

Matan - Judaism and the ISM

Judaism and Racism

#1 - Religious foundations of business

דברים פרק כה

(יד) לא יהיה לך בביתך איפה ואיפה גדולה וקטנה:

(טו) אבן שלמה וצדק יהיה לך איפה שלמה וצדק יהיה לך למען יאריכו ימיך על האדמה אשר יקוק אלהיך נתן לך:

(טז) כי תועבת יקוק אלהיך כל עשה אלה כל עשה עול: פ

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף פח עמוד ב

א"ר לוי: קשה עונשן של מדות יותר מעונשן של עריות

בעל "העמק דבר", הנצי"ב מוולוז'ין, מפרט את המקור לחטא המידות ואת חומרתו, ולהלן נביא חלק מפירושו הנרחב:

שנתבונן על מה שהפליגו חז"ל... עד שאמרו חמור עוון משקלות יותר מגלוי עריות, ומדוע חמור זה משאר גנבות, ותו מה זה דמיון משקלות לגילוי עריות עד שאמרו שזה חמור מזה... אלא באשר שהאדם החוטא בא לחטוא באחד מג' אופנים: או מהעדר האמונה בה' ובתורתו, או מצד התגברות התאוה, או מצד התגברות הכעס וכדומה במידות שנוגע בין אדם לחברו, והנה הראש שבהעדר אמונה הוא עבודה זרה, והראש בתאוה הוא גילוי עריות, והראש שבמידות רעות הוא שפיכות דמים... והנה הגרוע בשלשה עונות הללו הוא עבודה זרה, באשר נוגע לאמונה, וגם רחוק מן התשובה וכל באיה לא ישובו, ומעתה הגונב מחברו כלי יקר, יכול להיות שבא מצד התאוה לאותו כלי והרי זה מגדר עריות, אבל העושה משקלות שקר, אינו מדרך התאוה אלא מחסרון אמונה בה' הזן ומפרנס בהשגחה פרטית לפי מעשיו, והרי זה מגדר עבודה זרה, על-כן אמרו שעוון משקלות אע"ג שאינו אלא ענף מעבודה זרה ועדיין רחוק מראש הכפירה, מכל מקום הוא חמור מגילוי עריות, שהוא ראש פרעות התאוה, באשר חסרון אמונה קשה לתשובה וגם נוגע לכבודו ית"ש.

between **business competitors**, between producer and consumer. Here Judaism ^{the problem of} reminds us that normal business ethics is essentially more fundamental than [^] isolated crimes of passion and violence. It reminds us that there is a religious foundation of business, and that is: the pervasive faith that the Almighty is a zan u-mefarness la-kol, a feeder and supplier for all humans -- without relying upon dishonesty and unethical behavior.

The recent Civil Rights march on Washington, which is undoubtedly a high and glorious point in the history of our country, should set us thinking in the same direction. The crux of the issue is not so much "freedom now" for the Negroes, as self-respect and dignity now for the white majority which allowed such disgraceful discrimination to continue unabated for 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation. It was bad enough when hate-frenzied mobs lynched individual Negroes. But this crime of ^S shfikhat damim (homicide) is exceeded by the greater blot on our record: the methodical economic exploitation of one segment of our population, the systematic oppression of one race as the source of cheap labor and its designation as the first to suffer in any economic recession. When the economy of a great nation is built upon such patent injustice, it is a crime of avodah zarah, it is a breach of faith. It bespeaks lack of faith in G-d Who is av ehad le-kulanu, One Father for all humans, making us all brothers. ^{It is} It is a lack of faith that democracy really can function as its advocates claim for it, and is not merely a propaganda term in power politics, ^{and} a lack of faith that America can live up to its full destiny as a beacon for all peoples, opening new horizons of hope for the oppressed of all the world.

#2 - Insights into evil - feb 29th 1964

שמות פרק לב

(א) וירא העם כי בשש משה לרדת מן ההר ויקהל העם על אהרן ויאמרו אליו קום עשה לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו כי זה משה האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה היה לו:

(ב) ויאמר אלהם אהרן פרקו נזמי הזהב אשר באזני נשיכם בניכם ובנותיכם והביאו אלי:

(ג) ויתפרקו כל העם את נזמי הזהב אשר באזניהם וביאו אל אהרן:

(ד) ויקח מידם ויצר אתו בחרט ויעשהו עגל מסכה ויאמרו אלה אלהיך ישראל אשר העלוך מארץ מצרים:

(ה) וירא אהרן ויבן מזבח לפניו ויקרא אהרן ויאמר חג ליקוק מחר:

רש"י שמות פרק לב פסוק ה

(ה) וירא אהרן - שהיה בו רוח חיים, שנאמר (תהלים קו כ) בתבנית שור אוכל עשב, וראה שהצליח מעשה שטן, ולא היה לו פה לדחותם לגמרי:

רמב"ן שמות פרק לב פסוק ה

(ה) וירא אהרן - טעם זה הכתוב שראה אותם ברע מכוונים אל העגל, וקם ובנה מזבח, וקרא חג לה' מחר, שיזבחו לשם המיוחד על המזבח אשר בנה הוא לשמו, ולא יבנו הם מזבחות לבשת פניהם, ולא תהיה כונתם בזבחים בלתי לה' לבדו. ויתכן שאמר "מחר" להאריך להם, אולי יבא משה ויעזבו את העגל, והם השכימו בבקר ויעלו עולות ויגישו שלמים. ולא אמר הכתוב ויעלו לו עולות ויגישו לו שלמים, והענין, מפני שהיו בהם מכוונים לשם הקדוש ברוך הוא כאשר אמר אהרן, ומהם משחיתים וזבחים לעגל. ועל אלה אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה (להלן פסוק ח) וישתחוו לו ויזבחו לו, כי הם החטאים. ואם אולי היה אהרן המקריב קרבנות, אמר סתם ויעלו עולות ויגישו שלמים, כי הוא מכוין לשם ה', והם דעתם אל העגל אשר עשו, והיו הבעלים מפגלין:

This development of insight into evil refers not only to ancient but to modern idolatries as well. Whether it is scientism or materialism, communism or even godless humanism, the same three stages are required of man: the first, where you acknowledge immediately its absurdity and fallacy; the second, where you begin to appreciate the rationale and explanation; and the third, where, with a great deal more sophistication, you rise nevertheless to the moral heights of rejection. And the same development must apply to one of the most pernicious and idolatrous doctrines in the memory of living man, one that has caused untold grief to uncounted millions in our century: that of race superiority and race inferiority.

My recent trip to South Africa left me overwhelmed by the exhilarating beauty of the country, its great wealth, and the abundance of its natural resources. And yet I had the feeling that it is a tortured country, gripped by a tragic agony that dominates all thinking, underlies all conversations, and pervades all politics in this highly politicized community. The race problem is a pall that, in this land of magnificent climate and almost endless sunshine, darkens the heart of the country from one end to the other. The reaction to Apartheid, the doctrine of separate development of the races based upon the idea that the white race is superior to the non-white, must also go through these three stages.

It is true that we New Yorkers must not rush over-zealously to condemn and criticize those in other states, let alone other lands. For (without in any way favoring or denying the claims of certain Negro groups which may or may not be justified) we certainly have not been blemishless ourselves; and our race problem is far less severe and threatening to us than that in South Africa. Nevertheless, wherever one man oppresses another and shuns him because of the color of his skin; wherever one man denies another the benefit of his own labor and the right to the bounty of God's nature because of race or religion, whether it be in Georgia or Johannesburg, in Corona or Capetown; it is idolatry, because it denies the fatherhood of God. It is an affront to Torah, because Torah recognizes only one Apartheid: that between tamei ve'tahor, between pure

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and impure, good and evil, gentle and wild, malevolent and benevolent. We Jews who have suffered so from silence, from the silence of Popes and Presidents and organized populations during the time we needed help, when our families were slaughtered by the millions, we especially must not keep silent when an injustice is committed against others in our presence.

#3 - Putting a bad conscience to good use (october 1966)

רב אברהם בן הרמב"ם

ויאמר אליו וג' – הבן מסוד תשובתו ע"ה הנני שהיה מוכן בשעת הקריאה הכנה מורה על השגה שהיתה בו קודם הקריאה והגיע הדמיון שהיא השגה נבואית קשורה בהשגה שהיתה בו קודם. ו(ענינים) אלה נסתרות וסודות שאין אנחנו רואים אלא שמץ מהם; ומה רב החילוק בין מאמרו הנני ומאמר זקנו אדם ואירא כי עירם אנכי ואחבא.

רש"י בראשית פרשת וירא פרק כב פסוק א

הנני - כך היא ענייתם של חסידים, לשון ענה הוא ולשון זימון:

I would like to state at the outset that I prefer to see the problem in its true perspective without any extremist appeal. We Jews, as Jews, are not responsible for the conditions of Negroes in the United States. Our grandfathers were not slaveholders who devised this cruel and inhuman system. When the Negroes were being emancipated in the 1860s, we too were being emancipated in the ghettos of Europe. Indeed, on this very day of October 29th, in 1833 in Austria, we experienced our very first instance of

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legal political emancipation.

Nevertheless, we have participated in a growing economy which has to a large extent thrived on the exploitation of minorities, and we have shared deeply held prejudices about them. One need not masochistically excuse bigots like Leroy Jones and embrace other fanatics of the Black Power movement in order to appreciate that all whites suffer, or should suffer, some degree of a bad conscience.

The question is, what shall we do about it? Not to feel any guilt, any troubling of the conscience, is a sign of our own moral failure. We must experience some hirhurei devarim. Yet, to go overboard and dedicate our whole life to civil rights, to make of it an ersatz religion to replace Judaism, to concentrate only on the rights of others while ignoring the preservation of our own community here and overseas -- is to lose perspective and to reveal an inner moral weakness while we try to strengthen ourselves morally in some other direction.

Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, Truth and Peace Commission

I would like to pinpoint the failings as far as the Jewish community is concerned of all that happened in the apartheid era. The Jewish community did not initiate apartheid. Many in the Jewish community did not agree with apartheid. Almost everyone in the Jewish community had a kind of awkward tension about apartheid, but most of the Jewish community benefited in one way or another from apartheid. I want to read what Stephen Friedman, the Director of the Centre for Policy Studies recently wrote:

"No Jew who lived in South Africa during the apartheid period can plausibly claim that his or her circumstances today are not in some measure a result of apartheid. Anyone who succeeded in business, benefited from a right to economic activity which was denied others. Anyone who received a professional qualification, enjoyed a place at school, college, university which was denied to the majority on racial grounds alone. Anyone who enjoyed an authentic Jewish family life, Judaism is a domestic religion, did so in a home which persons not classified as whites could neither own nor occupy, save as a hired servant, in which latter case they were not permitted to enjoy a family life of their own. Any member of our community who found a job in a corporation or as a skilled artisan, probably occupied a post from which those classified not-white were barred".

Yes, many worked hard to achieve what they now have and employed much natural ability to do it. But can we really say that all of us would be what we are today, in the Jewish community, if apartheid had never existed? Can anyone of us, as a matter of principle, since it is impossible to determine how South African Judaism would have fared without apartheid, declare confidently that we enjoy no skills, capabilities and possessions which apartheid gave us? We bear responsibility today, whatever role we played in the past, however many letters we wrote to the newspapers, however many bursaries we sponsored, however civil we were to our workers or servants, because it is possible, indeed probable, that our personal circumstances are products of apartheid. And if we are responsible for this country's past, we are of course responsible for its future. In that the Jewish community benefited from apartheid, apology must be given to this commission.

#4 - Sinai - burden vs blessing

שמות פרק יט

(ו) ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש אלה הדברים אשר תדבר אל בני ישראל:

ספורנו שמות פרק יט פסוק ו

(ו) ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים. ובזה תהיו סגולה מכלם כי תהיו ממלכת כהנים להבין ולהורות לכל המין האנושי לקרוא כלם בשם ה', ולעבדו שכם אחד, כמו שיהיה ענין ישראל לעתיד לבא, כאמרו ואתם כהני ה' תקראו (ישעיהו סא, ו) וכאמרו כי מציון תצא תורה (שם ב, ג):

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ג

משנה יד

הוא היה אומר חביב אדם שנברא בצלם חבה יתירה נודעת לו שנברא בצלם שנאמר (בראשית ט) בצלם אלהים עשה את האדם חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום חבה יתירה נודעת להם שנקראו בנים למקום שנאמר (דברים י"ד) בנים אתם לה' אלהיכם חביבין ישראל שניתן להם כלי חמדה חבה יתירה נודעת להם שניתן להם כלי חמדה שבו נברא העולם שנאמר (משלי ד) כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתִי אל תעזבו:

Law and Order - oct 19th 1968

I would urge you, my dear friends, to be honest with yourselves, Let all of us be honest about our motives for calling for greater law and order in the face of the social crisis that besets us. Of course, we want law and order. The facile and simplistic answer, "social revolution," or "they are trying to make up for 300 years of slavery," will not restore his life savings to a Jewish

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merchant in the ghetto area who was looted, and is innocent of any wrong-doing -- whose great-grandfather was not a slave trader in the South, but a peddler in the ghettos of Europe. It is easy, all too easy, for a white Jewish upper-class suburbanite to excuse the excesses of Negro rioters, as long as it is not his store and his savings that have been destroyed. So we must be for law and order and for controlling all extremist groups.

But -- as Jews, who have a long and peculiar and specific history, we must not allow xenophobia and fear and racial antagonisms and innate bigotry to emerge in pious disguises. We who have been the perennial victim of cruel governments and established anti-Semitic powers who legislated us into bondage -- everything according to the "law and order" which they formulated -- we must not allow the cry for "law and order" to become a tool to be manipulated for unfairness and injustice and oppression. We must, of course, practice enlightened self-interest. But we must not confuse the desire for stricter law enforcement, which is necessary, with the development of a police state.

Keeping Our Motives Pure. May 1963

It is for this reason, strange as it may seem, that a White Rabbi rises to support the charge of a Black Muslim. Malcolm X, one of the leaders of this extremist Negro group, has recently criticized Pres. Kennedy:

"In his talk with Alabama editors, Kennedy did not urge that Negroes be treated right because it is the right thing to do. Instead, he said that if the Negroes aren't well treated the Muslims would become a threat. He urges a change not because it is right but because the world is watching this country. Kennedy is wrong because his motivation is wrong" (N.Y. Times).

Of course, this an extremist group which in many ways can become quite dangerous; but the argument is right. It is directed not only against our President, but against all or most of us. The first reaction of most of us to the shocking indignities our Negro fellow citizens are subject to in Alabama was not only revulsion at the cruelty of what was happening, but also the nagging thought: what will the Russians say? What will the neutrals think of us? How will this alter our image in the eyes of free Africa? Our motives were mixed. In fact, had they truly been pure, our government and society would have acted much earlier to put an end to the abuses, the humiliations, the bigotry which are the fodder for the fanatics' cannon. We would have corrected this ugly situation before it degenerated as it did.