

Introduction to Monotheism / JUDAISM

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*Introducing a 'paradigm' shift from Polytheism to Monotheism
(Signifying a cultural shift and not necessary a historical/chronological one)*

1. What is a PARADIGM? And a PARADIGM SHIFT?

- A Paradigm is "an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community." It refers to the conceptual frameworks and/or worldviews of a certain culture at a certain time of history; a cultural paradigm might overreach many cultures; and especially in the case of scientific paradigms it can even involve the conceptual frameworks of various scientific communities in different societies and cultures.
- A Paradigm Shift is "the replacement of a paradigm previously held to be valid to a new one." Paradigm shifts do not normally take place suddenly. A macro-paradigm needs a long time to mature before it establishes itself historically. For Kuhn, scientific revolutions occur during those periods where at least two paradigms co-exist, one traditional and at least one new. (Hans Küng, *Christianity: essence, history and future*, citing Thomas S. Kuhn).

Can you think of other paradigms? Name some.

2. The Monotheistic, Abrahamic Paradigm

- **Divinity:** a transcendental divinity, in principle separate from the world, controlling it from above and in the extreme case, conceived as having created the universe in *ex nihilo* 'out of nothing.'
 - **Sin:** fallen state of humanity (the poetic, idea of Adam & Eve in a primordial paradise, i.e., existing at the beginning of time).
 - **Scripture:** the verb *scribere* in Latin means to write hence the word scripture.
- These texts consist of the three religious writings (Holy Scriptures) considered sacred by Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

God addressing human beings through an authoritative sacred message/writing (symbolic and allegorical).

- **Covenant:** a pact between God and his worshipers; they are to enjoy the blessing and protection of God in return for remaining obedient and faithful.

- **Salvation History:** history of salvation – REDEMPTION – of the humankind: It is directed towards a goal. It has its beginning in God's creation, is confirmed by God's action and saving signs in time, and is directed towards an end.

3. THE HEBREW SCRIPTURE

√ **The Bible:** *ta biblia* in Greek meaning *the Books*, hence the designation *Bible*.

√ Consists of 3 parts:

1. **Torah:** The law or teaching
2. **Nebi'im:** The books of the Prophets.
3. **Ketubim:** The later books.

◦ *The Torah* (Greek **Pentateuch** or the five scrolls) is traditionally believed as the product of one author, the Prophet Moses himself.

◦ It dates from c.a. 1000 BC – 100 BC.

◦ *The Torah* consists of the books of: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.



4.

YAHWEH

- Judaism is a revealed religion.
- It is a religion about God / Yahweh who is different than all other deities and superior to them all.
- *YAHWEH is the God of ISRAEL, the Almighty, El-Shadai.*
- A Name filled with mysterious power.
- The GOD of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.
- The God of the Fathers, a Divinity that makes a COVENANT (= a binding promise) with ISRAEL and interferes in her history in order to secure her REDEMPTION.
- "Yahweh is God of gods and Lord of lords, the Great God, God triumphant and terrible, free of favoritism, never to be bribed. He it is who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow.." (*Deut. 10: 17-18*)

5.

JUDAISM

- Judaism is foremost the redemptive history of the 'Chosen People' who were guided by Yahweh.
- "Judaism is a way of life that endeavors to transform virtually every human action into a means of communion with God. Through this communion with God, the Jew is enabled to make his contribution to the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the brotherhood of man on earth. So far as its adherents are concerned, Judaism seeks to extend the concept of right and wrong to every aspect of behavior." (Hertzberg, *Judaism*, 73-74).
- Yahweh cares for the human kind – all humans alike.
- "You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." (*Deut.*, 6: 5).
- The love towards the Lord entails love of the neighbor, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am Yahweh, your Lord" (*Leviticus*, 19: 18); "Love the stranger then, for you were once strangers in Egypt" (*Deut.* 10, 19).
- Living according to the Torah and abiding by its LAWS – ritual purity.
- The human being lives his humanity truly when he stands in a community of faith – in relationship to God and to his fellow human beings.

6. GENESIS

- "Let There Be!" A creationist approach = God spoke, and his command resulted in creation; the creative divine word. The *transcendence* of God and His sovereign action. The order and unity of creation.
- Adam* in Hebrew means human being. The name of the genus becomes prototype of all human beings = the universal horizon of the Hebrew Bible.
- "In the image and likeness of God."
- Garden of Eden* = human situation.
 - ◆ The concern is not with immortality but *with morality*.
 - ◆ Man as a free moral agent which implies immeasurable responsibility.
 - ◆ HUMAN DIGNITY.
 - ◆ Sin = *Khaṭṭa'*. God's first reaction to the *Khattay* of the first pair was that of care. He gave the fearful and trembling man (Adam) confidence.
 - ◆ *Khaṭṭa'* is a product of human behavior and not a principle inherent in the cosmos. Sin is never made absolute.
 - ◆ Possibility of repentance or *teshuvah* = to turn back to God, to the human being's truest nature.
 - ◆ Righteousness absolves sin: life according to the Torah.

7. ABRAHAM (c.a. 1750 BC)

- From *Ur* of the Chaldeans to *Canaan*, the Promised Land, via *Haran* guided by the Hand of God.
- "Abraham put his faith in Yahweh and this was reckoned to him as uprightness" (*Genesis*, 15: 6).
- The Covenant (of a smoking brazier and a flaming torch): "To your descendants I give this country, from the River of Egypt to the Great River, the River of Euphrates" (*Genesis*, 15: 18-21).
- The covenant at the *Oak of Mamre*: Abraham and his descendants are commanded to circumcise 'the mark of the covenant' every male in the community including slaves on the eighth day after birth as a.
- "The binding of Isaac" – the *akedah* – a founding narrative and a fundamental cornerstone of pure faith: total submission and unconditional trust in God.
 - ◆ Kierkegaard (19th century Danish philosopher): "Faith is not the spontaneous inclination of the heart, but rather the paradox of existence– a movement towards a resolute transformation of the self and a subjective inwardness."
 - ◆ "Consequently, Abraham can be saved only by the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible, and this he grasps by faith for this is the courage of faith."

8. EXODUS (c.a. 1290)

- MOSES: The mediator of the divine word. Liberation from slavery in Egypt.
- A special call to lead Yahwe's 'Chosen People' from slavery into liberty and a life under the law in the Promised Land of Canaan, guided by Yahweh Himself.
- A revealing, central event: 'Chosen People', identity as a community, and underlying memory.
- Each believing Jew recalls and makes contemporary the Exodus as he/she celebrates **Passover*** and sees himself as participant in this liberating experience of total trust and faith.
- A New Covenant: Yahweh promises that if his chosen people abide by the terms of the covenant, they will become "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (*Exodus*, 19: 6). Moses reports the divine promise and the people assent to it (*Exodus*, 24: 7).
- Crossing of the desert = 'rite of passage;' a kind of trial and a process of maturation before they set foot on the 'Promised Land'.
- Yahweh promises Israel redemption (Ex 1-15) and consecration (16-24; 25-40) and declared to them the meaning of their deliverance: the meaning of their history and of his salvation plan.

* Passover (*Pesah*): When Yahweh passed over the Israelites' dwellings in Egypt to protect them and their first born from the plagues He inflicted on the Egyptians (*Exodus*, 12:27). It directly precedes the departure from Egypt (*Exodus*, 12: 27).

9. DEUTERONOMY

DEUTERONOMY (Greek: Second Law!)

- Ø Hebrew *debarim* = 'the words' after the first sentence of the book 'these are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel' (*Deut.* 17: 18).
- Ø Jewish history and ritual are recapitulated and elaborated.
- Ø It declares to be a sermon given by Moses just before the people crossed over the Jordan River. Prepare to enter the Promised Land, and makes a battle speech enjoining them to have faith in Yahweh, Israel's God, the One, the Mighty, and the benevolent.
- Ø An exhortation and an exposition of the law. Israel should keep itself free of all alien cults, magical practices, and all impurity.
- Ø The social responsibilities of the 'Chosen People': Love towards the orphan, the widow, the weak, and the stranger.

10. PROPHETS

- ◆ A PROPHET (*nabi*) = a person through whom Yahweh speaks to the people.
- ◆ A seer or clairvoyant (*ro'e* or *hoze*) - an ecstatic visionary.
- ◆ "The Prophets often made predictions in the conviction that Yahweh was shaping the course of the events according to His purpose". "The Prophet was primarily concerned with the present."

11. EZEKIEL

- The fall of Jerusalem (in 587 BC) and the Babylonian captivity.
- Received his call for prophecy in 593 BC.
- "It is the Lord Yahweh who speaks."
- Infinite distance separating Yahweh from a mere mortal or "SON of MAN".
- Allegories (the eagle of Babylon; Jerusalem as whore) pictorial images and vivid descriptions.
- The history of Israel in the imagery of prostitution (a common figure in Ancient Near East; also used by Hosea and Jeremiah).
- Prophet of disaster and exhortation.
- Strengthening his people in their faith encouraging new hope.
- Exponent of personal responsibility - individual repentance and accountability.

12. DANIEL

- Date of the book: c.a. 164 AD Hellenistic period, under Seleucid rule (312-128 BC).
- During the persecution of the Jews in Palestine under Antiochus IV.
- Protagonist is the pious Daniel who lived some 5 centuries earlier in the Babylonian Exile.

- APOCALYPTIC literature (from the Greek, to uncover or reveal). Disclosing the signs of the End of history.
- H O P E: Yahweh's work in history is purposeful – Deliverance through divine intervention.
- Second part, 7-12: Four visions – Yahweh will overthrow the tyrannical rule of men and establish His true Kingdom of Israel.
- Symbolic language and bizarre imagery – occult, secret codes.

13. JONAH

- Written in the 4th century BC.
- Yahweh sends Jonah to the city of Nineveh (Mesopotamia) to announce its destruction.
- No runaway from the sovereign Hand of Yahweh!
- Yahweh's nature is always to be merciful to Jews and gentiles (non-Israelis) alike.

JUDAISM: The "living Covenant" as the centre of Jewish faith
 Total faith and trust in God
 To become free *for* God and human beings precisely through the Law

Relying mainly on:

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