

## Jerusalem Interfaith Forum on Good and Evil: The External and Internal Struggle

Miri Kamar  
June 27, 2013  
UPF - Israel



Jerusalem, Israel - On the morning of June 27, an interfaith forum of 21 academic scholars, religious leaders, and peace activists took place at the Seminar Room in the Department for Jewish Philosophy of Bar-Ilan University. The subject of this meeting was: the Internal and External Struggle between Good and Evil.

The meeting opened with reading of excerpts from the Introduction of the Divine Principle by Mrs. Miri Kamar, Secretary General of UPF, Israel: "We find a great contradiction in every person. Within the self-same individual are two opposing inclinations: the original mind that desires goodness and the evil mind that desires wickedness. They are engaged in a fierce battle, striving to accomplish two conflicting purposes... Can it be that human life originated with such a contradiction? How could beings with a self-contradictory nature come into existence? If burdened by such a contradiction from its inception, human life would not have been able to arise" (Introduction, p. 1) Rabbi Ytzhak Bar-Dea, former Chief Rabbi of Ramat Gan, gave welcome remarks responding to the subject of good and evil: "The modern world is seeking after selfish happiness, but this only brings people to confusion and misery. We should think of the happiness of God. Human beings by themselves don't know what is good or bad for them; we are walking in a labyrinth, seeking our way. The one who knows the good way for us is God. This is why we should follow God's words in the Bible and His commandments. Without God – the misery of human beings would continue."

The first speaker was Father Abu-Hatum from Nazareth. He said that for good to win in the struggle between good and evil, we should be actively doing good things together, for example, visiting sick people in the hospital. A hospital is a place where everyone meets; in a time of sickness, there is no difference between a Muslim, a Christian, a Druze, or a Jew. Father Abu-Hatum concluded his remarks with a verse from Romans 7:14-25: "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."

The following speaker was Sheik Halil Elbaz, Imam from a mosque in Tel-Sheva, a Bedouin town in southern Israel. Sheik Elbaz declared that by walking together hand in hand we can give hope to our country. He expressed his loyal feelings to his country – the state of Israel, and shared the pains and difficulties that his people are dealing with. "God created us in order for us to worship him, because he gave us everything we need and because he is taking care of us. God also gave us our ability to think and use our mind to distinguish between good and evil. The way we act, what we are doing in our daily life,

privately or publicly – is the place to demonstrate our good ways or evil ways. Let us choose the good ways!"



The panel continued with Mr. Kobi Nehushtan, a homeopathic doctor and Kabbalah student, who said he was speaking in the name of the human heart. Mr. Nehushtan said that the existence of good and evil is the root question, which all religions tried to deal with. Following a quote by Chinese philosopher Lao-Tse, he said that this struggle between good and evil is the sickness of humanity and that the first step to heal this disease is to acknowledge its existence. Every human being, regardless of his religion, suffers from this disease, he stated. All the prophets and messiahs who came throughout history had diagnosed this disease and tried to offer a cure for it, in accordance with the time and geographic area, in which they were living.

Lao-Tse's vision, as well as the visions of Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and Buddha, were all worldwide visions. They wanted to heal the entire world. But due to the differences in cultures and social codes, conflicts among their visions emerged.

"When living in India, I witnessed monks talking about the values of humility and compassion, and at the same time they had such a deep rivalry against the other monks' groups. It made me wonder, why don't they practice their own teachings?"

"That is why I brought the paragraph from the Zohar about the importance of being one in heart and mouth: 'He whom his heart and mouth are one – is from the tree of life, and he whom his heart and mouth are not one – is holding the tree of knowledge of good and evil.' Goodness is absolute and eternal. Evil is temporary. In the verse from the Zohar, it is written that people are 'holding' the tree of knowledge of good and evil; from here I can conclude that we can 'let go' of this grasp. Evil can be cured."

"My prayer is that we all would hold the tree of life. To my understanding, we would be able to do this if, first, we acknowledge the struggle within ourselves; second, we see the beam in our own eyes before accusing our friend for having a chip in his eye; and third, we are one in heart and mouth."

"The way of oneness between mouth and heart is, to my understanding, a personal relationship with God. This is the cure for the battle between good and evil within us. Once those personal struggles are resolved, the external battles between countries, nations and religions will disappear."

The last speaker on the panel was Mr. Shlomi Perlmutter, Pedagogic Coordinator of "Elul," a secular Beit-Midrash (the traditional name for a Jewish religious school) in Jerusalem: "Elul was established in order to facilitate dialogue as a solution for the hatred and hostility among the different streams of Judaism. The tool of the dialogue is also important to overcome hostility among nations and religions."

"The holocaust was a point in history which raised many moral questions about good and evil: What is the origin of good? How can such evil come to exist? Through dialogue it is our obligation to find the solutions that humanity – throughout its long history – had failed to create."

"In the establishment of the United Nations after World War II, I see an expression of an international will to achieve peace and a wish for each and every human being on the globe to gain freedom and enjoy a peaceful life. As people living in the state of Israel, we have a chance to demonstrate to ourselves and others how to make peace among ourselves. There is a need for a deep study and dialogue in order to realize what we need to change."



"I would like to ask a very important question: what is the relationship between our understanding of God and our understanding of good, peace, love, beauty, and morality? Unfortunately, history shows that many evil things were done in the name of God. It means that for many people, the concept of good is not related to their way of understanding God and religion. Maybe a good starting point of our dialogue would be to agree on some basic, even holy, concepts such as: love, beauty, and truth."

After the panel speakers, there were two short responders: Mrs. Sana Elbaz, wife of Sheik Halil Elbaz, who had the honor of lighting a beacon at the national ceremony on the eve of Independence Day. She said that God had created all religions and we should learn to love each other as brothers. Our state is like a house with several rooms, she explained: a room for Christianity, a room for Judaism, a room for Islam. God gave us wisdom and beauty and goodness. We have a mission to achieve peace among ourselves – and then to spread it all over the world. There is a button we haven't found yet, but it is there. Once found, it needs to be pressed, and it would bring us the peace we are all seeking.

Prof. Yoram Hirschfeld from Tel Aviv University said that the struggle between good and evil is not a heroic battle. He believes that most people want to do good; they don't intend to do evil. There is a simple rule: do not do to others what you hate being done to you. It is that simple. That is what people need to do in order to prevent evil deeds. The verse "Love thy neighbor" is more difficult to comply with, he said, because it includes the affirmative action of the emotion "love," and Jewish people are divided regarding the interpretation of who the neighbor is. In Prof. Hirschfeld's opinion "thy neighbor" is every person who was born in the image of God.

The first part of the meeting concluded with Dr. Avi Gilboa from Bar-Ilan University. He shared about a group of Arabic and Jewish students that he had established, and how they conduct a dialogue between their cultures and religions through music.

Through this forum, Dr. Gilboa had met Sheik Samir Aasi from El-Jazar Mosque in Acre in northern Israel. His Arab-Jewish student group visited El-Jazar Mosque as part of a tour of the prayer houses of the three religions. Dr. Gilboa reported they had a most meaningful tour by listening to the sounds of Jewish, Islamic, and Christian prayers.

Most of the participants in this meeting expressed their intentions to be active; to translate the discussions to actions outside the four walls of the meeting room. Several ideas were already raised by participants, who are looking forward to the forum's next active project.