

"TYPES OF JEWISH SPIRITUALITY"
prior to the S.O.Y. Book Sale--February 6, 2000

1. Emphasize the types of Jewish spirituality, especially the normative (discussed in my Shema book, especially *kavannah*) and the ecstatic/Hasidic.
2. What is the difference between Jewish spirituality and secular/New Age spirituality? The former is always tied in to Torah. Even Hasidism, when it developed the ABG form of spirituality, and other forms of spirituality always struggled with having to make sure that it did not violate Torah in the case that it was not specifically sanctioned by Torah (the "adiaphora" or *reshut*).
3. The question of a non-theistic or non-Torah form of spirituality was first confronted by the Gaon in the story recorded by RH concerning the man who had visions which the Gaon knew were correct, but he banished the man because it was not Torah-related.
4. Spirituality & Science: On TV (CNN) yesterday, to celebrate the millennium, they interviewed a Dr. _____ Clark who had something to do with Kubrick's "2001." (He was in Sri Lanka at the time.) His wise, perspicacious reply as to what he thought of the future of religions, was, "I don't believe in God and I don't disbelieve in her. I believe the future belongs to Science and Spirituality."

In a way, this glib answer by a reputed intellectual (?) reveals something of the mind-set of many people as we go into the new century. The phenomenal advances of technology reinforce the religion of Scientism, which is as valid as that of any other superficially sophisticated cult. Science-as-religion=idolatry. And the idolatry is related to the question of spirituality--as Clark rightly juxtaposed them.

How? Scientism denies the metaphysical. The fact that science, as a method, simply does not deal with what is beyond the measurable and quantifiable here-and-now, is transmuted into a positive denial of the existence of anything beyond the material. But materialism, while it must be met on its own grounds, is not necessarily "proven" by science! Scientism is therefore atheistic--not even agnostic, even though Clark, in the above statement seemed to imply that he is agnostic, probably pandering to the world-wide TV audience.

spirituality, the way it is now understood, is divorced from "religion." (Even Scholem, in his later years, played around with this idea.) To my mind, mysticism--and especially spirituality--without God is just a "feel-good" exercise which should be of no interest save to therapists and the patients in need of relaxation-without-side-effects. If there is nothing transcendent to the material world, if corporeality exhausts the human experience, what in heaven's name is "spirit" or "spirituality?"

I am not against the use of even a Godless "spirituality" if it helps those in need. But this is therapy, not religion, not mysticism, not philosophy--and, really, not spirituality!

Also, when technology encroaches on theology, we have a replay of the דור ההפלה

5. Varieties of spirituality--

- A) see Scholem's essay (someplace!) on different models of elite: חכם, צדיק, etc.
- B) Normative spirituality: כוונה in Halakha; מצוות אי"צ כוונה; attitude of חזו"א
- C) Kabbalistic spirituality: contemplation...
- D) Philosophical spirituality: Rambam at end of Guide--& התפשטות הגשמיות
- E) Musar spirituality: Chaim Grade's novel...
- F) Hasidic spirituality: דבקות--varying definitions; ecstasy, etc. Also: *spurious spirituality*--See R. Dov Ber's work on this & Louis Jacob's translation, *Tract on Ecstasy*... See my TRTH on Berditchever on

Types of Spirituality

Spirituality & Halakha.

6. Spiritual hedonism Spirituality vs a *feeling* of spirituality

7. The Alte of Navardok, asked why he followed an unconventional path, replied that Jacob's dream was that of a ladder between Heaven & earth--and a ladder is effective only when it is placed at a slant, never when exactly straight...
8. The popularity of the current spirituality trend is 3 parts fad, 2 parts confusion, and 5 parts a feeling of inner emptiness, an aching hollowness--what the late Viktor Frankl called an "noogenic vacuum." The first 5 parts are not real, not genuine. In Hebrew, the word for "spirit" is רוח, and רוח means not only spirit but also wind...

In Hasidism, genuine spirituality is defined as self-abnegation, as ביטול היש, and the transformation of the אני to אני--as the Great Maggid taught. spirituality = self-transcendence, not self-fulfillment

Spurious spirituality is where the spirituality is a misnomer for emotion, e.g., the New Age type of spiritual hedonism as practiced by the likes of Madonna or Roseanne. Hasidim did not exclude emotion, but it was an accompaniment of the spirit, not a substitute for it.

9. Genuine spirituality does not negate the feeling of community, because it is by nature theocentric and not egocentric.
10. Classical rabbinic spirituality is that of כוונה--as in my *Shema*. There is little or no display of emotion, but the worshipper is certainly caught up in God-awareness. In the words of R. Hayyim Brisker, he knows that he is עומד לפני השכינה.
11. Scholem had started, in the latter part of his life, to experiment with spirituality which was secular, non-theistic. But I regard that as a delusion.
12. Is there such a thing as theistic spirituality which is not endorsed or even opposed by חכמי המסורה? The answer is yes--the story, cited by RHV, of the Gaon and the clairvoyant. Thus, no Jewish spirituality can lay claim to authenticity if it is in defiance or neglect of Halakha.
13. Maimonides held that the halakhic act--observance of the mitzvot--leads to piety (ירישי), but contemplation on the level of התפשטות הגשמיות leads to אהבת ה'.
14. An appropriate description of the yearning for spirituality is the verse from Amos (chap. 8)--הנה ימים באים נאם אדני ידוד והשלחתי רעב בארץ לא רעב ללחם ולא צמא למים כי אם לשמע את דברי ה'
15. Dorm Talk:

A) Varieties:

- ◆ Halakhic- Normativ, כוונה (*Shema* Book)
- ◆ Rambam- התפשטות הגשמיות
- ◆ Mystical-contemplative, not particularly ecstatic; קבלה=tradition
- ◆ Hasidic-ecstatic; דבקות (*TRTH*); Besht עליות נשמה (*TL*)
beginning→extremes: Tolkier (1770), attacked by RSZ
- ◆ R. Duber (#2 Habad) genuine/spurious meditation

B) "New Age" spirituality=spurious, ersatz, transient fad because no depth/history
/duties/no torah, just form self-indulgence, spiritual hedonism.

Spirituality-Types of

- D) Carlebach

16. We are moving toward a more spiritual conception of religion, one that is highly subjective and involves more emotion than reason. This tendency will continue in the next five to ten years, and with it comes a turn to oriental religions and a pseudo-mysticism--a state of mind that fails to appreciate the objective elements Kabbalah. The religious climate today fosters an ersatz spirituality represented by a flirtation with mysticism that does not require a great deal of circumspection and is currently touted by actresses and other famous people who know not whereof they speak. In Judaism I detect a confrontation between a strong focus on Halakha, the highly structured laws of the Torah, and the growing emphasis on spirituality with its concomitant subjectivity, individualism, and emphasis on emotion over reason. At the end of the next decade, I expect that spirituality and Jewish law will reach a dynamic equilibrium.

17. Spirituality involves the ethereal, immaterial aspects of existence; it speaks of transcendence.

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