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Class Essay - Part I

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES  
NON-JEWISH INFLUENCES

ON JEWISH (RELIGIOUS &) MORAL DEVELOPMENT

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Department Auspices:

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In the Kuzari of Yehudah Halevi, the following dialogue between the Khazar king and the rabbi who converts him to Judaism, is quoted:

THE KING: Does it not impair your religious beliefs when you hear that others have traditions much older than yours? The Indians, for instance, are said to have buildings and entire cities that are hundreds of thousands of years old!

THE RABBI: It would, indeed, impair my belief if these traditions were found in a nation or in a book that is generally believed. Such, however, does not exist..."

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This fragment of rather cryptic conversation suggests the motif of this paper, which is:

- 1) To study the extent and nature of non-Jewish influences primarily on the ethical ideas of the Jews from the Patriarchal period (ca. 2000-1400 BCE) until the period of the return from the Babylonian Exile (ca. 445 BCE).
- 2) To suggest how this information affects the attitude of the modern Jew toward the Jewish religious heritage.

The very stipulation of the above first aim indicates rejection of the rabbi's contention that "traditions much older" than his do not "exist". Whether such traditions "impair" <sup>one's belief</sup> --and if they do, to what extent and how -- will be the concern of the closing part of this thesis.

An inquiry into ethics may be launched on various levels: it may be a general or theoretical study dealing with the principles, aims, and ideas regulating conduct; or it may be a study of applied ethics presenting a scheme of action applicable to various human relations, setting forth the rights and duties involved in these relations. Both these approaches may be considered as "dynamic" or "normative".

The problem of ethics as reflected in Jewish tradition will be treated in this paper on a "descriptive" level, as opposed to the "dynamic". This method calls for a historical examination of the various data recording the actual conduct of the Jewish people.

Religious ethics finds the principles and aims of life in the teachings of religion, and proceeds to develop therefrom the demands and duties which the religious devotee must fulfill. Jewish ethics, therefore, is based on the fundamental concepts and teachings of Judaism. To determine the nature and extent of foreign influences on Jewish moral ideas, it will therefore be necessary to limn out the outstanding facts of Jewish religious development, which is essentially the development of the idea of God.

There are a number of conflicting views as to how the idea of God developed among the Jewish people. The major approaches toward this problem can be summarised as follows:

1) Monotheism, as we know it, is not the creation of the ancient Israelites who were either polytheists (believers in many gods) or monolatrists (henotheists: believers in one god among many). Monotheism is a late development in Jewish religious life, having emerged during the period of the literary prophets, ca. the ninth and eighth centuries. The prevalence of the monotheistic idea in the



Bible is due to later editors who projected the ethical-universalistic god ideas of the literary prophets into the bible narratives. (This view is generally that of the modern critical school: Wellhausen and others).

2) Monotheism was universal among the ancient Semites and the Hebrews were "transmitters" of this god-idea, not originators. (View of Ernest Renan). Within this view, generally propounded by Orientalists or Assyriologists, there are variant beliefs:

a) The Hebrews were monotheists since the time of Abraham, however, their monotheism was appropriated from the ancient Babylonian civilization. The Hebrews also appropriated the legends, and socio-legal codes of Babylonia which they incorporated into the Old Testament (hereafter written "OT"). (This is the view of Delitsch and others).

b) The Hebrews were monotheists since the time of Moses, however, their concept of a universal, ethical God they appropriated from the Egyptians during their sojourn in Egypt. The Hebrews' entire socio-moral-legal codes were acquired from the Egyptian genius. (So holds Breasted and others).

3) Monotheism is the fruit of the ancient Israelite genius as revealed in the Pentateuch. The concept of an ethical-universalistic God was regnant among the later literary prophets, but did they did not shape the ancient Israelite view. In addition, the socio-moral-legal codes were not appropriated from any specific group or culture, but were developed independently from an ancient legal tradition upon which most of the ancient civilizations drew. (This is a most recent view developed by Kaufman).

Within the framework of Jewish religious development which we now sketch, we shall allude to these various views only in so far as they appear to shed light

on the religious and moral ideas of the Hebrews. It is impossible within the limited compass of this paper to argue the various merits or demerits of these conflicting propositions, and the attendant problems of literary criticism of the OT. Suffice it to say that for purposes of continuity we shall follow the historic pattern outlined in the bible narratives, beginning therefore with the first prominent ~~israelite~~ historic figures, Abraham and the Patriarchs.

#### I - THE PATRIARCHS: 2000 - 1700 BCE

According to the Bible, which is the only extant contemporary record of Abraham, the first patriarch and his family migrated from Ur of the Chaldees to Haran, a chief town in Northern Mesopotamia. Abraham and his ~~family~~ family looked upon Haran as their homeland even after ~~making~~ reaching Canaan. (Gen 24). (The names ABRAHAM - in the form of ABAMRAM - and JACOB - in the form of JACOB-EL - are known ~~in the~~ as personal names among the Amorites, Semitic invaders from the Arabian desert who between 2000 and 1750 BCE flooded the whole Fertile Crescent, ruling the main cities from Syria to Babylon. It has been suggested that the journey of Abraham was directly or indirectly connected with the Amorite movement).

In light of the findings of the archives of a later North Mesopotamian city, named Nuzi (ca. 1400 BCE), many of the laws, practices and traditions, as recorded in the bible, are seen in clearer perspective. These cuneiform records are paralleled by the Genesis accounts of the antediluvian period, especially regarding the following traditions:

1) Thoroughly Semitic traditions of the creation story

2) Traces of the observance of a seventh day, "not unlike the Hebrew

Sabbath"

- 3) references to a sacred garden (the Garden of Eden)
- 4) possible similarities between the cherubic guardians of Eden and the colossi of Babylonia
- 5) resemblances between the Genesis and the Babylonian traditions of the Deluge
- 6) Nimrod (Gen 10:8)
- 7) the Tower of Babel (Gen 11), probably inspired by the most famous building of Babylon, the temple tower named ETEMENANKI, one of the wonders of the ancient world.

The essential outline of these biblical accounts (which are thoroughly Mesopotamian and which resemble nothing in the Egyptian or Canaanite literature) were brought from the homeland in Haran by the Patriarchs themselves.

According to the Nuzi documents, North Mesopotamian practices of the second Millennium influenced such Patriarchal laws and practices as: the deathbed blessing or will of the Patriarch (Gen 27), the giving of concubines for the purpose of raising family heirs, the heir-relationship between Abraham and Eliezer, the relations between Jacob and Laban, the hitherto obscure "teraphim" (Gen 31: 19), Esau's sale of the birthright, etc.

~~(It is generally held that both the legends and traditions which came into Abraham's hands from his environment were refined by him as he reached out for a conception of God.)~~

Precise knowledge of the nature of Abraham's religion in Canaan is unavailable. But it is known that the name of the patriarchal family God was "El Shaddai" (Ex 6:2; Gen 17:1) which has been mistranslated as "God Almighty". In reality, "Shaddai" is a Mesopotamian word meaning "The Mountain One". This was the name of the "God of the Fathers" whom the successive generations of patriarchs deliberately chose as their deity.

As recorded in the Bible, the relationship between the family and its chosen God was very close, so that he was addressed as "father", "brother", "kinsman", and was considered an actual member of the group. When treaties or covenants were made, he was the third party who sealed the agreement and saw it was kept (Gen 31:4).

It is significant to point out that God as a member of the family marks the first phase of the development of the God idea. Throughout the antediluvian and patriarchal stories in the Bible, this God who is generally known by the name "Elohim", makes his appearance in bodily form (to Adam, Cain, the men of the tower of Babel, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, etc.). To those scholars holding the view that monotheism was developed among the patriarchs, this conception of a family God appearing in bodily manifestations is of considerable importance in view of the role it is considered to play in the later religious development of the Israelites.

From the above brief resume of archeological findings and the sketchy review of the bible narratives, we are made aware of some of the Babylonian influences on the early stage of Hebrew religious life. Some Assyriologists contend that these influences were more profound and sweeping than is suggested here. It is their view (we shall refer to them by name hereafter) that the early Babylonians <sup>highly-developed</sup> impressed upon the patriarchal minds the entire conception of God, legal codes, ritual practices, etc.

To understand what sort of civilization the Patriarchs had come into contact with during their earliest wanderings, and to estimate the validity of the argument (although not to controvert it <sup>here</sup>) of the Assyriologists mentioned in the above paragraph, we shall briefly outline the cultural development of the Babylonians during the second millenium. Who were the Babylonians? What was the nature of their religious and moral life?



The Babylonians - consisting mainly of Akkadians (Semites from Arabia) and Sumerians (whose racial affinities are unknown) - developed as a people between 4500 - 4000 BCE. (The Assyrians, who were mainly Akkadians, developed around 2500 BCE; they derived their civilization from Babylon, worshipped Babylonian gods, and looked to Babylon as to a mother country).

In its early period Babylonia was divided into a number of city-states, each with its god or gods which were worshipped as guardians of the state. The ruler of the state was the chief priest of the cult. In Lagash, Ningirsu was the patron god; in Eridu it was Ea; in Nippur it was Enlil or Bel; in Ur it was Sin. As the cities warred one against another, one god or another was elevated to a place above the rest, but the original worship of the local god also continued. Thus some of the local gods came to be worshipped far beyond the confines of their own local states. Some of these gods came to be identified with the heavenly bodies: Shamash of Agade was a sun god, as was also Utu of Larsa; Sin of Ur (whence Abraham emigrated to Haran) was a moon god; Ishtar was identified with the planet Venus. Other gods seem not to have been localized at any time: Anu, for example, was a sky god.

Out of the confusing multiplicity of gods early emerged a triad which was thought of as sharing in the rule of the universe (Anu ruled the sky; Enlil, the earth and the surrounding atmosphere; Ea, ruled the waters on and above the earth). This triad was considered everywhere above the local gods, and much of the early religion and mythology centered about them. Later a second triad came into prominence, Sin the moon god, Shamash the sun god, and Ishtar, originally a sun goddess of fertility who became identified with the planet Venus.

Shamash, however, far transcended his character as sun god and came to be thought of as supreme judge of the world, "the guide of the gods as well as the

ruler of men". It was from his hand that the great king Hammurabi (now dated ca. 1700 BCE), who for the first time united all Babylonia and Assyria under one rule, is represented as receiving the code of laws known as the Code of Hammurabi. (His alleged influence on the Hebrew legal codes will be discussed).

With the rise of the city of Babylonia under Hammurabi as capital of the great empire, the local god Marduk became the greatest of the gods, and was so considered during the remainder of Babylonian history. His rise, long after the worship of the other great gods was well developed, made it necessary to reconstruct the ancient myths and fit him into them in the appropriate places. The texts that have been preserved give clear evidence of having been modified in this sense. Marduk and Enlil, or Bel, of Nippur were identified. Sets of family relationships were worked out by which Marduk was fitted into the system. He became the son of Ea, the god of waters, but also of wisdom, and so inherited all wisdom. Some scholars think that during the later or neo-Babylonian period a distinct monotheistic trend is observable, with Marduk in the position of the one supreme god. (This is contested by Moore who asserts that Marduk represented the entire pantheon, and that down to the disappearance of the empire, Babylonian worship continued to be that of a "luxuriant polytheism").

We might now briefly refer to the religion of Assyria which, as was noted before, was very similar to that of the Babylonians. The chief god of the Assyrians was Assur, the local god of the city Assur, which gave its name to the empire which later played such a vital role in the history of Israel. Associated with Assur were other powerful gods, among them Shamash, the sun god, who bore there, as in Babylonia, the character of judge and vindicator of the right by punishing the foes of Assyria. Even more important than Shamash, however, was Ishtar, who there became chiefly a goddess of war, consort of the



warlike Assur. Many other gods of Babylonia and of other surrounding nations are found incorporated in the Assyrian pantheon, adapted in each case to the peculiarities of the people.

We have already mentioned the parallels in Babylonian mythology and the Genesis narratives; i.e., the likenesses in the creation story as found in the Babylonian Cosmogonic Epic, and the flood story as found in the Gilgamesh Epic. The later epic, as uncovered in the documents of Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, revealed widespread interest in divination and fortune telling. The Mesopotamians appear <sup>than the Egyptians (as we shall see)</sup> to pay less attention to the idea of a future life in the hereafter and were primarily interested in living this life as successfully as possible. To do so they developed elaborate techniques for piercing the veil of the future, and Babylonian diviners became so famous that they were soon scattered throughout the Fertile Crescent. (Balaam, hired by the king of Moab to curse Israel is considered a good example. Deuteronomy 18:9 ff. later sternly prohibits these practices, although "diviners" are widely known among the Israelites).

The practice of divination was one of the major functions of the highly organized Babylonian priesthood who carried out an involved ritual. To ascertain the will of the gods a special priestly caste was trained to examine the entrails of dead animals, to interpret astronomical phenomena (this practice marked the rise of astrology <sup>later disseminated</sup> throughout the world), and to make known the significance of various other portents.

As mentioned above, the idea of the afterworld was hardly developed; the hereafter was thought of a dismal, colorless region in which there was no ethical distinction whatsoever. While there was no thought of reward of virtue or punishment of evil in the afterlife, the gods were, nevertheless, conceived as requiring righteousness. They rewarded and punished, but wholly within the mortal

span of life.

For a more detailed picture of the ethical consciousness and practices of the Babylonians we must investigate the code of laws of Hammurabi (who, recall, pictured himself receiving his doctrines from the god, Shamash) and <sup>also</sup> ~~from~~ <sup>surviving legal and moral</sup> other ~~surviving~~ literature (the Mari documents).

Firstly, we learn from Sumerian ideograms that in the Sumerian minds ethical conduct was associated with well-being, and in the Akkadian thought scheme, ethical conduct was associated with straightness and uprightness.

In the eyes of Babylonian law the family rather than the individual, was, from some points of view, the ethical unit. (Case of family law-suit during reign of Nabonidos, see Smith pp79). Individual responsibility is also seen in the Hammurabi laws which level certain obligations on the individual adulteress, adulterer, the false witness, the thief, the murderer, etc.

A high standard of personal morality is held up in an incantation text recited by a person when he appears before a god or goddess; in the text enjoins upon the individual obedience to the government, honesty between man and man, a clean social life, honesty in business--moreover, mercy to the unfortunate and the possession of a true and loyal heart. Mere lip-honesty is despised and condemned. (These were ideals, similar to the ideals in most religious literature, and it appears that in many instances they fell before the expediences of the marketplace).

In the social morality of the Babylonians, as observed in their laws and institutions, we again find the family at the center of the social structure. While in Assyria the wife was considered the possession of her husband and subject to violent punishments (if she committed a fault the

husband could cut off her nose or ears, or even put her to death), in Babylonia the husband had no such absolute power over his wife, yet she was by no means his equal. (She must be absolutely loyal to marital obligations; he could be lax; he could divorce his wife at will, while she must undergo a complex procedure to prove her case for divorce, and if she failed she could be thrown in the river).

Babylonian women, nevertheless, had some privileges (they could enter into business partnerships with other men, they retained the rights to their dowries). Monogamy was the normal marriage procedure according to the Hammurabi Code <sup>although</sup> (the husband was permitted to have slave concubines). Barren women could be divorced; prostitution was practiced in Babylonia and Assyria; marriage was controlled by the families; children were under the complete control of the parents (a rebellious son could be sold into slavery); yet the father had property obligations to his son.

Large sectors of the Babylonian and Assyrian populations were slaves; in the eyes of the law they were chattel, but in actual practice they had many privileges (they could own property, engage in business, make money to purchase their own freedom, marry a free woman who remained free, if <sup>an</sup> slave was injured <sup>an</sup> old Sumerian law provides for payment until the slave recovers).

The ethical feeling of these people is revealed in their prescriptions for punishment; many of the penalties were monetary, but a number of them provided for lex talionis (an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth). Mutilation in various forms was also practiced (Hammurabi records that <sup>his</sup> rebellious son who rejected adopted parents could have <sup>his</sup> tongue cut out and eye removed).

BUSINESS MORALITY in both countries was in principle well developed. Individual property was recognized and in general there appears a highly developed

sense of property rights, accompanied by severely regulated business transactions, wages fixed by laws and similarly with rentals, Rates of interest, however, were left untouched by law, making way for considerable usury practices.

PUBLIC MORALITY, that is the ideals of public service and the desire to realize them, were most advanced. A hymn addressed to the King of Ur, Dungi (ca. 2459-2392 BCE) speaks of him as "the king who brings justice, who favors the working man". Several hundred years later Hammurabi claims (in the preface to his laws) to have subdued the bandits, to have helped his people in their need, to have established the security of their property, to have justice prevail, and to have ruled the race with right. (The Assyrian sense of public duty appears less highly developed, their monarchs boasting of their conquests, of their piety toward the gods, and of the luxurious crops which grew during their time.)

Social servants (soldiers, levy masters, and tax gatherers) were accorded special privileges in matters of property because of the service they rendered to the public.

In international affairs, it is seen that foreigners residing among the Babylonians had no recognized rights. It was widely regarded that the business of the king was to subdue and plunder--nevertheless, the Babylonians are not regarded as <sup>especially</sup> particularly warlike people, their military undertakings being generally motivated by the many predatory attacks on their rich territory, which, in repulsing them led Babylonian kings to pursue warfare into neighboring countries. The Assyrians on the other hand left a record of unprecedented ferocity in warfare, engaging in such horrible deeds as skinning their captives and recording their escapades on palace walls.



WITH THIS PICTURE of Babylonian civilization in mind, we return to the central question: What is the nature and to what extent did this culture influence early Hebrew life?

Some Orientalists contend that the Babylonian ethical standards as reflected in the legal literature referred to previously, became the underlying basis of the entire Israelitish ethical and legal systems. Breasted (in the "Dawn of Conscience"), for instance, held:

The Babylonians were essentially a commercial folk, chiefly interested in commerce and its regulation by law. Along with Babylonian business came the commercial usages and laws followed by the Babylonian merchants. <sup>(1)</sup> Some of the same laws that have come down to us in the Code of Hammurabi became current also in Palestine before Hebrew days and through the Old Testament have found their way into Western civilization...It was doubtless in practical contacts like those of business that Palestinian life also received such institutions as the Babylonian Sabbath. (1) - See Exodus 21-23.

Such direct ~~and unbroken~~ influence of Babylonian practices in Hebrew life is contested by other authorities who contend that Israelite codes of right and wrong were not copies of the Code of Hammurabi. Kaufman, as do Albright, Wright and Filson, <sup>maintain</sup> ~~assert~~ that the Code of Hammurabi is "merely typical of the common law of the day, and from this law Israel later adapted much that she needed", as did the Assyrians and Hittites.

Regarding religious concepts and moral values, Breasted claims that Babylonia did not vitally affect the Patriarchal conceptions. Breasted asserts:

"It was in external usages and ritual observances rather than in

the essential content of religion that Palestine most easily adapted Babylonian ~~in~~ beliefs and ideas. " He adds that the earliest Babylonians beheld their gods in the forces of nature, and that their earliest divinities were nature gods. (Sin, the moon-god, ~~was~~ <sup>with</sup> is attributed unlimited power over the material resources of the land, but little is said of his moral virtues). Nevertheless, Breasted remarks, the Babylonians had developed the belief that Shamash, the Sun-god, was a god of justice who disapproved of unsocial conduct. But this recognition of social values did not, he says, "characterize the broad current of Babylonian life or the habitual conceptions of evil as they are found throughout Babylonian literature".

It is Delitzsch ("Babel and Bibel") who provides the solidager for Babylonian influence on Hebrew religious and moral development. In a word, Delitzsch claims the Hebrews virtually owe everything they possess to the Babylonians. This Assyriologist argues that the Babylonians at the time of Hammurabi recognized the sun-god, Sippar, enthroned in the Holy of Holies, as the Universal God. On the basis of documents dating back to Hammurabi's time, Delitzsch contends this god was known as IA-AH-VE-ILU-IA-HU-UM-ILU, or, as he translates it, "JHWH is God, EMMH, the Abiding One, the Permanent One".

As a result of his findings, Delitzsch concluded: "the people of Israel with its literature appears as only the youngest of a venerable and holy group of nations."

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## II - EGYPT: 1700-1400 BCE

The next stage in the religious and moral development of the Hebrews takes place in Egypt during the Hyksos period around 1700 BCE. We know little of this period from the Bible which records the beginnings of the era in the story of Joseph and the account of Jacob's descent into Egypt. The intervening years are passed over in silence in the bible narrative, and Israel's history does not take up again until it reaches the time of Moses and the exodus of Israel from Egypt, some 400 years later.

What sort of civilization obtained in this country which found among (for some four centuries) its inhabitants/the forerunners of the Israelite nation? And later on we are to ask, what influences did the Egyptian culture wield upon the Israelites prior to their exodus?

In the year 4000 BCE there existed in the Nile valley and delta a considerable number of independent city-states or "nomes", each with its separate government and local god or gods which were conceived as the divine guardians of the nome. Gradually the independent nomes became amalgamated into larger units as one or another gained control of its neighbors through superior force; and finally the two kingdoms were formed, the lower kingdom, comprising the Nile delta, and upper Egypt, which extended thence to the first cataract. These two kingdoms, which existed side by side as rivals for a long period, united into a single empire that marked their entrance into history.

For chronological background, the following information should be kept in mind: the Pyramid age occurred during the Second Union, from 3400 BCE to 2500 BCE. The Kerdal Age which followed, lasted until the year 2000 BCE. It was at this time, from 2000 to 1780 BCE, that Egypt became a strong empire

extending her control over Palestine and Syria. From ~~1800~~ 1780 (until 1550) Egypt suffered military reversals and was overrun by the Hyksos, who were mostly Canaanites. It was during this period that the Jacob's descent into Egypt took place. By 1546 Egypt had liberated herself from Hyksos rule, and from then until ca. 1200, Egyptian rule held sway over all the land between her borders and the Euphrates. It was about 1300 BCE (during the reign of the Pharaohs Sethos and Rameses II) that Moses led the Israelites in their exodus from the Egypt.

This political development of Egypt is closely paralleled by a religious development. We have noted that each nome had a local god to which it paid worship. But so closely was the god related to the city that when one city gained supremacy over another, its god also came to be considered as superior to the deity of the conquered city. It then happened that the conquered city turned to the worship of the superior god in place of its own, or that the two were worshiped together, or frequently enough, that the two gods came to be thought of as one, under a hyphenated name. (Thus we find names like Amon-Kneph.) The god of the city in which the king of the territory dwelt became the privileged god. Thus Horus of Behdet became the chief god of Lower Egypt, Set of Onnos the prevailing deity of Upper Egypt. Since these two kingdoms were rivals and were frequently at war, Horus and Set were usually represented as in conflict. Long after the memory of the political conflict faded out the two gods were still thought of as enemies, Horus as the sun in perpetual struggle with Set the power of darkness. When later Memphis became capital of the empire, the god Ptah enjoyed the supremacy. While Thebes was in the ascendancy, Amon was held to be the chief god.

In the early period, the gods were usually represented as animals, and the animals themselves were frequently objects of worship. Thus Amon of Thebes was a ram; Sebek was a crocodile; Thoth was a baboon or an ibis; Hathor of

Demetera was a cow; Bast was a cat; Sekmet of Memphis was a lioness; Apis was a bull. Curiously enough, however, they seem to have been thought of not as animals, but as persons; and from the third dynasty (ca 3000 BCE) they are pictured with a human body but an animal head.

Out of the confusing mass of gods, the priests attempted to bring some sort of order. This took the form of working out sets of family relationships, usually as father, mother and son. Thus An Thebes were grouped Anon, the principal god, Mut, the mother, and Khons, the moon god, as son. The best known of the triads was Osiris, Isis, and Horus; for they played much the most important part in the life of Egypt over a long period of history. (Osiris was a local god of lower Egypt, who became the chief god of Abydos, whence his worship spread over all Egypt. According to widespread myth, Osiris was murdered by his brother, then restored to life and made the ruler of the underworld. At a later period, this myth of the resurrection of Osiris became the center of the Isis cult, which spread over a large part of the Roman world, and was taken as a guarantee of immortality to man, much as the resurrection of Jesus is taken by Christianity).

Besides the local animal gods, the great nature powers were worshipped, for example, the sky, the sun, the moon, and the Nile, which meant so much to the life of Egypt. Some of these were represented symbolically in animal form. Thus Horus, originally a sky god, but later a sun god, was pictured as a falcon soaring in the sky; and the name of the great sun-god Ra was frequently joined with that of the local animal gods (as Sebek-Ra.)

At Heliopolis, of which Atum was the local god, the worship of the sun-god Ra achieved great prominence. The priests of Ra maintained that the sun was the greatest of all gods and were the first to formulate a definite theology.



In 2750 BCE, this solar religion became the religion of the state and some leading Egyptologists consider this a very definite step in the direction of monotheism, one which subsequently influenced the Israelite view of one god.

This state religion however did not come to its own for over a thousand years, and then for only a brief period when Amenhotep IV (1377-1350 BCE) attempted to set aside all the other gods and make Aton, the solar disc, the one and only god. His earnestness in this religious project is seen in his building a new capital which he called Akhetaton, "Horizon of Aton". He changed his own name to Ekhmaton, or Akhnaton, "Spirit of Aton", and ordered the name of the rival god Amen obliterated from monuments and temples. A hymn to the sun from that period is usually considered the finest in all the Egyptian religious literature (which we shall soon discuss in more detail). Apparently, the "monotheistic reform" was shortlived, for with the passing of Ekhmaton the people reverted to their former beliefs. Subsequently, the Egyptian religion underwent decay, with Ekhmaton's son-in-law, Tutankhamen, restoring the worship of the rival god, Amen.

The problem of the after-life was of unusual importance in the Egyptian religious patterns. From a welter of tomb inscriptions we learn that in the earlier periods it was only the king who was thought of as enjoying a happy after-life, that after death he went to a kind of heaven in the east. Later, it developed that all men might aspire to immortality, and it was then that the scene of the future life shifted to the west and was conceived by some as in the sky, by others as in the underworld.

In the earlier period, a happy after-life was thought of as being dependent on the preservation of the physical body (hence embalming became

a specialized art, and pyramids and mastabas were erected all over the Nile Valley, and later on tombs were excavated in solid rock cliffs along the valley in order to preserve royal bodies for their after-life venture.)

The afterlife was thought of as going on ~~in the same~~ very much like ordinary mundane life. This accounts for the offerings of food, drink, implements, and little clay images representing slaves accompanying their masters, at the royal tombs.

Of especial importance to us is the noteworthy ethical development which took place in Egypt: a conception of the afterlife which held that the future destiny of the individual depended upon how morally he had lived in this world. The idea was embedded in magical formula and rites, but it is nonetheless considered a remarkable achievement of the Egyptian world.

Written documents played an important part in early Egyptian religious life. These included: a) The Pyramid Texts - prayers, incantations, and directions designed to <sup>aid</sup> the dead in their journey to the afterworld; these were found inscribed on the walls of the pyramids; b) The Coffin Texts - many of the old pyramid text incantations and newer ones were inscribed on the insides of the coffins to be available to the dead as they entered the next world; c) The Book of the Dead - the sacred canonical book of the Egyptians containing 165 charms, prayers and incantations inscribed on papyrus rolls which were placed in each coffin.

The later document, which appeared to be held in greater reverence than any other, discloses in a chapter on judgment in the afterworld, a negative confession which the individual recites before 42 gods who pass judgment on the individual's right to bliss in the hereafter. Part of the confession reads:

"I did not murder...I did not commit adultery...I did not take away the milk from the mouth of children...I did not use false weights... I did not make the measure short..."

Though some of the sins which the individual was called upon to confess are crude, the general impression is that the Egyptians did achieve a fine sense of ethics and moral insight at least one thousand years before the Israelite exodus.

In the Egyptian conception of ethics, we find they conceived the moral distinction "good" to mean that which is pleasing to the gods, and "evil" as that which incites the anger of the gods. Because of the known Egyptian piety, "good" and "evil" was originally purely ritual and ceremonial, but in historic times we find that, although ritual right and wrong prevailed to some extent, a positive moral distinction was made.

The earliest inscriptions reveal that the family in Egypt was the social unit with its prototype in the life of the gods (i.e., Osiris, Isis, and Horus) and this remained true throughout the whole period of Egyptian civilization. Monogamy was the normal state of marriage ties, although pharaohs are known to possess harems. Marriage between brother and sister appears also to have been permitted.

The Egyptian family was patriarchal (obedience was due to the father) but paternal power over members of the family was not exerted as among the Babylonians. The wife is considered the equal of her husband; he even provided for her in the afterworld. Evidences of family love and filial love as strong forces in family life are found in various stelae dating back to 4000 BCE and in any number of epigrams current in Egyptian life.



In divorce proceedings, the woman had equal standing with her husband and could send him away as easily as he could her. ("wda", the Egyptian word for divorce, means "to make right").

At the top of the social scale stood the king who was considered the earthly manifestation of the "power, goodness, and providence of the gods". (He was called "neb maat", lord of truth, whose job it was to establish truth). The state's duty to the pharaoh was in fact obligatory "emperor-worship". Despite his absolute power, the royal decrees of the Egyptian king, by and large, speak eloquently of the rights of the people and a growth of a real democratic spirit can be observed.

The sense of individual responsibility, which we noted in the Book of the Dead confessions, flourished during the Empire period (ca. 1600 BCE). Although legal literature seems not as highly developed as among the Babylonians, there is evidence of considerable legal contracts, and legal trials. Property rights were recognized and defended by law, and property could be inherited and transmitted by women. Property was subject to taxation (religious institutions were exempted).

Punishments, as meted out by the numerous law courts, were on the whole fair, although there is evidence of severe treatment: in the case of robbery, a man lost his nose, for stealing hides, a man lost the hides and was flagellated one hundred times until five wounds were opened.

The Egyptians were not a <sup>too prominent</sup> commercial people, and their major business and trade interests were conducted on a domestic scale, with more than adequate legal precision.

Except for the king, all men were considered free laborers or servants (and were allowed to possess property). The slaves, however, were little more than chattel; it appears, however, that during the Middle Kingdom (2000-1700 BCE)

kindness to slaves was strongly recommended. During a later period, slaves acquired definite rights and sometimes rose to great prominence in state circles.

The ideal of the country, as seen in a series of hymns dated before the Middle Kingdom, is decidedly peaceful (http). It was after the Hyksos invasion that the formerly peaceful Egyptians were transformed into an aggressively warlike people which they remained until the Persians conquered them.

It is interesting to note that the Egyptians considered their wars holy undertakings which were blessed by their gods.

Such was the state of Egyptian civilization prior to and during the sojourn of the Hebrews. To what extent <sup>did</sup> Egyptian religious and moral ideas penetrate into the Hebrew world of thought? ~~much has been realized from the writings of~~ Prof. James H. Breasted in his exhaustive work on Egyptian civilization, "The Dawn of Conscience", argues that the degree of penetration was great. In fact, it is his contention that virtually all the religious and moral conceptions which have come down to the Western world were fruits of the Egyptian genius, and that the Hebrews served as a sort of transmission belt, relaying these conceptions <sup>to us</sup>, perhaps after intensifying or slightly modifying them. Among the moral and religious ideas which he attributes to Egyptian originality are ethical monotheism, Messianism, the suffering servant, social prophecy, wisdom literature, psalms, etc.

It is impossible to review his entire argument in these pages, but the following quotations from his work suggests his thesis:

—"The earliest known discussion of right and wrong in the history of man is ~~and~~ embedded in a Memphite drama celebrating the supremacy of Memphis and dating from the middle of the fourth millennium BC."

--"In the Second Union (3400 BCE) there arose the earliest conception of a moral order, designated by a significant word "righteousness", "justice", or "truth" (Egyptian "Maat") which endured for a thousand years and made a profound impression on the human mind".

---"The Maxims of Ptahhotep (2700 BC) furnish us with the earliest formulation of right conduct to be found in any literature", half of which deals with personal character and conduct, while the remainder have to do with administrative and official conduct.

---"Having arisen as an individual and personal matter, as a designation of right conduct in the family or immediate community, 'Maat' had then gradually passed into a larger arena as the spirit and method of a national guidance and control of human affairs, a control in which orderly administration is suffused with moral conviction. There was thus created for the first time a realm of universal values, and in conceiving the divine ruler of such a realm the Egyptians were moving on the road towards monotheism. --- It was along this road, as we shall see, that the Egyptians eventually attained monotheism, and it was no accident that they reached it long before any other people; nor is it an accident that the next people to gain monotheism were Egypt's nearest neighbors across the borders of Asia in Palestine...."

*Other*  
~~Other~~ ethical treatises which Breasted considers as precursors to Hebrew ethical ideas are: "Instruction Addressed to Merikere" (2500 BCE); "The Dialogue of a Misanthrope with His Own Soul" (after 2000 BCE) which, Breasted says, "is our earliest Book of Job written some 1500 years before a similar experience brought forth a similar book among the Hebrews".

Under chapter title: "The Earliest Social Prophets and the Dawn of



Messianism", Breasted calls "The Eloquent Peasant" (ca. 2000 BCE), the prototype of the "suffering servant" later found in Isaiah (52 & 53). He considers "The Eloquent Peasant" story the "first moral literature, crusading for social justice". During the Feudal Age (ca 2500-2000 BCE), the "Admonitions of Ipuwer" which calls for the regeneration of society, and expresses longing for the advent of the ideal ruler, is held by Breasted to be "Messianism nearly 1,500 years before its appearance among the Hebrews".

In writing on "Universalism and Monotheism", Breasted asserts: "It is clear that Ikhnaton was projecting a world religion, and endeavoring to displace by it the nationalism which had preceded it for twenty centuries". Calling Ikhnaton a "God-intoxicated man", "a prophet of both nature and of human life", Breasted adds: "While the interpretive art of this revolutionary movement under Ikhnaton's guidance found new content in the life of man, there was much in Egyptian experience with human society which Ikhnaton could not ignore. He fully accepted the inherited Solar doctrine of a great moral order, and in this brief history of Egyptian morals we have devoted some space to the revolutionary monotheism of Ikhnaton, it is for the reason that this whole monotheistic movement is the culmination of the ancient recognition of a moral order by the Egyptian thinkers of the Pyramid Age, and their creation of a universal realm of values, represented by the inclusive term Maat, brought forth by the Sun-God at Heliopolis. This new monotheism grew up on a three-fold basis. The first, as we have seen, was political, so that even the Sun-god's new name was enclosed in a Pharaonic double cartouche; the second was the observation of the Sun-god's universal sway as a physical force, everywhere present in the sun's heat and light; and the third was the logical development of the ancient Heliopolitan doctrine of a moral order, a doctrine some two thousand years old in Ikhnaton's day."

Having drawn this portrait of Egyptian religious and moral life, from the year 4000 BCE until approximately 900 BCE, Breasted proceeds to indicate the specific effects this culture had on the emerging Israelite people who were soon to embark on their <sup>new</sup> religious history.

"The Egyptian background out of which Moses had developed into a great national leaders," Breasted comments, "must in itself have contributed to his vision of YHWH's place in the life of his people! Moses (MOSE is an Egyptian word meaning "child" and a name "not uncommon in Egyptian monuments") "enjoined his countrymen to adopt an enormously ancient Egyptian custom, the rite of circumcision, which in his day had been practiced among the Nile-dwellers for at least 3,000 years and more." This indicates, Breasted stresses, that he was "consciously drawing upon his knowledge of Egyptian religion."

Further, Moses himself carried a magically-potent staff, "doubtless a serpent staff, in which dwelt the power of YHWH, and for the healing of the people he set up a shining brazen image of a serpent, obviously one of the many serpent divinities of Egypt. This image of an Egyptian divinity remained with the Hebrew long after they had settled in Palestine." (They continued to burn incense to it, Breasted adds, for five centuries after Moses' time, and it was not removed from the Temple in Jerusalem until the reign of Hezekiah, late in the eighth century BC (2Kings 18:4).

Estimating the influence of Egyptian moral literature on subsequent Hebrew religious-ethical development, Breasted declares:

"Moses must have been familiar with the writings of the Egyptian social prophets, the oldest of which had been in circulation for fifteen hundred years when Moses began teaching his people. It is obvious that a man brought up with

such literature around him would feel the need for a religion of ethical content for his people. How much moral and ethical teaching Moses left with them, it is now very difficult to determine." But he adds that "the reader may decide for himself whether a leader who had set up a brazen serpent for worship by his people, an image which was preserved and worshiped for centuries in the national sanctuary, could have also laid upon each Hebrew householder the command, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor (the likeness of) any form that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth!' Breasted concludes that the Decalogue must have been written after the nomadic and pastoral Israelites had been transformed into a settled agricultural community in the land of Canaan.

Plunging deeper into Israelite history, after the exodus from Egypt, Breasted points out that during the Hebrew monarchy, "the wealthy trading kings of Phoenicia naturally influenced the outlook of the Israelitish rulers" adding that it is among the Phoenicians that the writings of Ipuwer and Neferrohu (another Egyptian social idealist) found early circulation.

The Canaanite heritage, he continues, upon which the Hebrews later drew was filled with Egyptian ideas of the character of the Sun-God as a righteous ruler of men. Recent excavations at Samaria have revealed the fact that the Egyptians' conceptions of the righteous Sun-god were common in Palestinian life. In the ruins of the Palace of the Israelite kings at Samaria, Breasted says, the excavators discovered some carved ivory relief plaques once forming the decorative incrustation that adorned the furniture of the Hebrew sovereigns. Among these carvings appears a piece bearing the figure of the goddess "Righteousness" (Maat) borne aloft by a solar genius of Heliopolis.--- The entire design is Egyptian in content, but the workmanship shows clearly that



the carving was done by Palestinian craftsmen. Hebrew workmen were therefore familiar with such Egyptian designs, and Hebrews of high station beheld these symbols of the Egyptian Sun-god's righteousness every day adorning the very chairs in which they sat. The Egyptian Sun-god conceived as a righteous sovereign was therefore among the influences which contributed to transform YHWH into a righteous ruler of men.

In later Hebrew ethical development, Egyptian influence is still felt: when superiority of character over ritual observances was set forth, echoes are heard from "Instruction to Merikere" ("More is acceptable is the virtue of the upright man than the ox of him that doeth iniquity").

in the realm of conduct, the Hebrew prophets drew upon the literature of proverbs and fables which before 1000 BCE had already gained international currency (compare Wisdom of Amenemope to Jeremiah 17; also Proverbs) See Breasted pp 365 ff.

the influence of Ikhnaton's famous sun-hymn on Psalm 104.

(We omitted Breasted's contention that the Joseph narratives were originally the Egyptian folk-tale, "The Tale of the Two Brothers", which he said, gained currency in Canaanite Palestine and was later incorporated into the OT.)

In sum this is the argument of Breasted; the Hebrews during their 400 year sojourn in Egypt had come in contact with a rich and highly advanced civilization from which they and their leader Moses had gained a fully-developed conception of ethical monotheism, of ethical and legal systems, as well as ritual practices; when they came to Canaan they found the country already impregnated with Egyptian ideas and practices; both their rulers and

and their prophets drew upon the Egyptian heritage for religious ideas, for literary and art forms, so that in point of fact, everything we call Hebrew is really Egyptian. *in content*

In justice to the sense of proportion of this thesis, it must be pointed out that Breasted's proposition is not universally held. Professors Erman and Hoelscher, for instance, argue that no trace of Egyptian beliefs and ideas has as yet been found in the concepts and usages of ancient Israel. Other scholars, among them Prof. Petrie, go much further, contending that whatever moral awakening developed among the Egyptians is due to foreign influences. The religion of Ikhnaton, which Breasted regards as the full-flowering of ethical monotheism, is--according to Petrie--the result of Semitic influence brought to bear upon Ikhnaton by his Semitic wife and mother.

This thesis is further buttressed by Prof. Gardiner who argues that "between the VI and XII dynasties, Egypt had been liable to periodic incursions on the part of Bedouins of the Semitic Peninsula and of Palestine" and that these Semites, together with the later Semitic invaders, the Hyksos, immolated the Egyptians with a Syrian culture through art, style, language, etc.

Further, it is argued that Ikhnaton's "monotheism" was little more than a refined solar religion, which was virtually universal among all ancient peoples; the ethical and cosmic superlatives applied to Aton were of no special significance since they were applied to many gods, many persons, and many things; and finally, that Ikhnaton's reformation was more a political affair than a religious one. (He sought to demolish the influence of the rival Amon priesthood).

Regarding the influence of Egyptian religious and moral literature on the Hebrews, Breasted is charged with deliberately translating the Egyptian original in a Biblical idiom, and that ~~other~~ *by other scholars* translations, devoid of the Biblical

Class Essay - Part II

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

NON-JEWISH INFLUENCES

ON JEWISH RELIGIOUS & MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Submitted By:

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Department Auspices:

Philosophy of Religion  
PROF M.M. KAPLAN

### III - CANAAN: ca. 1300-1000 BCE

Israel's history as a nation begins with this third phase: the oppression in Egypt (under Seti I, 1319-1301 BCE), the Exodus<sup>1</sup> (from Ramesses II, 1301-1234 BCE), the organization of the people into a ~~ancient~~ covenant nation at Mount Sinai, and the conquest of Canaan. These episodes, and particularly Moses' leadership and the deliverance from bondage accompanied by some natural catastrophe ("the miraculous crossing of the sea when a strong wind backed up the waters") which destroyed the pursuing Egyptian troops, gave the Hebrews an initial heritage of glory which was the earliest influence holding them together as a nation.

In the wilderness, the Israelites occupied oases in the south of Palestine where they established close relationship with the Midianites who were present at Sinai, and among whom was Moses' father-in-law, Jethro or Beuel (Ex. 2:16; 18:1). One of the Midianite clans was called the "Kenites", meaning "metal smiths" (Num 10:29; Judges 4:11) and since the Sinai area was the scene of ancient copper and turquoise mines and one of the occupations of the Midianites was copper mining and smelting, their interest in the mines of Sinai appear obvious.

(1) - Although Numbers 1 and 26 lists the male population of Hebrews in the exodus episode as over 600,000 ("a figure which could mean a total of at least two or three million when women and children are included"), most Biblical scholars assume that between two and six thousand people were actually involved. (WRIGHT & PILSON, p. 37). One view holds "it is questionable whether all the tribes of Israel were ever in Egypt" in view of the fact that "the early legends which have come down to us had taken final shape at a time when the stress was being laid on the national unity of Israel".)



It is from Jethro, one of the sacred ministrants of the Midianites, that Moses is supposed to have learned<sup>1</sup> of their local god YHWH, and to have learned to reverence Sinai (also known as Horeb), the holy mountain.

The manifestation of YHWH as "a pillar of fire" or "a pillar of cloud" during their escape from Egypt, and His appearance on Mount Sinai by day with "thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud" (Ex 19:16) are attributed to a volcanic phenomena. YHWH is considered as a local volcano god who had localized his seat at Mount Sinai. (An attempt to establish the historicity of these "miraculous phenomena" is made by Dr. Emmanuel Velikovsky in his book, "Worlds in Collision". Admittedly, Dr. Velikovsky pays scant heed to generally accepted chronological data (for instance, he considers the Egyptian Ipuwer a contemporary of exodus period, ca. 1300 BCE, quotes one of his "laments" as validation of the factness of the "ten plagues", despite the fact that most authorities place Ipuwer in the Fendal Age of Egypt, between ca 2500-2000 BCE). He also ignores the reasoning of astronomers in order to establish as historical fact such Biblical narratives as the halting of the sun and moon by Joshua.)

Through the influence of Moses and the above manifestations of YHWH's ~~manifestations~~ power and favor, the Hebrews cast out their ancient "els" (Semitic word for local gods: Abraham's "el shaddai", Jacob's ISRAEL, etc)

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(1) In his "Pharisees" Dr. Louis Finklestein points out that the "Hebrew shepherds" also adopted the Cain-Abel tale from the Kenites, "their near neighbors and friends", although they later transformed the story from a primitive war saga into a pacifist allegory. (See "Pharisees", pp 352 ff)

and adopted YHWH as their sole god. It was at this climactic moment that the covenant was entered into. (The question of the covenant will be discussed separately in this paper).

Although we shall outline the ethical and religious life of the Israelites in the next phase of their development;--the conquest of Canaan and the transformation of the Israelites from a nomadic-pastoral people to a settled agricultural community under Canaanite influence---we should here like to point out the features of the Israelite religion in the wilderness on the basis of textual information provided by Kennett. (ENCYCLOPEDIA OF RELIGION and ETHICS, R.H. Kennett, "Israel").

Claiming that we have no direct information on this period since the Biblical accounts were written at a much later date and are therefore colored by later circumstances, Kennett declares the following are some of the main features of "wilderness religion":

1) On the basis of Amos 5:25 and Jeremiah 7:22 he claims that sacrifices (burnt offerings) were not part of the religion in the wilderness; they were infrequent rites confined mainly to the Passover Feast.

2) The Rechabites were representatives of the true Israelite religion (as distinct from the Canaanites) which proclaimed abstinence from agriculture. This abstinence preserved the Israelites from "the crude nature worship with which agriculture was connected".

3) The provenance of YHWH as national Israelite God was uncertain at this time. Exodus 3:14 represents it as revealed to Moses at Horeb, whereas according to Genesis 4:26 the name was known to the antediluvian ancestors of Israel. It is noteworthy that JOSHUA bears a name compounded of the tetragrammaton and it is possible, concludes Kennett, that the tribes of Israel were united in the wor-

ship YHWH before the conquest of Palestine.

4)YHWH, if called by the same name, was venerated by different symbols. Levi, and probably all the Leah tribes, venerated a seraph or winged serpent (recall Breastad on Moses' serpent staff); the Rachel tribe, a bull.

Kennett expresses uncertainty about other features of the Israelitish religion at this time: whether that were brought by Israel into Palestine or were acquired there. Among these are the observances of the new moon and Sabbath, and certain ethical ideas (it is probable that polygamy prevailed, and that although adultery was condemned, concubinage was freely allowed.)

IT IS in the third quarter of the thirteenth century (1250-1225) that Israel under the leadership of Joshua had carried out its conquest of Canaan. What was the cultural framework into which the Israelites now made entry?

Canaan, Breastad maintains, had passed through a civilized development which was over a 1,000 years old when the Israelite invasion took place. Babylonian culture had an important and lasting influence on Canaanite Palestine and it was chiefly through the Canaanites that the influence of Babylonian art, literature and religion were received by the Hebrews. In addition, Breastad contends Egyptian Pharaohs held Palestine as a subject country for over four centuries (for two centuries after the Hebrews ~~xxx~~ settled there), and Canaanite civilization had therefore reached an advanced stage under centuries of Egyptian ~~occupation~~ occupation and was ~~xxxx~~ tinged through with Egyptian elements when the Hebrews invaded the country. The Hebrews, consequently, on entering Palestine, were in immediate contact with a highly advanced composite civilization of the Canaanites, built up largely out of Babylonian and Egyptian elements.



This Canaanite civilization had already passed through a long social experience during which there developed also many cultural elements due to the Canaanites themselves. ("Indeed," says Breasted, "it was without doubt the very language which the Hebrew invaders found in Palestine, the Canaanitish speech, current there at that time, which the Hebrews adopted and which has descended to us as the Hebrew of the Old Testament.")

Although Breasted asserts that "unhappily" we know little of the moral history of these people; i.e., the Canaanites, before the Israelitish invasion, Wright and Wilson as declare that the religious life of Canaan at this time had reached an extremely low level, was of "barbarous character", and was an important factor that hindered the development of the Canaanite civilization.

Many gods were believed to exist and "el" was considered the father of these gods. (Wright & Wilson, pp 36 ff). He was the "father of man" as well as of the gods, the "father of years", and "creator of creatures". One of his epithets was "bull", with which he was likened to a bull in a herd of cows and calves. He was believed to have a wife named Asherah (I Kings 18:19) who was supposed to have borne him a sizeable family, composed of some 70 gods and goddesses. Chief among the offspring, as son or grandson, was Hadad, whom the people called familiarly "Baal" ("Lord"). Baal was the personification of all those forces in nature which produced rain and vegetation. He was the lord of heaven and earth, whose kingdom was "eternal to all generations".

In northern Syria, his wife was believed to be Anath, though in Palestine later another goddess named Ashtoreth (Astarte in Greek) was his wife. Both goddesses were the personifications of love and fertility. Other gods were Mot (Death), Baal's enemy; Resheph, the god of pestilence and lord



of the underworld; Shulman or Shalim, the god who brings health; Koshar or Kothar, the god of arts and crafts including music; etc.

The various stories told about the gods and goddesses (i.e., the mythology) were actually means of explaining how the natural forces of the ~~xxx~~ world operated. Chief among these was the saga about Baal (Rain and Vegetation) being murdered each spring by Mot (Death) and coming to life again in the fall. Thus the cycle of climate in Canaan (dry, rainless summers and rainy winters) was explained. The amazing thing about the gods, ~~as that they~~ <sup>is that they</sup> were conceived in Canaan, is that they had no moral character whatsoever. In fact, their conduct was on a much lower level than that of society as a whole, if we can judge from ancient codes of law. Certainly the brutality of the mythology is far worse than anywhere else in the Near East at that time. Worship of these gods carried with it some of the most demoralizing practices then in existence. Among them were child sacrifice--a practice long since discarded in Egypt and Babylonia-- sacred prostitution, and snake worship on a scale unknown among other peoples.

(This information is largely culled from the recently-discovered Ugarit texts dating about 1400 BCE, and also from the Tel-El-Amarna letters which disclose the drifting of Hebrew nomads into Palestine and reveal data on pre-Israelite Canaan. These documents, which were written in a new cuneiform alphabet closely akin to the Hebrew of the OT, contain a portion of the long-lost Canaanite religious literature and mythology, frequent allusions to which occur in the OT, as we shall see. The texts also contain many words and phrases borrowed by Israel, and provide a great deal of information about Canaanite poetry, certain forms of which were borrowed by the Israelites and used in their own psalmody; Judges 5; II Samuel 1:19; Ps 29; Ps 68, etc).

It was not long before the Israelite conquerors, with the exception of some families (such as the Rechabites) became thoroughly merged with the conquered Canaanites, adopting the customs and consequently, to a greater extent the religion of the latter. (For a detailed discussion of this "merger" process see the "Pharisees", pp 187 ff, where it is pointed out that as the Israelites adapted themselves to the soil, some of them forgot their early purist doctrines which considered degrading the entire agriculture civilization, including the building of houses and cities, planting vines and trees, wearing ornaments of gold and silver, riding horses, possessing chariots, or building a temple for their god or representing their god in statues of stone or wood or gold, etc)

Canaanite sanctuaries continued to exist as sanctuaries of the mixed race resulting from the fusion of conquerors and conquered. According to Kennett at these sanctuaries Israel acquired the patriarchal heroes associated with them. Thus, at Bethel Israel learned the tradition of Jacob; at Ramah, of Rachel; at Shechem, of Joseph, etc, and these now being regarded as ancestors of the united people, would have deeds assigned to them which in pre-Israelite times had not been told of them. With the growing sense of unity of the nation traditions originally local obtained a wider currency and, in the course of time, the reputed ancestors of clans were regarded as ancestors of great tribes or even the whole nation. (Perhaps, says Kennett, the only sanctuary during the period of the Judges which might be regarded as genuinely Israelite was Shiloh).

That the religion of Israel should be greatly affected by Canaan was inevitable. Since in primitive times, agriculture was bound up with religion so that agricultural operations might almost be reckoned as ritual observances, a pastoral people in adopting agriculture would, almost of necessity, adopt the religion of the agriculturists. Hence Canaanite feasts became Israelite and

the name Baal by which the Canaanites devoted their God, was applied to YHWH. (Household gods appear to have been common;--1 Samuel 19:13; Genesis 31:19); here and there a chieftain or wealthy man, such as Gideon or Micah, would build a sanctuary for an idol which would be revered by the family or tribe.)

Among the other Canaanite influences were: (1) the local cults of early Moloch worship (sacrifices of first-born children, a faint trace of which remains in the story of Melchizedek); (2) high places with altars (which appear to have been numerous, together with larger sanctuaries with temples and idols. The more important sanctuaries had organized priesthoods with the priest acting as a repository of religious traditions, custodian of whatever idols were kept, and possessor of the oracle (sacred lots) which enabled him to become the exponent of the common law); (3) the Kadeshim, "sacred men", who acted as surrogates of god in stimulating the reproductive powers of nature. The sacrifice of the first born, Kennett asserts, was associated with Kadeshim, since the "opening of the womb", the fruitfulness of marriage, was ascribed to the union with the god acting in the person of the Kadeshim, the first-born naturally being regarded as the property of the god. The office of the sacred women, Kadeshoth, may have been an extension of the Kadeshim principle, or may have been directly derived from Ashteroth worship (see above/ p 34); (4) diviners, Kosemim, who appear as prominent figures during Israelite monarchy ~~fixes~~ (Isaiah 3:2; Micah 3:7). (Wright & Wilson considers these of Babylonian origin, associated with the Gilgamesh epic. Balaam, hired by the king of Moab to curse Israel is one of these, later prohibited by Deuteronomy 18: 9-14).

(In speaking of those who ascertained the divine will by mechanical means, we should mention prophets and seers who claimed divine knowledge through intuition ~~and~~ or inspiration. Originally the prophets appear to have been groups

enthusiasts who stirred up the martial spirit of the people (setting forth YHWH'S will in war) but with the advent of peace that became exponents of his will in other matters.)

It is of interest to point out that during this period of the Judges, Israel was a loose federation of tribes being chiefly in the central ridge of Palestine, while around her ~~at~~ were strongly organized neighbors. The tribes were held together, not by a central political figure who exercised dictatorial control, but solely by a common tradition and a religious bond or "covenant". The visible symbol of the bond was the "Ark of the Covenant" which during most of the period of the Judges rested in the central sanctuary at Shiloh. With no central government the tribes would be in constant danger of attack from raiders and "oppressors" on every hand, unless the Israelite sense of ~~xxx~~ religious unity were kept so strong that danger to one tribe would immediately cause all tribes to come to its defense.

But according to the Book of Judges, and as reflected above, the people in settling down to an agricultural life succumbed in large measure to the seductive nature worship which the religion of Canaan. Whenever they did this, we are told, God sent "oppressors" to afflict them (Judges 2). In other words, the more paganism that adopted the weaker the covenant bond between them came, and the more each tribe tended to live by and for itself, isolated from the other tribes. This disunity made subjugation and oppression by outsiders relatively easy.

Complete disaster for Israel in these crises was avoided by spontaneous leaders who were called "judges". These figures have been called "charismatic" leaders because they were believed to possess some special gift of God's grace. They were set apart from others by special abilities, such as military prowess, wisdom, honesty, and natural capacities for leadership. In disputes between



individuals and families, it was only natural that the cases be taken before such leaders for decision. In this way the name "judges" was given to them, though for the most part the stories about them appear as military leaders. (The charismatic nature of the leadership of this period is considered a remarkable Israelitish feature).

SHORTLY AFTER 1200 BCE there appeared in the Southern coastal plain a people called Philistines (from whom the name "Palestine" was later derived). Between 1050 and 1020 BCE (when the ark was taken to the Temple of Dagon and Shiloh was destroyed) the Philistines were able to dominate Israel politically, and it is therefore at this time that the Israelites came to Samuel demanding a king who would organize them and drive off the oppressor. Thus began the monarchy.

Of the religious history of Israel under the monarchy down to the middle of the 9th century BCE there is little information. We hear of Saul's construction of altars (I Samuel 14:35), of David's bringing the ark to Jerusalem and institution of a sanctuary on Mt Zion (the court became not only the center of political unity, but religious unity as well, II Samuel 6), of Solomon's building of the Temple (using Canaanite artists and architects, employing Canaanite music and instruments in Temple worship), and of the adoption of Bethel and Dan as the national sanctuaries of North Israel and as a set-off against Jerusalem.

(These stories, Kennett claims, are not contemporary history, but belong to a later period. Certain flanges of primitive Israelite religion, such as, the hacking to pieces of Agag "before YHWH" (I Samuel 15:32), the conception of the ark as the YHWH's actual dwelling place, the method of its removal in a new cart drawn by horned cattle (II Samuel 6:3), David's dance before it (II Sam 6:14) have entered into the narrative thanks to the "inadvertence of the editors").

ISRAELITE RELIGIOUS history is said to begin about the middle of the 9th century BCE when a new danger for the religion of YHWH had been brought about by Omri's ~~1271-852~~ (882 - 871 BCE) alliance with the kingdom of Tyre and the marriage of his son Ahab (871-852 BCE) with Jezebel. Hitherto YHWH, at least in name, had been accepted as the sole god of the nation. But now an attempt was made to introduce the worship of the Tyrian Baal, and this was the more dangerous since many elements of the Canaanite religion had already passed over into that of Israel. This movement, which had considerable popular appeal, was fiercely resisted by the Gileadite ~~prophet~~ prophet, Elijah, (871 - 851 BCE), who left to his successor, Elisha (851 - 787 BCE) the task of maintaining the cause of YHWH against Baal. It seemed for some time a forlorn hope for Omri and Ahab were powerful kings, but the party of Elisha, at last succeeded with the aid of Jehu in overthrowing the dynasty of Omri and in impressing on the nation acceptance of the principle - "No God but YHWH in YHWH's land..."

It is difficult to determine whether Elijah's school attempted any reform in the worship of YHWH, but it is probable, says Kennett, that the requirements of the YHWH religion were now formally set forth in the ancient Decalogue (which can be distinguished in both of the earliest documents of the Pentateuch: Deuteronomy 5: 6; Exodus 20:1) and which was probably drawn up in Northern Israel and subsequently adapted in Judaea during the reign of Josiah. (The original draft of this Decalogue was probably ~~drawn~~ engraved on two stone tablets which were preserved at Bethel, and the Judaea copy on two similar tablets which, since they indicated YHWH's right against any other god, might be deposited in the Ark, which had probably been originally the portable shrine of YHWH's image--the bronze seraph--and which perhaps still contained it.) In this way we may explain how it was that the Ark came to be called the 'Ark of the Covenant'.

IT IS TIME now to sum up the first major phase of Israel's religious development and to outline the status of the ethical requirements at this pre-prophetic period which were demanded of Israel. The conception of YHWH has now achieved definition in the minds of the Israelites. YHWH is to be worshipped because of:

a) his moral character, b) his power (i.e., his superior strength over other gods). Both these attributes were manifested in the exodus from Egypt and in the conquest of Canaan where, in both instances, He showed pity on Israel's sufferings and revealed his strength in delivering them into the Promised Land.

Based on these two conceptions of YHWH, certain allegiances were demanded of Israel:

1) Israel must be the people of YHWH; i.e., Israel must fear Him (stand in awe before His holiness), must submit to His will; must revere His name; must obey His commandments as revealed through His spokesmen; must trust in His promises or predictions, and must love Him. (Numerous biblical references for these allegiances are found in L. B. Paton's essays in THE EVOLUTION OF ETHICS by Smith, pp. 322-160 ff.)

2) Israel must worship no other God (Elijah was especially insistent in this demand).

Alliance to YHWH calls for hostility to all other gods, indicating that other gods did exist, but that they must not be worshipped. (This is called henotheism or monolatry, rather than monotheism.)

a) The divinities of other nations were forbidden--viz., Elijah and the Tyrian Baal--(but foreigners residing in Israel were allowed to worship their ancestral gods. I Kings 11:7; 15:11-13).

b) Canaanite gods were forbidden; i.e., while "baals" were considered



foreign gods, their worship was prohibited, but when YHWH absorbed them and appropriated their sanctuaries, they were regarded as manifestations of Him. (Eighth centuries prophets appeared unable to compromise with Baal).

Hostility toward the Canaanite gods involved destruction of their sanctuaries, high stones, altars, images, abbeys, avoidance of their customs (Ex 23:24) refraining from making treaties with them, or marriages with them. Annihilation of the Canaanites was also commanded lest that should seduce Israel into worshipping their gods (Joshua 6:17; 8:25; I Samuel 15:2; II Samuel 21:2; Exodus 23:33).

c) The Cult of the Dead (i.e., the spirits, "elohim", such as the ghost of Samuel in I Sam 28:13) was forbidden as were the magical arts (divination auguries, charms, etc) which were regarded as belonging to the cults of other gods and as rivals to the legitimate methods of inquiry, such as the ark, ephod, urim and thummim, and prophecy which belonged to YHWH.

Along with this conception of allegiance to YHWH and hostility to his adversaries, there developed the allied conceptions of "holiness", "unclean", and "clean". Holiness was more a physical than a moral quality, one that could be transmitted to things everything connected with the deity (holy places, holy trees, holy stones, holy temples, holy garments, etc), and "holy", therefore, in this early religious sense meant "tabu for YHWH".

"Unclean" on the other hand, meant "tabu" for some other god and included everything connected with the worship of other gods, everything connected with foreigners who were worshippers of other gods, all physical defects which were believed to be caused by the activity of evil spirits, everything connected with sexual life because this was associated with Astarte cults, among other specific tabus which were to be avoided by the Hebrews.



"Clean" denoted that which was not "tabu" for YHWH nor "tabu" for another god and which therefore might be used freely.

Second to this fundamental demand--that of allegiance--which belief in YHWH compelled ~~from~~ among the Israelites was that of worship. This demand involved development of the idea of "holy places" wherein YHWH revealed Himself, "holy objects" which were found at the holy places and in which the sanctity of the spot was focused, "holy times" which were, so to speak, YHWH'S office hours when He was more apt to be found than at other times (these "holy times" which were mainly survivals from Semitic festivals, Mosaic institutions, and Canaanite institutions were divided into: a) astronomical holy days (new moons, the Sabbath), b) pastoral holy days (Passover, the three annual pilgrimage feasts which originated in the nomadic period), c) agricultural holy days (mainly of Canaanite influence, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Ingathering, etc), and d) Sabbatical year. ) The rites which obtained at these holy days--i.e., the stroking or kissing of the holy object, dancing before YHWH--were preliminary to the act of animal sacrifice which, in primitive conception, betokened a meal in which the worshipper partook thus sealing his communion with his "god. Sacrifice of first born children, and in some cases, of adults, were known as part of the worship procedure in early Hebrew times (although prophetic circles were vehemently opposed to these abominations). Corollary with the sacrifice was the institution of prayer which found the ancient Israelite invoking the help of YHWH through invocations, declarations, petitions for himself, petitions for others, promissory prayers, argumentative prayers, and thanksgiving prayers.

AS IS APPARENT, YHWH'S demands of His people in the early period were mainly ceremonial, still morality was also a vital part of His service.

Many social usages of that time which today would be considered ethically indifferent were then regarded as religious duties protected by divine sanctions, while other matters which to us are of highest ethical import were apparently ignored.

What we consider universal human rights was then operative only for the "Israelite" to whom the biblical appellations "brother" and "neighbor" mainly applied. Despite the fact that the Book of the Covenant proclaims: "An alien thou shalt not wrong, neither shalt thou oppress him, for ye were aliens in the land of Egypt" we are aware that non-Israelites stood outside the pale of moral obligation. (Instances: extermination of Canaanites, Amalekites, Edomites; on restriction of legal rights for aliens in Israel; selling of carrion forbidden to Israelite permitted to non-Israelite, exaction of debts of an alien, taking interest from an alien.) Hebrew slaves, women and children were denied civil privileges although they were guarded from gross abuse and injustices.

Early Hebrew legislation assured the Israelites the rights of life (involving the principle of blood revenge, cities of refuge, lex talionis, etc), rights of liberty (no moral objections was raised against slavery which was then a universal oriental institution; kidnapping a freeman for selling into slavery was punishable by death), rights of property (real estate ownership was safeguarded, theft/~~of~~ <sup>or injury to</sup> personal property was condemned and punished, equitable relationships between buyer and seller, employer and employee, principal and agent, lender and borrower, creditor and debtor were demanded and provided for in legislative codes), rights of truth (forbidding false witness and perjury, forbidding breach of contracts which were considered a religious as well as a civil offense since agreements were

confirmed with an oath to YHWH), rights of kindness (which the religion of YHWH required to be extended to the entire nation who were all "brothers" and "neighbors"; peaceableness, forgiveness of injuries, friendship, gratitude, fidelity, hospitality, and generosity-- all these moral qualities, numerous examples of which are listed in EVOLUTION OF ETHICS, pp 183 ff, were urged upon the Israelites ~~as divine imperatives~~ as divine imperatives (and which were pedagogically illustrated in the Bible narratives recounting the moral excellences of ancient Israel's saints and sages.)

The Israelite derived certain rights from family relations and these are delimited in marriage legislation (in order to keep property in the family the degrees of kinship were clearly defined). In general, the husband had a considerably dominant position in family relations, practicing polygamy, concubinage, not being constrained to chastity before marriage or fidelity in the marriage relation. From a legal viewpoint, the husband was considered the "baal" or owner of his wife ~~who~~, from all intent and purpose, was regarded as the chattel of the husband, like all the rest of his personal property. Absolute chastity was required of the betrothed girl and the wife both of whom were severely punished or killed in the event of consenting to seduction or infidelity. (Despite the inferior legal status which was accorded the Israelite woman, it is held that her actual position in the family area was superior to that of her fellow-woman in other oriental civilizations.)

One of the Israelite wife's chief duties was to bear children (barrenness was considered a curse), and failing her duty, the husband took a second wife (accounting for polygamy) or concubines; in the case of the death of the husband, the nearest male relative of the deceased was required to take his widow and raise up seed for him. Also, a man might divorce his wife for barrenness or for any other cause, as was Semitic custom.



Legally, Israelite parents had the right to put their children to death, but this was seldom practiced on account of the developed sense of parental love and the craving for children. A father could, however, sell his children into slavery (a daughter could be sold as a wife or as a concubine slave, or be dedicated as a "nadeshah"). In general, children's position did not differ from that of slaves as long as they remained under the parental roof.

If a man seduced an betrothed girl, his only punishment was that he must pay her father the dowry that would have brought if she had been sold as a wife, thus indicating that seduction was regarded merely as invasion of the property rights of a father in his daughter.

On the other hand, children were required to honor father and mother and striking or cursing them was punishable with death. A rebellious son was to be reported to the elders of the city, and they were to stone him to death. The only specified rights of children in Hebrew legislation were those of inheritance. All sons shared alike in inheritance regardless of the status of the mother (whether concubine or slave). When a man left no sons, his daughter inherited his property, with the proviso that she should marry men of her own tribe to prevent the possibility of property being alienated from the tribe. To insure the maintenance of the ancestral cult, the firstborn son was compensated with a double portion of the estate.

Slaves stood in much the same relation as children to the head of the household, hence they did not feel hardship in their position. They were personal property, and injury to them must be compensated to their master. Special provision was made for the Hebrew slave who enslaved for debt was to be set free in the seventh year (Hebrew woman slave was not set free in the seventh year; if married during his thralldom, the Hebrew slave could take his wife with him on leaving, excepting when the master gave him a wife, she remained with the master on the day



slave's freedom. If the Hebrew slave preferred to remain with his master after the seventh year, he was brought to a sanctuary, his ear was pierced with an awl, then he remained in permanent servitude. Other legislative provisions for slaves: a master who killed his slave was punished, but not with death; a master who injured his slave was obliged to set him or her free; a runaway slave was not to be returned to his master.

The ancient Hebrew legislation also defined the rights derived from governmental relations. Rulers were considered ordained by God (Moses at the command of YHWH appointed judges and officers, kings were chosen and anointed by prophets); and accordingly, it was the duty of subjects to render them respect and obedience: "Thou shalt not revile God, nor curse a ruler of thy people".

Regarding personal morality, the complete subordination of the individual to the group in early times, and the lack of a formulated conception of individual immortality makes understandable the small development in ancient Israel of the ethic of the individual. Modesty was regarded as a virtue, industry was commended, gross sexual vices were forbidden, skill and wisdom and courage were admired, but moderation in eating and drinking were apparently little cherished.

On the whole, the chief requirements of YHWH worship during this period were ritual; nevertheless, all the fundamental forms of morality were obligations to Him. Even in this preprophetic form, YHWHism was ethically superior to the other religions of antiquity.

On the whole, the chief requirements of YHWH worship during this period were ritual---nevertheless, and significantly, all the fundamental forms of morality were considered obligations to Him.

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#### V - MONARCHY & FIRST LITERARY PROPHETS (800 - 621 BCE)

In the middle of the eighth century BCE a great forward movement in the Israelite religion took place. The victories of Jeroboam II (787-747 BCE) who rectified Israel's borders and defeated the Aramaeans, were attributed to YHWH -- the "Day of YHWH" was now celebrated by the masses of the people in the Temple with sacrifices and offerings. Through increased commerce, the nation became prosperous, and simultaneously, the religion became perverted. (Materials for the sacrifices were obtained thru extortion. The Rechabites and prophets objected to these perversions).

Sacrifices now became integral to the YHWH religion - for animals were easy to procure, and wealthy patricians satisfied their gluttony at sacrificial feasts while believing they were propitiating YHWH.

AMOS (767 - 747 BCE), the plebeian shepherd of Tekoa, protested against the perverted religious practices, warning that because of the sins, the Divine wrath would subjugate Israel through Assyria (North Israel came to an end in 722 BCE with the fall of Samaria). Importantly, Amos regarded sacrifices as a misdirection of energy, saying that YHWH requires mercy instead. He also stressed that Israel's fathers worshipped without sacrifices.

In his eyes, the "Day of YHWH" originally directed against Israel's mortal enemies now became aimed against all unrighteousness.

HOSEA (747 - 735 BCE), the peasant prophet from the north, presents a darker picture of the Israelite religion during the days of the monarchy. He denounced the ritual sins of Baal worship, religious prostitution, futility of sacrifices, asserting that sanctuaries are the cause of Israel's degradation (YHWH is God of justice and love, not ritualistic), attacking superstitious reverence of Bethel golden bulls which originated in nature worship. It is probable that Hosea began the movement which later introduced the law prohibiting idol-worship in Israel. His influence is also apparent on Jeremiah's teachings; his own times, however, were not propitious for religious reforms. In 734, shortly after Hosea's prophecy, Tiglath-Pileser II invaded Northern Israel which fell completely in 722 BCE.

Despite the deportation of thousands of Northern Israelites by the Assyrians, the worship of YHWH continued. The fulfillment of Hosea's prophecies, that is, the destruction of the idols and sanctuaries in 722 BCE, strengthened the reformers, and resulted in the enlargement of the Decalogue by the law forbidding idol-worship (Exodus 20:23). According to Kennett, the attempt to win over the heathen imported from northwest Mesopotamia and the Assyrian Empire resulted in further development of the YHWHistic religion.

In Judah, little is known of the religious life from the period of the reformation of JOASH (829 - 800 BCE) until that of AHAZ (742-725 BCE), but it is believed, says Kennett, that Judean religious life was not superior to that of northern Israel.

ISAIAH (756-542 BCE), the "aristocrat" from Jerusalem, contributed to the religious development of Israel by insisting: 1) on the incompatibility of YHWH's majesty and holiness with image-symbols (this is considered due in



some measure to Hosea's influence], and conceiving of YHWH in higher terms; 2) influencing Hezekiah (725 - 697 BCE) to carry out drastic reforms, such as the destruction of the bronze seraph (II Kings 18:4) -- (See The Decalogue, one view asserts, which was accepted from Northern Israel as the legacy of Elijah during the reign of Joash (839-800 BCE), now included prohibitions against molten gods (Exodus 34:17) -- the uprooting of the asherah and high places. The people were angered by these drastic reforms (II Kings 18:22) but the menace of Sennacherib sidetracked any revolt (Isaiah's strong promise of YHWH's protection enabled him to influence Hezekiah's religious innovations).

After Hezekiah's death, monotheism seemed doomed in Judah because of the introduction of ancient superstitions and new cults of Assyrian officials and settlers. (It is suggested that these foreign influences also effected favorable improvements in some of the primitive Jerusalem worship: witness, Amaz (732) adopting the altar pattern of Damascus (II K 16:10).

While in Judah, YHWH seemed in jeopardy and reform was quashed under Manasseh (696-642), in Samaria the future looked brighter. According to Kennett, YHWHism was one of the many cults among the imported admixture of Aramaeans, Philistines and others. Because of their ties with the royal family, the priests at the great Bethel sanctuary were deported, and the work of Amos, Hosea, Elijah, and Elisha seemed imperiled. The turning point appeared to have come with the plague of the lions after the long war and the depopulation. The prophets now appealed to the new settlers, saying that the neglect of YHWH cult was responsible, and the Assyrian king then allowed the priests to return and teach the YHWH cult. (To win the imported settlers over to YHWH, the building of altars was encouraged. I Kings 18:30). An important development at this time was the fact that the golden Bethel bull



was destroyed and the Bethleite priesthood worshipped without idols, teaching the primitive Decalogue with the anti-image clause.

To instruct the alien stock in Israelite common law and religious worship, the primitive Decalogue was combined with a collection of laws relating air to slavery, property, etc. in order to unite the Samaritan population in a unified system of customs. (Exodus 20:23 - 23).

Further, to imbue the Samaritans with the traditions of Israel, E (the Elchist) document was prepared from local sanctuary narratives, including the patriarchal legends, the Egyptian exodus, the wilderness episode, the giving of the law by Moses (the law was the primitive Decalogue). As support of the theory that "E" was a document for the heathen population, the following is summoned: 1) Genesis 35:2-4; 2) the proper name of God is not the same as revealed to the nation and Moses; 3) Exodus 3:13-15 ("E-he-ye" is identical with the Aramaic "He will be"). Accordingly then, it is held that the "E" document was probably completed by the end of the seventh century, with the Bethel sanctuary responsible for its final shape.

The writing of the "E" document, it is pointed out, provided the stimulus for the writing down of other Northern Israelite traditions, such as the conquest of Canaan, the exploits of the judges, kings, and prophets. (Evidence: 1) Elijah is shown as a YHWE protagonist; 2) these accounts are by and large friendly to heathens; 3) Numbers 23:7 - Balaam from Aram asserts the superiority of YHWE.)

## VI - SECOND LITERARY PROPHETS, THE EXILE and THE RETURN (621 - ca. 400 BCE)

In Judah, following the death of Manasseh (ca. 641 BCE), the reaction against reform slowly evaporated. The reformation impetus came in 626 BCE with the news of the Scythian invasion in northern Palestine, now menacing Judah. The prophets began to preach repentance as a means of averting the threatened blow. JEREMIAH (639-598 BCE), who preached for the next 40 years, showed the influence of Hosea (which is suggested by the theory that under Manasseh Judean reformers fled to Samaria). Jeremiah attributed the oncoming blow to idolatrous evils plus the influence of the Aramean and Assyrian cults during the Manasseh reign.

In 621 BCE, during the repair of the Temple under Josiah (639-609), a scroll was found which convinced Josiah of the need for reform. (Kennett vaunts the theory that this scroll was not the Deuteronomy 5-28 passage which, he claims, came after the exile (598), but probably the scroll of Micah or Isaiah or Hosea's prophecies brought to Jerusalem from Bethel after Manasseh's fall.)

As a result of this find, the reforms undertaken included; 1)the destruction of the country sanctuaries; 2)the death of Kadeshim in the Temple; 3)abolishment of foreign cults; 4)the sacrifice was celebrated only in Jerusalem.

These reforms resulted in considerable dissension; there was now wrangling between the Zadokite priests in the Temple and the unemployed Levites of the country sanctuaries; the distance of the central Jerusalem sanctuary led many to give up sacrifices resulting in a class of prophets pleading for their reinstatement. Those who dropped the sacrifices were also exhorted to observe at least the great feasts (Exodus 34:23), and the

importance of the sacrifices was stressed in retelling the Patriarchal sacrifices. These exhortations formed the basis of the "J" document -- which was attributed to Moses.

Jeremiah opposed these exhortations to sacrifice (7:22), attacked the superstitions which lingered after the reform, and the moral evils which lurked in the Temple. The impending attack of the Chaldeans led Jeremiah (in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, 604-603) to dictate prophecies to Baruch, saying that although the Scythian invasion did not come off, the prophecy of doom would come true in the Chaldean attack.

Jehoiachin (608-598) rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, was killed in the Chaldean siege of Jerusalem to be succeeded by his son, Jehoiakin, who ruled for three months and then surrendered. Jehoiakin, the royal family, the Zadokite priests (about 3,023) were taken exile to Babylonia. Mattaniah (Zedekiah), Jehoiakin's uncle, now was made king of Judah. Incited by Egypt, Zedekiah rebelled, this resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem (598 BCE), the Temple, the walls, and the blinding of Zedekiah, his deportation with priests to Babylon. (Kennett says that Jerusalem bore the brunt of the attack, that a considerable population remained over which Gedaliah ben Achikam was appointed for five years when he was killed and the third transportation took place).

Fearing Chaldean punishment for the death of Gedaliah, a number of Israelites fled to Egypt where a number of cults were--at Elephantine they built an altar to YHWH. In his last years, Jeremiah went to Egypt too (possibly returned to Jerusalem to die).

Jeremiah marked the beginning of INDIVIDUALISM (31:29) -- which came with the breakdown of the nation--and Messianic prophecy (23:5-8 33:15f).



After the destruction of Jerusalem, Judah and Samaria were drawn closer together. The Aaronite priesthood at Bethel, which the Assyrian rulers permitted to be opened, now served at the Jerusalem sanctuary. Under such religious union, the "E" and "J" documents were also united into the "JE". Jerusalem was made one sanctuary, resulting in a number of compromises between the Samaritans (who in teaching the heathens held that sacrifices of the first born belong to YHWH) and the Judeans (who under Jeremiah's influence were opposed to sacrifices).

Among the important compromises were: 1) sacrifice of the first-born was prohibited; 2) blood of domestic animals need be poured on the ground, not on the altar; 3) the priesthood, formerly exclusively Zadokite, was now opened to country Levites; 4) certain sanctuaries, no longer places for sacrifice, were maintained as centers of asylum (Deut 19:1-13; 4:41; Jos 20)?

The outcome of these compromises and reforms was the "D" document (Deut 12:26; with the law stressing that sacrifices are to be offered at the One Altar) which also included from "E", the non-Judean teachings, the great feasts, priest maintenance, ending superstitions, permitting the eating of flesh at home, lifting the sacrifice above the merely "eat flesh" level.

To avert the infrequency of religious worship, there were prefixed hortatory addresses through Moses' mouth. To appease the Jeremiah school which insisted on justice and the moral virtues, there was included the new Decalogue (Deut 5) based on Jeremiah 7:9; 9:1-8. (Shechem also agreed to accept the One Sanctuary (Deut 27: 2-4), purging their own stones of heathen associations and inscribing the new law on them).



The Gibe Sanctuary now became the central rallying point for the nation, and national unity was so strongly fostered that special legislation for the new king was included in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. The "D" document appears to have been accepted before the appointment of Zerubbabel as governor.

IN BABYLONIA, the Jews were nationalistic and were less inclined to settle down in a foreign country, as were the Elephantine Jews who built Temples to YHWH. The presence of the Zadokite priests among the exiles (who came with Jehoiakin, 597) and who claimed only one sanctuary at Jerusalem, prevented the establishment of such in exile.

EZEKIEL (592-570), who was born the son of a wealthy priest associated with the Jerusalem Temple and who was imbued with Zadokite traditions (which were created after the 621 reforms), held that Israel's disasters were due to the sins of his people; i.e., the social evils, but as a priestly votary he emphasized that these sins stemmed from the idolatrous practices contaminating the YHWH worship. His viewpoint was essentially sacerdotal, made clear in his considering sacrifices a divine institution.

With some of the exiles accepting heathenism, Ezekiel became "individualistic", striving to keep INDIVIDUALS faithful to YHWH. To vindicate YHWH's justice, he insisted on YHWH's personal relationship to the individual soul. (Chapter 18, echoing ~~YHWH~~ Jeremiah 31:29). Ezekiel's greatest achievement was the forging of a weapon enabling YHWH religion to withstand heathenism; believing in the return to Jerusalem, he committed to writing the priestly traditions of the Temple, introducing his own improvements in old traditions, and reducing the Levites to an inferior position in the priestly hierarchy.

(In writings similar to Ezekiel, Zadokite priests codified the Law of Holiness (Leviticus 17-26) which requires the slaughter of domestic animals and blood-fat offerings at the central sanctuary, showing this is anterior to Deuteronomy.)

During this exilic (and the post-exilic) period, when the Israelites came into contact with the Persians and their Zoroastrianism, it is held by a number of authorities that "the religious development of the Hebrews was affected by the teachings of Zoroaster".

In view of the destruction of Jerusalem, "the very citadel of God's own people, the outlook seemed almost hopeless", writes Braden. He adds:

"Yet there were those who kept saying that although judgment had fallen upon the group as a whole, a remnant would return. As the hope of an earthly kingdom steadily waned, particularly after their contact with the Zoroastrian religion which they met during the Persian period, the note of individual immortality, with its compensation in a future world for the suffering and injustice in this world, began to emerge. Heaven and hell began to find a place in their system. Their minds began to turn toward an other-worldly kingdom which would be ushered in by a divine intervention in human affairs. One large group even came to believe in the resurrection of those who had already died to a life in the new kingdom. In other words, the apocalyptic hope became joined with the Messianic hope.

"This," Braden adds, "is particularly notable in the latter books of the Old Testament, such as Daniel, and even more pronounced in other books known as the Apocryphal writings."

THIS PERSIAN PERIOD mentioned above comes clearly into focus in the second year of Darius (520-519)/ Zerubabel, a member of an exiled

Judean family, was appointed governor of Judea. Some authorities hold it unlikely that a large scale return of exiles to Judah took place under him, but, they assert, it is probable that Zerubabel, on return was accompanied by a retinue which included a large number of Zadokite priests.

Jerusalem and the Temple were still in ruins. Haggai (520 BCE), who was a native Palestinian and not subject to Babylonian influences, took advantage of the enthusiasm aroused ~~at~~ at Zerubabel's appointment, and urged (on September 1, 520) the people to rebuild. On October 21, the foundation stone was laid (and the building was completed in 516).

Zachariah (520-516), returned from Babylonia, continued to flame enthusiasm in the building of the Temple, but deprecated Zerubabel's attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem wall.

It should be pointed out that Dr. Finklestein, in the PHARISEES, declares that Zachariah showed the considerable influence which Babylonia wielded on the exiles, particularly as reflected in this prophet's conception of angelology. In addition to claiming the new idea that God spoke to him through angels, Zachariah is considered by Dr. Finklestein as the first in Jewish literature to speak of Satan as the angel of evil, therewith replacing Ahriman, the Zoroastrian "satan".

Zerubabel's attempt to rebuild the Jerusalem walls aroused the suspicions of the Samaritans who thought him bent on becoming another Solomon and threatening forced labor.

In the Temple at this time, Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, who was possibly an Aaronite of Bethel, was opposed by the returning Zadokites. Zachariah championed Joshua, with the result that Zadokites who wished to ~~start~~

serve as priests had to enroll in the Aaron guild (this purportedly explains why Ezekiel refers to the "Zakokites and Levites" whereas the Priestly Code refers to the "Aaronites and Levites".)

Jealousies now arose between Samaria and Judah because, among other reasons: 1) the Zerubabel party was strong in Jerusalem; 2) Nehemiah was fervently anti-Samaritan and had developed such a following; Nevertheless, essential unity continued. To emphasize this unity, writers of the "J & E" documents collected ancient traditions of tribal conquests of Palestine, and to stem the idolatry among the arriving heathens, they employed stories of the past, used hymns (Deut 32), urged blessings (Deut 33), and also used collections of some of the prophets.

Three attempts were made to rebuild the Jerusalem wall (515, 495, and 460-55 BCE). With the permission of Artaxerxes, Samaritans (with the aid of the Ammonites and Moabites) demolished the wall, burned the gates and carried off captives. (Samaria's inducing the Edomites to take part in the attack was considered by the Judeans as treachery.)

In 445, Artaxerxes, convinced of Jewish loyalty because of their non-participation in the Syrian satrapies' rebellion, permitted Nehemiah to visit Jerusalem and to repair the wall in 52 days. Nehemiah was struck with horror by the Palestinian Jews intermarriage and difference in religious attitudes from the Babylonian Jews. He returned to Babylonia, obtained permission for Ezra to come to Jerusalem with a select group to institute reforms.

Ezra's attempt to separate the intermarried Jews met with great opposition. To establish a new authority, Ezra published a new law made by



the Zadokite priests in Babylonia (JE, D, P, H), formed a public compact with the people.

As a result of Nehemiah's entire policy (1-proclaiming the superiority of Judah and the Zadokites; 2-dismissing the intermarried grandson of the high priest, Neh 13:28) Samaria and Judah split, Samaria setting up its own Temple at Shechem, and the Jerusalem Jews becoming completely separated prepared to withstand the oncoming ideas of Alexander the Great.

Nehemiah's blending of the "east" and "west" laws prevented the development of a permanent cleavage in Jewish religion. (The Jews in Egypt knew nothing of this development of the De and Pf codes).

Among the most significant developments in Jewish religious life which emerged from this post-exilic period is that the population which now accepted the new religious law, also took upon itself the priests as the new heads of the state. This clerical aristocracy opposed the national spirit which called for a king. To teach the new law, the will of YHWH, the people now went to the new religious institution, the synagogue, presided over by the new interpreter of the law--the Scribe.

Of more profound importance is the fact that the Jewish religion now took on a higher spirituality which was later to affect the entire civilized world.

## VII - CONCLUSION

Having traced the religious and moral development of the Jews from the time of the Patriarchs until the period of the return from the exile, we now address ourselves to the second purpose of this paper which is (see page 1):

-to suggest how the previously-assembled material affects, or should affect in the view of this writer the attitude of the modern Jew toward the Jewish religious heritage.

The overarching effect which this investigation has achieved in the mind of the writer is that of rendering clear the implausibility of the traditional conception of "divine revelation".

The fact that the ethical-moral-legal matrix of the Torah appears, in varying extent and in perhaps slightly differing forms, in the literatures of other ancient peoples and in the recorded instances of their daily modes of behavior, peoples who were either anterior to or contemporary with the Israelites, convincingly renders nugatory the claim of any "exclusive" revelation at Sinai.

It is not our concern here whether Breasted or Delitsch or Albright or Kaufman (see pages 2 and 3) or other specialists were correct in every detail of their exhaustive theories. The cumulative effect of the material they uncovered is adequate to convince us, as Dr. Kaplan has asserted<sup>1</sup>

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1) Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan, in his essay, "The Contribution of Judaism to World Ethics", THE JEWS, edited by Dr. Louis Finkelstein

that "every normal society reflects some sensitiveness to the universal values of reason and to the eternal values of the spirit." (p. 684).

"The truth," as Dr. Kaplan continues to point out (p. 681), "is that all human societies in one way or another look to their gods as the chief guardians of moral behavior,<sup>2</sup> and that, further, "a comparative study of the different ethical systems...reveals (that)...the underlying distinctions of right and wrong, and the accompanying inner inhibitions that we associate with conscience, can be found in every human society, even the most rudimentary. Even those high principles which are often referred to as the consummation of ethics are not monopolized by any one religion, culture or ~~the~~ ethical system." (681).

Now since the traditional idea of "divine revelation" holds no factual validity for the writer, those conceptions, laws, customs, mores, etc. which integrally based on the idea of the historicity of the Sinaitic revelation must inevitably be affected.

The conception of the "chosen people", certainly in its traditional sense which asserts that the Israelites were selected by God from among all the peoples to receive and to promote the exclusive and divine revelation of God, can have little meaning in light of our investigation. (Obviously the doctrine can be reinterpreted along moralistic and inspirational lines to mean "chosen" for responsibility, or "chosen" to live ethically, or "chosen" even to suffer, etc., but this is homiletical, a sort of literary technique which can be applied to make palatable any human situation and which is of no inherent historical significance.)

The laws, customs, mores, etc. which derived their compelling power from the idea of revelation are similarly affected. As in all

cultural schemata, there is nothing inherently divine in these laws and customs which obtained, as we have shown, with striking similarity among most of the other ancients dwelling in the Nile and Euphrates (Kaplan, p 696). The major reason for their survival to this day is that those who abide(d) by them consider(ed) even the least ethically significant rite or even ethically indifferent custom in the Torah of divine origin, and therefore demanding of reverent observance. Because the Torah which details these laws, customs, mores is held to have been revealed in a divine theophany, the traditionalist, even of the present time, finds it unnecessary to explain to himself why he performs certain rites, abides by certain customs which grew out of an Oriental situation, which were either of Egyptian, Canaanite, Babylonian, or Persian origin, and which, if even transformed by his ancestors, nevertheless reflect the thinking and behavior of either the Israelite nomadic-tribal or agricultural-pastoral period. The normalcy with which the Torah treats of slavery, the inferior relation of the Gentile to the Jew, sacrifices or shatnes, indicates how these laws, ~~as originally revealed~~, are conditioned by time and place. This fact is further and even more insistently brought home by THE PHARISEES which provides the specific social and economic background in the post-exilic era in Palestine out of which emerged a host of legislation which is considered binding upon the traditional Jew today.

The question then arises; if the Torah was not divinely revealed at Mount Sinai, if the laws customs mores rites were by and large common practices among most of the ancient peoples, and if the modifications which obtain in these practices as particularly Israelitish-Jewish were occasioned by specific socio-economic situations which long since have been



altered, what is the rational basis for continuing this cultural configuration and what *raison-d'etre* is there for seeking continued association with this way of life?

Although not seeking to answer this question as formulated above, Dr. Kaplan in his above-mentioned essay, advances several reasons which, he believes, urge the continued existence of Judaism as a worthy way of life in these times.

These reasons, aiming to point up the "uniqueness" of Judaism, are summarised, in part, as follows:

1) Judaism has always affirmed in the vigorous fashion the inherent truth and the categorical and imperative character of the moral law, apart from considerations of expediency, aesthetic interest or any other source of validation. (The fact that it promulgated that principle at a morally crucial period in ancient times enabled it to save Western mankind from moral disintegration.)

2) As a result of this intrinsic and underrived character of the moral law, the problem of the good life cannot be WHY we should live the good life, but HOW we should live it... The answer that Judaism gives to the question of HOW to live is contained in Micah's description of the good life as consisting of justice, loving ~~maxax~~ kindness and walking humbly with God. (7b)

For the sake of argument, it may be agreed that this statement of Judaism's contribution to ~~xxxx~~ world ethics constitutes its "uniqueness". Nevertheless, this statement fails to provide any satisfactory answer to our question, for even these "unique" aspects are entangled in a skein of traditionalist assumptions which are of little relevance to one who is unable to accept the revelation idea.

Significantly, Dr. Kaplan himself admits that (p. 697) "it may

well be that even despite the ethical refinement of the law and custom which had thus come down from Israel's pre-historic days, or would have been taken over from other civilizations, the laws and customs still fall below accepted standards of the best in modern life. That fact, however, is entirely irrelevant from the standpoint of Judaism's role in the ethical development of mankind. That development was determined not by the particular content of the law but by the spirit that permeated the law."

From the standpoint of Judaism's contribution to world ethics it may be that the archaic character (p. 700) of Torah laws and customs are irrelevant, but from the standpoint of our question, this fact is all too relevant! If one admits that Judaism's ethical role is "determined not by the particular content of the law but by the spirit that permeated the law" the logical sequitur is that Reform Judaism (which virtually rejects the entire content of the archaic ~~character~~ law) and un-paganized Christianity (if Unitarianism can be called such) are the only current legitimate embodiments of that "spirit".

Further, what is this "spirit" which informs the law?

Dr. Kaplan says (p. 697) that the "essential character" of this spirit is to be found "in the laws of the Torah" (whose purpose is that of "rendering Israel a holy people") -- in other words, the "spirit" is inextricably linked with the content whose laws, customs, etc it is ~~impossible~~ impossible for us to accept as divinely revealed. The question arises, then, in what manner does this spirit become manifest and relevant for us in a non-traditional scheme of thought?

Over and above this, the "unique" aspect of Judaism which, Dr. Kaplan asserts, distinguishes it as a pattern of living from its contemporary

faiths, both ancient and modern, is (as was pointed out on p. 63) that Judaism always affirmed the "inherent truth and the categorical and imperative character of the moral law. In order to establish the categorically imperative character of the moral law, its "otherness", its "underivable" quality, and "self-existence", and to answer the question of HOW to live the good life, Judaism projects them into the very being of God. "God," Dr. Kaplan says (p. 707), "is accordingly represented throughout all stages of Judaism as a God of both justice and lovingkindness. In His capacity as a God of justice, He is the author of those laws which tell man what he must do to guard against depriving his fellow man of the power wherewith God has endowed him. In the same capacity God punishes those who transgress His laws..."

This clearly is the assumption of traditional Judaism -- "the specific laws and social arrangements which incarnate justice, lovingkindness, and walking humbly with God were supernaturally revealed to ancient Israel." Dr. Kaplan urges that this assumption be "interpreted functionally" which means that that this traditional idea dressed in modern garb "implies all human laws and social arrangements must be subjected to the moral test of being effective as a means of taming man's will-to-power."

This, of course, is an abstraction which is acceptable to many, including the humanist, the naturalist, and the positivist, none of whom concern themselves actively with the God-idea or with a priori premises or absolutes such as underived, self-existent moral laws.

In terms of our central question - what rational basis is there for continuing the Jewish cultural configuration - the above abstraction is hardly a reply.

To the writer's way of thinking there appears to be no logical

rationale for continuing this pattern of living on an every day level; the only apparent basis for its continuation is that of the emotional, sentimental, nostalgic. Unable to accept the traditional assumption that the customs and rites involved in Judaism's every day behavior pattern were divinely revealed, aware that many of these forms were cast in another time and geographic place and are consequently of little meaning or relevance to this moment and this place, the conclusion emerges that the modern Jew who is convinced of the material assembled in this investigation and who nevertheless feels strong emotional ties to the Jewish way of life which he knows as a result of background or exposure to it, will seek to continue those ties.

It is understood that if these ties of emotional nature are to be sufficiently rewarding, he will attempt to deepen the experience of being a Jew by cultivating whatever avenues of aesthetic, cultural, and intellectual Jewish character are relevant and satisfying and conducive to fuller and creatively richer living. It is possible, if not at all probable, that once removed from the penumbra of divine revelation and its constellation of absolutes which inevitably result in the gilding of paradoxes and wallowing in inconsistencies of thought and behavior, that the experience of being a Jew which derives from the natural volition within man rather from external compulsions which are super-man, can become altogether rewarding, healthful and beneficial in its fullest psychological and sociological sense.



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