



WHAT MAKES ISRAEL A “STRATEGIC ASSET”?

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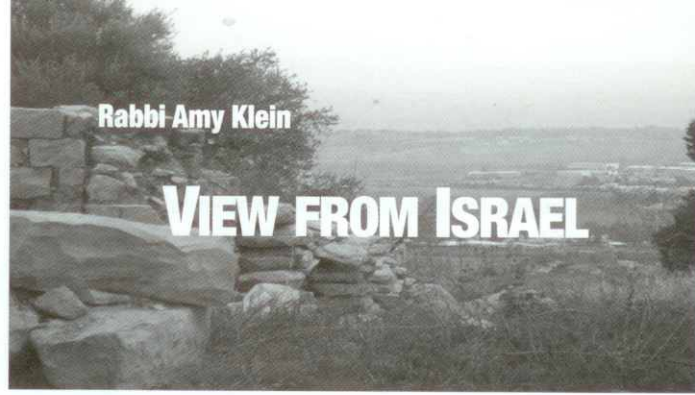
I saw the flash of pain in Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway's face when he told me the following story. Recently, as a guest speaker at a Canadian mosque, he shared a teaching from the Qur'an that is, for him, a model for nonviolent self-sacrifice: the story of Cain and Abel (although in the Qur'an the sons of Adam remain nameless). When one brother comes to kill the other, the other replies, "It is not for me to stretch my hand against you to slay you." To do so, even in self-defense, Abu Sway explained to his audience, would be to justify killing.

In the morning papers, he read that some attendees had accused him of being a Mossad agent.

Abu Sway shared this story with me at breakfast in the dining room of Hotel Uppsala in Uppsala, Sweden. Together with Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land, we were presenting at a workshop on theological responses to suffering, part of the Church of Sweden's second biannual Festival of Theology. Far from his home in Ras al-Amud, East Jerusalem, Abu Sway shared his thoughts about Islam, its role in his life and in the lives of other Palestinians in the occupied territories. He is an associate professor of philosophy and Islamic studies and directs the Islamic Research Center at al-Quds University. His research involves critical social theory and he has written on women in Islam, Islam and the environment, globalization, and various aspects of the Israel/Palestine conflict.

The word "Islam," he explained to me, means "submission" — submission to the will of God, or the substitution of God's will for one's own. In the Sufi tradition, the ultimate goal of the Muslim is to

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wipe out the "I" until there is nothing there except God. "Is this possible?" I asked. "The Sufis say it is possible," he answered with a smile.

"But if I were to write a book entitled *Introduction to Islam*," he continued, "I would define Islam as the last phase of revelation." The tradition sees revelation as linear: a portion was given to Noah, a portion to Abraham, a portion to Moses, a portion to Jesus, and the last portion to the Prophet Muhammad. There are twenty-five prophets named in the Qur'an and each one is part of the revelatory structure. The essential message of this revelation is the worship of the one and only God.

Islam, he continued, requires one to believe in all the prophets and their message in the original. "How confident are you that you understand the meaning of the message?" I responded. He smiled again and rephrased my question: Is Islam open for interpretation and, if so, how sure are you that you have the right one?

First, make sure that one is relying on an authentic tradition, he said. The Qur'an and the Surah of the Prophet are the primary sources. Second, in Chapter 3, verse 7, the Qur'an states that some of its verses are open for interpretation and others are not. As for the extent of interpretation, there is a "garden of meaning" within which you can interpret, but at some point you have left the garden.

While hermeneutics are Abu Sway's intellectual

