

SEGREGATIONISM VS. INCLUSIVEISM

The polemic between Center and Right on the proper approach to the non-Orthodox community must be viewed in a broader historical prospective.

In normative Jewish society, which obtained from the Talmudic Age through the Middle Ages and until the Emancipation, heterodox ideas and conduct were viewed as aberrant behavior, and treated as such. Even if the bearers of such unorthodox views were organized into a community, they were treated as individuals rather than as a collectivity. Thus, no credibility was given to the Karaites as an organized religious grouping. Instead, Karaites were treated as individuals who had strayed from the straight and narrow path of the Torah, and one took either a hard-line rejectionist approach to them or, as was the case with Maimonides, a more accommodating and accepting approach. In either case, this was an attitude towards Karaites, not to Karaism. It was always understood that such heterodox groups represented deviations from the norm, and that eventually they would disappear by being reabsorbed in the historic flow of main stream Torah Judaism. Hence, heresy as a community phenomenon was simply not considered, and reduced to a simple

collection of individual heretics who had no historical staying power.

All this was unquestionably true as long as the overwhelming majority of Jews identified with the broad outlines of the Torah tradition. Individual aberrations could then be dismissed as transient phenomena in the history of the faith. All this changed with the Emancipation and the Enlightenment. For more than two centuries now, various forms of heterodox thought and behavior have attracted a great majority of Jews everywhere. Secularism has proved one of the most powerful foes Torah has ever encountered, and it has insinuated itself into the very bloodstream and sinews of the body of Judaism. The quiet give-and-take between Judaism and the environing cultures of the Jewish people, that understated the very real dialogue between Torah and the "wisdom of the nations," which was such a powerful and creative dialectic as long as it was not exposed, was not stifled because of the progressive numerical weakness of those who identified with the Torah tradition and the corresponding triumphalism of those who espoused various forms of assimilation.

For over two centuries this condition has prevailed, and the great question is: Can one continue to view Jewish heterodoxy as a historic aberration and epiphenomenon, or does it assume a new shape and hence demand a different

approach?

The rejectionist camp within contemporary Orthodoxy continues to treat current non-Orthodoxy -- whether of the secular or religious variety -- as Jews historically treated heterodox individuals and movements in the past. The difference of quantity does not translate into difference in quality. If a great majority of the Jewish people today no longer observes Torah or is committed to it, so much the worse for them: We, the "saving remnant," will hold aloft the torch of faith long after the others have receded into the darkness of historical obscurity. Our numerical disadvantage is a temporary phenomenon, and the demographic strength and cultural power of all other Jews will prove evanescent.

The integrationist view does not accept that one can make such an easy transfer from an approach that worked when "Orthodox" Jews were in the overwhelming majority to one in which we constitute perhaps ten percent or less of world Jewry. From an ideological point of view, all Orthodox Jews agree in viewing departures from Torah life as historic eccentricities, as deviations from the norm. Truth does not bow to numbers, norms are unimpressed by size. But from the point of view of constituting a people, integrationist Orthodox Jews recognize that the situation that prevailed from Talmudic days onwards has now suffered a wrenching



displacement. We are now the minority, and it makes no sense to regard the majority of Jews as deviants and aberrants. (In the famous story told by the Bratzlaver, the king and his ministers know that the entire country has been poisoned and is going mad. What do they do? They too eat up of the poison grain which causes madness, but they place a sign on each other's forehead so that even though they too will be made, at least they will know that they are mad -- unlike the others...)

In other words, integrationists know that secularism and heterodoxy have settled in for the long haul, and they cannot be wished away. Old reactions must give way to new reactions -- or, perhaps, to ancient ones. For the last two centuries are, in the sense of a balance between Torah and paganism, a contemporary restatement of the situation that prevailed in prophetic days, when paganism prevailed, and the followers of the one G-d and the Law of Moses were a despised minority.

What we must now investigate is how, for instance, Elijah reacted in his situation, and make such reactions the stuff from which we must investigate to learn how to fashion a reaction, as a minority, in the contemporary Jewish world.