

# Judaism and Democracy – The Private Domain and Public Responsibility

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The interplay between Judaism and democracy is one of the most frequently discussed topics on the public agenda in the State of Israel – defined in its Declaration of Independence, and a number of its basic laws, as a Jewish and democratic state. Upon listening to the public debate on this subject, however, there often appears to be a basic ambiguity regarding the essential distinction between these two systems and the ways in which they interact. We often hear conciliatory voices, attempting to present the two systems as being convergent and complementary. Others accentuate the tension in the concept of a “Jewish and democratic state,” by embracing one of its component parts and rejecting the other. I will attempt to clarify some of the fundamental differences between Judaism and democracy, and to examine the different attitudes which result from the distinctions between them.

These two categories, as legal and ideological systems which exist side by side in Israel, and which address issues arising from shared national and civil circumstances, converge and intersect at many points. The difference between them lies primarily in the source of their authority, their applicability, the way in which they interact, and the limits of their

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mutability, or in other words, in the relation between heteronomous and autonomous law.

Judaism, in the minds of its adherents, derives its authority from divine revelation. Divine law, present in its foundation, is thus sacrosanct, eternal and immutable. It is mainly concerned with a Chosen People, Holy Scriptures, a holy community and even a holy land, as well as various concepts pertaining to divine sovereignty and its essential holiness. Divine revelation – perceived to be the absolute and binding truth as expressed in religious law and founding mythology – is directed primarily toward the establishment of a moral and religious consciousness based upon divine commandment and commitment to the Jewish People and to Judaism. The revelation also sets forth a spiritual and religious destiny, based upon shared memory and shared hopes for a common future. It also presents principles of social justice, as befits a people emerging from slavery and forging a new identity. Judaism is of course not simply an ideology based upon religious revelation and sacred texts, but is rather the aggregate of its changing historical manifestations, as well as the cultural and social processes experienced by the Jewish People.

Until the advent of the modern era, Jewish society was traditional, seeing its existence as being founded upon knowledge and sacred values inherited from the past. Its authority was based upon eternal divine law, and identification with the chain of halakhic and scholarly tradition passed down and interpreted by the Rabbis and Sages. It is in this fashion that the content and meaning of the divine revelation at Mount Sinai were expounded, as well as the attendant matters of faith and lifestyle, past and present. The historical fate of the Jewish People – in exile for nearly 2,000 years – resulted in the fact that the academic aspect of much of tradition was far greater than the practical, and many of the biblical precepts and guidelines never stood the test of the real world and the vagaries of time. The sacred formula of literal interpretation was discussed, expounded and studied, serving as the basis for a deep and varied corpus of religious literature – created to a large extent beyond time and place. The texts were only wrested from their theoretical status

– founded in memory, ritual and study – and forced to stand the test of changing reality – some two thousand years later when the Jewish People, realizing the dream of the Return to Zion, came back from exile and re-entered independent history, within the territorial boundaries of national sovereignty.

The almost mythical Jewish experience – associated with direct revelation, God-given law, and the changing social reality of history and the destiny of a people that “shall dwell alone” – was based upon a heteronomous imperative, or a law deriving from a source beyond Man and not subject to human standards and measures of reasonability and rationality. The vicissitudes of history from time to time brought about creative interaction between the heteronomous imperative and human interpretation of the divine law, revealing new facets. In the mind of the believer, however, religious truths spring from a supreme source of truth, which is not required to answer to rational, critical demands, or to prove itself by standards beyond faith itself.

Religious tradition draws upon eternal divine authority, absolute truth rooted in revelation, and sacred heteronomous law as expressed in the biblical canon and its exegesis. Democracy, which advocates equality between people, is, on the other hand, founded upon the exclusive sovereignty of Man: human decisions, relative truth, doubt and criticism, public consent and autonomous law deriving from a person himself. Democratic legislation incorporates complex socio-political processes in the historical experience of different peoples, striving to ensure that the basic principles of humanism are upheld, preferring them to all other commitments to ethnicity, religion, race, sex or family. These legal decisions and determinations must constantly compete in the free market of ideas, public criticism and relative evaluation, and be subject to majority decision, varying human estimation, judicial criticism and constitutional change. As such, they lack eternal validity and are likely to vary over time. These decisions, on a fundamental level, treat every person as an independent human being without any prior obligation, restriction or prejudice based on ethnicity, religion, race or sex.

In other words, the basic principles of democracy dictate equality, human dignity and liberty, regardless of religious identity or ethnicity, as well as man's autonomy, independence, the right to critical thought, and the right to doubt all conventions. At the heart of modern secularism lies the fact that it does not rely upon absolute truth, and does not mandate specific content or absolute priorities in matters of the spirit, but is, rather, open to all possibilities of human spirit and creation, while guaranteeing both maximum freedom and maximum access to sources of knowledge and information. The only absolute truth at the basis of democratic thought is that which pertains to the essential equality of all people, their right to liberty, dignity and freedom of expression. This right is not subject to any supreme values or unifying religious truth, but is inherent to the perception of equality as the birthright of all human beings.

The purpose of democratic legislation, beyond ensuring equality, safeguarding individual liberties, and clearly defining what the government may or may not do with regard to its citizens, is to guarantee the existence of a public domain in which different and opposing spiritual, cultural, social and political views can function. It achieves this objective by creating tools with which to regulate public activities and balance the social order, taking into account the various interests that result from changing socio-cultural circumstances. Democratic legislation, by nature, does not strive to realize any lofty spiritual purpose, impart a unifying truth, or promote content intended to shape the soul of the individual. Its goal is to ensure that individuals are provided with the maximum number of tools to achieve their inalienable humanistic rights, and to exercise their freedom to choose from a myriad of cultural, religious and social values, none of which is superior to any other, simply because they are not judged in light of any consistent and solid truth. Open society is based upon the recognition that no individual nor any human organization has a monopoly over truth, and therefore as more opinions and varied beliefs coexist in peace and tolerance, the entire public benefits as a result. Democratic legislation aims to guarantee that all beliefs that do not harm the public have the opportunity to

attain fulfillment. Ideally, democratic legislation, when confronting a multi-cultured mosaic, rather than a monolithic culture, recognizes the relativity of the various truths and their relation to the totality of the social experience. Democracy draws upon the prevailing legal tradition and accepted judicial rulings, as well as shifting historical, social and political circumstances, skeptical evaluation and critical judgment that change over time.

Jewish tradition, based on divine revelation, eternal law and a single, supernal truth, is inherently closed to relative criticism, binding rational evaluation, or change, with regard to essential questions. According to this belief, Man is subject to divine sovereignty over everything: law and justice, life and death, past and future. Duties and privileges, preference and discrimination, are linked to covenants and eternal promises between the God of Israel and the People of Israel, as declared in the Holy Scriptures. This is based on an exclusive approach to law and justice which treats one group ("Children of the Covenant") in one way, and other groups ("not of the Covenant") in another. Much of Jewish tradition makes a basic distinction between those who are "of the Covenant" and those who are not, Israel and the Nations, those who are holy and those who are not, Jews and gentiles, those who follow the divine commands and those who deny their validity. This fundamental belief in a "people [that] shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9) intrinsically rejects humanistic, universal and egalitarian concepts of equality between people, since ethnic origin and identity dictate superiority and inferiority, as well as the limits of obligation and privilege, application and exemption.

It is of course easy to find, within the vast and ancient body of Jewish tradition, expressions of humanistic values and moral positions, as well as verses and citations in support of equality and universal social justice. One can also easily find laws within the democratic legal corpus, contrary to the principles of equality before the law, individual autonomy, universal humanism, human dignity and liberty. The proof, however, does not lie in the quoting of random passages, but rather in analyzing the entire configuration, defining not only ideal principles and the

sources of authority, abstract and practical goals, but also the ways in which change was affected and criticism offered, and how the limits of its application were enacted. Religious law – founded upon a single eternal and divine truth, concerning a chosen community of believers, flowing from a divine sovereignty and preserving a tradition rooted in divine commandment and Holy Scripture – strives to mold spiritual identity, emotional status and religious imperative. Democratic legislation, on the other hand, is founded upon mutable and relative human truths, decisions, amendments and mistakes, as well as a system of balances between different interests, reflecting human experience and autonomy. Democracy – not rooted in any transcendental source of validity – in principle treats all people equally, regardless of their religious affiliation. Its legislation does not strive to establish any specific spiritual content or to create a cultural and intellectual agenda, based upon a monopoly over a single heteronomous truth. It is intended, rather, to express a pluralistic view, recognizing many truths, and creating the tools with which to establish a social order, providing equal opportunity and the autonomous freedom to choose between the various spiritual, cultural, political and religious possibilities.

The content of the divine revelation, expressed briefly in the Ten Commandments and extensively in the Torah and the Talmud, is unquestionable and irrefutable in the eyes of its adherents. Its precepts, laws and practices are not subject to fundamental change, although they are subject to clarification, debate, elaboration, exegesis and adaptation, based upon human interpretation, for “It is not in heaven....” (Deut. 30:12; *Baba Metzia* 59b). In principle, the divine commandments and sacred texts are immutable, as they are subject neither to human evaluation and critique deriving from changing circumstances, nor to considerations of balance, compromise and reasonability. Interpretation, however, attributes varying significance to the commandments, both in thought and in deed, which can be negotiated and debated, and can result – for various reasons – in adaptation and compromise. The rich body of Jewish literature in the fields of *Halakha* and scholarship illustrates the great power that lies within the dialectic unity of the sacred and

immutable text on the one hand, and its changing significance on the other, or in other words, the force of human authority to interpret divine law. This neither contravenes the principle of the heteronomous imperative nor exempts it from human critique and fundamental change demanded by changing times and changing views.

Democratic law, on the other hand, is based upon the principles of human autonomy and public agreement in accordance with civil legal tradition, ongoing legislation, basic laws or a constitution, and efforts to strike a balance between different values. It is by nature subject to negotiation, criticism and fundamental change, although this may be limited as a result of various cultural, social, historical, military and political constraints, regarding its applicability to certain population groups, and possibly even reflecting a broad and often intolerable gap between theory and practice. The fundamental uniqueness of the democratic regime lies in the fact that it does not strive for unity and uniformity based upon a single consistent truth, but rather accepts variety and its contradictions as a worthy norm, manifesting the basic values of human dignity and freedom of choice. The democratic system strives to strike a balance between personal and social goals, as well as the spiritual and material needs of individuals and groups. It does so not through dominant ideological unity, religious uniformity or predetermined heteronomous preference, but rather through awareness of the importance of multiplicity and variety, and the contradictions that arise from the absence of a single unifying truth. This balance is based upon an appreciation for a wide variety of points of view, their common and opposing interests, and the dynamic interaction between the various parts of society. Democracy strives to enable the greatest number of views and truths to be expressed, and to regulate the various interests vying in the public arena, without determining their preferability, truthfulness or value, since unity is not measured by the uniformity of the message, but by the ability of the public to bear disparate messages within the framework of common interests and freedom of choice.

These two legal systems derive their authority from entirely different sources, and differ in their history, goals, applicability, and the way in

which they define themselves. There is therefore no point in judging their respective advantages and disadvantages, or in arbitrarily and artificially seeking out their similarities. What should, however, be considered is the way in which they interact, in light of the fundamental differences between them. Clear distinction should be made between laws that derive from a divine source and laws made by human voice. Obligation to the former is based upon faith and tradition, while the creator, the law and the people are perceived as a single entity ("God, the Torah and Israel are one" [Zohar III, 73a]). Obligation to democratic law, on the other hand, is based upon the authority of a majority-elected government, equal application of the law to all citizens, its public usefulness, and the social order it maintains. Democratic law serves the common interest and the individual rights of every person. We must carefully consider which laws we wish to enact, and even impose forcibly upon the public, and which imperatives and values we wish to leave up to individual choice, belief and lifestyle.

I believe both systems to be of great importance, for different reasons. A clear distinction should be made, however, between matters of personal spiritual and religious freedom (adherence to religious law, tradition, religious values, or the spiritual and social preferences of a specific group), and that which can be imposed upon the individual in the name of social order and the public good, i.e., democratic law, humanistic civil tradition and democratic values. In my opinion, the former should be left to the province of individual liberty, freedom of choice, and personal identity. The latter, however, should be imposed upon society as a whole, in the name of human dignity, civil liberty and equality before the law, or in the name of humanistic principles pertaining to the entire public and to the equal benefit of all its component parts. I make this distinction according to a universal standard, asking: "Which system applies to all parts of society, in theory and in practice, guaranteeing the most rights to the largest number of people, considering their human dignity, freedom, autonomy and equality, and without discriminating on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion or gender?"

Religious law draws upon prophetic tradition, extensive moral and social views, faith and inspiration – some of the noblest expressions of the human spirit. To a large extent, religious law is concerned with a historical reality, thousands of years old, much of which no longer exists and is not relevant to the present time. In this corpus, one can find humanistic views and striking moral and social insights, as well as many non-egalitarian commandments, which fail to stand up to the criterion of present-day rationality, since they do not address issues of an individual's autonomy, basic rights, equality, freedom and dignity. We need only mention the many laws which favor or exclude various groups; laws of slavery, ritual purity, marriage, divorce and widowhood – involving deserted wives (*agunot*), coerced levirate marriage (*yibum*) and release from a levirate marriage (*halitza*); laws governing those who are unfit to give testimony (the deaf, the insane and minors); excommunication, laws pertaining to non-Jews, or those that advocate discrimination against gentiles and the handicapped and dismiss women from public life.

Each historical period appears to possess its own unique concept of truth, which perfectly explains reality. These concepts differ from one another, yet all claim to be comprehensive and absolute. Which is the real truth? The answer is that there is no one truth. Truth is the aggregate of all concepts of truth, together with the differences between them. This view is reflected in relativistic pluralism.

Secular democratic law, based on humanistic ideals, human experience and awareness of human shortcomings, theoretically treats all men equally. It strives to give expression to values that promote tolerance, pluralism, democracy, freedom of expression, equal rights, human dignity, individual autonomy and secure the right to choose and to criticize, as well as the equal access to the law, social justice, freedom and peace. A person's identity is not determined by one's religious affiliation or predilection for some particular divine revelation or another, but simply by virtue of inherent independent humanity, which therefore grants all of these principles. The attempt to strike a balance between individual rights and the general good, between universal and particular values, and between imposed obligations in the name of the

public good and inalienable rights in the name of individual freedom, does not derive from a supernal source. It is the product of human reason alone, which is subject to change, criticism and doubt. History has shown the limits of democratic legislation and its weaknesses, resulting from its dependence upon politics and shifting power bases. It would still appear, however, that the ideas, Weltanschauung, social views and ideals behind this legislation relate to universal humanistic values, and endeavor – more than any other system – to achieve the public good.

In light of this analysis, adherence to exclusive religious law – which favors certain groups and excludes others – should be a matter of individual choice and the private domain; while inclusive laws – which claim that all people are entitled to dignity, freedom, justice, equality before the law, civil fraternity and autonomy – should be enforced in the public domain. The former concerns the historical socio-religious identity associated with a specific group, while the latter pertains to everyone, regardless of religious, national, historical and cultural affiliation.

A country in which millions of people with different beliefs, religions and lifestyles live, must not enforce religious laws in the public domain. Religious law should apply only to those who freely choose to adhere to it, as an expression of faith, tradition, cultural and historical affiliation, or a desire to disseminate certain values.

People should therefore not be forced to adopt behavior associated with a specific group, the values and beliefs of which they do not share. This is in fact the essence of religious coercion: the coerced application of the values, beliefs and mythology of one group, on others who do not share belief in its sanctity, authority or significance. Thus religion becomes a mandatory, meaningless, external system, incapable of serving as a basis for coexistence in a secular, democratic, egalitarian and pluralistic society. It is particularly significant that religious precepts, customs and laws that are not enforced by state law enjoy a great deal of popularity, in theory and in practice, among most of the population. Well-known examples of this are: circumcision, *bar mitzva*, *mezuza*, fasting on *Yom*

*Kippur*, the Passover *Seder*, *Shabbat* candles, Holiday celebrations and the customs of mourning.

Relations between religious law – represented by *Halakha* and the rabbinical courts – and democratic law – represented by the Supreme Court – become particularly strained when the religious imperative clashes with the democratic point of view, or when tradition cannot be reconciled with changing reality. One example of this is the status of women. Women are perceived in many religions as being inherently inferior to men, and thus not entitled to independent status. They are treated as the chattel of their fathers or husbands, and are considered to be particularly prone to sin – thus in need of supervision and “taming.” They can be beaten and punished for purposes of education, modesty and correction. In many cases, women are even considered unfit to give testimony or to take economical and social responsibility. They are often portrayed as being impure, and a threat to public welfare and to family honor – thus unfit to appear in the public domain. Until not long ago, women were in fact barred from the public domain, silenced and not permitted to take part in any affair involving authority, autonomy, knowledge, status and judgment. In other words, they were denied the possibility of taking part in judicial matters, teaching and learning, public responsibility, leadership, etc. To this day, religious law and tradition bar women from serving as rabbis (Orthodox), *kadis* or priests, halakhic authorities, Torah scholars, *yeshiva* deans or rabbinical court judges. Women are not even permitted to lead prayers in the Orthodox synagogue, or to receive honors that require speaking and singing in public, or that pertain to authority and status. These roles and honors are reserved for men only.

This absurd situation has had tragic consequences for half of the human race, which has been denied the basic rights of human dignity, freedom of public expression, and equality, as well as the right to study and to participate in public life. This was fostered by the androcentric religious thought of the three monotheistic religions, supported by Holy Scriptures and the institutions of traditional society. These religions fundamentally reject humans' autonomy and equal rights, and are eager to deny the

human dignity of those who are not members of the "Chosen People," "the faithful" or "the holy assembly," or who do not fit the image of the intellectual, the civilized or the scholarly – figures who are always male.

Can a democratic state support the enforcement of that perception, which clearly discriminates against a large group of people, by force of religious belief? For the purposes of this question, it is irrelevant whether the religious law in question is Jewish, Islamic or Christian. It is also irrelevant whether the object of discrimination is women, minorities, gentiles or infidels, and whether the consequences are involuntary divorce, levirate marriage or the ritual release from it, marital desertion, divorce for reasons of infertility, sanctioned floggings, or the inability to give testimony. All of these examples and many others are the result of discrimination by force of religious law, which rejects human autonomy and equality, and ignores the inalienable dignity of every person.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, educators, leaders and legislators would do well to distinguish between voluntary exclusive values and enforced inclusive laws. The former pertain to the "particular" and to the interests of a specific group, while the latter concern the "universal" and common interests. Values pertaining to the beliefs of a specific group ("chosen" by self-perception), and to a particular socio-religious system, can only be left to personal preference and individual edification. On the other hand, laws that treat everyone equally – regardless of race, religion or gender – and strive to embrace alternatives and variety with all its inherent contradictions, must be imposed upon everyone – irrespective of religious, social or cultural identity. Democratic law stems from universal humanistic values, and applies to everyone for the benefit of all, without restrictive cultural preference for an elite of any kind, or sweeping discrimination based on creed, gender or race.

Concepts – such as equality, fraternity, liberty, autonomy, independence, inherent or natural right, universal education, equal opportunity, equal wages, freedom of expression, human dignity, social justice, access to knowledge, respect for human life, tolerance, freedom of choice, right of appeal, doubt and criticism, equal right to employment,

health insurance, child welfare, respect for the sick, elderly and dead, fair treatment, right to amnesty, right to compensation, non-discrimination, egalitarianism – must be safeguarded by legislation and universally applied. These rights belong to all people who dwell together in a country, not just to one group or another, and they alone should be imposed by law. Particular religious values, on the other hand, which pertain only to an exclusive group, should not be applied to everyone and should certainly not be imposed by law.

The idea of modern democracy is based upon universal recognition of certain inherent rights of all peoples and individuals. We must recognize, however, that every person is born into a specific religious, cultural and national group, but not into universal law or humanistic rights. In other words, a person is born a Jew, an Arab or a Druse, speaking Hebrew, Arabic or Circassian, and is born into a specific religious, national and cultural identity, directly or indirectly related to Judaism, Christianity or Islam, including their respective sects and subdivisions. Man is not, however, born autonomous, democratic, just, or possessing equal rights. Subsequent to the founding of the State of Israel, there is no need to struggle for one's natural religious, national and cultural identity, guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel which promises to "solve the problem of the homelessness of the Jewish people." There is therefore no need to defend this by force, coercion or legislation, beyond the reasonable minimum required to ensure its continued existence. Jewish identity is taken for granted by most Israelis of Jewish origin, simply by virtue of the fact that most of us are born into it. We speak the Hebrew language, are bound in some ritual or cultural way to the memory of a common past, and share hopes for a common future. Our lives are influenced by the Jewish calendar and by the cycle of *Shabbat* and Jewish holidays. The physical and abstract experience of Judaism is all around us, linked in one way or another to the life cycle traditions of *Halakha*. We also take part – willingly or unwillingly – in Jewish culture, its customs, literature, and traditions, and share its implicit and explicit associations and ritual heritage. These experiences can be intensified, cultivated and augmented ad infinitum, but there is no

need to do so by force. The natural vibrancy of the culture plays a decisive role, as evidenced by contemporary Hebrew arts and letters, which draw upon the spirit, imagery, mythology and lyricism reflected in the ancient Hebrew language that pervades every aspect of Jewish life, past and present.

On the other hand, those things that do not enjoy natural, inherent acceptance, and cannot be taken for granted, should be protected. Man is not born democratic, justice-seeking, egalitarian, autonomous, humanistic, sensitive to silenced voices and suffering, compassionate, pluralistic, feminist, respecting all individuals, generous and tolerant. Most people do not think of others in terms of the maxim "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God" (Ethics of the Fathers 3:18), nor do they have equal respect for their cultural and religious preferences, spiritual diversity, truths, or their right to espouse them. Tolerant, pluralistic views such as these have no natural language or mythology, and they lack the authority of divine revelation and ancient tradition. They must therefore be taught and defended, protected by legislation and imposed upon everyone. The State of Israel, according to its Declaration of Independence, "will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or gender; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture...and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations." In reality, there is still a great gap between the commitment and its fulfillment, but once again, it should be remembered that we are not born democratic, tolerant or pluralistic, and we do not speak from the moment of our birth, the language of justice and equality. There are no inborn cultural reserves, defending these conceptions as part of a distinct cultural, national and religious tradition. Education should therefore teach religious and cultural tolerance, equality, freedom of religion and conscience, recognition of manifold truths and lifestyles, as well as the relative nature of "absolute truth." One of the most important tasks of education is to point out that no one has a monopoly over truth, or a preeminence of dreams, imagination, memory, sacred belief or myth. No one socio-religious system is the sole arbiter of all meaning,

and no single allegiance or commitment is superior to all others. There are, rather, complex interactions between many truths, different loyalties and varied beliefs. The goal of a democratic political system is to maintain an arena of free expression, in which different beliefs and lifestyles can compete in a marketplace of ideas on a basis of freedom of expression and freedom of identification, and freedom of choice without coercion and without predetermined preference.

I don't believe that culture should be protected by imposed education and legislation. Life itself appears to preserve the common experience by virtue of identification, solidarity, and the decision to live within a specific national reality and cultural borders. This is achieved through the dominance of language, art, poetry, literature, memory and myth, ritual and liturgy in the lives of members of a given people. It is the power of the language of the street, and the diversity of experience constantly renewed through natural cultural growth and creation, which feed on both the past and the present. This growth is inexorably linked to the life cycle of shared association, which goes beyond the limits of time and space, and is deeply rooted in generations of experience. An individual's identification with a particular collective entity, through language, culture and lifestyle, religious tradition, solidarity, a common past and a common future, is taken for granted, since the individual's lifestyle, and the meaning and significance in one's life, is based upon one's culture. It would stand to reason that anyone born into a certain culture – if granted freedom, equality, dignity, a broad education and access to a wide variety of cultures, as well as a degree of tranquility, financial security and social justice – would naturally identify with some of its components in a fashion suitable to the circumstances of the individual's life, choosing those things that are close to one's heart. Judaism, which is thousands of years old, is not merely a religious faith. It is a historical, national and cultural legacy, binding the Jewish People together, not only through belief or *Halakha*, but by virtue of a national will to exist, a common identity and memory, shared hopes for the future, and a sense of communal caring and solidarity which transcend time and place.



Democracy on the other hand, being much younger, must carve out a place for itself and defend its values through legislation, systematic education, administration and enforcement, since it is neither natural nor innate, and has no language, memory or myth. Democracy demands no specific lifestyle, and has neither natural defenses nor tools for the kind of cultural growth that is taken for granted: that which ensures continuity.

In comparing these two systems, I believe unreservedly in the life force of the historical and national legacy of the Jewish People, in all its diversity and vitality. I have faith in the life force of millennia-old Jewish culture, and the new forces with which it has been imbued since its historical return to national life and territorial sovereignty. The many faces of Jewish tradition and the richness of its sources will guarantee the growth, change and vitality that will ensure its continued existence and the discovery of new facets, spanning the gap between past and future. The more Judaism confronts the test of freedom and choice, and the less it engages in coercion, the more it will grow, thus ensuring creative development through continuity and change. On the other hand, I fear for the existence of the State of Israel as a democratic state belonging to all its citizens, a democracy based upon a multiplicity of opinions, the essence of which is ensuring the rights of both the majority and the minority – the majority right to make decisions, and the minority right to self determination and freedom. Reality has proven this fear to be justified. Democracy depends upon pluralism and freedom of creation, the right and the duty to hold everything in doubt and to criticize, to choose, to determine and to see things in a relative light, to reflect and to petition, and to reach democratic decisions. Since this relativistic and pluralistic essence must deal with a normative world that draws upon absolute truths, the religious-political reality in Israel gives cause for a great deal of concern. I believe, therefore, that we must struggle to impart democratic concepts and egalitarian laws. Religion and state should be separated, as should religion and nationality, religion and politics, religion and the judiciary, religion and constitution. Religious coercion – or legal coercion of belief-dependent traditional values –

should be reduced to a bare minimum, leaving such matters to personal preference and choice. We should aspire to establish a secular democratic Israeli constitution that relates to all citizens. Nevertheless, we should intensify, deepen and cultivate our ties to Jewish culture and tradition, and we should do the same for every religious and cultural group in Israel, freely and by choice, through scholarship, study, cultural empowerment, enthusiasm, care, sensitivity and creativity.

In closing this discussion of the differences between the religious and democratic systems, we people of the twentieth century should bear in mind that we cannot rely only on secular rationalism and the deterministic optimism inherent to the idea of progress in democratic societies. The violence and cruelty manifested in the Holocaust, Stalinism, McCarthyism, two World Wars and the dropping of the atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, were not the product of religious thinking. The "people's democratic republics" did not commit murder in the name of a particular religion, but rather in the name of one secular ideological tyranny or another. On the other hand, religions throughout history, from ancient times to the twentieth century, not only often sinned and committed crimes in the name of their respective gods, but also safeguarded, preserved, created, acted, educated and progressed. We must constantly remind ourselves that the whole truth does not reside in any one place, and that criticism of religion must be accompanied by criticism of modern rationalism. Human culture is not arranged on a single shelf. It comprises, side by side, the tangible and the abstract, the rational and the irrational, intellect and faith, science and religion, the normative and the exception, various hegemonic values and dominant sources of authority, alongside the silenced voices on the margins of society, art and law, as well as the relative and absolute truths that are constantly redefined in the depths of human experience and the vagaries of history.