JEWISH SPIRITUALITY: THE WAY OF TORAH

Text: PP. 67-93

THE POSSESSION: COVENANT

On page 69 we begin to read that the Jews are people of the Covenant: a special “contract” between the people and God that contains both parties who are pledging to fulfill the terms of the covenant. “The Jewish tradition promises God’s Shalom to Jews who sanctify their lives according to the way of the Torah” (69)

In establishing this covenant, it follows that the Jewish people believe that God has chosen them as a special people “to be God’s own people.” As our author is quick to add, this does not mean that Jews regard themselves as superior to others. Why? “God ‘chose’ the Jews not to be superior over other peoples but to fulfill unique obligations that other nations do not bear.” (69) “God gives the Torah to the Jews, although God has not been so generous to any other nation.” (70) The chapter continually states the Torah is beyond value for the Jews.

- “... the Torah reveals to the Jews their corporate identity and their collective vocation as God’s holy people, and it has served for over 3,000 years as their very lifeblood.” (70)
- “the Torah has been the foundation of Jewish values and the inextinguishable light of Jewish vision...” (70)
- “the Torah guides the Jews in their faith commitment, nourishes their interior freedom, and sustains their hope for survival ...” (70)
- “the Torah even provides the Jews with God’s blueprint for their individual lives...” (71)
- “They have even revered the Torah as the ‘sun of the universe’ and God’s ‘daughter.’” (72)
- “Doesn’t God also study the Torah?” (72)
THE NATURE OF GOD

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share the same basic concept of God: loving, personal, close, and forgiving. In fact, Jews agree that the God of their faith is the same as "God, the Father of Jesus Christ," and "Allah." (73)

Note: the concept of "personal" is debated. Does God have "emotions?" Does God become "angry" with the wicked? Contemporary Jews probably would agree that God is personal but we must be careful and not make God anthropomorphic (73). "... Jews have stripped such human limitations such as emotions and corporeality." God is person in the following way: God is aware of human beings and knows their innermost thoughts and desires (73) and is "... able providentially to care for his people, forgive them their sins, and restore them to his redemptive embrace." (73)

"God has become near and not remote; he responds to his people according to their need." (73)

As we all know, the history of the Jews has been tumultuous. The Holocaust of the Second War has placed the concept of a "loving and caring" God in doubt for many Jews. If we are God's specially chosen people, and if God providentially cares for us — then how is it that the prayers of millions of Jews went "unanswered" during that great persecution? As our text says: "Jews still trust that God governs all things sweetly." (75)

Is it any wonder that we read that much of Jewish history is "wrestling" with God? "Jews question the LORD God and argue with him as they wrestle with the most challenging questions of human meaning — issues such as the mystery of evil, suffering, and death." (74) Certainly, if the Jews are the "chosen" people, then (as one rabbi puts it) "can't God chose someone else for a time?"

OBLIGATIONS OF JEWISH SPIRITUALITY

Throughout the chapter, comments are sprinkled that relate the expectations laid down in the Torah for practicing Jews. They are:

Notice on (81) that the emphasis in NOT on the individual Jew. The focus is always on the Jewish People. "there can be no room for an individual spirituality .... (since the Covenant) belongs to the people as a whole. It is the Jewish people and not individuals who have lovingly embodies the Jewish tradition, studied it, nurtured it, determined its implications, developed it, and handed it on from generation to generation."
On page (86) we read that Jewish spirituality must not be allowed to lapse into an empty formalism or dead rituals. Of course, this is a danger common to all religions, where the “letter of the Law” replaces the “spirit of the Law.” The Jewish religion has been the special target of many complaints that it is burdened with too many restrictions and rules/regulations.

Why? There are 613 Mitzvot (“all encompassing statutes for determining Jewish holiness” (87) Since these statutes cover “every facet of existence from the physical to the social, from the emotional and mental to the spiritual” one sees that the danger of Legalism is a real danger. There are 248 positive and 365 negative statutes. The most well-known of the Mitzvot is the Ten Commandments. (87)

The author rightly comments that “since Jews are God’s holy people, they must do far more than simply follow a code of ethics and live a ‘good life.’” (86)

Jews are expected to “respect and safeguard the inherent rights of all human beings, not only on the individual level but also within familial and other social relationships. In particular, they must NOT injure the bodily life, marriage bond, property, reputation, and integral well-being and others.” (88) If you have been following current events, you realize, then, the Palestinian issue is a sore point for all spiritual Jews. How to promote justice and to preserve God’s Shalom??

“... (they are to) render positive service to others,” (88)

“Jews must actively do the good and the right.” (88)

“Wealthy Jews do not have unqualified title to their possessions ... they are morally obliged to give a portion of them to those who are less fortunate.” (89)

Along with other religions “Jews render concrete expression to their spirituality through espousing the cause of the little ones in the world: the poor, the weak, and the needy.” (89)

Make sure that you read the entire chapter and study the various rituals in Judaism.

DVD: “The Protocols of Zion.” A book was published many years ago that is strongly anti-Semitic. It claims that the World order is being manipulated and controlled secretly by Jews. A recent claim is that the Jews themselves are responsible for the Terrorist destruction of 9/11. In this movie made only a few years ago, we will see the author, Sam Levin, as he interviews a number of Jews, Muslims, prison inmates, and Neo-nazis and tries to explain this strident denunciation of all things Jewish.

DVD: “Genocide”. Award winning documentary tracing the origins of hostility to the Jews in the Third Reich.
Philosophy 105 World Religions
Dr. Gayhart
Bring Huston Smith to class for this lecture

ISLAMIC SPIRITUALITY

Saint-Laurent PP. 129-156

THE BASICS

Muslims agree with Jews and Christians that there is only one God; they are all
Monotheists. Jews focus on the Way of Torah; Muslims focus upon the Five Pillars of
Faith. “Islam is built on five pillars: the profession that there is no god by God and that
Muhammad is the messenger of God; performance of the ritual prayer; payment of the
obligator charity; the pilgrimage; and the fast of Ramadan.”

The word ISLAM means: “one who surrenders.” A Muslim is “one who submits” (130).
Muslims believe that Allah provided Islam as the “final revelation” (130) or “complete
religion” for all of God’s human creatures.

We spoke of Shalom as being the promise of God to the Jews. In Islam the word is
SALAM. The word is derived from the root s-l-m which means primarily “peace” but
secondarily “surrender.” “Islamic peace includes total integration because it heals
divided human beings from mental distraction and moral estrangement. Islamic peace
conveys safety and security because it protects people from all conflicts, whether
individual, internal, and spiritual or social, external, and material.” (130) Notice that the
promised peace is both inner and spiritual as well as providential and focused upon the
external.

As with Jews and Christians, Muslims believe in an afterlife -- PARADISE is the reward
for all faithful who have submitted to Allah.

Islam has a key human personality, the prophet Muhammad. For those of you who are
new to Islam: You may read about him in our text (62-64) and there is a good narrative of
his life in The World’s Religions by Huston Smith (223ff). Smith writes:

The blend of admiration, respect, and affection that the Muslim feels for Muhammad is
an impressive face of history. They see him as a man who experienced life in exceptional
range. Not only was he a shepherd merchant, hermit, exile, soldier, lumiplier, profeles-
priest king, and mystic; he was also an orphan, for many years the husband of one wife
much older than himself, many times bereaved father, a widower, and finally the husband
of many wives, some much younger than himself In all of these roles he was exemplary.”
(WR: 231)
In our text, Saint –Laurent writes:

*Muhammad devoted all his time, mental acumen, practical skill, and physical stamina to delivering the Quran, proclaiming God’s oneness and mercy, opposing all rival gods, promoting justice for the wronged, and gathering the Arabs together into one umma. Like Moses and Jesus before him, Muhammad became God’s special possession, and he lived out the details of his life accordingly.* (62)

“No other human being has so captured the imagination of Muslims and no other man has so inspired the conduct of Muslims.” (133)

Do not confuse the relationship between Christians and Jesus. The Muslims revere or admire Muhammad but they Worship God alone. “Muslims... bind themselves personally not Prophet Muhammad but to God alone. Muhammad insisted: “Do not exalt me as the Christians have extolled the Son of Mary. I am only God’s servant. Refer to me as the servant and messenger of God” (133)

As with Jews and Christians, Muslims also believe in responsible Choice (Note: the notion of “Free” will is misleading in Monotheistic religions insasmuch as there is freedom within limits. No human may exercise “total” free will. God, being sovereign, allows human only to operate within limits that God establishes.)

“God has endowed human beings with the power of making a fundamental choice for the overall direction of their lives. They can devote themselves in service to God for the open-ended future as far as they can control it, or they can withhold themselves from God in a futile quest for autonomy.” (134)

**LIFE AS A MUSLIM**

The imitation of the life of Muhammad is the aim to be guided by obedience to the Five Pillars of Faith. They are (from Smith WR):

1. **Shahadah.** This is the “Confession of Faith.” “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Prophet.” At least once in his or her lifetime, a Muslim must say the Shahadah correctly, slowly, thoughtfully, aloud, with full understanding and with heartfelt conviction.

2. **Prayer.** Muslims are admonished to be constant in prayer to keep their lives in focus. The Quran considers this the most difficult lesson people must learn. Muslims are expected to prayer at least five times every day. The times of the prayers are: on arising; when the sun reaches its zenith; its mid-decline; sunset; and before bed. Muslims are expected to pray in mosques as they are able; and the Friday noon prayer gathering is emphasized. Prayer is directed in the direction of Mecca. Ritual washing prcedes prayers.
3. Charity. The Quran states that 2 1/2% is to be set aside to distribute to the poor and less fortunate. Although this may seem rather a small amount, the tax is to be computed both from INCOME and total ASSETS that a person possesses (house; property; stocks; etc). Poorer people owe nothing; but those in the middle and upper income brackets should annually distribute among the poor on-fortieth of the value of ALL that they possess.

4. RAMADAN. The Fast. Ramadan is a month in the Islamic calendar. All able-bodied Muslims fast during this month. From the first moment of dawn to the setting of the sun, neither food nor drink nor smoke passes their lips; after sundown they may partake in moderation. Since the Muslim calendar is lunar; Ramadan rotates around the years. When it fall in the winter its demands are not excessive. When, on the other hand, it falls during the scorching heat of the summer, to remain active during the long days without so much as drop of water is an ordeal.

5. The Hajj or Pilgrimage. Once during his or her lifetime, every Muslim who is physically and economically in a position to do so is expected to journey to Mecca, where God’s climactic revelation was first disclosed. [We will see the National Geographic DVD “Inside Mecca” for striking visuals of this.]

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES:

1. Islam and the Use of Force. Holy War or Jihad. Islamic Striving.

Those who read sparingly or who do not care to learn about Islam as a faith of millions, may be tempted to focus only upon the media’s version of Islam. And the version that makes the most rumble is continually focused upon one feature: Muslims and Violence. For many, MUSLIM = TERROIST. This is the regrettable state of media mentality. That is why your instructor will devote some extended discussion of the topic of “Islamic Striving” (137).

First, the text comments upon Muslim “Holy War” or “JIHAD.” “The struggle emerges from the very fabric of human existence, and it engages the Muslim’s energies throughout their lifetime. Some Eastern journalists have mistakenly reduced jihad to the concept of “holy war,” and they have incorrectly equated jihad with terrorism and violent conflict.

In point of fact, Muslims follow Prophet Muhammad’s guidance on this issue and carefully distinguish between the strictly spiritual struggle of self-disciple, or “greater jihad,” and the armed combat of self-defense, or “lesser jihad.” ... Muslims engage in the lesser jihad, or legitimate holy war, only when the Islamic umma (“community”) has become the victim of unjust aggression.” (138)
To be sure, Muslims do not have a counterpart of the Amish or the Quakers, who devote themselves to pacifism and non-violence. But not all Christians agree with pacifism.

Huston Smith likewise writes (WR 255):

Far from requiring the Muslim to turn himself into a doormat for the ruthless, the Quran allows punishment of wanton wrongdoers to the full extent of the injury they impart. Justice requires this, they believe ... Muhammad was an outstanding general and left many traditions regarding the decent conduct of war:

- Agreements are to be honored and treachery avoided
- The wounded are not to be mutilated nor the dead disfigured
- Women, children, and the old are to be spared, as are orchards, crops, and sacred objects.

The important question is the definition of a righteou s war. According to prevailing interpretations of the Quran, a righteous war must either be defensive or to right a wrong. “Defend yourself against your enemies, but do not attack them first; God hate the aggressor” (2:190)

Muslims claim that history reveals that religious tolerance is part of Muhammad’s message. The original charter of the Muslim nation decreed “that Jews who attach themselves to our commonwealth shall be protected from all insults and vexation; they shall have an equal right with our own people to our assistance and good offices; the Jews .... Shall practice their religion as freely as the Muslims.”

Muhammad himself said: “Will you then force men to believe when belief can come only from God?

2. Islam and the Role of Women (See your reading in Huston Smith)

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DVD: “Inside Mecca” This film was produced by National Geographic and is visually stunning. Never before has the city, culture, and people been so approachable. A great introduction to Islam and Muslim values. The end of the film shows the vast migration of Muslims during the Hajj or pilgrimage.
Women’s Beating

Allah (ﷻ), stated in the Glorious Quran 4:34 which the meaning of is translated as:

"...As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful), but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allah is Most High, Most Great."

Islam, in fact, forbids beating women and warns strictly against it. This is due to the general basic fact that women, in general, are physically weaker than men in their physical make-up are. Women are usually unable to defend themselves against beating. However, although beating of women is forbidden, Islam permitted it in restricted and very limited occasions and only when it is required as a final treatment of a persistent situation, i.e. when a wife disobeys her husband’s instructions for no visible and acceptable valid reason.

In the verse we quoted from the Glorious Quran, Allah (ﷻ) dealt with the case of a wife who disobeys her husband’s commands and instructions. The treatment of this extremely sensitive issue comes on gradual stages, as we have noticed from the verse. Medicine, or treatment of any ailment, can be very bitter at times. But an ill person will take the remedy gladly and bear the bitterness of the medicine in order to be cured from his illness. The remedy to treat a disobedient wife, as we have noticed, comes on three gradual stages, as illustrated by Allah (ﷻ) in the Glorious Quran.
Women in the Shade of Islam

First stage: The stage of advice, counseling and warning against Allah's penalty. A husband must remind his disobedient wife with the importance of following the instructions of the husband in Islam. This stage is a very kind and easy one. But, if this treatment does not work and prove not effective, then comes the next stage.

Second stage: To leave the wife's bed. Or, if one sleeps in the same bed with her, he will turn his back to her, not touch her, talk to her and have intercourse with her. This stage, as noticed, combines both strictness and kindness, although it is a very harsh practice on both. But, if this treatment does not work, then turn to the final stage of discipline below.

Third and final stage: Beating without hurting, breaking a bone, leaving blue or black marks on the body and avoiding hitting the face, at any cost. The purpose of beating here is a disciplinary action and not retaliation or hurting by any means. It is to let the wife know that her behavior, conduct and attitude towards her husband are not acceptable. Beating, in this case, and according to Islamic teachings, is restricted and limited to be a form of treatment only. Beating a wife is not meant to be a form of humiliation, a form of forcing and compelling the woman to do things against her own will, or a means of hurting her physically. In fact, it is reported that Ibn 'Abbas (رضي الله عنه), one of the leading companions of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and a scholar of early Muslims, hit only with the (Siwak) the natural wooden root that is used for brushing the teeth. Islam forbids severe beating as punishment.
This treatment is proved to be very effective with two types of women, as psychologists have determined:

The first type: Controlling or mastering women. These are the type of women who like to control, master and run the affairs of their husbands by pushing them around, commanding them and giving them orders.

The second type: Submissive, or subdued women. These women enjoy being beaten. G. A. Holdfield, a European psychologist, in his book *Psychology and Morals* states the following:

"The instinct of submission strengthens at times, in the human being so much that a submissive person will enjoy seeing someone overpowering him, over-ruling him and being cruel to him. Such a submissive person bears the consequences of his submission due to the fact that he enjoys the pain. This is a well spread instinct amongst women even if they do not realize it. For this very reason, women are well known being more forbearing to pain than men. A wife of this type of women becomes more attracted to and admiring of her husband when he beats her. Nothing, on the other hand, will sadden some women, such as, much as a soft, very kind and very obedient husband who is never upset regardless of being challenged!"

Beating, in according to the Islamic teachings, is listed as the last and final stage of training, discipline and upbringing methods. Islam does not permit, allow or even condone beating unless the first two stages are proven to be ineffective methods of treatment. Moreover, beating must not be employed as a remedy if a wife prefers to be divorced.