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"TOWARD A HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM DEALING WITH RELEVANT RABBINIC THEOLOGY (THE LIVING RABBIS)"

by

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Thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Hebrew Letters and Ordination

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

June, 1972

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DIGEST

In his two major works Readiness for Religion and Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence Ronald Goldman has shown that the adolescent (Mental Age 11+) is capable of propositional thinking. This fact together with the results of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' 1970 survey Teach Us What We Want to Know, the excellent results of the topical approach to teaching as exemplified in Schwartzman's and Spiro's The Living Bible and the serious need for a text on Rabbinic Theology and Concepts, has produced The Living Rabbis.

The text discusses thirteen questions in the areas of Theology, Death, Israel, Jews and Jewish Identity, Religion and Man. It attempts to show that to each of these thirteen questions Rabbinic Literature is relevant: the Rabbinic attitude is inferred from that literature. That the Rabbis did not create 'systems' of theology is stressed throughout the thesis. But, most importantly, is stressed the fact that there are parallels in Rabbinic Literature to each one of these questions.

The text is arranged according to questions (one through thirteen) rather than according to chapters. The first eight questions deal with Theology. Question 1 (How Can We Prove God's Existence?) is divided into two sections: I. Those arguments based on reason
II. Those arguments not based on reason.

---the goal being to show that while the Rabbis did not spend their days in systematic theology, they did show sensitivity to the traditional proofs for the existence of God. Question 2 (What Is God Like?) is subdivided into eight questions in which the Rabbinic concepts of Divine omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence (two questions), eternity, truth, justice and Man's

right to doubt, are discussed. Even though question two encompasses questions three through nine it is listed as a separate question to show that the questions (What is God Like?) is more than the sum of its parts.

Question 10 (What am I?) discusses the Rabbinic concept of Man. Question 11 (What Happens When We Die?) is divided into two questions. The first (What Is It Like To Die?) shows parallels between Rabbinic literature and the work by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross in her book On Death and Dying showing that many of the attitudes to death which Ross stresses as healthy and desirable, are found in the Rabbinic literature. The second question (What Do Jews Do When Someone Dies?) is a Glossary of Jewish mourning practices bringing together much of the research done by Rabbi Jack Spiro on the psychological implications of Rabbinic mourning customs.

Israel is discussed in question twelve (Why is it so important to Jews that Israel exists?) showing that while the Rabbis felt that Israel was essential, they did not insist in Aliyah at the expense of everything else. Man's role in bringing about the Messianic Age is discussed in question thirteen (Why Was I Born, Why Am I Living?).

The basic purpose of this text is twofold:

1. To show the relevance of Rabbinic Literature to the modern Jew.
2. To help the modern Jewish adolescent in the formulation in his personal theology and attitude to life.

PREFACE

In his two essential works in the area of Religious Education Ronald Goldman makes the following assumptions which we hold to be valid:

(i) No child is born religious. Every child is born a-religious and has a potential for religious thinking. While children seem to have an instinctive sense of religiosity, at the feeling-emotive level, they are not born with the fully developed religious sense of adulthood.

(ii) There is no religious faculty in the human mind.

(iii) Religious thinking is basically the same as any other kind of thinking in that it uses conception, perception and so on. In its development, therefore, methods which apply to teaching other kinds of thinking can be applied to it. Just as it is essential for adolescents to understand the experience which gave rise to Archimedes' Principle so is it essential for them to understand the experience which gave rise to the Jewish principle of ethical monotheism.

This book is written for the student of the ninth grade and up. In Ronald Goldman's terms (which he borrowed from Jean Piaget) we are writing for those children who have attained the mental age of more than eleven years and have developed the kind of thinking called "Formal Operations." That is, the individual employs logic which moves away from concrete bases so that he can think propositionally. The Midrash is within his capabilities. In a year or two he will graduate from the High School and enter College or University.

There are very few books available to the Jewish High School student which speak to his level of thought-development (most 'speak down' to him),

and which prepare him for religious thinking in College. He will be plunged into a highly-critical and often cynical environment for which our religious schools have not prepared him.

Of the more than 100 published books in the area of Rabbinic Theology and general theology which are listed in the Bibliography, only the following are written on the level of the student in the religious high school: William B. Silverman's Rabbinic Wisdom and Jewish Values; Milton Steinberg's Basic Judaism and Simon and Bial's The Rabbis' Bible.

To our knowledge, there are no books written for this age group-level which present for example, the Proofs for the Existence of God with their refutations. The same applies to the other areas dealt with in THE LIVING RABBIS. It may be that the high school is too early to present this material. It is, however, our opinion--based on Goldman's and Piaget's work--that the student in the religious high school is well prepared to enter the areas of propositional thinking that is involved in most of these chapters.

In 1970 the Union of American Hebrew Congregations' Commission on Jewish Education (CCAR-UAHC) published in its Newsletter (Compass Volume 3, number 3, Spring 1970) the results of "a national survey of thousands of our students throughout the country to determine those questions, issues and problems which concern them most." The author of this Thesis selected those questions in the following areas: Theology, Death, Israel, Jews, Jewish identity, Religion and Man. He used these questions to guide his culling of the Rabbinic Literature, published works and Rabbinic and Doctoral theses of graduates of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

In an age in which Jewish youth are delving into Eastern Religions and

occasionally leaving the Jewish faith completely and entering Judaism's sister-religions, an intelligent, rational look at the answers which Judaism gives to essential problems of life and belief, seems to be warranted. It may be that more questions are left unanswered than answered. If this is so--and all education should do just that--then THE LIVING RABBIS will be justified. For, if in studying the words of the Rabbis Jewish youth find reason and logic, then it seems likely that they will not later reject Judaism when confronted by the reason and logic of the College campus.

INTRODUCTION

Jews can't ignore the Rabbis. Look into any modern or ancient Jewish prayer book and the words of the ancient Rabbis will be found. Ask any modern "theologian" about Jewish belief and his answer will include concepts from the literature of Rabbis who lived nearly 2000 years ago!

Jews can't ignore them because they can't ignore Jewish history. To understand what <u>is</u> a Jew one has to know the Jew's past--and the ancient Rabbis are giants of that past.

This book is an Introduction in itself. The literature of the Rabbis is large. No one expects to master it in a short time. The ancient Rabbis themselves said "To be worthy of the title "Jewish Scholar" you have to have mastered all of Jewish Scripture, Mishnah, Midrash, Halacha, Talmud, Tosephta Aggada."

There are thirteen questions in this book. They were chosen from hundreds which American High School students wanted answered. In the thousands of years since the Bible was written, Jews have produced many answers to each of these thirteen questions. The answers in this book are those of the ancient Rabbis.

"The ancient Rabbis" were those teachers who lived between 300 BCE and 1500 CE. Thus we are looking at the literature of about 18 centuries! The focus is their concepts and ideas of that literature (called "Rabbinic Literature") --always looking for what is relevant for the modern Jew.

The Rabbis were neither philosophers nor theologians. They were different from others in that they did not spend their time working out elaborate systems

of philosophy or theology. To reach their concepts the modern Jew has to infer their beliefs from Rabbinic Literature. The Rabbis lived their religion--their literature is a record of lives in which a philosophy and theology were taken for granted.

There are two goals in this book. The first is to learn what our ancestors believed. The second is more personal. In learning about Rabbinic belief it may be that our own belief is deepened or clarified.

Now: the first question and THE LIVING RABBIS.....

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QUESTION 1

HOW CAN WE PROVE GOD'S EXISTENCE?

"The most significant feature of the rabbinical system of theology is its lack of system."
(Ginzberg, Students, Scholars and Saints 1928 p.92)

There are at least seven different arguments which have been adopted to prove God's existence. They fall into two main categories:

I Those arguments based on reason.

II Those arguments not based on reason.

The rabbis were not committed to any one argument or "Proof" (as it is usually called) for the existence of God. In fact they never formally argued for the existence of God at all. When pressed they justified their conviction that God existed in ways that can be related to these seven "Proofs for the Existence of God." In some instances the rabbis only hint at the argument. The important point to note is that the rabbis knew of God's existence and never formulated a rigid theology to establish His existence.

I

ARGUMENTS FROM REASON

The three arguments which follow are strictly reasoned and are the traditional three proofs for the existence of God.

1. The ontological argument:

(The word 'ontological' comes into English from the Greek on("Being" or "existence") + logos ("logic") i.e., 'ontological' means "Logically derived from existence")

"Neither Jewish nor Arabic philosophers make use of the ontological argument for God's existence."
(paraphrase of H.A. Wolfson The Philosophy of Spinoza Volume 1, p.122)

This argument was formulated by Anselm (1033-1109 C.E.) and made famous by Descartes (1596-1650). In its basic form (it came to be changed over the years) this argument reasons that the existence of the very idea of God logically implies God's existence. It discusses Psalm 14:1 which states "The fools says in his heart 'There is no God.'" (see footnote.) Why does a man who wants to deny God's existence have to use the word "God." Surely there must be a God because he uses that word. No man in his right mind would use the word GOOBLEDYGOOK and try to prove that it doesn't exist! Obviously it does not exist! Thus because even the fool has the idea of God, God must exist.

OBJECTION

It was Emanuel Kant who raised the strongest objection to this argument. Kant said: All right! Supposing there is a "God" which exists and which is spoken of by the fool who denies it and the believer who loves it: But just saying something exists doesn't tell us more than your idea of it exists. If you said a mermaid existed you have done nothing to prove or disprove the existence of a mermaid in reality. So what's the point of saying the mermaid existed? Anyone can have an idea that anything exists. If you could tell us more we would be impressed. At the most you have proved is that the idea of God exists.

Footnote: In The Living Bible it states: "...nowhere in the Bible do we come across the slightest reference to 'atheism.'" (page 18)

NOTE: To "say in his heart 'there is no God'" does not make a man an atheist. It does make him ungodly or godless (that is, a man who conducts himself as if there is no God to whom he is responsible). An 'atheist' is defined as one who, on the grounds of speculation, denies the existence of God. Such a person was unknown to the Psalmist.

THE RABBIS

In its simplest form this argument did not occur to the rabbis. However it shall be suggested that there are some parallels between this argument in its later form and Rabbinic names for God.

"That which nothing greater can be thought":

The ontological argument, in this modified form, grows out of the belief that God is the greatest being that exists. What is the greatest being we can think of? Clearly it is that which not only exists in our mind but also exists in reality. Therefore God must exist! Anselm said that God would be less-than-perfect if He existed only as an idea in our minds. By definition God is perfect. Any being who is not perfect could hardly be God! Therefore God must exist in reality! Descartes added another element to this view: no one could possibly dream up the idea of a perfect God by himself! The idea of a perfect God, therefore, who exists both in the mind and in reality, could only be produced by a God who exists in reality! Therefore God exists!

OBJECTION

Can you think what might be the philosophic objection to the ontological argument in its modified form? What are Anselm and Descartes talking about? Are they talking about things which exist, which have the same kind of existence as human beings? It seems to be evident that they are really talking about definitions. Words and the use of words are these philosophers' concern; they are not talking about things which exist at all! The most they have told us is that when we talk about God we are talking about the idea of God. The idea of a perfect God has to include the idea of existence. Granted that you can't think of a perfect God without thinking of His having existence; that's

a long way from saying that an idea of a perfect God proves that God actually exists outside of all the other fanciful ideas (like mermaids) that we have!

THE RABBIS

It is important to remember that the rabbis couldn't have cared less about definitions. For them God existed, had existed and would always exist. Who could imagine life without "the King of Kings" or "The High One" or "The Height of the World" or "The High and Lofty One" or "The Heaven" as God was often called by the rabbis?[1] The rabbis had 91 different names for God; it is interesting for our discussion that these names are among them. These names merely express God as the greatest Being conceivable by man. It was not until the Jewish philosopher Spinoza (1632-1677) that the ontological argument was developed; even then Spinoza stopped short of making this as important an argument as the two which follow for the Existence of God.

2. The cosmological (or causal) argument

(The word 'cosmological' comes into English from the Greek kosmos (the world) + logos (logic) i.e., 'cosmological' means "logically derived from the world.")

"The heavens declare Thy glory. The earth reveals Thy creative power." (UPB I p.118; SOH. p.219; Silverman p.89; Hertz p.429)

This argument was formulated about 2000 years ago. Plato's (427-347 BCE) original argument was repeated and modified by Aristotle (384-322 BCE), Augustine, Aquinas and others.

The philosopher works from creation in this argument. He goes through the stages of creation in the opposite direction to the Genesis account. In Genesis we read ON THE FIRST DAY GOD CREATED AND ON THE SECOND DAY GOD CREATED

and so on. The final creation is MAN. Before anything was created there was God. Thus the philosopher looks at creation (i.e. man) and deduces all the stages of creation leading logically back to God as the Prime Mover.

There are two principles involved in this argument:

A. Nothing can change or come into existence without a cause

B. The world came into existence, it has not always been here.

OBJECTION

Kant raised a similar objection to this argument that he raised to the ontological argument. He acknowledged that the cosmological argument may prove that God did once exist. What does the argument tell us about Him? What does He do now? What is the nature of the first cause? Thus Kant's criticism of the ontological and the cosmological arguments is that while the former may tell us that the idea of God exists now, and the latter may tell us that God, the Creator, existed in the past, neither of the arguments tells us what God does now.

THE RABBIS

It is easy to understand why Jewish philosophy would stress this proof. It fits in with Genesis and with the action of the Prophet who looked up to heaven and asked who had created it all. If one believes that the world was created at some time--and Jews always have maintained this as a basic truth--and that it has not always been here, then one naturally believes in a creator. Thus Jewish philosophy has rejected Aristotle's theory which denies the possibility of a created Universe.

The Bible was the Rabbi's best friend. He knew its every word, its every thought. He read the following lines with awe and wonder at the marvelous God that he had inherited from his fathers:

From Isaiah 40:26:

> "Lift up your eyes and see:
> who created these? (the planets and stars)
> He who brings out their host by number,
> calling them all by name;
> By the greatness of His might,
> and because He is strong in power
> not one is missing."

and Psalm 19:1:

> "The heavens are telling the glory of God;
> and the firmament proclaims His handiwork."

or Psalm 94:9:

> "He who planted the ear, does He not hear?
> He who formed the eye, does He not see?"

With these lines we can understand why the Rabbis called God "The Ancient of the World" and "the First of the World." God was often called "The Creator" in Rabbinic Literature and "The Creator of the World"; all these names suggest the cosmological proof for the existence of God.[2]

The Rabbis were never faced with a Kant to ask them "So what does God do now?" They thanked God for being and for giving them being. It is only in centuries following the Rabbis that we get the building of theological systems by the medieval Jewish philosophers Saadia, Maimonides, Bahya Ibn Paqudah, Hasdai Crescas, and Joseph Albo. The cosmological argument is often found in the writings of these Jewish philosophers who lived long after the Rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash.

3. The teleological argument (from design):

(The word 'teleological' comes into English from the Greek teleos ("complete" or "perfect") + logos ("logic") i.e., 'teleological' means "logically derived from completion or perfection."

"The order of the Universe shows that God is One." (Maimonides: Happalat ha-happalah quoted in HUCA, Vol 1, 1924, page 583)

This argument is found in the philosophy of Socrates, Cicero, Aquinas (1225-1274 C.E.), Paley and many others. Stated simply this argument has it that the design of things implies the necessity of a designer. It is impossible for example that the nitrogen cycle in plants and soil, the perfect movement of the planets and stars and the extraordinarily well designed human body were not designed by a Great Designer. God is the Great Designer.

OBJECTION:

It was Kant who raised the strongest objection to this and the other Proofs for the Existence of God. He said that the teleological argument from design can be proved or disproved; facts can be found to support or refute it. Unfortunately it depends, logically, on the other two arguments (ontological and cosmological) and thus has their weaknesses in it. It assumes that just because a house suggests a designer so the Universe must have a designer. No one has established that what is true of objects in the world (i.e., houses) must be true of the Universe. It could be that the Universe has its own rules!

It is important to note, however, that even the genius Kant admitted that this is a very strong argument. It doesn't tell us about the characteristics of this great designer. We have to infer what God is like from the world and history.

THE RABBIS:

It should be clear by now that God's existence was as basic an assumption in Rabbinic Theology as is the existence of our parents' love for most of us.

Many may say that God doesn't exist, or that parents do not love, the belief goes on in spite of all. Thus God's existence was never doubted.

Rabbi Akiba used the teleological argument to answer the unbelievers who demanded "Show me clear evidence that God created the world." Akiba asked "What material are you wearing?" "A cloth coat" answered the unbeliever. "And who wove the cloth?" asked Akiba. "The weaver, of course!" answered the unbeliever. To the unbeliever's surprise Akiba said "I don't believe you! Show me clear evidence that a weaver made it!" "Just look at the cloth. Obviously someone has woven it!" answered the other angrily. "So" responded Akiba "why do you ask for clear evidence that God created the World? Just as a building testifies to the existence of a builder who designed and built it, cloth to a weaver who wove it and a door to a carpenter who designed and built it, so does the World testify to the existence of God who designed, created and constantly sustains it."[3]

It is important to note that one does not have to choose one proof for the existence of God to the exclusion of all the others. Neither non-Jewish nor Jewish philosophers did this. It is well-known that in chemistry amalgams are made with mercury plus other substances to produce a new substance which has the strengths and weaknesses of all the ingredients. Similarly with belief numerous "proofs" are brought together to strengthen the final belief of the individual. In Judaism the cosmological argument was most 'popular.' However, Jewish philosophers often strengthened it with the teleological argument from design. The wonder of creation and the amazing efficiency of the University were evidence of God's goodness, unity, intelligence and, above all, His mystery.

II

Those Proofs not based on Reason

4. The argument from experience: "Experience is more forceful than logic" (Abravanel, Commentary to Deuteronomy 17.15)

"Throughout history, this argument goes," and throughout the world, human beings have had religious experiences. There is 'something Real' suggested by those experiences. That 'something Real' (or "Reality") can only adequately be explained by God. Thus God is the Reality behind every religious experience."

What is this argument really saying? It seems to say that man's religious experiences amount to an experience of God. It also seems to be saying that any definition of 'God' has to have as part of it this 'experience' of God.

OBJECTION!

Just because we define God by saying our experience comes from Him, does not mean that He exists! The most that can be said is that the experience existed and perhaps we feel like believing that God was behind that experience!

THE RABBIS:

The concept of "religious experiences" was somewhat foreign to the Rabbis. While they said that God is omnipresent through his shekhinah--rarely is an "experience of God" (literally "the in-dwelling presence of God which everyone can experience), the only proof for God's existence. When they said, "God is present in every minyan"[4] no one would have thought to ask "How do you know?" The Rabbis knew because they had a perfect tradition that God was present. God is "our God and God of our fathers" and fathers do not lie! Thus the Rabbis inherited a tradition about God which was as true as the Torah

itself. Jews today have problems with theology, largely because not only do they question the Torah but they also question the Tradition which the Rabbis believed in! It is interesting to note, however, that even though Jews do question Torah and Tradition they still talk about religious experiences and the many ways in which such experiences are expressed. With the Rabbis, we honour those who have that sensitivity to experience God.

The Midrash heaps praises on Nahshon ben Amminadab. When Moses stretched out his hand across the Red Sea and the waters divided, the Children of Israel stood in terror. How could Moses expect them to walk into the split? It would take a brave man to be the first; what trust in God that man would have!

Immediately (so the Midrash goes) Nashon ben Amminadab stepped forward. It was he, who, amidst universal hesitation was the first to jump in. When everyone else was overcome by their own fear he felt the presence of God and took the step which saved the Children of Israel.[5] This sensitivity to a commandment "Go ahead, do not hesitate!" and the courage to respond to it is what the Rabbis saw as experiencing God.

Thus for the Rabbis personal experiences with God were mostly in the past. Abraham, Moses, the Children of Israel and the Prophets had such experiences. The Rabbis shared in those experiences vicariously through studying the Torah and through worship. There was always room in the worship service for their own private prayers which they addressed directly to God. God was there for them, they would not however, have spoken of 'experiencing' Him. The possibility of a personal experience was always there. It just didn't bother an individual rabbi if it didn't happen to him personally.

5. The argument from utility (moral argument): "It is in God that morality has its foundation and guarantee."
(Baeck, Essence of Judaism 1936, p. 150.)

This argument is based on the assumption that any belief which improves human behavior is justified: A belief in God is good for people. It makes them act justly, live righteously and love one another. Thus belief in God is justified on moral grounds. Furthermore, everyone has a conscience; people may differ in there standards but every society has some life-supporting standards.

OBJECTION:

Jews question whether belief in God necessarily and always leads to either justice, righteousness or love. The Crusaders slaughtered Jews in their thousands; did these murderers not believe in God? Wherever Jews have been expelled, pushed, and persecuted, there have been "believers" who have either participated in the torment or who have stood by and let it happen.

A further objection could be raised. Let us suppose that belief in ghosts improved human behaviour, would ghosts thereby exist? Even if we accept that belief in God could have a positive moral effect on people, God's existence is not proved by that belief. There is just not enough evidence of man's conscience; did Hitler have a conscience?

No one is certain whether morals are produced by Society growing up or by God working through Society. The universal nature of some morals (which are held as "right" even though they are often broken) has suggested that God is working through Society. In short, God is believed in. His existence is not "proved" by the existence of morals.

THE RABBIS:

God and moral living were part of the fabric of the life of the ancient Rabbis. To deny God was to cut oneself off from all moral life. For the Rabbis a mitzvah ("commandment") was inconceivable without the existence of a m'tzaveh ("one who commands"); certainly this seems logical!

The Rabbinic ethical code and belief in God who is the source of that code, are two poles which are in constant tension. In the Supplement to the Mishna--the Tosephta-- this tension between morals and belief is expressed. Rabbi Reuben loved to visit Tiberias. On one occasion he met a philosopher who asked him the following question:

"Who is the most detestable person in the world?"

The Rabbi was hardly expecting such a question at that time. He thought for a while and asked: "You are familiar with the Ten Commandments are you not?" "Certainly I am" was the reply. "Then you know of the commandments:

Honour thy father and thy mother
Thou shalt not murder
Thou shalt not commit adultery
Thou shalt not steal
Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor
Thou shalt not covet

.....do you not?"

"Of course I'm familiar with them...who isn't?" answered the Philosopher. "Then you'll understand my answer to your question." answered the Rabbi. "He who is familiar with these mitzvot yet does not Honour
does murder
does commit adultery
does steal
does bear false witness
and does covet

that man is the most detestable person in the world. For by rejecting the mitzvot he logically must be rejecting the m'tzaveh--God Himself."

6. Argument from intuition: " A man who acts intuitively is dearer in the sight of God than a sinner whom calculating caution returned to Good." (M. Ibn Ezra, Shirat Yisrael, (12c) 1924, p. 96)

This argument is often used. It states that scientific arguments can neither prove nor disprove God's existence. God is known by revelation; man intuitively knows when God is communicating with him. A man who maintains this position probably says "I have a feeling that God exists."

OBJECTION:

How can I check your intuition? How do I know you are not mistaken? How can a community agree on your findings from "feelings" which can't be tested?

These questions are commonly raised in objection to the argument from intuition. The point is that people do have hallucinations! Freud has explained people's fantasies and delusions. Why (many ask) can't such intuitions be delusions?

THE RABBIS:

It is interesting to note that the Rabbis inherited a tradition which with rare exceptions frowned on untestable intuition. Thus we read in the first chapter of Pirke Avot:

> "Moses received the Torah on Sinai and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua gave it to the elders; the elders to the prophets; and the prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly." (UPB I p. 165)[6]

Note that only Moses is allowed to have the untestable experience. Those following him were taught the tradition from their fathers. Later Medieval Jewish Theology plays down the intuitive aspect of the Moses' revelation from God and emphasizes the evidence.

Thus the Rabbis believed that their knowledge of God came from as-good-as possible evidence and not from intuition. Modern man has a problem because modern critical scholarship has established that the Torah was not written by Moses on Sinai, but written over a long period! Joshua didn't get the whole Torah but, like those after him, he handed on traditions and added to the text of the Torah. It is important to remember, however, that the Rabbis knew nothing of modern Biblical Criticism. They tried to avoid supporting their beliefs with untestable intuition.

The normal way of knowing God existed was--for the Rabbis--to be taught the fact from reputable teachers. Thus one's Rabbi, parents and teachers were witnesses to God's presence. One could ask whether this "teaching" was considered the only way to know God and His mitzvot. The answer is "yes" but with four notable exceptions.

The Midrash Rabbah discusses the eminent Rabbi Abba bar Kahana who said that only four men gained knowledge of God through intuition and not through learning. These were Abraham, Job, Hezekiah, King of Judah, (who was part of the Davidic line from which the Messiah would come) and the King Messiah himself...who is yet to come.[7] Somehow these are the only four who can have knowledge of God's presence and His mitzvot without being taught. It is important to note that Moses is not one of those who knew God from intuition. When it came to a choice the Rabbis chose education and example over intuition as leading to a true knowledge of God.

7. Argument from consensus: "Evidence for God I have found in the Existence of Israel." (Edmund Fleg, Why I am a Jew, 1929, p. 93)

This argument asks the following question: If there is no God why throughout history and the world, have people believed that there is a God?

That is, does not the widespread knowledge of God suggest that God Himself exists? God Himself seems to be the only adequate explanation of this.

OBJECTION:

Throughout history people have had 'knowledge' of a great many false notions about the world. Everyone used to 'know' that the world was flat; because this was believed to be so did not make it so!

THE RABBIS:

While the Rabbis did not argue for the existence of God from consensus they did see the Jewish People as testifying to the presence of God. After all Haman and Hitler have come and gone and the Jewish People go on!
The Rabbis also felt that a Jew who left his community would fall prey to heathen practices and would finally become an atheist. Thus "do not separate yourself from your community" became a well-known instruction. The Rabbis knew that Jews suffered. The fact that Jews existed from one generation to the next and stayed loyal Jews was, for them, some evidence of God's existence. Thus the Jewish community's existence within Jewish tradition was central in the Rabbinic proof for the existence of God.[8]

But what of the non-Jewish community? This too was not to be ignored, the Rabbis believed. A man who isolates himself from people--whether those people be Jew or non-Jew--is like a man who has no God to call his own. Such a man, in the Rabbinic mind, was a pathetic figure.

For example, the half legendary, half historic story of Rabbi Elazar ben Parata and Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion expresses this Rabbinic belief. These two Rabbis were arrested by the Romans. Elazar was arrested on five charges, Chanina on one. The following discussion between them is important:

Rabbi Elazar: You should be happy! I have been arrested on five charges while you've only been arrested on one!

Rabbi Chanina: So? Even though you have more charges against you than I, you'll be set free. I only have one charge against me and I'll probably be burned at the stake!

Rabbi Elazar: How?

Rabbi Chanina: It's simply because you, Elazar, have made friends with these Romans. You studied Torah and gave them charity and your time while I just studied Torah! I'm like a man who has no God![9]

This statement of Rabbi Chanina is very strange. Why is he "like a man who has no God?" It was Rabbi Huna who said (and Chanina is quoting him) "He who occupies himself only with the study of the Law is as if he had no God."[10] By burying himself in the Torah this man is saying that God exists only in the Torah of the past. When a man neglects the world he implies that God is not found there. Thus to neglect the world is to be 'godless.' There could be no ivory tower devotion to the Torah for the Rabbis! But the Rabbis gained strength in their belief from the fact that thousands of Jews believed; after all thousands and thousands of Jews couldn't be wrong!

These last four arguments "not from reason" differ from the first three "from reason." Experience, utility, intuition and consensus are not arguments from reason. That is not to say that they are not sensible and acceptable to many reasonable people (including the rabbis); they just are not strictly reasoned arguments. At times the Rabbis seem to have been affirming their belief on non-rational (not irrational grounds) as has been discussed.

Conclusion and a final word....: "The best theology is that which is not consistent, and this advantage the theology of the synagogue possesses to its utmost extent." (Solomon Schechter Studies in Judaism i. p.231)

What have we established about Rabbinic 'theology?' This chapter of The Living Rabbis has shown that the life of the Rabbis was inextricably bound up with God. Of the seven proofs for God's existence:

I (From Reason)	1. Ontological
	2. Cosmological
	3. Teleological
II (Not From Reason)	4. Experience
	5. Utility
	6. Intuition
	7. Consensus

No one of these is THE Rabbinic proof for the existence of God. Note also that the living faith of the Rabbis was the product of both rational and non-rational decisions. (The difference between non-rational and irrational has already been discussed above.) Some of the proofs are only hinted at in the Rabbinic literature while others are expressed in full.

This life-centered quest for God is the value and greatness of Rabbinic literature for the modern Jew. If one approach to God is not appealing no Jew is bound to accept it as his own. An eagerness to keep searching is the important thing.

Each argument for God's existence has to come from life. The Rabbis "lived God" every moment of their lives. In order for the Rabbis to ask whether God existed or not the possibility of the "not" would have to occur to them. A swimmer has to step out of the water to get dry; if he stays there no normal towel will dry him. So, too, would the Rabbis have had to step out of their lives of service to God to think of Him as not existing.

It is a rare person who asks himself whether he loves his own parents. To find the answer to this question he would have to put his parents and himself under an impossible scrutiny. He would have to stop loving them for the period that he is asking himself whether he loves them! Just as this is an impossibility for him--and for all of us--so it was with the Rabbis and their approach to the proofs for the existence of God.

We have presented the objections to each of the "proofs" for God's existence. Note that each proof can be faulted. The important question is: Does proving that the arguments are invalid prove that God does not exist? Not at all. For to say that an argument is invalid is by no means the same thing as to say that its conclusion is false. Just because a man can't prove his love for his parents does not mean that he doesn't love them!

QUESTION 2

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

Introduction:

In this chapter we are concerned with learning more about the particular concepts of God the Rabbis had. They built on the traditions which they received from their fathers and which their fathers received from the Bible. Every generation builds on the traditions of its past. Thus modern man too has inherited concepts and beliefs about God which may be accepted, rejected or modified. The Rabbinic tradition, therefore, is a source of possibilities for belief.

There are eight sections in this chapter. Each section approaches a common question about God and discusses it in terms of Rabbinic beliefs:

1) Where is God?
2) Does God know me?
3) What can't God do?
4) What can God do?
5) Is God dead or alive?
6) Why is God called "The God of Truth?"
7) If God is just why does injustice exist?
8) Is it a sin to doubt?

This period of history in which the Rabbis lived is part of the modern Jew's past of which he can be proud. His ancestors had developed a meaningful approach to what life and belief is all about. Just as they were able to accept and fashion the beliefs of their past to their own needs, so the modern Jew must respond to his past and present needs in his approach to

God. Perhaps the beliefs of the Rabbis can only partially be accepted by the modern Jew; as long as he knows those beliefs he can choose wisely.

1. WHERE IS GOD? "The infinite heights are too small to contain You, yet somehow You can find a niche in the smallest parts of me." (Solomon Ibn Gabirol(1021-1058) Selected Poems)

That the Rabbinic life-centered approach to God should at times touch every one of the seven proofs for the existence of God should suggest that the Rabbis were by no means naive. True, complicated religious systems did not occur to them. To blame them for this would be like blaming neanderthal man for not inventing the wheel!

Thus it was not out of naivite that the Rabbis answered the question WHERE IS GOD? with the simple answer of GOD IS EVERYWHERE. God was with them when they worshipped, studied, ate, loved and in the final analysis, in every phase of their lives. Their lives were totally God-orientated. So how else would they answer the question?

The following account of a meeting between Rabbi Gamaliel II and Caesar is a clear illustration of the Rabbinic notion of God's omnipresence (i.e., His being everywhere):

RABBI GAMALIEL AND CAESAR:

The Emperor, Caesar, said to Rabbi Gamaliel: "You say that 'whenever ten Jews are assembled (for prayer) God dwells in their midst.' My question is this: throughout the world Jews are meeting in groups of ten; they meet in minyanim to pray. If God is One how can He dwell with all the minyanim in the world at the same time? Just how many Gods are there, Rabbi?"

Without hesitation, Gamaliel called Caesar's servant to him. To both

the servant's and Caesar's shock, Gamaliel hit the servant on the neck!

"Why did you permit the sun to enter Caesar's house?" Gamaliel asked the servant. He received no answer and the servant hurried away.

"Why did you hit my servant?" asked Caesar, not a little annoyed.

"Because" answered Gamaliel "He let the sun shine into your house."

"But it is crazy to punish him for that! After all, how can a man be blamed for the sun coming in through every nook and cranny? No man can stand up against the sun!"

Rabbi Gamaliel was ready to make his point. He looked Caesar straight in the eye and said, "You, O Emperor, asked me how it is possible for God to dwell in the midst of every minyan as our Sages have taught us, while there is but one God." Caesar gave a slight nod to show he was following.

"Well" continued Gamaliel, "You, yourself have said that the sun cannot be prevented from coming in your house. Isn't the world God's 'house?' He enters it through his shekhinah (God's presence in the world) whenever and wherever ten men are gathered for prayer. The sun is but one of the thousands of stars which God created and has in His power. If His servant--the sun--is everywhere while yet being one, how much more so, then, is the shekhinah (God's presence) able to be everywhere while yet being One!"[1]

Thinking things through....

Rabbi Gamaliel's Midrash expresses an important and central theme in Rabbinic literature. This theme concerns a two part view of God which the Rabbis had concerning the question WHERE IS GOD? The theme recurs in the following discussion between Rabbi Joshua and a non-Jew.

A non-Jew once asked Rabbi Joshua ben Karḥal the following question:

"Why did God speak to Moses from the pathetic thornbush? Couldn't He think of a better place to speak from?"

"That's a good question" responded Joshua. Let me ask you a question in return: "If the Bible had said God spoke to Moses from a mighty sycamore tree, what would you have asked me?"

"Why did God speak from the sycamore?" answered the non-Jew.

"I thought so!" replied Rabbi Joshua. Let me ask you another question" "If the Bible had said that God spoke from a tall and majestic carob tree from which we feed our animals, what would you have asked?"

"I would have asked, said the non-Jew, why did God speak from the carob tree?"

"Aha!" exclaimed the Rabbi, "I knew that if God had spoken from the sycamore tree or the carob tree you'd have asked the same question. Don't go away! I really do want to give you an answer. The best I can answer is that God could have spoken from the sycamore, the carob or any other tree. That God spoke from the thornbush is to teach us that there is no place where the shekhinah is not--even in the lowly, pathetic thornbush!"[2]

The two part view of God expressed in the Rabbinic answer to the question WHERE IS GOD is called by the terms IMMANENCE ("remaining in the world")and TRANSCENDANCE ("above and beyond the world").

When Rabbi Gamaliel and Rabbi Joshua referred to the shekhinah they were talking of God's IMMANENCE. God exists in the world and the name of this aspect of God which man can know and experience is called God's shekhinah. But it is obvious that the Rabbis believed that God was not limited to His shekhinah (His presence in the world.) Rabbi Gamaliel expressed this by stating

that God has the sun and all stars in His power; he 'transcends' (is greater than) them all. The shekhinah refers to God's IMMANENCE which the Rabbis maintained even though they believed Him to be transcendent.

Jewish prayer books express this two part view of God as "OUR FATHER OUR KING"[3] and "OUR FATHER IN THE HEAVENS"[4]

On a God who is both IMMANENT and TRANSCEDENT can rule mankind and the heavens. It may be clearer if we think of this two part view as occurring as immanence when man knows a feeling of intimacy with God and as transcendence when man stands in awe of God. The intimate and the awesome, Rabbis maintained, are aspects of the one God.

IS GOD "GOD" OR SHEKHINAH?

This new name for God is puzzling. One could well ask why the Rabbis didn't keep one name for God and understand that this name (perhaps adonay or elohim (i.e., Yahweh)) referred to God in all His aspects. Scholars have shown that there are 91 different names for God in the Rabbinic literature.[5] It is important for our understanding of Rabbinic theology for us to see why this is so.

NEW CIRCUMSTANCES, NEW NAMES FOR GOD:

The Rabbis inherited belief about God from their ancestors. When the People, Israel, were in the desert, they were satisfied with a concept of God Elohim who revealed Himself to Moses as YaHWeH. No one doubted that the same God who Moses knew as YaHWeH was the God who the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew as El Shaddai. But while YaHWeH could serve to unify all the people Israel with

"Hear O Israel YaHWeH our own God, YaHWeH is One"

in the wilderness, in the complex cities which the Rabbis lived in, this idea

of God was just not enough. The reason for this will be clear.

The Rabbis were scholars. They had only a scholar's 'book' knowledge of the animal sacrifices, agricultural laws, and priestly cults which were part of the 'old world' of the Temple which had long been destroyed. The Rabbis lived in an urban society; every day the society became more and more urbanized.

Caesar's question to Rabbi Gamaliel II is typical of the urban-mentality of that time. The minyanim were spread throughout the city.

The priests and their Temple, which had united the people, were no more. The Rabbis wanted Jews to remain loyal to God. They felt the need to express their belief that God was everywhere and that even though the Temple was now destroyed it was not God's only place. Thus they developed the name PLACE (MAKOM) for God to express this belief. God--He who is in all places--was still with the Jewish People in their new environment as MAKOM (the omnipresent).

It was Simon the Just[6] who was the first to use the word MAKOM for God. It is the oldest term for God in the Rabbinic material, thus showing us how early this need for an omnipresent God was felt. Knowing that man is not alone because God is ever present with him, the Rabbis could face their constantly changing and often antagonistic world.

CONCLUSION:

The Rabbis argued for God's omnipresence (His being everywhere). God is God of the Universe, the Rabbis maintained, while yet they said "Wherever you find the impression of human feet there God is before you."[7]

QUESTION 3

DOES GOD KNOW ME?

Loneliness can be terribly depressing. But everyone must be alone at least once in life. If man is not alone; if a God who knows him - exists, man need never feel really lonely. "The Lord is a God of knowledge." (I Samuel 2:3)

In the Dead Sea Scrolls we find this prayer:

> "Blessed art Thou, my God
> Who openest to knowledge the heart of thy servant."[1]

This prayer does more than say that God allows man to have knowledge. It also fits in with other prayers which call God the "source of knowledge." The Rabbis believed this. They realized that it stands to reason that if God was, is and always will be present everywhere, then he must have perfect knowledge! Thus we find in our prayer books the prayer

אתה חונן לאדם דעת ומלמד לאנוש בינה.

חננו מאתך דעה בינה והשכל: ברוך אתה יי חונן הדעת.

> "Thou who dost graciously endow man with reason and teachest him understanding, imbue us with true knowledge and discernment (literally 'knowledge, understanding and insight'). Praised be Thou, O Lord, gracious giver of knowledge."[2]

Thus the Rabbis believed that God too has knowledge and He gives that knowledge to man. Thus the simple answer to the question "Does God know Me?" is "Of course God knows you! God knows everything!" However, they would hardly have been using knowledge, understanding, or insight had they left things at that. The Rabbis wondered why it is that God has not given all His knowledge to man at birth. They explained this with tongue-in-cheek by saying that when an embryo is in the womb it does have perfect knowledge, or at least knowledge of the whole of Jewish tradition ("Torah" in its broad sense).

However, for some reason, at birth an angel strikes the infant on the mouth and all its knowledge vanishes![3] How do we know this? Have you never heard a newborn baby scream? Why else would it scream but from being struck and having lost all that knowledge! Let no one tell you that the Rabbis didn't have a sense of humor!

Let's get back to the question "Does God know Me?" What do you really mean by it? What you mean seems to depend on what you mean by "Me" and what you mean by "knowledge."

A. "Me"

Do you mean (1) "Me in the past?" (What I have done)
or (2) "Me right this minute?" (What I am doing)
or (3) "Me in the future?" (What I will do?
or (4) "Me and everybody else?"

(I) "Me in the past"

This is often what is meant by the question "Does God know me?" The Rabbis had a simple answer: "Yes. God knows the good and bad deeds that a person has performed in the past. Everything is recorded." The Rabbis believed that not only did God know man's deeds but that he weighed them in a balance and rewarded or punished the man depending on which side of the balance weighed most. We shall discuss this further in our section on "Is God Just?" The following Midrash illustrates God's total knowledge of the past. (The first commandment in the Bible is "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:22) and Hezekiah was held to be an ancestor of the Messiah, one of King David's House.)

> King Hezekiah was about to die. Isaiah, the prophet, walked in both to visit him and to rebuke him. Said Isaiah to the King: "You will die because you have refused to have children; how dare you disobey God's commandment, you who are of the House of David!"

> Hezekiah was shocked at this attack. Summoning up his strength he replied "I had a vision that all my children would be wicked. I therefore decided not to have any children. After all, aren't all visions from God?"
>
> "What could you possibly know about visions? ridiculed Isaiah, "You should have done what you were commanded to do--to have children--and let God do that which pleases Him."[4]

Thus God knew of Hezekiah's vow to be childless, says the Talmud But look again: what is the real nature of Hezekiah's vow? Hasn't he said, in effect, that seeing that his children to come are going to be evil--inevitably--that he may as well not have them? He has said that seeing that the whole of human history is worked out before it happens man may as well give up! Nothing is more opposed to the Rabbinic way of thinking. We'll return to this later.

(2) "Me right this minute"

If the Rabbis believed in God's omnipresence--that He was everywhere all the time--(and they did) then it follows that they believed that God knew that they existed. Thus they could pray to a God who knew them personally throughout their lives. The Jewish prayer book expresses it in this way:

> "Thou who probest the heart and knowest our inmost thoughts...."[5]

and

> "You know our thoughts before we utter them...You know our sins and our failings...."[6]

both of which comes from the Yom Kippur prayer of the Rabbis:

> "You know the secrets of the world and the hidden thoughts of every life...."[7]

While it is difficult to understand the special kind of knowledge that God must have--a universal knowledge of everything everywhere--this merely goes

along with our difficulty to grasp omnipresence (present everywhere) and omniscience (all-knowing) as abstract concepts. Try and think of anything which is on the scale of the universe; it is very difficult. A student expressed it this way:

> "The awesomeness and almightiness of God would make Moses feel like a worm in comparison!"[8]

The Rabbis could live with this awe. To them the "awesomeness" of God was simply on a higher plane than the awesomeness which they felt about man. We know of man being described as "little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8:5). We marvel at the phenomenon of the fingerprint; that no two are the same. We look at the faces of our friends; even 'identical' twins have slightly different faces and often totally different personalities! We stand in awe at man's extremes of sacrifice and selfishness. The Rabbis, could stand in awe of the mystery of God because they saw it as reflected in and as an extension of the mystery of man.

An excellent example of this is found in tractate Berachot of the Babylonian Talmud:

> "When one sees a crowd of six hundred thousand people one should say the benediction "Blessed be He who knows secrets."[9]

This seems to be a strange thing to do. But look at those people again. Let your mind's eye wander over their faces. Each face is different. Each mind behind the face is different. Somehow there is a secret of creation at work here of which we are totally ignorant. But the rule is established: every person shall have a different face and the ability to think his own thoughts. So we say with the Rabbis "Blessed be He who knows secrets."

(3) "Me in the future" ("What I will do") "All is foreseen" (Akiba, Avot 3:15)

Imagine if one had to explain the Jewish faith to someone of another planet who had taken over the earth. If these new rulers of mankind were insecure in their position, if they were fearful of being overthrown, any group--religious, cultural or national--would be careful in its portrayal itself.

While the Rabbis didn't have martians to explain Judaism and the Bible to, they did have insecure rulers who were fearful of rebellion and of being overthrown. There are certain passages in the Bible which speak of the Jewish people one day growing to enormous numbers:

(God promises Abram)

"I will make your descendents as the dust of earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth your descendents also can be counted." (Genesis 13:16)

(Jacob is speaking to God)

"But you said "I will do good for you and make your descendents as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of their great number." (Genesis 32:12)

These passages, then, speak of God knowing the future and making that future known to Jews. The Rabbis were not prepared to forego this belief and had to translate these passages even though their translations might alienate their Rulers who feared that these numbers of Jews might overthrow them.

God's foreknowledge, therefore, was an essential part of Rabbinic belief. In the following story, an agnostic (an ancient critic of the Jewish faith) tried to find evidence in the Torah that God does not know the future. He brought the following passage to Rabbi Joshua ben Korḥa in which God

> "Was sorry that He had made man and it grieved Him to His heart." (Genesis 6:6)

because man was so evil that God was forced to bring the flood to punish him.

The agnostic's question was that if God knows the future then He must have known that man would sin. If He already knew this they why did He grieve at the flood which He also knew was going to come? If God did grieve then He couldn't have known the future. Rabbi Joshua's answer is from the life-experience of the agnostic:

> "Do you have a son?" the Rabbi asked.
>
> "Yes....but what has that to do with it?" answered the Gnostic.
>
> "What did you do when your son was born?" asked Joshua.
>
> "I had a huge party! I was so happy that I got terribly drunk and had to be carried home!" was the reply.
>
> "But, didn't you consider that the child might die some day?"
>
> "Of course I knew that! What a crazy question! At a time of joy we rejoice. At a time of death we mourn. And so I rejoiced!"
>
> Rabbi Joshua was ready to make his point: "So why do you ask your question about God? When man sinned it was time for God to grieve; when man was created God rejoiced and said that it was good! Of course God knew man would sin; this didn't prevent him from feeling the same grief as you will feel when your son dies. Your grief-when your son dies--will be no less because you know about it in advance. God's grief at man's sin is no less because He knows about it in advance!"[11]

B "Knowledge"

(4) We have already said that the question "Does God know me" depends on our understanding of the words "Me" and "Knowledge." You probably see the difficulties with "Me." What about the word "knowledge."

When you asked the question "Does God know me?" you probably meant "Does God know me in the same way as I know that I am reading The Living Rabbis?" We have already noted that God's knowledge of you is the past you, the present you and the future you. Is this the same 'kind' of knowledge as

your knowing that you are reading The Living Rabbis? If you could get inside this book, see all its fibres, understand how it was written and published, and then see who will read it after you and what will happen to it in years to come, then your knowledge of The Living Rabbis would be somewhat the same as the 'kind' of knowledge the Rabbis said God has about man.

Look again at the Midrash of Hezekiah and Isaiah. Hezekiah gave up because he said history was determined and there was just no reason to go ahead and produce evil children. In philosophy this problem is called "Free Will and Determinism." Rabbi Akiba is the most well-known of the Rabbis who stated the belief that even though God knows (past, present, and future) man has free will. Akiba's words are found in Pirke Avot "Everything is foreseen (that is, known by God before it happens) yet free will is given."[12]

Do you understand the dilemma? If the future is fixed so that God knows it, how can man possibly have free will? The Rabbis saw God's purpose in the universe as part of His goodness. They could not believe that God's plan ("Providence" or "Determinism") would be for man's hurt. Man is free, they said, to either be part of fulfilling God's plan or be part of those who frustrate it. How God could possibly give man total free will (within the limits of his own body and nature) while yet determining the future was, for the Rabbis, part of the mystery of God's nature. Thus they called Him, in awe "The Holy One Blessed Be He" who is so great as to know everything yet protect man's free will. This is a real dilemma. Later Jewish philosophers compromised on either or both of Free Will and Providence (or Determinism) but the Rabbis lived with the dilemma. They felt the evidence for both existed and so they couldn't reject either even though they were contradictory.

Conclusion: A God who knows is easy to pray to. Man need never feel lonely even if he longs for the company of other people. What kind of knowledge did the Rabbis believe God has? Clearly this cannot be proven; does it make sense? In what ways is our life determined? Would total freedom ever be possible - or desirable?

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QUESTION 4

IS GOD DEAD OR ALIVE?

"God is dead!"
"No He isn't - He's hiding
in Argentina!"

"And when everything shall
cease to be,
He will still rule in majesty,
He was, He is, He shall always
be,
In endless glory."
(Adon Olam UPB I, p. 98, SOH p. 371,
Silverman, p. 42, Hertz, p.557)

The Rabbis believed that God existed before creation and will exist forever. In the centuries that came before the Rabbis' people (including Jews) believed in Gods who grow and die, revive and decay. Rabbinic Judaism discarded such belief. Their's was an eternal God.

While the Rabbis believed in God as THE ETERNAL they still maintained that He is influenced by man. There are at least three ways in which man has such an influence on God:

a) Man's effect on God's reputation
b) Man's fate shared by God
c) Man's effect on the Shekhinah

Note in the discussion that follows of each of these that the Rabbis believed God's essential nature remains eternal while yet man can influence Him.

a) Man's effect on God's reputation:

"If you make yourselves kadosh (holy, special, distinguished) I account it to you as if you had made Me kadosh. (Sifra to Lev. 22:32-33)

It makes sense that the way non-believers learn about God is through the actions of believers. A Jew who acts in an 'unholy' manner implies that his God encourages such acts. God's reputation thus suffers. The word kedusha when applied to God implies more than its literal meaning holiness but "making

holy."

Hashem (the name) is one of the 91 Rabbinic names for God. The Rabbis used the expression kidush hashem which logically means MAKING GOD HOLY. Thus the Rabbis believed that God is made holy by man; that is, man increases God's reputation in the world.

Just as God's reputation can be increased by man's action so can it be decreased. The opposite concept chillul hashem meant the destruction of the divine reputation. The Rabbis further believed that a public affirmation that God exists is kidush hashem while a public denial of God's existence is chillul hashem.[1] A man affirms God's existence by living ethically and morally; he denies God's existence by an unethical, immoral life. In the discussion, the moral argument for the existence of God it was pointed out that to break a mitzvah (a commandment) logically implies a denial of the mitzaveh (He who commands).[2] Thus while God Himself is eternal--never changing--His reputation--kiddush hashem or chillul hashem--which does change is in the hands of those who believe in Him. This puts a great responsibility on every person, Jew and non-Jew.

b) Man's Fate shared by God:

> Rabbi Abba said to Rabbi Nachman ben Isaac "Since the day of the destruction of the Temple there is no laughter for God." (Abodah Zarah 3b.)

The term anthropopathism refers to giving God human emotions. Obviously if God is not human then he cannot suffer, rejoice, weep or laugh as can human beings. However, the Rabbis invented an excellent device for expressing their feeling that God shares in the Jew's fate, that He suffers, rejoices, weeps and even laughs with them. This device involves putting the word

kivyachol "as it were" or "if one could say" before each anthropopathic expression.[3] It allows the Rabbis to speak of God in the only way they know how -- by applying to Him the same terms they applied to themselves.

The Rabbis knew what it meant to be persecuted. They could not believe that the God who was with them throughout life did not know the suffering that they were experiencing. To them God has more than a sympathetic relationship with His people--so that He feels sorry for them--God has an empathetic relationship with them; God feels with Israel. Through God's personal encounter with them the Rabbis believed that He became personally involved in their lives. He became stimulated by them--not changed but stimulated. God's empathy for them was (kivyachol) like the strings of a violin; when one string vibrates the others vibrate in harmony. Thus God could share a similar emotional state to that of the People of Israel with whom He empathizes. Just as the essential nature of a violin string is not changed by its vibrating in harmony, so is God's essential nature not changed by His empathy.

The uses of kivyachol to allow the Rabbis to be anthropopathic while yet expressing God's empathy are numerous in the Rabbinic literature. The following are some poignant examples:

> "When Israel is enslaved, God is as it were kivyachol enslaved with them."[4]

The Rabbis imagine God saying to Moses from the burning thorn bush:

> "If you do not feel that I am immersed in sorrow, then realize that I am speaking to you from the midst of the thorns, to show that I am, as it were, (kivyachol) sharing in their (the enslaved Israelites) sorrow."[5]

That God was believed to be eternal has already been discussed. But the fact that God can participate in Israel's joy and sorrow--that He is effected by Israel's fate--shows that the God of the Rabbis was not dead, completely inmovable Being. God's eternality--His being THE ETERNAL throughout all time--is thus modified in Rabbinic theology by showing that He shares the effect of Israel's fortune. The Rabbinic God was very much alive.

c) Man's effect on the Shekhinah (God's Presence in the World)

> "In the beginning, before Israel sinned the Shekhinah dwelt with all of them; when they sinned the Shekhinah departed from their midst." (Sotah 3b)

In the fourth proof for the existence of God (from experience) the Rabbinic belief in the shekhinah as the in-dwelling presence of God which everyone can experience, was discussed.[6] There are two views expressed in the Rabbinic material concerning the shekhinah. One view says "...even at the time when (Jews) are unclean the shekhinah dwells among them."[7] A more frequent view than this is that the presence of the Shekhinah among the People Israel depends on the behaviour of that People. If Israel sins then the Shekhinah leaves; if Israel follows the commandments then the shekhinah stays. Thus the general view of the Rabbis was that there is an aspect of THE ETERNAL which is affected by man's moral or immoral behaviour.

The Rabbis said that the well-known sins recorded in the Bible caused the shekhinah to leave. Thus the sins of Adam, Cain, the generations of the Flood at the time of Noah, and Sodom, caused the shekhinah to leave the world. However the righteousness of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--and of every righteous individual--brought the Divine Presence closer to the earth. The Rabbis never contemplated in precise terms actually where the shekhinah went once it

left the earth; they were only concerned with keeping this aspect of God with them.

Thus the Rabbis knew their responsibility. Each individual had a personal task to keep the shekhinah here. They said:

> "He who transgresses in secret pushes away kivyachol* the feet of the shekhinah."[8]

and

> "Every judge who adjudicates a case in truth causes the shekhinah to dwell in Israel's midst and every judge who does not adjudicate a case in truth causes the shekhinah to be removed from Israel."[9]

The shekhinah therefore is responsive to Israel's actions.[10] Once again it is clear that God's essential nature is not changed by the changing position of the shekhinah. But because the shekhinah is an aspect of God it is not correct to say that God does not change. He does change--through the shekhinah's responsiveness--yet THE ETERNAL remains unchanged.

Conclusion:

For the Rabbis God was very much alive and will always be so.

The Rabbis believed, however, that while God is eternal He is not totally unchanging. In the three ways in which man can change God are implied challenges to mankind. There is a challenge to protect God's reputation, to establish peace for Israel and all mankind and, finally, to live morally. Throughout history religious men have pleaded for moral society. The prophets and the Rabbis longed for the day when the quality of society in which mankind lived would be of the highest. In such a society God's reputation, Israel's

* kivyachol also made it possible for the Rabbis to speak of God having human limbs (anthropomorphism) while acknowledging that this was impossible yet fulfilling that desire to talk about Him.

fate and the Shekhinah's presence is secure. In such a society Auschwitz, Treblinka and Buchenwald could never occur.

Further Readings:

Lelyveld, Arthur J. Atheism is Dead. World Publishing Co., 1968.

Hertz, Richard C. What Can A Man Believe? Bloch, 1967.

QUESTION 5

WHAT CAN GOD DO?

"If God is so powerful why does he let me suffer so?" This is a question everyone asks at some time in their lives. If God is powerful and wants people to be happy, they should be happy! But they aren't; anyway - not all the time!

"The hands and tongues of men could not approximately describe God's power and greatness." (A. Marmorstein The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God p. 163.)

Above anything else the Rabbis wanted health. They wanted to be healthy in body and mind. When they approached their religion they did so with this dream in mind--to know health. The Rabbis believed that God gives this total 'completeness' which they craved. Of course when they spoke of 'health' they meant physical and spiritual and psychological health. Anything that fostered these could be asked for from God.

In their spontaneous private prayers to God--prayers which they themselves created and which they did not inherit--the Rabbis expressed this confidence in God. To them physical sickness differs from spiritual and psychological sickness only in kind. Any sickness is to be avoided! The following list includes some of the physical and material benefits which the rabbis asked God to give them:

Life
Financial Security
Strength
Wealth
Honour
Safety
Health
Fruitful Land

The Rabbis prayed less for material benefits, however, than for spiritual or, psychological or ethical benefits. In fact, while prayers in the Bible were largely for material benefits, the Rabbinic prayers, were almost exclusively ethical, spiritual or psychological. Thus the Rabbis

prayed for:

A Sense of Satisfaction with Life
A Life of Goodness (A Good Heart, Good Reason; Safety from an Inclination to do Evil)
A Sense of Feeling Blessed
Peace (Love; Brotherhood; Friendship and Tolerance)
Consolation in Mourning
And a Happy or Positive Outlook on Life[1]

Note That these private prayers were added to the synagogue service by each individual Rabbi. In the communal service God was praised and thanked. What the Rabbis believed God could do is expressed in these private prayers. A place was left in the service for each person to insert his personal religious feelings and experiences.[2]

The Rabbis never really asked themselves how God answers these prayers. They realized that man has certain ethical and moral responsibilities in life. Because it is God that does rule the world, can affect or influence man's life, does control history and is willing to help people, the Rabbis felt free to create prayers which would bring their needs and feelings to God's attention.

The Rabbis often began their private, creative prayers with the words MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE. They realized that they could not know how God benefits man only that He does. The following two verses are part of a modern Rabbi's prayer which express the ancient Rabbinic conviction that God can give man physical, spiritual and psychological health. The verses were written after a national tragedy had occurred in the United States:

> Master of the Universe! "He who makes peace on high," You are called. Do not make Your words null and vain as dust. Appear in the splendor of Your might; be filled with compassion for Your children; for they are deep in sorrow.
>
> Master of the Universe! Lord of peace! Pour out Your spirit upon us; enlighten our eyes and open our hearts. And give us peace; give us peace.3

Clearly, belief in God as the MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE did not die with the ancient Rabbis.

Conclusion:

What can God do? Do you still have a view of God as an old man in the sky with a long white beard? What does this chapter tell us about the way God works through men? Is this worth praying for? Is God worth praying to?

Further Reading:

Casper, Bernard M. Judaism Today and Yesterday, p. 91 "Rabbinic Teachings About God."

Dresner, Samuel H. Prayer, Humility and Compassion. J.P.S. 1957.

QUESTION 6

WHAT CAN'T GOD DO?

People like power. What little power we have we guard. We are not prepared to believe in a God who takes all our power from us.

"A man is led the way he wishes to follow" (Talmud: Makkot 10b)

Rabbi Hanina, the oldest of the interpreters of the Mishna (the Amoraim), knew that God cannot make men choose the way of innocence or guilt. The life-centered religion of the Rabbis expressed this conviction. They read the following verses from Deuteronomy (10:12)

> "And now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul....?"

and, with Rabbi Hanina, were convinced that

> "Everything is in the power of God except for the fear of God."[1]

Thus they believed that Man is free to make choices and to discriminate between one belief and another. God cannot influence man in this freedom. They saw Judaism as a guide to strengthen Jews, to direct them into making the right choices and discriminating wisely. Insofar as God revealed His Torah to their fathers and gave them the inspiration to interpret it meaningfully for their own lives, then God did influence them in this. The final choice is up to the individual.

The Rabbis were subjected to the influences of vast social forces--the constantly changing Empires of Rome and Greece. They refused to be helpless atoms. Their religion--the choices they made--saved them from becoming passive members of their societies.

God could not make their choices for them. They made their own, set their own goals and produced a life of complete satisfaction because of this freedom.

God's way of relating to man still remains a mystery. The Rabbis believed that he worked through them, and through society. Most important, they believed that everything God does is for the best. The Rabbis were thus able to live with their ignorance of how God works in the world.

Conclusion:

Does man's power or God's weakness explain Hitler? Does the fact of the holocaust mean that God is powerless or man is free? Does man deserve his freedom? What benefits have come out of man's freedom?

Further Reading:

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Buber, Martin, On Judaism. Schocken 1967, Chapter V, "Jewish Religiosity."

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QUESTION 7

WHY IS GOD CALLED "THE GOD OF TRUTH"?

False advertising is illegal. What about God? The "advertising" of Judaism about Him says He is the God of Truth. Is this a lie? What "Law" applies to God?[1]

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." (Job 13.15)

a) The trustworthy God of Truth:

The Rabbis admired any person who was completely trustworthy. They realized that even the best intentioned individual promises and finds he cannot fulfill the promise. Society has always rewarded the individual who accepts a responsibility and fulfills its demands. But the plain truth is that people are often prevented--by forces beyond their control--from being completely trustworthy.

Not so God. For THE ETERNAL is unhindered. The Rabbis believed that God had made a covenant (that is, a bargain) with man and He could be trusted because of this obligation to man. The Midrash to the Book of Psalms tells of a man whose countrymen used to deposit with him their property for safe-keeping. But the man was unfamiliar with the individual items of the peoples' property and he would make mistakes. He would give one man another's property and would occasionally lose an item or two. His countrymen, of course, were deeply disappointed in him. He finally lost their trust.[2] God, is different from man. Each night, said the Rabbis, every human soul is deposited with God. He keeps the souls until the morning when He returns each to its correct owner. The trustworthy GOD OF TRUTH makes no mistakes and no one gets the wrong soul! This belief in God's trustworthiness even when men sleep is

expressed in the traditional prayer said upon waking in the morning:

> "I thank You O ever-living King
> Because You have mercifully returned
> My soul to me;
> How great is Your trustworthiness!"

and continued in the Adon Olam Hymn:

> "My spirit I commit to Him
> My body too, and all I prize;
> Both when I sleep and when I wake,
> He is with me, I shall not fear."[3]

If when men sleep God is trustworthy, surely He is just as caring when His people are being persecuted while they are awake![4]

The Rabbis refused to believe that God had deserted them even when they were persecuted. They did believe that God's shekhinah (Presence in the world) left the world when society became evil.[5] But, said the Rabbis, God would only leave the world unwillingly and even then would soon return. The Kabbalah explains that the trustworthy GOD OF TRUTH kivyachol (as it were) leaves the world like a deer rushing away from its pursuers; just as a deer always looks back at its pursuers while rushing away, so the shekhinah looks longingly at the people Israel when forced out of the world.[6] Man's loyalty to his part of the covenant (bargain) restores the shekhinah.

b) The God of Truth who demands honesty:

> "To be honest in business is
> to fulfill the whole Torah."
> (Mikilta to Exodus 15:26)

The Rabbis were optimists. God's world, they saw has a regularity and dependability about it; nature, the seasons, the human life cycle, can all be relied upon--they are all the work of God. God can be trusted and man must strive to measure up to this example.

Complete honesty is never easy. Often business competition makes it seem necessary for a man to "stretch the truth" a little. The Rabbis all who knew Rabbi Simon ben Shetach--Jew and non-Jew-- would say "Blessed be the God of Simon ben Shetach!" Rabbi Simon once used what little money he had to buy an animal. To his shock found a precious gem caught in the animal's neck. His students told the poor Rabbi to keep the gem; surely he needed the extra money! But Rabbi Simon knew that God's reputation as GOD OF TRUTH was at stake. So He returned the gem to its owner who, in admiration and thanks, said "Blessed be the God of Simon ben Shetach!"[7]

Just as man learns how to live from God's attributes ("If God is GOD OF TRUTH" we must be honest") so God's attributes are learned from man. It is, said the Rabbis, from great men that we learn about God. They remembered the examples of Rabbi Simon ben Shetach and others who had performed similar acts of honesty. The moral of these lives were

> "If the words of a human being can be relied upon....
> How much more can we accept God's words as being
> trustworthy."
>
> "Let your ear hear what
> your mouth speaks."
> (J. Ber. 2,4)

The Rabbis called Him GOD OF TRUTH because TRUTH is reliable and so is God; TRUTH makes ethical demands upon man and so does God. The Rabbis earnestly thought that words were sacred. A written or a spoken word could never be part of "cheap talk" or "double talk" because all the Rabbi believed in the Biblical phrase

> "That which goes out of your lips shall you
> observe and do." (Deuteronomy 23:23)

They genuinely believed that God's word is His bond and that a Jew's word ought to be his bond too.

Conclusion:

Some politicians get elected on the basis of statements that are exaggerated or untrue. Businessmen often do a brisk business on the basis of false claims for their merchandise. What claims has God made? What promises are unfulfilled?

Further Reading:

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Berkovits, Eliezer. God, Man and History. Jonathan David, 1959.

QUESTION 8

IF GOD IS JUST WHY DOES INJUSTICE EXIST?

> Moses said: "Lord, is it right to give them and then kill them? Is a donkey told, here is a heap of barley and we'll cut off your head? Or a man, have a gold-piece and go to hell?"
> (Simon ben Yochai. Sifre, Num. #95)

Men have always tried to explain the existence of evil and injustice in a world ruled by a benevolent GOD OF JUSTICE. The Rabbis were true revolutionaries. While they believed in God's justice they complained to, argued with and cried at the God of their fathers who allowed innocent people to suffer while the guilty seemed to go free.

The problem of suffering was never solved.[1] There are numerous explanations in the Rabbinic Literature. Then the rabbis tried to answer the problem--not explaining it but going around it--in a desperate attempt to hold on to their belief in THE GOD OF JUSTICE while yet knowing that much injustice exists in the world. Having failed to explain it, and then failing to answer it, they gave suggestions as to how to live with the evil and injustice in the world.

a) <u>Explanations of why evil exists:</u>

In their explanations of why evil exists the Rabbis did not hesitate to contradict one another. There are two points of view in Rabbinic Judaism: the first, that God produces evil; the second, that evil is not from God.[2] There can be no dogmatism in Judaism on this question; it is up to the individual to decide for himself. The majority view of the Rabbis is that God is associated with goodness and not with evil. He was not responsible for the flood in Noah's day and He is not responsible for the other disasters of history. But even though this is the majority view, there is still that minority view which

sees God as creator of everything: including evil.

Similarly it is easy to see that the Rabbis differed on whether God is a GOD OF JUSTICE or a GOD OR MERCY. They finally said that He is both and that He occupies two thrones; when man's actions demand Justice--whether rewarding or punishing--God as it were, (kivhachol) sits on the justice throne; when mercy is required He moves to the mercy throne.[3] The Rabbis never came to a conclusion -- which they could all accept -- as to when He is God of Justice or God of Mercy.

Does sin always lead to punishment so that the amount a person suffers is proportional to the amount he has sinned?[4] Some Rabbis said "Yes" while others disagreed. Those who disagreed said that misfortunes, sickness, pain, early death, poverty and so on--have nothing to do with a man's sin; they are not punishment but just part of living. Punishment and reward occurs in heaven and not on earth. Again it is hard to find a consensus of opinion in the Rabbinic literature. The possibilities-- from which modern man can make his own choices exist though.

Those Rabbis who believed that punishment and reward occur on earth were divided among themselves on why this happens. Was God waiting for a man to sin or do good so that He could immediately punish or reward? This rather makes Him look like a terrible custodian ready to pounce on or pat man! Many Rabbis couldn't accept this view of God. So some believed that reward and punishment do occur on earth but are predetermined; when a man is born it is decided what his life is going to be. Other Rabbis--notably the great Rabbi Akiba--said that everything is predetermined (or foreseen)[5] yet somehow man has free will to move in any direction he wishes within the confines of nature. Akiba never explained how this is possible. The problem of theodicy--how evil

can exist in the kingdom of a good God who is all powerful -- remains an enigma. As with all theological enigmas, not explaining it does not prove that God is neither good nor all powerful, it just means that the Rabbis didn't find an explanation which they could all accept. The Rabbis were not prepared to limit God's goodness or power to free themselves of their enigma. They could live with it.

b) The enigma answered but not explained:

There are four frequently held answers to the problem of evil (or suffering) which do not attempt to explain it but try to remove it by answering it out of existence. (1) The first answer to the question "Why is there evil?" is "What we call evil is not really evil but good; there is no evil in the world." With the evidence of national disasters, assassinations, genocide, sickness and poverty, one could well be amazed at this answer to the problem. One could answer that if we are mistaken as to what is evil and good then that mistake is in itself an evil; why does the evil of a mistake exist in a universe produced by the perfect God? If we cannot know what is 'good' or 'evil' -- if they depend on a person's point of view -- is this ignorance not an 'evil?' Why does this ignorance exist?

(2) The second answer to the question is found in the Rabbinic saying gam zu l'tovah (everything for the best).[6] This belief is completely optimistic and says that good can come out of evil. Those who remember the horror of the Nazi era would say that evil can just as easily come out of evil. The expression gam zu l'tovah goes further by implying that evil will bring good "in the long run." Many Rabbis held this optimistic attitude while the cynics among them said "Ah yes! But man has to live 'in the short run of his 70-80 years of life!"

(3) Some Rabbis--a minority--held that evil is necessary to highlight the good. Without evil man would have nothing to contrast the good with. Thus God created evil with a purpose--so that we might know what not to become. The Rabbis tended to believe, however, that good is able to recommend itself.

and (4) The majority of Rabbis held that our confusion as to why there is evil in the world is a result of our limited intellect. Who knows, they asked, whether one man whom we call 'evil' is completely evil? From our perspective he may be a vile person; in the context of history and in the perspective of his good points, his evil nature may be unimportant. Maybe our ignorance of who is a tzaddik gamur (a completely righteous person) and who is a rasha gamur[7] (a completely evil person) is the source of our confusion as to why one person suffers without reason while another prospers.

Clearly there is a spectrum of GOOD AND EVIL people. At one end of the spectrum is the rare tzaddik gamur; at the other extreme is the equally rare rasha gamur. Most people are in between. The Rabbis were almost in complete agreement that the problem of suffering could be solved if we could only know at which point does a man shift from being a bad tzaddik to a good rasha. It all depends on which way one regards him. If mercy is to be the guide then his tzaddik qualities are stressed; if justice is to be the guide his rasha qualities are weighed against his tzaddik qualities. The point is that man does not have the perspective to see whether any man is on the rasha or tzaddik side of the spectrum. Only God has such a perspective said the Rabbis.

c) Facing the enigmas and living...

(1) There were many Rabbis whose attitude to suffering and sin in the world was one of patience and love. Their love for THE GOD OF JUSTICE conditioned

them to have patience with trials and tribulations. The Rabbis centered their lives around God's commandments, fulfilling them for their own sake not for reward but because God had commanded them--and for the future. They did not perform mitzvot (commandments) in order to get into heaven; they knew, however, that unless they performed them they would not get there. Thus heaven (or the world to come, the after life) is most important in the Rabbinic mind.

The "chastisements"[8] (sufferings) which the righteous Jew faces on earth were, said many Rabbis, lovingly provided by God to give God a chance to reward the tzaddik's righteousness in the world to come. Death is not the end and a tzaddik should be happy that he is suffering as this ensures him a place in the world to come. Thus it is said of Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa that he was completely righteous but knew terrible suffering in this world. Because of those sufferings a place in the world to come is certain for him.

An illustration...

Rabbi Akiba, it is recorded, was extremely concerned for his master who had yet to experience suffering. Perhaps, said Akiba, his master had received all the reward that is in store for him. God forbid that he should die without some unjust suffering so that there is nothing to "set right" in the world to come! Later Akiba found his righteous master ill; the caring student was now certain that his master would receive a just place in the world to come! Akiba was happy.

The advice of these Rabbis who saw in every injustice "chastisements of God's love" was, therefore, for man to have patience; THE JUST GOD is sure to grant eternal life to those who know suffering in this life. With this belief the Rabbis could face the enigma of the existence of evil in the good God's world.

(2) A second group of Rabbis were not prepared to be patient with suffering.[9] They abhorred Rabbi Akiba's attitude that suffering is to be received patiently and even desired! The world to come was too far away for these Rabbis; they wanted justice in this world!

These Rabbis were convinced that evil removes the shekhinah (God's presence) from the world. Where there is evil, the Jew suffers. To bring the shekhinah back to the world the Jew must rid himself of evil (atone and repent for his sins), worship and study Torah. Once this is accomplished the shekhinah will return to the world and suffering will disappear.

This is a simplistic way of living with the problem of evil. Simply stated it says that every evil is the result of sin; a man who examines himself for sin will eventually have relief from suffering. This approach to suffering never became the most popular among Jews; they could not believe in a God who could encourage the monstrous agonies that the ancient Rabbi experienced.

When Hadrian waged war against the Jews in the second century C.E., some Rabbis believed in the yessurin shel ahavah ("chastisements of love") that made it possible for them to live with the misery Hadrian brought them; most could not believe that God was beating them for past sins and using Hadrian as His whip!

(3) In spite of all the suffering that the Rabbis experienced, and this belief in the yessurin shel ahavah which made this misery easier to bear--the Rabbis could face the presence of evil in the world through one basic belief. The Rabbis were completely convinced that how a man conducts his life is the real test in regard to goodness. The tzaddik--the truly righteous man--is he who conducts himself with good deeds, charity, the study of Torah and the fulfillment of mitzvot.

Thus the Rabbis accepted suffering standing up, refusing to budge from their life style of exemplary conduct, of complete righteousness before God and Man. They were convinced that somehow--where and when they did not know--there would be justice in this world controlled by the GOD OF JUSTICE.

Conclusion:

If GOD IS JUST why is their injustice? was the most difficult question that the Rabbis ever faced. They tried explaining the presence of sin; failing that, they tried to answer the enigma and, finally, they made a desperate attempt at living with it. No one way is THE correct Rabbinic solution to the problem of suffering; they present numerous possibilities.

The Rabbis of the Talmud would have agreed with the modern Rabbi who said the following about suffering:

> "We cannot look at the suffering of this world and say God did it. God did not do it. God does not race automobiles down the highway. God does not carry a pistol. God does not hoard food supplies while children go hungry. God did not appoint Hitler as Chancellor. God did not build gas ovens in Auschwitz. Men do these things. Men, free to choose their way, sometimes choose paths of evil, of cruelty, of death." (Rabbi Robert I. Kahn The Problem of Suffering, Sermon, Houston, Texas.)

The important point is, the Rabbis were partially successful in explaining evil and in answering the enigma of evil, but they were completely successful in living with it and THE GOD OF JUSTICE.

Further Reading:

Berkovits, Eliezer. God, Man and History. Chapter 14 "God in History."

Jacobs, Louis. Principles of the Jewish Faith. pp. 55-58.

An Important Note:

Look back at the number of questions that have been answered.

The Main Question: What is God like?

Which includes the minor questions:

1) Where is God?

2) Does God Know Me?

3) What can't God do?

4) What can God do?

5) Is God dead or alive?

6) Why is God called "The God of Truth?"

7) If God is just why does injustice exist?

8) Is it a sin to doubt?

BUT: Have you discovered what God is like by answering these eight questions?

What other questions do you have about God?

QUESTION 9

IS IT A SIN TO DOUBT?

> "That's also a Jewish characteristic, very very Jewish: to believe with absolute faith...and all the same just very slightly not to believe, the tiniest little bit, and that tiny little bit is the decisive thing." (Hayyim Hazaz, "The Sermon" Abanim Rothot, 1946.)

There is an extraordinary passage in the Babylonian Talmud which states

> "Anyone who has not experienced the absence of God is not one of the Jewish people."[1]

It is not possible that the Rabbis who knew the Book of Lamentations and the Book of Job in the Bible, would not have expected religious doubt. The above passage from Hagiga expresses this Rabbinic expectation. An atheist who has rationally proved that God does not exist--did not occur to the Rabbis as a possibility. Men may believe in other Gods, they may have doubts about the constant, loving presence of the Rabbinic God, but they believed in "something." By rejecting atheism as a possibility, the Rabbis agreed, implicitly, with many modern philosophers who maintain that the existence of God can neither be proved nor disproved. An agnostic, a man who has honest doubt, was always a possibility in Rabbinic Judaism. While they defended their belief from the doubts of this agnostic, he was accepted as a Jew with his doubt.

Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, President of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, has expressed Judaism's attitude to the agnostic in this way:

> "It was T. H. Huxley who first spoke of 'agnostics.' He contrasted his knowledge of God with that of the Gnostics of the ancient world who claimed to have a special gnosis (knowledge) of God's nature. An a-gnostic, as Huxley taught, is someone who has no absolute, irrefutable knowledge of God. While gnosis, for the Orthodox group, might equal the revealed Torah at Sinai, which for them is absolute, this is not the case with Reform or Conservative Judaism. Since God continues to exist, gnosis of Him [illegible] is not frozen, nor is truth concerning Him bound securely in a book or series of books. (Maimonides) full well understood that defining God...limits our conception of Him. This was form of agnosticism but within the general framework of the ongoing body of Jewish belief. I consider this type of Jewish agnosticism among the most serious of religious positions and intellectual commitments." [2]
>
> Your Future as a Rabbi
> (pp. 44-45)

To doubt, to doubt one's doubts, was part of the Rabbinic way of life. A Jew is commanded to love his God "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might" -- the mind is included in this.

Conclusion:

Can a Jew doubt and still be a Jew? Would you agree with the man who said "Unless a Jew doubts, at best is not a Jew?" What's the difference between doubting and cynicism?

Further Reading:

Baeck, Leo. The Essence of Judaism. p. 260f. "The Jew: Dissenter of history."

Gottschalk, Alfred. Your Future as a Rabbi. Richard Rosen Press Inc., 1967, Chapter II "My Religious Commitment."

QUESTION 10

WHAT AM I?

Suicide often occurs for a man to take his own life he must believe himself to be worthless. What is man? Is each person born a burden to the world?

"Man is a manifestation of God."(The Baal Shem Tov JE II. 385a)

Many are the answers which the Rabbis give to this -- the most important of all questions. In this chapter we shall see that the Rabbis gave at least ten answers to the question What Am I?

1) You are a person of power:

The Rabbis never underestimated the power of the individual to influence the universe. All Jewish prayerbooks have the prayer

> "Praised be Thou, O Lord, God of our Fathers, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."[1]

When this prayer is read Jews, today, believe that God, the God of all men. The Rabbis said that because Abraham made God his God, God actually became Ruler of the world![2] Thus each person has the power of extending the domain of God. This gives each person great power! The Rabbis maintained that it was only because our ancestors accepted God's commandments as a personal privilege, that God came to be worshipped by all the major religions of the world today. Historically this is correct. The Rabbis do not include either Christians or Muslims under the heading of "Worshippers of False Gods" for, even though they had different theologies, Christianity, Islam and Judaism worship the same God. It was, therefore, the fact that our ancestors used their power as individuals that they changed the world.

2) You are a person of dignity:

Upon entering a traditional synagogue, one notices that the central

part of the service--the Eighteen Benedictions--is said silently by the congregation before the Cantor sings. This prayer commences with the "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" prayer and includes personal confessions of each person's sins against God's Law. The Rabbis of the Talmud said that this should be read silently so as not to put to shame any individual in the congregation.[3] They were determined to do nothing to destroy an individual's sense of dignity. The person in the congregation who feels guilty over his sin would be embarrassed by a public statement of his guilt. Destroying his dignity and sense of worth would not help him in his relationship with God.

Similarly, in the Grace after Meals, with the line:

> "I have been young, and I have grown old
> But I have never seen a righteous person so
> forsaken that his children must go in need
> of bread."

----the Rabbis recommended that this should be read silently so as not to embarrass any righteous person at the table who has poor and hungry children. As one scholar has written: "Shaming a person in public was considered to be morally equivalent to an act of murder!"[4]

(3) <u>You are a clue to God</u>.

The Rabbis believed that God is known by his creations. Man is our best clue to God's nature even though man is contradictory--sometimes good sometimes evil. They knew that each person has a Good Potential (or Good Inclination--the <u>Yetzer Tov</u>) and an Evil Potential (or Evil Inclination--the <u>Yetzer HaRa</u>). Man is neither born good nor born evil but has these two possibilities.

The belief that each person has a spark of the divine in him--and is therefore a clue to God--is reflected in the Rabbinic belief that murder is a

crime against God. The Greeks believed that if one man stabs another, then if the victim says he forgives his attacker in the few moments before death, the murderer is not liable to trial in the courts. Not so with Rabbinic Judaism. The Rabbinic court would impose the maximum sentence on a murderer and even then maintained that an even greater punishment was in store for him at the hands of God![5]

To destroy life, therefore, is to destroy a part of God, Himself. To love life and preserve it, is--in the belief of the Rabbis--to perform the most important commandment.[6]

(4) You are able to change:

The Rabbis were convinced of each person's ability to improve himself. They knew that the Evil Potential--the Yetzer HaRa--in man is strong; they also knew that the potential for good--the Yetzer Tov has no limits. In fact, they said, what seems an evil by some may actually be part of the workings of the Yetzer Tov! Thus the sexual urge in man has the potential for evil if exploited; without it the blessing of children would be an impossibility!

They were loathe to label a person as a Rasha Gamur--a completely evil person--because they knew each individual can and does change. Moreover, they said that an individual who truly and sincerely examines his life and admits his faults, erases his sin. He is a new person who may now face life once again with its possibilities for good and evil.[7]

(5) You are fallible:

To say no one is perfect throughout life is different from saying man is basically evil. The Rabbis maintained that everyone can make a mistake; it is not easy to always follow the Yetzer Tov and not the Yetzer HaRa.

A mature individual accepts his ability to err while he is determined to correct his past mistakes in the future.

Rabbis, Jewish leaders and even parents who seem perfect to their followers and children, are fallible. This tradition goes back to the time of the Temple in Jerusalem. The Mishnah states the public confession that the holiest man of that time--the High Priest--had to make. It is a confession which hardly differs at all from the confession of the 'ordinary' Jew:

> O Lord, I have done wickedly, transgressed, sinned before You, I and my house. O, Lord forgive the iniquities and transgressions and sins which I have committed and transgressed and sinned before You, as it is written in the Law of Your servant, Moses, "For on this day shall atonement be made." (Leviticus 16:30)
>
> (To which the priests standing behind the High Priest respond "Praised be His Name whose glorious Kingdom is forever and ever.")[8]

This practice of the most righteous man of the community making public confession, is followed today by all Jewish Day of Atonement Services where the Rabbi makes a personal confession at the start of the worship. No man is infallible in Judaism.

The fallibility of individuals is also understood in Rabbinic Law (the Halachah). The Sayings of the Fathers makes the rule: "Judge not alone for none may judge alone except God."[9] Thus in criminal cases the Rabbis had more than one Judge --- knowing that even judges make errors!

The Book of Deuteronomy (19:15) has the following law:

> "A single witness shall not prevail against a man for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed; only on the evidence of two witnesses, or of three witness shall a charge be sustained."

The following personal experience of Simeon ben Shetah shows how the Rabbis put this law of Deuteronomy into action:

> "I saw a man run after another into a desolate place. I ran after him and I saw a sword in his hand dripping with the other's blood and the murdered man struggling in the agony of death.
>
> I said to him "You wicked man! Who killed this man? Either I did or you did. But what can I do! Your life is not in my power for the Torah has said "only on the evidence of two witnesses shall a charge be sustained." But God who knows all thoughts will punish a man who murders his fellow man."[10]

Simeon ben Shetah knew that every person is fallible. It is recorded in the Talmud that he saw his own son executed on the false testimony of 'witnesses.'[11] Thus the Rabbis took great care in examining witnesses knowing that errors of judgement can easily occur.

Thus the Rabbis saw people as having the potential for justice and for right action. However, because individuals are not infallible, they took precautions to reduce human error to a minimum. This mature view of man--a cautious optimism--is a view Judaism has preserved throughout history.

(6) <u>You deserve Justice:</u>

One of the characteristics of Rabbinic Law which distinguishes it is its impartiality. The Rabbis were determined that each person should be equal in the eyes of the Law. Thus we read in the Talmud:

> The High Priest who violates any of the commandments is punished like an ordinary man.[12]

---this is remarkable when one realizes that in Greek society there was one law for the slaves and another for the nobles. The justice of Rabbinic law is, of course, an application of the law of the Torah to life. We can thus see in the following law the determination of the Rabbis:

> "You shall not show partiality to the poor man, nor pay respect to the person of might; but in righteousness you shall judge your neighbour." [13]

That a man deserves full justice is acknowledged by all legal systems. It is the Rabbinic system of law that puts this into practice.

(7) You are entitled to dissent:

The right to dissent is a frequent topic in society today. Many question whether a dissenting minority are to be considered loyal citizens. The Rabbis not only considered dissenters loyal, they preserved all opinions with which the majority differed. Thus the Mishnah records minority views along with those of the majority. The views of the School of Shammai are recorded in the Mishnah even though the law was usually decided in favour of the School of Hillel.[14]

Thus the Rabbis had a truly democratic system of law. There were authorities but no authority could say "It is so because I say so." Whether he was great or small--a leader of a vast School of scholars or a Rabbi speaking his own mind--he had a voice and the chance to convince the majority. And, even if the majority decided against him, his minority view was still recorded. Thus the right to dissent is basic to the Judaism of the Rabbis; it is a tradition of which the modern Jew can be proud.

(8) You are necessary for society:

The Rabbis knew that society depends on trustworthy individuals to protect each person's rights. Who is a person worthy of trust? They came to the conclusion that if a person's work or profession separated him from society, that person is untrustworthy. Thus professional gamblers were considered untrustworthy--for their 'profession' helps only themselves and not the growth of society.[15]

The choice of profession is thus extremely important. Certain individuals were excluded from being witnesses in legal cases by the Rabbis because of their professions.

Clearly the principle behind this view is that society must be protected. The Rabbis also felt themselves to be protectors of society in that they urged every person to be part of his community. Each person can help or hurt society --to separate himself from society was considered to be a sin.

(9) <u>You are worth trusting:</u>

Even though they took precautions in law over examining witnesses, the Rabbis had deep faith in man. Man is worthy of trust, they said:

> "No man will go astray unless the spirit of insanity enters into him." [16]

The Rabbis would have been horrified at the 20th Century where convicted and punished ex-convicts find it impossible to obtain work after they have served their sentences in prison. The Rabbis said that when a person has committed a crime and has been punished for that crime, he was to be treated as if he had never erred. After punishment he is free from all guilt. He is now considered trustworthy.[17]

(10) <u>You are responsible for me.</u>

The mutual responsibility that men have for each other, is basic in Rabbinic Judaism.[18] Charity is one way of expressing this. But in Rabbinic Judaism, the responsibility goes much further. Each individual was expected to improve the quality of life of his fellow; it was felt that he who does not increase his neighbour's benefits will decrease them.

It is with this attitude in mind that the Rabbis wrote in the Babylonian Talmud:

> Whoever is able to protest against the sins of his family and does not do so is punished for the sins of his family. Whoever is able to protest against the sins of the people of his city and does not do so is punished for the sins of the people of his city. Whoever is able to protest against the sins of the entire world and does not do so is punished for the sins of the entire world.[19]

Conclusion:

What am I? is answered in many ways throughout the Rabbinic literature. In this chapter only ten of the answers of the Rabbis have been mentioned. The attempt has been to give some insight into the Rabbinic view of Man. With such a view it would be unthinkable for a person to ever commit suicide. A person is too valuable, to much a part of God to destroy himself.

Do you share the Rabbinic view of man? Is there any way in which their view is lacking? Would psychologists today agree with them? Has your studying the material presented in this chapter deepened your own view of Man?

Further Reading:

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QUESTION 11

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

Every person is afraid of dying.
What are we really afraid of?
Dying, itself is not frightening -
people go to sleep before actually
dying. What happens before the sleep?
What do Jews do when someone dies?

I, Dorothy Ruth, am in this ground,
roots and rich soil close around,
growth, creation, taking and giving
so life was death and death was living.
(The Epitaph of Dorothy Bar Adon's
tombstone in Merhavia, Israel)[1]

Because few people are alone in the world, few are alone in the experience of death. In answering the above question the chapter shall first discuss death from the point of view of the dying person and, second, from that of the family.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TO DIE?

Everyone is different. Because this is so we would expect people who are told in advance that they are about to die react in different ways. Psychologists and psychiatrists have found that people react in much the same ways when told. Between the time of telling him and his actual death a person usually goes through five stages until he accepts the fact and can finally live with the knowledge that he is going to die, while hoping that a cure might be discovered.

These are the five stages which most people go through:

a) "No, not me, it cannot be true"[2]

We all fear death to some extent. No one has ever died and "come back" to tell the tale. So our natural reaction is to defend ourselves against this news by denying that it is true. Even a person has admitted to himself that he is about to die (sometime in the near future) he occasionally denies the fact. Someone has said "We cannot look at the sun all the time, we cannot face death all the time."[3]

People have great faith in medicine. A religious person doesn't pray for a cure from something he knows medicine can cure; he does pray for cures

from illnesses which medicine cannot cure! For those cures within the power of doctors, he might pray that the doctor use his science well. But when the doctor says, "We can do no more for you" people tend to deny that they are soon to die."

The Rabbis feared and were amazed at the possibilities of a life after death. They saw it as a time when man is about to meet his Creator. Death, they said, is a transition as important as the transition into life at birth. But even though they had this concept of death they still feared it. They were human! Thus Rabbi Joshua ben Levi denied the inevitability of death when he said "In the messianic future there will be no death."

But for now there is death. The Rabbis refused to allow any person to deny this fact. The orderliness of nature and the orderliness of human life--a fixed routine in which man can make ethical choices--gave the Rabbis faith in the GOD OF JUSTICE. Every person dies and every act is judged according to its own merits. No man must be allowed to deny the fact of his own death.

Even though the Rabbis tended to be realists, knowing that death is inevitable, they had respect for an individual's needs when faced with death. Psychologists have recognized that some people need to deny their illness. They try not to criticize the patient but to help him express his needs. The Rabbis adopted this attitude too.

It was this attitude that is found expressed in Rabbi Solomon Granzfried's Kitzur Shulchan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law). Ganzfried writes:

> "They who visit the sick should speak with him with judgement and tact; they should speak in such a manner as to neither encourage him with false hopes, nor to depress him by words of despair."

Thus the person who visits a terminally ill friend and says "don't worry, you'll soon be up and about" is, in Jewish Law and modern psychology, committing an act of poor judgement; he is really hurting his friend by aiding him in denying his sickness. To deny something for a long time which we know "deep down" to be true, leads to inner conflict and great pain. A person can find relief from this inner struggle if he can share in the happiness of his visitors and in the few happy days that may lie ahead. True, this may not seem much; it is more, however, than the inner agony which is produced by extended denial. He can hope for a cure - new cures are always being discovered; he must not deny his sickness.

b) "Why me? Why couldn't it have been him?"

When a person finally admits to himself that it is he who is going to die, he tends to express feelings of anger, rage, envy and resentment.[5] So many other people seem more suitable' for death than he. He forgets that no one is 'right' for death; it happens to young and old, the deserving and undeserving. But because of his anger he cannot look at his sickness with the wisdom he had when he was not faced by a close death. So he hits out at all around him, irrationally and unjustly, often suffering guilt for his action which adds to his discomfort.

Family and friends are often confused when they visit a patient who is terminally sick, when he criticizes them, the hospital, the doctors, the nurses, the bed, the noise and anything else in his world of sickness. Even those people who work with him night and day to keep him alive are victims of his attack! If they do not understand that he is protecting himself from the truth of his death (by shifting the focus of his life away from himself to

everyone around him) then they might react to his anger with further anger! They sometimes call him 'ungrateful' or 'difficult,' not realizing that he is facing an awful fate.

Simeon ben Lakish said:

> "Anger deprives a sage of his wisdom,
> a prophet of his visit."[6]

which has certainly been found true in the anger expressed by the dying patient. His anger is often produced by the nature of a hospital. A patient is often treated like an object, pushed here, pulled there, injected, washed, poked and talked about until he feels he has lost all human dignity. In an effort to maintain his dignity he hits out in anger. He does not want to be overwhelmed and manipulated, he wants to maintain a certain sense of being a person, a human being.

The ancient Rabbis would have agreed with psychiatrists and psychologists of our day who try to help a sick person regain their sense of dignity. Rabina ben Ḥuna said that to protect a person's sense of dignity a "Thou Shalt Not" commandment of the Torah may be disregarded.[7] Psychologists have found that when people are allowed to express their anger or rage, or envy or resentment (without those they love running away in shock) they get over this stage. This helps them come closer to accepting the fact of death while hoping for a cure. With acceptance comes peace.

c) <u>"If you'll only let me live a little longer I'll do anything."</u>

When we were children we often tried to manipulate our parents with irrational bargains. "I'll always be good if you'll buy me a puppy" or "if you'll only let me go to the dance I promise to clean the car every week for a year for no pay." Obviously we knew we would not "always be good" and after

the first or second cleaning the car would remain dirty. We may have felt a tinge of guilt at not keeping our part of the bargain; perhaps not.

The bargaining of dying patients often comes from guilt. It is not completely clear how this happens; all we know is that when a person is given a chance to express his guilt he tends to stop bargaining.

For, it must be clear, bargaining with death is just not possible. Some patients will say to their doctors, "I promise to give my body to science if you will use your knowledge of science to extend my life." Obviously doctors do not rely on bargains to decide who to 'save' from death and who to let die. The Hippocratic oath demands that they help everyone--no matter how close to death.

The Rabbis were familiar with this habit of bargaining to stay alive. Thus they warned against it by saying:

> "No one can say to the Angel of Death
> 'Wait until I make up my accounts.'" [8]

d) "Who'll take care of my family when I'm gone?"

When a person knows he is dying (i.e., not a sudden unexperienced death) he reaches a point when he admits his condition to himself, when he stops being angry with the world (and God) and when he realizes the futility of bargaining for more time. At that point he faces the grim reality and is often deeply depressed.

Psychiatrists have noticed two kinds of depression in the terminally sick patient. The first kind is expressed in the above question, the second kind is usually silent. When friends and family visit a patient they can remove a great deal of the first kind of depression by assuring him that his children will be cared for and that they and his wife will be financially

secure. It is this kind of effect that Rav Huna meant when he said:

> Anyone who visits a sick person relieves him of one sixtieth of his sickness.[9]

The silent kind of depression is harder to help. This is depression which comes from the person's efforts at preparing himself for death. He is about to lose everything he loves: family, the world and life itself. Most people are not given the warning that they will die; like a man ready to emigrate to another land, the dying patient prepares himself for his loss. His focus is now on the future and he wants a silent sharing of his fear at entering the unknown.

Those who visit a depressed person often try to 'cheer him up.' This is the opposite of what he needs! He can often have a release from his sadness and gloom if there is someone who he lives just to sit with him and hold his hand.[10] A prayer often helps many patients who are depressed. Those visiting him can thus relieve his depression by helping him to prepare himself for his future.

No man who is weighed down by sadness and gloom can adequately prepare himself for death. The Rabbis were aware of the damaging effect of sadness and gloom on an individual's life. With this in mind the Baal Shem and his Chassidim said: "Sadness obstructs communion with God"[11] and "Gloom obstructs our comprehension of the divine mysteries."[12]

While the Rabbis were not as well informed as is modern medicine, they were aware that people have to prepare to separate themselves from this life. They expressed this by stressing the wonderful nature of the world to come; this life is a preparation for (an antechamber to) that world. Thus they

said:

> "This world is like an antechamber to the next.
> Prepare yourself here that you may be admitted
> to the banquet hall there."[13]

The Rabbis were more certain than is modern man with the certainty of the future life. Both the Rabbis and modern man see the need for this preparation for leaving this present life. Depression prevents preparation.

3) "I'm ready to die in peace."

When a person has been helped to overcome his depression, and all the other stages of reactions to his near death, he is able to accept the fact with dignity and restful patience. He has not "given up" nor has he adopted the attitude "What's the use I just cannot fight any longer." He has, rather, accepted that he will die, that he has nothing to be angry about, that bargaining is folly and that he has prepared himself for his death.

Just as we rest before a long journey, so this final stage is characterized by long periods of sleep. Someone has said that just as a baby must sleep to grow into life, so a dying patient must sleep to grow out of life. When relatives and friends understand this, they will more readily accept the fact that the person they once knew and loved still loves them but is preparing himself for the end.

Rabbinic Judaism has given us examples of this healthy and hopeful acceptance of death. If a man lives his life knowing that he is a partner with God, he can meet death with hope that this partnership will not dissolve upon his physical extinction.

The Adon Olam prayer, written in the 12th Century by an anonymous author,[14] expresses this acceptance of the continuing relationship between man and God. The prayer was originally written as a night prayer but clearly

has implications for death:

> "My spirit I commit to Him
> My body, too, and all I prize;
> Both when I sleep and when I wake,
> He is with me, I shall not fear.[15]

The great Jewish poet-philosopher of Spain (1070-1138 C.E.) Moses Ibn Ezra expressed this stage of dignified, peaceful acceptance in the following words from his Song of Israel:

> "It is impossible to escape death,
> and what is inescapable you may as
> well anticipate readily."[16]

In an individual's life time he often has to part with people and things he loves. Rather than tear with one quick act of separation, most people detach themselves slowly making it easier for the end. When a person has accepted his death he wants to live to the end with dignity.[17] His body may be difficult to control and he wants to be remembered as the healthy, happy person he once was. Rather than have his family see him in his sad state before death, he might ask them not to visit him, thus making it easier for him to accept his final separation from them. When the family understands this--through speaking with their Rabbi or Doctor--they too, will be able to prepare themselves for the time when their father or husband will no longer be with them. This gradual separation makes the end easier for everyone.

Conclusion:

The question was asked WHAT IS IT LIKE TO DIE? Everyone at one time in their life has to experience death--if not their own then that of someone they love. If we understand the reactions of people who are faced with death, then, when someone we love knows he is to die, or we are faced with death in

our own life, we will understand what is happening. Perhaps this will make a painful experience less painful. Without pain man can hope.

We shall now answer the question from the point of view of the family: the Jewish practices for mourners who are left after a death.

Questions for your consideration:

If someone asked you the question "What is it like to die?" Could you answer them? While admitting that you can never really know until it happens to you, has this secondhand knowledge of dying helped you? How could you help persons adjust to the fact that they are going to die soon?

WHAT DO JEWS DO WHEN SOMEONE DIES?

There are many excellent books available which describe Jewish mourning customs. For this reason this second part of the chapter shall give a brief GLOSSARY OF JEWISH MOURNING PRACTICES which the student can expand through his own reading. Rabbinic beliefs and attitudes to mourning and the mourner shall be discussed in the GLOSSARY.

GLOSSARY OF JEWISH MOURNING PRACTICES:

Alav HaShalom:

When a male dies Jews will often say these words (which mean "May he have peace") after saying his name. Non-Jews have taken over the custom by their saying "May he rest in peace" after mentioning a deceased person.

Aleha HaShalom:

This means "May she have peace." Both alav hashalom and aleha hashalom are signs of respect. One is not commanded to say either of them but people just do.

Aninut:

Rabbinic Judaism (and modern orthodox Judaism) divided the time of mourning into four separate periods. Aninut is the time from the death to the burial; the other three periods are 2) shivah, 3) sheloshim and 4)avelut. (See below for 2,3and 4.)

Rabbi Jack Spiro has pointed out the following facts about aninut in his book A Time to Mourn:

i) The word means "to be fatigued, tired, weary as well as in great sorrow and trouble." It also has a further connotation: to complain, and to have resentment.[18]

The immediate reactions mourners have to a death include all the connotations of the word aninut.[19] It is considered to be the most intense period of grief for the mourners.

ii) During aninut the mourner is exempt from fulfilling all the Biblical Laws (except for all the "Thou shalt not" Laws) and from reciting the blessings before and after meals. The Rabbis thus knew that a person in the period of aninut cannot be expected to thank God with all his heart![20]

iii) Aninut must not go on too long! The state of shock and bewilderment should soon terminate. Thus Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Rabbis bury the dead as soon as possible. The shabbat and festivals are days on which burials are not performed.

iv) During the period of aninut one experiences feelings of guilt--"perhaps I could have done more" or "I should have called the Doctor sooner than I did." The Rabbis recognized that this happens and said that when the congregation is reciting the Tefillah (the prayers which commence with Psalm 51:17 ("O Lord, open Thou my mouth" followed by "...God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob...") and conclude with Psalm 19:15 ("May the words of my mouth...") the mourner says the following prayer to relieve his feelings of guilt:

> "Master of the Universe,
> I have sinned before Thee.
> I have fulfilled few
> responsibilities and I deserve
> much more punishment than this.
> May it be thy will to unite and
> comfort us."[21]

In some cultures people feel so guilty that they mutilate their own bodies. This is strictly forbidden in Judaism[22] although Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Zeira punished themselves when they were mourning.[23]

v) The child of the deceased must fast on the day of his parent's

death; this signals the first day of aninut and is the time of his deepest grief. This commandment and the law prohibiting the eating of "luxury items" --meat and wine--help him to get through the days of aninut and rid himself of all feelings of guilt.

vi) The whole idea of a period of aninut is to bring home to the mourners that they no longer have their relative. Aninut ceases as soon as the deceased is buried; the separation is then complete. Thus:

> "All the laws and ceremonies emphasize that the deceased is definitely separated from the survivors. This is the fundamental purpose of aninut: to enable the bereaved person to test reality and avoid resorting to unwholesome defenses like denial. While this struggle may be painful, it is therapeutically sound and helps bring about ultimate recovery."[24]

Avelim:

"Mourners" in Judaism are those who experience the death of seven relatives:

father
mother
husband
wife
son
daughter
brother
and sister

Note: There are eight in this list - the deceased person has seven relatives who mourn for him.

Avelut:

The period of avelut begins from burial and includes the whole first year of mourning. It is divided into two periods: shivah and sheloshim (see below).

The year of avelut is different from the few days before burial (aninut) in that:

i) The mourners are encouraged to return to reality from the beginning of avelut--as soon as the person is buried--whereas they are allowed to withdraw from reality during the intense grief of aninut. During avelut one must become less and less preoccupied with grief so as not to prevent "the bereaved from establishing new relationships and adjusting to the new situation in life without the lost loved one."[25]

ii) The avel (the mourner) must not use his mourning as an excuse to set himself apart from his community. Thus after the funeral he must stop mourning when there is a religious festival rather than spoil the festival for everyone else. Thus he cannot mourn during Hannukah. This law helps the mourner keep his perspective: even though he has suffered a tragic loss he still has to live life with all its emotions.[26]

iii) During avelut visitors must encourage the avel to talk out his own problems and grief. Thus the small talk which often happens when people visit is forbidden; one must not say anything until the mourner speaks first. Modern men are too concerned with embarrassing silences and tend to talk too much in such situations. The mourner has a lot to say; let him say it.[27]

iv) The Kaddish (see below) is recited for eleven of the twelve months of avelut. This means that for the last month of the year of mourning there is a radical change in the life-style of the mourner. He now is ready to come out of mourning and adjust to the loss, detach himself from the deceased and learn to relate to others. "Judaism allows the mourner slowly to regain a sense of independence."[28]

v) While the mourner may keep to himself at the beginning of avelut he must gradually come back to being a part of society. Thus Rabbinic Law states that:

> "For the first three days of avelut (from the time of burial) the mourner may not extend a greeting (as 'Shalom!') to others nor respond to one except to identify himself as a mourner.
>
> From the fourth to the seventh day, no greeting is extended but the mourner may respond if one is given him. Then from the eighth to the thirtieth day, the mourner may both extend and respond to a greeting."[29]

vi) After the year of avelut is over the mourner recites Kaddish on the anniversary (Yahrzeit) of the death. It is a religious duty to fast on that day.[30] Beyond this he has fulfilled his responsibility to honour the dead. Rabbi Spiro summarizes the value of avelut as

> "Thus Judaism helps the mourner to confront the emotional complexes involved in his loss, to adjust to a new life without the loved object, and to realize that there is indeed "a time to mourn."[31]

BaRukh DaYan HaEmet:

When a person dies the Rabbis saw this as a natural process: a transition as important as the transition into life at birth. Thus they said "Blessed be the true Judge" because only a DaYan HaEmet ("A True Judge") judges with the same laws for everybody: everyone who is born must die.

If one person did not die this would logically mean that other laws of the universe are able to be changed. Thus the Rabbinic belief that goodness is rewarded (sometime, somewhere) and evil is punished would be impossible to maintain as a 'law.' The Rabbis believed that THE GOD OF JUSTICE is consistent in His judgement of mankind; we may not always see that He is consistent, there are many horizons which we cannot see beyond.

Chevra Kaddisha:

Meaning "Holy Brotherhood" this is the Jewish society in every city whose

members devote themselves to the burial of the deceased and the many rites of purification that have been developed over the centuries. Thus no Jew is alone in his grief. The Chevra Kaddisha will stay with him during the night following the death and help with the funeral and burial arrangements.

Funeral 'parlours' rarely are able to help the mourners deal with their grief as is the Chevra Kaddisha. For men are not usually paid to belong to the "Holy Brotherhood" but do so out of their conviction that comforting the mourners and helping them face their loss realistically is a sacred duty of man to man.

El Maleh Rachamim:

Meaning "God full of compassion" this is the memorial prayer recited at funerals; it is frequently referred to as the "molay." The El Maleh Rachamim is the prayer which comes closest to being a Prayer for the Dead in Judaism. The Kaddish is not--it is a prayer in which the living praise God. Thus in the molay the name of the deceased is mentioned and the mourners express their conviction that death is not the end and that the soul is eternal (see below).

Funeral:

'Why have a funeral?' is a frequent question raised by those who are shocked at the grief that people go through at them, the apparent hypocrisy of eulogies which praise the person more than he deserves and costly memorials which the bereaved can often hardly afford. The question, however, shows little or no understanding of the amount of good a funeral can do if it has the following characteristics:

i) It should encourage the mourner to face the reality of death:

> "It should avoid any artificial or unreal atmosphere. It should not deny the fact of death even though it is concerned with relating the incident of death to a larger perspective of life. It should...help people to accept the pain of loss, and avoid the tendencies towards escape that easily develop."[32]

ii) It should include a meaningful eulogy (a Hesped) in which the Rabbi expresses the loss and help the mourners face the death. The Rabbis knew that a death is often as important for the community as it is for the family. As representative of the community, the Rabbi will often express the community's loss thus assuring the mourners that they are not alone in their grief. This kind of empathy is what can help a mourner.

iii) It should not gloss over the fact of the death. Thus cosmetics and perfumes are totally contrary to Rabbinic Judaism because they try to hide the fact. The Rabbis felt that the mourners should actually see the coffin lowered into the grave and be there while the earth is shovelled on top of it. Thus "this actually visualizes the separation from the deceased, making death complete and final."[33]

iv) It should give the mourners strength to live a meaningful life and should be an experience from which they can learn a worthwhile lesson for life. Thus the Rabbis stressed that all coffins--for rich and poor, famous and 'never-known'--must be made of the same plain wood. A man enters the world and leaves it as a human being; what he does between birth and death does not affect this. Wealth and fame have no influence on how a person is born or how he dies. We are all equal.

If the funeral gives people an insight into their own smallness then it is a worthwhile experience.

Gan Eden ("The Garden of Eden": Paradise)

While it is true that the Rabbis had many different views of what happens to a person when he dies, most of them did believe that the good person eventually goes to Paradise. Paradise is called "Gan Eden" in Hebrew because just as man knew innocent bliss in the Garden of Eden (according to Genesis) so will he know innocent bliss once he leaves this world.

In attempting to visualize the kind of bliss that is waiting for the righteous of all nations (not just Jews) the Rabbis naturally thought of their happiest day here on earth--the Sabbath. So too, because they enjoyed the world of books, study is one of the main activities they visualized in Gan Eden.

The following are three passages which express the Rabbinic view of Gan Eden:

From the Talmud: In the future world there is no eating, drinking, propagation, business, jealousy, hatred or competition, but the righteous sit, with their crowns on their heads, enjoying the brilliance of the Shekhinah (God's Presence).[34]

From the Midrash: In the hereafter, God will prepare a a banquet for the righteous![35]

and, again, from the Midrash: In the world to come there is no death, sin, affliction, but everybody delights in wisdom and understanding.[36]

The question is often asked: So if Gan Eden is waiting for the righteous, what's for the wicked? For the answer see Gehinnom (below).

Gehinnom (or Gehenna)

Jeremiah 32:35 mentions the "valley of the son of Hinnom" where children were burned as sacrifices to the sun-God Moloch; thus the horrors of child-sacrifice, torture by fire and human degredation became associated with the "Ge" (valley) of "Hinnom" i.e., Gehinnom. When the Rabbis thought of an existence which was the opposite of the bliss of Gan Eden they naturally thought of Jeremiah's Geninnom.

It is therefore untrue to say that the Rabbis did not believe in hell. Other religions (which grew from Judaism) took the Gehinnom concept and developed it. The Rabbis did not do this. They did not dwell on hell because they were convinced that God is the GOD OF MERCY and Gan Eden was in store for every righteous person. The Rabbis looked away from Gehinnom and worked for Gan Eden. Their conviction of the closeness of Gan Eden to them--and all righteous people--led them to say that Gehinnom and Gan Eden can hardly be thought of as two separate places. The GOD OF MERCY brings everyone to Gan Eden (sooner or later!) so why think of Hell as being somewhere in the bottom of the Universe--or in the heated inferno in the middle of the earth--and Heaven being somewhere 'up there'!

Thus the Rabbis said:

> "The distance between Gan Eden and Gehinnom is no more than the width of a hand."[37]

So where are Gehinnom and Gan Eden? Obviously the Rabbis did not know. However, they believed that if God is everywhere to ask "where is God?" is an impossible question. The Rabbis believed that on the death of the person, the soul returns to God. The kinds of existence a soul could have were conceived as extremes of joy (Gan Eden) and extremes of misery (Gehinnom). The Rabbis only guessed at the details of these extremes--they realized they could never know while they lived.

Kaddish:

Meaning "Sanctification" this is a prayer of thanks. It is not the Jewish prayer for the dead (see El Maleh Rachamim) for it is also said on occasions when one does not think of the dead: after the Torah Reading and after study. The Kaddish became associated with mourners through the belief that study pleases God so that, if mourners study, God will be merciful to the deceased and allow his soul to enter Gan Eden. The Kaddish was always said after study. Even when mourners ceased studying the connection between mourners and the Kaddish remained. In traditional synagogues it is still recited after the reading of the Torah and after study.

The ideas in the Kaddish are extremely profound. The congregation express their hopes that:

> "May He speedily establish His kingdom of righteousness on earth."

and

> "May He who establishes peace (or 'harmony') in the Universe, establish peace for us and for all Israel."

It is important to note that the Rabbis did not permit the saying of the Kaddish in private. The congregation support the mourners by responding to their Kaddish by saying "Amen" which is a sign of their agreement with the meaning of the prayer. Once again, then, the mourner is not alone in his grief.

When the mourners go to the cemetery for the burial, they recite Kaddish after the emotional pain of seeing the coffin lowered into the grave. Thus:

> "...at the moment of severest grief, the mourner must affirm God's will and His plan."[38]

The Kaddish, therefore, praises God because the death proves that there is consistency in the Universe. Birth and death are facts of life so that

> "by viewing death within the natural order of events, it becomes as natural to grieve as it is to die. Death is not disguised, so grief need not be expressed deviously or deceptively. One attitude follows from the other. The pain of separation must be confronted and expressed."[39]

Keriah:

Meaning "Tearing" or "Rending," this is the custom of the mourner tearing part of his clothing (or wearing a black, torn ribbon) as a symbol of the grief he feels at having someone he loves "torn" from him. Just as the Rabbis felt that a man should meet sorrow standing upright, so one should make the tear standing up and also (symbolically) over the heart on the left side.

Psychologists (and the Rabbis) have long recognized that people often want to pinch themselves when someone dies. They feel guilty and often blame themselves for the death. Thus the Rabbis allowed Keriah even though the Bible says "Rend your heart and not your garments."[40] The act of Keriah, however, has to be performed at the hour of one's greatest suffering: it is not to be performed out of habit and without real feeling. When it came to a choice between people mutilating themselves or their mutilating their clothes, the Rabbis chose the latter!

Matzevah

At the end of the first year after burial the Matzevah (or Tombstone) is placed at the head of the grave. The Rabbis recommended the tombstone because it helps people remember the dead. It is important to note that there is no command to have a matzevah. If the family need their money to live,

they must not use the money to build a matzevah.[41]

Nichum Avelim:

Meaning "comforting the mourners," this was regarded as righteous act by the Rabbis. This comfort must be of empathy--a feeling sorry with the mourners--rather than sympathy--a feeling sorry for them. Nichum avelim is stressed throughout the Rabbinic literature as in the following example from a Midrash:

> "When the Temple was destroyed, the sages instituted the rule that the bridegrooms and mourners should go to the synagogue and to the houses of study. The men of the place see the bridegroom and rejoice with him; and they see the mourner and sit with him upon the earth, so that all the Israelites may discharge their duty in the service of loving kindness."[42]

In the presence of loving and understanding friends, mourners can grow to shift their focus from the person they have lost to the friends they still have.

Onen:

One who is going through aninut (see above) is an onen.

Sheloshim:

This is the third period of aninut (mourning). It begins on the first day of the funeral and ends on the morning of the thirtieth day. By the thirtieth day the shock of the loss is expected to have passed; the mourner now can return to a normal way of life. He still continues to attend daily services to say Kaddish.

The Rabbis felt that if a mourner has not 'recovered' by the thirtieth day then he will have great difficulty ever accepting the death. Thus the thirty days are meant to be a period of intensive "coming to terms" with the fact. The mourner must not shave nor cut his hair; his life during this

period is one of working out what the rest of his life will be without the person he loves. People need this kind of self-understanding after such a shock.

Shivah:

This is the second period of aninut (see above). It refers to the first seven days of mourning after burial and is divided into two periods: the first three days and the last four days.

During the first three days following the burial, the Rabbis said a person can devote himself to weeping and deep mourning. They realized that tears are the body's way of relieving a lot of pain and hidden guilt. The mourner must not respond to any greeetings during these three days and (except under special circumstances) must stay at home. Because the mourner is so full of grief, visitors are discouraged during these first three days of shivah.

The next four days of shivah signal the start of the period when the mourner can lift his head up from his grief and take some love from his friends. After shivah the mourners enters the period of sheloshim (see above).

Soul:

The belief that man has 'something special' which makes him better than the animals, is held both among those who believe, and those who do not believe in God. The creativity of an Einstein or a Chagall, the brilliant leadership of a Moses, all seem to suggest that man has a 'spark' of something great and noble in him.

The "soul" has come to mean this spark. In the Bible it was called Nefesh and Neshamah and Ruach--words which mean "Breath" or "Wind." Thus the the soul is both as mysterious as the wind--causing marvellous events in the

world yet impossible to be seen, and it is "breathed" into man from the moment of his existence; from that moment he is an individual with his own distinct qualities.

The belief that the soul does not die came to the Rabbis from the Bible and from their observations of nature. They looked at the world and understood that nothing really dies--trees rot and go into the soil to provide nutriment for further growth. Thus the Rabbis had an idea of nitrogen, oxygen and hydrogen cycles of life. If the body goes on--from one form into another--why should the 'Breath' or 'Wind' of man (the Ruach, nefesh or neshamah) be any different? The soul must follow the rules of nature and carry on; the Rabbis said, therefore, that the soul returns to God.

The Rabbis could never prove that the soul of man is immortal. They were convinced--as is modern man--that the special qualities of every person are immortal. Thus his genes are carried on to his children, people remember him, and the effect he had on the world is always felt even if only in a small way.

The Rabbis treated every person who died as being equal. Perhaps a man whose life seems to have been worth nothing met a child one day. Perhaps he had encouraged that child to study, to learn, to probe the mysteries of life--maybe this child is that man's immortality. It may be that the man will be forgotten by the child in later years, but the seed of immortality has been planted. The effect of the man will never die.

Thus, while the Rabbis believed that the soul returns to God, they also believed in man's immortality on earth! The creative spirit, enthusiasm and special quality of every individual points to the presence of a soul in man.

Tachrichim:

Meaning 'Burial Garments' or 'Shroud' this is the loose garments in which the body is placed before it is put in the coffin. It is made of white linen cloth--the same for rich and poor. There are no hems nor elaborate stitching as finally, with death, the individual is free from the material world of fashion.

Tzidduk HaDin:

Meaning "Rightness of the Judgement" this is the prayer which is recited during the period immediately after the death. The Rabbis realized that they would hate to have to decide who should live and who should die. Thus they said that just as the Universe functions according to justice and equity, so this death must be just, equitable and right.

Man, therefore, is limited by the laws of God--man trusts God's mercy but when the 'Din' (judgement) is that he must die, man has to accept that there is "Tzidduk" or rightness in the judgement. This really amounts to an admission that nature is just. This prayer also makes the statement that the length of a man's life is unimportant--what man does with his life is important.

Yahrzeit:

This is a yiddish term for the anniversary of the death. The Rabbis believed that to be remembered by one's family is the minimum any man can expect. Of course they anticipated that the righteous person receives much more than this on his death! However, it has become the custom for Jews to return to the Synagogue (or Temple) to say Kaddish and remember their relatives on the Yahrzeit.

Yizkor:

Meaning "May He remember..." this is the prayer recited on Yom Kippur, Shemini Atzeret, the last day of Passover and Shavuot which asks that God remember the soul of the one who has passed away. Where Yahrzeit has a different date for each person--depending on the date of the death--Yizkor is a communal date of remembering the deceased. In these last centuries where millions of Jews have been killed with no one knowing the exact date of their death, Yizkor has allowed them to be remembered even though Yahrzeit is not possible.

Conclusion:

The Jew has to mourn in the best way he knows how. He is not alone in his mourning--his community, his family, and his God are with him. He gains strength in his grief from following the ways of his ancestors. But, in the final analysis, he must confront the fact himself and try to grow wiser and stronger from the experience. This is what the Jew does when someone dies. What will you do?

QUESTION 12

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO JEWS THAT ISRAEL EXISTS?

Modern man realizes he has many loyalties - to his country, his religion, his family and himself. Is there ever a conflict between his many loyalties? Can a Jew be loyal to his home land and to Israel? Do you have to live in Israel to be a Jew?

"I have never paced up and down the banks of the Jordan without in my mind's eye seeing the people of Israel cross over into the Promised Land and wondering what the spiritual equivalent of the Promised Land might be in our time." (Nelson Glueck)

The Bible records how God promised the ancestors of modern Jews the Land of Israel--or the Promised Land. Israel has been important as a hope--without which our People would not have survived--and as a fact of history. Israel is thus important for those Jews who want to live there and for those who want the possibility of living there. Those who do not want to live there support it because they realize that out of Israel comes living Judaism--a living language and culture--which encourages Jews in the Diaspora (the lands outside Israel) to remain Jewish.

The Rabbis realized that life in Israel was not as attractive as life in the Diaspora. Threatened by bands of hostile Arabs, sickness and the difficulty of making a living, Jews were not enthusiastic about going on Aliyah ("going up" to live in Israel). The Rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash encouraged them by pointing out that of all the religious acts that one is commanded, living in Israel is the most important.[1] In fact, the Rabbis were so keen to have Jews live in Israel that they assured them of the following benefits which living there brings:

1) Leniency in the Law:

> "Whoever buys a house in Israel may write his contract even on the Sabbath when writing is forbidden."[2]

2) Forgiveness of sins:

> "Whoever lives in the land of Israel is free from sin."[3]

3) Fulfillment of all the Commandments:

> "Living in the Land of Israel is a religious act (Mitzvah) equivalent to all the commandments of the Torah."[4]

and 4) Promise of a place in Heaven:

> "Whoever walks four yards in the Land of Israel is assured of the world to come."[5]

Life bad and good outside Israel:

At times life outside of Israel was intolerable. To express this the Rabbis often called it Galut or forced exile. Life in Galut made all the dangers of living in Israel seem unimportant. Thus the Rabbis said:

> "Living in Exile is punishment enough for the sins which a man might commit in his life."[6]

But the Rabbis knew that life outside Israel could be good. They used the form Chutz Laaretz when they were conscious of their voluntary exile from Israel. Thus living Chutz Laaretz assured Jewish survival:

> "God bestowed favour upon Israel in spreading them among the nations because, with Israel spread throughout the nations their enemies cannot destroy them all together at the same time."[7]

While such a voluntary exile as Babylon always had the possibility of the increase in Jewish numbers:

> "The Holy One blessed be He would not have forced Israel into exile among the nations were it not for the purpose of attaching converts to them."[8]

Not all the Rabbis were convinced that Jews would survive if they voluntarily remained Chutz Laaretz. The Jerusalem Talmud tells of Simon bar Abba who wanted to leave Israel. He went to his teacher Rabbi Hanina and asked for a letter of recommendation to the communities of the Diaspora so that he could earn a living there. His teacher refused. Rabbi Hanina explained his refusal by saying "If tomorrow I die and meet your ancestors they would be sure to attack me saying "We left a young plant in Israel, from him will come our descendants. How dare you allow him to leave Israel and disappear into the Diaspora!"[9] The Talmud records, however, that after Rabbi Hanina's death Simon did leave Israel to settle in Damascus. There another Rabbi convinced him to return to Israel.

Hiyyah bar Abba was more successful than Simon bar Abba in obtaining a testimonial to take with him Chutz Laaretz so that he could find work. His teacher, Rabbi Yudan, did recommend him with the words "I am sending you a great man. In what way is he great? He's not ashamed to say 'I don't understand!'

Thus while the Rabbis wanted all Jews to settle in Israel, they felt that life outside Israel was not always bad. In fact the Jews in Babylon were extremely happy. The Rabbis said that if a country outside of Israel could be like Babylon then it was all right for Jews to live there. In Babylon the Jews had total freedom of action and had been able to develop both their culture and their religion. Some of our most important Jewish religious practices started in Babylon:

1) The practice of circumcision
2) The celebration of Shabbat as a religious day and not as a market day

3) The first Synagogue
4) The first Prayer Book and Prayers
and 5) The belief that God rules the whole world as the One God with justice and mercy.

It is thus clear that the Jewish experience in Babylon was an extremely positive one. Rabbi Judah Ha Nasi said:

> "Whoever emigrates from Babylon to the Land of Israel violates one of the positive commandments of the Torah."[10]

...which certainly shows the esteem which the Rabbis had for Babylon. Another Rabbi said:

> "He who lives in Babylon is as if he would live in the Land of Israel."[11]

The Rabbis were not so much devoted to the Land as to the ethical life. As it was clear that the Jewish communities of Babylon did live as Jews, then it would have made little sense for them to abandon that. However, Israel--with all its possibilities for religious living--was the first choice for where to live. In Babylon the Jews never knew how long their security would last; in Israel their chances were better for a continued existence.

The important point which the modern Jew can learn from the Rabbis is that whether to live in Israel or in the Diaspora, was not a political, not a financial but rather a religious decision. The Jews of Babylon--unlike the other communities outside Israel which were doomed to extinction--had achieved creative, fulfilling Jewish life. Thus the Rabbis said:

> "As it is forbidden to leave the Land of Israel for Babylon, so it is forbidden to leave Babylon for other countries."[12]

Conclusion:

The Rabbis of the Talmud are not all in agreement that life in the Diaspora is bad while life in Israel is good for the Jews. The duty of a Jew,

they said, is to live a creative religious life. The Rabbis could not deny that such a life can be lived in and out of Israel.

Thus it is important to Jews that the Land of Israel exists, because with it there is always a further possibility that Jews will be able to be Jews in the religious sense of the word 'Jew.'

Must all Jews go to live in Israel? Must all Jews give the possibility of going there a consideration? Can one be a Jew without ever having considered Israel?

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QUESTION 13

WHY WAS I BORN, WHY AM I LIVING?

What's the purpose of life? How many of the billions of people who have lived and died are now remembered? What's all this talk about a "Messiah"?

"The meaning of man's life lies in his perfecting the Universe." A.J. Heschel The Earth is the Lord's, 1950, p. 72.

Most of the Rabbis were convinced that their life had meaning because they had a part in making the world better. Obviously, God is MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE but, even though they believed this, they felt that man has a function in the world. He is a partner with God. A better world --a world which has everything men have ever prayed for--was the Rabbinic hope for the future. It is called THE MESSIANIC HOPE.

The word "Messiah" means "the anointed one" and is found in Hebrew as mashiach and Arabic as meshicha.

The Bible:

There are two main points of view in the Bible about the Messiah. The view of Isaiah is that man can bring the Messiah, while the view of Daniel is that man is helpless in bringing him.

The Prophet Isaiah:

The people, Israel, is called "Servant of Yahweh" in that Israel serves God by being righteous and therefore brings the Messiah:

> "Behold my servant, whom I uphold,
> my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
> I have put my spirit upon him he will
> bring forth justice to the nations."[1]

In this case the "Messiah" about which Isaiah speaks is not truly an individual but rather an Age. He says that Israel--God's servant--can play an important role in bringing about the "Messianic Age" of justice.

The Prophet Daniel:

Daniel's concept of the Messiah is quite different from Isaiah's. At some time in the future God's representatives will take over the earth. This view is stated in the seventh chapter of Daniel. In that chapter we read of Daniel's dream:

> "The saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, for ever and ever."[2]

When this occurs, said Daniel, people had better be one hundred per cent righteous and pure; if not they will be punished. Thus they can do nothing to bring on the coming of the Messiah ("the saints of the Most High") but they can save themselves from the possibility of punishment.

The Rabbis:

The two attitudes: "You can bring the Messiah" and "You had better be ready when he comes" are found in the Rabbinic literature. Beliefs are modified by political circumstances. Thus when people had hope that Bar Kokhba would succeed in bringing Jewish independence from Roman domination they tended to believe in the view that due to Bar Kokhba's success the Messiah would be brought. When Bar Kokhba failed the Rabbis tended to believe that the Messiah would come on his own initiative some time in the future, without man influencing his coming.

The belief of Rabbi Akiba--that man is free yet everything is foreseen (or predetermined)--shows how the Rabbis accepted both Isaiah's and Daniel's view. Thus Akiba is saying that even though God has decided when to bring the Messiah or the Messianic Age, man still has free will concerning the final judgement aspect of the Messiah's coming. Man is free, therefore, to move (i.e. be it moral or immoral) within a predetermined history.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi was asked the question "What does Isaiah mean when he says "I the Lord will hasten it in its time?"[3] He expressed the Rabbinic belief in "free will within a foreseen history" in his answer:

> (God Says) "If Israel merits it, 'I will hasten it.' If Israel does not merit it, it will be 'in its (predetermined) time.'"[4]

As with other beliefs, the Rabbis held a variety of views with regard to the Messiah. Some stressed the role of human deeds in bringing the Messiah, others were more concerned with what life would be like once the Messiah arrives, while yet others wondered whether the Messiah would come at all.

The Messiah will not come...

It was a Christian, Origen, who probably made Rabbi Hillel ben Gamaliel, the third, adopt the view that the Messiah would never come. Origen was convinced that the Christian Messiah--Jesus--had been mentioned in the Old Testament. Rather than accept Jesus as the Messiah, Rabbi Hillel said:

> "There shall be no Messiah for Israel because they have already enjoyed him!"[5]

Of course, the majority of Rabbis did not agree with Rabbi Hillel! Rabbi Joseph heard Hillel say this and exclaimed:

> "May God forgive Rabbi Hillel for saying that!"

Life when he comes...

The persecutions which the Rabbis experienced are well known. They were convinced that the fate of Jews had to improve. Life was, at times, so bad for them that the word "Messiah" came to mean not so much a person who would be sent by God but an Age when things would be better.

Rabbi Samuel of Babylonia asked himself the question "What would be better than what we have now?" He looked at the history of his people and concluded that the difference between life in his day and the Messianic Age

is that foreign governments who rule and oppress the Jewish people will no longer exist. On another occasion he asked himself the same question. His conclusion was somewhat different: in the Messianic Age no community will know the feeling of anguish and longing which comes from being locked out of its rightful home. Exile will cease.

His coming depends on us...

One of the great centers of Jewish Law in Babylon was in Sura. In the third century the sage Abba Arikha went to Sura to establish that city as a center of Jewish Law. Abba Arikha was convinced that human deeds are far more important than predestination in bringing the Messiah. He knew that men had tried to predict when the Messiah was going to come (using hints at his coming in the Bible) but he had not come. Rav (As Abba Arikha was called) therefore came to the conclusion that

> "All the predestined dates (for the Messiah to come) have passed and the matter now depends only on repentance and good deeds."[6]

The Jerusalem Talmud expresses the same view:

> "If all Israel repented a single day the Messiah would come."[7]

The Messianic Chain...

In his book, The Messianic Idea in Israel, Joseph Klausner calls the Rabbinic belief about the Messiah "The Messianic Chain."[8] That is, there are at least ten "links" which it was believed will form a chain of events leading to the coming of the Messiah and continuing after his coming.

Unlike most chains (where the links are fixed) "The Messianic Chain" has "movable" links. Some Rabbis believed that the chain only had eight links, others put more than ten links in the chain. But everyone said that some

events at least will accompany the coming of the Messiah - those events form a "chain." The Rabbis inherited points of view about the Messiah which were flexible for everyone knew that any ideas about the Messiah or the order of the events leading to his coming, were just guesses.

The Ten Basic Links of The Messianic Chain:

1. Signs:

   There will be "signs" of the nearness of the Messiah's coming.

2. Suffering:

   Just before he comes the whole world will suffer just like a woman suffers when giving birth to a child.

3. Elijah:

   Elijah will precede him and announce that he is on his way.

4. Trumpet Blast:

   Just before he arrives a "Trumpet of Deliverance" will blast.

5. One God:

   Everyone will be converted to belief in the One God.

6. From 40-365,000 year rule:

   He will rule for as long as a thousand years (some say less). During that time all the suffering (the birth pangs which preceded his arrival) will disappear.

7. Righteousness and Peace:

   There will be a renovation of the world; while he is here the whole world will be righteous and peaceful.

8. Justice:

   The true justice ('theodicy') which men have always hoped for will come true. People will be rewarded and punished according to their good and evil qualities. The Messiah, alone, will know the tzadik gamur (totally righteous) from the rasha gamur (totally evil) individual.

9. Return to Life:

   The dead of past generations--who have been looked after by God--will finally be allowed to return to the world.

10. Eternal Life:

> Finally, all who have been privileged to see the fulfillment of THE MESSIANIC HOPE will receive eternal life.

While Hillel's view (that the Messiah has already come and will not come again) was overruled by the majority of Rabbis, it is easy to see why he rejected Origen's belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Clearly Jesus was neither preceded by universal suffering (the Romans were happy), Elijah, a trumpet blast, and universal belief in the One God, nor preceded by universal righteousness, peace, and justice--even disregarding a return to life of the dead and universal eternal life for all who witnessed his coming. Many who believed in Jesus tried to show that he did fit these 'requirements,' but the Rabbis could not accept their point of view.

Judaism has seen many men who have either presented themselves, or have been presented by others, as being the Messiah. Because the Rabbis knew of so many men who made such claims, and clearly did not fulfill their expectations of what the Messiah should be like, they became very cautious. In spite of their wariness, Messiahs continued to appear bringing their message of miraculous redemption and "better days" for the Jews and all mankind. It is interesting to note that these Messiahs invariably were preceded by periods of historical change and crisis. During the Crusades at the end of the 11th and during the 12th Centuries there were no less than ten messianic movements headed by messiahs, prophets and even a prophetess! The following table shows the emergence of Messiahs in thirteen centuries of Jewish history:

SOME OF THE MESSIAHS OF JEWISH HISTORY AFTER

THE COMPLETION OF THE MISHNAH (189 C.E.)

ace	NAME	CENTURY	PERIOD OF HISTORICAL CHANGE AND CRISIS WHICH PRECEDED THEM
ete	Moses of Crete	5th	Roman discrimination against the Jews.
gdad	David Alroy (Alrui)	12th	Jewish suffering after the First and Second Crusades in Eastern and Western Europe.
ily	Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia	13th	Catholic persecutions of the Jews at the Pope's whim.
in	Moses Botarel	14th-15th	Repeated persecutions following the obviously false blood accusations.
rtugal	Solomon Molko	16th	Marranos of Portugal burned alive at the whim of the Bishops and Kings of Portugal.
and	Shabbatai Zevi	17th	Chmielnicki pogroms in which the Cossaks killed 250,000 Jews between 1648 and 1658.

Conclusion:

No one knows whether the word messiah means that person sent by God or an Age which will come about through the efforts of God and man. A modern Rabbi has expressed his view concerning the Messianic Age as:

> "Jewish independence,...full of freedom for Torah study, the absence of famine, war, jealousy and competition, the presence of material abundance, and the striving of all mankind to know the Lord.
>
> The means to bring this age about--in addition to God's help--are, as the Rabbis put it, repentance, the return to a God-centered way of life, the recognition that all human actions are under the judgement of God, and the doing of good deeds--which include common decency and respect for one's fellow men."[10]

To be a part in bringing the Messianic Age, is the Jewish answer to the question WHY WAS I BORN, WHY AM I LIVING?

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CONCLUSION

Rabbi Ishmael died as a martyr in the year 135 C.E. after the defeat of Bar Kokhba. He left his people 13 rules which Jews must obey in interpreting the Torah. The rules of Rabbi Ishmael are called the 13 middot. This book has discussed 13 questions. They are the 13 sheelot of modern Jews. Rabbi Ishmael's middot (rules) explain the Torah; the modern Jew's sheelot (questions) explains the modern Jew!

What now? Rabbinic Literature, at most, covers eighteen centuries: from 300BCE to 1500CE. There is still vast literature which is Jewish and which gives different answers. What does Maimonides say, for example, about any one of these 13 questions?

Most of the questions cannot be answered without qualifications. It is the difficulty of the questions that makes them recur in every generation! The medieval Jewish literature, mystical works, Jewish ethical works and modern Jewish philosophy, all approach these thirteen questions in different ways.

Man will always ask questions about God. His existence, His nature, His relationship to man, will always be a mystery to man. Does this fact mean that man must stop trying to find answers to his questions? Judaism says No! Man will always have questions about himself. He wants to know what life is all about--what is Jewish existence all about?

The ancient Rabbis have opened up infinite possibilities for further questions. But their literature is only a fraction of the total corpus of Jewish literature. Jews were called the People of the Book with reference to their having given the Bible to the world. Look at the thousands of other works that have come out of the Jewish people. The ancient Rabbis were not

content to let the Bible be the only Jewish book. And Jews throughout all ages have followed their example.

The modern Jew is rich in Jewish literature. It is not all in Hebrew--much has been translated into English. Just as the ancient Rabbis were truly living, so all thinking men have given us a living heritage. Let us begin.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 1: How Can We Prove God's Existence?

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   Samuel S. Cohon. "The Name of God--A Study in Rabbinic Theology," (Hebrew Union College Annual, xxiii, part I (1950/51), pp. 579-604.

2. A. Marmorstein, pp. 74,94,97.

3. Akiba, Midrash Temura, Chapter 3.

4. Ber. 6a.

5. Ber. R. 12:16-21.

6. Avot 1:1.

7. Num. R. 14:2; Ber. R. 39:3.

8. Louis Jacobs. Principles of the Jewish Faith. New York, Basic Books, 1964, pp. 48-49.

9. Avodah Zarah 17b-18b.

10. Ibid.

Chapter 2: Where is God?

1. Sanh. 39a cf. also Hul. 59b-60a; Exod. R. 29; Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer chapt. 7; Midr. Ps. 103:5; b. Ber. 10a; Lev. R. 4:8; Deut. R. 2:37.

2. Exod. R. shemoth 2:9.

3. Union Prayer Book. Central Conference of American Rabbis, Vol. I New York, 1940, p. 315.
   Service of the Heart. Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues. London, 1967, p. 40.
   Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book (Silverman, ed.) 1946, p. 91.
   Authorized Daily Prayer Book (Hertz. rev. ed.) 1963, p. 114.

4. Union Prayer Book Vol. II, p. 124.
   Service of the Heart p. 377.
   Hertz p. 1000.

5. Marmorstein. pp. 54-107.
   Cohon op.cit.

6. Marmorstein. p. 92.

7. Mekilta to Exodus 17:6.

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Service of the Heart p. 48.
Meg. 17b
Ber. 33a

3. Ze'ev Gold. Lessons in Talmud. Jerusalem, World Zionist Organization, 1956, pp. 118-119.

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6. Service of the Heart, p. 275.

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8. Ronald Goldman. Religious Thinking From Childhood to Adolescence. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964, p. 60.

9. Ber. 58a.

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11. Gen. R. 27:7.

12. Avot. 3:17.

Chapter IV: Is God Dead or Alive?

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2. Op. cit.

3. Samuel E. Karff. The Rabbinic 'Idea of the Holy' (As Reflected in the Rabbinic Image of the Covenant) (Cincinnati: Unpublished, 1960), p. 141ff. Hereinafter cited as Karff--thesis.

4. Mekilta Pisha. Vol. I, p. 113.

5. Exodus R. 2:7.

6. Lelyveld.

7. Yoma 56b.

8. Hagiga 16a.

9. Shabbat 139a.

10. Karff--thesis, p. 144ff.
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Chapter VI: What Can't God Do?

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ChapterVII: Why is God Called 'God of Truth'?

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2. Midr. Tehilim, 25:2 ed. B. 210.

3. Zevi Scharfstein. Shiloh Prayer Book. New York: Shiloh, 1932, p. 1.

4. Union Prayer Book I, p. 98.
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   Hertz, p. 557.

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6. Zohar.

7. Deut. R. 3:5.

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3. Tanhuma Buber V. 11.

4. Samuel S. Cohonl Judaism as a Way of Living. Cincinnati, 1942, I. Chapter 1; section 8, p. 44.

5. Avot. 3:17.

6. Taanit 21b.

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8. Yom. 3.8.
9. Avot. 4:8.
10. Sanh. 37b.
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12. Tosefta Sanh. 19a.
13. Tanhuma Buber. Lev. 12, Sanh. 91a-b.
14. Mishnah Eduyot 1:1-4.
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4. Kitzur Shulhan Arukh CXCIII,5.
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6. Pes. 66b; Sifra Shemini 2:12; Sifre Numbers Chapter 157.
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9. Baba Metziah 30b; Vayikra Rabbah 34.
10. Kubler-Ross, p. 87.
11. Baal Shem. Tzevaat HaBesht 1797.
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23. Spiro, p. 69.
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Chapter XI Footnotes continue

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12. Loc. cit.

Chapter XIII: Why Was I Born, Why Am I Living?

1. Isaiah XLII:1.
2. Daniel VII:18.
3. Isaiah LX:22.
4. Sanhedrin 98a.
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