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Title: Reform of Judaism

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4/22/2015—Considering Ayaan Hirsi Ali's book, *Heretic: Why Islam Needs A Reformation Now*, suggests the question of what other religious traditions need a reformation, from the point of former adherents, anyway. Hinduism on matters of caste? But hasn't that been worked on quite a bit? Christianity on gender and sexuality? But, again, the tradition is hard at work on these matters. No one I know has a problem with Buddhism.

But what about Judaism? Granted, it is a tiny religion—around fourteen million in the world, mostly in Israel and America. But, for whatever reason, Judaism has an outsized influence on world events. I am not speaking of a world Jewish conspiracy, but that old canard does show the impact that Jews have had.

What is the problem with Judaism? Ironically, it is the same as the root of the problem in Islam—the problem of the other. In Islam, it is an insistence that everyone become a Muslim, or at least an unclarity as to what it means theologically that someone is not a Muslim. In Judaism, it is the meaning of the goyim—of the non-Jews in world history.

Years ago, the Jewish thinker and founder of Jewish Reconstruction, Mordecai Kaplan, called for an end to the concept of chosenness—the idea that Jews are the people chosen by God to be the fulcrum point of world history. But Kaplan's call has had no effect.

Judaism traditionally teaches that the point of world history is what God has planned for the Jewish people. Eventually, the day is to come when the Jews are reinstated in Israel and the Kingdom of God will reign. The only suggestion I know of the role of the other nations at that future time is that all the nations will worship God on the hills of Jerusalem.

There are warnings in the Torah that Jews should be especially sensitive to the stranger—"you know the heart of the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." And the book of Ruth places an immigrant at the center of Jewish history as the ancestor of King David.

But the horrible history of the Jewish people—exile and death followed by a threatened existence in the modern State of Israel—has hardened Jewish concern for the survival of the Jewish people above all other considerations. So, I never heard religious insistence—that is, in the synagogue—to be kind to the stranger in the sense of the non-Jew in Israel and the West Bank. Nor did I hear that Jerusalem should be shared so that the Muslims may also worship God on the hills of the city. (though, to be fair, the religious sites in Jerusalem are open to all religions, as they were not before 1967).

I am speaking here theologically. There are many Jews in Israel and outside working for peace. And there are many Jews, again in and out, who favor harsh polices out of a feeling of necessity and not out of prejudice against others, who would love not to be threatened. But in both cases, the feelings are essentially secular.

What is the religious meaning of the current situation? What does Judaism teach about the land of Israel and its native population? And its neighbors? Obviously some of the ancient traditions are not good—in the Old Testament, they were to be exterminated. But what about later teachings? I have never heard clear religious thinking here. That is what I mean by the need for a reformation in Judaism.