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Submission date: 07-Dec-2020 12:34PM (UTC-0500)

Submission ID: 1467641108

File name: Jewish_understanding_of_human_nature_5pgs_1.edited.docx (21.53K)

Word count: 1749

Character count: 8970

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Jewish Understanding of Human Nature

Introduction

Judaism is the earliest monotheistic religion, as it started about 4000 years ago. People who follow this religion believe in one God, appearing to early prophets. They worship in unique places called synagogues, and rabbis are their spiritual leaders. Its symbol is the six-pointed Star representing David. Studying this religion is necessary because it has approximately 14 million followers, mostly living in Israel and the United States. Regarding identity, one was named a Jew if the mother was Jewish. Jews rely on the holy book called Toral or the Hebrew Bible, which has similar Old Testament books like the Christians' Bible. However, they are arranged differently. The beginnings of Judaism are described in the Torah, how God revealed Himself to Abraham, a Hebrew man who started Judaism. The literature describes the Jews' view of human nature, considering their religion, culture, and ethnicity.

One of the aspects of the Jews' human nature is religion. They believe that human beings are created in God's image, implying that God was incorporeal. The rabbis interpret the information that humans have the power to reason. In Torah's Genesis 2:7, the word vayyitzer is used, where the spelling is said to be crucial concerning the message delivered in verse (Sadeghnia & Masoudi 28). Impulses about humans are evident, where yetzer tov means that humans have moral capability to remember God's law in their actions. The Yetzer

ra, on the other hand, shows that human beings act to meet their needs and desires. Here, the rabbis claim that meeting one's desires and wishes are not wrong because God created human beings that way, as stated in verse. The urge pushes them to work to afford basic needs and keep a family. However, the Yetzer Tov has to be applied with it, in that one does not engage in sins in meeting their desires. Therefore, it is human nature to desire and meet needs, but God's laws must be respected.

Free will is the other notable thing concerning the Jewish view of human nature. Notably, the religion disapproves of the original sin concept insisting that everyone would differentiate good and evil (Gittelsohn 40). The free will concept would be comprehended through one of the rabbinical teachings related to the soul. A king owned a garden with good early figs, and two watchmen were hired to guard them. One was lame while the other was blind, and the King left them to look after the orchard. After some time, the lame man informed the blind that the figs were excellent and should eat them.

The blind man accepted, believing that eating the figs would make him see while the lame would walk. In turn, they ate, but the expectations were not met. When the King returned, he questioned if they had eaten the figs and the watchmen asked about their expected outcomes. The King told them that when the blessed be God came to judge them, the soul would not blame the body for the sin. Instead, they would be combined and judged as one (Leviticus Rabbah 4:5). The response implied that humans had to reason and ensure that the body engaged in actions the soul would accept because they would be judged as one.

The Jews believe that people were formed with free will, where God provides the opportunity to choose prosperity or adversity. The idea is written in Deuteronomy thirty, verse fifteen, where the words life and death imply humans can choose either (Gittelsohn 41). Therefore, being holy for the Jews is not hereditary but a choice. They believe that respecting the given commandments results in several outcomes. One of them is that they would become

God's chosen people, meaning they would not suffer, and when they do, God will guide them out of the issues. Another outcome is that they would fulfill God's mission, and they would also become Godly, whereby sin is absent. Based on this outcome, the rabbis claim that the sole reason God created human beings was to praise him and engage in activities that imitate His actions. Therefore, though the believers have free will, it is their responsibility to praise and respect the commandments as it is the reason for human existence.

The religious beliefs are practiced in homes, whereby families conduct daily prayers in the morning, afternoon, and after the sun has set. The congregational prayers are done in the synagogue, where people pray to God and are also educated about religion. On Thursdays and the Holydays, the synagogue's services change, as the readings are from Hebrew and the prophets. Any member leads the services in the place, but in most cases, the rabbi conducts them. Other duties performed by the rabbis are conducting weekly sessions and making decisions on how religious law is applied to day-to-day life. Also, in case of severe matters like divorce, the leader is involved.

Another element about the Jews' human nature is culture, referring to the way of doing things accepted by the society members. Even though Judaism was based on the Jews' religious beliefs, they also have traditions and customs to respect. The people have spread in different regions, but several practices are there today. One of them is celebrating the b'ris covenant done when the Jewish boys reach eight days of life. In the event, the males are circumcised as a sign that the person has joined the Jewish community and entered into an agreement with God, which was started by Abraham (Brenner 85).

The other one is the Rosh Hashanah event, conducted at the beginning of a year, where the people eat apples and honey. The cultural event indicates that people desire a good year, where they would respect God's will by avoiding sins. The people also believe that dead people should not be left alone. The old Jews have to teach the young this burial tradition, as

breaking it would bring a bad omen. When children reach twelve years, the bat mitzvah event is celebrated, though, in modern society, most celebrate it later in life. The ceremony welcomes the children to adulthood, where reasoning is expected to improve to practice the free will discussed above.

The Jews' view about human nature was altered by the New Jew, where the Zionism concept developed in the 19th century (class 23). To comprehend the Zionism idea, trends like enlightenment and emancipation are useful. They occurred in both Western and Central Europe that motivating many Jews to believe in Zionism. Notably, the Jews believed that they were their chosen nation and that God would uplift them above other nations. However, in the 19th century, Eastern Europe developed the debate about centralization and accepting the Jews and other minority populations into the state languages.

It was also debated on whether they could be included in the educational facilities like the others. In the West, collective identities were eliminated to uphold individual rights. However, in the East, especially in the Russian Empire, ethnic groups were too many to understand the different beliefs was problematic. Therefore, it was almost impossible for Jews to be taken as modern and maintain their ethnic identities and religious beliefs. The commitment towards modernization increased with the many cultural movements.

In 1882, the desire towards modernization and integration into the larger society was affected when Tsar Alexander II was assassinated. Most of the inclusive laws rolled back and pogroms developed due to his death (Jamal 50). In the same period, alternatives to the Jews' liberal political idea developed, where the socialism idea was replaced by nationalism. It is in this transformation that Zionism developed said to be a mixture of the nationalism concept. The belief insisted that the Jews would be treated as a unique culture and nation only when they are in their homeland. Leon Pinsker's 1882 book known as "Auto emancipation" contributed much to accept this belief. In Western and Central Europe, Zionism emerged later

when the enlightenment introduced citizenship and personal rights. In case the idea was integrated into society, it means the Jews would be integrated. However, most of the citizens insisted that the Jews should not be accepted in the mainstream community.

The Zionism idea applied logic considering the events of that time, but only a few Jews accepted it. Most of them rejected it due to the religious beliefs in their culture. For example, Jewish liberals accepted the integration idea because they believed that rejecting it would cause more anti-Semitism movements. The Orthodox Jews, on the other hand, believed that their ancestors were exiled in history due to their sins and would recover only when God forgave them by sending the Messiah (Jamal 52).

Deciding to move to Palestine was, therefore, a heresy. The other Jewish group was the Autonomists believed that the Jews deserved national and cultural respect, but their issues would only be solved if addressed in the places they lived in that cultural autonomy would be attained. The rest insisted that dividing the nation was wrong, and the idea should be eliminated. The divisions regarding the Zionism idea led to the development of different Jewish ethnic groups.

Conclusion

The Jewish understanding of human nature is influenced by religion, culture, and ethnicity. They believe in one God, who gave them commandments to follow, the sole reason for human existence. Free will is also evident, where Jews have the chance to choose between death and life or right and wrong. In doing this, they have to consider God's expectations from them, being the chosen nation, obey Him, and fulfill His mission. Considering culture, the people have different customs and practices passed from one generation to the other. As noted in the paper, the practices are based on religious beliefs. Finally, the paper has covered the Zionism idea, which affected how the Jews viewed human

nature. Their acceptability into the mainstream society was questioned, making them develop different views, which brought the various ethnicity groups.

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