

Opening Remarks on the Workshop

No Truth Exists Where There is No Love

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Dear distinguished guests and colleagues, I thank you all for your participation in the CISMOR Workshop in Kyoto, Japan. For the next two days, we will listen to each other and exchange thoughts and views about the concept of “others,” which, for me, means thinking and rethinking how we distinguish between “ours” and “theirs” within human existence.

The inspiration for this workshop came from Prof. Yacob Rabkin, who visited us last year (2008) and spent two months giving lectures all over in Japan, making many friends in the process. Among them were Prof. Yuzo Itagaki and Prof. Mari Oka, scholars of Area Studies and modern Arab literature, respectively, who share a concern for the Palestinians. It seems that Prof. Rabkin enjoyed this experience enough to draft a proposal to CISMOR and other universities to host a series of academic dialogues at an international level between the three monotheistic religions and the issues they face together in response to one another.

I consider the present workshop as unique in the world because of the way it brings together Islam, Judaism, and Japan (or the Christianity of Japan). Obviously, the perspectives of the workshop will not be confined merely to the issues of the relationships between Islam and Judaism—they will also involve the relationships of Islam and Japan, as well as those of Judaism and Japan. In other words, the workshop promises to be multi-faceted and complex—not a discussion of the meanings of black and white within politics and religion—and I hope it will also cause us to reflect upon ourselves, namely, our academic efforts for dialogue. We will also not avoid politically sensitive issues, such as the justice of the Palestinian refugees or the Jewish state of Israel’s right to exist, and we must also rethink ourselves and understand the very language by which we distinguish “ours” and “theirs.”

Indeed, the awkward title of the workshop, “On Dialogue between Islam and Judaism; ‘Theirs’ and ‘Ours’ in Rethinking” is meant to allude to my own rethinking of previous CISMOR dialogues that did not do enough in going beyond the boundaries of preconceptions concerning “ours” and “theirs.” Therefore, in the next two days, while we learn a great deal

about the facts and views of Judaism and Islam surrounding the concept of “others,” I should ask all of you to remember the fundamental insufficiency of the academic language that we use, which may distract us from the true dialogue between “I and thou.” This is a big challenge—as we can see by taking a look at the modern disciplines of history or philosophy, which insist in the objectivity of the language that is rooted within a certain concept of the “other and the self.” Thus, we have to do our best to make our statement, description, or observation of the other in the third person—least the perception be biased by the emotions to the one existing before his or her eyes—avoiding use of language in the second person. It would be wonderful if we could grasp the significance of this concept together, through the workshop, questioning what we mean by an “objective” truth.

Perhaps the Bible offers some inspiration in this regard. The Psalms of the Bible and the classical prayer texts of Judaism are full of the language of dialogue of “I and You.”

“May the words of my mouth and the thought of my heart be Your pleasure before You, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.” (Psalm 19:15)

I believe the same is true of Islam as well. In that light, I would rather insist on our efforts to be strictly *academic* in terms of the merits of the language of “ours” and “theirs,” instead, saving the language of “yours” only for addressing God and for a genuine heart of prayer in which I believe we are the same and equal. I pray this workshop may enlighten our understanding of the distinction between “ours” and “theirs” by His fairness and move us in a direction that can perhaps partially overcome misperceptions on “dialogue,” helping us understand the significance and merit of *the academic, third-person language*.

Prof. Hasan Ko Nakata and I have been working together for four years as colleagues, and we are aware of the differences in our training as well as our knowledge; however, there is one thing that binds us together: a God-fearing respect for the truth of Islam and Judaism. Both of us hold great respect and a sense of obligation to the religious logic and perspectives that we respectively received from our teachers of Islam and Judaism.

Of course, I admit tensions exist between us when we relate to the state of Israel and the Palestinians, yet we have learned so much together, and I consider him as my great partner in exploring the prejudices of modernism or secularism. Through our dialogue, I can see myself as one who needs to rethink the language of “theirs” and “ours.”

I am looking forward to knowing the truths of Islam and Judaism, clearing away misconceptions and fantasies. Through this workshop, I anticipate reaching the many moments when I will

have to rethink what I understand as “ours” and “theirs.” I expect true academic interactions—since I love the subject and would like to see the *whole* truth of the subject (Judaism) I love more clearly and more closely, for which I must be prepared to rethink myself and become more courageous, in order to correct the mistakes in the words I hear about the subject I love.

I believe that truth and love should be a complement to each other, just as a great Protestant Bible scholar Hugo Gressmann believed that “true objectivity always requires love” (See Edward K. Kaplan, *Abraham Joshua Heschel*, 104). That is to say, the *true* love of Islam is required for speaking the *whole* truth on Islam. Likewise, the *whole* truth of Judaism cannot be spoken without a *true* love for Judaism. My approach, which does not seek to separate truth and love in the understanding of the subject, may be condemned as “blind” and “prejudiced,” according to the western standards of the science. Yet, following the ethics of Jewish scholars in the 19th century, I would contend that love of the sort I speak of here is the basis for understanding the whole truth. Why? Because no one wants to hear a lie about somebody he or she truly loves; and no one can truly love somebody on self-deceptions without knowing the truth about them. Those who love their subject with their *whole* heart are made to struggle for the *whole* truth of the subject with their whole heart.

I take great pride in the academics and in all of you in this room who struggle for the *whole* truth. Indeed, no one truly cares about telling or hearing the *whole* truth about something or someone he or she does not love. Moreover, that person may even like to hear *half* the truth or even a lie to damage someone or something that he or she *hates*. Bound by this commandment of love, the Jewish scholars of the 19th century, such as L. Zunz (1794–1886) or N. Krochmal (1785–1840) struggled for the historical truth of Judaism (*Die Wissenschaft des Judentums*). Inspired by their love, I distinguish their studies from those of their Christian contemporaries whose understanding of Judaism was often expedient for the advancement of their Christian theology or egocentric philosophies of secularism.

However, enough for the provocations for your thoughts: it is time for me to listen. I wholeheartedly thank you and our distinguished guests from abroad—Prof. Bakar, Prof. Kamali, Prof. Benbassa, and Prof. Rabkin—for being with us and sharing their knowledge for the inspiration and enhancement of CISMOR Studies on monotheism in Japan.

Let us begin the first session.