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"Maimonides - 750th Yahrzeit: What is His Message Today?"
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Crisis of Modern Man has provoked a "crisis philosophy" - Existentialism, neo-Orthodoxy, which rejects Reason.

Man's reliance upon reason has brought him to the scientific Age of Doom. Unhappy, lost, confused, harassed moderns, disappointed in Reason, make what they call "the leap to faith".

Reinhold Niebuhr for Protestants and Jacques Maritain for Catholics are leading examples of the new mysticism. They disparage Reason, say man cannot "know" God, prefers that knowledge is naught and faith is all. In Judaism, they are followed by Buber, Will Herberg, to some extent Heschel.

In the light of all this, Maimonides becomes even more interesting. Because he maintained that the meaning of life can be found only through the illumination of reason. Ultimate truth is contained in the Torah and can be read by the light of reason - not in any other manner.

There is a first axiom which must be accepted on faith, because human reason cannot encompass it - but beyond that axiom, the intellect and reason are sovereign and limited only by their own limitations.

The axiom is as follows:

"The foundation of foundations and the first pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is a First Existent Who brought every existing thing into being.... If it could be supposed that He did not exist, nothing else could possibly exist."

From this axiom, there is no need to make a "leap of faith" in order to cover the abyss between man and God. There is a road which can be travelled by the power of the mind. Maimonides felt that belief could be justified by reason because the human mind was

equal to the task, since it was of Divine origin.

Here are some of his major beliefs:

1. Knowledge is in the Torah, but its words must be rightly understood. All anthropomorphisms must be understood as allegories, since God is not a physical body. "The Torah speaks in the language of men." Hand of God, Foot of God, etc.

2. Man cannot know God as He really is, but only through His works (i.e. nature). Therefore man can describe God only in terms of inadequate human attributes. awesome, merciful, etc.

3. God does not literally rule and regulate everything. Instead there are general rules or laws which usually apply. These rules are not often suspended. M. is therefore wary of miracles. He interprets most of the Biblical miracles as visions or as extraordinary conditions predetermined by Providence. He did not deny the possibility of miracles, but maintained that true belief is not predicated upon them.

4. In regard to the matter of death and immortality, M. attempted to give guidance which was both reasonable and consoling.

   a.) Flatly denied the possibility of physical life in the World-to-Come.

   "As a blind man can form no idea of colors, nor a deaf man comprehend sounds, so bodies cannot understand the delights of the soul. And as fish do not know what fire is, because they live in its opposite, so are the delights of the world of the spirit unknown to this world of the flesh."

   b.)Yet flatly stated that this world-to-come existed. And its delights were those of the spirit, "enjoying the splendor of the Divine Presence." no eating, drinking, marriage- but souls sitting with God.

5. M. philosophy was mainly this worldly, with a realistic conception of the Messianic Age, which would see the restoration of Israel and the attainment of greater spiritual and ethical perfection by all mankind.

So-called "intellectuals" today reject religion, arguing that it is impossible to believe in an anthropomorphic God, miracles, physical after-life, etc.

These people are no different from the "perplexed" of this time, for whom he wrote his Guide. He labored to re-interpret the texts of the Bible, to find the allegory behind the literal word, so that all religious doubts could be answered with reason.

M. should prove to us that Reason need not be by-passed, as we attempt to walk carefully between the "leap-to-faith" approach and the "rejection-of-all-religion" approach. But religion can be made amenable to Reason, and faith in reason can be re-established. This is tremendously important for us today.

Maimonides system, [as outlined by Ached Ha'am]

1. All bodies things are compounded of matter and form
2. In man, The soul is the form and the body is the matter.
3. The soul has many different faculties or parts: The nutritive, the sensitive, the imaginative, the emotional, and the rational.

4. The first four parts of the soul are common to man and other animals. The fifth part - the rational- gives to the soul of man its essential superiority.
5. When the body is resolved into its elements, the soul also perishes with all its parts, including the rational.

This far Aristotle went -but no further. Maimonides built a much greater system on this same base. He wanted to show that the soul need not necessarily die - that it could grow.

I. "The idea is in substance this: that while reason, which is present in a human being from birth, is only one of the faculties of the soul, which is a unity of all its parts and ceases wholly to exist when the body ceases, yet this faculty is no more than a "potential faculty," by virtue of which its possessor is able to apprehend ideas; and therefore its cessation is inevitable only if it remains throughout its existence in its original condition - in the condition, that is, of a "potential faculty" whose potentiality has not been realised. But if a human being makes use of this faculty and attains to the actual apprehension of Ideas, then his intellect has proceeded from the stage of potentiality to that of actuality: it has achieved real existence, which is permanent and indestructible, like the existence of those Ideas which it has absorbed into itself and with which it has become one. Thus we are to distinguish between the "potential intellect," which is given to a human being when he comes into the world, and is merely a function of the body, and the "acquired intellect," which a human being wins for himself by apprehending the Ideas. This acquired intellect "is not a function of the body and is really separate from the body." Hence it does not cease to exist with the cessation of the body; it persists for

Plato

ever, like the other "separate Intelligences."

II. What, then, are the Ideas by the apprehension of which the intellect does become actual? They are those whose content is true and eternal Being. This Being includes (in ascending order):

1. The generic forms of all things in the lower sublumar world, which are, as we know, constant;
2. The heavenly bodies, which, though compounded of matter and form, are eternal;
3. The forms which are free of matter (God and the separate Intelligences).

Probably omit if no time.

III. Now as to the ethics. The purpose of man's existence is "to produce the most perfect being that can be produced". The most perfect man is the possession of the "acquired intellect" - "only wisdom can add to his inner strength and raise him from low to high estate; for he was a man potentially and has now become a man actually."

What is the highest duty? What is the most perfect moral good? Every action has a moral value only insofar as it helps or hinders man in his effort to fulfill the purpose of his being - the actualisation of his intellect.

GOAL

Apprehension of Eternal Being

By Rational Proof

(through study of physics and metaphysics)

STUDY	ACTION
1. mathematics and logic 2. ethics and aesthetics	1. which leads to "perfection of character." (reason cannot be achieved when a man pursues lusts and passions) 2. which achieves satisfaction of bodily needs, thus eliminating physical pain and mental distraction.

Any study and any action leading to the goal is ethically and morally good, in varying degrees of importance.

IV. What is the place of religion in this scheme?

The aim of religion is "to regulate the soul and the body" of society at large to prepare an environment which is capable of producing the greatest possible number of "actual men".

Religion must be popular, i. e., aimed at the great mass of society. It must raise the cultural level of society. There are three goals religion must give to the man:

1. true opinions in a form suited to the intelligence of the many.
2. a code of morals, individual and social, which makes for the health of society and the prosperity of its members.
3. a code of religious observances, intended to educate the many by keeping the true opinions and moral duties constantly before their minds.

Possibly omit if no time

V. Psychological basis for M. stress on reason above all else.

1. Fanatacism rife among Moslems at that moment.
2. Jews being pressed for conversion.
3. Big argument was that Islam was monotheism - and Mohammed was prophet as was Moses.

   Why not believe in him?
4. ERGO - M. subjected even the Prophet, with his miracles, revelation, etc., to the rule of reason.

VI. Guide to Perplexed

"Follow reason and reason only, and explain religion in conformity with reason : for reason is the goal of mankind, and religion is only a means to the end."

He would have been pronounced a heretic with the Guide if he had not previously written the Mishneh Torah, which also made him an exponent of the law.

He would have been put in Cherem (as was Spinoza who followed him) for this opinion - "Wherever a Scripture is contradicted by proof we do not accept the Scripture" but explain it in accordance with reason - if he did not also formulate the Creed of 13 Articles, which was acceptable to the orthodox authorities of his day.

Sermon re Maimonides – 750 years

Comments and Opinions

By TRUDE WEISS-ROSMARIN

THE LIGHT OF REASON

FOR THE PAST four decades, approximately, Western thought and letters have been riding the crest of a wave of "disappointment," which is still gathering momentum. The "disappointment" is with Reason, which has failed in the debacle of war and does not avail against the anxiety and insecurity which bedevil our century.

Life and man's destiny are essentially tragic:

> The days of our years are three-score years and ten,
> Or even by reason of strength four-score years;
> Yet is their pride but travail and vanity;
> For it is speedily gone and we fly away.
> (Psalm 90:10)

But it is the meaning of man's life and destiny to mitigate this tragedy and make it more bearable. Indeed, life is short and evanescent.

> In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up;
> In the evening it is cut down, and withereth.
> (Psalm 90:6)

But there is The Day—the span from sunrise to sundown—which is man's possession.

Culture is man's way of shaping his day on earth into forms yielding maximum satisfaction in the circumstances of his existence. From the dawn of history man has experimented with various tools and in many ways to make the road from the womb to the grave less stony and onerous. By trial and error, by determination and courage, with the cool calculation of the mind and the free-soaring flight of the imagination, by brute force and by tender love man has built his mansion in time and space, subduing even time and space to his will.

Our contemporary culture and civilization will probably seem as primitive to the men of a thousand years hence as the culture and civilization of a thousand years ago appear to us. Our advances in science and technique are spectacular and so are the comforts and amenities of life which they have made possible. But there is another side to the coin. Only a small slice of science and technique have gone into the betterment of life. Their bulk has been devoted to the annihilation of life through the science of war, with the result that man now commands weapons which can destroy millions of lives with the explosion of a single bomb.

Although modern man lives longer and better than his ancestors, he is more unhappy than the men of previous generations who had to toil long and hard for a scant living. Modern man—in the setting of Western culture—is deeply and profoundly unhappy. In our own America, at a time of unprecedented prosperity, frustration and anxiety abound. Feelings of lostness and unhappiness are widespread even among those who are not habitually given to philosophical reflection and psychological analysis.

What goes by the term of "The Crisis of Modern Man" has been the subject of much concentrated thought and many perspicacious studies over the past forty years, approximately. The basic theme of "the crisis philosophy," of which Existentialism, in one form or other, is the most popular current version, is the unequivocal rejection of Reason.

Man's self-reliance, his trust in his own resources of Reason, made possible the triumphs of the scientific age—but they also paved the road for the Atomic Doom which now confronts mankind, we are being told. Reason, and the pride in Reason, have led us to the brink of disaster, the crisis philosophers mourn. But our Reason, when all is said for it, is weak and deficient. Its light is dim and does not suffice for true cognition. It is in this fashion that modern thought has radically broken with the rationalism of the 18th and 19th century. "The Pure Reason" of Kant and his followers has been replaced with "The leap to faith" by which in Reason-disappointed harassed moderns seek to resolve their difficulties.

JUDAISM is many things, but it is definitely *unauthoritarian*. There is no fixed creed; there are no unilaterally binding dogmas. There is Law and the Jewish Way of Life—but thought and belief and interpretation are free. As a result, there have been commentaries without number attempting to define and explain what Jews believe Scriptures to mean. Some of these commentaries have gained authoritative standing, but not one of them has the power of dogmatic force. Moreover, since the very earliest times differences in the interpretation of Sacred Writ were recognized and respected. "These as well as these are the words of the Living God" became the watchword of Judaism. As a result, rationalism as well as mysticism have their respected and respective places in the Jewish tradition, although the rationalist orientation has been more pronounced and is stronger in re-

presentation.

Rationalism, in the Jewish orbit, has never meant denying the validity of faith. There are limits to human cognition and at these frontiers faith must take over. But even as there is a frontier for reason, so there is a boundary for faith. It has its place and its realm—but no more. Faith, in Judaism, may be said to approximate the role of the axiom in science. It is the basic fact beyond proof, which one would want to prove, it is true, but cannot prove.

Jewish rationalism is rooted in the axiom of faith in the Prime Cause, i. e. God. And so it is humble and free from the overbearing pride which prepared the downfall of modern philosophical rationalism. Jewish rationalism, from Saadia to Hermann Cohen, always was cognizant of its limitations. But it also knew the strength of reason, deploying it with pride, dignity and—restraint.

American Jewish thought—under the cumulative influence of Protestant "crisis philosophy," Existentialism, and a sugar-coated version of Buberized Hasidism—has recently broken out in a rash of quasi-mystic tributes to "faith." In tune with the general tenor of American Christian theology, cross-fertilized by the Neo-Protestant mysticism of Reinhold Niebuhr and the Catholic mysticism of Jacques Maritain, the disparagement of Reason has become popular with Jewish God-seekers, who profess that knowledge is naught and faith is all.

The American Jewish version of Existentialism, if such it can be termed, is not overly hospitable to the method of rational inquiry into religious truth, which Maimonides exemplified at its best. In the 750 years which have elapsed since Moshe Ben Maimon's death the human mind has blazed new frontiers and Judaism has moved on to new positions. But changed times and conditions, new discoveries and cognitions do not render the works of Maimonides obsolete. Indeed, many pages of his books strike us moderns as quaint, at best, and queer, at worst. But the quest-and-dedication of "The Guide of the Perplexed" is as timely now as it was almost eight centuries ago. For this quest is man's eternal search for certainty—solid certainty about the meaning of life, and how life is to be invested with meaning.

Maimonides asserted that this meaning can be found with the illumination of reason. He maintained that the ultimate truth is contained in the Torah and can be read by the light of reason—and not in any other manner. Indeed, there is a last and hidden recess—a first axiom—which must be accepted on faith, because human reason cannot encompass it, but beyond that axiom, the intellect and reason are soveseign and limited only by their own limitations. In the "Code" Maimonides put it thus:

> "The foundation of foundations and the pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is a First Existent Who brought every existing thing into being... If it could be supposed that He did not exist, nothing else could possibly exist."

The fact that our contemporaries who have despaired of reason advocate "the leap to faith" bespeaks the rash determination of despair. Why is it necessary "to leap" across the abyss separating man from God? Is there no road on which man, step by step, may wind his way to certainty?

Maimonides approached the task of justfying belief by reason with the strength of the conviction that the human mind is equal to the task, because it is of Divine origin. He was suffused with certainty that man can explore the will of God and the meaning of life. He took it for granted that the Torah is the repository of this knowledge and that its words, rightly understood, can solve the doubts and uncertainties.

To understand the Torah correctly meant for Maimonides to interpret its allegories and anthropomorphic expressions according to the principle that "the Torah speaks in the language of men." God is not a physical body and therefore all anthropomorphic expressions pertaining to God must be understood as allegories. Such expressions as "the finger of God," "the hand of God," "the eyes of God," the ears of God," and similar ones are, according to Maimonides, "adapted to the mental capacity of the majority of mankind who have a clear perception of physical bodies only. The Torah speaks in the language of men. All these phrases are metaphorical."

Maimonides held that God works through nature and considers the nature of man, to the extent of adapting the Torah to his needs. He believed that there was a reason for everything in existence and, also, for all the laws and ordinances of the Torah, although some of these reasons might defy human understanding But no matter how obscure and baffling these reasons might be, it is man's duty to meditate about them. Man's glory is his intellect; it is his bond with God and the guarantee of his immortality. Therefore, "those who have succeeded in finding a proof for everything that can be proved, who have a true knowledge of God, so far as a true knowledge can be attained, and are near the truth wherever an approach to the truth is possible, they have reached the goal and are in the palace in which the King lives."

Maimonides was well aware of it that human knowledge has inexorable limits. But within these limits he pushed dauntlessly forward to knowing all that can be known. He knew that God cannot be known as He is.

All that man's intellect can discern are God's works. Man's predicament is his inability of understanding the Being of God and hence derives the pathetic effort of describing God by means of attributes. But as these attributes are derived from human experience, they are necessarily inadequate for the definition of God. Therefore, the attributes of God are not really his attributes, but the forms in which man clothes his understanding of God. In other words, our thoughts and beliefs and opinions about God do not convey adequate information on His essence and nature.

In accordance with Jewish tradition, Maimonides believed that God the Creator is also the Guide of the world. His trust in Divine rule and guidance did not lead him, however, into endorsing what he regarded as popular misconceptions of God's role in the universe. He was no fundamentalist who believed that God literally rules and regulates everything. Instead, he affirmed that God established laws and rules through which His actions are manifest. Maimonides was therefore wary of miracles. He managed to interpret in rational fashion many of the Biblical miracles—as visions or as extraordinary conditions predetermined by Providence. He did not deny the possibility of miracles, but he maintained that true belief is not predicated on them. "Our teacher Moses was not believed in by the Israelites because of the miracles he performed. One whose belief rests on miracles has but an imperfect faith, since miracles can be wrought by magic."

MAIMONIDES was a religious rationalist. He accepted Scriptures as unconditionally true, but he claimed the right to understand and interpret Holy Writ with the illumination of reason. His over-all objective was to show that the seemingly unnatural is yet encompassed by natural law and can be accepted as true by the inquiring mind. In keeping with this orientation, he interpreted prophecy as a variety of "intellectual imagination," a form of intuition, and the knowledge of the Prophet of things to come he regarded as the highest type of knowledge possessed by minds who are completely concentrated upon God.

Belief in revelation presented no difficulties either for Maimonides, who regarded all knowledge as revelation and thus could easily accept the Sinaitic Revelation as the acme of communication between the Active Intellect and the passive minds of men.

Man's most pressing personal religious problems are bound up with death—the fear of death and the quest for immortality. Maimonides therefore attempted to give guidance for belief, which is both reasonable and consoling, in this area as well. In consonance with his spiritualizing tendency, he flatly denied the possibility of physical properties in the World-to-Come. "As a blind man can form no idea of colors nor a deaf man comprehend sounds, so bodies cannot understand the delights of the soul. And as fish do not know what fire is, because they live in its opposite, so are the delights of the world of the spirit unknown to this world of the flesh."

Our lack of knowledge of the world of the spirit does not mean, however, its non-existence. It is real, very real, Maimonides affirms, although, in the words of the Talmudic Sages, "in the world to come there will be no eating and no drinking, no washing and no anointing and no marriage. The righteous will be seated with their crowns on their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Divine Presence." In fine, "in the world to come there is nothing corporeal and no material substance," Maimonides teaches. "There are only the souls of the righteous without bodies." Here and now we cannot fully understand this kind of existence—just as we cannot understand what God is—but, and on this point Maimonides is very insistent, our lack of knowledge does not cancel out the reality of that which we do not, or cannot, know.

Maimonides' philosophy is essentially this-worldly and realistic, based upon the sequence of cause and effect. True, there are phenomena and realms where we cannot discern this sequence—but logic compels us to take it for granted by dint of the order of the universe and because there is the First Cause—God, the Creator.

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Maimonides' this-worldliness shaped all his interpretations and his entire outlook. It is responsible for his realistic conception of the Messianic Age, which is differentiated from previous epochs by the restoration of Israel and the attainment of greater spiritual and ethical perfection by all mankind. There will be nothing miraculous about the Messianic Age, as Maimonides saw it. "The days of the Messiah will be the time when the kingdom will return to Israel, who will return to the Holy Land... So far as existing things are concerned, everything will be exactly as now, except that Israel will possess the reins of power. There will be the strong and the weak, just as know... The days of the Messiah are not ardently longed for on account of plentiful vegetation and the riches they will bring in their train, nor in order that we may ride on horses, nor that we may drink to the accompaniment of various kinds of musical instruments, as is thought by people who are confused in their ideas on such things. No! The prophets and pious men longed for and ardently desired the days of the Messiah because then the righteous will come together, and there will be much goodness and knowledge."

"INTELLIGENT" modern Jews, who are estranged from the Synagogue, reject "religion" arguing that its teachings are primitive. They plead that they find it impossible to believe in a God, who has the attributes of man, and to accept as true the miracles said to have occurred in the past and those promised for the future. They declare their doubts in a physical after-life because reason and common sense preclude such beliefs...

The predicament of the modern "intelligent" Jew is no different from that of the "perplexed" for whom Maimonides wrote his "Guide" and pertinent sections in his other works. This predicament may be said to be semantic, stemming from the literal interpretation of the Bible and the Prayer Book. Taken literally and at face value, these texts present, indeed, insurmountable difficulties. Maimonides, as his great predecessor, Saadia, fully recognized this stumbling block. He removed it by pointing up and reiterating that "the Bible speaks in the language of men," expressing the abstract in concrete terms and depicting God in human fashion because of the limitations of the human mind.

By postulating that the texts which offend the mature philosophical mind do not really mean what they seem to express, Maimonides made it possible for intelligent persons to find relevance in Judaism. He interpreted and re-interpreted Judaism for *his* generation. Obviously, this version of eight hundred years ago does not answer the doubts and problems and perplexities of our time. But the guiding principle of the "Guide for the Perplexed" remains valid, namely, that religion is not beyond reason and that all religious doubts can be answered with reason.

While Maimonides labored to re-interpret the anthropomorphic language of the Bible and the prayers, the majority of American Rabbis—and this is as true of the Reform wing as of the Orthodox faction—make no attempts to lighten the perplexities by which contemporary Jews are beset. The "Invocations," composed by many of our spiritual leaders, are, if anything, even more redolent of anthropomorphic expressions than the sacred texts of the past. The same is true of much of the sermon material dealing with religious questions. There is a distressing tendency among Rabbis to humanize God by presenting Him (one offends, of course, by referring to God as "Him"...) in the fashion which Maimonides decried and sought to discourage.

It is true, indeed, that the heart has its own needs and its own reasons, especially when burdened and troubled by the vicissitudes of life and bowed down under the grief of bereavement. Still, it would be wise for our Rabbis to remember that, on the whole, our generation is too sophisticated to be moved and influenced by the sop of "easy religion."

Eager to bring Jews into the Synagogue, many of our spiritual leaders have done valiantly in providing "attractions." But, by and large, the brisque promotion of the House of God has failed. The "Three Days a Year Jews" continue to hold the majority and it is, alas, for the succoring of their atavistic and inarticulate fears and superstitions, that sumptious and spacious Synagogues have been built—and are being built—to be yawningly empty for all but three days out of three hundred and sixty-five.

True, there have been attempts to provide satisfaction for the "intelligent Jew" within the Synagogue. The Reconstructionists have produced a new Prayer Book from which have been eliminated "statements of belief that are untenable." The untenable beliefs, according to the Reconstructionists, are the doctrines of the Chosen People, Revelation, a Personal Messiah, Retribution, Resurrection and the hope for the Restoration of the Sacrificial Cult. These doctrines presented difficulties for Maimonides as well. He sought to resolve them by re-interpretation of the texts rather than by "eliminating" those statements of belief. For, in point of fact, it is utterly impossible to eliminate from the Prayer Book "statements of belief that are untenable" for thinking modern men. This is proved by the Reconstructionist Prayer Book. Virtually every line in the Bible and in the Prayer Book expresses "untenable beliefs" and so the only way of resolving the difficulty is Maimonides'

method of interpretation on the basis of the over-all rule that "the Torah speaks in the language of men."

The futility of the attempt to bring the "modern Jew" into the Synagogue by providing him with an "intelligent" Prayer Book may be gauged from just one example taken from the Reconstructionist version of the Sabbath Prayers. In the *Amidah*, the traditional text, "and he will bring the *redeemer*" has been changed to "and he will bring *redemption*" (in keeping with the rejection of the doctrine of a personal Messiah by the Reconstructionists). Now this would be well and good, *if* in the next paragraph, in the section for the Sabbath of Penitence, we would not read "and inscribe us in the book of life, for Thy sake, O living God." What point is there in splitting hair over fine points of doctrine, in connection with which the average worshipper will experience no intellectual scruples, while such anthropomorphic texts as the *Aleinoo* prayer are retained and without comment on how to understand such lines as: "It is He who stretched forth the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth. The seat of His glory is in the heavens above, and the abode of His might is in the loftiest heights."

"The language of man" cannot be eliminated, in the physical sense, from the Jewish sacred texts. If a consistent elimination were made, nothing would remain... The only sensible approach, therefore, is Maimonides' method of interpretation: to leave the text as is and to understand its allegories and metaphors as concessions to human limitations or as poetic attempts to clothe the Ineffable in words.

If the observance of the 750th anniversary of Maimonides' death will stimulate our religious leaders to a re-examination of their attempts at guiding the perplexed of *our* time, by comparing their methods and procedures with those of Moses Ben Maimon, they will discover the truth of his assertion: "The gate of interpretation is not closed." There *is* a way also for our generation to believe with the illumination of the Light of Reason.

IS ISRAEL A DEMOCRACY?

SINCE THE RISE of Israel, the new state has proudly laid claim to the title of "the world's youngest democracy," while its friends—Jews and Gentiles—have been paying tribute to "the outpost of democracy in the feudal Middle East." But is Israel *really* a democracy in the accepted sense of the term?

By common consent a democracy is predicated on equality before the law of *all* citizens, irrespective of sex, color or race. While Israel's Constitution affirms and promises to safeguard this basic plank of democracy, in real life one half of the Israelis are deprived of the most elementary human rights, while being classed, in certain realms of the law, as perennial minors and non-competents.

A year ago, the disenfranchisement of one-half of Israelis—the women—became the law of the land, when all litigations pertaining to personal status, such as marriage, divorce and inheritance, were assigned to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Religious Courts. As is well-known, the Jewish laws of marriage, divorce and inheritance discriminate against women to the extent of depriving the Jewish wife deserted by her husband and the childless widow with a brother-in-law, on her deceased husband's side, of the right to her *personal* freedom. The deserted wife, according to Jewish law as administered by the Religious Courts of Israel, cannot divorce her husband—and no court can free her—for she is regarded as the man's property to which only he can relinquish title. The same pathetic plight is the lot of the unhappy Jewish wife whose husband dies before she has borne him a child. She can only remarry upon obtaining release and permission *(Halitza)* from her husband's brother, and thus is utterly and completely at his mercy.

For many centuries learned and humane Rabbis have endeavored to mitigate the harshness of Jewish family law by providing loopholes through which they might "release" the fettered woman *(Agunah)*. But these measures have made no appreciable dent in the age-old tragedy of the Jewish wife, who forfeits the right to her own person, at the marriage ceremony.

When the liberal and progressive majority of Israel's Knesset made last year's infamous deal with the minority of the Religious Bloc, under the terms of which the Orthodox Groups, seated in Knesset, agreed to the National Service Law for Women in return for being given complete control over Jewish family law, spokesmen for Mapai declared that, in Israel, the problems of Jewish family law were altogether different. They declared that far from prejudicing the position of women, the application of religious Law in marriage, divorce and inheritance really gave them added advantages and protection. Characteristically, only male members of Knesset held forth in this vein...

Now a new problem involving the rights of women is on the Knesset agenda. And once again it seems as if the democratic rights of one-half of Israel's population are to be abrogated so as to satisfy the demands of the Orthodox Bloc:

A draft law for the appointment of Religious Court judges was recently introduced for its first reading in the

Knesset. The Orthodox spokesman, who introduced the bill, made it clear that the Appointment Committee for the Religious Courts would necessarily have to be composed of *men* and he further announced that it had been agreed upon that the religious judges should be exempted from pledging loyalty to "the laws of the State of Israel," as is expected of the judges in the secular courts.

In the ensuing debate, it was pointed out that the exemption of the religious judges from the legislation enacted by Knesset created an anomalous situation fraught with the most serious deterioation of the forces making for Israeli unity. Indeed, in practice the Religious Courts *have* ignored and set aside "the law of the State of Israel" by denying women equal rights, not only in family law but also respecting eligibility as witnesses. The Religious Courts do not accept evidence given by women, in accordance with the principle that "woman is disqualified to serve as a witness." The incongruities and difficulties which are bound to arise from this type of divided legal authority are already evident in Israeli life and there is no telling what dire consequences will grow from this unhealthy situation.

Israeli women are realistic. They know that they cannot entertain reasonable hopes to be represented on the Religious Courts, notwithstanding the fact that these Courts deal almost exclusively with the problems of women and children. True, all civilized progressive countries attempt to staff their family courts with women judges, realizing that in the sphere of family affairs women are better qualified than men. But the petrification of Jewish Orthodox thinking is such that the idea of a woman *dayan* (religious judge) is taken either as a joke or as blasphemy. The Israeli women, therefore, do not ask for representation on the Religious Courts, but they do ask that they be represented on the Appointment Committee of Ten which will decide on filling vacancies in the Religious Courts. But even this small concession is being denied to Israel's women!

Some superannuated Orthodox Knesset members, who replied to the Knesset women's demands for a say, at least, in the appointment of the judges, thumbed desks and thundered "A thousand times no!" But they did not qualify and substantiate this "No."

In point of fact, the Pentateuch—the sacred Written Torah—furnishes clear evidence that the Holy One, Blessed be He, prefers a woman's judgment in family affairs to a man's. When Abraham and Sarah could not agree on what should be done with Hagar and Ishmael, God told Abraham: "In all that Sarah saith unto thee, hearken unto her voice."

Rebekah, it is true, used wiles which are sometimes characterized as "female" so secure the Blessing for Jacob, her favorite son. But since the Blessing stuck, it may be assumed that God approved of her choice and judgment.

While Israel's Orthodox leaders shrug off the request of experienced social workers for a woman's voice in the appointment of Religious Judges, the Torah takes it for granted that women feel more at ease with a woman placed in authority of their affairs. Miriam, Moses' sister, was the leader of the women at the Exodus and during the wanderings in the desert. Later, in the period of the Judges, Deborah, "a mother in Israel," held court and passed judgment in the hill-country of the tribe of Manasseh, to say nothing of her military prowess and leadership.

Jewish law and tradition present no obstacles to giving women a say in the appointment of Religious Judges charged with administering justice almost exclusively to women. Nor is there support in Jewish law for those who reject as preposterous the idea that qualified women judges are best suited to sit in judgment over family affairs.

Jewish women are burdened with many handicaps in the realm of religious law. It therefore amounts to adding insult to injury if men, who pretend to speak in the name of the Torah, add to their burden unnecessarily. Raised in the Eastern European setting of yesterday, where women were disenfranchised, deprived of the right to an education and reduced to the role of drudges, the spokesmen of Israel's Religious Parties have failed to catch the drift and temper of our time and its women.

If Israel is in earnest about its democratic Constitution, it cannot and will not permit that one-half of the nation be deprived of equality before the law and equality of opportunity which are the hall-marks of a democratic society.

A chain is no stronger than its weakest link and no democracy can be considered firmly established which tolerates the kind of injustice and discrimination visited upon "the weaker sex" in Israel.

Civilizations are judged by their attitude to women. The State of Israel, too, will be judged by this criterion.

The Temple Bulletin

OF

Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun

Milwaukee 11, Wisconsin

Vol. 22, No. 4 | November 3, 1954 | Heshvan 7, 5715

Sabbath Services

Friday Evening, November 5, at 8 o'clock

RABBI HERBERT A. FRIEDMAN

will speak on:

"MAIMONIDES -- 750th YAHRZEIT"

WHAT IS HIS MESSAGE FOR TODAY?

Friday Evening, November 12, at 8 o'clock

RABBI HERBERT A. FRIEDMAN

will speak on:

"WAS IT MORAL FOR A SCIENTIST TO WORK ON THE HYDROGEN BOMB?"

Sabbath Morning Services

11:15 a.m.

Saturday Morning, November 13, 11:15 o'clock

ALLEN BLOOM

son of Mr. and Mrs. David Bloom

will be Bar Mitzvah

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Kaddish List

(Taken from Memorial Tablets)

November 5

Benjamin Painter

November 12

Abel Berkoff
Victor Elconin
Joseph E. Heller
Leopold Heller
Rae Manasse
Arthur Polachek
Jacob H. Simonson
Benedict Strnad
Julia Strauss
Daniel Whitehead
Arthur Zitron

SERMON NOTES

MAIMONIDES – 750th YAHRZEIT WHAT IS HIS MESSAGE FOR TODAY?

November 5

Moses Maimonides, one of the greatest Jewish personalities of all times, died in Egypt in 1204. This year we take note of the 750th anniversary of his death by attempting to re-evaluate the meaning of his life. The external facts are well known. Forced to flee from his native Spain, he lived in Morocco for a time, and then fled again to Egypt, where he became the personal physician to the Sultan.

In his philosophy, he attempted the major task of reconciling the teachings of Judaism with those of Aristotle. Maimonides' major works have endured through the centuries. While there is much in his philosophy which may no longer appear relevant, still he offered remarkable insights into certain universal problems. There is much in what he said which can be most helpful to us today.

H.A.F.

WAS IT MORAL FOR A SCIENTIST TO WORK ON THE HYDROGEN BOMB?

November 12

It is only natural, one day after Armistice Day, to think of the evil of war, and how much more horrible future war might be with the new bombs.

Why did scientists agree to continue work on these devilish projects? It could be argued that the A-bomb was a wartime necessity. But what of the H-bomb? There are those who say that the physicists, engineers, research men and all others who participated are guilty of the highest immorality — for they fashioned weapons of unheard of power against their fellow men. Others protest that the scientists are not at fault, but the diplomats and politicians who fail to make peace at the council tables must be blamed if war breaks out.

Is there any moral question involved? Was Oppenheimer's conscience a factor in his opposition? Was he right?

H.A.F.

RESERVE THE DATE!

Saturday Evening, November 20th

SISTERHOOD - MEN'S CLUB DINNER DANCE

(preceded by cocktail parties)

"Thanks"

We wish to thank those who participated in decorating the beautiful Succah which graced our pulpit this season:

Mr. and Mrs. Norman Abrahams, Alice, Jim and Jane Abrahams; Donald Ansfield; Ariel Bar Sela; Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Cohan, Debra, Jerry and David Cohan; Eva Ann Coifman; Julie Elliott; Dr. and Mrs. B. L. Feldman, Dorene and Armin Feldman; Mrs. Ben Galin, Susan and Richy Galin; Nancy and Louise Jung; Mrs. Robert Krauskopf; Frances and Kenneth Hurwitz; Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Levine and Dick Levine; Dr. and Mrs. Robert W. Mann, Kathy, Connie and Dick Mann; Norman and Bernard Marks; Fred Mayer; Judy Scheinfeld; Mr. and Mrs. Harold Watkins, Ruth, Rhona and Ramey Watkins; S. Harry Stern and Mr. and Mrs. Erwin Youngerman.

Thanks, also, to the following who served as ushers at the service on Monday evening, October 11:

Messrs.: Robert Gordon; Ernie Lane; Robert Mann; Phillip Schiff; S. Harry Stern; Gustave Wand and Burton Zucker.

RECENTLY ELECTED OFFICERS

The following young people have been elected Officers of the Confirmation Class for the coming year:

Co-Presidents — Todd Lappin and Edward Pereles; Vice President — Micky Fisher; Secretary — Sandra Smith; Treasurer — Robert Berkoff and Social Chairmen — Barbara Kay and Tom Kohn.

On Saturday morning, October 30th, these boys and girls were installed as Officers of the Religious School:

President—Myron Weisfeldt, 9C; Vice President—Michael Forman, 8A; Secretary—Linda Goldman, 7C; and Treasurer—Terry Forman, 6A.

FLOWERS FOR OUR ALTAR

The Sisterhood acknowledges with thanks the receipt of the following contributions to its Floral Fund:

IN HONOR OF: Mr. and Mrs. Ben Feld on their 60th wedding anniversary.
Mrs. Morris D. Callen's recovery.

IN MEMORY OF: Leo J. Kohn, Isaac and Ethel Kohn, Mr. and Mrs. B. W. Schwartz and Ishmael Bratt.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ENDOWMENT FUND

The Temple Endowment Fund received gifts during the past several months:

For Memorial Plates: From Mr. and Mrs. Ben Feld in memory of Emil Feld. From Mrs. Leo Zucker in memory of Leo Zucker. From Miss Lillian Friedman in memory of Sarah Friedman and Sam Friedman. From Mrs. Louis A. Weisfeldt in memory of Dr. Louis A. Weisfeldt. From Mrs. Leo Werner in memory of Leo Werner.

General Contributions: From Mr. and Mrs. Emil Hersh in honor of Rabbi Joseph L. Baron.

From Dr. and Mrs. Abe Melamed in memory of Dr. Maurice J. Ansfield and Dr. Louis A. Weisfeldt. From Dr. and Mrs. Francis Rosenbaum in memory of Dr. Maurice J. Ansfield. From Mrs. Joseph Lieberman in memory of Joseph Lieberman. From the Shadur Family in memory of Addie Karger.

INTER FAITH ACTIVITY

On Saturday morning, October 9th, mothers of students of the sixth grade in our religious school and their children served as hosts to 43 youngsters of the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades of the religious school of the First Methodist Church, Delavan, Wisconsin.

The luncheon for the Delavan visitors was arranged by our Temple Sisterhood in co-operation with the Midwest Regional Office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the Milwaukee Jewish Council.

Sisterhood members who participated in the arrangements were:

Mmes.: Norman Abrahams, Jack Abraham, Erwin Berk, Marvin Gordon, Maxwell Lerner, Harry Pittelman, Maurice Siegel, Raymond Strauss, and Alan Zien.

NEEDED!

The Temple is in need of an upright piano for the Vestry room. If you have such a piano, which you are not presently using, we will be happy to receive it. Please call Miss Friedman, ED. 2-6960.

TAX EXEMPTION NOW 30%

The attention of our members is called to the new tax law. The limit on charitable contributions for individuals has been increased from 20% to 30%, provided the extra 10% is donated to your Temple, a tax exempt hospital, or a tax exempt educational institution.

Dues and other contributions to Temple and its auxiliary organizations are income tax deductions.

Don't Forget

THE TEMPLE BOND DINNER

Sunday Evening, November 7, at 6:30 o'clock

Honorable ABBA EBAN

Ambassador of Israel to the United States

is speaking at the

Venetian Room of the Astor Hotel

in the interest of

Israel Government Bonds

Reservations, at $4.00 per plate, should be accompanied by checks made payable to Lawrence S. Katz and sent to the Temple, 2419 E. Kenwood Blvd.

THE TEMPLE BULLETIN
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Milwaukee 11, Wis.

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