April 30, 2000

filerane: Had a will

Theme: EVEN THOSE WHO PRESUME TO DO GOOD--MUST DO GOD'S WILL

Very often, those who believe, sincerely, that they are following the dictates of their conscience and are dedicated to what they conceive to be right and truthful and just, make egregious errors. Often, their idealism degenerates into ideology, and then the criterion of right action and fair conduct is to be found outside the realm of morality and in the area of ideology.

Sometimes the conduct is, indeed, acceptable from a general ethical point of view, yet as Jews we know that more is required than the generally accepted moral norms of the societies in which we live. All too often, we have learned to our dismay that genuinely held values that were considered liberal, humanistic, progressive--turned out to be harsh, unjust, counter-productive. Who can forget the horrors visited upon us by Communists who began as idealists searching for the ideal society, the perfect world? Who can forget the thousands of young Jews in the Pale of Settlement fired by the visions of a classless society and the utopian dreams of Marx and Engels who became the obsequious apologists for Stalin, one of the two most blood thirsty tyrants of the 20th century?

מיד אחרי ברכות השחר אנו אומרים תפילה קצרה: ויהי רצון מלפניך...ואל תשלט בנו יצר הרע...ודבקנו ביצר הטוב ובמעשים טובים וכף את יצרנו להשתעבד לד

Now, the language used is noteworthy. We identify quite clearly the יצר הרעם and then the יצר הטעם. However, the third mention is of neither; rather, the neutral, unmodified term צרנו is used. Why so?

I suggest it is because the יצר הטוב can, if given free and unsupervised reign, become as dangerous as the יצר הרע! Both Urges have to be responsible to the Almighty. Let loose, the יצר הטוב can morph into its dialectical opposite, and under the banner of goodness and progress and decency it can become a vastly destructive force.

As the Rabbis of the Talmud (ברפות בף נד עמוד א) put it, ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך וגו', בכל לבבך - בשני יצריך, ביצר טוב וביצר) put it, ביצר טוב וביצר - בשני יצריך, ביצר טוב וביצר . Both Urges, the good and the evil, have to be controlled by the Author of the good and the truthful and the just. Neither Urge by itself can play a constructive role in the divine moral economy.

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