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OF NORTH AMERICA שלום הרטמן

The Tribes of Israel Part II: Ultra-Orthodox and Religious Zionists

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I. The Ultra-Orthodox Tribe

1. Hatam Sofer, Responsa

How is it that words which emanated out of the mouths of the knowledgeable and wise, whose understanding is as wide as the opening of the universe and which were sifted and refined again and again over hundreds of years by thousands of Rabbis and became permanent fixtures amongst the people for close to two thousand years, with no one even contemplating and raising a word or moving a finger in objection, there then rise these “little foxes,” the darkness of exile, to breach their (the Rabbis) wall and destroy their fence and alter the form of their prayers and blessings. (*Likutei She-eilot ve-Teshuvot* 84)

Why should we rise and change a custom of our ancient fathers? (*Hoshen Mishpat* 192)

How could they permit in public, in their houses of worship, that which our fathers and father’s fathers deemed forbidden. (*Likutei She-eilot ve-Teshuvot* 84)

We do not have the authority to innovate from our hearts a mitzvah that our predecessors did not envision. (*Likutei She-eilot ve-Teshuvot* 84)

Anyone who changes is inferior (lit. his hand is on the bottom) and anyone who holds on to the words of the Rabbis and the custom of his fathers is superior (lit. his hand is on the top). (*Likutei She-eilot ve-Teshuvot* 84)

Heaven forbid changing from that which was. (*Likutei She-eilot ve-Teshuvot* 84)

May a thousand of these (Reformers) be destroyed and let not a single dot of the customs of Israel be moved from its place. (*Likutei She-eilot ve-Teshuvot* 85)

If it were permitted to translate the Torah into other languages (during the reading of the Torah in the services), the men of the Great Synod would have done it. If they refrained from doing it, it follows that for us (to do so) is also forbidden. (*Likutei She-eilot ve-Teshuvot* 86)

In all these matters, since our fathers and father’s fathers did not act as if it was allowed, it constitutes a forbidden custom. (*Likutei She-eilot ve-Teshuvot* 86)

The rule is that whatever is new, is forbidden by the Torah (*hadash asur min hatorah*). (*Orekh Haim* 28)

2. Hatam Sofer, Ethical Will

Be careful not to change your Jewish name, language, and dress, heaven forbid, and the sign is [the verse] “and Jacob armed safe/whole (*ShaLem*)” (Genesis, 33:18) . . . You shall not

say that the times have changed, for we have an *Ancient* Father, may His name be Blessed, Who has not changed and will not change. And [thus] no evil shall befall you.

3. Rabbi Zadok HaCohen Rabinowitz, "The Zionists Are Not Our Savors," Open Letter

A voice was heard from on high, a voice of lamentation from the imperial city of Vienna in a matter relating to all of Israel. It concerns the sect that has arisen recently under the name of Zionists. They drag iniquity by cords of vanity and lift up their souls to folly, hoping that in the course of time the sons of Israel will be subdued under their government and subordinated to transgressors. For this my heart grieves exceedingly.

For our many sins, the saying "The face of the generation is as the face of a dog" has been fulfilled among us. We see that their desire to force the whole world to the side of sin, Heaven forbid, is great. Even if in our age the mob will not thank us for uttering words of truth and reproof, I will nevertheless fulfill the commandment "Thou shalt surely reprove" and join in the protest against the Zionists.

For surely this is not a time to hold one's peace. Heaven forbid that one should show respect for persons in this matter. The danger to the community posed by those who are destructive and who dispute with the *Shekhinah* [the Divine Presence] is far too great for that. Concerning them the verse says: "He who observes the wind will not sow and he who beholdeth the clouds will not reap." The Zionists sow wheat and reap thorns and even though the work of Satan should prosper, the end will be, Heaven forbid, what it will be. The House of Israel, the holy and desolate, appears in this hour like a ship sailing without oars in a tempest in the heart of the sea, its helmsmen stricken with blindness.

We surely know that if we were believers and truly trusted in the salvation of the Lord and observers of the commandments of God, we would even today be dwelling in our holy land. For it is known that the land of Israel, by its very nature and the power of its holiness, was created for Israel alone.

It is said in the Midrash that the Holy One, blessed be He, created the land of Israel only for Israel; but it is also known that because of the power of its holiness the land rejects transgressors in the same way that the stomach vomits forth that which is incompatible with its nature. This matter is not subject to dispute. Yet now there have arisen fools and malicious conspirers whose deeds are born of a bitter poison. They proclaim that the life of Israel is in jeopardy and that they, the Zionists, will hasten salvation by founding a state.

They ask why we have been in exile for so long. But this question has already been asked of the sages and the prophets, and has been explained by the Holy One, blessed by He: "Why did the land perish? Because they abandoned My law which I put before them." It has already been made clear that the Zionists reject all the commandments and cleave to every manner of abomination. . .

* *Open Letter, c. 1900, The Transformation: The Case of the Neturei Karta, ed. I. Domb (London: Hamadfis, 1958), pp. 192-96. Trans, by P. Mendes-Hohr and J. Reinhard*

4. Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 35b

Our Rabbis taught: And thou shalt gather in thy corn. What is to be learnt from these words? Since it says, This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, I might think that this injunction is to be taken literally. Therefore it says, 'And thou shalt gather in thy corn', which implies that you are to combine the study of them with a worldly occupation. This is the view of R. Ishmael. R. Simeon b. Yohai says: Is that possible? If a man ploughs in the ploughing season, and sows in the sowing season, and reaps in the reaping season, and threshes in the threshing season, and winnows in the season of wind, what is to become of the Torah? No; but when Israel perform the will of the Omnipresent, their work is performed by others, as it says. And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks. etc., and when Israel do not perform the will of the Omnipresent their work is carried out by themselves, as it says, And thou shalt gather in thy corn. Nor is this all, but the work of others also is done by them, as it says. And thou shalt serve thine enemy etc. Said Abaye: Many have followed the advice of Ishmael, and it has worked well; others have followed R. Simeon b. Yohai and it has not been successful. Raba said to the Rabbis: I would ask you not to appear before me during Nisan and Tishri so that you may not be anxious about your food supply during the rest of the year.

5. Rabbi Haim of Volozhin, Nefesh ha-Hayim*

During the time of the study of Torah it is certainly unnecessary to be conscious of *devekut* (*communion with God*), for by the very act of study one is attached to the Will and Word of God, and He and His Will and His Word are One. This is what the Rabbis meant: When a man purchases an object, can he be said to be acquiring its owner as well? Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel and says to them, as it were, "You are acquiring Me." This is what is meant by the passage found in several places in the Zohar that the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Torah are one. Even greater than this is the statement that the teaching of the Holy One, blessed be He, is called *Torah*, etc., and Torah is none other than the Holy One, blessed be He.

Scripture has said, "It [Torah] is a tree of life to those who take hold of it." Let man therefore establish in his heart and know in his mind that if he were drowning in a mighty river and saw before him a strong tree, certainly he would make every effort to take hold of and cling to it with all his strength, not letting go of it even for a moment. Since his life hangs only on this, who would be so foolish as not to understand that if he were lazy even for a moment and loosened his hold, he would drown immediately? So is the holy Torah called a "Tree of Life," for only during the time that a man is seized with the love of it, and engages and meditates in it regularly, does he live a true higher life, and is bound up and attached, as it were, to the Life of the Worlds, blessed be His Name, for the Holy One, blessed be He, and His Torah are one. And if, Heaven forbid, he rejects his study and abandons its regular pursuit, in order to engage in the follies and pleasures of the world, he is removed and cut off from the higher life and drowns in the evil waters.

* "Torah for Torah's Sake" by Norman Lamm pg 115-116

II. The Religious Zionist Tribe

6. Abraham Isaac Kook, "The Lights of Rebirth", *The Zionist Idea* by Arthur Hertzberg, pg. 429-431

There is an eternal covenant which assures the whole House of Israel that it will not ever become completely unclean. Yes, it may be partially corroded, but it can never be totally cut off from the source of divine life. Many of the adherents of the present national revival maintain that they are secularists. If a Jewish secular nationalism were really imaginable, then we would, indeed, be in danger of falling so low as to be beyond redemption.

But Jewish secular nationalism is a form of self-delusion: the spirit of Israel is so closely linked to the spirit of God that a Jewish nationalist, no matter how secularist his intention may be, must, despite himself, affirm the divine. An individual can sever the tie that binds him to life eternal, but the House of Israel as a whole cannot. All of its most cherished national possessions—its land, language, history, and customs—are vessels of the spirit of the Lord.

How should men of faith respond to an age of ideological ferment which affirms all of these values in the name of nationalism and denies their source, the rootedness of the national spirit, in God? To oppose Jewish nationalism, even in speech, and to denigrate its values is not permissible, for the spirit of God and the spirit of Israel are identical. What they must do is to work all the harder at the task of uncovering the light and holiness implicit in our national spirit, the divine element which is its core. The secularists will thus be constrained to realize that they are immersed and rooted in the life of God and bathed in the radiant sanctity that comes from above.

Despite the grave faults of which we are aware in our life in general, and in Eretz Israel in particular, we must feel that we are being reborn and that we are being created once again as at the beginning of time. Our entire spiritual heritage is presently being absorbed within its source and is reappearing in a new guise, much reduced in material extent but qualitatively very rich and luxuriant and full of vital force. We are called to a new world suffused with the highest light, to an epoch the glory of which will surpass that of all the great ages which have preceded. All of our people believes that we are in the first stage of the Final Redemption. This deep faith is the very secret of its existence; it is the divine mystery implicit in its historical experience. This ancient tradition about the Redemption bears witness to the spiritual light by which the Jew understands himself and all the events of his history to the last generation, the one that is awaiting the Redemption that is near at hand.

7. Abraham Isaac Kook, "The Land of Israel", *The Zionist Idea* by Arthur Hertzberg, pg. 419-420

Eretz Israel is not something apart from the soul of the Jewish people; it is no mere national possession, serving as a means of unifying our people and buttressing its material, or even its spiritual, survival. Eretz Israel is part of the very essence of our nationhood; it is bound organically to its very life and inner being. Human reason, even at its most sublime, cannot begin to understand the unique holiness of Eretz Israel; it cannot stir the depths of love for the land that are dormant within our people. What Eretz Israel means to the Jew can be felt only through the Spirit of the Lord which is in our people as a whole, through the spiritual cast of the Jewish soul, which radiates its characteristic influence to every healthy emotion. This higher light shines forth to the degree that the spirit of divine holiness fills the hearts of the saints and scholars of Israel with heavenly life and bliss.

To regard Eretz Israel as merely a tool for establishing our national unity...The hope for the redemption is the force that sustains Judaism in the Diaspora; the Judaism of Eretz Israel is the very redemption.

8. Zvi Yehuda HaCohen Kook, "Ba-ma'arakhah ha-tzibburit", (Yosef Bramson ed, pg. 24-25, 244-246)

The State of Israel is divine... Not only can/must there be no retreat from [a single] kilometer of the Land of Israel, God forbid, but on the contrary, we shall conquer and liberate more and more, as much in the spiritual [as in the physical] sense. "The Glory of Israel does not deceive or change His mind" [1 Sam. 15:29]. We are stronger than America, stronger than Russia. With all the troubles and delays [we *suffer*], our position in the world, the world of history, the cosmic world, is stronger and more secure in its timelessness than theirs. There are nations that know this, and there are nations of uncircumcised heart that do not know it, but they shall gradually come to know it! Heaven protect us from weakness and timidity... In our divine, world-encompassing undertaking, there is no room for retreat.

9. Sammuel Hayyim Landau, "Towards an Explanation of Our Ideology", *The Zionist Idea* by Arthur Hertzberg, pg. 434-435

Zionism came into the world to announce a fundamental change. This movement emphasized that the concept of nationhood is the primal value of our people. The entire program of Zionism, therefore, revolves around this idea, and all other national values are significant only to the degree that they serve as instruments of the absolute—the nation. Even the rebuilding of the land is secondary, for the land was created for the nation and not the nation for the land. This approach is shared by the religious wing of the Jewish national movement as well.

What do we mean by Torah?

This "Torah," the heritage of Israel, has two basic meanings: The first refers to the Torah as a code of law which is incumbent upon the individual, which every single Jew must obey; the second connotes the Torah as a totality, as the national spirit, the source of its culture and life—i.e., the national and collective aspects of the Torah. (These ideas are, of course, not new.) In its individual aspect the Torah is unrelated to the nation as nation; it relates only to the children of Israel as individuals. In this sense it is an obligation that rests on every Jew in the Diaspora, and all the more so in the Land of Israel. This, however, implies no specific and essential connection between the Torah and the process of rebirth in Eretz Israel. The second meaning of Torah, as the collective spirit of the people, implies a totally different relationship. The Torah, interpreted in this sense, permeates completely the process of the national renaissance, appearing as both cause and effect, and it is therefore as related to the essence of the renaissance as the flame is to the glowing ember. A national renaissance is inconceivable without the national spirit, "for our people is not a people except through its Torah," and the spirit of our people cannot express itself unless there be a national revival in our own Land, for "the divine spark can influence our people only in its own Land."

In this sense—but only in this sense—the Torah is more than the command which individual Jews, the national vanguard in the Holy Land included, must obey; it is the *primum mobile*, the essential element, and the efficient cause of the national revival. It is more than the signpost and mold of individual and collective life; it denotes the ultimate spiritual source of the movement.