

A-120

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"SHOULD COMMUNISM BE TAUGHT IN OUR SCHOOLS? The Religious Point of View"

One of the most perplexing problems currently being grappled with by some of our more serious educators, thinkers and generally mature people, is the problem of teaching Communism in our public schools. The question is not a political one, since both proponents and opponents detest communism. If it were a political issue, it would not be discussed from this pulpit and by this Rabbi. The question is even more than a purely technical one to be discussed in the obscure jargon of professional educators. It is basically a moral problem, and is therefore open to a religious evaluation.

It is not an easy problem to solve. Both opposing points of view seem to have merit. It is our task to weight the merits and the faults carefully, from the points of view of the American tradition of democracy and from the point of view of plain common sense, and then to draw upon the fertile resources of our faith to see what it has to say.

Those who are against teaching Communism in our schools, and we speak here of intelligent opponents not hysterical bigots, are concerned with the danger of our students being convinced by it. Play with fire long enough and you are bound to be burned. Teach students Das Kapital and the Communist Manifesto, and they will wind up materialistic atheists with an allegiance to the Kremlin. Communism is an attractive theory, and it may claim many victims. The danger is too strong and the likelihood too great. Let them learn of other things. Don't teach them communism.

Those who maintain that the theories and ~~practices~~ actualities of communism should be taught, counter that argument by saying that all knowledge is, in one way or another dangerous. The knowledge of mathematics can lead to an atom bomb, the knowledge of philosophy to heresy and the knowledge of chemistry to poison gases. Yet that does not mean that we should abandon these studies. It depends upon who studies, how it is taught, and the moral tradition in which the studying is done. Surely, speaking from a Jewish point of view, when Solomon exclaimed YOSIF DAAS YOSIF MACHOV, that he who increases his knowledge increases his suffering, he did not mean to discourage wisdom. Solomon, of all people, revered wisdom and disdained fools. What you do with your knowledge, therefore, is independent of the studying itself.

Furthermore, these people say, any attempt to limit or cancel my intake of knowledge is the beginning of the end for democracy. Thought-control, even in times of national emergency, is contrary to everything our Founding Fathers taught and fought for. An educated, well-rounded and practicing free American must know about Communism too. And here they stress "about". For they advocate teaching about this ideology, not to teach it in the sense of indoctrination or propaganda.

These, then, in crude outline form, are the two basic opposing opinions concerning this vital problem. On the hand the danger of learning totalitarianism, on the other hand the danger of losing freedom. It is obvious that the choice is a hard one, and one which involves a moral and ethical position. It is because of this that teachers of religion have a right to express their opinions and present the teachings of their faiths on this crucial matter.

Does Judaism have any opinion in this matter? It certainly does. And the opinions of Judaism are not formulated by conventions; they are drawn from the Torah and the commentary of our Talmudic Sages. And in the particular Sidra we read today, the portion dealing with SHOFTIM, with Jewish judges, their character and personality and position and requirements, we find a clear and lucid allusion to our problem.

The Children of Israel are coming into their Promised Land, the land of the Canaanites. It is a land inhabited by barbarians, by idol worshippers who are degraded beyond words. The great majority of them practice the rite of the Molech, in which parents cast their young children into the gigantic arms of the idol, in the midst of which there burns a vicious fire, and the children die a miserable, horrible death. They are a superstitious lot, who believe in magic and charms and communicating with the dead, rituals accompanied by the most degenerate forms of immorality. Witchcraft and black-magic are accepted forms of social behavior. And here is Israel, a young, tender, naive and saintly people, coming into their midst! Listen to G-d's admonition to Israel: KI ATA BA EL HA'ARETZ... you are now coming into this new land I promised you, and as you do so remember LO SILMAD LA'ASOS K'SOAVOS HA'GOYIM HA'HEM, do not learn to do as they do, in all their abominations. Keep away from their cruel and inhuman idolatry, from their immoral magic, from their stupid superstitions.

And here our Rabbis make an astute observation. The prohibition against learning the abominable ways of the inhabitants of the land, they point out, is not a general one. It does not mean that their scholars may not learn their culture, or historians their history. One word must be remembered, they stress. LO SILMAD LA'ASOS, thou shalt not learn to do, AVAL ATA LAMED LE'HAVIN ULE'HOROSS, but you may learn in order to understand and to judge. You dare not learn in order to practice, you dare not learn as indoctrination - but certainly go ahead and study all about them if your object is to broaden your knowledge, to understand others, to attain wisdom. and even more: LE'HOROSS, to judge and evaluate! For how can one judge the relative merits of Judaism and idolatry if he knows nothing about idolatry. LE'HOROSS, to make a proper judgement, one must learn and learn well. Certainly it entails dangers, dangers of trying to imitate their barbarism. But it most certainly is worth the chance, for LEHAVIN ULEHOROSS is one of the highest attainments of any human being .

So that the opinion of Traditional Judaism is ATA LOMED LEHAVIN ULEHOROSS, we must study everything, even systems and ways of life most inimical to us, in order to understand and to judge. Certainly the parallel to our contemporary problem is clear. And so is the solution. By all means teach about Communism. In fact, teach them enough about it LEHOROSS, so that they will be able to judge, to judge it by itself and to judge Democracy by contrast. Let them contrast the high-sounding humanitarian phrases of Marx with the cruel, barbaric practices of the Stalins and Malenkovs. Let them evaluate the injustices current in America today with the colossal, inhuman and degrading injustice of Russia. LEHAVIN ULEHOROS. Let them understand, and let them judge. Deny them this learning, and you deny them the understanding of one of the most powerful and influential movers in modern history. Deny them this learning and you deny them the ability to judge and appreciate their own heritage of liberty and democracy.

Students of the Talmud know that Orthodoxy is much more liberal in thought than most of us so-called "moderns" want to believe. He who as a child studied Gemarra with its open, unhibited discussion of laws relating to various aberrations and forms of immorality, or eerie forms of homicide, or dim kinds of idolatry, is shocked by any attempt to consciously close the mind and shut out learning from it. Judaism, Talmudic Judaism, never accepted thought-control as a solution for anything. It is dangerous, yes, but so is any creative act in life; while ignorance is safe, safe as being in jail, or safe as the grave is safe. But no human being with a Divine soul will exchange this glorious danger for this lethal safety.

No wonder that in Eilat the prayer for a free - distinguish bet. good & evil, sound practice etc. as included particularly in that blessing when we ask for knowledge - see 1311 PMAR. Because our greatest function is a free. Here too - 13121 bet. communism & democracy

And allow me, at this point, friends, to diverge from our central topic, the teaching of communism, to an allied subject closer to my heart. We have been outlining the view of Judaism on education. We have been pleading for an opportunity for our children to study everything, even communism. Let me now do something that is painful for me. LET ME PLEAD THAT THEY BE ALLOWED TO STUDY EVEN TORAH. It is painful because a Rabbi from a pulpit has to plead for an opportunity for Jewish children to study their own religion and heritage, in the same tones he pleads for an opportunity for them to study one of the vilest and most poisonous forms of idolatry ever to bid for the soul of Man.

But if that is my task, then painful as it is, I must pursue it. I appeal to every man and woman here to send his or her child, or urge a neighbor's child, to acquire a Jewish education. I plead not in the name of G-d, which is what I should do. I plead not in the name of the necessity for observance of the Torah, which again is what I should do. I plead in the name of simple fairness to your children. Do not deny them access to the raw materials from which they must fashion a way of life. Do not deny to them an opportunity to find meaningfulness in life. Do not deny them the chance at least to understand and judge and appreciate. ATA LOMEC LEHAVIN ULEHOROSS. Let them learn at least to know for knowledge sake, or at least to know what not to do. Springfield is not poor in educational facilities. A grand, dynamic, functioning, high-class Day School. An efficient Afternoon School. And even lesser forms of education than that.

This is the season when registration is to begin for these various schools. For G-d's sake -- no, not only for G-d's sake, but: for your children's sake -- send them to some school, preferably to the school which offers them most in the way of Judaism as well as in secular studies, but to some school.

The religious point of view propounded by Judaism is clear enough. Learning is more than an intellectual act. It is an act of worship. The human mind, while recognizing its own limitations, must erect no artificial barriers. It would be a denial of American democracy, a caricature of liberalism and an act out of consonance with the traditions of the Torah, to keep any knowledge, even of Communism, from our people.

And, finally, it would be a denial of fairness, a caricature of mature parenthood and out of consonance with our paternal responsibilities to keep from our children a knowledge of the Torah.