

Who Stole Social Justice?
by Rabbi Adam J. Bernay

What would you say is the basic summary of our faith in Messiah? How about this, tell me if you think this is good: We believe in the promised Messiah, that He came to lead us back to a sincere and proper relationship to God's Torah, called us to proclaim this good news to the world, and that He will return to bring about a worldwide Kingdom of peace and prosperity, a paradise. Would that be about it? That was the original idea, the concept of a Messianic personage who first reconciled His People to God – Himself – and then brought the whole world into His Kingdom. This was basically the way all Israelites believed in Messiah, although some would debate if it was two Messiahs or two comings of one Messiah. Well, when the Temple was destroyed, this caused all sorts of consternation to the Sages. Messiah should've come already! Where is he? What are we going to do? There were basically two responses among the Sages to this catastrophe. The first, to quote the website of the Central Agency for Jewish Education, was:

Fearful that Judaism might not survive the destruction of Jerusalem, [the sage] Yochanan [ben Zakkai] had himself smuggled out of Jerusalem and surrendered to the Roman general Vespasian, who Yochanan predicted would someday become emperor. Pleased, Vespasian said, "Make one request and I will grant it." Yochanan responded with a sentence that changed the course of history: "Give me Yavneh and its sages." The city of Yavneh then became the center for Jewish life and learning.

From Yavneh, Yochanan and his group of sages created what we would call today "mainstream Judaism," "Orthodox Judaism," an outgrowth of the Pharisaical school. It was from Yavneh that the last Sanhedrin, under Hillel II, issued its rulings that have guided Exilic Judaism ever since, at least most of it.

At the same time, another strain of Jewish thought that would have wide-reaching effects on the world was beginning to be formalized as well. Again, in the wake of the destruction of the Temple and razing of Jerusalem, a Sage made his way out of the rubble, but unlike Yochanan ben Zakkai, who made friends with the Romans and got them to let him and his followers legislate Jewish life without the Temple in peace, this Sage – Shimon bar Yochai – became an outspoken critic of the Romans, which forced him to go into hiding. It is said that for thirteen years, he and his son hid in a cave in Peki'in, studied Torah all day long, were provided for directly by the Most High... and during this period, Shimon bar Yochai wrote the Zohar, the foundational books of the philosophy that is known today as Kabbalah.

Now, I know some of you are thinking about the announced schedule of teachings and going, "What does this have to do with the topic 'Who Stole Social Justice'?" Well, would it surprise you to learn that the thieving conspiracy began – without it being known – in that cave in Peki'in? You see, the basis for the secular faith that is social messianism today has its foundations in the Kabbalistic ideas of how the world was created. But bear with me, this is going to take some more background. Let me read to you from "The Politics of Bad Faith" by David Horowitz – an incredible book I highly recommend to you all – and specifically from the chapter "The Religious Roots of Radicalism." I'm reading from pages 129-131, and realize as I read this that I don't believe or teach these things, but that these are the religious roots of a pernicious worldview we fight against:

In the Kabbalistic teaching... God Himself became part of the exile of His people, and God's self-exile the explanation for how evil entered the world.

Before Eden, according to the... teaching, there was a primal act of creation. God withdrew into himself, creating the nothingness, the non-God, out of which the world was created. Thus, in [Kabbalistic] gnosticism, there was no longer one divine creation, in which God's children chose freely between what is right and what is wrong, but a creation dominated by warring forces of good and evil.

The elements of this creation are the *Sefirot*, or [vessels of light radiating the completeness of the divine influence]. ...[D]uring the primal act of creation only the first three levels of *Sefirot* could adequately contain the primal “divine light.” When the radiation reached the six lower *Sefirot*, their capacity failed and they were shattered by the divine radiance. Sparks of the divine light were trapped in the fragments of these vessels, and some mounted aloft, while others descended and sank. Those that sank, the *Kelippot*, or husks, were transformed into the forces of impurity and evil, whose strength derives from the sparks of divine light that are still trapped within them.

This is the [Kabbalistic] exile – the light entrapped within the broken vessels and subjected to evil. No longer is it an exile merely of the children of Adam, but of God himself; no longer are the Israelites alone in their exile: the *Shekhina*, the divine presence, dwells in exile with them. For in the course of its creation, the universe itself has become flawed. [The Kabbalistic view is that it] ... is a flaw in man *and* God, in creation itself. To heal the wound in creation requires a *tikkun olam* – a repair of the world.

This *tikkun olam* is the new [Kabbalistic] doctrine of redemption. The *Shekhina* must be reunited with God. The task of reunion is given to the people whom God has chosen. [According to this mystical worldview,] [r]edemption takes place through the holiness of the Chosen, whose observances and prayers are performed with a mystical intensity that deprives evil of its power. By redeeming the divine light, they perfect not only the soul of the Jewish people but of the whole world. For when the sparks that are trapped in the broken vessels are liberated and returned to their source, the Exile of the Light comes to an end, and the human and cosmic redemption is achieved.

What has happened in this Kabbalistic revision of the meaning of exile is the transformation of the religious teaching into a gnostic creed: redemption is no longer a divine release from the punishment of exile, but a humanly inspired transformation of creation itself. The concept of human exile has become divorced from the realities of history, the attempt to restore a covenant broken through humanity’s continuing capacity for evil. It has become instead a mystical Idea: the liberation of the divine light that will make the cosmos whole. In the gnostic view, the evil that men do emanates not from their own flawed natures, but is the result of a flaw in the cosmos they inhabit, which they can repair. Man is his own redeemer. ... Gnostic messianism is the echo of that serpentine voice that seduced Eve and led Adam to his Fall: *You shall be redeemers; you shall be as God.*

You see, in this version of Messianic thinking, the people themselves pave the way for the Messianic age by engaging in this “redeeming of the Shekinah”. Well, the Kabbalistic view became popularized among European Jews around the time of the Renaissance. And as Kabbalah became the dominant strain of Messianic theology among the people, another false messiah cropped up, Shabbatai Zvi. Shabbatai Zvi was a heretic who went around proclaiming Himself to be the Messiah while at the same time violating Biblical commandments and rabbinical tradition, pronouncing the Sacred Name in common speech, and – this is truly odd – used to perform mystical marriage ceremonies under a chuppah between himself and a Torah scroll. He was rejected by all rabbinic authorities, until finally he realized he must have some sort of mental illness, so he went to see a brilliant young Kabbalist studying in Jerusalem, Nathan of Gaza. Nathan decided that Shabbatai wasn’t ill, but that he truly was Messiah, and his deviant behavior proved it. Nathan gave a new Kabbalistic teaching that the soul of the Messiah was one of the elements of the divine light that had sunk into the world, and that it had become somehow one with the darker elements, and thus, when the soul of the Messiah was born into a man, this messiah would reveal himself by his bizarre and unkosher behavior. Talk about the ultimate in anti-Messianic teaching! But people bought into this, and Shabbatai Zvi went out to conquer the world. Well, he didn’t get very far. Captured by the Turkish caliphate in Constantinople, he was given a choice: convert to Islam or die. Shabbatai Zvi chose to – very publicly – convert to Islam. But he still had followers, as we read again in “The Politics of Bad Faith,” pages 133-134:

Nathan of Gaza explained the apostasy of the Messiah ... as the beginning of a new mission to release the divine sparks scattered among the gentiles, to redeem the light entrapped in Islamic darkness: it was the Messiah's task to take on the appearance of evil in order to purify others.

In the gnostic messianism of Nathan of Gaza and Shabbatai Zvi, in the antinomian [anti-Torah] belief in redemption through sin, in the arrogant ambition to transform human nature and remake the world, and in the very self-anointing presumption of a messianic party lies the true ancestry of the revolutionary Left.

The gnostic vision of exile – the light entrapped and subjected to evil – is precisely the Enlightenment vision of human oppression and liberation, which Marx and the socialists inherited. Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains. Men are naturally social beings and equal, but everywhere they are in conflict and unequal. Mankind is benevolent and angelic, but is everywhere alienated from its true self. No vision of human potential could be further from the realities of the sons and daughters of Adam, confused in their hearts between right and wrong, whose exile is the reflection of their disobedient wills.

Just as religious gnosticism sees evil as a flaw in the cosmic creation, so secular gnosticism sees evil as a flaw in the social cosmos, as a force [entirely] external to humanity itself. For the secular gnostics of the social Left, this flaw in the cosmos is private property.

It is private property that creates alienation and inequality, irrationality and social conflict, and condemns humanity to perpetual exile from its own freedom. To set mankind on the path back to an earthly paradise, it is only necessary to abolish property. In this messianic vision, redemption does not lie in the fulfillment of moral covenants and the adherence to law, but in the abolition and “transcendence” of both. Its path is not disclosed by divine grace but by a human reason that is, in fact, not reason at all, but a mysticism liberation. This mysticism is at the heart of every movement that seeks a revolutionary transformation of the world we know.

In this revolutionary mysticism, the messianic liberator is imprisoned in capitalist darkness; the liberator is an agent without property, that is in society but not of it; a force that is revolutionary because its revolt is not against the particular injustices of man's social existence, but the injustice of the existence itself. The messianic force is a class of people dispersed among the nations, but not of the nations, who in lifting the yoke of their own oppression will lift the yoke of all. ...

Here we see the mystical core of the Marxist faith, and of all the faiths of the revolutionary Left: a class representing the “total ruin of man” will bring about the “total redemption of man.” This is a logical absurdity. But as Gnostic heresy, it is theologically precise: light from darkness.

The foundation of socialist, progressive views of social justice is this social messianism, the idea that mankind is its own messiah, and thus may use messianic force to create a mundane paradise right here on a befouled Earth. What do I mean by messianic force? Well, we know that Scripture teaches that Messiah will conquer the nations and reestablish David's throne, this time as a world-wide kingdom. Thus, the social messianist believes that they have the right to use whatever means necessary – up to and including the use of force – to accomplish their means. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we saw this in the form of radical movements dedicated to establishing social justice via violent revolution to overthrow the established orders and install instead a socialist state.

But then, in the early 1900s, came the founder and chief philosophical light of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci, who suggested a mostly non-violent revolution involving a “long march through the institutions” – a slow, gradual takeover of the opinion-molding institutions of education, the arts, etc. – in order to make socialism acceptable to the masses. This idea was picked up by the American Progressives, who took the idea of social justice out of the Bible and perverted it for their own purpose of establishing the secular messianic state of socialism.

You see, in doing a long march through America’s institutions, you still had to deal with the fact that America was fundamentally a Bible-believing nation, and thus these secular progressives had to dip back into the religious foundations of their secular faith and pull out of the Bible statements like those we read in the Torah service and use those as justifications for the State to take over society.

But when we examine the Biblical commands about social justice, we find that things are basically the opposite of what the secular progressives want us to believe. Far from demanding that we inaugurate a human-centered messianic State that will enact social justice ultimately at the barrel of a gun – because if you don’t pay your taxes, that’s ultimately what the government will do is force you to with threats of force and imprisonment – the Bible teaches us that this is to be done through our religious institutions, through contributions not forced out of us but given in accordance with Divine Instruction because we love God and our fellow man.

Remember what I talked about last Shabbat? Rendering and over-rendering? This is the ultimate case of over-rendering to Caesar, when we give in to the secular messianic notion that the State is the Great Provider and should be the focus of our bringing about social justice. Now, I’m not saying we should refuse to pay our taxes as demanded by these secular messianists. But rather, let us not be deluded into thinking this exempts us from the necessity of pursuing Biblical Social Justice as we are commanded to by God. We must, rather, understand that when we personally help our fellow man – when we find the homeless person shelter, when we give the poor money and help the unemployed to find a job, when we show God’s love to people in these practical ways – then just as with showing people the truth that Yeshua is Messiah and they accept Him and become saved, we are bringing about, in part and in shadow, the Kingdom that will one day be brought about by Messiah when He returns.

If this sounds similar to what the social messianists believe, about redeeming the world through their social justice work, it is because social messianism is a Satanically-perverted copy of the truth. Our work is the Messianic Kingdom only in part and in shadow, while their work IS the divine redemption. You see the difference? You see – as I will talk about a bit next week and in future weeks when I teach about the origins of Christmas and Easter and other supposedly “Christian” holidays – Satan delights in creating perverted copies of the truth. He delights in finding ways to confuse us into thinking we are forwarding God’s Kingdom when we are in fact forwarding Satan’s kingdom.

And that is the reason for this somewhat academic, historical review of the perverted religious origins of secular messianism. We must always be on guard that we are not buying into Satan’s perversions of our holy callings, of God’s Holy Word, of the Truth. Because when we do, no matter how “good” the outcome may appear, we are simply giving in to the Serpent’s first lie to us: You shall be as gods. You shall determine what is right and what is wrong. You shall be the redeemer. As we know, to quote the Keith Green song, there is a redeemer... but it’s Yeshua, God’s own son... and not us.