

We are glad to share the inaugurating speech of the Chair of the Chaim Rosenberg School, Youval Rotman, delivered at the inauguration ceremony of the Koret Center for Jewish earlier this week



The Jewish Civilization: Defining the New Paradigm

Inauguration of the Koret Center for Jewish Civilization, 15/6/2022

It is an exciting moment to witness how an idea that sprouted a year and a half ago, has developed, took form and is being realized. It is not less and even more exciting to witness the enthusiasm with which this idea was welcomed, and the support it got.

I would like to thank the Koret Foundation, its president, board of directors and representatives for making this happen, and for responding with so much attention, willingness and excitement to the invitation of the ANU Museum's and the Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies-Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, to develop a new vision of Judaism as a Civilization!

What do we mean by Jewish Civilization? The term “civilization” refers to the largest human collective organization in existence: not a state, religion, society, community. All these concepts do not reflect the DYNAMIC, DIVERSE, and INCLUSIVE character of Judaism. Moreover, they do not convey its distinctive role in world history.

If we take the subject of identity for example: a civilization has no firm boundaries as far as identities are concerned. On the contrary, it allows a fluid, dynamic, multiple and unexclusive identities simultaneously. In fact, this is its main strength. It enriches itself from multiplicity of societies, communities, cultures, and ideas. A civilization becomes important and influential exactly when it expresses its diversity, and turns it into a feature of its development.

One of the ancient civilizations in world history, the Jewish Civilizations has had an extraordinary development in every aspect: historical, social, cultural, intellectual. Its diversity has allowed it great flexibilities and adaptabilities to changing circumstances. All this kept it a lively and dynamic civilization over MILLENIA. As a civilization it introduced innovative and even radical currents of thought, sometimes conflictual, which have offered great ideas to world history, ideas that changed the world: starting from monotheism and the Bible itself – the TEXT as an idea, the text as a touchstone, its study and exegeses, developed here in the Land of the Bible, the Land of Israel – and up to the great thinkers of modern times, including the idea of Zionism: the very idea to group together people from different places and to build a new society from scratch.

The Jewish Civilization is facing today growing challenges. These are not only the political threats of antisemitism and anti-Israel, but also internal or semi-internal challenges, that refer to its past and present, tradition and modernity, Israel and the Diaspora, religiosity and secularity, *avant guard* and conservatism.

These are not new. Indeed, the great importance, and BEAUTY, of the Jewish Civilization lies in the fact that it has managed to cope with such, and much more demanding and urgent challenges all along its history. It managed to organize itself as a collectivity without a political framework, without a religious center, without a land. It managed to do it by creating forms of CONNECTIVITY, by developing a sense of SOLIDARITY, and by its DIVERSITY.

Connectivity, Solidarity, Diversity: these are what the Koret Center for Jewish Civilization IS about. It will enhance them by promoting a new way to bridge between academia and the public, between Israel and the Diaspora, between different diasporas, and between Jews and non-Jews. The means to do that and to respond to antisemitism and other threats is: EDUCATION! This is the challenge in front of us: it is up to us to convey a NEW VISION of Judaism, worthy of the magnificent civilization we inherited.

The Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies-Archaeology at Tel Aviv University and the ANU Museum of the Jewish People offer together the ideal framework to meet this challenge! TAU's Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies-Archaeology will provide the perfect academic setting to generate a new paradigm in the study of Judaism. Its 5 departments and 55 renowned scholars offer a unique approach that combines ARCHAEOLOGY with the study of HISTORY, THOUGHT, CULTURE and LANGUAGE. Together with the ANU Museum and the Koret Foundation we will venture this vision outside Academia and develop a new language in the public international sphere. We will focus on Judaism's exceptional dynamism, responsiveness, adaptability. And will promote the idea of the Jewish Civilization as a WORLD HERITAGE, inclusive for both Jews and NON-Jews.

In the name of the Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies-Archaeology I thank you all for your support and faith in making this happen!

Prof. Youval Rotman, The Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies-Archaeology

