

"JUDAISM CONFRONTS SECULARISM"

I. THE WHOLE MAN

7131 713 627 Judaism faces another ideological or intellectual challenge. We began with the confrontation with Egyptian idolatry. We then had the problem of polytheism, etc. In our long history we have had to deal with the challenge of Roman heathenism, with the powerful Greek philosophy, with Christianity and its challenges, etc. Internally too, Karaism; Shabbatai Zvi -- who maintained that the law had been fulfilled and surpassed; with agnosticism; with scientism. All of these were in one way or another a direct attack on some $\gamma p'x$, some great fundamental principle.

When we discuss the confrontation of Judaism and secularism, however, we are dealing with something far more dangerous and far more insidious. Secularism does not really pose a frontal attack on Judaism at all. Rather, it says there is a place for religion in society -- it "puts religion in its place," then bypasses it altogether. It leaves religion, as it were, to wither on the roadside.

In the past 200 years of our encounter with secularism, Jews have taken a variety of positions. Some have compromised; these are the different forms of "Liberalism" in Judaism. One swallows secularism whole, to the point of throwing out the substantive belief in God - what is really

"Jewish secularism," and called "Reconstructionism." Many East European labor leaders referred to their brand of Jewish life as "weltliche Yiddishkeit." Others have taken the exact reverse position. Confronted with this pervasive attempt to "put religion in its place" and leave nothing but a skeleton, they have drawn back, segregated themselves, and condemned all of contemporary life.

I will not make an attempt to determine which approach is right. (Like the character in Molière's novel who was amazed to discover that all her life she had been speaking "prose," we all have an attitude, an opinion, consciously or subconsciously.) I am more interested in the theological confrontation. My contention is that in many ways Judaism is compatible with secularization -- not necessarily identical, but not necessarily the opposite. (I should really use "secularization" rather than "secularism." The latter is a clear, decided point of view; secularization is more an attitude than a doctrine.) Today we are going to discuss those areas where Judaism is not completely opposed to secularization. There is no simple good-and-bad, black-and-white answer to the problem. Our focus for these lectures will be not so much secularism (or secularization) as such, but rather the important attempt recently made to consider secularization as religiously acceptable, to make it "kosher" (which is a Christian effort.)

What is called "Radical Theology" (especially as formulated by Harvey Cox, a Harvard Professor, in his The Secular City) is that secularization, accompanied by urbanization, is the real movement of our times. We are living in an urbanized community and a highly secularized one. (Technopolis - a giant city which has become so through the fruits of technology.) Cox highlights the points of contact between Bible and secularism and attempts to remake religion in a secularist mold.

I do not claim that my concepts are *יוֹן דְּקִנְיָא דְּבִינָא*. My interpretations are legitimate only within certain boundaries. (To illustrate that interpretations can be extravagant, Rabbi Lamm recounts case of two vying Jewish dailies, one of which had a scoop on its front page that the queen of China was in this country looking for a mate. The publisher of the other paper orders his reporter out to research (yesterday's copy of the New York Times, of course) source of story. After two attempts locates item in shipping notes: "Empress of China on Maiden Voyage to U.S.A.")

The word "secular" - which does not mean atheist or agnostic, but rather experience interpreted without religious suppositions - reveals its major bias: there are two words for the word "world." - mundus and saeculum. The former is a "space" word, the world as a geographic entity, the cosmos, universe. The latter is world in a "time" sense: an age, an epoch -- a historical term. For the Greeks the major area of concern -- when they

said "world" -- was mundus, the natural world. Space, geography, was the center of their interest. Time and history were derogated to a lower level. They considered change a degradation; perfect forms were being violated with change. Time, history are subservient to space and nature. Space above time, nature above history. The same tendency was taken over by Christianity. History didn't make that much of a difference.

In Judaism, world, עולם, means both. But in early Hebrew, עולם, only: time. When it says בראשית ברא אלהים את העולם, it meant the totality of nature. That is why it didn't say בראשית ברא אלהים את המרחב, because עולם always means eternity in the Bible, never the space-world. (The only possible exception could be עולם הזה.) It is a time rather than space idea, history rather than geography concept. Judaism is in this sense "secularist." Its prejudice is in favor of history, time rather than space.

Kedusha: We have kedushat hamakom, the Temple, Israel. We do have the concept of holiness of place. But superior to it is kedushat hazman, holiness of time - we have Shabbat and all the festivals. Just as the world is completed is is time that is considered holy: we have Shabbat, etc. If our major emphasis had been on עולם הזה, the Jewish religion could not have survived. When we were exiled, had our major emphasis been on kedushat hamakom, holiness of place, sanc-

tity of geography, on mundus, we would have lost contact with the source of our religion. Our emphasis was on the holiness of time, which is with us for eternity. You can live a lifetime without entering into חג המצות, but you can't live a full week without encountering חג המצות.

Salo Baron, in his Social & Religious History of the Jewish Community illustrates: Passover symbolizes our exodus from Egypt. Succoth: our traveling through the desert. Shavuot: the giving of Torah. But in the Bible, they are also described as harvest celebrations. These three are agricultural festivals and historical festivals. We have emphasized the historical. From this emphasis by the Torah on time over space, there follow two interesting results. These two items show how the Bible confirms or possibly originates certain secularist ideas.

(1) Attitude to Nature. Before the Torah, magic was the religion that predominated in the world. God and man were both seen as forming part of nature, of the cosmos. God was part of the world -- there was a storm god, a sun god, fire god, etc. Man and god related to each other in nature. Therefore, man had an attitude of fear, reverence or revenge to nature.

הוא אלוהים ואינו טבעי - So God is supernatural, He is beyond nature because He is the creator of nature. God isn't identified with nature. Man can thus have a neutral attitude

toward nature. Man does not have to love it (if he does, it is an esthetic love), he does not have to relate to it religiously, and he can begin to understand it. When God, Who is beyond nature, creates man, He says to man, *אני אלהים*; the "conquest" of nature implies the "disenchantment of nature"; nature no longer has a religious quality. Adam names the animals -- "I am the master" -- they are subservient to him. This is the precondition for the growth of natural science. Nature has been reduced in importance. This began the growth of modern science.

(2) Politics.-- The ancient world knew of the concept of the "divine right of kings." Men identified religion with the political order. Religious argument of people in power has been "apparently if I'm king, God wants me thus." Or, "If you are poor, God has destined it to be so." They identified the social order with the will of God. (Difference between nature and history: nature always repeats itself, history doesn't. Actually history is new; despite patterns that seem repetitious, it is open, there is change, novelty, contingency. Nature, space, knows no novelty. History and time are open). To assert the divine right of kings, is to be opposed to change. The divine right of kings is a natural concept. It identifies religion with the public order. The Torah rejected, disbanded this idea.

If Creation is the Torah's judgment on Nature (it is a subject for science, not for reverence), then it follows too that Exodus, *פִּרְצֵן הַבְּזִ' ,* is its judgment on Politics. Pharaoh ruled by divine right (descendant of sun-god). When Moses overthrew him, he was making a revolution. The revolution is to deny that the political order is religiously sanctioned. *פִּרְצֵן הַבְּזִ' ,* marks the "desacrilization of politics." We can agree with the secular world that the political order is decided by social contact; there is no divine OU given to any government. The state has provisional worth, but never becomes the highest goal, as it did for a tyrant. Secularism is an attitude of personal freedom of tolerance. We can be as cynical about America as we like, but these are "good" qualities. Part of this system is to privatize religion. It has nothing to do with the public. The idea of privatization of religion is a fundamental aspect of secularism. We must never bring religion into the public forum.

What attitude can religious Jews take? Most of us, in America, accept the fact that we don't want to be pushed around, we want to be open. But what of Israel today? And what of the whole world, ultimately? We have to reconcile this with our own tradition, which speaks of the Word of God reigning supreme: *הַיְהוָה הוּא הָאֵל ,* etc. Secularism seems to imply that society is and should always be morally neutral. Can that really be so? When you subject some of these dogma to a clear analysis, it falls apart.

Every society has to have a point of view -- it can't be completely neutral. The government will more and more look aside and permit anyone to commit adultery -- that, yes -- but to permit a person to marry two wives -- that, no. If we are going to pull out of the social-public forum any kind of moral or religious judgment, it will be filled by another kind of judgment. (Even if it be the absence of any judgment, that in itself is a kind of moral posture.) You can't be completely neutral.

I would like to focus on the following base of secularism. In life, and in religious thought generally, we have what is called polarities -- the choice of two poles or elements, two opposites, as: this world and the next world, body and soul, universalism and nationalism, love and law, functionalism (dealing with each problem separately, fragmentation) or an overall metaphysical view. Christianity made its choices. This world is a pale shadow, the world of the demon -- the other world is holy. The body is contemptible -- the soul is eternal. Nationalism is wrong, we are universalists. Love is what really counts, law is a curse. (In Greek, law is nomos, the word used by Paul for "Torah.") Secularism takes its choices.

For Cox, as a secularist, this world counts, not the other world. The soul, that's your problem; the real arena of man is the body. Nationalism is out, we are universalists. Law is a necessary evil, and perhaps even an unnecessary one. When it comes

to functionalism (the focusing on immediate problems), the Christian judgment was for an all-embracing weltanschauung. The secularist man opts for a narrow, operational approach to clearly defined segments of experience. Christianity chose for power of God, secularism for freedom of man.

Just derekh agav, the result is a very sanguine outlook, a "Social Gospel" kind of Christianity. Cox is out to help everybody. But Cox overdoes it. He is the theological parallel of the hip-Christians who are bored to death of the cathedral, of the Gregorian mass and want to introduce rock and roll to services. A lot of these radical theologians (chronolatry - whatever is current is "in") (we shouldn't) overdo the relevance (like reading the New York Times -- relevant now). Cox is very happy in his secular city. He can afford to be. He's a successful, liberal WASP. He isn't worried about anything, because he's made it already. He doesn't see the mess the world actually is. In their (radical theologians) delight with modern man, they forget that there is a demon within man (Isaac Bashevis Singer in one of Short Friday stories starts "I am the last of the demons. Why influence the world to evil when it already is, etc."). None of these people are awake to the fact that in this generation there is אגב that experienced an Auschwitz.

I am not going to oppose the specific choice within each set of polarities. What I will maintain, what I do maintain, is that the whole concept that we are given polarities and we must

choose one or the other pole is totally fallacious. Its origin is in an ancient heretical movement lost in the mist of ancient history -- Gnosticism. It infiltrated into Christianity and to a slight extent influenced Judaism. It introduced the idea that there is an unbridgeable gap between this world and the next. They said that there is a god above and one (god) who creates. The one who creates is an evil god. Man's salvation lies in fleeing from this world. What keeps man chained to this world? Sex. Sex is nasty. There is a constant battle between this world and the other world. We have to take our choice. Every man must choose for himself. What Cox does, what all modern Christian writers do, is to say: we accept the fact that there are polarities. Christianity chose the other world, modern (secularized) Christianity chooses this world.

Now we come to the attitude of Judaism. We don't recognize the challenge. We don't recognize the either/or. Secularism is a reaction to Christianity which chose the other world. Do we know of such things as this world and the other world, aren't we too involved in these polarities? Yes. But we use them primarily as metaphors for the purpose of analysis. There aren't necessarily two different, antagonistic elements locked in combat, it is largely a form of speaking. Speaking of this world and the other doesn't mean that they are completely struggling against each other. We recognize the existence of body and soul, but they really are organically related. We believe that each of the poles in these

polarities are interdependent. They interact, they interpenetrate. We don't have to choose one over the other.

This world and the other world: Judaism accepts both this world and the other world. I can parade a procession of sayings to show that Judaism recognizes only the other world. But I can also prove that this was only meant in a preaching fashion. (Preaching is always exaggerated -- a calm, collected analysis is the best invitation to sleep.) When someone wrote a Musar Sefer he had to overemphasize, rather than present balanced judgments.

ר' יעקב אומר המלך בעה"ב צוהם עפרונצו דפני העה"ה - התקן עצמך
דפונצו דפני העה"ה. This world is only an antechamber
to the next world. Which is more important? עה"ה. This world
does mean something though. You can't enter the other world with-
out this one. (Unlike existentialists who say life is a vestibule
from one eternal darkness to another, you go from one unending
obscurity to another.) We say no. It is a passageway to something
greater. The existentialist point of view can lead you to despair.
Why live? For the Jew -- we agree that this is a passage, but it
leads to something better. This world means a great deal; it is the
arena of Halakhah, the actualizing of the divine Will. The fact
that it leads to the next world invests this world with great sig-
nificance. Proof: the next mishnah. הוא חי אומר יפה שעה אחת
בשעבוד וצדקה יותר מכל ימי חיי העה"ה ויפה שעה אחת
בשעבוד וצדקה יותר מכל ימי חיי העה"ה. One hour of repentance and good deeds
in this world overweighs all of Olam Haba, whilst one hour of

spiritual bliss in the world to come is greater than the entire life in this world. We have here an authentic paradox. He is saying: You can not make any simplistic judgments. You choose both in this polarity, and each has its place. You can't disentangle them. Factually, to which does Judaism give a greater emphasis? If this world is a *וְעוֹלָם*, it is more important.

R. Yaakov: One hour of teshuvah in this world is greater than the whole world to come. One hour of the world to come is better than everything here. The word *מִן* and *מִן* also mean from, (in addition to than); it is derivative as well as comparative. Where do we get the entire beauty of spiritual bliss of the world to come? *מִן הַעוֹלָם*. This is where we create the *עוֹלָם*. There is no geographical place called *עוֹלָם*. It is a state created in this world. They are organically related.

Secular world and spiritual world are intertwined not separate and autonomous. *הַעוֹלָם* is *עוֹלָם*, and *עוֹלָם* is *הַעוֹלָם*. But no Kabbalist is unconcerned with halakha, and no *חֲסִיד הַעוֹלָם* is really unconcerned with *קַדְשׁ*. Judaism's definition of *עוֹלָם* was not a space or even completely a time definition. Maybe it is a time concept, but not completely. *עוֹלָם* is created here.

R. Hayyim of Volozhin on: *אֵין מְקוֹם לְעוֹלָם אֲחֵר* - eternity - we create *עוֹלָם*. It isn't out there someplace waiting for us. It is "implanted in us" and we call it into real being by studying Torah. (Shabbat is *עוֹלָם* *מִן* *הַעוֹלָם*).

Body and soul: The bifurcation of man into two entities. When secularism opts for the body it is revolting against Christianity which opted for the soul. We don't see the need for choosing one over the other. When we choose only soul, asceticism results. (Monasticism in Christianity). When we ignore soul completely and abandon it, it is tantamount to hedonism. In secular life hedonism is "it." It is considered the legitimate moral goal of human beings. Judaism says: we have ascetic tendencies, but we also have anti-ascetic tendencies. Yehudah Halevi: A good Jew shouldn't be an ascetic. הנשלה ע"י . Both are God's doings. שניהם חשובים is important too. The best proof that we don't see the conflict between body and soul comes from Bereshit: רוח אלהים - the spiritual concept, followed by: וברא אלהים את האדם, the physical aspect. In one verse of the Torah we have a convergence of both elements, not necessarily in conflict with each other. We do not believe in the bifurcation, the splitting apart of two poles. It is one world, we do not believe in the split of body and soul; we are for the whole man.

Love and Law: No conflict between love and law. We do not maintain that we must either opt for law or love. ש"ס has מצוה לרחוק and מצוה לרע. We must act towards our fellow men with both. If you believe only in justice you can destroy the world. לא חרבה ירושלים אלא שהעבדו זכריהם ע"י זכריהם For 2000

years Jews have suffered from a "religion of love." We have heard it until it came out of our ears. There is a Jewish folk tale about ר' יוחנן בן עזאי who was met by a Bishop who challenged him: You Jews have a God of vengeance and we have a god of love. To which ר' יוחנן replied: True. Your god has a monopoly on love and left all the vengeance to you, while ours has a monopoly on vengeance and left all the love to us. We have the concept of both רחמים and ג'ו' . The Torah is an expression of divine love:

וְהָיָה כִּי יִקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹת הַבָּנוֹת הַשֵּׁנִי וְהָיָה אִישׁ מִכָּל הָעָם יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיָה אִישׁ מִכָּל הָעָם יִשְׂרָאֵל וְהָיָה אִישׁ מִכָּל הָעָם יִשְׂרָאֵל
 וְהָיָה אִישׁ מִכָּל הָעָם יִשְׂרָאֵל - Hithalekh - הָיָה אִישׁ מִכָּל הָעָם יִשְׂרָאֵל, you will become a whole man - הָיָה אִישׁ מִכָּל הָעָם יִשְׂרָאֵל.

The same is true of other polarities. If you will permit me to go on a bit longer, I would like to cover a difficult but fascinating point. Functionalism: Man cannot solve the ultimate, gigantic problems, but must restrict himself to that which functions, your immediate problems, as opposed to ontology - which is to look for something that gives meaning to all of life. Secularism doesn't believe in searching for ultimate meaning; he (secular man) isn't bothered by such problems. He is involved in immediate problems. Cox tells us that technopolitan man is not all interested in ultimate matters. Modern man is interested in pragmatic matters, in problems that can be solved and made to work. In everyday life, the classical question is not "Who is He?" but: "What does he

do?" A functional, pragmatic question. We don't think about larger problems, only immediate ones. Cox accepts this abandonment of quest for life's larger meanings. He is willing to swallow secularism whole. We become so segmented, so fastened to small, little things we completely lose any contact with הַקִּיּוֹם , etc. (Paul Tillich spoke of the quest for ultimate meaning.) Cox sounds like a theologian of the Kennedy era -- everything is pragmatism. (Cites Time's review of Henry Kissinger, praising him for avoiding typical American weaknesses of: (1) excessive idealism and (2) excessive pragmatism.)

If you look to halakhah, do we find ontology or functionalism? We find very specific problems. Halakhah, per RaMBaM, is our "bread and meat." It doesn't deal with larger questions, it deals with dishes, loans, etc. Small, segmented, immediate, practical questions. Even where we have a great overall principle in Torah, when Halakhah is through with it, it is down to a minute particle, i.e., $\text{כִּי יִשָּׂא אִשָּׁה לְאִישׁ}$ (imagine what the Christians do with this!) -- our Rabbis say: man shouldn't marry a woman without seeing her first, lest she prove repulsive and he will be נֶזֶק on this. RaMBaM on this dictum: $\text{כִּי יִשָּׂא אִשָּׁה לְאִישׁ}$, it is an exaggeration. You should really translate it "you should act with loving deeds, act lovingly towards him." Down to a functional detail, away from an overall

world-view. The one place in Mishnah where Rabbis discuss larger worldview, metaphysics -- it is negative. You should not study it. Ignore what is below, above, beyond you. Study what is before you.

הלא יאמרו לנו כל מי שיש לו תורה יאמר לנו Would that they forsook me as long as they observe my Torah. Let them leave metaphysics alone, but let them study Torah. We perform mitzvot to come close to God. Even if we perform them perfunctorily, without kavanah, we are credited for them. We are pragmatic, functional. The apogee of this idea was reached in greatest form by R. Hayyim of Volozhin. Every mitzvah has significance, it echos and reverberates through all the worlds. We have no of what happens, but we must do it anyway. We must live a noble, religious life. This is a pragmatic approach. (Tale of son of provincial Jew who went to St. Petersburg and returned "enlightened." In midst of recounting religious perplexities to father, father interrupts to say it is time to daven mincha.) It's a narrow theological approach, but the only way to be religious.

והוא אומר לנו כל מי שיש לו תורה יאמר לנו And the second part of the verse ויהאור שבגס מחצות הערב. When you live a life of Torah, somehow it comes out. Inner experience must be felt. We begin from details from a functional approach, and build our way up. Therefore, it has been the contention of many thinkers that

the only legitimate Jewish philosophy is one that is anchored in halakhah. Philosophy should grow out of halakhah. Don't begin with ethereal pronouncements. We have both halakhah and agadah -- our immediate concern and our larger ultimate concern.

If this is so, then how come secular man doesn't accept it? How come he has completely abandoned it? Doesn't secular man prove Cox right? Doesn't the fact that only functional questions are asked in the Secular City prove that ultimate questions are irrelevant, that halakhah is "in" and Agadah "out?" Not necessarily, because it is my contention that secular man who refuses to ask ultimate questions of himself is a religious "idiot." There is an aspect of his personality that has never developed, a dimension of his personality that was aborted in the womb. It is possible to have an entire generation which ignores certain dimensions of personality, even an entire civilization. Viktor Frankl (Austrian psychiatrist) developed existential analysis, logotherapy. He maintains that just as there is in man a will to sex (which Freud discussed in such great and convincing detail), a primary will to power (which Adler discussed), so is there a primary irrefutable dimension in man which is a will for meaning. Frankl endured Auschwitz and Theresienstadt ("model camp"), he saw life in its rawest possible sense. His book (Man's Search for Meaning) is one of the very finest I ever read. The major idea is that meaning in life is

a fundamental requirement. Hasidism's contention that man has an innate love for God -- if man doesn't experience it today, it doesn't vitiate the fact that man as such has no such capacity inherently. Man is homo sapiens -- man the wise, ~~man~~ the rational; so often man abandons this quality and quest, but this doesn't mean that it is not a natural part of his constitution. Freud and Fromm speak of whole civilizations, societies that are inane.

We recognize the boundaries of sanctification and profanity. But we say: It is the function of the kedusha to sanctify that which is profane. In life there are many areas that seem to have no relation with religion. It is the function of the religious individual to take both, the kedusha and the profanity, and with the kedusha ennoble and elevate every aspect of (the profane) life. Rav Kook - There is no real division between kodesh and chol (secular, profane). Chol is only the not-yet-holy. When it will become holy is your and my business, but there is no such thing as the absolute profane. ו' שלחן
הגדה בין קדש : in our הגדה we say: הגדה
הגדה בין אור חסד, בין ישאף חסד, בין יאף השב"ח השלם
הגדה ; we make four distinctions: Three are pertinent to
Havdalah. But with regard to הגדה, what is the relevance? There is a difference between הגדה in how they
conceive of the separation between the holy and the profane.

To the non-Jew, whether he be the old Christian or the hep-Christian, renaissance secularist or modern man, the key is kodesh and chol, an unbridgeable gap, chasm. Judaism doesn't accept this distinction. They are separate, there is a dichotomy -- but not infinitely and eternally. Because the ultimate task of the Jew is to make the profane sacred, to ennoble, elevate and raise it.

Judaism does not necessarily have to oppose secularism. When secularism puts the emphasis on the profane, on this world - we do too. But not only on this one. We live in a whole world, and we want to be whole men. Secularism, like Christianity, breaks up life, man and experience into separate realms. Jews see them as separate, but only as temporarily separated, so that the function of man is to unite them once again.

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קדוש-חול חול-קדוש חול-קדוש
על-על על-על על-על

All must be united. As Rav Kook, in his cryptic, symbolic way, said of the Kodesh Kodoshim -- purest spirituality is not the sacred, distilled and purified form of profanity, but contains within itself and is built on the element of chol and kodesh, as they unite.

This is the major contribution of the Jew in his confrontation with secularity and secularism. There are polarities, but not really separate, because Judaism sees "the whole man."