

Interview

Dr. Henri Baruk

The Professor Henri Baruk, renowned Jewish psychiatrist, discusses the evolution of psychiatry, justice, and the nature of the human person.

Shabbat Shalom*. Professor Baruk, we are happy that you could welcome us today for this interview; for the sake of our readers, could you introduce yourself?

Baruk: I think that you are aware of my principal titles. I was professor at the medical faculty of Paris and a member of the National Academy of Medicine. I have a background in the areas of medicine, neurology, and psychiatry.

Shabbat Shalom: For how many years have you been practicing?

Baruk: I have seventy years of experience in the medical domain. My father was a psychiatrist and head of the psychiatric hospital of Maine-et-Loire at Angers for a long time. I have been confronted with all these problems since my childhood.

Shabbat Shalom: Do you define yourself as a psychiatrist or as a doctor?

Baruk: One cannot separate psychiatry from medicine. I was senior intern in the hospitals of Paris which means that I touched all the branches of medicine before focusing on psychiatry. I was an intern at the Salpêtrière and was a disciple of the great neurologists of the time, Souquet and

French psychiatrist, specialist in neuropsychiatry, and director at L'École pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sorbonne, University of Paris, Henri Baruk is also a member of the National Academy of Medicine (Paris) and honorary member of the American International Academy.

Baruk believes in what he calls "moral psychiatry." For this reason, he has studied the Talmud and the Bible in addition to medicine. It is Baruk's philosophy that charity and justice, as well as science, must prevail if humans want to grow and even survive. Baruk is responsible for the creation of a neural laboratory for the study of catatonia at the Sorbonne.

His many books include Hebraic Civilization and the Science of Man (World Federation for Mental Health, 1961); Tsedek: Where Modern Science is Examined and Where It is Attempted to Save Man from Physical and Spiritual Enslavement (Swan House, 1972); and the best seller Patients are People Like Us: The Experiences of Half a Century in Neuropsychiatry (Morrow, 1977).

Babaché. One cannot separate medicine from neurology either. Of course, I have studied psychiatry since my childhood. All these disciplines have been the object of careful study on my part. Medicine, neurology, and psychiatry are one.

Shabbat Shalom: You have written profusely on Hebrew medicine, on the personality...

Baruk: Yes, I have also written a treatise of psychiatry.

Shabbat Shalom: Is the public aware of these books?

Baruk: They are very well-known. They have been reviewed in many countries.

Shabbat Shalom: When did your interest in the study of the human personality begin?

Baruk: In 1931, I was nominated head doctor of the Maison Nation-ale de Charenton, the principal establishment of French psychiatry. I found this establishment in a state of complete confusion. The sick were tied to their beds, the nurses in a state of intoxication...I immediately proceeded to stop the abuses: I had the sick unstrapped from their beds. The result is that I was almost killed to the outcry of "Death to the Jews!"

This is how I started out. I was threatened by a fanatical Albanian who had just arrived and threw himself on me with the intention of killing me. I thank God that he did not succeed!

This establishment was to be reformed at any cost! How did I go about it?

I remember at my retirement, the Minister of Health offered me the autograph of Pinel as a gift and

said: "The French Government is extremely grateful. You have transformed this establishment into a model institution. It is a miracle! How did you manage such a masterpiece?" To which I answered: "Sir, this is no miracle; all it takes is a few Hebrew lessons." Why did I answer with that? I soon came

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to realize that the state of disorganization of the establishment was due to an extraordinary proliferation of calumny and false testimonies. Almost all the problems of humanity are enrooted in false testimonies. The principal thing to do was simply the examination of these testimonies. For each complaint that was brought to my authority, I led a rigorous and impartial investigation. Needless to say, I was met with great opposition; yet, in less than two years, there were no more complaints or false testimonies for they always found themselves unmasked.

The establishment was thoroughly transformed. It was pacified. The Department of Health sent an inspector who showed himself extremely favorable to us and

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augmented the funds. The establishment came to be known worldwide. Colleagues from around the world came to work with us. Even a German psychiatrist, observing my investigating, wrote a book in

which he stated: "After my visit, I proceeded myself to examine testimonies, and I saw that it was the basis for peace."

Shabbat Shalom: And you have today enough renown to be heard?

Baruk: Yes, I am heard! First there was the Academy of Medicine which is at the heart of medicine in France. It benefits from a remarkable atmosphere where numerous problems are debated. Also in other places, I exert a certain influence. Of course, this is due more to my action than to propaganda. In my opinion, action is more powerful than propaganda. It also requires a lot of effort.

Shabbat Shalom: And from there, in what domains did you orient your research?

Baruk: I first tried to comprehend the reason behind mental problems. I realized that the principal cause was a toxic one. I then studied catatonia, which was then considered incurable, but it was simply due to a toxin coming from the intestines and the kidneys. It was, indeed, possible to cure this apparently incurable disease. It was my work on catatonia which revised the German conclusions on mental

problems: conclusions which established the incurability of mental troubles and the duty of the doctor being to effectuate a diagnosis but with no follow-up as far

as healing was concerned. This was the theory of Kraepelin, which I have strongly opposed through my example and my writings. Indeed, I have elucidated numerous mental illnesses where the

problem stemmed from a strictly physical cause.

For example, a very well-known lady in Paris, who at the time was not speaking to anyone and keeping to herself, broke into delirium when her husband was referred to as a "windbag." She was in fact prey to pyelonephritis colibacillosis. In one month of treatment, she was cured. She explained to me that her sickness was due to a deranging dream where she saw herself taken away to Russia to be shot by the Bolsheviks. It was this experience which showed me the importance of the works of Moreau de Tours, one of the first to describe mental illness as a dream: "Two lives are imparted to man: the waking life and the dreaming life. The line of demarcation between these two lives is sleep. Delirium is dreaming in the waking life." The crisis of psychiatry today lies in the fact that we have forgotten the possibility of healing.

Shabbat Shalom: What were the results of your research on schizophrenia?

Baruk: My work for seventy years has been a critique of schizophrenia. I have concluded after careful research that schizophrenia is a misnomer. It is a pseudosickness invented in Germany on the model of general paralysis which was considered incurable. In reality, we have classified under the name of schizophrenia countless other illnesses which we have mingled together under the seal of incurability. And so we have developed the idea of the incurability of mental illness which has led us to the actual crisis in psychiatry. However, the goal of medicine is healing, as one says in Hebrew: "*Refuah shlema*" (complete healing). If the doctor abandons this idea of healing and is content with just

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Shabbat Shalom: What do you think of the actual course that psychiatry is taking?

Baruk: I think that psychoanalysis has created some serious damage to psychiatry. It represents a tendency which consists in identifying man with the animal. This tendency already existed before psychoanalysis. In effect, it reduces man to his instincts and not to his moral conscience. It also incites man to overfocus on himself which is unhealthy and generates numerous illnesses. Action has more

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efficacy than self-observation, the latter leading to a degree of autism which can be very dangerous. Psychoanalysis has, in fact, cultivated neurosis instead of curing it. It is simultaneously antifamilial, which is unwholesome. In fact, Freud's position is a regression back to Hellenism, a regression to paganism. I see every day the deplorable results of psychoanalysis—people maintained in their illness, who then get into the habit of curling up upon themselves, listening to their "inner voice" which only accentuates the problem. Consequently, I am radically opposed to psychoanalysis. And I believe that Freud's last book was more a critique of Moses than of the medical order. He even qualified Moses' law as "*credito absurdum*,"

which betrays his sentiments of revolt toward his Jewish roots.

Shabbat Shalom: According to your work on the nature of man, how do you define man?

Baruk: Man is simultaneously instinct and moral conscience. He has instincts like the animals: hunger, thirst, and sexuality; but in addition, he has moral conscience. It is this moral conscience which is emphasized in the Bible and by all the religions biblically inspired. Some people, however, deny the existence of such a moral integer in man. Particularly Freud who, in spite of the fact that he was Jewish, has taken the opposite mindset. He has profusely attacked the notion of a moral conscience in man and the law of Moses which establishes it. He wanted to reduce man to his instincts like the animal. The danger today is to identify man with the animal and to refute the existence of a moral conscience, although it is uncontested. It inspires inner peace or troubles it. It can reveal itself as self-accusation which often mutates into hate. This was my analysis of hate in my book on moral psychiatry. Particularly the Hitlerian hate, which remains the most terrifying. I demonstrated, through my studies, that most hates are issued from people who make mistakes, undergo self-accusation, and in the feeling of guilt that results, become accusers and turn against others. The accused becomes accuser. This is how human hatred is generated and the root of the disaster of our planet. These are the main points I wish to express on the nature of man.

Shabbat Shalom: Man is often considered as tridimen-

sional: what are your thoughts on the matter?:

Baruk: This is abstract philosophy. I situate myself in the living thing. I do not indulge in such abstract discourses. This is all theoretical.

I have just told you that experience demonstrates that man has a part of him in common with the animal, his instincts, but that his specificity is his moral conscience, which is the capacity to distinguish between what is just and what is unjust. Justice is the key issue. That's it! The way to peace is to remain in justice.

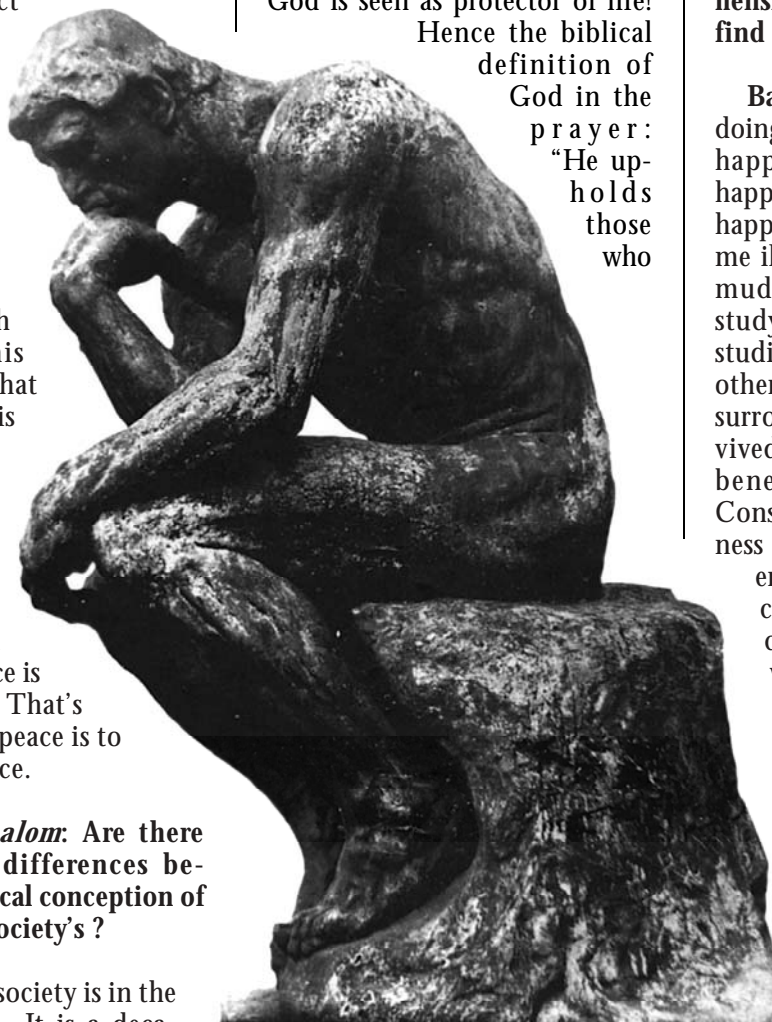
Shabbat Shalom: Are there fundamental differences between the biblical conception of man and our society's?

Baruk: Our society is in the eye of a crisis. It is a decadent society. The biblical conception of man is the only one which takes into consideration both his instincts and his moral conscience, which has been the object of continual study on my part. As far as I am concerned, the study of science is one with the biblical faith. In fact, I have uncovered in the Bible considerable medical evidence which is not exploited because those who study the Bible are not doctors. For example, the difference between life and death. The Bible says

that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of life. He is not the God of death, the God of certain German philosophers who have the delirium of death, who extol death. In the Bible, God is seen as protector of life!

Hence the biblical definition of God in the prayer:

"He upholds those who



The Thinker of Rodin

"The danger today is to identify man with the animal and to refute the existence of a moral conscience."

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fall. He heals the sick and delivers the oppressed." These are the preoccupations of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are to follow this practical teach-

ing. This is not the affair of philosophy. It is an affair of practice, of action!

Shabbat Shalom: Practically speaking, how can this comprehension of man permit him to find happiness?

Baruk: One finds happiness in doing good to others! We are not happy when seeking our own happiness. The man who seeks happiness will never find it. Let me illustrate this through a Talmudic story: "Two men were studying the Bible. One only studied and never practiced; the other studied and did good to all surrounding him. This man survived the longest and received benediction and happiness." Consequently, one finds happiness only in doing good to others, in defending justice and charity, that is the *tsedek*. I conducted a *tsedek* test, which is used in many countries of the world. It is based on the subject's capacity of both justice and charity. This theme has been well understood by my friend, the painter Benn, of whom you can here admire the works.

(Picture by Paris Bulloz)

Shabbat Shalom: Justice seems to be your prime concern?

Baruk: I continually have to deal with this problem. Some time ago, a man came to see me. He had just escaped from a psychiatric hospital where he had been interned for two years. He was dying. Seeing him in this state, I said to him: "Go home, do not go back to the hospital. I take upon myself the full responsibility." I then informed the head doctor of this; within a year, the man was healed. I then led an

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investigation and discovered that this man was a fervent Catholic. He had, however, a wife who was exactly the opposite; they obviously didn't get along. After a heated argument, the wife took a knife, cut open a large wound in her leg, and reported her husband to the police as her aggressor. Without any investigation, the police interned this man on the basis of false testimony! Naturally, I reported this to the court, which in turn annulled the internment of my patient and gave him back his liberty. This is what one must do his whole life: stand up and fight for "char-

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ity-justice," in Hebrew, *tsedek-tirdof*—"You will seek always the *tsedek*."

Shabbat Shalom: In your opinion, how may man attain the ideal which the Bible puts before him?

Baruk: It is not a question of opposing the ideal with reality! You do too much philosophy! One obtains inner peace only through charitable and just actions, helping others. In so doing, one obtains what is referred to in Hebrew as "The peace of the heart!" Too much importance is accorded today to the mind and to power and not enough to the heart. This is how one can find happiness. There is no other way.

Shabbat Shalom: Could you tell us what, in your opinion, can reconcile Judaism and Christianity?

Baruk: What defines the difference between Judaism and Christianity is revealed in the episode of the "waters of Meribah." In this episode, Moses, exhausted by the people's rebellious outcries for water, prays to God who tells him to speak to the rock and water would come out. Unfortunately, Moses makes the one mistake of his life and says: "And shall we not make water come out of this rock?" attributing to his own power the outcome of the miracle. This is why he was refused entrance into the Holy Land. The difference between Judaism and Christianity is that no man can perform miracles, no man can be elevated to the level of God. Man and God are different. Man must revere God, but he remains a man. This is the main difference between the two religions. In depth,

however, they are fundamentally very similar.

Shabbat Shalom: A last word, Professor?

Baruk: It all lies in a difference of conception between Greek thought and Hebrew thought. I studied Greek before Hebrew and found that in Greek culture the events make no sense; they are directed by fatality. In the Hebrew tradition, on the other hand, the events are directed by God in a just way. At first, force seems to overrule other elements, and it takes some time for the balance with justice to be reestablished

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through divine action. In Greek thought, this notion of justice hardly exists, except maybe in Antigone of Sophocles where Antigone tells the dictator Creon that there exists above him a power. But in general, these are two opposed civilizations. I recognize the Greek contribution in mathematics, logic, and physics. No doubt Greek thinking has elucidated many sciences; but as far as the conception of man is concerned, it lies in complete contradiction with biblical tradition.

*This interview was conducted by Richard Elofer, associate editor of *L'Olivier*.