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Come On In, the Water's Fine, unpublished manuscript, first draft, chapters 7-15, pages 142-284, undated.

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Chapter 7

JUDAISM IS

It was a bright morning. Everything and everyone was fresh. I began with a bit of personal history. Twenty-five years ago my father wrote a book distinguishing the Jewish world outlook from that of other philosophies and religions and titled his manuscript Where Judaism Differs. An editor put the title into the past tense, Where Judaism Differed, and so it was published. The editor apparently was motivated by a point of view shared at the time by many of liberal spirit that the historic theological differences between the major religions were no longer significant. He believed that no one paid serious attention to doctrine, that only the ethical teachings of the religions counted and that these were fundamentally similar; moreover, since doctrinal distinctions bred distance and misunderstanding, it was a progressive act to deny their continued importance.

Dad's editor misread the times. Doctrine isn't dead. Indeed, a tidal wave of religious passion has rolled across the globe. College women in Iran have thanked the Ayotollah Khomeini for ordering them back into purdah. Across the Near East immams preach jihad, holy war, against Israel. In Ireland, Lebanon, Iran, and India hundreds die because of doctrinal differences. Nor have religious passions been limited to backward countries or ignorant folk. The Right-To-Life crusade is fueled by church doctrine and led by many who are well-educated. Nor has the house of Israel been exempt. Some of the settlements on the West Bank serve security purposes. Others are there

because groups like the Gush Emunim, the self-styled 'faithful', insist that a Biblical description of the boundaries of the Promised Land must determine the foreign policy objectives of the government.

The editor reflected a particular time and situation. The Allies had won the war. America was prosperous and powerful. We seemed to be solving our problems and, among many intellectuals, there was a tendency to see religion as a set of medieval doctrines floating somewhere out there, interesting but archaic. People reminded each other that Confucius, Jesus, and Hillel each had taught the Golden Rule and could see no good reason to get excited about quaint customs or parochial formulations. Ministers and rabbis acted more like social workers and counselors than celebrants of a mystery or teachers of truth.

The traditional claims of the various religions had been discredited. Cultural anthropologists had located religion in every known culture, in the process making it clear that all claims to a monopoly on truth or to sole possession of the keys of the Kingdom were disputed and contestable. The promise of Heaven had been identified by socialist theory with propaganda designed to encourage political passivity. Biblical miracles were mocked as credulity. To use a favorite word of the day, religion was no longer relevant.

My father's editor, whom I later got to know, was, in fact, a communicant of an American civic religion which assumes the unquestioned value of democracy, social reform, and individual freedom, and bases its vision in the faith - I use the word deliberately - that what is contradictory, erratic, or malicious in human action results from societally induced distortions of our innate decency rather than any

inherent limitation of human nature. He shared with many other fine and gentle people the disadvantage of being an educated, mildly liberal, middle-class white American male who, secure in his country's power and prosperity, felt confident that his values were right and that ultimately they would be accepted by the rest of the world. There were still witch doctors and faith healers but they belonged to the Third World and the other America and would disappear as the benefits of learning and prosperity spread.

- What's your problem with these ideas? They seem reasonable. I believe that millions have been brutalized by dehumanizing institutions and that, as the world's institutions are reformed, our nicer side will emerge.

The cold streets of an urban slum, poverty and parentless homes certainly deprive millions of useful supports, not to speak of love and valuable role models. The jungle brings out the feral in the human animal. But environment isn't everything. A person of courage and principle can stand against the tide: "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." The Torah makes this point in the famous myth of Sodom and Gemorrah, the wicked cities of the Plain. God decided to destroy these towns for their evil ways, but Abraham intercedes on behalf of any good folk who might live there: "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?" When the count was taken, not even twenty righteous citizens were to be found, but the point had been made that even in Sodom strong-minded and highly moral individuals could survive.

- I read recently that Sodom and Gomorrah had been located by archeologists. Why did you call this story a myth?

Researchers have been excavating sites on the southeast bank of the Dead Sea where the Cities of the Plain are presumed to have been situated, but as yet any identification is only conjecture. No inscription has been found identifying any site. Even if we could positively locate these cities, the Genesis story would still be a myth, a story whose truth lies below the surface. Oral histories told of the sudden destruction of these cities and this famous event provided the appropriate focus for the God-Abraham dialogue which is the heart of the myth and makes the important point that God is just and not vengeful, reasonable, not a tyrant, a quite different god from any the pagan world had.

- Go back to your editor and his ideas that religious differences had been important, but weren't any longer. Where did he make his mistake?

Where Judaism Differed was published in 1956 just before ethnic and black studies burst on the scene. Blacks, it seemed, wanted to be black, not white. Spanish parents wanted their children taught in their native tongue. Christians wanted to be evangelical, not simply ethical. Disturbed by the blind impersonality of the mass society - T. S. Eliot's line caught its spirit: "here are decent godless people, their only memory the asphalt road and a thousand lost golf balls" - many subsequently turned away from the cosmopolitan ideal, 'no artificial divisions', which had characterized earlier progressive thought, and recognized the importance of the special and surprising messages.

Everywhere there was a renewed interest in 'soul'. Some turned to the cults, but far more to the religious gospels which had provided their ancestors with identity, moral certainty, and collective pride. It was the age of born-again evangelism and Jesus Christ Superstar. It was a time for "Tradition, Tradition".

Moreover, he projected his hopes and some rather innocent ideas about ecumenicism onto four billion earthlings and as a reasonable man he failed to understand that religions are not judged in terms of logical consistency and up-to-dateness but in terms of their emotional effectiveness. His life was calm and he forgot that most of the world was in turmoil. In times of anxiety, we want our families near us; we pull our religion close and hang on desperately to our religion's special message. What else is there?

Elie Wiesel introduced his powerful novel of the Holocaust years, The Gates of the Forest, with a Hassidic story Dad's editor might have sundered. "When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go to a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted. Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with Heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: 'Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer!' And again the miracle would be accomplished. Still later, Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: 'I do not know how to light the fire,

I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.' It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: 'I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient.' And it was sufficient."

- You're saying he misunderstood the urgency of our need for reassurance.

And the fundamental and elemental role of religion. Wiesel ends this parable with the line: "God made man because he loves stories." A religion's special message is redemptive, and to blur the specialness is to create intolerable doubts about its promise.

- In that sense this return to religion is a sad thing. Religions do create divisions. I lost a good friend who suddenly got all hot about his Christianity and couldn't leave me alone. He insisted I had to be saved.

There's no way out. My editor went to school when sociologists were describing American society as a melting pot; but cultural pluralism won the day. We resist being boiled down into a bland stew. We need identity and community; and community implies distances from others as well as closeness to your own.

George Santayana is credited with the observation that to try to be religious without espousing a specific religion is like trying to speak without controlling a specific language. Religions perform common social and psychological functions, but identity of function is

simply that and no more. Catholicism, Shamanism, Shintoism, and the Torah tradition are distinct religions each shaped by its special vision. The believer senses both the community of belief and a certain separation from those of other beliefs. America's civil religion and Soviet Communism are diametrically opposed in teaching and messianic hope, and their fierce competition for people's loyalty is almost inevitable.

- If I accept your all-inclusive definition of religion, I can appreciate what you're saying. But limit yourself to the conventional religions. Aren't Judaism and Christianity built around similar values? People speak of a Judeo-Christian tradition. We share the Bible.

There are similarities but far more differences. What is Torah to Judaism is Old Testament to Christianity, and what is taught in the New Testament determines how the church approaches the old. The church believes that the Old Testament contains important, even inspired, materials, a chronicle of the first stage of sacred history, prophecies about the Christ-Messiah, and some moving psalms; but that much of it has been cancelled or superseded, particularly the Torah law, the part Jews declare to be the heart of God's special and surprising message.

- We share the Ten Commandments.

The concept more than its specifics. Jews read, "you shall not murder." Most Christian translations read, "you shall not kill;" their version fits more closely Jesus' 'turn the other cheek' sermon than the clear intent of the Torah tradition which specifically permits wars of self-defense and stipulates capital punishment for certain crimes. Paul,

and subsequently all of Christianity, denied the authority of Torah law over their lives. Torah laws were treated as the no longer binding rules of the Jews. The Ten Commandments were treated as the synthesis of the laws necessary for society to function. As Dr. Einstein has taught us, perspective determines what we see.

- Aren't you making much out of a minor difference of translation?

I think not. You shall not kill suggests both pacifism and vegetarianism, interesting special messages, but not themes which have been central to the Torah tradition.

- We share the hope of peace on earth.

But we express it differently. The Christian vision is of a world joined in the mystic body of Christ. The Jewish vision emphasizes Jews secure in Zion and the world enjoying justice and peace. Little is said of everyone being joined in one religious communion.

- Such differences are limited to official pronouncements. People don't care.

Perhaps not, but differences in a religion inevitably have an impact on private attitudes. Try a simple test. Ask a few friends whether or not they agree with the sentence: Faith is a private matter. I think you will find that most Christians will say 'yes' without a second thought; and most Jews will agree, but quickly add something about the importance of community. The rabbis described the Jewish people as an extended family: "all Israel are related." Jews everywhere support Israel, welcome Soviet emigres, and worry about co-religionists in South Africa and the Argentine. Jewish communities

in every town of size in the United States organize fund-raising drives for caring institutions, religious education, and the relief of needy Jews under the rubric, 'we are one'. Such support is instinctive among Jews who have been taught by the prophets as well as by harsh experience that being a Jew involves you with God and with the Jewish people.

- People of all religions cooperate in civil affairs.

On some issues. Elements of the Protestant Church argue that the public school day should begin with prayer, a position most in the Jewish community oppose. The Roman Catholic bishop of Cleveland and I worked closely on race-related matters, particularly desegregation of the public schools, but we are on opposite sides of the political fence when it comes to Federal aid to parochial schools. I support the Planned Parenthood Association, and I am sure he does not. The specialness of our religion's message leads us to adopt different agendas and to take different stands on a variety of specific social problems.

The Jewish tradition emerged in a cultural environment where the body and the soul were accepted as inseparably intertwined. The Biblical word, nefesh, denotes the heart and that sense of individuality we call soul. Christianity emerged later in a world deeply influenced by Greek categories of thought whose tendency was to separate matter and form, body from soul. Form, the soul, was seen as eternal, pure; matter, the flesh, as perishable and impure. Formed by men who thought naturally in this dualistic way, early Christianity set high value on those religious disciplines which would free the soul from its prison within the body. To that end it encouraged ascetic disciplines

such as fasting and the mortification of the flesh. Marriage could only be seen as a concession to the flesh.

- Many of the differences seem to deal with sex.

Christianity praised celibacy. Judaism labeled marriage kiddushim, a sanctification, talked of love as a natural and healthy human expression, and saw no reason to be ashamed of physical attraction. "Three sights are too wonderful for me, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a young woman." Rabbis always have married. According to folklore, God spends part of each day as a marriage broker and enjoys His work. A thirteenth-century sage-mystic, Nachmanides, wrote a book which praised the sexual relationships between men and women as fulfilling God's creative purpose, not only because sex produced children but because pleasure was given and received.

- But I. B. Singer's novels describe Jews who rolled in the snow, fasted for extended periods of time and practiced various forms of denial.

Jewish history is a long record, and you can locate in it men who bathed in cold rivers and who fasted to break free from the power of their appetites. But the Torah's unitary understanding of human personality operated as a caution not to divide man into parts and declare some parts seemly and others unseemly. The community appreciated the piety of those of ascetic temperament but did not declare their way superior to those who worshipped God with a whole heart and after a good meal.

- It's all interesting, but wasn't that editor saying: what was, was; but little of all this matters any more?

We're humans all, and all of us have taken some of our values from the civil religion, but never underestimate the power of conditioning, environment and tradition. Even where the fires of belief burn low, the spirit glows with your religion's special cast. The philosopher Bertram Russell, makes it clear in his Autobiography that he has lost all belief in Christian doctrine, but I came across this paragraph in which he describes a visit to Greece:

> I found myself in a little church belonging to the days when Greece was part of the Byzantine Empire. To my astonishment, I felt more at home in this little church than I did in the Parthenon or in any of the other Greek buildings of Pagan times. I realized then that the Christian outlook had a firmer hold upon me than I had imagined. The hold was not upon my beliefs, but upon my feelings. It seemed to me that where the Greeks differed from the modern world it was chiefly through the absence of a sense of sin, and I realized with some astonishment that I, myself, am powerfully affected by this sense in my feelings though not in my beliefs.
>
> I know that the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem is essentially a retaining wall built by the tyrant Herod when he decided to enlarge The Temple's plaza. I dislike the aspect of a religious circus which I have sometimes found there. Yet, every time I go, I am moved. I see, not the stores, but the generations of pious men and women who braved taunts and attack to pray here for the coming of the Messiah, and I am moved by the indomitability of the human spirit.

- I can see the impact of American culture but not that of the Torah tradition.

It's interesting that we work best together on political issues and

are most apart in the area of personal morality, particularly on family and sex related issues: birth control, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, etc., where the civil religion has no clear position.

- Given the pervasiveness of the civil religion, wasn't the editor right in believing that the old differences are disappearing?

Torah may have little impact on some Jews; we've agreed a label is only a label; but we've also agreed that the impact of conditioning is significant even when we are unconscious of it. Not all the Jewish activists in the anti-war movements had gone to religious school, but something of the Jewish ethos had gotten through. I remember an early seventies demonstration in front of the Administration Building of the university where I teach. I was skirting the crowd on my way to lecture when I was accosted by a student I knew and berated for holding my class: "You should be here, this is what Judaism is all about." She was wrong. That particular noise was more adolescent rage than prophetic outrage; but she was expressing an instinctive recognition that Amos and Isaiah would not have remained silent in a similar situation.

- But there's less and less Judaism in the environment in each generation and so less Jewish impact.

That's not necessarily so. In many homes there is more observance than in the homes these parents came from. We've already talked about The Jewish Catalogue phenomenon.

- But that's a temporary third generation phenomenon.

No one is sure. For better or worse the more open-minded and liberal religious approaches seem to be losing ground across the world.

We live in an age when ideology is in full cry and where many religions are again demanding submission to church authority. Liberal religious groupings are a minority within their communities and almost unknown outside the Western world; and, even here, it's the fundamentalist and traditional groups that are showing the most growth. If anything, the old differences are being reasserted. Pope John Paul is staunching liberal attitudes towards birth control and divorce in his church. Fundamentalist churches in America are working hard to reinstitute Blue Laws and prayers in public school and the rabbinate in Israel has moved to reject as Jews those converted by non-orthodox rabbis.

- Come back home. You speak of a Torah tradition. Aren't there in effect Torah traditions? My rabbi just had a knock down drag out debate with an orthodox scholar about the ordination of women. Politically and socially these two rabbis seem poles apart.

A river sometimes separates and runs on two sides of an island, but ultimately the flow comes again together. We differ on a whole shopping list of issues, but the sense of a shared past and destiny keeps these differences from being completely decisive. Each of us is trying to adapt Torah to reality as we perceive it. We share veneration for Torah, and we feel part of an historic community.

- But the differences are major. I've read that the Reform movement has organized several gay synagogues. The rabbinic tradition defines homosexuality as a sin. The tradition requires ground burial, but some congregational cemeteries include mausoleums and niches for ashes. How can contradictory positions be equally Jewish?

It's almost always a question of emphasis. Some groups emphasize the letter of the law, others its spirit. Take the issue of homosexuality. The rabbinic tradition quotes a specific Torah rule which condemns homosexual acts; the liberal tradition cites Torah texts which prohibit treating anyone as a misfit or outcast. Where we come down will depend on whether we give greater weight to a formal rule or a broad moral injunction, our general attitude towards change, and whether our conceptual model for Judaism is the river or the tree. None of these issues are simple matters. I'm a liberal rabbi, but I'm troubled by the idea of a gay synagogue. I believe a congregation should include all elements in a community. I'm afraid a single focus synagogue will mistake its special concern for the wide range of issues Torah represents.

Rabbinic halacha permits abortion only when there is a direct threat to the mother's life. Since I define life qualitatively, I have no problem with abortions authorized when the woman feels emotionally or physically threatened. Both approaches affirm the sanctity of life. We differ in the degree to which we will adjust Jewish norms to the realities of modern life. There are differences, and they are basic; but, as long as they grow out of serious concern with Torah, they qualify as Jewish and can claim to be within the tradition.

Actually, in many ways, our pluralistic community gains from our disagreements. Debate sharpens awareness and the existence of various communities creates options. The more flexible among us force the formalists to consider whether circumstances have changed so much that people are being hurt rather than helped by ancient restrictions, and the

formalities force those of liberal spirit to examine their positions carefully to make sure that they are arguing genuine Torah concerns and not simply their convenience. I have noticed this benefit during the abortion debate. Liberals no longer dismiss out of hand criticisms of abortion as a birth control technique and formalists have begun to seek ways to adjust their reservations to take account of the new diagnostic capacities of modern medicine.

- A point of interest: Why did the rabbinic tradition limit abortions so sharply?

The relevant halachic rules were first formulated in Greco-Roman times when surgery was primitive, dangerous, and resorted to only near delivery, and only when the dangers to the mother's life were apparent and a simple excision of the foetus was possible. The rabbis faced a different set of circumstances sociologically as well as medically. Their world was underpopulated and fertility was a constant problem. Their issue was which life: the mother's or the baby's. Today abortion is a safe surgical procedure best carried out during the first trimester of pregnancy; our world is overpopulated and the human species does not have to be encouraged "to be fruitful and multiply." Our issue is whether to deliver a malformed or unwanted baby.

We all know that anti-semitism doesn't ask a Jew's denomination. Arguments are in the family. Secularist Jews eat kosher food at community meetings. Non-orthodox in Israel certainly resent having to conform to rabbinic laws of personal status; but all Israeli Jews speak the same language, study the same history and follow the same calendar.

- I understand family arguments (laughter).

- When I was in Israel there were pickets in front of a Jerusalem hospital which was performing autopsies. I know that the orthodox won't permit Reform and Conservative rabbis to officiate at weddings or recognize the authenticity of their conversions. What sense does it make to speak of a Torah tradition?

Each sees what he can see. Threatened by a fast-changing world they didn't make and don't comprehend, some Jews have retreated into a defensive shell constructed of the forms of the past. Other Jews have left their past behind for a world constructed out of their hopes for the future; most of us are trying to build our present out of our traditions and our hopes, and it's not easy. In the history of any religion, there are periods of calm and periods of transformations. We're obviously going through some rough water.

- How much weight do you give to the old ways?

A hundred generations of sensitive prescriptions should not be cavalierly dismissed but neither should its forms be slavishly followed. My rule is to break with the past only when the older forms cause palpable harm or restrict human development by failing to take into consideration the circumstances of modern life. The area of women's rights is perhaps the one where I break most often with the old ways. I do not consider the fact that the pronouns in the Torah text are of masculine gender sufficient reason to deny to a woman the right to initiate divorce proceedings or to offer testimony in court or to be a rabbi.

- A young woman who to this point had sat quietly spoke up with some heat. She allowed that she found my discussion interesting but what had this to do with her and her friends? History is over. Paul,

Augustine, and Nachmanides are long dead. My friends, Christian and Jewish, and I live in a liberated society, take our advice on sex and marriage from professional counselors, and neither know nor care what our respective traditions teach. Indeed, my rabbi tends to equivocate, but when all is said and done he believes the new morality is generally healthy and I seriously doubt that he made his decision on the basis of any Torah texts.

You're right, from your perspective. I've said it before. Most young Jews and Christians go to the same schools, read the same books, play the same sports, watch the same programs on television, think the same way about pre-marital sex and politics, and read the same experts on human development. More Jews read "Dear Abbey" than Nachmanides. Probably the only Torah commandment dealing with sex and marriage which is fully observed is the one which prohibits incest.

- Then isn't all talk about Jewish identity pointless? Samuel may get his presents on Hanukkah and Christopher on Christmas, but both asked for and will receive the same record albums. There's a good chance Christopher doesn't know the Christological base of his name or care and that he will fall in love with Samuel's sister, not only because she is attractive but because they share common interests and "speak the same language." There may be theological and ritual differences, but on the human level where it counts, aren't most young Jews and Christians cut of the same cloth?

I can't be truly human if I lack a compelling vision of life's coherence, a religion, and the Torah tradition is such a vision and one with a remarkably good track record. Where it had once been chic to

disparage the dietary laws as outdated public health measures and mock the tallit and tefillim as peculiar prayer uniforms, in recent years social scientists have studied the psychological and societal function of ritual and reported on the importance of ritual for mental health. Ritual is in. Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, Selihot services, Afruf, have reappeared in congregations where once decorum and a sermon comprised almost the whole liturgy. Guitar evangelism is not unknown in traditional synagogues. The pendulum has swung so far some of us are concerned that the religious life may become a form of idolatry for some who will neglect the parallel emphasis on learning and social justice. Fortunately, one of the grand things about this ancient and rich tradition is that it survives cultural fads because it is so many sided and contains wisdom relevant to all sides of life's contradictions. Ultimately, the forgotten themes are picked up.

- My generation seems to be going two ways at once. We are reviving many of our grandparents' religious ways and discarding many of their moral values. 'Give me that old time religion and the new morality.' I sometimes feel that we're like a young child who drags along his security blanket whenever he leaves his room.

In some contexts, new morality may be simply a euphemism for the old immoralities. Careless sex is simply careless and what is euphemistically called an open marriage anything but a stable relationship. The older forms are not the only ways to be "holy". Kiddushim implies an unshakable concern for the sanctity of human relationships, not a requirement that our homes and marriages duplicate those of our parents. The new morality is not the first new morality in Jewish life. Polygamy

was the accepted way in Biblical times and, in some Sephardic communities, remained the custom until quite recently. The Muslim environment was mildly polygamous, and the Machamim had no trouble seeing Kiddushim, sanctity, in such marriages. It's not the form but the spirit which consecrates.

- How do we judge?

I look to see whether a change attempts to adjust standards of loyalty, responsibility, and honest feeling to a new situation or an arrangement of convenience. Clearly, we must find new ways to support family ties, bind close the ties of love, see to it that each child is a wanted child, and bring dignity to old age. The older family had an authoritarian base. In a world where women have finally emerged as persons, partnership in marriage and concepts of shared parenting are appropriate. With the disappearance of the extended family and the fact that both husband and wife may need or want to work, it may not be possible to care for aged parents in the home.

- Somehow Judaism's stance on these issues seems vague and undefined.

Really not. There is a broad consensus in such areas as the sanctity of family, respect of persons, race relations, the well-cultivated mind, compassion, sensitivity and empathy, peace, man's careful stewardship of God's gift of life and the good earth. The problem is that we no longer see in our homes on a daily basis how these values are worked out. Our problem is a lack of role models, not a lack of rules.

The Torah contains the fixed and the dynamic, both specific commandment and general principle, and a surprising amount of different

opinions. The book of Leviticus mandates a rich and complex sacrificial code; Amos and Isaiah doubted the efficacy of the shrine and of sacrifices. The book of Ruth clearly accepts the normalcy, if not the fitness, of intermarriage; Ezra ordered Jerusalemites who had taken non-Judean wives to put them away. We know that the rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai debated several dozen issues over several decades and that there are many differing opinions among traditional scholars even today on such issues as the drafting of women into the Israeli army and organ transplants. The Torah is one, yet everyone who confronts its teachings brings to it his own circumstances, mind, and needs. We come from many backgrounds and, inevitably, have different understandings. Nor is this only a modern sentiment. In several places the Talmud says simply, "both this opinion and the other (quite different) opinion are the words of the living God."

- I'm still puzzled. You're describing a religious tradition which includes strong differences of opinion. That's a hard concept.

I know, but life is full of contradictions, so it has ever been. So it will ever be.

- Given our differences, what makes you think we'll stay together?

- In my experience, there's no more bitter argument than a family feud.

Questions of faith could permanently estrange significant elements of the community of fate. Family life requires compromise and patience, and there are those of 'there is no other way but mine' persuasion. But in Cleveland all the congregations meet to talk of shared concerns; and on the national level there's a Synagogue Council.

- What will hold such a disparate community together?

Principles and pressure. We are a community of faith because we are a community of fate, and a community of fate because the faith remains compelling.

Chapter 8

BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD

- My problem is that the synagogue is a place for believers and I'm not sure I believe in God. It was Friday morning. Sabbath eve services were scheduled. It was the first time the question of faith in a personal God had come up.

No one signs articles of faith when they join a congregation. Synagogue rolls and services are open to all who care about the Torah tradition and the Jewish people.

- But I feel out of place.

That feeling is in you, not in the synagogue.

Before we begin the Kol Nidre service on Yom Kippur there is a ritual which goes back to the bad days when many Jews were forced to accept baptism as the only alternative to death. Some became martyrs. Others chose to dissimilate. As you can imagine, those who became Christians were not whole-hearted and, on this holiest of days, many yearned to worship in the familiar way; so a formula was introduced which said simply: permission exists even for apostates to join in this service.

The synagogue began as a beit am, a local center where meeting, study and informal worship took place. It was only after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans that the synagogue took on some of the aspects of a sanctuary. The community needed a religious center and rites like the blowing of the shofar and the blessing of the lulav and ethrog, once limited to The Temple, were

transferred to the synagogue whose "holiness" was thereby enhanced. Yet, the synagogue never gave up entirely its original popular and informal character. In the Temple fences kept all but the priests at a distance from the inner courts. The synagogue has no fences or Keep Out signs: "Let all who are thirsty come and drink."

- You're talking architecture and I'm talking about belief.

Caught up as we all are in an age of uncertainty, synagogue membership reflects our heterogeneity and respects our doubts, but tries to take us beyond them.

Every worship service includes the Shema, a public affirmation of God's existence, oneness and accessibility; and petitional prayers addressed to the God who knows our thoughts before we utter them. Still, no one is denied entrance if they have doubts or escorted out if they cannot affirm.

- Why would a non-believer come? Prayer can have no meaning for him.

Many who are agnostic are nevertheless deeply involved with aspects of Jewish culture or are deeply committed to the survival of the Jewish people, and the synagogue is a place where they can touch base.

- But I feel a hypocrite at services.

A hypocrite puts on a false face and plays a role designed to delude. When you enter no one stands to gain except yourself. There are no points to be made. We come in search, if we do not come in faith; and there is nothing hypocritical in admitting that simple fact.

- How can any modern believe in God?

I do. Life is not a chance chemical explosion or a hapless, hopeless passage from cradle to crypt; purpose and promise are implicit in creation. God is the Guarantor that it all has meaning and the Redeemer who validates our hopes. The existence, the oneness and the personal concern of God for each person are central elements in the Torah tradition's special and surprising message, and I do not need to close off any part of my brain to affirm this faith.

- You're a rabbi.

I wasn't always.

- How did it happen?

Slowly and quietly. In school everything I studied suggested a creative unity within and behind the universe. History was my field and every place I touched the human experience I sensed the divine capacity of the human soul.

- One day I believe. Another day I don't. I've lain awake many a night wrestling with this question.

Faith, I've decided, is much like love. Some relationships are tempestuous and full of unexpected turns. Some wrestle the long night with their doubts, remember the image of Jacob wrestling with the angel; others simply, often unconsciously, let God in and that's that.

- My father often said that God discussions are pointless and dangerous. The believer cannot convince the atheist, and the atheist cannot convince the believer. Generally, he said, all you had was a shouting match.

Remember the line: Faith is caught not taught. In matters of faith there are no irrefutable arguments; but there are discussions which can help us better understand our feelings and the Torah's affirmations.

Each year I spend a good bit of time discussing the essentials of the Torah tradition with my Confirmation class. I explain as much as can be explained of our concept of God, prayer, and holiness. I tell these fourteen and fifteen-year olds how the Jews were revolted by the gross sexuality and the morbidity of Canaanite and Egyptian paganism; how in a polytheistic environment some of our ancestors came to the inspired vision of the one universal God; how all images, statues, and idols, indeed all representations of God, ultimately were purged; how the prophets insisted on a religion of works, not words; and how belief in the one God encouraged the vision of humanity, a concept which the Israelites were the first to hold. "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us all?"

I discuss with them some of the medieval philosophizing about God and His attributes; what we can know about God and what remains forever unknown; and I describe the various ways in which modern thinkers discuss the existence of God. However, once I have described, defined, and explained, much remains, for I am a rabbi, not an historian of religion, and this is a Confirmation class, not a course in comparative religion. I am less concerned with what was once believed as with what these students believe; and so we spend much time talking over their philosophies, not as grand or as ordered perhaps as those of Philo, Maimonides, or Spinoza, but their own, honest.

Fourteen-year olds remind me of butterflies beginning to shake off the restricting cocoon. They have outgrown the protective but circumscribed world in which they were nurtured, they are emerging into a new world; but it is an unfamiliar world and their movements often seem awkward. It's not easy to leave behind with old toys and a favorite teddy bear the God of the nursery, part guardian angel, part doting grandfather, yet this is what is happening. It's a time of doubt and challenge, and these early expressions of doubt are likely to be artless and pragmatic. One had told a lie and had not been caught. One had prayed to God during her grandmother's illness but the grandmother died. An athlete was able to tell me the exact hour and day on which he began to doubt. I still remember that date and time, seven p.m., November 12, 1977. He was in Junior High School at the time. He had an afternoon paper route. He was also captain of an intramural basketball team. Late one school day, an important game was unexpectedly rescheduled. The weather was bad and the boy was unable to bribe or cajole any friend to carry the route for him. In his distress, he entered a phone booth, closed the door and offered God a heartfelt prayer. "I must play this game; let none of my customers complain to the Circulation Manager. Please, God, just this once let me get away with not delivering my papers." At seven p.m. the telephone rang. It was the Circulation Manager. Customers had complained that they had not received their evening paper.

One year I asked a class to set down their beliefs. I asked them not to write what they thought I wanted to read. They didn't. I had brought several of their papers to the Institute and shared them now with the group.

This grim world really scares me. Every once in a while I realize the cruelty and insensibility of it and that's when I begin to wonder. We can't just be here to disagree, fight, and eventually blow ourselves to bits. There must be some purpose or reason behind us. That is when I think of God. This ideal is, in a measure, a crutch to lean on. It gives me some hope for the future. I believe I have outgrown the 'old man in the sky watching over me' type of feeling though I can't really describe what has replaced it. Sometimes I can't really accept God, I know you'd like me to, but I might as well be honest about it - probably because the abstract concept is over my head. When I look around and see the hatred and ugliness, I don't understand how God could allow it. The closest I can come, from my experience, is conscience as that part of us which is created in God's image.

I'm really not sure what I believe about God. I think that there must be something - something larger, better than man, that is within each person helping to draw the line between what is right and what is wrong. I cannot admit to myself that there is a Supreme Being whom we call God. I would like to believe this, I want to believe that when I do something wrong it is all predestined and that there is nothing I can do about it, but I can't. However, there must be something bigger than science guiding life, love, fear and all things. This I do believe. I cannot simply state, 'there lives a God,' because I just don't know. I don't really feel qualified to give an honest opinion.

I have not yet developed any definite ideas about God and I probably won't for a long time. I feel there is some reason and some kind of logic in life and why men live, but I am not saying it is God yet. To me God is a concept which is simply accepted by many - by those who actually study it and then accept it. I feel it is accepted only after accepting certain things on faith. I am not ready to say that a divine something created the earth and controls everything in it. There is too much to make this unbelievable - such as the fact that, if God doesn't like bloodshed, why war? If God wants peace, why battle? If God wants unity among men, why segregation? I feel that man as a society is much too complex to push off on something man doesn't even comprehend. I furthermore think that with advancement will come a totally new idea as to what controls us - an idea which will be able to be expressed in mathematical symbols. I also believe that too many people have looked for an easy out to the whole

question of life and death and origin and end and have simply attached the tag of 'God' to it all. Something much more complex, in my opinion, is the answer.

- Did you confirm these three?

Certainly. Remember Tennyson: "There is more faith in honest doubt than in half your creeds." For the child faith precedes doubt. For the adolescent doubt precedes faith.

These papers reveal a questing, a puzzling out, and a grasping for. They were written by minds in search - in search of meaning, in search of values - and that is, after all, the first step towards a vital faith. If faith were simply a matter of affirming some self-evident argument, then doubt would be an act of arrogance; but, as Immanuel Kant proved, the existence of God is not a demonstrable proposition. Religious certainty rarely comes without effort and soul-searching, and only the truly innocent never raise Job type questions about God's management of our lives.

- You've had doubts then?

Have had. Have. Will have. In my experience sensitive believers and serious agnostics are not far apart. Both seek to grasp the elusive mystery which lies behind the surface of things. The honest believer acknowledges that he has moments of doubt. The honest agnostic acknowledges moments when he has been awed by nature and sensed a creative purpose.

I told them about a collegian who had had a spiritual awakening; God now meant a great deal to him, and he wanted to know more about the rabbinate as a profession. I happened to have these papers on my desk and I asked him to read several. He read with attention and with

increasing puzzlement: "How can you confirm them? Read this."

> The many morals and standards of our religion greatly influence my life. I believe in living a good moral life as taught by my religion and parents, but I think that religion, not God so much, seems to affect my life at present. To me God is an abstract word to whom people pray and about whom I am not sure what I believe, since I haven't spent much time thinking about it up to now. I plan to wait so that I can better understand myself before reaching any conclusions about God.

What's the problem?

- He doesn't believe in God. How can you confirm him?

Have you never had doubts?

- Certainly, but I now have faith.

Were you certain as an adolescent, always certain?

- No.

Were you confirmed?

- Yes.

I used an old rabbinic phrase, 'Let your ears hear what your mouth has said.' Confirmation is a stage in one's Jewish growth, not a public testimony to a full and unshakable faith. On Confirmation Day the pledge speaks of belonging and becoming rather than specifically of doctrine, "With all my heart, soul and might, I will strive to fulfill the holy purposes of Judaism."

- Some years ago I went to a friend's Confirmation in her church. It seems to me she recited what the program called a Confession. All I remember is that it began, 'I believe.'

At various times groups and individuals have drawn up what they considered to be the principle of the Jewish faith. Moses Maimonides' Thirteen Articles represent the best known of these efforts. A century later a poet abbreviated Maimonides' extended discussion into thirteen brief statements, each of which begins, 'Ani Ma'amim ,' I believe, and in many synagogues these were recited during services. Other groups and individuals have denied that Judaism demands doctrinal affirmation. Moses Mendelsohn's statement that Judaism has no

dogmas is the best known of these arguments which rest on the assertion that Judaism is a tradition based on deed rather than creed.

- Who was right?

Both and neither. Maimonides was right that Judaism embraces a special message. Mendelsohn was right that rabbinic Judaism has emphasized works rather than words and defines the Jew by membership in the community rather than by an oath of allegiance to a set of doctrines.

I respect this emphasis, because it focuses religious life on a whole range of cultural values rather than on agreement to another's formulation. When I first learned the Ani Ma'amim, I found myself saying: I disagree in whole or part with five of the thirteen: that the Torah was given by God to Moses, that the Torah is immutable, that God rewards and punishes, that a Messiah will come and that there is resurrection of the dead. Later when I read Maimonides' extended explanation of these five articles I found that he treated them sensitively and subtly and that each raised a theme which I no longer dismissed out of hand. The problem with brief dogmatic statements is that they abstract and, in so doing, diminish an idea by pulling it out of the living, developing tradition. Catechism reminds me of a biopsy in which tissue is killed and frozen in order to be examined; and, even as I use this analogy, I recognize why Maimonides was interested in dogmatics. A biopsy is an important diagnostic tool. The state of the faith needs to be examined from time to time.

The label, God, can be used for all kinds of deities. Some precision is important. Maimonides was concerned that Jews acknowledge the Jewish God.

- We haven't got our own God.

I'm talking of perception not possession. The Torah affirms a God who is just, merciful and caring rather than simply a First Cause or a power indifferent to human need.

Twice each day Biblical men stopped their work and spoke a simple watchword, "God is, and God is One." Today the Shema is recited during every service, it is the climactic

and concluding affirmation of Yom Kippur and the final affirmation spoken by the Jew before he dies. Monotheism, the Jew's perception of God, belief in the one God, or at least belief in the unity of all that is, now seems almost a self-evident idea, since it is shared by the major faiths and seems confirmed by our science, which insists that there are overarching, natural laws which bind all that is together.

- I remember a cartoon of a group of monks in the Southwest looking out along the mesa towards a beautiful sunset and calling out: "Author, author." I can't believe that the wonder that is nature is the result of a chemical accident. I once memorized a sentence of Einstein's: "The scientist's religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection."

Monotheism may seem natural to us. It was not to our ancestors.

An early eighteenth century New England Catechism written by a good New England divine who wanted the world to know that had he been God he would have nominated a more appropriate nation as his standard bearer includes the couplet: "How odd that God the Jews should choose." From time to time I have twisted the old doggerel into a different theme: How odd the Jews one God should choose. They lived in a world which they knew to be made up of distinct and separate parts. The moon moved across the night sky and was replaced in the morning by the sun which moved in a different orbit. The wind rose and blew and no man knew from where it came. Streams bubbled up from seemingly bottomless sources. Each element in nature was distinctive and appeared self-actuating. In pre-scientific societies polytheism seemed self-evident since the activity of nature could be explained only by assuming an in-dwelling spirit or god in each element.

- Are you really saying that worshipping idols was more reasonable than monotheism?

The ancients did not actually worship sticks or statues. They saw their idols as

representations of the complex and not totally coherent world of powers which presumedly resided in nature. Open an acorn and you will not find a diminutive oak tree. How else then account for the tree's growth but by the postulate of an indwelling God Who makes it grow in just that way. The sun makes a daily circuit of the heavens, disappears and reappears in the east each dawn. Experience showed that physical objects do not move themselves. How else account for its movement except by some such myth as that of Apollo and his chariot? We sense pattern and order in nature, but we also experience nature's unexpected violence -- the lightning bolt, the flood, the overpowering heat of the sun -- so it was only natural to assume that the gods were not only numerous and powerful but unpredictable. Prudence dictated that worship should envolve not only simple reverence but sacrifices, attempts to entice, to bribe, these powers not to do harm and, if possible, to do what we ask of them.

Since the gods were related to visible objects, it was only natural to believe that the gods were indwelling. Ancient men worshipped at various shrines where particular rites were performed by appointed priests for the purpose of placating the god's anger or gaining favor. The Hebrews, too, had their shrines. It would be centuries before they would outgrow the edifice complex, if they ever really did; but beginning in the eighth century B.C.E. prophets emerged who taught the people that "the whole earth is full of His glory" and that shrine activity should not be the major focus of the religious life.

- I'm fascinated by place. You can tell so much about people from their homes and about a country by the way it keeps up its cities and countryside. I spent a summer wandering in Europe and, after I tired of cathedrals and palaces, I began to look for synagogues. The ones I found were modest in the extreme and intimate. Obviously people counted and felt God to be close, caring rather than a distant, awesome heavenly emperor.

There have been cathedral-type synagogues, but you're right; for the most part the synagogue was unpretentious. It was not God's house or the place where a royal audience was held, but the home of a Jewish community where Torah was read, worship celebrated, God adored, and where the Jew was reminded that he was never apart from God.

- I always thought the polytheism-monotheism switch was a relatively harmless numbers game.

Actually, it represents one of the great watersheds in human thought. Monotheism raised God above nature. "In the beginning God created." Man no longer felt himself subservient to the unpredictable forces of nature but covenanted to the Creator God Who, according to Genesis, had given man power to subdue the animal kingdom and to use nature to his benefit. This shift in perspective increased man's self-assurance and sense of worth. It also set the stage for science. Gods cannot be investigated; their actions are autonomous and therefore unpredictable; but, if nature is distinct from God, is not God but object, then there are patterns which the minds can investigate.

The pagan world worshipped its gods and feared them. Their gods, like humans were caught up in private plans and conflicts - the Trojan war began in an argument over the winner of a Heavenly beauty contest - and the activities and whims of the gods often turned out to be harmful to men and nations. You never knew what a god would do, so your relationship to God was more that of courtier to tyrant than son to loving father. "And you shall love the Lord your God" was a new thought which germinated among those who no longer equated nature's unpredictability with the activities of the various gods born and who had begun to conceive and shape worship as thanks-speaking rather than as a form of bribery. Sacrifices remained central to worship as long as The Temple stood; but in their habitations Jews became accustomed to the idea that the sacrifice God truly desires is "a humble and contrite heart."

Idolatry encourages the snobbery which characterized certain tasks as noble and others as demeaning. Blue bloods were descendants of the major gods; ordinary folk were children of a lesser god. Landed gentry held merchants in disrepute. In the pagan world nobles entered a shrine by one door, commoners by another. Monotheism led inevitably to democracy. If all have one father, God values equally the various labors we each do. The Torah tradition became a scholarly tradition, yet no attempt was made to disguise the fact that some of the sages earned their living as shoemakers, smiths, and craftsmen. Jewish folk legend includes

many versions of the city mouse-country mouse variety. There are no menial tasks only mean-minded snobs.

Idolatry separated man from man, city from city, nation from nation. If Ra, the great god of Egypt, created man, the Egyptian was created first and belonged to a master race. All other peoples were the creation, so the myths had it, of the concubines of the gods, consequently a lesser breed. Idolatry consecrated the separation of men into city-states, nations and races, and failed to provide them a unifying vision which would raise humanity's needs above each group's special needs. Racism thrived in the soil of idolatry.

Idolatry separated people by caste and rank. When the emperor of Assyria made known Marduk's law, he proclaimed a rule which protected the persons and privileges of the nobility far more than those of the peasant and lower castes. The slave had no protection at all. If a slave was murdered by a free man, no charge of murder was leveled and the matter was concluded. His owner was paid the dead man's market value as restitution. Idolatry precludes the notion of humanity. Its myths declared the home folk to be descendants of a union between a patron God and a progenitor and other folk to be lesser breeds. Peoples spoke different languages and exhibited different body types; and, since there was no myth of a common ancestor, by all evidence nations and castes were as different from each other as the various species of the animal kingdom. The concept of humanity could emerge only among a people long accustomed to monotheism. If God is one and His reach is world-wide, all peoples are His creatures and a myth such as that of Adam and Eve is developed which binds all humans into a single family! One Creator, one humanity; one moral law for all.

The idolator saw himself as a pawn and plaything of the gods, powerless against fate. Conceiving God as one permitted men to consider the possibility that justice could be expected in life since there was only the one God whose nature was both just and dependable. The pagan felt that you took what the gods meted out. The Hebrew felt that you get what you deserve,

and the goal of a religious life became the building of a worthy personal record rather than offering lavish sacrifices or reciting magical incantations. Monotheism provided worship its ethical dimension. The liturgy of both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is shaped on the myth of an annual assize during which the individual's deeds are reviewed by the Supreme Judge. The myth is refracted throughout these services, never more pointedly or poignantly than in a medieval prayer known as the Unetaneh Tokef: "Let us declare the utter holiness of this day for it is one of awe and dread. . . truly You are judge, accuser and all-knowing witness, You write and seal, record and number, remember all things that have been forgotten, open the book of remembrances wherein each deed speaks of itself. Overhead a great shofar is sounded, the angels join in fear and cry out: 'Behold the day of judgment'." The idea that each of us is being constantly judged is a dominant and recurrent theme in the Torah tradition. But God is merciful as well as strict. He will weigh our intentions as well as our deeds, and there is always a second chance. "Repentance, prayer, and righteousness can avert the severe decree."

Idolatry encouraged excessiveness. God is One introduced a welcome measure of balance to ethical discussion. In the pagan myths each of the gods was endowed with specific virtues or qualities. There was a god of love, another of war, another of wisdom. There was a god of life and there was a god of the Kingdom of the Dead. Each god encouraged his communicants to shape their lives around his attribute; but, as Aristotle observed in his Ethics, any virtue taken to excess becomes a vice. The Egyptians so centered their worship on death and immortality that they literally buried in the uncaring sand wealth that might have lifted the burden of abjectness from the masses and guaranteed the nation a prosperous future.

If you worshipped the great Fire god, Maloch, your worship consisted of having a son or daughter walk across burning coals and throw themselves on the fires of the altar. If you belonged to one of the agricultural cults of Canaan you worshipped at a shrine where the earth's fertility was stimulated by orgiastic rite at which worshippers impregnated the shrine's female attendants, a form of sympathetic magic designed to fertilize the earth. In the Torah tradition

children are carefully nurtured, not sacrificed, and the earth's fertility depended on the community's way of life not shrine activity. "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel you shall be devoured by the sword."

- Surely there were non-orgiastic cults and kindly idolators?

Yes, and when Jews had separated themselves from the impress of the all-pervading pagan cultures, when that battle had been won and generations of Torah living had fully separated the Jewish psyche, we find some of the sages of the Talmud pointing to men of quality among the pagans and finding value in some elements of their culture. But Judaism never let down its guard against the dangers of idolatry.

Idolatry dethrones God and enthrones some human passion or interest in His place. Some worship themselves. Some worship a guru. The Communists' idol is the ideology they call "scientific Marxism", and those who argue for the untrammeled freedom of the marketplace have an idol called capitalism. We are in danger of regressing into idolatry whenever we care blindly or excessively.

The worship of the master race leads to war, to the grinding down of the poor and the weak under the iron boot; the only wars which the worship of the one God encouraged are the wars against want, injustice, and man's cruelty to his neighbor.

- Why is the Shema possessive of God? "The Lord, our God," God isn't ours.

You've elided the text. The Shema reads: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one." God isn't ours, but we have a special perception of God and a special relationship to God.

- You're talking about the covenant.

Yes, and about Israel's special perception of God. Every theistic religion fills the name, God, with its special perceptions. Israel's God was not only one, beyond any single attribution, but bound to a particular covenant, that is, perceived as both just and gracious.

When the Torah is taken out from the ark the service generally calls for a recitation of a

sentence from *Exodus* which lists God's attributes: "The Lord, the Lord God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and ever true, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin." God can be described simply as overwhelming power. The Jewish God was more than mysterious power. He was holy, the model of moral perfection. The consummate duty of the Jew was to pattern himself after God.

- I thought Judaism taught that God could not be described.

It also taught that God had suggested his nature in the Torah. God had clothed the nakedness of Adam and Eve; visited Abraham while he was recovering from surgery; comforted Isaac after the death of his father; reminded Moses of his duty; so, "After the Lord your God shall you walk."

- You're getting ahead of me. You haven't explained how the Israelites made the conceptual leap from idolatry to monotheism?

Some have tried to explain "the Lord is one" as an insight born of living on the edge of empty wilderness. The Hebrews were sheep-herding tribes who lived in the open land between the Canaanite cities and the desert and so nothing stood between them and the sun, the storm, and the sweep of the earth; presumedly, daily experience with the on-rolling cycles of nature sensitized them to the One behind all discrete phenomena.

- That's a dramatic theory, but not convincing. There were many bedouin tribes. Why were the Hebrews the only group to outgrow paganism?

Others reverse the argument and explain monotheism as an insight born of living on the edge of civilization. As desert folk the Israelites watched with detached amusement as one city-state conquered another to be in turn conquered by a third and how, after each overthrow, the victims demoted the gods of the defeated city to a subordinate place in their pantheon. According to this theory, the haplessness of the gods to arrest this endless cycle of victory and defeat led our fathers to seek the unity behind the parade.

- An equally unsatisfactory explanation. It has the same flaw. Apparently only the

Israelites saw the foolishness of all this. Why?

A few historians argue that monotheism was borrowed from the Egyptians. The Exodus story seems to place the Israelites in Egypt in the fourteenth century during a time of great stress when a strong-minded Pharoah, Akhenaton, set out, unsuccessfully, to destroy the power of the priestly elite by overthrowing all the ancient gods but one, the solar disk, Aton, whom he raised as god above all the other deities of Egypt. This theory holds that Akhenaton's Hebrew slaves knew of these events and Moses, basing himself on Akhenaton's lead, proceeded to dedicate his people to a single God, all-powerful, all-embracing, a One. I'll make the arguments against this theory for you. While we are fairly certain of Akhenaton's political motives, we know nothing of his theological concerns, if he in fact was aware of the religious implications of his short-lived reform, and any argument based on cultural borrowing is at best tentative.

- What's your theory?

That God revealed His Oneness. Frankly, we have no better explanation. When Israel was still young, a man, it may have been Moses the prophet, we know not exactly who, found a commanding voice speaking to him and reached out with his mind into the darkness and wrenched from the darkness the vision of the one God. Science did not demand it, indeed, reasonable men, including the best minds of the next thousand years, argued against it; but, somehow, a few men reached out and understood.

- You don't actually believe that God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush?

The bush is an element in a dramatic myth which like many myths is truer than if it were literally true. Sometimes when you puzzle over a problem a totally unexpected answer flashes into your mind. I believe that Moses, or another, puzzled over the incongruities of idolatry and that in his mind a new understanding of the creative and mysterious reality behind the world of things and appearances began to take shape. I believe in radical surprise which is what I believe is meant by revelation.

- Do you mean that God actually described Himself to Moses?

Franz Rosenzweig suggested some years ago that the Torah's language describing Sinai, "and God came down and God spoke," should be carefully considered. "God came down," he said, concludes the revelation; "God spoke" begins Moses' interpretation. The miracle is that God, meaning, presented itself; once it is present a human mind appropriates the idea and expresses it as best it can.

- Hold up. I'm confused. I know Judaism teaches God's oneness, but I've been reading I. B. Singer and his stories are full of demons and spirits. If God is One and these stories are where authentic, do all these lesser gods come from? Is Judaism really a monotheist tradition?

In terms of theology, yes. In terms of popular credulities, no. The faith consistently has proclaimed God alone. When stories were told of spirits or demons, an attempt was made to make clear that these were not independent powers. God has dominion over all that is, the seen and the unseen. Satan in the Job story is not an independent power but an angel in God's court who must get God's permission before Job can be tested. The theory was that all the angels and spirits, what was called the "Family of Heaven", did God's will, but official theology was often compromised by popular faith.

- Popular faith is just a euphemism for superstition.

Jews were often superstitious. Were, Are.

Life is full of premonitions which are not fully understood and of unexpected experiences; moreover, before medicine discovered germs and viruses, how else was disease to be explained

Before you feel too superior remember that ours is the Age of Aquarius. Oneness is a concept which is hard for the mind to grasp. How do you envision what cannot be seen, touched, or described?

- But I'm not superstitious.

Then why are you wearing a Hai emblem around your neck?

- It's my identification as a Jew.

Don't you feel just a bit unprotected when you forget to put it on?

– Enough. I've got another question. Why did our ancestors take axes to Canaan's idols? I know a collector who will pay thousands of dollars for those statues. They're quite beautiful. Weren't they being fanatics? We don't go around knocking other people's religions, much less cutting down their shrines.

The Torah insists that there was to be no accommodation with idolatry. "Obliterate the foreign gods that are in your midst." Pagan high places must be torn down and ploughed under. The sacred groves must be cut down and the wood used for fuel. Foreign gods were mocked. They were vanity, nothingness, shameful and worse. Idolatry equated the gods and power. Ancient Israel had no National Conference of Idolators and Jews.

– That's my point.

You're still caught up in the 'religions are necessarily good' syndrome. Those who came to see the world with Torah-instructed eyes recognized that idolatry supported indecency, injustice, the separation of races and, worst of all, perpetuated an understanding of God which was not morally inspiring. Civilization required that the cry of animism on the human spirit be broken. What they attempted and ultimately achieved was no less than a complete revision of the most cherished values of a long-lived and coherent culture.

– All that's history. Idolatry died with the pagan world. No one makes idols.

Don't they? What are those plastic figures I see on so many car dashboards? Innocent, you say? Perhaps, unless the driver is convinced that because they are there he can floor the accelerator pedal without danger.

– You'll admit you're stretching a point.

I'll agree that idol making is not a growth industry, but idolatry still thrives.

The Torah defines as idolatry the worship of anything real or imaginary other than God Himself. One such idol is named pride of birth and another pride of place. There is the deity of the white skin and the deity of color. What of the patron god of the self-righteous nation? We are scandalized that some ancients offered human sacrifices. I put to you that each decade

or so we offer a holocaust of our best and brightest to the god of national ambition, or is it the god of national greed?

Idolatry comes easily. We tend to project into the heavens a rather indulgent deity who forgives us for our foibles, applauds us vigorously for our trivial accomplishments, encourages us in our low moments and who is careful not to reprimand us for enjoying leisure and security without thought to the needs of others. Who of us has not been tempted to love excessively a parent, a cause, a possession, a charismatic leader, a party, the state? When I recite the Shema I am reminded forcefully that there is only one love which cannot be excessive and that all other commitments must be conditional. It matters very much whether you worship the Jewish God or some other god.

It was getting late. I suggested a related thought to mull over at services. A person never rises above the God whom he worships.

Chapter 9

THE GOD WHO LETS US CRY

Late at night. The service had been a warm moment. A few of us had retired to the oldtimer's bunk. Coffee, doughnuts and quiet talk. For some reason, I had been rambling on a bit about a recent trip to China.

The astronauts reported that the Great Wall was the only man-made object they could identify from space. Jewish history, like the Great Wall, is vast, sweeping and highly visible. One of the special feelings I enjoy as a Jew is that I am part of a truly significant enterprise which will outlive me.

- There is no particular virtue in longevity. I know folk who have lived into their nineties and whose accomplishments only charity would allow me to describe as modest. Despite Grandma Moses types, the last years usually are uncreative, a time for sitting around and being cared for. Old age is a cane and failing eyesight. Besides, there are a lot of old folks around: Egyptians, Greeks, the Chinese.

Jewish history is not only a long story but a mysteriously significant one. There have never been a lot of Jews but there is hardly an era in which the Jewish presence has not been notable.

- With all due respect, rabbi, aren't you deluding yourself? I remember a survey course in world history I took as a college freshman. We spent a day on the Israelites and the Hebrew Bible. The prof talked about its original ideas but made it clear that the Bible's importance to Western civilization was due largely to Christianity's later interest in it. After that lecture neither the Jewish people nor any Jewish contributions to civilization were mentioned until the last week when we talked about the political implications of modern anti-semitism. He talked for some time about anti-semitism's long history: exiles, forced conversions, the ghetto,

and the gas chamber. I draw no encouragement from our lengthy record as history's most available victim.

I quoted Justice Brandeis: "The Jew gave to the world its three greatest religions, reverence for law, and the highest conceptions of morality," but even as I did I knew that the judge's testimony did not adequately make my case, so I resorted to a question: why do you think the Jew was such a frequent victim?

- We were there and a minority.

- The Christ-killer myth.

- We wouldn't be baptized.

I look on the world's antipathy as a perverse tribute to the power of the ideas to which the Torah tradition witnesses. The privileged encouraged anti-semitism because they knew that the themes of democracy and justice are sanctified in the Hebrew Bible; and ideologues of the left went along with anti-semitism because the Torah tradition values each person and rejects any claim that noble ends justify immoral means or that the individual must subordinate his rights to the collective.

- I'm not sure I follow your analysis. Anti-semitism describes prejudice against Jews not Jewish ideas.

The Jew, the black, any distinctive outsider is what he is and what the majority think him to be. The Jew internalized many Torah values and the non-Jew projected on to the Jew what he assumed Judaism stood for. We denied his religion, so it was almost inevitable that he should see us as subversive.

Kings claimed the right to rule as they saw fit, the Hebrew tradition rejected all claims to absolute authority. Priests and popes believed they controlled the keys to the kingdom, but Jews acted as if they knew that the Archangel Gabriel would let them in. Monks denied basic physical needs believing God valued a life of celibacy, while rabbis married and went out into the world. Theologians explained that the Bible foretold Christ but the Jews, who alone could

read the original text, insisted otherwise. Simply by being, the Torah challenged all claims to arbitrary authority and privilege.

- Oh come on, they went after us because we would not bow to their gods, play in their games, or eat in their restaurants.

Prejudice begins in the myths of the bigoted, not in the acts of the calumnied.

- There are prejudices and prejudices. I've always wondered why anti-semitism has appealed to so many so powerfully.

It's one of the few prejudices which has religious sanction. Its roots are in the New Testament text and it retains vitality because of the authority which millions still ascribe to those documents.

- Are you saying the New Testament aids and abets prejudice?

The gospel writers, aided and abetted by Paul, set up the Torah tradition as the straw man against which they could score polemical points. They stereotyped Judaism as a dry and lifeless legalism and Jewish leaders as lying hypocrites and narrow-minded priests. They mocked the Jewish way as deadly to the spirit and twisted historic fact to make the Jew rather than Pontius Pilate responsible for the Crucifixion. In the Gospels, as you know, Jews cry out for Jesus' death. It didn't hurt their argument that many in their Roman audiences were prepared to look on Jews as enemies of legitimate authority, obstinate rebels who refused to see the value of the Pax Romana.

Some Church Fathers went further and developed what Jules Isaac has called a theology of contempt whose basic thesis was that God had ordered that the Temple be destroyed as punishment for their crimes and sentenced the Jews to eternal wandering. God meant for the Jew to be punished, and obviously no God-fearing person would go against God's will. Christians were made to feel that they obeyed God when they forced the Jew to wear a demeaning costume, denied the Jew standing in law, and set up the rules of apartheid which governed Christian-Jewish relations for fifteen hundred years. The Greek orthodox theologian, Nicholas Berdyaev, said it

well: "Perhaps the saddest thing to admit is that those who rejected the Cross have to carry it, while those who welcomed it are so often engaged in crucifying others."

- Why didn't anti-semitism weaken over the centuries as most myths do?

Because there we were. Because the Gospel story could not be revised. Because our presence kept alive ideas and values which challenged the self-confident assumptions of the majority.

A century ago the ministers of the Czar talked candidly about their policy of deliberately forcing the Jews from Russia because Jews were Typhoid Marys who spread ideas like democracy and freedom which were unwelcome in that absolutist society. Centuries earlier the medieval church, not only locked up the Hebrew Bible lest the faithful read and question official doctrine, but forbade those who could read the text, the Jews, from discussing it with Christians lest they be led into heresy.

Because Christianity claimed to be the truth, but the Jew was obstinate and would not see 'the truth'. For those to whom Christian teachings seemed self-evident, Jewish non-agreement could only be explained as due to a spiritual blindness, a deformity God had placed on all Jews until the Second Coming. Otherwise, they would have had to admit the inadmissible that there were valid reasons to doubt the Church's confidence in its teachings. We have seen religion's certifying function. The Jews' simple presence was a challenge to Christian confidence.

To probe into the causes of anti-semitism is to understand something of what the Jew has meant to civilization.

- I'm not sure I like the idea of being a whipping boy because the world is protective of familiar ideas and unwarranged privileges.

It's not been an unrelieved horror story. During the Biblical period the Jewish experience was not particularly bitter; and, in many places since, there have been extended periods of quiet settlement.

- But the fact remains that we've had more than our share.

I'm not quite sure what a fair share is. Let's not play the 'who's suffered most' game. History tells us that there has been a great deal of suffering and that the world is not a fair place. Why are some born to luxury and some into the poverty of Bangladesh. The question to which faith suggests an answer is, shall we bless God or blame God for making the world as it is.

- Bless God?

Would our Jewish community be as sensitive to social welfare issues and civil rights if our history had been a happier one. The Torah's teachings are sensitive and noble, but in the end only words. I am convinced that Jews owe their instinct for justice equally to Amos and apartheid and that many of the fine qualities which are expressed by the Jewish community: compassion, empathy, a pragmatic attitude towards success; open-handed generosity and impatience with privilege are the result of bitter experience.

- Come off it. My father, an old socialist, keeps reminding me that it was a Jew who owned the sweat shop where he first worked.

Not all Jews are sensitive or charitable or committed to social justice; but a remarkable number were and are. The ghetto was a dismal place whose high walls rarely let in the sunlight, but within this cramped area Jews constructed a remarkably compassionate community.

A medieval Jewish community was a miniature welfare state, replete with groups which provided dowries for poor girls, travel money for the stranded, medicine for the sick, tuition for those requiring scholarship aid, as well as direct financial assistance for the poor.

- Aren't you rationalizing?

- The real issue is God. Why did Jews have to face such a cruel existence? Where was God? Why did God let Jews suffer as they have? Your analysis of anti-semitism suggests that God has nothing to do with history; if He hasn't, then the Torah tradition with its emphasis on Divine Providence falls apart and Auschwitz marks the end of the line for any pious talk about a God who cares.

Recently a man wrote me an angry letter about God. His brother had died during open heart surgery. Apparently the surgery had been botched. His brother had been an active Jew all his life. How could God have allowed this to happen?

I wrote back that God had not performed the operation or decided to have it performed. The mistakes were medical ones. If we praise God for freedom, a mind and will of our own, then we must be prepared not to blame him for human decisions which are harmful or have undesired results. The blessing of freedom is medical research. The price medical error.

- What has this to do with Auschwitz?

German engineers built Auschwitz, not God.

- What kind of God would create such a world?

What kind of God wouldn't? Would you want to live without freedom, as a prisoner of your instincts?

For us to have some control of our lives, God had to let go of certain controls over history. War is a human achievement, not God's. The gift of self-consciousness, the quality which distinguishes the human being from the animal, requires that history depend in part on our activity and judgment. Growth requires the possibility that our actions may be terribly wrong.

- But why doesn't God stop war?

Because we're adults not angry children who need to be pulled apart by a gym instructor. How will we learn if we don't have to suffer the consequences of our actions? We're back to the paradox that if God were to restrict man's freedom and power He would be narrowing our responsibilities and diminishing our control over our lives. If our capacity for mischief were diminished, so would our capacity for significant achievement. The point is God did not make us inadequate to the moral challenges we face.

- But we don't seem to learn.

Is that God's problem or ours? It would be God's problem if He had given us freedom but no reason or will or instruction. The point is we know better than to murder millions. We

have sufficient will power to discipline our actions. The simple truth is that God has not failed us. We fail God.

War and apartheid are human activities which God could override only by stripping us of the privilege of freedom. At creation God gave us all we needed. Before peoples cut down the jungle and overcropped the land, Bangladesh supported a thriving civilization. Most human suffering is the fault of other humans.

- We were talking about yellow badges, pogroms, Stalin, Hitler, and Arab wars against Israel. Why continue a pilgrimage which obviously angers or frightens many?

An anonymous prophet who lived among the Judean exiles in Babylon offered an image which you might want to think about. Those were difficult years. The Temple had been destroyed. Jerusalem had been razed. Many had been physically uprooted and exiled. A question of significance faced those who thought about the Jewish religion. What could an exiled people, prisoners and little esteemed, contribute to the unfolding of history. He answered his own question. Their role was to be God's suffering servants. They were to proclaim God's will by example and by word to nations comfortable with idolatry and the limited values of the pagan world. The sleeper wants only to squash the noisy mosquito which buzzes around his head so that he can go back to his slumber, "so Israel was despised, forsaken of man, a people of pain from whom others hid their faces." Israel is the nagging conscience of the world. As long as Israel remains, the world's sleep will be fitful.

- But why lay all this on the Jews?

I don't know. Remember: "seek not to explain God's ways to man because those are beyond your understanding."

- That's a copout.

Only if you believe everything can be explained.

- But the world never seems to learn.

I'm not sure of that. It seems to me that much of the world has awakened to life's possibilities. I often think of Dickens' famous sentence: "It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." Billions are spent on weapons, and millions seek to throw off the limitations of ignorance and insensitivity. Millions seem to be listening to God and choosing life.

The death camps are a truth, but not the whole truth. What about Hitler's bomb shattered bunker in Berlin and 1948 and the creation of the State of Israel? Think again about the mysterious significance of Jewish history.

- But six million did not survive to contemplate the mysterious significance of Jewish history.

I know, and I cry and remind myself of what I do not understand and of the psalmist's faith: "though He slay me, yet will I believe in Him." I don't have answers, but I am a Jew and my myths describe the hardships of the wilderness trek and arrival in the Promised Land and the fact that, if the tribes had not repeatedly rejected the will of God, clear duty, they would have reached Canaan much sooner.

- Your approach is a bracing one; but many Nazis survived the war and became prosperous in post-war Germany, and the six million were dead. To say we are responsible for our world is to address only part of the problem. The other part, the faith shattering part, is the suffering of the innocents.

You're right, of course. I have no answer. At this point reason must give way to faith. I know only this, that I owe it to my past not to abandon our witness to truths mankind cannot afford to deny for the price of rejection is the end of civilization.

After a moment, I turned back to the problem of God and suffering.

Some of our confusion comes from a controlling image of God which is, to put it kindly, childish. Over the centuries the Torah tradition has fought a brave battle to disabuse us of the image of God as a kindly Heavenly Grandfather.

- But the prayer book speaks of God as kind, merciful and just and as a God who hears

our prayers.

It also says that God knows our prayers before we utter them, that God's kindness and mercy depend on a wisdom deeper than any we can imagine, and that God knows our needs before we are ever conscious of them and His goodness is manifest in creation and not proven by whether He permits our petitions or denies them.

One of the tradition's favorite names for God was makom - place - God is the animating spirit of all that is. Such a God creates a world full of possibility and it is up to man to meet the challenge.

- In effect, you're saying that prayer has many psychological advantages: it releases pent-up feelings, focuses our thoughts and opens up emotional reserves; but is not efficacious in the sense of making God respond to our needs.

I guess we all pray at times for a miracle. Abe Lincoln said it: I find myself down on my knees when I have no place else to go. That kind of prayer is elemental and explosive rather than a product of sober reflection. The Torah tradition reflects both need and reason. God responds to prayer and man should not pray, sit back and depend on God to do His thing.

- I can't get beyond the horror that six million were killed.

And many millions more. Jews were not the only victims. You ask for reasons. Reasons are words. These events are elemental and beyond reason's grasp. They cannot be explained, but they can be transcended. Ultimately reason must give way to faith if we are not to be paralyzed by our inability to explain. If life were reasonable, people would never have created religions. There would have been no need. Remember religion's function is to confim and affirm an ultimate purpose - to prove that chaos does not rule the world. Faith allows us to carry on despite the cruelties we experience. The watchwords of the Bratzlaver Hassidim says it simply: Gewalt, Yiden, zeit sich nit meyaesh - for God's sake, Jews, do not despair. These words only repeat the Psalmist's pledge: "though He (God) slay me, yet will I believe in Him." Faith describes convictions held despite contradictory experiences. The Hebrew word for faith

is emunah which comes from a root which means holding firm.

- Holding firm to what?

To a recognition of the possibilities of life. To the discovery of the holy dimensions of our existence. To God's promise that a life of concern can make a difference.

- I wonder sometimes.

Our problem is that we are less bound up than earlier Jews with the Messianic promise of our faith and half suspicious that we are consoling ourselves with fiction.

- Are we?

I think not. Recent history cannot be read as unrelieved tragedy. Sweeping political and social changes are taking place. The masses are coming alive and their individuality and potential is being revealed. An unsettled society is full of frustration and potential violence; but our convulsions also suggest our potential for effective change. You can't have the one without the other. The ancients knew this. Almost every scenario about the Messianic Age assumes that it will be preceded by a time of unprecedented trouble. The most famous of these images is a homely one. Just as a child's delivery is preceded by birth pangs, the Messianic Age, according to tradition, will be preceded by the birth pangs of the Messiah.

- How does one acquire such a faith?

It's a matter of opening up the inner eye, of seeing what is always there but which we rarely notice, being preoccupied as we are with the routine demands of life.

- Isn't faith simply self-hypnosis?

Illusion has no basis in reality. I quoted a few lines from Abraham J. Heschel.

> Faith does not spring out of nothing. It comes with the holy dimensions of our existence. . . . Faith does not detach man from thinking. It does not suspend reason. It is opposed, not to knowledge, but to indifferent aloofness to the essence of living. . . . Faith is the insight that life is not a self-maintaining private affair, not a chaos of whims and instincts, but an aspiration, a way, not a refuge.

- That's a bit poetic for me; but I think I see what you're driving at. But I don't want to get detoured into a discussion of faith in the abstract. Our question is specific: Why have the

Jews suffered more than any other group?

They haven't. Some day read a history of the Ameneans or the Druzes. Jews have had our share and more, but I doubt that we're number one on the most persecuted list.

- Then why have Jews suffered as much as they have?

Deuteronomy offers one explanation: you get what you deserve. I'm talking about covenant theology, the old idea that God rewards loyalty and punishes disloyalty. The prophets who applied this grading system to contemporary events insisted that Israel's sufferings - they meant everything from bad harvests to military defeat - were the result of the community's failure to live up to the terms of the covenant. This view provided, until our day, one of the myths through which the Jew has explained to himself his fate. It runs this way. At Sinai we signed on to the covenant and agreed to its conditions, including a list of rewards for obedience and punishments for default. The prophets of Israel "heard" God "render judgment". When defeat came it was seen as a deserved punishment, "Because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes and trample the head of the poor in the dust of the earth . . . Therefore . ."

- I find it infinitely sad that some Jews went to their deaths in Nazi Europe, beating their breasts and confessing, 'It is because of our sins.'

So do I. So did the writers of apocalypse who followed the prophets who insisted in their writings that God determines the course of history for His own purposes. There's some truth to both contentions. A nation that plays the power game will at some point find that it's no game, but I don't believe that life operates like a classroom, that hard and conscientious work guarantees good grades. At best, to quote our sages, the reward of the good deed is the deed itself. Job's challenge to his comforters who defended the operation of God's grading system was based solidly on experience; I've seen some healthy and prosperous bastards; yet, I must add that over time there does seem to be something of a balancing out. Israel is, and many a more powerful empire is not. I also believe that there are spiritual rewards which do not depend

on wealth or security: "Better a small morsel and quiet therewith than a house full of feasting and strife."

- You're beginning to sound like one of Job's comforters.

Their observations of human nature were often accurate. They argued that suffering is good for the soul, that through storms we grow. Prosperity, they said, tends to make us oblivious to human need. Grief and pain can expose our latent capacity for empathy. I knew a young couple, born to wealth, who were devoted to nothing beyond themselves until a child developed a rare and dangerous blood disease. Forced out of themselves they grew into caring people and have devoted much time to the support of pediatric medicine.

- Where did they go wrong?

Though keen observers of the human condition, the religious understanding was conventional and uninspired. They told Job that suffering represents a trial which allows God to measure human character. They tried to justify God's ways to man and, as we've seen, this can't be done.

- This trial idea suggests that God may be a bit of a sadist.

Job in his pain says as much: "God crushes me for a trifle and increases my wounds without cause."

The comforters simply closed their eyes to the fact that there are times when the suffering is so intense that it coarsens the soul and deadens the spirit. I will never forget the concentration camp survivor who explained patiently why she had decided not to have children: 'I simply can't let myself feel that deeply any more.'

Much suffering is avoidable, certainly more than we generally admit. God did not build Auschwitz and Maidenek, but to live is to be bruised, suffering is also part of the given life; and we do not fully understand its function. We may never understand so our challenge is to master our condition and not be defeated by it.

- I find it terribly sad when someone says that you get what you deserve. A baby doesn't deserve to die. Few among the poor really deserve their poverty. Certainly none of us

would claim that the well-off and well-placed are simply enjoying their just desserts.

It has another pernicious effect. It suggests to some that an accident or illness is somehow deserved. When I visit someone recently bereaved, I often hear: 'what did I do to deserve this?' as if the widow is somehow guilty for her husband's death.

- Much of what you are saying suggests that God is indifferent to the individual's fate?

Not indifferent but, at the same time, not bound to do what we want.

Do you remember the end of the Book of Job? Job has challenged God's justice, but God makes no attempt to explain himself to Job. God simply reveals His majesty to him. "Where were you when I rolled out the Heavens?" In a long poem God parades the mysterious and vast operation of creation, His creation, and Job submits: "I know that You can do anything . . . I had heard of You, the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor my words and repent. . ."

Walter Kaufman, in an interesting work, The Faith of a Heretic, describes Job's response as acquiescence to the "tragic power" of the world. "This is the ultimate truth of philosophy. There is a power beyond us and the power makes no sense except that it is there, and man must, as best he can and with what composure and equanimity he can muster, simply accept life on its terms." I think Kaufman is mistaken in his analysis. God parades before Job, not cold and indifferent power, but creative power. God seems to be saying: creation is not a chaotic structure but a well-designed universe. There is a mysterious and wonderful order. You cannot fathom the totality of that purpose, but you can sense it. Rudolf Otto put it this way: "When we envisage certain things in our world, such as the starry sky, the thickly-people ocean, the orderliness and the progressiveness of life, and give them the keenest and clearest scientific description in our power, there is left in our mind a feeling of the Holy or the Sacred."

From the perspective of Torah, Kaufman is a heretic. He does not deny God but he

denies that there is a creative purpose. Faith begins with a recognition of benign purpose. After each stage of creation, Genesis one uses the refrain, "And God saw that it was good."

- I keep measuring your comments against the Holocaust. How can you have faith in a benign order having lived through such evil?

I have no answer. The Holocaust is overwhelming. How does one think about the malignancy called Naziism or the adamant enforcement of restrictive immigration quotas into Palestine, England and the United States by the Allies? On one level this sad record must restrain our enthusiasm for notions about man's basic and innate goodness. But it also must be said that there were non-Jews of compassion and bravery who put their lives at stake to hide Jews and help them escape. We're back to the familiar question: was the Holocaust God's fault or man's? If life is to include possibility, the possibility must include evil as well as heroism.

- Isn't the point that God did not interfere. Millions prayed for relief and none was sent.

Do you remember the story I told several days ago about Moses visiting the Academy of Akiba and being astonished at the rules Akiba was quoting as the law of Moses? I didn't complete the story as the Talmud reports it. After God had reassured Moses that what Akiba was teaching was in fact Torah, Moses says to God: 'How is it that knowing such a sage would arise, you gave the Torah through me?' To which God answered, 'Be silent, such is My decree.' God then allowed Moses to see the rest of Akiba's life and his death. He was burned alive by the Romans during the Bar Kochba Rebellion and his skin sold in the marketplace. Moses was appalled: 'Is this the reward for such learning and devotion?' 'Be silent, for such is My decree.'

- I'm appalled.

Some things must be accepted. Our sages defined atheism not as the denial of the existence of God, the Walter Kaufman's of our world are prepared to use God's name as a label for mindless power, but as the denial of God's justice: Le'it din ve'leit dayan, there is no

justice and there is no judge. No one ever suggested that faith comes easily. We've got to face Akiba's martyrdom and the suffering of the Jewish people. But without faith the soul withers and shrivels and there is no reason to stay with the great causes of the human race.

- You can't leave it there.

Akiba's martyrdom inspired generations of men and women who had to put their lives on the line for what they believed.

- That's not enough.

I know. No argument eases suffering. When my heart aches, sweet reason is not the medicine I need. At such times I want to be listened to and not to be talked at. I need love not logic. Any explanation offered me seems irrelevant.

I have been a rabbi for nearly thirty years and have spent a fair amount of time close to illness and grief. As a young rabbi I expected to hear those beaten to their knees cry out in anger and deny. I have heard complaints, certainly, and self-pity, 'why me'; but I have rarely known anyone whose faith was completely shattered by illness, ill luck or pain. Somehow, when we are on our knees we look up and sense a transcending wisdom. The life force takes over and more often than not what I hear is a half-whispered, half-believing, 'maybe it's for the best.'

- I can't get the Akiba story out of my mind. It suggests that God has an arbitrary streak and is really a cruel God.

What it really suggests is that there are facets to life we cannot explain and must learn to accept. Consciousness is given. Our endowments are given. Death is a given and so are illness and pain.

I often think of what the psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl, wrote out of his personal experience as a death camp inmate:

> Whenever one is confronted with an inescapable, unavoidable situation, whenever one has to face a fate which cannot be changed, e.g. an incurable disease, such as an incurable cancer; just then one is given a last chance to actualize the highest value, to fulfill the deepest meaning, the meaning of

suffering. For what matters above all is the attitude we take towards suffering, the attitude in which we take our suffering upon ourselves.

- Are you saying: Make the best of a hapless bargain?

The rabbis weren't stoics. They were not resigned to a hapless world. There were joys and happy days. They trusted that God would accept repentance and end the Exile. Our worship always includes prayer: "Hear us, O Lord, and we shall be healed. Save us and we shall be saved."

There is a pragmatic side to the Torah tradition which says, 'live, do the right, don't ask too many questions, keep the faith.' The Hebrew letter Bet is the first letter of the first word in the Torah. Why B rather than A? Simple, the sages said. The Hebrew letter is formed by three strokes which enclose three sides of a square, " ". Since Hebrew is written from right to left, the missing side opens towards the flow of the text. Bet, they said, was chosen as a sign that the Jew should read what follows, the Torah, carefully and not worry too much about what cannot be known: what is above, what below and what preceded creation.

- I've heard all you've said, but you've really not resolved the problem of suffering.

I know. The Mishnah quotes R. Yannai as saying that we cannot explain the prosperity of the wicked or the impoverishment of the good. I would add that Torah seeks to arm us with rituals which will help us hold on to sanity when the pressures mount. Before death, the dying spoke the Shema. After death the mourners speak the Kaddish. In stress we are advised to affirm life and God. The Kaddish also speaks of the inevitable coming of Kingdom.

Every Jewish act has a Messianic element to it. We are conditioned to hope. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but with the morning there is joy." The Gates of Eden may be locked behind us, but at some point the Gates of Paradise will open. God lets us cry and He tells us to look through our tears to life's possibilities. No easy task, but an ennobling one.

It was late. Time to close with a story. This one was first told by the sixteenth century martyrologist, Solomon ibn Verga, about the persecution and exile of the Jews of Spain and Portugal.

A ship was stricken with plague and the captain made for the nearest land fall where he unceremoniously left the passengers on a deserted beach. Many died there of hunger. A few, including a Jew, his wife and two sons, tried to make it on foot to some settlement. They walked with great effort but it proved too much for the woman who collapsed and died. The man carried his two sons until he fainted from exhaustion. When he revived he found the boys dead beside him. In great distress he rose to his feet and said: Lord of the universe, You are doing a lot to make me abandon my faith. I am a Jew and a Jew I shall remain and nothing that you have brought upon me or will bring upon me shall avail.

Chapter 10

THE GENERATION GAP, GUILT AND GOD

Shabbat afternoon. A morning service, written and organized by Institute members, had been read and enjoyed. There was a happy feeling of community.

- "I like it here. There's no dressing up. There's song and touching. I don't like services at home. The pews are uncomfortable, the service is a set piece, everyone's dressed up and uptight."

How often at home do you come to a service after five days of Jewing? Rather, you walk in cold. You've been thinking of work or finances. You sit yourself down and challenge the service to move you.

- It's also the guitar, open shirts and singable tunes.

The forms of Jewish worship have always conformed to personal need and cultural style. There always have been a variety of ways to express one's faith. Maimonides worshipped at home with a few disciples in quiet dignity next to the bustle of an active synagogue whose noise he deplored. The problem is not guitar or organ, or open shirt or ties, but how to make sure the spirit is full and the environment truly representative of the Torah spirit. When there were shrines, sacrifices, and priests, Jews had shrines, sacrifices, and priests. In cultures when worshippers and courtiers prostrated themselves to express humble submission, Jews, like Muslims to this day, prostrated themselves. Pews and a gowned clergy are eighteenth century forms. The guitar is late twentieth century.

In former times these differences tended to follow geographic lines; Yemenite Jews sit cross-legged on prayer rugs; Polish Jews prayed standing before tall reading desks. Today these divisions tend to be generational. Some synagogues have an adult service and a youth service on Friday night. Adolescents don't want to sit in pews, pews are straight and confining. They're not ready to sit quietly and listen to somebody preach; they want dialogue,

not a sermon. They want intensity, to do it themselves, not the calm of an organ playing over them nor the artistry of a cantor singing for them.

The modern synagogue often seems to be a three-ring circus. In one ring is the cantor, the prayer book, the reading of the Torah, a thoughtful sermon, and the formal rites of the tradition; in another there is a guitar, a mimeographed service, wordless dance, and a friendship circle; while in the third ring there is a family service full of simple songs, cut-down prayers, a story sermon, wriggling children and beaming parents. The young claim to be put off by the formality of adult worship. Adults are often nonplussed by hand clapping sing-alongs and the use of audio-visual equipment. Each service reflects the emotional, psychological, and physical needs of its congregation.

- Didn't these generational differences exist in earlier generations?

As far as I know, no. Adolescence seems to be a modern phenomenon. In medieval times boys entered the adult work world quite early. Today young people live amid their peers, in a different atmosphere than their parents; and, consequently, their attitudes, aesthetics, and play are distinct.

- There is a formal order of service. That's what Siddur means. How can you approve disorder?

I was talking of style more than content, but recognize that Jewish worship is not a set piece. The Siddur is not a closed book. Its basic structure took shape in Mishnaic times, but much has been added and, from time to time, elements have been dropped. In terms of spirit and style hitlahavot, genuineness, takes precedence over form. The medieval synagogue was a tumultuous and noisy place. Jews stayed for hours and gossiped even as they worshipped. They were familiar with each other and with their God. The medieval Jew had nothing else to do and no other place to go. There were no movies, no radio or television, probably no other public space in his town; so he lengthened the service and, not accustomed to privacy, denied it a place.

Emancipation changed all this. The emancipated Jew no longer enjoyed enforced leisure born of underemployment. These were the years of the twelve-hour day. The service had to be shortened. He was now part of a larger world and aware of its aesthetics. The familiar swaying came to seem inappropriate, since middle-class burghers sat silently in pews. As decorum and discipline took over, some of the old sense of involvement was lost. The balance shifted swiftly and the congregation became increasingly an audience, and worship tended to become what it had never been before and never ought to be - a spectator sport.

- But I respond to intimacy and participation.

Needs and attitudes have shifted again. We live in a world fascinated by soul and roots. We're intrigued by the imagination more than the mind. So the guitar replaces the organ, and congregations experiment with dance, citing the precedent of the Hassidim. Whatever the shortcomings of the new style services, they have, at least, the virtue of liveliness and in worship immediacy is critical.

- You talk of guitar music as if it were everywhere. We belong to an orthodox synagogue where instrumental music on the Sabbath is forbidden.

The Temple in Jerusalem featured a choir and orchestra of Levites and, when it was destroyed, instrumental music was banned as a sign of mourning for the destroyed Temple. During the Renaissance some traditional communities in Italy built an organ into their synagogue, which they played on weekdays though not many an orthodox synagogue brings in a folk singing, guitar playing rebbe in a similar way.

- What's your feeling about all this?

I look on the issue pragmatically. God, we are told, should be worshipped in the beauty of holiness, and beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Each congregation must decide what setting inspires them. There is no right or wrong. Why is a cantor more appropriate than a choir? Why is one musical setting for a prayer more appropriate than another? Priests danced in the Jerusalem Temple. The medieval synagogue had no pews. Kabbalists held all-night vigils. The Hassidim often told of the illiterate shepherd boy who played his flute in

the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah because he didn't know the Hebrew words, and that his was the voice welcomed into Heaven. It's not the medium but the message.

- But isn't the medium also the message?

The Torah chant is an old and formal one. Many hymns are set to familiar melodies and we respond instinctively to them. But to make too much of the familiar is itself a danger. Worship must offer a challenge as well as tradition.

- Some years ago our youth group put together a creative service out of Bob Dylan and Kahil Gibran. It was moving but our rabbi had a fit. Why can't our service be whatever we want?

The worship hour is designed to be a Jewish experience, not just a spiritual happening.

- I don't understand.

In worship Jews immerse themselves in the Torah tradition. Readings from Gibran and Thomas are not a Torah experience.

- You make worship parochial, but you told us earlier that prayer is an elemental and universal form of expression. Why do you insist that a service have a Jewish atmosphere? Aren't good thoughts enough?

- I once heard a minister talk on worship. He argued that the church takes itself too seriously; that the religious moment must be a celebration of possibility, a freeing of the imagination and a passionate encounter of the symbols of the powers we do not control and only dimly comprehend. Thar made sense to me.

Did you visit one of his services?

- Yes.

Didn't it include invocation of Christ and New Testament readings?

- I think so.

Then it spoke out of the Christian tradition. The purpose of worship is not an undifferentiated sense of the sacred but a Jewish expression of the sacred.

- You're going back to the worship-prayer distinctions we spoke about.

Yes. These distinctions are critical.

The dictionary defines prayer in terms of petition and entreaty. Most of us equate prayer with the sudden surge of emotion which comes over us when we are pushed beyond our resources or unable to contain our joys. I prayed when my father was deathly ill. I prayed when each of my children was born. Those prayers were spoken late at night in a hospital corridor and not in a synagogue. Prayer cannot be scheduled. To be sure, there have been times when I have prayed during a service. I came troubled. The music calmed my spirits. The sense of community, the quiet, an awareness of the presence of God unlocked my heart. But I can number these moments.

There is a petition in the service, but a Jewish service is not a prayer meeting. Open the Siddur and you will find praise, doctrine, paragraphs from the literature, The Sayings of the Fathers, a collection of proverbs from the Mishnah, memorial prayers. During Sabbath worship Torah is read. A sermon may be preached. Candles are lit. The Kaddish is recited. Those who say, 'I do not need to come to the synagogue to pray,' are absolutely right. Prayer is agnostic -- people pray to God, to gods, to mother, to the devil, to the winds. Jewish worship is mono-theistic. Prayer is spontaneous. Worship uses a text and is conducted largely in a holy language. Prayer pleads. Worship challenges. Prayer is a private expression. Worship is congregational. Worship requires a minyan, ten of the community. Worship is instructively Jewish, an attempt to marry the religious vision to the soul. Worship exists to lift us from the workaday world and to place us in the Torah world where we can breathe for a few moments the pure air of the vision and live for an hour within the beauty of the tradition. Worship creates an emotional environment in which the basic teachings can come alive for us because they have been turned into song and visualized in effective ritual.

Worship allows us to live in the spiritual order of the Jewish people. Wherever he finds himself, the Jew can find a service with which he will be familiar, feel rooted and at home.

- You've made your point, but I've still got a problem. I want to be genuine and during worship I am asked to read somebody else's words. At services I often think I am being transformed into a parrot. They give me a book, tell me to open to such and such a page and read. They expect me to feel religious precisely between 8:15 and 9:30 on Friday night. I always feel I'm being directed by some anonymous 'they'.

Spontaneity is not the consummate value. Prayer is spontaneous and being artless it can be foolish, petty, misdirected, or self-deluding. Men can and will pray as the spirit moves them. When we worship and use the classic poetry of the psalms or paragraphs sanctified by centuries of faith, we recognize that worship has the extra dimension of spiritual grace.

- Still a service seems artificial.

Worship is artificial in the sense that all civilization is artificial; that is, it is a creation of human design. The label, "creative service", is an unfortunate one for a service which tosses out centuries of classic literature for a few paragraphs written in haste. It also suggests that we cannot relate creatively to another's words. Would you say that Rubenstein or Heifetz are not creative musicians because they play scores written by Chopin and Beethoven? The pianist creates new music even as he recreates another's music. I've thought a lot about the twenty-third Psalm and written a piece on it, and I would insist that it belongs as much to me as to King David.

In prayer man speaks to God. In worship God, Torah, speaks to man. The Shema is not a philosophic definition but a revelation - the end and beginning of faith. The Torah is not an ancient teaching, but the presentation of God's word for us to consider. The Kaddish is not a prayer for the dead, but the faith that death is part of God's wisdom and an affirmation of the immortality of generations who struggled, suffered and served. Here is the sense of continuity, the compelling sense of command, the bonds that tie us to others who respond to the same deep memories and emotional needs we do.

Traditional worship is changed, minor-keyed, full of movement. A Jew davens, a

colloquialism which suggests a far more active posture than sitting in a pew. He loses himself in words which came from nearly every century of his people's life. The Siddur allows us to sing along with King David and Judah ha Levi. We remind ourselves of the martyrs whose sacrifice commands our loyalty and of the poets whose images inspire our thoughts. There is petition in the liturgy but also the reminder that "we do not know whether what we ask for is for our good." When we look carefully we notice that requests are phrased in the third person plural, 'we', not 'I'. What is asked for is the fulfillment of hopes we all share: health, a just social order, a return to Zion, the Messianic Age. "Grant us peace."

The central act of worship is the reading of Torah, but it is never left there. There is interpretation, an opening of our spirit to the meaning of God's words. At worship we signify a willingness at least to listen, really to listen, to the commands which holiness imposes. Here is our past, our mythic language, our becoming, the mysterious power of God's words still instructing us as He did our fathers at Sinai.

- You're being uncharacteristically romantic. When I go to my synagogue I tend to find the mood flat; and, instead of being lifted, I am let down.

I suspect we've all been let down by a service. I have been put off by a restless congregation, a posturing cantor and a service conducted off-handedly. Many who come to the synagogue come to honor a friend or a friend's child and not to honor God. They are in no mood to pay attention to the words or mood, and they send out unmistakable vibrations that they are not part of a worshipping congregation.

But, if I've been to services which failed to lift me out of myself, I've rarely been to a service which failed to bring me back to my Jewish self. Whatever was happening on the pulpit, I could always read my Siddur. The familiar symbols were there and almost always a familiar tune or two. I welcome the chance to touch base with my Jewish life. During the day I am a husband, a father, a professional, an American citizen; in the synagogue I am simply a Jew.

- You obviously look on worship as important. I've always thought of it as color. I can go or not go with little or no practical consequence.

Not so. Worship is one of the ways of strengthening the Jew in you; your childhood conditioning is reinforced. You're reminded of Torah themes you'd forgotten about.

Worship helps me answer the question which has bothered us so much: What is Judaism? In my studies I've got to deal with the almost infinite number of aspects which our river has exhibited. Worship synthesizes and selects and raises up the relevant major themes which are quietly affirmed. Worship presents basic Judaism. Complexity has been reduced to straightforward sentences. Outside the synagogue a Jew answers a question with a question. The Siddur puts the question aside. Here are the affirmations. "True and firm, established and enduring, right and faithful, beloved and precious, desireable and pleasant. . . is this Thy word."

You've objected a bit to the repetitiveness of worship. I often think that, were worship not as familiar as it is, had not unconsciously memorized many of its paragraphs and taken to heart its melodies, Judaism could not have survived the end of social segregation. During worship, the teaching takes the wings of song and imbeds itself deep within our psyche, and we become Jews.

- Why are so many synagogue services pedestrian?

- I spent a semester in England at Cambridge University. Each college has a chapel and most have Evensong. It's quiet and candlelit. The Gothic arches and the shadows blend beautifully with the hymns. There's an unmistakable sense of sanctity.

- My synagogue is small and when people are in it it's noisy. I'd love a church's majesty.

I've attended Evensong at King's College, Cambridge, and been moved, but I also noticed the values that were expressed by the architecture. The fellows and students were in an inner space behind a screen. I was on the other side with the commoners. In the synagogue

there are no separations based on class or rank. The informality of the synagogue reflects Judaism's commitment to democracy.

- You've not answered my question.

I, too, want a service which catches me up in a sense of the divinity reaching out to me from behind the surface of life, from within the teachings of Torah and from deep within the history of the Jewish people. There must be song and feeling and the presence of Kedushah, holiness. Song which releases the spirit. Poetic language which touches the soul. The space should shut out the work-a-day world, a sense of what we would like the world to be like: warm-hearted folk, not cold-eyed people; chant, not cacaphony; worthwhile thoughts, not cruel ones; a sense of closeness to God.

Because we don't give them a chance. America's Jews tend to be generous, public spirited, socially aware and indifferent to worship. It's a routine sight in many congregations for parents to drop children off and go on to some other activity. By and large the pious stayed in Europe, and those who came were too busy seeking all the goodies available to offer to seek the intangibles which worship offers. They didn't need worship to celebrate life's possibilities. Moreover, the tradition had never threatened those who didn't worship with damnation. It's changing. Services are better attended. The times are darker and more concerned with spirit and soul.

- You have described one of worship's functions as celebrating life's possibilities. Go on a bit.

A community visualizes, symbolizes, its redemptive gospel in ritual and worship. In all religious communities such moments provide a foretaste of Paradise or of Heaven on earth and remind the communicant of how he must live to qualify for the Kingdom. Appropriate music is heard. A preacher reads from God's word and discusses what we must do to be worthy. There are reminders of high duties and fundamental obligations, the ways we can help build the Kingdom. People are dressed up and on their best behavior, as if they were already angels. Work

clothes are deliberately excluded. Here is a foretaste of what life can be when we create the just society on earth or enter the heavenly Jerusalem: golden words, glorious themes, and a grand vision; a symbolic confirmation of the fact that the redemptive promise is real. To participate is to be caught up in the moment and to be encouraged. Many of the themes are Messianic. Generally we grow through such an experience but we are not transformed into saints. No one knows better than those who take a religious tradition with utmost seriousness how far short we fall of our private expectations and, at the same time, how important the religious forms are in strengthening our will and sensitizing our spirit to a whole range of obligations and possibilities.

- I can buy worship as an opportunity to live as a Jew and as a celebration of life's possibilities, but I can't buy the darker side of worship. All that sin talk. The idea of confession. It's too heavy. The world gives me enough stress without the synagogue adding to my distress.

- The phrase, "we have done perversely," has always stuck in my craw. I'm not perverse. Why does the Yom Kippur worship lay such guilt-ridden terms on us? Guilt inhibits. There's already too much guilt in the world. Most sins are society's fault.

How would you organize a service around the theme of conduct?

- Yom Kippur ought to be a grand celebration of the possibilities of life. The liturgy should speak of expectation and hope. Let bygones be bygones. In any case, no one is guilty. We do what we do because of our environment, our conditioning, because our families raised us in a certain way. There are no bad children, only bad living conditions and careless parents.

I always think of Yom Kippur as a grand celebration of possibility, and it's the worship's emphasis on sin and confession which makes it so. Sin implies possibility.

The concept of sin reminds me that I am morally responsible for talents untapped, sensitivities unused, and responsibilities unmet. Have you ever read B. F. Skinner?

- Yes. He's the psychologist who believes that we can become only what our genetic

endowment and our environment allows us to be. I agree with him.

Skinner holds that frustration and failure prevent us from fulfilling our potential. The goal, then, is to eliminate failure in the educational process. Skinner proposes to do so by a mechanical environment, a learning machine, which would provide the child all the information needed to put ideas together so as to form new ideas, to learn, without ever facing the frustration of knocking his head against a wall. Skinner's device was designed to insure that mistakes would not occur and to instantly acknowledge a correct judgment. Presumedly, the student would learn without frustration; no guilt, no mental or emotional block.

Skinner's box was based on a theory of some merit which insists that the environment in which we live substantially affects how we live, what we can accomplish, the questions we ask, and the answers we arrive at. We tend to think of ourselves as if we are autonomous beings when, in fact, we are in rather significant ways what our parents and our society have allowed us to become. Conditioning determines much about us. The fact that we speak English, for instance, means that some ideas can be expressed easily and others perhaps not at all. Our habits are American-bred and, therefore, we think of ourselves differently than an Indian villager or a Japanese worker thinks of himself.

- These ideas are not particularly new.

Skinner's popularity lay in the fact that he begins with a surprising value judgment: that the impact of Western civilization on the individual is destructive precisely because it suggests that we are free. Encouraged to believe that we are autonomous, we have come to expect that we can, by the exercise of will and determination, modify our behavior. This idea, according to Skinner, is wrong and can create paralyzing frustration. He particularly blamed the Western religions for emphasizing individual responsibility. He argued that we do not fail because, in fact, we are not responsible for what we do; our environment is.

- I like the idea of no sin.

Many do. That's why Skinner's ideas were popular. No one likes to shoulder responsibility

We're quite ready to argue that the triviality of our lives is not our fault but the fault of our parents or of environment. Skinner's arguments set well with a socially aware but undisciplined age; an age which doesn't like sin talk.

Environment does play a role in our lives, and so do a number of special factors such as age and mental competence. The Midrash explains God's decision to have the whole generation of onetime slaves die in the wilderness as a result of His recognition that their spirit had been broken and that they lacked the initiative and drive pioneers require. But the whole ethos of the Torah tradition cries out: "they (the commandments) are not too hard for you." Choose. You are responsible for your actions and your character. God did not fashion us as robots but as conscious creatures, capable of thinking through the consequences of our actions and ultimately capable of acting on our decisions. Skinner is simply and vitally wrong. We do have a measure of freedom and the inner resources to use our freedom wisely.

- But we're not completely free. I'm color-blind. I couldn't be a painter if my life depended on it.

The crux of this debate is not on whether there are special factors but whether we shape what is given us. I think we do. The Torah says we can. Children raised in good homes with parents who care for them and correct them have a better chance of developing a coherent sense of self than a street child who is raised carelessly, perhaps cruelly; but environment is not all. Some raised in good homes become bums. Some who are raised on the street become saints.

In life everything, including freedom, has limits, but the grandeur of the Torah tradition is that it insists that we act in the area of moral judgment as if these boundaries did not exist. We have been given by God the artist's gift of dominating the material before us, and the more trained and disciplined we become the greater our freedom of action. Animals are ruled by instinct; behaviorists like Skinner liken man to an animal. God made the animals, each according to its kind. An animal remains what he was born. The Torah says man was made differently. "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image and likeness'." Animals do not

reason. The human animal can become a human being.

- Well and good, but why lay on guilt? We were talking about Yom Kippur.

Sin measures potential. I don't sin. If I could act in any other way, morality would imply that I could not be other than I am, and that's a dismal thought. It's only when I cease to feel that I can change or grow that the world becomes a gray and hapless place. The sense of sin forces me to consider the more I can do and must do and will do; and it's that "can" and that "must" and that "will" out of which progress, a better future and maturity, a better self, will be formed. Sin says I'm responsible and that's always an encouraging thought.

- But sin is such a heavy thought.

Not all that heavy. When I leave the synagogue after the closing service of Yom Kippur, I walk taller than I did the night before. As I confessed my sins I recognized I wasn't shackled to them.

- But you never get out from under.

We're human, not models. I hope you have noticed that the Torah's special message focuses on growth not purity. Judaism is a way to become a more competent human rather than a way to escape our humanity.

- But what about guilt?

What about it? As with all things in life, there's healthy guilt, a prodding conscience, and morbid guilt, a grovelling in abjectness. The fact that some people can't handle responsibility is no reason to deny the responsibility of those who can.

I couldn't resist closing the session with a miniature Yom Kippur sermon. In many ways the absence of a strong sense of moral responsibility is the classic sin of our age. Everybody is more comfortable with compromise. Everybody wants to do his thing. Nobody wants to be a whistle-blower. People close their ears to cries of help and refuse to testify to a crime. Contrast this shoddy reluctance with God's straightforward and bracing demands: "See, I have set before you this day, life and death, the blessing and the curse, choose life. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well."

Chapter 11

TRUE AND ENDURING IS THY WORD - OR IS IT?

– My father is an architect. As I grew up he beat into my head the rule that a building is only as stable as its foundations. A structure that isn't solidly based will shift and ultimately collapse, which brings me to my Noah's Ark problem. How can I take seriously a Torah full of fairy stories even if they are dignified by such an august term as myth? It was late on Sabbath afternoon and we had been talking about that morning's Torah portion.

– I was in a Bible class that you led last year. You described the Noah story as an Israelite redo of a classic Asian epic. If I remember correctly, in the original version the gods opened the flood gates because the noise of the city disturbed their siesta and the hero was saved because he is a favorite of a goddess; while in Genesis God decided to destroy mankind because of the world's wickedness and Noah is saved because he is a good man. I was impressed by the way the Israelites turned a conventional flood story into a vehicle for morality, Judaism's special message; that we were not playthings of the gods but servants of a dependable master. I no longer look on the Noah story as a fairy story, but I was unsettled by your casual statement that the Noah chapters represent an amalgam of two distinct traditions. If I remember correctly, in one version the animals come two by two, in the other by sevens. How can I take seriously a Torah which contains inconsistent, even contradictory, materials? Certainly, an inconsistent tradition can't claim to be revelation.

– There are not only two Noah stories but two creation myths and even two versions of the Ten Commandments.

The ancients didn't edit sacred literature for consistency. If there were two old and venerated creation myths, they were simply placed side by side.

– You haven't addressed my question.

Your problem is a perceptual one. You have literally identified the Torah's text with

God's Word in much the same way some people say nature is God when what they mean is that God is the creative force behind or within all that is. The text is not God's word so much as the creative force within that text. Just as God's glory is refracted through nature, but lies beyond and behind as well as within the natural order, so God's words lie beyond and behind the text as well as within. To use a rabbinic metaphor, the received text is simply the outer garment of God's Word.

- I'm not sure I understand.

Among the interpretive rules or middot which the Talmudists applied to the Torah was one which stated that God had deliberately phrased the Torah using language ordinary people could understand, which is to say that the Torah's idiom and imagery suggest but do not exhaust God's meaning.

- Give me an example.

God does not speak, at least not in any way in which we do, but how else could the idea that the Torah contained God's will be communicated? In the ancient world escaped slaves were hunted down ruthlessly lest other slaves be encouraged to run away. The Israelites made good their escape. Obviously God had made this remarkable event possible. Taken literally, the parting of the seas is a colorful miracle story; taken imaginatively, the parting of the seas is a powerful metaphor of God's redemptive power. As God's Word, it promises redemption yet to come.

- I'm still not sure you've answered my question. The problem is not the ark and the animals or the Reed Sea, I understand metaphor, but two distinct versions of the same story edited in such a way that the loose ends still show. How can truth be contradictory?

I've never been troubled by the existence of several versions of a story or law, probably because I've never identified the Torah text with God's actual words. If you accept Torah as a compilation of the understandings which came to the religious leaders of Israel when and as they met God, to use Martin Buber's term, then such inconsistencies cease to be troubling.

God was met, let in, by various people at various times. A single prism reflects various colors depending on the angle of the light source and the placement of the viewer. Those who edited the Torah did not feel compelled to edit the reports of those various meetings into a systematic truth. Their criteria was prophetic authenticity not editorial neatness.

- Do you believe that the Torah is God-given?

Let me answer your question with some care. An academic colleague enjoys reading the Bible as literature: "the sweep is epic and the style classic." He equates the Deuteronomic historian with Homer as a master story teller, "but my God, to claim more is absurd." He mocks the idea of the Torah as in any way divinely inspired. It contains an outdated science, a record of a six-day creation, and some patently unacceptable rules of conduct: the stoning of adulterers and the burning of witches." That's not the way I approach the Bible.

A minister friend takes his history from the Bible. He gave money to an expedition which proposed to find the pieces of Noah's ark on Mount Ararat, and he tells his congregation that the prophets' texts, God's words, foretell a great war between Russia and this country. That's also not the way I read the Bible.

The Torah contains exaggeration: a company of six hundred thousand ex-slaves could not have survived for forty days, much less for forty years, in the barren waste of the Sinai. The Torah contains some ethically shabby material: Abraham passes off Sarah as his sister, fearing the Pharoah would covet her for his harem and that his life would be endangered as the unwanted husband; Jacob rips off his brother's birthright; God is pictured as hardening the heart of Pharoah when he was about to free the slaves so that He might subject Egypt to still more severe punishment. And incredible legend: the sun standing still so the Israelites could complete the destruction of enemies, daily rations of manna with a double portion on Friday so no one would have to violate the Sabbath, the Angel of Death striking down all Egyptian first-born.

Why go on? The problem is well-known. The Torah isn't consistently uplifting. It's hard to imagine God revealing this kind of shoddy stuff.

- Yet, this morning in services, after the Torah was read, you recited the line: "The Torah of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." Aren't you perpetuating a lie?

It is a line from the Psalms, poetry. Perfection suggests enduring vitality and that miraculous power to keep the waters refreshing. I give a talk each week on the Torah portion, and I'm constantly amazed at the relevance of the text to the modern condition.

- I've heard sermons where the text was pretext. Isn't the Torah's supposed relevance a form of self delusion? You find relevance because you are determined to find it. I doubt your Martian friend would find in the Torah what you find there.

The Torah in a worship setting represents all that is insightful and redemptive in Jewish experience. It presents and represents our special and surprising message; and, more often than not, its message revives the soul.

- Isn't this vitality in the text all in our minds? Wouldn't he read it as you read Homer, as a Western classic whose ideas and literary forms provide an interesting view of Israelite religious ideas? Wouldn't he read the flood story as a legend about the end of the Ice Age which seeks to explain the origin of the rainbow rather than as a profoundly significant message about God, moral obligation and the proper concern of religion? Mightn't he find it a bit quaint that generations of Jews have been inspired by these stories?

He would read as an outsider. The Jew reads as a participant observer. He would read only what he saw, a bare text. I read a text whose every word and letter has been examined, a text full of depths and delights.

- Which man has put there.

A disciple asked his rabbi, "Where is God?" And the master answered: 'God is wherever you let Him in.' I've always thought of Sinai in two ways: as the mystery of the availability of God's Word and as the mystery of Israel's ability to appreciate God's Word. You have to have eyes with which to see.

- Magicians trick our eyes every day.

Their magic is a game. The Torah has proven its capacity to revive the souls of a hundred generations.

The image that comes to mind is the blue sky we see every day. The sky is of God, blue, yet not blue; for blue is what our optical apparatus permits us to see. An animal sees the sky differently and so would a Martian. The sky is part of space, empty, yet filled with energy; dimensioned, yet infinitely expanding. The Torah is a text, words, yet filled with energy, dimensioned, yet infinitely expressive.

Philosophers as well as theologians acknowledge that there is a world of appearances and a world that lies deeper, the "blue" sky and the endless ether. Monotheism did not emerge out of intellectual analysis; as we have seen it ran counter to the science of the day; rather, someone, Moses or another, sensed the unity within; or, put another and equally valid way, God allowed His nature to be sensed and a mind was encouraged to break free of the conditioning of pagan culture. The Five Books of Moses, Scripture, become Torah when Jews read them as Torah rather than as Bronze Age classics. To treat Scripture as no more than an ancient classic is to be unable to explain the vital force which inspired/inspires millions.

- Doesn't every religion rest on "evidence" of this kind? The Christian suspends disbelief about the Crucifixion. The Communist does the same with Marx's description of the so-called scientific laws of economic and political development.

Each community has eyes for its message and sees in it insights which escape the outsider, and many messages have value. I've not argued that Torah represents a deposit of all truth. I've felt the medieval piety which found science as well as spiritual wisdom in Torah. What I do argue is that religions must be judged by their impact; and, you've heard me say this before, that by this test, the Jew can 'prove' that the Torah is revealed. Haven't its teachings and promises kept the Jewish people alive, sensitive and creative. Jewish life is sound and healing. My favorite image for Torah is Isaiah's phrase: "a fountain of living waters." Remember the river theme. What more can be asked of God's Word?

– What about all those far-fetched sermons?

Imagination can carry us away, but serious commentary on the text has directed Judaism's growth over the centuries. Science is to nature what commentary is to Scripture. Science seeks to discover and explain what the senses see but do not immediately comprehend. Commentary seeks to find what a first reading does not suggest, and what is most impressive is that there is always something else to find.

The medieval rabbis sometimes described the Torah as the blueprint of the universe. They felt its text contained, not only the ideas which are apparent on the surface, but all truth. Some said the Torah consisted only of names of God. Some described it as black fire on white fire. Akiba was able to find surprising teachings in Moses' Torah because he and his colleagues insisted that the apparent meaning of a text was only a small part of its import; each word, each letter, even the way a letter was formed suggested other truths.

– You, yourself, said the Torah isn't a science text. Akiba and his friends found what wasn't there.

And what was and what could not have been discovered in any other way. Akiba's seemingly contrived exegesis, remember the Midrash which describes Moses shaking his head in disbelief over Akiba's method, nevertheless created the functional and spiritually significant forms of rabbinic Judaism. Somehow the Torah's message communicates itself in mysterious ways, but so do many of the profoundest truths about life. Logic is a useful but limited tool.

– For the first time, you sound like a medieval.

No one should rule out revelation simply because it's not a scientific term or because we can no longer accept a whole bunch of ideas which rabbis and priests once claimed to have been revealed. New ideas do come into our consciousness in unexpected ways.

Revelation is the breaking out of the hidden into the known, an emergence into civilization of truth or beauty never before available. When revelation occurs, there is something new under the sun and in our souls. How else shall we look on this new thing but as a gift from God?

- That's poetry.

I don't believe so. Shakespeare's line that there are more things on heaven and earth than in all our philosophies turns out to be an accurate analysis as well as great poetry. Science has advanced to the point where it must speak of its conceptual limits. Our understanding of natural law must include the principle of indeterminacy, black holes in the universe, and rays that we have no way of accounting for. Man's consciousness cannot be fully predicted. There are good and valid reasons to suspend disbelief and to recognize that mystery underlies what we normally call reality, and that at times some part of this deeper reality breaks through and we see and understand what we had not recognized before. The ancients described this process as a form of speech, "And the Lord said unto Moses. . ." Some of us prefer less sense related terms, so we describe the sense of everything falling into place which is experienced when clarity replaces confusion. We talk of insight or intuition. Whatever term we choose, we refer to recognition of what has not before been known, a special and surprising message. For the Jew the miracle of awareness took place on Sinai and that awareness was collected in, and is refracted by, the Torah.

Unfortunately, many are conditioned by a mental set which rules out revelation <u>a priori</u>. They assume that what they do not know simply has not yet been researched. There must be an explanation for everything. Actually this is an old-fashioned and no longer creditable idea which was popularized during the early years of the Enlightenment when thinkers were intoxicated with the rate of discovery and invention. The eighteenth century still believed in the iron laws of nature. Physical scientists had not yet had to confront indeterminacy, the presence of probability and the absence of certainty in nature, or social scientists the power of the irrational in human life. Since the quantum theory was discovered science no longer argues that equal causes produce equal effects; but many remain trapped in a deterministic caste of mind. The truth is that God did not give us the skills necessary to explore His purposes. There are things we will never know. I often quote the Torah's prescient observation: "God's ways are not our ways. . . Just as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than your ways and His

thoughts than your thoughts. Science describes, it does not explain. Love, beauty, justice, creativity, revelation, cannot be fully examined in a laboratory.

I read to them a paragraph from Victor Weisskopf's "The Frontiers and Limits of Science." "A Beethoven sonata is a natural phenomenon which can be analyzed physically. However, even if these processes are completely understood in scientific terms, this kind of analysis does not touch what we consider relevant and essential in a Beethoven sonata - the immediate and direct expression of the music. In the same way one can understand a sunset or the stars in the night sky in a scientific way, but there is something about experiencing these phenomena that lies beyond science."

There is no reason today to deny mystery. Revelation is not an illusion; indeed, it plays a role, perhaps the major role, in scientific research. Research proceeds in two ways, by a piling up of information and by revelation.. An inexplicable spark brings ideas together into a possibility which surprises a researcher and which he sets out to prove. Something new has come into being.

- Why not, then, argue my grandfather's way? He dismissed Biblical criticism as arrogance. The Torah is a mystery. God's words are sui-generis. The normal rules of analyses do not apply.

Your grandfather's belief that the Five Books of Moses, the Torah, were given in their present form to Moses by God is untenable .and was not the faith of the Israelites during the Judaism's formative centuries. It became an orthodox dogma sometime around the time of Ezra, seven hundred years after Moses. The Torah text does not make the claim that the whole text was given to and through Moses. Genesis does not begin: "and the Lord said unto Moses." In fact, nowhere in Genesis is the claim made that these chapters are God's words. Isaiah and Jeremiah questioned whether God had ordered that Jews observe the priestly rules governing the sacrificial cult; "Who has asked this of you to trample My courts?" suggesting at the very least that that part of the legal material of the Torah which deals with the sacrificial cult was in their day not accepted by all as Torah. In any case, I cannot see that the mysterious vitality inherent

in Torah is enhanced when the text is seen as a once-and-only revelation rather than as an inspired collection of inspired traditions.

I am satisfied that research has shown what some late medieval philosophers, particularly Spinoza, already suspected, that various oral traditions circulated in ancient Israel and that, over time, these were drawn together and edited and that, towards the middle of the first millenia, the text we now call Torah was published.

- Then we're back to the Torah as literature.

The Torah is both a composite manuscript and a consecrated mystery. Light provides a useful analogy. Light is both a wave and a cluster of active particles, and it turns out that it is impossible for an observer to view or measure these two properties simultaneously. I often wonder if the rabbis recognized how apt their description of Torah as light, Torah Orah, was. If you look at the text and see only the text, you will not sense the wisdom deep within. If you look at the Torah and see only the word of God, you will not see the seams, the editings and the contradictions. My academic friend is wrong when he dismisses Torah as no more than an anthology of Israelite myths, legends and laws. Your grandfather was wrong when he dismissed academic analysis. For a moderate to appreciate Torah, he must be both patient scholar and committed Jew and recognize that he cannot be both at the same time.

Every week I handle two Torahs: a printed Hebrew text in which I have noted in the margins the many textual suggestions and emendations suggested by teachers and my own reading; and the Torah scroll which I wouldn't dream of marking up and from which I read as part of a sacred ritual. I handle the one text seriously, but unceremoniously. I make notes. I erase. I handle the other reverently and speak a blessing before and after which offers heartfelt thanks to God for the gift of His Instruction.

- You almost speak of Torah as a living entity.

Precisely. I draw an analogy between Torah and soul. My features are not God-like, nor is my body; but that in me which responds to the world with care and compassion, which loves

and is loved, which rejects selfishness and injustice, which pushes me to discipline my talents and to put them to good use, my soul or spirit, call it what you will, is of God. Those who crush divinity, either by abusing another or by being indifferent to the spirit, commit a horrible sin for they erase possibility, God, from life. I believe that, just as there is something divine within every human being, though we are far from being divine creatures, so the Torah's text is not physically God's Word, but contains within it a wisdom and a compelling spirit which is of God.

- You didn't let me finish. I admit the Torah's functional value. Jewish history is a history of unusual accomplishment and sensitivity; I agree that a Torah-based society has enhanced spiritual growth, encouraged family life and sharpened the sense of human dignity and justice; but it still seems to me as if you're saying that a brilliant forgery is, nevertheless, a great painting and should be hung beside Rembrandt and Da Vinci master works in a museum.

A forgery is a manufactured invention. The Torah began in a genuine meeting between Moses and God and was enlarged by the records of other meetings between God and our ancestors. They understood and expressed themselves within the limitation of their culture; but nothing was invented.

Most of us carry an image of revelation which we owe less to careful thought than to romantic literature and the movies where a bass voice comes out of the clouds as light rises in the background and no one is left in any doubt that 'this is God talking;' Cecil B. Demille improving on the description of thunder, lightning, and horn blowing which, according to Exodus, accompanied the theophany on Mount Sinai.

Early in his career the prophet Elijah is told to return to Mount Sinai. He does so and God speaks to him, not in the whirlwind, but in a voice of great stillness. On that occasion there was no thunder or earthquake. No one else heard God speak to Abraham on Mount Moriah, to Moses at the Burning Bush, or to any of the prophets. In other episodes, revelation is treated as a vision which enters the mind unexpectedly, "This is the vision of Isaiah. . . which he saw," or as ideas which, somewhat to his surprise, a prophet hears himself saying: "The

God put forth His hand and touched my mouth and said to me (Jeremiah), 'see I have put My words in your mouth.'"

- You're asking me to consider revelation as an experience which might occur to any concerned and sensitive person. I've never heard God. If someone were to say to me: "God told me," I would suggest medical help.

Biblical man lived in an age which believed in prophecy and identified the awareness of new ideas with God's speech. We live in a secular age which no longer instinctively identifies the rush of insight as God's speech; hence, anyone who hears God comes immediately under suspicion.

Revelation takes place all the time, though, and this is important, not all revelation is significant. The miracle of Sinai is not that it is a once and only revelation but that it produced the Torah.

- I once went to a hillbilly church, The Church of Holy Prophecy, where people went into a trance and began to talk ecstatically. How can anyone believe in the messages which are little more than babblings?

The Amos's and Micah's of the Bible were not babblers who spoke in an ecstatic trance. There were such seers in Biblical times, and the Bible dismisses them, just as you did, as babblers, "the prophet is meshugah." They were as suspicious of the ESP world as many of us are; but they knew better than to dismiss out of hand everything that purported to come from areas of the mind which lie far below those where conscious thought takes place. There were "true" prophets and "false" prophets. A "true" prophet was one whose message made sense. The prophets were concerned and sensitive men and women who had thought long and hard about God, man, justice and politics and who found or "saw" ideas of particular force and freshness form in their minds. Speech did not pour out. There is every indication that they took the time to phrase carefully their thoughts. They differed from you and me only in believing that their fresh and unexpected understandings came from God.

- I've never heard voices.

We learn some things through step-by-step logic, days of preparation and testing. We learn other things unexpectedly when an arc sparks between the active mind and the deeper levels of reality. Often a scientist has a brain storm, or a poet's ear or an artist's eye becomes aware of a subterranean stream of meaning which is always there and which we rarely tap. I call such a quantum increase in understanding revelation, God disclosing part of what was hidden heretofore, and I suspect you've had some form of this experience.

Two people meet. They treat each other as companions. They decide to work together or simply to have some fun together and then, perhaps unexpectedly, they touch a deeper reality in each other. Companionship becomes friendship or love. The potential was always there, but it had not been exposed, a new reality has emerged and often neither person really knows how it happened.

Normally, we take the outdoors for granted. There is grass to be cut and leaves to be raked. Then one day we walk out into the field and suddenly we sense a beauty, a power, the indwelling glory of nature. No one will see anything happen to us, but something important has occurred. Nature is no longer simply a resource to be used but a divine gift which we feel compelled to protect from those who have not sensed that "God is in this place and I knew it not."

When friendship becomes love, not lust but love, that, too, is a revelation. When the burdened soul touches the life force, God, and finds strength flowing into his soul, that, too, is revelation. When the mind wrestles with the conditions of our lives and suddenly the pieces fall together and replace conventional wisdoms, that, too, is revelation.

When a sage was asked, where is God, he answered, God is wherever men will let Him in. Many an ancient Israelite prophet, sage and storyteller let God in, and when this happened something new was perceived. I like the phrase of Abraham Heschel who described Sinai as "a moment in which God was not alone."

The Torah, like the human, is created in God's image, but is not God; it is both a human and a divine book. Inspiration had to be coded in language and expressed in meaningful idiom. We hear what we are prepared to hear. The word had to be understood by people of a particular culture and time. Beethoven wrote for the instruments then available and used musical notations of early nineteenth-century Europe. If he had been Indian or Chinese, his talent would have been as great but his music would have taken on a quite different form. Those who heard God could only formulate their new understanding in terms of their culture using familiar concepts and metaphors.

- You talk like a mystic.

Every serious religionist is, but I hope that mine is not a mysticism which glorifies the irrational. I believe in the divinity of Torah because it alone, of all the religious works of antiquity, has evidenced a compelling power, alive. The Babylonian version of the flood story was far better known in its day than the Noah version; but for more than two thousand years, until archeologists chanced on the ancient library of Ugarit, almost all trace of this once dominant lay buried in the ground. During all these years the Noah story was read regularly and seriously confronted by the synagogue.

The miracle of Sinai is not that God spoke - revelation is not a unique phenomenon - but that a whole people were prepared to accept Moses' report of the meeting and that a religion emerged. The Word was not lost but became the founding message of a dynamic religious tradition. The tradition always uses two terms for revelation, "the giving of Torah" and "the acceptance of Torah." Sinai symbolizes God's proclamation and Israel's appropriation.

I believe in revelation. There have been times during serious discussion that I suddenly recognized that what I or another had said presented an unexpected truth, not the truth of text books, common sense, or experience, but an ultimate and irreducible truth. I believe Israel sensed this at Sinai and senses it still.

I believe that revelation is not a once-and-only event. We have seen that Sinai was

special to Israel, but these binding moments still occur. The rabbinic tradition insisted that long before Sinai God had revealed to Noah the terms of a covenant designed to regulate all human society. I have no trouble understanding that Christians and Muslims feel they possess a revealed message. Their thinkers, too, knew moments of sudden clarity, and for millions the words they saw have been and are compelling.

- But we're right, right?

Every first-rate work of art is distinct from all others in form and character and, of course, in subject matter; yet, each piece is high art. Life is full of ideas which are seemingly contradictory, but nonetheless significant. Civilization, like a well-constructed symphony, contains many vital and imaginative messages.

- Are you saying the New Testament and the Koran are, like the Torah, revelation?

I am saying that they and many other scriptures have been accepted by believers as revelation: Lao Tzu's Meditations, Gautama's Lotus Sutra, Marx's Das Kapital, Mao's Little Red Book. Each contained some spark of truth, else it could not have struck the responsive chord it did. My problem begins when any religion claims that its message fully explains the mystery of life and excludes all other insights. No revelation, and that includes Torah, says it all.

- How can I choose between messages?

Let me quote you the Torah's distinction between a true and false prophet: "and should you ask yourselves, 'how can we know that the oracle (of the false prophet) was not spoken by the Lord?' If the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the Lord, the prophet has uttered it presumptuously; do not stand in dread of him." Updated, this means simply, judge the Word pragmatically. See how it has shaped the lives of its adherents. I've said this before.

- But, why choose the Torah?

For over a hundred generations our people have opened themselves up to Torah and found meaning and inspiration in it. Had Torah not been a fountain of living waters, it would long since

have become a musty book on a shelf in a rare book library, but it lives and inspires. I have no trouble deciding in favor of Torah. It's mine by birth. Its realism appeals to me as much as its hopefulness. I like what it's done to, and for, the Jewish people. Most of all, I have sensed God in the reading and in its meanings.

- I haven't

Have you let the Torah speak to you? It was time for Havdalah, so I closed with a paragraph from The Zohar. "The Torah stories are only the garments of the Torah. Whoever imagines that the garment is the Torah herself, and not other than the Torah, may he expire and have no share in the World to Come. This is why David says: 'Open mine eyes that I may see wondrous things out of Thy Torah,' namely, that which is beneath the Torah's garments."

Chapter 12

IS MAN THE MESSIAH?

– A sunny morning. That lazy hour before Sunday lunch when conversation turns naturally towards the philosophical. Someone spoke a bit condescendingly. Another chided: 'don't put on airs, be yourself.' Another began to muse about human nature. Strip away all the overlay and what are we?

– Human beings, mortals.

– That says only that we are going to die, three score years and ten and all that. The sixty-four dollar question remains: What are we like underneath? Are we angel or animal?

Some philosophies take the view we're animals and that the overlay of civilization checks the excesses of the predator. Others insist that the cruelty we see in people is the result of social pressures rather than an innate sadism and argue that we're innately decent.

– Who's right?

Most philosophies and religions assume that the human being is an unpredictable and undependable creature who needs to be kept in line. It is not hard to see why. Serious history makes melancholy reading. War has been endemic. In every society the privileged have oppressed the poor. Once in power, liberators become oppressors and reformers seek special privileges. Disciples of Jesus prove their loyalty to the founder's ideas by going on crusades, and disciples of Ghandi show their allegiance to non-resistance by building an atomic arsenal. Again and again communities and leaders prove themselves shortsighted, foolish, cowardly, close-minded, greedy, prejudiced or worse.

– You sound like Thurber's cartoon of the little man crouched on a box saying to himself: "People are no damn good."

I don't feel that way. I live with a lot of fine people, and I'm pretty decent myself.

– Most people feel that way. Why all the pessimism?

Because of the evidence.

- I suspect the hopeful view is more popular today.

You're probably right. Increased prosperity has increased our hopes and allowed some to exhibit the kinder side of their nature. Man's innate decency is a relatively modern theme.

The image of the noble soul perverted by the institutions of society was seriously put forward by a few philosophers in the eighteenth century, most notably Rousseau, and became a popular thesis in the nineteenth century. They argued that the child is an innocent and as proof they waxed eloquent about the noble savage whose spirit and soul had not been perverted by industrial society.

These arguments have not held up. On closer examination the savage proved not so noble and the infant not so innocent. Freud talks a good bit about infant sexuality and aggression; and anthropology has studied the darker sides of primitive life.

It turns out that this philosophy of man is less a result of new research than a reaction to the sense of possibility which surged through the West as the age of exploration and industrialization began to increase prosperity and so make possible the breaking of long familiar habits and patterns of life.

- If I accept your definition of Communism as a religion, then faith in man's innate decency is broadly held. Certainly Marxism teaches that, as class bound institutions are replaced, the worker emerges stronger, nobler and purer.

The worker in the Communist state, not only enjoys a better society, but becomes, because of his experience with just institutions, more upright and great-hearted, in a word, better. Those romantic paintings of Soviet workers with their smiling unblemished faces, clear eyes and strong bodies present this vision; but, as the song goes, it ain't necessarily so.

The unceasing achievement of modern technology convinced many that similarly dramatic changes had, or would, take place in us. Education was the key; knowledge would teach us how to become more open-minded, clear-headed and empathetic, and the university

became for many the cathedral at whose altar they worshipped. But educators were not able to prove that learning and character went hand in hand. Do you remember the teaching assistant from my Ethics class? So, the formula was changed slightly. Education would teach us how to organize healthier institutions; and they, in turn, would shape gentler and kinder people. Charles Dickens dramatized what many had noted, that there was more violence in a slum than a manor house. It was argued that the child is bent out of shape and often dehumanized by class-bound, coercive institutions which corrupt his spirit and limit the unfolding emotional and psychological potential. In an open, just and sympathetic social environment, children would develop naturally their innate decencies. Progress came to mean institutional reforms, and people began to experiment with new institutional models; New Harmony, the kibbutzim, urban communes, designed to create healthy and loving environments in which a new and gentler breed could grow.

I've always suspected that a culture's assessment of human nature explains a great deal about its religious perspective. Armed with this faith in man, humanism and Marxism constructed a new Messianism, in effect new religions whose basic theme was that man, not the Messiah, not God, would change the world for the better; and, in changing the world, he would change himself. They argued that the future depended on political and social reform and the miracle of human potentiality rather than the miracle of God's promise. The older religions had assumed a supernatural transformation, "In the End of Days the lion shall sit down with the lamb and a little child shall lead them." Now, unless man built it himself, Utopia would never be built and, since no industrial Utopia could last long governed by citizens governed by self-interest, the humanist hope had to be that we would create a society which would allow us to recover the lost innocence of our childhood.

- You've shifted ground. We began talking about human nature and you've raised the issue of human capacity.

The truth about human nature, like so many truths, lies somewhere between the romantics

and the cynics. We have ego needs and could not survive without them; and we have an innate capacity for empathy and love. A rough passage can harden the shell and a loving experience can help us free our feelings and be more open, but we are, and will never cease to be, both animal and human.

Here, as in so many areas, the Torah tradition has been wisely inconsistent. Some texts describe the human as little lower than the angels and others dismiss him as little higher than a brute. A favorite rabbinic image describes human nature as comprised of polar energies, one generous and loving, the other competitive and demanding; both innate and neither excisable. The human animal can grow into a human being, but never outgrow his animal nature. Studies of communitarian and utopian communities indicate that shared prosperity and true community do lessen the need to learn the competitive arts, but that these utopian environments do not resolve the contradiction of our emotional make-up. Anti-social and even criminal behavior exist in Paradise. The libido cannot be cut away.

On Easter the Christian community celebrates the possibility of man becoming God. On Passover Jews celebrate the promise of freedom, the possibility of creating social conditions in which man can become man. The Biblical metaphor is the image of Adam and Eve being human even in Paradise, committing the one forbidden sin and being driven out of Eden to live by the sweat of their brow and by developing the human skills and disciplines they possess.

- I'm having trouble reading you. All week you've been emphasizing conditioning, but now you seem to question the importance of environment.

I don't question that poverty and deprivation create environments, the street, where predatory skills are rewarded and necessary to survival. What I question is the thesis that an ideal environment would produce a community of saints.

Those who were sensitive to the Jewish tradition were not surprised when technological progress and greater prosperity did not engineer Paradise or transform us into saints. But an age of revolutionary change had raised hopes high, and hope dies hard. The problem, optimists

told each other, was that the reforms had not been radical enough. The human being was unregenerate because social conditions remained inadequate. The more intransigent our nature came to appear, the more radical the changes utopians demanded. Perhaps the consummate tragedy of our age is that heightened expectations of human decency encouraged many to employ coercive measures to enforce their revolutionary programs so as to effect the desired transformation. Mao's cultural revolution is the ultimate metaphor of this murderous parade. Millions were killed to save mankind and, despite formidable and fearsome efforts, there is little evidence that the desired human transformation has or can occur.

-You're not being particularly hopeful.

Why raise false hopes. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick."

Perfection is an attribute which can be ascribed only to God. Even when our intentions are good, we often do harm and we can never escape the limitations of culture and ego. The Torah has few illusions; the thoughts of a man's heart are evil from his youth. None of the Biblical figures is given a sinless biography. Their virtue lay in their struggle to become better than they were. None of us is a paragon of virtue and, try as we can, we never completely master our ego and libido. Judaism speaks openly of the limitations of human nature, but never despairingly, of the possibility of spiritual and moral growth. The name Israel signals possibility. Jacob was called Israel after he wrestled the long night with an angel, his fears, and stood firm. It means "he who struggled with powers divine."

The Torah tradition is realistic not pessimistic. The covenant image assumes we can give a good accounting of ourselves. As I suggested earlier, that favorite Biblical term, sin, suggests the human reach. The long list of confessions on Yom Kippur night suggests Judaism's rather high assessment of human potential, far higher than most of us ever achieve.

This point is made by the creation story which is a carefully crafted description of a six-stage creation. After each of the early stages a refrain is appended: "God saw what He had done and it was good." When Adam was created the text omits this happy evaluation. Many

interpret this to mean that the animal species are and remain what God intended them to be, but man was left unfinished. We become what we will ourselves to become. Physically, we grow like weeds, inevitably; but in terms of character we grow by reflecting on our experiences, by opening up our tenderer feelings and by force of will.

-You make life seem an unremitting challenge. I thought Judaism believed a time would come when the struggle would be won, when "the lion and the lamb shall lie down together."

That's utopian imagery which looks to a time called the End of Days when God, presumedly, will create another world and people it with a breed who will possess "a new heart and a new spirit." Until then, the Bible suggests humans will continue to be both resolute and forgetful; spontaneous and calculating; selfless and selfish.

The Torah tradition assumes that the strengthening of character is possible, that moral growth is possible, that the human animal can mature into a human being. The covenant's emphasis on duty and obligation would be a pointless exercise if we lacked the ability to meet the Torah's high standards. What Torah does not postulate is that we can jump out of our skins and become angels. We face tests we cannot fully master with feelings we do not completely control. No human being will ever be able to say: 'I am free of sin and of sinful thoughts.' The Torah tradition does not crown its heroes with halos.

We are not trapped in our limitations, but neither are we ever free of them. Maturity, competence, sensitivity, character, are not easy to achieve and never fully achieved. The challenge is unremitting and the reward is the task itself, not its completion. Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land. He had to be satisfied with the knowledge that he had led the people to its border.

-You're not very comforting. I hate it when an older person plays the disabused realist. I want to believe that the world is getting better; I don't want my illusions shattered; but I also recognize that part of my anger is that I find it hard to answer your arguments.

I spoke of accepting our limitations and of recognizing that there was no need to despair. There is growth; but it requires unremitting effort and self-discipline as well as faith. The struggle need not be a joyless one. There can be joy in work well done, in help offered and accepted; in a quiet meal or a walk out of doors. The Sabbath and most of our festivals are designed to provide a joyous environment.

- I know very few happy people.

The hope of a man-made Messianic Age sustained many good people during the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, a period when the rate of knowledge, learning, invention and discovery was impressive. Machines, technology and medicine had begun to transform the world and to give apparent substance to old hopes, but belief in progress began to wear thin during the pointless carnage of the First World War. Then came Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, and atomic reactors which could provide energy but also could destroy the human race. Confidence in progress gave way to deep uncertainty.

World War II, the Holocaust, and Hiroshima forced many to the unhappy conclusion that the future was no longer what it had once been. Our world lives in fear of machines of mass destruction of its own devising./ Our machines lighten our burdens and threaten our very existence. Our assembly lines provide a flood of goods provided we rape the good earth of its natural resources to feed man. Our medicine has become lethal as well as life-sustaining, creating a population explosion which can destroy us all. The pressures of mass society coarsen every human activity. Winston Churchill chose as the motto for the last volume of his memoirs: "How the great democracies triumphed, and so were able to resume the follies which had so nearly cost them their life." The future became 1984. Many no longer see history as a drama of progress but as a theater of the absurd.

Bit by bit the Messianic Age dissolved before our eyes.

To describe our feelings we have resurrected from the vocabulary of forgotten terms a gray verb - to cope. It used to be when I asked someone, "how are you doing," he would say, "fine" or "alright" or "okay." Now the answer is, "I'm coping." This word, cope, derives

from the same root as the French verb, "couper", to cut. In medieval times the noun, coupen, described a protracted, exhausting duel in which neither knight could gain the upper hand, a seemingly endless, debilitating struggle where neither protagonist had any real hope of victory. It suits us now. We are determined but resignedly so. We push on but without much eagerness, and I find this attitude the ultimate surrender. To be sure, stoic persistence, squaring our chins and rolling up our sleeves, is a commendable posture; but not a virtue. The test is not whether we do our duty, but whether we do it with happy resolution. The Torah tradition speaks frequently of "the joy of duty," simha shel mitzvah. Life's challenges are to be relished rather than endured.

- Easier said than done.

Not really once we accept the idea that happiness is a state of mind, the joy of feeling in tune with our existence.

Some time ago, I browsed in a book store. The table of non-fiction bestsellers was full of books on how to cope: how to cope with your marriage; how to cope with your divorce; how to cope with your children; how to cope with your parents; how to cope with youth; how to cope with age; how to cope with work; there was even a book on how to cope with leisure. As I looked at this vast array of copology, I wondered at the extent of discouragement in our society. Was life so emotionally draining? Obviously not. Yet many of us are deeply frustrated and clearly feel unfulfilled - that, by the way, was the word I noticed on many of the promotional blurbs on the book jackets - fulfillment - an impossible term, but "here is the key to fulfillment," absolute happiness, joy at all times.

Why are we so frustrated? Why has the future ceased to be an exciting prospect? The answer, I would suggest, is that science, technology, and the generations that have gone before have so enlarged our opportunity that we take the "good life", or is it the "too good life", for granted; that we have come on a bad patch, and do not like the idea of having to put our minds back on a survival agenda. Put bluntly, many of us are spoiled.

Some time ago I picked up an Anglo-Jewish journal and noticed that its New Year's editorial bore the headline, "5740, Can We Cope?" The writer proceeded to make a list of problems which beset the Jewish people and Israel. The first paragraph was about Soviet anti-semitism and a recent Politburo decision to limit Jewish emigration. Subsequent paragraphs dealt with the escalation of neo-Nazi violence in the Argentine, the dislocations which face the Jewish community in South Africa, the world-wide economic effects of the Arab boycott, the high cost of Israel's defense and the stress that such expenditures place on the Israeli economy; the savagery of international terrorism directed against Israel, the shrillness of attacks within the United Nations against Israel, the sale of American supersonic jets and air-to-ground missiles to Jordan and Saudi Arabia -- and on and on and on. In his last paragraph the journalist turned his attention to 5741 and asked his original question: "Can We Cope?" The answer, obviously, was yes; he intends to publish next year. Yes, but how? The editor really had no other answer but the old piety, Am Yisrael Hai, the people of Israel lives; we have survived, therefore, we will survive.

- I know what you're going to say. Would this man have written the same article if he had not been a comfortable, public-school educated London intellectual but his great-grandfather, an immigrant from Czarist Russia who had settled in the East End where he had survived as a poorly paid school teacher.

You'll admit it's a good question. Would great-grandfather have been surprised by Soviet anti-semitism, or would he have been surprised by and emphasized the easy citizenship Jews enjoy in the Free World, their remarkable social and economic progress, the fact that American Jews take equality and freedom for granted? Would his great-grandfather have underscored the high cost of Israel's defense of the existence of a State of Israel. After nineteen hundred years of homelessness, the Jewish people now are in their home and have proven their ability to defend that home through three decades and four wars. Would he have listed the sale of some arms by the United States to the Gulf states or have remarked on three decades of military and political support by the greatest power of the world for a Jewish State far away from

its borders? We take as a matter of course what our great-grandparents hardly dared to dream of, and when the first cold winds blow we forget how blessed we really are.

- Our problems are real.

And frightening; but to quote Churchill again: 'We have nothing to fear, but fear itself;' I'm not suggesting playing the ostrich.

What disturbs me is that you can cope, plod ahead with your eyes down only so long, and then the joylessness of it all begins to wear you down. Some give up, pull away from community and responsibilities and seek work without challenge or stress. Others swing to the other extreme and try to cultivate an indifference to possessions and to feelings. If they don't want too much or care too deeply, then they feel they'll protect themselves from frustration and hurt.

The Greeks had a word for this attitude. Ascesis described the deliberate cutting back of appetites and hopes which is adopted by those who want to escape the disappointment of caring and losing. Ascesis says I am not going to allow myself to want desperately because I will only be frustrated since I can never have all I want. I won't let myself love fully or have children because I don't want to give over hostages to fortune.

- Forgive me, but you sound a bit like a snake oil salesman dispensing one of those up-beat philosophies which emphasize heady and hopeful stuff which satisfies our age's need for hope.

I hope not. I can still remember the millions who read Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking. Publishers tell me a well-written 'If you only put your mind to it you can' book is an almost guaranteed best seller. I've never tried. I'm not much taken with something called the human potential movement which argues that we go to school but are taught only part of what we need to know and delight to describe largely unexplored areas of personality and feeling; areas like extrasensory perception symbolize for them man's untapped potential and who propose to make up for this lack by organizing classes in sensitivity or emotional awareness. I'm not talking about a quick fix, but about the pleasure of being part of

a long-lived and creative people, the pleasure of discovering and using God-given talents, the joy of being alive in God's world and of being convinced that we are doing work which would please Him.

Jews were not of a mind to write off the four score years. Sophocles summed up the despairing world view when he had a chorus chant: "Not to be born is, past all prizing, best, but, when a man has seen the light, this is next best by far, that with all speed he should go to the place from whence he came." Contrast the Psalmist's enthusiasm: "Happy are we. How happy our lot. How pleasant our situation." Among the new ideas which Israel's prophets put forward was a Messianic vision of a good life in a Promised Land. The good earth, God's creation, was designed to support a decent social order. Jews were encouraged to find in themselves and in their world the real possibilities which are here. Life is brief and bruising, but there are hopes that do come true and the view is often breathtaking. Judaism despaired neither of man nor of life. There is the joy of service, simha shel mitzvah; the joy of love, "the rejoicing of bride and groom"; the joy of being a person of quality, "happy is the man who has not followed the way of the sinner"; the joy of the Sabbath. There was a requirement that the Jew say a blessing for each meal, each purchase, each day, each drink, on seeing a beautiful view or a beautiful woman, literally number his blessings. Happy occasions were not to be piled on top of each other, but separated and separately savored. Among the Hassidim it was a mitzvah to banish sadness for it caused a "narrowing of the spirit" and made it difficult for anyone to love God.

On Rosh Hashonah we wish each other a shanah tovah, a good year. We do not ask God for joyless months spent dragging ourselves from problem to problem; we are thinking of something far better. The liturgy reads: "Our Father, our King, grant to us a year of happiness," renew our days, fill them with joy. Joy is a mood, an openness to certain feelings which can be ours only when we accept life for what it is, a short passage between the dependency of infancy and the dependency of age. Joy begins when we can face the truth that life is change,

flux, growth, and that it does not have conclusions, that what it has are moments, experiences, the now, and God, that these are, after all, enough.

- That's working kind of hard at being happy.

Happiness is worth working at. It takes a good bit of judgment and effort to place yourself where life can be satisfying. Only a considered philosophy and a good bit of discipline will allow us to keep our appetities in bounds and so be satisfied with what we have. I love the old folk saying: If someone tells you he is making a living,'but it wouldn't hurt if things were a little better;'ask him 'How do you know it wouldn't?' Only good judgment and discipline can keep us on the high road where the pleasures are not artificial but those of true accomplishment. Many who pursue happiness flee joy.

- Before I can relax and enjoy, I've got to have hope. Give me some reason to hope.

Israel. Despite Auschwitz and Arab armies determined to drive the Yishuv into the sea, Jews created a modern state on a despoiled and neglected land. Israel is for us what the Phoenix was for the Greeks, a metaphor of the truth that civilization can rise from the ashes.

- What if, God forbid, Israel should go under, what else do you have to offer?

Our Torah's Messianic vision.

- I don't believe in all that business about plough shares and pruning hooks.

Neither do I, except as compelling poetry. I'll answer you, but let me do it my way.

Rene Dubose writes a regular column in The American Scholar entitled "Despairing Optimist." I love the title because I identify with it. It suggests that to stay human we need to keep on working for a better world despite the suspicion that we may be building on quicksand. I approach the question of Israel-Arab peace in this spirit. I have no reason to believe that a treaty between Israel and Egypt will bring peace to the Middle East. Even if tourists are able to cross the common border and some bilateral trade agreements are worked out, a treaty will not assure peace. Cruel political realities and passions would remain. Governments can change. Prejudices can be stirred. Army divisions would still be massed on both sides of the border.

Treaties are pieces of paper which are scrapped when they are no longer of benefit to one of the parties. Yet, a treaty would be a useful step.

There is no reason for black despair and there is no reason for jubilation. We are no longer in what business men call a "can do" posture where an employee assures his boss that he can meet any challenge that is set. We can try. We must try, but there are no guarantees. Many problems cannot now be resolved, and most solutions create unanticipated problems. The social sciences now talk of "tradeoffs" which describe the costs which accompany any political and technical program we undertake. Change coal for oil and you may melt the ice cap. Use nuclear fuel instead of oil and coal and you risk radioactive contamination. Continue to use oil and the world will run out of energy.

- Doesn't it bother you that there will never be a time when everyone will sit securely and none shall make him afraid?

Not really. It would bother me more if there were no tasks to accomplish.

The original hope was of a time of peace without end when the gods would bring paradise to earth or man into paradise. For centuries we prayed for the coming of a Messiah, a scion of the House of David who, supported by God, would free Jerusalem from foreign domination and bring peace, freedom, and justice into our world. The Messianic dream was an understandable hope in an age which had no reason to believe that man could, in fact, change history. A better world required God, therefore the intensity of the hope invested in the Messiah, but the Messiah never came.

As science and industry began to increase man's sense of his power to transform his situation, a secularized version of the Messiah-hope emerged. Man was in charge of change, and history was seen as a long progress from the cave to civilization. The going was rough at times and exhausting, but movement was generally upward, and some day humanity would reach the top and find there a grassy meadow, level and smooth, paradise, the Messianic Age.

It didn't happen that way. The more we climbed, the further the top receded. We began

to realize there is no top. There is only the climb. The Messianic Age is a compelling idea, but an idea we mustn't take too literally.

- What's left?

Duty and possibility. We cannot transform the world, but we can increase the yield of grain per acre, find new sources of power and lengthen the life span. There are new things under the sun. We cannot destroy the animal in us but we can refine our spirits, discipline our emotions, and develop our minds. With love, practice and wisdom we can, and do, grow. If we cannot be part of the conclusion, we can join the expedition. As mountain climbers know, the climb to the base camp is exciting and the view exhilarating.

Let me tell you a tale by Israel's premier folklorist, S. Y. Agnon. A farmer herded goats. An old buck developed the habit of wandering off. Whenever he returned his coat was glossy and he looked younger. The goat's wanderings fascinated the farmer and one day he told his son to trail the animal. The boy followed the goat across the valley, up a mountain slope, deep into a cave, and through a narrow slit in the cave's wall and into Paradise. While the goat grazed in these idyllic surroundings the boy looked about. He was dazzled and resolved to return home and bring back his father. Why farm when Paradise is within a day's walk? He returned to the slit in the rock but the fissure was constructed in such a way that he could not wriggle through. So he wrote a note describing his find and instructing his father to follow the goat. He tied it to the animal's horn, confident that as before the animal would return to the flock. It did, but when the farmer saw the goat returning alone he cursed it as a devil and killed it with a single blow. Only then he noticed the note tied to its horn.

Paradise is not for the likes of us. Can you guarantee yourself against illness or sudden accident or the uncertain politics of the world? Can you guarantee family relationships against stress and separation? There is never a point in our lives when we can say: "I have it made and I can keep it this way."

What is true of us individually is true of us collectively. There will never be a period

of peace without end. There will never be an age without social and political problems. Our children and their children will know unexpected tragedy and face the contradictions of their natures. We are mortal, there will be death. We are fragile, there will be illness. We are inconstant, there will be treachery, disappointment, and violence. Some will have less, others more. Some will want, others will take. The world will never be endlessly calm and secure. Adam and Eve were locked out of Eden.

- You're not offering me as much as the competition. Marxism is full of hope; they insist that there are iron laws to history and that the dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable as is the falling away of the coercive nature of government.

I can't offer you what I don't believe in. Marxism's simple-minded Messianism is its major appeal. The problem is that after the Czar you end up with Stalin. I think it was George Bernard Shaw who said that revolution never lightens the burden of tyranny, it merely shifts it from one shoulder to another.

- I'm not sure I agree with you and I know I don't want to. Aren't you contributing to the mood of joylessness you criticize? If you don't believe in a personal Messiah or in a Messianic Age, what do you believe in?

I'll say it again. I believe that it is possible to live meaningfully and joyously in a world without conclusion. Living itself is a joy, particularly if you commit yourself to high ideals and grand values. There is joy, is there not, in the work we do when that work is worth the doing; in love and in friendship when those we love are open to us; when we give ourselves over to experiences which are significant to us, which touch our soul and inspire our deepest feelings? Wherever we are, whatever be our condition in life, it is possible, is it not, to spend our energies usefully and to know that we will know a certain satisfaction from our labors; and to give oneself over to friendship and love, knowing that though there will be quarrels and anger there will be moments of intimacy and happiness. I believe in the Messianic journey. It is good to be on the way, part of the pilgrimage of mankind among those who seek human

betterment. Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, I believe none of us will ever reach the Promised Land, but I know that there is joy in being with those who are trying and who care.

There is work worth doing, challenges worthy of us, and there can be delicious moments along the way. Whenever we do something for another selflessly; involve ourselves with some social undertaking that is not self-serving; give of ourselves in a moment of need; align ourselves with a useful cause; at that moment we are on the Messianic journey moving like our fathers toward a Promised Land.

Some years ago I met a man who had worked for fifteen years on a research project in physics. He had not been able to solve the problem. We talked. I remember saying to him: "You must be terribly disappointed." I have never forgotten his answer. "Yes, at times, but not as much as I thought I would be. You know, every lead that I pursued will save someone else from turning into a dead end. I've helped. I will not win the Nobel Prize, but I have helped. Most mornings I enjoyed going to the laboratory. There was an excitement to what I was doing. I knew it was worth the doing." We do not have to succeed to know the joy of moments when we know that the pattern of our life is good, that we love and are loved, and that we are among those who are building civilization. The Torah tradition lifts up the joy of being on a worthwhile way and teaches us through the religious life how to savor the joys of the road.

Chapter 13

THE PROMISE OF LAND

The morning paper was full of another General Assembly debate over Jerusalem and the West Bank which, as so often, was not a debate on the merits of Israel's policies but a well-rehearsed diatribe; not unexpectedly, the first question had to do with Zionism.

- My non-Jewish roommates say religion should have nothing to do with real estate. They wonder why Jews are so emotionally tied to a piece of land.

What did you tell them?

- That our history began there.

What did they say?

- That their history began there, too.

Actually our past begins in Syria, Abraham's home, not Canaan. Every one of the patriarchs spent part of his life outside Canaan, and Moses never set foot on its soil. Israel's importance to Jews is religious rather than historical. Zion is all tied up with the special messianism of the Jewish tradition; it is the Promised Land.

- I love the sense of antiquity.

So do I, but there are many ruins in our world, some far older and grander than any in Israel. It's not the ruins. David conquered Jerusalem and made it Israel's capital. The ruins of David's city are still there, a mass of rubble south of the walls of the Old City. Hardly anyone visits David's walls; yet we are drawn like drones to the Western Wall - a much later structure, but one associated with The Temple, God, the promise.

- What promise?

Redemption. Every element in Judaism's special and surprising message related redemption to this place. The Messiah will rule here. Resurrection will take place here. A sovereign

Israel in its land is the first step in the drama of redemption.

- You certainly don't take these ideas literally.

No, but I recognize that they color all Jewish thought and are expressed in every worship service, "Rebuild Jerusalem quickly in our day." Israel is in a Jew's soul, and this emphasis on place tells us a good bit about Judaism's attitude toward the future.

If a religion despairs of this life and focuses on the joys of the next, its promise will not include a Promised Land theme. Christ insisted: "My Kingdom is not of this world." Gautama taught his followers not to put down roots, for those who care about possessions or place will not achieve Nirvana. But, if your tradition affirms the possibility of a sound society here and now, that community has to be located someplace and place becomes a theme of consequence in that religion's message. For Israel to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, there must be a country where schools can be established, synagogues dedicated, farms tilled, cities established in justice.

It is a measure of Judaism's optimism that so many myths center on place. God commanded Abraham to go to the land "that I will show you." Moses was ordered to lead the slaves to a Promised Land. Deutro-Isaiah brought God's promise, promising to make a way in the desert for those exiled to Babylon along which they could return to Jerusalem. Other worldly themes were added to Israel's hope -- promises of immortality, resurrection and the World to Come, one nice thing about dreams is that they are open-ended -- but Jews never let go of the earthly promise and, consequently, despite serious and repeated buffetings, never despaired of this world. To others the world might be a vale of tears or a place of unrewarding trial. Jews neither denied the tears nor the trial, but theirs was always the confidence that God would redeem and that redemption would take the form of a "Zion redeemed in justice."

- Why doesn't Christianity have a similar focus on land in its teachings?

Christianity was the creation of men who believed that the familiar world was coming to

an end, that the Kingdom of God was at hand and that God's new world would be a different kind of place. The early Christians left the Promised Land for the Wilderness and the Diaspora. Their preparations were directed towards the End of the World not the building of God's Kingdom here and now. Over the years, Christianity developed myths of places. The Puritans left England to find a place where they could build the city on the hill, but these earthbound themes developed late and in scattered places, so there was never any agreement on a particular Zion.

- Promised Land talk sounds just a bit romantic. I thought the Biblical myth was that God had locked the Gates of Eden so that we would have to move about in the real world. Isn't the Promised Land myth simply a projection of a childish hope to be back in Eden?

For the Israelites the crossing of the Jordan was not entry into Paradise, but the beginning of centuries of hard work as they attempted to conquer the Promised Land, protect it from enemies, enhance its cities, and secure its fertility. There is nothing in the founding myth which promises ease in Zion.

The beauty of Zion was often described in enthusiastic terms, "a pleasant land;" "a land flowing with milk and honey." Jeremiah says, "the goodliest heritage of the nation." But Zion was not Eden where everything one needs is available for the asking. Zion is subject to drought, locusts and invasion, all the natural and international catastrophes which can afflict a country. It took a lifetime of wandering for the Israelites just to reach the Promised Land and three more centuries of struggle to subdue and overcome the Canaanites and the Philistines. The land is a hard and unyielding place; home, but not a fairy land: cultivable, but not magically fertile.

- This week you've talked a lot about the contradiction within human personality and the fact that most problems have no solutions. I buy that. But the Promised Land thesis suggests that our wanderings do end.

Not quite. When the wandering ends, new responsibilities begin. The Promised Land did not belong to Israel by natural right. Jews had not been the original settlers. The land was theirs because God wished it so. God had promised the land to Abraham and his descendants.

If they proved irresponsible tenants, God might some day decide to take it back from them. Indeed, early in our history, Israel was twice driven off the land, first by the Babylonians and then the Romans; and the prophets told their people that defeat and exile were the result of the nation's faithlessness to the covenant. Sovereignty is never unconditional. The struggle goes on.

The national home was looked upon as private property, God's: "The land is Mine" (Lev. 25:23). God chose Israel to live there, to farm it and secure its cities. The tribes paid God rent in the form of tithes. God's Word, the Torah, provided His tenants careful and detailed instructions as to the rules of cultivation, conservation, and community organization. The land was to lie fallow each seventh year. Trees were not to be cut down for the battering rams and scaling ladders required to besiege an enemy town. No field was to be planted with mixed seeds. Each city was to organize a system of courts and provide welfare support to its poor. The Torah required that boundary stones were to be raised and respected; but these established only conditional title. God had allotted the land among the Twelve Tribes and each Jubilee Year, every fiftieth year, the land was to revert to its original assignee. Those who sought to enlarge their holdings violated the spirit of God's homestead program, "Woe unto them who add field to field." Monopolists were punished, not only for the common sin of greed, but for the covenant sin of disobedience. Violation of the terms of the covenant, translate indifference to the responsibilities of social justice, would cancel the lease.

In Jewish thought, sovereignty and social responsibility are inextricably paired.

For the Zionists of our times pioneering in the Yishuv was not simply a back-breaking effort, and physical labor was only part of the challenge. They knew that Zion is to be built in justice. Theodor Herzl's utopian novel, The Old-New Land, describes a model society, classless and free, based on a culture of the highest order.

- I spent a year at the Hebrew University. I saw rocky land transformed into green fields,

unwanted Jews welcomed into citizenship, the piety and mysticism of The Wall; but I felt Israel's psychological impact particularly in terms of my Jewish identity. I've never quite been able to put it into words. It had something to do with there being a Jewish State. Ambassadors and matters of high policy. It had something to do with being tied to Jews who had roots.

The settled, not nomads, build civilization. The Hebrews were among the landless of the world and the overlooked. The Israelites were of the land and so able to build a consequential record. Land is not only the most precious of possessions but, psychologically, perhaps the most necessary. The wanderer leaves no mark of his passing. The farmer plants trees for his grandchildren, and the city dweller builds libraries and museums for his.

- I've been to The Wall and worked on a kibbutz. And I appreciate that return to the land has meant an end to living on somebody else's turf and tolerance; what I don't understand is why the world seems not to understand. I was shocked out of my skin when a friend found I was a Zionist and said almost carelessly, 'I never thought of you as a racist.'

He had picked up a scrap of the big lie which the Arab and Soviet blocs repeat endlessly and have even managed to dress up as official wisdom through their automatic majorities at the United Nations. When, in 1977, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution condemning Zionism "as a form of racism and of racial discrimination," the vote was condemned as outrageous by the United States government; and outrageous it was, a tribute to the power of oil; to old-fashioned anti-semitism; to knee-jerking anti-Americanism; and to ignorance. Repeat an idea often enough and it gains currency.

- How do you define Zionism?

- Zionism is a liberation movement focused on the renewal of the Promised Land as a national home for the Jewish people.

- Liberation movement is twentieth century jargon. I think of Zionism as the fulfillment of a long-deferred but never forgotten promise.

Jewish messianism is rooted in the concept of freedom and security on our land. We

reject the image of life as a hapless burden, with all blessings reserved for some life to come. On Passover we end the Seder with the hope: "next year in Jerusalem." Jews sanctify this connection of land and covenant, not simply out of dogged piety, but because it has always expressed our understanding of redemption. Redemption is possible in the here and now as well as in the World to Come.

God's initial summons to a Jew, to Abraham, required him to leave Ur of the Chaldees for a new land; Abraham was told simply: "Go to the land that I will show you, and be a blessing." Once Abraham had settled in that land, Canaan, God made a covenant with him. In return for his pledge of obedience God promised Abraham that this land "will be yours, and your seed forever."

Later, at the Burning Bush, God placed two obligations upon Moses, to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt and to lead the tribes to the Promised Land. When the tribes of Israel affirmed God's Word at Sinai, they accepted the bonds of a covenant relationship inextricably bound up with the land. God warned: "If you agree and give heed, you will eat the good things of the earth; but, if you refuse and disobey, you will be devoured by the sword." Biblical prophecy is best explained as an interpretation of Jewish history which elaborates a single insight: that the fate of the nation is not determined by ordinary considerations of political power, but by the quality of national obedience to the covenant regulations. The prophets interpreted the successive disasters which befell Israel and Judah as God's doing, results of the nation's sins. Land is an essential category in the covenant's calculus of rewards and punishments and, thus, the existence of a Jewish State or its absence is a measure of Israel's closeness to or alienation from God. Once exiled for their sins, this people, accustomed to covenant thinking, expected to return if and when they showed themselves repentant and worthy.

The word repentance, teshuvah, comes from a root, shuv, which implies both contrition and the act of returning to one's place; thus, teshuvah suggests deep religious concerns and that contrition and moral discipline will be rewarded by return to the homeland. Exile was always

galut, both physical displacement and a state of alienation from God. To travel to the Holy Land is aliyah, a going up; and to leave the land is yeridah, a going down. Jews felt closer to God in the land than any place else.

- That's irrational.

That's the power of myth.

- If the Jew prayed every day for a Jewish State, why didn't Jews before Herzl do something about it?

In the Biblical view, state building was God's work. The prophets' Zionism consisted of a preaching mission summoning Jews to repentance and righteousness. God would reward a repentant Israel with land, security and peace. Traditional messianism remained, by and large as it began, pious and politically passive.

- I don't like to think of Jews as passive.

They weren't always. Chanukah celebrates a successful struggle for sovereignty and Masada an unsuccessful one. Israel's passivity was part piety and part cold calculation. Generally the simple truth was that there was nothing else a few Jews could do.

So, they prayed and obeyed God's instructions. During every century since the destruction of the Temple in the first century, the pious went up to Jerusalem to offer prayers in the Holy City asking God to hasten Israel's return to Zion, for redemption. The medieval Avalei Zion, or Mourners for Zion, believed that by offering devotion near the Temple Mount and baring their misery they would move God to speed the coming of the Messiah. Children as a people innured to political impotence, whose faith, Biblical faith, insisted that God was in full control of history, it did not occur to them that they might hasten Zion's redemption by buying and cultivating land and organizing a government.

Modern Zionism was deemed irreligious by ultra-pietistic sources because it insisted that prayers were not enough. The early Zionists were mostly non-traditional Jews who had caught the modern spirit of activism, abandoned passivity and prayer and gone on the land to create the

physical basis of the nation's rebirth. Modern political Zionism, like the social gospel of contemporary Christianity, represents a vision of man as partner with God in the work of creation.

During that 1977 General Assembly debate, an Arab diplomat, Abd-allah al-Sayegh, informed the world body that Arabs have no quarrel with Judaism. Arabs, he said, applaud Judaism, but Zionism is a bastardization of that tradition. His proof? The existence of opposition to Zionism among Jews. Al-Sayegh claimed that the Zionism as Racism resolution simply repeated what "Jewish intellectuals" had said. Al-Sayegh spoke with a forked tongue, but he was right to this extent: during the nineteenth century significant numbers of orthodox Jews, still caught up in the medieval hope that God would bring the Messiah and recreate the Jewish State on His own, in His time, opposed practical Zionism. Such pious folk looked on practical programs of renewal of Palestine as either blasphemous or pointless. It was blasphemy to force an end to the Exile since such activity suggested that Israel no longer trusted God; and, since such blasphemy was a sin, whatever the pioneers accomplished would only delay the long-awaited redemption.

- That's no longer the mainline orthodox position today.

It hasn't been for a long time. As the possibility of establishing a national home by political means emerged as a realistic possibility, the vast majority of traditional Jews joined the Zionist movement. Nor did they have to abandon fundamental doctrine in order to do so. A theological rationale had/given provided, by men like Yehudah Alkalai and Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, nineteenth century orthodox rabbis from Eastern Europe, who argued that Jews have never expected God's forgiveness without evidence of teshuvah on our parts. Repentance is an active posture. It implies changing the basis of our lives. The initiative must be ours. Let our people show initiative and go to the Holy Land. Let them establish farms and found cities and build schools. God will see that we are eager to please Him and He may turn towards us and complete our beginning by making it secure and sending the Messiah.

- That's interesting. I had thought most opposition to Zionism came from assimilated Jews.

Being assimilated, these were the people who had access to public platforms and the general press. The events of our century have exposed the tragic inaccuracy of their political judgments, but their position must at least be understood.

Many of the newly enfranchised Jews of the West half believed that the Messianic times were at hand. The once-excluded were now citizens. Isaac Mayer Wise, the energetic organizer of Reform Judaism in the United States, said at various times: "In the nineteenth century civilization began;" "In a matter of a few years universal peace will reign;" "The old barriers between people are coming down." I do not pick out Isaac Mayer Wise to pillory or parody him; his voice picked up what was being said by hundreds of Jews who suddenly found themselves in a world full of dazzling freedoms and possibilities, sensed the vastness of the changes which had come on Jewish life, and could not believe that the liberal reforms basic to their brave new world would not fulfill their promise. In their eyes it was a time for men of progressive attitudes to cooperate, not separate. They could not imagine Jews leaving the golden streets of New York or Chicago for the barren wastes of a backwater province of the Turkish empire. They believed in a universal brotherhood of men of good will. All nationalisms seemed anachronistic. Why erect fences? Why take Jews out of that community? They had just escaped from a state of their own, the ghetto. Why create a new Jewish State?

Zionism grew among those Jews who valued the particularity of Jewish life, whose piety was not passive and whose political judgment was not sanguine. The bourgeois Jew of the West read his history as a Messianic drama. The ideas of the French and American Revolutions would soon become political reality across the globe. The Zionist read the nineteenth century as just another century, a time of promises made and promises broken. The principalities of Germany had emancipated the Jew under Napoleonic pressure and quickly locked them up again after the

Congress of Vienna. In the universities new and exciting ideas were taught, including, in some places, new theories of anti-semitism based upon pseudo-scientific theories of race. Political anti-semitism diminished in some places and grew in others. By the end of the century, Vienna, perhaps the most cultured city of the age, was governed by a council dominated by The Anti-Semitic Party, and which had only one plank in its platform, "to deprive the Jews of control of the city." Rightist parties throughout Europe popularized the theme that Jewish attitudes popularized by Jewish writers and artists introduced cosmopolitan ideas which would subvert the native purity and idealism of Germany or Austria or Poland or France. Zionists saw, not less hate, but more. According to their analysis, the European Jew was in a Catch-22 situation: If he advanced politically and socially, he incited envy, and the envious used anti-semitism to eliminate competition; if he failed to Westernize and remained an outcast, he was vilified as alien, a fossil, an anachronism.

- It's amazing how often we see only what we want to see.

I keep telling you religion is powerful stuff.

- You're saying that Zionism was a program for Jews who did not believe that we had entered the Messianic Age.

Zionism is a program for action in an unredeemed world. Theodor Herzl was sent to Paris, the cradle of liberty, by an Austro-Hungarian newspaper to cover that capital's theatre. His assignment happened to coincide with the Dreyfus Trial. The Jew, Dreyfus, an army captain, was convicted of treason on trumped-up charges manufactured by a powerful military clique, eager to find a scapegoat for their own incompetence. This show trial was to prove that France's defeat by Prussia in the 1870 war was not the army's fault but the Jews'. Herzl was shocked by this blatant miscarriage of justice and by the sight of tens of thousands of Frenchmen, marching down the Champs Elysees, wearing black arm bands, cursing the Jews as the arch enemy and anti-Christ. Then and there Herzl realized that anti-semitism was not a medieval poison whose venom had lost its sting, but a virulent and active disease for which there was no known remedy.

He came to feel that Jewish life would be crippled as long as it depended on Europe's diseased political environment. Jews had to have a home of their own because Europe would never provide them security. Herzl did not foresee Mein Kampf or Dachau; but he and his fellow Zionists attacked the naivete of those Jews who believed that it was the dawn of a Messianic time. Herzl urged Jews to act: "A people can be helped only by its own efforts, and if it cannot help itself it is beyond succor." The action required was to build a state.

- I'm not much for nationalism. People should be loyal to humanity, not governments.

Perhaps that will happen when the Messiah comes. Until then loyalties will be directed to the groups of which we feel a part. Statehood is not an end, but it's an important step beyond rootlessness.

There are religions and religions, and states and states. The Jewish vision of state, Zion, is heavily value laden. For Jews, state is an ethical as well as a political term.

When the Zionists looked at the Jews of the ghettos and of Eastern Europe, they saw in the Pale of Settlement what sensitive observers have recently taught us to see in the ghettos of American cities: men and women brutalized by a cruel and impoverished environment and by experiences which have rendered them nearly incapable of fulfilling their potential as human beings. Europe's diseased and racist political environment had taken its toll of the Jews. Many Western Jews were so uncertain of their roots and place that all they wanted was to put Jewishness behind and were filled with that most corrosive of poisons, self hate. The Zionists did not try to hide the unfortunate characteristics of the huddled masses. Yes, many Jews were far too shrewd; and many of them were idle, never having been able to earn a living; many of them cringed when a muzik walked by; and there was much in their home and civic life which was not pretty. Zionism was a program for the rehabilitation and spiritual renewal for the Jew: Hebrew instead of Yiddish; skills with the hoe and spade as well as the pen; new role models, the Maccabees and the Biblical soldiers and farmers to complement that of a scholar bent over his books. Until the Second World War most of the money raised by the Zionist movement was spent

in Europe, not in Palestine. It was spent to purchase farms where young Jews could learn the skills of a modern society, to establish community centers where young Jews could express the Jewish spirit in a modern context. The Zionists saw the Jew as he was and the Jew as he might be. Jewish life had to be strengthened in Israel and out: "Zionism is a return to the Jewish fold even before it becomes a return to the Jewish land."

Statehood was critical because, until the Jew had a place he could call his own, a national home where he would always be welcome, where his spirit could unfold naturally, his spirit would remain to some degree constrained and his political situation precarious. Every program of human renewal espoused by thoughtful men of the age was espoused by one or another Zionist for the renewal of the Jewish nation. Tolstoy told his Russians to go back to the land and, with honest labor, sweat the corruption of the city out of their souls. Zionists like A. D. Gordon said to the Jew: "Labor is our cure. Centuries ago you were driven off the land. Life in the crowded cities has corrupted the Jewish soul. Let us go back to the land. Work with our hands. The poisons of the ghetto will be leached out of our bodies by our daily labors under the sun. You will find your back straightening, your mind clearing." Socialist Zionists suggested programs to end all class divisions. Ben Zvi, Borochov and others wrote of true community, of an end to privilege, of the socialism of the kibbutz, of sharing labor and benefits.

- What's Jewish in all this? Sensitized by outside influences, these thinkers looked for reflexes of Tolstoy or Marx in Torah and, as legions of commentators before them, found underground streams whose waters they brought to the surface. Many Biblical figures had worked the land. . . Why not read, "by the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread," as a blessing rather than a curse. The prophets had attacked the perversities of the wealthy and condemned all economic and social privilege.

It was a time when Jews generally sensed the need to reshape the pieces that make up Torah.

Though secular learning had replaced medieval scholasticism and superstition in much of Europe, Judaism was still deeply enmeshed in Kaballah and the superstitious web of medieval life. A Zionist writer like Ahad Ha-Am looked upon the rebuilding of the national home as an opportunity to create modern cultural and academic institutions which would reshape and unlock the spiritual energies of an historically creative people. For many Zionists like him, one of Zionism's major goals was to build "a great cultural institution in Palestine, attracting to itself a large number of gifted Jewish scholars working in a Jewish atmosphere, free from repression and not unduly subject to extraneous influences, becoming a source of new inspiration to the Jewish people as a whole and bringing about a true revival of Judaism and Jewish culture" - a Hebrew University.

- I'm puzzled. We've talked a good bit about the ability of the Torah tradition to provide the ideas and hopes around which Jews could, and did, shape a healthy community and a life which was human and humane. Now you're describing social pathology. Is Judaism enlivening or not?

The human being and the societies he creates are remarkably resilient, but not infinitely so. The historic communities of Spain and Portugal were eliminated at the end of the fifteenth century. Eastern European Jewry never recovered from the Cossack massacres in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These were the years in which the ghetto was officially created in Italy, when the Roman Church, reeling from the Protestant heresy, turned on the Jew as source of that heresy, and when Protestants like Luther turned on the Jew because they were trapped by Christianity's traditions of contempt. It was an age when more was being asked of Torah than any religion can provide.

- I thought that Zionism was created to solve a refugee problem. You're saying that Zionism was created to renew the Jewish people, to energize and reform its institutions, and to enlarge the possibilities of the Jewish spirit.

Herzl lived a half century before Hitler, at a time when immigration to America was possible. Ellis Island was open. America spelt opportunity, but no one could be certain that Europe might not infect America. Besides, Judaism in America would remain a Diaspora tradition.

- It must have been harder to make the case here than in Europe.

It was.

Al-Sayegh was right to this extent: in the West, particularly among Jews who had prospered, Zionism was mistrusted and misunderstood. He was wrong when he implied that there is today any major division of feeling among Jews over Zionism. Beginning when Great Britain closed the doors to Palestine in the 1930's and ending when the Allied armies opened the gates of the death camps in 1945, a series of incredibly bitter lessons transformed nearly all Jews into Zionists. Herzl's analysis made in the 1890's proved out tragically in the 1930's and 40's. World War II taught Jews two unforgettable lessons. First, not to depend on good will. Great Britain had closed the doors to Palestine precisely when Jews most desperately needed to find a haven. The United States had not opened its doors during the decade when Hitler's refugees needed a place of refuge. Second, that anti-semitism had the power to turn ordinary people into efficient butchers of Jews. I cannot put out of mind Hannah Arendt's phrase describing the activity of Eichmann, "the banality of evil." These two lessons, hard-learned by many Jews, turned all who cared about Judaism into Zionists committed to the renewal of the Jewish creative spirit, to the intensification of Jewish life, to Jewish learning and programs of identity, and to the survival of Jewish people.

- I lived for several months in Israel and Zionism is for me, all that you have said and a much needed proof of what is possible in our world. If our people, the castouts of Europe, could take an unwanted place and turn it green and build on it a graceful civilization, then what was not possible for the world given will and determination?

- Isn't Zionism also the West Bank settlements, an occupying army, and a massive defense budget?

There have been four invasions of the State, endless terrorism, and a stated Arab policy to blot Israel off the map. Israel's life has not been easy, and energies and resources have had to be diverted to defense; yet, few other nations have so transformed their environment. Israel's social services are studied by other nations as useful and successful models. Culturally, Israel is a major power. Almost all are refugees, but there are no refugees. The achievement remains compelling.

Chapter 14

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It had been a rainy Monday. The TV had been on and a few had been watching a soap opera which, as it turned out, provided the peg for our conversation. The screenhad showed a father returning home after a visit to his daughters in San Francisco and saying to a friend, "Either the whole world is crazy or I am."

- The line's an old war horse.

- My father often feels that way. His version is: "No one seems to know what's right anymore."

I'd heard that phrase before when an anxious and obviously bewildered lady came to see me. Her son had been berating her because she regularly contributed to the United Way and other charities that she considered worthwhile. He insisted that private welfare programs were bandaids that simply covered over festering social ills; that America needed radical political and economic surgery and that such gifts as hers delayed, perhaps fatally, such reform.

Her daughter had been home for a visit that had proved to be difficult. She was living with another graduate student. They had a wonderful relationship, or so she told her mother; but they were not about to be married. Marriage would sully the purity of their love. What they had now was genuine; what they would have if they married would be something less.

After sixteen years of marriage her brother and sister-in-law had filed for divorce. They were the best of friends and intended to remain so, but her brother had told her both of them needed a fresh start and, since they weren't getting any younger, the sooner the better.

The night before she came to my office her husband had come home and told her to pack their bags. They were going to take a long trip. He was sick to death of the hassle with clients, government forms, and union negotiations. Someone else could take over the business. Whatever they could get out of it, so be it. He wanted to see the country while he could still

enjoy the trip. Perhaps they would end up living in California. She paused. She seemed whipped. "I just don't know what's right any more."

- As long as nobody gets hurt, what's the difference?

Shared values are as important to a family as love. Without some basic agreement on goals and standards, there can't be community.

- You're talking regimentation.

There's a world of difference between a voluntary consensus, what the eighteenth century called a social compact, and arbitrarily imposed standards.

- My parents are fairly sensible, yet, we have knock-down-drag-outs on just this kind of question. I believe in living each day. They fought my dropping out of school on the grounds that I ought to get my professional degree first. I said I'd get it, but I didn't want to spend my youth in school. I talked about today. They talked about the future.

When I listen to the generations struggling to adjust to the structural changes which have taken place in family life and the social order, I find myself an audience to some real anger between people who love each other, each of whom believes he is acting wisely and with his own and the other's best interest in mind.

A few months ago an elderly woman came to me with a bitter complaint about her daughter and son-in-law. They were insisting that she move into an old folks' home. She had been raised in the era of the extended family when ageing parents lived in the family home and only the impoverished or unwanted were institutionalized, so she felt betrayed and abandoned: "Don't my children know the Ten Commandments: 'honor your father and your mother'? How can they do this to me?" A few days later her children were in my office. Both of them worked, and they could not afford a full-time housekeeper to look after a mother who sometimes became disoriented and wandered off. They had thoroughly investigated the local homes and had found a first-rate facility. "She will be well cared for. We'll be there often. She will not be alone. We have no other choice." A day or two later I received a telephone call

from a granddaughter at college. She was angry and upset with her parents. "How could they put grandmother in a home? Don't they know that institutions dehumanize, that grandmother will become a chart and diminish as a person? How could they do this to such a wonderful woman?"

We talked about this specific case for a while and agreed that analyzing complicated ethical questions and clearly evaluating motives and consequences is a painful and difficult process and one which requires a good deal of honesty; I guess that's why many simply shout: 'I'm right,' and shout down anyone who questions their motives or actions.

- I'm not convinced that ethical decisions need to envolve such heavy going. Most of the time I know what's right. I feel it in my guts.

- Don't delude yourself. The little red flags in our conscience are put there by our culture. I have a Muslim friend who feels guilty whenever he takes a drink and an Indian friend who suffers whenever he eats meat. You can't trust your gut reaction.

Many have a convenient conscience. Perhaps that's why Judaism insists that we trust God's commandments, Torah, not conscience.

- You've criticized arbitrary standards. Now you're approving them, How come?

Ethical standards must be grounded in some normative system. Any measurement requires at least two fixed points. I agree with Emil Brunner's observation: " Could we possibly conceive that the ethic of Buddhism or of Brahmaism, with its world denial tendency, should not be wholly different from the system of morality which has grown up in China, with its emphasis on ancestor worship. . . To try to discuss an 'original moral common tone' behind these influences of the various religions is simply a wild goose chase."

Torah ethics emphasizes the uniqueness of each situation, the need for case-by-case analysis and the value of a pragmatic assessment of consequences; but it also insists that there must be a certain thrust or direction to any ethical decision. The Hassidim say that, when a certain rebbe was appointed to head a community council, his associates asked him to formulate

a new constitution for their city. He presented them a copy of the Ten Commandments.

Ethics envolves an ideal side, Torah, and a practical decision-making side. At Sinai God provided man with the basic rule of holiness around which civilization has formed. Clear words were spoken about appropriate actions. The Torah shows me the direction in which my thinking must go. The abuse of wetback labor is evil. Why? "You shall neither wrong nor oppress a stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." I cannot sit quietly in my home when someone outside calls for help. Why? "You shall not stand idly by the blood of a neighbor." When I was foreman of our local Grand Jury I had to be careful of cultural attitudes which are class-determined. Why? "You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment. You shall not respect the person of the poor or favor the person of the powerful." I hear many things in the course of my professional duties and, when people ask about others, I must remain silent. Why? "You shall not go up and down as a tale bearer among your people." The Torah is a collection of instructions which, taken together, contribute a rule of life, a way which, so the Torah tradition affirms, if followed faithfully leads to the well-being of the individual, the community and the society.

- What about the Torah rules you do not accept - burning witches, stoning adulterers, sex-differentiated roles. How can a Torah which includes unacceptable instructions provide standards?

I've also talked about the long tradition of interpretation through which the Torah has been made to provide instruction appropriate to each day. When I say Torah, I mean the whole river, Torah and Torah commentary, not simply the bare text. The rabbis honored anachronistic statements by inattention or reinterpretation. Capital punishment was effectively abolished by judicial process. Adultery was condemned, but adulterers were not stoned.

- The Torah says "an eye for an eye." Surely, you don't affirm the nobility of revenge?

It's not a rule of revenge at all, but a rule that damages must be commensurate to the hurt. "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. . ."

- You wouldn't punch out another simply because he'd taken a swing at you.

No, but I might call my lawyer. The Biblical rule uses primitive terms; the Talmud made the point explicitly: "An eye for an eye is a principle in cases envolving monetary damage." It was important to limit damages and to preclude blood feuds, and to teach that, once damages have been paid, the issue is closed.

- Wasn't a bastard ostracized under rabbinic law as if he were an Indian untouchable?

That's overstating it. Children born out of an adulterous liaison suffered certain status disabilities and were limited as to whom they could marry. It was not what any of us would call a humane rule, but the sages apparently thought they were protecting the sanctity of marriage. The bastard was a warning to others. The reality of inherited guilt was fairly evident. The son of a slave was a slave. We think they went about it in the wrong way, but their way was not immoral or insensitive for their time. Quite the contrary, they felt it to be a socially beneficial rule.

The problem is rarely with Torah, but with our tendency to see a particular rule as fixed for all times. I am as concerned with Kiddushim, the sanctity of marriage, as any Talmudic master; but I must seek to strengthen marriage in ways consonant with my times.

- In Confirmation class we were told to imagine situations in which each of the Ten Commandments could and should be broken. I remember writing that I would kill to protect my family from a psychopath and that, had I been a Jew in Nazi Europe, I would have stolen whatever I needed to survive. I think now I would feel that the spouse of a permanently institutionalized mate who could not bear to divorce a loved one could be encouraged to have another relationship.

It's a case of the exception proving the rule. The rule remains an appropriate ideal.

- In my synagogue the tablets of the law are displayed above the ark. They're supposed to be etched in stone. The symbol suggests that these rules are rock solid. How can the synagogue use this symbol if there are exceptions?

Judaism never looked on Torah as a boiler plate, a set of instructions that you thumbed

through til you found the right one. Torah provided instruction. Talmud Torah suggests how text might relate to life and the obligation to imitate God's moral nature provided an ethical dynamic which transcended the whole Torah process. Talmudic law held that, in the case of gross negligence on the part of laborers, they are obliged to pay damages. A Talmudic sage hired some workers who carelessly broke some wine casks. The sage demanded damages. The judge awarded damages. Then the workers appealed to the judge's leniency on the grounds that they were poor men who worked hard and had families to feed. The judge remitted the award and ordered the sage to pay their wages. The sage asked the judge: 'Is this the law?' And the answer he got was "Yes, is it not written, 'and the ways of the poor shall be preserved'?" The text was never the final answer.

- If Torah represents a set of goals and we agree on these goals, why do rabbis come down on opposite sides of issues like autopsies and abortion?

Rabbis live in different environments, and many of us are conditioned by different aspects of our fractured culture. Not only that, but we see different problems. Take the issue of pulling the plug on the brain dead. Some see the issue as the sanctity of life problem. Others that it is a quality of life issue. And both groups feel they are obeying God's command, "Choose life."

Over several years a favorite subject around our dinner table was President Carter's human rights campaign. Should we withhold aid and, perhaps, even recognition, from any country which didn't guarantee full and equal rights to all its citizens. Carter might easily have quoted Torah in support of his policy: "Proclaim freedom unto the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof." The dignity of every earthling is fundamental Torah, but I found myself suggesting that, in many countries, particularly in Africa and Latin America, American-style democracy was impractical. Three-quarters of the population may be illiterate, and most had little experience with self-government. If we imposed arbitrary restraints, there were powerful authoritarian forces at work eager to take advantage of the ensuing turmoil. To apply the human

rights mandate indiscriminately, as the Carter administration tried to do in places like Angola and Nicaragua, did not guarantee a freer or juster society in the countries concemed; in fact, the result might be quite the opposite.

- The camp doctor offered his experience; I found myself making the opposite decision in two almost identical situations. In both cases a patient had a fatal illness. The first patient was a man in his middle years. As I looked him over, he looked up and said: "Doc, I feel better now and I know that I am going to be well." Actually, he had only a few weeks to live; yet, here he was, talking about health and going back to work. A lot of thoughts raced through my mind before I came to a decision: "No, you're not." He cried. I explained. We talked. Why had I spoken so openly? This man had a wife and children, a business. He had been suddenly stricken. If he avoided the decisions which needed to be made they would not be made and with unhappy consequences for the people who depended on him. He had to confront his situation, however painful the thought.

In another room on the same floor, I visited an older woman, also ill with cancer and with a limited time to live. She spoke to me hopefully: "I'm beginning to feel a bit better. All this will soon be behind me and I'll be well." I was comforting and solicitous. I made no attempt to disabuse her. No one depended on her. There were no decisions that she had to make except to organize her last days as she wished.

- Often it's necessary to eschew compromise in order to remind a society of its real purposes.

There's a need for prophets and a need for effective bureaucrats. Some must make society aware of the inhumanity of poverty, and some must organize and staff effective programs of social welfare.

The Torah presents God's standards. We need to apply these sensitively and intelligently to our situation. A generation ago a husband honored his wife by respecting her sex-differentiated role; today she might chafe under that kind of respect.

Joseph Fletcher, who taught ethics at various Protestant seminaries, insisted that the best way to check our judgments is to make a rigorous examination of our motives. If I feel that I am doing what I am doing out of love, if I feel it is genuine, that's enough. Unselfish motivation affirms the goodness of an act. Fletcher defines the good as acting out of love. This definition may unmask the hypocrite, but I am troubled by it. There are all kinds of love. There's a selfless love which is truly giving and there is a selfless love which grows out of a pathological need to be a martyr. There is a mother love which sustains and there is a mother's love which smothers. You can love a person to death. There is a love of self which is becoming pride and a love of self which is pure arrogance. Love covers anything and everything, anything, at least, that we want it to cover. The Grand Inquisitor sent men to the rack out of his love for their immortal souls and felt good about it. His motives were pure. Pure love can kill.

- O.K. If motives are only part of it, how do you suggest we think about the right and the good?

By a calculus of consequence rather than a calculus of motivation. I watched the other day as a family pleaded with a physician to do all he could to save their mother. She was in her eighties, in a deep coma, and her brain scan showed little activity. They spoke out of love, but heroic measures could only condemn their mother to protracted unconsciousness and deny a hospital bed to a patient who might be helped. In my opinion he rightly denied their pleas. Love blocks judgment. A basic principle of Talmudic judicial procedure is that a judge is disqualified from a case involving someone he loves or hates.

- But how do you know what ought to be done?

I seek to transpose, as sensitively as I can, those acts commanded and commended in Torah into the context of my life.

- Explain yourself.

I'll give you a 'for instance'. A large number of texts command concern for need. "Happy is he who considers the poor." There is also an emphasis in the Torah which assumes that the ultimate responsibility for the poor rests with the community. The community is to impose a poor tithe and other taxes so that the poor need not beg or depend on someone's charitable impulse. To that end long term support (kupah) and emergency relief (tamchley)were communally organized. It follows that, as a Jew, I need not support a badly conceived public welfare law; but I must recognize that the tradition affirms the basic thesis of the welfare state. As an individual, I may be moved to help another, but I must do so without demeaning him and, if possible, with an eye to his specific needs. To God and in Torah, the poor is a person of dignity created in God's image, not a statistic.

Since I had begun on this task, I decided to repeat a Talmudic illustration contrasting Job and Abraham.

In defending his integrity, Job cited charity among his other virtues: "Have I eaten my morsel alone and not fed the orphan from my plate?" To which God is said to have commented: "Well and good, but you fell short by half of Abraham's standard. You ate and let the poor come to you. Abraham went out to find the hungry and invited them home. You fed them whatever you were serving, Abraham fed them what they requested."

The Torah tradition is rich in such illustrations and lists many 'oughts'; but it does not suggest a mechanical duplication of what others have done or a literal translation in our lives of some duty. Torah begins with the image of our being created in God's image. When the sages asked why God had done so, they answered: "So that we might make ourselves like our Creator." When the point was pressed and people asked,"how can man act like God?" They answered, "As God is merciful and gracious to be you." The Talmud puts it this way: "How can man walk after God? Is God not a consuming fire? What is meant is that man ought to walk after God's attributes. Just as God clothes the naked, attends the sick, comforts the mourners, and buries the dead, do you likewise." How do we know these are God's ways? God clothed

Adam and Eve. He visited Abraham at Mamre when he was sick. He comforted Isaac after his father's death.

- God also hardened Pharoah's heart and condemned indiscriminately all who lived at the time of Noah.

The sages didn't take literally the idea that God's every reported notion must be imitated, though they had imaginative rationalization for each. The doctrine of Imitatio Dei is no more nor less than the setting up of moral standards which demand always more and better of us.

- Some people talk endlessly about values; but I don't see that their lives are any better than mine.

The search for a useful definition of the good was vigorously pursued in the academies of ancient Greece. Plato developed an elegant formulation which grew out of an analysis of four cardinal virtues. Yet, when I first read The Dialogues, I remember being puzzled that, having defined the good to his satisfaction, Plato did not go out into the agora and preach to the Athenians about their imperialist ambitions, nor stand up in the Council of Athens and insist that slavery was evil and that all slaves should be freed. He continued to live as before, teaching philosophy to the sons of the well-born.

Philosophy defines. The Torah demands. "It has been told you, O man, what is good." The primary consideration is not a satisfactory definition but the sensitive deed. The Chinese wrote the noun, 'ethics,' with an ideogram which consists of the shape of a man and the symbol for the number two. This suggests, I am told, that ethics exist only in relationship to others, that a person proves his virtue not by the subtlety of his description of the good but by the quality of the life which he leads.

As an undergraduate I took a course in Moral Philosophy from a fine teacher, Ralph Barton Perry. He lectured twice each week and an assistant conducted a Friday seminar which gave us a chance to talk over what we had studied. The young instructor obviously knew a great deal about philosophy, but he was a sadist. Instead of encouraging undergraduates, fumbling in their

first attempts to understand critical thought, he tore us to shreds and did so with obvious relish. He was trained and we were neophytes. He knew all about the good, but he was not a good man.

I mistrust outbursts of moral passion by men of suspect character. Peace, justice, freedom, love - all those compelling words must be judged by the character of the person who is using them, the context in which they are said, and the consequences of the proposals being made. I have heard Hitler and Stalin speak of peace and Neville Chamberlain promise peace in our times. I have watched mobs demonstrate violently in the cause of peace. I heard four American presidents speak of peace and escalate violence in Vietnam. To quote an old Torah saw: "It's not the words but the deeds that count." I've always appreciated the rabbis' insistence that a text be clearly attributed to a particular tender. I'll listen to Hillel on virtue, but not to a glib scoundrel.

- I know what you mean. When I hear youngsters pontificate about the wickedness of politicians, I find myself wondering how they will act when their time of temptation comes.

There's a good deal of wisdom behind the rabbinic monition: "Never judge another until you've stood in his shoes.

I quoted a few lines from Dietrich Bonhoeffer: "The question of the good always finds us already in a situation which can no longer be reversed. We are alive. The question of good is posed and is decided in the midst of each definite, yet unconcluded, unique and transient situation of our lives. In the midst of our living relationships with men, things, institutions and powers, in other words in the midst of our historical experience." Goodness does not exist apart from the deed itself. I have little sympathy for those impulsive characters who act before they think and, when they fail to accomplish their ends, as is often the case, excuse themselves by saying: "I only meant to be helpfull"

- Why listen to Bonhoeffer?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in Germany in 1906 and died in 1945 in a Nazi prison. A child of privilege, Bonhoeffer grew up close to his church and found his way into its ministry.

Possessed of a well-furnished and keen mind, he became known as one of the leading theologians on the continent. In 1938 the Union Theological Seminary in New York invited him to join its faculty. He came, but a year later with war imminent Bonhoeffer returned to parish work in Germany where he defied the Nazi officials who forbade him to preach or teach. Within a matter of months he was in jail. Knowing he faced death, Bonhoeffer nevertheless worked on a book on ethics, the book from which I quoted, until he was hung.

Believing as I do that Bonhoeffer is correct, that we will fail to define the good if we try to do it apart from a concrete situation, the times, the context, the relationship and the culture, the range of options in which that particular decision must be made; I have always appreciated the special genre of writing developed by the rabbis to investigate ethical questions. Jews generally avoided ethical theorizing in favor of a careful analysis of individual cases. Occasionally, a medieval philosopher like Saadya wrote a chapter on ethics, generally presenting an analysis which was little more than a Judaized version of Aristotle's middle way; but, by and large, they preferred the specific to the abstract. An interesting case would present itself or someone would pose a specific question involving moral issues. The rabbi so addressed would advise as best he could and explain his views on the basis of Torah standards. Those involved would accept his advice or not; but, if the issues were interesting, this did not end the matter. The rabbi would draw up a digest of the problem to which he might or not append comments and send this precis and his decision to other authorities for comment. No one expected every scholar to come down with precisely the same judgment. What was looked for was enlightenment, insight, and sensitivity. The case would go the rounds. Each sage would apply his knowledge of Torah and Talmud precedent as well as his own judgment. In so doing, the sages developed a literature called <u>She'elot u'Teshuvot</u>, <u>Questions and Answers</u>, responsa which related to specific issues and emphasized the importance of thoughtful application.

A rough analogy can be made to our constitutional system. Each Supreme Court justice interprets the Constitution according to his light. Some are overwhelmed by change and feel the need to defend the old ways lest all sense of fitness and continuity be lost. A Justice Douglas

strides confidently into the law ever eager to break new gound. There have always been strict and broad Torah constructionists, those who balanced precedent conservatively and those who shaped old rules into new designs. Neither group was bound slavishly to precedent. In Judaism, ethical judgment always blends text and spirit, Torah and hest . When one reviews the literature, it's surprising how often we are reminded to interpret the law through its spirit: 'the law was given to man to live by it, not to die by it,' 'the Sabbath was given to man, not man to the Sabbath,' 'would that they might forsake Me if it means keeping faith with the Torah.' Let me quote you a bit of Talmud about fasting on Yom Kippur. "If, on Yom Kippur, a pregnant woman smells some food and craves for it greatly, she should be given a little until she no longer feels weak or faint. A sick person, too, is fed at the word of the physicians. If no physicians are present, one feeds the sick person when he wants it - until he says, 'enough.'

Verse 126 of Psalm 119 reads: "It is time for God to work, because they have rebelled against the law." If one takes this phrase out of context, as the rabbis sometimes did, another translation becomes possible. "When it is time to be active for God, then put aside your law."

Torah law prohibited the High Priest from wearing his sacred robes outside the Temple Compound; but, when Alexander the Great swept through Asia Minor, the reigning High Priest, Simon, put on his crown and his vestments and traveled far from Jerusalem to offer Alexander the city's homage. His robes were necessary to impress Alexander with his authority and, so, keep harm far from Jerusalem. Five centuries later when Hadrian, the Roman emperor, unleashed a terrible repression against the recently defeated Judeans, the sages voided a time-honored prohibition against writing down the Oral Law. There was danger that those few who knew the law might be killed and that details of the law would disappear with them.

- That would seem to justify setting aside the Torah entirely.

Not really. When a Governor proclaims martial law, he is responding to an emergency. Torah sets norms. Emergencies require exceptions.

- What about civil disobedience?

Torah accepts the laws of a state as binding, unless authority is tyrannical and obedience would force Jews to take life, violate another person or flaunt what the Torah stands for.

- What about the idea that the best legal system has the least law?

The Torah suggests that freedom requires law. The rabble who came out of Egypt were rebellious, and, as such, worthless to themselves until they bound themselves at Sinai to the terms of the covenant. Freedom is not absence of law, but the absence of arbitrary and unjust law. Torah does not support anarchy; yet, respect for law does not require passive submission to tyranny. When King Solomon connived in the death of the husband of the beautiful Bathsheba so he could bring her into his harem, God sent the prophet, Nathan, to condemn him. No one is above Torah law.

The lunch bell sounded. I left with them a paragraph from Martin Buber:

> Judaism, which more than any other religion has grasped the seriousness for actual life of the fact that God created man, has also most unequivocally recognized the importance for the life of man of the phrase, "in his image." To this fact, the saying of Rabbi Akiba bears witness: "Beloved is man, in that he was created in the image of God. But it was a special act of love that made it known to him that he was created in the image of God." The fact that it has been revealed to us that we are made in His image gives us the incentive to unfold this image and, in doing so, to imitate God.

Chapter 15

IT'S GOOD TO BE A JEW

Bags were packed. It was our last day. Dessert had been served and the conversation had become anecdotal. Our unannounced theme: nice things that have happened to me because I am a Jew. The Institute director remembered a seder in Marakesh during World War II. It had been a touch of home on the far reaches of Jewish life. A number of Moroccan Jews had joined in the soldiers' celebration. A physician of the town had asked him to a second seder at his apartment. The ritual had been familiar, yet different, especially the melodies. He had been told the history of a thousand-year-old Jewish community he had not known of before.

- Someone reported that each Jewish student at her university was adopted by a local family who provided home-cooked meals, a bed away from the dormitory, and someone to talk to. Being Jewish often affords all the advantages of an extended family.

When I was in college the food was less than adequate.

- It couldn't be as bad as ours.

But being Jewish helped.

- How?

I had informed the food service that I didn't eat pork or shell fish. Shell fish was too expensive even to appear on the menu, but pork appeared regularly as the basic ingredient of sausage or luncheon meat; and, whenever it did, I was served a portion of the chicken or beef which otherwise was reserved for kitchen workers and other privileged staff.

Few other traditions provide as much community support. A stranger at synagogue will be invited home to a Sabbath dinner. There is an old maxim that all Jews are related and you can't be a Jew for long without recognizing the special sense of responsibility for co-religionists everywhere.

- You're talking about the United Jewish Appeal.

Actually, I was thinking of relationships in a far more intimate way.

In nineteen fifty-three, during the Korean conflict, I was assigned as a chaplain to the staff of the Commander of our Naval Forces in the Far East. One day a young flier came to me to make arrangements for his marriage. He had been assigned a regular courier run which included Hong Kong where he had met and fallen in love with a local girl. For various official reasons which had to do with her citizenship, they had to be married on our base. We set a noon-hour date some weeks distant, and I asked a young couple in my congregation if they would arrange a luncheon so the occasion would be warm and personal. At that lunch, as everyone talked, the bride and the host discovered they were second cousins. Neither had known of the other's existence. When the pogroms reached their grandparents' village in Russia, his family had fled West while hers had crossed Siberia to Manchuria, settled in Harbin and moved on to Hong Kong when Japan attacked.

- It's been this way for a long time. I remember reading that the Mediterranean communities maintained an office on the island of Rhodes for the purpose of ransoming Jews captured by the pirate bands and brought there to be sold on the slave market.

- My best friend's father was a child in pre-war Austria. His parents somehow got hold of a Detroit phone book and wrote to everyone with their same last name. A man who was no relation sent them back the necessary papers which included an affidavit guaranteeing his parents employment.

In a world full of refugees, Jews do not allow other Jews to remain refugees if we can help it. During the 1930's my parents and their friends signed as many affidavits as they could, guaranteeing that those German and Czech Jews who were allowed into the country would not become welfare cases. Today our communities are exerting great effort to bring Jews out of Russia, Iran, and North Africa and to help them establish new lives; and the aid extends to all those services necessary for self-sufficiency.

- We've been talking about warmth and a sense of family; before we break up, I want

to talk about my private feeling. I've known a few happy times as a Jew. I've enjoyed a seder and occasionally been caught up in a Sabbath service, but I never quite feel that I'm doing it right. I go to classes and work on the Sabbath. I don't obey all, or even most, of the rules, and I often feel that what I do is a token and not the real thing.

You're not alone. Many Jews feel some guilt in this regard - not that most are about to change their habits - but the traditional way is still seen as the 'real thing.'

During the First World War a young philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig, made, and later described, a spiritual pilgrimage which took him from a culturally assimilated German-Jewish home and a mood which found him contemplating conversion to Christianity into an active and reflective Jewish life. When he came in out of the cold Rosenzweig observed some of the mitzvot but not all of them. Asked if he would adopt all the traditional ways, he answered, when and as they feel compelling to me. For Rosenzweig the traditional mitzvot remained the norm and becoming Jewish was, among other things, a growing sense of ease with traditional practices.

I read to the group a paragraph by a liberal rabbi, whose approach is much like Rosenzweig's. "If pressed for explanations as to why I observe this or that commandment, I can come up with a variety of reasons. Usually ethical or intellectual content is the smallest part of my explanation. I prefer the hint of the Hassidic Jew who reminded me that if a person wears tight shoes he can get a headache - that is to say, the somatopsychic approach to mitzvot, the idea that if you eat kosher you think and feel 'kosher.' Or sometimes I think of the whole business as a game - the kind of game described in Hermann Hesse's Magister Ludi, which can, through being played, bring one into contact with the deepest strata of thought and life. Most often and basically, however, I think of the mitzvot as the visible extensions of the Jewish collective soul. They are the means by which a Jew can connect himself with this soul and, through this soul, with the wellsprings of life, ultimate reality, God, or whatever you want to call it. And the more mitzvot, the more connections."

- That suggests that conservative and reform practice is really baby food, a specially prepared pablum for those whose stomachs are not yet ready for the real thing.

- What makes the rabbinic tradition the real thing? It's been around a long time, but not forever. Your river keeps running and Jewish life, and its accepted norms, do change.

My wife and I lead busy lives, and necessity taught us that it wasn't how much time we spent with our children but the quality of the time shared. An hour of undivided attention is worth a distracted day. More is not necessarily better. The equation, the more mitzvot the more connections, doesn't ring true.

As you know, I don't equate Judaism with a fixed set of practices. Akiba practiced different mitzvot from Amos. Yet, both were good and pious Jews. The rabbis took only an historic interest in the sacrificial cult, and I take little more than historic interest in the prohibition of instrumental music during synagogue worship or the separation of men and women. My soul is dead to the appeal of such practices and it's alive to some forms which are quite recent: Confimation, Consecration, and Yom ha-atzmaut are cases in point.

Rituals become mitzvot only when they suggest significant connections with Torah to the Jew. The observer, not the observance, creates meaning. When the Jew changes, the mitzvot mix will change, which is why so many of us would be uncomfortable worshipping in a synagogue with a mehitzah or not being able to accept a neighbor's dinner invitation because their home isn't kosher.

We determine what rituals are mitzvot and the particular way a mitzvah should be structured. The rule is that men say Kaddish for dead relatives. In most congregations, women do so as a matter of emotional need and as a statement of their personhood. The Jew has changed, and so the practice changes.

Some years ago a young child in my congregation stood for the Kaddish. The Kaddish prayer praises God and an old tradition decrees that it is recited by near male relatives when they mourn their dead. I knew the family well and I had not heard of any death, so after

services I asked. It turned out that she had said Kaddish for her pet dog. Some few weeks later I wrote an article in my congregational bulletin describing this episode and saying that I was much taken with the honesty of her feelings. Why shouldn't the Kaddish be said for any living thing that one loved? An ultra-traditional newspaper in Chicago picked up my column and played to the prejudices of its readers with this headline: "Reform Rabbi Orders Kaddish Said for Dogs." I was struck not only by the insensitivity of the piece but by the assumption that, as a rabbi, I order another element from the past to which my soul is dead.

The development of Sabbath law was tended to center on the no's: no work, no cooking, no traveling, the rules which protected this rest day; but, in a society where the human being is no longer a pack animal and where there are rigidly limited work hours, "In it you shall do no manner of work" has lost some of its bite and I prefer to consider the Sabbath as a day set apart for all that refreshes my soul, a day to be with the family, to worship, rest, and relax. It's a time to read a good book without interruption and to meet with friends without talk turning to work-related problems. All that enhances life is appropriate to Sabbath. I see God's will in a Sabbath which includes worship, institutes such as this one, even a walk in the woods or a game of tennis.

- Even work?

Yes, even work, if your work is a spiritual and intellectual delight. I've 'worked' writing a book on many a Sabbath afternoon.

When he was asked when he would become a fully observant Jew, as defined by orthodoxy, Rosenzweig answered: when I can. I would answer: I am an observant Jew.

- Do you feel guilty because you don't keep kosher?

No.

- Is it because there are tough Pure Food and Drug Laws and you find Jews no longer need kashrut's hygienic protection?

No. Remember, the dietary laws were originally rules developed to separate Jews from

idolatry. The usefulness of some of these rules, as protection against diseased meat and spoilage, was an unexpected side effect.

I do not keep a traditionally kosher home because I was not raised in such a home. I eat no pork. We have no shell fish in the house. My mitzvah is a way of fulfilling the commandment: honor your parents, a reminder of a complex food code which once governed Jewish life and a statement of my developmental view of the Torah tradition. The separation of milk and meat and the other dietary laws grew up over time -- neither David nor Isaiah kept kosher in the full rabbinic way -- and can be diminished over time.

- But that's inconsistent.

Emerson described a foolish consistency as the hobgoblin of little minds.

- If Judaism is not defined by common practice, what holds us together?

Ours is not the first age where significant differences in practice have emerged. Sadducees ate in any Jewish home. A Pharisee would eat only at the table of another Pharisee. Rabbinic Jews would not eat meat slaughtered by a Hassidic butcher. For a thousand years polygamy was permitted in many Sephardic communities and prohibited among Ashkenazim. It's not an either all the mitzvot or no mitzvot situation. There have been numerous redefinitions of the norms. The river runs on.

In my city there is a conference which includes the president and rabbi of each synagogue. Our shared concerns range from support for religious education and the extension of services to the institutionalized and the aged to the integration of Russian Jewish immigrants, state laws about Sunday closing, and prayer in the public schools. Our judgments are not always identical on an issue like Federal aid to parochial schools; but the sense of community is strong and there is more which binds than separates us.

We are bound together by a shared calendar. The Sabbath comes at the same time each week for the pious and the secular citizen of Israel. All Jews accept the same dates for the High holidays and Pesah. There is a strong and regular pulse to Jewish life and even those

who take the holy days as holidays respond in some degree to the special nature of the occasion. I once saw a fascinating collection of Haggadahs prepared and mimeographed by various kibbutzim. Many were simply collections of materials on freedom and liberation and made no mention of the God Who saves, but all were intended for Seder night and included the Seder's familiar matzah and the four cups.

Practice has never been the only bond that holds Jews together. First, and foremost, Jews share history and destiny. No one asked those who were marched into Auschwitz whether they were reform, conservative, or orthodox. Jews of all persuasions are citizens of Israel and contribute to the agencies and appeals of our diaspora communities.

Beneath all the other ties, a myth binds us as one. It's the myth of election. We sense a purpose to Jewish survival. The theist says: God has assigned us an historic role. We witness to God's will. The secularist says: Jews remind the world of the mandates of social justice and moral duty. And those who are only half-convinced by the myth say: we share a destiny and way of life which, as much as any other, perhaps more than any other, encourages the growth of character and the strengthening of family and moral sensitivity.

- It's our last session. Don't hide behind history and theory. Tell us about yourself as a Jew. You weren't born a rabbi. What led you to adopt your Jewish identity? I'm asking for what Christians call testimony.

I'm afraid you'll find my testimony a bit disappointing. Testimony is most compelling when it records a traumatic spiritual pilgrimage, like Augustine's Confessions, or sets one's faith against traumatic event, like Anne Frank's Diary; my life has been relatively calm and, by becoming an active Jew, in retrospect, seems no more than an unfolding of what was always there and always around me.

I grew up in a stable and learned Jewish home. Being Jewish always has seemed right and natural. In my home there were books everywhere: in my father's study, in the living room, on the landing of the stairs, even in the basement. The old leather of the bindings attracted me

long before I could read the contents. The child learned that he had roots that went deep. These were my father's books. He was a wise man and so I was certain the tradition was wise; thirty years of serious adult scholarship have confirmed me in that view.

Until I was ten or so, Judaism meant those books; Hebrew lessons so I could read those books; serious discussions around the table about the rise of Naziism and the need for Palestine as a Jewish home, and the holidays. Hitler's photo was frequently in the papers. My grandparents lived in Jerusalem and wrote me from there. Seder meant thirty or forty guests, much moving of furniture and a dollar if I found the afikomen. Books, land and matzah. A child relates to concrete symbols. Theology came later. I remain convinced that a meaningful Jewish identity begins with specific rituals and/or specific involvement in the survival agenda of the Jewish community. The Jew who wants that part of his life to come alive need not resolve all doubts about the existence and nature of God, few Jews have; but he must eliminate the distance between himself and the distinctive features of Jewish life. Both outsiders and insiders have doubts, often the same doubts. Doubts do not an indifferent Jew make; distance does. Jewish identity begins in some binding activity.

Much later, when I was an undergraduate, a roommate and I went at God over a long night. We were angry. This was 1945, the papers had just published the first pictures of piled-up corpses and death camp ovens. My roommate was the first person I heard use the phrase, God is dead. He was angry at God. I was as angry at the cold-hearted world. Somehow, I didn't blame God. Germans had built Auschwitz, not He. In exasperation at my patience, he burst out: "you still believe because your father is still alive." Perhaps he was right; faith is the sense that security and love do exist.

God is God, somehow I've never expected God to answer my prayers any more than I expected my parents to do whatever I asked. It's enough that He listens and tells me to push on. The effort is worth the making. God is my confidence in the possibilities of life. In an age of recurrent tragedy, God is to me the promise of civilization. Not surprisingly, one of my

favorite lines from the Psalms reads: "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the dawn." Worship for me is congregation. I'm not alone in my hopes; the first or the last of the well intentioned.

I have never questioned my Jewish identity. Mine was a happy and respected home. Anti-semitism was the non-Jews' problem not mine. I've been called names and told that certain doors were closed to me; but I early recognized I could only be myself. It seems natural that people should be married under a huppah or sit shivah during mourning; but I can take rituals in many forms. What I could not take, at least when I was younger, was the sense that Jewish survival might not be of real significance to the world. I got irrationally angry with the historian, Arnold Toynbee, when, with the myopia of an imperialistic Christianity, he declared the Jewish people "a fossilized relic."

At college I took a famous course, History I, which was a survey of Western civilization. I think I mentioned a few days ago that Jewish life was barely mentioned except for one session which discussed the Biblical tradition as a background for Christianity. History I made me wonder whether our survival was really important. There were all those miles of non-Jewish books in the University Library and my father's study, for the first time, began to seem small and insignificant. The course destroyed my innocence about the pivotal nature of Jewish life. I could never say with some of the ancient sages that all knowledge is in Torah, but I also recognized that those lectures were biased by the narrowness of a WASP academic tradition which was then already on its last legs. I doubt that anyone would teach such a course today; we've come to the end of the era of Christian parochialism; still, as you've gathered, I have, ever since, been sensitive to the question of numbers. It's so easy to label that which is small as parochial, but it is equally inane to insist that good things necessarily come in small packages. In the real world quality and quantity are both significant.

My father used to say, to know a man look at his enemies rather than his friends. The greatest power in Europe declared us to be Enemy Number One and set out to wipe us off the

face of the earth. Israel is not simply another small people. If we were/are the arch enemy of the Nazis and all forces of privilege and all ideologies of state power, then, truly, the Torah tradition contains some recognizably powerful and vital truths; and, as its witnesses, Israel participates in that power. The Holocaust is a human tragedy but it is also a tribute to the reach and the authority of the Torah. Six million Jews were killed, not for who they were, but for what they represented; and what they represented was a way of life which affirmed human dignity and equal justice which would not make its peace with tyranny of any kind or with the Big Lie; which had no patience with the pretensions of the privileged or their claims to special treatment; which insisted on a vision of a world united in understanding and mutual respect; and which placed its faith in the will of a God Who demands that we live by a law of righteousness whose obligations are quite specific.

In college I also took a course in Marxism where I came across the term, 'cosmopolitan,' used as a pejorative label to describe someone who is unfocused, vague, romantic, unrelated to economic realities. I appropriated the term to describe that imaginary fellowship of people of good will so many of my friends talked about: good folk who could put aside all the old divisions and dedicated their lives unselfishly to civil rights, peace and the United Nations. I've never doubted the force of self-interest. My father often quoted the text: "Do not put your trust in princes," which he took to mean that governments write white papers to explain their black deeds. Israel would not be if Jews had depended on the world's good will. The years after the end of World War II, two million Jews still languished in European Displaced Person Camps and English destroyers blockaded the sea lanes to Palestine lest these survivors sneak in. Labels cannot be discounted, and a people who do not look to their legitimate interests will find them snatched away. I've always responded to the tradition's realism and often quoted Hillel's maxim: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am for myself alone, what am I?"

I'm getting ahead of my story. The death camps were opened by the Allied armies,

and I saw pictures of the piles of emaciated corpses and heard the tales of horror. I knew I owed these people a deep debt. They had died because they symbolized the tradition in which I had been raised. On graduation in 1947, I went to work for an agency whose purpose was to secure skilled military personnel for the defense of the Yishuv. Five Arab nations were threatening to drive them into the sea. I am equally committed to this people and its principles. To use the terms we've used before: I'm a part of a community of fate and a community of faith. The survival of the Jewish people; social reform in the United States and the development of a strong spiritual life are all major agenda items.

Again and again, as I trace my coming alive as a Jew, I find I go back to concrete moments and specific people. Anyone who teaches in a Religious School knows that sweet reason and a presentation of the high-minded definition of the Jewish way is not in itself compelling. It's words, not life. It is also bland. Experience binds. I've felt the binding moment in a sanctuary when the familiar chants reach into my soul. I've felt that I belong when I've defended the legitimate interests of the Jewish people, when I met a plane load of Soviet Jewish refugees landing at Lydda in the early hours of the morning, when I placed in our Ark Torah scrolls which, in pre-World War II days, had been used in a synagogue in Prague, when I discovered in the tradition a moral perspective which helped me think through the difference between World War II and Vietnam. I've rejoiced in belonging to a community which seeks truly to support every member and where emotions need not be hidden. I felt bound during a visit to Jerusalem's Western Wall as the evening sun refracted two thousand years of piety from the rose-colored stone; and in a small apartment in Tel Aviv as a cousin told of his experiences in Europe and of the moshav where he is now a member. The binding moment is a visit to an archeological dig as the scientists map out a gate which the Philistines defended against David's attack. It is being part of a voluntary American Jewish community with its networks of social welfare agencies and its synagogues. It is most of all the fabric of my family:

life, the songs we sing - badly - ; the foods we eat and don't eat, the holidays we observe and the concerns we share. And when the house is quiet it is my library, my father's and mine, the ideas which reach back in time and speak still to my times. It is my religious life and my sense of the presence of God. It's the blessed sense that becoming Jewish has been a redemptive journey which has graced my life, a feeling of appropriateness.

The loudspeaker crackled. The buses were ready. There was a rush of goodbyes. They were kind enough to say they'd enjoyed our talk; I know I had.