

The Roots of Religious Strife in the Holy Land

Moshe Schonfeld

The bitter confrontations between the religious and secular communities in Israel are all the more shocking because they represent struggles between Jew and fellow Jew—and because they are taking place in the Holy Land.

There are those who view each such crisis—whether drift of women, "right to work" permits on Shabbos, or immigrant-absorption policies—as the inevitable by-product of administering a mixed society. According to this view, leaders of the Medina may indeed be irresponsible in their personal lives, but they endeavor to take into account the needs and the rights of the religious sector and, for that matter, the religious roots of Israel when administering the country. Indeed, the proponents of this view will point to yeshivos and other Torah schools that are flourishing in Israel, often with a substantial assist from government funds. At the very worst, they contend, bureaucratic convenience or personal predilection may dictate decisions in favor of anti-religious measures, but these stem from ignorance and estrangement, not sinas hadas—a naked animosity for religion, per se. As a result, we are assured, a ~~policy~~ of patience, good-will, and public education on the part of the religious community will go a long way toward healing the fissures in Israeli society.

Is this view really adequate? Might it not be self-deceptive? Behind all the nagging conflicts one might perceive an underlying clash of ideologies based on a driving desire to secularize the Jewish people—even though many government officials may not be aware of pursuing such a course.

MOSHE SCHONFELD of Bnei Brak, an engineer by profession, is widely respected as a profound thinker. He has maintained a close relationship with many Torah leaders, notably the Chazon Ish ⁵⁷³⁷. Many of his thought-provoking pieces have been featured in respected journals in Israel. Mr. Schonfeld's article, which follows, is based on his analysis of the writings and remarks of the founders and leaders of Secular Zionism, and on the assessment of famed Torah authorities with whom he was close.

While there are undoubtedly those who will take exception to some of the nuances of Mr. Schonfeld's piece, we deem it a privilege to present his views on a public forum.

INSTEAD OF REGISTERING SURPRISE at each crisis in religious life in the Holy Land—"Who would have imagined that such things could possibly happen in a Jewish state?"—it would be much more prudent to

examine secular Zionism as the common source. Although it may be moribund as an ideal, secular Zionism still represents the roots of the State, and as such should offer a fruitful field for analysis.

The Jewish Observer / October, 1972

Studying the backgrounds and motivations of the visionaries and founding fathers of political Zionism will show beyond question that the lyrical "To be a free nation in our own land" (from "Hatikvah") means to be free of Torah and *mitzvos*. It is a sordid study and an unpleasant one, but it is far better to abandon illusions sooner than to suffer the jolt of cruel awakenings at a later time.

Prophetic Wisdom

THE GAON, REB CHAIM SOLOVITCHNIK ⁵⁷¹ of Brisk (1853-1918) demonstrated that the "wise man perceives more clearly than the prophet," when he offered his definitive evaluation of Zionism: *Zionism demands a Jewish state, said Reb Chaim, not because it cures for a Jewish state for its apparent value, but only because it views the existence of a Jewish state as the most practical means to its real end: revoking the Covenant of Sinai and converting a holy nation into a secular one. As such, Zionism represents the collective yetzer hora of the Jewish Nation.*

Our Sages said: "Why was Sinai called by that name? Because of the Torah that was given on its slopes, *sinah*—hated and anti-Semitism—descended into the world." Secular Zionism is in full agreement with this diagnosis of our suffering, and as a result offered its own solution to the Jewish Problem: remove the initial cause of anti-Semitism, renounce the unique Torah-observance which so arouses the passionate hatred of the Gentiles; create a state just like every other—a secular state; this would solve the Jewish Problem with finality—by eliminating it!

Thus Theodore Herzl's suggestion of Uganda as a possible location for the Jewish State is not an anomaly. And those Zionists of Eastern Europe who disagreed and held out for Palestine, did so for pragmatic reasons only. They knew well that the Jewish masses were not so bewitched by the nationalistic ideal that they could be attracted to a synthetic African "homeland." They had to bank on the ancient and deeply-rooted longing for Eretz Yisroel, which could be harnessed to a Palestine-based nationalism with bonds of love. It was on the matter of location alone that his colleagues differed with Herzl; otherwise they identified completely with his concept of the "new" Jewish nation.

"The clergy? . . . we will
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DER JUDENSTAAT

Dr. Herzl: A Founding Father in Word and Action

WHILE ONE MAY SHRUG OFF Dr. Herzl's Uganda suggestion as a chance proposal, not related to any

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underlying philosophy, his own writings as well as his personal life betrayed a very deep alienation from Judaism, and reveal root-causes for many individual crises in Israel today—especially those that grow from negative attitudes toward rabbinical authority, toward protective barriers against assimilation and inter-marriage, and toward the integrity of the Jewish People and its religious heritage.

To quote Dr. Herzl in *Der Judenstaat*: "The clergy shall rule over us? Never! We will lock them up in their synagogues as one confines an army to its barracks. We will certainly not allow them to interfere in affairs of state."

"If our state were in existence no citizen could be prevented from marrying a Gentile. Upon marriage, she would become a 'Jewess,' regardless of her religion."

—Theodore Herzl
(from MEMOIRS OF NORDAU)

When his friend and colleague in the Zionist Movement Dr. Max Nordau married a Gentile woman, Herzl was most encouraging (from *The Memoirs of Nordau*, p. 106): "Your fears concerning the reaction of the fanatics to your mixed marriage are perhaps exaggerated. I don't believe that any sensible person can reproach you on this score. Ideally, we would already be citizens of the Jewish State, which it is our supreme purpose in life to bring into being. If our state were already in existence, surely no one of its citizens could be prevented from marrying a foreign Gentile. Upon marriage she would become a 'Jewess' (i.e. a citizen-by-marriage of the Jewish State) regardless of her religion. If she subsequently would have children, they too would be 'Jews' as a matter of course.

"Incidentally, you can always say that you are following in illustrious footsteps; if I am not mistaken, Moses himself married a Midianite woman."

Dr. Herzl argued that it was necessary to establish a Jewish state for those Jews who could not or would not assimilate—mainly the Jews of Eastern Europe. For the Jews of Western Europe, he had a different solution to offer: wholesale conversions. From his diary:

"I wanted to solve the Jewish question, in Austria at least, with the help of the Catholic Church. I wanted to assure myself first of all of the help of the princes of the church, and through them to obtain an audience with the Pope, to say to him as follows: 'Defend us against the anti-Semites, and I will found a strong

The Absorption Minister and his appointees are orthodox Marxists, who consider religion the "opiate of the masses." They would no sooner meet the religious needs of the olim than supply addicts with hashish.

movement of Jews converting to Christianity, proudly and of their own free will. The leaders of the movement, myself in particular, will remain Jewish, and it will be as Jews that we will advise and recommend willing acceptance of the dominant faith. The mass conversion will take place at high noon of a Sunday amid the pomp of a ceremonial parade and the ringing of the church bells of St. Stephen's—not furtively and with humiliation as Jews have converted until today, but standing tall and proud! All this on condition that the leaders will remain as Jews, accompanying the people to the threshold of the church, they themselves will remain outside; this will add stature to the proceedings, which will acquire the aura of a great revelation. We strong ones will be a transition generation. We ourselves will remain within our faith, but we will convert our small children to Christianity before they reach an age to decide these things for themselves."

Dr. Herzl had an only son named Hans, whom he wished to spare the burden of belonging to the Jewish nation. He therefore refused to allow the child to be circumcised—entered into the *bris* of *Avrohom Avinu*. Towards the end of his life, Hans Herzl converted to Christianity. Jacob Wintshel, a leader of Herut, tells us in his biography of the younger Herzl (p. 45):

"When Hans was born, his father would not circumcise him, for reasons of his own. At that time, Herzl himself did not yet see a way out of the Jewish dilemma. He feared that some Jews would have to accept Catholicism, others . . . Socialism. . . . He himself saw abandoning Judaism as incompatible with human dignity. But he did not care to solve the problem in advance for his son."

In this unretouched word portrait of the founder of Zionism and the circumstances in which Zionism was born, one can discover the roots of everything taking place today—especially the antipathy for the Rabbis as bearers of *halacha* and tradition, as opposed to the official tolerance toward mixed marriages and missionary activities.

Secular Pressures: No Surprises

THE CHAZON ISH, OF BLESSED MEMORY, often expressed a harshly condemnatory assessment of secular Zionist leadership. Meir David Lewinstein, Agudat Member of the first Knesset, visited the Chazon Ish (in the

presence of the writer of these lines) to bemoan the "Law of Work and Rest," which violated the very essence of the Shabbos day. The Chazon Ish answered him, "I am surprised at your complaints. I had personally thought that the lawmakers of a secular state would go so far as to force religious Jews to open their stores and to report to the factories on Shabbos and Yom-Tov! And you are disappointed with the present law?"

The Chazon Ish went on to say, "A few days ago the Rav of Petach Tikvah came to see me, pouring out his bitterness over the women's rights clause in the Law of Inheritance that the government wants the Rabbinical Courts to administer. I said to him, 'Do you really think that the State of Israel would maintain Rabbinical Courts at its own expense, and grant them jurisdiction, so they should render judgment on the basis of *halacha*? Why, that is a contradiction in terms! They will mount ever-growing pressures on the rabbis to compel them to deviate from the *halacha* and to open grave breaches in the wall of Torah observance.'"

Our sainted teacher offered a prophecy and he knew whereof he prophesied.

And indeed, several months ago in an interview with a French journalist, Prime Minister Golda Meir was asked her opinion of the current religious strife in Israel. She said, "Six hours after we achieve peace with our neighbors, the current strife will come to an end." Her intentions are obvious. With the advent of peace, the existence of the State will no longer be dependent on funds from abroad, nor will it require any longer the moral and political support of Jews from around the world; so the secularist government will be free to carry out its designs on religion without interference.

"Kliah" Problems

THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY surrounding the Absorption Ministry's announced intention of assigning Russian olim to irreligious Kibbutzim does have its apologists. They see this policy as simply another unfortunate manifestation of an insensitive bureaucracy at work. This approach is both shallow and naive. The Minister and his appointees are members of Mapam, orthodox Marxists, who consider religion "the opiate of the masses." They would not allow the Georgian immigrants to settle together in order to preserve their time-

honored way of life, or provide them with shuls, mikvot, and schooling facilities any more than they would think of supplying addicts with hashish and pipes for smoking.

Just as one disperses drug addicts to wean them away from narcotics, so does the Mapain Minister see it as his duty to scatter the Georgian immigrants within a secular environment and to do his best to dissociate them from the tradition of their fathers. It is only discreation and a fear of public opinion—especially from outside Israel—that prevent the Minister from stating his views openly, and force him to tread with care and work with circumspection.

We do not share his need to be circumspect. Before us we behold a tribe unique in that its every member, without exception, is Torah-observant! And here, in Israel, this group has been threatened with the fate of the Yemenite, Moroccan, Iraqi, Libyan, and Cochinites which preceded it—the fate of spiritual extinction. This is meant to be yet another conquest in the triumphal march of Secular Zionism, which proclaims that here, at the shores of Israel, one casts off at last and throws into the sea the burden of being Jewish—the *Yiddishkeit* which was preserved with such sublime self-sacrifice in the dark and far-flung *gola*.

Co-existence—a Destructive Delusion

IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, co-existence of holiness and profanity is a myth. As the Chazon Ish said to Ben-Gurion: *If a loaded wagon and an empty one would come to a narrow alley where both cannot pass at the same time, which must stand aside? Surely the empty one must allow the loaded one to take precedence. By the same token, the passage is too narrow for a wagon loaded with Torah and mitzvot to allow the empty wagon of secularism to pass at its side.* . . . Secularism's tolerance for religion is not genuine; and for the forces of religion to be tolerant of the secular is to be self-deceptive to the point of self-annihilation.

"I am not afraid of evil decrees, . . . [which are] ultimately abolished, but the lure of false Messiahs has wrought frightful havoc in the vineyards of Israel."

The Chazon Ish

Secularizing the Georgian Jews is just the opening shot in a renewed campaign against Torah observance, and we would be wise to be better prepared for it; for many of the skirmishes will not be of such an obvious nature. The sainted Chazon Ish said, "I am not afraid

of anti-religious decrees. However, I am fearful of the sweetness of the *Medina* becoming attractive to the faithful Jew. . . . Evil decrees are ultimately abolished, but the lure of false Messiahs has wrought frightful havoc in the vineyards of Israel."

And the Chasam Sofer said, "It is written: *A song of Asaf, Nations have invaded your lands (Tehillim 79:1)*. Why does the Psalmist introduce this as a song? Surely this would be the occasion for a dirge! But we sing because it was the *nations* who entered Jerusalem and reduced it to rubble, and not Jews. Had the Jews, G-d forbid, destroyed the Bais Hamikdash, then a dirge would indeed be appropriate. . . ."

When Arab workers accidentally drilled four small holes in the *Kotel*, the press erupted in condemnation and the government immediately set up a Board of Inquiry. Yet when the rulers and legislators uproot entire passages from the Torah, which is beyond question more ancient than the *Kotel* and beyond measure holier, there are even "*Yidim*" Jews who do not interrupt their daily routine. They make peace with the reality of the State and even complete the Hallel every Fifth of *Iyar* in its praise. . . .

When forced to face the implications of the *Kliyah* policies and the de-Judaizing of the Georgian *olim*, these well-meaning religious Jews found it impossible to fully digest the situation. Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz gave voice to harsh truths in a Knesset speech when he said: "If it is inevitable that Jews of Georgia must desecrate the Shabbos in Israel, it would be better for them rather to continue to sanctify G-d's name in the Russian *gola* (than to come to Israel at all)." The indignant challenges to this statement even came from religious Jews. They had overlooked the basic tenet that "the who causes another to sin is more guilty than if he would kill him." The oversight is tragic but inevitable, since their way of thinking and their *weltanschauung* is nourished more by *Maariv* and *Yediot Achronot* than (*behavdil*) by the words of the holy sages.

In their confusion, the Religious Nationalists (Mardai) and other nationalistic religious groups said that Rabbi Lorincz's impassioned cry would refute the well-known fact that the *mitzva* of *Yishuv ha'Aretz* (settling the Land) is equivalent to all the other mitzvot of the Torah put together. In other words, they found it preferable to desecrate the Shabbos inside Eretz Yisroel. Yet less than 100 years ago, the *geonim* the *Nerzi* and Rabbi Shmuel Mohilever of blessed memory, leaders of the *Chovevei Zion* movement (which the Mizrahi claims as its forerunner) directed their representative Dr. Pinsker to take any appropriate action against the members of Bilu who had settled in Gedera, because the word had gone out that they were careless in observance of the *mitzvot*. . . . to purify the Land of these destructive elements, even at the cost of

several thousand francs to enable them to leave the Land, and in their place to settle there religious people from Yerusshalaim who are interested in farming" (from *Toldot Chibbar Zion*, by S. L. Chinn).

Dr. Pinsker wrote back: "We certainly must ascertain that the colonists do not willfully break the laws of the Torah. It goes without saying that those in Eretz Yisroel who are supported by their fellow Jews in the *gola* must be *shomeret mitzvot*, and that the irreligious are not entitled to such support."

What a great distance we have traveled since then! Even the secularist Dr. Pinsker understood that the non-observant are disqualified from being builders of the Land. Yet today, religious Jews believe that when faced with the choice between *aluya* to Eretz Yisroel or observance of Torah, *aluya* takes precedence!

Indeed it was this lamentable confusion of mind that provoked Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik (the Bisker Rav) to dissolve into tears during *Yomim Noraim* at the phrase: *למה נאמר . . . to probe our attitudes in judgment*. He explained that Hashem judges us not only for what we do but also for what we think and believe. "Who can be certain of emerging safely from the Day of Judgment," he would say, "when our minds are constantly being infiltrated by the perverted ideologies of the outside world, so opposite in every way to the principles of faith?"

Redemption from Ideological "Golas"

KABALAH TEACHES us that the *golas* of the intellect exists in tandem with the *golas* of the *Shechinah*. Self redemption from false and misleading ideologies must precede the redemption of the *Shechinah*. This is one of the most difficult tasks facing the Jew who aspires to holiness.

The *Baal HaTaurim* tells us that the word *pedus* (redemption) appears three times in the Torah. Chassidic literature links the three *pedus* to three states of *golas*.

וַיִּצְדַּק יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵינֵי כָל הָעָם "I shall place redemption between My people and your people" (*Shemos* 8:19)—this refers to the dispersion of the Jews among the Gentiles.

וַיִּצְדַּק יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵינֵי כָל הָעָם "A redemption dispatched to His people" (*Tehillim* 111:9), hints of the *golas* of Jews among Jews.

וַיִּצְדַּק יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵינֵי כָל הָעָם "And a bounty of redemption with Him" (*Tehillim* 130:9)—this is for the estrangement of a person from his own ideal self.

Because this last is the most pernicious *golas* of all, the *pasuk* speaks of this redemption as a strong one (boundful). Only when we are indeed free men—free of all foreign influences swimming against—not with—the tide, can we withstand the militant secularism with which we are confronted.

וְעַד כִּדְרֵימָה קָרָן הַתּוֹרָה

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