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THE JEWISH HERETIC: A STUDY IN
RELIGIOUS DEVIANCE FROM LILITH TO LENNY BRUCE

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

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by Marc Gellman

DIGEST

I believe that there is a most important yet unrecognized tradition within Judaism. It is a tradition of Jewish heretics. These men and women who could neither abandon nor accept the Judaism into which they happened to be born are decisive figures in the ever-changing determination of normative Jewish identity. They set the limits for what it means to be Jew.

Each age, each period in the Jewish experience creates its own heretics out of its needs for group self-definition. This work examines six such Jewish heretics, Lilith, Korah, Paul, Elisha ben Abuya, Uriel Acosta, and Lenny Bruce. They are each examined against the normative Judaism of their time, against a set of general methodological criteria for the definition of Jewish heresy, and against themselves--that is against the inner tensions which animated their life and thought. Every chapter contains both an analysis of the particular heretic as well as a complete collection of all, or most, of the primary texts relating to his biography. The analyses are meant to give coherence and meaning to the texts; the texts are meant to act as a constant check against wild generalizations in the analyses. This is a study of social deviance within a religious tradition. As such a great deal of emphasis has been placed upon delineating the functional interrelationships between the individual heretic and the normative Jewish community to which he was ambivalently

connected. Some of the characters appearing in these pages are mythopoetic, others are purely historical, and some are a peculiar combination. All of them, by their deviance, show the rest of the Jewish community how far out one must go to forfeit the right to come home again.

THE JEWISH HERETIC: A STUDY IN
RELIGIOUS DEVIANCE FROM LILITH TO LENNY BRUCE

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"There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you."

----I Corinthians 11:19.

"The Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition. You may, if you like, see Akher as a prototype of those great revolutionaries of modern thought: Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, and Freud. You may, if you wish to, place them within a Jewish tradition. They all went beyond the boundaries of Jewry. They all found Jewry too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting. They all looked for ideals and fulfilment beyond it, and they represent the sum and substance of much that is greatest in modern thought, the sum and substance of the most profound upheavals that have taken place in philosophy, sociology, economics, and politics in the last three centuries."

----Isaac Deutscher, The non-Jewish Jew.

INTRODUCTION

This is a study of Jewish heretics. That is to say it is a study of various men and women who defined the outer limits of what it means to be a Jew.

By their unique position, it is my thesis, they comprise a crucial and heretofore unrecognized tradition which has served both to define and dynamize the Jewish experience in every age. Indeed, the span of time covered by the Jewish heretics in our study is over 4,000 years. The scope of this tradition is enormous; the first two characters, Lilith and Korah, are figures of ancient myth and legend; the last, Lenny Bruce, died six years ago. Some of them created great new systems, like Paul, others died unknown and unremembered. The autobiography of Uriel Acosta has to this day never been published in any English book. Some were very rich and highly educated, like Elisha ben Abuya, others had very little money or formal education, like Lenny Bruce. But they are all social deviants--people for whom conformity to accepted social norms is either impossible or undesirable. For some, the stigmatization thrust upon them by the normative community was particularly severe and personally crushing; for others, it was the source of new respect and adulation. Heresy led some to suicide and others to success.

The six Jewish heretics in our study are all highly intriguing personalities. They all led fascinating lives, but it is in the light

they shed upon the ever changing parameters of normative Jewish identity that they have most to teach us. I can describe the methodology at work here by this analogy: If one wanted to find out about a high school, I mean really identify its most essential characteristics--its most powerful ideals, goals, norms and limits--then a number of possibilities would emerge. You could find out what books were in the school library there and which ones were used most often. You could check out the lesson plans, course outlines, and curriculum proposals of the teachers. You could ask the brightest and best students to give you an "insiders" opinion about their studies. You could get a copy of the "approved" books of school rules. Or just perhaps you might want to go to the principal of this high school and ask him which students he had placed on probation or suspended and what they had actually done to merit disciplinary action. You would then probably want to talk to these kids and find out from them exactly what one had to do to get kicked out of that particular high school. After talking to enough of them you would have a good idea about what "rules" one could break with impunity and which ones brought instantaneous reprisals. You would be searching for the limits to normative social behavior, and you would soon discover that those limits can only be set by those who transgress them.

So it is with this work. We do not probe the classic texts for a few more time worn commentaries or examine once again the approved teachings of the most famous for new insights into their legal decisions. The implicit or explicit theologies of hundreds of Jewish thinkers over thousands of years are of very little concern here.

This is a study of the "twilight zone" of the Jewish experience. Where we are going all the sages are beaten men. Few, if any, of them will have their words immortalized in any collection of pithy Jewish aphorisms. Such is the fate of heretics. Simply put, we are after the Jews who never fit very comfortably into Judaism, whatever that label happened to connote when they were born, but Jews who never fit into anything else quite as well.

They are the limit-setters of Jewish identity. They are the ones who show other Jews where the rest of the world begins. They are living examples of tensions and problems that the normative community creates but does not yet feel. They call forth new possibilities for Jewish existence which lie resolutely smothered in their own age. The Jewish heretic cannot define the guts of Judaism, but only he can define its outer limits. Only the Jewish heretic can play this crucial role in the process of group self-definition. A normative Jew, no matter how potentially heretical he may be, always leaves essentially untested actual limits of acceptable Jewishness. The heretic can give the community a sense of itself precisely because it means much more to say, "you are just outside the boundary" than to say, "you are just within it."

An important part of the heretic's role is to represent a real example of the normative communities negative ego ideal. It is as important for developing members of any group to have a heretic to hiss at and abuse and ridicule as it is to have a hero to cheer and praise and emulate. Both social types are flesh and blood incarnations of abstract and complicated social norms. Whether they

are objects of scorn or adulation, both the heretic and the hero are real objects.

Closely related, the heretic serves as a point of projection of massive wishes for fantasy escape. The harsh bonds of reality chafe on all of us at times and the heretic is often the anathemized character who actually does what we would never dare. In the Jewish experience the fantasy escapes often center around the desire to violate Jewish Law, halachah. In essence it is an attempt to rid oneself of all fetters of external authority. When the heretic is a figure of myth these impulses for projection and fantasy escape receive more uninhibited play than is possible if the real limitations of a historical personality must be accommodated.

We must give more flesh and substance to the terms of our study. Exactly what is a Jewish heretic. A primary element in our definition is that the heretic must be involved in a clear and decisive reciprocal tension with the normative Jewish community. The key element here is mutual involvement. The heretic must see Judaism as a worthy object for change but an unworthy object of allegiance; and the Jews must see the heretic's identity as close enough to be possible, desirable and thus threatening to the normative group, but too far away and extreme to be acceptable on its own terms. The heretic often considers himself a perfectly respectable Jew and invariably is the authoritative Jewish community which makes the first strong moves to identify his Jewishness as deviant. What this means is that the heretic's critique of the existing religious tradition is that of an insider. Time and again we will encounter cases of the heretic calling upon other Jews to live up to

their own best traditions, to be consistent with their own values. The Jewish heretic confronts the normative community with the unfulfilled possibilities of their own Jewishness. Sometimes, driven further and further away by their attacks, the heretic may develop totally new and radically anti-Jewish philosophies, but the genesis of his thought is always the result of a deep initial contact with the Jewish community. It is not rejection but transcendence which best describes the response of the heretic to his Jewish past.

The second primal tension which defines the Jewish heretic is the conflict between personal experience and inherited traditions. A tension which is ultimately resolved on the side of personal experience. What one is told to see in the world and what one actually does see are nearly always in conflict. The chasm between the two is enlarged to precarious extremes in normative rabbinic Judaism. In the Bible the inherited traditions of God's covenant with Abraham's descendents seemed to be consistently verified by experience. The exodus from Egypt, the revelation on Mt. Sinai, the conquest of Canaan, and the speedy return from Babylonian captivity were among the many publically witnessed events that gave sure and certain validation to the traditions of a benevolent God of history. Again and again in the biblical text, God's power to act in concrete history swiftly closes any gap that might emerge between promise and providence. By the time of the destruction of the 2nd Temple, the biblical God of history seemed to have been refuted by history. it was from this time on that the traditions of choseness, sovereignty, and covenant began to mesh less and less

with the terrifying and real experiences of exile. I do not know why the heretic feels this anomaly in God's salvation history more intensely than other Jews. I do not know why the Jewish heretic could not find some way to reconcile his differences with other Jews. Some questions are ultimately mysteries.

The tradition of the Jewish heretic could thus be seen as a tradition of those Jews who continue the struggle to unite real history with salvation history. Neither "this worldliness" nor "other worldliness" sufficed for them. Neither deferred gratifications in a World to Come nor the naked exercise of power by a God of history could ease the struggle of the Jewish heretic to find a seamless Jewish existence and a usable past.

As such, the heretic must be a person without models -- without teachers -- without friends. As such, the heretic represents a very special type of individual in the history of religion -- the "pneumatic." The pneumatic is in the possession of certain knowledge or beliefs which he believes make him a law unto himself. He is highly critical of the system into which he has been initially rooted and fiercely independent. Basically an "inner directed" man, the pneumatic is unable to internalize the legitimacy of socially approved authority figures. The basic tension which most centrally animates these loners is, I believe, the quest for immediate salvation -- the desire to acquire ultimate freedom and autonomy. The social context into which they are born supplies the obstacles to their search for pure autonomy. The dialectic of such a quest is open ended and creates an escalation of the heretical critique. When authority rested in priestly and prophetic absolutism, then the heretics like Korah rose to reject prophet and priest.

When Judaism placed the locus of authority over salvation in the hal-achah, heretics like Paul and Elisha ben Abuya denied that the law was the single instrumentality towards that goal. When the rabbis claimed exclusive power to authoritatively interpret Jewish law, then men like Uriel Acosta attacked those rabbinical prerogatives and the Sacred Scriptures upon which they were based. In our secular age, the claims of organized religion to mediate between the individual and his ultimate freedom and autonomy are very weak. So in our times, God alone must bear the brunt of the attacks of a contemporary heretic like Lenny Bruce. God is the last obstacle in the escalating critique of the Jewish heretic.

It may seem that the tradition of Jewish heresy is an essentially destructive one but I believe this is not the case. No more so than the sharp spade digging up fallow ground is destructive to the growth of the seed. At certain historical junctures these "non-Jewish Jews" can breathe new life and energy into stagnating social forms. This happened in the case of the Baal-Shem-Tov, the founder of Hasidism. It was prevented from happening in seventeenth century Poland when Shabbtai Zvi proclaimed himself the Messiah. History is a fickle mistress to the Jewish heretic. Sometimes she allows them to create great systems, the equal of the Judaism they have left behind; sometimes they are crushed and beaten with all but a few traces of their life and passions obliterated from the historical record. The line between Zaddik and Mumar -- between hero and heretic, is more finely drawn than we could ever imagine.

* * *

A word is in order about the rather unconventional format of this work. An attempt was made to avoid a cloistered and secretive attitude

towards primary texts. Generally, I have found very few primary sources relating to the lives of the Jewish heretics in our study but those I have discovered have been included in a separate section at the end of each chapter. This has two purposes. It permits less frequent footnoting and repetitious citations in the various chapters and it also serves as a check on the author's sometimes unwarranted conclusions and generalizations. The reader can, and should, examine the primary text sections carefully and decide for himself the particular importance of the particular heretic. I believe that there is an important and discernable tradition of Jewish heresy outlined in these pages. Final assent, however, is the reader's and it must come with all the facts plainly laid out.

Another surprise needing clarification is the heretics who are not included here. The comments of interested bystanders always expands the list of potential Jewish heretics. Indeed, the author had prepared in rough draft additional chapters on Shabbtai Zvi, Baal Shem Tov, Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Solomon Maimon, Felix Adler, Rosa Luxemborg, Gustav Landauer, Baruch Spinoza, Abbie Hoffman, Arthur Waskow and, of course, Bess Meyerson. Soon the work began to feel like a paraphrase of the old joke, "If you have two Jews, you have three heretics!" The exigencies of time and energy compelled the rather arbitrary selection of the present six.

And so it begins.

CHAPTER ONE

LILITH: The Loving and the Terrible Mother

HELMER: Before everything else you're a wife and a mother.

NORA: I don't believe that any longer. I believe that before everything else I'm a human being, just as much as you are-- or at any rate I shall try to become one.

-----Ibsen, A Doll's House

Man has always stood in awe of the world. At the very beginnings of his consciousness this world-awe took the form of Poetry and Myth--there was no other way to express the wonder and terror of life.¹ So for man in the past the world became a place tremendously alive, a place animated in every way by the forces of life and death. The Poetry and the Myth became the incarnation of man's hope that the world would give special nurture to the forces of life. The forces were given names and shapes, powers and dominions, so that they might be contained just a bit and made, perhaps, a little less awesome and a little less terrifying for men who remained, after all, nearly totally at their mercy.

We are, however, modern men. We comprehend and control the forces which dominated the men of Myth and Poetry. For us, world-awe is expressed in quotients and numbers. But there is something about numbers that is hollow and unreal--unsuited to the expression of world-awe. Maybe it is that you cannot draw a picture or tell a story or fall in love with a number. So one must be delicate and understanding if one is a modern man of the "primitive" expressions of naive bewilderment that seem to animate the minds of men we call ancient. Their legends and sagas are so imprecise and childish when compared to our formulas and equations.

We have grown out of myth and poetry. To understand our past we must learn to grow back in again.

Lilith is part of the myth and poetry of the Jewish woman. She emerges at the very beginning of human culture and maintains a consistent presence down to our own times. Lilith is a major figure in the

folk-religion of the Jewish people, and her career is an extensive in scope as it is in breadth: Lilith is from time to time a night demon, the first wife of Adam, a mother to monsters and giants, a seducer of lonely men, a tormentor of little children, a harlot and a queen, a vampire and a consort of the angels.² In her ultimate triumph, Lilith even becomes the wife of God. Throughout Lilith is the consummate Jewish heretic--she is quite literally everything that a Jewish woman should not be. As is the case with all the Jewish heretics we shall explore, Lilith serves to define the acceptable parameters of normative Jewish identity. The socially sanctioned role of the Jewish woman ends where the myth of Lilith begins. Her negative stigmatization serves as a warning to all who would flirt with the heresy of deviance.

The heresy of Lilith has many facets and remarkably most of her features seem fully formed and initially present in the very earliest stages of the myth. Lilith, or lilitu, was a type of storm demon mentioned in the Sumerian King List (2400 B.C.E.) but through a mistaken etymology (layil-lilitu) she entered the Jewish tradition as a night demon.³ Beyond this rather slight transformation, Lilith seems to have been consistently viewed as a harlot vampire who delights in tormenting men and killing little children. She was believed to reside in the desert or on the seashore or in any other spooky deserted place. Long flowing hair and a huge set of wings were her most noticeable physical characteristics. Though nothing else united them, if you were to ask a resident of third millenium Sumer, eighth century Palestine and eighteenth century Poland, to describe Lilith you would get an incredibly consistent picture of this nocturnal succuba. Lilith has been with us a very long time.

Perhaps Lilith's greatest heresy is that she is the absolute representation of the non-passive, non-acquiescing woman. The midrashim about Lilith and Adam recount in tremendously human terms the initial struggle for male dominance acted out in myth between the two first and equal humans. Lilith's refusal to accept the passive and recumbent position during the first intercourse with the first man, her resistance at Adam's attempt to rape her, the flight from Adam to the haunted reaches of the Red Sea, and above all, her steadfast refusal to obey God's word and return to her husband, all of this is one of the most powerful and poetic assertions of female equality and independence ever made.⁴ Given the expectations of Adam and God, however, it turns out to be a totally unjustified assertion. It is an act of rebellion against God's established order--an order in which man is meant to rule over woman. As such Lilith's flight from Adam could be seen as the result of man's deep but repressed fear of woman. Unable to accept their deep desire to flee from women, the Lilith myth projects onto the woman the initial impulse for flight and seclusion.

It is, according to tradition, this unfelicitous creation of Adam and Lilith as equal partners that is referred to in the Creation account of Genesis 1:27. The creation of Eve in Genesis 2:21-24 leaves no doubt about who is to be the boss. Eve's creation from man's rib (in some versions from his tail!) not only disguises her divine origin, but also indicates her naturally subservient relationship to man. The Hebrew also contains a demeaning pun on the word, tsela which means "rib" and "stumbling block." The message is quite clear: Eve is made to be the way a woman should be, and Lilith -- Lilith is the total and utter negation of Eve. Eve is the day lady, the wife and mother figure; Lilith is

the night lady, the temptress, the seductress, the whore. Though they are both figures of poetry and myth, Eve is reality -- a reality that every religious tradition of the western world has conspired to support and maintain -- a reality in which the only valid female roles are that of wife and mother. Lilith is a fantasy escape from that reality. Independence and freedom are highly praised qualities in the Bible, but when sought after by women they form the roots of heresy.

Lilith is even more than this.

Lilith is the negation of monogamous heterosexual love. The demon with the long hair seduces any man her passion drives her to. Lilith has no single mate -- no exclusive lover. Any man sleeping alone is a prime target. With the sperm of the man she has seduced, Lilith bears hundreds of demons which enter the world to plague mankind. The guilt thus produced in a man who has had a nocturnal emission is enormous. He must first face the obvious evidence of his uncontrolled passion, a sin in its own right (Cf. Gen. 38:9-10), and additionally he must bear the burden of knowing that his sperm has helped to increase the demonic elements in the world. To the degree that men tried to sublimate their passions, control their erotic thoughts, to guard themselves against any romantic attachment with Lilith, surely to that degree she must have become irresistably alluring as a fantasy escape from precisely these sublimations. Even union with one's own wife had to be approached with trepidation lest the darting spectre of Lilith snatch up some errant drop of semen and convert it into a new brood of demons.

The picture of Lilith hovering close by a couple so conjoined is indeed apt. Lilith represents the taboo and heresy of illicit

sex -- of unrestrained passion and, indeed at the moment of orgasm, at the very summit of unrestrained passion, fantasy and reality are never so clear, illicit and approved sex are at that moment indistinguishable. Perhaps the worry is that men will forget, even for an instant, the distinction between Lilith and Eve. When every aspect of man's life is contained by "The Law" even this cannot be.

The consort of Lilith in many of the midrashim is Naamah who in most respects is an identical type of demon.⁶ Lilith and Naamah travel together, conceive demon children for each other, and even seduce the same man at times. Lesbianism seems implicit in their relationship. It must also be remembered that Lilith was, by some accounts, originally androgynous (as was Naamah) and therefore I feel that Lilith's seductions should not be considered wholly heterosexual.

Put bluntly, Lilith is sex according to Norman Mailer; Eve is sex according to Dr. David Reuben.

Lilith is also the infanticide -- the child killer -- and this is one of her most enigmatic roles. Circumscision for a boy and the twentieth day of life for a girl was a significant rite of passage for child, family, and community. Until recently (and only in industrialized countries) infant mortality was enormous during these first days of life. Lilith is an important and useful myth in helping people cope with the death of a little baby. Lilith provides a reason for death. She also acts as a projection of a deeper, more sinister feeling of parenthood. Here again Lilith and Eve are polar opposites. Eve represents that aspect of parenthood that is selfless and joyful at the birth of a child. Lilith, however, is the aspect of parenthood that hates the new-born child for causing the mother

pain in labor, and dividing the love of the now larger family group. Lilith is the result of the projection of parents who say, "It is not us who hate this child and wishes it were dead -- it is Lilith and her evil designs on my children!" Moreover, she may represent the infant fear of maternal cannibalism as imagined punishment for the cannibalistic act of breast feeding.⁷

It must be remembered that Lilith does all this at God's will, and this points up a central thesis in Jewish demonology, namely, that demons and spirits exist and they are real. Moreover, they have a specific form and function bestowed upon them by God's intentional will. Crucially important is the fact that they can be controlled and stymied through adherence to God's commandments and Torah. This protection against Lilith gives us a fascinating insight into the relationship between the folk-religion of the people and the approved religion of the rabbinic elite. From what we have seen it seems clear that the myth of Lilith was so deeply rooted in the minds of the people that it could not be ignored or denied. By first admitting the real existence of Lilith, and then by asserting that only strict adherence to normative Rabbinic Law could surely protect one from her, the rabbis were thus able to fight at the root the popular, yet unsanctioned apotropaic measures like amulets, incantations, etc., that were so popular among the people. Moreover, to have maintained that Lilith was not real or not created by God would have given unwitting support to Gnostic and other dualistic sects which maintained that the evil⁸ in the world does not flow from the same source as the good. These demonic figures, of which Lilith is but one, are at times grotesque and appalling but always above them is the One God. For both biblical

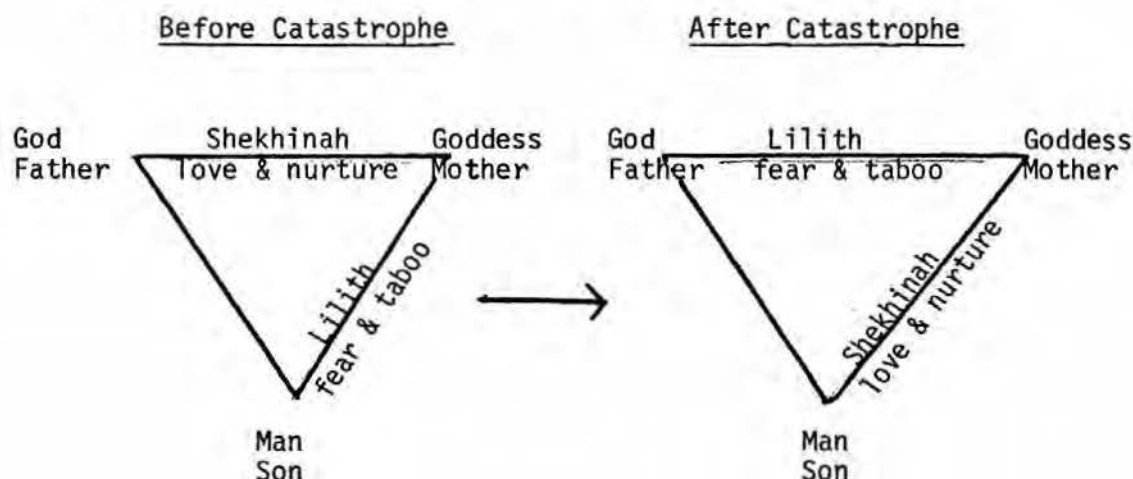
and rabbinic Judaism, the terror and the joy of life all have but one source.

Lilith at the summit of her demonic career, becomes more than simply a heretic from every normative form of male-female relationship, she even becomes an obstacle to the coming of the Messianic age. The contrast between the positive and negative aspects of female identity which earlier set Lilith off against Eve achieves an even more fitting parallelism in the Zoharic legends about Lilith and the Matronit (or Shekhinah). The Matronit or Shekhinah, like Eve before, represent socially sanctioned female ego ideals. The Shekhinah has a fascinating history of her own, but essentially she is God's female aspect which became separated from him through some cosmic catastrophe.⁹ It is the notion of the Zohar that this catastrophe was the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. Because the Jews were at that time forced into exile, God was also forced to expel the Matronit, to divorce her for a time, and accept instead as his wife and consort, "the handmaid", Lilith! This incredible account of her rise to supreme power should convince all those who had doubts of the power and importance of the myth of Lilith in the Jewish Experience. Here again enormous guilt is generated since it was supposedly the sins of the Jewish People which brought on the destruction of the Temple which brought on the expulsion of the Shekhinah from her rightful place beside God. Because of the sins of the children, Israel's mother, the Shekhinah, was forced to leave God, Israel's father, and go into exile with her children while the demon whore Lilith becomes the mistress of the house. Some versions place the split between God and the Shekhinah at the time of the Creation,

but all accounts seem to agree that only the coming of the Messianic Age can effect that final and ultimate reunion between the two estranged parts of God (yehud kudshah brichoo oo'shekhintey). Not only will the masculine and feminine aspects of God be united at last, but on that day "the handmaiden", the night demon, the temptress, the winged vampire with the long flowing hair -- Lilith will herself meet death.

Finally we must ask, "Why such amazing continuity in a myth which spans such diverse civilizations and times?" I believe it is because there exists a psychic continuity, one which operates on the twin foci of sublimation and fantasy escape. The driving force in this psychological continuity is the nuclear psychological conflict of each human being -- the Oedipal struggle. The taboo against sexual love between mother and son results in the massive repression of these incestuous wishes toward the mother. This results in highly ambivalent feelings between the son and the father who is seen as the source of these repressions.¹⁰ Society always tries to resolve this conflict along institutionally constructive lines. In the Hebrew Bible, for example, there is the covenant (brit) in which God cares for the entire clan and man renounces any attempt at killing God. But in fact this only increased the intensity of the fantasy escape, and during the exile when it particularly seemed that God the father had himself reneged on his promise to care for the clan, then the new possibilities of claiming the Shekhinah, the mother, were fully exploited. The children cause the mother to be taken from the father and placed in the abode of the children -- into the land, into the earth where her nurturing love is most evident and available. What

this reflects is an anti-Messianic impulse in Judaism. If, after all, the Messianic Age meant the reunification of God and his Shekinah then that necessarily meant the removal of the Shekinah from the earth -- from her close contact with the people. Either way, someone loses mommy! This psychic rebellion can be diagrammed thus:



What we are left with is now much more than a story about a particular woman, it is rather a story of two aspects of one woman -- the ultimate woman who is so deeply embedded in the collective unconscious of mankind that no amount of time or space can dim the impact of the Mother Archtype. Lilith and the Shekhinah are what Carl Gustav Jung has called "the loving and the terrible mother". He writes:

All these symbols can have a positive favourable meaning or a negative evil meaning. An ambivalent aspect is seen in the goddesses of fate (Moirae, Graeae, Norns). Evil symbols are the witch, the dragon (or any devouring and entwining animal, such as a large fish or a serpent), the grave, the sarcophagus, deep water, death, nightmares and bogies (Empusa, Lilith, etc.). This list is not, of course, complete; it only presents the most important features of the mother archetype.

The qualities associated with it are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility...On the negative side, the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate. Perhaps the historical example of the dual nature of the mother most familiar to us is the Virgin Mary, who is not only the Lord's mother, but also, according to some medieval allegories, his cross. In India, 'the loving and the terrible mother' is the paradoxical Kali. Sankhya philosophy has elaborated the mother archetype into the concept of prakrti (matter) and assigned to it the three gunas or fundamental attributes: sattva, rajas, tamas: goodness, passion, and darkness. These are three essential aspects of the mother: her cherishing and nourishing goodness, her orgiastic emotionalism, and her Stygian depths.¹¹

The sociological implications of Lilith, "the loving and the terrible mother" are built upon these psychological foundations. By internalizing the negative stigmatization of Lilith, the young Jewish woman could be socialized into the community in the most effective and thorough way. The desire to assume the roles of wife-mother do not have to be forcefully imposed from without; rather, they spring up themselves from the already self-programmed super ego of the woman herself.

Today as women struggle to reject the passive and recumbent posture which Lilith abandoned in the mythopoetic past, we must recognize the severe psychic and social damage done to women through the instrumentality of "our-rich-and-sacred-tradition".

It is time to bring that beautiful woman with the long flowing hair back from her anathemized exile.

The greatest challenge of our age is to sanctify Lilith!

EPILOGUE.

Once upon a time, I have been told, there was a woman in the then-vanguard party who felt a need deeper than that of spot-welding a superficial unity around current issues. She disappeared and has never been heard from since. Presumably the earth swallowed her, or maybe it was the East River. At any rate, such foolhardy hubris was not repeated, and radical women have since disciplined themselves, with only minor grumblings ("bitchings"), to accept the incantation as a promissory note on pie to be granted in some future socialist sky, reward for humble performance of their appointed tasks in the kitchens of radical halls and at the typewriters of radical offices, or for zeal in organizing their fellow women to support prevailing campaigns.

Well, damn it, I've no faith in the unity that's sought through yielding; and I'm not going to walk away, because I'm as much a part of this revolution as you are, and maybe, at this moment in history, more. Here I stand. You're going to have to cope with me brother.
Now.

----Lilith's Manifesto (1969)
Women's Majority Union (Seattle, Washington).

Translation of primary texts, The Myth of Lilith

Isaiah 34:14

The wild desert catsshall consort with the jackals
And the satyr shall howl to his fellow,
Behold, Lilith shall repose there
And find her a place of rest.

Numbers Rabbah 16:25

Moses said to Him: THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND...HAVE HEARD THAT THOU LORD ART IN THE MIDST OF HIS PEOPLE...NOW IF THOU SHALT KILL THIS PEOPLE AS ONE MAN (Num. 14:14f.) He implied: Do not do this, that the nations of the world may not say: 'The gods of Canaan are more difficult to overcome than the gods of Egypt. The gods of Egypt are false but those of Canaan are possessed of strength.' THEY WILL SAY TO THE INHABITANTS...BECAUSE THE LORD WAS NOT ABLE--YEKOLETH(ib. 14ff.). Because they will imply, He was unable to supply them with food, He brought them out to slay them in the wilderness. The expression Yekoleth cannot but signify food; as is borne out by the text, Twenty thousand measures of wheat for food (makkeleth) to his household (I Kings V, 25). Another exposition: Do not do it, that the nations of the world may not regard you as a cruel Being and say: 'The Generation of the Flood came and He destroyed them, the Generation of the Separation came and He destroyed them, the Sodomites and the Egyptians came and He destroyed them, and these also whom He called My Son, My Firstborn (Ex. IV, 22), He is now destroying! As that Lilith (play on yekoleth and kelilith) who, when she finds nothing else, turns upon her own children, so Because the Lord was not able to bring His people into the Land...He hath slain them' (Num. 14:16)!

Alpha Beta diBen Sira, ed. Eisenstein, Otzar Midrashim, p.47.

He said (Ben Sira): The angels which are appointed for healing are Senoi, Sansenoi, and Semangeloff. When The Holy One, Blessed Be He, created the first man alone He said, 'It is not good for the Man to be alone.' (Gen. 2:18). So He created a woman for him from the earth just as He had done with him, and He called her Lilith. Immediately they began to challenge each other. She said, 'I refuse to lie beneath you (during intercourse). He said, 'I refuse to lie below (during intercourse). I should assume the dominant posture because it is proper that you be recumbant and I be above. Lilith said to Adam, 'We were created equal since we were created from (the same) earth!' There was no understanding between them, and then when Lilith saw that (Adam was trying to rape her), she uttered the name of God and disappeared into the air. The man stood in prayer before his creator and said, 'O Master of the Universe, the woman you gave to me has fled from me!' Immediately the Holy One, Blessed Be He, dispatched these three angels (Senoi, Sansenoi, and Semangeloff) to go after her and bring her back. Said The Holy One, Blessed Be He, 'If she wishes to return, it is good, but if not, then 100 of her demon children will die every day. The angels went after her and

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

finally overtook her in the midst of the Red Sea. She was riding on the great waves that were in time to drown the Egyptians. They told her of God's word yet she refused to return to the Man. They threatened her saying: 'We will drown you in the sea!' Lilith replied: 'Release me! for I was created to weaken little babies: if it is a male, I have power over him from the day of his birth until the eighth day (the day of circumcision on which he gains protection from Lilith), and if it is a female, until the twentieth day.' When they had heard her words they begged (God) to (let them) take her (back by force). (To prevent this) she swore to them in the name of God, the Living and Existing One, that whenever she would see them or their names or their images on an amulet, she would have no power over the child. Finally she gave consent to the death of 100 of her children every day. That is why every day 100 demons die. And that is why we write their names on an amulet for little baby boys; so that when Lilith sees it she will remember the vow she swore and the little child will be cured (of the dangers of Lilith).

Babylonian Talmud Seder Niddah 24b. (Discussion stating that a woman is only unclean if she aborts something which is clearly a human child.)

Rab Judah citing Samuel ruled: If an abortion had the likeness of Lilith its mother is unclean by reason of the birth, for it is a child, but it has wings. So it was taught: R. Jose stated, It once happened at Simoni that a woman aborted the likeness of Lilith, and when the case came up for a decision before the sages they ruled that it was a child but that it also had wings.

Babylonian Talmud Seder Erubin 100b.

Eve was cursed with ten curses, since it was written: Unto the woman He said, and I will greatly multiply, (Gen. 3:16) which refers to the two drops of blood, one being that of menstruation and the other that of virginity, 'Thy pain' refers to the pain of bringing up children, 'and thy travail' refers to the pain of conception, 'in pain thou shalt bring forth children' is to be understood in its literal meaning, 'and thy desire shall be to thy husband' teaches that a woman yearns for her husband when he is about to set out on a journey, 'and he shall rule over thee' teaches that while a wife solicits with her heart the husband does so with his mouth, this being a fine trait of character among women?--What is meant is that she ingratiates herself with him. But are not these only seven?--When R. Dimi came he explained: She is wrapped up like a mourner, banished from the company of all men? If it be suggested: That she is forbidden to meet a man in privacy, is not the man also (it could be retorted) forbidden to meet a woman in privacy?--The meaning is rather that she is forbidden to marry two men. In a Baraitha (an extraneous Mishnah) it was taught: She grows her hair long like Lilith, sits when making water like a beast, and serves as a bolster for her husband.

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

Babylonian Talmud Seder Erubin 18b. (Discussion on Adam's actions after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden)

R. Jeremiah b. Eleazar further stated: In all those years (according to tradition, 130 years after the expulsion) during which Adam was under the ban (not to have intercourse with Eve) he begot ghosts and male demons and female demons (rochin, shadin, and lilin--the demon children of Lilith), for it is said in Scripture, And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and begot a son in his own likeness, after his own image, from which it follows that until that time he did not beget after his own image. An objection was raised: R. Meir said, Adam was a great saint. When he saw that through him death was ordained as a punishment he spent a hundred and thirty years in fasting, severed connection with his wife for a hundred and thirty years, and wore clothes of fig leaves on his body for a hundred and thirty years---That statement was made in reference to the semen which he emitted accidentally.

Babylonian Talmud Seder Shabbat 151b. (In a discussion which has no relationship whatsoever to Lilith except that it has just described the attitude of beasts toward corpses)

R. Hanina said: One may not sleep in a house alone and whoever sleeps in a house alone is seized by Lilith.

Zohar I:19b.

AND GOD SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHTS, ETC. (Gen. 1:14) The word for lights (meoroth) is written defectively, as if me'eroth (curses), for the reason that the children's disease, croup, was through them created. For after the primordial light was withdrawn there was created a "membrane for the marrow", a k'lifah, and this k'lifah expanded and produced another. As soon as this second one came forth she went up and down until she reached the "little faces". (second one is a common synonym for Lilith in the Zohar and little faces is a synonym for the cherubim) She desired to cleave to them and to be shaped like one of them, and was loak to depart from them. But the Holy One, Blessed Be He, removed her from them and made her go below (to earth). When He created Adam and gave him a partner, as soon as she (Lilith) saw Eve clinging to his side and was reminded by his form of the supernal beauty, she flew up from thence and tried as before to attach herself to the "little faces". The supernal guardians of the gates, however, did not permit her. The Holy One, Blessed be He, chid her and cast her into the depths of the sea, where she abode until the time of Adam and Eve's sin. Then the Holy

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

One, Blessed be He, brought her out from the depths of the sea and gave her power over all those children, the "little faces" of the sons of men, who are liable to punishment for the sins of their fathers. She then wandered up and down the world. She approached the gates of the terrestrial paradise, where she saw the Cherubim, the guardians of the gates of paradise, and sat down near the flashing sword, to which she was akin in origin. When she saw the flashing sword revolving, she fled and wandered about the world and, finding children liable for punishment, she maltreated and killed them. All this on account of the action of the moon in diminishing her (original) light. When Cain was born this k'lifah (i.e. Lilith) tried for a time without success to attach herself to him, but at length she had intercourse with him and bore spirits and demons. Adam for a hundred and thirty years had intercourse with female spirits until Naamah was borne. She, by her beauty, led astray the "sons of God", Uzza and Azael (Gen. 6:1-4) and she bore them children, and so from her went forth evil spirits and demons into the world. She wanders about at night time, vexing the sons of men and causing them to defile themselves. Wherever these spirits find people sleeping alone in a house, they hover over them, lay hold of them and cleave to them, inspire desire in them and beget from them. They further inflict diseases on them without their being aware--all this from the diminution of the moon. When the moon was restored, the letters of the meoroth (lights) were reversed to form the word imrath (word), as it is written, "the word(imrath) of the Lord is tried, he is a shield to those that trust in Him" (Ps. 18:31), i.e. He is a shield against all those evil spirits and demons that wander about the world at the waning of the moon, unto those that hold fast to their faith in the Holy One, blessed be He. King Solomon, when he "penetrated into the depths of the nut garden" (as it is written, "I descended into the nut garden", Song of Songs 6:11) took a nut-shell (klifah) and drew an analogy from its layers to these spirits which inspire sensual desire in human beings, as it is written, "and the delights of the sons of men (are from) male and female demons" (Eccl. 2:8). This verse also indicates that the pleasures in which men indulge in the time of sleep give birth to multitudes of demons.

Zohar I:34b.(discussion of the verses describing the creation of man)

The words, "Let us make man" may be taken to signify that God imparted to the lower beings who came from the side of the upper world the secret of forming the divine name "Adam", which embraces the upper and the lower in virtue of its three letters, aleph, daleth, and mim final. When these three letters descended below, together in their complete form, the name Adam was found to comprise male and female. The female was attached to the side of man until God cast him into a deep slumber, during which he lay on the site of the Temple. God then sawed her off from him and adorned her like a bride and brought her to him, as it is written, "And he took one of his sides and closed up the place with flesh." (Gen. 2:21). I have found it stated in an old book that the word "one" here means "one woman", to wit, the original Lilith, who was with him and who conceived from him. Up to that time, however, she was not a help to him, as it is written, "but for Adam there was not found a fitting helpmeet for him." Observe that Adam came last of all, it being fitting that he should find the world complete on his appearance.

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

Zohar III:18b-19a.

When God created man, He created him without flaw, as it is written, "God made man upright" (yashar, lit. straight) (Eccl. 7:20). The word "man" (adam) means male and female, the female being included in the male, and hence it says "upright". Now in the depth of the great abyss there is a certain hot fiery female spirit named Lilith, who at first cohabited with man. For when man was created and his body completed, a thousand spirits from the left side assembled round that body, each endeavouring to enter, until at last a cloud descended and drove them away and God said, "Let the earth bring forth a living soul" (Gen. 1:24), and it then brought forth a spirit to breath into man, who thus became complete with two sides as it says, "And he breathed in his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). When man arose, his female was affixed to his side, and the holy spirit in him spread to each side, thus perfecting itself. Afterwards God sawed the man in two and fashioned his female and brought her to him like a bride to the canopy. When Lilith saw this she fled, and she is still in the cities of the sea coast trying to snare mankind. And when the Almighty will destroy the wicked Romr, He will settle Lilith among the ruins, since she is the ruin of the world, as it is written: "For there Lilith shall settle and find her a place of rest." (Isa. 34:14). In ancient books it says that she fled from man before this, but we have learnt differently, that she associated with man until this soul (neshamah) was placed in him, and then she fled to the seaside, where she tries to harm mankind.

The remedy is this. When a man unites with his wife, he should sanctify his heart to his Master and say: "She that is wrapped in a robe is here. Thou shalt not enter nor take out; it is neither of thee nor of thy lot. Return, return, the sea is heaving, its waves await thee. I cleave to the holy portion, I am wrapped in the holiness of the King." He should then cover his head and the head of his wife for a short time. In the book which Ashmedai gave to King Solomon, it says that he should sprinkle clean water around the bed. If a woman issues suckling a child she should not join her husband while the child is awake, nor give it suck afterwards until time enough has elapsed for walking two miles, or one mile if the child cries for milk. If all this is done, Lilith will never be able to harm them. Happy are the righteous whom God has taught the secrets of the Torah, of heaven and earth, and all for the sake of the Torah, for whoever studies the Torah is crowned with the crowns of the Holy Name, and knows secret ways and the mysteries of heaven and earth, and never comes to harm.

Zohar III:69a.

One day, as the Companions were walking with R. Simeon, he said: 'I see all other peoples elevated and Israel degraded. What is the reason? Because the King has dismissed the Matrona and put the handmaid (Lilith) in her place. Who is the handmaid? This is the alien Crown whose firstborn God slew in Egypt (i.e. Lilith) R. Simeon wept and continued: "A king without a queen is no king. If a king cleaves to the handmaid of the queen, where is his honor? A voice will one day announce to the MATRONA, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

of Jerusalem, for thy king cometh unto thee; he is just and having salvation", etc. (Zech. 9:9); as if to say: The Righteous One (Zaddik) will be saved, he that was hitherto poor and riding on an ass, viz., as we have explained, the lower Crowns of the heathen nations whose first born God killed in Egypt. It is the Zaddik, as it were, who will be saved, because till now he was without Zedek (righteousness), but now they will be joined.' R. Isaac here asked R. Simeon to explain how it is that some say the world is founded on seven pillars and some on one pillar, to wit, the Zaddik. He replied: 'It is all the same. There are seven, but among these is one called the Zaddik on which the rest are supported. Hence it is written: "The righteous one (Zaddik) is the foundation of the world" (Prov. 10:25). This handmaid, resumed R. Simeon, 'will one day rule over the holy land below as the Matrona once ruled over it, but the Holy One, blessed be He, will one day restore the Matrona to her place, and then who shall rejoice like the King and the Matrona?--the King, because he has returned to her and parted from the handmaid (Lilith), and the Matrona because she will be once more united to the King. Hence it is written: "Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter of Zion", etc. Observe now that it is written, "This shall be to you a statute for ever" (Lev. 16:29). This promise is a decree of the King, fixed and sealed.

Zohar III:76b-77a.

THOU SHALT NOT UNCOVER THE NAKEDNESS OF THY FATHER'S SISTER. We have learnt elsewhere that Adam separated from his wife a hundred and thirty years after Cain killed Able. R. Jose said: 'When death was decreed for him and for all mankind, he said: Why should I beget children for confusion? and he therefore separated from his wife. Then two female spirits (prob. Lilith and Naamah) used to come to him and they bore from him. Their offspring were demons and were called "plagues of the children of men". We have learnt that when man came down to earth in the supernal likeness all who saw him, both higher and lower beings, came to him and made him king of this world. Eve bore Cain from the filth of the serpent, and therefore from him were descended all the wicked generations, and from his side is the abode of spirits and demons. Therefore all spirits and demons are half of the class of human beings below and half of the class of angels above. So, too, those that were born from Adam afterwards were half of the lower and half of the upper sphere. After these were born from Adam, he begat from those spirits daughters with the beauty of the heavenly beings and also the beauty of the lower beings, so that the sons of God went astray after them. One male came into the world from the side of the spirit from the side of Cain, and they called him Tubal Cain. A female came with him who was called Naamah, from whom issued other spirits and demons; these hover in the air and tell things to those others below. This Tubal Cain produced weapons of war, and this Naamah clung to her own side, and she still exists, having her abode among the waves of the great sea. She goes forth and makes sport with men and conceives from them through their lustful dreams. From that lust she becomes pregnant and brings forth further species in the world. The sons whom she bears from human beings show themselves to the females of mankind, who become pregnant from them and bring forth spirits from them, and they all go to the ancient Lilith, who brings them up. She goes out into the world and seeks her little ones, and when she sees little children she cleaves to them in order to kill them and to insinuate herself into their spirits. There are, however, three holy spirits which fly in front of her and take that

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

spirit from her and set it before the Holy One, blessed be He, and there they are taught before Him. Thus they (Senoi, Sansenoi, and Semangeloff) guard that child and she cannot hurt him. But if a man is not holy, and draws upon himself a spirit from the unclean side, she comes and makes sport with that child, and if she kills him she enters into his spirit and never leaves him. You may say: What about those others she has killed, although the three angels confronted her and took from her their spirits? Since they were not on the side of uncleanness, why had she power to kill them? This happens when a man does not sanctify himself, but yet does not purposely try to defile himself nor actually do so. In such cases she has power over the body but not the spirit. Sometimes it happens that Naamah goes forth to have intercourse with men and a man is linked with her in lust, and then suddenly wakes and clasps his wife though his mind is still full of the lust of his dream. In that case the son so born is of the side of Naamah, and when Lilith goes forth she sees and knows what has happened to him, and then brings him up like the other children of Naamah, and he is often with her, and she does not kill him. This is the man who receives a blemish on every New Moon. For Lilith never gives them up, but at every New Moon she goes forth and visits all those whom she has brought up and makes sport with them; hence this man receives a blemish at that time. These things King Solomon revealed in the book of Asmodai, and we find therein a thousand and four hundred and five manners of defilement which can affect mankind. Alas for mankind that they close their eyes and observe not nor take any heed how they were preserved in the world! Counsel and healing are before them but they heed not, for they cannot deliver themselves save by the counsel of the Torah, as it is written: "Ye shall sanctify yourselves and ye shall be holy, for I am the Lord your God."

Rashi to Babylonian Talmud Seder Sanhedrin 109a.

Demons (shedim) have human form and they eat and drink like human beings. Spirits (rochim) have no visible body or form. Lilin (the offspring of Lilith) have human form except that they also have wings (Cf. B. Niddah 24b.).

Zohar I. 148a. Sitre Torah.

A mystery of mysteries: Out of the power of the glow of Isaac's noon (i.e. the Gevurah or God's aspect as power and stern judgement) out of the dregs of the wine, there emerged an intertwined shoot which comprises both male and female. They are red like the rose, and they spread out into several sides and paths. The male is called Samael, and his female (Lilith) is always contained in him. Just as in the side of Holiness, so in the Other (Evil) Side as well, male and female are contained in one another. The female of Samael is called Serpent, Woman of Harlotry, End of All Flesh, End of Days.

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

Emeq Hamelekh, by Naphtali Herz ben Jacob Elhanan, (Amsterdam, 1648) 179d-180a.

the giant human figures, tall of stature, who were born of Adam in the 130 years during which he begot demons, spirits, and lilin. Lilith used to come to him against his will, and conceive from Adam (and she bore these beings). And they are always sad and full of sorrow and sighs, and there is no joy among them. And these hosts can multiply and ascend from that earth to this world upon which we stand, and (here) they become harmful spirits, and (then) they return there...

Emeq Hamelekh, p.103a.

She (lilith) forsakes the husband of her youth and descends to earth and fornicates with men who sleep here below, in the uncleanness of emission. And from them are born demons, spirits, and Lilin, and they are called 'the plagues of mankind!'

Emeq Hamelekh, Sha'ar Tiqqune Hateshuvah, chll, p.19c.

And behold, that hard shell (i.e. embodiment of evil), Lilith, is always present in the bedlinen of man and wife when they copulate, in order to take hold of the sparks of the drops of semen which are lost--because it is impossible to perform the marital act without such a loss of sparks--and she creates out of them demons, spirits and Lilin...But there is an incantation for this, to chase Lilith away from the bed and to bring forth pure souls...in that moment, when a man copulates with his wife, let him direct his heart to the holiness of his Master, and say:

In the name of God.

O you who are wrapped in velvet (i.e. Lilith)

You have appeared.

Release, release!

Neither come nor go!

The seed is not yours,

Nor in your inheritance.

Go back, go back!

The sea rages,

Its waves call you.

I hold on to the Holy One,

Wrap myself into the King's holiness.

Then let him cover his head and his wife for one hour...

Emeq Hamelekh, 84b.

Lilith, God preserve us, has dominion over children who issue from who couples with his wife in candlelight, or with his wife naked, or at a time when he is forbidden to have intercourse with her. All the children who issue from such

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

unions, Lilith can kill them any time she wishes, because they are delivered into her hands. And this is the secret of the children's smiling when they are small--because of Lilith who plays with them.

Zohar I. 148a-b, Sitre Torah.

She adorns herself with many ornaments like a despicable harlot, and takes up her position at the crossroads to seduce the sons of man. When a fool approaches her she grabs him, kisses him, and pours him wine of dregs of viper's gall. As soon as he drinks it, he goes astray after her. When she sees that he has gone astray after her from the path of truth, she divests herself of all ornaments which she put on for that fool. Her ornaments for the seduction of the sons of man are: her hair is long and red like a rose, her cheeks are white and red, from her ears hang six ornaments, Egyptian chords and all the ornaments from the Land of the East hang from her nape. Her mouth is set like a narrow door comely in its decor, her tongue is sharp like a sword, her words are smooth like oil, her lips are red like a rose and sweetened by all the sweetness of the world. She is dressed in scarlet, and adorned with forty ornaments less one. Yon fool goes astray after her and drinks from the cup of wine and commits with her fornications and strays after her. What does she thereupon do? She leaves him asleep on the couch, flies up to heaven, denounces him, takes -er leave, and descends. That fool awakens and deems he can make sport with her as before, but she removes her ornaments and turns into a menacing figure. She stands before him clothed in garments of flaming fire, inspiring terror and making body and soul tremble, full of frightening eyes, in her hand a drawn sword dripping bitter drops. And she kills that fool and casts him into Gehenna.

Sefer Raziel 43b. (text of an amulet to protect women in childbirth from Lilith).

In the name of EHYE WHA AA BB AO MAK AAA.

I adjure you First Eve (here an epithet of Lilith) in the name of Him Who is your Creator and in the name of the three angels whom your Creator sent after you and the angel in the isles of the sea, to whom you swore that wherever you will find their names you will cause no harm, neither you nor one of your cohorts and servants, and that (you will not damage) anybody who wears their names. Therefore, in their names and seals set down here, I adjure you and your cohorts and your servants that you cause no harm to the women in childbirth, N. daughter of N., nor to the child who was born to her; neither during the day nor during the night, neither through their food nor through their drink, neither in their head nor in their heart, neither in their 248 limbs, nor in their 365 sinews. By strength of these names and figures I adjure you and your cohorts and your servants.

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.Mar'eh ha-Yeladim, Jerusalem, 1908, by Raphael Ohana, p.52a.

If children laugh in their sleep, or if they laugh while they are awake but alone, this is a sign showing that Lilith is playing with them, and especially when this happens on the night of the new moon. Whoever notices that they laugh, will do well to tap them on the nose with his finger and say: 'Go hence, Pelonith (i.e. Lilith), you have no portion or inheritance here, you have no satisfaction here!' Then let him recite the entire 'Wihi no'am' prayer, and do thus three times...

Mar'eh ha-Yeladim, 94a-b.

In another manuscript book I found written the following: Protection from Lilith. Draw a Seal of King Solomon, peace be upon him, who adjured Lilith that when she would see his seal she and her cohorts would flee, and that she would have no permission to hurt him. And if it be placed on a house, she would not enter it, neither she nor any one of her band. If it be engraved upon pure silver, it is even better...If you place a needle close to the wick in the lamp which is in the house of the woman in childbed, she will be safe from the entry of Lilith. Also, if she takes the measure which is used to measure the wheat, and place it close to the bed, and if Lilith is there, she will sit on that measure and will not move from her place until they remove that measure from there. From a Babylonian manuscript book.

Targum SHĒHĪ to Esther 1:3.

King Solomon had dominion over the demons, spirits, and Lilin, and knew the language of each...and when his heart was merry with wine, he would command the wild animals, the fowl of heaven, and the creeping things of earth, as well as the demons, spirits, and Lilin to dance before him.

Zohar Hadash, Tiqqunim, Warsaw: Levin-Epstein, p.117a.

Come and see: The Shekhinah is at times called the Mother, at times, the Slave-Woman (i.e. Lilith), and at times the King's Daughter.

Zohar I: 27b.

Before Israel went into captivity, and while the Shekhinah was still with them,

Texts, Myth of Lilith, cont'd.

God commanded Israel: "Thou shalt not uncover thy mother's nakedness" (Lev.18:7) and this captivity is the uncovering of the nakedness of the Shekhinah, as it is written, "On account of your sins your mother has been put away" (Is. 50:1), i.e. for the sin of unchastity Israel has been sent into captivity and the Shekhinah also, and this is the uncovering of the Shekhinah. This unchastity is Lilith, the mother of the "mixed multitude".

B'rith haLevi, ch.7, cf. ch. 6.

And it is known that there is no glory for a man except with his wife who was destined for him, but not by adhering to handmaids...through which he himself is reduced to a lower rung. Likewise, after the Shekhinah in exile descended to be with us...her rival (lilith) angers her greatly, and she sobs and sighs because her husband (God) does not throw his light upon her...Her joy has fled because she sees her rival in her house, deriding her, to the extent that the Mistress became a handmaid and the handmaid Mistress. And when our father sees our mother lying in dust and suffering because of our sins, He too becomes embittered in his heart and He descends to save her and make the strangers cease violating her. And now, can there be anybody who sees these things without rending his heart to repent and thus to bring back our Mother to her place and to her palace?...

FOOTNOTES---MYTH OF LILITH

1. The nature of primitive mythopoeic thought is thoroughly described in, H. and H.A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobson, William A. Irwin. The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1946. esp. pp. 3-30, 223-390.
2. The best secondary sources on the myth of Lilith are:
Ludwig Blau. "Lilith". The Jewish Encyclopedia. Vol. VIII. New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1904. pp.87-8.
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3. Patai. op.cit. pp.207-8.
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8. Vis. Chapter 4.
9. Patai. op.cit. pp. 137-156. on the Schekina and pp. 186-206 on the Matronit.
10. Sigmund Freud. Totem and Taboo. New York, Vintage Books, 1946. pp. 26-97.
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CHAPTER TWO

KORAH: The Heretic as Hero.

"You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

----Numbers 16:3

Moses was too big for the Bible. His works were too marvelous. His power was too awesome. His authority was too complete. His life was too great--too tinged by divinity--to end the persistent thought that he too was a god. Of course every verse of the biblical text speaks the same lesson over and again: The works, the power, the authority, and the greatness all come from God. Moses is simply a chosen messenger for the chosen people. But, his chosenness by God was so intimate and complete. His mission was so historic and, indeed, so crucial to the history of the Jews that his constant disclaimers to possession of any personal authority or power are nearly irrelevant in the face of the greatness of his deeds. One can truly understand the terror and awe which gripped the people as they saw Moses in his greatest moment, descending the mountain amidst a radiant glow, carrying the tablets of God's law. One can further understand how the thought must have emerged in the deepest recesses of the minds of all those who waited at the base of Sinai, "If we kill this man, we can take that power for ourselves!"

This thought took its first and final form in the rebellion of Korah and his followers against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. In his direct and wanton challenge to the authority of God's prophet and God's priest, Korah marks himself forever as one of the greatest

of all Jewish heretics. The utter and total annihilation of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and all the congregation which supported their rebellion also teaches a lesson of obedience which is repeated again and again by the destruction of Jewish heretics in every generation. It is just right that Korah and his band are swallowed up by the fiery bowels of the earth. The story conveys in image and metaphor what is really meant: the Jewish heretic shows you the entrance to hell.

But we must dig a little into the Jewish tradition in order to see exactly how the dimensions of Korah's rebellion impress themselves on the Jewish Experience.

Perhaps the most important consideration in fully appreciating the gravity of Korah's challenge to Mosaic and Aaronide authority over the people is that it is an attack mounted from within the ranks of the people themselves. The tensions leading to Korah's rebellion were inner tensions stemming from the basic dynamics of biblical Judaism itself and not from outside or alien locales. This struggle within the community and between two groups of Jews marks Korah's revolt as heresy and not war.

In both the biblical text as well as in the later rabbinic writings, the rebellion was seen as receiving overwhelming popular support. The cause of this popularity is difficult to assess through the limited evidence of the passage in Numbers, yet it may be conjectured with some assurance that, Korah served to focus the intense and repressed anger of the people at having to experience God's will through the mediating agency of Prophet and Priest.

In the biblical text this popularly based vehemence is thrust first against Moses for exchanging the secure, relatively affluent life in Egypt for the vicissitudes of the howling wilderness; and secondly, against

Aaron for assuming the office of high priest against the claims of the Levites and the rest of the "holy community"¹ The unprecedented divine wrath which annihilates Korah and his followers not only seals their fate but, by extention, anyone else who would contemplate further rebellion. His total defeat by God himself establishes his heresy with great impact, all who challenge prophetic or priestly prerogatives challenge at the same time the power and prerogatives of God.

Surely, the most amazing characteristic of the post-biblical traditions on Korah's heresy is that they present such a sympathetic and appealing picture of this biblical villain.

The rabbinic reconstruction, in the midrash, of the motivations of this man goes far beyond the meager information supplied by the few cryptic verses in Numbers, chapter 16.

The rabbis seem agreed that neither Korah, Dathan and Abiram, nor any of their followers imagined their rebellion to be a challenge to God. Indeed, their case for an undifferentiated holy community is based upon God's universal revelation to the people at Mt. Sinai. This is highly ironic because it seems that the original purpose of the public hearing of the Law had backfired. What was probably meant to serve as positive proof for the people that God wanted obedience to His commandments as interpreted by His prophets and priests, became the validating experience used by Korah to undermine those very prophetic and, especially priestly prerogatives. If all the people had heard the Law -- what right did one person have to rule them in its name?

Interestingly, Korah is never pictured by the rabbis as contemplating the use of force in accomplishing his objectives. A coup d'etat

would seem the natural course for someone seeking a naked grab for power. Yet, Korah's arsenal of weapons was argumentation -- not swords. In the stories preserved in the Midrash, Korah argues against both the provisions and origin of the Law in order to expose perversions whose source was Moses and Aaron and not, it must be remembered, God!

Firstly, Korah attacks what he considers to be highly arbitrary provisions of the halachah. In an ingenious dialogue with Moses, Korah forces Moses to admit that a totally blue cloak does not fulfill the commandment to wear blue fringes (tzitzit) on one's cloak; nor does a room full of holy books abrogate the need for a mezuzah on one's doorpost containing but a few scriptural passages. In their debate, Moses and not Korah comes out looking like a fool. The effect of the Law is described as excessive and anti-human. The tithes and gifts payed by the people to the priests were skimmed off the first and the finest produce of the land. It was a constant drain on the resources of the common people -- a drain which few could afford. All this is driven home by the moving story of the widow, her two daughters, and the priest recorded in the Midrash on Psalm I. In it this poor woman is driven to abject destitution by the insatiable demands of Aaron for his due portion. Korah sees these clearly set forth, yet anti-human, provisions in the Law as being Aaronide perversions of an essentially benevolent divine will. This leads Korah to proclaim "Moses is no prophet -- Aaron no priest." Indeed, it is quite perplexing to find "arbitrariness," and "excessive" used as arguments against the Law. These are both irrelevant categories when dealing with God's revealed word. Revelation alone is sufficient cause for obedience. Korah attempts to solve the problem

of uncomfortable provisions in God's revealed Law by positing that parts of it are human in origin and, therefore, fallible. Korah's absolute defeat gives grim warning to all who would attempt to divide God's in-frangible halachah. The rabbis could brook no such tampering with the divine nature and origin of the commandments. Until the dawn of the Enlightenment, Korah's arguments were heresy of the worst sort.

The Midrash is not without room for rebuttal. Moses responds to Korah, not with a defense of each law attached by him, but with a defense of Mosaic and Aaronide authority which goes to the heart of Korah's essential argument in the Bible, "All the congregation is holy." The defense is in two parts.

First, Moses argues that the principle of separation is an eternally valid and essential part of reality. There are boundaries God established at Creation which are not arbitrary and have great value for man if they are obeyed and respected. To deny these divinely ordained and humanly nurturing boundaries is absurd. To challenge them directly is heresy. For Korah to deny the value and correctness of Aaron's distinction from the people or Israel from the other nations makes as much sense as denying the distinction between day and night. According to the God of Moses and the rabbis, they are all distinctions of the same nature. This is a most significant argument. Throughout the biblical experience there is the recurring assertion that God as He is in Nature is the ultimate validation for God as he is in History.² God remains active in the history of mankind but during those times when His presence seems obscure or immoral or unjust one need only look to nature for reinforcing assurance of His order and constant providence. Respect and awe of nature leads to res-

pect and awe of the Law which is seen to have the same source.

The second part of Moses' rebuttal is that to deny the authority of Moses and Aaron is to deny the authority of God. A parable is then adduced about a king who appoints one of his servants to a high position in court. The moral is clear: if Aaron had taken the priesthood on his own impulse and authority, he would then indeed be culpable, but God appointed him priest so an attack on Aaron is, by extension, an attack on God. This argument and this parable has the effect of raising the stakes in the debate. It is one thing to attack a priest -- quite another to attack God.

Moses goes even farther than this in dragging God into his debate with Korah. In Numbers 16:28-30 Moses in effect puts God on trial by publicly demanding that God annihilate Korah's band through unnatural and particularly harsh means. The parable of the man who insults the king reveals how Moses had, in fact, compelled God to act. The Midrash even goes so far as to picture Moses as threatening apostasy if God did not meet his demands for quick punishment of the rebels. This particular incident reveals to a great degree the ambivalence the rabbis felt toward both Korah and Moses. Korah was, of course, the heretic, the rebel, the underminer of God's established order and yet, in the Midrash, at least, he is the defender of the widow, the orphan and the downtrodden. Though his punishment was exceptionally severe, he was seen as meriting resurrection due to the petitionary prayers of Hannah. In one of the stories, he speaks from the depths of the earth periodically and indicates his error for doubting God and his appointed messengers.

One can understand why the rabbis might have harbored some sympathies

for Korah. By the rabbinic period his heresy and all that it had once threatened had been completely neutralized. After Ezra there were no prophets. After 70 C.E. there were no priests. The main actors in the biblical drama had passed away. The rabbi and the synagogue were new realities with new problems (and new heretics!) Korah's challenge to centralized prophetic and priestly absolutism did not touch the basic tensions of tannaitic Judaism at all. The unmediated relationship between the individual member of the community and God, which seemed to be the central goal of Korah's rebellion had largely been achieved by rabbinic Judaism. Now the individual was free through prayer and the mitzvah system to achieve his own personal salvation in an unmediated relationship with God. Rabbinic sympathies for Korah might thus be explained: though Korah was a real heretic vis a vis biblical Judaism's prophetic and priestly absolutism, he was much more of a normative Jew when seen against the new background of Pharisaism.

Rabbinic attitudes toward Moses are far more perplexing. Moses was without any question the greatest Jew. Yet in the Korah legends he is pictured as the defender of an inflexible oppressive legalism; an unfair fighter who rather than meet the opponent on his own terms, called in "big brother" to settle the contest for him. In one Midrash, which really gives vent to the castration fears of the people over their "machismo" leader, Moses is even accused of committing adultery with Israelite women! In another Midrash, God takes revenge on Moses for involving him in the Korah incident. God punishes Moses by forbidding him to enter the Land with the people. Indeed, God's anger at Moses was justified because in acceding to Moses' demand to destroy Korah as he

did, the dangerous precedent was established in the Bible that power equals truth.³ Power, once used to validate the God of history can also be used to refute him. Indeed, after the destruction of the temple, the "power" seemed to be clearly in non-Jewish hands --and there was no Moses around to prove otherwise.⁴ To heirs to this biblical principle that, ultimately, might makes right, the rabbis were deeply conscious of its shortcomings. They constantly cautioned against making faith contingent on the miraculous ('ain somchin 'al ha-nes). Moses was just too big a leader to swallow in one gulp, and for the rabbis, at least, some of him got stuck on the way down. This is the best reason I can find for the myth of Korah. The rebellion served as an important escape valve to release the pressure of the hidden sources of resentment, envy, and hatred against Moses, the dominant human figure in the Jewish experience. Korah, the heretic, acts as a substitution figure for the community, expressing as in a dream all the things forbidden expression in the outside world.⁵

The fantasy escape from the reality of subservience to a hierarchy of both Jewish and non-Jewish authority figures led over and again to the creation of Jewish heretics -- people like Korah who could bear the deep and ever recurring longings of the people to be free unto themselves alone.

Numbers 16: 1-35

Now Korah, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, betook himself, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth--descendants of Reuben--to rise up against Moses, together with two hundred and fifty Israelites, chieftains of the community, chosen in the assembly, men of repute. They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the Lord's congregation?"

When Moses heard this, he fell on his face. Then he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Come morning, the Lord will make known who is His and who is holy, and will grant him access to Himself; He will grant access to the one He has chosen. Do this: You, Korah and all your band, take fire pans, and tomorrow put fire in them and lay incense on them before the Lord. Then the man whom the Lord chooses, he shall be the holy one. You have gone too far, sons of Levi!"

Moses said further to Korah, "Hear me, sons of Levi. Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the community of Israel and given you access to Him, to perform the duties of the Lord's Tabernacle and to minister to the community and serve them? Thus He has advanced you and all your fellow Levites with you; yet you seek the priesthood too! Truly, it is against the Lord that you and all your company have banded together. For who is Aaron that you should rail against him?"

Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come! It is not enough that you brought us from a land of flowing milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us? Even if you had brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and given us possession of fields and vineyards, should you gouge out those men's eyes? We will not come!" Moses was much aggrieved and he said to the Lord, "Pay no regard to their oblation. I have not taken the ass of any one of them, nor have I wronged any one of them."

And Moses said to Korah, "Tomorrow you and all your company appear before the Lord, you and they and Aaron. Each of you take his fire pan and lay incense on it, and each of you bring his fire pan before the Lord, two hundred and fifty fire pans; you and Aaron also [bring] your fire pans." Each of them took his fire pan, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and took his place at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as did Moses and Aaron. Korah gathered the whole community against them at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

Then the Presence of the Lord appeared to the whole community, and the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, "Stand back from this community that I may annihilate them in an instant!" But they fell

on their faces and said, "O God, Source of the breath of all flesh! When one man sins, will You be wrathful with the whole community?"

The Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to the community and say: Withdraw from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."

Moses rose and went to Dathan and Abiram, the elders of Israel following him. He addressed the community, saying, "Move away from the tents of these wicked men and touch nothing that belongs to them, lest you be wiped out for all their sins." So they withdrew from about the abodes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

Now Dathan and Abiram had come out and they stood at the entrance of their tents, with their wives, their children, and their little ones. And Moses said, "By this you shall know that it was the Lord who sent me to do all these things; that they are not of my own devising: if these men die as all men do, if their lot be the common fate of all mankind, it was not the Lord who sent me. But if the Lord brings about something unheard of, so that the ground opens its mouth wide and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, you shall know that these men have spurned the Lord." Scarcely had he finished speaking all these words when the ground under them burst asunder, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households, all Korah's people and all their possessions. They went down alive into Sheol, with all that belonged to them; the earth closed over them and they vanished from the midst of the congregation. All Israel around them fled at their shrieks, for they said, "The earth might swallow us!"

And a fire went forth from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense.

Numbers Rabbah, Chapter 18. Korah.

1. NOW KORAH, THE SON OF IZHAR, THE SON OF KOHATH...TOOK MEN, etc. (Num. 16:1). This bears on the text, A brother offended (nifsha') is harder to be won than a strong city-kiryath (Prov. XVIII, 19). 'A brother nifsha'' applies to Korah who contended against Moses and, having rebelled, fell from the glory which he already enjoyed. 'Nifsha'' cannot but denote 'rebellion'; as is borne out by the text, The King of Moab hath rebelled (pasha') against me (II Kings III, 7). And their contentions are like the bars of a castle (Prov. loc. cit.) applies to him because the earth bolted its bars upon him as in a castle, for he contended against Moses and against the Omnipresent.

2. NOW KORAH...TOOK. The expression 'taking', cannot but denote 'drawing along with persuasive words', all the chiefs of Israel and the Sanhedrin having been drawn after him. Thus, in the case of Moses it says, And Moses and Aaron took these men (Num. I, 17). Similarly, Take Aaron and his sons with him (Lev. VIII, 2). In the same strain it says, Take with you words (Hos. XIV, 3). Also, And the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house (Gen. XII, 15). This bears out the explanation that NOW KORAH...TOOK means that he drew

their hearts with persuasive words. NOW KORAH...TOOK. What moved him to start a quarrel? He was moved to it by the fact that Elizaphan, the son of his father's brother, was appointed prince over his family; as it says, And the prince of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites being Elizaphan the son of Uzziel (Num. III, 30). Korah argued: My father was one of four brothers; as it says, And the sons of Kohath: Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel (Ex. VI, 18). As for Amram the first born, his son Aaron attained to greatness and Moses to royalty. Who then should rightly take the next office? Is it not the next in age? It is said, 'And the sons of Kohath: Amram, and Izhar.' Now I, being the son of Izhar, should by right be the prince of the families. Yet Moses appointed the son of Ozziel! Shall the youngest of my father's brothers be superior to me? Behold, I shall dispute his decision and put to naught all that has been arranged by him. Accordingly KORAH...TOOK.

3. NOW KORAH...TOOK. What is written in the preceding passage? Bid them that they make them...fringes...and that they put with the fringe of each corner a thread of blue (Num. XV, 38). Korah jumped up and asked Moses: 'If a cloak is entirely of blue, what is the law as regards its being exempted from the obligation of fringes?' Moses answered him: 'It is subject to the obligation of fringes.' Korah retorted: 'A cloak that is entirely composed of blue cannot free itself from the obligation, yet the four blue threads do free it! If,' he asked again, 'a house is full of Scriptural books, what is the law as regards its being exempt from the obligation of having a mezuzah.' He answered him: 'It is under the obligation of having a mezuzah.' 'The whole Torah, he argued, 'which contains two hundred and seventy-five sections, cannot exempt the house, yet the one section in the mezuzah exempts it! These are things,' he continued, 'which you have not been commanded, but you are inventing them out of your own mind!' Hence it is written, Korah...Took(WAYYIKKAH). WAYYIKKAH cannot but signify discord, his heart having carried him away; as is borne out by the text, Why doth thy heart carry thee away-yikkahaka (Job XV,12)? This explains what Moses said to him in the text; Is it but a small thing...that the God of Israel hath separated you? (Num. XVI, 9). The Sages said: Korah was a very clever man and one of the bearers of the ark; as it says, But unto the sons of Kohath gave he none, because the service of the holy things belongs unto them (ib. VII,9), and Korah was the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath. When Moses commanded 'That they put with the fringe of each corner a thread of blue', Korah instantly gave orders and had two hundred and fifty cloaks of blue made, in which the two hundred and fifty heads of Sanhedrin who rose against Moses wrapped themselves; as it says, And they rose up in face of Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty men; they were princes of the congregation, the elect men of the assembly (ib. XVI,2). Korah rose and made for them a feast at which they wrapped themselves in the blue cloaks. Aaron's sons came to receive their dues, viz.

the breast and the shoulder (of the animals that had been slaughtered for the feast; cf. Lev. vii, 31 f.) They (Korah's party) stood up in front of them and said to them: 'Who commanded you to receive these gifts? Is it not Moses? We shall not give anything! The Omnipresent did not command us to do such a thing!' The priests came and informed Moses, and the latter went to persuade them. Thereupon they rose up against him.

4. NOW KORAH . . . TOOK implies that he took his cloak (of blue, as was stated above) and went to take counsel with his wife. When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them. And thus shalt thou do unto them, to cleanse them . . . let them cause a razor to pass over all their flesh (ib. viii, 6 f.), Moses forthwith did so to Korah. The latter walked about among the Israelites and they did not recognise him. They said to him: 'Who did this to you?' Said he to them 'Moses did it to me. Nay, more, he laid hold of me by my hands and feet and I was waved and he told me: "Behold, you are clean!" Then he brought his brother Aaron and decked him out like a bride and made him sit in the Tent of Meeting!' Instantly, Moses' enemies began to incite Israel against him, saying: 'Moses is king, his brother Aaron is high priest, and his sons are deputy high priests! The priest gets terumah, the priest gets tithe, the priest gets twenty-four gifts! (Cf. Tosef. Hallah 11, 7.) Thereupon THEY ASSEMBLED THEMSELVES TOGETHER AGAINST MOSES, and straightway, SAID UNTO THEM: YE TAKE TOO MUCH (RAB) UPON YOU (XVI, #). R. Levi expounded: At that moment Korah collected his assembly and said to Moses and Aaron: 'You have laid upon us a burden that is greater (hirbethem) than the Egyptian slavery! We were better off under the Egyptians than under your rule!' They wanted to stone him, and so WHEN MOSES HEARD IT, HE FELL UPON HIS FACE (ib. 4). Moses said to them: 'I do not seek for kingship, nor do I desire the high priesthood for my brother Aaron; as it says, And as to Aaron, what is he that ye murmur against him? (ib. II). 'Sovereign of the Universe,' said Moses, 'didst Thou not thus command me: And bring thou near unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him (Ex. XXVIII, I)? Behold, they are facing us with intent to slay us!' Said He: In the morning the Lord will show who are His (Num. XVI, 5). What is the reason why He chose such a time? R. Nathan explained: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'If all the magicians of the world were to assemble and try to turn the morning into evening, they would not be able to do so, and as I made a partition between light and darkness, so have I set Aaron apart to sanctify him as most holy.' Thereupon Moses sent to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; and they said: We will not come up (ib. 12). It is not written in this passage, 'We will not go' or 'we will not come'; but 'We will not come up', for A fool's mouth is his ruin (Prov. XVIII, 7)! They invited punishment with their mouths, implying that they would die by descending and not by ascending. As they had said, so they died: So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit (Num. XVI, 33). Moses thought: Seeing that they do not want to come to me I will go to them; perhaps they will feel ashamed and retract; as it says, And Moses rose up, and went unto Dathan and Abiram (ib. 25).

On this account Moses began by saying: If these men die the common death of all men (Num. XVI, 29). And the earth opened her mouth (ib. 32). Come and observe how grievous a thing strife must be, seeing that the Holy One, blessed be He, exterminates all memory of one who foments strife! For so it is written, And fire came forth from the Lord, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men (ib. 35

R. Berekiah commented: How grievous a thing must strife be! The heavenly Court as a rule inflicts penalties only on sinners who are twenty years old and upward, and the terrestrial court does so only on those who are thirteen years old or more, yet in Korah's strife babies of a day old were burned and swallowed up in the bottomless abyss; as it is written. With their wives, and their sons, and their little ones . . . So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit (ib 27, 33). Accordingly it is written, KORAH . . . TOOK (Sc. he took a punishment unlike the ordinary (M.K.).

5. NOW KORAH, THE SON OF IZHAR, THE SON OF KOHATH, THE SON OF LEVI . . . TOOK. Why is it not written, 'The son of Jacob' or 'The son of Israel'? This bears on the text, Let my soul not come into their council (Gen. XLIX, 6), namely that of the spies; Unto their assembly let my glory not be united (ib.), namely to that of Korah. Jacob said to the Holy One, blessed be He: "Sovereign of the Universe! Let not my name be mentioned with those wicked people, either in connection with the spies or in connection with Korah's quarrel. When then should my name be mentioned? When they trace their pedigrees to take their stand upon the dais (to perform the levitical service of song.) and so it says, The son of Tahlath, the son of Assir, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel (I Chron. VI, 22 f.). WITH DATHAN AND ABIRAM (XVI, 1). From this text the saying is derived: 'Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbour!' It applies to Dathan and Abiram, neighbours of Korah, who occupied a position on the south side of the Tabernacle . . .

6. AND THEY ASSEMBLED THEMSELVES TOGETHER AGAINST MOSES AND AGAINST AARON (XVI, 3). Korah said to them: 'ALL THE CONGREGATION ARE HOLY, EVERY ONE OF THEM (ib.) and they have all heard at Sinai the commandment: I am the Lord thy God (Ex. xx, 2); WHEREFORE THEN LIFT YE UP YOURSELVES ABOVE THE ASSEMBLY OF THE LORD? (XVI, 3). If you alone had heard it while they had not, you could have claimed superiority. But now that they have all heard it, WHEREFORE THEN LIFT YE UP YOURSELVES?' Thereupon Moses was thrown into a tremor, on account of the dissension; for this was already their fourth offence. The matter may be illustrated by the case of a king's son who had offended his father and for whom the latter's friend had effected a reconciliation, once, twice, and three times. When he offended a fourth time the king's friend lost courage. How many times can I trouble the king? he thought. It was the same in the present instance with Moses. When Israel had sinned in connection with the Calf, Moses besought the Lord (Ex. XXXII, II); When the people were as murmurers (Num. XI, I), then Moses prayed (ib. 2); in connection with the spies, Moses said unto the Lord: When the Egyptians shall hear (ib. XIV, 13). When the dissension of Korah broke out he said: 'How many times can I trouble the Omnipresent?' Consequently, WHEN MOSES HEARD IT, HE FELL UPON HIS FACE (XVI, 4).

7. AND HE SPOKE UNTO KORAH . . . IN THE MORNING (XVI, 5). What reason had he for saying, IN THE MORNING? Moses thought: Perhaps they have been speaking as they did because they have just eaten and drunk. Perhaps,

he thought, between now and then they will repent. This is the reason why he said IN THE MORNING THE LORD WILL SHOW. Moses told them: 'I am not permitted to go in [to speak to God] now. He indeed does not eat or drink, but I must not go in on our account, for we have taken food and drink.' Another exposition: Moses said to them: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, has assigned certain boundaries in His world. Can you, for example, fuse day and night? Scripture, in reference to this, says at the very beginning, And there was evening and there was morning (Gen. I, 5), and God divided the light from the darkness (ib. 4) in order that it might be of service to the world. And just as He divided the light from the darkness in order that it might be of service to the world, so He separated Israel from the nations: as it says, I have set you apart from the peoples, that ye should be Mine (Lev. XX, 26). In the same manner also He set Aaron apart; as it says, And Aaron was separated, that he should be sanctified as most holy (I Chron. XXIII, 13). If, then, you are able to confuse the distinction which He has made between the light and the darkness, you will be able to annul this also.' For this reason he said to them: IN THE MORNING THE LORD WILL SHOW WHO ARE HIS, AND WHO IS HOLY, AND WILL CAUSE HIM TO COME NEAR UNTO HIM; the person is already designated; [is taken to denote the one that is already holy (M.K.). . . EVEN HIM WHOM HE MAY CHOOSE WILL HE CAUSE TO COME NEAR UNTO HIM (ib.).

8. THIS DO: TAKE YOU CENSERS, KORAH, AND ALL HIS COMPANY; AND PUT FIRE THEREIN, AND PUT INCENSE UPON THEM BEFORE THE LORD TOMORROW (XVI, 6). What reason had he for saying so? He said to them: 'It is the way of the other nations to have many religious observances and many priests, and they cannot all gather together in one edifice [because they worship different deities, who all have separate shrines.]. We, however, have only one God, one Torah, one code of laws, one altar, and one High Priest, and you, two hundred and fifty strong, all seek the High Priesthood! I too am agreeable. Therefore, you and all your assembly, THIS DO: TAKE YOU CENSERS, KORAH, AND ALL HIS COMPANY. I offer you a service more precious than all others!' That was the incense, which is more precious than all the sacrifices, but there was poison in it and through it Nadab and Abihu were burnt. Accordingly he warned them that IT SHALL BE THAT THE MAN WHOM THE LORD DOTCH CHOOSE, HE [Only one individual] SHALL BE HOLY (ib.7). Moses said to Korah: 'I advise you not to incur guilt; only the man who shall be chosen of you shall come out alive, and all the rest of you will perish! ENOUGH FOR YOU, YE SONS OF LEVI! See, I have warned you!' Were they not fools that, in spite of his having given them such a warning, they still decided to offer? They sinned against their own lives; as it says, THE FIRE-PANS OF THESE LIVES (XVII, 3). Now Korah, who was a clever man--what reason had he for such folly? His mind's eye misled him. He foresaw that a long and distinguished progeny would emanate from him, particularly Samuel, whose importance would equal that of Moses and Aaron; as may be inferred from the text, Moses and Aaron among His priests, and Samuel among them that call upon His Name (Ps. XCIX 6), and that from among his descendants there would be formed twenty-four [Mah. would emend to fourteen, both here and in Tan]levitical divisions all of whom would prophesy under the influence of the Holy Spirit; as it says, All these were the sons of Heman (I Chron. XXV, 5) [A descendant of Korah] He argued: 'Is it reasonable that, since such greatness is destined to emanate from me, I should keep silent?' He did not, however, foresee

accurately. In fact his sons repented, and it was from them that the distinguished progeny was to emanate. Moses, however, did foresee it. The reason then why Korah was foolish enough to risk that danger was because he heard from Moses that they would all perish and one of them would escape; as it says, AND IT SHALL BE THAT THE MAN WHOM THE LORD DOTCH CHOOSE, HE SHALL BE HOLY.

9. AND MOSES SAID UNTO KORAH: HEAR NOW, YE SONS OF LEVI (XVI, 8). If a person goes and talks with Joseph, does he say to Simeon, 'Hear? [Why does Moses, who is talking to Korah, ask the sons of Levi to hear?]' Some explain that Moses asked him to retract, and spoke gentle words to him, but when he saw that Korah would not listen he thought: [I had better do something] before the others make common cause with him. So he began to speak to them: 'HEAR NOW, YE SONS OF LEVI! Is the honour you are now enjoying too little? IS IT BUT A SMALL THING UNTO YOU, THAT THE GOD OF ISRAEL HATH SEPARATED YOU FROM THE CONGREGATION OF ISRAEL,' etc. (ib)? Then he turned again to Korah: AND THAT HE HATH BROUGHT THEE NEAR, AND ALL THY BRETHREN THE SONS OF LEVI (ib. 10)--Owing to the fact that he was the chief of his tribe his brethren were accounted as mere satellites--THEREFORE THOU, AND ALL THY COMPANY THAT ARE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD (ib. II). This quarrel, he implied, is not with us, but with the Holy One, blessed by He. The matter may be illustrated by a parable. A king had numerous servants. He chose to make one of them a free man and to give him a rod of office. He then went further and made him a senator. His colleagues rose up against him. People said: 'If he had come forward himself and taken that dignity of his own accord, they would have acted well in rising up against him. But here, seeing that his master has conferred the distinction upon him, then whoever rises against him does he not rise against his master?' It is the same here. Moses said to the Levites: 'If Aaron my brother had taken the priesthood on his own initiative, you would have done well in being indignant against him. Now, however, that it was given to him by the Holy One, blessed be He, to whom belongs greatness, might, and sovereignty, then any one who rises against Aaron, does he not rise up against the Holy One, blessed be He?'

Therefore, you ARE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD! With all these arguments Moses tried to win Korah over; yet you do not find that the latter returned him any answer. This was because he was clever in his wickedness and thought: If I answer him, I know quite well that he is a very wise man and will presently overwhelm me with his arguments so that I shall be reconciled to him against my will. It is better that I should not join issue with him. When Moses saw that he could do nothing with him he took leave of him.

10. AND MOSES SENT TO CALL DATHAN AND ABIRAM (XVI, 12). They also persisted in their wickedness and did not deign to answer him. AND THEY SAID: WE WILL NOT COME UP (ib.). These wicked men were tripped up by their own mouth and there is a covenant made with the lips, [Words spoken, even unintentionally or in another sense, are nevertheless of some effect.] for they died and WENT DOWN into the bottomless abyss, after they had 'Gone down alive into the pit' (ib. 33). IS IT A SMALL THING THAT THOU HAST NOT

BROUGHT US UP . . . BUT THOU MUST NEEDS MAKE THYSELF ALSO AS PRINCE OVER US (ib. 13)? 'On what ground,' they asked, 'do you lord it over us? What good have you done to us? You have brought us out of Egypt which is like a garden of the Lord. You have not, however, brought us into the land of Canaan, but behold we are in the wilderness and the plague is continually let loose on us! WILT THOU PUT OUT THE EYES OF THESE MEN? WE WILL NOT COME UP (ib. 14). AND MOSES WAS VERY WROTH (ib. 15). Why? Because when a man argues with his companion and the other reasons and replies, he has some satisfaction, but if he does not reply [as in their case when they refused to answer his summons] he feels grieved. AND SAID UNTO THE LORD: RESPECT NOT THOU THEIR OFFERING (ib.). . . . BE THOU AND ALL THY CONGREGATION BEFORE THE LORD . . . TO-MORROW (ib. 16). Korah went about all that night and misled the Israelites. He said to them: 'What do you suppose? That I am working to obtain greatness for myself? I desire that we should all enjoy greatness in turn, not like Moses who has appropriated the kingship to himself and has given the High Priesthood to his brother!' And so he went about winning over each tribe with arguments suited to that particular tribe, until they made common cause with him. How is this inferred? From the text, AND KORAH ASSEMBLED ALL THE CONGREGATION AGAINST THEM (ib. 19). They approached Moses, all speaking as Korah did. Instantly, THE LORD SPOKE UNTO MOSES AND UNTO AARON, SAYING: SEPARATE YOURSELVES FROM AMONG THIS CONGREGATION . . . AND THEY FELL UPON THEIR FACES (ib. 20f.).

11. AND SAID (XVI, 22). They said to Him: 'Sovereign of the Universe! In the case of a mortal king, if a province rebels against him and rises and curses the king or his deputies, even if only ten or twenty of them have done so, he sends his legions there and carries out a massacre, slaying the good with the bad, because he cannot tell which of them has rebelled and which has not, or who has honoured the king and who has cursed him. Thou, however, knowest the thoughts of man and what the hearts and reins counsel. Thou discernest the inclinations of Thy creatures and knowest which man has sinned and which has not, who has rebelled and who has not. Thou knowest the spirit of each and every one.' Accordingly it says, THE GOD OF THE SPIRITS OF ALL FLESH, SHALL ONE MAN SIN, AND WILT THOU BE WROTH WITH ALL THE CONGREGATION? (ib.) The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: You have spoken well! I shall make it known who has sinned and who has not.

12. AND THE LORD SPOKE UNTO MOSES, SAYING . . . GET YOU UP FROM ABOUT THE DWELLING OF KORAH (XVI, 23). Although Moses heard the order from the Almighty, he did not tell the Israelites, 'Get you up,' until he had gone and warned the people concerned; as it says, AND MOSES ROSE UP AND WENT UNTO DATHAN AND ABIRAM (ib. 25). This serves to acquaint us with their wickedness, for although Moses went on foot to them, these wicked men stubbornly refused to be reconciled. What did they do? They refused to come out of their tents to meet him. When Moses saw how matters stood, he said: 'Thus far I was in duty bound to go [but no further]'. AND HE SPOKE UNTO THE CONGREGATION, SAYING: DEPART, I PRAY YOU, FROM THE TENTS OF THESE WICKED MEN (ib. 26). Our Rabbis have taught: Four types of people are called wicked. (1) One who puts out his hand against his fellow to strike him, even though he has not actually struck him, is called wicked; as may be inferred from the text, And he said to the wicked one: Wherefore wilt thou smite thy fellow?

(EX. II, 13); it does not say 'Wherefore hast thou smitten' but 'Wherefore wilt thou smite'. (2) One who borrows and does not repay; as is borne out by the text, The wicked borroweth, and payeth not; but the righteous deal-eth graciously, and giveth (Ps. XXXVII, 21). (3) One who shows insolence and who is not ashamed in the presence of one greater than himself; as it says, A wicked man hardeneth his face; but as for the upright, he looketh well to his way (Prov. XXI, 29). (4) One who is given to contentiousness; as it says, DEPART, I PRAY YOU, FROM THE TENTS OF THESE WICKED MEN. Two of these faults were in Dathan and Abiram, viz. insolence and contentiousness (mahaloketh). 'Mahaloketh' consists of mem, which stands for makkah (smiting); heth for haron (fury); lamed for likkui (punishment); kof for ketalah (curse); and tav for to'ebah (end), signifying that strife brings destruction (kelayah) upon the world.

AND MOSES SAID: HEREBY YE SHALL KNOW THAT THE LORD HATH SENT ME . . . IF THESE MEN DIE THE COMMON DEATH OF ALL MEN (XVI, 29). This may be illustrated by a parable. To what can the matter be compared? To the shoshbin of a king's daughter who had the evidence of her virginity in his possession. One of the wedding guests stood up and cursed the shoshbin, saying that the king's daughter had no virginity. The shoshbin rose in the presence of the king and exclaimed: 'If you do not claim redress for the insult offered to you and refuse to have this man taken out and executed publicly, I shall also believe that no virginity has been found in the king's daughter.' Thereupon the king thought: It is better that I should slay this man than that the shoshbin should spread an evil name about my daughter. It was the same with Korah. He contended with Moses and said that the latter had invented all these things from his own mind and on his own initiative. Moses said to the Holy One, blessed be He: 'If these people die in their beds as people ordinarily do, doctors coming in and visiting them in the same way as all other sick people are visited, I shall also become a heretic and say, THE LORD HATH NOT SENT ME (ib.), and that what I have spoken came out of my own mind!' Moses was one of the three prophets who spoke in this way. There were Elijah, Micaiah, and Moses.

And so Moses also said: IF THESE MEN DIE THE COMMON DEATH, etc. The Holy One, blessed be He, asked Moses: 'What do you request?' Said he to Him: 'Sovereign of the Universe! IF A CREATED THING (XVI, 30) [If the . . . a new thing]; if, I say, Thou hast already created a mouth for the earth, well and good. But if not, then THE LORD MAKE (ib.); let Him, I say, create a mouth for it now. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to him: Thou shalt also decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee, and light shall shine upon thy ways (Job XXII, 28).

13. AND THE EARTH OPENED (XVI, 32). R. Judah said: At that moment there opened out in the earth numerous orifices; as may be inferred from the text, The earth opened her mouth . . . in the midst of all Israel (Deut. XI, 6) [Sc. wherever a follower of Korah happened to be the earth opened beneath his feet and swallowed him]. But, R. Nehemiah objected, does it not say AND THE EARTH OPENED HER MOUTH. Well then, said the other, how will you reconcile the text,

'In the midst of all Israel'? You can only suppose that the earth assumed the shape of a funnel, and wherever any one of the rebels happened to be he would roll down and get into the mouth together with the rest. Thus you confirm the text, 'In the midst of all Israel' and you also confirm the text, THE EARTH OPENED HER MOUTH. And all the yekum (Deut. loc. cit.) [E.V. 'Every living substance'.]; that is their money, called yekum (standing) because it puts a man on his feet. Our Rabbis said: Even if they had clothes at the laundry these came rolling along and were swallowed up with them. R. Samuel b. Nahmani said: Even a needle borrowed by an Israelite from them was also swallowed up; as it says, SO THEY, AND ALL THAT APPERTAINED TO THEM, WENT DOWN ALIVE INTO THE PIT (XVI, 33): Why all this? Because he contended with the Holy One, blessed be He. Nevertheless, in the time to come they will rise up again. R. Judah b. Bathyra learned that they had a share in the World to Come; as may be inferred from the fact that it says, AND THEY WERE LOST FROM AMONG THE ASSEMBLY (ib.), while in the case of David it says, I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant; for I have not forgotten Thy commandments (Ps. CXIX, 176). Now, as in the case of David it is a loss for which search will be made [Since it says, Seek Thy servant.] so in the present instance it is a loss for which search will ultimately be made. Thus Hannah prayed for them in this strain, saying: The Lord killeth, and maketh alive, he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up (I Sam. II, 6).

R. Levi asked: Why did Korah contend with Moses? He argued: I am a scion of 'oil', being the son of Izhar [which means 'oil'], as is proved by the text, Thy tirosh and thy izhar, the increase of thy kine and the young of thy flock, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee (Deut. VII, 13), where 'tirosh' means wine and 'izhar' means oil. Now into whatever liquids you put oil it will rise to the top. Moreover, it is written, These are the two sons of the oil [E.V. 'anointed ones'.] that stand by the Lord of the whole earth (Zech. IV, 14). Now has oil sons? Surely not; but the expression applies to Aaron and David who were anointed with the anointing oil, Aaron having taken the priesthood and David the kingship. Korah argued: If these, who were merely anointed with the anointing oil, had conferred upon them priesthood and kingship, shall not I, who am the son of 'oil', be considered as anointed, and be created priest and king? Forthwith he contended with Moses.

18. YE TAKE TOO MUCH UPON YOU (RAB LAKEM), YE SONS OF LEVI (ib. 7). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: 'You have smitten them with a rod. You shall yourself be smitten with that which you have used for smiting others. You said, RAB LAKEM, and in the near future you shall hear: Rab lak--let it suffice for thee (Deut. III, 26) [The verse continues: Speak no more unto Me of this matter, i.e. of entering into the Promised Land.].

'Moses our Master, save us! AND FIRE CAME FORTH FROM THE LORD, AND DEVOURED THE TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY MEN THAT OFFERED THE INCENSE (ib. 35). The others were swallowed up, but these were burnt. Korah stood among those who were burnt, as may be inferred from the fact that Moses said to him: Thou also, and Aaron, each his fire-pan (ib. 17) [Showing that he was among

those who had offered incense.] He was, however, punished more than all the others; for he was both burned and swallowed up. [Cf. infra. Rad, who cites Sanh. 110a, reverses the penalties.] Why were these two sentences carried out on him? Because, if he had been burned and not swallowed up, those who were swallowed up would have had ground for complaining [On the Day of Judgment.] that though none but Korah had brought upon them all that divine visitation, they were being swallowed up while he escaped. If, on the other hand, he had been swallowed up and not burned, those who were burned would have had ground for complaining that none but he had brought upon them the divine visitation, and yet they were being burned and he escaped. Consequently he was sentenced to two forms of death; first the fire flamed round him in the presence of all those who were being burned, and in whose hands were the fire-pans containing the incense, and then the fire rolled him up like a ball and spun him along until it brought him to the mouth of the earth together with those who were being swallowed up; as it says, AND THE EARTH OPENED HER MOUTH. AND SWALLOWED THEM UP, AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS AND ALL THE MEN THAT APPERTAINED TO KORAH, AND ALL THEIR GOODS (XVI, 32).

20. AND ON, THE SON OF PELETH (ib. I). Why was he called by the name of On? Because he spent all the rest of his days in mourning [i.e. in regret 'over his share in the rebellion']. Why THE SON OF PELETH? Because he was a son for whom miracles (pela'oth) were wrought. Rab said: On the son of Peleth was saved by his wife. She said to him: 'What has this dispute to do with you? If Aaron be High Priest you are but a disciple, and if Korah be High Priest you are but a disciple, and if Korah be High Priest you are but a disciple. I know,' she said to him, 'that the whole assembly is holy, for it is written of the, all the congregation are holy' (ib. 3). [This is her reply to her objection that he had taken an oath to help Korah, if summoned; v. commentaries.] What did she do? She gave him wine to drink and made him drunk, and put him to bed. Then she sat down at the entrance, along with her daughter, and dishevelled her hair, [it was considered improper to look at, or approach, a woman in such a state] so that any one who came for On her husband [To summon him to the rebellious assembly as arranged] on seeing her turned back. Meanwhile, the others were swallowed up. Thus the text, Every wise woman buildeth her house (Prov. XIV. I) Applies so the wife of On; But the foolish plucketh it down with her own hands (ib.) applies to the wife of Korah.

AND WHEN MOSES HEARD IT (ib. 4). What did he hear? R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: It implies that they suspected him of adultery with a married woman; as may be inferred from the text, They were jealous [This expression is used of suspicion in connection with adultery; V Num. V, 14.] of Moses in the camp (Ps. CVI, 16). R. Samuel b. Isaac said in the name of Rab: It implies that every one suspected his wife of intercourse with Moses.

R. Hisda said: If one contends against his master, it is as though he contended against the Divine Presence; as is proved by the text, When they strove

against the Lord (Num. XXVI, 9). R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: If one engages in strife with his master, it is as though he did so with the Divine Presence; as is borne out by the text, These are the waters of Meribah (strife), where the children of Israel strove with the Lord (ib. XX, 13). R. Hanina said: If one shows irritation with his master, it is as if he showed irritation with the Divine Presence; as is borne out by the text, Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord (EX. XVI, 8). R. Abbahu said: If one harbours evil thoughts about his master, it is as if he harboured evil thoughts about the Divine Presence; as is proved by the text, And the people spoke against God, and against Moses: Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, etc. (Num. XXI, 5).

Rabba son of bar Hana related: I was once walking on the way, when a certain Arab merchant said to me: 'Come, and I will show you the spot where the men of Korah were swallowed up.' I went and saw two cracks from which smoke was coming. The Arab took a ball of clipped wool and, steeping it in water, set it upon the top of a spear and inserted it into that place. The wool was singed and dropped off. He said to me: 'Listen, if you can hear something.' I heard them saying: 'Moses and his Torah are true, and they [Korah and his associates] are liars.' He said to me: 'Every thirty days Gehenna whirls them back to this spot like meat in a pot, and they thus exclaim: "Moses and his Torah are true." In time to come the Holy One, blessed be He, will take them out.' Of them Hannah sang: The Lord Killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down into the grave, and bringeth up (I Sam. II, 6).

The Midrash on Psalms I. 15.

15. A different exposition: Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked refers to the sons of Korah who did not walk in the counsel of their father after Moses had said to them "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men" (Num. 16:26). Nor standeth in the way of sinners--like Korah and his companions, who, it is said, "have sinned at the cost of their lives" (Num. 17:3). Nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful like Korah, who spoke in scorn against Moses and Aaron. What did Korah do? He assembled all the congregation against Moses and Aaron, as is said Korah assembled all the congregation against them unto the door of the Tent of Meeting (Num. 16:19), and in their presence he began to speak words of scorn, saying: In my neighborhood there was a widow, and with her were her two fatherless daughters. The widow had only one field, and when she was about to plow, Moses said to her: Thou shalt not sow thy field with two kinds of seed (Lev. 19:19). When she was about to reap the harvest and to stack the sheaves, Moses said to her: "Thou shalt not harvest the gleanings, the overlooked sheaves, and the corners of the field" (cf. Lev. 19:9; Deut. 24:19). When she was about to bring the harvest into the granary, Moses said to her: "Give me the heave-offering, the first tithe, and the second tithe." She submitted to God's decree and gave them to him. What did the poor woman do then? She sold the field

and bought two sheep, so that she might clothe herself in the wool shorn from them, and so that she might profit out of the lambs. As soon as the sheep brought forth their young, Aaron came and said to the widow: "Give me the firstling males, for this is what the Holy One, blessed be He, said to me: All the firstling males that are born of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the Lord thy God" (Deut. 15:19). Again she submitted to God's decree, and gave the young of her sheep to Aaron. When the time for shearing arrived, she sheared her two sheep. Then Aaron came again and said to the widow: "Give me the first portion of the shearing." She said: "There is no strength in me to withstand this man; behold, I will slaughter the sheep and eat them." After she slaughtered them, Aaron came again and said to her: "Give me the shoulder, the jaws, and the maw." The widow said: "Though I have slaughtered my sheep, I am still not free of thy demands: behold, I devote my sheep to the uses of the Temple." But Aaron said to her: "If the sheep are to be devoted to the uses of the Temple, they belong entirely to me, for it was said to me Everything devoted in Israel shall be thine" (Num. 18:14). Thereupon Aaron lifted up the sheep, went on his way, and left her weeping with her two daughters.

Is such a thing right? Oh, the despoiled woman! the hapless woman! Moses and Aaron have done all these things to her, but hang the blame on the Holy One, blessed be He!

Footnotes, The Rebellion of Korah

1. The Levites did indeed have ample cause for anger. The priestly prerogatives had been guaranteed to them in the last testament of Moses (Deuteronomy 33:8-11). Suddenly, and without any biblical basis, Aaron and his sons had taken over the priesthood. The rebellion of Korah thus seems to serve in the Bible as the ex post facto justification for an expropriation of levitical power. We can also make the reasoned assumption that this Aaronide power grab occurred after the time of the prophet Ezekiel. For Ezekiel also wanted to depose the Levites from the priesthood (in favor of the sons of Zadok) and therefore desperately needed the Korah story to clinch the Zadokite claims. But he did not know the Korah story of Numbers because, we can assume, Numbers had not yet been written! We can fix the terminus ad quo for the inclusion and common knowledge of the Korah episode as the time of Sirah (ca. 180 B.C.E.) who dwells on the glories of the functioning Aaronide priesthood and the unparalleled perfidy of Korah ad nauseum (Sirah 45:6-22). The study of these historical implications of the rebellion of Korah thus also gives us a useful insight into the range of time within which the Hebrew Bible was canonized.
2. This idea is implicit in the biblical account of Creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and explicit in Psalm 19 where adoration of Nature slides into adoration of God's "statutes and testimonies". In the book of Job God's speech out of the whirlwind (Job 38:1ff.) also echos the same theme that God as He manifests Himself in Nature is always sure and certain even when God as He is in History seems totally negligent. Martin Buber has dealt with this subtle dialectic in his essay, "The dialogue between Heaven and Earth" in On Judaism, New York, Schocken Books, 1967. pp.214-225. esp. pp.221-225..
3. This point is extremely well developed in an essay which was of particular use to the author in preparing this chapter by Richard L. Rubenstein, "God's Omnipotence in Rabbinic Judaism" in The Religious Imagination: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Jewish Theology. Indianapolis, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968. pp.117-137.
4. Ibid. pp.124-126.
5. Richard L. Rubenstein. "Dreams, Psychoanalysis, and Jewish Legend" in The Religious Imagination. pp.30-31.

CHAPTER THREE

PAUL OF TARSIS: The Law Taught Me Sin

"Quench not the spirit."

-----I Thessalonians 5:19

Paul is the keystone of our study. In no other man do the terms Jewish heretic conjoin with such certain accuracy. No other man so confounds our manichaeistic tendencies to see in each age a clear division between "Jews" in one monolithic camp and "enemies of the Jews" in another. These stark battle lines of Jewish identity seem to have their ultimate origin in the Bible, where it is quite difficult for toleration of cultural pluralism to be a central virtue. It is, after all, a salvation system based on an authoritative, perfect, revelation from God.

The attitude which would make of Paul either friend or foe receives special nurture during periods of intense social dislocation and chaos. During such times social cohesion depends on the group's ability to clearly and consistently define the parameters of socially acceptable behavior and belief. This type of situation gives rise to one of the enduring functions of the heretic. Through his stigmatization by the normative community, the heretic divides and insulates the in-group against the incursions of other threatening social forms as well as standing as exemplary warning of the inexorable¹ punishments certain to befall the social deviant.

For the Jews the first century of the common era was just such a time of chaos, and Paul was just such a heretic. The Mediterranean had become a "Roman lake" and upon its shores common men and kings had to adjust to the new and often shattering realities which had² been introduced by Greece and culminated by Rome. The Jews were

sorely tried during this time and the rabbis of the Tanaaitic period reveal a penetrating awareness that theirs was indeed an age filled with radically new problems and pressures.³ When Titus marched into the Temple sanctuary and defiled it forever the Jews were dealt a terrible and enduring blow which could never be erased from the Jewish soul. Yet this event has been greatly misunderstood and misrepresented as the catastrophic beginning of Jewish life in exile.⁴ In fact, by 70 C.E. an overwhelming majority of Jews were already living outside the Land. During this century there were estimated to have been five to ten times more Jews in the Diaspora than in Palestine.⁵ By 70 C.E. exile was already the normative form of Jewish life.

The destruction of the Temple furthermore insured a total victory for the Pharisees, the only Palestinean party that could truly relate to the needs of Diaspora oriented Jews. 70 C.E. was indeed the coup de grace for the Sadducees, the temple oriented priestly elite, but the brutal fact remained that the Pharisaic sofer- scholar class never truly needed the Temple. Since the Temple was a Sadducean stronghold and focal point it was, in fact, something of an obstacle to future Pharisaic growth and expansion.⁶ The oral law, codified in 200 C.E. by Judah the Prince, the Mishnah, and later on the Gemara, reflected the growing Pharisaic emphasis on individual salvation, resurrection of the dead, and eternal life in the world to come. All those concepts which were totally undeveloped in the Bible proved to be important and valuable Pharisaic tools for fashioning a viable Jewish identity in the Diaspora.

It was therefore, a young and vigorous Pharisaism that Paul

encountered. A Pharisaism that produced in Paul's own day such religious geniuses as Philo and Hillel. A Pharisaism that was made young and vigorous in part by its constant confrontations with the myriads of mystery cults, Jewish and Christian gnostics, and especially a new deviant group of Jews centered in Jerusalem who called themselves Christians, and professed a belief in the risen Christ. It was a young Pharisaism desperately in need of a sense of limits. It had to develop a clear notion of what a Jew could safely do or believe in that confused world which would be accepted by the normative community. The furious ideological ferment of the age seethed and bubbled within and without the synagogues of the Mediterranean heightening the need for community self-definition. The continued existence of the Jewish community was precisely what was at stake. Jewish law, halachah, regulated action, always a far clearer arbiter of group identity than attemptation to regulate thought and belief--the purpose of catechism. And so it was halachah and not catechism that became the yardstick of Jewish identity in normative Pharisaism. Paul's indifference to circumscribing new Christians was, seen in this light, an absolute breach of halachah, more than that, it was heresy itself.

Though abrogation of halachah was always potentially heretical it only became heretical to the degree that the normative religious authorities felt their power and position threatened by the heretic or his movement. The Judaism of Paul's day was still reeling from the defeats of both 70 C.E. and 135-8 C.E. One can understand why Paul was beaten, reproached and ostracized (and why Stephen was stoned to death.) His heresy represented an attack on the community

at a time when most of its defenses had been stripped away by the events of concrete history. However, after seventeen centuries of entrenchment, the rabbis of Europe and Asia Minor could treat, for example, the pseudo-Messiah, Shabbatai Zvi with incomparably greater leniency. Zvi did such scandalous things as, uttering the explicit name of God in a synagogue on Yom Kippur, urging Jews to feast on recognized fast days and encouraging all forms of sexual licence and moral debauchery.⁷ Yet his movement only truly became heretical after his conversion to Islam!⁸ Paul on the other hand was, except for his belief in the risen Christ, an obedient and faithful Jew, "I was according to all things obedient to the traditions of the fathers." As community instability increases so, it seems, do the pressures to make some of its more deviant members heretics.

Like other Jewish heretics, Paul was in great tension with the Jewish community of his day. The Jews were confronted by a man who saw Jesus not as the negation of the covenant between God and his people (vis. Marcion Gnosticism), but rather as its quintessential fulfillment. Paul was confronted by a community which was meant to play a central role in God's work of salvation, and yet who stubbornly refused to recognize the most recent and clear manifestation of God's saving power. This tense deadlock prevailed until Paul's death.

By the time of John, however, Paul's "heresy" had stimulated the development of such a different life style from normative Pharisaism, it had become a "sect" and lost that vital tension with the normative Jewish community which was essential in stimulating⁹ Paul and the entire tradition of Jewish heresy which we will study.

There were many examples of Paul's deep connections with his Jewishness: His early persecution of Christians, his willingness to be flogged for abrogating Jewish law, his constant obedience to Jewish law, his staunch belief in eternal life and resurrection of the dead, his belief in individual salvation, his use of Jewish symbols like, Pesach, Isaac and Covenant to express his conception of Christ's role in salvation history, his mastery of the midrashic method to establish the claims of Jesus, his acceptance of the truth of God's revelation to the Jews, his belief expressed most powerfully in Romans 9-11 that Jews remain crucial to the further working out of salvation history, his notion that the Messiah would be the telos of the law, and beyond all this his full acceptance of the basic terms and goals of Jewish Messianism all indicate the extent of Paul's rootedness in the heart of normative Pharisaism.

The heretical tension ultimately stemmed from the fact that Paul believed that all the Pharisees taught and hoped for in the Messianic "illo tempore" had actually begun, and was to be completed in his own day. Paul was not alone in his belief that he stood at a nodal point in salvation history. He was joined by masses of people in the Mediterranean world who clung to the belief that theirs was indeed the Messianic age of fulfillment--the age of Pleroma. Paul remained certain that all man's striving to achieve salvation through the Law had always been impossible and now had suddenly been made irrelevant by Christ's atoning death and resurrection. It was in this assertion and in his steadfast claim that Jesus was the Messiah hoped for and spoken of in Scripture which decisively placed Paul outside the bounds of normative Pharisaic Judaism.

In Paul's struggle with the Law the Jewish heretic in him stands out in sharpest relief. As a loyal Pharisee, Paul internalized the deepest desire for personal salvation. Moreover, he had accepted the halachah as the indispensable path toward that goal. The Jew Paul, before Damascus, never doubted his certainty that God had entered the world to provide for man's salvation, resurrection, and eternal life by giving him the oral and written Torah. But the heretic Paul began to be consumed by anxiety and despair over his inability to perform the comprehensive and complex set of commandments consistently and truly. Indeed, the more scrupulously observant Paul became, the greater were his doubts about the efficacy of his obedience. The doubts were nurtured by an already present anxiety and desperation. The inner defenses could hold back his heresy no longer. The internalized Law crumbled. The Pharisaic salvation system had failed him.

Sin, which for Jews had always been viewed as an act--a wilful or ignorant abrogation of the Law--became for Paul a condition or state of being. The essential Jewish link between commanded action and promised salvation was severed by Paul's unconsolable view of the fallen state of man. Teshuvah, repentance, became an impossible and irrelevant category. Only the free gift of Christ's atoning death could redeem fallen, sinful, man. Yet Paul's messianic expectations were always cast in traditional Jewish terms. The same covenant relationship between God and the Jews which promised resurrection, eternal life and the Messianic age remained valid even though mankind could not merit any of it through his deeds. The goal of salvation remained the same, only the path towards that goal had

changed. The Law remained holy, only its effect on man was unholy. The law taught man sin. The halachah was irrelevant to salvation not because it had been replaced by another law, but because it had been fulfilled in Christ. According to Paul, in the short time to precede the Second Coming (Parousia), Christ had replaced the negated Law as the sure symbol of God's saving presence--a presence which so certainly seemed absent in the recent history of His chosen people--the Jews. Pauline thought is filled with this persistent tension between tradition and experience--between the tradition of Jewish chosenness versus the experience of Jewish suffering; the tradition of Messianic expectation versus the experience, on the road to Damascus, of the actual Messiah. All these tensions were resolved on the side of experience. They are tensions which mark Paul as a Jewish heretic in a clear and decisive way.

It must be reemphasized that Paul would never have, and in fact never did, abandon Judaism for some other form of current wisdom like Gnosticism or the mystery cults. Paul spoke of the "old" versus the "new" Israel. For Paul, the subject had remained the same--only the adjectives had changed.

Several aspects of Pauline thought clearly develop longings which had deep roots in Judaism. The intense desire of the Israelites, expressed again and again in the Hebrew Bible, to know God in an intimate and certain way are given new expression in the Pauline understanding of the Eucharist feast. The psychoanalytic interpretation that ultimate satisfaction is achieved through oral incorporation of the diety which gives vent to both joyous identification and cannibalistic hatred of the Progenitor or progenitrix may be too

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specious to be taken seriously.¹² Yet the Eucharist clearly does provide a powerful symbolic contact for the masses with a direct manifestation of deity heretofore unattainable in Judaism by any but a few biblical prophets. The Eucharist also provides an important locus for Paul's transformation of the biblical moral calculus. Neither Paul nor the rabbis doubted the existence of a moral equilibrium in the world in which the "wages of sin are death." For the rabbis, punishment inexorably followed abrogation of the Law, but Paul had already negated the decisive salvation--importance of the Law. For Paul the consumption of the Eucharist by unworthy individuals became the causal force in the appearance of death and disease among the newly chosen members of the "new covenant."¹³

Throughout the Jewish experience the impulse to universalism, to have God's will confirmed by all peoples, rises and falls. Paul's heresy is exacerbated by the fact that this impulse was falling in normative Judaism at the same time it was on the rise in Pauline thought. The persistently expressed notion that the destruction of the Temple and the ensuing Exile were justly deserved punishments for failure of the Jews to accept Christ's saving grace, made the rabbis understandably reluctant to proclaim at that time the universal glories of being a Jew.

Seen from the perspective of the Jewish experience, Paul achieves a truly remarkable synthesis. He was able to draw upon the dynamic innovations of both biblical and rabbinic Judaism. The widely corroborated "fact" of the resurrection of Jesus gave Paul the new evidence for the old biblical conviction that God's will can be experienced in concrete

historical events. Furthermore, the rabbis of normative Pharisaism supplied Paul with a powerful and inspiring vision of the Messianic Age. Resurrection of the dead, and eternal life in the World to Come were the promised rewards for both Jewish and Christian Messianism. Paul's unique synthesis of the two major options for Jewish identity, the biblical and the rabbinic, was rejected out of hand by the normative Jewish community in favor of obedience to the internalized oral and written Law. Paul could not be accommodated. His heresy grew. His constituency changed. The pagan world eagerly embraced the "good news of the risen Christ". The heresy became a sect. The sect became a Church and the Church changed the world. The feeble tent maker from Tarsis could hardly have suspected it. His modest and holy life was a powerful witness to the enduring dynamism of the Jewish experience.

Primary Texts--New Testament Sources for Paul

These selections from the Pauline epistles focus on Paul's Jewishness and his attitude toward the Jewish community.

Romans 9-11.

I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.

But it is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants. For this is what the promise said, "About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son." And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call, she was told, "The elder will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So it depends not upon man's will for exertion, but upon God's mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, "I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he had mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills.

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me thus?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the vessels of wrath made for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

As indeed he says in Hose'a,

"Those who were not my people

I will call 'my people,'

and her who was not beloved

I will call 'my beloved.'"

"And in the very place where it was
said to them, 'You are not my
people,'

they will be called 'sons of the living God.'"

And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved; for the Lord will execute his sentence upon the earth with rigor and dispatch." And as Isaiah predicted,

"If the Lord of hosts had not left us children,

we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomor'rah."

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; but that Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on law did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written,

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make men stumble,
a rock that will make them fall;

and he who believes in him will not be put to shame."

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Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified.

Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it. But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. For, "every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" But they have not all heeded the gospel; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So

faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.

But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for

"Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world."

Again I ask, did Israel not understand: First Moses says,

"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;
with a foolish nation I will make you angry."

Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

"I have been found by those who did not seek me;

I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

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I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the scripture says of Eli'jah, how he pleads with God against Israel? "Lord, they have killed thy prophets, they have demolished thy altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Ba'al." So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

What then? Israel failed to obtain what it sought. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written,

"God gave them a spirit of stupor,
eyes that should not see and ears that should not hear,
down to this very day."

And David says,

"Let their feast become a snare and a trap,
a pitfall and a retribution for them;
let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
and bend their backs for ever."

So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you. You will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is

true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast only through faith. So do not become proud, but stand in awe. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off. And even the others, if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree.

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved; as it is written,

"The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";
"and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins."

As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable. Just as you were once disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy. For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all.

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

"For who has known the mind of the Lord,
or who has been his counselor?"

"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.

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I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him. For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

I Corinthians 1:20-25

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

I Corinthians 7:18-22

Was any one at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was any one at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.

For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God.

Every one should remain in the state in which he was called. Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ.

I Corinthians 9:19-23

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law -- though not being myself under the law -- that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law -- not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ -- that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

I Corinthians 11:27-30

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.

That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

II Corinthians 3:4-16

Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God, who has qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but eh Spirit gives life.

Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses; face because of its brightness, fading as this was, will not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendor? For if there was splendor in the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendor. Indeed, in this case, what once had splendor has come to have no splendor at all, because of the splendor that surpasses it. For if what faded away came with splendor, what is permanent must have much more splendor.

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor. But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.

Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed.

II Corinthians 11:21-29

But whatever any one dares to boast of -- I am speaking as a fool -- I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one -- I am talking like a madman -- with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, deanger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

Romans 2:17-29

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely upon the law and boast of your relation to God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because

you are instructed in the law, and if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth -- you then who teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God.

Romans 3:9-18

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, as it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one;
No one understands, no one seeks
for God.

All have turned aside, together they
have gone wrong;

no one does good, not even one."

"Their throat is an open grave,
they use their tongues to deceive."

"The venom of asps is under their
lips."

"Their mouth is full of curses and
bitterness."

"Their feet are swift to shed blood,
in their paths are ruin and misery,
and the way of peace they do not know."

"There is no fear of God before
their eyes."

Romans 3:28-31

For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through

their faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Acts 5:33-39

When they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them.

But a Pharisee in the council named Gama'li-el, a teacher of the law, held in honor by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a while. And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men. For before these days theu'das arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered.

So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

Acts 22:3-11

"I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cili'cia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gama'liel, educated according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as you all are this day. I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, as the high priest and the whole council of elders bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brethren, and I journeyed to Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

"As I made my journey and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone about me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.' Now those who were with me saw the light but did not hear the voice of the one who was speaking with me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'

And when I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

Acts 23:6-10

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sad'ducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a sone of Pharisees; with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead I am on trial." And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sad'ducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sad'ducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor arose; and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks.

Acts 26:4-23

"My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and at Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. And now I stand here on trial for hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme; and in raging fury against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

"Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining round me and those who journeyed with me.

And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.' And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles -- to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

"Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and

throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance.

For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles."

Galatians 1:11-14

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel.

For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Galatians 4:4-7

But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

I Thessalonians 2:14-16

To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Philippians 3:2-11

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the

law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

FOOTNOTES--PAUL OF TARISIS

1. Vis. Introductory chapter.
2. Three especially fine sources for this period are: Carl Siegfried and Richard Gottheil. "Hellenism" in Vol. VI, The Jewish Encyclopedia. New York, Funk and Wagnall Company, 1904. pp. 335-340. Also Saul Lieberman. Texts and Studies, Vol. XVIII, Hellenism in Jewish Palestine. New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962. And a classic work in the field, Victor Tcherikover. Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews. Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1966.
3. The total rabbinic response to these new pressures is dealt with best in George Foot Moore. Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era. 3 vols. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1966.
4. 4. For a corrective to this view see the excellent study of Paul from a Jewish perspective by Samuel Sandmel. The Genius of Paul. New York, Schocken Books, 1970. esp. p. xiii.
5. Ibid.
6. A specific instance of this conflict is described in Jacob Z. Lauterbach. Rabbinic Essays. Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1951. pp. 51-83. A broader view of the clash between the Pharisees and Sadducees is to be found in Ellis Rivkin. The Shaping of Jewish History: A Radical New Interpretation. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971. pp. 42-83.
7. Clearly the finest work on the life and thought of Shabbatai Zvi is Gershom Scholem. Shabbatai Zvi and the Shabbataian Movement During His Lifetime. 2 vols. Tel Aviv, Am Oved Publishers Ltd., 1967. (Hebrew).
8. Gershom Scholem. "Redemption Through Sin" in The Messianic Idea in Judaism. New York, Schocken Books, 1971. p. 88. in which the fierce heretical tension between personal experience and outward historical facts is brought out clearly.
9. The important distinctions between heresy, sect, church and monastic society are clarified by the awesome work of G. Van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestation. New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1963. p. 262.
10. Adolf Deissmann. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History. New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1957. pp. 85-110. Samuel Sandmel. op.cit. pp. 36-60. Jacob J. Petuchowski. Heirs of the Pharisees. New York, Basic

Footnotes--Paul of Tarsis (Cont'd.)

Books, 1970. p.71.

Hans Joachim Schoeps. Paul. Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1961.

11. In the author's opinion, the very finest and most perceptive psychological approach to the life of Paul--a book of tremendous value in preparing this chapter--is, Richard L. Rubenstein. My Brother Paul. New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1972.
Cf. Ellis Rivkin. op.cit. pp.74-81.

12. Rubenstein. op.cit. pp.78-86.

13. I Corinthians 11:27-30.

CHAPTER FOUR

ELISHA BEN ABUYA: Aher and the Crisis of Biblical Faith

"He (Elisha) said, 'Turn back, Meir; this is the Sabbath limit.' He (Meir) asked, 'How do you know this?' He said, 'From the paces of my horse, which I have been counting while he went two thousand cubits.' He (Meir) said, 'You have all that wisdom and yet you do not return?' He said, 'I cannot.' He asked, 'Why?' Elisha replied, 'Once I was passing by the Holy of Holies, on the Day of Atonement, which fell on the Sabbath, riding my horse, and I heard a Bat Kol (a divine voice) issuing from the Holy of Holies which said 'Return ye backsliding children -- except Elisha ben Abuya, for he knew my might and rebelled against Me.'

--Jerusalem Talmud: Haggigah II, 1.

The Hebrew Bible is mankind's greatest attempt to bring a real God into contact with real history. The decisive impetus for this attempt came from men of religious sensitivity and scope who sensed at the very first that the gods of nature must die. One must ultimately stand in awe of the innovative genius of an Abraham or a Moses who were able to transcend the cyclical, mythological, world-view inherited from Mesopotamia and the East in which constantly warring dieties struggle for a small fiefdom in a Cosmos they never surely control.¹ The deep crisis produced by Marduk, Tiamat and the host of Ancient Near Eastern nature gods is best described as a kind of panic in the minds of men who had lost hope in a world of purpose, morality and nurture. The central theme of the Epic of Gilgamesh, the greatest literary work of ancient man before the Bible, is of man trapped in a universe of chaos and caprice in which death is the only and ultimate reality.²

The biblical God begins to unfold a new dialectic in the relationship between Man and God. One can feel the deep and powerful rhythms of the new order in the very first verses of the very first book of the Hebrew Bible. Here is depicted a vision of a vast and fruitful world, teeming with life, and undergirded by a single, omnipotent, benevolent diety whose creations are not puppet-slaves

in a cosmic prison; but rather, are all part of an interconnected chain of life whose growth and development are the ultimate purpose and the ultimate praise of the Creator.³ Thus the first and ultimate validation of the biblical God is Nature which is the work of His hands.⁴ But a God in Nature, even, as in the case of Adonay, a God who creates Nature, is only a small step away from myth, and so Adonay emerges also as the Revealing God--the God who talks to chosen men, enters into reciprocal covenantal relationships with these chosen ones, the validation of which is the events of concrete history--the God who establishes a moral equilibrium in the universe in which Israel is free to obey God's word and receive terrestrial rewards or disobey divine strictures and suffer inexorably just punishment for rebellion.⁵ The moral calculus in the Bible is an exceedingly simple one: human sin is the ultimate cause of the whole host of evils which beset our world. Evil is just punishment for sin. Sin is a rebellion against the sovereignty of God--a breach in His moral order.⁶

Sin enables the biblical God to survive; it is the crucial concept in the moral calculus of the Bible. The insertion of a Good God into Nature and especially history is more than a bit problematical. The facts of history constantly threaten to destroy such a God the moment He fails to reward obedience in man.⁷ When righteous men suffer, when thoroughly religious people find their promised land overrun by enemies who deny God's providence and power, at that point the biblical God is in serious trouble.⁸ A God whose trustworthiness, indeed whose very existence, is validated by the power he wields in history is liable to refutation when the power seems to have shifted into other hands.⁹

The suffering of God's chosen ones threatens to push the Good God of history back into myth.

From well before the first millenium B.C.E. until roughly the dawn of the common era, Adonay had made His way through history without much trouble. He had established to the satisfaction of generations of Jews through nodal events like the Exodus, the Revelation at Mt. Sinai, and the Conquest of Canaan that His saving power in history was both reliable and undisputed. By the Tanaaitic and Amoraic periods, however, both God and history were in dire crisis.

The crisis was triggered by the growing confrontation between the Hellenistic world with all of its philosophical and material accouterments and the Biblical world and all of its presuppositions.¹⁰ It was, among other things, a clash of truth forms. The Stoic's praise of man's unaided reason stood in starkist contrast with biblical Revelation and divine fiat. Men were beginning to picture in art and thought the individual as an entity whose fate and fortune were no longer inexorably bound to the tribe, the clan, the collectivity. The Greek Polis stood out as a new model of social integration founded on reason and not on revelation. It did not need the forefather's special covenants nor the forefather's special land. The Gnostic "God concept" for example was nearly totally transcendental with God being pushed far off into a realm where He was neither in contact with nor concerned about affairs of the world.¹¹ Both the Greek and Gnostic Gods were so pure and infinite and immutable that a whole host of intermediaries were needed to handle the second rate jobs of creation and governance of the world.¹² This divine metaphysic contradicts at the root the

biblical assertion that the One God created the world and rules it with One will. Finally there was the destruction of political sovereignty in Judea by the armies of Titus in 70 C.E. The raising of the temple and then finally the brutal suppression of the revolt of Bar-Cochbah in 135 C.E. dealt a political and psychic blow to Jews, their history and their God which seemed at first glance fatal. Indeed, like sharks drawn to a bleeding carcass, this period witnessed the growth of enumerable sectarian groups and mystery cults, all claiming to be the true "saving remnant" -- the holy seed which had been chosen to carry on where the biblical tradition had failed.¹³

The rabbis could not afford to approach this crisis with the high minded objectivity and precision of an idle intellectual. The times were too grave, the people too disillusioned to allow the luxury of such discourse. The rabbis had to accurately assess the opposition, extract their major premises and provide decisive workable answers for the people. Such a situation develops an instinct for the jugular.

Yet among these rabbis of the first and second century there was one who did not respond to the crisis of biblical faith with polemics and refutations against the threatening and alien philosophies. For one of them, the novel thoughts and the horrible events bore heavily on his mind. He could not throw off his doubts and scepticism. His name became a synonym for heresy in the history of the Jews.

Elisha ben Abuya was a very great and very troubled man. He himself was a noted rabbinic authority in the Mishna and Gemara whose opinions were quoted as authoritative law. He was the main teacher of one of the greatest of all tanaaites, Rabbi Meir. He had position,

learning, wealth, and the respect of the community. He gave up all this. He became an apostate, a heretic, an outsider. The community refused to speak his unauthorized name in public. He was called "Aher", the other one. He was reviled by everyone save his student, Rabbi Meir who continued to study with his old teacher until the end. The heresy of Aher presents us with some exceptionally difficult problems. In no other man is the fact of his apostasy so clear while its causes and nature are so enigmatic. What Aher did to become a heretic and why he did it essentially remain mysteries down to our own day.¹⁴

It is my feeling that the life and thought of Elisha ben Abuya, such as it is known through the documents of tradition, justify the assertions that his heresy was triggered by two great problems that had become central to the religious tensions of first century Judaism: the problem of theodicy and, closely related, the problem of transcendental theism.

In Aher's deeply troubling struggle with the problem of evil in the world, we can see one of the important tensions characteristic of the Jewish heretic.¹⁵ As we mentioned in the introductory essay, the Jewish heretic is extremely sensitive to the conflicting interpretations of reality given to him by his experience on the one hand, and inherited Jewish traditions on the other. In the case of Aher, almost nothing in his entire life validated the traditional Jewish notion that obedience to God and performance of good deeds are surely rewarded. Indeed, almost no period of Jewish history could have provided fewer possibilities for affirming the truth of reward and punishment. This was the period called simply, the "sakkanah" (the danger). It was filled with

unbelievably brutal and extensive torture and massacre of the Jewish population following the abortive rebellion of Bar Cochbah and lasted from 135 to 138 C.E. Particularly victimized were the Jewish scholars and teachers, some of whom, like Rabbi Akibah, were the most ardent supporters of the revolt. It seems to have been the extreme brutality of those times which was the decisive causative factor in making Elisha ben Abuyah contemplate apostasy.

The traditions on Aher differ as to what was the decisively crushing event in his life. Some say it was witnessing the tongue of a great rabbi being devoured by a pig on a dungheap -- others say it was the sudden death of someone while performing a commandment. Whatever it was, at that moment all of tradition's claims for a moral equilibrium in the world evaporated. Elisha ben Abuya became from that time on, "Aher." It has been mentioned that these scenes were witnessed by many Jews who did not consequently lose their faith.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the challenge to faith is implicit and powerful in such brutality. For reasons which are, I believe, truly impenetrable, some men's faith is strengthened by the tensions of such times while others find faith an impossible response.¹⁷ All members of the community feel these tensions-- only the heretic is consumed by them.

Elisha ben Abuya lived during the formative period of rabbinic Judaism. The great tanaaites of the first two centuries set the ideological and structural foundations for the next two millenium of Jewish life in the Diaspora. During Aher's life these foundations had not yet been firmly set. The Mishnah, that great compillation which would systematize the conflicting legislation of all the independent rabbis,

was not completed until 200 C.E. The crucial rabbinic concepts of eternal life, the World to Come, and the resurrection of the dead had not yet taken firm rooting in normative Judaism. Still prominent was the biblical view that reward and punishment are worked out in this world and not in some hazy, hoped for World to Come. It was, however, precisely this world which seemed to offer the most convincing refutation of God's benevolent providence.

I am inclined to accept the thesis of Louis Ginzberg that Elisha ben Abuyah was a Sadducee.¹⁸ It would explain why the doctrines of the rival Pharisaic Party would have had little attraction for Elisha. As a Sadducee, he could have been expected to respond more frantically to the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. The Temple in Jerusalem was the symbol and seat of Sadduceean power and its destruction was simultaneously the destruction of Sadduceeism. The establishment of rabbinic academies in Javneh and elsewhere offered new hope to the Pharisees at precisely the moment when all hope for Sadduceean rebirth was being totally crushed.¹⁹ If Aher was indeed a Sadducee it might explain, though hardly justify, the legends which report that he turned in observant Jews to the Roman authorities for punishment. One might easily expect a committed Sadducee to become a quisling. In any event we can at least say that Elisha ben Abuyah's heresy was decisively motivated by the problem of theodicy posed by the destruction of the Temple and the crisis of biblical faith which it provoked.

Closely related in the shaping of Aher's heresy was the problem of transcendental theism. The problem simply stated was, how could the singular, perfect God of monotheism contact an imperfect world? The

rise of Greek thought and particularly Jewish Gnosticism represented a new compelling solution to the metaphysical difficulties of biblical Judaism.²⁰ In a way this was not only a new alternative, but also a new problem. Neither in the Bible nor the Talmud is a systematic philosophic attempt made to deal with cosmology or metaphysics. The structure of the cosmos and the ultimate essence of man and world were all irrelevant categories in the Bible and forbidden categories in rabbinic Judaism. This is made strikingly clear in the Midrash Rabbah, Genesis 1:1.²¹

With growing Hellenistic influence in Judaism, two important (yet essentially arbitrary) assumptions of Greek thought began to receive a larger audience among Jewish intellectuals. They were, first, that change is defect.²² Mutability could not coexist with perfection, yet both were important characteristics of the biblical God. Second, it was assumed that, a radical dualism exists in the world between matter and spirit.²³ The soul -- the ethereal piece of deity in each person -- is good and pure; the body, or matter, was evil and base. The material world was thus nothing more than a prison for the soul, preventing it from ascending through a series of spheres and rejoining the One, pure, immutable source, God, who exists far above and beyond the world and has no contact whatsoever with the affairs of men.²⁴ Only certain select souls have the special saving knowledge (gnosis) which enables them to escape the brutal tyranny of the world, ascend through the Pleroma (the encompassing spheres) and become one with the good God.

Gnosticism had certain obvious attractions to Elisha ben Abuya. The problem of evil was solved by making the demonic material world the source of evil while saving the immutable God as the source of

goodness and grace. A nearly totally transcendental God preserves for the Gnostic system the popular Jewish notion that the cosmos, however broadly defined, is the location of a single benevolent force. It also fits with concrete historical reality in assuming that the earth was a prison, a fallen world and an abode of demonic suffering. It appealed to intellectual elitism in its belief that those with special knowledge would find salvation in spite of the world. Yet all this undermined the entire system of biblical and rabbinic thought. It severed the vital connection between the individual and the community which expressed itself through the halachah, the normative Jewish "path" to salvation. It was the severing of this link and the embracing of this forbidden philosophy that fixed Elisha as Aher.

It must be said in Aher's defense, that within normative Pharisaic Judaism there was almost no outlet for acceptable cosmological speculation. Those who entered upon it always risked heresy. Only the greatest scholars, the men most unshakable in their faith, were hesitantly permitted such intellectual prerogatives. The famous parable about the four great rabbis who entered Paradise is exemplary. The "Paradise" which Ben 'Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher and Akiba entered is probably to be interpreted as speculation on the Gnostic cosmology described above.²⁵ Their experience of the deepest secrets of the structure and nature of heaven was so overpowering that Ben 'Azzai died immediately, Ben Zoma went mad, and Elisha ben Abuyah became a heretic (literally: he destroyed the plants). Only Rabbi Akiba came out unscathed.

There is no agreement among scholars as to the exact meaning of the phrase, "Aher destroyed the plants". The Babylonian Talmud suggests that

Aher saw the mythological figure Metatron seated in heaven and thus became convinced that there were in fact two supreme powers in the world. This heresy is referred to in rabbinic literature as, "The heresy of two powers" (shtey rashuyot). The Jerusalem Talmud, on the other hand, explains the phrase as a reference to the period following the abortive Bar Cochbah rebellion when Aher supposedly went to the different schools and enticed the students away from the study of Torah and into worldly pursuits. All accounts conclude by affirming that Aher was immediately excommunicated by a voice from Heaven, a Bat Kol, which repeated over and again, "Return you backsliding children (Jer. 3:14)--except Aher!"

Elisha ben Abuyah's close relationship to Rabbi Mier more than any other aspect of his life reveals to us the powerful tensions which made him both Jew and heretic. It seems to be a pattern in our study that, in many of the Jewish heretics their heresy is mental and experiential in origin while their Jewishness is deeply visceral and instinctual. So it is with Aher. In matters of ideology and philosophy Elisha ben Abuyah capitulated to Gnosticism. In identity he maintained a continuous struggle with what it meant to be a Jew in his time. The student Mier repeatedly urges the teacher Aher to repent and repeatedly Aher indicates his desire to do so. Yet he is convinced time and again by the Bat Kol that his heresy has put him beyond repentance.

In a certain sense there is justice in the harsh verdict rendered against Aher. During the chaotic times in which he lived, Elisha ben Abuyah failed the normative Jewish community as both intellectual and as leader. Aher rejected rabbinic Judaism at the time it was struggling

to fashion a viable Jewish life for the Diaspora. Moreover, his rejection was cast in terms of the highest wisdom of the age. It also conformed to the concrete historical realities of Jewish life which did not require faith to perceive. As a leader of other Jews he also failed. How could the people continue to cling to their faith when the great Elisha ben Abuyah had lost his. Transforming the respected rabbi Elisha ben Abuyah into the anathamized heretic Aher was one of the only ways the normative Jewish community could defend itself against the threat to its internal solidarity posed by his socially destructive views. The calumny was so great that though it was recorded that Elisha came from a very wealthy home, by the time his daughter was grown she had to go begging for charity to support herself. This could only happen in a community of Jews whose faith was based upon the very same forces which drove Aher to heresy.

The isolation and total rejection of Aher by the rabbis of the tannaitic period in Judaism set a tone which would characterize all periods of Judaism until the Enlightenment. Namely, philosophical speculation was seen as a dangerous and insufficient method of proving the truth of God's revealed will. Only strict obedience to Jewish law as interpreted by approved authorities could help to achieve for the individual all the glowing promises of salvation recorded in the tradition. The philosophic and intellectual impulse as a respectable and self-validating enterprise within Judaism died with Elisha ben Abuyah. For the next eighteen centuries Jewish intellectuals had to hide their philosophic flirtations in the obtuse and allegorical mode of Haggadah or in purposely intricate and subtle commentaries on some sacred text. Even the great Maimonides

was accused of heresy by Abrabanel who thought that his Guide for the Perplexed undermined the doctrine of the divine revelation of the Torah.²⁶ Aher did not have many followers. His heresy was not soon to be repeated. A "fence was built around the Law" to make it safe from such attack. The revealed Law and the community which depended on that Law for its inner stability and outward direction, by their abandonment of all claims to philosophical sophistication, began to prepare themselves for the advent of the Middle Ages.

We are left with the stories of Elisha ben Abuyah, encrusted as they are by the calumny of the generations. The picture of Aher rendered in the midrash, the man slowly riding his horse on the Sabbath with his student Mier walking alongside raising questions of Torah is surely one of the most enduring and powerful images preserved within the entire Jewish experience of the Jewish heretic.²⁷ Aher could not dismount and return. Aher could not cease his study of and struggle with God's law. He rode on beyond the ritual boundary for the Sabbath. In doing so he left behind Mier, the Jewish people, and perhaps the very best part of himself.

The Primary Text, The Heresy of Elisha ben Abuya

Babylonian Talmud Hagigah 146-156.

One of the main sources revealing the heresy of Aher

Our Rabbis taught: Four men entered the 'Garden', namely, Ben 'Azzai' and Ben Zoma, Aher, and R. Akiba. R. Akiba said to them: When ye arrive at the stones of pure marble [Giving the illusion of water], say not, Water, water [I.e., how can we proceed!]. For it is said: He that speaketh falsehood shall not be established before mine eyes. Ben 'Azzai cast a look and died. Of him Scripture says: Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. Ben Zoma looked and became demented. Of him Scripture says: Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it. Aher mutilated the shoots. R. Akiba departed unhurt.

Aher mutilated the shoots. Of him Scripture says: Suffer not thy mouth to bring thy flesh into guilt. What does it refer to?--He saw that permission was granted to Metatron to sit and write down the merits of Israel. Said he: It is taught as a tradition that on high there is no sitting and no emulation, and no back, and no weariness. Perhaps,--God forbend!--there are two divinities! [Thereupon] they led Metatron forth, and punished him with sixty fiery lashes [I.e., he was beaten with 'heated disks or rings strung on a lash' (Jast.). The purpose of the punishment was to show that M. had no more power than others (Tosaf.).] saying to him: Why didst thou not rise before him when thou didst see him? Permission was [then] given to him to strike out the merits of Aher. A Bath Kol went forth and said: Return, ye backsliding children--except Aher. [Thereupon] he said: Since I have been driven forth from yonder world, let me go forth and enjoy this world. So Aher went forth into evil courses. He went forth, found a harlot and demanded her. She said to him: Art thou not Elisha b. Abuyah? [But] when he tore a radish out of its bed on the Sabbath and gave it to her, she said: It is another [Aher]. After his apostasy, Aher asked R. Meir [a question], saying to him: What is the meaning of the verse: God hath made even the one as well as the other? He replied: It means that for everything that God created He created [also] its counterpart. He created mountains, and created hills; He created seas, and created rivers. Said [Aher] to him: R. Akiba, thy master, did not explain it thus, but [as follows]: He created righteous, and created wicked; He created the Garden of Eden, and created Gehinnom. Everyone has two portions, one in the Garden of Eden and one in Gehinnom. The righteous man, being meritorious, takes his own portions and his fellow's portion in the Garden of Eden. The wicked man, being guilty, takes his own portion and his fellow's portion in Gehinnom. R. Mesharsheya said: What is the Biblical proof

for this? In the case of the righteous, it is written: Therefore in their land they shall possess double. In the case of the wicked it is written: And destroy them with double destruction.

After his apostasy, Aher asked R. Meir: What is the meaning of the verse: Gold and glass cannot equal it; neither shall the exchange thereof be vessels of fine gold? He answered: These are the words of the Torah, which are hard to acquire like vessels of fine gold, but are easily destroyed like vessels of glass. Said [Aher] to him: R. Akiba, thy master, did not explain thus, but [as follows]: Just as vessels of gold and vessels of glass, though they be broken, have a remedy, even so a scholar, though he has sinned, has a remedy. [Thereupon, R. Meir] said to him: Then, thou, too, repent! He replied: I have already heard from behind the Veil: Return ye backsliding children-- except Aher.

Our Rabbis taught: Once Aher was riding on a horse on the Sabbath, and R. Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah at his mouth. Said [Aher] to him: Meir, turn back, for I have already measured by the paces of my horse that thus far extends the Sabbath limit [i.e., two thousand cubits (in all directions) from the place where a person makes his abode for the Sabbath, beyond which it is forbidden to go on the day of rest]. He replied: Thou, too, go back! [Aher] answered: Have I not already told thee that I have already heard from behind the Veil: 'Return ye backsliding children'--except Aher. [R. Meir] prevailed upon him and took him to a schoolhouse. [Aher] said to a child: Recite for me thy verse [i.e., the verse which thou hast studied today. The answer thus obtained was considered to have the authority of an oracle.] [The child] answered: There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked. He then took him to another schoolhouse. [Aher] said to a child: Recite for me thy verse! He answered: For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me, saith the Lord God. He took him to yet another schoolhouse, and [Aher] said to a child: Recite for me thy verse! He answered: And thou, that are spoiled, what doest thou, that thou clothest thyself with scarlet, that thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, that thou enlargest thine eyes with paint? In vain dost thou make thyself fair etc. He took him to yet another schoolhouse until he took him to thirteen schools: all of them quoted in similar vein. When he said to the last one, Recite for me thy verse, he answered: But unto the wicked God saith: 'What hast thou to do to declare My statutes' etc.? That child was a stutterer, so it sounded as though he answered: 'But to Elisha God saith'. Some say that [Aher] had a knife with him, and he cut him up and sent him to the thirteen schools: and some say that he said: Had I a knife in my hand I would have cut him up.

When Aher died, they said: Let him not be judged, nor let him enter the world to come. Let him not be judged, because he engaged in the study of the Torah; nor let him enter the world to come, because he sinned. R. Meir said: It were better that he should be judged and that he should enter the world to come. When I die I shall cause [By my prayer.] smoke to rise from his grave. When R. Meir died, smoke rose up from Aher's grave. R. Johanan said: [What] a mighty deed to burn his master! There was one amongst us, and we cannot save

him; if I were to take him by the hand, who would snatch him from me! [But] said he: When I die, I shall extinguish the smoke from his grave. When R. Johanan died, the smoke ceased from Aher's grave. The public mourner began [his oration] concerning him [I.e., R. Johanan] thus: Even the janitor [I.e., of hell] could not stand before thee, O master!

Aher's daughter [once] came before Rabbi and said to him: O master, support me! He asked her: 'Whose daughter art thou?' She replied: I am Aher's daughter. Said he: Are any of his children left in the world? Behold it is written: He shall have neither son nor son's son among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings! (Job 18:19) She answered: Remember his Torah (i.e. his vast knowledge of the Torah) and not his deeds. Forthwith, a fire came down and enveloped Rabbi's bench. (There-upon) Rabbi wept and said: If it be so on account of those who dishonor her, (i.e. the Torah) how much more so on account of those who honor her!

But how did R. Meir learn Torah at the mouth of Aher? Behold Rabbah b. Bar Hana said that R. Johanan said: What is the meaning of the verse, For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the Law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts? [This means that] if the teacher is like an angel of the Lord of hosts, they should seek the Law at his mouth, but if not, they should not seek the Law at his mouth!--Resh Lakish answered R. Meir found a verse and expounded it [as follows]: Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply thy heart unto my knowledge. It does not say, 'unto their knowledge', but 'unto my knowledge'. R. Hanina said, [he deduced it] from here: Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house etc. The verses contradict one another!--There is no contradiction: in the one case Scripture refers to an adult, in the other to a child. When R. Dimi came [to Babylon] he said: In the West, they say: R. Meir ate the date and threw the kernel away.

Raba expounded: What is the meaning of the verse: I went down to the garden of nuts, to look at the green plants of the valley etc.? Why are the scholars likened to the nut? To tell you that just as [in the case of] the nut, though it be spoiled with mud and filth, yet are its contents not contemned, so [in the case of] a scholar, although he may have sinned, yet is his Torah not contemned.

Rabbah b. Shila [once] met Elijah. He said to him: What is the Holy One, blessed be He, doing? He answered: He utters traditions in the name of all the Rabbis, but in the name of R. Meir he does not utter. Rabbah asked him, Why?--Because he learnt traditions at the mouth of Aher. Said [Rabbah] to him: But why? R. Meir found a pomegranate; he ate [the fruit] within it, and the peel he threw away! He answered: Now He says: the Shechinah give utterance? 'My head is heavy, my arm is heavy'. If the Holy One, blessed be He, is thus grieved over the blood of the wicked, how much more so over the blood of the righteous that is shed.

Samuel found Rab Judah leaning on the door-bolt weeping. So he said to him: O, keen scholar, wherefore dost thou weep? He replied: Is it a small thing that is written concerning the Rabbis? Where is he that counted, where is he that weighed? Where is he that counted the towers? 'Where is he that counted?'--for they counted all the

letters in the Torah. 'Where is he that weighed?'--for they weighed the light and the heavy in the Torah. 'Where is he that counted the towers?'--for they taught three hundred halachoth concerning a 'tower which flied in the air'. Yet we have learnt: Three kings and four commoners have no share in the world to come. What then shall become of us? Said [Samuel] to him. O, keen scholar, there was impurity in their hearts.--But what of Aher?--Greek song did not cease from his mouth. It is told of Aher that when he used to rise [to go] from the schoolhouse, many heretical books used to fall from his lap.

Nimos the weaver asked R. Meir: Does all wool that goes down into the [dyeing] kettle come up [properly dyed]? He replied: All that was clean on its mother comes up [properly dyed], all that was not clean on its mother does not come up [properly dyed].

Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 39b.

Another version of the source of Aher's heresy

R. Joseph said: Had Aher interpreted this verse [The promise of reward and long life] as R. Jacob, his daughter's son, he would not have sinned [He interpreted it literally, as referring to this world, and seeing that the promise was not fulfilled turned unbeliever.]. Now, what happened with Aher? Some say, he saw something of this nature. Others say, he saw the tongue of Huzpith the Interpreter dragged along by a swine. 'The mouth that uttered pearls licks the dust!' he exclaimed. [Thereupon] he went forth and sinned.

Midrash Ruth Rabbah VI 4.

Contains variant readings of some Aher stories repeated in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud

R. Meir was sitting and expounding the Law in the School of Tiberias, and Elisha his teacher passed by the street on horseback on the Sabbath. They said to R. Meir, 'Look! Elisha your master is passing by in the street.' He went out to him, and Elisha said to him, 'With what were you occupied?' He said to him, 'With the verse, So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning' (Job XLII, 12). He said to him, 'And what did you say concerning it?' He answered: "'He blessed him" means that he doubled his wealth.' Elisha responded: 'Your teacher, Akiba, did not explain thus, but he explained "And the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" that he was blessed at the end because of the repentance and the good deeds which were to his credit at the beginning.' He said to him, 'And what else did you expound?' He answered, 'The verse, Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof' (Eccl. VII, 8). 'And what did you say concerning it?' He answered, 'I said, A man may purchase merchandise in his youth, and lose thereby, and in his old age he makes a profit on it. Another interpretation: "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof"; a man may learn Torah in his youth and forget it but in his old age it returns to him. These are my interpretations of: "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof."' He answered him:

'Akiba, your master, did not expound so, but he explained, Good is the end of a thing, when it is good from its very commencement. I will give you an example from an incident concerning me personally. My father, Abuyah, was one of the notable men of his generation, and at my circumcision he invited all the notables of Jerusalem, including R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. And when they had eaten and drunk, they sang, some ordinary songs and others alphabetical acrostics. R. Eliezer said to R. Joshua, "They are occupied with their matters [Profane amusements] while we neglect ours." They began therefore with exposition of the Pentateuch, and from the Pentateuch they went on to the Prophets and from the Prophets to the Hagiographa, and the words of the Pentateuch rejoiced as on the day they were given on Sinai, and fire played round them, for were they not originally given on Sinai in fire, as it is said, And the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven?

(Deut. IV, II). [When my father saw this], he said, "Since so great indeed is the power of the Torah, if my son is granted life, I will dedicate him to the Torah." And because his intention was not for the glory of God [His intention was that his son should have similar power, which is regarded as an impure motive] my Torah did not remain with me.'

'And what else did you expound?' [continued Elisha. He answered], 'Gold and glass cannot equal it' (Job XXVIII, 17). He said, 'And what did you say concerning it?' He answered: 'It refers to the words of the Torah which are as difficult to acquire as vessels of gold, and as easily lost as vessels of glass.' He responded: 'Your master Akiba did not expound thus, but he expounded: Just as broken vessels of gold and glass may be repaired, so a scholar who loses his learning may return to it.' At this point, Elisha said to Meir, 'Turn back.' He asked, 'Why?' He answered, 'Up to this point is the Sabbath limit [Beyond which one is not permitted to walk on the Sabbath]. He asked, "Whence do you know?" He answered, "From the footsteps of my horse which has already traversed two thousand cubits." Said Meir to him, "You possess all this wisdom and you will not return?" He responded, "It is not within my power," He asked, "Why?" He answered: "I was riding on my horse, and was passing by the College [the Jerushalmi reads, "The Holy of Holies"] on a Day of Atonement which fell on a Sabbath, and I heard a voice break forth and say, "Return, O backsliding children (Jer. III, 14). Return unto Me, and I will return unto you (Mal. III, 7)--all except Elisha b. Abuyah, who knew My Power, and yet rebelled against Me!"'

How was it that Elisha acted in this manner? [Became an apostate.] They related that once he was sitting and studying in the plain of Gennesare [on the banks of the sea of Galilee] and he saw a man who ascended to the top of a date-palm and took the dam with the young [Transgressing the command of Deut. XXII, 6.] and descended safely. At the conclusion of the Sabbath, he saw another man who ascended the tree and took the young but let the dam go and when he descended a snake stung him and he died. Whereupon he said: It is written, Thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, but the young thou mayest take unto thyself, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days (Deut. XXII, 7). Where is the goodness, and where the length of days for this man? But he was unaware that R. Akiba had publicly expounded 'That it may be well with thee' in the world which is entirely good,

'And that thou mayest prolong thy days' in the world of eternity.

Some say that it was when he saw the tongue of R. Judah the Baker [One of the ten martyrs of the Hadrianic persecution] in the mouth of a dog. He thereupon said: If this is the reward of the tongue which toiled all its days in the Torah, how much more so the tongue which has not that knowledge and has not toiled! And he said: Since that is so, there is no reward for the righteous, and no resurrection of the dead.

Others say that the reason was that when his mother was pregnant with him she passed by idolatrous temples, and she smelled the dish, and they gave her some of it to eat, and she ate it, and it spread through her like the venom of insects.

After some time Elisha b. Abuyah was taken ill, and they came and told R. Meir, 'Elisha your master is sick.' He went to him and appealed to him, 'Return in penitence.' He said to him, 'Will they accept me after all this?' He responded, 'Is it not written, Thou turnest man to contrition (Px. XC, 3), even when one's life is crushed.' At that, Elisha b. Abuyah burst into tears and died. And R. Meir rejoiced and said, 'It appears that my master passed away in the midst of repentance.' And when they buried him, fire came to consume his grave. They came and told R. Meir, 'The grave of your master is aflame,' and he went and spread his garment over it, and said to him, 'TARRY THIS NIGHT in this world which is all night, AND IT SHALL BE IN THE MORNING, IF THE GOOD ONE WILL REDEEM THEE, HE WILL REDEEM THEE. IT SHALL BE IN THE MORNING refers to the world which is all good. IF THE GOOD ONE WILL REDEEM THEE, the GOOD ONE is the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said, The Lord is good to all (Ps. CXLV, 9). BUT IF HE WILL NOT REDEEM THEE, THEN WILL I REDEEM THEE: AS THE LORD LIVETH, LIE HERE TILL THE MORNING,' and the fire subsided. R. Meir's disciples said to him, 'Master, in the World to Come, if they will say to you, "Whom do you desire, your father or your master," what will you answer?' He answered, 'First my father and then my master.' They said to him, 'And will they heed your request? [To give Elisha a place in Heaven] He answered, 'Is there not a Mishnah to this effect? The case of a scroll may be saved together with the scroll, and the case of phylacteries together with the phylacteries. Elisha will be saved by the merits of his Torah.'

After some time the daughters of Elisha came to beg alms before our Teacher. He quoted, Let there be none to extend kindness unto him; neither let there be any to be gracious unto his fatherless children (Ps. CIX, 12), whereupon they [Either Elisha's daughters, or perhaps R. Judah's disciples] said to him, 'Master! Regard not his actions, regard his learning.' At this Rabbi wept, and ordered that they should be given maintenance, and said, 'If one whose Torah was not for the glory of God produced such [Either, such disciples, the reference being to R. Meir (Y'A.); or, such children, Rabbi recognising nobility of character in his daughters (M.K.)] how much more so he whose Torah was for the glory of God.'

Mishnah Arot 4:20

(This further shows that Aher's opinions were well known and could not be removed from the tradition after he became a heretic)

Elisha ben Abuyah said, If one learn as a child, what is it like? Like ink written on new paper. He that learns as an old man, what is it like? To ink written on blotted paper.

Babylonian Talmud Mo'ed Katan 20a

(This passage also shows how, before his apostasy, Elisha was a respected arbitor of Jewish Law.)

There was the case of the father of R. Zadok who had died at Ginzak, and he was not informed till after three years. He [thereupon] came and asked of Elisha b. Abuyah and the elders that were with him and they told him to observe seven [days] and [up to] thirty, and when R. Ahiyya's son died in the Diaspora, he [too] sat on his account seven and [observed mourning up to] thirty.

Avot de Rabbi Nathan Chapter 24

(It is a tribute to Aher that despite his apostasy, his teachings were so well known and highly regarded that they were included in this famous collection of rabbinic sayings)

Elisha ben Abuyah says: One in whom there are good works, who has studied much Torah, to what may he be likened? To a person who builds first with stones and afterward with bricks: even when much water comes and collects by their side, it does not dislodge them. But one in whom there are no good works, though he studied Torah, to what may he be likened? To a person who builds first with bricks and afterward with stones: even when a little water gathers, it overthrows them immediately.

He used to say: One in whom there are good works, who has studied much Torah, to what may he be likened: To lime poured over stones: even when any number of rains fall on it, they cannot push it out of place. One in whom there are no good works, though he studied much Torah, is like lime poured over bricks: even when a little rain falls on it, it softens immediately and is washed away.

He used to say: One in whom there are good works, who has studied much Torah, to what may he be likened? To a cup that has a base. But one in whom there are no good works, though he studied much Torah, to what may he be likened? To a cup that has no base: as soon as the cup is filled it overturns, and whatever was in it spills.

He used to say: One in whom there are good works, who has studied much Torah, to what may he be likened? To a horse that has a bridle. But one in whom there are no good works, though he has studied much

Torah, to what may he be likened? To a horse that has no bridle: when one mounts it, it throws him off headlong.

He used to say: When one studies Torah as a child, the words of the Torah are absorbed by his blood and come out of his mouth distinctly. But if one studies Torah in his old age, the words of the Torah are not absorbed by his blood and do not come out of his mouth distinctly. And thus the maxim goes: "If in thy youth thou didst not desire them, how shalt thou acquire them in thine old age?"

He used to say: Like gold vessels, the words of the Torah are hard to acquire, and like glass vessels they are easy to wreck, as it is said, Gold and glass cannot equal it, neither shall the exchange thereof be vessels of fine gold (Job 28:17): Scripture compares gold to glass--even as gold vessels can be mended after they have been broken, and glass vessels cannot be mended when they are broken unless they are restored to their original state.

And how interpret Neither shall the exchange thereof be vessels of fine gold? This says: If one toils over the words of the Torah and carries them out, his face shines like fine gold; but if one toils over them and does not carry them out, his face darkens like glass.

He used to say: One may learn Torah for ten years and forget it (all) after two years. How so? For example: If for six months one neglects to review, he then says of the unclean "It is clean" and of the clean "It is unclean." If for twelve months he does not review, he then confuses the Sages with one another. If for eighteen months he does not review, he forgets the treatise headings. And after saying of the unclean, "It is clean," and of the clean, "It is unclean," after confusing the Sages with one another, after forgetting the chapter headings and treatise headings, he sits and keeps quiet in the end. And of him said Solomon, I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thistles; the face thereof was covered with nettles, and the stone wall thereof was broken down (Prov. 24:30 f.): for once the wall of the vineyard falls, the whole vineyard is destroyed.

He used to say: If one makes his fellow carry out some commandment, Scripture accounts it to him as though he had done it himself, (as it is said, Only take heed to thyself and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw . . . but teach them to thy sons, and thy sons' sons (Deut. 4:9).)

A parable is told; to what may this be likened? To the following: A king of flesh and blood snared a bird and gave it to one of his servants. He said to him: "Take care of this bird. Now, if thou art careful with it, well and good; otherwise I shall have thy life for it." This is what the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: "The words of the Torah which I have given to you, if you keep them, well and good; otherwise, I shall have your life for it"--as it is said, Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes saw . . . but teach them to thy sons; and it says, For it is no vain thing for you; because it is your life (Deut. 32:47).

Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah VII. 7.

(More material, some repetitive, showing how deeply affected Aher was by the experience of seeing the righteous suffer.)

BETTER IS THE END OF A THING THAN THE BEGINNING THEREOF (VII, 8). R. Meir was sitting and expounding in the House of Study of Tiberias, when his teacher, Elisha, passed in the street, riding a horse on the Sabbath. It was told R. Meir, 'Behold, Elisha, your teacher, is passing [riding a horse] on the Sabbath.' He went out to him, and Elisha asked, 'With what were you engaged?' He answered him, 'With the verse, So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning (Job XLII, 12).' [How did you explain it?' he asked,] and he told him, '"Blessed" means that He doubled his wealth.' Elisha said to him, 'Not so did your teacher Akiba explain it; but "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning" means that He blessed him for the merit of the repentance and good deeds which were his from his beginning.' R. Meir asked, 'And how do you explain, BETTER IS THE END OF A THING THAN THE BEGINNING THEREOF?' He inquired, 'What have you to say on it?' He replied, 'You have, e.g., the man who acquires a stock of goods in his youth and loses money on it, but in his old age he makes a profit out of it. Another illustration of BETTER IS THE END OF A THING THAN THE BEGINNING THEREOF: You have a man who begets children in his old age and they survive. Another illustration of BETTER IS THE END, etc.: You have a man who commits evil deeds in his youth but in his old age performs good deeds. Another illustration of BETTER IS THE END, etc.: You have the man who learns Torah in his youth and forgets it, but in his old age he returns to it; that is an instance of BETTER IS THE END OF A THING THAN THE BEGINNING THEREOF.' Elisha said to him, 'Not so did your teacher Akiba explain it; but his interpretation was: Good is the end of a thing when it is good from its beginning. So it happened with my father, Abuyah, who was one of the great men of his generation. When he came to arrange for my circumcision, he invited all the eminent men of Jerusalem, and all the eminent men of the generation, among them being R. Eliezer and R. Joshua. After they had eaten and drunk, some recited songs and others alphabetical acrostics. R. Eliezer said to R. Joshua, "They are occupied with what interests them, so shall we not occupy ourselves with what interests us?" They began with subjects connected with the Pentateuch, then with the Prophets, and after that with the Hagiographa. The words were as joyful as when they were given from Sinai and fire surrounded them; for were they not originally delivered from Sinai with fire, as it is said, The Mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven (Deut. IV, II)? My father thereupon remarked, "Since the might of the Torah is so great, should this child survive to me I will dedicate him to the Torah." Because his intention was not for the name of Heaven, my study of the Torah did not endure with me. What do you say is the meaning of the verse, Gold and glass cannot equal it (Job XXVIII, 17)--what have you to say on it? R. Meir answered, 'These are the words of the Torah which are as difficult to acquire as vessels of gold and glass.' He said to him, 'Not so did your teacher Akiba explain it; but his inter-

pretation was: as vessels of gold and glass can be repaired if broken, so can a disciple of the Sages recover his learning if he has lost it.'

Elisha then remarked, 'Turn back.' 'Why?' R. Meir asked. 'Because this is the Sabbath limit.' 'How do you know?' 'By the hoofs of my horse [which tell me that he] has already gone two thousand cubits.' R. Meir exclaimed, 'You possess all this wisdom and yet you do not repent.' He replied, 'I am unable.' 'Why?' He said to him, 'I was once on my horse riding behind the Temple on the Day of Atonement which occurred on the Sabbath, and I heard a Bath Kol crying out, "Return, ye back-sliding children (Jer. III, 22), Return unto Me, and I will return unto you (Mal. III, 7), with the exception of Elisha b. Abuyah who knows my might and yet rebelled against Me!"

How did this happen to him? He once saw a man climb to the top of a palm-tree on the Sabbath, take the mother-bird with the young, and descend in safety. At the termination of the Sabbath he saw a man climb to the top of a palm tree and take the young but let the mother bird go free, and as he descended a snake bit him and he died. Elisha exclaimed, 'It is written, Thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, but the young thou mayest take unto thyself; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days (Deut. XXII, 7). Where is the well-being of this man, and where is the prolonging of his days!' He was unaware how R. Akiba explained it, viz. 'That it may be well with thee' in the World (to come) which is wholly good, 'And that thou mayest prolong thy days' for the world which is unending. Some say that it was because he saw the tongue of R. Judah the baker in the mouth of a dog and exclaimed, 'If it happened so with a tongue which laboured in the Torah all its days, how much more so will it be with a tongue which does not know nor labour in the Torah!' He went on to say, 'If this is so, there is no reward for the righteous nor is there a resurrection of the dead.' Still others say that it happened because when his mother was pregnant with him, she passed by idolatrous temples and smelled (the offerings). They gave her some of that kind (of food) and she ate it, and it burned in her stomach like the venom of a serpent (and affected him).

Some time later Elisha b. Abuyah became ill, and it was told R. Meir that he was sick. He went to visit him and said, 'Repent.' He asked, 'Having gone so far will I be accepted?' R. Meir replied, 'Is it not written, Thou turnest man to contrition (Ps. XC, 3), i.e. up to the time that life is crushed out (the penitent is accepted)?' Then Elisha b. Abuyah wept and died. R. Meir rejoiced, saying, 'My master seems to have departed in a mood of repentance.' When, however, they buried him, fire came to burn his grave. They went and told R. Meir, 'The grave of your master is ablaze!' He went out, spread his tallith over it, and said to him, 'Tarry this night (Ruth III, 13) in this world which is wholly night, And it shall be in the morning, if he who is good will redeem thee, he will redeem thee (ib.). What means "And it shall be in the morning"? In the world which is wholly good. [What means] "If he who is good will redeem thee"? It alludes to the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said, The Lord is good to all (Ps. CXLV, 9). But if He [i.e. God] will not redeem thee, then will I [Meir] redeem thee, as the Lord liveth; lie down until the morning' (Ruth loc. cit.). The fire was then extinguished.

R. Meir's disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, in the World to Come should you be asked, "Whom do you want, your father or your teacher?" what would you say?' He replied, 'First my father and then my teacher.' They said to him, 'And will they listen to you? [If you were to beg for your teacher, Elisha, to be received in view of his evil deeds.] He answered them, 'Is there not a Mishnaic teaching that [in the event of a fire on the Sabbath] the case of a book may be saved with the book and the case of phylacteries together with the phylacteries! So may Elisha be saved through the merit of his knowledge of Torah.' Eventually Elisha's daughters came to beg alms from our Master [Rabbi Judah the Prince], who quoted, Let there be none to extend kindness unto him, neither let there be any to be gracious unto his fatherless children (ib. CIX, 12). Said they, 'Rabbi, consider not his actions but his Torah!' Thereupon Rabbi wept and decreed that they were to be supported, and exclaimed, 'If a man [like Elisha] whose study of Torah was not for the name of Heaven has reared such daughters, how much more so will it be with him whose study of Torah is for the name of Heaven!'

FOOTNOTES--ELISHA BEN ABUYAH

1. Alexander Heidel. trans. The Babylonian Genesis. Chicago, Phoenix Books, 1963. p. 11.
A. Marmorstein. The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God. London, Oxford University Press, 1927. p. 160.
2. Alexander Heidel. trans. The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels. Chicago, Phoenix Books, 1963. pp. 137-223. This section of the book contains valuable comparisons between the Babylonian and the Biblical attitudes towards death and the afterlife.
3. Samuel S. Cohon. "The Unity of God--A Study in Hellenistic and Rabbinic Theology" (Hebrew Union College Annual XXVI). Cincinnati, 1955. p. 425.
4. George Foot Moore. Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era. 3 vols. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1966. p. 382. This work is the undisputed classic on this entire period.
A. Marmorstein. op.cit., p. 173.
5. Samuel S. Cohon. op.cit. p. 427.
Nowhere in the Bible is this moral calculus more decisively stated than in Deuteronomy 11:13-21. Cf. Isaiah 2:12-17 and Amos 5:18-20.
6. Solomon Schechter. Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology. New York, Schocken Books, 1936. pp. 219-241.
7. George Foot Moore. op.cit. p. 375. Cf. Psalm 106.
8. Richard L. Rubenstein has written an especially perceptive essay on this very problem, "God's Omnipotence in Rabbinic Judaism" in his fine book, The Religious Imagination: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Jewish Theology. New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968. pp. 117-137.
9. Samuel S. Cohon. op.cit. pp. 428-438.
10. The full impact of Hellenistic thought on the Jews is dealt with in Victor Tcherikover. Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews. Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1966. and Saul Lieberman. Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary. Vol. XVIII. New York, 1950.
11. An awesome work of tremendous literary and scholarly depth is Hans Jonas. The Gnostic Religion. Boston, Beacon Press, 1963. (2nd Ed.) pp. 42-48.

Footnotes--Elisha ben Abuyah (cont'd.)

12. Ibid. pp. 241-264.
13. This theme is particularly evident in the writings of the Qumran community on the shores of the Dead Sea. Especially relevant is the scroll of "The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness." vis. Theodor Gaster. The Dead Sea Scriptures. New York, Doubleday, 1964. pp. 293-326..
14. The numerous difficulties confronting the scholar who would investigate Aher's life and thought are ably outlined in an essay by Rev. R. Travers Herford, "Elisha ben Abuyah" in Essays in honour of the Very Reverend Dr. J. H. Hertz. London, Edward Goldston (edited by I. Epstein, E. Levine and C. Roth), 1942. pp. 215-225.
15. There is a worthwhile fictional account of the life of Elisha ben Abuyah which develops his enigmatic personality much further, Milton Steinberg's As A Driven Leaf. New York, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1939.
16. Herford. op.cit. p. 216.
17. A modern version of Aher's heresy--of the ultimate problem of evil in the world represented in the work of Richard L. Rubenstein. His most cogent statement of the impossibility of retaining a theistic ethical system in After Auschwitz, New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966.
18. Louis Ginzberg, "Elisha ben Abuyah" in Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. V. New York: Funk and Wagnall Company, 1903. pp. 138-139.
19. Heinrich Graetz. History of the Jews. 6 vols. Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1967. Vol. 2. pp. 324-5, 334-5.
20. Lieberman. op.cit. pp. 100-115.
21. Bereshith Rabbah I. 10:
 IN THE BEGINNING (BE-RESHITH) GOD CREATED. R. Jonah said in R. Levi's name: Why was the world created with a beth? Just as the beth is closed at the sides but open in front, so you are not permitted to investigate what is above and what is below, what is before and what is behind. Bar Kappara quoted: For ask now of the days past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth (Deut. IV, 32): you may speculate from the day that days were created, but you may not speculate on what was before that. And from one end of heaven unto the other (ib.) you may investigate, but you may not investigate what was before this. R. Judah b. Pazzi lectured on the Creation story, in accordance with this interpretation of Bar Kappara.

Footnotes--Elisha ben Abuyah (Cont'd,)

22. Robert M. Grant. Miracle and Natural Law in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Thought. Amsterdam, North Holland Publishing Company, 1952. pp. 29-40.
Both Plato's world of Forms as well as Aristotle's "Unmoved mover" are concepts which indicate this Greek idealization of immutability.
23. For parallels in rabbinic thought to this dualistic cosmology as well as a description of the great penetration of Gnostic themes in tanaaitic thought see Alexander Altmann's essay, "Gnostic Themes in Rabbinic Cosmology" in Essays in honour of the Very Reverend Dr. J. H. Hertz. I. Epstein, E. Levine and C. Roth eds. London, Edward Goldston, 1942. pp. 19-32.
24. Jonas. op.cit. pp. 42-86. Cf. Robert M. Grant. Gnosticism: An Anthology. London, Collins, 1961. and William Kingsland. The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom in the Christian Scriptures. London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1937.
25. Ginzberg. op.cit. p. 138-39.
26. Alvin Jay Reines. Maimonides and Abrabanel on Prophecy. Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1970.
27. A man deeply influenced by the story of Aher was Isaac Deutscher. He recounts his childhood flirtations with Aher in a marvelous essay, "The non-Jewish Jew" in The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. pp. 25-41. Deutscher is the only writer I have come across who has tried to expose the central importance of the Jewish heretic in the history of both Judaism and the world. His initial insights have been the impetus for this work.

CHAPTER FIVE

URIEL ACOSTA (1590-1640): The Heretic as Martyr

"We do not live a good life if we observe a lot of empty ceremonies,
but only if we live according to Reason."

----Uriel Acosta, An Example of a Human Life

Oftentimes the soul of a man becomes most clear when we ask what he did in his twenties. By the time that Uriel Acosta turned thirty: he had abandoned a high church office in his native town of Oporto, Portugal; he had left the affluent and secure life of the Portugese upper-middle class; he had emigrated to Amsterdam with his widow mother, sister and two brothers in order to live as a Jew; he had fought the Amsterdam Jewish authorities bitterly and unsuccessfully over principled issues of faith; he had written a treatise in his defense which caused him to be imprisoned, fined, and excommunicated, and his book publically burned. By the time Uriel Acosta was forty-five he had been excommunicated by the Jewish community a second time, disowned and ignored by his family and friends, spat upon in the street, and flogged in public for his heresies. By the time Uriel Acosta was fifty-seven he had blown out his brains with a pistol.

In all the most decisive biographical fact was that Acosta was a Marrano. The nature of this enigmatic Jewish-Christian community which flourished on the Iberian Peninsula from the 14th through the 16th centuries is a topic of intense scholarly debate.¹ Whatever the final verdict may be on the history of the Marranos their specific importance for our study is that they provided an exceptionally fertile matrix for heresy. As a Marrano, Uriel Acosta was an outsider to both the normative

Jewish and Christian communities. The path he chose towards salvation reflected this unique historical context. Leo Strauss describing the impact of Acosta's Marrano past writes, "The connection with Judaism was still strong enough to inhibit unquestioning life within the Christian world. On the other hand the connection was too tenuous to make life possible within the Jewish world."² This sense of anomie was present in many Marranos but only in Acosta did it become the goad for the creation of a new definition of Jewish identity in which he hoped to finally feel at home. His struggles prefigured both the Enlightenment and the great philosophic system of Baruch Spinoza. In view of Spinoza's universal fame and respect, the nearly total obscurity of this man who truly paved the way for him is particularly lamentable. It is for this reason, among others, that Uriel Acosta is included in our study and the great philosopher of the Netherlands is not.³

A unique concatenation of personality and historical conditions drove this tormented soul from Catholicism to biblical Judaism and from there to Deism and finally suicide. Throughout this journey of life and thought there is revealed the tension between inherited traditions and personal experience: which ultimately characterizes the Jewish heretic.

One of the basic principles animating the thought of Uriel Acosta is clearly drawn from the traditions of biblical and rabbinic Judaism. It is the belief that truth is proved by a thing's antiquity and not its novelty. The biblical account of Creation serves to draw the history of the Jewish people back to the very beginnings of time. The rabbis constantly justify seemingly new developments in Jewish law by citing

biblical proof texts which refute any thought that they were actually stimulating innovative and unprecedented changes in Judaism. Even Christianity did not base its claims on the unprecedented novelty of Jesus' death and resurrection, but rather on the fact that his entire mission had been prefigured in the books of the Old Testament prophets.

This same impulse to see truth in antiquity decisively animates the development of Acosta's thought. He rejected the New Testament for the Old Testament. He rejected all "later additions" to the Pentateuch⁴ in favor of the more ancient, and therefore truer, Mosaic law. He then rejected the Mosaic law when he found in the Law of Nature an even more ancient legal system.

Uriel Acosta was a complex and brilliant thinker and from the very beginnings of his consciousness, the inherited traditions fought a losing battle against another truth form which had intruded into his thought. It was radically new and was rooted in his own, rather than the Jewish, experience. Acosta came to believe that, that which had greatest universality had greatest truth. A law could only be true if it was innate and common to all men. This was a truth form validated by human reason. The truth forms of biblical and rabbinic Judaism as well as Christianity had always been validated by divine revelation. For the two major faith systems of the West, that which has closest contact with God has greatest truth. Never were the Israelites or the rabbis or the early Christians prepared to fundamentally doubt the truth of God's revelations simply because the vast majority of other men and nations held that some other truth form was more common and universal. The most any medieval theologian

could admit was that reason was "the handmaiden to faith". Thomas, Philo, Saadia, Maimonides, Abelard, and Anselm all toyed with reason as an additional validation of God's revealed will; never did they come to see it as a totally self-sufficient and independent source of knowledge and truth against which one could test God's will.

Indeed the early period of Acosta's thought resembles medieval scholasticism in its insistence on the "reasonableness" of God's revelation to Moses. He could not imagine how God, the source of reason, could have revealed to Moses anything that would contradict reason. It was this assumption of a totally rational revelation that enabled Acosta to reject out of hand all post-Mosaic developments in Judaism. Especially noxious to Acosta in this regard was the rabbinic doctrine of the immortality of the soul. He considered it a "foul lie which the rabbis, not without hope of their own advantage, had invented." For the rabbis, and particularly for Samuel da Silva who vilified Acosta in print, denial of this central doctrine of normative rabbinic Judaism merited immediate excommunication. Acosta's reply to da Silva blatantly confirmed everyone's suspicions that Acosta had become a kofer b'eikar, a denier of an essential principle of faith.⁵

The rejection of all non-Pentateuchal phrases of the Jewish experience was represented by the old heresy of the Karraites.⁶ There is even some evidence to support the thesis that Acosta actually had been influenced in Portugal by some Karraites who had fled there to escape Turkish oppression.⁷

Just as the Old Testament had been used as a weapon against the

New; the Pentateuch used as a weapon against the rabbis; now the "natural law" (or law of Nature) became the final weapon against the Pentateuch and all revealed religion. The natural law was determined and defined solely by "right reason"; it posited as the only axiom that men should live together in peace and harmony. Mutual love the natural result of natural law--hatred, conflict and confusion were the sorry legacy of man-made law. Religions based on revelation had a decisive effect on community solidarity, because they turned brother against brother and shattered social peace. This was a new and unprecedented heresy but it must be seen as the painful last resort of a man who intensely wanted to be a Jew against a community that intensely wanted him to be a heretic.

Strauss correctly observes that Acosta's, "critique of the Mosaic Law took on its essential meaning only as a result of the experience gained in conflict with his Jewish opponents. It is in fact only after this experience that he rejects the Mosaic Law as a product of the human mind."⁸

The natural law was a Sinai-like event for Acosta. Indeed it represented a law that was older than the revelation at Mt. Sinai. It therefore undercut the authority of all the laws which came after the creation of nature. All authority based upon revelation as contained in Scriptures became instantly illegitimate. It was for John Locke to fully develop the political implications of the natural law. In his Apologia for the rebellion of 1688 we see for the first time the revolutionary implications of natural law theory in dismantling the theory of divine right of kings, and beyond that the entire medieval world view.⁹

In Acosta's thought the thrust was still against the Jewish experience as opposed to the world at large. The Jewish impulse for salvation was transformed into an impulse for freedom. The Jewish God was transformed into the natural law. The "saving community" became irrelevant as did the categories of redemption and salvation. The personal freedom of the rational man became a supreme goal.

So in Acosta's thought experience triumphed totally over tradition shattering the tension between the two which had characterized his earlier thought. In the end all that remained was recta ratio. This may perhaps be explained by the fact that the changes in Acosta's thought were not brought about by a powerful personal experience of deity as, for example, in the case of Paul. Uriel Acosta became a heretic in his head--Paul on the road to Damascus became a heretic in his guts.

Jewish thinkers of the Enlightenment like Moses Mendelssohn tried to reconstruct a viable replacement for the severely crippled halachah which had once linked the individual Jew to the saving community but had now surrendered to Reason as the indispensable "path" towards freedom. This link, loosened by Acosta and shattered by those who followed him was broken forever. It would never be reforged. The problems and promise of modernity had begun to flood in upon the chosen ones of God.

The constant and bitter tension between Acosta and the normative Dutch Jewish community began in 1624 with his published attack on the immortality of the soul and ended in 1647 with his suicide. This tension is, I believe, inexplicable outside the tradition of Jewish heresy. Acosta could have abandoned his conflict with the

Jews in favor of associating with like-minded men in the Diest movement then taking root in Holland. But he did not. The Amsterdam Jews could have written him off as an irrelevant lunatic instead of living their brightest ideologue to refute him in print. But they did not. Twice he was excommunicated. Twice he recanted and was accepted back into the community. The second time he was forced to endure the spectacle of a public flogging and other degradations, and he accepted all this from a community whose base of authority he had come to reject in toto! These last humiliations proved to be too much for soon after this second recanting of his heresy Acosta killed himself with a pistol. Beside his crumpled body lay the freshly penned manuscript of An Example of a Human Life [the complete text of which appears at the end of this chapter]. Even in death Uriel Acosta continued his war with the Jews. Throughout it all one senses a thoughtful, deeply troubled soul straining to provoke, to arouse, to change the very community which stigmatized him and yet to which he felt deeply and primarily drawn. One also senses a community of Jews, straining with all its might to resist that provocation and change. Perhaps the Amsterdam Jews of the mid-seventeenth century were too uncertain about the implications of their new found freedoms to abandon so swiftly the inherited traditions of the past. Perhaps the memories of the Inquisition were still too fresh and too frightening to permit toleration of one whose suspicious and novel views might embarrass them in front of the good Christian citizens of Amsterdam. At the end of the next century Jews would be handling civil freedom with greater ease and their memories of past terrors would be

substantially blurred. In those times Acosta's heresy would be the groundwork for a new branch of normative Judaism. In his time he was too early or, his fellows too late. One thing is clear, a man like Acosta whose life energies were spent in continuous tension and struggle with the Jews and Judaism of his day cannot be written out of the Jewish experience. Nor, it must be said, can he be included in its normative center. Yet Acosta, (and all the other pieces in our puzzle) does stand within a positive Jewish tradition. It is the tradition of the Jewish heretic. Men and women whose marginality in an already marginal group both defines and dynamizes the Judaism of their own age. Without the Jewish heretics "klal yisroael" would not know where it ended and where the rest of the world began.

Even the smallest are at the most extreme periphery of a great circle points to the center.

What follows as the primary text portion of this chapter is the autobiography of Uriel Acosta. An Example of a Human Life was translated from the German of Carl Gebhardt (the minister who preserved this document) by Helen Lederer. It initially appeared in mimeographed form as part of the series, Readings in Modern Jewish History. Ellis Rivkin ed. Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College, 1958.

Translation of Primary Text, The Heresy of Uriel Acosta

An Example of A Human Life

I was born in Portugal, in the city of the same name, which usually is called Porto. My parents belonged to the nobility. They were descended from the Jews, who in that country had once been forced to convert to Christianity. My father was a devout Christian and at the same time a gentleman of strict integrity who held honesty higher than anything else. In his house I was educated in accordance with our rank. There was no lack of servants, there was a noble Spanish horse in the stable for my father was a master in the art of riding and I followed his example from my early youth. After I had acquired all the arts suitable for young men of rank, I studied law. I had a highly emotional nature and was so much inclined to pity that I could not keep back the tears if I heard talk of another's misfortune. My sense of honor was so deeply ingrained that I feared nothing more than an offense. There was nothing ignoble in my character but I was not free of anger if there was just cause for it. Therefore, I abhorred conceited and insolent men wholeheartedly and always took the side of the weaker party.

I have, in the course of my life, suffered unbelievable things for the sake of religion. According to the custom of that country I was brought up in the Roman-Catholic religion; and as I was, until the years of my adolescence, very much afraid of eternal damnation, I endeavored to keep all the commandments scrupulously. I read the Gospels and other religious books, studied the apologetic literature, and the more I brooded over these books the more difficult the problems seemed to me. Finally

I fell into deep confusion, anxiety and depression. Sorrow and misery overwhelmed me. It seemed impossible to me to confess my sins according to the Catholic custom in order to get absolution, and impossible to fulfill all the commandments. So I despaired of my salvation, if it could only be achieved in that manner. However, because it was hard to give up a religion to which I had been accustomed to from the cradle and which had taken deep roots by my belief in it, there arose in my heart a doubt (I was then 22 years old) that maybe there was less truth in all the tales about a future life, doubt whether the belief in this was compativle with reason, as reason again and again asserted many things which were quite contrary to that belief. After this was called into doubt, I became restive within and decided that whatever the truth might be, this was not the way which could lead me to salvation. At that time I was, as I said, a student of law. When I was 25 I obtained a church office, the post of treasurer of a cathedral.

As I was unable to find peace in the Roman-Catholic religion and as I longed for a religion which would give me the support I desired, I studied the books of Moses and the Prophets, for I was well aware of the great debate going on between Christians and Jews. I found there many things which were in direct contradiction to the New Testament, and what was said about God [in the Old Testament] seemed less difficult. Besides, Jews as well as Christians believed in the Old Testament while only the Christians believe in the New Testament. Believing finally the words of Moses, I decided to obey the Law because he asserted that he had received it all from God while he was simply the mediator. (So one deceives children.) Since there was no possibility of practicing that religion in Portugal, I decided to leave the land of my fathers and move to another country. I did not hesitate to quit my church office without regard to

the profit and honors that go with it in Portugal. I also left my beautiful home which my father had built in the best district of the town. So we boarded a ship under the greatest peril (for descendants of Jews are not allowed to leave the country without special royal permit, my mother, I, and my brothers to whom I had conveyed in brotherly Love my newly-won convictions on religion - a hazardous action which could have ended badly for me, so great is the danger of talking about such questions in that country. We landed finally in Amsterdam, and in order to fulfill the Law we immediately fulfilled the commandment regarding circumcision.

After a few days I already discovered that the customs and institutions of the Jews were not at all in accordance with the prescriptions of Moses. If the Law, however, must be observed as scrupulously as it demands itself, then it was wrong of the so-called sages to invent so many things which deviate entirely from the Law. I could not be silent; I even believed that I was doing something pleasing in the eye of God if I freely and openly defended the Law. The Jewish sages of today have retained their customs as well as their vicious character; they fight stubbornly for the sect and the institutions of the abominable Pharisees, not without any eye to their own advantage, as has been said of them justifiedly by others: to take the places of honor in the synagogue, to be greeted with respect on the market place. They would not permit me to deviate even in the minutest detail from their rules; I was to follow scrupulously in their footsteps in everything. Otherwise they threatened me with the ban and complete excommunication in religious and secular matters. However, since it would have hardly behooved a man who had given up his country and all exterior advantages for the sake of liberty to be intimidated by such threats, and since under such circumstances it would have been neither

right nor just nor manly to submit to men who did not even have any legal authority, I decided rather to take everything upon myself, but to adhere to my opinion. So I was excommunicated, and even my brothers who had formerly been my pupils passed me on the street and did not dare to greet me out of fear of those men.

I decided to write a book to vindicate my cause and to prove from the Law itself the invalidity of the Pharisaic tradition and observance, and the incompatibility of their traditions and institutions with the Law of Moses. While working on the book it happened (I must tell the whole story simply and faithfully) that after long deliberation I agreed firmly with the opinion of those who hold that the reward and punishment mentioned in the old Law are to be understood as happening in this world, who do not assume a life to come and the immortality of the soul. Aside from other reasons, I supported my argument by the fact that the Mosaic Law is completely silent about these matters and promises only this-worldly reward or punishment to those who observe or transgress the commandments. My enemies were jubilant when they heard that I had arrived at this opinion; for they thought that they would now find sufficient support with the Christians, because their faith is based on the New Testament in which express mention is made of eternal salvation and eternal punishment, and they therefore believe in and recognize the immortality of the soul.

To prevent me from publishing my work and to turn Christian opinion against me, they published, before my book was printed, a pamphlet under the title On the Immortality of the Soul written by a physician. In that pamphlet the author vilified me freely as an adherent of Epicurus - at that time I thought little of Epicurus and, on the basis of unjust

reports, I expressed myself unthinkingly on that philosopher whom I had not read and who was remote from my interests. However, after I had read the judgments of some friends of truth, and after I had become acquainted with what he really taught, I am sorry that I once called such a man foolish and nonsensical. I still have no sufficient judgment about him because I do not know his writings. They said that whoever denies the immortality of the soul has not far to go to deny the existence of God himself. Their children, incited by the rabbis and their parents, gathered on the street and shouted curses after me and annoyed me with vilifications of all kinds, calling me heretic and apostate. Sometimes they gathered in front of my door, threw stones, and did everything to disturb me so that I would not even have peace in my own house.

When that pamphlet appeared I immediately wrote a pamphlet in my defense, in which I attacked the concept of immortality very strongly, and in passing pointed out many things in which the Pharisees deviate from Moses. When the pamphlet was published the Jewish elders and deputies denounced me to the city authorities. They declared that I had written a book in which I denied the immortality of the soul, and in which I not only had attacked them but had undermined the Christian religion [as well]. Upon their denunciation I was arrested but released after eight to ten days against bail. The judge imposed a penalty on me. I was sentenced to a fine of 300 fl. beside the loss of the books.

Later, in the course of time, as experience and the passing years reveal many things and change a man's judgment (as I said, I may speak freely, for why should not a man speak freely, in the face of death, who so to speak make his Will, in order to bequeath to humanity the meaning of life and [to render] a true example of human suffering) it became

doubtful to me whether the Mosaic Law can really be considered the Law of God, for there are many points that speak against it, or even forced me to assume the contrary. At last I became convinced that the Law of Moses [was not revealed by God], that it is only a human invention like numberless others. Many things in it, namely, are contrary to natural Law; and God, the creator of Nature, can not possibly have contradicted himself, which would have been the case, had he really given man commandments which were against Nature.

After I had come to this conclusion I said to myself: (Oh, that such an idea never had entered my head!) What good will it do if I continue all my life to exist in this manner, excluded from the community of those priests and that people, and I a stranger in the land, with no contact with its citizens, not even knowing their language? It will be better if I return into their community, follow their rules if they want it that way, playing as one says, the monkey among monkeys.

Out of this consideration I returned into their community, revoking my statements, and signed what they wanted me to sign. Fifteen years had passed since I had been separated from them. A cousin of mine was the mediator in this agreement.

A few days later, a boy, the son of my sister who lived in my house, denounced me for disobeying the dietary laws and other things proving that I was no Jew. This denunciation led to a new bitter attack on me. The cousin, who, as I already have stated, had mediated the agreement, thought that my actions might lead to reproaches against him, and as he was very proud and conceited, and besides very ignorant and insolent, he incited an open attack on me, brought all my brothers on his side, and tried by every means to bring about the complete destruction of my honor, my fortune, and

consequently my life. He broke up my intended marriage - I was a widower at that time. He caused one of my brothers who had my fortune in deposit to withhold it from me and destroyed the existing business connection between us, which at that moment did immeasurable harm to my affairs; in short, he was the most embittered enemy of my honor, my life, my fortune. Side by side with this, so-to-speak, domestic war there was a public war from the side of the rabbis and the people who again began to persecute me with their hatred and perpetrated so many infamies against me that I conceived a justified disgust against them.

In the meantime, something new happened. I had, by chance, a conversation with two men who had come to Amsterdam from London, one an Italian, the other a Spaniard, both Christians, and not of Jewish origin. They told me of their distressed condition and asked me for advice concerning conversion to Judaism and admission to the Jewish community. I dissuaded them from this step, told them they should remain what they were and that they did not know what yoke they would be putting on their necks. I requested them not to inform the Jews of the conversation, which they promised. These scoundrels betrayed everything to my dear friends the Pharisees, from whom they expected a sizable reward for this.

Immediately the elders of the synagogue called a meeting, the rabbis were furious, the angry mob shouted: Crucify him, crucify him! I was called before the council of the elders, I was informed in muted and sad tones of all they had against me, as if it were a matter of life and death, and finally they told me that if I was a Jew I had to submit to their judgment; otherwise I would be excommunicated again. Oh you excellent judges who can judge so well to do me harm; but when I needed your judgment to protect me against an act of violence then you were not judges, only

the paid servants of the arbitrariness of another. Do you call this justice and demand that I obey your decision?

Then they read the sentence to me: I was to come to the synagogue in mourning garb, a black candle in my hand, and recite certain prescribed, very debasing sentences before the congregation, in which my crimes were described as crying to high heaven. Then I should let them whip me in public with a scourge or a stick, and thereafter to lie stretched out on the threshold of the synagogue and let all people step over me and besides I was to fast on certain days.

I was boiling mad, I felt burning anger pervade my whole being. But I controlled myself and replied simply that I could not fulfill such demands. When they heard my answer, they decided to excommunicate me again from the community and not satisfied with that many of them spit at me when they passed me on the street, and the children, taught by their parents, did the same. They did not stone me because they lacked the power to do that.

This fight again lasted seven years, a time of unbelievable suffering for me. Two fronts fought against me, the people and the relatives who sought my degradation in order to take revenge on me. They gave no peace until they had pulled the carpet from underneath my feet. They said among themselves: He won't do anything until he is forced, and forced he must be. When I was sick, I lay alone. When some other ill befell me, they welcomed it as something desirable. When I told them to appoint an arbitrator from their midst to judge between us, no answer. To complain about this to the authorities, as I tried to do in the beginning, was very difficult. It meant long drawn-out lawsuits, many delays, many adjournments. My adversaries said often: "Submit! We are all priests;

you must not believe or fear that we will deal dishonorably with you. Only say, at last, that you are ready to do all we demand of you and leave the rest to us, and we will arrange everything as it is right."

And although just that was what was questionable, and although such an enforced submission and readmission was a great dishonor for me, I conquered myself in order to finish the matter, in order to see the end of it, firmly resolved to accept and bear anything they wanted. I thought, if they demanded dishonorable and shameful things it would vindicate even more the justice of my stand against them, and it would then be brought out into the open what their attitude towards me was like and whether they were honorable and trustworthy men. And indeed, it came out into the open how mean and abominable the character of that people is, which deals with men of honor as if they were common slaves. "All right," I said, "I will do everything you will demand."

Now listen to me carefully, all who have a sense of honor, insight, and humanity, listen and consider carefully the sentence they executed against me, private citizens, subjects of a foreign power, without any wrong on my part. I entered the synagogue which was filled with men and women; for they had gathered to see the spectacle. At the appointed time I ascended the wooden platform in the middle of the synagogue, which is destined for the preacher and other ceremonial uses, and read in a loud voice the document they had composed which contained my confession: that I deserved to die a thousand deaths for what I had done: the violation of the Sabbath, disloyalty to the faith of Judaism which was so serious in character that I had even dissuaded others from converting to Judaism. In order to atone, [indicated that] I was willing to submit to their judgment and fulfill all they would demand. Besides, I promised not to

commit such sins and crimes again.

After reading this I left the platform and the president of the congregation whispered into my ear that I should step into a corner of the synagogue. I stepped into a corner. The sexton told me to take my clothes off. I bared my body to the belt, wound a scarf around my head, took my shoes off and spread out my arms, taking hold of a sort of column. The sexton bound my hands with cords to that column. The the chazan came and with a leather scourge gave me thirty-nine strokes on the sides according to the tradition; for the Law says not to give more than forty strokes and as these people are so very conscientious and scrupulous they take care not to commit a sin by miscounting. A psalm was sung while the scourging was going on. After this I sat down on the ground. The preacher or sage (how ridiculous are the affairs of men!) came to me and released me from the ban and so the gates of heaven were open to me which had been barred with the strongest bolts before, keeping me out.

I dressed and went to the threshold the synagogue where I stretched out. The sexton supported my head. Then all of them stepped over me when leaving the synagogue, lifting one leg and stepping over my legs. All stepped over me, young men and old (no monkey could offer a more disgusting spectacle or more ridiculous gestures). After that business was gotten over with and nobody was left, I rose and the sexton cleaned the dust off me (let nobody say that they did not treat me honorably, for although they scourged me first, they lamented me and stroked my head) and I went home.

Oh you most shameless of men! Accursed priests who said that nothing ugly was to be expected from them. "We, beat you?" they said. "Far be it from us to think of such a thing!" Let everyone who has heard this now judge what kind of spectacle this is, to have an old man, of good

family, of modest nature, stand half naked in a public assembly, before men, women and children, and be scourged upon the command of judges, judges who are rather contemptible slaves than judges. Let him consider the pain of lying at the feet of the worst enemies, people who had done me so much harm and injury, lie down at their feet and let them step on me. Let him consider this (which is still worse, an unnatural thing, a horrible abomination, the sight of which makes the heart shudder): my own brothers, sons of the same father and mother, who grew up with me in the same house, did everything in their power to achieve this aim, unmindful of the love I had always shown them, unmindful of the many benefits they had received from me. Instead of gratitude I harvested only disgrace, injury, evil, so inexpressibly vile that I am ashamed to talk of it.

My adversaries, who are below contempt, assert that my punishment was just, that they had to make an example to prevent others from daring to rebel against their commands and write against the sages. You scoundrels capable of every lie! How much more right would I have to punish you, to make an example of you so that you would never dare to act like that again towards men who love the truth and hate lies, who are lovers of all humanity. You are enemies of humanity because you consider all nations as no better than animals and think of yourself as far superior. You flatter yourself with your own lies, while in reality you have nothing to be proud of, except perhaps that you are homeless and despised by all peoples and hated because of your ridiculous and peculiar customs by which you seek to keep yourself separate from the rest of humanity. If you wished to excel by a simple life and justice, then woe to you, for obviously many others are much better in this than you. Therefore I say: I would have had the right, if I had been able, to avenge myself on them

for the suffering and the cruel injustice which made my life a hated burden to me. For what man with a sense of honor could willingly bear a life of dishonor? Somebody said it well: Either to live honorably or to die honorably is the duty of a nobleman. My cause, however, is so much more than theirs, as truth is higher than lies. They fight for falsehood in order to catch men and make them slaves, while I fight for truth and the natural freedom of man, for whom it is more fitting to lead a life of human dignity, free from superstition and empty ceremonies. I admit that it would have been better for me if I had been silent from the start, if I had accepted existing conditions without protest. That is the way to act for those who want to live among men, if they do not want to suffer at the hands of the ignorant mob or be suppressed by unjust tyrants. Everybody thinks only of his own profit, tries to suppress the truth, lays snares for the weak, and tramples justice with his feet. And yet, after I was incautious enough, deceived by a false religion, to enter into a fight with them, it is better to go down to honorable defeat or at least to die without the pain which in men of honor is the penalty of base flight or foolish surrender.

My adversaries argue that they have the support of the multitude. "You, a single individual, have to give in to us, the many." My friends, it may be advantageous for the individual to give in to the many, in order not to be torn to pieces by them, but from the fact that something is profitable it does not follow that it is also beautiful. It is certainly not beautiful to withdraw from the field of battle in disgrace and see violence and injustice triumphant. Accordingly you must concede that it is manly and praiseworthy to resist the thrusts of the insolent with all one's might, lest the scoundrels who profit from their villainy get even more insolent from day to day. True, it is fine and worthy of a just and

and noble man to be meek among the meek, a lamb among lambs. But it is foolish and brings only disgrace and blame to show the gentleness of a lamb in a fight with lions. If it is counted among the greatest virtues to die for one's country, because the fatherland is a part of our own self, who can say it is not beautiful to die for one's own honor, which is our deepest inner self, without which we can not go on living, if we do not want to wallow in the mud of our own greed like the dirtiest swine.

True, the wretches who mock me derive their right only from numbers. They say: "What can you, a singly individual, do against so many?" It pains me to admit that I have been crushed by your numbers, but at the thought and at your words my anger flares up and I would shout it out to the world: "Bad, it is bad, to show kindness to evil, insolent, stubborn, obdurate men." Only one thing I say: "I lack the power."

I know that my adversaries repeat this again and again, to destroy my reputation among the ignorant: "he has no religion, he is neither Jew nor Christian, nor Mohammedan." Consider, Pharisee, what you are saying. For you are blind, and even if you are filled to overflowing with malice you run like a blind man against a wall. Tell me, please, what would you have said if I were a Christian? Obviously, you would have said that I am the vilest of idolaters and would get my punishment, together with Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher of the Christians, from the true God whom I had deserted. If I were a Mohammedan everybody knows the names you would call me. So I could never escape your tongue, my only way out would be to fall down and kiss your miserable feet, I mean your vile and abominable institutions.

Enlighten me, I beg you: Do you know no other religion than the three above named, the last two of which you declare to be false, not reli-

gions but apostasies? Now you admit that you do know one other religion which is really a religion and by which men can find favor in the eyes of God. If, namely, all nations, with the exception of the Jews (for you must always keep yourselves aloof so that you won't be in touch with the common and the base) if they keep the seven commandments which, as you say, were kept by Noah and the others who lived before Abraham, that suffices for their salvation. So there is, according to your own belief, a religion which I may confess even though I am descended from Jews. I beg you, therefore: Let me join that other crowd, or, if you will not give me permission, then I will take that liberty myself. O blind Pharisee, who has forgotten that law, although it is the original one, the one which was there from the beginning and which will last forever. You talk all the time only of other laws which came into being later and which except for your own, you condemn yourself, which however is condemned by others, whether you will it or not, on the grounds of common reason which is the true norm of that natural law you have forgotten and which you would like to buy in order to put your heavy and abominable yoke on the neck of men and rob them of sound reason, making them like insane men.

Since we have come to this point, I want to stop here for a moment and not pass over in complete silence the excellence of that original law. I say that this law is common to all men, that they are born with it in their hearts because they are men. It is a bond of love between all men, not leading to discord which is the root and cause of hatred and the worst evils. It teaches us to live rightly, distinguishes between right and wrong, between ugly and beautiful. All that is good in the Mosaic or any other law is included in the natural law in perfect form. Even a small

deviation from that natural norm causes dissension, then discord arises and all peace is lost. If the deviation is great, who can enumerate the terrible evils and abominations which owe their origin and growth to this falsification? What is the best commandment in the Mosaic law or any other law concerning human society, causing men to live happily together and get along well with each other? Certainly the first is to honor one's parents, and then not to steal another's goods, be it his life, his honor, or other things useful for life. I ask: Is not all of this contained in the natural law? By nature we love our children, children love their parents, the brother his brother, the friend his friend. By nature, we strive to preserve all our possessions intact and hate those who disturb our peace, who want to rob us of our possessions by violence or cunning. From this natural inclination it follows obviously that we understand that we must not do ourselves what we condemn in others, and behold, here we have without effort the main point of every law. Regarding food, we will leave this to the physicians; they are best qualified to tell us which foods are salutary for us and which are harmful. Concerning the rest of the ceremonial, the rites, commandments, sacrifices, tithes (a real fraud, so that an idler may live on the work of others), we can not sufficiently lament that we got into so many labyrinths by human wickedness. The true Christians who recognized this are worthy of every praise for abolishing all this and retaining only what is morally necessary for a just life. We do not live a good life if we observe a lot of empty ceremonies, but only if we live according to Reason.

Some will say, perhaps, that the Mosaic and the Christian law contain something more sublime and perfect, namely the commandment to love our enemies, a commandment unknown to the Natural Law. My answer to

this is as I said above: The moment we deviate from Nature and want to invent something better, there is discord and the peace is disturbed. What good does it do if I am commanded to do something that is impossible, that I cannot fulfill? No good can result from this, only deep anxiety when we see that we are incapable by Nature of loving the enemy. Certainly it is not quite impossible by Nature to do good to one's enemy (which can be done also without love) because man, in general, is naturally inclined to charity and pity. We can therefore not deny at all that such perfection is included in the Natural Law.

Let us see now what evils follow if one deviates very much from the Natural Law. We said that there is a natural bond of love between parents and children, brothers, and friends. This bond is dissolved and destroyed by the positive law, be it the law of Moses or any other law, if it commands that the father, brother, husband, friend kill or betray his son, brother, mate or friend for the sake of religion. Such a law demands something greater and more sublime than human nature can fulfill, and if it were fulfilled it would be the worst crime against Nature; for Nature rejects all that with horror. But w-y do I have to mention this: if men have been insane enough to burn their own sons as sacrifices to the gods they worshipped in their supidity, deviating so far from that natural norm that they forgot the natural feelings of a father. How much better would the world be if men had remained within the barriers of Nature and had never invented such abominations. What shall I say of the inexpressible horrors which men in their wickedness have inflicted on their fellow men? There would be nothing of this kind if men would only listen to the voice of Nature which knows nothing of all this. How many are there who despair of salvation, who suffer martyrdom

for the sake of all sorts of beliefs? Who lead a miserable life, lacerating their bodies in the solitude of deserts, far from human society, tortured continuously by the anguish of their soul, fearing that they will in future suffer all the torments which they suffer already in the present? A false religion, invented by men in their wickedness, has brought these and innumerable other evils on humanity. Am I not myself one of the many shamefully deceived by these impostors and ruined by believing them?

They say, if there were no other law but the Natural law and men did not believe in a life to come and did not fear eternal punishment, what would keep them from doing evil all the time? You have invented such things (perhaps there is still something else behind this, for it is to be assumed that you wanted to put the burden on others for your own profit), similar to those who think up ghosts or horrible words to frighten children, until the little ones give up their own will sadly and reluctantly and submit. Your carryings on are just as ridiculous and can frighten none but children and fools. The others who see through you only laugh at you. I shall abstain from talking here about the justifiability of such a fraud. You yourself, who invent such things, have among your regulations also, that one must not do anything evil in order to achieve a good. Perhaps you don't consider it evil to lead people into heavy prejudice by lies, and to give the weak in mind the opportunity for deeds of madness? If there were just a trace of true religion or fear in you, you would undoubtedly be very frightened men; for you have brought so much misery over the world, have caused so much discord among men, have committed so many injustices and abominable crimes that you did not even shrink from inciting parents against their children and children against their parents.

One thing I would like to know: If you invented all this because of the wickedness of men, in order to keep them on the path of virtue by imaginary horrors because it would be hard to force your will upon them otherwise, have you ever considered that you are likewise wicked, always doing evil, always harming others, without pity for anyone? I can see you getting angry because I dare to ask such a question; I can see each of you protesting zealously that his actions are just. There is none among you who does not call himself a pious, charitable, truthful and just man. However, you are either lying when you praise yourself like that, or you are falsely accusing all men of wickedness whom you want to save with your imaginary horrors and punishments. It is blasphemy to depict God as a cruel executioner and torturer and you are abusing men when you tell them that they are born to such pitiable sufferings, as if everybody had not enough misery in this life. I admit that there is much malice in man, I acknowledge that myself, and you are my witnesses, for there is exceedingly great malice in you. Would you otherwise have been able to invent such fantasies? But try to find the most effective cure to heal this human sickness without making man even more ill. Put away the ghosts which anyway impress only children and stupid fools. If the sickness is incurable, however, cease lying; do not like stupid physicians promise a cure which you cannot effect. Be content to make just and reasonable laws, reward the just, punish the wicked. Liberate all who suffer in-justice from violent men, so that they need not complain that there is no justice on earth, that there is none who assists the weak against the strong. In truth, if men were only to follow Reason and live in accordance with human nature then all would love their fellowmen and help each

other to carry their burdens. Every man would do all in his power to relieve the misery of his fellow man, or at least would not harm his neighbor without reason. If people act differently then it is against human nature, and many things happen because men invented various laws deviating from Nature, and because one incites the other by evil deeds. There are many who pretend to be exceedingly God-fearing men and deceive trusting hearts by using the mantle of religion to catch all they can. They may justly be compared to the thief who sneaks in by night to rob people while they sleep. Usually just these men are glib with words like: "I am a Jew, I am a Christian, you can trust me, I won't deceive you." Oh you wicked beasts. A man who does not say anything like that, who just professes himself a man, is much better than you are. For if you won't trust him as a man, better beware of him. But who will protect himself against you, who, wrapped in the mantle of a pretended sanctity come like the thief in the night through loopholes to fall on the unsuspecting sleeper and strangle him?

One thing I wonder at more than anything, and it is indeed amazing: How can the Pharisees living among Christians have so much liberty that they can even execute judgments? I can say in truth: If Jesus of Nazareth whom the Christians hold in such reverence would want to preach in Amsterdam today, and the Pharisees wanted to scourge him again because he fought their traditions and accused them of hypocrisy, they could do it without interference. This is certainly a shame and must not be tolerated in a free state that boasts that it protects the freedom and peace of its inhabitants. And if a man has no defender and no avenger, it is not surprising if he seeks to defend himself and to take revenge for a wrong done to him.

This is the true story of my life. I have told you what part I played in my futile and wandering life on this unimportant stage. Judge me justly, oh sons of men, judge me without passion and according to the truth, for this alone behooves men who are truly men. If you find something worthy of pity then recognize and lament the sad lot of men which is also your own.

To complete the tale - my name, when I was a Christian in Portugal, was Gabriel a Costa; among the Jews - oh that I never had come to them - I was called with a small alteration, Uriel Acosta.

FOOTNOTES---URIEL ACOSTA

1. The classic works in this field are: B. Netanyahu. The Marranos of Spain. New York, The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966. and Fritz Baer. A History of the Jews in Christian Spain. 2 vols. Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society, 1966. Also valuable for an economic analysis of the Marranos are: Ellis Rivkin. Marrano-Jewish Entrepreneurship and the Ottoman Mercantilist Probe in the Sixteenth Century. (mimeo) Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College, 1967. and by the same author, "The Utilization of Non-Jewish Sources for the Reconstruction of Jewish History." in Jewish Quarterly Review Vol. 48. October, 1957.
2. Leo Strauss provides one of the very few fine scholarly articles on Acosta in his book, Spinoza's Critique of Religion. New York, Schocken Books, 1965. p.53.
3. Strauss realizes the important connection between Acosta and Spinoza by including him as one of the three central thinkers paving the way for Spinoza's great system. Heinrich Graetz also compares and contrasts these two men in his masterpiece, History of the Jews. 6 vols. Philadelphia, the Jewish Publication Society, 1967. pp. 92-3,97.
4. Though even here one can observe how far Acosta had strayed from traditional rabbinic vocabulary. According to normative Pharisaic Judaism the entire Bible is a perfect, unitary revelation from God. It is therefore completely devoid of any sequential chronology. Thus the dictum, ain mukdam oom'uchar ba-torah ("there is no early or late in the Torah").
5. Frederick de Sola Mendes. "Uriel Acosta" in Jewish Encyclopedia. Vol. I. New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1904. p.167. Graetz. op.cit. p.59.
6. Raphael Mahler. The Karrarites. (Hebrew) Merhavva, Siphrah Poalim, 1949. Leon Nemoy. "Early Karraism" in Jewish Quarterly Review. Vol. 40. 1947. pp.307-315.
7. Sanford Shepard. "The Background of Uriel da Costa's Heresy--Marranism, Scepticism, Karaism" in Judaism. Vol. 20. Number 3. Summer, 1971. pp.341-350. esp. p.348.
8. Strauss. op.cit. p.62.
9. This is seen most clearly in his Apologia for the Rebellion of 1688.
10. Graetz. op.cit. pp.60-65. Mendes. op.cit. pp.167-8.

CHAPTER SIX

LENNY BRUCE: Leonard Alfred Schneider died for your sins

"There is only what is!"

-----Lenny Bruce

PROLOGUE

- September 29, 1961: BUSTED FOR POSSESSION OF NARCOTICS, Philadelphia
- October 4, 1961: BUSTED FOR OBSCENITY, Jazz Workshop, San Francisco
- September, 1962: BANNED IN AUSTRALIA
- October 6, 1962: BUSTED FOR POSSESSION OF NARCOTICS, Los Angeles
- October 24, 1962: BUSTED FOR OBSCENITY, Troubador Theatre, Hollywood
- December, 1962: BUSTED FOR OBSCENITY, Gate of Horn, Chicago
- January, 1963: BUSTED FOR POSSESSION OF NARCOTICS, Los Angeles
- April, 1963: BARRED FROM ENTERING ENGLAND, London
- April, 1964: BUSTED FOR OBSCENITY, Cafe Au Go-Go, New York City
- October, 1965: DECLARED A LEGALLY BANKRUPT PAUPER, San Francisco
- August 3, 1966: DEAD. Los Angeles.

Jews do not take well to prophets. They never have. Even in the days when God seemed so close at hand and his miracles seemed so consistently available -- even then Jews mumbled words of anger and indignation against shabby messengers who came out of the wilderness to remind them that hypocrisy, cant and oppression have no place in God's world. If the prophet's message of chastisement is particularly severe or if the people are particularly fat and complacent, or if they are particularly sensitive to what "others" will say, then the prophet may well fear for his life. People have only so much tolerance for the truth. Then the prophet dies. His words can become written down and sanctified and made safe for the children of those whose lives he came out of the wilderness to change. Separated from our own lives by over twenty eight centuries, Amos indeed looks like a prophet. Separated from our own lives by less than six years, Lenny Bruce still looks like a heretic.

In the late fifties and early sixties, a new recruit was added to the growing underground counter-culture in America. Lenny Bruce, born Leonard Schneider, created with his coarse biting wit a new battlefield in the war that Ginsberg, Dylan, Goodman, Parker and the others had begun with their music, poetry and verse. Like them he had declared total war upon the humanly bankrupt, oppressive hydra of American culture. Lenny Bruce was a founding father of what has come to be the "Woodstock Nation."¹

Lenny Bruce was a Jew. It was as a Jew that Bruce found his most incisive and vital idiom in attacking American culture. It was as a Jew

that he found "a comprehensive metaphor for his loneliness and constantly deepening pain."² And it was as a Jew that Lenny found the basic values which were to animate his life. It was as a heretic that that life impressed itself into both the American and Jewish experiences.

It may seem that the Jewish heretic Bruce in the mid twentieth century looks more American than Jewish. The fact is that during this period of time the same could be said of the Jewish community as a whole. The fruits of the Emancipation had either ripened or rotted, depending on one's perspective. The tensions in American society had become by and large the tensions in Jewish society. Yet for Lenny, Jewishness is a kind of life-line. He pulls and pulls on it and uses it to drag himself away from both America and Americophile Jews. For Bruce, the assertion of ethnic identity became a revolutionary act.

As Americanized as he may have been, Lenny does manifest the deep tensions which we have seen as characteristic of Jewish heretics in other times. He is furiously angry and in great tension with the American Jewish community for abandoning the religion of Moses in favor of a cheap Danish-modern, neon lit, plastic coated "goyish" imitation. He is consumed by the tension between tradition and experience. The traditions of repression of sexual openness and freedoms in both religious traditions, especially Catholicism, contradicted his own personal experiences of many forms of uninhibited, highly gratifying forms of sexual expression. This tension is ultimately resolved on the side of experience. Lenny rejects organized religious forms, American society, and retreats to a bitter subjective hedonism. He is the classic pneumatic individual. He steers his own ship -- alone. He

is a self-made man. Lenny was a student of society with no teachers. He was harassed and impoverished by his enemies. It is no wonder that only "Lenny" could survive the busts, the divorce, the illnesses -- not Lenny, the American; not Lenny, the Jew; not Lenny, the intellectual; just Lenny -- himself.

All this being stated, it must nevertheless be emphasized again that of all the tenuous predicates to his name appended by friend and foe, the most important, the most vital in defining the parameters of his life and work was, Jew. The Jewishness of Lenny Bruce is the most consistently misunderstood and unappreciated element in the volatile and enigmatic chemistry of this tragic man,³ one of the greatest of the contemporary Jewish heretics. It is to an appreciation of Lenny's Jewishness that we now turn.

Lenny Bruce grew up in Brooklyn and he grew up during the Depression.⁴ The milieu provided for him as a child and adolescent was deeply, though secularly, Jewish. Growing up without a father and being raised by his mother and aunt who ran a school for strippers, Lenny's Jewishness was of the coarse, lumpenproletariat, hustler variety which characterized an entire generation of lower-East-side-Jewish-comics. His "significant others" were junkies, hookers, black jazzmen, hustlers and social deviants of all sorts. The Jewish hustler had to think fast on his feet, keep his cool, and fight with his mouth not his fists. It was this street sense that Bruce drew on for the free-association monologues which carried his nightclub act. In fact, his philosophy of life which admiring intellectuals extravagantly compared to Swift, Rabelais and Twain was really nothing more than this lower middle class Jewish street sense writ large.⁵

"There is no right or wrong -- only need." Or, "There only is what is." ⁶ The Brooklyn Jewish underground was Lenny's womb and first stage. In the "bits" and banter he shared with friends on Saturday nights, Bruce found a platform from which he would flail away at America without being flailed in return. In this, Albert Goldman has an important insight that Bruce functions as a modern-day Shaman, that primitive tribal exorciser of demons who taunts evil, brings it out in the open and yet does not die and who, thereby, makes visible and public the systems of symbolic fantasy that are present and operative in all members of the community. ⁷ "Bruce has indeed become the shaman: he has taken on himself the role of exorcising the private fears and submerged fantasies of the public by articulating in comic forms the rage and nihilistic savagery hidden beneath the lid of social inhibition." ⁸ This may well be Bruce's essential function, but the metaphor shaman is, I think, untenable. Unlike a shaman, Bruce was not at the respected and venerated center of society, but rather on its lunatic fringe. Secondly, the shaman taunts evil but never becomes evil himself. Bruce did not exorcise demons, he became one in the eyes of society. Thirdly, the shaman's power and prestige comes from the fact that he does not die in his work. Bruce does. In his suicide by an overdose of heroin any hint of shamanism is destroyed. The man who taunts the community demons and lives may well be called a shaman or prophet or mystic. For the man who taunts them and is ostracized and destroyed, there is only one appropriate label and that is -- heretic. ⁹

Lenny's Jewishness gave him a deep sense of shame and self-hate. As he surveyed the American scene, he became consumed by a sense of

real inferiority. The "goyim could really duke;" the blacks were "super-schtoppers;" the intellectuals could analyze and think systematically, but the Jews, all they could do was screw people out of money and act "charming" when they were being kicked around. He had a bit about how the Jews got into show business in which the Jew is so "charming" to the Egyptian Taskmasters -- it becomes a great act and gets them out of work.¹⁰ Clearly he saw show business, the one field where he received status, as a degenerate, grabby life, filled with second rate phony people.

The sense of shame and self-hate Bruce felt at being a Jew and performer led him at first to romanticize the WASP America he wanted so desperately to enter and then, seeing that such entrance was both impossible and undesirable, he fashioned out of his Jewishness a powerful weapon of attack.

There are many references to Lenny's early idealization of "goyish America" in his autobiography. He describes how the radio led him into a fantasy world in which Faye Bainter, the mother of Andy Hardy, represented the ideal mother.¹¹ Her clean pressed apron and clear diction was the absolute and total antithesis of the heavy dialect and filthy sweatiness of his mother ("whose breath always smelled from onion rolls")¹² and Aunt Mema. His early dreams were powerful fantasy escapes into a rural Americana which never touched North Bellmore, Long Island.

"I dreamed of living over a barn, seeing the stars through a cracked-board room, smelling the cows and horses as they snuggle and nuzzle in a shed below, seeing the steam come up from the hay in the stable on a frosty morning, sitting at a table rich with home-canned goods with seven other farm hands, eating home fries, pickled beets, fresh bacon,

drinking raw milk, laughing, having company in the morning, having a family, eating and working and hanging out with the big guys, learning to use Bull Durham."¹³

The period of naive romanticism soon ended in bitter disillusionment. Lenny ran away from home at sixteen to a farm. But the rural life was as dirty, bankrupt and hollow as the life he had run away from in Brooklyn. Lenny got another lesson in the violence and debasing inhumanity of WASP America in the Navy during World War II. When the big war ended, Bruce's private war with America -- that object of love and hate -- began in earnest. His unsuccessful marriage to a "beautiful redheaded shiksa," Honey Bear Harlowe, marked the destruction of another Jewish fantasy about the erotic gentile world. Bruce began to use bitter and incisive bits like Jewish vs. Goyish (in which he derogates gentile taste and boorishness)¹⁴ and Religious, Inc. (in which the Pope, Billy Graham and Oral Roberts are portrayed as cheap shill men).¹⁵ The relatively harmless effects of marijuana are contrasted in his act to the physically destructive results of alcoholism -- the trademark of "Goyish society."¹⁶ Bruce even speaks of his free usage of "dirty" words and liberated sexuality as stemming from his Jewishness. Yiddish, says Bruce, has no "dirty" words (e.g. shmuck is German not Yiddish).¹⁷ Furthermore it is Christianity, and especially Catholicism, which has introduced into Western culture the perverse notion that the body is evil and intercourse is at most a necessary evil. In a bit he says, "Jews don't understand that "fuck" is a dirtier word than "shit" because while both priests and rabbis shit, only one of them fucks!"¹⁸ It is understandable why he reserves such special ire for those assimilated Jews who still

pant after the affectations of WASP America that he has come to despise. (e.g. his bits on Reformed Rabbis--"Quench your flaming Yartzeit candle!" and the kid home from Fort Loeb). Bruce's constant use of Yissish terms which were obviously strange to most of his audience must be seen, I believe, as a powerful bludgeon fashioned for use against gentiles, and assimilated Jews whom he had truly come to hate. His derision is at times more than obvious. Bruce has a hilarious bit about two gentiles who are constantly asking, "whatsit-¹⁹ mean, whatsitmean, whatsitmean?" Bruce's Yiddishisms serve to distance the performer from an audience which he despised for their hypocrisy, cant, and viciousness, yet whose money bought his time, and thoughts, and guts. (Often he would actually threaten to urinate or defecate on the audience in a fit of not too contrived rage.)

Lenny's Jewishness provided him with a built in, extra personal explanation for the calumny and harassment he was forced to endure. His frequent references to the unending persecution suffered by Jews for the charge of killing Christ are more than bits in an act. They are pained personal confessions. Bruce even stated that his harassment by the police and the courts was the result of gentile anti-²⁰semitism.

Lenny's persecution and unswerving honesty made him a hero to liberal intellectuals, many of whom rallied to his defense during his long ordeal in the courts.²¹ In a real sense, they were his heroes in return. His Jewishness really did give him a keen respect for the intellectual whose humorless, didactic critiques attacked the same beast which he flailed away against on stage. But they thought with their minds--Lenny Bruce thought with his guts. Their critique was

books and essays--Lenny Bruce's critique was his life.

Outrage and iconoclasm were Lenny's weapons in life. They were both deeply shaped by his Jewishness. The outrage could only emerge in a man who had a deep and naive trust in the truth and value of basic religious ethical codes (e.g. his bit on Christ and Moses) and then lived to see them perverted by the very institutions charged with preserving those values and ideals (e.g. Religions Inc.). His is the outrage of the insider. Bruce stands vis a vis the Jewish community in the 20th Century America as Soren Kirkegaard²² stood vis a vis the Christian community of 19th Century Denmark. Their critique is not of the essential irrelevance or insufficiency of their respective religious traditions, but rather the hypocrisy of the religious institutions which have betrayed those values which gave them their initial life. Bruce cries out for Jews to be consistent with the values of Moses, not to reject them. When Lenny Bruce calls upon people to be their own best selves, he inevitably relates to them in a religious dimension. Bruce's iconoclasm could only be pushed to its searing extremities by someone for whom obedience to accepted social taboos had no functional utility. What real rewards for social respectability could be held out to a lower middle class Jewish hipster. He was, by both class and instinct, a social deviant. But he was also the "Yid"--always outside of everything, observing it all. Yet he was paid for his deviance. Lenny senses the paradox. In a way, he was finally consumed by it. In his headlong dash to break a taboo that no one would laugh at or pay to see--Lenny Bruce was lost. He flung his coarse "kikeishness" against a decadent "goyishness". In the collision that resulted Lenny Bruce expended

his last and ultimate weapon--his life. On August the sixth nineteen hundred and sixty six in a final puking fit, with a needle in his arm, "the kid" burned out.

As for America, she stepped over this crumpled witness to a society as yet unfree and sought new diversions to make her people laugh a bit between the tears.

Epilogue

This year's smash hit on Broadway is, "Lenny". It is a reincarnation of his life and work. The play has garnered rave reviews and much money for the producer, Julian Barry, the star, Cliff Gorman, the publisher of the playscript, Grove Press, and a host of others. Six years ago Lenny Bruce died a legally certified pauper. His cannonization is proceeding right on schedule.

Primary Texts--The Bits of Lenny Bruce

The texts for the other Jewish heretics have really been almost totally complete. With Lenny Bruce this is impossible. His life's work would fill volumes and anyway most of his best bits have been collected in The Essential Lenny Bruce. What follows are thus brief excerpts from this book and his LPs relative to his thoughts and feelings about the quality that intrigues us most--the Jewishness of Lenny Bruce.

Come on down, Christ and Moses, come on down!

I bet you, when Christ and Moses return, the shules have had it first.

Saturday they would make every kind of shule--a drive-in shule, Frank Lloyd Wright shule, West Coast shule. West Coast? Santa Monica--there is that A-frame shule that they just put the statues in:

"Are you putting a madonna in the shule?"

"Yes, it's contemporary, that's all."

"Whew! Don't figure out, man . . . that's, uh, they supposed to have one?"

West Coast reform shule. Reform rabbi. So reformed they're ashamed they're Jewish. Rabbis that had this kind of sound:

"Heyyy, mein, Liebe, Heyyyyy . . ."

These rabbis have turned into doctors of law. And they've lost their beards, because they were called beatniks. And now they have this sound:

REFORMED RABBI [Clipped, hearty, good-fellow British articulation]: Ha ha! This sabbath we discuss Is-roy-el? Quench yon flaming yortsite candle! Alas, alas, poor Yossel . . .

Deah deah deah! Today, on Chin-ukka, with Rose-o-shonah approaching, do you know, someone had the chutz-pah to ask me,

"Tell me something, doctor of law, is there a god, or not?"

What cheek! To ask this in a temple! We're not here to talk of God--we're here to sell bonds for Israel! Remember that! A pox

upon you, Christ and Moses! Go among them and kiss your empty mezuzahs.

JEW: Rabbi, that was a beautiful speech!

RABBI [Jewish accent]: Danksalot. Ya like dot? Vat de hell, tossetoff de top mine head, dot's all. Und tsi gurnischt."

So Moses is depressed, The shules are gone. No more shules.

He breaks open a mezuzah--nothing inside!

"GEVULT!"

But a piece of paper that says

"Made in Japan."

I think that's the challenge--that the Jews want to sit for Jehovah. They're wrestling for the position all the time. They want to be the right-hand man, sitting at the gate.

But Filipinos know this for sure: that as beautifully liberal as any Jewish mother is--she'll march in every parade--yet, let the daughter bring home a nice, respectable Filipino son-in-law, with a nice, long, black foreskin and a gold tooth--

"Ma, this is my new husband. I met him at college."

"Ahhhhhhhhh! Ahhhhhhhh!"

That's all. Yeah.

Faye Bainter, Andy Hardy's mother, screwed up every mother in the world. She really did, man. Dig, who can be like Faye Bainter, man? Faye Bainter was always in the kitchen sweeping with an

apron. And Anglo-Saxon--and my mother was sweating and Jewish and hollering, man. Why couldn't she be like Faye Bainter? And That's what everyone wants their mother to be. And she was a virgin. Yeah, she never balled anyone because old Louis Stone would say, "Andrew," and that was all, man. Unless there was some kind of pollination that way--through dates or some esoteric, mystical thing, yeah. So that's some heavy propaganda, man.

Now we take you to a young boy who's returning home from Fort Loeb. But first we dissolve to the interior of the home, on Second Avenue.

JEWISH MOTHER: Vell, jus' tink. Soon, he'll be home. Our boy's comink home from military school. I saved every penny vot ve had to bring him der success dot der outside world vud neffer gif him. Ah, soon our boy will be home, from overseas in Delaware.

Now dissolve to the kid, on the steps, going through the trauma of going home:

KID [Ivy League voice]: I don't wanna be there with those Mockies! I don't wanna look at them anymore, with their onion-roll breaths. I found something new at Fort Loeb, and a girl who doesn't know anything about the Lower East Side.

Cut to parting scene by the cannon on the hilltop:

KID: I'm going now, darling, but I'll be back.

Now back at the apartment:

KID: Hello, Mom.

MOM [overpoweringly]: Hello dollink!

KID: Aaaaggh!

MOM: What's da matta vit chew?

KID: Nothing, Mother. I'm just so excited about seeing Bellevue and Zeder, I just don't know how to say . . .

MOM: Avvright, you'll siddown, you'll have some soup get into.

KID: It's not like that Philadelphia scrapnet school.

Bronx mockie! Aaagghh! [briskly] Well, Taddy, I have to run back now to school and I hope that you and your people . . .

Now that's another thing that you sense--a street Arab. I am of a Semetic background--I assume I'm Jewish. A lot of Jews who think they're Jewish are not--they're switched babies.

Now, a Jew, in the dictionary, is one who is descended from the ancient tribes of Judea, or one who is regarded as descended from that tribe. That's what it says in the dictionary; but you and I know what a Jew is--One Who Killed Our Lord. I don't know if we got much press on that in Illinois--we did this about two thousand years ago--two thousand years of Polack kids whacking the shit out of us coming home from school. Dear, dear. And although there should be a statute of limitations for that crime, it seems that those who neither have the actions nor the gait of Christians, pagan or not, will bust us out, unrelenting dues, for another deuce.

And I really searched it out, why we pay the dues. Why do you keep breaking our balls for this crime?

"Why, Jew, because you skirt the issue. You blame it on Roman soldiers."

Alright. I'll clear the air once and for all, and confess. Yes, we did it. I did it, my family. I found a note in my basement. It said:

"We killed him.
signed,
Morty."

And a lot of people say to me,

"Why did you kill Christ?"

"I dunno . . . it was one of those parties, got out of hand, you know."

We killed him because he didn't want to become a doctor, that's why we killed him.

Or maybe it would shock some people, some people who are involved with the dogma, to say that we killed him at his own request, because he knew that people would exploit him. In his name they would do all sorts of bust-out things, and bust out people. In Christ's name they would exploit the flag, the Bible, and--whew! Boy, the things they've done in his name!

This routine always goes good in Minnesota, with about two Jews in the audience.

But he's going to get it if he comes back, whacked out again.

Now, a lot of people say, "Well, that's certainly not a very nice

attitude, you know. You'll bring back the racial hatred." But I'm going to tell you something about that. See, I neologize Jewish and goyish. There's like, the literal meaning--first I'll start with goyish, cause it'll really knock you out. Dig this. Goy--"one who is not civilized, one who is not Mormon, one who is not Jewish." It's "heathen," that's what goyish means. Now, a Jew--dictionary style--"one who is descended from the ancient tribes of Judea, or one who is regarded to have descended from that tribe."

Now I neologize Jewish and goyish. Dig: I'm Jewish. Count Basie's Jewish. Ray Charles is Jewish. Eddie Cantor's goyish. B'Nai Brith is goyish; Hadassah, Jewish. Marine corps--heavy goyim, dangerous. Koolaid is goyish. All Drake's Cakes are goyish. Pumpernickel is Jewish, and, as you know, white bread is very goyish. Instant potatoes--goyish. Black cherry soda's very Jewish, Macaroons are very Jewish--very Jewish cake. Fruit salad is Jewish. Lime jello is goyish. Lime sodais very goyish. Trailer parks are so goyish that Jews won't go near them. Jack Paar Show is very goyish. Underwear is definitely goyish. Balls are goyish. Titties are Jewish. Mouths are Jewish. All Italians are Jewish. Greeks are goyish--bad sauce. Eugene O'Neill--Jewish; Dylan Thomas, Jewish. Steve is goyish, though. It's the hair. He combs his hair in the boys' room with that soap all the time.

Louis. That's my name in Jewish. Louis Schneider.

"Why havn't ya got Louis Schneider up on the marquee?"

"Well, cause it's not show business. It doesn't fit."

"No, no, I don't wanna hear that. You Jewish?"

"Yeah."

"You ashamed of it?"

"Yeah."

"Why you ashamed you're Jewish?"

"I'm not any more! But it used to be a problem. Until

Until Playboy Magazine came out."

Yeah. That's right. IN--OUT. You just can't be that urbane bachelor and drive down the street driving a Jag or a Lotus yelling "nigger" and "kike". It don't fit. That's what's really happened.

Up to about six or seven years ago, there was such a difference between Christians and Jews, that--maybe you did know--but, forget about it! Just a line there that would, whew! And the 'Brotherhood of Christians and Jews' was like some fifthe column bullshit. I don't know, it was like a phony dumb board.

No, I don't think so--I don't think Christians did know it. Because only the group that's involved--it's like: the defense counsel knows it because he has a narrow view, where the D.A., he's hung up with a bigger practice. So it's the same: the Jew is hung up with his shit and maybe the Christian--because, when the Christians say, like, "Oh, is he Jewish? I didn't know. I

can't tell when somebody's Jewish."

I always thought, "That's bullshit."

But he can't. Cause he never got hung up with that shit, man. And Jews are very hung up with that, all the time.

I always try to search out the meaning of any cliches that attach to any ethnic group. And I've always heard that stupid bubeh miseh about Jews and all the smut books, and all. But here's where all that must come from--and in part it's true. Dig. But I have to tell you by way of a complaint report.

At the Troubadour Theatre in Los Angeles I was arrested for putting on an allegedly obscene show. Now the report said, he did a routine that related to his ex-wife was the type of person who became upset when he walked into the bathroom while she was "fressing the maid." "Fressing" is Yiddish; it means eating. Eating is an act of oral copulation. So I'm putting on an obscene show. How's that for from Tinker to Evans to Chance?

But it ought to continue with, an act of oral copulation is goyish. Because there's no word in Yiddish that describes oral copulation. In fact, there are no gutter phrases in Yiddish--it's amazing. Homosexuality is known as "the English disease." Emmis. There are no words in Jewish that describe any sexual act--emmis--or parts, or lusts.

Dig: "schmuck" is a German word. In Yiddish (this is the official Yiddish dictionary) "schmuck: a yard, a fool." So dig what happens, a weird thing happens. The Jews take it humorously, make a colloquialism out of a literal word--and some putz who

doesn't understand what we're talking about busts you for obscenity.

Dig this. Doesn't it seem strange to you that Jewish judges, when it comes to obscenity cases, they're never the dissent? They're never swinging for the guy being not guilty. But Jewish attorneys defend alleged pornographers. Roth was Jewish. You should think about that. Why is that? Are Jews pornographers?

Or is it that the Jew has no concept? To a Jew f-u-c-k and s-h-i-t have the same value on the dirty-word graph. A Jew has no concept that f-u-c-k is worth 90 points, and s-h-i-t 10. And the reason for that is that--well, see, rabbis and priests both s-h-i-t, but only one f-u-c-ks.

You see, in the Jewish culture, there's no merit badge for not doing that. And Jewish attorneys better get hip to that.

And since the leaders of my tribe, rabbis, are schtuppers, perhaps that's why words come freer to me.

Now, the reason, perhaps, for my irreverence is that I have no knowledge of the god, because the Jews lost their god. Really. Before I was born the god was going away.

Because to have a god you have to know something about him, and as a child I didn't speak the same language as the Jewish god.

To have a god you have to love him and know about him as kids--early instruction--and I didn't know what he looked like. Our god has no mother, no father, no manger in the five and ten, on

cereal boxes and on television shows. The Jewish god--what's his face? Moses? Ah, he's a friend of god's:

"I dunno. Moses, he's, I dunno, his uncle, I dunno. . ."
He has no true identity. Is he a strong God? Are there little stories? Are there Bible tales about god, that one god, our faceless god?

The Christian god, you're lucky in that way, because you've got Mary, a mother, a father, a beginning, the five-and-ten little mangers--identity. Your god, the Christian god, is all over. It's a story you can follow. Constant identification.

The Jewish god--where's the Jewish god? He's on a little box nailed to the door jamb. In a mezuzah. There he is, in there. He's standing on a slant, god. And all the Jews are looking at him, and kissing him on the way into the house:

"I told the super don't paint god! Hey, Super! C'mere. What the hell's the matter with you? I told you twenty times, that's god there. What're you painting god for? My old lady kissed the doorbell three times this week. You paint here, here, but don't paint there, alright? Never mind it's dirty, we'll take care of it. Alright.

Wait a minute. . . Maybe he's not in there any more . . . maybe the Puerto Ricans stole him--they probably would, to make more garbage. That's it. . . I dunno what to do. . . You wanna open it up?. . . Yeah?. . . We'll pry it open, if he's in there. . . Gevult! They stashed a joint!"

Now there's a curtain line for great Jewish theatre. This would

be a capper on Broadway. The old Jewish couple, there they are, they open up the mezuzah, and the guy goes:

"Gevult! They stashed a joint!"

Boom! Curtain.

That's vernacular for a marijuana cigarette. You'd make a bad vice officer, for Chrissake:

"They what? They what? What?"

"Ah, putzo, shut up! Just forget about it. Just get hot, and that's it."

A mezuzah is a Jewish chapstick. That's why they're always kissing it when they go out.

You know why Jews are the smartest people in the world? Cause everybody told them that, for years:

"They'll screw ya, you can't trust em, they'll screw everybody!"

And the schmucks really believed it:

"That's right. We're the smartest people--screw anybody!

Goddamn right, we're smart! We'll screw everybody. Boy, we'll screw them all. We're so smart."

"Dave Brubeck--he gets ten grand a night! Isn't that amazing?"

"Jewish--they all do that, you know."

A schiksa is a goy. That's right. That was the concept in the late thirties, that was the Jewish phrase. It meant, literally, a Christian is a drunk. That was the concept of all Jews that I knew then, that Christians were drunks. And that Jewish mothers were the only mothers, and Christian mothers sold their children for bottles of whisky. And all their kids had grape jelly on their underwear and rotten teeth. They even had rotten teeth on their underwear. That was the badge of all Christians--they had rotten teeth.

I'll bet you that if I got a chance to listen at the Christian window I would have heard some "schiksa is a goy" in reverse. But I never got a chance to pass, cause you never catch them without the mask on.

You know, Ruby did it, and why he did it was because he was Jewish-- and the villain was his grandmother. I really want to tell you that. I want to tell Christians that, you know. I can tell it to you because it's all over now. I wouldn't cop out when it was going on; but it is all over now.

Why Ruby did it. You see, when I was a kid I had tremendous hostility for Christians my age. The reason I had the hostility is that I had no balls for fighting, and they could duke. So I disliked them for it, but I admired them for it--it was a tremendous ambivalence all the time: admiring somebody who could do that, you know, and then disliking them for it. Now the neighborhood I came from there were a lot of Jews, so there was

no big problem with a balls-virility complex.

But Ruby came from Texas. They're really concerned with "bawls"--they got ninety-year-old men biting rattlesnakes' heads off! And shooting guns! And a Jew in Texas is a tailor. So what went on in Ruby's mind, I'm sure, is that

"Well, if I kill the guy that killed the president, the the Christians'll go:

'Whew! What bawls he had, hey? We always thought the Jews were chickenshit, but look at that! See, a Jew at the end, saved everybody!'"

And the Christians'll kiss him and hug him and they'll lift him on high. A JEWISH BILLY THE KID RODE OUT OF THE WEST!

But he didn't know that was just a fantasy from his grandmother, the villain, telling him about the Christians who punch everybody.

Yeah. Even the shot was Jewish--the way he held the gun. It was a dopey Jewish way. He probably went "Nach!", too--that means "There!" in Jewish. Nach!

Italians and Jews-- I can report that culture best--they don't hit their old ladies. They don't punch them; but they're pinchers, and they grab their arms as though they won't hurt them, and squeeze a little extra. But Anglo-Saxons are rifle people--they shoot their old ladies.

Now, Italians are really tough to get away from. Oh yeah. If you're married for ten years, chick has a lotta dues. You got to start maybe, oh, three years before, just getting ready to

split. You start out with things like

"Listen, Rocko, there's nobody else. I want you to know that.

But I just, someday I just want to get away. . . and think.

There's nobody else! Nobody else, I just want to get away, I just want a little, maybe a convent! Maybe a nun'll come and pick me up and take me in a car, and I'll be watched, and examined every day by a doctor. . . and I'll just think.....

But there's nobody else!"

And maybe, maybe the chick will get away. Maybe, and escape the spitting on the windows and clothes getting cut up.

Alright. Now, the first thing that Italians and Jews do, they malign the old lady's reputation:

"That piece of shit! I didn't tell ya about her. She was a lesbian--I didn't tell ya that either. And she screwed Paul Robeson's nephew, too. And, ah, you better have paper cups over here, too--you know what else she does, I didn't tell ya that either."

And he calls up her mother, the final touch:

"You wanna hear what a cunt your daughter is?" Vicious poison, poison, poison, and more poison.

How the Jew Got Into Show Business.

The Jew had a hip boss, the Egyptian, oh yeah. Couldn't bullshit the Egyptian, you know. No, he was pretty slick. But the Jew kept working at it, working at being charming.

EGYPTIAN: Never mind the horseshit, thank you. We got the pyramids to build, and that's where it's at. Gonna get it up, takes your generation, next generation, do a nice workmanlike job here."

JEW: Oh thank you, thank you."

EGYPTIAN: Get outta here with that horseshit! Now stop it now!"

But the Jew kept working at it, working at being charming. And he got so slick at it--he never carried it off--but he honed his arguments so good, he got so good at it, that that was his expertise:

EGYPTIAN: These Jews got bullshit that don't quit! I mean, it's an art with them. C'mon. Let's go watch a Jew be charming. Hey!

Jew! Do that charming bit for us, there. We know you're bullshitting, but you do it so good we get a kick out of it. Do it for us, will ya please?"

See? That was it, and he was on his way.

Now dig the switch-around. Now the Jew gets into show business. And, he writes motion pictures, he's making the images--he has the film industry knocked up--he controls it! And the Jew naturally writes what he thinks is pretty, what he thinks is ugly--and it's amazing, but you never see one Jewish bad guy in the movies. Not ever a Jewish villain, man. Gregory Peck, Paul Muni--haha! It's wonderful! Who's the bad guy? The goyim! The Irish!

And you see a lot of pictures about Christ--a ton of religious pictures, in the most respectful position. And the reason that is, I'm sure, it's the way the Jew's saying, "I'm sorry." That's where it's at.

FOOTNOTES--LENNY BRUCE

1. So it is that Abbie Hoffman's book, Woodstock Nation. New York, Random House, 1969. is dedicated to Lenny Bruce.
2. Albert Goldman. "Comics" in The New York Review of Books. Vol. 5. No. 16. January 20, 1966. pp.15-17.
3. Except for Goldman's articles and most recently Benjamin de Mott's piece in, Saturday Review. Vol. 55. No. 13. March 25, 1972. pp. 88-97. entitled "Lenny Bruce Case Continued..." most of the critical reviews of Bruce's work have mentioned his Jewishness only in passing. The great predominance of Jewish material and idiom in his routines makes this oversight disturbing and puzzling indeed.
4. The details of Lenny's life are never thoroughly drawn in his autobiography, How to Talk Dirty and Influence People. Chicago, Playboy Press, 1966. but it remains the single best source of Bruce on Bruce.
5. Ibid. p.173.
6. The best selections from the best bits of Lenny Bruce's humor come from the only written collection of his work, The Essential Lenny Bruce. New York, Ballantine Books, 1967. p.293.
7. Albert Goldman. "The Comedy of Lenny Bruce". in Commentary. Vol. 36. No. 4. October, 1963. p.315.
8. Ibid.
9. Nevertheless Goldman's theory does demonstrate a basic assumption of this work, namely that the terminology of ancient religious traditions can be used effectively in describing contemporary cultural figures. So it is that we apply the term "heretic" in many different contexts.
10. The Essential Lenny Bruce. op.cit. p.50.
11. Ibid. p.38.
12. Ibid.
13. Bruce. How to Talk Dirty... op.cit. p.12.
14. The Essential Lenny Bruce. op.cit. p.41.
15. Ibid. PP.61-67.
16. Ibid. p.147.

FOOTNOTES---LENNY BRUCE (cont'd)

17. Ibid. p.43.
In fact, Lenny was constantly amazed by the condemnation his "dirty words" drew down upon him by hostile critics from show business who, he thought, should have known better. Nat Hentoff in one of the very earliest and very best critical defenses of the humor of Lenny Bruce brings up exactly this point, The Reporter. Vol. 22. No. 13. June 23, 1960. in an article entitled, "Where Liberals Fear to Tread". pp. 50-52.
18. The Essential Lenny Bruce. op.cit. p.44.
19. Lenny Bruce at Carnegie Hall. UAS: 9800. Side two of LP 1. This is one of only three live, complete, unexpurgated recordings of an entire Bruce concert. The others are: The Berkeley Concert. Bizarre Records: 6329. and, by far the best, the most impressive performance he ever gave, Lenny Bruce Live at the Curran Theatre. Fantasy Records: 34201. There are several other recordings of some of Lenny's bits on Fantasy Records but all of them are pieced together from many different performances. Only the recordings of an entire concert can reveal the rhythms of his stream of consciousness humor and the unity of his creative genius. The Curran Theatre is Lenny Bruce at his best--Berkeley is Lenny Bruce when he is tired and ragged and depressed and on the verge of suicide.
20. At one of his appearances in court, Lenny even publically stated that his harrassment by the authorities was the result of gentile intolerance of Jewish attitudes towards sex. Albert Goldman. "Comics", op.cit. p.16.
21. de Mott. op.cit. pp.96-7.
22. Especially, Soren Kierkegaard. An Attack upon Christendom. Boston, Beacon Press, 1956.

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