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MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.

Series IV: Writings and Publications, 1952-1992, undated.

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Come On In, the Water's Fine, unpublished manuscript, third
draft, chapters 6-15, pages 124-288, 1983.

Chapter 10

THE GENERATION GAP, GUILT AND GOD

Shabbat afternoon. The morning service had been informal. There was a feeling of community and contentment.

- I like services here. There's no dressing up. I like to sing. There's a feeling, a warm feeling. I don't like services at home. The pews are uncomfortable, the service is a set piece, everyone's dressed up and uptight.

Here you're tuned in. You came to the service after three days of talking and thinking about Judaism. At home you walk in cold. You're not in a service mood. The difference is as much in you as in the service.

- It's also the guitar and my open shirt. I don't like put-on. I'm sure God doesn't care if I'm in a coat and tie.

Dressing up is one way of getting into a particular mood. A coat and tie are a conventional sign of respect, that what we're about is significant.

- Dress doesn't mean much anymore. We dress down, not up.

You wouldn't go to a White House dinner in your camp shirt; but, basically, you're right, getting dressed up no longer means as much as it used to. In the old world putting your Sabbath suit on, properly your only suit, marked the Sabbath as a special occasion. No longer. Most of us wear and coat and tie every day to the office. Clothes no longer give off clear signals.

- I don't like an organ. It's too austere an instrument. We'd do better with a guitar.

You'd soon tire of it. It's fine for a sing-along, but it doesn't have the range or majesty for the High Holidays.

- My grandfather was of the old shul. We belong to a Reform synagogue and when he comes to services with us he always complains that the organ belongs in a church.

- That's where it came from.

What's wrong with that? Organs aren't baptized. We borrowed the organ from the church centuries after they borrowed the Gregorian chant from us. In religion everyone copycats a bit.

- Pops said that his shul didn't have an organ as a sign of mourning for the Temple in Jerusalem.

He told you right. The Temple had an orchestra and when it was destroyed the synagogue prohibited all musical instruments as a sign that we'd lost the glory of The Temple.

- You'd change all that.

We have, as you know. The river flows on and there's a point when looking back is no longer helpful. Many of us want and need a richer musical setting for our worship than the unaccompanied voice can provide. Besides, while we're sorry the Temple was destroyed, in terms of the dynamics of Jewish life it's a good thing that it happened. I'd hate to think of twentieth-century Judaism still based on shrines served by hereditary priests conducting animal sacrifices.

- An organ-accompanied service can be flat.

A service is what the congregation makes it and what they bring to it. It's the same with a play. A cold audience can destroy our pleasure in a great production of Hamlet. The analogy to a play, by the way, in some respects is a useful one. The prayer book is in the script, but every congregation, like every director, makes a number of additions and deletions and sets the play differently. The hall makes a difference, so does the musical setting. The biggest difference, of course, is the congregation. Some come to criticize, others to participate.

- Cultural differences also make a difference. In Israel I visited a Bokharan synagogue and though the text was familiar I felt like a complete outsider.

Yemenite Jews sat cross-legged on prayer rugs like their Muslim neighbors while Polish Jews, like their Christian neighbors, prayed standing before tall reading desks. Services reflect the environment.

- And the congregation. At home we have two services on Friday nights: an adult and a youth group service, and it's hard to believe that they're organized by people from the same community.

In a sense they're not. Today, for the first time in history, kids and their parents spend most of their time in distinct and separate cultures and, understandably, develop quite different sensibilities and tastes. Young people want dialogue, not a sermon; rock not Bach; movement rather than calm and decorum.

- Families should worship together.

- There are times to be together and times to be apart.

- We all enjoyed this morning's service.

There are no teen-agers or octogenarians in camp.

- Also no one who can't worship without a coat and tie.

- Don't laugh, but what I liked best about this morning was that there were no ushers. At home they patrol the aisles and I always feel I'm being watched and treated as a child.

- I'm a convert. I like our service but never have gotten over my surprise at the hubbub. Some never stop talking to each other. Others visit when they come in late. My parents' church was always hushed. People stayed in their pews. I asked our rabbi about it and all he said was, 'democracy is noisy.'

- Why the noise and moving about?

The traditional service is excessively long - too long to sustain intensity of feeling.

Why? During the Middle Ages Jews had no other diversions. The synagogue was their theater and meeting place as well as their sanctuary.

- On Friday night my synagogue is like a three-ring circus. The cantor, the prayer book, the reading of the Torah, and the rabbi's sermon are in the sanctuary, the center ring. The youth group, a guitar, folk music, a mimeographed service and a friendship circle fill the chapel and the assembly hall is full of wriggling children and beaming parents who have come together for simple songs, cut-down prayers and a story sermon.

Does this bother you?

- Yes. It's all quite lively, but it lacks holiness. "Know before whom you stand," is inscribed over our ark. After one particularly noisy evening I suggested that we amend it to read: "Know before whom you schmoos."

- It's fun just to be together.

- That's why we have an oneg - but after services, at services, I want a chance to be alone with my thoughts.

In our services a Jew can be alone with God provided there are at least nine other there with him.

- I spent a semester at King's College in Cambridge. The college had a chapel and regularly celebrated Evensong. It's a quiet and candlelit moment. The Gothic arches and the shadows blend beautifully with the hymns. Though I was an outsider, there were times when I experienced quite powerfully life's mysterious holiness.

The church celebrates mystery and does it well. The synagogue is an open space with few depths or shadows. It accepts mystery but does not celebrate it.

When I visited a professor friend at King's College he took me to Evensong and, I, too, was moved, but I also noticed that the fellows and students were in an inner space behind a screen and I was on the other side with the commoners. The chapel affirmed aristocracy, not democracy.

- I don't follow you.

One of worship's primary functions is to reinforce the religion's teachings.

- Our buildings seem to have no particular shape. Apparently we didn't use architecture the way Christians do. Many churches are built in the form of a cross and in themselves a sign of the Christian message.

Our message is expressed in the scrolls, not in the structure, and the message is specific, not just symbolic. But there's still a sense of holiness there. When a Jew crossed in front of the Ark he bowed to it. The scrolls somehow reflect the presence of God. The rabbis deliberately ordered that a curtain, the parochet, hang before the Ark to suggest the curtain which hung in front of the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple which symbolically protected the worshipper from the radiance of God and proclaimed that there was something of God within.

Our curtain's a perforated metal screen. I never have given it a second thought.

Unfortunately, we tend to treat symbols offhandedly. We commission an artist to "do" an ark but never tell him what message it should suggest. He treats it simply as a focal point in an auditorium. It's too bad because awe and reverence heighten our expectations of a service and, therefore, increase its impact on us. Not so long ago when a Jew dropped a prayer book he kissed it as he picked it up. Now he simply complains that it's too bulky.

I always feel awkward when I'm at a service where people reach out with their prayer shawls to touch the Torah as it's being processed. I couldn't bring myself to do it.

Once familiar acts of reverence fall out of style, but every service ought to include some reverential rule which tells us we've affirmed our faith.

- A few months ago our youth group worked up a creative service using some poems by Bob Dylan and Kahlil Gibran. It was moving, but the rabbi had a fit.

I'm sure he was bothered by its signals.

- I don't follow you.

One of worship's primary functions is to reinforce the religion's teachings.

Your youth group produced an emotional experience, perhaps even a spiritual experience, but not a Jewish experience.

- We said the Shema.

Six Hebrew words can get lost in an hour of Gibran and Dylan.

- Why must a service be Jewish? If I need to I can pray anywhere, anytime, and when I do I'm sure God doesn't care whether I say my piece in Hebrew or English.

I'm saying worship and you're hearing prayer. Prayer is an unscheduled expression of deep feeling. In our worship God, Torah, speaks to us. In prayer we speak to God. A Jewish service is not intended as a prayer meeting.

- Obviously, we need to define terms.

I equate prayer with the sudden surge of emotion which comes over me when I am pushed beyond my resources, beaten down by life, or unable to contain my joy. 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. Of course, there have been times when I have prayed during a worship service. I came troubled. The music calmed my spirits and the sense of community, the quiet, an awareness of the presence of God unlocked my heart, but I can number these moments and my point is simply that prayer cannot be scheduled.

Worship is scheduled, congregational, and largely scripted. Those who say, 'I do not need a book to pray,' are absolutely right. Worship is an orchestrated experience, not a happening. Worship tends to lift us from the workaday world into the Torah world so we can breathe for a few moments the pure air of the Jewish vision and live for an hour or so under the spell of the Jewish tradition. When you open the Siddur you find praise, doctrine, paragraphs from the literature, Psalms and memorial prayers, a distillation of the central themes of our special message. Worship is visibly and instructively Jewish. The Torah is read. A sermon is preached. Candles are lit. The Kaddish is recited.

defines the basic thrust of Jewish life and this is best done through a familiar

- When I go I'm given a book, told to open to such and such a page and follow along. I'm told by hand signals when to stand and when to sit. I always feel I'm being directed by someone else and that I can't just be myself.

Don't challenge a service, let it flow over you.

- Say what you will, services are artificial.

Yes, in the sense that all civilization is artificial; that is, a creation of human design. Prayer is spontaneous, we pray as the spirit moves us, and being artless, prayer can be foolish, petty, misdirected or self-deluding. Spontaneity isn't the ultimate virtue.

- At least prayer is genuine.

And egotistic. Prayer speaks of need, my needs. I'm the center of my prayers. Prayer doesn't enlarge my horizons. Worship's scripted and the Siddur presents readings which reflect the wisdom of a spiritually sensitive people and speaks of the many needs of all human beings. Worship makes me think of community, its needs as well as mine.

- But the script is fixed, the same week in, week out; year in, year out.

Not quite. Communities add or subtract material whenever the Siddur is republished. Congregations often modify the Siddur for their own purposes. The first synagogue services seem to have been constructed out of the Psalms and responses which had been used in The Temple's worship. Since then much has been added and subtracted. At one time the Ten Commandments were recited at every service, a practice which was dropped more than fifteen hundred years ago. The Kaddish is only a thousand years old, the Yigdal hymn perhaps five hundred years. At one time the service included many erudite and abstruse hymns called piyyutim, most of which have disappeared.

- Still, I'm given a book and the service follows a predictable course.

Flexibility is one thing, formlessness quite another. Synagogue worship defines the basic themes of Jewish life and this is best done through a familiar

structure which reinforces the core themes and provides definition as well as the reassurance of continuity. Each age should have its own voice but not lose touch with the original voice. The sense of history is an encouraging one.

- What about relevance?

What about it? The Shema is as relevant as the day it was first spoken. The fact that God is one and that Israel feels a special relationship with "our God" hasn't changed. Moreover, most services include more than the readings. There's a talk, an opening and closing prayer, mention of events in the community's life. It's disconcerting. A matter of balance, too much repetition, can be boring; too much relevance can be disconcerting.

- I've always felt that the best service would be a happening - a happy, and perhaps unexpected, surprise. How can a moment which is consciously organized be genuine?

When a director uses a Shakespeare script or a conductor a Beethoven score we don't immediately say that he lacks originality. A skillful and knowledgeable handling of these texts can give us fresh insights as well as a great deal of pleasure. I'm puzzled when you limit creativity to original work as if there cannot be creative responses to another's thought or music. I've thought a lot about the twenty-third Psalm and written about it, and I would argue that it belongs as much to me as to King David.

- I still say they're somebody else's words.

So were the words in the pamphlet that youth group put together for its Dylan-Gibran service. I find the term, "creative service", uniquely inappropriate for a service which substitutes a few paragraphs written in haste or collected at random for a carefully chosen, time-tested, familiar bouquet of the best poetry and thought of a remarkably creative people.

- Why should your judgement be better than the kids'?

I've been at it longer. They're interested in one Friday night and I'm concerned with the continuity of the Jewish experience and the disciplines of the religious life, not a single presentation. A prayer book service need not be tired or uninspiring. I try to organize worship that is warm-hearted, not cold-eyed; full of melody, not cacaphony; hard thinks, not vapid; a moment of Jewish intimacy rather than alienation.

- At home every Sabbath service is the same.

Sameness has its virtue. I've always found that familiarity increases my pleasure in a serious piece of music or work of art. I bring more to it each time and take more away.

- It's dull.

People who doze through an opera continue to find opera dull.

Last Christmas a minister talked at our Rotary. He said that the church takes itself too seriously, that the religious moment should be a celebration of possibility and a freeing of the imagination. He has rock bands at his services. He wants people dancing in the aisles. Why not celebrate, he said, our love of a generous God we do not control and only dimly comprehend, but who cares for us. He made sense to me. His church must be a lively place. Incidentally, he didn't talk about worship as a Christian experience.

Did you attend one of his services?

- I did, and the church was full and lively.

Did he read from the New Testament and sign his prayers in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost?

- Yes.

That was his way of signaling that this was a Christian experience.

- I'm sure you'd rule out rock music and modern dancers.

It would depend on the rock music and the dance. If the electronics drowned out thought or the choreography overwhelmed all sense of tradition, I wouldn't use the music. Part of our message is that we're to think about our lives and

values. A mindless experience isn't a Jewish experience.

- The Church obviously doesn't feel as constrained as you do.

Christian worship celebrates the good news that salvation has been made possible by a Saviour's coming. We're not ready yet for a victory celebration. Our worship talks to us of duty and possibility in a demanding world so that we will play our part in the world's redemption.

- I find your comparison of worship and theater interesting, though I would draw a conclusion from the analogy which I doubt will be pleasing to you. An evening at theater can be a pleasant or moving experience but of little lasting or practical benefit. That shouldn't be true of a Sabbath service. I don't think it's meant as entertainment. Worship should help me become a better person, but I leave services much as I came.

- You've earned a brownie point with God.

- I'm being serious.

Not all plays are simply entertainment. They can be, and often are, effective vehicles for the transmission of all kinds of ideas. Plays help me imagine other lives and often encourage us to change our political or social views. Worship, unfortunately, can be little more than an hour's entertainment, but it can also be much more: a binding experience, a challenging moment, a reminder of what must be done, a quiet but useful insight into some parts of our lives.

- Each play is unique. Our worship uses the same script week in and week out. It can't possibly have an impact on us every week.

Theaters have audiences. Synagogues have congregations. An audience comes largely unprepared. The evening is determined by what happens on the stage. The message, if there is one, must have a punch. Worshippers come prepared. They know much of what they will hear. Its virtue is reinforcement, a deepening of awareness, rather than the presentation of radically new ideas.

- Worship keeps me from unravelling. During the week my work and the family pull me in many directions. I look forward to the familiar words and music of Friday night as an hour to put Humpty Dumpty together again. I often leave that service feeling like Antaeus whose strength was renewed whenever his feet touched Mother Earth.

- Plays have a story line. Our service is formless, little more than a piling up of pious paragraphs.

Not so. Our worship is carefully arranged. We're welcomed by a call to God's worship, the Borechu, which consists of praises of God. To praise God is to remind ourselves what we owe to others and to The Other when we affirm the oneness of God and the community of Israel, our brotherhood. The Shema makes it clear that we worship the Holy One, praised be He, not the God of power or wealth or national ambition. Then, first silently, privately, then congregationally, we speak prayers of general need: "Favor us with knowledge," "Pardon our transgressions," "Bless this year and may its harvest bring us well-being," "Hear our prayers." On certain days the Torah is read and there is an interpretation of the reading as it relates to our lives. A sermon is presented. Finally, praise, affirmation, need and instruction are drawn together into an Adoration of the God of all mankind whose teachings will one day be acknowledged by all nations and peoples, then the Kaddish, an affirmation of life and of God's majesty which is used as a memorial prayer. Affirmation, not anger; death and life somehow conform to God's wisdom.

- I've never been aware of structure.

I'm always amazed at those who will reread Macbeth before going to a new production or look over the score of a symphony before going to a concert but who think that worship doesn't need the same kind of understanding.

- If I understand what you've been saying, you look on worship as providing the answer to the question we've been talking about all week: what is Judaism?

- You can't be serious.

- Most of us are practical folk and no one ever sat down and explained to me why I'd be better off if I went to services on Friday night than if I went out on the town. I remember someone telling me: God doesn't take attendance.

The discipline of worship helps us understand the Jewish message and to enlarge our lives through it.

- What about character? I haven't found that those who go to temple regularly are better or more sensitive than those who don't.

I've no statistics on the point. I don't think any exist. I know I do a lot of hard thinking about my life and my values when I'm in services and I assume others do too. Somehow it's harder for me to delude myself there than in my office.

- I find services wearying. They lay on guilt. There's all that sin talk,. I'm under enough pressure without worship adding to it.

We don't have confessional booths.

- But there's Yom Kippur and those heavy Yom Kippur refrains: "We have done perversely." I'm not perverse and life's tough enough without my religion laying guilt on me.

What would you have Yom Kippur be?

- What the minister said, a grand celebration of the possibilities of life.

That's exactly how I think of Yom Kippur - as a grand celebration of possibility; and it's Yom Kippur's specific emphasis on sin and confession which gives me that welcome sense of encouragement.

- How so?

Sin implies possibility. When I say, "I have sinned", I'm telling myself I might have acted differently.

- No one is guilty. We do what we do because of our environment, our conditioning, because our families raise us in a certain way. There are no bad

We can't read all the books Jews have written, so the service presents what's important.

Worship teaches us the language which lies at the heart of the Jewish experience and turns teaching into song. When it works, and it doesn't always, we begin to think as a Jew, sing as a Jew, and come alive as a Jew.

- A nice idea, but I seriously doubt that's the way it happens. Most services are dull and uninspiring. The words are either in Hebrew which I don't understand or in heavy English. I'm more likely to fall asleep than to feel spiritually enlivened.

It's what you bring as much as what is brought.

- I'm certainly not unique. Look at all the empty pews.

They're there for many reasons.

- Name one.

Impatience.

- I don't follow you.

Jews have picked up America's preference for action over contemplation.

Worship is thinking time.

- There are more empty pews in my new synagogue than in my old church.

There's an old saying that when the world catches cold Jews contract pneumonia. But don't exaggerate the empty seats. For what it's worth, in the last decade or so Jews have begun attending services in larger numbers.

- Why?

My guess would be the Arab wars, nuclear warheads, fears of increasing anti-semitism, the instability of family relationships and loneliness; not necessarily in that order. Whenever the times become tense we need reassurance and the security of our roots.

- The problem's motivation. No one ever told me that if I didn't attend services I'd be damned.

children, only bad living conditions and careless parents. Have you read the psychologist, B. F. Skinner?

Yes.

He says we can only do or become what our genetic endowment and our environment allow us to be. He doesn't believe in sin. I agree with him.

Skinner is a determinist who believes Western civilization has encouraged us, to our hurt, in the illusion that we are free moral agents who can, by the exercise of will and determination, modify our behavior. He blames the Biblical religions for this state of affairs, all the do's and don'ts and sin talk. In his view we are not responsible for what we do and so he prescribes, in the cause of mental health, that we abandon what he calls the nonsense of freedom and recognize that there is no sin. We delude ourselves and often make ourselves ill, he believes, when we assume we could have followed some other path.

- I like the idea of no sin.

Skinner became something of a cult figure because he appeals to all those who are ready and eager to explain to anyone who will listen that the triviality of their lives is the fault of their parents or their environment.

- You've gone on at length about conditioning.

Endowment and environment play a role, but it is not the whole story. The Torah reports that God condemned the entire generation which had endured Egyptian slavery to death in the wilderness, and the midrash explains that God did so because their spirit had been broken and diminished by their servitude, so much so that they lacked the initiative and grit pioneers require.

Freedom is certainly not an absolute.

- A schizophrenic isn't in command of himself.

- I'm color blind. I couldn't paint if my life depended on it.

I said there are limits. Freedom is circumscribed within those limits. We can, and do, choose between compromise and principle, between caring for others

and caring for ourselves.

- What chance do slow children have?

Less than your children or mine, but America's history records that in each generation millions of families escaped the slums.

Everything, including freedom, has limits. I can't by any act of will develop talents I don't have, but I can develop these skills with which I am endowed or leave them unshaped. Behaviorists like Skinner liken man to an animal. An animal remains what he was born, forever a creature of instinct. Jewish thought emphasizes that the human animal, a creature of instinct, can become a human being, a creature of sensitivity, who can choose at times to control his appetites and instincts. More than this, the Torah tradition asserts that in the area of moral judgement we should think and act as if there were no limits on our freedom since these are, in fact, fewer than we think and the more practiced and disciplined we become in choosing discipline over indulgence, the greater our freedom of action becomes.

- How does Yom Kippur make this point?

Sin says, "you're responsible," "You can be other than you are," and that's an encouraging thought. When I say 'I have sinned' I am forced to consider the more I should do and can do, and it's that "should" and that "can" which allows me to leave Yom Kippur encouraged. As I confess my sins I recognize I'm not shackled to them. My world becomes gray only when I feel that I can't effect what's happening to me.

- But we never get out from under. Next year's Yom Kippur is already scheduled.

Yom Kippur focuses on growth, not on purity. There are no saints. "There is no man on earth so righteous that he sins not." Yom Kippur suggests to us that what God wants of us is sensitivity, humaneness, moral growth - not perfection.

If He wanted us to be angels He'd have made us angels.

- But what about guilt?

What about it? As with all things in life, there's healthy guilt, a prodding conscience; and morbid guilt, groveling abjectness. Should we deny that we're responsible for the quality of our lives just because some can't handle that responsibility? If it didn't sound like I was playing with words I'd say that the absence of a strong sense of sin is the besetting sin of our age. We have a dozen ready explanations for every failure. Our mothers loved us too much or too little. We grew up on the streets or in the lap of luxury. We've raised excuse-making into an art form and even developed statistics and graphs to make our excuses sound scientific.

- Excuse-making isn't a modern invention. Adam and Eve were already adept at the art.

God does not ask the impossible, but he certainly expects us not to settle for a life of excuses and inaction. I find it suggestive that our founders routed the Jewish experience in an act of conscious choice. God ordered Abraham to leave home or stay. He didn't have to go, but he went. The responsibility to choose growth over compromise is underscored in almost every line of Torah teaching. "See I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life."

- We've moved a long way from worship.

Not really. Worship keeps before us the responsibility of making the best choices of which we are capable. "O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the Lord."

Chapter 11

TRUE AND ENDURING IS THY WORD - OR IS IT?

Saturday night dinner was over and we were sitting on the porch of the lodge, talking over our conversations.

- My father is an architect. I often complained about school work and he'd remind me that a building that isn't solidly based will shift and ultimately collapse. I've thought about his little speech a good bit this week. How can I take seriously a message which isn't solidly based. The Bible's a book full of fairy stories. Last year I took an interest in a Bible course. The Noah story turns out to be an Israelite redo of a well-known Middle Eastern myth. In the original story the gods use a flood to punish earthlings whose noisy activities have disturbed their royal slumbers and the hero is saved because he was good looking and a goddess took a shine to him. I was impressed by the skill with which the Israelites transformed the original myth into a saga which reinforced their conviction that those who live honorably need not fear that God will abuse them. In Genesis God decides to destroy mankind because of the world's wickedness and Noah is saved because he is a righteous man. The Genesis version makes an important point, but it's a myth. There was no Noah and no Ark, and I don't understand how anyone can credit as scripture a book which is full of such fancies.

Stories convey ideas which logic and philosophy cannot express. Moreover, you must recognize that ancient Israel didn't consider these materials as sacred in the same way pre-modern Christians and Jews did. There was no Bible in what are called Bible days. The myths of creation and the flood were well-known and trusted stories, but they were not yet accepted as revelation. Nowhere in the Noah chapters is the claim that God had revealed the facts about the flood. That claim was advanced only much later when piety turned the whole Torah into God's

speech.

- Why was such a story left in the Torah?

There was no reason not to. It had become part of the repertoire of the chanters and storytellers who recited to Israel the beloved legends about the beginning of the human race. The Torah's editors did not define their task as editing out all those portions of their people's myth and history which were not specifically claimed to be God's words.

They brought together that literature which was known and revered. It was only much later that the idea became popular that the whole Five Books of Moses had been dictated by God to Moses.

Even if I accept your argument about the Torah's origins and the value of stories - myths, I've still got a problem with the value of Torah. The text is full of contradictions. Take the Noah chapters: some sentences indicate that the animals came into the Ark in pairs, in other places we're told they came in groups of seven. It's a small thing, but it raises for me a big question: how can there be a special message, a true message, in a book which contains contradictions?

You raise a serious issue. The Bible's contradictions involve fundamental principles, not just detail. An example: a sentence in the Ten Commandments suggests that there may be other, to be sure, inferior gods besides the one God. "You shall have no other gods before Me"; while Deutero Isaiah makes the categorical statement: "Before Me no other god was formed; and after Me none shall exist." How right was the Biblical concept of monotheism? Another example: another sentence in the Ten Commandments suggests that guilt clings in a family passing down from father to son: God will "visit the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation." On the other hand, the prophet Ezekiel insists: "a son shall not share the burden of his father's guilt."

- You've made my point, not answered it.

As I said, Biblical man didn't have a Bible. He cherished a body of sacred learning, law and liturgy - some oral, some written down - which was gradually shaped into texts and subsequently canonized as Scripture. This body of material was prized for many reasons, and explained to the community by priests and sages who defined its implications for many reasons. No one researched these texts for doctrinal consistency since they were known to those who lived within a coherent culture. When it came time to organize these materials into texts, these changed with this work, wisely gave more weight to the reverence and popularity of a passage than to its logical consistence with other portions of the anthology they were creating. Nor were they at all abashed by the idea that a concept and its opposite might be true. Life isn't neat. Human nature and the societies humans create are ripe with inescapable contradictions.

My sister carried her Confirmation Bible at her wedding. She said it made her feel that God was there. Talismans have their value, but the Bible clearly isn't God's word. How did people ever get the crazy notion that it was The Truth?

Truth is as truth does. The Bible helped catalyze Western civilization. It contains ideas which enable the West to free itself from the limiting and all-pervasive conditioning of the pagan world. I've already suggested to you that the Biblical vision cleared the way for modern science.

Yet, the religious have always tried to impede science. The Church forced Galilee to recant and our fundamentalists want to get out of the public schools.

Nevertheless, I'll stick by my statement. In the pagan world the gods were seen as animating spirits within all the phenomena of nature. There was a sun god, a moon god, river gods. Each god went his or her own way and did their thing. Judaism thought of God as creator of all that is. In this perspective nature was no longer an accumulation of gods busy at being gods but a natural universe full of objects which can be studied. Pagans were afraid to study nature, fearing that by so doing they would incur divine wrath. Moreover, gods by definition are

unknowable, they cannot be studied. Those can be studied, the gods cannot.

- For me the Bible's great advance is the Shema. Racism is mankind's greatest curse and monotheism gave the lie to all master race theories. I'm an old civil rights-nik, for me the Bible's greatest sentence is, "Have we not all one Father, has not one God created us all?"

Don't minimize the other side of that coin, the Bible's unremitting attacks on idolatry. Idolatry is the arrogance of certainty and we've still got plenty of that about.

- The Bible can be an idol. I've watched as preachers wave the Book as they talk of proof of whatever argument they're making.

Some of the cautions the rabbis cultivated grew out of their recognition that the ultimate meaning of any text remains shrouded in mystery. Any reading must be tentative: "My thoughts are not your thoughts. . . for as the Heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My thoughts than yours."

The Bible's spare style seems almost deliberately chosen to underscore this approach. More is left unsaid than explained. There are few descriptions and fewer explanations of motivation. In the famous story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, we aren't told why God decided to test Abraham, what Abraham thought about God's decision, anything about Isaac's feelings, where they were when God made His demand, what Abraham felt during the three-day journey. Whenever I read this chapter and others of equal power, I feel the text challenging me to understand its message.

- Are you sure that anything's really there?

I can prove it. The Torah is read through, as you know, in an annual cycle. Every week for the last two thousand years the designated section of the Torah has been read in every synagogue and on each occasion every congregation found some message for its situation. If the word miracle has any meaning, it applies to Scripture. Can you think of any other work which has had this capacity to be unceasingly relevant and insightful?

- I'd argue that Jews have read relevance, their ideas, into the text rather than read the text to find there God's ideas.

Undoubtedly, that was sometimes the case, but the text had to be the starting point.

- You don't really believe God had anything to do with the Torah?

I believe that Moses and others perceived some of the meaning God intended them to and set it down, that it's available to those who persevere, and that these meanings have proven their worth over and over again by providing an intellectually and spiritually liberating understanding of the world and man's place in it.

- The Torah is just a book, like any other.

You sound like an academic colleague who enjoys reading the Bible as literature. He calls the Deuteronomic historian a master storyteller, "Homer's equal"; but he insists that "to claim more is absurd." "How can you call divine a book which contains an outdated science, a record of a six-day creation, and laws which require adulteresses to be stoned and witches burned?"

- Precisely.

Then how do you explain the hold the Bible has exerted on so many people's deepest feelings? No other classic has ever commanded such veneration or catalysed such a radical transformation of cultural values.

- The Bible must have had a good press agent.

The Bible was written in an obscure Near Eastern dialect - Hebrew was spoken by only a small fraction of the people of the area. There are no records of any major publicity, missionary, campaign. It was the Bible itself, not any hoop-la, which commanded it to the world. You can't even argue that, like the Koran later, its text was popularized by conquest.

- Our prayerbook this morning included the sentence: "The Torah of the Lord is perfect." I know it's from a psalm, poetry, but it's also a lie. You've talked of the contradictions.

Finish the phrase: "The Torah of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul."

The Torah's perfection lies in its invigorating spiritual power. The mystery of the Torah, its divinity, is the ability of this Iron Age text to stimulate Space Age minds.

- Preachers twist texts to make their point.

Some do. Most don't. Remember that when the Psalmist spoke of Torah as perfect, he was referring to the living faith or, rather, his understanding of its teaching, not of a book. Just as he did so, we should interpret each portion in our understanding of the spirit of the living religion.

- I'd bet our Martian couldn't make some of the connections you've made between the Torah portion and your sermon.

Of course not. He'd know only the bare text. My text refracts the depths and delights added to it by three thousand years of associations.

- You're reading in, not reading out.

Simple deductive logic isn't the only tool we possess to explore a text's meaning. Imagination has a legitimate role to play in this process.

- You simply put there what you want to find there.

You make the art of commentary sound like deliberate chicanery. It's not. The rabbis revered the Torah and would never have deliberately interpreted the text in a way they felt to be illegitimate. They were devoted Jews who believed that the Torah was God's word, not a self-serving class of ecclesiastics out to protect and preserve their privileges. It is through the process of continuous commentary that the river of our living faith has been able to remain refreshing to us.

- Commentary piles on. The Bible's just another classic.

It's a classic which has proven to be an unceasing and compelling source of inspiration. Try to put your determined realism aside for a moment and see of Jewish thought. You'll learn which texts have been seminal and which have tended not to have as rich a history.

that very special power. The Bible provides us an approach to the realm of meaning which lies behind our world of familiar, but never fully understood, experiences.

- Explain yourself.

Philosophers as well as poets acknowledge that beside or behind the world which our senses recognize, there is another world, a world that lies deeper, the world where there are ultimate truths. The sky is part of space, empty, yet filled with energy; of fixed dimension, yet infinitely expanding. The Torah, like the sky, is at first glance an attractive and thought-provoking text which can be read through in a given number of hours, but there's wisdom there which cannot be mined by a single reading. I've studied Torah all my life and almost always I've found a new idea, an insight of value.

- We took a beach vacation sometime ago and, unfortunately, it rained every day. I read through the few paperbacks we had and then picked up the only other book in our room, the Gideon Bible. I read it from cover to cover. I liked some parts. Much of it was downright boring. It wasn't a painful experience, some of the images are powerful, but I didn't get any earthshaking insights.

Like the Martian, you read the bare text. You read Torah without the envelope of the larger Torah, the whole Jewish tradition, without the overlays of wisdom which add geometrically to our benefit. The bare text is just that, bare of the wisdom invested in it by a hundred generations.

- I haven't time for all those commentaries, Rashi, Ibn Ezra, you rabbis are always quoting. Besides, they're certainly out of date.

Yes, if you mean unaware of the latest in archeological or from critical research, they're medieval; but they're rich in insight into the human condition. If you don't want an older commentary, read modern ones. There are some good ones which will provide you what a quick read can't, a useful perspective, how, when, where, why the text first appeared; what role the text has played in the development of Jewish thought. You'll learn which texts have been seminal and which have tended not to have as rich a history.

- I thought everything in the Bible's important.

Not really, at least not for those whose interest is in Torah. Deborah sang a great victory song when her armies defeated the Canaanites. Historians and linguists are delighted by it because it's one of the few earliest literary documents in the collection and tells us a good bit about how the Israelite tribes were organized during the years when they first came to prominence in Palestine. On the other hand, there's not much of spiritual value in these verses. The poem's god is a war god, praised for his might rather than for any other attribute, the god of the tribes rather than the god of all peoples. Not surprisingly, this poem has never been included in our liturgy.

But it's all called Scripture.

Not by us. Scripture is a Latin term popularized by the Church. What they call Scripture we call Tanak, an acronym for the three divisions into which the sages divided the Biblical canon, T = Torah, N = Neviim, the prophets, K = Ketuvim, the writings. Jews have never assumed that all the books of the Bible are equally sacred. Only the Torah is kept in the Ark.

- But the Five Books of Moses are deemed sacred - revealed.

Yes, by rabbinic Judaism. I prefer sacred to revealed since all these chapters have been revered, but not all have always been treated as revealed.

- You told us the story of how Moses was astonished at what Akiba found in the Torah text. You said Akiba insisted that the apparent meaning of a text was only one of its many meanings, that each word, each letter, even the way a letter was formed suggested other truths. Moses must have felt Akiba's explanations were as contrived as I sometimes feel about a sermon.

Reason can take us only so far into the meaning of life. At some point informed imagination must take over. Research has shown that scientific discovery rarely takes place by a steady process of logical investigation. At some point in the process, the investigator suddenly gets an idea. He's inspired. We'd be

foolish and short-sighted to dismiss out of hand imaginative commentary by informed minds. In Akiba's case, his imaginative explanations shaped rabbinic Judaism.

- That's awfully close to saying: believe what's absurd.

Not so. I'm saying trust both sides of your mind. I'm saying reason can be a stultifying straight-jacket and that the imagination can sometimes liberate ideas which could be exposed in no other way.

- You sound more and more as if you believe in revelation. I can't take voices from outer space seriously.

Don't identify revelation with a literal reading such Biblical phrases as: "and the Lord said to . . ." or the conventions of the movies in which a bass voice booms out of the clouds, light rises in the background, and everybody "knows" this is God talking. Revelation suggests mental and imaginative process which, to a degree, we've all shared.

- I seem to remember that the Torah describes thunder, lightning and horn-blowing on Mount Sinai.

That was a conventional way of saying, 'pay attention, this is important.' But what was important was the words which were apprehended, not the fanfare which annourced them.

- Define revelation.

Revelation is catching sight of what is normally hidden from view because of our preoccupation with the world of everyday tasks. Revelation is an emergence into civilization of truth or beauty never before available, the breaking out of the hidden into the known. New ideas do come into our consciousness from unsuspected levels of awareness and in unexpected ways. You puzzle over a research problem and then one day a series of ideas fall into place. Some call it intuition, others inspiration, others revelation. My point is that what Jews call revelation is out of the ordinary only in the truly dramatic consequences of the truths which were apprehended.

- How's revelation different from falling in love?

In many ways it isn't. People who work together or simply have fun together sometimes unexpectedly find that friendship has become love. A new reality has emerged, depths of feelings have come into play, and often neither person really knows how it happened.

- I hike a lot, and most times I simply work up a good sweat, but sometimes as I walk over a field or follow a trail I suddenly sense a beauty, a power, I had not felt before. It's as if I'd suddenly tuned in to a different frequency.

- You're talking about intuition, what I feel in a bridge game when I know I should play a certain card. Sometimes I'm right and I tend not to remember all the times it didn't work out. We all get and tell stories about some sudden inspiration, but our intuition may lead us into serious mistakes. There were "true" prophets and "false" prophets. In terms of prediction, I suppose the "true" prophets were simply luckier. The prophets whose speeches are included in the Bible seem not to have had any better record in predicting the future than others. They're included because of the power of their ideas. "True" prophets were concerned and sensitive individuals who had thought long and hard about God, man, justice, and politics, and who found or "saw" ideas of particular force and consequence. False prophets found or "saw" insignificant or meaningless ideas. Our message is a miracle not because it came to us through prophets but that the message has made such remarkable and sense that it laid the groundwork for all of Judaism. The ultimate test was the importance of the message.

We learn some things through hard thinking, step-by-step logic, days of preparation and testing. We learn other things unexpectedly when an arc sparks between the active mind and the deeper levels of reality. A scientist may have a brainstorm. When the burdened soul touches the life force, God, and finds strength flowing into itself that, too, is revelation. When the mind wrestles with the con-

ditions of our lives and suddenly the pieces fall together and fresh, strong ideas replace conventional wisdom that, too, is revelation. A poet's ear may catch the sounds of the subterranean stream of meaning which is always there but which most of us never hear. I call such a passage from one level of understanding to another revelation. Certainly, the experience has been too broadly shaped for us to discount it.

- Sparks may fly without any real illumination. I'm thinking of the brain storms of the mad scientist.

As I said, there were true prophets and false prophets. Some prophets spoke gibberish, others like Jeremiah, Jesus or Mohammed spoke ideas which millions find compelling.

- How did people know who to trust?

There's no sure test, but somehow you can feel when an idea is right. There's an immediacy and a simplicity to it which makes you say why didn't I think of this before.

- Then revelation isn't limited to the will and words of God?

Socrates had a daimon who whispered truths in his ear and many of our best scientists have testified that they found their way in a sudden and unexpected way. God is the source of meaning. All insight represents God disclosing to us something of Himself.

- Imagination, intuition and insight can lead us on a merry chase to nowhere. My research associate had a "flash" and lost a year of work trying to prove his intuition. The idea didn't fly.

Not all flashes prove out, but his experience doesn't disprove that this is the way truth often emerges from the depths.

- I still can't conceive of God speaking to anyone.

The Torah uses speech to define a far more complex process for which the ancients had no term. Those who had this experience had no option but to use a

human attribute to describe the breaking through process. Today we use more conventional terms like insight or intuition, but we're no closer to fathoming or explaining the experience.

- I paint, sometimes before I put any paint on the canvass. I don't know how it gets there or how to describe the process which put it there. I've no problem with intuition or inspiration, or even revelation, but what I have felt is a private experience and the Bible claims that thousands heard God at Sinai and instantly recognized the value of the new ideas. As a description of inspiration, the Sinai story is, to say the least, misleading.

Sinai was not as broadly broadcast as you make it out to be. Actually, the text indicates that the assembly heard only the first word or two of the revelation and then were so frightened by the experience that they asked God to use Moses as an intermediary. I read the detail of an opening public statement as a device to underscore the reliability of the message that was received. It was a way of saying: this is God, not Moses, talking. A new message was at stake and it was crucial that its source be seen as in God rather than a fallible human, Moses

- If someone came up to me and said: "God told me" this or that, I'd suggest he see a psychiatrist.

I would, too. We're not Iron Age Jews. We've read Freud. We know about the sub-conscious and the two sides of the brain. We take for granted that speech over the centuries, but it still seems to me that what you call the Torah's compelling power says more about your needs than about the book itself. Haven't you

- If my grandfather could have heard this discussion he'd have said, you're Jews projected onto or into the Torah what we needed to find there? Isn't it bright but your learning only complicates what's simple. You haven't explained because Jews are accustomed to locating their special message in the Torah that Sinai any better than the Torah did with the words: thus says the Lord. Why not we continue to find it there? We expect wisdom and, being inventive, found it. leave well enough alone?

Maybe, but then how do you explain how that special sense of holiness came originally to be associated with this book?

Because we're twentieth century creatures who think in analytic terms and take for granted the Bible's language.

- Your grandfather was raised in a different culture than ours and, for better or worse, we can't take our pieties as simply as he did.

- I still don't see how you can treat the phenomenon of revelation analytically and read the Bible critically and still revere the text as inspired.

Light is both a wave of energy and a cluster of active particles, and science has discovered that it is impossible to measure those two properties simultaneously. I've come to analogize Torah to light. If you look at the Torah and see only the text you will not hear the voices within. If you look at the Torah and see only the word of God you will not see the seams, the editings and contradictions.

Every week I handle two Torahs: a printed Hebrew text which I keep in my library and in which I annotate in the margins, and the Torah scroll which I read as part of a sacred ritual and which I wouldn't dream of marking up. I handle my library text seriously, but unceremoniously. I seek in it the history and culture of ancient Israel. I make notes. I erase. I handle the Torah scroll reverently and before and after reading from it I speak a blessing which offers heartfelt thanks to God for the gift of His Instruction. I sense in that Torah Israel's special and surprising message for me and my times.

- No one will argue that the Bible has played a major role in Jewish life over the centuries, but it still seems to me that what you call the Torah's compelling power says more about your needs than about the book itself. Haven't Jews projected onto or into the Torah what we needed to find there? Isn't it because Jews are accustomed to locating their special message in the Torah that we continue to find it there? We expect wisdom and, being inventive, found it.

Maybe, but then how do you explain how that special sense of holiness came originally to be associated with this book?

In many ways the miracle of Sinai is not that God spoke - the deeper meanings are always there and people in all cultures have sensed some of these imperatives - but that a whole people responded to this new message and were prepared to shape their future around it. The tradition, with good reason, uses two terms for revelation, "the giving of Torah" and "the acceptance of Torah" and it is the latter which is the cornerstone of Jewish history, the founding miracle.

- I'm beginning to think of you as a closet mystic.

I've never hidden the fact. There have been times when I suddenly recognized that what I or another had said had the ring of truth, not the truth of text books, common sense or experience, but an ultimate and irreducible truth. I believe Israel sensed that power in the Torah and that this fountain of living waters is the enlivening source of our faith.

The sun was disappearing. It was time for Havdalah. The brief moment between sundown and sunset on the Sabbath, according to our mystics, is a bewitching time particularly appropriate to miracles and mysteries, so I closed with a favorite line from The Zohar. "The Torah stories are the garments of God's wisdom. This is why David prays: 'Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things out of Your Torah,' namely, that which is beneath the Torah's garments."

We watched the sun set. We sang the folk tune which encourages Elijah to hasten to us with the news that the Messiah is on his way. As we sang I hoped some of the singers were sensing the mystery of a hopeful world, if not of God.

- We're apes.

We're human apes.

- You're saying the same thing.

Not so. To speak of us as apes is to emphasize our animal ancestry and make-up. If we're apes we're creatures ruled by instinct and it follows that strict

Chapter 12

IS MAN THE MESSIAH?

A lazy Sunday morning is a time when conversation turns naturally towards the philosophical. Today was Sunday. Someone suggested that since religions exist to satisfy specific human needs, we would do well to examine human nature.

- We're mortal. Three score years and ten about does it for most of us.

- That doesn't say much.

- Death explains religion. We don't want to die, so we invent myths and rites that give us the illusion that the grave is not the end and that another life awaits us beyond the pearly gate.

Death puzzles and disturbs everyone, but it's not our only profound anxiety and perhaps not the most disturbing; we worry about relationships, feelings and, most of all, the purpose of it all, are our efforts really worth the effort. Religions exist to help us overcome paralyzing doubt and to give us some confidence in all these areas.

- Explain to me something. We're all made the same way and have the same needs. Why, then, are there different religions, each offering different explanations and confirming different values?

Consciousness always bears the imprint of culture. From birth a child is conditioned by his environment whose values come to seem natural to him and any religion which speaks to him must speak in terms he understands and reflect his special condition. Human nature also always bears the impress of culture which is why philosophers answer the question, what is man, in terms of their cultural biases.

- We're apes.

We're human apes.

- You're saying the same thing.

Not so. To speak of us as apes is to emphasize our animal ancestry and make-up. If we're apes we're creatures ruled by instinct and it follows that strict

rules and strong restraints are necessary to check our predatory instincts. To speak of us as human apes is to suggest that our instincts are controllable by will and wisdom, our humanity. Those who like this view generally argue that creating a loving and caring environment which will allow our human potential to grow and assert itself must be the key political effort. Given a decent chance, people will be decent. What's needed are imaginative programs of social reform.

- Who's right?

If the world's wise men were polled I'm afraid we would discover that most of them would vote for the less flattering proposition. Our world has rarely known peace and has learned that generosity of spirit is usually an erratic impulse, so those who look at the world without flinching tend to see us as undependable creatures who need to be kept in line.

- Not hard to see why. We've been fighting and killing each other ever since Cain murdered Abel.

In power liberators become oppressors and revolutionaries become tyrants. The early Christians applauded Jesus' pacifism by going on bloody crusades, and Ghandi's followers now honor his belief in non-resistance by establishing an atomic arsenal. Again and again human beings prove themselves short-sighted, cowardly, close-minded, greedy, prejudiced or worse. History certainly makes melancholy reading.

- You sound like the little man in Steig's cartoon, crouched in a box, saying to himself: "People are no damn good." Actually, I know a lot of fine people. I like to think I'm one myself.

History makes melancholy reading because historians, like journalists, have tended to write about the dramatic and wars and assassinations are drama - all the tragedy that's fit to print. Few history books describe teachers and their classes or the love which is shown every day inside most families. I'm convinced that the real history of the human race hasn't yet been written. There's

native decency. What used to be called original sin, the all-too-evident perversities of human nature, are not genetic endowment but the unhappy result of broken homes, poverty and racism. If everyone had enough there would be no reason to steal. If everyone was loved, no one would build a hard shell around his soul.

A fraternity brother was caught stealing. He came from a rich family and had plenty of money. He told us he stole because it was a thrill. He needed to live dangerously.

- He's an exception. Most thieves steal out of need

- Or to sustain a drug habit.

- That's a need.

When Adam and Eve were in Paradise they had everything they could possibly need, but they found a way to spoil things. It's a mistake to explain away all anti-social behavior. Quirks, perversities and ambition, are only a few of the motives which determine behavior in ways which have little to do with justice and economics.

- How does Judaism describe our nature?

Some of our texts describe us as little lower than the angels, and others emphasize that we are not angels, "There is no one on earth so righteous that he sins not." A favorite rabbinic construct describes human nature as embracing polar energies, one generous and loving, the other competitive and demanding, both innate and inescapable. The human animal can become a human being but can never put aside his animal nature. The human being can always improve himself but never shed his instincts and emotional makeup. That's why in the past most of our teachers rejected the idolizing of any hero, even Moses, no one is perfect; and why today we reject doctrinaire humanism. Human actions are always of complex motivation and so do not provide a certain enough measure to be the basis of any meaningful ethical standards.

a great deal of good in people which is lost forever because we don't notice it.

- Steig's wrong when he says that people are no damn good, but the romantics are equally wrong when they say people are basically good, that we're born innocent, energetic but malleable, and that the cruelty people exhibit is the result of the pressures of a misshapen society. We're not apes and we're not angels. We're humans. The question is not are we by nature good or bad, we're full of contradiction, but how much do we do with our endowment. There are no born saints. We all have moments of anger. At times we act on impulse. There are unconscious as well as conscious motives in all we do. The test is to live gracefully and usefully, and to make the best of the potential which is ours. Character is an achievement, hard-earned and hard to sustain, not a natural endowment.

Exactly. The very name by which we call ourselves expresses what you've been saying. Jacob was first called Israel after he wrestled the long night with an angel, with his fears, and was not thrown. Israel means "he who struggled with powers divine." The myth, incidentally, does not indicate that Jacob won that struggle, only that he was not defeated. We can't fully transcend our instincts, a truth the Bible drives home by portraying the faults and failings of our founding fathers as well as their accomplishments. Noah has many virtues, that's why he is saved, but he's given to drink. Abraham gives in to Sarah's demand that Hagar be driven away. Jacob schemed to gain Esau's birthright. The patriarchs were flawed, but they also had the strength to do many fine things - like any of us.

You spoke of a poll of the world's wise men. I think if you polled only our generation you'd find us less pessimistic than they seem to have been. Most people, I'm sure, would agree that it's the injustices of society and the cruelties and ignorance of the people who form his world, the unhappy experiences of childhood, which ultimately block and distort the natural expression of a child's

- If we're by nature creatures full of contradictory drives we'll never resolve our problems.

Utopia is, as the name implies, U-topus, no place.

- You mean we're consigned to frustration?

- But not necessarily to violence and war. The world was not created as paradise. There will always be challenge. That doesn't worry me as much as our impatience does. Most of us want solutions and the more our reforms fail to accomplish what they seem to promise, the more radical become our demands and the more willing we become to attempt final solutions. Frustrated idealism leads many into terrorism or tyranny as we make desperate efforts to impose a new order on the old.

- You're talking about the Gulag State.

And the Cultural Revolution and the Red Brigade and every ideology which has ceased to worry whether its means and materials are moral. I'm suggesting why Judaism has so often praised that rarely practiced virtue, humility. Humility is the ability to say, 'I could be wrong.' When we say omniscience belongs only to God, we're also saying that every ideology and every religion contains at best a partial appreciation of truth and so cannot justify immoral means to achieve its goals.

You say there will always be problems. What about the promise of a time when "the lion and the lamb shall lie down together and a little child shall lead them." That's in the Bible.

It's in the book of Isaiah in a portion where the prophet describes a period called "the End of Days", a technical term in Biblical Hebrew for an era after the human condition, as we know it, has ceased, when God will create another world and people it with a breed of humans whose nature will differ from ours, they will possess "a new heart and a new spirit", and presumably no libido.

- That's a wild idea. Life here will come to an end some day when the sun explodes; but I can't imagine God repopulating this world with angels.

The ancients believed that there had been worlds before this one and there would be a series of worlds after it. At some time in the future our world would end in a Day of Judgment and then God would repopulate the earth with a new and better breed.

- It will never happen.

Agreed, but then our ancestors felt the constraints of human nature more intensely than we do. Our technical achievements have given us a feeling they never had, that we can change our world for the better.

- I'm an optimist. I believe the world's on the brink of a major breakthrough. It's not only industry and technology. For the first time we're beginning to understand the mind. We're going to be able to treat and, I hope, eliminate anti-social behavior.

- That's brainwashing.

- We already treat some depressions successfully with drugs.

I've always looked on messiah talk as hoping against hope. It seems to me that we don't need the messiah anymore because we have good reason to be sanguine about the future. Because of our machines, man's no longer a two-legged pack animal. Medicine reduced the dangers of birth and infancy and of early death. The standard of living of hundreds of millions of people has been radically improved. We don't have to wait for a messiah to create the good life for us, we can do it ourselves.

- Things don't provide happiness.

- Don't kid yourself. Prosperity helps. There's no joy in poverty.

You're right about the messiah. As industry, medicine, and prosperity changed the conditions under which people lived, the children of those who worked in the mines and sweat shops went to college and began to live infinitely more expansive lives. They looked on life differently than their parents. They believed in change. They were their own proof that human nature can be changed for the better. Professor Higgins's determination to transform Liza Doolittle

from street girl into a lady is the perfect symbol of man's new confidence in himself.

- They must have seen the price of progress. Didn't they read Dickens?

London slums and company towns in the coal fields of West Virginia were the places they had left and which their children would never see. Hard work was the key. Readers doted on Horatio Alger success stories and it became an article of faith that the prosperous had earned their privilege and that the drunken cruelties of slum life were the result of poverty and ignorance and would give way as the many took advantage of their opportunity.

- Were they really that naive?

They proved their own beliefs. They had worked hard and look at the changes for the better it had made in them.

But we're talking about robber barons and bankers who thought nothing of foreclosing on farmers who had suffered a bad crop.

We're not given to looking critically at ourselves. In any case, the new confidence based on material and mechanical success was not limited to the wealth. It influenced many who had a sensitive social conscience. The nineteenth century was the age of the social visionary - Owen, Saint Simon, Fourier, Tolstoy, Kropotkin, men who were convinced that the perversions of human behavior which they saw all about them would be eliminated as prosperity and planning made possible a non-coercive and just social order. Almost all of these visions were fueled by the naive feeling that the human was by nature good and that anti-social behavior was the result of the diseases of poverty, ignorance and the unjust distribution of the world's goods. Once society was properly reformed, our innate decency would again be expressed. Much of the scandal that Freud created with his research into the dark corners of the mind suggested that it would not be so easy, if it was at all possible, to effect this plan for the betterment of the human race.

- A baby is an innocent.

Freud's studies into infant sexuality and aggression suggested that innocence is not a term which is appropriate to a baby's emotional system. We are not born innocent. We are born with animal instincts and with the capacity to sublimate these instincts into useful activity.

- Slums and poverty do twist the spirit.

True, but that doesn't prove that even an ideal society can guarantee that every child will grow up to be a loving, sensitive and cooperative adult.

- The problem with these visionary plans lay in the fact that they paid too little attention to education. If you put people who have never learned to live in a city, illiterates, into decent housing they're still not able to manage the city's pressures, and they may not be able to maintain their homes or their lives. Education is the key. Knowledge gives us control over our lives. No one can manage in our complex society without being able to read, write and keep a budget - and education takes time.

An educated person is an educated person, not necessarily a good person. Three of four death squads, Einsatzgruppen, sent out by Himmler to eliminate the Jews of Eastern Europe were commanded by men who had earned graduate degrees in German's deservedly famous universities. If those with college degrees no longer get drunk on Saturday night in the local bar it's because they get drunk in somewhat more elegant surroundings.

- I remain convinced that when we provide an open, sympathetic and reasonable environment, children will grow up without developing the hard shell, the defenses, which shut others out and shrivel the soul. Education can teach us how to organize more humane and more flexible institutions and these, in turn, will incubate gentler and kinder people. The kibbutzim are in many ways my model.

The kibbutz is now the world's longest-lived voluntary communitarian experiment and studies of its children indicate that while the shares of prosperity

and activity, the sense of trust and community which the kibbutz at its best provide does lessen the child's need to develop competitive skills, it does not eliminate the innate contradictions or complexities of his emotional nature. The kibbutz child can be as temperamental or malicious as his counterpart elsewhere. He has the same needs for a compelling vision and can be as attracted to the more bizarre cults as other youngsters. A rough childhood can harden the shell and a loving home often makes it easier for us to express our feelings, but however we're raised we are, and never cease to be, human beings. As a student wrote me on a Confirmation examination where I had asked for an explanation of each of the Ten Commandments, "Honor your father and your mother - this means that you should respect your parents because they raise you to the best of your ability."

- You seem to be saying there's nothing for us to do but sit back and watch each generation repeat the mistakes of every other generation. Where's our hope?

To say that we can't shed our instincts, that the contradiction of human nature will never be fully resolved, and that our lives will always be full of problems, is not the same as saying that we can't improve in what we have or who we are. Prosperity and political reforms have remarkably raised the nation's standard of living. Literacy and opportunity are on the rise in most parts of the world. We have limitations, but also strengths. After each of the first days of creation, the text in Genesis adds: "God saw what He had done and it was good." When Adam is created, the text elaborates this happy judgment, "God saw what He had done and it was very good." Commentators took this to mean that everything in nature, including the various animal species, are and remain what God intended them to be while man - Adam stands for all of us - is left unfinished. Animals are. A horse will always be a horse. We become. The human animal can become a human being. Personality and character depend in part on what we're given, our genes, but, perhaps to a greater extent, on the wit, will, and wisdom

with which we organize our lives.

- But you don't see any end to our problems.

It's only natural to want our problems to end. That's why children have always believed in fairy queens and adults in messiahs. But I'm afraid there's no such magic and I don't find it uncomfortable to think of life as an unremitting challenge. Happiness to me includes the joy of measuring up well to demanding and important tasks, the simcha shel mitzvah. It's quite an honor to be "a partner with God in the work of creation," part of the process we call civilization.

- But not enough. Work's a necessity, not a virtue.

During a complicated operation every talent of a surgeon, every part of his being, is alive, and so is every talent of an artist during a concert.

- I'm talking about feeling - love, creativity, delicious experiences - Thoreau at Walden Pond - satisfactions which have nothing to do with work.

- History is a record of human absurdities. Tomorrow the bomb may fall. I don't think the world has too much longer to go. I can't get out of my mind the sub-title Winston Churchill chose 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."

What's your point?

You're offering me weak tea when I need a stiff drink. You've been saying religion's virtue is that it offers a vision, hope. Fine, where is it? I need to dream and you're saying all I can really expect is to be able to cope. You're advocating a commendable steadiness but it's too chastened an attitude for me. I want something more than to be told square my chin, roll up my sleeves, get to work but not to expect that I'll get to the Promised Land.

You've mistaken my meaning. I'm not a stoic philosopher. The stoic doctrine quickly as they come but the day-to-day knowledge that we're where we ought to be, doing what we ought to be doing for and with those we care about.

of Artaraxis, unfeeling resignation, was a Greek, not a Jewish, prescription. When the Greeks were saying, don't care too much, the rabbis were emphasizing that there's joy in doing our duty, "nothing better than that man should rejoice in his works." On Rosh Hashanah we ask God for "a year of happiness," a shanah tova. The Zohar insists "in God's service there is no room for sadness."

- Most work's a bore.

Mine's not, at least most of the time, although every task has routines.

- People work because they have to, not because they want to.

Rabbinic culture tries to heighten our appreciation of often taken-for-granted pleasures and experiences. There was a blessing for each meal, each meeting, each day, each drink, on seeing a beautiful view or a beautiful woman. No satisfaction was to be taken for granted. Happy occasions were not to be piled on top of each other and gulped down, but separated so that each could be separately savored. The Hasidim insisted that it is a mitzvah to banish sadness, "for a heavy spirit causes a narrowing of the spirit," which in turn makes it difficult to love God.

- You can't order away depression.

Happiness is an art and, like all arts, success is never guaranteed and requires practice and judgment. Happiness begins when we accept that life, though it does not have conclusions, does have satisfying moments and fulfilling experiences, and that these are, after all, enough - at least that's the traditional Jewish view. Happiness is a mood, an openness to certain feelings which we develop when we accept life - God's gift to us - for what it is, a short but potentially exciting passage between the dependency of infancy and the dependency of age. The deepest joys are not the unexpected happenings which dissipate as quickly as they come but the day-to-day knowledge that we're where we ought to be, doing what we ought to be doing for and with those we care about.

to believe in some implacable destiny but in the possibilities of human life and my life, "choose life".

- You've been talking of a world which is always full of problems. What about the messiah? Has he really gone the way of so many once churchied ideas?

It seems to me that the idea of a supernatural messiah has run its course. I'm convinced that if we don't handle our problems no one else will.

- Not even God?

God will strengthen our hands, encourage us, remind us that it's possible to avoid a nuclear war, but He won't do it for us. S. Y. Agnon, Israel's premier folklorist, tells a wonderful story about a farmer who herded goats and who became fascinated by an old buck who took to wandering off, sometimes for days, and always returned sporting a wonderfully glossy coat and looking well fed. Puzzled, the farmer 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 back wall. He found himself in Paradise. As you'd expect, he found everything idyllic and he looked around while the goat grazed contentedly. There was only one thing to do. He would return home and bring back his father. Why farm when Paradise is within a day's walk? But when he tried to slide back through the slit in the rock he could not make it so he wrote his father a note which he tied to the goat's horn. In it he told his father to follow the goat as he had done and he'd be led into Paradise. When the farmer saw the buck return without the boy anger and fear seized him, he cursed the goat as a devil and killed it with a single blow. Only then did he notice the note tied to its horn.

- Can we manage? I simply cannot, will not, sit back and say: "I'm not

In modern times a secularized version of the messiah idea emerged. Mankind would be its own messiah. Our own efforts could and would bring about a Messianic Age. The going would be rough at times and exhausting, but progress was taken for granted, and people were confident that some day humanity would build its own Paradise. Faith helps, at least our faith does. I was never taught

- What's knowledge got to do with it?

We have to know when enough is enough, when it's time to work and time to rest, when we should follow one road and not another.

- My brother could use some happiness lessons. He lost his kids in a messy divorce. After working for years for a company he was told one Friday that the company had been sold and he was out of a job. Now he's drawn a wall around himself.

He deserves our sympathy, but he must sense that it's wrong to run up the white flag before we have to. We all get our knocks and if Judaism has any sermon which it preaches over and over to us it's "choose life", don't turn our back on life. Don't be afraid to open yourself up.

- How many times can you take a beating?

I don't know, but I know we have to keep trying. I can't imagine anything worse than saying Kaddish for yourself when you're still alive.

- What would you advise my brother?

I'd give him as a mantra from the Zohar, "There's no day without its night and no night without its day." Stay open. Situations change. I'd talk to him of the joy of being alive in God's world and try to put him in the way of some pleasurable experiences.

- Everything we do ends up as so much dust.

But you can't take away from the feelings I've shared or the fulfillment and elation I've known from time to time. I call myself a "Despairing Optimist", a phrase I borrowed from Rene Dubose who used it to title a regular column in The American Scholar. I simply cannot, will not, sit back and say: 'I'm not going to be a good husband, father, or citizen because there's a good chance whatever I do will be wiped out.' I believe that to stay human I need to keep on working for a better world despite the possibility that I may be building on quicksand - despite the suspicion that someone may push the red button which would trigger a nuclear war. Faith helps, at least our faith does. I was never taught

- I believe in progress. We're no longer cave men. We've increased the food supply and the life span. There's nothing we won't some day be able to do. Look at all our computers, robots and miracle drugs. There'll soon be a cure for cancer and a way to control the aging process.

But no cure for all the conflicting moods of our nature. We can increase the yield of grain per acre, develop new sources of power, limit the disabilities of age - but we can't turn ourselves into angels.

- We can certainly do better for the hundreds of millions who are still caught in the grip of ignorance and poverty.

We must try, but even as we do, remember that every problem we resolve only throws up new problems. The only final solution is the grave. Progress comes at a cost. 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. Every accomplishment raises new problems and requires certain tradeoffs. The higher a country's standard of living, the higher the expectation of the community. The eye is never satisfied with seeing, that's why there will never be a Messianic Age. There's no top, only the climb.

- Give me some hope.

Join the trek.

- What will that do for me?

You'll be part of a great adventure and even if you only make it to a base camp, you'll have had an exciting and rewarding experience.

- You're not offering me as much as your competition.

Which competition?

- Marx and Mao promise me that history is governed by iron laws which guarantee that a liberated mankind will reach the top. The dictatorship of the proletariat is inevitable. They guarantee a vision - a just and peaceful world, or-

ganized by straight-backed, clear-thinking, clear-minded worker citizens who will live openly and cooperatively as class-bound institutions wither away.

I think George Bernard Shaw came closer to the truth: revolutions never lighten the burden of tyranny, they merely shift it from one shoulder to another.

- Rabbi, what do you really offer?

The messianic journey. It is possible to live with meaning and joy in a world without conclusion. Living itself is a joy, particularly if you commit yourself to high ideals and grand values. I'm happy in the work I do when that work is worth doing; in love and in friendship when those I love are open to me; when I give myself over to experiences which touch my soul and satisfy my spirit. Whenever we face challenges worthy of us; do something for another selflessly; involve ourselves with some undertaking that is not self-serving; give of ourselves to those who need us; align ourselves with a useful cause - at that moment we are on the messianic journey, moving like our fathers toward a Promised Land. And there are delicious moments along the way. I've known them and I trust you have, too.

- Sometime ago I sat next to a man on a plane who had worked for fifteen years on a research project he'd never been able to complete. I don't know why he unburdened to me. I was a total stranger, but I won't forget his calm. There was no self-pity. "There are bad moments, but not as much as I thought there would be. I'm satisfied that every lead I pursued will save someone else from turning into that dead end. I won't win a Nobel Prize, but I've helped, and most mornings I enjoyed going to the laboratory. There was excitement in what I was doing.

He's my kind of man. He's savored the joy of the road.

- There's pleasure in less significant activities. I enjoy my stamp collection, playing softball, listening to records. I don't do these things for any serious purpose, yet, I don't consider these activities trivial.

Neither do I. The Sabbath is, among other things, a sign that part of life is to be spent on ourselves. God didn't create us to be drone bees whose whole

life is devoted to the service of the hive. Human beings need to be both careful and carefree.

- And caring.

The bell's rung and I send them into lunch with the quote: "Eat your bread with joy, drink your wine with a merry heart." Audible groans accompanied our breaking up.

They feel at home wherever they are. Their religious never talks about going back home.

- It's also their holy land. The history book says, too.

Actually, it didn't. The history book says, too.

Actually, it didn't. The history book says, too.

- You're quibbling.

WRHS



Israel is not simply the faith and where it all began but the historical home of our people, the Promised Land which God selected for us as a homeland. God commanded Abraham to go to the land "that I will show you." God ordered Moses to lead the tribe back to the land He had promised Abraham. Centuries later, Deuteronomy brought an article promising the exiles in Babylon that God would return them to Jerusalem. Israel remains in our eyes the promised homeland. It's here that the messianic drama will be played out.

- You said you didn't believe in a messiah.

I don't, but a major part of our people's redemptive hopes focus on the Promised Land. The messiah will appear in Jerusalem. Here is where resurrection will take place. Ever since the destruction of The Temple by the Romans Jews have accepted the idea that they lived in exile, a condition of alienation

Chapter 13

THE PROMISE OF LAND

The Sunday paper had carried a detailed account on yet another General Assembly debate over the West Bank which, as always, was less a debate on the merits of the issues than an orchestrated anti-Israel diatribe. We talked about Israel and the United Nations and then the conversation shifted to the broader question of what the Jewish State means to Jews and why many Christians have trouble understanding our feelings.

- They feel at home wherever they are. Their religion never talks about going back home.

- It's also their holy land. Their history began there, too.

Actually, it didn't. Christian history, and ours, began in Syria, Paul's home and Abraham's.

- You're quibbling.

I'm making the point that we don't feel as we do about Israel because it's the location of ancient ruins where King David or Jeremiah once lived. For us Israel is not simply the Bible land where it all began but the national home of our people, the Promised Land which God selected for us as a homeland. God commanded Abraham to go to the land "that I will show you." God ordered Moses to lead the tribes back to the land He had promised Abraham. Centuries later, Deuterocanonical Isaiah brought an oracle promising the exiles in Babylon that God would return them to Jerusalem. Israel remains in our myths the Promised homeland. It's here that the messianic drama will be played out.

- You said you didn't believe in a messiah.

I don't, but a major part of our people's redemptive hopes focus on the Promised Land. The messiah will appear in Jerusalem. Here is where resurrection will take place. Ever since the destruction of The Temple by the Romans Jews have accepted the idea that they lived in galut, exile, a condition of alienation

which would be ended when God brought them back to Zion. For centuries Jews believed a messiah would accomplish their return. In recent times the Zionists decided Jews could go out on their own and set out "to be a free people in our own land", as their new hymn Hatikvah put it.

- And the Christian hope?

Christianity began as a promise of salvation in the afterlife offered to people of many nations. Christianity relates alienation not to the loss of national sovereignty but to original sin. It teaches that redemption consists in accepting a Christ, a Saviour, who died to cancel out that sin. Those who accept the Saviour will know God's favor and spend eternity in Heaven. Classic Christianity emphasizes a spiritual redemption whose benefit is fully realized in Heaven; while rabbinic Judaism contains many similar elements but also emphasizes a down-on-earth redemption whose centerpiece is the Jewish people secure and at peace in Zion.

- What about Jesus' Second Coming? Isn't that a time much like our Messianic Age, a time when peace, prosperity and justice will envelop the world?

Yes, but except in the very early years the Second Coming was a secondary theme. The emphasis was on the sacraments which provide the keys to the kingdom. The Christian hope focused rather more on the heavenly Jerusalem which Jews prayed "next year in (the real) Jerusalem."

- Christians care as much as we do about the problems of the world and work as hard as we do to improve them. I've a minister friend who's quite a political activist and his church is always busy organizing to pass welfare levies or for a peace march.

Christianity has changed over the centuries just as Judaism has. The early Christians were millenarians who believed that the world was coming to an end. Since Judgment Day was near at hand, there was no point in struggling for social

and political reform. When the world didn't end, Christian teachers changed directions a bit and talked more about the redemptive value of faith in a Saviour. The promise was to the individual. One gained Heaven through faith, by remaining constant despite life's trials. Many Christian thinkers separated Caesar's concerns, practical politics, from theirs, the care of man's immortal soul. Medieval Christianity did not encourage the idea that human beings could create a just and stable society on earth. People were told to endure, to have faith, rather than to commit themselves to social or political reform. They would be repaid for their pains in Heaven.

- What about my minister friend and what he calls the Christian social gospel?

He's a new breed. As Western man became more conscious of his power and achievement, he lost the sense of impotence which had for so long dominated his soul and began to feel that he could do something about the dismal economic and political conditions under which he lived. Churchmen, too, sensed the new spirit and increasing numbers began to formulate a new Christian synthesis which gave importance to our role as a partner with God in creating a decent life for all.

- You said that Christianity's efforts didn't focus on place. What about Jonathan Edwards' city on a hill or Calvin's Geneva?

Edwards tried to create a model community and Calvin a righteous community in New England. The places they chose had no previous emotional connection with Christianity. They might have chosen anywhere. For Jews Zion described a specific place, Palestine. Early in this century the British government offered the Zionists Uganda as a national homeland. They refused the offer. Uganda was not Zion and so couldn't unleash our people's spiritual and pioneering energies.

- When I went to The Wall for the first time I suddenly remembered my grandfather saying with a catch in his voice at the end of each Seder, "next year in Jerusalem."

Our attitude toward the Wall makes my point that the hope of redemption rather than historical association determines our attitudes toward Israel. As a wall this pile of stone has little particular beauty nor is it associated with any great Biblical personage. It was originally a buttressing wall raised to permit an enlargement of the plaza on which The Temple was built. We owe a significant part of this particular section to a rather despicable, petty tyrant and Roman puppet, Herod, who suffered from a Napoleonic edifice complex. But the Wall draws Jews because it is all that remains of The Temple compound and The Temple's past and its association with redemption are powerful myths which continue to hold us in their thrall. A few hundred paces south and east of the Wall, in the Valley of Kidron, lie the ruins of the actual walls of David's city. If historical associations were the key to our Zionism, everyone would visit David's city, but hardly anyone does. David's city, despite David's importance, remains an unvisited ruin. The Wall, despite Herod's bad reputation, draws us because it allows us to feel part of Israel's continuing and mysterious relationship with God.

- That explains a conversation I had with the old man, a pious Jew, who was active in all the Zionist groups in town. In 1968, after Jerusalem was reunited, I tried to get him to go and visit the Old City. He said he was now too old to travel that far. Was he disappointed? A bit, but he'd get there, if not in this life then in the next. He talked to me of the lessons he had learned in heder where the rebbe had taught him that the resurrection of the dead would take place on Mt. Zion.

The old myths were old. The first Zionists were non-believers - young radicals. They didn't settle in Palestine because of a messiah they didn't believe in.

- They were more caught up in the myth than they knew. We all are. I told you that in 1901 the British government offered Theodore Herzl Uganda as a national home and the Zionist Congress refused the offer. The diaries and letters of the early pioneers make it clear that they expected Israel not to be just another

nation-state place, Zion. They secularized the old myths but did not deny them. They even used the old rabbinic term, aliyah, going up, Jerusalem is on top of the Judean hills, to describe the decision to immigrate and settle.

- You've been saying that history never stops, that utopia is no place. The idea of a Promised Land seems to me a static theme. It suggests to me that here's the place where we're meant to be and all will be well. The Promised Land sounds suspiciously like the boy and his goat you told us about yesterday.

Our myths did not promise ease in Zion. Entrance into the Promised Land under Joshua marked the beginning of centuries of hard work as the Israelites attempted to conquer the land, protect it from enemies, secure its fertility, and establish prosperous communities. The land was a hard and unyielding place, not a fairy land; cultivable but not magically fertile; home, but not necessarily habitable. Nineteen forty-eight represents a beginning, not a conclusion.

- What about all the milk and honey the Bible talks about?

Understandable hyperbole. The thick forests and cultivable fields of Canaan must have looked like heaven to people who had spent their lives in the dry and rocky wilderness.

Didn't God promise Abraham that this land would belong forever to his descendants?

So He did, but He didn't promise them the right of permanent settlement. They had to be worthy of the land. The national home was private property, God's. Boundary stones were to be raised and respected, but they established only a conditional title. Rent was paid to God in the form of tithes which were used for welfare purposes and the upkeep of the sanctuary. Torah lists God's careful and detailed instructions to Israel about the obligations of tenancy. The land was to lie fallow each seventh year. Trees were not to be cut down for battering rams or scaling ladders. Every city was to have a system of courts and provide

support for the poor. Citizens were to conduct themselves properly at all times. These terms were written into the lease, the covenant, and failure to live up to them could lead to temporary eviction. According to our understanding of history, God exercised this clause twice: in 586 B.C.E. when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, and in 70 C.E. when the city was captured and razed by the Romans.

- God's a more forgiving landlord than I would be. If I had a bad tenant I'd evict him and find another.

Then let's be thankful you're not God. God did not strip His people of the right of tenancy, though he threw them out until they were ready to take proper care of the property. Teshuvah, the Hebrew word for repentance, comes from a verb, shuv, which implies both contrition, a change of heart, and the physical act of returning to one's place. Among the exiles, after The Temples were destroyed, it was an article of faith that the nation's spiritual renewal would eventually lead to the longed-for homecoming. Nineteen forty-eight was important because it proved that the long-held faith had not been misplaced.

Nineteen forty-eight had nothing to do with faith. Israel exists because of international politics, a U.N. vote, and the courage of the Haganah.

That's the realistic view. Our prophets, however, insisted that a nation's destiny depends on the quality of the community's obedience to covenant terms rather than on military or political power.

- Nonsense. Virtue never stopped a tank.

Nations rot from within. Rome had lost its elan long before the barbarian tribes breached her frontiers.

- The stained glass windows in our sanctuary carry Biblical phrases. One fits what you've been saying: "Not by power nor by might, but by My spirit." The older I get the more troubling this idea becomes. Tanks and F-16's aren't everything. We lost out in Vietnam despite our superior equipment because we

lost belief. I don't like to think of Jews as an praying power. I want us to be the world's peacemakers.

didn't have our heart in it; but the "not by power" sentence is categorical and power does corrupt. Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland remain Soviet colonies.

The phrase was spoken by the prophet Zechariah as part of a warning to the first returnees from the Babylonian Exile that they must be patient with limited rights in Jerusalem and not attempt to assert by force their independence from Persian authority. It said: if you try, you'll be beaten, so 'be patient, have faith.'

- Out of context it says something quite different.

Many find comfort in this bold thought. Given the lethal technology we possess, many are frightened, and with good reason, of the national power policies. War is no longer, if it ever really was, an acceptable extension of politics and Zechariah's phrase voices their frustrations and their hope that some radically new approach will be attempted.

- If the State of Israel followed Zechariah's advice there would be no state.

The other side of the coin is that having become, out of necessity, a military power Israel finds itself trapped in all the moral contradictions that power entails. Weapons defend and, as we saw in Lebanon, weapons kill. One of the problems the existence of Israel presents to many sensitive and liberal Jews is that government policies cannot escape the corruptions and contradictions of power. When is a raid or an nuclear reactor justified? What freedom can be given to trust Bank Arabs, many of whom may be security risks? It's no longer so easy for us to be hot angels and our myth of Zion as a special nation has been scarred by the inevitable compromising with moral principle that the government, like any government, has had to make.

The kibbutzim, the Green Line, and the integration of two million refugees are remarkable achievements, but I hated the pictures of the Air Force bombing West Beirut. I don't like to think of Jews as an occupying power. I want us to be the world's peacemakers.

- Israel should do what it can to advance justice and peace, but there must be reciprocity. Israel can't do it alone.

- I wish Israel wouldn't retaliate as she often does.

The holy war the Arab world proclaimed in 1948 hasn't been abandoned. Israel has been since then under the equivalent of permanent seige. At some point you have to use force to defend yourself.

- Violence always leads to more violence.

Passivity encourages the blood lust.

- What about Ghandi?

The British were already questioning the value of India to them and they had a history of fair play. Arab opposition has been adamant. It's based on theology - lands which are once Muslim-controlled must remain under that control - and on precedent - the Crusaders were finally driven out of the Middle East.

- Sometimes we talk and act as if the whole world's against us.

During World War II the Allies refused to bomb the rail lines into Auschwitz though our planes flew regular missions overhead; England kept Palestine's doors shut to refugees, and our own country organized sham refugee conferences. It takes an act of faith to feel that it would be any different another time around. The last decade has seen most Western European nations welcome officials of the PLO and promote peace plans which involved Israel's giving and the Arabs' taking.

- I know that if we don't stand up for our rights no one else will, but I hate bloodshed. War never settles anything. I like the prayer which says: "enable Israel to be a messenger of peace unto the peoples of the earth."

- Israel has been involved in five wars. How many do there have to be?

I don't know. The problem is that the other side thinks it is fighting a holy war.

- Will it ever end?

- France and Germany fought three times in less than a century and now, thirty years later, they're allies in the Common Market.

- I'm not a pacifist. I've been proud of the courage and skill of the I.D.F. I responded to the raid on Entebbe and to the surgical destruction of Iraq's nuclear generation. The first saved lives, the second will save lives; but Masada troubles me; defense is one thing, a cult of military daring another.

- I climbed Masada. It was a broiling summer day and no one else was there. I've never been so alone and in the middle of such palpable silence. On the top I thought of all the centuries Israel has been alone in just this way. It may be a bit sad, but it's not surprising that a beleaguered community should be showing some signs of siege mentality.

- They ought to get over it. The world has changed.

I agree, but not because the world has changed, it hasn't, but because the sense of being beleaguered deadens the spirit. Our command from God is to "choose life", not to build a shell around our spirits out of fear that every hand is raised against us.

- It sometimes seems that way. Look at those lopsided votes in the United Nations. Zionism is the only liberation movement which has been officially condemned.

If choosing life were easy God wouldn't have had to make such a thing about it.

- Help me out. Jews care deeply about Israel but some call themselves Zionists and others don't. I can't get a handle on the distinctions which are being suggested.

- Zionists believe that it's each Jew's duty to settle in Israel.

I call myself a Zionist, but I don't intend to settle in Israel. I look on aliyah as a privilege, not an obligation. As a Zionist I believe that Israel needs the diaspora and we need Israel. Two are stronger than one, and it's good for us to have and share different perspectives on the problems of Jewish life. A person with one eye lacks depth perception.

was a Jewish State.

- I don't believe in the nation state. People should be loyal to humanity, not to governments. Zionism troubles me because it promotes nationalism.

Nationalism has been, and clearly still is, an important and apparently unavoidable way station peoples pass through as they move from cultural isolation and tribal and caste relationships into some more international form of political life.

- Nationalism breeds suspicion and war.

The ties of common language, history and culture are essential to our identity. We need roots and a state provides these. We need to share our feelings and hopes with those whose culture is our own, and the nation-state provides the means. Jingoism is one side of nationalism, but community is the other.

- Since Vietnam I don't trust any government, including my own. Governments are run by governors who, to a large degree, only serve themselves.

You may not like nations, but all political plans are doomed which do not pay attention to national groupings. Americans were slow to learn this lesson because of the wide open spaces and prosperity. We thought all the immigrants would forget their origin and America would be a melting pot, but, as we've seen, ethnicity hasn't disappeared. Peoples don't give up their histories.

You described Zionism as a program of national renewal. I can't see that people change just by being in a state of their own.

But they do. Being outcasts and pariahs for so long had done some ugly things to the Jewish spirit. The ghetto was a slum. Suffering was endemic, so much so that many had come to accept it. Many Jews were idle, never having been able to earn a living, and too shrewd by far, having had to use their wits just to stay alive. Many cringed when a muzhik walked by. Zionism was a program designed to renew the Jewish spirit.

- Then define Zionism.

Zionism is a liberation movement organized by Jews who believe that the renewal of Jewish life, their lives, requires the renewal of the Promised Land as a national home for the Jewish people. Jews in the diaspora have led a marginal existence and Zionists believe that we can develop our cultural heritage naturally and find a place of our own.

- It's hard to see why anyone would oppose this idea, but many did. Why?

There were traditionalists who were convinced that state building was properly the messiah's work, not ours. Some emancipated Jews were afraid that the existence of a Jewish state would give local anti-semites the excuse to say, 'go home, we don't want you here.' Zionists didn't trust emancipation. They did not deny that changes had taken place, but they doubted they would solve the Jewish problem. When Napoleon conquered Europe he enforced throughout the continent many of the ideas of the French Revolution, including the emancipation of Jews, but as soon as Napoleon was defeated the German states locked their Jews up again. Emancipated Jews could now do many things that they had not been allowed to do before, but if the ghetto was gone all kinds of academic and employment quotas had risen in its place. In Europe, the Zionists were convinced, the Jew would never escape anti-semitism.

- I once did a paper on Theodor Herzl. Herzl was in Paris at the time of the Dreyfus Trial and as he watched this blatantly anti-semitic show trial and the attendant mob hysteria, he suddenly realized that Europe's endemic racism was of such virulence that Jews would never be secure. Parties on the Right accused Jews of spreading the cosmopolitan and subversive ideas which undermined patriotism. Leftist parties attacked Jewish clannishness which, they said, made Jews unassimilable. Herzl didn't know the term, but he recognized a Catch-22 situation when he saw it. If Jews assimilated and advanced politically and socially, they incited envy. If they failed to Westernize and remained outsiders, they were willified as aliens and subversives. The only solution in his mind

- If the Torah tradition provided sound ideas, structures and hopes why were these intensely Jewish communities full of stunted and dispirited people? It would appear that Judaism didn't do what you said it could and should do.

More was being asked of Torah than any religious culture can provide. Our way of life prevented the total disintegration of personality and community under the most appalling and unremitting pressures. One of the Zionists' rallying cries was that the Jew had to be gotten out of Europe so Europe could be gotten out of the Jew and Jews could begin to live naturally with the heritage.

- How would being in Israel effect these changes?

The Zionists counted on the cleansing power of a healthy and national culture: Hebrew instead of Yiddish; work with the hoe and spade as well as the pen; new heroes, the Maccabees and Biblical soldiers and farmers to complement the model of a scholar bent over out-of-date books. Different thinkers had different programs - most of them versions of then popular philosophies of human renewal. A. D. Gordon, taking his lead from Tolstoy, said to the Jew: "The sweat of honest labor will remove the corruption of the city. Labor is our cure. Go on the land. Work with your hands. The sun and sweat will leach out of your bodies the poisons of the ghetto." Socialists like Ben Zvi and Borochoy spoke eloquently of the benefits of true community and the healthy environment of a fully communal experience like the kibbutz where labor and benefits are shared. Writers like Ahad Ha-Am sounded like John Dewey when they spoke of a national cultural and academic center whose creative activities would unlock the spiritual energies of an historically creative people and make possible Judaism's free and distinctive development in a context entirely its own.

- What's Jewish in all this?

Everything and nothing. These thinkers took ideas from other cultures, but bound those themes to native traditions. Gordon took the term avodah, which had long signified the act of worship, liturgy, and returned it to its original

meaning, work; work as worship. Borochoy read Amos's attack on the perversities of the wealthy and the evil of economic and social privilege as fundamental socialist thinking. Many of the utopian and reformist ideas which circulated in Europe seemed to be natural extensions of the social and economic justice themes which occupied a significant place in Jewish thought.

- I thought that Israel was created so that the refugees from Hitler's Germany would have a place to go.

Herzl died a half century before Hitler came to power.

- Why didn't Europe's Jew come here? Until 1924 America had no immigration quotas.

Many came until 1924 America passed strict immigration laws. Most of Europe's Jews chose the promise of America over the hardship of Palestine. The Zionists went against the current because they feared that wherever the Jew went, unless he went to his own country, he would ultimately face anti-semitism and be treated as an outsider.

- Not true.

- Not true here, at least for now; but certainly true in countries like South Africa, Argentina and Mexico where many European Jews settled.

- Are you a Zionist?

If you're asking whether I believe anti-semitism will become a major social and political fact in American life, I don't know. It depends on many factors, not the least of which is economic. When times get bad a society looks for scapegoats. Will we be that scapegoat again? I don't know. In many ways the United States is unique. We escaped the unhappy medieval conditioning which poisoned Europe. In Europe we were the only non-Christians. Here there are many minority groups, many potential scapegoats. A few years ago the KKK found it had so many enemies on its hit list, it had to delist the Catholics.

- So what do you mean when you call yourself a Zionist?

First that I believe Jews must not let their fate depend on anyone's good will. Great Britain closed the doors to Palestine precisely when Europe's Jews most desperately needed a haven, and the United States organized refugee conferences which were designed to be without result. Second, that prejudice is not necessarily a thing of the past and that the existence of a national home where Jews can always come is a welcome element in the survival agenda of the world Jewish community. The key positive element in my Zionism is my conviction that the existence of a Jewish state is an essential element in the renewal and continuing development of the Jewish spirit. It seems to me essential in our changeful times for Jewish life to express itself in all the forms of social and cultural activity as well as religion, and this kind of full-bodied development can take place only where Jewish civilization is not limited to a few social agencies and the synagogue.

- Zionism also means the West Bank settlements, an occupying army, the bombing of Beirut and a massive defense budget.

Israel has been invaded four times, yet survives. Energy and resource have had to be diverted to defense. Political mistakes have been made; yet, few other nations have so transformed and improved their environment. Most Israelis came as refugees, but in Israel there are no refugees. Israel's social services are studied and serve as useful and successful models to many peoples. These achievements remain remarkable and, given the circumstances, are really quite remarkable.

- You've not answered my question.

The defense budget is a necessity. At times I've felt Israel over-reacted, but let the country that is without sin throw the first stone. If the Arab states had accepted the United Nations partition resolution in 1947, a Palestinian

State would be celebrating today well over thirty years of independence.

- It's not only the bombing raids and settlements' it's religious coercion of Jews by Jews. As a Reform rabbi you couldn't officiate at a marriage in Jerusalem.

Israel isn't Zion, but I'm encouraged that many in Israel want it to be. Israel is a vibrant democracy. Tens of thousands rally against certain West Bank policies. There's a strong civil rights movement. An Israeli friend who is often critical of government policies always quotes Martin Buber that "this land is not merely the land of special favor, it is also the land of special work." That's the challenge, isn't it?

- But they're so far from meeting it.

- What country isn't? Our own country last year sold more arms abroad than all the rest of the world. Given the unremitting pressures of the last decades, Israel's record isn't shamed at all.



After twenty years of marriage her brother and sister-in-law had filed for divorce. They remained the best of friends, but brother had told her, she 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 forces, and union negotiations. His partner 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. Maybe they would end up living in California. She paused. She seemed whipped. "I just don't know what's right anymore."

Chapter 14

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It was a rainy Monday. The TV was on and a few of the group had been watching a soap opera. In the episode a father returns home after a visit to his daughter and describes to a friend her determinedly unconventional life. We heard him say, "either the whole world is crazy or I am."

- When my father finishes reading the morning newspaper, he shakes his head and says: "No one seems to know what's right anymore."

The phrase rang a bell. I'd heard it a few weeks before in my office from the lips of an anxious and obviously bewildered woman. Her son had been badgering her because she contributed regularly to the United Way and other charities she considered worthwhile. Private welfare programs, he claimed, were band-aids that covered over festering social ills without curing them and so delayed the radical political and economic surgery America needed.

Her daughter's recent visit had proved difficult. She was living with another graduate student. They had a genuine relationship, she had told her mother, but they were not about to be married. Marriage would compromise the purity of their love.

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- Her problem is that she's old-fashioned. We've liberated ourselves from all ideas about absolute standards. Times change. Values change. What matters is that we feel right about what we do.

- And that nobody gets hurt.

Can there be community or family without shared goals and values? Recently an elderly woman came to me with a bitter complaint about her daughter and son-in-law. They wanted her to move into a nursing home. She felt betrayed and abandoned. She had been raised in an era when only the impoverished or unwanted were institutionalized. "Don't my children know the Ten Commandments: 'honor your father and your mother'? How can they do this to me?" I asked her children to stop by. They did so one evening since both of them worked. They could not afford a full-time housekeeper to look after a mother who couldn't drive and sometimes forgot to turn off the stove. They had thoroughly investigated available locations and had found a first-rate facility. "She will be well cared for. We'll be there often. We have no other choice." A day or two later I received an angry telephone call from a granddaughter who lived out of town. "How could they put nanna in a home? Institutions dehumanize. Nanna will become a chart. She's a wonderful person. How could they do this to her?"

- Everybody's got a right to his opinion.

Agreed, but if we don't share basic goals and values what will hold our relationship together?

- Love.

How long can love survive the frustration of daily misunderstandings?

- We live in a free society. Everyone thinks his thoughts, votes as he pleases, and does his thing. It's worked.

A majority of those who settled here had left Europe for many of the same year's cards and call each other up when we were passing through.

- You have to work at relationships.

The Bible says, "Honor your father and mother", not love your parents.

Love is a natural feeling. Honor involves care and courtesy. It's the Bible's

reasons and shared a community of interests. That's why there's a traditional American civic religion.

- It didn't always work. Look at the Civil War.
- And the growth of single issue and ethnic politics.

My point exactly. Countries fall apart when each group insists on its way. I often worry that we're in a falling apart phase.

- Nothing is more important than freedom. I won't be regimented.

There's a world of difference between regimentation, forced obedience to arbitrary standards, and consensus, what the eighteenth century called a social compact.

- A few years ago my parents and I went fifteen rounds on whether I should stay in school and get my professional degree or drop out for awhile and live. I said I didn't want to spend my best years in school. My parents said that if I dropped out I'd get out of the study habit and never go back.

You haven't gone back, have you?

I found I didn't want to be a lawyer. I want to write.

And?

- Nothing published, but I'm trying.

And your parents?

They still don't understand, but they help out with the rent. They've said families must hold together.

- My family's o.k., but we're not tight. I'm closer with friends than family.

- I'll feel lucky if I have a handful of real friends in my lifetime. Most so-called friends are simply companions who happen to be around and with whom I like to do things. If they moved out of town tomorrow we'd exchange New Year's cards and call each other up when we were passing through.

- You have to work at relationships.

The Bible says, "Honor your father and mother", not love your parents. Love is a natural feeling. Honor involves care and courtesy. It's the Bible's

way of saying we have to work at the relationships which are important to us.

- I'm not confused about family or ethics. I know what's right. Family is right. Peace is right. War is wrong.

Are all wars wrong? If you were Israel would you make peace with the Arabs at any price?

- I won't play that game. Words can be twisted any way.

Haven't you ever regretted a judgment?

- I've been wrong sometimes, but my conscience is clear.

- Most people I know have convenient consciences. They listen to it when they want to. Besides, conscience is an uncertain guide. A Muslim may be guilt-ridden because he takes a drink, an Indian suffers whenever he eats meat. Our conscience reflects our culture.

- What's your point?

Conscience is a protean capacity which has no chance to be effective unless it is carefully programmed. That's why rabbinic Judaism took such pains to create an all-encompassing and ethically principled way of life. Our religious culture had moral conditioning as its primary goal.

- I don't believe in standardized rules.

No two situations are exactly alike, but I believe there are fundamental moral standards and specific situations which we face which can be applied sensitively and imaginatively to the instance. I often tell the story of the rebbe who was appointed to head a community council and told that his first task would be to prepare a new constitution for his city. It took him only a few minutes. He handed the council a copy of the Ten Commandments. He wasn't being flip, but he was making the point that once we agree on fundamentals, specific procedures and decisions can be arrived at.

- You're contradicting yourself. You've been describing Judaism as a process, now you're defending fixed and static standards.

I'm defending the original moral commitment. We are to do what is right, not what is best for us or most satisfying to us. To determine his ship's position the navigator needs a fixed point. The North Star is always there, but each ship sails on its own voyage. We need a starting point, certain axioms, in order to be able to think. Judaism has always known this, that's the idea behind the myth that commandments were given to us on Mt. Sinai.

- The tablets on which Moses inscribed the law were made of stone. The myth tries to make the point that these rules are fixed for all times, but I don't believe even the Ten Commandments are everywhere and always valid and neither do you.

- As you know, I'm one of your old Confirmation students and I remember a discussion you had with us where you asked us to suggest a situation in which it would be right to break each of the Ten Commandments. You said that if you were a fugitive fleeing the Nazis you'd steal to survive or even murder if an SS trooper stood between you and freedom.

I also said that I was not making a particularly radical change. Despite their belief in the Commandments as God's immutable word, the rabbis taught that there are instances when to serve God we should set aside the Torah's rules. To save a life you are to break the Sabbath prohibitions. As I said earlier, the immutable Torah was not the naked text but the text as interpreted by centuries of faith and need. Anachronistic statements were honored by inattention or reinterpretation. Capital punishment was effectively abolished by judicial process. The prerogatives of the priestly class were reduced to empty honors.

- On whose authority?

The Torah's, or so the sages believed. They interpreted individual texts through the spirit of the whole text. You can see this in any number of their interpretive principles: 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.' One of my favorite Talmudic passages deals with the rules of fasting on Yom Kippur. "If, on Yom Kippur, a pregnant woman smells some food and conceives a great craving for it, 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. . .'"

- If such, indeed, was their approach why are you and the orthodox so far apart?

Because of a growing sense that the sages of the past had faced every conceivable problem. The sages allowed the river to silt over. Orthodoxy built a dam across the river and said: 'What is, is Judaism.' Liberals have tried to keep the chapel free and insist that our respect for what has been should not limit our work towards shaping the religious approach which needs to be.

- You talk about the Torah having an informing spirit. It seems to me that the Torah assumes a number of values which are sometimes in conflict. Since we've been talking about adjusting the tradition to life, the Torah says also, "you shall not add nor subtract from this statement of the teaching." How can you affirm this statement of an unchanging pattern of life and those quotes you just gave about the necessity of change?"

Let me teach you a Talmudic phrase: Taku. A number of Talmudic debates end with it. Taku indicates that the issue could not be resolved. On complicated moral issues sensitive and experienced people may come to opposite conclusions. One of the reasons Judaism has steered clear of a centralized bureaucracy like the papacy is that decentralization permits the circulation of differing judgments in difficult cases. Debate is not cut short.

- Hard cases make bad law.

- And in such cases lawyers hope the high court will hand down a split decision.

I've made the opposite decision in almost identical situations. In both cases a patient had a fatal illness. The first patient was a man in his middle years. When I entered his room he smiled at me: "Rabbi, I feel better. I know that I am going to be well." Actually, he had only a few weeks to live; yet, here he was, talking about health and going back to work. A lot of thoughts went through my mind before I said: "No, you're not." He was silent. I'd only repeated what the doctor had already told him. We talked. Why had I spoken so openly? This man had a wife, children, a business. He had been suddenly stricken. If he avoided the decisions which needed to be made they would not be made, with unhappy consequences for those who depended on him. However painful it was, he had to face the truth. In a room on the next floor I visited an older woman, also ill with cancer and with a limited time to live. She, too, greeted me with a smile: "I'm beginning to feel a bit better. All this will soon be behind me and I'll be well. I'm looking forward to my granddaughter's wedding." I made no attempt to disabuse her. I was comforting and solicitous. No one depended on her. There were no decisions that she had to make. She did not need to face the added pressure.

- I like the Taku idea. During Carter's presidency his human rights campaign was a frequent subject of dinner table conversation. The inalienable right of every human being to life, liberty, etc. is, obviously, a fundamental principle, but in many countries, particularly in the Third World where the population is largely illiterate and few have any experience with self-government, democracy is not only an alien form of government but may be an unworkable one. To withhold aid, and perhaps recognition, from such countries might be to force their governments to turn for support to the Soviet bloc or so weaken these governments that the military or the undemocratic Left came to power.

The Torah puts it well, "Do not be righteous overmuch."

- I don't believe in compromise. What's right is right.

virtues, and not ultimate virtue, so there are many sins and no ultimate sin.

There is a folk saying that the gates of Heaven are shut to anyone who ends life having spoken only the truth and done only the right. Rigid personalities inevitably do a lot of harm. Remember the incorruptible Robespierre? Compromise is necessary for peaceful and effective progress.

- Why?

In our crowded world, or any social unit, no one can have it all his way.

- You're using right as a moral standard. Right, at least as I use the term, includes questions of intent and motive. If I feel good about my motives, if my impulses are genuine and loving, then what I do is bound to be right.

Then I would argue, and I think Jewish thought comes down heavily on this point, that good intentions do not establish the goodness of an act. Lenin ordered the death of millions of muzhiks in his belief that only their elimination would permit Communism to flourish in Russia. You can love somebody to death. In the Middle Ages thousands of Jews were forced to convert to Christianity because of the church's loving concern for their immortal souls. There is a mother love which sustains and a mother love which smothers. The Grand Inquisitor sent men to the rack out of his love for their immortal souls. His motives were pure but he literally loved people to death.

- At least when I do what I feel is right I'm not a hypocrite.

God condemned those who "honor Me with its lips but keep their heart from Me," but hypocrisy is not the ultimate sin.

- What is?

- Egotism, selfishness, caring only about yourself.

- Contempt for others.

- Impatience, elbowing others aside because you're in a hurry.

- Singlemindedness.

- Unforgiving hate.

You're right, you're right, and you're right, too. Just as there are many virtues, and not ultimate virtue, so there are many sins and no ultimate sin.

- So how do you decide what is right?

I use a calculus of consequence rather than a calculus of motivation. I accept the moral concerns of our special message and I try to understand how I can most usefully apply these to the issue at hand. I try to maximize benefits and minimize harm. I believe that what flows from a decision is more important than the spirit in which it is taken. I watched the other day as a family pleaded with a physician to do all he could to save their mother, a comatose lady in her eighties, whose brain scan had shown only erratic activity. They spoke out of love but without thought to what would happen if they had their way. The doctor gently advised them to accept what had already happened. He was thinking about what lay ahead. The family could not get beyond their feelings.

- What happened?

They insisted that a dangerous operation be performed and she died on the table.

Judgement requires that we take consequences into account.

- Why?

It may be preferable for one unwed mother to abort a fetus and for another to carry and deliver the child. So much depends on the mother's conditioning, family situation, emotional well-being and self-image. Situations are never identical.

- Even a calculus of consequences needs a base line. Where do you begin?

With the thrust of our tradition which, I believe, represents our perception of God's general concerns. I try to follow God's lead. I look at the specific traditions of our teaching and try to discern the moral concerns implicit in them.

- Be specific.

According to the Torah the community is to impose a tithe and other taxes so that the poor need not beg or depend on the erratic charitable impulse of the well off. Long-term support (kupah) and emergency relief (tamuchui) were avail-

able in almost all communities. Given this record, I cannot look, as some do, on welfare-related taxes as depriving me of what is mine; rather, I see them as a valid mechanism for the proper distribution of opportunity and I dismiss as callous all social philosophies which blame the poor for their poverty, and all political theories which deny that the community has a public welfare obligation.

I'll give you other examples. The Torah says, "You shall neither wrong nor oppress a stranger for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." Jewish criminal and civil law treats all peoples in the same way. It follows that "separate but equal" is an unacceptable political form, that the abuse of wetback labor is evil. "You shall not stand idly by the blood of a neighbor." So, I cannot stay in front of my TV set when someone outside calls for help. You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment. When I was foreman of our local Grand Jury I consciously tried to be sensitive to class and culturally skewed attitudes. Why? Because our tradition insists "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 remain silent. Why? "You shall not go up and down as a tale bearer among your people." "The seventh day is the Sabbath. In it you shall do no manner of work." Every human being has an inalienable right to use as he wishes some part of his life. Life is to be savoured, not simply endured.

- I visited Eastern Europe last year and I didn't like what I saw. Share the wealth plans tend to be ham-fisted.

When he protested his integrity to his friends, Job cited charity as one of his virtues: "Have I eaten my morsel alone and not fed the orphan from my plate?" According to an old midrash, the friends were impressed, but God was not. "Well and good, but you fell short by half of Abraham's standard. You let the poor come to you. Abraham went out to the roadside to find the hungry and invite them home. You fed them whatever you were serving, Abraham asked them what they would like and fed them whatever they requested."

- You spoke of following God's lead. How can I follow what I can't see or know?

Here is where myth, the imaginative expression of otherwise incommunicable truths, comes to our rescue. At Sinai Moses asked to know something more about God, Himself. God makes it clear that He cannot be seen even by Moses, but He tells Moses to place himself in a cleft in the rock and He will make His glory pass by. Moses does so. God passes behind him and Moses senses something of God's nature: "I the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth." This myth which provides us a list of God's attributes was accepted as a meaningful description of God's nature. The list was often quoted in Biblical times. It appears in a number of places in the Tanakh and we repeat it still in our synagogue when the Torah is taken from the Ark. It's our patterning text. Since we "know" that God is good, kind, etc., we know that He wants us to be like Him in these respects.

- God is unknowable.

But this much is known about God.

- Was?

Those who experienced God sense these aspects of his nature. The Talmud commands: "Just as God clothes the naked, attends the sick, comforts the mourners and buries the dead, do you likewise." A student of the times asked your question. How do we know these are God's ways? His teacher responded. The Torah tells us that God clothed Adam and Eve. He visited Abraham when he was sick. He comforted Isaac after his father's death.

I can't believe you credit such nonsense.

Our tradition created a graceful culture out of what you call nonsense. Myth exposes truths grasped by our imaginations and these are the truths which reach deep and on which we gamble everything. I like the comment of a contemporary sage - must be accepted as metaphor, but beyond that the sage's was on careful and patient applications of these principles to your life. The rabbis developed

writer, Edward Dahlberg: "Man must eat fables or starve his soul to death."

- I'm not sure I quite appreciate what this myth adds to our ethical approach.

The "do's" and "don'ts" can take us only so far. God's qualities obviously represent broad moral concerns, and as we try to weave them into our lives we develop a moral sensitivity which helps us understand how the specific do's and don'ts are to be understood and those others which are required of us but not covered by the 'you shall' and 'you shall not.'

- Monarchy is deep. What we're doing is talking about values and I don't set much store in talk. Most moralists I know don't live up to their sermons. Plato's my favorite example. He goes to great pains in the Dialogues to define the good, but after he published his book he continued to live as before, teaching philosophy to the sons of the well-born. You'd think that someone concerned with ethics would have taken an active political stand against Athenian imperialism or their tolerance of slavery and contempt of foreigners.

Philosophy seems to define. Torah demands. "It has been told you, O man, what is good. And what the Lord demands of you." In Chinese, ethics is written with an ideogram consisting of the shape of a man and the number two. Apparently they meant to suggest in this way that ethics involves action, not analysis, and that we prove our virtue by the quality of our relationships.

Moses said of himself, "I am not a man of words." The Torah does not debate the why and wherefore of God's Instructions. The sages' favorite saying was, "It is the deed, not the analysis, which is central." It is because the deed is the ultimate test that we must think through the consequences of an act before carrying it out. "An impulsive person cannot be a saint."

- Weren't the tribes praised because at Sinai they accepted the covenant before Moses stipulated its terms?

This was our myth's way of saying that certain standards - right must be done - must be accepted as axiomatic. But beyond these the emphasis was on careful and patient applications of these principles to your life. The rabbis developed

a special genre of writing, She'elot u'Teshuvot, Questions and Answers, Responsa, which centered on a careful analysis of individual cases. An interesting case would present itself or someone would pose a specific instance involving moral and legal issues. The rabbi to whom the issue was brought would handle it as best he could and explain his judgment on the basis of relevant Torah principles. If the issues were interesting this did not end the matter. The consulted rabbi would draw up a digest of the problem and circulate this precis and his decision to other authorities for comment. No one expected every scholar to concur with the original judgment.

- It sounds like our process of judicial review.

In many ways it is.

- If the rabbis disagreed how did anyone know who's right?

You didn't. In many cases there is no clear-cut right. The goal was not unanimity but enlightenment, the refinement of a community's moral sensitivity.

- What about Nietzsche's idea that the superior person is above the law and can make his own law?

We don't believe anyone is above the law. Israel's king was to write out by hand a Torah scroll as a symbolic act of submission to God's Instructions.

- We've mentioned any number of unacceptable Biblical and rabbinic laws: capital punishment, the segregation of the sexes, the prohibition of most autopsies. Why should a king or anyone else submit to them?

- He shouldn't and we don't. He was to write out the familiar scroll, but his allegiance was to the living Torah. I've suggested to you that when a rule became dysfunctional it was either treated with benign neglect or its purpose was achieved in a more effective way.

- Not always. Orthodox Judaism holds on to the rule that only a mother determines the child's religious status. I have a friend who went to religious school with me and who was confirmed with me, who, if the old-fashioned controlled

all Jewish life, would never have been allowed in our school and so would never have become a rabbi.

There are always won't-let-goers who are afraid of change, but, as I said, the process of breaking open the shells, saving the present from the dead hand of the past, is recognized in the tradition itself as essential.

- The problem is law. Let people be and they'll work things out.

Not always. Communities require structure and law provides that structure.

- So many laws are unjust. They protect privilege or give certain groups unfair advantage.

Admitted. Yet, a society of laws, however imperfect, is to be preferred to anarchy. I'm paraphrasing an old rabbinic text. "If it were not for law men would swallow each other alive." According to Talmudic law, a Jew owes obedience to the law of the country where he resides unless its law requires him to take a life, violate another's person, or publicly disgrace the Torah or the Jewish people.

- Are there no limits? I won't obey a tyrant.

Neither will I. A country ruled by fiat is subject to the ruler's whims; its citizens cannot depend on due process or published laws. When a government is arbitrary and tyrannical we cannot be expected to accept the obligation of obedience.

- What do you mean by "the limits of political reality?"

A medieval Jew who denounced the king's policies, in effect, committed suicide and sometimes endangered his whole community.

- I won't obey any law I don't believe in.

You wouldn't last long in the Soviet Union or Iran. Civil disobedience is an effective political weapon only when it is used against a fairly restrained government.

- If I had been a black in the South I'd have sat down in the front of the bus, but it seems to me that many are too ready to set themselves above the law. Too many of us are hot angels. We've lost all sense of the importance of community.

- I was totally opposed to the war. When I spoke with one rabbi about the possibility of going to Canada he listened sympathetically; another suggested that if I didn't serve, another, probably a poor black man from the urban ghetto, would have to serve in my place. A third was completely unsympathetic and told me that it was my duty to serve. Presumably, as a Jew I owed this country a special kind of loyalty.

The first rabbi concentrated on your needs; the second tried to make you recognize that moral decision cannot be made in a vacuum, that your clear conscience might cause another to die; the third had made a political judgment about the war different than yours.

- Who was right?

Perhaps all three.

- That can't be.

Why not? Each had approached the problem with a particular set of consequences in mind. Normal judgments are not easy to make and the right is rarely a simple matter.

Chapter 15

IT'S GOOD TO BE A JEW

Bags were packed. It was our last morning. Breakfast had been served, addresses exchanged, and the conversation had become anecdotal. The Institute Director was remembering his youth.

- When I was in college the local Jewish community had an adopt-a-student program which offered us surrogate parents and home-cooked meals on weekends. Jews were the only group on campus who had such ties to the community. I've always looked on the Jewish community as an extended family. A visitor at synagogue will be made welcome and generally offered home hospitality. We always invited out-of-towners and anyone who is alone to our Seder. When the Russian Jews began to arrive they were given jobs and all kinds of help.

During the Korean War I served as a chaplain on the staff of the Commander of our Naval Forces in the Far East. One day a young pilot came to my office to make arrangements for his wedding. He had been flying regularly into Hong Kong where he'd met and fallen in love with a local girl. For various official reasons they had to be married by an American official. We set a noon hour date some weeks ahead. I wanted the occasion to be as warm and as personal as it could be so I asked a young couple who lived on the base if they would arrange a luncheon. They did and over the lunch table the bride and the host discovered they were related, actually second cousins. When the pogroms reached their grandparents' village in White Russia the host's family had fled West while the bride's had crossed Siberia to Manchuria, settled in Harbin, and moved on to Hong Kong when Japan attacked. Neither had known of the other's existence.

- My best friend's father was a child in pre-war Austria. In 1938 when the German invasion seemed inevitable, his parents, desperate to get out, somehow got

hold of a Detroit phone book and wrote to everyone who was listed there under their last name. One man, no relation, sent them the necessary papers, including an affidavit guaranteeing the father's employment. He saved their lives.

— There's a law that Jews must ransom fellow Jews who are being held as slaves. During the Middle Ages Jewish communities from all around the Mediterranean supported an office on the island of Rhodes whose mission was to ransom Jews captured by pirates. The Rhodes was the Mediterranean's busiest slave market. We've always had our share of slaves and refugees - they're still coming out of the U.S. S.R. - and we know we're to help them in any way we can.

- I teach English at night to Russian Jews who've come in the last year or two to our city.

- Can I change the subject? It's our last day and before I lose the chance I want to talk about some private feelings. I've known happy times as a Jew. We always have a Seder and I occasionally go to Sabbath service. I like the sense of being part of a large family. Whenever I travel I visit synagogues, but I never quite feel that I'm doing it right. In college I went to classes on Rosh Hashanah and now I work on the Sabbath. I feel I'm something of a sham and not the real thing.

You're what I call a Rosenzweig Jew.

- A what?

Rosenzweig Jew is my label for those of us who feel vaguely guilty that we're not more observant. Franz Rosenzweig was an interesting writer and philosopher whose spiritual pilgrimage took him from a culturally assimilated German-Jewish home and the serious contemplation of conversion to Christianity into an active Jewish life. His re-entry into Jewish life began just before the first World War. During the 1920's Rosenzweig helped found a rather brilliant adult education academy in Frankfort and published a seminal, and quite original, Jewish apologetic:

The Star of Redemption. During the early stages of his return to Judaism, Rosenzweig observed only a few of the mitzvot. When he was asked why he didn't follow the rest he would answer, 'some day, I'm not yet ready.' He practiced those rites which appealed to him, and he assumed that as time went, and being Jewish became more natural, that he would add more of the tradition. Rosenzweig's definition of Judaism was quite original, but in terms of practice rabbinics remained his standard. I think that most Jews tend to think as he did, but I'd try not to equate Judaism with any particular set of practices. Akiba's practice differed from Amos's, yet, both were good and pious Jews. It's the old business of the river rather than the tree. Many traditional rites appeal to me, but my soul is dead to customs which prohibit instrumental music during Sabbath worship or require the separation of men and women. I'd be embarrassed to turn out my pockets so as to empty my sins into a river and I've not the patience for an interminable service. At the same time, I respond to some recent customs like Consecration and baby naming. When asked when he would become an observant Jew, Rosenzweig answered, 'when I can.' When I'm asked the same question I answer, 'I am an observant Jew. I'm fully committed to Jewish life as I understand it.' The old rule was that only men say Kaddish for dead relatives. I take it for granted that women are persons who grieve as men do and that they should take part in our rites just as men, not only because these rites can be helpful but as a statement of their value as persons and as Jews. I am firmly convinced that as the needs of Jews change the mix of practices must change as well as the meaning ascribed to the familiar forms. So it has been. So it will ever be. Breaking a glass at a wedding may once have frightened away the evil spirits. Today it's simply the first act of a Jewish wedding. Incidentally, I have both the bride and groom break a glass.

- Why?

To take the edge of male chauvinism off the marriage rite.

- Then you don't feel constrained by tradition?

Tradition provides me a basic structure which I try to decorate to my taste and needs.

- I saw you play tennis on Saturday afternoon.

The old Sabbath laws emphasized the No's: No work, no cooking, no travel, rules which made clear its role as a mandatory rest day; but in our world where the forty-hour work week is the norm, the rule, "you shall do no manner of work," doesn't have to be applied so literally. I continue to think of the Sabbath as a day set apart, set apart for all that refreshes my soul, a day to be with family, to worship, rest and relax. All that enhances life is appropriate to Sabbath, including a walk in the woods or a game of tennis.

- Even work?

Yes, even work if your work is a spiritual and intellectual delight. As a rabbi I work on the Sabbath.

- Do you keep kosher?

Not really.

- Don't you feel guilty for abandoning a major part of the tradition?

No.

- Why not?

I eat no pork. We have no shell fish in the house. These practices are my way of keeping in touch with the past and, incidentally, of honoring my parents. This was the way I was brought up, and remains my way of keeping in touch with the complex food code which once governed Jewish life.

- You're not being consistent.

I don't set great store by consistency. Life's too full of zigs and zags.

- How can you have a religion if the rule is everyone makes up his or her own mind?

I'm not saying Judaism is whatever I want it to be. The river flows all around me. Community norms play an important role in defining practice.]

live within the Jewish community. Customs are often maintained in highly original ways. I once saw a fascinating collection of Passover Haggadahs prepared by secular kibbutzim. Many were simply collections of readings on freedom and liberation, but all were intended for Seder night, assumed that everyone was eating matzah, drinking four cups of wine, and singing 'an only kid.' Everyone had a Seder and on the same day.

- You're breaking traditions which have lasted from Sinai.

Few are that old. Yom Kippur didn't become a high holiday until after the Babylonian Exile some eight hundred years after Sinai. Monogamy has been the norm among European Jews for less than a thousand years and polygamy was still permitted in Yemen and other Oriental centers until our generation. The separation of milk and meat and the other dietary laws grew up over time - David didn't keep a kosher palace and Esther didn't eat kosher in Ahasuerus' palace.

- We certainly need some agreement as to the terms of our way of life.

A strong and regular pulse holds us together despite differences in practice and approach. In Cleveland we have a committee which includes the president and rabbi of every synagogue, all of whose members share similar concerns for adequate support for religious education, services to the non-institutionalized elderly, the integration of Russian Jewish immigrants and the elimination of sectarian observances from the public schools. We disagree on some issues. Each congregation has a distinct pattern, but all of us work hard for Israel, Jewish education and the support institutions of our Jewish community.

- On the railroad platform at Auschwitz no one was asked whether they were reform, conservative or orthodox.

- Or not religious at all.

- It's our last session and you're just beginning to open up. I want to know more about you as a Jew. What led you to become a full-time Jew?

I'm afraid you'll not find my testimony particularly dramatic. I didn't have any great spiritual crisis like the one Augustine describes in his Confessions.

When I look back my becoming an active Jew seems no more than the natural unfolding of what was always there and was always meant to be. I grew up in a secure and learned Jewish home. There were books everywhere: in my father's study, in the living room, on the landing of the stairs, even in the basement. These books and the smell of the leather bindings attracted me long before I could read the pages. These were my father's books. He was a wise man and I concluded, without thinking much about it, that the tradition was wise. Years of serious study have confirmed the child's instinctive impression.

Until I was ten or so Judaism meant those books, holidays, Hebrew lessons, and serious discussions among the adults gathered at our table about the rise of Nazism and Zionism. Hitler's picture was frequently in the papers. My grandparents lived in Jerusalem and wrote me from there. Seder meant thirty or forty guests, much moving of furniture, and a dollar if I found the afikomen. A child relates to concrete symbols. Theology came later.

When I was an undergraduate, a roommate and I went at God over a long night. We were angry. It was 1945, the papers had just published pictures of piled-up corpses in the ovens of the death camps. My roommate was angry at God. He was the first person I ever heard use the phrase, God is dead. I didn't blame God. Germans had built Auschwitz, not He. I was angry at the Nazis and a cold-hearted world.

I don't know why, but I've never expected God to answer all my prayers any more than I expected my parents to do whatever I asked. It's enough that He listens. I don't complain much to God, but I need to feel that the Heavens are not shut tight. I grew up during years that were unbelievably hard and cruel for Jews and saw that somehow most kept their faith. Indeed, as I look back now on the thirties they appear not only as a tragic time but as the beginning of a period of Jewish renewal. During those difficult years, my formative years, I

significant.

watched faith sustain and I came to appreciate its enlivening value.

I grew up in a happy and respected home. I was sometimes called names and some children never offered friendship, but I sensed that if people could hate people like my parents they were irredeemably prejudiced and nothing I could do would make any difference. I early recognized that anti-semitism was the non-Jews' problem, not mine; and I've never been particularly interested in the subject. What I could not handle, at least when I was younger, was the suggestion that Jewish survival might not be of significance to the world.

In college I took a famous survey course, History I, and had an experience not unlike the one one of you mentioned a few days ago. Jews were mentioned only in the one session which discussed Biblical times and writings. There were all those miles of non-Jewish books in Widener Library, and for the first time my father's study began to seem small and its wisdom parochial. That course destroyed my innocent belief in the pivotal role of Jewish life and thought in the development of world civilization. Since then I have smiled quietly when I read the writings of some sage who claims that Torah represents all that is worth knowing. I had then what you might call a mini-crisis of faith, but even then I recognized that those lectures reflected the narrowness of a European academic tradition which was already on its last leg, the tradition which would have its last gasp a few years later when the English historian, Arnold Toynbee, with the arrogant disdain of an Oxford don and the myopia of a self-confident Christian, declared the Jewish people "a fossilized relic." No reputable college would offer such a course today. Islam was treated as off-handedly as Judaism. The Third World was not even on our maps. We've come to the end of the era of Western and Christian cultural imperialism. Still, as you've gathered, I have ever since been sensitive to the population problem. I know that a small pond can reflect the whole circle of the sky, but I also know that in the real world both quality and quantity are significant.

My father often quoted an old, rather cynical but astute, proverb: 'you can know more about a man by noting his enemies rather than his friends.' When I was still a child the greatest military power in Europe declared us to be World Enemy Number One and set out to wipe us off the face of the earth. I remember thinking that if we merited such attention then the Torah tradition must contain some powerful and vital truths, that the world needs our witness. The Holocaust is, of course, a human tragedy of genocidal proportions, but it is also a tribute to the reach and the authority of the Jewish message. 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 a concept of justice which will not make peace with tyranny of any kind or with the Big Lie; which had no patience with the pretensions of the privileged or their claims to special treatment, which insisted on a vision of a world united in understanding and mutual respect; and which placed its faith in the will of a God who demands that we live by a commitment to righteousness which lays quite specific obligations on us. I affirm those values, and my life as a Jew is my way of expressing my commitments.

In another college course I came across, for the first time, the term, cosmopolitan, used as a pejorative label by Marxists to describe someone who is unfocused, vague, romantic, and particularly one who is ignorant of economic realities as Karl Marx had defined them. I'm no longer sure why, but I appropriated the term to describe those who found the Jewish label too parochial and who talked of belonging to the fellowship of people of good will who presumably have put all group interests aside and now work only for the general good. I'm not sure such a fellowship exists. There are no saints out there. Good people yes, but everyone has his peculiarities and private interests. I've always believed we served humanity best by first looking to our character and discharging our obligations to our ourselves, our families, and our immediate circle. If everyone took care of their own, we'd be way ahead. In any case, help has to be specific and focused

or it's no help at all. I don't believe that anyone has to give up his or her roots, family or community in order to be socially committed. It's because of my Jewish interests and convictions that I've worked for civil rights and social reform.

My father often quoted the text: "Do not put your trust in princes," by which he meant that everyone, even the one you helped elect, had his own agenda and that those Jews who waited for 'good' Germans to oust Hitler waited in vain; as did those who were confident that President Roosevelt's administration would open America's doors to Hitler's victims or that the Vatican would act out of Christian charity to save the Jews of Europe. Everyone needs friends, but "if I am not for myself who will be for me?" My father was convinced that Israel would never come to be if Jews waited on the world's good will. As you know by now, I respond to the Torah's realism, and that I believe in the messianic journey. I also believe that the romantic and naive are not only potential victims but often become, because of their obtuseness, obstacles to progress. They want their whole dream, but in real life dreams are dreams and half a loaf is better than none. A starving man can't wait for the revolution.

As I said, I was seventeen and in college when the death camps were liberated by the Allied armies and saw, for the first time, pictures of the piles of emaciated corpses and heard the survivors tell their tales of Hell. The years that followed were the years when a million Jews languished in Displaced Person Camps in Europe while English destroyers blockaded the sea lanes to Palestine lest these survivors of the Holocaust sneak into the land they have been promised. I knew then that I owed my people a debt I would have to repay. They had died and suffered because they symbolized the tradition in which I had been comfortably raised, and I could not escape my responsibility to do all I could to continue the witness which was clearly our people's destiny. I graduated in 1947 and immediately went to work for an agency whose purpose was to secure skilled military personnel for the defense of the Yishuv as it battled Arab armies determined to drive the settlers

into the sea. My work wasn't particularly heroic, but I felt myself part of our community of fate and our community of faith, and I was proud to be part of Jewish history. The rabbinate more and more seemed a good way to live up to my commitments to this people, its Torah and its work. The survival of the Jewish people, social reform in the United States, the elaboration of the Torah tradition, and the development of a strong spiritual life became and remain active concerns.

Again and again, as I trace the way I came alive as a Jew, I find I go back to concrete moments and specific people. Activity, not apologetics, makes the Jew. No book or guru formed my faith. I don't know anyone who has been argued into being an active Jew. Experiences bind. I often feel the binding moment at worship when a familiar chant reaches into my soul. I feel bound when in the early hours of the morning I met a plane load of Soviet Jewish refugees landing at Lydda and on the Sabbath when I placed in our Ark Torah scrolls which had been cherished and read in some now-destroyed synagogues in Czechoslovakia. I felt bound during a visit to Jerusalem's Western Wall as the evening sun refracted two thousand years of piety from the rose-colored stone; and I feel the ties when I welcome the Sabbath in my home with my wife and children around our table. When the house is quiet and I'm in my library, my father's and mine, I'm bound by the ideas which reach back in time and somehow still speak to my times. I'm glad that I belong to a religious community which is in many ways an extended family and where emotions need not be hidden. Once bound, it was only natural that many of the practices of Judaism should become a major part of the fabric of my family life, the songs we sing (I, badly), the foods we eat and don't eat, the holidays we observe and the concerns we share. No, I haven't resolved all my doubts. I haven't thought through all the problems. You know by now I don't know all the answers, or even all the right questions; but I feel at home within the Jewish world and tradition, happily and usefully at home, and as I involve myself with the holidays, the worship, the texts, and the needs of Jewish survival I feel

that my life has a certain grace to it.

The loudspeaker crackled. The buses had arrived. There was a rush of good-byes. They were kind enough to say they'd enjoyed our talk.

