

HALACHIC AND HASHKAFIC ISSUES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

109 - WHAT IS HASHKAFKA AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM? OU ISRAEL CENTER - FALL 2018

A] DEFINING HASHKAFKA

1. וישקיפו על פני סדום - כל השקפה שבמקרא לרעה חוץ מהשקיפה ממעון קדשך (דברים כ"ט:ט), שגדול כח מתנות עניים שהופך מדת רוגז לרחמים

רש"י בראשית פרק יח:טז

Hashkafa means 'outlook from a high position', here used in the context of the melachim looking down over Sedom. Rashi brings the idea from Chazal that 'hashkafa' brings with it a harsh or critical connotation.

2. פירוש והטעם כי השקפה היא לרעה מפני שהוא לשון מכה, וכן המשקוף נקרא "משקוף" (שמות י"ג:כג) מפני שהדלת שוקף עליו, ולפיכך כל לשון השקפה הוא לרעה מפני שהוא מכה ככה על הדבר, וזה הוא לרעה, חוץ מן מתנות עניים שהוא מהפך מדת הדין - לטובה

ספר גור אריה על בראשית יח:טז

The Maharal links the expression to the word משקוף - the lintel of the door which is so called since the door bangs on it.

Hashkafa is a theoretical construct - a way of viewing things in abstract which is of necessity critical and demanding. The practical application of hashkafic principles is often less ideal and more compromised. But at least hashkafa helps us to 'think straight' even if we can't always put that into full practice.

3.

ב.

עוד מושג אחד אנו צריכים להעביר תחת שבט הבקורת, והוא: "השקפת העולם", או בקיצור: "השקפות". ראשית יש לדעת כי מושג זה הוא נטע זר, שצמח על אדמת גרמניא. פירושו הוא: אדם "משקיף" על העולם ויוצר לעצמו דרך להבין את העולם, את החיים ואת עצמו, ומזה הוא מגיע למסקנה כיצד יחיה את חייו. כאן יש לשאול: האם יש מקום להשקפת-עולם בתוך תחום התורה? האם אדם יכול לסמוך על הכרתו לחשוב שהיא אמיתית ומחייבת, כלומר אמיתית לאמיתה של תורה? ועוד יותר: האם אדם יכול, ורשאי, לקבוע לעצמו ערכים עליונים בתוך תחומה של תורה? על השאלה הראשונה ילמדנו

בתוך תחומה של תורה אין מקום ל"השקפות". מאידך עלינו לדעת, שאין לעשות מתורה עצמה השקפת-עולם אנושית ח"ו. התורה היא התגלות האמת עצמה והיא היא החיים הרוחניים עצמם. כיצד לגשת אל העולם ואל כל תופעותיו ועל מה לבנות את חיינו — כל אלה עלינו לשאוב מההלכה, מסוד חכמים ונבונים ומלמד דעת מבינים. במקום אחר בחיבור זה וגם בחלק הראשון ממנו מתבאר, איפה מוצא היחיד את מקומו המיוחד לו בתורה. כאן נקבע רק, כי הגישה ההשקפתית יש לרחק בהחלט מתוך תחומה של תורה.

ספר עלי שור חלק ב' עמ' קמד

Rav Wolbe understood that there is in fact NO authentic Jewish concept of 'hashkafa'. It is an idea imported from the German concept of weltanschauung. Authentic Torah values come only from the world of halacha.

B] FINDING HASHKAFI IN CHUMASH

4. וְעָשִׂיתָ הַיָּשָׁר וְהַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֵי ה' לְמַעַן יִיטֵב לְךָ וּבָאתָ וְיִרְשֶׁתָּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַטֹּבָה אֲשֶׁר נָשָׁבַע ה' לְאַבְרָהָם:

דברים ו:יח

One of the mitzvot is to do what is 'upright and good'. Why is this a separate mitzvah - aren't all of the mitzvot meant to be yashar and tov? How are we to judge whether our idea of what is straight and good is in accordance with God's?

5. ולרבותינו בזה מדרש יפה, אמרו זו פשרה ולפנים משורת הדין. והכוונה בזה, כי מתחלה אמר שתשמור חקותי ועדותי אשר צוך, ועתה יאמר גם באשר לא צוך תן דעתך לעשות הטוב והישר בעיניו, כי הוא אוהב הטוב והישר: וזה ענין גדול, לפי שאי אפשר להזכיר בתורה כל הנהגות האדם עם שכניו ורעיו וכל משאו ומתנו ותקוני הישוב והמדינות כלם, אבל אחרי שהזכיר מהם הרבה, כגון לא תלך רכיל, לא תקום ולא תטור, ולא תעמוד על דם רעך, לא תקלל חרש, מפני שיבה תקום, וכיוצא בהן, חזר לומר בדרך כלל שיעשה הטוב והישר בכל דבר, עד שיכנס בזה הפשרה ולפנים משורת הדין

רמב"ן שם

The Ramban explains that, although the Torah includes hundreds of mitzvot and thousands of details, it could not possibly legislate specifically for every case in every time and place. It therefore includes this general mitzvah bein adam lechavero which requires us to be fair and honest and use our moral and ethical judgement in all circumstances.

This is a parallel to the mitzvah of 'kedoshim tihiyu' (see Vayikra 19:2) in mitzvot bein adam lemakom. A person might be a gross glutton and get drunk all day eating kosher meat and drinking kosher wine and never technically break any mitzvah. Kedoshim tihiyu comes to tell us that we have an overriding obligations to be 'holy' - i.e. to follow the spirit of the law and be bigger people. So too in interpersonal relations, we must not allow the letter of the law to deflect us from the spirit of the law.

6. דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עַדְתְּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

ויקרא יט:ב

7. והענין כי התורה הזהירה בעריות ובמאכלים האסורים והתירה הביאה איש באשתו ואכילת הבשר והיין, א"כ ימצא בעל התאווה מקום להיות שטוף בזמת אשתו או נשוי הרבות, ולהיות בסובאי יין בזוללי בשר למו, וידבר כרצונו בכל הנבלות, שלא הוזכר איסור זה בתורה, והנה יהיה נבל ברשות התורה: לפיכך בא הכתוב, אחרי שפרט האיסורים שאסר אותם לגמרי, וצוה בדבר כללי שנהיה פרושים מן המותרות וזה דרך התורה לפרוט ולכלול בכיוצא בזה, כי אחרי אזהרת פרטי הדינין אמר בכלל ועשית הישר והטוב וכן בענין השבת, אסר המלאכות בלאו והטרחים בעשה כללי שנאמר תשבות

רמב"ן ויקרא יט:ב

The methodology of the Torah is to supplement the details of mitzvah with Torah 'meta-principles' which provide the context and backdrop to our practice of the mitzvot generally and sets the 'spirit' of the law.

Consider also the Ramban's understanding¹ of 'Shabbaton' as a positive 'meta-mitzva' which defines the broader concept of rest and renewal on Shabbat and Chag, beyond the more technical negative definition of the melachot.

Overriding hashkafic 'meta-principles' stressed by the Torah multiple times could include (but without limitation):-

- sensitivity for the weak and underprivileged.
- enforcing justice.
- not to focus on material gain as a life goal.
- that our role in this world is one of giving and mesirut nefesh, not personal gain.
- that we champion the concept of delayed gratification - olam haba.
- the centrality of Eretz Yisrael and the importance of fighting to protect it.
- striving for shalom, particularly in the relationship between man and woman.
- belief in an ultimate redemption for the world and working to achieve that end.
- the centrality of Torah and Torah learning.
- achieving personal purity and sanctity in act, word and thought.
- that there is a metaphysical reality which goes beyond the world around us.

Notwithstanding his uneasiness with the concept of 'hashkafa', Rav Wolbe (AleI Shor 2:1) explains that Chazal and the Rambam consistently stress the need to identify 'klalim' - overriding principles - which we use to inform our Torah observance.² This gives us context and allows us to 'see the wood and not just the trees'. The structure of the Talmud Bavli - an organic mix of halachic and aggadata - is testimony to the stress on providing context for practical mitzvah observance.

1. In his comments on Vayikra 23:24

2. The line between meta-halachic klalim and hashkafic principles is difficult to define. To some degree, this may be an issue of semantics. Hashkafa is more abstract and further removed from the practical world of halacha.

So what is hashkafa? Here is one possible definition:-

“Hashkafa” is an understanding of the overarching principles of Torah, which informs and gives context to our mitzvah observance. Given the details of daily life and the halachic norms which apply to them, hashkafa is the methodology by which those details and norms are weighed against each other to produce a psak, which is not only halachically correct, but which also resonates with the spirit of the Torah.

The specific blend, emphasis and weighting of different hashkafic principles will produce a certain ‘sound’, rather like the blending of treble and bass tones in a graphic equalizer. Following this analogy, the shortcut modern references to ‘hashkafa’, as in Charedi, Religious Zionist, Modern Orthodox etc, will be akin to ‘presets’ where a particular balance of tones is saved in advance and can then be activated at the touch of a button.

C] FINDING HASHKAFKA IN MIDRASH

8. דורשי הגדות אומרים: 'רצונך להכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם? למוד הגדה - שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם ומדבק בדרכיו'

ספרי דברים פרשת עקב פסקא מט

Chazal stress that Midrash is a window into developing a relationship with and recognition of God.

9. רבי יצחק בן פנחס אומר כל מי שיש בידו מדרש ואין בידו הלכות לא טעם טעם של חכמה. כל מי שיש בידו הלכות ואין בידו מדרש לא טעם טעם של יראת חטא. הוא היה אומר כל שיש בידו מדרש ואין בידו הלכות זה גבור ואינו מזויין. כל שיש בידו הלכות ואין בידו מדרש חלש וזיין בידו. יש בידו זה וזה גבור ומזויין

אבות דרבי נתן נוסחא א פרק כט

Halacha is a key source of wisdom and intellectual development. As such, it is an incredibly powerful tool, but it does not necessarily build the person internally. For that they need midrash - a window into the creative, imaginative, rich and more holistic world of hashkafa.

10. וירץ עשו לקראתו ויחבקהו ויפל על צוארו וישקהו ויבכו ... ויפל על צוארו וישקהו

בראשית לג:ד

11. ט וירץ עשו לקראתו וישקהו, נקוד עליו. אר"ש בן אלעזר ... מלמד שנכמרו רחמיו באותה השעה ונשקו בכל לבו. אמר לו ר' ינאי אם כן למה נקוד עליו?! אלא מלמד שלא בא לנשקו אלא לנשכו ונעשה צוארו של אבינו יעקב של שיש וקהו שיניו של אותו רשע. ומה ת"ל לויבכו אלא זה בוכה על צוארו וזה בוכה על שיניו

בראשית רבה (וילנא) פרשת וישלח פרשה עח:ט

One example of a 'hashkafa-focused' midrash is that of Esav kissing/biting Ya'acov and the later's neck turning to stone to break Esav's teeth. This could be read as a fundamental primer in how to filter the negative of non-Jewish culture, when the non-Jewish world comes to kiss and not kill us. Although there is poison in the embrace, rather than reject the hug, we convert our neck (which connects our worlds of action and thought) to 'stone', which is impervious to tumah impurity. We can then 'filter' the messages coming through and remove the sting, whilst keeping the honey.

D] CAN YOU DECIDE YOUR OWN BLEND OF HASHKAFKA?

12. האומר אין תחיית המתים מן התורה - שכופר צמדרשים דדרשינן בגמרא לקמן מניין לתחיית המתים מן התורה, ואפילו יהא מודה ומאמין שיחיו המתים אלא דלא רמיזא צאורייתא - כופר הוא. הואיל ועוקר שיש תחיית המתים מן התורה - מה לנו ולאמונתו?! וכי מהיכן הוא יודע שכן הוא? הלכך כופר גמור הוא

רש"י סנהדרין צ

Here, Rashi stresses that correct hashkafot must be based on the Torah sources. Beliefs which are rooted other than in the Torah sources are an irrelevant - even if they happen to be true! The absorption of Torah hashkafa from the sources is what we call 'Da'at Torah'.

13. Were there no genuine gadol who had subscribed to the core halachic positions of what is roughly denominated modern Orthodoxy, ordinary rabbis and laymen would be hard put to cling to them. In the absence of an imprimatur from any *Shofet Shebeyamecha* whatsoever, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to justify adoption of norms and values in defiance of a wall-to-wall phalanx of gedolei Israel. Such action would simply be regarded as an error... One's contemporary authority no doubt bases himself largely, and perhaps selectively, upon classical predecessors. But the ordinary person must base himself upon a *Shofet Shebeyamecha*. Even if we should assume that, at the personal level, a moderate *lamdan* may, and perhaps must, act in accordance with his own informed and conscientious reading of the sources - a dubious proposition in its own right - surely no course could be championed in the public sphere. Who, however imagines this to be the case? Only the ignorant and the arrogant with respect to the major issues generally perceived as critical to a modern orthodox *weltanschauung*, the Rav z'l took a clear position, so that, in a meaningful sense, he can indeed be regarded as both patron and advocate of that orientation. Hence, he can be rightly regarded as a legitimizing authority for the modern Orthodox Jew at his best Those who identify with his worldview and halachic orientation can rightly regard their similar views as legitimized by his authority - with the proviso, of course, that they generally submit to that authority. They need not routinely accept any jot and tittle of his every ruling ... They should, however, meaningfully identify themselves as his followers.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein: Legitimization of Modernity - Classical and Contemporary, Engaging Modernity - The Orthodox Forum 1997 p18

Rav Lichtenstein sees the adoption of a halachic position as dependant upon a gadol beYisrael adopting that position and 'עשה לך רב' as a means of identifying with such an authority.

14. However, there are many who contend that the primary issues are, rather, matters of *hashkafa*, to which authority per se is far less relevant, and with respect to which recourse to the classical sources is arguably self-sufficient. This brings us to the familiar shibboleth of *da'at Torah*. I find the ... view that *gedolei Torah* are professional experts whose authority and wisdom can ordinarily be regarded as confined to the area of their technical proficiency, simply inconceivable. Our abiding historical faith in the efficacy of Torah as a pervasive ennobling, informing and enriching force dictates adoption of the concept of *da'at Torah* in some form or measure.

ibid p20

On hashkafic issues, he also subscribes, at least to some degree, to the concept of Da'at Torah.

15. לכל אחד מאתנו יש דעת תורה - אבל באחוזים. יש שאחד זכה בחמשים אחוז, משנהו השבעים וחמש, והשלישי בחמש עשרי אחוז. אבל האחוזים הנותרים אצל כל אחד ואחד הם לא מדעת תורה כי אם דעות אחרות - דעת פרנסה, דעת מסחר... דעת תורה במאה אחוז אפשר למצוא רק אצל גדולי הדור, שפרקו מעליהם כל הבלי העולם והתמכרו אך ורק לדעת תורה

קובץ מאמרים (תש"ס עמ' ק"ב)

Rav Elchanan Wasserman explains that all of us have some element of *Da'at Torah*. **Pure** *Da'at Torah* (and thus the source of legitimate *hashkafa*) can only come from *Gedolei Torah*, whose minds are solely focussed on Torah.

It seems therefore that *hashkafot* are legitimately held where they are professed by the followers of a gadol beTorah who espoused such views. This would certainly relate for example to the *hashkafot* espoused by such great Torah figures as the Chafetz Chaim, Rav S.R. Hirsch, Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik. How would it apply however to more 'modern' *hashkafot* espoused by some groups today? Can *hashkafa* be synthesized?

16. 'To what extent, if at all, is it legitimate to base a cohesive modern Orthodox worldview upon selection of elements from the thought of various authorities - for example, Rabbi D.Z. Hoffman on academic scholarship, Rav Hirsch on humanism, and Rav Kook on Zionism?' Implicit in this formulation is the assumption that modern sanction is vital, the only question being whether it can be attained eclectically. with reference to the halachic realm ... the sanction to subscribe to a minority view derives from the reliance upon an authority to whom one is, in some meaningful way, attached, to the point of being part of his societal or ideological community. What kind of adherence is there however, if one accepts convenient *psakim* and deserts his authority when one discerns choicer pickings elsewhere? Hence, to presumed votaries of dissenting orientations, eclecticism poses a special difficulty. Transposing these criteria to the axiological sphere ... is clearly applicable to *machshavah* no less than to Halakhah. A person who subscribed to Rav Kook's Zionist ideology but preferred the Satmar Rav's view on secular Jews would be as hard put to rely on his *heteron shemittah* as one who rejected his *pesakim* regarding *ribbit* or the status of *agunot*. However, at least one major qualification can be suggested. I do not believe that, in order to be regarded as a disciple, one must derive his comprehensive philosophical sustenance from a single authority. Certainly, one can draw wisdom and inspiration from varied sources and blend them within his own spiritual orbit

The crucial question is where one's presumed master stands with respect to what one has imbibed elsewhere. If he is sympathetic or oblivious, if he related to the area in question with detached geniality or consigns it to benign neglect, surely one may and possibility should turn to others who have studied the matter in depth and feel passionately about it. However, if the positions sought elsewhere are vigorously opposed by one's mentor - especially if they are challenged on ideological grounds as possibly illicit - adherence to them severely strains supposed affinity and the right capitalize upon it. Could a votary of astrology readily claim reliance upon the Rambam with respect to the allegorical hermeneutics? ... No relation to the Rav would have been strained over territorial compromise. Historicistic psychologization of Halakhah would have been another story, however.

... the motivational factor is equally applicable. Whatever one may think of the wisdom of collecting masters - with respect to *talmud Torah*, Hazal saw both pros and cons - the legitimacy of this course appears to me beyond reproach. The impetus is crucial, however. How can we fault a person who composes a mosaic out of elements drawn from various sources, each of which has been culled because of its resonance with his or her profoundest Jewish instincts? If, on the other hand, one has selected elements because they are the *hashkafic* equivalent of *kulot*, state-of-the-art philosophically correct, and culturally convenient, the eclectic quest is thoroughly reproachable.

ibid p24, 28

17. Ideological eclecticism per se is thoroughly legitimate. There is no a priori reason to object to the selective gathering, properly motivated, of hashkafic components from various Torah thinkers and to the attempt to fuse these into a coherent worldview. However, an important qualifying distinction should be borne in mind. If the elements gathered are thoroughly grounded in indigenous tradition - of which, in effect, they severally constitute a rendering - the quest can be pursued without reservation. If, however, they are accretions appended to tradition, let the selector beware.

Let me emphasize that I do not advance this distinction out of the rejection of accretions per se. The caveat relates to the eclectic aspect. It is perfectly legitimate for individuals profoundly committed to Torah to employ categories of their ambient intellectual culture in dealing with major religious issues and to integrate aspects of that culture into their thought and experience, while yet recognizing that these elements indeed have originated outside their Torah orbit. Collected appendages are something else. ...

The issue is not only quantitative but qualitative ... The identical 'modern' component assumes very different meaning when transposed from the world of a profoundly traditional thinker, for whom it may be singular, to that of a reforming modernist.... Above all, if one is to engage in philosophic eclecticism, he must be animated by a unifying and synergizing Torah commitment, through which organic integration into a meaningful world-order can take place. It cannot be recommended if the result is potpourri and flux - even less so, if it is conducted in a spirit which, essentially, builds a *weltanschauung* out of secular materials and regards normative *halakhah* as a complex of obstacles to be circumvented. If context and proportion are disregarded, we may find ourselves grappling with the conundrum posed by Roman legists: If I construct a wooden ship and then proceed to change its planks, one at a time, at which point does it lose its initial identity?

ibid p32-33

18. On two occasions during the years I spent in Boston, I was privileged to have personal audiences with the Rav. The first time, in the winter of 1972, we spoke for over an hour. Two points in this conversation particularly stand out. I asked what he would recommend that I study to build an authentic hashkafa; in response, he advised that I study the aggadot of the Sages and Ramban's Commentary on the Torah—and, of course, learn as much Talmud as possible. What I find interesting, in retrospect, is that he did not recommend studying a systematic philosophic work, such as Maimonides' Guide; nor, on the other hand, some Rabbinic "handbook," such as Mesillat Yesharim. Rather, he seemed to tell me to create my own synthetic picture from classical Rabbinic sources and rishonim

An exchange with the Rav by R. Yehonatan Chipman - taken from <http://hitzeivehonatan.blogspot.com>

Rav Soloveitchik's advice is interesting, although it is not certain that the writer's conclusions concerning 'synthesized hashkafa' are indeed the Rav's true intention.

Which areas of study are legitimate sources from which a gadol will form his 'shikul hada'at' on hashkafic issues?

19. ודע שהדברים אשר אמר בפרקים אלו ... אינם דברים שבדיתים מעצמי ולא פרושים שחדשתים. אמנם הם עניינים לקטתים מדברי חכמים במדרשות ותלמוד וזולתם מחבוריהם. ומדברי הפילוסופים גם - כן הקדמונים והחדשים - ומחבורי הרבה בני אדם. ושמע האמת ממי שאמרה!

הקדמה לשמונה פרקים

The Rambam clearly forms his views based not only on traditional Torah sources but also on non-Jewish sources which he understands to be true to Torah values. How far does that go? To what degree are 'modern' ideas legitimate ingredients in the formula which dictates how a gadol beTorah exercises his shikul hada'at? To what extent is such da'at Torah corrupted or enhanced by exposure to non-Torah sources. This question is itself the subject of hashkafic debate!!

This question of psak in hashkafa is a **MUCH** bigger topic and will iy'H be dealt with in Part 2!

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