

VIET NAM: A REAPPRAISAL

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PLEASE BE ADVISED THAT MY PURPOSE IN SPEAKING ON THE SUBJECT OF VIET NAM TONIGHT IS NOT TO ANNOUNCE MY CANDIDACY FOR THE PRESIDENCY OF THE U.S. NOR IS MY DECISION TO SPEAK AGAIN ON THIS SUBJECT PROMPTED BY ANY RECENT POLITICAL NEWS. THE TITLE FOR THIS SERMON WAS DELIVERED TO THE EDITOR OF OUR TEMPLE NEWSPAPER BEFORE THE PEOPLE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE SPOKE IN THEIR PRIMARY AND BEFORE THE SENATOR FROM NEW YORK DECIDED TO DECLARE HIMSELF. I AM NOT PREPARED THIS EVENING TO SAY FOR WHOM I WILL VOTE IN THE FORTHCOMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. THAT EVENT IS STILL RELATIVELY DISTANT, AND A GREAT DEAL CAN HAPPEN BETWEEN NOW AND THEN. I AM MOVED TO SPEAK NOT BECAUSE OF ACTIVITY ON THE POLITICAL SCENE BUT BECAUSE OF INCREASED MILITARY ACTIVITY. ACCUMULATING EVENTS IN VIET NAM OVER THE PAST MONTHS SINCE LAST WE DISCUSSED THIS ISSUE HAVE RECONFIRMED MY RATIONAL VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT AND HAVE REINFORCED MY EMOTIONAL VIEWS TO THE POINT THAT I MUST, IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE, SPEAK OUT.

AS TO MY VIEWS WHICH ARE THE RESULT OF RATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE WAR, LET ME SAY, FIRST I BELIEVE THAT THE PEOPLE INDIGENOUS TO A PARTICULAR GEOGRAPHICAL AREA HAVE THE RIGHT TO GOVERN THEMSELVES. THIS, AFTER ALL, WAS THE BASIS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR. THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN THE NEW WORLD DECIDED THAT THEY WANTED TO BE FREE OF ANY FOREIGN DOMINATION. THE SOUTH VIET-NAMESE, FOR THEIR PART, DESERVE TO BE FREE OF THE NORTH VIET-NAMESE PRESENCE AND FREE OF THE AMERICAN PRESENCE. I AM NOT WEIGHING NOW WHICH OF THESE FOREIGN PRESENCES IS LESS OR MORE ADVANTAGEOUS TO THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE; I AM MERELY SAYING NEITHER PRESENCE IN SOUTH VIET-NAM IS CONSISTENT WITH FREEDOM FOR THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE.

SINCE I AM A NON-INTERVENTIONIST, I WOULD BE CRITICAL OF THE FOREIGN POWERS WHO ATTEMPTED TO INTERVENE IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, AND THERE WERE SUCH POWERS. I AM CRITICAL OF THE ATTEMPT OF THE SOVIET UNION TO PLANT ATOMIC WEAPONS IN CUBA. I BELIEVE THAT OUR COUNTRY WAS RIGHT IN OPPOSING KRUCHEV IN THIS INTERNATIONAL CRISIS. I BELIEVE THAT OUR COUNTRY IS WRONG IN INTERFERING IN THE SITUATION IN VIET NAM.

SINCE I AM A NON-INTERVENTIONIST, I RESPECT THE MONROE DOCTRINE, WHEREIN THE U.S. HAS SWORN TO OPPOSE ALL FOREIGN POWERS INVADING OUR HEMISPHERE. SIMILARLY, I THINK THE ASIANS ARE ENTITLED TO A MONROE DOCTRINE FOR THEIR OWN HEMISPHERE. WHILE I DO NOT THINK THE NORTH VIETNAMESE SHOULD BE IN SOUTH VIET NAM, I CAN UNDERSTAND THE INDIGNATION OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE THAT A DISTANT NATION FROM ANOTHER HEMISPHERE HAS SENT A LARGE BODY OF TROOPS ON THE SOIL OF THE CONTINENT OF ASIA. JUST AS WE WOULD BE RIGHT IN OPPOSING ANY ATTEMPT BY THE SOVIET UNION TO BE THE CONSCIENCE OF THE WORLD AND TO USE THIS CONCEPT AS A PRETEXT FOR SENDING TROOPS TO THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE, SO WE CAN UNDERSTAND THAT THE U. S. CONTENTION THAT IT IS THE CONSCIENCE OF THE WORLD HAS TO BE VIEWED BY ASIANS WITH CONTEMPT, ESPECIALLY, WHEN THAT CONSCIENCE IS IMPLEMENTED BY B-52 BOMBERS AND MAPALM.

FROM THE PURELY RATIONAL POINT OF VIEW, BY INVADING THE EASTERN HEMISPHERE, THE U.S. HAS INVITED OTHER NATIONS TO SHOW DISRESPECT FOR OUR OWN MONROE DOCTRINE. BY OUR MILITARY PRESENCE IN ASIA, ACTING AS A SEPARATE NATION AND WITHOUT INVITATION FROM THE UNITED NATIONS, WE HAVE DECLARED FOR THE DOCTRINE THAT A MILITARY POWER HAS THE LICENSE TO DO WHATEVER IS IN ITS POWER TO DO. IF THIS IS TO BE THE CASE, WE CAN HARDLY CHALLENGE RUSSIA AGAIN FOR SENDING ATOMIC WEAPONS TO CUBA ON THE BASIS OF THE SANCTITY OF OUR HEMISPHERE. THE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN VIET NAM SETS A DANGEROUS PRECEDENT FOR THOSE WHO LIKE TO PLAY THE GAME OF MILITARY CHECKERS. PERHAPS OUR PRESENCE THERE IS INDICATION OF THE FACT THAT WE HAVE ACCEPTED THE AGE OLD SLOGAN THAT MIGHT MAKES RIGHT.

FROM THE RATIONAL POINT OF VIEW, I HAVE CONSIDERED THE ARGUMENT THAT AMERICA MUST FIGHT IN VIET NAM BECAUSE THE ALTERNATIVES ARE LESS BEARABLE. THAT ARGUMENT RUNS THIS WAY. COMMUNISM IS THE INCARNATION OF ALL EVIL. ALL COMMUNIST NATIONS FOLLOW THE MOSCOW LINE. THE COMMUNISTS WANT TO DESTROY AMERICA. THEREFORE, WHEREVER COMMUNISTS SEEK TO EXTEND THEIR POWER, WE MUST OPPOSE THEM MILITARILY. THIS VIEW HOLDS THAT ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE FOR THE COMMUNIST-CAPITALIST CONFRONTATION, THAT NOTHING IS REALISTIC WHICH IS NOT RELATED TO THIS CENTRAL FACT, THAT MEN ARE NOT ENTITLED TO PEACE UNTIL ONE BLOC OR THE OTHER HAS BEEN TOTALLY VICTORIOUS. I AM CONVINCED THAT THIS "EITHER-OR" REASONING WILL LEAD THE WORLD TO ATOMIC DESTRUCTION, AND SINCE I AM SO CONVINCED, I WOULD HAVE TO BE A COWARD, NOT TO SPEAK OUT. WHILE I OPPOSE COMMUNISM BECAUSE OF ITS DENIAL OF FREEDOM TO ITS CITIZENS, I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT THE COMMUNIST NATIONS CONSTITUTE A MONOLITHIC MONSTER. READ ANY GOOD FOREIGN AFFAIRS MAGAZINE TODAY, AND YOU WILL LEARN THAT RUSSIA AND CHINA HAVE MARSHALLED LARGE ARMIES ON THEIR RESPECTIVE BORDERS, ARMIES AIMED AT EACH OTHER. IN A CRISIS, IT IS NATIONALISM WHICH DETERMINES THE WAY IN WHICH THESE NATIONS ACT, JUST AS IT IS NATIONALISM, AND NOT DEMOCRACY, WHICH DETERMINES AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY. GENERAL MAXWELL TAYLOR, WHO HAS BEEN ONE OF THE TOP ADVISORS TO OUR PRESIDENT ON VIET NAM, HAS STATED FROM THE PULPIT OF BETH AM THAT THE NORTH VIET-NAMESE ARE AS MUCH AFRAID OF CHINA AS THEY ARE OF AMERICA. IN OPPOSING NORTH VIET NAM, WE ARE OPPOSING ONE COMMUNIST NATION, BUT WE ARE NOT STRIKING AT THE HEART OF COMMUNISM. AS ONE COMMENTATOR HAS RECENTLY WRITTEN, WE ARE WASTING OUR FIRST TEAM AGAINST THE FOURTH TEAM OF THE COMMUNISTS. IN OPPOSING NORTH VIET NAM, WE HAVE INCREASED THE DEPENDENCY OF THAT NATION ON CHINA AND ON MOSCOW, HOWEVER, AND WE HAVE STRENGTHENED THE DETERMINATION OF ALL ASIATIC COUNTRIES TO SEE THAT NO FOREIGN POWER GAINS A FOOTHOLD THERE.

LET ME TELL YOU THAT I RECENTLY SPOKE TO A MAN WHO WAS SADDENED BECAUSE HIS OWN SON WAS KILLED IN VIET NAM. FILLED WITH SYMPATHY FOR HIM, I SENT HIM A LETTER IN WHICH I SAID HE SHOULD TAKE HEART BECAUSE HIS SON HAD DIED FOR ALL OF US. I HAD TO SEND THAT LETTER TO HELP THAT POOR MAN, BUT I AM NOT SO CERTAIN THAT I WAS TELLING HIM THE TRUTH. I AM NOT SURE THAT HIS SON'S DEATH HAS HELPED ANY ONE, AND THAT IS WHY I HAVE TO TALK TONIGHT ABOUT VIET NAM. TO TOLERATE NEEDLESS DEATH IS IMMORAL.

I AM AGAINST COMMUNISM BECAUSE I DO NOT BELIEVE IN THE STALINIST TEACHING THAT THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS. JUDAISM TEACHES THAT THE MEANS EMPLOYED DETERMINES THE NATURE OF THE GOAL THAT IS ACHIEVED. THE BIBLE TEACHES THAT PEACE IS ACHIEVED THRU RIGHTEOUSNESS. I CANNOT AGREE WITH THE MILITARIST VIEW THAT IF AN ENEMY RESORTS TO DEVIANT MEANS, WE HAVE TO OUTDO HIM IN THAT REGARD. FOR I BELIEVE THAT WHEN WE RESORT TO WAR, WE REMAKE OURSELVES IN THE IMAGE OF WAR, WE BECOME CALLOUS, UNSEEING, UNFEELING. THINK A WHILE, COULD ANY OF US SURVIVE IF WE REALLY TRIED TO FEEL THE VIET NAM STATISTICS WHICH WE READ DAILY IN THE NEWSPAPERS. IF INSTEAD OF READING "1,000 DEAD," YOU PERMITTED YOURSELF TO ENVISION ONE DECAPITATED BODY, ONE AMERICAN BOY WITH A LEG OFF, ONE SOUTH VIETNAMESE CHILD WHOSE HOME WAS BOMBARDED, IF YOU COULD PERMIT YOURSELF TO FEEL, COULD YOU TAKE THIS WAR? OF COURSE NOT. IF ONE IS TO SURVIVE THRU A WAR, EVEN FROM A DISTANCE, ONE MUST IMMUNIZE ONESELF. ONE MUST BECOME UNFEELING, ONE MUST BECOME UNHUMAN.

HO CHIN MINH MAY BE ONLY A FERVENT NATIONALIST, AS SOME CLAIM. HE MAY BE A FANATIC NATIONALIST. HE MAY BE A CORRUPT COMMUNIST WHO IS ANTI-CHINESE. WHATEVER HE IS, HE IS NOT WORTHY OF AMERICAN IMITATION, AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE DOING IN VIET NAM. WE ARE IMITATING THE ATROCITIES OF HO CHIN MINH AND PROVING TO HIM THAT WE ARE ABLE TO KILL AS MANY AS HE CAN AND MORE. WE ARE DEMONSTRATING THAT WE ARE MORE EXPERT AT INDIFFERENCE AND WHOLSALE DESTRUCTION. CAN WE BE PROUD OF THIS? IS THIS THE AMERICAN WAY? IS THIS THE PATH TO WORLD PEACE? IS IT A CRIME TO OPPOSE THIS? WILL THE WORLD COME TUMBLING DOWN IF WE WITHDRAW FROM THIS COMPETITIVE DESTRUCTION?

LET ME MAKE IT CLEAR THAT MY REMARKS THIS EVENING ARE NOT GIVEN IN SUPPORT OF ANY PARTICULAR THEORY AS TO HOW AMERICA MAY WITHDRAW FROM VIET NAM WITH HONOR. I AM A RABBI, NOT A POLITICAL OR MILITARY STRATEGIST. NOR DO I JOIN WITH THOSE WHO SEEK TO MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL OF THE VIET NAM SITUATION. I THINK THE PROBLEM IS MUCH TOO TRAGIC FOR THAT. IT IS ALWAYS EASY WHEN ONE IS NOT IN THE POSITION OF LEADERSHIP TO STAND BACK IN OMNIPOTENT OBJECTIVITY TO SAY, "I WOULD HAVE DONE IT ANOTHER WAY." IN THIS SENSE, THE "OUTS" ALWAYS HAVE THE ADVANTAGE OVER THE "INS". WHILE I BELIEVE THAT AMERICA HAS TO RALLY BEHIND A VIEW THAT WILL MAKE FOR OUR WITHDRAWAL FROM VIET NAM, I HAVE NO STOMACH FOR SOME OF THE PETTY ATTACKS CURRENTLY BEING MADE UPON THE PRESIDENT. MY QUARREL IS NOT WITH ANY SPECIFIC AMERICAN, BE HE THE PRESIDENT OR A GENERAL, MY QUARREL IS WITH ALL THOSE IN AMERICA AND IN THE COMMUNIST WORLD WHO THINK THAT INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY CAN BEST BE WAGED BY MILITARY FORCE. WHAT I OPPOSE IS A WORLD SICKNESS WHICH SEEMS TO SAY THAT, "NO NATION BUT MY OWN IS SANE," THEREFORE WE CAN ONLY TREAT THE OTHER NATIONS WITH CONTEMPT AND AT THE BUTT OF A GUN. I DO NOT THINK THAT KILLING ANOTHER FEW HUNDRED THOUSANDS IN VIET NAM WILL CURE THIS SICKNESS. ON THE CONTRARY, I THINK IT WILL DEEPEN THE SICKNESS AND LEAD THE WORLD CLOSER TO ATOMIC WAR.

THESE ARE SOME OF THE REASONS, FROM THE RATIONAL VIEWPOINT, THAT I FEEL AS I DO ABOUT VIET NAM. I HAVE, OF COURSE, SOME EMOTIONAL FEELINGS ABOUT THE WAR. THE TALMUD TEACHES, "HE WHO DESTROYS ONE HUMAN LIFE IS AS IF HE HAD DESTROYED THE WORLD." IN EACH HUMAN BEING THERE IS ALL THE COMPLEXITY AND BEAUTY OF THE WORLD. HE IS THE UNIVERSE IN MINIATURE. HE IS THE PRECIOUS HARVEST OF THE CENTURIES, THE SEED OF THE FUTURE. SHALL HE BE SACRIFICED, TORN FROM HIS PARENTS, DENIED TO HIS CHILDREN, SEPARATED FROM HIS WIFE, TO PLEASE THE MILITARY CHECKER PLAYERS. THE PROOF OF THE INEFFICACY OF THE WAR FROM THE RATIONAL VIEWPOINT IS THAT IT IS AT A STALEMATE AFTER MANY YEARS AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF DEATHS LATER. AS A RABBI, I FEEL IMPELLED TO SAY THAT THERE ARE VALUES IN THE WORLD MORE ETERNALLY VALID THAN THE VALUES OF EITHER CAPITALISM OR COMMUNISM! NO NATION AND NO GROUP OF NATIONS, NO ECONOMIC SYSTEM HAS THE RIGHT TO SUBMERGE THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD IN A CONTINUING SERIES OF WARS IN THE ATTEMPT TO FURTHER ITS SPECIAL INTEREST. IN THE RECENT TEACHER STRIKE, THE TEACHERS WHO THOUGHT THEMSELVES TO BE STRIKING IN THE INTEREST OF A GREAT CAUSE, RETURNED TO THEIR JOBS EVEN THOUGH IN SO DOING THEY WERE PRAGMATICALLY ADMITTING DEFEAT. THERE ARE SOME THINGS WORSE THAN DEFEAT, AND SOMETIMES THOSE WHO BACK AWAY FROM A FRUITLESS SHOW OF FORCE ARE THE REAL HEROES. JOHN F. KENNEDY MADE A FOOL OF HIMSELF IN THE BAY OF PIGS INCIDENT, BUT THIS HAS BEEN LOST IN A TOTAL EVALUATION OF HIM AS A FINE PRESIDENT. AMERICA DOES NOT HAVE TO WIN EVERY ENCOUNTER TO BE A GREAT NATION. ONLY THE TRULY GREAT ARE CAPABLE OF ADMITTING A MISTAKE. NO MARRIAGE WOULD LONG ENDURE UNLESS, AT LEAST, ONE OF THE PARTNERS WAS CAPABLE OF ADMITTING A MISTAKE. SO OUR WORLD WILL NOT LONG ENDURE WITHOUT THIS FLEXIBILITY ON THE PART OF THE NATIONS. KRUCHEV BACKED DOWN OVER CUBA. AMERICA IS HAVING HER KNUCKLES RAPPED NOW. NO MATTER, WE SHALL SURVIVE AND BECOME STILL A GREATER NATION, IF WE KNOW HOW TO TURN FROM THE DOCTRINE THAT MIGHT MAKES RIGHT.

IF ONE BELIEVES THAT MAN IS BASICALLY EVIL, AND THAT HE IS IMPELLED TO HIS OWN DESTRUCTION, THEN ONE MIGHT AS WELL SUPPORT WHAT THE POWERS OF THE WORLD ARE DOING TO EACH OTHER NOW. BUT IF ONE BELIEVES THAT MAN IS MADE IN THE "IMAGE OF GOD", IF ONE BELIEVES THAT THIS WORLD DOES NOT HAVE TO BE EXPLODED, IF ONE BELIEVES "THAT HE WHO SAVES ONE HUMAN LIFE IS AS IF HE HAS SAVED THE WORLD," THEN HE WILL ACT TO INFLUENCE OUR PRESIDENT AND OUR POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES TO MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF PEACE. IT IS TIME TO SHREI, "GEWALT".