

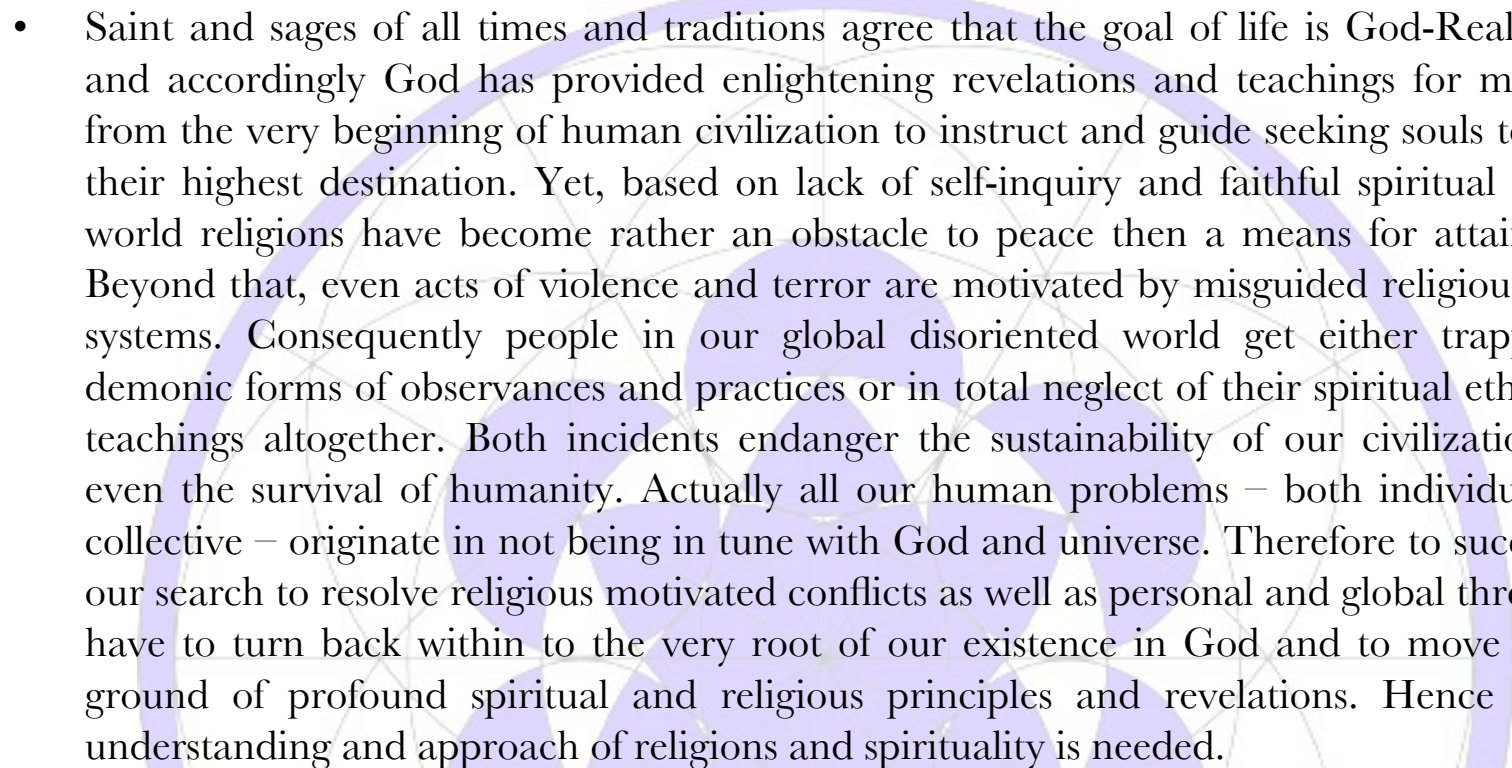
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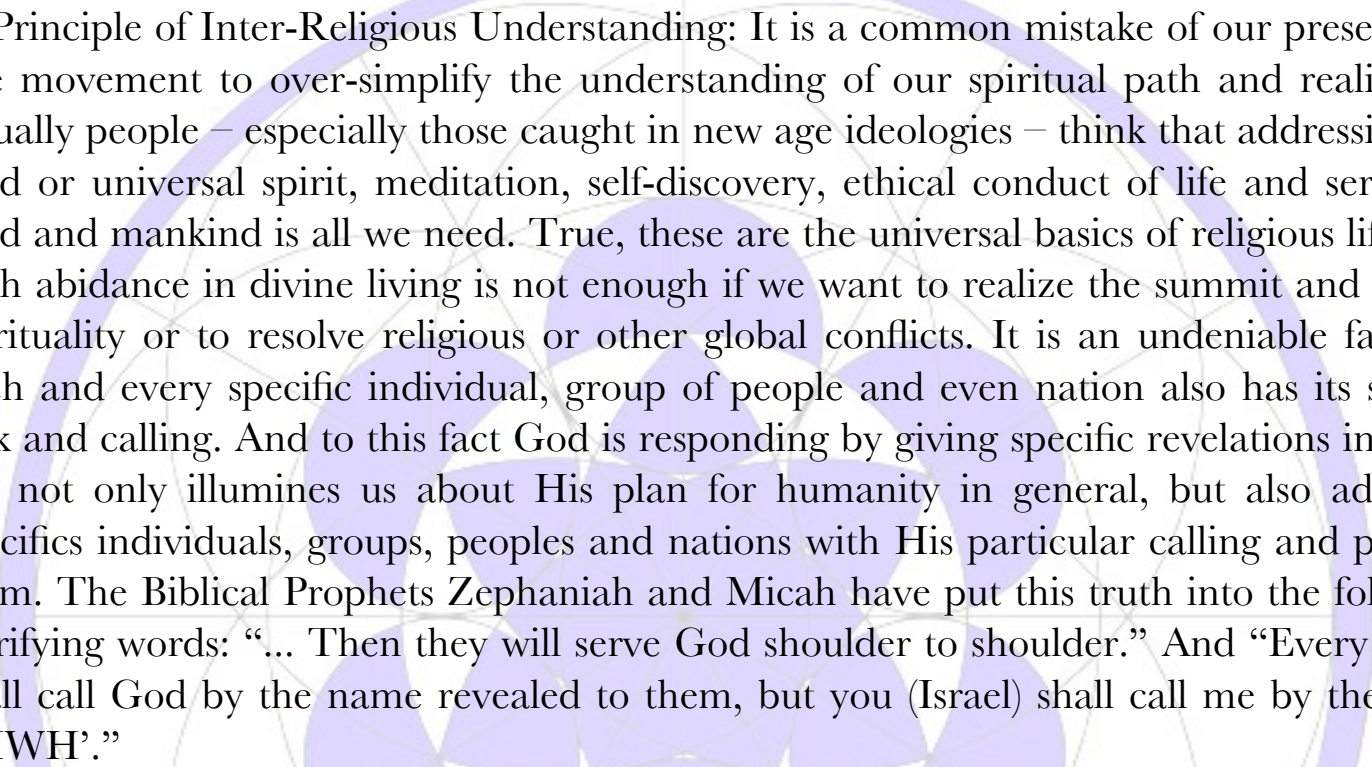
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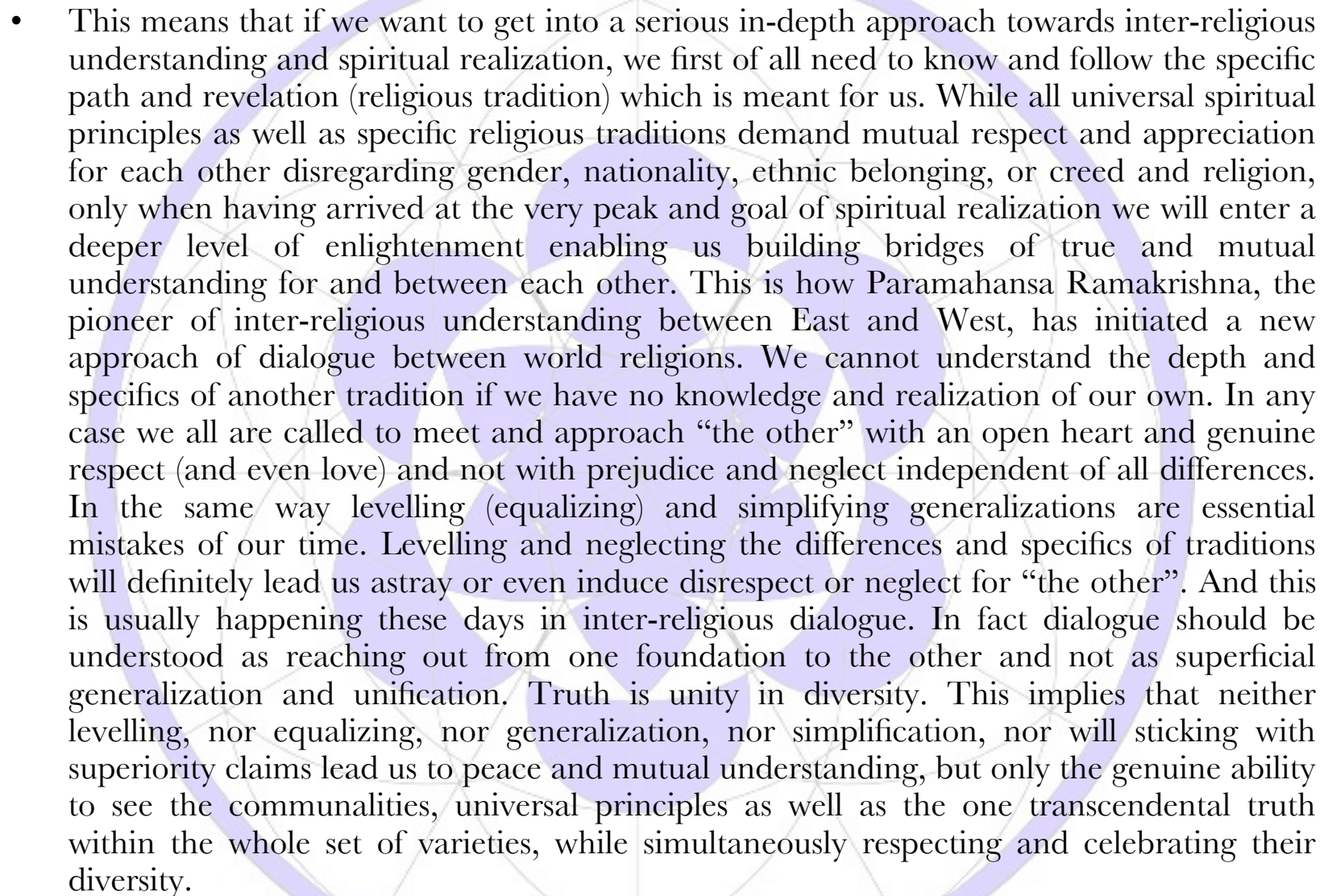
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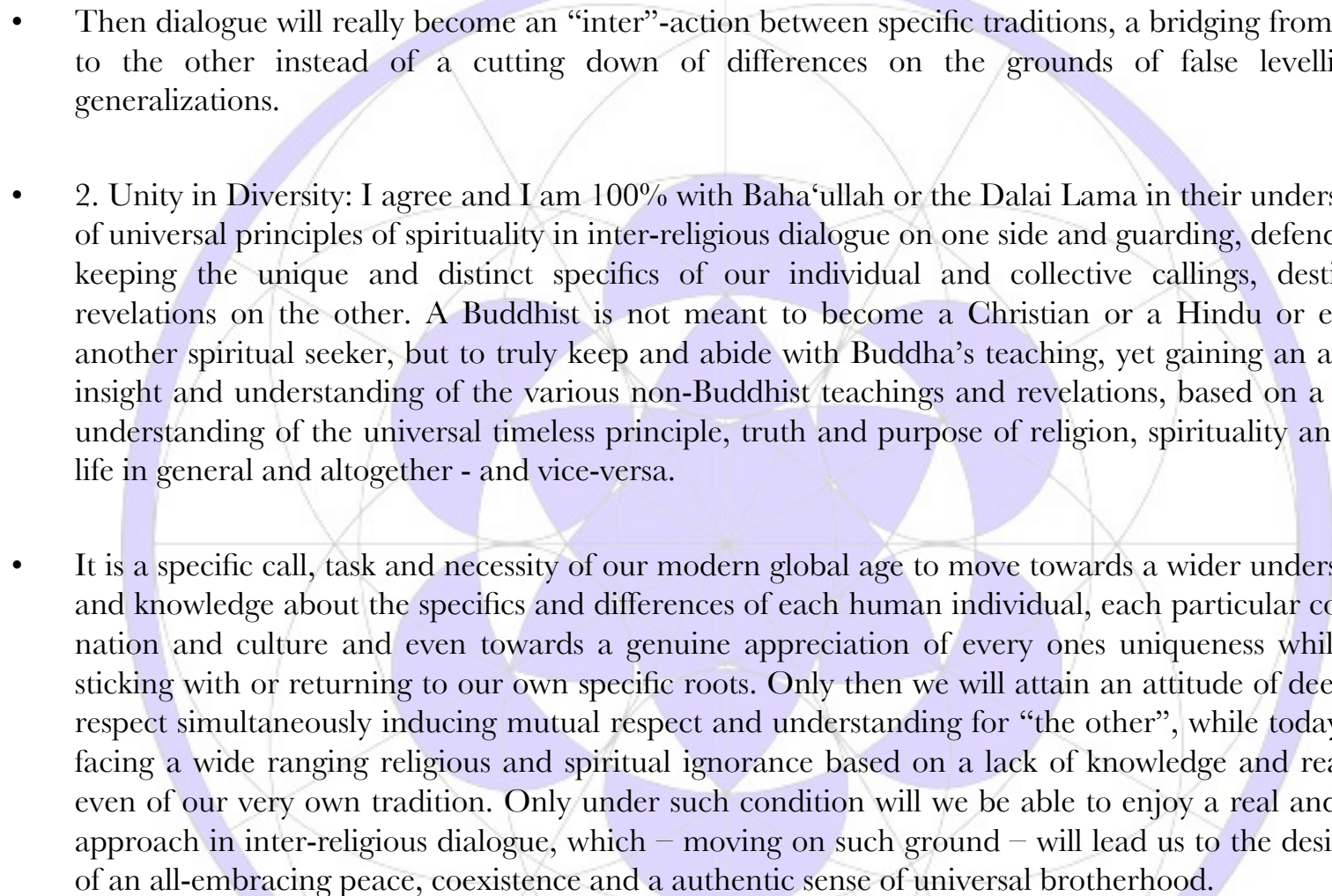
Preliminary Remarks On Inter-Religious Understanding and Dialogue And its Application to the Question of Jerusalem

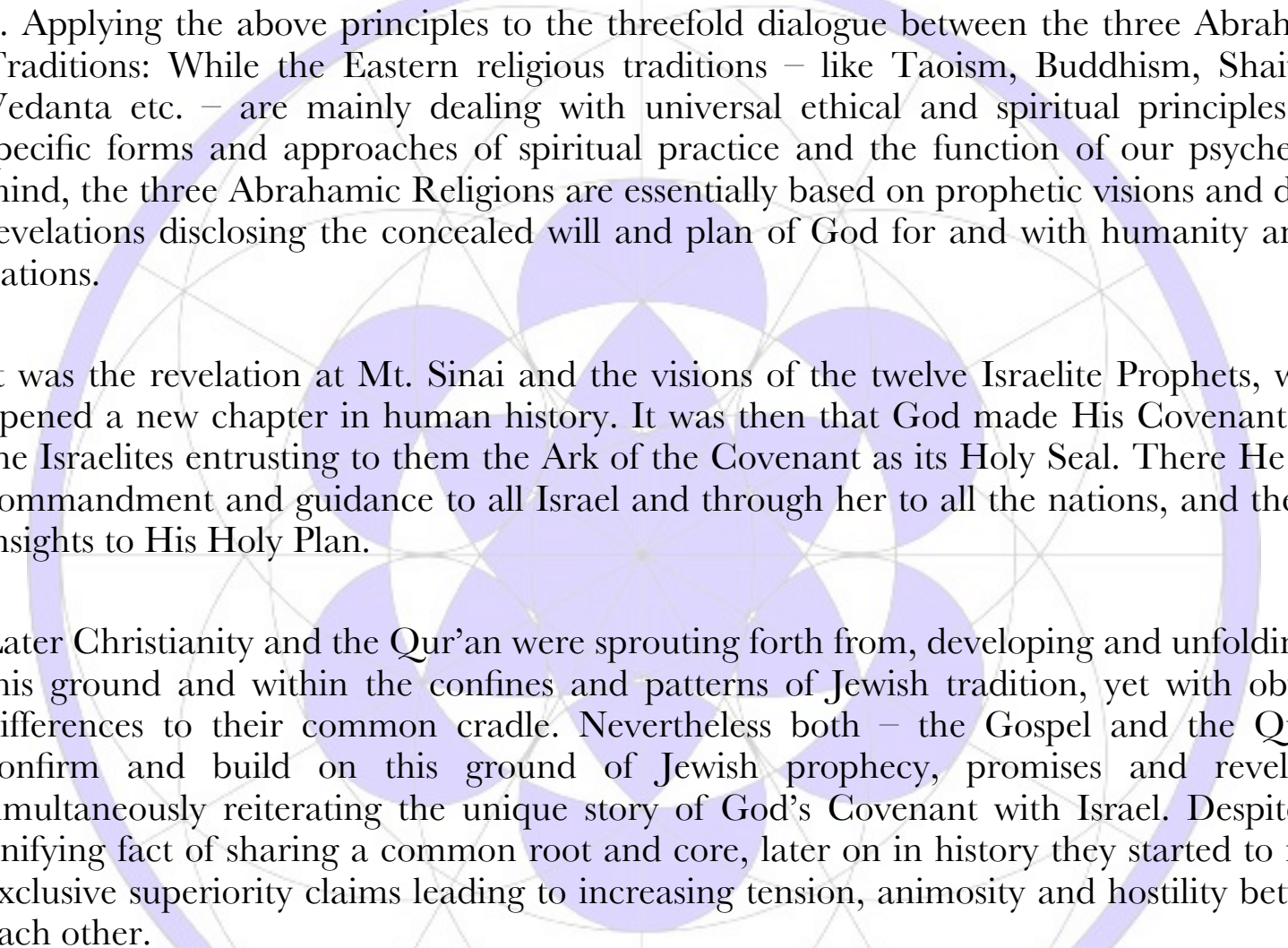


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- Saint and sages of all times and traditions agree that the goal of life is God-Realization and accordingly God has provided enlightening revelations and teachings for mankind from the very beginning of human civilization to instruct and guide seeking souls towards their highest destination. Yet, based on lack of self-inquiry and faithful spiritual guides, world religions have become rather an obstacle to peace than a means for attainment. Beyond that, even acts of violence and terror are motivated by misguided religious belief systems. Consequently people in our global disoriented world get either trapped in demonic forms of observances and practices or in total neglect of their spiritual ethos and teachings altogether. Both incidents endanger the sustainability of our civilization and even the survival of humanity. Actually all our human problems – both individual and collective – originate in not being in tune with God and universe. Therefore to succeed in our search to resolve religious motivated conflicts as well as personal and global threats we have to turn back within to the very root of our existence in God and to move on the ground of profound spiritual and religious principles and revelations. Hence a new understanding and approach of religions and spirituality is needed.

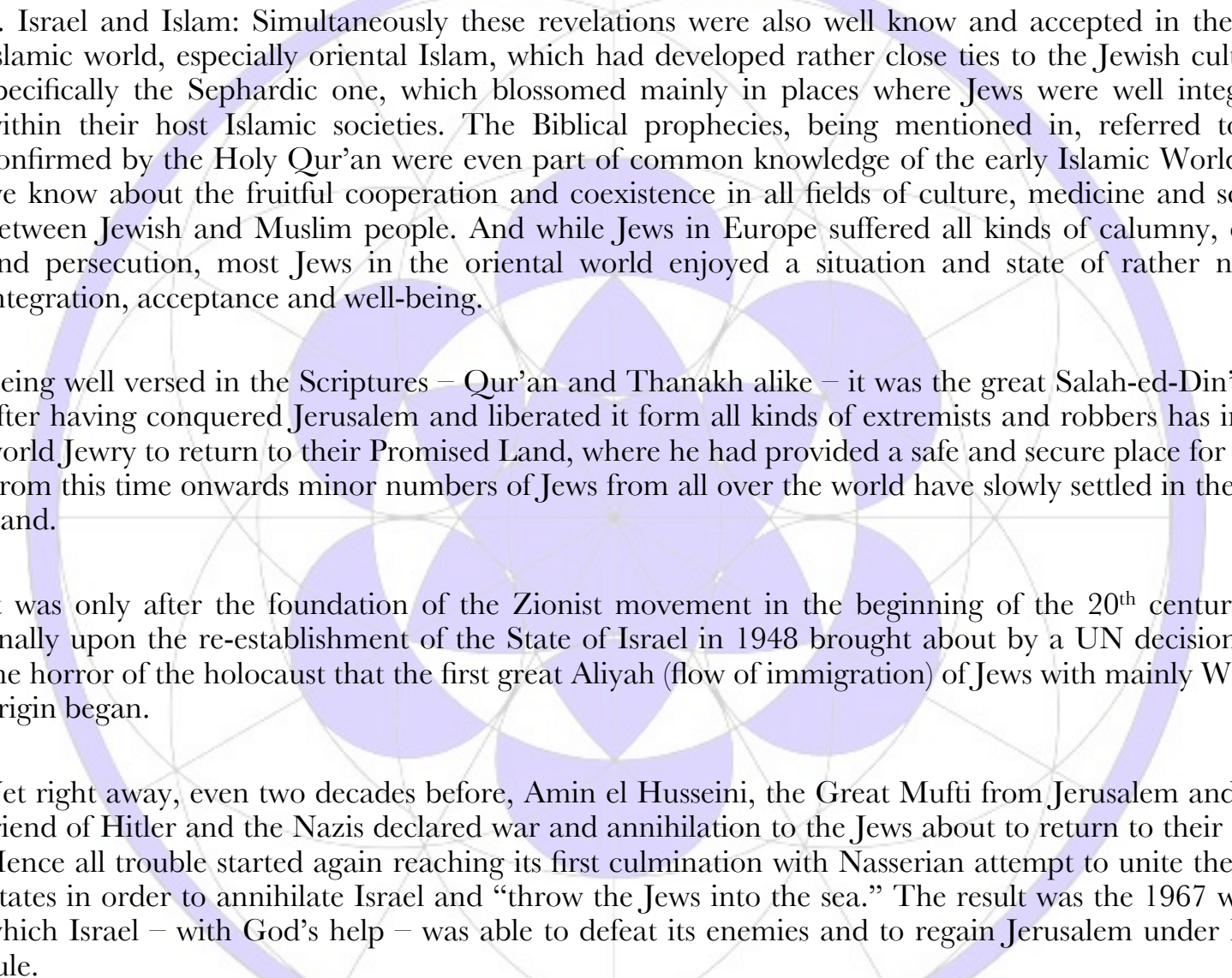
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- 1. Principle of Inter-Religious Understanding: It is a common mistake of our present new age movement to over-simplify the understanding of our spiritual path and realization. Usually people – especially those caught in new age ideologies – think that addressing one God or universal spirit, meditation, self-discovery, ethical conduct of life and service to God and mankind is all we need. True, these are the universal basics of religious life. Yet, such abundance in divine living is not enough if we want to realize the summit and goal of spirituality or to resolve religious or other global conflicts. It is an undeniable fact that each and every specific individual, group of people and even nation also has its specific task and calling. And to this fact God is responding by giving specific revelations in which He not only illumines us about His plan for humanity in general, but also addresses specifics individuals, groups, peoples and nations with His particular calling and plan for them. The Biblical Prophets Zephaniah and Micah have put this truth into the following clarifying words: “... Then they will serve God shoulder to shoulder.” And “Every nation shall call God by the name revealed to them, but you (Israel) shall call me by the name ‘JHWH’.”

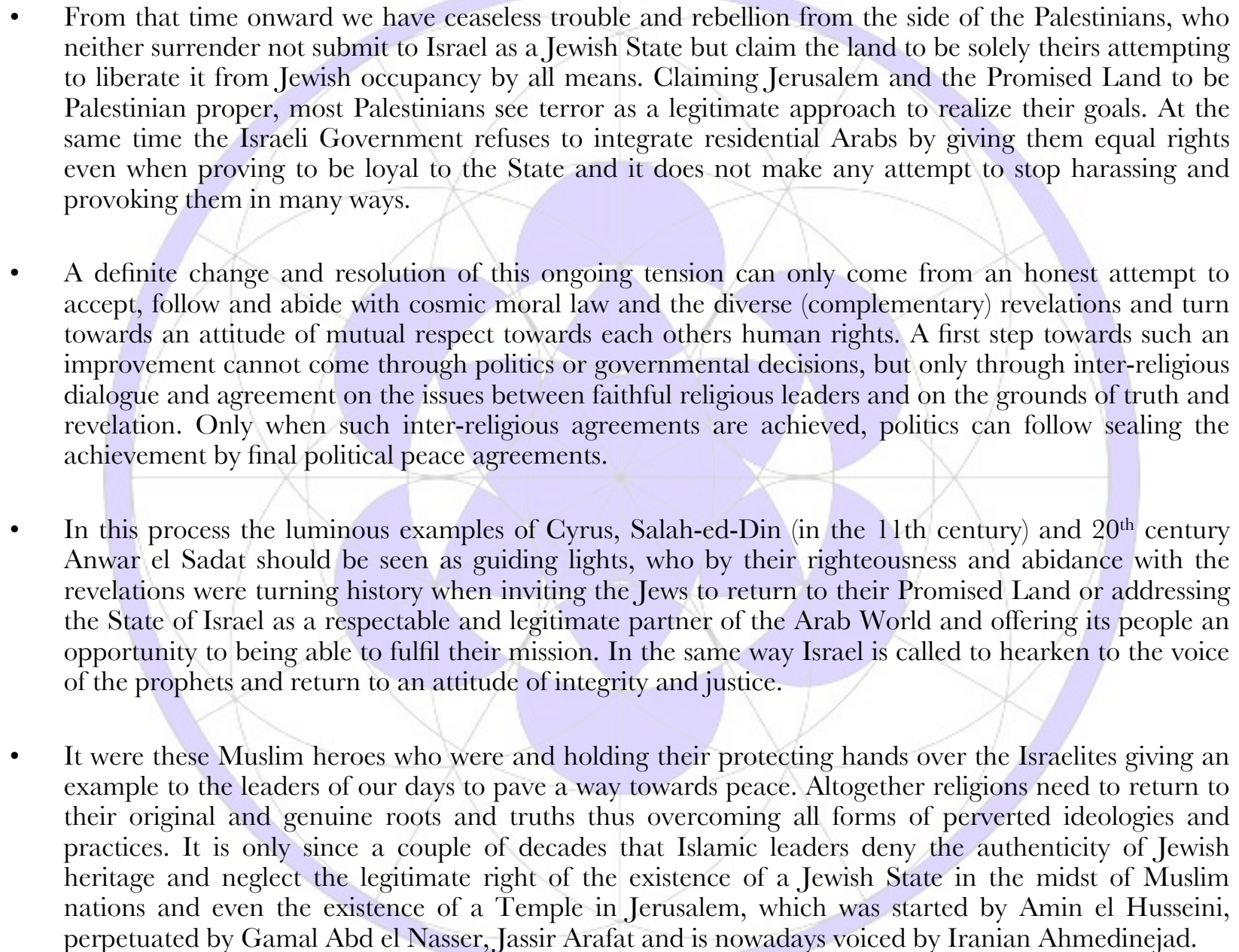
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- This means that if we want to get into a serious in-depth approach towards inter-religious understanding and spiritual realization, we first of all need to know and follow the specific path and revelation (religious tradition) which is meant for us. While all universal spiritual principles as well as specific religious traditions demand mutual respect and appreciation for each other disregarding gender, nationality, ethnic belonging, or creed and religion, only when having arrived at the very peak and goal of spiritual realization we will enter a deeper level of enlightenment enabling us building bridges of true and mutual understanding for and between each other. This is how Paramahansa Ramakrishna, the pioneer of inter-religious understanding between East and West, has initiated a new approach of dialogue between world religions. We cannot understand the depth and specifics of another tradition if we have no knowledge and realization of our own. In any case we all are called to meet and approach “the other” with an open heart and genuine respect (and even love) and not with prejudice and neglect independent of all differences. In the same way levelling (equalizing) and simplifying generalizations are essential mistakes of our time. Levelling and neglecting the differences and specifics of traditions will definitely lead us astray or even induce disrespect or neglect for “the other”. And this is usually happening these days in inter-religious dialogue. In fact dialogue should be understood as reaching out from one foundation to the other and not as superficial generalization and unification. Truth is unity in diversity. This implies that neither levelling, nor equalizing, nor generalization, nor simplification, nor will sticking with superiority claims lead us to peace and mutual understanding, but only the genuine ability to see the communalities, universal principles as well as the one transcendental truth within the whole set of varieties, while simultaneously respecting and celebrating their diversity.

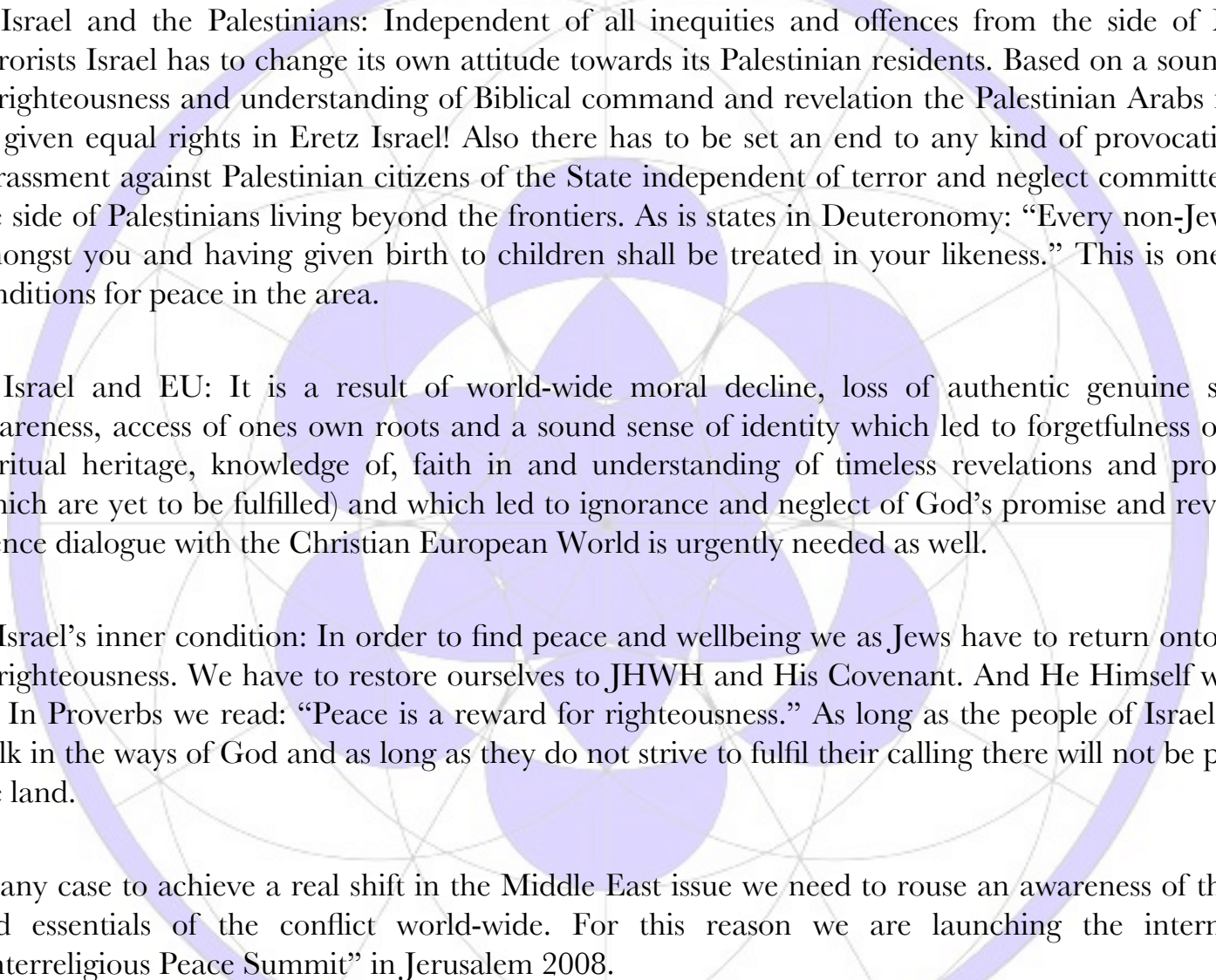
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- Then dialogue will really become an “inter”-action between specific traditions, a bridging from the one to the other instead of a cutting down of differences on the grounds of false levelling and generalizations.
 - 2. Unity in Diversity: I agree and I am 100% with Baha‘ullah or the Dalai Lama in their understanding of universal principles of spirituality in inter-religious dialogue on one side and guarding, defending and keeping the unique and distinct specifics of our individual and collective callings, destiny and revelations on the other. A Buddhist is not meant to become a Christian or a Hindu or even just another spiritual seeker, but to truly keep and abide with Buddha’s teaching, yet gaining an authentic insight and understanding of the various non-Buddhist teachings and revelations, based on a genuine understanding of the universal timeless principle, truth and purpose of religion, spirituality and divine life in general and altogether - and vice-versa.
 - It is a specific call, task and necessity of our modern global age to move towards a wider understanding and knowledge about the specifics and differences of each human individual, each particular collective, nation and culture and even towards a genuine appreciation of every ones uniqueness while firmly sticking with or returning to our own specific roots. Only then we will attain an attitude of deeper self-respect simultaneously inducing mutual respect and understanding for “the other”, while today we are facing a wide ranging religious and spiritual ignorance based on a lack of knowledge and realization even of our very own tradition. Only under such condition will we be able to enjoy a real and fruitful approach in inter-religious dialogue, which – moving on such ground – will lead us to the desired goal of an all-embracing peace, coexistence and a authentic sense of universal brotherhood.

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- 3. Applying the above principles to the threefold dialogue between the three Abrahamic Traditions: While the Eastern religious traditions – like Taoism, Buddhism, Shaivism, Vedanta etc. – are mainly dealing with universal ethical and spiritual principles plus specific forms and approaches of spiritual practice and the function of our psyche and mind, the three Abrahamic Religions are essentially based on prophetic visions and divine revelations disclosing the concealed will and plan of God for and with humanity and its nations.
 - It was the revelation at Mt. Sinai and the visions of the twelve Israelite Prophets, which opened a new chapter in human history. It was then that God made His Covenant with the Israelites entrusting to them the Ark of the Covenant as its Holy Seal. There He gave commandment and guidance to all Israel and through her to all the nations, and the first insights to His Holy Plan.
 - Later Christianity and the Qur'an were sprouting forth from, developing and unfolding on this ground and within the confines and patterns of Jewish tradition, yet with obvious differences to their common cradle. Nevertheless both – the Gospel and the Qur'an confirm and build on this ground of Jewish prophecy, promises and revelation simultaneously reiterating the unique story of God's Covenant with Israel. Despite the unifying fact of sharing a common root and core, later on in history they started to rouse exclusive superiority claims leading to increasing tension, animosity and hostility between each other.

- 4. God's Covenant: Despite its temporary neglect by fascist, Nazi and Stalinist Anti-Semitism, it was common knowledge and understanding (and part of common education) throughout the Christian world, thoroughly confirmed by Qur'an and Hadith, that God had selectively chosen the Israelites (= the Jews of today) for a specific task within the family of nations – whose fulfilment and realization is still pending and for whose cause He separated them amongst the nations (Babylonia) and gathered them in the land of Canaan. He called them forth to become a „kingdom of priests and holy people“ and „a light unto the nations“ (Isaiah), to dwell as a „people of God“ „in the Promised Land“ in the midst of other nations. For this task He gathered them in the Land of Canaan which he promised to the forefathers as an eternal kingdom to be inherited from generation to generation until the end of days.
- 5. History: For more than 2000 years of Exile, the Jews have suffered repeated and continued suppression, persecution, holocausts in whatever host country they have lived, with the exception of the oriental world. No place was safe, no short period of quiet enduring, and no rest granted anywhere, so the Jews were in a permanent alert and on permanent travel in search for security, protectedness and survival. Hence derives the image of the eternally wandering Jew. And wherever they stayed they had no equal rights or support or appreciation, yet they developed their own culture according to their religious heritage and tradition. What kept them alive and comforted their souls and minds in times of persecution, threat and distress was the vision of a final return to the Promised Land and the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem. While the Land of Israel did not just mean the land of their ancestors (forefathers), but the land chosen and destined by God for the fulfilment of His Plan of redemption for the people of Israel and the world, the Temple represented the abode of the returning Sh'khinah and the opening of an area of healing, redemption and fulfilment of divine prophecy and the destiny of the people.
- Every Jew and every Christian was familiar with the Biblical call of Israel and the prophecies about God's promise to finally gather His people in the Promised Land. They have heard the verses from Isaiah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Zachariah, Micah and Christ's references to them, hundreds of times, and the notion of the “Promised Land” has even become an common know idiom in our Western Christian languages.

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- 6. Israel and Islam: Simultaneously these revelations were also well known and accepted in the early Islamic world, especially oriental Islam, which had developed rather close ties to the Jewish culture – specifically the Sephardic one, which blossomed mainly in places where Jews were well integrated within their host Islamic societies. The Biblical prophecies, being mentioned in, referred to and confirmed by the Holy Qur’an were even part of common knowledge of the early Islamic World, and we know about the fruitful cooperation and coexistence in all fields of culture, medicine and science between Jewish and Muslim people. And while Jews in Europe suffered all kinds of calumny, denial and persecution, most Jews in the oriental world enjoyed a situation and state of rather natural integration, acceptance and well-being.
 - Being well versed in the Scriptures – Qur’an and Thanakh alike – it was the great Salah-ed-Din’s who after having conquered Jerusalem and liberated it from all kinds of extremists and robbers has invited world Jewry to return to their Promised Land, where he had provided a safe and secure place for them. From this time onwards minor numbers of Jews from all over the world have slowly settled in the Holy Land.
 - It was only after the foundation of the Zionist movement in the beginning of the 20th century and finally upon the re-establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 brought about by a UN decision after the horror of the holocaust that the first great Aliyah (flow of immigration) of Jews with mainly Western origin began.
 - Yet right away, even two decades before, Amin el Husseini, the Great Mufti from Jerusalem and close friend of Hitler and the Nazis declared war and annihilation to the Jews about to return to their Land. Hence all trouble started again reaching its first culmination with Nasserian attempt to unite the Arab States in order to annihilate Israel and “throw the Jews into the sea.” The result was the 1967 war, in which Israel – with God’s help – was able to defeat its enemies and to regain Jerusalem under Israeli rule.

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- From that time onward we have ceaseless trouble and rebellion from the side of the Palestinians, who neither surrender nor submit to Israel as a Jewish State but claim the land to be solely theirs attempting to liberate it from Jewish occupancy by all means. Claiming Jerusalem and the Promised Land to be Palestinian proper, most Palestinians see terror as a legitimate approach to realize their goals. At the same time the Israeli Government refuses to integrate residential Arabs by giving them equal rights even when proving to be loyal to the State and it does not make any attempt to stop harassing and provoking them in many ways.
 - A definite change and resolution of this ongoing tension can only come from an honest attempt to accept, follow and abide with cosmic moral law and the diverse (complementary) revelations and turn towards an attitude of mutual respect towards each others human rights. A first step towards such an improvement cannot come through politics or governmental decisions, but only through inter-religious dialogue and agreement on the issues between faithful religious leaders and on the grounds of truth and revelation. Only when such inter-religious agreements are achieved, politics can follow sealing the achievement by final political peace agreements.
 - In this process the luminous examples of Cyrus, Salah-ed-Din (in the 11th century) and 20th century Anwar el Sadat should be seen as guiding lights, who by their righteousness and abidance with the revelations were turning history when inviting the Jews to return to their Promised Land or addressing the State of Israel as a respectable and legitimate partner of the Arab World and offering its people an opportunity to being able to fulfil their mission. In the same way Israel is called to hearken to the voice of the prophets and return to an attitude of integrity and justice.
 - It were these Muslim heroes who were and holding their protecting hands over the Israelites giving an example to the leaders of our days to pave a way towards peace. Altogether religions need to return to their original and genuine roots and truths thus overcoming all forms of perverted ideologies and practices. It is only since a couple of decades that Islamic leaders deny the authenticity of Jewish heritage and neglect the legitimate right of the existence of a Jewish State in the midst of Muslim nations and even the existence of a Temple in Jerusalem, which was started by Amin el Husseini, perpetuated by Gamal Abd el Nasser, Jassir Arafat and is nowadays voiced by Iranian Ahmedinejad.

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- 7. Israel and the Palestinians: Independent of all inequities and offences from the side of Muslim terrorists Israel has to change its own attitude towards its Palestinian residents. Based on a sound sense of righteousness and understanding of Biblical command and revelation the Palestinian Arabs need to be given equal rights in Eretz Israel! Also there has to be set an end to any kind of provocation and harassment against Palestinian citizens of the State independent of terror and neglect committed from the side of Palestinians living beyond the frontiers. As is states in Deuteronomy: “Every non-Jew living amongst you and having given birth to children shall be treated in your likeness.” This is one of the conditions for peace in the area.
 - 8. Israel and EU: It is a result of world-wide moral decline, loss of authentic genuine spiritual awareness, access of ones own roots and a sound sense of identity which led to forgetfulness of world spiritual heritage, knowledge of, faith in and understanding of timeless revelations and prophecies (which are yet to be fulfilled) and which led to ignorance and neglect of God’s promise and revelation. Hence dialogue with the Christian European World is urgently needed as well.
 - 9. Israel’s inner condition: In order to find peace and wellbeing we as Jews have to return onto a path of righteousness. We have to restore ourselves to JHWH and His Covenant. And He Himself will help us. In Proverbs we read: “Peace is a reward for righteousness.” As long as the people of Israel do not walk in the ways of God and as long as they do not strive to fulfil their calling there will not be peace in the land.
 - In any case to achieve a real shift in the Middle East issue we need to rouse an awareness of the roots and essentials of the conflict world-wide. For this reason we are launching the international “Interreligious Peace Summit” in Jerusalem 2008.