

# Globalism And Judaism

Don't throw away the newspaper! Newspapers are the day-to-day records of history. Judaism has a passion for meaning. Events have meaning. What do events mean? How do changes instruct us? Look around at the world. Every event has something to teach us. As the Zohar instructed: "There is nothing in the world empty of God."

When the Industrial Revolution took place, it overwhelmed the world of the shtetl, the Jewish village. It is told that the disciples in one shtetl asked the rabbi, "What does it mean? What can we learn from the invention of the train, the telegraph, from the telephone?" The rabbi answered, "From the train, we learn that, but for one moment, everything can be lost. Once the door of the train is closed, you miss the great journey. Pay attention!

"And what can you learn from the telegraph? From the telegraph you learn that every word counts. Guard your tongue! And what can you learn from the telephone? From the telephone you learn that whatever you speak here is heard there." Words have consequences.

We live in the age of globalization--economic, political, cultural, technological globalization. What meaning does globalization have for us? It has entered our life, the life of our country, the life of world civilizations. This is the age of the Internet, satellite television, computers, cell phones, email and out-sourcing. The world is smaller and more interconnected than ever before in its history. Things move faster. Space is more constricted. Geography has shrunk. What happens in

Baghdad affects Tarzana. What happens in Darfur affects Washington. What happens in Indonesia affects Iowa.

What does globalization mean? What globalization means has produced many debates and many interpretations. Historian Francis Fukuyama, in his End of History, argues that Globalism means that economics, in the future and in the present, is more powerful than politics. The Soviet Union imploded, not because a single missile was shot. The Soviet Union imploded because it could not bear the burden of its command economy. Trade unity will do what politics did not do before globalization.

On the other hand, Professor Samuel Huntington, in The Clash of Civilizations, believes that globalism not only stabilizes, but also destabilizes the world. Jihad and McWorld occur at the same time and are both linked together, driven by technology, ecology, communication, congress. Huntington foresees, not global harmony, but tribal factionalism, the clash of civilizations. The world is falling apart--the center will not hold.

How about us? Judaism is a religion of meaning. What does Judaism have to say about the phenomenon of globalization?

Judaism speaks to the entire world because Judaism is a global religion. Consider the different calendars of religions. How do different religions mark the calendar of time? For Christianity, this is 2006 Anno Domini, the Year of Our Lord. It marks the birth of Jesus as the Son of God.



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Muslims begin their calendar differently. They begin the calendar of the world with 622 A.D., which dates back to Mohammed's Hajira, his flight from Mecca to Medina. Here history begins. But the Jewish calendar is 5766, which celebrates not the birth of a Jewish savior, not the birth of a Jewish redeemer, not a Jewish event such as the Exodus out of Egypt or the revelation of the Law at Sinai. Rosh Hashanah celebrates the birth of the universe and the birth of humanity.

Open the first pages of the book of Genesis: The first eleven chapters do not deal with a Jew--not with Abraham nor Isaac nor Jacob nor Moses nor Aaron. It deals with Adam, and Adam as the archetype of humanity. Adam is not a Jew--the name is derived from "adamah" which means "earth." And when the sages ask, "From which place in the universe was this earth taken? Was it from Athens or Rome or Jericho?" The answer given is that it was taken from four corners of the earth: north, south, east and west. And what was the color of this clay that formed the human being? Our sages answered, "It was black, and white, and red and yellow."

God did not create religion. God created the universe and within the universe, humanity. And the singular biblical verse which resonates throughout Judaism and world history is the verse in Genesis: chapter 1, verse 26: God created every human being--man, woman, child--in God's image. Whatever color, whatever race, whatever ethnicity. God created every human being with Divine potentiality.

There were other traditions that believed that some people are informed by God. The Egyptian Pharaoh believed that he was

God. The kings of Sumeria believed that they were gods. But in Judaism, every single human being is created by God, prince and pauper, the mighty and the weak.

For Adam is not created as different species or kinds. Adam is one. There is only one humanity and only one universe and only one God and only one universal obligation.

In the Midrash it is written: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He took Adam around to see the trees of the Garden of Eden, which included the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge, and He said to Adam, 'Behold My work. All this I create for you. Take care you do not destroy it, for if you do, there is no one left to repair it.' " This charge is addressed to every man, to every human being, and every human being can say, "For my sake was the world created." For when the rabbis asked, "Why did He create Adam singly, by himself, and not as part of a family?" the rabbis answered, "So that no one should say, 'My ancestor is superior to yours.'"

Here is a Jewish particularistic, universalism:

- To be a Jew is think big.
- To be a Jew is to think globally.
- To be a Jew is to act globally.
- To be a Jew is to love God, who is global.

"Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha-Olam." Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the entire universe." King of this universe. God's universe is not to be escaped, or denied, or demeaned. The universe is to be sanctified.



The text books in comparative religion treat Christianity and Islam as universal religions, but not Judaism. From Spinoza to Kant to Hegel, and to many Jews and non-Jews, it is believed that while every religion I have mentioned is universal, Judaism is ethnic, small and provincial, tribal--concerned only with its own believers and well-being and with no one else.

We are a small people with a big idea. When Egypt, by 3000 B.C.E., had built its pyramids, and Sumer had its huge empires, we Jews were a tiny band of nomads milling around the upper regions of the Arabian Desert. When this small people finally settled down on the land, it was 150 miles in length, from Dan to Beersheva; 50 miles across to Jerusalem. But significantly, this small people accepted God's majestic agenda. God's agenda is the entire world and humanity.

Look at God's agenda. Look at God's world. Close the book—open up a newspaper:

- God's world is populated by six billion people.
- One sixth of the world's people, twenty two percent, live below the poverty line.
- 1.3 billion human beings have no access to safe drinking water.
- 2.6 billion live without elementary sanitation.
- 841 million people are severely malnourished.
- 150 million people go to bed hungry every night.
- Thirty thousand children will die today, as they will every day, from starvation, from lack of shelter, from poverty.

You can't close the newspaper once you believe in a global God. For if you close the newspaper, you make God's world irrelevant. If you close the newspaper, you make a mockery out of prayer and repentance and goodness. A synagogue of prayer must have a window, not a mirror; a window to look out at the world.

But why we? We are a small people. Would you add foreign burdens upon us?

Who in the world do you think we are?

I confess: "There is another man within me, and that man is angry with me." If I close the window of the newspaper, I close the character of Jewish world religion. What shall I say to my children and my grandchildren? Who will ask after Rwanda and Darfur, "Where was the synagogue, the rabbis, the congregations?" What shall we say to ourselves; we who rightfully asked, "Where were the priests, pastors, Pope?"

Our greatness as a religion is that we Jews conceived of ourselves as God's allies, as God's partners, as God's friends. We gave the world conscience. We gave to the world a sacred universalism that remains at the foundation of our relationship with the world. Our prophets cared about the ethical behavior of the Ammonites, the Hittites, Syrians and Babylonians. Our last prophet, Malachi, spoke to the world population: "Have we not one Father? Did not one God create us all? Did He who made me in my mother's belly not make him? Did not one God form us both in his womb?"



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How else can I understand our tradition, which on the very first day of Rosh Hashanah speaks of Hagar and Ishmael, not as Jews, but as a mother and a son who are protected by the Angel of the Universal Lord? How else can we explain that our sages chose for us to read the Book of Jonah, which chastises the Jewish prophet Jonah for his unwillingness to preach to the citizens of Nineveh, who are the enemies of God? How else can I explain the grandeur of Abraham's challenge to God in defense no less of pagans, those of Sodom and Gomorrah?

Judaism gave the world not ziggurats or pyramids or mausoleums, but compassion and responsibility. We gave the world a sacred humanitarianism. We gave the world an economic which commands us to set aside a corner of a field, to set aside a corner of the harvest, for the poor.



“*Shickah*,” to see to it that the forgotten seed not be scrounged up from the fields, but let to lay for the hungry. We gave the world the notion of tithing. The third and sixth year of the seventh agricultural year must go to the hungry. We gave to the world dignity, empathy and economic justice. In Exodus, chapter 22: “And if you take from your neighbor a cloak as a pledge, you must return it to him at sunset, because his cloak is the only covering that he has.

“*Bameh yishkov?* With what shall he sleep? And when he cries out, I will hear.”

We gave to civilization whistle blowers against the exploitation and corruption of power. Listen, once again, to the outcry of the Jewish prophet Amos against tyranny: “For they ripped open the pregnant woman. They sell the righteous for silver,

and the needy for a pair of shoes. They trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth and turn aside the way of the afflicted” (Amos 21).

We gave the world the unique heroes of a world religion who were not philosophers searching for a definition or miracle men who promised life after death, but emphasized the goal of all life here and now. The prophet touched the ethical nerve and chastised the kings of all nations, including Judah. Damascus and Judah, to protest the lot of the poor, the widow, the orphan, the sick here in God's world. The Jewish religious hero adopted God's agenda as his own--and it became our agenda.

The Torah insists that I open the newspaper, and not only the entertainment section. Why should I care about “them”? In the late 1960's I was invited by the West German government to visit Germany and to see its progress after the conclusion of the Second World War. In Berlin I met with German theological students--young men who urged me (for what reason I knew not) to visit with D. Otto Dibelius, the Bishop of Berlin Brandenburg. I came to his large home, and because I had just visited the Dachau concentration camp, I turned to him and said, “Bishop, what did you do on Kristallnacht when the synagogues and temples and houses were destroyed by the Nazis? What did you do when so many Jews were placed in jail?”

The Bishop looked at me and said, “You are a rabbi, and you should know that it is my first obligation to protect the well-being of my church.” I asked him about the crucifixion, about sacrifice for fellow human beings, for Christian compassion,

and he answered, "As a Bishop my primary concern was with my church and its people." I brought home from Germany a most valuable lesson. He taught me to beware of spiritual narcissism and to overcome religious selfishness and religious tribalism.

They are killing people every day in Darfur, in the Sudan, in our time. They are raping girls and women. They have already forcibly displaced a million human beings -- 200,000 refugees with nowhere to go. Men, women and children die of starvation--30,000 dead in only 18 months. The Janjaweed militia of Sudan continues to destroy, pillage, torture. "Janjaweed" is an Arabic term that is translated, "A devil on horseback with a gun." It brought to mind the Cossacks and the pogroms, "Chmielnicki."

We took an oath, "Never again!" Was this vow to protect only Jews from the curse of genocide? God forbid that our children and grandchildren ask of us, "Where was the synagogue during Rwanda, when genocide took place, 800,000 slaughtered in 100 days.

Can we throw out the newspapers; do we dare shut our eyes and ears so as not to see or hear what is going on in God's world? After the Shoah, we know. The real question is not why God does not intervene. The question is why God's partners, in whose nostrils God breathed Divine potentiality, pretend that they are mute, paralyzed, deaf, impotent.

I must answer the man within that is angry at me. Perhaps you have heard from him as well. I need your help. I need your

Jewish heart and soul and compassion. I need your Jewish neshamah. I need you as a religious Jew of a world religion.

"Few are guilty," my teacher Heschel wrote, "but all are responsible." We are responsible to protect each other, to love and protect the stranger, the pariah, the weak, those of another color, those of another faith. We need to cry out to the world and to influence the world, beginning with ourselves, to mandate them, "Lay not your hands upon the innocent. Do not do anything to harm them, for they are God's children."

At stake is humanity. At stake is the universe. At stake is the stature of God. How big is our God? The rabbis interpreted the verse "Adonai Tzilchah," "God is your shadow," to mean the following: If you stand bent down, then the shadow of God will be contracted and shriveled, but if you stand erect, the shadow will expand, grow mighty and enlarged." As we stand, God will be elevated. We live in God's shadow and God's shadow lives in us.

We Jews who hear with ancient ears know that silence is lethal. We must know; to know in order to do. And we must do in order to change the world. We know how essential raising our voice is. We know that silence is lethal and feigned laryngitis, wicked.

We knew what we wanted the church to do. We wanted them to protest, to fast, to stand before embassies, and to chain their hands to iron fences.

Can we do less? We can protest. We can use our voice to pierce



the callousness of society. We can take our fasts from Yom Kippur into the streets and into the marketplace.

“Is this the fast that I have given you, but to break every yolk, to deal bread to starving infants, to break down the curtains of indifference?”

We gave the world the sacred power of conscience. Conscience stayed the hands of those who would destroy our children. Conscience must not slumber, conscience can waken the world.

And if you ask, “Who in the world are we?” the answer is clear: we are Jews.

