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Articles, "The Ethics of Judaism," manuscript and  
correspondence, 1978.



November 2, 1978

Dr. Fred Holck  
Cleveland State University  
University Tower  
East 24th and Euclid Ave.  
Cleveland, Ohio 44115

Dear Fred:

I am sending you my chapter for the book on ethics. I trust that it fits in with what you had in mind. I enjoyed working on it.

There are still one or two more specific citations that I have to run down and I will do so so that I can mark up the typescript. In any case, I wish you good luck with the project and I have fulfilled my promise to get it to you before the end of the year.

Sincerely,

Daniel Jeremy Silver

DJS:mp



*F-11C*

## THE ETHICS OF JUDAISM

Daniel Jeremy Silver

Judaism describes the religious civilization of the Jewish people. The goal of this religious enterprise is the consecration of life (Kedusha). "You shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy people" (Ex. 19:6). It was taught that in time the rest of the world would follow the example set by this people. "Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Is. 2:3).

The root from which the term Kadosh, holiness, was formed designates an object set apart for religious purposes. There were those, like the Nazarites of Biblical times and the somewhat later Qumran community, who withdrew into piety; but those were the few and they were not idealized as heroes of the spirit. In the everyday speech of this people when holiness was asserted of a community or an individual it described ordinary folk who, in their daily routines, were faithful to a divinely prescribed way of life. Judaism affirmed that God had made known a full set of instructions for the human community, and Kedusha described a life organized according to Torah, those Instructions.

Holiness was more than a mechanical obedience to the law of God. To be holy was to pattern oneself after God. "You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19:1). The rabbis called God "the Holy One, blessed be He." Holiness suggested God's otherness and a holy life always had about it some degree of abstinence and withdrawal from the worldly; but neither the mortification of the flesh nor withdrawal from family and marriage were encouraged. God was other and, at the same time, intimately involved with mankind; so the holy man had not only to cultivate his soul but to enter into sensitive relations with other folk. "Just as God is called merciful, be merciful. Just as God is called forgiving, be forgiving. Just as God is called just, be just. Just as God is called kind to His creatures, be kind" (Sifra).



The command, "to walk in His ways" (Deut. 10:12) was explained as a mandate to shape one's life after the attributes with which God had described Himself during the theophany of Sinai. "The Lord! The Lord! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; yet, He does not remit all punishment. . . ." (Ex. 34:6-7).

What these attributes of relationship meant when posited of God is an elegant problem in epistemology; but in the interest of moral guidance the sages pushed aside interpretive difficulties. They found helpful illustrations of God's justice and mercy in Scripture and were satisfied to encourage each generation to read these texts intuitively.

What means the text, 'You shall walk after the Lord your God?' (Deut. 13:5). Is it, then, possible for a human to walk after God's Presence; for has it not been said, 'The Lord your God is a consuming fire' (Deut. 4:24). The meaning is to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, as it is written, 'And the Lord God made for Adam and Eve coats of skin and clothed them' (Gen. 3:20) so you must clothe the naked. God visits the sick as it is written, 'And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre' (Gen. 18:1) so you must visit the sick. God comforted mourners, as it is written, 'And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son (Gen. 25:11) so you must comfort mourners. . . .

The idea of the deed as the fulcrum of the holiness enterprise led some writers to describe Judaism as ethical monotheism. The term suggests that Judaism is a religious tradition in which goodness and godliness are treated as equivalent. This is not the case. Holiness transcends goodness. Holiness points to requirements beyond those a disengaged philosopher might list if he were asked to describe responsible moral behavior. Holiness requires behavior which is in accord with the explicit prescriptions and the implicit spirit of Torah; general obligations of the order;



"honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12); and particularist obligations such as "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8). The unique forms of the Jewish way were not dismissed as parochial. How could they be? God had formulated these standards. In the end of days they would be universally acknowledged since all nations would ask to be taught His ways. If Judaism must be labeled, it is best to describe this way of holiness as Torah monotheism.

God was dependable. "All His ways are just; a faithful God, never false, true and upright is He" (Deut. 32:4). God was not given to impulse or whimsy, and His instructions were a reflex of His nature. "The law of the Lord is perfect" (Ps. 19:8). A just and merciful God could do no less than promulgate instructions which were just and ennobling. If men did not always comprehend the full purpose of some of these Instructions the failure was theirs. "The precepts of the Lord are right" (Ps. 19:9). All are essential to the holiness enterprise. The importance of the dietary laws was not enhanced by <sup>medicine's</sup> ~~medical~~ discovery of their hygienic value. They were quintessentially important because God had ordered them. ~~Much later~~ <sup>M</sup> medieval philosophers sometimes explored the sociological and emotional benefits to man of God's commands (Taamei ha Mitzvot), but they were aware that even when specific benefits could be shown, and this was not always possible, their explanations had not exhausted God's reasons.

If ethical philosophy be defined as a search for a satisfactory definition of the good and right, it must be said that traditional Judaism paid little attention to this area of speculation. The revelation at Sinai had defined good and evil for all times. "It has been told you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you" (Micah 6:8). The task this people set for themselves was to spin out the implications of



God's Instructions for the ever changing conditions of life and to synthesize the spirit of Torah so that an individual might understand how he should approach those value judgments which cannot be anticipated. Jewish ethics became autonomous when the threshold of action was crossed. The Torah stipulated the good, but the individual was free to accept or reject God's Instructions and to determine the spirit he would bring to the holiness enterprise.

A false distinction continues to be made by some apologetes who distinguish a presumed Christian emphasis on motive and disposition from a presumed Jewish emphasis on law and obedience. The Biblical revelation presumed to a morality of patient conformity rather than to a morality of empathetic and loving response. Torah was never understood as a list of specific injunctions which were to be mechanically obeyed. Torah was not the naked statement of a few laws on a page of the English translation of the Bible, but an expression of the spiritual reach of a religious culture, a seamless web of instructions - some prescriptive, some messianic, some consciousness-raising - which not only provided the structure of Jewish life but suggested the stance a Jew should take to the political, social and cultural challenges of his day and pointed to the ways in which the Jew could grow emotionally and spiritually. The Torah was a summation of God's wisdom. It presented a way of life, and suggested spirit in which that way of life should be followed. Obedience which was not willing was acceptable but not praised, and no particular value was assigned to a doglike obedience.

Torah admits no division between profane and sacred and thus admits no division between the duties which regulate relations with other men and those which govern a man's relations with God. Faith plays a central role in the ethical enterprise. There was a direct relation between conviction and conduct. The fear of God



was accepted as the primary, if primitive, motive for self-discipline. Conventional wisdom insisted that those who did not feel commanded by God inevitably lived undisciplined lives.

Anyone who wishes to acquire moral qualities must blend fear of God with every virtue, for the fear of God is the bond which unites virtues. It is like a string passed through the holes of the pearls and tied in a knot to keep them together. No doubt that by loosening the knot the pearls fall apart. Even so, the fear of God links all virtues. When it is loosened the virtues disintegrate, lacking the virtues you can have whether Torah or commandments for the entire Torah depends upon the perfection of man's moral qualities' (The Ways of the Righteous, Intro.)

Since Torah does not distinguish sacred from profane, all aspects of life must be governed by consideration of Kedusha. Judaism did not agree with those systems of thought which would render unto Caesar that which belongs to Caesar and unto God that which belongs to God. God's Instructions relate even to the use of power.

The Torah tradition includes civil and criminal law, ceremonial rules, stipulations concerning personal status as well as statements of faith and insights into moral growth and human behavior. Some of these rules, particularly those which deal with ceremonial practice or formal judicial procedure, tend to be dismissed from discussions of ethical theory as essentially devoid of ethical consequence. The traditional Jew would not have agreed. God "has sanctified us by (all) His commandments. He took his key from chapter 19 of Leviticus. This section begins with the mandate to be holy as God is holy and then presents a wide-ranging list of specific rules and moral statements which must be made a part of the life of a person who seeks after holiness. These rules require honesty in business, due process in law, that the gleanings of the vineyard be left to the landless and poor, avoidance of certain sexual relationships and Sabbath observance; as well as removing the stumbling block from before the blind and loving a neighbor as one's self. The holiness enterprise involved



all of life. Holiness transcends discipline, but begins in discipline. The ladder of saintliness must be firmly grounded before anyone can begin to climb to the higher levels.

Since holiness did not require ascetic separation and was within the reach of ordinary men, holiness talk centered, to a large degree, on programs which could enhance the process of character and conscience formation. Long experience led Jews to dismiss as trivial philosophies which lifted up spontaneity as the sole basis of ethics. Morality described a way of life, not a momentary impulse. Character formation is a slow process and Jewish moralists emphasized the importance of the first steps: parental training, the stimulation of Torah learning, community standards and a system of rewards and penalties; "withhold not correction from the child" (Prov. 23:13). The basic disciplines were imposed by family and community and explained by school and synagogue; and there were few hangups about the imposition of rules. It was taught that only a fool despises correction. Discipline always precedes freedom; just as patient practice precedes the mastery of an art. It is the hours of practice which ultimately allow the writer or musician freely and fully to express himself. To the Jew structure was not conformity but a precondition to spiritual sensitivity. "Since God wished to endow Israel with quality, He gave them a demanding Torah and the commandments" (M. Makkot 3:16).

The sages were not satisfied simply to encourage holiness by pulpit exhortation, though they did not discount the value of instruction: "The words of the wise are as goads" (Ecc. 12:11). In the popular understanding resurrection and immortality as well as health and longevity were held to be dependent upon hesed, one's faithfulness to the covenant. Preachers were not above throwing the fear of God into their



flock. The rabbinic sages were not bashful about their use of the carrot and the stick. A child must be civilized before <sup>A responsible</sup> the adult can emerge. High-mindedness is not innate but develops through conditioning and experience. Sensitivity grows like any other habit, slowly and cumulatively. Character, a pattern of internalized good habits, must develop before anyone can hope to practice the higher levels of ethical behavior. Since the ancients located intelligence, conscience and will in the soul, both learning and conditioning were seen as central elements in the sensitizing process. Torah was a way of life and Torah was a wisdom to be explored and internalized. The schoolroom where Torah was studied was essential to the process of understanding the demands of God. The synagogue where man worshipped the Holy One, praised be He, was essential to the process of sensitizing the spirit to the urgency of God's concerns. The pattern of ritual which surrounded daily life provided constant reminders that every act must be sanctified. In measure as a person devoted himself to God's service, the good habits and the strengthened character which he developed enabled him to free himself more and more from instinct and commonness. "If man sanctifies himself a little, God sanctifies him much. If man opens the door the width of a hair, God opens it for him wide enough that wagons and carriage might easily pass through." Conversely, if a person lives a carefree and careless life habit binds him ever tighter to his weakness: "Though his weaker impulses seem in the beginning only like the threads of a cobweb, in the end they become heavy like a cart rope." It followed that as man grew older and became more set in his ways, reformation of character and reorientation of values became that much more difficult. Yet, it was never impossible. The door of sincere repentance closed only at the moment of death.

An individual begins to obey God the way a child first obeys its parents; but with practice, prayer and study he transforms the human beast into a human being,



and comes to his duties willingly, recognizing the virtue of a consecrated life. Such a person has transcended his fear of God and now acts out of love of God. He obeys God because he would not do otherwise. This level of obedience is called Torah lishmah to do God's will because it is God's will.

Obedience to the yoke of the commandments was essential, but not the ultimate reach of obligation. On this foundation a man raised the edifice of his life with such art and skill as he could manage. Above obedience was the midat hasidut, the way of those who had internalized the spirit of the covenant. The hasid, the "saint", shaped his life according to the spirit of the law as well as its letter and performed acts of supererogation and of sacrificial generosity whose range the Torah could only suggest (lifne v'lifnim meshurat ha-din). By virtue of his faith, education and understanding, he had learned to serve God not only in what is obvious but in those areas where only conscience and reason could be his guide. How does anyone achieve this understanding? By studying with and following the example of religious masters; by studying Torah until his spirit became one with the word; by learning to care enough about God that he seeks to serve God at every turn.

This tradition accepted a view of the individual which emphasized both capacity and weakness. Man was created in the image of God and possessed a spirit which, if developed, permitted the individual to escape from the domination of his instincts; at the same time man was of the earth and unable to transcend his mortality. The rabbis named two tendencies present in every person: a yetzer ha-ra, the libido, the acquisitive and sexual drives, the aggressive tendencies; and the yetzer tov, conscience, generosity of spirit, empathy. Both drives are necessary to life and ever present. Man's spirit is inconstant. "The heart is devious above all things" (Jer. 17:9). Perfection belongs only to God, but, obviously, some develop finer spirits and greater



moral competence than others. How? Why? Understanding, will, education, correction, compelling example, a sense of God's commanding presence. Torah writing on ethical questions tended to be pragmatic, suggesting ways to stimulate the development of the finer character traits and <sup>a religiously</sup> ~~the~~ sensitive spirit. Over the centuries the emphasis on the probing study of God's Instructions (Talmud-Torah) developed into what might be called a Jewish ethical mode. It was sensitive and subtle and deeply concerned with the consequences of actions. Impulse can mislead. Childlike simplicity may be simply childish. When faced with a question of what to do in a particular situation <sup>for which</sup> ~~where~~ there ~~there~~ was as yet no explicit traditional guidance, the sages would debate how various themes of Torah applied and analyze the consequences of the various choices that might be made. Much in rabbinic thought took the form of recurring, increasingly subtle, discussion of actual incidents where complex ethical judgments needed to be made.

The Biblical literature did not contain a systematic analysis of character development. The wisdom literature, particularly Proverbs, lays a rather heavy emphasis on the value of strict discipline: "Train up the child in the way that he should go and he will follow you all the days of his life" (Prov. 22:6); "He who withholds the rod hates his child and he who loves him will reprove him early" (Prov. 13:24). Beyond pedagogy the moral sense was understood to develop through correction, study of Torah, practice of Torah, fasting and a regimen of worship, and a heightened awareness of the realities of God's power and love. A coarse and vulgar life was a reflex of a faith which was external to the soul, indifferently understood and carelessly practiced. Sin was seen as a result of obstinacy, rebellion, or want of knowledge. <sup>Sin resulted when</sup> ~~that is~~ a soul inattentive to the reality of God's will and judgments: "The <sup>lives</sup> fear of the Lord, that is wisdom" (Job 28:28). Freud had not yet been born and it



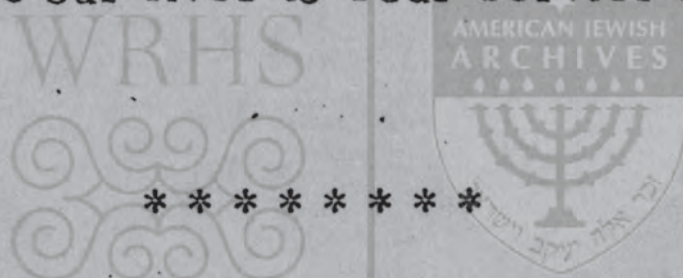
was assumed that what God asked man could do. "The command is not too hard for you" (Deut. 30:17). Irrational behavior was seen as the result of ignorance of God's will or possession by evil spirits. Sin, as it was used in this tradition, was both a condemnation and a comforting term for it measured the individual's potential. If a task is beyond one's capacity it is no sin to fail. The pedagogic question then was how to place knowledge of God in the soul and how to awaken a lethargic will.

Biblical thought asserted the reality of judgment and assumed a calculus of rewards and penalties for community behavior and later for that of the individual as well. At Sinai the commandments had been published and the community had entered into a covenant with God. In offering this covenant God had promised to sustain the community as long as it obeyed His Instructions. In acclaiming this covenant the people had affirmed their willingness to accept these obligations and to accept the consequences of their actions in respect to its terms. With the enabling of this covenant, deeds became consequential. "If you are willing and obedient you shall eat of the good of the land. If you refuse and rebel you shall be devoured with the sword" (Is. 1:19). Virtue was rewarded and virtue was its own reward. Sin was punished and sin was its own punishment.

The problem was that experience did not confirm <sup>The Teaching</sup> that the good is rewarded and sin punished, thus Job. Despite the evidence the faith affirmed God's providential care. Here the Jew made his leap of faith. The first question the gatekeeper asks of those asking admission to Paradise was whether the petitioner had kept faith in God as the righteous judge. God's universe was justly governed in relation to other mortals. Man was to <sup>pattern</sup> himself after the image of Himself that God had granted him. Ever and always the patterning model was God Himself.



Little emphasis was given to the political consequences of social commitment. The messianic enterprise was God's responsibility. Before the recent explosion of technology, man could not anticipate that activity on his part could alter fundamentally existing political or economic realities. The mission of Israel was not to create agencies of social change, but <sup>to</sup> make others appreciate the value of Torah, God's Instructions. How the Jew lived was not a private matter between himself and God. The quality of his life reflected on God. "When Israel fails to do God's will, God's name is profaned" (Mek. Shirata 3). His was a heavy obligation and the Jew prayed each day: "Our Heavenly Father, help us that by our lives we may sanctify Your name before men and testify of You and Your holy law. . . Put into our hearts the love and fear of You that we may consecrate our lives to Your service and glorify Your name in the eyes of all men."



Many Bronze Age peoples in West Asia shared a myth which taught that the gods made known the theory of justice to the king who, if he was able and wise, shaped sound law out of this awareness. The Israelite tradition reshaped this myth. God had revealed not only knowledge of the abstraction 'justice', but specific commandments. Hammurapi's code represented that emperor's particular formulations of the god Marduk's generalized teachings; the Torah reported God's exact words. Moses was not a lawmaker but a prophet, a conduit; and the words that he brought were instructional as well as legislative, a philosophy, a vision and a rule - the truth man needs to know.

Since the Mesopotamian king established the law he was the law. Israel's kings lacked the authority to make fundamental law and were held to be under God's law. When David conspired in the murder of Uriah and committed adultery with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan denounced him for a serious breach of the covenant. Jewish



thought is egalitarian. There are no excluded classes.

There were no untouchables. Every person was created as Adam had been, in God's own image. "All Israel are of royal birth." As a princeling, more importantly as a person created in God's own image, man is a person, not a thing, an end in himself, possessed of inalienable rights. Each life is sacred and any act which destroys or demeans the individual is sinful. "He who destroys a single soul, it is as if he destroys the world. He who saves a single soul, it is as if he saved the world" (T. B. San 37a). So sacred is life that every formal obligation of the law except apostasy, incest and murder can be set aside to save a person in mortal danger.

Various of Hammurapi's successors announced new rules for the kingdom. In theory, Torah was not susceptible to cultural or social change. God's Instructions had been announced once and for all at Sinai. Technically, the word was inviolate, but Torah, as the rabbis understood it, was never the naked text. The Jew approached Torah through Torah. Talmud-Torah, Torah study, was designed not only to explore the Torah's reach, but to synthesize the Torah's spirit. This process of weaving the Torah out of itself became a mandated piety, an essential element in the holiness enterprise. The Bible stipulates capital punishment for various categories of serious crime. By rabbinic times some elegant technicalities were in place that assured that capital punishment was rarely, if ever, carried out. To students of Torah this was not change but simply what had been intended by a life-affirming and justice-loving God.

A brief word about the operating standards of this process of Torah elaboration. The sages insisted, understandably, that truth was one. The most important axiom of all was the assumption of the coherence of God's words. A law required



that the gleanings of the vineyard be left for the stranger, orphan and widow: "So that you will remember that you were slaves in Egypt" (Deut. 24:22). Tzedakah - justice, charity - as the Jew understood the term, was not an act done out of the goodness of one's heart, but a duty fulfilled for the good of one's soul - to keep one-self human and sensitive. Exhortations of the order of "you shall not covet. . ." (Ex. 20:14) and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:15) suggested the importance of disciplining the disposition of the soul. The Torah included prophetic writings which raised up justice, righteousness and compassion as terms of transcending value. Prophets like Hosea, Amos and Isaiah had insisted that God had been made heartsick by a community which emphasized the ceremonial rules of the covenant without thought to the spirit of righteousness in which the whole law was framed. Though righteousness is an abstract term and capable of various definitions, its use emphasized that formal practice must be carried out within the basic context of social justice obligations. The prophets had used "justice" and "righteousness" as categories to denounce the greed, indulgence and cruelty which respectable people tolerated but which is, in fact, intolerable - adding field to field until the poor are driven off the land; filling a house with costly items of furniture and jewelry while the hungry beg at the door - and the Jewish tradition would show little patience with any attempted legitimization of injustice. Obedience to halacha, the revealed way, was basic; but a thoughtless obedience was discounted. There were always transcending imperatives.

Six hundred and thirteen commandments were given to Moses.

Three hundred and sixty-five "you shall nots," the number of the days of the solar year;

And two hundred and forty-eight "you shalls,"

Corresponding to the parts of the body.

David came and brought them down to eleven; as it is written:

"Lord, who shall sojourn in Your tabernacle? . . .

He that walks uprightly, and works righteousness,



And speaks truth in his heart;  
 That has no slander upon his tongue,  
 Nor does evil to his fellow,  
 Nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor;  
 In whose eyes a vile person is despised,  
 But he honours them that fear the Lord;  
 He that swears to his own hurt, and changes not;  
 He that puts not out his money on interest,  
 Nor takes a bribe against the innocent" (Ps. 15:1-5)  
 Isaiah came and brought them down to six;  
 as it is written:

"He that walks righteously and speaks uprightly; he  
 that despises the gain of oppressions, that shakes his  
 hands from holding of bribes, that stops his ears  
 from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from look-  
 ing upon evil" (Isa. 33:15).

Micah came and brought them down to three;  
 as it is written:

"It has been told thee, O man, what is good. . . Only to  
 do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with  
 thy God" (Mic. 6:8).

Isaiah came again and brought them down to two;  
 as it is said:

"Thus says the Lord,  
 Keep justice, and do righteousness" (Isa. 56:1).

Amos came and brought them down to one;  
 as it is said:

"For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel:  
 Seek Me, and live" (Amos 5:4).

Rav Nahman bar Isaac (died 356 C. E.) objected:

"Seek me" - may it not mean: in all the Torah?

Rather, Habakkuk came and brought them down to one;  
 as it is said:

"But the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). T. B. Mak. 23b).

#### **DURING**

In the Middle Ages manuals were published which detailed various regimens and disciplines through which character and spirit might be refined. The most popular of these was The Duties of the Heart by Bachya ibn Paquda, a Spanish sage of the eleventh century. Bachya assumed that his reader obeyed almost without thought what he called the duties of the limb, the halacha, the way commanded by God, and he concerned himself entirely with the development of what we could call the dispositions of the soul, "the duties of the heart."



For Bachya the soul was the seat of both intelligence and feeling. It followed that the development of the rational and appetitive parts of the soul must go hand in hand. The sensitizing value of Torah study, confession, prayer and a pattern of abstinence must act and react on each other until the inner man has become a more refined and spiritualized being. ~~Like most of his contemporaries,~~ Bachya encouraged a life of religious devotion and austerity, but he stopped far short of the encouraging monasticism or the abandonment of family and work. The goal is a life in which man continues to live in his community but in which his soul detaches itself from the worldly and the petty and begins to respond instinctively to the holiness enterprise.

Ultimately, godly behavior must be a byproduct of a sensitive understanding of God. The cultivation of the soul begins when there is a sharpened awareness of God's providential care. This awareness, in turn, leads to a heightened sense of the possibility of a life completely absorbed in God. A whole-hearted trust in God encourages the individual to do the right in the confidence that God will support his efforts. At this point a person begins to do the right not for show or reward but out of heartfelt devotion.

Since there was little need to theorize about the nature of the good, medieval Jewish literature concentrated on the development of those spiritual and personal disciplines which it was thought develop character and raise consciousness. Ten thousand sermons reminded the congregation that they were accountable to God for their acts. Future reward depended upon a righteous life here and now. People were encouraged to be anxious about the level of their moral reach but also to have confidence that God would judge them mercifully as well as fairly. Retribution and repentance were emphasized. There was always the possibility of growth, of change, of being forgiven for one's sins.



Besides the literature which sought out the deepest implications and furthest reaches of Torah as a prescribed way of life and the pious consciousness-raising manuals; a small number of philosophically oriented sages dealt with ethics in the Greek manner, as a discrete category of thought. In the ninth century an Egyptian academician, Saadya ben Joseph, devoted the last chapter in his religious theology, The Book of Belief and Opinions, to the question: "How man should conduct himself in this world. Saadya presented his answer in the form of a series of short essays on the proper attitude towards such subjects as asceticism, sex, money, children, power and the comforts of home. In each case his answer was essentially a rabbinic version of Aristotle's Golden Mean. Within the framework of the Torah-regulated life man's well-being is best served by an appropriate balancing of pursuits and interests. Let everything be in moderation. Any excess should be modified by a curbing discipline.

A few centuries later Maimonides (1135-1204) treated these ethical themes in a more systematic way. He defined ethics as a form of practical philosophy. Character begins to develop through conditioning so that the first test of an ethical system is the quality of the law which governs that society. God's law is without peer, ~~and the~~ <sup>who is bound To God's Law</sup> Jew grows in a most appropriate environment. Maimonides believed that the development of ethical sensitivity was essentially a concern of the appetitive soul. Good habits are taught by family, school and repetition. Sensitivity can be heightened by advice, correction and the guidance of a competent teacher who will help a person to moderate any excess.

Such conditioning of the appetitive soul was only the first stage in the process of spiritual growth. The mind must ultimately take over and direct life. Innocent of Freud, Maimonides assumed that once the confusions of philosophy had been cleared up, once a person saw life in its true dimension, once he had fully activated the



rational part of his soul, the enlightened person could take complete control of his life. As the philosopher learned more and more about God he came to understand the real world which lies behind the world of appearances and so could guide his life rationally. Indeed, Maimonides <sup>WENT ON TO</sup> suggest that in measure as such thinkers truly activate their souls they become incapable of sinning.

\* \* \* \* \*

The ramified world of Torah with its prescriptive ethics and suggestive ethical vision, its familiar norms and its teachings about the various dispositions of the soul and the training of the soul, satisfied the Jewish spirit down to modern times and continues to provide the framework within which rabbinic Jewish thought organizes itself. However, for many Jews, thrust into the teeming pluralism of modern society, this sensitive and consistent intellectual tradition is no longer self-validating. Schooled in the traditions of the European Enlightenment, they have come to question the authority of revelation, indeed, of all authority. In their minds ethical decisions must be grounded in the informed consent of the individual.

The traditional ethics had emphasized eternal values, love and obedience, community, justice, compassion and family, free will and retribution. The new spirit was skeptical of religious authority and emphasized instrumental means and pragmatic approaches to moral issues; the individual, self-interest and innovation, existential rather than eternal values. The obvious successes of science and technology in increasing the satisfactions of life led many to affirm unhesitatingly the newer approach. Many of these "new" Jews transformed <sup>The "OLD" TORAH</sup> into "prophetic Judaism" a tradition which found God in man's divinity and capacity and founded ethics on the moral outrage of the Biblical prophets against the indulgence and privileges of the elite of ancient Judea, an ethical outlook which fit in well with the popular reformist and pro-



gressive programs of the age. The specifics of the Torah tradition were melted down into what were called essential tenets - justice, love, righteousness. The result was an emphasis on broad humanist categories which, in its most extreme form, lost all specific reference to the Jew or the needs of the Jewish people. Insofar as any explicit theory undergirded this approach, it was that the "ought" could be defined on the basis of the needs of the future. A bright new day was dawning and man was under the obligation to be a partner with God in building the brave new world. Preaching explored the tension between what is and what might be and encouraged the congregation to help make it be.

As the twentieth century darkened, this messianic ethic lost some of its glow. The future was no longer what it had been just a few years before. New questions were asked. Was the divine in man strong enough to be trusted? Was man's reason capable of defining the good? Could a society which encouraged freedom fashion the necessary institutions in which character and conscience could be formed? Disappointed in the results of the Enlightenment and in the various ideologies which arose to claim man's allegiance led many to explore again the Torah approach and to ask how much of the old wine could be poured into new bottles. Martin Buber, among others, explored the old-new idea of ethics as a response to the commanding voice of God. He did so by defining revelation not as a once-and-for-all-times gift of truth, but as that response of the human spirit which has taken place whenever the Jew or the Jewish people have seriously responded to God's commanding voice. In this sense the ethics of Judaism require not simply obedience to an articulated set of laws and traditional sentiments, but obedience to the voice of God as its commands were understood by those whose writings comprise the tradition, qualified by that understanding of the will of God as it is heard by those who care deeply.