

RELIGIOUS THINKERS; HERALDS OF ZION [2]

by Dr. Meir Tamari

SHMUEL CHAIM LANDAU

Harav Shmuel Chaim Landau's vision which he named Torah V'Avoda, introduced a new dimension into religious Zionism. This term was later presented either as labor and study or a bridge between secular and religious Israelis or as modern Orthodoxy; some maintain that after 1967, it was supplanted by settlement of the greater Eretz Yisrael as the aim of religious Zionism. However, Landau's meaning differed radically and was clearly as he himself termed it, 'Mered HaKadosh', the Holy Revolution. He aimed at nothing less than establishing the social and moral agenda of Judaism as the rule in the envisaged new state. He inherited his love for Eretz Yisrael from Chassidism and his zealousness for redemption, from a lifelong connection with Kotsk, with its emphasis on truth.

The virulent anti-Semitism in Europe and the Balfour Declaration influenced Landau and he immediately joined the Polish Mizrachi movement. The impact that he had on that movement far surpassed his shortened life span. Almost single-handedly he brought the Mizrachi youth movement into existence and ran the Mizrachi movement in Poland, devoting most of his energies to encouraging Aliya and establishing hachsharot for their

eventual settlement on kibbutzim. In 1925, Landau and his family went on Aliya, settling in Jerusalem and quickly establishing himself as the leader of Hapoel Hamizrachi. Two years later, exhausted, he suddenly took ill and died at the young age of thirty-six.

His ideal he expressed in the phrase he had coined 'Torah V'Avoda', which soon became the slogan of Hapoel Hamizrachi, the religious labor movement and its youth organization Bnei Akiva. Later, it was also reflected in the ideas of Yitzchak Breuer of Aguda and in the labor party Poalei Agudat Yisrael. There is nothing in his Torah V'Avoda of the teachings of Harav A. Yitzchak Hakohen Kook who was a founding member of Agudat Yisrael and started Degel Yerushalyim, a non-political movement aimed at disseminating Judaism. This Torah V'Avoda signified the synthesis of three seemingly different ideological factors: Torah, Zionism and Socialism. Landau, however, proclaimed it to be in reality, expression of one single truth, Torah. Since the Talmud teaches that the Torah was created for the sake of Israel, it is therefore self-evident that the rebuilding of the land must be governed by the ultimate goal, the national renaissance. Torah V'Avoda is Landau's fundamental blueprint for the regeneration of Eretz Yisrael. He himself explained this in his writings which we can summarize as follows:

Torah, which is the inheritance of Israel, contains two major conceptual ideas. First, there are its laws and statutes to which each and every Jew

must adhere. Each individual, not the nation of Israel as a whole, relates to them in a totally personal manner, whether they are in the Diaspora or in our homeland. Secondly, the Torah must also be seen as the spirit of our nation, the source of our culture and the essence of our souls. It is within this category that the public - nationalistic ideals that the Torah espouses are to be found.

Avoda as economic activity is temporary and individualistic but we have to make Avoda one of basic and organic requirements in our nation's revival. Avoda that would nurture and contribute to our nation's revival through producing national unity and contribute immeasurably to our rebirth. Nation combines the spiritual factors of the conglomerate with its physical needs. In the Diaspora, Israel abandoned this unity and Jews, both as the collective and as individuals, have been forced to live according to the will and whims of others. Dispersed, scattered, and subjugated to foreign nations, caused us to rely upon others for our well-being. Placed within the care of other nations and needing them for our safety we became lowly and degraded and were used only to suit the needs of others. We became 'a nation destroyed'. Avoda will enable the collective "I" to create and produce independently, to go from a scattered and separate people into a collective nation in its full sense and meaning. With this concept the nation begins to rebuild itself. Independent, in spirit, in physical labor, and activity.

The revival of our nation lies at the

very root of Torah and Avoda. Torah is the life-giver, creating a world which integrates all aspects of life and its intricacies from the most mundane to the most holy. Physical and economic well-being, as well as the spiritual condition, all are given expression through the medium of Torah. The observance of the Jewish religion, its commandments, statutes and laws which pertain to the individual in Eretz Israel and in the Diaspora, is incumbent upon the individuals and the nation. Thus, the Torah in its truth cannot be a source of life unless it is followed by the individuals and the collective. Torah creates and revives our nation while Avoda forces us to move our ideas from the potential into the real. The combination of the two will lead to the very goal towards which we are striving - the revival of our nation! ★