

NORMAN LAMM  
OCTOBER 29, 1961

THE JEWISH CENTER  
ADULT ED. PROGRAM

Fall Supper Lecture Series

"YEHUDAH HALEVI"

2. THE "KUZARI": ITS PHILOSOPHY

1. BACKGROUND: TO UNDERSTAND SIGNIFICANCE OF YHL, MUST CONSIDER POSITION OF JUDAISM IN MID-ELEVENTH CENTURY . THREE-PRONGED ATTACK AGAINST IT:

A) FROM WITHOUT: MOSLEM THEOLOGIAN VS. JEWISH INTERPRETATION OF BIBLE

B) FROM WITHIN: THE KARAITES

C) MOST IMPORTANT: FROM WITHIN: PHILOSOPHIZING IN NEO-PLATONIAN, ARISTOTELIAN STYLE

YHL TRIED TO FELL ALL THREE IN ONE STROKE. CRITICIZED ISLAM (AS WELL AS CHRISTIANITY); DEFENDED RABBINITE VS. KARAITES; ATTACKED BOTH THE CONTENT OF THE FASHIONABLE PHILOSOPHIES & (MORE SIGNIFICANTLY) TRIED TO DEMOLISH WHOLE STRUCTURE OF EXAGGERATED METAPHYSICAL SPECULATION (esp. as represented by Ibn Sina-Avicenna)

WE SHALL DIVIDE OUR PRESENTATION OF YHL'S THOUGHT INTO TWO: TONIGHT - HIS CRITIQUE OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE DEIFICATION OF REASON; NEXT LECTURE - HIS POSITIVE, AFFIRMATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO JEWISH THOUGHT.

2. LITERARY FORM: THE KUZARI: WRITTEN IN ARABIC - CREATED SENSATION - TRANSLATED TO HEBREW WITHIN 30 YEARS, SOON A SECOND HEBREW TRANSL. (TELL OF HARTWIG HIRSCHFELD ENGLISH TRANSL.) CALLED "AL KHAZARI".

1913: This week's press; report comp. volume by Prof. Lammiman W. in Khazari  
\*\*\*OBSCURE ORIGIN OF WARRIOR-KINGDOM OF KHAZARS... KING CALLED "KHAGAN"... MOSTLY PAGAN, BUT COMPLETE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR ALL (INCL. FEW JEWS)... ROYAL HOUSE AT ONE TIME, PERHAPS 400 YEARS BEFORE YHL, CONVERTED TO JUDAISM... HASDAI IBN SHAPRUT (10th CENTURY) AND HIS LETTER TO JOSEPH, KHAGAN OF KHAZARS.... JOSEPH'S REPLY EXTANT, AUTHENTIC... AN ASIAN PEOPLE (RELATED TO TURKS, MONGOLS?) KINGDOM IN CRIMEA & ENVIRONS...

TELLS HASDAI OF KING BULAN - DREAM, G-D... PEOPLE WILLING TO BE CONVERTED... NEIGHBORING RULERS SEND GIFTS, ALSO PEOPLE TO CLAIM THEIR FAITH AS TRUE... ASKS FOR JEWISH SAGE... BULAN ASKS CHRISTIAN & MOSLEM (SEPARATELY) WHICH IS SUPERIOR, THE OTHER OR JUDAISM; EACH PREFERS JUDAISM TO THAT OF OTHER. KING CHOSE JUDAISM, CIRCUMCISED HOUSEHOLD.



SENT FOR JEWISH SAGE, LEARNED TORAH, TAUGHT IT TO PEOPLE. DESCENDANT, KING OBADIAH, ARRANGES FOR ALL KINGDOM TO LEARN JUDAISM. (ALL ROYAL LINE NOW ADOPTS BIBLICAL NAMES). LEARN MISHNAH & TALMUD TOO. SOON HOWEVER, PRINCE OF KIEV (RUSSIANS) INVADE, OTHERS, EMPIRE BREAKS UP. LONG TIME CRIMEA CALLED "KHAZARIA". DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM.

\*\*\*YHL USED THIS HISTORIC INCIDENT AS A LITERARY DEVICE, PRESENTING HIS THOUGHTS IN THE FORM OF A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE "KUZARI" (I.E. KING BULAN) AND CHRISTIAN, MOSLEM, PHILOSOPHER, AND \* MOSTLY - THE "CHAVAR" OR RABBI. HIS POETIC PROWESS HELPED DEVELOP THIS TO A FINE LITERARY TECHNIQUE. HERDER PRAISED IT AS SUPERIOR EVEN TO DIALOGUES OF PLATO.

\*\*\* BOOK DIVIDED INTO 5 "MAAMARIM" OR PARTS

~~\*\*\*THESE ARE THE MAIN THEMES OF THE BOOK\*\*\*~~

3. THE RATIONALIST TRADITION IN JUDAISM: FROM SAADIA (10th CENTURY) TO APEX IN MAIMONIDES ~ 50 YEARS AFTER YHL) AND AFTERWARDS. IDENTIFICATION REASON & RELIGION, TORAH & SCIENCE.....

YHL: COMPLETELY OPPOSED. REASON OR SPECULATION IS A LIMITED TOOL. MAJOR EMPHASIS: EXPERIENCE.

*G-d is not any facts accessible to human Reason; they are living entities to be lived, loved, experienced, and known in a very special way accessible to a particular people as result of historical experience*

\*\*\*READ ... AUX.TEXT p. 5 to mid-p.6

4. YHL's skepticism of Philosophy - anti-metaphysics - origin: AL GHAZALI ("On Destruction of Philosophy") ... highly developed by YHL.

5. CRITICISM OF PHILO. IN GENERAL: Rational certainty - only mathematics or logic.... NOT in metaphysics (proof: so many differing schools)

FURTHER: Philo. misunderstands nature Religion when it asserts human reason can find way to G-d unaided (i.e. by special revelation).

Nature of religion: depends on G-d alone. Only He can show man how to reach for Him. When Philosophy tries to create its own religion (i.e. achieve communion with G-d) it is only an illusion. RELIGION EMANATES FROM G-D, NOT FROM MAN.

6. CRITIQUE OF THE "ACTIVE INTELLECT".

- "Rationalism" does not mean simply using your head - every non-rationalist uses it, at least as well as his rationalist friend. Means that world, experience, G-d are all accessible to the intellect working by itself.

- One of highest and most typical expressions of Rationalism Middle Ages: THE ACTIVE INTELLECT. (Say: must necessarily simplify... is one example of YHL criticism... if don't follow - & I think you can - don't give up...)

- THE ACTIVE INTELLECT (as Aristotle taught it, Medieval Aristotelians interpreted it & Aristotelian theologians applied it) is a kind of UNIVERSAL INTELLECT, A COSMIC MIND OR SPIRIT. Unlike individual thoughts ("sekhel ha-nikneh", Passive Intellect) which are constantly changing, there is one central, real, active, eternal, changeless mind - & it is a separate entity in itself. This is the SEKHEL HA-POEL - ACTIVE INTELLECT. *It is an emanation from the part of the divine world*

- This objective, impersonal mind is the source of all thought that occurs to individuals



who think. It sort of jumps from body to body without itself being corporeal. When you think a high, pure thought, you are in communion with the Active Intellect.

-from this certain religious consequences.

-for: A.I. regarded as an emanation from, part of character of G-d.

-thus: through speculation (use of intellect insustained way) I commune with A.I., which means I commune with G-d. If this communion is persistent, then I become immortal, for my body may die but my thought - connected with the A.I. - cannot die, since the A.I. as part of G-d is immortal, eternal. Reason is thus the way to immortality.

-Similarly: prophecy is a matter of the prophet being in communion with the A.I. to whom the future is as accessible as past and present. Primary quality of prophet is thus intellectual.

-Further: Since A.I. is an emanation from G-d, and since every intelligent person can, by use of mind, commune with A.I., therefore man can find way to G-d DIRECTLY, by reason alone, without mediation of good deeds, prayer, etc.

-What is significance of this rationalist idea of A.I.? Basically: a premium on intellect, mind, reason. Is responsible for religion, immortality, prophecy. ...

-Maimonides, Ralbag, other Jewish rationalist Aristotelians subscribed to this in one form or another.

## 7. YHL ON THE A.I.

-YHL agreed can have unmediated communion between Man and G-d - but not thru Reason alone, though it should be there too. Need Mitzvot, Tefillah. Proved his point DIRECTLY and INDIRECTLY.

\*DIRECTLY: (empirical): have never seen or heard of one case where a philosopher (highest example rational man) achieved PROPHECY by virtue of CONTEMPLATION. Evidently communion, prophecy ("DEVEKUT") is outside realm philosophy, intellect

\*INDIRECTLY:

-if way to G-d is through A.I. (pure thought divested of behavior) then it's not ACT that counts but INTENTION ("kavvanah").

-then why, if 2 peoples, each intending serve G-d (good intention), murder each other in name of same G-d - as with Christians vs Moslems? If each in touch with A.I., should be close, friendly...

-Why didn't Aristotle know all of Plato's inner thoughts, since each in intense communion with same A.I. (which is undifferentiated, simple, single)?

-why is my SOUL different from yours, since both are part of A.I.? (i.e. - how do you account for individuation of mind, personality)?

-finally, if A.I. is separate, objective ("nivdal"), then why doesn't the philosopher think great and infallible thoughts even when asleep or drunk?

—these arguments later repeated to great extent by Thomas Aquinas

-YHL thus DENIES EXISTENCE OF AN A.I. Believes: while REASON is a valid human tool, it is not omnipotent, it is circumscribed in power (SHOW HOW MOD, SCIENCE AGREES)

-so: YHL showed shallowness of dominant rationalism

-YHL adds that of equal importance to Intellect, Reason, is: INTUITION (chush ha-ruchani, chush ha-nistar, or ayin ha-nisteret).

(can see how YHL the poet influence

YHL the thinker - a ~~poet~~ romantic)

[strongly influence vote for mapai, elect Ben Gurion - on 10th day stopped. Reason: opened their eyes]

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## 8. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PHILO. AND RELIGION

- have seen how YHL attacks a central thesis of the rationalists - the A.I.
- have mentioned that YHL objected to all those eminent Jewish thinkers who identified Torah and Wisdom, Religion and Philosophy, Judaism and Reason.
- from Saadia on, Jewish rationalists had declared Judaism to be metaphysics... maintaining that, however, since our reason sometimes fails us (our fault, not reason's), therefore when in doubt rely on Revelation.

-YHL raised Religion above Reason, denied identity. Religion incl. Intuition, Experience, Revelation.  
 -His revolutionary slogan (repeated centuries later by Pascal without giving YHL credit):  
 "THE G-D OF ARISTOTLE IS NOT THE G-D OF ABRAHAM". *Aristotle tried to "prove" G-d's existence. was known & proved from historical experience & tradition*

*om it is 540505*  
 -Two aspects of G-d - Essence and Relation (Essence- existence, unity, incorporeality...  
 Relation- creation, prophecy, providence...) - *action or* - *accounted by epik - univ. essential, 3-nat'l, personal*

-PHILOSOPHY (REASON) CAN LEAD ONLY TO FIRST, NOT SECOND.

-G-D OF ARISTOTLE: absolute, one, ~~static~~ incorporeal. BUT: static, introverted, incapable of relationships with men - a DEISM

-G-D OF ABRAHAM: real, relational, PERSONALITY, involved in history, concerned men, revelation as well as creation, Creator in freedom, choosing one people....

-SO: G-d of Philosophers - limited as He is -- can be known only through Reason, which is not shared by all equally, which is halting and uncertain. Ultimately, G-d of Philosophy is not real, only an IDEA, Approach philosopher is thus thru cognition: cold and impersonal

-G-d of Torah, of Abraham: can be known experientially and empirically (since He's involved in our experience) & thru personal life (i.e. revelation-Sinai)

-Approach of Jew is thus not with ultimate aim of knowledge (as with Maimonides) but through COMMUNION (YHL: big difference between DAAT & DEVEKUT)

## 9. YET: THERE IS A ~~COMMON~~ COMMON GROUND

-despite arguments vs. overstating case for Reason, is not opposed to it, no rejection  
 -"NOTHING IN TORAH OFFENDS REASON"

-thus equally opposed to TERTULLIAN - "I believe because it is absurd") or current Neo-Orthodox Protestant Existentialism which is ANTI-rationalistic)

-YHL: function of Philosophy: to give systematic expression to content of Revelation  
 -NEITHER Reason nor Revelation can grasp ESSENCE of G-d. But both can probe for deeper understanding of ACTIONAL ATTRIBUTES, Philosophy concentrating on static-natural aspect, Revelation - on dynamic-supernatural)

— so far, mostly negative aspect YHL thought, his criticism of prevailing thinking. Next lecture, p.G. — his positive contributions.

*om it*  
 maybe include w. part of poem concerning greek wisdom:

*פירוש פסוקי חזקוני*  
 - Let not the wisdom of the Greeks beguile thee, it has no fruit only flowers  
 - Hark how the words of her wise are confused, built on a vain, unstable base  
 - why then should I seek me out crooked ways  
 And forsake the mother of paths?

CRIT - TIPS - EXACTLY INE HADRA