

[Spirituality](#)



Rabbi Abraham Skorka of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Pope Francis embrace after visiting the Western Wall in Jerusalem May 26, 2014. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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March 14, 2025

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As the United States undergoes another presidential transition amidst profound political, economic and social polarization, I find myself reflecting on the words of the Talmudic sage Rabbi Yochanan, who said, "Wherever you find the power of God, you also find God's humility" (Megillah 31a). I am drawn to the notion that true greatness is found in the humility to listen, to empathize and seek a unity that honors differences rather than erasing them.

This Jewish teaching harmonizes with Jesus' message in the Gospel of Matthew 23:12: "For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Across faith traditions, humility emerges as a cornerstone of true strength — a lesson that profoundly shaped my life as an Orthodox rabbi raised by a devout evangelical Christian mother.

My family's situation might seem like something out of fiction, maybe even a far-fetched comedy. But for us, it was a serious experience that influenced who we are at our core. Our family could model a guide for our deeply divided society that yearns for more than mere tolerance. At this fraught moment, our society demands an active embrace of religious diversity.

A famous Jewish teaching asks: "Who is wise? One who learns from all people" (Pirkei Avot 4:1). Similarly, the Christian theologian St. Augustine wrote, "Let us, on both sides, lay aside all arrogance...and seek the truth together." These insights, though millennia old, hold renewed relevance in an era marked by ideological divides; they urge us to seek shared wisdom rather than entrenchment in opposing worldviews.

As someone who bridges two faith traditions, I have often encountered skepticism in speaking out about the need for closer interfaith dialogue, particularly within the Orthodox Jewish community. Critics point to the 72% interfaith marriage rate among non-Orthodox Jews, reported by Pew, as a sign of cultural crisis. Yet my personal experience offers a different narrative, one of spiritual enrichment through dual heritage. Growing up with a Christian mother while embracing Jewish Orthodoxy in adulthood taught me that religious conviction and pluralistic engagement are not mutually exclusive.

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Some of my most treasured memories with my mom, who passed away in 2023, are studying the psalms together. Our differing religious perspectives didn't divide us; instead, they deepened and enriched our shared journey through the sacred texts. The poetic words of King David became a bridge, revealing how our faiths connect us rather than separate us.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, writing in the aftermath of the Holocaust, urged caution in Jewish-Christian theological dialogue. His perspective reflects a historical context of trauma, yet our contemporary challenges call for an expanded, nuanced approach. A Jewish text elucidates the idea that "the crown of a good name supersedes all other crowns" (Pirkei Avot 4:17). In today's context, that good name might be earned by showcasing interfaith engagement that respects and preserves the integrity of each tradition while acknowledging differences and forging novel paths.

To my Christian friends: Your profound connection with Jesus is worthy of admiration. True pluralism, however, hinges on our ability to understand one another. For Jews, while Jesus holds a historical place, he does not occupy a central role in our theological beliefs. Meaningful interfaith conversations must carefully address this significant difference, using language and expectations that foster relevant discourse rather than create unintended obstacles.

To my Jewish community: While we must remain vigilant in remembering history's painful chapters, we should also celebrate the righteous gentiles who have demonstrated exceptional moral courage. The 1965 Vatican II declaration *Nostra aetate* represented a groundbreaking advancement in Catholic-Jewish relations, and it is our responsibility to build on this progress by fostering relationships that balance historical awareness with forward-looking hope.

Imagine a grassroots movement of Jews and Christians studying Torah together, bringing their authentic perspectives while honoring boundaries. Interfaith families, where traditions often intertwine, can discover consequential ways to celebrate both heritages without erasing their unique identities.

Two prophetic voices of our shared history, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., demonstrate the transformative power of interfaith collaboration. What we need now are new leaders with even bolder ideas to guide us through uncertain tomorrows and increased paranoia.

Jewish mystical texts beautifully describe divine light as refracted through countless colors, each unique yet emanating from the same source. Similarly, our faith traditions offer diverse paths toward the repair of our world. In an age dominated by consumerism and political tribalism, we need what some of us call a "third space": a realm where faith, art and culture thrive independently of partisan divides. As C.S. Lewis observed, "Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art, like the universe itself (for God did not need to create). It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival."

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook emphasized that the righteous do not dwell in despair but rather ignite the light. This profound insight encourages us to forge a brighter future through humility, empathy and cooperation — turning our diverse perspectives into pillars of strength instead of points of contention.

Engaging with two faith traditions has proven to be both enriching and demanding. My experiences have revealed that true pluralism hinges on a profound respect for our differences while recognizing our common divine essence. In an era marked by significant societal divides, this approach of humility and respect is not just admirable; it is crucial.