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Norman Lamm: I have always felt that Shammai's policy was wiser than Hillel's in their respective reactions to the Gentile who challenged them to teach him the whole Torah while standing on one foot. It is probably better not to try at all than to risk all the ambiguities that must necessarily attend a condensation of one's religious outlook to a couple of thousand words. Nevertheless, out of deference to the preference of the Jewish tradition for Hillel, I am willing to take my chances and come armed with naught but naive trust in the reader's fairness, no matter what his convictions.

(1) I believe the Torah is divine revelation in two ways: in that it is God-given and in that it is godly. By "God-given," I mean that He willed that man abide by His commandments and that that will was communicated in discrete words and letters. Man apprehends in many ways: by intuition, inspiration, experience, deduction—and by direct instruction. The divine will, if it is to be made known, is sufficiently important for it to be revealed in as direct, unequivocal, and unambiguous a manner as possible, so that it will be understood by the largest number of the people to whom this will is addressed. Language, though so faulty an instrument, is still the best means of communication to most human beings.

Hence, I accept unapologetically the idea of the verbal revelation of the Torah. I do not take seriously the caricature of this idea which reduces Moses to a secretary taking dictation. Any competing notion of revelation, such as the various "inspiration" theories, can similarly be made to sound absurd by anthropo-

morphic parallels. Exactly how this communication took place no one can say; it is no less mysterious than the nature of the One who spoke. The divine-human encounter is not a meeting of equals, and the *kerygma* that ensues from this event must therefore be articulated in human terms without reflecting on the mode and form of the divine *logos*. How God spoke is a mystery; how Moses received this message is an irrelevancy. That God spoke is of the utmost significance, and what He said must therefore be intelligible to humans in a human context, even if one insists upon an endlessly profound mystical over-plus of meaning in the text. To deny that God can make His will clearly known is to impose upon Him a limitation of dumbness that would insult the least of His human creatures.

Literary criticism of the Bible is a problem, but not a crucial one. Judaism has successfully met greater challenges in the past. Higher Criticism is far indeed from an exact science. The startling lack of agreement among scholars on any one critical view; the radical changes in general orientation in more recent years; the many revisions that archeology has forced upon literary critics; and the unfortunate neglect even by Bible scholars of much first-rate scholarship in modern Hebrew supporting the traditional claim of Mosaic authorship—all these reduce the question of Higher Criticism from the massive proportions it has often assumed to a relatively minor and manageable problem that is chiefly a nuisance but not a threat to the enlightened believer.

Torah is not only God-given; it is also godly. The divine word is not only uttered by God, it is also an aspect of God Himself. All of the Torah—its ideas, its laws, its narratives, its aspirations for the human community—lives and breathes godliness. Hillel Zeitlin described the Hasidic interpretation of revelation (actually it was even more true of their opponents, the Misnagdim, and ultimately derived from a common Kabbalistic source) as not only *Torah min ha-shamayim* (Torah from Heaven) but *Torah she'hi shamayim* (Torah that is Heaven). It is in Torah that God is most immediately immanent and accessible, and the study of Torah is therefore not only a religious commandment *per se*, but the most exquisite and the most characteristically Jewish forms of religious experience and communion. For the same reason, Torah is not only legislation, *halakha*, but in its broadest meaning, *Torah*—teaching, a term that includes the full spectrum of spiritual edification: theological and ethical, mystical and rhapsodic.

Given the above, it is clear that I regard all of the Torah as binding on the Jew. To submit the *mitzvot* to any extraneous test—whether rational or ethical or nationalistic—is to reject the supremacy of God, and hence in effect to deny Him as God. The classification of the *mitzvot* into rational and revelational, or ethical and ritual, has descriptive-methodological but not substantive religious significance. Saadia Gaon, who a thousand years ago proposed the dichotomy between rational and non-rational commandments as the cornerstone of his philosophy of law, maintained that even the apparently pure revelational laws were fundamentally rational, although man might not, now or ever, be able to grasp their inner rationality. At the same time, far greater and more genuine spirituality inheres in the acceptance of those laws that apparently lack ethical, rational, or doctrinal content. It is only these performances, according to R. Hai Gaon, that are prefaced by the blessing, "Blessed art Thou...who has sanctified

us with His commandments and commanded us to..." Holiness, the supreme religious category, contains an essential non-rational core; and this state of the "numinous" can be attained only when man bows his head and submits the totality of his existence to the will of God by performing His *mitzvah* for no reason other than that this is the will of the Creator. R. Nachman of Bratzlav recommended to his followers that they observe the "ethical" laws as though they were "ritual" commandments. In this manner, the ethical performance is transformed from a pale humanistic act into a profound spiritual gesture. I do not, therefore, by any means accord to ceremonial laws any lesser status than the others. On the contrary, while confident that these *mitzvot shimiyot* are more than divine whim in that they are ultimately of benefit to man and society, I prefer to accept even the *sikhliyot*, the rational and ethical, as "ritual" in an effort to attain holiness, the ultimate desideratum of religious life.

(2) It should be unnecessary to have to clarify to sophisticated readers, at this late date, that the Jewish doctrine of the election of Israel is not one of racial or ethnic superiority. The chosenness of Israel relates exclusively to its spiritual vocation embodied in the Torah; the doctrine, indeed, was announced at Sinai. Wherever it is mentioned in our liturgy—such as the blessing immediately preceding the *Shema*, or the benediction over the Torah-reading—it is always related to Torah or *mitzvot*. This spiritual vocation consists of two complementary functions, described as *goy kadosh*, that of a holy nation, and *mamleket kohanim*, that of a kingdom of priests. The first term denotes the development of communal separateness or differentness in order to achieve a collective self-transcendence. The *halakha* is the method *par excellence* for the attainment of this goal. The second term implies the obligation of this brotherhood of the spiritual elite toward the rest of mankind; priesthood is defined by the prophets as fundamentally a teaching vocation. The election of Israel "because all the earth is Mine" was understood by Seforno (to Ex. 19:5) to mean, "because I love all the peoples of My world, I have elected you to teach all mankind to call upon the Name of the Lord and serve Him in unison."

These two functions, the tension between which is inherent in the concept of chosenness, are not antonyms, mutually exclusive, but supplementary ideas. In a study of how this doctrine was treated in Tannaitic times, a contemporary scholar has discovered that the greater the emphasis by an individual sage on chosenness and its inescapable particularism, the greater the breadth of his universalism. This separateness of Israel, its "holiness" function, may both result in and be fostered by a sense of alienation. But to assert, as some have done, that it is *exhausted* by the experience of alienation, is to misread the whole meaning of election by eliminating its clear *telos*, that of holiness. There is no virtue in alienation, or particularism, or an inclination for dissent, for their own sake. They may be characteristic, respectively, of modern man's psychological condition, or the aspirations of Jewish secular nationalism, or the liberal credo; but they are not Judaism. And, ultimately, they cannot nourish the soul or provide an answer for the spiritual yearnings of men.

Can the idea of chosenness give birth to the wild *Herrenvolk* theories that have proved so catastrophic in our times? Of course it can, and possibly has (although it never has with Jews). But such noxious

notions are not legitimate children of the biblical doctrine of election; they are monsters, genetic mutations. Any idea contains the risk of distortion; and the nobler the idea, the greater the danger and the uglier the perversion. The concept of government can be reduced to tyranny; must we, therefore, all be anarchists in order to avoid such dangers? Religion can become superstition; democracy, mobocracy; liberty, libertinism; respect, subservience; love, lechery. Shall we abandon the former because they can and often do degenerate into the latter?

The same holds true for the chosenness of Israel. It is a teaching of service and a service of teaching. It is concerned with the attainment of spirituality. Its particularistic aspect, while essential and indispensable, is propaedeutic; its universalist element remains the ultimate *telos*. Israel may be a reluctant teacher, and the world an unwilling pupil. But the methodology of divine pedagogics is rarely directly didactic. The teaching occurs on many levels and is expressed in many ways: by word, by sublime example, and most notably by the very mystery of Jewish history. That Israel is the chosen agent for this education of mankind does not reflect either on the superiority or inferiority of this people—although intimations of both may be found in Jewish literature. The nearest that any major Jewish thinker has come to a biological interpretation of this spiritual elitism is the highly ethnocentric historiography of Judah Halevi. But only a deliberate misreading of the *Kuzari*, the work in which this idea is proposed, can mistake it for a precursor of modern racialism. The whole of the argument is addressed by the rabbi in the book to the pagan king of the Khazars in an endeavor to convince him of the truth of Judaism. At the end of the book, the king converts to Judaism—surely an astonishing conclusion to a tract supposedly elaborating an exclusive doctrine of Jewish racialism!

(3) The nature of Israel's priesthood, its teaching to all of mankind, can be divided into two: the social-ethical and the spiritual-metaphysical (the two, of course, are ultimately interrelated). The *halakha* articulated the first in the form of the "Seven Noahide Laws" which, in effect, mean civilized behavior. (Nachmanides considers these as seven categories of law, rather than as individual commandments.) These are essentially negative: the rejection of immorality and brutality and lawlessness. The only "religious" one of the seven laws is also negative: the proscription of idolatry. To this the prophetic tradition adds a second element—the spiritual-metaphysical content of priesthood, positively formulated: the recognition and service of God. This is the vision of a day when "the Lord will be King over all the earth," and the redemptive future when "the knowledge of the Lord" will fill the earth as the waters cover the seas. This acceptance of God, of course, comprehends the good life. Maimonides distinguished between the first and the second of these two elements—the humanitarian-humanistic and the profoundly theistic ethos—by referring to the practitioners of the first as *wise Gentiles*, and to the second by the more honorific term, *pious Gentiles*.

That a number of these ideas are shared by the major religions, some as a result of Jewish influence and some independently, cannot and ought not be denied. But this by no means relieves Israel of the obligation to pursue its vocation without relaxation. Surely this post-Auschwitz era needs education in civilized conduct as much as did the Canaanites of

antiquity; and contemporary man—whose avant-garde theologians have killed what he had of God and directed his religious concerns solely to the worship of a man—needs, no less than the fetishistic primitive, the constant reminder that “the Lord [and not an apotheosized human] is God” and that the Lord is One. And perhaps the most significant teaching, the uniqueness of Judaism, is the coalescence of these very elements—the spiritual and the practical, the theological and the ethical, *aggada* and *halakha*. Judaism has always resisted the effort to foist on it—as metaphysical truth rather than as merely analytical device—the bifurcation of body and soul, of letter and spirit, of ritual and social, of cultus and ethos. The restriction of religion to worship and cult was accepted quite naturally by the ancient pagans, and the confinement of the spirit to cult in modern times, despite all gallant attempts at developing a “social gospel,” is one of the sad triumphs of secularism. We have cornered God, locked Him up in little sanctuaries, and now complain that we cannot find Him in “the real world.” Judaism’s unique contribution to modern man may well lie in its insistence that God is very much alive, that He is *not* absent from society (even “secular” society) for those who invite Him in, and that the best way to achieve this goal is to release Him from His incarceration in our barren and dessicated temples. In a word: *halakha*! Through a sanctifying of all of life, meaning and purpose return to man, God is once again accessible, and human spirit can be affirmed in the very midst of life in all its existential tensions and the wealth of its variegated phenomena. It is through *halakha* that a new relationship is established between the sacred and the secular (Rabbi Kuk referred to them as the holy and the not-yet-holy), and that man can reorient himself toward nature in a manner that affirms joyously the development of technology.

(4) I do not believe that Judaism commits us to any specific social, political, or ideological system, but I do believe that it may negate certain viewpoints. Fascism and Communism, for instance, insofar as they offend human dignity and strip men of certain human rights, are obviously in violation of the principles of Judaism. Just as Judaism allows, within certain limits, a latitude for various philosophical tenets, and does not bind us to any one comprehensive metaphysical outlook, so there exists an area of freedom for different social and political philosophies. Much work remains to be done in elucidating the limiting principles beyond which a political theory is considered offensive to Judaism. It should also be emphasized that not all contemporary political issues can be resolved by immediate reference to Jewish sources. The attempts to align Judaism as a religion with either side of the Vietnamese question is a case in point. The naivete in proposing simplistic solutions to enormously complex international issues, and the almost incredible *chutzpah* in labeling one’s prejudices as official “Judaism,” point to the danger in making religion *too* relevant. Judaism certainly has something to say about every significant issue in life, but this judgment can be meaningful only if it is applied to a problem that has been properly defined. Neither world political and social matters nor individual halakhic questions can be decided when they are enshrouded in an impenetrable vagueness. Appeals to sentiment and good intentions cannot substitute for the intellectual exertion that is the task of man in clearly formulating the problem for which guidance is sought in divine revelation. The giants of *halakha* have

always emphasized that enlightenment cannot be acquired cheaply. Judaism may be neglected if it is too remote from the issues that agitate contemporary men; it will surely be held in contempt if it presumes to offer snap judgments in the form of pronouncements by self-proclaimed spokesmen on every issue that journalists and politicians consider of abiding importance.

(5) Space does not permit me to dwell upon what I believe is an authentic Jewish reaction to the current “God is dead” controversy. I have commented on that in a recent article in *Jewish Life*. Briefly, I do not believe that the entire issue has any real relevance for Judaism, except insofar as it emphasizes the element of *hester panim*, the “hiding of the face” of God, by which is meant the absence of men’s personal religious experience of the presence or nearness of the Creator. Christian theologians, however, have gone beyond this to a far more radical position. Insofar as I can understand them at all, they have banished the Jewish or genuinely theistic elements of their faith in favor of the Christian myth which is its specifically pagan character. Fundamentally, therefore, the issue has no special importance for Jews.

I feel quite differently about the exciting talk of the relation of religion to the secular world, as propounded by Cox and others. Here I think that Judaism has a great deal to say, if we are willing to liberate ourselves from the defensive, apologetic positions that we have taken *vis-à-vis* Jewish secularists in the last hundred years. I suspect that research into the philosophy of *halakha*, the thinking of the founders of Hasidism, and the writings of Rabbi Kuk will offer a great deal of enlightenment on this problem.

The real challenge to Jewish belief in our day will come, I believe, from the cyberneticians who have been developing a metaphysics of cybernetics in which they attempt to use theories of communication and control to establish criteria for a materialistic conception of meaning and purpose. If the source of human purpose is in the neuron feedback circuits of our nervous system, then we have snuffed out freedom and established a new and imposing materialism.

But challenging though it may well be, I do not fear it. The computer is an extension of the human brain even as the scissors is an extension of the hand and the automobile of the foot. Just as we need our limbs to operate our instruments, so will we need our minds to ask the right questions of our omniscient answer-machines. I have faith that mindlessness will not prevail, and that human dignity—the divine image—will not be proven obsolete. And after all, it is that historic and personal Jewish faith, that *ani maamin*, that has prevailed and kept us alive to this day.

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