

Creative Contest: „Christian-Jewish Dialogue –
Why? What for?

Contribution by
Lidiia Batig

INTERVIEW WITH “JEWISH” G-D

Inspired by the lectures of Rabbi Jack Bemporad

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Russell Foundation and the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue (Rome, Italy), Libertas Center for Interreligious Dialogue (Lviv, Ukraine), Cardinal Bea Centre for Judaic Studies (Rome, Italy) and Renovabis organization (Freising, Germany)

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4)

Abusing tranquility of the dusk demesnes of night, secluded she sits, awaiting Him restlessly. Ashen faced, she stares unblinkingly with her blue beady eyes straight at the cold brick door. Emotionless on her stripped of skin-stool, pretentiously looking comfortable.

He and only Him can read through her emerald eyes...

With complete submission, she's fashioned in a senseless repetitive motion. Vulnerable panting throughout her veins, visible underneath her skin, added with quivers of endless clamor.

He enters through that huge cold brick door! She gasps in horror owing to pain forcing her shriveled lips to finally permit the air to be inhaled.

When G-d had entered, Esther's filled with her obscure life-time anxiety, surprised but in static movement. Her white thin skin, in matter of seconds, blood strives to wander in her strains, blaring; hardness and valour. She has just witnessed an unordinary human. A sophisticated man, who was not so tall, but not so short, around 60 years old, in good shape, with fancy grey curly hair, bronzed skin mixed with hardness, reflecting colors of the Mediterranean Sea. He was dressed like James Bond from the 80s. As soon as He started talking, His majestic voice softened her within, hitting notes of peacefulness. Soothing the soul, speaking words of melodies filled with touches of love and passion, like a Sinatra song.

Unexpectedly and despite her prejudices against G-d's daunting voice, its formidable effect became a paralyzing quilt for all her sins. She had been wrong, and now everything that she felt, inspired confidence, some positive comfort thus commenced her confabulation with G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Taken into imagination, the most important event in her media career: today she records the interview with the most powerful, omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscience force in the whole universe – Him, He is G-d. He had existed before she was even born and would be the king of kings after her death. They call him “Elohim”, “Adonai”, “YAHW”, “Allah”, “Father”. He has no fear of the future, no regrets for the past, no uncertainty in the present, because He was, is and will forever be the Supreme Being.

Esther always knew that G-d is the strongest ruler, leader of this world and beyond it, but she has never believed that He was her individual G-d; who hears her prayers and pain. Foolishly, it seemed to her as if the Creator had a connection with other people, cultures, heritages, except with her. She was born as a Christian, unknowingly to her upbringing. Esther has never actually followed her own spiritual tradition. G-d was always a perfect, strongly motivated Boss of the Universe, the Lord of the World, but a complete stranger to her. Esther thought of Him as a “Jewish” G-d, who came from the Middle East and conquered earth, but not her heart. She imagined Him as people think of annoying celebrities; whom you can see in each and every mainstream movie, reality TV-show, music videos. Not understating and jealously seeing how they are admired by all around, except you, me in this case. G-d was the same to Esther as the Kardashian family is for the rest of the world.

1. *“ESTHER, YOU ARE MY DAUGHTER!”*

“For G-d does not want to be believed in, to be debated and defended by us, but simply to be realized through us”, - **Martin Buber**, Jewish philosopher

“Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe”, - **Saint Augustine**, theologian, philosopher, one of the Church Fathers

Esther: So, you’re a man evidently, not a woman as some conspiracy theories claim? And how come I can see your face, if even angels can’t? I should have died after looking into your eyes...

G-d: Esther, I came to you in a form that you wanted me to be. The image you had buried long time ago in your heart, but still mourns for, the image of a strong and caring Father, who loves His children, and will never cheat on his family or leave them. That is how you see Me, and feel Me. It is an image that your mind and your heart have created together.

Esther: That's true. I wanted You to be everything opposite of my real father. My father was a man without honor, he cheated, rejected and abandoned us for a younger woman and a better life. He doesn't even deserve to be a father or to be mentioned in our conversation. Because of him, I can't believe in anything in this world – not in loyalty, not in other people's promises. So many prayers, so many expensive therapy sessions, and yet I still have hate inside me. I am furious - Is it bad that I feel anger? Is that why you also don't accept me?

G-d: It is your pain talking to Me, not the real you, my child. It echoes each and every morning when you wake up and every night as you surrender to sleep. These words come from the devil to confuse you, to make you doubt in Me, in yourself and in the beauty of life. I always accept you, I know you better than you know yourself. I know what person you were before, and what person you should become, I know your path and your final destination. Because I had created you a long time ago before you were born. It is Me who is your real Father. I was with you when the closest people betrayed you, and when you betrayed yourself. You were never alone. Do not listen to the fake voices in your exhausted head. Do not lose yourself by being lost in confusion and uncertainty. They want you to kneel, and I want you to raise your head and see the beauty of Heaven that I created for you.

Esther: Such beautiful words. Why then I have never felt Your presence, Your guidance, like others? I have only heard how people speak about their experience of love, friendship and guidance You blessed them with...

G-d: Because you were blindfolded with the cloth of anger towards Me and against your own self, because you still want my attention, no matter what. I even reply to you in a way that only you will understand, using words and tones of voices that calm only you down. Why would you think I have ever been able to ignore you? Even though my existence annoys you sometimes, you still desire my love more than anything and anyone in this world.

Esther: I think You are too busy to pay attention to insignificant creatures like me. You have all your perfect boring worshipers – Jews, Christians, Muslims – who always pray so much and appreciate You, because You are their G-d. But I do not feel that You are my G-d. I hate You sometimes because of all the years when You responded with silence, for all these years You left me alone in my Exile. If You are G-d who led Moses through the Red Sea, who saved Noah and his family from the Flood, who couldn't allow Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac; who resurrected Jesus... Why then couldn't You save me from all evilness I experienced in my childhood and during my adult life? Why couldn't You destroy my enemies and the people who harmed me? Why wouldn't You give me a chance to be born and

raised in a better family? What is this stupid destiny about? Did You decide to torture me like You tortured Job? Did it bring You pleasure – my misery and misery of other people?

G-d: It is said in *Romans 2: 6-13* that I will repay each person according to what they have done; that for those who seek honor, I will give eternal life, but there will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil. I will not leave the world in sadness, but I will punish only the sin, not the sinners.

Esther: I don't care about every human being and even about justice at this point. I have learned that there is no justice in this world unless we create it. Your vision of the world sounds like a fairytale. You were absent too long, and look what has happened with me and people like me! We didn't sign any contract with You. And maybe I sound like a stupid ignorant child, but I don't need You and Your forgiveness. And I don't understand why You asked me to do this interview. There are millions of journalists in this world! Call them!

G-d: I regret everything your parents did to you. I gave all people the choice to do good or bad, to follow me, or to live in darkness. And I came here for you – to comfort you, to protect you as I have always done before, but you were so busy feeling sorry for yourself, that you have never been noticed. I am here today because you chose me a long time ago, because you were lost, and I found you. Because I felt lost without you, without your prayers, without our conversations, and even your protests. Imagine, I have all the power in the world, but I can't force you to love me, even I must deserve your love, fight for it every day. You are not an orphan as you thought before, you are My daughter. Yes, I have many other children, but no one else is like you. And even if I wanted I would not be able to create another Esther, because You are a missing piece of the peace inside of Me, that I willingly sacrificed and gave to this world to make it a more holy, more kind and more alive place.

2. "I FORGIVE YOU. LET'S GO HOME..."

"A little bit of light dispels a lot of darkness", -Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi

"I will not cause pain without allowing something new to be born", - Isaiah 66:9 NVC

Esther: I swear that I want to understand the plan You have for me, but I can't. I am not a true Christian; I'm not a member of the Chosen People group. Maybe, you don't have any plans for me. I always feel unprotected. I am alone in the world, and there is nobody to advice me, and no one to guide me. I wake up every morning and I'm waiting for something terrible to happen to me or the people I love. I have no peace. I have been fighting for centuries on

foreign lands, in other people's wars. I lose, lose, and lose...because of this I have stopped my prayers. I'm overwhelmed with Your existence and with Your superficial love. I don't want to read Your Torah, Bible or Quran. Take those books away from me. Even if You listen to me, you never really hear me. I have never got clear answers from You. Your quotes, psalms, Sunna, and letters You can keep for others. It all means nothing to me.

G-d: But I have always answered you, even on questions that you never asked. Maybe you do not need to pray, but I definitely need your prayers. You refuse to realize that I need you as well, I am waiting for our conversations all day, but you reply less and less ... I am afraid that one day you will just block Me. Not because I am selfish or almighty, not because I want you to beg Me, to bow on one knee, or to swear on your loyalty; but because I miss your light, I need to be closer to you, because you are my child, and I am proud of you, even if you think you are nothing.

Esther: I cannot believe in this, sorry! With all Your power and knowledge, you need my light? I have no light anymore! It sounds like a cruel sarcastic joke. Where were You when I was walking in pain and screaming for You to come and save me? When I was crying and bleeding? What light are you talking about now? You are delusional... and I am sure I am too.

G-d: I was with you... crying with you, holding your hand and not letting it go. I was with you and did not let you die. I did not want you to die that day and do not want to see your death tomorrow. I'm not ready to be present at your funeral. I will not go there again. It is your choice. You made me angry, devastated and upset that day, with all your poisoned thoughts about killing yourself. I wanted to see you stronger, but you chose weakness. You are not like that...

Esther: I thought our interview will be about religions, dialogue, the Shoah, the role of monotheism, Messianic times, Middle Eastern conflicts, justice and children dying from cancer whom You refuse to save. But You decided to give me a free therapy session! Are You trying to interview me?

G-d: First of all, who told you that this therapy session is free? If you want to come and kill yourself now, the door is open there. You can go, nobody is forcing you to be here, you are not my prisoner. But be honest, you do not want to die, because you came to see Me and to fight with Me. And believe Me, I am also exhausted. It's boring saving you all the time, Esther. But I know you want to live.

Esther: I hate my life, You actually know nothing about it. I wanted to kill myself, if You were there, You could see all. But You were so busy listening to the prayers of these damn perfect toxic religious people. So fake, hypocritical lies in their prayers. *“Oh, G-d, thank you for my perfect life... I just pray to You to ask for even more money, success and happiness, because I want to buy a bigger house... and travel, travel, travel... And always stay positive”*. Foul people! I couldn't handle it anymore. Why should I wake up every day with this anxiety and mental sickness? Why me? I haven't done anything bad to anyone. I haven't cheated my husband, haven't stolen from people, tricked them, I haven't abused my children. Why should I suffer with madness that came as a “gift” from my mother to me, that other people put on me? I am afraid of myself sometimes. That is why I wanted to finish it all. I wanted peace. Everyone left me because of this sickness. People are laughing at me, saying that I am a joke, that I am delusional sewage rat, pointing their fingers at me. If I have a choice as You said about my parents, why couldn't I use this choice to die, stop it all forever. Hell is better than Your lectures about happiness. I am tired of waiting for the World-To-Come and the Messiah.

G-d: The prophecy where it is written that you should have died on that day, does not exist. And what a dramatic choice you made – October, 9th – the day of your birth. There is nothing written about your death in My Book. And I will not change it to please your fears. The fact that you have terrible character, that you are annoying and almost always selfish, does not make You less important in My eyes. It does not make you My enemy. Because we passed through hell with you, and you helped Me to save you, I will not let you die. Not today not tomorrow. Because when you were ready to kill yourself, I called your name and told you: “Let's go home”, and you did not take these pills, you did not ignore my voice. You did not pray... yes, I know this, however you have never done anything evil that can't be fixed with regret, with redemption and with hard work. All you did, each time you sought revenge was provoked by pain, but it is not an excuse. You should fix all your messes. Even if these people you harmed never forgive you, I will forgive you. I am telling you this now. And my forgiveness is more than enough for you to stop this suicidal activity. I am listening to all that you are telling me today... Even King David or King Solomon could not let themselves raise their voice to Me the way you do. You are more annoying than Jacob, but you do not want my blessings. I can destroy You in less than a second, but I do not want to destroy My own and my most beautiful creation, My rebellious child. I have so many rewards for you, so many happy days I have planned for you, centuries before You were even born... So many people will experience love, happiness, safety because of you... Millions of events and human

beings' destinies are connected to you. I will rather erase time and space than you. You will give life and protection to others as I do for the whole Universe. Do not steal this future from yourself and from Me, do not ruin all the beauty that I had managed to create when I created your soul.

3. ***“WHAT I PREPARED FOR YOU IS CALLED HEAVEN”***

“Whoever destroys a soul it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved the entire world”,-The Talmud

“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? - Matthew 16:26

Ether: How should I live, how should I handle it all? I need You to understand that I am exhausted!!! I feel pain in every cell of my body...

G-d: Esther, your fears lead you. You should control them, not the opposite. You must stop their provocations today. They cannot just vanish and avoid You anymore. You should open your eyes and wake up. Wake up, Esther! It is said in *Matthew 11: 28-30* that everyone who is weary and burdened, should come to Me... and I will give her or him rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. My child, you shall not reject Me anymore when I come to you to support you. Give Me all your worries, and I will destroy them, turn them into ashes. Give Me your sadness, and I will turn it into joy.

Ether: That's not advice. I wake up every day, and I feel this anxiety: that I'm not good enough, not talented enough, no one loves me... I feel more than lonely, I feel completely alone in the world. No matter who is around me. It's such a scary feeling... I am at war, and I'm losing every battle, my enemies are attacking me, bullying me, cursing me. G-d, I'm failing everything. I'm losing my job, my health, my husband. The man I love is scared and disgusted by me, and avoids me. Nobody is talking to me anymore... I am afraid I will end up homeless, disrespected. I hate myself.

G-d: I will tell you a story of one Jewish man. His name was Abraham. He was my loyal son and servant. Everything I asked for, he did with pleasure. And when he died at the age of 96, he came to see Me. I asked him: *“Abraham, my son, if there is something in this life, you regret?”*. And he answered: *“Like every human being, I have a lot of sins. And I made a lot of mistakes. But the biggest one that I regret that I was so worried about so many things in my life that had not even happened. I was scared I could be called lazy by people, so I worked*

hard all day, even on Shabbat sometimes. I have never travelled with my wife. I regret that we have not seen warm and beautiful Italy together. I have only been working. I regret that I never played football with my younger son while he was still alive. He died when he was 14 from cancer. And before he always asked me to spend time with him. But I worked, because I wanted to please other people and my own ego. But if I gave my son five minutes of my time, played with him, and shared my knowledge, it would make me closer to You than anything else. Now I understand it and regret it. I regret that I am dead now, and I did not experience all the beauty and variety of life. I regret all of the stresses, fears and anxieties, my anger and tears, because those things made me blind”.

Do not live your life, Esther, in a way, that you will regret later. I did not create you for this. If I tell you to stop, you should stop worrying today. Be sensible. But sometimes you need to ignore your own plan, because I have a much better plan for you. Let Me surprise you!

Esther: But what if I will wake up tomorrow, feeling that I’m not good enough again, that I’m worthless? What should I do? Just live?

G-d: You will never be good enough, because you are more than enough. You will wake up tomorrow and nothing will happen. You will have your breakfast; your coffee will be terrible.

Then you can sleep more, no need to wake up every day at 5 AM. You have time to do all the things you need to. Trust Me, just trust Me, that is all You need to do tomorrow. I will not solve all your problems, but I will show you that all your troubles are dust, you will walk through life through with dignity because I will stand by your side, as I have done for thousand years. What I prepared for you is called Heaven.

4. “EVERYONE DESERVES TO BE SAVED AND FORGIVEN”

“At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, the throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne”, - Revelation 4:2

“But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what G-d has prepared for those who love Him”, - 1 Corinthians 2:9

Esther: Tell me G-d, what does Heaven look like? Will it be like Christians see it, or will it be something like the Jews call “Olam haBa”, or a Muslim’s Paradise?

G-d: I cannot tell you what Heaven looks like. But I can tell you what Heaven feels like. Imagine the most sacred dream you have. You live in a small beautiful city near the sea. You

have a job and a house you have always dreamt about; you write books filled with inspiration and happiness, and the work never makes you tired. You are married to a man who deserves you, and whom you deserve as well. Let it be the husband you have now, the best, the most noble version of him and of you...

He is far from perfect, but he loves you not for what you have, but for who you are. With him you feel comfortable, like it is supposed to be. You can sit, eat, and act as you want. You don't need to pretend that you are someone else. You do not need to hide all the strange, or bad things about you, because he does not notice them. He sees only you. Your children are never sick, or sad. You always have food on your table.

After a long day you come not to just a house, but a Home, and there are all people you need, and who need you. There are no fights, only laughter, peace and love. Of course, sometimes things are hard, but you simply do not care. Because when you are Home, you feel peace, you feel My Presence as well. It feels like this will be the same forever. That no other woman will come and replace you, nobody will lie to you. That your husband and children adore you. Everything can be managed, everything can be fixed. And no one ever dies. Esther, imagine this feeling when you wake up and when you go to sleep. The world where there is nothing to stress about, nothing to panic about. Imagine, you do not have your mental sickness anymore. And you wake up without headaches. Imagine your husband forgives you for all you did, and you both moved in together, your mom is your best friend, your brother is happy and healthy... Imagine. Does it not sound like Heaven?

Esther: In this world I can eat all the chocolate I want, and I won't get sick? I'm joking, forgive me! It's a beautiful dream...

G-d: You are joking, but yes, in this world you can do all you want. All that makes you happy. So Heaven is a billion times better than this world that I have just described to you. But you deserve your Heaven not by being a demon, or an angel, but by being a woman with dignity and pride.

Ether: What if I don't find my way there? What if I get lost again, desperate again? What if I forget all Your words and Your stories? I want to believe, but I don't think I deserve to be saved.

G-d: Everyone who regrets their evil deeds, deserves to be saved, and has a chance for redemption. I promise to guide and to lead you. I ask you only to believe. Do not believe in Me if it is hard for you, but believe Me. If you forget My words, I will remind you. If you are in danger, your enemy will not reach you, because I will stop them. As it is written in *Luke*

12:7: *“Indeed the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows”*.

Esther: How should I act to become strong and smart, and maybe even wise one day? How can I trick my sickness and the demons that live in me? How should I earn my way Heaven while being on earth?

G-d: Heaven is already in You. My words are written in the Talmud. Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a gazelle, and strong as lion to do my will. First correct yourself and then correct others. As a tree is known by its fruit, you will be known by your works. Be wise and do not let terrible thoughts trick you. You are much more than your thoughts; you are My soldier. I believe in you, in all the power that is growing in you.

5. *“G-D'S PROMISE TO ESTHER”*

“Where love is, no room is too small”, - the Talmud

“Love. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres”, - 1 Corinthians 13:7-8

“Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs”, - Proverbs 10:12

Esther: So what is true love?

G-d: It is more than you think about. True love is not about “I”, it is about “You”. So when you say to someone: “I love you” it is meaningless, it is just a stereotypical phrase from romantic movies. First “I”, then “love”, and only then “you”. Sounds selfish. But when you say: “You are my Love” the words gain real power. When you say to someone: “I cannot live without you”, it is not love, but emotions. On the contrary, when you are honest and tell: “I can live without you. I won’t die tomorrow, if I lose you. I will cry all my tears out and will miss you, but I will not kill myself. But it is only You who turns my existence into life”. Then it is totally real, pure and beautiful. Then it is real Love.

Esther: Do you need my love and love of other people?

G-d: When I prepare for my feast, and you do not come, I miss you. When I cannot find you sitting at my table, even if are many other people, I feel lonely. When you refuse to take my blessings, I feel rejected. So, as I am the power that takes your existence and creates life from it, you make My existence necessary. So you are my Daughter and My Love. As I promised to Moses, I promise to you and others... I Myself will go with You into darkness and I will

give you rest... For you have found favor in my eyes and I have known you by name. I will not leave you not only until the end of times, but even after.

My angels will protect you, and your prayers will protect them. Never leave Me alone. Even if you leave, I will still stay by your side. But if you do not leave Me, you will feel my presence. The hours of sadness and days of fear will bring you no harm, no memories, they will just disappear. If you agree to try, we can start our interview now.

Esther: I agree... to try. I will try my best to be closer to You.

G-d: It makes me glad, and now... Let's start our interview.... I am ready to answer any other questions.

Esther: So, my first question is: "What do You say to those who blame You for leaving the Jewish people during Shoah to be tortured, killed and humiliated?"

Comment on the text by Lidiia Batig:

My novel "Interview with "Jewish" G-d" is not only a sort of a personal confession.

In this novel I blend autobiographies, memoirs, and of course an attempt to create my own interfaith story, connected with the tragedy of the Shoah. What should these victims of the Shoah and new generations have felt, and what do they feel now? Did G-d betray and abandon them? The main idea of my novel is that through our despair, our pain we can also become a source of power for others...

My protagonist Esther is ready to meet G-d– to wake her up from her foolishness and anger.

Esther is me; she is a modern Job; she is the Jewish nation after the Shoah; she is a person, a revolutionist, a child who experienced death of hopes, faith and dreams; who survived, but is not able to start living again. She is a memory and a heritage... fragile and strong at the same time...

She is a part of experience I have gained while studying Jewish-Christian dialogue...

Her wounds are not healed, but she desires to find G-d and to experience true love even through incredible pain.



Short biography Lidiia Batig:

Lidiia Batig, Religious Journalist, Theologian, an alumna of the Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies and Cardinal Bea Center for Judaic Studies

Lidiia Batig is an alumna of the Russell Berrie Fellowship in Interreligious Studies (Pontifical St. Thomas Aquinas University, Rome, Italy) and Cardinal Bea Center for Judaic Studies (Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy). Lidiia is also a student of the John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences (Pontifical Lateran University, Rome, Italy).

She was working as a Media Intern for the John Paul II Center for Interreligious Dialogue, responsible for the Center's social media and communications. Lidiia holds an MA in Religious Journalism from the Ukrainian Catholic University and an MA in Journalism from the Ivan Franko Lviv National

University (Ukraine). Partly due to her own religion, family history and the current situation in Ukraine she made religious journalism her calling. She understands that in the difficult circumstances of the time and society in which we now live we should not oppose each other's differences, but we should seek ways to find compromise.

She worked as a journalist at the press office at the "Spiritual greatness of Lviv" website and cooperated with Lviv City Council (Ukraine). She also actively cooperates with the Libertas Center for Interreligious and Inter-confessional Understanding founded by Russell Berrie Alumnus, Taras Dzyubansky, and organizes various Christian-Judeo-Muslim round tables.

Lidiia founded her own project, "The School of Interreligious Dialogue". The purpose of this initiative was to equip journalists with skills and tools when covering interfaith issues, promoting dialogue and fighting propaganda and fake news in the media. In the time of war and conflict in Ukraine, this project stood out as a much needed, innovative and timely initiative to consolidate the society in the times of crisis and unrest.

In 2018 "The School of Interreligious Journalism" received the prestigious Intercultural Achievement Award in the category "Innovation" from the Federal Ministry Republic of Austria (Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs). Lidiia's personal interreligious motto is a phrase of the famous Jewish philosopher **Martin Buber**: *"We cannot avoid using power, cannot escape the compulsion to afflict the world, so let us, cautious in diction and mighty in contradiction, love powerfully"*.