

Section III: Hashkafah

This is a series that Rav Weiss wrote for the Jewish Life Magazine, during the years 1957-1962. One article from 1968 was added to this section, being similar in content and format to the rest of the section. Much appreciation is owed to the Agudas Yisroel of America, and to their Archivist, Rabbi Moshe Kolodny, for retrieving for us many articles from their wonderful archives.

This is the introduction to the series given by the editor of the Jewish Life Magazine:

We are pleased to introduce herewith a new JEWISH LIFE feature, "Hashkofah,"(Outlook), to appear regularly in our pages. Dr. Weiss, distinguished orthodox Jewish thinker, leader, and educator, offers in this series illuminating expositions-in-brief of Torah concepts in application to modern man.

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April, 1957

1 - The Jewish Concept of Freedom

"...and we shall thank thee in a new song from our redemption and for the deliverance of our soul. Blessed art Thou O Lord who hast redeemed Israel."

(Pesach Hagadah from the blessing over the second cup.)

TORAH in relating the creation of man, defines his nature and purpose: *and G-d created man in his image, in the image of G-d he created him* (B'reshith 1:27). Cast in the Divine form, man's purpose is to fill the mold of the Divine image, the matrix of his creation, and to bespeak through his thoughts and deeds his kinship with the Almighty.

Yet, we are vexed to find the point of juncture with the Almighty, that resemblance which makes us His image. We are mortal—He is eternal. We are narrow and circumscribed, frail and beset by constant temptation—He is infinite and wise, unchangingly one and absolute. Where, then, do we resemble Him?

Our philosophers and Bible commentators have wrestled with this problem. Their conclusions can be summed up in one term: "B'chirah"—freedom of choice. Man has been endowed by his maker with intelligence and the ability to choose, to accept or to reject, and to act by his choice. This is the point of juncture. On this precious ability is based our kinship with our maker. Like the Holy One, blessed be He, we can act in sovereignty, by our own and free decision. The entirety of

Torah, as it addresses itself by command and prohibition to man, is based on this freedom of sovereign, intelligent decision.

MAN ALONE, among all creatures, has further the concomitant ability of critical self-observation. In the very act of choosing, of evaluating, he judges himself. Because he is free, he is also responsible. And because there are always two ways before him, his free choice makes him also the object of divine judgment. Reward and punishment find their justification in B'chirah.

B'chirah is the very pulsebeat of human existence. As long as he lives, man remains under the postulate of the Divine image. Necessarily, therefore, the higher he ascends the mountain of moral and intellectual achievement, the greater becomes his test, his choice, and the wider stretch out before him the horizons of infinity. By nature, man knows of no final accomplishment and his goal is ever expanding. The voice and the call which reach him do not cease. This, too, is part of man's resemblance to the eternal, infinite Creator.

The permanence of our intellectual substance, one of the

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fundamentals of our faith, is a further integral part of this basic concept of B'chirah. *And thou shalt choose life* (D'vorim 31:19)—the soul, capable, by divine endowment of free choice, is also capable of gaining eternity. Beyond that, man's spirit can permeate matter and make it share in his eternity. Thus, the narrow confines of his body and of his physical world need not become his grave. If elevated and sanctified by the good choice, man's body gains resurrection and the entire world bliss and renewal.

FREEDOM, then, is the essential category of man's soul, the meeting ground of man and G-d. It is never accomplished by the escape from the physical master. The chains of oppression may burst asunder, yet

the former captive will still remain a slave unless he understands and accepts his physical freedom as the opportunity of a self-imposed, freely accepted discipline, as the G-d-given chance for the exercise of B'chirah. Without the "deliverance of our souls" the redemption from Egypt would have been vain.

Four expressions of freedom and deliverance are found in Torah's record of the Exodus from Egypt. We recall them by the four cups of wine at the Seder. The last and culminating of these expressions reads: *And I shall take you unto Me as a people* (Sh'moth 6:7). When did we become His people? Say our Sages: on Sinai. For nowhere else will freedom ever be engraved but on the Tablets of the Divine Law.

June, 1957

2 - The Am Segulah Concept

Now, therefore, if you will truly listen to My voice and keep my covenant, then you will be My treasure among all the nations, for Mine is the entire earth (Sh'moth 19,5)

IN His preamble to the Decalogue, the Almighty pronounces His choice of Israel, conditioned on the acceptance of the covenant of Torah, as the *segulah mikol hoamim*, the chosen jewel, from among all other nations. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, the great Bible commentator who exerted so deep an influence on Maimonides, Nachmanides and all other subsequent classic Jewish thinkers, explains the term *segulah* as *an object honored and desirable like which nothing else can be found*. Accordingly, Israel has been chosen to be a treasure among all nations, a people unlike others and distinguished from them by precious qualities.

The idea of a chosen nation is not a popular one. The contemporary Jew finds it difficult to accept because of the apparent conflict with the concept of human equality so deeply ingrained in Jewish thought and action. Everything in his soul revolts against the arrogance of a scheme of human relations which condemns a human being *a priori*, from the birth on, to an inescapable lower level of existence of rights and privileges. He has seen his people decimated as a direct result of a racist theory denying this equality.

He responds with all his heart to the Divine command, so often stressed throughout Scripture, to love the stranger and to extend to him equality of rights, *one law shall prevail for you and the stranger in your midst*.

LOVE is the highest form of acceptance. It presupposes the almost complete identification with the recipient and object of such love. To love is not to extend pity nor to exercise mercy and compassion, but to bring the loved one into the circumference of one's own existence and to experience him as an integral part of him. How then, can the Jew reconcile these fundamentals of his relation to humanity with the concept of the *Am Segulah*?

Equality is not an evaluative category. It does not postulate the identity of merit and value, for if so it would deny all human ascent and development. Equality is rather the acknowledgment of the common basis and potential of all men, their being endowed with the same limitless possibility of intellectual and moral expansion. Equality, in fact, is the recognition that the only, permissible distinction between men

2 - The Am Segulah Concept

is by their utilization of this potential, that their difference in value rests solely on their moral level and virtue, and that no other measure of human value be applied to any human being. Thus, the noble is elevated above the base, the saint above the profanizer; and the righteous stands higher than the wicked who has turned his potential into the destructive pattern of evil.

This is why the choice of Israel was made contingent upon its acceptance of the Divine Law. This is why we are told by the Almighty that our distinction must be based on the keeping of the covenant—for His is the entire earth and all beings are His children.

"**SAID** Rabbi Meir: Whence do we know that even the Gentile who occupies himself with the Torah is like the High Priest? Therefore, it is written *which man shall do and live by them* (Vayikra 18:5.); Scripture does not say, *Kohanim, Leviim, Yisroelim*, but *man*. So you learn that even the Gentile who performs the Torah deeds is like unto the High Priest." (Avodah Zorah, 3). It is only in the performance of Torah and Mitzvoth that we justify the choice, and only by the enactment of the Divine precepts that we remain a *kingdom of nobles and a holy people*.

Torah was offered by the Almighty, as tradition tells us, to all the nations but only Israel chose to accept it. Yet, even now the way is open for every human being to join

the chosen people, to share its distinction and to become jewel and treasure. David the King, from whose progeny will come forth the Moshiach, was himself the descendant of a noble woman who chose poverty and suffering above the riches of her father's palace to join our people and our G-d. This is one of the reasons why we read the Book of Ruth on the *Yom Mattan Torotheynu*, on Shovuoth, the day Torah was given to us. Shemaya and Avtalyon, Onkelos the Translator and many other *Geyrim* joined the Am Segulah and became teachers of our people, revered and honored for all times. *For mine is the entire earth* — this is the portal, the open gate which never was closed to anyone seeking the goodness and the truth of Torah.

OVER 3200 years ago we stood on Sinai and accepted the Covenant, the Laws of the Torah. Since then we have remained the Chosen People; G-d's treasure among the nations, by our continued willingness *to live by them*, generation after generation, in peace and in persecution, in prosperity and in dire poverty. By our very existence as a people, we have offered our excellency to all who wanted to share it by clinging to the content of the Divine Revelation, the 613 Precepts, in word and deed. We have never sought to missionize, we have never forced our faith upon others. We are enjoined by the Torah not to accept rashly the proselyte but to test thrice his

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seriousness and the steadfastness and purity of his resolve. If like Ruth he then speaks *entreat me not to leave thee and to cease from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go and whither thou sleepest I will sleep, thy people shall be my people and thy G-d my G-d*, he is accepted in the ranks of the Am Segulah.

Ennobled by the good choice, elevated and sanctified by the good deed, precious among all nations unto the Lord by the performance of His precepts—this is Yisroel's concept of the *Am Segulah*. It is also Yisroel's expression of sublime confidence in the unlimited potential of the human soul, the cornerstone of human equality.

3 - The Concept of Kedushah

August, 1957

3 - The Concept of Kedushah

And Jacob awoke from his slumber and said: Truly the Almighty is on this place and I knew it not. And he was afraid and said: How awe-inspiring is this place. This is none other but the House of G-d and this is the gate of heaven.
(B'reshith, 28:16-17)

ONE OF the fundamental tenets of Judaism is the belief in the Divine Omnipresence. As Maimonides elucidates in the Yad Hachazokah, the concept of this omnipresence flows from the Oneness, the "Achduth," of the Almighty. Being One and Infinite, he is necessarily both omnipresent and eternal, above and beyond all limitations of space and time which are His creations.

Certainly, our Father Jacob was aware of this omnipresence long before his vision on Mount Moriah. Abraham had recognized it and had taught it to his children and disciples. What, then, was it that Jacob did not know about the Almighty's presence on this place, and what caused him to dedicate this place for the Temple to be built later on by his progeny.

As our Sages relate, Jacob went out of his way, on his flight from Esau, to pray on Moriah where Abraham stood the test of the "Akeydah." When he was granted the prophetic vision of the ladder placed on this earth and reaching up to heaven, it revealed to him that the Divine Omnipresence does not deny the possibility of *setting aside specific places*, endowed above

others with sanctity, for worship and the communion with the Almighty. He recognized that man by his action can hallow, within the finiteness of earthly space, a meeting ground between him and his Maker, a "House of G-d," above which will always be opened the "gates of heaven."

While omnipresent, G-d is closer to man in these sacred confines. While the entire earth is His footstool, there is yet the grace of immediacy bestowed upon these chosen points of juncture. The Holy Temple, and before it the Tabernacle, was the sacred place where this immediacy of the Divine Omnipresence was experienced by Israel. There, they brought the sacrifices of atonement and purification, of thanksgiving and gratitude. There, they bowed down before the Almighty and every day anew accepted his dominion.

"Kodosh" — sacred — is the term denoting apartness and separation, loftiness and elevation. Not only places of worship, but also the physical instruments set aside for the performance of worship and any other Mitzvah are "kodosh". The Sefer Torah, the Tefillin, the Tallith,

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the Siddur and even the bookcase containing our sacred writings, are endowed with Kedushah. In this material world which tends to blot out the thought and the action of spiritual dedication, they represent our affinity with G-d. They are apart and elevated above the common usage of matter. Our awe before the Almighty is expressed by the reverence with which we relate ourselves to them. The entire fabric of Jewish life is interwoven with the strands of Kedushah, resulting in the Jew's constant awareness of the Divine Omnipresence and in the sanctification of his entire existence. The focal point and wellspring of Kedusha, in the days of old, was the Holy Temple on Mount Moriah.

ON TISHA B'AV, we mourn the destruction of the Temple. We mourn our removal from the immediacy of experiencing His omnipresence, our being cast away from before His face, our being denied the entrance to that gate of heaven which Father Jacob beheld in his vision. With the destruction of the Temple, there was taken from us and from the entire world the closest point of juncture, the place of highest Kedushah.

Our Synagogues are, as our Sages teach us, small replicas of the Temple. They draw their holiness from the same source of G-d-nearness. Their very structure is to follow that of the Temple, though its holiness will never be duplicated until the Temple itself will be rebuilt

on its Mount by Moshiach. The Bimah in the middle, from which the Torah must be read, occupies the place of the altar. The Ark containing the Holy Scrolls occupies the position of the "Kodshey Kodoshim" in which was placed the "Aron Hakodesh" and the Tablets of the Law. It is to be situated on the wall which the congregation and the Chazon face in prayer, in the direction of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. The balcony or the Mechitzah take the place of the "Ezrath Nashim", the court of the women who were separated from the men in the Temple, so that no extraneous emotion or thought may intrude into our worship. The Temple, and like it the synagogue, is to be dedicated to one love only, to "Ahavath Hashem," the love to the Almighty.

THE TALMUD tells us that any generation in which the Temple is not rebuilt must consider itself as guilty as the one during which the temple was destroyed. What shall we say to a generation which has permitted ruthless hands and irreverent, shallow minds to destroy even the remnant of the Temple's sanctity retained in our Synagogues? Under the guise of modernization and under the slogan of the need to comply with the modes and moods of changing times, a concerted effort is being made to make our Synagogues conform to the meeting places of secular character. But sanctity is precisely the aloofness from, and the elevation above, the

3 - The Concept of Kedushah

profane. Kedushah is precisely the conditioning of earthly space and matter, to make it a fitting meeting ground between G-d and man. How senseless, then, is it to approach the category of the sacred with the ephemeral and man-made irrelevancies of changing tastes and preferences.

In the mourning of Tishah B'Av, the sanctity of our Synagogues and the study and the faithful observance of our Torah are our only solace. To rise to their defense and to proclaim their unchanging validity as the supreme manifestations of the Divine Omnipresence, is an integral postulate of this day.

October, 1957

4 - Thought, Word and Action

“On Rosh Hashonah, all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him like a flock of sheep, as it is written: “Who forms the hearts of them all, Who understands all their doings” (Psalms 33:15).

(Mishnah Rosh Hashonah 1,2)

MAN relates himself to the multitude of experiences which in their totality constitute his conscious life, by *Machashovah*—thought, by *Dibbur*—word, and by *Maaseh*—action. Out of the strands of *Machashovah*, *Dibbur*, and *Maaseh* is woven the fabric of his existence. Intellect, language, and the planned deed elevate man above the animal. They are the divinely given faculties by which man reacts to the phenomena of reality. His other endowments of perception, the five senses, are but the portals through which the observables of the universe enter his realm, providing the raw material for the process of living.

Machashovah—the thought, *Dibbur*—the word, and *Maaseh*—the action, are not detached from each other. A truth which man recognizes, an emotion which deeply stirs him, will burst forth in pronouncement. Not only is the word the vehicle of communication, transferring man's thought to his fellow, it is also the final station of the very process of thinking. Unless the idea finds form in the word, it will not be conclusive and satisfying even to the thinker himself in his creative loneliness. While the word overcomes and

bridges the gap between man and man, it also enables man to confront himself in self-articulation and self-clarification. The thought needs the birthstool of the word. Without the word, the thought remains stillborn.

Correspondingly, the word does not fully articulate man unless it evolves in action. Rare indeed is the instance when man would feel fully expressed by language alone. Vast acres of his spiritual territory would remain fallow, were verbal articulation to constitute the sum-total of his expression. Man culminates, and finds his highest creativeness, in the deed. Not only to think, not only to speak, but also to do what is good and right and noble—this is his constant urge, the very beat of his heart.

This is why Torah directs its commands almost entirely to human action, which alone envelopes man in a totality of experience unequalled by any other expression-form of human existence. Not even the study of the Torah itself, the greatest of all *Mitzvoth*, engaging thought and word, is sufficient in itself. As our Sages teach us, it is the greatest of all *Mitzvoth* precisely because it evokes the good deed above any

4 - Thought Word & Action

other exercise of human intellect and language.

THREE Yomim Tovim signify the month of Tishrei: Rosh Hashonah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkoth. On Rosh Hashonah, our task is to recognize the dominion of the Creator over us and all other creatures, and to conceive of ourselves as put into this existence not only by the accident of some blind or cruel fate, but by divine wisdom, purpose and design. To recognize and to accept Him as King is the motto of our prayers on this holy day, and the Shofar sound is the pronouncement of His sovereignty. To escape from the shallow and profane usage of lives and things, to avoid henceforth our robbing them of their divinely set purpose and meaning, this is the supreme conclusion of a process of thought which acknowledges G-d's presence and mastery. Rosh Hashonah is the Yom Tov of Machashovah.

The specific Mitzvah of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is Teshuvah—repentance. Were man irrevocably tied to his past, he would have lost his self-determination. The first error would condemn and enslave him forever. His free choice would be limited to the first conscious moment of responsibility, and out of this moment would come eternal salvation or, forfend, eternal failure. The splendor of human existence is based on the fact that as long as man breathes, as long as there is life in him, he is master of

his inner destiny. He can say "no" to his past and start anew, unencumbered by his past errors and transgressions. He must rectify them if they affected others, as proof of the sincerity of his repentance. Yet, its basis is the ever-present freedom of decision which overcomes even the past. "And until the moment of his death He awaits for him and if he returns He instantly accepts him." This return to G-d is expressed by the "Vidui", the pronouncement of confession. The Vidui is conditioned on true remorse and on the earnest, unqualified decision to refrain from sin in the future. Otherwise, the very confession itself constitutes a grave transgression, becomes "Vidui Peh", lip service, the defilement of the precious grace of G-d's willingness to instantly accept us. The true remorse and the true acceptance upon oneself of a life of restraint from evil and of doing good, find their sublime expression in the recital of the Vidui. We sinned and we admit it. We failed and we confess it. We want forgiveness and we ask for it. Yom Kippur is the Yom Tov of Dibbur.

Having accepted anew the "Malchuth Shomayim," the sovereignty of the Almighty, having cleansed ourselves from the shame of our past, we become worthy of rejoicing before our Lord. There is joy in leaving our permanent abodes to erect, and to dwell in, the fragile and temporary hut which signifies the divine protection which is Israel's

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in all its wanderings. There is joy in taking the festive twigs and the Ethrog and in waving them in praise and thanksgiving before the Lord towards all directions of this physical world, so miraculously and mysteriously surrounded and filled by His omnipresence. There is joy in the performance of these precepts in which our body participates and by which "all our limbs speak who is like Thee." On Sukkoth, we reap the

fruit, the harvest of the seeds of Rosh Hashonah's word and Yom Kippur's thought. Sukkoth is the Yom Tov of Maaseh.

IN the month of Tishrei the three strands of the fabric of our existence, Machashovah, Dibbur, and Maaseh, are elevated and purified. In the month in which the Almighty created the world, man too can be reborn anew.

5 - The Jewish Concept of Courage

December, 1957

5 - The Jewish Concept of Courage

"The good deeds are those which are balanced and centered between the two extremes, both of which are evil, one of them being the superabundance and the other one the deficiency. Likewise, the qualities of character are those conditions of the soul and their resulting properties which are balanced between the two evil characteristics, one of them being the exaggeration and the other one the insufficiency. From these conditions emanate all deeds.... Courage is balanced between the abandonment to dangers and the cowardice." (Maimonides, Shemonah Perokim, 4)

THE Hebrew term "Gevurah" denotes both strength of body and strength of character. Strength of body is a relative concept, of value and meaning only in relation to the physical prowess of other men, the strongest of whom must still be considered weak if compared to any more powerful species of creation. Strength of character, on the other hand, is an absolute term. It rests within man himself, it is a faculty attainable in complete disassociation and freedom from any extraneous factor.

"Who is strong? The one who masters his desires." (Pirkey Avoth 4,1). Our Sages, in search for absolute standards of human value, found the true measure of strength within the confines of the soul itself. Weak indeed is the one who must draw confirmation of his superiority from comparison with others even weaker. Only he who maintains the power of intellectual and moral decision, under all circumstances and against all inner and outer temptations, may properly be called strong.

This is the point of juncture which makes intelligible the dual meaning of "Gevurah". Higher potency of strength lies in the ability of the human spirit to disregard outside factors, not to permit their influence to impinge upon the free decision and to act by the higher dictate only. This is courage.

Our Torah and the books of our Prophets and Scribes do not extol physical strength. The battle and the war are not decided by it. Wherever they are recorded, Scripture states that it was the Almighty who delivered us from our enemies and gave them into our hands or, in the case of defeat, that we were beaten as a consequence of our guilt. Even the feats of strength of Shimshon Hagibor, one of the Divinely-inspired Judges of Israel who led our people before the period of the Kings, are introduced by the recurring words *and upon him rested the spirit of the Almighty* (Judges 14:6; 14:19; 15:14). Likewise, when his strength leaves him and he becomes "as the rest of men", Scripture states *and he did not know that the Almighty had left him*.

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THUS, it becomes clear why our Sages, in the establishment of Chanukah, did not stress the military accomplishments, the wise strategy; and the undaunted heroism of the Maccabees. It is the miracle of the little crock of pure oil, found inviolate in the defiled Temple and feeding the sacred flame for eight days, which is impressed upon us. The lights we kindled in the Temple in acknowledgment of G-d's sovereignty bespeak the purpose of the struggle. They symbolize the "Gevurah", the courage and the strength of heart, rewarded by the Almighty with physical victory.

"Thou hast delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few" — this is the true story of Chanukah. Though weak and few, we gained victory, for there is established in the Divinely-guided history of our people and of the entire world, the principle that ultimately will be given "the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the evildoers into the hands of those who perform Thy law".

We are bidden by Torah to safeguard our physical existence. Abandonment to danger of life is a grave transgression, and self-destruction is considered the most unforgiveable of sins. The Halachah clearly defines the principles by which we are permitted and sometimes even bidden to risk this physical existence. To state it in

broadest terms: to save a life, one may risk one's own life; to avoid an existence bereft of worth, one is bidden to suffer even death. Specifically, a life of sexual immorality; a life bought at the expense of a fellow man's life; and a life defiled by idolatry or by an act disavowing our fealty to G-d, are thusly considered unworthy of continuance. Wherever and whenever a situation arises forcing a Jew to purchase his existence at the price of any one of these three infractions, the Divine Law commands us rather to die than to comply and to live on. Those who suffer death for the sake of such loyalty, are called "Kedoshim". In a larger sense, all those martyred because of their Jewishness, because of their belonging to our people, are "Kedoshim".

YET, to die is the ultimate resort and the final decision. Before that, the Jew fights and wages physical battle against all odds of military superiority, though weak and few in numbers. The Maccabees have become the symbol of Jewish heroism because of their decision to rise up against the conqueror who sought to pervert their existence and to deny them the loyalty to their sanctities and their G-d. They epitomize Jewish courage, which never is the blind disregard of danger but on the contrary the exact calculation and the deliberate facing of peril for the sake of preserving the very purpose of Jewish existence.

5 - The Jewish Concept of Courage

Courage is wisdom applied to the problem of self-preservation and its worth. Courage is saintliness applied to the final estimate of values. Courage is the basis of all true freedom in its disregard of outer force. Courage is the proud manifestation of the Divine character of man's soul and its

radiance. The lights we kindle on Chanukah bespeak not only the glory of the past and the hope for the future and the Temple rebuilt. They bespeak the very soul of the Jew, more sacred than even the oil of the Temple's holy Lamp, for *"the candle of the Lord is the soul of man"* (Mishley 20:27).

February, 1958

6 - Miracle in Nature

"And it shall be for a token upon thine hand and for an insignia between thine eyes, because with a strong hand has the Almighty brought us forth from Egypt." (Sh'moth 13 : 16)

"Since the Holy One, blessed be He, will not work a sign or miracle in every generation for the eyes of every evildoer or G-d-denier, therefore He has commanded that we shall always make a remembrance and a token for what our eyes beheld and that we shall transmit the knowledge of these miracles to our children and they to their children, until the last generation...."

"Reflecting upon the great undeniable miracles, men will come to acknowledge the hidden miracles, an acknowledgment which is the foundation of the entire Torah. For indeed, one has no portion in the Torah of Moshe our Teacher, unless he believes that all our circumstances and occurrences are in reality miracles and not the consequence of nature or the course of the world, be it concerning the multitude and be it concerning the individual. But if one fulfills the Mitzvoth, he will succeed in their reward and if he transgresses against them, he will be uprooted in their punishment, all upon the decree of the Most High...." (Rabbi Mosheh Ben Nachman — Ramban — Commentary to Torah, l.c.)

THE STORY of our people begins with the achievement of an intellectual giant who, as our Sages tell us, recognized the Creator behind the obscuring curtain of the Universe. He scanned all phenomena of existence. In the contemplation of their interlocking, cosmic order he found, in utter loneliness of view, this world to be "a palace full of light", rather than an accidental and conflicting jumble of appearances ruled by opposing powers and spirits. This palace, he further concluded, was built and is maintained and lit by the Divine Architect Who in His Oneness and Infinity and Omnipotence is the source of all existence. (Midrash Rabbah B'reshith, 39,1.) When Abraham our patriarch thus found

G-d, he was chosen to become the father of a people which was forever to be distinguished by its ability to comprehend the Creator within and above His creation, a people of seers and sages who conceive of nature as of the first and enduring revelation of the Almighty.

The marvel of existence never pales to a mind identifying nature as but the outer mantle of the constant miracle. Every day anew, the Jew is bidden to look upon this world with fresh wonder, not permitting his heart and thought to be dulled by the constancy and predictability of the ever recurring "works of Creation". Every morning, he thanks the Almighty for the splendor of the heavenly lights and for the creative

6 - Miracle in Nature

renewal of all existence, as he thanks Him for having chosen Israel in the abundance of His love, to be the recipient of the second enduring, and even greater, Divine revelation, the giving of the Torah on Sinai. While in the "Birchath Ha-m'oroth" we thank the Creator for revealing Himself in Creation, in "Birchath Ahavah Rabbah" we thank Him for revealing on Sinai the purpose of Creation. The "Onochi Hashem" of the Decalogue is the Almighty speaking as the Master of "B'reshith Bara" Whose creative power was evidenced to Israel and the entire world in the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt, since only nature's Master and Maker can bend and suspend its rules to do His will. Likewise, only man's Master and Maker can give him command and direction (see Ramban, Sh'moth 20:1).

In the "Sh'ma" which follows these blessings of gratitude for the gift of Creation and the legacy of Torah, we acknowledge G-d both as the Creator, Who in His Oneness is the source of all being, and as the Sovereign Whose law we accept, to fulfill it with all our heart and soul and might. Our daily "Kabbolath Malchuth Shomayim" is based on these two great revelations of the Most High, on Creation and Torah and on their enduring continuance.

IN HIS explanation of the meaning of the Tefillin and the Mezuzah, and of our also otherwise constantly referring to and remembering the

great miracles and signs of the Exodus, Nachmanides projects this fundamental cognition of the constancy of Creation from the Macrocosm, the universe, to the Microcosm—to individual man. Torah is active in and the principle of this world. It is directed in its postulate to man. All that happens to man, "all his circumstances and occurrences" are never accidental. They are the consequence of the Divine will and justice, they are "created" for his reward or punishment. Cloaked in the mantle of nature, hidden behind the curtain of circumstantial developments, Divine Providence — the "Hashgochah P'rotith" — is unceasingly concerned with man, and his fate is the constant renewal of the great revelations of Creation and Sinai.

Thus, from the school of the Exodus and the lesson of Sinai, the people of the Torah advanced from the teachings of the "Nes Nigleh" the open miracle — to the higher level of understanding Him in the "Nes Nistor" the hidden miracle of nature and circumstance. In this advancement, Ramban sees the very criterion of faith. Without it, man has "no portion in the Torah of Moshe our Teacher", for he nullifies by his fallacious acceptance of blind fate and disrelated accident, or by his demand for a repeated suspension of the rules of nature as proof of G-d's mastery, the very purpose of Torah. He denies, by such

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myopic insistence, at once both the revelation of the "B'reshith Bara" and the revelation of the "Onochi Hashem".

IN THE sacred canon of our Bible, among the books of our T'nach, there is one scroll in which the name of G-d does not occur. This is the Scroll of Esther, the story of a rescue which Jews will always remember and continue to celebrate even in the days of Moshiach, as it is written: *and these days of Purim shall not be forgotten among the Jews nor their memory cease from their seed* (Megillath Esther 9:28). It is a story of a persecution and a deliverance which, if taken in its fractional components, is a conglomerate of accidental happenstances and

fortuitous coincidences. And yet, not one can read this story without being moved to the core of his being by the transcendence of the Divine Omnipresence which in its awesome, hidden way is the ultimate and final authority over the fate and history of all men.

Unspoken and yet undeniable, the name of G-d illuminates the story of Purim. In even greater glory than in the "Nes Nigleh", the Almighty reveals Himself in the "Nes Nistor", of which this story is the Jew's classic example and from which he has learned to penetrate the darkness of exile with the light of his knowledge of G-d's loving nearness and constant concern.

April, 1958

7 - Jewish Continuity

In every generation man is obliged to consider himself as if he himself had come forth from Egypt because it is written, "And you shall tell your son on this day as follows: for this reason did the Almighty work my deliverance when I went forth from Egypt." Not our fathers alone did the Almighty redeem but also us with them, as it is written: "And us He brought forth from there to bring us into, and to give us, the land which He had sworn to our Fathers."

(Hagodah Shel Pesach).

IT WAS in Egypt that the Divine promise to our Father Abraham that from his loins shall spring forth a great people, saw its first fulfillment. His children, the twelve tribes of Jacob, became a people in exile and slavery. Pharaoh, their cruel master, was the first to recognize it when he said: Behold, the nation of the sons of Israel are greater in number and stronger than we (Sh'moth, 1,9). Distinct by their names, their language, and their garb from their Egyptian host, the sons of Israel resisted the natural tendency of the servant, to imitate and assimilate to their rulers. In spite of oppression and serfdom, in abject misery and pitiful wretchedness, they retained unmistakably their identity and their heritage. They remained sons of their fathers, and the sanctity of their family life was kept inviolate.

Possibly because our people was born in exile, we have remained throughout history immune against our temporal masters and oppressors who "stood up in every generation to destroy us." True, our

people lost many of its sons and daughters by physical annihilation, and many fell by the wayside by the spiritual decay of submersion in foreign worships and cultures. Even from Egypt, as our Sages tell us, only a small minority, "chamushim," emerged as worthy of redemption. The others fell prey to the darkness of Egyptian enslavement and were not capable any longer of responding to the prophetic call to freedom. They perished in the days of the ninth plague, the days of darkness. And yet, historically seen, these losses were peripheral. Always, as in Egypt, the healthy core persisted and linked the Jewish past with the Jewish future.

UNLIKE other nations, we live a qualitative and not a quantitative existence and not necessarily is our fate determined by the majority. Jewish continuity does not always flow through the broad river of mass participation. Often, it chooses the current represented by the few who are heroically determined to make their existence a manifestation of

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Jewish identity and who conceive their lives to be both the repository of our heritage and the seed of our promise. This heritage is a freedom under the Divine Law and a discipline which alone make men worthy of standing on the apex of creation. This freedom and discipline have come to us with the acceptance of Torah. The promise is the vision of a redemption not limited any longer to Jacob's children, but bestowed upon all children of men, a vision of a world void of oppression and pain and filled with the joy and the light of all the goodness and all the nobility of which man's soul is capable once it has recognized its source.

Continuity means to take the past into the present. It is to overcome the finality of time and its passage. It is man's triumph over death and his approximation of G-d's eternity. While only He is truly eternal, above and beyond all time which is His creation, man, having once not been, can never be eternal in the true sense. Still, he can bespeak the eternity of the Almighty in which he is wrapped and from which he came forth, for he can merit and gain continuance, immortality and everlasting presence.

Moshe our Teacher, before he accepted the mission to redeem his people from Egypt, asked the Almighty: *When they say to me, what is His name what shall I tell them?* (Sh'moth, 3,13). In answer, the Almighty revealed to him His

ineffable Name and commanded him to teach it to Israel. This Name bespeaks the eternity of the Creator, His being the source of all existence and His loving will to maintain it and not to suffer its destruction (Commentary of Rabbenu Ovadyah Seforno, 1.c.). This was our first lesson when we became a nation: that time need not efface us, as individuals or as a people, but that we can master it and make it submissive to us as an instrument of transmission and perpetuation rather than being submissive to time as to the inexorable quicksand of oblivion.

For the Jew, the past is never just a story to be read, possibly to give some knowledge and enlightenment and then to be laid aside. For the Jew, the past is more than even a lesson of his duties. It is a revelation of his inner self and of his very present. In him, his fathers are alive. In him, all they were, all they achieved, remains true and constant. Only the Jew who declares, "I was enslaved in Egypt, and the Almighty redeemed me. I then stood on Sinai, and here I still am, proudly carrying His will and word," only this Jew belongs to the persisting core which carries the seed of the Jewish future and its promise.

PESACH is the Yom Tov of Jewish redemption, the birth hour of our people, for it is the "Time of our Freedom." Lest this freedom be lost, every year anew Jewish fathers teach their sons and mothers their

7 - Jewish Continuity

daughters in the night of the Exodus, that this redemption is not an occurrence of the past but the constant and living experience of the Jewish present. Once redeemed and delivered from bondage, this freedom has become *our* freedom, an integral part of our ability to be recipients of Jewish tradition and

sanctity, and to transmit them to our children in continuity. It is this ability that makes “Pesach Mitzrayim” into “Pesach L'Doroth” and transforms the event of the past into the pillar of light accompanying us, throughout our generations, in the nights of our exiles.

June, 1958

8 - The Premise of Faith

Said Rabbi Abahu in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah, no bird chirped, no fowl fluttered, no ox lowed, the Angels did not fly, the Seraphim did not utter the "Kedusha", the sea did not roar, the creatures did not speak; the universe was silent and mute. And the voice came forth "I am the Almighty, thy G-d".

(Medrash Rabbah Sh'moth 29, 7)

THE CORNERSTONE of Israel's faith is the belief in the revelation on Sinai. In the structure of Jewish thought, no other event or miracle occupies a similar position. Jewish history prior and subsequent to this revelation is replete with the miraculous evidences of Divine protection and guidance of our people, bespeaking the Almighty's justice and mercy. Nevertheless, they do not reveal the divine postulate to man; they do not set his purpose.

The omnipotence of the Creator is manifest in the very existence of this world. It is evident in the constancy of the natural laws which have governed it since the first Sabbath day, "Shabbath B'reshith" on which Creation donned the mantle of nature. His sovereignty over nature finds expression in the miracles which by His will supersede its laws and return it, for the higher purpose of salvation, to the matrix of Creation. Yet, neither the universe—the contemplation of which led our Father Abraham to recognize its Maker—nor our miraculous redemption from Egypt—which

resulted in that sublime acknowledgment of Divine sovereignty, the Song of the Sea—reveal the purpose of Creation and the purpose of Israel's existence. And without man's knowledge of their Divine purpose, Creation and Redemption are still incomplete.

In the count of the days of Creation, Torah singles out the sixth day by the "Heh Heyedah"—the definite article—to indicate, as our Sages explain, that the entire universe was still in suspense and remained awaiting the sixth day, namely the sixth day of Sivan on which the Torah was given on Sinai (Rashi, B'reshith 1, 31). When Moshe our Teacher was appointed by the Almighty to be the messenger of Israel's redemption, he asked for the purpose of this freedom. He was told that that Israel would accept Torah on Mount Sinai seven weeks after their liberation (Rashi and Ibn Ezra, Sh'moth 3 11-12). It is with Torah given on the sixth day of Sivan, seven weeks by count after the day of redemption, that there came to the world and to its inhabitants knowledge of their purpose,

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pronounced in climactic revelation by their Creator.

WHEN ISRAEL stood on Sinai and heard G-d's voice filling the world with the *Onochi Hashem*, they perceived in Divine inspiration the entirety of the universe receding into nothingness before His presence, so our Sages tell us. The Almighty revealed Himself to them not only as the omnipotent Creator of Heaven and Earth, but also in His omnipresence pervading all existence. As the Divine will evoked the universe ex nihilo, out of the absolute void, so the "Metziuth Hashem"—this Divine Omnipresence—forever continues to be the sole source of its existence. On Sinai, we understood that existence is nothing else but the extension of Creation, depending every split-second on the Creator and His maintaining presence, for "were it imaginable that He be not, nothing else could possibly exist" (Maimonides, Hilchoth Yesodey Torah, 1, 2).

The Divine name *Mokom*—Place—signifies this relation of the world to its Maker. "Not is the universe My place but I am the Place of the universe." It is the uninterrupted constancy of His creative will, the will which in the Beginning propelled whatever is into being, which is the place and the very possibility of any existence, for "everything leans on Him continuously in its very being" (Maimonides, l.c. 2, 10).

To be, then, does not merely mean to have been once created and henceforth been forsaken. It means to be wanted by Him now and as long as one continues to be. Thus, both our existence and our task are necessarily inseparable; His wisdom would not ordain our being without purpose.

THEREIN LIES the profound and decisive distinction between Torah and, *lehavdil*, any other religious pattern. A law emanating from the, omnipresent G-d must address itself to every facet, every situation, every contingency and every moment of existence. It cannot be a law or a ceremonial for certain hours or days or events. Like the Almighty Who embraces by His existence, and is the *Mokom* of, the entire world, so His law, too, necessarily must envelope us in our totality—without pauses and without reservations. To relegate this law to any lesser extent or sphere, would be tantamount to the denial of its Divine origin and character and, in fact, be a crude and falsifying blasphemous debasement of the One Whose omnipresence is verified by all existence.

Jewish and world history of the millennia preceding Torah is but a preamble leading to Revelation, leading to Sinai, leading to the perception of our purpose. Bereft of Torah, this world would return to the void, the *Tohu Va-vohu*, from which it emerged. *B'reshith*, "for the sake of Torah which is called *Reshith*". All the world's enchanting beauty, all its

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majestic grandeur, the flight of its birds, the song of its angels and all the talk of men will not fill it nor preserve it. As then, even so today it

will find fulfillment only in the voice that came forth on Sinai and spoke to all of us *Onochi Hashem*.

August, 1958

9 - Jewish Identity

"The adversary has spread his hand upon all her treasures, for she has seen enter her Sanctuary peoples of which Thou didst command that they should not enter Thy congregation."

(Eycha, 1:10)

When the enemies entered the Holy Temple, the Ammonites and Moabites entered with them. All ran to loot silver and gold, but the Ammonites and Moabites ran to destroy the Torah to erase its command: "No Ammonite and Moabite shall come into the congregation of the Lord." (Devorim, 23:4)

(Medrash Eichah 1:40)

THE ENEMIES of the Jewish people, from Bileam on have always consciously or instinctively directed their attacks against the Jewish spirit. To destroy the Temple was the objective of Nebuchadnezzar as much as to conquer the land. To plant an idol in the Sanctuary and to flaunt in its sacred confines the abomination of sexual immorality, was the purpose of Titus as much as to strengthen the hold of the Roman Empire on Eretz Yisroel. Short of the literal slaughter of our entire people, which the Almighty has always prevented, there was never a way to conquer the Jew unless by divorcing him from his Torah and his G-d.

We mourn the destruction of the Holy Temple, and will continue to mourn it until it is rebuilt, because freedom and an independent state of our own were never ends in themselves for the Jewish people, but rather the perfect vessels in which the pure content of Jewish essence and

Jewish identity could be preserved. The breakage of these vessels, has weakened this essence and identity and has caused, throughout the ages of our exile, the loss of all those who submitted to the onslaught of outer pressures and saw human dignity only in the terms of equality with the Gentiles. It takes men and women of truly, heroic proportions to maintain in the face of ridicule, misunderstanding and naked hatred, loyalty to a faith and to an idea and pride in an identity. Thus, in every generation many were lost by overt conversion or by the silent *sh'mad* of toppling over the periphery of Jewish consciousness and belonging.

A component of this exile-psychology marking those not possessed of the courage and heroism necessary for Galuth survival, has been the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred. There stood up in every generation men who pretended to see, or in myopic view mistakenly assumed, a need to transfer the base of Jewish

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perpetuity and Jewish peoplehood onto platforms divorced from Jewish traditions and sanctities and cut off from the deep wellsprings of Jewish continuity, exchanging them for "false cisterns which do not preserve their waters."

PARADOXICALLY, the Jewish State has now become a vehicle for such Jewish self-hatred. Some of those who fought and bled for the state want it to be a secular mold in which to form a new Israel, a new people like all other peoples, and have fallen prey to this fatal aberration. A nationalism without any metaphysical content and allegiance; a patriotism replacing millennia of yearnings with the accomplishments of parliamentarism and technology; the substitution of time for eternity and of man for G-d — this is the new form of escapism. A graver self-imposed danger to the Jewish nation cannot be found in the annals of our people. It is the destruction of the Temple transposed into a principle of Jewish nationhood. It is the willful decision to sever the Jewish present and future from the Jewish past and to substitute the vessel for the content, the "now" for the Messianic hope. It is the arrogance of taking ten years of Jewish history and placing the entire Jewish future on its secular and immature evaluation.

Who is a Jew? A taxpayer to

the Jewish State? An inhabitant of the territory of Israel? The child of a Gentile woman fathered by a Jewish transgressor of the Divine Law? Can a denier of all Jewish values and sanctities, by the mere act of a declaration, become a Jew? Or is a Jew the one who, either by birth or by adoption of their way of life, calls Abraham his father and Sarah his mother? Is a Jew the one begotten in proper wedlock of Jews or, at least, conceived in the womb and born in the labors of a Jewish mother? Hallowed are in the esteem and in the living memory of our people those born as Gentiles, the *B'nei Nechor*, who joined our people by the acceptance of Torah, signifying this acceptance by *Meelah* and *Tevilah*, by circumcision and immersion in the ritual pool. While we do not seek them out, we accept them if convinced of their moral and intellectual sincerity. We are commanded by the Almighty to extend to them our love, and this commandment is repeated, as Maimonides points out in his famous response to Rabbenu Ovadiah Ha-Ger (The Proselyte), thirty-six times in our Torah. Thus, a person may declare himself to be a Jew for himself and for all his progeny. There is no other way.

A STATE harboring in its boundaries people of divergent creeds, must offer them equal

9 - Jewish Identity

individual and collective protection. A Jewish state must, therefore, protect not only the ephemeral existence of its Jewish inhabitants but must accept as its prime obligation the protection of the perennial character of the Jewish people dwelling therein. The bastardization of the Jewish people now attempted by declaring a Jew anyone who cares to pronounce himself a Jew regardless of descendance, faith and practice, is genocide perpetrated by legislation.

To declare citizenship in the Jewish State as identical with Jewishness, is the absurd and yet inescapable consequence of the

Galuth psychology of self-hatred which has always befallen those oblivious to the higher reality of Jewish existence. This phenomenon is not new in the sad experience of our dispersion. The present tragic difference lies only in the fact that secularists denuded of the true meaning of Jewish identity are now in power in Israel. Therefore, they are in a position to destroy what even Nebuchadnezzar and Titus were never able to destroy.

Suddenly, Tisha B'Av has assumed an additional heartrending meaning for all of us.

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October, 1958

10 - T'shuvah

T'shuvah brings near those who were afar. Yesterday, the sinner was rejected before the All Present, was outcast, removed and abominated; and today he is beloved, chosen, close and befriended before Him.
(Rambam, Hilchoth T'shuvah 7:6)

THE IDEA of T'shuvah is one of the central concepts of the Jewish faith. There is no word in the English language or, for that matter, in any other language, which could serve as a proper translation of this term. In its literal meaning, T'shuvah is Return. Yet, the Hebrew term includes in its periphery also repentance, resolution, change, and atonement. Furthermore, it is not limited to emotional and intellectual components only, but also connotes practical corrective and preventive measures. The Jew "does" T'shuvah. It is a revolutionizing and shattering inner experience culminating in definite and expressive action. A limitation of this experience to mere contemplation would manifest its weakness and even insincerity.

What makes man punishable today for sins and transgressions of yesterday? Is it justice to make him accountable and suffer for something past? The answer lies in the continuity of existence and in the soul-shaping power of the human action. One who stole yesterday has, by the act of thievery, become a thief and, regardless of the cessation of this action, he yet remains a thief even today. By uttering a falsehood a man becomes a liar and remains

one, whether or not he continues to lie. What man does becomes part of his inner structure and character. It carves his spiritual physiognomy. Organically, he is the cumulative result of his entire past, the sum-total of the thoughts and actions of all his yesterdays. Therefore, the punishment, delayed though it may be, remains just and properly addressed.

If this were unchangingly so, man would remain inescapably chained to, and condemned by, his past, forever carrying its burden. The cessation of the evil in itself could neither change nor redeem him and would only prevent further deterioration of his soul. In effect, the very continuity of his existence would be almost meaningless, for the very essence of life is change and flux and growth. To remain forever what one was and to repeat but yesterday's existence, being bereft of these most precious essentials of life, would not deserve to be called life. Man's freedom would be reduced to a negative status, for he would be free only not to become worse or weaker. The best he could do in such limited freedom would be to remain stationary and suspended on the level of his downfall.

10 - T'shuvah

Were this to be true, punishment would be barren, for it would not truly atone. Judgment would be futile, for it would produce no betterment. Possibly, it would benefit society by protecting it from the effects of the repetition of the crime, but never the sinner himself. Any failure would become the mark of Cain and the first transgression the tombstone on the grave of hope. Dark indeed and desolate would be all existence before such finality of human imperfection.

BUT the sovereignty of life denies such hopelessness. *Seven-times falls the righteous and yet rises up* (Mishley, 24:16). The past does not govern and determine the present. The yesterday has no dominion over the today and the tomorrow. The ability to choose and to decide in freedom is the very pulse-beat of human existence and can break all enchainment of previous aberration. There is in man the power to reaffirm or to deny all he ever did before, the good as well as the bad, by renouncing it and henceforth acting accordingly.

"Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said even if a man is completely righteous all his days and at the end he regrets it, he has destroyed his former good deeds, as it is written: *The righteousness of the righteous will not save him on the day of his rebellion* (Ezekiel, 33:12); and even if a man is completely wicked all his days and does T'shuvah at the end, the Heavenly Tribunal will not again

mention his wickedness, as it is written: *and the wickedness of the wicked will not make him stumble on the day when he returneth from his wickedness.*" (Talmud Bavli, Kedushin 40b.)

This nullification of the past is the core of T'shuvah. It is the soul-wrenching disassociation from habit and tendency, from lust and deceit, from haughtiness and folly, from callousness and cruelty. Logically, it must be of an intensity and incisiveness at least equal to that of the previous abandonment, for otherwise it could not evoke the necessary inner change and transformation which true T'shuvah demands. T'shuvah is rebirth, as our Sages define it, a process leaving literally no part of one's existence untouched. One either emerges from T'shuvah completely reborn, *k'koton she'nolad*, or one has not done T'shuvah.

The regret, the cessation, the correction wherever possible of the consequences of the sin, and the acceptance by resolution of the proper life in the future, they all are components of T'shuvah and must be expressed in the *Vidui*. This *Vidui* is more than a confession of guilt, more than an expression of remorse, more than a prayer for forgiveness. It is a declaration of inner rebirth by the power of man's free decision and of the enthronement of the good in man over the evil to which he submitted. It is the announcement of the decision not to accept past

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actions as a compelling commitment for one's future, unless they are scrutinized and weighed again and found just and noble. It is the expressed recognition of man's ability yet to become worthy of G-d's favor, in spite of his having sullied himself and his surroundings by the defacement of his soul. It is the outcry of man being delivered again on the birthstool of the Divine Grace which in granting life also has granted him the possibility of constant renewal.

T'SHUVAH is an experience of such supernatural dimensions that our Sages declare it to be superior in some aspects to the entire life in the world to come (Pirkei Avoth, 4:22). In the moment of T'shuvah, man's proximity to his Maker is greater than at any other moment of life. *Seek the Lord while He may be*

found, call upon Him while He is near (Isaiah, 55:6)—these days of nearness, so our Sages say, are the days between Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. *Let the wicked forsake his way and the man of sin his thoughts, let him return unto the Lord and He will mercifully accept him*—for this is the closest man can come to his G-d.

In the pristine freshness of his spiritual and moral rebirth, he finds himself sheltered in the all-encompassing mercy of his G-d, and experiences the entire universe translucent with new light and new meaning. From the darkness of the past, he and his world emerge endowed with the splendor of creation, and before them stretch the infinities of ascent and perfection.

December, 1958

11 - Creation and Nature

"There are four beginnings of the year:- On the first day of Tishri is Rosh Hashonah for the years, for the count of the Sh'mittah and the Yovel, for the plantings and vegetation. On the first day of Sh'vat is Rosh Hashonah for the trees, according to the teaching of Beth Shammai. The Beth Hillel say, on the fifteenth of this month."

(Mishnah Rosh Hashonah, 1:1)

THE acknowledgement of the fact that this world is the product of Divine Creation and not the accidental outcome of a blind mechanistic process, makes for the profoundest difference in man's attitude to life and nature around him. It determines his relation to his fellow man and is decisive in his acceptance of a moral code.

The believer sees in the universe the majestic revelation of Divine power, wisdom, and goodness. He stands in awe before the omnipotence of the Almighty Who, by His will and word, called into existence all that is, out of the unimaginable nothingness. All beings and things are for him continuous evidence of the Divine presence. All existence is thus miraculous. Its constancy, far from robbing the miracle of its splendour, bespeaks the eternity of its source.

Man himself, endowed with the faculty of intellectual perception and awareness and crowned with the ability of free choice, stands out among all beings as his Maker's image, to whom He has revealed

Himself in His creation. If Creation is the revelation of the Almighty, man is the addressee of this sublime disclosure. It is to him that the world speaks. To him is directed its universal utterance of G-d.

The heavens tell the glory of the work of His hands. Day unto day flows over with saying and night unto night reveals knowledge. Without speech, without words; in silence their voice is heard" (Psalms 19:2-4).

The forces of nature do not frighten the believer as wildly unleashed and wantonly destructive. Thunder and lightning and the enchanting beauty of the first blossoms in spring, the grandeur of the great waters and the mysterious transformation of nourishment into energy and thought, evoke in him in an immediacy of recognition, gratitude, and blessing. He "*who makes winds His messengers and flaming fire His servants" (Psalms 104:4)*, has not left His Creation and will not abandon it. In a created world, man is never lonely nor ever lost. As long as there is another man, he will have a brother. As long as he

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is alive, he will be sheltered in the Divine presence.

How desolate, on the other hand, is the world for the one whose concepts are confined in the strait jacket of mechanical and physical formulas. How insignificant is man if he is but part of an inexorable process which is bereft of meaning and purpose. Among the many species, he is at best a frail mutation whose intellect is a puzzle without solution and whose awareness the cause of bleak and hopeless vexation. His added endowments may give him greater elasticity of adaptation to outer circumstance, yet he remains the playground of forces and reflexes beyond his control and judgment. Immutable in their progress and impervious to his will and determination, they make his thinking and planning an illusion. His very existence is of no import. Nothing will change by his absence as nothing has changed by his occurrence. He will be ground under the wheels of the blindly evolving mechanism which has no need of him as it has indeed no need of itself.

How untenable then is any moral postulate if addressed to a being which ultimately must define itself as a cipher and all existence as incapable of change and betterment. Man's appetites become by cold necessity his ruling maxims and personal advantage the sole principle of conduct. All beings and things are either his servants or his

mortal enemies. Truly, without the acknowledgement of Creation there can be no law and no love; the beginning of Torah is *B'reshith Bora Elokim*.

Many are the Mitzvoth of the Torah which remind man that nature is a curtain behind which he must discover the constancy of Creation. Confronted by the steady cycle of the seasons, by seed and harvest, by blossom and fruit he tends to forget in the multitude of blessings their dependence on the Creator. This is why the Jew brought the *Bikkurim*, the first fruits of his land and orchard, to the Temple, gave *T'rumah* and *Maaser*, shared his produce with the Kohen, the Levite, and the poor, affirming that the bounty is bestowed upon him by his Maker and is not the result of his own prowess, forming the pattern of his life on the basis of this acknowledgement that he lives amidst Creation and is part of it. This is why once every week, on the Shabboth, the Jew refrains from all creative work and dedicates himself to worship and study and spiritual joy, in testimony of the fact that in six days the Almighty created heaven and earth and all their hosts and rested on the seventh day. This is why the rhythm of nature is marked, just as is his own existence, by beginnings, by the Rosh Hashonah of the field and the Rosh Hashonah of the tree, relating them and him to the Eternity whence all existence flows.

11 - Creation & Nature

THUS, the Jew is also bidden to leave the soil fallow every seventh year, the year of the *Sh'mittah*, lest he forget that this earth is G-d's and its fruit a grant to be deserved. This "Shabbath Haaretz" applies even now to the Holy Land and to those who have possession of it. By its sale, a Jew may free himself from the duty of *Sh'mittah*. Yet, how proud must all of us be of the few kibbutzim whose inhabitants observe the *Sh'mittah* and do not sell their land but rejoice in the performance of this Mitzvah on holy soil, manifesting their faith in the Creator and their faith in "Kedushath Ha-aretz." During this year 5719, which is a year of *Sh'mittah*, they will neither plow nor plant nor harvest, returning their portion of nature to creation and sanctifying the name of G-d in doing so. On the fifteenth of *Sh'vat*, when

the sap has risen in the trees of Eretz Israel, Jews all over the world will rejoice. They will eat of the fruits of trees, to pronounce over them the Divine name in blessing. This, we are taught, is a merit for the trees on their Rosh Hashonah. In Israel, children will leave the cities, go out into the fields and orchards, dance around the trees, and sing out to the Lord. This year, though, they will not plant new trees as they are wont to do every year on Tu Bish'vat. They will celebrate not only Tu Bish'vat but all *Sh'mittah*. They will feel their oneness with G-d's nature and rejoice in its beauty. And all of us will again become mindful that nature is but the perpetuation of Creation and that we too, are branches of His plantings, the work of His hands wherein he may glory.

12 - Prophecy

(7th of Adar Reflections)

"I am convinced that the world, this riddle-locked enigma in which we move during the limitation of our years, is created by a hidden power of which to conceive is beyond the ability of any creature; and that there exists the power of prophecy which ties the strands between the soul of man and the will of the creator; and that there were ages joyous and full of light, generations of splendour, which possessed in their merit this power; and that humanity will ultimately regain this state of bliss. Those living in the interval have inherited the gain of these numbered generations, this is the inheritance of the Torah which is in our hands. Aside from that, anything else is vanity and the pursuit of wind."

(From a letter of Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, of blessed memory, in "Kovetz Igaroth Chazon Ish", Vol. 1, 7.)

MORAL LAW is implicit in creation. Even if the Torah had not been revealed, we could have deduced many of its laws from the observation of the animal world, so Rabbi Yochanan teaches us (Talmud Eruvin, 100b). Each of G-d's creatures bespeaks a specific principle of virtue. The "Perek Shirah" of Rabbi Eliezer Hagodol, the Tannaite, ascribes not only to the animals but also to the sky and to the earth, to sun, moon and stars, to clouds and winds, to dew and rain, to trees and flowers, such inherent teachings. From the contemplation of the universe, our Sages tell us, our Patriarch Abraham penetrated to the knowledge of the Almighty. The self-same source led him to the recognition of His will and so "he observed the Torah before it was given". Yet, such knowledge of the Divine will is indirect and difficult to transmit. A moral and legal code based on the interpretation of the

world and its creatures, could not establish its lasting authority. Its rejection would be provoked by the fact that it is arrived subjectively. Every individual would want to verify such a code within his own intellectual and emotional experience before accepting it as binding. As a result, man would live the majority of his years in error and sin before reaching the truth. Divine mercy, therefore, necessitates the direct and unmistakable communication of the divine will through the vision and the word of prophecy.

Furthermore, "Ahavath Hashem", love of the Almighty and the consuming yearning for His proximity, is the immediate result of universal perception, as pointed out by Maimonides. This yearning is not answered by the process of logical conclusions. This thirst of the soul is quenched only by the immediacy of the dialogue with G-d. Thus, in the

12 - Prophecy

system of Jewish thought, the phenomenon of prophecy is neither miraculous nor even surprising. It is an integral of the total relationship of the Creator to that creature which he has endowed with the faculty of intellect.

"And the Almighty created man... and the Almighty blessed them and the Almighty spoke to them" (B'reshith, 1, 27-28). Blessing and word reached man in natural sequence to his creation, as long as he remained in the state of intellectual and moral perfection and did not weaken the links between him and his Creator by the blemish of his disobedience. Since only the first man and woman set out in life with a fullness of all qualities, all subsequent generations of man had to attain the state of such perfection by their own labors in order to merit prophecy, as Rabbi Yehudah Halevi elucidates in the Kuzari. It is the absence of prophecy, therefore, which must be regarded an anomalous and as a consequence of human failure. In the history of our people, it is a by-product of Israel's dispersion. Redemption and the Messianic era are thus necessarily envisioned as a return of man to that G-d-nearness which is accompanied by the blessing and the direct word, the dialogue between the Almighty and his prophet.

SUPERIMPOSED then, so to speak, upon the created universe with its implicitly revealed will of the Creator, is the explicit revelation. It is

prophecy which sets purpose to the world in unmistakable and binding terms. If the heavens are G-d's throne and the earth His footstool, the Divine proclamations are articulated through His prophets. Among these proclamations, the Torah given by the Almighty through Moshe Rabbeinu ranks supreme. In Torath Moshe are authenticated the prophecies preceding it. Likewise, no succeeding prophecy can ever supersede or change Torah's content. And higher than any other prophet, before or after him, towers Moshe Rabbeinu as the recipient of the explicit law in its totality and its eternal, unchanging validity. Of no other prophet does Torah testify "mouth to mouth I speak to him, in clear view and not in riddles". Not in visions and not in prophetic dreams, but in an immediacy of colloquy never attained before nor ever to be attained hence, and in a proximity never interrupted from Sinai on until the very end of his days, Moshe Rabbeinu was addressed by the Almighty "face to face", as the messenger of His will, the "man of G-d" and the teacher of His word for all generations.

ON THE seventh day of Adar, Moshe was born to Amram, the prophet, and to Yocheved, the daughter of Levi. On the seventh day of Adar, 120 years later, Moshe had completed his task and returned his soul to his Maker. He was the pure vessel through which G-d's word and will could reach his people and the

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entire world, without distortion and undiminished in its truth and splendour by any human frailty. On his authority is based forever all Jewish law and all Jewish wisdom. In

his unequalled modesty, human greatness reached its highest summit. In his existence, eternity met with time and impregnated it forever with infinity.

13 - The Concept of Independence

June, 1959

13 - The Concept of Independence

*And there we saw giants, the sons of Anak—and we were in our eyes like locusts and so we were in their eyes. (Bamidbar 13:33)
They said, "and we were in our eyes like locusts." Spoke the Holy One, blessed be He: This I forgave them; but their saying "and so we were in their eyes," this I resented. (Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar, 16,8)*

TO BE *m'kadesh Hashem*, to be a testimony to the Almighty by the example of our national existence and individual lives and to evoke in men His awe and love by the impact of our being, is the supreme fulfillment of our role among the nations. Conversely, to avoid what may sully the imprint of our spirit upon others is one of the paramount maxims of Jewish conduct. The Halochah enjoins us from many actions which, though legally proper, may evoke the impression of callousness, of human disregard, or of a lack of piety. From Sinai on, it has been the Jewish aspiration to manifest the wisdom and veracity of Torah by the nobility of our conduct and the loftiness of our motivations.

Our endeavor to spread the knowledge of the Almighty among all men and to win them to the acceptance of His sovereignty, is conditioned upon the preservation of the purity of our faith. To add to the laws of the Torah or to diminish from them in order to gain the favor and the approval of others, is clearly contradictory to Israel's Divine mandate. We cannot entertain the proposal to change our ways and our thinking, our pattern of existence

and our values, to become more acceptable to others. We have no right to modify Torah or to dilute its standards in order to find a more ready market for it. Part of the Jewish courage has always been to cling stubbornly to the Divine precepts and their performance, regardless of the contempt and the ridicule which so often have been our lot. To sacrifice value for the sake of applause and virtue for the purchase of social acceptability is the root of all assimilation and tantamount to spiritual slavery.

IT has been the historic experience of the Jewish people that all attempts to win acceptance by the sacrifice of Jewish substance have been singularly unsuccessful. The fleeting applause was always rapidly replaced by painful disregard. Any apparent equality attained by tossing overboard the tenets and observances which set us apart from others, had to be shored-up and fed by continuous further cancellations of Jewish ideas and practices. In the end, when there was no longer anything left to give up, the initial rejection was painfully reimposed. But then, there was no inner strength left to endure it with

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dignity.

No other lesson of Jewish history has been repeated so often and in such unequivocal clarity. We were always forced by the outside world to recognize that acceptance is never bought by compromise nor equality by the flight from Jewish identity. Those who throughout the ages maintained their Jewish loyalty were upheld in their contention, which was to become the basis of the democratic ideal, that there is no meaning to equality unless it is predicated on the right to be different and that social acceptance is a sham and an indignity unless it is expressive of the desire to add the specific Jewish cognition and way of life to the living experience of humanity. The Jewish people still waits for mankind to reach the maturity of such admittance.

FRIGHTENED by the powers bent on our destruction, our people have often sunk into the depths of despair. Small and weak among the nations, the object of their unrelenting hatred and scorn, we have experienced the agonies of hopelessness and fear. "We were in our eyes as locusts" we became lowly in our own eyes and lost the confidence in our future and in the Almighty. Yet, we always emerged from the abyss of desolation and recovered our faith. In repentance, we cried out to the Almighty, "Remember Thou that we are but

dust." And we were forgiven.

But whenever we accepted the opinion of others as the measuring rod of our value and as the decisive weight on the scales of our decision, we became lost. "And so we were in their eyes" — this is the unforgivable national sin, for it makes senseless our redemption and by its inherent denial of the purpose of freedom nullifies the intent of independence. Denuding us of our inner sovereignty, it makes us unworthy of a country and a statehood of our own. The generation which accepted an external estimate as decisive for a Jewish resolution, had to perish in the desert and was not allowed to cross the border and to establish itself in the Promised Land. Ever since, destruction and exile have been linked to this approach and the tears shed in that fateful hour of weakness became a "weeping for generations".

BETWEEN the banks of our faith in the Almighty and our loyalty to His Torah flows the river of true Jewish independence. For centuries and millennia it has flowed through the desert of human isolation without being deterred from its course. We are the keepers of the Covenant. We hold the promise that from its waters will come purification and spiritual nourishment for the entire world, even "today, if we but listen to His voice."

August, 1959

14 - Messianic Hope

Our longing and our hope for the days of the Moshiach is not for the sake of gaining plenty and riches, nor in order to ride on horses, nor for the luxuries of wine and music, as those of confused opinions think. The Prophets and the men of true piety yearned for the days of Moshiach with such exceedingly strong longing, because in his days will occur the joining of the righteous and because then good conduct and wisdom will prevail. They longed for these days because of the justice of the king and because of the abundance of his integrity, the depth of his wisdom and his closeness to the Almighty, and because then will be possible the fulfillment of all the precepts of the Torah of Moshe our Teacher, may he rest in peace, without lassitude and indolence and without forcible prevention of our observance, as it is written: "No longer will they teach, a man his neighbor and a man his brother, saying 'Know the Lord', for all will know Him, from the smallest unto the greatest of them." (Jeremiah 31 :33)

(Rambam, Commentary to Mishnah Sanhedrin, 10, 1)

THERE IS no precedent in human history for a people to observe year after year, for almost two millennia, days and periods of mourning. Yet, the destruction of the Temple and the loss of national sovereignty and independence mark the Jewish calendar; the "three weeks" and especially the Ninth of Av are in all lands of our dispersion days of sorrow for every Jew who still maintains his link with Torah. Neither economic security nor civic equality and freedom have dried the Jewish tear. It is not glory lost, nor hardship suffered, nor national pride and dignity violated, which can explain the depth and the permanence of this sorrow which still awaits its solace. The Jew mourns on Tisha B'Av much more than the outer wrappings of his former loftiness and elevation.

In spite of our sins and failings, we are a people whose vision and whose hope have remained undimmed by exile and persecution. From Sinai on, we wanted to be a nation distinguished by its closeness to, and constant communion with, the Almighty. We understood that the highest joy of existence can be found only in the striving for moral perfection. We saw in all things material only the instruments to attain wisdom and goodness. We understood life as the glorious challenge to manifest the dominion of the spirit by which all limitation of matter can be overcome. We perceived of history as the development of humanity toward a G-d-nearness in which all evil would be conquered and all dross burned off by the pure flame of man's perception of the true values. We

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wanted to walk through history a living testimony to the Almighty and his Torah, a testimony of goodness and purity and saintliness. To teach and to bespeak by our mere existence the all-presence of the Lord, was our national ambition. Our Prophets spoke to us of a world united in the recognition of the Almighty, reflecting in its unity His Oneness. Never parochial, our hope and vision always embraced the entirety of mankind.

We never were willing to settle for less. We refused to exchange striving after such ends for any ephemeral accommodations. Each Jewish generation, endowed with the knowledge of the Jewish past, accepted upon itself the Jewish future as its obligation. We never wanted to live temporary existences. Each Jewish life was to be a tributary to the great stream of eternity. Success was not to be measured on the scales of the present, but rather by its productiveness for, and transmittability to, future generations. Temporary attainments or setbacks, material success or failure were thus accepted with an equanimity unintelligible to those whose lives and interests are circumscribed by external considerations. While mortal, we were marked by immortality; while passing through time, we bespoke eternities.

THE DESTRUCTION of the Beth Hamikdosh and our dispersion have removed us from the early

attainment of our vision and have subjected us to the bitter test of maintaining the Jewish ideal amidst strange surroundings. We are bereft of the completeness of Jewish life, for the fullness of observance is no longer granted to us in the absence of the Temple and in the absence of a land of our own in which Torah is the law. No longer are our leaders graced by the direct communion with G-d, by Prophecy, which ceased with the destruction of the Temple. Wisdom and goodness, learning and piety, have diminished. The true measure of human greatness has long escaped our ken. Since the *Churban*, we have steadily diminished in stature. Today, there is great danger that we might soon make peace with our national and individual imperfection and that redemption may become meaningless for us because we may no longer be aware of the shame and the oppression of human failure.

AS LONG as we still mourn the loss of the sublimeness which once was ours, as long as Tisha B'Av links us with the Jewish vision, the Jewish hope is still alive. On the day of destruction, on Tisha B'Av, Moshiach will be born, so our Sages tell us. He will come, they teach us, in either event, whether we will merit him by the fulfillment of the Divine laws and by our moral attainment, or whether we will be "all guilty". The Almighty in His mercy will not permit mankind to be doomed and to sink to even greater depth of materialistic

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depravity. There will arise a man so great and wise and pure that he will merit Prophecy and become by the sheer power of his personality the Teacher, first of Israel and then of the entire world. His word will bring refreshment to the parched and shrunken soul of humanity like a freshet in the desert. "The righteous

will join, good conduct and wisdom will prevail." No longer will brother lift a sword against his brother, for in the presence of such greatness G-d will become undeniable. The Temple will be rebuilt and all nations will stream to it and bow in reverence before the Creator. Then will we find solace.

October, 1959

15 - Justice and Mercy

He turned to the supplication of the destitute and did not spurn their prayer." (Psalms 102:18)

Said Rabbi Yitzchok: This refers to the later generations who have no prophet and no priest to teach righteousness and no Holy Temple to atone for them; but one prayer is left them which they pray on Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. Do not disdain it, for it is written: "And He did not spurn their prayer."

(Midrash Tehillim)

THE central theme of the Days of Awe is the recognition and the acceptance of the sovereignty and the rulership of the Almighty, the *Kabbolath Malchuth Shomayim*. It is the acknowledgement that behind the bewildering and seemingly accidental occurrences of life are found the directing will and wisdom of the Creator which alone determine our fate. This will and wisdom set the frame of our existence. Whatever happens to us is either the Divine response to our actions—reward or punishment—or His test of our integrity and strength.

Whether reward or punishment, we are bidden to recognize both as the Almighty's call to higher ascent and development. "The reward of the good deed is a good deed"—not to reap fruits is the purpose of our existence in this world but rather to gain wider fields to till and to plant. "The reward of sin is sin"—not the suffering of pain is our greatest fear but rather the further downfall and diminishment of our stature and value. The purpose of Divine justice, of *Din*, is that we may fathom the

approval or disapproval of our Maker in the consequences of our actions. The good opportunity offered to our choice as well as the abyss yawning before us in the wake of our transgression, the joys allotted to us as well as the pain and the anguish we must suffer—equally they are signposts guiding us to betterment.

Likewise, the test is not placed in our path by the Almighty to ascertain our value, for His omniscience precludes the need for such exploration. Man is tested to the end of bringing to realization his inner potential, for the purpose of gaining greater strength and scope. The Divine knowledge of his possibilities does not determine his development. It is his own action which is decisive for his growth. Extended between the poles of good and evil, torn between the impulses of the *Yetzer Hatov* and *Yetzer Hora*, he rises or falls solely by the exercise of his *Bechirah*, of his sovereign will. It is, in fact, this sovereignty of decision which makes him the image of his Maker and the master of his

15 - Justice and Mercy

soul, of its shrinkage or its infinite expansion. Without the test, he would remain stationary and bereft of purpose. Only out of the test can he emerge with higher quality, ready for further elevation and merit.

DIVINE justice, then, is the very pulse-beat of human existence. In reward, in punishment, or in test, man is constantly called to his purpose. Even if hardship and suffering are decreed upon him, he ought to welcome this judgment in gratitude and joyous acceptance rather than submit to it with a sense of resignation or despairing helplessness. He ought to acknowledge it as an act of grace, as the manifestation of the *Hashgochah Protis*, of the unbroken and constant link between him and the guiding hand of G-d. Where, then, is the place of *Rachamim*, for Divine mercy, where the place for the prayer to spare us from what we deserve or to grant us what we do not merit? Is not His justice highest mercy? And how can we hope or do we even dare to suggest in prayer that we be exempt from His justice, while confessing by our very turning to Him in prayer that His justice is true and wise and good? In reality, is not such supplication, couched in whatever terms of submission, either rebellion against His judgment or a blasphemous attempt to sway it? And yet, the Almighty Himself taught Moshe Rabbeinu the order of prayers and revealed Himself to His children as the G-d of boundless

mercy.

IT IS in the very purpose of Divine justice that the place of Divine mercy can be found. It is in the intent of *Din* that our prayers for *Rachamim* become justified. As long as we are granted life, our sins and our failures are revocable. If we but so choose, we can rise today above our yesterdays, not prodded by the punishment inflicted upon us, not coerced by the bitter consequences of our transgressions, but propelled by our recognition of the truth and motivated by our yearning for righteousness, goodness, and purity. By the power of our decision, by a process taking place entirely within the realm of our own being, we can shed and leave behind us the ignominy of our evil deeds, break the entanglements of habit and temptation, repair the broken walls of our principles and restore to its pristine freshness our relation to our Maker. If in earnestness and truth, before the One Who is not deceived nor swayed, we so resolve; if such upheaval takes place in our hearts, sweeping away all grime of our debasement; if in the pain of inner rebirth we become divorced from all that is shameful in our past, then Divine justice will be spared, so to speak, the task of punishment and outer direction. "For He does not desire the death of the one guilty to die, but that he return from his way and live"—then justice will be fulfilled by the gains of the life granted in mercy.

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We pray not to escape justice but to be given the chance by merit to offset failure, by goodness to atone for cruelty, by piety to rebuild the destructions of callousness, by love to heal the wounds of hatred. In prayer, we ask that the purpose of *Din*, change and betterment, be accomplished by *Rachamim*, for we recognize His will and desire life to fulfill it. Before the One Who knows our hidden thoughts and desires, we clarify in our minds and hearts that henceforth any bounty granted us

will not be misunderstood nor be misused, but that it will be accepted as His gift of greater opportunity for service and true attainment. Thusly identifying ourselves with the Divine purpose, we may hope that life and blessing be not denied us. In all its multiple variations according with the needs of man, this is the one prayer still left us: that we be granted in *Rachamim* life, so that we may stand up in *Din* and earn justification before the throne of Divine justice.

December, 1959

16 - The Great of Our People

In Memory of the Brisker Rav זצוק"ל

"And you shall speak in them when you sit in your house, when you go on the road, when you lie down, and when you rise up."
(Devorim, 6:7)

TORAH does not suffer any relegation to circumscribed spheres of human existence. The revealed will and directive of the omnipresent G-d, it is permeated by His omnipresence. Without pause and without void, its voice and call fill all our times and all our places. Nothing is more contradictory to its very essence than the fragmentation of its claim, the denial of its relevance to any given juncture of development or any constellation of circumstances. All-embracing and all-pervading, Torah is the element in which the life of the Jew is placed by Divine will. It is the source of his concepts, his weights and his measures. It is his idiom and his habitat.

Greatness in the Jew is assessed by the degree of such total envelopment of man, intellectually and emotionally, in Torah. It is the completeness of identification in which all of man's motivations coalesce with the Divine command, which marks the great of our people. The prerequisites of this confluence are the mastery of the knowledge of Torah and the purity of intentions. The ignorant cannot be truly righteous, though he may desire

righteousness. The impure cannot attain true greatness, though he may exceed in knowledge. In the Jewish view, the perfection of mind and character complement each other and cannot be achieved unless in harmonious and reciprocal development.

Our people has merited, by Divine grace and providence, the presence of such greatness in every generation. Its exponents have risen to leadership not as the consequence of outer positions of glory or strength—more often than not the Jewish Great have shied away from them—but rather as the result of our people's unquenchable yearning for completeness, for the unbroken oneness and the majestic freedom attained only in that harmony of all human faculties which these luminaries personify.

THE almost instinctive perceptiveness of the Jew, even of the unlearned and estranged, which makes him recognize the grandeur of such an existence, has possibly been the strongest factor in the miraculous continuity of our people's reverence for Torah and its Sages. This reverence reaches far beyond

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the circle of the actual observers of the Jewish law. By the hidden and silent communications of the Jewish soul, the influence of the Godol extends even to those who may seem already beyond the periphery of Jewish consciousness. They may live in the shadows and yet, without the light shed by the Jewish Sage, total darkness would long ago have engulfed them. Though they may not know it, his radiance reaches out to them and in his existence there is vouchsafed to them the hope of return.

Among our great, there emerges in every age one whom his people recognized as the Teacher of his entire generation, as the holder of Jewish wisdom and tradition, entrusted to safeguard and to transmit it. He is acknowledged as the Master of Torah whose authority to interpret it and to find in its teachings the way, the Halochah, amidst our vexations, makes him the *Rabbon shel kol B'nei Hagolah*, the Rav of the entire congregation of Israel in all the lands of its dispersion. In his concept of the Halachic truth, the highest intellectual and moral potency of the

Talmid Chochom find their sublime expression. The imprint of his spirit and his utterances mold the minds and hearts of his contemporaries. Thus he becomes an integral part of Jewish history, of Jewish perpetuity. He is the great Pillar standing fast in the quicksands of time upon whom rests securely the bridge of our continuance.

IN OUR generation, the Brisker Rav לצוק"ל was this acknowledged Master of Torah, the *Rabbon shel kol B'nei Hagolah*. Like his father Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik לצוק"ל before him, so Rabbi Yitzchak Zeev Soloveitchik לצוק"ל was the Sage and the Teacher of Israel, the living personification of Jewish greatness and Torah leadership. On Yom Kippur 5720, at Kol Nidrei, in Yerushalayim the Holy City, where he had dwelt the last eighteen years of his life and whence his light illuminated the darkness of our times, the Brisker Rav was taken from us. Bereft of his presence, of the flame of his word, of the example of his courage, and of the inspiration of his truth, all of Israel are his mourners.

17 - The Concept of Rabbinic Authority

February, 1960

17 - The Concept of Rabbinic Authority

"And the Almighty spoke all these words" — Said Rabbi Yitzchak: What the prophets were to prophesy in every generation, they received from Sinai. And not only the prophets received their prophecy from Sinai, but all Sages too, who are going to rise in every generation, every one of them received his share from Sinai. For the covenant of Torah was concluded, so Moshe spoke to Israel, "with the one who stands here with us today and with the one who is not here with us today," (Devorim 29.14). This refers to the souls which are to enter this world in the future. (Midrash Rabbah Shemoth 28:4)

SINCE our life, in all its experiences and manifestations, moves through the dimensions of space and time, the concepts of infinity and eternity which we associate with the Almighty remain beyond the ken of our grasp and imagination. Escaping our positive identification, these terms are subject to negative definitions only. Infinity is the status of non-confinement by any boundary, the freedom from any spatial condition. Eternity is the status of timelessness, an unimaginable repose and constancy dissociated from any change, for change is an occurrence possible only in time and within the categories of "before" and "after."

I, The Almighty, have not changed (Malachi 3:6) — the Creator is impervious and immune to any variation, for He is above the limitations of space and time which are His creations. "Before any thing was, didst Thou exist; and when all was made, Thou didst fill all. Thy creations do not compress Thee nor do they diminish Thee. When Thou didst make the heavens, the earth

and the waters, they did not attract nor distance Thee, for no enclosure can divide Thee." Thus sings the medieval Kabbalist and poet, Rabbi Sh'muel Hachasid (*Shir Hayichud*, third day). While imminent in His creation, G-d has remained utterly unaffected by it. Encompassing and surrounding, so to speak, in His infinity and eternity all times and all boundaries, He is neither subject to, nor determined by, any of their limitations. The Jew, while contemplating the universe, perceives in it therefore not only the evidence of Divine wisdom. He stands even more astonished before the omnipotence of the Almighty, Who, in spite of His infinity and eternity, could express and reveal Himself in a world of limitation in which the boundaries of time and space prevail. It is this awesome *tzimtzum*, the self-confinement of the Creator on which all existence emanating from Him is based, in which he sees creation's greatest miracle and grace.

ON SINAI, the Almighty revealed Himself to His chosen people as the

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Creator Who in His omnipotence and by His will bridges the gap between infinity and limitation, between eternity and fleeting-time. Elevated to the level of prophecy, the children of Israel heard the *Onochi Hashem* and recognized, so our Sages tell us, that all existence is filled and maintained by the Divine Presence. They understood that the Torah proffered to them is the Divine disclosure of the purpose of all creation. They experienced in prophetic view the *Vayered Hashem* —the Almighty "coming down," so to speak, into this material world, to make Himself understood to man, to express Himself in sound and articulation, in word and writ, and to infuse the human limitation with the content of the Divine postulate. On Sinai, infinity and eternity met space and time and were joined through the covenant of Torah whose carrier is Israel. Ever since, Israel and its Torah have remained the Divine instruments of this juncture between G-d and His world.

It is this affinity to Sinai which has preserved our people. It is this recognition of our juncture, through Torah, with eternity which has made us withstand all ravages of time and all erosions of exile and persecution. *I, the Almighty, have not changed and you, the sons of Jacob, have not been consumed* (Malachi, 1.c.) — as carriers of Torah we have been stamped with the seal of the Divine eternity and remained impervious to destruction and decay. Often

diminished, we have always risen again. Often truncated, the remnant of the people rooted in eternity always brought forth again blossom and fruit, to be a testimony by their mere existence to G-d, the infinite and eternal.

Those chosen by the Almighty to teach and to interpret Torah to His people and to the world, "received their share" on Sinai. The Prophets graced by the direct communication with the Holy One, blessed be He, as well as the *Chochmey Hatorah*, the Sages of the Torah of the later generations, represent the Divine will and wisdom revealed on Sinai. Though not as yet embodied in flesh and blood, their souls were present on Sinai and accepted their task to pronounce the eternal truth within the space and time set for their corporeal existences, for the revelation of this truth was permeated with the timelessness transcending the limitations of this world, encompassing all generations, and impregnated with the constancy of eternity which proscribes any mutation.

ON THIS constancy is based the authority of the teachers of Torah, of the rabbis whose responsibility it is to safeguard the spirit and the letter of the Divine Law and to apply its unchanging principles to the effervescent reality. Torah itself clearly defines this authority and imposes upon the Klal Yisroel the obligation to accept it in reverence. The situations and conditions under

17 - The Concept of Rabbinic Authority

which an individual Jew or the entire community may temporarily be absolved from certain precepts and observances, are set forth in the Written and in the Oral Law and are, therefore, part of its system. Any change not foreseen in Torah itself and not stipulated as to its permissibility in the Mishnah or the Talmud and thence embodied in the Shulchon Oruch, the authoritative Halachic compendium, is a transgression against the very essence of Torah. Such a transgression is of an incomparably more serious character than any iniquity caused by human frailty or lust, for it constitutes a denial of Torah's eternal validity. Any man advocating such change, arrogantly superimposes the limitations of his knowledge and insight over the infinite wisdom of the Almighty and

makes eternity submissive to time. By so doing, he automatically loses all claim to rabbinic authority, no matter how learned he may be and how pious he may appear in his outward behavior and actions.

In defining in his Thirteen Principles of Faith the fundamentals of Jewish belief, Maimonides included the principle of the unchanging constancy of Torah: "I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will never be changed and that there will never be any other law from the Creator, blessed be His Name" (Ninth Principle). For when this Torah was given, our fathers accepted it upon themselves and upon all future generations, and our souls were with them on Sinai and joined them in this acceptance.

June, 1960

18 - The Concept of "Kano'uth"

"Pinchas, the son of Eliezer, the son of Aaron the Priest, has turned away My wrath from the Children of Israel by his zealousness for My sake in their midst and, thereupon, I consumed not the Children of Israel in my zealousness. Therefore say: behold, I extend to him My covenant of peace" (Bamidbor 41:11-12).

Said the Holy One, blessed be He: "It is justice that Pinchas take his reward. Therefore, tell him, 'Behold, I extend to him My covenant of peace.'" Great is the gift of peace which He bestowed upon Pinchas, for the world can function only by peace. And all of Torah is peace, as it is written, "Her ways are the ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace" (Mishley 3:17).

And when a man comes home from the way, one bids him peace. And so, each morning one bids his fellow man peace anew, as one bade him peace the day before. We read the Sh'ma and conclude it with a blessing to the One Who spreads over His people the abode of peace. The prayer of Amidah concludes with peace; the blessing of the Priests concludes with peace. Said Rabbi Shimon Ben Chalafta: "There is no vessel which can contain blessing but the vessel of peace, as it is written (T'hilim 29:11): 'The Almighty will give strength unto His people, the Almighty will bless His people with peace'."

(Midrosh Rabbah Bamidbor 21:1)

MAIMONIDES makes the observation that the lack of clear terminology in the categories of virtue misleads man to mistake, for instance, baseness for humbleness, recklessness for courage, wastefulness for generosity, and indifference for self-control (*Sh'monah P'rokim L'Rambam, 4*). Rambam considers it, therefore, the duty of the *Chachmey Hatorah* to engage in the task of defining, in the terms of their respective age and culture and in the language spoken by those entrusted to their spiritual care, the qualities and the inferiorities which lie within the potential of the human soul. Those desirous of moral elevation and nobility of character will be enabled,

guided by these definitions, to make the proper choices. They will set their sights for the true achievement and be protected from the acceptance of apparent values which, in reality, mask deficiencies and weaknesses. Those whose language is replete with the inaccuracies of misnomers will suffer the disability of incorrect moral judgment. They will condemn what deserves praise and will praise what in reality is deserving of censure and disapproval.

Like Rambam before him, so also Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto in his classic *Mesilath Yeshorim* describes the frailty of the human judgment which often accepts wickedness as

18 - The Concept of Kano'uth

rectitude and folly as wisdom, likening the human being to a wanderer in the darkness of the night who often may imagine a lifeless pillar to be a man, and a man to be a pillar. The clarification of the concepts of good and evil and the definition of the Jewish scale of values are, therefore, primary objectives which must be reached before there can be established a pattern of conduct reflecting the Torah ideal.

This ideal is based on *D'veykuth ba-Shem* man's striving to walk in the ways of the Almighty as He has revealed them to us in His Torah and through His Prophets, and on human integrity, on man's aiming for the good and the sacred unswayed by any considerations of personal benefit. Neither the recognition of the ways of the Almighty nor our reflecting them within the confines of this world and neither the good nor the sacred are attainable without the clear knowledge of the postulates of Jewish ethics. Rooted in our sacred writings, they must be restated unmistakably in every language in which Jewish leadership addresses itself to the Jewish people and, for that matter, to all men.

Seldom has a term been used in a more derogatory fashion and an attitude been more vilified than the term and the attitude of *Kano'uth*, of zealotry in matters of the Jewish faith. To be labeled a *Kano'i* is often tantamount to the ostracization of the afflicted one. It is a value

judgment of devastating social and sometimes even economic consequences. The *Kano'im* are glibly exposed to contempt and even hatred, for they are by this nomenclature automatically identified as the enemies of the Jewish people, as unreasonable fanatics who will disregard all higher consideration to win their puny and irritatingly insignificant objectives, and as irrationally impervious to the social processes of dialogue and discipline. In short, by this name they are designated as a destructive element disruptive of the peace of the Jewish community and of the Jewish people. Apparently, nothing could be more contradictory and mutually exclusive than *Kano'uth* and *Sholom*, than zealotry and peace.

The Torah and our Sages in the Midrash teach us otherwise. Pinchas, as reward for his *Kano'uth*, is given the covenant of peace. By the principle of *middah k'neged middah*, of measure for measure, which the Almighty applies in bestowing His reward in complementary reciprocity to the deeds of man, He finds the appropriate response to zealotry in—peace. By his very zealotry Pinchas is qualified to become a Kohen, whose function it is to create peace between G-d and man and between man and his brethren, though initially only Aaron and his sons—and not his grandsons—were anointed to Priesthood. But he who rose to the defense of Jewish Purity

Section III: Hashkafah

amidst the Congregation of Israel—*he shall have and his seed after him the covenant of everlasting Priesthood, because he was zealous for his G-d* (Bamidbor 41:13).

Peace or harmony achieved by the waiving and the obliteration of those principles or convictions which differentiate us from others, are not the desirable accomplishments of tolerance and mutual respect, as the hucksters of social and political conformity want us to believe. They are debasing defeats. The ability to say "no" in the face of popular dissent, the courage to act by the dictates of one's faith and one's convictions, in disregard of the certain condemnation by the multitude and in disdain of its shifting norms and patterns—this is *Kano'uth*, standing up for G-d among men, and *D'vekuth*, cleaving in truth and trust to Him Whose Torah and Whose blessing is peace.

"He saw what happened and he remembered the Halochah"—this is how our Sages characterize the *Kano'uth* of Pinchas. The *Kano'i* in his zealousness for his G-d will never exceed the bounds of the Halochah. Vilifications, diatribes, or any other transgressions of the Shulchon Oruch are foreign to true *Kano'uth*.

But so are also the timidity when being outnumbered, the fear of becoming unpopular, and the dread of being ostracized as the consequence of following the dictates of the Almighty.

TRUE peace and harmony are possible and of any value only among those unafraid to live their convictions and to pronounce them in dignity. When we, the Jewish people, were chosen by the Almighty to be a "Kingdom of Priests," we were appointed by Him to pronounce His precepts and His postulates and to bespeak by the pattern of our existence man's kinship to G-d which is the basis of man's possibility to be *dovuk ba-Shem*, to cleave to His Maker.

Neither the shameful silence nor the paper protests of the religious groups against the recent onslaughts on our sanctities and the very foundation of our faith will fashion the only vessel which can contain G-d's blessing. We live in a generation, so it appears more clearly every day, in which the Jewish future and the Jewish peace can be secured only by those who, like Pinchas, are ready to disregard the popular labels and to perform G-d's will with *Kano'uth*.

19 - A Letter of the Chazon Ish

August, 1960

19 - A Letter of the Chazon Ish

When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, moon and stars which Thou hast established;

What is man, that Thou shouldst remember him, and the son of Adam that Thou shouldst consider him?

Yet, Thou hast distanced him but little from G-d and with honor and glory Thou hast crowned him.

Thou gavest him dominion over the works of Thy hands; all didst Thou place beneath his feet.

(T'hilim 8:4-7)

RABBI AVRAHAM YESHAYAHU KARELITZ, of sainted memory, known throughout the Jewish world by the title of his major halachic work on the Talmud as the "Chazon Ish," left a legacy of letters, the *Igroth Chazon Ish*, posthumously published by his brother-in-law Rabbi Shmuel Greineman, of blessed memory.

These letters are moving documents of the deep and personal concern of this Sage of our people with the *yochid* and the *k'lal*, the individual and the entire congregation of Israel.

His special affection was given to the young students of Torah, the *bachurey hayeshivoh*. Like all the great of the Torah, he saw in them the inner core and the future guardians of the Jewish essence, and many of his letters reveal the depth of his inner participation in their struggle for intellectual and moral ascent.

Almost invariably, he lays the foundation for his counsel and admonishment in sweeping terms,

scanning the totality of life and within it, the human potential as it is extended between the two poles of good and evil. The above-quoted verses from T'hilim may well serve as the motto of the Chazon Ish's grandiose definition of existence and of man's place in the Divine order.

The present letter is found on page 40 of the first volume of the *Igroth Chazon Ish* (Letter 14). It may appropriately be read and reflected upon in the Elul days.

"**THE** difference between those whose hearts are secure in the knowledge that the system of the universe is supervised by an eternal Overseer and those whose hearts are restless in doubt, is enormous. They are as apart in person, in kind, and in species, and there is no comparison between them. A man who has lived by the concept that this is a world full of insufficiency and pain and that the host of days rushes past in anguish in a process called life, and that the bitter end is the return to dust in a finale called death.. and suddenly this person is

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made aware of all the wealth which is man's portion on this earth, for his soul has eternal endurance, and that there is a Being above all human perception, and that this Being reigns over all creatures and metes out punishment and reward, and that there exists the power of prophecy and that through it there were days of communion between man and his Maker, blessed be He, and that through this power of prophecy were communicated to us the laws of life and the statutes of the world, and similarly this person becomes aware of other concepts equally full of light and of a preciousness without compare—such a man would stand astonished in wonder and be shaken to the core by the tremendous upheaval in the aspect of the universe and the relevance of life and by the cognition of what is man's duty in his world.

"My constant habit to assess the values of existence from the vantage point of the certainty of the Thirteen Principles of Faith in which the people of Yisroel are rooted, has gained for me a limitless love of the Torah. I have thereby also become enriched by love for my fellow man and in particular for a youth equipped with gifts of intellect and an understanding heart. A youth dedicatedly immersed in the study of Torah captivates my heart and enthralls my soul. His remembrance fills my entire word and my soul is

bound up with him by ties of love which can never be torn asunder.

"Having seen in you a sudden turn which by my definition signifies your preference of the life of the market place over the life of Torah which reigns supreme in Yeshurun, I was confronted with a calamity. Day after day, I had to overcome my great pain and could not free myself from a deep anguish persisting through all my waking hours. On one hand, I was praying for your T'shuvah, and on the other hand I was overwhelmed by despair. And because of man's self-love, I was, in doubt whether I should not endeavor to forget all the past and say, 'All hope is lost.' Still, my love for you gave me no rest. But the length of time during which you had forsaken me so completely and had evidenced no desire to have contact with me, determined me to cease remembrance and thus to seek succor in my suffering.

"How heavy, then, weighs upon me that you come to reawaken the old love which urges me to believe and to nurture joyous hopes. And yet, my despair still persists. Much more that moves my heart remains unsaid—but possibly you can understand my feelings.

"Writing with heavy heart, I remain, desiring your true happiness,

Ish".

October, 1960

20 - "Vidui"

All Mitzvoth of the Torah, be they commandments or prohibitions, if a person transgressed any one of them either intentionally or by oversight, when he does T'shuvah and returns from his sin, he must confess before the Almighty, blessed be He, for it is written: "Man or woman, when they should commit any of these transgressions, then they shall confess their sin which they committed" (Bamidbor 5:6-7). This is the Vidui, the verbal confession. This Vidui is a positive commandment. How does one confess? He says: "O G-d, I have failed, transgressed, and sinned before You, and this and this is what I did; and I have come to regret it and I am ashamed of my deeds and never will I repeat them." This is the basic statement of the Vidui.

(Rambam, Hilchoth T'shuvah, 1:1)

THE WORDS of Scripture, "*and thus man became a living being*" (Bereshith 2:7), are identically translated by Rabbi Jonathan ben Uziel and Onkelos to mean that man became a speaking being. Man's superiority above the other creatures, which are likewise denoted in Torah as *nefesh chayah*, as living beings, and his specific endowment with a soul breathed into him by the Almighty, is manifested by his faculty of speech.

Man is graced by the Creator with intellect and perception, enabling him to organize in his mind the multiplicity of observables into a system, to recognize their interdependence, to conceive their purpose within the cosmic frame. He alone has also the capacity to choose his actions freely and to accept the resulting responsibility for them. True, these wondrous abilities elevate him above all other creatures upon this earth, justifying his appellation as the *Tzelem Elokim*,

as the image of the Almighty. Yet, Rabbi Jonathan ben Uziel and Onkelos the Translator see in man's faculty to articulate, to communicate by speech, the highest manifestation of this G-d-likeness.

Articulation connotes the giving of utterance as well as its acceptance and assimilation in the mind of its addressee. It is not only the conveyance, the transmittal of inquiry and knowledge, of thought, idea, and concept, but also the concomitant ability to be the recipient of such conveyance. In man, even the eye shares in this astonishing process and thus language becomes expressed in writ. The sound and its symbol, the letter, join man with his fellow and with his G-d. The Almighty revealing Himself on Sinai gave his chosen people the *Torah Shebik'sav* and the *Torah Sheb'al Peh*, the Written and the Oral law. They heard the *Onochi Hashem* and they saw it engraved on the Tablets of Witness and

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Covenant. They still hear it in every generation from the mouths of their teachers and see it written in ink on the parchment of our Sacred Scrolls.

THE SPEECH of man is akin to revelation. As the Creator in His omnipotence and wisdom chose to bridge the ineffable gap between Himself and the creatures He evoked, by equipping them with the intellectual organs capable of receiving His manifold revelations, of discovering Him in nature, in the history of nations, in the hidden miracle, the *nes nistor*, of one's own personal fate, in one's own joy and pain and, above all, in prophecy and in Torah—so man, too, though alone in his innermost recesses, though separated by his very individuality from his fellow man and though experiencing his life and the entire world in essential uniqueness, is endowed with the power of revelation. Imparting of himself to his brother and sharing in his brother's uniqueness of existence, he crosses the chasm between them by the miraculous bridge of language. As a speaking being, as one capable of revealing himself to others and of comprehending their intellectual and spiritual identity, man reaches the closest similarity to his Maker.

Within the complexity of the human being, the word is determining. Thought and deed find form, direction, and fulfillment in the utterance. Even to the Almighty, before Whom all secrets of the heart

are revealed and before Whose eyes naught is hidden, man turns in language—in blessing, in prayer, and in confession. A gratitude not elevated to the level of thanks-giving speech, remains a passing sentiment incapable of further motivation. A need which does not find its climax in the outcry before the One Who alone can grant requests, bespeaks the sterility of despair. A remorse and a repentance not poured out in cleansing, self-revealing supplication, merely confirm the barren doubt of continued vacillation. They have not reached the core of one's being.

THE specific Mitzvah of Yom Kippur, the day we rest from all work and which therefore is called *Shabbath Shabbathon*, the day on which we deny ourself all physical sustenance and pleasure, thus diminishing as far as possible the material barriers which divide man from his Maker—the specific Mitzvah of this holiest of days is the Vidui. Lest the Vidui be a lie and an abomination of falsehood, it presupposes true inner remorse. This Vidui, as Maimonides defines it, must contain four components. It must be addressed to G-d Himself to Whom all prayer must be directed and Who alone can grant the miracle of inner rebirth, of the radiant spiritual rejuvenation of the true *Baal T'shuvah*. It must further contain the enumeration of one's negligence, lustful transgression, and rebellious disregard of the Divine postulate, for only by speaking the

20 - Vidui

Chotosi, Ovisi, Poshati will man truly clarify to himself the full impact of his weakness and debasement. It must further include the pronouncement of man's remorse and guilt and shame, for only in such pronouncement will he be shaken to the very essence of his soul. And finally, man must state before the Almighty the inescapable conclusion of addressing himself to Him with the enumeration of his failures and the depth of his repentance: he must vow to abstain forever from the evil he did and from the transgression he committed.

In the Temple of old, to be rebuilt again when Israel's collective T'shuvah will merit it, the High Priest uttered the sacred words of the

Vidui in the Holiest of Holies, asking forgiveness for himself, his house, and the entire congregation of Israel. Today, every one of us must give Vidui for himself and, in doing so before the throne of Divine Mercy, attain the upheaval of truth by which alone man can change and find betterment.

Our Sages tell us there was no more joyous day in Israel than the day of *Yom Hakippurim*. On Yom Kippur, in fulfilling the Mitzvah of Vidui, our people return to the G-d-nearness of the *Tzelem Elokim*. In creative freshness they rise to the highest kinship with the Almighty and thus fathom depths of joy which only T'shuvah can unlock.

December, 1960

21 - The Task Ahead

The following contribution is excerpted from the final portion of the Report of the Executive Vice President submitted by Dr. Samson R. Weiss at the recent 62nd Anniversary National Biennial Convention of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. We believe that readers will agree that the character of the message is in keeping with the ideological significance and literary distinction for which Dr. Weiss' Hashkofah essays are noted.

—Editor

THE Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America meets in its 62nd Anniversary National Biennial Convention at a crucial juncture of history. Humanity has been exposed, in the past two years, to tremendous stresses. The spectacular scientific advances, notably in the exploration and the conquest of space, did not evoke the exhilaration which used to accompany the accomplishments of the genius of man and the gradual unlocking of the mysteries of the universe. They rather brought with them an increasing trepidation for the fate of mankind and for the very continuation of civilization as we know it. The Cold War reached new intensities, perhaps in the wake of the deep disappointment which followed the brief rays of hope which appeared over the gloomy horizons only to soon give ground to even darker pessimism. International diplomacy continued in its failure to find a common language and purpose. Even within the two dominating power blocs, new stresses and schisms appeared and assumed threatening proportions,

contributing an added dimension to the feeling of helplessness engulfing mankind.

The Jewish people has always evidenced a peculiar sensitivity to the atmosphere of historic conditions and developments. This is due not only to our exposed position among the nations of the world but also to our deep sense of identification with mankind as a whole. The People of the Torah, the first to proclaim the sovereignty of the Creator, has always seen the brother in every human being. They never could isolate their own destiny, or attempt to retreat into their own precincts, from the fate of the other inhabitants of G-d's earth. This peculiarity continues to mark the Jew and has remained a sign of his spiritual nobility, though he may have become dissociated from the religious practices and observances which identify the Jew as the spiritual heir of the Chosen People. Not because we are necessarily singled out for the threat, but rather because of the extent of our humane concern, we react with

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seismographic acuity to the slightest tremor and are shaken by the distant pain and distress.

IN our age in which, due to the rapidity of communication and transport, distance has become an ever diminishing factor in the lives of men, territorial boundaries cannot serve any longer as shields of isolation. The fate of nations has become intertwined. The resulting responsibilities for the leaders of the Great Powers have assumed awesome proportions. We find ourselves in a new era which cries out for bold and imaginative new approaches and measures in all fields of collective human endeavor. The Jewish community, too, is thus bidden to discard many of the once possibly adequate approaches and techniques in acknowledgement of our new needs and contingencies. The challenge of today will only be met by the exercise of, our highest creative potential and by a measure of inner discipline by which alone we can make our specific Jewish contribution to the building of a better tomorrow for all men.

Torah-true Judaism pronounces, as one of its basic concepts, the eternal validity of the Divine Law as revealed on Sinai. It charges man with the task to apply Torah's eternally pertinent and unchanging principles to the effervescent reality. It rejects the proposition that time-conditioned, ephemeral situations, and among them the human constellation, can justify any

dispensation or abrogation or change of Torah or of any part of it. Deeply imbedded in Torah are those guideposts which enable the Jew to rise to the challenge of the outer situation and to make Torah and Mitzvah viable within them. It is the Halochah, the majestic system of Jewish law and Jewish tradition, which protects the constancy of the Jewish idea and prevents time from assuming dominion over eternity.

More and more of our people are returning to Torah-true Judaism, to the Halochah, in their yearning for this constancy amidst the flux. The signs and the symptoms of this yearning and of this earnest search are evident everywhere. Jewish content and Jewish knowledge—as distinct and apart from concern with Jewish needs and from participation in Jewish affairs—have become part of the common Jewish program, joined even by Jewish organizations and movements heretofore completely bent on assimilation and secularization. We find it hard to share the opinion that the increase in "Jewish" interest is a surface; and not a depth, symptom, and that the statistical increase of Jewish education can be neatly classified as the consequence of certain economical and sociological changes. These developments must rather be recognized as of a much more profound nature, and they present the orthodox Jewish community with an immense challenge.

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IT IS the task of Jewish leadership to steer the ship of Jewish continuity through the uncharted seas of the future. We may enter this voyage with confidence. The growth of the Hebrew Day School movement and the development of the higher institutions of Jewish learning holds out the great promise of a learned, well-informed orthodox laity which will supply inspired leaders and loyal following, guided by a rabbinate which embodies Torah scholarship and analytic understanding of the American climate. American Orthodox Jewry is also developing

the type of organization which holds out the promise of a steadily increasing ability to discharge our responsibilities in a disciplined and effective manner.

Our responsibilities are commensurate with the great promise and potential. We are called upon by Divine Providence to represent, in a world filled with chaos and fear, the confidence of faith and the serenity which is the portion of those who chart their course by the signposts of eternity.

February, 1961

22 - The Divine Intent and Man

When the letters of extinction were signed and given into the hands of Haman, he and his associates joyously came out from the palace and met Mordecai walking before them. At this moment, Mordecai saw three children who came from the school and hastened after them. He asked the first one to tell him the verse which he had learned today. The child answered: "Fear not the sudden threat nor the ruin of the wicked when it cometh" (Mishley 3:25).

"I, too," said the second child, "studied today and this is the verse. I learned: 'Take counsel together and it shall come to naught; speak the word and it shall not stand, for with us is the Almighty' " (Isaiah 8:10).

Said the third child: "Until your advanced years I am the same and until your old age I shall carry you. I have made you, I will bear and carry you and bring you deliverance" (Isaiah 46:4).

(Midrash Megillath Esther, 7)

THE acknowledgement of the Divine concern with every being demands of us to search every occurrence falling within the orbit of our experience for its meaning and purpose. To permit any event to be registered as accidental, as the outgrowth of blind circumstance and, therefore, as devoid of particular and personal directive, is tantamount to a denial of Divine providence, justice, and mercy. It is, in essence, a correlate of the concept of the Almighty's omnipresence, as it permeates every phase of existence, which precludes the interpretation of any happening as bereft of significance. Behind the curtain of the obvious flows the quiet and eternal stream of the Divine intent.

It is this intent which presents man with a continuous challenge. Possessed of the ability of

discernment and intelligent decision, endowed with the capacity of choosing freely his actions and his way, man finds himself confronted by the superior will of his Maker. In fact, he is vexed to find any realm in which, against the background of the Almighty's sovereignty, his choice becomes of meaning. It was Maimonides who gave classic expression to this problem. "Know, then, that everything is done according to His will, but that nevertheless our actions are given to our choice. For, just as the Creator wanted that fire and air go upwards and water and dust go downward and that the globe turn and that likewise all creations of this world behave in the manner which His will assigned to them, so He wanted that man be endowed with freedom and that all his actions be governed by his sovereign choice" (Hilchoth

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T'shuvah 5,4). By this freedom of action, man is distinguished among all creatures. All other things and beings perform G-d's will by nature, in unquestioning obedience. Only man is bidden to perform His will by conscious acceptance. This is the premise of the entire Torah. To all other things and beings the Creator spoke, "Thou shalt be." Only to man He also spoke, "Thou shalt do."

This knowledge sets us apart from all others who drew from the acknowledgement of a supreme being the paralyzing conclusion of helplessness and who considered any human action as pre-ordained. In their view, the supreme being and its supreme will pre-empted man's shaping his own destiny. His fate, they thought, is set. Sinner or saint are equally insignificant, set apart merely by labels, motivated by compulsory and inexorable decrees from above, mere puppets in a play not of their making. On Sinai, man was set free from the confining jail of this fatalism. On Sinai, G-d revealed not only Himself. He also revealed man, heretofore unknown to himself and chained in the fetters of superstition, ignorance, and error. The true grandeur of human existence, experienced before Sinai only by the Patriarchs and those few who lived by their teachings, thus became the portion of an entire people who were to manifest and teach it by their very existence to all humanity.

Sovereign man, so Torah teaches

us, can identify himself with his Maker by making his will a conscious and active part of the Divine purpose. By the exercise of his freedom he can elevate himself and the entire world, for nothing is final as long as life and thought are granted him. The fool can attain wisdom and the wicked goodness. Cruelty can be replaced with love and sadness transformed into the laughter of joy. Before him stretch the infinite vistas of his association with the Almighty, a "partnership in the works of creation" which endows with meaning every moment of existence and enables man to penetrate behind the surface of appearances.

MEGILLATH ESTHER is the record of a series of seeming coincidences and of the manner in which Mordecai "the Jew" found in them indication and purpose. Where others saw only accident, he found revelation. The rise of the oppressor and his apparently insurmountable power were seen by him as a test of his faith and of the faith of his people, as but one strand in the fabric of destiny. Three children, coming from the school of Torah and quoting the verses of confidence and trust, signified to him the dawn of salvation. He now understood why Esther the Prophetess, the noble and the pure, was chosen queen and why he overheard the plot of the king's assassination. In the final climax, brought about by the sleeplessness of the king, the pattern emerges for

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all to see and even the gallows erected by Haman find their purpose. Esther's plea for her people, delayed for one day until the Almighty indicates to her by Mordecai's triumphant ride the turning point, is heard and her people saved.

Nowhere in the Book of Esther

appears the name of G-d. Yet, He becomes undeniable as the story unfolds. To find the traces of the Almighty in the developments of history and to follow them, to discover Him and His will where others see only painful confusion and senseless turmoil, this is this genius of Israel.

June, 1961

23 - Yochid and K'lal

"Lift up the head of the entire congregation of the sons of Israel according to their families, by the house of their fathers, in the number of their names, every male individually" (Bamidbor 1:2).

In Bamidbor Rabbah I saw as follows: "In the number of their names individually," The Holy One, blessed be He, told him to count them with honor and greatness, every one of them. You shall not ask, He told Moshe, of the head: of the family, 'How many are there in your family, how many sons do you have?' but every single one of them shall pass before you in awe and honor. This is why it is written: "In the number of their names, from twenty years on upward, according to their heads" (Bamidbor 1: 18).

(Ramban, Commentary to Torah, Bamidbor 1:45).

THE complexity of modern living tends to make man progressively dependent on society—the market, the organization, the city, and the state—obliterating his own personal and essential uniqueness. He is valued—often, tragically, even by himself—by his "contribution" to the larger social unit and by his ability to become a participant in its composite endeavor and intent. Concomitantly, the submersion of any tendency to differ has emerged as a prerequisite of such participation.

Not everywhere is such loss of personal uniqueness regarded as undesirable. A large part of humanity is presently governed by systems which demand of their subject's total conformity and identification with the national and global aspirations of the ruling party and its ideology, which, in these systems, are co-extensive with the state and its doctrine. Even in some of the major democracies, the

encroachment of the state upon the freedoms of its citizens increasingly is assuming proportions which imperil the very foundations of a free society. Thus, man is being slowly relegated to a role of participation in mass motion. He traverses his road by marching in step with others, one of the many, a fraction of the aggregate, a mere number in a count of which only the sum-total is still of any pertinence.

A world view which conceives of the universe as a creation and regards existence as the continuous manifestation of the Creator's will and wisdom, cannot possibly accept such notions of man's place in society. The work of creation finds its climax in man—single, individual man. Revelation on Sinai transforms Israel from a family of tribes into a nation precisely because every individual accepted the covenant as binding upon himself personally. "I am the Almighty G-d who brought thee out of the land of Egypt out of

the house of bondage"—this is addressed, as is every subsequent word of the Decalogue and as are most of the Commandments and prohibitions of the Torah, to the *yochid*, to the individual whose life is vouchsafed by his Maker, whose suffering is known to Him, and whose prayers He hears.

THAT there occurred a time in history when an entire people joined in a prophetic view transcending all possible achievement of the speculative intellect—perceiving the true reality of life and existence as G-d-given and G-d-sheltered—makes that hour on Sinai the pivotal experience of all humanity. Having recognized on Sinai his own constant and immediate link to his G-d, the Jew forever sees in his fellow man an equally sovereign, free, and unique manifestation of the selfsame phenomenon which he himself represents and which defies description: creation. The sanctity of existence therefore supersedes all others on the Jewish scale of values, for it is the purest reflection in this world of the sanctity of the Almighty.

Many of the laws of the Torah bespeak the higher potency of the *k'lal*, of the many, in advancing life's divinely set purposes. The *k'lal* and the congregation have duties and prerogatives going beyond those of any individual. Yet, the congregation of Israel is not an amorphous mass. On the contrary, the Jew is bidden to join with the congregation because

only in congregation can he fulfill these duties and attain these prerogatives. It is within the *k'lal* that the *yochid* can reach his fullest moral and intellectual potential; and it is the essential duty and concern of the *k'lal* to provide the *yochid* with the climate and the means of reaching this potential, for the *yochid* forever remains the primary purpose of the *k'lal*. The Jewish collectivity thus is based on the concept of individual responsibility, from which there is no dispensation, neither by solitariness nor by submersion.

AFTER Sinai, the members of the Jewish tribes were to be counted by the shekel, the equal contribution assuring every Jew of his individual portion in the communal worship and sacrifice; and when this count was totaled to arrive at the number of the Jewish army, the Teacher and the Priest and the Princes of the tribes did not debase their people by this count. Everyone passing muster before them appeared as the *yochid*, as the utterly irreplaceable, unique, and sacred being in whom the Oneness of his Maker is so gloriously reflected. In awe and in honor they stepped forward and thus entered "the secret of the nation and the writ of the sons of Israel" (Ramban, *loc. cit.*).

We are the people who shall never permit man to be toppled from the throne of creation.

August, 1961

24 - Parenthood

And He spoke: "I am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob" (Shemos 3:6)

Blessed be He, revealed himself to Moshe, he was a novice in prophecy. Said the Almighty: "If I appear to him with a strong voice, I would frighten him; if with a low voice, he might become contemptuous of prophecy". What did He do? He revealed Himself to Moshe in the voice of his father Amram. Spoke Moshe: "Here am I. What does my father wish?" Spoke the Holy One Blessed be He: "I am not your father, but the G-d of your father. In disguise I come to you lest you be frightened..."

"Moshe rejoiced and said 'Behold my father is counted with the Patriarchs'..."

(Medrash Rabbah, Shemos 3:1)

MAN overcomes the limitations of his physical life span, reaching out beyond it into the future, by the transmission of his intellectual and moral attainments to coming generations. The ways of such transmittal are manifold. They range from his being the object of observation, teaching by the example of his conduct, to the articulation of his thoughts and emotions in word and writ specifically intended for those who are likely to survive him. The chosen few may achieve the climactic grandeur of the parting hour in which fathers utter their last injunctions to their children and masters and leaders proffer their final instructions to their disciples and their entire people. Our Torah, our sacred literature, and the annals of our people are replete with the recount of our great whose corporeal existences ended in this crescendo of the human spirit.

Man experiences in his progeny the physical continuance in which he instinctively realizes escape from death. He shares with all other creatures the ability to procreate, the miraculous endowment bestowed by the Creator upon all living organisms. But unlike any one of them, he alone is also granted in the child a depository of all his experiences and cognitions, of all his judgments and conclusions. Compared to this unspeakably more precious intellectual and spiritual continuity vouchsafed him in his seed, the physical immortality represented by the child pales to insignificance. It is in fact this continuity which hallows the physical vessel and endows it with the sanctity ascribed by Torah to the human body. It is the parental duty to teach, to impart wisdom and goodness to one's child, and not the duty to provide food and shelter, which is stressed by the Torah, for

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therein is found the essence of parenthood. This is also why the *rav*, the teacher, is compared to the father and the *talmid*, the pupil, to the son. "Whosoever teaches Torah to the son of his fellow man is as if he had begotten him."

OUR SAGES note that while envy of the other's higher intellectual and moral level is an ever-present temptation, no father so envies his child and no *rav* so envies his *talmid*. The very purpose and fulfillment of the transfer of values is found in the addition by the recipient of another stone to the structure, of another awareness and comprehension to the past volume of cognitions, in the enlargement of scope and horizon. A father wants his child to stretch out even higher toward the ideal of perfection and to achieve even more than he was able to accomplish. He wants not only to live on in the child, he wants his own ascent continued. He does not desire to be merely repeated, but to be bettered, not merely to be maintained, but to be elevated by being improved upon.

Conversely, man at every stage—the child, the adolescent, and even more so the mature person—is forever in need of a father, a teacher whose greater knowledge and virtue constantly propel him to the conquest of new horizons and to whom he can return to gain new inner strength for the difficult climb to the next rung on the infinite ladder of the human potential. Were he to begin always anew, he would

waste the heritage awaiting him and spoil his own substance. He is the prism which must receive the cumulative light of the past, diffracting it in the uniqueness of his own and irreplaceable personality and shedding its intensity upon his own time and beaming it into the distances ahead. Within his circumference he must find place for all that was before him and in his vision he must encompass all that shall be after him. In his existence are linked the heritage and the hope. He is at once the bridge and the vehicle, transporting the treasures entrusted to him into the future, on the way adding to the precious load nothing less than his very self.

THIS is the meaning of *mesorah*, one of the untranslatable Hebrew terms connoting receiving, adding, and handing on, a core concept of the Jewish pattern. By *mesorah* the recipient becomes the link, the disciple emerges as tomorrow's teacher, and the father enters the life of the son in an intimacy and identification unparalleled in the vast array of human relationships. The Almighty gave the Torah; Moshe our Teacher received it, *u'mosrah*—and so initiated the eternal chain of the Jewish Mesorah which stretches unbroken from Sinai on into the distant future. The carrier par excellence of this Mesorah is the Jewish parent.

The first of the Tablets of the Covenant contains those five commandments of the Decalogue

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which speak of man's relation to his Maker. Inscribed on this tablet is the commandment to honor father and mother. For the Jewish parent, who lives and teaches as Torah expects him, opens to the child all gates of insight and all portals of true piety. The "*Onochi Hashem*," the voice of the Almighty spanning all generations, becomes truly intelligible to man — without

shattering him by its force and yet without losing its majesty and its splendor—first through the father.

How great is he who represents to his child the living link with the Fathers of our people, those who chose G-d and who were chosen by Him. How great is he through whose voice the Almighty is revealed to his generations.

25 - Trust in Divine Providence

December, 1961

25 - Trust in Divine Providence

"When you pass through the waters I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not drown you; when you walk in the midst of fire you shall not be consumed and the flame shall not burn you"
(Isaiah, 43:2).

THE Jewish concept of "Hashgachah P'rotith"—in its literal sense meaning individual supervision—places the human being into direct and constant relation to the Almighty. Maimonides made this concept part of the first of his famous Thirteen Principles in which he laid down the fundamentals of the Jewish faith. "I believe with perfect faith that the Creator, blessed be He, creates and guides all creatures and that He alone worked, works, and will work all deeds".

In this statement, Rambam combines into one, two apparently distinct Divine functions. The Almighty *creates*. By the present tense, Rambam indicates that creation is a continuous process expressing itself, within the framework of nature, by its very continuity. As the Almighty evoked all existence by His mere will, so its continuance is vouchsafed by precisely the same will. Whatever exists is wanted by Him to be, for reasons often hidden to the human intellect in the unfathomable perfection of Divine wisdom.

The Almighty also *guides* all his creatures. Since He alone is master, through all the times, of all

occurrences, of all that happens and is done. He not only creates and maintains but also regulates in His justice, mercy and wisdom the fate of every being. This first Principle thus defines creation in its meaning for man. Since I am, I know I am wanted by Him and that whatever occurs to me is not merely known to him but caused by Him.

THE obvious problem as to the place in such a creation for "B'chirah," for the freedom of choice, is treated by virtually every major Jewish thinker. The answer lies in the two-fold appearance of man on the scene of life. As an active participant, he is endowed with the freedom to choose his role and his contribution. He can extend help and give solace to his fellow man and indeed to the entire world, or he can choose to inflict upon them pain and misery. The premise of all the commandments and prohibitions of Torah is the fact that the Almighty suffers man to sin, so that he may gain merit by the exercise of his freedom to refrain from evil and to perform the deeds of goodness and nobility. On the other hand, man is the target and the passive object of outer forces, not the least among them the malevolence, the cruelty,

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and the cupidity of his fellow beings.

The killer, therefore, cannot claim immunity because of the omnipotence and knowledge of the Creator. He is responsible for his actions which are the result of his own free choice. The victim of the crime, however, does not perish by "accident." A classic exposition of this dichotomy is found in Torah itself. "If you build a new house, you shall make a fence around its roof and not place the guilt of blood in your house, if there falls from it the one who falls" (D'vorim, 22:8). "Though he is deserving to fall (the Torah calls him 'the one destined to fall') still his death should not be caused by your hands, for merit is brought by the meritorious and injury by the wrongdoer." (Rashi, 1.c.).

The death of the victim of violence accordingly is possible only by the concurrent decree of Divine judgment. This judgment is not necessarily coextensive with punishment. Death also is atonement and, in the case of the truly righteous, simply the transition which occurs when man has completed the task set for him in this world, whereupon he enters the World to Come. Death in itself, furthermore, may be the final test of faith, to be accepted and "performed" with the Sh'ma as the last utterance or with the blessing "al Kiddush Hashem" proudly pronounced with the final breath. A people which does not see in the

end of physical existence the finale of life but merely the conclusion of one of its stages—and we know at least four of them—has never been shaken in its faith by the pyres of the Inquisition and the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka. The unspeakable infamy of murderous ages has never impinged upon our faith and trust.

AS active participants on the scene of life we refrain from and oppose all forms of murder. We seek to establish a world which will not only outlaw murder and not only bring swift retribution upon its perpetrators but in which the moral temper of society will not permit even the consideration of individual or mass killing as the solution to any human conflict and perplexity. It is the Jewish duty to contribute to the creation of such a society by example and by teaching, by our own moral excellence and by the ceaseless propagation of the causes of righteousness.

Still, we are exposed together with all of humanity to the terrible dangers threatening the entire family of nations; but we draw from our faith a serenity and confidence which prevents us from falling prey to the paralyzing global neurosis of all-consuming fear. We have been assured by Divine promise that there will be those who merit to survive in the midst of fire. Our task is to see that there be many who so shall merit if, G-d forbid, there occurs another global conflagration. Beyond

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this, we know that mankind is capable of ultimately rising to the level when all of its members shall so

merit, making impossible any war, and this is our Messianic hope.

February, 1962

26 - Ultimate Purpose

Rabbi Berachyah opened his discourse on Megillath Esther as follows: "Who wrought and accomplished it? The one who calls the generation from the beginning, I the Almighty, who is the first and with the last, too, I am He." (Isaiah, 41:4). From the beginning of creation the Holy One, blessed be He, prepared for everyone what befits him. Adam was the first of the creatures; Cain the first of the murderers; Abel the first of the victims;... Aaron the first of the Priests; Moshe the first of the prophets; ... David the first of the singers; Sh'lomo the first of the builders; Nebuchadnezzar the first of the destroyers; Ahasuerus the first of the sellers; and Haman the first of the buyers.

(Midrash Megillath Esther, Pethichah).

AMONG the great Jewish thinkers there is a division of opinion whether or not the purpose of creation is ascertainable by man. In his "Moreh Nevuchim," Maimonides expresses the view that this purpose is inaccessible to the human mind. Like the knowledge of the true reality of the Creator, known only to the Creator Himself, the knowledge of the Creator's true intent is also beyond human ken. Since the limitations of finite man preclude his perception of the all-embracing universal purpose, the very inquiry into the Divine intent is both idle and arrogant. All that man can know are his duties within this Creation and his own purpose among the multiplicities of existences. These duties and this purpose were revealed to him on Sinai.

Other thinkers disagree. The Kabbalists, for instance, find in the Divine attribute of goodness the purpose of Creation. "The ultimate purpose of the good is to do good." Therefore, Rabbi Chaim Moshe

Luzzato states, the Almighty created the world to be a receptacle of his goodness. Among all creatures, it is man who is the most fitting recipient of this Divine goodness because, being endowed with the faculty of intellect and possessed of the freedom of choice, he is the only one who can *earn* G-d's friendship and closeness—the highest bliss in both worlds—rather than simply receiving it as a gift. It is man, therefore, for whose sake all was called into being and continues to be. In him is found the ultimate purpose and all that is, though we may lack in wisdom to understand how, serves directly or indirectly this purpose.

By postulating the superiority of earning reward to receiving undeserved gifts, the existence of evil in this world and of the evil impulse of man, falls into place. To overcome the evil and to choose to do good, makes man the "owner," as Luzzato terms it, of the Divine recompense. Otherwise, he would be the recipient of humiliating alms

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and eat the "bread of shame." Were man insensitive to this qualitative distinction and thus be spared this shame, he would no longer be the image of the Almighty Who is the owner and apex of all quality. Hence, evil exists in this world and is indeed necessary for the purpose of the good and is no contradiction whatsoever to the goodness of the Creator.

Similarly, this distinction makes intelligible why man was placed first in this world rather than in the Hereafter, though only in the World to Come will he experience the true delight in the "Splendor of the Shechinah." There would be no joy in the meal to which our Sages compare the delight of the righteous in the World to Come, were one to partake in it without having earned one's portion, without having tilled the soil and watered the gardens which grew the pleasant fruits served at this meal. It is this world in which man prepares the table at which he shall be seated in the Hereafter. Thus, in fact, everyone creates, so to speak, his own "Olam Habah." In another parable of our Sages, this world is compared to the Erev Shabbath and whosoever does not utilize the time and opportunity apportioned to him in his lifespan—"what shall he eat on the Shabbath?" Not by punishment but as a consequence of his own failure he has excluded himself from the meal. The burning shame of such isolation from the company of the

righteous—these are the purifying fires of the Gehinom.

THE difference between Maimonides and the Kabbalists is not as great as it might appear. Rambam, too, sees every man creating his own portion in the World to Come and sees in punishment the natural consequence of failure. There is unanimity in authentic Jewish thought on the purpose of evil in a world emanating from a benevolent Creator. There is also no dispute on the fact that the essential quality and greatness of man emerges precisely from his ability to judge and to choose. Rambam rejects only the notion that the completeness of the Divine Will can be encompassed within man's comprehension. To identify our notion of the Divine intent with its true reality would constitute, so it appears from Rambam, forfend, a limitation of the Almighty and a "definition" of his essence.

There is another confluence of Jewish thought inherent in the common acceptance of the "good" purpose of evil in this world and of its non-contradictory character to the all-pervading benevolence of the Creator. Though man may choose to do evil, against the will and command of the Almighty, he is unable to escape from or to contradict the supremacy of the Divine intent. Man's sovereignty is severely bound and essentially reflective only upon himself. His use

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of the world for his evil purposes does not deter its unfolding pre-ordained destiny. (See also 25 - "Trust in Divine Providence" — December 1961) The palace erected by the tyrant may contribute to this destiny by sheltering in its ruins, hundreds of years later, a Tzaddik. (Rambam, Introduction to his Mishnah Commentary).

This is a world of murderers and victims; it is also a world of priests and prophets. This is a world of destroyers; it is also a world of builders. This is a world in which whole nations are on the market, with sellers and buyers eager for their profits; it is also a world in which a small people endures as a living testimony to the supremacy of the Divine Will over all human infamy.

WE are a people whose history is replete with the evidences of this

supremacy. Sold by Ahasuerus and bought by Haman, both intent upon our destruction, we witness a salvation to which they themselves unwittingly contribute. The advice Haman gives to the King, self-servingly aiming at his own glory, brings about the elevation of Mordecai. The gallows Haman erects to avenge his hurt pride on the stubborn Jew who refuses to bow before him, become the symbol of the triumph of the Jews over their enemies. The people that were to be the prey of every vulture, emerge to new heights, purified in the crucible of persecution. The Purim story is a vignette characterizing the unfolding of the entire Jewish history.

When Adar enters, we begin to rejoice as befits a people whose history reflects the invincibility of those who walk with G-d.

April, 1962

27 - The Jewish Core

*"I am asleep but my heart is awake (Shir- Hashirim 2:2)
Spake the Kneset Yisroel before the Holy One, blessed the worlds, I am asleep in regard to Mitzvoth, yet my heart is of kindness; I am asleep in regard to Tzedokah, yet my heart is awake to perform it; I am asleep in regard to the sacrifices, yet my heart is awake for Kriath Sh'ma and the prayer; I am asleep in regard to the Holy Temple, yet my heart is awake to the Houses of Prayer and the Houses of Study; I am asleep in regard to the end of days, yet my heart is awake to the redemption and even if my heart is asleep in regard to the redemption, yet the heart of the Holy One, blessed be He, is awake to redeem me.
Said Rabbi Chiya bar Aba; Where do we find that the Holy One, blessed be He, is called the Heart of Israel? For it is written "Strength of my heart and my portion is the Almighty forever." (T'hilim 73:26)
(Midrash Shir Hashirim 5,2)*

JEWISH history moves between the two poles of *Hester Ponim* and *Haorath Ponim*. *Hester Ponim*, in its literal meaning "the hiding of the Face," denotes the apparent removal of Divine protection and blessing from the K'lal Yisroel. Goluth or foreign dominion in the Holy Land, not being masters of our own destiny, persecution and suffering—these are the consequences of G-d's turning His Face from us. Freedom and absolute autonomy, the abundance of material blessings in the Land of our Promise, peace and serenity enabling us to live in the exemplary, G-d-reflecting sanctity of Jewish nationhood—they are *Haorath Ponim*, the indications of the Almighty's shining countenance.

The national sin of not utilizing the opportunities of the *Haorath Ponim* for their spiritual purpose has caused our exiles. In exile, the outer conditions are the obstacles which

we must overcome to cling to our faith and its Mitzvoth. Having misused the opportunity proffered, we must atone, in keeping with the principle of *Midah K'neged Midah*—measure for measure — by creating our own opportunities amidst a world hostile to our aspirations and insensitive to our visions. While *Haorath Ponim* is closeness to and awareness of the Divine Presence *Hester Ponim* is, so to speak, removal from this Presence. Distanced from us He apparently can be forgotten.

Slaves imitate their masters. They worship their master's gods. They accept their social patterns and share their ambitions. Thus, in the slavery of Egypt our forefathers but for a few exceptions assimilated to their surroundings. No more than a fifth remained indomitable enough in spirit in spite of such enslavement, to merit redemption. There was left within them a hidden resilience, an

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untouched core from which rejuvenation could blossom forth and grow. Not even the angels, as our Sages tell us, could detect this core. Only the Almighty in His wisdom beheld it behind the facade of slavish imitation and beyond the ugly layers of the idolatrous pattern. This germ seed of an inner freedom and nobility was to burst forth into the most astonishing national transformation ever recorded in human history.

IN every exile, bereft of the immediacy of the Divine Presence, the Goluth symptoms reoccur. They vary in intensity and in their outer manifestation. They are identical in that they present the aspect of a people bent on submerging its identity and seeking to obliterate all differences from their surroundings.

Still, never again did we lose such numbers. Though many are lost and disappear, escaping beyond the periphery of our peoplehood, from Sinai on the vast majority have always retained their Jewish identity. Sometimes it is only by the most tenuous links that they remain connected with K'lal Yisrael and its history and destiny. Their own torturous rationalizations in which they engage to answer the riddle of this identity, can hardly explain this miracle of Jewish perpetuity. In language and idiom, in garb and conduct, in food and drink, in political persuasion and activity, they seem to blend completely with the non-Jews of their surroundings.

Their Jewishness seems to be asleep. They do not perform the Mitzvoth. They have lost that priceless and sublime Jewish practice of Tzedokah which is as removed from charity as is a mother's smile from the sneer of a prison warden. They have forgotten the sacrifice and no longer dream of the Temple restored. They are unaware of Israel's final destiny and feel no need for redemption.

But in spite of this comatose stupor, there lives and persists in them, often inarticulate and buried under the many envelopes and crusts of their contemporary civilization and its lusts and vices, an awareness. This is the awareness of the living G-d, an awareness which can be called upon and reawakened. Even within the slavish imitation, the differences resulting from this awareness becomes discernible. Jewish charity is still different. The return to the synagogue is not a substitute for, *lehavdil*, the country club. The pronounced Jewish interest in all humane causes — statistically well-established — is the residue of the Jewish vision of universal redemption. The Jewish people is still identified by its faith, however some may dilute and distort it. G-d has remained the waking heart of the Jewish people.

THOSE who by upbringing or by their own conscious return live by Torah and Mitzvoth will, therefore, never agree that a Jew is cut off from the people of the Torah by his non-performance of the Mitzvoth.

27 - The Jewish Core

Precisely the opposite is true. While we consider Torah and Mitzvoth obligatory upon every son and daughter of our people, we also proclaim to all of them that their ties to G-d and His chosen nation are not torn asunder by the omission and neglect of the Divine precepts. We reject the new so-called rationales of the Jewish identity, but in doing so we reject only the sin and not the sinner. The sinner is a Jew. His heart is still awake. He is our task. His

sleep is our failure.

In forty-nine days, the Jewish way led the indescribable distance from Egypt's slavery to Sinai's freedom, from paganistic defilement to the acknowledgement of the One G-d and the acceptance of His Torah. Every year anew, we recount these days of Jewish rebirth. In the midst of *Hester Ponim*, the Jewish heart is still awake and its longing for the *Haorath Ponim* will never cease.

August, 1962

28 - The Second Tablets

The Almighty, in His Love for His people, multiplied the evidences of His goodness upon us and commanded us to return to Him whenever we have become enmeshed in sin. And while T'shuvah is always valid, still the month of Elul is apt in a higher degree than the other days of the year for the acceptance of man's return, for these have been days of Divine Grace from the time when we were chosen to be His people. How so? When Israel sinned with the Golden Calf and the first Tablets were broken on the seventeenth day of Tammuz, and when Moshe prayed for forgiveness and the Holy One, Blessed be He, told him to hew new Tablets and consented to inscribe and to give him these second Tablets, then Moshe ascended again on Rosh Chodesh Elul and stayed on the mount until Yom Kippur, the day of the completion of the atonement. And it is written that the people of Israel were given to prayer and fast all these forty days.

And because they blew the Shofar in the camp of Israel when Moshe went up on Mount Sinai, to admonish the people that they should not go astray again, as had happened at the end of his first ascent, therefore we, too, have the custom of blowing the Shofar every day from Rosh Chodesh Elul on throughout the entire month, except on the eve of Rosh Hashonah.

(from the "CHAYEY ODOM" of Rabbi Abraham Danzig)

RABBI Chaim Vital, the great disciple of the Ari Hakodosh, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, writes in his "Shaarey K'dushah" (Gates of Sanctity) that the correspondence between the precepts of the Torah and the physical structure of man is one of the evidences of the inherent harmony and oneness of the entire universe, a manifestation, in turn, of its origin. A world called into existence by the One G-d must bear the insignia of His Oneness.

The two hundred and forty-eight positive commandments of the Torah correspond to the two hundred and forty-eight bones of the human body, and the three hundred and sixty-five prohibitions equal its sinews. But this total of six hundred

thirteen Mitzvot is reflected not only in the physical cloak of man. His soul too, which functions in this world through the instrument of the body, is endowed with six hundred and thirteen facets. These facets, or parts, are housed in a body structured with this corresponding number of bones and sinews. As a glovemaker will fashion his gloves to fit the number of fingers, Rabbi Chaim Vital states, so the Almighty formed the "garment of the soul," the body, in perfect congruence with it. It is this soul for whose nourishment, elevation and perfection the Torah was given and for every one of its facets there is a Mitzvah.

Thus, the Divine idea of man is, so

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to speak, expressed twice and joined in the wondrous juncture of the human being, once in his soul and once in his body. Dissimilar as are the melody and the string instrument, they are yet in perfect congruity, one being the purpose and, therefore, the very reason of the other. As an ideal artist might fully express his vision and his concept in stone or on the canvass, in rhyme or in prose, so the Creator gave the Tzelem Elokim its fitting physical concretization.

WHAT is a sin? And wherein lies the obligation to desist from it? And once committed, how can its consequence be ever again denied or avoided?

Sin is a debasement of man's potential. It is the withdrawal from his soul of the nourishment it needs for complete and glorious unfolding. To sin is to cripple it or, at least, to let it starve. To till the field given into his care and have it bring good fruit, this is man's obligation. To despoil it or to leave it barren, this is evil.

The great teachers of our people throughout the ages, have searchingly analyzed man's

propensity to fail and his yearning to escape the just results of his failure. They have seen in *T'shuvah*, in the repentance and return, though it be only one of the six hundred thirteen Mitzvoth, an unparalleled revealment of the infinite mercy and goodness of the Maker. That there still remains in the undernourished, starved and crippled soul that power of rejuvenation from which can spring forth healing and fullness, that in the deeds of man there never is any finality determining inexorably his value and his tomorrow; that there is no ultimate darkness in the precincts of man's struggles and vexations—this is a miracle and a grace compared by our commentators to *T'chiyath Hamethim*, the resurrection of the dead.

The first Tablets have, alas, been broken. In Elul, we are called upon to ascend and to bring before the Divine Throne of Judgment those second Tablets which we must hew ourselves from among the rocks of our obstacles. On them will be inscribed again, if we so merit, the word of G-d.

October, 1962

29 - The Human Dimension

*"In the beginning the Almighty created the heavens and the earth."
"B'reshith—at the beginning of time, in the first moment which was
indivisible, for no time preceded it. "Bara"—He made nothingness into
substance, and in this process time does not intrude at all."
(Rabbenu Obadyah Seforno, Commentary to the Torah)*

THE Jewish year, beginning with the majestic overture of the Yomim Noroim and followed by the joyous Sukkoth Festival bespeaking the confidence of a people anchored in eternity, though living in fragile, temporary abodes, settles into its rhythmic cycle on Shabbath B'reshith. Wherever Jews congregate for prayer on this Shabbath, the first portion of the Torah is read and the chapters of creation unfold anew.

Though the Talmud relates (Megillah, 29b) that there once existed a custom to divide the reading of the Torah over a three year cycle, "the custom accepted by all of Israel is to complete the reading of the entire Torah in one year." (Rambam, Hilchoth Tefillah 13,1). Ordained by Moshe our Teacher (ibid. 14,1), the weekly reading of the Law has become part of the ever recurring signposts which mark the flow of time, the same as the Sabbath and the Festivals.

The human mind cannot possibly conceive of the nothingness preceding existence, nor can it comprehend true eternity, which is not simply never ending time, but rather the status of complete freedom from time, and thus outside

of its categories of beginning and end, past, present, and future. Creation, as Rabbi Obadya Seforno states, is simultaneously the evoking of existence and its being placed into the dimension of time which, too, is a creation. All that once was not and is now, needs the "now" in order to be and is conditioned by it. True eternity is, therefore, reserved for the Creator Who alone is unconditioned in His existence. His ineffable Name is expressive of His sovereignty above all time. When we pronounce in prayer and blessing the permissible utterance of this *Shem Havayoh*, calling him Master, we reflect in our thoughts that He was, that He is, and that He will be—the closest we can come to the concept of His eternity.

THE great thinkers of our people have stressed the permanence of Creation behind the facade of an apparently independent and consistent nature, seeing in the very fact of existence the portal to the knowledge of G-d. They have gone further. Beyond the miracle of Creation and its permanence vouchsafed in the continuous creative will of the Almighty "on Whom everything constantly leans in

29 - The Human Dimension

its very being" (Rambam, Yesodey Hatorah, 2, 19), they have found in existence a supreme revelation of the Divine Omnipotence. This omnipotence is not only manifested in the works of Creation and their grandeur. Humble and astonished, man stands before the power of Him Who could Make Himself known to His creatures in the vessels of time and matter, in the cloak of finiteness and limitation. Revealing Himself in these vessels, He bridges the immeasurable gap between His Eternity and Infinity and man who is bounded by time and the restraints of space. This is the higher oracle of Creation, the higher evidence of His omnipotence. "Said Rabbi Yochanan: 'Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be there you also find His modesty'" (Megillah, 31). That He can be found by man, that in itself is discovery of His grace, a glimpse beyond the confines of our boundaries toward the majestic source of all existence.

The sanctification of life, as the Jew understands it, is the permeation of our limitations and their transcendence with eternity and infinity. The Divine precept, addressed to man and his condition, makes him an extension of the Divine will, above all time and space. In the recurrence of Shabbath and Yom Tov and in the observances

which connote for the Jew the daily passage of morning, noon, and night, he becomes identified with that Divine constancy which envelops him and all other beings. Setting aside places and objects consecrated to His service, he stretches out towards that Divine Infinity which shelters all the worlds.

THE "Kedushath Yisrael" is based on living within this enveloping and sheltering Divine presence, on regulating one's existence by the guidelines of such identification and extension, and on thus walking the ways of this world towards immortality. (comp. Seforno to Sh'moth 19:6 and Vayikroh 19:2). "*I keep the Almighty ever present before me*—this is a cardinal principle of the Torah and the distinction of the righteous who walk before the Lord." These are the words with which Rabbi Moshe Isserles, in the opening paragraphs of his famous Glossary to the Shulchon Oruch, lays down the foundation of all Jewish observance.

Only he who knows of *B'reshith* will see in the human boundaries the challenge and the promise. Only he who knows that time flows from eternity will fill the span of his life with the Divine radiance of meaning and purpose.

30 - Renewal

*Today is the birth of the world.
Today, He places before His tribunal all creatures of the earth.
(From the Rosh Hashanah Machzor)*

THE impact of any experience tends to become weakened by repetition. The first wonder and astonishment lose their intensity and are soon replaced by a callousness of acceptance often bordering on disdain. This obtains not only in the sphere of sensory perception. The heart and mind, too, quickly become jaded. The repeated exposure, for instance, to scenes of misfortune and sickness tragically turns the initial heart-wrenching pity into indifference and even annoyance. The exhilarating pure joy of a new insight, of a sudden intellectual discovery is usually limited to the first lifting of the curtain, to the first breakthrough into the new area of thought.

It seems that man's pulse quickens only at the first encounter.

Obviously, such calcification of emotion and intellect presents dangers to man's moral stature. A truth bereft of its evocative, stimulating power not only loses its effectiveness, but soon becomes a festering charge. The denial of the response called for by the moral postulate must in the end warp man's character. Indifference and cruelty are only quantitatively distinct from each other.

In the realm of man's moral choice, there is no neutral ground.

The great challenge, then, is to remain astonished, to take no experience ever for granted and to respond to continuous goodness and grace with the fervor of the first spontaneity. This is, in fact, what Torah demands of us. We are bidden to accept the gifts of life and the bounty of every new day with the pristine freshness of the new awakening. Each day anew, we pronounce the blessings which express our gratitude for the soul restored to us, quickened and rested, when we arise from our sleep. Each day anew, we praise Him as the Creator of light and darkness and of the cosmic harmony. We thank the Almighty "Who renews in His goodness constantly the works of creation." In return, we, too, are to renew constantly our response to the marvels of existence and cognition. Each day we cite in the "Sh'ma" the sacred words commanding us to act not by usage but motivated by the constantly renewed insight and to perform the Mitzvoth as if we ourselves were receiving them from G-d on Sinai "today."

Merely repeating our yesterdays

would be a waste of the life granted us today.

THE acknowledgement of an obligation is obviously but the first step towards its accomplishment. How can man rise to the level of an inner freshness which knows no spoilage? How can he possibly retain forever the spiritual beauty of the first bloom which knows no wilting? How can he transform all his yesterdays to rungs on a ladder leading to a higher today?

Clearly it is man himself who must change, who must grow, who must awaken each day a different being and thus experience all that is in the new light, in the new radiance of his own change and growth.

Just as one cannot enlarge a circle on any point, if it is indeed to remain a circle, without enlarging and changing its entire circumference, so man cannot add to the volume of his wisdom and goodness without emerging changed in his totality. The complexity of man's spiritual structure defies analysis and definition, and yet there is in man an essential oneness which overrides all his contradictions. Thus, when man grows, he grows in every aspect. The famous statement of our Sages, "Whosoever is greater than his fellow man, his evil impulse is also greater," was spoken in sublime praise of total man, for true greatness calls for victory over the greater adversary, for surmounting the greater odds, and for emerging ever stronger from the ever harder

test.

"Chodoshim La-bekorim"—new every morning stretches out before man the widened horizons of his own potential. Unknown to his yesterdays, they were discovered by his yesterday's climb to greater heights. Within the new, enlarged, and therefore completely changed circumference of his own existence, man experiences the world and all its knowledge in awesome, unfaded beauty, for there still clings to it the dew of Creation. And so, in his own very self, he finds correspondence to the prayer in which he asks the Creator of the luminaries to let "new light" shine in Zion. Yesterday's lamps cannot illumine his today's world and do not suffice to penetrate its shadows.

IT is in Torah and by Torah that the Almighty has vouchsafed man the ability for his constant renewal. It is Torah which opens for him the road to never ending ascent. It is in the study of the Divine Word that a man experiences true "Chiddush"—the new thought, the new understanding, the new concept, the new value. Such "Chiddush" in the study of Torah is both a test of its proper understanding and a test of the proper fruits which Torah bears in man's mind and heart. This is why preceding the "Sh'ma" we recite, after the blessing and the prayer for the "new light," another blessing of thanks for the Torah which G-d has given us in infinite love, that Torah by which we are linked forever to

Section III: Hashkafah

the source of Creation, that Torah which shall bear in us, so we pray, the fruit of understanding and deed. Then, after this second blessing, we are ready to recite the "Sh'ma" and to accept anew upon us the duty of Jewish life in the total service and in the total acknowledgment of our Maker.

Not every day does the average Jew succeed in restoring this intimacy of relationship to himself and to his G-d. The heavy burden of fruitless yesterdays all too often weigh down the wings of his soul, and what was to be the soaring flight to new horizons becomes a tortuous crawl through the mud of futility. Fatigued and well-nigh hopeless, he may utter the words, but they remain bereft of life, bereft of the sap of emotion and understanding. Yet, there is one day in the Jewish year when the Jew has to find his way back to creation, when he must undertake the vast journey to his source, so that he himself may gain freshness and renewal. On this day, he is promised a special nearness, a special grace, if he but sets out on this journey. "Seek Him when He can

be found, call Him when He is close"—it is the day of Rosh Hashonah, the birth hour of the world, in which we are bidden to shed all usage and to begin the return, the Teshuvah, to the unspoiled freshness of a new beginning.

TESHUVAH is not mere repentance, though repentance is one of its integral factors. Teshuvah is the renouncing of our yesterdays and all their flaws. It is saying "no" to all the dross man accumulates covering the gold of his essential goodness. It is the breaking of the chains and the shackles of the past and its errors. It is the rising from the dust and folly of smallness and sin to the glory of unbroken purpose and service. It is the exercise of man's highest creativity by which he transforms himself and his entire world, renews them and makes them translucent with the new light.

Today, on Rosh Hashonah, man is called upon to give birth to a new self and to a new world. He will be judged by his response to this call.

