

MULTIPLE LOYALTIES

The question is whispered, and must be answered in a forthright manner: Darfur or Israel? Is your loyalty to your people, or to humanity? Is your loyalty to Judaism, or to mankind? Are you essentially a Jew, or a human being?

Be wary of the framing of the question, because it forces a strangle-hold on us, a hard disjunctive “either-or” choice. It is like the question my aunt asked me as a child: “*Tell the truth, dear. Do you love your father or your mother?*” That is a cruel option.

For a Jew, to love Judaism is to love humanity. That is basic Jewish theology. God of Israel is global, not tribal. The traditional formula for our liturgy reads “*Blessed are Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe.*” *Melach ha-olam*. We are the custodians of the world and its inhabitants.

The righteous indignation of the Jewish prophets was not restricted to Jews or Judaism. The Prophet’s call to repentance was not for Israel alone. In Judaism, the defense of human dignity never was, or is, for Jews only.

When we open the bible we learn that the first Jew, Abraham, first defended not Jews, but the pagan citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah and confronted God: “*Shall the judge of all the world not do justice?*” Abraham spoke to God in passionate defense of the people of Sodom, none of whom were Jews.

On Yom Kippur, we read that the prophet Jonah was sent to prophesy to the people of Ninevah, none of whom were Jews. They repented for their transgressions, and God repented for his punishment.

The prophet Amos addressed God’s concern not only for Israel, but for the people in Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab.

Do you love your people or humanity? We reject the premise.

To be a Jew is to love humanity. To love God is to love His creation. On Rosh HaShanah, we do not celebrate the birth of any of our Jewish patriarchs — Not Abraham nor Moses. Our High Holy Day calendar does not celebrate the birth of a Jewish messiah, or the accomplishments of any of its Jewish prophets. The Jewish calendar is calculated not as 2006 C.E. or 6th Century B.C.E. but commemorates the birth of the universe and of all humanity.

In the beginning, God created Adam. Adam has no race, no ethnicity and no creed. Adam is each man and each woman and each child created in the image of God. So, in the first chapter of Genesis we read: “*And God created the human being in God’s image, male and female, created He them.*”

When the sages ask “from what continent? From what corners of the earth — south, west, east or north — and from what color earth was Adam formed? They reply, “Adam was formed from every corner of the earth and out of black, white, red and yellow dust.”

If you hurt my brother or my sister — black, white, yellow, red — in Europe, Asia, Africa or America — if you humiliate, torture, torment them, you rip apart the image of God. It is my flesh, soul and heart that you wound. It is my flesh that is pierced and my tongue you cut

out and my eyes you make blind.

The God of the Universe did not create Islam or Christianity or Judaism. God created “*adam*,” the human being, who through his religious choice cultivates religious culture, conscience and compassion.

Wise people repudiate the making of false “either-or” choices. The choice is not either/or: either our own or others; either we shed tears for our family alone or for the other families of the earth. Compassion and justice are not like pieces of pie. Cut a slice for yourself, you take away from the other. Your pie is too small! Your god is too small. True love and mercy are inclusive, expansive, embracing, enlarging. So, our sages taught “*mitzvah goreret mitzvah*” — one good deed leads to another. Love of the Children of Israel leads to love of all the children in God’s world. The moral choice is not either/or. The Jewish response is “both/and.”

Like charity, love begins at home but it must not end there. If it ends at home, it is not love and charity but tribal narcissism. Therefore, in our tradition, we are mandated to care for the poor, the pariah, the diseased, the murdered of all humanity. We are mandated to feed the hungry of the stranger together with the hungry of Israel. We comfort the bereaved of the alien together with the bereaved of Israel. We visit the sick of the nations of the world with the sick of Israel.

Above all, Jews and non-Jews must not fall victim to the humiliating game of “one downmanship”— “my genocide is worse than your genocide.” Your blood is not as red as my blood. Genocide, no matter its color, ethnicity or religion, of any fabric, is the ultimate blasphemy to the image of Godliness.

Loyalty to Jews or humanity? The Torah teaches a kinship of suffering whether the victims threatened are in Judea, Armenia, Chad, Bosnia, Rwanda or Darfur — all souls are threatened. And on Yom Kippur we fast for all who are afflicted with drought and famine.

It is a false choice: Do you love your children or the children of others? On the contrary, because we love our children, we love other children. Because we love our families, we love other families. Because we mourn our holocaust, we mourn the holocausts of the world.

It is perilous to abandon the particular in order to love the universal. It is equally foolhardy to abandon the universal for the particular. As the philosopher George Santayana noted: “*You cannot speak in general without using any language in particular.*” Judaism is our particular language through which we address humanity. From out of the depth and memory of our own pain, we cry to alleviate the pain of our brothers and sisters.

The President of Sudan, Omar Hassan Al-Bashir, got it right. He railed at Jews and the Zionist plot for our condemnation of Sudanese genocide in Darfur. He condemned Jews and Jewish organizations like Jewish World Watch for interfering in the internal affairs of Sudan.

He has a point.

Jews do not sleep, and they will not let tyrants sleep.

We honor our Jewish holocaust by remembering the other holocausts in our world. We give voice to our murdered to speak their message of outrage to a mute world out of the ovens of Treblinka. It diminishes our people’s suffering to confine the Holocaust to one moment, to one time, to one place, to one people.

The voice of the Jewish World Watch is captured in the poetry of Rabbi Isaac Kook — Israeli mystic, Talmudist and poet:

“There is one who sings the song of his own self, and in himself finds everything. Then there is the one who sings the song of his people, and cleaves with a tender love to Israel, and there is one whose spirit is in all worlds and with all of them does he join in his song.”

Jewish World Watch has its song. The song of the self, the song of our people, the song of humanity, the song of the world. When the songs merge they become the song of holiness.

*Speech delivered by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis at the **First Annual State of Humanity Forum:** October 17, 2006 at Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, California*