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Judaism and Islam  
(Short Presentation)

It is interesting that while Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all originate from the same area of the world, all claim to be religions of peace, and all point to Moses and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as their forefathers, their followers do not uniformly believe that terrorism is evil. Some have interpreted Islamic writings in such a way as to condone, and even endorse, terrorism. During class we explored why Christian theology detests terrorism and can be used to support the US war on terror. It is my goal to look to Jewish writings and experience to explain why Judaism also detests terrorism and demands any and all actions necessary to prevent terrorism.

Both Judaism and Islam contain several similar statements that should mean that all members of each religion should come to the same conclusions about terrorism and violence. Each contains a commandment to the effect of "Do not kill." Each also contains a commandment derived from Deuteronomy 22:26: *Habah l'hargecha hashken l'hargo* -- "If someone is coming to kill you, rise against him and kill him first." This law applies equally to someone coming to kill someone else -- you're obligated to kill the murderer in order to save his intended victim. Finally, both religions contain the story of from the Book of Exodus, Chapters 14 and 15 where the Jewish People cross the Red Sea while Pharaoh's army drowns. But only Judaism contains the story of the Jewish people mourning the loss of Pharaoh's army rather than celebrating their newly won freedom and the story of G-d remanding the angels for celebrating their deaths. (Midrash) This story, singularly present in the Jewish tradition, teaches the lesson that no matter what one must do to protect oneself, one must remember that all life is created by G-d and is thus sacred. Such a story can go a long way to preventing terrorism by reminding combatants that because of this sacredness, all efforts must be made to prevent the loss of innocent life. Terrorism actively attempts to kill innocent life, and is thus in direct contrast to the lessons of this story.

While Judaism and Islam share very similar theology, their national experiences have been very different. Such experiences can often have heavy influence on cultural expressions and morays, including whether terrorism should always be condemned or if there would be times when terrorism is 'understandable,' condonable, and even supportable. While both religions began as religions of the Semites, and share a common root language, the commonalities run out there. The lessons of the spreading of Islam at the point of the sword, a violent historical feature that many in Islam celebrate, can easily be applied to terrorism. The gaining of one's goals through violent means is part in parcel the definition of the word terrorism. Another difference between the outlooks of the two groups based upon simple numbers. As the world's second largest religion by membership and due to the many nations built on Islam, there is a strength in numbers that followers of Islam can cling to, a comfort level that Jews cannot comprehend due to their feelings of frailty learned through the centuries of persecution, small numbers and lone voice heard at the U.N.