

Science Alone is Incapable of Elucidating the Secrets of the World

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The Jewish religious outlook on the world and man. The importance of prayer for modern man.

Man must realize two things:

- 1) How insignificant he is
- 2) The greater his knowledge and achievements, the greater his amazement regarding creation.

Indeed, the riddles multiply faster than the answers are provided. The problems and difficulties grow in conjunction with technical progress. The further the telescope penetrates the distant galaxies, the more galaxies man reveals, the faster and further rocket ships travel, the more precise laboratory instruments become, and the sharper yet more abstract the mathematical formulae proposed, the more man must recognize and accept how weak and how little he really knows. The more he is compelled to realize that he must wait for salvation from God. **כִּי־אֲרָאָהּ שָׁמַיָּהּ מַעֲשֵׂי אֱצָבֶנְתִּיהָ יָרַח לְכוֹכָבִים אֲשֶׁר כּוֹנֵנָתָה** (Psalms 8:4).

Unfortunately, tragically, modern man is a braggart, full of chutzpah. He pays homage to his intelligence, to his laboratories, to his scientific accomplishments and reputation. He deifies these accomplishments and has absolute trust in them. He believes that only can the scientific genius discover laws of nature that will enable us to harness new powers and abilities to better serve. It can also set ethical and moral standards that will elevate man and make him more reverent. He thinks that ultimately science will reveal all secrets - it will be all powerful and all knowing. In brief, insolent, insignificant man takes upon himself the mission of dethroning the Godly will and replaces it with his conclusions.

The serpent in the Garden of Eden enticed Chava, saying **וְהִיִּתְּם כְּאֱלֹהִים יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע** (Genesis 3:5). Is this not a description of communist Russia? Is this not what Nazi Germany did? Is this not what some intellectuals are preaching in democratic countries? Does not the superficial, positivistic-agnostic, pseudo-scientific, philosophic and ethics/moral system argue for this? Is not the younger generation pulled in the spirit of such an ugly, pragmatic materialistic world view?

We Jews, the bearers of the legacy of Abraham of whom it is written ויקרא בשם השם (Genesis 12:8), not only are we not better in this topic/area, but in many cases we are much worse than others. We are by nature a nation in perpetual amazement and an עמא פזיזא, an impetuous people. We have gone overboard in our aggrandizement of this new and progressive path and forgotten completely about man's insignificance and the Almighty God.

One of the prominent surgeons in Boston once poured out his heart to me. He was a Jew who was apparently very distant from Judaism but had a religious soul. Rabbi, he said, I have already performed hundreds of surgeries of small and great difficulty, from appendectomies to brain surgery. I have operated on Jew and Gentile. I have one amazing observation. When a non-Jew is brought into the operating room and the anesthesiologist places the anesthesia mask over his face, I notice how his lips are silently mouthing a prayer. He surrenders his body and soul into God's hand prior to losing consciousness. Unfortunately, I have never seen such a prayer prior to surgery from a Jewish patient. The Jewish patient, pale and frightened, lips convulsing from an indescribable fear, but despite this no prayer emanates from his lips. He surrenders his body and soul to my hands, the hands of a human being, someone who is just as helpless as he is. The Jewish patient has no faith in God, but rather in me, a mortal being.

And the surgeon added with a sarcastic smile: the fool thinks that everything depends on my expert hand! How many complications can occur during a surgery that even the best surgeon has no control over?! When I operate, there is always standing next to me an old slightly stooped surgeon, wearing a surgical mask and gown with a furrowed brow - each furrow is a thousand years **כי אלה שנים בעיניו** old (Psalms 80:4). From time to time, I raise my eyes and glance towards this old surgeon in white. If I see him, I know that all is proceeding well. Sometimes he disappears in the middle of the surgery. Something unfortunate and tragic would happen on those occasions. Unfortunately, my friend confided, my colleagues, students and assistants do not notice the old man in white and therefore they often speak with bravado and haughtiness about their professional skill and consider themselves superhuman, upon whom the poor deathly ill patients must depend upon. How beautiful and sanctified would the medical profession be if the doctor would always be accompanied by that old man.

Scientific professional haughtiness is a curse that our generation has been burdened with. Previously, society suffered from blood-line aristocracy. Today it suffers

from a professional aristocracy. The doctor, the engineer, the physicist, the chemist, the professor, and even the modern rabbi believe they stand above the average person and therefore often approach those seeking their help and skill with contempt and condescension. This vulgar bravado is a result of the deification of human knowledge and science. Bravado was always a pagan attribute.

Therefore, Halacha immediately introduced a special blessing for knowledge and the ability to learn, intelligence and cognizance at the start of the middle set of blessings in the Amidah (those that conclude with שומע תפלה). Immediately when the one reciting prayer reaches the section of Amidah where he expresses his wants and needs to God, he must admit the truth - that he is ignorant and helpless, that no matter how much knowledge and intelligence he possesses, he remains the same insignificant person who does not even begin to comprehend the mystery of creation.

I think that if the typical doctor prayed and understood this concept of יחוד השם, unification of the name of God, how it is reflected in the blessing of אתה חונן רפאנו, he would cast away his foolish pride and petty egotism. He would then cease to display condescension to other human beings and would no longer be indifferent to the suffering of the ill. He would elevate himself to the level of an ethical personality, a friend and angel. Then the old surgeon dressed in white would always accompany him.

If the engineer, the physicist, the chemist would pray and recite אתה חונן with the proper mindset and focus, כונה, he would never develop a senseless illusion that man can reach the level of "all-powerful and all-knowing". He would understand that besides mathematical, physical and chemical formulae, there are also metaphysical, religious-ethical ideals and values, and not everything can be reduced to a senseless root. They would then recognize the truth that man cannot find his purpose in a simple, wild, mechanical-blinded world that he is constructing. Were they to pray, there would be no need to produce an atom or hydrogen bomb and the world would not have to fear a nuclear catastrophe and global destruction.

If professors, psychologists and social reformers would pray and appreciate the concept of יחוד השם, a different type of youth would arise. Children, teenagers, and young adults would not be misled in a cause or ideal or cult and would not be driven to crime or group licentiousness.

If modern rabbis would pray correctly and would appropriately **מיחד השם**, they would not take such pride in their erudite, educated, and flowery diction and their **עבודה שבלב**, prayers, would not become obscured with theatrics. Instead of a false externality, they would reveal a warm heart, full of love and empathy for poor, unfortunate and simple Jews. Then the rabbinate would carry on the tradition established by the prophets.

The idea of **יחוד השם** must also be strenuously applied in a second area, namely, that of political perspective. Judaism sanctions a governmental/community lifestyle. The Halacha is interested in both the individual as well as the community. Therefore, it speaks kindly of the institution of government, with all its instruments and organizations. The Halacha abhors anarchy and sectarianism, and believes that organized political clout is important. There are entire sections in the Torah and mountains of laws that deal with political perspective, situations, and problems, such as war, justice, both in the civil and criminal justice areas, and as it relates to a king or a political leader. With the mobilization of an army, with the division of land, etc. The Torah required that citizens respect the authorized governmental organizations and offices and comply with their appropriate requests and demands as it says “**שום תשים עליך מלך**” - that you should show respect and fear for the monarchy - **שתהא אימתו עליך**. Our Halacha obviously is very realistic, and with expert knowledge and understanding of human character, recognized that one cannot rely too much on the sense of righteousness of the individual and must rely on a higher power to control, in a limited sense, the affairs of the people. “**שאלמלא**”, and that is why the halacha requires all to submit to the objective governmental law. The Jewish tradition throughout our exile always insisted on loyalty and dedication to the local government where the Jew was a citizen. It demanded that the Jew uphold the law of the land and to participate in the political life and, when required, to defend that country in battle against its enemies.

However, from the other side, Judaism did not tolerate the granting of absolute power or deification of political theories. When a political ideology and a political institution are glorified to such levels, that one starts to believe in their absolute value over all else, and the ideology and institution is placed above all else, even above the hidden relationship between God and man, then political power becomes enveloped in a terrible idolatry. I think that it is superfluous to emphasize that the totalitarian, atheist, materialistic regimes and systems portray themselves as the greatest forms of idolatry that history will record after reflection on them. The **מולך**, with its child sacrifices, is comparable to a Stalin or Hitler, perhaps a milder, good-natured idol in comparison.

Not only the wicked regimes, but also the benevolent political systems that we value highly and are essentially close to traditional Jewish political perspective, such as democracy must not be considered as absolute and perfect. It is true that we must be thankful to God for the kindness that He bestowed upon us to provide us the opportunity to live in a democratic country. Nevertheless, we must always remember that all forms of government, no matter how ethical they may be, were established by people who inherently are far from perfect ethical and moral beings, and therefore cannot be considered as being perfect. Whoever claims that the answers to all humanity's problems and struggles can be found in democracy, and that democracy can and must be embraced as a belief system is an idolator. Even the best system of government, just like science, will not bring any redemption to mankind, if God will not be included as a partner in such an endeavor. “אם ד' לא יבנה בית שוא עמלו בוניו”.

My words relate also to the State of Israel. I have often openly discussed the idea that the birth of the Jewish government must be considered as a double miracle. The first is an internal Jewish reason, as it has given us the opportunity to rescue hundreds of thousands of unfortunate, discriminated-against and abused brothers from the concentration camps and the Sephardic countries, for whom the doors of all lands were almost completely closed. The second is an external miracle seen by the entire world, that we were correct in our interpretation of the prophetic visions and promises, and not the catholic church. The World Protestant Theological Conference in Evanston, Illinois, demonstrated the fear that has engulfed their theological world. With great temerity the theologues agreed (as if it were a political question!) that the establishment of the State of Israel is not the work of God, and the prophets did not prophesy about it. However, every honest thinking theologian knows well that this pronouncement is a big lie. for without the help of God, the birth of the state could never have happened. If their pronouncement is false, a foundation of Christian theology has been destroyed, the idea that with the arrival of the first christian, the role of the historical Knesset Yisrael came to an end, and therefore all the promises relating to Israel, Zion, Jerusalem and the Temple are to be interpreted allegorically as relating to the Christian church.

However, no matter how precious and beloved the State of Israel may be to us, we must always remember that it is not the highest value in our Jewish value scale. God alone is the goal and purpose for all. If the State of Israel will serve as the instrument that enables Knesset Yisrael to realize and fulfil the will of God clearly expressed in the Halacha, then the establishment of the state can be the most important political, spiritual-cultural event in modern Jewish History. However, if

there is a wild pursuit of secularization, if God forbid, the state claims absolute authority as a state and creates a political cult around itself as a state interested only in being a state, and leads to God Himself toppling its authority, then, I fear, the theologues from Evanston, Illinois will rejoice, and the state will adopt a character of idolatry.

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