

"HARMONY WITHOUT HOMOGENIZATION"

One of the most seminal thinkers in the Jewish tradition about whom legend has weaved many beautiful stories, was the great גאון פראג, R. Loewe (MaHaRaL) of Prague. In his work "חידושי חזקוני"; the MaHaRaL discerns one central teaching that emerges from a number of the laws relating to Passover. That principle is, the unity of God.

Thus, MaHaRaL explains ^{that} the Passover sacrifice could not be offered on the altar with any of its parts missing or burnt separately, but הכל אחד, the entire animal had to be offered as one. Hence, the principle of an unfragmented unity. Similarly, the very idea of matzah suggests the same theme. It consists of nothing but flour and water, the simplest and most minimal ingredients for bread, without any additives such as yeast or sourdough. The commandment to eat matzah and to refrain from hametz is thus again suggestive of the unity theme. Finally, as we read in today's Torah recitation,

וְהָיָה עֲדָתְכֶם אֶחָד וְאֶחָד, we are not permitted to offer up the Passover sacrifice outside of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Every family had to come to the center of the nation and there, on the Temple Mount, offer the Paschal Lamb, slaughter it, and eat it. Here the principle of geographical unity is affirmed in the laws of Passover. Hence, from all these laws, we learn to rededicate ourselves to the concept of oneness.

But Passover suggests not only the oneness of God but also the oneness of man; not only preachment but prophecy; not only doctrine but vision of the future. Thus it is that for the Haftorah of this last day of Passover we read the immortal words of Isaiah who speaks of the redemption to come in the end of days when the Messiah will arrive. Isaiah's words are known to all mankind:

וְהָיָה לְרֹגֶל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד
וְהָיָה לְרֹגֶל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד

"And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid... and the cow and the bear shall feed together." In these metaphors does the prophet paint for all men the picture of cosmic unity which will prevail when Israel will be redeemed. It is a vision of human oneness, reflecting and proclaiming the oneness of God, that has fascinated civilization for some twenty-five centuries.

But, of course, I realize that this sounds like a bromide. Who is against unity? It is, without doubt, a cliché. But clichés often conceal truths which are no less meaningful because they are

well known and oft repeated.

It is a fact that unity is desperately needed in the State of Israel. Unless there is severe pressure from without, the inner fragmentation and atomization of Israeli society begins to show all too quickly, and national unity is dispelled in this explosive and centrifugal polarization of all segments of society. If only we were smart enough to use the occasion of external threats to bolster our inner unity and oneness!

The United States too could do with some unity. During the 1960's and early 1970's, this country underwent unprecedented social, political, and cultural convulsions. By some special grace from above, we weathered this social turbulence, and the country did not fly apart. But I feel that we are now facing a more severe crisis, one that will even more seriously threaten the fabric and unity and cohesiveness of this country. I refer, of course, to the Watergate scandal in which there has been uncovered a cess-pool of political and moral obscenities in the highest reaches of our government. The recourse to wire-tapping and bugging simply proves what a distinguished Supreme Court Justice once said of wiretapping in general: "it is a dirty business." The dirt has now flooded the entire country and demoralized and humiliated us. We can only pray for that same divine grace to steer our country through these muddied waters, and hope that our national cohesion will emerge shaken but not destroyed.

Unity, then, must be acknowledged as an obvious desideratum for individuals and nations alike. Nevertheless, permit me to offer one caveat, one modification. This too may be obvious, and yet bears repetition. Unity is worthy only when it does not imply uniformity; harmony is a good when it does not insist upon homogenization. We must strive for oneness without insisting upon sameness.

Curiously, while we have failed to attain unity, an important political scientist (Prof. Dan Elazar) has recently pointed out that we are inclining to the ideal of sameness. All contemporary life seems to be heading towards the eradication of distinctions and the abolition of differences between groups that had always been considered as separate. Thus, for instance, our society tends more and more to abrogate the distinctions between man and woman, so that now both clothing and hairstyle and social and domestic functions are such that the sexes are undistinguishable and sometimes interchangeable. Hence, that weird neologism, "unisex." The more liberal and sophisticated segments of society

prefer to minimize and abolish other distinctions as well, such as that between Jew and gentile. Thus, on the campus too many young Jews (usually the more liberal segment) feel that the separateness of religions and races and ethnic groups is atavistic, and that proper universalism requires assimilation and mixed marriage -- the easiest way to dissolving ethnic differences and religious distinctions. Our society today is favorably disposed to minimizing the differences between adults and children. Whereas once we used to pace the nature of experiences to which young people were habituated, until they became adults, we now seem in a rush to push our children prematurely into every kind of conceivable experience as soon as possible. Those parents who are benighted enough to want to postpone for their children certain experiences heretofore considered adult, are looked upon by others with a beady eye, as if they were criminally curtailing the civil rights of their children. And not only do children become more like adults, but adults become more like children -- in trying to emulate the mannerisms, the speech, and the clothing of the "younger set." Similarly, sophisticated and progressive doctrine holds that we must erase the differences between teacher and student, between achievers and non-achievers. Other such distinctions could be cited.

These sometimes yield good results, for not all distinctions are legitimate. Mostly, however, this homogenization is disastrous. Confusion of function between men and women has produced a moral calamity in this country and throughout the Western world. The merging of Jew and gentile has been an unmitigated ethnic disaster. Diluting the differences between adults and children has created a psychological problem for growing people. Refusing to accept the distinction between achievers and non-achievers has meant scrapping the "merit system" which has been one of the great contributions of American society. If we are not to recognize merit as being in some ways superior to non-merit, the real sufferer will be society itself, whom the meritorious segment is supposed to serve. As a teacher I can testify to the negative effects of the movement against the distinction between teachers and students. The revolutionary rhetoric of the 60's left deep marks even on quiet campuses. Today's college students do not even know that there was a time when there was required attendance at certain lectures. When we went to college, we accepted the fact that certain courses were required even if we were not interested in them. Today all this is rapidly being scrapped as an instance of "faculty paternalism." Students assert that they are the best judges of their own needs. Why should the student be told what to do by a

teacher who has merely spent most of his adult life in research and scholarship and observing the flowering of young mind, when this student has already read two books on the subject and thus exhausted all that is necessary for him to know about it? All is freedom, authority is gone. Prof. Sidney Hook has recently pointed out that this radical group and many of their sympathizers have misinterpreted Prof. John Dewey who asserted that all education should come through experience. They have misconstrued that to mean that all experiences are educational, and then that all experiences are equally educational. Hence, any one subject matter is as good as any other subject matter. But if candle-making is equivalent to chemistry, and astrology as good as astronomy, and flower-arranging as important as philosophy, then the curiosity and bent of the student is as authoritative and as determinative as the experience and intuition of the teacher. All is the same, all is alike, for teacher and student are no different from each other except that one is paying for services, and the other a mere employee.

But this is not the view of Judaism. Halakhah affirms that there are distinctions and differences in life which must be respected. There are difference between men and women: men are responsible for a certain number of commandments, women are released from certain positive commandments which are time-conditioned. Their functions must not be interchangeable. There are differences between Jew and gentile -- one is responsible for 613 commandments, the other only for seven. There are differences between teacher and student. A teacher is required to teach the student what the student wants, within the context of a prescribed curriculum, and the student is required to respect and revere his teacher, even to rising in his presence -- a law which often astounds some of our younger people today. There are clear differences between children and adults, even though children eventually become adults. Adults are required to care for children. Children are required to give reverence and respect to their parents, and reverence to all older people even if they are no wiser than they and even if they are more ignorant.

Not only the Halakhah which deals with the here-and-now, but even the Messianic vision affirms unity without uniformity, peace without identity, harmony without homogenization. Isaiah demands that the wolf dwell with the lamb-- not that they look alike and interbreed, just that the wolf be less rapacious and the lamb not be victimized. The leopard will lie down with the kid, but the leopard will retain its spots and the kid will remain gentle. The cow and the bear will feed, but the cow will not be cowed and the bear, if we may say so, will be less

unbearable. The differentiation of species will remain. The great vision of Isaiah is that of unity, not identity.

The concept of democracy and equality and egalitarianism is certainly valid, provided that the equality does not end in sameness, and that our avoidance of discrimination does not imply the end of distinction.

I repeat: not all distinctions should be preserved. The gap between rich and poor must be narrowed and even eliminated. That between sick and healthy, the haves and the have-nots, the illegitimately advantaged and the unnecessarily disadvantaged -- all these differences ought to be narrowed. The good liberal doctrine which seeks to maximize opportunity for the greatest number of people may, for the most part, be accepted as good Jewish doctrine. There is nothing in the Torah which can support the economic discrimination against women, the exploitation of woman's labor in the market or in professions. There is nothing in the Torah that can possibly support the institutional tyranny of the university before the recent student rebellion -- and indeed they often were tyrannical, heartless, inhumane, depersonalized.

Nevertheless, nature, psychology, civilization, tradition, revelation do acknowledge certain separate classes, genders, and groups; and they assign to each different functions. Not always does the difference in function imply a difference in value; indeed, often we may assert positively that value remains the same, such as the distinction between man and woman which is only in function and not in value, or that between child and adults. But differences there certainly are!

The halakhic tendency is that of unity with ^{אברהם} distinction. The Halakhah recommends intelligent and fair and just differentiation. If a modern world prefers to ignore such ^{אברהם}, we have no choice but to remain exceptions to the general trend. Nevertheless, it is now possible to predict that, in this sense, the world will soon come to its senses, and not submit to this continuing extravagance. The campus is beginning to regain its sanity and serenity, and even already beginning to undo its passivity. The option of single-sex educational institutions, especially women's colleges, is now once again being reasserted. In other ways too, one feels that a reaction will set in and common sense may again prevail.

To distinguish, to choose, to differentiate -- all this requires wisdom and insight, acumen and intuition. Isaiah's description of Messiah refers to him as being endowed with

חכמה ודעת, the spirit of wisdom and understanding and knowledge.

The Talmud, too, associates wisdom with differentiation and distinction. Thus, it tells us that the recitation in the liturgy of the שמע ישראל, the distinction between the sacred and the profane (הקדוש והחול) which we recite on Saturday nights and on festival nights, must be recited in the fourth blessing of the Amidah, the one which we thank God חנן ורחמן, for gracing us with wisdom. The reason for this: אין חכמה ואין דעת, if there is no knowledge and wisdom, wherefrom the ability to distinguish and discern?!

So that it takes wisdom and understanding to strive for unity and yet avoid uniformity, to achieve harmony without falling into homogenization. Perhaps this is what R. Nachman of Bratzlav meant when he said: "when the Messiah comes, nothing will change, except that people will be ashamed of their foolishness" ...

It is appropriate to conclude, especially before Yizkor, by asserting that the best instance of this vision of pluralistic unity which we have described is achieved within the confines of the family. The family is a laboratory of such rational unity. It is there that we achieve the feeling of oneness, where we find love and security and affection. If not in the family, where else can one attain these most necessary ingredients for a human existence? Perhaps the memory of parents and grandparents who so desired that their families continue whole should prevail upon those of us whose families are rent by bitterness and divisiveness and enmity, to look into their own souls and rediscover the necessity and beauty of unity. Each person, each faction, must be willing to give in order to achieve the oneness of the family as a whole so as to make home a place in which at least the possibility of love and the probability of security will prevail.

But if the family offers unity, never must it insist upon absolute uniformity and homogeneity. Parents must never attempt to make their children a carbon copy of each other, or even of themselves. Intelligent parents will seek to unify their family by allowing each member to develop in his or her own image and fulfill his or her own potentials. Neither must children demand of their parents that they keep up with the younger generation. Parents have formed their own outlook, developed their own

style of living and speaking and reacting, and children must not imagine that because they are later in history, that therefore they are more sophisticated and wiser, and that they can demand of their parents to be "up" on everything that is now considered proper and fashionable.

In the family, above all else, we find a perfect reflection of what Judaism's conception of harmony and unity without sameness can be -- and the most likely place for us to experiment in producing a miniature Jewish society.