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Come On In, the Water's Fine, unpublished manuscript, fifth draft,
chapters 6-16, pages 98-257, undated.

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 intensity 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 straight 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 sitting in a pew. He loses himself in words which came from nearly every century of his people's life. The siddur has form, but it 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 guitar 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 material 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. Presumably, 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 encouraging 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 band-aids that simply covered over festering social ills; that America needed radical political and economic surgery and that her gifts delayed, perhaps fatally, such reform.

Her daughter had been home for a visit which had proven to be quite difficult. She was in love and was living with another graduate student. They had a wonderful relationship, or so she told her mother; but they were not about to be married. Marriage would sully the purity of their 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 encouraging 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 Talmudic literature contains little theoretical speculation about

the good. Occasionally, medieval philosophers like Saadya 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. In extremis 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 argued against raising 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 tyrannical

to violate the basic rules of the Torah we need not

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 at 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 contains an outdated science, a record of a six-day creation, and some patently unacceptable rules of conduct: the stoning of adulterers and the burning of witches."

The Torah 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 Pharaoh 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 Pharaoh 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 Or. 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 emendations 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 reading. 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.

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.

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 pages 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 immediately 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 meshugah", 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 tabula rasa.

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 command 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 philosophies and religions enshrine the less optimistic view of the human being as a creature of instinct, an unpredictable and undependable creature, who needs, at times, to be kept in line. It is not hard to see why. 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 contradictions which now make us greedy and unable to make

'enlightened' political decisions. Perhaps this classic anomaly 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 than 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. Physically, 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 asceticism 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 asceticism 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 ~~that~~ 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 regular 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 man 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 gray 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 day he told his son to trail the animal. The boy followed the goat across the valley, up a mountain slope, deep into a cave, and through a narrow slit in the cave's wall and into Paradise. While the goat grazed 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 peace 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 1964. 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 lifetime 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 ignorance, 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 charity, 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 rehabilitation and spiritual renewal for the Jew: Hebrew instead of Yiddish; skills with the hoe and spade as well as the pen; new role models, the Maccabees and the Biblical soldiers and farmers to complement that of a scholar bent over his books. Until the second World War most of the money raised by the Zionist movement was spent in Europe, not in Palestine. It was spent to purchase farms where young Jews could 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, Borochoy 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. There 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 far reaches of Jewish life. A number of Moroccan Jews had joined in the military celebration. A physician of the town had asked him to a second seder at his apartment. The ritual had been familiar, yet different, especially the melodies. He had been told the history of a thousand-year old Jewish community he had not known of before.

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 regular courier run which included Hong Kong where he had met and fallen in love with a local girl. For various official reasons which had to do with her citizenship, they had to be married on our base. We set a noon-hour date some weeks distant and I asked a young couple in my congregation if they would arrange a luncheon so the 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 conservative 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 diaspora communities. We are bound together by a shared calendar. The Sabbath comes at the same time each week for the pious and the secular citizen of Israel; and all Jews accept the same dates for the High Holidays and Pesah. There is a strong and regular pulse to Jewish life and even those who take the holy days as holidays respond to some degree to the special nature of the occasion. I once saw a fascinating collection of Haggadahs prepared and mimeographed by various kibbutzim. Many made no mention of the God Who saves and were simply collections of materials on freedom and liberation, but they were intended for Seder night and included the matzah and the four cups. The thrust of the river's current is powerful.

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

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

In my city there is a conference which includes the president and rabbi of each synagogue. Our shared concerns range from support for religious education and 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 Nazism 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 insane to insist that good things necessarily come in small packages. In the real world quality and quantity are both significant.

Israel is not simply another small people. The greatest power in Europe declared us to be Enemy No. 1 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.

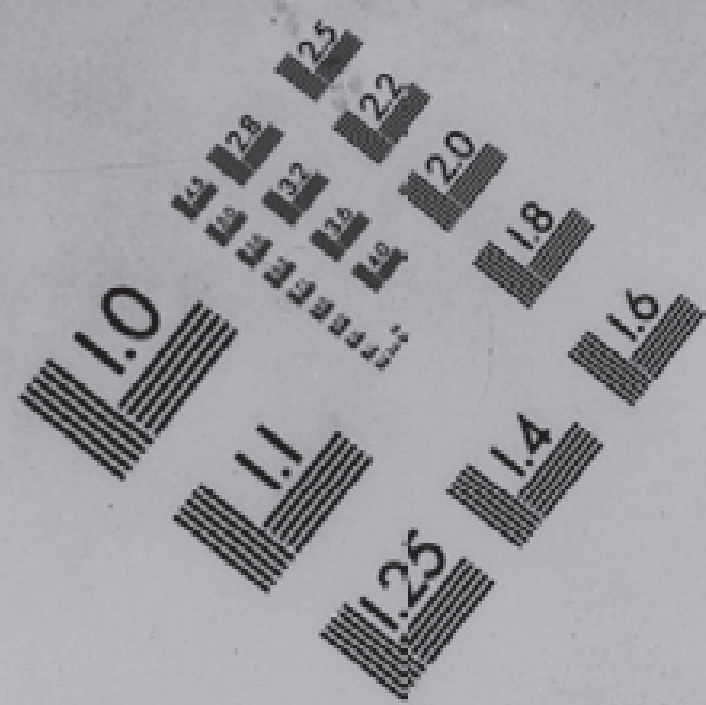
It is belonging to a community which seeks truly to be supportive of every member and one where emotions are not hidden. It is the visit to Jerusalem's western wall as the evening sun refracts two thousand five hundred years of piety from the rose-colored stone. It is a small apartment in Tel Aviv as 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.

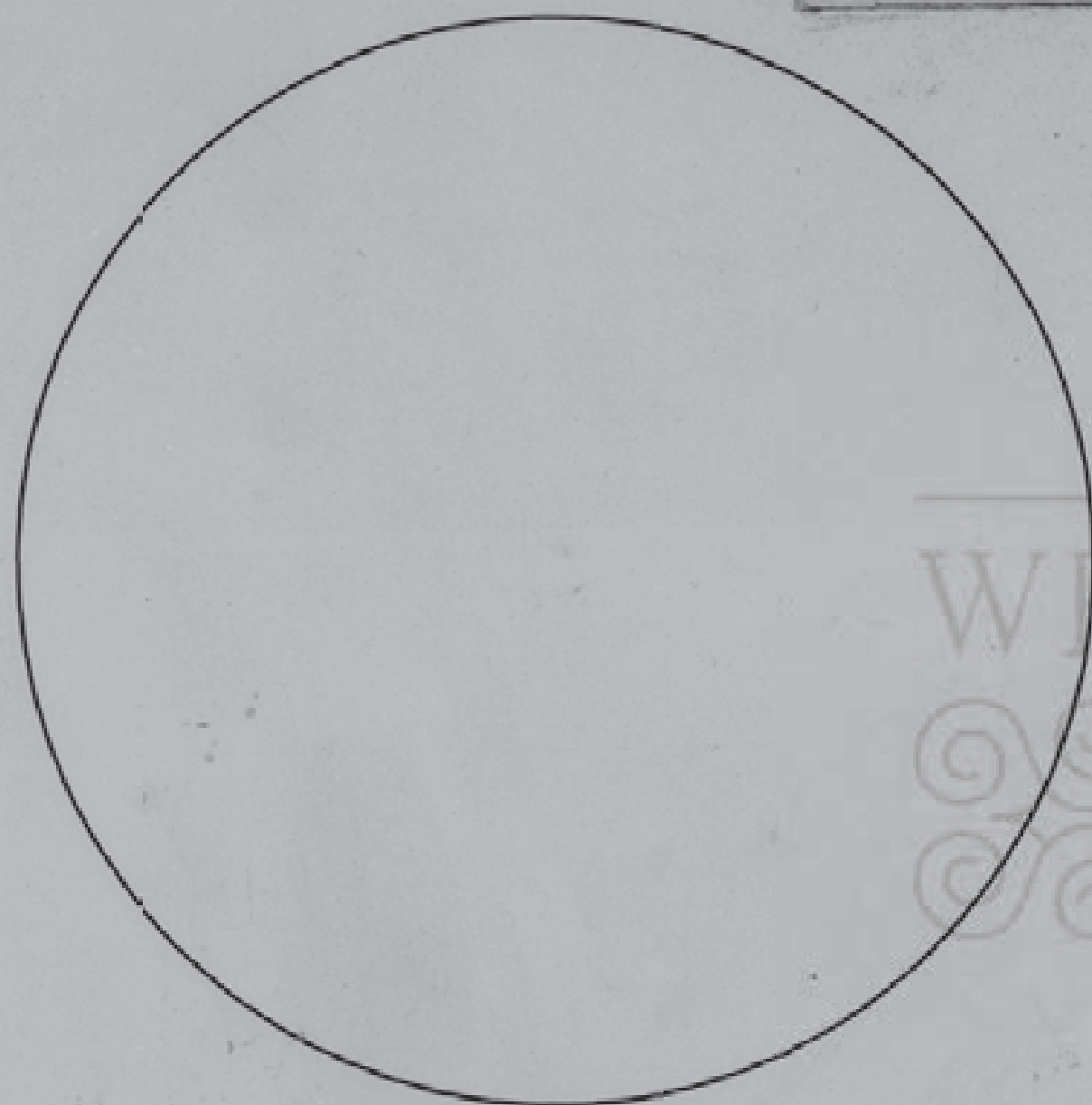
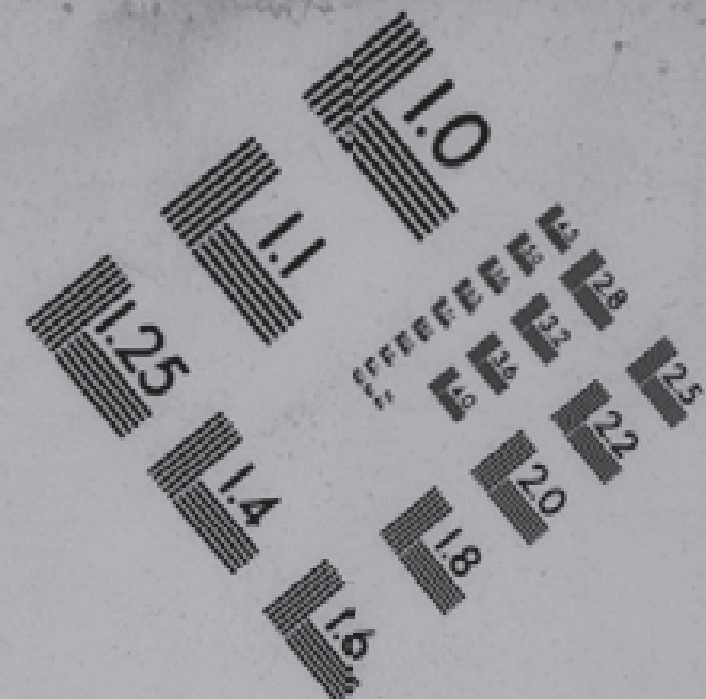


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