DRAFT

KISHREINU - קִשְׁרֵינוּ

OUR BOND

THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN DIALOGUE WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1

KISHREINU: Our Internal Bond

"Do not separate yourself from the community" (Pirkei Avot 2:5)

The Jewish People's bond was established through a commitment to common religious values as declared in the Torah and other sacred works, a common history, a common language, a common land, the land of Israel, and common identity.

Through the tragedy of exile and dispersion, the Jewish People found themselves spread throughout the world, living among various peoples and cultures in which Jewish communities flourished, and alas, also suffered. But each Jewish community, while maintaining core Jewish values and identity, also developed its own cultural identity, traditions and institutions.

The Jewish way of life has been - and still is - based on communities, reflecting the plurality and diverse cultures of each of the places where Jews live.

These types of bonds are generally religious, from many existing variety of denominations, but they can also be secular, stemming from the areas of education, culture, academia, politics, sports, and social or artistic aspects, among others. In turn, volunteers, rabbis, professional leaders or any combination thereof may lead such organizations.

Each Jewish community has its own characteristics. However, the common denominator is that Jewish life does not exist in isolation, whether Jewish communities are scattered around the world or are located in the State of Israel, which crystallizes the unity between the Jewish people and the land of Israel.

Because of the communal nature of our religion, with its lack of a hierarchical leadership style - no single person or organization can speak on behalf of the entire Jewish People.

However, our voice - those of us now present, community leaders representing the communities of more than 100 countries - is far-reaching, polyphonic and vibrant. We are promoting a new step regarding our bond with the Catholic Church.

2

KISHREINU: Our Bond with all Humankind

"And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." (Genesis 22:18)

The Torah teaches us that G-d created Adam and Eve, and that all of humankind are their descendants. Although we may be different, we are all children of the same parents.

Our People's tradition prescribes three types of love: love of G-d, love of our neighbors, and love of the stranger. By loving one another, we manifest the divine promise to Abraham that through him "will be blessed all the families on earth."

Our bond with those who are not part of our people – the strangers, those who are different from us and may have different habits - is where we also see our commitment to our love of the Creator most vividly. The challenge to strengthen our fraternity with those who do not share our beliefs has never been an easy task, especially when in certain cases that relationship has been tainted by violence.

In this sense, we point out that the *Vaikra* verse (Leviticus 19) encouraging us to love our neighbor also clearly condemns nurturing resentment and revenge: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

Honest, open and productive dialogue with other peoples and religious traditions will only strengthen communal ties, further enhancing our Jewish mandate of "*tikkun olam,*" "repairing the world," a practice to which we have been committed to for almost four millennia.

3

KISHREINU: Our Bond with the Catholic Church

"You turned my wailing into dancing" (Psalms 30:12)

The tensions, disagreements and violence between Catholics and Jews that overshadowed our relationship slowly began to dissipate with the heartening light shed by Nostra Aetate, which marked the beginning of encounter and dialogue.

This declaration by the Second Vatican Council, issued on October 28, 1965, has been the starting point for a new and auspicious era in the relationship between Jews and Catholics.

We remember when Pope John XXIII, who opened the Second Vatican Council, greeted the Jewish delegation in a surprising manner, announcing: I am your brother … all of us are the children of the same Father…" - a biblical greeting reminiscent of Joseph.

Pope Paul VI took over the Council after the death of John XXIII and signed the Nostra Aetate with the clear sense of wanting to "hold a dialogue with everybody."

Pope John Paul II brought to fruition the task described in Nostra Aetate, particularly where the Jewish people are concerned, advancing the idea of having the courage to find the way of fraternity.

Pope Benedict XVI stated "the fact that we are committed to walking together along the road to dialogue, reconciliation and cooperation is a reason to be thankful."

Pope Francis has cemented the fraternal framework of the bond through several declarations and hundreds of gestures of goodwill towards the Jews during his Papacy thus far, just as he is doing once again by welcoming our delegation today.

4

KISHREINU: Our Bond with the Future

"Your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" (Isaiah 30:21)

A profound development concerning the fraternal bond can be traced in our first sacred text, the Book of Genesis, from the striking opening of the "murderous fraternity" of Cain and Abel to Jacob's blessing of his grandchildren Ephraim and Menashe and the luminous example of loving brotherhood appearing at the end. Over 3,500 years have passed since then and we still bless our sons with the same words used in the Book of Genesis.

In 1960, John XXIII welcomed Jules Isaac – surely the most important Jewish proponent of what resulted in the Nostra Aetate -- to the Vatican. When asked about the change in the Catholic teachings concerning the people of Israel, John XXIII responded: "You have the right to more than hope."

In that same spirit, reinforcing the courage of fraternity, and travelling a path that has been a wonderful journey for over 50 years, with the same right to "more than hope," yet with all the duties those rights involve, we would like to affirm the following points:

a) As Jews, we are told to respect differences. We must not hide, trivialize or minimize them. The challenge involves not only understanding, but celebrating our differences.

b) We must continue to promote everything seeking to expand and improve academic and theological studies that focus on the special bond between Jews and Catholics.

c) Educational activities with the young should be emphasized to guarantee that future generations will continue to pursue the path of coexistence.

d) Jewish and Catholic scholars should each endeavour to deepen their understanding of how the other reads and understands the Tanach - Hebrew Bible. Pope Francis endorsed it, saying "exists a rich complementarity as well which allows us to read the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures together and to help one another to mine the riches of God's word."

d) Cooperation is necessary so that wherever Jewish and Catholic communities exist, the relations will increase in quality; that wherever there are prejudices and distrust, an interest in mutual knowledge will arise, so that dialogue will ensue. Where dialogue exists, friendship will grow. Where fraternal coexistence is present, joint activities will follow and the sanctity of our shared values will become manifest in our everyday lives.

5

KISHREINU: The Jewish Complement to Nostra Aetate

"The righteous of all nations shall have a share in the future world" (Tosefta Sanhedrin 13:1)

The mere fact that the venue in which these paragraphs are presented in the Vatican is itself a much stronger symbol than words alone.

The presence of Jewish community delegates representing over 100 countries, convened by the World Jewish Congress before Pope Francis, provides special evidence of our bond - Kishreinu.

We recognize that Francis is deeply invested in the progress of interreligious dialogue. His heart-felt and much appreciated apology for the ill-treatment of the Jewish people promoted by the Church over centuries has only served to strengthen our bond.

We hope that Kishreinu will also become a catalyst for a series of new initiatives that will lead us from the Jewish and Catholic worlds to strengthen our bonds with the other religions of the world, thus working towards better coexistence between all the inhabitants on earth.

We learn from the past, we celebrate the present and we will work together to create a better future.

In Latin, "Nostra Aetate" means "our time".

In Hebrew, Kishreinu means "our bond".

In this unique and miraculous conjunction of time and space, we perceive the echo of a divine whisper that embraces us and cries out:

Let us celebrate our time through the celebration of our bond!

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