Rabbi René Gutman

Let me begin with a Jewish story that I love, about a Jewish scholar who is invited to deliver a theological lecture in Beijing, China. Not knowing Chinese, he was, of course, provided with an interpreter. He began his lecture and after a sentence or two, stopped in order to let the translator translate. But the translator waved him on. He said, « Carry on, I will tell you when to stop. » So he carried on, uninterrupted for about fifteen minutes. After fifteen minutes the Chinese interpreter turned to the audience and said four words in Chinese. You will have to excuse me Chinese, it is not that great! Something like « ohoy hi wa shiho », four words, and then, « Carry on. »

He same thing happens after the next fifteen minutes. He speaks for fifteen minutes; complicated theological matters, and, at the end of it, the translators says four words. The same thing happens after forty-five minutes, and, at the end, the translator gives three words in Chinese. As the audience files out, the Jewish scholar turns to the Chinese interpreter and says, « That was unbelievable! I gave the most complicated lecture on theology and you compressed it into those few words. What did you say? »

And the translator said, « Oh well, that was easy. After fifteen minutes I said, « So far he has not said anything new. » After thirty minutes I said, « He still has not said anything new. » After forty-five minutes I said, « I don't think he is going to say anything new. » And after an hour I said, « I was right! »

Before I begin I would like to pay tribute to the State of Qatar under the leadership of His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar for hosting this conference, and I would also like to express our respect and appreciation to His Excellency Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jabir al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. I would also like to thank Dr. Aisha Youssef al-Mannai, Dean of the Faculty of the Sharia and Islamic Studies for permitting me to participate in this sixth Conference of Interfaith Dialogue on the theme of Perspectives on Peace and Respect for Life.

When we contemplate the physical creation as a whole, we realise that it is all as one organism, that the parts are linked in varying gradations to each other. We see this in every plant, in every living being. We see this in man, how his higher organs which bear an important and ideal function are dependent, in their formation, in their being and continue existence, and on lower organs, on which we sometimes look disdainfully.
The same is true when we assess the parts in their integrated state. To whatever extent we pursue our general analysis, the more clearly we understand the nature of the particulars. Even where the eye cannot penetrate we discern with clear perception and a profound spiritual conjecture to what extent the differentiated parts in existence are dependent on each other. The depths below and the heights above are linked to each other. The realization dawns on us that were it not for the lower beings the uncouth and the unseemly, the higher beings could not have emerged in their splendour, their esteem and their luminous quality. We continually become more conscious of the integration and unity of existence.

From the material world we move to the spiritual world, to the thoughts and designs of man, to the different cultures, religions, idealogies. We are appalled when we see the evil and the folly which have dominated and still continue to dominate the hearts of people, in their norms of behaviour, their opinions, their beliefs, their individual and collective lifestyles. We see all the abominations that are perpetrated in the name of religion, the human sacrifices offered up to modern idols, victims of religion’s despicable moral norms. We see all the evil, the vulgarity, the weakness and the ignorance to which it gave its approval. On the other hand, we see the flashes of light, the glory in human reason, and its uprightness. We see the wisdom of scholars, the courage of the brave, the torch of the holy light of faith in its purity and exaltation, the aspirations and hopes for the great future, and the torches of life shining in the present. At once we conclude: the entire phenomenon of the spiritual is one world. This, too, has an organic character. This, too, with all this splendour of the splendour, with the sparkling of the holy spirit and the might of God which pervades it is dependent of everything below it. Were it not for the dregs and dirt in man’s spirit, he could not have produced the fruit of his harvest that brings joy to God and man.

At once we are consoled on being lowly creatures, and accept in love the profound design of the architect of the world, the creator of all events, the God of all beings, the Lord of all souls, who endows souls to the people of the earth, and spirit to all who walk on it, and from whose goodness all derive good. Increasingly we are girded with holiness and might, and we begin to understand our lowly state as well as our greatness. We cherish the flowers of grace and duty that grew in the garden of human development. We then
recognise what transcends this in nobility. What stands far higher in significance. We all feel the great yearning to sing in celebration, and we are imbued with strength to walk proudly toward the light, to know the harvest if ideals brought forth by the spirit, which nurtures all good and uprightness all enlightenment and freedom. We embrace the fruit of religion in its pure and developed state to the extent that our understanding can reach it. And we accept this stirring within us which exceed our understanding, confident that One higher than the high is watching over us. We are fortified by our sound counsel and are strengthened by the grandeur of God, which we know as our inheritance from the teaching of the holy ones in early generations. « Who is mighty like You, O Lord, and Your faithfulness is round about You ! » (Psalms 89 :9)

**Conclusion**

It is why the highest position in the love of people must be taken by the love of man, and it must extend to all men, despite all the differences of opinion, religion and faith, despite all distinctions of race and climate.... We must know that the point of life, light and holiness never moved from the divine image bestowed on humanity in general, and on every people and tongue, each according to its significance, and that this holy kernel will elevate all. Because of this point of life we wish for the total elevation that will affect the world, the light of justice and righteousness... the perfection of all that is created and man and all his faculties first.

Without doubt, the settlement of the world in its many ramifications is a precondition and vital need for our attaining our own way in life. Each country and each nation which respects itself does not and cannot be satisfied with its narrow boundaries and limited domains. Rather the desire to bring in all that is good and beautiful, that is helpful and glorious to their national, cultural treasure. And they wish to give the maximum flow of their own blessings to the heritage of humanity as a whole. Happy is the nation, like this State of Qatar, thatz can give us today an account of what is has taken in from others, and more importantly, of what it will give to the heritage of all humanity. Woe to the country and nation that encloses itself within its own four cubits, and limits itself to its narrow boundaries, lacking the means of contributing, and lacking the tools to receive from others.
Of course, our faiths are different. Judaism is not Christianity, Christianity is not Islam, the Abrahamic monotheisms are different eastern mysticism on the one hand, and from scientific humanism on the other. Yet, when we bring our respective heritages of wisdom to the public domain, we have no need to wish to convert others. Instead, we are tacitly saying, «if this speaks to you, then please take it as our gift! Indeed, it is yours already for wisdom belongs to us all!»

The willingness to share non-coercively our several traditions of moral insight is, in a religiously plural culture, an essential part of the democratic conversation.

Let us thank God for the privilege of bringing our worlds to another nation, for though our faiths are different, profoundly so, I believe that all prayers and all songs that come from the heart converge in God’s infinity, where all persons are loved if they themselves love. What they will give is unimportant. But that they will give is essential. Society is what we will build together, and the more different types of people there are, the more complex and beautiful will be the world we will create! The important thing is that we will build together!

Let us thank His Highness the Emir of the State of Qatar who permits us, during these three days of dialogue and reflexion, to build the foundations of a better world we want to create with the values of peace and the respect of life for all humanity!