

communicate. At such times I hear the voice of those who once said, "Shammai's impatience sought to drive us from the world, but Hillel's gentleness brought us under the wings of the *Shechinah*."

For me, and surely for most Jews at most times, Torah was not simply or even primarily the "theoretical physics" of Rav Soloveitchik's *Halachic Mind*, or the mysticism of other worlds or the self-righteousness of a cloistered elite. It was, quite simply, the architecture of a society built on justice and compassion, the choreography of grace in human relationships and the building of a home for the Divine presence made out of deeds that bring God from heaven to earth. That is the Torah which calls to us today, defining our task and assuring us that, with God's help, we will be equal to it.

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Orthodoxy is not merely a comfortable source of tribal bonding...It is God's revealed path to Him.

RABBI MAYER SCHILLER:

Judaism teaches that spirituality is pursued in public as well as private realms. The "future of American Orthodoxy" will, thus, be played out on three stages: that of America and the world at large which we share with non-Jews, that of the Jewish people as a whole, both Orthodox and "not-yet-frum," and internally in the communal and individual lives of *shomrei Torah*. A cautionary note: we may all speculate a bit about the future. Ultimately, though, Providence is not bound by the rules of sociological cause and effect. We may safely anticipate many Divine surprises in the future as there have been in the past.

The World and National Stage

There is an inevitable moral tension in being a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" chosen in some way to forever "dwell alone." In the Written and Oral Torahs and throughout Jewish history we have grappled with the rival demands of universalism and uniqueness. It is a tension which cannot be avoided for we live alongside non-Jews and inevitably relate to them as individuals and groups.

There have, of late, been certain hesitant attempts to scrutinize our dealings with

Gentile individuals. These efforts are commendable, but they fail to touch on Gentile group identity. This failure is a potentially dangerous one, for the non-Jew is as desirous as we are to experience the consolations and fulfillments of peoplehood. Jewish communal relations toward the non-Jewish world which ignore this basic human need are morally insensitive and sure to provoke resentment.

How does our national-religious existence (which transcends borders and civilizations) relate to that of other nations amongst whom we often find ourselves?

What is a nation? There are two types of national social contracts with which we are familiar. The first is identity based. It sees society as rooted in a commonality beyond that of mere ideas. Shared ancestry or religious fellowship is the raw material from which the social fabric is sewn. Think of England, Spain, Iran and Zaire in this regard, to cite some otherwise diverse examples. Israel is also an example of an identity-based society. A far smaller number of nations are (or, at least, attempt to be) idea-based. America today would be an example of this. According to this latter view, the nation is seen as devoid of specific identity. It is composed of many peoples and faiths, all pledged to the national ideology. In America, for example, this ideology has been variously defined in our 200-year history as a limited, constitutional republic at the founding and a multicultural, global crusade for egalitarian democracy today.

The great ethical dilemma for Jewry since the Emancipation has been how to approach the non-Jew's sense of his own identity and social cohesion. Traditionally, our public advocates and organizations have attempted to convince the Gentile that he would be best with idea-based societies. We fear—and with much evidence from history—that Gentile societies rooted in identities, be they of faith, race, culture or ethnicity, will see us as a different people and persecute or, at very least, treat us in some ways as strangers.

Is this advocacy duplicitous? The obvious question—whether this policy is good for the survival of Gentile group identities or their faiths—is never raised. The answer—again based on history—is obviously, no. Secular, heterogeneous, multicultural, capitalist societies devoid of commitment to peoplehood inexorably destroy the group identities of their inhabitants.

In *Netzach Yisrael* (Chapter 2) the Maharal posits that in pre-Messianic days all nations are deserving of independence



because, "God created them all separately; therefore, none should rule over the other." Thus, all nations by virtue of a process which "inheres in creation" should have their own existence. It is easy to view self-determination favorably when we as a people are not effected by it. (Tibet should be free of the Communist Chinese or Kurdistan from Iraq.) What is more difficult is when self-determination is asked for by those whom Big Brother despises (the Afrikaner and Zulu in South Africa, the Scots-Presbyterians of Ulster or Quebecois in Canada). It is most difficult when nations among whom we dwell seek to preserve their peoplehood.

The inevitable, vexing question then: Is it moral to publicly promote pluralist models for the Other? May we zealously guard our group loyalty (and in the case of Israel, see our Jewish identity as the nation's core) while stripping Gentiles of their identities in the name of global capitalism, open immigration, multiculturalism, egalitarianism and the like?

Until we attempt to deal with this question honestly, Jewish social activism is doomed to be merely Machiavellian maneuvering for our own good, masquerading as social concern.

There are four moral answers to this problem: 1) Zionism, that is, living in Israel. This is the end result of proclaiming our peoplehood and answers the question of "Are Jews English, French or German?" with a resounding "No." 2) Patriotism, a loyalty and sense of identity with the nation, people, culture, history where we dwell. 3) Autonomy, no longer discussed as an option today, in which Jews would have their own authority structure within Gentile nations but be excluded from the Gentile governing procedure. 4) Absolute universalism which seeks to obliterate all distinctions between peoples.

Of course, the last approach, would it be sincere, would mean the end of our people along with all others in a global homogenization and must be ruled out. The current approach is to "homogenize the non-Jews" in order to protect ourselves. This view may be legitimate if we grant a Hobbesian view of intergroup relations, where all are seen as forever at war with each other and any means to survive, fair or foul, are demanded. Morality then becomes that of the tribe's survival and is neither universal nor ultimate.

Currently this is the across-the-board Jewish approach. To me, it is unconscionable and fraught with danger, for the

non-Jew is not as oblivious to the facade as he sometimes seems. Its rectification, following any of the above four options, should be at the top of our group agendas. Yet, this would require an openness of soul of which we are seemingly incapable at present.

Two trends compete today for the allegiance of mankind. The first, which has humorously been labeled "MacWorld," sees reality as economic (global capitalism) or political ("rights," "pluralism," "multiculturalism") and views national, religious, ethnic, racial, cultural, historical and local loyalties as meaningless relics of earlier ages. Although the former has money and power in the West today, the latter, both in the Third World, Europe and North America, has the dedication which extra-personal, group loyalty brings. Jews, who know the blessings of peoplehood, should be careful never to deny them to others.

The Non-Orthodox

The "not-yet-*frum*" are another matter altogether. Here we must tread the delicate line between proclaiming the truth of Torah while reaching out to those tragically beyond its embrace. Although we are morally bound to all men, it is to Jewish souls that we are mystically linked. We are to love them unconditionally. This axiom of faith is one of the many which the Baal Shem Tov imbued with a renewed passion for our generations. Love conquers, if not all, at least much. It is what made the Lubavitcher Rebbe world revered and Reb Shlomo Carlebach inspiring. (Incidentally, both extended their concern to non-Jews as well.) It still possesses great potential if applied by *shomrei Torah* to all Jews and all men.

Nonetheless, it does much harm to obfuscate basic truths. Pledged allegiances to "tolerance" and "pluralism" when relating to the ideologies of non-Orthodox movements have no place in Torah philosophy. Glib use of these phrases can only further confuse those Orthodox Jews whose minds are already clouded by modernism's plentiful heresies. Notions such as "everyone is entitled to their own opinion," or, "Orthodoxy is true for you, but not for them," when mouthed by *shomrei Torah*, are tantamount to an unwitting denial of faith. There is only one Judaism, that of the Torah. At what point in an individual or group *kiruv* effort this axiom is stated is a prudential decision. Yet, at no point in the process should we say or imply that it isn't true.

Whither *kiruv*? Until recently the total domination of media, education and politics by

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secular decadence left me pessimistic. Today, though, the advent of alternative media on the Internet which bypasses secularism's censors combined with a growing sense that Big Brother doesn't always know best, provide a glimmer of hope. These alternatives of faith which we offer must be dignified, learned and charitable but willing to state the truth with courage.

There is no reason to suspect that the unraveling of the social fabric taking place all around us will not continue. As a result, Jews are reaching and will continue to reach beyond the public school system. They will grow ever more disdainful of mainstream politicians and popular media. This appropriate skepticism may prove beneficial to their souls if Orthodoxy is creative, caring and, of course, courageous.

A relatively recent development, linked in many ways to the just noted social disintegration, is a desire on the part of growing numbers of Jews in the Conservative and Reform movements for *mitzvah* practice. A difficult question is, how are we to view these practices if done under non-Orthodox direction and auspices? At first glance, we are tempted to say that any *mitzvah* a Jew does, any connection he makes with the Torah and his people is positive. However, I cannot help but be plagued by certain doubts. What is the halachic and subsequently metaphysical status of *mitzvos* performed by those whose belief in their Divine origin is questionable? Whether we maintain *mitzvos tzrichos kavanah* [*mitzvos* require intent] or not, surely, one cannot fulfill one's duty while maintaining a conscious belief that the *mitzvos* are of human origin. It is one thing to say that the odd *mitzvah* performed by a *tinok shenishbah* [one raised in a milieu devoid of Torah] is valid if he has no thought about the source of the *mitzvah* at all. It is another thing when *mitzvos* are performed by the products of Reform and Conservative Day Schools and adult educators who teach explicitly that they are not Divine.

Further, the performance of more *mitzvos* in non-Orthodox circles may soothe the consciences of their practitioners to the point where the Torah-true path will not even be considered. This a complex issue which requires much serious thought. Suffice it to say, though, that our not-yet-*frum* brethren are searching and we must be capable of quenching their spiritual thirst.

Accordingly, no good is accomplished by blurring the Torah perspective to others or even to ourselves on matters which

run counter to "Big Brother's" prevailing dogmas on sexual perversion, egalitarianism, abortion or modernity's lax mores of discipline, manners, respect and so on. A faith which must forever accept the root assumptions of whatever revolutionary vanguard is current is doomed to be no more than a holding action, forever jettisoning ever-larger areas of its own beliefs and practices.

And Within

Feminism represents a crucial Rubicon for Orthodoxy. Torah faith clearly sees men and women as fundamentally different and postulates that this difference be reflected in a halachic structure of hierarchy with men in positions of authority and public action. The *halachos* (biblical and rabbinic) where this is manifest are too numerous and well known to elaborate here. The matter is really breathtakingly simple: Either Torah norms or Big Brother's whimsies are to shape our view of reality.

Pure *emunah* requires immersion in Torah. Due to our flawed nature the initial stages of our confrontation with any aspect of Torah may prove puzzling. Indeed, God's actions in our own lives are often beyond any human comprehension. This, though, is faith—acceptance of our creaturely status and *kabbolas ol Malchus Shamayim* [acceptance of the Kingdom of Heaven].

I deeply fear that the unwillingness of many Modern Orthodox leaders to courageously reject the zeitgeist's dogmas in this area will lead to a fundamental break between them (as they inevitably accept ever more radical "reforms") and the rest of *Klal Yisrael*. Rest assured, too, that once homosexual acts are completely accepted legally and socially and their condemnation fraught with the same cultural stigma which accompanies anti-feminism today we will witness a similar chipping away at Torah beliefs and practices there as well. Unless we are willing to say that the "respectable world" is capable of abominable evil then there is no end to the compromises possible.

Internal problems?

I have a sense that despite the well stocked Judaica stores full of *seforim*, books, CDs, videos etc., despite the exploding population of all segments of Orthodoxy and institutions to service them, a sense of our faith's God-centeredness is missing. Orthodoxy is not merely a comfortable source of tribal bonding and the best guarantee for the folk's survival. It is God's revealed path to Him. That is the essence of Torah study and *halachah* obser-



vance. Absence of this awareness yields an aridity which makes for rote religious performance while ignoring the vast bounty of a life of the spirit.

Many of the faults which stalk Orthodoxy's assorted communities may be traced to this root problem: the lack of a personal yearning for God and attendant unwillingness to experience *mitzvos* in their essence—e.g. *muktzah* as a means to create an alternative, non-weekday reality; laws governing *middos tovos* as a means to express and incarnate empathy and caring for others. As a result we find, for example, even the halachically committed, lacking a sense of *p'nimius* [spiritual reality] are far too prone to spend money they don't have on things they don't need.

I suppose the solution lies in a re-immersion in works of the spirit capable of refocusing our gaze upon the Creator—*Chassidus*, *musar*, *Rav Kook*, *Rav Hirsch* etc., or in some new literature yet unborn. The yearning is there. Those who turn to Rabbis Avigdor Miller, Moshe Wolfson, Yaakov Mayer Shechter, and others like them, are searching. In Israel the *hesder yeshivah* world is producing men of spirit and inspiration. Whether the old or new enthusiasms can yet stir us beyond the confines of small groups, whether the large Modern Orthodox synagogues, Chassidic courts and "yeshivish" *yeshivos* can be permeated by their warmth remains to be seen.

On the other side of the coin, Torah learning and halachic observance are constantly increasing. Talmud study, the life blood of our people, is becoming ever more common. *Chesed*, communal and organizational, abounds. Perhaps these improvements are most notable among the Modern Orthodox where, as a result of having their young people travel *en masse* to study in Israel, they are experiencing an internal renaissance of Torah study and halachic observance. This trend will continue and we will witness an increasing commitment to the *Shulchan Aruch*.

America's future will have an inevitable impact on Orthodoxy and all Jews. Two important questions: What will right wing Orthodoxy do in an economy where it becomes increasingly difficult for the unskilled and uneducated to earn a living? What effect will the rapid demographic transformation of America into a Third World country have on all Jews? For the Modern Orthodox, firmly entrenched in the nation's economic upper strata the question is, will the new American majority continue to allow the concentration of wealth and power to remain in the hands of a few, or

will they seek to forcibly redress the imbalance as they are doing in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) by unbearable taxation, mass "affirmative action" and finally actual dispossession of property?

And the ultimate question: How well will Orthodox faith, nurtured at present on creature comforts, survive the more difficult economic and political times ahead? How well will it fortify us for the final *nisyonos* [trials] of war and suffering, of *mienus* [heresy] triumphant that will usher in *Moshiach*?

Yet, imperfection, ambiguity and doubt are forever part of this world before its ultimate redemption. Torah, *tefillah* and *chesed* form the rhythms of life; *emunah* and *bitachon* are its essence in all Torah camps. From Yeshiva University to Lakewood to Williamsburg, the sweetness of God's proximity is available. Civilizations rise and fall. Heresies abound. Many Jews are sadly lost. There may, indeed, be rough times ahead. But the ship of faith sails on and its passengers, while awaiting *Moshiach*, have, *Baruch Hashem*, found the best accommodations available.

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Too many Jewish women ...view Judaism and their place in the Jewish community through the lenses of Western culture.

DR. ESTHER M. SHKOP:

In the closing session of a semester-long course on the *Megillot*, I challenged my class to respond to excerpts from an article published in the 1970s which promoted the notion that Queen Esther is an anachronistic role model for the modern Jewish woman. Crudely restating the thesis of the article, I pointed out to my students that while we praise Mordechai for his intransigence, for his bold refusal to kow-tow to Haman, even at the risk of death for himself and other Jews throughout the Persian Empire, we unfairly condemn the same tenacity and pride when expressed by Vashti. The behavior so laudable in a male is deemed unseemly in a female. In contrast, the model of Esther reinforces quiet submission and blind obedience. Even at her greatest moment, Esther relies on subtle manip-

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