

With God's help

Sunday. The 2nd of July, 2017

In honor of the participants at the conference held by CESNUR, at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute.

Dear participants!

We found out, incidentally, about a lecture to be held at the conference entitled "Is Lev Tahor a destructive cult?"

We do not know what the content of the lecture should be, the source of the data before the lecturer and what conclusions will be drawn.

We were unable to attend the conference personally since we are abroad. Therefore, in consultation with the conference directors, we thought it appropriate to express our main points of view in writing to the distinguished participants.

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The Lev Tahor community (henceforth: "the community") does not see itself as a new religion and certainly not as a Cult.

The community was founded in Jerusalem at the end of the eighties, by the Rabbi Shlomo Elbarnes (Helbrans).

The foundations of the community are only a true and genuine observance of the commandments of the Torah, as defined by the original Judaism, that is, the Jews of the Diaspora prior to the so-called Enlightenment (or as it called in the community "Modernization").

The values of the community are, in fact, a reconstruction of the Hasidic movement in its early generations. On the contrary, the community views itself as an insistence on the preservation of original Judaism and as a defense against the Modernization, Reform, and later Zionism and secularism that threatened the original Judaism.

Therefore, in terms of the community, there is no significant and fundamental change between the original Hasidic movement and other leaders and communities of the time, Lithuanians, Sephardim, Ashkenazim, etc., who also continued the original Judaism. The changes between Sephardim and Ashkenazim, Hasidim, and Lithuanians, Yemenites and Hungarians, etc., are seen in the community as changes in customs only, and as long as they are original orthodox, the community sees itself ideologically affiliated with them.

The Torah study and observance, observance of the commandments and values of Judaism, encompasses the entire life of the members of the community. With the belief that God is the Creator and Leader of the Universe, that the purpose of God is to bring all human beings to infinite happiness, that the Torah is God's message, and that the observance of its commandments is the way to fulfill the purpose of God. God's purpose is actually the official purpose of the community.

In Jewish sources, prayer is the center of God's service, and therefore a considerable time of the day, especially on Shabbat and holidays, is dedicated to the prayers. Contemplation (Jewish meditation) is also a supreme value in the community.

The rules of kosher food are supposed to be to the satisfaction of members of the community, which is above the standards of most commercial kosher agencies.

In Judaism, a woman is a supreme value, built by God in paradise. Judaism, therefore, emphasizes the proper clothing of the woman and her modest behavior. The modesty of a woman increases her respect and her place in the family and society as a dignified spiritual symbol. The degradation or beating of a woman is a criminal sin. The sages said: honoring the wife is respect to the omnipresence, humiliating the wife is compare to a blow to the Godhead. The Sages also said: A man shall respect his wife more than himself.

The education of boys and girls has always been one of the components of Judaism, and the means for its continuation generation after generation. The education system is a kind of reconstruction of the education that was practiced in the pre-modernization Diaspora communities, with the exception of the girl's institutionalized education in the community (instead of homeschooling in the immemorial). The boys and girls learn, step by step, the Torah, its laws and values from the books of Judaism. Boys and girls also receive a comprehensive education in all vital subjects, from mathematics to science, but without incorporating theories that we do not believe in (evolution, etc.).

Beatings and corporal punishment are not acceptable in the community. Education based on beating, punishing and/or intimidation is, from the community's point of view, a bad education that will collapse.

True to the values of Judaism, intimate relationships outside of marriage are unacceptable in the community. The matches are arranged in advance between the families, but the consent, will and satisfaction of the bride and groom are the actual decisive factors. Forced marriage of one of the parties is a misdemeanor. The bride and groom should overlap at their age. The desired age of marriage usually ranges from 16 to 20, but the limitations of local law are binding anyway.

Since the Rabbi serves as a spiritual leader as well as an advisor and a supporter, it is only natural that the members of the community admire him, and he is treated with the standard respect that is customary in Jewish communities to a teacher and a spiritual guide. According to the community, "cult of personality" is similar to idolatry.

As an inseparable part of the original values of Judaism, the community's view is that the exile of the Jewish nation is a divine punishment. The redemption of the people of Israel and their return to their land will only be in the divine process described in the books of the prophets, which will include the unification of humanity in peace and harmony to the worship of God. Therefore, the idea of Zionism and the State of Israel per se is a denial of original Judaism. Apart from the secular character of Zionism and the State of Israel, which is an antithesis of the Torah of Moses in general and Judaism in particular.

In addition, to the community's unrecognition of the legitimacy of the State of Israel to act in the name of the Jewish nation, the community also advocates the passive resistance of the Jewish nation to the State of Israel and its rule. According to the community's book named 'Derech Hatzalah' ('Path of Rescue') published in 2003, Jews can live under 'A state of all its citizens', under a Muslim state, under an Arab state, or under any foreign rule, as they once lived in the Diaspora. Only the idea of Zionism and the mobilization of the Jewish nation for

the State of Israel is what causes the identification of the Jewish nation as a fighting force in the Middle East, and consequently puts the Jewish residents in the Land of Israel in danger of annihilation. In any event, the opposition to Zionism of the community is purely religious.

The controversy created around the community in Israel and abroad, due to its anti-Zionist publications, is indescribable in this short document and is the subject of a book of its own. The persecution against the community is driven out of fear of the ideological expansion of the community that will undermine the Jewish basis for support Zionism and the State of Israel. (For a starting point, see the essay of Professor Maximilian Forte at <https://zeroanthropology.net/2014/04/26/targeting-lev-tahor-from-israel-to-canada/>)

To this end, if the recent westerns values of permissiveness are absolute constructive, the community values are probably destructive. If the westerns values of permissiveness have destructive components, the community values probably offers some constructive components.

In any case, to reconstruct the life of Diaspora Jewry in a full and uncompromising manner at the end of the 19th century and in the 20th century, creates an extraordinary impression by itself, not to mention eccentric. The boldness of the anti-Zionism views of the community paints it as a danger to the public. Hence the name of the community in the media: 'the Taliban sect' or 'the Jewish Taliban'.

Whereas in the past the Israeli articles dealt with all kind of political accusations against the community, from partnering the enemy to incitement to genocide, recently, however, due to the recognition of the community's rabbi as a political refugee in Canada in 2003, the headlines changed and began to deal with alleged inter-communal crimes.

The Israeli media knows how to tell about the "horrors" of "child abuse" "forced marriage" "corporal punishment" "family breakup" "child theft". In short, except for beheadings, the Israeli media considers the community as ISIS for all intents and purposes.

The conventional tactic 'against cults', to use former members with negative emotions in order to spread gossips and rumors against the group, has worked extremely well in the case of the Lev Tahor community, in which former members, especially those who became secular, received a broad platform in the Israeli media and in Israeli courts, and their statements were accepted without question.

To enter into details, this is not something that can be done within the framework of this document. What is more, we do not know what details to relate, since each person chooses to attach importance to certain details and to ignore others. However, anyone who is interested in additional information, regarding specific details and charges, is hereby asked to contact us and we are committed to satisfying his interest.

From the media the falsely accusations found their way to the Israeli authorities, Knesset committees met several times to discuss the danger of the "Lev Tahor cult" and the means to fight it. It is self-understood, that the Knesset committees and other inter-ministerial committees convened with the consensus of prejudices regarding cults in general and the Lev Tahor in particular. Israel's diplomatic relations with foreign countries have been used to create pressures to fight the community abroad.

The proposed law on cults, which is scandalous from a legal point of view, was formulated in the course of the work of Knesset committees in the matter of "Lev Tahor". Its initiators are

Orly Levi Abekasis and Yariv Levin, both of whom were involved in parliamentary activity against the community abroad, and it is doubtful whether the bill would have passed the preliminary voting in the Knesset without first assigning it to the "dangerous sect" Lev Tahor.

In a document prepared by CESNUR, and sent to members of the Knesset, it was well described the scandal in this bill. Which delayed the approval of the law, which is now officially postponed for amendments by the welfare minister's office.

But delaying the approval of the law did not prevent the Judge Rivka Makayes of the Petach Tikva Magistrate's Court from using the bill as if it had been passed. In fact, the judge circumvented the international efforts of the CESNUR Institute and others to thwart the law.

The judge added the "definitions of sectarian characteristics" from an Israeli inter-ministerial report (known as the Taasse-Glazer Report). And given that the decisive part of the trial took place unilaterally, with no possibility of defense by the community, this created a precedent opportunity to a landmark case regarding 'Cults'.

The judge decided in a ruling that was partially published, that the Lev Tahor community is an 'abusive cult'. The judge declared all the minors in the community as needy minors and ordered them to be removed immediately from their parent's custody. In the part of the unpublished secret ruling, it obligated the families who defended themselves in part of the trial, to pay the costs of the trial (in the sum of 100,000 NIS). It also denied most consular services to most of the members of the community abroad and instructed the state to allocate all the resources for bringing the community families with their children to Israel (for the purpose of adopting the children by the state).

The last fortune of the community is that its members were not within the jurisdiction of the State of Israel at the time of the judgment. The community tries to appeal the verdict, through its attorney, Mr. Ephraim Damri in Tiberias. The chances of success in the appeal are unpredictable and depend heavily on public opinion.

This legal precedent is not only endangering the community, it is endangering the values of freedom of religion in the State of Israel and may even have an adverse effect outside its borders. It creates a precedent in which a judge unequivocally determines the definitions of an "abusive cult" when almost every religion, group, organization or commune, that does not conform to Western values in general, and the State of Israel, in particular, may find itself under the same category.

The community applied its request, to all persons and bodies that are concerned and sensitive about the values of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, justice and integrity, to do everything possible to thwart this ruling, to prevent religious persecution of any kind in general and against minorities in particular.

For more information, suggestions, questions, or requests, please contact us through the website of the World Committee for the Rescue of the Lev Tahor Community.

[Http://www.rescuecommittee.org](http://www.rescuecommittee.org)

Best regards

Lev Tahor Community.

Santa Rosa, Guatemala.