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The Story of Scripture, draft, chapter 7, 1989.

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EPILOGUE: SCRIPTURE TODAY

note p 404 is missing

RABBINIC JUDAISM PRESENTED ITS TEACHINGS AS TIMELESS. MODERNITY INTRODUCED THE DIMENSION OF TIME INTO ALL RELIGIOUS DISCUSSION. JOSEPH ALBO, WHO LIVED DURING DIFFICULT TIMES IN EARLY 15TH CENTURY SPAIN, WAS A PHILOSOPHICALLY-MINDED SAGE WHO DEVELOPED IN HIS SEFER HA-IKKARIM (BOOK OF FIRST PRINCIPLES) A NEAT MODEL OF THE TORAH TRADITION. HE LIKENED THE TORAH TO A SPRIG PLANTED BY THE EVENTS AT SINAI. LIKE ALL YOUNG TREES, ITS BASIC SHAPE, WHILE STILL UNDER DEVELOPED, WAS ALREADY IN PLACE. THE TRUNK REPRESENTS THE EXISTENCE AND UNITY OF GOD; THE BRANCHES PROVIDENCE, COVENANT, ELECTION, IMMORTALITY; THE SMALLER BRANCHES THE MITZVOT, THE COMMANDMENTS. OVER THE YEARS STUDY AND INTERPRETATION NOURISHED THE TREE, WHICH HAS GROWN TALLER AND STURDIER IN ALL ITS PARTS; BUT ITS SHAPE HAS REMAINED AS IT WAS WHEN PLANTED. TO BE SURE, THERE HAVE BEEN CHANGES. EACH YEAR THE TREE LEAFS OUT AND BLOSSOMS APPEAR. THESE ARE THE CUSTOMS APPROPRIATE TO EACH GENERATION WHICH, LIKE THE LEAVES, FALL TO THE GROUND TO BE REPLACED THE NEXT SEASON, BUT NOTHING ESSENTIAL CHANGES.

HISTORY CHALLENGED THIS MODEL. OVER THE LAST 200 YEARS COUNTLESS CAREFUL STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT A FULLY MATURE MONOTHEISM TOOK A NUMBER OF CENTURIES TO DEVELOP, THAT THE DOCTRINE OF PHYSICAL RESURRECTION DID NOT EMERGE UNTIL THE TIME OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL (2ND CENTURY B.C.E.), THAT THE CONCEPT OF TWO TORAHS FIRST APPEARS IN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH CENTURIES C.E., AND SO ON. PIOUS JEWS, LOVING THE TORAH AND ITS FAMILIAR THEMES AND SAGAS, REACTED TO THE CHALLENGES HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FLUNG AT THEM AND BEGAN TO

SEARCH IN THE TRADITION FOR THEMES WHICH SEEMED TO REACH BACK IN TIME TO THE BEGINNING. MANY WELL-TRAINED MINDS UNDERTOOK THIS TASK OF APOLOGIA, BUT ULTIMATELY THE SEARCH FOUND WHAT THE SEEKERS WERE PREPARED TO FIND. THE MODERN ORTHODOX FOUND THE TWO-FOLD LAW, THE MORE MODERATE REFORMERS DISCERNED A NATIONAL SPIRIT ACTING AND REACTING ON THE TRADITION, THE MORE RADICAL REFORMERS EMPHASIZED AN ETHIC WHICH SPOKE TO AND ABOUT MORAL PRINCIPLES RATHER THAN TRADITIONAL PRACTICES. GIVEN THE RELIGION'S THREE-THOUSAND-YEAR HISTORY ON ALL THE CONTINENTS OF THE WORLD SAVE THE POLAR CAPS, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT EVIDENCE COULD BE FOUND FOR DIVERSE AND DIVERGENT PORTRAITS OF JUDAISM.

TO THE PRE-MODERN JEW SCRIPTURE HAD BEEN FULLY FORMED FROM THE BEGINNING AND LATER AUTHORITIES ONLY FILLED IN THE DETAILS. WITH MODERNITY CAME A PERCEPTION BORN OF A NEW AWARENESS OF THE INEVITABLE CHANGES WHICH TAKE PLACE IN ALL TIMES. WITH THAT AWARENESS CAME THE RECOGNITION THAT THE RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD WERE LIKE ALL OTHER HUMAN INSTITUTIONS, SUBJECT TO DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE.

PERHAPS MODERNITY'S MOST PERSISTENT QUARREL WITH THE OLD CLAIMS THAT THE TWO TORAHS CONSTITUTE A SEAMLESS SCRIPTURE IS WITH THEIR PRESCRIPTIVE NATURE. TORAH NOT ONLY SETS OUT RULES AND DISCIPLINES AS GOD'S WILL BUT ASSUMES THAT THE COMMUNITY WILL ENFORCE THESE OBLIGATIONS. YET, ONE OF THE HALLMARKS OF THE MODERN SPIRIT, AT LEAST IN THE WEST, IS THE LOSS OF CONTROL BY RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AND A SUSPICION OF ALL AUTHORITY. UNLESS DERIVED FROM A VOLUNTARY SOCIAL CONTRACT, AUTHORITY IS SEEN AS ARBITRARY AND SUSPECTED OF BEING ENTIRELY SELF-SERVING. IT IS GENERALLY, THOUGH NOT UNIVERSALLY,

HELD THAT POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS LOYALTIES SHOULD BE FREELY CHOSEN. CHURCH AND STATE SHOULD BE SEPARATE, AND THE PATTERN OF ONE'S LIFE FREELY ESTABLISHED.

UNHAPPINESS WITH THE COERCIVE ELEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS HAS ITS PRE-MODERN ROOTS IN THE PHILOSOPHIES OF MEN SUCH AS JOHN LOCKE. THE RATIONALIST ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT RELIGION DEVELOPED DURING THE ENLIGHTENMENT, IN THE SPREAD OF EDUCATION BEYOND THE CLERGY, AND IN THE GROWING DISSATISFACTION AMONG THE NEWLY POWERFUL URBAN MERCHANT CLASS WITH THE CHURCH'S SUPPORT OF TRADITIONAL CLASS-BASED PRIVILEGES. THIS CONCERN WITH THE HEAVY HAND OF RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY PROVIDED THE THEME FOR WHAT WAS PERHAPS THE FIRST MODERN TRACT DEALING WITH THE TORAH: JERUSALEM: ON RELIGIOUS POWER AND JUDAISM. JERUSALEM WAS PUBLISHED IN 1783 IN BERLIN BY ONE OF THE FIRST JEWS TO BE ADMITTED INTO NON-JEWISH ACADEMIC CIRCLES, THE GIFTED PHILOSOPHER MOSES MENDELSSOHN (1729-1786). HE ONCE WON FIRST PLACE--OVER, AMONG OTHERS, IMMANUEL KANT--IN AN ESSAY CONTEST SPONSORED BY THE PRUSSIAN ACADEMY.

AN OBSERVANT JEW, MENDELSSOHN SET OUT TO SEPARATE PERSONAL BELIEF AND PRACTICE FROM INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY. HE ARGUED THAT RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS OUGHT TO BE CONCERNED ONLY WITH ENHANCING MAN'S RELATIONS WITH GOD AND MAKING CLEAR HOW THAT RELATIONSHIP CREATED THE VALUES BY WHICH ONE'S PRIVATE LIFE SHOULD BE SHAPED. AS THE TORAH WAS THE FOCUS OF THESE VALUES, MENDELSSOHN PREPARED A GERMAN TRANSLATION OF THE TORAH SO THAT IT MIGHT BE UNDERSTOOD BY THE GROWING BODY OF JEWS WHO COULD NO LONGER READ OR UNDERSTAND

HEBREW.

actually
It's been
argued
that he
did this in order
to introduce
German to Jews
who knew
Hebrew.

Jews who knew
Hebrew.
The Buber/Rosenzweig
note: Rather, answers
to the question
described in

See A. Altman's
biography
p. 371 (last 2 P's)
re cultural
improvement of
nation and
esp. p. 378.

THE STATE HAS EVERY RIGHT, MENDELSSOHN ARGUED, TO REGULATE THE ACTIVITIES OF INDIVIDUALS TO ENLARGE THE COMMON GOOD. RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, ON THE OTHER HAND, CAN ONLY TEACH, ENCOURAGE, AND PERSUADE. WHEN PALESTINE WAS A JEWISH STATE, IN ROMAN TIMES, THE TORAH WAS ITS OPERATIVE LAW; TODAY, THE TORAH IS NO LONGER AN OPERATIVE LAW WHICH MAY BE IMPOSED BUT A RELIGIOUS OBLIGATION TO BE FOLLOWED OUT OF CONVICTION. IN HIS DAY THE BERLIN JEWISH COMMUNITY'S ABILITY TO REGULATE OR CONTROL THE LIVES OF ITS MEMBERS WAS LIMITED TO SOCIAL PRESSURE AND, IN EXTREME CASES, TO EXCOMMUNICATION. MENDELSSOHN STRONGLY OPPOSED THE PRACTICE OF EXCOMMUNICATION AND ARGUED THAT NEITHER THE STATE NOR THE RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES MAY INTRUDE IN MATTERS OF CONSCIENCE.

MENDELSSOHN WAS A PARADOX. STRICTLY OBSERVANT, WILLING AND ABLE TO HOLD TO AND CARRY OUT THE PRESCRIBED RITUALS WITHOUT ANY OF THE USUAL RELIGIOUS ASSUMPTIONS WHICH NORMALLY ENGENDER SUCH LOYALTY, HE FAILED TO SEE THE INHERENT CONTRADICTION IN HIS POSITION OR TO FORESEE ITS DISRUPTIVE CONSEQUENCES. MENDELSSOHN'S GRAND-CHILDREN WOULD NO LONGER BE JEWISH. BUT HE HAD RAISED PERHAPS THE MAJOR PROBLEM OF MODERN FAITH--WHAT TO DO WITH THE MEDIEVAL ASSUMPTION OF THE OVERRIDING AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.

IN THE MEDIEVAL WORLD CORPORATE ENTITIES WERE THE ACCEPTED PATTERN OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION. WHEREVER THEY LIVED, JEWS BELONGED TO A SEPARATE CORPORATE BODY AND WERE TREATED AS A COMMUNITY APART. THEY GOVERNED THEIR COMMUNAL LIFE, ALWAYS ACCOMMODATING TO THE SHARP, RARELY BENEVOLENT, REQUIREMENTS OF THE LOCAL RULER.

IN THE EARLY DECADES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, TO WARSAW AND LUBLIN

BY THE FIRST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY, THE CORPORATE CHARACTER OF LIFE HAD BEGUN TO BREAK DOWN. JEWS IN WESTERN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES COULD, FOR THE FIRST TIME, BECOME CITIZENS OF A STATE. BY THE MIDDLE OF THE CENTURY SOME WERE ADMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITIES OF CENTRAL AND WESTERN EUROPE. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EUROPEAN HISTORY SOME JEWS COULD COME OUT OF THE ISOLATION THAT HAD BEEN THE NORM IN THE MIDDLE AGES FOR ALL, AND WHICH FOR JEWS LASTED DOWN TO THE 19TH CENTURY. NEW IDEAS, NEW POLITICAL CONSTRUCTS, AND NEW INSTITUTIONS WERE CASTING DOUBT ON WAYS OF LIFE WHICH HAD LARGELY BEEN TAKEN FOR GRANTED AND NOW BEGAN TO SEEM SUSPECT. THE NEW VALUES OF THE LARGER WORLD CHALLENGED THE VALUES OF THE TRADITIONAL JEWISH WORLD. SOME JEWS BEGAN TO FEEL CONSTRAINED BY THE AUTHORITY THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY EXERCISED OVER MAJOR ELEMENTS OF THEIR PERSONAL LIVES. MANY RESENTED ANYONE TELLING THEM THEY COULDN'T SHORTEN THE PRAYER SERVICE OR ADD A SERMON IN GERMAN, THEIR VERNACULAR, OR TEACH GIRLS TOGETHER WITH BOYS IN THEIR SCHOOLS.

IN EASTERN EUROPE, WHERE JEWISH SELF-GOVERNMENT AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY WERE RETAINED FOR ANOTHER CENTURY, THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND TORAH AUTHORITY REMAINED A SMOLDERING ISSUE. EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWISH COMMUNITIES WERE MORE RESISTANT TO NEW IDEAS AND CHANGE, IN PART RESPONDING TO THE RESISTANCE OF THE SOCIETIES IN WHICH THEY EXISTED, WHICH WERE GENERALLY LESS EDUCATED THAN THOSE OF CENTRAL AND WESTERN EUROPE.

MODERNITY WAS NOT A CONDITION WHICH DESCRIBED ALL SEGMENTS OF JEWISH LIFE. THE MODERN SPIRIT CAME TO FRANKFORT AND PHILADELPHIA IN THE EARLY DECADES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, TO WARSAW AND LUBLIN

MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY LATER, IT NEVER PENETRATED THE HAMLETS AND VILLAGES OF THE SHTETL. WHEN IT CAME, IT OFTEN CAME SUDDENLY. THE JEWS OF EUROPE DID NOT HAVE THE TIME TO ENJOY A RENAISSANCE, A REFORMATION, OR AN AGE OF REASON. MANY WHO BOUGHT STEAMER TICKETS IN HAMBURG AND DISEMBARKED EIGHT WEEKS LATER IN NEW YORK WERE THRUST INTO A MODERN WORLD THEY HAD NO PREPARATION FOR.

MENDELSSOHN'S JERUSALEM RAISED, ALBEIT INDIRECTLY, A QUESTION WHICH HAS FACED JEWISH LIFE EVER SINCE. AS LONG AS THE PENTATEUCH AND THE BIBLE WERE ACCEPTED AS SCRIPTURE, GOD-INSPIRED, THE UNITY OF ALL THE PARTS OF TORAH COULD BE ASSUMED. MODERNITY DESTROYED THIS COMFORTING CONSENSUS. MODERN JEWS BROUGHT TO TORAH IDEAS FROM THE WORLD OUTSIDE TORAH AND WHICH THEY FOUND SATISFYING.

MENDELSSOHN HIMSELF WAS A SON OF THE AGE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT. THE AUFKLARUNG, THE BELIEF THEN POPULAR AMONG MANY INTELLECTUALS THAT REVELATION COULD NOT DISCLOSE ANY IDEOLOGICAL TRUTHS THAT WERE NOT ALSO DISCERNIBLE THROUGH REASON AND EXPERIENCE. THE THEOLOGIAN OF THE AGE TRANSLATED THIS IDEA TO MEAN THAT THERE WERE THREE ELEMENTAL RELIGIOUS TRUTHS: THE EXISTENCE AND ONENESS OF GOD, DIVINE PROVIDENCE, AND THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL. TO BE SURE, ONE FINDS THESE CARDINAL BELIEFS ENUNCIATED IN SCRIPTURE, BUT ONE CAN ALSO FIND THERE MUCH ELSE--THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD, VARIOUS MESSIANIC THEMES, THE SPECIAL CREATION OF HUMAN BEINGS--THAT IS NOT SELF-EVIDENT. MENDELSSOHN, LOVING AND BELIEVING SCRIPTURE, NONETHELESS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE CENTRAL BELIEFS WERE UNMISTAKABLY SELF-EVIDENT, ARISING NATURALLY IN THE HUMAN MIND. THESE TRUTHS WERE UNIVERSAL

Earlier
you pointed
out that
Resurrection is
not in the text
but is Rabbinic.

TO SCRIPTURE. BY CONTRAST, HOWEVER MUCH THE MODERN APPRECIATES ELEMENTS WITHIN SCRIPTURE, HE CONSCIOUSLY BRINGS TO IT OUTSIDE MATERIAL. HE NO LONGER MAKES THE CONNECTION HIS ANCESTORS WOULD HAVE ASSUMED, THAT SOMEHOW OUT OF SCRIPTURE'S DEPTH THE TRUTH THAT ONE SEEKS WILL EMERGE. THE MODERN MAY READ APPRECIATIVELY, BUT HE READS CRITICALLY. THE SCRIPTURE IS NOT HIS WORLD; RATHER, HE BRINGS HIS WORLD TO SCRIPTURE.

MODERNITY DEVELOPED QUICKLY IN 19TH CENTURY EUROPE. FROM A FEW FAVORED JEWS AND EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUALS LIKE MENDELSSOHN, IT GREW INTO A WAY OF LIFE AND THOUGHT POPULAR WITH MANY JEWISH BUSINESSMEN AND INTELLECTUALS. AGAIN AND AGAIN, MODERN JEWS CHALLENGED THE OLD ASSUMPTIONS OF A FIXED AND ALL-ENCOMPASSING TRUTH EXPRESSED BY SCRIPTURE. SOME LAYMEN WERE EAGER TO INTRODUCE GERMAN SERMONS AND TEXTS INTO THE LITURGY AND TO INTRODUCE INTO WORSHIP A MODERN ESTHETIC. SOME TOOK ADVANTAGE OF CITIZENSHIP AND CONVERTED TO CHRISTIANITY. OTHERS WORKED OUT THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL WAYS OF ADJUSTING TRADITION TO THEIR BELIEFS. THERE WERE THOSE WHO, LIKE ELIJAH, GAON OF VILNA, THE LEADING RABBINIC LIGHT OF THE 18TH CENTURY, HELD TO TRADITIONAL WAYS AND PRACTICES WHILE ENCOURAGING A BROAD SECULAR EDUCATION.

IN THE 19TH CENTURY THE BEST KNOWN ADVOCATE OF THIS LAST APPROACH WAS A GERMAN RABBI, SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH (1808-1888). HE TOOK A MISHNAIC STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED TO RABBI GAMALIEL--"AN EXCELLENT THING IS STUDY OF TORAH COMBINED WITH WORLDLY OCCUPATION FOR TOIL IN THEM BOTH PUTS SIN OUT OF MIND" (M. *Avot* 2:2)--AND

TRUTHS, AS VALID IN CHRISTIANITY AS IN JUDAISM. THEY DID NOT DEPEND ON SCRIPTURE. THEREFORE, JUDAISM DID NOT WHOLLY DEPEND ON SCRIPTURE.

JUDAISM, ACCORDING TO MENDELSSOHN, WAS A COMBINATION OF THESE THREE ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES AND A REVEALED LEGISLATION. TO HIM IT WAS MANIFESTLY CLEAR THAT "YOU ARE NOT COMMANDED TO BELIEVE, FOR FAITH ACCEPTS NO COMMANDS; IT ACCEPTS ONLY WHAT COMES TO IT BY REASONED CONVICTIONS" (JERUSALEM, P. 71). YET, HE WENT ON TO ARGUE THAT SCRIPTURE DID, IN FACT, COMMAND A SPECIAL DISCIPLINE, THE FAMILIAR AND ETERNALLY VALID CODE OF PRACTICE, TO WHICH THE JEW SHOULD GIVE ASSENT BECAUSE IT HAD BEEN A FREELY GIVEN GIFT FROM GOD, DESIGNED TO CONFER DISTINCTION ON AND GIVE A SACRED PURPOSE TO JEWISH LIFE. CEREMONIAL LAW WAS OBLIGATORY, DOCTRINE WAS NOT.

MENDELSSOHN WAS ONE OF THE FIRST TO ARTICULATE A GROWING BELIEF AMONG WESTERN JEWS THAT SCRIPTURE HAD CEASED TO BE THE SOLE SOURCE OF REVEALED DOCTRINE AND HAD BECOME LARGELY A CONFIRMATION OF WHAT THE AGE OF REASON TAUGHT. ONE OF THE HALLMARKS OF MODERNITY IS THE WILLINGNESS OF MEN TO TRUST THEIR OWN THOUGHTS, TO LOOK TO THE MIND AND TO EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN TO A SCRIPTURE, FOR CONFIRMATION. MENDELSSOHN INSISTED ON THE THREE CARDINAL BELIEFS; HIS PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM, BASED ON IDEAS OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT, SHAPED HIS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS.

AS WE HAVE SEEN, GENERATIONS OF JEWS BEFORE HIM HAD DONE MUCH THE SAME, SHAPING THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS ACCORDING TO THE IDEAS OF THEIR TIMES, BUT THEY HAD BELIEVED THEY WERE SIMPLY INTERPRETING THE TEXT. THEY WERE NOT CONSCIOUS OF BRINGING A SET OF PRECONCEPTIONS

did not work.

*What about
who writes
he would write
reinterpreted
creation ex-
nihilo if that
he felt that
was to be the
correct?*

INTERPRETED "WORLDLY OCCUPATION" TO SIGNIFY NOT SIMPLY "EMPLOYMENT", BUT THE HIGH CULTURE OF THE DAY. HIRSCH'S MOTTO, TORAH IM DERECH ERETZ, TORAH TOGETHER WITH A CONTEMPORARY STANDARD OF MANNERS AND CULTURE, ENCOURAGED A SCRUPULOUS OBSERVANCE OF THE HALACHA AND LEGITIMATIZED A CURRICULUM WHICH INCLUDED MODERN LEARNING AND SCIENCE AS WELL AS THE WRITTEN AND ORAL LAW. THOSE WHO FOLLOWED HIRSCH'S WAY READ THE CREATION STORIES LITERALLY AND MIDRASHICALLY AS A SOURCE OF SOME TRUTHS BUT NOT NECESSARILY OF SCIENCE; YET, THEY DID SO IN A REVERENT MANNER, ACCEPTING THE GENERAL AUTHORITY OF THE TORAH. WHILE NOT UNAWARE OF STUDIES THAT WERE FINDING THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS OF SINAI INCONSISTENT AND INCONCLUSIVE--EVIDENCE WAS PILING UP THAT MANY TRIBES OF THE CONFEDERATION WERE NEVER IN EGYPT AND THAT THE MOSAIC LAW REFLECTED OTHER AND LATER CONDITIONS THAN THOSE OF THE SINAI YEARS--THEY JUDGED THIS IRRELEVANT TO TORAH STUDY; YET, THEY DID NOT INSIST THAT ALL THE DETAILS OF THE EXODUS AND THE SINAI REVELATION BE TAKEN LITERALLY.

HIRSCH INSISTED THAT THE TASK OF THE MODERN JEW WAS NOT TO QUESTION THE MYSTERY OF REVELATION BUT TO SEARCH OUT AND, AS BEST ONE COULD, UNDERSTAND ITS MEANING AND LIVE UP TO ITS OBLIGATION. THESE MEN WERE NOT SIMPLE LITERALISTS WHO WOULD JOIN A SEARCH FOR NOAH'S ARK ON MOUNT ARARAT, BUT THEY AFFIRMED ON FAITH THAT THE WHOLE TORAH IS REVEALED, FULL OF WISDOM, AND AUTHORITATIVE; AND THAT COMBINED WITH THE DISCIPLINES TAUGHT BY THE ORAL LAW, IT PROVIDES THE BASIS FROM WHICH THE VALUES OF MODERN LIFE ARE TO BE JUDGED. THEY BELIEVED THAT THEY HAVE IN THE TORAH A STANDARD AGAINST WHICH

BECAUSE THE SEAL OF GOD IS TRUTH. THE ONLY EXCEPTION TO THIS

ANY AND EVERY CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OR VALUE SYSTEM SHOULD BE JUDGED. THEY WERE ADAMANT ON THE REVELATORY NATURE OF THE TORAH AND TOOK SERIOUSLY THE TRIPARTITE DIVISION OF THE WRITTEN SCRIPTURE: "THE LAW, THE PROPHETS, AND THE WRITINGS."

TOWARD THE ORAL LAW THEY TENDED TO TAKE A SIMILAR POSITION. THEY READILY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WHILE THE MISHNAH AND TALMUD ARE NOT IDENTICAL WITH THE TORAH SHE-BE'AL PEH, THE UNDERSTANDING DERIVED FROM PIOUS STUDY AND LIVING BY GENERATIONS OF SAGES (TRADITION) IS INSPIRED AND AUTHORITATIVE. THEY TOOK DELIGHT IN MUCH OF THE AGGADAH OF THE TALMUD AND MIDRASH BUT DID NOT LOOK ON THESE AS LITERALLY TRUE. MANY WERE PREPARED TO ENGAGE THEMSELVES IN A CAREFUL STUDY OF THE HISTORY OF TALMUDIC COMPOSITION, BUT DID SO WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE RULES SET DOWN THERE ARE AUTHORITATIVE AND THE TEACHINGS CONSEQUENTIAL.

IN NEO-ORTHODOX CONGREGATIONS WHERE THE AUTHORITY OF THE TWO TORAHS WAS AFFIRMED, AFFIRMATION WAS MORE A MATTER OF FAITH THAN OF LITURGICAL PROOF. THE TORAH IS REVELATION, A UNIQUE DOCUMENT, A MIRACLE WHICH GOD IN HIS KINDNESS MADE AVAILABLE TO ISRAEL THROUGH HIS PROPHET, MOSES. IT IS THE SOURCE OF ISRAEL'S FAITH AND CONTAINS WITHIN ITS PAGES LIBERATING TRUTHS WHICH THE GENERATIONS HAVE SOUGHT TO MAKE REAL IN THEIR LIVES. UNLIKE SOME MODERN ORTHODOX JEWS WHO SEE THE SECULAR UNIVERSITY AS A THREAT, HIRSCH'S SPIRITUAL HEIRS REJOICED IN THE KNOWLEDGE EXPLOSION. WHILE STANDING ON THE FOUNDATION OF TORAH, HIRSCH'S DISCIPLES ACCEPTED MODERN KNOWLEDGE OF ALL KINDS AS USEFUL. INsofar AS KNOWLEDGE IS TRUE, IT CANNOT BE A THREAT BECAUSE THE SEAL OF GOD IS TRUTH. THE ONLY EXCEPTION TO THIS

DEFINITION TOUCHES THE NATURE OF TORAH: THE TORAH IS TORAH EMET, TRUE IN EVERY WAY.

A MAN WHO HAD BEEN A CLASSMATE OF SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BONN, ABRAHAM GEIGER (1810-1874), PROVIDED THE BEST KNOWN STATEMENT OF THE LIBERAL POSITION. GEIGER WAS ESPECIALLY INFLUENTIAL BECAUSE OF HIS REPUTATION AS AN EXCEPTIONAL SCHOLAR WHOSE LEARNING ENCOMPASSED VIRTUALLY ALL JEWISH THOUGHT AND HISTORY. IN A SERIES OF THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS, HE DESCRIBED JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CULTURE ALWAYS IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING. THERE HAD BEEN A REVELATION AT SINAI AND, SUBSEQUENTLY, TO THE PROPHETS, OUT OF WHICH HAD EMERGED THE INSIGHT THAT THERE IS ONE CREATOR, GOD, WHO IS KNOWN PRIMARILY BY KNOWLEDGE OF HIS MORAL WILL. PRIESTS, WISDOM TEACHERS, AND SAGES DEVELOPED THESE IDEAS, CRITICIZED SOME, ELABORATED OTHERS AND DEVELOPED STILL OTHERS. THE TANNAIM DID NOT SIMPLY INTERPRET WHAT THEY RECEIVED BUT ACCEPTED NEW IDEAS ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS. REVELATION WAS NOT A ONCE-AND-ONLY PHENOMENON, LIMITED TO A SINGLE EVENT THAT PRESUMABLY DEFINED THE TRADITION FOR ALL TIME. GEIGER TAUGHT THAT REVELATION TOOK PLACE AT MANY TIMES AND IN MANY WAYS--HIS CONCEPT OF "PROGRESSIVE REVELATION"--AND WAS VOUCHSAFED NOT ONLY TO PROPHETS BUT TO POETS, ARTISTS, AND SCIENTISTS. NEW TRUTHS ARE CONSTANTLY BEING DISCOVERED AND ANY THEOLOGICAL TRADITION WHICH CLAIMS TO BE COMMITTED TO TRUTH MUST ADAPT ITSELF TO THIS FACT. BY DEFINITION, THEN, NO SCRIPTURE CAN CONTAIN ALL TRUTH.

GEIGER DID NOT SEE JUDAISM'S DEVELOPMENT AS EVER UPWARD. SINAI HAD SET ISRAEL ON THE WAY. INSPIRATION, PIETY, CONCERN, COMMITMENT AND AN OPENNESS TO NEW IDEAS KEPT IT ON THE WAY. ONCE

THE TALMUD WAS IN PLACE AND THE PHILOSOPHIC-MINDED LIKE MAIMONIDES HAD MADE THEIR CONTRIBUTION, JUDAISM HAD, UNFORTUNATELY, CLOSED ITSELF OFF FROM THE SOURCES OF LIFE AND TRUTH. AS A LEADER OF MODERATE REFORM IN HIS DAY, GEIGER WAS MOVED TO PREACH ON THE IMPERATIVE OF REAWAKENING THE TRADITION'S SLUMBERING VITALITY. HE BELIEVED THAT SOME OF THE DISCIPLINES WHICH SUCH MEN AS MENDELSSOHN HAD PRAISED PUT OFF THE BEST SPIRITS OF HIS AGE, WHOSE INTERESTS AND AESTHETICS REQUIRED NEW FORMS OF EXPRESSION. HE EMPHASIZED, INSTEAD, THE CENTRALITY OF THE MORAL LAW AND URGED HIS FOLLOWERS TO BE "A LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS."

JUST OVER A CENTURY AFTER MENDELSSOHN, THE NOTED HEBREW AND ZIONIST MASTER, AHAD HA-AM (ASHER GINSBERG, 1856-1927), PUBLISHED A FIERY ESSAY IN WHICH HE PROTESTED AGAINST THE INSISTENCE OF TRADITIONALISTS THAT JUSTICE AND MORALITY WERE FULLY AND SATISFACTORILY DEFINED BY A SCRIPTURE DEVELOPED LONG AGO BY SAGES WHO HAD FACED QUITE DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES. HE WORRIED THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK HAD SURRENDERED THEIR SOULS TO THE BOOK, TO AN ARBITRARY AND SOMETIMES ANACHRONISTIC AUTHORITY OF THE WRITTEN WORD. "THE BOOK CEASES TO BE WHAT IT SHOULD BE, A SOURCE OF EVER NEW INSPIRATION AND MORAL STRENGTH; ON THE CONTRARY, ITS FUNCTION IN LIFE IS TO WEAKEN AND, FINALLY, TO CURB ALL SPONTANEITY OF ACTION AND EMOTION TILL MEN BECAME WHOLLY DEPENDENT ON THE WRITTEN WORD AND INCAPABLE OF RESPONDING TO ANY STIMULUS IN NATURE OR IN HUMAN LIFE WITHOUT ITS PERMISSION AND APPROVAL" (THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK, 1894, p. 59).

did not
check

(31-8-37)

AHAD HA-AM ARGUED THAT LIFE, NOT ANCIENT LEGAL FORMULAS, MUST CONTROL A COMMUNITY'S CONCEPT OF MORALITY AND JUSTICE. HE ILLUSTRATED HIS ARGUMENT WITH A STORY HE HAD FOUND IN A POEM BY A. D. GORDON. A TALMUD STUDENT GOES ABROAD TO MAKE A LIVING. HE LEAVES HIS YOUNG WIFE BEHIND. YEARS PASS. HE DOES NOT SEND FOR HER AND SHE MEETS SOMEONE SHE WOULD LIKE TO MARRY. SHE WRITES ASKING FOR A DIVORCE, THE HUSBAND AGREES AND HAS A SCRIBE PREPARE THE APPROPRIATE DOCUMENT. BUT WHEN IT ARRIVES, THE LOCAL RABBI DISCOVERS A SINGLE, TRIVIAL SCRIBAL ERROR AND DECLARES THE DOCUMENT INVALID. A CORRECTED COPY IS REQUESTED BUT NEVER ARRIVES. THE HUSBAND HAD BY NOW SET OUT FOR AMERICA AND HAD BEEN LOST AT SEA. THERE WERE NO SURVIVORS OF THE SHIPWRECK, AND SINCE RABBINIC LAW REQUIRES TWO WITNESSES TO CERTIFY A DEATH, THE WOMAN BECAME AN AGUNAH, A DESERTED WIFE, FORBIDDEN BY JEWISH LAW TO REMARRY OUT OF FEAR THAT HER HUSBAND MIGHT SOME DAY TURN UP ALIVE.

not in case of one witness is sufficient

ARCHIVES

AHAD HA-AM WANTED TO END JUDAISM'S RELIANCE ON TEXTS, AND RESCUE IT FROM THE LIFELESS, FROZEN ORTHODOXY HE BELIEVED IT HAD BECOME. TO RESTORE JUDAISM TO LIVE, MORE THAN WORDS WERE REQUIRED. IT WAS NECESSARY FOR JEWS TO MOVE FROM MINORITY STATUS IN A NON-JEWISH WORLD INTO THEIR OWN WORLD--ZION. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT IN ZION, IN PALESTINE, IN THE PROMISED LAND, THEIR OWN LAND, JEWS COULD CREATE A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE THAT WOULD INSPIRE OTHERS. MORE IMPORTANT, THE NEW LIFE WOULD ENABLE JEWS TO RECREATE THEMSELVES AS A PEOPLE. HIS IS ONE OF THE FIRST VOICES TO CALL FOR A JEWISH PEOPLE BOUND TOGETHER BY OTHER THAN PURELY RELIGIOUS TIES.

(ex 1252)

THERE ARE STILL GROUPS WHICH READILY AND WITHOUT RESERVATION ACCEPT THE TORAH'S AUTHORITY. FOR THEM THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE TRADITION IS A MATTER OF FAITH AND AN HISTORICAL FACT. THEY FIND THE TORAH'S DESCRIPTION OF THE THOUSANDS WHO WERE AT SINAI, WHO SAW GOD'S PRESENCE DESCEND ON THE MOUNTAIN AND HEARD HIS VOICE AND LATER MOSES' PROCLAIM THE TEACHINGS, FOR THEM THE BEST POSSIBLE EVIDENCE THAT THESE EVENTS HAPPENED JUST AS THE BIBLE DESCRIBES THEM. IN THEIR EYES THE TEXT IS SACRED AND THE SOURCE, TOGETHER WITH THE ORAL LAW, OF ALL SIGNIFICANT TRUTH. SUCH BELIEVERS ACCEPT THAT OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S INSTRUCTION IS THE KEY TO REDEMPTION, BOTH FOR THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE NATION. "THIS BOOK OF THE LAW SHALL NOT DEPART OUT OF YOUR MOUTH, BUT YOU SHALL MEDITATE THEREIN DAY AND NIGHT THAT YOU MAY OBSERVE TO DO ACCORDING TO ALL THAT IS WRITTEN THEREIN; FOR THEN YOU SHALL MAKE YOUR WAY PROSPEROUS AND YOU SHALL HAVE GOOD SUCCESS" (JOSHUA 1:8).

outdated term (perhaps not)

MEMBERS OF SUCH GROUPS WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY GENERALLY SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS WHOSE TEACHINGS REINFORCE THEIR RELIGIOUS ASSUMPTIONS AND EQUIP THE CHILD WITH KNOWLEDGE OF THE RICH TAPESTRY OF IDEAS AND TALES WHICH THE SAGES AND FOLKLORE HAVE DRAWN FROM OR INTO THE TEXTS. THOSE TEXTS ARE, THEY BELIEVE, FAR MORE EXTENSIVE THAN THE SEFER TORAH--TOGETHER WITH WHAT WE CALL THE BIBLE, THEY INCLUDE THE TALMUD, THE MIDRASHIM, THE CODES, THE PHILOSOPHERS, THE KABBALAH AND THE RESPONSA. TO ALL THESE TEXTS, SAVE THE SEFER TORAH, CRITICAL ANALYSIS CAN BE APPLIED, BUT THEY INSIST THAT THE SEFER TORAH IS GOD'S WORDS AND THEREFORE UNIQUE,

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are! EXEMPT FROM SUCH EXAMINATION. THEY DO NOT QUESTION THE TORAH'S AUTHORITY OVER THEIR LIVES. INDEED, THEY (CLAIM TO BE) SADDENED BY THE INDIFFERENCE OF MOST JEWS TO THE PATTERN OF LIFELONG STUDY AND COMMITMENT WHICH THEY CALL THE TORAH WAY.

THERE IS A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEO-ORTHODOX JEWS, SUCH AS HIRSCH'S FOLLOWERS, WHO ARE TODAY EXEMPLIFIED BY THE FACULTY OF BAR ILAN AND YESHIVA UNIVERSITIES, AND THOSE GROUPS WHO CONTINUE AS IF THE KNOWLEDGE EXPLOSION OF THE LAST SEVERAL CENTURIES HAD NOT TAKEN PLACE. FOR THEM TORAH STUDY IS THE ONLY KNOWLEDGE THAT COUNTS FOR ANYTHING. THE WORLD OUTSIDE HAS LITTLE OF VALUE TO TEACH. THEY CONTINUE THE PATTERN OF CULTURE OF EUROPEAN JEWRY BEFORE IT WAS CHALLENGED AND RESHAPED BY MODERNISM. THEY LIVE TO A SURPRISING DEGREE IN AND FOR BOOKS, MORE SPECIFICALLY, IN AND FOR TORAH. IN THAT EUROPEAN JEWISH WORLD, MEN SPENT THEIR LIVES STUDYING THE TALMUD AND ITS COMMENTARIES. OTHER, SIMPLER FOLK SPENT HOURS EACH DAY RECITING TORAH TEXTS AS AN ACT OF DEVOTION. BOOK STUDY WAS HELD TO BE A CONSUMMATELY WORTHY WAY TO SPEND ONE'S LIFE--BUT ONLY THE BOOKS OF THE TORAH WERE HELD TO CONTAIN ALL WISDOM AND EVEN THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF PRINTING, MANY HEBREW BOOKS CONTAINED A TITLE PAGE CALLED SHA'AR; THE USUAL INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION WAS PRINTED WITHIN THE OUTLINE OF A GATE BEARING A MOTTO WHICH SUGGESTED THAT ALL WHO PASSED THROUGH IT AND STUDIED WHAT LAY BEYOND PERFORMED A PIOUS ACT: "THIS IS THE SHA'AR (GATE) OF THE LORD, THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL ENTER THEREIN" (Ps 118:20). TALMUD TORAH, TORAH STUDY, WAS SEEN AS A VIRTUOUS WAY TO SPEND ONE'S LIFE, AND

THIS WAY WAS ACCEPTED AS A TECHNIQUE OF MORAL AND SPIRITUAL IMPROVEMENT: AS A KEY TO THE MYSTERIES; AND AS A WAY TO APPROACH GOD.

IT IS THIS CULTURE THAT GAVE RISE TO THE CONVENTIONAL JUDGMENT THAT JEWISH CULTURE IS BOOK-CENTERED, EVEN BOOK-DOMINATED. TELLING THE EXTENSIVE AND FASCINATING STORY OF THE AUTHORS, EDITORS, SCRIBES, AND PRINTERS WHO DEVELOPED AND MADE AVAILABLE THE LITERATURE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, THE HEBREW BOOK (EDITED BY RAPHAEL POSNER AND ISRAEL TA-SHEMA, ONE OF A SERIES OF SINGLE-THEME VOLUMES DEVELOPED FROM THE MATERIALS PREPARED FOR THE 1974 ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA)

REHEARSES THIS CONVENTIONAL JUDGMENT: "NOT FOR NOTHING HAS THE JEWISH PEOPLE BEEN KNOWN AS THE 'PEOPLE OF THE BOOK,' THE MOST IMPORTANT OBJECT IN JUDAISM IS, ALBEIT IN SCROLL FORM, A BOOK.

THE TORAH, AND THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE IS A STORY TOLD NOT IN PICTURES, BUILDINGS OR STATUES BUT IN BOOKS" ().

THEIRS IS A CLUMSY VERSION OF JEAN PAUL SARTRE'S MORDANT OBSERVATION

THAT "JEWS LIVE IN BOOKS, NOT IN LANDSCAPE" (). SARTRE'S EPIGRAM IS MORE ELEGANTLY ELABORATED IN "OUR HOMELAND, THE TEXT,"

AN ESSAY BY GEORGE STEINER, EUROPEAN CRITIC-PLAYWRIGHT WHO MAKES EPISODIC FORAYS INTO MATTERS OF JEWISH INTEREST (TELUS #44 SUM. '80, P. 205). THE JUDGMENT, HOWEVER CONVENTIONAL AND POPULAR, IS A

STRANGE ONE FOR A PEOPLE WHO, AS WE HAVE SEEN, MADE PRODIGIOUS EFFORTS TO PREVENT JUST THAT FATE OF BEING SMOTHERED BY TEXTS.

THERE IS TODAY NO SYNAGOGUE WITHOUT AN ARK AND NO PATTERN OF SYNAGOGUE WORSHIP WITHOUT KERAT HA-TORAH, THE RITUAL OF READING FROM THE SEFER TORAH. ORTHODOX CONGREGATIONS FOLLOW THE TRADITIONAL CYCLE OF SABBATH AND HOLY DAY READINGS, WHILE NON-ORTHODOX BODIES MAY READ ONLY A SECTION OF THE WEEKLY PORTION EACH SABBATH. ALL

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CONGREGATIONS READ AT LEAST A FEW VERSES. KERAT HA-TORAH WAS, AND REMAINS, THE CENTRAL JEWISH RITUAL ACT HONORING THE TRADITION. UNHAPPILY, ONE OF THE HALLMARKS OF MODERN LIFE IS ITS SWIFT PACE; FEW COME REGULARLY TO THE SYNAGOGUE AND THOSE WHO COME NO LONGER LINGER IN GOD'S COURTS. THERE IS SO MUCH ELSE OF INTEREST FOR JEWS TO DO. YET, FEW JEWS WOULD DENY THE VALUE OF KERAT HA-TORAH. THE OLD FORMS ARE MAINTAINED. THE NUMBER OF THOSE CALLED UP TO READ FROM THE TORAH, OR MORE CUSTOMARILY ~~SIMPLY~~ TO OFFER THE BLESSINGS, HAS REMAINED FAIRLY CONSTANT OVER THE CENTURIES: SEVEN ON THE SABBATH, THREE ON THE WEEKDAYS. IN EVERY CONGREGATION THE READING IS PRECEDED AND FOLLOWED BY FAMILIAR BLESSINGS WHICH THANK GOD FOR THE GIFT OF TORAH, WHICH IS SEEN AS THE HALLMARK OF ISRAEL'S ELECTION AND, AS SUCH, THE SOURCE OF ISRAEL'S IMMORTALITY AS A PEOPLE. "PRAISED BE YOU, O LORD, OUR GOD, KING OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO HAS CHOSEN US FROM AMONG ALL PEOPLES AND GIVEN US HIS TORAH. PRAISED BE YOU, O LORD, GIVER OF THE TORAH." "PRAISED BE YOU, O LORD, OUR GOD, KING OF THE UNIVERSE, WHO HAS GIVEN US ^{the} ~~A~~ TORAH ~~FULL~~ OF TRUTH AND [IN SO DOING] PLANTED WITHIN US ETERNAL LIFE. PRAISED BE YOU, O LORD, GIVER OF THE TORAH" (TRADITIONAL TORAH BLESSINGS).

NINETEENTH-CENTURY LIBERAL SYNAGOGUES FOUGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO MEET, TEACH, AND ORGANIZE THE LIFE CYCLE EVENTS IN THEIR OWN WAYS. SUCH A SYNAGOGUE WAS RECEPTIVE TO THE MUSIC, ART, AND CULTURE OF THE DAY AND USED THEM IN WORSHIP. ITS CONGREGANTS RECOGNIZED IDEAS WHICH CAME FROM OTHER CULTURES AND OTHER WAYS OF LIFE AND WERE

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. THERE WAS LITTLE UNITY TO BEGIN WITH.

SCRIPTURAL TRANSLATIONS AND COMMENTARIES WERE MANY AND VARIED.

WILLING TO ADAPT THESE TO JEWISH PRACTICE. THIS ECLECTIC APPROACH ASSUMED THAT WHAT THE RABBI AND CONGREGANTS FELT TO BE VALID HAD VALIDITY--AND WHAT DIDN'T, DIDN'T.

IN EUROPE THERE WAS A MIXED PATTERN OF CONGREGATIONAL AUTONOMY, VARYING FROM REGION TO REGION. IN SOME REGIONS AND CITIES, LOCAL JEWISH COUNCILS LIMITED THE ABILITY OF LIBERAL JEWS TO EXPERIMENT, TO DROP OLD RITUALS AND CREATE NEW ONES. IN OTHER REGIONS, LIBERALS GAINED CONTROL OF THEIR LOCAL COUNCILS AND INSURED THAT THEIR WAY WAS ACCEPTABLE TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND TO THE LOCAL NON-JEWISH AUTHORITIES, TO WHOM ALL CHANGES IN WORSHIP AND UNRESOLVED FRICTIONS WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HAD TO BE SUBMITTED.

IN THE UNITED STATES, WHERE THERE WAS NO TRADITION OF JEWISH CORPORATE LIFE, FROM THE BEGINNING THERE WAS FULL CONGREGATIONAL AUTONOMY. CONGREGATIONS ORGANIZED THEMSELVES ON THEIR OWN AUTHORITY AND THERE WAS DURING MOST OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY NO OFFICIAL NATIONAL BODY WHICH COULD ENFORCE ITS WILL. EFFORTS TO TREAT THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITIES AS A SINGLE ORGANISM AND TO PUT COMMUNAL RESTRAINTS ON CHANGING ATTITUDES WERE UNSUCCESSFUL.

PERHAPS THE CENTRAL ISSUE ON WHICH ATTITUDES WERE CHANGING WAS THE ISSUE OF THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE. THESE CHANGES APPLIED EQUALLY TO THE FIRST AND THE SECOND SCRIPTURE. IN EUROPE THE ISSUE COULD NOT BE AVOIDED FOR IF IT LED TO STRIFE WITHIN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT STEPPED IN. IN THE UNITED STATES, IT WAS NOT AN ISSUE WHICH DISTURBED THE OUTWARD UNITY OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. THERE WAS LITTLE UNITY TO BEGIN WITH. SCRIPTURAL TRANSLATIONS AND COMMENTARIES WERE MANY AND VARIED,

AND COMMUNAL STANDARDS NO LONGER ENCOURAGED OBEDIENCE TO THE TORAH'S FULL AUTHORITY.

THE ISSUE DID NOT DISAPPEAR IN THE UNITED STATES. THERE WERE ALWAYS FERVENT ORTHODOX BELIEVERS, AND WITH THE CREATION IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL THE ISSUE BECAME A MATTER OF INCREASING CONCERN AND NATIONAL DIVISION: WHAT DEGREE OF AUTHORITY SHALL AN ORGANIZED, YET PLURALISTIC, JEWISH COMMUNITY GIVE TO THE BODIES WHO CLAIM TO GOVERN IN THE NAME OF TORAH?

THE REACH--OR LIMITS--OF SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY HAVE BEEN DEFINED IN SEVERAL CONTRADICTORY WAYS IN MODERN TIMES. SOME ACCEPT SCRIPTURE. SOME SEE ONLY CLAIMS THEY CAN NO LONGER AFFIRM AND CATEGORICALLY DENY ANY DIVINITY TO SCRIPTURE. IF THE TEXTS ARE INSPIRED AT ALL, IT IS THE INSPIRATION THAT COMES TO ARTISTS AND POETS. SOME SEE THE SCRIPTURES AS INTERESTING BUT ARCHAIC. OTHERS SEE THEIR SEMINAL ROLE IN WESTERN CIVILIZATION AND THE CONTINUING POWER OF SOME OF THEIR IDEAS; IN THEIR EYES, THE BIBLE IS A CLASSIC BUT NO LONGER A COMMANDING VOICE. OR IF IT IS A COMMANDING VOICE, THE ORDERS IT GIVES ARE SO NOBLY AND BROADLY ETHICAL AS TO BE CAPABLE OF AFFIRMING WHAT ONE WISHES TO AFFIRM. SOME CLAIM THAT JUDAISM'S LONG EXPERIENCE WITH TEXTS STANDS IN THE WAY OF THE SENSE OF IMMEDIACY IN RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE; THE CALL TO OBEDIENCE TO THE TEXT OVERWHELMS THE EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS THAT PLAY SO GREAT A PART IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE.

THOSE WHO ACCEPT SCRIPTURE--TO BE EXACT, BOTH SCRIPTURES--SENSE GOD IN THE WORD. SOME ACCEPTING BELIEVERS CAN BE QUITE

?! || BELLIGERENT ABOUT THEIR FAITH, PERHAPS BECAUSE THE RISING TIDE OF
 FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD CONFIRMS THEIR FAITH IN "BIBLE."
 OTHER BELIEVERS MAY HAVE DOUBTS BUT ALLOW THE EVIDENCE OF THE
 CENTURIES OF A RICH TORAH-BASED CULTURE TO SILENCE THEIR DOUBTS.
 THEY TREAT THE TORAH AS INSPIRED, UNIQUE, A MIRACLE. THEY BELIEVE
 THAT THE RABBINIC ETHOS, THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF TORAH, REMAINS
 AUTHORITATIVE. THEY INSIST THAT THEY--AND THEY ALONE--DO NOT
 BRING FOREIGN FIRES TO THE ALTAR, AND THAT THEY, AND THEY ALONE,
 ARE OPEN TO THE SPECIALNESS OF GOD'S WILL.

✓ — TO MANY MORE JEWS, THE SCRIPTURES BECAME A SEMINAL DOCUMENT,
 THE SOURCE BUT NOT NECESSARILY THE SUBSTANCE OF THEIR TRADITIONS.
 ACCEPTING THE IDEA THAT TORAH LAW IS INSPIRED AND THEREFORE,
 NECESSARILY, GOOD, THEY NONETHELESS ARGUE AGAINST IMPOSING IT ON
 THOSE WHO DO NOT AGREE WITH THEM. THEY SEE JUDAISM AS A LIVING,
 CHANGING RELIGIOUS CULTURE WHICH BEGAN AT SINAI AND WAS AFTERWARDS
 CONSTANTLY IN THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT. IN THE NINETEENTH CEN-
 TURY THIS VIEW OF THE TORAH AS THE CATALYST BUT NOT THE ALL-INCLUSIVE
 TEACHING WAS GENERALLY COMBINED WITH THAT CENTURY'S CONFIDENCE
 IN PROGRESS.

— FOR STILL OTHER JEWS THE SCRIPTURES HAVE BECOME SIMPLY A
 SERIES OF DOCUMENTS WHICH REVEAL VARIOUS CONCERNS AND INTERESTS
 OF JUDEANS AND ISRAELITES OVER THE COURSE OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM
 B.C.E. FROM THIS SECULAR APPROACH, ~~MANY~~ OF THE BIBLE'S CONSTRAINTS
 DO NOT COMMEND THEMSELVES TODAY AND CANNOT BE ACCEPTED ON FAITH
 OR ON ANY OTHER BASIS.

THE LIBERAL TRADITIONS, AS THEY WERE DEVELOPING A HUNDRED YEARS AGO, ADVANCED ARGUMENTS BASED ON THEN CURRENT IDEAS ABOUT HUMAN PROGRESS. CONFIDENT THAT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY WERE IMPROVING HUMAN LIFE, THAT WHAT WAS EARLY WAS NECESSARILY PRIMITIVE AND WHAT WAS CONTEMPORARY WAS "ADVANCED", LIBERAL JUDAISM TRUSTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN AND WOULD BE MANY REVELATIONS, NOT JUST ONE. VIVIAN SIMMONS, A MID-20TH CENTURY ENGLISH LIBERAL RABBI, EXPRESSED THESE THOUGHTS IN POPULAR FORM IN THE PATH OF LIFE.

LIBERAL JUDAISM CANNOT ACCEPT THE OLD TEACHING OF THE VERBAL INSPIRATION OF TORAH. NEVERTHELESS, JEWISH TRADITION, THE BEST OF JEWISH TRADITION, A GREAT DEAL OF IT, IS STILL SACRED TO US. THE SCROLL OF THE LAW IS STILL THE OUTSTANDING SYMBOL OF JUDAISM. IN THE SYNAGOGUE IT PLAYS A PROMINENT PART. THOUGH IT CONTAINS ONLY THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES, IT STANDS FOR THE GREAT JEWISH PRINCIPLE THAT MAN IS BOUND BY LAW. BUT TO LIBERAL JEWS IT IS NOT ONLY JEWISH LAW. THAT IS BINDING UPON US ONLY IN SO FAR AS IT HARMONIZES WITH THE BEST THOUGHT AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR OWN AGE. FOR US RELIGIOUS TRUTH AND COMMAND MEAN: ALL THOSE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL OBLIGATIONS, WHETHER EXPRESSED IN THE LAW OF MOSES OR IN ANY OTHER FORM, ANCIENT OR MODERN, WHICH WE ACKNOWLEDGE AS COMMANDS FOR US TO OBEY, THOUGH NATURALLY WE LOOK PRIMARILY TO JEWISH LAW AND TRADITION.

THE SCROLL OF THE LAW IS THE SYMBOL OF OUR HUMAN DUTY--
TO GOD, TO OUR NEIGHBOURS, TO OURSELVES. IT STANDS
FOR THE SUPREME PRINCIPLE OF REVELATION: THE BELIEF
THAT GOD REVEALS HIMSELF AND HIS WILL TO MAN, NOT IN
ONE AGE, BUT IN EVERY AGE, NOT IN ONE FORM, BUT IN MANY
(THE PATH OF LIFE, VALENTINE-MITCHELL, LONDON, 1961, p.48).

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SIMMONS DESCRIBES THE USE OF THE SCRIPTURE IN A LIBERAL
SYNAGOGUE:

WE STILL READ OUT OF THE SCROLL OF THE LAW AT
THE SERVICES OF THE SYNAGOGUE, BUT WE DO NOT
READ ALL OF IT, AS IS DONE IN ORTHODOX SYNAGOGUES.
WE READ THOSE PARTS THAT HAVE FOR US A PRESENT-DAY
MEANING, AND ARE EITHER THE SOURCE OR AN ILLUSTRATION
OF THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS WHICH GUIDE
OUR LIVES (PP. 46-7).

THE EXPLANATION THAT THE TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS AND RULES "ARE NOT
DIVINE IN ORIGIN, AND ARE THEREFORE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AND
REPLACEMENT" (P. 48) MAKES CLEAR THAT THE SCRIPTURES HAVE BECOME
SOURCES FROM WHICH CRITICAL SPIRITS CHOOSE WHAT IS SATISFYING
TO THEM AND, FURTHER, THAT THE SCROLL'S "PROMINENCE IN THE
SYNAGOGUE DOES NOT IMPLY A PLEDGE TO ACCEPT ALL ITS TEACHINGS
OR TO OBEY ALL OF ITS COMMANDS." ARGUING THAT THE CENTRAL COMMAND
IS 'JUSTICE, JUSTICE SHALT THOU FOLLOW', SIMMONS SAYS THAT THE
MOSAIC CODE IS JUSTICE "IN AN EARLY FORM" AND "OUR INTERPRETATION

OF WHAT JUSTICE MEANS AND DEMANDS HAS GONE FAR BEYOND THE MOSAIC LAW IN ITS APPLICATION TO THE LIFE OF TODAY. IT IS BY MEANS OF THESE PROGRESSIVE CONCEPTIONS OF JUSTICE THAT THE JEW AND HIS NEIGHBOURS ADVANCE TOWARDS THE IDEAL OF HUMAN SOCIETY" (PP. 48-49).

WHAT ALL NON-ORTHODOX VIEWS OF SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY HAVE IN COMMON IS AN ACCEPTANCE OF THE VALUE OF THE SCRIPTURE AS A SEMINAL AND SUGGESTIVE DOCUMENT, EVEN THOUGH IT HAS BEEN DRAINED OF THE DIVINITY WHICH HAD GIVEN IT ITS ORIGINAL AUTHORITY AND POWER. THE BIBLE'S VALUE IS AS A CHRONICLE OF THE INCREDIBLY SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF ETHICAL LIVING AND OF THE ATTEMPTS OF A NATION TO BUILD A WAY OF LIFE ON THE BASIS OF NEW IDEAS AND STRUCTURES. THE NON-ORTHODOX BELIEF THAT NEITHER THE FIRST NOR THE SECOND SCRIPTURE ACTUALLY PRESENTED GOD'S WORDS IN NO WAY ERODED THE CONVICTION THAT THE TWO SCRIPTURES HAD MADE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO JEWISH CIVILIZATION. MODERN IDEAS ABOUT HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY INFLUENCED LIBERAL JEWS TO RECOGNIZE THAT REVELATION MUST ALWAYS BE TRANSMITTED THROUGH HUMAN MINDS AND IS, THEREFORE, INEVITABLY CONDITIONED BY HUMAN CIRCUMSTANCE. SINAI REVEALS AS MUCH ABOUT MOSES AS ABOUT GOD--PERHAPS MORE.

SCRIPTURE REMAINED SCRIPTURE BUT BEGAN TO BE READ AS LITERATURE, AS MATERIAL WHICH COULD BE CLASSIFIED AS MYTH, SAGA, NARRATIVE, LAW, AND PSALM. PARALLELS COULD BE AND WERE FOUND IN OTHER WEST ASIAN CULTURES, AND STUDIES WERE MADE OF THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE TORAH, HOW ITS LAW CODES DIFFERED FROM HAMMURABI'S, FOR EXAMPLE. THE QUESTION THAT FACED EVERYONE WAS WHETHER THE

BIBLE WAS, IN FACT, JUST ANOTHER NATIONAL LITERATURE, ALBEIT ONE WHICH HAD PLAYED AND CONTINUED TO PLAY AN UNUSUALLY SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION.

7 DESPAIRING OF BEING ABLE TO USE HISTORY TO PROVE THE BIBLE'S DISTINCTIVENESS, SOME BEGAN TO SPEAK OF TRANSCENDING HISTORY; THE SEARCH FOR THE ESSENCE OF JUDAISM BECAME A SEARCH FOR JUDAISM'S EXISTENTIAL MEANING: WHAT DOES THE TRADITION AS I KNOW IT MEAN TO ME? TWENTIETH-CENTURY MEN LIKE FRANZ ROSENZWEIG AND MARTIN BUBER ARGUED THAT RELIGIOUS TRUTHS ARE NOT FOUND BY APPLYING SOME KIND OF PHILOSOPHIC OR SOCIOLOGICAL JUDGMENT TO WHAT PEOPLE HAVE SAID AND WRITTEN. THERE ARE, IN FACT, NO OBJECTIVE AND UNIVERSAL TRUTHS. WHAT THERE ARE ARE MOMENTS OF INTIMACY AND QUITE PERSONAL MOMENTS OF REVELATIONS WHEN SOMEONE CONFRONTS ANOTHER'S CONCERNS OR IDEAS AND FINDS THAT THEY SPEAK TO HIS INNERMOST NEEDS AND AWAKEN NEW IDEAS AND FEELINGS. THE BIBLE, AND PRESUMEDLY ALSO THE TALMUD, ARE NOT TO BE SEEN AS A COPY OF SOME DIVINE DICTATION BUT AS RECORDS OF HUMANS, LIKE OURSELVES, OPENING THEMSELVES TO ULTIMATE REALITY. THE BIBLE IS THE RECORD OF A DIALOGUE BETWEEN GOD AND ISRAEL, AND THIS UNIQUE QUALITY GIVES IT ITS POWER AND MORAL AND SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY. THE ULTIMATE SERIOUSNESS OF THE ORIGINAL EXPERIENCE WAS NOT COMPLETELY LOST IN THE REPORTING.

MARTIN BUBER WROTE OF THE HEBREW BIBLE AS A COMPILATION OF THE RECORDS FROM THAT CENTURIES-LONG DIALOGUE BETWEEN A SPEAKING GOD AND MEN WHO WERE READY TO LISTEN. THE VALUE OF SCRIPTURE

FOR THE MODERN WAS THAT IF HE WOULD SPEND THE TIME AND DEVOTE SENSITIVE ATTENTION TO THE TEXTS HE COULD LISTEN IN TO THAT ORIGINAL CONVERSATION. HE, TOO, COULD STAND AT SINAI OR WITH JOSHUA AT BETH EL.

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY MODERNS WHO SEEK TO PRESENT THE ALIVENESS OF THE BIBLE TO A GENERATION OF SILENT, CRITICAL READERS IS TO GET THEM TO HEAR ITS VOICE. WE FIND MARTIN BUBER ENCOURAGING READING ALOUD, READING OVER AND OVER, LETTING THE WORDS AND CADENCES WASH OVER THE READER, LETTING THE BIBLE SPEAK RATHER THAN SIMPLY READING IT. BUBER'S GERMAN TRANSLATION AS WELL AS HIS ENCOURAGEMENT OF READING ALOUD, MEETING THE TEXT, SOUGHT TO BREATHE LIFE, IMMEDIACY, INTO THE BIBLE-READER RELATIONSHIPS.

THE MAN OF TODAY HAS NO ACCESS TO A SURE AND SOLID FAITH, NOR CAN IT BE MADE ACCESSIBLE TO HIM. IF HE EXAMINES HIMSELF SERIOUSLY, HE KNOWS THIS AND MAY NOT DELUDE HIMSELF FURTHER. BUT HE IS NOT DENIED THE POSSIBILITY OF HOLDING HIMSELF OPEN TO FAITH. IF HE IS REALLY SERIOUS, HE TOO CAN OPEN UP TO THIS BOOK AND LET ITS RAYS STRIKE HIM WHERE THEY WILL. HE CAN GIVE HIMSELF UP AND SUBMIT TO THE TEST WITHOUT PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS AND WITHOUT RESERVATIONS. HE CAN ABSORB THE BIBLE WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH, AND WAIT TO SEE WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HIM, WHETHER HE

WILL NOT DISCOVER WITHIN HIMSELF A NEW AND UNBIASED APPROACH TO THIS OR THAT ELEMENT IN THE BOOK. BUT TO THIS END, HE MUST READ THE SCRIPTURES AS THOUGH THEY WERE SOMETHING ENTIRELY UNFAMILIAR, AS THOUGH THEY HAD NOT BEEN SET BEFORE HIM READY-MADE, AT SCHOOL AND AFTER IN THE LIGHT OF "RELIGIOUS" AND "SCIENTIFIC" CERTAINTIES; AS THOUGH HE HAS NOT BEEN CONFRONTED ALL HIS LIFE WITH SHAM CONCEPTS AND SHAM STATEMENTS WHICH CITED THE BIBLE AS THEIR AUTHORITY. HE MUST FACE THE BOOK WITH A NEW ATTITUDE AS SOMETHING NEW. HE MUST YIELD TO IT, WITHHOLD NOTHING OF HIS BEING, AND LET WHATEVER WILL OCCUR BETWEEN HIMSELF AND IT. HE DOES NOT KNOW WHICH OF ITS SAYINGS AND IMAGES WILL OVERWHELM HIM AND MOLD HIM, FROM WHERE THE SPIRIT WILL FERMENT AND ENTER INTO HIM, TO INCORPORATE ITSELF ANEW IN HIS BODY. BUT HE HOLDS HIMSELF OPEN. HE DOES NOT BELIEVE ANYTHING A PRIORI; HE DOES NOT DISBELIEVE ANYTHING A PRIORI. HE READS ALOUD THE WORDS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK IN FRONT OF HIM; HE HEARS THE WORD HE UTTERS AND IT REACHES HIM. NOTHING IS PREJUDGED. THE CURRENT OF TIME FLOWS ON, AND THE CONTEMPORARY CHARACTER OF THIS MAN BECOMES ITSELF A RECEIVING VESSEL (BUBER, MARTIN, DIE SCHRIFT UND IHRE VERDEUTSCHAF, BERLIN, 1926, P. 181).

ONE FURTHER MODE OF DEALING WITH THE SCRIPTURE IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY--A PURELY ACADEMIC ONE--IS PERHAPS BEST ILLUSTRATED BY THE NEW JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY TRANSLATION OF THE TORAH, FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1962 AND REVISED IN 1967. ONE OF ITS GOALS IS TO BE AS ACCURATE AND EXACT AS POSSIBLE, INCLUDING IDENTIFYING TEXTUAL ERRORS AND UNTRANSLATABLE WORDS: "MEANING OF HEBREW UNDERTAIN" APPEARS THROUGHOUT. THE NEW TRANSLATION ADMITS OPENLY THAT A VARIETY OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS ARE POSSIBLE FOR GIVEN HEBREW SENTENCES AND EVEN THAT THERE ARE SENTENCES IN THE HEBREW THAT CANNOT BE TRANSLATED, THEREBY RAISING THE QUESTION, ALBEIT INDIRECTLY, OF WHETHER OR NOT THE TORAH REPRESENTS THE WORD OF GOD. THIS APPROACH PUTS ON SCRIPTURE ITSELF A STATEMENT OF FALLIBILITY. ACADEMICALLY SOUND, THE TRANSLATION DENIES ANY LITERAL ACCEPTANCE OF TORAH.

THIS IS PERHAPS THE FINAL STEP IN A GRADUAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE IDEA THAT THE SCRIPTURE IS NOT GOD'S WORDS. ISRAEL'S SCRIPTURE HAS BECOME FOR MANY A HUMAN DOCUMENT, A CLASSIC WORK(S) INSPIRED IN THE SENSE THAT SUCCESSFUL ART IS INSPIRED BUT NO LONGER AN UNQUESTIONED SOURCE OF AUTHORITY OR ALL-KNOWING, UNQUESTIONED GUIDE TO DEED AND DOCTRINE. IN THAT SENSE FOR MANY JEWS THERE IS NO LONGER A SCRIPTURE. THE POWER OF THE BOOK AND THE VALUE OF MANY OF ITS IDEAS ARE ACKNOWLEDGED, BUT IT IS NO LONGER ALTOGETHER HOLY.

OF SCRIPTURE HAS PLAYED A KEY ROLE; BUT THERE WAS A DISTINCTIVE FAITH TRADITION LONG BEFORE A WRITTEN SCRIPTURE APPEARED.

AND FOR MANY THE MODEL OF THEIR RELIGIOUS TRADITION IS NO LONGER ALBO'S, OF A TREE, BUT A RIVER, A GREAT RIVER LIKE THE MISSISSIPPI. IT BEGINS IN SMALL FRESH WATER LAKES IN CANADA AND MINNESOTA AND FLOWS SEVERAL THOUSAND MILES ACROSS THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT TO THE GULF. THE CURRENT FLOWS IN ONE DIRECTION. THE PAST IS PRESENT BUT NOT NECESSARILY VISIBLE. AT ST. LOUIS THE RIVER IS QUITE DIFFERENT THAN AT ITS SOURCE OR AT ITS MOUTH. OVER ITS COURSE MUCH CHANGES. RAINS FALL. TRIBUTARIES FLOW IN. THE SUN EVAPORATES WATER FROM THE SURFACE. CITIES DRAW OUT WATER FOR THEIR RESERVOIRS AND FARMERS FOR IRRIGATION. AT TIMES POLLUTION ENTERS THE RIVER. IF ONE GETS HIGH ENOUGH IN A PLANE, THE WHOLE RIVER CAN BE SEEN. SCIENCE CAN TODAY COLOR A WATER MOLECULE AND FOLLOW ITS PASSAGE. SOME MAY MAKE IT TO THE GULF. OTHERS WON'T. THERE IS CONTINUITY AND SIGNIFICANT CHANGE.

TWO SCRIPTURES DO NOT FIT EASILY INTO SUCH A MODEL. A SCRIPTURE IS FIXED. THE TEXT IS FROZEN. SOME SAY THAT JUDAISM HAS COME FULL CIRCLE AND THAT WE ARE BACK AT THE TIME WHEN THERE WAS TORAH, TRADITION, BUT NOT YET A SEFER TORAH. SCRIPTURE HAS AGAIN BECOME SIMPLY A PART OF TRADITION. FOR MANY THE VALUE OF SCRIPTURE IS BEYOND DEBATE BUT NOT ITS UNQUESTIONED AUTHORITY. THE AGE OF SCRIPTURE AS AUTHORITY IS FOR MANY OVER AND DONE.

OF IN THE CREATIVE EBB AND FLOW OF JEWISH LIFE, THE RISE AND FALL OF SCRIPTURE HAS PLAYED A KEY ROLE; BUT THERE WAS A DISTINCTIVE FAITH TRADITION LONG BEFORE A WRITTEN SCRIPTURE APPEARED IN

ISRAEL SHOW THAT HE HAD REASON FOR HIS FEARS. HE WORRIED THAT

AND THE TRADITION CAN ADJUST TO ITS DETHRONEMENT. WHAT IT MAY NOT BE ABLE TO ADJUST TO IS THE RADICALLY DIFFERENT WORLD VIEWS WHICH EXIST NOW WITHIN MAJOR SEGMENTS OF THE COMMUNITY AND DETERMINE THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD AUTHORITY AND FAITH.

IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THERE ARE STILL JEWS WHO WOULD SACRIFICE LIFE TO TEXT. MUCH OF THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN ISRAEL WITH THE SO-CALLED "BLACK HATS" IS OVER THIS ISSUE OF TORAH AUTHORITY. IN 1948, THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NEW STATE OF ISRAEL, FOR POLITICAL REASONS AND FOLLOWING THE OLD BRITISH MANDATE LAW THAT EACH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY GOVERNED THE LAWS OF PERSONAL STATUS ACCORDING TO ITS OWN TRADITIONS, GAVE TO TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES CONTROL OVER MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, ISSUES OF INHERITANCE, ADOPTION, AND THE LIKE. FROM THAT DAY THE BATTLE HAS BEEN JOINED BETWEEN THOSE WHOSE IDEA OF A JEWISH STATE IS ONE GOVERNED BY THE TWO SCRIPTURES AND THOSE WHO WOULD TAKE A MODERN STANCE AND FOLLOW THE MODEL OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION BY CREATING SECULAR LAWS AND SEPARATING STATE AND SYNAGOGUE. SINCE AHAD HA-AM'S DAY THE ISSUES OF CONFLICT BETWEEN THOSE WHO GO BY THE BOOK AND THOSE WHO INSIST THAT THE TORAH OFTEN BLURS REAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY, HAVE MULTIPLIED: AUTOPSIES, WOMEN AS RELIGIOUS LEADERS, THE AUTHENTICITY OF NON-RABBINIC INTERPRETATIONS OF JUDAISM, THE RIGHTS OF NON-ORTHODOX JEWS TO HAVE THEIR MARRIAGES AND CONVERSIONS ACCEPTED. AHAD HA-AM FEARED TORAH FUNDAMENTALISM, AND THE ACTS OF THOSE ORTHODOX JEWS WHO DESECRATE GRAVES OF REFORM RABBIS IN ISRAEL SHOW THAT HE HAD REASON FOR HIS FEARS. HE WORRIED THAT

IN TERMS APPROPRIATE TO OUR TIME AND PLACE--FOR EXAMPLE, THE

INTENSITY OF CONVERSION OR THE SENSE OF PEACE WITHIN A SANCTUARY.

"A PEOPLE OF THE BOOK, WHILE A NORMAL PEOPLE, IS A SLAVE TO THE BOOK, IT HAS SURRENDERED ITS WHOLE SOUL TO THE WRITTEN WORD" (IBID). THE PROBLEM TODAY IS THAT MANY CAN NO LONGER SURRENDER TO SCRIPTURE OR ACCEPT AS AUTHORITATIVE THE PRESCRIPTIONS OF SCRIPTURE, WHILE OTHERS INSIST THAT THE JEWISH STATE FORCE ALL JEWS TO ABIDE THE OLDER UNDERSTANDING.

SINCE 1948 ISRAEL HAS BEEN THE FOCUS OF A HEATED STRUGGLE BETWEEN THOSE WHO INSIST THAT A JEWISH STATE MUST BE GOVERNED BY GOD'S LAW, TORAH, AND THOSE WHO INSIST THAT IN MATTERS OF BELIEF EACH SHOULD DO WHAT IS RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES. WHAT HAPPENS IN ISRAEL HAS REPERCUSSIONS THROUGHOUT THE DIASPORA. IN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES BEFORE 1948, IT WAS A MATTER OF LIVE AND LET BE. TODAY THERE ARE PRESSURES TO ABIDE THE TORAH AS LAW. AMERICAN JEWS OF CONSERVATIVE OR REFORM GROUPS MAY NOT BE ABLE TO SETTLE IN ISRAEL UNLESS THEIR MARRIAGES, DIVORCES, AND ADOPTION PROCEDURES FOLLOW CERTAIN HALACHOT. IN ISRAEL TODAY THE FIERY BATTLES OVER TORAH AUTHORITY THAT WORKED THEMSELVES OUT IN EUROPE AND AMERICA IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES ARE FLARING AGAIN, AND ARE MAJOR CAUSES OF DIVISION. THE WORLD AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE THINKS OF THEMSELVES AS A SINGLE BODY, SO THESE ISSUES THAT DIVIDE THEM ARE NOT PURELY PHILOSOPHIC ONES.

MANY LIKE TO THINK THAT THE ONLY VALID RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IS ONE WHICH IS IMMEDIATE AND INTENSELY PERSONAL, BUT CONDITIONING AND TRADITION ARE ALWAYS CONSEQUENTIAL FACTORS. JUST AS WE SEE WHAT WE ARE PREPARED TO SEE, SO WE INTERPRET SENSATION AND EXPERIENCE IN TERMS APPROPRIATE TO OUR TIME AND PLACE--FOR EXAMPLE, THE INTENSITY OF CONVERSION OR THE SENSE OF PEACE WITHIN A SANCTUARY.

✓ | THE GREAT RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS INCORPORATE IN THEIR SCRIPTURES
 RECORDS OF WHAT INDIVIDUALS HAVE FELT IN THE PRESENCE OF THE
 SACRED. IN THAT WAY TRADITIONS INEVITABLY BECAME A SUPPORTIVE
 AND CONDITIONING ENVELOPE OF CUSTOM AND PRACTICE. ONE CAN, OF
 COURSE, USE THE TEXTS AS A WORSHIPER USES A CATHEDRAL, AS AN ENVIRON-
 MENT IN WHICH THE IMMANENCE OF GOD IS FELT AS PRESENT. BUT FEW ARE
 PREPARED OR WILLING TO EXPLORE THOSE POSSIBILITIES. OURS MAY BE
 A "POST-CHRISTIAN" SOCIETY BUT TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN NORMS STILL
 SHAPE ITS THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES; CHRISTIANITY EMPHASIZES THE EX-
 PERIENCE OF THE MASS AND THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT, AND IT IS
 THEREFORE TO THE SERVICE, RATHER THAN TO THE SCRIPTURE, THAT MANY
 MODERN JEWS ARE CONDITIONED TO LOOK FOR THE SACRED.

✓ | THIS SUGGESTS THAT THOSE WHO SEARCH FOR A SCRIPTURE WILL
 PROBABLY SEEK IT IN THE PRAYERBOOKS. THE LANGUAGE OF THE WORSHIP
 SERVICE IS GENERALLY NON-SPECIFIC, BROADLY HUMAN, YET PHRASED IN
 TRADITIONAL IDIOMS, OFTEN THOSE OF THE BIBLE. ITS THEMES ARE
 NOBLE, CAPABLE OF THE MOST VARIED INTERPRETATION. PAST STATEMENTS
 AND PRESENT NEED ARE FUSED AND OFFER A WAY TO TOUCH SCRIPTURE:
 THE CYCLE OF TORAH READING, A SELECTION FROM SOME TRADITIONAL
 PASSAGE, A TALK WHICH CAN BRING IN RELEVANT AND ACCEPTABLE BITS
 OF THE RABBINIC TRADITION.

THE TIME IS APPROPRIATE TO CLEAR UP AS FAR AS ONE CAN THE
 CONVENTIONAL IDEA ABOUT JEWS AND THEIR BOOKS. BOOK LEARNING WAS
 INCREASINGLY PRIZED IN MODERN TIMES, SO TALK OF JEWISH TRADITIONS
 OF BOOK LEARNING EMPHASIZED THE INTELLECTUAL NATURE OF THE JEWISH

RABBIS MADE PRODIGIOUS EFFORTS TO MITIGATE THE LIMITATIONS WHICH

ETHOS. JEWS SECULARIZED THEIR UNIQUE TRADITION OF SACRED LEARNING AS THEY ENTERED CIVIC LIFE IN THE LARGER WORLD. AT A TIME OF INDUSTRIAL TRANSFORMATION, WHEN TRAINED MINDS WERE IN GREAT DEMAND, JEWS FOUND THAT THEIR AGE-OLD HABITS OF EDUCATION COULD BECOME THE BASIS OF ECONOMIC SUCCESS IN THE WEST. ALL THESE ACCOMPLISHMENTS--LITERACY, CULTIVATION, ERUDITION, ACHIEVEMENT--WERE ADMIRERD IN THEIR NEW WORLD.

BUT BOOK LEARNING IS ONE THING, THE JEWISH TRADITION OF TALMUD TORAH QUITE ANOTHER. TORAH RECITATION IS NOT SPEED READING, IT IS NOT KEEPING ABREAST OF THE RESEARCH IN ONE'S FIELD, DABBING IN WORLD LITERATURE OR POLITICAL ANALYSIS, NOR AN ACQUAINTANCE WITH CONTEMPORARY WRITERS. IT IS A PROCESS OF IMMERSING ONESELF IN A SPECIAL CULTURE. WHAT THE RABBINIC WORLD CALLED LERNEN, TOO EASILY TRANSLATED SIMPLY AS "LEARNING," WAS AND IS A DISCIPLINE INTENDED TO TRANSFORM SCRIPTURE INTO LIFE.

WHEN JEWS IN THE 20TH CENTURY BEGAN TO APPLY THE LABEL, "THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK," TO THEMSELVES, THEY MEANT IT AS A LITERARY COMPLIMENT AND AS A PASSPORT INTO THE LARGER ARENA. SHARING, AS THEY DID, WITH THE CHRISTIAN WORLD LOVE OF "THE BOOK" ALLOWED THEM TO EMPHASIZE A BOND WHICH THEY HOPED THE OTHER PEOPLE OF THE BOOK WOULD ALSO FEEL. IN THEIR MINDS "THE BOOK" WAS THE BASIS OF A NEW ENTITY, WHICH THEY CALLED THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION.

IT IS THE ARGUMENT OF THIS BOOK THAT THE JEWISH SPIRIT DID NOT SET OUT TO DEVELOP A SCRIPTURE, THAT DURING MOST OF THE BIBLICAL PERIOD A WRITTEN SCRIPTURE PLAYED NO SIGNIFICANT ROLE, THAT THE RABBIS MADE PRODIGIOUS EFFORTS TO MITIGATE THE LIMITATIONS WHICH

THE EXISTENCE OF A SCRIPTURE IMPOSED, THAT THE CONCEPT OF AN ORAL MEMORIZED LAW IN PART REFLECTS THESE EFFORTS, AND THAT UNTIL THE EUROPEAN CENTURIES JUDAISM MORE OR LESS EFFECTIVELY ESCAPED THE LIMITATIONS OF SCRIPTURE.

JUDAISM IS NOT AND NEVER HAS BEEN JUST THE TEACHINGS OF A SET OF AUTHORIZED BOOKS. THE TEXT IS NOT OUR HOMELAND, LIFE IS. COMMENTARY READS IN AS READILY AS IT READS OUT. OUR BOOKS WERE MEANT TO BECOME PART OF US, THE LIVING VOICE OF GOD AND TRADITION. EXCEPT UNDER RARE CIRCUMSTANCES IN JEWISH HISTORY, THE TEXTS DID NOT DEFINE LIFE. FAR MORE THAN MANY HAVE RECOGNIZED, LIFE DEFINED THE TEXTS.

✓
Powerful, compelling
summation of Jewish
orthodox phenomenological
approaches.

