ISLAM AS OUR OTHER ISLAM AS OURSELF

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In my talk to today I will argue that Islam, as the third monotheistic religion, shares a dual identity as both other and same to Judaism, to Christianity and to the Christian West. This ambiguous position calls forth the ambiguous emotions of sibling rivalry but also promises the possibility of brotherly and sisterly love. From the point of view of scripture, which is my point of entry into any theological discussion, Islam shares with Judaism and Christianity not only a devotion to the one God, to the goodness of creation, and the dream of a future time of judgment and peace, but the very basic principle that revelation is given in scripture. We are all people of the book in this sense and though our books are different we share common narratives, common prophets, and common hermeneutical principles to guide us in the interpretation of scripture. And this gives us, despite all differences, a common starting ground for discussion of the issues that both divide and unite us.

For my reflections today on the simultaneous otherness and sameness of Islam to Judaism and Christianity, I have chosen the Hebrew Scriptures that speak of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael. I begin with my own texts because I must begin with what I know and where I stand. I must admit that I began my scriptural reasoning on Hagar and Ishmael with a worry that it may not be the appropriate place to start, since the Jewish tradition is fairly negative about these figures. Yet as I reread the stories I was taken in by the spiritual insights and depth of the character of Hagar. And I recalled a point made by the modern Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, which I take to be most instructive in doing scriptural reasoning. Buber argues that the Torah should be viewed, not as an objective history of world creation and redemption, but as a story of the relation of God to Israel that is told primarily from the perspective of the people of Israel.[303] It certainly moves out from Israel to attempt to embrace the entire world, but its starting point

[303] Martin Buber, *On the Bible,* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), p.24.

is a small family that wanders from some where in ancient Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan and comes to see itself as bearing a world historic message. This means that the Torah is at once a particularistic and universal document. I could put this somewhat differently and say that the Torah is both an ethnocentric and theocentric document. From the ethnocentric perspective of Israel, Hagar may be a mere slave girl and Ishmael a wild ass of a man and thorn in the side of Israel, but from the perspective of the larger narrative of the Bible and from the perspective of God, Hagar and Ishmael have a unique role in God's design.

Also, although some might be put off by Hagar's status as a lowly slave girl. This fact actually unites her to Jewish and Christian origins. For the children of Israel trace their origins to their status as Egyptian slaves who were freed by God and Christians find their origins in the death of a lowly carpenter who suffered the criminal's death of crucifixion.

Yet in addition to these rough analogies to overarching concepts, the use of scripture, and lowly origins, the stronger point I wish to make, is that the presence of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael in scripture embeds the Muslim people in the Torah of the Jews and the Old Testament of the Christians. Hagar is at once the other who comes from Egypt, the land of exile and slavery, and the wife of the patriarch Abraham through whom all the peoples of the world will be blessed. Hagar is at once the surrogate womb for Sarah to exploit, and the second wife of Abraham and mother of his first son. The most obvious implication of this to me is that although Islam is often presented as the other to Judaism and Christianity and to the strange fiction called the "Judeo-Christian Tradition," Hagar and Ishmael's presence in those very scriptures is a warrant for Jews and Christians to take Islam seriously not only as the third monotheism but as a tradition that is rooted in Genesis and whose origin and destiny is intertwined with Israel. If Islam is rooted in the Hebrew scriptures what this opens up is a new possibility to see Islam as not opposed to the Judeo-Christian tradition of Monotheism but, indeed a part of it. Through Hagar and Ishmael, Islam regains its place as simultaneously the first child of Abraham and the third stage in the development of Monotheism. What this means is that we have a warrant in the revealed texts of Judaism and Christianity to engage with Muslims not as strange others but as long lost members of the great family whose destiny is

to be a light of truth and healing to all the nations of the world. Thus, the greatest significance of scriptural reasoning is that it is beginning to see the advent of a new religious consciousness that recognizes that there is not just a Judeo-Christian tradition but a Jewish-Christian-Islamic reality.

With this as an introduction I will move now to scripture.

GENESIS 16

7 The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. 8And he said, "Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." 9The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit to her." 10The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." 11And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction. 12He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." 13So she named the Lord who spoke to her, "You are El-roi"; for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" 14Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

The first thing to note in these verses is that we have the first appearance of an angel in biblical literature and the first time that God speaks to a woman. Thus, though a slave-girl, Hagar merits particular interest on the part of God. God sends a messenger to her, the messenger finds her in the middle of a journey back to Egypt (as Shur is close to Egypt Gen 25:13), and he finds her by a well. Well scenes are replete throughout the Genesis narrative and thus we call the visits of Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, even Joseph to wells at crucial points in their lives. The angel asks a highly loaded question, "Where have you come from and where are you going?" Clearly the angel knows where Hagar comes from. So this question must be asked more for Hagar's sake then for the angel's. This is the type of question that is only asked of biblical characters of significance, Adam, Cain, Abraham. Elijah,

Jonah. It is an existential question that seeks out a person's integrity and ability to respond and to take responsibility. It is a kind of trick question or question of testing that biblical figures often fail. Hagar's answer however, is straight forward, honest, unequivocal, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." Apparently, Hagar passes the test but his leads to a seemingly cruel command that she return and submit, or literally "place herself under her mistress's hand." Given that biblical law demands that one help a run-away slave escape, this is, indeed, a strange command. We can either view it as an expression of the cruelty of slavery, of abusive patriarchy and divine tyranny or search in it for another level of meaning. If, indeed, I am correct, that the first question, "where have you come from…" is a test, then the command that follows my be interpreted as a deeper more difficult test. Hagar, must return to Sarah and submit to her. Although the Hebrew *hitani* appears to have no relation to the Arabic word to submit, am I stretching to far to find an intimation to the command all Muslim's, indeed all Jews and Christians, have to submit to the will of God? The supposition however, that God wishes Hagar no ill and, indeed, has a special mission for her is born out in the next lines. "I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude." Nahum Sarna notes that the messenger uses a rhetorical form that signifies "the birth and destiny of one who is given a special role in God's design of history (cf. Gen 25:23 and Judges 13:3)."[304] It is easy to see connections between Hagar and the first women, Eve. The Hebrew *harbeh arbeh* "I will greatly multiply…" is the same phrase that God uses in the curse of Eve, in greatly multiplying Eve's pain in childbirth. Yet, the consequence of result of Hagar's suffering is that she will be abundantly rewarded with multitudes of descendents. Thus, unlike Eve, Hagar is blessed and not cursed. Since Hagar flees Sarah's home in Canaan, heads for Egypt and then returns to Canaan, her journey reminds us of Abraham's journeys. Like Abraham, Hagar is a wanderer who comes to hear the word of call and fulfil a divine mission.

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[304] *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2001), p.85.

Tikvah Frymer -Kensky reminds us that the verses that describe Hagar fleeing the home of Sarah and travelling toward Egypt occur right after God has told Abraham in 15:13 that his offspring will be enslaved in Egypt.[305]

> ***Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be strangers [****Ger iyeh zarha****] in a land that is not theirs and they shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years, but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.***

It is startling when we realize that the word used to describe Israel in Egypt is *Ger*. *Ger iyeh zarha*, "strangers shall your offspring be." Thus, God tells Abraham in chapter 15, that his offspring will be literally be *Gerim*. And in the next chapter we meet Hagar, *Ha-Ger*, the Egyptian stranger. Frymer-Kensky makes the point obvious, Hagar, the stranger, Hagar the servant, Hagar, wife of Abraham and mother of Ishmael *is* Israel! She presages, she prefigures, Israel's suffering in Egypt. And in her deep connection to God, and in the fact that God sees and listens to her suffering and rewards her with a multitude of offspring, Hagar also prefigures Israel's ultimate redemption!

But now we must pause to reflect on Ishmael and who he is. First, we have his wonderful name which means "God hears." Our verses connect the hearing to God attending to Hagar's suffering.

> ***for the Lord has given heed to your affliction." But later in verse 21:17 a connection is made to God's hearing the voice of Ishmael. "And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, 'What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is' (21:17)."***

In 16:15, Abraham gives Hagar's son the name Ishmael, fulfilling the divine directive and also legitimizing Ishmael as his son.[306] Ishmael clearly has

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[305] Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Sarah and Hagar," *Talking About Genesis: A Resource Guide* (NY: Doubleday, 1996), p.97.

a name that suggests that God hears and will attend to his voice; and thus the Torah seems to recognize and underscore that Ishmael and his offspring will maintain a special relationship to God and that God will continue to hear the voice of Ishmael wherever he is!

In this context, it is somewhat difficult to understand the second part of the description of Ishmael in verse 12. "He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin." I have previously described this as the view of Ishmael from the perspective of Israel, which highlights the tension between the descendents of Ishmael and the descendents of Isaac. It is thus not necessarily some deep description of the eternal nature of Ishmael and his descendents. It is noteworthy that the recent Jewish Publication Society version of the last part of verse "*al penai kol echav ishkan*" translates it not as "he shall live at odds with" but, "He shall dwell alongside all his kinsmen." This stresses the intricate relationship between the descendents of Ishmael and the descendents of Isaac without the eternal state of conflict.[307] It is

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306 *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*, Sarna, p.88.

307 There is very strong scholarly tradition of Qur'an commentary in Islam, going back to the earliest times, which, in order of preference, gives a very special place to the Old and New Testaments as the exegetical tools to understand the Qur'anic narrative. According to their hierarchical arrangement, these scriptures are the next to the Qur'an itself. Hamid al-Din Farahi and Amin Ahsan Islahi are the two great representatives of this line of commentators in modern times. Steven Kepnes' treatment of the figures of Ishmael and Hagar resonates very strongly with some of the best commentaries on the Qur'an on the issue of Ishmael and Hagar. At this point in his paper he says, "It is noteworthy that the recent Jewish Publication Society version of the last part of verse "*al penai kol echav ishkan*" translates it not as "he shall live at odds with" but, "He shall dwell alongside all his kinsmen."

It is almost exactly the same what Amin Ahsan Islahi, the greatest of contemporary Qur'an commentators,has written in his *Tadabbur i Qur'an*, (Meditating on the Qur'an) the best of commentaries on the Qur'an to be written in the 20th century. It is very interesting to look at the way Muslim and Jewish scholars approach and reason with their respective Scriptures as well as the Scripture of the Other. What is more amazing is that Islahi has used, obviously quite independently and remaining within the tradition of Qur'an commentary, the same proof texts from Exodus and Genesis that Steve does with a slightly different treatment. This is not the place to enter into a detailed discussion of the subject so I translate a few paragraphs from his *Tadabbur i Qur'an* (Faran Foundation, Lahore, 1996, Vol. 1, p. 327-329) to give an idea to the readers.

further interesting that the description of Ishmael in the later chapter 21 describes him in less contentious terms. "God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (21: 20-21)

If we leave Ishmael and return to the fascinating figure of Hagar. We have to comment on the fact she names God and furthermore is the only figure, male or female, in the Bible to do this! "So she named the Lord who spoke to her, 'You are El-roi'; for she said, 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?'" 16:13. This expression seems to give witness not only to God seeing into the very soul of Hagar, and her passing this test, but to Hagar's own ability to see God! It is remarkable that after God names Ishmael, Hagar names God, and the Hebrew expression used in both these occasions are similar. Thus "*Korat Shmo Ismael*," "you shall call him Ishmael"…is followed by "*v'tikrah shem Adonai,*" "And She called God…"

It was necessary for the sacrifices that these should be offered to the Lord in the *ma'bad* (place of worship) and …the Holy of the Holy was prescribed to face the South. Similarly the greatest annual sacrifice was also made facing the South. This is a significant point which is usually not taken into consideration whereas it is an established fact that the Tent of worship of the Jews always faced North from the beginning. (See Exodus 27: 9)…"and the table was set out side the curtain in the northern corner of the tent of gathering and on it the bread was placed before the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses, and the lamp was also placed in the tent of gathering on the southern side." (Exodus 40: 21-24) In our view the rationale of all these directions is that who ever enters the presence of he Lord would face South i.e. towards Mecca and the Abrahamic tabernacle….. This is further corroborated by the fact that God had made this tabernacle the place towards the children of Abraham faced (*qiblah*). Abraham made his descendents settle in the North and East of Arabia and made the dwelling place of Ishmael their *qiblah*. Torah says that Ishmael settled facing his brothers. Genesis 25: 18 says "….*He dwelt facing all his kinsmen*" and Genesis 16:12 says "*He shall be a free man like a wild ass, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live facing all his kin*." There can be no other correct explanation of "*he shall live facing all his kin*" as all the descendents of Abraham settled in the North and East of Arabia except Ishmael and who could *"live facing all his kin*" only if his dwelling happened to be in the direction to which they all faced. (Note that Islahi translates these verses from the Hebrew Bible differently, without knowing the recent Jewish Publication Society version mentioned above, without the tenor of the earlier translation which read, "*He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.*)
M. S. Umar, Editor.

The Hebrew expression *v'tikrah shem Adonai* also calls to mind a different use of the phrase by Abraham in Genesis 13:13. Here we also have v-*ikrah bshem adonai.* This is generally rendered in English "and Abraham called on or called out the name of God." However, the Talmud interprets this to mean that Abraham was fulfilling his prophetic role and publicizing the revelation of the oneness of God throughout the world. Could it be that Hagar was not just speaking to herself when he called out God's name, but also wished to publicize her revelation of God as one who sees into the essence of humanity and one who sees the suffering of humanity and responds to it? If this were true, Hagar would be a counterpart to Abraham as another evangelist of the One God.

After Abraham dies, we hear nothing more about Hagar except that a hint of her and what she represents seems to live on in the Torah. This hint is found in the countless references to Ha-ger to the stranger and how Israel is to treat the stranger. The notion of the Ger occurs no less than thirty-six times in the Torah and is connected with the commandment to treat the stranger as one of Israel. The nineteenth century German Jewish philosopher, Hermann Cohen, argues that the development of the notion of the "*Ger"* in the Torah represents one of the most significant events in the history of all of monotheism. Cohen tells us that the *Ger* is a "great step with which humanitarianism begins." [308] The power of this notion can be clearly seen in two texts of the Torah. "One law shall be unto him that is home-born and unto the *Ger*, the stranger that lives among you (Ex 12:49) (cf. Num 15.15, Lev 24.22, Deut 1.16)." "Thou shall love the Ger, the stranger as yourself (Lev 19:33)."

Cohen tells us that what is remarkable about the notion of the *Ger* is that it achieves its development as monotheism is codified in law and given political expression in the nation. Thus, the notion of the *Ger* is not developed as an afterthought, but comes immediately with the formation of Israel. Here, under the commandment of the Torah, the stranger must be treated equally, even though he is not a member of the house of Israel.

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[308] Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. S. Kaplan. (Atlanta: Scholars Press 1995), p. 121.

In the holiness code of Leviticus, the principle of the *Ger* as fellowman is intensified to the commandment of love. "You shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lev 19.33). Where Kantian ethics develops the responsibility of the self for others on the basis of a universal rational law, the categorical imperative, and the recognition a fundamental moral duty, Cohen recognizes that humans are not motivated by reason and duty alone. In turning to Leviticus, Cohen follows the lead of the Torah to add the emotions of love and compassion to the ethical relation. "Religion achieves what morality fails to achieve. Love for man is brought forth"[309] The Torah accomplishes this achievement on the basis of Israel's own experience of slavery. Israel should be able to identify with the stranger and love her because she too went through the experience of being a stranger when she was in Egypt.[310]

II

I hope that I have convinced you of the power of the figures of Hagar and Ishmael in the Torah of the Jews and the Old Testament of Christians. I have argued that far from being "the other" these figures are part of the very fabric that ties the people of Israel to God. Having walked you through a short exercise in scriptural reasoning with the Torah I would like now to speak a little more about the power of scripture in general and the power of the three particular scriptures of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. This will

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[309] *Ibid.*, p.146.

[310] It seems that there is a rough parallel in the Torah's notion of the Ger to the notion of the Dimi in Muslim societies. The Dimi is granted respect and certain protections; but the position of the Dimi, like that of the Ger, is not ultimately equal to the members of the host societies. I will shortly discuss the modern way of dealing with the relation of host societies to others who do not share the dominate religio-cultural identity. The modern way is to move to a universal homogenized culture which dissolves all cultural differences between peoples and assures them all the same minimal human rights. Although this strategy has obvious advantages, it also has the disadvantage of depriving people of life giving religio-cultural systems. Scriptural Reasoning attempts to forge a third way between the solution of bestowing minority status, as in the Ger or Dimi, and washing out all cultural difference in a universal global culture, and abstract declaration of human rights. That third way may begin from the notions of the Ger and Dimi but need to move well-beyond them to recognition of equal status for those who are different before God.

allow me to say a few things about the promise of the movement called scriptural reasoning which I and a number of our panellists are a part. In speaking about scriptural reasoning, one of my central tasks will be to distinguish it from Western philosophic reasoning.

One of the wonders of scripture that I discovered again in my research into Hagar and Ishmael is that scripture is not beholden to modern secular standards of narrative, historical and philosophic coherence. These standards might demand that Hagar and Ishmael, as minor figures in the story of Israel, be painted in wholly negative terms or be excised from the narrative after they have filled their functions as foils to Sarah and Isaac. Yet, we see that after these figures are introduced in Genesis 16 and 21 they are not erased but they appear again. Thus, seemingly out of the blue, Ishmael appears in chapter 25:9 to bury his father Abraham alongside Isaac. The burial site is not just any place but the cave of Machpelah, where Sarah was also buried. Scripture then tells us that Isaac settled near *Beer-lahai-roi*, the place where God revealed himself to Hagar! The fact that Isaac settles here clearly ties him to Hagar. After being informed of this, we then are given a long list of the genealogy of Ishmael (25:12). Narrative coherence might demand that this information on Ishmael be left out. Or, rather, if Hagar and Ishmael were truly enemies of Israel, coherence might demand that they be painted in consistent negative portraits. Yet, what we find is a far more complex portrait of these figures. As I have shown, Hagar is a counterpart of Abraham in prophetic sight, she is a positive counterpart to Eve, and her wandering, suffering, and blessing are counterparts to Israel's slavery and redemption. Similarly, Ishmael might be a wild ass of a man but then, in the end, he shows up as a dutiful son to his father and brother to Isaac at Abraham's burial.

We may say that this treatment of the other as both different and same, foe and friend is unique to the Jewish scriptures. But if we move to the New Testament, we see an equally ambivalent portrait of the most clear and obvious other to the Christian, the Jew. On the one hand, we have the portrait of the Jews as hypocrites, Christ killers, stubborn sinners doomed to Hell, and on the other hand the Jews carry the law that Christ fulfils without abrogating. The Jews represent the trunk of the tree onto which Christians are grafted. And most importantly, the scriptures of the Jews, despite many

attempts to sever their connection to Christianity, are tenaciously maintained, preserved, and even revered as part of Christian scriptures, as the Old Testament.

Holding on to the Jewish scriptures as Christian scripture simply put, is not easy. Certainly, from the standpoint of narrative and logical coherence it doesn't really work. To pull it off, Christianity must develop a complex, self-contradictory hermeneutic which says at once that Jewish scripture is revealed and wrong. Its way of Torah, its way of the law, is both necessary and superseded. Its promise to the children of Abraham both nullified and fulfilled.

Muslims may look over the shoulders at Christians and see this as strange, but they must admit that they have a similar ambivalence about their older monotheistic brothers and sisters. On the one hand, Muhammad is the final seal, the last prophet, the one who corrects what was wrong in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. On the other hand, the Qur'an, in its infinite mercy and openness, recognizes Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and many others as prophets. And the Qur'an preserves many of the narratives of the Jewish and Christian scripture and it praises the people of the book as righteous children of Abraham. There is no question that there are highly negative statements about the Jews and the Christians in the Qur'an, but if we remember Buber's insight that scripture is at least partially written from the perspective of one people in an attempt to understand their unique relation to God, we can understand why non-Muslims are presented, at times, in a negative light. Yet, if I may return to my original point about scripture, one of its truly wondrous aspects is that it neither thoroughly demonize the other nor does it leave their narratives out. On the contrary, it preserves the memories and stories of the others and says, in fundamental ways, that these other are related to us. These others, indeed, are us! Thus we read in the Qur'an Surah 2:62.

> ***The believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians—whoever believes in Allah and the last day and does what is good shall receive their reward from their Lord. They shall have nothing to fear and they shall not grieve.***

And in Surah 2:135-36

We follow the religion of Abraham who was no polytheist.

We believe in Allah, in what has been revealed to us, what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes, and in what was imparted to Moses, Jesus, making no distinction between any of them.

And finally, in Surah 3:1-3

Allah, There is no God but He, the Living, the Everlasting.

***He revealed the Book to you in truth, confirming what came before it* And He has revealed the Torah and the Gospel.**

Our dear friend Peter Ochs likes to say that if we look at the logical pattern of modern Western philosophy and the modern culture which it reflects, we are offered a way of thinking that follows a logic of dichotomies. One the one hand, we have secularists on the other religious fundamentalist; on the other hand, we have the progressive West and the other backward Islam. On the one hand, we have modernity, on the other tradition. Light/dark, Spirit/matter, male/female, same/other, us/them, yes/no, 0/1, these are the binaries that define our thinking and our world.

However, in the face of this logic, scripture offers us another way of thinking. Ochs calls it, following Peirce, a logic of relations. In this logic the binary pairs are placed in dialogue. To paraphrase the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, scripture places the isolated elements, God, World and Human in fundamental relations. Scripture offers us concepts of connectedness: creation, revelation, covenant, redemption. It offers us figures of mediation, Adam, Abraham, Hagar, Jesus and Muhammad. These figures are given to fill the gap between us and them, between God and human and between human and human.

This is not to say that scripture is innocent and pure, divorced from dichotomies of spirit and matter, saved and damned us and them. Indeed, if we look, we can find ample examples of these oppositions. But, the point is that scripture cannot be adequately and fully define by these dichotomies.

Rather, a closer look reveals, in almost every page of the Torah, the New Testament and the Qur'an, elements and figures that lie outside of neat dichotomies and divisions. Scripture is filled with lacunae, gaps, inconsistencies and mysterious sayings, images, and parables that defy simple logic. Scripture, again in the words of Ochs, is "vague," its meaning unclear and hidden.

Because of the fundamental vagueness of scripture, the reader is called upon, indeed, required to interpret the text. Unlike a mathematical formula, or a simple sign like a traffic light, scripture does not yield clear, distinct, univocal meanings. Scripture, instead, is an opaque semiotic system whose meaning is fulfilled in its interpretation by us. This is another way of pointing to the logic of relations of scripture. Its meaning is only given in relation to the interpreter or community of interpreters that receives it. In Hebrew, the Torah is often called the *Miqra* which means a calling out. Thus, the Torah is a system of signs that calls out, it calls out to those who listen for it and truly hear it. But we could also reverse the line of communication and say that the cry does not only come from scripture, but that it comes from humans who cry out in their need and suffering. As a conduit of communication between God and humans, scripture itself is a form of mediation, a vessel that bridges the gaps in material and spiritual life. As a conduit for divine communication, scripture is an agent of healing, redemption, even salvation.

Now if my description of the logic of relations in scripture is correct, we should not be shy and bringing our voice and cries of the twenty-first century to it. I have already spoken of the dichotomizing logic of the modern world and I have, at least, intimated that scripture may give us a vision and a way to heal that logic. But I want to go even further and suggest that scripture holds within it additional spiritual resources that may help us to address the suffering in our existential and historical world today.

Certainly, the problem that plagues contemporary Jews, Christians, and Muslims today is the problem of distrust, hatred, and misunderstanding between us. One of the great blessings and also curses of the modern world is that the world seems to have shrunk. You know the movie "Honey I shrunk the kids!" Well, modern world leaders could easily adopt this and say, "Honey, we shrank the world!" What this means is that we no longer have

the luxury of Hagar to run away into the wilderness where we can be alone and isolated from each other. Where Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the pre-modern world could pretty much keep to themselves, we, like Ishmael and Isaac, must live next to each other. And like Ishmael and Isaac, we can either live against each other or alongside each other. Certainly, our scriptures offer us ammunition to oppose one another and even kill one another. But it also offers us alternative avenues of mediation, conciliation, and peaceful co-existence.

As well as offering us a logic of dichotomies, modernity, to be fair to it, did and still does offer us another way to solve the problem of many different people, with different cultures, living in an increasingly smaller world. This is the route of universal principles, universal rights of men, a universal economic order, and a universal global culture. The universalizing move of modernity flips all the dichotomies vertically and subsumes the bottom element into the top. Thus, the other is subsumed into the same, "them" is subsumed into "us," tradition is subsumed into modernity, religion into secularism, East into West, etc., etc.

Although this modern solution has had some success, it has also led to great suffering throughout the world as people see their traditional cultures, local customs, belief in God-- which are constructed to preserve human dignity and ethical relations between communal members-- dissolving in the solvent of modern universalisms. Certainly, part of the supposed battle between secularism and fundamentalism and between the modern West and Islam is a reaction to the relentless onslaught of a modern universalism which would wash away all particularism in the tidal wave of a global culture. Here again, I believe that scriptural reasoning can be an aid. Although, some have argued that monotheism represents the first great attempt at an imperialistic and universalistic world culture, the record from the scriptures suggests something else. If I follow Buber's logic and assert that three scriptures offer a mixture of particularism and universalism, the Torah singles out Abraham, but he is told that "all the nations of the world will be blessed through you." Before Abraham, Noah, a non-Israelite, is called "righteous" and before him Adam, the first human who represents all humans, is created in the image of God. The Tower of Babel story clearly favours a diversity of peoples and languages as it suggests that the attempt to have one language,

and one culture, is counter to God's will. I have given only hints to parallel attempts in the New Testament and Qur'an to negotiate particularity and universalism and to provide resources for conciliation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. I will leave it to others to expand on these resources and close by returning to Hagar and Ishmael and then say some final words about what the study of Islamic texts has meant to scriptural reasoning.

What I especially like about the Hagar and Ishmael narratives in the Torah is that the differences between Sarah and Hagar and Isaac and Ishmael are neither overlooked nor dissolved. The tension and conflict between then is neither denied nor obscured. Instead difference, tension, conflict is acknowledged and strategies and models for conciliation and coexistence offered. This conciliation and coexistence is offered not on the basis of some universal principle, or abstract declaration of human unity, but, instead on the basis of a shared sense of the oneness of God.

Hagar may be a servant and stranger, but she also is a woman, who suffers, wanders, fears, perseveres until she sees God. Ishmael, whose name means "God hears", may be the son of a surrogate mother, who is unloved by his father's wife and tossed under a bush to die, but he also knows how to cry out to God and is heard by God. Hagar and Ishmael may be others to Israel, but in their suffering and redemption Hagar and Ishmael also represent Israel. And in their spiritual search they recall the "suffering servants" of the Lord who even go beyond Israel to represent the spiritual struggle of all human beings.

The movement of scriptural reasoning began over a dozen years ago as a group of Jewish philosophers gathered to read Jewish texts with scholars of Talmud and Jewish mysticism. The movement was enlarged and broadened when Christians joined us some ten years ago and we then read from the Torah and the New Testament. This was fairly natural for Christians, because the Torah is part of the Christian Bible and despite the long history of Jewish and Christian animosities, there has been, for over a century, a sense that it was the combination of Judaism and Christianity together with Greek culture that produced what is sometimes called Western culture or as we like to say in America, the Judeo-Christian tradition. Following the holocaust and with recent Christian scholarship of the historical Jesus and the Jewish character

of the early Church, Christian scholars have sought to bring Christianity closer to Judaism. But this has been met by an increasing Jewish and Christian antipathy toward Islam.

Scriptural Reasoning was relatively tame and acceptable when its practitioners read and interpreted the Torah and New Testament, but the movement really became bold and internationally significant when, about seven years ago it started to included the study of Islamic texts. One can imagine the exciting possibilities for discourse and discovery if you merely consider the math. When you move from two partners to three, from a dyad to a triad, the possibilities multiply. Two represents a lovely couple capable of romance but three represents a family, the challenge to bring romance into reality. Emmanuel Levinas has said that the relation of the one to another can easily remain a private matter, but when you add a third, you enter the public domain, things get far more complex and you must consider issues of justice. We have already discussed the problem of binaries which tend toward polarities and oppositions. When a third is added complexity multiplies but so too do terms of relation and mediation. I have already mentioned my sense that the three scriptures are each, in their own way, a combination ethnocentrism and theocentrism. Ochs likes to say that the enlightenment sought a solution to what it saw as excessive ethnocentrism in the Bible by substituting abstract universals for God. My sense is that the addition of Islamic texts to scriptural reasoning supplies us with yet another avenue to approach the problem of the new modern form of ethnocentrism. This is an ethnocentrism which pits the Judeo-Christian Tradition and its modern reincarnation in a post-capitalist global culture against the rest of the world. In the face of this new ethnocentrism, Islam, as both "Western and Eastern" both Us and Them, Same and Different, can be the crucial mediating element between the West and the world. In addition, Islam offers the world the possibility of another chance, another model, for dealing with the conflict between tradition and modernity, between religion and the secular. Judaism followed Christianity in allowing its religious texts, rituals, symbols and liturgies to be disembowelled and made over into the terms of the enlightenment. In this process, Christianity and Judaism became "modern liberal religions" that were transformed into mere handmaidens of modernity. They became shallow reflections of enlightenment ideals and

supplied superficial prooftexts to legitimize and not challenge the new modern economic, political, social, and cultural order.

Islam has, by and large, resisted the modern West and now wages a somewhat desperate battle to preserve its traditional beliefs and practices in the face of modernity. Islamic leaders are certainly aware of the avenues carved out by modern Jews and Christians and some are calling for Muslims to follow parallel paths. Yet others are trying to blaze a new way that will steer between the paths of modern liberal religion on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other. Some Muslims, whose representatives are in this room, are trying to do again the mix of tradition and modernity, Islam and secularism, in new ways that will be a true mediation between the two poles of fundamentalism and secularism and a source of healing and truth that contemporary Jews and Christians will want to follow.