



## For Heaven's Sake #38: Christmas in a Jewish Majority State

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What is the role of interfaith relations in modern Judaism and Jewish statehood? Are Jews ready for a new kind of relationship with Christians and Muslims, one rooted in psychological self-confidence and spiritual curiosity rather than historical trauma? What are the responsibilities that come with being the majority in a Jewish homeland with Christian and Muslim minorities?

Join **Donniel Hartman**, **Yossi Klein Halevi**, and **Elana Stein Hain** for a thoughtful conversation about bridging divides toward a more whole, pluralistic world.

*This source sheet is part of Episode #38 of **For Heaven's Sake**, a bi-weekly podcast from the Shalom Hartman Institute's [iEngage Project](#) that revives the lost art of Jewish debate for the sake of illuminating a topic, not sowing division. The podcast draws its name from the concept of *Machloket l'shem shemayim*, "disagreeing for the sake of heaven."*



The Shalom Hartman Institute is a leading center of Jewish thought and education, serving Israel and North America. Our mission is to strengthen Jewish peoplehood, identity, and pluralism; to enhance the Jewish and democratic character of Israel; and to ensure that Judaism is a compelling force for good in the 21st century.

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## Exclusivist

### 1. Exodus (Shemot) 33:16

וּבַמָּה יוֹדַע אֶפּוֹא כִּי מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ אֲנִי וְעַמֶּךָ הֲלוֹא בְּלַכְתְּךָ עִמָּנוּ וְנִפְלִינוּ אֲנִי וְעַמֶּךָ מִכָּל  
הָעַם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה :

For through what now shall it be known that I have found grace in Your sight, I and Your people? is it not by your going with us, so that we are distinguished, I and Your people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth?

### 2. Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi), Commentary to Exodus (Shemot) 33:16

ובמה יודע אפוא - יודע מציאות החן, הלא בלכתך עמנו. ועוד דבר אחר אני שואל ממך  
שלא תשרה שכינתך [עוד] על אומות העולם :

ונפלינו אני ועמך - ונהיה מובדלים בדבר הזה מכל העם, כמו (שמות ט: ד) והפלה ה' בין  
מקנה ישראל וגו' :

**For through what now shall it be known** - i.e. for through what shall the “finding of grace” be known, is it not by Your going with us?! And yet another thing do I ask You: that You should not let Your presence rest upon the other peoples of the world (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 7a).

**So that we are distinguished, I and Your people** - through this very thing we shall become different from all the peoples. נפלינו is of the same root and meaning as in (Exodus 9:4) “And the Lord shall make a separation (והפלה) between the cattle of Israel etc.”

## Universalist

### 3. Immanuel of Rome (13<sup>th</sup> c. Italy), "Tofet v'Eden" (Parody of Dante's *Inferno*)

These are the pious among the gentile state  
Who by their intellect and wisdom have become great...  
Whilst they with their intelligence searched out who formed them, and who was the  
Creator,  
And as they passed the Faiths of all other under examination...  
But they chose of all beliefs views such as seemed to them right,  
Upon which people versed in conscience had no cause to fight...  
And when people boastfully would attach a name of God, our hearts trembled; it shook  
our frame to think that each and every people should give Him some definite name.  
We, however say, Be His name whatsoever, we believe in the First Existence the True  
One, whom we never from our life can ever sever.

## Inclusivist

### 4. Rabbi Jacob Emden (Ya'avetz), Commentary to Mishnah Avot 4:13

We should consider Christians and Muslims as instruments for the fulfillment of the prophecy that the knowledge of God will one day spread throughout the earth. Whereas the nations before them worshipped idols, denied God's existence, and thus did not recognize God's power or retribution, the rise of Christianity and Islam served to spread among the nations, to the furthest ends of the earth, the knowledge that there is One God who rules the world, who rewards and punishes and is revealed to humankind.