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Come On In, the Water's Fine, unpublished manuscript,
second draft, chapters 7-15, pages 146-298, undated.

Chapter 7

JUDAISM IS

It was a bright morning. Everything and everyone was fresh and I began with a bit of personal history. Some years back my father wrote a book about the distinctions between the Jewish world outlook and 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 classic faiths were no longer significant. He believed that only the ethical teachings of the religions counted and that these were fundamentally similar; and, since doctrinal distinctions bred distance and misunderstanding, it was considered a progressive act to deny their importance.

Dad's editor misread the times. Since World War II a tidal wave of religious passion has moved across the globe. Who would have believed college women in Iran would beseech the Ayatollah Khomeini to put them back into purdah? Across the Near East immams have preached ji-had, holy war, against Israel. Ireland, Lebanon, Iran, and India give the lie to those who still believe that the world has outgrown religious 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 current government.

~The editor was a product of a particular time and situation. It

was an expansive time. The Allies had won the war. America was prosperous and powerful. We seemed to be solving our problems and, among academics at least, there was a tendency to see religion as a set of medieval doctrines floating somewhere out there, interesting but archaic. People like to remind 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. Many assumed that the old theologies would wither away and be replaced by a sensitive up-to-date humanism which would celebrate political freedom and exalt the potentialities of each person.

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 without merit. Socialist theory identified religion with other-worldliness and the encouragement of political passivity and, as such, with the propaganda spread by those who benefited from the injustices of the status quo. To use a favorite word of the day, religion was no longer relevant.

Dad's editor considered himself a reasonable man and in his mind it stood to reason that modern thought had voided all assertions of theological distinction. The ministers and rabbis he knew acted, in their everyday work, like social workers and counselors rather than celebrants of a mystery. I think it was Jean Paul Sartre who said, "the best way to feel oneself no longer a Jew is to reason." He might equally well have said 'Christian' or 'Muslim'. There is a Christian message and a Jewish message. Each hints at truth, but, as I keep insisting, God alone knows the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

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.

- Do you disagree with his proposition that humanism, selfish or erratic behavior is the result of the human spirit having been brutalized by the cruelties and dehumanizing institutions of the social order and that, as our institutions are reformed, a gentler and nicer breed of people will emerge?

The streets of an urban slum, poverty, broken homes certainly deprive millions of useful supports, not to speak of love and valuable role models. The jungle requires survival skills and 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 Gomorrah, the wicked cities of the Plain. When God decided to destroy these towns for their evil ways, Abraham intercedes on behalf of any good folk who might live there: "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?" Not even twenty righteous citizens were to be found, but the point had been made that living in Sodom need not reduce strong-minded people to the vulgarity of their surroundings.

- I read an article recently that said that Sodom and Gomorrah

had been located by archeologists. Why do you call them myths?

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. They have tentatively labeled these tells as the Cities of the Plain, but as yet no inscription has been found identifying any site. But, even if we could positively locate these cities, the Genesis story would still be a myth, a story whose truth lies below the surface. The Torah is not interested in reporting historical fact, but in introducing the God-Abraham dialogue into a famous bit of history about the sudden destruction of certain towns. The dialogue, which is the heart of the myth, tells us what the religious leaders of Israel wanted to make known about God, that He is just and not vengeful, reasonable, not a tyrant.

- Go back to your editor and his ideas about religions. Was he wrong?

The world-wide resurgence of religion certainly suggests so.

- Where did he make his mistake?

He looked at religion as a cluster of ideas, most of which he felt were passe. He failed to understand that religion fulfills a universal need, to give meaning and purpose to life, and that religions are not judged in terms of logical consistency and up-to-dateness but in terms of their emotional effectiveness. He also forgot that social upheaval, not only intensifies religious need, but turns people towards their own. In times of anxiety, we want our families near us and we pull our religion close.

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". Religion was in.

- In one sense this return to religion seems sad. 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.

Diversity stimulates both distance and tension, but there's no way out. We resist being boiled down into a bland stew. My editor went to school when sociologists were describing American society as a melting pot; but cultural pluralism won the day.

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. Religion never exists in the abstract. Catholicism, Shamanism, Shintoism, and the Torah tradition are distinct religions and natural expressions of particular religious civilizations. Religion is a surprising and special message and those who feel addressed by it. Religions share common social and psychological functions, but identity of function is simply that and no more. America's civil religion and Soviet Communism are diametrically opposed in teaching and messianic hope, and it's inevitable that they compete for people's loyalty.

- 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? Isn't the Bible shared? Don't we speak of a Judeo-Christian tradition?

There are similarities but far more differences. What is Torah to Judaism is Old Testament to Christianity. When you enter a church you will find an English Bible resting on a lectern. Inside you will find the Old Testament and the New. If you attend services you will hear two readings, one from each section. That chosen from the Old Testament will, in all likelihood, be from the Psalms or the Prophets. As you know, the ark in a synagogue contains only the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, that part of Scripture from which the fewest of the scheduled church readings are selected. The church believes that the Old Testament contains important, even inspired, materials, a chronicle of the first stage of sacred history, and prophecies about the Christ-Messiah; and they believe 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". Christians translate, "you shall not kill"; their version fits more closely Jesus' 'turn the other cheek' sermon than the Torah's clear intent since the law permits wars of self-defense and stipulates capital punishment for certain crimes. Behind this technical difference in translation lies a critical difference in religious attitudes. Paul, and subsequently all of Christianity, denied the authority of Torah law over their lives. The Ten Commandments were an exception and were treated as a self-contained unit. Rabbinic Judaism accepted all the commandments as sacred and necessarily related all the commandments to each other.

- 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 faith in the mystic body of Christ. The Jewish vision emphasizes Zion, the land, established in justice, and the world rejoicing in justice and peace without necessarily being joined in one religious communion.

- Aren't such differences really limited to official pronouncements? People don't care.

Differences in a religion's shape inevitably have an effect on individual 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' unequivocally; and most Jews will agree, but quickly add something about the importance of community. There is a much stronger sense of community in Jewish conditioning than in the Christian ethos; a sense of interdependence which has been fostered throughout Jewish history and leads Jews everywhere to support Israel, welcome Soviet emigres, and worry about their 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 Jews everywhere 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. We expect rabbis to be active in the community and not lead a life of secluded devotions. Moses went back to Egypt to bring out a whole people. The rabbis called the Jewish people an extended family: "all Israel are related."

- Yet, people of many religions cooperate in city affairs.

On some issues. The Roman Catholic bishop of Cleveland and I have 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 and the proposed anti-abortion constitutional amendment. I support the Planned Parenthood Association, and I am sure he does not. Inevitably, the specialness of each religion's message will lead to different agendas and to different attitudes towards specific social problems. Elements of the Protestant Church translate "remember the Sabbath day" as a command to enact Sunday Blue Laws and argue that the public school day should begin with prayer, positions which the Jewish community opposes. Concern for churches and communicants in the Arab world has led international church bodies, both Catholic and Protestant, to be less than generous in their pronouncements on Israel and more than generous in their understanding of terrorism.

Christianity praised celibacy. The Augustinian Church transformed Paul's putdown of marriage as a condescension to the flesh into official doctrine. 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.

The Jewish tradition emerged in a Near Eastern cultural environment where the body and the soul were accepted as inseparably intertwined. The

Biblical word, nefesh, denotes both soul and the physical heart. Christianity emerged a millenium later into 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 a religious discipline 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.

- Aren't there differences among Jews about love and marriage?

In the long record which is Jewish history you can locate men who bathed in cold rivers and who fasted to break free from the power of their appetites. Nachmanides rejoiced in marriage. Maimonides married because it was a Torah command, 'be fruitful and multiply', only to have children. But the Torah's unitary understanding of the human being continued to act 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 your editor saying: what was, was; but is no more. I know that you're often out crusading with a number of local ministers and priests.

On the issues we agree on, but for all our agreements we draw from and go back to a particular polity, tradition and community, and the force of our roots and religion should not be underestimated. All of us, of course, feel the pressure of, and respond to the value of, the civil religion and the American culture. Priests, ministers and rabbis are sentient beings not programmed robots.

- Given the existence of such ambivalence, wasn't the editor right in believing that the old differences are disappearing?

I don't think so. The Liberal religious groupings are a minority within their communities and 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. We live in an age when ideology is in full cry and where submission to church authority is being demanded.

- You speak of a Torah tradition. In effect, there are Torah traditions. My rabbi just had a knock down drag out debate with an orthodox scholar about women rabbis.

A river sometimes separates and runs on two sides of an island, but the flow ultimately comes again together. We differ on a shopping list of issues, but the sense of a shared part and destiny keeps these differences from being completely decisive. Anti-semitism doesn't ask a Jew's denomination. 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. Arguments are in the family.

- I understand family arguments (laughter).

- When I was in Israel there were pickets in front of a Jerusalem hospital which was performing autopsies. Liberal friends there told me that the orthodox won't permit Reform and Conservative rabbis to officiate at weddings, that they impose restrictions on everything from abortion to divorce. How can you talk of a Torah consensus?

Threatened by a fast-changing world they didn't make and don't

comprehend, some orthodox Jews have retreated into a defensive shell constructed of the forms of the past. Unfortunately, their shell has hardened over time to the point where little of the enlivening spirit of the Torah manages to express itself. The more the world changes the tighter they become. Don't judge Judaism by its relics.

- In my experience, there's no more bitter argument than a family feud. What makes you think we'll stay together?

If separation occurs it will be tragic. It could happen. Family life requires compromise and patience and we have our 'there is no other way but mine' fringe. But in Cleveland all the congregations meet to talk of shared concerns, and on the national level there's a Synagogue Council of America. Most try.

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

Some groups emphasize the letter of the law, others its spirit; and both groups can make a case for their position. Take the issue of homosexuality. The rabbinic tradition emphasizes a specific Torah rule which condemns homosexual acts; the liberal tradition cites Torah texts which prohibit treating anyone as a misfit or outcast. Our personal judgment will depend on whether we give greater weight to a formal rule or a broad injunction, our general attitude towards change, and whether our conceptual model is the river or the tree. Nor is it a simple matter of either/or. I'm troubled by the idea of a gay synagogue. I believe in a religious community which is a reflex of the whole community. I'm afraid a single focused synagogue would come to identify righteousness with a set of narrow needs. I do admit that a great divide cuts across modern Jewish life. Rabbinic halacha permits abortion only when there is

a direct threat to the mother's life. Liberal Judaism does not oppose abortion when the woman feels emotionally or physically threatened. Both traditions affirm the sanctity of life. There are differences, and they are basic; but, as long as we think seriously about Torah values, our conclusions are within the tradition, and 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 the regimens which an older commentary suggested, and the formalists force those of liberal spirit to examine their positions more carefully to make sure that those positions are the result of serious reflection on the Torah tradition and not simply an arbitrary selection of a text or two whose only purpose is to make the tradition more convenient. I have noticed this benefit particularly 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 the 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 attempted only near the time of delivery when the dangers to a woman's life were apparent and a simple operation possible. In our time abortion is a safe surgical procedure best carried out during the first trimester of pregnancy. The rabbis faced a different set of circumstances sociologically as well as medically. Their world was underpopulated and fertility was a constant problem. Our world is overpopulated and the human species does not have to be encouraged "to be fruitful and multiply". Their issue was which life: the mother's or the baby's. Our issue is whether to deliver a

malformed or unwanted baby.

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

A hundred generations of moral sensitivity should not be cavalierly dismissed but neither should they be slavishly followed. My rule is to break with the past only when the older forms cause palpable harm or restrict human development by not taking into consideration the circumstances of modern life. I dismiss out of hand any rule which would restrict autopsies. 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 had sat quietly 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 doubt he could base his view on the Torah.

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 tefillin 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, Selichot services, Afruf have reappeared in old-line liberal congregations where once decorum and a sermon comprised the 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.

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 a special cast. The philosopher Bertram Russell, making it clear in his Autobiography that he lost all belief in Christian doctrine, coming across this paragraph by him about 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.

Would a young Christian respond to the idea of spending time on a kibbutz? Would a young Jew think of spending two years in church service as the Mormons do?

- No, but both might join Vista or the Peace Corps. I can see the impact of the larger community but not the impact of the Torah tradition.

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 home 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 trying to express her instinctive recognition that Amos and Isaiah would not have remained silent in a similar situation.

- My generation seems to be going two ways at once. We are taking on many of our grandparents' religious ways and discarding many of their social forms. 'Give me that old time religion and the new morality!' I sometimes feel that we're like a young child who carries his

security blanket whenever he leaves his room.

The term, new morality, can be simply a cover for the old immoralities. Careless sex is simply careless and what is euphemistically called an open marriage is not a marriage. My question always is whether these changes are attempts to adjust standards of loyalty, responsibility, and honest feeling to a new situation or arrangements 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 marriages 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. 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 remained the custom / in Sephardic communities until quite recently in the Muslim environment, and their religious leaders had no trouble seeing Kiddushim, sanctity, in such marriages. It's not the form but the spirit which consecrates.

- But Judaism's stance on moral 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 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.

- Accepting what you say, what holds 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. We are a community because we choose to be.

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. The Sabbath was approaching. Services were scheduled. It was the first time 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. 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.

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. After all, 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.

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 lulev 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.

The synagogue openly espouses not only the God idea but a personal God. 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?

Some who are agnostic are nevertheless deeply involved with aspects of Jewish culture or are deeply committed to the survival of the Jewish people.

- But I feel a hypocrite when I am in a synagogue.

A hypocrite puts on a false face and plays a role designed to delude. When we enter no one stands to gain except ourselves. 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 a personal God?

I do.

- But 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. Faith, I've decided, is much like love. Some

relationships are tempestuous and take 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.

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, even contorted. 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. Most have at least begun the process. It's an age of doubt and challenge. 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. During pre-adolescence we trust; we test; and, if God fails the test, we reject.

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, sacrilegious as it may seem, 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. Their spirits are alive. 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.

I prize these papers because they reveal a questing, a puzzling out, and a grasping for. They are the products of 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. Belief is a response to the mystery of creation and consciousness. Religious certainty rarely comes without effort and soul-searching, and only the truly innocent never raise Job's questions about God's management of our lives.

- You've had doubts then?

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

Over the holidays a collegian came to visit. He had had a recent spiritual awakening and God meant a great deal to him. 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 these young people? 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?

I asked my true believer to define a religious person.

A religious person is one who believes in God.

Have you never had doubts and questions?

Certainly, but I now have faith.

Were you certain as an adolescent, always certain?

No.

Were you confirmed?

Yes.

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 concern rather than assent to doctrine, "With all my heart, soul and might, I will strive to fulfill the holy purposes of Judaism."

At various times in our history 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. Other groups and individuals have denied that Judaism demands doctrinal affirmation. Moses Mendelssohn's statement that Judaism has no dogmas is the best known of these formulations of Judaism as a tradition based on deed rather than creed. The truth, as always, rests on middle ground.

There are affirmations and these affirmations have been subject to constant reinterpretation as time and environment change. When I first read Maimonides' articles as abstract principles, 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. When I read Maimonides' extended explanation of these articles I began to see them in context, to sense the variety of interpretations to which they have been subjected, and to recognize the special twist Maimonides gave to an idea like reward and punishment, and I no longer feel myself a nein-sager. The problem with any dogma is that it abstracts and diminishes an idea and pulls it out of the living, developing tradition in which, as you know, I set great store. In matters of faith, the first step is to feel you belong within the community and only then do we ask you to open your hearts to the possibilities implicit in our teachings.

- 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 have no trouble with God as Creator. 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." But I have never understood why the Torah tradition makes such a to-do about God's Oneness.

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." This Puritan might have been surprised to learn that the rabbis had puzzled the same oddity. How was it that among all the mighty empires of the world little Israel was chosen? One suggestion was that God did not wish His law of truth and peace to be imposed by conquest or by coercion, so He chose the least and the smallest.

Twice each day Biblical men stopped their work and spoke the simple watchword of our people, "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 belief in the one God, or at least belief in the unity of all that is, now seems almost an inevitable idea, since it is shared by the major faiths of Western civilization and seems to be confirmed by our science which insists that there are overarching, natural laws which bind all that is together.

Monotheism may seem natural to us. It was not to our ancestors. From time to time I have twisted the old doggerel into a different theme: How odd the Jews one God should choose. The world they knew was 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. Polytheism seemed logical to the ancient Middle East since the activity of nature could be explained only by assuming an indwelling spirit or god in each element.

- Are you really saying that polytheism 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 presumably reside in nature. Open an acorn and you will not find a diminutive oak tree. How else then account for the tree's emergence but by the postulate of an indwelling God Who makes the tree grow in just that way. The sun makes a daily circuit of the heavens, disappears and reappears in the east each dawn. Experience shows 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 but unpredictable and that appropriate worship should involve not only reverence but also an attempt to entice, to bribe, these powers not to do harm and, if possible, to do what we ask of them.

Ancient men worshipped at various shrines. Since the gods were related to visible objects it was only natural to believe that the god actually lived there. At the shrine 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. The focus of the religious life was to become a holy community; and holiness, be it remembered, always was defined in active ethical terms. Those who were able to conceive of God's oneness understood that religion involves acts of holy living which are not shrine-centered.

The pagan had no concept of humanity. Their 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 were as different from each other as the various of an animal species. 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 can be conceived which binds all God's human creatures into a single family.

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 grows rapidly in the soil of idolatry. So do the rationalizations which justify slavery and caste. 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 a single humanity. The oneness of God requires it; one creator, one world; one humanity; one moral law for all.

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 untamed freedom of the marketplace have an idol called capitalism. All ideologies which claim infallibility are idolatries.

The ancient saw himself as a pawn and plaything of the gods, powerless against fate. Conceiving God as one permitted man to consider the possibility there was a single power beyond and that could, in fact, gain some control over their lives, since this single God rewards the good and punishes the evil. The Hebrew felt that you get what you deserve. A major goal of life became the building of a record which deserved reward. The Torah tradition emphasizes the theme of moral accountability in every way possible. 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."

Israel's affirmation of God's oneness brought about a revolution in human thought by introducing 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 mass of their people 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 fertility 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 has little to do with 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, we begin to find some of the sages of the Talmud agreeing that there are men of quality among the pagans. But Judaism never let down its guard against the dangers of misplaced worship.

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." Two themes: God is the creator, the ground of all being; and Israel has a special relationship to God and God to Israel.

- You're talking about the covenant.

Yes, and about Israel's special perception of God - God is a word which every theistic religion fills 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 calls for a recitation of God's attributes as those are phrased in the Torah: "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." 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 as he had revealed Himself in 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. How did it happen that our fathers 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; presumably, daily experience with the on-rolling cycles of nature sensitized them to the One behind all discrete phenomena. This argument is highly dramatic, but does not explain why, of all the bedouin tribes, only the Hebrews outgrew a polydemonistic and polytheistic culture and came to an understanding of a single creative principle.

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 city-state conquered another to see it turned around by a th~~us~~ and how each victory solemnly reduced the defeated gods to a subordinate place in their pantheon only to have their God in his turn similarly treated. According to this theory, the haplessness of the gods to arrest their endless cycle led our fathers to seek unity behind the endless parade. This explanation again fails to explain why only the Israelites saw the foolishness of all this.

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 Pharaoh Akhenaton set out 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. There are many problems with this theory; while we are fairly certain of Akhenaton's political motives, no one is certain if Akhenaton's concerns were also theological; we are not sure of Moses' dates; and any argument based on cultural borrowing is at best tentative.

- How did monotheism emerge?

I believe the explanation lies close to the Bible's statement that God revealed His Oneness to Moses. 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 Moses went up Mount Sinai and that God spoke to him there?

Sinai is an element in a dramatic myth which like all truly significant 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 described Himself to Moses?

Franz Rosenzweig suggested some years ago that the Torah's language describing Sinai, "and God came down and God spoke", was carefully chosen. "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.

Monotheism raised God above nature. "In the beginning God created." Man was not 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. Pagan gods cannot be investigated; their actions were autonomous and therefore unpredictable; but, if nature is distinct from God, is not God but is object, then our minds can investigate its furthest reaches.

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 of a new state of mind which had begun to conceive and shape worship as thanks-speaking rather than as a form of gift giving. 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."

If all have one father, God values equally the various labors we each do. The Torah tradition was 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. The theory was that "the study of the Torah is excellent if it is combined with a worldly occupation for this combined effort puts sin out of mind", but it was equally true that labor without learning reduced man to the level of a pack animal. Compare the snobbery which characterized certain tasks as noble and others as demeaning. The middle-class in America still has trouble with a child who wants to become a factory worker. The landed gentry held merchants in disrepute. In ancient times nobles entered a shrine by one door, commoners by another.

- Hold up. If God is One where do all the angels and spirits of some of the hymns and the folk tales come from? I've been reading I. B. Singer and his stories are full of such imaginings. Is Judaism really a monotheist tradition?

In terms of theology, yes. In terms of popular faith, no. The faith has proclaimed consistently that God has dominion over all that

is seen and unseen. Satan in the Job story is not an independent power but an angel in God's court who has no independent power and must ask God's permission to test Job. But over the centuries many feared Satan and holy men cast spells against the evil spirits. 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 credulity.

- Credulity is just a polite word for superstition.

Jews were often superstitious. Were, Are. Before you feel too superior remember that ours is the Age of Aquarius. The oneness of God is a concept which is hard for the mind to grasp. How do you envision what cannot be seen, touched, or described? Life is full of premonitions which we do not fully understand and unexpected experiences; moreover, before medicine discovered germs and viruses, how else was disease to be explained?

- But I'm not superstitious.

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

- It's my identification as a Jew.

But don't you feel a bit unprotected without it?

- Enough. I've got another question. Why did our ancestors take axes to Canaan's idols? Today collectors 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.

Ancient Israel had no National Conference of Idolators and Jews. The Torah insists that there was to be no accommodation with idolatry. "Obliterate the foreign gods that are in your midst." The 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.

The Torah tradition equated God and good. Since idolatry supported indecency, injustice, the separation of races, its worship must be swept away and replaced by Torah worship. When Moses asks to see God he is told, "You cannot see My face, but I will make My glory pass behind you." In what did God's glory consist? I am the Lord, a God of mercy and a God of righteousness, justice, decency and maturity.

That's the rule and the theory. The Biblical historian describes the centuries of tense struggle which Israel's religious leaders waged in order to separate out monotheism from baal worship. 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 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 the idol makers are out of business, 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?

Don't 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? The Israelites would have been surprised to hear some of their later descendants argue, 'it matters not what you believe as long as you do believe.' It very much matters what you believe. 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.

Chapter 9

THE GOD WHO LETS US CRY

Late at night. It was the oldtimer's bunk and turn. Coffee, a few beers, and the feeling that it was their chance. I began by 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 a monumental phenomenon. I feel satisfied in a special way that I am part of a truly significant enterprise which will outlive me.

- There is no particular virtue in longevity. Old age is a cane and failing eyesight. The future belongs to the young. Besides, there are a lot of old folks still around: Egyptians, Greeks, the Chinese. 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.

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 creative.

- With all due respect, rabbi, aren't you deluding yourself? As a freshman, I took a survey course in world history. 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 really answer the question. You mention anti-semitism. Why do you think the Jew was such a frequent victim?

- The Christ-killer myth.

- The fact 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 democracy and justice, themes which are deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible; and the ideologues of the left attacked those who represented that because they knew or sensed that the Torah tradition is concerned with the individual and rejected their impatient claim that valid ends justify any means and the subordination to the collective.

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 gambled their lives, 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. The Torah and its living representative, the Jew, challenged simply by being 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 calumniated. Anti-semitism is a pervasive cultural myth which has its roots in the New Testament text and retains much of its vitality because of the continuing reverence and authority ascribed to those documents. The gospel writers, aided and abetted by Paul, set up the Torah tradition as the straw man against which they could score polemical points. Judaism, stereotyped as a dry and lifeless legalism, provided an effective contrast for their emphases on the movement of the Holy Spirit. The chroniclers and apologetes of the early church whose writings comprise the New Testament twisted the facts to make the Jew rather than Pontius Pilate responsible for the Crucifixion, had the Jew cry out for Jesus' death, and mocked his tradition as deadly to the spirit. It didn't hurt their argument that many in their largely Roman audience looked on Jews as enemies of legitimate authority who had revolted against imperial authority and who refused to submit to the orderliness of law.

The early Church went further and developed what Jules Isaac has called a theology of contempt whose basic thesis was that God had sentenced the Jews to eternal wandering and ordered that the Temple be destroyed as punishment for their crimes. Would any God-fearing person go against God's will? It was not hard to infer that Christians 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."

- There are prejudices and prejudices. I've always wondered why anti-semitism continues to appeal to so many so powerfully. Why didn't it weaken once the centuries as most myths do?

Because there we were. Our presence kept alive ideas and values which challenged the self-confident assumptions of the majority. 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, even after patient explanation, could only be explained as due to a spiritual blindness, a deformity God had placed on all Jews until the Second Coming.

We choose as victims those who remind us of our limitations or who by their existence challenge cherished beliefs. The Protestant theologian, Karl Barth, put it this way: "By being hostile to the Jewish people the world simply proves that it is the world: blind and deaf and stupid in the ways of God, as they are visibly before it in the existence of this people." A century ago the ministers of the Czar were quite candid about their policy of deliberately forcing a massive exodus of Jews from Russia. They identified Jews with subversive ideas like democracy and freedom which were unwelcome in that absolutist society. The bearers of these ideas were to be quarantined, converted, or expelled. For much the same kind of reason 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. 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 unwarranted privileges.

It's not been an unrelieved horror story. During the Biblical period there was nothing particularly bitter about the Jewish experience, and in many places there have been extended periods of quiet settlement. But the fact remains that by human standards the world is not a fair place and many Jews haven't had a fair share. Unfortunately, the 'why' can't be answered any more than we can explain 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?

I wonder whether the record would show that the Jewish community had manifest as much sensitivity to social welfare issues and injustice if our history had been a happier one. The Torah's teachings are sensitive and noble, but they are 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 real Jew was in many ways a quite remarkable fellow. 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, full of cultural and welfare institutions which preserved the family and mitigated the social and psychological cost of persecution. That the Jewish family retained a measure of cohesion and the community a measure of

dignity testifies to the functional value of a Torah-consecrated way of life.

- I don't deny that the Torah tradition has proved its value as a survival mechanism. That's not the question. The real issue is God. Why did Jews have to face such a cruel existence? 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. He had been an active Jew all his life. How could God have allowed this to happen?

I answered 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 for actions and decisions which are harmful or undesired. The blessing of freedom is that it turns life into an exciting challenge. The price of freedom is that we may blunder or decide to be self-centered. The blessing is medical research. The price medical error.

- What has this to do with Auschwitz?

Auschwitz is the other side of civilization. German engineers built Auschwitz, not God. They also did some remarkable atomic research. You can't have the one without the possibility of the other.

- What kind of God would create such a world?

What kind of God wouldn't? Would you want to live as a prisoner of your instincts?

If space ship earth were paradise what challenge would there

be? Doesn't the gift of self-consciousness, the quality which distinguishes the human being from the animal, require that history depend in part on our activity and judgment? If the future is determined self-consciousness is an illusion. Growth requires the possibility that our actions may be terribly wrong. 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.

- 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?

- But we don't seem to learn.

Is that God's problem or ours?

War and apartheid are human activities which God could override only by denying us 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 are 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. As exiles the Judeans were subject to the orders of others. A new question faced those who thought about the Jewish religion. How could a slave people serve God? What did an exiled people whom this prophet described as 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 who didn't want to be disturbed. 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. The Torah tradition rests ultimately on faith.

- But the world never seems to learn.

I'm not sure of that. Are the death camps 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 know this much, that much of our problem 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. You shall not make any graven images. Why not? Because any image suggests that God can be described.

- But the prayer book speaks of God as kind and merciful and just.

And it also uses the phrase, "the Holy One, praised be He," to remind us that God's kindness and mercy depend on a wisdom deeper than any we can imagine. We are told not to assume that God's actions must conform to conventional standards in order to be accepted as just or good. God knows our needs before we are ever conscious of them and His goodness is implicit in creation rather than expressed by His listening to our prayers and granting us our desires.

Another of the Torah 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.

- But why would a benevolent God place in us our evident capacity for mischief?

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 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 paralysed by doubt. If life were reasonable, people would never have created religions. Remember religion's function is to confirm and affirm an ultimate purpose - to prove that what we do is worth the

doing. Faith allows us to carry on, Early in the sixteenth century Solomon ibn Verga told this story in a history describing 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. Know then, truly, that despite the dwellers in Heaven 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.

That poor man's steadfastness is a paradigm of the man of faith. His 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.

- Is there really something beyond and behind the world we struggle in?

Our problem is that we are less bound up than earlier Jews with the 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 the measure of our potential for violence is

also a measure of 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. Birth is preceded by birth pangs. The Messianic Age, according to tradition, will be preceded by the birth pangs of the Messiah.

- Where does such faith come from?

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. I quote a few lines from Abraham J. Heschel:

Faith does not spring out of nothing. It comes with the holy dimensions of our 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 means to hold small things great, to take light matters seriously, to distinguish the common and the passing from the aspect of the lasting. . . Faith is a dynamic, personal act, flowing between the heart of man and the love of God. . . 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 little too poetic for me; but I think I see what you're driving at. Let's not get detoured into a discussion of faith. The question was: Why have the Jews suffered more than any other group?

They haven't. Some day read a history of the Armenians 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 Jewish history insisted that Israel's sufferings - in their time this meant bad harvests and 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, the myth through which the Jew explained to himself his history. Essentially, it's a we-get-what-we-signed-on-for thesis. At Sinai Jews agreed to the covenant terms, 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."

- 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. The writers of apocalypse who followed the prophets downplayed the idea that we get what we deserve and insisted that God determines the course of history for His own purposes. I believe that the reward of the good deed is the deed itself. I don't believe that life operates like a classroom, that hard and conscientious work guarantees good grades. I've seen some healthy and prosperous bastards. Job's challenge to his comforters who defended the reality of retribution was based solidly on experience and cannot be blinked away; 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. Israel's record refracts some fine human qualities. 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."

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

On a human level they had something to say.

They argued that suffering is good for the soul, that through storms we grow. Prosperity tends to make us oblivious to human need. Grief and pain can expose our latent capacity for empathy. I know a young couple, born to wealth, who were devoted to nothing beyond themselves until their first 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.

Job was also told that suffering represents a trial which allows God to measure our character. Presumably, if we are steadfast we will enjoy God's grace, if not in this world, then in the World to Come.

- That 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."

Here is the recognition that suffering is not always an ennobling experience. The comforters did not understand 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.'

I look on suffering as part of the given in life. Much suffering is avoidable, certainly more than we generally admit. God did not build Auschwitz and Maidanek. German engineers did, but some is not. To live is to be bruised. The test 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. It's one of those terribly dangerous half-truths for it becomes the idea that the well-off and well-placed are 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.

- Are you saying that God is indifferent to the individual's fate?

Do you remember the end of the Book of Job? God does not 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 reveals the mysterious and vast operation of creation, to which 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 called The Faith of a Heretic, describes Job's response as the result of Job's confronting 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 of the meaning of Job when he defines tragic power as the ultimate reality. The God Who reveals Himself to Job in the whirlwind reveals 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. If Job cannot fathom the totality of that purpose he comes to sense it.

From the point of view of the Torah tradition Kaufman is a heretic. He does not deny God but he denies that there is a creative purpose. Faith begins with a recognition of that purpose. Genesis one

uses as a refrain after each act of creation: "And God saw that it was good." I often end a service with a benediction taken directly from the Psalms: "Religion, as we have seen, discovers the order hidden in chaos and takes as its orders the manifestation in everyday life of the order which underlies life."

- Job was a single sufferer and the whole thing was a test. Let's talk about facts and not a piece of fiction. How can you have faith in purpose and order in the face of the Holocaust?

I have no answer. The Holocaust is overwhelming. How does one think about the malignancy called Nazism 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.

- Eichmann and his colleagues organized the Final Solution; and God did not interfere. Millions prayed for relief and none was sent.

Do you remember the story I told a few days ago about Moses visiting the Academy of Akiba and being astonished at many of the teachings being quoted 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 genius would arise, you gave the Torah through me?' To which God answered, 'Be silent, such is My decree.'

God then allowed Moses to see 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 the world are prepared to use God's name for their 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. Evidence of God's Providence is, to say the least, inconclusive. How explain Akiba's martyrdom or the fate of the Jewish people? It is precisely here that the Jew must make his leap into faith.

- You can't leave it there.

Akiba's death 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 can satisfy the sufferer. 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. Any explanation offered me seems irrelevant. I need love not logic. God did not explain Himself to Job, but spoke to him of the incomparable majesty of creation and, inferentially, of the Creator. "Where were you when I laid out the Heavens?" There are questions which find their answer only when we allow ourselves to feel the depths of purpose behind the everyday confusions. Logic is useless to us here. We grasp at this kind of meaning intuitively.

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 dany. 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 grief. 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 fulfil 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. 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.' 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, "ג". Since Hebrew is written from right to left, the missing side opens towards

the flow of the text. Set, 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.

- You know, you've really not answered the problem of suffering.

I know. The Mishnah quotes: The reason for the prosperity of the village was for the troubles of the good is not of our hand. In explaining religion, as in everything else, there are limits. What we have instead of Judaism is a method to transcend confusion whose purpose is to make us see possibility and promise even in the darkest hour. Before death, the dying spoke the Shema. After death the mourners speak the Kaddish. Neither prayer mentions death. Each affirmed God. The Kaddish also speaks of the inevitable coming of

. The psalmist spoke wisely when he wrote: "Seek and you shall find." The statement has as much promise as we see in it. The God who lets us cry calls on us to affirm.

Chapter 10

THE GENERATION GAP, GUILT AND GOD

Shabbat afternoon. That morning service, written and organized by Institute members, had been read and enjoyed. The mood was mellow.

- "I like it here. There's open space. 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 prepare for a service over four days? You walk in cold. You've been thinking of classes or finances. You sit yourself down and challenge the service to move you.

- But here there's a guitar, open shirts and a sense of community.

The forms of Jewish worship conform to cultural style as much as to ancient commandments. I have worshipped in Casablanca and Bombay and in the Sephardic congregations of Jerusalem, and I discovered in each of these places chants, customs, and hymns unknown to me. Yemenite Jews sit cross-legged on prayer rugs. Moroccan Jews chant the whole of the Song of Songs before the Sabbath. When there were shrines, sacrifices, and priests, Jews had shrines, sacrifices, and priests. In a culture when worshippers and courtiers prostrated themselves to express humble submission, Jews, like Muslims to this day, made similar obeisance. Pews and a gowned clergy are eighteenth century forms. The guitar is late twentieth century.

People have different needs. In former times the divisions were geographic. Today they tend to be generational. A youth culture is a modern phenomenon. Boys used to go to work at thirteen. Separate youth group services testify to the fact that today's boys don't live

and work with their fathers. They're more with their peers, in a different atmosphere than their parents, and consequently their attitudes, aesthetics, and play are distinct.

You don't want to sit in pews, pews are straight and confining. You're not ready to sit quietly and listen to somebody else. You want dialogue, not a sermon. You want intensity, to do it yourself, not the calm of an organ playing over you. You want commitment, activity, proof of conviction, and participation in a group which will feel close and warm. Well and good. 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 catching and the environment representative of the Torah spirit.

Because different responses are appropriate to different periods of our lives, 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.

- Who's right?

Why must any of the three approaches be wrong? The question isn't one of form but of motivation. Is the spirit sincere?

- Isn't the prayer book called a Siddur, and doesn't the Hebrew mean order? There is a formal order of service. How can you approve disorder?

In worship 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 had the enforced leisure born of underemployment which had allowed his ancestors to linger in synagogue most of the day. He had to work long hours, so the service had to be cut. As part of a larger world, he came to appreciate its aesthetics. Middle-class burghers sat silently in pews. The familiar swaying came to seem inappropriate. Jews began to live in homes with private space. As decorum and discipline took over some of the old sense of involvement was lost. The balance shifted subtly 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.

- We're emancipated Jews.

In our times needs and attitudes have changed again. We're intrigued by the imagination more than the mind. Soul has replaced decorum. The guitar replaced the organ. Congregations are experimenting with dance. 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 a sign of the youth culture.

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, you're right, when it was destroyed instrumental music was ruled out of the synagogue as a sign of mourning for the destroyed Temple. During the Renaissance some communities in Italy allowed organ music in the synagogue except on the Sabbath and holidays. The prohibition was a memorial one rather than an attempt to impose a rigid form. 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 more appropriate to a prayer than another? Priests danced in the Jerusalem Temple. The medieval synagogue had no pews. Kabbalists held all-night vigils. The Hasidim 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 challenge as well as the encouragement of the lasting.

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

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

the freeing of the imagination through 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. 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 Harvey Cox talk on worship. Cox is a minister on the faculty of the Harvard Divinity School who believes 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. That made sense to me.

The purpose of worship is not an undifferentiated sense of the sacred but a Jewish expression of the sacred.

Worship and prayer are not synonymous.

- I thought services were for prayer.

Not really. The Sabbath hour is a worship hour.

- What's the difference?

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. Abe Lincoln used to say that he often found himself on his knees because he had no place else to go. 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 monotheistic. Prayer is spontaneous. Worship uses a text and is conducted largely in a holy language. Prayer pleads. Worship challenges. Prayer is a private expression. Jews worship congregationally. 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.

Wherever he finds himself, the Jew can find a service with which he will be familiar, feel rooted and at home. Congregation overcomes the inevitable sense of loneliness which we feel when life takes us away from the familiar. Worship allows us to live in the spiritual order of the Jewish people.

- But forms restrict. 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 prayerful 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 instinctive and being instinctive 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 hymns sanctified by centuries of faith we recognize that worship has the extra dimension of spiritual grace. We cannot all write Shakespearean poetry or Bach's music but we can still make it our own; we can open our hearts to it and enrich and expand ourselves by sharing and appropriating it. 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.

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 to us. 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 earlier generations who struggled, suffered and served. Here is the mystery and magic of worship, 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 chanted, 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 has form, but it's not a closed book. The forms took their basic shape in Mishnaic times, but much has been added and, from time to time, elements have been dropped. In the Siddur you will find what those who swam in the river in other ages felt about their experience. Siddur allows us to sing along with King David and Judah ha Levi. We remind ourselves of the martyrs whose blood 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", and if 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."

Worship is artificial in the sense that all civilization is artificial; that is, it is a creation of human design. It's unfortunate that people tend to use the label "creative service" for a service which tosses out centuries of literary genius for a few paragraphs written in haste. I find it naive to believe 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. The engaged worshipper participates fully and genuinely in the words of the psalmist or the poet. The Twenty-third Psalm belongs as much to me as to King David.

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

I, too, have been let down by a service. I have been put off by

a restless congregation and by an off-handed service. 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. However the material was presented there was always the familiar paragraphs. It was/is a way of touching base. During the day I am a husband, a father, a professional, an American citizen; here I am simply a Jew.

I spent a semester in England at Cambridge University. Each college has a chapel and most have Evensong. It's quiet and candle-lit. 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 miss 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 church 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.

I've
- You/made worship sound important. I've always thought of it as color.

It's the deed that counts. Where there is not motivation, the kinds of deeds we're talking about don't occur. When worship works, and it doesn't always, it provides the emotional electricity which binds Torah to an individual's life. We say: This I must do.

Worship has other important values not the least of which is that it answers the otherwise sticky question: What is Judaism? On an intellectual level we've got the problem of change and of a variety of positions; but in worship a certain number of the major themes are quietly affirmed. Far more than any other book, including the Bible. The Bible's in our library. The Talmud is in The Temple Library. The Siddur is in our hands and many of its words are in our hearts. The soul of the individual Jew and of our people is mirrored in its liturgy and ceremony; somehow, during worship soul speaks to soul, the teaching takes the wings of song and imbeds itself deep within our psyche.

- Why can't a synagogue service have majesty?

It can. 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 releases the spirit. Poetic language touches the soul. The synagogue room shuts out the work-a-day world. There is 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. A congregation united in expression refracts a holiness which suggests all that has made the Torah civilization possible.

A community visualizes, symbolizes, its redemptive gospel in ritual and worship. In all religious communities such moments provide a foretaste of Paradise or 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. 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 in a Jewish ethos and as a celebration of God and life's possibilities, but I can't buy the word sin or the idea of confession. It's too heavy. The world gives me enough stress without my being made uncomfortable when I come to the synagogue. Anyway, most sins are society's fault.

-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.

How would you organize Yom Kippur which is, after all, a time for soul searching?

- 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 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; but, before I draw this out, let me ask if you've read B. F. Skinner.

- Yes. He's the educator and psychologist who believes that we can become only what our genetic endowment and our environment allows us to be. I agree with him.

In Skinner's view frustration and failure prevent us from fulfilling our potential. To eliminate failure Skinner created 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, and eliminate the frustrations associated with learning by creating a continuing sense of accomplishment. We don't need to spend time on the technology of Skinner's device except to say it was designed to insure that mistakes would not occur and to acknowledge instantly the correctness of a student's work so that the young person would learn without frustration; no guilt, no mental or emotional block. Presumably, using such a computerized learning device, society could not only do away with classrooms, teachers and grade pressures but tension and frustration. 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. All that's not particularly new. Skinner's popularity lay in the fact that

he began his presentation with a value judgment: that the impact of Western civilization on the individual is destructive precisely because it falsely suggests that we are free. Encouraged to believe that we are free, we have come to expect that we can, by the exercise of will and determination, modify his behavior. This idea, according to Skinner, is wrong and can create paralyzing frustration. He particularly blamed the Western religions for emphasizing individual responsibility. He argues 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. We live in a confusing age and are never quite sure what is right socially or politically. We like the word crime. Crime is what somebody else does and gets punished for. Sin hits too close to home. Sin suggests that our life isn't what it should be and we are responsible; but we're quite ready to argue that the triviality of our lives is not our fault but the fault of our parents or of being raised at a particular time in a particular place.

The Torah tradition admits to a part of Skinner's argument: environment does play a role and so do a number of special factors such as age and mental competence. 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.

There are extenuating factors, but the crux of this debate is not on whether there are special factors but whether a competent adult is in fact competent to shape his or her life. I would agree that 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 who are raised in good homes become bums. Some who are raised on the street become great people. 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. In terms of ethical standards we have been given by God the artist's gift of dominating the material before us, and the more trained and skilled we become the greater our freedom of action. Animals are ruled by instinct; behaviorists like Skinner emphasize that side of our nature. God made the animals, each according to its kind. An animal remains what he was born. "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image and likeness'." The human animal can become a human being.

- Well and good, but why add guilt to our other problems? Why not live in a world of no-fault morality?

The fact that I sin points directly to my potential. No-fault would imply that I could not be other than I am, and that's simply not so. Sin implies possibility.

The concept of sin reminds me that I am morally responsible for talents untapped, sensitivities unused, and responsibilities unmet. It's only when I cease to feel that I can change or grow that the world becomes a gray and hapless place. 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 always 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.

The Torah's goal is not purity but growth.

- 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.

The important thing is the concerted moral effort. 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

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It had been a rainy morning. 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 screen had 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.

- I know, but the scene's real. My father often feels that way. His version is: "No one seems to know what's right anymore."

I'd heard those words 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 band-aids that simply covered over festering social ills; that America needed radical political and economic surgery and that her gifts delayed, perhaps fatally, such reform.

Her daughter had been home for a visit that 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 were getting a 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. We'll never have true community without basic agreement on goals and standards.

- But that's regimentation.

There's a world of difference between voluntarily consensus, what the eighteenth century called a social compact, and arbitrarily imposed standards. Right is not only worth doing but worth knowing.

- 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 ^{professional} get my/license 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 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 aged 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 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 grand-daughter 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 everyone tends to judge from a particular perspective. Asking complicated ethical questions and clearly analyzing motives and consequences is a painful and difficult process; I guess that's why many find it easier simply to shout: 'I'm right,' and to shout down anyone who questions his assertion.

- That's nonsense. 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.

The Torah's special and surprising message includes the idea that we are to trust God's commandments, what's written, not our conscience. Many have a convenient conscience.

- But you've criticized arbitrary standards. I thought you believed in situation ethics.

Situational ethics is freewheeling. It insists on the uniqueness of every situation and on the necessity of a thoughtful examination of all pertinent factors. What it lacks is any but the most mechanistic standard by which to judge consequences. 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 his associates asked him for a set of new rules for their community. He gave them a copy of the Ten Commandments.

There are standards and standards. There are standards which represent broad ideals and narrow standards. Goals can be constant. How we shape our decisions to favor these goals will vary with the situation. Over several years a favorite subject around our dinner table has been 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. I suggested 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. There are also powerful forces at work eager to take advantage of turmoil to impose their authoritarian ideology. In those places, what is euphemistically called guided democracy may be the most we should expect. To apply the human rights mandate indiscriminately, as the Carter administration tended to do in places like Angola and Nicaragua, did not make for a freer and more just life in the countries concerned.

- Are you advocating compromising values?

No. I'm advocating being sensible, being Jewish about values. There is a well-known rabbinic policy that one must never impose on the

community more than the society can bear. Another which says, "Don't be righteous overmuch." Often it's better to get half of what you hoped for than to end without any return at all. Often it's necessary to compromise goals in the name of survival. It is not the best of all solutions to spend billions for military hardware, and obviously much of what we now spend is misspent; but given the jungle of international politics it would be suicidal to give no thought to the defense of our freedoms and rights.

Do you recall the Torah report of the long and arduous trek to the Promised Land? Only two, Joshua and Caleb, of the six hundred thousand who left Egypt entered the Promised Land. Why didn't the others have that privilege? Because God judged that they had been so brutalized and emotionally stunted by slavery that they lacked the necessary qualities of self-governing citizens. Even God takes all aspects of a situation in mind. I read this myth as the truth that life is a difficult journey. From one oasis to the next the tribes did not know where they were headed. Decisions must be made on the basis of incomplete information. Along the road many broke rank and murmured against God. Our companions are what they are, not saints. That is the truth of it. Each step of the way required its special plans and institutions. Family standards of a clan are one thing and, in an age of nuclear arrangement, another.

The Torah represents God: judgments. Life requires our sensitive and intelligent application of these ideals to the facts of a particular situation. In one act a husband may honor his wife by respecting her sex-differentiated role; certainly today she might not want that kind of respect.

I think of the Torah's ethical themes - justice, righteousness and freedom - in much the way I think of God. They exist but resist

full description. I don't know in what absolute justice consists but I can figure out some of the ways justice applies to race relations in my city.

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."

Ethics involves an ideal side, Torah, and a practical side, my decision processes. 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 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.

- You've talked about Torah rules you do not accept - burning witches, stoning adulterers, sex-differentiated roles. How can a catch as catch can collection provide standards?

I've also talked about the mysterious capacity of Torah to reflect its sense of holiness and of 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 by reinterpretation. Capital punishment was effectively abolished by judicial process. Adultery was condemned, but adulterers were not stoned. Rather, ways were found to emphasize the sanctity of marriage.

- Wasn't a bastard set aside almost like our Indian untouchables?

That's overstating it. Children born out of an adulterous liaison suffered certain status disabilities and were limited as to whom they could marry. Since we are conditioned by our culture, our structures will inevitably reflect some of the ethical perspectives and limitations of our age. Rabbinic society was conscience of bloodlines, and the concept of inherited guilt was popular in the general culture. In that world the son of a slave was a slave. Upward nobility was rare. They thought they were protecting marriage and family. We think they went about it in the wrong way. Their way was not immoral or insensitive for their time. It would be in ours.

- One of the assignments I was given in Confirmation class was to imagine situations in which each of the ten commandments could and should be broken. I would kill to protect my family from a psychotic killer. Had I been a Jew in Nazi Europe I would have stolen whatever I needed to survive and escape. I remember writing that a young spouse of a permanently institutionalized mate who could not bear the thought of abandoning a loved one should be encouraged to have another relationship.

It's a case of the exception proving the rule; but the rules remain appropriate ideals nonetheless. In my synagogue the tablets of the law are displayed above the ark. What they stand for, what they are, a symbol that the God whose nature is justice and mercy demands that we who are created in His Image shape our lives around these rules.

- 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?

Our environment is not of a piece, and many of us are conditioned by different aspects of this fractured culture. Not only that, but we see different problems. Some see the problem of the sanctity of life, others that of the quality of life, and both feel they are obeying God's command, "Choose life."

We see what we are prepared to see. We make judgments based on experience and people of different generations and in different centuries have different experiences and so make judgments on the basis of widely different assessments. If I were to institutionalize a parent, I would not feel guilty; another might, and that sense of guilt must figure in his thinking. Before the age of "future shock" life flowed along fairly predictably. Children grew up in a social context not unlike that of their parents. Now each generation grows up in a radically different world, what you saw your parents do and were conditioned to believe to be right may no longer seem appropriate to you and may seem downright backward to your children. I still have trouble with people 'living together' instead of getting married.

Ethical decisions cannot be independent of context. Some time ago, visiting in the hospital, 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 entered he looked up and said: "Rabbi, I have been very sick, but I feel better now and I know that I am going to be well." A week before the doctor had told him in my presence that he could not expect to live for more than a few weeks; 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. 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 costly 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've been very sick, but 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 intrude reality. No one depended on her. There were no decisions that she had to make except to organize her last days as she wished.

How should we go about making ethical decisions? 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?

I begin with God and with the Bible's revelation of God's goodness. I am under obligation to serve God by seeking to pattern my life after Him.

- But what is goodness?

It is those acts commanded and commended in Torah transposed into the context of my life.

- But 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 paid for harm you cause another and that those 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 involving monetary damage." It was important to limit damages and to preclude blood feuds, and a good thought is that, once damages have been paid, the issue is closed.

How do you judge the application of the Torah's spirit?

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 pless. 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.

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

The Torah offers its standards in the language of specific commandments rather than of a classifying definition. Philosophy defines. The Torah demands. "It has been told you, O man, what is good." The primary consideration is the deed. Ethics has no existence outside of ethical activity. 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 definition of the good but by the quality of the life which he leads.

The search for a useful definition of the good was vigorously pursued in the academies of ancient Greece. Plato developed an elegant formulation which depended on stipulating 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.

As an undergraduate I took a course on 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 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. I've always felt that Judaism was right to make an issue of attribution. Every statement must include an indication of the promulgator, to quote an old Torah saw: "It's not the words but the deeds that count."

When I hear youngsters pontificate about the wickedness of politicians, I find myself repeating the rabbinic proverb: never judge another til you've stood in his shoes, and wondering how will they act when their time of temptation comes. On the other hand, when I hear judgments spoken by men and women who have used power with some degree of wisdom and restraint, I listen attentively.

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 1933 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 which he completed shortly before he was hung. I quoted a few lines: "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 helpful!"

Believing as I do that Bonhoeffer is correct, that any attempt to define the good apart from a concrete situation, the times, the context, the relationship, the culture, the range of options in which that particular decision must be made will fail, I have always appreciated the fact that a unique genre of writing developed by the rabbis to investigate ethical questions. Jews generally avoided 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 She'elot u'Teshuvot, Questions and Answers, 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 new world ever eager to break new ground. There have always been strict and broad Torah constructionists, those who argued rabbis must not rewrite the covenant and enforce the letter of the law and those who interpreted the letter of 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.'

The Talmud contains other similar examples. 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.

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."

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

Not really. When a Governor proclaims martial law, he is responding to an emergency situation in which the usual routines of the law are inappropriate. Torah would be pointless if it were not effective.

- What about civil disobedience?

Torah accepts the laws of a state as binding, unless authority is tyrannical and obedience would force Jews to violate the elemental rules of social organization or publically flaunt what the Torah stands for.

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

Freedom is not absence of law, but the absence of arbitrary and unjust 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. Torah does not support anarchy; yet, respect for law does not require passive submission to arbitrary authority. No one is above Torah standards. When King Solomon connived to send the husband of the

beautiful Bathsheba to his death so he could bring her into his harem, God sent the prophet Nathan to condemn him. It is not law for law's sake, but just law for the sake of justice.

- Is there an intelligent way to make ethical judgments?

Think before you act. Make sure you understand the issues.

Remember what Torah is all about, study your options carefully, work out as best you can the possible consequences of your decision, and act in such a way as to increase rather than diminish the opportunities of the living.

- That's hard. Often there's not enough time.

Like most skills, moral judgment improves with practice and thought.

Chapter 12

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 Scripture full of fairy stories even if they are dignified by such an august term as myth? It was Saturday afternoon and we had been talking about that morning's Torah portion.

- I was in a Bible class that you led last year. You mentioned that the Noah story is an Israelite version of a classic Asian epic. I was impressed by the way the Israelites turned the familiar flood story into a morality piece. 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 one of the goddesses; while in Genesis God decides to destroy mankind because of the world's wickedness and Noah is saved because he is a good man. You helped me see the special message in the Torah myth; that we were not playthings of the gods but servants of a dependable master, that the conceptual change which results for a perspective which insists that God need not be feared leads to new and liberating religious perspectives. 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 tradition based on a Torah which contains inconsistent, even contradictory, materials? Certainly, an inconsistent tradition can't claim to be revelation.

- I remember hearing that there are not only two Noah stories but

two creation myths and even two versions of the Ten Commandments.

The Torah contains any number of inconsistencies because the ancients didn't edit material with the same rigor as we do. If there were two old and venerated creation myths, they were simply placed side by side.

- But that fact doesn't answer the question.

Your problem is a perceptual one. You have literally identified the Torah's text with God's Word in much the same way pantheists say nature is God when what they mean is that God is the creative force behind or within all that is. The Torah is not the text God dictated to Moses for transcription in its present form. It is the creative force within that text. To use a rabbinic metaphor, the received text is simply the outer garment of God's Word. We touch the mystery of revelation when we uncover the Torah's deep wisdom.

Among the interpretive rules or middot which the Talmudists applied to the Torah was one which stated that God deliberately phrased the Torah using language ordinary people could understand. The Torah's idiom and imagery suggest but do not exhaust God's real meaning. Intended for everyone's understanding, the Torah expressed itself through imagery and drama rather than subtle theory and elegant theology. 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 groups of 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. The parting of the seas taken literally is a dramatic miracle story. Behind the miracle lies the redemptive recognition of God's power to save.

- You have avoided the question. The problem is not the ark and

the animals on 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.

There were various versions of the Hebrew myths, each venerated, which were finally brought together into our Torah. I confess I've never been troubled by the existence of several versions of a story or law, probably because I've never fully identified the Torah text with God's actual words. If we are not fixated on the text as literally God's Word but accept Torah as an anthology of the understandings which came to them 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 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 believe that it contained a complete and systematic truth. That's a later piety.

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

Let me answer your question with some care, so be patient. 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. "The Torah 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."

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: God is pictured as hardening the heart of Pharaoh when he was about to decree the freeing of the slaves in order to subject Egypt to ever more severe punishment. And

incredible legend: the sun standing still so the Israelites could complete the destruction of enemies, daily rations of manna in the wilderness with a double portion on Friday so no one would have to violate the Sabbath, the Angel of Death striking down all the Egyptian first-born. Some of the activities of the patriarchs seem downright immoral: Abraham seeks to pass off Sarah as his sister, fearing the Pharaoh would covet her for his harem and that his life would be endangered as the unwanted husband; Jacob rips off his brother's birthright. But why go on? The problem is well-known. The Torah isn't true in the conventional sense of that word.

- Yet, after you read from the Torah during a service, you recite 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 flowing, of which we've spoken. The Torah in a worship setting represents all that is insightful and redemptive in Jewish experience. It presents and represents all that revives the soul.

- If a class in Comparative Religion in Japan were assigned the Torah, wouldn't they read it as we read Homer, as a Western classic whose ideas and literary forms provide an interesting view of certain religious ideas of a particular West Asian people? They would read the Flood story as a legend about the end of the Ice Age which seeks to explain the origin of the rainbow and to make certain mythic statements about life, not as a divinely empowered text which continues to inspire an important religious community. Mightn't they wonder how generations of Jews could have been inspired by these stories?

Of course. They would read as outsiders. The Jew reads as a participant observer. A disciple asked his rabbi, "Where is God?" And

the master answered: 'God is wherever you let Him in.' The books of Scripture become Torah whenever Jews read them as Torah rather than Bronze Age classics.

- Why suspend disbelief?

Because our history proves that these scrolls are more than an anthology of fables and archaic laws. They have the vital spark of inspired meaning. They represent Judaism's special and surprising word. It is our myth, one proven out in a thousand ways, that what happened at Sinai, God's gift to Israel of Torah revelation, represents the central and vivifying message of this tradition. To treat Scripture as no more than an ancient classic is to be unable to explain the vital force which inspired/inspires millions.

- You're saying that what's not true is true.

I'm saying that facticity isn't the best form of truth. Every religion rests on "evidence" of this kind. Religion, after all, pulls together ideas which cannot be proven. 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. Moreover, the Jew can 'prove' that the Torah is revealed. Its teachings and its promises have proven their value. The Jewish people is alive and creative. Jewish life is sound and healing. What more can be asked of God's Word?

Ever since Sinai Jews have found unexpected depths of meaning in the text. A favorite image for Torah was the Biblical phrase: "a fountain of living waters." Remember the river theme. The Torah was seen as a present from God of many depths and levels. 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 real 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. These images must not be taken literally, but they represent a perception of the Torah's life enhancing spirit which we can share. 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 as well as within. 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.

- What about revelations?

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 expanding. 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 had broken free of the conditioning of pagan culture. Moses and his Followers struggled to make this perception real. Science is to nature what commentary is to Scripture. Science seeks to see what the senses do not see. 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.

- That's poetry.

I don't believe so. Revelation is the breaking out of the hidden into the known, an emergence into civilization of truth or beauty never

before available. 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? Unfortunately, many expect there to be explanations for everything. Many are conditioned by a mental set which rules out revelation a priori. We assume that what we do not know simply has not yet been researched. Our troubles with revelation result from the fact that we have accepted one of the Enlightenment's assumptions that everything could be explained as gospel truth. It's not. The eighteenth century had not yet had to confront indeterminacy, the presence of probability and the absence of certainty in nature, and 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 of us still are caught up in a deterministic caste of mind which is really out of date. The truth is that there are things we will never know. God did not owe us the skills necessary to explore His purposes. Science describes, it does not explain. Love, beauty, justice, creativity, revelation, cannot be examined in a laboratory. I would add that revelation plays a role, perhaps the major role, in scientific research. Research proceeds in two ways, by a piling up of information and by revelation. A spark brings ideas together into a possibility which surprises a researcher and which he sets out to prove.

- The rabbi in my town dismisses Biblical criticism as pointless. The Torah is a mystery. God's words are sui-generis. The normal rules of analyses do not apply.

I respectfully disagree. In my view the claim that the Five Books of Moses, the Torah, were given in their present form to Moses by God is untenable. I am satisfied that research has proven what some late medieval philosophers like Spinoza already suspected, that various sacred 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 in its present form.

- 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 the two properties of light simultaneously. If you look at the text and see only the text you will not see Torah, the divinity within. If you look at the Torah and see only its divine force, 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 rabbi friend is wrong when he dismisses academic analysis. To fully appreciate Torah one must be both scholar and Jew and recognize that he cannot be both at the same time. I often wonder if the rabbis recognized how apt their description of Torah as light, Torah Drah, was.

I read to them from Victor Weisskopf's "The Frontiers and Limits of Science," which is worth thinking about. "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."

Every week I handle two Torahs: a printed Hebrew text in which, over the years, I have noted in the margins the many corrections 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. I never touch its text but read with a pointer. As so often in matters Jewish, contradiction is affirmed and the suggested approach is both/and.

Actually, I have three Torahs: my annotated text, the Torah in the ark and my library, hundreds of volumes which are the records of ongoing and unceasing Torah commentary by Jews. The primary religious task of the Jew has been to explore the Torah's meaning, and over the centuries methods of incredible ingenuity have been employed in this task with results which range from insight to absurdity. Commentary can be pious and pointless as well as reverent and significant.

Those who read the Torah as ancient literature do so as archeologists or students of myth and in order to know more about those times and those people. The Jew when he is Jewing reads the text within the context of his times and his needs and he responds not only to the text but to the generations of commentary and interpretation. He may not read any particular commentator, but he approaches the text with the commentator's assumption that it has something of significance to say about his goals and activity. The Jew listens to or reads the Torah with the presumption of its relevance.

It is now generally held that the piety that the five scrolls of the Torah were the result of a single revelation became orthodox sometime around the time of Ezra, seven hundred years after Moses. Burdened by such critical theories about the Torah's composition, some modern Jews cannot deal with the myth itself, Sinai, and so never allow themselves to feel the Torah's spell. Sinai deserves a closer look. The Torah text does not make the claim that the whole Torah 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 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 not accepted by all as Torah in their day. The purpose of declaring that the whole Torah was a single revelation mediated through Moses, which became a dogma of rabbinic Judaism, was to guarantee that Judaism's special and surprising message would not be reshaped by anyone adding new revelation. It was a useful and perhaps necessary dogma in an era which believed in prophets, but I, frankly, 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 editing of a number of inspired traditions. Seen as the enlivening message of Jewish religious life and approached as a living document, the Torah opens itself to us and, as its name suggests, instructs.

- You praise Torah, but in fact no one today lives according to its teachings. Your friend, the Martian, could not reconstruct the Torah's text from observing current Jewish practice, however orthodox. Jews are monogamous. The patriarchs were not. Jewish life centers on synagogues, an institution never mentioned in the Torah.

I'll say it once more. The Torah is a text and all that proceeds from it. If the Martian saw me paddling in the river, he could describe that scene, but not the whole sweep of the Mississippi. The Martian could describe, from my practice, my Torah and my Torah flows directly from the original Torah. Approach the Torah sensitively rather than literally and you can sense that mysterious power. I am firmly convinced that revelation, the incursion of unexpected truth,

is refracted by Torah. It sent into history something altogether new, unexpected, divine, a transvaluation of conventional attitudes whose implications we have not yet succeeded in discovering. The fallibility of the Torah would bother me only if I did not also sense its divinity.

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 own limits. The concept of natural law no longer suggests absolute certainties. Physical laws 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: we tend to prefer less sense related terms. . . We describe the sense of everything falling into place which is experienced when our questions about life seem to be answered, when clarity replaces confusion. We talk of insight. 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 its substance has been collected in, and is refracted by, the Torah.

- 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. Just as there is something divine within every human being, so there is something divine within the Torah. The Torah's text is not perfect, God-like, but there is within its wisdom a profundity 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 significant accomplishment. The Torah tradition has helped shape healthy individuals and encouraged family life and 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, was enlarged by the record of other meetings between God and our ancestors and grew and changed as the serious and committed of every generation confronted the Torah message.

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. The early saga tellers loved to embellish the Sinai story. It's the central episode, but not the only report of revelation, and the others were described in less florid terms. The language used often suggests that the prophet sensed ideas rather than a

voice. "This is the vision of Isaiah. . . which he saw." 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. Revelation is generally treated as a vision which comes unexpectedly into the mind of an individual or as ideas which, somewhat to his surprise, he 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 opening himself up to life's mystery and meaning. I've never heard God. If someone were to say to me: "God told me," I would mark him down as unbalanced and suggest medical help.

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. Biblical man lived in an age which believed in prophecy and identified the emergence of new ideas with God's speech. Clear your mind of the stereotype of the prophet as one who spoke in an ecstatic trance or as a spiritual or medium. The prophets whose words were found worthy of canonization were people much like us. They were deeply concerned with the events of their day, particularly Israel's religious spirit and national will. Speech did not suddenly pour out. There is every indication that they took the time to phrase carefully their insights and thoughts.

It seems to me self-evident that we learn not only through step-by-step logic, days of preparation and testing, but also 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.

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. There is no thunder, 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 wisdom, that, too, is revelation.

When a sage was asked, where is God, he answered, God is wherever man 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, a contemporary thinker, who described Sinai as "a moment in which God was not alone."

- But what of their errors?

Biblical men knew that he could not believe every prophet who came down the road. The Bible dismisses many spirituals with the phrase, "the prophet is meshugah." They are 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 Torah 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 had to write for the instruments then available and to use 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 the events of their day and necessarily expressed their insights using familiar concepts and metaphors.

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.

- Do you really believe the twelve tribes were there? I thought the current theory held that some of the tribes were never in Egypt.

Again you raise the problem of literal truth. I do not know who was at Sinai. I don't think it's a terribly important issue. I suspect Biblical men didn't either. In one chapter in Exodus Moses is alone on the mountain; in another Joshua is with him; and in a third so are the seventy elders. The Torah was no more concerned with such details than we need to be. What was important was that it happened, there was a sense of a new understanding, new Words, a covenant, and so compelling were these Words that the tribes bound themselves to the Instruction. The Torah was given to Israel and, because it carried the authority of meaning, the people gave themselves over to it.

- 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.

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 have occurred today. 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 revealed words. Their thinkers, too, knew the moments of sudden clarity, and for millions these words 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 special 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 new truth, else it could not have struck the responsive chord it did. My problem begins when any religion claims that its message explains the mystery of life. Insight, yes; but no revelation, including Torah, says it all in the only way it can be said.

- How can I choose between revelations?

Let me quote you the Torah's own 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. Some rivers are clear and a delight to bathe in; others are brackish and fetid. But

I've said this before.

- But, why Judaism?

For over a hundred generations our people have opened themselves up to Torah and found meaning and inspiration in it. Had it lacked this wellspring of continuous vitality, the Torah 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. Most of all, I have sensed God in the reading and in its meanings.

- I haven't

You won't find God until you let the Torah speak to you.

Chapter 13

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?

- We're human beings, mortals.

- To describe us as mortal means simply that we are going to die, three score years and ten and all that. The sixty-four dollar question remains: Are we angel or animal? What are we like underneath? 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. I've always suspected that a culture's assessment of human nature explains a great deal about its religious perspective. If man is seen as undependable, the religion will consecrate authority to keep him in check; on the other hand, if we are seen as loving, generous, and sensitive by nature, then the religious tradition will emphasize freedom rather than discipline and encourage a restructuring of the social order so as to eliminate those institutions and social restrictions which stunt the human spirit.

Your suspicion is well founded, but it's not an even balance. Most philosophies and religions assume that the human being is described as a creature of instinct, an unpredictable and undependable creature, who needs at times to be kept in line. It is not hard to see why. Any serious review of the past makes melancholy

reading. War has been endemic. In every society the privileged have oppressed the poor. Once in power, liberators become oppressors and reformers form a new privileged class. Disciples of Jesus prove their loyalty to the founder's ideas by going on crusades, and disciples of Gandhi 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.

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 only in our century. They argued that the child is an innocent and they waxed eloquent about the noble savage whose spirit and soul have not yet been perverted by society. These arguments have not held up; psychology has questioned the infant's innocence, Freud talks a good bit about infant sexuality and aggression; and anthropology has questioned the nobility of the savage soul. In fact this new philosophy of man is less a result of research than a reaction to the sense of probity which surged through the West as the age of exploration, rapid scientific advances and the industrialization began to change long familiar and restricted patterns of life. Now it was possible to argue that people would not foul up progress as they had everything else. A new age would shape a new and better breed.

In our time the most popular religions take man's basic decency as an article of faith. Communism and Maoism are really very simple and optimistic religions which emphasize the perverse effects of a misshapen environment and the potential significance of political and economic changes in resolving the contradictions which now afflict human nature. The worker in the communist state is not living a better life, but has become, because of his experience with just

institutions, a 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 represent their religious vision.

The idea that man was by nature good and by experience warped was vigorously argued by those who were impressed by the achievements of the Industrial Age and felt that these augured well for the development of the human spirit. Man, not the Messiah, would change the world for the better; and, in changing the world, he would change himself. They argued that the future depended on the miracle of human potentiality rather than the miracle of God's promise. Humanism almost forced people to accept the "man is by nature good" hypothesis. There was no other basis for God. 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 Utopia could last long with cold calculating citizens, the hope had to be that we could recover the lost innocence of our childhood.

The unceasing achievement of modern technology convinced many that similarly dramatic changes had or would take place in us. Education was the key and the university became for many the cathedral at whose altar they worshipped. The knowledge explosion would teach us how to become more open-minded, clear-headed and empathetic. 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. In an unregenerate environment, the institutions of privilege, power and class, corrupt the child's spirit and limit the unfolding emotional and psychological potential. The child is bent out of shape by class-bound, coercive institutions, dehumanized. If we would create an open, just and sympathetic social environment, its 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.

Almost all of us have been affected by up-beat philosophies which emphasize heedful and hopeful stuff which satisfies our age's need for hope. In no other age has so much been written and said about our undeveloped capacities. 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. Something called the human potential movement has sprung up. These groups argue 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. They propose to make up for this lack by organizing classes in sensitivity or emotional awareness.

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

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 physical nature. Recent sociological studies confirm this, the thousand-year-old insight. 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 did not radically transform human nature. Ego continues to exist in Paradise. Anti-social and even criminal behavior do not disappear. The libido cannot be cut away. The contradictions of our nature cannot be fully resolved. Cain, after all, grew up in Paradise.

Those who were sensitive to the Jewish tradition were not surprised when technological progress and greater prosperity did not bring us into Paradise or transform us into saints. But hope dies hard. The optimists told each other that the human being still was unreformed because the reforms had not been radical enough. Man was still a beast because social conditions remained heresy. Only when the past had been completely buried and a truly communitarian social order created would the miracle of human transformation take place. The more intransigent our nature came to appear, the more radical the changes the utopians demanded. By the time Communism and Maoism appeared the social optimists had convinced themselves of the morality of forcing people by every coercive measure known to conform to their revolutionary programs so as to effect the desired transformation. Millions were killed to save mankind and, despite those formidable efforts, there is little evidence human nature can be radically transformed.

- That was the issue in the campus riots of the late sixties, wasn't it? The weren't simply against the war in Vietnam. They wanted to bring down what they saw as a corrupt and corruptive society almost as a purgation, and out of a romantic feeling that what

would be built on the ashes would have to be better - presumedly because they would be the architects.

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; vide: the Soviet Union.

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 humans. 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. On Easter the Christian community celebrates the possibility of man becoming God. The Torah tradition categorically denies that such a radical transformation is possible. Christianity began with a promise of radical transformation: "Prepare for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Judaism began with God's decision that the Israelites were to take the long round-about road to the Holy Land. No images; sudden and radical change and the long haul. The Torah tradition hoped for God's intervention; but, until then, "yours not to complete the work, but neither can you desist from it." The human remains human.

- 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 thoughts of a man's heart are evil from his youth. None of the Biblical figures is given

an all-white biography. Their virtue is that they struggle to become better than they are. 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 given that name 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 confessions of Yom Kippur suggest a 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 by force of will.

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

Such imagery looks to a time called the End of Days when God will create another world and people it with a breed who will possess "a new heart and a new spirit." Until that supernatural event we humans will continue to be both resolute and forgetful; spontaneous

and calculating; selfless and selfish.

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. It is not intended to be that. 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. What it 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 dyspeptic cynic; 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 these 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. But 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.

Unfortunately, World War II, the Holocaust, and Hiroshima

forced many to the unhappy conclusion that the future was no longer the happy thought it had once been. Our brave new world lives in fear of machines of mass destruction of its own devising. 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 and 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, the period in which we now live, when our machines lighten our burdens and threaten our very existence, when assembly lines provide a flood of goods provided we rape the good earth of its natural resources to feed man, when medicine has become lethal as well as life-sustaining, creating a population explosion which can destroy us all, and when mass society coarsens every human activity. Bit by bit the messianic age dissolved before our eyes. Winston Churchill sustained England's spirits after World War II, but 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. 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 is an interesting one. It 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 the meaning of our existence.

The other day I browsed in a book store at a table of non-fiction bestsellers. The table 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 most 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.

Sometime 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 growing 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 wonder if the present is as joyless and the future as forbidding as his essay suggests. I found myself wondering what it would have said if it had been written not by a comfortable, public-school educated London intellectual but by 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. Would great-grandfather have emphasized or 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? I wondered whether his great-grandfather would have underscored the high cost of Israel's defense or 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.

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.

The question then is this: given our world as it is, the reasonable expectation that next year's headlines will be as fearsome in their own way as this year's, how will we find joy in the days ahead? Our ancestors dreamed the impossible dream but recognized that until the Messiah comes life will go on pretty much as we know it. What hope then for us? Jews were not of a mind to write off a via dolorosa, a time of trial and burden, as a possibility.

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." The eruption of religious insight among a small confederation of semi-nomads who lived in the distant provinces of West Asia and not in the well-known imperial and cultural centers, is one of the great mysteries of history. Israel's transvaluation of conventional religious ideas was revolutionary in every respect. Among the new ideas which Israel's prophets put forward was a messianic vision of the hope of a good life here on earth. 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. If there is any particular Jewish idea of redemption, it is that the challenge is bracing and not beyond us. 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 Hasidim it was a mitzvah to banish sadness for it caused a "narrowing of the spirit," making it difficult for anyone to love God and to sense the possibility in our experiences.

- On Rosh Hashonah we wish each other a shannah 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 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 can allow us to keep our appetites in bounds and so be satisfied with what we have. Given the inevitable and highly visible differences in people, homes and life styles, such restraint takes a good bit of doing.

- You've been talking up 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 symbol of the faith 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 go at 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. Treaties are simply pieces of paper routinely scrapped when they are no longer of benefit to one of the parties. 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. 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. Social science now talks of "tradeoffs" and describes the costs we attend every 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 to paradise. In its Jewish form the hope was of a Messiah, a scion of the House of David who, when armed with God's miracles, would free Jerusalem from foreign domination and bring calm to the world. For centuries we prayed for the coming of a Messiah whose power would be supernatural, magical; somehow, by his coming, peace, freedom, and justice would come into our world. The messianic dream was an understandable hope in an age where there was little change, "There is nothing new under the sun," and no realization that man could, in fact, affect history. Men then lacked the knowledge or the power to change the world. A better world required God, therefore the intensity of the hope invested in the Messiah, but the Messiah never came.

All our messianic images go back to this world where God is in charge of change. 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 has been rough at times and exhausting, but movement had been 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, 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 be part of the expedition. As mountain climbers know, the view from the base camp is exciting.

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 ^{21DYLLIC?} idealic 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, and only then 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.

- But the popular ideologies of our age, particularly Marxism, are 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. Isn't that a secular version of the good old messianic age bit?

Sure it is. Ideology can blind its disciples to the enorms, especially where everyone wants to believe. Marxism's simple-minded messianism is its major appeal, sustained largely by shifting the force of hope from human activity to the dialogues of history. The problem is that after the Czar you end up with Stalin.

- 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, to the stoicism you criticize? If you don't believe in a personal messiah or in a messianic age, what do you believe in?

I believe that it is possible to live meaningfully and joyously

in a world without conclusion. In the act of living itself, there is 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? Moses labored for a lifetime knowing he would not enter the Promised Land. God had told him bluntly: "You will not complete the work. . ." 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 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 that none of us will ever reach the Promised Land, but I know/there is joy in being with those who are trying and who care.

The Exodus generation never reached the Promised Land. We won't either. A messianic age, that is a trouble-free time when human nature sheds its passions and contradictions and when all the troubling political and economic inequities are resolved is an unrealizable, though compelling, dream. There will be plenty of problems for your children but there can be a few less if we set out on a messianic journey. 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.

War, injustice and privilege are the results of human activity and so can be avoided by human activity. You and I can believe in the growth and possibility of the human spirit because we sense the possibility within ourselves. .

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." You do not have to succeed to know the joy of moments when we know that the pattern of our life is good, that we are among those who are building civilization, that we love and are loved. The Torah tradition lifts up the joy of being on a worthwhile way.

Chapter 14

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 but a carefully organized diatribe; and 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 real estate.

It's a matter of perspective. If a religion despairs of this life and focuses on the joys of the next life, its promise will not include a familiar Promised Land. Gautama taught his followers not to put down roots, for only the rootless will achieve Nirvana. Christ insisted: "My Kingdom is not of this world." But if your hope includes establishing a sound society here and now, that community has to be located someplace and place becomes a matter of consequence in that religion's culture. For Israel to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation there must be a country where schools could be established, synagogues dedicated, farms tilled, cities established in justice.

The myths center on place. God commanded Abraham to go to the land "that I will show you." Moses was ordered to bring the slaves to a Promised Land. The prophets brought a word from God promising to make a way in the desert for those exiled to Babylon along which they could return to Jerusalem. Heavenly 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, despite serious and repeated buffetings, never despaired of this world. To others the world might be a vale of tears or a place of unceasing trial. Jews neither denied the tears nor the trial, but theirs was always the confidence that God would redeem and that redemption would take place in an earthly Jerusalem as well as in Paradise. "Zion shall be redeemed in justice."

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

Classic Christianity is the creation of men who believed that the world was coming to an end. The Kingdom of God was at hand and God's new world would be a different kind of place. But Christianity has a social gospel. The ministers I know are always working for affirmative action and welfare reform.

The longer the Second Coming was delayed the more civic concerns, what happens here and now, came to the fore. In Christian thinking Christianity became worldly but its emphases remained utopian.

Christianity's hope was to missionarize the world; and where, under Constantine, Christianity became an imperial religion, the whole world rather than a small part of it became its place.

- Talk about the Jewish place.

The Zionist hope was an unusually realistic one. The beauty of Zion was often described in enthusiastic terms, "a pleasant land;" 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 for their descendants to subdue and overcome the Canaanites and the Philistines. The land is a hard and unyielding place; home, but not fair, land: cultivable, but not magically fertile.

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.

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 founding myth emulates the creation and operation of a model state. For the Zionists of our times pioneering in the Yishuv was 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.

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. He might some day decide to take it from them. Indeed, Israel has twice been driven off the land, first by the Babylonians and centuries later by the Romans, and Jews understand defeat and exile as a result of the nation's being faithless to the covenant. Sovereignty is never unconditional and the primary condition is hesed, covenant faithfulness.

It followed that, for those fortunate enough to settle in it, sovereignty and security were signs of God's ties with the Fathers, His faithfulness to His pledged word, and His special concern for them. God had redeemed His people from Egypt. In Canaan He had established them in the land which He had promised would be their national identity; home and their/land gave meaning to their corporate existence. 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 are well known. Land is not only the most precious of possessions but, psychologically, the most necessary. Anthropologists have been writing a great deal about what one calls the Territorial Imperative.

- I understand the mystique of the Promised Land. I've been to the Yall 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 my college roommate 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 even dress up as official opinion 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 votes bought by oil and promises 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 a twentieth century term. I thought Zionism went back to Jewish beginnings.

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 spoke; the people assented. God warned; 'If you accept these commands you are bound to them; if you obey them it will be well with you, you will live in

security on your land; if you are disobedient I will close up the heavens, there will not be rain; I will drive you off the land.' Land is an essential category in the covenant's statement of rewards and punishments and thus a measure of Israel's closeness to or alienation from God.

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. "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." The prophets interpreted the successive disasters which befell Israel and Judah as God's doing, results of the nation's sins. 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.

Jewish messianism is rooted in the concept of freedom and security on our land. We reject the image of life as an endless trial, 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.

In the Biblical view of history, at the appropriate time, God would do it all, return Israel to its land. The prophets's Zionism consisted of a preaching mission summoning Jews to repentance and righteousness. God would reward a repentant Israel with a return. Traditional messianism remained, as it began, pious and politically passive. 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 Avelei 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. None came with tangible hopes and plans for renewing the land.

Children of 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, child of an activist age, abandoned passivity and prayer, went on the land and created the physical basis of the nation's rebirth. I'll not rehearse the , but its keep was an ancient messianism wedded to modern energies eager to be up and doing. The social gospel of contemporary Christianity represents a similar theological transformation. Modern political Zionism and the social action movement accept man as God's agent.

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 not an essential element in the Jewish tradition, indeed, it 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 were opposed to practical Zionism for reasons of piety. They were still caught up in the medieval hope that God would bring the Messiah and recreate the Jewish State on His own, in His time. 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. They knew the devastating consequence of earlier "Zionist" activities; more than once a charismatic had proclaimed himself Messiah and had raised people's hopes only to dash them when his words proved empty. It was an argument over means, not ends; and, 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 this change require any abandonment of fundamental ideas. A theological rationale was provided for them by men like Yehudah Alkalai and Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, orthodox rabbis from Eastern Europe, who argued that Jews have never expected God's forgiveness without any evidence of a change of heart on our parts. Repentance, teshuvah, must precede forgiveness. 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.

- There was also non-orthodox opposition.

Until the second World War two political analyses were current among emancipated Jews. The once-excluded were now citizens. Instead of being locked into a ghetto they were free to move about. Many of the newly enfranchised Jews of the West half believed that the messianic times were at hand. Isaac Mayer Wise, the reform rabbi of , 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 then found themselves in a world full of dazzling freedoms and possibilities, sensed the vastness of the chapter which had come on Jewish life, and could not believe that the liberal reforms of 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 the melting pot. They believed in a universal brotherhood of men of good will. All nationalisms were an 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 whose piety was not so passive and whose political judgment was not so sanguine. The bourgeois Jew of the West read his history as a drama of progress, beginning with the French Revolution and the promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and developing into the promise of America. The Zionist read the nineteenth century as a false dawn, 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 grew throughout the nineteenth century until by the century's end Vienna, perhaps the most cultured city of the age, was governed by a council dominated by a group which chose as its name 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 were subversive to the fundamental values of nationalism. They claimed that 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, that the Jew was not only insecure but helpless. 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.

Zionism is a program for action in an unredeemed world. A European Jew, the son of a privileged Austrian Jew, Theodor Herzl, became a convert to the Zionist analysis. Sent to Paris, the cradle of liberty, by an Austro-Hungarian newspaper, Herzl had his moment of truth, 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 which had been revealed for all to see in France's defeat by Prussia in the 1870 war. It was not the army's fault but the Jew's. Herzl was caught up in 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, and shouting "a bas les Juifs," "down with the Jews." Then and there Herzl realized that anti-semitism was not an old poison whose venom was losing 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 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. 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.

The political realism of the Zionists carried over into their evaluation of the European-Jewish community. Europe's diseased and racist political environment had taken its toll of the Jew. They saw many Western Jews so uncertain of their roots and place that all they wanted was to put Jewishness behind. They saw the ravages of assimilation and self hate when they looked at the impoverished and unemancipated masses of Eastern Europe.

When the Zionists looked at the Jews of the ghettos and of Eastern Europe they, too, did not like what they saw, but they refused to put these Jews out of mind. Zionism expresses fraternity and mutual responsibility. 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. 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. The Zionists saw the Jew as he was and the Jew as he might be. 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. Zionism saw the potential of the Jew to be a human being and was convinced that as a human being the Jew would not only be happier but a better citizen of the world. 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." But, 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 constrained and his political situation precarious. Zionism represents a program for the rehabilitation of the individual Jew, the Jewish people, and of Judaism.

Every program espoused by thoughtful men of the age for the renewal of their own nationality 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." Zionism suggested programs to end all class divisions. Ben Zvi, Borochoy and others wrote of true community, of an end to privilege, of the socialism of the kibbutz, of sharing labor and benefits.

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 this week about the ability of the Torah tradition to provide the ideas and hopes around which Jews could shape a community and a life which was human and humane. What happened to this capacity in recent centuries which led to the breakdown of community which you have been describing?

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 Chmislinitzki massacres of the mid-seventeenth century. These were the years in which the

ghetto was officially created in Italy and when the Roman Church, reeling from the Protestant heresy, turned on the Jew as source of that heresy, after all the heretics were reading the Hebrew Bible, and unfurled all the old apartheid legislation.

That any dignity survived these melancholy and brutal centuries is a tribute to the enlivening power of ; but short of the promise of national redemption being realized, it was simply one of those times when more was being asked of a religious entity 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 reform all of the institutions of a people determined to remain a people, and to enlarge the possibilities of the Jewish spirit. That's hardly the mark of a racist program.

So 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. Jews emerged from World War II having learned two lessons. First, not to trust the good will of the West. 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 simple pride. I marveled at the reclamation of wasted earth by irrigation and sweat and this attempt to create a cooperative and non-competitive society. I saw a medieval backwater transformed into a vibrant modern state. It was more than national pride. It was also a sense that Israel was a symbol 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 resource 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. The achievement remains compelling.

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 them home-cooked meals, a bed away from the dormitory, and someone to talk to. Being Jewish provides 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 slice 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. Most families have a story about unexpectedly discovering relatives. My favorite is a war story. 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.

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. 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. 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.

- 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 without question 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. 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.

- Talk veered in another direction. We've been talking about warmth and a sense of family. I want to talk about my private feeling. I've known a few happy times as a Jew. I've gotten out of a seder or 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 a twinge of guilt about what I don't do, and 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 they 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 contemporary, 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 K^sad^sdic 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. And the more connections, the greater the infusion of life juices. And the more life juices, the more sensitivity, pain, joy, consciousness. In other words, "the more Torah, the more life." So I pick eclectically from those commandments which seem to be, as the Kabbalists would put it, the particular "diet for nourishing the roots of my soul."

- That suggests that conservative and reform Judaism are like baby food, easily digested edibles for those whose stomachs are not yet ready for the real thing.

- My wife and I lead busy lives, and necessity has 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. I've never felt that more is necessarily better. The equation the more mitzvot, the more connections, the more Jewish consciousness, is too simple.

That's part of my answer. But the major part of my answer touches the dynamic quality of religion that I have tried to state throughout. Akiba practiced different mitzvot from Amos. Yet both were good and pious Jews. But almost a thousand years had passed. Much had happened. Much is happening. I respect the rabbinic

of Judaism, but in many ways it is no longer mine. Just as the rabbis took little more than historic interest in the sacrificial cult, so I take little more than historic interest in, say, the prohibition of instrumental music during synagogue worship or the enforced separation of men and women. My soul is dead to the appeal of such practices and it's alive to some practices which are quite recent: women cantors and rabbis, Confirmation, Consecration, and Yom ha-atzmaut are cases in point.

Forms are made to be modified. 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 pleasure of sports, and even work - if our work is a spiritual and intellectual delight.

When he was asked when he would become a fully observant Jew, as defined by orthodoxy, Rosenzweig answered in effect: 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. The dietary laws were originally rules to separate Jews from idolatry. The ancients often ate the totem which represented their gods, in much the same way as Christians during Communion take the flesh and blood of the Christ, the wafer and the wine, into themselves. The idea, idolatrous to Jews, was to become one with the deity. The wild boar was the token of Moab and the crayfish of the Phoenicians. 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. My ritual 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. I eat no pork. We have no shell fish in the house. 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. A more authoritarian world permitted and enforced a consistency we no longer accept as a desideratum.

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

Ours is not the first age where there are significant differences in practice. Sadducees ate with any other Jews. A Pharisee would eat only at the table of another Pharisee. It's not an either orthodoxy or no practice situation. There is a Jewish way. All Jews observe the same set of holidays. Whether you play tennis after services or study , every synagogue has Sabbath services. Among the orthodox only men say the Kaddish, among the non-orthodox everyone in the immediate family; the point is that our memorial customs are structurally the same. A number of factors besides practice holds Jews together. First, and foremost, a shared 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 of our diaspora communities. 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 made no mention of the God Who saves and were simply collections of materials on freedom and liberation, but they were intended for Seder night and included the matzah and the four cups. The thrust of the river's current is powerful.

A myth binds us as one. It's the myth of election. There is a purpose to our survival. The theist says: we witness to God's will. The secularist says: we remind the world of decency and moral duty. And those of us who are only half-convinced by the myth say: we share a destiny and way of life which, perhaps more than any other, encourages the growth of character and moral sensitivity.

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 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 so much more which binds than separates us.

- It's our last session. Don't hide behind history and theory. Tell us what the Torah tradition has meant to you. 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

hejira like Augustine's Confessions or a poignant journal, Anne Frank's Diary; my life has been relatively calm.

I grew up in a happy and learned Jewish home. Being Jewish always has seemed right and natural. I've lived with a good bit of balance which I have always ascribed to the Torah's blend of realism and idealism; prudence and principle.

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; much later, 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; the holidays and serious discussions around the table about the rise of Naziism and the need for Palestine as a Jewish home. Hitler's photo was frequently in the papers. My grandparents lived in Jerusalem and sent me notes from there. Seder meant thirty or forty guests, much moving of furniture and a dollar if I found the afikomen. Books, land and matzoh. 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. Jews will sometimes call a fellow Jew an epikoros, a term which goes back to the

Greek philosopher, Epicurus, and has come to mean a curmudgeon who does not go along with the local authorities. An epikoros is a Jew and, generally, one deeply involved in Jewish life, albeit in his own way. 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 were full of pictures of piled-up corpses at the death camps, and there were good reasons for our feelings. 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, but 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 emerges out of our personal experiences and is the sense that there is security and love in the world.

God is God, but God is my confidence in the possibilities of life. In an age of recurrent tragedy God is to me the promise of civilization. I'm not alone, the last of the well intentioned. I'm not one of the tramps waiting hopelessly for Godot. Not surprisingly one of my favorite lines from the Psalms reads: "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the dawn."

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 would be 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 that Jewish life was barely mentioned except for one session which discussed the Biblical tradition as a background for Christianity. For the first time I wondered whether our wisdom was really important. There were all those miles of books in the University Library and my father's study, for the first time, began to seem small and insignificant. I took that history course in 1944 and I have recognized that those lectures were biased by the narrowness of the classic WASP historical tradition which was then 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, 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 insane to insist that good things necessarily come in small packages. In the real world quality and quantity are both significant.

Israel is not simply another small people. The greatest power in Europe declared us to be Enemy ^{Number One} and set out to wipe us off the face of the earth. My father used to say, to know a man look at his enemies rather than his friends. If we were the arch enemy to the Nazis, the forcing of privilege and all ideologies of state power, then, truly, the Torah tradition must contain some powerful and vital truths. 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, but insisted on a vision of a world united in understanding and mutual respect; and which placed its faith in the will of God Who demands that we live by a law of righteousness which has quite specific implications.

At about this time I took a course in Marxism and 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 who presumedly had put aside all the old divisions and who would be the force which would bring the vision of One World into being. Many of my college friends felt that their lives would be less ethnic and Jewishly imprinted than their parents' had been. I was headed for the Rabbinate and had no such desire or illusions; but they and I have lived through the decades of Soul, Roots, Black is Beautiful,^{2nd} Fiddler, and their lives have for the most part been as Jewishly involved as mine. The melting pot did not produce the bland stew, it was supposed to. Today we take cultural pluralism for granted and define a rich society as one whose people have a variety of skills, backgrounds, and ideas and are not interchangeable integers.

The death camps were opened by the Allied armies while I was in college and I saw pictures of the piles of emaciated corpses and heard the tales of horror. I felt I owed these people a deep debt. They 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.

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 Religious School knows that sweet reason and a presentation of the high-minded definition of the Jewish way is not in itself compelling. It is what the student expects. It is also bland. Experience binds. The binding moment can be in a sanctuary during the hour of worship when the familiar chants reach into my soul. It is belonging to a community which seeks truly to support every member and where emotions need not be hidden. It is a visit to Jerusalem's Western wall as the evening sun refracts two thousand years of piety from the rose-colored stone. It is a small apartment in Tel Aviv as a cousin tells of his experiences in Europe and of the moshav where he is now a member. It is the visit to an archeological dig as they 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 flesh we 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 worship and my God and the sense of encouragement that sometimes plows through those lines.

I've been swimming in our river for a long time. It's a experience. All I can really say is, Come on in, the water's fine.

The loudspeaker crackled. The buses were ready. They were kind enough to say they'd enjoyed our talk; I know I had.