

A Jewish Appreciation of Muhammad (PBUH) and Its Contemporary Significance for Coexistence in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

The Middle East is home to a rich tapestry of religious, ethnic, and national identities. The stability and future of the region depend largely on whether these identities are experienced as sources of conflict or as threads within a shared human story. In recent years, the United Arab Emirates has emerged as a regional beacon of coexistence and mutual respect, exemplified by initiatives such as the Abrahamic Family House. Yet for such a vision to contribute to lasting regional stability, it must become reciprocal and deeply rooted across the broader Middle East.

The goal is not merely tolerance, which can imply enduring the presence of the other as a burden, but genuine fraternity: seeing members of other faiths and cultures as partners in a shared moral and spiritual journey. One important dimension of this future is the cultivation and dissemination of a Jewish appreciation of Islam in general, and of Muhammad (PBUH) in particular.

In this lecture, Rabbi Dr. Nagen, both a rabbinic scholar and academic researcher – will present rabbinic voices throughout Jewish history that not only acknowledged the legitimacy of Islam but also viewed its emergence and spread as part of divine providence. Among these are traditions that interpret the flourishing of Islam as a fulfillment of the biblical blessing bestowed upon Hagar and Ishmael, as well as rabbinic opinions that regarded Muhammad (PBUH) as a prophet sent to humanity.

The talk will further explore how these perspectives resonate with the vision articulated in the Qur'an (5:44-48): that religious diversity and multiple sacred traditions exist within the will of God, and that the Abrahamic faiths are called not to erase one another, but to work together in the service of the Divine.

At a time of profound tension in the region, the widespread dissemination of such ideas, made increasingly possible through modern technology that transcends geographic and linguistic barriers, has the potential to transform perceptions throughout the Middle East. It can help foster a future in which people no longer see one another as rivals competing for legitimacy, but as partners in shaping a shared and sacred story.