YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT (VBM)

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IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE KUZARI:

AN INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

by Prof. Shalom Rosenberg

Lecture #15d: Global Brotherhood

 The French Revolution symbolized the advent of the modern era. It upheld the desire to achieve three great ideals: liberty, equality and brotherhood fraternity. At a later stage we will discuss the conflict between these different ideals, such as the tension between freedom liberty and equality. However, here I would like to turn our attention to another aspect of the problem. Since the French Revolution we have developed a growing awareness that human societies are merely human, or in other words, that they are imperfect. Freedom does exists. However, it must be noted that freedom appears on the backdrop of tremendous pressures. On the other hand, equality is limited. As George Orwell put it, all are equal, but some are more equal than others. There are those who are less equal, the weak and the elderly, the sick and the retarded. We must give our hand and help to these groups, for there is no such thing as total freedom or absolute equality.

 The third ideal remains; it the epitome of biblical ideals: fraternity, or brotherhood. Even if at times doubts arise, brotherhood must continually be stressed, when equality and freedom have been curtailed or eliminated. The brotherhood which I extol does not prescribe any blurring of the differences; rather, it instructs us: "Behold we all have one father, behold One God created us." (Malakhi 2:10).

 For the relativist, who does not believe that truth exists, tolerance comes easy. "To each his own" is his motto. Yet, what is the meaning of tolerance for a math teacher who knows that a certain student is wrong? In this case, tolerance changes from a philosophic concept to a moral one.

 We are not relativists. We will never compromise even minimally on the truth of our position. Yet, we wish to exemplify brotherhood in humanity, even outside the borders of our religious affiliation. We must not be blind to the erroneous elements in other religions and recognize that they are primitive mistakes, that are probably the results of blindness, lack of sensitivity or stubbornness. Despite all this, however, these religions are not representatives of Satan. We pray for their repentance. Only then will the verse in Zekharia (14:9) be truly fulfilled (Zechariah 14, 9): "On that day God will be one and his name will be One." The religions that were born of Judaism worship one God, but they do not recognize His name.

 Our unique historical situation as a Jewish people who have returned to their homeland, is indeed the dawn of hope for a new era. History testifies in countless examples to the difficult lives of the Rishonim (early medieval Jewish commentators legal authorities). They dwelt among the Gentiles and their foreign religions. Their position was of necessity one of struggle and constant contention. Therefore, it became imperative that their creative writings contain religious polemics. This blend of religious writings and religious debate finds ample expression in the Rambam's works. How is it possible to speak of tolerance when your brothers are persecuted because of their faithful adherence to the religion of their forefathers? And even without the effects of persecution, Jewish education in the Diaspora meant, first and foremost, education for self -defense; defense against the religious and cultural pressure from without. And this resistance would have been impossible without contention and struggle.

 Survival as Jews in exile would have been impossible without polemics and apologetics. When living amongst the gGentiles, even in a ghetto, one must first of all explain to one's children the difference between us and them, and give one's his offspring emotional and intellectual provisions so that they may rise to the challenge. Jewish independence means the existence of a political basis which serves as the key to spiritual development without continual conflict, and without the need for polemics as our central weapon. Polemics and emotional aggressiveness are part of the price that Jewish thought was obliged to pay for life in the Diaspora. For us, the modern -day students of the Rambam and Rihal, who live during the establishment of the state of Israel, a new possibility exists: that of developing our faith free of conflict.

"And it will come to pass in the end of days..."

 I would like to end this unit with the story of Aime Paliere, a Gentile who converted to Judaism.

 In his autobiography, "The Hidden Temple," Paliere relates his life story. His encounter with the Jewish faith seemed almost destined from Above. His first meeting with Judaism took place when he was yet a child, who loved to look at his parents' giant album of Dore's biblical pictures. His second meeting with Jews was when, while strolling with a friend one day, he chanced upon a synagogue. He entered precisely at the time of the Ne'ila prayer on Yom Kippur. He saw the Jews at prayer and felt that they were all priests. He also instinctively felt that they longingly awaited something: forgiveness and redemption. At the time Paliere was studying for the priesthood, but slowly and after many adventures, he recognized the Judaism that appeared to him as part of the Christian heritage, and was drawn to it. He wished to convert, but when he turned to Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Amozaegh, the Rabbi of Livorno, Italy, Rabbi Ben-Amozaegh explained that righteous Gentiles will also merit the world to come, and he entrusted Paliere with a different task: the renewal of the doctrine of the children of Noah. He felt that only an innovation such as this could generate new religious life in the future. Aime Paliere indeed became a 'child of Noah.'

The Dilemma

 A conference of 'Noahides 'children of Noah recently took place in the United States. Various Orthodox Jewish groups consider this the key to the betterment of the world. To be a child of Noah, then, means to accept the concept of divine revelation, the centrality of the Bible and of Jewish thought, without accepting the yoke of the commandments. This brings us to one of the dilemmas of modern Jewish thought, a dilemma which has not been resolved. How will the redemption that we have placed our faith in actually come about? Will redemption occur through the agency of the Mmonotheistic religions which stemmed from Judaism, or rather through their disappearance?

 Rihal witnessed the singular works of Christianity and Islam, and he developed an innovative approach, which was later accepted by the Rambam. In Rihal's view, both Christianity and Islam are history's tools to pave the way for the process of redemption; their reign constitutes a stage which must precede the victory of the Torah and Jewish messianism:

"Every religion that came after [Judaism]...alters, in truth, to be like it. Although on the surface they seem to appear to be distant from it, these religions are really only a preparation and introduction for the awaited messiah, who is the fruit, and in the end of days when they defer to him, they will be his fruit. And the tree will be wholly one. Then they will revere the root that they previously scorned..."(4:23, 178).

 Rihal explains this idea with the parable of the seed. The Jewish Nation in exile appears to be a seed rotting in the soil. And yet, this seed is destined to change the face of the earth. Rihal develops this parable in a radical manner:

"This grain falls into the ground and there it changes and seemingly becomes soil, water and mire. And to one who looks at it there is no evidence of what previously was the seed. However, after a time it turns out that this very grain will alter the dirt and water to adopt [the seed's] nature, and [the seed] will change them stage by stage until the elements are rarefied and it will make them similar to itself, and then it will bring forth husks, leaves and more. Until this seed will become cleansed and worthy of having the divine essence reside within it, and [become] the likeness of the first seed. Then it will become a tree which bears fruit of the type which dispensed the seed." (Ibid.)

 It is interesting to note that here Rihal apparently concludes that in the end of days the divine essence will reside within all who will become a "fruit -bearing tree;"; in other words, all of humanity.

 This is one position. However, another approach is conceivable as well. This second position claims that although the Christianity and Islam brought the tidings of monotheism and the Bible to all four corners of the earth, the ultimate redemption of the world will take place without them. For the Anti-Semitism that they perpetuated is the proof that they abused the duty entrusted to them. This was evidently the opinion of Rav Kook. He did not believe in the possibility of a Christian revival returning Christian faithful to Judaism; he felt that the redemption and return would stem from a source outside of Christianity. Indeed, he considered it possible that the redemption was more likely to arise from the nations who never accepted what is termed the 'Judeo-Christian tradition.'

 We present these two positions without attempting to choose between them. In any case, this debate does not affect the prevailing fundamental idea that if Israel's redemption is the initial stage of the process, the second stage involves the return of all the nations of the world to the age old truths of Judaism. Rabbi Nachman of Breslav expressed this beautifully in his explanation of the fact that Moses was buried outside the borders of the land of Israel. Rabbi Nachman explains that it is because he is waiting for the arrival of all the nations of the world. Rabbi Nachman writes: (Likutei Moharan 17:6):

"And this is the meaning of [the phrase in the 'Aleinu' prayer,] ''to correct the world with the kingdom of Sha-dai (God; literally, "has enough") and all flesh will call your name,' this is the element of the concept of return, where the good returns to its place... for Sha-dai is the category of one who has enough in his Godliness for every creature and does not desire any other form of worship, 'to turn towards You all the evil ones of the earth' [refers to]... the category of the converts, 'all the inhabitants of the earth will recognize and perceive [God's dominion].'"

(This lecture was translated by Gila Weinberg.)

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