

"THE ILLOGIC OF LOGICAL CONCLUSIONS"

In a rather obscure Midrash (quoted in the introduction to "הכנה" in the "דף ירק" which contains an indirect reference to our Sidra, we learn of a most interesting controversy among the Tannaim who lived in the period of the Bar Kokhba rebellion.

בן זומא אומר מציון פסוק כולם והוא שמע  
ישלאלה אלוקינו ה' אחד. בן ננאס אומר מציון פסוק  
כולם יאהו והוא ואהבה לרעך כמוך. ר' שמעון  
בן פאזי אומר מציון פסוק ואת ישראל יאהו והוא  
את הכבש האחד ואת הצאן בקר.

Ben Zoma says: we find a comprehensive verse in the Torah, and that is, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." Ben Nannas says: we find a more comprehensive verse, and that is, "And thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Rabbi Simeon ben Pazzi says, we find a still more comprehensive verse, and that is, "And one lamb shall you offer up every morning."

These three opinions come to answer the question: which is the most significant element in Judaism? Ben Zoma, who offers the verse dealing with God's unity, holds that faith is the most significant element. Ben Nannas obviously believes that love is most important. And Ben Pazzi, who cites the verse concerning the daily sacrifice that had to be brought in the Temple, implies that law -- its regularity, its detail, its practicality -- is the central moment in Jewish life.

This Midrash is part of the whole tradition of מצוות or religious fundamentals that forms a significant branch of all Jewish literature. Most of us are acquainted with various specimens of this literature, as when the Mishnah in the Ethics of the Fathers informs us that the world rests on three pillars, תורה -- the study of Torah, the service of God, and the doing of good deeds; or, elsewhere in the same tractate, that the world rests על הצדקה והעשר והתעורר.

on justice and truth and peace. The Talmud (end מוסף) informs us that some of the prophets held there were eleven principles, others held there were six, some three, some two and some one -- as when Habakkuk proclaimed that יְהוָה צַדִּיק וְיֵשׁוּעַ, "the righteous liveth by his faith." So, in the medieval period, Maimonides set down thirteen principles, and, at the end of that era, Rabbi Joseph Albo held there were only three principles -- and Abarbanel taught that there were none, for everything in the Torah is equally a major principle...

Yet for all these differences of opinion, none of them ever divided the concepts from each other and advocated that any one element be accepted to the exclusion of others. They differed on emphasis -- whether one or two or thirteen -- but never implied the neglect of all else in the Torah.

The same is true of Jewish communities throughout the world. Each one had its own life-style (as we are wont to say today), and each highlighted different notes in the symphony of Judaism. Lithuanian Jewry was not the same as German Jewry which was not the same as Polish Jewry which was not the same as Yemenite Jewry which was not the same as Spanish Jewry. Each showed a different facet of the complex of values and ideals within Judaism. But none of them ever discarded any of the other aspects of Judaism.

This idea of inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness is evident in a key word in the passage I quoted: " most comprehensive verse. The three Sages argued as to whether faith or love or law is the most inclusive and comprehensive; none of them argued that their principle was opposed to the others and the only valid one.

This is evident, as well, from the conclusion to that passage:

אמר ה"ר של כהנאין אלא הנהיה בן בן וכו' וכו'  
 ומה בן ארבע אלף... וכו' וכו'

One of the Sages arose and proclaimed, the halakhah remains with Ben Pazzi (who pointed to the verse, "one lamb shall you offer up every morning," implying that law or halakhah was the most inclusive principle); because it is written (in our Sidra), "according to all that I show thee... and so shall ye do." "And so shall ye do," is the commandment to implement the law, to live Judaism in practice and in "doing" as an observant Jew. But this phrase follows the commandment, at the beginning of our Sidra, to give תעשה, offerings to the Tabernacle. And both the offerings and the Tabernacle, while their implementation was a matter of law, nevertheless included the

other two principles. The Tabernacle proclaimed the oneness of God, and the offering had to be given "לאלהים אחד," for the sake of God -- hence, the element of faith. The Tabernacle was the symbol of *שלום* or peace, and the offering was given by every one *לדבר* *לדבר* *לדבר*, who acted out of generosity and love; hence, the element of love. Thus, *לדבר* *לדבר*, the halakhic imperative, the commandment to do and to practice, included the elements of faith and love.

Today, Jewish society has so<sup>rely</sup> misread this and similar passages. It has undergone fragmentation and splintering, the separation and sundering of the focii, the unraveling of the fabric of Judaism so that we have violated its integrity. Jews have always differed in emphasis, as we have said, but never have been eclectic in principle, separating one fundamental from the other.

So it is that we today have nationalistic Jews who are only Israel-oriented; cultural Jews; ethnic Jews; philanthropic Jews; social justice Jews; Jews who have a generalized and vague religion; observant Jews... who ignore all the other elements.

We have Jews who misread Ben Zoma, and who know only the *לדבר* *לדבר*, the principle of faith. These are the Jews who think that they are good and wholesome Jews only because they read Buber, or because they write their own theological meanderings -- but there is no Shabbat and there is no tefillin. It is the Jew who says to me, "I pray in my own way" -- and I learn that "his own way" includes neither a prayerbook nor a synagogue, neither charity nor observance. It includes the Jew who blithely tells me, "God and I get along famously" -- as if in tribute to his own tolerance for a wayward Deity. All of this reminds me of the whimsical renegade who turned to God and said, "Almighty God, I am willing to do teshuvah and repent -- but only in an advisory capacity..."

So are there Jews who have misread Ben Nannas, and who know only the principle of love, *לדבר* *לדבר* *לדבר*. These are the Jews who give money to Federation, but are unconcerned as to how the funds are spent, and whether any Jewish purposes are served by them. Or, they are the young people who strike against this same Federation because it does not give enough to Jewish education; but rarely do they themselves come to a regular sheur and study the Torah. Several years ago, at the beginning of the protest movement against Soviet Jewry, I remember being struck by the absurdity of the paradox of many Jews high in the Jewish community gathering together to protest the Soviet government's denial of *לדבר* *לדבר* for Jews in Russia

for Passover, and the refusal to grant them prayerbooks and Bibles and open a yeshivah -- when these same people not only do not send their children to a yeshivah, not only do they never pray or open a Shema, but I doubt very much if they have been to a Seder and eaten matzah in the last ten or twenty years. Included in this category, too, are those Reform rabbis who continue to preside at mixed marriages, even to the point of advertising in the "yellow pages" of the telephone directories in their community. I have talked to some of these people, and I have heard their arguments. I am even willing to grant a measure of sincerity: they do so out of respect for the feelings of love that the couple has one for the other. All hail to romantic love! As if we are here dealing with the most momentous issue in all of existence, as if this kind of love must of necessity prevail over every other human and Jewish value. Or, they show even broader horizons: they preside at such mixed marriages because, they say, they do not want to hurt the family of the Jewish partner who will otherwise feel completely rejected. In other words, for the sake of ahava -- love, consideration -- they are willing to perpetuate an outright, scandalous fraud. This is what happens when one principle is sundered from all others in the complex of Jewish values.

We Orthodox Jews have, by and large, agreed with Ben Pazzi who pointed to the verse וְעָלַתְּ לְפָנָיו לֶחֶם אֶחָד, to offer up one lamb every morning, i.e., Jewish observance, law, the halakhic regimen. And I believe that we are right -- וְעָלַתְּ לְפָנָיו. George Foote Moore, the great Christian scholar of Second Commonwealth Judaism, once said, in an unpublished lecture, that "the difference between philosophy and religion is that religion does something about it." All the faith and all the love in the world remain insignificant until they are actualized in a regular routine, in the Halakhah, which transforms faith and love into reality.

But sometimes we Orthodox Jews too forget that principle of וְעָלַתְּ לְפָנָיו, that the Halakhah is important, and even most important, only when it includes the others. Sometimes we forget the verse from today's Sidra which the Midrash cited as its proof-text: וְעָלַתְּ לְפָנָיו, so shall ye do -- that the halakhic imperative must include the concepts implicit in the וְעָלַתְּ לְפָנָיו, those of faith and love. When the Jew observes the Halakhah in practice, but has no faith in the God who commanded the mitzvot, then he is merely indulging in a behavioristic charade and mechanistic ritual; he is at best being a Reconstructionist, who does things because they are "folkways," and not because they are commandments. And when he acts out of the Halakhah without love and gentleness and consideration, then too he is making a dreadful error. When



Orthodox Jews allow their rhetoric to get out of hand and are unrestrained in their denunciation of scholars, of *חכמים גדולים*, they are perpetuating a *פגמה*, a desecration of the Name of the One in Whom we must all have faith, and it is a violation of both the *מצוות* and *אמונה*. I must refer again to the controversy surrounding Chief Rabbi Goren, because his antagonists refuse to let the issue die. I have no complaint against great scholars who are involved in the issue in a scholarly way. Halakhic controversy has always been part of our tradition -- and it is a positive phenomenon, because it shows that in Halakhah we do not recognize any dogmatic pronouncements from a church-like hierarchy. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel is an administrative office, not a halakhic one. Halakhic controversy has always been a sign of health rather than of divisiveness. But all this is true provided that scholars respect each other, and that they do not allow politicians to become involved. There is, thus, legitimate question as to the validity of Rabbi Goren's halakhic decision -- although very few people have spoken of this issue -- and there is even greater question of the particular means he used to announce his decision. But when the discussion evinces an escalation of rhetoric, when Orthodox Jews become intolerant and vituperative, when they shout vile epithets at the Chief Rabbi, hurling invective from the Lower East Side of Manhattan across the ocean and into Jerusalem, then they execute the most scandalous crime of all: the separation and divorce of Halakhah from Torah; concentrating on sacred law to the exclusion of redeeming faith and the generosity of love. *אין זה נכון*. This must never be done.

There is, of course, a logical consistency in those who opt for one-sidedness. If all is faith (*אמונה*), then we may ignore all the rest when the rest is not supportive of the principle of faith. If all in Judaism is love (*אהבה*), then all else in Judaism must bow to it, and we must therefore scrap the laws of *אורח חיים* (sexual morality) and the laws of *אורח חיים* (legitimacy) and all that frustrates the expression of personal or communal *אהבה*, love. And if the major principle is Halakhah, then any consideration of personal happiness or national unity or the attractiveness of Judaism to those who stand outside the fold, even if such consideration are integrated by halakhic means, it must be looked upon with suspicion and fought. All this is true if we go to a logical extreme. However, doing so ignores the principle of "*כולל*," comprehensiveness, and the principle of *אורח חיים*.

Professor Robert Rosen, one of the world's few and leading theoretical biologists, has recently pointed out (in an issue The Center Magazine) that social organisms ought to imitate biological organisms, which are orchestrated, doing many different things at once, with nothing ever getting in the way

of anything else. The biological organism is exquisitely balanced. Nothing in biology gets carried to its logical extreme. Thus, it is important to pump blood effectively. But if we are going to carry this to its logical conclusion, we must then remove all resistance to the effective pumping of blood, and that means removing the capillary bed and the tissues, and so forth. We will thus have an effective cardiovascular system -- but we will have killed the entire organism in the process! Biology teaches us the principle of balance, of not carrying things to their logical conclusions; for that is the essence of biology.

This is precisely the point made in the Midrash when, in deciding in favor of the halakhic view ( *לפי מה שכתבנו* ), it added the proof from *וזהו כי* ("so shall ye do"). Only when the principle is " *וזהו כי*," comprehensive and inclusive, can we attain the idea of balance and orchestration of never going to a logical conclusion or exclusive extreme. It is a principle that comes to us from antiquity as well; the attack on one-sidedness was made by Plato in the Greek tradition, and Saadia in the Jewish tradition. And the Midrash gives it its stamp of approval, too.

Perhaps this will provide us with an answer to a question posed by a number of Jewish scholars, most prominent among them Rabbi Nathan Adler, the great saint and sage of Frankfurt. He points out that the measurements of the Ark ( *אֹרְכָהּ* ) in the Tabernacle are all in fractions, not integers. Thus, the dimensions of the Ark are  $2\frac{1}{2}$  cu. x  $1\frac{1}{2}$  x  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cu. Why not integers? Why only fractions?

Rabbi Nathan Adler gives his own answer -- it teaches us, he says, that the scholar who represents what is within the Ark must always feel that he is only half, he must be humble and broken-hearted. But I believe that what we have been saying provides an alternative answer. The fractions of the dimensions of Judaism are never complete, each by itself. The *אֲסוּדָה*, the fundamentals of our religion, such as faith and love and law, may be emphasized, but never may any one of them or any group of them be taken to logical extremes and made exclusive. For then we remain with a fractionated Judaism, not with anything complete. Every aspect of Judaism needs every other. It is a refreshing thought, and one that encourages us to self-restraint and respect.

It reminds us that only when we respect the wholeness of Torah can we be whole ourselves.

When we examine Judaism very closely, we may be deluded into mistaking analysis to reality. When we separate out the various strands of Judaism under the microscope of our attention, we may make the tragic error of pulling apart the whole fabric.

But when we look at all of Torah from the proper perspective, from the right kind of distance; when we raise up our eyes to the distant mountain on which it was first revealed, we can then see it in its original fullness and its primordial integrity.

כאלו הורה אלך בהר, כן יעשו.

"As He has shown thee on the mountain, so shall they do."