

Jewish Messianic Concept in Perspective of Psychoanalysis' Erich Fromm

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ABSTRACT

Jews's journey from time to time showed an ebb and flow situation. Sometimes they reached glory, while in the other times they experienced deterioration. However, the traces of suffering were seen more obvious befalling the nation that claimed themselves as the chosen people. Being enslaved in Egypt, stranded in Arab Coast for 40 years, evicted from the promise land (Palestine), inquisitioned by Christian Church in Midle Age and killed in Holocaust tragedy were the long period of dark destiny afflicting Jewish people. Expulsion, hatred and assassination became the common things for Jews. Meanwhile, this minority nation among billions people around the world could survive through every bitter period that approached their lives. Reclining to the belief in God, the messianic hope had given an optimistic feeling to them to face deal with whatever bitter the life was.

This research used a figure approach to discuss a topic. The figure that I took to explain Jewish messianic concept was Erich Fromm, a social psychology expert that had a strong Jewish tradition background. This research was a literary research by using methodical elements: description, interpretation, holistika and reflection.

Reffering to Fromm's analysis, the question about Jewish survival can be explained through the concept of hope in Jewish belief called "messianic". The hope bandage by the faith spirit had a link with the concept of "homo esperans" or expectancy beings. Hope and expect are human basic conditions. The spirit of hope for messianic era had made Jewish people traversed various bitter conditions in their history. Messianic concept had some philosophical values: suffering for freedom, theological hope for repairing life and harmony.

Keywords: *Judaism, Messiah, Erich Fromm, and Expectation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Jews were a phenomenal nation in humankind history. More than 2000 years they had been living in exile. They experienced sufferings from slavery in Egypt when "Pharaoh" held the rule, stranded for several years before entering the Promise Land (Kanaan/Palestine), tortured by the Church (the Inquisition) in the Middle Ages to the Holocaust tragedy in the middle 20st century.

The bitter experiences for thousand years made Jews being trained to think hard to save their destiny as the *Chosen People*. Diaspora made them interact with several cultures and created

a unique worldview of Jews, so that nowadays their concepts were accepted by many nations in the world and became a society that cannot be separated from Western Civilization.

The present Jews as the influential power in Western Civilization was mentioned by Huston Smith in his books, *The Religions of Man*:

“It is assumed that 1/3 of Western Civilization have characteristic features of Jew. We can feel the Jewish power in names given to our children: Adam Smith, Noah Webster, Abraham Lincoln, Isaac Newton, Rebecca West, Sarah Teasdale and Grandma Moses.”¹

Today, people around the world witnessed the power of Jewish lobby influencing the American's politics. It proved that the shrewdness of Jewish people succeeded to conquer the superpower country, the United States. Moreover, Huston Smith explained The United States itself showed the Jewish legacy contained in Declaration of Independence.²

In the 10th Summit of Islamic Conference Organization (16 Oct 2003) in Kuala Lumpur, Mahathir Mohamad as the Prime Minister of Malaysia stated that "The European killed six million Jews out of 12 million. But today the Jews rule this world by proxy."³

The explanation about Jews was not complete without mentioning the famous person in science and philosophy. Sir Alfred (A. J.) Ayer, Henri Bergson, Noam Chomsky, Jacques Derrida, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Edmund Husserl, Thomas Kuhn, Karl Marx, Sir Karl Popper, Hilary Putnam, Baruch (Benedict) de Spinoza, Alfred Tarski, and Ludwig Wittgenstein were the genius figures that have Jewish blood.⁴

In 2001, scientists predicted that 8.3 millions jewish people lived and spread (diaspora) around the world besides Israel. Meanwhile, the jewish people living in Israel were 4.9 millions. From the number of the diaspora jewish people, a half of them lived in America. The World's Jewish Population predicted that there were 13,155,000 jews in 2007 with growth rate 0.5%. Moreover the jewish people in Israel grew 1.5% and the jewish population growth in other continents decreased into 0.2%.

The phenomena of Jews became a big question for me, why can they could survive for thousand years? Meanwhile, if we looked at many historical books, Jewish civilization in its early presence was not a big civilization. Indeed, Arnold Toynbee did not mention the Jewish Kingdom in the era of David and Solomon in his bestseller book "A Study of History". Many analyses were raised by the scholars to answer the survival fittest of Jewish people. However, I was interested in researching the success of Jewish survival viewed from theological perspective that became one their fundamental faith, the concept of Messiah.

¹ Smith, Huston. 1995. *Agama-Agama Manusia*. Page 298.

² Ibid. Page 298.

³ Husaini, Adian. 2003. *Yahudi Menguasai Dunia?*

⁴ Editor. Jewish Philosophers.

The concept of messiah had root in the cultures that grew in Mediteranian. In its growth, messianic concept was believed by many civilizations around Mediteranian and transformed into Jew, Christian and Islam.

Every Jewish adherent had a sacred purpose and mission in the earth. It was mentioned in jewish praying books that humans carried out a duty to “perfect world under the Kingdom of God”. Humans live not just to breath day by day and then die, while they are in under an obligation to be God’s partner in order to make earth as a peaceful and good place.

The happiest and perfect time for the humans in Jewish theological literatures is “the Messianic Age. At that time, all of people get eternal rewards. Suffering and evils will loose from the life so that people just face the peace and perfection. In Jewish history, the waiting for the messiah had a wider influence towards religious and political aspects of Jewish people.

The main objectives of this research were explaining the messianic concept believed by Jewish people and elaborating Jewish messianic concept towards Erich Fromm’s perspective. I hope I could show a clear description about messianic concept believed by Jewish people. Moreover, I expected that I could explicate Erich Fromm’s thought about Jewish messianic concept and gave a new perspective to undertand messianic concept from his point of view.

My research question is what the philosophical values contained in Jewish messianic concept in perspective of Erich Fromm are. I expected that this research could inspire the other researcher to search the Jewish intellectual treasures, gave a better undstanding about Jewish messianic concept through Erich Fromm’s analysis and enriched the human philosophy discourse especially about the messianic concept and the situation of Jewish people.

2. THEORITICAL REVIEW

According to Leahy, Philosophy of Humankind is “a branch of philosophy that studies the meaning of being human. Meanwhile, Burhanuddin Salam stated that “Philosophy of Humankind is one of philosophy branch that discusses human.⁵ Louis Leahy explained that Philosophy of Humankind places the human as discussion object and analyses human existence and human fundamental structures.⁶

Besides formulizing a clear material object, in doing research we must also have an appropriate analysis framework. After considering and searching many theories, I valued that Erich Fromm’s theory was synchronous with this research.

Rainer Funk, a prominent writer of Erich Fromm’s biography, in one of his articles noted that, Fromm’s interest to sociology and psychology was started from Jewish religion course that was given in his undergraduate study. He got much inspiration from his lecturers who taught *talmud*. Therefore, he then wrote a dissertation about Jewish law. 7 years after obtaining Doctorate

⁵ Salam, Burhanuddin. Second Edition July 1988. *Filsafat Manusia (Antropologi Metafika)*. Page 15

⁶ Leahy, Louis. 1984. *Manusia Sebuah Misteri: Sintesa Filosofis tentang Makhluk Paradoks*. Page 10-11

degree, Fromm learned Psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud, specially about theory of the formation of psychic impulses.⁷

Fromm's main interest was human libido structures in relation to human social presence. His researches were mostly related to individual social unconsciousness. For Fromm, individual awareness is affected by the subconscious of community.⁸

For Fromm, humans is a unique creature. Humans were born as a unique species in which they are tamed by nature while at the same time they can conquer the nature. They must seek the action principles and take decisions to replace the instinctive principles. They must hold point of view that make them manage the world consistently and then they can create consistent action.⁹

2.1 Messianism

According to Hans Kohn, messianism is a main concept in religion about the coming of a savior that will end the current order to a new peace and happy order. Meanwhile, Russian philosopher, Nicolai Berdyaev explained that messianism is a hope, not only the hope for a savior but also the hope that influence people's action. Messiah is a long-awaited savior who will change the current order to universal harmony.

In Jewish literature, messiah is mentioned as "the anointed one" or "the anointed of Yahweh. This word of "anointed" was called 39 times. Literally, the messiah meant the sacred human and referred to expected redemption.¹⁰

Messianic expectation in Jewish concept was related to history of Davidic kingship.¹¹ Prosperity and glory that Jews felt in David's legacy became the dream of Jews. The concept emergence of messianic expectation at first developed from their interaction with the neighboring civilizations. Hereafter, the Jewish rabbi based on their reading to sacred text defined the messianic concept as a certainty appointment revealed by Yahweh.

The presence of messiah was not an utopian hope. Jews fully believed in his presence. By the messiah's legacy, Jews believed in the world restoration and the change of human life towards a better condition.

⁷Rainer Funk, Rainer. 2007. *Life and Work of Erich Fromm*. http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_6.3/funk.htm. Downloaded at 19 August 2009.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Boeree, C. George. 2008. *Personality Theories: Melacak Kepribadian Anda Bersama Psikolog Dunia*. Page 190

¹⁰ Fromm. *Manusia Menjadi Tuhan*. Hal 167.

¹¹ Buttrick, George Arthur. 1962. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of The Bible*. Abingdon Press: New York. Hal 360

2.1 Hope

Human is a unique being that can adapt in various conditions. They can survive either in freedom or slavery condition. Fromm stated:

“There are almost every hard psychological condition that can be borne by humans. Humans can live free, or can be like a slave. Humans can live free with wealth and luxury, on the other time, they can live in famine. They can live as the fighter, intruder, mugger or as the lover that cooperated with the others. They can live in every conditions, can do anything and can use anything to survive.”

Even though humans can bear all forms of life, while they can not escape from sufferings caused by existential dilemma and alienation, either the pain from unfriendly nature or the sickness caused by conflict and exploitation. As the sensitive being, human will react towards repression that happen to them.

Fromm spelled out that there were 3 human reactions while they experienced sufferings:

1. Posturing apathetic attitude, weak of vision, initiative and abilities to run humanity and social functions.
2. Accumulating hatred and devastation that then destroys themselves, the rulers and the existing system.
3. Creating the autonomy and longing of freedom to develop better societies with their creativity.

Furthermore, Fromm explained that reactions raised by individual and society were influenced by economical, political and spiritual factors in which the individual and the members of society ensconced. From these situations the hope then appeared.

Hope is an important element for social change towards the better life. Hope for Fromm was not the passive action, unrealistic attitude in which humans imposed themselves on unaffordable situation. From stated that “hope is like lion that is ready to jump and pounce its prey in right time.”

From remarked that one of the passive hope effects was a future idolatry that was a form of the hope alienation. The passive action was characterized by doing nothing for today and simply handed over the future to offspring. The passive hope indicated the lack of hope and powerlessness.

Many terms raised by the experts to define human; homo faber (handyman, creating tools), homo sapiens (rational beings that use their brain and intelligence to find better ways to survive and reach what they want), homo ludens (playing beings, doing pleasure activities without certain purposes after they could fulfill their primary needs). Related to hope element that intrinsically exists in human life, Fromm brought up a new term, homo esperans (hope beings). This term was aligned with the term of homo negans (being that can say “no” although the majority says “yes” responding certain and repressing condition).

Fromm is a genius thinker who was able to collaborate some theories. He merged Freudian theory with Marxism. He was also interested in the effect of economical and cultural structures towards human personality. For him, personality is a reflection of social class, social acceptance, education, occupation, religious background, and philosophical view.¹²

The uniqueness of Fromm's theory is in his effort to unify Freud and Marx. Freud elaborated about subconscious theory related to biological needs and repression. In other words, Freud postulated that human characters determined by biological aspect. Meanwhile, Marx argued that human behaviour is determined by their living environment, specially economic system ruled the society. Besides affected by Freud and Marx, Fromm was also fascinated with Max Weber's theory about how theological values give impact to human progressivity for fulfill the profane things.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis method that I used to elaborate philosophically the influence of messianic concept in Jewish people's life was Erich Fromm's psychoanalysis concept. Erich Fromm grew up in an observant Jewish family. He was a psychology academia who held Ph.D from Heidelberg University, Germany. As a psychiatrist, Fromm was inspired by Sigmund Freud's theory about psychoanalysis that became a prominent theory in philosophy of humankind. As an activist that concerned to social problems, he was influenced by Karl Marx and Marxian figures. Moreover, his interest to the correlation between religion and social condition was affected by Max Weber, an English philosopher that was famous with his magnum opus, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

The depth of Fromm's thought and his direct contact with Jewish tradition and Jewish community was the main reason why I used Fromm's perspective to elaborate the messianic concept of Jewish people. Through the influence of 3 prominent figures (Freud, Marx and Weber) I hope that Fromm's perspective was representative for this research.

This research is a literary research in which I elaborated many literature sources, from books, journals, articles, and the other researches. Many publications discussed Jewish people and Fromm's theories, so that I systematized all of data from those sources and researched all of books explaining theological messianic concept in Jewish religion and all references discussing the about theory of hope and human existence that were elaborated by Erich Fromm.

This research was started from data inventory in which I collected all of data related to this research. I analysed all of data with methodical elements that I used and finally, I wrote the analysis results in systematical writings.

¹² Ibid. Page 203

To analyse the data, I used 4 methodical elements. First was description. In this step I gave elaboration about Erich Fromm's human philosophical concept and Jewish messianic concept. I focused to discuss Erich Fromm's point of view towards human philosophical problems and discourse about Jewish messianic concept. Second was interpretation. In this step I tried to go deep into the data to seek a new understanding about Jewish messianic concept by using Erich Fromm's perspective. Third was holistica. In this process, I tried to understand the data comprehensively, so that I could find appropriate understanding and analysis. The last was reflection. In this process I contemplated the research result to find a new theory about Jewish messianic concept based on Fromm's theory.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Suffering for Freedom

The relationship between Jews and God was ups and downs. Sometimes, God was so kind to them, while in the other times, God was wrath over their perfidy. The God's warth realized in disasters was triggered by human's perfidy and disgression towards God's commands.

Related to human's sin, Erich Froom probed futher into the history of the fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise. The moment was the start of humanity history. Humans became the stranger in the earth. Adam and Eve felt strange with themselves and their new environment. The fall of Adam for Fromm, was not a curse that made him desperate with the new condition. On the contrary, the Adam's proclamation to say "no" to God with breaking the prohibitions in heaven became a historical beginning of human freedom to choose.

At the first time falling into earth from heaven, Adam complained about uncomfortable condition in the earch and must face malignant life. Only then, Adam and Eve ask forgiveness to God. However, one sin had changed everything. Remorse and repentance did not succeed to mollify God's heart to return Adam and Eve to heaven. They could not return and there was no way to revert God's decision.

Heaven could be compared with uterine life in which every human needs had been fulfilled without any effort. This condition for Fromm was same with animal condition. Expelled from paradise was God's scenario to streghthen human existence, moving from comfort zone to freedom. Being glued in comfort zone would make humans go to death rapidly.

This situation also happened to the phases of human life development. Growing from uterine life, childhood, adolescence, adult and aged were the process becoming the whole man. In this process, humans often experienced alienation. In interesting word, Fromm said that only by passing the alienation, human could solve and get a new alignment.

In this context, pain and infliction experienced by Jews were the bitter condition as consequence of “human situation”. Only by passing the alienation process and struggling to find the answer for their existential problems, human moved to build their natural potencies. One of natural human potencies was hope. The expectation of messiah always burned jews’s spirit to reach a new alignment and a new harmony instead of living in a comfort zone which was like animal situation (dependent).

4.2 Theological hope for repairing life

If we contextualized Jews’s situatuon with Erich Fromm’s theory, we could formulate that happiness and peace were the wanted condition in accordance with human instict and human nature. On the other hand, sufferings and pain were the unwanted condition. Sufferings lead people to be hopeless. History had proved that the hopeless society became extinct and did not become part of the current society. Meanwhile, what happened to Jewish people was a incredible struggle. They could survive although experiencing so many opressions from time to time.

Jewish survival was build by the theological concept of hope, the presence of messiah. The experts called it as “messianic expectation”. For Fromm, humans is homo esperans, the hope beings. Hope and expect were the human basic condition. Putting the hope into the meaningful life, peace and inner serenity covered by messianic spirit was the real hope for Jewish people.

4.3 Harmony

Human is the rational being that always think about the unexpected born and mysterious death. Human presented in the earth suddenly in powerless condition, then they proceeded to realise about their presence in the earth. The destiny that could not eluded by the human was the existential destiny containing so many contradictions that must they solved.

The contradictions covered Jewish people about the status of “the chosen people” and the bitter life made them confused to define their identity. In one side, God was believed as the Supreme being who had chosen them as the best nation. Meanwhile, the reality was not friendly to them. In uncertainty waves, the belief of messiah became the panacea and gave them spaces to formulate their life purposes. The messianic time is a condition when the people can fulfill their needs biologically and psychologically, create a lovely relationship bounded by confraternity and solidarity, cope the nature with creating not destroying.

The life purpose on harmony that happened in Messianic age became a streight of Jews to pass painful and bitter life experiences. Belief in messiah for Fromm could be said as one of rational belief towards human ability to extricate from deadly life webs and save them from massive disaster.

4. CONCLUSION

Messianic expectation could burn Jews's spirit to reseek their identity as the chosen people. Even though the situation that they had been facing during history was not happy as they expect, Jews still believed that the messianic era will come to solve and resque them from bad and bitter life. Based on my analysis, the hope on messiah had led Jewish people to be patient passing all of sufferings. Messianic concept had some philosophical values: suffering for freedom, theological hope for repairing life and harmony.

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