It is unfortunate that in today's world many Jews and Muslims see themselves as diametrically opposed to one another. They see their respective religious traditions as dissimilar, sharing little in common—and even as being hostile to the other. The situation is often made worse by the media, which can take advantage of the political climate to exaggerate or sensationalize tensions for its own marketing or profit motives.

What many Jews and Muslims do not realize is that they share many similar religious beliefs. I believe that if more people were taught about the many connections between Judaism and Islam, they would see them as a bridge toward greater interfaith understanding.
Shared belief in one God
One of the most fundamental ways in which Judaism and Islam are similar is their firm monotheistic belief in one God. Jews recite the following verse from Deuteronomy 6:4 as part of their daily prayers:

"Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one."

This is probably the best-known declaration of faith in all of Judaism, because it establishes absolute monotheism and belief in the absolute unity of God. The medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides affirmed that "God is one. He is not two or more, but one, unified in a manner that surpasses any unity that is found in the world."

This is certainly similar to Shahada, the first pillar of Islam, in which Muslims state that "there is no god but Allah," as well as the declaration in the Qur'an, 112:1, which states, "Say: 'He - (He is) God, (Who is) the Unique One of Absolute Oneness.'"

Both Judaism and Islam teach that it is God who created the universe. The Hebrew Bible opens with this statement in the book of Genesis:

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

So too does the Qur'an 7:54 state:

"Indeed your Lord is God, Who has created the heavens and the earth in six days."

Both religions affirm that it is God who creates and forms human beings. The Hebrew Bible states in Genesis 2:7, that "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the earth." A parallel verse is found in the Qur'an 40:67: "He it is Who created you from earth."

Shared reverence for the Hebrew Bible and Biblical prophecy
Traditional Judaism is based on the belief that the Hebrew Bible is the sacred word of God. Within the Bible, the Torah is considered the most sacred, because according to Rabbinic tradition, Moses received not only the Ten Commandments from God at Mount Sinai, but also the entire Torah. The Torah's commandments, teachings, and theological beliefs form the core of what Jews believe and how they are to behave.

The Qur'an sees the transmission of the divine word as a process that encompasses both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament. 33:4 confirms that "He sends down on you the Book in parts with the truth, confirming (the Divine origin of, and the truths still contained by) the Revelations prior to it. And He sent down the Torah and the Gospel in time past, as guidance for the people."

While Islam views the Qur'an as the culmination of divine revelation, it accepts the divine origin of both the Torah and the Gospels.

The tradition of prophets, who received messages from God and transmitted them to the community, is very ancient in Judaism. Moses stands out as a prophet, because he was able to receive prophetic messages "face to face" with God (Deuteronomy 34:10). Islam also reveres prophets. The Biblical prophets of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament are accepted by Islam as authentic, with Muhammad as the pinnacle of prophetic activity:

"We have believed in God (without associating any partners with Him), and that which has been sent down to us, and that which has been sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Prophets who were raised in the tribes, and that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and that (knowledge, wisdom, and Prophecy) which was given to all other Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them" (Qur'an 2:136).

Shared belief in the Afterlife, Final Judgment, and Resurrection
Both Judaism and Islam share a belief in an afterlife – that as human beings we are created with both a body and a soul, and that after death our soul continues. The ancient Rabbis stated in Talmud Shabbat 152b, "After death, the souls of the righteous are kept beside the Throne of Glory in heaven." Concerning the soul, the Qur'an 89:27-30 states, "O you soul at rest (content with the truths of faith and God's commands, and with His treatment of His creatures)! Return to your Lord, well-pleased (with Him and His treatment of you), and well-pleasing to Him."

Both Judaism and Islam also believe that human souls will experience a Final Judgment at the end of time, when all the righteous will receive their ultimate reward and the wicked their ultimate punishment. For both Judaism and Islam, the righteous will be resurrected after death, with their bodies and souls reunited forever, and will enjoy eternity in a heavenly realm. The prophet Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible describes resurrection in dramatic, poetic terms:

"Thus the Lord God said to the dry bones: 'I will cause breath to enter you and you shall live again. I will lay sinews upon you, and cover you with flesh, and form skin over you. And I will put breath into you, and you shall live again.'"

So too does the Qur'an 39:67, 73-74 describe resurrection in uplifting terms:

"The whole earth will be in His Grasp on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be rolled up in His Right Hand... Those who keep from disobedience to their Lord in reverence for Him and piety will be led to Paradise in companies. When they finally arrive there, its doors will be opened (as sheer grace from God), and its keepers will welcome them saying: 'Peace be upon you! Well you have fared and are purified (from the foul residues of sin, and delivered..."
from all suffering), so enter it (Paradise) to abide!' And they say: 'All praise and gratitude are for God, Who has fulfilled His promise to us, and has made us inheritors of this land (of bliss).’”

The centrality of prayer and ritual
Both Jews and Muslims are required to pray daily, and daily prayer is the second pillar of Islam. For Jews, there are three daily prayer services, and for Muslims, five. These consistent times of prayer are meant to remind us of God’s continuous presence in the world and to give us opportunities to give praise and thanks to God.

Both traditions also have times of fasting, during which neither food nor water is permitted. Jews fast on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), when we confess and atone for our sins, resolve to turn from evil, and ask for God’s forgiveness. Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan, which is the fourth pillar of Islam. Like Judaism, the Qur'an 2:183 states that fasting during Ramadan is “so that you may observe God’s protection (against the temptations of your carnal soul) and attain piety.”

Both Judaism and Islam affirm the spiritual value of religious pilgrimage. For Jews, there are three pilgrimage festivals each year (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) that are ideally observed in Israel, and many Jews make the effort to be in Israel for these sacred times. Similarly, the pilgrimage to Mecca, the fifth pillar of Islam, is a supremely important religious observance.

Jews and Muslims are also required to observe dietary laws. They share the prohibition against eating pork. These restrictions cause us to think about God every time we eat, provide us with a daily discipline of paying attention to what we put in our mouths, and cause us to see eating as a sanctified ritual, rather than mindlessly consuming whatever food is readily available.

Shared values
One of the most cherished values in Judaism is that of tzedakah, which involves acts of charity to those in need. Leviticus 19:9-10 teaches us, “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.”

Similarly, the third pillar of Islam is Zakat, the duty of Muslims to give charity to the poor and needy. The Qur'an 2:177 praises the person who “gives away of his property with pleasure, although he loves it, to relatives, orphans, the destitute, the wayfarer, and those who have to beg (or who need a loan).”

Both religions have a very high regard for the value of humility. The Hebrew Bible notes that humility is the outstanding trait of Moses:

“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

The same is found in the Qur'an 25:63:

“The (true) servants of the All-Merciful are they who move on the earth gently and humbly.”

Lastly, both traditions emphasize the power of forgiveness. In the Hebrew Bible, Exodus 34:6-7 lists God’s qualities of forgiveness:

“A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin.”

Islam also emphasizes the qualities of Allah as “the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful” in the Basmala. We are all imperfect human beings who rely on God’s boundless mercy to forgive us when we sin and help us to repent for our wrongs.

Judaism and Islam also expect believers to be forgiving of each other, just as God is forgiving of us. The medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides emphasized that we are required to forgive those who have harmed us:

“It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and refuse to be appeased. Rather, he should be easily pacified, but hard to anger. When a person who wronged him asks for forgiveness, he should forgive him with a complete heart and a willing spirit. Even if he aggravated and wronged him severely, he should not seek revenge or bear a grudge.”

The ideal of the forgiving person is described in the Qur’an 3:134 as the kind of person who is “ever-restraining their rage (even when provoked and able to retaliate), and forgiving people (their offenses). God loves (such) people who are devoted to doing good.”

A bridge to interfaith understanding
These are just a few examples of the many ways in which Judaism and Islam share common beliefs and values. In today’s fractured world, it is vital that Jews and Muslims understand what they have in common and reach out to each other in friendship and support. We need to repair the gaping hole where ignorance currently resides. Knowledge of each other is the only way to prevent future religious bigotry and violence, and to replace hatred with love.

Notes
1. Translations of the Hebrew Bible are from The Tanakh (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).
3. Translations of the Qur’an into English are from The Qur’an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali’ Onal (New Jersey: Tughrha Books, 2015).
4. Eliahhu Touger, Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:10, p. 630.