

Interfaith Relations in a Cosmopolitan Society

1. בראשית פרק ב'

- (ד) אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בַּיּוֹם עָשׂוֹת יְקֹנֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:
(ה) וְכָלֹא שֵׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרֵם יִהְיֶה בָאָרֶץ וְכָל־עֹשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרֵם יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר יְקֹנֶה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם אִין לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאָדָמָה:
(ו) וְאָדָם יַעֲלֶה מִדְּהָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי־הָאָדָמָה:
(ז) וַיִּצְרֵ יְקֹנֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֶפְרָ מִדְּהָאָדָמָה וַיַּפֵּחַ בְּאַפִּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה:
(ח) וַיֹּטֶעַ יְקֹנֶה אֱלֹהִים גִּבְעֹדֶן מִקְדָּם וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יִצָּר:

2. Tradition (Spring-Summer 1964 Edition), "Confrontation," pgs. 5-6

The Biblical account of the creation of man portrays him at three progressive levels.

At the first level, he appears as a simple natural being... Natural man, unaware of the element of tension prevailing between the human being and the environment of which he is an integral part, has no need to live a normative life and to find redemption in surrender to a higher moral will. His existence is unbounded, merging harmoniously with the general order of things and events. He is united with nature, moving straightforward, with the beast and the fowl of the field, along an unbroken line of mechanical life-activities, never turning around, never glancing backwards...

Man, who was created out of the dust of the ground, enveloped in a mist rising from the jungle, determined by biological immediacy and mechanical necessity, knows of no responsibility, no opposition, no fear, and no dichotomy, and hence he is free from carrying the load of humanity.

In a word, this man is a non-confronted being. He is neither conscious of his assignment vis-à-vis something which is outside of himself nor is he aware of his existential otherness as a being summoned by his Maker to rise to tragic greatness.

3. The Emergence of Ethical Man, pgs. 11-12

All three reports about creation, that of plant, animal and man, are almost identical. All three, for example, take account of the common origin of life, namely the earth. All three exponents of living matter emerged out of Mother Earth. Moreover, the fact that man is named Adam bespeaks his origin...

Man in the story of creation does not occupy a unique ontic position. He is, rather, a drop of the cosmos that fits into the schemata of naturalness and concreteness. The Torah presents to us a successive order of life-emergence and divides it into three phases; the last of those living structures is man. The viewpoint is very much akin to modern science. Christianity split the story of creation in two, and analyzed the story of man without taking cognizance of that of animal and plant. That is why it arrived at half-truths and misinterpreted the Biblical anthropology.

4. בראשית פרק ב'

- (טו) וַיִּקַּח יְקֹנֶק אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיְנַתְּהוּ בְּגִדְלָוָו לַעֲבֹדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָה:
 (טז) וַיִּצְוּ יְקֹנֶק אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵצֵהֶנָּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל:
 (יז) וּמִעֵץ הַדְּלֵעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ לִי בְּיוֹם אֲכָלְךָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת תָּמוּת:

5. "Confrontation," pgs. 9-13

At the second level, natural man, moving straightforwards, comes suddenly to a stop, turns around, and casts, as an outsider, a contemplative gaze upon his environment... At this very moment, the separation of man from cosmic immediacy, from the uniformity and simplicity which he had shared with nature, takes place. He discovers an awesome and mysterious domain of things and events which is independent of and disobedient to him, an objective order limiting the exercise of his power and offering opposition to him. In the wake of this discovery, he discovers himself. Once self-discovery is accomplished, and a new I-awareness of an existence which is limited and opposed by a non-I outside emerges, something new is born – namely, the divine norm. "ויצו ה' א' על האדם"...

6. בראשית פרק ב'

- (יח) וַיֹּאמֶר יְקֹנֶק אֱלֹהִים לֹא־טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבִדּוֹ אֶעֱשֶׂה־לּוֹ עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:
 (יט) וַיִּצְרֵ יְקֹנֶק אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאָדָמָה כָּל־חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְרֵאוֹת מִה־יִּקְרָאֵל וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאֵל הָאָדָם נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ:
 (כ) וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שְׁמוֹת לְכָל־הַבְּהֵמָה וְלָעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלָכָל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וּלְאָדָם לֹא־מִצָּא עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ:
 (כא) וַיִּפֹּל יְקֹנֶק אֱלֹהִים תְּרַדְמָה עַל־הָאָדָם וַיִּישָׁן וַיִּקַּח אֶחָת מִצִּלְעֹתָיו וַיַּסְגֵּר בָּשָׂר תַּחַתְנָה:
 (כב) וַיִּבֶן יְקֹנֶק אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַצֶּלַע אֲשֶׁר־לָקַח מִן־הָאָדָם לְאִשָּׁה וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים:
 (כג) וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם זֹאת הִנֵּנִי עֵצָה מִעֲצָמִי וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לִקְהָהָ־זֹאת:

7. "Confrontation," pg. 14

There is, however, a third level, which man, if he is longing for self-fulfillment, must ascend. At this level, man finds himself confronted again. Only this time it is not the confrontation of a subject who gazes, with a sense of superiority, at the object beneath him, but of two equal subjects, both lonely in their otherness and uniqueness, both opposed and rejected by an objective order, both craving for companionship. This confrontation is reciprocal, not unilateral. This time, the two confronters stand alongside each other, each admitting the existence of the other. An aloof existence is transformed into a together-existence.

8. "Confrontation," pgs. 17-18

We Jews have been burdened with a twofold task; we have to cope with the problem of a double confrontation. We think of ourselves as human beings, sharing the destiny of Adam in his general encounter with nature, and as members of a covenantal community which has preserved its identity under most unfavorable conditions, confronted by another faith community. We believe we are the bearers of a double charismatic load, that of the dignity of man, and that of the sanctity of the covenantal community. In this difficult role, we are summoned by God, who revealed himself at both the level of universal creation and that of the private covenant, to undertake a double mission – the universal human and the exclusive covenantal confrontation...

The emancipated modern Jew, however, has been trying, for a long time, to do away with this twofold responsibility which weighs heavily upon him. The Westernized Jew maintains that it is impossible to engage in both confrontations, the universal and the covenantal, which, in his opinion, are mutually exclusive. It is, he argues, absurd to stand shoulder to shoulder with mankind preoccupied with the cognitive-technological gesture for the welfare of all, implementing the mandate granted to us by the Creator, and to make an about-face the next instant in order to confront our comrades as a distinct and separate community. Hence, the Western Jew concludes, we have to choose between these two encounters. We are either confronted human beings or confronted Jews. A double confrontation contains an inner contradiction.

The proponents of the single-confrontation philosophy (with the exception of some fringe groups) do not preach complete de-Judaization and unqualified assimilation. They also speak of Jewish identity (at least in a religious sense), of Jewish selfhood and the natural will for preservation of the Jewish community as a separate identity. As a matter of fact, quite often they speak with great zeal and warmth about the past and future role of Judaism in the advancement of mankind and its institutions. However, they completely fail to grasp the real nature and the full implications of a meaningful Jewish identity.

9. בראשית פרק כ"ג

(ג) וַיֵּקֶם אַבְרָהָם מַעַל פָּנָיו וַיִּדְבֹּר אֶל-בְּנֵי-חֵת לֵאמֹר:

(ד) גֵּרוֹתַי שָׁב אֲנִי עִמָּכֶם תְּנוּ לִי אֶחְזֶזֶת-קֶבֶר עִמָּכֶם וְאֶקְבְּרָה מִתִּי מִלִּפְנֵי:

10. "Confrontation," pgs. 26-27

Our first patriarch, Abraham, already introduced himself in the following words: "I am a stranger and sojourner with you" – "גר ותושב אנכי עמכם" – Is it possible to be other – גר – at the same time? Is not this definition absurd since it contravenes the central principle of classical logic that no cognitive judgment may contain two mutually exclusive terms? And yet, the Jew of old defied this time-honored principle and did think of himself in contradictory terms. He knew well in what areas he could extend his full cooperation to his neighbors and act as a תושב, a resident, a sojourner, and at what point this gesture of cooperation and goodwill should terminate, and he must disengage as if he were a גר, a

stranger. He knew in what enterprise to participate to the best of his ability and what offers and suggestions, however attractive and tempting, to reject resolutely. He was aware of the issues on which he could compromise, of the nature of the goods he could surrender, and vice versa, of the principle which were not negotiable and the spiritual goods which had to be defended at no matter what cost.

11. בראשית פרק ל"ב

(יז) וַיִּתֵּן בְּיַד עֲבָדָיו עֵדֶר לְבָדֹו וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עֲבָדָיו עֲבְרוּ לִפְנֵי וְרוּחַ תְּשִׁימוּ בֵּין עֵדֶר וּבֵין עֵדֶר:

(יח) וַיֵּצֵאוּ אֶת־הָרֶאשִׁיוֹן לֵאמֹר כִּי יִפְגָּשֶׁךָ עֲשֹׂו אָחִי וּשְׂאֵלְךָ לֵאמֹר לְמִי־אַתָּה וְאַנְּה תִלְךָ וְלִמִּי אֵלֶּה לִפְנֵיךָ:

12. "Confrontation," pgs. 27-28

My brother Esau, Jacob told his agents, will address to you three questions. "Whose art thou?" To whom do you as a metaphysical being, as a soul, as a spiritual personality belong? "And whither goest thou?" To whom is your historical destiny committed? To whom have you consecrated your future? What is your ultimate goal, your final objective? Who is your God and what is your way of life? These two inquiries are related to our identity as members of a covenantal community. However, Jacob continued, my brother Esau will also ask a third question: "And who are these before thee?" Are you ready to contribute your talents, capabilities, and efforts toward the material and cultural welfare of general society? Are you ready to present me with gifts, oxen, goats, camels, and bulls? Are you willing to pay taxes to develop an industrialized country? This third inquiry is focused on temporal aspects of life. As regards the third question, Jacob told his agents to answer in the positive. "It is a present unto my Lord even unto Esau." Yes, we are determined to participate in every civic, scientific, and political enterprise. We feel obligated to enrich society with our creative talents and be constructive and useful citizens. Yet, pertaining to the first two questions – whose art thou and whither goest thou – Jacob commanded his representatives to reply in the negative, clearly and precisely, boldly and courageously. He commanded them to tell Esau that their soul, their personality, their metaphysical destiny, their spiritual future and sacred commitments, belong exclusively to God and His servant, Jacob...

This testament handed down to us by Jacob has become very relevant now in the year 1964. We find ourselves confronted again, like Jacob of old, and our confronters are ready to address to us the identical three questions: "Whose art thou? Whither goest thou? Whose are these before thee?" A millennia-old history demands from us that we meet the challenge courageously and give the same answers with which Jacob entrusted his messengers several thousand years ago.