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 Jerusalem, November 1, 2019

Admissions Committee

Student Exchange Program

Faculty of Humanities

Yale University

Dear Sir/Madam,

 **RE: MA Student Exchange – Spring Semester, 2021**

I am writing this letter in support of my application to study at Yale University in the Spring semester of 2021, as part of the student exchange program of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. I want to express my deep interest in the program: I am convinced that participation in this exchange program will provide opportunities to expand my intellectual horizons and further advance my academic capabilities, constituting a landmark in developing my research in the field of Islamic studies.

Over the course of my BA and MA studies, I developed a profound interest in Sufism (Islamic mysticism) and its relationship with Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism). During my BA studies, I wrote a seminar paper entitled “Mystical concepts in ‘Bayān al-farq bayn al-ṣadr wa-al-qalb wa-al-fuʼād wa-al-lubb’ by Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī.” This paper explored the Persian intellectual al-Tirmidhī’s treatise on the structure of the heart. As part of my MA studies, I authored a study comparing the nature of the soul in Sufism (*nafs* in Arabic) with the nature of the soul in Kabbalah (*nefesh* in Hebrew), through a comparison of al-Tirmidhī’s above-mentioned treatise with the Kabbalist Moses ben Jacob Cordovero’s essay, “Pardes Rimonim.”

It has been fascinating to observe the manner in which certain mystical ideas, sometimes similar in origin, are expressed in different ways in the writings produced by authors within different religious traditions and sub-communities. To my mind, research into the field of mysticism is of fundamental importance for establishing an understanding of both the nature of religion and that of mankind. It is fascinating to observe how different religions, in particular Islam and Judaism, deal with the tension between mysticism and rationalism. This dissonance is engrained in the heart of every human being, and it is one that is reflected in contemporary intellectual trends in the Western world: The inclination toward greater knowledge and increasing education is one that is associated with secularism, and civil education tends to promote a rationalistic orientation. Nevertheless, many individuals continue to search for greater spiritual expression and to pursue transcendental meaning. In my view, this modern striving for religious or spiritual expression bears similarity with the phenomena of dedication and cleaving to God that one finds in Sufism. Advancement of scholarship in the field of Sufism studies will surely contribute toward a better understanding of different religions, human nature, and widespread trends toward transcendental seeking in our own times.

I am excited by the prospect of having the opportunity to study with distinguished and accomplished scholars at Yale University, and in particular with Prof. Gerhard Bowering, an expert in the field of Sufism with whose publications I am very familiar. I believe that there is no better place to broaden my intellectual horizons and imbue my academic research with new perspectives. I very much look forward to the opportunity to share ideas with students from all over the world and to learn from their approaches, opinions, and perspectives. Moreover, I hope that, during my time at Yale, I will have the opportunity to contribute my own original and valuable insights to the academic discourse in my field.

Thank you very much for considering my application.

Yours sincerely,

Noya Zandberg