



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE  
"GORDIAN KNOT" SERIES

1999 12 16 NUMBER # 4

This time, the speakers at the regular discussion under the "Gordian Knot" Series were:

- **Levon Mkrтчyan,**  
Advisor to the Prime Minister,  
Acting President of the Religious Affairs Commission,
- **Archbishop Shahoh Achemyann,**  
Dean, Theology Faculty, Yerevan State University,
- **Lyudmila Harutyunyan,**  
Chair and Professor, Sociology Department, Yerevan State University

"GORDIAN KNOT"  
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# GORDIAN KNOT

## THE ROLE OF THE SPIRITUAL IN SOCIAL RELATIONS

The discussion did not consider the spiritual as a purely religious principle. The overall religious structure was discussed as a general system of non-material values. The conversation was about the role and significance of spiritual values for contemporary Armenian society.

According to Levon Mkrтчyan, the processes in Armenia (from the start of the Artsakh movement to the Declaration of Independence and the building of the new state) occurred simultaneously with major changes in ideals, ideologies, principles, and spiritual life. Certain forms, modes of life, and the value-system of daily life were transformed. After such changes, society either tries to build the new, based on its traditional values, or generalizes the system of values it will use through copying and integration. It is a difficult task: to shape an independent state in a small section of the fatherland, in Armenia, where no more than 40% of all Armenians live. It must express the objectives of a nation that is spread all over the world. Some parts try to preserve their values under different conditions. In this case, the non-material, that is, the moral system that will allow for the possibility of getting oriented in the present confusing relationships, becomes decisive.

**" There are incomplete sections in the spiritual structure of Armenians, and the foundation for this structure is not clearly set out "**

Levon Mkrтчyan believes that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will bring about other needs: moving forward with just the values of the past will not be enough. First, it is necessary to answer certain questions. In such situations, a number of nations have attempted to form their system of values based on the so-called "continuity theory", which carries a high degree of development. Meanwhile, expressions such as "preservation of the nation", "survival", "self-defense," – amongst others – are prominent in the lexicon of Armenians. Development plays a small role. The energy of Armenians, as a nation that has witnessed serious catastrophes, is mainly concerned with defensive instincts. Consequently, communal and cohesive logic plays a greater role in the psychology of the Armenian Diaspora, while the enclave mentality is predominant among Armenians who live in Armenia.

Another characteristic quality is premised on the fact that having just had a homeland, a clear and Armenian national ideology still has to be formed. The one ideology predominant in a united state alienated (to a certain degree) those spiritual and traditional values characteristic of independently-developing nations. Mr. Mkrтчyan considers the national-spiritual ideology to be the greatest of these values. Armenians were one of the first ones in the world to have this ideology, but they have recently forfeited their place to the logic of society.

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Levon Mkrtchyan thinks that the next spiritual problem is caused by the fact that it has been impossible to relate the objectives of Armenian society to those groups living outside it. No common denominator exists and it is difficult to decide on priorities. He thinks that a nation-wide inventory is required in three dimensions, the first of which is a moral one.

Each nation must have its moral calling card. Simply said, every Armenian should be able to briefly and clearly formulate what policy s/he believes in, what role s/he is playing in the world, and what s/he has given to the world. Armenians have not yet formulated these precepts. Thus, it is first necessary to conduct a moral inventory. Furthermore, it is proposed to conduct physical and material inventories, to unite existing potential, and only then, set common goals and clarify the ways to reach them.

According to Archbishop Shaheh Achemyan, there are incomplete sections in the spiritual structure of Armenians, and the foundation for this structure is not clearly set out. He qualified the concepts "nation preservation", "survival", and "self-defense" as very general ones: if we look at the current situation from the perspective of these concepts, then the situation is alarming.

In his words, when one speaks of a spiritual structure, s/he must first consider the faith in that structure. The national faith of Armenians is clear and simple: it has a tradition of two thousand years and although it is currently not expressed in the same way, and in a different style, the basis remains the same. It is the Christian belief.

Archbishop Shaheh Achemyan thinks that the first step towards the rehabilitation of the spiritual structure of today's Armenia lies in the answer to the question: "What does society really believe in?" Is there the belief that in the present fragile situation, it is possible to create a fatherland in the broadest meaning of the word?

An opinion was expressed that sacredness of land ought to be one of the main components of national ideology. Every Armenian must understand his/her tie with the native land. Only then will s/he realize what his/her responsibility is in terms of protecting that land.

As the next important component, Archbishop Shaheh Achemyan mentioned the sacredness of the family. Armenians have always clearly expressed this notion. Recently, however, the foundation of Armenian families has been somewhat weakened. Nonetheless, people, since childhood, receive their spiritual enlightenment, their national feelings, and their systems of values at this level.

Lyudmila Harutyunyan presented the subject matter from a social viewpoint. While appreciating the role of the spiritual in present-day social relations, she mentioned that although there are a number of worrying problems, the situation is not at a dead-end. She believes that materialism is currently enjoying a huge role. It would be wrong to think that the solution of spiritual issues will result in the rehabilitation of society. At the same time, she expressed hopes that the spiritual will play a great role in the life of people, nations, and the state, and it will solve many gnawing problems.

Professor Harutyunyan linked the survival and development of the nation primarily with the growth of a national ideology. She thinks that the national idea has been completely forgotten. The world, however, is seen to respect those states that have a solid national ideology. That ideology ought to contain the role, significance, and goals of the state.

Armenians, historically, have a certain spiritual wealth that continues to lead and give life to the nation. How much does this historically - formed dimension assist or support progress? Lyudmila Harutyunyan thinks that the Armenian nation has still to determine the value of certain historic moments. Among these, she mentioned the Armenian Genocide. She characterized it as the most powerful spiritual factor that, however, does not have a task of either rationalization or modernization.

According to her, our country cannot make choices. She believes that we still have not answered the question of which civilization is the one of our choice. Armenia has yet to make its geopolitical, as well as its ideological, choices.

She expressed the opinion that Armenia lacks serious bodies and groups of society that would deal in spiritual matters, ideas, and ideology, to consider these matters. "Armenians must, by looking back, move forward." This was the conclusion of one sociological survey. According to Lyudmila Harutyunyan, however, the key to this formula has not yet been found.

A general opinion was expressed that the issues raised cannot be solved in a few years' time. Moreover, they cannot be solved by a group of people or by the wish of the rulers. Great importance was given to the discussions about the role of the spiritual in social relations. This is because, according to Levon Mkrtchyan, the clarification of that topic may set the foundation for the development of a clear overall concept of national security. This can be the path towards having an individual role in the whole structure known as World Civilization.

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