

The Challenges to Jewish Unity II: Working Together with All Jews

March 1, 1956

Psak Din — No Participation in Mixed Religious Groups

(English translation of *psak din* barring Orthodox rabbis from participating in mixed religious organizations and local rabbinical boards.)

We have been asked by a number of rabbis in the country and by alumni and *musmachim* of yeshivos, if it is permissible to participate with and be a member of the New York Board of Rabbis and similar groups in other communities, which are composed of Reform and Conservative "rabbis."

Having gathered together to clarify this matter, it has been ruled by the undersigned that it is forbidden by the law of our sacred Torah to be a member of and to participate in such an organization.

We have also been asked if it is permissible to participate with and to be a member of the Synagogue Council of America, which is also composed of Reform and Conservative organizations.

We have ruled that it is forbidden by the law of our sacred Torah to participate with them either as an individual or as an organized communal body.

May Hashem Yisbarach have mercy on His people, and seal the breaches [in Torah life] and may we be worthy of the elevation of the glory of our sacred Torah and our people Israel.

Signed this fifth day, the week of *Parshas Ki Sisa*, the eighteenth day of *Adar*, 5716, in the city of New York.

Moshe Feinstein
Avraham Jofen
Avraham Kalmanowitz
Aaron Kotler
Gedaliah Schorr
Dovid Lifshitz
Chaim Mordechai Katz
Yaakov Kamenetzky
Yaakov Yitzchok HaLevi Ruderman
Yitzchok Hutner
Menachem Yosef Zaks

Amos Bunim, *A Fire in his Soul* p. 231,2

Meanwhile, Rabbi Hollander had acquired powerful supporters, among them Rabbi Kotler, the Satmar *Rebbe*, and the Lubavitcher *Rebbe*.¹⁸ The issue might have ended in a vehement struggle had it not been for Rabbi Soloveitchik's decision to remove the question from *halachic* consideration. It appears that due to his great respect for Rabbi Kotler's authority, Rabbi Soloveitchik would not openly contravene his ruling. It was a clear manifestation of Rabbi Kotler's emergent status and enormous influence in the Torah world.

While Rabbi Kotler's objection to joining such groups is

At that time Amos Bunim asked Rabbi Kotler for clarification of the *psak*. "Does the *issur*," he asked, "mean that we must also separate ourselves from individual Jews who are Conservative or Reform?" Rabbi Kotler was firm in his reply. "Not by any means," he said. "No individual member of *klal Yisrael* can or should be written off. Rather they have the status of an infant captured and raised by non-Jews and therefore not responsible for Torah ignorance or non-observance."¹⁴ It is the Reform and Conservative clergy and leadership organizations from whom one must maintain a distance." Rabbi Kotler made it clear that this distancing was essential in order not to grant them recognition as rabbis. Honoring them is a *chilul ha-Torah* (desecration of Torah).¹⁵

Previous Examples: see article by Jonathan Sarna in The Relationship of Orthodox Jews with Believing Jews of other Religious Ideologies and Non-Believing Jews

1855- Cleveland Conference, *Shalom al Yisrael* included Isaac Wise and Isaac Leiser

1903 – Response to Kishinev

1909 – The Kehilla

WWI – Central Committee for the Relief of Jews

1924 – Avram Simon'

WWII – CANRA Committee on Army and Navy Religious Activities

Letter by Rav Soloveichik regarding joining in translation of JPS (1953) *Community, Covenant, and Commitment*, 111

I noticed in your letter that you are a bit disturbed about the probability of being left out. Let me tell you that this attitude of fear is responsible for many commissions and omissions, compromises and fallacies on our part which have contributed greatly to the prevailing confusion within the Jewish community and to the loss of our self-esteem, our experience of ourselves as independent entities committed to a unique philosophy and way of life. Of course, sociability is a basic virtue and we all hate loneliness and dread the experience of being left alone. Yet at times there is no alternative and we must courageously face the test. Maimonides of old was aware of such bitter experiences (vide Code, *Hilkhot De'ot* 6:1).

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Dear Rabbi Klaperman:

We take the liberty of advising the Executive Committee of the Rabbinical Council of America that the question submitted to us by the President, Rabbi David Hollander, whether or not

the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations is permitted to continue its longstanding affiliation with the Synagogue Council of America, was temporarily taken off the agenda of the Halakhah Commission. Our decision not to take action at the present time is motivated by the fact that under the present circumstances that now prevail and for which we bear no responsibility, it is humanly impossible to discuss impartially this most serious matter and to render an opinion meeting high standards of halakhic objectivity and truthfulness.

We wish to add that this delay, caused by the aforementioned developments, reflects in no way our opinion concerning the advisability or inadvisability of associating with non-conforming groups within the Jewish community.

We are confident that the Executive Committee will attempt to maintain high standards of dignity in its debate on this matter.

Yours truly,

Samuel Belkin

Joseph B. Soloveitchik

THE COVENANT AT SINAI AND THE COVENANT IN EGYPT

When we probe the nature of our historical existence we arrive at a very important insight, one that constitutes a fundamental element of our worldview. The Torah relates that God made two covenants with the Israelites. The first covenant He made in Egypt: "And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God" (Exodus 6:7); the second covenant, at Mount Sinai: "And he took the book of the covenant . . . and said: 'Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you in agreement with all these words'" (Exodus 24:7-8). (The third covenant, "These are the words of the covenant . . . beside the covenant which He made with them in Horeb" [Deuteronomy 28:69], is identical in content and goals with the covenant at Sinai.)¹⁰ What is the nature of these two covenants? It seems to me that this question is implicitly answered at the beginning of our essay. For just as Judaism distinguishes between fate and destiny in the personal-individual realm, so it differentiates between these two ideas in the sphere of our national historical existence. The individual is tied to his people both with the chains of fate and with the bonds of destiny. In the light of this premise, it may be stated that the covenant in Egypt was a covenant of fate, while the covenant at Sinai was a covenant of destiny.

p. 45 - Fate

Him, to freely invite Him into his life. He imposes His rule over man against his will. A Jew cannot expel the God of the Hebrews from his private domain. Even if he violates the Sabbath, defiles his table and bed, and strives to deny his own Jewishness, his membership in the Jewish people, he will still not be able to escape the dominion of the God of the Hebrews, Who pursues him like a shadow. So long as a person's nose testifies to his origins, so long as a drop of Jewish blood courses through his veins, so long as physically he is still a Jew, he serves the God of the Hebrews against his will. Neither counsel nor understanding can prevail against Him. Yea, if the Jew who rejects his

COVENANT OF DESTINY

What is the nature of the covenant of destiny? Destiny in the life of a people, as in the life of an individual, signifies a deliberate and conscious existence that the people has chosen out of its own free will and in which it finds the full realization of its historical being. Its existence, in place of simply being the experience of an unalterable reality into

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Camp and congregation constitute two distinct sociological phenomena, two separate groups lacking any common features, devoid of any symbiotic relationship. The camp is created as a result of the desire for self-defense and is nurtured by a sense of fear; the congregation is created as a result of the longing for the realization of an exalted ethical idea and is nurtured by the sentiment of love. Fate reigns, in unbounded fashion, in the camp; destiny reigns in the congregation. The camp constitutes a particular stage in the historical development of the people, while the existence of the nation is identical with that of the congregation.

CCC, p. 145

The conclusion above is very simple. When we are faced with a problem for Jews and Jewish interests toward the world without, regarding the defense of Jewish rights in the non-Jewish world, then all groups and movements must be united. In this area, there may not be any division, because any friction in the Jewish camp may be disastrous for the entire people. In this realm we must consider the ideal of unity, as a political-historical nation, which includes everyone from Mendes-France to the "old-fashioned" Jew of Me'ah She'arim – without exception. In the crematoria, the ashes of the hasidim and pious Jews were put together with the ashes of the radicals and the atheists. And we all must fight the enemy, who does not differentiate between those who believe in God and those who reject Him.

With regard to our problem within [the Jewish community], however, – our spiritual-religious interests such as Jewish education, synagogues, councils of rabbis – whereby unity is expressed through spiritual-ideological collectivism as a Torah community, it is my opinion that Orthodoxy cannot and should not unite with such groups which deny the fundamentals of our *weltanschauung*. It is impossible for me to comprehend, for example, how Orthodox rabbis, who spent their best years in *yeshivot* and absorbed the spirit of the Oral Law and its tradition, for whom Rabbi Akiva,