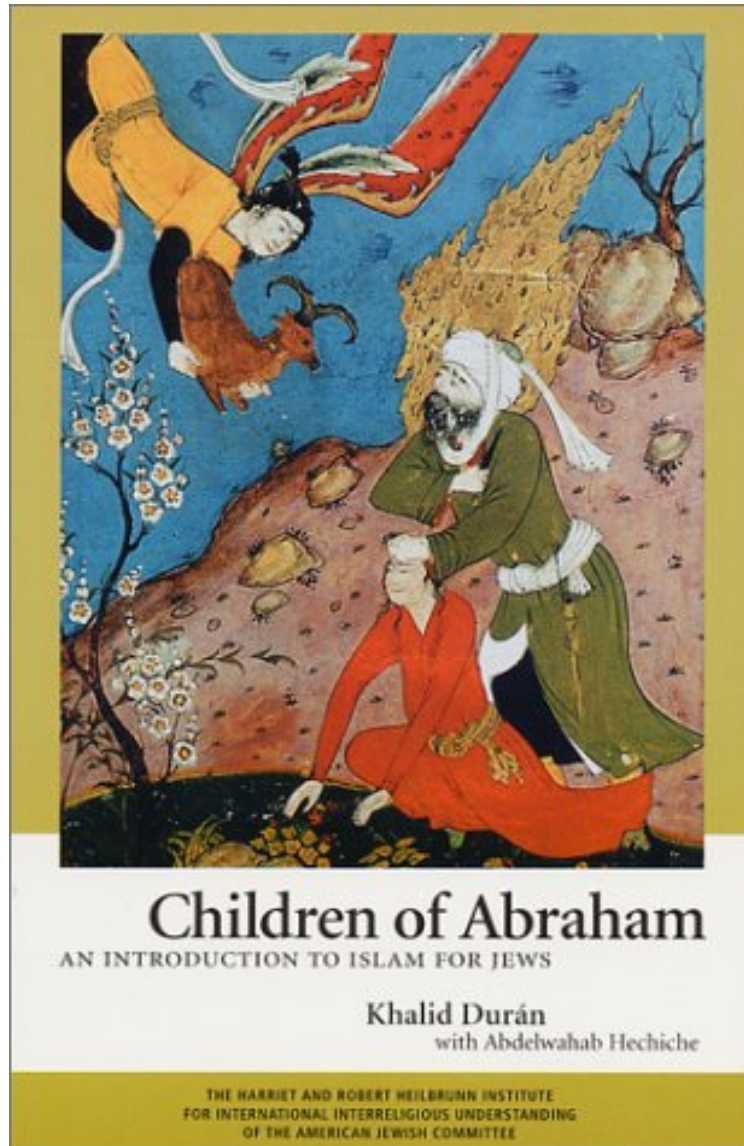


(Download pdf) Children of Abraham : An Introduction to Islam for Jews

Children of Abraham : An Introduction to Islam for Jews

Khalid Duran

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Khalid Duran : Children of Abraham : An Introduction to Islam for Jews before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Children of Abraham : An Introduction to Islam for Jews:

21 of 26 people found the following review helpful. Khalid Duran's An Introduction to Islam for JewsBy Ralph BlumenauIt is not surprising that Duran has got into trouble with the so-called Muslim fundamentalists, who are here generally called Islamicists. Although he sets out their views without distortions, as well as those of their opponents, he not only is intensely critical of them, but makes it clear that the great majority of Muslims do not agree with

them, which I think is such an important thing for the West to take on board. His account of all the varieties and issues within Islam in a relatively short space is clear and exemplary. Curiously enough, the weakest section of a book with this particular title is, in my opinion, that which deal with the history of the relationship between Islam and Judaism, which I found a trifle perfunctory and no more than adequate, with some important material omitted. 11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. An appealingly honest introduction by Brian Griffith Khalid Duran is a wonderful guide, able to speak of his religion in a relaxed, honest, informed and non-defensive way. Here he writes a companion volume to Jewish scholar Reuven Firestone's "Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Judaism for Muslims", and the two books form a genuinely civilized exchange. Duran shows no fear of discussing awkward truths from the past or the present. It seems he has only interest in what can be gained by openness. For example, "... women who join Islam often do so for diametrically opposed reasons. Some believe that Islam, rightly understood, elevates women more than any other religion. Others convert because they prefer confinement in the home and a position of childlike dependence; they wish to opt out of the rat race of modern life ... Many of these are well educated, professional women; their catchword is 'shelter' and their arguments constitute a counterrevolution to feminism. It is difficult to imagine viewpoints more divergent than the two extremes found among female converts to Islam. Each camp, of course, claims to have the right understanding." (pp. 217-218) Duran's descriptions of different tendencies in Islam can be humorous, and they easily relate to similar tensions in Jewish tradition: "The alim/faqih [or legalist] tends to be a communalist, a separatist. He is fond of erecting barriers between groups, such as followers of different religions, people of different generations, men and women - so that everything is in its right and proper order. The sufi/wali [or mystic] loves to break down barriers and bring all creatures together: animal and human, old and young, men and women, Moses and Muhammad, making them exchange seats." (p.202) This romp through Islamic history and culture is good enough to have earned Duran at least one death threat, from a fanatical jihadist who evidently believed it God's will that the various children of Abraham must fight to the end. -author of Correcting Jesus

27 of 33 people found the following review helpful. A kinder, gentler, vaguer Islam by Gershom Gale One doesn't envy Islamic scholar Khalid Duran the task of trying to describe his religion to any audience, let alone a Jewish one, but must admire his courage for making the attempt. As he states in the preface to this five-chapter volume (a companion to *The Children of Abraham: An Introduction to Judaism for Muslims* by Reuven Firestone): "The important thing is to delineate both the ideal and the reality honestly, rather than project unsavory practices at the expense of lofty ideals or present ethereal ideals as if problematic actualities did not exist... sometimes there is more beauty and sometimes more ugliness, sometimes the ideal is stronger and sometimes the reality bleaker. Sometimes it is not so clear what really is the ideal, and even the reality cannot always be easily gauged." With a whole chapter dedicated to "Present-Day Threats" - in which he decries the "hijacking" of key concepts such as shari'a (Islamic law) and jihad by the "Islamists" and "jihadists" - Duran takes great care to distance what he calls the essentially pacifist, pluralistic faith taught by Muhammad (who said "Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you" and "An Arab is not superior to a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab superior to an Arab") from the twisted travesty with which the world has become all too familiar since September 11. What Muhammad intended, says Duran, was not to create a third religion after Judaism and Christianity, but "to bring them all together on a common platform: the reconstituted Abrahamic original." But rather than unifying Judaism and Christianity, multiple assassinations in the wake of Muhammad's death in 632 meant that within a century Islam itself was split between the Shi'is, who felt that only members of Muhammad's family could succeed him, and the "orthodox" Sunnis who, following Muhammad's example, bestow leadership of their churchless community, where every believer is his own priest, on the most worthy. "In the course of time," relates Duran, "each of these early factions developed a separate theology, drifting apart in matters of ritual and law as well as communal structure. What at one time were political parties turned into religious sects." The Shi'is thus created the imamate, while the Sunnis instituted the caliphate, a religious-political-economic empire which eventually came to dominate a large part of the world. The immense wealth and concomitant "boisterous materialism" of the caliphate eventually became an affront to many pious dissenters, who reacted by embracing an ascetic, fatalistic lifestyle and wearing garments of coarse wool (suf). Thus arose a branch of modern Islam known as Sufism, often described as Islamic mysticism.

HOW THE originally simple, but today almost anarchic religion known as Islam has interacted with the world's Jews over the past 1,400 years is the subject of Duran's third chapter, "Jews and Muslims." This chapter begins with a section titled "A Difficult Start," goes on to describe the Muslim version of plurality (dhimmitude) - in glorious theory and often-less-than-glorious practice - and concludes in the modern era ("Fresh Wounds and Dim Hopes: The Twentieth Century" and "A New Page for Other Priorities: the Twenty-First Century"). The fourth chapter is titled "Religious Life and Society," and outlines the origin and nature of the Koran, providing some details about the religion as practiced today. But Duran leaves out much. For example, the explosive and, to Jews, incredible claim that God's Chosen People have corrupted the Torah (according to Muslims, it was Ishmael and not Isaac who was almost sacrificed by Abraham) is mentioned only in passing. In his final chapter, "Women: The Most Vexing Question," Duran laments what he seems to feel is Islam's greatest shortcoming: its attitude toward and treatment of females. The book then concludes with a chronology and a much-appreciated glossary of terms. To sum up, *Children of Abraham* is a courageous and much-needed attempt to explain one side of an age-old conflict to the other, but doesn't provide the greater understanding of

Islam or explain its antipathy toward Judaism that this reader was hoping for.

Book by Duran, Khalid

From Publishers Weekly Duran, editor of the journal *TransIslam*, misses a great opportunity to educate his Jewish audience about the extensive similarities between Judaism and Islam. Pockets of the book are enlightening. He accurately describes the archaism of Shari'a (Islamic law) in the modern world, and makes a strong point that Islamism, or fundamentalist Islam, is a political, not religious, movement. However, Duran spends the bulk of the text on Islamists, belying their small population. He writes that "the history of Jewish-Muslim relations is so complex that one can list as many positive as negative examples of their interaction," yet he relates mostly the negative ones, sabotaging his ostensible purpose. He also misstates facts about Islam and women in Islam, and mishandles the description of dhimmi (minority status) in Islam. His many controversial assertions lack supporting evidence. He presents far-fetched, incendiary theories, such as, "the culprits in the Oklahoma City bombing [the Euro-American Timothy McVeigh and his fellow militia members] had an association" with the terrorist Osama Bin Lfdin. He also absurdly claims that many Muslims regard Bin Ladin He also absurdly claims that many Muslims regard Bin Ladin "as a revolutionary hero, a Muslim version of Che Guevara." The Islam described here is ritualistic, suspicious, misguided and overpowered by Islamists. Duran dismisses Jesus and his mother Mary's appearances in the Qur'an as merely "a courtesy to Christians," a dubious assessment. Most troublesome is his habit of analogizing Islamic behavior to Nazi behavior. The juxtaposition, like the book, treads an unwise path. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal Most American readers will welcome the venture in interreligious dialog undertaken by these two books, copublished with the Harriet and Robert Heilbrunn Institute for International Interreligious Understanding of the American Jewish Committee. Written in a clear manner for a popular audience, both are arranged by key topics that address some of the great controversial issues of our times. Firestone (*Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*), a professor and the director of the Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Hebrew Union-College Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles, offers a thoughtful introduction to Jewish religion, history, and thought. He stresses how both Jews and Muslims have greatly benefited from peaceful relationships through the ages. Dur n, the author of five books on Islam and the editor of *TransIslam*, a journal devoted to an analysis of Islamic developments, has the more difficult task, as few would argue that Islam is viewed in a distorted way by Americans. He presents a critical, historical, and religious overview, devoting much of his book to the tensions and challenges found today, such as how Islam is perceived by different national leaders. He also writes about the role of women, for whom he believes "a change for the better is underway." Even before publication, Dur n's book has raised a firestorm among scholars. Many feel that he does not offer a balanced view of his subject, pointing out, for instance, that Dur n equates fundamentalism with fanaticism. The book does read like a polemic in many ways and is far less suitable as a basic introduction than Firestone's. As a result of the controversy, readers will ask for these books, and Dur n's will certainly stimulate discussion. Ultimately, however, American readers are likely to come away from these books with a more positive view of both religions. Libraries should make sure to consult "*Bridging the Gap: Islam in America*" (LJ 10/1/98) when building a collection. Paul Kaplan, Lake Villa Dist. Lib., IL Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.