MS-4850: Daniel Jeremy Silver Papers, 1972-1993.
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Come On In, the Water's Fine, unpublished manuscript, fifth draft, chapters 6-16, pages 98-257, undated.

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Chapter 6

BEING GOOD ISN'T ENOUGH

The conversation began with a comment from an aide. A religious school principal called me the other day and asked me to be a substitute teacher. I agreed and was surprised by the changes. We had Hebrew and History classes, they still do; but now there were classes in Hebrew lettering, Jewish cooking and a group who spent part of the morning carpentering a wooden ark for an overnight camp.

In recent years some religious schools have emphasized Jewish experiences; Hebrew camps, Israeli dance festivals and shul-ins as well as course work and language mastery on the valid grounds that the only way to appreciate the full range of what it means to be a Jew is to jew: to celebrate Sukkot, to participate in the burial of a used Sefer Torah or to spend some time on a kibbutz or moshav in Israel.

Not so long ago Jews lived in a Jewish environment, jewing came naturally and the religious school simply provided background information which explained the Jewish world in which the child was caught up. Today's child grows up in a fragmented environment. His home is a middle-class place, an American place, a television place, a public school place, as well as a Jewish place. Many homes are lean on Jewish experiences. His parents may be deeply committed but that commitment may be a civic one which he may not be able to observe. So unless the institutions of the Jewish community, particularly the religious school, provide Torah experiences he would never tastee its flavor and color. The result would be what it is, I am afraid, for many, that they think of the Torah tradition as a few candles, a prayer or two and a set of disembodied ideas floating out there, as a religion which has no immediate relationship to their lives.

Neither logic nor factual information ever impelled anyone to become a committed Jew or Christian or Marxist. We are thinking animals, but when it comes to ultimate commitments the heart rules the head. We use facts after the fact to rationalize our decisions. I teach in the Department of Religion

of a local university and, as you would expect, my courses focus on Judaism. Ministers and nuns have been among my best students. Their previous training heightens their ability to assimilate theological ideas and to put these into a comparative perspective. I hope they gained from the course some appreciation of our tradition, but I am sure that nothing they learned changed their basic loyalties.

Disembodied ideas, however golden, do not a Jew make. I know a good bit about Christianity and Islam, far more probably than the average communicant, but I am neither Christian nor Muslim. Religious involvement requires commitment rather than comprehension. Many believers know only that they believe. Theologians with careful arguments provide the faithful with understanding of their commitments. That art is called apologetics and, as its name, so it is - after, rather than before, the fact. Logic never persuaded anyone to reciprocate feelings they did not respond to. If you want to answer the question why be a Jew, you have to get in the river and swim.

A cool voice I hadn't heard before. Experience has become a big thing in our country: soul, consciousness raising, the greening of America. My friends use words like spontaneity, being genuine, and 'getting in touch with'; and put me down when I say: 'I must think about it.' They call me a coward for not acting spontaneously. Are you among those who have lost faith in reason?

Thinking is the process which makes us human. The animal reacts instinctively, thinks with his nervous system; we reflect and consider. I am sure that the religious school which had these programs in dance and carpentry also offered classes in Hebrew and History. No Jew can glorify unreason, but reason is not the only key to a meaningful life: "The heart has reasons of which the mind is ignorant."

I picked up a copy of <u>The Jewish Catalogue</u>.

A few years ago a group of folk from the <u>havurah</u> movement published this volume which they sub-titled, A Do It Yourself Kit. Their introduction

said that "this book was designed to open options for personal Jewish creativity and contemporary utilizatioh of the rites and rituals of Jewish life." Forgive them the jargon. What they offered and what was eagerly appropriated, the book sale was a minor publishing phenomenon, was a step-by-step guide to writing your own ketubah, baking matzah or decorating a sukka. Here was a way to do Jewish things rather than to have them done for you; and the authors argued, with effect, that such experiences can be the first step in a meaningful religious awareness.

I found the success of The Jewish Catalogue a fascinating phenomenon for many reasons, not the least of which was that it seemed to signal the end of an age during which the Torah's reasonableness and the pragmatic value of its commandments was its major selling point. The dietary laws were praised as hygienic. The Sabbath day was held up as an early labor law. Yom Kippur provided an opportunity for an annual spiritual examination which was as good for you as your annual physical. Many set great store by the argument that the Torah tradition was reasonable while Christianity required an irrational leap of faith and rather reveled in unreason. Had not some of the Church Fathers defended the myth of Christ's resurrection on the grounds that the mind could not have invented such a miracle. QED it must have happened. Credo quia absurdam est. Judaism's presumed virtue was that it was credible. God could only be one. There was no nonsense about a son of God or a virgin birth. The prophets' virtue was their moral vision. Rabbinic law provided a functioning structure which made possible the survival of a disadvanteged minority. The case was often made, and many of the arguments offered were cogent, but, as a compelling argument for Jewish commitment, there was a major drawback. If Judaism is reasonable, why do I need it? Wouldn't it be enough for me simply to be a reasonable person? There was also something a bit unmanly as well as unwise about the need to prove Judaism's rationality. Who were we proving it to? Ourselves? We either felt the Torah tradition in our souls or we didn't. Those out there? Did anyone really care? It often seemed as if we were involved in an exercise

whose only purpose was to prove that it wasn't odd of us to be Jewish.

The world is coming off a rather prolonged love affair with reason which began several centuries ago. The Age of Reason gave us the American Constitution and a vision of the human mind controlling nature and transforming widespread misery into widespread opportunity. Voltaire and his friends insisted that the medieval forms of privilege and authority were unreasonable. Newton and his friends proved that the human mind could explore the universe and gain mastery over nature. Our laboratories and research continue to provide proof of the power of man's mind to increase prosperity, longevity and leisure. The accomplishments of the Enlightenment are many.

Unfortunately, reason is a two-edged sword. Science and technology have lightened the burdens of labor and heightened the danger of atomic holocaust. We have transformed the world about us and outgrown the certainties of the past only to find ourselves wandering without a map in a spiritual wasteland. We know so much that we no longer know what is right, where to go, or how to get there. The future is no longer what it used to be.

Critical philosophy has not provided us certainty or clear direction, a reasonable alternative to the religious vision. How else explain the willing suspension of the critical faculty which allows some of our best and brightest to follow a teen-age guru or obey the simple "do it" of Habad? Reason exposed the limitations of all human institutions and led to a fraying of all relationships: marriage, family and community; and ultimately, to the loneliness of urban man.

The image I have of reason is of the sorcerer's apprentice. According to the Jewish version of that legend, a brilliant scientist-Talmudist of the sixteenth century, Loewe of Prague, a friend of Johannes Kepler, discovered the incantations by which a clay statue, a golem, could be enlivened. When his community was beset by bullies, Loewe decided to use his knowledge to provide a protective escort to the aged and the women. He shaped the clay. He whispered the incantations. He placed a seal bearing the magical name of

God on the status's forehead and the golem came to life. The toughs got a taste of their own medicine, but in time the golem ran amuck and Loewe had to speak the magical words which reduced his automaton to clay.

Sobered by recent experience, the fallout of the Age of Reason, the population explosion, the pollution of the environment, mass production, the depersonalization of an urbanized society, people have begun to put greater emphasis on the left-hand side of the brain, on the soul and sensitivity. Where this is not childish peeve, 'if I can't have everything my way, I won't play', or rampant anti-intellectualism, 'what do eggheads know'; it represents an understandable mistrust of the trained mind uncoupled from a sensitive heart. Dr. Strangelove comes to mind and so does Adolph Eichmann.

Some of the most attractive movements of our time represented attempts to get us back in touch with our feelings and sensitivities in the hope that we will learn to develop our spiritual resources and that a heightened moral sensitivity will somehow allow us to wrest control of our lives from those unemotional minds who work out how many millions of deaths will occur during an initial atomic attack and then base foreign policy on concepts like acceptable levels of risk.

Religious folk joined the move by speaking more of a personal god than the god idea; by bringing the guitar into the sanctuary and by making the worship hour into a time of motion and song rather than for rigid pew sitting. In this new cultural environment the reasonableness of the Torah tradition was no longer its most compelling quality; indeed, many have come to value our tradition precisely for the richness of the feelings and emotions that worship and belonging provide. Audiences responded when Tevye sang: "Tradition. Tradition."

The nineteenth century's emphasis on the mind was also an expression of unease with the passion, intimacy and enthusiasm of the religious life. Hitlahavut, intensity, was associated with the unwashed Hasidic hillbillies of Eastern Europe. During the Age of Reason Jews found themselves for the

first time in the capitals of European culture, going to symphony and lectures, and enjoying the experience. So much was changing, it was the Age of Political Emancipation, that many came to believe that a new social order based on reason would emerge, ending a millenium of political and social ostracism. It did not happen that way. Men proved unreasonable. The times are cold and we need not only the bracing command to seek justice and the strengthening of a congregation that sings together against the darkness but faith in God's power to save. Judaism in the Age of Reason was confident, progressive, reformist. We hope against hope. We work because we have no alternative. Their hope was confirmed by labor-saving devices and bourgeois revolutions. A pervasive sense of alienation and of the tragic binds our experience into a single mental set. If we have hope it derives simply and directly from our faith in God.

Why did attitudes charge so dramatically and in such a short time?

For some Jews their sharp awareness of the dark and the tragic began with the failure of the liberal revolutions of 1848. For some it began as blackshirted legions marching through Paris during the Dreyfus trial or with Kishnev. For others it began when Jewish revolutionaries were denounced by their Russian Communist comrades. For some it began on Kristalnacht or with Stalin's purges. For some it began with the British White Paper and the post-war blockade of Palestine or when the Allies organized the Evian and Bermuda Refugee Conferences as empty masquerades designed not to save Jews but to quiet the protests of those who demanded that Hitler's chosen victims be saved. For some it began when when the mosques rang with cries of <u>jihad</u>, holy war, and Arab armies went again and again into battle against Israel. One need speak only one name, Auschwitz, and Jews understand. The shocks have been many and not confined to Jewish life: Coventry, Hiroshima, Czechoslovakia, Vietnam.

They believed in progress. I ask myself how can I accept today's wisdom as necessarily superior to yesterday's revelation simply because it is today's?

Universities did not show up well as centers of truth and character in the nineteen-thirties in Germany or in the nineteen-sixties in America. If today's wisdom is so advanced why are we burdened by a pervasive sense of meaninglessness? Why do we respond instinctively when Martin Buber tells us that wisdom is not in logic, which is a game, but in meeting, which is growth? I remember the woman who told me: enough talk, let's just dance like the Hasidim.

The Jewish Catalogue provided a primer to those who wanted to swim around a bit without having to resolve heavy theologic ideas. It's a 'how to' book. Abstractions were left on the shore. Earlier generations were worried about the Torah tradition's credibility. We are concerned with its viability. They used reason effectively to cut through a logjam of folkways and superstitions so as to allow the river to flow on unimpeded, but overused, reason proved an acid which burned away not only superstition but the sacred. I often think of the inner-directed, outer-directed personality distinction David Reisman made popular some years ago. They worried how the Torah tradition looked to outsiders, whether it passed intellectual muster. We worry whether the Torah makes a difference to us.

There are three ways to see a river: from a spacecraft, from the river bank or as a swimmer, from water level. From the satellite you can look across the whole sweep of Jewish history. The river is seen in clear outline. Its direction is apparent but there is little sense of the speed of the current or of the specific details of any particular mile of the stream. You can see but not touch or smell or hear.

From the bank you can see a few miles each way. Details are clearly defined, but what is around the bend is hidden. You are still an observer though the river, or part of it, is close at hand and you can sense its presence and hear its flow, but not feel the water against your skin.

The swimmer sees only a few yards in each direction but he is alive to the river. He, too, does not know what is around the next bend, but he can

feel the current which tries to pull him along. The Jewish Catalogue is for the swimmer. To know the feeling of being a Jew you must take the plunge, but having entered the water you must make sure you are swimming in a safe part of the river. Jewish life is not without its stretches of quicksand and whirlpools.

My parents went to services some weeks ago when the youth group was in charge. They came away aghast. The readers wore sport shirts. There were guitars and no organ. There was no sermon. Someone showed Sierra Club slides and read a parable by Elie Wiesel. During the Shalom Aleichem everyone linked arms and swayed back and forth as they sang. It was folksy, not my folks' cup of tea. Aren't you talking about a generational thing?

It goes deeper. The change is as much cultural as generational. Some have argued that the generational divide is between those wtill caught up in the buoyancy and optimism which characterized the nineteenth century and this twentieth century preoccupation with the tragic. I think the differences are deeper and subtler and I sometimes characterize them by calling the one attitude Maimonidean and ours Ha-levian. Moses Maimonides was a towering intellect, master of all the rabbinic disciplines and a firm believer in the redemptive power of reason. Judah ha Levi was a poet of sensitive heart and passionate feelings; a philosopher who was willing, indeed eager, to acknowledge reason's limits.

Maimonides trusted only the mind. The heart was impulsive; only the mind was constant and clear. He was proud that the Torah explained itself in 'acceptable philosophical' terms. The mitzvot were God's will, but, happily, mental health andpersonal hygiene were enhanced through them. Maimonides was an elitist who held that an able man could master life through the determined use of his intellect. The noise of the synagogue next door often distracted him and he looked on the occasional parading of the Torah around the hall as vulgar behavior appropriate for the masses but not to the enlightened few. His prayer was the calm outreaching of the mind rather than the uncontrollable expression of need by a troubled heart.

Maimonides wrote prose, brilliant analyses which awe the reader with their analytic precision and logical acumen. He provided sophisticated answers to the sophisticated questions asked by intellectuals but had little time for the simple needs and confessions of ordinary folk. He defended Jewish interests at the governor's court, he was that worthy's physician, but he did so by quiet representation and not by angry remonstration. One simply cannot imagine Maimonides in an unbuttoned shirt, sitting cross-legged at a campfire, holding hands with neighbors while he sings along with them a series of Hebrew folk songs. The Maimonidean spirit, like the spirit of American Jews until a generation ago, was critical, catholic in its interest, elitist, dignified, uneasy with emotion, pleased that the Torah tradition was reasonable, high-minded and wise.

Judah ha Levi trusted his heart. He had studied philosophy long enough to be impressed by the bitterness with which philosophers disagreed, so he was not abashed when he stepped beyond the limits of logic. His philosophy instinctively shaped itself into a drama. The inconsistencies of talk were dearer to him than the orderliness of theory. The mind is a useful instrument but only the heart encourages men to make lasting commitments. Ha Levi sang openly of his feelings and spoke easily to all whom he met. He trusted people and paraded around the synagogue without any self-consciousness.

Maimonides married to have children. Ha Levi sang of love, wine and nature; and sometimes happily of the temptations of the flesh. He rejoiced in friendship and in the bustle of life. He would be charged with occasional excess, but never with indifference. Maimonides spoke gravely and advised the diaspora to face its problem with patience and prudence. Ha Levi impatiently went up to Zion where, according to legend, he was cut down by Arab cavalry as he prayed before the gates of Jerusalem. He was scandalously committed to the mystery of Israel's chosenness and cried for the Messiah. Ha Levi's spirit was full of feeling, passionate and compassionate, democratic, poetic, responsive to the grand redemptive themes, intensely Zionist and, above all,

steeped in and concerned with the fate of this people.

The times have made Halevians of most of us. The emphasis is on the Torah tradition as itself. Western civilization has let us down. The Torah tradition is significant not because it is the same but precisely because it is significantly special. At least that is the hope. Maimonides justified Judaism by showing that its teachings corresponded to philosophic concepts his age accepted as reasonable. Ha Levi struggled to show Judaism as a distinctive reality and he judged its teachings by their impact on the living rather than on their logical consistency.

The Halevian Jew dismisses all institutional divisions which keep us apart as scandalous. The real divisions are not between Reform and Conservative, kippah or no kippah, but between indifference and concern. We are few, and the enemy is at the gates. The Halevian seeks community. A recent survey of congregations summed it up with this observation: "No single conclusion registers so strongly as our sense that there is among the people we have come to know a powerful, perhaps even desperate, longing for community" (ReForm Is A Verb). The synagogue must be a place where a Jew can overcome the loneliness of urban life.

Then it must become a less formal place.

We are a less formal generation. Life is simply not orderly and the synagogue must be an alive place where something can happen to the spirit happening. I once studied synagogue programs and found that over a generation there had been a measureable shift from archeology to Torah in study , from lists of Jewish notables to Anne Frank, in sermon references and from lectures on the origin of the holidays to the worship experience itself. Even liberal Jews who once mocked law now talk of the need for a guide for practice; not so much, I suspect, because they want to be told what to do but because they want to feel that their practices are not antique relics but mitzvot, sacred acts.

Wait a minute. I remember being taught in religious school that

Judaism could be defined as ethical monotheism and that the core of Judaism consisted of a few simple truths about morality, justice and a just and gracious God. It all seemed clear. You're making Judaism complicated.

These Jews who reduce the Torah tradition to ethical monotheism believed that Israel's mission was to offer moral leadership to the world. No one paid any attention to their plans, or if they listened they declared our teachings subversive. Others, like Franz Rosenzweig, taught that Israel's mission was to provide the world with a symbol of the eternal way men so rarely travel. The Holocaust was too high a price to pay to be someone else's symbol. The assumptions of such a mission now seem either sheer arrogance, 'how many of the unknown saints of our world are Jews', or a forlorn illusion, 'who really saw the pioneers of the Yishuv turn the barren soil of Palestine into a green place and, if they saw, why did they arm nations eager to ravage these fields and towns?

The Torah tradition is ethical, monotheistic and much more. There is Rosh Hashanah, the Sabbath, the huppah and yahrzeit, Hebrew and Yiddish, Ayn Kelihenu and the Hatikvah - a rich, varied and compelling religious civilization.

We have need of the warmth of ritual. It's cold out there. The youth have shul-ins. Parents arrange Sabbath dinners to learn the words and the songs which they can sing with their children around their own table. You're here at this Institute. Such is our need that we have wrapped the shtetl in Fiddler on the Roof nostelgia. The shtetl was poor, full of misery and cruelty, a bleak place, not the Paradise Lost that we have imagined it to be, but its intimacy and color are in sharp contrast to the dreamy urban sprawl in which we lead our partially alienated lives and seems eminently desireable.

We no longer accept the narrow definition of the Torah tradition as prophetic Judaism. It is ethical and more. The Torah tradition defined as prophetic Judaism, the shape given to it by liberal Judaism, helped break Jews

from a tendency towards passivity imposed by centuries of subjugation, but it is a limited and simplistic definition which tended to diminish all that contributes to the religious life. The Torah tradition is not fully comprehended by those who say: "I live by the Ten Commandments. That's what it's all about. Who needs the synagogue" or "I'm involved in the Peace Movement and I don't need all that ritual stuff"; a Johnny One Note Judaism is precisely that, narrow, repetitive, not at all compelling. How long can anyone listen to one sound?

There's another problem. What does it mean to say 'I obey the ten commandments?' Usually those who preen themselves in this way mean little more than that they don't beat their wives, break into another's home, are reasonably honest in business, give a few dollars to various charities and help out with Little League. Wrenched out of the context of a sensitive religious system which raises up all aspects of morality, a few rules are simply that, naked words, which can mean much or little.

The big bold pronouncements about justice and righteousness which abound in the prophetic literature and are heard routinely from some pulpits are precisely that, big, bold and vague. Several generations of social engineering have taught me much about the evil that well-intentioned but unsophisticated planners can do. Told to build freeways, bury engineers did; and their miles of asphalt and concrete destroyed much of the sense of neighborliness which had made our cities livable. Simplicities simply will not solve complex problems which interestingly corresponds closely to the case-by-case analysis used by the rabbis who examined a problem from all sides and tried to apply principles from the body of Torah jurisprudence before making a judgment. Ethical commitment of a high order there must be, and wisdom of a high order in its application.

All this reminds me of a philosophy course I took last term during which the teacher introduced us to a mindset he called existentialist. If I understood him, existentialism denies the ability of abstract reason to comprehend

life. You learn by living. Meaning emerges from involvement. The goal is to deepen our experiences and get more out of each opportunity, not to find words which seem to explain but really do not explain what life is all about. Persons, not systems; intensity of feeling, not detachment; concern, not analysis. In the sense that existentialism makes a distinction between definition and affirmation and emphasizes affirmation, I have been arguing from a similar perspective. The label, Jew, is a label, something external, if you are not actively doing Jewish things. The Torah tradition must pass time tests: Is it reasonable? Is it functional, supportive of growth and maturity? Is it compelling?

I know I want the Torah to assert an autonomous claim. Abraham Joshua Heschel put the issue squarely: The doors of Western culture are open before him and whenever he wishes to enter he finds a welcome place. Why should he not assimilate? The worthwhileness of belonging to the Jewish people must not be taken for granted. Why should he not detach himself from the Jewish community and join another community? Can we in all sincerity say to the Jew: "He who separates himself from Judaism commits spiritual suicide?" The goal is to discover what is authentic and meaningful in our special and mysterious world. I must go beyond the narrow confines of logic which can describe passion. When the need to believe, the rush to faith, is strong as it is now, like any stream, it can break over its bank and become a destructive flood.

For all of our new-found interest in feeling and spirit there is a clear and present danger in setting aside logic and reason and glorifying emotionalism and feeling. Our emotions and feelings can lead us to serve devilish causes. The heart can run away with us as easily as the mind. Hitler's youth were whole-heartedly, honestly committed to the Fuehrer's goals.

You seem to be saying contradicting things. First you say go swimming. Then you say stay on the bank and take stock.

It is a matter of degree. The Maimonidean thought too much and there

was room to balance reason with feeling. The Halevian runs the danger of thinking with his feelings which can be suicidal. As always the advice you get from the synagogues speaks to both sides of life; contradictions. There is danger that we may never act. Becket's Waiting for Godot speeks to this side of the modern temper. Two tramps wait, hoping that Mr. Godot will come. Their lives are empty. Godot is their hope for the future but they are not sure Godot is real or that, if he comes, he has the power to transform their lives. They wait. Nothing happens. It's time to stop waiting and do something. Both acts end with the line: 'Let's go'; and neither moves. Becket has drametized the deepest pessimism of our age. We are trapped. There is no redeeming gospel. No effort on our part will bring nearer the Kingdom of God.

The Torah tradition has little patience with an inferiority which leads to lethargy. There is a commanding voice which we must heed: "Seek justice, correct oppression, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow's activism. Israel did not wait endlessly but set out on the long road to the Promised Land. Neither they nor Moses had a precise plan. We cannot and should not wait until someone presents us a completely detailed triptik. We will see the future that clearly, but we must move out and do the right, act with the materials and opportunities at hand, trusting that what we sincerely try to do well will be useful to us and serve God's purpose.

Fortunately, there seems to be a balance at the heart of the Jewish experience which says, "take hold of this but do not leave go of the other." We have had our enthusiasts. We have had our phlegmatics. But when you look at the broad outlines of Jewish thought you discover that our tradition tends to reject either/or decisions in favor of a both/and attitude: both the cultivation of the mind and the cultivation of the soul. With us it's not total abstinence but drink in moderation and sing the Kiddush. Piety is important but our daily responsibilities must be discharged: "If you had a sapling in your hand and someone calls out: 'Lo, the messiah comes, plant the

sapling first and then go to meet him.'" Materialism and greed were condemned as sins but poverty is no proof of virtue just as wealth is no proof of an evil character. The Jew prayed every day: "Grant us peace"; but pacifism was not declared an absolute rule. Self-defense was permitted on the Sabbath. Faith in God did not lead to any disparagement of human capacity. Man is neither demonic nor angelic by nature but both; and our actions are therefore rarely wholly saintly or wholly devilish. There can be fools for Christ but the strangeness of the phrase, fools for Torah, speaks volumes.

How do we know how to balance feeling and reason?

Go swimming and then dry yourself off and think about the experience. All I've been saying is that it won't help you at all to think about swimming if you've never tried it.

Chapter 7

THINK BOLDLY - BUT THINK

Indoors. The afternoon sun had given way to drizzle and dark. Chairs arranged in a circle, a bit too classroom for my taste. I was not surprised to be challenged for not having given simple and no-nonsense answers.

Billy Graham says, 'here it is, take it'. My rabbi says, 'let's think about it'. He likes to research ideas. At times I am not sure he comes to a conclusion. Sometimes I find myself thinking that Judaism is a sponge rather than a shaped religion.

I had expected something of the kind. Judaism's realistic and practical side runs head on into contemporary impatience. The pressure is for quick cures and instant solutions. I remember a young man who complained: 'I want to march to a distant drum and you keep telling me to be careful under whom I enlist.' An emphasis on wisdom breeds its own discontents.

One of the arresting paradoxes of modern times is that the religious traditions which are the most orthodox, evangelical and cocksure are, for many, the most attractive. These groups say: 'here is the way and the truth', and many of the truly free subscribe. Sometimes when I look at my synagogue's half-filled pews I wish I could affect the theological simplicity of a Billy Graham. I am a good preacher and if, in good conscience, I could raise my hands and say, 'Come unto me. Here is the light. Bring me your troubles. Here are answers', I am confident I could fill those pews.

Well, why don't you? The evangelists of the world have helped many and whatever their failings, some of the cults have helped straighten out confused kids.

Life is full of contradictions. There are no simple, good-for-all occasion rules. Life is a gift of God and precious, but must we attempt heroic measures to sustain a person whose heart and lungs are strong but whose brain has gone? Must we deny a pregnant woman the right to an abortion

when there are indications the embryo is malformed? It's not enough to proclaim a few simple so-called truths.

Recently I watched several young aides in our Nursery School who were overseeing the playground. A child fell on his back from a climbing device. A young assistant rushed over, picked up the crying tot and began to soothe it. Her impulsive act of love might have aggravated the injury.

Generosity is a virtue but not always. When the Judeans rebelled against Roman misrule, they were soundly thrashed and harshly punished. Hundreds of thousands were killed. Cities were plundered. Judea's population was pauperized. The few who somehow had been spared the worst were moved to give all they had to the homeless and starving. Unexpectedly, the sages suggested that a limit be put on one's generosity. The limit was a high one, but it was a limit nonetheless. There was no virtue in giving so much that your own family was added to the hapless caravan of need.

In messianic times a little child may lead us, but until then the Torah tradition preferred to entrust authority to the experienced and the wise. Simplicity was not considered a virtue. There is an old saying among us that "the ignorant man cannot be a saint." There may be a certain nobility in turning the other cheek, but a child in a fit of rate or a paranoid with his blood running hot must be restrained for his own well-being as well as for the protection of others. The Torah puts it bluntly: "if a neighbor is attacked one may not stand idly by" even if our interference endangers us. We may believe in non-resistance but abstract theory must not get in the way of saving a life.

The advice that you receive in a synagogue is likely to be pragmatic as well as principled. "I want to drop out of school and do something for the world." Fine, but trained minds and hands can do more for the world than those guided only by enthusiasm. Doesn't the Bible say that man does not live by bread alone? Yes, but without bread man does not eat at all. Where there are no groceries there is no Torah.

The Torah tradition has been called an obdurate morality of common sense [Abba Hillel Silver], but that is not the whole of it. The standard is holiness, not compromise, but the reality is that saints, like scholars, require years of basic training so the Torah includes the ethical A, B, C's: just weights and honest measures, tithes left for the poor, honor shown to one's parents, as well as the more sensitive levels of conduct: to love your neighbor as yourself; not to covet; if your enemy is hungry give him bread to eat; if he is thirsty give him water to drink. There were duties and 'oughts'; sins of commission and sins of omission; a required standard of conduct and a standard which was called "above and beyond the letter of the law." The Jewish curriculum was really little more than a ceaseless attempt to analyze the issues involved in applying Torah principles constructively to the hard realities of life. Talmud Torah can be described as a lifelong study in Jewish values clarification.

Conversation with your rabbi is likely to raise issues that you had not thought of before. We are trained to examine a problem from all sides. You want to get married. It's an intermarriage. The issues seem simple; you're in love and labels are not that important. You've even decided to raise the children as Jews. Have you thought about what the non-Jewish parent will be giving up, the emotional cost; and the danger that "see how much I did for you" will be a constant irritant in your marriage. What will happen to your children when they're shuttled between the two sets of grandparents? Is your love in any way an unconscious desire to hurt your parents; and, if so, is that a good basis for marriage? What about the non-religious differences in your background? A young man who came to talk with me about his plans said as he left: 'you're like the law professor who taught me that in reading a case every possibility has to be followed up'. There is Torah, the basic rules and moral principles; and there is Talmud Torah, a catalog of consequences, the imagination and the mind working out the various scenarios. What you will not hear from your rabbi is: 'it's open and shut.'

Blind faith was never considered a virtue. Faith can work miracles except when it fails to work miracles. A faith healer is successful except when he fails. He helps others except when the time spent with him delays a necessary visit to the doctor. When faith and reason are uncoupled, tragedy can result. Judaism rejected any glorification of emotion or feeling which raised ignorance or innocence into the category of virtues. Jonestown and Nurenberg suggest the possible danger of following charismatic leaders blindly.

Jews knew the cost of blind faith because we were often the victims of fanaticism and because, occasionally, we lost our emotional balance. The seventeenth century was a time of persecution and apartheid, you might call it 'the pits.' Ghetto walls were being raised on all sides. Driven by the logic of desperation which is not logic at all but raw emotion, thousands proclaimed a tormented and neurotic scholar-Kabbalist, Shabbetai Zvi, as the Messiah. Families sold all they had and traveled months to be at his side. Of course, Shabbetai was not the messiah. When told by Turkish authorities he must convert to Islam or die, he converted and his followers found themselves adrift without roots or hope. Many committed suicide. Othes followed the leader into Islam. Religion uncoupled from reason, like love uncoupled from reason, is an invitation to disaster.

Faith in faith is not enough. An optimistic faith can help us master our fears and speed recovery from illness, but to argue,as Mary Baker Eddy did, that illness is a state of mind which can be cured by a positive mental attitude is nonsense; and worse than nonsense if we fail to have the bone set or to undergo the indicated surgery. Not so long ago I visited a twenty-three year old in the psychiatric ward of a local hospital. In college she had set her heart on a medical career. Only an average student, she had been rejected wherever she had applied. Undaunted she continued to plan on a medical career despite the advice of her parents and, incidentally, mine, to set other goals for herself. She would be accepted. How could she be sure? She had attended a two-week human potential seminar where she had been

assured that if you set your mind to the task nothing can stand in the way. She did a year of graduate biology, resubmitted her applications, was again refused and suffered a nervous breakdown.

Among the world's religions there are, and always have been, traditions which emphasize intensity in one's religious life, withdrawal and asceticism. Such attitudes have played a role in the Torah tradition; but Judaism did not bring these disciplines front and center and declare living in a monastery or taking vows of celibacy to be marks of a special holiness. Most rabbis lived at home, married, had children, worked at an ordinary occupation and were distinguished by their knowledge of Torah rather than by a particularly arduous religious discipline. We had ascetics who wore hair shirts and bathed in the cold rivers, and mystics who fasted and prayed so that they might sense God; but most were also Talmudists, men of well-trained minds who busied themselves a good part of the day with affairs of the community. The prophetic message was judged by its contents, not by the fact that it had been brought by one who wore a hair shirt. An ecstatic who babbled was a babbler, not a prophet. Midnight devotions, mystical exercises, prayer vigils, were known, but they were not prized above quiet meditation, thoughtful discussion and knowledge of the literature.

Torah study was as essential to the religious life as public worship and private devotion. I remember attending a Greek Orthodox service where the gospel was sung in classic Greek, a language no communicant any longer understood. It was a moving, but not a learning, experience. The Torah also is chanted and many do not understand Hebrew, but for as long as the Torah has been read in the synagogue the rule has been that it is to be translated and for those who may not grasp the text's meaning a paraphrase or explanation, the sermon, is to be offered. Torah reading is not simply a ritual but an affirmation of the continuing relevance of the word to our lives and an exploration of that meaning.

There is no virtue in not knowing. Faith can be misplaced and excessive

and the hope was that knowledge would restrain incipient fanaticism. Cult leaders demand uncritical and unconditioned allegiance and try to convince prospective disciples that ideas other than their views are not only unworthy of consideration but the work of the devil.

When I asked a friend who had spent some time in an ashram about the attraction of a sixteen-year old, pudgy, Indian guru who sits cross-legged with his followers and teaches a vague set of ideas about love, living with less and good vibrations, he told me: "I felt I counted. I was part of an important group. We had truths denied everyone else. The cult leader knew me. I was not a computer punch card. Our leader didn't say much, but life quieted down. He seemed to simplify life. The group was warm and full of good feelings. My head had been in many pieces and I was helped to put it together." Why did you leave: "I discovered that I was being used. I wanted to visit my parents and was told 'no'. I found I was loved only when I obeyed, and that's not love but manipulation."

A voice chimed in: "It is kind of bizarre, but this guy I grew with has a guru. He quotes his master all the time, visits him periodically, and gives over most of what he earns. He says that for the first time he can love everybody. He's got answers and I've got questions."

I would guess your friend's life had been unfocused and he had a deep need for certainty. A century ago, when you closed the door, the world remained outside. Today you may as well not close the door. The world comes in via the television, the telephone and the radio. The home no longer provides the child a coherent environment. His parents say one thing, his peers another. His teachers have their own ideas and Madison Avenue and Hollywood get six hours a day at him through the tube. Our emotions, forced to cope with this abundance of experiences, opportunities and advice could be compared to an overloaded electrical circuit. When energy surges beyond the circuit's capacity a circuit breaker is activated and the mind shuts off. That's when the cult leader comes in: 'don't worry about another breakdown,

I'll do your thinking for you.' He provides emotional security in the overwhelming world of future shock. Silver's rule explains the current popularity of cults and gurus: the more change, the more credulity; which is to say, the more decisions we need to make, the stronger the need to believe that there are simple answers and the more likely we are to have faith in those who assure us they have answers.

So many conflicting ideas are presented to us that we are driven to near distraction, 'my head is falling apart'; in effect, we find ourselves paralyzed and then, in frustration and anger, break out by deliberately suspending disbelief. Perhaps it is inevitable that under such pressure we turn to a father figure or a simple philosophy, but we ought to be clear as to what we are doing. Hasidism failed not because the rebbes were charlatans, some were, many were not; but because as adívsers they were limited by their environment and learning and passed on as truth what was, in fact, only the conventional wisdom of their place, and often bad advice. Despite his self assurance, the guru is human and participates in the fallibility which is the hallmark of the human race.

A religion that did not provide a sense of certainty would not survive, but there are all kinds of certainty. There is the certainty that an amulet will protect or that a mystical voice will tell you what to do or that the hands of the minister will heal; and there is the certainty that Torah Orah, the Torah is light, that there is a helpful vision and much wisdom in the rich and varied Torah tradition.

The cults are not the only groups who seek to satisfy this need for certainty. The most popular religions of modern times, Communism and Maoism, demand the absolute submission of their postulants and get it. The Party will think for you. Work and trust your leaders. They know the 'scientific' laws of history and how to make it all come out right. Then there is the Torah. The Torah wants us to turn our minds on, not off. The Jewish experience declares the mind sacred, enshrines learning, counsels respect for the judgment of others, and dares to worship a god who not only demands obedience

but says, "come, let us reason rogether." Our myths recount that both Abraham and Moses argued with God about various matters. You're not asked to park your mind when you enter the synagogue.

One of my gentile friends found Christ and it is as if she were a different person. She says that her decision to accept Jesus has changed her life, that everything suddenly has become clear and joyous. I have to take her at her word. She is always smiling. I have never felt that surge of clarity and I've never met any Jew who has.

I have a young friend who was something of a rebel until he met a Habad missionary. Now he has answers. It happened quite suddenly during a Habad Sabbath. Now he not only knows but he is remarkably calm.

He sounds well off. I'd like to put my head together.

Everyone would, but there is a price. He will not eat any longer in his parent's home. They are not sufficiently kosher and his girl has left him. She wanted companionship,to be able to touch him in public and not to be badgered to live as he decided to live.

Why did you assume that my friend who had accepted Christ was young?

Most religious conversions occur to young people in their late teens end early twenties.

Why?

Why?

There is a statistical correlation between confusion and conversion. Adolescence is perhaps the most confusing passage we ever make. There are so many opportunities, so many questions and few clear guidelines. We are immigrants entering a new country. We've lived among peers and mostly in a school environment. We don't know what we will find when we enter the strange adult world. We don't know what we will find. There are so many decisions to make. During such dangerous passages our longing for certainty, for a confirming system of values, increases geometrically. Simply put, these are the years when we are most susceptible.

You'll admit that your Habad friend is an exception.

Certainly. Our tradition has never focused worship on a confirming

religious experience. Classic Christianity made the gaining of faith primary and so ritualized such moments as Communion and such experiences as giving testimony, both of which focus on a public avowal of one's faith.

A Jew is a Jew. There are learned Jews and indifferent Jews; but no Jew is considered outside the Torah's redemptive promise. The Torah tradition simply is not as convinced as Christianity as to the significance of a sudden transforming experience.

I think I know what you mean. A Jew is a Jew, but there are one to ten Jews. On the one to ten scale, I am a two or three Jew. I went to religious school and I go to services on Yom Kippur. I came here to be with friends as much as for the talk. I've found the discussion interesting. Your approach has lowered my resistance, but I began to want to be a six or seven Jew when we held hands last night around the camp fire, chanted the Havdalah prayers and sang Hebrew songs. No offense meant, but I suspect a warm and open Jewish experience is worth a hundred reasonable explanations of what you keep calling the Torah tradition.

None taken. Our basic commitments transcend reason. Religious commitment is like love. You can't set out to love someone because they fit some perceived analysis of the ideal mate. Love surprises you. It comes on us for many reasons, some of which are unpredictable. Haven't you ever met someone others had insisted you would like and know right off that the chemistry was wrong?

Aren't we back to the Christian emphasis on the transforming moment?

In part. Moses had his transforming moment at the Burning Bush. There are transforming moments; but they are only the first step and the Torah tradition will not make too much of them. If Moses had heard God and not gone back to Egypt the moment would have been meaningless.

On the Jewish scale I'm about a six. I'm a holiday freak. I like being with the family at a Seder table: the food, the songs, hiding the Afikomen. I get a kick when I rattle off "Who knows thirteen" without looking at the

book or taking a breath; so I can appreciate what you've been saying about the binding quality of the rites; but I don't think I'd appreciate the holidays if they didn't convey some important ideas to me. I'm not much for happenings. The Haggadah always gets me thinking about the difference between "freedom from" and "freedom for", about physical and spiritual bondage and about the fate of the Jewish people. I find the holidays both binding and reminding."

Another voice: I'm a two. I find the holidays modestly moving. I'd like to have a transforming experience, but I can't imagine finding God along with the Afikomen.

A voice I had not heard: I can. We had a Russian emigre family for Seder last year. I didn't understand the father's broken English, but I saw the tear in his eye when he read, 'last year we were slaves, this year we are free.' The Exodus was taking place and I sensed the God Who redeems.

Rabbi, we've gotten away from the question. My born-again friend insists that she is a changed and better person since she has taken to Christ. I have enjoyed various moments as a Jew, and I know that being Jewish has conditioned many of my attitudes; but I cannot imagine myself saying, 'hey, everything is clear, I feel saved'. Now that I think of it, I've never heard a rabbi speak of being saved.

Some have described Christianity as faith in faith, and over the centuries the Christian ethos has conditioned the believer to look for the Holy Spirit, and to anticipate the inrush of the Holy Spirit which suddenly resolves confusions and doubts; and, since no blessing is more sought after, to call the resolution of an identity crisis a gift of the grace of God. Modern psychologists explain the inrush of the spirit, the feeling that life falls into place, less theologically: when burdened by indecision and confusion we seek help, our need allows us to tap spiritual resources which up to now have lain dormant, and when they come on stream there is a surge of power which makes us feel what we had not felt before, and since we now have new powers or sensitivities we feel more alive than ever before. In psychological terms being saved is the unexpected feeling of coming alive.

If these powers lie dormant within us why hasn't Judaism created rituals which would help us unlock these capacities?

There are dangers in ritualizing techniques to achieve an emotional high, not the least of which is that redemption is made to pivot on an emotional experience. A single experience, no matter how powerful, is a slender reed on which to hang so much. An identity crisis repositions our hopes, it does not by itself change personality or character. The faithful often slip back into alcoholism or philandering or uncontrollable anger. Guideposts gives only the success stories. Our tradition does not deny such moments or even discourage them, but it does not pivot our religious life about them.

There have been mystics in all ages who knew the inrush of the spirit, the Hebrew term was ruah ha-Kodesh, and a number of medieval manuals describe with some precision how the soul can prepare itself for the mystic moment. Many have sensed the presence of God but no attempt was made to make this feeling an absolute requirement; why make second-class Jews of those who don't experience Feelings of this intensity. Not everyone is susceptible to the mystic experience and not every such experience catches the worshipper up in a spiritually significant way. Some come down from the mountain bound to fanatical visions which is why the Torah tried to ground the mystic to the Torah's prescribed way of life. Some come down uncharged.

Why did I think before today that Judaism didn't have a mystical side?

I once heard the rabbi described as a resource person and I remember thinking how completely secularized some recent attitudes toward the Torah tradition have become. Actually, the traditional rabbi was a learned man but learning was only one aspect of his personna. He was also a holy man whose wisdom was acknowledged to go beyond understanding of the rules of divorce or of kashrut. He was known to be pious, but that was not all. His prayers could intercede with God on behalf of Israel or keep the Angel of Death away from a sick bed. So it was in Talmudic times and again among the Hasidim.

You brought your problems to the tzaddik and he gave you good counsel; indeed, he knew your problems before you spoke them. His wisdom worked because you had faith in it; that is, it worked if you were a disciple. I am a sophisticated professional in a highly complex and largely secular environment who has no desire to play God, but I have performed miracles, not because I am an adept or even interested in faith healing, but simply because people come to me expecting a miracle and sometimes what happened between us was what needed to happen.

Sensitive apologetes like Martin Buber have helped us appreciate the humanity, the joyousness, the enthusiastic piety, the immediacy of experience which Hasidism summoned and which is the basis of its appeal to moderns, but there was another side to it. Enthusiasm for the spirit and the immediacy of experience were at times so overwhelming as to block counsels of prudence. No need to consult a doctor. The tzaddik's charm and charisma would be the means of healing. You must attend the rebbe's court so you are advised not to emigrate to the United States.

There is a bit too much decorum and rigidity in the conventional synagogue presentation to suit my taste, but I have watched youth parade in Nurenberg and on Red Square and I know why my tradition is deeply suspicious of pure emotion and of faith in faith.

The Hebrew word for faith is emunah. Emunah defines an unshakable confidence in life's possibilities and a calm faith in God's redemptive will rather than a surge of mystical feelings. Emunah defines steadfastness on a given course, perseverance. The emphasis is on a whole-hearted service which never doubts that we do the good because God wills us to do the good, or that we will continue on the way because we have faith that God's way is the way we should go. Emunah suggests the special meaning of faith in the Torah tradition.

Christianity's faith in faith relates to its understanding of the psychological obstacles to a happy and honorable existence. The Torah tradition recognizes all the obstacles we face as we try to climb as high as we can on

the ladder of moral sensitivity: our appetites, passions, ambitions, greed, envy. . .; what it does not recognize is a single entity, the hypostesis which Christians call Original Sin, made up of all these natural passions and appetites, an entity which can be overcome by faith. The Christian myth put it this way: when, against God's specific command, Adam and Eve ate of the Tree of Knowledge, they committed a sin whose taint was passed on to all their descendants. Burdened by this Original Sin, no one could gain salvation until God decided that mankind would no longer have to be shackled in this way and brought about a second deliverance. The first was the Exodus, the second God offering the world His son as Christ. All mankind had shared in the sin of Adam, now all could share in the atoning death and be released by faith from the inherited and crippling stigma. Original Sin was defined as thralldom to the devil, being entangled by the libido, being ensleved to lust, ambition, and it was taught that,by faith in the Christ's vicarious sacrifice of Himself, man could break free of these shackles and save his soul from damnation.

The Torah tradition recognized in our makeup each of the elements of Original Sin, and knew how each was an obstacle in the way of our developing what is generally called character; but denied that these obstacles could be removed simply by an act of faith. Faith is simply not that powerful. I have a deep faith in God but I have not resolved all the contradictions of my nature nor have I managed properly all my responsibilities. There is no evidence that right doing is easier for the born-again Christian than for the once-born Christian or the non-Christian.

Jimmy Carter's a case in point.

I let the comment slip by. Our tradition does not encourage the believer to feel that having felt the touch of the Holy Spirit he is saved. Heaven is not reserved for those who have faith but for those who are good. Classic Christianity, with its teaching that only faith in the Cross saves, could not say as did at least some elements in rabbinic Judaism: "The righteous among the peoples of the world have a share in the World to Come."

All of us know Robert Burns' line: "You take the high road and I'll take the low road and I'll be in Scotland afore ye." Christianity took the high road, justification by faith, the promise of a sacramental salvation, an emphasis on motivation rather than community structure and careful self-discipline. We took the low road and worked to create the institutions which would encourage ethical growth and create the basis of a humane social order and the discipline which develop character. Our emphasis was on regimen and discipline rather than impulse. You will find the sages pronouncing: At first do what should be done because it's demanded of you. In time you'll do the right because it's the right thing to do. Character development is a slow process and one which requires concern for the environment in which we live as well as for our habits. The high road may be a more dramatic way but, according to the poet, those who take the low road get there first and, besides, it is from the valley floor that you see the mountains in all their splendor.

Her voice: Until now I never thought about it quite this way but you've touched my problem with Judaism. I want a vision and my rabbi gives me wisdom. I want to dream the impossible dream and he tells me to make sure it's not mission impossible and to make sure I know where I am going. I have always felt Judaism makes too much of the mind. Sometime I can't sleep all night because my mind is whirling so fast. There can be an intellectual as well as an emotional overload.

There can be too much wisdom. My city has paid innumerable experts to prepare urban renewal plans; and the process of making plans and deciding between competitive designs has become a major source of delay. A good case can be made that in recent times elements within the Jewish community undervalued feeling and the power of emotion. I can still remember the surprise of many in my congregation when I gave a course on Jewish mystical techniques: all-night Torah study; fasting from dawn to dusk; midnight vigils and the like. 'I didn't know Jews ever did such things.' Throughout most of the Middle Ages more Kabbalah was studied than Talmud, and in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries the spiritual center of Jewish life was the sacred city of Safed where mystics-in-training clustered around learned spirit masters who taught them esoteric techniques and an esoteric wisdom. It was always both mine and spirits. The Bible, like Caesar's Gaul, is divided into three parts and the wisdom literature is only one part of the whole. Another is prophecy where intensity breaks through prudential concerns. Amos was impatient with the concerns of a high priest like Amaziah who argued that nothing should be said which would suggest to people that there were questions about the value of coming to the shrine. Amos mocked Amaziah, but the priest was not simply protecting his turf. To be sure, many priests made their living at Shiloh, but it was equally true that its fund supported widows and orphans and the community's public welfare programs.

I have a friend who worries over each decision so long that he has never gotten his life off dead center.

Your rabbi did not tell you not to go. Abraham was told: Go! Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house and go to the land that I will show you. No detailed plans or specific directions were offered. Presumedly, by faith, Abraham would find his way. But, even as Abraham is given his head, he is also given a warning: "Be a blessing", be careful that what you do will not cause hurt to another but will add to the sum total of happiness, a typically Jewish prescription. The vision splendid with a dash of practical advice.

That's calculation.

Perhaps. Calculation comes in two models. There is the rather mechanical calculating of consequences. Aristotle suggests such a calculus in his discussion of the Golden Mean. Following his mathematics one would try to keep his actions balanced and really never take bold steps; and there is a calculus of possibility which seeks not the middle road but the path which will lead to an unfolding of our spirit and the achievement of a higher level of self-control and sensitivity. Torah-based calculation, at its best, thrusts

deliberately towards an enlarged generosity of spirit, a greater sensitivity and a heightened awareness of our responsibility to others and to God. We must move on in a spirit of mounting espiration which is what the prophet Hosea meant when he said, "Press on to know God."

The Torah tradition's goal is the sanctification of life. Equal weight is given to the individual's religious life and to the fashioning of a just society. Torah is a revelation which includes specific rules for personal growth, family structure, business relations, a community's social welfare, even public health. Israel is to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation". Prophetic outrage at injustice, Amos thundering about the spoiled and callous folk of his day, has always played a role in Israel's program of social regeneration; but so has the less dramatic responsibility of training up a child in the way he should go, creating social welfare institutions of all types, and the disciplining of one's own lusts and greed: "Sanctify yourself and only then seek to sanctify others."

Your way takes too long. Our society needs radical surgery. Prudence and wisdom, what you call halachic discipline, are rationalizations for inaction and the excuses of those who are not willing to be bold.

People of decision and of conviction are among the most blessed and the most dangerous of all human beings. A vision is by definition missionary. It is only natural to want to share what we know to be right with our children and with the world. A missionary offers himself and a redeeming wisdom which is to him a gift without price. Missionaries went to Asia, Latin America and Africa and imposed upon the natives attitudes and values which were often ruinous to the tribe's social and cultural life. They were not paid to do so. Their motives were unselfish. They risked their lives so that others might share God's blessings.

What happens when what you believe stands in the way of what I believe? If my ego is large enough or my convictions uncertain, I try to convert you. If I cannot convince you, you become an obscurantist and I may well be

tempted to devise coercive means of changing your mind. During the Cultural Revolution millions of Chinese were sent to re-education communes. The Russians handle dissidents in what they euphemistically call mental hospitals. Millions have died because someone wrote a book on economic philosophy and that book became for millions a truth uncoupled from that humane wisdom which would interpose restraint.

The virtue of halachic discipline is that it provides a way to rein in the excesses of the committed. Modern there are things that we may not do. We may not murder property owners who stand in the way of a revolution simply because they are in the way. We may not steal another's good name even if he opposes what we consider progress. We may not slander a political opponent even though we know he is unfit for office. The Jew does not say, 'to thine own self be true', but 'know before whom you stand'. The commandments limit the means we can use to fulfill our vision and, in so doing, protect us from ourselves. Patience tempers the dream. Dreams and imagination raise patience above the level of tawdry compromise.

Go! Do! But be careful to be a blessing. Don't let your passions push you out of control.

Jews, too, can be fanatics.

In Israel some Jews stone the cars of those who drive near Mea Shearim on the Sabbath. Jews have censored books, sometimes, to be sure, under coercion; but sometimes simply because authority never likes to be questioned. But it is not easy for Jews to stay at white heat. Our sense of humor gets in the way and the tradition does not encourage unbridled passion. Torah literature vibrates with the requirement of patience. Man is not God. How can we be that sure we are right? When I got hot under the collar my father would say: Hop nicht, don't jump into it; and my mother would add: 'Don't be a hot angel'.

Jews do not make disciplined followers. The Israelites repeatedly murmured against Moses and,later, repeatedly rebelled against their kings.

Golda Meir used to say that she was the only premier with two million presidents. Office does not ennoble the occupant. Rabbis were accorded only that authority which the people felt their erudition and character deserved. When a medieval community wanted an halachic question resolved they circulated the case broadly or else got an answer from a respected sage and submitted that brief to other scholars for comment. Authority lay with a scholarly consensus and not with the opinion of a single man. Even trusted wisdom must be checked out. God alone enjoyed uncontested authority, all other authority was derivative. Checks and balances are in our blood.

I was struck as you spoke of the Torah's ability to handle contradictions constructively.

Some people see every decision as between black and white; they are either/or types. Others see a wide range of possibilities and consequences, many shades of gray. We're both/and people, or at least our tradition encourages us to be, both community and autonomy; both wisdom and imaginative commitment; both mind and spirit. Our motto might well be the rabbinic maxim, "take hold of this thought and do not forget the opposite thought."

We're back to the Golden Mean.

No. Aristotle's world was thatof the cool and detached academic. The Torah tradition is committed to holiness. We use reason not to avoid action but to avoid being counterproductive. Our goal is growth not balance.

Chapter 8

JUDAISM IS

After lunch I began with a bit of personal history. Some years back my father studied the distinctions between the Jewish world outlook and that of other philosophies and religions, and titled his manuscript Where Judaism Differs. An editor antiqued the title into Where Judaism Differed, and so it was published. The publisher apparently was motivated by a point of view shared at the time by many of liberal spirit that though there had been major differences between the classic faiths, these were no longer significant. Theology meant little to them and they could not imagine anyone really caring about Calvary or Sinai which they dismissed as colorful legends. Only the ethical teachings of the religions counted and these were assumed to be essentially similar. Theological distinctions bred distance and misunderstanding and it was a progressive act to deny their importance.

That editor misread the times. Since World War II a tidal wave of religious passion has moved across the globe. Who would have believed college women in Iran would encourage the Ayotollah Khomeini to put them back into purdah? Across the Near East immans have preached jihad, holy war, against Israel. Ireland, Lebanon, Iran, India, give the lie to those who still believe that the world has outgrown religious differences; nor is religious passion limited to backward countries or ignorant folk. The Right-To-Life crusade in our country is fueled by church doctrine and led by many who are well-educated. Nor has the house of Israel been exempt. Some of the settlements on the West Bank serve security purposes. Others are there because groups like the Gush Emunim, the self-styled 'faithful', insist that the Bible's description of the boundaries of the Promised Land must determine the foreign policy objectives of the current government.

He was a child of his time and situation. The allies had won the war. America was prosperous and powerful. We seemed to be solving our problem

and, among the academics at least, there was a tendency to see religion as a disembodied and largely irrelevant set of doctrines floating somewhere out there. There was no good reason to get excited about quaint customs or parochial problems. The non-affiliated folk assumed that the old theologies would simply wither away and be replaced by a sensitive ethicism which could recognize and exalt the potentialities of each human being. There was a good bit of talk about a Judeo-Christian tradition, the assumption being that each faith system encouraged the same basic values: moral responsibility, individual dignity, economic and social justice, the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God.

At the same time Socialist theoreticians were identifying religion with other-worldliness and the encouragement of political passivity and, as such, part of the propaganda put out by those who benefited from the injustices of the status quo. Cultural anthropologists had located religion in every known culture and had defined the integrative and enlivening function of religion and, in the process, making it clear that all claims to a monopoly of truth or to sole possession of the keys of the Kingdom were without merit.

Theology tended to be dismissed, without warrant, as little more than skillful apologetics for a particular position rather than as an investigation of truth. Departments of Christian theology became Departments of Religion where study focused on developing a methodology which would permit students to comprehend the function of all religious systems rather than on an examination of the "truth" of one system. There was no "true" religion, only complementary and culturally distinct ways of achieving a coherent and inspiring outlook on life. Such comparative studies and the opening of neutral space in society where religious labels didn't matter, seemed to open the way, finally, to a true human community; and within this frame of reference, particularist concerns could only be seen as quixotic and regressive.

It was a time when people kept reminding me that Confucius, Jesus and Hillel each had taught the Golden Rule: 'do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you,' from which it presumedly followed as night the day

that everything that needed to be said about religion had been said.

I think it was Jean Paul Sartre who said, "the best way to feel oneself no longer a Jew is to reason." He might equally well have said 'Christian' or 'muslim.' Reason seeks truth and there is no Jewish, Christian or Hindu truth, at least not if we are using truth in an objective sense. Dad's editor considered himself a reasonable man and in his mind it stood to reason that modern thought had voided all claims to theological distinction. This approach did not consider the possibility of Iran's Ayotollah Khomeini, Libya's Quadafi, Ireland's Rev. Paisley, China's cultural revolution or the born-again phenomenon in our own country.

Why was he so wrong?

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

My father's editor, whom I later got to know, was, in fact, a communicant of an American civic religion which assumes the unquestioned value of democracy, social reform and individual freedom; and bases its vision in the faith, the word is deliberately used, that what is contradictory, erratic or malicious in human action results from societaly-induced distortions of our innate decency rather than any inherent limitation of human nature. According to this upbeat humanism, selfish or erratic behavior is the result of the human spirit having been brutalized by the cruelties and dehumanizing institutions of the social order. Presumedly, as human institutions are reformed, the amount of psychological damage will diminish and our gentle and loving self will emerge from its ego defenses. This was the religion which provided the impulse, acknowledged or unacknowledged, to utopian communes from America's New

Hormony and Amana to Israel's Degania and Ein Harod.

Do you disagree with the proposition that we are what our society allows us to become?

The rabbis warned against settling in a city where there are no schools. A community's reach augments or limits your own; but not completely. You can stand against the tide: "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." The Genesis myth of Sodom and Gemorrah, the wicked cities of the Plain, focuses on Abraham's intercession with God on behalf of any good folk who might have lived there: "will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty?" Not even twenty righteous were to be found, but the point had been made that living in Sodom need not reduce strong-minded people to indecency. Environment isn't everything. Every commune has its failures.

Go back to your editor and his common denominator idea about contemporary religions. Was he so wrong?

Where Judaism Differed was published in 1956 just before ethnic and black studies burst on the scene, and my editor friend misread the times. Blacks, it seemed, wanted to be black, not white. Spanish parents wanted their children taught in their native tongue. Christians wanted to be evangelical, not simply ethical.

Disturbed by the blind impersonality of the mass society, "Here are decent godless people, their only memory the asphalt road and a thousand lost golf balls" (T.S. Eliot), many turned from the struggle to be like to a struggle to separate out. French Canada is a case in point. Everywhere there was a renewed interest in 'soul". Some turned to the cults, but far more toward the religious gospels which had provided their ancestors, but not necessarily their parents, with identity, moral certainty and corporate pride. It was the age of the born-again evangelism and Jesus Christ Superstar. It was a time for "tradition". The ghetto was a cold, impoverished and squalid place, full of pathology, but Fiddler on the Roof exposed none of this. Religion was in. But then we began to hear about the Moonies and brainwashing and we began to realize again that religions could not be accorded a blanket certificate of

ethical value.

The editor failed to recognize that holiness never exists in the abstract, but always adheres to a particular rite, holiday or hymn. There is no such thing as an unlabeled human being, everyone must have a name; there is no such thing as an unlabeled religion.

George Santayana is credited with the observation that to try to be religious without espousing a specific religion is like trying to speak without controlling a specific language. Esperanto and ecumenicism belong to those bleached ideas which went out of style at about the time America recognized we would remain a pluralistic society and not a homogenous one. French, Swahili and Japanese are distinct languages and natural expressions of a particular culture. "Catholicism, Shamanism, Shinto and the Torah tradition are distinct religions and natural expressions of a particular religious civilization. There are methodologies which allow us to study the various religions; religions share common social and psychological functions; but identity of function is simply that and no more. America's civic religion and Soviet Communism are opposed diametrically in teaching and messianic hope. The idea that the various religions promulgate the same fundamental attitudes and values is absurd.

Limit yourself to Judaism and Christianity. Aren't they built on the same foundation, the Bible?

Not really. What is Torah to us is Old Testament to them. To Christians the Bible contains important, even inspired, materials, a chronicle of the first stage of sacred history and prophecies about the[Christ] Messiah; but much of it has been cancelled or superseded.

We share the Ten Commandments.

In part. We read, "you shall not murder". They translate, "you shall not kill"; their version fits more closely Jesus' 'turn the other cheek' sermon; but it's an impossible translation since the Torah text permits wars of self-defense and stipulates capital punishment for certain crimes. Behind this example lies a difference in approach. Paul denied the divine authority

of all the six hundred and thirteen commandments in the Torah, so the Ten Commandments could be interpreted as a self-contained unit. To Jews all the Commandments were sacred.

We share the messianic hope of peace on earth.

In part, the Christian vision is of a world joined in faith as the mystic body of Christ; the Jewish vision, growing out of our history, emphasizes Zion, the land, established in justice, and the world rejoicing in justice and peace without necessarily being joined in one religious communion.

Arent't religious differences really limited to official pronouncements? People don't care.

Differences in religion show up in the individual attitudes as well as the church publications. Try a simple test. Ask a few friends whether or not they agree with the sentence: faith is a private matter. I think you will Find that most Christians will say 'yes' unequivocably; and most Jews will agree, but quickly add something about the importance of community. There is a much stronger sense of family in the Jewish experience than in the Christian ethos. The Jewish position reflects the palpable sense of Jewish interdependence which operates throughout the Jewish world and leads Jews everywhere to support Israel, welcome Soviet emigres and worry about their co-religionists in South Africa and the Argentine. Jewish communities in every town of size in the United States organize fund-raising drives for caring institutions, religious education and the relief of Jews everywhere under the rubric, 'we are one'. Such support is instinctive among Jews, so much so that we wonder when the Christian world fails to mobilize itself to support the Christians of Lebanon or the Sudan. Jews have been taught by the prophets as well as history that being a Jew involves you with God and with the Jewish people. We expect our leaders to be active in the community and not lead a life of secluded devotions. Moses went back to Egypt to bring out a whole people.

The existence of religious differences does not preclude civic cooperation.

On some issues it does. The Roman Catholic bishop of Cleveland and I have worked closely on race-related matters, particularly desegregation of the schools, but we are on opposite sides of the political fence when it comes to Federal aid to parochial schools and the proposed anti-abortion constitutional amendment. His church takes a more rigid attitude on birth control than rabbinic Judaism and, certainly, than I do. Elements of the Protestant Church translate the rules of Sabbath rest into Sunday blue laws and argue an absolute pacifism, neither of which is a Jewish position. Concern for churches and communicants in the Arab world has led international church bodies, both Catholic and Protestant, to be less than forthcoming in their pronouncements on Israel. Different clusters of religious ideas lead to different agendas and to different attitudes towards specific social problems.

Christianity glorified celibacy. The Augustinian Church accepted Paul's putdown of marriage as a condescension to the flesh. Judaism labeled marriage kiddushim, a sanctification. Love was a natural and healthy human expression. There was no reason to be ashamed of physical attraction. "Three sights are too wonderful for me, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a young woman." Rabbis always have married. According to folklore, God enjoys working as a marriage broker. A thirteenth-century sage-mystic, Nachmanides, wrote a book which praised the physical relationships between men and women as fulfilling God's creative purpose, not only because sex produced children but because pleasure was given and received. No one found anything unseemly in the suggestion that the frank love lyrics of the Song of Songs at the same time described God's love for Israel.

The Jewish tradition emerged in a Near Eastern cultural environment where the body and the soul were accepted as inseparably intertwined. The Biblical word, nefesh, denoted both soul and the physical heart. The New Testament emerged in a world deeply influenced by Greek categories of thought

whose tendency was to separate matter and form, body from soul. Form, the soul, was seen as eternal, pure; matter, the flesh as perishable and impure. Having come of age when this dualistic system was dominant, early Christianity came naturally to hold that one of the purposes of religious discipline was to free the soul from its prison within the body. To that end ascetic disciplines such as fasting and the mortification of the flesh were encouraged. Marriage was seen as a condescension to the flesh. Elements of the Jewish people were influenced by this dualism and an ascetic tradition developed; but at no time was monasticism declared the only way to holiness. Moses had a wife, Zipporah, and sons. Jesus was a bachelor.

In the long record which is Jewish history you can locate men who bathed in cold rivers and who fasted to break free from the power of their appetites; but the Torah's unitary understanding of the human being continued to act as a caution not to divide man into parts and declare some parts seemly and others unseemly. Among Jews ascetics coexisted with those who worshipped God with a whole heart and after a good meal, and the community generally was not prepared to declare one way superior.

Aren't there differences of similar magnitude between orthodox and other Jews on a range of matters, from the separation of church and state to cremation? The tradition defines homosexuality as a sin. The Reform movement organizes a gay synagogue. The tradition requires ground burial but some congregational cemeteries include mausoleums and niches for ashes. How can Torah be such a mishmash?

We live at a time when the river we call Jewish life is plunging through white water rapids and significant differences have developed among those who are serious about the Torah tradition on how responsibly to come to grips with changing conditions. Some emphasize the letter of the law, others its spirit; and both groups can make a case for their position. Take the matter of homosexuality. The rabbinic tradition emphasizes that the Torah condemns homosexual acts; the liberal tradition cites the Torah texts which prohibit treating anyone as a misfit or outcast. Our choice of a position will depend

on which theme we give the greater weight, our gut feeling about the advisability of change, whether we think in terms of the river or the tree. Here lies the great divide in modern Jewish life. The halacha permits abortion only when there is a direct threat to the mother's life, but also affirms that the holiness of life involves concerns about the quality of life. There are differences, and they are basic; but, as long as we choose to think seriously about Torah values, our conclusions are whether the tradition and there is reason to believe that as we learn to live in our new world greater agreement will emerge. The more flexible force the Formalists to consider whether circumstances have have changed so much that people are being hurt rather than helped by the regimen Torah suggests and the Formalists force those of liberal spirit to examine their positions more carefully. I have noticed this particularly in the great abortion debate where liberals no longer dismiss out of hand criticisms of abortion justified as a birth control technique or suggestions of the emotional bit of an abortion.

Why did the rabbinic teaching limit abortions rather tightly while many of us take a different position?

Medical advances have changed the context in which such a decision must be made. Halachic norms were set up at a time when surgery was primitive, dangerous and attempted only when there were no alternatives and towards term. Abortion in our time is a safe surgical procedure best carried out during the first trimester of pregnancy. Their world was underpopulated and fertility was a constant problem. Our world is overpopulated and the human species does not have to be encouraged "to be fruitful and multiply." Their issue was which life: the mother's or the baby's. Our issue is whether to deliver a malformed or unwanted baby. No one can be comfortable with a cavalier attitude towards the taking of life or potential life; good Jews will disagree on the abortion issue, but the sensitivity of our disagreement testifies to the range of Torahic concerns and the familiar emphasis on the consequences of moral judgment.

How much weight should we give to the old ways?

I can answer only for myself. I try to remain open to traditional ways, a hundred generations of moral sensitivity should not be cavalierly dismissed nor should they be slavishly followed. My rule is to break with the past only when the older forms restrict the possibility of holy living in the present by not comprehending the circumstances of modern life. I pay little attention to old rules such as the one which forced a wife to remain technically married if her husband had disappeared or if no witness could be found to his death. I respect the sanctity of marriage, but modern communication makes the survival of missing travelers unlikely in the extreme and minimizes the possibility that twenty years later, unless he has deliberately tried to run away, and then the wife surely is better off married to another. The area of women's rights is perhaps the one where I break most often with the old ways. I do not consider the fact that the pronouns in the Torah text are of the male case reason sufficient to deny to a woman the right to initiate divorce proceedings or to offer testimony in court.

I cannot overstate the argument that being Jewish is not an unnecessary add-on to the task of becoming a good human being but an essential prerequisite. I can't be truly human if I lack a compelling vision of life's coherence, a religion, and the Torah tradition is one such vision and one with a remarkably good track record. Where it had once been chic to disparage the dietary laws as outdated public health measures and mock the tallit and tefillim as peculiar prayer uniforms, in recent years social scientists have studied the psychological and societal function of ritual and reported on the importance of familiar ritual for mental health. Ritual is in. Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, Selihot services, Afruf have reappeared in old-line liberal congregations where once decorum and a sermon comprised the liturgy, and guitar evangelism is not unknown in traditional synagogues. The pendulum has swung so far some of us are concerned that the religious life may become a form of idolatry for some, an end in itself, and that they will neglect the parallel emphasis

on learning and social justice. Fortunately, one of the grand things about this ancient and rich tradition is that it survives cultural fads because it is so many sided and contains wisdom relevant to all sides of life's contradictions. Ultimately, the forgotten themes are picked up. Ancient Israel had its priests who ministered colorfully at the altar, scribes who taught the prudential wisdom literature to the court and prophets who questioned both prudence and wisdom in the name of hesed, an uncompromising covenant loyalty.

I went on a bit in this way when a young woman who until this point had sat quietly stopped me in my tracks: "So what?" She allowed that my discussion was fairly accurate, but what had this to do with her and her friends? "History is over. Paul, Augustine and Nachmanides are long dead." She and her friends, Christian and Jewish, live in a liberated society, take their advice on sex and marriage from professional counselors and neither know nor care what their respective traditions teach. "Indeed", she added, "my rabbi tends to equivocate but, when all is said and done, he believes the new morality is generally healthy and I doubt he could base his view on the Torah."

She was right - from her perspective. Most young Jews and Christians go to the same schools, read the same books, play the same sports, watch the same programs on television, think the same way about pre-marital sex and politics and read the same experts on human development. In this most personal of all areas the old traditions seem to be honored in the breach. More Jews read Dear Abbey than Nachmanides. Probably the only Torah commandment dealing with sex and marriage which is fully observed is the one which prohibits incest.

If this is so, isn't all talk about Jewish identity pointless? Christopher may get his presents on Hanukkah and Samuel on Christmas, but both asked for and will receive the same popular record albums. There is a good chance that Christopher does not know the Christological base of his name or care, and that he will fall in love with Samuel's sister, not only because

she is ettractive but because they share common interests and "speak the same language". There are ritual differences but on the human level, where it counts, aren't most young Jews and Christians cut of the same cloth?

We're humans all, but never underestimate the power of conditioning and environment.

I can see the impact of the secular environment but not the impact of the Torah tradition.

On some Torah may have little impact, a label is only a label though, as we have seen, the impact of home and environment is often quite apparent even when we are unconscious of it. All those Jewish activists at Selma and in the Anti-War Movement may not have gone to religious schools but something of the Jewish ethos had gotten through. I remember an early seventies demonstration in front of the Administration Building of the university where I teach. I was skirting the crowd on my way to lecture when a student I knew accosted me and berated me for holding classes: 'You should be here, this is what Judaism is all about.' She was wrong. That particular noise was more adolescent rage than prophetic outrage; but we're back to the instinctive recognition that the Torah tradition is a way of life and not simply a way to organize synagogue life.

Back, please, to her comment on the new morality.

The issue is one of attitude and approach and not the purely formal question of whether we should continue our grandparents' approach.

Young People live together openly before or without marriage. Aging parents are placed in homes rather than brought into the home. Women work and men look well to the ways of their household. Parental authority is a sometime thing. My question is always whether these changes are being made to adjust standards of loyalty, responsibility and honest feeling to an open and mobile society a situation which has never existed before, or for less honorable and more hedonistic reasons? Careless sex is simply careless and what is euphemistically called an open marriage is not a marriage. In such

cases the term, new morality, is simply a cover for the old immoralities; but, clearly, new ways must be found to support family ties, bind close the ties of love, see to it that each child is a wanted child, and bring dignity to age. The older family had an authoritarian base. In a world where women have finally emerged as persons partnership marriages and concepts of shared parenting are surely appropriate. With the disappearance of the extended family and the fact that both husband and wife may need to work or want to work, it may no longer be possible to care for aged parents in homes where there are neither rooms nor maiden aunts to act as housekeepers. The older forms are not the only ways to be "holy". Kiddushim implies an unshakable concern for the sanctity of human relationships, not a requirement that our homes and marriages duplicate those of our parents. The new morality is not the first major challenge to "Jewish" family norms. The nobility of Judea maintained harems. Polygamy remained the accepted practice among Oriental and North African Jews until quite recently. Why not? It was the accepted way in Biblical times and the custom in the Muslim environment of the Sephardic communities whose hachanim had no trouble seeing Kiddushim, sanctity, in the better managed plural marriages.

The tradition's stance on moral issues seems vague and undefined.

Really not. There is a broad consensus in such areas as the sanctity of family, respect of persons, race relations, the well-cultivated mind, compassion, sensitivity and empathy, peace, man's careful stewardship of God's gift of life and the good earth.

When I was in Israel there were pickets at a Jerusalem hospital which was performing autopsies. The orthodox will not permit Reform and Conservative rabbis to officiate at weddings and impose restrictions on everything from abortion to divorce which liberal Jews find galling. How can you talk of a Torah consensus?

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Threatened by a changeful world they did not make and do not comprehend, some have retreated into a defensive shell made up of the forms of the past.

Unfortunately, their shell has hardened over time to the point where little of the enlivening spirit of the Torah manages to express itself. The more the world changes the tighter they become. Judaism must not be judged by its relics any more than orthodoxy in Israel must not be judged by a politicized rabbinate.

The Torah contains the fixed and the dynamic, both commandment and debate. The book of Leviticus mandates a rich and complex sacrificial code. Amos and Isaiah doubted the efficacy of the shrine and of sacrifices. The book of Ruth clearly accepts the normalcy, if not the fitness, of intermarriage. Ruth is made the direct ancestor of King David. Ezra ordered those Jerusalemites who had taken non-Judean wives to put them away. Clearly, he felt intermarriage to be a sin. The rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai debated several dozen issues over several decades. The Torah is one, yet everyone who confronts its teachings has his own circumstances, mind and needs. We come from many backgrounds and, inevitably, have different understandings. Nor is this a modern sentiment. In several places the Talmud says simply, "both this opinion and the other [quite different] opinion are the words of the living God." Yet, the bonds of Torah and peoplehood keep us one.

I would like Judaism better if there were fewer options. It would be nice if all you had to do was look up a handbook.

I doubt it. Didn't you complain when your parents imposed rules and a curfew? The need to work things out for ourselves is the price of freedom, the right to be responsible for our actions, which means that we have to work harder at both religion and morality. That's why your rabbi makes so much noise about learning and adult education. You can't apply the themes and value set of the Torah tradition if you don't understand it.

What holds so disparate a community together?

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

I know, but life is full of contradictions and of change. So it has ever been. I have cited the evidence. Why should differences disappear in our day?

Accepting what you say, what holds people of such differing opinions together? Principles and pressure. We are a community of faith because we are a community of fate, and a community of fate because the faith remains compelling. We are a community because we choose to be.

Chapter 9

BUT I DON'T BELIEVE IN GOD

My problem is that the synagogue is a place for believers and I'm not sure I believe in God. It was the first time God had come up.

You do not sign articles of faith when you join a congregation. Any Jew may join. Before we begin the Kol Nidre service on Yom Kippur there is a ritual which goes back to the bad days when many Jews were forced to accept baptism as the only alternative to death. As you can imagine, those who became Christians were not whole-hearted, and on this holiest of days many yearned to worship in the familiar way; so a formula was introduced at the beginning of the service which said simply: we give permission for the service to take place even though there are apostates among us. Synagogue rolls are open to all who care about the Torah tradition and the Jewish people.

Originally, the synagogue was a beit am, simply a local center where meeting, study and worship took place. After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple the synagogue became, for the first time, a sanctuary as well as a meeting place. Rites like the blowing of the shofar and the blessing of the lulav and ethrog, once limited to The Temple, were transferred to the synagogue whose "holiness" was heightened. Yet, the synagogue never lost its original popular and informal character. In The Temple there were fences which kept non-Jews at a distance from the inner courts. The synagogue has no fences or Keep Out signs: "let all who are thirsty come and drink".

To be sure, the synagogue openly espouses a personal God. Life is not a chance chemical explosion or a hapless, hopeless passage from cradle to crypt; purpose and promise are implicit in creation. God is the Guarantor that it all has meaning. Every worship service includes the Shema, a public affirmation of God's existence, oneness and accessibility. Still, no one is denied entrance if they have doubts or escorted out if they cannot affirm. Caught up as we all are in an age of uncertainty, synagogue membership reflects

our heterogeneity, respects our doubts, but does not make peace with them.

Why would a non-believer come?

Some who are agnostic are nevertheless deeply committed to many of the Torah's values, find satisfaction in observing the holidays and life-cycle customs and are deeply committed to the Jewish people.

Why accept them?

There is always value to be drawn from exposure to our historic culture.

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

A hypocrite puts on a false face and plays a role designed to delude someone. When we enter a synagogue no one takes the roll and no one stands to gain except ourselves. We come in search, if we do not come in faith; and there is nothing hypocritical in admitting that simple fact.

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

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

Maimonides or Spinoza, but, their own, honest.

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

One year I asked a class to set down as honestly as they could what they believed about God. I asked them not to write what they thought I wanted to read. They didn't. I had brought along several of these paragraphs which I shared with the group.

> This grim world really scares me. Every once in a while I realize the cruelty and insensibility of it and that's when I begin to wonder. We can't just be here to disagree, fight, and eventually blow ourselves to bits. There must be some purpose or reason behind us. That is when I

think of God. This ideal is, in a measure, a crutch to lean on. It gives me some hope for the future. I believe I have outgrown the 'old man in the sky watching over me' type of feeling though I can't really describe what has replaced it. Sometimes I can't really accept God, sacrilegious as it may seem, but I might as well be honest about it - probably because the abstract concept is over my head. When I look around and see the hatred and ugliness, I don't understand how God could allow it. The closest I can come, from my experience, is conscience as that part of us which is created in God's image.

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

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

new idea as to what controls us - an idea which will be able to be expressed in mathematical symbols. I also believe that too many people have looked for an easy out to the whole question of life and death and origin and end and have simply attached the tag of 'God' to it all. Something much more complex, in my opinion, is the answer.

Did you confirm these three despite their doubts?

Certainly. Remember Tennyson: "There is more faith in honest doubt than in half your creeds." Their spirits are alive. Moreover, a Jew is a Jew is a Jew. These are open and searching spirits, not professional doubting Thomases.

I prize these papers. I prize them because they reveal a capacity for conceptual thinking and self-analysis rare even in the adult. Remember, these are fourteen-year olds, not collegians. What a tragedy that school systems often feed intellectual pablum to such minds as these.

I prize these papers because they represent a questing, a puzzling out, and a grasping for. They are the products of minds in search - in search of meaning, in search of values - and that is, after all, an essential religious activity. We are not born believers. Religious certainty does not come without effort and soul-searching. If faith were simply a matter of affirming a self-evident bit of reasoning then doubt would be an act of arrogance; but, since Immanuel Kant proved that the conventional demonstrations of God's existence all had holes in them, we have been forced to acknowledge that the openness of the synagogue was a tribute to our people's sensitive understanding of the human condition.

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

in our teachings. Every step necessarily [illegible]

A collegian came to visit a while back. God meant a great deal to him and he wanted to know more about the rabbinate as a profession. I happened to have these papers on my desk and I asked him to read several. He read with attention and with increasing puzzlement: "How can you confirm these young people? Read this." He handed me this paragraph:

> I have been brought up on respect for God through prayer. The many morals and standards of our religion greatly influence my life. I believe in living a good moral life as taught by my religion and parents, but I think that religion, not God so much, seems to affect my life at present. To me God is an abstract word to whom we pray and about whom I am not sure what I believe, since I haven't spent much time thinking about it up to now and I think I can wait before making any final decision. I believe in the moral codes as guides in leading a fine life and religion is a good teacher of this, but God to me is something apart. I plan to wait so that I can better understand myself before reaching any conclusions about Him.

I asked my true believer to define a religious person. "A religious person is one who believes in God." "Have you never had doubts and questions?" "Certainly, but I now have faith." "Were you certain as an adolescent, always certain?" "No." "Were you confirmed?" "Yes." "Let your ears hear what your mouth has said." Confirmation is a stage in one's Jewish growth, not a public testimony to the fullness of one's faith. The affirmation we ask on Confirmation Day is a pledge of continuing effort: "With all my heart, soul and might I will strive to fulfill the holy purposes of Judaism", rather than an assent to doctrine.

Jews are never commanded to take a loyalty oath to God. There is no signing ceremony when we place before would-be confirmands a many-paragraphed statement of religious principles and say, 'subscribe'. We are encouraged to "seek Me and live." The first step is to feel you belong within the community and only then do we ask you to open your hearts to the possibilities implicit in our teachings. Every step necessarily involves search. If we search we

will find. If we do not find God we may sense something of the mysterious divinity which operates in life.

I have no trouble with God as Creator. I remember a cartoon I saw of a group of monks in the Southwest looking out along the mesa towards a beautiful sunset and calling out: "Author, author." The wonder that is nature could not be simply the result of a chemical accident; but I have never understood why the Torah tradition makes such a to-do about God's Oneness.

An early eighteenth century New England catechism included the couplet: "How odd that God the Jews should choose?" A good New England divine wanted the world to know that, had he been God, he would have nominated a more appropriate group as his standard bearer. This Yankee might have been surprised had he known that the rabbis had puzzled the same oddity. How was it that among all the mighty empires of the world little Israel was chosen? One suggestion was that God did not wish His law of truth and His law of peace to be imposed by conquest or by coercion, so He chose the least and the smallest.

From time to time I have twisted the words of this doggerel into a different theme: How odd the Jews one God should choose. Twice each day in Biblical times men stopped their work and spoke the simple watchword of our people, "God is, and God is One." The Shema often is written in the design above our ark. It is the climactic affirmation of our worship of Yom Kippur and the final affirmation spoken by the Jew before he dies. Monotheism, the belief in the one God, or at least belief in the unity of all that is, seems to us almost an inevitable idea since it is shared by the major faiths of Western civilization and seems to be confirmed by our science which insists that there are overarching, natural laws which bind all that is together. Perhaps the greatest scientist of our century, Albert Einstein, put the modern view this way: "The scientist's religious feeling takes the form of a rapturous amazement at the harmony of natural law which reveals an intelligence of such superiority that, compared with it, all the systematic thinking and acting of human beings is an utterly insignificant reflection."

Monotheism may seem natural to us. It was not to our ancestors. The world they knew was made up of distinct and separate parts. The moon moved across the night sky and was replaced in the morning by the sun which moved in a different orbit. The wind rose and blew and no man knew from where it came. Streams bubbled up from seemingly bottomless sources. Each element in nature was distinctive and appeared self-actuating. During the Bronze Age the activity of nature could be explained only by assuming an in-dwelling spirit or god in each element directing its destiny. Polytheism seemed natural to the ancient Middle East.

The pagan had no concept of humanity. Their myths declared each people to be descendants of a special protector and, in certain ways, different from and better than other peoples. There were Greeks and lesser breeds without the law. Each pantheon had a high god who was that country's protector. When a country was beaten the conquerors decapitated or defaced the protector's images and raised up their own. The concept of humanity implicit in the Biblical verse, "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us all", could emerge only among a people long accustomed to monotheism. If God is one and His reach is world-wide, all peoples are His creatures and there are no people over whom God's control does not extend. The Biblical god is the god of Ethiopians and the Persians as well as the Jews. His fate does not rise and fall with the nation's political fortunes; indeed, one of the accomplishments of the prophets was to recognize that a nation's fortunes did not depend on the power of their god but on the quality of the natural life or, in Israel's case, on faithfulness to the terms of the Sinai covenant. Pagan myths depicted ceaseless struggle among the gods and among the nations until the empire whose god was most powerful god conquered all. The Biblical myth depicted God as caring for all peoples. Its vision was not of victorious armies but of international peace, the image of every man sitting under his vine and under his fig tree with none to make him afraid.

Israel's affirmation of God's oneness brought about a revolution in

human thought by introducing a welcome measure of balance to ethical discussion. In the ancient myths each of the gods was endowed with specific virtues or qualities. There was a god of love, another of war, another of wisdom. There was a god of life and there was a god of the Kingdom of the Dead. Each god encouraged his communicants to shape their lives around his attribute; but, as Aristotle observed in his Ethics, any virtue taken to excess becomes a vice. The Egyptians so centered their worship on death that they literally buried all that might have guaranteed the nation a prosperous future and lifted the burden of slavery and abjectness from the mass of their people. Israel's God was not only one, beyond any single attribution, but Jewish: that is, perceived as both just and gracious.

How can God be Jewish?

Every theistic religion emphasizes certain perceptions of God. The Jewish God was known by His actions which were accepted as ultimately moral and right. When the Torah is taken out from the ark the service calls for a recitation of God's attributes as those are phrased in the Torah: "The Lord, the Lord God is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and ever true, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. The Jewish God was more than mysterious power. He was the model of moral perfection and the consummate duty of the Jew was to pattern himself after God and after examples of God's activity which are reported in Torah. God had clothed the nakedness of Adam and Eve; visited Abraham while he was recovering from surgery [circumcision]; comforted Isaac after the death of his father; so, "After the Lord Your God shall you walk."

How did it happen that our fathers made the conceptual leap from idolatry to monotheism?

We can only speculate. Some have tried to explain "the Lord is one" as an insight born of living on the edge of empty wilderness. The Hebrews were sheep-herding tribes who lived in the open land between the Canaanite cities and the desert and so nothing stood between them and the sun, the

storm and the sweep of the earth; presumedly, daily experience with the on-rolling cycles of nature sensitized them to the One behind all discrete phenomena. This argument is highly dramatic, but does not explain why, of all the bedouins, only the Hebrews outgrew a polydemonistic and polytheistic mindset and came to an understanding of a single creative principle.

Others reverse the argument and explain monotheism as an insight born of living on the edge of civilization. As desert folk we watched with detached amusement as we saw one country or city-state conquer another and destroy the gods of the vanquished or reduce them to a subordinate place in their pantheon; in turn, to be defeated and have their God rudely treated. According to this theory, the endless rise and fall of imperial gods led our fathers to seek the unity behind the tomfoolery. This explanation again fails to explain why only the Israelites saw the foolishness of all this.

Some historians argue that monotheism was borrowed from the Egyptians. Our fathers happened to be in Egypt during a wrenching dynastic struggle when Pharoah Akhenaton (14c) set out to destroy the power of the priestly elite by raising the solar disk, Aton, as god above all the other deities of Egypt. His Hebrew slaves presumedly knew of these events and Moses skillfully built on Akhenaton's idea and after the Exodus dedicated his people to a single God, all-powerful, all-embracing, a One. Among the problems with this theory is that no one is certain if Akhenaton's activity was theological as well as political; nor are we certain that Moses' perception of God was monotheistic. Certainly monotheism did not become widespread until some centuries after his death.

I believe the explanation lies closer to the Bible's simple statement that God revealed His essence, His Oneness, to Moses. Frankly, we have no better explanation. When Israel was still young, a man, it may have been Moses the prophet, we know not exactly who, found a commanding voice speaking to him and reached out with his mind into the darkness and wrenched from the darkness the vision of the one God. Science did not demand it, indeed,

science argued against it. Reason did not demand it, indeed, reasonable men, including the best minds of the next thousand years, argued against it; but, somehow, our fathers reached out and understood.

You don't actually believe that Moses went up on Sinai and that God spoke to him there?

Sinai is part of a dramatic myth which like all truly significant myths is truer than if it were literally true. Sometimes when I puzzle over a problem the answer comes when I least expect it, often when I am thinking of something else. I believe that Moses, or another, puzzled over the incongruities of idoletry and suddenly a new understanding of the creative and mysterious reality behind the world of things and appearances fell into shape. I believe in radical surprise which is what I believe is meant by revelation.

Franz Rosenzweig suggested some years ago that the Torah's redundant language describing Sinai, "and God came down and God spoke", was carefully chosen and not simply the result of the oriental love of pilling on phrases. "God came down", he said, concludes the revelation; "God spoke" begins Moses' interpretation. The miracle is that God, meaning, presented itself; once it is present a human mind appropriates the idea and expresses it as best it can.

The ancients did not actually worship sticks or statues, but a complex and coherent world of powers represented by their idols which resided in nature. Open an acorn and you will not find a miniature oak tree. How else then account for the tree's emergence but by the postulate of an indwelling God Who makes the tree grow in just that way. The sun makes a daily circuit of the heavens, disappears and reappears in the east each dawn. Yet, physical objects do not move themselves. How else account for its movement except by some such myth as that of Apollo and his chariot? We sense pattern and order in nature, but we also experience nature's unexpected violence: the lightning bolt, the flood, the overpowering heat of the sun, so it was only natural to assume that the gods were not only numerous but unpredictable and that the appropriate worship of such gods should envolve not only reverence

and an attempt to entice, bribe these powers not to do us harm and, if possible, to do what we ask of them. Polytheism focuses on the shrine. Monotheism enables the Torah to give priority to acts of holy living which are not shrine-centered or ceremonial.

Ancient men worshipped their gods at various shrines. Since the gods were related to visible objects it was only natural to believe that the god actually lived there. At the shrine particular rites were performed by appointed priests for the purpose of placating the god's anger or gaining his favor. The Hebrews, too, had their shrines. It would be centuries before they would outgrow the edifice complex, if they ever really did; but beginning in the eighth century B.C.E. prophets emerged who taught the people that "the whole earth is full of His glory" and that shrine activity never was meant to be the sole focus of the religious life. The focus of the religious life was to become a holy community; and holiness, be it remembered, always was defined in active ethical terms.

Monotheism raised God above nature. "In the beginning God created." Man was not subservient to the unpredictable forces of nature but covenanted to the creator God Who, according to Genesis, had given man power to subdue the animal kingdom and to use nature. This shift in perspective increased men's self-assurance and sense of worth. It also set the stage for science. Pagan gods cannot be investigated; their actions were autonomous and therefore unpredictable; but, if nature is distinct from God, not God but object, then our minds can investigate its furthest reaches.

The pagan world worshipped its gods and feared them. Their gods, like humans were caught up in private plans and conflicts, the Trojan War started over a Heavenly beauty contest, and the activities and whims of the gods often turned out to be harmful to men and nations. You never knew what a god would do so your relationship to God was more that of courtier to tyrant than son to loving father. "And you shall love the lord your God" was a new thought which germinated among those who no longer equated nature's unpredictability with the activities of the various gods. It was a pregnant idea which described

a new state of mind which could begin to conceive and shape worship as thanks-speaking rather than as bribery, the sacrifices.

The ancients saw themselves as pawns and playthings of their gods. The pagan felt himself powerless against Fate. The vision of God as one permitted men to consider the possibility that they had some control over their lives, God rewards the good and punishes the evil, and a major goal of life becomes the building of a moral record which deserves reward. The Hebrew felt that you get what you deserve. The Torah tradition theme of moral accountability is emphasized in every way possible. The liturgy of both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is shaped on the myth of an annual assize during which our individual lives, and that of the whole people, are reviewed by the Supreme Judge. This myth is refracted throughout these services, never more pointedly or poignantly than in a medieval prayer known as the Unetaneh Tokef: "Let us declare the utter holiness of this day for it is one of awe and dread. . .truly you are judge, accuser and all-knowing witness, you write and seal, record and number, remember all things that have been forgotten, open the book of remembrances wherein each deed speaks of itself. Overhead a great shofar is sounded, the angels join in fear and cry out: 'Behold the day of judgment'." The idea that each of us is being constantly judged is a dominant and recurrent theme in the Torah tradition; but God is merciful as well as strict. He will weigh our intentions as well as our deeds, and there is always a second chance. "Repentance, prayer and righteousness can avert the severe decree."

If all have one father, God values equally the various labors we each do. Most societies characterize certain tasks as noble and others as demeaning. Physical labor, particularly, was held to be low-class. The middle-class in America still has trouble with a child who wants to become a factory worker. The landed gentry held merchants in disrepute. In ancient times nobles entered a Temple by one door, commoners by another. The Torah tradition was a scholarly tradition, yet, no attempt was made to disguise the fact that some of the sages earned their living as shoemakers, smiths and craftsmen. The theory was that "the study of the Torah is excellent if it is combined

with a worldly occupation for this combined effort puts sin out of mind", but it was equally true that labor without learning reduced man to the level of a pack animal.

Hold up. If God is One where do all the angels and spirits of some of the hymns and the folk tales come from? I've been reading I.B. Singer and his stories are full of such folk. Are we really monotheists?

Yes and no. The faith has proclaimed consistently that God has dominion over all that is seen and unseen. Satan in the Job story is not an independent power but an angel in God's court who must ask God's permission to test Job. But it is true that over the centuries many cast spells against the wee folk and many tales were told about them. The oneness of God is a concept which it is hard for the mind to grasp. How do you envision what cannot be seen, touched or described? Life is full of premonitions which we do not fully understand and unexpected experiences; moreover, before medicine discovered germs and viruses, how else was disease to be explained? The theory was that the panoply of Heaven did God's will, but official theology was often compromised by credulity.

Angels and wee folk of the night are superstitions.

True, but before you feel too superior remember that yours is the Age of Aquarius.

But I'm not superstitious.

Then why are you wearing a <u>Hai</u> emblem around your neck?

That's simply my identification as a Jew.

Perhaps, but why do you feel naked and unprotected without it?

Enough. I've got another question. Why did our ancestors take axes to Canaan's idols? Today collectors pay thousands of dollars for those statues. They're quite beautiful. Nor do we go around knocking other people's religions.

In ancient Israel there was no National Conference of Idolators and Jews. With idolatry there was to be no accommodation. "Obliterate the foreign gods that are in your midst." The high places must be torn down and ploughed

under. The sacred groves must be cut down and the wood used for fuel. The foreign gods were mocked. They were vanity, nothingness, shameful and worse. Idolatry equated the gods and power. The Torah tradition equated God and good. Since idolatry supported indecency, injustice, the separation of races, its worship must be swept away. When Moses asks to see God he is told, "You cannot see My face, but I will make My glory pass behind you." In what did God's glory consist? I am the Lord, a god of mercy and a god of righteousness, justice, decency and maturity.

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

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

You'll admit you're stretching a point.

Most of our idols are invisible but nonetheless real. There is the idol named pride of birth and another pride of place. There is the deity of the white skin and the deity of color. What of the patron god of the self-righteous nation? We are scandalized that the ancients should offer human sacrifice. I put to you that each decade or so we offer a holocaust of our best and brightest to the god of national ambition, or is it the god of national greed?

Idolatry dethrones God and enthrones some human passion or interest in His place. The Communists' idol is the ideology they call "scientific Marxism", and those who argue for the untrammeled freedom of the marketplace have an idol called capitalism. All ideologies which ascribe infallibility to a set of human ideas are idolatries.

Do we not project into the heavens a rather indulgent deity who forgives us for our foibles, applauds us vigorously for our trivial accomplishments, encourages us in our low moments and who is careful not to reprimand us for enjoying leisure and security without thought to the needs of others?

We hypostatize our prejudices and our privileges, and our alter ego god assures us that our position is merited and that the less fortunate are less able. Who of us has not been tempted to love excessively a parent, a cause, a possession, a charismatic leader, a party, the State? The Israelites would have been surprised to hear some of their later descendants argue, 'it matters not what you believe as long as you do believe.' It matters what you believe. Good will needs a bit on rethinking. When I recite the Shema I am reminded forcefully that there is only one love which cannot be excessive and that all other commitments must be conditional.

If you worshipped the great Fire god,Malo, your worship consisted of having a son or daughter walk across burning coals into the raging maw of this monstrous god. Is there any greater outrage than child sacrifice? In the Torah tradition the proper sacrifice is the humble and contrite heart. If you belonged to one of the fertility cults of Canaan you worshipped at a shrine where the earth's fertility was stimulated by orgiastic rite designed as a form of sympathetic magic to impregnate the earth even as the worshipper impregnated the shrine's female attendants. In the Torah tradition the earth's fertility had little to do with shrine activity. "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel you shall be devoured by the sword."

It still matters whether you worship the high priest of the master race and shout, "Zeig Heil" instead of"Amen." The worship of a master race leads to war, to the grinding down of the poor and the weak under the iron boot; the only wars which the worship of the one God encouraged are the wars against want, injustice and man's cruelty to his neighbor.

The Kamikazi pilot believed and believed deeply. The Ku klux Klansman believes and believes deeply. There are churches in our country that have created a god of whiteness. Belief simply defines commitment to a vision. What if you are attached to a base vision or a corrupt hope? Outrageous beliefs lead to outrageous actions. Belief is not necessarily a virtue.

With people of high-minded theologies, we smile, we welcome, and we exchange. Idolatry separated man from man, city from city, nation from nation. If Ra, the great god of Egypt, created man, the Egyptian was created first and belonged to a master race! All other peoples were the creation, so the myths had it, of the concubines of the gods, consequently a lesser breed. Idolatry consecrated the separation of men into city-states, nations and races, and failed to provide them a unifying vision which would raise humanity's needs above the group's special needs. Racism grows rapidly in the soil of idolatry. So do the rationalizations which justify slavery and caste. When the emperor of Assyria made known Marduk's law, he announced a rule which protected the persons and privileges of the nobility far more than those of the peasant and lower castes, and the slave had no protection at all. If a slave was murdered by a free man his marked value was paid to his owner as restitution and there was no charge of murder. Idolatry precludes the notion of a single humanity; the oneness of God requires it; one creator, one world; one humanity; one moral law for all.

Chapter 10

THE GOD WHO LETS US CRY

Late at night. It was the oldtimer's bunk and turn. Coffee, a few beers and the feeling that it was their chance.

On their return the astronauts reported that the Great Wall of China was the only man-made object they had been able to identify from space. Jewish history, like the Great Wall, is a monumental phenomenon. I feel satisfied in a special way that I am part of an enterprise that has played a central role in world civilization and which will outlive me.

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

All of us have known folk who have lived into their nineties and whose accomplishments only charity would allow us to describe as modest. Despite Grandma Moses types, the last years usually are uncreative, a time for sitting around and being cared for. In an endurance contest the price is usually not worth the effort. What lifts me up is not that our history is a long one but that it has been mysteriously significant across time. There have never been a whole lot of us but there is hardly an era in which we have not been creative.

There was a lot of shaking of heads. Someone said gently: With all due respect, rabbi, I think you are deluding yourself. A few years ago I took a survey course in world history. We spent a day on the Israelites and the Hebrew Bible. The prof talked about its original ideas but left the clear impression that the Bible's importance was due largely to the later interest in it of Christianity. After that one lecture the Jewish people were never mentioned nor any Jewish contributions to civilization until the last week when we talked about the Jew as victim. As he talked about the Dreyfus Trial, the Russian pogroms and the Nurenberg laws, I was reminded of a Religious

School teacher who seemed always to be discussing exiles, forced conversions, the ghetto and the gas chamber. I draw no encouragement from our lengthy record as history's most available victim.

I picked up on this last remark: ask yourself why we were so often the chosen victim. I look on the world's antipathy as a perverse tribute to the power of ideas to which our tradition witnesses. The privileged are often anti-semitic because they know that democracy and justice are Jewish in character; and the idealogues of the left, the anti-privilege, are often anti-semitic because they know or sense that the Torah tradition is concerned with the individual as well as the collective, with means as well as ends.

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

Prejudice begins in the myths of those who engage in the putdown, not in the acts of those who are calumnied. Most analyses of European anti-semitism locate its roots in the New Testament. The gospel writers aided and abetted by Paul set up the Torah tradition as the straw man against which they could score points. Judaism described as a dry and lifeless legalism provided effective contrast for their antinomian emphases. Eager to appeal to Romans, the early church made the Jew rather than Pontius Pilate responsible for the Crucifixion, the Jew is made to cry out for Jesus' death, and later developed a theology of contempt whose basic thesis was that God had ordered that The Temple be destroyed as punishment and sentenced the Jews to be wandering pariahs. It followed that Christians were obeying God's will, doing good when they forced the Jew to wear a demeaning costume, denied the Jew standing in law and set up the rules of apartheid which governed Christian-Jewish relations for fifteen hundred years. Forced off the land and denied entrance into most occupations and guilds, the Jew was forced to make a living any way he could, which meant that he had no alternative but to enter those occupations his neighbors shunned, and as peddler or pawnbroker he not only absorbed the peasants' and the urban poor's abuse,

no one loves his creditors; but gained the disdain of the Well-to-do who would never deign to sully their hands in such demeaning activities, but who were not above extorting from the Jew whatever he managed to accumulate.

There are other explanations of anti-semitism and most have some validity, set apart he lived a different life and difference creates unease; but I would suggest that when all is said and done the Jew was victim because our survival kept alive ideas and values which challenged the self-confident assumptions of the majority. Christianity claimed to be the truth, but the Jew was obstinate and could not and would not see 'the truth'; so either the Christians had to accept that the gospel's claims were not as self-evident as they thought or that Jews had been sentenced to spiritual blindness until the Second Coming. Kings believed they had the right to rule as they saw fit, but the Hebrew tradition denied that right. Priests and popes believed they controlled the keys to the kingdom, but Jews acted as if they knew that the Archangel Gabriel would let them in. Monks gambled their lives on the consummate virtue of celibacy and a life of denial while rabbis married and went out into the world. We get terribly angry with those who stand in the way and the Torah and the Jew stood in the way of the universal Church, of absolutist power and of politics of privilege.

Our fate has had its tragic aspect but I wonder, if our history were a happier one, whether the record would show us to have been as committed to social welfare issues and as hypersensitive to justice. I am convinced that the combination of ancient teaching and familiarity of persecution is responsible for many of the fine qualities which are expressed by the Jewish community: compassion, empathy, a pragmatic attitude towards security and success; the feeling that those who are in distress must be succored; open-handed generosity; an impatience with privilege. We owe our instinct for justice perhaps as much to Amos as apartheid.

Come off it, my father often remarks that Senator McCarthy's two henchmen were Jews.

Not all Jews are sensitive or charitable or committed to social justice; but a remarkable number were and are. The ghetto was a dismal place where high walls rarely let in the sunlight, but within this cramped area Jews constructed a remarkably compassionate community, full of cultural and welfare institutions which preserved the family and mitigated the social and psychological cost of persecution. Recent studies of black ghettos have helped us become aware of the insidious ways in which systematic humiliation can brutalize and degrade a people. That the Jewish family retained a good measure of cohesion and the community a measure of dignity, that the Jew was not completely broken by ostracism and suffering testifies to the functional value of Torah-consecrated way of life.

I was brought back to the victim question. You're talking sociology. The real issue is God. The Torah tradition has proved its value as a survival mechanism; but why did Jews have to face the cruelties they did? Why did God let Jews suffer this way. To explain anti-semitism sociologically is to suggest that God has nothing to do with history; if He hasn't, then the Torah tradition with its emphasis on sacred history and Divine Providence falls apart, and Auschwitz marks the end of the line for any pious talk about a God who cares.

The question of unmerited suffering is as old as Job and the Torah tradition has addressed it. Some argued that suffering is good for the soul. Through storms we grow. Our sufferings are from God. When prosperity and health are on us we tend to forget that life is brief and bruising and are rather brusque with those who are not as fortunate as we. Grief and pain can sensitize us to another's need and bring to the surface our latent capacity for empathy. I remember a young married couple, born to wealth, totally self-envolved, long skiing trips and expensive cars. Their first child early on developed a rare blood and long-lived blood disease. Forced out of themselves, forced to face the pain of the world, they grew into caring people. But there are times when the suffering is so intense that it coarsens the soul and

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deadens the spirit. I remember the concentration camp survivor who explained patiently why she had decided not to have children: 'I simply can't let myself feel that deeply any more.'

Others have argued that suffering represents a trial which allows God to discover whether we are strong in our faith or fair weather people. How else will God know whom to admit to Heaven? The first Jew, Abraham, was tested. He stood firm and was awarded the covenant of land and progeny. Presumedly, if we are steadfast we will enjoy God's grace; if not in this world, then in the World to Come. But there are those fortunate few who are not tested. What kind of God would dump on some but not on others? Then, too, there may be no Heaven.

Your arguments are interesting, but I did not ask why innocent people suffer, but why the Jewish people have suffered more than any other.

Have we? Some day read a history of the Armeneans or the Druzes. We've had our share and more, but I doubt that we're number one on the most persecuted list.

The prophets insisted that Israel's sufferings, in their time this meant bad harvests and military defeat, was the result of the covenant and of God's special relationship with us. This popular view provided, until our day, the mythic terms in which the Jew explained to himself his history. Essentially, it's a we-get-what-we-signed-for doctrine. At Sinai we agreed to the covenant terms including the rewards for obedience and the punishments for default. The Biblical histories were edited to prove that the nation prospered when it was obedient and suffered when it sinned. The prophets of Israel "heard" God "render judgment". "Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Israel, yea, for four, I will not reverse their punishment." What was their sin? "Because they sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes and trample the head of the poor in the dust of the earth." exile was seen as a deserved punishment. If and when the people repented galut, exile, would end and God would return them to their land.

Do you actually believe that history operates this way? I find it infinitely sad that some went to their deaths in Nazi Europe, beating their breasts and confessing, 'It is because of our sins'.

So do I. So did the apocalyptic writers who followed the prophets and who insisted that God determined the course of history for his own purposes and not on the basis of deserved merit. i don't believe that there is a quid pro quo in life. I've seen some pretty healthy and prosperous bastards. Job's challenge is based solidly on experience and cannot be blinked away; but over time there does seem to be something of a balancing out. Israel is and many a powerful empire is not, and there are spiritual rewards, peece of mind, which cannot be measured by an outside observer. "Better a small morsel and quiet therewith than a house full of feasting and strife."

Aren't you trying to justify God's ways to us and didn't you tell us earlier that was a form of theological chutzpah?

Well taken. God does not explain himself to Job. God simply reveals His majesty to him. "Where were you when I rolled out the Heavens?", which translates: 'have faith in God's wisdom; don't waste too much time worrying about what you'll never fully understand; and don't judge by anyone's material circumstances.' Despite his sufferings Job was what he knew himself to be, a good man. Net worth and human worth are unrelated standards.

Walter Kaufman in an interesting work called The Faith of a Heretic describes the conclusion of Job's work as one in which the righteous man is made to confront the "tragic power" of the world. "This is the ultimate truth of philosophy. There is a power beyond us and the power makes no sense except that it is there, and man must, as best he can and with what composure and equanimity he can muster, simply accept life on its terms."

I think Kaufman is mistaken in his analysis of Job and he is certainly outside the Torah tradition when he defines tragic power as the ultimate truth. The God Who reveals Himself to Job in the whirlwind reveals not only reked power but purposeful power. Creation is not a chaotic structure. There

is a mysterious and wonderful order. If Job cannot fathom the totality of that purpose he still senses it.

From the point of view of the Torah tradition Kaufman is a heretic. He does not deny God, but he denies that God is kind. We touch here the leap of faith a Jew must make if he wishes to be caught up in the Torah tradition. I often end a service with a benediction taken directly from the book of Psalms: "The Lord shall guard your going out and your coming in, from this time *forth* and forever." As I've said before, the Jewish God is not a tyrant but a loving Father, Protector,/this "Guardian of Israel Who neither slumbers nor sleeps". Remember the question Heaven's gatekeeper asks: did you remain confident of redemption? The Torah's faith, and mine, is not faith in a power outside ourselves but in a purposive power outside ourselves, a faith in the messianic possibility of life.

Our orders were to live in dignity and according to God's law and, by so doing, to set an example that others might follow. Being chosen conferred few privileges save that of knowing that God had a set of special rules for us. God would not let us be satisfied with compromises which were routine elsewhere, which brings us back to your question, after all, the reasonings and rationalizations.

Must not a tragedy of the dimensions of the Holocaust destroy, once and for all, such a faith? The six million did not get what they deserved.

I have no answer. The Holocaust is overwhelming. How does one think about not only the malignancy called Naziism but the unresponsiveness of the Allies to pleas that the rail lines to Auschwitz be bombed and their adamant maintenance of restrictive immigration quotas? The record of the cruelty and indifference of men is sad and must give pause to any naive notions about man's basic and innate goodness; but it also must be said that there were non-Jews of compassion and bravery in Nazi Europe who hid Jews, helped Jews to escape and who, in so doing, put their life at stake. The silence which seems unrelieved is God's.

Do you remember the story I told the Institute a few days ago about Moses visiting the Academy of Akiba and being astonished at many of the teachings being quoted as the law of Moses? I did not tell you the full story as the Talmud reports it. After God reassured Moses that what Akiba teaches is in fact Torah, Moses says to God: 'How is it that knowing such a genius would arise, you gave the Torah through me?' To which God answered, 'Be silent, such is My decree.' God allowed Moses to see Akiba's life and his death. He was burned alive by the Romans during the Bar Kochba Rebellion and his skin sold in the marketplace. Moses was appalled: 'Is this the reward for such learning and devotion?' 'Be silent, for such is My decree.'

There are occurrences we do not understand.

Our sages defined atheism,not as the denial of the existence of God, one can affirm an Unmoved Mover and still not be religious; but, as the denial of God's justice: Leit din ve'leit dayan, there is no justice and there is no judge. Evidence of God's Providence is, to say the least, inconclusive. How shall we explain the death of a newborn or the fate of the Jewish people, so it is precisely here that the Jew must make his leap into faith.

You can't leave it there.

Job's comforters tried not to, but none of their arguments, which were much like those we have talked about, satisfied the sufferer. Indeed, Job was never satisfied by any words of consolation. When I feel put upon by life, all explanations offered me are exposed as rationalizations. The words which seem to explain in fact simply cover up. In the end it was an emotional experience, not logic, which allowed Job to make his peace with life. God offered no explanations save a revelation of the incomparable majesty of creation and inferentially of the Creator. There are questions which cannot be answered intellectually but which find their answer when we allow ourselves to feel the depths of purpose behind the everyday confusions and that's what faith is all about.

I have been a rabbi for nearly thirty years and I have discovered an

unexpected truth about the human reaction to tragedy. Tragedy rarely snuffs out faith. As a young rabbi I expected to hear someone beaten to his knees cry out in anger and deny. I have heard complaints, certainly, 'why me', but I have rarely known a Job whose faith was shattered by illness, ill luck or grief. It is as if when on our knees we look up and see the power that we could not stay and are overawed by the fullness of God's might. Generally I have heard at such moments a half-whispered, half-believing, 'perhaps it is for the best.'

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

No. It suggests that there are facets to life we cannot explain and must learn to accept. Consciousness is given. Our endowments are given. Death is a given and so are illness and pain. There is a pragmatic side to the Torah tradition which says: 'don't weary yourself over metaphysical questions you will never fully resolve.' The Hebrew letter Bet is the first letter of the first word in the Torah. Why B rather than A? Simple, the sages said. The Hebrew letter B consists of three strokes which form three sides of a square. The missing side opens towards the flow of the text. Bet was chosen as a signal to us to read what follows carefully and not worry too much about what is above, what below and what precedes creation as we know it.

The Akiba story would fit Kaufman's thesis about tragic power. Are you saying that the power beyond us, God, is indifferent to our actions and that we must simply learn to cope with our circumstances with such composure as we can muster? Surely, the rabbis were not stoics. They bent the knee to a God who listens and responds to prayer. They trusted that God would accept their repentence and end the Exile. You told us that when the Torah is read on the holidays the service includes God's self-definition as merciful and compassionate, long suffering and full of mercy and truth.

The Torah also says: "God's ways are not your ways." There is an ultimate order but its specifics cannot be fully apprehended.

Rabbi, you are slipping away from the issue. We are talking about Jews, yellow badges, pogroms, Stalin, Hitler and Arab wars against Israel. The question is why continue a pilgrimage which obviously angers or frightens so many others and why should God have dumped on us in this cruel way?

I called up an image offered by an anonymous prophet who lived among the Judean exiles in Babylon. .These were difficult years. The Temple had been destroyed. Jerusalem had been razed. As prisoners the Judeans were no longer masters of their fate, they couldn't organize a Torah-based community since they were ruled by others, so the question had to be answered: how could a slave people serve God? This prophet described the people were prisoners and little esteemed, yet he held that they remained ultimately significant in God's plans. They were God's suffering servants. Their role was to bear the pains of the world. Israel's role was to proclaim God's truth by example and by word, but the nations were comfortable with idolatry and didn't want to be disturbed. The sleeper wants only to squash the noisy mosquito which buzzes around his head so that he can go back to his slumber, "so Israel was despised, forsaken of man, a people of pain from whom others hid their faces." Israel is the nagging conscience of the world. As long as Israel remains, the nation's sleep will be fitfull.

We choose as victims those who remind us of our limitations and failings and who by their very existence challenge our familier beliefs. The Protestant theologian put it this way: "By being hostile to the Jewish people the world simply proves that it is the world: blind and deaf and stupid in the ways of God, as they are visibly before it in the existence of this people" (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, p. 511). A century ago the ministers of the Russian Czar were quite open as to the reasons for the pogroms and the policy of deliberate Jewish impoverishment. They identified Jews with subversive ideas like democracy and freedom
/which were not wanted in absolutist Russia and deliberetely set out to quarantine, convert or expel the bearers of these ideas. In much the same way the Medieval Church, not only locked up the Hebrew Bible from the faithful lest

they read and question official doctrine, but forbade those who could read the text, the Jews, to discuss The Book with Christians lest the faithful be misled. To probe into the causes of anti-semitism is to understand something of what the Jew has meant to civilization.

I'm not sure I like the idea of being a whipping boy for no better reason than that the world is morally indolent and unwilling to give up unwarranted privileges or restrain its passions. But the question remains, what kind of God would punish the innocent rather than the guilty?

Neither logic nor social science theory can answer that problem for us. Why are some born to luxury and some into the poverty of Bangladesh? By our standards the world is not a fair place. There are questions which can't be answered. The question to which faith suggests an answer is whether to bless God or blame God for making it as it is.

Bless God?

If space ship earth were paradise what challenge would there be? Doesn't the gift of self-consciousness, the quality which distinguishes the human being from the animal, require that there be neutral space in which personality and character can unfold and grow, an incomplete universe? The possibility of the soul's unfolding requires the possibility that our actions may be terribly wrong.

Moreover, when I think about suffering and God's responsibility, I must ask: is the fault man's or God's? Before peoples cut down the jungle and overcropped the land, Bangladesh supported a thriving civilization.

You are being theoretical and this discussion is personal. Why should one people have suffered so much?

In many ways the persecutor is worse off than the persecuted. Power corrupts. During the long medieval passege, Jewish literacy and family life was infinitely superior to that of the Crusaders, Inquisitors and simple bullies.

That's a modest reward for the centuries of pain. If Israel's suffering is part of God's plans, God is incredibly cruel.

War and apartheid are not really God's doing. They are human activities which God could override only by denying to man the fundamental capacity of freedom.

But why?

I don't know. The sages admitted as much; remember: seek not to explain God's ways to man because those are beyond your understanding.

That's a copout.

Only if you believe everything can be explained. Remember, the Torah tradition rests ultimately on faith. Some see only the death camps. Others see the bunker in Berlin. Others see 1948 and the creation of the State of Israel. Look again at the mysterious significance of Jewish history.

But six million did not survive to contemplate what you call the mysterious significance of Jewish history.

I know. If you conceive of God as a supernatural being who sits on a Heavenly Throne controlling the lives of history, you must wonder at the justice He dispenses. Those who held such a view of God had no alternative after the Holocaust but to say, "God is dead."

Over the centuries the Torah tradition has fought a brave battle to disabuse us of the idea that God is a Heavenly Grandfather. You shall not make any graven images. Why not ? Because these suggest that God can be described. We inevitably take our descriptions from the only world we know and assume that God's actions must conform to our conventional standards in order to be accepted as just or good. No wonder the sages used every euphemism and paraphrase they could imagine to make us conscious that the Holy One, Praised be He, was holy, other, and not to be conceived or judged as we judge each other.

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

But would a benevolent God create in man our evident capacity for evil?

For all creation and her assistance that we are confusing ourselves with

We're back to the question of consciousness and free will and to the paradox that if God were to restrict man's freedom and power He would be narrowing our responsibilities and diminishing our control over our lives.

But six million were killed.

And many millions more. Jews were not the only victims. No, I do not avoid the issue. I try to transcend it. You ask for a reasonable answer. Reasons are little more than words. These events are elemental and therefore beyond reason's grasp. The Torah tradition has never denied the reality of pain and cruelty, but our histories emphasize how the faithful have carried on. Four hundred years ago Solomon ibn Verga told this story in a history describing the persecution and exile of the Jews of Spain and Portugal.

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

That poor man represents the posture of faith. His words only repeat the Psalmist's pledge: "though He (God) slay me, yet will I believe in Him." Faith describes the convictions we hold to despite our experiences. We live in a world where the Holocaust is possible. We live in a world where a just and secure world order is possible. Our test is to have faith in life's possibilities and to act on this faith. Ibn Verga's age was as tear stained as ours, yet most hold firm. Our problem is that we are less bound up in the Torah tradition and half suspicious that we are consoling ourselves with

fiction.

Is it?

I think not. Recent history cannot be read as unrelieved tragedy. Great changes are taking place across the globe. The masses are coming alive and their individuality and potential is being exposed. Swooping political and social change always entail friction and conflict and an unsettled society is full of frustration and potential violence; but the measure of our potential for violence is also a measure of our potential for meaningful change. You can't have the one without the other.

Prayer and imagination can help us see beyond [redacted] the frightening headlines to the hidden and hopeful dimensions of our existence. As we work for a sounder community, we sense the potential for good which God has implanted in us and creation.

There are no guarantees. Man ultimately may destroy human life on this planet; but it need not happen, if we have the faith.

Chapter 11

THE GENERATION GAP, GUILT AND GOD

After a Sabbath service written and organized by Institute members, we went right back at it. Someone had heard Harvey Cox talk on worship. Cox is a minister on the faculty of the Harvard Divinity School who believes that the church takes itself too seriously; that the religious moment must be a celebration of possibility, a freeing of the imagination and a passionate encounter of the symbols of the powers we do not control and only dimly comprehend.

For some reason as he went on a Biblical line came to mind: "the young men shall see visions; the old men dream dreams." Our imagination remains active throughout our lives but, depending on our age, we respond differently to its promptings. When we are young and the future stretches before us, we more than half believe our visions. When we are old and the future has been, we know that our dreams are day dreams, idle.

Another voice picked up the first. "I like it here. There's open space. There's song and touching. I don't like it at home. In my synagogue the pews are rigid, the service is a set piece, everyone's dressed up and seems uptight."

A rabbi learns quickly that there's a wide response gap between the young adult and the settled adult in regard to religious expression. The young want their religious experiences to be intense. They want Torah to provide direct answers and doable programs to save the world. The middle-aged tend to prefer a moment of fellowship with friends and a thoughtful sermon. They know that they will not reform the world so "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead" civics are abandoned for a more deliberate commitment. Much can be done, but every successful resolution or policy precipitates new problems. The pullout from Vietnam gave us peace, the Boat people and Campuchean refugee camps.

Because different responses are appropriate to different periods of our

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

Which is the right way?

Each can be if it is engaged in with sincerity and attention.

Isn't our prayer book called a Siddur, and doesn't the Hebrew label mean order? There is a formal order of service. How can you approve what looks like anything goes?

In worship hitlahavot, genuineness, takes precedence over form. The medieval synagogue was a tumultuous and noisy place. The medieval Jew had nothing else to do and no other place to go. There were no movies, no radio or television, probably no other public space in his town; so he lengthened the service and, not accustomed to privacy, treated it with understandable familiarity. Jews stayed for hours and gossiped even as they worshipped. They were familiar with each other and with their God. Emancipation changed all this. The emancipated Jew no longer had the leisure born of under-employment to linger in synagogue most of the day. Abroad in the larger world he came to appreciate the aesthetic of his city and class. Middle-class Christians sat silently in pews. The familiar swaying of the worship came to seem inappropriate. Decorum became a mandate.

When /I have worshipped in Casablanca and Bombay and in the Sephardic congregations of Jerusalem, I have discovered chants, customs and hymns hitherto unknown to me. Yemenite Jews sit cross-legged on prayer rugs. Moroccan Jews

chant the whole of the Song of Songs before the Sabbath. Like costume, many of the forms of Jewish worship conform to cultural style rather than to ancient commandments. When there were shrines, sacrifices and priests Jews had shrines, sacrifices and priests. Pews and a vested clergy are eighteenth century forms. The guitar is late twentieth century.

The older divisions were geographic rather than generational. A youth culture is a modern phenomenon. Boys went to work at thirteen. Separate youth group services simply testify to the fact that there is a young adult culture whose attitudes, aesthetics and play are quite distinct from the adult world.

The problem of many manuals which describe the Torah tradition is not that they fail to do justice to the subject, many are quite competent, but that they provide reasonable middle-age explanations for an age group which wants passion, not philosophy. You do not want to sit in pews, pews are straigh and confining. You are not ready to sit quietly and listen to somebody else. You want dialogue, not a sermon. You want intensity, to do it yourself, not the calm of an organ playing over you. You want commitment, activity, proof of conviction and participation in a group which will feel close and warm. Well and good. There always have been a variety of ways to express one's faith. Maimonides worshipped at home with a few disciples in quiet dignity next to the bustle of an active synagogue whose noise he deplored. The problem is not guitar or organ, or even whether an audio-visual presentation is acceptable but how to make sure the spirit is full and the environment representative of the best in Jewish life.

You talk of guitar or organ. We belong to an orthodox synagogue, and instrumental music is forbidden. I was told that this prohibition is a sign of mourning for the destroyed Jerusalem Temple.

There was a choir and orchestra of Levites in The Temple and, when it was destroyed, instrumental music was ruled out of the synagogue. During the Renaissance in Italy some communities allowed organ music in the synagogue

except on the Sabbath and holidays. The position we take will correspond to our attitude towards form. I look on the issue pragmatically. God, we are told, should be worshipped in the beauty of holiness. What setting will lift up the congregation to the meaning and mood of the liturgy?

There is no right or wrong. Why is an organ more appropriate than a guitar, or a cantor than a choir? Priests danced in the Jerusalem Temple. The medieval synagogue had no pews. Kabbalists held all-night vigils. The Hasidim often told of the illiterate shepherd boy who played his flute in the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah because he did not know how to speak the Hebrew words and that his was the voice which was welcomed into Heaven. It's not the medium but the message.

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

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

I don't understand.

Worship provides an opportunity to immerse oneself in the Torah tradition. Readings from Gibran and Thomas do not provide a Torah experience.

You make worship sound important. I've always thought of it as icing on the cake. It's the deed that counts and the rest is color.

When worship works, and it doesn't always, it provides the emotional electricity which binds Torah to an individual's life. As we have seen, on an intellectual level there is no final answer to the question, what is Judaism but an answer emerges as we engage ourselves in synagogue worship. The soul of the individual Jew and of our people is mirrored in its liturgy and ceremony; somehow, soul speaks to soul, the teaching takes the wings of song and imbed themselves deep within our psyche.

I thought services were for prayer.

Not really. The Sabbath hour is a worship hour.

What's the difference?

The dictionary defines prayer in terms of petition and entreaty. Most of us equate prayer with the sudden surge of emotion when we are pushed beyond our resources or unable to contain our joys. I prayed when my father was deathly ill. I prayed when each of my children was born. These prayers were spoken late at night in a hospital corridor and not in a synagogue. Abe Lincoln used to say that he often found himself on his knees because he had no place else to go. Prayer cannot be scheduled. To be sure, there have been times when I have prayed during a service. I came troubled. The music calmed my spirits. The sense of community, the quiet, an awareness of the presence of God unlocked my heart; but I can number these moments.

There is a petition in the service, but a Jewish service is not a prayer meeting. Open the siddur and you will find praise, doctrine; paragraphs from the literature; The Sayings of the Fathers, a short collection of proverbs from the Mishnah; memorial prayers. During the worship hour Torah is read. A sermon may be preached. Candles are lit. The Kiddush is recited. Those who say, 'I do not need to come to the synagogue to pray' are absolutely right. Prayer is agnostic. People pray to God, to gods, to mother, to the devil, to the winds. Jewish worship is monotheistic. Prayer is a happening. Worship is sculptured. Prayer is spontaneous. Worship has a set calendar. Worship is a commitment. Worship exists to lift us from the workaday world and to place us in the Torah world where we can breathe for a few moments the pure air of the vision and live for an hour within the beauty of the tradition. The pleasure we can derive from a service is the inspiration of worship, not the release of prayer. Prayer pleads. Worship challenges. Prayer is wholly private. Jews worship congregationally. Worship requires a minyan, ten of the community. Worship follows a set calendar and uses classic formulae like the Shema and the Amidah. Torah reading and interpretation are core elements in a literary construct which is conducted largely in the holy tongue. Prayer is highly personal and immediate. Worship is congregational, instructively Jewish

an attempt to marry the religious vision to the soul. Worship creates an emotional environment in which the basic teachings can come alive for us because they have been turned into song and visualized in effective ritual.

Wherever he finds himself, the Jew can find a service with which he will be familiar, feel rooted and at home. Congregation overcomes the sense of loneliness and gives the Jew a home wherever his travels take him. Worship allows us to live in the spiritual order of the Jewish people. What I do individually will be lost in the activities of several billion earthlings. What I do as part of a people of Israel ties me to a long history of significance.

Our tendency to think of the service as a prayer experience creates many of our intellectual problems with it. If the service is for prayer it is only natural to wonder: am I a parrot that they give me a book, tell me to open to such and such a page and read? How do you expect me to feel prayerful precisely between 8:15 and 9:30 on Friday night? I come to pray, yet, when I get there I am read to, lectured and sang at. Why?

Yes, why? It was the counselor who had read Harvey Cox. Forms restrict. The key imperative for me is to be genuine and during worship I am asked to read another's words.

Traditional worship is chanted, minor-keyed, full of movement. A Jew davens, a colloquialism which suggests a far more active posture than siting in a pew. He loses himself in words which came from nearly every century of his people's life. The siddur has form, but it is not a closed book. These forms took their basic shape in Mishnaic times; but much has been added and some things have been dropped. In the Siddur you will find the living faith, something of what the river has seemed like in every age. In worship the Psalms allow us to sing along with David, the Babylonian sages and Judah ha Levi. We remind ourselves of the martyrs whose blood commands our loyalty. There is petition in the liturgy but it is worded in the third person plural, 'we', not 'I'. We are gently reminded that "we do not know whether what we ask for is for our good." What is asked for is the fulfillment of hopes we

all share: health, a just social order, a return to Zion, the messianic age. "Grant us peace." During worship we live in the world of Torah, all the paragraphs are living Torah, and the central act of worship is the reading and interpretation of Torah, an opening of our spirit to the meaning of God's words. The average personal standard of conduct is average, well-intentioned and erratic. The Torah's standard is holiness. By being at worship we signify a willingness at least to listen, really to listen, to the commands which holiness imposes. Here is our past, our mythic language, our becoming, the mysterious power of God's words still instructing us as He did our fathers at Sinai.

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

The urgency of our age is to be authentic. Many assume that they cannot parrot another's words and be true to themselves. Obviously, one cannot schedule the sudden surge of emotion which rushes out when we are pushed beyond our resources or unable to contain our joys. However, spontaneity is not the consummate value. Prayer is instinctive and being instinctive it can be foolish, petty, misdirected or self-deluding. Men can and will pray as the spirit moves them. When we worship and use the classic poetry of the psalms or hymns sanctified by centuries of faith we recognize that worship has the extra dimension of spiritual grace. "We cannot all pray from our own creative resources because we are not all of us religious geniuses, and prayer and religion are as truly a form of genius, a gift from God, as poetry or music or

any high endowment. We cannot all write Shakespearean poetry or Bach's music but we can still make it our own; we can open our hearts to it and enrich and expand ourselves by sharing and appropriating it" (Henry Slonimsky).

Worship is artificial in the sense that all civilization is artificial; that is, it is a creation of human design. I am troubled by the tendency to limit the use of the label "creative service" to a service which tosses out centuries of literary genius for a few paragraphs written in haste a few hours before the service. Only naivete could lead one to believe that we cannot relate to another's words meaningfully or creatively. Would you say that Robenstein or Heifetz are not genuine musicians because they play scores written by Chopin and Beethoven? The pianist creates his music even as he recreates another's music. The engaged worshipper participates fully and genuinely in the words of the psalmist or the poet. The Twenty-third Psalm belongs as much to me as to King David.

I was accused of being uncharacteristically romantic. Most of the time she came to the synagogue she found the mood flat; and instead of being lifted up she was let down.

I, too, have been let down by a service. Synagogue folk can be as off-handed and careless as anyone else. I have been put off by a restless congregation. Many who came to the synagogue do so to hear a friend or a friend's child and not to honor God or to pay attention to the words or mood. These send out clear vibrations that they are not part of the congregation and cast a pall over the rest of us. When decorum and discipline took over the service much of the old sense of involvement was lost. The mood shifted subtly from that of congregation to audience, and worship became what it had never been before and never ought to be - a spectator sport.

I have been to services which failed to lift me out of myself, but rarely a service which failed to bring me back to my Jewish self. There was always Torah. In worship I am always aware of God and of the centuries of faith and learning. During the day I am a husband, a father, a professional, an American

citizen; here I am simply a Jew.

My reverie was stopped by another. I miss a church's majesty. My synagogue is small and when people are in it it's noisy. I spent a summer in England at Cambridge University. Each college has a chapel and most have Evensong. It's quiet and candle-lit. The Gothic arches and the shadows blend beautifully with the hymns. There's an unmistakable sense of holiness.

I've attended Evensong at St. John's College, Cambridge, and been moved, but I could not help noticing what was expressed by the architecture. The fellows and students were in an inner space behind the church screen. I was on the other side with the commoners. In the synagogue there are no separations based on class or rank. There is an old proverb that nine rabbis do not make a minyan, but ten tailors do.

What about form? Forget an outsider like Gibran. Can a guiter service, seated on the floor with individual reflections and our own thoughts be authentic Jewish worship?

In recent times needs and attitudes have changed again. Soul replaced decorum. The guitar replaced the organ. Pop ideas and music came in, often for no better reason than that borrowing such ideas was seen as creative, but whatever their shortcomings the new style services, at least at first, had the virtue of liveliness.

I want a service which catches me up in a sense of the divinity reaching out to me from behind the surface of life and from deep within the history of my people. There must be song and feeling and the presence of Kedushah, holiness. Song releases the spirit. Poetic language touches the soul. A congregation united in expression refracts a holiness which suggests all that has made the Torah civilization possible. I am never satisfied by a service which gives me little more than a simplistic paragraph on my social duties.

A community visualizes, symbolizes, its redemptive gospel in ritual and worship. These moments provide us a foretaste of Paradise or Heaven on earth, and remind the communicant of what must be done to qualify for the Kingdom.

Ethereal music plays. A preacher lifts up the Scriptures and discusses what we must do to be worthy. People are dressed up and on their best behavior, as if they were already angels. Work clothes are deliberately excluded. Here is an appetizer of what life can be when we create the just society on earth or enter the heavenly Jerusalem: golden words, glorious themes and a grand vision; a symbolic confirmation of the fact that the redemptive promise is real. To participate is to be caught up in the moment and to be encouraged. We are reminded of high duties and fundamental obligations, the ways we can help build the Kingdom. Generally, we grow through such an experience but we are not transformed into saints. No one knows better than those who take a religious tradition with utmost seriousness how far short we fall of our private expectations and, at the same time, how important the religious forms are in strengthening our will and sensitizing our spirit to a whole range of obligations and possibilities.

I can buy worship as a celebration of God and life's possibilities, but I can't buy the word sin or the idea of confession. It's heavy. Life's got enough problems without being dumped on when I come to the synagogue. Anyway, most sins are society's fault. Every Yom Kippur the phrase, "we have done perversely", sticks in my craw. I'm not perverse. Guilt talk is medieval. Guilt inhibits. There's already too much guilt in the world. That's why we have expensive psychiatrists to free us of our guilt. Why does Jewish worship lay such guilt-ridden terms on us?

I asked how she would organize Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur ought to be a grand celebration of the possibilities of life. The liturgy should speak of expectation and hope. And she went on to say: no one is guilty. We do what we do because of our environment, our conditioning, because our families raised us in a certain way. There are no bad children; only bad living conditions and careless parents. Why does the synagogue continue to talk of guilt? None of us are guilty. We simply do what our physiology, our genetic inheritance and our environment allows us to do.

I think of Yom Kippur as a grand celebration of possibility, but before I spoke of my experiences I wanted to understand where my questioner was coming from. Have you read B. F. Skinner?

Yes.

B. F. Skinner is a well-publicized educator and psychologist who believes that we can become only what our genetic endowment and our environment allows us to be. In his view frustration and failure prevent us from fulfilling our natural potential. To eliminate failure he set out to create an environment, a learning machine, which would provide a continuing sense of accomplishment. Skinner's learning box would provide the child all the materiel needed to put ideas together so as to form new ideas. The technology of Skinner's device need not detain us. It was designed to insure that mistakes need not occur. The machine would acknowledge instantly the correctness of a student's work and the young person would learn without frustration: no guilt, no mental or emotional block. Presumedly, using this computerized learning device, society could do away with classrooms, teachers, peer pressures, the frustrations associated with being part of a group of varied abilities; and without pain or failure shape a well-trained, literate, competent, technologically sensitive human being.

Skinner's box was based on a theory of some merit which insists that we recognize how much the environment in which we live affects how we live, what we can accomplish, the questions we ask and the answers that we arrive at. We tend to think of ourselves as if we are autonomous beings when, in fact, we are in rather significant ways what our parents and our society have allowed us to become. Conditioning determines much about us. We speak English, not French or Chinese. The fact that we speak English means that some ideas can be expressed easily and others perhaps not at all. Our habits are American-bred and, therefore, we think of ourselves differently from an Indian villager or a Japanese worker. All that's not particularly new. Skinner's popularity lay in the fact that he began his presentation with a value judgment to the

effect that the impact of western civilization on the individual was destructive precisely because it suggested that we were free. Being told constantly that we are free, we have been trained to believe that each of us is an independent being who can, through an exercise of will and determination, modify his behavior. This idea, according to Skinner, is wrong and does little except produce frustration. He particularly faulted the Western religions for emphasizing individual responsibility and for insisting that moral failure was sin. No one should have to bear a burden of guilt because, in fact, we are not responsible for what we do; our environment is. If you want to modify behavior don't talk of individual responsibility, such talk only increases frustration and guilt; talk of restructuring the society. We are what our world allows us to be.

Skinner's studies and writings seemed to confirm a number of assumptions which fit the current mood. In changing times many want to be free of guilt for living quite differently from parents and for paying no attention to their advice, and justify themselves by arguing that there are no rights and wrongs. Among Christians it's wrong to smoke hashish but not to drink. Among Muslims it's wrong to drink but not to smoke hashish. What is accepted in one culture is rejected as sinful in another. If there is no sin there is no basis for guilt. Such self-serving arguments were reinforced by a psychoanalytic tradition whose description of the psychological carryover of infancy experiences into our adult lives raised questions as to the degree of freedom any of us enjoy. Psychiatry also studied and made many conscious of the emotional crippling men and women sometimes suffer because of a pathological sense of guilt.

We live in a confusing age and are never quite sure what is right socially, sexually, in terms of family relationships or in terms of manners and morals. It is fine to talk of crime because crime is what somebody else does and gets punished for. Sin hits too close to home. Sin suggests that our life isn't what it should be and we are responsible; and we would prefer

to avoid the blame. It's all the fault of our parents or of being raised at a particular time in a particular place. We were loved too much or not enough. What else could I do? Given all those circumstances, many want to feel that their situation and environment determines everything, that they need not accept full responsibility as morally autonomous individuals or feel guilty for modest lives.

The Torah tradition admits to Skinner's charge. Yes, environment plays a role and so do a number of special factors such as age and mental competence, but the whole ethos of the Torah tradition cries out: "they [the Commandments] are not too hard for you." A competent individual is responsible for his actions and his character. God did not fashion us as robots but as conscious creatures, capable of thinking through the consequences of our actions and, therefore, of judgment and of acting on our decisions. The Sinai covenant and the commandments, the key myth, would have no bite if each of us were not morally responsible.

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

I've got a senile grandmother who has to be watched all the time.

There are extenuating factors, but the crux of this debate is not on whether there are special hereditary or age factors but whether a competent adult is in fact competent to shape his or her life. Children raised in good homes with parents who care for them and correct them have a better chance of developing a coherent sense of self than a street child who is raised carelessly, perhaps cruelly; but environment is not all. Some are raised in good homes and become bums. Some are raised on the street and become saints. The "I", our particular spirit, plays a major role in determining whether we take advantage of opportunity or allow our environment to limit all we do. In life everything, including freedom, has limits, but the grandeur of the Torah tradition is that we are asked to act in the area of moral judgment as if these boundaries did not exist. In terms of ethical standards we have been given

by God the artist's gift of dominating the material before us, and the more trained and skilled we become the greater our freedom of action. Animals are ruled by instinct and behaviorists like Skinner emphasize that side of our nature. The Bible's creation myth emphasizes that the animal kingdom was created at a different and earlier stage of the creation process than man. God made the animals, each according to its kind. An animal remains what he was born. "Then God said, 'let us make man in our image and likeness'." The human animal can become a human being.

Well and good, but do we really need to revive breast beating? Why add guilt to our other problems? Why not live in a world of no-fault morality?

Paradoxically, it is the concept of sin which lifts the pall and reminds us of our potential. No-fault implies I could not be other than I am. That's simply not so. Sin implies possibility. I know that I fall short of my expectations of myself and can improve.

Perhaps it's a bit of perversity, I rather think not; but I rather like to think of myself as a sinner. Sin says I'm responsible and nothing more encoureging could be said to me.

The concept of sin reminds me that I am morally responsible for talents untapped, sensitivities unused and responsibilities unmet. It's only when we cease to feel responsible that the world becomes a gray and hapless place for then there is no hope of change. Sin forces us to consider the more we can do and must do and will do; and it's that "can" and that "must" and that "will" out of which progress, a better future and maturity, a better self, will be woven. Sin is a key to stronger character and a better world.

But sin is a heavy thought.

Whoever told you life would be easy. But, really, sin talk isn't all that heavy. Each year I leave the synagogue after the closing service of Yom Kippur much happier than when I began my day of confessional worship. As I confessed my sins I recognized I wasn't shackled to them.

But you never get out from under.

The Torah's goal is not purity but growth. The Torah's realism is proverbial. There are good folk but no saints. "There is no man on earth so righteous that he sins not."

I couldn't resist closing this session with a miniature Yom Kippur sermon. In many ways the absence of a strong sense of moral responsibility is the classic sin of our age. Everybody wants to go along. Everybody wants to do his thing. Nobody wants to be a whistle-blower or to stop to help somebody being attacked. I could be hurt. It could be a trick. Or to testify to a crime, I'd have to take days off and go to court. Contrast these shoddy rationalizations with God's straightforward demands: "See, I have set before you this day, life and death, the blessing and the curse, choose life." "Cease to do evil. Learn to do well."

I've always found the Torah's message bracing.

Chapter 12

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

How can I know right from wrong?

I was reminded of an anxious and obviously bewildered lady who had come to see me. Her son had been berating her because she contributed regularly to the United Torch and other charities that she considered worthwhile. He insisted that private welfare programs were bandaids that simply covered over festering social ills; that America needed radical political and economic surgery and that her gifts delayed, perhaps fatally, such reform.

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

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

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

She paused. She seemed whipped. "I just do not know what's right any more."

I remember a father who had returned from visiting two grownup daughters in San Francisco: "Rabbi, either the whole world is crazy or I am."

Given the prevailing confusion of moral and ethical judgments and the

experience of meeting those who choose life styles which seem to us incomprehensible, many have begun to say: "As long as nobody gets hurt, what is the difference?" Others are driven to the point of saying and almost believing: "Anything goes." In any case, "who is to judge?"

Moral decisions are never easy. There is a folk tale about a rabbi who was occupied in his study with his secretary when an irate woman burst through the door. Without pausing for the amenities she proceeded to pour out a litany of complaints about her husband. The rabbi tried to get her to sit down, but she was restless with anger. Her husband was arrogant, cold to her, careless of the children, a spendthrift. To calm her the rabbi kept repeating: "you're right, you're right, you're right." Finally, she ran out of steam, allowed herself to be soothed and left. A half hour later there was another explosion through the door. This time it was the husband. He, too, had a full chronicle of complaints. His wife was a shrew, vindictive. She was careless around the house. Her cooking was abominable. Again, the rabbi tried to calm his visitor: "you're right, you're right, you're right." The husband allowed himself to be soothed and left. The secretary who had witnessed these two interviews was puzzled: "Rabbi, they can't both be right," to which the answer, of course, was "you're right, too."

A few months ago an elderly woman came to me with a bitter complaint about her daughter and son-in-law. They were insisting that she register in an old folks' home. She had been raised in the era of the extended family, when families kept their own at home and only the impoverished or unwanted were institutionalized; and she felt betrayed and abandoned: "Don't my children know the Ten Commandments:''honor your father and your mother'? How can they do this to me?" A few days later her children were in my office. They had investigated the local homes for the aged and had found a first-rate facility. Both of them worked. The family could not afford a full-time housekeeper. Mother sometimes became disoriented and wandered off. "She will be well cared for. We have always been close. She will not be alone. We have no other

choice." A day or two later I received a telephone call from the granddaughter at college. She was quite perturbed with her parents. "How could they put grandmother in a home? Didn't I know that institutions dehumanize? Grandmother would become a chart and diminish as a person. How could they do this to such a wonderful woman?"

You're right, you're right, and, to a certain degree, you're right, too. When I listen to the generations struggling to adjust to the structural changes which have taken place in family life and the social order, I find myself an audience to a good bit of anger between people, each of whom believes he is acting wisely and with the best of intentions. There is no frustration equal to that of misunderstood goodness.

How do we know what is the right? The sturdy and functional values of the older generation may have been right in an earlier society, but are they necessarily right today? The experimental and experiential values of the young are passionately proclaimed, but are they necessarily right simply because they are new? Complicated questions must be asked and clear analyses of motive and consequences made; and, unfortunately, many find it difficult to think an issue through. It's easier to shout: 'That's what my guru taught me' or 'It's what I feel'.

Moral judgments are never easy. The question of motivation must be considered. Was the son berating his mother because he believed that only radical political upheaval would establish justice in the country, or was he looking for some way, any way, to put down his parents and so find his manhood? Was the daughter making an issue about marriage because she believed that introducing the law into their relationship would sully their love or because she was afraid that if she began to talk about marriage to her young man he might clear out?

The search for an adequate definition of the good was pursued vigorously in the academies of Greece. Plato made a classic investigation of the problem and concluded that he could define the good in terms of four cardinal virtues,

each of which conformed to an idealized form. His was an elegant definition, but when I first read The Dialogues I remember being puzzled by the fact that having defined the good to his satisfaction Plato continued to live as before. He did not go out into the agora and preach to the Athenians about their imperialist ambitions, nor did he get up in the Council of Athens and insist that slavery was evil and that the slaves should be freed. Not at all. Having defined the good Plato continued to teach philosophy to the sons of the well-born. Philosophy considers. The Torah commands.

As an undergraduate I took a course on Moral Philosophy from a fine teacher, Ralph Barton Perry. He lectured twice each week and an assistant conducted a Friday seminar in which we were given a chance to talk over what we had learned. The young instructor obviously knew a great deal about moral philosophy, but he was a sadist. Instead of encoureging undergraduates who were fumbling in their first attempts to understand critical thought, he tore us to shreds with obvious relish. He was trained and we were neophytes. He knew all about the good but he was not a good man.

The Chinese wrote the noun 'ethics' with an ideogram which consists of the shape of a man and the symbol for the number 2. This suggests, I am told, that ethics exists only in relationship to others, that a person proves his virtue not by the subtlety of his definition of the good but by the quality of the life which he leads. Our tradition puts observation this way: it's not the reasoning but the result that counts. I mistrust outbursts of moral passion by men of suspect character. Richard Nixon and Timothy Leary are not proper guides into the fields of morals. In my lifetime I have heard Stalin, Hitler, promote peace. I have watched mobs demonstrate violently in the cause of peace. I heard four presidents speak of peace and escalate violence in Vietnam. Peace, justice, freedom, love - all these compelling words mean nothing and must be judged by the character of the person who is using them, the context in which they are being said and the consequences of the proposals being made. I heard Neville Chamberlain promise peace in our times. When I

hear youngsters pontificate about the wickedness of politicians, I find myself wondering whether their noble enthusiasm is ultimately serious or satisfying posturing. What is their mandate? How will they act when their time of temptation comes? When I hear judgments spoken by those who have used power with some degree of wisdom and restraint, I listen attentively. They have earned the right to speak of the good and the right.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in Germany in 1906 and died in 1945 in a Nazi prison. Bonhoeffer was a child of privilege who grew up in the confessing church and found his way into the ministry of the German Evangelical Church which he served faithfully for many years as a parish priest. His mind was well furnished and keen, and he became known as one of the leading theologians on the continent. In 1938 the Union Theological Seminary in New York invited Bonhoeffer to join its faculty. He came, but a year later with war imminent, Bonhoeffer returned to Germany to be with his people. He returned to parish work and defied the officials who forbade him to preach or teach. The Nazis threw him in jail. In jail he worked on a book on ethics before he was hung. Let me quote you a few lines which ring true: "The question of the good always finds us already in situation which can no longer be reversed. We are alive. The question of good is posed and is decided in the midst of each definite, yet unconcluded unique and transient situation of our lives. In the midst of our living relationships with men, things, institutions and powers, in other words in the midst of our historical experience." To understand what is good we must look at a concrete situation, at the times, the context, the relationship, the culture, the range of options, in which a particular decision must be made. Goodness does not exist apart from the deed itself and any attempt to define the good and the ought will fail.

Believing as I do that Bonhoeffer is correct, I have always appreciated a special genre of writing developed by our sages to investigate ethical questions. The Torah consists of specific commandments rather than general concepts and <u>Talmudic</u> literature contains little theoretical speculation about

the good. Occasionally, medieval philosophers like Seadya will add a chapter on ethics to an apologetic work, generally presenting a Judaized version of Aristotle's middle way; but, by and large, Jews eschewed analysis for case study. Instead the sages developed a literature called She'elot u'Teshuvot, Questions and Answers, responsa. Someone would present an actual case or a specific question of moral theory to a rabbi. He would advise as best he could and those involved would accept his advice or not; but, if the issues were interesting, this did not end the matter. The rabbi would draw up a digest of the problem to which he might or not append comments and would send this precis and his decision to other authorities for comment. No one expected every scholar to come down with the same judgment. What was looked for was enlightenment, insight, sensitivity. The case would go the rounds. Each sage would apply his knowledge of Torah and Talmud precedent as well as his own judgment. Particularly under today's conditions we must appreciate this acceptance of the uniqueness of every situation and this emphasis on the necessity of a thoughtful examination of all pertinent factors.

Sometimes we are forced to act quickly and decisively and we do the best we know how; what the Torah tradition tried to do was to so sensitize the Jew that our immediate response would reflect the wisdom we have drawn from Torah.

If there is no such thing as an abstract definition of the good which can be applied in every case, then the first step in making ethical judgments must always be the making of as complete an analysis of the situation and of the possible consequences of any decision as we can. No wonder our tradition, unlike some, insists that neither a fool nor an impetuous person can be a saint. Innocence and passion guarantee impetuosity, not wise judgment. You can love a person to death. Good intentions are often quite dangerous to others if not to ourselves.

Ethical decisions cannot be independent of context. Some time ago, visiting in the hospital, I found myself making the opposite decision in two almost identical situations. In both cases the problem was one of fatal illness

In the first bed the patient was a man in his middle-age. As I entered he looked up and said: "Rabbi, I have been very sick, but I feel better now and I know that I am going to be well." A week before the doctor had told him in my presence that he could not expect to live for more than a few weeks; yet, here he was, talking about health and going back to work. A lot of thoughts raced through my mind before I came to a decision: "No, you're not." He cried. We talked. Why had I intruded the cruel facts? This man had a wife and children, a business. He had been suddenly stricken. If he lived in a dream world and avoided the decisions which needed to be made they would not be made. There would be costly consequences for those who depended on him. He had to confront a painful reality.

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

Ethical decisions must be based on specific considerations as well as formal commandments. One of the assignments I annually assign a Confirmation class is to stipulate a situation in which such basic commandments as: you shall not murder, steal, commit adultery; I would kill to protect my family from a psychotic killer. Had I been a Jew in Nazi Europe, I would have stolen whatever I needed to survive and escape ; the young spouse of a permanently institutionalized mate who cannot bear the thought of abandoning a loved one can be forgiven another relationship. <u>In extremis</u> life takes precedence over form.

Certainly, the reason we argue so much about ethics is that the social environment is unstable and changes on us all the time. Those of different generations make judgments on the basis of widely different assessments of the

consequences of a decision for all involved. If I were to institutionalize a parent I would not feel guilty, another might; and this sense of guilt must figure in his thinking. Moreover, I live in a different social environment than you do. Before the age of future shock life flowed along fairly predictably. Children grew up in a social context not unlike that of the parents. You grow up in a radically different world, and the overlay of experience, what you saw your parents do and were conditioned to believe to be right may not seem appropriate to you. The question of young people 'living together' is a case in point.

How should we go about making ethical decisions? Some would have us concentrate on a calculus of motivation. Joseph Fletcher who taught ethics at various Protestant seminaries insisted that the best way to check up on our judgments is to make a rigorous examination of motives. If I feel that I am doing what I am doing out of love, if I feel it is genuine, that's enough. Unselfish motivation affirms the goodness of an act. Fletcher defines the good as acting out of love. This definition unmasks the hypocrite but I am troubled by it. There are all kinds of love. There's a selfless love which is truly giving and there is a selfless love which grows out of a pathological need to be a martyr. There is a mother love which sustains and there is a mother's love which smothers. There is a love of self which is becoming pride and a love of self which is pure arrogance. Love covers anything and everything, anything, at least, that we want it to cover. The Grand inquisitor sent men to the rack out of his love for their immortal souls and felt good about it. His motives were pure.

O.k. Then how do I go about thinking about the right and the good?

One way to approach this task is through a calculus of consequence rather than a calculus of motivation. I watched the other day as a family pleaded with a physician to do all he could to save their mother. She was in her eighties, in a deep coma and her brain scan showed little activity. They spoke out of love, but heroic measures could only condemn their mother to

protracted unconsciousness and deny a hospital bed to a patient who might be helped. Knowledge must always guide and censor our impulses. I would trust the skill of a first-rate surgeon or lawyer who did not care for me rather than place myself in the hands of a good friend who lacked competence. I have little sympathy for those impulsive folk who turn off their minds and, failing in their plans, end by saying: 'I only meant to be helpful!'

Whenever I face a moment of decision I remind myself of another cherished myth, that of the long trek to the Promised Land. Only two of the six hundred thousand who left Egypt entered the Promised Land. Life is a difficult journey, not a calm sojourn in Utopia. Our options are limited and decisions must be made about goals and relationships on the basis of incomplete information and within a given context. Our companions are what they are, not saints. Our political options require trade-offs. Yet, so much contemporary moralizing is utopian. It is assumed that all things are possible. One more revolution and the Golden Age will be here. Unfortunately, after the revolution, if one comes, the winners will abuse their new power and the new elite will seek to protect and extend their privileges. It is not the best of all solutions to spend billions of dollars for military hardware, and obviously much of what we now spend is misspent; but given the jungle of international politics it would be suicidal to give no thought to the defense of our freedoms and rights.

You're talking all around the point. I accept the idea that consequences must be weighed, but to make a judgment in any specific case I need standards. How do I know whether it's best to pull the plug or leave on the life support systems unless I have some basic conviction of the importance of life?

Torah provides standards. At Sinai God provided man with the basic rules of holiness around which civilization has formed and clear words were spoken about appropriate actions. The Torah is a collection of instructions which, taken together, comprise a rule of life, a way which, so the Torah tradition affirms, if followed faithfully leads to the well-being of the individual and

But we've already talked about Torah rules which we cannot accept: burning witches, stoning adulterers, and about exceptions to those we can: stealing to survive.

We've also found the mysterious capacity of Torah to be more than it seems and to provide instruction appropriate to each day. Our tradition honored the formally unacceptable elements in certain commandments by inattention and by relating the commandments so that their positive elements came to the fore. Adulterers were not stoned. Capital punishment was effectively abolished by judicial process. Adultery was condemned, but the positive, the sanctity of marriage, was what was emphasized. Every effort was made to teach that the human being should not defile his nest.

Why are there differences of opinion about an issue like adultery among rabbis? Don't you all know what the Torah says?

When Supreme Court justices interpret the Constitution there is room for honest disagreement. Each judge sees the issues from his own perspective and relates legal precedents and moral principles of the Torah to a case according to his prayerful understanding of the Torah's letter and spirit. There is no division among rabbis on the sanctity of the marriage vows. Difference emerges when the issue moves from the realm of morality to that of legality. As an ideal, a standard, yes; but, when adultery is labeled a crime, that's where many of us have problems. The halachic rules often had severe consequences for children. Under the old forms children born out of an adulterous liaison suffer certain disabilities about their status which limit whom they can marry. The sanctity of marriage is Torah and so is the tradition against inherited guilt. The Supreme Court rarely has unanimous opinions.

Some rabbis are overwhelmed by change and feel the need to defend the old ways lest all sense of fitness and continuity be lost. Others stride confidently into the new world and are eager to break new ground. This kind of division is not new to our tradition. There have always been strict and broad constructionists, those who argued rabbis must not rewrite the covenant and those who [illegible] the letter of the law over its spirit:

'the law was given to man to live by it, not to die by it,' 'the Sabbath was given to man, not man to the Sabbath,' 'would that they might forsake Me if it means keeping faith with the Torah!' You all know about fasting on Yom Kippur, so let me quote you a bit of Talmud: "If, on Yom Kippur, a pregnant woman smells some food and craves for it greatly she should be given a little until she no longer feels weak or faint. A sick person, too, is fed at the word of the physicians. If no physicians are present one feeds the sick person when he wants it - until he says 'enough."

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

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

This rule would seem to justify setting the Torah rule entirely aside.

Not really. When a Governor proclaims martial law to cope with a disaster he is acting because a state of emergency exists to which the usual routines of the law simply are inapplicable. Similarly, the rabbis in the situations I just cited.

What about civil disobedience?

State law is generally accepted as binding, but when that law is tyran-

submit.

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

If our tradition makes any statement it is that freedom requires law, not the absence of law. The rabble who came out of Egypt were worthless to themselves, even rebellious, until they bound themselves to the terms of the covenant. At the same time veneration of law does not require passive submission to arbitrary authority. Our trinity involves law, order and justice.

Is there an intelligent way to make ethical judgments?

Think before you act. Be clear on basic principles. Remember what Torah is all about, study your options carefully, work out as best you can the possible consequences of your decision, and act in such a way as to increase rather than diminish the opportunities of the living. Care about your act and act humbly for you can never foresee all the consequences.

Chapter 13

TRUE AND ENDURING IS THY WORD - OR IS IT?

"My father is an architect. As I grew up he beat into my head the rule that a building is only as stable as its foundations. If not solidly based, a structure will shift and ultimately collapse, which leads me to my Noah's Ark problem. As a child I liked coloring in the animals, but how can I take seriously a Scripture full of fairy stories even if they are dignified by the high-fallutin' word, myth ?*

Another voice: I was in a Bible class that you led last year. You taught us that the Noah story is an Israelite version of a classic Asian epic. I was impressed by the nature of the Israelite revisions, particularly the way they turned the flood story into a morality piece. If I remember correctly, in the original version the flood occurs because the noise of the city disturbs the peace of the gods and the hero is saved because he is a favorite of one of the goddesses; while in Genesis God decides to destroy mankind because of the world's wickedness and Noah is saved because he is a good man. You helped me see the new theme around which informs the Torah myth, that we were not playthings of the gods but servants of a dependable master. God need not be feared. These conceptual changes represented a new and liberating religious perspective; but I was unsettled by the fact that the Noah chapters represent an amalgam of two distinct traditions. In one version the animals come two by two; in the other by sevens. There was more to it, but what disturbed me was the idea that the Torah contains inconsistent, even contradictory, materials How can we take seriously a tradition based on contradictions? Certainly, an inconsistent tradition can't claim to be revelation.

Your problem is a perceptual one. You have identified the Torah's text with God's Word. It's like saying nature is God when we mean God is the creative force behind or within all that is. God's Word is the creative force within Torah. To use a rabbinic metaphor, the received text is simply the outer garment of God's Word. We discover revelation when we uncover the Torah's

deep wisdom.

One of the interpretive rules or middot which the Talmudists applied to the Torah was one which stated that the Torah uses language ordinary people can understand. Intended for everyone's understanding, the Torah uses imagery and drama rather than theory and theology. In the ancient world groups of escaped slaves were hunted down ruthlessly lest others be encouraged. The Israelites made God their escape. A miracle was needed to explain the success of the Israelites. God did not walk in the cool or the garden. God does not speak,at least not in any way in which we do, but how else could the idea of God's presence or revelation be communicated?

You have avoided the question. The problem is not the ark and the animals, I understand metaphor, but two distinct versions of the same story edited in such a way that the loose ends still show.

If we are not fixated on the text as God's Word but accept Torah as an anthology of God's Word as understood by the Hebrews, understandings which came to them when and as they met God, to use Martin Buber's term; then such inconsistencies cease to be troubling. God was met, let in, by various people et various times. It is surprising that the material fits together as neatly as it does.

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

The question of revelation needs to be examined with some care. An academic colleague enjoys reading the Bible as literature: "the sweep is epic and the style classic." He equates the Deuteronomic historian with Homer as a master story teller, "but my God, to claim more is absurd. The Torah conteins an outdated science, a record of a six-day creation, and some patently unacceptable rules of conduct: the stoning of adulterers and the burning of witches."

The Torah is inconsistent. There are not only two Noah stories but two creation myths and even two versions of the Ten Commandments.

The Torah contains exaggeration: how could six hundred thousand ex-slaves

survive for forty years in the barren waste of the Sinai? The Torah contains ethically shabby material; what kind of god would harden the heart of Pharoah against freeing the slaves; and incredible legend; the sun standing still so the Israelites could complete the destruction of enemies, daily rations of manna in the wilderness with a double portion on Friday so no one would have to violate the Sabbath, the Angel of Death striking down all the Egyptian first-born. The Torah describes some of the activities of the patriarchs as downright immoral: Abraham seeks to pass off Sarah as his sister, fearing the Pharoah should covet her for his harem and his life be endangered as the unwanted husband; Jacob rips off his brother's birthright, but why go on? The problem is well-known. The Torah isn't true in the conventional sense of that word.

In my view the claim that the Five Books of Moses, the Torah, were given in their present form to Moses by God is untenable. In our century scholars have proven what philosophers like Spinoza had suspected, that various oral traditions circulated in ancient Israel which were only drawn together and edited toward the middle of the first millenia, and that it is that edited text which is our Torah.

Yet, after you read from the Torah, you recite the line: "The Torah of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul." Aren't you perpetuating a lie?

It is a line from the Psalms and the Psalms are poetry. Perfection is a metaphor which suggests enduring vitality and redemptive encouragement, and that power is manifest, at least in a worship setting. If the Torah were read by a class in Comparative Religion in Japan, they would approach the text as we read Homer, as a Western classic. Its ideas and literary forms would be seen as modulations of the religious ideas and literary devices of West Asia. They would see only the document and not the generations of Jews which have been inspired by it or the library of ideas which the Torah tradition developed as each age commented on the text. They would read the flood story as a legend about the end of the Ice Age which seeks to make a statement about life;

not as a myth, a truer-than-true story which was and is among the most significant and sacred possessions of this people. They would read as outsiders. The Jew reads as a participant observer. Hearing the Torah read at services, the Jew suspends disbelief.

Why?

Because his people's history proves that the Torah is not an anthology of fables and archaic laws but Judaism's 'surprising and mysterious word'. He knows that what happened at Sinai, God's gift to Israel of Torah, represents the central myth of his tradition, and that if that "true story" is treated as no more than an ancient classic the vital force with his religion dies.

But that's self-delusion.

Not at all. Every religion rests on "evidence" of this kind. Religion, after all, pulls together ideas which cannot be proven. The Christian suspends disbelief about the Crucifixion. The Communist does the same with Marx's description of the so-called scientific laws of economic and political development. Moreover, the Jew can 'prove' that the Torah is revealed. Its teachings, or is it its promises, have proven themselves. The Jewish people is alive and creative. Jewish life is sound and healing. What more can be asked of God's Word?

The medieval rabbis sometimes described the Torah as the blueprint of the universe. They felt its text contained not only the kind of material that it seemed to contain but all truth. Some said the real Torah consisted only of names of God. Some described it as black fire on white fire. Akiba was able to find surprising teachings in Moses' Torah because he and his colleagues insisted that the apparent meaning of a text was only a small part of its import; each word, each letter, even the way a letter was formed suggested other truths. They were wrong in formalizing the miracle of revelation,but their sense of the Torah's mystery was perceptive. In every age Jews have found unexpected depths of meaning in the text. A favorite image for Torah was the Biblical phrase: "a fountain of living waters." The Torah was a present from God of many depths and levels. Just as God's glory is refracted

through nature but lies beyond and behind as well as within the natural order, so God's words lie beyond and behind as well as within. The image that comes to mind is the blue sky we see every day. The sky is of God, blue, yet not blue; for blue is only what we see given our optical apparatus. An animal sees the sky differently and so would a Martian. The sky is part of space, empty, yet filled with energy; dimensioned, yet infinitely expanding. Science seeks to see what the senses do not see. Commentary seeks to find what a first reading does not suggest, and what is most impressive is that there is always something else to find.

Unfortunately, many of us are conditioned by a mental set which rules out revelation a priori. We expect there to be explanations for everything. We assume that what we do not know simply has not yet been researched. Here is a case where the conventional wisdom is wrong. Science describes, it does not explain. Love, beauty, justice, creativity, revelation, cannot be examined in a laboratory. Nor does this view adequately explain the process that we call scientific research. Research proceeds in two ways, by a piling up of information and by revelation, an idea which surprises a researcher and which he sets out to prove.

Revelation describes an emergence into civilization of truth or beauty not before available, and what is that but a gift from God. One of our troubles with revelation is that the possibility which Sinai represents denies one of the Enlightenment's basic assumptions: that everything could be explained. The eighteenth century had not yet had to confront indeterminacy, the presence of probability and the absence of certainty in nature, and the power of the irrational in human life. Our science no longer argues that equal causes produce equal effects; but the quantum theory was discovered only recently and many of us still are caught up in a deterministic caste of mind which is really anachronistic.

To the heirs of the Age of Reason it seems self-evident that, if the Torah contained anachronistic and contradictory materials, then all claims that it was a significant, much less a divine, document could no longer be

credited. If they thought about it, they went on to argue that the Torah tradition's continuance could only be justified sociologically by pointing to the kinds of healthy individuals it helped shape, the family life it encouraged and the sense of human dignity and justice which it taught. Those who took the time to analyze this apologetic argument found that it was not terribly compelling since it was much like saying that a brilliant forgery was nevertheless a great painting.

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

The Torah is both a composite document and a consecrated mystery. I sometimes use as an analogy the fact that light is both a wave and a cluster of active particles and that it is impossible for an observer to view both these properties of light at the same time. If you look at the text and see only the text you will not see Torah, the divinity within. If you look at the Torah, what the believing Jew discovered in the text, you will not see the culture-bound laws or the reworked myths. Our predecessors probably did not know how apt their analogy was when they described Torah as light, Torah Orah. Critics are wrong when they dismiss Torah as an ancient anthology of Israelite myths, legends and laws. Your rabbi friend is wrong when he dismisses the critical view. The scholar has his vantage and the Jew his, and one can be both scholar and Jew, though not at the same moment.

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

I've always lived with two Torahs: a printed Hebrew text in which I have noted in the margins the corrections and emmandations suggested by teachers and my own reading; and the Torah scroll in my synagogue ark from which I read as part of a sacred ritual. I handle the one text offhandedly. I make notes. I erase. I handle the other reverently. I never touch the text, but read with a pointer. I follow an ancient schedule in the reeding. I speak a blessing before and after which offers heartfelt thanks to God for the gift of His Instruction.

Actually, I have three Torahs: my critical text, the Torah in the ark and my library, hundreds of volumes which are the records of an ongoing and unceasing commentary by Jews on the text. The primary religious task of the Jew has been to explore the Torah's meaning and our methods have been as ingenious as the results have been insightful. Those who read the Torah as ancient literature read it as archeologists or students of myth. They read the bare text and see it only as a document of its time and place. The Jew read the naked text and the results of a ceaseless process of commentary and interpretation. We read and learn something about our lives not to learn more about the way ancient Israel lived. An architect designs a building and then all who live and work in it are shaped by it. The Jew is shaped by Torah and we continuously add to it what we come to know of it and ourselves.

Our ancestors lived in a three-dimensional world and thought in static terms. They looked for and found constants. Our world has added the fourth dimension, time, to all thinking, and has had to accept the possibility of varying perspectives of the same events or experiences. To be alive is to be part of a process. God's words, engraved on tablets of stone, fixed for all times and of constant meaning, was a metaphor appropriate to its age but not to ours. Indeed, the rabbis were not fully satisfied with it. There was text and more, an oral tradition which also was revealed. Torah was this two-fold revelation and all the sages and teachers derived from their consideration of Torah. We see Sinai not as a once and only phenomenon but as a continuing appropriation of new understanding drawn from the original

understanding.

Burdened by critical theories about the Torah's composition some cannot deal with the myth itself, Sinai, and so begin to move out from under the Torah's spell. Sinai deserves a closer look. Yes, the Talmudic sages claimed that the whole Torah was given to and through Moses, but the Torah text does not make this claim. Genesis does not begin: and the Lord said unto Moses. In fact, nowhere in Genesis is Moses mentioned. Critics like Spinoza and Voltaire were not the first to question the Mosaic origin of parts of the Torah; Amos and Hosea questioned whether God had ordered that Jews observe the priestly rules governing the sacrificial cult; "Who has asked this of you to trample my courts?" Their speeches suggest at the very least that part of the legal material now in the Torah was not accepted in their day by all sections of the Israelite Confederation as Torah. It is now generally held that the idea that the five scrolls of the Torah were the result of a single revelation became orthodox only after all this material was collected in a single scroll sometime after the time of Ezra, seven hundred years after Moses, and became a dogma of rabbinic Judaism in order to guarantee the religion's shape against those who felt compelled to add Words. I cannot see that the mysterious vitality of this teaching is enhanced if it is seen as a once and only revelation or diminished if the present text is seen as an inspired editing of a number of inspired traditions.

When we see Torah as part of the process of Jewish religious life and allow it to remain a living document, it remains alive. No Jew today actually lives by the letter of the text. My friend, the Martian, come among us could not reconstruct the Torah's text from observing current Jewish practice, however orthodox. We are monogamous. The patriarchs were not. The shrine laws are disregarded. There are no priests among us and Jewish life centers on synagogues, an institution which is never mentioned in the Torah. Traditionalists insist that the shrine laws are not outmoded but simply being held in abeyance until the Temple in Jerusalem will be reopened in the Messianic Age.

[illegible] Revelation is deepened awareness, not preservation. Our fathers

I doubt that many Jews would willingly throng again to sacrifices even if the messiah came. Why not say it? The humanity of the Torah would bother me only if I did not sense its divinity.

Approach the Torah sensitively rather than literally and you can sense that mysterious power. I am firmly convinced that revelation, the incursion of unexpected truth, is refracted by Torah. It represents something altogether new, unexpected, divine, a transvaluation of conventional attitudes whose implications we have not yet succeeded in discovering.

Wait a minute. Can a flawed document be called revelation?

What is revelation?

Revelation is the breaking out of the hidden into the known. It is as a volcanic explosion of understanding which before that time had not been recognized. There is something new under the sun and in our souls.

The old saw that there are more things on heaven and earth than in all our philosophies turns out to have a high probability of being true. Science has come to the point where it has to speak of its own limits. The physicists have a principle of indeterminacy, black holes in the universe, and rays they cannot account for. Natural law deals in probabilities rather than absolute certainties. Man's consciousness cannot be fully predicted. There are good reasons to suspend disbelief and to recognize that mystery underlies life and that at times another order of reality breaks through and makes us see and understand what we have not understood before. The ancients described revelation as the actual word of God, the sense of everything falling into place which is experienced when our questions about life seem to be answered, when clarity replaces confusion. We may prefer such a term as insight, but whatever term we choose we refer to the inflow of what has not before been known. For the Jew the possibility of such knowledge is collected in and refracted by the Torah.

What you have said so far suggests that the Torah document, whatever its limitations has had and continues to have a profound and ennobling significance.

prophecy. Revelation is deepened awareness, not prediction. Our fathers

Like the American Constitution, the Torah stands at the center of Jewish civilization. O.K. But is it revelation?

I analogize Torah and soul. I believe there is something divine within every human being and that there is something divine within the Torah. My features are not God-like nor is my body; but that in me which responds to the world with care and compassion, which loves and is loved, which reacts strongly against self-serving and injustice,which pushes me to discipline my talents and to put them to good use, my soul or spirit, call it what you will, is of God. Those who crush divinity, either by abusing another or by being indifferent to the spirit, commit a horrible sin for they erase possibility, God, from life. What is true of our bodies is true of the Torah. Its frame is not divine but the spirit is. How do I know? Because, like the soul, it never ceased pushing me toward a more sensitive and compassionate habit and its power to do so seems never to diminish.

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

There is another metaphor for revelation in the Bible. Early in his career the prophet Elijah is told to return to Mount Sinai. He does so and God speaks to him not in the whirlwind but in a voice of great stillness. On that occasion there was no thunder or earthquake. Actually, the Exodus description is an exception, not the rule. No one else heard God speak to Abraham on Mount Moriah; to Moses at the Burning Bush or to any of the prophets.

In pioneer homes when the family was faced with a difficult decision they would take a Bible, stand it on its spine, let the peges fall open where they would, and apply the text to their problem. The Torah is not magic or prophecy. Revelation is deepened awareness, not prediction. Our fathers

confronted the text seriously and sought in it understanding and guidance. They called it Instruction and what they found was a way of life which had dignity and divinity. How can we prove this? That which is dysfunctional does not survive.

You're asking me to consider revelation as a natural possibility, as an experience which might occur to any concerned and sensitive person opening himself up to life's mystery and meaning. I've never heard God. If someone were to say to me: "God told me", I would assume he was unbalanced and suggest medical help.

We live in a secular age which no longer instinctively identifies the rush of insight as God's speech; hence, anyone who hears God comes immediatly under suspicion. We no longer "naturally" find God in the creative moment and those who do are clearly out of it; which leads us to conclude that revelation is necessarily a form of delusion. Biblical man knew that he could not believe every prophet who came down the road. There were "true" prophets and "false" prophets. A trance did not a "true" prophet make. The Bible dismisses many spirituals with the phrase, "the prophet is <u>meshugah</u>", but for all their suspicion of the ESP world they knew better than to discount all sources of wisdom which come from those areas of the mind which lie far below those places where self-conscious thought takes place. We learn not only through step-by-step inductive logic, days of preparation and testing; but when an arc sparks between the active mind and the deeper levels of reality. Often a scientist simply has a brain storm; so, too, a poet's ear or an artist's eye can become aware of that subterranean stream of meaning which is always there and which we rarely tap. I would call such a quantum increase in understanding revelation, God disclosing part of what was hidden heretofore.

Two people meet. They treat each other as companions. They organize their relationships to work cooperatively or simply to have some fun together; and then, perhaps unexpectedly, they touch a deeper reality in each other. Companionship becomes friendship or love. The potential was always there, but it had not been exposed, and often it is neither really knows why or how.

Normally, we take the natural world for granted and content ourselves managing its resources to our advantage. Then one day we walk out into the field and suddenly we sense a beauty, a power, the indwelling glory of nature. No one will see anything happen to us. There is no thunder, but something important has occurred. Nature is no longer simply a resource to be used but a divine gift which we will protect and carefully steward.

When friendship becomes love, not lust but love, that, too, is a revelation. When the burdened soul touches the life force, God, and finds strength flowing into his soul, that, too, is revelation. When the mind wrestles with the conditions of our lives and suddenly the pieces fall together and the conventional wisdoms are known for what they are, that, too, is revelation. "Surely God is in this place and I knew it not."

When a sage was asked, where is God, he answered, God is wherever men will let Him in. Many an ancient Israelite prophet, sage and storyteller let God in, and when this happened something new was perceived. I like the phrase of a contemporary thinker who described Sinai as "a moment in which God was not alone" [Heschel]; God descends, Moses goes up, and something new entered his consciousness.

But what of the errors and the morally unacceptable stories?

The Torah is both a human and a divine book. The word had to be coded in a given language and expressed in meaningful idiom. Beethoven had to write for the instruments then available and to use musical notations of early nineteenth century Europe. If he had been Indian or Chinese his talent would have been as great but his symphonies would have sounded quite different. Those who heard God could only assimilate their new understanding into what was already in their minds. No mind is a <u>tabula rasa</u>.

Philosophers as well as theologians acknowledge that there is a world of appearances and a world that lies deeper, the blue sky and the endless ether. Monotheism did not emerge out of intellectual pursuits of the day; as we have seen it ran counter to the science of the day. Someone, Moses or another, sensed the unity within; that is, God allowed His being to be sensed and in

the reaching out by God and the appropriation by man, the origin of the Torah's vision is to be found. The break with the idolatry of pagan culture is vividly described in the Torah. As he approaches the Burning Bush Moses is still a prisoner of conventional thinking about the gods. God speaks, but Moses is not yet prepared to believe. He will not be satisfied until he is given God's name. God responds enigmatically: 'I am that I am.' God is but God can not be seen. God has come to Moses for a purpose. He does not order him to set up a Temple for worship. Moses is to be His ambassador in the program to release an enslaved people. "I have seen that which is done to you in Egypt." Kings can be arbitrary and self serving. The King of Kings is steady and responsive to need. The revelation, written large on every page of the Torah, is that God is not only powerful and majestic but sensitive to need and just; this Word represents a quantum leap in human understanding, an unexpected and liberating truth, whose consequences still affect all of us. Human concerns rather than shrine activities come front and center in the religious enterprise.

The miracle of Sinai is not that God spoke, revelation is not a unique phenomenon, but that a whole people were prepared to accept Moses' report of the meeting and the message; a new destiny. The tradition always uses two terms for revelation, "the giving of Torah" and "the acceptance of Torah." Sinai symbolizes God's proclamation and Israel's perception.

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

Again we raise the problem of literal truth. I do not know who was at Sinai. Indeed, I could not know those present with certainty simply from reading from the Torah's own account. In one chapter Moses is alone on the mountain, in another Joshua is with him, and in a third so are the seventy elders. The Torah was no more concerned with mere history than I need to be. However, it happened, there was a sense of a new understanding, new Words, a covenant, and so compelling were these Words that the tribes drew together into the document we call Torah. The Torah was given to Moses and because it

was revelation the people gave themselves over to it.

You talk like a mystic.

Every serious religionist is, but I hope that mine is not a mysticism which glorifies the irrational. I believe in the divinity of Torah because it alone, of all the religious works of antiquity, has had the power to remain alive. The other Noah story, the Gilgamesh epic, was far better known in its day, but for three thousand years, until archeologists began to dig up ancient libraries, almost all trace of it lay buried in the ground; and during all these years the Noah story was read regularly in every synagogue.

I believe in revelation. There have been times in my relations with another that I have sensed that what they said or what I said had a ring of truth, not the truth of text books, common sense or of experience, but of an ultimate and irreducible truth. I believe Israel sensed this at Sinai and senses it still. I believe in Torah because I have sensed many times a commend addressed to me.

I believe that revelation is not a once and only event. According to our myths God revealed to Noah the terms of a covenant designed to regulate all human society. I have no trouble understanding that Christians and Muslims feel they have the revealed word as well as we.

Why are we right and they wrong?

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

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

I am saying that they and many another scripture have been accepted by believers as revelation: Lao Tzu's Meditations, Gautma's Lotus Sutra, Marx's Das Kapital, Mao's Little Red Book. Each contained some new truth, else it could not have struck the responsive chord it did; but ultimately, 'by its

deeds shall you judge them.' Not all have added to the sanctity of life. I must judge their revelation and choose which Words to stake my life on.

How can we choose between one claim to truth and another?

Let me quote you the Torah's own distinction between a true and false prophet: "and should you ask yourselves, 'how can we know that the oracle [of the false prophet] was not spoken by the Lord?' If the prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the Lord, the prophet has uttered it presumptuously; do not stand in dread of him." Updated, this means simply, judge the word pragmatically. For over a hundred generations our people have opened themselves up to Torah and found meaning and inspiration in it. Its spirit enhanced their lives. Had it lacked this continuous vitality the Torah would long since have become a musty book on a shelf in a rare book library, but it lives and inspires. I have no trouble deciding in favor of Torah. It's mine by birth. Its realism appeals to me as does its hopefulness. Most of all, I have sensed God in the reading and in its meanings.

I haven't.

Have you tried?

Chapter 14

IS MAN THE MESSIAH?

It was one of those quiet periods when conversation turns naturally towards the philosophical. Someone mused aloud about the phrase 'to be oneself'. Strip away all the cultural and societal overlay and what is left? To describe us as mortal means simply that we are going to die, three score years and ten and all that. The sixty-four dollar question remains: is man angel or animal? What are we like underneath? Some philosophies take the view that the overlay of civilization checks the excesses of the human animal. Others insist that the cruelty we see in people is the result of social pressures rather than an innate sadism. Am I wrong to feel that a culture's assessment of the human species is central to its religious perspective? If man is seen as undependable, obviously the religion will enshrine some kind of authority to housebreak him; on the other hand, if we are loving, generous and sensitive by nature, then a religious tradition will encourage a restructuring of the social order or the withering away of laws and social restrictions.

She had stated the problem succinctly. I simply add that most philosophi and religions enshrine the less optimistic view of the human being as a creatur of instinct, an unpredictable and undependable creature, who needs, at times, to be kept in line. It is not hard to see why. War has been endemic. In every society the privileged have oppressed the poor. Once in power, liberators become oppressors and reformers form a new privileged class. Disciples of Jesus prove their loyalty to the founder's ideas by going on crusades, and disciples of Ghandi show their allegiance to non-resistance by building an atomic arsenal.

The image of the noble soul perverted by the institutions of society has become popular only in recent times. Communism and Maoism are its principal exponents; emphasizing, as they do, the perverse effect of a misshapen environment and the potential significance of political and economic change in resolving the contredictions which now make us greedy and unable to make

'enlightened' political decisions. Perhaps this classic enomaly of our times is that the positive assessment has been held up by those who have killed and brainwashed millions to make history come out their way. Man can be loved to death.

The idea that man was by nature good and by experience stunted was given its modern form by the thinkers of the Age of Reason, particularly Rousseau. It followed that the miracle of human potentiality could be substituted for the miracle of God's messianic promise and that humanism could replace the classic messianism as the locus of hope. Philosophers argued that the mind was capable of developing a quantifiably greater understanding of the world and, having gained that understanding, of using it to increase the sum total of human happiness. Education would stimulate an unfolding of the human spirit. The university supplanted the cathedral as the key to a remarkable future.

Optimism has lingered. The unceasing achievement of modern technology convinced many that progress had or would take place in the human area as much as it had in industry and medicine. Almost all of us have been affected by up-beat philosophies which emphasize our undeveloped capacities. The middle-aged still read Norman Vincent Peale's The Power of Positive Thinking. Others, particularly younger folk, have a full range of groups loosely formed into what is called the human potential movement. These groups delight to describe the largely unexplored areas of personality and feeling. Areas like extrasensory perception symbolize for them man's untapped potential. They argue that we go to school but are taught only part of what we need to know. There are no classes in sensitivity or awareness so we neither train our imagination nor our emotions. They will show us how to develop these skills.

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

When our machines did not bring us into Paradise or transform us into saints, some asked why, despite prosperity, political reform and universal education, we still act erratically; the answer came back that the reforms had

not been radical enough. The past and all its institutions had to be buried and a truly communitarian social order had to be created in order for the miracle of human transformation to take place. An evil environment corrupts the spirit and limits man's emotional and psychological potential. We had been bent out of shape by class-bound coercive institutions. At birth the spirit was pure but society dehumanized us. Note the verb, to dehumanize; it suggests that initially the nature of man is human, not animal.

When the question was asked, what is that that dehumanizes us, answers were ready at hand: all institutions of privilege, power and class. Progress came to mean doing away with these evils, and people began to experiment with new institutional models; New Harmony, the kibbutzim, urban communes, designed to create healthy and loving environments in which a new and gentler breed could grow.

Studies of these communities indicate that prosperity, true community and freedom do gentle the soul; there is less pressure to compete and little need to learn the art of putting down; but also that these utopian environments did not radically transform human nature. Ego needs exist in paradise. Bastards grow up in such societies. The libido cannot be cut away. The contradictions of our nature cannot be fully resolved.

Babies are so cute and loving, you have to believe that they don't have to grow up into the uptight and nasty adults I see all around.

Many wanted to tar and feather Freud when he talked of infant sexuality and aggression, but the facts are there.

He also spoke of love.

Yes, and the truth about human nature, like so many truths, lies somewhere between the romantics and the cynics. We have ego needs and could not survive without them; and we have an innate capacity for empathy and love. A rough passage can harden the shell and a loving experience can help us free our feelings and be more open, but we will never cease to be both animal and angel. Here, as in so many areas, the Torah tradition has been wisely

inconsistent; "take hold of this but don't leave go of the other." You find texts which describe the human as little lower than the angels and others which dismiss him as a fetid drop. We are a child of God and a child of the earth.

None of the Biblical figures is saintly, "the thoughts of a man's heart are evil from his youth", but Abraham,Moses and David struggle to become better than they are. "Man is created in the image of God." None of us is a paragon of virtue. None of us ever masters completely our ego and libido. Each of us must struggle constantly with the desire to master and dominate. Even when our intentions are good we find ourselves falling back into greed, callousness and venality. The Bible's utopian vision is of a time at the End of Days when God will create a new breed who will possess "a new heart and a new spirit". The human being can grow but he will never transform himself into an angel.

The Torah tradition is realistic which leads it to add that, far from being no-accounts, we can give a good accounting of ourselves. As I suggested earlier, that favorite Biblical term, sin, makes the point. You do not sin if you do not bring peace to our world, that's beyond your power. It is a sin if you do not work for peace. Sin suggests the human reach. The confessions of Yom Kippur suggest a rather high assessment of human potential, far higher than most of us ever achieve.

The image of a covenant between man and God, Sinai, would be a cruel joke if we lacked the ability to meet the Torah's high standards. It is not intended to be that. The Torah tradition assumes that the strengthening of character is possible, that moral growth is possible, that the human animal can mature into a human being. What it does not postulate is that we can jump out of our skins and become other then fallible mortals. "There is no one on earth so righteous that he sins not." Even in the best of circumstances we remain complex and erratic creatures. The favorite rabbinic image of human nature describes it as comprised of twin innate energies, one generous and loving, the other greedy and demanding; neither able to do in the other. There

is never a time when any human being can say: 'I am free of sin and of sinful thoughts'. We do not crown our heroes with halos. I face tests I cannot fully master with feelings I do not completely control.

The creation story is a carefully crafted piece which describes a six-stage creation. After each of the early stages a refrain is appended: "God saw what He had done and it was good." When Adam was created the text omits this happy thought. Many commentators interpret this to mean that the animal species are and remain what God intended them to be, but man was left unfinished We become what we will ourselves to become. Physicelly, we grow like weeds, inevitably; but in terms of character we grow by force of will, self-discipline by reflecting on our experiences and by opening up our tenderer feelings. Adam was created in the image of God which meant that there is something godly in the human's makeup; but, though created in God's image, Adam is not a god. He is human, a sinner who eats of the forbidden fruit.

We are not trapped in our limitations, but neither are we ever free of them. Maturity, competence, sensitivity, character, are not easy to achieve and never fully achieved. The challenge is unremitting and the reward is the task itself, not its completion. 'Yours not to finish the work but neither are you free to desist from it.' Moses is not allowed to enter the Promised Land. He had to be satisfied with the knowledge that he had done good work. "The reward of the good deed is the deed itself." Our rewards are never those we anticipate.

I want to believe that the world is getting better, but it's hard. I hate it when an older person plays the dyspeptic cynic, but I recognize that part of my anger is that I find it hard to answer him.

The higher you fly the harder you fall. Those nineteenth-century people who were most certain of man as redeemer were among the first when times got tough to give in to despair and to begin to describe us as hollow men. World War I was a pointless blood bath which destroyed not only millions of lives but Western civilization's naive confidence that men and nations

could resolve their problems rationally. World War II, the Holocaust and Hiroshima forced many to the unhappy conclusion that progress was an illusion. The future was no longer the happy thought it had once been. Our brave new world is full of machines of mass destruction which are increasingly available to dangerous people. One man with a gun can hijack an airplane. One person with an atomic bomb could hold up a city. The drama of progress gave way to a theater of the absurd. Ordinary folk began to cultivate stoic resignation, the art of coping, so that they would not be burned too badly when history ended with a whimper. There has been a squaring of the chin, a stubborn determination, "We will somehow carry on." "We will make do." Mankind's common sense has asserted itself. To describe our feelings we have resurrected from the vocabulary of forgotten terms a gray verb - to cope. It used to be when I asked someone, "how are you doing," he would say "fine" or"alright" or "okay." Now the answer is, "I'm coping." This word cope is an interesting one. It derives from the same root as the French verb, "couper", to cut. In medieval times the noun, coupen, described a protracted, exhausting duel in which neither knight could gain the upper hand, a seemingly endless, debilitating struggle where neither protagonist had either relief or any real hope of victory. We are determined but resignedly so. We will push on but without much eagerness. To be sure, we are to be commended for squaring our chins, rolling up our sleeves and saying to ourselves: "I can't go south for the winter so I will hunker down, pull on my boots and my heavy coat and survive as best I can." Persistence is a commendable but not a joyous virtue and not one our Torah tradition encourages.

Sometime ago I picked up an Anglo-Jewish journal and noticed that its New Year's editorial bore the headline, "5740, Can We Cope?" The writer proceeded to make a list of problems which beset the Jewish people and Israel. The first paragraph was about Soviet anti-semitism and a recent Politburo decision to limit Jewish emigration. Subsequent paragraphs dealt with the escalation of neo-Nazi violence in the Argentine, the dislocations which face

the Jewish community in South Africa, the world-wide economic effects of the Arab boycott; the high cost of Israel's defense and the stress that such expenditures placed on the Israeli economy; the savagery of international terrorism directed against Israel; the growing shrillness of attacks within the United Nations against Israel; the sale of American supersonic jets and air-to-ground missiles to Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and on and on. In his last paragraph the journalist turned his attention to 5741 and asked his original question: "Can We Cope?" The answer, obviously, was yes; he intends to publish next year. Can we cope? Yes, but how? The editor really had no other answer but the old piety, Am Yisrael Hai, the people of Israel lives; we have survived, therefore, we will survive.

None of the problems mentioned on this list is imaginary. I would add a few paragraphs of my own, and I am perfectly convinced that Israel and the Jewish people will survive. But I wonder if the present is as joyless and the future as overwhelming a prospect as his piece suggests. As I read his piece I found myself wondering how it would have been written if it had not been penned by a comfortable, public-school educated London intellectual but by his great grandfather, an immigrant from Czarist Russia who had settled in the East End where he had survived as a poorly paid teacher of children. Would great grandfather have emphasized or been surprised by Soviet anti-semitism, or would he have been surprised by and emphasized the easy citizenship Jews enjoy in the free world, our remarkable progress and prosperity, the fact American Jews take equality and freedom for granted? I wondered whether his great grandfather would have underscored the high cost of Israel's defense or the existence of a State of Israel; after nineteen hundred years of homelessness the Jewish people now are in their home and have proven their ability to defend that home through three decades and four wars. Would the old man have listed the sale of some arms by the United States to the Gulf states or have commented on three decades of remarkable military and political support by the greatest power of the world for a Jewish State far away from its borders?

We take as a matter of course what our grandparents hardly dared to dream of, and when the cold winds blow we forget how fortunate we really are and become despondent.

The other day I spent some time in a book store which had a table which displayed best-selling non-fiction. I found the table full of books on how to cope: how to cope with your marriage; how to cope with your divorce; how to cope with your children; how to cope with your parents; how to cope with youth; how to cope with age; how to cope with work; there was even a book on how to cope with leisure. As I looked at this vast array of copology, I wondered at the extent of unhappiness in our society. Was our society so emotionally devastating? Obviously not, and yet, many of us are deeply frustrated and clearly feel unfulfilled - that, by the way, was the word I noticed on most of the promotional blurbs on the book jackets - fulfillment - an impossible term, but "here is the key to fulfillment," absolute happiness, joy at all times. Why are we so frustrated? Why do we see in the future only our burdens? Science, technology and the generations that have gone before have so enlarged our opportunity that we take the "good life", or is it the "too good life", for granted. Put bluntly, many of us are spoiled.

A woman came into my office the other day absolutely desolate. Her life was at an end, she told me, she really could not afford to go to Florida for the winter.

Given this prevailing heaviness of spirit I am delighted that most, at least, are trying to cope, to carry on; but what disturbs me is that you can cope, plod ahead with your eyes down only so long and then the joylessness of it all begins to wear you down. Some who cope are so worn down that they give up, pull away from community and responsibilities and seek work without challenge or stress. Others develop a posture of stoic resignation. "If I do not care too deeply I cannot be hurt too brutally." If we do not want too much we won't be too frustrated, so let's not want.

The Greeks used the term <u>ascesis</u> to describe the deliberate cutting

back of appetites and hopes which is adopted by those who say: "I can make do with little. i am going to travel light. I am not going to allow myself to care deeply or to love fully or to have children or to want desperately because I will only be frustrated since I can never have all I want." I sense ascesis developing among us.

The question then is this: given our world as it really is, the fact that next year's headlines will be as fearsome in their own way as this year's, our futurologists have painted the year 2000 in bleak colors, how will we find real joy in the days ahead? Our fathers dreamed the impossible dream but recognized that until the coming of end time life will go on pretty much as we know it. What hope then did they hold out for people like us who live in the familiar world? We were encouraged to find in ourselves and in our world the real possibilities which are here. Life is brief and bruising but there are hopes that do come true and the view is often breathtaking. Judaism despaired neither of man nor of life. If there is any particular Jewish idea of redemption it is that the challenge is bracing and fulfilling and not beyond us. We can be happy. There is the joy of service, simha shel mitzvah; the joy of love, "the rejoicing of bride and groom"; the joy of being a person of quality, "happy is the man who has not followed the way of the sinner"; the joy of the Sabbath. The Jew had a ritual requirement that he say a blessing for each meal, purchase, each day, each drink, on seeing a beautiful view or woman, literally to count his blessings. The ritual was designed to remind him of how much he had to be grateful for. Among the Hasidim it was a mitzvah to banish sadness for it caused a "narrowing of the spirit" which made it difficult for anyone to love God, sense the good that lies in our experience.

I no longer believe in a supernatural messiah or that [redacted] God will appear suddenly and transform the world. You say religion is in the vision business. Give me one.

Israel. Despite Auschwitz and the belligerent imperialism of the Arab

world, Jews created a modern state in a despoiled and neglected land. Israel is for us what the Phoenix was for the Greeks, symbol of the faith that civilization can rise from the ashes.

What if, God forbid, Israel should go under, what then?

Our Torah's messianic vision.

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

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

Rene Dubose writes a reguler column in the American Scholar entitled "The Despairing Optimist." I love the title because I identify with it. It suggests that to be human is to hope despite all the dark headlines and to keep on working for a better world despite the suspicion that we may be building a house of cards. We have no reason to believe that a treaty between Israel and Egypt will bring peace to the Middle East. Tourists may be able to cross the common border and there may be some bilateral trade but a treaty will not assure peace. The cruel political realities and passions would remain. Governments can change. Prejudices can be stirred. Army divisions would still be massed on both sides of the border. Yet, a treaty would be a valuable step.

The same might be said of an arms limitation agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. The great debate over SALT II is over the issue of verifiability, whether we have the means to monitor what the Soviet will do, and they have the means to monitor us; and this worry speaks volumes about the suspicion which envelops SALT II and the fears which will sabotage it. Yet, SALT II could have value. Its cost containment provisions might release desperately needed money for human services.

There is no reason for black despair and there is no reason for jubilation. We are no longer in what business types call a "can do" posture where an employee assures his boss that he can meet any challenge that is set. We can try. We must try, but there are no guarantees. Many problems cannot now

be resolved, and most solutions only create new problems. Our social scientists talk of "tradeoffs" and describe the social cost which we must pay for every social and technical program we undertake. Change coal for oil and you may melt the ice cap. Use nuclear fuel instead of oil and coal and you risk radio-active contamination. Continue to use oil and the world will run out of energy. On Easter the Christian community celebrates the possibility of men becoming God. The Torah tradition categorically denies that such a transformation is possible. On Passover Jews celebrate the possibility not only of political freedom but the liberation of the spirit from bondage to fear, ignorance and passion, and declares that both political and spiritual freedom are goals towards which God will assist us.

On Rosh Hashonah we show that we are not resigned to another grey year spent dragging ourselves from problem to problem. We wish each other a shanah tovah, a good year. We did not ask God for joyless months, we were thinking of something far better. The liturgy reads: Avinu Malkenu Hadesh Alenu Shanah Tovah - "Our father, our king, grant to us a year of happiness," renew our days, fill them with joy. Joy is a mood, an openness to certain feelings which can be ours only when we accept life for what it is, a short passage between the dependency of infancy and the dependency of age, change, flux, growth and aging. Joy begins when we can face the truth that life does not have conclusions, that all it has are moments, experiences, the now, and that these are, after all, enough.

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

The original hope was of a time when everything will be right and secure, now and forever more, peace without end; the gods would bring paradise to earth or man up to paradise. In its Jewish form this hope was that God would send a messiah, a scion of the House of David, who, armed with God's miracles, would free Jerusalem from foreign domination and bring security to the world.

For centuries we prayed for the coming of a messiah whose power could be supernatural, magical; somehow, by his coming, peace, freedom and justice would come into our world.

The messianic dream was an understandable hope in an age where there was little change and no realization that man could, in fact, effect history. Men used the same tools as had their grandfathers. They lived in the same place. They farmed the same land. They used the same rudimentary medicines. They paid the same taxes to the same kind of tyrants. There was no change. "There was nothing new under the sun." Man could not change his world. A better world required God, therefore the hope invested in the Messiah, but the Messiah never came.

All our messianic images go back to the pre-Einstein world of static thought. Isaiah did not believe that this transformation would take place in history as we know it. That oracle begins: "It shall happen in the end of days."

We do not give up our hopes easily so a secularized version of the messiah hope emerged. History was figured as a long climb from the cave to civilization. The going has been rough at times and exhausting, but some day we will reach the top and find there a grassy meadow, level and flat, paradise if you will, utopia. Men of good will would band together effectively and, using all the fruits of the new research, engineer a time of full prosperity and great calm. Reasonable and able men would create a reasonable social order. How wrong could we be? Reasonable men are not considering how many millions will die in an atomic first strike. There is no grassy plateau at the top. There is no top. There is only the climb. Yet the modern spirit correctly senses possibilities of which the Hebrews were unaware. The Bible saw man's ability to master nature: "I have given you dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air and over every living thing"; our ability to meet the standards set by the covenant law and his ability to choose a life of merit, "See, I have set before you life and death, the blessing and

the curse, choose life"; but not man's role as an agent of social change; "that which has been is that which shall be; there is nothing new under the sun." God was in charge of change.

Today we have sensed our technological powers to change the human environment and the Torah tradition gradually has abandoned its age-old posture of patient calm, 'wait til the messiah comes', for a more active social ethic.. We cannot transform the world but we can increase the yield of grain per acre, find new sources of power and lengthen the life span. There are new things under the sun. If done with love and care such change can be for the better. We cannot jump out of our skins but we can refine our spirits, discipline our emotions and develop our mind, and if this is done with love and wisdom it, too, can be for the better. Despite the Biblical myth we do change and we do change our world and that, I would submit, is all that we can ask - the privilege of changing ourselves and our world for the better.

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

Paradise is not for the likes of us. Have you ever reached a point where you can say: "I have it now, everything I want. I have success and

status. I have my family. I have my health and I can keep it this way." Can you guarantee yourself against illness or sudden accident or the uncertain politics of the world? Can you guarantee family relationships against stress and separation? There is never a point in our lives when we can say: "I have it made and I can keep it this way."

What is true of us individually is true of us collectively. There will never be a period of peece without end. There will never be an age without social and political problems. Our children and their children will know unexpected tragedy. Human beings inhabit the world and not paradise. We are mortal, there will be death. We are fragile, there will be illness. We are inconstant, there will be treachery, disappointment and violence. Some will have less, others more. Some will want, others will take. The world will never be endlessly calm and secure.

The hope of a man-made messianic age sustained many during the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The world had entered a period when the rate of knowledge, learning, invention and discovery was impressive. Our machines, our technology and our medicines began to transform our world and a new hope came into being. But it began to wear thin during the pointless carnage of the first World War. Then came Hitler and Mussolini and Stalin, and frightening machines which could provide energy but also destroy the human race. Suddenly we entered upon the period in which we now live, when our machines threaten our very existence, when medicine has become lethal as well as life-sustaining, providing a population bomb which can destroy us all, and when mass society coarsens every human activity. The assembly line provided a flood of goods and threatened to rape the good earth of its natural resources. Bit by bit the messianic age dissolved before our eyes. The future became 1984. Winston Churchill sustained England's spirits during World War II, but he chose this motto for the last volume of his memoirs: "How the great democracies triumphed, and so were able to resume the follies which had so nearly cost them their life." There are those who still believed the Marxist dream of a moment

when suddenly all will become light and proletariat, a conclusion; but deep down most of us are pessimists who no longer believe in a moment in time when somehow we will have reached the top.

I'm not sure I agree with you and I know I don't want to. Aren't you contributing to the mood of joylessness, the stoicism you criticize? If we cannot believe in a personal messiah and we cannot believe in a messianic age, what can we believe in?

I believe that it is possible to live meaningfully and joyously in a world without conclusion. In the act of living itself, there is joy, particularly if your life commits you to high ideals and grand values. There is joy, is there not, in the work we do when that work is worth the doing; in love and in friendship when those we love are open to us; when we give ourselves over to experiences which are significant to us, which touch our soul and inspire our deepest feelings. Moses labored for a lifetime knowing he would not enter the Promised Land. The tradition puts it bluntly: "You will not complete the work. . ." Wherever we are, whatever be our condition in life, it is possible, is it not, to expend our energies usefully and to know that we will know a certain satisfaction from our labors; and to give oneself over to friendship and love, knowing that though there will be quarrels and anger there will be days of intimacy and happiness. I call this theme the messianic journey, it is to be, on the way, part of the pilgrimage of mankind towards the solution of the problems which face us. Like the children of Israel in the wilderness, none of us will ever reach the Promised Land, but there is joy in being with the band of those who are trying and who care.

I doubt that any of us really believes that mankind will resolve most of its problems within any time frame that has meaning to us, I certainly don't; but you and I can believe in the growth and potential of the human spirit since we sense the possibility within ourselves. We can grow. We do grow. Growth is slow. There will be plenty of problems for your children but there is possibility. We can set out on a messianic journey. Whenever we do something for another selflessly; involve ourselves with some social undertaking

that is not self-serving; give of ourselves in a moment of need; align ourselves with a beneficial cause; at that moment we are on the messianic journey with our fathers on the way to a Promised Land. The Exodus generation never reached the Promised Land. I cannot believe in a messianic age in the sense of a trouble-free time when human nature has outgrown its passions and when all the troubling political and economic inequities are resolved, but I do believe that there is work worth the doing, challenges worthy of us and that there can be delicious moments along the way; and I believe that war is a human activity and so can be avoided by human activity.

I remember meeting a man some years ago who had worked for fifteen years on a research project in physics. He had not been able to solve the problem. We talked. It was on a plane and I remember saying to him: "You must be terribly disappointed." I have never forgotten his answer. "Yes, at times, but not as much as I thought I would be. You know, every lead that I pursued will save someone else from following a road that leads to a dead end. I've helped. I will not win the Nobel Prize, but I have helped. I have done something. Most mornings I enjoyed going to the laboratory. There was an excitement to what I was doing. I knew it was worth the doing." We do not have to succeed to rejoice in life. Really, there is no such thing as success. All there are are moments when we know that the pattern of our life is good, that we are among those who are building civilization, that we love and are loved. If we take the time along the way to savor the way, to savor each day and each relationship, surely, there is joy to the day.

Chapter 15

THE PROMISE OF LAND

The paper this morning was full of another General Assembly debate over Jerusalem and the West Bank which, as so often, was not a debate but a carefully organized diatribe; and the first question had to do with Zionism.

My non-Jewish room mates say religion should have nothing to do with real estate. Put the Promised Land idea in perspective.

The eruption of religious insight among a small confederation of semi-nomads who lived in the provincial boon-docks of West Asia and not in the well-known imperial and cultural centers, is one of the great mysteries of history. Israel's transvaluation of conventional religious ideas was revolutionary in every respect. Among the new ideas which Israel's prophets put forward was a messianic vision which held out the hope of a good life here on earth. The good earth, God's creation, was designed to support a decent social order. Sophocles later summed up the pagan world view when he had a chorus' chant: "Not to be born is, past all prizing, best, but when a man has seen the light, this is next best by far, that with all speed he should go to the place from whence he came." Contrast the Psalmist's enthusiasm: "Happy are we. How happy our lot. How pleasant our situation."

If your religion despairs of this life and limits itself to the joys of the next life, its promise will not include a familiar Promised Land. Gautama taught his followers not to put down roots. Only the rootless achieve Nirvana. Christ insisted: "My Kingdom is not of this world;" but, if your hope is to establish a sound society here and now, that community has to be located someplace. For Israel to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation there had to be a nation where schools could be established, synagogues dedicated, farms tilled, cities established in justice.

Abraham was ordered to go to the land "that I will show you". Moses was ordered to bring the slaves to a Promised Land. Later God promised to make a way in the desert for those exiled to Babylon along which they could return

to Jerusalem. At the end of days Zion will be redeemed in justice. In time heavenly themes would be added to Israel's hope; promises of immortality, resurrection and the World to Come, the nice thing about dreams is that they are open-ended; but this people never let go of the earthly promise and, despite rather serious and repeated buffetings, never despaired of this world. To others the world might be a vale of tears or a place of unceasing trial. Jews neither denied the tears nor the trial, but there was always something more, the confidence that God would redeem and that redemption would take place in an earthly Jerusalem as well as in Paradise. "Zion shall be redeemed in justice."

Being of this world, the Zionist hope was a remarkably realistic one. The beauty of Zion is often described in enthusiastic terms, "a pleasant land, the goodliest heritage of the nation" [Jeremiah]; but Zion is not Eden where everything one needs is available for the asking. Adam was driven out of Eden, an angel guards its entrance against his return, and the land he came to must be carefully and energetically cared for and tended. It took a life-time of wandering just to reach the Promised Land and three centuries of struggle to subdue and overcome the Canaanites and the Philistines. Being of this world Zion is subject to drought, locusts and invasion, all the natural and international catastrophes which can afflict a country.

The national home was looked upon as private property, God's: "The land is Mine" [Lev. 25:23]. God chose Israel to live there, farm it and secure its cities. The tribes paid God rent in the form of tithes. God's Word, the Torah, provided His tenants careful and detailed instructions in the rules of cultivation, conservation and community organization. The land was to lie fallow each seventh year. Trees were not to be cut down for the battering rams and scaling ladders required to besiege an enemy town. No field was to be planted with mixed seeds. Each city was to organize an incorruptible court and provide welfare support to its poor. God had stipulated in the lease that boundary stones were to be raised, but these established only conditional

title. God had allotted the land among the Twelve Tribes and each Jubilee Year, every fiftieth year, the land was to revert to its original assignee. Those who sought to aggrandize land violated the spirit of God's homestead program, "Woe unto them who add field to field". Monopolists were punished not only for the common sin of greed but for the covenant sin of disobedience. For the Israelites the crossing of the Jordan was not entry into Paradise, but the beginning of centuries of hard work as they attempted to conquer Canaan, protect it from enemies, enhance its cities and secure its fertility. There is nothing in the founding myth which promises ease in Zion. For the Zionists of our times pioneering in the Yishuv was a back-breaking effort and physical labor was only part of the challenge. Zion is to be built in justice. Theodor Herzl's utopian novel, The Old-New Land, describes a model classless and free society enjoying world class culture. The founding myth emulates the creation and operation of a model state.

The Promised Land did not belong to Israel by natural right. Jews had not been the original settlers. The land was theirs because God wished it so. God had promised the land to Abraham and his descendants might some day wish it otherwise. Indeed Israel had twice been driven off the land, first by the Babylonians and centuries later by the Romans; because the nation had been faithless to the covenant. Sovereignty is only the first step in a many-tiered national challenge.

To those fortunate enough to settle in it, the land was a constant sign of God's ties with the Fathers, His faithfulness to His pledged word and His concerns for them. From Egypt God had redeemed His people. In Canaan He had established them in the land which He had promised would be their home and their passport to national identity. The Hebrews were among the landless of the world and the overlooked. The settled, not gypsies, build civilization. The Israelites were among the land and are well known. Land is not only the most precious of possessions but, psychologically, the most necessary one that frees many levels of human talent. Bedouins are outsiders.

Why doesn't Christianity have a place for places in its vision?

You don't plant trees when you believe the End of Days is at hand. Classic Christianity is the creation of men who believed that the world was coming to an end.

That's too simple. Christianity has a social gospel. The ministers I know are always organizing on behalf of affirmative action and welfare reform.

The longer the Second Coming was delayed the more civic concerns, what happens tomorrow, came to the fore. A succession of Popes and many a bishop, John Calvin and the Puritan Fathers, governed a particular place for which they had high hopes.

But Christianity doesn't focus on the Vatican, Geneva or Plymouth plantation the way Judaism does on Jerusalem.

Under Constantine, Christianity became an imperial religion, Judaism never held that status, and Christianity's hope was to missionarize the world. Rather than tend a single garden, it would transform the world into a community of believers.

I can understand the mystique of the Promised Land and how it is seen as a sign of being again in God's good grace; and I appreciate that return to the land has meant an end to living on somebody else's turf and tolerance. What I don't understand is why the world seems not to understand. I was shocked out of my skin when my college room mate found I was a Zionist and said almost carelessly, 'I never thought of you as a racist.'

He had picked up a scrap of the big lie which the Arab and Soviet blocs repeat endlessly and even dress up as official opinion through their automatic majorities at the United States. When, in 1977, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution condemning Zionism "as a form of racism and of racial discrimination", observers explained the vote as due to Arab initiative combined with Communist ideology; to votes bought by oil and promises of oil; to old-fashioned anti-semitism; to knee-jerking anti-Americanism and to ignorence, and the vote was condemned as outrageous by the

United States government; and outrageous it was.

Define Zionism for me.

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

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

Later, at the Burning Bush, God placed two obligations upon Moses, to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt and to lead the tribes to the Promised Land. When the tribes of Israel affirmed God's word at Sinai, they accepted the bonds of a covenant relationship, inextricably bound up with land. God spoke. The people assented. God warned: 'If you accept these commands you are bound to them; if you obey them it will be well with you, you will live in security on your land; if you are disobedient I will close up the heavens, there will not be rain; I will drive you off the land.' Land is an essential category in the covenant's understanding of reward and punishment and thus a measure of Israel's closeness to or alienation from God.

Biblical prophecy is best explained as an interpretation of Jewish history which elaborates a single insight: the fate of the nation is not determined by ordinary consideration of political power, but by the quality of national obedience to the covenant regulations. "If you agree and give heed, you will eat the good things of the earth; but if you refuse and disobey, you will be devoured by the sword." The prophets interpreted the successive disasters which befell Israel and Judah as God's doing, consequent on the nation's sinful living. It was not that the army was weak but that the nation had been disobedient. Once exiled for their sins, this people, accustomed to covenant thinking, expected to return if and when they showed themselves repentant and worthy.

The word used in Biblical thought for repentance, teshuvah, comes from a root, shuv, which implies both contrition and the physical act of returning to one's place; thus, teshuvah suggests not only a spiritual stance but, at the same time, that the reward of contrition and moral discipline includes return to the homeland. Exile was always galut, both physical displacement and a state of alienation from God. To travel to the Holy Land is aliyah, a going up; and to leave the land is yeridah, a going down. One was closer to God in the land than any place else.

Our hope, indeed, all of Jewish messianism, is rooted in the concept of freedom and security on our land. On Passover we end the Seder with the hope: "next year in Jerusalem." Jews sanctified this connection of land and covenant, not simply out of piety and doggedness, but because it expressed their/ our understanding of redemption. Judaism insists that redemption is possible in the here and now as well as in the World to Come. We do not accept the image of life as an endless trial, a hapless burden, with all blessings reserved for some life to come. Therefore, our redemptive hope must necessarily be understood in terms of a particular people in a particular place at a particular time. Redemption this side of the grave must involve a particular place and a particular people. We are earth-bound, not ethereal beings. I must add that even those traditions which looked upon this life as a via-dolorosa, a way of tears, and who believe that there can be no happiness this side of the grave, instinctively apply categories of space to Heaven by turning it into a restricted subdivision reserved for like-minded folk.

In the Biblical view of history, God would do it all. Modern Zionism went beyond the Biblical hope in that it is politically activist. The prophets' political program was a preaching mission limited to summoning Jews to repentance and righteousness. No prophet organized a five-year plan for the economic and social development of Judea. Structural change was God's work. Until quite recently, our messianism remained, as it had been, pious and politically passive. During every century since the first century destruction of the Temple pious folk went up to Jerusalem to offer prayers in the

holy city for Israel's early return to Zion, for redemption. The medieval Avelei Zion, or Mourners for Zion, believed that by offering devotion at the ruins of the Temple and exposing their misery they would move God to speed the coming of the messiah. None came with hopes and plans and went on the land.

Biblical and medieval thought is pious and submissive. "Not by power nor by might, but by My spirit." Children of a people innured to political impotence, whose faith, Biblical faith, knew that God was in full control of history, it did not occur to them that they might buy and cultivate land and organize a government and so hasten its redemption. If and when Israel lived obediently, God would let Israel live in peace. Modern thought is activist and eager to be up and doing. In many ways the social gospel of contemporary Christianity represents a theological transformation parallel to Zionism. Both modern movements look on man as an active partner with God in the work of creation. Neither is satisfied that the poor will always be among us or that a barren land cannot be renewed.

During the General Assembly debate an Arab diplomat, Abd-allah al-Sayegh, informed the Assembly that Arabs have no quarrel with Judaism. Arabs, he said, applaud Judaism, but Zionism is not an essential element in the Jewish tradition, indeed, it is a bastardization of that tradition. His proof? The existence of opposition to Zionism within the Jewish camp. Al-Sayegh claimed that the Zionism as Racism resolution simply repeated what "Jewish intellectuals" had said. Al-Sayegh spoke with a forked tongue, but he was right to this extent: during the nineteenth century significant numbers of Jews were opposed to practical Zionism for reasons of orthodox piety. They were the heirs of those who had believed with every fiber of their being that God would bring the messiah and create the Jewish State on His own, in His time. Conditioned to impotence and to the concept of a supernatural redemption such pious folk looked on practical programs of renewal of Palestine as either blasphemous or pointless. It was blasphemy to force the End since such activity suggested that Israel no longer trusted God. They pointed to the

devastating consequence of earlier "Zionist" activities; more than once a charismatic had proclaimed himself to be the messiah and had raised people's hopes only to dash them when his words proved empty. Theirs was an argument over means not ends. Whatever their feeling about practical programs of land reclamation, these pious folk prayed every day for their return to Zion, and as the possibility of establishing a national home by political means emerged as a realistic possibility, the vast majority of traditional Jews joined the Zionist movement. It should be added that a theological rationale was provided by men like Yehudah Alkalai and Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, orthodox rabbis from Eastern Europe, who argued that we have never expected God to forgive us without evidence of a change of heart on our parts. Repentance, teshuvah, must precede forgiveness. The initiative must be ours. Let our people show initiative and go to the Holy Land. Let them establish farms and found cities and build schools. God will see that we are eager to please Him and He may turn towards us and complete our beginning.

Until the second World War two political analyses were current among Jews. The Jews of the West, particularly those of France, England and the United States found themselves in a world which by contrast to the immediate past seemed a paradise. The once excluded were now citizens. Instead of being locked into a ghetto they were free to move about. Many of the newly enfranchised Jews of the West half believed that the messianic times were at hand. "In the 19th century civilization began," "In a matter of a few years universal peace will reign," "The old barriers between people are coming down," (Isaac Mayer Wise). I do not pick out Isaac Mayer Wise to pillory him or to parody him; he simply is typical of tens of hundreds of Jews who now found themselves in a dazzling world full of freedoms and possibilities.. Such liberated Jews, with their growing bank accounts and enlarged sense of belonging, could not believe that their brave new world would not fulfill the promise. This was a time for men of progressive attitudes to cooperate, not separate. They could not imagine Jews leaving the golden streets of New York

or Chicago for the barren wastes of a backwater province of the Turkish empire. They believed in the melting pot. They believed in a universal brotherhood of men of good will. Why erect fences? Why take Jews out of that community? They had just escaped from a state of their own, the ghetto. Why create a new Jewish State?

Zionism grew among those Jews whose political judgment was not so sanguine. Put another way, Zionism is a program for action within the context of an unredeemed world. The bourgeois Jew of the West read his history as a drama of progress, beginning with the French Revolution and the promise of liberty, equality and fraternity, and developing into the promise of America. The Zionist read the nineteenth century as a false dawn, a time of promises made and promises broken. The principalities of Germany had emancipated the Jew under Napoleonic pressure and quickly locked them up again after the Congress of Vienna. In the universities new and exciting ideas were taught, including, in some places, new theories of anti-semitism based upon pseudo-scientific theories of race. Political anti-semitism grew throughout the nineteenth century until by the century's end Vienna, perhaps the most cultured city of the age, was governed by a council dominated by an Anti-Semitic Party, so labeled, which had only one plank in its platform, "to deprive the Jews of control of the city." Nationalist parties throughout Europe popularized the theme that Jewish attitudes were subversive to the fundamental values of the nation. They claimed that Jewish writers and artists introduced insidious cosmopolitan ideas which would subvert the native purity and idealism of Germany or Austria or Poland or France. There was not less hate but more. The position of the Jew was not only insecure but hapless. It was a Catch 22 situation. If the Jew advanced politically and socially he incited envy and the envious used anti-semitism to eliminate competition. If the Jew failed to Westernize and remained an outcast he was pilloried as alien, a fossil, an anachronism.

A liberated Jew, the son of a privileged Austrian Jew, Theodor Herzl,

became a convert to this 'I never promised you a rose garden' analysis. Herzl had been sent to Paris by an Austro-Hungarian newspaper. There, at the cradle of liberty, he had his moment of truth, the Dreyfus Trial. The Jew Dreyfus, an army captain, was convicted of treason on trumped-up charges manufactured by a powerful military clique, eager to find a scapegoat for their own incompetence, revealed for all to see in France's defeat by Prussia in the 1870 war. It was not the army's fault but the Jew's. Herzl was moved by this blatant miscarriage of justice and by the sight of tens of thousands of Frenchmen, marching down the Champs Elysees, wearing black arm bands and shouting "a bas les Juifs," down with the Jews; cursing the Jews as the arch enemy and anti-Christ. Then and there Herzl realized that anti-semitism was not simply a long-lived poison whose venom was losing its sting, but a virulent and active disease for which there was no known remedy. Jews had to have a home of their own because Europe would never provide a secure home. Jewish life would be crippled as long as it depended on Europe's diseased political environment. "A people can be helped only by its own efforts, and if it cannot help itself it is beyond succor." It was a time for action, and the required action was to build a state. Herzl did not foresee Mein Kampf or Dachau; but he and his fellow Zionists attacked the naivete of those who believed that these were messianic times. Jewish life had to be strengthened in Israel and out. "Zionism is a return to the Jewish fold even before it becomes a return to the Jewish land." Until the Jew had a place he could call his own, a national home where he would always be welcome, where his spirit could unfold naturally, his spirit would remain constrained and his political situation precarious.

Why didn't those pessimists simply convert or assimilate?

They wanted to be Jews. They were proud of the history and tradition. Zionism represents a program for the rehabilitation of the individual Jew, the Jewish people and of Judaism. When the bourgeois Jew of western Europe and the United States looked about, he was satisfied. He had had a certain

success. He had made it. He preferred not to look at the poor Jews of eastern Europe who lacked his political and economic opportunities. They were a strange people. They spoke a jargon called Yiddish. He might send them cherity, but he certainly did not want them as neighbors. They were not his kind.

When the Zionists looked at the Jews of the ghettos and of eastern Europe they, too, did not like what they saw, but they refused to put these Jews out of mind. Zionism expresses fraternity and mutual responsibility. The Zionists saw in the Pale of Settlement what Robert Coles and others have taught us to see in the ghettos of our cities: men and women brutalized by a cruel and impoverished environment and by experiences which have rendered them incapable of fulfilling their potential as human beings. The Zionists did not try to hide the unfortunate characteristics of the huddled masses. Yes, many Jews were far too shrewd; and many of them were idle, never having been able to earn a living; many of them cringed when a muzik walked by; and there was much in their home and civic life which was not pretty. The Zionists saw the Jew as he was and the Jew as he might be. Zionism was a program for the rehebilitation and spiritual renewal for the Jew: Hebrew instead of Yiddish; skills with the hoe and spade as well as the pen; new role models, the Maccabees and the Biblical soldiers and farmers to complement that of a scholar bent over his books. Until the second World War most of the money raised by the Zionist movement was spent in Europe, not in Palestine. It was spent to purchase farms where young Jews could go and learn agriculture, to establish vocational schools where young Jews could learn the skills of a modern society, to establish community centers where young Jews could express the Jewish spirit in a modern context. Zionism saw the potential of the Jew to be a human being and was convinced that as a human being the Jew would not only be happier but a better citizen of the world. Zionism was a program for Jewish renewal, but that hardly makes it racist.

Every program espoused by men of sensitivity for the renewal of their particular nation was espoused by one or another Zionist for the renewal of

the Jewish people. Tolstoy told his Russians to go back to the land and, with honest labor, sweat the corruption of the city out of their souls. Zionists like A. D. Gordon said to the Jew: "Labor is our cure. Centuries ago you were driven off the land. Life in the crowded cities has corrupted the Jewish soul. Let us go back to the land. Work with our hands. The poisons of the ghetto will be leached out of our bodies by our daily labors under the sun. You will find your back straightening, your mind clearing."

The Jewish communities of Europe had known all the usual divisions between rich and poor; and all the usual abuses. Community was imposed from above rather than by democratic means. Zionism suggested programs to end all class divisions. Ben Zvi, Borochov and others wrote of true community, of an end to privilege, of socialism of the kibbutz, of sharing labor and benefits

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

Zionism was not created to solve a refugee problem. That came later. Zionism was a program to reform all of the institutions of a people determined to remain a people because ours is not yet a utopian age. Zionism was created to renew the Jewish people and to enlarge the possibilities of the Jewish spirit.

Al-Sayegh was right to this extent; in the West, particularly among those who had bettered themselves economically, Zionism was mistrusted and

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

What you say is interesting, but I lived for several months on a kibbutz and Zionism is for me the reclamation of wasted earth by irrigation and sweat and an attempt to create a cooperative and non-competitive society.

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

There have been four invasions of the State, endless terrorism, and a stated Arab policy to blot Israel off the map. It's not been easy, and energies and resource have had to be diverted to defense; yet, few other nations have so transformed their environment and the dream remains compelling. The social services of Israel are still studied as useful and successful models.

Chapter 16

IT'S GOOD TO BE A JEW

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

One of the members reported that the Jewish students at her university were adopted by a local family who provided them home-cooked Sabbath meals and a local Jewish mother, someone to talk to. Being Jewish provides you all the advantages of an extended family.

When I was in college the food was less than adequate, there is nothing new under the sun, but being Jewish helped a good bit. I had informed the food service that I didn't eat pork or shellfish. Shell fish was too expensive even to appear on the menu, but pork appeared regularly as the basic ingredient of sausage or luncheon meat; and whenever it did I was served a slice of the chicken or beef which otherwise was reserved for kitchen staff and other privileged folk.

Few other traditions provide as much community support. A stranger at synagogue will be invited home to a Sabbath dinner. There is an old rabbinic saw to the effect that all Jews are related and you cannot be a Jew for long without recognizing the special sense of responsibility felt for co-religionists everywhere. Most families have a story about discovering relatives in a distant place. My favorite is a war story. In nineteen fifty-three, during the Korean conflict I was assigned as a chaplain to the staff of the Commander of our Naval Forces in the Far East. One day a young flier came to me to

make arrangements for his marriage. He had been assigned a reguler courier run which included Hong Kong where he had met and fallen in love with a local girl. For various official reasons which had to do with her citizenship, they had to be married on our base. We set a noon-hour date some weeks distent and I asked a young couple in my congregation if they would arrange a luncheon so the moment would not be cold and impersonal. At that lunch, as the bride talked over lunch, the bride and the host discovered they were second cousins. Neither had known of the other's existence. When the pogroms reached their grandparents' village in Russia, his family had fled West while hers had crossed Siberia to Manchuria, settled in Harbein and moved on to Hong Kong when Japan attacked. Ours is a small and intimate world.

A medieval Jewish community was a miniature welfare state, replete with groups which provided dowries for poor girls, travel money for the stranded, medicine for the sick, tuition for the poor as well as direct financial assistance. The Mediterranean communities maintained for centuries an office on the island of Rhodes for the purpose of ransoming Jews captured by the pirate bands who were brought here to be sold on the slave market. I came to consciousness during the 1930's when my parents and their friends were signing as many affidavits as they could, guaranteeing that those German and Czech Jews who were allowed into the country would not become welfare cases. In a world full of refugees Jews do not allow other Jews to remain refugees if we can help it. Our communities are exerting great effort to bring Jews out of Russia, Iran and North Africa and to help them establish new lives; and the aid extends to all those services necessary to permit self-sufficiency.

Our theme veered in another direction. You have been talking about the happy times and I've known a few. A seder or a Sabbath service can be an enjoyable experience, but I never quite feel that I'm doing it right. I go to classes and work on the Sabbath. I don't obey all, or even most of the rules and I often feel a twinge of guilt about what I do not do, and that what I do is a token and not the real thing.

There was silence for a moment. Many Jews feel some guilt in this regard, not that they are about to change their habits. The traditional way is still seen as the 'real thing.' Language betrays our assumption. I have heard the term,'religious', applied to liberal or conservetive Jews, even of those who go to services regularly and are active in the community.

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

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

eclectically from those commandments which seem to be, as the Kabbalists would put it, the particular "diet for nourishing the roots of my soul" [Herbert Weiner].

What's your problem with this approach?

My wife and I lead busy lives, and necessity has taught us that it wasn't how much time we spent with our children but the quality of the time shared. An hour of undivided attention is worth a distracted day. I've never felt that more is necessarily better. The equation the more mitzvot, the more connections, the more Jewish consciousness, is too simple.

Moreover, as you know by now, when I look back over Jewish history I see constant process, not an immutable code. The rabbis felt little more than historic interest in the sacrificial cult and that is about the degree of interest I can muster for the concept of the prohibition of instrumental music during synagogue worship. My soul is simply dead to the appeal of such practices and it's alive to some practices which are quite recent: women cantors and rabbis, Confirmation, Consecration and Yom ha-atzmaut are cases in point.

In my book forms are made to be modified. Some years ago a young child in my congregation stood for the kaddish. The kaddish prayer praises God and an old tradition decrees that it is recited by near male relatives when they mourn their dead. I knew the family well and I had not heard of any death, so after services I asked. It turned out that she had said kaddish for her pet dog. Some few weeks later I wrote an article in my congregational bulletin describing this episode and saying that I was much taken with the honesty of emotions involved. Why shouldn't the kaddish be said for any living thing that one loved? An ultra traditional newspaper in Chicago picked up my column and played to the prejudices of its readers with this headline: "Reform Rabbi Orders Kaddish Said For Dogs." I was struck not only by the insensitivity of the piece but by the assumption that as a rabbi I order. "You should" is far different from "you must."

In Biblical times all countries in West Asia were slave-based. The

Torah understood this and tried to point the way to the larger freedom by requiring that one day in seven a master could not order about his slave. The development of Sabbath law tended to center on the no's: no work, no cooking, no traveling, the rules which protected this rest day; but, in a society where the human being is no longer a pack animal and where there are rigidly limited work hours, "In it you shall do no manner of work" has lost some of its bite and I prefer to consider the Sabbath as a day set apart for all that refreshes my soul, a day to be with the family, worship, rest and relax. The Sabbath suggests to me what the messianic age might truly be like. It's a time to read a good book without interruption and to meet with friends without talk turning to job advancement or work-related problems. All that enhances life is appropriate to Sabbath. Many of us can see God's will in a Sabbath which includes worship, institutes such as this one, the joy of sport, and even work - if our work is a spiritual and intellectual delight.

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

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

No.

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

No. The dietary laws were not set up originally as hygiene rules but as rules to separate Jews from idolatry. The ancients often ate the totem which represented their gods, in much the same way as Christians during Communion take the flesh and blood of the Christ into themselves. The idea was to become one with the deity. The wild boar was the token of Moab and the crayfish of the Phoenicians. Their usefulness of some of these rules as protection against diseased meat and spoilage was an unexpected side effect.

I do not keep a traditionally kosher home because I was not raised in such a home. I eat no pork. We have no shell fish in the house. My ritual

is a way of fulfilling the commandment: honor your parents, a reminder of a complex food code which once governed Jewish life and a statement of my developmental view of the Torah tradition. The separation of milk and meat and the other dietary laws grew up over, neither David nor Isaiah kept kosher in the full rabbinic way, and can be diminished over time. The usual American accommodation is a kosher home and no pork or shell fish when dining out.

But that's inconsistent.

All of life is. We adjust to our environment. In many ways being Jewish is a stage of mind and each of us emphasizes different elements of Jewing.

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

Ours is not the first age where there are significant differences in practice. Sadducees ate with any other Jews. A Pharisee would eat only at the table of another Pharisee. A number of factors besides practice holds Jews together. First, and foremost, a shared history and destiny. No one asked those who were marched into Auschwitz whether they were reform, conservative or orthodox. Jews of all persuasions are citizens of Israel and contribute to the agencies of our diespora communities. We are bound together by a shared calendar. The Sabbath comes at the same time each week for the pious and the secular citizen of Israel; and all Jews accept the same dates for the High Holidays and Pesah. There is a strong and reguler pulse to Jewish life and even those who take the holy days as holidays respond to some degree to the special nature of the occasion. I once saw a fescinating collection of Haggadahs prepared and mimeographed by various kibbutzim. Many made no mention of the God Who saves and were simply collections of materials on freedom and liberation, but they were intended for Seder night and included the matzah and the four cups. The thrust of the river's current is powerful.

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

perhpas more than any other, encourages the growth of character and moral sensitivity.

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

It's our last session. Don't hide behind history and theory. Tell us what the Torah tradition has meant to you. I'm asking for what Christians call testimony.

I'm afraid you'll find my testimony a bit disappointing. Testimony is most compelling when it records a traumatic spiritual hejira like Augustine's Confessions or a poignant journal, Anne Frank's Diary; my life has been relatively calm.

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

In my home there were books everywhere: in my father's study, in the living room, on the landing of the stairs, even in the basement. The old leather of the bindings attracted me long before I could read the contents. The child learned that he had roots that went deep and were intellectual. These were my father's books. He was a wise man and so I was certain the tradition was wise; much later, thirty years of serious adult scholarship have confirmed me in that view.

Until I was ten or so Judaism meant those books; Hebrew lessons so I could read those books; the holidays and serious discussions around the table about the rise of Naziism and the need for Palestine as a Jewish home.

Hitler's photo was frequently in the papers. My grandparents lived in Jerusalem and sent me notes from there. Seder meant thirty or forty guests, much moving of furniture and a dollar if I found the afikomen. Books, land and matzoh. A child relates to concrete symbols. Theology came later. I remain convinced that a meaningful Jewish identity begins with specific rituals and/or specific involvement in the survival agenda of the Jewish community. The Jew who wants that part of his life to come alive need not resolve all doubts about the existence and nature of God, few Jews have; but he must eliminate the distance between himself and the distinctive features of Jewish life. Both outsiders and insiders have doubts, often the same doubts. Jews will sometimes call a fellow Jew an epikoros, a term which goes back to the Greek philosopher, Epicurus, and has come to mean a curmudgeon who does not go along with the local authority figure. An epikoros is a Jew and, generally, one deeply involved in Jewish life, albeit in his own way. Doubts do not an indifferent Jew make; distance does. Jewish identity begins in some binding activity.

Much later, when I was an undergraduate, a room mate and I went at God over a long night. We were angry. This was 1945, the papers were full of pictures of piled-up corpses at the death camps,and there were good reasons for anger. My room mate was the first person I heard use the phrase, God is dead. He was angry at God. I was as angry at the cold-hearted world, but I didn't blame God. Germans had built Aschwitz, not He. In exasperation at my patience, he burst out: "you still believe because your father is still alive." Perhaps he was right; faith emerges out of our personal experiences and is the sense that there is security and love in the world.

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

I have never questioned my Jewish identity. Mine was a happy and respected home. Anti-Semitism was their problem not ours. It seems natural that people should be married under a huppah or sit shivah during mourning; but I can take rituals in many forms. What I could not take, at least when I was younger, was the sense that Jewish survival might not be of real significance to the world. I got irrationally angry with the historian Arnold Toynbee when, from the myopia of an imperialistic Christianity, he declared the Jewish people "a fossilized relic".

At college I took a famous course, History I, which was a survey of western civilization. Jewish life was barely mentioned except for one session which discussed the Biblical tradition as a background for Christianity. For the first time I wondered whether our wisdom was really important. There were all those miles of books in Weidener Library and my father's study, for the first time, began to seem small and insignificant. I took that history course in 1944 just before the end of the era of Western parochialism and I have recognized that the lectures in History I were biased by the narrowness of the classic WASP historical tradition in which the lecturers had been trained. I doubt that anyone would teach such a course today; still, I have, ever since, been sensitive to the question of numbers. It's so easy to label that which is small as parochial, but it is equally inane to insist that good things necessarily come in small packages. In the real world quality and quantity are both significant.

Israel is not simply another small people. The greatest power in Europe declared us to be Enemy No. I and set out to wipe us off the face of the earth. My father used to say that to know a man look at his enemies rather than his friends. If we were the arch enemy to the Nazis, then, truly, the Torah tradition must contain some powerful and vital truths. The Holocaust is a human tragedy but it is also a tribute to the reach and the power of the Torah. Six million Jews were killed not for who they were but for what they represented; and what they represented was a way of life which affirmed human

dignity and equal justice; which would not make its peace with tyranny of any kind or the Big Lie; which had no patience with the pretensions of the privileged or their claims to special treatment, the vision of a world united in understanding and mutual respect and for their faith in the will of God Who demands that we live by a stipulated moral law.

At about this time I took a course in Marxism and came across the word 'cosmopolitan' as a pejorative label used to describe someone who is unfocused, vague, romantic, unrelated to economic realities. I appropriated the term to describe that imaginary Fellowship of people of good will who had put aside all the old divisions and who would be the force which would bring the vision of One World into being. Many of my college friends felt that their lives would be less ethnic, Jewishly impacted, than their parents' had been. I was headed for the Rabbinate and had no such desire or illusions; but I have lived now through the decades of Soul, Roots, Black is Beautiful, and Fiddler. The melting pot did not produce the bland stew. It was supposed to, so today we take cultural pluralism for granted and define a rich society as one which has people with a variety of skills and ideas and not interchangeable integers.

The death camps were opened by the Allied armies while I was in college and I saw pictures of the piles of emaciated corpses and heard the tales of horror. I felt I owed these people a deep debt. They died because they symbolized the tradition in which I had been raised. On graduation in 1947 I went to work for an agency whose purpose was to secure skilled military personnel for the defense of the yishuv. Five Arab nations were threatening to drive them into the sea. I am committed to a people as well as to principles.

Again and again, as I trace my coming alive as a Jew, I find I go back to concrete moments and specific people. Anyone who teaches Religious School knows that sweet reason and a presentation of the high-minded definition of the Jewish way is not in itself compelling. It is what the student expects. It is also bland. Experience binds. The binding moment can be in a sanctuary during the hour of worship when the familiar chants reach into my soul.

It is belonging to a community which seeks truly to be supportive of every member and one where emotions are not hidden. It is the visit to Jerusalem's western wall as the evening sun refracts two thousand five hundred years of piety from the rose-colored stone. It is a small apartment in Tel Aviv as a cousin tells of his experiences in Europe and of the moshav where he is now a member. It is the visit to an archeological dig as they map out a gate which the Philistines defended against David's attack.

So my answer to the question this Institute has centered on is a simple piece of advice: Come on in, the water's fine. First paddle around a bit, then think about what you've experienced.