
nouns have gender. Therefore, it is easy for an English speaker when reading or learning Hebrew to make the mistake of ascribing sexual nuances to gendered words.

Mistakes are not always bad, if they lead to new insights and greater holiness. Because the sexual metaphor is used (sparingly) in Torah to warn against infidelity to God, one might expect that the elevation of the sexual metaphor in Jewish Renewal would bring with it a renewed ethic of fidelity in intimacy.

I was encouraged to discover that Elat Chayyim has a strict policy which prohibits the *initiation* of a sexual relationship between faculty and students during the week of residence. (Rabbinic organizations need such a code of conduct!) But everything else about sex and Jewish Renewal seems to fall into the category of "consenting adults can do no wrong." With sexuality a central metaphor for theological interaction, the danger of a virtually unrestricted attitude toward sex is evident. There is a difference between a loving experience (or even a succession of loving experiences) and a life of loving commitment. As Rabbi Raphi Friedman has similarly observed, there is a difference between a spiritual experience (or even a succession of spiritual experiences) and a life of spirituality. In both cases, the former is an attempt to rise above the mundane. The latter—the goal which typifies Judaism in all its expressions—is an attempt to raise the mundane.

It is the conceit of every generation that they can better fulfill Micah's admonitions to do justice and love kindness than generations past. By casting off the yoke of the tradition so carelessly, Jewish Renewal compounds that conceit by ignoring Micah's ultimate requirement: to walk humbly with God. †

The meaning & message of Jewish renewal

Rami Shapiro

Jack Moline's critique of Jewish Renewal offers us a welcome opportunity for self-reflection; a chance to clarify our thinking and align our energies. I shall attempt a little of both, responding to the four issues raised in Jack's essay and then proposing my own manifesto of Jewish Renewal.

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Jack is turned off by the idea that God is love. Me too. It is a dangerous theology inexorably leading to scapegoating as a means of explaining the presence of evil. Contemporary America suffers greatly under the heavy hand of Love, excusing our complicity with evil by blaming all our problems on welfare mothers, illegal immigrants, Newt Gingrich, big government, big business, Democrats, Republicans...Jews. My own theology comes from Isaiah 45:5-7: "I am God, there is nothing else...I make light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I, God, do all of this!" And we are created in the image of God. We create light and darkness, good and evil. Be care-full.

Jack worries that, for us, Torah is "just a book." I hope he's wrong. Torah is our continuing conversation about how to be humanly holy. Torah reflects our dual nature, our capacity for evil and good, and provides us with a means for controlling the one and affirming the other. Not everything in Torah is to be applauded, but there is nothing in Torah we can dare to ignore.

Jack believes we are messianic. He is correct. We believe we are creating a fresh Jewish voice for the 21st century. This belief is the source of our creativity and strength. It can also be the source of blind *chutzpah*. If our sense of mission overwhelms our *mentschlichkeit* we will create nothing of lasting value. Our messianism should be humbling, challenging us to be worthy of our mission, and excepting nothing less than our best.

Jack fears we verge on sexual irresponsibility. There is always danger here. Of all the fires that burn within us, it is sex that most threatens to consume us. We should articulate a clear sexual ethic, and open it to debate.

Jack Moline is not a casual observer. If he questions our love and respect for God, Torah and Israel, we may well be giving out a message we do not intend. With that in mind, I present my own understanding of the meaning and message of Jewish Renewal.

Challenge

Contemporary American Judaism, an *ad hoc* mix of ethnicity, nostalgia, pop-psychology, Holocaust memorials and vicarious Zionism, no longer speaks to the majority of American Jews. Unless we boldly reclaim and recast the timeless message and meaning of a Torah centered and spiritually compelling Judaism for the 21st century, we will be the grandparents of Gentiles.

Vision

To be a holy people, a beacon of justice and compassion rooted in an understanding of reality that unites all things in the Greater Unity of God.

Mission

In the ancient tradition of our prophets, sages, scholars, mystics and rebbes, we seek to fashion a contemporary voice for the timeless message of Torah—Be Holy.

Values

Our voice is inclusive, egalitarian, democratic, just, compassionate, wise and fearless. We honor the past, not through imitation, but through study; using it as a compass pointing us toward holiness rather than as a map leading us over old ground.

Principles

There can be no Judaism without God, Torah, Israel, *mitzvot* and *mentschlichkeit*.

Definitions And Obligations

God is the Source and Substance of all Reality, the transcendent unchanging One and the immanent ever-changing Many. Our obligation to God is to be holy and to move the world toward holiness. Being holy means devoting ourselves to the spiritual challenge of ethical monotheism; to awaken to the unity and interdependence of all things; to realize there is but one race, one morality, one planet; to act justly and compassionately; and to hold ourselves and the world to the highest ethical standards.

Torah is the diary of the Jewish search for holiness. Our approach to Torah is primarily, though not exclusively, *midrashic*. Our concern is not simply with what Torah says, but with what Torah means. Our obligation to Torah is to study her. This further obligates us to basic Hebrew literacy and a familiarity with her commentators.

Israel reflects our tri-fold identity as people, nation, and community. As a people, we are committed to caring for and defending Jewry worldwide. As a nation, we are loyal to the Zionist ideal. As a community, we secure a place for Judaism in our homes, our neighborhoods, and our national agenda. Being Israel obligates us to alleviate Jewish suffering, to visit Israel, to establish Jewish homes and households, to promote Jewish learning and literacy, and to join or create synagogues and *chavurot*.

Mitzvot are the obligations that come with choosing to be a serious Jew. There are six essential categories of *mitzvot*: *tefillah* (daily prayer and meditation); Shabbat and holy days; *eco-kashrut* (ethically and environmentally sound consumption); *tzedakah* (generosity); *teshuvah* (perfecting self); and *tikkun* (perfecting society). How one meets these obligations is open to choice, meeting them itself is not.

Mentschlichkeit is the acting out of holiness in the world. *Mentschlichkeit* obligates us to visit the ill; comfort the grieving; feed the hungry; house the homeless; clothe the naked; avoid hurtful speech; do justly; act compassionately; walk humbly.

Conclusion

Judaism is an ancient and ongoing experiment in human holiness. Judaism is not and has never been fixed or monolithic. Judaism survives because in every age she has lovers who dare to speak to her and of her in the vernacular of their time. Jack Moline is correct when he says that what ties all these experiments together is a shared reverence for God, Torah and Israel. He is wrong when he contends that we Jewish Renewalniks do not share that reverence. In an era when most Jews have divorced themselves from Judaism, it is precisely our love for God, Torah and Israel that compels us to take up the challenge of Sinai and create a holy, just, compassionate and authentic Judaism for both ourselves and our world. †

Jewish renewal: another perspective

Judy Petsonk

An exciting and significant Jewish Renewal is going on in America, and it will be a shame if Jewish leaders don't notice and encourage it. By Jewish Renewal I mean the return to concern for spirituality among a wide range of contemporary Jews.

Evidence of this return to spirituality includes a surge in study of sacred texts, such as the Torah study sessions at the Council of Jewish Federation's General Assembly in 1995, the *bat mitzvah* of thousands of adult women, including 120 at last summer's Hadassah national convention; the growth of national and regional study *kallot* in the Reform movement; the many families trying to make teenage *bat* or *bar mitzvah* a spiritual and emotional landmark through *tzedakah* projects and study of texts on Jewish ethics.

Origins

The post-1960s *havurah* movement, with its focus on meaningful prayer, was an expression of the return to

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