

THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

ABSTRACT FOR THESIS

Remembering Al-Andalus: Şūfī Pathways of Engagement Between Jews and Muslims in Israel and Their Contribution to Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation

Katherine Randall

**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
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This doctoral thesis investigates the practice of Sufism and Şūfī inspired activities among Jews and Muslims in Israel and examines their potential contribution to peace and reconciliation by creating pathways of engagement between members of the two faith traditions. The history of the interreligious encounters between Muslim and Jewish mystics in medieval Al-Andalus and Fustāt, Egypt is presented as the narrative of a heritage common to Jews and Muslims practising Sufism together in contemporary Israel. The examples of Şūfī practice in Israel that are revealed in this study demonstrate the continuity of such exchanges. The narratives of Israeli-Jews who are engaging regularly with Israeli-Muslim-Şūfīs form the primary source material for the study. The narrators consist of those who identify themselves as Jewish-Şūfīs; those who have adopted Şūfī concepts and practices; those who have gained an insider perspective of Sufism but who do not define themselves as Şūfīs; and those who have taken hand with a Muslim Şūfī Shaykh in the traditional manner of the Şūfī orders. They all remain rooted in their own Jewish faith and see no dissonance in the adoption of traditionally Şūfī practices to pursue a path of spiritual progression. The focus of the investigation on the potential of Sufism in Israel to provide a channel of mutual engagement between Jews and Muslims situates the thesis within the discipline of Şūfī Studies while also constituting an original contribution to academic studies on conflict transformation and Jewish-Muslim relations. The investigation presents an original approach to the study of reconciliation in that those studied are not members of explicitly named peace groups. It establishes the reconciliatory potential of the Şūfī-based engagement between some members of the Jewish and Muslim faith communities in Israel and situates this within the wider context of grass-roots peace initiatives and constitutes the first examination of the Derekh Avraham Jewish-Şūfī Order.

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PART ONE: PROCEDURE AND CONTEXTS OF THE RESEARCH

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 An Alternative Approach to the Study of Conflict Transformation

This study pursues an interdisciplinary approach to instances of interreligious encounter between Jews and Muslims in Israel and evaluates their relationship to historical precedents in the Middle East and their contribution to contemporary reconciliation and conflict transformation. The encounters studied arise through Ṣūfī and Ṣūfī inspired practice by Jewish-Israelis with some attention given to the Muslim-Israeli Ṣūfīs with whom they study and engage in various projects and events. The title indicates the historical component and then moves forward in time to explore the link between Ṣūfī practice and the struggle for a solution to the one hundred year conflict of territorial, political, and religious interests within the stretch of land now known as Israel and the Occupied Territories of the Palestinian people.¹ The conflict and all its concomitant complexities is such that an attempt to name the geographical area on which differing narratives promote incompatible descriptions of actual and desired political boundaries becomes a matter of debate, often with violent consequences. The historical component of this study is considered relevant as a contextual exercise in terms of the historical figures, thought, practice, and interreligious exchanges that inform contemporary practitioners of Ṣūfī oriented spiritual paths in Israel. The specific history of the interest that Jews and Muslims have shown in each other's traditions of mysticism in Al-Andalus and in Fustāt, Egypt is therefore a locus of grounding and a precedent of present day engagement. In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, David M. Freidenreich notes that, 'Conceptual affinities between Islam and Judaism were recognized by early Muslims themselves, who saw both religions as the products of divine revelation and who consciously appealed to traditions of reportedly Jewish origins about pre-Islamic religious history (*isrā'īliyyāt*).'² These purported origins, the '*isrā'īliyyāt*', find mention in the interview narratives presented in Part Two of this study but of greater import is Freidenreich's observation that although, 'Academic scholars once commonly explained parallels between Islam and Judaism in terms of 'borrowing' by the former from the latter,'³ this has changed to an approach that acknowledges the exchange of ideas in the context of a shared space and Freidenreich

¹ Henceforth referred to as the OTP.

² David M. Freidenreich, "Muslim-Jewish Dialogue", *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Islamic World*, edited by John L. Esposito. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, Available at: <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/muslim-jewishdialogue> [Last accessed: 20th July 2013].

³ Freidenreich, Muslim-Jewish.

notes that, ‘Scholars today are more likely to emphasize the shared cultural and intellectual milieu in which both Judaism and Islam evolved and to examine the ways intellectuals from each community employed and reshaped common ideas.’⁴ This is examined in greater detail in the introduction to Chapter Three of this study with special reference to the work of Sarah Stroumsa⁵ and under the sub-heading, ‘Borrowings’ and ‘Influences’ or Contextual Integrity?

The impetus to pursue this study began when I read that on the occasion of the publication of the first translation of selected Ṣūfī texts into Hebrew, the translator, Sara Sviri, noted that there is a rising interest in Sufism among the Jewish-Israeli population. The programme for an evening of discussion and music in Jerusalem described the event as:

An evening honoring Sara Sviri’s anthology: *The Ṣūfīs*. Interest in Ṣūfī mysticism has steadily grown among Israelis. The underlying reasons for this will be explored by a variety of clerics, scholars and artists: Dr. Sara Sviri; Ṣūfī Sheikh Abd as-Salam Manasara; Rabbi Menachem Froman; Kabbalah researcher Melila Helner; Avraham Alkayam, founder of the Tariqat Ibrahimiyah; poet Tamir Greenberg; composer and oud player, Samir Makhoul⁶

Sufism has a long history among Muslims in the former Palestine and continuing into contemporary Israel and the OPT. Daphna Ephrat has written a history of Sufism in medieval Palestine from the early caliphate to the rise of Ottoman rule.⁷ It is a slim volume for the time period covered but valuable for its use of biographical material and an approach that emphasises the practice of Sufism and its social as well as its religious evolution. Ephrat proposes that the role of Sufism in shaping an Islamic society in Palestine, ‘must have acquired a special significance in a land that was demographically and culturally dominated by Christians, at least during the first four centuries of Islamic rule.’⁸ What is missing however is any mention of relations between the Ṣūfīs and Jewish mystics. Even in the epilogue which takes a brief look at the Qādiri fraternity in contemporary Nazareth – a

⁴ Freidenreich, Muslim-Jewish.

⁵ Sara Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*, (Princeton, US and Woodstock, UK: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶ Everything Jerusalem 2008, The Oud Festival, “To the Land of the Hearts” [Online] Available at: http://www.jerusalem.com/discover/article_1012/Everything-Jerusalem-Culture---Tourism-Guide [Last accessed: 5/01/2010].

⁷ Ephrat, Daphna, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Ṣūfīs and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press), 2008. Harvard Middle East Monographs.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

fraternity which plays a pivotal role in the practice of the Jewish interviewees in this study – Ephrat remains close to the purely Muslim practice of Sufism, saying only that, ‘Non-Muslims are also invited to visit and observe.’⁹ Many of the fraternities were negatively impacted in 1948 when many fled during the war but of those that stayed, as Ephrat relates, ‘Their pattern of appearance and growth is similar to that of the earliest *tariqas* in Palestine. Small local congregations are united by a collective devotion to a charismatic shaykh, either a descendant of a local leading family or a successor in a genealogical chain of spiritual ancestors.’¹⁰ The interviewees in this study narrate their affiliation with such groups as the Qādiri in Nazareth and the Naqshabandi of Jerusalem. Although this study poses its question primarily through the perspective of Jewish participants it nevertheless pays attention to relevant Muslim Ṣūfī perspectives of theological, historical, and social purport which contribute to creating the resources on which the participants draw and which play a pivotal role in creating the contemporary opportunity for Jews and Muslims to engage in interreligious encounters with one another.

Ṣūfī practices are being observed together by Jews and Muslims in Israel. Some interfaith events are also inspired in their content by Ṣūfī concepts and practices and this takes several forms.¹¹ There are also Jewish Ṣūfīs¹² (some of whom are academics involved in Ṣūfī studies) practising Sufism under the guidance of a Muslim Ṣūfī mentor. As mentioned in the excerpt above, one Jewish academic, Professor Avraham Elkayam, has co-founded a Jewish-Ṣūfī Order. This is mentioned in a paper by Itzchak Weismann who writes in his article on Ṣūfī brotherhoods in Syria and Israel:

Finally attention should be drawn to an Israeli version of the tariqa Ibrahimiyya. Although, as in Syria, this way aims at enhancing an interfaith dialogue, in Israel it was founded by a Jewish group, including a conservative Rabbi and academic scholars, who relate themselves to the Jewish Ṣūfī tradition inaugurated by Rabbi Abraham son of Maimonides in the thirteenth century. The members used to meet to read Ṣūfī texts and perform the dhikr under the guidance of Muslim Ṣūfī shaykhs.

⁹ Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers*, p. 198.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹¹ For examples of such initiatives see the work of Jerusalem Peacemakers [Online] Available at: <http://jerusalempeacemakers.org/about/founders> [Last accessed: 9/05/2012].

¹² ‘Jewish-Ṣūfīs’ is a contested designation which finds further treatment in the interviews studied in Chapter Six. Also see under the sub-heading ‘Terms and their Elusive Definitions’ in the present chapter for a discussion of the term ‘Sufism’.

These activities were interrupted following the break of the last Intifada in 2000, but recently they have been renewed.¹³

Four of the co-founders of this group – Avraham Elkayam, Roberto Arbib, Khalid Abu Ras and Paul Fenton – are participant narrators in this study.¹⁴

The contribution of Ṣūfī and Ṣūfī influenced practice among Jews and Muslims in Israel to efforts for reconciliation and peace is the central objective of this investigation. Tracing the antecedents to contemporary activities of spiritual encounter between the Abrahamic faiths, in the form of Ṣūfī concepts and practices, as apparent in Al-Andalus 711 - 1492, and medieval Fustāt (old Cairo), serves to highlight the existence of a relationship of fruitful encounter between the traditions of mysticism in Judaism and Islam and to embrace it as a common heritage that provides a firm and inspirational foundation for contemporary groups. Avraham Elkayam points out that, ‘We are not the first Jews who are interested in Sufism because in Andalusia there is Bahya Ibn Paquda and also the son of Maimonides who wrote *Kifāyat al-‘Ābidīn*,¹⁵ you know and we talked about the Jews in the Middle East, in the Arab world, that most of them were Ṣūfīs. You know that my friend Professor Paul Fenton, who was also among the founders of Tariqat Ibrahimiyya/Derekh Avraham, he was one of the founders of our ṭarīqa, and you know he found Ṣūfī texts of Ibn ‘Arabī in Hebrew letters, Arabic in Hebrew letters’.¹⁶

The question situates the research within three overlapping contexts in Israel. These are the religious components of the conflict, the potential of Ṣūfī methodology in the traditions of mysticism to contribute to conflict transformation, and the arena of reconciliation and interfaith dialogue in the country. That latter sentence already contains two terms – ‘religious’, and ‘mysticism’, and one might add ‘spirituality’ – which are considered problematic in the study of religions and which the present author finds additionally awkward from an ‘insider’ Ṣūfī perspective. The use of these terms will be qualified and

13Itzchak Weismann, “Sufi Brotherhoods in Syria and Israel: A Contemporary Overview” [Online] Available at: <http://www.ou.edu/mideast/Additional%20pages%20-%20non-catagory/Sūfism%20in%20Syriawebpage.htm> [Last accessed: 23/11/2009].

¹⁴ The reason for using the expression ‘participant narrators’ interchangeably with ‘interviewees’ is in respect of their participation in the process under study and their role as participants in providing the narrative produced by the interviews which constitutes the primary source of this investigation.

¹⁵ Abraham Maimonides (1186 – 1237), *Kifāyat al-‘Ābidīn* (‘The Compendium for the Servants of God’). Mentioned in the introduction by Paul Fenton in, ‘Obadyāh Maimonides, *The Treatise of the Pool: Al-Maqāla al-Ḥaḍiyya*, Paul Fenton (trans.) (London: Octagon Press for The Ṣūfī Trust, 1995), p. 7. Second impression.

¹⁶ Avraham Elkayam, Appendix I.

defined as far as possible for their application in this study further on. They will also be addressed within the analysis of the field narratives as the interviewees themselves raise questions as to their meanings. The term 'Şūfī' likewise raises discussion about what it actually defines and this will also be addressed as the question of the nature of Sufism is approached.

Although politics, religion, and interfaith dialogue are closely interwoven in the historical and the contemporary realities of the conflict in Israel and the OPT they will not receive equal attention except in so far as each is implicit when speaking of conflict transformation in Israel. This applies mainly to the political situation which, though spoken of by the interviewees and being the basis of the conflict and any possible path to justice and reconciliation, it is not the main framework within which the Şūfīs work. It is this point that leads to maintaining that this thesis takes an unusual approach to the study of conflict transformation. Instead of studying groups or grass-roots organizations that are explicitly working for resolutions to conflict this investigation examines individuals and groups whose ethos and practice naturally creates an engagement with the other as a mirror of God and the means of learning about the self that they may know God. In this approach the groups being studied are neither primarily nor explicitly working for a resolution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine but are following a spiritual path which consists of a Jewish interest in Şūfī theory and practice and naturally brings Jews together with Muslims for that purpose. Avraham Elkayam comments that, 'This is a love way and this is the basis for peace in the Middle East or between people, and of course between the Jews and the Arabs, the Muslims and the Jews, and I'm convinced that the Şūfī way is first of all my way to God, first of all, and also of course, to the other'.¹⁷ Their hope cannot be other than for peace. As Sara Sviri says, 'Those people who are interested in the Şūfī type of mysticism they really cannot be fundamentalist, they cannot be nationalistic, it doesn't go together'.¹⁸ It is apparent in the interview narratives and in the material presented in Chapter Seven of the Muslim Şūfīs, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari and Shaykh Ghassan Manāsra, who worked/work with Eliyahu McLean for peace, that Sufism offers a channel for engagement between Jews and Muslims. The tradition of Jewish mysticism plays a significant role in opening that channel for the Jewish participants as several of the interviewees report. However, it needs to be stated clearly that the present study does not intend to suggest that Sufism alone can offer a solution to the conflict but rather that the beliefs and the activities of the studied groups and individuals is bringing the Jewish and

¹⁷ Elkayam, Appendix I.

¹⁸ Sara Sviri, Appendix I.

Muslim participants into regular contact and that this is a default reconciliatory process that builds on a foundation of Ṣūfī notions of the other as a mirror of the self. It is also important to emphasize the value of such meetings and projects regardless of the lack of a political voice. In the conclusion the possibility of grass-roots initiatives gaining a political voice is considered but the strength of the human example they offer to affect attitudinal changes in the population in regard to acceptance of the other offers another path of reconciliation. This is the case even though it might be argued that the participants may have always been of a tolerant and open-minded disposition. Nevertheless, it is the pursuit of a Ṣūfī inspired spiritual path that brings these individuals – Jewish-Israelis and Muslim-Israelis – together to enable the provision of such an example. It is therefore to be noted that it is not the intention of this investigation to claim Sufism as a universal tool of application to conflict situations. This would be neither practical nor realistic. Rather, it is approached here as a practice in Israel that brings Jews and Muslims together, and which provides a balanced appreciation of the manner in which Ṣūfī concepts and practice is meaningful to the targeted group of Jewish and Muslim Israelis in this investigation. Sufism does offer an approach towards relations with the other that can transform interactions between conflicting parties, however it is unrealistic to expect conflicting parties to engage in the Ṣūfī path for this purpose. There are certainly methods and practices within Sufism that may well be adapted for use in dialogue and negotiation alongside the same from other traditions such as the Kabbalah. Several of the actors mentioned in this investigation are in fact inspired by both Sufism and the Kabbalah as well as more mainstream religious concepts of several faiths in their work and practice. As is apparent in the interview narratives cited in Part Two of this study, their primary concern is their relationship to God and the path they have chosen. Sufism is the vehicle that brings some Jews and some Muslims, and to a lesser extent some Christians, together.

In viewing ‘religions’ as a category of study, and ‘religion’ as a term within that category, one becomes immediately aware of the term’s weakness and the danger of homogenizing groups of faith traditions as a fixed monolith. Yet there is a plethora of movements, traditions, groups with foci on specific aspects or themes of their faith, and individuals who through their literary output posed, and still pose, questions of faith, or of theological and philosophical inquiry. Such diversity of expression and interpretation of faith is apparent in Judaism and Islam which, when considered together with the multiple histories, cultural expressions, and geographical locations and migrations within each faith, stands as a

powerful witness to the lack of any monolithic narrative and points to the inherent weakness of any attempt to portray either faith as an homogenous entity. The question then arises as to what unites each faith under the descriptions of Judaism or Islam? Where is their internal coherence, if any? Are internal differences sometimes so great that it becomes difficult to comprehend some groups or movements as belonging to the same faith? Are there similarities across the faith traditions that in some instances give rise to more commonalities between groups/movements of different faith traditions than there are with others of the same faith tradition? Primary in answering each of these questions are those texts considered foundational in the original emergence of the faiths, those texts that are considered sacred by the faithful; secondary, but of such significance that it deserves to be counted as co-primary, are the interpretations of those texts. The historical, geographical, and socio-political situatedness of faith populations is a third significant factor. It can easily be seen therefore that the terrain is marked by heterogeneity and, it may be noted, by often fruitful encounters between the faiths that were more widespread during medieval and pre-modern times than is generally remembered today. These considerations are also true of Sufism itself where, despite core principles and concepts that are shared by most orders, there is great diversity in the application of methods and practices.

One movement across Judaism and Islam is the path of gnosis which seeks to know, to experience, and to be changed by, an intimate relationship with the Divine. This aspiration has itself taken many forms, from the informal teaching at the feet of an experienced guide, through the individual striving in prayer, to the formalized orders of Ṣūfī practice based on the teachings, experiences, and textual interpretations, done by founding figures. This diversity of forms is apparent in the Andalusian and Palestinian history of Sufism and continues in contemporary Israel. Ṣūfī practices that relate specifically to the relationship between the self and the other and the self and God are *ṣoḥbet*, spiritual conversation; *adab*, or spiritual courtesy; *muḥasabat al-nafs*, a method of self-examination; and *dhikr*, the remembrance of the divine through the chanting of the Names of God. The latter is intended to cleanse the heart and aid the practitioner in an awareness of the presence of God.

In this chapter the ground is surveyed in terms of the academic approach taken to seeking an answer to the question of Sufism's contribution to reconciliation and peace in Israel and, in chapter two, of the religious and spiritual contexts within which the Ṣūfī practitioners live and engage with self and other. Identities that are built within that context

are, as will be seen later, identities that, according to Ṣūfī practice, need to be deconstructed, or ‘released’ from any paradigmatic fixity in order, in accordance with the *hadīth*, to fully ‘know oneself that one may know one’s Lord’.¹⁹ In the conceptual world of the Ṣūfī this means to be in command of the *nafs* (ego self) and not ruled by it so that the One may manifest Itself through the diversity of humankind.

1.2 The Question and its Contexts

The question this thesis asks implicates three disciplinary areas. Being a study on Sufism naturally situates the research within the discipline of Islamic Studies. However, as the investigation specifically addresses the practice of Sufism by Israeli Jews together with Israeli Muslims the work can also be seen as implicating the discipline of Jewish Studies. At this point Jewish and Islamic studies align. This is not the only instance where the study of these two faith traditions merges as will be seen in the historical context that demonstrates the precedents of Jewish interest in Sufism and that is demonstrated as one of the contextual backgrounds of Israeli practitioners in Part Two. It is equally evident in many of the interviewee narratives that form the field data analysed in Part Two. The stated aim of the research involves a further disciplinary area: that of peace studies and conflict resolution. The thesis would stand well enough without this component both in its originality and as a survey of Sufism in Israel. However, the examination of Sufism as a path to conflict transformation is central to the irenic intentions of the work and fits usefully into an examination of methods for reconciliation. Theoretically, Ṣūfī ontology and epistemology offer a view of what it means to become fully human that I claim can address many of the questions that arise in the field of conflict transformation, reconciliation, and peace.

As this is a study of Jewish-Muslim intersections and ‘alignments’ in their respective traditions of mysticism, the question of the disciplinary location of the study needs to be clarified. First, when a Jewish interest in Ṣūfī teachings extends to, and embraces, the practice of Sufism, then can this trend be considered as equally pertinent to both the history of Jewish mysticism and the history of Islamic mysticism? Put in another way, and from the practitioner’s perspective, would a Jewish-Ṣūfī understand his/her Ṣūfī practice as

¹⁹ On the authenticity of this *ḥadīth* see Dom Sylvester Houédard, “Notes on the more than human saying: ‘Unless you know yourself you cannot know God’” [Online] Available at: <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org.uk/articles/notesonsaying.html> Houédard records that, ‘The Shaykh includes the hadith with those not established (*thabit*) by transmission (*naql*) but considered sound (*sahih*) on the basis of unveiling (FM II 399.28; C.250).’ Cf. with n. 77 in Chapter Two of this study.

much a part of the history of Muslim esoteric practice as it is of Jewish esoteric practice? This query includes the applicability, or otherwise, of 'delineating' a phenomenon that may prove to elude a complete delimitation. Due to the universal aspects of a Ṣūfī ontology and epistemology, the nature of the subject may display its unboundedness and direct the researcher to base her description of the researched field on the narrative(s) of the practising Ṣūfī, both Jewish and Muslim, and to design her analytical approach accordingly, even though this will inevitably involve negotiating some 'moments of perplexity'. As will be seen further on this was a decision taken together with other considerations of integrating a Ṣūfī methodology into the academic approach. Second, on the basis of the field data, it would not have been the most productive method to select an analytical approach based on producing an 'uncomplicated' or 'clean' account of the subject matter in order to serve the conventions of data analysis within any one school. It was felt that this would risk losing potential insights arising from an acknowledgement of the complex nature of the diversity of practice and the subjectivity of the experiential components of the participant narratives.

1.3 Terms and their Elusive Definitions

'Mysticism', 'Sufism', 'spiritual encounters', and 'conflict transformation' are the terms defined below for their use in this study.

Mysticism: In attempting to define the term 'mysticism' scholars of the subject may find themselves in a similar, or parallel, situation to the very mystics they are studying when those mystics attempt to describe the experiences that are generally termed 'mystical'. Fundamentally, an utterly transcendent God cannot be defined and neither can any experience of divine union find full justice in literary expression. Poetry and its rich use of symbol, metaphor, and 'unsaying' assist the language of an individual attempting to describe the ineffable. Each cataphatic statement requires its apophatic deconstructor and silence is required to speak as the numinous presence which fills the form given to the ineffable translates into another form, as the old form collapses almost simultaneous to its arising. Can the scholar apply the same methods in attempting to define mysticism? Will the scholar be left in a state of longing for an easy definition of the term, a state that is parallel to the mystics longing for the Beloved? The simple answer is for the scholar to cite the words of those who display attributes that she considers within the remit of her

investigation and of her own definition of the linguistic space she has designated with the term 'mysticism'. Language is often as inadequate and unstable in its ability to communicate a fixed meaning in the academy as in the vast literary output of mystics who feel compelled to write. Is this why language in all its literary registers of discourse has a captivating, and even enchanting, quality for the great writers of Sufism precisely because it reflects the constant unveiling (*kashf*) of reality that reveals unsuspected levels of realization that make previous perceptions of 'truth' inadequate? Vocabulary remains fixed – or at least it changes only slowly – but the meanings it is intended to embody move and morph in a continuous deferral to other lexica as the intentions, experience, and knowledge of speaking voices changes. Scholars and mystics continue to write profusely about the subject. Some of those scholars are also mystics. Whereas the mystic writes in diverse literary forms about what she/he has experienced and in many instances constructs a formalized 'template' for the Ṣūfī path, the scholar must justify and qualify her use of the term and the worthiness of its subject matter as an academic topic of investigation. The term appears in the titles of many a monograph²⁰ and inevitably the author begins by explicating its meaning and use within the parameters of the respective study. This unavoidably includes the admission that the term 'mysticism' is insufficient and not entirely appropriate. For a clear working definition of the term 'mysticism' I find that given by William C. Chittick most pertinent to its use in this investigation. In a lecture delivered at the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University, May 2003, he says, 'In short, "mysticism" as I would prefer to understand it, stresses the fact that many religious people have been seriously and intimately engaged with ultimate reality, or, at the very least, that they have been engaged with a quest for communion with that reality.' I would qualify that statement a little to say that some religious people do not feel satisfied with the formal aspects and doctrines of religion alone and, while certainly not dismissing liturgy, ritual, and statements of faith, they seek to experience the reality that they perceive to be the true core of their faith. This is where the Ṣūfī term '*dhawq*' (to taste) describes the Ṣūfī aspiration so well: the Ṣūfī seeks to taste the Real. At its core is a desire for direct experience of the divine, growth towards the fullness of being human, and action for compassionate change in the world.

²⁰ See for example the discussion on the definitions of 'mysticism' in Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar*, translated by Nathan Wolski, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 19 – 22.

Spiritual Encounters: The use of the terms ‘spiritual’ and ‘spirituality’ denote a wider meaning that contains ‘mysticism’ as its vessel and refers to the sense of an inner content in religion that is perceived as affecting the soul and spirit beyond what the observance of formal rituals and legalistic formulas are capable of without that content. In arguing for the universality of the message of the Qur’ān, in a work which relates a Ṣūfī hermeneutics of the Qur’ān to the practice of interfaith dialogue,²¹ Reza Shah-Kazemi does not give a direct definition of ‘spirituality’ but in using the term to highlight the dangers of a non-inclusive interpretation he succeeds in illuminating the breadth and depth of spirituality as opposed to the destructive narrowness of form without spiritual content:

It is spirituality, we believe, that reveals, more effectively than any other aspect of the Islamic tradition, the reductionism inherent in the attempt to ideologize and politicize the message of the Qur’ān. For it is precisely when the spiritual appreciation of Revelation is weak, that its message becomes susceptible to ideological distortion. There is a clear relationship between the decline of spirituality and the rise of ideology, in Islam as in other religions; and it would not be going too far to say that, deprived of a living spirituality at its core, Islam will inevitably be reduced to an empty shell, the vacuum within soon becoming filled with worldliness in all its guises: its revealed text becomes an ideological pretext; morally reforming oneself gives way to violently rectifying the other; spiritual contemplation is scorned in favour of political machination; the subtleties of revelation become submerged by the exigencies of revolution.²²

I suggest that what is understood under the term ‘spiritual’, and especially in a Ṣūfī context, is the transformative journey to being fully human and living life in a manner that considers being human as encompassing something larger than the physical existence of this lifetime and beyond anything that individual ‘knowers’ can comprehend by reason alone. It is partly for this reason that the term ‘spiritual encounters’ is used in the present study, in preference to the term ‘interfaith dialogue’, and alongside ‘interreligious encounters’ and ‘engagement’, the latter suggesting a deeper involvement in relation to the other. This is to reference the shared spirituality of those engaged in such encounters that arise from a Jewish-Muslim pool of ontological and epistemological baselines and that gains diversity in the specifics of its interpretations, the meanings invested in its symbols and myths, and its consequences for human life as interpreted through Judaism and Islam, and again through the many varieties of interpretations within each of those traditions. The term ‘spiritual encounters’ allows for the concept of an engagement of faiths in a common spiritual

²¹ Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur’ān and Interfaith Dialogue*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2006).

²² *Ibid.*, pp. viii, ix

striving without necessitating conversion to a doctrinal base other than one's own faith.²³ This proposes religion as a matrix for spiritual activity. An example of this is to be found in the work of the Jewish scholar-mystics of Al-Andalus who, when drawn to a Ṣūfī expression of their spirituality, related Ṣūfī themes to their own sacred texts and history, and highlighted the ancient tradition of Jewish mysticism from which some claimed the Ṣūfīs had benefitted.²⁴ This promotes a perspective, that is embraced by many a Ṣūfī and Kabbalist practitioner, that sees the emergence of both traditions going back into an ancient mythic-historical time long before their formal institution.

Sufism: One often finds an initial definition of the word 'Ṣūfī' as originating with early ascetics who chose to wear wool (ṣūf), however, the etymology of the term is not as simple as that and there is no etymological finality in the various options put forward as Tanvir Anjum demonstrates:

The Arabic word *taṣawwuf* is derived from the word *Sūfī* [Ṣūfī]. Different theories have been put forth about the etymological derivations of the words *tasawwuf* and *Sūfī*. Medieval scholars of the tenth and eleventh centuries wrote treatises on the subject as well. For instance, Abū Bakr Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Kalābādhī (d. 385/995), a fourth/tenth century scholar of Sūfism, devotes an entire chapter to explain how the Sūfīs account for their being called Sūfīs. He cites various opinions regarding the etymological sources of the word Sūfī, which have been summarized as such: *safa'* (purity), because of the purity of their hearts; *saff* (rank) as they are in the first rank before God; *ṣuffah* (the platform) as the qualities of the Sūfīs resembled those of the *aṣḥāb al-ṣuffah* (People of the Platform, a group of the Companions of the Prophet (peace be on him) who had devoted their lives to worship and learning);

23 I initially encountered the term 'spiritual interaction' in a paper written by Suwanda H. J. Sugunasiri. In his article, "'Spiritual Interaction,' Not 'Interfaith Dialogue': A Buddhist Contribution" (*Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 16. (1996), pp. 143-165, [Online] Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1390163> [Last accessed: 9/5/2009] Professor Sugunasiri argues that the term, 'interfaith dialogue' is too limited, both in who it includes and in the aspects of the human being that are addressed. He maintains that it says nothing of the 'intra' dimension involved both in the sense of within one tradition and in the sense of the change happening with the individual participant. I agree that 'spiritual interaction' serves these purposes better and indicates an intention toward a foundational shift in the all too human habit of othering to the detriment of the other. Not only are fresh insights gained by the participants, both of their own and of their fellows' concerns, but an opportunity is opened for spiritual experiences that are felt in the here and now as concrete realities seeking expression in action. Spirituality therefore becomes a living movement of change in the individual and group life.

24 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh writes that, 'Thus, it is sometimes possible to trace an idea, concept or custom absorbed by early Islam from Judaism and assimilated there in a genuine Islamic spirit, but subsequently, in its Muslim disguise, leaving its impact on Jewish culture.' See Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Some Religious Aspects of Islam: A Collection of Articles*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), p. 74.

sūf (wool) because of their habit of wearing wool, and safwab (the chosen, the select) owing to their being the elite, or the chosen or selected ones.²⁵

He concludes by noting that, 'The above discussion indicates that there is no consensus regarding the etymological derivation of the words taṣawwuf or Ṣūfī'

'Today it is a name without a reality, but formerly it was a reality without a name' cites Vincent J. Cornell who tells us that this was said by an early Ṣūfī and explained by 'Ali al-Hujwiri (d. 1071) in his *Kashf al-Mahjub* (Unveiling the Veiled) as, 'Formerly the practice was known but the pretense was unknown, but nowadays the pretense is known but the practice unknown'²⁶ The issue of naming and categorizing emerged in the interview with Sara and illustrates the reluctance that many 'Ṣūfīs' have with identifying themselves as such. The interview began with the following comments:

I can't make any claim belonging to any denomination or even to understanding what it means. I wanted to say simply a few things – for example: not all mystics that we think of as Ṣūfīs would be named 'Ṣūfīs' in their self appreciation and time. For example, Hakīm al-Tirmidhī. Another example is Shibli, who was definitely a Ṣūfī in terms of belonging to this social setting in Baghdad where Ṣūfīs started to blossom in the 9th century. He was asked why Ṣūfīs are named Ṣūfīs. And very appropriately he said, 'Because of something that was left in their *nafs*, namely in their ego. If they had really purified their ego they wouldn't have to be named by any name at all.' Now what does this mean? All this business with names, and denominations, and groups, and religions, and who belongs where, and who is to be called what. I look at it and marvel. And where am I in all this? You probably wanted to talk to me about my experiences with Irina Tweedie and the so-called Ṣūfī group in London. This is something I can talk about, but it doesn't mean that I was stamped with any kind of denomination.²⁷

In the recently published first issue of the Journal of Ṣūfī Studies the editors are grappling with the definition of 'Sufism' before they can describe what they call the relatively new field of Ṣūfī Studies:

²⁵ Tanvir Anjum, "Sūfism in History and its Relationship with Power", *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 2006), pp. 221-268, Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, Islamabad, pp. 224, 225 [Online] Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839016> [Last accessed: 13/04/2012].

²⁶ Vincent J. Cornell, "Reasons Public and Divine: Liberal Democracy, Shari'a Fundamentalism, and the Epistemological Crisis of Islam" in Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin (Eds.), *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), p. 24. Cornell's citation is from: 'Ali B. 'Uthman al-Jullabi al-Hujwiri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: The Oldest Persian Treatise on Sūfism*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, 1911; repr., (London: Luzac, 1976), p. 44.

²⁷ Sviri, Appendix I.

Assaying a field of academic inquiry is never an easy task. In the case of what in recent years has increasingly come to be referred to as “Sufi studies,” the difficulty of such a task is made doubly hard. This is due in large part to the fact that the field itself is still very much enmeshed in various and complex processes of self-definition. At the same time, while the descriptor “Sufi studies” itself has only recently begun to gain currency in the academic literature, the very fact of its use suggests the existence of a certain scholarly sentiment regarding its existence. But, to what exactly does this sentiment refer? In the broadest sense, it would appear to refer to the affinity of a body of academic researches which share a common subject of study, that subject being the diverse and richly variegated expressions of what is commonly known as “Sufism.” But, what then is “Sufism?” (...) “Sufism” as the subject of Sufi studies is neither anything more nor anything less than what the name itself denominates in any one instance of naming. Or, put another way, the subject of Sufi studies is ultimately the many and varied denotations of Sufism when and wherever they may be found. Historically speaking, such denotations have been nothing if not persistently present in a wide range of contexts within and across Muslim societies, past and present. At the current juncture in the development of the field, then, it would appear that it is precisely those attempts to understand the nature of this persistent and multifaceted presence, however it may be defined, which more so than anything else constitutes Sufi studies as a delineable scholarly endeavor.²⁸

In the present work I define as a *Ṣūfī* any individual who self-identifies with that term plus those who are reluctant to call themselves *Ṣūfīs* but who engage in *Ṣūfī* practices and who are inspired by their study of *Ṣūfī* masters. There are many more aspects to this discussion some of which occur during the analysis of the interviews in Part Two. Here I would just like to note further that there is barely an aspect of Islam that can be described as monolithic. On the contrary not only Islam as a whole but also Islam in the particularity of its several expressions is multivocal and multivalent. The basic rituals of prayer, pilgrimage, fasting, the paying of an alms tax, and the pronouncement of the statement of faith, are common to all Muslims. The sacred text of the Qur’ān and the veneration of the Prophet as the Messenger of God, the Seal of Prophecy and the *insān kāmil* (complete human being), are also common to all Muslims. Beyond these fundamental and profound essentials of the Islamic faith all else is subject to the interpretive activities of scholars and religious authorities as well as the cultural, geographic, and historical-political qualifiers that make up the incredible diversity and the historical openness to debate of the Muslim *ummah*.

²⁸ From the Editors, *Journal of Sufi Studies*, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2012, BRILL, p. 1 [Online] Available at: <http://docserver.ingentaconnect.com/deliver/connect/brill/22105948/v1n1/s1.pdf?expires=1337468376&id=68894523&titleid=75006863&accname=Guest+User&checksum=38C12AF34BF772E79A8A8A06BB9B5575> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/221059512X626108> [Last accessed: 19/05/12].

In a recently published work by Sa'diyya Shaikh,²⁹ to which greater reference is made below in respect of its significant inspiration of the epistemological approach taken here, Shaikh notes of Sufism that:

In addressing the nature of human beings, society, and God, Şūfī scholars often reveal a specific preoccupation with ontology, or the nature of reality. Drawing both on contemplative interpretations of the primary Islamic sources, the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, and mystical experiences, Şūfī thinkers address most questions including understandings of gender, in relation to the ultimate nature of reality.³⁰

This gives a succinct and very pertinent description of the Şūfī that is embraced in this study.

Conflict Transformation: Conflict transformation can be approached as a process of transformation of the self in the Şūfī sense as well as the transformation of external conflicts in the world of conflict resolution. The choice to use the term 'transformation' rather than 'resolution' is partly due to the consideration of self-transformation that is paramount on the Şūfī journey. The Şūfī practices for reigning in the *nafs* are a means of adjustment in understanding self and other that widens horizons to greater inclusiveness of difference as diversity, and a means to greater learning in favour of peace. In discussing the role and nature of the self (*nafs*, ego) in Şūfī teachings Sara Sviri writes:

Adverse as the *nafs* may be, it is seen by Sūfī authors as a component of human nature that can be transformed. In fact, the ideal of the transformation of the self and its bad qualities is a *sine qua non* in Sūfism. It stems from an outlook that couples the somber characterization of *nafs* with an optimistic view of change. It is that very culpable nature of man that in the end, when transformed, ennobles him.³¹

To engage in transforming a conflict indicates a process of self-transformation in order that the external transformation is based on an ongoing work for peace that is greater than the absence of violence, or negative peace. Chapter Two evaluates the relation between Sufism and conflict transformation

1.4 Academic Theory and Şūfī Epistemology

²⁹ Sa'diyya Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn 'Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³¹ Sara Sviri, "The Self and Its Transformation in Sūfism: With Special reference to Early Literature" in David Dean Shulman and Guy Stroumsa (eds.), *Self and Self Transformation in the History of Religions*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 196.

As I evaluated possible approaches to the study I became aware of similarities between Ṣūfī methodology and the necessary position of the academic researcher. The researcher needs to adopt a non-judgemental stance, neither positive nor negative, to the views expressed by interviewees. All responses and views expressed in relation to the subject matter of the investigation constitute primary sources in the provision of information and the acquisition of knowledge that are vital in achieving the stated aim of the study. The interlocutors share their personal experience and the researcher becomes a part of that conversation and finally, through the analysis and report, she becomes a co-contributor to the discourse, in this case, on Jewish-Muslim relations, alongside the interviewees themselves. The dialogue thereby becomes epistemic in the sense that knowledge is gained through an intertextual conversation between the participants' narratives. The intention is to mark a route to knowledge by involving all narratives in the analysis of each: each text 'speaks' with 'responses' from the other 'speakers'. By this method of analysis the attempt is made to illuminate the practice and the current concerns of a group of people who have several identity markers in common. They are Israeli, they pursue a Ṣūfī-inspired spiritual path, and they are concerned with reconciliation and peace in Israel and the OPT although they do not belong to explicitly peace-seeking initiatives as a group. This approach to the field data intends to mirror, as far as possible, the engagement of its authors with each other and their work. This includes the study and its author in that engagement as a subjective insider and utilizes that subjectivity in the gaining of knowledge. The insider researcher is a Ṣūfī but she is simultaneously an outsider, a non-Jewish, non-Israeli observer making the decisions on how to analyse the narratives and other field data based on themes largely directed by the participants in response to a simple introduction to the investigation. I was encouraged in the attempt of finding a way to align academic and Ṣūfī methodology by the words of Sa'diyya Shaikh when she notes that:

In recognizing the always partial nature of human perceptions, a Sufi approach to knowledge carries the seeds of an organic hermeneutic of humility and openness. Knowledge is recognized as being infinitely layered and expansive – it reveals more or less of itself depending on the state of the seeker. Given this epistemological approach, where reality is constantly unfolding, a Sufi epistemology is theoretically more open to the ways in which truth claims are constantly shifting and are often reconstituted at different levels. In addition, Sufi methodology recognizes that language mediates between mystical truth and transient social realities and that such a mediatory process is inevitably dynamic and fluid.³²

³² Shaikh, *Sūfī Narratives of Intimacy*, p. 115

The ‘transient social realities’ in a conflict situation, and in a nation state that is still so new, provide many an occasion when the search for ‘mystical truth’ in an engagement of Jews and Muslims can become vulnerable in the face of political realities. In this situation, holding on to an awareness of the transitory nature of truth claims and the re-adjustment to new contexts, and the relocation of expectations, can enable hope to survive. Paul Fenton expresses this hope despite difficult conditions in the following:

I can add this and I think it’s the bottom line, I think it’s probably one of my deepest thoughts on the subject – is that providence has brought us together, Jews and Muslims, in this encounter. Instead of making it a human and spiritual encounter unfortunately politics has become involved and turned everything sour. But I’m sure that there is something in the Divine Project that has wound up all Jewish-Muslim encounters within the Muslim world – where you had thriving communities in Morocco, in Syria, in Iraq, all of these have now disappeared – there’s no longer that day to day encounter between Jew and Muslim in the bazaar, in the souk. It should all be happening now here in Israel. That’s what the powers-to-be, what providence, wants and we’re not letting it happen but it should.³³

‘Epistemic dialogue’ and ‘intertextual conversation’ are not new terms. The former is found in education in the sciences and computer mediated dialogue, my use of it here is to suggest the gaining of knowledge through dialogue and that dialogue is pursued through an intertextual conversation. The application of those terms as designating a method of data analysis is original in providing a space for the scholar-practitioner to make theological, ontological, and epistemological comments that are grounded in a Ṣūfī methodology of engagement with the other in a qualitative, participant-observer work. This is made possible, and gains validity from the fact that the narrators themselves approach the themes that arise in a similar manner. Four of the interviewees are also scholar-practitioners. The intertextual conversation is extended to include published texts authored by the narrators and texts cited by them which they consider as significant to the study. Textual data from cyberspace is also included where considered appropriate, the main example being the profile and words of the late Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari who played a significant role in the study of Sufism for many of the interviewees and in his role as a peace-worker in Jewish-Muslim relations.

Entering into dialogue with texts requires posing questions as well as providing answers through an analysis of the texts. This takes some inspiration from the Jewish manner of a rigorous questioning of texts through discussion in the group as I experienced in many a meeting in Israel, and secondly it enables an academic version of that which

³³ Paul Fenton, Appendix I.

Sa'diyya Shaikh refers to in the above excerpt when she says that, 'a Sufi approach to knowledge carries the seeds of an organic hermeneutic of humility and openness'. The intertextual conversation conducted in Part Two intends an 'organic' analysis that is open to unexpected conclusions.

It is hoped that the research might benefit the cause, in some small way, for a transformation of the conflict in Israel and Palestine and the relationship between Jews and Muslims within Israel. It also seeks to avoid harm to any persons therefore a careful consideration of the interviewees desire not be anonymous is seriously considered. It would be very difficult to maintain anonymity for a few of the interviewees who are in the public eye. This in no way compromises the work in its contribution to the academic field and it is hoped that its impact in areas outside the academy will be informative and irenic. One arena in which it is hoped this research may have some impact is in beginning to dismantle a widespread impression that Jews and Muslims have always been enemies and that this enmity can only continue.

Is it valid to pursue irenic intentions in addition to academic rigour in writing a thesis? The answer to this question may well lie in the conclusions reached and in the success of the research project in answering the original thesis question. It is the thesis question and its embedding in the area of conflict transformation that lends validity to irenic intentions particularly when a concern with the sharing of knowledge between academic and field work is primary. These considerations have informed the choice of method and the theoretical basis on which data from the field study is analysed. The analysis incorporates an acknowledgement of the linguistic/textual/creative power of speech that is so prominent in Judaism and Islam, and a recognition of the apophatic practice of Sufism that 'transfers' presence constantly, with 'meaning/being' as its only constant. No text is discrete and if 'text' is expanded to include the inscribed land and the narrated identity then this becomes even more apparent. This comes closest to enabling an engagement with the research sources/text, in the widest sense, which produces results beyond the superficially descriptive by addressing the spiritual momentum, its ebb and flow, which inevitably inhabits the material circumstances within which it must project its agency. Entering into a dialogue with the texts meant taking the risk of appearing insufficiently focussed on the question under investigation insofar as the interviewees occasionally pursued lines of thought too broad for a narrow focus but on closer examination all their comments are relevant to the pursuit of peace because they form

context and it is in the interdependency of relationships that is characteristic of contexts that the (Şūfi) self finds its being, and in reflexive narrative, that identity in relation to the other emerges as the narrator negotiates the actors in her/his account.

In the activities of observing and interviewing, and in the analysis of the data, another thread is woven into the texture of the research. That other thread is the researcher herself and her subjectivity and how she negotiates her subjectivity to enable the groups studied to speak in their own voices rather than to make them suffer an over enthusiastic interpretation informed only by the researcher's bias. Interpretation is unavoidable but bias towards one's own 'pool of knowledge' is avoidable if regarded as a toolbox which may not always be equal to the task and that requires an occasional inventory to determine the value of its contents. Reflexivity is certainly one tool that I feel needs to accompany all research activities in a qualitative, participant-observer investigation. It is also a tool that assists in facilitating an honest embodiment of the participants' narratives in that it allows participants to speak while the researcher reflects, and adapts her expectations and aims accordingly, as informed by the participants' voices. However, what is being enabled through the intertextual conversation is a 'thinking with' as well as 'thinking about' the field narratives. The former occasionally happens during the interviews and it is here that the narratives take a more conversational tone. This is especially the case in the interviews with Sara Sviri and Paul Fenton where a discussion mode is heightened due to the presence of a third participant, Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf. 'Thinking with' does not compromise the lead given to the narrators but rather follows their line of thought.

Moshe Idel proposes a methodological eclecticism to avoid a simplistic analysis of what is a complex subject.³⁴ In encouraging this approach, Idel cites the example of the Kabbalists and simultaneously points to further considerations when he says, 'Even the more modest Midrashic approach, which had a deep impact on subsequent Jewish thought, allowed Jewish mystics to bring together different and even conflicting views concerning the same topic in the same work. This fact invites theories of organisation of knowledge that may account for the significance of this phenomenon.'³⁵ The latter comment is also pertinent in relation to the ontological and epistemological theories of the Muslim scholar-mystic, Ibn

34 Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, (New York: Central European University Press, 2005), p.9.

35 *Ibid.*, p.10.

‘Arabī³⁶ who proposes an imaginal realm (*alām al-Khayāl*) that constitutes a field of knowledge acquisition that is distinct from that of intellectual reasoning.³⁷ Idel’s comment on the Midrashic ability to bring conflicting views together in one work, reflects the idea that perplexity at the juxtaposition of the apparently contradictory is considered a sign of spiritual progress, as has been reflected on by some of the scholar-mystics of the Abrahamic faiths.

In speaking above of facilitating an honest embodiment of the participants’ narratives I borrow a term as applied by Lawrence Fine who, when speaking of Lurianic Kabbalah, refers to it as an ‘embodied phenomenon’. With this he refers to the fact that those practitioners of the Kabbalah, as taught by Isaac Luria in Safed, Palestine, were central to its practice and deserve more attention in the study of Lurianic mysticism. Secondly, Fine argues that in addition to the mythic teachings of Luria which were attentively studied the, ‘... Lurianic Kabbalah was first and foremost a lived and living phenomenon, the actual social world of a discrete, historically observable community.’³⁸ Fine undertakes to embody the study of Luria by contextualizing him historically and biographically rather than pursuing a purely theoretical study of Luria’s teachings. He also explores the spiritual community of Safed before Luria arrived there and during the last three years of his life that he spent there. An interesting parallel to Lawrence Fine’s work on Isaac Luria can be found in a biography of Ibn ‘Arabī by Stephen Hirtenstein.³⁹ In this case Hirtenstein’s primary objective is to record the life story of the Andalusian scholar-mystic, his person, his travels, and his geographical, social, and spiritual situatedness. Simultaneously the book is generously filled with the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī to illuminate the Shaykh’s metaphysical teachings and spiritual practice. In this manner Hirtenstein gives ‘body’ to the spirit of Ibn al-‘Arabī while giving spirit to the ‘body’ of his life. The Lurianic Kabbalah, and the Ṣūfī *taṣawwuf* of Ibn ‘Arabī, are living phenomena in Israel and Palestine today equally, both Isaac Luria and Ibn ‘Arabī are significant figures on the historical timeline drawn in this investigation. The embodiment of the lives and perceptions of

³⁶Ibn ‘Arabī (1165 – 1240), also known as ‘the Greatest Shaykh’, lived and worked in Al-Andalus and has had a wide-ranging influence on Islamic mysticism to the present day. See Chapter Two and Chapter Three for more detailed information on Ibn ‘Arabī’s life and work.

³⁷For an excellent exposition of Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas on the imaginal realm see William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

³⁸Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and his Kabbalistic Fellowship*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 10. Stanford Studies in Jewish History and Culture.

³⁹Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn ‘Arabī*, (Oxford and Oregon: Anqa Publishing and White Cloud Press, 1999).

participants pursued in this investigation bears resemblance to that given to Isaac Luria and Ibn al-'Arabī by Fine and Hirtenstein respectively, but is also somewhat different. The phenomenon that I seek to give a textual embodiment in this thesis is the continuing practice of the Ṣūfī path, or practices inspired and informed by this path, among Jews and Muslims and this is undertaken through the qualitative study of the participants in this phenomenon. The methodological approach I pursue was chosen in part for its ability to embody the experientially gained knowledge of the participants in their own narrative voices and in relation to the other with whom they live.

1.5 Method and the Narratives from the Field

The approach is historical and comparative in its study of past relations between Jews and Muslims. Geographically this investigation covers several locations. Chronologically it likewise travels through more than one temporal zone. The choices made concerning times and locations are neither arbitrary nor disparate but rather draw a cultural, religious, and spiritual, line that provides ample underpinning for the examination of contemporary Ṣūfī practices as a tool for peace and reconciliation that is the intention of this investigation.

In the exploration into the points of contact between the two faiths and the distinctions that make each of them discrete in their monotheistic expressions of faith, theology will play a role insofar as the areas where the boundaries are fluid between the faiths are highlighted. I also find it appropriate and timely to approach my investigation from a feminist perspective. By this I do not mean a specific theoretical approach, or one which favours a focus on female participation in any of the areas covered, either historically or contemporaneously, this would not be appropriate in a study that is not focusing exclusively on the role of women in interfaith dialogue or in Sufism, however, I do consider it appropriate to take a feminist perspective for three reasons: first, as a female student of religions I feel more comfortable proceeding with an approach that honours the different but equally valuable contributions of all interfaith activists in an arena where women often appear to be side-lined, second, Ursula King has made the point that despite the profound methodological shift brought about by feminist studies of religion,⁴⁰ interfaith dialogue is

40 Ursula King, "Is there a Future for Religious Studies as We Know It? Some Postmodern, Feminist, and Spiritual Challenges", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, June 2002, Vol.70, No. 2, pp. 365 - 388 [Online] Available at: <http://jaar.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/70/2/365> [Last accessed: 14th April, 2009].

an area where feminist scholars of religion have as yet made few inroads; and additionally, whereas women are involved at the grassroots level they are rarely seen at official dialogue meetings; and finally, the subjectivity involved in the participant narratives and the inclusion of reflexive notes are very much feminist concerns in recent scholarship. King also notes the dependence of the 'Western' academy on foundational texts in the study of religion(s) to the detriment of studying faith traditions in the lives of its practitioners.⁴¹ This is certainly changing where social science methods are applied such as the participant-observer field study and loosely-structured interviews which are the central constituents of the present study, but foundational texts remain fundamental in that they inform the lives of faith communities and the field study observes the interpretations of individuals and communities of their foundational texts. I therefore intend to achieve a balance between the two.

The major part of this work is formed by the focus on an analytical reading of the field data the primary sources of which are eight narratives gained from Jewish interviewees in Israel. While focussing primarily on the Jewish perspective the Muslim view is also represented through interviews, participant observation, and cyber data. Excerpts from this material are found throughout Part Two of this study. The question that this investigation attempts to explore is answered by those who I interviewed during two field studies in Israel during May and August 2011. They spoke of several themes I originally intended to treat in-depth in the first part of this work and they also mentioned a great deal of literature that they either wrote themselves or had read. Several of my interviewees were academics whose work has proved invaluable to this investigation. I therefore decided that this offered an opportunity to take an approach that integrates the examination of themes pertinent to the theory and methodological approach, primarily within the analysis of the field data. The remarks made by participants during their interviews often refer to themes pertinent to the background of this investigation, not necessarily because I have asked questions directly relevant to those themes but because they naturally arise in the spiritual – and in some cases academic – world of mysticism. As part of the analysis of the participants' narratives I take the opportunity to examine those themes as they arise within the narrative. They include the use of language in describing the ineffable, the application of terms that are seldom entirely satisfactory and require qualification, issues of identity in Israel, and the dynamics of interreligious encounter. These themes are all addressed in Part

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 376.

One with additional reference to the field data and then find a re-assessment in Part Two through the subjective lens of the participants' narratives. Each of the four themes mentioned above carries both an academic relevance to the present research and a hermeneutical consequence arising from the ontological, epistemological, and theological concepts of the Şūfī interpretation of the Qur'ān. This method intends to promote a greater understanding of the Şūfī world in Israel from the inside and highlights the relevance of those themes to the question of Sufism's potential contribution to reconciliation and peace. For example, one narrator speaks passionately about the problems she perceives with the terms 'Şūfī' and 'mysticism'. Her comments provide the space within the analysis of her narrative to speak further on the Şūfī understanding of human development and on the mentioned terms. It also assists in delving deeper into appreciating the nature of her hope that lives alongside her fears. These themes find a deeper and more organic treatment through their subjective application in the narratives and the lives of the narrators and conversants.

The field data is divided into two groups: The narratives of interviewees, and the complementary participant-observations described more fully below. Beginning with a simple description of the research the interviewees were asked to speak about their path to Sufism and what this meant to them. They were free to speak of their own experiences and to follow any threads that arose for them while describing that path. Although a fixed list of questions would have enabled a direct comparison of responses to establish commonalities and differences among the target groups the chosen procedure for gathering narratives allowed the opportunity for a deeper analysis of points appropriate to a dialogue with the transcribed text. It was felt that a list of questions would not do service to the complexity of experiences that parallel the complexity of identities – spiritual and cultural – in Israel. Although the use of questionnaires might offer a useful subsidiary set of data more akin to the social sciences approach nevertheless a method that allows greater inclusion of the interviewees freely arising concerns is deemed to be more satisfactory. Any further questions posed during the interviews arose from the content of the narrators accounts. The enthusiasm and articulateness of the narrators produced extensive narratives that lend themselves easily to discussion over several chapters in Part Two and which also provide material for citation throughout the thesis. Any more than the chosen narratives given a full reading here would have been unwieldy within the bounds of this work but they are complemented by further data gathered through observation,

conversations, and participation in Ṣūfī events in Israel. Included in the interviewee narratives are reports on works of non-fiction that are available in Israel and therefore form part of the exposure to Ṣūfī ideas and Ṣūfī/Kabbalah juxtapositions such as in the music of the popular group, Sheva⁴² The strong cultural connections to the Jewish literary and cultural scene in the US reinforce this exposure. It would be too ambitious to claim that this creates an ambience of Jewish-Muslim cultural and religious interaction among the general population of Israel but it is safe to say that it contributes to an openness to know more among those who come in contact with the musical and literary expressions that are specifically of a Ṣūfī nature or are Ṣūfī inspired. The art museum in Jerusalem has also held a series of talks on Iranian art and literature which inevitably includes Ṣūfī material thereby demonstrating an interest sufficient to ensure participation. There is not sufficient space within the boundaries of this study to give this literary and artistic aspect of Jewish-Muslim engagement its due consideration apart from mention by the participants but it is a subject worthy of further research.

As explained above, the theoretical underpinning of Part Two consists of an epistemic dialogue: gaining knowledge through dialogue with the field narratives through an intertextual conversation between them. Since the texts constitute the transcripts of interviews and the primary source material of the study, a justification is required as to why a dialogue is not pursued by the author as part of the interview process and then simply analysed in the manner of discourse analysis. As previously stated it was deemed more appropriate to allow the interviewees as much freedom as possible in their narration after a brief description of the research and an introductory invitation to speak of their path to Sufism as Jews, what it meant to them, and whether they saw their practice as contributing to reconciliation and peace. Any further questions were asked only as encouragement and the interviews often adopted a conversational tone. They were not directed in the sense of presenting a set of specific questions.

The decision to pursue an intertextual conversation arose from an awareness of the participants and myself being part of the discourse on Jewish-Muslim relations and the role of Sufism in that discourse. This awareness permeated the conducting of each interview. The literature produced by the interviewees, of both academic and general reading genres, is also seen as significant material that contributes to answering the thesis question of

⁴² See Appendix II for mention of this group in the excerpts from the Olam Qatan newsletters written by Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf.

whether the pathways of engagement being created are also contributing to reconciliation and peace.

Textual sources were used for the historical components of the study and for the relation of Ṣūfī ontology and epistemology alongside its hermeneutics of the Qur'ān in the exploration of Ṣūfī applicability to an integration of the other in the understanding of the self. Field narratives are the most important primary resource of this study and are complemented with personal observation and a reading of cyber data. Publications and pending publications of several of the interviewees are also significant as data insofar as they represent the work of the author/interviewee on themes pertinent to Sūfism in Israel and the dissemination of those themes among the academic community and the reading public within Israel. Interviews were relatively informal and were recorded using a small and unobtrusive digital voice recorder. Some interviews were also done via Skype. On a few occasions I used a notebook. I also attended meetings, study circles, a Ṣūfī conference, and the Jerusalem Ṣūfī Circle regularly over nine weeks in the summer of 2011. In addition I engaged in many casual conversations with an interested general public in Jerusalem which activity provided a good general background of attitudes, practices, and curiosity about Sufism in Israel. These conversations took place in the homes of friends, in cafes, and with customers at the Ṣūfī book stall at the Friday *shouk* (market) in Jerusalem. For the purpose of becoming more acquainted with the Beshara School I attended four of the symposia of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society in Oxford in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013.⁴³ This society is closely related to the Beshara School and the translations and monographs of Ibn 'Arabī's life and work have constituted a large part of my reading specifically for this study and in general throughout my BA and MA studies. I have also received regular updates from a contact in Jerusalem on meetings, conferences, and Ṣūfī festivals in Israel that are attended/organized by the founders of Derekh Avraham, the members of Beshara, other Jewish Ṣūfī practitioners, and the Qādiri Muslim Ṣūfīs of Nazareth. In the pursuit of field data I often felt like an insider and an outsider simultaneously. I was experiencing my own spiritual journey while attending to the academic work of research and this related closely to the topic of Sufism and the Ṣūfī practice of seeing the other as a divine reflection with invaluable lessons to provide for the spiritual journey. I did not find this to be an obstacle to objectivity and found it to be a parallel experience to that of the researcher who needs

⁴³ In May 2013 I was also invited to speak about my research at the annual symposium.

to suspend judgement when engaging with the subject – something which a Ṣūfī is constantly trained in while seeking knowledge and applying discernment.

Several of the contemporary academic texts that inform this investigation are also objects of the same investigation in that they are written by Jewish-Israeli scholars on Ṣūfī and Jewish mysticism who are among the participants interviewed for this study. This is a direct continuation of the scholar-practitioner tradition and is in itself worthy of further research. Those academics who are scholar-practitioners play a significant role in maintaining the heritage of spiritual interaction in the work they do, both academically and practically. Academic research that is of value to interfaith dialogue and grassroots practice meets in the work of these scholars. Ursula King outlined what she called, '(A) larger vision than a merely academic one', for the future of religious studies.⁴⁴ She describes this larger vision as linking, 'the academic endeavours of religion scholars within universities to the non-academic, practical concerns of wider communities.'⁴⁵ The scholar-practitioner contributes by her/his work both to the academy and to the faith communities and thereby partakes in this larger vision to which King refers. From the scholar-practitioner mystics of Al-Andalus to their counterparts in the Israeli academy today, who focus their research on Ṣūfism and Jewish mysticism while actively practising a spiritual path that is the focus of their intellectual endeavour, were, and are, enriching both the academy and the tradition while having the potential to effect a change in the way self and other are perceived in relation to the dynamics of Jewish-Muslim relations.

'Participant' is applied here as indicating the participation of interviewees and conversants in the process of transformation of perspectives on self and other. They are, of course, also participants in the field study but this distinction is made to emphasize the ensuing narratives as the experiential knowledge base owned by the agents of change who have effected that change by following the techniques of Ṣūfī practice. Others have attended events organized by peace leaders with Ṣūfī and/or Kabbalistic backgrounds which inspire their work. An example of the latter is the involvement of Eliyahu McClean and Sheikh Bukhari in the Jerusalem Hug, and the Sulha Gatherings which bring all sectors of the population together. It takes courage to embark on such a path, or to truly meet the other for the first time. As mentioned above, in addition to the primary sources that result from

44 King/ Is there a Future, p. 385.

45 Ibid., p. 385.

the field study in Israel-Palestine, I also use a secondary field for gathering qualitative data: cyberspace. The cyber-field offers more than one category of data: report, journalism, blog, and social networks, and they have all been of value in indicating trends of thought on Israel and Palestine as well as being the medium for practitioners and activists to reach a wider support base.

1.6 Chapter Outline

After this introduction which covers method and theory the trajectorial intention in this work begins with establishing the primary contexts within which the lives and work of the subjects that give rise to the question under investigation are embedded. It continues by grounding the activities of the subjects in the historical precedents of engagement between Jewish and Muslim traditions of mysticism. From this basis the launch into the contemporary appearance of such engagement in Israel is made through an analysis of the gathered narratives of some of its practitioners and the recorded observance of the events and conversations in which I either participated or of which I have been informed after the field study in Israel. To the latter it may be noted that the cyber field study has been ongoing through email, Skype calls, social networking and blog interaction. **Chapter Two** clarifies the interdisciplinary nature of the work and explores the three primary environments in which the subject under study is embedded and which thereby necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. Sufism, spirituality and religion, and interfaith dialogue constitute those environments and are outlined in a manner that includes the formation of identities and the role of language in several narrative registers. Historical and political narratives are naturally implicated within the above categories. Political and religious points are also implicit in the examination of multiple Israeli identities, as are also the linguistic aspects of identity narratives as expressed through national, religious, and ethnic linguistic identities with consideration given also to the apophatic language of mysticism and its deconstruction of fixed loci of meaning. Şūfī teachings and practice, and their relation to interfaith and reconciliation movements, are also examined here. **Chapter Three** engages in the history of Jewish-Muslim interreligious encounter and exchange in Al-Andalus and Fustāt, medieval Cairo. It is not intended as a rigorous study of this extended time period but gives an intimation of important figures and their work while surveying the literature in this field of study. Topics pertinent to this history arise within the narratives of the interviewees and find further mention within the analysis of those narratives. A consideration of contested versions of the history of *convivencia* and the use of the epithet

'Golden Age' is also given here. **Part Two** covers **Chapter Four** through to **Chapter Eight** and forms the main body of the thesis in which the field data is analysed. The choice of narratives for this section is based partly on the contribution of their authors, the interviewees, to the activities they promote and the pivotal nature of their work either to the meeting of Jews and Muslims and/or the dissemination of Ṣūfī thought in Israel. The extent and depth of these narratives also enable an enriching analysis in the qualitative and dialogical manner here undertaken. **Chapter Four** examines the narratives of three co-founders of the Derekh Avraham Jewish-Ṣūfī Order, Avraham Elkayam, Roberto Arbib, and Paul Fenton. **Chapter Five** engages with two members of the Beshara School, Judith Sternberg and Rachel Gordin. **Chapter Six** views the work and practice of three individuals in Jerusalem, Sara Svir, Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, and David.⁴⁶ Although this study presents the Jewish perspective on the subject, **Chapter Seven** introduces the work of two Muslim Ṣūfī peacemakers, Shaykh Ghassan Manasra and the late Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari, both of whom find frequent mention in the interview narratives of the other participants. The Jewish-Israeli peacemaker, Eliyahu McLean also plays a significant role in this chapter as the working partner of both Ghassan and previously of Abdul Aziz. A brief survey of other existing peace initiatives in Israel contextualizes the work of these three peacemakers. Throughout Part Two excerpts from the narratives of the Muslim Ṣūfīs, Khalid Abu Ras and Mustafa Abu Sway are also included. As a co-founder of Derekh Abraham/Ṭariqāt Ibrahimiyya, the interview narrative of Khalid Abu Ras is found mainly in Chapter Four.

As a researcher and author of the investigation I stand in relation to the texts and to the land, and primarily to the people, who constitute the focus of my enquiry. Therefore **Chapter Eight**, the final chapter of **Part Two**, is devoted to reflexivity and the question of subjectivity. Integrating my personal reflections into the body of the text provides the opportunity to include comments on the field data which would be inappropriate in the academic analysis of the interviews and observations. An example of this would be the palpable hope of positive change during the interview with Sara even when she was saying that she is not optimistic. This hope comes through in a few of her remarks but more can be said about this from a Ṣūfī perspective that it is difficult to express in an intellectual manner simply because the Ṣūfī posits, and experiences, a mode of knowledge that is informed by the heart.⁴⁷ As the purpose of this study is to investigate the potential of Ṣūfī practice to furthering understanding and reconciliation between Muslims and Jews it feels appropriate to allow comments from the researcher's Ṣūfī perspective within the main

⁴⁶ David is the only interviewee who wished to maintain anonymity.

⁴⁷ Ṣūfī epistemology will be elucidated in Chapter Two.

body of the text in addition to the academic analysis. This is simply what might be called a parallel register of reading that does not claim to possess more salient information on the investigation and its results but nevertheless honours an approach that regards the 'truth' as residing in several locations and as accessible through more than one of the human faculties of information gathering.

Part Three, Chapter Nine is devoted to the conclusions drawn from the research and the field study and summarizes the most often occurring themes raised by the participants. Special attention is given to issues of identity and the historical precedents of Jewish-Muslim engagement as providing a common heritage to both communities and a potentially shared marker of identity building. The comments of the interviewees on their perceptions of *convivencia* and historical Jewish-Muslim engagement is compared with the previously noted contested narratives of this period and the problems arising from such. The work of the participants is situated within the context of the many grass-roots initiatives for peace in Israel and Palestine and evaluated for its agency within the 'other voice' referring to those engaged in reconciliatory activities on the ground. The extent to which mysticism is able to contribute to this 'other voice' receives attention here and its primary role in the lives of the interviewees is emphasized as the basis of the relationship to the other that forms the core motivation for the studied group to meet and work together. The case for knowledge exchange between academic research and groundwork in the field is assessed and suggestions for further research and practical work towards furthering the irenic intentions of all participants in this study are made.

CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXTS OF THE INVESTIGATION

2.1 The Land Inscribed

The situation in Israel and Palestine is beset with complexities from whichever perspective or discipline it is approached and it is difficult, if not impossible, to speak of justice, peace, and reconciliation from a religious perspective without paying some attention to politics, history, national narratives, and collective memory, to mention some, but by no means all, of the aspects that are closely knit in approaching the problem. The fact that a holistic picture of the entirety of an era or theme is only possible through the work of many academics coming from diverse perspectives, approaches, and disciplines is a positive sign that indicates the value of interdisciplinarity and works against any tendencies to present a monolithic view of any theme in the study of religions.

The political history is not dealt with here as it is equally well-covered from several perspectives and different political vantage points in both academic works and those for general reading with a voluminous and growing contribution. This study does not list perceived injustices, illegal actions, acts of terrorism or the failure to abide by UN sanctions, by any of the parties involved in the conflict except where such may find mention in a citation. One thing that became very apparent to me during my stay in Israel is that to be pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli means to be contra the other. In a study with irenic intentions in the field of dialogue and reconciliation and one, moreover, that examines the potential contribution of *Ṣūfī* practice in Israel to the process of peace, it would be inappropriate and unhelpful to engage in an apportioning of blame, even where it is obvious. This does not indicate a stance of indifference on the part of the author but instead is intended to emphasise that the focus here is on the grassroots pathways of engagement between Jews and Muslims that are appearing amidst the political manoeuvres and rhetoric of hate and dissonance that demonize the other in many quarters of the populations of the Holy Land. This approach was reflected in the narratives of the interviewees, all of whom spoke with great enthusiasm about their spiritual practice and its practical consequences but who were sometimes reticent or less happy in speaking of the political situation, not because they were indifferent, but mostly because the relationships between Jews and Muslims that they were actively pursuing were in themselves actions that result from their engagement in *Ṣūfī* mysticism. The general mood among the narrators concerning the political situation was one of frustration and sadness. The contexts that this chapter purveys are those within which the participants of the field study

are situated: the religious, the dialogical, and the spiritual world of Sufism and which impact on Jewish-Muslim relations in a positive sense of knowing the other. In exploring the markers of identity in the specific contexts of religious, spiritual, and dialogical contingencies an idea may be formed of the matrix within which any bid for peace must navigate its intentions. The exploration begins with this short introduction to the dialectical relationship between people and land as an inscription of each and the resulting complex identities in Israel.

The larger context within which the focus on Şūfī practice in Israel is situated is equally complex and multi-layered. The history of the faith traditions in the Holy Land includes the sacred significance invested in the area and the politics of conquest, occupation, and rule by different peoples through time. This covers a period of approximately five thousand years⁴⁸ and has continuing echoes in Israel and the OTP in the practice of the faiths and in the interpretation of histories taken to justify the establishment of the State of Israel, or to deny its validity.⁴⁹ The sacred significance of the land is of importance to Jews, Christians, and Muslims around the world as well as the Druze and the Samaritans.

The designation 'Holy Land' is one that is acceptable to all sectors of the population of Israel and the OTP even though there may be differing interpretations of its historical, political, and geographical nature and extent. This term is occasionally used in this study when referring to issues involving all residents of the area of Israel and the OTP when they are not explicitly political or contained within the present political boundaries of Israel. 'Eretz Yisrael' is a similar, but specifically Jewish, term that is biblical in origin. In Genesis 15. 18 – 21:

On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your offspring I assign this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites,

⁴⁸ See Nur Masalha and Michael Hayes, "Research Notes: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Fundamentalist Perspectives on Jerusalem: Implications for Interfaith Relations" in *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 5, Number One, May 2006, pp. 97 – 112, DOI: 10.1353/hls.2006.0009, Edinburgh University Press [Online] Available at: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/holy_land_studies/summary/v005/5.1masalha.html [Last accessed: November 2010] Here it is noted that, 'Historically the city of Jerusalem was not founded by Jews, Christians, or Muslims – it is one of the oldest cities on earth, founded by the Jebusites, who belonged to a Canaanite tribe, about 5,000 years ago; also historically the city, for different reasons, became central to the 'sacred geography' of the three faiths. Its 'holiness' for Jews, Muslims and Christians partly derives from the presence of their most sacred shrines in the city.' (p. 100)

⁴⁹ Those who deny the validity of Israel as a Jewish state include sectors of the Palestinian (Muslim and Christian) and Jewish (Haredi, or Ultra-Orthodox Jewish) population within the land in addition to some Muslim, Arab, and Jewish voices outside the land. The varied reasons for this denial are usually based on religious or human rights issues.

the Kennizites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

In the commentary to these verses in *The Jewish Study Bible*⁵⁰ it is noted that:

These are the maximal borders of the promised land given in the Tanakh. They encompass, for example, much more territory than the borders specified in Num. 34. 1 – 2, and may reflect an ideal that was never realized. The expression “river of Egypt” is unparalleled. It may refer to an eastern arm of the Nile or to the Wadi el-Arish, a body of water between the Negev and the Sinai Peninsula. The Heb. words for “river” and for “wadi” are very similar.⁵¹

As mentioned, these borders were never realized and the present borders of Israel enclose a much smaller area. Israel was established as a state for all Jews and it is for this reason that at its inception the decision was made to make a distinction between citizenship and nationality. As a Jewish state the nationality of the citizens of Israel is Jewish. If you are Palestinian then your nationality is Arab. If you are neither then your nationality will be defined in ethnic or religious terms. There are over 130 possible nationalities adopted by the interior ministry.⁵² Approximately twenty percent of the citizens of Israel are not Jewish. In an article by Jonathan Cook it is reported that a group of Jewish and Arab Israelis were attempting to be recognized as Israeli nationals but with little likelihood of success as, ‘Israel refused to recognise an Israeli nationality at the country’s establishment in 1948, making an unusual distinction between ‘citizenship’ and ‘nationality’. Although all Israelis qualify as ‘citizens of Israel’, the state is defined as belonging to the ‘Jewish nation’, meaning not only the 5.6 million Israeli Jews but also more than seven million Jews in the diaspora.’⁵³ Concerning the matter of Israel defining itself as a Jewish State and whether this is compatible with democracy, a SHUR report states the following:

Notions of democracy differ significantly in Israel and in the OPT due to their radically different political structures. In Israel, the debate is both theoretical and legal: theoretically, it mainly revolves around the definition of the nature of the State. Israel defines itself as a Jewish and democratic state, and this seems an at least apparent contradiction. Legally, this presents issues concerning the status and rights

⁵⁰ Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (eds.), *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation: Torah, Nevi'im, Kethuvim*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, Jewish Publication Society, 2004).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵² In Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People*, (London and New York: Verso, 2009). Translated by Yael Lotan. Originally published in Hebrew by Resling, 2008, Sand speaks in an introductory chapter on personal memories of the complications involved for members of his family in recording nationality and religion on their identity cards. See also n. 53.

⁵³ Jonathan Cook, ‘Why There Are No ‘Israelis’ in the Jewish State’ Dissident Voice [Online] Available at: <http://www.jkcook.net/Articles3/0472.htm#Top> [Last accessed: 7th April 2010].

of minorities in Israel, mainly the non-Jewish minorities, and it poses questions of discrimination in regard to the Palestinian Arab citizens of the state. Legal action in Israel is one of the main means used by human and civil rights NGOs and movements in actions in support of equality and justice.⁵⁴

While discrimination of Arab citizens of the state is an issue that needs to be rectified it is also important to understand in what sense many Israelis understand their nation as a Jewish State. In conversation I gained the impression that it is not seen as a contradiction to democracy, and it is certainly not a theocracy, and that the whole point of the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state was to provide a safe haven from persecution for all Jews. One might view the terms 'democracy' and 'Jewish State' as a perplexing juxtaposition but dialogue is necessary to clarify the consequences of these definitions and the status of non-Jewish citizens of the state.

Shaykh Ibrahim Abu el-Hawa, who works together with Jewish peace workers as part of the Jerusalem Peacemakers, describes the confusion of political status and rights, especially as a resident of East Jerusalem which is part of the OTP:

People around the world don't know much about our lives. They regard me as an Arab. An Arab, yes, that is right, but there are 22 Arab countries in the world, and the whole Arab world is not mine. As a Palestinian living in Israel I cannot have Israeli citizenship, and as I live in East Jerusalem in Israel I am not legally a Palestinian. I need a visa if I want to make the *hajj* to Mecca, and it is forbidden for me to go, for example, to Syria or Iraq, because I live in Israel. It is easier for me to travel to Europe or the US than to most Arab countries. I don't have citizenship anywhere in the world, but I believe I am a citizen of the world. I am a man without a country, without a passport. Although I have lived here all my life, all I have is a special residency. If I stay outside my country, Israel, for more than a year, I am not allowed to come back again.⁵⁵

The complexities of political and religious identity, and their diverse interweaving, mean that Israel, when described as a Jewish state, becomes problematic for its non-Jewish

⁵⁴ SHUR Working Paper Series, Case Study Report WP5, Israel-Palestine field research report, Kenneth Brown, Mediterraneans/ MSH, Paris, Laure Fourest, EHESS/MSH, Paris and Are Hovdenak, PRIO, Oslo. With the contribution of Rabea Hass, Marburg University, SHUR wp 02/08, June 2008. SHUR: Human Rights in Conflicts: The Role of Civil Society is a STREP project funded by the 6th Framework Programme of the European Commission (Contract number: CIT5-CT-2006-028815). [Online] Available at: <http://shur.luiss.it/files/2010/01/shurwp04-08.pdf>, p. 4. [Last accessed: 5th May 2011].

⁵⁵ Ibrahim Abu El-Hawa, Jerusalem Peacemakers [Online] Available at: <http://jerusalempeacemakers2008.jerusalempeacemakers.org/ibrahim/intro.html> [Last accessed: 5/10/2010].

population and the many Palestinian refugees hoping for a right to return to their homeland.⁵⁶

The equation of the intertextuality of the many narratives that constitute the story of Israel and the OPT, with the interdependence of its residents in the understanding of their history and their present situation, focuses on the role of multiple narratives in the building of identity and the struggle for justice. As that interdependency becomes more apparent so the story may be perceived in a different light. This equation is implicit in a Şūfī hermeneutics of the Qur’ān. It is appropriate to highlight the often pivotal role played by language when treating questions of identity and problems of attempting to describe the ineffable. While the former requires a consideration of political, national, and historical registers of narrative, the latter can benefit from a poststructuralist and apophatic approach that compares the insights of deconstruction with the creative endeavours of mysticism to speak of a divinity that is utterly transcendent while being simultaneously immanent. I relate these two registers of socio-cultural and political identity, and the experiential basis of Şūfī practice as the Şūfī view of identity is one which requires a measure of detachment from all that binds an individual to the ties of the world in the understanding of the unity of all being. This does not so much negate the identity of a person but puts it into the perspective of a larger picture where the aim is to embrace a unity that manifests through all beings and it is this ontological stance that can enable a contribution to the project of peace. A Foucauldian acknowledgement of the links between language, knowledge, and power is also in place here when speaking of language and identity and which curiously finds parallel links in the realm of the esoteric that can – in contrast to Foucault’s proposal – only function when the egoistic desire to manipulate the ‘other’ to one’s own ends is completely absent.

A multitude of texts interact in the claiming and re-claiming of identities bound to the land and to the narratives of the other. The land is a body inscribed by its dwellers and their narratives, and in turn the land inscribes the lives and narratives of those who live there, whether that response is one of attempted selective negation, an uneasy co-existence with

⁵⁶ On the history of the Palestinians in Israel and issues of equal rights see Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman, *Israel’s Palestinians: The Conflict Within*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and Ilan Pappé, *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

the uncomfortable, or the acceptance of its palimpsestual nature.⁵⁷ Within the three themes of the sacred, the political, and the personal, it is the relation of each to the other that touches on the complex realities of identity and agency in this specific conflict reality. They are so closely bound that, as already noted, the several communities present in the land are interdependent in terms of those three registers and therefore also mutually reliant on that interdependency in the building of identity and, ironically, in the practice of othering. Marc Gopin comments on the extent of interdependency in the process of othering as a means to building identity:

There is not just an interdependency of politics and myth, or politics and culture, in conflict and peace-making. There is also a highly interactive dependency of cultures on each other, *even when they are adversaries*. Cultures that live side by side are always in competition in some fashion, and always guarding their boundaries. This is inevitable for the formation of unique identity, which appears to be a near universal need among both individuals and whole groups. We all watch each other constantly, and we take our cues from others. When one culture emphasizes a belligerent approach to the outside world, then the other, neighboring culture will do the same. Deciphering which one starts this, for various internal reasons, or whether the process is simultaneous, is difficult to know and varies with each case. But one thing is certainly true, even when we see ourselves as qualitatively different and better than our lifelong adversaries, we cannot help but be influenced by and influence the adversary culture. And the worse the conflict becomes, the more it seems that enemies begin to resemble each other, to the point where the propaganda and demonizations of each group seem identical.⁵⁸

Apart from the geo-political complexities there is also the strong architectural, religious, and cultural heritage of each of the communities who have lived together in the land through the centuries. The peoples of this territory are therefore constantly reminded of the presence of the other. The resemblance of enemies that Gopin speaks of above is not purely one that is generated by the conflict in the act of identity building in the face of adversaries, it is also a resemblance, especially between Judaism and Islam, of culture, faith, and many other of the aspects of life that accrue on a specific terrain and that has been endowed by those communities with a sacred significance. It is true, however, that many of the Jews who moved to Israel were unfamiliar with the existing culture and knew Eretz Yisrael, and especially Jerusalem, primarily as a sacred location embedded deeply in the religious history and psyche of the Jewish people. The demographic and territorial

⁵⁷ A dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian scholars on the narratives of the conflict can be found in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History's Double Helix*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁵⁸ Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East*, (New York: Oxford University Press, US, 2002), p. 56.

situation of the Holy Land is also complex. The State of Israel alone contains several diverse groups including Muslim and Christian Palestinians of Israeli citizenship. There are also Sephardic, Mizrahi, Falashi, and Ashkenazi Jews in addition to Samaritans and Druze. Of the twenty percent of the population that is of Palestinian origin the majority are Muslims and about two percent are Christian of several denominations including Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Maronite, and Anglicans. Each of these groups has a different history to tell.⁵⁹ However, the position of the Christian and Muslim Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, under the Palestinian Authority and Hamas is significantly different to that of their fellow Palestinians living within the State of Israel. There are also approximately half a million Israeli settlers living illegally within the Occupied Territories under the protection of the Israeli military.

Shaykh Abu el-Hawa, in the excerpt above, highlights a sense of loss of his Palestinian identity by being defined as Arab. The Arab-Israeli minority in Israel is composed of individuals, and their descendants, who did not flee their homes during the Israeli War of Independence/*Nakba*. Although their understanding of themselves is as Palestinian-Israelis, intimately related to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the official Israeli designation of their identity status is that of Arab-Israelis. Further problems of ethnic identity and national status emerge from the fact that many Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewish-Israelis identify themselves as Arab-Jews, having arrived in Israel, sometimes hesitantly, after centuries of living in Arab countries.⁶⁰ These communities were generally well integrated in their 'host' countries, speaking fluent Arabic as their mother tongue and generally reluctant to perform *aliyah* after 1948. The Sephardic Jews are the descendants of those who fled the Iberian Peninsula when Isobel and Ferdinand, the Catholic Monarchs, conquered the final remaining territory of Al-Andalus, the Kingdom of Granada, in 1492 and pronounced an edict saying that all Muslims and Jews either be baptized into the Roman Catholic faith, leave, or die.⁶¹ The majority of the Jews who left Al-Andalus moved to

⁵⁹ For these and further statistics see Phyllis Bennis, *Inside Israel-Palestine: The Conflict Explained*, (Oxford: New Internationalist Publications, 2007), Part One.

⁶⁰ See Rachel Shabi, *Not the Enemy: Israel's Jews from Arab Lands*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁶¹ Christians of Al-Andalus may have also suffered under the new regime of the Catholic Monarchs, mainly on three points: many still followed the Visigothic rites which they were now required to relinquish; their status being suspect in the new societal conditions because of their 'Arabization'; the loss of the multi-faith/multi-cultural society which ruled both in Al-Andalus and in the territories re-taken by Christian forces prior to the ascendance of Isobel and Ferdinand. In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* it is noted that the Visigothic rite, also known as the Mozarabic rite, is, 'The conventional name for the liturgical forms which were in use in the Iberian Peninsula from the earliest times until the 11th cent. Its replacement by the Roman rite was a result of the Christian reconquest of Spain. There was resistance to its abolition in Toledo, and here it was

Muslim countries, especially Istanbul, Baghdad, and Morocco. The social status of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews in Israel has often been lamented as that of second class citizens and one reaction to this has been the attempt to identify more with the national narrative and the Ashkenazi history of persecution in European countries by emphasizing the persecution and loss of property experienced in their Arab homelands after the establishment of the state of Israel.⁶²

2.2 Religious and Spiritual Narratives

The religious narratives relating to the Holy Land and to the city of Jerusalem in particular, have their foundation in the writings of the Tanakh, the Qur'ān, and the Gospels. In this section the term 'religious and spiritual' narratives indicates those narratives whose content or motivation is of a religious nature. It does not refer directly to the scriptures of the Abrahamic faiths although their many interpretations, and the consequences of those interpretations for contemporary Israelis, both religious and secular, and equally for Palestinians living in the OTP or as Israeli citizens within Israel, can validly be claimed as the major defining factors of life in the Holy Land today. Of the Tanakh, the Jewish Bible, Uriel Simon, Professor of Biblical Studies, has noted that:

The Zionist endeavor defined itself from the start in biblical language, as the 'return to Zion' (Ps. 126:1), and regarded the renaissance of the Bible, achieved by placing Bible study at the center of the curriculum of the Hebrew school, as an integral component of national rebirth, the re-building of the ancestral land and the revival of its language. The return to the land, to Zion and Jerusalem, to the national independence of the First Commonwealth, to cultivation of the land and military valor, to speaking and creating in the tongue of Amos and Isaiah, received quasi-religious inspiration from the Bible which, for that generation, embodied its immediate tasks and visions, as if the present were recapturing the past.⁶³

allowed to remain in use in six parishes.' Interestingly, the dictionary also notes that, 'In 1989 permission was given for the general use in the region of Toledo (and, with the permission of the Ordinary, throughout Spain) of a new *Missale Hispano-Mozarabicum* which had been revised on the basis of the oldest MSS and with regard to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.' See under the entry "Mozarabic rite" in: E. A. Livingstone (ed.), *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (2 rev. ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Published online: 2006, Current Online Version, 2013. [Available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198614425.001.0001/acref-9780198614425-e-3942#>].

⁶² See Shabi, *Not the Enemy*

⁶³ Uriel Simon and David Louvish (trans.), "The Place of the Bible in Israeli Society: From National 'Midrash' to Existential 'Peshat'" in *Modern Judaism*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Oct., 1999), pp. 217-239, Oxford University Press. [Online] Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1396675> [Last accessed: 12/04/2009], pp. 217, 218

He then discusses the power of poetry which references the Bible, as playing 'a major role in this two-way association of the Zionist endeavor with the Bible'⁶⁴ However, there were also those 'for whom clinging to the national heritage and accepting authority, excess spirituality, moral scruples, the claim to national uniqueness, were obstructions on the path to a natural, free life'⁶⁵ and who rejected the Bible. The mainly secular face of Zionist ideology, referred to by Simon as:

The secular generation, eager to find its reflection in the Bible and to guide its life by its light, could ardently embrace such verses as 'doing work with one hand while the other held a weapon' (Neh. 4:11), but was puzzled and repelled by such words as 'You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy' (Lev. 19:2). To bridge the gap, they had to resort to a quasi-midrashic interpretation, which sanctified biblical values while rejecting the plain meaning of passages concerned with the revelatory source of the text.

The presence of a large secular population in Israel today does not, however, lessen the impact of foundational religious narratives on the contemporary residents of the Holy Land. In 'A Jerusalem Diary', written by Steven Joseph, an American Jew and Jungian therapist who wrote the diary as an account of his experiences during a professional trip to Jerusalem, the sense of extraordinary juxtapositions that continuously confront anyone walking through its streets and partaking in its life is related by Joseph to his work through the topics he is about to teach and which encapsulate appropriately for him the experience of Jerusalem:

It is time for me to call my friend and Jungian colleague Eli, who is my contact for the group of Jungians that I will be teaching. My topic is "Symbolic Images of Transformation"? Lacanian images (transgressing the endless chain of signifiers), Hasidic images (the self-consuming flame of an oil lamp), and Jungian/alchemical images (the middle series of the Splendor Solis) a thicket of contrary images and modes of transformation, just the thing for the burning bush thicket of contradictions that threaten to consume this corner of the world.⁶⁶

For Joseph the images and symbols of Jerusalem are obviously indicators of a psychological, or psycho-spiritual, process and when he speaks of what Jerusalem means to him, and the sentiments it evokes for him, then he is speaking as much of an inner process that he hopes

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 218

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 220

⁶⁶ Steven Joseph, "A Jerusalem Diary" The San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 2006), pp. 6-23, University of California Press on behalf of The C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25705376> [Last accessed: 13/03/2011] p. 10

can lead to a new awareness of liberatory reconciliation that in turn has consequences for life lived with the other:

The New City of Jerusalem was built up largely in the nineteenth century - recently as these things go. But the stones used to build it are ancient. For me it is the stones that carry the *numen* the feeling of bottomless depth that Jerusalem evokes. The City of Reigning Peace, *Yerushalayim*, where the three Abrahamic traditions engage in endless enmity, like the black, white and red birds endlessly pecking at each other in the alchemical *vas* of the *Splendor Solis* series! I do not know whether this City of Peace can transform to the next step or not, as does happen in the *Splendor Solis*. Maimonides suggests that the ultimate root of faith is to wait expectantly and impatiently every day for the coming of *Mashiach* (Messiah), the human being who can reconcile irreconcilable conflicts and contradictions. I suppose that I do this, I wait, more anxiously than expectantly, for the dawning of *mashiach* consciousness in myself and in everyone else.⁶⁷

The centrality of Jerusalem as the spiritual and terrestrial core of Jewish faith and identity cannot be overestimated. Nur Masalha has also noted the powerful emotions that the city arouses and the impossibility of separating the religious, the political, and the secular:

Furthermore devotion to the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem has partly to do with the spiritual life of each faith. In fact one of the main current problems of Jerusalem is the *inseparability* of the spiritual/religious and secular/political dimensions. Moreover in all three faiths the notion of the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem seems to answer a profound human need. In recent years the 'sacred space' of Jerusalem has inspired powerful emotions among Jews, Muslims and Christians: deep anxiety, intense anger, intense traumatic pain, and strong socio-economic, religio-political and spiritual activity.⁶⁸

Joseph records his own 'powerful emotions' in his diary using biblical language of rich symbols and metaphor which he describes as a 'Jungian' truth. He maintains that his words are not literal and yet his experience is embodied:

I know internally – I sense it in my body as a very subtle shimmer and vibration – that I have been touched by the numinosity of this place in yet another way, at yet a new level. It is taught, as I've noted, that the air of Jerusalem makes one wise – but what about the chthonic waters that *flow underneath* Jerusalem? Might they not be living waters that flow from the *Mekor Mayyim Chayyim*, the Source of Living Waters, that hidden and recondite Divine Desire/ Delight which is far deeper than "mere" Wisdom, according to the kabbalah? Divine Desire receives and is a vessel for overflowing Divine Delight. Both are manifestations beyond human comprehension

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁸ Masalha and Hayes, *Research Notes*, p. 100.

of the all-encompassing unitary Name of God, *Eheyeh*, I AM , the *sephirah Keter* (Crown) – the One who/that creates and delights in our cosmos, the One who/that renews Her/His/Its creation continuously at every moment in every location of our spacetime-matter-energy universe. Not literally, of course, not literally, I tell myself. This is not a literal truth, not even a metaphysical truth, but a psychical symbolic truth, a "Jungian" truth. Yet does It not shatter even these categories of psychic discourse? What I do know is that I have been touched and moved quite literally, concretely and bodily by my experience – not only, not even mainly, symbolically.⁶⁹

There is a sense of perplexity in the Jerusalem Diary, a search to understand the psychological, spiritual, and even physical responses that Simon Joseph experiences in Jerusalem. This place that has seen so much bloodshed and yet, in its very name, stands for peace and has such a powerful impact on him which, it appears, he recognizes as an inner impact, and yet he is moved, 'concretely and bodily by my experience – not only, not even mainly, symbolically'. Another search was undertaken by Yossi Klein-Halevi, a correspondent and a religious Jew who wishes to explore spiritual connections with Muslims and Christians in the Holy Land. His story is very movingly written, and more so for its honesty. In the midst of his despair with the conflict he manages to find hope in the spiritual encounters he experiences:

In my daily life I am a journalist, dealing with concrete events in the material world. Given the vehement anti-Jewish hatred emanating from the Arab world, I often find myself questioning the value of my encounters with the Sūfis, who are hardly representative of Palestinian Islam. So what if we danced together, even in a Gaza refugee camp? Rereading parts of this book is sometimes disorienting for me, as if I'm encountering someone else's experiences. But when I stop being a journalist and become instead a spiritual seeker, I recall another reality. The laws of faith, after all, operate differently than the laws of politics. In mundane reality, numbers count; but, as the history of religion repeatedly proves, God doesn't need multitudes to effect spiritual change, only a few individuals determined to become portals for divine will. I met people who aspire to be such instruments, and their presence here gives me hope that God will find His entry points into this despairing land.⁷⁰

The uncomfortable position of being open to apparent contradictory 'truths' is expressed by Halevi when re-visiting Gaza, now as a spiritual seeker who has an appointment with a Šūfī Shaykh, once, previously as an IDF soldier on duty:

Gaza presented me, a child of the Holocaust, with an unbearable paradox. I believed that history imposed on Jews two inviolate demands: Never do to others what was done to you, and never underestimate the intentions of your enemy. Yet freeing

⁶⁹ Steven Joseph, "A Jerusalem Diary" pp. 20, 21.

⁷⁰ Klein Halevi/The Entrance to the Garden, pp. xvi, xvii.

Gaza from occupation meant empowering the enemy that wanted to destroy me. The Israeli left anguished over the occupation of Gaza but ignored its expansionist dreams; the Israeli right warned of Gaza's malevolence but dismissed the corruption of occupation. I was cursed with an openness to opposing truths; the result was shame for being an occupier even as I felt that I had no choice.⁷¹

In contradistinction to Halevi's willingness to hold the contradictions within, another sector of the population of the Holy Land lives by their sense of certainty. These are the followers of 'fundamentalist' religious ideologies in all of the three faiths. The research done by Nur Masalha on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim 'fundamentalist' groups and their perspectives on Jerusalem yielded the following results:

The initial examination and evaluation of materials has revealed not only the growing power of 'fundamentalism' within the three 'Abrahamic faiths' but also the growing focus of the religious conflict in Israel-Palestine on the question of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Furthermore, it was confirmed, there were some profound similarities between the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious 'fundamentalist' attitudes towards the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem.⁷²

'Fundamentalist' attitudes are often rigorously exclusive:

Evidence has emerged supporting the project's original hypothesis that for many Jewish, Christian, and Muslim fundamentalists the religious 'holiness' of the city is not a *historically* evolving phenomenon, but rather something which exists above and outside history. Although religious attitudes towards the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem have evolved historically and will continue to do so, many Jewish, Christian and Muslim 'fundamentalists' (as well as secular and religious nationalists) continue to propagate ahistorical and mythical perspectives on Jerusalem.⁷³

Masalha obviously uses the term 'mythical' in a derogatory sense of 'untruthful' in this excerpt, and not in the sense of a narrative register that might carry 'truths' of a nature other than literal. However, it is the literal-mindedness of the 'fundamentalist' faithful that perpetuates exclusivist viewpoints that are often destructive to a reconciliatory understanding between different communities.

To complete this section I finish with a report from Marc Gopin where the religious and the political impact powerfully on the personal. As a Jewish academic and Rabbi working ceaselessly for peace, Marc Gopin speaks of his moving experience in Jerusalem where the ideal city clashes painfully with the terrestrial reality:

⁷¹ Klein Halevi/Entrance to the Garden, p. 273.

⁷² Masalha and Hayes, *Research Notes*, p. 99.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 100 .

The next time, several years later, that I went to the wall, so many terrorist incidents had occurred in the Old City that the area was militarized to the hilt, soldiers and guns everywhere. And, as I surveyed this almost surreal combination of sacredness and militarization, something broke inside me. My legs weakened, I fell down, and I wept and wept that day in the middle of the plaza overlooking the wall, in the hot noonday sun, laid out flat on my side, for it seemed an eternity. The tears were so intense that the wall became a blur and my shirt was drenched, and in some odd way I felt fulfilled, because Jewish texts often speak of intense crying as the fulfillment of prayer. (...) Religious people I knew at the time, colleagues I daresay, were speaking about needing to “do something”—violent, that is—about Prime Minister Rabin, and I believe that I began mourning over his death right then, months before he was assassinated, because I am often plagued by dark dreams of possible futures. And so the waters of my life flowed that day out of my eyes and my nose and my mouth, as if they had been stored up for decades. I had never done that in any public space in my life, and several Jews approached to see what was wrong but walked away soon, upon seeing that I was not physically in danger. After all, they probably said to themselves, “people do strange things in Jerusalem.” It is a city of many passions that propel you beyond social convention.⁷⁴

2.3 Interfaith Dialogue and Conflict Transformation in Israel

Throughout the history of reconciliation and peace studies and practice in the field, involving also the inclusion of interfaith work, several problematic issues have arisen. These issues are addressed here. Each of the concerns highlighted are related to the context of the present investigation thereby providing a concise illumination of the location of those concerns within the academic study of conflict transformation in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Likewise, the intention is to simultaneously justify the choice of themes that inform the rationale for looking at the subject of Sufism whose primary aim is not conflict resolution as the term is normally understood. The relationship between the academy and the field provides two, sometimes interwoven, threads to this history. As it is a major concern to encourage the exchange of knowledge between these two strands this manner of approaching the history and concerns of reconciliation and peace work is seen as a step in the direction of greater mutual exchange. I write from the perspective of faith as having the potential for a significant contribution to peace in Israel and Palestine and therefore I focus on the role of religions and spiritualities.

The present state of the field in theoretical and applied work on reconciliation and conflict transformation is confronted with several problems. The collection of essays that address theory and practice in a volume edited by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Reconciliation, Justice*

⁷⁴ Marc Gopin, *Holy War*, pp. 80 – 82.

*and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*⁷⁵ highlights both explicitly and implicitly the many challenges facing scholars and practitioners. Abu-Nimer outlines these in his introduction to the book and they range from the lack of agreed definitions and uses of key terms to the often complete inability of policy-makers and high-ranking negotiators to honour the necessity of the very processes that seek a clearer definition. This lack of clarity is a matter that is very evident in a more recently published work on Islamic approaches to peace, *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*⁷⁶. In the ten years between the publications of these two works little appears to have changed. Standard terms in current use such as 'reconciliation', 'conflict resolution', 'peace', 'justice', and 'coexistence' present a challenge not only in their application by theorists but as much in the diverse understanding and expectations of these processes by involved communities and policy-makers. I suggest that initiatives emerging from the grass-roots level, often led by religious leaders and affiliated academics, possess an organic and holistic element that relates closely to the particularity of the conflict from which they arise. Such work often provides a very different image of the reality of a conflict to that projected by governments and media who may have an agenda that fails to address significant aspects of a conflict. The organic nature of grass-roots peace activities does not imply a lack of universal considerations that can be applied elsewhere. It does, however, exemplify the need to respect and apply local and traditional customs for reconciliation and justice and to fully encourage imagination and creativity as essential elements in the process. These factors do not offer an easy path to a theoretical analysis of methods on the ground that can be offered to policy-makers and practitioners as a plan of action applicable to all conflict situations. However, if the view of those engaging in grass-roots activities for change is taken as the primary voice for conflict transformation then the challenge for effective cooperation between academics, policy-makers, and the people indicates a path that offers hope for all parties concerned because of the recognized necessity of cooperation. This way asks politicians to listen to those who are actively pursuing a peaceful coexistence in their communities. It maintains the integrity of those who are a living part of the conflict and it acknowledges their knowledge and experience. Nathan Funk and Abdul Aziz Said are scholar-practitioners, academics in peace studies and practicing Şūfīs; their work is therefore pertinent to this

⁷⁵ Mohammed Abu-Nimer (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice and Coexistence: Theory and Practice*, (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001).

⁷⁶ Qamar Ul-Huda (ed.), *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2010).

study. In a paper on 'localizing peace' they make the point of the importance of local solutions very eloquently. First, they state the challenge:

It has become commonplace for commentators on world affairs to observe that we are entering a period of profound social stress and of extreme pressures on often ineffective national as well as international governance systems. Globalized patterns of inequality, economic volatility, and resource scarcity are exacerbating localized social cleavages among ethnocultural groups, in ways that often outstrip the capacities of already-weak states to preserve social peace and stability. In some world regions, local and national conflicts increasingly spill over borders, presenting severe challenges to multilateral initiatives charged with containing violence and establishing security.⁷⁷

They then highlight the problem of peace operations that do not bring about a strong 'positive' peace that is able to endure:

While ambitious and multi-faceted peace operations have helped stabilize deeply fractured societies and reduce direct violence few have proved capable of addressing root causes of conflict or sustainably empowering the local population. Critics of contemporary stabilization and reconstruction missions have observed that the top-down nature of major international missions mirrors imbalances within the larger world order, and frequently results in a low-quality or "stalled" peace.⁷⁸

This is where a 'home-grown' practice of Sufism can offer both a local knowledge and an international support base. In Israel there is also the memory of previous Jewish-Muslim relations that lend a sense of historical support in the region and in the contemporary meetings and mutual learning between Jews and Muslims. However, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Amal I. Khoury, and Emily Welty, in an extensive survey and analysis of interfaith dialogue practice in the Middle East⁷⁹ comment on the danger of what they term the harmony model of dialogue, of emphasizing historical periods of harmony such as that in Al-Andalus while ignoring present conflict and differences. This is an important point for while it can only be good to remember times when good interreligious relations were apparent, and to honour such historical narratives as a binding element in the faith identity of each heritage, it can only act as a plaster to hide wounds if remembering in this way attempts to pull a curtain across the real problems. This curtails any dialogue that

⁷⁷ Nathan C. Funk and Abdul Aziz Said, "Localizing Peace: An Agenda for Sustainable Peacebuilding" in *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Volume 17, Number 1, Spring 2010, Special Issue: "Peacebuilding, Reconciliation, and Transformation: Voices from the Canada-EU Conflict Resolution Student Exchange Consortium", p. 102

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Abu-Nimer/*Unity in Diversity*, pp. 64, 65

addresses the pain felt by all and it fails to honour the narrative voice of the individual. If somebody has a story to tell of dispossession, or the deaths of close relatives, then to respond to them with stories of Al-Andalus can not only appear disrespectful but it also signifies that the individual has not been heard and that another agenda other than listening and caring, and increasing one's knowledge of the other, is at play. Fear may possibly play a role here. It takes courage to approach pain head on and the same authors report on the difficulties their researchers had in finding interviewees during heightened periods of conflict for that very reason.⁸⁰ The emphasis placed on Al-Andalus in this study, however, is not one that intends to claim harmonious relations where there are none – itself a form of denial as highlighted by Abu-Nimer *et al* – but one that seeks to allow an alternative narrative to emerge that narrates the commonalities that existed and continue to exist, thereby providing the often besieged practitioners of grassroots activities for peace, the support of an actual heritage in the face of their detractors who are often their fellows in faith.

2.4 Şūfī Ontology and Şūfī Hermeneutics on Self and Other

The practitioners of Şūfī inspired spirituality in contemporary Israel which involve the general public, religious leaders, and some academics, are equally engaged in grassroots action that integrates the spiritual sense of such action being necessary to the journey of becoming human from the perspective of the mystical traditions. This does not imply a conversion to Islam among those non-Muslims partaking in the practice but more a recognition of an alignment of the faiths in an understanding of the individual's obligation to all fellow humans. This obligation is based on an ontological narrative that describes the meaning of being human and the concomitant responsibilities in relation to God and fellow human beings that accompany that fact. An ontological narrative on the human condition, as filtered through the perspectives of each of the Abrahamic faiths, can be interpreted as informing the core concerns of interfaith dialogue for reconciliation and peace. This is the testing ground of religion as a resource for peace and crucial in its role in grass roots action towards that end. Ibn 'Arabi (1135-1240) is considered as one of the greatest Muslim philosopher-mystics of Al-Andalus, and the wider Muslim world through which he later travelled. His work has been both controversial and deeply influential up to the present

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 209

time.⁸¹ While deeply rooted in the Qur'ān and *hadīth*, his writing is considered as containing a universal message of love that typifies the approach of the Ṣūfī to her/his faith. Ṣūfīs claim love as their path and their aim, and the spiritual heart as their organ of perception.⁸²

The cosmology of Ibn 'Arabī is closely related to his ontological view of the human condition. The nature of the created worlds, their origin, and their purpose seen from an Islamic perspective, and approached from a Ṣūfī hermeneutics of the Qur'an, may best be illuminated by a *hadīth qudsi* that is fundamental to the Ṣūfī path and to Ibn 'Arabī's cosmological and ontological framework. A *hadīth qudsi* is an extra-Qur'ānic revelation and the one in question here addresses the purpose of creation and thereby holds consequences for understanding the human condition according to this view when God speaks and says, 'I was a Hidden treasure and desired to be known, so I created you that I might be known'.⁸³ When this is read together with another *hadīth qudsi*, 'Know yourself that you may know your Lord'⁸⁴ then it appears that God knows Himself through His manifest creation. As all things are considered as signs of God the human being, the most complete of those signs, may know God by looking within her/himself and by looking at other human beings as signs and mirrors of God and of her/himself.

One of the most striking characteristics of Ibn 'Arabī's thought is his hermeneutics of Qur'ānic vocabulary.⁸⁵ This is especially aided by the structure of the Arabic language which is based on root consonants (*usūl*) from which a multitude of words emerge. In the lexical sense it is therefore possible to see intimations of other meanings which, in a Ṣūfī approach to exegesis, underpins the claim that the Qur'ān bears levels of meaning of spiritual import.

⁸¹ See Knysh, Alexander D., *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999). This work gives a thorough account of the reception of Ibn 'Arabī's work in the medieval Muslim world.

⁸² See the work of William C. Chittick, *The Ṣūfī Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), the work of Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn 'Arabī*, (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999 and Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1999), and the work of James Winston Morris, *The Reflective Heart: Discovering Spiritual Intelligence in Ibn 'Arabī's Meccan Illuminations*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2005) for an exposition of this perspective.

⁸³ See William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-Arabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York, 1989), n. 14, p. 391, for his comment on the authenticity of this *hadīth*. Chittick notes that it is considered a forgery by the majority of *hadīth* scholars but that Ibn 'Arabī maintains that its authenticity, 'is proven by unveiling (*kashf*), or vision of the Prophet in the imaginal world.'

⁸⁴ See n. 19 in Chapter One of this study.

⁸⁵ Claude Addas brings notice to this fact in her treatment of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation of the terms *ahl* and *āl* in her article "The Muhammadian House: Ibn 'Arabī's Concept of *ahl al-bayt*", *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society*, Volume 50, 2011, pp. 77 – 95. Translated by James Lees. She notes that, 'Ibn 'Arabī, as we know, attached the greatest importance to hermeneutics in the examination of religious vocabulary of both the Qur'ān and the *hadīth*'.

The word therefore veils and reveals simultaneously in as far as a simple and literal definition presents itself to the reader/listener but to listen with the heart means to uncover the enriching senses to the narrative that lie within the lexical cover.

Peter Coates states at the beginning of his work on Ibn 'Arabī and modern thought that, 'The availability of English translations of the writings of Ibn 'Arabī offer an extraordinary opportunity to re-examine the depth and significance of the issue of the relationship between metaphysics and modern thought in the light of one of the most profound metaphysical teachings the world has ever known.'⁸⁶ The scholars he names as translators, commentators, and interpretators of the voluminous corpus produced by Ibn 'Arabī are Henry Corbin, Claude Addas, Ralph Austin, Michel Chodkiewicz, William Chittick, Toshihiko Izutsu, and James Morris.⁸⁷ I concur that the work of these scholars has been, and continues to be, of immense value to the study of medieval Islamic mysticism, the history of Sufism, and diverse sub-genres within those disciplines. Coates adds Stephen Hirtenstein to this list, deservedly so, for his biography of Ibn 'Arabī which is accompanied by explanations of his teachings. This latter work is very accessible to the lay reader thereby including a wider readership beyond the scholarly devotion of academia in the fascination with the ontological and epistemological view of reality as taught and experienced by Ibn 'Arabī. Coates intention with his work is to, 'analyse the underlying conception of knowledge that permeates the metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabī and compare it with the paradigmatic assumptions about knowledge that permeated much of twentieth-century theoretical culture.'⁸⁸ The intention of the present author in including the work of Peter Coates at this juncture in the thesis is to provide a picture of the increasing interest in the relevance of Ibn 'Arabī's thought to the contemporary world as displayed in scholarly works. Scholars who are explicitly making this connection between the medieval *Shaykh al-Akbar* and the needs of a world in distress as it grapples with the challenges of globalization and plurality, political and economic failures, and the devastating consequences of war, occupation, and the extremist actions of ideological groups and oppressive regimes are James Morris, Reza Shah-Kazemi, and William Chittick.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Peter Coates, *Ibn 'Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously*, (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2002), p. 2. Re-printed 2008 with amendments.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See James W. Morris, *Orientalisms: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*, (Cambridge: Archetype, 2004); Reza Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One: The Universality of the Qur'ān and Interfaith Dialogue*, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2006); William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICAL ENCOUNTERS OF JEWISH AND ISLAMIC MYSTICISM: PRECEDENTS OF CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE IN ISRAEL

3.1 'Borrowings' and 'Influences' or Contextual Integrity?

History can be read in different ways and the historian of religion can choose a variety of themes to follow. Whether the choice is to research the history of the intellectual conceptualization of spiritual experience in the mystical traditions, or to focus on the lives of outstanding figures, or to take an approach that investigates the social and political contexts of Ṣūfī institutions, each is the choice of the researcher and traces threads that finally rest on contemporary interests. The contemporary interest in this study is focused on Sufism in Israel among Jews and Muslims with this chapter surveying its antecedents in medieval Jewish-Muslim relations. This chapter offers a concise view of Jewish-Muslim relations in medieval Al-Andalus and Fustāt, Egypt through cameos of the most significant thinkers of the period including Baḥya Ibn Paqūda, Judah Ha Levi, Ibn 'Arabī, and Abraham Maimonides. Other figures will find mention during the cameos to indicate the continuity and historical impact of the figures and the ongoing influence of their work on Jewish and Muslim mysticism. As a preliminary to this it is useful to evaluate the advantages of approaching the time, not as a history of two religions and the indices of 'influence' or 'borrowings' that occurred, but as a cultural arena of thought and practice. In the preface to her work⁹⁰ on the Jewish Andalusian philosopher, Moses Maimonides (d. 1204), Sara Stroumsa establishes what sets her approach apart from the already voluminous work on Maimonides. She seeks to portray, 'Maimonides interaction with his multifaceted historical and cultural legacy, and how this cultural context affected him and shaped his thought.'⁹¹ Stroumsa sets the philosopher in the context of the world of thought in which he lived and worked thereby broadening the boundaries around the disciplines that focus on the religious, philosophical, and cultural achievements of the medieval Mediterranean period. The delimitation of several religions present in the area also loses its power in defining communities as homogenous entities and yields to a better understanding of the intellectual exchange and spiritual encounters between those faith communities without which they would have lacked the challenges and stimulation of engaging in a dialectical relationship with the other.

⁹⁰ Sara Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker*, (Princeton, US and Woodstock, UK: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xii

Stroumsa uses the term ‘influences’ to emphasize the importance of engaging with the intellectual milieu of Jewish and Muslim thought in the work of Maimonides:

The present study regards the detection of hitherto unrecognized direct influences as an indispensable tool for the historian of ideas and of mentalities. The identification of influences is critical in our attempt to gauge the depth of a thinker’s attachment to his milieu. It enables us to transform this milieu from a scenic background into the pulsating world in which the thinker lived.⁹²

However, I suggest that the term ‘influences’ is best used with caution as by viewing the religious scholars and mystics of this geographical area and time period as engaged in an enterprise of shared questions and concerns – and to some extent of a common symbolic pool – we can stop speaking of influences of one religion on another and begin to evaluate the contributions from diverse starting points to a philosophical, theological, and spiritual discourse of epistemological, ontological, and cosmological proportions. Although this study does not have the space for a full and detailed examination of the Andalusian period, it nevertheless holds this approach in mind through this historical section and in the analysis of the field narratives. By its very nature, this study requires the multifocal approach that Stroumsa speaks of applying in her study of Maimonides. I also accept entirely her analogy when she notes that:

Furthermore, in this complex intellectual world the ideas flow into each other, brazenly oblivious to communal barriers. The flow of ideas was never unilateral or linear, but rather went back and forth, creating what I propose to call a “whirlpool effect”, where, when an idea falls, like a drop of coloured liquid, into the turbulence, it eventually colours the whole body of water.⁹³

The highly respected professor of Islamic studies, Vincent J. Cornell also highlights this milieu of inter-cultural and spiritual encounter in a letter he wrote as a Muslim to fellow Muslims:

The most innovative and fruitful periods of Islamic civilizational development have been when the doctrines and philosophies of diverse peoples could compete in a “free market of ideas.” Without the challenge of Greek thought, there would be no Islamic philosophy; without the challenge of Christian thought, Islam would have no systematic theology; without the challenge of Babylonian and Indian thought, Islamic science and mathematics would never have prospered; without the challenge of

⁹² Ibid., p. xiii

⁹³ Ibid., p. xiv

Aristotelian thought, Islamic jurisprudence could never have become a model of Islamic reason. No culture or religion is born in a void.⁹⁴

In a very real sense it is possible to speak of some of the categories in Religious Studies as yielding little of the facts on the ground in as far as those categories refer to a religion as constituting a definable group of people distinct from other definable groups of people rather than, for example, viewing a religious community or individual as one of the many diverse incidences of spiritual expression based around the matrix of a specific sacred text or texts, oral tradition, ideology, or shared experience. In their introduction to the idea of a 'participatory turn' in the discipline of Religious Studies, Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob H. Sherman speak of the critical discourses within the discipline which have emerged during the twentieth century and refer to the foundational categories as following:

We could also situate here the increasing proliferation of critical analyses that show how foundational categories of the discipline of Religious Studies (such as "religion", "world religions", or "Hinduism") are analytically vacuous or the product of modern European colonial interests and Christian theological agendas⁹⁵

Therefore, as much as a historical heritage of creative encounters and borrowing of terms and concepts between the Abrahamic traditions of mysticism can be evidenced and appreciated in the study of ideas and phenomena within each faith, and as belonging to the 'discrete' study of each religion, so also – and I feel to greater benefit in this investigation in view of its aims and the contemporary manifestation of similar encounters in Israel – it can be approached as an historical movement of the human creative aspiration to integrate modes of knowing in relation to the divine where those of like mind and heart have found companionship of symbols, metaphor, language, and concepts in an indiscrete sharing of the same across 'text' communities and in a perceived common experience of the numinous. This was, and is, a co-creative enterprise that acknowledges the holistic nature of human knowledge acquisition, and its cooperative imperative in that the various modes of 'knowing' are acknowledged as co-equal both as a human necessity and for the individual, and as an enriching asset in the community of humankind.

⁹⁴ Vincent J. Cornell, "A Muslim to Muslims: Reflections after September 11", *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101:2, Spring 2002, Duke University Press, p. 335

⁹⁵ Jorge N. Ferrer and Jacob H. Sherman (eds), *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), p. 6

3.2 The Jewish-Muslim Interreligious Encounter in Al-Andalus and Fustāt

In addition to fragments of material evidence there is some circumstantial evidence that a conversation between the religious and spiritual movements of Judaism and Islam took place in Al-Andalus. As James W. Morris notes when speaking of the influence of the work of Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘In this respect, the extraordinary breadth and continuity of Ibn ‘Arabī’s influence remains a striking historical mystery, in ways that closely parallel the equally far-reaching and surprisingly lasting influences of such Spanish near-contemporaries as Moses of Leon (the presumed compiler of the *Zohar*), Averroes and Maimonides.’⁹⁶

As in the Arab empires of the Umayyads and Abbasids and likewise in the multi-faith and multi-cultural empires of the Ottomans, the Safavids, and the Moguls, medieval Al-Andalus also became a hub of inter-cultural exchange and encounters of difference from which emerged the recognition of kindred concerns on all levels from the practical to the intellectual and the metaphysical. Here Morris detects a history that he sees of relevance today in explaining the continuing inspiration provided by those figures he mentions in the above citation, ‘As the citation of such figures suggests, perhaps one of the central roots of that mystery lies in the way the situation of 12th- and 13th-century Spain already prefigured so many of the civilizational and religious conflicts, encounters, and possibilities that are such a predominant feature of global life at the dawn of the 21st century.’ One would be hard put to find a clearer example of this than in Israel and Palestine in respect of the rich opportunities that are present but still waiting to be harvested for a society that could only benefit from an embrace of mutual exchange. Indeed, in another of Morris’ works on three Islamic thinkers, one of whom is Ibn ‘Arabī, Morris dedicates it, ‘For the peoples of every Jerusalem and Sarajevo.’⁹⁷

The interreligious and spiritual encounters of Judaism and Islam, particularly in its Ṣūfī and Kabbalah manifestations, are both historical and contemporary. There is evidence of a Jewish engagement with Sufism found in the Cairo Genizah collections on which S. D.

⁹⁶ James W. Morris, ““...Except His Face”: The Political and Aesthetic Dimensions of Ibn ‘Arabī’s Legacy” in *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society*. Volume xxiii, 1998, p.19

⁹⁷ James W. Morris, *Orientations: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*, (Cambridge: Archetype, 2004). In this work Morris chooses to examine the thought of Al-Fārābī, Ibn ‘Arabī, and the 20th century Iranian mystic, Ostad Elahi, or more precisely, as it notes on the back of the edition, ‘Al-Fārābī’s political philosophy, Ibn ‘Arabī’s scriptural hermeneutics, and Ostad Elahi’s ethically grounded spirituality’, as an exercise in uncovering what can be learnt, and applied, in a contemporary world in distress.

Goitein has worked extensively⁹⁸ and which continues to provide material for translation and research. 'Genizah' is a Hebrew word that denotes a hiding place and a *Genizah* was built within, or adjacent to, synagogues for the purpose of storing documents. They included religious, legal and other miscellaneous documents.⁹⁹ Built in 882 CE, the wealth of documents contained in the Cairo *Genizah* did not become accessible to scholars until the late nineteenth century when the only known Hebrew original of 'The Book of Wisdom' came to light. Solomon Schechter of Cambridge recognized its significance and arranged for a portion of the documents to be shipped to Cambridge for thorough study. Alden Oreck says of this historical discovery that:

No other library in the world possessed such an array of religious and private documents from the 10th to 13th centuries, when the Fatimid caliphs (10-12th centuries) and Ayyubid sultans (12th-13th centuries) ruled. The *genizah* revealed a wealth of information from this period, an era previously not well-known in Jewish history. Its leaves described the vital role the Jews played in the economic and cultural life of the medieval Middle East as well as the warm relations between Jews and Arabs, through community minutes, rabbinical court records, leases, title-deeds, endowment contracts, debt acknowledgements, marriage contracts and private letters.¹⁰⁰

As will be seen, especially in the work of Paul Fenton on the Jewish-Şūfī order inaugurated by Abraham Maimuni, the Cairo *genizah* has been invaluable in providing information on the Jewish interest in Sufism.¹⁰¹

Due to the already existing, substantial scholarship on individual figures of Al-Andalus, they are presented here mainly to establish contemporary practitioners as the inheritors of a firm tradition. The faith encounters of Al-Andalus thus delineated form a small excerpt from the wider narrative of interfaith exchanges between the Abrahamic faiths. The work of those involved has had widespread influence through the faiths down to the present day. This is often not recognised even by those affected, and although it is not lost, for it is spoken of in relevant academic circles and it is apparent in the architecture,

⁹⁸ S. D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts Through the Ages*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1964).

⁹⁹ Alden Oreck, "The Cairo Genizah", Jewish Virtual Library, [Online] Available at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Genizah.html> [Last accessed: 30th August, 2008]

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ This is also apparent in the work of Moshe Idel on the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia and in the work of Eitan P. Fishbane on the medieval Kabbalist, Isaac ben Samuel of Akko. See Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988) and Eitan P. Fishbane, *As Light Before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

genealogy, language, and tourist interests of Spain, Baghdad, Istanbul, and Israel, it is nevertheless hushed.

There were many exemplary incidences of a convergence of Jewish-Muslim work in theology and philosophy, science and engineering, in mysticism, translation, and statecraft in Al-Andalus. Paul Fenton notes the remarkable parallels between Jewish and Islamic mysticism:

Upon catching sight today in the synagogues of Safed or Jerusalem of the white-clad, bearded Kabbalists, engrossed in their meditations, one is unavoidably struck by the similarity in appearance with the swaying, white-capped Sūfīs performing the *dhikr* ritual. In point of fact, the similarity is not only external; of all forms of mysticism, perhaps an unsuspected and yet remarkable parallelism exists between Islamic and Jewish mysticism. Though the two tendencies appear to have developed quite independently, there have been significant points of intersection between them. Within the wider framework of the influence of Islamic thought and spirituality, the study of the interaction between Israel and Ishmael in the domain of mysticism is one of the most fascinating chapters of comparative religion. Even in the broad lines of their respective historical evolutions, Jewish and Islamic esotericism betray a remarkable resemblance.¹⁰²

Work by Jewish scholars on Al-Andalus and Sephardic studies are positive on the flourishing of Jewish intellectual, religious, and cultural life during the period of Islamic rule. Being aware of the dangers of selectivity, or extreme interpretations to meet various agendas – and no-one is exempt from those dangers including the researcher – is part of the practice of interfaith dialogue alongside its antidote, reflexivity, as well as being a vital practice in scholarly endeavour. Basically, it is not the intention here to claim a ‘Golden Age’ that lasted for 800 years, but rather examples where *convivencia* really was a reality and an example. Certainly the period of scholarship in philosophy, religious tracts, poetry, architecture and general well-being of the community and the flourishing of its arts, businesses, and practice of the faith that Al-Andalus represents for the Jewish descendants of Sepharad, is named by them as a Golden Age. As Paloma Díaz-Mas notes in her study of the Sephardim, as she writes of the use of the place-name ‘Sepharad’ for the Iberian Peninsula by Jews, and its plural adjective ‘Sephardim’:

The name ‘*Sepharad*’ appears in the prophecy of Obadiah (Obad. 20) as one of the places where the Jews exiled from Jerusalem lived. The biblical allusion is probably to Sardis, a city in Asia Minor. But Jewish tradition, especially since the eighth century C.

¹⁰² Paul Fenton “Judaism and Sufism” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.) and Oliver Leaman (ed.), (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). Reprinted 1997, 1999, 2002. Routledge History of World Philosophies, Volume 1, pp. 755 – 768.

E., tended to identify Sepharad with the western edge of the known world – the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, during the entire Middle Ages, and especially during the Golden Age of Hispano-Hebraic culture, Spanish Jews called themselves Sephardim, a name they subsequently used (and not without a certain pride in their glorious peninsular past) in the diaspora following their expulsion from Spain.¹⁰³

Historians speak of another Golden Age in Spain but the later one was marked by the loss of non-Christians from the Peninsula as Chris Lowney remarks when writing of the Spanish conquest of the Americas:

Thanks in part to Inca gold, Spain entered what historians typically call her Golden Age. The age was golden in one obvious respect, as precious metals lifted from New World colonies gilded Spain's altars and financed her European conflicts. Yet, in other respects, the Golden Age label is at a minimum incomplete. For this was at least the *third* Golden Age Spain had enjoyed. Spain's Islamic Golden Age had blessed Europe with new models of architecture, mathematics, ceramics, agriculture, philosophy, medicine, and astronomy, to name a few disciplines among many. Spain's Jewish Golden Age had nurtured Europe's most prosperous, accomplished, and largest Jewish population, and through Maimonides and Moses de León bequeathed masterworks that still fundamentally influence Jewish thought and worship.¹⁰⁴

Chris Lowney's intention with his work on Medieval Spain is to highlight the richness of its multi-faith, multi-cultural society and to ask what can be learned from it in today's often violent and intolerant world. What Lowney describes as the Islamic Golden Age and the Jewish Golden Age of course overlapped, not simply running parallel to each other but in many respects interdependent. However, the term 'Golden Age' should be approached with caution. The achievements of the Muslim and the Jewish populations of Islamic Spain were real and of lasting benefit to ever widening circles but they must be seen relative to the context of Muslim political and cultural hegemony and not portrayed as a utopia. Primarily, the history of Jewish-Muslim Šūfī exchange in Al-Andalus forms the perceived heritage of contemporary Jewish-Muslim Šūfī practitioners of peace in Israel today. A

¹⁰³ Díaz-Mas, Paloma and George K. Zucker (trans.), *Sephardim: The Jews from Spain*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 7. Hardback edition 1992. In Israel today a distinction is made between Sephardim and Ashkenazi (of European origin) Jews. The Mizrahi Jews are those of other Middle Eastern origin and the Sephardim, most of whom fled to other Middle Eastern countries including Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and North Africa are often elided with the Mizrahi. These groups are native Arabic speakers and on the whole experienced a peaceful life style in Muslim countries until the establishment of the State of Israel. The Zionist venture was an Ashkenazi movement. The expulsion from Al-Andalus/Sepharad and the persecution of the remaining *conversos* under the Spanish Inquisition is mourned today alongside the destruction of the First and Second Temples on the day of Tisha B'Av.

¹⁰⁴ Lowney, Chris, *A Vanished World: Medieval Spain's Golden Age of Enlightenment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 255 and 256

useful comparison is found in another instance of looking to the Andalucian past to reconfigure present developments in the work of the *Maskilim* during the Jewish *Haskalah*¹⁰⁵ when great Jewish intellectuals of Al-Andalus/Sepharad were interpreted as predecessors of the *Haskalah* project and the *Maskilim*, ‘used the past to locate their work historically and to imbue it with cultural and textual authority.’¹⁰⁶ In this activity the writings of the past figures, in whom the *Maskilim* perceived the forerunners of their intellectual endeavour of a Jewish enlightenment, were read through the interpretive lens of their contemporary needs, ‘Halevi was not simply an intellectual influence. Rather the *Kuzari* was a text that they used dynamically: at times they adopted its ideas, and at other times rejected or recast them.’¹⁰⁷ It may be argued that this constitutes a reconstruction of history to the advantage of an agenda of later generations or, conversely, that later generations are undertaking a creative interpretation of historic incidents within the context of their contemporary needs that maintains a sense of continuity with their own group identity. I suggest that what is essential in such acts of ‘remembering’ is transparency of intention in the choice of, ‘text(s) that they used dynamically’.

The offshoots and branches of this historical *convivencia* and creative interdependency are numerous and reach across faiths, philosophical systems, and spiritual practices. They extend into literature and cultural/religious movements such as the troubadours and the Cathars.¹⁰⁸ While there is plentiful scholarship on these areas as discrete units of study there is less on the connections between them and little on the application of the specific encounters studied here in relation to the furtherance of reconciliation and peace in present day Israel and the OTP. As Ori Z. Soltes notes in the

¹⁰⁵ In the *Jewish Virtual Library* Shira Schoenberg introduces her essay on the *Haskalah* thus ‘The Haskalah, or Jewish Enlightenment, was an intellectual movement in Europe that lasted from approximately the 1770s to the 1880s. The Haskalah was inspired by the European Enlightenment but had a Jewish character. Literally, Haskalah comes from the Hebrew word *sekhel*, meaning "reason" or intellect" and the movement was based on rationality. It encouraged Jews to study secular subjects, to learn both the European and Hebrew languages, and to enter fields such as agriculture, crafts, the arts and science. The *maskilim* (followers of the Haskalah) tried to assimilate into European society in dress, language, manners and loyalty to the ruling power.’ Shira Schoenberg, “The Haskalah”, *Jewish Virtual Library* [online] available at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/Haskalah.html> [Last accessed: 30th December 2013].

¹⁰⁶ See Adam Sutcliffe and Ross Brann, “Introduction: Al Andalus, Enlightenment, and the Renewal of the Jewish Past”, in Ross Brann and Adam Sutcliffe (eds.), *Renewing the Past, Reconfiguring Jewish Culture: From Al-Andalus to the Haskalah*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ See Rosa Maria Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002).

preface to his study of Abrahamic mysticism, 'The literature of discussion and analysis of each of the three is large; the literature of comparison between any two of them is much sparser; that which offers all three in a straightforward chronological and conceptual manner is virtually non-existent.'¹⁰⁹

The manifold journeys of the religious encounters ensuing from Al-Andalus, and that reach into the present day, are obviously too wide ranging an undertaking for the present investigation but it is worth noting that even a cursory look at the powerful connections, encounters, intertextualities, and the flow of spiritual and religious movements around the Mediterranean and beyond indicates a strong interaction between the Abrahamic faiths that is at its most creative when the spirituality of faith is emphasised, rather than doctrinal concerns which are more likely to be a focus of debate and argument. In seeking loci within Judaism and Islam that address the spiritual content of faith rather than the purely doctrinal, legalistic, and ritualistic, one finds distinct parallels in the area of the mystical traditions. Al-Andalus, Fustāt, and historical Palestine provide geographical and chronological loci that offer excellent examples of such parallels. The fact that Sufism is being practiced in Israel today by members of each faith enables the drawing of that historical thread through to the present day. After the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 with the threat of exile, conversion to Christianity, or death, some went to Safed and Jerusalem in Ottoman Palestine and continued to pursue a spiritual path informed by the growing mystical traditions of their faiths. There they joined an already thriving community of Ṣūfī and Kabbalah practitioners.¹¹⁰

In the work of such authors as Diana Lobel, Moshe Idel, Sara Sviri, Avraham Elqayam, Paul Fenton, S. D. Goitein, Maria Rosencal, and Salma Khadra Jayyusi on texts written during the period of Muslim rule in Al-Andalus by Jewish and Muslim authors, a very clear picture of philosophical, theological, and spiritual exchange emerges. This exchange is most prominent between Judaism and Islam in the area of Ṣūfī ideas and practice. An influence

109 Ori Z. Soltes, *Mysticism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Searching for Oneness*, (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), p. ix

110 For the history of the expulsion of the Jewish people from Al-Andalus see Paloma Diaz-Mas, *Sephardim: The Jews from Spain*, translated by George K. Zucker, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chapters 1 and 2; for the history of Safed see Lawrence Fine (trans.), *Safed Spirituality: Rules of Mystical Piety, the Beginning of Wisdom*, (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1984), *The Classics of Western Spirituality*. For the history of Sufism in medieval Palestine see Daphna Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Ṣūfīs and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2008). Harvard Middle East Monographs.

on Christianity has also been discerned by recent research on the Messianic female mystics of sixteenth century Spain after the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews and Muslims by the Catholic Monarchs.¹¹¹ However, mysticism does not emerge as part of the Spanish expression of Christian faith until after the demise of Al-Andalus although it must also be remembered that Christian ascetic practice in Egypt and Syria may have had an influence on the early development of Sufism.

3.3 Philosophy and Mysticism

Diana Lobel describes what she terms 'philosophical mysticism' in eleventh century Spain and distinguishes two types.¹¹² In qualifying the definition of the term 'mysticism', Lobel cites Israel Levin¹¹³ who, in working on the poetry of Ibn Gabirol and considering whether Ibn Gabirol might be termed a mystic, offers two definitions of the term. One is the union with the divine in which 'subject and object are erased'. This is the dissolution of the ego-self (*nafs*) in the divine Being and known as *fana fi Allah* by Sūfīs. The second, and more inclusive definition of mysticism by Levin, is the longing for such communion with the divine. This equates with definitions of mysticism given by Chittick, Shah-Kazemi, and Melila Hellner Eshed when writing of Ibn 'Arabi and the Zohar respectively. This second definition is the one espoused in this work and is emphasized for its implication that the journey on the path to union is the journey of return to the origin and does not end with ecstatic union. An intense feeling of longing (*Ishq*) is the essential character of the lover for the beloved that is central to Sufism and agreed on by Ibn Paqūda, Ibn Gabirol, and Ibn 'Arabī. Spiritual contemplation that leads to compassionate action (exemplified by '*adab*') marks this understanding of mysticism, and compassionate action may be viewed as the practice of love in the journey of self-transformation and is therefore directly pertinent to contemporary reconciliation and peace work.

Lobel's chapter on philosophical mysticism is concerned less with the use of a difficult and often ambiguous and sometimes controversial term than it is with types of mysticism as examined by various scholars and situating Ibn Paqūda within that discourse and typology. Although the nature of the mystical experience is somewhat subsumed in her discussion

¹¹¹ Sharon Faye Koren, "A Christian Means to a *Conversa* End, in *NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, Indiana University Press, Number 9, Spring 5765/2005, pp. 27-61, *Special Issue: Jewish Women's Spirituality*, [Online] Available at: <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nashim/v009/9.1koren.html> [Last accessed: 18th March, 2009]

¹¹² Lobel/Sufi-Jewish Dialogue, p. 21

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

she nevertheless explicates a very useful categorization of mysticism in relation to philosophy, intellect, and devotion as applied by modern authors and previous theorists, classical and medieval alike, of the nature of knowledge of the divine. Since her survey involves discussing the arguments and ideas of classical philosophers and philosopher-mystics through to the time of medieval Spain it also provides an insight into the ongoing discourse, influences, and appropriations evidenced in the writings of Ṣūfī and pre-Kabbalah Jewish theorists of mysticism. Using Ṣūfī terminology, perhaps the greatest difference between the philosopher and the mystic is that the mystic longs to taste (*dhawq*) the divine and regards the intellect as being subservient to the heart (*qalb*) when in its rightful place. This creates problems for the scholar in seeking to describe persons such as Ibn Paqūda and Ibn 'Arabi as 'philosopher-mystic' is insufficient and possibly misleading and 'mystic' alone often bears connotations that have no relevance to the matter in hand. Add to this the fact that there is no equivalent term in either Hebrew or Arabic and one might be excused for being bemused by the fact that neither Jewish nor Muslim scholars appear to express the same reluctance in using the term 'mystic' – after due qualification – as some of their Christian colleagues, or scholars taking a social science approach to the study of religion. Franz Rosenthal attempts to define 'philosophy' and 'mysticism' and to highlight the distinctions between the two:

It needs hardly any comment that the terms 'philosophy' and 'mysticism' require definition in order to realize the difference between them (and between mysticism and religion). There are no doubt many who would deny the existence of suitable clear cut distinctions. In Islam, 'philosophy' can be considered as equivalent to what Muslims themselves designated with a loanword from the Greek, falsafah. The curious modern term 'mysticism' has no such direct identifying connection between Arabic and a second language. In Arabic, tasawwuf was the label for a diverse and, eventually, all-pervasive religious and societal movement that touched intellectuals and the social elite as well as the masses. It is not always absolutely clear why an individual was considered a *faylasuf* or a Ṣūfī, or into which category he might fall according to our understanding of philosophy and mysticism.¹¹⁴

Oliver Leaman, however, includes a chapter on mysticism in his introduction to Islamic philosophy¹¹⁵ which describes mysticism as, 'one of the most pervasive trends in Islamic

¹¹⁴ Franz Rosenthal, "Ibn 'Arabi between 'Philosophy' and 'Mysticism': "Sūfism and Philosophy Are Neighbors and Visit Each Other" *fa-inna at-tasawwuf wa-t-tafalsuf yatajāwarāni wa-yatazāwarāni*. *Oriens*, Vol. 31 (1988), pp. 1-35, BRILL. [Online] Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1580724> [Last accessed: 13/04/2012]

¹¹⁵ Oliver Leaman, *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*, (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1999), reprinted 2001

philosophy'¹¹⁶ and notes that, 'virtually all of the philosophers in the Islamic world were committed to mysticism in one form or another, and those who were not, such as Ibn Rushd, stand out as a result.'¹¹⁷ The difference between 'mystical and non-mystical philosophy'¹¹⁸ is seen by Leaman as simply 'two different ways of doing something rather similar'¹¹⁹, he then notes that, 'the science of mysticism, the *ilm al-tasawwuf* as it is often represented, is seen as far more than a subjective, personal seeking after kinds of experience'.¹²⁰ Leaman conceives the, 'problem with any such way of exploring the nature of reality [as] its ability to sink into subjectivity,' and as, 'something which needs to be countered by anyone who is able to lay down specific rules as to how to carry on the mystical enterprise.'¹²¹ Although Ṣūfī masters and fraternities have evolved theoretical systems for the basis of practice – and the work of Ibn 'Arabī is pivotal in this respect – nevertheless, subjectivity, in terms of an experiential path, is vital to the authenticity of the *ilm al-tasawwuf* and its value to students on the path. The practitioner who writes and teaches cannot simply speculate but must speak from the depths of his/her own experience even when that requires the activity of interpreting spiritual states for which human language is not completely adequate; Ibn 'Arabī's stance on this is dealt with on the section dedicated to him below.

In seeking a way to describe the work of Ibn 'Arabī I have also felt drawn to the term 'theosophy'. It is rich in meaning and offers the possibility of including a reflection on the relation of *Sophos*, *logos*, and *mythos* in the approaches applied by Ibn 'Arabī in his work. In the discipline of Religious Studies the use of the term 'theosophical' is considered problematic unless it is directly connected to the Theosophical Society and Madame Blavatsky of Victorian England. This is unfortunate and yet, in the disciplines of Jewish Studies and Islamic Studies, there are scholars who are not shy of utilizing what they consider to be the most pertinent description of their subject and apply the term 'theosophy'.¹²²

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 73

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. p. 74

¹²² See Eliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Imagination*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994, and also in the works of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and William C. Chittick.

3.4 Ibn Masarra, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, Baḥya Ibn Paqūda, and Judah Ha Levi

Sara Sviri and Sarah Stroumsa apply the term ‘philosopher-mystic’ in their jointly written paper on Ibn Masarra¹²³ and this offers an introduction into the following sections on pivotal philosopher-mystics of the period. Born in Cordoba in 883 C.E., Ibn Masarra studied under his father. Later he studied for a while in Mecca for:

It is assumed that he had to leave al-Andalus due to being denounced there for religious subversion. In Mecca, he possibly frequented the circle of Abū Sa’īd b. al-A’rābī, a former disciple of al-Junayd in Baghdad, as did many of the Andalusīs who came to Mecca. He returned to al-Andalus during the reign of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III al-Nāṣir (300/912-350/962) and drew around him a circle of disciples who were attracted to him for his eloquent teaching as well as for his austere and ascetic life. It is said that Ibn Masarra, together with his disciples, withdrew to the mountains around Cordoba, hence his nickname al-jabalī. He died in his mountainous retreat in 319/931.¹²⁴

In a lengthy and thorough article¹²⁵ by Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri a glimpse is afforded into the work of Ibn Masarra and the later writing of Ibn ‘Arabī that indicates communal interests between the two philosopher-mystics and their Jewish colleagues for both of these scholar-practitioners speak of the science of letters which also played a major role in Jewish mysticism. This is of value not only to gaining an impression of such exchange in Al-Andalus but also to the later significance of letter mysticism, or Gematria, among the Kabbalists in Safed, especially as taught and practised by Abraham Abulafia as a method to attain ecstatic union with the divine. The treatise of the article’s title was originally unnamed and not ascribed to Tustarī until 1974 by Muḥammad Kamāl Ibrāhīm Ja’far who found and published it in the same year.¹²⁶ The paper compares, ‘the teachings of Sahl al-Tustarī as reflected in classical Ṣūfī sources with sayings ascribed to him in this epistle as well as in other sources, in particular the tenth-century *Kitāb khawāṣṣ al-ḥurūf* (*Book on the Properties of Letters*) by the Andalusian author, Ibn Masarra’. The purpose in citing this work here is less a concern with Sahl al-Tustarī but more to highlight the parallel interest in letter mysticism of Jews and Muslims over an extended period of time. .

¹²³ Sarah Stroumsa and Sara Sviri, “The Beginnings of Mystical Philosophy in Al-Andalus: Ibn Masarra and his *Epistle on Contemplation* in an offprint from *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, Vol. 36, 2009 [Online] Available via www.academia.edu

¹²⁴ Ibid. pp. 201, 202

¹²⁵ Michael Ebstein and Sara Sviri, “The So-Called *Risālat al-Ḥurūf* (Epistle on Letters) Ascribed to Sahl al-Tustarī and Letter Mysticism in Al-Andalus”, *Journal Asiatique*, 299.1, pp. 213 – 270, 2011. [Online] doi: 10.2143/JA.299.1.2131065. [Accessed through the author, Sara Sviri]

¹²⁶ Ibid. p.213

Paul Fenton also notes a shared interest in letter mysticism between Jews and Muslims, 'First of all Ibn 'Arabī himself in the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiya* describes a conversation that he held with a Rabbi and they're not talking about the weather, they're talking about profound spiritual matters. The conversation revolves around the symbolism of letters, a fundamental discipline of Islam and Judaism.'¹²⁷

Today Pablo Beneito, a Spanish academic who has recently been instrumental in creating the Spanish branch of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society, has done studies on gematria in addition to his translation work.¹²⁸

Baḥya Ibn Paqūda was writing approximately between 1050 and 1090 in Saragossa. He was a younger contemporary of Solomon Ben Yehuda Ibn Gabirol the Hebrew poet of whom Diana Lobel says:

Ibn Gabirol is the first Jewish philosopher in Spain; he is also the first poet to reflect Ṣūfī themes in his poetry. Although his strictly philosophical treatise, *Meqor Hayyim* (The Fountain of Life) – written in Arabic, translated into Latin and an abridged Hebrew version – was not influential in the history of Jewish philosophy, his religious poetry entered the liturgy early, and he was widely celebrated as one of the greatest medieval Hebrew poets.¹²⁹

Those Ṣūfī influences are apparent in the following poem:

Lord of the world, O hear my psalm,
And as sweet incense take my plea.
My heart hath set its love on Thee
And finds in speech its only balm.
This thought forever haunts my mind,
Some day to Thee I must return,
From Thee I came and backward yearn
My very fount and source to find.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Paul Fenton, Interviewee narratives, Appendix I.

¹²⁸ See the presentation downloaded by Lapis Magazine at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgtPLdKIK9U> This presentation was recorded at the 2007 Esoteric Quest for The Golden Age of Andalusia: Sufis, Kabbalists and Christian Philosophers in Medieval Spain.

¹²⁹ Diana Lobel, *A Ṣūfī-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Baḥya Ibn Paqūda's Duties of the Heart*, (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p.3

¹³⁰ Available at: <http://www.abrahamfund.org/main/siteNew/index.php> [Last accessed: 10/06/08]

To return to Baḥya Ibn Paqūda, Diana Lobel refers to him as a philosopher, theologian, Ṣūfī, and Jew steeped in an Andalusian intellectual milieu informed by Neoplatonism and Sufism.¹³¹

Judah Ha-Levi (1075-1141), was a poet and mystic. Critical of the rationalistic tradition, he grounded his work in Judaism. In contrast to the universal God of Maimonides, Judah Ha-Levi appealed to the 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'.¹³² Lobel finds it surprising therefore that Ha-Levi wrote his treatise, *Kuzari*, in Arabic with Hebrew letters and also introduced Ṣūfī terminology while not mentioning Ṣūfīs by name, 'Appropriating it and refashioning it to show his Jewish audience that the spiritual fruits promised by Sufism exist foremost within the living Jewish tradition'¹³³ Three of the terms he uses, and which I find of particular interest, are *dhawq* (taste), *'ishq* (love), and *shawq* (longing) among others that Lobel examines. She also notes that Ha-Levi's interpretation of psalms in reference to these Ṣūfī terms throws a new, mystical, light on their understanding bringing what might otherwise appear to be a 'rhetorical flourish' into 'living experience'.¹³⁴

The work and lives of the Jewish and Muslim scholars and practitioners of mysticism have had an enduring influence on the theology and the spiritual and ritual practice of each of their respective faiths, even where it is not fully acknowledged or known. Diana Lobel, for example, begins her study on Baḥya Ibn Paqūda with an anecdote about a pious man (*ḥasid*) from an eighteenth century Hasidic manual written by Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonnoy, Eastern Europe. As it happens, the Rabbi is citing the anecdote from the Hebrew translation of Ibn Paqūda's *Duties of the Heart* which was originally written in Judeo-Arabic (Arabic written in Hebrew script) and the anecdote is a well-known ḥadīth about the Prophet Muhammad which Paqūda used to highlight the difference between the lesser struggle (*jihad*) of self-defence and the greater struggle of the battle with one's own ego.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Ṣūfī Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's Kuzari*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

¹³³ Ibid. pp.3,4

¹³⁴ Ibid. p.91

¹³⁵ Diana Lobel, *A Ṣūfī Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Baḥya Ibn Paqūda's Duties of the Heart*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. ix

3.5 Ibn 'Arabī and Moses de León

An article written by Sara Sviri in 1996 tells us that, 'In the 13th century Judaism and Islam gave birth to two monumental works which had a lasting impact on their respective mystical systems. Within Judaism and the Kabbalistic tradition it was the *Zohar*, *The Book of Splendor* (...) and since its appearance in the second half of the 13th century has been associated in one way or another with the Castilian Kabbalist Moses ben Shemtov de Leon'.¹³⁶ The author of the first 'monumental work' was Ibn 'Arabī and Sviri refers here to his truly immense *Futuhāt al-Makiyya* (Meccan Revelations). This was, however, just one of over three hundred and fifty works authored by Ibn 'Arabī whose output was prolific. Sviri continues by drawing attention to the impact that these works have had on their respective traditions:

That these two mystical works which marked a turning point in the history of Kabbala and Sufism were conceived within such temporal and spatial proximity, is thought provoking. In spite of clear distinctions between the two (the *Zohar* was compiled in Aramaic within a Jewish circle from the North of Spain living under Christian rule; the *Meccan Revelations* was written in Arabic by an Andalusian Muslim from Seville), the fact that these thirteenth-century works compiled by Spanish mystics have come to occupy such outstanding positions in their mystical traditions, points to a common trait. Both works mark the culmination of a process which had started, for Spanish Jews and Muslims alike, approximately two centuries before, when certain teachings brought to Al-Andalus from the east initiated a growing interest in the mystical dimension of the religious life.¹³⁷

Ibn 'Arabī has already been introduced in the section on Ṣūfī ontology and Ṣūfī hermeneutics on self and other in Chapter Two. Together with further details of his life the focus will now be on his interpretation of the meaning and nature of knowledge and love as these two themes occur regularly within the interviewees narratives. First, in reference to the above discussion on philosophy and mysticism and the question of subjectivity, a short mention of Ibn 'Arabī's own claims about his work: Michel Chodkiewicz refers to the claim of Ibn 'Arabī of always speaking from his own experience in his work on Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine on sainthood and prophethood.¹³⁸ In the context of a vision that Ibn 'Arabī had in Cordoba at the age of twenty-five (586/1190), where he met all the prophets and all their

¹³⁶ Sara Sviri, "Spiritual Trends in Pre-Kabbalistic Judeo-Spanish Literature: The Cases of Bahya Ibn Paqūda and Judah Halevi", *Donaire*, Número 6, Abril 1996, p. 78

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Michel Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the Doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi*, translated by Liadain Sherrard, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993).

followers, Chodkiewicz cites Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, the stepson and disciple of Ibn ‘Arabī as saying that, ‘Our teacher had the ability of encountering the spirit of whomsoever he wished among the prophets and saints of the past in three ways: sometimes he caused those who inhabit that world [of the spirits] to descend and perceived them in a subtle corporeal form; sometimes he caused them to be present to him in his sleep; and sometimes he would cast aside his own material form.’¹³⁹ Chodkiewicz therefore maintains that when he refers to the ‘doctrine’ of Ibn ‘Arabī it is, ‘the written translation of a visionary knowledge and a personal experience of sainthood’ that he is interpreting and that, ‘we do not find in Ibn ‘Arabī, in connection with this or with any other subject, the systematic exposition of a theory such as a theologian might write’.¹⁴⁰ The Shaykh al-Akbar himself often says that neither the content nor the structure of anything that he wrote was from his own will but was written as ‘divinely dictated’ to him.¹⁴¹

An example of the universality of Ibn ‘Arabī’s hermeneutics of the Qur’ān, which makes his work so relevant to contemporary concerns, is found in the following words from the *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* (Meccan Revelations):

It is He who is revealed in every face, sought in every sign, gazed upon by every eye, worshipped in every object of worship, and pursued in the unseen and the visible. Not a single one of His creatures can fail to find Him in its primordial and original nature.¹⁴²

Ibn ‘Arabī maintains that, ‘The movement which is the existence of the universe is the movement of love’.¹⁴³ To discover more on how this love, which is portrayed by Ibn ‘Arabī as an immense energy, so powerful that it is the very existence of the universe, manifests in the created world (*al-Khalq*), it is useful to purvey Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought on duality and the dynamic interaction of opposites. This is a theme which arises in the following chapters from the comments of the interviewees and it will be expanded on in response to those comments. Further, my purpose in delving deeper into this saying of Ibn ‘Arabī on love is to

¹³⁹ Ibid. pp. 17, 18

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 18

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* and cited on the home page of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society [Online] Available at: <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org>

¹⁴³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Wisdom of the Prophets (Fusūs al Hikam)*, translated from Arabic to French by Titus Burckhardt, from French to English by Angela Culme-Seymour, (Gloucestershire: Beshara Publications, 1975).

illuminate the vigour of his teaching which makes the concept of the movement of love so powerful and nowhere near any kind of superficial pseudo-spirituality, the latter being a concern that Sara Sviri raises during her interview narrative. It may also help in elucidating the complex relationships in Israel and an almost intangible sense of something 'stirring', or as Sara Sviri maintains, 'All Sufis speaks of love...' But how does love move? How is it the existence of the universe according to Ibn 'Arabi? Pertinent to the practical question of developing an awareness of this love and its consequences in relation to the other, Rachel Gordin asks:

How does one develop a heart that is capable of every form? The question is more crucial in the loaded zone of the Middle-East where the different forms become cause for slaughter and bereavement. Can Ibn 'Arabī, a Muslim who lived in Andalusia during the golden age of Islam, offer a key not only to accepting 'the other' with mutual respect, but to uncovering the point of identity from which the forms are seen as different expressions of the same love of beauty? The same longing for intimacy? The same awe in face of the sublime? The same sweetness that the heart cannot contain? Only appealing to the widest, the most profound, in us, that which contains everything and is not contained by any partial aspect of it – would enable one to recognize the difference, not just with respect but also with love. That width, that depth, is God. Neither God to whom one says, 'You have chosen us', nor 'my God' who is 'greater than your God', in a mistaken understanding of 'Allahu Akbar'. But that essential Being that cannot be defined and who is yet 'closer to man than his jugular vein' as the Qur'ān claims. According to Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of unity, 'Muslims', 'Jews', or 'Christians' are not exclusive perceptions that cancel each other, but different expressions of the same fathomless depth that no form can properly express.¹⁴⁴

The question of love is addressed in the chapters of Part Two as it arises in the participants' narratives.

3.6 Abraham Maimonides and the Jewish Ṣūfīs of Egypt

The great Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1135 – 1204), left Al-Andalus when the Almohad dynasty came to power, supplanting the Almoravid dynasty, and eventually settled in Egypt. His work was on the non-conflicting nature of reason and revelation, in other words the compatibility of philosophy and religion, and paralleled that of Ibn Rushd (Averroes, (1126 – 1198), both of whom suffered under the changing political regimes. The son, Abraham, and grandson, Obadiyah, of Moses Maimonides were both more interested in esotericism. Paul Fenton says the following:

¹⁴⁴ Rachel Gordin, Appendix I

The Jewish Pietist movement that arose in thirteenth century Egypt, in the wake of the widespread diffusion of Sufism, is of great interest for the history of Jewish spirituality and is an extraordinary testimony to the profound fascination Jews had for Islamic esotericism (...) Although the origins of the movement are still shrouded in mystery, recent research in the field of Genizah study has brought to light texts and commentaries, letters and manuals which have greatly added to our knowledge of the Jewish Ṣūfīs and of the wide extent of their movement. Most of our knowledge concerning the Jewish Ṣūfīs stems from the works of Abraham Maimonides, who became an ardent member and defender of the movement.¹⁴⁵

Obadiyah Maimonides wrote *The Treatise of the Pool* of which it is said, 'The very title of the work "The Treatise of the Pool" refers to the typically Ṣūfī idea that the heart is to be emptied of all but God in order to draw it near to the divine, just as a pool is first cleansed and then filled with clean water'.¹⁴⁶ In his essay on Judaeo-Arabic mystical writings found in the Cairo genizah, Fenton connects the Jewish interest in Sufism, in Al-Andalus and Fustāt, to the later development of Hasidism in Central Europe:

The Third category of writing, which will be the main concern of this essay, belongs to a pietist group who call themselves *hasidim*, and whose source of inspiration was that form of Islamic esotericism known as Sufism. The Pietist movement which arose in XIIIth century Egypt was not the first instance of the interaction of Judaism and Sufism, nor was it to be the last. Islamic pietism had earlier inspired Baḥya Ibn Paqūda's (circa 1080) *Fara'īd al qulūb (Duties of the Heart)* whose impact was to be considerable, not only in Jewish circles, where it was constantly cited as a model, but also, much later, in its Hebrew version, in Central European Hasidism, where it became a basic manual. As far as can be detected, subsequent Ṣūfī influence was to be sporadic and although individual Jews may have been induced to adopt Ṣūfī practices there is no evidence before the period under study of any widespread Jewish movement of a Ṣūfī character. However, in the XIIIth century, the Golden Age of Sufism, Muslim esotericism developed into a powerful spiritual body taking on an institutionalized aspect in the form of mystical brotherhoods, particularly in Egypt. It was only natural that the immense spiritual energy galvanised by this phenomenon should influence the contemporary Jews in search of a deeper religious experience, for whom Sufism was the immediate spiritual model.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Paul Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham He-Hasid: The Jewish Ṣūfī" *Journal of Semitic Studies* XXVI/i Spring 1981

¹⁴⁶ Available at: <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/Taylor-Schechter/GF/4> [Accessed 29/3/08]

¹⁴⁷ Paul B. Fenton, "Judaeo-Arabic Mystical Writings of the XIIIth to XIVth Centuries" in Norman Golb (ed.), *Studies in Muslim-Jewish Relations: Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam: 1997, pp.88, 89. Proceedings of the founding conference of the Society of Judaeo-Arabic Studies (Studies in Jewish-Muslim Relations; v.3)

This spiritual interaction continues today in Israel, a good example of which is apparent in the newsletter of the Olam Qatan book shop run by Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf who identifies himself as a Jewish-Sufi:

'Derekh Avraham' or 'Tariqat Ibrahim' is an organization with which I have a lot in common. Like 'Olam Qatan' it's been meeting for some 15 years, and while it mainly consists of Israeli seekers who are interested in Sufism, it also includes Arab Muslim Sufis and fosters spiritual dialogue between the Jewish and Islamic traditions... sometimes including elements of other traditions as well. Their evening programs this year will be mostly in Tel Aviv on Sunday nights. But they also feature weekend retreats which include some form of Shabbat prayers. The Fall Retreat is usually held at the Monastery of the Sisters of Zion in Ein Karem here in Jerusalem, and it's coming up this week-end! The theme is 'Tiqqun HaLev', the restoration of the heart. The opening Friday night *ṣoḥbet* (spiritual conversation) will feature Omar Reiss from Acre and Aviva Berkovitch-Ohana (who translated our book 'Dervish Yunus' into Hebrew... soon to be released in a new edition). Saturday morning we'll hear from the Sufi perspective of Ghassan Manasra and the Kabbalistic perspective of Avi Elqayam. I'll be contributing along with others on Saturday afternoon – my contribution will be the teaching by Rebbe Nahman on "Tzur Levavi" which describes how each of us creates his or her own world within the heart, and the importance of employing "good design" to make space in the world for the qualities of the Divine. I hope to complete my book (in English) on the core teachings of Rebbe Nahman this year, and this gives me a chance to start focusing on these teachings... which I have found to be a natural bridge between Hasidism and Sufism.¹⁴⁸

To what extent might Abraham Maimun, or his descendants, have been familiar with the work of Ibn 'Arabi? In a paper by Mireille Loubet¹⁴⁹ in which she provides the background for her translation of *Futuhat az-Zaman* (The Spiritual Conquests of Time),¹⁵⁰ a treatise found in the Cairo Genizah and now a part of the Firkovitch collection in the Leningrad library,¹⁵¹ she notes that, 'The name of the author of this work, transcribed by a single scribe, does not appear. The title, quoted in the text itself, "*Futuhat az-zaman*" (The Spiritual Conquests of Time) immediately sets the mystical tone of the content and appears as a debt or a tribute paid to the master of Sufism, Ibn Arabi, whose "*Futuhat al-Makkiyya*" (The Mecca Illuminations) are known world-wide for their influence and richness.'¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ 'Olam Qatan Books and Music' email newsletter, 12th October, 2012 by Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf

¹⁴⁹ Mireille Loubet, "Jewish Pietism of the Sufi Type: A Particular Trend of Mysticism in Medieval Egypt" *Bulletin du CRFJ, automne 2000, numéro7* [Mireille Loubet, « Jewish pietism of the Sufi type », *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem* [En ligne], 7 | 2000, mis en ligne le 13 mars 2008, Consulté le 19 octobre 2012. URL : <http://bcrfj.revues.org/2312>]

¹⁵⁰ This is Loubet's transliteration and translation of the Arabic title. It might also be translated as, 'The Openings (or revelations) of Time'

¹⁵¹ Loubet/Jewish Pietism, p. 2

¹⁵² Ibid.

To refer back to the beginning of this chapter and the citation from Sarah Stroumsa's work on Moses Maimonides, and based on what is known and touched on above, it is safe to assume that, 'The flow of ideas was never unilateral or linear, but rather went back and forth, creating what I propose to call a "whirlpool effect", where, when an idea falls, like a drop of coloured liquid, into the turbulence, it eventually colours the whole body of water.'¹⁵³

3.7 Postscript on Spain's attitude to its Judeo-Islamic heritage

The poetry of the eleventh century poet Ibn Gabirol, whose poetry expressed the longing of the soul for the divine, and his contemporary, Bahya Ibn Paqūda who developed his own, distinctive synthesis of philosophy and mysticism, and the work of the philosopher mystic, Judah Ha-Levi, are indicative of the cross-pollination of ideas and concepts between Judaism and Islam in medieval times. Yet the Jewish contribution to the life and culture of Al-Andalus is not given the attention it deserves in contemporary Spain. For example, the Alhambra in Granada is presented to the tourist purely as a Muslim fortress-palace with no mention of its Jewish beginnings:

The story of the Alhambra, told in the fullness of its complexity, is a maze of superimposed memories that is a fitting emblem for the powerfully paradoxical and often unexpected cultural history of al-Andalus as a whole (...) the first building on the site was begun by Samuel Ibn Nagrila (Samuel the Nagid), the powerful Jewish vizier of Granada, whose family had fled from Córdoba to Granada at the time of the overthrow of the Umayyads, in 1013. The construction was subsequently continued and elaborated by the Nagid's son, Joseph (...) If these foundational details are largely not remembered it is because the attention of all guidebooks – and in this category one can certainly include most general historical presentations – is per force, and with very good reason, turned to the Granada of the Nasrids, which between 1273 and 1492 was the last Muslim city-state of the peninsula. As this last outpost of what had been a brilliant civilization, during those last 250 years of Islamic dominion, the independent kingdom of Granada achieved the cultural and artistic heights manifest in the unrivaled Alhambra.¹⁵⁴

Ibn Gabirol wrote in one of his poems:

We lounge beneath the pomegranates,
Palm trees, apple trees,
Under every lovely, leafy thing,

¹⁵³ Stroumsa/*Maimonides* p. xiv

¹⁵⁴ Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (eds.), *Literature of Al-Andalus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 3, 4

And walk among the vines,
Enjoy the splendid faces we will see,
In a lofty palace built of noble stones.¹⁵⁵

To see the reflection of paradise in the gardens and palaces, the water features and bountiful harvests of Al-Andalus was not the prerogative of Muslims. Its Jewish citizens were equally enamoured of its bounties and the designation of Cordoba as the 'ornament of the world' came from the Saxon nun, Hroswitha who travelled to the renowned city to see for herself. Without the participation of the diverse faith communities of Al-Andalus there would have been less to admire. A sense of respect and intellectual curiosity brought several Europeans to visit Cordoba and wonder at its street lighting, its domestic water system, its architecture, and above all, its libraries. Equally impressive were the genuine discoveries of common ground in faith between Jews and Muslims. As Rosa Maria Menocal comments when speaking of the fact that the history, literature, and language of Al-Andalus cannot be easily categorized into one discipline, e.g. that of the Arabist, or the student of Romance languages, by attempting to categorize too narrowly scholars were missing out on the larger picture of diversity and *convivencia*:

But no less remarkable is the fact that the most spectacular of the four surviving synagogues of Spain is decorated with something in and of itself the real thing but in a context that is, to say the least, unexpected: the Toledan synagogue now called El Tránsito, built in 1360 in resplendent echoes of the Alhambra, just then being finished, includes real Arabic, along with Hebrew, integrated into the complex stucco ornamentation. And not just any Arabic, nor even some bits of the considerable body of Jewish writing done in Arabic in al-Andalus, but lines from the Qur'an itself.¹⁵⁶

It is easy to begin waxing lyrical when speaking of Al-Andalus, as indeed did the poets of the time. The tears that come to the eyes of many a Muslim visiting the mosque of Cordoba or the Alhambra in Granada, a veritable bastion of nostalgia, are genuine tears that reflect the sorrow of loss in 1492 and also a certain bafflement and melancholy at the state of the Muslim world today and its perceived misinterpretation by Americans and Europeans. Although distant in time, the work of Andalusian philosophers, theologians, and mystics, also constitute an alternative narrative to claims that Jews and Muslims have always been

155 'Cities of Light' on the website 20,000 Dialogues [Online] Available at:

<http://www.20000dialogues.com/citiesoflight.aspx> [Last accessed: 7th March, 2009]

156 María Rosa Menocal, "Visions of Al-Andalus" in María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (eds), *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.10

in conflict with each other. There is also a story to tell of a Muslim-Jewish symbiosis that has suffered from a lack of attention from various scholarly disciplines until recently. The work of contemporary scholars on those writers of Al-Andalus are additional narratives insofar as they also evidence a different story in line with the authors they are translating, analysing, and interpreting.

The period of Muslim rule in Al-Andalus has resulted in complex attitudes among the contemporary Spanish towards their heritage. The question of historical heritage and identity is one of great complexity. While in the past many claimed to be of 'pure Spanish blood' historical facts must make a farce of this claim when it is remembered that Carthaginians, Romans, Visigoths, Arabs, and Berbers, have all intruded into the land of the indigenous Iberian each bringing their culture and their faith, and intermarrying across ethnic and faith boundaries. Spain is now a secular democracy that respects the right of its citizens to follow the faith of their choice, or none at all. The majority of Spaniards are nominal or practising Roman Catholics with a small presence of protestant churches and an ever growing population of Muslims that consists of Spanish converts and immigrants from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. The Jewish presence in Spain numbers several thousand with larger communities in Madrid and Barcelona and smaller communities in several other cities.¹⁵⁷ As for the history of Al-Andalus, Spanish scholars appear to reflect the complexities of the contemporary Spanish people's relation to their history which is also influenced by such diverse factors as the Franco period, church politics, immigration, and the tourist trade. Rosa Maria Menocal comments that, 'There is a particularly virulent strain of Spanish historiography that has viewed the Andalusian chapter as the cause of subsequent Spanish social ills, and much of the xenophobia of this view survives in Spanish culture to this day.'¹⁵⁸ In, "'I am, by God, Fit for High Positions': On the Political Role of Women in Al-Andalus" authors, Nada Mourtada-Sabbah and Adrian Gully refer to the two main historiographical approaches to the history of Al-Andalus, the 'traditionalist' and the 'anti-continuist' approaches, and how the choice of approach affects the outcome:

But it is clear that one's interpretation of this issue will be influenced to a certain degree by one's own perception of historiography; in particular, the extent to which

¹⁵⁷"The Jewish Community of Spain" [Online] Available at: <http://amyisrael.co.il/europe/spain/#Adresses> [Accessed: 24th March, 2009]

¹⁵⁸María Rosa Menocal, "Visions of Al-Andalus" in María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (eds), *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.7 - 8

one wishes to acknowledge the impact made by the Muslim conquest of Spain. In other words, one's conclusions will be shaped according to whether one subscribes to the 'traditionalist' trend of interpreting history at that time and in that place, or whether one adopts the 'anti-continuist' reading of the history of Muslim Spain. Historians have themselves accorded different levels of importance to the impact of the Islamic conquest of Spain and offered many diverse interpretations of it. Spanish historians have been inclined to focus on the continuity between Islamic Spain and the pre-Islamic past, asserting that Hispano-Muslim civilization was but a 'phase', or even a parenthesis, an ephemeral episode in their national history that added no specific character to the Peninsula by virtue of the conquerors' customs and their import or input. Thus, according to this first view, the conquerors added no significant original contribution to the Iberian Peninsula, which thus presumably remained faithful to its pre-Islamic roots. Other historians have adopted quite a different line of thought, however. They consider that of the two different social structures-the one occidental or Western characterizing the former Roman and Visigothic Hispania, the other oriental or Eastern featuring the Arab-Muslim societies and having been imported by the conquerors to the Peninsula-it was the latter structure imported by the conqueror that prevailed after the conquest. The proponents of the first trend-which we will henceforth refer to as the 'traditionalist' historiographical trend or tendency-consider that the 'oriental' structure, if indeed it was introduced to the Peninsula by the conquerors, did nothing more than superficially colour society only in appearance, without deeply affecting its infrastructure. However, adherents to the opposite current- the 'anti-continuist' viewpoint-posit that the oriental structure, which is highly indicative of Eastern society, mentality and the mode of life it stemmed from, has imposed itself in Muslim Spain and has indeed remained so strongly pervasive and even invasive as to survive the cultural interpenetration, the coexistence and interaction between incoming Muslims (whether Arabs or Berbers) on one hand, and indigenous categories (whether they remained Christian or adopted the new faith) on the other.¹⁵⁹

Yet, in the light of the history of Al-Andalus many interfaith groups and other institutions such as UNESCO and the *Legado de Andalusí* choose to hold intercultural and interfaith conferences and legacy initiatives in Spain. The Spanish attitude to its own history is, however, ambiguous and marked by a degree of silence, attempted denial of any continuity between Islamic Spain and present day Spain, anti-Semitism, and very selective historical narratives in some cases. The opposite of all this is also present with some startling examples ranging from 'Golden Age' euphoria in the tourist industry to a recent phenomenon of whole regions trying to re-discover the Jewish heritage of Al-Andalus to the extent of some going to great lengths to try and establish that their surnames are of Hebrew origin. Additionally, I know of several Jews interested in visiting the country or in

¹⁵⁹ Nada Mourtada-Sabbah and Adrian Gully, "'I Am, by God, Fit for High Positions': On the Political Role of Women in al-Andalus", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Nov., 2003), Taylor & Francis, Ltd., pp.185, 186. [Online] Available at: Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3593222> [Last accessed: 21/09/2008]

living there with the hope of an 'Andalusian experience'. The Jewish population of Spain has been growing since the end of the Second World War, as has also the Muslim population. The former includes immigrants from North Africa and the latter consists of growing numbers of immigrants from North Africa plus an increasing number of Spanish converts to Islam since the death of Franco. Many of these converts claim Muslim ancestry.

This chapter has given a brief introduction to the climate of mutual engagement with mysticism and its socio-cultural context in Al-Andalus. During the intertextual conversation that constitutes an analyses of the field data obtained in Israel, the following chapters will include further discussion of this period as such themes arise from within the interviewee narratives. This gives occasion to return to the themes addressed surrounding Ibn 'Arabī, the Maimonides dynasty, the masters of Kabbalah and Sufism, amongst others, and to elucidate their relevance to the practice of the interviewees and to the role of Sufism in conflict transformation.

PART TWO: READING THE FIELD NARRATIVES

CHAPTER FOUR: THE DEREKH AVRAHAM/TARĪQAT IBRAHIMIYYA AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RE-EMERGENCE IN ISRAEL

4.1 Introduction to Part Two

The interview narratives that are analysed in the following chapters are viewed as a narrative of indicators for exploring the potential of Sufism to contribute to a grass-roots peace process via an engagement between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Israel. They form a part of the discourse on Jewish-Muslim relations and constitute the primary sources of this study. They do not evidence a large movement of Ṣūfī groups working for peace but are exemplary of the manner in which Sufism can function as an agent of peace and are therefore invaluable in the examination of the concepts and methods that impact on the understanding of the self in relation to the other for an evaluation of the viability of such as an approach to conflict transformation.

The Muslim Ṣūfīs of Israel include other orders such as the Shadhiliyya and the Yashruti and are of great interest in forming a complete picture of Sufism in Israel and the OPT but for the purpose of this investigation it is the Naqshabandi and the Qādiriyya with whom the narrators are most active. The Derekh Avraham are the clearest example of a fraternity engaged in Jewish-Muslim interaction through the medium of Ṣūfī practice and who, as a group, are engaged in educational projects for peace. They are not alone as will be seen as the network of individuals and groups, both Jewish and Muslim, becomes apparent through the following chapters. The narratives of the Beshara interviewees in Chapter Five aids in elucidating some doctrinal points in the application of Ṣūfī metaphysics as a method of self-transformation and the consequences this has on the process of 'othering'. The individuals who contribute to the narrative in Chapter Six provide an in-depth account of the personal journey as Jews on the Ṣūfī path and on their work in the dissemination of Ṣūfī literature, the provision of workshops, and an extended conversation between two of the narrators on points relevant to a critical examination of several points pertinent to the question of a Ṣūfī contribution to peace. The narratives of this chapter problematize issues of identity, terminology, self-definition, and the debate on authenticity in the Ṣūfī tradition. The latter is a point of discussion that is the cause of disagreement in Ṣūfī communities in the West. Chapter Seven introduces two Muslim Ṣūfī peacemakers and places the Ṣūfī practitioners within the context of grass-roots initiatives for peace.

The approach taken to the gathering of the interviewee narratives gives agency to the participants in contributing to the discourse on the irenic potential of Ṣūfī practice. The wider question as to how Ṣūfī engagement in peace processes may best be implemented is considered in the concluding chapter in Part Three. The participants are the producers of a narrative to which they have been invited to contribute, rather than the subjects of a survey, and as such their narratives lend this investigation a hermeneutical character that accesses the tools of the social sciences and the humanities to initiate the production of the text. The interviewee narratives analysed in the following chapters add to the discourse on Jewish-Muslim relations.

4.2 Reviving the Jewish-Ṣūfī Path

The founding of the contemporary Jewish-Ṣūfī order of *Derekh Avraham/Tarīqat Ibrahimiyya*¹⁶⁰ in the year 2000 marked a noteworthy event in the history of Jewish-Muslim relations despite its exposure to the contingencies of political volatility and the challenges presented to their work by the ongoing conflict. Yet the movement has received almost no academic attention as yet.¹⁶¹ They do not have a large number of members but their

¹⁶⁰ *Derekh Avraham* and *Tariqāt Ibrahimiyya* both mean ‘The Path of Abraham’ in Hebrew and Arabic respectively. The Arabic term was used more often than its Hebrew equivalent by the members of the group I spoke to during the field study in Israel. To emphasize its Jewish origins the group is referred to here as simply ‘Derekh Avraham’.

¹⁶¹ See chapter one, note 5 for details of Itzchak Weismann’s mention of *Derekh Avraham* in his article, “Sūfī Brotherhoods in Syria and Israel: A Contemporary Overview”. A work for general reading on the history of Jewish-Muslim relations by means of a Jewish engagement with Sufism has recently been published: Thomas Block, *Shalom/Salaam: A Story of a Mystical Brotherhood*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2010). Based on many years of research, but using only secondary sources, and covering a time-period from the earliest development of Sufism through to the present day, his work is interesting for the abundant references to the work of scholars on the subject that he has gathered in one volume. However, Block noted in an interview with the Washington Independent Review of Books that, “Some academics have viewed the book with a bit of scepticism due to the fact that I am not a lettered academic myself, yet have had the “audacity” to write an academic book which breaks new ground in the research of the history of Jewish-Muslim relations, as well as Judaism itself.” (“Shalom/Salaam: The Story of a Mystical Fraternity” Q&A with author Thomas Block, Washington Independent Review of Books, (n. d.) [Online] Available at: <http://www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/author-q-and-a/shalomsalaam-the-story-of-a-mystical-fraternity>). In his defence Block says, “I might add that a Muslim academic and Jewish academic – neither of whom were adverse to the book’s publication – stated that they would never have written this book as they wouldn’t have wanted to jeopardize their academic positions!” It is not clear why academic positions would be compromised by a study of Jewish-Muslim relations that involved an interest in Sufism and an adoption and/or re-interpretation of some of its concepts and practices in an historical and geographical arena where religious borders were not so rigidly defined as to exclude a creative exchange and response to the other. As is apparent in citations used in the present study, and in Block’s own work, several scholars have not shied from referring to those relations. One of the interviewees whose narrative is related in this chapter does not give fear of academic reprisal as the reason for not publishing a monograph on the topic. He says, “It was always my ambition, although it never actually came to be, to write a book about the comparison

influence widens through greater participation from interested parties in events regularly organized together with other Ṣūfīs and peace-makers in Israel. The initial motivation of the co-founders is apparent in the interviewee narratives analysed in this chapter. The Jewish narrators report an affinity to Sufism but no desire for a formal conversion to Islam. The Muslim narrators express respect for their Jewish colleagues as *ahl al-kitāb* (people of the Book). Inspiration from the medieval Jewish-Ṣūfī movement in which Abraham Maimuni played a major role emerges as pivotal in the ease the narrators feel in integrating Ṣūfī concepts and practice into their Jewish faith. An existing heritage of Jewish-Muslim interaction lends relevance to Derekh Avraham's aspirations for greater understanding of such relations among the Israeli population when Jewish forbears have pursued similar practices.

In medieval Fustāt we find a parallel situation in the efforts of Abraham Maimuni to defend his work by referring back to earlier generations. Writing on the Jewish writers of Al-Andalus and Fustāt who espoused Ṣūfī ideas and concepts, Paul Fenton comments that, 'In an effort to assert their authenticity and to gain credence within the Jewish fold, the Pietists presented their novel doctrines as a restoration of practices previously prevalent among the Ancient Israelites'.¹⁶² Certainly the Jewish Ṣūfī movement in Egypt led by Abraham Maimuni, son of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), and Nagid of the Jewish community, felt it necessary to defend his work and religious practice before the community who wanted him replaced. Their reasons though were of a more political nature as they wanted to see a member of their own elite in the position of Nagid and not,

between Jewish spirituality – mainly from the Kabbalah and Hasidism – and Muslim spirituality. I've never written that book as a book but it comes over in many of the articles I've written in the footnotes that this is the common denominator between the two traditions." PF, Appendix I. The reason that Block gives for the claimed academic caution in approaching the topic is that, "The thesis is not only too controversial, but the amount of information that it covers makes it nearly impossible for a strict academic to be an expert in all of the many facets of the story." Block's stated intention with his work is nevertheless valuable and much needed as he responds to critics, "It should be noted that I state quite clearly that I am writing this book to begin a conversation, not provide the last word, and I am writing as an informed "citizen-diplomat" and not a lettered academic." Block's intentions are to bring the history of Jewish-Muslim relations to light through the Jewish interest in Sufism and, as he notes himself, 'to begin a conversation'. I was in Israel when the book arrived at the book store of Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf (The name of the book store in Jerusalem is 'Olam Qatan' and is the enterprise of Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, one of the interviewees in this study). It was awaited enthusiastically but I heard from one scholar and practitioner of Jewish mysticism that he was dismayed that the author had presented the subject in a manner that appeared to attribute too much Ṣūfī influence to the growth and development of the Kabbalah and Ḥassidic movements.

¹⁶² Paul Fenton, "Some Judaeo-Arabic Fragments by Rabbi Abraham He-Hasid, The Jewish Sūfī", *Journal of Semitic Studies* XXVI/i Spring 1981 [Online] Available at: <http://jss.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/citation/26/1/47> [Last accessed: 4th May, 2012].

as they saw it, the usurpers from Al-Andalus.¹⁶³ Abraham had been preceded by his father, Moses Maimonides, in the position of Nagid who had left Cordoba when the arrival of the Berber ‘puritan’ regime of the Almohads made life difficult for one whose work involved the claim that rational thinking and belief in revelation were not mutually exclusive. The same had been the case for Ibn Rushd (Averroes) who also wrote on reason and revelation from the Muslim perspective. The problem for Maimonides’ son was less in the realm of philosophy and more to do with the thriving Jewish Ṣūfī movement in Egypt, for, ‘Abraham Maimuni appropriated not only whole chunks of characteristically Ṣūfī vocabulary, but also some of the principal forms of apologia and argument that had been adopted by leading orthodox Muslim expositors of this trend’.¹⁶⁴ Abraham Maimuni’s son, ‘Obadyah, continued this trend when he wrote *The Treatise of the Pool*, which was discovered amongst the Genizah fragments kept at the Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit, Cambridge University and translated by Paul Fenton. The unit’s newsletter commented on this discovery, ‘Obadyah consciously uses Ṣūfī concepts and mystical vocabulary in describing the Jew’s spiritual journey towards God. The very title of the work ‘The Treatise of the Pool’ refers to the typically Ṣūfī idea that the heart is to be emptied of all but God in order to draw it near to the divine, just as a pool is first cleansed and then filled with clean water.’¹⁶⁵

This is not simply a matter of using Ṣūfī vocabulary as the most appropriate in expressing spiritual themes in the Judeo-Arabic in which these works were written but of applying Ṣūfī concepts to the context of Jewish spirituality.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Gerson D. Cohen, “The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni”, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 35 (1967), p. 76, Published by: American Academy for Jewish Research [Online] Available at: Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3622476> [Last accessed: 10th February, 2011].

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 78

¹⁶⁵ *Genizah Fragments*, The Newsletter of Cambridge University's Taylor-Schechter Genizah Research Unit at Cambridge University Library, No. 4 October 1982 [Online] Available at: <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/Taylor-Schechter/GF/4>

¹⁶⁶ Although we have evidence in the surviving writing of several Muslim and Jewish writers of Al-Andalus, and later in Egypt, of a lively interest in Ṣūfī ideas and practices by Jewish scholars and mystics this does not necessarily indicate a one way flow from Islam to Judaism. Quite the reverse, as it would appear that a tendency to express one’s sincerity in faith takes an ascetic/mystical expression of closeness to God in all three Abrahamic faiths, albeit with distinctive theological emphases. The influence of Sūfism on Christian mystics of fifteenth century Spain, often via Judaism, has also been discerned in recent research on Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, who both hailed from *converso* families, those Jews forcibly converted to Christianity, (Luce López-Baralt, “The Ṣūfī *Trobar Clus* and Spanish Mysticism: A Shared Symbolism” (trans. Andrew Hurley) *Allama Iqbal Journal*, 1997 [Online] Available at: <http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/oct97/7.htm> [Last accessed: August 22nd, 2010] and on the Messianic female mystics of sixteenth century Spain after the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews and Muslims by the Catholic Monarchs (Sharon Faye Koren, “A Christian

This chapter examines to what extent the activities of the contemporary Derekh Avraham/Ṭarīqat Ibrahimīyya can be found to contribute to reconciliation and peace. Although distant in time, the work of medieval Andalusian and Egyptian philosophers, theologians, and mystics, constitute alternative narratives to the prevalent idea in popular culture and the media of an historical and ongoing enmity between Jews and Muslims. The four interviewees are all founding members of the contemporary Derekh Avraham Jewish-Ṣūfī order and display great dedication to their faith and to projects for peace in the milieu of an enduring and complex conflict that exhibits no signs of resolution.

4.3 The Narratives of Derekh Avraham/Ṭarīqa Ibrahimīyya

4.3.1 Encountering Sufism and its Kinship with Jewish Mysticism

Sitting in a café in Tel Aviv with Avraham Elqayam, Al-Andalus felt very close as he spoke. Avraham Elkayam comes from a family of Sephardic Jews who have kept the memory of their ancestors dwelling in Al-Andalus, and their later journey through the *Maghrib* before finally settling in Israel, very much alive. As a founding member of Derekh Avraham, Avi is following a spiritual path that feels natural to him and which is a continuation of his family's engagement with the Arab-Muslim world.

Before speaking of his route to Sufism, Avi told the story of the presence of Islam in his own life and in the lives of his ancestors. He says he grew up with a sense of a symbiosis¹⁶⁷ between Judaism and Islam imparted to him by the many stories his family told of their sense of security, and even love, when living among Muslims. It was this symbiosis that he says he was born into and which forms his heritage.¹⁶⁸ Avi's family spoke Arabic, 'I heard Arabic from my grandmother. She was just in Jerusalem, and you know when she said 'God' she didn't say it in Hebrew, she said 'Allah' in Arabic although she was

Means to a *Conversa* End, in *NASHIM: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, Indiana University Press, Number 9, Spring 5765/2005, pp. 27-61, *Special Issue: Jewish Women's Spirituality*, [Online] Available at: <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/nashim/v009/9.1koren.html> [Last accessed: 22nd August, 2010]. A discussion on the possibility of Jewish and Christian influences on Sufism arises in some of the interviewee narratives in the following chapters.

¹⁶⁷ 'Creative symbiosis' is a phrase used by Shlomo Dov Goitein to express the Jewish-Muslim interaction in the Medieval Middle East on several cultural, epistemological, and religious levels. See S. D. Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: A Concise History of Their Social and Cultural Relations*, (New York: Dover Publications, 200). Previous editions in 1955, 1964, 1974. In the Preface on page 6 Goitein writes, "With the great Arab conquests following the rise of Islam, which converted all the countries between Spain and Persia into a single territory dominated by the new religion, and soon after by the Arabic language as well, the majority of the Jewish people of that time came under Arab rule. Thus began the long and great period of Jewish-Arab symbiosis."

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Avraham Elkayam, Appendix I.

Jewish. Also when she spoke she recited some verses from the Qur'ān.¹⁶⁹ He later chose to study philosophy at university but continued to be drawn towards Islam, 'When I came to university studies it was philosophy, Jewish philosophy and mysticism, but also I studied classical Arabic, I studied Qur'ān and I studied also Sufism. My teacher she was very expert in Al-Ghazālī, yes, but it took time until I opened my heart to Sufism. First of all I just study, it takes time, and one day I decided that this is my way. I don't know, perhaps it came from God, that my work is Sufism, and I tried to find a Ṣūfī teacher.'¹⁷⁰

The study of Arabic that then leads to an engagement with Ṣūfī texts also played a significant role in Paul Fenton's discovery of Sufism as meaningful to his spiritual practice. While drinking Turkish coffee on the patio of a house in Jerusalem, Paul describes his initial steps towards Sufism as beginning with a desire to learn Arabic during childhood. In answer to my question on his path to Sufism as a Jew he responds, 'One should be very specific because it was in very clear circumstances although my attraction to Arabic goes back a long time. As a child, and certainly as an adolescent, I was always interested in Arabic and I learnt to read Arabic on my own when I was ten years old and I read the Qur'ān when I was about Bar Mitzvah age.'¹⁷¹ This interest is pursued further at university level, 'So it was evident for me that I would read Arabic at university and that's what I did. I studied Arabic and I was lacking the spoken language so in the summer of 1969 I came to Israel and I did a course at the Hebrew University and the language courses and civilization course.'¹⁷² This study of Arabic becomes far more than an intellectual exercise and linguistic expertise

¹⁶⁹ Elkayam, Appendix I. This sense of being a part of Arab-Muslim culture and society is not unique among Jews as many Sephardim and Mizrahim, the Jews of Middle Eastern origin, testify. For example, Haim Ovadia, the rabbi of a Sephardic congregation in California, says the following about himself, "I am a Jew of Islam. (...) It is not only because in my family's veins runs the blood of people who lived in Iraq, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia and Turkey, nor because among my congregants there are natives of Bahrain and Indonesia. It is true that my iPod is packed with Abdul Wahab, Sabah Fakhri and Farid Al Atrache and the Shabbat songs, and liturgy borrows freely from generations of Islamic, Ṣūfī and secular Arabic music, but the connection runs much deeper. I am a Jew of Islam because Judaism under the rule of the crescent took a different course than that under the rule of the cross (...) The remedy for fanaticism is to support and promote proponents of moderate Islam, to bring back the glory of Andalusia, Cordoba and Granada and to prepare a cadre of imams and Quran scholars who are willing to accommodate to changing times, simultaneously teaching Westerners about Islam. It is time to open up a dialogue of acceptance, not one that teaches our ways to others, but rather one that searches to solve conflicts and violence by drawing upon each one's own culture. It is a long and difficult way, but history has a long breadth and memory, and it will wait. Meanwhile, we don't have to build a bridge with Islam, just open for traffic the ancient one." (in "The Jewish Journal" [Online] Available at: http://www.jewishjournal.com/opinion/article/its_time_to_reopen_dialogue_with_islam_20080111 [Last accessed: 4th March 2012].

¹⁷⁰ Elkayam, Appendix I.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Paul Fenton, Appendix I.

¹⁷² Fenton, Appendix I.

when Paul attends a course on Sufism, ‘One of the courses was on Sufism by Menahem Milson who had written on Sufism. I believe he was one of the great Arabists of Israeli academia. He published his *‘Adab and Muridin*¹⁷³ which was an introduction to life in a Ṣūfī convent and how Ṣūfīs would live together and what their manners would be, and I was very touched by this text so when I furthered my studies in Arabic I read a lot of material about Sufism.’¹⁷⁴ What particularly struck Paul was a sense of the familiar arising from his knowledge of another tradition within Judaism, ‘Since I come from a religious background and I had been exposed to Hasidism in my youth I was very struck by the parallelisms between the Ṣūfī approach attached as it was to a rigorous legal dimension that one finds not only in Islam but also in Jewish orthodoxy. Hasidism is also more interested in the spiritual dimension of religious experience rather than the legal application of legislation.’¹⁷⁵ This was the turning point for Paul that informed his scholarly work and inspired the practice of his faith. Although his ambition to write a comparative work on Jewish and Islamic mysticism is as yet unrealised nevertheless he notes, ‘I’ve never written that book as a book but it comes over in many of the articles I’ve written in the footnotes that this is the common denominator between the two traditions and that this common denominator is closer than what one would think.’¹⁷⁶

The commonalities between Hasidic Judaism and Sufism were also perceived by Roberto Arbib, the Rabbi of a Conservative synagogue and a co-founder of Derekh Avraham. His interest in Sufism had likewise been aroused by lessons on the Hassidic movement which drew his attention, ‘We start together with Avraham Elkayam and Shaykh Manasra something like twelve years ago. The group is called Ṭarīqa Ibrahimiyya/Derekh Avraham. The interest in Sufism for me started even before Derekh Avraham when there were teachings about the Hasidim. And it was often useful to bring some stories from the Ṣūfīs to create a parallel with the Hasidim.’¹⁷⁷ What had begun for Roberto as an intellectual interest developed into a deeper engagement with Sufism when he discovered, to his surprise, that there were Ṣūfī groups present in Israel and he entered wholeheartedly with Avi into learning directly from the Ṣūfīs and joining them in their worship:

¹⁷³ Menahem Milson (trans.), *A Sufi Rule for Novices: Kitāb Ādāb al-Murīdīn of Abū al-Najīb al-Suhrawardī*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1975).

¹⁷⁴ Fenton, Appendix I.

¹⁷⁵ Fenton, Appendix I. Hasidism began in Podolia, Eastern Europe with the charismatic figure, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, known as the Baal Shem Tov

¹⁷⁶ Fenton, Appendix I.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Roberto Arbib, Appendix I.

Then Avraham told me that there is a group and together with Eliyahu McClean we visited them with the Ṭarīqa Ibrahimiyya. It was the first time we meet the Shaykh. And we had dhikr the first time and it was very funky for me because, you know, you start to pray and the Muslims they prostrate on the ground and it was something completely new for me to participate in this but it was very interesting and we start meeting with the Shaykh and after we have been invited for a festival of the Ṣūfīs and we were there with Avi and the Shaykh and it was also an occasion to know a bit more about the ṭarīqa and we decided to create and to start meeting and to study more about Sufism here in Israel and we discovered that there do exist several ṭarīqas here.¹⁷⁸

Avi also recalls these initial meetings with a sense of excitement at discovering in Israel that which his ancestors experienced in their daily lives, 'One day I was in the class in Hebrew University and Khalid Abu Ras¹⁷⁹ give a lecture in the seminar and he said something about the thinking of his Ṣūfī teacher. After the seminar I came to Khalid and asked him, 'Who is this teacher?' He told me, 'My teacher is the Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām Manasra.¹⁸⁰ If you want to see him I can speak with him.'¹⁸¹ This moment of discovery of the existence of Ṣūfī orders in Israel, accompanied by some excitement and enthusiasm to know more, is perhaps indicative of the lack of communication between the Jewish and the Muslim populations of the country. In the case of each narrator it also appears as an opportunity to resume a pre-existing dialogue giving their interest thereby an historic Jewish precedent that underpins their engagement in Ṣūfī practice, in community with Muslim Ṣūfīs, as a valid Jewish path within the tradition of Jewish mysticism. Paul even maintains that, 'This rupture of the dialogue between Jews and Muslims, and even in the Ṣūfī context, is not natural in a certain sense seeing that such encounters have taken place in the past.'¹⁸² He also gives a reason for why he thinks this has happened:

It's the fundamentalist swing that we are witnessing at this time that has proscribed such encounters, but they did take place in the past and I'll give you two examples from Ibn 'Arabī's book. First of all Ibn 'Arabī himself in the *Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* describes a conversation that he held with a Rabbi and they're not talking about the weather, they're talking about profound spiritual matters: the fact that the conversation revolves around the symbolism of letters, a fundamental discipline of Islam and Judaism. And then one of Ibn 'Arabī's disciples, called Ibn Hud, who came from the same birth place as Ibn 'Arabī – Murcia – flees Andalucia, as Ibn 'Arabī

¹⁷⁸ Arbib, Appendix I. Ṣūfī Orders with a presence in Israel include the Qādiriyya, the Naqshbandi, and the Yashruti

¹⁷⁹ Khalid Abu Ras is a Muslim Ṣūfī and teaches Arabic language and literature in Israel

¹⁸⁰ Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām Manasra is the head of the Qādiriyya order with his base in Nazareth. He is also the father of Ghassan Manasra who is mentioned several times in the interviews. Chapter 7 examines the peace-making activities of Ghassan Manasra with Eliyahu McClean.

¹⁸¹ Elkayam, Appendix I.

¹⁸² Fenton, Appendix I.

himself, when Sufism was unwelcome and he settles in Damascus and one of the books he takes with him from Andalusia is *The Guide for the Perplexed*¹⁸³ from Maimonides and the Jews of Damascus come and seek out his guidance in the understanding of the book which indicates that they might have construed it as a book of Sufism. And here he is, Ibn Hud, from the Ibn 'Arabī *wujūdiyya* school teaching the Jews of Damascus, *The Guide for the Perplexed*. This is an extraordinary example of dialogue; not about astronomy or about the weather forecast but deeply spiritual matters. So it's not something outrageous or impossible.¹⁸⁴

Although Paul claims the 'fundamentalist swing' as the cause for the rupture in Jewish-Muslim relations, and not without good reason¹⁸⁵ he fails to mention that the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 initiated widespread unrest in the Middle East and North Africa and discrimination and violence against Jewish communities, especially in Baghdad, which became the cause of Jewish immigration to Israel. The origins of the Jewish community in Baghdad pre-dated the rise of Islam and Jews and Muslims had lived side-by-side for generations.¹⁸⁶ It is therefore not surprising that some showed an interest in Sufism. That this was not just the case in medieval times but has persisted until the present day in places such as Turkey and Morocco, where there is still a Jewish presence, is emphasized by Avi:

You see that the Jews in the Arab world were very interested in Sufism. Not just in the Middle Ages but also in pre-modern times – which is my research at the university. It's also in Turkey, the interest in Sufism. You know the Cantor in the synagogue studies the *maqam*, the spiritual music in the Şūfī order; in Izmir, and also in Istanbul. And also in Morocco, the spiritual music, the typical music in the synagogue comes from the Şūfīs – Şūfī music.¹⁸⁷

An additional point to be considered is the status of Israeli- Palestinians within Israel which impacts on issues of identity and questions of equality of rights with Jewish Israelis.¹⁸⁸ This

¹⁸³ Maimonides wrote *The Guide for the Perplexed* (*Dalālat al-hā'irin*) in Arabic and it was later translated into Hebrew by Shmuel Ibn Tibbon of Andalusia

¹⁸⁴ Fenton, Appendix I.

¹⁸⁵ See the conclusion to this chapter for more on this point.

¹⁸⁶ See note 103, Chapter Three. The Zionist enterprise that led to the establishment of the State of Israel was very much a European Ashkenazi venture. The Mizrahim and Sephardim, coming from a very different cultural and historical experience to European Jews, were confronted with problems of integration on their arrival in Israel for that very reason. One example of this is that their native language was Arabic and they were now negotiating their identities in a new nation at war with the Arab world.

¹⁸⁷ Elkayam, Appendix I.

¹⁸⁸ Israel was established as a state for all Jews worldwide and it is for this reason that at its inception the decision was made to make a distinction between citizenship and nationality. As a Jewish state the nationality of the Jewish citizens of Israel is Jewish. If you are Palestinian then your nationality is designated as 'Arab'. If you are neither then your nationality will be defined in ethnic or

can create a climate of caution and even fear, as will be seen below in comments from Roberto under the sub-heading of challenges faced by Derekh Avraham in their work.

Sara¹⁸⁹ also mentions the problem of identity for Palestinian-Israelis, 'Muslim Sūfīs, by the fact that they are Sūfīs, it doesn't mean that they love Jews. It doesn't mean they will get whatever solution the Israeli government offers them. It's not so. It doesn't mean that they don't love their homeland or don't think in terms of home, of place. It's not true. They have to live with a lot of problems; identity problems.'¹⁹⁰

Khalid Abu Ras, a member of the Ṣūfī community in Nazareth, is mentioned by Avi above as his first point of contact with Ṣūfī orders in Israel of which he had been previously unaware. Khalid speaks with enthusiasm about the early days when the interest shown by Avi and Roberto initiated the first meetings of Jewish and Muslim Israelis:

We established it in Tel Aviv, some Shaykhs and especially my head Shaykh, 'Abd al-Salām Manāsra, head Shaykh of the Qadiriyya brotherhood in the Holy Land, and Roberto Arbib from the Conservative movement and also Dr. Avraham Elqayam from the Tel Aviv University. They are with some of us, like Sheikh Bukhari, he passed away. He was a good friend for us and I know him, he was for me a brother and may God send for his soul a mercy, insha'allah, and also from the Muslims like the son of the Shaykh, Ghassan Manasra, and also members from other orders like from the Yashrutiyya order, Shaykh Omer Reis from Acre and many other people. They are a good way for us – Jews and Muslims and Christians – to learn together, to pray together. This is a special way for our whole life.¹⁹¹

Khalid sees the movement as having a specific purpose in the context of the Holy Land, 'For me Tariqat Ibrahimiyya, I think is a special path for God for this special land, the Holy Land. You know in Israel and Palestine we live together, Muslims and Christians and Jews – and the occupation. So there is a lot of tension. So we need a special way of thinking, a special

religious terms. There are over 130 possible nationalities adopted by the interior ministry. This is difficult for the twenty percent of the citizens of Israel who are not Jewish as there are several laws which privilege Jews. In an article by Jonathan Cook it is reported that a group of Jewish and Arab Israelis were attempting to be recognized as Israeli nationals but with little likelihood of success as, 'Israel refused to recognise an Israeli nationality at the country's establishment in 1948, making an unusual distinction between "citizenship" and "nationality". Although all Israelis qualify as "citizens of Israel", the state is defined as belonging to the "Jewish nation", meaning not only the 5.6 million Israeli Jews but also more than seven million Jews in the diaspora.' Jonathan Cook, 'Why There Are No 'Israelis' in the Jewish State' Dissident Voice [Online] Available at:

<http://www.jkcook.net/Articles3/0472.htm#Top> [Last accessed: 11th December, 2009]

¹⁸⁹ See chapter 6 for the interview narrative of Sara Sviri

¹⁹⁰ Sviri, Appendix I.

¹⁹¹ Abu Ras, Appendix I.

way of spirituality, how to live together.¹⁹² In speaking of the history of Ṣūfī presence in the Holy Land, Khalid emphasizes the religious significance of the land to all the Abrahamic faiths, ‘You know the first *zāwiyya*, for example, was in Ramle City. It was established one hundred and fifty years after Muḥammad died. This is our Holy Land, for Jews, for Muslims, for Christians. We believe in Islam it’s the land of the prophets. This is the land of the saints, the *awliyya*.¹⁹³ Khalid is in accord with Avi and Roberto and Paul in seeing the activities of the *Derekh Avraham* as an opportunity for meaningful engagement between their communities that is not hindered by their faith affiliations but represents instead a common devotion to a spiritual path that enables an inclusive attitude to the other. Khalid connects this directly to the political situation, ‘We need to face this problem together and to make our channels more open. I think that our special way, our *Tariqa Ibrahimiyya*, Abrahamic way, is a special spiritual path for God, for Allah, for *Al-Raḥīm*. This year we celebrate the thirteen years of *Tariqa Ibrahimiyya*. We established this way in 2000. So this is the thirteenth year.¹⁹⁴ Khalid tells of his mother’s influence on him in his relations to Jewish Israelis:

I was born in 1976 and I grew up in a classic Muslim family. I saw my father keeping the prayers all the time and all the time reading the Qur’ān, and always fasting in Ramadhan. My mother also kept the prayer and fasting and Ramadhan and on special Ramadhan nights she prayed more than my father in the house. All the time I told my friends that I am influenced by my mother. All the time she had good ideas about how to have a good relationship with the others. For example when my village got the technology of electricity and telephone – this was in the year of 1980 – and I saw in my village Jews who made these things and my mother always sent me to bring water to the Jews and something to eat; so all the time I have my mother in my mind, in my heart, who told me to be a good man.¹⁹⁵

At the age of fifteen he entered the Ṣūfī path. In addition to his spiritual practice he also pursues academic study of Sufism and considers this as important in maintaining a balance:

When I was in High School I heard about my former Shaykh who was in Jerusalem and I was fifteen years old, a younger man, and I went to Jerusalem with my friends and I met my Shaykh, may God have mercy on him, and I made *biat*, I took his hand, and he prayed for me that God will forgive my sins. This was August 1991 and until now I was in the *ṭarīqa* with my Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām Manasra, may God bless him. So this is my life and all the time – and something I have to say to you – that I went to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and studied the Arabic language and also

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

historical studies of wisdom ideas. So I have the Ṣūfī way and also the academic way. I have a balance. For me, alḥamdulillah, it's good and I think, insha'allah, it's the real way and, insha'allah, God will guide me to the good way in these times. In these difficult times.¹⁹⁶

4. 3. 2 Ṣūfī Practice and Learning with Muslim Ṣūfīs

In this section the conversation addresses the practice and activities of the Derekh Avraham as well as some theological points as they arise. After more than a decade since the founding of the contemporary Derekh Avraham the three Jewish narrators have studied with the Muslim Ṣūfīs in Nazareth, to which group Khalid belongs, and partaken in the *dhikr* and *ṣoḥbet* and have been active in organizing many events. Their interest obviously extends beyond curiosity and plays a central role in their personal practice and the enrichment of their faith to the extent that the personal becomes a communal engagement with Israeli-Palestinians who are practising Muslim Ṣūfīs. Their Jewish faith is maintained – the narrators have not formally embraced Islam – rather they stand in dialogue with Islam, often accepting some core tenets of Islam from a perspective of belief in the universal message of the Qur'ān as also speaking to the Jewish people. Avi points to Avraham Maimuni in support of this approach:

It is not just ideas it is also practice. When the son of Maimonides talked about how to pray to God, he saw how the Ṣūfīs prayed and he wanted the Jews to pray like this as well. I believe that Sufism is the inheritance of the prophets and the energy of the prophets is in Sufism. I accept this and I believe in it and this is my way of life. We, as Jewish Ṣūfīs, are accepted by Muḥammad, the Prophet Muḥammad is a prophet, a real prophet, God sent him and we believe in his prophecy of course.¹⁹⁷

Khalid also speaks of Avraham Maimuni and adds the example of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilāni, a famous medieval Ṣūfī master active in Baghdad, as another instance of interfaith sharing through the medium of Sufism:

It's not usual for Jews and for Muslims to meet together and to learn from each other. It started in medieval times in Cairo, for example Abraham ben Maimonides, the son of Maimonides. He established a Ḥassidic circle in Egypt that was influenced by Sufism. This is history. Also in the *zāwiyya* of Mawlana 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilāni in Baghdad Jews and Christians came to the *zāwiyya* and shared the Muslims' *dhikr*. So we can learn how the Muslims accepted the Jews and the Christians, and the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews continue their own religions.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Elkayam, Appendix I.

¹⁹⁸ Abu Ras, Appendix I.

When asked if there is any problem, from a Jewish theological perspective, in a Jewish person accepting Muḥammad as a prophet, Avi responds with, ‘No, no there is no problem and I see that I was not the first one to say that because in the Yemen the Yemeni Jews also open their heart to Sufism and some of them say that they can believe in the Prophet Muḥammad because we accept the prophecy of Muḥammad.’¹⁹⁹ For the members of Derekh Avraham this has an immediate practical effect following in the tradition of Avraham Maimuni, ‘We accept, we say in our prayer, we are the Ṣūfī Jew. When we pray, we first pray the *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* because *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* is a universal prayer it’s not just to the Muslims.’²⁰⁰ Despite the recitation of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* and their acceptance of Muḥammad as a prophet this does not make them any less Jewish in their faith, or Muslim in any formal sense of the word. The Muslim Ṣūfīs involved in Derekh Avraham have no ambition to convert their Jewish friends either. Khalid says of himself and of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām, ‘I don’t want the Jews to convert to my religion. I want from them to be good men, to accept me; I don’t want to change their faith. My Shaykh always tells the Jews that he doesn’t want them to convert to Islam but only to keep their faith and to be strong in their faith; not to be weak with your faith.’²⁰¹ Khalid then reveals, ‘And I think my teacher, Professor Avraham Elqayam, he once said something in Hebrew, he said that Judaism needs Islam to keep the religion alive, to keep the life of Judaism. Judaism cannot live only with Jews. It needs the other.’²⁰² When asked if Islam also needs Judaism, Khalid’s response demonstrates a sense of inclusivity in the relationship of humankind to God. Khalid equates this with the need to seek wisdom and an acknowledgement that wisdom is not exclusive to Muslims:

Islam also needs Judaism, also needs Hinduism, also needs Christianity. You know we have in Sufism, we have the good tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, he said to us about seeking wisdom wherever it is found. *Ḥikma* is wisdom and wisdom is what the believing man seeks, the believer seeks wisdom all his life. Wherever he finds wisdom he will take it. So for me to seek wisdom is not only in Islam. I can even go to the people who worship idols to seek the wisdom there.²⁰³

At this juncture it is timely to question the definition of ‘Muslim’ by widening its application based on the actual meaning of the Arabic word. Avi provides an initial alternative to the

¹⁹⁹ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²⁰⁰ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²⁰¹ Abu Ras, Appendix I.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

accepted definition of an individual who is a member of a faith called 'Islam', 'Also Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām Manasra said that everyone who believes in God and is a servant of God, is a Muslim. He called me a Muslim! He says, 'You are a Muslim!''²⁰⁴ This is clearly of great importance to Avi – to be accepted as *muslim* while being simultaneously Jewish. He expands on this and its implications in terms of study and religious practice:

If you ask me I can say I am a Muslim. I'm not practising the hajj or something like that but I am accepted, we are accepted, we are... the Jewish Ṣūfīs accepted the prophecy of Muḥammad, we pray, we study the Qur'ān. We study the Qur'ān with the Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām Manasra, also with his son, Ghassan Manasra and also with the Imam Khalid Abu Ras. And he took us to the mosque; he invited us to his mosque every Friday. We're going to the mosque and they accepted us very nicely and we prayed with them and we heard the sermon (*khuṭba*). Yes, this is a synthesis between Judaism and Islam.²⁰⁵

Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf also adds to this discussion in speaking on the meaning of '*islam*':

There are some terms in Islam for this universal essence of opening oneself to the Divine, which is beyond form, beyond religion. Although the ultimate purpose of religion is, precisely, aligning people to this. 'The Way of Allah' is a term that appears in the Qur'ān. And as far as I know, the term '*islam*' as it appears in the Qur'ān doesn't mean the particular religion of the community of the Prophet Muhammad, rather, it means this. But the term '*islam*' took on this second, more external meaning, and so people like Rūmī chose to speak of 'the religion of Love.' Of course he saw Islam (properly understood) as the royal road to the religion of Love, but he also found the need to distinguish the two concepts.²⁰⁶

Derekh Avraham establishes a balance between study, practice, and projects aimed at the dissemination of information on Sufism and the history of Jewish-Muslim relations as well as Ṣūfī inspired celebrations of the shared cultural and musical heritage. Avi reports that, 'Every year we hold a conference at the end of the academic year and this year is about prayer, this is the subject of the conference. It's two days in St. Gabriel Hotel in Nazareth and we will speak about prayer in Ibn 'Arabi.'²⁰⁷ And this is complemented by practice, 'But

²⁰⁴ Elkayam, Appendix I. The discussion on the meanings of '*muslim*' emerges once again in the narrative of Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf in chapter 6. Its importance is not only relevant to concerns of inclusiveness but also to the way in which many Israeli Jews (mis)understand the Qur'anic claim that Abraham was a Muslim. In fact it can be argued that the term '*muslim*' is no longer heard as it would have been heard by the followers of Muḥammad during the period of the reception of the Qur'ān and that contemporary Muslims may also benefit from a re-evaluation of the interpretation of the term.

²⁰⁵ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²⁰⁶ Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, Appendix I.

²⁰⁷ Elkayam, Appendix I.

the Sūfis open another challenge for prayer. Ora²⁰⁸ and Ehab will make a session every week on Tuesday in their home in Jaffa. And she is a dervish according to Mevlana and whirling dancing. She is dancing the whirl, and she will teach us how to pray with whirling. You know this is also praying?²⁰⁹ Roberto tells of the weekly lessons held in his home for the first seven to eight years of the group's meetings in addition to seminars arranged at several locations. He takes care to emphasize the reason for the textual study in which Derekh Avraham engages, 'Especially Ṭarīqa Ibrahimiyya is always studying texts so as to create a deep experience, not only New Age meditation... but to create a deep studying with Professor, academics, and Shaykh in order to create a real understanding of the philosophy of Sufism.'²¹⁰ This is his description of their first seminar:

The first seminar that we organized in Neve Shalom we invited professors from the university and from Palestine and Israel and from abroad and we had the first meeting that combined academic lectures and prayer and meditation with the Ṣūfī's Shaykh. Also the prayer was very touching because we did the prayer of Shabbat and together with the Muslims and it was something that was completely new for the Israelis. It was in 2000. And after we had several meetings with my congregation here in Tel Aviv and invited other Shaykhim²¹¹ from Akko, from Jerusalem, and we had a meeting and we started to know much more about the presence of the Ṣūfis here in Israel and in parallel we started studying with Avi and books in Italian that exist on Sufism.²¹²

Paul gives an insight into how he integrates the inspiration he gains from Sufism into his Jewish practice. With Ya'qub present at the interview he asks Paul if he is just interested in Sufism or whether he sees himself as a practitioner of Sufism. Paul's reply, in accord with other comments cited from his interview, demonstrates the position of a religious Jew who recognizes a deep connection to Islam through the Ṣūfī approach and feels his faith enhanced, though sometimes frustrated by a lack of reciprocation from the Muslims, through an ongoing study of Ṣūfī texts and an association with Ṣūfis. To Ya'qub's question he responds, 'Not in any continuous way but I'm inspired by readings of Sufism and there's not one day that goes by without reading in Arabic and going to sleep at night I read Ṣūfī books in the original Arabic with commentaries. So that's part of my worship but when I'm

²⁰⁸ Ora Balha is a Jewish woman who lives in Yaffo with her husband, Ihab who is a Palestinian-Israeli Muslim-Ṣūfī and an initiated Shaykh.

²⁰⁹ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²¹⁰ Arbib, Appendix I.

²¹¹ Note that Roberto uses a Hebrew plural form for an Arabic word here.

²¹² Arbib, Appendix I.

inspired by what I read it comes into my devotion.²¹³ He does not, however, pray in Arabic, but qualifies that by explaining that he often reads Arabic meanings into Hebrew words that are almost identical to the Arabic but have a slightly different meaning, ‘You have the relation between Hebrew and Arabic that you can read a Hebrew word as an Arabic word and then it takes on a different meaning which can add to the sense of the prayer. So that’s one of the ways in which I integrate Sufism into my own Jewish ritual.’²¹⁴ Paul also finds it important to read Hebrew with an Arabic pronunciation of letters:

You might not understand what I mean. Unfortunately even the Israelis whose mother tongue is Hebrew, they have terrible pronunciation of the language, it doesn’t sound like a Semitic language because they were originally Americans, English, or Yiddish speakers. The sounds have been completely altered, in the negative sense. So when I read in Hebrew I read it as Arabic, pronounce it as Arabic. And I think it adds so much to the prayers (...) I think that some of the power and the magic of the Qur’ān is in the way it’s pronounced. I found that – and it’s several years I’ve been doing this – that pronouncing the prayers in the Arabic way, there’s a different power to it.²¹⁵

Khalid relates the study of scripture and classical texts directly to an improvement of relations between the faiths to enable a better life for all:

We read, we have a special reading. We read the holy books – from the Qur’ān and the Holy Bible and the New Testament, the *Injīl*, and from the Torah, the Tanakh; and also from other books, for example the *Duties of the Heart*²¹⁶ from Bahya Ibn Paqūda

²¹³ Fenton, Appendix I. It is interesting that Paul experiences his reading as part of his devotional practice. The idea that the reading of a text can even lead to spiritual unveilings is also found among scholars of Ibn ‘Arabī’s work who claim this was the Shaykh al-Akbar’s intention. This is also found in the work of Elliot R. Wolfson, a scholar of Jewish mysticism of whom the same is claimed by some. In the preface to a work on Wolfson’s writing and art in Marcia Brennan and Jeffrey Kripal, *Flowering Light: Kabbalistic Mysticism and the Art of Elliot R. Wolfson* (online creative commons attribution license) Kripal cites Brennan, ‘Wolfson’s interpretive approach is characterized by close textual readings and rigorous theorizations that actively promote the dissolution – and creative re-envisioning – of received patterns of meaning. This method breaks new ground for the transformation of thought, as the texts themselves become a new form of mystical writing. In turn, Wolfson’s paintings can be seen as compelling pictorial equivalents of these visionary processes, as the canvases serve as landscapes that enable viewers to walk between worlds.’ An evaluation of the importance of the word in Islam and Judaism as the means of creation and its significance in the Kabbalistic practice of Abraham Abulafia and in the hermeneutics of Ibn ‘Arabi, would make a fascinating study.

²¹⁴ Fenton, Appendix I.

²¹⁵ Fenton, Appendix I. It is noticeable, for example, that the letter ‘*qaf*’, which is pronounced from the back of the throat by Arabic speakers (Arabic: *qāf*) and would normally be pronounced in the same way by Hebrew speakers, is most often pronounced as a ‘k’ or ‘*koḥ*’ (Arabic: *kāf*) by Hebrew speakers.

²¹⁶ See Lobel/*A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue* for a critical examination of Paqūda’s use of Ṣūfī concepts and vocabulary.

and also *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*²¹⁷ of the holy Shaykh Hamid Abu Ghazali. So we read all the time together how we can make our life here in Israel and Palestine better spiritually, better in the religious way; how we can make our life here in Israel better in our spirituality and in the religious way; how to make our religion – Islam and Judaism and Christianity more acceptable for society, for humankind.²¹⁸

4.3.3 Interpretations of Ṣūfī Concepts and Practices

In approaching Ṣūfī concepts and practices from a Jewish perspective is there any way in which they are seen as through a different lens that sets their practitioners apart from Muslim Ṣūfīs?²¹⁹ Or conversely, that may provide an instructive perspective for their Muslim colleagues. Paul touches on some of the possibilities he perceives in learning from each other:

Muslim sources that discussed the spiritual path or the traits of the prophets, whom we call Patriarchs in the Jewish tradition, like Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moshe, there are a lot of - in inverted commas – ‘legends’ that we share that may well come from a common source. Some of them identical, some of them different but they throw light on each other. It’s like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that come together and form a picture. So that was the most passionate component of the quest to see how this fits together and how – without becoming identical because all of these pieces are independent – how they can mutually enrich each other. What we can see in Islam that has significance for us and enriches our own experience because coming from one particular direction or one particular school we might be oblivious to different dimensions of the same phenomenon which we’re not taught by our tradition and conversely that same richness and interest holds true for a Muslim, that in fact he has probably much more to learn about his own – what is part of himself – of which he’s not aware. That’s in a nutshell.²²⁰

Paul is therefore proposing that Jews and Muslims alike have something to learn from each other, not only in terms of historical relations in the Middle East and North Africa, but also in relation to faith and identity. Avi sees a closeness of the two faiths from his reading of the Qur’ān and he gives the example of the Prophet Muḥammad’s relation to the patriarch Moses (the Prophet Musa in Islam), ‘I think the Prophet Muḥammad loved Moses and also he moulds Islam in the way that Moses moulded – they are very close and I think because

²¹⁷ For an English translation of this work see Al-Ghazali, *The Marvels of the Heart: The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. Translated from the Arabic with an Introduction and Notes by Walter James Skellie with a Foreword by T.J. Winter. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae. 2010).

²¹⁸ Abu Ras, Appendix I.

²¹⁹ It must be emphasized here that within Islamic Sufism there is great diversity of practice within the many orders. Sufism is no more a homogenous entity than Islam itself. The emphasis in this section is on those differences that arise specifically from a Jewish perspective and which are either an occasion for debate or the initiators of a potentially fruitful dialogue between Muslims and Jews.

²²⁰ Fenton, Appendix I.

of that I think that Judaism and Islam are symbiotic.²²¹ Like Paul, Avi also finds significance in the fact that, 'The two languages are Semitic languages, Hebrew and Arabic, and not – the New Testament is in Greek language.²²²

In confirmation of the statement of Paul that Judaism and Islam can learn from each other, Avi shares the topic of study in the Derekh Avraham meetings at the time of the interview, 'Now we are reading the interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī on the Sūrat Nuh, of course this prophet is also in the Bible also in the Qur'an, Sūrah 71, about Nuh and I don't know how in Israel most of the Jews are very, very far from Islam. I can't understand it how it can be but I think it's, you know it takes time to convince this is the way – to come closer to Islam.²²³ Avi obviously thinks that if the Jews and Muslims of Israel knew more about each other's faith then this in itself would contribute to reconciliation as they each become aware that what they share is greater than their differences.

There are, however, some distinct differences in the practice of Derekh Avraham to the manner in which most Ṣūfī orders proceed, and the most significant, and indeed controversial, of these is the decision not to take *biat* with a Shaykh. In a sense this is logical as Derekh Avraham is a Jewish order following in the footsteps of Avraham Maimuni and although its members are very happy to learn from Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām and others, to actually take *biat* with a Shaykh would mean to become a member of the order represented by that Shaykh. Avi cites one instance of criticism from a friend who questions his authenticity as a Ṣūfī:

I have a friend, he was a Catholic and convert to Islam and to the Ṣūfī way (...) and he criticizes our ṭarīqa. He says, 'You are not a real ṭarīqa because you don't make the initiation.' He is right. Our ṭarīqa is not for making initiation. If you want to make initiation you can go to 'Abd al-Salām, you can go to the ṭarīqa of Qadiri, of the Shadhiliyya, the Yashrutiyya, or if you want to go to Chisholme, to Hakim.²²⁴ Because our ṭarīqa has one aim, it's the path of love and the path for peace. This is our ṭarīqa. This is what I want to say.²²⁵

²²¹ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²²² Elkayam, Appendix I.

²²³ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²²⁴ This is a reference to the Beshara School in Scotland and its director, Peter Young. There is a Beshara group in Israel members of which were interviewed for this study and whose narratives are analysed in chapter 5.

²²⁵ Elkayam, Appendix I.

Avi continues that Derekh Avraham is not a traditional *ṭarīqa*, ‘But those who are coming with us on our path are for love, for peace.’²²⁶ There are Rabbis in the *ṭarīqa*, there are also professors in the *ṭarīqa*, there is also a Shaykh in the *ṭarīqa*, but our Shaykh is God. We decided from the start that our Shaykh is God, and not a human being.²²⁷ But although he maintains that this is not traditional, and describes Derekh Avraham as post-traditional Sufism, he also states that Ibn ‘Arabī had no Shaykh.²²⁸

In an email exchange with Mustafa Abu Sway, Professor of Philosophy and Islamic studies at Al-Quds University in East Jerusalem and a practicing *Ṣūfī*, Mustafa comments on his own decision to continue on the path without a Shaykh after witnessing the behaviour of his former Shaykh. Unable to accept his Shaykh’s activities Mustafa withdraws from his mentorship:

In a formal sense, I joined a Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*) when I was 18 years old, just after finishing high school in Jerusalem. This was the mid-1970's and religiosity was not the hallmark of Palestinian youth. When my sheikh failed, in my eyes, to address questions that were posed to him by university students, it led to a great disappointment on my part, and I left that Sufi path. Eventually, I returned to Sufism but without a Sheikh or a specific path.²²⁹

This is one instance of a Muslim choosing to practice *tasawwuf* without a guide and although rare it is nevertheless not unique. Neither does it imply any rejection of guidance

²²⁶ Whether Derekh Avraham is an ‘authentic’ *Ṣūfī* order according to the traditions of Muslim *Ṣūfī* orders is of less relevance here than the fact that they are a Jewish-Israeli group who engage regularly with Palestinian-Israelis and that they are willing to learn from them and disseminate their knowledge to the Israeli public in as far as the public shows an interest. It is this final point – that of the interest shown in their work – that is significant to the question of reconciliation and peace and the potential and challenges with which they are faced. Nevertheless, the subject of the authenticity of *Ṣūfī* practice does require attention as it is raised again by the interviewees in the narratives analysed in the following chapters alongside questions of the definition of ‘Sufism’ (see the discussion in chapter 1 under ‘Terms and their Elusive Definitions’ which examines the term ‘*Ṣūfī*’). The intertextual conversation being pursued here between the interviewee narratives will continue at those points of further mention of the subject with reference back to the interviewees’ comments cited in the present chapter. It will be seen that the statements made on the subject of authenticity in *Ṣūfī* practice are diverse, lending themselves to a fruitful comparison.

²²⁷ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²²⁸ Elkayam, Appendix I. As Avi is also aware, Ibn ‘Arabī studied under many Shaykhs, three of them women. Sufism had not yet been formalized into brotherhoods although this development was just beginning around the end of Ibn ‘Arabī’s life. Rather the *Ṣūfī* (see ‘Terms and their Elusive Definitions’ in chapter one for a discussion on the use of the term ‘*Ṣūfī*’) sought out masters with whom to study *taṣawwuf*.

²²⁹ Mustafa Abu Sway, Appendix I.

from the great masters of Sufism.²³⁰ Mustafa reveals additional information about his former Shaykh that raises a question on the practical procedure of reconciliation:

What I learned from the previous experience in relation to the Israeli occupation, is that Sufism did not soften the position of the Sufis in that specific path. To the contrary, the Sheikh established links with Fatah (The Palestinian Liberation Movement) and some of his followers ended up in jail, along with the Sheikh, who was exiled later on to Jordan. He returned after the Oslo Agreements.²³¹

The question raised is one of the perception of justice, the role it plays in reconciliation, and the process by which it is addressed in a manner that leaves a path open to reconciliation. The balance between the two is fine and seeking justice alone can hinder the building of peace.²³²

Where exactly does Derekh Avraham stand then in respect of the Ṣūfī tradition of taking hand with a Shaykh? Avi is clear that they are not a New Age movement and in justifying this he mentions the traditional texts that Derekh Avraham studies:

And therefore Ṭarīqa Ibrahimiyya is a Ṭarīqa post-Sufism but we are not New Age. We are not New Age because we are focussing on traditional texts. We don't study and create a synthesis; we are very traditional in our texts. The texts of Ibn 'Arabī, and Rūmī, and also Jewish texts like those from Rambam, Ibn Paqūda, from Andalusia. Therefore we are not New Age. Some people from the New Age don't understand us. The people from traditional Sufism do not understand us. We are between; we are traditional but not really traditional.²³³

²³⁰ Professor Abu Sway holds the Integral Chair for the Study of Imam Ghazali's Work at Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa and at Al-Quds University. As such he is a scholar of Imam Ghazali and was nominated as one of the world's most influential Muslims in the 2013/2014 *The Muslim 500: The World's 500 Most Influential Muslims*, Chief Editor Prof. S. Abdallah Schleifer, The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre, (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 2013). Available online at: <http://themuslim500.com/download>

²³¹ Abu Sway, Appendix I.

²³² In his work on reconciliation as a sustainable venture, Jean Paul Lederach utilizes Psalm 85:10 as a mediation text in his discussion of the issues involved in the reconciliation process. In the translation given by Lederach the verse reads, "Truth and Mercy have met together; Peace and Justice have kissed". Lederach takes the four figures as presented in this verse to illustrate the need for each of these elements to be addressed in any attempt at sustainable reconciliation. Equally he is aware of the paradox created by the tension existing between concerns unique to each and he portrays reconciliation as encircled by these four figures. See John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Washington, DC: (United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), pp. 28 – 31. Mustafa also addresses the Islamic requirement for justice as a prerequisite to reconciliation and his comments find mention in Chapter Nine in the concluding discussion on Sufism and conflict transformation.

²³³ Elkayam, Appendix I.

This paradox of being ‘traditional but not traditional’ is resolved to some extent when I suggest that Derekh Avraham is somewhere in a *barzakh* and Avi responds with laughter, ‘Yes, in a *barzakh*, yes! This is the best, insha’allah! To be in the *barzakh*, this is the place, this is the place, yes! This is *mushahada*... to *bishah* to look.’²³⁴ After this the conversation turns to the importance of Ibn ‘Arabī who gave his concept of the *barzakh* a central role in his cosmological and ontological hermeneutics of the Qur’ān, ‘The Shaykh of ‘Abd al-Salām Manasra, from East Jerusalem, Ibn ‘Arabī was very important for him because his teacher was from the Maghrib and he told me that Ibn ‘Arabī is very important for the spiritual way therefore when he studies Sufism he focuses on Ibn ‘Arabī. Ibn ‘Arabī is very important in the Maghrib and in Dimashq, in Syria, but also in Jerusalem, in Palestine, Ibn ‘Arabī is very important.’²³⁵ The members of Derekh Avraham do not, however, pursue the study of texts purely for their own intellectual curiosity and progress on the spiritual path, nor do they study Ibn ‘Arabī to the exclusion of other masters, ‘I also translated all the poems of Al-

²³⁴ Elkayam, Appendix I. The *barzakh* spoken of here refers to Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of what he terms the *‘alām al-khayāl* (the imaginal realm). This is a liminal space or *barzakh*, an ‘in-between’ which bridges the worlds of Spirit/Intellect and corporeality. The *barzakh* performs a connecting function between the two in that the corporeal can take on spiritual/intellectual characteristics in this *barzakh* and the intellectual/spiritual can take on form. Ibn ‘Arabī presents this realm of the imaginal as an ontological as well as an epistemological and eschatological reality. It is what Ibn ‘Arabī calls the place of the soul. It is the place where dreams and visions reside and is the destination of the soul at death. Ibn ‘Arabī includes imagination, alongside memory and reason, as a faculty of perception. In order to exercise those faculties there must be an object of perception. Naming imagination as a faculty of perception is only possible if what is imaginalized is a real object of perception, something that is manifest to the perceiver. In *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in Hekhalot and Merkavah Literature*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 67, 68, while examining the Hekhalot (heavenly palaces) and Merkavah (chariot) literature of Jewish mysticism, Vita Daphna Arbel speaks of the ‘mythological imagery’ used in the descriptions of the transcendent mystical experience that comes at the height of a spiritual journey. Arbel speaks of the ‘mythological imagery’ as the manner in which mystical notions are expressed in the literature of the Hekhalot and the Merkavah. In the tradition of Ibn ‘Arabī it would be appropriate to speak of a mythic imaginary when referring to the transcendental realms through which the voyager travels. However, while Arbel’s use of the term ‘mythological imagery’ is intended to describe the use of metaphor by the Jewish mystic, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s *barzakh* the ‘places’ and experiences described are absolutely real. Arbel contrasts descriptions of an inner – she uses the term ‘mental’ – journey and of an outer, actual journey. The externalization of inner processes of spiritual progress is a characteristic of Ibn ‘Arabī’s imaginal realm and the two kinds of account described by Arbel would be two perspectives of one phenomenon in the Akbarian account. A vision, for example, may be seen only with the ‘inner eye’ or also with the ‘outer’ physical eye. Returning to the narrative excerpt cited above, when it is suggested to Avi that Derekh Avraham is in a *barzakh* it is intended, and understood as, simply in-between the traditional and the non-traditional but it is also said with the implication of the *barzakh* as in the teaching of Ibn ‘Arabī. This is immediately understood by Avi, hence his enthusiastic response. A similar exchange occurs about the *barzakh* with Rachel in chapter 5, and Ya’qub in chapter 6. Avi’s exclamation that this is a *mushahada* indicates a contemplative witnessing of the Real. For a clear exposition of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching on the *barzakh* see William C. Chittick, *Imaginal World’s: Ibn al-‘Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

²³⁵ Elkayam, Appendix I.

Hallaj, and Ghassan and I translated Sulāmi into Hebrew. This is our project to open Sufism to the Israeli people.’²³⁶

It is clear from the narrative citations under this sub-heading that Derekh Avraham is not a closed group but has a strong aspiration for openness to sharing what they feel is important to a greater understanding between Jews and Muslims in the pursuit of peace. Despite some criticism of the importance they place on study, as Roberto reports, ‘We have a lot of critics because people say we are too intellectual but for us it’s the way, to create a deep understanding of the tradition and not just to have a beautiful meeting of dancing and music and at some points something of Ibn ‘Arabī but really a knowledge about the tradition and the different trends’,²³⁷ Derekh Avraham engages in projects to transmit Sufism to the people. Publishing Şūfī literature in Hebrew is one such project and teaching in schools is another. It is in this work that the ground is laid for reaching a wider audience, and the possibility of increasing the agents for change gains a greater chance of effecting conflict transformation together with other grass-roots peace initiatives. This is also where some of the greatest challenges become apparent.

4.3.4 Conflict Transformation and Its Challenges

Among those challenges most pertinent to the question of reconciliation and conflict transformation are the number of Israeli citizens, both Jewish and Muslim, who partake in the study meetings and devotional gatherings of Derekh Avraham; the extent to which the Muslim Şūfis of Israel engage with Jewish citizens and with fellow Muslim citizens; and difficulties relating to the funding and organization of meetings and projects. Challenges are encountered on each of these points and they are posed by political, ideological, and economic forces, all of which intertwine to produce complex situations in need of negotiation. The three categories mentioned cannot help but overlap so that if it is asked, for example, why greater numbers of Muslims do not attend meetings then it is necessary to examine the ideological and political dynamics that may be the cause.²³⁸ This overlap is

²³⁶ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²³⁷ Arbib, Appendix I.

²³⁸ Susan Nathan, who lives in an Arab village in Israel, writes about the position of Palestinian Israelis and the lack of equal rights accorded them in *The Other Side of Israel: My Journey Across the Jewish/Arab Divide*, Harper Collins ebooks (n.d.). The political situation of the Palestinian Israelis may also impact on their possible attendance at meetings and events and finds further mention in later chapters and in the concluding chapter of this study. It is also appropriate to mention here the work of Rachel Shabi, *Not the Enemy: Israel's Jews from Arab Lands*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), in which she writes about the position of the Arab-Jewish community in Israel of Middle-Eastern origin, and their relations with the Ashkenazi-Jewish community of European origin. To some extent this parallels that of relations between Jews and Palestinians, and

apparent in the interviewees' narratives and therefore no attempt is made to divide the narratives strictly under the three categories. Before assessing the challenges the interviewees speak of the projects that Derekh Avraham is presently engaged in and which involve the participation of the Muslim Şūfīs. Avi is active in translation and publication:

In Akko there is Dr. Omer Reis²³⁹ and we meet them in the *zawiyya*, a very nice *zawiyya* in Akko, in the old city of Akko we make the activities. One of the activities in which this Shaykh supports us and also gives us money is a very important project. It is the project of prayer. We take prayers from the Islamic tradition and from the Jewish tradition and it's called 'Prayer for Peace' because I think it's really important that if you are in the way of peace you can also pray, not just the prayer from your tradition but you must pray also the prayer from the other religions, from the Islamic religion and therefore we are making a collection of prayers from the Islamic and Jewish traditions.²⁴⁰

Roberto emphasizes the importance of translating works of Jewish spirituality into Arabic and likewise, of works of Arabic *taṣawwuf* into Hebrew:

We also have a lot of projects in translation and there is also a will to translate Jewish texts into Arabic. It's also very important that classical, traditional books of Jewish spirituality are translated into Arabic and vice versa. It is our aim in the next few

therefore the Sephardim and Mizrahim could be seen as having a potentially significant role to play in peace-making. As Arab-Jews of Middle-Eastern origin they occupy an intermediary position between Arab and Jew and this is possibly another reason why Avi responds so enthusiastically to the idea of being in a *barzakh*. In a Guardian review of Shabi's book, Daphna Baram also sees the 'in-between' status of Arab Jews in Israeli society. Baram writes, "Her analysis is particularly sharp when it comes to the complex connections between Zionist ideology, the treatment of Palestinians by Israel, and the "place in between" - not quite first-class Jews, but not second-class Arabs either - imposed on Mizrahi Jews." <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/apr/25/arab-jews-israel-rachel-shabi>. My main interest in approaching this subject is to put forward the idea that Israeli-Jews of Middle-Eastern origin are well suited to building bridges between Jews and Palestinians while simultaneously in the process of building bridges between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews. These dynamics also constitute one of the challenges that face members of Derekh Avraham although it should be noted that not all the participants in the activities of Derekh Avraham are Arab-Jews. Israeli identities are complex and neither should it be attempted to divide the population into easily defined groups of ethnic origin, religious status, political orientation, or any other available categories in a society that is still in the relatively early years of its existence as a nation state. However, many of the differences between sectors of the population are of great significance to the process of reconciliation and peace and I propose that an improvement of the relationship between Arab and Ashkenazi Jews is pivotal to Israeli attitudes towards Palestinians, and to Arabs in general. This subject will, therefore, be addressed further in this study although it cannot be afforded a fully comprehensive examination within the confines of the present work but will be limited to the extent to which it impacts on the information provided by the interviewees in respect of their work. In the interviews with Sara and Ya'qub in chapter 6, other divisions in Israeli society become apparent, especially that which is perceived by them as the secular/religious divide, a divide which they both see as problematic and which Ya'qub attempts to bridge.

²³⁹ Omer Reis is a member of the Yashruti Şūfī order based in Akko/Acre. He is involved with some of the work of Derekh Avraham

²⁴⁰ Elkayam, Appendix I.

years to be active in this direction and also in publication. I believe we will be successful in doing our small work and in giving our small contribution for reconciliation²⁴¹

Roberto recognizes the need to reach a wider public with information and views the publishing enterprise as a significant effort in the direction of reconciliation. A further planned project, if successful, would be a substantial contribution to mutual understanding between the faith traditions:

I spoke with Ghassan Manasra and together with Rabbi Roberto here, about a project. We see that in the schools in Israel – also in the Muslim schools – there are no lectures about love. What is love? Not sex education, no, but love; there is nothing about what love is and how to love others. We wanted to make a course about this for schools according to the Ṣūfī texts, according to Al-Qushayri, according to Sulāmi, according to Rūmī, the love poems of Rūmī. Why don't our children read these poems?²⁴²

²⁴¹ Arbib, Appendix I. The translation and publication of Ṣūfī literature as part of a project to familiarise the Israeli public with this material is also undertaken by Sara and Ya'qub with good results. The publishing activities of Sara and Ya'qub are examined in more detail in chapter 6.

²⁴² Elkayam, Appendix I. Some insight on attitudes to Arabic literature in Israel can be gained from an article by Reuven Snir, "Arabs of the Mosaic Faith: Chronicle of a Cultural Extinction" in *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Vol. 46, Issue 1 (2006), pp. 43-60, published by BRILL, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20140706>. Snir is referring to Sephardim and Mizrahim who immigrated to Israel from countries in the Middle East and North Africa where their ancestors had lived for generations. If, as the article suggests, there is a problem with the acceptance of Arab Jewish authors then how much more would this be the case with classical Arab Muslim Ṣūfī literature? On page forty-three of the journal, Snir names some of the poets who died with little recognition, "Two years later Murād Michael (1906-1986) died. And over the years other Arab-Jewish poets and writers passed away in total anonymity: Shalom Darwīsh (1913-1997), David Semah (1933-1997), Ya'qūb Balbul (1920-2003), Ishāq Bār-Moshe (1927-2003), and 5 months ago one of the greatest of Arab-Jewish writers of our generation, Samīr Naqqāsh (1938-2004). He passed away without having the most elementary means for honorable survival. 'I don't exist in this country,' he said some years ago, 'not as a writer, neither as a citizen nor human being. I don't feel that I belong anywhere, not since my roots were torn from the ground [in Baghdad].'" The Arab-Jews represent a *convivencia* of Arab and Jewish culture and the Muslim and Jewish faiths and the cause of the 'discomfort' of Ashkenazi Jews with this fact is explained by Snir on page forty-six thus, "What I have tried to illustrate from different perspectives is the unspoken agreement between the two national movements, Zionism and Arab nationalism, each with support from an "exclusivist" divine source – to perform a total cleansing of Arab Jewish culture. Their struggle over a small piece of territory has not hindered them from seeing eye to eye in this respect (and I am very much aware of the difference between the two national movements – the one inspired by European colonialism and the other, an anti-colonial venture)." Snir was born in Israel and describes what it meant to his sense of identity, "I would like to give you some details of my background: My parents were born in Baghdad; they immigrated to Israel in 1951. As a Sabra (a native-born Israeli Jew) I had been taught that Arabness and Jewishness are mutually exclusive. Trying to conform to the dominant Ashkenazi-Zionist norm, as a child I felt ashamed of the Arabness of my parents. For them, I was an agent of repression sent by the Establishment, after excellent training, into the territory of the enemy – my family – and I completed the mission in a way that only children can do with their loving parents: I forbade them to speak Arabic in public or to listen to Arabic music." (p. 47)

The main challenge that Avi sees as standing in the way of implementing this plan is a financial one, 'But we have no money to do this. We talked about having ten teachers from Jewish school and ten teachers from Islamic school to speak about love and to give them ten or twelve lessons about this subject. We hope that when they teach the children in the schools it will work. This is our belief.'²⁴³ Paul contributes naturally to the dissemination of knowledge on Jewish-Muslim relations but his work is mainly read in the academic world.²⁴⁴ On the attempt to find funding for projects Roberto explains:

What happened in Derekh Avraham is that we tried to receive money from the European Foundation but after we passed the first steps of the application they refused. I don't know why but since then we decided not to open even a non-profit organization. What's happened since is a good thing. Everybody pays about thirty Shekels, or something, at each meeting. So we adopted this system instead of organizing as a non-profit organization. Avi says we should create an official organization for fund-raising but I think we have a good model. We still have all these activities that we do every week and also we organize the seminars three or four times a year, the longer meetings and without any other support except volunteering ourselves. Of course I also have my institution so I can give them the help of a secretary for sending emails and things and it works. Sure we are not spread more. We have more and more other projects that we don't do because we don't have money but, you know, this is the situation.²⁴⁵

The meetings and events, which are open to all, attract a varied number of people depending on the nature of the gathering. As Roberto clarifies, it requires greater commitment to attend weekly meetings:

There are two different kinds of meeting. One meeting we have every week and about twenty or thirty people come. It's every week, it's really an effort. When we have a gathering, like a seminar of two days, three days, a Saturday, or one all night studying and playing music, then it can be up to a hundred people who come. Always, since the beginning, there are people who want to enter in the circle, who want to know about Sufism, so they come two or three times in the year for special gatherings, and music and special lectures. Then we have the more regular meeting with people who are interested in studying and in meditating together. They come every week so there are less people than at the gatherings.²⁴⁶

This suggests that although it is a smaller group of people, approximately twenty to thirty persons, who are interested in regular study and practice, nevertheless there are larger numbers who attend events and workshops and in this manner gain a familiarity with Şūfī

²⁴³ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²⁴⁴ See the bibliography for some of Paul Fenton's publications

²⁴⁵ Arbib, Appendix I.

²⁴⁶ Arbib, Appendix I.

practice and teachings.²⁴⁷ Roberto is the Rabbi of a Conservative synagogue and when asked how the members of his congregation feel about his interest in Sufism his response is very encouraging. He says that some of the members of Derekh Avraham who attend regular meetings have come through their contact with Roberto at the synagogue. He also offers courses to the congregation, 'We also organize a course of language and Arab culture in my congregation so they know that I'm very involved in the interfaith relationship and the dialogue and they support me. Of course sometimes there are some who are not so satisfied but most of them are very satisfied and they admire our approach to creating a bridge between Islam and Judaism.'²⁴⁸ However, numbers at the Derekh Avraham meetings have diminished and Roberto notes this, 'But what I have to say as being critical – or maybe what you should know – is the frustration that all this time there has been much, much more interest from the Jews in these meetings than from the Muslims which means that the number of Muslims who visit this group is always very low.'²⁴⁹ Paul agrees, 'So periodically there have been a number of activities but none as intense as they had been in the past because of the reticence of Muslim participants. Whereas we have had quite a few in past years who took an active part in meditation and in the common prayer that we had but that's all died down now.'²⁵⁰ Roberto gives another reason for the lack of Muslim interest:

The Muslims are afraid, they don't know exactly what a Ṣūfī is and they are afraid about it and Jews are always more interested in the stranger. There are a lot of Jews in Israel who are interested in Buddhism and other spiritual traditions. But I always say to the board of our ṭarīqa that we have to move on and we have to enter the villages and to ask in schools about going to speak with children and people and to really do it. But you know that it's not easy, it's not easy logistically, and also there is a lot of danger in doing such an activity.²⁵¹

The second intifada in 2000 has not helped matters but the members of Derekh Avraham show great commitment and endurance in their desire to continue their work:

²⁴⁷ The Muslim Ṣūfīs of Nazareth, Jerusalem, and Akko are sometimes involved in the organization of events alongside other Ṣūfī and Jewish peace-makers such as Eliyahu McClean and Sheikh 'Abdul Aziz Bukhari (d. 2010). One can speak of a network of engaged practitioners as will become more apparent in chapters 6 and 7.

²⁴⁸ Arbib, Appendix I.

²⁴⁹ Arbib, Appendix I.

²⁵⁰ Fenton, Appendix I.

²⁵¹ Arbib, Appendix I. For more on the cause of Muslims fear of becoming acquainted with Sufism see the conclusion to this chapter.

And it was especially interesting because, you know, after the second intifada in 2000, even though it was a terrible time we continued our meetings and we had a special meeting for peace to convince people that not all the Muslims are terrorists and not all the Arabs want to destroy us and we keep on meeting even now with all the difficult times. This is our belief that we should create an understanding in the spiritual way and the Muslims will be more aware of our Jewish spiritual approach and the Jew will also understand Islam differently.²⁵²

Khalid throws more light on the difficulties for the Muslims from his Muslim, and specifically Ṣūfī, perspective:

We face many difficult conditions very difficult times for the cause of the programmes and the cause of the activities. For me it's not easy to be a Muslim and to have a relationship with Jews in this special way. Although I live in Israel and I have the passport of a citizen of Israel but I have all the time many people (Muslims) here in Israel, in Nazareth and Jerusalem think about us and they think we are going against Islam. For example they write things against my Shaykh. They attack my Shaykh. But we continue and keep this way and all the time we have many activities for Jews, for Christians, for Muslims in Nazareth. For example, the last Ramadhan, in the house of my Shaykh, we had the celebration for breaking the fast, the iftar, together and I saw there a friend and his wife and sons, he came to Nazareth to share this special occasion with us, this special holiday of Ramadhan.²⁵³

When asked further about the hostility of some of the Muslim community and its specific cause, Khalid reveals his pain at the lack of understanding and tolerance of Sufism in the general Muslim population:

Yafiah: Are your fellow Muslims angry with you because you meet with Jews or do some of them not like Sufism?

Khalid: It's both, because I am a Muslim and have a good relationship with the Jews and also because I am a Sufi. So, you know I have to learn more how to answer the questions. For example, my society didn't see in good eye the Sufi. They didn't know what Sufism is. But for me it is a good moment because the Sufism in Islam, it is Islam! I cannot understand Islam without Sufism. So I think, you know, you touch my pain. Our society didn't accept Sufism so all the time I talk with my Shaykh, with my friends, why is there a situation like that? Why?²⁵⁴

Khalid explains further :

So all the time I live my Islam but in the special way of Sufism. So it's for those here, it's not easy to accept me. You know, Yani, they come to my house and they see the pictures of my Shaykh and of my former Shaykh and they ask, what is this? They

²⁵² Arbib, Appendix I.

²⁵³ Abu Ras, Appendix I.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

don't understand Sufism. So for me I cannot accept that, I cannot live in Islam without Sufism and also I cannot live with the Jews without Islam because Islam tells me to be a good man not only with myself, with my children, with my wife, but also with my environment, with my neighbourhood, with my village, with my country, with my area I have to be good.²⁵⁵

Finally, how do the interviewees see the prospect for peace and their role to that end? Avi emphasizes that *Derekh Avraham* does not concern itself with the political process, 'About the solution for peace...first of all it's not the earth because we believe that the earth, the land, is not of men or states, it's for God. Therefore we are not dealing with the political problem. The way to peace is first of all to change the cautiousness, and what I mean when I say to change the cautiousness is to open your heart with love to the other. This is our mission. If you ask me how to solve this problem or what I think about Bibi Netanyahu, this is not something that we discuss.'²⁵⁶ Avi is very adamant, in good *Ṣūfī* tradition, that their way is the way of the heart:

We are discussing how you open to the other, not how you think as a journalist about this issue. But open your heart, to the Jew and to the Arab and love him, and embrace him. This is our practice, our way of thinking. We are not political, we do not think like politicians or like a journalist in the newspaper or in the media, this is not our way. Our way is now to open our hearts to God and to others. This is the way for peace. Because we believe that God loves everyone, and we love everyone. It's in the Israeli it's very crazy but this is our way, our path, this is our path.²⁵⁷

There is another point that arose in the narratives of Avi and Roberto which is implicit in previous comments and this is the fact that they are most comfortable with Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews. Avi's final words are, 'I think that our tradition of the Sephardic Jews who lived in Andalusia and the Islamic area, I think that our way in life is Sufism. This is everything to us and the Muslim-Jewish Sufism is our way. And if I can bring this in Israel to the Sephardic Jews it will be very good.'²⁵⁸ Roberto brings another aspect to this that is worthy of consideration because it addresses unresolved tensions in the relations between Ashkenazi and Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews:

So today I identify myself as a Rabbi *Ṣūfī*. For me it's also that the Sephardic relation to Sufism is important because it craves my spirituality as a Jew, as a Rabbi, and also I believe that it's the way for us here in Israel with the culture of Islam and not the

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²⁵⁷ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²⁵⁸ Elkayam, Appendix I.

Christians – I always say that we have to deal with Islam and not with Christianity. Christianity is the problem of the Jew that lives in exile in Europe and the States and our task here in Israel is to create a bridge with Islam because we live together so it's very important to approach one another not only culturally and socially but also spiritually.²⁵⁹

It is vitally important here to recognize an acknowledgement of the question of Israeli identities – that there is not an homogenous Ashkenazi identity – albeit that the Zionist enterprise which led to the establishment of the State of Israel was in the main an Ashkenazi venture – but that Israel is a Middle-Eastern nation with both Middle-Eastern Jews and Palestinians among its citizens and Avi and Roberto are implicitly asking for a recognition of the fact that a greater sense of the Jewish Middle-Eastern heritage is a prerequisite for reconciliation and peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

This leads to another concern often expressed by participants in interfaith dialogue and summarized here by Roberto, 'The Muslims that we meet are very open and very interested but of course we should meet people who are less open with the Jews and create a dialogue with them. This is the challenge.'²⁶⁰ The necessity to have a wider area of engagement is clear to Roberto and he has no false hopes:

The situation in the Arab world is changing and I think this is a time of change and we don't know the direction of this change even though they are close to us. It's something that I believe we should do. And spirituality is one of the fields where we can give our approach but this is not easy and I'm not naïve that because we are meeting and we are studying Sufism that we create peace. But I'm sure that you have to change the atmosphere at least among the Jews. You know it's like you believe this is the way so you do it even if you don't see the end of the struggle but you don't change because this is the way that you believe that you have to do it. But I'm not optimistic that we are going to change the situation here in Israel. It's really complicated and today it's more complicated because there is almost war happening in the Muslim world and because of the relationship with the western world, in America and Europe. We can create our contribution to understanding but I'm not sure we will have a real reconciliation in a short time.²⁶¹

In response to the question of whether Sufism opens doors to engagement between Jews and Muslims in Israel, Paul's thoughts are ambiguous for he begins with little hope:

Well, during the time that we were active I think that it did. I think one of the reasons why the Israelis continued to come is because they were so enchanted, they were so surprised to see the Muslims coming to these meetings and that gave them a flame

²⁵⁹ Arbib, Appendix I.

²⁶⁰ Arbib, Appendix I.

²⁶¹ Arbib, Appendix I.

of hope that reconciliation with someone was possible; you know, faced with this wall of hostility. But it's come to a standstill and it's most regrettable. You know the people that we're dealing with, you can count them on the fingers of one hand and in the years that we've been active doesn't seem to have gone beyond that.²⁶²

However, Ya'qub interjects with a reminder of an occasion that demonstrated an enthusiasm for greater engagement from the Muslims. This was in relation to the publication for the first time of an anthology of Arabic Ṣūfī texts in Hebrew:

Ya'qub: One moment of exception to that was the book-launching of Sara Sviri's book...²⁶³

Paul: Yes

Ya'qub: ...in Nazareth where there were hundreds of Muslims, maybe several dozen, maybe fifty or a hundred Jews and at least ten or twenty Christian Arabs. But the majority was Muslim

Paul: Really? Well Nazareth is a Muslim city

Ya'qub: Yes but it wasn't...it was exceptional in my experience having been to peace groups, not necessarily spiritual ones, with the vast majority being Jewish – it was so refreshing. And the most touching moment was when Ghassan's wife talked about Ibn Farad, the Arab Ṣūfī poet who responded to what Sara had written in the book, and she spoke in Arabic, and of course I didn't understand a word but Sara understood every word she said and it was just a beautiful moment, these two women in their love of Sufism and their common knowledge of Arabic and an audience that was Arabic speaking...and Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām presented a *Khirqā*²⁶⁴ of the Shaykh to Sara Sviri in recognition for what she'd done.²⁶⁵

In the face of the many difficulties they encounter Derekh Avraham nevertheless remains steadfast in its aims and Avi and Roberto return again and again to the necessity of love.

Avi illustrates this with a story of the Patriarch Abraham/Prophet Ibrahim:

And the others religion does not matter, he can be *kafir*²⁶⁶, you must love him. Because we believe that God loves everyone. Because we are breathing, we are alive. You know the story that is also in the Ṣūfī tradition – Islamic tradition – and also in the Jewish tradition about Abraham our ancestor that he had a tent and every man who was around came to eat and Abraham asked them what they believed. One day a very old man came to him and Abraham gave him food and after he finished eating he asked him, 'Okay, what do you believe in? What god?' And the man told

²⁶² Fenton, Appendix I. Paul's comments here appear to contradict those of Avi and Roberto. His assessment of the decline in numbers since 2000 is harsher. This may be because he is looking mainly at the numbers present at regular meetings while Avi and Roberto include attendants at the larger events.

²⁶³ In chapter 6 Sara and Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf speak about her work on this book and its significance.

²⁶⁴ This is the cloak of the Shaykh and to be given the *Khirqā* signifies an honouring of the receptor and their inclusion in the community.

²⁶⁵ Fenton, Appendix I.

²⁶⁶ An unbeliever

him he believed in one of the other gods, not in our God. And Abraham told him, 'Get out! Get out of my tent,' and God spoke to Abraham, 'He is eighty years old. I gave him a life and he is eighty years old and you cannot host him in your house? It doesn't matter what he believes! If God can give him a blessing you can also give him a blessing. Help him! It doesn't matter what he believes or what he does, you must love him! As a creature you must love him!' This is our story, our belief and we try to practice this in our life.²⁶⁷

And once more, 'The Ṣūfī way is the way of love, the way of *muhabba*, of *'ishq*, this can be, I think, the way to peace in the Middle East. This is our belief.'²⁶⁸

Khalid sees the necessity for political negotiations alongside efforts towards reconciliation and he mentions traditional Islamic methods of reconciliation when asked if he considers the coming together of Jews and Muslims and Christians as promoted by Derekh Avraham contributes to reconciliation and peace in Israel and Palestine:

This is a good question because I think we need reconciliation because we have passed difficult times from 1948 until now. We passed many events, like many bloodsheds and I think if we want to establish peace here in the Holy Land we need, after we signed the agreement between the governments, between the Palestinian state and the Israeli state, we need to establish a committee for reconciliation between the two peoples, the Arabs and the Jews. We have to have reconciliation because you know in the Arabic tradition the Arab man can make reconciliation – *Sulḥa* – in three stages. The first is *musalaḥa* – reconciliation, and after this we make *mumalaka*, it means 'we eat together', and after this is the third stage, *musamaka*. Reconciliation, eating, and forgiveness.²⁶⁹

Khalid also raises a further point that is particular to the Palestinian-Israelis and this is their close relationship to the Palestinians of the OTP:

Yafiah: Do you feel then that contribution to reconciliation comes after the political agreements or do you feel that somehow before the political agreements are made you can contribute?

Khalid: I think it must be together, at the same time we have the political negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis on the political side and on the other side to have reconciliation between the two people because we have until now sixty-four years of bloodshed and war, we have a war between Jews and Arabs. It's something that's amazing how we can continue with this. So we have to start right now with reconciliation between us, Jews and Muslims and Christians. At the same time the governments in Ramallah and Jerusalem must continue their negotiations. Also, I have in my head I think they have to be with an open mind, with

²⁶⁷ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²⁶⁸ Elkayam, Appendix I.

²⁶⁹ Abu Ras, Appendix I.

open heart, it's enough. We can't continue with this situation. It is for us difficult. For me a Muslim I live in Israel and it's a difficult situation for me that my people, the Palestinian people, they are in war with my country, Israel. It's not good for us to live like that.²⁷⁰

4. 4 Conclusion

In the conclusion to this chapter and the following chapters the main emerging themes are highlighted. Other topics such as the interpretation of Ṣūfī concepts and practices and problems of definition²⁷¹ and legitimacy²⁷² will be discussed in the final conclusion which constitutes a comparison of the results from the interviewee groups and an evaluation of the potential contribution of Sufism to conflict transformation.

To what extent can the activities of the *Derekh Avraham/Ṭarīqa Ibrahimīyya* be said to contribute to reconciliation and peace? Two themes become apparent after a close reading of this interview data, and as will be seen they are also present in the interviewee narratives in the following chapters. These themes are love and knowledge. They are, in fact, complementary and can be approached as concepts in Ṣūfī hermeneutics that have concomitant paths of application in daily practice. Information on the importance of these two factors to the work of the *Derekh Avraham/Ṭarīqa Ibrahimīyya* was volunteered by the interviewees without the aid of pre-planned questions specific to these themes or with the intention to elicit comments on either love or knowledge. Nevertheless, it is clear that the acquisition and sharing of knowledge on Sufism and the history of Jewish-Muslim relations is paramount in the activities of the group. This is partnered with the idea that love of the other is necessary to reconciliation and peace. Love of the other is not only an idea but is clearly based on a love of God who, as Avi repeats more than once, loves all human beings without distinction. In several of the interviews the moments that were palpably most moving for the interviewees came when they spoke of the love of God and the unity of being as understood from the Ṣūfī perspective that understands God as manifesting through all creation. In a very practical sense love and knowledge come together in the plans of Avi and Roberto to teach school pupils and adults, both Jewish and Muslim, about this perspective on love. The dynamics of the relationship between knowledge and love in

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ The meaning of the term 'Muslim' is one example of definitions discussed in the interviews

²⁷² Questions of the necessity, or otherwise, to take hand (*biat*) with an authorized Shaykh and thereby be connected to the chain of transmission (*silsila*) in order to be a practising Ṣūfī, and the question as to whether it is possible to be a Ṣūfī without converting to Islam, are topics that emerge more urgently in the interviews with Sara Sviri and Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf in Chapter Six.

Ṣūfī epistemology and ontology will be expanded on in chapter five and chapter six with reference back to the present chapter but it is noted here that they come across as pivotal to conflict transformation in the narratives cited so far. Knowing the other and loving the other, going beyond friendship as Avi maintains, are the tools of conflict transformation as presented here but, as reported by the interviewees, they are limited in their application by lack of funding, difficult logistics due to political considerations, and what is perceived by all three interviewees as a lack of Muslim interest in Sufism. The latter is the third theme highlighted here.

As a point of regret and concern, the lack of Muslim interest in Sufism is mentioned by all the narrators. They propose both theological and practical reasons for this in addition to mentioning the difficulties that those Muslims who are practising Ṣūfīs experience with their fellow Muslims and as elucidated by Khalid.²⁷³

The Muslim lack of interest, or actual fear, as maintained by the narrators, could have two reasons, first is the lack of significant engagement between the Palestinian-Israeli and the Jewish-Israeli communities and the vulnerability of the Palestinian-Israelis whose position is precarious on issues of identity and equal rights.²⁷⁴ Another reason, and one that is possibly of greater import, is the influence of Salāfi and Wahhābī²⁷⁵ influenced Islam both of which are very literalist in their interpretations of Islam and puritan to the extent that classical scholars and their work are seen of little value. This naturally also applies to their attitude to Sufism which they view as *bida'*, innovation, of the worst kind, and Ṣūfīs as guilty of *shirk* (literally: placing others beside God) which is the worst possible sin. The emphasis of their viewpoint on Islam is a perspective on the concept of *Ṭawhīd* that discriminates against anything that they perceive as ascribing partners to Allah. For them this includes Ṣūfī practices such as visiting the shrines of *awliyya* (saints, or 'friends of God') or giving allegiance to a Ṣūfī head of a *ṭarīqa*. The centre of Wahhābī Islam is Saudi Arabia where it has the support of the ruling Sa'ud royal family and where the oil industry provides enough wealth to spread the message of the Wahhābī orientation to mosques around the world. This influence is also found among Muslims in Israel and in the

²⁷³ This is an issue that is most at the forefront for Ghassan Manasra and the late Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari. The problems they experience, or have experienced, find mention in chapter seven which looks at their work and its role in peace-making

²⁷⁴ See note 61 on identity and equal rights issues for Palestinian-Israelis

²⁷⁵ Founded by Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhābī (1703-92). See Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Ṣūfīs and Anti-Ṣūfīs: The Defence, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World*, (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1999). Curzon Ṣūfī Series, p.3. See also p. 175 for the alignment of the Salafiyya movement, initiated by Muhammad 'Abduh, with the Wahhābīs

Palestinian Territories and constitutes one of the major difficulties for the work of the Ṣūfīs in Israel. It should not, however, be assumed that all non-Ṣūfī Muslims are adherents of this particular movement.

Finally, it remains to question the extent to which the work of Derekh Avraham is inclusive of the general population of Israel, both Jewish and Palestinian, in order to assess its potential as an agent for reconciliation and peace.²⁷⁶ It is seen in the narratives above that Derekh Avraham is an open and welcoming group with a network of like-minded Ṣūfī practitioners and workers for peace. The challenges they seek to negotiate, as explicated above, are the main hindrance to the full potential of their inclusivity which mirrors their understanding, based on the universal interpretation of the Qur’ān by Ibn ‘Arabī, Jālāl al-Din Rūmī and other classical masters, of the Ṣūfī path.

To summarize the activities of Derekh Avraham and their potential to effect a contribution to conflict transformation the following words of Roberto express a restrained but hopeful response:

I think that on the Israeli side it can still be really important because as I said before the Israelis receive from the Islamic culture only the radical and the violent side and they’re very ignorant about the spiritual tradition of Islam. So even in the academic you know things are changing. Nobody used to want to study the influence of the Ṣūfīs on Jewish mysticism and Jewish philosophy, today if you read the scholars’ research about Jewish philosophy and mysticism they should and they do refer to the relationship with the Muslims. So it became more and more important for Israeli society – academically for sure – but I think it’s also important – even if only from the Jewish side – to convince people that Islam is something different to what they think.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ This question will be posed in the conclusion to each of the following chapters that analyse the field data and the results are compared in the concluding chapters of Part Three to establish the degree to which the research question can be answered in the positive and to evaluate the areas of vulnerability in fulfilling that potential.

²⁷⁷ Arbib, Appendix I.

CHAPTER FIVE: BESHARA: LOVERS OF IBN 'ARABĪ

5.1 Contemporary Students of the Shaykh al-Akbar

It must be stated initially that the two interviewees from the Beshara group whose narratives are analysed in this chapter do not study and practice together with Israeli Muslims. Muslims are welcome to the group but the group does not study under a Ṣūfī guide as the Derekh Avraham members study with the Qadiri Shaykh in Nazareth. It is therefore necessary to clarify the purpose in including them in a study that aims to evaluate the potential of Ṣūfī practice to contribute to reconciliation when such requires an engagement with the other. The reasons are twofold and require a clarification of the objectives of Beshara and an outline of its foundation and history. This will seek to justify their inclusion here on the basis of an ontologically significant stance gained through their study of Ibn 'Arabī that necessitates an engagement with the other for its full unfolding and for which the same is initiated through the teachings of an Arab master of Islamic esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* corpus.²⁷⁸ Although use is made in the present chapter of the same categories of analysis, with minor adaptations appropriate to Beshara, as applied in chapters four and six, the one significant difference to the other interviewee groups is the lack of practice with Muslim Ṣūfīs. That which they have in common with the interviewees of the Derekh Avraham participants is found in the fact that they are an example of Jewish students of a Muslim philosopher/mystic and have found a spiritual path that is based in Islam. In contrast to the other interviewees of this study they do not come from a practice-based expression of their Jewish identity²⁷⁹ but, on their own account during interview, their study of Ibn 'Arabī has taken the interviewees from being non-religious to declaring a profound universal and metaphysical ontology that is not just a theoretical stance but which they also claim has changed their lives and their sense of Jewish identity. Central to this transformation is the concept of *ṭawḥīd*. The meaning of this term, and the consequences of its interpretation by Ibn 'Arabī to an understanding of the relationship between Creator and created, are succinctly described by William C. Chittick and which I cite here in full. Chittick is one of the pre-eminent translators and commentators of the work of Ibn 'Arabī and belongs to the group of scholars who are

²⁷⁸ Although Ibn 'Arabī is an historical figure who lived several centuries past, it is nevertheless apparent in the following narrative excerpts of this chapter that the interviewees experience him as a presence in their lives today to the extent that he is often spoken of in the present tense.

²⁷⁹ This can only be said of the individuals interviewed here and not of those in the group who were not interviewed although it must be noted that students of Beshara are not attached to the form of religious tradition.

active in the work of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society.²⁸⁰ This society is an affiliated project of the Beshara School whose centre is in Chisholme, Scotland. The citation is therefore additionally appropriate here as being part of the corpus produced and read by scholars of Ibn 'Arabī and students of Beshara:

Literally, *tawhīd* means to say one or to assert one. Technically, its first meaning is to utter the formula, '(There is) no god but God'. The simplest way of bringing out *tawhīd*'s implications is to place any Quranic name of God into the formula. God is Creator. It follows that there is no creator but God. God is Knowing. It follows that there is none knowing but God. God is Compassionate. It follows that there is none compassionate but God. In short, the formula means that all real qualities belong exclusively to the Ultimate Reality and that, simultaneously, all qualities of created things are essentially unreal. When we talk about ourselves or others using words like creativity, knowledge, and compassion, our words are more like metaphors than statements of the actual situation. In our case these divine attributes do not designate what they seem to designate; they are rather pale imitations or distant reflections of the true Reality. The truth of the situation is that there is no true reality but the absolute reality of the Real. This is the fundamental insight of *tawhīd*. Working out its implications has been the preoccupation of all schools of Islamic thought, not least theology, philosophy, and Sufism. No one has been as thorough in accomplishing this task as Ibn 'Arabī.²⁸¹

The history of Beshara and the influence of Ibn 'Arabī's legacy in the West has been studied in two recent works that take quite different approaches, Isobel Jeffery-Street's study focuses on the influence of Ibn 'Arabī in the contemporary West and places this focus within the context of the wider influence of his work world-wide.²⁸² MIAS and the Beshara school contribute to the spread of this influence with branches of the society in the US and Spain.²⁸³ Jeffery-Street's methodological approach is phenomenological and she writes of Beshara as an example of westernized forms of Sufism. In her work, *Beshara and Ibn*

²⁸⁰ Henceforth referred to as MIAS.

²⁸¹ William C. Chittick, "The Anthropology of Compassion", Reproduced from the Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society, Volume 48, 2010.

<http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/anthropology-of-compassion.html>

²⁸² Isobel Jeffery-Street, *Ibn 'Arabi and the Contemporary West: Beshara and the Ibn 'Arabi Society*, (Sheffield UK and Oakfield USA: Equinox Publishing, 2012).

²⁸³ The newly constituted Ibn 'Arabī Society in Spain with its headquarters in Murcia, the birthplace of Ibn 'Arabi, brings the Shaykh al-Akbar home to the geographical place that hosted the spiritual genius of his life and work, the seeding space, in the external sense, of the revelatory space that opened within the heart of the young Ibn 'Arabī. According to his own words, Ibn 'Arabī lived, prayed, and wrote from within that liminal space that he referred to as a *barzakh*, the world between the purely spiritual realm and the corporeal world of the senses and matter. This world between is the *'alam al-Khayāl*, the world of the imagination, or the imaginal world as scholars prefer to designate it in order to avoid any confusion with the idle fantasies that human imaginations are often inclined towards. The inauguration of the Spanish branch of the society was announced at the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society (MIAS) annual symposium in Oxford 2012 and its website is linked to the main MIAS homepage.

'*Arabi*,²⁸⁴ Suha Taji-Farouki takes a social sciences approach and places Beshara within the context of new religious movements.²⁸⁵ She claims that Bulent Rauf, the Turkish founder of Beshara, responded to, 'The spiritual search of counterculture youth he encountered in England from the late 1960's.' It is not clear whether she is suggesting that Rauf took advantage of this climate for his own purposes – she speaks of Rauf, 'recruiting the legacy of Ibn 'Arabī by way of response ...' – or that he simply found an opportunity to teach in sixties Britain the material that he was eminently suited to share.²⁸⁶

Jeffery-Street says very little about Beshara in Israel and Taji-Farouki does not mention them at all in the main text of her work. She does, however, include a long footnote on the history of Beshara's entrance into Israel. It is less a structured history and more a casual stream of individuals attending the Beshara School in Scotland and simultaneously visitors from Beshara going on tours of Israel. Taji-Farouki sees the interest in Beshara as part of a movement of interest in New Religious Movements (NRM's) and reactions to the school as supposedly part of the reaction to NRM's and New age movements in Israel as either a threat to Jewish identity or conversely, an escape from the same.²⁸⁷ During my research I have noticed that interest in practices such as yoga and Buddhist meditation are often given a Judaic framework. My experience of this aspect of Jewish faith identity and spiritual practice has not suggested any basis to these claims of identity issues but Taji-Farouki's book was published in 2009 and it is possible that attitudes have changed. In Chapter Six of this study, Sara Sviri mentions the development of what she terms New Age tendencies within Israeli society and gives her own impression of such and their role in encouraging a greater openness to the other. Taji-Farouki's observations need greater attention than she is able to give them in a footnote. In the following we rely on the narratives of Judith and Rachel for their experience within Beshara which has a less historical focus and a greater sharing of the individual impact of the teachings on their lives.

²⁸⁴ Suha Taji-Farouki, *Beshara and Ibn 'Arabi: A Movement of Sufi Spirituality in the Modern World*, (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2007). Paperback edition, 2009.

²⁸⁵ I Argue that there is a third perspective that can be taken on Beshari other than 'westernized Sufism' or NRM's and this is that a Şūfī perspective does not require affiliation to a traditional order and Beshara can be viewed as part of the ongoing diversity of Şūfī expression. One might also say that Ibn 'Arabī does not belong to anyone and that the study of traditional texts and practices can hardly be called the creation of an NRM especially when Beshara remains very close to those original practices.

²⁸⁶ Farouki/Beshara, p. 10. If we regard the sixties as a period in which authority of all kinds was being tested and questioned, and apply this also to religious life, then it is clear that many were searching for a fulfillment of their spiritual aspirations outside the established religious institutions.

²⁸⁷ Taji-Farouki/Beshara, note 13, pp. 335 – 336.

5.2 The Narratives of Members of the Beshara School in Israel

5.2.1 Joining Beshara

I met with Judith Sternberg in a café in Jerusalem and took notes during our conversation. Judith's parents were German Jews and she was born in Israel. She has been studying the work of Ibn 'Arabī as a member of the Beshara group in Israel for 23 years. In 1988 she went to their centre in Chisholme to attend a course. Peter Young, the director of the school at Chisholme, visits Israel regularly to teach the group. He is referred to by the members as 'Ḥakim' which translates as 'wise one' or 'sage'. Speaking of her background and the impact of Ibn 'Arabī on her sense of identity she says, 'I come from a left wing family and was already a peace person. Ibn 'Arabī puts emphasis on us all being human beings first and then come the national, religious and other differences. Ibn 'Arabī's path encompasses all levels including the political, emotional, intellectual and spiritual.'²⁸⁸ Her recognition of differences as being secondary to that which unites all being in the Akbarian sense, is further emphasized in the transformation of her perspectives on life and its meaning that she has experienced, 'I had an atheist upbringing and didn't believe in anything but when I met Ibn 'Arabī it changed because it's not a matter of believing anymore. Now I can honestly say I don't believe in anything but God. It puts life in a context. It's not a ladder you can climb on to make your life easier.'²⁸⁹ It is clear here, as it is in the other participants' narratives, that to be a traveller on this path of transformation of the self is not an easy option. The necessity to follow this path with complete presence of the whole being, involving the intellect, the soul, and the spirit, is emphasized in the teachings of Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1904 – 1981 C.E.), an Iranian master of Akbarian gnosis, who taught during the first half of the twentieth century in Qom, Iran:

In the center of his innate nature and his essence, man finds a desire to move toward this cynosure of all quests and the pivot (*qibla*) of worship. With the God-given power of instinct and primordial nature, man sets out on a journey and with all his being goes toward that direction. Therefore, in the course of the journey all his bodily organs and his total being must be put to work to perform their functions. The physical world and corporeal faculties, which constitute his physical nature (*ṭab*) the imaginal and archetypal world that constitute his intermediate world (*barzakh*), and the realm of intellect and spirit that constitute his reality, all must participate in this journey and collaborate with each other.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ Judith Sternberg, Appendix I.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, *Kernel of the Kernel: Concerning the Wayfaring and Spiritual Journey of the People of Intellect - A Shii Approach to Sufism*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 2

The metaphors of 'the journey' and 'travelling' as applied by Ṭabāṭabā'ī are used often by Ṣūfīs and Ibn 'Arabī makes use of them throughout his work basing the imagery on the Qur'ānic statement that, 'From God you have come and to God you will return'.

For Rachel Gordin,²⁹¹ a well-known film critic who wrote for many years for Haaretz daily newspaper, her introduction to Beshara and Ibn 'Arabī came as an invitation from God, 'I have received a letter from God saying, 'Dearly beloved...' It is a poem by Ibn 'Arabī.²⁹² In her home in Tel Aviv, Rachel had this poem ready to read at the beginning of the interview:

Listen oh dearly beloved. I am the reality of the world; the centre of the circumference. I am the parts and the whole. I am the wheel established between heaven and earth. I have created the perception of you only in order to be the object of My perception. If then you perceive Me, you perceive yourself, but you cannot perceive Me through yourself. It is through My eyes that you see Me and see yourself. Through your eyes you cannot see me. Dearly beloved I have called you so often and you have not heard Me. I have shown Myself to you so often and you have not seen Me. I have made Myself fragrant so often and you have not smelled Me. Savour as food and you have not tasted Me. Why can you not reach Me through the objects you touch? Or breathe Me through sweet perfumes? Why do you not see Me? Why do you not hear Me? Why? Why? Why? Love Me! Love Me alone! Love yourself in Me, in Me alone! Attach yourself to Me! No one is more inward than I. Others love you for their own sakes, I love you for yourself. And you? You flee from Me. Dearly beloved I am nearer to you than your self, than your soul, than your breath. Who among creatures would treat you as I do? I am jealous of you over you. I want you to belong to no other, not even to yourself. Be Mine! Be for me as you are in Me, though you are not even aware of it. Dearly beloved, let us go toward union. And if we find the road that leads to separation we will destroy separation. Let us go hand in hand. Let us enter the presence of Truth. Let it be our judge and imprint its seal upon our union forever.²⁹³

It is bold of Ibn 'Arabī to speak in the voice of the Divine but as previously mentioned he claimed to never write anything that he was not told to write through divine transmission.²⁹⁴ The whole passage reads as a message of love from the One who says in the *hadīth al-qudsī*, 'I was a Hidden Treasure and desired to be known, so I created you that

²⁹¹ Before the interview began Rachel gave me several pages of the introduction to her book which she had translated from the Hebrew and printed out for me. Portions of it are cited by her in the following interview.

²⁹² Rachel Gordin, Appendix I.

²⁹³ Rachel/Appendix I. The full poem is to be found on the Beshara website accessible at: <http://www.beshara.org/principles/selected-reading/ibn-arabi/theophany-of-perfection.html>. The translation is taken from Henry Corbin in *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969).

²⁹⁴ This would also be one of the points that his detractors criticise.

I might be known.’ Rachel was sent this poem by a friend who was planning her wedding at Beshara. Rachel saw it, ‘as a personal letter from God to me. So I had to come and I came...I came with the excuse of her wedding but it was amazing, my first meeting with Beshara.’²⁹⁵ She stayed for eight days and experienced a complete change in her life, ‘It was like a break in my life. I wept – for eight days there I kept on weeping and when I came home, all the way back home I was weeping. I couldn’t stop. It was... at last I met myself. After...I think it was about twenty years ago so I was forty-seven, forty-six years old and it was the first time in my life that I met myself on such a deep level, such a profound level. And it’s not as if I haven’t lived until then. I’ve done many things. I had children, I have grandchildren. But it was on a completely different level.’²⁹⁶

Rachel returned to Beshara at Chisholme to participate in a six month training course that is a regular feature of the school, ‘After having been to these eight days I came home and I said I’ve got to go back and do a long course, a half year course and it took half a year until I went to Chisholme.’²⁹⁷ This course was unlike the eight days of Rachel’s original visit and she experienced her time there as hard but necessary work. The Beshara programme is about ‘knowing one’s self’ and this requires facing often unwelcome realizations:

We were about twelve people on the course and each one had a completely different course, it was completely personal ... and it was completely unlike these eight days of elation that I had in the beginning. It was tough. It was like being drilled in the army. It was very difficult but there were...there were very good moments. Some of them were peaks of experience; some of them were bottom of experience. Like when I felt like that I am thrown back to the basic... and once I was thrown back I started to build up my self-importance again and then I would be knocked off my feet again. It was very good.²⁹⁸

As uncomfortable as it might feel to struggle through such peaks and troughs to know oneself, it is nevertheless expected as part of the course, as Rachel’s statement that, ‘It was very good!’ shows.

5.2.2 Practice and Study with Ibn ‘Arabī

Judith and Rachel attend the weekly meetings for dhikr and spiritual conversation which take place on alternate weeks. The meetings are led by a different member each week; there is no single head of the group although Peter Young regularly visits the group in

²⁹⁵ Rachel/Appendix I.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

Israel. About every two months they have study weekends on different topics of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching as well as on other mystics such as Meister Eckhart²⁹⁹ and Jālāl al-Din Rūmī.³⁰⁰ ‘Spiritual conversation’ is simply a translation of the Arabic ‘*ṣoḥbet*’ which is also practised by the members of Derekh Avraham, and by the Jerusalem Circle which is led by Ya’qub, who is interviewed in the following chapter. *Ṣoḥbet* is traditionally led by a Shaykh who is considered able to understand the needs of her/his students who are invited to offer their own experience and ideas on the topic of conversation. The *ṣoḥbet* may open and finish with prayer and include meditation (*muraqaba*), the practice of making a heart to heart connection (*rabita*), which in the first instance is maintained between the student and the Shaykh, and other exercises. Refreshment is usually served and ‘*adab*’ is strictly observed.³⁰¹ *Ṣoḥbet* provides a learning space in which the ego (*nafs*) and its paradigmatic boundaries are challenged. The form may be different at a Beshara meeting but these elements are all present. The school in Chisholme offers conversation weeks which they describe as, ‘An immersive exploration of a particular theme chosen for the week from the perspective of the unity of being.’³⁰²

²⁹⁹ Meister Eckhart is on the reading list of many a Ṣūfī order.

³⁰⁰ Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī are connected via Qunāwwī, the step-son of Ibn ‘Arabī, who went to Konya after the death of his master and was responsible for the spread of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings from Konya throughout the Ottoman empire (See Jeffery-Street/Ibn ‘Arabī and Stephen Hirtenstein, *The Unlimited Mercifier: The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn ‘Arabi*, (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999 and Oregon: White Cloud Press, 1999). The Ottoman Empire, of course, included Palestine which at the time was part of the Vilayet of Syria. Ibn ‘Arabī would have therefore become known among Palestinian Ṣūfīs via this route in addition to a more direct route from Al-Andalus in the fifteenth century with the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Iberia. Contemporary Ṣūfī orders in Israel and the OPT include the Qādiri, the Naqshabandi, the Yashrutiyya, and the Shadhili all of whom have connections with fellow Ṣūfīs of the same orders in Lebanon and Syria. The Ottoman-Palestine and Turkish-Israeli relations in the world of Sufism mirror political and socio-cultural relations. Onur Gökçe was formerly the Turkish Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary appointed to Israel. He was the first to hold this position and was in office from 1991 to 1995. He writes that, “Turkey is a long-standing regional power, something relatively rare in world history. The Ottoman Empire reigned in the region for centuries, leaving a legacy and heritage shared by all states in the Middle East. Although Turkey is now in the form of a republic, and no longer has the geographical reach of the Ottoman Empire, it maintains strong cultural, religious and historical ties with the people of the region. Although Turkey does not necessarily reference this history in formulating her foreign policy towards the region (and at times it has worked to her disadvantage) it makes Turkey an integral part of the Middle East equation in many aspects, particularly in regards to her geo-strategic position.” Onur Gökçe, “The Dynamics of Turkish-Israeli Relations” in *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, Vol.1, Number 2, July 2012, pp. 55 – 68.

³⁰¹ Spiritual courtesy requires constant attention to how one behaves toward others and to never knowingly upset or hurt anyone. ‘*Adab*’ also requires self-examination of one’s behaviour and responses to others always looking within for the source of reactions and attempting to learn from the other as if looking in a mirror.

³⁰² *Beshara* website [Online] Available at: <http://www.beshara.org/courses/about-courses.html> [Last accessed: 4th May, 2013].

The second residential course that Rachel attended at Beshara posed some previously unthought surprises for her which directly addressed her sense of identity, 'The second course is a course of conversation. The first course you study texts and you work and you meditate and you do *dhikr* and all these sort of things.'³⁰³ When asked if, as a Jewish woman, she had any hesitation in studying the Arab-Muslim Ibn 'Arabī she laughed as she had anticipated the question and had an excerpt from her book ready to read to me, 'Look, I've written a paragraph about it. So I'll read you the paragraph. The name of the paragraph is, 'Who am I?''³⁰⁴

'Muhammad?' shrinks my good friend, 'when I hear 'Muhammad' I think of 'Arafat' (the prototype of the Jew-baiter). In one of the courses at the school in Scotland I raised a similar difficulty. 'As a Jewess and an Israeli I have a difficulty with Muhammad', I announce at the start of a conversation – it was on the second course actually - 'You know', the correlator responded, 'it's strange, but I never thought of you as a Jewess and an Israeli'. My mouth dropped open. Who am I? Are Jewess and Israeli real definitions of who I am? Should I define myself as a mother, a wife, or according to my profession? Or maybe I don't have to live any of these definitions – even not all of them together? Maybe 'I' am a possibility unknown even to myself, and my life - a laboratory for researching such a possibility? In the context of life in Israel 'Muhammad' is not a neutral concept such as 'Buddha' or 'Brahma', and 'Allahu Akbar' is known mainly as the declaration of a suicidal terrorist before he activates the bomb. Ibn 'Arabī's way is about the essence, but essence cannot appear without form. And with Ibn 'Arabī the form is Arabic, the terms are the terms of Islam, and the prayers are based on the Qur'ān. Should I ignore the difficult connotations of these forms in order to touch the essence? Or become a stranger to the call that arises from the depth of my being, and look for other forms with which I would feel more comfortable? Or maybe difficulty is the door-keeper of new possibilities, for, as any avowed reader of legends knows, the sitting post of the dragon is where the treasure is hidden. Ibn 'Arabī does not represent the Muslim dogma. That is why he became subject to recurrent attacks by representatives of official Islam. The gnostic, he writes, will never be trapped in one form of belief. Knowing the kernel of all beliefs he recognizes it in any disguise. He sees the interior and not the exterior and accepts whatever form he is presented with.'³⁰⁵

5.2.3 Interpretations of Ṣūfī Concepts and Practices

Beshara students do not call themselves Ṣūfīs, although there are some who are initiated into Ṣūfī orders in addition to their work with Beshara. Jeffery-Street notes that:

[T]he participants of the Beshara School while insisting that they are not a 'Sufi order' and are open to people of all backgrounds do, in fact use a preponderance of

³⁰³ Rachel/Appendix I.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

Islamic and Sufi texts as well as quietly adapted practices in their teaching. Therefore the Beshara School may be included along with the other recently westernised Sufi groups already mentioned as providing a prime example of the way in which central spiritual aspects of Sufi teaching are being more widely adapted and assimilated into various western settings.³⁰⁶

Many an English speaking Şūfī, and scholars of Islam, benefit greatly from the articles on the MIAS website and the translations and commentaries done by those scholars who are affiliated to Beshara and MIAS. This is also the case, to some extent, in French and Spanish.³⁰⁷ It is the work of MIAS that has made Ibn ‘Arabī available to a non-Arabic speaking public. Rachel’s book of her engagement with Ibn ‘Arabī, which includes material on the teachings of Ibn ‘Arabī, also makes him accessible to a Hebrew reading public.³⁰⁸

The Beshara interpretation of Şūfī concepts is naturally concomitant with Ibn ‘Arabī’s work as translated and disseminated through MIAS. There is then a natural affinity with Şūfī orders in respect of the influence of Ibn ‘Arabī throughout the Şūfī world. Judith claims that the intellectual study of Ibn ‘Arabī is inseparable from a spiritual experience of advancing on the path, ‘It’s both intellectual and a spiritual experience. You can’t separate the two. It’s a process. It’s deepening and widening and getting clearer. I would like to visit Ibn ‘Arabī’s tomb in Damascus but of course I can’t go with an Israeli passport.’³⁰⁹ Pilgrimage to the shrines of Şūfī masters and saints (*awliya*), both male and female, form a regular practice of Şūfī piety in the belief that the individual can partake of the *barakah* (blessing) of the saint; Judith’s wish to visit the tomb of Ibn ‘Arabī testifies to the love for him that members of Beshara feel and the fact that study of his work involves more than the intellect. Rachel clarifies further the approach to study and her perception of how it is distinct from an academic study of the work:

This special flavour of Ibn ‘Arabī for me is that he gives one the feeling that the world is wider than we can imagine or – that’s the ‘Allahu Akbar! It’s that God is always greater. Now I’m joining Avraham Elkayam and other people ... I’m joining them in the Bar Ilan University to read the *Fūsūs* in Arabic. I don’t know Arabic but I’m struggling with it. I sit at home and I translate and then I come there. But it’s not the way it’s being studied in Chisholme. In Chisholme you study yourself through Ibn ‘Arabī and you sometimes know things that are not in the text. And things happen in

³⁰⁶ Isobel Jeffery-Street, *Ibn ‘Arabi and the Contemporary West: Beshara School and the Ibn ‘Arabi Society*, (Sheffield, UK and Oakfield, US: Equinox, 2012), p. 15

³⁰⁷ The translators and commentators, Pablo Beneito, Michel Chodkiewicz, and Claude Addas are examples of authors writing in Spanish and French.

³⁰⁸ Note that in chapter 6 it will be seen that the publishing ventures of Ya’qub in Olam Qatan and the translations of Sara are also making the work of Yunus Emre, Jālāl al-Din Rūmī, and other Şūfī masters, available in Hebrew.

³⁰⁹ Judith/Appendix I.

a magical way. And that's why for me, this way of Chisholme is...what it includes is that there is magic in life. I haven't touched its surface yet.³¹⁰

That which stands out here is that Beshara students are studying the self – 'Know thyself and you will know your Lord' – through the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī and not simply studying his work. He functions here as the teacher, the guide and spiritual mentor, and that, 'things happen in a magical way' is perceived as the direct effect of the 'presence' of Ibn 'Arabī through his words. All Sūfīs are on the journey of knowing the self but the spiritual mentor is the Shaykh of the order in which the individual is initiated although it is also seen as possible to establish *rabīta* with masters, sages, saints, living or passed on, for the purpose of learning. This latter appears to come closest to the relationship with Ibn 'Arabī that Judith and Rachel declare. This explains Rachel's striking comment that, 'I can only say that for me Ibn 'Arabī and Beshara is the main reason for living. My children, my grandchildren, are not that important, are not as important as this. It's really...it...makes contact for me with the most profound layer of reality.'³¹¹

5.2.4 Conflict Transformation and Its Challenges

Beshara is a small group and although it is open to anyone who may wish to attend, Rachel and Judith gave no indication of the advertising of workshops or talks as are found in the UK and the US. Residential courses take place in Chisholme, Scotland offering an opportunity for learning that is not easily accessible for many in Israel. The question of the challenges facing the members of Beshara must therefore be directed more to individual activities in the light of an approach informed by Ibn 'Arabī. Judith connects individual consciousness with group consciousness in the sense that she believes the concerns of the group and the concerns of the individual interact. One can conclude from this that any progress in self-knowledge contributes to the knowledge and actions of a group:

I don't know what this (conflict) serves in a spiritual sense. It could serve something if we learn from it but it could also all be wasted. I believe what happens to human consciousness as a group is the same as what happens to consciousness on a personal level. I can say with certainty that this place is a very difficult place to live. It's like being faced constantly with existential questions.³¹²

³¹⁰ Rachel/Appendix I.

³¹¹ Rachel/Appendix I.

³¹² Judith/Appendix I.

Rachel, in response to the question of whether seeing all human-beings as manifestations of the Attributes of God makes a difference to how she sees others, even those who she finds difficult, replies, 'I don't know. It's very difficult when things happen...As I said it's very easy to see it in black and white and... 'We're victims!' You see, it's easy to feel this way.'³¹³ The political situation in which Judith and Rachel live provides them with their major challenges while also presenting them with the greatest opportunity for lessons about the self in the Şūfī manner of *muḥasabat al-nafs* (self-examination). Fear is one of the components that is often supported by pessimism, leaving little space for hope. Judith has faced this in her work with *Machsom*, a Jewish-Israeli group that observes the behaviour of the IDF at the checkpoints and educates the public on the conditions they note, 'We (Beshara) don't do anything as a group but many of the members are involved individually. I worked with Machsom Watch. We used to go to the military court and observe. I'm not optimistic. I would like to see the government doing more for peace.'³¹⁴ The dynamics of the conflict, the diverse narratives, and the politics of identity are so complex that it is difficult for Judith, as for most Israelis and Palestinians, to see any imminent resolution to the conflict. Judith adds:

I would like to see two states but I don't know if it would work because they hate each other but when they (the Palestinians) see the Jews as a common enemy then they don't fight each other. There are lots of voices in one. Both sides do stupid things. It's becoming more complex. Israel is like a tightening knot. In Jerusalem the knot is tighter and in the Old City its tightest of all ... but then you can cut it. You can take a pair of scissors and cut through the knot! The Arab Spring is promising but I don't know, it could easily be taken by fundamentalists. Look at the Palestinian march to the borders on Sunday (Nakba day). Thousands of Palestinians! A real show of strength! It wouldn't be very pleasant to live under Muslim rule. It could happen that Israel comes under a Muslim government. It's been getting worse in the last two years. The atmosphere here is becoming more right wing and governed by fear.³¹⁵

She also speaks of sorrow for what she considers to be the stupidity of fighting, 'What are we fighting about!'³¹⁶ Judith's response to what can be learned from the other when seeing another human-being as a reflection of God with something to teach about the self is one of a project-in-progress that is marked by frustration with the tendency of some to make whole communities culpable for what is ostensibly being done in their name. The sense of

³¹³ Rachel/Appendix I.

³¹⁴ Judith/Appendix I.

³¹⁵ Ibid. The Palestinian march to the borders was a non-violent demonstration against occupation. The demographic fear of a one-state solution leads to Judith's remark on the possibility of Israel coming under a Muslim government.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

helplessness that results from a lack of agency in the political defence environment that nearly demolishes any gains made in grass-roots dialogue and interfaith activity is very apparent in Judith's comments:

Yes, yes I know it's the case but I don't always manage to see it. Not in everyone. I did a conflict resolution leadership course with Arabs and Jews. I did it together with a friend who is also from Beshara. One could see the levels.³¹⁷ There was such a feeling of love in the group. We all loved each other but once we started talking about issues like the territories it was war. Well not war, we still felt the love but it was difficult. You can accept the deeper level of being human beings but when it comes to making decisions ... they couldn't meet us during the war (Operation Cast Lead). They were so angry and that was difficult for me because I wasn't the one throwing the bombs. It was right for the Israelis to react to the rockets from Gaza but not like that! It was madness! But what do I know? I don't know anything!³¹⁸

Rachel finds it challenging in this atmosphere of misunderstanding, reprisals, and brutal violence to sustain a focus on the unity of all and the external forms as expressions of the One and writes a plea in her book to see beyond the particularity of difference to the divine manifestation of beauty in the human:

How does one develop a heart that is capable of every form?³¹⁹ The question is more crucial in the loaded zone of the Middle-East where the different forms become cause for slaughter and bereavement. Can Ibn 'Arabī, a Muslim who lived in Andalusia during the golden age of Islam, offer a key not only to accepting 'the other' with mutual respect, but to uncovering the point of identity from which the forms are seen as different expressions of the same love of beauty? The same longing for intimacy? The same awe in face of the sublime? The same sweetness that the heart cannot contain? Only appealing to the widest, the most profound, in us, that which contains everything and is not contained by any partial aspect of it – would enable one to recognize the difference, not just with respect but also with love. That width, that depth, is God. Neither God to whom one says, 'You have chosen us', nor 'my God' who is 'greater than your God', in a mistaken understanding of 'Allahu Akbar'. But that essential Being that cannot be defined and who is yet 'closer to man than his jugular vein' as the Qur'ān claims. According to Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of unity, 'Muslims', 'Jews', or 'Christians' are not exclusive perceptions that cancel each other, but different expressions of the same fathomless depth that no form can properly express.³²⁰

This is a question of the embodiment through action of the concepts of the transcendence of God through an awareness of the immanence of the divine. But Rachel finds the

³¹⁷ By 'levels' Judith is referring to the *maqāmāt* of the traditional Ṣūfī schema of stations of the *nafs*.

³¹⁸ Judith/Appendix I.

³¹⁹ This passage is an excerpt from Rachel's book. This line refers to a famous poem of Ibn 'Arabī which has become popular beyond the *dergahs* of Sufism and the world of Islam.

³²⁰ Rachel/Appendix I.

multitude of 'truths' a hindrance to taking any position on the peace process, 'I'm not active in the way of – towards peace. It's because it seems to me that there are so many truths, so many aspects, that it's very hard to take a position, to take a direction in this. I tried for a while to go to Machsom.'³²¹ But she found it difficult to continue, 'I just came two or three times and I couldn't go because the woman I went with was preaching the soldiers all the time how they should behave. Immediately I take a position and I feel it's not right because there are so many positions.'³²²

Rachel then expands on the problem she perceives of taking a position and relates this to points made by Ibn 'Arabī on the bewilderment that arises in the face of the tension between opposites. Rachel states, 'What I get from Ibn 'Arabī and his perception of reality is that there is *ḥayra*; that you are torn by opposites. Living in Israel is very much like that. You feel torn by opposites all the time. And the only thing I can do in it is let myself be torn by opposites, not choose a direction.'³²³ '*Ḥayra*' means 'bewilderment' and Ibn 'Arabī counts this state as one of the highest stations (*maqām*) an adept can achieve. It manifests as a result of seeming unresolvable paradoxes such as the impossibility of human understanding being able to comprehend the Transcendent God while simultaneously experiencing an intimate knowledge of God in His Immanence. In his work on *Sufism and Deconstruction*³²⁴ in which he compares Jacques Derrida and Ibn 'Arabī on their singular approach to 'confusion' and 'bewilderment', Ian Almond maintains that:

Neither Ibn 'Arabī nor Derrida seem to be afraid of bewilderment – or, for that matter, bewildering. Whether it is the constantly 'exploding semantic horizons' of the disseminating text, or the guidance which means being 'guided to bewilderment', the acceptance of 'incoherent incoherence' or the God Who is everywhere and nowhere, both Derrida and Ibn 'Arabi part with a philosophical and Koranic tradition which sees confusion synonymous with error, failure, untruth and sin.³²⁵

Further on Almond notes that, 'The fact that Ibn 'Arabi can take such a standard Koranic (not to mention biblical) motif such as 'confusion' and imbue it with a positive meaning – to the point of making bewilderment a gift from God – not only attests to the Shaykh's daring originality, but also indicates how far Ibn 'Arabi is prepared to radically re-interpret

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ian Almond, *Sufism and Deconstruction: A Comparative Study of Derrida and Ibn 'Arabi*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), Routledge studies in religion.

³²⁵ Ibid., pp. 39 – 40.

familiar sections of the Koran such as the Surah on Noah (*Nuh*).³²⁶ Bewilderment gives rise to tension and Ibn 'Arabī says this tension gives rise in turn to movement and that this movement is love. Ibn 'Arabī's elucidation of *ḥayra* as the result of the juxtaposition of apparently conflicting realities implies another *barzakh*, a *barzakh* of love in which the opposing realities unite. When Souad Hakim, a Ṣūfī scholar who contributes articles to the MIAS website and journal, speaks of the 'isthmuseity' of the human condition³²⁷ that is such an important part of the Akbarian teaching she is referring to the reality of the *barzakh*, the imaginal space between pure Intellect and corporeality. She relates this to how that 'isthmuseity' can be of practical benefit in the contemporary world:

The fact that our reality is 'isthmic' means that we have the power to connect to two different worlds at the same time, from two sides. In practical terms, man today could realise a temporal isthmuseity, by having one face turned to the present and another turned towards eternal time. He could gain greatly by this temporal isthmuseity, reconciling the past, present and future, but also in taking up the past again, not as the past, but in its present. We could also gain by the isthmuseity of our intellect between reason and inspiration, receiving from one side the data of sense and reason, and from the other receiving the inspiration of the heart. Thus we can open the possibilities of our existence and gain from our isthmuseity to realise our spiritual fullness on earth.³²⁸

In addition to Hakim's suggestion of a temporal *barzakh* – which is certainly relevant to the interviewees in terms of the agency of memory in the dynamics of the present conflict³²⁹ – and her emphasis on the importance of allowing inspiration to work together with reason, a further isthmic state emerges from the narrated experience of the interviewees and other peace-makers with whom I spoke in Israel.³³⁰ Referring back to the comments of Avi on the *barzakh*³³¹ and likewise those of Judith and Rachel on the sense of being in an isthmic position in relation to the positions taken by others and the complexities of the conflict and its political agendas, then another use of the concept of the *barzakh* becomes apparent. As a practical application in situations of conflict, one solution to creatively managing the tension is that of residing with full awareness within that space between opposites, in that isthmus, or *barzakh*, which manifests the tension between opposites.

³²⁶ Ibid., p. 40.

³²⁷ Souad Hakim, "Unity of Being in Ibn 'Arabī: A Humanist Perspective", *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, Volume 36, 2004. Also available online at: <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org.uk/articles/unityofbeing.html> [Last accessed: 29th June, 2013].

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ I refer here to issues of identity based on historical narratives and political agendas that apply disparate narratives as their justification.

³³⁰ See Chapter Seven.

³³¹ See Chapter Four, pp. 13, 14

This can be experienced as a movement of love, as attested by several interviewees, as an abiding of love within the heart that enables an outflow of love toward the other, despite the circumstances. Following Ibn 'Arabī, it is about becoming aware of the beauty of God's love moving through, within, and in interaction with Itself in the created forms.

Does the bewilderment that Judith and Rachel feel provide an opening to acceptance of the differing narratives that fuel the conflict and the political agendas of the parties involved? Is it possible, or even advisable, to ignore the political and historical components of identity and to focus on knowing the self to thereby gain an understanding of the other as inseparably part of oneself and as an equal reflection of the divine that the student of Ibn 'Arabī strives to know through the knowledge of the self? Is the contribution of Beshara to reconciliation held within the spiritual path of self-knowledge that they follow? I ask this question of Rachel and she confirms this with confidence:

Yafiah: So would you feel that what you have just described to me about being torn by opposites, about not being able to take one position because there is always its opposite position, and what you have learnt and experienced through Ibn 'Arabī – that that process in itself, happening within you, is a contribution towards peace in as far as our relationship to every other...
Rachel: I'm sure it is. I'm sure it is.³³²

5.3 Conclusion

In concluding this chapter with the question of Beshara's contribution to reconciliation and peace it is noticeable that the two themes of love and knowledge are equally apparent in the narratives of Rachel and Judith as they are in the narratives from the Derekh Avraham participants. Their constellation in terms of the primary objectives of the interviewees and their conversion into active projects finds a different emphasis. Study and practice within the group is the focus of the group whereas participation in projects for reconciliation is undertaken individually and outside the group.

The words of Peter Young on the Beshara website highlight the primacy of love as an energy available to all:

Love is the truth that binds us all together, through which we can learn to live and interact, knowing that we are loved by an inexhaustible love that will not run out. We do not have to try to obtain it from others because it is there for us in our

³³² Rachel/Appendix I.

very being. We must learn to be connected constantly to the source. Love alone is effective; it is the only actor.³³³

Rachel's experience of love is expressed in her book in terms of longing – that form of love known as *ishq* in Arabic and formulated by Ṣūfīs around the world as the longing to be united with the Beloved – and she cites Ibn 'Arabi's own anguish of longing to describe her feelings. She begins the passage with the concept that Truth is an inner certainty, 'For Ibn 'Arabi God is not 'a belief'. He is the deepest certainty of Truth. He is the premise that Truth exists even if we do not have any way to it. The voyage to God, according to Ibn 'Arabi, starts with God. Not with gradual advance from where we are to another place, but with total acceptance of that certainty planted in the heart and researching its implications on life.'³³⁴ She then connects this inner sense of certainty to the yearning that she sees as its expression:

Paradoxically, the mode of presence of this certainty in the heart is yearning. Neither yearning for the past nor yearning for the future. Neither yearning for the unknown nor passion motivated by lack. But longing for the perfection that the heart knows. For the wholeness that is felt intimately. That is why I experienced, on that sunny day in May 89, the confidence that I've arrived home and uncontainable nostalgia for the present moment. The unbearable longings are the face of love in the heart of the lover. Ibn 'Arabi expresses it well in one of the 'Tarjuman' poems, in which he pleads with his cruel beloved: 'Pity a passionate lover, outcast and distraught, Whom desires eagerly encompass and at whom speeding arrows are aimed wheresoever he bends his course'. But 'She displayed her front teeth and a Levin flashed, and I knew not which of the twain rent the gloom, And she said, 'Is it not enough for him that I am in his heart and that he can behold me at every moment? Is it not enough?''³³⁵

The inner certainty equates with a knowledge given through gnosis (*ma'rifa*) and here we see one of the ways in which knowledge and love come together in Ibn 'Arabi's epistemological view.

Finally, do the members of Beshara partake in any of the activities organized by Derekh Avraham? Looking at connections between Derekh Avraham and other Ṣūfīs – Jewish and Muslim – the comments of Roberto, when asked whether the Derekh Avraham group meet

³³³ Peter Young, Principal, The Beshara School, *extract from: The Spirit of the Millenium, MIAS Symposium, Chisholme 2000*, Beshara website [Online] Available at: <http://www.beshara.org/about-beshara/what-is-beshara/love.html> [Last accessed: 18th January, 2013].

³³⁴ Rachel/Appendix I.

³³⁵ Ibid.

with Beshara members and with other Jewish-Sūfīs, provide a clarifying response to this question:

Ya'qub, yes, but with the Beshara much less. We don't have a really relationship with them. With Ya'qub and with Eliyahu McClean we do have but not with the Beshara. They are very closed and have their own philosophy. For me it is very important that we participate in the born tradition and for me it is very important that we be together also with the Jewish tradition, the Shabbat, and the Kashrut and all the other things. I'm not sure that the Beshara people are interested in that. They don't care about Judaism. They care about Sufism. The difference is that we are Şūfīs and Jewish and that means that we create a bridge between the two traditions because we can very deeply weigh the Jewish tradition too and not only like Şūfīs but without religion, but a connection with the Jewish tradition.³³⁶

Roberto has emphasized the continuing practice of Judaism as an important factor in Derekh Avraham's Şūfī practice indicating that they hear the Qur'ān and the Prophet Muḥammad as speaking to all People of the Book, as the Qur'ān designates all monotheists. Beshara's intense focus on Ibn 'Arabī has led Rachel and Judith to emphasize the universality of Ibn 'Arabī in their narratives and to understand him as taking a perspective beyond religious form. This forms part of their attraction to the Akbarian tradition. However, Ibn 'Arabī grounds all his work in a profound knowledge of the Qur'ān and *hadīth* and while it is certainly justified to read a universal appeal in the Qur'ān it must be questioned whether Ibn 'Arabī, or the Qur'ān, promotes a renunciation of religious practice. Nevertheless, James W. Morris speaks of the accessibility of Ibn 'Arabī to all audiences of any or no faith and in addition Beshara follows several of the traditional forms of Şūfī practice. In reflecting on her Jewish identity, Rachel considers the relation between universality and difference:

Universality is not wiping out the differences. It's about each one being the most profound *your* self you can find. And a part of all these layers is being Jewish. Now I don't know what it means to me to be Jewish because I'm not religious, I never was. On the contrary my father was anti-religious although his father was a Hassidic Jew and I have a very strong kinship with him. But I was raised as an atheist. But I still feel Jewish and my language is Hebrew and I want my language to be Hebrew – I'm studying Arabic and I read in English and I read in French but my natural milieu is Hebrew and the Hebrew culture and the Bible in Hebrew.³³⁷

As an addition to the interview data, Rachel sent me the following email. It demonstrates a further tension to the ones caused by the conflict and that is the tension between action

³³⁶ Arbib/Appendix I.

³³⁷ Rachel/Appendix I.

and contemplative practice. It is in this tension that I suggest an energy can arise in the individual or group that forces a continuous balance between paying attention to progress in knowing the self and applying the fruits of that knowledge to action in society:

Why am I writing to you now? I guess it's because I feel that what I've said when you visited me was not up to the situation, but then - nothing is. I've just started reading the Hebrew translation of Dr. Abuelaish's book "*I shall not hate*". You are probably familiar with his life-story. Have you read his book? It's heart wrenching, and like testimonies about the holocaust one is torn between the wish to read it (for the sake of Truth) and the tendency to avoid the pain of such knowledge. It feels as if the level of justice, which serves both sides to justify unbearable deeds, is so shallow in comparison with sheer pain, or hope, or longing for the possibility of joy and normality.

I'm debating with myself whether to go to "conversation" in the Beshara Center this evening or go to demonstrate for peace agreement within the borders of 67. I think I'll come to "conversation". Maybe because it seems that a response to the situation needs to come from a deeper level than demonstrations. Have you seen the French film "J'accuse", in which the dead of both world wars rise from their graves marching in protest against the possibility of a 3rd world war? It seems that the proper response to the situation is something of that calibre.³³⁸

³³⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER SIX: EMBRACING THE ŞŪFĪ PATH AND THE DISSEMINATION OF KNOWLEDGE

6.1 Lovers and Academics

In giving the title 'Lovers and Academics' as the introduction to this chapter it is not the intention to suggest that either is exclusive of the other as a description of the interviewees whose narratives are analysed here. Sara Sviri, Professor of Islamic Studies and translator of the first collection of classical Şūfī texts into Hebrew, is an academic whose work has involved research into classical Şūfī texts and sages such as Hakīm al-Tirmidhī.³³⁹ Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, formerly known as Joshua Heckelman until receiving a new name from his first Shaykh, completed an MA dissertation on the concept of the Tzadik in the teaching of Reb Nahman. He now owns a book shop in Jerusalem, Olam Qatan, and leads a circle of Şūfī practice in the Kebzeh tradition of Murat Yagan³⁴⁰ which attracts diverse Israeli Jews and visitors from abroad. His stated mission is to attempt to bridge the gap between religious and secular Jews. David is a member of the Jerusalem Circle that Ya'qub leads. David is an Orthodox Jew seeking a spiritual language in which he could frame the need he felt to explore the challenges of his life. Sara and Ya'qub are both active in the dissemination of knowledge on Sufism through translation, commentary, and publishing. Sara has spoken at the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society Annual Symposium and written a Şūfī handbook³⁴¹ in addition to her many academic publications. She has been a student in the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya Şūfī Order. She now prefers to follow the path independently and regards Hakīm al-Tirmidhī and Irina Tweedie as her teachers.³⁴² Both are active in Şūfī events offering workshops and talks on Sufism.

The approaches of each of the participant narrators discussed in this chapter are quite distinctive and present a variety of concerns which often align with the concerns and

³³⁹ Hakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 295/908), was a ninth-century mystic from the Transoxanian town of Tirmidh.

³⁴⁰ Ya'qub edited, introduced, and published a book by Murat Yagan on the Şūfī traditions of the Caucasus mountains based on a series of *şohbets* given by Yagan. See Murat Yagan, *The Essence of Sufism in the Light of Kebzeh: The Tradition of the Caucasus Mountains*, ed. Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, (Canada: Kebzeh publications, 2009).

³⁴¹ Sara Sviri, *The Taste of Hidden Things: Images on the Sufi Path*, (California: The Golden Sufi Center, 1997.) Second printing, 2002

³⁴² See Sara Sviri, "Hakīm Tirmidhī and the *Malāmātī* Movement in Early Sufism" in *Classical Persian Sufism from its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, (London and New York: KNP publications, 1993), pp. 583-613 and in *The Heritage of Sufism*, vol. I, (Oxford: Oneworld, 1999). On Irina Tweedie see Sara Sviri, "Daughter of Fire by Irina Tweedie: Documentation and Experiences of a Modern Naqshbandi Sufi" in *Women, Discipleship and Power*, eds. E. Puttick and P. Clarke, (Aberystwyth and New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), pp. 77-89

experience of the other narrators both within this chapter and in previous chapters. Equally, they each raise matters important to each respectively that reflect their mode of approach and personal situations, and their engagement in Ṣūfī activity. The narrative excerpts below are taken from interviews with Ya'qub and David and an interview with Sara at which Ya'qub was also present.

If the members of Derekh Avraham have aspirations to educate, then the work of Sara and Ya'qub provides further examples of how education and the dissemination of knowledge may be effected in introducing a familiarity with Ṣūfī literature and a taste of Ṣūfī practice to interested parties in the Israeli population. The narrators here are not members of Derekh Avraham, as neither are the narrators of the previous chapter, but are, however, closely linked through their interests and work so that one might speak of the participants in each of the categories here described as forming a loose network of Jewish-Ṣūfī engagement. Included in this network are those other participants mentioned in the following chapter. This can be seen as a web of contemplation, intention, and action, drawn together less because of a programme of peace activity and more through a genuine spiritual affinity. Through this activity they come to know the other who becomes a part of the self, the 'us' rather than 'them' with the qualification that the 'us' consists of a group heralding from different but related faith traditions. This is not a minor point but it is one which provides a basis for discussion that enables consideration of several factors, theological and social, that potentially impact on political realities as well as spiritual growth. This forms a pool of interactive energies that uncover questions too often ignored by political players, primary of which is the extent to which political agendas are congruent with the wishes and realities of the people. It is this creative friction that the narratives examined in this chapter highlight and address. They are of significant relevance to the question of Sufism as an agent of peace. Further to the sense of inclusion of the other into the sense of 'us' as the identity of an integral group, is the question of the extent to which the Arab-Palestinian-Muslim-Israeli and the Palestinian-Muslim of the OPT is seen as an 'other' whose otherness diminishes through greater familiarity. Does the study and practice of Sufism through the classical literature of such masters as Ibn 'Arabī and Jālāl al-Din Rūmī, and the regular meetings of Muslims and Jews, facilitate an understanding of the political other in the inclusive 'we' as inhabitants of the geo-political territory and the socio-religious narratives of the territory of conflict? The narratives of this chapter problematize issues of identity, terminology, self-definition, and the debate on authenticity in the Ṣūfī tradition. The conclusion to this chapter includes a longer excerpt from the

discussion between Sara and Ya'qub which constitutes their concluding thoughts and clearly expresses their doubts, from individual perspectives, of the possibility of a resolution to the conflict and of the role of Sufism in particular in the pursuit of peace. Their comments thereby illustrate a less positive outlook than that expressed by the participants from Derekh Avraham. These doubts, however, are answerable to the proposition that it is not the intention to portray Sufism as a major player in the peace process but rather to evaluate the pathways of engagement that are created by the participant narrators. The doubts expressed are an invaluable contribution to the discourse in that they raise points which cannot be ignored in an honest evaluation. This is expanded on in the conclusion to this chapter with attention given to two comments made by Sara and Ya'qub that will be pivotal to the final evaluation of this study and which relate to a stated hope in the effect of the present research, and the necessary provision of a common vision which can be offered by Sufism for religious and secular minded Israelis. In the thematic categories of analysis the two subheadings that dealt with Ṣūfī practice and study with Muslim Ṣūfīs, and the interpretations of Ṣūfī concepts and practices in the two previous chapters, are integrated in this chapter under the heading of 'Jewish-Ṣūfī Interfaces'. This takes its title from a comment made by Ya'qub and is used here to denote the finely woven interplay of practice, study, history, and the discussion on Jewish and Ṣūfī conceptual alignments and variances that characterize the narratives of Sara and Ya'qub. It would be pedantic to tease these themes apart when they appear so interdependent that to do so would diminish their discursive value.

The narrative excerpts in this chapter continue to bear witness to the import accorded to the medieval Jewish-Muslim relations related by all the participants and which this study considers as a vital point in the evaluation of Sufism in Israel and Palestine to the peace process.

6.2 The Narratives of the Jerusalem Practitioners

6.2.1 Encountering Sufism and its Kinship with Jewish Mysticism

In conversation with Ya'qub he exclaims, 'I mean I am a Ṣūfī, inshallah! But I'm a very Jewish Ṣūfī you know, it couldn't be otherwise.'³⁴³ Sara, however, makes a very different claim during a radio interview in which she disputes the idea of a Jewish-Ṣūfī:

As for Judaism let me tell you something interesting from the point of view of making connections; here is something which is known in history and in scholarship as

³⁴³ Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, Appendix I.

Jewish Sufism. Jewish Sufism is a term that scholars invented. No Jew actually called themselves a Jewish Ṣūfī, except now today in Israel there are people who call themselves Jewish Ṣūfīs. What I'm referring to is groups of people who lived in Egypt in the 12th, 13th, 14th century, and they were practising in a very similar way to Ṣūfīs. Interestingly enough, one of the main figures in this tradition was the son of Maimonides, Rabbi Abraham Maimonides, he was a rabbi. He was the leader of the congregation. But he was extraordinarily interested in the Ṣūfī phenomena which he saw, where he lived in Fustāt, which is old Cairo.³⁴⁴

Sara is referring to the Jewish-Muslim heritage that stands as a precedent for contemporary interest in Sufism but in contesting the term 'Jewish-Ṣūfīs' one might also question the relevance of definition as a method of distinguishing oneself from others in medieval times. Those distinctions in terms of 'Jewish', 'Muslim', or 'Christian' were fixed but within the arena of cultural, philosophical, and religious debate and exchange, labelling one's affinities may have been less important. Abraham Maimuni was certainly charged with the introduction of Ṣūfī practices by the Jewish community of Fustāt but this was due more to a political resentment of an Andalusī taking on the position of Nagid.³⁴⁵ Maimuni defended his actions by claiming he was simply re-introducing practices that were part of the Jewish heritage and from which the Muslims had benefitted in the early development of Sufism. In documents found in the Cairo Genizah³⁴⁶ we see evidence of concerns of a woman from the Jewish community that her husband may be compromising his Jewish identity because he has joined the Ṣūfīs. This prefigures comments made by Ya'qub further on in this discourse in relation to Israeli friends who showed an interest in Sufism but a hesitancy in becoming further engaged.

Sara explains further, and as previously cited in the consideration of the definition of the term 'Ṣūfī' and repeated here, that she has a problem with any kind of labelling:

I can't make any claim of belonging to any denomination or even to understanding what it means. I wanted to say simply a few things – for example: not all mystics that example, Al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī. Another example is Shibli, who was definitely a Ṣūfī

³⁴⁴ Radio National, "The Spirit of Things". Transcript of an interview with Reza Shah-Kazemi and Sara Sviri. Broadcast on Sunday 27th November, 2011, recorded in Israel and Australia. [Online] Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/spiritofthings/the-Ṣūfī-spirit/3686180> [Last accessed 15th April, 2012].

³⁴⁵ Gerson D. Cohen, "The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni", *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, Vol. 35 (1967), p. 76, Published by: American Academy for Jewish Research [Online] Available at: Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3622476> [Last accessed: 10th February, 2011].

³⁴⁶ Alden Oreck, "The Cairo Genizah", Jewish Virtual Library, [Online] Available at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/Genizah.html> [Last accessed: 30th August, 2008] Also see Chapter Three of this study under the sub-heading, "The Jewish-Muslim Interreligious Encounter in Al-Andalus and Fustāt".

in terms of belonging to this social setting in Baghdad where Sūfīs started to blossom in the 9th century. He was asked why Sūfīs are named Sūfīs. And very appropriately he said, ‘Because of something that was left in their *nafs*, namely in their ego. If they had really purified their ego they wouldn’t have to be named by any name at all.’ Now what does this mean? All this business with names, and denominations, and groups, and religions, and who belongs where, and who is to be called what. I look at it and marvel. And where am I in all this? You probably wanted to talk to me about my experiences with Irina Tweedie and the so-called Sūfī group in London. This is something I can talk about, but it doesn’t mean that I was stamped with any kind of denomination.³⁴⁷

When asked how she would define the spiritual status of Hakīm al-Tirmidhī Sara replies, ‘*Hakīm*. *Hakīm* you can translate as ‘sage’ or, as some scholars – one scholar actually – calls him ‘theosopher’³⁴⁸ This not only raises the question of classification but also feeds into the debate on whether Sufism requires the student to be formally a Muslim and this will form a part of the final assessment of how Sufism can offer resources for reconciliation.

In the case of Ya’qub it was the commonalities between Kabbalah and Sufism that eventually drew him in the direction of a Sūfī Shaykh in Jerusalem with whom he took hand. Coming originally from Brooklyn he spent several years in Vermont and he describes his journey to Sufism as beginning with studies with Reb Zalman Schachter:³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷ Sara/Appendix I. In view of Sara’s reluctance to be, ‘stamped with any kind of denomination’ it is interesting to note that in a book chapter, “*Daughter of Fire* by Irina Tweedie: Documentation and Experiences of a Modern Naqshbandi Sufi” in Elizabeth Puttick and Peter B. Clarke (eds.), *Studies in Women and Religion*, Volume 32, (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), on page 79 Sara cites the work of her teacher, Irina Tweedie, in the eponymous title, “In one of their very first meetings, dated in IrinaTweedie’s diary as 3rdOctober [1961], Bhai Sahib - the title by which her naqshbandi teacher from Kanpur was addressed - explains to her what Sufism is, ‘Sufism is a way of life. It is neither a religion nor a philosophy. There are Hindu Sufis, Muslim Sufis, Christian Sufis - My Revered Guru Maharaj was a Muslim (*Daughter of Fire*, p.9).’ This statement is significant. Bhai Sahib was a Hindu but received his *adhikara* (the authority to carry on the teaching; in Arabic: *ijaza*) from a Muslim teacher, and transmitted the *adhikara* to Irina Tweedie, an Orthodox Christian by birth. This statement implies an extension of the boundaries of Sufism. According to Bhai Sahib, this has been happening not only in the modern age, but since pre-Islamic times.”

³⁴⁸ Sara/Appendix I.

³⁴⁹ An article on J Weekly.com speaks of Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi as, “The 87-year-old granddaddy of Jewish Renewal — the New Age, neo-Chasidic movement he founded three decades ago — is considered one of the few Jewish sages alive today. In the 1970s he fused the mystical traditions of his Lubavitch background with modern sensibilities concerning the environment, technology and psychology in an effort to reinvigorate a Judaism he found stultifying. Without dismissing Jewish rituals, he told his followers not to be content with surface observance. Look deep inside yourselves, he said. Dance, sing, find the joy within Judaism — don’t be spiritually lazy.” He studied under Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach. The article continues, “Born in Poland, a survivor of the Holocaust, an ordained Lubavitch rabbi and a Sufi shaykh, Reb Zalman (as he is known to his followers) has never been afraid to cross boundaries.” [Online] Available at: <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/66104/reb-zalman-87-coming-to-east-bay-for-rare-visit/> I attended a Renewal Shabbat service with Ya’qub at Neva Tehila in Jerusalem when he was invited to chant prayers during the service. As I was present Ya’qub decided to introduce *sujūd* (the Muslim

Let's start on how I came to Sufism. The first person I really took on as a teacher was Zalman Shachter, and there was a lot of talk about spirituality, and there was a lot of endeavour to get into spiritual experience. But along with that, there was a kind of doubt for me about, was it real? How do you know?" Zalman spread a full table of all kinds of spiritual things, his own background is Chabad.³⁵⁰ Carl Jung said a very deep thing. He said that everyone in the West is either Neo-Platonic or Aristotelian. And in Hasidic teaching that plays out as Reb Nahman or Chabad, and I found that the school for my soul was the teachings of Reb Nahman.³⁵¹ He was talking about the essential quality of things as opposed to Shneur Zalman, who was rigorously proving things. Years later I tried to read a book about Hasidism by Adin Steinsaltz, *The Longer Shorter Way*³⁵², and I just couldn't work out what the heck he was talking about! And I realized that he's trying to prove things rationally. And between Reb Nahman and my involvement in Sufism, when I read a text my intellect does its work but it's all in service of the heart. I'm trying to grasp the image, and trying to get the wholeness of it intuitively from the heart, and I'm just not built for rational proofs. I mean, this is alien to me. I've been deconstructed from philosophy all these years.³⁵³

Ya'qub's interest in Reb Nahman led him to study in Israel:

I was progressing with my MA thesis on the archetypal Tzaddik in Reb Nahman's teachings and in the Jewish tradition that led up to that. Was this Reb Nahman being influenced by the Ṣūfī he met or was he a product of the Hasidic tradition and the Kabbalistic tradition? That was my MA thesis. Then I discovered Moshe Idel – did I belong to a school – and in my looking for the Jewish development, the Jewish ideas of Kabbalah, there's a school – and I'm looking for universal spiritual ideas in Kabbalah – Moshe Idel had two main revolutionary insights, one is that there is *unio mystica* in the Jewish tradition, and the other is that...although there are, of course, non-Jewish influences on the Jewish tradition as well, there are deep Jewish sources out of which Kabbalah and of course Hasidism proceeds. So I came to Israel to study with Moshe Idel, I thought I was coming for a year, it became two years.³⁵⁴

Ya'qub's fascination with the teachings of Reb Nahman was, 'Seeing at the core of the universe the archetype of the spiritual master, the archetype of the Tzaddik³⁵⁵ as the channel connecting heaven and earth, as the one who heals, who helps others to find their

prostrations) while chanting and invited anyone who wished to join him. A few did join the prostrations, not many, but no one objected. See chapter 7 for a more detailed account of this meeting.

³⁵⁰ Chabad Lubavitcher Hasidic

³⁵¹ Reb Nahman of Breslov, April 4, 1772 – October 16, 1810, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov. Not to be confused with another very interesting figure, Nachmanides/Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman/Ramban born 1194 Gerona, d. 1270 Palestine.

³⁵² Adin Steinsaltz, *The Longer Shorter Way: Discourses on Chasidic Thought*, (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1988). Translated and edited by Yehuda Hanegbi.

³⁵³ Interview with Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, Appendix I.

³⁵⁴ Ya'qub/Appendix I.

³⁵⁵ Equivalent of the Islamic *Qutb* (Pole) or *Insān Kāmil* (Perfect Man) who manifests all the Attributes of God.

own alignment to the Divine. Like a gardener helping the trees each to grow in their own alignment, and thinning them out when necessary. So I was very inspired by the teachings of Reb Nahman and something that was clearly universal in a very Jewish expression.³⁵⁶ Not satisfied with just reading these teachings, Ya'qub decided that, 'The next step on my journey would be to go to Israel and look for a spiritual master. That was 1976.'³⁵⁷ He was given details of where to find a teacher in the tradition of Reb Nahman plus the address of a Ṣūfī Shaykh as the most likely people able to help him. The former said that:

'Your question is on the level of the teaching of the Tzaddik but there's only one problem, neither you nor I are tzaddikim.' So I understood he was saying you're looking for the spiritual master, as a student of Reb Nahman. I certainly wouldn't discourage you but in our school there's been no living master since Reb Nahman died in 1810 so if that's what you're looking for you might have to keep looking.³⁵⁸

So he visited the Shaykh and found that the house, 'Held the definite presence of love. I was twenty four years old at the time, I was impressed and I thought there was a presence of love, it wasn't just sentimentality.'³⁵⁹ When the Shaykh entered the room he gave Ya'qub a text to read:

It begins, 'In the Name of Allah, beloved look with the eye of your heart and don't look back. See with the eye of hearing then you'll be hearing with the ear of God and see with the eye of God. This is the source of all the waters, the *ma'yan*, the spring which all the lovers are preaching about and when you come to this force be as Moses is when he speaks with his Lord and takes off his shoes – your shoes are the *nafs*, the ego and the *shaytan*, the *dunya* – and then you are from Him, to Him forever.' And I had this feeling – I didn't feel like I wanted to bow down before his feet – I felt like there must be this source of water in the next room or something. We're very close here.³⁶⁰

Ya'qub remained a student of the Shaykh for several years and visited him regularly as he was not yet permanently resident in Israel. The Shaykh never required Ya'qub to formally accept Islam but nevertheless Ya'qub eventually felt pressure in the implication from the Shaykh that it would be better to do so. This finally led to Ya'qub asking the Shaykh to be released from his tutelage despite the great love he felt for him and the progress he had made.

³⁵⁶ Ya'qub/Appendix I.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

Ya'qub was becoming interested in Turkish Sufism through Kabir Helminski who invited him to accompany him on a teaching trip to Turkey, 'I met some wonderful teachers in Turkey. The most moving was probably Hasan Suşud, teacher of J. G. Bennett."³⁶¹ It was through Kabir Helminski that Ya'qub met Murat Yagan, a Caucasian Şūfī who lived in Canada:

I was in the habit of going every year down to the Mevlana Foundation but one summer Kabir invited me to a Şūfī gathering on the path of Rumi, at his home. They have weekends and it was the first time they were going to have a week, seven nights. He said *Open Secret* had come out and Murat's autobiography, *I Come from Behind Kaf Mountain*.³⁶² He suggested I read the last chapter – he sent it to me as a gift – 'What is Sufism?' and I read it and I thought that it was very objective and a little bit more sort of Fourth Way flavour. It also had love; it had prayer, and a sense of humour. I said this could be Sufism for me.³⁶³

Ya'qub finally moved to Jerusalem and began the Jerusalem Circle based on the Kebzeh teachings of Murat Yagan which encourages looking to God within. His strong attraction to Turkish Sufism and the way of the *Malāmatī* (the path of blame) brought him into contact with his spiritual mentor, Baba, who mediates a more heart-centered practice. As Ya'qub explains:

From Baba I kind of get his being, his humorous, loving being. From Murat I get teachings and practices (with the exception of the meditation that I do, that's a Naqshbandi practice I got from Baba). But Murat has an intellectual teaching that's addressed to aligning the intellect with the heart, and exhausting the intellect so that you reach the heart. It's clear, but it doesn't go in circles around itself the way I perceive much of philosophy does, trying to prove itself by its consistency. It's just trying to be coherent, so that a greater understanding can come through, so you have language to communicate it clearly. So I'm very grateful for that, I'm grateful I found that kind of teaching.³⁶⁴

David, a resident of Jerusalem, discovered Sufism through Ya'qub's book shop, Olam Qatan, and later became his student in the Jerusalem Circle which meets weekly for *soḥbet*, meditation, and prayer. David is an Orthodox Jew. He sees his path as a process of seeking until he met Ya'qub:

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Murat Yagan, *I Come from Behind Kaf Mountain: The Spiritual Autobiography of Murat Yagan*, (Vermont: Threshold Books, 1984).

³⁶³ Ya'qub/Appendix I.

³⁶⁴ Ya'qub/Appendix I.

Well, where does a path really begin? I'd say that actively – in an active sense my path to Sufism began in 2006 when I joined the circle, the Jerusalem Circle led by Ya'qub and it's developed gradually from there. I would say the path there began about ten years or so before that, when I began exploring...say...non-conventional, less conventional modes of spirituality. But more at the time from a self-help point of view. I would say that the first ten or eleven years were more of an attempt at finding some answers to make pain go away. It wasn't so much a search for a relationship with God for its own sake. My path took a very sharp turn in that direction in the summer of 2006. It happened quite suddenly. My first encounter with Ya'qub was in the early 90's, when he was a Master's student at Hebrew University, and a couple of years after that he opened Olam Qatan – or rather I think it was more like five years after that, he opened Olam Qatan. I became a regular customer just dropping in every now and then, just looking for whatever Buddhism, or self-help, or maybe even Sufism, had to offer. In terms of trying to just maybe re-frame difficult experiences I was having in the language of some kind of spiritual path.³⁶⁵

Olam Qatan provided David with the opportunity to become familiar with Sufism and to decide whether this was the path he wished to pursue. This was the service that Ya'qub had intended to provide when he opened Olam Qatan and began the Jerusalem Circle.

David speaks of this process:

You know basically there was a ten year period where Ya'qub to me was a guru with a store. But I really hadn't been exposed to the depth of his knowledge and the depth of his teaching and also to the human element of just really getting past the searcher having a relationship with the book to exploring spiritual practices in the context of a group and all that gives you including the challenges it gives you.³⁶⁶

David decided to join the Jerusalem Circle and to begin practising the teachings he had, so far, only read about.

6.2.2 Jewish-Şūfī Interfaces

Sara and Ya'qub speak of their practice with Muslim Sufis within the context of their own biographies but interestingly, and relevant to the additional objective of this study to illustrate an awareness of Jewish-Muslim relations as a contemporary heritage, they also contextualize present encounters within the historical incidents of exchange in the 'whirlpool effect' of the medieval Middle-East described by Sarah Stroumsa.³⁶⁷ In a radio interview Sara is asked whether there are connections between Sufism and the Kabbalah.

³⁶⁵ David of Jerusalem, Appendix I.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

³⁶⁷ See Chapter Three of this study.

The question focuses on the Names of God and Sara expands this to speak of the idea, in both Judaism and Islam, that creation is effected through the word of God:

Rachael Kohn: Sara, with the many Names of God, I wonder whether there is a connection to the Jewish practice in Kabbalah of the many Names of God.

Sara Sviri: Well, there must be, and in fact we can go on and on when we try to dig into the past and origins, and we don't want to do that of course, but I think it's worth mentioning a very ancient Jewish book which is considered mystical. It's known as *Sefer Yetzirah*, or *The Book of Creation*. Nobody knows when exactly it was composed, who composed it, but it is ancient, that's for sure. The great scholars tried to convince us how ancient it is. And its idea is the world is created by letters and words – even less than words – by letters. So this idea you can find also in Islam, also in ancient traditions. So from this point of view Islam has kind of developed a basically Jewish idea. But then it developed it in its own way, and when it comes back in Judaism later, let's say 12th, 13th, Kabbalistic sources, this is already developed in a Jewish way. So we have interesting...like we can use the metaphor of a tree, like there is the trunk or there are the roots which are common, and from these roots and trunk, branches evolved and they are different.³⁶⁸

Sara has elucidated the 'whirlpool effect' here by providing an example of how a concept originating in one community is developed further by another and is consequently re-assessed, sometimes generations later, by the community from which the original impetus emerged.³⁶⁹ It is examples such as these that underscore the commonalities between the Abrahamic communities and provide a shared history previous to the contested history of the past century.³⁷⁰

In the interview with Sara, at which Ya'qub is also present, the connections between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were raised several times. It begins with comments on the book by the journalist, Yossi Klein-Halevi, who set out on a journey to learn from Christians

³⁶⁸ Radio National, "The Spirit of Things". Transcript of an interview with Reza Shah-Kazemi and Sara Sviri. Broadcast on Sunday 27th November, 2011, recorded in Israel [Online] Available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/spiritofthings/the-Şūfī-spirit/3686180>. On *ḥurūf* also see Michael Ebsen and Sara Sviri, "The So-Called *Risālat al-Hurūf* (Epistle on Letters) Ascribed to Sahl al-Tustarī and Letter Mysticism in Al-Andalus", *Journal Asiatique* 299.1 (2011) 213-270, doi: 10.2143/JA.299.1.2130165 (Ibn Masarra)

³⁶⁹ A good example of this is Diana Lobel's example of the Jewish, Bahya Ibn Paquda's use of the Muslim hadīth on jihad which later finds its way in the seventeenth century into a Hasidic prayer book still used today.

³⁷⁰ The European character of Zionism and the majority of Israeli Jews and the impact this may have on Israel situating itself culturally as well as geographically within the Middle East is dealt with in Chapter Eight

and Muslim Palestinians.³⁷¹ Ya'qub relates what he perceives as the role of Sufism in an intra-Abrahamic learning process:

It's a very important thing that's happened in the last decades. For a Jew like Yossi, like for a Jew like myself, the Ṣūfīs are our teachers. We are not their teachers, they are our teachers. There is something – some gap, some missing piece – growing up with a strong, healthy, spiritual, Jewish outlook, still we're in need of something from the Ṣūfīs. They're providing a vitamin that we're lacking. And just as the Jews have this contribution to Christians, the Muslims have this contribution to Jews.³⁷²

Sara then introduces the influence of Christian hermits to the early development of Sufism and this leads on to further instances of encounters between mystics of other traditions in the Middle East and Central Asia. It is both history and anecdotal legend and in part supported by textual fragments and complete texts that on examination yield enough circumstantial evidence to conclude with confidence that such interreligious encounters and exchanges happened as much among contemplative practitioners and educated persons as they did at the court of the Abbasids in Baghdad and in the salons of Al-Andalus. Sara responds to Ya'qub's comments:

That's interesting. I never thought of it in that way. It just came into my mind by association how the beginning of Sufism, when there were a lot of wanderers in the desert, and they met with Christian monks *and* nuns, they learnt from them. They

asked the monks and the nuns, 'Can you teach us wisdom?' So it's interesting

Ya'qub: It's very interesting because it leaves the question of that third relationship about the Muslims and the Christians which obviously I don't know anything about

Sara: They took a lot from Christianity...

Yafiah: Yes, I believe that...

Sara: ...and openly, openly

Yafiah: Yes, yes

Sara: I mean there are lots of stories about meetings in the desert with Christian monks and Christian nuns and quite a lot of them. They ask them, 'Teach me.'

Ya'qub: Even in Turkey, this is something I mention because I don't know enough about it but I suspect there are some records of kind of dharma debates between Ṣūfīs and Christian mystics. And of course in the Islamic and the Ṣūfī literature the Muslims win (laughter) but I'm sure they were learning from the Christian tradition

Yafiah: I'm sure they were. There was a continuing interest in debate beginning in Baghdad between representatives of all the religions that were there. I mean they had a few rules like, no you must not say anything mean about the Prophet

otherwise everything else is up for debate

Ya'qub: Muslims, Jews, and Christians

³⁷¹ Yossi Klein Halevi, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden: A Jew's Search for Hope with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land*, New York and London: Harper Perennial: 2002. Hardcover edition published 2001 by William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

³⁷² Sara/Appendix I.

Yafiah: ...learning from each other
Ya'qub: I'm sure Turkish Sufism benefitted from Central Asian Shamanism and Buddhism, along with Islam...
Sara: Yes
Ya'qub: ...I'm sure they must have drawn something from the Byzantine and even earlier Anatolian traditions
Sara: Yes.³⁷³

The awareness of a heritage of Jewish-Muslim and Christian interaction is not limited to Al-Andalus and Cairo; it covers the entire Islamic Empire, wherever Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities resided together, and it remains a source of inspiration for the interviewees today.³⁷⁴ If Jewish mysticism has been influenced by Sufism it should also be noted that Islamic mysticism has been enriched by its encounters with Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Shamanism, Christianity, and Judaism, in the various geographical areas of Islamic expansion and then further disseminated throughout the Islamicate via Ṣūfī travellers and traders. The publication of Sara's anthology³⁷⁵ of Ṣūfī classical writings translated into Hebrew continues a tradition of the availability of Arabic texts to Jews living in the Islamicate in the past. Sara speaks of the response to her work among the Muslim Ṣūfī community, 'Let me tell you something that I find instructive. You probably know that a rather large Sufi anthology was published in Hebrew.'³⁷⁶ While Ya'qub rightly notes that, 'Yes, clearly we have Israeli interest in the Islamic mystical tradition, 'he also asks another, equally pertinent question, 'Of how the impact of this kind of work, this kind of western, even Israeli, perspective on Ṣūfī teaching impacts on the Islamic world, the Arab world in Israel? This would be interesting to explore as well.'³⁷⁷ Sara has Muslim students and says, 'I'm very well aware of it because I'm still teaching at the university. I have Israeli-Arab students. And they need it; they need it because the texts themselves are not so clear to them. The fact that they know Arabic is no guarantee that they can read Ṣūfī texts and understand it. So they need some sort of mediation. By the fact that it is in Hebrew there are footnotes and introductions.'³⁷⁸

³⁷³ Sara /Appendix I.

³⁷⁴ The recent publication of a much needed history of Jewish-Muslim relations, and its successes and vicissitudes, through four time periods to the present day covers a variety of themes. See Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora (eds.), *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).

³⁷⁵ Ya'qub speaks of the reception given for Sara by the Ṣūfīs in Nazareth. See Chapter Four.

³⁷⁶ Sara/Appendix I.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

Exploring Jewish-Şūfī interfaces is a practical exercise as well as textual and traditional in contemporary Israel. The participants speak of their spiritual practice, its relationship to their Jewish faith, and the affect that this has on their lives and engagement with the other. Ya'qub feels at ease with Muslim prayer, the *salat*, 'I was introduced to the prayers and they fit very well for me. I took Islamic practice the way I took Buddhist practice, not as a religious identity but as a serious spiritual practice.'³⁷⁹ He also sees it as a necessary base for other Şūfī practices, 'There's a lot of dhikr – and I understood that the dhikr alone – and the inner dhikr in the Shadhuli teaching – without the grounding of the prayer would be too ungrounded, you need to prostrate.'³⁸⁰ However, he never felt the need to become officially 'Muslim', 'I really wasn't interested in changing religion or rejecting Judaism by any means. The first summer I was a bit perplexed but I went through many profound things and touched experiences I'd never touched before.'³⁸¹

When David spoke of finding a spiritual path in Sufism I asked if he had looked within his Jewish faith for possible resolutions to his search. His answer is interesting as it expands the previous comments of Sara on the challenges of definition within Sufism, and comments from Ya'qub on the meaning of '*islām*', to include the denominations of Judaism as problematic in their self-definition. This aligns naturally with questions of identity and the markers applied in establishing identity. There is a marked tendency in all the participant narrators to cross the boundaries of identity, or to at least to be flexible in their interpretations of faith identity and spiritual practice. This does not appear to result in any marked uncertainty of faith, or hesitance in following a Şūfī inspired programme of spiritual exercise. David does express some tension but it expresses itself more as frustration:

I can't honestly say that I gave Judaism a shot. I wouldn't say that I gave conventional, rabbinic Judaism a fair shot. I would say that in the last ten or fifteen years I've become aware of alternative approaches that once upon a time I would have regarded as being offshoots of Judaism – at this point I would say that I'm in a state of flux in terms of what I even would define as being Judaism or what I even would define as being Sufism. Just this past Shabbat we had some lunch guests and people started asking me whether the synagogue we go to was Orthodox. We started talking about it and I said, 'What does the word mean anymore? What does the word really mean? Maybe twenty years ago the word meant something in a definitive sense and now you have Modern Orthodox and Progressive Orthodox, and Neo Orthodox, and you have traditional Conservatism that in some ways is more orthodox than the left-wing of orthodoxy, and you have Gay Orthodox, and you just have basically any manifestation, you know, any manifestation of Jewish tradition

³⁷⁹ Ya'qub/Appendix I.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

that has some connection to men and women davening, or praying, a traditional service with men and women usually separated by some physical barrier. I don't know what the word means any more, any more than I really know what the word 'Sufism' means to be quite honest.³⁸²

David reports that his work on the Ṣūfī path has borne fruit for him in his personal relationship to God and, as a result of this, in his relationship to others in a tight interdependency of the former on the latter, knowing God through the self and the other:

Over the past five years I guess I've become engaged with Sufism – you know both the good and the bad of it in terms of that engagement. It's given me a base of knowledge and a base of access to knowledge that's been a phenomenal resource to me in terms of giving me what I would call a tool box for connecting with God. And when I say connecting with God I mean beyond what I see as being abstract methods that conventional monotheistic religion gives you – giving me tools for experiencing God as an intuitive process through direct reception. And also giving me a foundation of relationships with people that I can talk with who understand what I'm talking about. Who can regard me as someone who can listen to them and not in any way be dismissive of what they're talking about, and actually be interested in what they're talking about, and just having, you know, the shared experience of exploring God within as a community. Because it's not only exploring God within yourself; I believe it's Kabir Helminski who talks about how we polish our own hearts to become reflectors of God – and in doing so we polish each other's hearts to reflect God in one another. So I would say that that, in simple language, sums up what the experience has been for me.³⁸³

David's dislike of categorization applies equally to a reluctance to departmentalize areas of life or to make distinctions between spiritual practice and other activities, 'I don't necessarily like to categorise; now I am doing something Ṣūfī, now I am doing something else. If you're going to be on the path you're always on the path.'³⁸⁴ In practical terms for David this means, 'Working on excising your inner demons and working on becoming a kinder, more decent, caring human being and just being a trusted friend and a loving partner and parent, a trustworthy, caring colleague and just all those things that human beings who are cognisant of those things and actually take the effort to work on them, and are people that you actually want to have as your friends, and are people you want to have in your community.'³⁸⁵ In Ṣūfī terms what David is describing here is *muḥasabat al-nafs* (self-examination) and '*adab* (spiritual courtesy). It constitutes the ongoing work of the Ṣūfī path and necessitates an on ongoing struggle with the ego known in Ṣūfī terminology as the

³⁸² David/Appendix I.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

greater jihad. Sufism is a practice that is inclusive of every life activity and David has a strong sense of this commitment:

Ṣoḥbet is for me a way of reinforcing the discovery of spiritual truth through a group conversation – through a guided group conversation. There is making *dhikr*, and there's *ṣoḥbet*, I would say that in the circle it's more *ṣoḥbet* and there is some element of *dhikr*. So that's an engagement in practice and the work that I do in terms of reading the teachings of masters, great or small, and applying that thinking and meditating on how I can apply that to my life. But I like to think of the Malāmi path as something that you are living every micro-second of your existence. It's not like something that you categorize like now I am a Ṣūfī and now I am a regular guy. Or now I am a Ṣūfī and now I am a Jew. I am a Jewish Ṣūfī and the Malāmi awareness is something I try to take with me when I'm putting on phylacteries and praying with *tallit*, still taking an awareness that I am connecting to God within myself and from there radiating outward and the point of contact is within me. The point of contact is within all of us and from there you can radiate outward.³⁸⁶

It is noteworthy that all the participants feel no division in their practice of Sufism while maintaining elements of their Jewish faith or their identities as practicing Jews but rather an enrichment, as Paul previously remarked. When asked, 'So would you say that your study and love of Sufism, your knowledge of Arabic, enriches your practice of Judaism?' He replied, 'Absolutely! That's the essence of what I've been saying.'³⁸⁷ This is evident in David's remarks above and in Ya'qub's keeping of the Sabbath:

Shabbat is what's kept me Jewish more than anything else. I mean there is also my ancestry and I discovered, the longer I was with my first Shaykh, how much I have a Jewish psychology. The other thing, in practical terms, I'd be with my Shaykh and I was making the prayer but Friday evening I'd sit out on the hillside at the time of sunset and in my heart welcome the Sabbath bride.³⁸⁸

Ya'qub's Ṣūfī path is integrated into his Jewish practice and he exclaims that Israel is a place where he finds this possible:

Shabbat is part of experiencing God while in this world. I don't want to give that up. I'm happy to inform it with my spiritual knowledge. Maybe be a bit more flexible about it. No insistence on an exact form. But no, I don't want to give that up. That's part of what makes living here so splendid.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Paul/Appendix.

³⁸⁸ Ya'qub/Appendix I.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

In conversation, Ya'qub mentioned several times that Judaism, including its mystical branch, is so wide that there is plenty of choice as to how one practices the faith. This was borne out by my own experience in Israel of the several denominations and of the growing interest and openness among Israeli Jews for different forms of spiritual exploration that are often integrated into a Judaic framework. This forms part of the 'in-between' group mentioned by Ya'qub which he hopes will bridge the gap between the secular and the religious in Israeli society. The following comments of Ya'qub are an example of this ease of symbiosis in action. He speaks of how he found the continuation of the Hasidism of Reb Nahman in Sufism. It is in Sufism that he finds the living ones described by Reb Nahman. While speaking of pivotal influences in his life that relate to his Jewish identity as part of a persecuted community he is also connecting the commitment he feels to the impact of Sufism on his life and in fulfilling that commitment:

You have the Forty Abdal in the Şūfī tradition and you have the thirty six Tzaddikim in the Jewish tradition. The earliest and really seminal text in the Jewish tradition, the Bahir, is the transitional species between Midrash and Kabbalah. And in the Bahir they introduce this archetypal notion of the Tzaddik. And they say there is a single pillar in the world and its name is 'Tzaddik'. It is named after the Tzaddikim, after the Righteous, plural. When there are more Tzaddikim in the world it is strengthened, when there are fewer it is weakened, but always there is at least one in the world because otherwise it would not exist as the Tzaddik is the foundation of the world. You know my spiritual path has been – what's really drawn me – is that glimpse of the Tzaddik that I saw in the teachings of Rebbe Nahman. My desire to find some real living ones – one to link up with which is what drew me to Sufism – because I was privileged to study with, to be around Reb Shlomo. And I did feel it with my Shaykh and I see something quite profound in Murat.³⁹⁰

He then continues to recount the political threats and the traumatic history of the Jews in Europe and their influence on his spiritual quest:

I think for myself growing up in the shadow of the atom bomb in New York in the fifties – you know they'd take us down to the gym in my Jewish day school, Jewish centre, you know, to have air raid drills – we weren't stupid. There were little windows at the top there, you know, if they drop a bomb in Manhattan this is not going to save us in Brooklyn, we knew that. That, probably more than the holocaust, was something that shaped my spiritual quest. Although I can also picture somebody in the gas oven crying out, 'Can somebody out there find the truth because we can't do anything more in here?' I feel connection and obligation to that. So, I don't know how far I've come really in the direction of the Tzaddik but it's still my great love.³⁹¹

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

The impact of Sufism on David's life is equally compatible with his Jewish faith and he expresses the influence of mysticism on relationships with others:

Experiencing God through direct perception is, I think, the greatest thing a human-being can do. Or should I say, using that perception as a spring board for treating other human-beings with kindness, decency, and respect I'd say is the greatest thing a human-being can do. And I would say it has to start with the individual and like we said in college, think globally and act locally. You start by acting locally, what can I say, I may be pessimistic about the condition of the world but I can be personally optimistic about myself and about being part of a spiritual community of friends who help one another achieve their potential through manifesting God within us and through us and without us. What more is there?³⁹²

6.2.3 Conflict Transformation and Its Challenges

The main challenges to reconciliation and conflict transformation that are addressed by the narratives in this chapter are not dissimilar to those of previous chapters which focused on the openness of the groups to Jewish and Muslim Israeli citizens and difficulties confronted in realizing planned projects. The emphasis here falls more on issues of identity and their related problems with terminological and categorical definitions. Additionally, there is a clear doubt expressed by all three participants of any political solution to the conflict and any hope in a contribution to peace through religious or spiritual based encounters is hesitant. On identity, Ya'qub relates a problem with religious Jews for whom the contact with Sufism was unsettling, 'The first year or so of trying to put together a group I attracted a lot of Jewish guys, like the guys who accompanied me to see the Shaykh, who were a little more orthodox than I was, who were hungry spiritually but who couldn't get past the question, 'Will Sufism threaten my Jewish identity?''³⁹³ In response to this hesitance Ya'qub decides to address a divide in Israeli society among the Jewish population with the intention of strengthening the middle ground between the polarities of secular and religious:

Then I made a shift. I shifted from the desire to have a group that would have Jews and Christians and Muslims together to a group in which secular and religious Jews could do spiritual work together. I decided that's the first frontier. If we don't address that then we can't go any further. I've come to understand that broadly in terms of my analysis of Israeli society and war and peace in the Middle East. The Muslims see Israel not just representing a Judaism that they're jealous of but representing Western atheist materialism, not without some justification. Israel sees

³⁹² David/Appendix I.

³⁹³ Ya'qub/Appendix I.

our Arab neighbours representing Islamic repressive fundamentalism, not without some real justification. But within the Jewish world there's that split between the secular and the religious that's been virtually schizophrenic. In the years that I've lived in Israel there has been a significant shift in that polarization. I've participated in this. There is more and more of a spectrum in-between.³⁹⁴

To what extent does this have an impact on reconciliation if the group is not meeting with Muslims? As seen in the Beshara group it contributes to a transformation of the view of the other and this is significant to a change in attitude of the majority population towards the Palestinian minority in the political choices they make and the relationships they form, both of which form a preliminary step towards equal rights for all Israeli citizens³⁹⁵ and greater understanding of what they hold in common.

After commenting on the change in his work to a focus on bridging the divide between secular and religious in Jewish-Israeli society, Ya'qub turns to reflections on the position of being in-between:

Here we could talk about the exoteric and the esoteric and the mesoteric, and I think a lot more of us have been recruited to the mesoteric. Between the two. You and I, we're not on the level of outer religion but we're not the illuminated elite either. We're somewhere in-between and we're about the opening of that channel in-between. So I understand that there's a strong sense of that out there and to participate in the work of the Tzaddik, insha'allah.³⁹⁶

Once again, as in the narratives of the Derekh Avraham and the Beshara participants, the theme of a sensed *barzakh* emerges, and in each case it is within the theme of this section on the challenges of conflict transformation that those comments find their best locus of analysis. Ya'qub sees what he terms the 'mesoteric' as a space in which the average religious person and the 'illuminated elite' – to whom one would certainly count figures such as Ibn 'Arabī, Jālāl al Dīn Rūmī, and Hakīm al-Tirmidhī – are able to converse. This space is enabled by those who mediate between the two and invite others to join them. Perplexity once again plays a role when unbending narratives of identity are challenged by an unexpected encounter with those who are confident in their own faith identity and yet

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ A number of Israeli policies favour the Jewish-Israelis because they stipulate advantages to those who have served in the IDF. This automatically excludes the Palestinian-Israelis who are not permitted to serve in the army. See Peleg, *Israel's Palestinians*

³⁹⁶ Ya'qub/Appendix I.

relate to the other – whether that is in interfaith dialogue or active peace initiatives – in friendship and genuine benefit to both.³⁹⁷

Sara sees a similar bridging of the gaps by maintaining an in-between position in the work of Rabbi Fruman, a man who defies categorization and who she sees affectionately as a ‘nutcase’ of whom there are not enough:

One person I admire is Rabbi Fruman. Because to me he appears as someone who knows very well all the contradictions and yet he is there to do something about it. Now, he’s very religious, he is a settler, he lives in Tekoa and believes that, ‘Tekoa belongs to ‘us’ and that’s why I live there.’ And yet he says, ‘Well, if I find myself under a Palestinian government, okay.’ But how many Rabbi Fruman’s do you have? He’s a *meshuga*, he’s a nutcase. But they are a handful and it doesn’t matter what they are called. Those who want to call themselves *Şūfīs*, so be it. Very few carry this possibility of holding these opposites. I’m not an optimist.³⁹⁸

David expresses his doubts about the political peace process but holds more hope in a religious path to reconciliation. When asked if he sees any potential in *Şūfī* practice as an agent for reconciliation and peace he responds:

It’s a very interesting question because on the one hand I’ve never been particularly optimistic about political reconciliation. Since I began coming to the circle I’ve come to believe that religious reconciliation – and I’m specifically using the word ‘religion’ I’m not necessarily using the word ‘Sufism’ – I think that the only hope for peace is through religious reconciliation, basically acknowledging that we’re all ‘Ibn’ Ibrahim.³⁹⁹

He is realistic about the challenges and he sees them in the question of religious identity and the history of the conflict:

Culturally we’re very different and there’s a lot of negative baggage, there are a lot of bloody shirts to wave around. I wouldn’t necessarily say that I’m optimistic about it in an idealistic sense. I would say that there’s probably far more resistance to religious reconciliation than there is to political reconciliation because religious reconciliation in many ways seems very threatening especially when you’re heavily egotistically invested in whatever religion you have whether you’re a practitioner – let’s say you’re an orthodox practitioner – or not. Even if you’re quite secular the cultural baggage and the cultural associations that you relate to religion can make

³⁹⁷ See Chapter Seven for the views and experiences of Eliyahu McLean and Shaykh Ghassan Manasra on this point

³⁹⁸ Sara/Appendix I. Rabbi Fruman has recently died. Eliyahu speaks of his work and his friendships with Palestinians in Chapter Seven.

³⁹⁹ David/Appendix I.

the idea of building a bridge religiously to another faith as being very threatening. So I would say that I see a potential...I certainly see a potential for reconciliation.⁴⁰⁰

It is relevant to return again to the question of meeting the other that is addressed in the previous two chapters. This is not the sole element in a successful transformation of how the other is viewed and known – this has been illustrated in the narratives on the significance of spiritual practice and a universal outlook grounded in Ṣūfī concepts – but it is obvious that without actual interaction the contemplative practice has no translation into action and remains, therefore, unrealised in the fullness of its intention. Reconciliation and conflict transformation are dependent on regular and free meetings between the parties of a conflict. Those who, like the participants in this study, who are already engaged in interreligious and spiritual encounter, struggle with the political and ideological factors that cause a limitation of a possible wider participation of interested persons from all the faith traditions. When David relates the following:

There was one time when I attended a discussion between Rabbi Menachem Fruman and a Ṣūfī Shaykh. It was the father of Ghassan, Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām Manasra. A very enjoyable experience but you see the thing is that when you have one of these panel discussions it’s more like these guys are engaging and the people who come and attend are like passive observers even if they are asking questions. It’s not engaging people in the crowd and getting people to say, ‘Can we put our differences and our religion aside and look at the commonalities and acknowledge that we’re praying to the same God, perhaps in slightly different ways but the differences are fairly minor. Can we get past the cultural differences and learn how to trust one another.’⁴⁰¹

He is speaking directly to the necessity for hands-on engagement of which talks and information are a necessary compliment but ineffective without meeting the other in the same way as those giving the talks and providing the information.

Ya’qub also notes a, ‘lack of interest’ among Muslims to attend interfaith and peace activist meetings.⁴⁰² The following exchange between Ya’qub and Paul addresses this perceived lack of interest and touches on the tensions between Ṣūfīs and Salafi Muslims in Nazareth. Paul also notes that among Salafi and Wahabi Muslims Sufism is considered un-Islamic:

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Ya’qub/Appendix I.

Even outside the strictly spiritual realm you'll find that there's always been an immensely greater quantity of interest amongst Jews for Islam and Muslim spirituality than there has been amongst Muslims for any other spirituality than their own.

Ya'qub: Even dialogue groups not concerned with spirituality, you know, I've been in groups with thirty Jewish-Israelis and two or three Muslims

Paul: Yes

Yafiah: Why do you think this is?

Paul: Well, first of all – please, I apologize ahead that I mention this – but many people who come to Islam through Sufism, many westerners, do not realize that Sufism, somewhere along the line, is not Islam and this trouble, this tension which Ya'qub is describing in Nazareth is not necessarily directed against Muslims who associate with Jews but it's Muslims who associate with Sufism. I think that's one element. And what makes it even bad is that these *Şūfīs* are associating with Jews but I think that's secondary. In some respects this spiritual fundamentalism that's breathing throughout the Islamic world – you can see it here, you can see it in Egypt, and Syria where bookshops won't hold *Şūfī* books; whether they're threatened or whether they feel this is beyond the pale. That's one thing that one must bear in mind. Ya'qub: But would you separate Sufism from Islam?

Paul: No, I wouldn't and when that was said to me by someone who knew what he was talking about, I took offense. But in our days – they told me this about twenty years ago – but this time, in our times, it's become true. The Muslims, the fundamental Muslims do not consider that Sufism is a part of orthodox Islam.

Ya'qub: Sure, on the other hand some of our Arab-Muslim *Şūfī* friends talk very gently about the fundamentalists as 'beginners'. They don't have a lot of experience of the religion so they don't understand that *Al-Raḥmān* and *Al-Raḥīm* come ahead of the other qualities and this is just basic Islam. And you know, I think of Ghassan and his father and his son being descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. You know, as well as being very educated these are not marginal people to the world of Islam at all.⁴⁰³

Continuing on the theme of intra-Muslim tensions which also arose in the narratives of Chapter Four and Chapter Five, Sara sees it as a significant problem in interfaith encounters that applies equally to Judaism and Christianity, as well as to Islam. She makes the following comment when speaking of the impact of her translation of *Şūfī* texts into Hebrew on the Muslim population and its possible relationship to the question of a *Şūfī* contribution to peace, and points to some of the problems she perceives including that of extremist elements:

So you are asking a simple question which points to a very complex situation from the point of view of language, from the point of view of culture, from the point of view of history. I put culture first because if you take Arab-Israelis they don't need to be *Şūfīs*, they don't need to belong to any *Şūfī* school or centre but they may be interested. The imams in many mosques talk against Sufism. But then they may become interested because it's an interesting cultural phenomenon, or phenomena. So before you come to the question: Does it offer some sort of hope for

⁴⁰³ Paul, Appendix I.

reconciliation? You have to plough through quite a lot of very muddy fields; in terms of Israeli culture, in terms of Arab culture in Israel, outside of Israel and all these things before you even start to ask – what about fanatics? What about fundamentalists?⁴⁰⁴

The problem of religious extremists of each of the Abrahamic faiths is a factor in the lack of ease with which a balance of Muslims, Jews, and Christians⁴⁰⁵ are able to attend Ṣūfī events and meetings even within the Arab-Israeli town of Nazareth where the Qadiri Order led by Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām al-Manasra and his son Ghassan Manasra is situated. The dilemma of Ghassan and the Ṣūfī community of Nazareth is described in a Haaretz newspaper article:

They particularly attack them as ‘collaborators’ for associating with Jews. Menasra is involved with numerous interfaith programs, joins rabbis for meetings with international political leaders and performs Sufi chants with Jewish musicians such as Yair Dalal. Menasra argues that interfaith cooperation was the Prophet Mohammad's way and later was the tradition of Muslim and Jewish mystics in Medieval Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus and Morocco. Interacting with other faiths also helps Arabs, he said. ‘We need to talk [with Jews] about the problems of Arab rights in Israel and Palestinian rights,’ he said. ‘Muslims can also teach Jews the cultural codes of peacemaking in Islam – politics alone cannot build trust.’⁴⁰⁶

The article then details the harassment experienced by Ghassan and his family, ‘Menasra says he and two of his five children have been beaten in Nazareth and Jerusalem and his wife, an Islamic educator for women, was pushed. Shaken by threats and having tear gas thrown into his home, he spent two weeks in meditation to avoid the fate of Jerusalem Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari, who suffered similar attacks and died of a heart attack in 2010 at age 61.’⁴⁰⁷ With challenges to the Muslim Ṣūfīs of such a serious nature, the possibility of a wider knowledge of the Jewish-Ṣūfī heritage among Jewish-Israelis is diminished by the lack of opportunity, or willingness, of traditional Ṣūfīs to draw the attention of Salafi Muslims to their activities.

When Sara maintains of the Jewish-Israelis that, ‘Statistically, unlike you, I don’t think there is really a great deal of interest in Sufism. A little bit, but statistically, not a great deal’⁴⁰⁸ then it is valid to question the extent to which these factors of intra-Muslim

⁴⁰⁴ Sara/Appendix I.

⁴⁰⁵ The Palestinian Christian population constitutes approximately 9% of the Palestinian-Israeli population. See Peleg, *Israel’s Palestinians*, p. 22.

⁴⁰⁶ Lauren Gelfond Feldinger, “Nazareth’s Sufis bullied by fellow Muslims”, 10th August 2012, Haaretz.com, [Online] Available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/nazareth-s-sufis-bullied-by-fellow-muslims.premium-1.457312> [Last accessed: August 2012].

⁴⁰⁷ Feldinger/Nazareth’s Sufis

⁴⁰⁸ Sara/Appendix I.

tensions play a significant role in hindering a wider participation in addition to the economic and political disadvantages imposed on the Palestinian Israelis and the Palestinians in the OTP.⁴⁰⁹ She says of Ghassan, ‘You know whenever you think about Muslim Ṣūfīs in Israel you immediately think about Ghassan and everybody knows Ghassan and he is all over the place and he talks and he’s nice and you love him and he’s accommodating and everything. Gosh, I think the man goes through hell! I don’t know for a fact, he never talks about this.’⁴¹⁰ She adds, ‘I mean, his son was beaten and they had to leave and they had to flee and all kinds of things. When I say that he doesn’t talk about it I don’t mean that he is secretive but he tries to cover it by whatever he does. And this is just one example. It’s very difficult. So it’s not all hunky dory and on the other side, you know.’⁴¹¹ This is a realistic statement pertinent to all those who seek engagement with the other and serves to emphasize that spiritual interaction and interreligious dialogue requires hard work, both personal and communal. Relative to the personal practice of the Ṣūfī, Ya’qub recalls advice from the Ḥassidic teachings that are very close to the Ṣūfī approach, ‘There’s a teaching from the Baal Shem Tov: When you see something wrong in your neighbour you must find the place of it within yourself, address it within yourself, do teshuva, heal it, re-align yourself there, it will open the way for your neighbour. I collected many of his teachings years ago, translated, on this theme.’⁴¹²

6.3 Conclusion

The work of Sara and Ya’qub clearly engages with the general public, both Jewish and Muslim, through the accessibility of publications that disseminate knowledge of Sufism and promote a familiarity with the classical literature of the Ṣūfī masters. They are both participants in events with Derekh Avraham and maintain relationships with Israeli Muslim Ṣūfīs. Despite the reluctance of all three participants to be too enthusiastic about the potential of Sufism in the reconciliation process, Sara and Ya’qub each offered a reflection on the present research and what they felt Sufism had to offer. As these two reflections became pivotal to how the question of this thesis is viewed and how the concluding answer to that question, and suggestions for further research and action, was approached, I give

⁴⁰⁹ In Chapter Seven the report on the work of Eliyahu McLean and Ghassan Manasra covers the ways in which they help Palestinians from the OTP to attend gatherings. Also see Ilan Peleg and Dov Waxman, *Israel’s Palestinians: The Conflict Within*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.32 – 46, for details of the disparities between the Jewish-Israeli and the Arab-Palestinian-Israeli populations of Israel.

⁴¹⁰ Sara/Appendix I.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ya’qub/Appendix I.

the full excerpt of the conversation below from which Ya'qub's reflection emerges. It begins with a comment made by myself in response to the apparent doubt of the role of Sufism in the endeavour for peace in and between Israel and Palestine:

Yafiah: I'm beginning to get the impression from the interviews I've done so far that to speak about Sufism's potential for bringing reconciliation and peace is a bit overblown

Sara: Yes

Yafiah: And I have to bring that really right down to simply asking whether Sūfī or Sūfī related activity, brings together Muslims and Jews and contributes to the other activities that bring together Muslims and Jews, such as the school of Rabbi Ron Kronish, for example. Is it a contributor...?

Ya'qub: No

Yafiah: Not at all? But you go to meetings and things where you're coming together with Arabs, don't you? There is some engagement happening there that might not happen otherwise

Ya'qub: Sorry, I'm just addressing your precise question. There's much more interest in Jewish-Arab dialogue groups. It's not motivated by Sufism. So if you're asking what the contribution of Sufism is, I don't think you'll find it there. I think there might be another...I would suggest it might be someplace else. I would suggest it would be in giving a vision to people; giving a spiritual vision which is beyond the form of religion. But here I have a little bit of a difficulty hanging on from before. Sara was talking about serious things like Jewish mysticism and Sufism and New Age things. And we look at someone we respect like Yossi Klein Halevi. I know Yossi's story. There was a small group of Israelis who did serious work with a Hindu woman guru thirty years ago and he's one of those people and so there's another piece of this picture which has to do with serious engagement with spiritual practice; not necessarily Jewish, not necessarily Islamic, and from within that universal but grounded spiritual perspective, the Jewish peace and the Islamic peace. So I think it's good to broaden it that way. In my case I came to Sufism from Judaism and Buddhism and yes, but I'm not really a Buddhist, and Judaism – I will always be Jewish but it's not quite satisfying in and of itself so is there a bridge, is there something in the middle? And I discovered Sufism; I discovered very Islamic Sufism out of that question, and then Turkish Sufism. So I think there's also a question about mysticism, whatever we call it, about serious spiritual engagement, spiritual practice. Now in a western framework, in an Abrahamic framework, we have a universal vision articulated in Sufism more than we have in the Jewish or Christian traditions. So that's a very important contribution

Sara: Say it again, say it again

Ya'qub: We have in the Abrahamic side of the family, as distinct from the Hindu side of the family, the Hindu, Buddhist etcetera side of the family, on the Abrahamic side of the family we have a universal vision articulated in Sufism more than in the Christian or Jewish traditions

Sara: Yes

Ya'qub: The Jewish tradition is just not busy...it's not its job; it's not busy with that. The Christian tradition has its particular formulation which then becomes exclusive and problematic. Sufism *is* Islamic and *is* universal because actually Islam itself is universal. So you have that paradox in Sufism, wrestling with that paradox but there's certainly much room for a vision that allows somebody like David in my

group, to live as a Modern Orthodox Jew and see that in a Malāmi context. Of being an ordinary person in a religious sense and having a spiritual vision that is beyond and he needs that vision because parochialism won't do it. And he's raising kids Jewish and there's nothing wrong with that. They need a religious life, it's appropriate to have a religious life but he knows that there is a wider context for all of this. So the Ṣūfī tradition gives him a reference point. So I'm arguing for the importance of Sufism for individuals, for spiritual individuals, for motivated individuals in terms of giving a vision, confirming a vision. Not so much that it impacts on the social world of Jewish-Arab dialogue but for people who are questing who may be important. The Ṣūfī tradition does contribute a great deal.

Yafiah: ...towards a spiritual vision that protects against fundamentalism as well

Ya'qub: Yes, Jewish or Muslim...

Sara: ...of any kind, of any kind...

Ya'qub: ...and that honours our Abrahamic roots, our western roots, our Middle Eastern roots

Yafiah: ...and possibly contributes to a greater preparedness, willingness, to speak, to dialogue with the other?

Ya'qub: For sure! For sure it nourishes a respect

Sara: The important point is not Sufism. It's this preparedness to add on a universal, humanistic, dimension to the kind of person you are.⁴¹³

In the above, Ya'qub sees the vital contribution of Sufism in providing a universal vision of openness to the other. Sara agrees but stipulates that it is not necessary for this to be provided by formal Sufism. It is the effort to be open to the other as part of religious faith and spiritual practice that is central. Sufism does, however, provide this possibility and there is no question that it needs to work alone. The peace-making partnership of Eliyahu McLean, Sheikh Aziz al-Bukhari, and Ghassan Manasra illustrates the obvious benefits of resourcing both mystic traditions of Sufism and Kabbalah and the symbiosis of Judaism and Islam. This will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

In addition to the vision of which Ya'qub speaks he also raises another point that finds consideration in the concluding chapter and this is the fact that he is talking about a vision, 'That honours our Abrahamic roots, our western roots, our Middle Eastern roots.' Palestine is very definitely 'in' the Middle East; Israel is geographically in the Middle East but in many respects – culturally, politically – in Europe to some extent.⁴¹⁴ The question of the various influences on Jewish-Muslim and Israeli-Palestinian relations will be explored and an attempt undertaken to situate Sufism within those dynamics of individual, communal, geographical, and ideological-political dynamics.

Finally, the second reflection mentioned, that came from Sara, coincided with my own thoughts. The sense that the Ṣūfī voice – together with the work of other peace initiatives

⁴¹³ Sarah/Appendix I

⁴¹⁴ In Chapter Four it was discussed how this is a problem for Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews.

that were bringing people together – was able to form an emerging movement of energy for peace was something that I had begun to consider over the last few months of my research. When I shared this with Sara she said, ‘I was thinking about you. This moving from here to here to here, it’s like you are gathering the yeast that is there somewhere. And maybe it’s important what you’re doing, you know.’⁴¹⁵ Ya’qub agreed and Sara continued, ‘Like a bee that you take a bit of dew from here and from there. Maybe such work as you’re doing is important in its own right but in terms of what it will do for the prospect of peace; this is not the way that I would approach it.’⁴¹⁶ Ya’qub then describes this process in terms of a potential shift, ‘Idries Shah suggests an idea that a small group doing a small thing in the right place at the right time can bring an important shift and he connects this with Sufism. And I think that is in the right ball-park.’⁴¹⁷ It is the expression, ‘gathering the yeast that is there somewhere’ that raises two noteworthy points, first, the implied value of scholarly research that can connect with the work in the field, and second, the issues that are revealed in the suggestion that the yeast, ‘is there somewhere.’ The lack of mainstream media coverage of the Jewish-Muslim relationships narrated in this study, and political negotiations which fail to acknowledge the voices of those seeking peace, or simply practising peace, through transformative relations with the other, holds many people within the country and globally, ignorant of this alternative narrative for peace which might otherwise cause them to adjust their assessment of the situation were they sufficiently informed. The idea of an ‘emergent yeast’ of peace will be examined further alongside Ya’qub’s idea of the necessary vision, and the issues it raises.

In distinct ways Sara, Ya’qub, and David express less confidence in the proposal that Sufism can contribute to reconciliation and conflict transformation than Avraham, Roberto, and Paul of the *Derekh Avraham*. This is despite the fact that Sara and Ya’qub contribute in significant ways to the betterment of Jewish-Muslim relations in Israel with regular contact to the *Şūfī* Muslim community and activities in the dissemination of knowledge through publication, talks, and workshop events. However, if their work is assessed in light of its inclusivity of the Jewish and Muslim populations of Israel and its impact on Jewish-Muslim relations then its influence as an agent of reconciliation and peace is not negligible. They connect significantly to the other peace-nodes in the network of *Şūfīs* and peace-seekers

⁴¹⁵ Sara/Appendix I.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

and their work is characterized by the same holding power and persistence that is demonstrated by all of the interviewees.

CHAPTER SEVEN: JEWISH AND MUSLIM PEACEMAKERS

7.1 Introduction

The method applied in this study utilizes a combination of participant observation and depth interviews, however, the excerpts from talks and interviews given by Eliyahu McLean, Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari, and Shaykh Ghassan Manasra are taken from online sources. As all three were also met and observed during participation in their work, such as attendance at the talk given by Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari in Bristol, UK; informal conversation; and participation in the Abraham day tour with Eliyahu McLean, the gathered data forms a combination of online resources and participant observation. Although not personally interviewed by myself in a formal situation, the information given by the three participants in the recorded talks available on You Tube was provided in a similar manner to the interviews conducted with the participant narrators of this study in as far as they spoke freely of their work with direct questions posed only during the question and answer period at the conclusion of the talks. Although much of their narrative has been accessed online, I would like to stress that this does not carry quite the impersonal character that is usual for such resources.

7.2 Peacemaker Narratives

Eliyahu is a *rodfe shalom*, an initiated peace-maker in the Jewish tradition. In the *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace*, Daniel Roth has written of traditional methods of peace-making in both the Jewish and Islamic traditions.⁴¹⁸ Of the Jewish peace-makers he notes:

In Jewish history, there were individuals referred to as *rodfei shalom* (pursuers of peace) or *mitavchey shalom* (peace mediators). These peacemakers were active in communities from eleventh-century Muslim Spain through fifteenth-century Christian Prague and until twentieth-century Morocco. Unlike earlier traditions, such as Aaron, the pursuer of peace, these peacemakers were not holy or religious leaders but generally well-respected laypeople. Also in contrast to Aaron, these peacemakers did not act alone in their pursuit of peace. It is interesting to note that mentions of these community peacemakers ended with the immigration of Jews to Israel from North Africa in the 1950s.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸ Daniel Roth, 'The Peacemaker in Jewish-Rabbinic and Arab-Islamic Traditions', *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace*, Volume 4, Issue 2, Spring 2011 [Online] Available at: <http://www.religionconflictpeace.org/volume-4-issue-2-spring-2011/peacemaker-jewish-rabbinic-and-arab-islamic-traditions>. [Last accessed: 10th may, 2013].

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

Eliyahu speaks of his path to becoming a peace-maker during a talk and presentation given together with Ghassan Manasra at the Israel Center and co-hosted by the Israel Center and the University of Albany-Hillel, at Chapel House during a talking tour of the US:

A little bit about my journey – I grew up in – not in Israel – I grew up in Hawaii of all places – born in California to hippy parents who were part of the sixties and we ended up in Hawaii and as a teenager I was searching for my sense of identity and connection. And my parents had this teacher from India and I didn't know anything about my Jewish roots until my Jewish friend invited me to a Jewish ritual called a Bar Mitzvah and I set foot in a synagogue in Honolulu and I felt like I was coming home. To make a long story short, that started a whole journey that ended up with me living in Israel and meeting a very special Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach,⁴²⁰ and along the way studying with a movement called Chabad and living in a country to the west of here called the People's Republic of Berkeley, California. There I was a pro-Israel activist but I also met a pro-Palestine activist and I got interested in the whole subject and decided to dedicate my passion in life to building bridges between the religions and the cultures of Israel, the Holy Land – Palestine as it's sometimes called – so I made *aliya*, moved to Israel about twelve years ago and have been involved ever since in these kind of peace-building, bridge-building, projects to bring the different religions together.⁴²¹

Eliyahu works together with Shaykh Ghassan Manasra and since the passing of Sheikh Bukhari, Ghassan has joined Eliyahu on talking tours to share their experiences of interfaith dialogue and peace work. During a tour of the US they were interviewed by Barbara Altmann of the Oregon Today radio station at the University of Oregon. Eliyahu recounts how he and Ghassan met:

Altmann: How did the two of you end up working together?

Eliyahu: Well, in the year 2000 there was a meeting of a group called Derekh Avraham – Al-Ṭariqāt al-Ibrahimiyya. This is a movement of Muslims and Jews in Israel, Palestine, the Holy Land, who are trying to study the Jewish-Ṣūfī movement of Cairo, the son of Rambam – Maimonides, the greatest scholar in Judaism – there was a lot of historical cooperation between the mystics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam especially in Morocco, Cairo, in the Golden Age of Spain. So we started a group to try and revive and revitalize that and there was a conference in Neve Shalom, a Jewish-

⁴²⁰ Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach of the House of Love and Prayer

⁴²¹ This is transcribed from a video on You Tube. Uploaded by The Israel Center, it is introduced as following, *'Video of our Nov. 7, 2011, Jerusalem Peacemakers event, featuring grassroots activists Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Ghassan Manasra: a Jew and a Sufi Muslim from Israel. The two presented 'Stories of Hope from the Holy Land: Grassroots Arab-Jewish Peace Efforts That Do Not Make the News.'* The event was co-hosted by The Israel Center and UAlbany-Hillel, at Chapel House.' [Online] Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=AuTVnbYLMqI [Last accessed: 6th July, 2013],

Arab peace village near Jerusalem and Ghassan and I met there in the year 2000 and we have been working together ever since.⁴²²

How this conference developed from small beginnings is best described by Eliyahu in a meeting of Imams and Rabbis that very quickly illustrated Jewish-Muslim relations of recent history:

I was invited to the southern Israeli city of Eilat to a gathering of Imams and Rabbis, Muslim and Jewish leaders, and after three days the Chief Rabbi of Eilat stood up and said that, 'When my grandfather was the Chief Rabbi of Halab,' Aleppo, Syria, it's a little bit in the news these days, Aleppo, right, 'When my grandfather was the Chief rabbi of Aleppo it used to be that Jews and Muslims, when they had a dispute they solved it in the Jewish Court of Law, the Beit Din, and most Muslims in Aleppo became experts in Halakha, Jewish Law.' So one of the co-founders of Jewish Peacemakers – he was a Şūfī Shaykh, we heard about him, Sheikh Bukhari, who unfortunately passed away two years ago but he was a very close friend and partner for both of us – and in Israel, in Hebrew, when you want to say, 'That's not a big deal' we say, 'Ze lo big deal' – he said, 'You guys think that's a big deal about your grandfather? Ze lo big deal! When my grandfather studied to be a Shaykh at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, not only did he study Islamic Law and Islamic commentary but he also studied the Talmud.' It was part of his training to become a Shaykh to study the Talmud, in that time. Not to be outdone, there was a Chief Rabbi of a suburb of Tel Aviv, he said, 'You guys think that's a big deal? Ze lo big deal. When my grandfather was the Chief Rabbi of Libya,' also in the news recently, right, 'Not only did he know all the Qur'ān by heart, he knew all the commentary by heart! So much so that the Muslims in Libya used to call him *Shaykh al-Yehud*, the Jewish Shaykh!' And they all had the same story, one after another, and there was no such thing then as interfaith dialogue. It was in fact knowing each other's tradition from the inside and it wasn't a threat to my identity, my religious and cultural identity, and who I was as a person of faith in my own tradition, in fact it was out of respect and knowledge for the other.⁴²³

Eliyahu continues that, 'Out of that gathering of Imams and Rabbis emerged several international retreats called the World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace and Shaykh Ghassan and I were at the meeting in Brussels, and in Seville, Spain – one hundred Imams and one hundred Rabbis, and there were Christian leaders as well.'⁴²⁴ However, the atmosphere at one of these meetings was very challenging and the talks were not going well:

⁴²² Eliyahu McLean, director, Jerusalem Peacemakers, and Ghassan Manasra, director, Lights of Peace Society, discuss their work building interfaith bridges toward peace in Israel/Palestine, University of Oregon Today With Barbara Altmann, Published on You Tube on the 31st July, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLwzx7TK2Q4> [Last accessed: 24th July, 2013].

⁴²³ Stories of Hope/Israel Center. A fear of compromising one's faith identity often holds people back from dialogue. Ya'qub comments on experiencing this among friends as well.

⁴²⁴ Stories of Hope/Israel Center

There was, at one of these meetings, so much tension because of politics of Gaza – there were even Imams from Gaza at this meeting – and the Rothschild Foundation, Rothschild, right (gestures to the hosts) put over half a million dollars into this meeting, but the whole meeting almost fell apart because of the politics of the Middle-East. And Andrei Ozulay, who is the Chief Jewish Advisor to the King of Morocco, he came up to me and Sheikh Bukhari and Ghassan and he said, ‘You guys need to do something.’⁴²⁵

Then something spontaneous and remarkable happened that demonstrates the value to the peace process of remembering the Middle-Eastern heritage of Jews and Muslims. Here it happens in action, not just talk:

So Ghassan and Sheikh Bukhari called over a friend of his who happens to be the Imam of a building you might have heard of before, it’s called the Dome of the Rock (laughter) and he sat and he started to sing the most beautiful melodies from the Islamic tradition and all the Muslims sat down and then another Chief Rabbi, originally from Morocco, sat down and he started to sing in fluent Arabic and he softened the hearts of many of the Muslims. And all the other Rabbis said, ‘If he’s sitting over there and he’s wearing a black hat like me, maybe it’s kosher. Maybe it’s okay’ and he sat down next to him and for the next four hours they started to share sacred melodies from the two traditions, from the Middle-Eastern tradition, and that started to melt the anger in the heart⁴²⁶ in such a way that the next morning, when they re-convened, they could re-approach the whole situation after having made that connection from the heart.⁴²⁷

The Jerusalem Peace-makers website contains a memorial to Sheikh Bukhari written by Shafiq Morton and reproduced from his own website.⁴²⁸ The memorial begins with a description of the Old City, ‘The streets of Old Jerusalem are labyrinthine. Their cobbled lanes hark back to an age when donkey-carts had right of way. Today, Israeli soldiers in olive-green fatigues patrol the Old City’s tangled shadows.’⁴²⁹ He continues, ‘Soldiers patrolled the Old City 24-hours, and policing its alleys must have presented its own set of

⁴²⁵ Stories of Hope/Israel Center

⁴²⁶ *Dhikr* – and this comes close enough to be seen as a form of *dhikr* – is performed to cleanse the heart so it is free for Allah. This is exactly the effect that Eliyahu is describing here. This account of Eliyahu’s also, once again, raises the question addressed in Chapter Four of the value of the history of Jewish-Muslim relations in the Middle-East to a greater understanding of everything that is shared by the two traditions.

⁴²⁷ Stories of Hope/Israel Center

⁴²⁸ Shafiq Morton is a South African correspondent and media presenter. His memorial for Sheikh Bukhari also illustrates the international reach of Sheikh Bukhari’s work. His website is available at: http://vocfm.co.za/blogs/shafiqmorton/?page_id=2 [Accessed: 14th July 2013].

⁴²⁹ Shafiq Morton, ‘Sheikh Bukhari: The Real Hero’ [Online] Available at: <http://jerusalempeacemakers.org/in-memorial/sheik-buchari-the-real-hero/> [Last accessed: 14th July 2013]

challenges. However, I must admit that it would have been more reassuring to have seen policemen, rather than armed Israeli conscripts, patrolling the Muslim quarter.⁴³⁰ Morton continues with memories of the challenges faced by Sheikh Bukhari, 'Shaikh Bukhari represented everything that was once the charming grace of the Old City. Generous, hospitable and a Shaikh in the Naqshbandi Sufi order, his demeanour was of contained serenity. But I knew that in his chest beat a passionate and sometimes anguished heart.'⁴³¹ And to this he adds, 'In Sufi lore the biggest battle of the human soul is the one of the self. Control of one's anger, and the quality of compassion, are two key pillars of this internal jihad. A Sufi has to honour all Creation.'⁴³² Morton was present when an altercation between a Palestinian and the military police was happening and which resulted in a young boy being arrested, 'As I turned I saw Shaikh Bukhari's face creased with sorrow, he was wrestling with himself, trying not to show his feelings. It was quite a battle, and it took some moments before he regained his composure. I pretended not to notice.'⁴³³ Sheikh Bukhari was the leader of the Uzbeki community and the Naqshabandi order in Jerusalem. He is a descendent of Imam Bukhari, the respected compiler of ḥadīth and the author of commentaries that are used around the world. In a video made by Zej Media which is part of a project initiated by Marc Gopin, Sheikh Bukhari addresses the theme of religion and violence and the imbalance in the interpretation of the scriptures today:

Most people watch television and they think that Arab and Jew will never live together in peace and harmony. But we want to change that opinion. We want them to know that there are people willing to live together in peace and harmony and work together as a family, as the children of Abraham. All the three religions they talk about peace and love and harmony and living together in peace. Three percent is violence but unfortunately we are holding to the three percent and we are forgetting the rest. God says in His holy book that killing one person is like killing the whole world, saving one person is like you are saving the whole world. That teaches us that God wants people to live together in peace and harmony. God doesn't want people to kill in His Name and on His behalf.⁴³⁴

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Zej Media, 'Unusual Partnerships: Eliyahu and Sheikh Bukhari' Part One [Online] Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y5E5qM9dLY&feature=c4-overview&list=UU3YyKyn7Ab1STB_YH8C6HHg [Last accessed: 12th June 2013].

In an interview published on the Just Vision⁴³⁵ website, Eliyahu expresses his feeling of what is missing in the high level peace negotiations of politicians and the research work of academics in failing to include any grass-roots experience in their deliberations and policies:

I like the way Rabbi Menachem Froman from Tekoa puts it. He often says, 'I am a proud primitive.' The problem is that the negotiations that happen in Washington or in Europe are between English-speaking academic Palestinians and English-speaking academic Israelis. They don't incorporate any of the people-to-people approach, the grassroots elements. They leave out the religious and spiritual dimension, which is often missing from statecraft. We're trying to reclaim the indigenous tools of Middle Eastern peace wisdom - the *sulha*, text study - tools found within Islam and Judaism in particular, but of course also in Christianity and in all the traditions here. Spirituality deals with the trans-rational level, the non-rational world, with spiritual ideals. Sometimes if you try to approach this conflict only from a rational point of view, you don't get anywhere; it's almost like deadlock.⁴³⁶

Eliyahu explains:

I'm trying to approach the chaos and the conflict that seem to be completely unsolvable by getting out of the box of the usual ways of trying to approach this conflict-both in peace activism and in the official governmental level peace talks. I'm trying to bring in this other dimension. This is the Holy Land, and it's not the Holy Land for nothing. If you try to approach people - the simple Palestinians on the street, the vendors, falafel stand owners, taxi drivers, bus drivers - many of them, on both sides, if you try to approach things purely from a political, rational level, you won't get anywhere. But if you bring in the spiritual dimension, I find that sometimes you can make bridges in amazing ways.⁴³⁷

No longer predictable, clichéd, or polarised, this approach can help to initiate that disarming perplexity that has the power to break down the walls of paradigmatic attitudes that do little to promote a solution, and to open up the possibility of the unexpected and the unthought. However, in correspondence with Mustafa he notes the importance of justice in Islam alongside efforts at reconciliation:

Any Muslim who adheres to the Islamic worldview would recognize the Jews and Christians as "People of the Book". I called for an Islamic theology of soft-otherness in relationship to Jews and Christians, but this acceptance is not accorded to the

⁴³⁵ Just Vision is an organization based in Washington D. C. and Jerusalem that publishes information on non-violent peace initiatives by Israelis and Jews. They have also made several award-winning documentaries.

⁴³⁶ Eliyahu McClean, 'Interview with Eliyahu McClean', Just Vision [Online] Available at: <http://www.justvision.org/portrait/76069/interview> [Last accessed: 27th July, 2013].

⁴³⁷ McClean/Just Vision

Zionist project. As Palestinians, we are subjected to a host of ongoing policies and practices that make our life difficult. Sufism does not call for abandoning one's rights, and in the case of North Africa, Sufi orders were at the forefront of resisting European colonialism.⁴³⁸

It may be argued that one step towards justice for all that simultaneously enables a path to reconciliation lies in beginning to personally know the other. Ghassan is aware of this and pursues initiatives that bring communities together in everyday activities. Ghassan describes the work of his centre during a talk on the US tour with Eliyahu:

We have in Nazareth the Lights of Peace Society, Anwar al-Salām. This is an Islamic Cultural Center and inside this center we have two tracks. The one track is the dialogue with the other and the other track is the dialogue within Islam, the project of the educators, the second project, is the Families Forum and it's very important for these families with all of their children to come to meet together, to break the ice between Arabs and Jews. Jews, Christians, Muslims. Not only to discuss about philosophy, about sciences, intellectual discussions – no, also to work to prepare food, to get together and to give the model for their children to do the same thing. And the children will see their parents in action, in work, to make this built in since this age. It's very important. When we go back to Israel we will continue with the next year of this project.⁴³⁹

Ghassan and Eliyahu, like all the participants in this study, recognize the value of education and the necessity to work with educators and teachers:

Then we decided to bring High School principals and teachers – in the beginning it was very difficult to bring them together – it was very, very difficult. Slowly, slowly we persuaded them to come. It was happening in Jerusalem – East and West Jerusalem, north and South Jerusalem – Jews, Christians, and Muslims together. We began with twenty-four people, principals and teachers. After one year we had twenty-four projects. Each one became a project with other people. It's very important to us to work with this leadership because they will educate, and they are educating, the next generation. We need them to help us to change the way of their thinking, to draw forth the tension and to stop the prejudice between all of them and to create a new education programme; and they began to write and they are finished and we are working now to make this programme a formal programme in the High Schools – we are working for this and hopefully it will succeed.⁴⁴⁰

This also extends to the need for religious leaders to learn from each other. As Ghassan notes, 'I saw that it's very important also for the Shaykhs and the Imams to learn a little bit

⁴³⁸ Abu Sway, Appendix I.

⁴³⁹ Eliyahu and Ghassan/*Stories of Hope*

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

about the other.⁴⁴¹ By learning about Christianity and Judaism from Christians and Jews, Ghassan hopes that misunderstandings and prejudices will be tackled and the Imams and Shaykhs will pass on this information to their communities:

Then what to do, we need to create a project to know the other and we invited twelve Imams and Shaykhs – Shaykhs are the leader of the mosque, the leader of the prayers of the mosque – and we initiated a course called, ‘An Introduction to Judaism’ and ‘Introduction to Christianity’. And I brought a Jewish teacher for ‘Introduction to Judaism’ and a Christian teacher for ‘Introduction to Christianity’. The teacher for ‘Introduction to Judaism’ was my friend Professor Avi Elkayam, Bar Ilan University, and Rabbi Roberto Arbib, and from the Christian side my friend Father Makutso. After the course the Shaykhs of the Muslims told me that it was very important for them to learn directly from the other – to learn the sources of the other – to know Judaism through Islam and to know Christianity through Islam. It’s good. It’s great because it’s our sacred text, just also to know then the text and the interpretation of the religion from the other – to know how to deal with the text of the other. After that they became more flexible, more open to discuss and to connect with the other.⁴⁴²

Eliyahu McLean comments on the passionate love of Jerusalem that sometimes leads to conflict:

Now, when you hear about the word, the term, Jerusalem, ‘Yerushalayim’, Yeh ha Kodesh, the whole world is praying, especially from the Abrahamic traditions, for Jerusalem. Right, do we have Christians in the room? Right. You pray for Jerusalem. Jews? We’re praying three times a day for the re-building of the *Beit ha Migdash*, Yerushalayim. We have some Muslims in the room, Al-Quds – the Holy City. Now the challenge is that each one of us has such a love and a passion for Jerusalem that our love and passion for Jerusalem sometimes can’t necessarily make room or include the love and passion for Jerusalem of another people and it’s not about blaming any side but we’ve noticed over the years that there is such a love and passion for Jerusalem that sometimes that gets directed to conflict over Jerusalem because of that attachment that is so central to the Abrahamic tradition.⁴⁴³

Eliyahu is describing the inauguration of the Jerusalem Hug that began as an initiative which emerged during the second Intifada in the year 2000 when, as Eliyahu relates, ‘a small group of us held a fast and prayer vigil above the Kotel, above the Western Wall in the Old City, and we created there a sacred prayer space that wasn’t there to condemn anybody but to create a space where anyone can come and share their hopes and their

⁴⁴¹ Eliyahu and Ghassan/*Stories of Hope*, Part Two

⁴⁴² Eliyahu and Ghassan/*Stories of Hope*, Part Two. Note that the use of term ‘Shaykh’ in this context refers to a respected elder person or community leader. It does not relate to Sufism.

⁴⁴³ Eliyahu/Israel Center

dreams and their fears.⁴⁴⁴ It is a remarkable testimony to the will for peace among this small group and the manner in which it attracts seemingly unlikely visitors that:

Many Arabs living in the Old city came by and shared their stories and their concerns. Israeli soldiers came by and also even participated in the circle and when that Friday was called to be a day of rage and we knew there were going to be clashes nearby between the Israeli police, people, and the Muslim worshippers after the Friday prayers, the police cleared away the whole square but they said – there was a small group of us who were gathered to pray for peace and harmony between the children of Abraham, Jews, Christians, and Muslims – and the police said everybody has to leave but they can stay (the group) ‘Who knows, maybe what they’re doing can help.’⁴⁴⁵

This became a weekly Friday vigil that continued for four years and the, ‘the seeds of that gathering morphed into an organization called Jerusalem Peacemakers.’⁴⁴⁶ The Jerusalem Hug is another event which issued from those early days and which is held annually in June with the intention of being inclusive of all those who love Jerusalem, ‘So we decided to unite the lovers of Jerusalem and we organized an event called the hug of Jerusalem; to literally form a human chain and to pray for peace around the world from the Old City of Jerusalem.’⁴⁴⁷ They succeeded in forming a chain from the Damascus Gate to the Jaffa Gate and, ‘We invited whoever wanted to come and before we knew it there were religious Jews and even settlers joining our circle, Palestinian shopkeepers joining in our circle.’⁴⁴⁸ In this and in other events organized by members of Jerusalem Peacemakers it is not easy for Palestinians to attend but Eliyahu speaks of the efforts made to include them and he notes an interesting fact, ‘We work with many Palestinian partner organizations in the West bank cities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, and Hebron and secure permits for them to come to all of our events. We have friends and partner organizations and I’m always surprised to see how much there is a hunger and yearning on the ground to meet Israelis as human beings, face to face, eye to eye.’⁴⁴⁹ Eliyahu then refers to the heavenly Jerusalem:

The very name of Jerusalem in Hebrew is Yerushalayim. ‘Yeru’ means ‘you shall see’ and ‘shalayim’ is the double form of the word ‘shalom’, so in our tradition we pray for (Hebrew) the heavenly Jerusalem, right. But if you’re opening up – any day of the week I imagine – the Jerusalem Post dot com, the website, or the New York Times, or most newspapers in the world, chances are you’re reading about conflict in

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

Jerusalem, the problems of the earthly Jerusalem. So our work is to try and bring together the heavenly and the earthly Jerusalem, to bring them a little bit closer.⁴⁵⁰

7.3 Other grass-roots peace initiatives and organizations with a religious base

There are many other individuals and groups working for peace in Israel and Palestine and the following provides a few short examples.

Ora Balha is a Jewish woman who lives in Yaffo with her husband, Ihab who is a Palestinian-Israeli Muslim-Şūfī and an initiated Shaykh. Ora is a Mevlana Şūfī who has taken *biat* with a female Shaykh of the order (Shaykha). In a recent newsletter of the Olam Qatan book store, Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf speaks of Ora and her Shaykha while describing an upcoming event:

The main focus of the weekend will be three intensive four-hour sessions in which Sheikha Khadija will be teaching the Mevlevi 'Turn'. There will also be Zikr Allah (chanting) in the tradition of our hosts, the Yashruti-Shadhulis of Acre (with the participation of members visiting from Tunisia!), and a Zikr and meals provided by Ghassan and friends, the Qādiris from Nazareth. On Shabbat afternoon I look forward to participating in the general Symposium on the Sufi Way. The details are in Hebrew, below. I expect that the event will mostly be conducted in Hebrew, although Khadija will be teaching in English. Let me add a word about Sheikha Khadija. Ora Balha is the main teacher of the 'Turn' here in Israel.⁴⁵¹

Despite many attempts, and the enthusiasm of Ora, it was not possible to arrange an interview for this study. Ora and Ihab are also very busy running their mixed Jewish and Palestinian Israeli kindergarten.

Rabbi Ron Kronish is the founder of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel. It brings together people of all faiths in regular courses designed for this purpose. Their mission is described on their website, 'The mission of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI) is to harness the teachings and values of the three Abrahamic faiths and transform religion's role from a force of division and extremism into a source of reconciliation, coexistence, and understanding. To accomplish this, we work with youth, women, and religious leaders to promote Jewish-Arab coexistence and peace-building projects.'⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ See the excerpts from the Olam Qatan newsletter in Appendix II

⁴⁵² ICCI, *Religions for Peace*, [Online]. Available at: <http://icciblog.wordpress.com/about-2/> [Last accessed: 29th July, 2013]

The principles on which Rabbi Ron Kronish and his co-workers base their work are: 'moving from dialogue to action', 'addressing the conflict', 'focus on communities rather than individuals', 'long-term programs and relationships', and 'religion as part of the solution'.⁴⁵³ Rabbi Kronish writes regularly on the ICCI blog and for the Huffington Post⁴⁵⁴ keeping supporters around the world informed of the work of the organization.

Sabeel is the Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center founded by Reverend Naim Stifan Ateek. It is a Palestinian Christian organization, 'working for justice, peace, and reconciliation in Palestine-Israel.'⁴⁵⁵ The website contains a purpose statement:

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, to promote unity among them and lead them to act for justice and peace. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on love, justice, peace, nonviolence, liberation and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word "Sabeel" is Arabic for 'the way' and also a 'channel' or 'spring' of life-giving water.⁴⁵⁶

Sabeel is particularly concerned with the oppressed and the occupied and as Christian Palestinians they relate to Jesus as having lived under similar conditions to themselves. They also work to bring more awareness to Christians and other peoples around the world of the existence of Palestinian Christians as too often the Palestinians are immediately equated with the faith of Islam.

The Sulha Peace Project, founded by the musician Gabriel Meyer, and Elias Jabur, aims to bring together Jews and Palestinians to meet as equal human beings. Inspired by an indigenous method of mediation they describe themselves as, 'a grassroots organization for the healing and reconciliation of the Children of Abraham, rooted in the spirit of the prophetic voices from the Holy Land.'⁴⁵⁷ The Sulha Peace Project was co-founded, and is directed by, Şūfī, Jewish-Şūfī, and Kabbalah inspired peace activists such as Eliyahu

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ For a list of articles written by Rabbi Kronish see Ron Kronish, *The Huffington Post* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ron-kronish/> [Last accessed: 2nd July, 2013].

⁴⁵⁵ *Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center*, [Online]. Available at: www.sabeel.org [Last accessed: 29th July, 2013].

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ "What is Sulha?" on the *Sulha Peace Project* website [Online]. Available at: <http://www.sulha.com>. [Last accessed: 30th July, 2013].

McClellan, Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, Gabriel Meyer-Halevy, Sheikh Bukhari, Rabbi Fruman, and Melilla Hellner-Eshed. Their web page contains the description:

We are a group of Israelis and Palestinians who meet regularly to encounter the other in our full humanity. Together, we demonstrate that we, the children of Abraham/Ibrahim, share a common destiny. Twelve years ago, at the height of the El Aksa intifada, when Israel and Palestine were locked into terror of the other side, the Sulha Peace Project was born. As coffee shops exploded and soldiers fired into crowds of youths, we brought Israelis and Palestinians together in a human encounter and, through wholehearted listening, we explored and strengthened the bonds that link us with each other. We've been doing it ever since.⁴⁵⁸

The short video on the website speaks to participants at one of their large outdoor events. Many of those interviewed, Palestinians and Jews, are crying as they explain that they always thought the other only wanted to kill them but that now they had actually met each other they see this was a mistaken impression and want to continue meeting.⁴⁵⁹

These are just a few examples of grass-roots peace initiatives in addition to the ones spoken of by Eliyahu above and the many more in existence.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide something of the grassroots context within which the interviewees contribute to enabling pathways of engagement between Jews and Muslims, and Christians. It is in this context that the potential of a Şūfī contribution to peace is evaluated in the conclusion to this study.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER EIGHT: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

8.1 Introduction

The present chapter serves two purposes. The first is an account of observations, discussions, and participation in events with people involved in Sufism but with whom interviews were not possible. The second purpose is to give time to the exercise of reflexivity. The former is integrated into the latter and the chapter therefore has a reflective tone. As previously noted in Chapter One,⁴⁶⁰ the reflective exercise is presented as a parallel register of reading that provides information through more than one of the human faculties of information gathering. The reflections taken from my research journal constitute a record of personal reflections and observations made during the process of the investigation. It is intended to follow in the tradition of the Şūfī practice of reflexivity which is quite closely related to the reflexive practice on subjectivity required of the qualitative researcher. I reflect on my responses and reactions to the research experience and enable a constant gauging of my intentions and subjectivity as the investigation progresses. In this way the personal notes serve several purposes: First, it constitutes the record of my reflective practice as a means of adjusting expectations and questions in the field in order to achieve greater objectivity. Simultaneously, and this may present an (intentional) paradox, it embraces and respects subjectivity as an integral narrative among narratives within the context of the investigation. Finally, the researcher's journal forms another narrative that is peripheral to the concerns of the participant narrators but significant to the readers of this investigation in situating the intentions and the progress of the researcher within the framework she has set herself and the knowledge she hopes to acquire and share. I believe it is an illusion to maintain that a researcher can stand completely outside her topic of investigation and 'peer in' to discover and report on 'what is happening'. There is a flavour of imperialism to this method of knowledge acquisition that would serve, as Foucault and Edward Said might maintain, to 'know' the other by taking control of the business of knowledge production. This may be why I struggled with the most appropriate theoretical approach to pursue. I needed to be honest in the sense of not allowing a dichotomy to arise between the theoretical requirements of the academy and my personal approach in life which is informed by my Şūfī practice. The inclusion of other modes of knowledge acquisition, by which is not only meant the methods of

⁴⁶⁰ See Chapter One, p. 33 – 34

gathering data, but the inclusion of instinct and intuition, obviously not as the foundation for statements but as the beginning of questioning and probing a problem intellectually, seemed important. In Ṣūfī teaching this would correspond to the ‘inner heart’ (*qalb*) informing the intellect (*‘aql*) and this is apparent in the interviews when participants are attempting to explain a feeling that is not immediately available to a clear intellectual definition.

I refer again to the words of Sa’diyya Shaikh⁴⁶¹ on, ‘The partial nature of human perceptions’⁴⁶² the recognition of which informs a Ṣūfī epistemology that understands the Truth as something that is revealed to the seeker of knowledge through a series of unveilings (*Kashf*) according to the state of the seeker.⁴⁶³ Shaikh adds that, ‘Ṣūfī methodology recognizes that language mediates between mystical truth and transient social realities and that such a mediatory process is inevitably dynamic and fluid.’⁴⁶⁴ The dynamics and fluidity of language in communicating knowledge gained in the field is recognized in this chapter through the inclusion of the reflective voice and in acknowledging the agency of this voice in the narratives of all the participant narrators in this study. The ‘transient social realities’ that Shaikh cites as the context within which ‘mystical truth’ reveals itself form the daily struggles of the participants who live by their faith in a deeper mystical reality.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶¹ See Chapter One, p. 21.

⁴⁶² Sa’diyya Shaikh, *Ṣūfī Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn ‘Arabī, Gender, and Sexuality*, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2012, p.115

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Shaykh Ghassan Manasra wrote a short obituary for Rabbi Froman which movingly encapsulates this. He begins with a short story to illustrate what his work with Rabbi Froman meant to him, “A Sufi sheikh was walking in the desert with one of his disciples. The disciple was talking at great length about a dispute he was having with a fellow disciple. All the while, the sheikh was listening and smiling, until finally he turned to his student with great love, his eyes filled with fondness and respect, and said: O my son, do you wish to hear the truth or that which is higher than the truth? The disciple was surprised and immediately answered: O Sheikh, from the beginning of my path with you, you have taught me that we seek the highest station, the station of truth. Are you now telling me there is something more lofty than truth? The Sheikh turned to him and said: People usually misunderstand. Most people seek their own truth, and ignore the Supreme Truth. Because the truth we seek is truth diluted with our own negative thoughts, which cultivate prejudices and various other distortions. But the Supreme Truth is the one we don’t have to seek because it is within us. Truth is the God that is present in all places. Yes, there is something that is higher than the truth of Man: reconciliation is higher. Because reconciliation is Supreme Truth itself.” He finishes the piece by saying, “I say to Rabbi Froman, from here in this world, I will continue on the path. It is hard for me to be alone here without you. Very hard. But I will not stop.” The Times of Israel, 5th March 2013, Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, “To Rabbi Froman I say, I will stay on our path” [Online] Available at: <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/it-is-hard-to-be-alone-here-without-you/> [Last accessed: 12th June, 2013]

As the 'Truth', as Shaikh uses it in the above excerpts is an absolute – she is speaking of one of the Names of God – how can this approach be transferable to an epistemic approach that is academically viable? Shaikh refers to a truth that unveils itself to the seeker and it is the partiality of the human senses – their veiled condition – that prevents seeing the truth. This posits an absolute. However, the *hadīth qudsi* that is fundamental to Ṣūfī cosmology, 'I was a Hidden Treasure and desired to be known therefore I created you that I might be known' when juxtaposed with the Ṣūfī ontological position that there is nothing but God, leads to the conclusion that God knows itself through creation. Does this mean that the idea of an absolute is a human construction and the 'truth' is better understood as the real? 'The Real' is an alternative, and often used, translation of the Name *Al-Haqq*. A seeker of knowledge through the human manifestation of its attributes, the Real seeks to know the Real? From the human perspective, at least, this indicates participation in a process of divine revelation. As this is pertinent to the practice of those interviewed it therefore seems valid for the scholar-practitioner to work with an awareness of this process which has its academic parallel in qualitative research which is a method of gathering information through an engagement with the subject that initiates a process of sequenced discovery and continuously reveals new perspectives that adjust the final conclusions.

The following begins with three anecdotal accounts of reflections prior to the field study. The first recalls a meeting in Andalusia and the reflections on Jewish-Muslim relations during my extended stay in the country that eventually progressed to an interest in pursuing this investigation. The second recalls my first meeting with Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari in England. The third tells of an unexpected meeting shortly before I flew to Israel which I include here for the remarks made by my friend and which form a succinct summary of an approach I feel to be essentially Ṣūfī and which proved to form a central view of the participant interviewees. This is followed by a reflective account of both field-studies that integrates information on Muslim Ṣūfī peace-makers in Israel with excerpts of their own accounts of their work accessed online. The gathering of cyber-data might also be viewed as a third field-study which has been ongoing throughout the investigation. I conclude with some final reflections on the emic and the etic perspectives of researching Sufism in Israel and I return to the concepts of 'mirroring' and residing in a *barzakh* that have played a critical role in the narrative analysis of the previous chapters,

and in the lives and engagement with the other of all the participants and many discussants encountered during the activities of participant observation.

8.2 The first field study

8.2.1 Prologue

May 2008, Andalucia

I am in Andalucia and a friend is visiting with her father. He is a holocaust survivor of Bergen-Belsen and wants to hear about my interest in Al-Andalus. We meet in the local bar, the only bar in a remote mountain village that has a view looking straight across the Mediterranean to Morocco. Here we sit, two Jews and a Muslim *Ṣūfī*, in a land that many centuries ago would easily have been host to a similar situation – Jews and Muslims, and Christians, working together, making immense strides in the translation of Greek philosophers, in medicine, engineering, mathematics, theology, the list goes on. Both Jewish and Muslim communities worldwide were to benefit from the advances made during this time of *convivencia*. The few mulberry trees remaining in the village are testimony to the successful silk trade pursued by the Jews in the Andalucia of those times. This all came to an end with the conquest of Al-Andalus by the Catholic monarchs, Isabel and Ferdinand, and to this day the Jews remember the pain and grief of their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula. When I visited Israel for my second field study I joined in the twenty four hour fast of Tisha B'Av, a day of mourning for suffering inflicted on the Jewish people. I spent most of the day with friends at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies attending workshops and talks about the theme of the day. The main instances of injustice and suffering that were being mourned were the destruction of the first temple, the destruction of the second temple, and the expulsion of the Jews from Al-Andalus, or Sepharad as it is known in Hebrew.

Muslims, when visiting the Alhambra or the mosque of Cordoba, are often moved to tears with nostalgia over what has been lost, and frustration at no longer being allowed to pray in the mosque which is now officially a cathedral. When I was there I stood in front of the *mihrab* and knew that if I began praying the guards would be escorting me out of the building very fast. Instead, I prayed silently and visualized the movements. Afterwards I went to a nearby Arab tea house and got talking with a group of Palestinian and Spanish Muslims. They told me that the Muslim community of Cordoba has a house just outside the city which they use as a mosque. Christians who had lived for centuries among the Muslims and Jews suddenly found that their liturgical rites were disapproved by the new rulers and

they became suspects of cultural betrayal to Christian civilization. The Inquisition made it a sin to 'Judaize' and many found their end in the *auto de fe*. Large scale population transfers from the north to the south of the country were undertaken to ensure the dismantling of the prevalent culture and the Spanish inquisition came into being. And yet this long period of *convivencia* had been the precursor of the European Renaissance and later neglected by scholars as such until recent times.

I sat with my friends in the bar, aware of the presence of history, aware that only since the death of Franco have Spanish citizens been given the freedom to follow the faith of their choice or none at all, aware that the Muslim and Jewish populations of Spain are increasing with immigration from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa and that many of those newcomers have a sense of returning home after many centuries of exile. They join a growing number of Spanish converts to Islam and to some extent to Judaism as well, although it is rare, of those who discover that their ancestors were Jewish. Although, as many stories tell, aside from the historical denial current among many of the Spanish people, there are also those who are beginning to discover that their ancestors were Muslim or Jewish and some are 'returning' to the faith that has been practiced secretly for centuries, finally realizing the origin of their family tradition of lighting candles on a Friday evening.

So I sat with my friend's father and listened while he told me about Bergen-Belsen and how he had been the only survivor in his family. I shared with him how, as a child, I had sat and listened to my own father's story of how he had been in the British regiment that had liberated Bergen-Belsen. Understandably, Jewish-Israelis are unhappy and angry at some Muslims who deny the holocaust and recent initiatives to take groups of Jewish and Palestinian-Arab Israelis to visit the sites of concentration camps in Germany, together with German groups, are having good results.⁴⁶⁶ Likewise a new development in tours of

⁴⁶⁶ This was initiated by Sheikh Bukhari. See Jerusalem Peacemakers, "Arab-Jewish Youth Delegation to Auschwitz" [Online] Available at: <http://jerusalempeacemakers.org/action-areas/peacebuilding/arab-jewish-youth-delegation-to-auschwitz/> [Accessed 15th May 2013]. The website gives the following description, 'The late Sheikh Bukhari initiated a project of sending Muslim, Christian and Jewish Youth to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in order to help cultivate compassion and awareness of the effects of incitement and delegitimization. On November 1-10, 2010 Jerusalem PeaceMakers sent a group of Arab and Jewish Israeli youth to join youth from Germany, Switzerland, Poland and Italy at the Bearing Witness Retreat at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. The youth encounter was a part of the larger annual retreat led by the Zen Peacemaker community. The event included reading names of victims of the Shoah, prayers from different traditions, listening circles, chanting traditional melodies in the children's barracks, a forgiveness ceremony. Even with all sides coming with feelings of victimhood, each side attempted to understand the pain of the other. All the youth came to feel a shared humanity, agreeing that rather than deepening the wounds with violence, we should create places of healing.'

Jerusalem and Yad Vashem with mixed groups is providing necessary lessons that include both narratives.⁴⁶⁷ While living in Andalucia I became ever more interested in the Jewish-Muslim relations of medieval times and as I was also studying the work of Ibn 'Arabī and visiting some of the places where the Shaykh al-Akbar lived and worked, contemporaneous with other masters such as Moses Maimonides, Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and Ibn Tufayl,⁴⁶⁸ I began to consider the potential value of this history of *convivencia* to interfaith dialogue in Israel. I was unaware at the time of the emerging grass-roots initiatives in Israel and the Jewish interest in Sufism. Shortly afterwards I began the present research project and began preparing for the first field study in Israel.

February 2009

Radio Salaam Shalom⁴⁶⁹ in Bristol, UK is more than a radio station; it is also an interfaith encounter and an organizer of events pertinent to Jewish-Muslim relations. As a guest speaker over five broadcasts I worked together with Tal and came to appreciate his friendship and perspective. Tal is Israeli and he was an enthusiastic member of the Radio Salaam Shalom team working together with Javed on the Abraham Nexus programme that was sent out on Saturday nights. The station invited Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari to speak in Bristol during their UK speaking tour. It was a small gathering of Muslims, Jews, and Quaker Christians and after Eliyahu and Sheikh Bukhari finished their talk and answered questions we all joined in a simple *dhikr* led by Sheikh Bukhari. While enjoying refreshments I engaged in conversation with them both and announced my intentions to do a field-study in Israel. They were both very encouraging and open-armed in their hospitality. When Sheikh Bukhari invited me to visit him he said, 'My home is your home' and immediately I am reminded of friends in Andalucia saying the same. I will always be grateful that I had the chance to meet Shaykh Bukhari at this event and I was deeply saddened at the news of his passing. When I met Eliyahu again in Jerusalem there was a feeling of old friends going about the same business. Before my departure for Israel I had

⁴⁶⁷ There is an article about these trips in Haaretz by Khaled Diab, "Learning about the Holocaust – in Arabic" [Online] Available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/learning-about-the-holocaust-in-arabic-1.465515?block=true> [Last accessed: 21st September 2012]. "Building understanding and compassion is exactly what the Tiyyul-Rihla trip to Yad Vashem is about. 'The idea behind the initiative is to expose each side to the other side's narrative, and to have a very deep conversation about it,' explains Israeli journalist and activist Nir Boms, one of the idea's originators."

⁴⁶⁸ The Islamic philosopher, Ibn Tufayl (d. 1185), who lived in Al-Andalus and wrote the philosophical allegory *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, (Living Son of the Watchful) intended to prove that philosophical reasoning reaches the same conclusions as revelation.

⁴⁶⁹ Radio Salaam Shalom is a voluntary venture run by Jews and Muslims of Bristol, UK

learnt that Eliyahu had studied for a while under my own Shaykh when he was exploring Islam.

May 2011, Devon

Before leaving for the field study I spent a few days visiting family and had the unexpected privilege of meeting an 'ancient' (he's in his eighties) Jungian therapist. We 'clicked' immediately and had a lively conversation about aspects of Jung's work. We also spoke about my thesis and he not only showed great interest but also suggested to his daughter and her husband (documentary film makers) that they go to Israel to make a documentary on the many stories of cooperation towards peace that are evident there. As a Jungian therapist he was very familiar with the Şūfī tradition and while looking round his marvellous library in the loft of an old barn I came across many of the books I have read, or am in the process of reading, as well as many more I would have loved to have read then and there ensconced in one of the comfortable sofas that gave this library the feeling of a place to relax with the wisdom of masters. What made the greatest impression on me though was his comment that the Jews and the Muslims are like mirrors of each other – as indeed we all are – and they only need to see their reflections in the other to begin the process toward peace. This statement was spoken from both a Şūfī and a Jungian perspective, but most importantly, he was speaking from the perspective of his own Jewish heritage. I have thought of that meeting often during my research and his wise words have often reminded me that I too am 'looking in a mirror'.

8.2.2 Initial impressions

May 2011, Arrival

As the plane touched down in Ben Gurion Airport, Tel Aviv, filled mainly with members of the Ḥassidic community of Stamford Hill, I knew that I was entering a country of which I had no experience and yet it also felt familiar due to its centrality in the Bible stories of childhood, or its constant presence in the press. Should I be nervous as I stepped into the completely unknown or should I relax into a comfortable fiction of an assumed knowledge that would no doubt be characterized by ignorance of the reality on the ground? I cultivated an attitude of being open to what I met without any firm expectations.

No matter how prepared one may be in terms of academic reading on the subject of Israel and Palestine nothing can prepare one for the experience of actually being immersed in its complexities. Any purely textual examination of Sufism as a potential partner in the

business of reconciliation, justice, and peace would miss the many nuances of individual and group histories, the ambience of discord and sacrality at holy sites, the perplexity at strange juxtapositions of attitude and practice in engagement with the other, and the paradox of two such closely related faiths as Judaism and Islam being largely unable to see their similarities. One book did give me some idea of the complexity of the situation I was entering and the one which had the greatest impact in terms of emotional perception was not an academic work but an account by the correspondent, Yossi Klein-Halevi, of his journey into Islam and Christianity in an effort to understand and partake in their spirituality.⁴⁷⁰ This is the work that Sara and Ya'qub mention and of which Sara comments, 'I found his book extraordinary. It's very open-eyed and yet it's palpable with some kind of longing.'⁴⁷¹ Halevi's description of a *dhikr* he attended is powerful both for the experience he is describing but also for those Jewish men attending in the midst of the ongoing conflict.

From the airport I took a *cherut*, a twelve-seater taxi that takes each passenger to their destination. I was the last on the route and had a very thorough tour of the suburbs of Jerusalem on the way but I finally arrived, close to midnight, to a warm welcome from my new landlady, a good meal, and lots of questions about my planned field-study. From my room I could see the lights of Jordan in the distance.

8.2.3 Abrahamic tour of Jerusalem

Day 1

My first day was Shabbat and therefore spent in the home and with neighbours for the first Shabbat meal. This was the first time I had celebrated Shabbat and I was deeply moved by the ritual of blessing the bread and wine and the chanting of prayers which accompanied it.

Day 3

I had, initially, found the ubiquitous presence of armed soldiers a challenge when, on my third day I visited the Kotel, the Western Wall, and they were everywhere. Just before my arrival in Israel celebrations of the Day of Independence had taken place. On the day of my visit to the Wall it was the day on which the Palestinians remembered the same day but for them it was the Nakba (catastrophe). Israeli Arabs were no longer allowed to mark this day and so security in the city was heavy. I don't know how I managed to stop worrying about the military presence but it happened very quickly that I began seeing the human beings

⁴⁷⁰ Klein-Halevi/ *At the Entrance to the Garden*.

⁴⁷¹ Sara/Appendix I.

behind the uniforms and guns. They were mainly very young and fulfilling their national service. During my first Shabbat meal with the neighbours I had spoken with one of their daughters who had just finished her service and I was beginning to hear from many parents that they didn't feel truly Israeli until their children had served in the army and they had feared for their lives the whole time. The perception that Israel is permanently in danger from the Arab world and that Israel is very capable of defending itself was very strong.

Day 4

The following day I joined the Abraham Tour with a small group led by Eliyahu McClean, an ordained Jewish peace-seeker with Şūfī connections. Now I was to experience Eliyahu at work as he took us on a tour of Jerusalem visiting peace-makers and those involved in interfaith dialogue. Eliyahu conducts these tours on a weekly basis and we began the day at a grocery store in East Jerusalem to meet the owner who was busy serving vegetables to his customers. An elderly Şūfī, he radiated good will and with a beaming smile he spoke of love and radiated warmth. I felt I was in the presence of a person with a very large heart. His main emphasis in what he told us was that no-one should seek to blame anyone but instead we needed remember that we are all human beings and to treat each other as we would have others treat us. Next we visited a Şūfī in the welfare office. He belonged to the Shadiliyya Şūfī order and works as a professor of Islamic studies at the Al-Quds University. He spoke of his pain at the occupation of his village in 1948 and at not being able to move around the country as he wished. He doesn't speak of Israel or Palestine but of the Holy Land and tells us that the mystics of all the faiths speak of the Holy Land – *Eretz ha Kodesh, Ard al-Anbiya, al-ard al-muqadassa*. He speaks of the Abrahamic faiths as one religion with three messages or one book in three editions. This is very much after my own way of thinking. I asked him about the practice of *dhikr* and he replied that his order has no communal *dhikr*. The members are all professors and educated people who engage in discussion and debate and learning. Their mission is as logical thinkers. Muslims are one nation and the mission of his order is to interpret and give the true path of Islam. They gather regularly for *Şoħbet* when they address ethical questions and give a fatwa (opinion) on various issues. He also attended the World Conference of Imams and Rabbis with many other religious leaders from Israel and Palestine. On asking about his work for peace and speaking with the Jews he said a ceasefire (*hudna*) is necessary. The vocabulary and concepts of conflict resolution are all there in Islam but he feels that negotiation cannot be spoken of when the sides are not equal. He said 1200 mosques have been demolished by

the Israelis and of 12 million Palestinians half are refugees. He claims that Palestinians are paying the price of the holocaust. He is against all aggression and injustice and wants to see changes in the plight of the Palestinians such as the children not having enough schools or not being able to get to schools outside of Jerusalem. He claims they have the 'strong hand of the Israelis on their neck.' He wants the world to know the truth. Peaceful protesters were injured and killed on Nakba day. The *dhikr* in his order takes the form of continuous remembrance of Allah through all of daily life – as scholar, worker, writer, 'all the time I am living in God'. He also said, 'Respect all of creation with wisdom and good speech'. This was something he emphasized several times during the visit as being essential both to a good practice of Islam and to achieving justice.⁴⁷²

We then went on to the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer within the Old City walls and attended the noon prayer held daily in the church. There, in a circle behind the altar we said a prayer, sang a hymn, and recited a Psalm before speaking with the Pastor about his work for peace. Our group consisted of several Jews, two Muslims, and a few Christians. After the service we joined the pastor in his office. His honesty impressed me when he spoke of the disproportionate Christian ownership of property in Jerusalem in relation to the size of the Christian community. He mentioned, very movingly, that the Christian heritage in Jerusalem has many shadows, its dark side, and how important he felt it was that this be acknowledged, that the heritage of most communities in Jerusalem has its shadows. This is an important point that we not only listen to the pain of the other but that each community admits their culpability to aspects of the conflict. Acknowledging the pain of the other is the beginning of friendship in the endeavour for peace.

We stopped for lunch in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. While eating falafel and pitta in the sunlit square I am aware that the ground beneath us, the buildings around us, are the fertile ground of history, myth, and even conspiracy theories, the volume of which probably beats any other plot of land on the planet! Life goes on as usual in this extraordinary city! But 'usual' includes a lot of pain. It is impossible for me to restrict myself solely to academic work and the sober collection of field data. This is a personal journey that runs parallel to my research but interweaves with it and informs it in a mutual exchange. There is a spiritual process that is alive and unfolding on my journey and it is about experiencing the

⁴⁷² This is the practice of *'adab* which means courtesy but in *Ṣūfī* terms one can speak of spiritual courtesy. It requires a constant attention to one's behaviour, reactions, and intentions in respect of the other. It is also a tool by which lessons can be learnt about the self in the mirror of the other.

enrichment of my spiritual path through an engagement with Judaism. The same experience that the Jewish interviewees had in their engagement with Sufism was happening to me in the other direction, meeting in a space of mutual benefit. I am also aware of how much I miss the presence of Sheikh Bukhari.

Earlier in the day we had passed the house of Sheikh Bukhari and Eliyahu had stopped outside to speak a little about his close relationship to him. They had worked together for years and Eliyahu was missing his company a lot and said that whenever he felt the difficulty and struggle that inevitably accompanies peace-work he would hear the voice of Sheikh Bukhari urging him to keep going. When I interviewed Avraham in Tel Aviv later during this field study he remarked that, 'When Sheikh Bukhari died all of us cried because there is no one in Jerusalem now who can replace him, you know, because Jerusalem is very important for us. Sheikh Bukhari lived there and we started studying with him.'⁴⁷³ Sheikh Bukhari was mentioned with love and respect by all the participant interviewees and I am very grateful that I had the chance to meet him previously when he and Eliyahu visited Bristol and he expressed great enthusiasm over my plans to do a field-study in Israel and invited me to visit his home with open arms.

Finally we visited Rabbi Daniel Sperber in his beautiful house in the Jewish Quarter which is attached to a Yeshiva. He came originally from Wales where he ran a refugee centre for Jewish children from Germany in 1939. He has been in Jerusalem for 45 years and is very well known for his work on Halakha. He was also at the World Conference of Rabbis and Imams and has had many interfaith meetings with Anglicans, (the secretary of Rowan Williams was just taking his leave as we arrived), Hindus, Sikhs and other faiths. He served as a Rabbi in Calcutta in the 60's and is presently writing a paper on the Jewish legal approach to Hinduism and the mis-translation of various Sanskrit words into 'gods'. He works for the Association of Religion and Conservation (ARC), he is also a vegetarian. He was a very close friend of Shaykh Bukhari and says of him that you could see the spirituality, the Presence in his eyes. He said he was a true *tzadik*. Now in the house of Rabbi Sperber, it was clear in the warmth of his voice that he had appreciated his friendship with Sheikh Bukhari. However, of his interreligious work, Rabbi Sperber said, 'It is very frustrating because the politicians get in the way and muck it up.' He went on to emphasize the importance of language and translation in talking with other faiths and as an example he spoke of the different approach to the trinity held in Orthodox and Coptic churches. He

⁴⁷³ Elkayam, Appendix I.

was gentle, humorous and inspiring. His comment on the limitations imposed by politicians on the grass-roots peace process and track two interfaith diplomacy, is mirrored by Eliyahu's concerns reported in the previous chapter.

This had been a day on the streets of Jerusalem and this is where it matters in grass-roots peace-making. It was a 12 hour day but well worth it. We met many people and heard different perspectives on the situation here.

8.2.4 A Şūfī conference

Day 20

I continued to have interesting casual conversations with people I met on the buses, at cafes, at Shabbat meals, or with visitors to the house where I was staying, all of which contributed to the impression of a complex society with multiple identities and narratives, both personal and group narratives. I began conducting interviews and found everyone I spoke to welcoming and helpful. Then I heard that there was to be a Şūfī conference in Baqa al-Garbia. This is an Arab-Palestinian town in Israel and about a two hour drive from Jerusalem. I wasn't sure how to get there as I could find no route on the bus timetable. However, the following day I visited Rabbi Ron Kronish⁴⁷⁴ in his office on Emek Refaim. Rabbi Kronish is the founder of the Interreligious Coordinating Council of Israel and he and his staff offer courses that bring together Arabs and Jews. I had attended a workshop offered by Rabbi Kronish and his wife in the UK. When I mentioned the conference, Rabbi Kronish was on the telephone immediately and within five minutes had organized a lift for me with an historian from the Hebrew University who was also attending the conference. This was yet another instance of the willingness to help that I encountered all the time, and especially among the network of Şūfīs and peace-makers, that gave me a sense of being welcomed into the network.

⁴⁷⁴ The ICCR website, previously mentioned in Chapter Seven, introduces Rabbi Kronish with the following words, "Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish is also a noted rabbi, educator, author, lecturer and speaker. He received his B.A. from Brandeis University, rabbinic ordination from Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, and doctorate in Education from Harvard University. Dr. Kronish has published articles and essays on Jewish politics, faith communities and the peace process, as well as education, culture and contemporary issues in America and Israel. He has represented ICCI at the Vatican and at many international conferences, and is frequently consulted by media representatives for background information and briefings. He has lived in Jerusalem for the past three decades. He currently blogs for the Times of Israel, and the Huffington Post." The Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel [Online]. Available at: http://english.icci.org.il/index.php?Itemid=56&id=17&option=com_content&task=view [Last accessed: 14th June 2013]

The conference was titled, 'In the Footsteps of Sufism: History, Trends, and Praxis' and took place at Al-Qasemi College. The director and staff of the college are Şūfis but most of the students are not. There were several Jewish-Israeli scholars speaking and to my delight the first people I met were Avi and Sara. I arranged with Avi to meet in Tel Aviv on the same day that I would also be visiting Rachel. I interviewed Sara during my second visit.

It was good to be present at the conference in a gathering of Muslims and Jews but was there another feeling, especially among the students, that I failed to notice? Sara remarked later during her interview, 'I have a feeling that for Muslims generally speaking, and Muslim Şūfis also, there is a threat, something threatening about Israelis who want to pick up Şūfī teaching and Şūfī dancing, there is something threatening there, 'Oh here they come again. They want to possess us'.⁴⁷⁵ There is some ambiguity here that appears to express the challenges to Palestinian identity in a political situation that denies them full self-expression and autonomy of decision-making in many areas of their lives. However, in contrast to this, the reception of Sara's translation of Şūfī texts into Hebrew was one of great appreciation for the interest in Muslim culture, 'I was astonished! The first celebration was done by Baqa al-Ghabia, the Muslim academy, which is very interesting you know because they are pious, they are pious Muslims. And they invited me and I even have this wooden plaque that they did for me with my name. So it was out of gratitude that something precious in the Muslim culture was brought out into the open.'⁴⁷⁶

Days 22, 23, 24

Previous to the conference, I had met and interviewed Ya'qub. In the last few days of my field study he invited me to attend the classes on the Baal Shem Tov with Menachem Kallus, author of *Pillars of Prayer*.⁴⁷⁷ During my second visit I attended these teaching sessions regularly and especially enjoyed the critical rigour with which all those present approached the text, unafraid to argue and debate. This kind of engagement with a text keeps it alive and I found the same approach to the Torah.

On the day before my departure I joined the Jerusalem Circle *şoḥbet*. Turkish coffee, music, discussion and prayer – in this gathering I was more 'inside' than 'outside' and this

⁴⁷⁵ Sara/Appendix I

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Kallus, Menachem, (translator and annotator), *Pillar of Prayer: Guidance in Contemplative Prayer, Sacred Study, and the Spiritual Life, from the Baal Shem Tov and his Circle*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 2011). Special edition commemorating the Besht's 250th Yahrzeit. Spiritual Affinities Series, series editor, Rabbi Dr. Aubrey L. Glazer. See Appendix II for news and notes of this book in the Olam Qatan newsletter especially on the epilogue which addresses the connections between Sufism and Hasidism.

gained a symbolic expression when, on my last Shabbat, I was invited to light the Shabbat candles.

On my return back to the UK, I spoke to my Shaykh and shared the experiences of my first field-study. When I told him about my feeling of connection with the Jewish tradition he simply said, 'That's because it's where your roots are.' With this I understood him to be acknowledging the debt that Islam, and Christianity, owe to Judaism, the first of the 'three books' of the Abrahamic traditions.

8.3 The second field study in Israel

8.3.1 Prologue

Ramadan was approaching and although this might not be the best time to travel, or to seek interviews, I needed to return to Israel. I had transcribed the interviews and needed more. Despite the strong connection I felt to the interviewees there were, nevertheless, sufficient areas of difference to maintain objectivity. I remain an outsider in most respects of the lives and challenges of the interviewees. It is mainly the Ṣūfī connection that gives me the sense of a common aim among the groups under study. One virtue of the Israelis that I admire and which proved very helpful for the investigation is their ability to talk effortlessly and to engage wholeheartedly in debate. This had two aspects: First, it meant that the decision to allow the narrators the greatest possible autonomy in their choice of subject matter to narrate was working well, and second, in study meetings and other conversations, I greatly admired the Jewish Israeli's willingness to ask questions of their own tradition and scriptures and to argue different interpretations. This was something I was to encounter regularly in the second field study and which gave me the opportunity to learn and to consider my own approach of critical examination of the diverse narratives I heard but also of my own relationship to the Abrahamic scriptures.

8.3.2 Praying and studying

General reflections

For my second field study I found accommodation in an apartment with one other woman and three men of differing religious orientations within their Jewish practice but they were all sympathetic to my research. Shabbat was celebrated every week and I was invited to participate fully including invitations to friend's houses for Shabbat meals. The first question I was asked on arrival, half teasing, was whether I was going to convert to

Judaism. I asked if it was possible to be a Muslim-Jew at which there was laughter. I was however, becoming ever more aware that that my own faith was being enriched by my engagement with Judaism.

Shortly after my arrival it was the day of the Tisha B'Av fast. As I was now staying with friends who kept the twenty-four hour fast I decided to join them and we spent most of the day at the Pardes Institute partaking in various workshops on the meaning of mourning. This second field-study was to be marked by participation in study circles, such as the weekly one with Menachem Kallus, and in regular Shabbat and synagogue attendance including the very lively and moving Kabbalah Shabbat at Neva Tehila described in Chapter Four. There was also plenty of opportunity to speak with the general public when I accompanied Ya'qub to the Friday morning *Shouk* where he sold music and books, many with a *Ṣūfī* theme.

In addition to completing more interviews there were also disappointments when, despite great willingness and many phone calls, meetings with Ora and Ihab Balha and Sheikh Ghassan Manasra became too difficult due to their very busy Ramadan schedules of hospitality to family and friends. Ghassan was now living in Nazareth after the difficulties he and his son had suffered in Jerusalem. One of my regrets concerning the field-studies is that I was unable to spend time in Nazareth. Future research on Sufism in Israel, from the Muslim perspective, would certainly include time spent in Nazareth.

8.3.3 Jerusalem

Most of my time was spent in Jerusalem with short visits to Tel Aviv and Baqa al-Ghabia. As Jerusalem, and its status as a sacred city for three faiths, is central to many political negotiations and held in the hearts of many as a core historical and metaphorical focus of faith, my final reflections before concluding are therefore from within Jerusalem.

So often through time Jerusalem has been sought as a healer, a fount of sacred wholeness and yet she has been repeatedly wounded and deeply scarred by those who plead for her blessings. Her devotees maintain a deep emotional connection to her promise even when this fails to manifest, and so they project her healing potential, that is so intimately connected with their hopes of renewal, into another world for which the earthly Jerusalem becomes a metaphor. Thus the celestial Jerusalem is born. One might ascend to this city of the Real but not before visiting, at least imaginally, the city of stone and blood. However, it

is necessary to return from that visit and to bring the city of peace back to earth in the transformed heart. When enough people are capable of this journey, that is both an ascent and a descent, then a re-integration of the celestial with the earthly is possible and Jerusalem becomes the wounded healer.

The scriptural images of the celestial Jerusalem are powerful and abiding and the sacrality of Jerusalem imbues each of the Abrahamic faiths in distinct but overlapping ways. As a researcher I need to reflect on the extent to which those images might compromise the interviews I conduct. I cannot claim complete objectivity; memories arise of my grandmother, an Anglican Christian, telling me stories of Jerusalem as a child and saying that when every Jew has returned to Jerusalem then Jesus will return, and of my time as a teenager singing in the church choir and chanting the Psalms. My imagination is therefore informed by both a Christian and a Muslim view of Jerusalem with the latter having greater strength since my acceptance of Islam. The interviewees, however, are all Jewish and it was into that world of faith and metaphor that I entered as a guest and in which I felt increasingly comfortable, no doubt assisted by our common *Ṣūfī* paths but also felt in speaking with other Jewish-Israelis and in celebrating Shabbat at the invitation of neighbours and new friends. The sense of belonging to one *ummah* echoed my experience at Radio Salaam Shalom in Bristol and in the Jewish-Muslim dialogue group during the same period. Nevertheless, this is not a sentiment felt by many and it would be naïve to believe otherwise.

Many of the Jewish *Ṣūfīs* I spoke to see the building of the third Temple as something which takes place in the heart, a metaphor for clearing the space within where God resides. The scholar, Algis Uzdavynis,⁴⁷⁸ in a fascinating account, even speaks of Mecca coming to Jerusalem, the original *qibla*, the direction of prayer, for Muslims. I'm not sure what I think about that but I know how 'right' it felt to pray *fajr* in Jerusalem together with a Jewish friend facing the Old City because that was also the direction of Mecca from where we were standing. I remember Avi speaking of the symbiotic relationship between Judaism and Islam and I become aware that this symbiosis is happening within me in my experience of Jerusalem. In no way does this compromise my own faith any more than the participants I interviewed felt their Jewish faith was compromised by their *Ṣūfī* affiliations, rather, it felt

⁴⁷⁸ Algis Uzdavynis, *Ascent to Heaven In Islamic and Jewish Mysticism*, (London: The Mattheson Trust, 2011), pp. 168 – 173.

enriched, as Paul also stated that his Jewish faith was enriched by the encounter with Islam.

Reconciliation work is inherently subjective as it touches a person's sense of identity⁴⁷⁹ and while history undoubtedly plays a significant role in the causes of conflict nevertheless, it is individual and group memory that determines actions and feelings in the present moment. Memory and the emotional and active response ensuing from memory are subjective incidents that accompany the historical consciousness and the contemporary 'enlivenment' of both conflict and peace-seeking. Language in all its registers attaches to memory, emotion, and action, and in listening to the diverse narratives of past and present in Israel – the Holy Land – Eretz Yisrael – Palestine – *'Ard al-Anbiya* – the Land of the Prophets, there is a responsibility to respect the position of the other and to listen.

8.4 Conclusion and Final Reflections

8.4.1 Emic and etic perspectives on researching Sufism in Israel

Being an 'insider' here refers to the fact that I belong to a traditional Şūfī order that is open to all seekers, but I am simultaneously an 'outsider' in that I am neither Jewish nor Israeli. As a Şūfī I relate closely to much of what the interviewees speak about concerning the Şūfī path while, at the same time, I listen with great interest but somewhat apart from their experiences as Israeli Jews and Muslims. However, I once attended a Jewish-Muslim dialogue group that was run by a Jewish woman trained in the method of compassionate listening. Al-Andalus was spoken of and the Jewish members of the group showed a great interest in its history and a desire to visit Andalucía. Both the Jewish and the Muslim members of the dialogue group expressed nostalgia for what is perceived by both faith communities as a 'Golden Age'. Although of differing opinions and diverse experience, all of us likewise felt a deep sadness for the situation in Israel and Palestine today. The responses of the Jewish and Muslim members of the dialogue group to experienced problems such as anti-semitism and Islamophobia was more than sympathetic. They expressed an understanding and sympathy rooted in the experience of their own people over generations. Something that I now term 'spiritual interaction' was happening. In those moments I felt a sense of belonging together that has remained with me, a feeling that 'your people are my people' that I believe characterizes the power of the transformative action of seeing 'self' and 'other' as interdependent and which is a part of Şūfī practice.

⁴⁷⁹ More is said on issues of identity in Chapter Nine.

That sense of belonging grew stronger over the period of my field study and when I reflect on the reason for this it becomes perplexing. Surely I should have felt alienated, even scared, at the presence of soldiers everywhere, all carrying weapons. Or exasperated at some of the difficulties encountered trying to organize interviews with ever more individuals suggested to me.⁴⁸⁰ After several phone calls the interviews almost happened, only to be scuppered at the last minute. Or outraged at some of the opinions to be heard from those less open to meeting the other. But none of this was the case as I was overwhelmed by the warmth and sincerity of the people I met and the dedicated individuals I interviewed. Their help opened up possibilities for further potential interviewees and wherever I went – celebrating Shabbat with neighbours and with friends, attending study meetings and the conference, or simply chatting with people on the bus – the welcome was always genuine. When half a bus is concerned to help in giving you directions to a destination, when even an IDF soldier with very right-wing persuasions concedes that *Şūfis*, ‘Seem to be quite decent Arabs’ then, although the awareness of the conflict and the suffering didn’t leave me, I very rapidly lost my fear of encountering censure due to my faith.⁴⁸¹

I gained a strong impression during the interviews of engaging with individuals who were truly *sulūk* (travellers, single – *salik*) on a journey of discovery. But this was something more than the traditional struggle with the *nafs* on the *Şūfī* path. In my perception the attempt to grasp realities was palpable as was the striving to define meanings that sometimes remained elusive to the lexical grasp of English, Hebrew, or Arabic – and probably to any human language – when attempting to speak of the ineffable. A sense of communion between that which has emerged from both traditions and yet transcends all form and institutionalization was felt by the participants and yet gave rise to some frustration – even resignation – in the face of suspicion and scepticism from others and in the face of a conflict so much in need of an inclusive world-view for its resolution.

8.4.2 Residing in the *barzakh*

In Israel I became immersed in that historical consciousness so apparent in both Arab and Jewish Israelis that brings the ancient past into direct contemporary relevance. I had heard of this in a radio podcast interview with Yossi Klein Halevi and now I was experiencing it in

⁴⁸⁰ For example, Ora and Ihab Balha, or the popular singers and composers, Sheva who integrate *Şūfī* material into their lyrics

⁴⁸¹ My appearance does not meet the usual expectations of how a Muslim woman looks and although I dress modestly – I was sometimes teased as looking ‘Haredi’ because I wear long skirts in summer – I don’t cover my hair.

the daily life of Jerusalem. The Patriarchs, Prophets, Sages, and Saints walk the streets and come into the homes and their presence is felt around the many shrines and tombs which are also often painful reminders of more recent history. Political realities prevent access to holy sites to one or another group and are sometimes heavily guarded by the IDF. But the ancient histories of the peoples who have lived here through time remain alive in the hearts of the present-day population and are pivotal to the way life is lived in the Holy Land today and to decisions made in the political process that seeks a solution to the conflict. That Arabs and Jews also have a history of creative engagement with each other in the Middle East is often concealed behind a cloud of forgetfulness that blurs memory. There are many instances though when that cloud clears and one sees in individuals and groups an enriching relationship that awaits re-discovery by the wider population. I also heard stories of hate and misunderstanding and tendencies to define the self by demonizing the other. Historical facts, trans-historical narratives, and the complex politics of Europe, the United States, and the Middle East, form a tangled ball with threads of sacred inspiration, triumphalism and resentment, deep pain and loss, and a polarization of the facts on the ground.

In response to a question about identity in Israel as a different notion and a different experience to elsewhere, Yossi replies, 'I think it begins with a relationship to history ...'⁴⁸² He explains:

That's not only true for Israel; it's very true for the Middle East. Events that happened a hundred or two hundred years ago are considered virtually contemporary because the extended memory of Jews and Arabs goes back, a contiguous memory, to millennia. So the strength of that experience is that you don't feel cut off. Your reality tends to be pretty defined. The obvious negative expression of that is that you can get boxed in to the past and your options can be very narrow.⁴⁸³

In order to widen those options he suggests, 'That our challenge here, for those of us who live within an historical consciousness, is to prove that one can honour the past and be in dialogue with the past but not be imprisoned by it. That, I think, is really the challenge of Arabs and Jews in this conflict.'⁴⁸⁴ Yossi explains that part of his reason for undertaking the journey into Islam and Christianity was, 'To try to understand, really, how other

⁴⁸² Yossi Klein Halevi, "Thin Places, Thick Realities" broadcast on *On Being* with Christa Tippett [Online]. Available at: <http://www.onbeing.org/program/thin-places-thick-realities/14> [Last accessed: 29th July, 2013].

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

communities here experience the same history and the same events. In a sense, I think that our reality is a kind of a Rashoman and it's not necessarily that there are different facts but there are such radically different interpretations of those same facts.⁴⁸⁵ To enter the space of the other and to maintain integrity in one's own faith and sense of identity in a situation of conflict involves, as has been seen, holding the tensions of in-between, of living in a *barzakh*. I saw this in so many of the people I spoke to and I came to the realization of how simultaneously painful and joyful this space can be and how necessary it is to any successful engagement with the other for conflict transformation whether that is addressed to a transformation of the self or explicitly to the bid for peace. I felt the presence of love and I came away knowing that there can be no transformation of the situation there if you are pro one side and contra the other. Of course it is possible to point out obvious injustices but the peacemaker is pro-peace for the benefit of all.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

PART THREE: CONCLUSION

CHAPTER NINE: THE OTHER VOICE

9.1 Recurrent Themes

This investigation has asked whether the practice of Sufism among Jews and Muslims in Israel has the potential to contribute to reconciliation and conflict transformation. It has studied Şūfī inspired individuals and groups among the Jewish-Israeli population and assessed the measure of their success in creating pathways of engagement between Jews and Muslims in Israel. This has been presented as an alternative approach to studying conflict transformation insofar as the interviewees are not members of peace groups but nevertheless effect a meaningful engagement with Muslim Şūfīs through their practice. Their activities have been contextualized as part of the many initiatives working for peace as constituting a voice issuing from the people on the ground who are active in Jewish-Muslim engagement and interreligious encounters. It is not presumed that this voice speaks in unison concerning political directions in solving the conflict but it does express a desire for peace beginning with engagement with the other and the use of local resources. I refer again to the comments of Nathan Funk and Abdul Aziz Said, previously cited,⁴⁸⁶ on the failure of large, internationally applied schemes for conflict resolution. They maintain that:

While ambitious and multi-faceted peace operations have helped stabilize deeply fractured societies and reduce direct violence few have proved capable of addressing root causes of conflict or sustainably empowering the local population. Critics of contemporary stabilization and reconstruction missions have observed that the top-down nature of major international missions mirrors imbalances within the larger world order, and frequently results in a low-quality or “stalled” peace.⁴⁸⁷

I suggest that a great deal is lost when the experts on the ground are not consulted for their view in official peace negotiations.

Based on the data gathered and the method of discourse analysis, which has pursued an epistemic dialogue with the aid of an intertextual conversation, my conclusion is therefore that the work of the participants in this study does demonstrate a potential for enabling pathways of engagement between Jews and Muslims. There is no intention here to claim Sufism as a remedy for all, that would be unrealistic, but it is evident from this

⁴⁸⁶ See Chapter Two, p. 48 where the proposal of this study that local voices for peace are given greater agency in high-level negotiations is first discussed.

⁴⁸⁷ Nathan C. Funk and Abdul Aziz Said, “Localizing Peace: An Agenda for Sustainable Peacebuilding” in *Peace and Conflict Studies*, Volume 17, Number 1, Spring 2010, Special Issue: “Peacebuilding, Reconciliation, and Transformation: Voices from the Canada-EU Conflict Resolution Student Exchange Consortium”, p. 102

study that it contributes to a grass-roots movement for peace that consists of diverse initiatives and citizen diplomacy within Israel, Palestine, and internationally, that act as a groundswell of irenic intentions. This has an impact on political givens in a subversive manner in as far as the voice for peaceful co-existence is able to break down barriers of resistance to an acknowledgement that the narrative of the other has validity. The political, cultural, ideological, and social factors that resist such an acknowledgement pose constant difficulties for those who strive for a betterment of Jewish-Muslim-Christian, Israeli-Palestinian relations. But as the promoters of narratives that have a destructive effect on the peace process increase, so the Şūfis and other peace-makers deconstruct those narratives by demonstrating the possibility of peace through action on the ground in the creation of relationships that many others may find startling and unusual.⁴⁸⁸ This is a point made by Eliyahu McLean in Chapter Seven. This concluding chapter elucidates the grounds for maintaining a positive answer to the thesis question and the manner in which it sees the possibility of its success and its implications to the question of Sufism as an irenic practice.

The subsidiary question of this study which asks whether the activities of Derekh Avraham and other Jewish parties with an engagement in Şūfī practice constitute a continuation of medieval spiritual encounters and engagement between scholar-practitioners of Jewish and Islamic mysticism in Al-Andalus and Fustāt, can only be partially answered in the positive in view of the many comments from the interviewee-narrators that refer constantly back to their perceived heritage from medieval times. It should, however be noted once again that scholarship and popular perceptions of Jewish-Muslim relations in the medieval Middle-East raise controversy over the nature of the *convivencia* and caution is advised here in applying the term ‘Golden Age’. I refer back to Chapter Three of this study where it is noted that the achievements of the Muslim and the Jewish populations of Islamic Spain were real and of lasting benefit to ever widening circles but that they must be seen relative to the context of Muslim political and cultural hegemony and not portrayed as a utopia. It also needs to be noted that more research is required to establish the extent to which Jewish and Islamic mysticism found a fruitful spiritual engagement through the scholar-practitioner mystics.

⁴⁸⁸See Marc Gopin, *Bridges Across an Impossible Divide: The Inner Lives of Arab and Jewish Peacemakers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). This book and the accompanying short films which are available on You Tube present the partnerships between Jewish and Muslim peace activists as ‘unusual’. Eliyahu McLean and Sheikh Abdul Aziz Bukhari are also interviewed in this work.

The themes that emerged in the interviews as most significant over the period of the field-study are: issues pertaining to identity; the Jewish-Muslim heritage in the Middle-East; Ṣūfī perspectives on self and other and their transference to practical action; knowledge and love finding expression in educational activities; and the concept of the *barzakh* and its concomitant state of ‘holding the opposites’. Issues pertaining to identity are examined in greater depth below. The significance of the Jewish-Muslim heritage to contemporary relations is re-visited. This is followed by locating the context within which this study concludes that Sufism does contribute to reconciliation and conflict transformation with suggestions for further research and positive action.

9.1.1 Identity as a Ṣūfī and as a Jewish-Israeli

Perceptions of self and other are built, processed, and reside within a context. The political, social, religious, and narrated contexts of perceptions of self and other are highly complex in Israel and Palestine. The dynamic constellations of national narratives, historical experience and historical memory, ethnic and national origins, political agendas, and religious metanarratives – told in diverse registers of narrative from meta-historical to political rhetoric – are the context within which the participants are situated in negotiating their own identity and encountering the other. The applied identity markers of political status, ethnicity, origin, and faith practice, are diverse within Israeli society. To be Jewish has a range of interpretations and likewise, so do the terms ‘Zionist’, ‘secular’, ‘religious’, and ‘spiritual’ with varying combinations of meaning and expression. A secular person will often continue to practice Jewish traditions such as circumcision and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, or a religious person will keep the Shabbat regulations in varying degrees and manner according to the denomination they embrace.⁴⁸⁹ There are many more examples of how

⁴⁸⁹ See also an article in the Jewish Daily Forward by Nathan Jeffay, “Jerusalem Gets Very Different Kind of Kabbalat Shabbat: Sabbath with Mixed Prayer, Beer and (Gasp!) Dancing” July 22nd 2013. [Online] Available at: <http://forward.com/articles/180899/jerusalem-gets-very-different-kind-of-kabbalat-sha/> [Last accessed: 22nd July 2013]. The article reports on a public Shabbat service in Jerusalem attended by all denominations and none. The report illustrates the variety of practice and a narrowing of the gap between the ‘secular’ and the ‘religious’ populations, ‘It sounds like anarchy to even rabbis with the rowdiest congregations. But here, there’s consensus that this represents a renaissance for the liturgy instead of a degeneration of religious standards. The 400 people assembled include Jews from secular to Orthodox. All of this is taking place in Jerusalem, the city that has a reputation as dominated by Haredi zealotry — just a few minutes drive from the Western Wall where this year women holding communal prayers have been pelted with eggs.’ One attendee makes the following remark, “‘Maybe this is the beginning of a new development of non-religious people coming to see Jewish culture as something that doesn’t necessarily need to be done the Orthodox way,’ said Adi Talmon, a middle-aged secular Jerusalemite as he looked at the scene

the identities of large groups of the Jewish-Israeli population resist a clear designation.⁴⁹⁰ There are also problems with the identity markers applied by Israeli officialdom to their Arab-Palestinian citizens. The terms ‘Muslim’, ‘Christian’ and ‘Arab’, are not adequate in describing the diversity of Palestinian identities in Israel and Palestine and the term ‘Arab’ refuses to identify the Arabs as Palestinians.⁴⁹¹ Islam and Christianity as practised by Palestinians in Israel also find diverse expressions as also in the OTP.

In viewing the many contexts of identity within which the contemporary activists for peace and reconciliation are working – whether explicitly as peace-makers, as Eliyahu, Ghassan, and Sheikh Bukhari are doing, or in creating pathways of engagement as Avi, Roberto, Paul, Ya’qub, Sara, Rachel, David, and Judith are achieving in different ways – then it is evident that we are speaking of a fluid and creative area of identity formation that is intimately entwined with political and religious agendas. This situation is perhaps characteristic of a young nation-state in search of a unifying national narrative. Following Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as an ‘imagined political community’⁴⁹² one might best see this process as an ongoing imagining of what constitutes the sense of self within a community of people who are simultaneously imagining what their community represents and how the elements of its identity form a whole. National and personal identities are therefore, possibly, more tightly interconnected than in older nation-states. The use of the term ‘imagining’ is not intended in any derogatory sense here but rather as a human tool for building a sense of identity. If the Ṣūfī, for example, did not begin by imagining the unity of being (*waḥdāt al-wūjūd*) then he or she might never taste (*dhawq*) its reality nor, in consequence of that experience of the dissolution of the ego (*fana fi’Allah*), begin to fully appreciate the necessity and beauty of diversity that is the infinite manifestation of the One. Here, in speaking of the dissolution of the ego, it is pertinent to question how this aim of Ṣūfī practice interacts with the building of identities and to ask if the former is in conflict with the latter. If dissolution of the ego is sought then is identity something which the self must discard? First, there are so many questions of definition in that question, each of which requires a critically engaged examination, that I will remain within a Ṣūfī interpretation of ‘ego’, ‘identity’ and ‘self’ to focus on the apparent dilemma stated above. An experience shared by Rachel and cited in Chapter Five provides an appropriate opening.

approvingly. Talmon has become a regular because ‘as a non-religious person I think it’s great to finish the week with Kabbalat Shabbat — every person has his own Shabbat and this is to separate between the sacred and the mundane.’”

⁴⁹⁰ This is based on my observation in Israel.

⁴⁹¹ I most often heard the Palestinian Israelis and the Palestinians of the OTP referred to as ‘Arabs’.

⁴⁹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (New York: Verso, 2006). First edition by Verso, 1983

She relates a conversation during a course at the Beshara school in Scotland, “‘As a Jewess and an Israeli I have a difficulty with Muhammad’, I announce at the start of a conversation – it was on the second course actually - ‘You know’, the correlator responded, ‘it’s strange, but I never thought of you as a Jewess and an Israeli’.” This response comes as a complete surprise to Rachel and leads her to reflect on the identity markers she applies to herself:

My mouth dropped open. Who am I? Are Jewess and Israeli real definitions of who I am? Should I define myself as a mother, a wife, or according to my profession? Or maybe I don’t have to live any of these definitions – even not all of them together? Maybe ‘I’ am a possibility unknown even to myself, and my life is a laboratory for researching such a possibility?

Rachel is all those things but she begins to question whether such definitions are comprehensive of the possibilities open to the self – the ‘I’ – that life presents. When Rachel says, ‘Maybe I don’t have to live any of these definitions’ then the sense is gained of the Greek meaning of the word ‘persona’, as a role that is played but which does not represent the deeper self behind the role. As she considers life as an opportunity given for exploring the possibilities of the self, she is moving into a definition of the self that comes closer to the Ṣūfī use of the term *‘rūḥ*, which is usually translated as ‘spirit’, or the *qalb*, the heart, which is the organ of spiritual perception and communion with God.⁴⁹³ In Chapter Two it was seen that Ṣūfī ontology, based on Ibn ‘Arabī’s hermeneutics of the Qur’ān and key ḥadīth,⁴⁹⁴ portrays the purified self as the mirror of the divine and the other as a mirror of the self. However, the ‘self’ referred to as a mirror is the *qalb*, or heart, in Ṣūfī vocabulary. Equally, one might use the term *nafs* which denotes variously, ‘self’, ‘soul’, and ‘breath’.⁴⁹⁵ There is a wealth of meanings to be mined from this multivalent and equivocal terminology but the main concern here is with the Ṣūfī application of the term *‘nafs’* as the self that is base, commonly translated as ‘ego’, and which is capable of transformation through the stations (*maqām*) of progress to a refined and serene self.⁴⁹⁶ The Ṣūfī psychology of transformation offers a complete map of human nature and human potential. To return to the initial question of how the aim of dissolution of the ego interacts with the building of identities, it is attachment to roles as identity markers that clouds the

⁴⁹³ See Shah-Kazemi, *The Other in the Light of the One*, p. 68

⁴⁹⁴ ‘Know thyself ...’ and ‘I am a Hidden Treasure ...’

⁴⁹⁵ Sara Sviri, “The Self and its Transformation in Sufism”, in David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 195 – 196.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197

mirror of the heart, and not the unique expression of the self as a manifestation of the Names. Finding, rather than assuming, an 'identity', in this sense, can be understood as shedding attachments to transient identities to release the possibilities held behind those attachments. This is what Rachel is exploring when she reflects that, 'Maybe 'I' am a possibility unknown even to myself, and my life is a laboratory for researching such a possibility?'

Questions of the necessity, or otherwise, to take hand (*biat*) with an authorized Shaykh and thereby be connected to the chain of transmission (*silsila*) in order to be a practising Ṣūfī, and the question as to whether it is possible to be a Ṣūfī without converting to Islam, are topics that emerged in several narratives. The latter is partially answered in the exploration of the term '*muslim*' as denoting 'one who accepts their complete dependence on God', rather than as the title of a formalized faith tradition. As to the former issue of the chain of transmission, there are precedents for foregoing this among Muslim Ṣūfīs who claim a spiritual connection to deceased masters.⁴⁹⁷ This is a form of *rabita* (connection) that is also essential to connecting to the *silsila* through a personal Shaykh so it would not be amiss to claim that there are similarities providing the student has a connection of some kind to a guide. Avi and Roberto claim that God is their 'Shaykh' and they also study with the Shaykh of the Qādiri Ṣūfīs in Nazareth.⁴⁹⁸ Judith and Rachel feel a strong connection to Ibn 'Arabī,⁴⁹⁹ and Sara feels the same to Ḥakīm Tirmidhī.⁵⁰⁰ It must also be noted, however, that these issues are under discussion in the Ṣūfī orders with varied conclusions.⁵⁰¹

Finally, it is helpful to follow the example of Ibn 'Arabī in approaching the problem of terminological definitions that attempt to define but fail. James W. Morris, in *Orientalisms*, speaks of Ibn 'Arabī's, "distinctive method of deconstructing an overly fossilized, routinized technical term or religious symbol, by returning to its deeper etymological roots and to the network of subtle spiritual meanings almost always potentially present in the original Qur'ānic Arabic."⁵⁰² This leaves us free to examine what a Ṣūfī means by '*taṣawwuf*' and its derivative 'Sufism' rather than utilizing the latter purely as an identity marker. By doing this we come closer to understanding the frustrations expressed by Sara, which are both

⁴⁹⁷ In the Uwaysi tradition the connection is purely spiritual and the Shaykh may be deceased but understood as alive in a different realm.

⁴⁹⁸ See Chapter Four

⁴⁹⁹ See Chapter Five

⁵⁰⁰ See Chapter Six

⁵⁰¹ This is my experience as the moderator of an online Ṣūfī forum.

⁵⁰² James Winston Morris, *Orientalisms: Islamic Thought in a World Civilisation*, Cambridge, UK: Archetype, 2004, p. 45

academic and subjective. Morris notes that Ibn ‘Arabī is, “using that same rhetorical method to turn his perceptive readers’ attention toward the *existential, real meanings* of the underlying ‘Reality ...’” and that reality, Morris clarifies, is according to, “each person’s experiential ‘unveilings’ of the manifestations (*tajalliyāt*) and necessarily unique discoveries of the divine Name *al-Hādī* (the Guide). In this instance, Morris is speaking specifically of Ibn ‘Arabī’s use and interpretation of the term, ‘*al-mahdī*’, an Islamic messianic figure known through the ḥadīth, but Ibn ‘Arabī uses it and its cognates to direct its meaning to the non-technical sense of, “*any person* who is spiritually ‘rightly guided’, who has received and actively assimilated some degree of inner divine guidance in various realms of life.”⁵⁰³ I suggest that this hermeneutical method is easily transferable to the term ‘*Ṣūfī*’ (which does not appear in the Qur’ān), or even to the term, ‘*muslim*’. If the Reality that the *Ṣūfī* is striving to experience is revealed in a continuous unveiling (*kashf*) of the Real as the struggle with the *nafs* progresses, then the term is little more than a convenience⁵⁰⁴ and there is a richer soil to be mined in the vocabulary used in Sufism and that finds its basis in the Qur’ān.⁵⁰⁵ What is then meant by such terms as ‘*kashf*’, ‘*ruh*’, ‘*tajalliyāt*’, ‘*nafs*’, ‘*qalb*’, and ‘*dhikr*’, all of which are applied to the *Ṣūfī* experience, can find levels of meaning as the subject experiences them and which do not require an attachment to the technical term, ‘*Ṣūfī*’. This gives the freedom to those who dislike categorization of their spiritual practice to embrace an antinomian stance which, in consideration of the words of the great *Ṣūfī*, Shibli, as cited by Sara, indicates progress on the path, ‘Another example is Shibli, who was definitely a *Ṣūfī* in terms of belonging to this social setting in Baghdad where *Ṣūfīs* started to blossom in the 9th century. He was asked why *Ṣūfīs* are named *Ṣūfīs*. And very appropriately he said, “Because of something that was left in their *nafs*, namely in their ego. If they had really purified their ego they wouldn’t have to be named by any name at all.”’⁵⁰⁶

In conclusion to this section on identity it is apt to consider the forces that contribute to the construction of identities. This is done by examining the perspectival nature of the discourses that surround the person and with which the individual or group is in a dialogical

⁵⁰³ Morris/Orientations, pp. 45 – 46

⁵⁰⁴ The problematic etymology of the term ‘*Ṣūfī*’ has been discussed in Chapter One under the sub-heading, “Terms and their Elusive Definitions”. The unease of naming the path is addressed by Sara in Chapter Six.

⁵⁰⁵ The fact that these terms are all found in the Qur’ān means they are available to all Muslims according to their interpretations and do not constitute some kind of elitist vocabulary of the *Ṣūfī* *ṭurūq*.

⁵⁰⁶ See Chapter One under the sub-heading, “Terms and their Elusive Definitions”.

relationship. This clearly includes the practice of othering. Camelia Suleiman is the author of a work on the politics of self-perception in the Israel-Palestine conflict.⁵⁰⁷ She interviewed Palestinian and Israeli peace activists in 2005 and 2006 with the intention of demonstrating the complexities of the conflict in the face of media coverage that gives little attention to the intricacies of the situation.⁵⁰⁸ Her intentions in undertaking her investigation were also irenic. As a Palestinian-American she states her desire to make a contribution towards reconciliation.⁵⁰⁹ Of her interviewees, who she describes as, ‘moderate people with convictions about the necessity for peace’⁵¹⁰ she says that, ‘they have been engaged in taking on the ‘other’s’ perspective.’⁵¹¹ Individual perspectives and communal perspectives, informed by personal experience and historical and political facts within living memory, when given a voice, reveal the complexities of the conflict and the weakness of any simplified interpretations. Suleiman emphasizes a further element of discourse analysis which she identifies as, ‘a foundational aspect of discourse – often neglected – namely the perspectival character of speech.’⁵¹² Discourse analysis is a method of analysis that she regards as a plurality of methods informed variously by Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, the neo-Marxists, Pierre Bourdieu and Antonio Gramsci⁵¹³ among others. Suleiman notes that, ‘Discourse thereby allows a particular mode of thinking about the world and knowing the world.’ This lends power and agency to a discourse and Suleiman continues by citing Baxter on discourses, as a plurality, as presenting, ‘forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectations and explanations, governing mainstream social and cultural practices.’⁵¹⁴ She then follows Van Dijk in drawing the conclusions inherent in that statement, for not only are discourses and discourse users obviously interdependent but this means, as Van Dijk explains, and cited by Suleiman, that discourses, ‘besides being subject to the social constraints of the context ... also contribute to, construe or change the context.’⁵¹⁵ When a discourse, such as the discourses examined in this study, including the discourse on Jewish-Muslim relations, the prospect of peace between Israel and Palestine, and the present discourse formed by the participant

⁵⁰⁷ Camelia Suleiman, *Language and Identity in the Israel-Palestine Conflict: The Politics of Self-Perception in the Middle East*, (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co., 2011).

⁵⁰⁸ Suleiman/Language, p. 1

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 2

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵¹² Ibid., p. 44.

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., p. 45. The excerpt cited by Suleiman is in J. Baxter, *Positioning Gender in Discourse: A Feminist Methodology*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 8.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p. 45. The excerpt cited by Suleiman is in, T. Van Dijk, “The study of Discourse”, in T. Van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Structure and Process*, (London: SAGE, n.d.), pp. 1 – 34.

narratives of this study on the potential Ṣūfī input to reconciliation between all the parties involved in the conflict, when such discourses are both subject to, and contributors thereto, of the constraints of political agendas, narratives of memory, and media constructions then there is clearly a question of power and control, at the least in the mediation of narratives, in the thrust to gain or consolidate or to expand areas of control, or, conversely, in making a bid for agency and voice in the adjustment of dominant discourses. Identity building happens in dialogue with discourses and identities are constructed in various responses and reactions to the discursive environment in which an individual is immersed. A discursive environment may be religious, political, cultural, or historical, among others, and mediated to the individual through family, the wider community, the media and social media, education, and other institutions. As individual and group identities are negotiated so also, as Van Dijk is cited by Suleiman above, they, ‘also contribute to, construe or change the context.’ There is therefore, the possibility for change through a re-consideration of our discourses and how we relate to them and in consequence of this, a possible re-negotiation of identity and a less destructive practice of othering. This is best begun through meeting the other.

The creation of stereotypes forms an element of othering that gives rise to a perspective based on not-knowing the other. Self-perception and group identities are formed to some extent in contradistinction to a stereotyped other. However, stereotypes that are learnt in one’s own community but never tested are quickly broken down through meeting and engaging with the other. Reuven Firestone, founder and co-director of the Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement at the University of Southern California, speaks of his own experience, ‘I went to Israel in 1970, by myself as a teenager. I went under the naïve impression that all Israeli Jews would be heroes and that all Arabs would be bad, violent, and untrustworthy.’⁵¹⁶ He soon learnt otherwise, ‘I was a bit of an aspiring hippie, hanging out in the wrong part of Tel Aviv and observed a fair amount of violence between Jews. I had never experienced that kind of violence before as an upper middle-class American.’⁵¹⁷ He befriends two young Muslim men and lives for two months in the Muslim Quarter:

⁵¹⁶ “Embracing the Challenge: Reuven Firestone on Jewish-Muslim Dialogue, An Interview by Joshua Stanton”, *Inter-Religious Dialogue* [online] Available at: <http://irdialogue.org/articles/on-campus-articles/embracing-the-challenge-reuven-firestone-on-jewish-muslim-dialogue-an-interview-by-joshua-stanton/> [Last accessed: June 18th, 2013].

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

It was almost like I had been joined as a family friend to their large family and social network. I was introduced to their extended family, friends, business acquaintances. I ate with them, picked up a surprising amount of Arabic, and had discussions about everything from philosophy to food, religion, and of course, politics. This experience shattered my preconceived notions and stereotypes.⁵¹⁸

Firestone's next remarks highlight the fact that it is enough for stereotypes to be current in our wider environment for them to be adopted:

Interestingly, I had learned these stereotypes not as a Jew and from my own home, but as an American. I later learned how such stereotypes are deeply embedded in American culture and affect everybody, Jewish, Christian and even Muslim! When I was a very little kid, my father took me to the National Mosque in Washington, D.C. I remember when my father said to me, "These people are our cousins." And then we walked into the mosque. These stereotypes I held were not family stereotypes - but from American culture.⁵¹⁹

After the stereotypes crashed in the face of experience, Firestone says, 'I stayed in touch with them and just kept coming back to the issue of the ways that we are similar and the ways we are different.'⁵²⁰

As seen in the participants' narratives there is another way of seeing the other. The image of the mirror as a metaphor for reflecting the image of God within, and as a reflection of the self in the other, forms one of the most important themes of Ibn 'Arabī and is central to the proposal that Sufism has something to offer the reconciliation and peace process. From the narratives of the participants it is clear that it plays a role in their own practice. In introducing himself at the beginning of the talk at the Israel Center, Ghassan connects this metaphor with knowledge of the self and emphasises how neither he nor Eliyahu could be doing their work without the other:

As a Muslim and a Ṣūfī I believe that I'm not alone in this world. I'm living with different and other people, other religions, and I have my background supporting me to do these things, to do these connections, and to feel that I'm not alone. The verse of the Holy Qur'ān that God said, *subhana wa ta'ala*, 'All people, We created you, male and female, and We have made you nations, clans, and tribes, to know one another.' It's a very important verse. To know one another – we have the aspect of knowledge, very important, to know one another. To know one another it means to know myself because in our tradition, Prophet Muḥammad, *salah alayhi wa salam*, said if you want to know your God you must know yourself. Great! I must know

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Embracing/Firestone

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

myself then I can know my God. I just have to know myself. I need the other. I need the mirror – to reflect myself on his essence, her essence. Then the other is my mirror. I need him – to realise who I am. Together we can complete one another then he is my bridge to know my God and she is my bridge to know my God. Also I am the bridge for all the other to know their God. My Shaykh in Jerusalem he told me, Ghassan the other is you with different language, different religion, different colour, different nationality.⁵²¹

This is more than simply saying that they need each other's support. Ghassan is relating the essential need of the presence of the other in order, finally, to know God. Whether approaching the other in this spirit, or simply with a desire to meet and engage with the other, a reciprocal 'knowing' acquired through direct engagement and interaction adjusts stereotypes and disables polemical views.

When the other is seen as a threat to identity then the perception of a threat can become the threat in terms of how responses to the perceived threat act as a proof of threat and provide justification for an escalating defence of group identity. This is how the issue of identity is relevant to the thesis question and how the activities of the narrators and the groups they belong to are assisting in deconstructing that threat. This is not to claim that there is no threat to either the Jewish-Israelis or the Palestinian-Israelis or the Palestinians. Mustafa speaks from a Palestinian perspective and his own experience when he notes that, 'While there are many Israeli Jews who reject the Israeli occupation, the overwhelming majority moved to rightist political parties that essentially reject the political rights of Palestinians. The Jewish Sufis are very few and they cannot affect the overall grim picture.'⁵²² However, existing threats are consolidated if no steps are taken to know and engage peacefully with the other. Neither the Jewish nor the Muslim *Ṣūfīs* interviewed in this study can have a significant effect on the political process nor do they engage primarily in efforts towards a political peace but the fact of their diverse modes of the practice of mysticism serves as a means of direct interaction with each other which, in the voices of the narrators studied here, provides an example of common purpose and exemplary instances of the possibility of relating to the other in friendship albeit with the tensions of the issues of justice that surround everyone in the Holy Land.

9.1.2 The Jewish-Muslim Heritage in the Middle East

All the narrators in this study have spoken of their perceptions of the positive Jewish-Muslim relations in medieval Al-Andalus and Fustāt, with enthusiasm, interest, and a sense

⁵²¹ Ghassan/Israel Center

⁵²² Abu Sway, Appendix I.

of a heritage that it is vital to keep alive. Several of them are active in achieving this through educational projects, workshops, and publications. They are also living examples of the continuation of such interreligious encounters enabled through a world view that is more universal⁵²³ than particular although each, both Jewish and Muslim, remain confident within their own faith traditions. Ghassan uses this heritage during a peace tour to remind his audience of these historical encounters and he connects this to the idea of mirroring the other. He begins by quoting his own Shaykh:

‘In the essence of the other, with us, we are the same. All of us, we are the same and we need these differences.’ Without differences we cannot create anything. We need to create lots of knowledge to know one another. The knowledge we come through the meeting with one another. We have an example, the Golden Age, Spain; the meeting between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Maimonides, Averroes, and Thomas Aquinas: three great philosophers. They prepared for us lots of great things and here together with Eliyahu McClean, and with others, we need to reclaim the Golden Age with our modern addition. With this background our community decided to work on this way and to connect with the other to stop the fear, the hatred, the pain – not only in the Holy Land, Israel and Palestine, no, or in Jerusalem. In the Middle East and all over the world we need to help to do everything to stop these things.⁵²⁴

On the importance of study in addition to social engagement as a means to know the other in interreligious dialogue and, one might add, spiritual encounter, Reuven Firestone maintains the following in an interview with the *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue*:

Firestone: We just finished a pilot program in which Jews and Muslims are paired and study together in a chevrotah [Hebrew term for a pair of study partners] to look at parallel material in the Qur'an and Bible, with guidance along the way. We had students from age 22 to their late sixties, men and women, Jews and Muslims. It turned out to be a phenomenal program. The deepest change students experienced was in their self-understanding. They certainly gained a better sensitivity to the other religion, but widely reported a deeper engagement in their own religious traditions. Stanton: Why such a heavy emphasis on study, rather than social interaction? Firestone: Engagement between Jews and Muslims without responsible access to information is just being nice. Otherwise you go home saying, "I just met a nice Jew" or "I just met a nice Muslim." Because you may think that these nice Jews or Muslim are exceptions to the norm, stereotypes persist. Relationships without information [about the other person's religion] don't work. It is the combination of responsible information and personal relationships that works well. That's why we focus on text study and social responsibility projects.... They go beyond lip service. Authoritative

⁵²³ Universal in the sense described in Chapter Six

⁵²⁴ Ghassan/Israel Center

texts prove that religious groups don't just care about their own members, and social action proves it too. Information and engagement are key.⁵²⁵

A vision of peace requires action for its implementation. The democratic process allows the electorate to choose its leaders but dependence on political negotiations, necessary as they may be, has not brought any solution to the conflict. Peace-makers, non-violent activists, and the Ṣūfis interviewed here, can create a movement for change no matter how small the beginnings may be. Ghassan sees education as a vital element in a social movement for peace:

We went to the politicians and we found that they are very, very busy. Poor people, they don't have time. And we said, okay we need to search and to find the alternative leadership and we found that the educators can be the alternative leadership because they can influence the next generation. And amongst this generation there will be the educators, will be the religious leadership, will be the social leadership – and the politicians also.⁵²⁶

He is not alone as has been seen in the accounts of Avi and Roberto when speaking of the projects of Derekh Avraham and the congregation of Roberto's Conservative (Masorti) Synagogue, or the academic work of Paul, Sara, and Avi, or the publications of Avi, Sara, Rachel, and Ya'qub. University conferences, Ṣūfi festivals, the work of Ghassan's 'Lights of Peace Center', workshops, the book store, the mixed Arab-Jewish Kindergarten in Yaffo founded by Ora and Ihab Balha, and the many projects initiated by Eliyahu and Sheikh Bukhari, all have two points in common: education and familiarity with the other, either through study or direct meeting and sharing.⁵²⁷ Through the isthmic self-positioning of the narrators in holding the opposites by residing in a *barzakh*, love, knowledge, and education function as loci of practice for demonstrating the possible. As Mustafa claims when asked whether he believes Sufism can help towards peace in Israel and Palestine, 'I think that once the Israeli Occupation ends and Palestinians regain their rights, including the right of return, Islam itself has many resources that could assist in reconciliation. Sufis have big open hearts and they could be excellent facilitators.'⁵²⁸ He is optimistic about the role of Sufism after political change has been achieved but less so as a player in the process towards that end. It is relevant to recall a similar hesitation of confidence in religious resources for peace in the words of Yossi Klein Halevi already cited in Chapter Two of this

⁵²⁵ "Embracing/Firestone

⁵²⁶ Ghassan/Israel Center

⁵²⁷ See Appendix II for examples of the Olam Qatan Newsletter

⁵²⁸ Abu Sway, Appendix I.

study from his book, *The Entrance to the Garden of Eden* where he notes that Sufism is not representative of Islam as practised by Palestinian Muslims. Speaking as a Jewish Israeli and as a journalist he reveals that, 'In my daily life I am a journalist, dealing with concrete events in the material world. Given the vehement anti-Jewish hatred emanating from the Arab world, I often find myself questioning the value of my encounters with the Sūfis, who are hardly representative of Palestinian Islam. So what if we danced together, even in a Gaza refugee camp?'⁵²⁹ However, when Halevi reflects on his journey of interfaith encounter from his perspective as a 'spiritual seeker' he reaches a different conclusion, 'But when I stop being a journalist and become instead a spiritual seeker, I recall another reality. The laws of faith, after all, operate differently than the laws of politics. In mundane reality, numbers count; but, as the history of religion repeatedly proves, God doesn't need multitudes to effect spiritual change, only a few individuals determined to become portals for divine will. I met people who aspire to be such instruments, and their presence here gives me hope that God will find His entry points into this despairing land.'⁵³⁰ Halevi's claim that, 'only a few individuals determined to become portals for divine will' have ever been necessary, 'to effect spiritual change' is, of course, a statement of faith that eludes academic verification but it does serve as anecdotal evidence of a desire for peace and an enduring hope that change can issue from a religious source in addition to the many secular, grass-roots initiatives for reconciliatory engagement with the other. This hope, as expressed by Halevi is mirrored in many of the narrators' comments in this study. Halevi is not a Sūfī but, as a Jew, he sees a glimmer of this hope in his meetings with Sūfis and Christian monastics.

9.2 Gathering the Yeast: Sara's Words and the Other Voice

Reference is made here to Sara's words on 'something brewing'⁵³¹ which includes Sufism within the many other grass-roots initiatives that have been outlined in Chapter Seven, whether explicitly for peace or reconciliatory by default of a spiritual practice that disallows any view of the other as other than interdependent with one's own humanity. This is what has been observed as emerging and creative in its ability to be flexible in a situation so complex that it demands a constant creative trajectory of intelligent thinking that serves an open heart always ready to hear the unexpected.

⁵²⁹ Klein Halevi/*The Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, pp. xvi, xvii.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ See Chapter Six

I base my conclusion on an expansion of Sara's words when she says, 'I am not optimistic but one never knows, there is some kind of movement,'⁵³² by saying first that I fear for any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict simply because of the present political volatility in the region and the decisions made by politicians of all parties, but simultaneously I see through my research that there are Şūfīs and other people who, through their own self-transformation, and in assisting others in a transformation of how they identify themselves and the other, can certainly contribute to a transformation of the conflict. Sufism does not offer the only possibility for change in how one sees the other in relation to the self. It offers a specific mode of practice and a conceptual framework based on an esoteric interpretation of the Qur'ān and ḥadīth. Şūfīs are not alone among Israelis and Palestinians in believing that their faith(s) can offer resources for reconciliatory purposes by those who have a desire for an inclusive peace even though there are those whose exclusivist interpretations of their faith make reconciliation an uncertain and fraught aim. There are also many non-religious initiatives in Israel that promote a reconciliatory engagement with the other through study, dialogue, and inclusive events and activities.⁵³³ The Şūfīs interviewed in this study are among those peace-builders inspired by their faith to action that informs and creates pathways of engagement, in this instance due to their faith and not primarily as an explicit peace group. In Şūfī language this is the *zahir* (outer form) and the *batin* (inner meaning) of the matter: conflict transformation has an impact on the world based on the reality of an inner transformation that legal and political negotiations do not address. Political negotiations require results and signatures but these have been mainly words with little effect on the ground. It is possible that the Şūfī practices, projects, and engagement with the other (or dismantling of otherness) investigated in this study are capable of promoting reconciliation between the Jews and Muslims participating in the groups interviewed and to some extent a wider audience of contacts and interested persons, including Christians. It is also justified to maintain that as a contributor to grass-roots initiatives they are active in knowing the other to the extent that if these initiatives expand it becomes more difficult to demonize the other as that knowledge is disseminated through Israeli society. However, it would be overly optimistic in the present political climate to claim that either the Şūfīs or citizen peace-makers have a voice that is strong enough or an agency that is sufficient to impact on political agendas or popular narratives

⁵³² Svirī, Appendix I.

⁵³³ For a list of many such organizations see the *Just Vision* website available at: <http://www.justvision.org/resources/organizations>

that either uphold a stagnation in the peace process or encourage policies and actions that are destructive to a transformation of the conflict.

Chapter Seven situated the work of Eliyahu McClean, Sheikh Bukhari, and Shaykh Ghassan Manasra within the range of several grass-roots initiatives. Some of these initiatives do have a measure of agency within Israel and are occasionally reported in the press. Several have social media profiles and find international support. However, they have little, if any, voice in top level political negotiations. If the question is approached from the perspective of gaining a voice and becoming agents of political change for a network of individuals whose activities do not include the exercise of political power then less than usual routes must be sought. First, it needs to be established that as much as this investigation has not taken a political stance nor discussed political matters in any depth with the participants, it cannot, nevertheless, be denied that any successful building of healthy and equal relations between Jewish-Israelis, Arab-Palestinian-Israelis, and Palestinians in the OPT requires legal and political negotiations that provide a baseline for reconciliation and conflict transformation. The Şūfīs, the peace-makers, and other Israelis who pursue friendships with each other⁵³⁴ all form a grass-roots fund of experience that can provide a parallel voice and consultancy function to high-level political negotiations for peace. However, Jewish-Muslim relations as they present between the network of Şūfī inspired practitioners has informed the main focus of this study and in the midst of conflict it is those relations that contribute to the naturally emerging question of their reconciliatory impact. Even lacking a political voice the fact of an improvement in Jewish-Muslim relations through a common endeavour that is based on seeing the other as a mirror of the self and striving to experience the divine with and through the other is a noteworthy development in those relations. There is a more urgent point of pertinence to the results of this study. Those interviewed are not only willing but also demonstrably enthusiastic to be in an engaged relationship with each other. This engagement is based primarily on a position of faith that recognizes the other – Jew, Muslim, Christian – as essential partners on a spiritual path that endeavours to attain an intimacy with the divine.

⁵³⁴ One example is the Modern Orthodox neighbour I spoke with. He is a biker and runs a group that includes Arab-Israelis and just wants to be 'left in peace by the politicians' so he can continue to meet his friends who together engage in fund-raising for the medical needs of un-insured Arab-Israelis.

9.3 Further Research and Practical Suggestions

This study has demonstrated a continuation of Jewish-Muslim religious encounters in Israel. This is happening despite the political conflict and the diverse religio-political narratives that are not conducive to Jewish-Muslim understanding. Significantly, the interview material gained during the two field-studies, alongside participant-observation clearly evidences the engagement of Jews with Muslim Israelis in a common pursuit of Sūfi-inspired spiritual practice and action-focussed objectives. The challenges that the latter involves have been addressed by the interviewees and in the analysis of the field data. The question of a contribution to reconciliation and conflict transformation requires two approaches: one in which it is addressed to the situation within Israel, and the second in relation to Israel and the OTP. This study has focussed on Israel; however, it is clear that both the internal and the 'external' dynamics of conflict impact on each other. This becomes increasingly relevant as some parties to the situation, including political agents, see no future to a two-state solution. In an article in the Jewish Daily Forward,⁵³⁵ written in response to the recent news that John Kerry, the United States Secretary of State, announced that peace talks are to resume, the author, Hillel Halkin, questions the viability of the Two-State solution. This leaves the possibility that Israel claims sovereignty over the West Bank, thereby raising urgent questions of equal rights and citizenship for the Palestinians living in the West Bank, or an agreement is reached between Israel, Hamas, and Fatah to establish a federal state. The former is the most likely outcome, and there are those that predict this outcome as happening by default, but it would also risk raising the spectre of an apartheid-similar regime if laws are enacted that address the Jewish fear of losing the Jewish majority in the Jewish state. The conclusion reached by Halkin is that:

What is called for is a two-state solution — but two states in one country. Two governments for two peoples, a part of each living under the jurisdiction of (although not necessarily with the citizenship of) the other; a set of mutual contractual obligations that ensure close and permanent collaboration; a common security policy; free trade; open borders; open travel; no more roadblocks and checkpoints; an end to walls and fences. In short: an Israeli-Palestinian federation.⁵³⁶

Muslim Sūfis are integral to the practice of the Jewish-Israeli participants. Although this

⁵³⁵ Hillel Halkin, "John Kerry is Wasting His Time – and Ours: Why We Need an Alternative to the Two-State Solution" in The Jewish Daily Forward, 22nd July 2013 [Online] Available at: http://forward.com/articles/180804/john-kerry-is-wasting-his-time-and-ours/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_term=Opinion&utm_campaign=Opinion%202013-07-22 [Last accessed:22nd July 2013]

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

study has been presented mainly from the Jewish perspective as much as possible has been done to present the work of the Muslim Ṣūfīs. In view of this an investigation into the Ṣūfī practice of Israeli Muslims must be proposed as a necessary complement to the present work. This would include a history of Sufism in the former Palestine, its position in Israel and the OPT today, its historical and contemporary engagement with Jewish groups, and the special dynamics of the relationship between Muslim Ṣūfīs and their fellow Muslims in Israel and the OPT. The latter is a subject which, although specific to the region in its particularities nevertheless expands to address the issue of Ṣūfīs and anti-Ṣūfīs in a global Islam influenced by Wahabi and Salafi ideologies. The work of Ghassan Manasra and the Center of Lights in Nazareth is pertinent to this theme and worthy of being addressed in greater detail than has been possible here. As defined in Chapter One, conflict transformation can be approached as a process of transformation of the self in the Ṣūfī sense as well as the transformation of external conflicts. For the Ṣūfī the latter requires the former. The conflict referred to in this study has been that between the Arabs and the Jews however, if conflict is viewed as any ‘discomfort’ with the other, even when violent action is not present, then we can also speak of the transformation of intra-group conflicts. In Israel and the OPT this provides the opportunity of examining two such intra-conflicts: the Ṣūfī/non-Ṣūfī relationships among the Muslims and the secular/religious⁵³⁷ relationships among the Jews. The work of Ghassan Manasra and the concerns expressed by Ya’qub Ibn Yusuf in this study are both of significant relevance to further research as being suggested here.

As seen in the example of some of the participant narrators, the role of the scholar-practitioner is invaluable in the link they can provide between the academy and the field. This is an area of research which has received little attention and which can make a contribution to knowledge exchange and spirituality in action.

In conclusion, I concur with Camelia Suleiman when she says:

I am optimistic that the conflict will be resolved; there will be a future without bloodshed. My position does not arise out of naiveté regarding the political conditions of the conflict and of the forces which keep it alive. To the contrary, I am well aware of all that; however, my optimism is a political statement. If we all engage

⁵³⁷ ‘Secular/religious’ is too simple a term and would need further qualification that takes into account the complexities of the various religious and spiritual tendencies in Israel and their relation to the wider Jewish world. It is, however, the division commonly used by the Israelis.

in hate, then there is not much to use to pull ourselves away from the edge of the abyss which both peoples are close to falling into.⁵³⁸

If some of the comments made by the participants in this study, and those whose views were gathered through online data in Chapter Seven, appear at all naïve when they speak of the necessity for respect and love and hearing the other, then it must be remembered that they speak from within the context of the conflict, from the position of those in-between, and to persevere in hope is a daily struggle. Equally, as Suleiman maintains, this is a political statement. I am once again reminded of Sara's words which apply the metaphor of yeast. In *Ṣūfī* terms, the hope, the struggle, the daily *jihad* of the *Ṣūfī*, does lead to a transformation of the self in relation to the other and the gathering of those forces that work towards a resolution to the conflict that is beneficial to all peoples living in Israel and Palestine can hopefully lead to that very aim. This is the case for activities that inherently create pathways of engagement as it is with those engaged in explicitly intentioned peace-work. This optimism needs to be carried forward even in the dangerously volatile situation running wild in the Levant⁵³⁹ at present, in which several international powers and political-religious parties are seeing opportunities for widely conflicting agendas.

The participant narrators of this study, and the study itself, demonstrate that the 'other voice' is present and that they are part of that voice. They contribute to a greater knowledge within the Israeli and Palestinian population of a common history of Jewish-Muslim engagement which can be embraced as a shared marker of identity and they create opportunities for communities to meet and know each other.

⁵³⁸ Suleiman/Language, p. 5

⁵³⁹ I use the geo-political term 'Levant' to indicate Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria which once constituted an administrative region during the Ottoman period and which today forms the nations that are in the centre of, and most affected by, the Syrian uprising and the Israel-Palestine conflict.

APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES

Interview with Avraham Elkayam in Tel Aviv, May 2011

Avi: First of all you asked me about my way to Sufism but before my way to Sufism, I will speak about my way to Islam because as I said, my family is from Andalucia and after they left Spain they went to the *Maghrib*, Morocco and from Morocco eventually they came to Israel. So my first topic is about how the Jews and the Arabs lived together. This was very important in my family because in all the time they lived in Andalucia, and also in *Maghrib*, in Morocco, they felt secure – I think also love – with the Muslims. When I was a child my family talked about it all the time, about the symbiosis between Judaism and Islam. It was my heritage, or the heritage of my family. My family name is Elkayam but the Arabic name is Al-Qā'im, Muḥammad al-Qā'im is the name of the messiah, the *Mahdi*. We call this now in Hebrew 'Elkayam' meaning the God is existence. This was my interest, philosophical or spiritual, in Islam because as I was born in the symbiosis between Islam and Judaism – it's not just Islam or Judaism but the combination between the two religions. Therefore in my mind Christianity is not, it's not a place, it's not in my spirituality. I know that my friends whose families come from Europe, the conflict, it is between Judaism and Christianity, but it was not in our family, talking about Christianity or about the spirituality of Christianity or Jesus Christ and therefore when I was in the university I studied philosophy. But all the time I heard Arabic from my grandmother. She was just in Jerusalem, and you know when she said 'God' she didn't say it in Hebrew, she said 'Allah' in Arabic although she was Jewish. Also when she spoke she took some verses from the Qur'ān. I talk about the symbiosis between Islam and Judaism and when I came to university studies it was philosophy, Jewish philosophy, mysticism, but also I take a part to study – I know Arabic – but classical Arabic, I studied classical Arabic, I studied Qur'ān and I studied also Sufism. My teacher she was very expert in Al-Ghazali, yes, but it take time when I open my heart to Sufism. First of all I just study, it takes time, and one day, and one day I decided that this is my way. I don't know, it perhaps comes from God that this is my work, Sufism – and I tried to find a Ṣūfī teacher. Not in the academy but in the area and I think about it and one day I was in the class in Hebrew University and Khalid Abu Rais give a lecture in the seminar and he said something according to the thinking of his Ṣūfī teacher. After the seminar I come to Khalid and ask him, 'Who is this teacher?' He told me, 'My teacher is the Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām Manasra. If you want to see him I can speak with him.' And he told me, 'Welcome,

we will welcome you. Come to Nazareth.’ And I take my friend, Rabbi Roberto Arbib, whose synagogue is here and we go to the Shaykh and speak with him and it was in the second meeting, and there were twelve meetings, that the Ṣūfī way is a love way, this is a love way and this is the basis for peace in the Middle East or between people and of course between the Jews and the Arabs, the Muslims and the Jews, and I’m convinced that the Ṣūfī way is first of all my way to God, first of all, and also of course, to the other. To myself and to the other. And then we studied with Sheikh Bukhari – you know that his teacher was Shaykh Nazim, from Cyprus. You know Shaykh Nazim?

Yafiah: Yes I do

Avi: Yes. The *dhikr*, when we came to the house of Sheikh Bukhari, he did not make *dhikr*. He opened the cassette with the voice of Shaykh Nazim – you know he’s very old now, Shaykh Nazim, you see on his face how spiritual he is – and we hear his *dhikr* and make a *dhikr* with him, Shaykh Nazim. This was a... (gestures to indicate a powerful force). And this is I think the first idea the Ṣūfī way is the way of love, the way of *muhabbā*,⁵⁴⁰ of *‘ishq*,⁵⁴¹ this can be, I think, the way to peace in the Middle East. This is our belief.

Yafiah: How will that happen in a practical sense? Do you hope that more and more Jews and Muslims will become familiar with Sufism?

Avi: Yes, yes but Sufism... and when I read I see that we are not the first Jews who are interested in Sufism because in Andalus there is Bahya Ibn Paquda and also the son of Maimonides who wrote *Kifāyat al-‘Abidin*,⁵⁴² you know and we talked about the Jews in the Middle East, in the Arab world, that most of them were Ṣūfīs. You know that my friend Professor Paul Fenton who was also in the founders of Ṭarīqat Ibrahimiyya/Derekh Avraham – you know Professor Paul Fenton?

Yafiah: Yes, Paul Fenton, yes, I’ve read his work.

Avi: Yes, he was one of the founders of our ṭarīqa and you know he found Ṣūfī texts of Ibn ‘Arabī in Hebrew letters, Arabic in Hebrew letters.

Yafiah: Really!

⁵⁴⁰ Love

⁵⁴¹ Love that is a longing for the beloved

⁵⁴² Abraham Maimonides (1186 – 1237), *Kifāyat al-‘Ābidīn* (‘The Compendium for the Servants of God’).

Avi: Yes, about Hallaj, also texts...the treatise of Ibn 'Arabi, *Tajalliyat*.⁵⁴³ He found it in Hebrew. Also he found Al-Ghazali translated to Hebrew. You see that the Jews in the Arab world were very interested in Sufism. Not just in the Middle Ages but also in pre-modern times – which is my research at the university. It's also in Turkey, the interest in Sufism. You know the Cantor in the synagogue studies the *maqām*, the spiritual music in the Ṣūfī order, in Izmir, and also in Istanbul. And also in Morocco, the spiritual music, the typical music in the synagogue comes from the Ṣūfīs, Ṣūfī music.

Avi: And it is not just ideas it is also practice. When the son of Maimonides talked about how to pray to God, he saw how the Ṣūfīs prayed and he wanted the Jews to pray like this as well. I believe that Sufism is the inheritance of the prophets and the energy of the prophets is in Sufism. I accept this and I believe in it and this is my way of life. We, as Jewish Ṣūfīs, are accepted by Muhammad, the Prophet Muhammad is a prophet, a real prophet, God sent him and we believe in his prophecy of course.

Yafiah: Theologically there is no problem for a Jewish person to accept Muhammad as a prophet is there?

Avi: No, no there is no problem and I see that I was not the first one to say that because in the Yemen the Yemeni Jews also open their heart to Sufism and some of them say that they can believe in the Prophet Muhammad because we accept the prophecy of Muhammad. We accept, we say in our prayer, we are the Ṣūfī Jew, when we pray we first pray the *Surat al-Fātiḥa* because *Surat al-Fātiḥa* is a universal prayer it's not just to the Muslims. Also Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām Manasra said that everyone who believes in God and is a servant of God, is a Muslim. He called me a Muslim! He says, 'You are a Muslim!'

Avi: Yafiah: This is what I was going to ask you next because if you take what the word 'muslim' means – someone who is completely surrendered to God...

Avi: Yes

Yafiah: ...then that makes sense when the Qur'ān says that Abraham was a Muslim, Jesus was a Muslim, they're not talking about a religion but that word needs to be translated, you know. If you're translating into English then translate the word 'Muslim' as well and then you might hear it as the very first companions heard it.

⁵⁴³ Epiphanies

Avi: Yes. If you ask me I can say I am a Muslim. I'm not practising the hajj or something like that but I am accepted, we are accepted, we are... the Jewish Ṣūfīs accepted the prophecy of Muhammad, we pray, we study the Qur'ān. We study the Qur'an with the Shaykh 'Abd al-Salam Manasra also with his son, Ghassan Manasra and also with the Imam Khalid Abu Ras. And he took us to the mosque; he invited us to his mosque every Friday. We're going to the mosque and they accepted us very nicely and we prayed with them and we heard the sermon (*khutba*). Yes, this is a synthesis between Judaism and Islam.

Yafiah: Do you feel the two faiths are actually very close in many ways?

Avi: Yes they are very close because you see when I read the Qur'ān I see that the hero of the Prophet Muhammad was Moses. Moses, he...I think the Prophet Muhammad love Moses and also he moulds Islam in the way that Moses moulded – not like Paulus when he take from Jesus and make it...I don't know – and therefore Moses and the Prophet Muhammad, they are very close, and I think because of that I think that Judaism and Islam are symbiotic. Also of course, the two languages are Semitic languages, Hebrew and Arabic, and not – the New Testament is in Greek language. It's also we are very, very, very, close and also when we study we see there is in the Qur'an the *Israiliyyat*, you know from the prophetic tradition. Now we are reading the interpretation of Ibn 'Arabī on the *Surat Nūḥ*, of course this prophet is also in the Bible also in the Qur'ān, Surah 71, about *Nūḥ*. And I don't know how in Israel most of the Jews are very, very far from Islam. I can't understand it how it can be but I think it's, you know it takes time to convince this is the way to come closer to Islam.

Yafiah: How many members are there in the Derekh Avraham?

Avi: I think now it's three hundred, four hundred

Yafiah: Really!

Avi: Yes but I can't say, they come to, you know when we make...performance, music...I don't think they care for the music but they love our way, they appreciate what we are doing but not all of them are very close. You heard of Professor Weismann?

Yafiah: Yes

Avi: He's a lecturer. Well he says this is also my way. But we are small but look here, when Sheikh Bukhari died all of us cried because there is no one in Jerusalem now who can

replace him, you know, because Jerusalem is very important for us. Sheikh Bukhari lived there and we started studying with him. But also in the Islamic world in Israel there are not a lot of *Ṣūfīs*. We are very small. I think we are more Jewish *Ṣūfīs* than Muslim *Ṣūfīs*.

Yafiah: That's interesting.

Avi: The Qādiri *ṭarīqa* in Nazareth and also with Shadhili *ṭarīqa* in Akko. But In Akko there is Dr. Omar Rais and we meet them in the *zāwiya*, a very nice *zāwiya* in Akko, in the old city of Akko we make the activities. One of the activities in which this Shaykh supports us and also gives us money is a very important project. It is the project of prayer. We take prayers from the Islamic tradition and from the Jewish tradition and it's called 'Prayer for Peace' because I think it's really important that if you are in the way of peace you can also pray, not just the prayer from your tradition but you must pray also the prayer from the other religions, from the Islamic religion and therefore we are making a collection of prayers from the Islamic and Jewish traditions. But someone tell us that you must take also from the Christian tradition and I make most of also the prayer of Francis of Assisi

Yafiah: Francis of Assisi yes, very *Ṣūfī*

Avi: Yes you are right, that was perhaps I also make the prayers for peace according to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam but we finish now with the translation. It will be in Hebrew, English, and Arabic; every prayer. I think it is the first time in the world it will be because when I was in England, you know Waterstone and Border, and I saw all the prayer books of Christianity and I don't see a multi religion prayer book. There is a Jewish prayer book, Islamic prayer book, a Christian prayer book, but I think we must pray also...and I think also I must open my heart to pray – because it's very easy for me to pray Islamic but Christianity – I must do something to pray Christian praying – but I must do it because this is to open – like Ibn 'Arabī says, my heart is open to Christianity, or this one – and it's not easy for me as I told you my tradition – but I make it and therefore I thought it would be very important for me first of all and if this project would be also with Christian prayers. Dr. Rais' Tariqa I visit his Shaykh in Amman and it was very important to him to do this project. He helps us in money to make this translation. Every year we hold a conference at the end of the academic year and this year is about prayer, this is the subject of the conference. It's two days in St. Gabriel Hotel in Nazareth and we will speak about prayer in Ibn 'Arabī, in Islamic tradition according to the Prophet Muhammad, and Moses – and we will talk also and make a session about this prayer book. But the *Ṣūfīs* open another challenge for prayer. Do

you know Ora? Ehab and Ora? Ora and Ehab will make a session every week on Tuesday in their home in Jaffa. And she is a dervish according to the Mevlana and whirling dancing. She is dancing the whirl, and she will teach us how to pray with whirling. You know this is also praying?

Yafiah: I do that too

Avi: It's opening like a flower

Yafiah: Yes, last night I went with Ya'qub to an orthodox rabbi, it's a meditation group and he plays his guitar and says the words that come and it felt very Şūfī even though he knows nothing about Sufism, but I felt very much I want to get up and move I don't want to sit – whole body, whole spirit, whole heart

Avi: Yes and did you stand up and dance?

Yafiah: I didn't, no, it was my first time there and nobody else was doing that but I did say afterwards that that's how I felt and he said, 'Oh you can do that,' he said, 'we have someone who comes sometimes and she dances all around the kitchen' (Laughter). No, but it is the full being isn't it?

Avi: Yes and therefore we are talking about prayer with words and prayer without words, meditation and dance, music, I think it will be a very, very beautiful weekend.

Yafiah: And that will be end of June?

Avi: Yes

Yafiah: Can I ask you...what do you see as...or what would you like to see as the solution for peace?

Avi: About the solution for peace, first of all it's not the earth because we believe that the earth, the land, is not of men, or states, it's for God. Therefore we are not dealing with the political problem. The way to peace is first of all to change the cautiousness and what I mean when I say to change the cautiousness is to open your heart with love to the other. This is our mission. If you ask me how to solve this problem or what I think about Bibi Netanyahu, this is not something that we discuss. We are discussing how you open to the other not how you think as a journalist about this issue. But open your heart, to the Jew and to the Arab and love him, and embrace him. This is our practice, our way of thinking. We are not political, we do not think like politicians or like a journalist in the newspaper or

in the media, this is not our way. Our way is now to open our hearts to God and to others. This is the way for peace. Because we believe that God loves everyone and we love everyone. It's in the Israeli it's very crazy but this is our way, our path, this is our path. I spoke with Ghassan Manasra and together with Rabbi Roberto here about a project. We see that in the schools in Israel – also in the Muslim schools – there are no lectures about love. What is love? Not sex education, no, but love; there is nothing about what love is and how to love others. We wanted to make a course about this for schools according to the Ṣūfī text, according to Al-Qushayri, according to Sulāmi, according to Rumi, the love poems of Rumi. Why don't our children read these poems? I think this is our way, this is our way of thinking but we have no money to do this. We talked about having ten teachers from Jewish schools and ten teachers from Islamic schools to speak about love and to give them ten or twelve lessons about this subject. We hope that when they teach the children in the schools it will work. This is our belief.

Yafiah: It's about knowing the other.

Avi: Knowing the other, not just being friends...

Yafiah: ...with love

Avi: Yes, with love. And the others religion does not matter, he can be *kafir*⁵⁴⁴, you must love him. Because we believe that God loves everyone. Because we are breathing, we are alive. You know the story that is also in the Ṣūfī tradition – Islamic tradition – and also in the Jewish tradition about Abraham our ancestor that he had a tent and every man who was around came to eat and Abraham asked them what they believed. One day a very old man came to him and Abraham gave him food and after he finished eating he asked him, 'Okay, what do you believe in? What god?' And the man told him he believed in one of the other gods, not in our God. And Abraham told him, 'Get out! Get out of my tent,' and God spoke to Abraham, 'He is eighty years old. I gave him a life and he is eighty years old and you cannot host him in your house? It doesn't matter what he believes! If God can give him a blessing you can also give him a blessing. Help him! It doesn't matter what he believes or what he does, you must love him! As a creature you must love him!' This is our story, our belief and we try to practice this in our life.

Yafiah: I think Ibn 'Arabī's hermeneutics of the Qur'ān is very universal and it goes beyond saying no god but God, saying there is nothing but God

⁵⁴⁴ Unbeliever

Avi: Yes

Yafiah: So all things – especially the human being are manifestations...

Avi: Yes of course! Also even Ibn 'Arabī say about *Surat al-Fātiḥa*, *Ihdinas sirāt al-mustaqim*,⁵⁴⁵ you know these words

Yafiah: yes

Avi: What is mean *Ihdinas sirāt al-mustaqim*? He said every man, even the atheist is a *sirāt al-mustaqim*, there is no place... (laughter)

Yafiah: There isn't anywhere else

Avi: Yes and therefore we are lovers of the atheist

Yafiah: Yes

Avi: Because all of us are in the *sirāt al-mustaqim*. He is very generous, Ibn 'Arabī. This is our way, our belief

Yafiah: Avraham is there anything you would like to add to what you've said? Is there anything more you'd like to say before we finish?

Avi: I have a friend, he was a Catholic and convert to Islam and to the Ṣūfī way, and every time – I study from him a lot – also he's very expert in Persian Sufism and Turkish Sufism, because we are studying – our ṭarīqa – just in Arabic Sufism, we study sometimes with Rumi but in English or translated to Hebrew but not in Persian – he knows Persian very well and he criticizes our ṭarīqa. He says, 'You are not a real ṭarīqa because you don't make the initiation.' He is right. Our ṭarīqa is not for making initiation. If you want to make initiation you can go to 'Abd al-Salām, you can go to the ṭarīqa of Qādiri, of the Shadiliyya, the Yashrutiyya, or if you want to go to Chisholme, to Hakim.⁵⁴⁶ Because our ṭarīqa has one aim, it's the path of love and the path for peace. This is our ṭarīqa. This is what I want to say. We are not like a traditional Ṣūfī ṭarīqa in the Middle East but those who are coming with us on our path are for love, for peace. Someone who is very traditional can criticize us, 'Where is initiation?' and we are, how can I say, we are post-Ṣūfī. Post-Ṣūfī meaning we are not traditional Ṣūfī because we decided that in the ṭariqāt Ibrahimiyya there is no Shaykh of

⁵⁴⁵ 'Guide us on the right path'

⁵⁴⁶ This is a reference to the Beshara school in Scotland and its director, Peter Young. There is a group in Israel.

the ṭarīqa or Rabbi of the ṭarīqa. There are Rabbis in the ṭarīqa, there are also professors in the ṭarīqa, there is also a Shaykh in the ṭarīqa, but our Shaykh is God. We decided from the start that our Shaykh is God, and not a human being. This is not traditional. Traditionally you have a Shaykh, the *silsila*, and all this. We are post- traditional Sufism. We say also that Ibn ‘Arabī had no Shaykh. The Qādi was his Shaykh.

Yafiah: He had...he went to many teachers and learnt...

Avi: ...yes but not a Shaykh. Also a lot of women, from Murcia, also Fatima... yes of course all these women were his Shaykh

Yafiah: He had a great appreciation of women didn't he?

Avi: Yes. You know my friend, Martha was a very, very spiritual and smart woman. I learnt from her a lot...and she did not study in school when she was a child but she was I think – in a way – a Ṣūfī. A very spiritual woman. Coming in the morning to pray, and the evening, all the time and helps women who want to marry, give them money, help them. And therefore ṭarīqa Ibrahimīyya is a ṭarīqa post-Sufism but we are not New Age. We are not New Age because we are focusing on traditional texts. We don't study and create a synthesis. We are very traditional in our texts. The texts of Ibn ‘Arabī, and Rumi, and also Jewish texts like those from Rambam, Ibn Paquda, from Andalus. Therefore we are not New Age. Some people from the New Age don't understand us. The people from traditional Sufism do not understand us. We are in-between, we are traditional but not really traditional.

Yafiah: You are somewhere in a barzakh

Avi: (laughter) Yes in a barzakh, yes! This is the best, insha'allah!

Yafiah: Yes it is isn't it?

Avi: To be in the barzakh, this is the place, this is the place, yes. This is *mushahada*...to *bishah* to look. The Shaykh of ‘Abd al-Salām Manasra, from East Jerusalem, Ibn ‘Arabī was very important for him because his teacher was from the Maghrib and he told me that Ibn ‘Arabī is very important for the spiritual way therefore when he studies Sufism he focuses on Ibn ‘Arabī. Ibn ‘Arabī is very important in the Maghrib and in Dimashq, in Syria, but also in Jerusalem, in Palestine, Ibn ‘Arabī is very important. Therefore we study a lot of Ibn ‘Arabī. I also translated all the poems of Al-Hallaj and Ghassan and I translated Sulāmi into

Hebrew. This is our project to open Sufism to the Israeli people. Everyone can read it and therefore I spoke with Professor Ernst. Did you hear his lecture?

Yafiah: No I had to go back quite early because I was going back with Reuven

Avi: Ah Reuven. Because Professor Ernst translated Hallaj into English.

Yafiah: Yes I read he was doing that...

Avi: Paul Fenton found a manuscript of Al-Hallaj in Hebrew.

Yafiah: It must be so exciting!

Avi: I think that our tradition of the Sephardic Jews who lived in Andalucia and the Islamic area, I think that our way in life is Sufism. This is everything to us and the Muslim-Jewish Sufism is our way. And if I can bring this in Israel to the Sephardic Jews it will be very good.

Yafiah: Thank you very much. That's a wonderful point to finish with.

Interview with Rabbi Roberto Arbib via Skype, Tel Aviv – Winchester, September 2011

Roberto: We start together with Avraham Elkayam and Shaykh Manasra something like twelve years ago. The group is called *ṭarīqa Ibrahimiyya/Derekh Avraham*. But the interest in Sufism for me started even before when they were teaching about the *Ḥasidim*. And it was several times useful to bring some stories from the *Ṣūfīs* to create a parallel with the *Ḥasidim*. And it was just an intellectual interest but I never know that in Israel exist a group of *ṭarīqa*. Suddenly at once Avraham told me that there is a group and together with Eliyahu McClean we have been in Ramle with the *ṭarīqa Ibrahimiyya*. It was the first time we meet the Shaykh. And we had *dhikr* the first time and it was very funky for me because, you know, you start to pray and the Muslims they prostrate on the ground and it was something completely new for me to participate in this but it was very interesting and we started meeting with the Shaykh and after we have been invited for a festival of the *Ṣūfīs* and we were there with Avi and the Shaykh and it was also an occasion to know a bit more about the *ṭarīqa* and we decided to create and to start meeting and to study more about Sufism here in Israel and we discovered that there do exist several *ṭarīqas* here. The first seminar that we organized in Neve Shalom we invited professors from the university and from Palestine and Israel and from abroad and we had the first meeting that combined academic lectures and prayer and meditation with the *Ṣūfī's* Shaykh. Also the prayer was

very touching because we did the prayer of Shabbat and together with the Muslims and it was something that was completely new for the Israelis. It was in 2000. And after we had several meetings with my congregation here in Tel Aviv and invited other Shaykhim from Akko, and from Jerusalem, and we had a meeting and we started to know much more about the presence of the Ṣūfis here in Israel and in parallel we started studying with Avi and books in Italian that exist on Sufism and for me it was very interesting because there is a need to create a bridge of peace in Israel that would pass through Islam especially the spiritual Islam and to try to change the severity of Israeli society today. So for us it was a discovery and we want the other Israeli to discover that there does exist even in Israel not only Ibn 'Arabī and Konya in Turkey but also in Israel, and we can study from them. We started to have lessons every week in my house for almost 7, 8 years and from time to time we also organized different seminars in Neve Shalom, in Nazareth, in Jerusalem, and other places. Especially ṭarīqa Ibrahimiyya is always studying texts so as to create a deep experience, not New Age meditation, but to create a deep studying with Professor, academics and Shaykh in order to create a real understanding of the philosophy of Sufism. So that was the idea and also we tried to spread our approach and we have organized in Jerusalem, in Hebrew University a seminar with music combined, Jewish music and Islamic music and with a lecture about the relationship between Jewish and Muslim in Israel. And it was especially interesting because, you know, after the second intifada in 2000, even though it was a terrible time we continued our meetings and we had a special meeting for peace to convince people that not all the Muslims are terrorists and not all the Arabs want to destroy us and we keep on meeting even now with all the difficult times. This is our belief that we should create an understanding in the spiritual way and the Muslims will be more aware of our Jewish spiritual approach and the Jew will also understand Islam differently.

Yafiah: Do you feel, Roberto, that your study and your experience of Sufism enriches your Jewish faith?

Roberto: Sure, sure, because I discover – and for me this is amazing – how many parallels there are between Islam generally – original Islam and the mysticism and the Ṣūfis – with Jewish mysticism and religion. There are a lot of parallel interpretations. They have discovered more and more about the relationship between Jewish philosophy during the Middle Age and the influence they received from Islamic philosophy and specifically from Sufism. So today I identify myself as a Rabbi Ṣūfī. For me it's also that the Sephardic relation

to Sufism is important because it craves my spirituality as a Jew, as a Rabbi, and also I believe that it's the way for us here in Israel with the culture of Islam and not the Christians – I always say that we have to deal with Islam and not with Christianity. Christianity is the problem of the Jew that lives in exile in Europe and the States and our task here in Israel is to create a bridge with Islam because we live together so it's very important to approach one another not only culturally and socially but also spiritually.

Yafiah: How many people usually come to the meetings, to the Derekh Avraham meetings?

Roberto: Yes, there are two different kinds of meeting. One meeting we have every week and about twenty or thirty people come. It's every week, it's really an effort. When we have a gathering, like a seminar of two days, three days, a Saturday, or one all night studying and playing music, then it can be up to a hundred people who come. Always, since the beginning, there are people who want to enter in the circle, who want to know about Sufism, so they come two or three times in the year for special gatherings, and music and special lectures. Then we have the more regular meeting with people who are interested in studying and in meditating together. They come every week so there are less people than at the gatherings.

Yafiah: Roberto you're the Rabbi of a Conservative congregation is that right?

Roberto: Yes

Yafiah: How do the members of your congregation feel about your interest and your study of Sufism?

Roberto: Some of them participated in the meetings because some of them in the past were also in my synagogue. We also organize a course of language and Arab culture in my congregation so they know that I'm very involved in the interfaith relationship and the dialogue and they support me. Of course sometimes there are some who are not so satisfied but most of them are very satisfied and they admire our approach to creating a bridge between Islam and Judaism.

Yafiah: Would you say that the people who come to your meetings are mainly people from Tel Aviv or are there people coming from Jerusalem as well?

Roberto: Some come from Jerusalem because in the past we had meetings in a house in Jerusalem. We have been having meetings for a long time, twelve years. We met for seven years here in my house and before that we had two years in Jerusalem and the last two

years we met in Jaffo and finally we are going to meet in a centre that they built in Tel Aviv that will be the house also of the ṭarīqa.

Yafiah: Wonderful!

Roberto: Yes where we will have all different kinds of meeting. Not only the regular meeting but also I want to offer another course on Sufism and Islam and on the relationship between Jews and Muslims.

Yafiah: That sounds very good. So by the sound of it would you say that you're just as strong now as you were twelve years ago? Does the interest continue or has there been a decline over the years?

Roberto: No, no, completely not. But what I have to say as being critical – or maybe what you should know – is the frustration that all this time there has been much, much more interest from the Jews in these meetings than from the Muslims which means that the number of Muslims who visit this group is always very low.

Yafiah: That was in fact the next question I was going to ask you because I've heard this before that there is in fact more Jewish interest in Sufism than there is Muslim interest in Judaism and...

Roberto: ...or even in Sufism.

Yafiah: ...or even in Sufism

Roberto: I had a meeting in Baqa al-Ghabia with – there is the Islamic Academy, but I saw there is much more interest comes from the Jew and not from the Islam.

Yafiah: Why do you think...?

Roberto: The Muslims are afraid, they don't know exactly what a Ṣūfī is and they are afraid about it and Jews are always more interested in the stranger. There are a lot of Jews in Israel who are interested in Buddhism and other spiritual traditions. But I always say to the board of our ṭarīqa that we have to move on and we have to enter the villages and to ask in schools about going to speak with children and people and to really do it. But you know that it's not easy, it's not easy logistically and also there is a lot of danger in doing such an activity.

Yafiah: Yes, I was going to say is that possibly dangerous? You would have to have support from the people in the villages for you to come in, wouldn't you?

Roberto: Yes. Generally we go...in Baqa al-Ghabia we have been several times. But they don't really have the will to meet the Jew in a spiritual approach and it's a pity and this is really a big frustration for all of us that we tried to convince very few person to be part of our meeting and the oppress of the Israeli are always by.

Yafiah: So considering that there are less Muslims interested in Jewish spirituality how far do you think that this work can contribute to peace?

Roberto: I think that on the Israeli side it can still be really important because as I said before the Israelis receive from the Islamic culture only the radical and the violent side and they're very ignorant about the spiritual tradition of Islam. So even in the academic you know things are changing. Nobody used to want to study the influence of the Sūfīs on Jewish mysticism and Jewish philosophy, today if you read the scholars' research about Jewish philosophy and mysticism they should and they do refer to the relationship with the Muslims. So it became more and more important for Israeli society – academically for sure – but I think it's also important – even if only from the Jewish side – to convince people that Islam is something different to what they think.

Yafiah: So even if you don't have a lot of Muslims coming to meetings nevertheless the work that you're doing can help to give the Jewish people a different view on the Muslim world?

Roberto: Yes, sure, and it is really important because it can create a change in atmosphere or a will for peace and a different understanding of the Muslims. A very important Rabbi such as Maimonides, and Kabbalists used to study or be influenced by Islam, so it's important to open the gate.

Yafiah: Yes, so basically it's like a ground is being created for more peaceful interaction between Jew and Muslim in Israel?

Roberto: Yes, it can create better...still we have to find a way to enter the core of Islamic people here in Israel, at least in Israel.

Yafiah: And in order to do that you're hoping to go out to the villages more. When...?

Roberto: I think to go...yes to move from Tel-Aviv, from Haifa, to go...because even when we go to Nazareth, when we go to Acco, we still meet the same people.

Yafiah: So it's like a small group of Şūfi Muslims that you're engaging with most of the time but that's not widening out yet to other Muslims

Roberto: I don't know why but even Acco...Jerusalem is more...it's not easy, it's a very difficult time and people are afraid or do not have the time. The Muslims that we meet are very open and very interested but of course we should meet people who are less open with the Jews and create a dialogue with them. This is the challenge.

Yafiah: Yes, this is – I think you might agree – a problem with interfaith dialogue that you're usually talking to the converted

Roberto: Yes, that's exactly

Yafiah: And the problem is how to bring in those people who feel a lot more sceptical or even afraid of talking to the other

Roberto: Yes, you know it's happened several times that we have been in Valencia and in Brussels in the meeting of Rabbis and Imams and there come Imams and the Rabbis also from the Jewish side more liberal and conservative and...but there are more the orthodox, Jewish Orthodox they are also completely not willing to have a meeting with a Muslim. So it's happened in general meeting, in international meeting, it's happened that we meet radical Muslims that, yes they put it also, orthodox Rabbis that maybe they would never participate in it in Israel but abroad they do participate and even disagree but it's also something that they accept to participate in the meeting. And Rabbi Makior and Rabbi Fruman also they participate in Alexandria and other places. It's also a way of the establishment of the orthodox are very close to the dialogue but when there is also deal with the diplomatic and the peace. It was in the past some steps in this direction.

Yafiah: Are there any plans for another Congress of Rabbis and Imams?

Roberto: Yes, I think so. It was a – I don't know if you know – an association for dialogue and they organize two meetings, international meetings, one in Valencia, one in Brussels, of Imams and Rabbis, and I don't know why they stop it because I think it was very successful but it was very expensive so maybe it was also a problem of budget

Yafiah: Yes, I was going to ask you, does Derekh Avraham, as a group in Israel, have any possibility of accessing funding for the work that you are doing?

Roberto: What happened in Derekh Avraham is that we tried to receive money from the European Foundation but after we passed the first steps of the application they refused. I don't know why but since then we decided not to open even a non-profit organization. What's happened since is a good thing. Everybody pays about thirty Shekels, or something, at each meeting. So we adopted this system instead of organizing as a non-profit organization. Avi says we should create an official organization for fund-raising but I think we have a good model. We still have all these activities that we do every week and also we organize the seminars three or four times a year, the longer meetings and without any other support except volunteering ourselves. Of course I also have my institution so I can give them the help of a secretary for sending emails and things and it works. Sure we are not spread more. We have more and more other projects that we don't do because we don't have money but, you know, this is the situation.

Yafiah: So if you could raise funds there would be a few projects that you would like to do but which you can't do at the moment because you don't have the funds?

Roberto: All of us are volunteers and we do a lot of voluntary work but there is a limit to what you can do. You have to be sure that you can pay a secretary and to organize other things

Yafiah: In addition to the Derekh Avraham there are other groups in Israel who study Sufism, for example Beshara. The Beshara group in Tel Aviv is a group of people who study Ibn 'Arabī, and then you have other Jewish-Şūfīs for example Yaq'ub Ibn Yusuf in Jerusalem. Do these groups all come together sometimes?

Roberto: Yaq'ub, yes, but with the Beshara much less. We don't really have a relationship with them. With Ya'qub and with Eliyahu McClean we do have but not with the Beshara. They are very closed and have their own philosophy. For me it is very important that we participate in the born tradition and for me it is very important that we be together also with the Jewish tradition, the Shabbat, and the Kashrut and all the other things. I'm not sure that the Beshara people are interested in that

Yafiah: So they are less observant in the Jewish faith than...

Roberto: ...yes they don't care about Judaism. They care about Sufism. The difference is that we are Sūfis and Jewish and that means that we create a bridge between the two traditions because we can very deeply weigh the Jewish tradition too and not only like Sūfis but without religion, but a connection with the Jewish tradition. It is specifically our way that we pray together, that we meditate together, but also we are studying. We have a lot of critics because people say we are too intellectual but for us it's the way, to create a deep understanding of the tradition and not just to have a beautiful meeting of dancing and music and at some points something of Ibn 'Arabī but really a knowledge about the tradition and the different trends.

Yafiah: Roberto, could you say something about how you feel the situation is at the moment in Israel between Jews and Muslims and how you would like to see things move forward for reconciliation, peace, justice, and what the role is for Derekh Avraham in that process?

Roberto: It's very difficult to say that today. The situation in the Arab world is changing and I think this is a time of change and we don't know the direction of this change even though they are close to us. It's something that I believe we should do. The only way that can create a change should be a change in different fields, in the atmosphere, in the peace, in the work and economics. And spirituality is one of the fields where we can give our approach but this is not easy and I'm not naïve that because we are meeting and we are studying Sufism that we create peace. But I'm sure that you have to change the atmosphere at least among the Jews. You know it's like you believe this is the way so you do it even if you don't see the end of the struggle but you don't change because this is the way that you believe that you have to do it. But I'm not optimistic that we are going to change the situation here in Israel. It's really complicated and today it's more complicated because there is almost war happening in the Muslim world and because of the relationship with the western world, in America and Europe. We can create our contribution to understanding but I'm not sure we will have a real reconciliation in a short time.

Yafiah: But do you feel that your work – which is very grass-roots – together with the grass-roots work of various other organizations is in fact a great contribution in parallel to political negotiations for peace? That the grass-roots work like you are doing is in fact very important?

Roberto: Yes, as I told you, I think that we have created a changing of Israeli society that more and more people, even in the leftist for peace, they just believe in peace only because for their own interest, and also give another direction that not only we need to create a Palestinian state and they stay there and we stay here and don't want any contact with them, this was the historical approach of the Left in Israel. They understand the importance of understanding and knowing much more about Islamic spirituality and religion. This I think is really changing in about the last twenty years. It's important, this changing of the mind, again, only for the Israeli, not for the Muslims, but it's also something.

Yafiah: Is there anything else you'd like to say Roberto, before we finish? Anything you'd like to add?

Roberto: We also have a lot of projects in translation and there is also a will to translate Jewish texts into Arabic. It's also very important that classical, traditional books of Jewish spirituality are translated into Arabic and vice versa. It is our aim in the next few years to be active in this direction and also in publication. I believe we will be successful in doing our small work and in giving our small contribution for reconciliation and to create something really new for this area.

Yafiah: Roberto, thank you very much

Interview with Paul Fenton, Jerusalem, August 2011 (Ya'qub is also present)

Yafiah: Could you tell me about your path to Sufism as a Jew?

Paul: One should be very specific because it was in very clear circumstances although my attraction to Arabic goes back a long time. As a child, and certainly as an adolescent, I was always interested in Arabic and I learnt to read Arabic on my own when I was ten years old and I read the Qur'ān when I was about Bar Mitzvah age. So it was evident for me that I would read Arabic at university and that's what I did. I studied Arabic and I was lacking the spoken language so in the summer of 1969 I came to Israel and I did a course at the Hebrew University and the language courses and civilization course. And one of the courses was on Sufism by Menachem Milson who had written on Sufism. I believe he was one of the great Arabists of Israeli academia. He published his *'Adab and Muridin* which was an introduction to life in a Şūfī convent and how Şūfīs would live together and what their

manners would be, and I became – with lots of anecdotes – and I was very touched by this text though when I furthered my studies in Arabic I read a lot of material about Sufism. And since I come from a religious background and I had been exposed to Hasidism in my youth I was very struck by the parallelisms between the Ṣūfī approach, attached as it was to a rigorous legal dimension that one finds not only in Islam but also in Jewish orthodoxy. Hasidism is more interested in the spiritual dimension of religious experience rather than the legal application of legislation. So, having seen these parallels, that was my path and it was always my ambition, although it never actually came to be, to write a book about the comparison between Jewish spirituality – mainly from the Kabbalah and Hasidism – and Muslim spirituality. I’ve never written that book as a book but it comes over in many of the articles I’ve written in the footnotes that this is the common denominator between the two traditions and that this common denominator is closer than what one would think in so far as – and this is something that came in later on – that through the Muslim sources, especially those that discussed the spiritual path or the traits of the prophets, whom we call Patriarchs in the Jewish tradition, like Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moshe, there are a lot of - in inverted commas – ‘legends’ that we share that may well come from a common source. Some of them identical, some of them different but they throw light on each other. It’s like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that come together and form a picture. So that was the most passionate component of the quest to see how this fits together and how – without becoming identical because all of these pieces are independent – how they can mutually enrich each other. What we can see in Islam that has significance for us and enriches our own experience because coming from one particular direction or one particular school we might be oblivious to different dimensions of the same phenomenon which we’re not taught by our tradition and conversely that same richness and interest holds true for a Muslim, that in fact he has probably much more to learn about his own – what is part of himself – of which he’s not aware. That’s in a nutshell.

Yafiah: What form does your practice of Sufism take? Do you have a Shaykh or are you a member of Derekh Avraham?

Paul: No, well we did have – I’m one of the founding members of something called Ṭarīqa Ibrahimiyya

Yafiah: Yes

Paul: I don’t know if you know anything about it

Yafiah: That's what I meant by Derekh Avraham

Paul: Derekh Avraham, but unfortunately, because of the political circumstances – not that this is defunct because they do have a number of activities during the year.

Ya'qub: There was a gathering last week that we missed. On Thursday

Paul: Really?

Ya'qub: It was a Ramadan gathering that Avi publicized although Avi wasn't there, and Ghassan and Ze'ev ben Aryeh led. They did a Jesus walk

Paul: Aha, well that's a pity. I wasn't informed about that at all.

Yafiah: So there seems to be a bit of a lack of communication

Ya'qub: Well there's the email list

Paul: And before that there was the re-dedication of the *zāwiyā*⁵⁴⁷ in Jaffa. Did you go to that one?

Ya'qub: No

Paul: And then in the spring there was a meeting in a Jewish-Muslim *moshav*⁵⁴⁸ or Jewish-Arab

Ya'qub: Neve Shalom

Paul: Neve Shalom. And that was on the spiritual significance of spring. I think you were there

Ya'qub: Yes

Paul: So periodically there have been a number of activities but none as intense as they had been in the past because of the reticence of Muslim participants. Whereas we have had quite a few in past years who took an active part in meditation and in the common prayer that we had but that's all died down now. In fact in the Neve Shalom meeting no Muslim was there. I felt a bit ridiculous that I had come – I spoke...I think initially I was supposed to speak about the symbolism of the tree in Jewish mysticism and in Islamic mysticism but I think in the end I changed it somewhat and brought it nearer to the seasonal significance of

⁵⁴⁷ A Šūfī centre, or lodge.

⁵⁴⁸ A *moshav* is a town or village that is an agricultural community or co-operative.

springtime. And I spoke a lot about Islam so that was informative I think for the Jewish participants, and then I spoke about the Jewish side but there were no Muslims there to hear it. So that was somewhat disappointing.

Yafiah: But the loss of Shaykh Bukhari is a big loss and Ghassan doesn't go so far out of Nazareth so often.

Ya'qub: He's moved to Nazareth

Paul: Oh he's moved to Nazareth?! Was that because he was threatened by his neighbours?

Ya'qub: Persecution by the Muslims, yes. His son was beaten up too many times. His son was beaten up, that's how they get at him. I was there last year at Ramadan – this was really heart-breaking, I went there to spend a Shabbat during Ramadan, and that Friday in Nazareth his son was beaten

Paul: In Nazareth?!

Ya'qub: In Nazareth

Paul: That's awful! For the same reasons?

Ya'qub: Apparently, yes

Paul: That's – I mean in Nazareth? That's just unbelievable

Ya'qub: The Ṣūfīs were the victims here.

Paul: Now I think there's a saying that describes the Ṣūfīs as the Jews of Islam. Unfortunately this has always been the case. Even outside the strictly spiritual realm you'll find that there's always been an immensely greater quantity of interest amongst Jews for Islam and Muslim spirituality than there has been amongst Muslims for any other spirituality than their own.

Ya'qub: Even dialogue groups not concerned with spirituality, you know, I've been in groups with thirty Jewish-Israelis and two or three Muslims

Paul: Yes

Yafiah: Why do you think this is?

Paul: Well, first of all – please, I apologize ahead that I mention this – but many people who come to Islam through Sufism, many westerners, do not realize that Sufism, somewhere along the line, is not Islam and this trouble, this tension which Ya’qub is describing in Nazareth is not necessarily directed against Muslims who associate with Jews but it’s Muslims who associate with Sufism. I think that’s one element. And what makes it even bad is that these Ṣūfīs are associating with Jews but I think that’s secondary. In some respects this spiritual fundamentalism that’s breathing throughout the Islamic world – you can see it here, you can see it in Egypt, and Syria where bookshops won’t hold Ṣūfī books; whether they’re threatened or whether they feel this is beyond the pale.

Ya’qub: But would you separate Sufism from Islam?

Paul: No, I wouldn’t and when that was said to me by someone who knew what he was talking about, I took offense. But in our days – they told me this about twenty years ago – but this time, in our times, it’s become true. The Muslims, the fundamental Muslims do not consider that Sufism is a part of orthodox Islam

Ya’qub: Sure, on the other hand some of our Arab-Muslim Ṣūfī friends talk very gently about the fundamentalists as ‘beginners’. They don’t have a lot of experience of the religion so they don’t understand that *al-rahīmān*⁵⁴⁹ and *al-rahīm*⁵⁵⁰ come ahead of the other qualities and this is just basic Islam. And you know, I think of Ghassan and his father and his son being descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. You know, as well as being very educated these are not marginal people to the world of Islam at all. How would you – Yafiah asked you a little while before and she’s probably too polite to pursue it further – how would you define your relationship to Sufism? Are you interested in Sufism or do you see yourself as a practitioner of Sufism?

Paul: Not in any continuous way but I’m inspired by readings of Sufism and there’s not one day that goes by without reading in Arabic and going to sleep at night I read Ṣūfī books in the original Arabic with commentaries. So that’s part of my worship but when I’m inspired by what I read it comes into my devotion, but I don’t pray in Arabic – well, I’ll qualify that in a few minutes – I don’t say Muslim prayers and I don’t observe Muslim prayer times or anything of the Muslim ritual. Having said that, sometimes I read into the Hebrew text of our canonical prayers – given that Hebrew and Arabic of course are so close that sometimes you can – but like the Latin element in English, you know the phenomena of the

⁵⁴⁹ The Merciful

⁵⁵⁰ The Compassionate

faux ami? Sometimes a word that is identical in French and English do not have the same meaning. In the same way you have the relation between Hebrew and Arabic that you can read a Hebrew word as an Arabic word and then it takes on a different meaning which can add to the sense of the prayer. So that's one of the ways in which I integrate Sufism into my own Jewish ritual. Besides which I read Hebrew as Arabic. You might not understand what I mean. Unfortunately even the Israelis whose mother tongue is Hebrew, they have terrible pronunciation of the language, it doesn't sound like a Semitic language because they were originally Americans, English, or Yiddish speakers

Yafiah: So there are sounds that are difficult for them to pronounce

Paul: The sounds have been completely altered, in the negative sense. So when I read in Hebrew I read it as Arabic, pronounce it as Arabic. And I think it adds so much to the prayers that the pronunciation – if you listen to the incantation of the Qur'ān, I think that some of the power and the magic of the Qur'ān is in the way it's pronounced. I found that – and it's several years I've been doing this – that pronouncing the prayers in the Arabic way, there's a different power to it.

Yafiah: So would you say that your study and love of Sufism, your knowledge of Arabic, enriches your practice of Judaism?

Paul: Absolutely! That's the essence of what I've been saying.

Ya'qub: And I don't imagine you've really found – Ghassan is the closest thing I can think of – but I don't imagine you've found a lot of Arab colleagues who find Judaism enriching their Islam

Paul: No, I've never unfortunately ever met one, never met one single individual. But this was said in the thirteenth century by a man called Ibn Kammuna⁵⁵¹ who wrote a very interesting treatise, a comparative treatise between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and discusses in particular the phenomena of prophecy and he says, 'You know you might find Jews who are attracted to Islam but never the other way around', because it's natural that

⁵⁵¹ The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy says the following, "Sa'd ibn Mansur Ibn Kammuna, a Jew from Baghdad, actively participated in the lively discourse of his day. In his copious writings he takes up the entire gamut of philosophical issues discussed by his contemporaries." It adds that, "Ibn Kammuna was certainly born into a Jewish family. Though his writings as a rule do not betray his Judaism—if anything, they read like the work of a devout, if philosophically inclined, Muslim—his two forays into comparative religion exhibit a clear bias in favor of rabbinic Judaism. Some subtle polemics are detectable in glosses that he wrote to an important work of Islamic theology." [Online]. Available at: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-kammuna/>. [Last accessed: 30th July, 2013].

a minority living within a majority society is interested in the culture of the majority and not the other way around. So that's one factor that can explain this

Ya'qub: Well I'm going to stick my neck out here. In certain ways Ibn 'Arabī is definitely a Muslim supremacist, nevertheless I detect strong Jewish influence including his sense of humour, his ironic way of approaching things strikes me as very Jewish. I've always suspected Jewish influence in Ibn 'Arabī and I just wondered – you'd know more about that.

Paul: You're talking about humour and character. No, I'm talking about Muslims that, as I do, would read Jewish texts and realize how close they are to their own tradition and realize their roots coming through the prophets, coming through some of the Qur'ānic texts and legends, are here. That's where they come from. And then how these texts may spread light – not only in the historical way, because I think that's also very important – but also in a spiritual way, how this realization can enrich their own spiritual experience. Now there are two great obstacles to that on the Islamic side, one of which is theological and – well both really are theological, and it boils down to this, that from the very start a Muslim learns that in the same way that Christianity abrogated Judaism, Islam has abrogated Judaism and Christianity and that anyway, in the meantime Jews and Christians have falsified their scriptures. So why read something which has no relevance? Which is something archaic and *depassé* on the one hand and which has been falsified on the other? What truth can there be in this if it's been falsified? That's one of the great obstacles added to which the other incentive, or rather lack of incentive, comes from the fact that the Muslims consider that Muhammad was the last, the ultimate, revelation, supremacist. So anything else has no significance. So these are two great impediments to the opening up of the Muslims to the Jewish tradition

Yafiah: Do these impediments really have any basis in the Qur'ān or is it a matter of interpretation?

Paul: I'm afraid they do because listen if you're – I would say without this being the major factor it's a very important component in Muslim theology – if you're the last come and you want to be the first served how are you going to get over the fact that there are two prophets before you without saying that 'b' has abrogated 'a' so I'm 'c' and I'm going to abrogate 'b' but is there someone standing behind me 'd'? No, I am the Seal of the Prophets.

Ya'qub: That's actually not in the Qur'ān

Paul: *Khatim al-Nabiyya*⁵⁵² is in the Qur'ān

Ya'qub: Is it?

Yafiah: Seal does not have to mean final, does it?

Paul: No, it doesn't have to mean final. You can have it putting the seal on the thing. But the normal understanding of the seal is of the letter, it's closed, it's finished. No, it's very common with that because Muslim spirituality continued to develop but no-one ever dared use the word '*Nabi*', they spoke about *Wilayya* that Ibn 'Arabi talks about, *Khatim al-awliyya*⁵⁵³ not *Khatim al-Nabiyya*, but I'm sure that he was inspired prophetically as were others before and after him. But in Jewish tradition you also speak about the sealing of prophecy, *Khotem Nevi*⁵⁵⁴ but the phenomenon continues but you can't say that in Islam without...

Ya'qub: ...becoming another religion. Baha'i or something

Paul: Baha'i, and being persecuted. But nonetheless that's what I like to preach, that one of the great problems of Islam, if it's not the problem of coming to terms with the conflict here in Israel, is this lack of recognition of the Jewish component in Islam – the Jewish component in Islam. I'll tell you a story – I won't mention the name of the person. We were trying to come to some understanding going across this whole problem with the example I'm going to give you. And our problem was: Is Judaism willing to recognize Islam as a form of prophecy? This Talmudic reasoning you know, someone owns up to a portion of the truth which is always already a foot in the door, on the way. So we came to this wonderful formulation, really wonderful. I'm telling you it was a *nefha*, it was a breath of inspiration. That here we have the Prophet Muhammad at the door of the Holy Land and he's living within a Jewish context, could it not be that some of the prophetic spirit of the Holy Land flowed over into Arabia which is at the doorstep of Eretz Israel? That's how we formulated it and we asked around and then we brought proof that this had already been said. You have an idea and you want to substantiate it then you look and you find. There were Rabbis in the Middle Ages who were willing to say that the Qur'ān was an inspired book, albeit for the Muslims, not for the Jews, but they accepted that it was a spiritual document. So this is

⁵⁵² Seal of the Prophets, referring to Muḥammad.

⁵⁵³ Seal of the saints.

⁵⁵⁴ Seal of the Prophets

what we put in and then we turned it round and we asked the Muslim would he go along with this? That the Qur'ān – that he as a Muslim could accept this Jewish element in the birth of Islam, in the nascent period of Islam the Jews have contributed so much to the emergence of Islam in its formative period. It's obvious if you look for it, the prayers, the dietary laws, even the five pillars of Islam, all Jewish in content. He only had to think for a second. What was his answer?

Paul: No. obviously it can't be because the Qur'ān is pre-existent. It was there before Judaism, before time began, so there is no influence, there is no previous influence.

Ya'qub: You know it reminds me – this story has a happier ending – I'm talking about somebody who's not here right now but we will talk to him later. My dear friend,⁵⁵⁵ the first time we went together to Istanbul we had a lovely time. And of course your hotel room comes with breakfast, so breakfast *ṣoḥbet* becomes part of what we're doing, and we get to the subject of the pre-eternal Muhammad and I say, 'Well, of course, you know in Christianity they say, in the beginning was the Word, and I think Judaism really gets it right because God consulted with the souls of the *Tzaddikim*, it doesn't specify which *Tzaddikim* actually, before he created the human-being. In other words the illuminated human-being to come was there from the beginning, the final fruit of action is there from the beginning. And my friend said, 'No, it doesn't mean that to me. It was Muhammad.' I said, 'You've got to be kidding!' He said, 'No, I believe it was Muhammad.' I said, 'What can I say? All the appeal of Islam, at least for a Jewish person like me, is the universality of what the Prophet Muhammad represents – the complete human-being. Once you identify it with a particular personality you might as well have Jesus. What have we gained by going to Islam? You know, it's the same problem all over again. You've got to have your guy and he's not even one of ours, like come on, give me a break!' And he said, 'You know my father agrees with you but I don't agree with you.' (Laughter all round) 'He agrees with you because of the prophetic archetype or whatever but I believe it was Muhammad.' Anyway, he came around a year or two later. He said, 'Ya'qub, I've come around to your perspective.'
Alhamdulillah!

Paul: As it says, you know, that the breath of Muhammad was there as the world lie between nothingness and clay. So that's the pre-existent Muhammad. But interestingly his father...

⁵⁵⁵ Ya'qub mentions a Muslim Ṣūfī friend

Ya'qub: He told me his father agreed with me, yes. He had come to it on his own. I don't know how he said it but that it was the prophetic archetype, the prophetic station, it was the prophetic essence. It wasn't the person Muhammad. It was that station – I'm putting words in his mouth – that Muhammad had embodied as the human embodiment of the complete human-being but it was the complete human-being not the person Muhammad who was there before the creation of the world which to me makes perfect sense. We call it the *Tzaddik* but you know we don't identify it with Moses. It was Philo who talked about the Word before Christianity came along. It was Greco-Jewish mysticism before we had Greco-Islamic mysticism of course.

Yafiah: Now to come round to reconciliation and peace. Despite the difficulties that you've been speaking about do you feel that Sufism in Israel opens doors for engagement between Muslims and Jews?

Paul: Well, during the time that we were active I think that it did. I think one of the reasons why the Israelis continued to come is because they were so enchanted, they were so surprised to see the Muslims coming to these meetings and that gave them a flame of hope that reconciliation with someone was possible, you know, faced with this wall of hostility. But it's come to a standstill and it's most regrettable. You know the people that we're dealing with, you can count them on the fingers of one hand and in the years that we've been active it doesn't seem to have gone beyond that.

Ya'qub: One moment of exception to that was the book-launching of Sara Sviri's book

Paul: Yes

Ya'qub: In Nazareth where there were hundreds of Muslims, maybe several dozen, maybe fifty or a hundred Jews and at least ten or twenty Christian Arabs. But the majority was Muslim

Paul: Well Nazareth is a Muslim city

Ya'qub: Yes but it was exceptional in my experience having been to peace groups, not necessarily spiritual ones, with the vast majority being Jewish – it was so refreshing. And the most touching moment was when Ghassan's wife talked about Ibn Farad, the Arab Sūfī poet, responding to what Sara had written in the book, and she spoke in Arabic, and of course I didn't understand a word but Sara understood every word she said and it was just a beautiful moment, these two women in their love of Sufism and their common

knowledge of Arabic and an audience that was Arabic speaking...and Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām presented a Khirqā of the Shaykh to Sara Sviri in recognition for what she'd done

Yafiah: That's powerful!

Paul: Oh wow! When was this?

Ya'qub: It was about twelve years ago I think. And I heard Sara mention very, very modestly that she had a couple of reports of Palestinian Muslims who want a positive identification with Islam but not a fanatical one, who found in her book something that spoke to them and she was very happy to hear that. But we're not talking about any kind of mass movement

Paul: But I think as a person coming from an educational commitment that if something were done in the world of education of children and adults I'm sure that things could move, and if presented in a Ṣūfī light. In music too, we've had some success with music.

Ya'qub: Sheva, God bless him, has the ability to pull things together, to pull together this Diwan Project, which is much more Mizrahi Jewish, basically Yemenite collective oriental music with Mark Eliyahu and Amir Shahaza who lives at least part-time in Israel and is the best oriental – or probably western – flautist in the country. They've made this incredible album of Jewish devotional music and religious and secular people come to their concerts. They invite the audience – the idea is the dewan concerts of North Africa where in the courtyard of the synagogue you would do a *piyyutim*⁵⁵⁶ but at a high concert level and people would come with an intention of prayer. So they perform in the more popular type concert halls around Israel and they always at the beginning of the concert invite the audience to sing – the majority without head cover, men and women, the minority with head cover, men and women, and virtually everybody knows the words. I've wept through their concerts it's just beautiful. And of course, in some sense, the first healing is within secular and religious and it might as well happen within the nation of Israel and then, insh'allah, will be reflected with our Arab neighbours who are also schizophrenic between secular and religious, instead of seeing the value of both ends of the spectrum and the healing – redeeming what speaks to us from our religious traditions but not being bound by everything that people have been bound by before. So that's the latest incarnation of Sheva.

⁵⁵⁶ Jewish liturgical poems

Yafiah: So music is another way of bringing people together and the music that you are talking about is very often Ṣūfī informed in a sense

Paul: My dream is to have some gathering – call it the *Sulha* – where the music element would be a factor of conciliation and in the background you'd have presentations to which both Muslims and Jews could relate either over the grave of a great spiritual figure – and there's quite a few – in the Holy Name, prophets that we have in common like the tomb of King David or the Prophet Samuel above Jerusalem, or even purely Muslim saints of which there are a number dotted around. You know even in Ge'ula,⁵⁵⁷ just behind the Me'er Shearim, there's an old Muslim cemetery which has been preserved and there's a mosque there and Shaykh Nabulsi,⁵⁵⁸ who was a great commentator on Ibn 'Arabī, he was there, he visited in the sixteenth century and he describes it and it's still there and that's somewhere that people could – it's in the Jewish part of the city but it's a Muslim sacred place. It's somewhere that a gathering could take place. Let's talk about the people we have in common.

Ya'qub: It would be wonderful to see the Psalms translated into Arabic

Paul: They are in Arabic translation

Ya'qub: 'The Lord is my Shepherd'

Paul: (recites in Arabic Psalm 23), 'As a hart panteth after immortal streams so panteth after the...'

Ya'qub: Something I really love with the new Sephardic recording of Reb Nahman's ten Psalms is it's basically Qur'ānic chanting to a western scale. There's an organ in the background. For me it's not knowing Arabic you know, I get to understand the words. But it would be so wonderful to bridge that again to the Islamic world. To hear the Prophet David you know because it's also more personal. It's just a different dimension. It's Da'ud, it's not Muhammad. It's speaking in the very personal way that David speaks and like Rumi it's giving you a way of bridging the very personal and the spiritual.

⁵⁵⁷ Ge'ula, which means 'redemption' is a neighbourhood in Jerusalem where many Haredi live.

⁵⁵⁸ Abdul-Ghani al-Nabulsi (d. 1731).

Paul: And that has a place in the Islamic tradition. *Zabur*,⁵⁵⁹ it's called *Zabur*. And there's nothing legal about it so they can't say it's falsified because it speaks so let's make it happen. I have to go now unless you have a very specific question.

Yafiah: No, thank you very much just if there's anything you want to add, to conclude.

Paul: No, I think this is a very optimistic note that we're concluding on. We want to see it happen but we're aware of the difficulties in the path and what was at first a path that seemed open has unfortunately been...what's the word? Like scattered with thorns and what we thought would happen did not transpire but that doesn't mean that we won't try again.

A few minutes later...

Paul: This rupture of the dialogue between Jews and Muslims, and even in the Sūfī context, is not natural in a certain sense seeing that such encounters have taken place in the past. It's the fundamentalist swing that we are witnessing at this time that has proscribed such encounters. But they did take place in the past and I'll give you two examples from Ibn 'Arabī's book. First of all Ibn 'Arabī himself in the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiya* describes a conversation that he held with a Rabbi and they're not talking about the weather, they're talking about profound spiritual matters. The conversation revolves around the symbolism of letters, a fundamental discipline of Islam and Judaism. And then one of Ibn 'Arabī's disciples, called Ibn Hud, who came from the same birth place as Ibn 'Arabī – Murcia – flees Andalus, as Ibn 'Arabī himself, when Sufism was unwelcome and he settles in Damascus and one of the books he takes with him from Andalus is *The Guide for the Perplexed* from Maimonides. And the Jews of Damascus come and seek out his guidance in the understanding of the book which indicates that they might have construed it as a book of Sufism. And here he is, Ibn Hud, from the Ibn 'Arabī *wujūdiyya* school, teaching the Jews of Damascus *The Guide for the Perplexed*. This is an extraordinary example of dialogue; not about astronomy or about the weather forecast but deeply spiritual matters. So it's not something outrageous or impossible. And especially in the Holy Land – I can add this and I think it's the bottom line, I think it's probably one of my deepest thoughts on the subject – is that providence has brought us together, Jews and Muslims, in this encounter. Instead of making it a human and spiritual encounter unfortunately politics has become involved and turned everything sour. But I'm sure that there is something in the Divine Project that has

⁵⁵⁹ The Psalms

wound up all Jewish-Muslim encounters within the Muslim world – where you have thriving communities in Morocco, in Syria, in Iraq, all of these have now disappeared – there’s no longer that day to day encounter between Jew and Muslim in the bazaar, in the souk. It should all be happening now here in Israel. That’s what the powers-to-be, what providence, wants and we’re not letting it happen but it should.

Yafiah: Inshallah!

Ya’qub: Inshallah!

Paul: Inshallah!

Judith Sternberg of Beshara, from notes taken during a conversation in Jerusalem, May 2011

Judith has been studying the work of Ibn ‘Arabī as a member of the Beshara group in Israel for 23 years. In 1988 she went to their centre in Chisholme to attend a course. Peter Young, the director at Chisholme, comes to Israel regularly to teach the group. They meet every week for *dhikr* and spiritual conversation alternately and take turns in leading the group. About every two months they have study weekends on different topics of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching as well as on other mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Rumi. All the members of the group are Jewish. They are neither formally Muslims nor Ṣūfīs. Judith’s parents were German Jews and Judith was born in Israel.

Yafiah: Have you been involved in any peace initiatives?

Judith: We don’t do anything as a group but many of the members are involved individually. I worked with Machsom Watch. We used to go to the military court and observe. I’m not optimistic. I would like to see the government doing more for peace.

Yafiah: What kind of solution to the conflict would you like to see?

Judith: I would like to see two states but I don’t know if it would work because they hate each other but when they see the Jews as a common enemy then they don’t fight each other. There are lots of voices in one. Both sides do stupid things. It’s becoming more complex. Israel is like a tightening knot. In Jerusalem the knot is tighter and in the Old City its tightest of all. But then you can cut it. You can take a pair of scissors and cut through the knot! The Arab Spring is promising but I don’t know, it could easily be taken by

fundamentalists. Look at the Palestinian march to the borders on Sunday (*Nakba* day). Thousands of Palestinians! A real show of strength! It wouldn't be very pleasant to live under Muslim rule.

Yafiah: Do you believe that is a possibility?

Judith: Yes, it could happen that Israel comes under a Muslim government. It's been getting worse in the last two years. The atmosphere here is becoming more right wing and governed by fear.

Yafiah: What effect has studying Ibn 'Arabī had on you? Has it changed your view of how you see the other?

Judith: I come from a left wing family and was already a peace person. Ibn 'Arabī puts emphasis on us all being human beings first and then come the national, religious and other differences. Ibn 'Arabī's path encompasses all levels including the political, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. I don't know what this conflict serves in a spiritual sense. It could serve something if we learn from it but it could also all be wasted. I believe what happens to human consciousness as a group is the same as what happens to consciousness on a personal level. I can say with certainty that this place is a very difficult place to live. It's like being faced constantly with existential questions.

Yafiah: Do you live in fear?

Judith: I don't fear for myself. I'm not bothered with that. It's my grandchildren I think about. But it's not just fear. It's sorrow for what is stupidity. What are we fighting about!

Yafiah: You say you are not formally a *Ṣūfī* or a Muslim but do you believe in God?

Judith: I had an atheist upbringing and didn't believe in anything but when I met Ibn 'Arabī it changed because it's not a matter of believing anymore. Now I can honestly say I don't believe in anything but God. It puts life in a context. It's not a ladder you can climb on to make your life easier.

Yafiah: Was this an intellectual grasp of Ibn 'Arabī's work or did you have a spiritual experience?

Judith: It's both intellectual and a spiritual experience. You can't separate the two. It's a process. It's deepening and widening and getting clearer. I would like to visit Ibn 'Arabī's tomb in Damascus but of course I can't go with an Israeli passport.

Yafiah: Do you see the other as a reflection of God with something to teach us?

Judith: Yes, I know it's the case but I don't always manage to see it. Not in everyone. I did a conflict resolution leadership course with Arabs and Jews. I did it together with a friend who is also from Beshara. One could see the levels.⁵⁶⁰ There was such a feeling of love in the group. We all loved each other but once we started talking about issues like the territories it was war. Well not war, we still felt the love but it was difficult. You can accept the deeper level of being human beings but when it comes to making decisions ... They couldn't meet us during the war (Operation Cast Lead). They were so angry and that was difficult for me because I wasn't the one throwing the bombs. It was right for the Israelis to react to the rockets from Gaza but not like that! It was madness! But what do I know? I don't know anything!

Interview with Rachel Gordin, Tel Aviv, May 2011 Before the interview began Rachel gave me several pages of the introduction to her book, "Angels do not dream", which she had translated and printed out for me. She read excerpts from this translation during the interview below.

Yafiah: How did you come to Beshara?

Rachel: Well everything in the introduction is right.⁵⁶¹ I have received a letter from God saying: "Dearly beloved" – do you know this poem?

Rachel: It is a poem by Ibn 'Arabī

Yafiah: Yes

Rachel: I'll show you the whole poem, just a minute

Yafiah: When I was living in Spain the church had what they called a multi-faith meeting. This was right up in the mountains, but it was basically all Christians there, and I said to the local priest, 'Can I please read a poem from Ibn 'Arabī?' It was the one that begins, 'My heart is capable of all forms.' And that was nice because that was Andalusia, you know, it was Ibn 'Arabī's...

⁵⁶⁰ Judith is referring to the *maqamāt*, the stations, or levels of the nafs (ego self).

⁵⁶¹ Rachel is referring to the translation of the introduction to her book.

Rachel: ...natural habitat

Yafiah: ...natural habitat, yes.

Rachel: Here it is (Rachel shows me the poem) I'll read just the beginning with my accent. 'Listen, oh dearly beloved. I am the reality of the world; the centre of the circumference. I am the parts and the whole. I am the wheel established between heaven and earth. I have created perception of you only in order to be the object of My perception. If then you perceive Me, you perceive yourself, but you cannot perceive Me through yourself. It is through My eyes that you see Me and see yourself. Through your eyes you cannot see me. Dearly beloved, I have called you so often and you have not heard Me. I have shown Myself to you so often and you have not seen Me. I have made Myself fragrance so often and you have not smelled Me. Savourous food - and you have not tasted Me. Why can you not reach Me through the objects you touch? Or breathe me through sweet perfumes? Why do you not see Me? Why do you not hear Me? Why? Why? Why? Love Me! Love Me alone! Love yourself in Me, in Me alone! Attach yourself to Me! No one is more inward than I. Others love you for their own sakes, I love you for yourself. And you? You flee from Me! Dearly beloved, I am nearer to you than yourself, than your soul, than your breath. Who among creatures would treat you as I do? I am jealous of you over you. I want you to belong to no other, not even to yourself. Be Mine! Be for me as you are in Me, though you are not even aware of it. Dearly beloved, let us go toward Union. And if we find the road that leads to separation we will destroy separation. Let us go hand in hand. Let us enter the presence of truth. Let it be our judge and imprint its seal upon our union forever.' I skipped some parts. I didn't read all of it. But I received it from a friend who has been to Beshara School and she was getting married there. And she said, 'We read this poem and as we read it I thought about you. So I'm sending it to you.' And I saw it as a personal letter from God to me. So I had to come and I came with the excuse of her wedding but it was amazing, my first meeting with Beshara.

Yafiah: How long did you stay there for?

Rachel: Eight days

Yafiah: And then you continued when you got back here, in the group?

Rachel: I didn't continue anything. It was like a break in my life. I wept for eight days there and I kept on weeping and when I came home, all the way back home I was weeping. I couldn't stop. It was...

Yafiah: I can feel that

Rachel: Yes. It was... at last I met myself. I think it was about twenty years ago so I was forty-seven, forty-six, years old and it was the first time in my life that I met myself on such a deep level, such a profound level. And it's not as if I haven't lived until then. I've done many things. I had children, I have grandchildren. But it was on a completely different level.

Yafiah: This is not just from reading Ibn 'Arabī but an experience, a tasting, as well as...

Rachel: Yes, it is. It is. To my experience there is something very unique in Chisholme House. It is a real school and it's a school in the sense that – I thought about it – in the last chapter of the book that I've written. Whenever I come there, there are two feelings that happen to me, two experiences. One is that I feel extremely loved – and not by people. And the other is that I feel how inadequate I am. All my inadequacies pop on the surface. As if I'm told, 'You are loved and this is to be corrected'. All these, and so to me it has the sense of the – I don't know if you are familiar with Simone Weil? She says something like – I'm paraphrasing it, 'Thank You, God, for showing me all my faults. Not so that I'll correct them but so that I'll be in the presence of Truth.' For me, being in Chisholme is like that. It has this sense.

Yafiah: And have you been back since that first time?

Rachel: Yes, after having been to these eight days I came home and I said I've got to go back and do a long course, a half year course. But I couldn't because my youngest son has attention deficit – learning difficulties. And I couldn't take him with me. I said, what am I going to do? I can't take him there. I can't leave him here and go by myself. So what am I going to do? And also I was leaving my job at the time as a film critic in Haaretz newspaper and I started working with the body. And I said, I'm starting a new career! Will I go away for half a year? Then something amazing happened on this level because just before going to Chisholme two journalists – two newspaper journalists – called me and said, 'Oh we heard you're leaving Haaretz newspaper and going to work with your hands. Can we interview you?' And I said, 'No I don't think so because I don't want to publicize it in this way. It will come from mouth to ear and anyway, I'm going away now for a month.' Because I was doing a course in Paris and then going away to Scotland. So one of them said, 'Look, I'll call you again when you come back. Maybe you'll change your mind.' And when I came back, after having been to Chisholme, she called me and she said: 'Do you want to be interviewed?' So I said, 'No, I don't think so.' She said, 'Look, I've got to write an article for

Friday' – it was a Monday or something – 'So if you change your mind, here is my phone number.' And she gave me her phone number. Now my husband hasn't been in Israel then. He went to Australia to study. And I went to the bank and I said to myself it's very strange because I don't work and I don't put money in the bank and I have more and more money in the bank! (Laughter)

Yafiah: Tell me your secret!

Rachel: There was a small minus before the sum which I didn't notice (very hearty laughter)

Yafiah: That's a good one

Rachel: So I called her and – I thought I've got to work, I've got to earn some money – and I called her. She wrote an article about me which was published on Friday morning and on Friday morning there was a queue of people standing before my husband's clinic where I worked – she wrote the address which was also something unusual. And I had such a success that for half a year I had a waiting list. All my time was occupied. And to my perception it had to do with having been to Chisholme. And then I said, how am I going to go to Chisholme for half a year now that I started a career and I want to practice. So I spoke with my son and I said, 'Would you come with me to Chisholme?' And he said, 'Only if I can go and not work, not go to school there.' So I said, fine, I took him out of school. And it took half a year until I went to Chisholme but I went with him and my first course was to do mainly with him. You see, we were about twelve people on the course and each one had a completely different course, it was completely personal. And what I went through had mostly to do with my difficulties with him. And it was completely unlike these eight days of elation that I had in the beginning. It was tough. It was like being drilled in the army. It was very difficult but there were...there were very good moments. Some of them were peaks of experience, some of them were bottom of experience. Like when I felt like being thrown back to the starting point...and once I was thrown back to nothingness - I started to build up my self-importance again and then I would be knocked off my feet again. It was very good.

Yafiah: So when you're at a course at Beshara are you then in continual conversation with Hakim or one of the other...

Rachel: No. The second course is a course of conversation. The first course you study texts and you work and you meditate and you do *dhikr* and all these sort of things.

Yafiah: Could you tell me something about – you are Jewish and Ibn ‘Arabī was – is – Muslim

Rachel: Look, I’ve written a paragraph about... (laughter). So I’ll read you the paragraph.

Yafiah: Okay. You knew what my questions were going to be didn’t you? (Laughter)

Rachel: Yes. The name of the paragraph is, ‘Who am I?’

(Rachel reads from the translation of her book which is written in Hebrew)

‘Muhammad?’ shrinks my good friend, ‘when I hear “Muhammad” I think of “Arafat” (the prototype of the Jew-baiter). In one of the courses at the school in Scotland I raised a similar difficulty. ‘As a Jewess and an Israeli I have a difficulty with Muhammad’, I announce at the start of a conversation – it was on the second course actually - ‘You know’, the correlator responded, ‘it’s strange, but I never thought of you as a Jewess and an Israeli’. My mouth dropped open. Who am I? Are Jewess and Israeli real definitions of who I am? Should I define myself as a mother, a wife, or according to my profession? Or maybe I don’t have to live any of these definitions – even not all of them together? Maybe ‘I am a possibility unknown even to myself, and my life - a laboratory for researching such a possibility? In the context of life in Israel ‘Muhammad’ is not a neutral concept such as ‘Buddha’ or ‘Brahma’, and ‘Allahu Akbar’ is known mainly as the declaration of a suicidal terrorist before he activates the bomb. Ibn ‘Arabī’s way is about the essence, but essence cannot appear without form. And with Ibn ‘Arabī the form is Arabic, the terms are the terms of Islam, and the prayers are based on the Qur’ān. Should I ignore the difficult connotations of these forms in order to touch the essence? Or become a stranger to the call that arises from the depth of my being and look for other forms with which I would feel more comfortable? Or maybe difficulty is the door-keeper of new possibilities, for, as any avowed reader of legends knows, the sitting post of the dragon is where the treasure is hidden. Ibn ‘Arabī does not represent the Muslim dogma. That is why he became subject to recurrent attacks by representatives of official Islam. ‘The gnostic’, he writes, ‘will never be trapped in one form of belief. Knowing the kernel of all beliefs he recognizes it in any disguise. He sees the interior and not the exterior and accepts whatever form he is presented with.

Anyhow, I quote this poem of ‘My heart has become capable of every form.’

How does one develop a heart that is capable of every form? The question is more crucial in the loaded zone of the Middle-East where the different forms become cause for slaughter

and bereavement. Can Ibn 'Arabī, a Muslim who lived in Andalusia during the golden age of Islam, offer a key not only to accepting 'the other' with mutual respect, but to uncovering the point of identity from which the forms are seen as different expressions of the same love of beauty? The same longing for intimacy? The same awe in face of the sublime? The same sweetness that the heart cannot contain? Only appealing to the widest, the most profound, in us, that which contains everything and is not contained by any partial aspect of it – would enable one to recognize the difference, not just with respect but also with love. That width, that depth, is God. Neither God to whom one says, 'You have chosen us', nor, 'my God' who is 'greater than your God', in a mistaken understanding of 'Allahu Akbar'. But that essential Being that cannot be defined and who is yet 'closer to man than his jugular vein' as the Qur'ān claims. According to Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of unity, 'Muslims', 'Jews', or 'Christians' are not exclusive perceptions that cancel each other, but different expressions of the same fathomless depth that no form can properly express.

Yafiah: Thank you. I wonder, can you tell me first of all are you in any way active in peace initiatives? What do you feel Ibn 'Arabī's contribution might possibly be, through Beshara and also the Şufis who would know his work, to peace here, to reconciliation?

Rachel: I'm not active in a political way towards peace. It's because it seems to me that there are so many truths, so many aspects, that it's very hard to take a position, to take a direction in this. I tried for a while to go to... How do you call it?

Yafiah: Machsom Watch?

Rachel: Machsom Watch, yes...

Yafiah: Did you go with Judith?

Rachel: No, Judith was very active in it. I just came two or three times and I couldn't go because the woman I went with was preaching to the soldiers all the time on how they should behave, and made them feel guilty.

Yafiah: I thought that the women always kept silent and simply watched

Rachel: No. Immediately I take a position and I feel it's not right because there are so many positions. And what I get from Ibn 'Arabī and his perception of reality is that there is *ḥayra* – you know what *ḥayra* is?

Yafiah: Yes

Rachel: That you are torn by opposites. And living in Israel is very much like that. You feel torn by opposites all the time. And the only thing I can do in it is let myself be torn by opposites, not choose a direction. You see, there was a film a short while ago, on the television, about a woman from Gaza whose son was ill. An Israeli journalist, Shlomi Eldar, who is a very good man, brought her son here to be treated, she already lost two children. Were you told about it?

Yafiah: I've heard several stories like this. I don't remember this one in particular

Rachel: Two of her children were already dead because of this hereditary disease and here was the baby who didn't have the prospect of reaching being one year old. And he was brought here by the initiative of this journalist and he was treated in hospital, and she was with him and by the end the treatment was successful. The journalist asked her, 'So now would you send him to be a *shahīd*?⁵⁶² And she said 'Of course I will'. Now afterwards she retreated from her statement, and she made different excuses but it is true what she said, you see. And she is pushed by public opinion where she is living, and we are pushed by... That's why it's so difficult to take a position and go on the barricades because everything has its opposite aspect as well. And for me, Ibn 'Arabī, his greatness is that he encompasses all the aspects. And he doesn't even encompass it, he lets them come through him and do the action that needs to be done.

Yafiah: So would you feel that what you have just described to me about being torn by opposites, about not being able to take one position because there is always its opposite position, and what you have learnt and experienced through Ibn 'Arabī – that that process in itself, happening within you, is a contribution towards peace in as far as our relationship to every other...

Rachel: I'm sure it is. I'm sure it is. So in a way, reading all these things and it's being so...so powerful for me, influences how I am with other people and that's the small way in which I contribute. Because I really love Ibn 'Arabī, it's not something which I've adopted. And after I've written this book there was a non-conformist Jewish Rabbi who read it and he said: 'I found a brother in Ibn 'Arabī!' Because you find yourself in it, you find the universality within yourself in Ibn 'Arabī. It's not something that you adopt from the outside

Yafiah: It feels like... as if that's within you

⁵⁶² A martyr

Rachel: That's what I've been about all my life. I only didn't know it. It didn't have a form until then.

Yafiah: In Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation of the Qur'ān, and of the *shahāda*,⁵⁶³ and this is what every Sufi would say as well, it's not just 'There is no god but God' but there is nothing but God

Rachel: Yes

Yafiah: All of creation, and especially the human being as a manifestation of the Attributes of God, does that effect in any way how you see other people, even other people who maybe shock you or you find difficult? Does it make any...?

Rachel: I don't know. It's very difficult when things happen. As I said it's very easy to see it in black and white and, 'We're victims!' You see, it's easy to feel this way. But...I don't know...this special flavour of Ibn 'Arabī for me is that he gives one the feeling that the world is wider than we can imagine or – that's the 'Allahu Akbar!' It's that God is always greater. Now I'm joining Avraham Elkayam and other people in the Bar Ilan University to read the *Fusūs* in Arabic. I don't know Arabic but I'm struggling with it. I sit at home and translate and then I come there. But it's not the way it's being studied in Chisholme. In Chisholme you study yourself through Ibn 'Arabī and you sometimes know things that are not in the text. And things happen in a magical way. And that's why for me, this way of Chisholme is – what it includes is that there is magic in life. I haven't touched its surface yet.

Yafiah: Rachel do you mind if I ask you – and you may have already answered this indirectly – what kind of solution would you like to see for Israel and the Palestinian territories?

Rachel: I believe we must have a Jewish state and I believe the bottom line is not having the right of return to the borders of '48. Now immediately when I say it ... I'm going to ... I feel like ... I miss the most simple words. Like having an argument about, 'We didn't kick them out, they went', or... I'm going to leave it aside, it's not important but I believe there is no Jewish state in the world, there are so many Arab states and I had this argument with somebody in Chisholme who said, 'Why can't you live in Germany? Why can't you live in another country? Why do you have to have your own state? Why does your son need to be in Israel?' And I thought about it, that universality is not wiping out the differences. It's

⁵⁶³ The first pillar of Islam which is to bear witness that there is no god but God.

about each one being the most profound *your* self you can find. And a part of all these layers is being Jewish. Now I don't know what it means to me to be Jewish because I'm not religious, I never was. On the contrary my father was anti-religious although his father was a Ḥassidic Jew and I have a very strong kinship with him. But I was raised as an atheist. But I still feel Jewish and my language is Hebrew and I want my language to be Hebrew – I'm studying Arabic and I read in English and I read in French but my natural milieu is Hebrew and the Hebrew culture and the Bible in Hebrew. It's not something I would like to give up and I think we are entitled to it, to have this small piece of land – which is really small – in which we can cultivate the Jewish culture.

Yafiah: So the Palestinian Territories, the West Bank and Gaza ...

Rachel: ... I would have returned everything from '67 on the condition – and I would have divided Jerusalem, I have no difficulty with it, or even having an international in the Temple Mount. Because I think there is a problem. If I come to the Temple Mount and I close my eyes, do you know that immediately someone comes running to me saying, 'No praying, no praying!' Why shouldn't I be able to pray in the Dome of the Rock? Why should I not be able to close my eyes and be with something?

Yafiah: Why shouldn't Jews and Arabs be able to pray together in there?

Rachel: Yes

Yafiah: ... and I believe that once upon a time they did

Rachel: I don't think so. It was called *Haram al-Sharif*

Yafiah: I think we're talking a few centuries ago

Rachel: No it was never like that. I've done some research about it. And it became worse and worse and now they even call our temple '*maz'ūm*' which means 'full of lies'. As if we never had a temple. I don't care about the temple but I care about truth and I think that truth today is very much manipulated and you don't know what is true anymore. So that's why I feel this '*ḥayra*' of Ibn 'Arabī very strongly because what is the victim is shown as the one who abuses and the one who abuses is shown as the victim and it's not true there is no abuser and no victim and everything is mixed up and thus all these so-called narratives that everybody goes with – it's postmodernism with its many truths, as if there is no truth and for me the power of Ibn 'Arabī is that he says there is Truth. Even if we don't know it, but it is, and this is the main factor.

Yafiah: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Rachel: I can only say that for me Ibn 'Arabī and Beshara is the main reason for living. My children, my grandchildren, are not that important, are not as important as this. It really makes contact for me with the most profound layer of reality.

Yafiah: Thank you very much

Rachel: It's a pleasure

Email from Rachel to myself sent on 4/06/2011

Why am I writing to you now? I guess it's because I feel that what I've said when you visited me was not up to the situation, but then - nothing is. I've just started reading the Hebrew translation of Dr. Abuelaish's book "I shall not hate". You are probably familiar with his life-story. Have you read his book? It's heart wrenching, and like testimonies about the holocaust one is torn between the wish to read it (for the sake of Truth) and the tendency to avoid the pain of such knowledge. It feels as if the level of justice, which serves both sides to justify unbearable deeds, is so shallow in comparison with sheer pain, or hope, or longing for the possibility of joy and normality.

I'm debating with myself whether to go to "conversation" in the Beshara Center this evening or go to demonstrate for peace agreement within the borders of 67. I think I'll come to "conversation". Maybe because it seems that a response to the situation needs to come from a deeper level than demonstrations. Have you seen the French film "J'accuse", in which the dead of both world wars rise from their graves marching in protest against the possibility of a 3rd world war? It seems that the proper response to the situation is something of that calibre.

Love, from Israel

Rachel (Hamida) Gordin

Interview with David of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, August 2011

Yafiah: Would you like to start telling me about your path to Sufism?

David: Well, where does a path really begin? I'd say that actively – in an active sense my path to Sufism began in 2006 when I joined the circle, the Jerusalem Circle led by Ya'qub

although – and it’s developed gradually from there. I would say the path there – I would say began about ten years or so before that when I began exploring...say...non-conventional, less conventional modes of spirituality. But more at the time from a self-help point of view. I would say that the first ten or eleven years were more of an attempt at finding some answers to make pain go away. It wasn’t so much a search for a relationship with God for its own sake. My path took a very sharp turn in that direction in the summer of 2006. It happened quite suddenly. My first encounter with Ya’qub was in the early 90’s when he was a Master’s student at Hebrew University, and a couple of years after that he opened Olam Qatan – or rather I think it was more like five years after that, he opened Olam Qatan. I became a regular customer just dropping in every now and then, just looking for whatever Buddhism, or self-help, or maybe even Sufism, had to offer. In terms of trying to just maybe re-frame difficult experiences I was having in the language of some kind of spiritual path.

Yafiah: Can I just ask you there, you didn’t find that in Judaism?

David: To be quite fair I can’t honestly say that I gave Judaism a fair shot. I wouldn’t say that I gave conventional, rabbinic Judaism a fair shot. I would say that in the last ten or fifteen years I’ve become aware of alternative approaches that once upon a time I would have regarded as being offshoots of Judaism. At this point I would say that I’m in a state of flux in terms of what I even would define as being Judaism or what I even would define as being Sufism. Just this past Shabbat we had some lunch guests and people started asking me whether the synagogue we go to was Orthodox. We started talking about it and I said, ‘What does the word mean anymore? What does the word really mean? Maybe twenty years ago the word meant something in a definitive sense and now you have Modern Orthodox and Progressive Orthodox, and Neo Orthodox, and you have traditional Conservatism that in some ways is more orthodox than the left-wing of orthodoxy, and you have Gay Orthodox, and you just have basically any manifestation, you know, any manifestation of Jewish tradition that has some connection to men and women davening, or praying, a traditional service usually separated by some physical barrier. I don’t know what the word means any more, any more than I really know what the word ‘Sufism’ means to be quite honest.

Yafiah: So you were going regularly to Ya’qub’s bookshop

David: Yeah, I was sort of going on some sort of occasional basis to Ya'qub's bookshop and the truth is that now I start thinking about the history, before Ya'qub – a couple of years before Ya'qub opened the book shop he had a school called *Ruach Hadashah* – the New Spirit – where they were basically teaching classes in various...basically taking Jewish teachings and traditions and sort of creating a blend with various New Age spirituality and modalities. Like for example I took a course in Torah and Yoga where this really fantastic teacher got us to sit in a circle, you know got us sitting in the lotus learning the weekly Torah portion and combining that with yoga practices and it was quite an amazing thing. And he (Ya'qub) did that for a couple of years, maybe a year or two, and after that he opened Olam Qatan which was where I really started having more extended conversations with him, you know, buying books, talking about books, talking about the teachings in the books and outside the books, and just getting to – regarding him more as like...you know he was – you know basically there was a ten year period where Ya'qub to me was basically a guru with a store. But I really hadn't been exposed to the depth of his knowledge and the depth of his teaching and also to the human element of just really getting past the searcher having a relationship with the book to exploring spiritual practices in the context of a group and all that that gives you including the challenges it gives you. (Long pause). You have to ask me some leading questions

Yafiah: How did it develop on from there when you started attending the group and when did that happen?

David: Over the past five years I guess I've become engaged with Sufism – you know both the good and the bad of it in terms of that engagement. It's given me a base of knowledge and a base of access to knowledge that's been a phenomenal resource to me in terms of giving me what I would call a tool box for connecting with God. And when I say connecting with God I mean beyond what I see as being abstract methods that conventional monotheistic religion gives you – giving me tools for experiencing God as an intuitive process through direct reception. And also giving me a foundation of relationships with people that I can talk with who understand what I'm talking about. Who can regard me as someone who can listen to them and not in any way be dismissive of what they're talking about, and actually be interested in what they're talking about, and just having, you know, the shared experience of exploring God within as a community. Because it's not only exploring God within yourself; I believe it's Kabir Helminski who talks about how we polish our own hearts to become reflectors of God – and in doing so we polish each other's hearts

to reflect God in one another. So I would say that that, in simple language, sums up what the experience has been for me. I would say the negative side is that it can get quite cosy. You know just like a church or a synagogue or a mosque can become sort of a substitute for doing the actual work. Okay, well I'm involved in a house of worship and, you know, I'm paying my dues so to speak, and you can get sort of wrapped up in the regularity of things and the routine-ness of things and you can go through periods of stagnation where things are just sort of comfy and cosy and you can be fun and chatty with the people and you can say a little prayer, read a few poems, sing a few songs. Okay, we did that, see you next week! That can go on for periods of time and I'm sure many people have experienced that but every now and then I need to wake myself out of that sort of slumber and, 'Okay Dave, you got some work to do. The coffee was nice, the songs were nice, we had our...you know, let's pray and let's have a group hug. Okay, Dave you have some work to do. You need to get up early in the morning instead of sleeping in or surfing the internet or doing whatever. Just meditate seriously, do some serious reading, do some of the inner body exercises or outer body exercises and time to wake up and do some of the work.' What in Kebzeh is called the *chilleh* work. I'm not sure what the Christian equivalent of that would be but I guess in Christianity or Judaism just working on yourself. You know working on excising your inner demons and working on becoming a kinder, more decent, caring human being and just being a trusted friend and a loving partner and parent, a trustworthy, caring colleague and just all those things that human beings who are cognisant of those things and actually take the effort to work on them and are people that you actually want to have as your friends and are people you want to have in your community.

Yafiah: Often we don't see. We have a blind spot for our own faults which is why it's always good to have a spiritual mentor/Shaykh or guide. Do you see Ya'qub in that way, or the Kebzeh teachings? You haven't actually taken hand with a Shaykh have you?

David: It's a very interesting question, okay. I've always had some inner resistance to saying, 'You are my master. I am your disciple', although you can be sure that if Ya'qub gives me some points I do take them quite seriously. I would say that I do regard him as my Shaykh in a liberal, flexible way. You know the fact is that I was acquainted with Ya'qub for about fifteen years before I joined the circle and we'd had some fairly intense spiritual life conversations for about eight or nine years, or even ten years before I joined the circle. So in many ways Ya'qub is a friend, you know, so when I enter into *sohbet* I do make a conscious effort to switch off the buddy-buddy mode and go into the Shaykh-disciple

mode. You know it does happen occasionally that he has some pointed things that he needs to say to me. Like, for example, if he says, 'David I need you to take responsibility for the language you're using. You need to be clear about what you're saying. Don't be lax with your words here. You're talking about something very important and I need you to take seriously and focus on your vocabulary right now.' And that's not something you say ordinarily to a friend you're having a beer with. This is a respect that I give him, you know, that when we're in *ṣoḥbet* every so often he needs to call someone to order and every so often that person happens to be me and I give him that. You know, in this framework we're having a Shaykh-disciple relationship. He's still my friend and after the meeting you know we may just have a beer or I might invite him over for a Shabbat lunch or we may just talk about work or talk about the women in our lives and all those kind of things that friends talk about, you know, within *ṣoḥbet* he's the boss.

Yafiah: So *ṣoḥbet*, would you say, is your main *Ṣūfī* practice as well as self-examination?

David: Self-examination, that's a good way of putting it

Yafiah: *Muhasabat al-nafs*

David: I don't necessarily like to categorise; now I am doing something *Ṣūfī*, now I am not, I am doing something else. If you're going to be on the path you're always on the path. *Ṣoḥbet* is for me a way of reinforcing the discovery of spiritual truth through a group conversation – through a guided group conversation. There is making *dhikr*, and there's *ṣoḥbet*, I would say that in the circle it's more *ṣoḥbet* and there is some element of *dhikr*. So that's an engagement in practice and the work that I do in terms of reading the teachings of masters, great or small, and applying that thinking and meditating on how I can apply that to my life. But I like to think of the Malāmi path as something that you are living every micro-second of your existence. It's not like something that you categorize like now I am a *Ṣūfī* and now I am a regular guy. Or now I am a *Ṣūfī* and now I am a Jew. I am a Jewish *Ṣūfī* and the Malāmi awareness is something I try to take with me when I'm putting on phylacteries and praying with *tallit*, still taking an awareness that I am connecting to God within myself and from there radiating outward and the point of contact is within me. The point of contact is within all of us and from there you can radiate outward. Awareness should be something that should be going on all the time and I would say that it's a similar thing that I try to take with interactions that I'm having at work and interaction that I'm having with my wife, my kids, my neighbours, whoever it may be. This awareness is

something that I try to maintain – I don't always succeed – but I try to maintain it at all times.

Yafiah: Sometimes there are events attended by both Muslim and Jewish Ṣūfīs, for example in Nazareth with Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām, with the Derekh Avraham, do you ever partake in any of those events?

David: I haven't gone to events outside of Jerusalem. Forgive me if I'm confusing Naqshbandi and Bektashi, I'm sorry – but there were some dances that I was going to here in Jerusalem a few years ago. I haven't gone to the group in Yaffo or in Nazareth. It's something I've considered doing at some point. I mean I don't necessarily rule it out, it's just something I haven't done yet. I pretty much limited my involvement to Jerusalem.

Yafiah: So would you say you haven't as yet had a great deal of interaction with Muslim Ṣūfīs as well in your practice?

David: I've had interaction with the Muslim Ṣūfīs that have come through the Jerusalem circle, the people in connection with Ya'qub. There've been a handful actually. He's had some Muslims come from Jerusalem, or there've been a few from Turkey, maybe some European Muslims that have come through, mainly visiting, so I've had contact with them.

Yafiah: And do you perceive change within yourself over the years through your Ṣūfī practice?

David: Sure, sure.

Yafiah: Do you see potential in Ṣūfī practice in helping towards reconciliation and peace in Israel?

David: It's a very interesting question because on the one hand I've never been particularly optimistic about political reconciliation. Since I began coming to the circle I've come to believe that religious reconciliation – and I'm specifically using the word 'religion' I'm not necessarily using the word 'Sufism' – okay, I think that the only hope for peace is through religious reconciliation, basically acknowledging that we're all 'Ibn' Ibrahim. Culturally we're very different and there's a lot of negative baggage, there are a lot of bloody shirts to wave around. I wouldn't necessarily say that I'm optimistic about it in an idealistic sense. I would say that there's probably far more resistance to religious reconciliation than there is to political reconciliation because religious reconciliation in many ways seems very

threatening especially when you're heavily egotistically invested in whatever religion you have whether you're a practitioner or whether let's say you're an orthodox practitioner or not. You know, even if you're quite secular the cultural baggage, the cultural associations that you relate to religion can make the idea of building a bridge religiously to another faith as being very threatening. So I would say that I see a potential...I certainly see a potential for reconciliation. There was one time when I attended a discussion between Rabbi Menachem Froman and a Şūfī Shaykh...

Yafiah: Shaykh Bukhari?

David: I think so, I think it was him...or actually now that I think about it I think it was the father of Ghassan

Yafiah: Ah, Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām

David: 'Abd al-Salām, yes, the father of Ghassan. A very enjoyable experience but you see the thing is that when you have one of these panel discussions it's more like these guys are engaging and the people who come and attend, you can be sure that their not coming to be hostile but they're sort of like passive observers in the audience even if they are asking questions. It's not engaging people in the crowd and getting people to say, 'Okay, can we put our differences and our religion aside and look at the commonalities and acknowledge that we're praying to the same God, perhaps in slightly different ways but the differences are fairly minor. Can we get past the cultural differences and learn how to trust one another.' Because you see the thing is people are always talking about peace but they're not necessarily talking about the underpinnings of peace. The main underpinning of peace is trust, okay, not necessarily love, okay. I would say trust is more important than love because when you have love without trust it's very fleeting. It's sort of like a bit of a fling I would say. Can we trust one another that when we say, 'Okay, you live here and we live there,' that we're not going to encroach on one another's – I don't necessarily mean in a literal, or even in a figurative sense you know – are we going to encroach on each other's territory, is it opportunistic, you know, are we looking to screw one another at the first opportunity? To get that you need trust, to have trust you have to have exposure to one another and you know seeing peace as something you just demonstrate for and that you demand from your leaders and that you send them off to negotiate and they come back with a bad deal. Is Sufism a bridge to religious reconciliation? I would say it's certainly one modality where I can see it taking shape. I'm not necessarily sure I'm optimistic about it

having a huge impact on a national level but I think that it's now more important that just more individuals start to awaken. That is what I would expect to happen, let's say, in my lifetime.

Yafiah: So on a very grass roots level if you have Jews interested in Sufism it becomes easier and there is maybe more opportunity to interact, to get to know Muslims who are *Ṣūfīs* as well and your wider circle is aware of that and begins to possibly break down the paradigm that Jews and Muslims can't talk to each other?

David: Well look, there's this word in Hebrew, sort of like a Yiddish word because it was made into a Yiddish word. It's called *taqlas*, you know, *taqlit*, which means the essential, let's say getting down to the brass tacks of things. I don't regard the *Ṣūfī* circle as a peace group

Yafiah: No

David: It's not a peace group, okay. It's a forum for spiritual exploration as a community. Maybe a small community, maybe a larger community, but it's a forum for spiritual exploration as a community of friends. Those friends can be Jewish, they can be Christian, they can be Muslim. They can be a mix. They can be anything, you know, they can be Buddhists, they can be disengaged from any tradition and getting their context completely as a *Ṣūfī*. You see, Israelis are very practically-minded people, Jewish-Israelis, across the religious spectrum, let's say the denominational spectrum, or across the religious-secular divide. People are very practically-minded so someone might think, 'This is all very nice what you're talking about.' Look, practically speaking, Yafiah, I'll be very direct with you, I don't hide from my children that I'm engaged in *Ṣūfī* practice. As they get older they start to see that I'm doing something a little offbeat. I have five kids who at some point or another will probably be going to go into the IDF. I'm not going to soft-pedal them and be in denial that at some point they may have some very difficult encounters with Arab Muslims. There's more that I'll even tell you about when we're not being recorded. For a long time I was resistant in getting involved in this circle because I was saying to myself, 'Look, David, yes of course, as an individual if becoming part of a circle of Jews and Muslims leads to greater understanding, a greater bond, a lessening of personal hostility and being able to build that into something greater where that radiates outward...Yes that's great.' But for a long time I was resistant. I was resistant in that sense. I felt like what's the point of all this nice talk. When it comes down to it they have their interests and we have ours and I

would say that from joining the Şūfī circle I began to see the differentiation between political reconciliation and religious reconciliation and I began to actually believe in religious reconciliation and become quite open to it. I think that it's something that happens very much on an individual level. I don't believe that it can necessarily remove, or let's say absolve us, from what I believe as a Jew is a responsibility for self-defence. To be very frank with you I would say that where I wasn't five years ago where I am now is that I could acknowledge the validity in the notion of defence being the first point of aggression. The notion that to achieve peace means behaving peacefully and at the same time I have to be quite honest that I feel a very strong Jewish survival impulse and the point where I am now is that I'm open to religious reconciliation and my perception of reality is that there is a need for Jewish self-defence. I can try and keep the two separated and there's more I can say without being recorded but I would say that where I am now on my own path is I see a need for both. Let's say, just to summarize, I have very low expectations of political reconciliation, placing somewhat greater stock in religious reconciliation and seeing my connection to religious reconciliation through being engaged in Şūfī traditions and practices. Both on a local and a global scale but I'm certainly not at a point where I can see there not being a need for Jewish self-defence in the foreseeable future and if I were to embrace that notion that defence is the first point of aggression I feel that I would be abrogating my Jewish responsibility.

Yafiah: So that would be a very difficult thing for you to fully embrace, that self-defence is the first point of aggression because of that strong Jewish right to self-defence that you feel?

David: It's not a question of right; it's a question of responsibility. I can forgo rights

Yafiah: Ah, okay

David: I'm not really interested in rights when I come here or when I engage in any kind of spiritual practices. It's more a question of responsibilities... (long pause) we have to live in the world and maybe if I lived in Vermont or if I lived in Vernon, British Columbia I'd be able to just – not that those places don't have their own problems but it's not like living in Jerusalem or living in Israel. Maybe if I was raising my family in those places maybe I could bring myself to disconnect from what's going on here and just say, okay, maybe I would be able to embrace the notion of 'violence never'.

Yafiah: Actually the responsibility to defend yourself, your family, your friends – that is a responsibility from a religious point of view in both Judaism and Islam

David: Yes, right

Yafiah: And again, in both, it's completely forbidden to be the aggressor, but one prays that it will never be necessary to kill in self-defence

David: Exactly

Yafiah: A Ṣūfī group isn't there as a peace group. But it would seem to me, even if in a very small way, very, grass-roots, it does provide a ground for people from different religious traditions, and in this case we're talking about Arab-Israelis and Jewish-Israelis who maybe in everyday life don't interact much with each other

David: And Palestinian Arabs

Yafiah: Yes. But there is a possible ground there. Would you agree with that? For that interaction to happen in a setting where there is an understanding between Jews and Muslims because they're both coming together on the Ṣūfī path?

David: Well I would say that there's certainly a ground for it but I would say that it requires a lot of proactive – you have to be very proactive about dealing with your own obstacles in getting there. Look, it took me ten years from the time that Ya'qub first proposed that I joined the circle, it took me almost ten years to get there. There was a lot of inner resistance I had to overcome in order to get to that point. Political resistance, religious resistance, there was a lot to work to go through just to get there.

Yafiah: That is in fact though, wouldn't you say, part of the path?

David: Yes

Yafiah: It's what the path is about

David: Absolutely

Yafiah: About dismantling the baggage

David: Absolutely and you know I'll tell you something. I sometimes wonder about this, I sometimes wonder to what extent I've succeeded in compartmentalizing these various parts of my life and have I really changed in terms of the way I see people or have I just

succeeded in seeing the circle as a safe ground without necessarily changing how I see people. Because look, I would say the truth is probably somewhere in the middle. I would say I do see people somewhat differently. I would say that the way it's really changed is that I'm willing to... it's more like I recognize the Arab-Israeli conflict, which I really call the Muslim-Jewish conflict, I see as more of a conflict of flawed human-beings who carry around a great deal of cultural baggage whether it's religious, it's genetic, it's all those, it's national, it's all those things, and just flawed human-beings holding onto what they know, being afraid that they're going to lose what they have if they let go of what they know. I would say that I see it less as there being always a clear right and a clear wrong. It's more, human-beings are flawed and we fight with one another and the fact that this conflict can be traced back something like four thousand years to the book of Genesis empowers the conflict in and of itself. You know there are conflicts in other parts of the world that don't stretch back quite as far that and in that sense may be more easily solvable or there may be fewer barriers towards solving them. I may have strayed from the original question, I'm sorry if I have

Yafiah: That's okay. Is there anything else that you would like to say to conclude, about your experience of Sufism and what it means to your life?

David: God within, it's a very difficult sell because it goes against so much of our conditioning, religious conditioning, or cultural conditioning. Salvation is a consumer product, unfortunately. And God is an abstract concept that makes our pain go away. It can be those things at times but it's not those things. Experiencing God through direct perception is, I think, the greatest thing a human-being can do. Or should I say, using that perception as a spring board for treating other human-beings with kindness, decency, and respect I'd say is the greatest thing a human-being can do. And I would say it has to start with the individual and like we said in college, think globally and act locally. You start by acting locally, what can I say, I may be pessimistic about the condition of the world but I can be personally optimistic about myself and about being part of a spiritual community of friends who help one another achieve their potential through manifesting God within us and through us and without us. What more is there?

Yafiah: Thank you very much

David: It's my pleasure

Interview with Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, Jerusalem, May 2011

Ya'qub: Let's start on how I came to Sufism. The first person I really took on as a teacher was Zalman Shachter, and there was a lot of talk about spirituality, and there was a lot of endeavour to get into spiritual experience. But along with that, there was a kind of doubt for me about, was it real? How do you know?" Zalman spread a full table of all kinds of spiritual things, his own background is Chabad. Carl Jung said a very deep thing. He said that everyone in the West is either Neo-Platonic or Aristotelian. And in Hasidic teaching that plays out as Reb Nahman or Chabad, and I found that the school for my soul was the teachings of Reb Nahman.⁵⁶⁴ He was talking about the essential quality of things as opposed to Shneur Zalman, who was rigorously proving things. Years later I tried to read a book about Hasidism by Adin Steinsaltz, *The Longer Shorter Way*⁵⁶⁵, and I just couldn't work out what the heck he was talking about! And I realized that he's trying to prove things rationally. And between Reb Nahman and my involvement in Sufism, when I read a text my intellect does its work but it's all in service of the heart. I'm trying to grasp the image, and trying to get the wholeness of it intuitively from the heart, and I'm just not built for rational proofs. I mean, this is alien to me. I've been deconstructed from philosophy all these years.

Let me mention a little aside here, a surprising thing, maybe, that we'll pick up again later. Turkish Sufism, which I feel very close to—most of my friends involved in Turkish Sufism are very oriented towards Ibn 'Arabī, towards philosophy. And I don't get it! Shams i-Tabriz talked about a 'Shaykh Muhammad' he met in Damascus who was probably Ibn 'Arabī. He says that he's a great guy, great to hang out with, a lot of fun, but he doesn't follow the footsteps of the Prophet! Not that I'm, you know, focused on following the footsteps of the Prophet, I'm not an orthodox Muslim by any means, but I resonate deeply with Shams i-Tabriz for some reason, and so I don't get it! Rumi and his friend Shams i-Tabriz, his father Baha'uddin, not to mention Yunus Emre... none of them are philosophers! Some of them very consciously are working *not* to be philosophers. To Yunus it comes naturally, he didn't have the background, you know. For Rumi especially, it was a choice, and they're all of them working very hard *not* to be philosophers. What I love about Turkish Sufism is these characters, you know, and it doesn't seem to be what a lot of my Turkish Sūfī friends are inclined towards. My friends Binyamin and Rabia, who are *fuqara* of Shaykh Nazim, they

⁵⁶⁴ Reb Nahman of Breslov, April 4, 1772 – October 16, 1810, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov. Not to be confused with another very interesting figure, Nachmanides/Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman/Ramban born 1194 Gerona, d. 1270 in Palestine.

⁵⁶⁵ Adin Steinsaltz, *The Longer Shorter Way: Discourses on Chasidic Thought*, (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1988). Translated and edited by Yehuda Hanegbi.

explain it as, “Well, you know, if you don’t have the prayer, so you need philosophy.” I’m very grateful to Murat Yagan, who is my teacher, certainly my *upa* (method) guru, not my *sat* (being) guru. From Baba I kind of get his being, his humorous, loving being. From Murat I get teachings and practices, with the exception of the meditation that I do, that’s a Naqshbandi practice I got from Baba. But Murat has an intellectual teaching that’s addressed to aligning the intellect with the heart, and exhausting the intellect so that you reach the heart. It’s clear, but it doesn’t go in circles around itself the way I perceive much of philosophy does, trying to prove itself by its consistency. It’s just trying to be coherent, so that a greater understanding can come through, so you have language to communicate it clearly. So I’m very grateful for that, I’m grateful I found that kind of teaching. I’m not interested in philosophy. When I considered going back to finish my PhD, I went to Bar Ilan University and they wanted me to take a course in philosophy. So the whole thing ended there.

So, Zalman’s background is Chabad, but he’s that kind of universal soul that really contains both, and what I most resonated with, even before I went to study with Zalman. Zalman had always been into the new technology. Today it’s Skype but in those days it was maintaining a conversation by sending a tape back and forth in the mail, and I had the chutzpah to ask, ‘Is God Jewish or is God Goddish? Because if God is Jewish, it’s really too bad for the goyim, you know? They miss out. But if God is Goddish, so what’s with all this Jewish stuff?’ And Zalman was not offended, he rather liked the question and he said, ‘To my understanding God is Goddish.’ And he said, ‘God is a verb.’ David Cooper later wrote a book by that title, ‘*God is a Verb*’. And Zalman goes on and says, ‘I God Jewishly’. Now that wasn’t entirely accurate, Zalman Gods Jewishly/eclectically, with a lot of spices from other traditions. He’s almost not capable of just staying in one language, but it was also very useful – broadening my horizon and informing me spiritually. So I became very taken with the teachings of Reb Nahman and what I found at the core of Reb Nahman’s universe is not seeing the Torah as a super code but seeing at the core of it the archetype of the spiritual master, the archetype of the *Tzaddik*. As the channel connecting heaven and earth, as the master who heals, who helps others to find their own alignment to the Divine. Like a Gardener helping the trees each to grow in their own alignment, and thinning them out when necessary. So I was very, very inspired by the teachings of Reb Nahman and something that was clearly universal in a very Jewish expression. The next step on my journey would be to go to Israel and look for a spiritual master. That was 1976. So I get to Israel, I look up Maggie Levine, I tell her about my spiritual journey thus far. First one on

the list is a teacher from the teaching of Reb Nahman, the second is a Zen Roshi, a Japanese Zen Roshi who was then living on the Mount of Olives, and the third was a Muslim Ṣūfī Shaykh. She said he's very powerful. He's rather traditional but with your Conservative Jewish background that may not be such a problem. She was right about that, I can handle a certain amount of tradition whatever the tradition is, but she said they say he's quite powerful. So I went to see the Hassidic teacher and he said, 'Your question is on the level of the teaching of the *Tzaddik* but there's only one problem, neither you nor I are *tzaddikim*.' So I understood he was saying you're looking for the spiritual master, as a student of Reb Nahman I certainly wouldn't discourage you but in our school there's been no living master since Reb Nahman died in 1810 so if that's what you're looking for you might have to keep looking. I remember we went to the top of the hill, bus-driver stops, pours his tea, plays music, wow this is another world. Then on the Mount of Olives it's like a 'u', on the northern spur is the more secular side, the southern spur is the more religious side. It then rose at its centre on the northern side. I actually got to the Zen centre and there was nobody home. I thought well that sort of fits for a Zen when there's nobody home. Later a neighbour came by and said they went away to the desert to do a retreat. I said well I don't think I came all the way to Israel to study Japanese Zen Buddhism. I've done my Buddhism already; let's go check out the Shaykh. I went to the Shaykh, I was twenty four years old at the time, I was impressed and I thought there was a presence of love in the house, it wasn't just sentimentality. So finally the Shaykh walks in. I'd hoped for a wizened, old, Semitic-looking guy with a long beard, olive skin but in walks a very light-skinned guy with a short crew cut and a reddish beard, built sort of like a Sumo wrestler, not flabby but strong but definitely something there, maybe a little bit daunting. Anyway he picks up a sheet of paper; it's a text of just a couple of pages long of the knowledge of the Ṣūfī path. He says, 'beloved can you read this?' It begins, 'Beloved, look with the eye of your heart and don't look back. See with the eye of hearing then you'll be hearing with the ear of God and see with the eye of God. This is the source of all the waters, the ma'yan, the spring which all the lovers are preaching about and when you come to this force be as Moses is when he speaks with his Lord and takes off his shoes, your shoes are the nafs, the ego and the shaytan, the dunya, and then you are from Him to Him forever.' And I had this feeling like – I didn't feel like I wanted to bow down before his feet – I felt like there must be this source of water in the next room or something, you know, we're very close here. It definitely spoke to me.

Yafiah: Yes

Ya'qub: So each time I go to the Shaykh I pick up another Jewish seeker and they express all the reservations – wait a minute is this going to compromise my Judaism, and so I feel like, would you just shut up and see about what they have to offer. At one point Shaykh is talking about serving God. You need knowledge to be able to serve God because you need to know the place of the servant and the place of the Lord within your own being. It sounded right to me and the words jumped out of my mouth, 'But I want to serve God!' and he responded saying, 'Yes beloved but the order has not come.' 'Oh! Whoa! Whoa! Whoa! Did I say I want to be your student? I don't think so! But maybe I did.' They warmly encouraged me to come back but said next time just come by yourself. I said that's fine, it's alright, I hear you. So I came back and Shaykh greeted me very warmly and said, 'Beloved, the order has come. You can come and you can stay and you can walk station after station and be complete and more complete if you like.' What do I do with this? I hadn't knowingly refused any invitation from God until that point. Well I'm going to go for it. I don't even know what I'm getting into. He never said I had to embrace Islam but he never said I didn't have to either. I was introduced to the prayers and they fit very well for me. In Buddhism they talk about body, speech, and mind, it's really an ideal body, speech, and mind exercise and I took Islamic practice the way I took Buddhist practice, not as a religious identity but as a serious spiritual practice. There's a lot of *dhikr* and I understood the *dhikr* alone, the inner *dhikr* in the Shadhuli teaching, without the grounding of the prayer probably would be too ungrounded, you need to prostrate. Maimonides could have written that you know but I really wasn't interested in changing religion or rejecting Judaism by any means. The first summer I was a bit perplexed but I went through many profound things and touched experiences I'd never touched before. As the years went on I would come back every year for maybe a couple of months – often in the summer but not always in the summer – spending it on the Mount of Olives.

Ya'qub: Okay. I came to feel more and more that I was stuck. Anyway, through some friends from the Mevlana Foundation in New Mexico I met Kabir Helminski and he invited to me come travel with him when he teaches in Turkey. I knew that I had to ask Shaykh to release me. He did and he didn't. He said, 'Beloved you can go and you can see and you can come back,' which on the one hand was generous of him but I also felt like he wasn't letting go. But I realized I had served notice, I was clear and also I'd freed him from his obligation. I met some wonderful teachers in Turkey. The most moving was probably Hasan Suşud, teacher of J. G. Bennett. Yanis writes about him being much more connected to the Malāmi. I saw this man in love with the void. Kabir said people say he has many presences

of prophets and saints around him but he doesn't relate to them, he's not interested in that and I felt a bit like a bull in a china shop around him. I could feel I didn't have the refinements for the love, the passionate love of non-being that he had. I was in the habit of going every year down to the Mevlana Foundation but one summer Kabir invited me to a Şūfī gathering, the path of Rumi, at his home. They have weekends and it was the first time they were going to have a week, seven nights, and he said *Open Secret* had come out and Murat's autobiography, *I Come from Behind Kaf Mountain*, he said read the last chapter – he sent it to me as a gift – “What is Sufism?” and I read it and I thought that it was very objective and a little bit more sort of Fourth Way flavour. It also had love; it had prayer, and a sense of humour. I said this could be Sufism for me. You know I'd read *Open Secret* and I said, you know, what's the path that goes with what Rumi is talking about here? This could be for me and then Kabir wrote back and said they need to ask for a little bit more contribution from the people who are coming because Murat and Maisie are coming. We got there – actually I gave a little teaching about Ibn 'Arabī – Murat and Maisie arrived about three days in – you know we had many activities but it all melted down as one big *şoḥbet* around the table with Murat because that was the most dynamic thing. Imagine we did lots and lots of Islamic prayer, less and less *dhikr*, less and less work projects, we went from one meal to the next having *şoḥbet* with Murat. One night – this story I think addresses your question – one night Murat asked, ‘How many here are dervishes?’ Now, they were all students of Kabir, I thought that everyone would raise their hand. Only three of us very meekly raised our hands, and it was clear that the three of us had taken hand with other Shaykhs. I could feel that Murat immediately felt our pain more than he was showing it. It was a very strong moment. He gave us a beautiful *şoḥbet* about first love. He said in first love there's a true taste of love. He said if you can stay with your first love then stay. People who say, ‘Oh this one, that wasn't real love, I really love that one!’ he said that's nonsense, love is love. On the other hand if for some reason you cannot stay with your first love you are free. God never interferes with your will. Will is the most precious thing a human being has. If God never interferes with your will no human being has the right to. Very interesting, a little different from Islam as submission to God's will. It hit me very deeply, resonated for me very deeply, in stereo. On the one hand I heard him respecting that I would never have the deep love, even subconscious as well as conscious involvement that I had with my first Shaykh, with any other teachers. He was my first love, you know, and there's nothing you can do about it and I felt his respect for that. These people are overwhelming! They're huge! In some ways I later thought that with Murat also.

So I felt really deeply understood by Murat if he could say that. That evening, at what was for me the break-fast dinner meal after dark; Murat started this long *şohbet* about allegiance to the holy city. Suleiman Dede who Murat deeply respected was still alive in Konya but he was saying to Kabir, what are you going to do when Suleiman Dede has passed on? How are you going to keep your point of contact with Konya – Mevlana? And Murat – so he’s talking about Konya but I’m thinking about Jerusalem – I no longer have a Shaykh in Jerusalem, he was a Muslim Shaykh but I’m a Jew. If I forget the old Jerusalem! He was keeping me connected to Jerusalem, now what do I do? I no longer have a compass to Jerusalem. So, again it resonated deeply for me.

Yafiah: And were you still living in the States at this time?

Ya’qub: No, no, I’ve been in Winnipeg all this time.

Yafiah: When do you decide to come to Israel?

Ya’qub: I was progressing with my MA thesis on the archetypal Tzaddik in Reb Nahman’s teachings and in the Jewish tradition that led up to that. Was this Reb Nahman being influenced by the Şūfī he met in the Arab town that’s close to Haifa or was he a product of the Ḥassidic tradition and the Kabbalistic tradition? Is this archetypal understanding of the Tzaddik of the (inaudible) tradition and I found that it really is. That was my MA thesis. It could have been a PhD but I didn’t have an MA yet. Then I discovered Moshe Idel. Did I belong to a school? And in my looking for the Jewish development, the Jewish ideas of Kabbalah, there’s a school – and I’m looking for universal spiritual ideas in kabbalah – Moshe Idel had two main revolutionary insights, one is that there is *unio mystica* in the Jewish tradition, and the other is that – although there are, of course, non-Jewish influences on the Jewish tradition as well, there are deep Jewish sources out of which Kabbalah and of course Hassidism proceeds. So I came to Israel to study with Moshe Idel, I thought I was coming for a year, it became two years, I went back each summer to visit friends in the States and to see Murat. He had since moved to the mountains of British Columbia from Vancouver. He’s a mountain man. It was time to go to Israel and I went – I didn’t go definitely deciding to live, to move there permanently, but I turned over the group I led in Vermont to the woman in the group I most trusted and I asked Murat, I said, ‘Your point of contact for the group here in Vermont is Jesus. I’m going to Israel with the intention of starting a group there. What do you recommend?’ It was a scary question to ask him but he gave me the right answer. He said, ‘You’re going to Jerusalem. Take

Abraham as your point of contact.' I said it's a group of probably mostly Jewish people, I hope there'll be Christians and Muslims as well. He said, 'Take Abraham as your point of contact and when you think of Abraham also think of Melchizedek.' So I thanked him very deeply. I didn't ask him if I should go to Jerusalem because I wasn't ready for a 'no' answer but I asked him for his blessing and I definitely got it. The first year or so of trying to put together a group I attracted a lot of Jewish guys, like the guys who accompanied me to see the Shaykh, who were a little more orthodox than I was, who were hungry spiritually but who couldn't get past the question, 'Will Sufism threaten my Jewish identity?' And then I made a shift. I shifted from the desire to have a group that would have Jews and Christians and Muslims together to a group in which secular and religious Jews could do spiritual work together. I decided that's the first frontier. If we don't address that then we can't go any further. I've come to understand that broadly in terms of my analysis of Israeli society and war and peace in the Middle East. There's an obvious projection. The Muslims see Israel not just representing a Judaism that they're jealous of but representing...Western...atheist materialism, not without some justification. Israel sees our Arab neighbours representing Islamic...repressive fundamentalism, not without some real justification. But within the Jewish world there's that split between the secular and the religious, that's been virtually schizophrenic. In the years that I've lived in Israel there has been a significant shift in that polarization. I've participated in this. There is more and more of a spectrum in-between. My parents were part of that – they came to Israel the same summer – the same summer their son became an Islamic Ṣūfī, they came to Israel, to fulfil their lifetime dream of establishing a conservative congregation where men and women can sit together, in the holy city of Tsfat and they did it, they had a beautiful congregation after 26 years. My father passed away, my mother came to Jerusalem and she later passed away. And I got to share with them; I'd be up there every two weeks for Shabbat. So my group, when I saw that there was a Jewish work to be done, the group stabilized interestingly.

Yafiah: Can I ask you a bit more about how you see the situation here for Israel and for the Palestinians and what you see as a possible solution or what you hope for?

Ya'qub: I'm not impressed with the political solutions. First of all I don't even understand this talk about the '67 borders. They're not the '67 borders, they're the '48 borders, excuse me! They changed the borders in '67. There's nothing sacred about '48 or '49 or '56 borders. There's nothing sacred about the '67 borders either. I don't know if we have the material for a Palestinian state there and given Israeli settlements – which it doesn't make

sense to dismantle all of them – maybe some, I don't know. People in Tekoa, Rabbi Fruman says, 'Messiah hasn't come, I'll live in Palestine, as Jew! We have Muslim Arabs in Israel; we have to work this out!' A very interesting position. I don't feel – and maybe it's because I'm getting this instilled through Israeli media but I don't think so – I don't feel a deep desire and integrity on the Palestinian side to make an economically, culturally viable Palestinian state on the bottom line basis of peace with Israel, I don't feel that. What deeply distresses me is – I don't really care about the politics – I have Arab friends in Beit Omer who come knocking at my door for money for operations that their children need. They can't get medical insurance. This is outrageous! I don't know whose dropping the ball. To some degree I think it's Israel's responsibility. This concerns me, this concerns me. If we're responsible for these people then we have to see that they're fed and they have medical care, at least. Otherwise we're just alienating them and turning them into the enemy and that's not smart! So you know there's plenty of blame to go around on many sides. That's as much as I've got to say on the politics.

Yafiah: Do you feel that Şūfī activity among Muslims and Jews can contribute in some way to peace and do you feel your work with Olam Qatan...?

Ya'qub: There's a teaching from the Baal Shem Tov: When you see something wrong in your neighbour you must find the place of it within yourself, address it within yourself, do *teshuva*,⁵⁶⁶ heal it, re-align yourself there, it will open the way for your neighbour. I collected many of his teachings years ago, translated, on this theme. In one place he says if you've done all the work and your neighbour still refuses to get it you're off the hook. I don't have illusions that if all of Israel falls in love with Rumi we'll have peace in the Middle East. A lot of Israel is in love with Rumi. All I did was in addition to the translation of Coleman Barks into Hebrew I published a translation from Persian into Hebrew with my friend Alex Fegan. You know one of the books I have in the works is a translation of Yunus Emre. Interestingly there has been a translation from Turkish into Hebrew, it wasn't done by Şūfīs. And they overlook the sense of humour, oy ve! And Kabir's book, not to mention – have you seen Murat's book?

Yafiah: Yes, in the shop

Ya'qub: Yes okay, the sense of humour is there. That needs to get into the Hebrew, especially for an Israeli audience.

⁵⁶⁶ Hebrew, meaning 'repentance' or literally 'return'.

Yafiah: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Ya'qub: I know what to pray for and the third Temple we know is in the heart of every human being.

Yafiah: Thank you Ya'qub

Ya'qub on skype, June 2011

The Ṣūfī path is being presented as something beyond religion and I can understand and appreciate that, at the same time it's being presented as something beyond religion that needs to be presented within a religious framework and I understand and sympathize with that, the only problem I have is I have one already: it's called Judaism. As for Islamic practice I appreciated it, not in the same way that I appreciated Buddhist practice as a practice that is designed to do a certain work on the human being but not as a cultural identification, not as any kind of ego identification, at all, and yet I felt this pressure from my Shaykh, who never said I had to embrace Islam but clearly never said I did not have to embrace Islam and spoke constantly, indirectly about the perfect way of the perfect prophet of all the prophets. And where was my surrender. Did I or didn't I have to embrace Islam in order to really walk the Ṣūfī path? Because again I respected Islamic practice, I respected Muḥammad as an example of the complete human being – which is everyone's birth right and which is what all the prophets are about and exhibiting in different ways but I felt all that was being used in a sense to get me to become a Muslim. And I didn't want to be 'gotten', thank you very much. Then I heard Reshad Feild and maybe Murat Yagan, people like that, talk about completion not conversion. It really resonated for me. I was looking for a way for completion, I was willing to look beyond Judaism, but I wasn't looking to ditch my Judaism or throw my Judaism in the garbage in order to embrace something better. And this was a constant conflict with my first Shaykh that I could not resolve, could not address in an open way with my first Shaykh and it was a great frustration. But it was a question I had to keep probing. Was I resisting the call of God, the call of the spirit? Or was I just not willing to let somebody else make a political use of religion and spirituality to serve their own social-political agenda; of making the whole world Muslim especially the bright, talented Jewish people like me. If we can grab them, if we can recruit them to the cause of Islamic hegemony; turning the whole world Muslim. And in that sense, you know, I supported the cause of turning the whole world Goddish but not turning it Jewish and not Muslimish, thank you very much. That's not what it's about. Against all that background,

when I heard that *sohbet* with Murat, when he talked about first love – I think I mentioned that yes?

Yafiah: Yes you did.

Ya'qub: And he said if you can stay with your first love you should stay with it. But if you need to move on you should feel free. So he was not only honouring the depth of my connection with my first Shaykh which was an irreplaceable connection. I've never had that deep connection, not with Murat, not with Baba, not with any teacher since, an overwhelming connection, but at the same time he was talking about a relationship with God that I'd already established, already begun through Judaism and I couldn't betray those roots. I can grow further but not by averting. Now let me bring something else to this from a Christian perspective. I hosted many, many authors giving presentations of their books in my book store, in Olam Qatan in Jerusalem, and one of the most moving ones for me, very personally, was a Christian author who studied Midrash, I think at Hebrew Union College at the Reform Seminary, and he said his epiphany came when he came across the rabbinic statement that the *darash*, the interpreted meaning, does not violate the *peshat*, the simple meaning. And he thought he saw the sin of the church – and he is a Christian and he was using that language 'the sin of the Church', God bless him – which is the Church is trying to graft the branch of Christianity on to the trunk of the religion of Israel. And at the same time they're sawing away at the root of that tree! As soon as he said that – and I thought I was very universal and sophisticated and *Şūfī* and all that – never mind – when he said that I felt my heart opening specifically to Christians. And I said, 'If you guys want to graft your branch onto our trunk and you really don't want to saw away at the roots – welcome, *bavakasha*, welcome.' You know just please take that saw away from the roots. It's painful! But if you sincerely want to graft your branch in an appreciative way, please. And really that's similar to a prayer that my Shaykh taught me that's part of the salat. You know the prayer, 'May you bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as you have blessed Abraham and the family of Abraham and barak Allah, say it again may your baraka be on Muhammad and the family of Muhammad as it is on Abraham and the family of Abraham. The whole world cannot be Jewish – and it's too complicated. It's hard enough for us to keep track with – you can take the good things from it which you can use, which was what Muhammad was about, and apply it and let's be friends. What's the problem? And you know, thank God I had Muslim friends like Baba who clearly think this way but with my first Shaykh it was a hot political issue that couldn't ever be resolved. I couldn't get

past the politics. Again, one moment of clarity I had maybe I told the story, maybe not. There is a special place. It's an orthodox, open-minded, Jewish spiritual centre and we had for a while a Jewish-Islamic beit midrash, a Jewish-Islamic study at the centre and students came from Baka al-Ghabiya. Baka al-Ghabiya actually has a college. The teachers are Şūfīs. The students are normal, Arab Muslims. And we were studying texts and discussing things in small groups and then we had a large meeting with everyone in a big circle; just kind of a Jewish way of study. And one of the Modern Orthodox people from one of these groups said, 'I have a problem with what I'm hearing because I hear you guys saying that all the prophets were Muslim and all babies are born Muslim on the one hand, and on the other hand I hear you saying Islam is the religion of the Qur'ān and the community of Muḥammad. So, what is it? Because these two don't jot up.' And one of the teachers who was a Şūfī Shaykh said, 'Well the problem is that there are actually two definitions of the word 'Islam'...

Yafiah: Yes, exactly!

Ya'qub: 'One is the original religion, in that sense all of the prophets. It's not that Abraham was making salat, it's not that Moses was making salat. They didn't know the Qur'ān but they followed Allah. And all babies naturally are open to the way of Eloha. But there's a second meaning which is the community of Muhammad that tends to follow the same implicit inner meaning of Islam but in its way as a religious community following the Qur'ān, following the Prophet Muhammad; so there are two meanings actually.' At this point a ripple of anger and distress ran through the Arab-Muslim community. The students were not ready to hear what they just heard. And the rabbi – the head of the whole centre, Micky Rosen, may he rest in peace, a very, very special man, said something that blew my mind. He jumped a step or two ahead. Micky's a funny guy, he had these big glasses, his eyes were always sort of out of focus, he kind of looked up, but God bless him, he said, 'You know when there are conflicts within each of our communities, the Jewish community and the Islamic community, when we're willing to openly share with the other community our own conflicts within our own community, then we will be able to have dialogue on a whole other level.' Beautiful! Beautifully said! Beautifully said! So he was honouring – he wasn't saying that the teachers were right and the students were wrong. He was saying, 'Wow, this is what we call in Judaism a *machhoket*, this is a deep controversy that almost characterizes the religion.' You could call it controversy for the sake of heaven even, maybe. He didn't give it that seal of approval but he said, 'This is significant, this

controversy and I can see you guys don't really want to share this with us because it's too touchy an issue within your community but I just want to say I honour the conflict and I would love to share openly about this. We could also share some of our conflicts.' Beautiful thing to say! Now, stepping away from it I have to say that a great deal of rhetorical use – I would say political uses – is made by Muslims of ignoring the two definitions and conflating them into one, the two meanings of 'Islam'. And as a Jew who admires Islam I say, 'Guys, cut it out! Don't try with that! You know in one sense you want to call any true Jew and any true Christian and any true Mu'min of any way, Muslim. Fine, I'm not insulted. It's a compliment. And if on that basis you would welcome those of us who wish to come and stand with you on the prayer line occasionally and pray with you, count me in that number. But if you're using all that to get us to convert please stop! Right now!' It's a very personal issue. It should be a blessing! It should be a blessing that confirms the truth of all the religions by holding the truth of Islam, by holding the light – that's the idea – a light that is neither of the East nor of the West illuminates East and West. Not by competition but by illumination. I guess that's what we call the real Şūfī message.

Yafiah: Yes, I agree

Ya'qub: Okay, so now I've said it as explicitly as I can

Yafiah: Thank you.

Communication from Ya'qub via email, June 2011

Some thoughts to add to yesterday's conversation...

There are some terms in Islam for this universal essence of opening oneself to the Divine, which is beyond form, beyond religion. Although the ultimate purpose of religion is, precisely, aligning people to this. "The Way of Allah" is a term that appears in the Qur'an. And as far as I know, the term "Islam" as it appears in the Qur'an doesn't mean the particular religion of the community of the Prophet Muhammad, rather, it means this. But the term "Islam" took on this second, more external meaning, and so people like Rumi chose to speak of "the Religion of Love." Of course he saw Islam (properly understood) as the royal road to the Religion of Love, but he also found the need to distinguish the two concepts.

Now in a sense, people of all religions should be able to distinguish between this inner essence of religion and their particular ways of pointing you towards that. But really Muslims should be more aware of this double meaning than the followers of other religions. The religion of Israel, from which Judaism as we know it grew, came on the scene, after all, at a time when the surrounding peoples were pagan idol-worshippers. They had to radically distinguish themselves from their surroundings—there was little possibility in this case, of distinguishing between their new religion and the Truth of religion. Although when we go back to the originators of the religion Moses had his apprenticeship with Jethro, Abraham had his confirmation from Melkhitzedeq, these people did have very significant spiritual contacts who stood above and beyond the new religious communities that they were forming. Christianity, seeing itself as the completion or perfection of Judaism, and taking in a very big influence from Greek philosophy and from Roman sovereignty, all too often took up the very arrogant position that “all those who don’t embrace exactly the right formulation of belief are damned!” And Christians applied this not only to Jews and pagans, but to other Christian communities! Now the Prophet of Islam had all of this in his perspective when he came on the scene. We know that Muhammad knew and consulted with Jews and Christians and it is not difficult to imagine his perception of the strengths and weaknesses of the religions he saw around him. I’ve heard it suggested that at the end of the Fatiha, when it says “Guide us in the straight way, the way of those who have Your favor upon them, not those who have wrath upon them or those who go astray” what was meant in the first case were the Jews—who had too many commandments, which they couldn’t possible keep!—and that what was meant by “those who go astray” were the Christians, who had veered with the worship of Jesus back into a kind of paganism. Certainly it’s not hard to see this application of the words. But the words themselves are very clear—and with 20-20 hindsight we can see that they are clearly applicable to Muslims as well. “Those who have wrath upon them” would be those who are busy condemning others for their religion... or lack of it. Those who confuse the universal essence of surrendering and opening oneself to the Divine with embracing a certain outward form would certainly be those who “go astray” into a kind of worship of the man-made forms of religion. These words apply to Muslims, at least as much as other religions! Again, it seems to me that Muslims should be more responsible for carrying this understanding, both because the Qur’an specifically addresses these issues, and because historically, the new Muslim community already was acquainted with other valid “People of the Book” surrounding them. And yet where do we find the attitude of basic respect for other

peoples' religions—while reserving the right to differ on particular points of practice and understanding? Of course we find it among Ṣūfīs and also among many quiet, modest Muslims. But in general it appears to be more widespread among Jewish and Christian leaders today, than among the people who proclaim themselves the leaders of Islam. What a pity!

Recorded in the Olam Qatan Bookstore, August 2011

Ya'qub is speaking about the Turkish Shaykh who is his mentor/friend who he had previously invited to speak in the store. Here he recalls the second time he invited him.

Ya'qub: 'Well okay Baba. Let me put it this way. If you were to come back again and we were to invite you again to talk in the store what would be an appropriate subject to make you feel free to go where you felt to go?' He said, 'Well, I would say general Sufism. If you call it general Sufism then I've got a lot of room to manoeuvre.' I said, 'Terrific!' so he did come back. I invited him back. He came with his wife this time. And I called it essential Sufism, leaning a little towards Murat but the right meaning, essential Sufism. He had notes prepared. He gave a brilliant *ṣoḥbet*. Basically the point of departure I remember is the line from the Qur'ān, 'We have put our signs on the horizons and in your selves'. My sister came to me at the end of the evening. She said, 'I never knew I was a Ṣūfī but what he talked about – that's what I believe! That's what I feel inside me!' Beautiful! Beautiful! It was a beautiful night. So we hit it right that time, you know.

Another Baba story: That same visit I finally did the right thing. Baba is very conscientious about praying – about going to Friday prayer. So he likes to go to the mosque on Friday. He's a kind of conservative Muslim, you know. Like a conservative Jew in that sense. Okay, so both times he was in Jerusalem he wanted to go to the Temple Mount on Friday. The first time I brought my Israeli passport – well guess what? He got in and I didn't. I sat and ate knuffi and waited for him until after it was over. The second time I don't know what possessed me, I did a brilliant thing, I brought my US passport – Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf. So I looked to them like an American convert to Islam. They didn't ask me to recite *Fātiḥa* or anything; certainly not *shahāda*. They just looked – fine, you're welcome, you know. Right, you're here, great. So that was nice, that was nice, without any questions, Ya'qub Ibn Yusuf, you know, I've paid a price. After we went to the mosque, I guess, maybe a week later, maybe that same day, we rented a car and went up to Tsfat to visit my parents, may

they rest in peace, to their synagogue in Tsfat. Which was the perfect place because men and women sit together and we have prayer books with Hebrew facing English and he was reading the prayers in English and I understood this was an opportunity to find out what the Jews are praying about. So he was having quite a good time translating the prayers for his wife. He seems quite happy in the synagogue. It was really beautiful – but he had one question. He said, ‘There’s just one thing. What’s this about God resting on the seventh day? Surely you don’t mean the Creator rests! It’s His manifestation that rests.’ I said, ‘Well Baba, wait a minute, do you think that Jews believe that God gets into a hammock and takes a nap on Saturdays like? The most orthodox Jew doesn’t believe that. Nobody believes that.’

‘Yes, right, so what does it mean that God rests? It must mean His manifestation rests.’

So, I took it home and worked on it. So I was working on this question and the next time I saw Baba I said, ‘Well, as far as God resting, it looks to me like this. You know, in the whole process of evolution it’s like God is inside nature. He’s inside of everything pushing it to evolve. Until finally we evolve the solar system and the planet earth and the stage is set for the human being to appear and when the human being appears God kind of steps back. Because man has will it’s time for the human being to be responsible and God’s not meddling so much. He’s leaving it up to human beings. So we remember that process of creation with the six days of the week and Shabbat. And on Shabbat we want to imitate God so also we step back from our world. We stop creating it, we stop meddling with it and just step back to appreciate what’s here.’ Baba said, ‘Right. His manifestation rests!’ So there are some Jewish-Şūfī interfaces with my dear, dear friend Baba.

Yafiah: That’s wonderful. Thank you.

Ya’qub: We are in that place of being really a channel uniting the Creator and the creation. But my understanding of what it means to be a complete human being demands a further development. The taste of it may be in remembering God in any moment but it’s somebody who really is transformed and a transformer. So I appreciate that teaching – have we talked about that from the Sefer Ha Bahir?

Yafiah: I can’t remember

Ya’qub: Okay, so you have the Forty Abdal in the Şūfī tradition, you have the thirty six in the Jewish tradition

Yafiah: That's right

Ya'qub: You have the Forty Abdal in the Şūfī tradition and you have the thirty six Tzaddikim in the Jewish tradition. The earliest and really seminal text in the Jewish tradition, the Bahir, is the transitional species between Midrash and Kabbalah. And in the Bahir they introduce this archetypal notion of the Tzaddik. And they say there is a single pillar in the world and its name is 'Tzaddik'. It is named after the Tzaddikim, after the Righteous, plural. When there are more Tzaddikim in the world it is strengthened, when there are fewer it is weakened, but always there is at least one in the world because otherwise it would not exist as the Tzaddik is the foundation of the world. You know my spiritual path has been – what's really drawn me – is that glimpse of the Tzaddik that I saw in the teachings of Rebbe Nahman. My desire to find some real living ones – one to link up with which is what drew me to Sufism – because I was privileged to study with, to be around Reb Shlomo. And I did feel it with my Shaykh and I see something quite profound in Murat. I think for myself growing up in the shadow of the atom bomb in New York in the fifties – you know they'd take us down to the gym in my Jewish day school, Jewish centre, you know, to have air raid drills – we weren't stupid. There were little windows at the top there, you know, if they drop a bomb in Manhattan this is not going to save us in Brooklyn, we knew that. That, probably more than the holocaust, was something that shaped my spiritual quest. Although I can also picture somebody in the gas oven crying out, 'Can somebody out there find the truth because we can't do anything more in here?' I feel connection and obligation to that. So, I don't know how far I've come really in the direction of the Tzaddik but it's still my great love. And I do feel, certainly, in the call from the sixties and seventies from the spiritual awakening that there was a need to recruit more people in the work. Here we could talk about the exoteric and the esoteric and the mesoteric, and I think a lot more of us have been recruited to the mesoteric.

Yafiah: What is the mesoteric?

Ya'qub: Between the two. You and I, we're not on the level of outer religion but we're not the illuminated elite either. We're somewhere in-between and we're about the opening of that channel in-between. So I understand that there's a strong sense of that out there and to participate in the work of the Tzaddik, insha'allah. One other thing I didn't talk about, I remember I mentioned I'm not a Shari'at Muslim and I'm not a Halakhic Jew, what am I saying exactly here? I reflected back on it and the one thing I didn't talk about was Shabbat. Shabbat is what's kept me Jewish more than anything else. I mean there is also my ancestry

and I discovered, the longer I was with my first Shaykh, how much I have a Jewish psychology. The other thing, in practical terms, I'd be with my Shaykh and I was making the prayer but Friday evening I'd sit out on the hillside at the time of sunset and in my heart welcome the Sabbath bride. Shabbat is part of experiencing God while in this world. I don't want to give that up. I'm happy to inform it with my spiritual knowledge. Maybe be a bit more flexible about it. No insistence on an exact form. But no, I don't want to give that up. That's part of what makes living here so splendid. Good!

(A customer enters the store Ya'qub serves the customer and then continues)

Ya'qub: It's such a healing, the awakening of Christian interest in Midrash and of course the Jewish willingness to share but the Christian receptivity, I think it's a huge thing. It's mostly happened in North America since I've left but I'm aware of it and I'm very appreciative of – it's a great thing. Now, there's a funny relationship in our times. In some ways Christians have to learn from Jews and Jews have to learn from Muslims. I don't mean 'have to' like making a rule but this is what I observe in my friend Yossi Klein Halevi's book, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, the spiritual dialogue. This is how it works, the Christians are beautiful people. They're so respectful and they have such beautiful qualities but they regard him as a teacher. And the Muslims, some of them are great and some of them are rather difficult characters but they have something that Yossi needs.

Yafiah: Thank you

Ya'qub: Yofi!

Interview with Sara Sviri, Jerusalem, August 2011, Ya'qub is also present

Sara: I can't make any claim of belonging to any denomination or even to understanding what it means. I wanted to say simply a few things – for example, not all mystics that we think of as *Ṣūfīs* would be named '*Ṣūfīs*' in their self appreciation and time, for example, Al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī . Another example is Shibli, who was definitely a *Ṣūfī* in terms of belonging to this social setting in Baghdad where *Ṣūfīs* started to blossom in the 9th century. He was asked why *Ṣūfīs* are named *Ṣūfīs*. And very appropriately he said, 'Because of something that was left in their *nafs*, namely in their ego. If they had really purified their ego they wouldn't have to be named by any name at all.' Now what does this mean? All this business with names, and denominations, and groups, and religions, and who belongs

where, and who is to be called what, I look at it and marvel. And where am I in all this? You probably wanted to talk to me about my experiences with Irina Tweedie and the so-called Ṣūfī group in London. This is something I can talk about, but it doesn't mean that I was stamped with any kind of denomination. I'm sorry, Yafiah, of being contradictory, or contrary?

Yafiah: Sara that's really perfectly fine. Let me just ask quickly, if Hakīm al-Tirmidhī called himself anything or if you would call him anything, what would it be? Would it be 'gnostic'?

Sara: *Hakim*. *Hakim* you can translate as 'sage' or, as some scholars – one scholar actually – calls him 'theosopher'

Yafiah: Yes

Sara: But what does this mean?

Yafiah: And this word comes with baggage today, if you use the word 'theosophy'

Sara: Exactly (laughter). Let me tell you something that I find instructive. You probably know that a rather large Ṣūfī anthology was published in Hebrew.

Yafiah: Yes, I wanted to ask you about this I heard about it first of all online. I heard about the launching, or celebration of it. That was when I first came to know that there was such a thing as Jewish-Ṣūfīs.

Sara: But not from the anthology because the anthology has nothing to do with the historical presence of so-called Jewish-Ṣūfīs. It has to do primarily with the Ṣūfī tradition itself.

Yafiah: No, there was a short – it was 'What's on in Jerusalem this Month' and there was a short section describing this – there was an oud player and yourself and several other people

Sara: Ah that was in...what is the name of this place?

Ya'qub and Sara: The Confederation House (Beit ha-Konfederatzia).

Sara: It was a lovely evening

Yafiah: And it said in the same little article that Sufism is gaining interest in Israel

Ya'qub: So you have to re-define...

Yafiah: Yes

Sara: I will have to find a way to say, 'Look, there is something which is *Sufiyya* historically or culturally which is not just anything that is spiritual, but it's a problem, it's a conscious problem. It's a problem of awareness. It's a problem of...you know...whatever you want to call this nexus between language and culture and self identity

Yafiah: You're talking now mainly about finding a word for 'mystic' in Arabic? You see no problem in the word 'mystic' itself in English?

Sara: Well I do but this...

Yafiah: What I've noticed is that in most books on Islamic and Jewish mysticism the word is used, a few paragraphs written to justify its use and qualify the way it's being used and then it's used, but with a great deal more difficulty in works on Christian mysticism for some reason. There seems to be a more easy use and acceptance of the term in Jewish and Islamic mysticism

Sara: When it comes to 'Sufism' the word, the term, the denomination, the self-identity of people who use it, there is a linguistic confusion because modern Arabic uses 'Sūfī' and 'Sufism' (*tasawwuf*) in the generic sense of 'mystic' and 'mysticism'. Okay, I say Al-Hakīm al-Tirmidhī would never call himself a Sūfī. We know that classical Sūfīs say, 'Well somebody needs to call us by a name.'

Ya'qub: When you're ready I would suggest...

Sara: 'Sūfī' becomes the generic word for mysticism.

Ya'qub: Yes, clearly we have Israeli interest in the Islamic mystical tradition

Yafiah: Yes

Sara: Yes

Ya'qub: So this is another question: of the impact of this kind of work, this kind of western, even Israeli, perspective on Sūfī teaching impacting the Islamic world, the Arab world in Israel. This would be interesting to explore as well. What kind of impact do we begin to feel with Sara's work and works like Sara's work in the Arab world in Israel?

Sara: Also I'm very well aware of it from let's say because I'm still teaching at the university. I have Israeli-Arab students. And they need it; they need it because the texts themselves

are not so clear to them. The fact that they know Arabic is no guarantee that they can read Şūfī texts and understand it. So they need some sort of mediation

Ya'qub: Hmm

Sara: By the fact that it is in Hebrew. There are footnotes and there are introductions

Yafiah: This is fascinating.

Sara: So you are asking a simple question which points to a very complex situation from the point of view of language, from the point of view of culture, from the point of view of history. I put culture first because if you take Arab-Israelis they don't need to be Şūfīs, they don't need to belong to any Şūfī school or centre but they may be interested. The imams in many mosques talk against Sufism. But then they may become interested because it's an interesting cultural phenomenon, or phenomena.

Ya'qub: Or part of their heritage...

Sara: Before you come to the question: Does it offer some sort of hope for reconciliation? You have to plough through quite a lot of very muddy fields; in terms of Israeli culture, in terms of Arab culture in Israel, outside of Israel and all these things before you even start to ask – what about fanatics? What about fundamentalists?

Ya'qub: Let me throw out a question if I may

Sara: Well, I tell you something. But I can't answer it from a personal point of view. Statistically, unlike you I don't think there is really a great deal of interest in Sufism. A little bit, but statistically, not a great deal.

Ya'qub: Are we talking about Jewish-Israelis or...?

Sara: Yes, we're talking about Jewish-Israelis. They are interested in spirituality in some sort of New Age way. New Age infiltrates. People are confused, they don't know really...unless they are making a study of it, and a study doesn't necessarily mean academic studies. They can go and study with some Kabbalists or they can go and study with Chabadniks, or with Nahman of Breslau. So there are very serious groups of people, devotees let's call them, and statistically they are growing. Then there are many television programmes and radio programmes on astrology, and graphology, and Tarot cards, and you name it. So people are gripped by these things in a stronger way, much more pronounced way, than twenty, fifteen, years ago. So it's something that is in the air.

Yafiah: So you are saying it's good because it leads to a more universal outlook...

Sara: ...it allows...

Yafiah: ...it allows a more universal outlook even if the person's knowledge or practice is somewhat fuzzy...

Sara: ...and for the wrong reasons. You know, a kind of romantic belief in love...

Yafiah: ...yes, whereas the actual path – whether you call it Ṣūfī path or whatever – is actually tough, rigorous, and real, real, real

Sara: Yes! Absolutely! I don't know if it makes sense to you. So actually that's why I asked you, that's also why I asked you about Yossi Klein Halevi's book because I find – I don't know him very well – but I found his book extraordinary. It's very open-eyed and yet it's palpable with some kind of longing. But it's not romantic

Yafiah: No it's not

Sara: It's not in the clouds and it's not fuzzy. He really describes Christian and Muslim, facts, you know. Muslim Ṣūfīs, by the fact that they are Ṣūfīs it doesn't mean that they love Jews. It doesn't mean they will get whatever solution the Israeli government offers them. It's not so. It doesn't mean that they don't love their homeland or don't think in terms of home, of place. It's not true. They have to live with a lot of problems. Identity problems. You know whenever you think about Muslim Ṣūfīs in Israel you immediately think about Ghassan and everybody knows Ghassan and he is all over the place and he talks and he's nice and you love him and he's accommodating and everything. Gosh, I think the man goes through hell! I don't know for a fact, he never talks about this.

Ya'qub: I do

Sara: What? You know?

Ya'qub: Yes

Sara: I mean, his son was beaten and they had to leave and they had to flee...

Ya'qub: Yes

Sara: ...and all kinds of things. When I say that he doesn't talk about it I don't mean that he is secretive but he tries to cover it by whatever he does. And this is just one example. It's very difficult. So it's not all hunky dory and on the other side, you know.

Yafiah: Yes

Sara: It's not grounded, it's not grounded

Yafiah: It's not grounded

Sara: It's not grounded. Yes, there is a sense again of longing, of devotion, of something better, of something more beautiful, of something exotic, of real longing. And what I'm saying is in spite of this, in spite of Ghassan's problem – let's take it as a sort of token for the Muslim *Ṣūfī* side, and the longing, the fuzziness of the Israeli devotees – in spite of this when something touches them which is spiritual but not fundamental it's good

Yafiah: Yes

Sara: But how strong it's going to be, where it's going to take them, us, everybody, I don't know

Yafiah: Whether it's actually going to make any difference

Sara: Whether it's going to make...you see, I tell you...you see, one person that I admire is Rabbi Fruman

Yafiah: Yes, yes

Sara: Because Rabbi Fruman he's somehow, to me he appears as somebody who knows very well all the contradictions and yet...and yet he is there to do something about it. Now, he's very religious, he's a settler, he lives in Tekoa and believes that, "Tekoa belongs to 'us' and that's why I live there". And yet he says, "Well if I find myself under a Palestinian government, okay." But how many Rabbi Frumans do you have? He's a *meshuga*, he's a nutcase

Ya'qub: *Majnun* (laughter)

Yafiah: *Majnun* (laughter)

Sara: Yes, he's a nutcase but so I'm saying something like that, there are a very, very few nutcases.

Yafiah: Yes

Sara: But they are a handful and it doesn't matter what they are called. Those who want to call themselves *Ṣūfīs*, so be it. Those who want to call themselves...you know, I don't know, it doesn't matter. Very few carry this possibility of holding these opposites. I'm not an optimist.

Yafiah: I'm beginning to get the impression from the interviews I've done so far that to speak about Sufism's potential for contributing to reconciliation and peace is a bit overblown

Sara: Yes

Yafiah: And I have to bring that really right down to simply asking does *Sūfī* or *Ṣūfī* related activity bring together Muslims and Jews and contribute to the other activities that bring together Muslims and Jews – Rabbi Ron Kronish, for example, with his school, he brings together Muslims and Jews – is it a contributor...

Ya'qub: No

Yafiah: Not at all? But you go to meetings and things where you're coming together with Arabs, don't you? There is some engagement happening there that might not happen otherwise

Ya'qub: Sorry, I'm just addressing your precise question. There's much more interest in Jewish-Arab dialogue groups. It's not motivated by Sufism. So if you're asking what is the contribution of Sufism, I don't think you'll find it there. I think there might be another, I would suggest it might be someplace else. I would suggest it would be in giving a vision to people; giving a spiritual vision which is beyond the form of religion. But here I have a little bit of a difficulty hanging on from before. Sara was talking about serious things perhaps like Jewish mysticism and Sufism and New Age cloudy things. And we look at someone we respect like Yossi Klein Halevi. I know Yossi's story. There was a small group of Israelis who did serious work with a Hindu woman guru thirty years ago and he's one of those people and so there's another piece of this picture which has to do with serious engagement with spiritual practice; not necessarily Jewish, not necessarily Islamic, and from within that universal but grounded spiritual perspective, the Jewish peace and the Islamic peace. So I think it's good to broaden it that way. So you have in my case I came to Sufism from Judaism and Buddhism and yes, but I'm not really a Buddhist, and Judaism – I will always be

Jewish but it's not quite satisfying in and of itself so is there a bridge, is there something in the middle? And I discovered Sufism; I discovered very Islamic Sufism out of that question, and then Turkish Sufism. So I think there's also a question about mysticism, whatever we call it, about serious spiritual engagement, spiritual practice. Now in a western framework, in an Abrahamic framework, we have a universal vision articulated in Sufism more than we have in the Jewish or Christian traditions. So that's a very important contribution

Sara: Say it again, say it again

Ya'qub: We have in the Abrahamic side of the family, as distinct from the Hindu side of the family, the Hindu, Buddhist etcetera side of the family, on the Abrahamic side of the family we have a universal vision articulated in Sufism more than in the Christian or Jewish traditions

Sara: Yes

Ya'qub: The Jewish tradition is just not busy...it's not its job; it's not busy with that. The Christian tradition has its particular formulation which then becomes exclusive and problematic. Sufism *is* Islamic and *is* universal because actually Islam itself is universal. So you have that paradox in Sufism, wrestling with that paradox but there's certainly much room for a vision that allows somebody like David to say, in my group, to live as a Modern Orthodox Jew and see that in a Melāmi context. Of being an ordinary person in a religious sense and having a spiritual vision that is beyond and he needs that vision because parochialism won't do it. And he's raising kids Jewish and there's nothing wrong with that. They need a religious life, it's appropriate to have a religious life but he knows that there is a wider context for all of this. So the Şūfī tradition gives him a reference point. So I'm arguing for the importance of Sufism for individuals, for spiritual individuals, for motivated individuals in terms of giving a vision, confirming a vision. Not so much that it impacts on the social world of Jewish-Arab dialogue but for people who are questing who may be important. The Şūfī tradition does contribute a great deal

Yafiah: Towards a spiritual vision that protects against fundamentalism as well?

Ya'qub: Yes, Jewish or Muslim...

Sara: ...of any kind.

Ya'qub: ...and that honours our Abrahamic roots, our western roots, our Middle Eastern roots

Yafiah: ...and possibly contributes to a greater preparedness, willingness, to speak, to dialogue with the other?

Ya'qub: For sure! For sure it nourishes a respect

Sara: The important point is not Sufism. It's this preparedness to add on a universal, humanistic, dimension to the kind of person you are. Like for example I mean there is the Reform Synagogue. There is a lot of that. It's not mystical, it's devotional, it's very sober, but it is – you can call it liberal, you can call it reform, you can call it whatever you like – but there is this openness to the other as you say. And perhaps this is even a better place, or a better platform because I have a feeling that for Muslims generally speaking and Muslim Şūfis also there is a threat, something threatening about Israelis who want to pick up Şūfī teaching and Şūfī dancing, there is something threatening there, 'Oh here they come again. They want to possess us'. You know it's the other way around.

Sara: Yes. The only thing is – like in Israel there are all these factions and politically and socially, you know, you've been here, you've seen what's going on; it's actually very lively and dynamic right now. But the moment people are in danger, the moment the bombs start everybody gets together. So it may be that this will bring Jews and Muslims together.

Ya'qub: Sara can I ask a little more specifically about response to your book?

Sara: If there was I'm not aware of it

Ya'qub: Wonderful (laughter)

Sara: No I'm really, I mean I was astonished, the first celebration was done by Baqa al-Ghabia, this academy, Muslim academy which is very interesting you know because they are pious, they are pious Muslims, and they invited me, they gave me...I even have this wooden plaque that they did for me with my name. So it was out of gratitude that something precious in the Muslim culture was brought out into the open.

Ya'qub: I remember the reception – I wasn't present at Baqa al-Ghabia but I was in Nazareth...

Sara: In Nazareth

Ya'qub: Warm, huge, it was like a wedding

Sara: It was like a wedding. And so from where I was invited in Muslim gathering it was really welcoming

Yafiah: Yes

Sara: And yet for those so-called Jewish-Şūfis in Egypt in the twelfth, thirteenth century, like the son of Maimonides and his own son and so on for several generations – they were prepared by Maimonides philosophy because it had a very strong universalistic outlook. So those people who say, ‘How come there were these Şūfis, mystics in the House of Maimonides the rationalist?’ It’s just wrong because he was a rationalist but he was such a broad-minded philosopher that drew him to universalistic ways of thinking and he saw Judaism from both a particularistic and a universalistic perspective. Prophecy, for example, is a phenomenon that can occur...

Yafiah: ...anywhere

Sara: ...to human beings in certain conditions. Of course he gives Biblical examples but from an anthropological viewpoint, so to speak. He speaks as a phenomenologist, a universalist. So his descendants were ready to take in what they saw among the Şūfis and they could claim it back to Judaism

Yafiah: Yes, yes they said it was something Judaism had lost and that...

Sara: ...exactly!

Yafiah: ...the Şūfis benefitted and now we’re re-claiming it...

Sara: Absolutely! But nevertheless Rabbinic Judaism couldn’t do that

Yafiah: No

Sara: Or even change all kinds of practices in prayer and meditation and so on. They could do it because they were somehow prepared by an outlook which was not only particularistic. So that’s what I’m saying: anything which can bring in – on both sides, Islam – because Islam can also be so particular, so fundamental – so on both sides whatever can touch from a humanistic and universalistic perspective, then there will be hope.

Yafiah: Then there can begin to be an exchange that is enriching for both parties

Sara: That’s how I see things

Yafiah: Thank you very much Sara. That's very helpful. Is there anything else you'd like to say before we conclude?

Sara: I'm sure there are many things that we could say as friends on the path

Yafiah: Yes we could

Ya'qub: It's a very important thing that's happened in the last decades. For a Jew like Yossi, like for a Jew like myself, the *Ṣūfīs* are our teachers. We are not their teachers, they are our teachers. There is something – some gap, some missing piece – growing up with a strong, healthy, spiritual, Jewish outlook, still we're in need of something from the *SṢūfīs*. They're providing a vitamin that we're lacking. And just as the Jews have this contribution to Christians, the Muslims have this contribution to Jews

Sara: That's interesting. I never thought of it in that way. It just came into my mind by association how the beginning of Sufism, when there were a lot of wanderers in the desert and they met with Christian monks *and* nuns, they learnt from them. They asked the monks and the nuns, 'Can you teach us wisdom?' So it's interesting

Ya'qub: It's very interesting because it leaves the question of that third relationship about the Muslims and the Christians which obviously I don't know anything about

Sara: They took a lot from Christianity

Yafiah: Yes, I believe that

Sara: ...and openly, openly

Yafiah: Yes, yes

Sara: I mean there are lots of stories about meetings in the desert with Christian monks and Christian nuns and quite a lot of them, they ask them, 'Teach me'

Ya'qub: Even in Turkey, this is something I mention because I don't know enough about it but I suspect there are some records of kind of dharma debates between *Ṣūfīs* and Christian mystics. And of course in the Islamic and the *Ṣūfī* literature the Muslims win (laughter) but I'm sure they were learning from the Christian tradition

Yafiah: I'm sure they were. There was a continuing interest in debate beginning in Baghdad between representatives of all the religions that were there. I mean they had a few rules

like, no you must not say anything mean about the Prophet otherwise everything else is up for debate

Ya'qub: I'm sure Turkish Sufism benefitted from Central Asian Shamanism and Buddhism, along with Islam...

Sara: Yes

Ya'qub: I'm sure they must have drawn something from the Byzantine and even earlier Anatolian traditions

Sara: Yes. In Turkey there are interesting things going on. I know only from reading but what I read you know like the...what's the name of this man who is in America but he has a big movement of followers...Gulen?

Yafiah: Oh, Fethullah Gulen. He has a huge educational movement and lots of schools

Sara: He has a huge number of followers, yes, and he translates it all into *Khidmat* which means service. So it's very interesting; he takes all these...within the Sūfī tradition, he takes all the ideas and he translates them into working in the community, working with people, working with schools. Yafiah: There is some kind of hope there that...

Sara: ...there is some kind of impetus to search for new forms of Sūfī teachings

Yafiah: Who knows what might emerge, it could go either way

Sara: But from my experience when it's under the heading of 'Interfaith Something or Other' it doesn't work

Yafiah: It's something far more organic than that?

Sara: Exactly, and that's a good term for it

Ya'qub: Yes

Yafiah: Right, and that is something that I have been gradually perceiving over the last few months

Sara: Just recently I was thinking about you (to me). This moving from here to here to here it's like you gather the yeast that is there somewhere. And maybe it's important what you're doing, you know.

Ya'qub: Yes

Sara: Like a bee that you take a bit of dew from here and from there. Maybe such work as you're doing is important in its own right...

Yafiah: Let's hope so

Sara: ...but in terms of, 'What will it do for the prospect of peace' this is not the way that I would...

Yafiah: Part of the brewing

Sara: ...part of the brewing

Ya'qub: Idries Shah suggests that a small group doing a small thing in the right place at the right time can bring an important shift and he connects this with Sufism. And I think that is in the right ball-park

Sara: But it doesn't matter what it's called. I think for people like Fethullah Gulen it was important not to call it Sufism

Yafiah: Thank you Sara

Sara: Well thank you for coming

Interview with Khalid Abu Ras, October 2013 via Skype

Yafiah: I would like to hear from you, Khalid what it means for you being together with the Tariqat Ibrahimiyya?

Khalid: For me Tariqat Ibrahimiyya, I think is a special path for God for this special land, the Holy Land. You know in Israel and Palestine we live together, Muslims and Christians and Jews – and the occupation. So there is a lot of tension. So we need a special way of thinking, a special way of spirituality, how to live together. I think in the Tariqa Ibrahimiyya that, for example we read, we have a special reading. We read the holy books – from the Qur'ān and the Holy Bible and the New Testament, the *Injil*, and from the Torah, the Tanakh; and also from other books, for example the *Duties of the Heart*⁵⁶⁷ from Bahya Ibn

⁵⁶⁷ See Lobel/*A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue* for a critical examination of Paquda's use of Šūfī concepts and vocabulary.

Paqūda and also *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*⁵⁶⁸ of the holy Shaykh Hamid Abu Ghazali. So we read all the time together how we can make our life here in Israel and Palestine better spiritually, better in the religious way; how we can make our life here in Israel better in our spirituality and in the religious way; how to make our religion – Islam and Judaism and Christianity more acceptable for society, for humankind. [The skype connection fails] I think this is one of the problems in Israel that the Muslims and the Jews face that they cannot contact all the time.

Yafiah: Yes that is a problem

Khalid: So we need to face this problem together and to make our channels more open. I think that our special way, our Tariqa Ibrahimiyya, Abrahamic way, is a special spiritual path for God, for Allah, for *Al-Rahīm*. This year we celebrate the thirteen years of Tariqa Ibrahimiyya. We established this way in 2000. So this is the thirteenth year.

Yafiah: So were you involved right at the very beginning when it was founded?

Khalid: Yes, we established it in Tel Aviv, some Shaykhs and especially my head Shaykh, ‘Abd al-Salām Manāsra, head Shaykh of the Qadiriyya brotherhood in the Holy Land, and Roberto Arbib from the Conservative movement and also Dr. Avraham Elqayam from the Tel Aviv University. They are with some of us, like Sheikh Bukhari, he passed away. He was a good friend for us and I know him, he was for me a brother and may God send for his soul a mercy, insha’allah, and also from the Muslims like the son of the Shaykh, Ghassan Manasra, and also members from other orders like from the Yashrutiyya order, Shaykh Omer Reis from Acre and many other people. They are a good way for us – Jews and Muslims and Christians – to learn together, to pray together. This is a special way for our whole life. This was in March 2000. We face many difficult conditions very difficult times for the cause of the programmes and the cause of the activities. For me it’s not easy to be a Muslim and to have a relationship with Jews in this special way. Although I live in Israel and I have the passport of a citizen of Israel but I have all the time many people (Muslims) here in Israel, in Nazareth and Jerusalem think about us and they think we are going against Islam. For example they write things against my Shaykh. They attack my Shaykh. But we continue and keep this way and all the time we have many activities for Jews, for Christians, for Muslims in Nazareth. For example, the last Ramadhan, in the house of my

⁵⁶⁸ For an English translation of this work see Al-Ghazali, *The Marvels of the Heart: The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. Translated from the Arabic with an Introduction and Notes by Walter James Skellie with a Foreword by T.J. Winter. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae. 2010).

Shaykh, we had the celebration for breaking the fast, the iftar, together and I saw there a friend and his wife and sons, he came to Nazareth to share this special occasion with us, this special holiday of Ramadhan.

Yafiah: Are your fellow Muslims angry with you because you meet with Jews or do some of them not like Sufism?

Khalid: It's both, because I am a Muslim and have a good relationship with the Jews and also because I am a Sufi. So, you know I have to learn more how to answer the questions. For example, my society didn't see in good eye the Sufi. They didn't know what Sufism is. But for me it is a good moment because the Sufism in Islam, it is Islam! I cannot understand Islam without Sufism. So I think, you know, you touch my pain. Our society didn't accept Sufism so all the time I talk with my Shaykh, with my friends, why is there a situation like that? Why? Also, last year I went with my Shaykh 'Abd al-Salām Manasra to Mecca. So all the time I live my Islam but in the special way of Sufism. So it's for those here, it's not easy to accept me. You know, Yani, they come to my house and they see the pictures of my Shaykh and of my former Shaykh and they ask, what is this? They don't understand Sufism. So for me I cannot accept that, I cannot live in Islam without Sufism and also I cannot live with the Jews without Islam because Islam tells me to be a good man not only with myself, with my children, with my wife, but also with my environment, with my neighbourhood, with my village, with my country, with my area I have to be good. Allah says in the Qur'ān that you have to say to the people – not only the Muslims – *al-nas* in Arabic means all the people; you have to say to them good words. So I have to show to others that I am a good man, that I have a good intention for them, that I love them. You know, in Islam we believe that Allah created all the people, created the Jews, created the Muslims, the Christians and He orders us to be good with others. He orders us to respect the feelings of others, to respect the faith of others. So in the Qur'ān for example, God says to us don't argue with people of the Book. Who are the People of the Book? Jews and Christians. So we have to be in a good relationship with the Jews and with the Christians. So I think it is an order for us to be in a good relationship with others.

Yafiah: Khalid, are there many Christians who come to the meetings?

Khalid: Yes, I think in the meetings we have many people all the time, especially on Thursday. On Thursday we meet together in the house of the Shaykh. This is the Thursday before the Eid al-Adha and Sunday we have the holy Day of Arafat and we spend this day in fasting and also the prayers and also we prepare the house for Eid and Tuesday we start Eid. This year, Alḥamdulillah, thanks for God, Allah – Yani – gave me some money and, insha'allah, I will sacrifice a lamb.

Yafiah: Alḥamdulillah!

Khalid: Yes, this is for us a duty. These are the holy days for us, the good days for us. I have, Alḥamdulillah, three children and these days we are fasting, a day of fasting. On this day we meet in the house of the Shaykh and make dhikr and also we study one or two pages from a Sufi book, about the holy stations of the Sufi, *maqamāt*. We live Sufism and we study and we continue the classic traditional Sufism that started here in our land, in the Holy Land. You know the first *zāwiyya*, for example, was in Ramle City. It was established one hundred and fifty years after Muḥammad died. This is our Holy Land, for Jews, for Muslims, for Christians. We believe in Islam it's the land of the prophets. This is the land of the saints, the *awliyya*. This is the land of the hereafter, the *yawm al-dīn*, of the judgement day. So we need to make our life good because we especially believe that from my life I get a good life in the hereafter.

Yafiah: Khalid, may I ask you if you have many women Ṣūfis as well?

Khalid: We have some women and now we work to spread our *tariqa* to others and now we work like house-circles. We go to the houses and we make *dhikr* and we also meet with families, with the women and the children and, Alḥamdulillah, right now we have five or six women that are in the *tariqa* and, Alḥamdulillah, my wife is also in the *tariqa*.

Yafiah: Do the women do *dhikr* with the men or separately?

Khalid: Not with the men together but beside them. They are all there with us at *dhikr* and they are gathered with us.

Yafiah: I see. I would like to come and join your *dhikr* in Nazareth.

Khalid: You are welcome anytime.

Yafiah: Do you think this coming together of Jews and Muslims and Christians contributes to reconciliation and peace in Israel and Palestine?

Khalid: This is a good question because I think we need reconciliation because we have passed difficult times from 1948 until now. We passed many events, like many bloodsheds and I think if we want to establish peace here in the Holy Land we need, after we signed the agreement between the governments, between the Palestinian state and the Israeli state, we need to establish a committee for reconciliation between the two peoples, the Arabs and the Jews. We have to have reconciliation because you know in the Arabic tradition the Arab man can make reconciliation – *Sulha* – in three stages. The first is *musalahā* – reconciliation, and after this we make *mumalaka*, it means ‘we eat together’, and after this is the third stage, *musamaka*. Reconciliation, eating, and forgiveness.

Yafiah: Do you feel then that contribution to reconciliation comes after the political agreements or do you feel that somehow before the political agreements are made you can contribute?

Khalid: I think it must be together, at the same time we have the political negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis on the political side and on the other side to have reconciliation between the two people because we have until now sixty-four years of bloodshed and war, we have a war between Jews and Arabs. It’s something that’s amazing how we can continue with this. So we have to start right now with reconciliation between us, Jews and Muslims and Christians. At the same time the governments in Ramallah and Jerusalem must continue their negotiations. Also, I have in my head I think they have to be with an open mind, with open heart, it’s enough. We can’t continue with this situation. It is for us difficult. For me a Muslim I live in Israel and it’s a difficult situation for me that my people, the Palestinian people, they are in war with my country, Israel. It’s not good for us to live like that.

Yafiah: Something else I wanted to ask you ...

Khalid: Yes, please

Yafiah: Many of the Jewish people I spoke to in Tariqāt Ibrahimiyya, and others, feel that their Jewish faith is enriched by their involvement with Sufism, by their engagement with Ṣūfis. Do you feel any enrichment of your Muslim faith from the Jewish faith?

Khalid: Okay, let me tell you some information. It's not usual for Jews and for Muslims to meet together and to learn from each other. It started in medieval times in Cairo, for example Abraham ben Maimonides, the son of Maimonides. He established a Ḥassidic circle in Egypt that was influenced by Sufism. This is history. Also in the *zāwiyya* of Mawlana 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilāni in Baghdad Jews and Christians came to the *zāwiyya* and shared the Muslims' *dhikr*. So we can learn how the Muslims accepted the Jews and the Christians, and the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews continue their own religions. So I don't want the Jews to convert to my religion. I want from them to be good men, to accept me; I don't want to change their faith. My Shaykh always tells the Jews that he doesn't want them to convert to Islam but only to keep their faith and to be strong in their faith; not to be weak with your faith. And I think my teacher, Professor Avraham Elqayam, he once said something in Hebrew, he said that Judaism needs Islam to keep the religion alive, to keep the life of Judaism. Judaism cannot live only with Jews. It needs the other.

Yafiah: And do you think also that Islam needs Judaism?

Khalid: Islam also needs Judaism, also needs Hinduism, also needs Christianity. You know we have in Sufism, we have the good tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him, he said to us about seeking wisdom wherever it is found. *Ḥikma* is wisdom and wisdom is what the believing man seeks, the believer seeks wisdom all his life. Wherever he finds wisdom he will take it. So for me to seek wisdom is not only in Islam. I can even go to the people who worship idols to seek the wisdom there.

Yafiah: That reminds me of the poem of Ibn 'Arabī

Khalid: Ibn 'Arabī yes, yes, yes. Al-Shaykh al-Akbar!

Yafiah: Yes, the Shaykh al-Akbar where he says his heart has become a vessel for all ...

Khalid: Yes, 'My heart became a place for idols, and became a place for Jews, and Christians. This is Sufism. In the old times the Shaykh's told us that the Ṣūfī must be like *al-ṭarīq*, what is *al-ṭarīq*? It is the Way. Why to be like *al-ṭarīq*, because the Way accepts all the other, the Muslim, the Jew, the Christian, the unbeliever. You have to be like the Way, to accept all the other. You know, we have a phrase in three words '*du'a*, (unclear as child calling in background). We have to walk our Sufism but not to judge the other. It's not my business to judge the other and also I like (unclear) my thesis in university. You know the *Imitatio Dei*?

Yafiah: Yes

Khalid: I have to imitate God. I have to behave like God, the Merciful, to be merciful like God.

Yafiah: The Names, the Attributes of God, the Beautiful Names, become manifest through us.

Khalid: Yes.

Yafiah: Khalid may I ask you if you grew up in a Ṣūfī family or did you come to Sufism later?

Khalid: I was born in 1976 and I grew up in a classic Muslim family. I saw my father keeping the prayers all the time and all the time reading the Qur'ān, and always fasting in Ramadhan. My mother also kept the prayer and fasting and Ramadhan and on special Ramadhan nights she prayed more than my father in the house. All the time I told my friends that I am influenced by my mother. All the time she had good ideas about how to have a good relationship with the others. For example when my village got the technology of electricity and telephone – this was in the year of 1980 – and I saw in my village Jews who made these things and my mother always sent me to bring water to the Jews and something to eat; so all the time I have my mother in my mind, in my heart, who told me to be a good man. When I was in High School I heard about my former Shaykh who was in Jerusalem and I was fifteen years old, a younger man, and I went to Jerusalem with my friends and I met my Shaykh, may God have mercy on him, and I made biat, I took his hand, and he prayed for me that God will forgive my sins. This was August 1991 and until now I

was in the ṭarīqa with my Shaykh ‘Abd al-Salām Manasra, may God bless him. So this is my life and all the time – and something I have to say to you – that I went to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and studied the Arabic language and also historical studies of wisdom ideas. So I have the Ṣūfī way and also the academic way. I have a balance. For me, alḥamdulillah, it’s good and I think, insha’allah, it’s the real way and, insha’allah, God will guide me to the good way in these times. In these difficult times.

Yafiah: Insha’allah!

Khalid: Insha’allah!

Yafiah: Khalid, before we finish is there anything else you would like to say?

Khalid: Yes, first of all I thank you for this special opportunity and I wish you success in your research. You know now we meet by Skype so if you like to visit Israel please, you have your brother in humanity. You have your house here near Nazareth and please visit us and my family, your family.

Now also in the nights I pray for our land, for peace, for inner peace because it’s a duty. For us as Muslims the big jihad is to make peace – for example first of all with ourselves, with the neighbour, and to defeat the satan, you know the Ṣūfī struggles all the time with the *nafs*. This is my duty now and insha’allah, Allah will guide us to a good situation here in Palestine and Israel. I have hope that the future will be good and there will be more peace than now.

Yafiah: I hope that also Khalid and thank you very much for your time, for your invitation to your home and I pray, insha’allah, it may be possible for me to come back and visit you all.

Khalid: You are welcome, thank you very much.

Yafiah: I pray that you and your family have a blessed Eid.

Khalid: Thank you, goodnight and I pray you have good times. Salaam alaykum.

Yafiah: Wa alaykum salam.

Email correspondence with Mustafa Abu Sway

Dear Yafiah,

Here are my answers:

1. How did you come to the Sufi path and what does your work involve?

In a formal sense, I joined a Sufi path (*tariqah*) when I was 18 years old, just after finishing high school in Jerusalem. This was the mid-1970's and religiosity was not the hallmark of Palestinian youth. When my sheikh failed, in my eyes, to address questions that were posed to him by university students, it led to a great disappointment on my part, and I left that Sufi path. Eventually, I returned to Sufism but without a Sheikh or a specific path. What I learned from the previous experience in relation to the Israeli occupation, is that Sufism did not soften the position of the Sufis in that specific path. To the contrary, the Sheikh established links with Fatah (The Palestinian Liberation Movement) and some of his followers ended up in jail, along with the Sheikh, who was exiled later on to Jordan. He returned after the Oslo Agreements.

2. Has your work with Sufism changed your perception of Israelis?

Any Muslim who adheres to the Islamic worldview would recognize the Jews and Christians as "People of the Book". I called for an Islamic theology of soft-otherness in relationship to Jews and Christians, but this acceptance is not accorded to the Zionist project. As Palestinians, we are subjected to a host of ongoing policies and practices that make our life difficult. Sufism does not call for abandoning one's rights, and in the case of North Africa, Sufi orders were at the forefront of resisting European colonialism. While there are many Israeli Jews who reject the Israeli occupation, the overwhelming majority moved to rightist political parties that essentially reject the political rights of Palestinians. The Jewish Sufis are very few and they cannot affect the overall grim picture.

3. Do you have any problems with other Muslims because you meet with Jews?

No. I do not have problems with other Muslims at all because I meet Jews. The issue for me is not whether I meet them or not; the issue is what is it that I say and do.

4. Do you have any problems with other Muslims because you are a Sufi?

The word Sufi is an umbrella concept covering many paths. As long as Sufism means tending to the affairs of the heart on the path of the hereafter, in accordance with the Qur'an and the Sunnah, then no problem should be expected.

5. Do you think Sufism can help towards peace in Israel and Palestine?

I think that once the Israeli Occupation ends, and Palestinians regain their rights, including the right of return, Islam itself has many resources that could assist in reconciliation. Sufis have big open hearts and they could be excellent facilitators.

Best,

Mustafa

APPENDIX II

EXCERPTS FROM THE OLAM QATAN NEWSLETTER OF YA'QUB IBN YUSUF

The following excerpts are included here to give a wider impression of Şūfī related activities in Israel. The newsletters go out by email and are in Hebrew and English. The excerpts below pertain only to Şūfī related events and to Kabbalah and Hassidic events pertinent to the theme of Jewish-Muslim spiritual interaction. Olam Qatan also has a wide selection of books from other traditions which, of course, also find mention in the newsletter.

11th September, 2011

Now for our news, a book-launching coming up this week:

The 'Pillar of Prayer' Book Launch

The Pillar of Prayer: Teachings of Contemplative Guidance in Prayer, Sacred Study, and the Spiritual Life, from the Ba'al Shem Tov and his Circle translated and annotated by Menachem Kallus

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the extraordinary human being who inspired the Hasidic movement in Eastern Europe in the 1700's, never sat down and wrote a book. His oral teachings are collected in many books which were written by his colleagues, disciples and descendants, the "circle" of the Baal Shem Tov. There is an excellent two-volume collection of his teachings in Hebrew called *Sefer Baal Shem Tov al ha Torah (The Book of the Baal Shem Tov on the Torah)*. Although most of it is arranged around the weekly Torah portion (fortunately there is a thematic index), there is a special collection of teachings contained within this book that focuses on the theme of prayer and contemplation, called "The Pillar of Prayer." My old friend Menahem Kallus has translated the whole "Pillar of Prayer," plus an equivalent amount of material that he drew from elsewhere in this anthology, adding his own in-depth analysis of these teachings on how to make Jewish prayer and study the basis of a spiritual life. (...) Sometimes I think that a Şūfī approach would be more in keeping with the spirit of the Baal Shem Tov, but then I bring my Şūfī orientation to my study of Hasidism! Yet I am not the only person who connects the Baal Shem Tov with Sufism (we should bear in mind that this book has a Şūfī publisher). The book concludes with an essay by Dr. Rabbi Aubrey Glazer relating to the idea of "Spiritual Affinities" between certain cultures, particularly Hasidism and Turkish Sufism, entitled "Istanbul mon amour." Glazer suggests that there were remnants of the Ottoman Empire in the region where the Besht lived, so that the liberal spirit of Turkish Sufism must have rubbed shoulders with the social environment of the Besht. (...) Glazer relates a number of fascinating Hasidic stories that illustrate but do not exactly prove his point. In my favorite story, the Besht healed an Ottoman princess by bringing her a delicate white flower that she had imagined—and that had become her obsession—which Elijah the Prophet had showed him was actually growing in a cave inside a mountain nearby! Glazer doesn't really interpret the implications of this story, but it seems to me to be saying that the Besht had access to an inner spirituality which was known to the Turks and was precious to them, but which they couldn't reach. While this indicates an "affinity" it also suggests a polemic: I think the Hasidic author of this story (it may not go back to the Besht) is saying that the Besht had access to what the Turks were missing—maybe as a way of denying that we Jews got a spiritual injection from Turkish Sufism of something that we were missing! At any rate, I do see reasons to suspect that 18th Century Hasidism was influenced by Turkish Şūfī traditions going back to the 13th Century:

the two traditions share an “easing up” on strict ritual observance (without eliminating it), and they both feature the use of folk music and dance and story-telling as spiritual methods, and a strong emphasis on the figure of the spiritual master and the fellowship of the community around him. But in this case, it also makes sense to me that the Besht was careful *not* to leave signs that he was influenced by Sufism. I would say that he worked very hard to present himself as a 100% Jewish mystic! I certainly don’t mean to be reductionist and imply that the Hasidism of the Besht is a mere product of Turkish Sufism. Here, Glazer is right to be cautious. The Besht was too original, he was too much of a spiritual genius for that. Yet we sometimes understand a teaching we might find in our own backyard, only when we discover it in somebody else’s. And this can go both ways. Thus there is the teaching of the Besht that “everyone is a microcosm” (olam qatan) and when you see something objectionable in your neighbor, you must have a trace of it within yourself. And if you can identify and correct it within yourself, you really open the door for them overcoming it as well. I came across this teaching in Hebrew years ago, in the course of my own search for the spiritual master ‘within’, in the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov. And Menachem doesn’t emphasize this particular teaching, but it is there in his book, along with other significant teachings of the Besht, I expect, that are just waiting to be discovered. All of this is being made available to the English-speaking public for the first time. (...) In addition to Aubrey Glazer’s essay, there’s a more readable and informative introductory essay by Moshe (Miles) Krassen, which helps the reader to see how the Besht applied universal spiritual principles in his practical approach to making Jewish davenning a powerful form of meditation. That essay is almost simplistic, compared to the rest of the book. But it is probably the best place for most readers to get oriented to the approach of the Baal Shem Tov. Indeed, if we are looking for connections between universal spirituality and Jewish thought and practice, the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov is a very good place to look. This book puts tools into the hands of English-speaking readers that allow us to dig deeply into those teachings. It is a very intense example of an approach that I applaud—the attempt to bring together academic research, religious practice and spiritual practice, so that they can encounter and inform one another. And while I expect that some seekers may find this book almost overwhelming, others will find it deeply engaging. At least that’s my personal impression of the book, after living with a “pre-publication copy” for a couple of months. We will see what kind of picture emerges from the panel on Thursday evening! I hope to see many of you there on Thursday, and others of you at the Farmers’ Market on Friday.

Cheers!
Ya’qub

9th February, 2012

Dear Friends,

Next week is an event we’ve been looking forward to for some time. The National Library has been hosting a lecture series (in Hebrew, admission free) presenting different aspects of the World of Islam in literature and art. The final event will be on Tuesday, February 14 (Valentine’s Day!) and it will focus on the Persian tradition of mystical love, especially as it is illuminated by Jelaluddin Rumi. The event opens at 7 pm, and Persian art and manuscripts will be on display. The presentations begin at 8 pm: Dr. Yulia Rabinovich will introduce Šūfī love stories like Yusuf and Zuleikha and Leila and Mejnun, and Dr. Rachel Millstein will describe scenes from Rumi’s life, his “Song of the Reed,” and other themes of love in Persian literature, and show how they are illustrated in Persian art. The final event that is planned is

my Arab Ṣūfī friend Ghassan Manasra and I reading from the poems of Rumi from 'The Diwan of Shamsi Tabriz', (along with some words from Rumi's father Bahauddin, and Shamsi Tabriz) and discussing this personal experience of "the Path of Love" that Rumi is describing. The evening will feature musical accompaniment from Amir Shamsar and friends, playing classical Persian music and a bit of Turkish dervish music. (We'll have a table of Ṣūfī books and Persian music for sale, from Olam Qatan.)

Kol tov,
Ya'qub

9th May, 2012

Dear Friends,

The Ṣūfī Festival

We're selling tickets to the Ṣūfī Festival in Ashram baMidbar near Eilat. It will go from Thursday, May 17—Shabbat, May 19. You can order tickets from us at Olam Qatan. Until May 15 we'll offer tickets for sale for 330 shekels. You can come by and purchase your tickets, or phone in your order by credit card.

This is the first time a "Ṣūfī Festival" is happening here in Israel: a broad range of Israelis (mostly Jewish and some Muslims) who are involved in a various aspects of Ṣūfī activity, and a few guests from overseas, will be sharing what we do with a wide audience of interested people (mostly in Hebrew, a little bit in English). I hope many of you can come!

Next Thursday evening, at the beginning of the event, I'll be offering an introduction to the music and dance and dervish folk-tales of Turkey – the Mevlevi Way of Rumi, as well as the more heretical Bektashi tradition. The next morning I'll be accompanying my friend Aviva with more Bektashi stories, as she reads from our new Hebrew translation of the poems of Yunus Emre (which I hope will be out in time!) 'Dervish Yunus'. On Shabbat I'll be leading a group *ṣoḥbet* (spiritual conversation) along with my friend Lisa Talesnick, on the subject of "God as the Friend and God Within" – to be followed by a Collective Prayer. Then I'll be part of a "duet" presentation with my Islamic Ṣūfī friend Ghassan Manasra about the Tzaddik in Hasidism and the Complete Human Being in Sufism. Other activities will include instruction in the Whirling Dervish Turning by Ora Balha, and well... too many things to mention here. Highlights include Ghassan supporting his son Abed in a presentation about Arab Ṣūfī music and chanting, and Sheikh Omer Reiss from the Shaddhuli Yashrutis of Acre speaking about drunkenness on the Ṣūfī Path and about the master-disciple relationship. Gil Ron Shema (from the music group Sheva and Diwan HaLev), one of the organizers of the event, will be performing Ṣūfī music with two of our favorite musicians: Mark Eliahu and Amir Shamsar. Shye ben Tzur will be performing his Hebrew Qawali music with friends visiting from Rajistan, the north of India! There will be some American Ṣūfī dancing, and Lisa will be leading Circassian Dancing as well as Circassian Exercises each morning. There's a workshop which interests me, in singing the oriental maqam... and many other things. Check out the link: www.Sūfifestival.co.il

The following is a paragraph about Sufism I contributed to the Festival website:
Sufism developed in the world of Islam – the great Ṣūfī masters were Muslims who went beyond seeing differences between religions, to understand the unity of God. There were traditional and radical developments in Islamic Sufism, and today many people are drawn to the Ṣūfī Path from other religions, and no religion. But for all Ṣūfis the point of departure

is certain oral traditions, Hadith Qudsi, attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, in which he is speaking in the name of God. God says: "I was a hidden treasure who yearned to be known, and so I created the world that I might be known." God also says: "Neither My heavens nor My earths contain me, but the heart of my faithful believer contains Me." Sufism has developed many ways of opening that heart and uncovering the One within – through music and dance, through poetry and teaching stories and spiritual conversation, through relating to a teacher of the way and sharing with friends on the path. There's another saying of Muhammad which says it all: "He who knows his Self knows his Lord." So we have a lot of things coming up. I look forward to seeing you in the store, or maybe at one of these events!

May we all be blessed in this season,
Ya'qub

21st February 2013

I'll dedicate the rest of this email to some reflections following the Ṣūfī Festival weekend I attended at Acre. Remember Rabbi Yitzhaq of Acre? He's the one whose saying "Everyone is a microcosm (olam qatan), and the world as a whole system is a macro-human being" inspired the name of our store. It turns out that Acre has been a place where Jews and Ṣūfīs rub shoulders, for a very long time. I recently learned from Danny Matt that Rabbi Yitzhaq knew Ṣūfīs... and it looks to me like this influenced his approach to Kabbalah. Check out his teaching on "Drowning" in 'The Essential Kabbalah' (page 131) keeping in mind the Ṣūfī idea of "Die Before You Die" (see the book I edited, The Essence of Sufism by Murat Yagan, page 112.) Another connection: when Rebbe Nahman of Bratzlav first arrived in the land of Israel, he met a young "Ishmaelite" in Acre, probably a Ṣūfī, who proclaimed his love for the rabbi and later challenged him to a dual. This was in the Ottoman Empire, where everyone knew the story of Rumi and Shams... and he may have seen himself as the dervish "Shams" in relation to the learned Rabbi Nahman. In his biography of Nahman Arthur Green suggests that there was a physical attraction between them, but it seems to me that a spiritual attraction would have been no less powerful, and threatening. Anyway, all of Reb Nahman's tales and his best teachings come from the time after he returned to Europe from his trip to Acre and to Israel. What was unique about our weekend in Acre is that instead of Jewish Israelis inviting Muslim Ṣūfīs to join in making an event together, this time the "Festival" host was our Muslim friend Omar Reiss. Ghassan Manasra and family and friends who came down from Nazareth were the local caterers. But Ze'ev ben Aryae was the program organizer, and the guest of honor was his teacher Sheikha Khadija, a Jewish-American Ṣūfī with strong Buddhist leanings. Sheikha Khadija has a good esoteric understanding of the Qur'ān, and she had a good time conversing with Omar and Ghassan about subjects like "the mirror of the heart". But unlike Tariqat Ibrahim events, the focus here was not so much intellectual as it was practical. When it came to her workshops in Mevlevi Whirling, I appreciated how Sheikha Khadija not only spoke of visualizing a line of light running through one's body around which one turns, but she conveyed a vivid sense of the Presence or Essence that is at the very core of our being. Buddhism has conquered the minds and hearts of many smart people in the West... including here in Israel. It seems to me that Sheikha Khadija makes it possible for people to engage in Ṣūfī practice with a lot of passion and heart, without compromising one's non-theistic Buddhist understanding. (...) Another upshot of this whole experience: last week Aseem invited me to teach again this year, at the second "**Sufi Festival at Ashram BaMidbar**" which is planned for the week-end of May 2–May 4. What topics would I like to address? And it became very clear to me: one

of my talks needs to be about God. In Sufism we relate to God in general as the One, but also very personally as the Beloved, and also to God Within – awaiting our attention, deep within ourselves. So one of my presentations will be about these three dimensions of God, and how it's not a matter of choosing what to believe, but of moving through them all in relating ourselves to God.

Hag Sameakh,
Ya'qub

GLOSSARY

'alam al-khayāl – the imaginal world

ḥayra – perplexity, bewilderment

dhikr – the communal or individual invocation of the Names of God, the literal meaning of the word is 'remember'

'ishq – the longing for union with the Beloved

Silsila – the chain of spiritual authority passed from one shaykh to the next

Ṣoḥbet – spiritual conversation among companions on the path usually led by an authorized shaykh

Ṭarīqa (pl. *ṭurūq*) – literally meaning 'path', also meaning the Ṣūfī path or a particular order

Maqam (pl. *maqamāt*) – a station or level attained on the journey of self-transformation

Piyyutim – Jewish liturgical poems

al-raḥmān – the Compassionate, one of the Names of God

al-raḥīm – the Merciful, one of the Names of God

Tajalliyat - epiphanies

Zāwiya – a Ṣūfī centre or lodge

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