

Creative Contest: „Christian-Jewish Dialogue –  
Why? What for?

Contribution by  
Linda Mahler

*For all of us*

by Linda Mahler

# green

"I can't believe it has been five weeks already, I miss you so much!" I hear a familiar voice coming from my computer. It is my best friend who called me over FaceTime. Her voice has made me laugh more times than I could ever count and usually I love listening to it. It has comforted me, challenged me and it always supports me. It has been there countless times and somehow it almost sounds like home by now. If home could ever be captured in a sound... Today it feels different though. I haven't heard it in quite some time. Maybe that's why? Or maybe it is the spatial distance, or the fact that we need technology to communicate with each other. It doesn't really sound that different but it definitely feels different.

"So?" my friend asks me, pulling me away from my thoughts.

"I'm sorry, what?" I reply, indicating that I wasn't fully listening.

"How do you like it?"

Countless images immediately come to my mind. I can't help but smile, thinking about my very first day in Haifa about five weeks ago... I just finished unpacking my bags. I sit down on my office chair and I can tell it is brand new. It still has its tag on it. "Turning every house into a home" it says in bright colors. It doesn't say how expensive it was but I imagine that it wasn't that much. At least it doesn't feel that way. The chair is not very comfortable. The blue fabric slightly smells like a cheap toy produced in China. But it'll do, I tell myself. In four months I'll be back home anyways. My eyes wander off. Away from the bright blue fabric and to the deep green leaves of the tree outside of my window. I smile. Watching the leaves dance ever so slightly in the wind sends a cold shiver down my spine. I suddenly realize how cold I am. Not because of the breeze outside but because I didn't study my weather App good enough before packing my bags. I expected it to be warmer already, so I only brought two sweaters with me. Wishful thinking, I guess. I push a tiny orange button on the remote next to me, turning on my air conditioning. With every beep the number on the little display rises until it stops at 25 degrees Celsius. Immediately, I can feel a flow of warm air surrounding me, forcing my goosebumps to disappear, leaving a tingly feeling on my skin.



# green

I open a small container and remove the plastic seal underneath its lid. Right away, I can smell it. My first Israeli hummus. I wonder if it lives up to my expectations. Curious and even a little excited I take a piece of my pita bread and dip it in the beige spread. It seems to be very creamy and rich. Just like I imagined it would be. I take my first bite and another one right away. I am somehow not sure whether I like it or not. The hummus I had in Germany tasted very differently. It must have had more lemon in it. Maybe also less tahini? I'm not sure... I keep dipping my pita in the chickpea blend trying to figure out why it tastes so different, not knowing that in a couple of weeks I would dread the day I have to go back to German hummus.

I smile knowing that this place has already become a home away from home. With its brand-new chair that smells like a cheap plastic toy, the leaves dancing behind the iron bars in front of my window and the pita dipped in delicious Israeli hummus.

"I love it!" I say...



# Linda

I look at my watch. It is almost 10 o'clock. Time to take off, I think. I take my brick colored Kanken backpack, that has been with me on so many adventures already and throw in my iPad, my wallet, my phone and a water bottle. I don't really need anything else. This should be enough. I take a step outside of my dorm and take a deep breath in. The fresh air fills my lungs and brings joy to my heart. Finally, we have overcome the cold and rainy days and today actually feels as if it might get really hot. I start battling the many, many stairs to get to campus. It is so worth it though, I cannot wait to see it. 98, 99, 100, 101... I quietly count, my breath getting heavier with every number. And there it finally is. The ocean! And the campus of the University of Haifa of course... This view really gets me up every day. How can you get used to living on this beautiful mount Carmel, that has the most mesmerizing ocean view? It is just so bright blue that it immediately makes you want to take the day off and go to the beach. But sadly not today. I am early to class though, so I stop at Gregs, enjoying the ocean a little longer. I order a medium-sized Latte Macchiato with soy milk. While I get another stamp on my bonus card, that almost fills it up, promising a free drink, I think of my very first stamp. I had ordered the very same thing, in small though instead of medium. And because the nice Israeli woman didn't understand my English correctly, I got an Espresso Macchiato from her instead. I'm still disappointed, when I think of it. "Here", the barista hands me my right order of coffee. I take my first sip, head to class and sit down next to Carmit and David. Over the last few weeks, these two have become very dear to me. They thought me so many interesting things about Israel, Jewish culture and religion, and they didn't even shy away from talking about politics with me.

"So, Linda. There is this thing on Wednesday. There is a Purim party at our community center and my friend is the DJ there. He can get us on the guest list. Do you wanna come?", Carmit asks me excitedly.

I'm a little confused "Purim?".

"Yes, it's a religious holiday. Basically we all dress up in different costumes, kinda like Halloween or Carnival and drink and party and have fun."

"Ok, sure... Can you pick me up from campus?"

"Yes girl!"

"Good morning students. Welcome to another class of American Literature of the 1960s. It's great to see you. Let's dive in right away. How did you like the reading material for this week?"





"Heeey Linda?" one of my flatmates yells around our apartment, interrupting me from my homework.

I look up at the closed gray door behind me. "Yes?"

"Do you want to join us? We're taking bus 37 down to the city later, we're craving Fattoush." I look down at my watch. It's only 5:30 pm. If I finish my work before 6 pm, I'd be ready in time to join them for dinner. "Yes! I'd love to come. I need thirty more minutes to finish up my reading though."

"Sure, we gotta get ready first anyways."

I go back to "Rabbinic Thought" by Kellner, my reading for the next day. I'm taking a class about Jewish Philosophy, but really it's like Jewish Theology and I absolutely love it. Seth Kadish, who we kindly call Avi, is an actual Rabbi and an incredible teacher.

Unbelievably smart, funny and really challenging at the same time. I can't remember ever being so excited for a class at my German University. Avi really opened up a whole new world to me. Back at home I study, among other things, Protestant Theology and we did learn a little about Judaism, but really... I had no clue. This rich tradition and these brilliant minds like Maimonides for example. How he came up with "The Thirteen Foundations of the Torah" and how he postulated the denial of corporeality from God sometime around the 12th century. It's incredible. He had so many interesting thoughts that even helped me understand my own tradition better. How could I have not known about this before?

"Hey Linda?" I hear my flatmate yelling again.

"Yeah?"

"Can I borrow your curling iron?"

"Yes, take it. It's in my bathroom."

I go back to my iPad, flip to page 43 and continue reading. "The Torah understands emunah, faith or belief, less in terms of propositions affirmed or denied by the believer ('belief that') and more in terms of the relationship (primarily of trust) between the believer and God ('belief in')." Beautiful, I think. I take my Apple Pencil, highlight the sentence in a soft blue color and continue reading.



# Sund

"And this is actually the spot, where Jonah left the harbor to flee from God. At least it's said to be. Do you all know the story? It's in the Torah or the Bible, whatever you believe in. There, God orders Jonah to go to Ninneve..."

I drift off, as Ariel, our guide, continues to tell the story. I've heard it many times already. In Sunday school of course and on this tour. It's my fourth time being on it. Whenever someone visits me in Israel, I take them on a Free Walking Tour through Old Jaffa. My mom is up to visit me next. Actually, I think with her, I might be able to skip the tour and be our own guide. By now, I know most of the places and stories by heart anyways, because I use many of my free weekends to travel to Tel Aviv. This vibrant city somehow just draws me in. All of the colorful and creative street art, the friendly people, the amazing vegan food, the beautiful ocean and this incredible energy... the list goes on and on. I fell in love very quickly with this almost magical place. It is just so rich in history and to me, especially Old Jaffa, looks so incredibly authentic that it almost feels like you become part of one of these ancient stories. Its picturesque sand colored walls and cobblestone alleys, small galleries of local artists and the salty ocean breeze really make you want to stay as long as you can to take everything in. It is unbelievable and at the same time such an honor to be in a country, where so many of the stories took part, that I have read time over time and that are so important to my religion. To our religions.

Our little group of tourists comes to a stop right next to the ocean and I feel a few splashes of water on my skin. Right now, it feels like the most amazing thing I have ever felt. Why was I so eager to have sunny weather again? A couple of weeks ago it couldn't get hot fast enough for me and now I'd give everything for some cool air. Ariel points at a rock close to the beach and I'm pretty sure I know which story he is going to tell next. It must be the one about the Andromeda's Rock.





# Reflection

52 pages. Finally, I can hold them in my hands. They're still warm and I can even smell their fresh ink. So many hours, weeks and months have gone into this. It's definitely the biggest paper I have ever written and for sure the one that is most important. Somehow it became a passion project for me. Living in Israel was one of the greatest and most educating experiences of my life. It really helped me grow as a person and to overcome many of my stereotypes. I have met so many Jewish and Muslim people and learned a lot about their religion and history. I now understand how important dialogue is and have realized that we all need to learn so much more. I believe that the world would be a much better place, if we all just tried to understand each other better and keep an open mind.

One thing I will never forget is visiting Yad Vashem. I very vividly remember the moment that I had finished the tour and stood right under a triangular structure that opened up to this very bright forest view. It was one of those moments, that you just want to bottle up and take home with you. After seeing and hearing all these terrible things, it was this one moment of hope. It felt like I was looking into a brighter future. A future, that I would actually want to be part of, that we all could be proud of. And because I couldn't really bottle up that moment, I started writing my paper. Yes, it probably won't have a big impact. And even though it is supposed to help teachers with their holocaust didactics in religious education, I doubt that even one teacher will ever read it. Because why should they listen to some random student? Nevertheless, I think it already made an impact. On me for sure. It opened up my eyes to how important dialogue is and how we cannot be quiet. I wrote it because I deeply believe that we all need to remember. We all need to learn. We all need to connect. And yes, I wrote this paper to get an excellent grade. At least I'm hoping on it. But really... I wrote it for all of them. And for all of us.



**Comment on the text by Linda Mahler:**

*My essay contains 5 snapshots of my time in Israel. They portrait my personal journey of diving into Jewish culture. After having spent 4 months in Haifa, I wrote my final thesis about Holocaust didactics. To do so, I visited Yad Vashem and spent a few hours at their International School for Holocaust Studies. The people there really inspired me with their approach and I realized, what an impact I'm going to have, teaching teenagers about the Shoa. So, I am trying to become a role model for my students, showing them how important Jewish and Christian dialogue really is.*

**Short biography Linda Mahler:**

I'm Linda, a 26-year-old student. I go to the Julius-Maximilian-Universität in Würzburg, Germany, and I'm currently getting ready to write my state exam this upcoming February. If all goes well, I will be a teacher for English and Religious Education soon. Last year, I spent a semester in Israel and not only fell in love with its beautiful landscape and loving people, but also with the topic of Jewish and Christian dialogue.