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SYMBOLS OF FAITH IN JEWISH STORIES: STORYTELLING AS JEWISH EDUCATION

Linda Joseph

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

1994

Referees, Professor Richard Sarason
and Professor Samuel Joseph

Dedication

For Margot and Peter who told me stories,
and for Simon,
who listened to the stories beside me.
Your love and support across the oceans
have sustained me.

And to all those in Australia
who lobbied and believed in me so that one day
I would become a rabbi.

****

"The world says that tales put people to sleep,
I say with tales you can rouse people from their sleep."
((Nahman of Bratslav, *Hayye Maran*)

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A BIG THANK YOU to Marc Leeds for staying up all night and helping me format and print this thesis. He could not have done it without Saralyn, Marisa and Whitney's permission - so thank you to them too!

To all my friends in Oz who endured my 3 and 4 a.m. phone calls while I was writing, to Christine Manning who was my late night "study-buddy," and to all the families and individuals who have adopted and supported me during my stay in America. Without you all I would not have come this far.

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DIGEST

Amol iz geveyn, once upon a time ... we were told stories. This thesis is an exploration of the impact of Jewish storytelling on forming faith and spirituality within every Jew.

Chapter One explores the impact of the story for both the individual's identity and the making of Jewish culture. It explores the elements that make a story "Jewish" and what is meant by Jewish folklore. Finally, it traces the evolution of the oral Jewish story in history.

Chapter Two attempts to define what is meant by faith and spirituality in a number of ways. It begins by analyzing a number of definitions suggested for faith and spirituality. It follows with an analysis of the role of story in forming faith by looking at the pivotal theorists in faith development, and reviews the methodologies that Reform Judaism has used in fostering faith and spirituality in its adherents.

The conclusion of all this research is that faith and spirituality are complex and are only limited by succinct definition. To understand Jewish faith and spirituality, "thick description" is required. Stories, because they speak in symbols and metaphor, are an ideal vehicle for conveying the meaning of faith, and provide indispensable paradigms for each Jew. Thus I unpack in medieval Jewish folk-story some of the themes of faith that are present, using The Encyclopedia of Religions' exploration of "faith" as a guide.

Chapter Three looks at the meaning and role of symbol within story in educating towards faith and spirituality. It explores three symbolic complexes of faith

and spirituality in medieval folk-story - the efficacy of prayer, the Messiah, and the miracles of Elijah. It show the importance of these symbols of faith and spirituality in conveying the essential concept of "hope" that has sustained Jewish survival.

Chapter Four explores why the symbols and the stories of the past are pivotal in establishing faith and spirituality in the present. It advocates our interaction with these stories and symbols in our own storytelling, and explores how modern authors have interacted with the tradition in the writing of their stories today. Then, employing some of the methodologies used in Jewish stories in modern times, three new stories of faith and spirituality have been written, incorporating the symbols of efficacy of prayer, the Messiah, and the miracles of Elijah.

This thesis concludes by suggesting that story and symbol are primary to imbuing each generation of Jews with a sense of faith and spirituality. By refraining from telling stories, or by editing which stories we tell, we are depriving the Jewish future of valuable paradigms of faith and spirituality. The challenge for the educator does not end with familiarization with the tales of our tradition. To keep Judaism vital and relevant it is incumbent upon us, the new generations, to live and tell new tales, so that future generations will see both the ancient and future possibilities in Jewish faith and spirituality.

INTRODUCTION

Amol iz geveyn, once upon a time ... we were told stories. One powerful way of communicating spirituality and faith in concrete form is through the popular story. From the time of the Bible, Jews have been involved in the process of storytelling. Over the centuries Jews have used stories as a means of voicing their faith and spirituality. Often a story can paint more vividly for the masses a concept or idea, than can the philosophical strivings of the intellectual.

There has been recognition throughout this process that the allusive and evocative nature of story is an ideal vehicle for expressing faith and spirituality because of its figurative character. The story's plot would encapsulate the essence of faith and the spiritual through painting a picture and invoking an experience of understanding in the mind of the listener. The story becomes a paradigm for understanding faith and spirituality.

The symbols within the story are the cogs that give shape to the stories in which they are set. Our understanding of symbolic complexes such as prayer, Elijah the prophet and the messiah, for example, are vehicles around which the story is set. They shape the types of stories that we hear. We are influenced by the literature in which these symbols appear as a whole, and the symbols from these contexts become a network of models from which we can draw our understandings of faith and spirituality.

At the same time prayer, Elijah and the Messiah hold resonances for us in song, poetry, art, and prayer because of the multiplicity of stories that we know containing them. As well as the stories being shaped by the symbols which are within them, the symbols are shaped by the contexts in which we have placed them,. The story and the story's symbols together, become a powerful teaching vehicle towards a greater understanding of how our ancestors perceived faith and spirituality and how we might understand it today and in the future.

In this thesis, I propose to give an overview of the types of literary folklore within Judaism from the Bible through to modern tales and *midrashim*. I will look at the function of narrative in its cultural context and the purpose for which it was created and how it was used.

Since the story has been adopted as a vehicle through which to express faith because of its evocative and allusive qualities, and is a primary means through which faith and spirituality are conveyed to the individual, I will examine how story and symbol operates according to the writing of leading faith development theorists. Then I will explore a sampling of popular Jewish stories whose central theme is that of faith and spirituality, and seek to understand how they express and act out religious faith and spirituality. From this research I will look to create a working description of faith and spirituality for modern Jews.

In a wider exploration of the role of symbol, I will take three symbols/symbolic complexes of faith and spirituality in the Jewish story-telling tradition and research how each of those symbols is used historically. These symbols/symbolic complexes

are [1] the efficacy of prayer [2] the miracles of Elijah [3] the Messiah. This exploration is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of the symbol/symbolic complexes, but rather illustrative of their usage. I will analyze the use of those symbols in the medieval Jewish story and explore the thesis that stories and symbols of the past have a relevancy for contemporary understandings of faith and spirituality.

Finally I will investigate how the modern story-teller creates an atmosphere in his/her tales that invokes the spirituality and faith for which the modern Jew searches. I will look at how modern authors have utilized the traditional symbols of faith and spirituality in their tales for this purpose. To illustrate the possibilities that writing within the Jewish faith and spiritual tradition holds, I will create three stories to illustrate some of the outlined methodologies.

Amol iz geveyn, once upon a time ... we were told stories. It is my prayer that the work in this thesis will help convey to all who read it, how important it is to continually tell the stories of the past and the stories of the future, so that our children and our children's children will have a complex understanding of faith and spirituality to draw upon in their lives.

CHAPTER ONE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF STORY IN JUDAISM

Amol iz geveyn, once upon a time ... we were told stories. And it is these stories that we were told and that we continue to tell that make us who we are today. Our need for stories as human beings is evident by their appearance and preservation in every culture, nation and century.[1] Great philosophers have recognized the importance of stories in our education. Aristotle said: "The friend of wisdom is also the friend of myth."[2] Plato in his Republic suggested that future citizens would begin their education with myth.[3]

And as for Jews, we were and are formed by our story and our stories, that continue through the generations to proliferate and be revered.[4] For Jews the stories themselves became so honored that they were even seen by later generations as the *raison*

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[1] Catherine Leary, "Parables and Fairytales," in Religious Education 81, no. 3 (Summer, 1986), p. 485.

[2] Cited in Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), p. 35.

[3] Bettelheim, p. 35.

[4] Booth calls this process "coduction." Pamela Mitchell explains its meaning: "In coduction, the reader meets the ethos of story in *community*, with other readers and other stories ... We ask our questions not of the story alone but in the presence of others, and we ask these questions of the others as well. We become part of a spiralling dialogue, with stories and persons." See Pamela Mitchell, "Why Care About Stories? A Theory of Narrative Art," in Religious Education 86, no. 1. (Winter, 1991), p. 40.

d'etre of human existence in a world created by God. As the *hasidim* say: "God invented man because he loves stories."[5]

THE IMPACT OF THE TELLING

Warm memories are often conjured by the telling: evenings encircled by a bountiful blanket in bed next to a parent; *Shabbat* afternoons aside grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, listening to the laughter and laments of family; the innocence of the class-room watching our teacher turn the pages of a book; hearkening to the animated Rabbi enchanting us with words of faith. The stories are more than the plots told, they are the relationships they create.

Many memoirs from the *shtetls* of Europe speak of the connection created between generations through the imparting of stories:

> I never heard a *maysele* from my grandfather ... But my grandmother - it was she who told me a *maysele*, or asked me a riddle. At twilight on *shabes*, as it got dark outside and long evening shadows fell over our ill-constructed little house, my grandmother Khane would sit me on her lap near the large clay oven and tell me a story.[6]

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[5] Saying quoted by Edwin H. Friedman Friedman's Fables (New York, London: The Guilford Press, 1990), p. ix. That such an attitude should develop in a culture that saw the Torah, the core story, as a blueprint for creation and that continued the creative process with subsequent stories, is not surprising. For reference to the Torah as the blueprint for creation see Ch. N. Bialik and Y. Ch. Ravnitzky Sefer ha'aggada: Mivchar haaggadot shebatalmud uvemidrashim (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1986), p. 6.

[6] Memoir from Pumpyan, Lithuania, ca. 1920 quoted in Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, Yiddish Folktales, translated by Leonard Wolf, (New York: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, 1988) p. 31.

> My grandfather and I would sit in the old synagogue in the interval between early and late evening prayers, and we'd talk quietly. It was then that he would tell me legends about the ancient sages and later heroes, about important events that happened long ago and in more recent times.[7]

The story is a "powerful union-event"[8] between teller and listener.[9] The bond *created* is more potent than simply the memories *created* by the quality-time spent together. Jerome Berryman, when speaking of the importance of the telling writes - "... adults, then, ought not to see their role as teaching children about parables but as showing them how to live in parables by entering them with children."[10] What is meant by entering a story with the child is that the adult steps out of this world and enters into the world of the story, including its settings and boundaries.[11] The adult "living" the story is a model, and through that paradigm the child is encouraged to grow with the story and adopt it as his or her own.[12] In other words, the teller, by

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[7] Memoir from Berestetshke, Poland, 1925 quoted in Weinreich, p. 259.

[8] Leary, p. 486.

[9] A note on the meaning of "teller": The tale, it has been suggested, is more effective when physically told by one person to another. See Leary, p. 49. Yet the telling of a story through the written word, while not reproducing the immediate nature of the personal telling, also may have profound effects on the reader. This is the gist of Robert Coles' work. Through the act of reading, people tell the story to themselves and learn from that experience. In this chapter I am referring to both forms of telling when I speak of the telling of story.

[10] Jerome W. Berryman "Being in Parables with Children" in Religious Education 74, no. 3. (May-June, 1979), p. 180.

[11] Mitchell, p. 38.

[12] Michael Torop, The Power of Story and Imagination in Developing Faith: Teaching the Genesis Narratives from a Faith Development Perspective (unpublished HUC-JIR rabbinic thesis, Cincinnati, 1990), p. 180. See also Michael G. Lawler, "Symbol and Religious Education," in Religious Education 72, no. 4 (July-August, 1977), p. 372.

being in the story with the listener, is acting as an affirming influence. As J. R. R. Tolkien asserted:

> What really happens is that the story maker proves a successful subcreator. He makes a secondary world which your mind can enter. Inside what he related to it was true; it accords with the laws of the world. You therefore believe it while you are, as it were, inside. [13]

An important aspect of forming a relationship between narrator and listener in storytelling is this immersion in the world of the story. By doing so, truths are acknowledged in the narrative and the participants in the telling adopt those truths for themselves. Catherine Leary describes the process:

> Story is life lived deeply. It is reality at its deepest level. It is ambiguous and therefore open to new meaning, capable of being understood in new ways and related to new circumstances and experiences. It is the experience of truth told in a creative and symbolic way. Delving into the resources and the wellspring of self, we attempt to vocalize what we perceive as truth. Story is the sharing of a personal message. We receive the message of the storyteller according to who we are and where we're at. What I tell you today could change tomorrow; not that the verbalization differs but rather the receiving as we enter into another level of reality.[14]

Within the popular story, truth is found in consoling propensities, symbolic meanings, and interpersonal meanings,[15] which the telling by one individual to another validates on the subconscious and conscious level. These truths in story do not refer to the

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[13] J. R. R. Tolkien, Tree and Leaf (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 45.

[14] Leary, p. 486.

[15] Bettelheim, p. 150.

reality of the narrative but rather the realities imparted through the story itself.[16] Elie Wiesel concurs, in this personal anecdote:

> [A]... story has to do with my teacher, who was a Hasidic rabbi, and me. Many years after the war I came to see him in Israel, but by then I had changed. He had not. He still looked like a Hasidic rabbi, but I no longer looked like a Hasid. When I came to him and was properly introduced, he looked at me and suddenly said "You are Dodye Feig's grandson." My grandfather was a Hasid. And I said, "Rebbe, I've worked so hard for so many years to make a name for myself, but for you I still remain his grandson."
> "But what are you doing?" he asked. "What *were* you doing for so many years?"
> "I am writing," I replied. "That's what I'm doing," I said.
> "What are you writing?"
> I said, "Stories."
> "But what kind of stories?"
> I said, "What do you mean, Rebbe?"
> He said, "Stories of things that happened."
> And then I caught him. I said "Rebbe, it's not so simple. Some events happen that are not true. Others are true but did not happen." At that point he was lost. And he simply said, "What a pity."[17]

The same point is discussed in the Talmud. In B.T. Sanhedrin 92, Rabbi Eliezer comments on the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37. Rabbi Eliezer says, "Those who were resurrected by Ezekiel stood up and sang praise to the Lord, but then they died again." Following a discussion about what kind of praise they sang Rabbi Yehuda then says "*Emet mashal haya,*" (It was true and a parable). Rabbi Nehemiah takes the position of Wiesel's Rebbe: "*Im emet, lama*

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[16] Søren Kierkegaard talks about two types of communication: (1) the scientific empirical type of knowledge, (2) self-knowledge - passions, existence and personal actuality - that cannot be measured, but which is conveyed and understood. It is this latter type of knowledge that story and symbols convey. See Mitchell, p. 33. Also see Torop, p. 67.

[17] Elie Wiesel, "Myth and History," in Alan M. Olson, ed., Myth Symbol and Reality (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), pp. 20 - 21.

mashal, veim mashal, lama emet?" (If it is true, then why is it a parable, and if it is a parable, why is it true?) He answers the dilemma by denying the story's truth - "It was truly a parable."

In modern thought on storytelling, it is Rabbi Yehudah's and Elie Wiesel's position that prevails: that a story, whether fictional or historically based may contain truths. The truth lies in the resonance the story contains for the listener/reader.[18] As Sally TeSelle explains: "[In] a sense, any story is about ourselves and a good story is good precisely because somehow it rings true to human life."[19] If a story holds truths, it touches people in a profound manner. Ergo, it will often be retold because of this quality. I would argue that the essence, the secret, of the popular folk story which begs retelling is this element of truths.

The truths are found in the "language event" described by Adolph Tulicher where "... the spectators have become participants, not because they want to necessarily or simply have 'gotten the point' but because they have, for the moment, 'lost control.'"[20] On a psychological level, becoming part of the action, entering into the story, becomes an existential experience. The story can reveal something about the lives we are leading and give insight. They can make our lives out to be somewhat

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[18] Robert Coles, The Call Of Stories: Teaching And The Moral Imagination (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), p. 204.

[19] Sally TeSelle, cited in Torop, p. 88.

[20] David Stern, Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature (Cambridge and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 10 - 11.

better than they are in reality so that we can cope with a situation.[21] Or stories may answer for us "the great questions: where do we come from, who are we, where are we going?"[22] Pamela Mitchell writes about the impact of exiting and entering the story: "The entering/exiting reader intrudes his or her own perspectives into the stories' world to ask evaluative questions about the world and its way of functioning."[23]

Why are such profound realities packaged in story?[24] Often the best communication of truths is not in descriptive models, but through analogical means.[25] To be told the truths would not be as effective as to glean the truths and to learn from our "experience," which is those truths working in our imaginations. The truths within story are the truths of the imagination,[26] and they are active on manifold levels. Vivian Paley states how these truths consciously or unconsciously work:

> It is a story that enables us to see things on many levels. It is the original scientific thinking. Cause and effect. Many prisms through which you view a single event. The story within the story within the story.[27]

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[21] S. J. Lonergan and J.F. Bernard, "Reality, Myth, Symbol," in Olson, p. 33.

[22] Robert Coles cited in Christopher Woodhull, "The Man Who Listens to Children," in Storytelling 4, no. 4. (Fall, 1992), p. 9.

[23] Mitchell, p. 40.

[24] Robert Y. O'Brien, "Packaging Religious Myths," in Religious Education 70, no. 3 (May-June 1975), p. 333.

[25] Thomas Fawcett, The Symbolic Language of Religion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1971), p. 86.

[26] Bettelheim, p. 117.

[27] Marge Cunningham, "The Moral of the Story," in Storytelling 5, no. 2 (Spring, 1993), p. 10.

The truths are triggered because story has "a sequence of stages and events, and a structure ... hence a more forceful claim concerning the nature of reality."[28] Consequently the reality created by the plot opens the listeners to the truths contained by the plot and allows them to use those truths for themselves.[29]

The truths in story, as they resonate within each one of us, become a tool for different types of growth in our lives. At different times in our lives, stories will resonate in different ways. We are touched by the truths contained within, depending on our own realities. Robert Coles, renowned for his teaching and psychological work through stories, comments on the novel:

> We all remember in our own lives times when a book has become for us a signpost, a continuous presence in our lives. Novels lend themselves to such purposes; their plots offer a psychological or moral journey, with impasses and breakthroughs, with decisions made and destinations achieved - though it often remains a mystery to me, despite my years of teaching, why a given student has chosen *that* novel (rather than one I might have predicted as more congenial) as the one to take a decisive role in shaping a future life course.[30]

The uncertainty over which stories will resonate within each individual, and when they will find resonance, is, as I will argue in Chapters Two and Three, ground for the need for an individual to be exposed to many different narratives and kinds of narratives.

Coles was not the first to note that our experience is expanded by stories. The Protestant theologian Søren Kierkegaard speaks of story as clarifying life not by giving us a completely new life-view, but by allowing us to perceive how it is to construct

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[28] Jacques Waardenburg, "Symbolic Aspects of Myth," in Olson, p. 55.

[29] Mitchell, p. 34.

[30] Coles, p. 68.

life in a different way. By doing so, we are opened to a new realm of possibilities.[31] A student describes the impact of this process in her life to Robert Coles:

> With a novel, if the teacher holds you back and makes sure you take things slowly and get your head connected to what you're reading, then (how do I say it?) the story becomes yours. No, I don't mean 'your story'; I mean you have imagined what those people look like, and how they speak the words in the book, and how they move around, and so you and the writer are in cahoots.[32]

A Hasidic story speaks of this power of story in a similar way:

> This is how Rabbi Yaakov-Yosseph of Polnoye found his way into the Hasidic fold:
> One morning he arrived at the Sharogrod synagogue and found it empty.
> "Where are the faithful?"' he asked the beadle.
> "At the market."
> "All of them? At this hour, when they should be praying?"
> "Well, you see, there is this stranger there, telling stories. And when he speaks, one doesn't want to leave."
> "What impudence! Go and bring him here at once!"
> The beadle had no choice, he obeyed as was his duty. He ran to the market, made his way through the crowd and transmitted the order to the storyteller.
> "Fine," the stranger said calmly, "I am coming."
> The rabbi did not get up to receive him: "Who are you and how dare you divert this community from the ways of the Lord?"
> "Don't get angry," said the visitor, "a rabbi like you ought never to give in to anger. Instead, listen to a story."
> "What! More stories! Your insolence seems to have no limits! You'll pay for this!"
> "Anger is something one must learn to control," the visitor said gently. "Listen to me..."
> And there was in his voice a certain quality that troubled the rabbi and he fell silent. He could not keep himself from listening, never before had he felt such a need to listen.

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[31] Mitchell, p. 36.

[32] Coles, p. 64.

> "This is a story that happened to me," said the Baal Shem. "I was riding in a coach drawn by three horses, each of a different color, and not one of them was neighing. I could not understand why. Until the day we crossed a peasant on the road who shouted at me to loosen the reins. And all at once, the three horses began to neigh."
> In one blinding flash the rabbi of Sharogrod understood the meaning of the parable. For the soul to vibrate and cry out, it must be freed; too many restrictions will stifle it.
> And he began to cry. he cried as he had never cried before: freely, spontaneously, without apparent reason. What happened later is well known: Rebbe Yaakov-Yosseph became one of the pillars of the new movement.[33]

The impact of the story in its effect on one's life is not always so immediate. Bruno Bettelheim writes in his book, The Uses Of Enchantment, how the fairy tale works in providing a future road-map in life for a child through its plot and images.[34] This benefit is not immediately tangible, contends Bettelheim, rather a "scattering of seeds, only some of which will be implanted in the mind of the child."[35] The story will be drawn on unconsciously at different times through that person's life,[36] as not only a model for human behavior, but also as a means to give meaning and value to life.[37]

The meaning and value conveyed by stories can work on many emotional levels. For example, stories can provide models of comfort - the happy ending, suggests Joseph Campbell, "is to be read, not as a contradiction, but as a

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[33] As told by Elie Wiesel, Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters (Northvale, New Jersey and London: Jason Aronson, 1972, 1993), pp. 40 - 41.

[34] Bettelheim, pp. 121 - 122.

[35] Bettelheim, p. 154.

[36] Bettelheim, p. 12.

[37] See Mircea Eliade, in Bettelheim, p. 135.

transcendence of the universal tragedy of man."[38] For Jews, stories often gave comfort in the foreign environs that provided them a precarious national existence.[39] Stories that maintained a sense of humor in adversity, spoke of the outsmarting of oppressors and rulers, and affirmed the daily sacrifices of life, helped make the historical realities that were not so comfortable more bearable. Stories provided an outlet for emotions that could not be verbalized in a direct manner. Allegory in risky circumstances was often a more germane type of expression.

Storytelling is not limited to the individual in its formative potential. It might begin with the personal - with the telling of story between parent and child, teacher and student, rabbi and congregant. It might offer alternative views or road-maps for behavior. But in addition to these purposes, the narrative conveys to each individual a "life-view or ethos."[40] The development of a group identity within each individual works ultimately towards the creation of a larger culture.

Vivian Gussin Paley in her book, The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter, writes about how she creates a whole classroom culture through the stories that she and her students tell. The importance of keying into the story's plots and symbols is illustrated by Jason, the child who is the outsider in the classroom. He has to learn to

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[38] Joseph Campbell, The Hero With A Thousand Faces (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2nd ed., 1968), p. 28. See also Bettelheim, pp. 10 - 11.

[39] Nathan Ausubel, A Treasury Of Jewish Folklore (New York: Crown Publishers, 1948), p. xvii.

[40] Mitchell, p. 35. Craig Dykstra suggests that communities of faith shape their members by (a) historical dramas that can be owned, (b) convictions and visions that can be owned, and (c) language and rituals that help shape visions and acts them out. See Torop, p. 43. Stories play a vital role in all Dykstra's categories.

adapt to the symbols, to adopt the symbols and to become part of the stories of his class-mates so that he may be included in their cultural experience. While he refuses to do so, he remains the outsider in the group. This sociological study of the classroom shows in the microcosm what happens in the macrocosm, that each human being "acquires stories by being born into a particular culture"[41] or by adopting the stories of that culture.

Ellen Frankel describes this dynamic in Jewish culture when she proclaims that "We are Jews today because of those stories. "[42] An important element of being part of Jewish culture is to understand and be part of the plots and the symbols of Jewish stories. Not every story need resonate in a profound manner:

> ... [T]ales join their voices together into a great chorus of stories echoing down through generations. Taken collectively, a people's tales gain uncommon strength. They never let their listeners out of the thrall.[43]

Keying into your community's stories means that one is exposed to the ideals and symbols of that community. They tell us, more than the actual historical accomplishments of that culture, the secret of that people's soul.[44] Jewish stories are

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[41] Lawler, p. 364.

[42] Ellen Frankel, The Classic Tales: 4,000 Years Of Jewish Lore (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1989), pp. xxv - xxvi.

[43] Frankel, p. xxiii.

[44] Wendell C. Beane and William G. Doty eds., Myths, Rites, and Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader, Vol. 1. (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 113.

filled with the symbolic forms at the foundations of the intricate expression of the literate society.[45]

Without a wide variety of symbols and symbolic complexes for different individuals to draw upon, to meet each individual's needs, the symbols and stories and consequently the culture can become meaningless.[46] Thomas Fawcett explains how the stories and their symbols act beyond intellectual reasoning in his book, The Symbolic Language Of Religion:

> Intellectual difficulties may abound but cause little concern because experience of symbolic power makes them a peripheral concern. For such as these there is a rich store of symbolic language and ritual on which they can call in periods of religious strain.[47]

In addition to the provision of powerful symbols, stories provide us with a collective heritage. Ellen Frankel writes:

> For a people's tales are its memory, its conscience, its channel to the divine imagination. In them are embedded the formative experiences of the nation, the primal sensibilities that first shaped and even now continue to shape a particular people's vision of the world. A national body of tales is just that: a collective mind imbued with centuries of wisdom and an infinite recall, legs sinewed by a thousand odysseys, fingers flexed to recapture treasures glimpsed and lost, a heart pressed and steeled by the vise of fate, blood and bile and breath stirred up and called in the service of an inventive God.[48]

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[45] Dan Ben Amos, "The Idea of Folklore: An Essay," in Issachar Ben Ami and Joseph Dan eds., Folklore Research Center Studies 7. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1983), p. 15.

[46] Waardenburg, p. 56.

[47] Fawcett, p. 281.

[48] Frankel, p. xxiv.

The stories provide a mythical history which Mircea Eliade terms anhistorical. This history invariably includes the reduction of events and individuals to archetypes that are found in all popular historical memory[49] but have some unique properties which make them that culture's own.

WHAT MAKES A JEWISH STORY?

The early academic studies of myth, folklore, and symbol concentrated on the universal elements found in all cultures.[50] There seem to be basic archetypes preprogrammed into human nature that recur in our narratives worldwide. The symbols used and the plots told often have much in common with those used in other cultures. No one could also deny that Jewish stories are filled with direct borrowings from other peoples. This, however, is a trait true of the folklore of almost every people.[51] The Stith Thompson Motif-Index and Aarne Thompson Type-Index are volumes totally devoted to pointing out such commonality. Joseph Campbell in his conversations with

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[49] Eliade, Myth, p. 44, and Beane, p. 106.

[50] Ben Amos, p. 13. Also see Dov Noy's introduction: "What Is Jewish About The Jewish Folktale?" in Howard Schwartz, Miriam's Tambourine: Jewish Folktales From Around The World (Oxford, New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), p. xii.

[51] Raphael Patai, On Jewish Folklore (Detroit, Wayne State Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 23, 37. Also Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, p. xii.

Bill Moyers warns: "... If you were not alert to the parallel themes, you would probably think that they were quite different stories, but they're not."[52]

In addition to commonality of plots and symbols there are certain types of stories that are common to both Jewish and other cultures. Dov Noy in his article on "Folklore" in the Encyclopedia Judaica categorizes types of Jewish stories in accordance with the categories worked out in the Aarne Thompson Type- Index. They include Myth (A Type motifs), Animal Tales (AT 1 - 199), Ordinary Tales (AT 300 - 749), Religious Tales (AT 750 - 849), Novellas or Romantic Tales (AT 850 - 999), Realistic Tales (AT 1200 - 1999), and Jewish legend, which is a unique form of literature particular to the Jewish people.[53] Noy points out that while the universal types of folk narrative are found in Jewish tradition, the ratio between the various different kinds of narratives differs between Jewish cultures and surrounding cultures. "Thus the didactic story, and not the magic tale, is dominant in the Jewish folk narrative; similarly the legend in Jewish lore is a much more popular vehicle of expression than in general folklore."[54]

While the early studies of story emphasized the universal elements, recent literature and studies have concentrated on the uniqueness within each culture's literature. It is the accent of the story that signals the distinctiveness of each group's

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[52] Joseph Campbell, with Bill Moyers, The Power of Myth, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 14.

[53] "Folklore," in Encyclopedia Judaica (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 6: 1376 - 1384. Each of these tale-types is defined in detail, and Jewish examples are give alongside some comparative material to other cultures.

[54] "Folklore," col. 1377.

tales. Stories, Dov Noy notes "... live and breathe in particular cultural environments, are narrated in and informed by different languages, and in all likelihood carry highly characteristic messages."[55] Raphael Patai concurs:

> ... in addition to the more easily discernible, definable, and classifiable motifs contained in a piece of narrative folklore, the latter is also characterized by such traits as mood, flavor, spirit, and atmosphere. These traits may account for its distinctiveness even though its motifs and structure (i.e. its concrete content) may be borrowed ... In fact, much of the specifically Jewish character of Jewish folklore can be found precisely in these elements to which the usual classifactory techniques of motif analysis are not applicable.[56]

That the Jewish character of Jewish literature should fall outside the categories of regular analysis should not be surprising. For Jewishness itself is a much-debated issue which often seems beyond definition. There is a multiplicity within *Klal Yisrael* - Jews speak a variety of languages and are made up of all physical types and colors. Yet there are still shared values, symbols, and contexts that create a bond. Roger Abrahams writes of an encounter with Jews from many places and backgrounds:

> Though we came from widely different places and had varying life-experiences, we sat around and did the obvious - we told jokes, or at least we tried to. The problem was that we all knew most of the same ones - and those we didn't know, we recognized right away anyhow. I think there would be little argument that whatever was going on here was an expression of ethnicity ... Ethnicity, as the self-conscious recognition of cultural differences, works here as a means of bonding a disparate group in an otherwise alien situation.[57]

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[55] Dov Noy, in Schwartz Miriam's, p. xii.

[56] Patai, p. 37.

[57] Roger D. Abrahams, "Folklore In The Definition Of Ethnicity: An American And Jewish Perspective," in Frank Talmage, ed., Studies in Jewish Folklore (Cambridge, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1980), p. 16.

The ethnicity he speaks about is mused upon by Raphael Patai, who argues that the commonality among Jews, as found in their stories, is more than simply tradition. "Jewish tradition," he writes, "though it evidently belongs to the sphere of culture, cannot be regarded as the culture of the Jews, for in fact it constitutes everywhere only a small part of their culture ..."[58] The tradition, suggests Patai, is created by the religious bond of the anhistory of a people, beginning with Abraham and continuing over two millennia.[59] The Jewishness of the people originates in its story. So despite the vast contrasts in geographical origin and times of composition, Jewish stories display a remarkable unity. Nathan Ausubel suggests, too, that this unpredictable cohesiveness lies in the origins of the original tale and symbolic complexes being derived from the Bible, the *Aggadah* in the *Talmud*, and the *Midrash*. Later Jewish literature piggy-backed upon these forms and contents when and wherever it was composed.[60] Stories were consequently lifted out of the oral form in a continuous process and fixed in a written form as a record of the anhistory of the people.[61]

The anhistory is given credibility through the teller of the story. The plot, characters, and even images might not be specifically Jewish in nature. For example, an animal tale might seem to have no specific Jewish theme about it, but when it is

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[58] Patai, p. 23.

[59] Patai, p. 31.

[60] Ausubel, pp. xx - xxi.

[61] Patai, p. 38, and Frankel, pp. xxiv - xxv.

told in a Jewish setting - the "'where', 'when,' and 'why' of the performance"[62] -justifies the link of this story as a Jewish folk - religious one. Dov Noy explains:

> The allusion to Biblical or Jewish characters and events is less critical to defining the Jewish character of the story than the fact that the story is being told (or imagined by the listener as being told) by a Jewish storyteller to a Jewish audience in a Jewish setting at a meaningful time in the chronology of Jewish living - and for what only can be called a Jewish purpose, namely, to edify and convey a message.[63]

Jewish characters do, however, appear in Jewish stories. Biblical characters, post-biblical figures, historical personages and rabbis and pious men and women appear as the heroes of tales.[64] Often the Jewish personalities were depicted in terms of the universal patterns of heroes: "miraculous birth, dangerous exposure, growth in an alien environment, unintentional revelation of divine qualities, etc."[65] The variation in the socio-economic status of the hero would depend on the Jewish society for which the tale was crafted: different classes would identify with different types of heroes.[66]

The character of the biblical hero differs in tenor from that of the post-biblical hero. The post-biblical stories no longer laud the physical power of Jewish characters. Also, as we were governed by foreign rule in our own land and became an alien

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[62] Dov Noy, "Is There A Jewish Folk Religion?," in Frank Talmage, p. 277.

[63] Dov Noy, in Howard Schwartz, Miriam's, p. xiv.

[64] Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, p. xvii and "Folklore," col. 1383 - 1384.

[65] "Folklore," col. 1383 - 1384.

[66] Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, p. xvii.

people in strange lands, the direct line to God is disconnected. The heroes "must take the long way around"[67] in their communication with God.

Being surrounded by non-Jewish culture meant that the Jewish story became peopled by non-Jews. In Jewish stories the non-Jew either typically behaves in a Jewish manner, showing the Jewish qualities of the specific society in which the tale was formulated,[68] or the non-Jew is a "gentile" type, the stereotyped Jewish projection of the non-Jew. Often they are referred to by generics - such as King, Prince, Vizier, Cardinal. When named, it is to lend to the anhistory some historical substantiation.[69]

Jewish events or Jewish time, though not essential to the integral plot of Jewish story, may also be an aspect of Jewish storytelling. If not part of the plot, the story may be written for a specific time-period in mind - a festival, a ceremony or a life-cycle event. Stories were a way of passing the time or amusing the children at group-oriented events.[70] Dov Noy explains:

> ... stories relate to the dark of the pre-*Havdalah* synagogue or home, told in the waning darkening moments of *Shaleshudes* (the late Sabbath afternoon meal) referred ofttimes to events dark and mysterious, and somehow connected with the Sabbath. The same holds true for stories narrated during the *Shiva* period (the seven days of sequestered mourning after the passing of a close relative). These stories show a preoccupation with death, the Angel of Death, rejuvenation, reincarnation, return from the other world, God's justice, theodicy, and

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[67] Frankel, pp. xxix - xxx.

[68] Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, p. xvii.

[69] "Folklore," col. 1383.

[70] Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, p. xvi.

the power of the dead to plea on behalf of surviving relatives and the Jewish People before the heavenly court.[71]

The Jewish setting in which the story is told is also an important characteristic in defining the Jewishness of the story, though not essential to it being a Jewish tale. Often the tales will be set in places which Jewish culture imbues with holiness - the synagogue, the home, the Temple, the land of Israel. These settings add a Jewish atmosphere to the tale. And if the tale is not set in those places, it is often told in those places. Stories were (and still are) an essential part of the synagogue *drasha* or sermon. They were told in the home. They were part of the repartee of the Jewish *cheder* or classroom, where an older person would instruct a younger.[72]

The message of the Jewish story is perhaps the most distinguishing feature of the bulk of this literature. From the Talmudic tales set in the period of the Roman empire onwards, Jewish tales have been concerned with morality, especially the nature of God's justice in this world.[73] Whatever the tone of the story, whether it be philosophical or pious or witty, there is always some moral message that may be gleaned.[74] It has been suggested that the main purpose of the Jewish tale is the didactic lesson that may be gained from it by the individual and by a people. Dov Noy suggests:

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[71] Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, pp. xv - xvi.

[72] Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, pp. xvi - xvii.

[73] Frankel, p. xxx.

[74] Ausubel, p. xx.

> Whereas the universal folktale appeals to the present psychological state of the listener, delighting him with a pat resolution in a formulistic happy ending, the Jewish folktale is future-oriented, urging the listener to adopt an ideal or goal as yet unrealized, to improve his ways or change his attitudes.[75]

Often the message is conveyed in an ambiance of sadness. Nathan Ausubel notes, "Like so many of the Jewish folk songs they [the stories] too are keyed in a haunting minor."[76] He suggests that this is one of the foremost distinguishing features of Jewish literature. Though he notes that this sadness never immerses itself into pity, rather it is "the ennoblement of grief in the steadfast spirit, of the moral triumph of the righteous even in defeat."[77]

This emotional spirit is saved from depression through a most prominent feature of Jewish story: the wit which is suffused through its words. Nathan Ausubel writes:

> Jews have received their tempering from an unflinching realism learned for a high fee in the school of life; they have always felt the need of fortifying their spirits with the armor of laughter against the barbs of the world.[78]

Laughter was not just for gaiety and frivolity, but it was designed as the affirmative and defiant answer of the Jews to the harshness of the world that surrounded them.[79]

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[75] Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, p. xviii.

[76] Ausubel, p. xx.

[77] Ausubel, p. xx.

[78] Ausubel, p. xx.

[79] Ausubel, p. xx.

The laughter often takes the form of irony. While God is behind the scenes, it is human cunning that is discerned. Irony takes the form of triumph over Hamans and Czars, Caesars and Princes. The wit also comes in the form of self-enlargement, giving us stories of sexual failure, intellectual vanity and the infamous foolishness of Chelmites. Being able to laugh at ourselves was, and is, an important part of Jewish humor. It is a means of enabling the Jews to hold up their heads in a sea of anti-Jewish feeling and to help them hold onto their own pride and faith.[80] The message is, "We do not need you to be critical of us, we know ourselves - warts and all - and we can laugh about it."[81]

The Jewish story, through plot and symbol, would meet the unconscious and conscious needs of the Jewish community. Therefore it would repeatedly be retold and listened to with great interest.[82] This retelling would make it Jewish by origin, adoption or reformation. The stories were part of the lives of the Jews:

> Everywhere mothers still tell wondrous tales to their children about *gute yidn* [Hasidic rebbes; literally, 'good Jews'] who help poor people in hard times. Grandmothers still like to tell about the days of yore, or about the *shretelekh* [elf-like creatures], who bring good fortune to the

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[80] Frankel, p. xxx - xxxi.

[81] This depiction of Jew and non-Jew in Jewish folklore is typical of a number of genres of folklore. William High Jansen pointed out the esoteric-exoteric factor: "This included the in-group's image of itself (the esoteric dimension), and the in-group's depiction of others (the exoteric dimension). But the concept is considerably more complicated, for the two dimensions interrelate in a number of ways, not least of which is the kind of lore which reflects the in-group's reaction to an out-group's depiction of the in-group." See Abrahams, p. 17.

[82] Bettelheim, p. 36. While Bruno Bettelheim refers to fairy tale, this meeting of the conscious and unconscious needs of the people is a characteristic of the success of all popular story.

> home; about evil men who invent libelous stories about Jews; about the Prophet Elijah, who does not forget the poor man. And in the small houses of worship and study where the ordinary folk gather to pore over sacred work or huddle near the stove, stories are told, with equal fervor and enthusiasm, about miracles performed by Hasidic rebbes .. and about the hidden *tsadek* [saintly man] who wanders over cities and small towns, disguised as a water carrier or a poor tailor or sexton, and who brings with him consolation and redemption.[83]

Stories were adopted from every conceivable culture - "... the Panchatrantra of India, the Kalila and Dimna of Persia, Aesop's Fables, the 1001 Arabian Nights, the Christian Gesta Romanorum, local folktales"[84] They were told and circulated through Europe by the mouths of Jewish merchants, tradesmen and scholars who would pick them up in their travels and translate them for the different communities of Europe, Jewish and non-Jewish. The ethnographic commission of YIVO reported in the 1930's where the best story-tellers could be found and where they have always been found:

> They are the merchants who travel to fairs and meet all kinds of people and get to hear a variety of tales and bring these home together with their hard earned *groshn*. Then there are the village artisans and craftsmen, who travel with their tools from village to village; *klezmorim* [musicians]; *badkhonim*, specializing in humorous and sentimental semi-improvised rhymes, who go from one wedding to another in neighboring towns and villages; *shadkhonim* [marriage brokers]; mendicants; blind musicians; street singers. There are also the Hasidim, who go on visits to their rebbe, or stay a while at his *hoyf* [court], where they hear many tales about Hasidic rebbes and about pious, saintly men.[85]

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[83] Weinreich, p. xxv. This is from advice given to folklorists who set about to collect Yiddish Jewish folklore in the first half of this century. It appeared in the YIVO *anketes* publications.

[84] Frankel, p. xxviii.

[85] Cited in Weinreich, p. xxiv.

The travelling army of Jews imparted tales that became part of their own literature, and tales that would find no home in Judaism but would become part of the outer culture. Classic fairy tales such as those of the Brothers Grimm were disseminated by the Jews who travelled through Europe.[86] And those that found a home in Judaism became known as Jewish, part of the anhistory that continued to form the consciousness of the people throughout the generations.

THE TREASURE TROVE OF JEWISH FOLKLORE

I

So far in this chapter examining the role of story in Judaism I have looked generally at how story defines us and attempted to outline elements that make a story Jewish in character. Throughout this chapter I have avoided defining Jewish stories as folk literature, despite my intention in later chapters to concentrate on folk literature in ascertaining a definition of faith and analyzing symbols.

The reason for this is two academic dilemmas. The first dilemma is deciding how folklore should be defined generally. The second is determining what stories constitute Jewish folklore. Since the aim of subsequent chapters will be to examine faith and symbol within popular story as defined by folklore, it is appropriate to try to

[86] "Folklore," col. 1379.

explore the academic perceptions of folklore and to ascertain a working definition of Jewish folklore for this analysis.

What are the general characteristics of folklore? This is an extremely difficult question to answer. Dan Ben Amos could not have uttered a truer word when he stated:

> Any of the qualities that were, and still are, attributed to folklore might be inherent in some forms, in some cultures - and any they are is up to the folklorists to demonstrate anew.[87]

Different folklorists have invoked different elements in constituting what they believe are the essential elements of the folktale. Among the criteria considered are the following:

1. Folktales have no firmly established form: The different names given to types of folktales such as animal fable, fairy tale, parable etc. are used to distinguish the categories of folktale, but do not limit its structure.[88]

2. Folktales are an anonymous oral literature: They are passed down in society and from culture to culture in an oral form. The originator of the story is thus unknown.[89]

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[87] Ben Amos, p. 17.

[88] G. S. Kirk, Myth: Its Meaning And Function In Ancient And Other Cultures (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Cambridge Univ. Press and Univ. of California Press, 1970), pp. 36 - 37, and Beane, p. 4.

[89] Ben Amos, pp. 15 - 16.

3. Folktales contain universal elements in common with other cultures and elements that are particular to the folktale's culture: The universality is that which is in common with the primary culture of humanity, while the particular encompasses the personal and local cultural references, the culture's meanings and the culture's symbols.[90]

4. Folktales are a culturally unique mode of communication: Folklore may exist in any society and reflects the values and themes in the formal and informal life of that culture. Folktales are the traditional stories of that culture. Belonging to a culture they reflect no specific social strata of that society, although the folktales may reflect the attitudes found within particular social strata (the poor versus the wealthy, the learned versus the unlearned).[91]

5. Folktales primarily aim to entertain: Joseph Campbell suggests that while folk literature may induct young people into the expectations of society, the primary aim is not didactic like mythology, which is more serious in its subject matter. The folk tale is entertainment that expresses ideas of less consequence like simple social situations, or plays on ordinary fears and desires. Myth in contrast contains elementary ideas and teaches one about oneself.[92]

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[90] Ben Amos, pp. 14, 15 - 16.

[91] Ben Amos, pp. 13, 17 and Kirk, p.37.

[92] Campbell, Power, pp. 71 - 72 and Kirk, pp. 37, 41.

6. Folktales are the literature of the ordinary folk: These are not the stories of the intellectual strata of society but are the products of the common people.[93] This idea is conveyed in the German expression *das Volk dichtet*, which says that the idea of literature and poetry starts with the folk,[94] although this expression and notion is itself a product of a romantic ideology of the elite!

7. Folktales come out of an elite experience: Joseph Campbell, in contrast to point 6, suggests that folk literature does not come out of the common strata of society but is rather produced at the outset by gifted people:

> These people speak to the folk, and there is an answer from the folk, which is then received as interaction. But the first impulse in the shaping of folk tradition comes from above, not from below.[95]

8. Folktales are set within historical time: They are assumed to have taken place in a past which is not the primeval past of myth, but an imaginable distance from the present.[96]

9. Folktales are repositories of truth: The contemporaneity of the past, suggest William Beane and William Doty, should not confuse us regarding the amount

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[93] Campbell, Power, pp. 71 - 72.

[94] Campbell, Power, p.107.

[95] Campbell, Power, p. 107.

[96] Kirk, p. 40.

of truth hidden within the narratives, because they may "... reveal strata of culture more archaic than the one represented.."[97] Others suggest that the truth in myth is more profound.[98]

10. Folktales contain human heroes, despite the appearance of animals, witches, giants, ogres and magical objects. These heroes are often of humble origins and the presence of the supernatural or animal element seems to help or hinder these characters in their purpose.[99]

11. Folktales often contain anonymous characters: Particular names are not given, but rather generic names to characters. Part of the appeal of the folk narrative is the lack of specifics and references. Where a set of folktales is centered around a specific hero, the folktale hero is identified with a legendary hero. [100]

12. Folktales contain plots where one event leads to another: There is no skipping from scene to scene as one might find in a myth or a novel.[101]

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[97] Beane, pp. 112 - 113.

[98] Beane, p. 4.

[99] Kirk, p. 37.

[100] Kirk, p. 39.

[101] Kirk, p. 40.

13. Folktales may contain supernatural subsidiary elements: The supernatural and the fantastic are introduced to produce adventure and insight. They are part of a wish-fulfillment fantasy.[102]

14. Folktales are filled with plots that show ingenuity: The main point of a tale will often be the ingenious way a difficulty is overcome or a problem is solved.[103]

As I have said above, not all of these attributes are consistently present in every type of folk literature, and some of the points are even contradicted in some types of folktales. For example, the animal fable does not take place within a historical time-frame at all. It is, in fact, impossible to come up with a complete, all-encompassing definition if the contradictory opinions among all the experts are taken into account.

The academic dilemma which most concerns us in terms of definition centers around what constitutes Jewish folklore. There are many positions, but I will present three central views. In the narrowest sense Jewish folktale is a limited genre of literature. Howard Schwartz defines the Jewish folktale as a particular type of literature from the Middle Ages, which is less didactic than its predecessors, but still moral in its tone. The difficulty of this definition is delineating which stories fall specifically into this category from the medieval period.

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[102] Kirk, pp. 37, 38, 41, and Dov Noy, in Schwartz, Miriam's, p. xi.

[103] Kirk, p. 38.

In a wider definition, the premier folklorist Dov Noy defines Jewish folk religion as that which is not within the "mainstream," (i.e. that defined by the literary elite). He writes:

> ... the Bible ... the talmudic-midrashic literature, the geonic responsa, the legal codes of Maimonides and Rabbi Joseph Karo ... and so on, represent the mainstream and the great tradition of the Jewish religion and of the ideal of Jewish behavior that accords with it. As a folklorist, however, I am also interested in the minor traditions - in the beliefs, practices and creations of the common people, the masses, the 'folk' in our terms. Not just because this is and has always been, quantatively, the main segment of the observers and the bearers of the Jewish tradition and religion, but because without understanding the margins of a cultural or religious phenomenon, one cannot comprehend the mainstream ... Jewish 'folk religion' is the expression of traditional behavior, reflecting a wide range of devices, intended to fulfill the constant task of Jewish religious survival in the hostile world.[104]

According to such a definition, folktales would be those stories that are not found in the "mainstream" (i.e. elite) codified works of Jewish literature, including Talmuds, midrashic compilations, kabbalistic and philosophical works.

One dilemma of this definition is that these elite works contain folk elements. Since the folk expression is so pervasive (and persuasive) in culture, and the rabbis were not unresponsive to its influence, or to the power that this type of story held on their followers and on themselves, they were not above utilizing it in their own works.[105] Further, stories from the canonical literature often entered the folk tradition through a variety of means, including the telling of stories in sermons, from teacher to

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[104] Noy, in Talmage, pp. 263 - 274.

[105] Ausubel, p. xix.

pupil, from parent to child.[106] Do we thus discount these stories as folklore? This highlights a specific tension prevalent especially in Jewish folklore. Is folklore a product of the masses or an intellectual elite? The truth, may indeed, lie somewhere in-between.

Another tension found in Dov Noy's view is the question whether folklore is a purely oral literature, or whether, as in the case of people as literate as the Jews, something can credibly hold a claim to being folklore when it is written or codified.[107] Within Judaism the oral and written forms of literature were transmitted one alongside the other, exercising a mutual influence one over the other.[108] The written form inspired new oral variants of a story, which then were subsequently written down as they were or when they had attained another version of their "classic" form.[109] Raphael Patai thus agrees with B.A. Botkin that:

> ... the transference of oral tradition to writing and print does not destroy its validity as folklore but rather, while freezing or fixing its form, helps to keep it alive...[110]

Because of the difficulty of ascertaining which stories constitute folklore according to this definition, due to the ambiguities presented above, I have decided not to use Dov Noy's definition in my analyses, even though he is the most pre-eminent of folklorists.

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[106] Weinreich, p. xxi.

[107] Arnold J. Band, "Folklore and Literature," in Talmage, p. 35.

[108] "Folklore", col. 1376, and Weinreich, p. xx.

[109] Bettelheim, p. 216, and Weinreich, p. xxxii.

[110] Patai, p. 39.

In the widest possible sense, Jewish folklore consists of all of Jewish story throughout time. The distinction between myth and folktale is disputable,[111] since even within the myth, folkloric-type narratives occur.[112] The definition centers around the tale's connection to the Jewish religion and tradition,[113] rather than the uncertain characteristics that one might use to define a folklore literature in general. It is with this definition in mind that I will now explore the history of Jewish story.

II

The Book of the Book by Howard Schwartz

(In Memory of Louis Ginzberg)

IN THAT country was only to be found one book. No one knew how or when the Book had first appeared, but it was believed by all to be the first book ever written, and that the stories it recorded had been handed down for centuries before finally being written down. At the same time the Book was a history of everything that had ever happened. It started with the story of how the sun had entered the world, and concluded with the stories of the kings and the prophets whose words still ruled the kingdom. It was the custom of these people to read from the Book three times each day, when the sun rose in the morning, and just before and after it had set. But there was also a few among them whose sole duty it was to spend their days reading from the Book, and this was considered to be the highest calling in the land.

Still fewer were a group of writers who had devoted themselves to the strange practice of trying to rewrite the Book. Some of them

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[111] Kirk, p. 34.

[112] Patai, pp. 38 - 39.

[113] Patai, p. 41.

would simply work from memory and write for years without referring to the original, while others would make up stories that would shed light on particular legends in the Book. In both cases these new legends were considered to have great importance, and were studied by the full-time readers as a commentary on the Book. Such a tradition would probably seem foreign, for we find it disturbing if one work too closely resembles any other. However, the people in this country had no doubt about this tradition, because it had been derived from one of the parables which appeared in the Book. This parable was about a mirror that reflected back whatever it was that the one on the other side of it was missing. If it was night when they looked into the mirror, the mirror reflected day, and if day, night; while if they were young the mirror would reflect how they would look when they were old, and if old, then how they had looked when they were young. In addition, if one was worried about a loved one who had been out to sea too long, or could not recall the face of a parent who had passed away, the mirror would reply to these and all other questions. In some ways it was like a window that always looked out on the same landscape, but what reflected changed from season to season. Little by little the replies to their questions would take form in front of them. And this is what the authors who rewrote the Book were trying to preserve - the forms that took shaped when they phrased their questions as they stood in front of the mirror.

Thus it happened, after the Book had been read and rewritten for many centuries, that one of these writers realized that all of the others had rewritten so many of the legends that they had created a new version of the same Book, the Book of the Book. And he gathered these new legends from every source he could find, and wove them together to form a single story, a history that reflected the history in the Book like the changing landscape in the parable of the mirror. And in this way it was finally recognized that for centuries the Book had been trying to give birth. And now that the new Book had appeared, the people believed that they were as blessed as those who had lived when the Book had first been written down, who had been relieved of the burden of preserving it by word of mouth. And before long the legend arose that one day the Book would again give birth, and it was a common belief that when this third Book appeared men would discover another dimension, one it is impossible to reflect in any mirror. A third eye with which to see - this is what they awaited.[114]

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[114] Howard Schwartz, Gates to the New City (New York: Avon, 1983), pp. 94 - 95.

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In its widest definition Jewish folklore is part of an evolving process. Howard Schwartz speaks of the evolution within Jewish literature:

> The Aggadah of the Talmud and Midrash and the legends of the Kabbalah and of the hasidim are unique among the sacred literatures of the world, since virtually every phase of their development can be traced in each subsequent generation. And this evolution continues into secular literature in the form of the folklore of the exiled and oppressed people who also found solace in reimagining the Bible and the subsequent history of their holy men, martyrs, and great rabbis. Although the style of presentation of these folk legends tends to be less didactic and more narrative than that of the Aggadah, the legends themselves are cut from the same cloth.[115]

New voices through the ages constantly add to the old traditions - Hasidic voices, Sephardic voices, Middle Eastern voices, Eastern voices, women's voices. [116] Each generation is legitimized as a valid and essential part of the people's anhistory and ethos. A talmudic legend in B.T. Menahot 29b gives credence to this development in law and lore. This is how Bialik and Rawnitzky retell it:

> When Moses ascended to heaven he saw God busy adorning some letters of the Torah with decorative crowns. Moses asked God, "Why are You doing this?" God answered "Some time in the future a great teacher will arise by name of Akiba ben Joseph and he will teach many new laws from each of these crowns." Moses asked, "Can I see him?" God did this for Moses who was then carried off into the future and placed in the school room of Akiba where he sat at the back of eight rows of students. As he listened to the lesson, Moses felt distressed because he did not understand what Akiba was teaching. Then one of the disciples asked Akiba what was the authority for the new law

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[115] Schwartz, Gates, pp. 8 - 9.

[116] Frankel, p. 51.

> which the master was expounding. Akiba answered, "It is a tradition which we have received going back as far as Moses on Mount Sinai." At that, Moses felt at ease again. He came to God and said, "Master of the World! with such a man why did you give the Torah through my hand?" God answered him, "Moses be still; this is My decision..."[117]

The stories of the Jews begin, as this story suggests, with Torah. The stories found in the Pentateuch are the "master" stories of Judaism. I use master story in the sense defined by Michael Torop. These are stories that answer the basic questions: Who are we? What is our world like? How do we respond?[118] They are mythical in nature: beginning with the origins of humanity and continuing with the family history of a people: their arguments and reconciliations, their births, their deaths and their marriages. The biblical myth continues with the making of a people through slavery and redemption, through trials in the wilderness, through their covenant with God, and finally the possession of the land promised to their ancestors.

Scholarship has shown that these have much in common with many of the basic myths found in the region of the ancient near east.[119] And like myths of other cultures, the biblical stories contain truths that hold great appeal for people[120], and help

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[117] H. N. Bialik and Y. H. Rawnitzky, Stories of the Sages, trans. by Chaim Pearl from Sefer HaHaggadah: The Book Of Jewish Folklore and Legend (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1991), p. 79.

[118] Torop, p. 99.

[119] "Folklore," col. 1377.

[120] Herbert Mason, "Myth as an Ambush of Reality," in Olson, p. 16.

us structure our reality.[121] Adoption

of these truths becomes the adaption of a "mythic heritage,"[122] so that myths are more than anhistory but also the pedagogical introductions to a culture.[123]

The unique aspect of the biblical myth is that this narrative, in addition to displaying the traditional concepts of archetypes and repetitions which it has in common with subsequent folk literature, presents historical events as imbued by God's proximity and care.[124] In other words, the biblical stories are a created mythology. God becomes an active character within the biblical story. God and God's intention for the people Israel become the "transhistorical justification for historical events."[125] God's active presence is an influence on the nature of story that comes after, as divine providence remains an aspect of these stories.

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[121] Torop, p. 98; Bettelheim, p. 52. Bettelheim argues that Bible stories might solve the riddle of existence but do not solve psychological needs and questions such as how to live a good life, how to cope with the darker sides of our personalities. This I believe is a judgmental position, for as I have discussed above, Robert Coles has shown that we can never be sure which story, which narrative, may resonate with a reader. Further, the bible's stories are, I believe, designed to deal with both the riddle of existence and psychological issues. Stories such as the conflicts between Jacob and Esau, the actions of Joseph and his brothers, the behavior of David etc., can become paradigms for our own behavior in a positive and negative manner.

[122] Waardenburg, pp. 58 - 59.

[123] Waardenburg, pp. 58 - 59.

[124] Eliade, pp. 104, "Historical facts thus become 'situations' of man in respect to God, and as such they acquire a religious value that nothing had previously been able to confer on them." Also Eliade, p. 106. The historian Ellis Rivkin expands this idea of God interacting through history beyond the biblical period in what he calls the "unity concept." See Ellis Rivkin The Shaping Of Jewish History: A Radical New Interpretation (New York; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. xvii - xviii.

[125] Eliade, p. 147.

All that is written subsequently is based on the truths inherent within the myth found in Scripture. The Five Books of Moses were joined over centuries by the Prophets and the Writings until the canon of Hebrew Scripture was closed.[126] The Bible's literary influence sets the tone and suffuses the future:

> In each generation it has been the practice of the Jewish people to return to the Bible for guidance in both ethical and spiritual matters ... Thus the Bible, and specifically the Torah, is not only the covenant between the people of Israel and God, but it is also the source of primary myths of the culture, and the bedrock for all commentary, both in the halakhic, or legal, realm, and in the aggadic, or legendary, realm.[127]

Its influence is strongly observed in the surviving literature from the late Second Commonwealth period, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Philo and Josephus, the New Testament, as well as the (later) writings of the Church Fathers.[128] These works model themselves upon, or take motifs and images from, the biblical tales. This source of folklore derives its authority from writings that are already viewed as authoritative.

In rabbinic literature, the heir of biblical story is *Aggadah*. The rabbis make *midrash*: they literally "inquired" or "examined" the biblical text to search out what had been left out of the *Torah*. There was no querying why such a story should be left out, just an *a priori* assumption that the biblical myth was composed to leave room

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[126] Schwartz, Gates, p. 5.

[127] Schwartz, Gates, p. 5.

[128] "Folklore," col. 1376.

for future tales, an assumption only strengthened by the *Torah*'s well-known ellipticism.

As the rabbis meditated on the Bible, certain common motifs were perceived to recur and were revisited.[129] Obscure passages or interesting wordings were enlarged upon to invent resolutions which "tended to reflect their creators as much as they resolved the unfinished tale."[130] Their search of the biblical text for the answers to the questions and concerns of their own era expanded the biblical myth into the present, and gave it a contemporary feeling for their generation.[131] The principle that "there is no 'earlier' and 'later' in the Torah," suggests the attitude that chronology is not a constraint in this literature.[132]

There seemed to be established procedures in the creating of *aggadah* which provided the link of this literature to the *Torah* or the whole corpus of biblical literature, and validated it as the successor literature. Howard Schwartz lists some of these elements:

> These rules hold that all additions must be demonstrated to be linked to the original text (thus the need for proof-texts); that all additions must clarify and complete missing elements of the original; that they must

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[129] Schwartz, Gates, p.6.

[130] Schwartz, Gates, p. 4.

[131] Schwartz, Gates, pp. 5 - 6, 10.

[132] Frankel, p. xxviii. This principle has a literary a well as a chronological aspect,namely, that the verses of Torah exist simultaneously with each other, and can be juxtaposed with each other or read in combination with each other.

> remain true to the reverent spirit of the original; and that the tone and, to a certain extent, the style must be consistent with the original.[133]

David Stern in his work on midrashic narratives has proposed that there are three distinct types of story forms within the midrashic literature - the *mashal,* the homiletical-exegetical narrative, and the *ma'aseh.* All these types of tales can be found in the early stories of the *Tannaim* (70 - 200 C.E.) and in the later *Aggadah* found in collections edited in the 12th and 13th centuries.[134] Stern defines the *mashal* as

> a literary-rhetoric form, a genre of narrative that employs certain poetic and rhetorical techniques to persuade its audience of the truth of a specific message relating to an ad hoc situation. Even if a mashal's narrative personifies abstract concepts, entities and relationships - God, the community of Israel, the covenant - those features of the mashal, be they called allegorical or symbolic or referential, exist only for the sake of enabling its audience to grasp for themselves the ulterior message that the mashal bears.[135]

In other words, the *mashal* is an extended analogy. The *mashal* is a narrative that elicits the listener's participation as a sleuth trying to solve the stories' meaning. The images contained within the stories are designed to parallel real- life situations, though they have a symbolic meaning.[136] When regularized[137], the *mashal* is often introduced

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[133] Schwartz, Gates, p. 12.

[134] Stern, p. 206, and Schwartz, Gates, p. 8.

[135] Stern, pp. 11 - 12.

[136] Stern, p. 8.

[137] Stern, p. 207. By regularization, Stern refers to the rhetorical and thematic stylization imposed by the editors. The presence or absence of this feature is not related to the early or late age of the narrative, though regularization is more conspicuous in the early and late medieval narratives such as Tanna De-Bei Eliyahu. See Stern, pp. 211 - 216. Further, in mystical narratives such as Sefer Habahir, the *nimshal* may be absent from the *mashal* to avoid stating the explicit meaning of the story. See Stern, pp. 216 -

with a recognizable formula.[138] It concludes with the *nimshal,* the solution or the interpretation which is appended to the end of the narrative, as a check for the listener that they solved the story in the correct manner.[139]

The *mashal* does not purport to have an historical basis. It is a fiction that is utilized as an exegetical tool.[140] In contrast, the homiletical-exegetical narrative claims historicity as an extension of the biblical narrative - in the form of commentary solving a textual dilemma or as an independent story attached to the authority of the text.[141] These *aggadot* are based on the lives of biblical figures, major and minor.[142] The aim is not simply to expand the biblical text through exegesis, not simply to tell a story, nor simply to make a didactic point through homily - but to achieve all three purposes at once.[143] Thus Stern compares this kind of narrative to an origami strip - "...it folds back upon itself, reversing the difference between narrative and exegesis into a kind of illusion of discourse.[144]

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[138] Stern, p. 207.

[139] Stern, pp. 5, 9.

[140] Stern, p. 237.

[141] Stern, p. 237.

[142] Stern, p. 238.

[143] Stern, pp. 238 - 239.

[144] Stern, p. 240.

The third type of narrative found in midrashic literature, the *ma'aseh,* takes the historical claim one step further by asserting that the story actually took place.[145] This, explains Stern "...has nothing to do with the separate, historical question of whether the ma'aseh actually did occur. Nor does the claim to historicity entail a claim to naturalism; very frequently, ma'asim contain supernatural or miraculous elements."[146] There are several types of *ma'asim*:

1. The Exemplum: A story that purports to be true and is a paradigm for the reader's action. The main point is the moral.[147]

2. The Sage-Story: Anecdotes and tales about the Rabbis that have a didactic purpose. The sage is a model of ideal behavior. These stories are more ideological than based on historical fact. There are several types of sage-stories:

(a) Example Stories: The sage performs deeds that have a special meaning. These deeds are often used as cases to create legal precedents in the *Mishna* and *Talmud.*

(b) Miracle Stories: The sage performs a supernatural deed.

(c) Pronouncement Stories: An anecdote that results in an intelligent remark that, in addition to being wise, is quotable.

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[145] Stern, p. 237.

[146] Stern, p. 240.

[147] Stern, p. 240.

(d) Martyrologies: Sages who are sacrificed and suffer because of their devotion to Judaism, especially in times of persecution.

(e) Education Narratives: More than just how sages are educated, this type of sage story details how rabbis overcame great obstacles to become learned.

(f) Anti-Sage Stories: Stories which detail characteristics of rabbis that are not to be emulated.[148]

3. Villain Stories: These contain characters whose actions define them as villains - the main purpose of these stories is to show the retribution against the wicked and the vindication of God.[149]

4. Romances: Probably an import from Greco-Roman literature, though more sketchy in form, they appear as early as late biblical literature and early apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature. They include the following categories:

(a) Fantastica: Tall tales and travels.

(b) Tales of Sexual Ordeals: In which the righteous are put to a test.

(c) Hagiographical Tales: Ordeals experienced by the righteous, through which God's providence is vindicated.[150]

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[148] Stern, pp. 242 - 243.

[149] Stern, p. 244.

[150] Stern, pp. 244 - 245.

5. Fulfillment Narratives: These are designed to show how biblical prophecies are fulfilled by history.These stories are usually ended with the formula "*lekayeim* .... [verse]," in order to fulfil such and such a verse. Another variation is when a verse is applied to the fate of an individual as a fulfillment of the promise made in Scripture.[151]

These types of narratives appear in all eras of aggadic writing, though the exegetical and terse style of earlier *midrashim* (Mekhilta, Genesis Rabbah) gives way to a more narrative style in later rabbinic collections (Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer, Sefer HaYashar).[152] The many *midrashim* through the ages form an extension of the anhistory created by the biblical stories. Howard Schwartz writes:

> As generation followed generation, a larger picture became apparent from the Aggadah, a vision in which image was linked to image, theme to theme, metaphor to metaphor, until finally legend was linked to legend in a way that suggested the possibility of an unbroken bridge of legends built across the gaps in the biblical narratives and chronology. What ultimately was being created was a kind of mono-myth of all creation - even of the time prior to existence - through all of time to the End of Days.[153]

As Jewish folklore in the widest sense moves into the Middle Ages, it begins to change. Rather than the didactic *midrashim*, we see didactic exempla as in The Meshalim of Solomon and Sefer Hasidim. Fables appear in story collections and in the

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[151] Stern, pp. 245 - 246.

[152] Schwartz, Gates, p. 11.

[153] Schwartz, Gates, p. 9.

maqamat (Hebrew rhymed prose narratives that appeared first in Spain in the twelfth century).[154] These might be classified as a new type of Jewish narrative, historically contemporaneous and different from the *midrashim*. Howard Schwartz calls this "medieval folklore"[155].

Medieval folklore was not included in the canonized tradition. It differs from the Bible and the midrashic genre of literature because its social and literary context is different. Further, it does not restricted itself to the ethics of the literature that preceded it, though within these stories there are morals present.[156] The medieval folklore does not use proof-texts in the manner of *midrash* to justify its legitimacy. But within this genre the subjects of earlier sacred literature are to be found: the Ten Lost Tribes, the miracles of the prophet Elijah, the lives of rabbis, heroes, scholars and holy men.[157] In addition to the tales of quests and the conveying of world-views, this is a literature of the imagination - stories of miracles, the supernatural, of demons and dybbuks.[158]

The influences on this literature not only lie in the Jewish narrative past, but come from the folklores of surrounding cultures, which is recast in a Jewish context. It is by definition probably the closest to other folk literatures, in the sense that much of

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[154] Stern, p. 224.

[155] Schwartz, Gates, p. 26.

[156] Schwartz, Gates, p. 26.

[157] Schwartz, Gates, p. 26.

[158] Schwartz, Gates, p.26.

it began with the ordinary people. Howard Schwartz describes this co-existence of influences:

> It is apparent that these folktales reflect a simpler, more fundamental grasp of religious elements, while at the same time they are more grounded in a realistic perspective, except in the kind of enchanted tales in which it is recognized that a flight of fancy is desired. Here too can be found those aggadic motifs which appeal to the popular imagination; for the inclination to embellish and extend existing myths and legends is just as intense as it is in the sacred literatures. At the same time, it is apparent that the powerful influence of the Oral Law, which lends its sacred aura to the legends of the Talmud and Midrash, is considerably diminished in medieval folklore. And while one consequence of this absence is the sacred aura ... a distance enters into the narration of the tale, which does not presume the tale is necessarily true, at the same time there is a great liberation of the imagination than in the earlier literature, now that its foremost commitment is no longer primarily the affirmation of the sacred tradition.[159]

While this folklore was not canonized, with the advent of print some of it was published. The Mayse-bukh (Book of Tales), Sefer Hasidim (mentioned above) and other volumes recorded the folktales of the time. In the introduction of the Mayse-bukh the publishers state the purpose of collecting such stories:

> to provide Jewish men and women with a wholesome alternative to the current "ungodly" worldly literature by presenting them with over two hundred edifying tales and legends drawn from a variety of oral and literary sources.[160]

In modern times, the work edited by Micah Yosef Bin Gorion, Mimekor Yisrael, and the work edited by Mordechai Ben Yechezkel, Sefer Maaysiot, comprise the two foremost collections of this literature.

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[159] Schwartz, Gates, p. 27.

[160] Weinreich, p. xxi.

The folklore of the Middle Ages was not just the product of the folk. Some also was derived from the imaginations of the intellectuals, the rabbis. The new "religious" folklore was tied to the culture of *kabbalah*. The "religious" folklore dealt with the mystics involved in *kabbalah*. Stories found in Shivhei Ha-Ari, the tales about the Ari, the great Rabbi Isaac Luria, include miraculous birth stories, miracles, and teachings. Likewise, the primary disciple of the Ari, Rabbi Hayyim Vital was the subject of several volumes entitled, Shivhei Rabbi Hayyim Vital, which told similar miraculous tales about this leader's life.[161] In one sense these are extensions of the sage-story found in classical rabbinic literature, with a similar didactic purpose. But this is a literature that also relates to the many folklore motifs that were narrated about heroes within other cultures.

This "biographical" literature is also inextricably bound up with the *kabbalah* itself. The fact that the Ari's creation myth, which involves collecting the sparks that escaped when the divine vessels broke, is also a story about the coming of the Messiah (for that is the result of the recollected sparks), links the lives of these kabbalists with the Kabbalah. "Both the Ari and his primary disciple, Hayyim Vital, were regarded in their time as the precursors of the messiah, if not Messiah ben Joseph, who precedes the coming of the Messiah ben David, and prepares the way."[162]

Some of the stories within kabbalistic literature are more clearly the direct heir of Midrash rather than the medieval folktale because of their midrashic form. It was

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[161] Schwartz, Gates, p. 27.

[162] Schwartz, Gates, p. 24.

the kabbalistic aim to view the Bible from a mystical perspective, to search out the deeper meanings to the stories involved in Jewish anhistory. It invented its own mythology of *sefirot* and emanations[163], of *tikkun* and of the world waiting for the Messiah,[164] and of the messianic age. This literature adapted themes from the surrounding culture and subsumed them in its religious enquiry. Because of the kabbalists' penchant for the mystical and for finding their own myths within the biblical myth, the interpretations and understandings of past stories were quite radical in nature.[165] Howard Schwartz writes:

> A close examination of the traditional elements the Ari used in his mythic retelling includes the biblical version of Creation, the Fall, and the entire kabbalistic system of emanation. Yet it emerges as a new myth, one of the last to be added to the Jewish tradition and one which quickly becomes an integral part of it. For like all new myths it recombines elements of the old in a new fashion, which nevertheless transforms it into something new. That this myth of the fall and restoration should find such wide acceptance came about because of its apparent links to past traditions, which made it possible for it to be recognized as having been implicit in earlier texts. It had grown from within, and although it presented a new transformation, the seeds were still recognizable. From this perspective the myth of the Ari existed all along, but awaited the Ari to be revealed.[166]

The themes and symbols and hopes of this literature would become part of the anhistory, part of the mono-myth of Judaism. It would provide the doorway for subsequent literatures to combine not only its themes and its structures, but also its

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[163] Schwartz, Gates, p. 24. The concept of emanations derives from neo-Platonism in Hellenistic philosophy.

[164] Schwartz, Gates, p. 24 - 26.

[165] Schwartz, Gates, p. 20.

[166] Schwartz, Gates, p. 25.

use of the sacred and secular. The Hasidic literature that followed utilized the kabbalistic model, especially when it enabled the *Hasidim* to incorporate some new type of religious dimension.[167]

The Hasidic masters rejoiced in the world of stories. They sought to see the presence of God in all situations as a means of spiritual enlightenment. Like the kabbalists, they emphasized the mystical in life (i.e. communion with God, the mysteries of the inner workings of the cosmos). They surpassed the medieval writers in their sense of "[m]essianic longings and the sense that in the Baal Shem and some of the later Hasidic figures, figures of the stature of the sages of the past had come again into the world."[168] Through their beliefs and through their stories the Hasidim brought a renewal of spirituality to the masses in Judaism.

The telling of stories was regarded as a worthy past-time by the Hasidim. They believed that,

> since God was immanent in this world, he could be present in a seemingly idle tale, which, upon examination, might contain a deep theological truth; the tale projected before the devout the image of the hasidic hero, the Tsadik, more often than not the Besht himself; the tale was an effective means of communicating basic religious notions.[169]

These stories of the Besht, the famous Baal Shem Tov, were recorded by his scribe Dov Baer. The formula for these stories is based on the legends of the Ari and other kabbalistic masters. The basic themes that reappear are outlined by Joseph Dan:

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[167] Schwartz, Gates, p. 27.

[168] Schwartz, Gates, p. 30.

[169] Band, in Talmage, p. 36.

1. The "lofty and hidden concepts" found in tales of other people, be they Jews or gentiles, all are parallel to the "holy sparks" which fell into the world at the time of the cataclysmic act of creation.

2. The tales themselves underwent a process similar to the Lurianic "breaking of vessels" at the time of creation; they are therefore confused, ruined, disorderly, and their original meaning has been lost.

3. The inspired Tsadik, in this case the Besht, is endowed with the power to reveal the holiness hidden in the stories by restructuring them according to their original, proper order. In this sense the Tsadik "repairs" the story.

4. Once the story has been repaired, it assumes enormous religious, even theurgic power, and a tsadik like the Besht can use the story to "unite the unities"... which had split asunder in the act of creation.[170]

This formula found in the Besht stories would be repeated over and over to describe the lives of succeeding Hasidic masters who were clued into life's mysteries.[171]

The stories also included elements of other earlier Jewish literature, as Howard Schwartz explains:

> These texts are a product of the sacred literatures of the Bible, Talmud, Midrash and kabbalah, but what is less apparent is the influence of medieval folklore. For hasidic tales incorporate elements of the narrative similar to those found in folk tales, as well as the miracles, enchantments, witches, and demons that are so familiar in folklore and fairy tales. Imposed on this archetypal substructure are figures of angels and spirits, a supernatural aspect of hasidic literature that is found in a great many tales.[172]

Hasidic literature took a new turn in the nineteenth century in the stories of Nachman of Bratslav. Even more than the hasidic rebbes prior to him, Rabbi Nachman

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[170] Band, in Talmage, p. 38.

[171] Schwartz, Gates, p. 31.

[172] Schwartz, Gates, p. 31.

would create *ma'asim*. Drawn to the mode of the folktale,[173] it became his primary mode of teaching. Influenced especially by the symbols and images of fairy tales, with their magical qualities, and the ability of good to vanquish evil, he used such themes to express his own concept that faith can overcome any obstacle.[174]

It was not only the theme of the folktale that appealed to Rabbi Nachman. He used common folktale motifs - such as a princess under an evil spell and a prince seeking her out. These were meant to be understood allegorically, which the Bratslav Hasidim, his followers, did to the most esoteric levels. Howard Schwartz comments:"Nachman's tales are regarded as sacred texts, and are studied from every angle and subjected to the same thorough exegesis as are the sacred scriptures."[175] Their commentaries are the *midrash* on his text!

Not that these were simple tales by any means. Rabbi Nachman had a natural ability to include kabbalistic concepts within his folktale-type narratives. It is suggested that he perceived the common archetypes present in the biblical narrative, the Kabbalah, and in the folk-story, and found a way of revealing this to his Hasidim so that they understood it from their traditional perspective.[176] The motifs, the characters, were all archetypes of one and the same prism. His work is the combination of both the folk and the mystical/intellectual. This combination is not as

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[173] Schwartz, Gates, pp. 35 - 36.

[174] Schwartz, Gates, p. 37.

[175] Schwartz, Gates, p. 37.

[176] Schwartz, Gates, p. 39.

antithetical as it may seem, because all these types of narrative had an appeal to the psychological, as Rabbi Nachman seemed to have recognized. Howard Schwartz notes:

> Nachman perceived, for example, that the exile of the Shekhinah concerned him in the most personal way possible. The Shekhinah was not only lost to Israel as a whole, but also to him individually, and it was possible and necessary to set off on the quest to restore her to her former position of glory.[177]

The Nachman narratives are the bridge to the modern era of story-telling. His stories, like that of Jewish storytelling preceding him, took an oral form and then were written down. His stories, though, represent the end of the dominance of such a mode of storytelling.[178] As storytelling moves into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the written creation predominates. In Chapter Four I will examine the techniques used in modern story writing, which is the continuation of the Jewish story-telling tradition, though as yet not sufficient time has passed to know what of the new stories will crystallize into folklore.[179]

These Jewish stories, past and present, though different in style and sometimes innovative in content, express ideas and thoughts of the Jewish people. Contained within these narratives are Jewish perceptions of faith and spirituality with which Jews are inculcated. The next chapter will examine how we are educated through the story to understand our faith and spirituality, as well as probe tales from the medieval period in search of a working description of faith and spirituality for Jews.

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[177] Schwartz, Gates, p. 41.

[178] Schwartz, Gates, p. 46.

[179] Ausubel, p. xxi.

CHAPTER TWO

IN SEARCH OF A WORKING DESCRIPTION OF FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY FOR JEWS

Amol iz geveyn, once upon a time ... we were told stories. And it is these stories that we were told and that we continue to tell that help imbue us with a sense of faith and spirituality. In this chapter I will begin by examining how story inspires faith and spirituality as perceived by major faith development theorists and other scholars concerned with these issues. Then, understanding how we are educated towards faith and spirituality through the tool of storytelling, I will search for a working description of the meaning of these characteristics as taught to contemporary Jews through the vehicle of story.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONCEPTS OF FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

> People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive.[1]

People are meaning-making animals by nature. Robert Kegan defines meaning-making as an evolutionary activity that provides "the context for self - other

[1] Campbell, Power, p. 1.

relationships; it is the dance of life that makes us essentially human."[2] Stories have an essential place within our meaning-making processes, for through them we are instructed in ancient wisdoms[3] and wisdoms accumulated over time through a community's experience. James Fowler asserts:

> Others before us have composed, given us language, symbols, myths and concepts which both awaken and guide faith's composing ... We do not compose alone ...[4]

The stories of our traditions become one of the models for our life's thought and experience.

How do we define faith? The Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary submits that it is:

> ... belief and trust in and loyalty to God ... belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion ... firm belief in something for which there is no proof ... complete trust ... something that is believed in esp. with strong conviction; *esp* : a system of religious beliefs

Different experts have offered varying definitions. William Cantwell Smith proposes:

> Faith, at once deeper and more personal than religion, is the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition.[5]

James Fowler elaborates with a more complex definition that includes a constructive process of one's world around faith:

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[2] Cited in Torop, p. 40.

[3] "Mircea Eliade ... finds that ancient man has something to teach the world, an ability to formulate the impingement of that which man calls the sacred in himself." Fawcett, p. 280.

[4] James W. Fowler, Stages Of Faith: The Psychology Of Human Development And The Quest For Meaning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 30.

[5] Fowler, pp. 9 - 10.

> Faith is:
> People's evolved and evolving ways
> of experiencing self, others and world
> (as they construct them)
> as related to and affected by the
> ultimate conditions of existence
> as they construct them
> and of shaping their lives' purposes and meanings,
> trusts and loyalties, in light of the
> character of being, value and power
> determining the ultimate conditions
> of existence (as grasped in their
> operative images - conscious and
> unconscious - of them)[6]

Michael Torop attaches the confused context of a dark reality as a backdrop in his delineation of the meaning of faith:

> Faith is defined as a human universal, understood as the process of making meaning, seeking pattern, order and significance in a world that is inherently chaotic and troubling.[7]

Mircea Eliade provides a different perspective when he writes that faith is "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."[8]

There are many more definitions that experts outline. To summarize the commonality among them, there is, for the most part, a general agreement that faith is a personal understanding of meaning, as opposed to belief, which is the acceptance of doctrines which are contained in a system. William Cantwell Smith writes on the differences between faith and belief.

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[6] Fowler, pp. 92 - 93.

[7] Torop, p. ix.

[8] "Faith" in The Encyclopedia Of Religion (NY: Macmillan, 1987), 5: 250.

> Faith is deeper, richer, more personal. It is engendered by a religious tradition, in some cases and to some degree by its doctrines, but it is a quality of the person not the system. It is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level, to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension.[9]

Today spirituality, not faith, is the vogue catch-phrase of those seeking meaning. The Webster's Ninth Collegiate Dictionary defines "spirituality" as "... sensitivity or attachment to religious values ... the quality or state of being spiritual." It seems to be the way the individual experiences his or her faith. Michael Barnes suggests:

> The focus of thought about spirituality is usually on the individual person, on our inner sense of self and all the many patterns by which our self-hood is constituted. We reflect on our virtues, on how limited they are and how to improve them. We come to know our own needs and desires, putting them in order as best we can, coming to cherish them as our own and as human, however vulnerable they make us. We review our own commitments, deepening some, putting others in better perspective. The center of our attention in this is our own development.[10]

Abraham Joshua Heschel perceives spirituality as an entity that we share with others yet the focus is still on the personal:

> It is the reference to the transcendent in our own existence, the direction of the Here toward the Beyond. It is the ecstatic force that stirs all our goals, redeeming values from the narrowness of being ends in themselves, turning arrivals into new pilgrimages, new farings forth. It is an all-pervading trend that both contains and transcends all values, a never-ending process, the upward movement of being. The spiritual is

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[9] Cited in Fowler, p. 11.

[10] Michael Barnes in response to a paper by Thomas H. Groome, "The Spirituality of the Religious Educator," in Religious Education 83, no. 1 (Winter, 1988), p. 23.

> not something we own, but something we may share in. We do not possess it; we may be possessed by it. When we perceive it, it is as if our mind were gliding for a while with an eternal current, in which our ideas become knowledge swept beyond itself.[11]

Lawrence Kushner defines spirituality in a similar manner, seeing it as evoking an affective (as opposed to cognitive) response in the individual:

> Spirituality is that dimension of living in which each of us becomes aware of God's presence. Jewish spirituality or *kedusha*... is about an ever present possibility for each individual, about the potential immediacy of God's presence. It is also about the patience and paying attention, about seeing, feeling and hearing things which only a moment ago were inaccessible.[12]

Eugene Borowitz, although not comfortable with the term spirituality, also sees its definition as pertaining to the emotions evoked by faith:

> I am using the word spiritual to refer to that in us which vibrates with that part of reality which is in significant measure other than ourselves and which is of such special quality - say, as the sublime or the numinous - that it draws forth our religious response.[13]

Like faith, on investigation the word spirituality does not elicit a universally accepted meaning. The experience of spirituality may be found in action, or in a moment of time, in the perception of an object or in a meaningful activity - depending on who you read or to whom you speak. Spirituality is an opaque term that is difficult to define.

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[11] Abraham Joshua Heschel, God In Search Of Man: A Philosophy Of Judaism (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955), p. 416.

[12] Lawrence Kushner, "Finding God," in Reform Judaism 20, no. 3, (Spring, 1992), p. 8.

[13] Eugene R. Borowitz, "Beyond Immanence," in Religious Education 75, no. 4, (July - August, 1980), p. 388.

In this realm of ambiguous terms, what can be ascertained is that most scholars would concur that faith deals somehow with the cognitive faculties and spirituality somehow with the affective faculties, though there is some overlap. Those who define faith speak of the rationale behind personal beliefs. Those who talk of spirituality are dealing with the emotional realm. They are saying: rather than seeking meaning in life, we are searching for the feeling of being alive.[14]

The multiplicity of thought on the meaning of faith and spirituality suggests the complexity of these terms. When they are limited by our intellectual definitions, their sense is fallible. The secret towards a definition must be to look for the meaning that is beyond words. These are terms that require a "thick description".[15] Story, because of its evocative and allusive qualities, is a suitable vehicle through which to make such an inquiry. For stories are vehicles through which each generation has molded the subsequent generation's faith. They are a vehicle that has an innate spirituality about it.[16]

Stories help us build our faith and spiritual realities. Their impact can be seen in looking at some of the central constructivist models in the area of faith development. Constructivist models around faith combine the developmental mode established by Jean Piaget, the psycho-social theories of Erik Erikson and the moral

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[14] Campbell, Power, p. 1.

[15] Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation Of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3 - 30. Geertz appropriates Gilbert Ryes' term "thick description" to explore definitions of culture.

[16] Mary Cunningham, "Do We Ask Too Much Of Storytelling?" in Storytelling 5, no. 4, (Fall, 1993), p. 21.

reasoning theories of Lawrence Kohlberg. These viewpoints work in tandem or with different emphases to form theories of each individual's development of a concept of faith.

The constructivist model is one whereby the individual, in conjunction with his or her ability to reason and the surrounding social and cultural environment, constructs some order within their life, so as to interpret knowledge, meaning and reality. This construction is experienced as real and true by the individual and therefore will have an impact upon his or her behavior.[17] The stages of faith are experienced and bridged by the knowing of the imagination.[18] Fowler suggests that "[i]magination is a powerful force underlying all knowing."[19] Imagination is a real process that is often maligned. David Galin in his medical research points out that imagination and feeling, or "primary process thinking" controlled by the right side of the brain, is seen as less important than processes such as analysis and logic controlled by the left side of the brain.[20] Immanuel Kant defines and understands imagination through the German word "*Einbildungskraft*," meaning the "power of shaping into one."[21] The brain shapes

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[17] A. Roger Gobbel, "On Constructing Spirituality," in Religious Education 75, no. 4 (July-August, 1980), pp. 414, 416.

[18] William J. Bausch, Storytelling: Imagination And Faith (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-third Publications, 1984), pp. 9 - 28.

[19] Fowler, p. 30.

[20] Bausch, p. 47.

[21] Torop, p. 72.

experiences, images, symbols and stories into an understanding of faith, a stance of ultimate conviction in the world.

Constructive theories suggest that as individuals incorporate new data (situations, information, experience, events, crisis etc.) into their constructions of reality, it is compared and contrasted with all the old data and the established construction. The new data's inclusion may demand a re-arrangement, an alteration or even a transformation of the base construct.[22] In these theories the stages are perceived to progress in order in a hierarchical fashion. Each stage is experienced in turn by an individual. A higher stage is perceived as more advanced than a lower stage.[23]

When looking at these theories one concentrates on the static descriptions of the stages which are achieved at different times.[24] Yet, constructivist theories are more dynamic than a diagram of stages might suggest. The imaginative process allows the individual to be in the workings of an earlier stage late in life, or one may be in the midst of experiencing several stages at once, although one stage may dominate.[25] Comprehension may be at the next higher stage to the dominant stage of an individual. It is not unusual for one to prefer the reasoning of the highest stage they can

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[22] Gobbel, p. 415.

[23] Roberta Louis Goodman, "Nurturing Meaning Making As An Approach To Jewish Education: A Look At Faith Development Theory," in Audrey Friedman Marcus, The Jewish Teacher's Handbook: Revised Edition Denver: Alternatives In Religious Education, 1994, p. 4. (unpublished manuscript)

[24] Torop, p. 40.

[25] Fowler, pp. 146 - 148.

understand. Lengthy or potent exposure to the reasoning at a higher stage will often inspire an individual to move to the next stage.[26]

Dynamism is involved in this movement between the stages. James Loder has termed this the "transforming moment." The transforming moment occurs when the individual is confronted by information that conflicts with their construct of understanding. The fracture promotes an interlude where old data or information is scanned. The imagination then builds a new framework incorporating new insight. When the conflict is resolved, and the individual attains a new construct or context with which to interpret new images,[27] there is a realignment of our understanding of seeing or being.

An important protagonist in constructivist development theory concerning faith is James Fowler. Fowler combines the theories which involve knowing the world through physical objects (Piaget), knowing the self and others through perspective-taking (Piaget and Selman), the capabilities for moral analysis and judgement (Kohlberg) and other constitutions of the self as related to others (Kegan) to compose the cognitive part of his own theory.[28] The affective part of his faith development theory draws on the psycho-social models found in Erikson.[29] Fowler divides our development of faith into a Pre-Stage and six "Stages of Faith." The following is a

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[26] Torop, p. 186.

[27] Torop, pp. 80 - 82.

[28] Torop, p. 7.

[29] Jardine M. Marlene and Henning G. Viljoen, "Fowler's Theory of Faith Development: An Evaluative Discussion," in Religious Education 87 (1992), p. 77.

brief description of each stage and my understanding of how story is involved within the processes of that stage.

Pre-Stage: Infancy And Undifferentiated Faith

This Pre-Stage focuses on the development of trust and mistrust. Courage, hope and love fuse with fears of abandonment resulting from inconsistencies and deprivations experienced in the relationship with caregiver(s). The potency of trust developed at this stage will engage or undermine later stages of faith.[30]

The role of story in the Pre-Stage rests entirely on the relationship created between storyteller and child. It is not the content of story that matters but the telling of story. The focus is the interaction between caregiver and child, for it is through interaction that trust and mistrust are nurtured. It is with understanding, "with the convergence of thought and language, opening up to the use of symbols in speech and ritual play"[31] that the transition to Stage One is made.

Stage One: Intuitive-Projective Faith

During this stage the child's imagination is caught by images, actions, moods and stories provided by those who surround him or her. Imagination, rather than

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[30] Fowler, p. 121.

[31] Fowler, p. 121.

logical thought, is the dominant thinking mode, and the child creates a fantasy-filled environment with long-lasting potent images and thoughts that will be sorted at a later phase. Children's perception of the world is egocentric, perceiving their viewpoint to be indistinguishable from the viewpoint of others who are close to them.[32]

Storytelling is crucial at this stage. While young children cannot typically create their own narratives, or faithfully retell the sequence of events in narratives told to them, they appreciate stories, their details, symbols and images in a concrete manner. Magic and fantasy become part of their reality. The story

> ... provide[s] images, symbols and examples for the vague but powerful impulses, feelings and aspirations forming within them ... provide models for their construction of self and others in relations to an ultimate environment...[33]

The importance of this stage is the molding of the child's imaginative ability:

> The gift or emergent strength of this stage is the birth of the imagination, the ability to unify and grasp the experience-world in powerful images and as presented in the stories that register the child's intuitive understandings and feelings towards the ultimate conditions of existence.[34]

The power of the imagination that is nurtured as a force at this stage will be the continuous force with which the environment is pieced together at later stages.[35]

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[32] Fowler, p. 133 - 134.

[33] Fowler, p. 136.

[34] Fowler, p. 134.

[35] Fowler, p. 131.

Stage Two: Mythic Literal Faith

As a child develops concrete operational thinking, a new stage emerges. The ability to reason enables the individual to distinguish between reality and fantasy.[36] This is the period when children incorporate the stories, beliefs and observances of their surrounding community. Rather than the episodic appreciation found in a child with Intuitive-Projective Faith, children in this later stage are capable of appreciating the narrative construction of a tale, of repeating it almost verbatim and extending their cognitive abilities to the creation of their own narratives.[37]

The story provides coherence to the child's imaginative experiences, and provides a tool for increasingly understanding the experience of others.[38] At this stage a child will comprehend sequence, fostering an appreciation for the story-history of his or her people.[39] Stories at this stage of development provide concepts of fairness and reciprocity. The symbols and story-line are understood on a literal level.[40] James Fowler writes:

> For Stage Two meanings are conserved and expressed in stories. There is also a sense in which the meanings are trapped in the narrative, there

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[36] Goodman, p. 7.

[37] Fowler, pp. 136, 149.

[38] Fowler, p. 149.

[39] Goodman, p. 8.

[40] Fowler, p. 149.

not being yet the readiness to draw from them conclusions about a general order of meaning in life.[41]

When we sit enthralled by the teller's tale told to us for the first time, we are benefiting from the legacy of this stage, the legacy of an appreciation of stories.

Stage Three: Synthetic Conventional Faith[42]

This stage normally emerges in adolescence and for some becomes a stage of equilibrium. It is characterized by the ability to think abstractly and a cognisance of the points of view with which one is surrounded. It is the stage that shows a strong awareness of self-image and a preference for conformity. Belief is structured by a chosen external authority or by the consensus of the peer group. The individual unconsciously adopts "ideologies" of thought without discerning that these are unexamined positions. Because of this lack of scrutiny, values and beliefs may be communicated unsystematically. Differences with others are perceived as differences in "kinds" of people.[43]

This is the stage that "struggles with ideals and realities,"[44] and it is in this phase that viewpoints in stories become personalized. It is the time of emergence of

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[41] Fowler, p. 137.

[42] Stage Three and Stage Four are often criticized by feminists as being based on a masculine model. For a discussion of this critique, see Goodman, p. 15.

[43] Fowler, p. 172 - 173.

[44] Goodman, p. 11.

personal stories, "the myth of one's own becoming in identity and faith"[45], the religious anhistory becomes one's own history and the individual becomes part of the myth's future.[46] Fowler writes: " ... the youth begins to project the forming myth of self into future roles and relationships."[47] This new understanding includes an integration on a personal level of symbols. Symbol in story is understood on a literal level.[48]

Stage Four: Individuative Reflective Faith:[49]

Exposure to value systems which contradict the one formed in Synthetic-Conventional Faith facilitates the movement into Stage Four. It is marked by the formation of a new identity which is no longer dependent upon an outside authority or group for its frame of meaning. This is the stage that chooses group membership and loyalties. Clear distinctions and abstract concepts become one's own. Fowler writes:

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[45] Fowler, p. 173.

[46] In terms of Jewish education and development of God concepts, Roberta Louis Goodman notes the effectiveness of Hasidic stories at this stage as the individual tries to define his or her relationship with God. The Hasidic story presents a close and caring relationship with God, which is an important model for them. This is also the stage where they can reason and observe the unfairness in the world which is governed by God. See Goodman, p. 11.

[47] Fowler, p. 152.

[48] Fowler, p. 163.

[49] Sharon Parks divides Fowler's Stage Four into two categories. She identifies the breakdown of values in Stage Three and the ability of the early adult to become critical and reflective of his or her ideas as the period of young adult faith. Michael Torop points out that this substage is essentially the transition point between Stage Three and Stage Four in Fowler's theory. Parks' second substage, which she calls "mature adult faith", may possibly occur in the period of early adulthood or as late as one's mid-thirties and forties. See Torop, p. 35.

> Self (identity) and outlook (world view) are differentiated from those of others and become acknowledged factors in the reactions, interpretations and judgements one makes on the actions of the self and others.[50]

Individuals in Stage Four are immersed in their own story and blind to the truths in others stories. Within their own tale they are capable of understanding conceptual meanings of symbol and ritual. It is the stage of demythologizing, as symbols are comprehended as metaphors, permeated with a certain flatness because of a tendency to reduce their potency and connotations.[51] The meaning, purpose and logic of the story becomes important to this stage. Goodman describes this stage as that of the "Wissenschaft des Judenthums,"[52] because of the dominance of logic and reasoning. Indeed, the rationale and the purpose of the story becomes all important. Stories become useful because of their surface truth and insight. The persons at Stage Four are trying to comprehend the "why" with explanations that are meaningful to their pattern of reasoning.[53]

Stage Five: Conjunctive Faith

As stories, symbols, myths and paradoxes of one's own tradition or of other traditions interrupt one's thought processes, and one begins questioning the orderly and

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[50] Fowler, p. 182.

[51] Fowler, p. 182.

[52] Goodman, p. 12.

[53] Goodman, p. 12.

flat perceptions assembled in Stage Four, the transition to Stage Five is made. Unusual before mid-life, Stage Five is a reconsolidation of both the cognitive and affective realms in faith development. This is the stage of "second naivete" where "symbolic power is reunited with conceptual meanings."[54]

Conjunctive Faith brings questions and doubts to the individual, coupled with a self-assurance in one's own being, facilitating one's ability to listen to the viewpoint of others. One becomes self-critical and can recognize the origin of thoughts and prejudices within oneself. There is an interest in the varying opinions of others to form a dialogue with them and with self.[55] Either/or is no longer so central to thought patterns. Issues are seen as multi-sided simultaneously.[56] Religion is seen as limited to only one people's experience, and interest in faith turns to how many thoughts can exist and contain truth, how this may compliment and correct one' own perceptions.[57] James Fowler writes:

> The new strength of this stage comes in the rise of the ironic imagination - a capacity to see and be in one's or one's groups most powerful meanings, while simultaneously recognizing that they are relative, partial and inevitably distorting apprehensions of transcendent reality. [58]

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[54] Fowler, p. 197.

[55] Fowler, p. 197 - 198.

[56] Fowler, p. 15.

[57] Fowler, p. 186.

[58] Fowler, p. 198.

Story in this stage gains renewed power in the life of the individual as the cognitive dimension of faith and the affective domain of the spiritual meld again. James Fowler summarizes:

> Stage Five can appreciate symbols, myths and rituals (its own and others) because it has been grasped , in some measure, by the depth of reality to which they refer.[59]

This is the stage of experimentation, the stage when new rituals and stories become part of the creative urge for uncovering deep and rich meanings enhancing the faith of the Stage Five individual.[60] The conflict within storytelling and story-listening at this stage is found in the recognition of the universal elements within the tale, and the tension of not being able to feel entirely comfortable with this unresolved paradox. Fowler asserts:

> ... this stage remains divided. It lives and acts between an untransformed world and a transforming vision and loyalties. In some few cases this division yields to the call of the radical actualization that we call Stage Six.[61]

Stage Six: Universalizing Faith: [62]

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[59] Fowler, p. 198.

[60] Goodman, p. 13.

[61] Fowler, p. 198.

[62] Fowler's Stage Six is often disparaged by critics as too masculine (Maria Harris and Sam Keen), as being too Christian (Gabriel Moran and Michael Shire), as not descriptive of faith (Moran), as limiting of growth because it is viewed as the pinnacle of faith. For discussion of these viewpoints see Torop, pp. 35 - 58.

Stage Six is the hardest to articulate since it is so rarely evidenced in life. This in Fowler's model is the apex of faith development. A Stage Six person becomes a "disciplined, activist incarnation"[63] of absolutes. The lines between the conviction and the person becomes blurred, occasionally leading to martyrdom. Those who reach Stage Six are viewed as exceptional in the moral and religious realm. Goodman characterizes people who are at Stage Six within Jewish tradition as the lamed-vavnik or the tzaddik.[64] In Judaism, one becomes a true partner with God experiencing God's transcendence and immanence intertwined.[65]

An individual who has reached Stage Six, becomes "one" with the story. The story is the lens through which they experience life. To state it differently, there is an intersection between "the individual's story" and the "big story" or, in the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, the individual becomes a "text-person." The big story, as I have discussed as part of Chapter One, is filled with the archetypes of the universal human story, so the individual, when integrated personally into the big story, at the same time, represents the archetypes that are found in all stories.[66] Thus the conflict evidenced at Stage Five is resolved. Of course, if one is conscious of being at this stage, then one is probably not at this stage, for the integration is all-consuming.[67]

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[63] Fowler, p. 200.

[64] Goodman, p. 14.

[65] Goodman, p. 14.

[66] I am grateful to Roberta Louis Goodman for her dialogue with me on this point.

[67] Goodman, p. 14.

Fowler's theory is challenged by the work of Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks. They argue that Fowler's concern with structure ignores the content of faith that they see as so essential. In their view imagination is key to the constant patterning and repatterning of faith. God is the pivot around which the response to faith is made.[68]

Controversially, Dykstra does not see the acquisition of faith as a developmental process.[69] He also does not view it as a necessity to human existence.[70] Dykstra argues that the contents of faith are assimilated through the individual's relationship with his or her community and its faith tradition. The education process is concerned with:

> 1. the centers of value which the community holds in common.
>
> 2. the images of power which inform the community's relationship to the world and the divine.
>
> 3. the master stories that characterize both those images of power - in-action together with the centers of value, revealing the ultimate meaning of their lives, placing them in an ultimate context.[71]

According to Dykstra, the faith community, which is defined by its story, becomes itself the architect of faith for people within the community.

Dykstra "...focuses on a conception of the world as a transcendent mystery which requires an active encounter of the imagination in order to make it

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[68] Torop, pp. 11 - 13.

[69] Torop, p. 75.

[70] Torop, p. 13.

[71] Torop, p. 175.

comprehensible."[72] This concern with divine mystery has been termed by Rudolph Otto as "the experience of the Holy."[73] Abraham Joshua Heschel calls it "wonder" or "radical amazement" or "awe." The transcendent mystery to which Dykstra refers is found in the experience of the wonder of a burning bush, of a tree in bloom, of the veins in a leaf. Faith is nurtured through the content of the experience.

The challenge of structure versus content is taken up by Gabriel Moran. Moran sees content and structure as inextricably bound together and advances his own theory of faith development.[74] In outlining the content he clearly delineates the role of story in forming faith within an individual. One moves through the stages by means of the imagination, which has to work to bridge our changing understanding of the world at a given point.[75] Moran postulates three central stages of development as follows:

Stage One: Simply Religious

This is the mythic stage, seen in a child aged 0 - 6/7 years. They are receptive to the power of images and narrative as a grounding of structure for future life. These play a central role in the development of the child, assuring them of God's role in the

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[72] Torop, p. 78.

[73] "Faith," p. 252 - 253.

[74] Torop, p. 52.

[75] Torop, p. 76.

universe, the problem of good versus evil, and deal with the child's fears - in that the good will triumph over evil.

Stage Two: Acquiring A Religion

This is the stage of acquiring a religion through cognitive thought. The individual develops the ability to recognize sacred and profane in the particular religious system he or she is embracing. Story becomes associated with history, reflective of the beliefs of "our people." This is a literal stage where the answer to all questions is found within the story.

Stage Three: The Religiously Christian (Jewish, Muslim etc.)

This stage brings about a more mature understanding of faith. Parables and stories are recognized as being symbolic and tools to reflect on life's paradoxes and inequities.[76]

These steps are in fact not so radically opposed to Fowler's model, and in many respects are a simplification of the process that Fowler outlines to a Stage Five level. This format is, however, more explicit on content, and articulates the role of story in the process of developing faith. Story is essential to the understanding of content.

[76] Torop, pp. 94 - 95.

Another challenge to the dichotomy between content and structure in Fowler's theory is posed from a specifically Jewish perspective in the writings of Michael Shire. While I am not convinced by Shire's arguments, his views encourage us to think about the stage theories within Judaism and question the method of the stages versus the tools of accruing faith. Shire, I am convinced, confuses the tools of forming faith with the means of forming faith.

In Shire's view the concept of faith is encompassed in the word *emunah* which he describes as "... a relationship of trust between God and humankind; one in which we set our hearts upon a transcendent reality and expect a covenental relationship in return."[77] Shire maintains that *emunah* is expressed practically in the performance of *mitzvot*. The *mitzvot* become the lens through which the world is viewed.[78] The yoke of the *mitzvot* is accepted on the merit of the *aggadah* which provides us with images, symbols and metaphors that motivate our acquiescence.[79]

Shire contests that Judaism cannot be described in the confines of Fowler's universal faith because the *mitzvot* and stories provide a unique process.[80] He argues that the symbols, images, and metaphors of Jewish life are the process of searching for meaning, the methodology of meaning-making.[81] If in Judaism there is continuous

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[77] Michael J. Shire, "Faith Development And Jewish Education: A Critical Look," in Compass 10, no. 1 (Fall, 1987), p. 24.

[78] Shire, p. 24.

[79] Shire, p. 24.

[80] Shire, p. 24.

[81] Shire, p. 25.

revelation, argues Shire, then the Jew receives their meaning rather than making from them meaning as the developmental theorists suggest.[82]

This argument comes from within a (traditionally oriented) Jewish ideology rather than apart from it, so that Shire's theory comes across as an uncritical apologetic. Shire is blind to the idea that receiving revelation from the tradition (through Torah, *halacha, aggadah,* stories) is not dichotomous with making meaning. When faith becomes personal, the individual has approached the received tradition and made sense of it for him or herself. From the tools that are filled with resonances, the individual makes meaning.

Like Dykstra, Shire sees the community as the defining force in the forming of faith. For Shire, meaning is received through the community and the individual is obliged to find a niche. There is no correct path per se but rather a number of varying paths. Personal meaning-making comes into the structure with the finding of that place where each Jew belongs in the continuum of the tradition. Shire further asserts that the Jewish community favors no specific process of development akin to the stages found in Fowler's Faith Development theory. At different times, in an ad hoc manner, one can be in different perspectives of faith.

Once again Shire ignores that the *mitzvot* and the stories and the community are the tools in this process and not the process itself. Community attitudes, stories and symbols, I believe, help form an individual's perceptions, and this requires stages. In opposition to Shire who asserts that different individuals will find different

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[82] Shire, p. 124.

meanings in different parts of Judaism at different times, I believe there are certain processes of understanding that must be undergone before other processes of understanding can be reached. It is the doing of *mitzvot*, the thick description provided by stories, and the community support that are the tools that infuse our reasoning and feelings through the stages.

In all of the above theories on developing faith concepts, story is a powerful tool that plays a central role in an individual's understanding. Storyteller Steve Sanfield comments:

> I believe stories have a great power. They have the power to delight and enlighten, to educate, to entertain, to heal and transform, to touch minds and hearts. Traditionally, they have been used to pass on what is good and decent in the world, to show that we are not alone, to celebrate the lives of ordinary people, to record and instill a sense of tradition in history and to preserve the wisdom of the past.[83]

In Judaism the power of story is a key factor in an individual's changing sense of self.

As I have shown in Chapter One, the story facilitates an understanding of reality, which includes an individual's faith and spirituality. Stories provide a paradigm through the interpersonal relationship between teller and listener, by means of the models they provide for psychological development, via the questions they answer, through the cultural lens and anhistory they establish, by mean of the symbols and symbolic complexes they provide, and through the linguistic resonances they infuse. They become the individual's model for behavior, thought and responses to life's situations and challenges. Of course, these components also are provided by other

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[83] Mary Cunningham, "Do We Ask Too Much Of Storytelling?" in Storytelling 5, no. 4, (Fall, 1993), p. 21.

vehicles in culture - for example, the interaction and values of family and community, through the words of the liturgy, through the musical tradition, but story is a strong component in identity formation. Sherry Blumberg describes the varying means on her spiritual journey:

> ... The path is often poignantly beautiful, filled with wonder and love. The path is often painfully difficult, filled with obstacles and hurt. I travel because the journey itself is the goal. My soul longs to journey with God, to make a difference in the world. At times I am suspended in time - part of the past of my Jewish tradition, part of the future of the Jewish people, and always in the present.
>
> On my journey, my companions are the sacred texts of my tradition, the Sabbath, Jews who were the heroes and heroines of our people - both those who struggled and lived and those who were martyred for *Kiddush Ha-Shem* ... - my family and friends, my teachers and students, and always the possibility of the presence of God. I rejoice in these companions; I love them. They carry me sometimes; I carry them, too.[84]

All such tools of ingraining faith and spirituality in the individual are actually based on the themes and symbols and cultural references found in the stories of the Jewish people. More than a people of the Book, perhaps Jews could be better described as a people of a Story. For the story is the origin and the developer of faith and spirituality. In this day and age of a "crisis of credibility"[85] of religion, when it has become difficult for moderns to articulate their faith and spirituality with the same sense of commitment presumed in the pre-modern era, the story can become a

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[84] Groome and responses, p. 27.

[85] Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements Of A Sociological Theory of Religion (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1967), pp. 126 - 128.

paradigm that models affect, belief, value and action in situations comparable to those in which the individual might find him or herself.

AN OVERVIEW OF REFORM JEWISH VIEWPOINTS ON THE SEARCH FOR FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

The modern task of searching for meaning in a world that is filled with variables, constantly and rapidly changing, is a difficult one. Prior to exploring story for a description of faith and spirituality for Jews, it is essential to understand the means through which moderns have wrestled with the concepts of faith and spirituality. We are fortunate to have a survey essay on the forming of conceptions of faith and spirituality by Eugene Borowitz, entitled "Beyond Immanence."[86] Borowitz suggests that there is an element of immanence in Judaism[87] as well as an element of transcendence. Reform Judaism as a modern approach to Judaism has formed various approaches towards an understanding of this Other:[88]

[1] Classical Reform Judaism found the transcendent in the rational, in the study of Wissenschaft des Judenthums. There is a enigma about the transcendent in one who

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[86] Eugene R. Borowitz, "Beyond Immanence," in Religious Education 75, no. 4 (July - August, 1980), pp. 387 - 408.

[87] Borowitz, p. 289.

[88] Borowitz, p. 390.

quests for it in this manner. Borowitz writes: "The transcendence implied in rationality is ... beyond reason's ability to fully disclose, much less rigorously to delimit."

[2] The reaction to the rationality of Classical Reform Judaism was the introduction of "greater emotion into their religious life."[89] Today we take for granted that people are motivated by their emotions in their spiritual quest.[90]

[3] Another method of faith and spiritual quest is by means of ethnic identification. This is evidenced often by descendants of Eastern European Ashkenazim who selectively embrace parts of that culture and speak of their association with Judaism as "Yiddishkeit."[91]

[4] Others find spirituality through the aesthetic components of religion - they find spirituality in music or art or literature.[92]

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[89] Borowitz, p. 392.

[90] Borowitz p. 392. Borowitz, in a value-laden assertion suggests that the failure of the quest of emotion, is that it does not necessarily lead to true commitment, because emotion has the capability of leading us astray from our search.

[91] Borowitz, p. 393. This group loyalty does not always contain elements of the ethereal, in fact quite the opposite. This compels Borowitz to reject it as a spiritual path.

[92] Borowitz, p. 394. Borowitz suggests that while the aesthetic component is uplifting, it alone cannot satisfy the spiritual search.

[5] Alternatively, some see faith and spirituality fostered through the *mitzvot*. Abraham Joshua Heschel speaks of this as the Jewish leap of action.[93] We have already seen this idea in the faith development theory of Michael Shire referred to above. This, notes Borowitz, is an especially problematic path for Reform Jews, as they have a murky sense of what *mitzvot* are required of them as a group.

[6] Faith and spirituality is recognized in human interactions and in helping others. Martin Buber suggests that God's presence is found in the background of all human encounters.[94]

[7] An additional approach is finding Transcendence through a radical concentration on self.[95] Through understanding our psychological selves we come into contact with the divine.[96]

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[93] Borowitz, p. 394 - 395. Borowitz suggests that observance on its own does not necessarily lead to faith and spirituality.

[94] Borowitz, pp. 395 - 396. Borowitz suggests that this is not the search for faith or spirituality but rather "our perception of the quality of life demanded by the Transcendent Other." Borowitz, p. 396.

[95] Borowitz, p. 396.

[96] Borowitz, p. 396 - 397. Borowitz makes two criticisms of this course. Firstly, it is uncertain whether the spirituality and faith experienced on this pathway are merely human beings interacting with themselves, or with that which is beyond themselves. Secondly, concentration on self isolates the individual from interaction with others and the Other to whom their destinies are linked over time.

[8] The final approach that Borowitz outlines is the "use of the self as a means by which we make direct personal contact with the Transcendent Other."[97] This is a mystical approach utilized by those involved with the "New Age" experience, where the self is comprehended through non-conventional explorations.[98]

For Borowitz, none of these approaches toward developing a concept of faith and spirituality is sufficient by itself. Nor do these approaches provide us with a specific definition. The search is elusive, as he writes:

> Life is an unceasing, demanding spiritual struggle. And often, just when we need the assurances that might come from our previous spiritual victories, we cannot find them. The Other we had come to know, perhaps even to love, seems gone. We are bereft of that which we know we most need and which, if we can gain access to, we know we cannot hold. How can we base our lives on a fluctuating spiritual relationship in which loss regularly succeeds assurance, when a moment's great confidence can never keep the emptiness from returning?[99]

Because of the elusiveness of definition, Borowitz in his article argues that the search for faith and spirituality in Judaism demands the use of the different approaches outlined above in assorted combinations depending on the individual. The baffling character of these terms defies any singular attempt to grasp its meaning.

I believe the meanings of the elusive terms of faith and spirituality are embedded within the stories and the symbols of Jewish culture. These meanings are

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[97] Borowitz, p. 397.

[98] Borowitz, p. 397. Borowitz intimates that there is a growing rebirth in finding spirituality and faith through this means. Yet for some, even if they are not oriented towards a strictly rational approach, the concepts in this strategy are difficult.

[99] Borowitz, p. 400.

multivalent and will be perceived slightly differently by each individual. It is precisely this multivocality of faith and spirituality that makes the stories and their meanings powerful and effective. Succinct definition of the terms faith and spirituality, will limit our understanding of their full impact. By allowing ourselves to be immersed in the stories and symbols of Judaism, we can submerge ourselves in the multitude of potential meanings that can be found for contemporary Jews. Each Jew, depending on where he or she is in his or her development of faith and world view, will detect a different resonance.

For this reason, the only working definition we can logically make is one that works experientially and functionally, and this must be through the plots, symbols and images found in the cultural past. The definition cannot be encompassed in a short number of words, because for someone, somewhere, those words will be criticized as inadequate. A working definition must be a multi-valent description of what has been and what could be.

IN SEARCH OF A WORKING DESCRIPTION OF FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY FOR CONTEMPORARY JEWS THROUGH STORY

The article on "Faith" in The Encyclopedia of Religion outlines various ways faith is represented in religions, recognizing that faith and spirituality are terms that defy a logical definition and must consist of layered elements.[100] Since the nature of

[100] "Faith," p. 250.

faith and spirituality can only be approached through thick description, the variables to the meaning of these terms are plentiful. To isolate all these images of faith and spirituality would be a superhuman task. So in search of a description of the variegated and multiple aspects of faith and spirituality open to Jews from the Jewish tradition, I will limit my exploration to the categories outlined in The Encyclopedia of Religion as they appear in Judaism. These categories consist of both the cognitive and affective, the logical and the ethereal, thereby embracing both the realms of faith and spirituality.

There are certainly more themes in Jewish folk literature that could be teased out and seen as embodying faith and spirituality than those presented in the article from The Encyclopedia of Religion. In addition, it is possible for a story to contain several motifs constituent of traditional faith and spirituality simultaneously. The methodology of this survey will be through a perusal of the categories, and by bringing a few examples of that particular sentiment, as illustrated in the telling of the medieval Jewish tale.[101] Each tale may of course reveal several aspects of faith and spirituality, but my explanations will center on what it is pertinent for this survey.

1. Faith-as-Faithfulness:

[101] The largest collection of Jewish medieval tales in English is Micha Joseph Bin Gorion, Mimekor Yisrael: Classic Jewish Folktales (Books 1 - 4), edited by Emanuel Bin Gorion; translated by I. M. Lask (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1976). All folktales quoted are taken from these volumes.

Faith has come to be synonymous with loyalty and devotion to Judaism and its ideals and its God. A breach of faith-as-faithfulness could result in punishment, although there is a possibility for *teshuva* (repentance) when the individual is motivated in the correct manner.[102] The first story presented illustrates this aspect of faith through depicting a holy man who is willing to die as a martyr rather than depart from his convictions. Martyrdom for one's personal beliefs i an extreme illustration of faith-as-faithfulness that recurs again and again in Jewish stories. In this tale, even at the time of his death, so immersed was this holy man in his faithfulness to God that he was oblivious to his pain until it was called to his attention. The second tale tells of a recluse who was devoted to his faith, helped by the fact that he isolated himself from society and its temptations during the week. The Sabbath was his regular time to re-enter society, and one Friday he found himself returning to the domain of people under unusual circumstances. His brother left him in a worldly position (looking after his shoe shop) where the thought of departing from his fidelity to the ways of Torah crossed his mind, specifically, through his sexual desire. He is warned by the roar of a lion of the error of his musings. While the thought of sin was not carried out in action, the implication for us concerned with faith-as-faithfulness is that even the thought of sin is improper, that is, faith-as-faithfulness demands loyalty in both thought and action.

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[102] "Faith," pp. 250 - 251.

ONCE the Gentiles brought false charges against a certain holy man. They thrust a wooden stake through him from below into the interior of his body by force, and the stake pierced all his inner organs and its point emerged near his ear. It was almost the Sabbath eve when this happened, and all that week he had eaten nothing but fasted the whole six days; and shortly before the hallowing of the wine they slew him.

Before he died, he sang hymns and praises with a mighty love. They asked him whether he felt any pain. He answered that he had felt nothing until they asked their question. This was by reason of the great devotion in his thought and his mighty and overwhelming love for the Blessed Creator, and his great joy at the future pleasure his soul would know when he came to Eden in yet a little while.[103]

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THERE IS a tale of a certain shoemaker who had a brother that was a recluse. Now at the beginning of every week this recluse would go to the wilderness to be alone and devote himself to the Torah, returning home on the Sabbath eve. On one occasion he was delayed almost until noon on the eve of Sabbath, and he lost his way and did not know which way he should go. But he saw a lion with a snake around its neck, and he rode upon it until they reached the shop of his brother, the shoemaker.

Now his shoemaker brother had some important business, and he had to go and complete it elsewhere and then return. So he said to the recluse: "Stay in my shop until I get back." And the lion was there on the other side.

Gentile women came to purchase shoes and boots. They found the recluse sitting in the shop and said to him: "Sell us shoes and boots." He handed them out to them, and they tried them on. Then he said: "In a little while my brother will come and will tell you the price." There was one whose feet would not go into the boots, and the recluse tried to push them

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[103] Original sources cited as Avraham Dantsig ed., Ta'ame ha-Minhagim, (Lemberg, 1911), Vol. 1, 46; Nathan W. Dinner, Sha'are ha-Emunah, (Warsaw, 1901), 43. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 250, p. 458.

onto her feet. Then a desirous thought entered his mind, but the lion, then and there, roared and wished to eat him up.[104]

2. Faith-as-Obedience:

In one sense, Faith-as-Obedience is an adjunct to Faith-as- Faithfulness. Faithfulness demands obedience, a conforming to Jewish law and its ethics. Faith-as-Obedience presupposes that the moral and halachic imperative is divinely inspired and passed on through Moses to the people of Israel.[105] The first example of a story that deals with faith-as-obedience tells of a student of the Ramban who was so engrossed in the study of Torah that he neglected himself. The Ramban would constantly remind him that obedience to Torah required both study and personal care but the student chose to ignore his cautions. The error of his ways is finally communicated to him through a horrific experience. The second story illustrates the merit of a shopkeeper who has faith in God and is obedient to God's commandments. His obedience is rewarded when his prayer on behalf of the community is acted upon favorably.

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THE RAMBAN of blessed memory had a certain student whose soul yearned most wondrously for the Torah so that he would scarcely permit himself to sleep. If he ate something to sustain himself, the book would be

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[104] Original source cited as Ele'azar 'Araki, Sefer ha-Ma'assiyot, (Baghdad, 1892), No. 113. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 285, p. 513.

[105] "Faith," p. 251.

open before him and he would always keep his eyes on it. Indeed, he did not pray because of his great love of the Torah. The Ramban always used to warn him, saying: "Eat at mealtimes and sleep at nighttime and say your prayers at prayer-times, and the merits of the Torah will always be with you and guard you. But do not neglect this, for the Torah will demand a punishment for its humiliation before the Holy and Blessed One, and you may be punished because of this, heaven forbid. So take care and pray!"

But the student paid no attention to his words and did not take them to heart. Now it came about that before very long he went to the market in order to purchase something. When he returned home, he found a certain knight raping his virgin daughter on the very table where he had always been studying. He mourned over this for a long time, and the Ramban said to him: "Indeed, I told you to be careful and pray, but you did not listen to me, and that is the cause of what befell your daughter."

And thereafter the said student saw clearly that Providence reigns over omission of prayer, and he began to pray as required by faith and law.[106]

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THERE WAS a drought in a certain city, and the townsfolk began perishing of thirst. The rabbi imposed fasts on the community every Monday and Thursday and Monday in accordance with the law. The people prayed and entreated and uttered penitential prayers, but there was no response. The rabbi was disturbed and unhappy because there was no response until he was informed in a dream: "Do not pray so much, for all your efforts are in vain. There will be no response until such and such a man prays on your behalf in the synagogue."

When the rabbi awoke, he was very surprised because that man was a simple ignoramus. So the rabbi asked: "What can be the character of his prayers and deeds for the Holy and Blessed One to respond to his prayers? Surely this dream has no value." He again prayed for rain, calling on God to have mercy on them. And once again he was told in dream: "Do not entreat so much in your prayers, for there will be no response until that man stands in the place of the emissary of the congregation and prays for

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[106] Original sources cited as Tsevi Hirsh Kaidanover, Kav ha-Yashar, (Frankfurt a.M., 1903), No. 8, p. 17; Ele'azar 'Araki, Sefer ha Ma'assiyot, (Baghdad, 1892), No. 75; Aruvot ha-Shamayim (Ma'assim tovim), (Warsaw, 1903), No. 17. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 226, p. 786.

you." When the rabbi woke up, he said to himself: "Since this dream has come to me a second time, there must be some good reason."

In the morning he sent for the townsfolk and ordered them to gather in the synagogue and return to their prayers. They all gathered in the House of the Lord and asked the rabbi: "Who will lead us in prayer today?" And he told them: "The shopkeeper who is sitting yonder in the last place of the congregation." At this, they wondered for there were several scholars and great men in the community. As for the shopkeeper, when the rabbi told him to take his place and lead them in prayer, he said: "Why do you talk to me like that, sir? I do not know a single letter of the Torah, and not even the whole verse of 'Hear, O Israel.'" But the rabbi told him: "Say whatever you know."

The shopkeeper at once removed his prayer shawl, hurried home and returned with his scales in his hands, and went straight up to the place of the prayer leader, while all the people gazed at him in wonder.

Then the shopkeeper opened his mouth and said: "Lord of the Universe! If ever I lied with this balance of mine and harmed Your Holy Name, may fire descend from heaven and burn me at once. But if I have never lied with my scales and have never robbed or injured Your Name, I entreat You, merciful Lord of all the Universes, that because I have fulfilled this commandment and have never lied with my weights, you may look upon me with mercy and let rain of good will fall in this very hour." And when he finished speaking, the heavens grew dark with clouds and plentiful blessed rain descended, so that they could not even go out.

Then the rabbi began to preach and reprove the whole congregation, reminding them once again that the prohibition of lying and robbery applies to weights and measures. And he said: "See the great reward of this man who has not lied with his weights and has not robbed in his business dealings."[107]

3. Faith and Works:

While faith and works as a theological category is usually associated with the Christian tradition, there is also an aspect of this idea that appears within Judaism. The concept of faith and works assumes that the moral code of Judaism is definitive and

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[107] Original source cited as Y. S. Farhi, 'Osseh Pele, (Leghorn, 1902), Vol. III, Folios 30 - 31. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 62, p. 1218.

that there are no other alternative ways of behaving that are valid.[108] Faith is shown through works, through the performance of the *mitzvot*. The concept of divine retribution, that the righteous who act according to God's ways will be rewarded, and the wicked who act contrary to the divine expectations will be punished, is based upon the premise that one's actions determine one's destiny in both this world and the next. The first story illustrates the relationship between faith and works as Rabbi Abba witnesses a gentleman who was miraculously saved from death. When questioned, the man revealed that he acted in a remarkable manner towards other human-beings, and Rabbi Abba understands that the man's deliverance is related to his actions. The second story tells of a family who, while acting within the boundaries of the law, acted in an unethical manner. Their works are reproved from on high with subsequent misfortune in their lives.

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> RABBI ABBA sat in the gateway of Lod. He saw a man who came and sat on the ledge of an earthen mound, weary from the way. So he sat and fell asleep there. Then Rabbi Abba saw a snake moving to that spot, but a piece of wood split off from the roof of the tree and slew the snake. When the man woke up, he saw the snake lying dead opposite him. And when he rose to his feet the mound collapsed into the deep, and he was delivered.
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> Then Rabbi Abba approached him and said: "Tell me what you have done, for the Holy and Blessed One has performed these two wonders for you. They are not without reason." And the man answered: "All my life no man has done me harm, and if anything came about between someone and me, I would always come to terms with him and forgive him. This I do to all who grieve and vex me, and I have never

[108] "Faith," p. 251.

paid attention to any wrong that is done to me. Nor is that all. From the day they do me some wrong I try to do them good."

At this, Rabbi Abba wept and said: "This man's deeds are greater than those of Joseph. For those were Joseph's brothers that did him wrong, so it was his duty to be merciful towards them. But what this man does is greater than the deeds of Joseph. He is fitting to have the Holy and Blessed One perform wonder upon wonder to him.[109]

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IT IS TOLD that a certain widow demanded her jointure from the heirs, and took oath before two witnesses without knowing that one of them was a kinsman. Now she had no children. After her death her brothers who inherited from her demanded the house in which she had lived for themselves, for the heirs of the husband had come to live there. But her heirs claimed that it was the inheritance of their sister, and added: "Surely you know that our sister took an oath about her jointure." To which the others answered: "One of the witnesses was a kinsman, while the other has gone overseas."

And it came about that the husband's relatives lost all their property and the house fell into ruin.

Indeed, there are things which a court below cannot judge, but for which the court on high brings punishment.[110]

4. Faith-as-Trust:

A reliance on the providential care of God underlies the idea of Faith-as-Trust. In Judaism, we often express this idea in our liturgies with images of God as "Father," "Rock," "Redeemer," etc., the idea being that such images evoke trust within us. Faith-

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[109] Original source cited as Sefer ha-Zohar, (Amsterdam, 1784), Parashah Mikets, Folio 201b. Story cited in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 174, pp. 725 - 726.

[110] Original source cited as ed., Y. H. Wistynezki, Sefer Hassidim, (Berlin, 1891), Para. No. 1005. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 104, p. 1256.

as-Trust instructs us that despite the uncertainties, dangers and worries of the moment, trust in God ultimately will be rewarded with triumph.[111] The importance of faith-as-trust is exemplified in the first story by a lame man who chooses not to trust in God but to look for an alternative cure to his affliction. In doing so he thwarts his own healing, mistrust being his demise. The second and third tales are variations on the same parable, about the blind who refuse to have faith and trust in the preparations made for them. They are obviously philosophical allegories derived from the Arabic context in which Jews lived given the sources. In the first rendition the failure of blind men to perceive the arrangements made for them and the failure to trust in their host led to their own man-made misery. In the second variant the message of faith-as-trust is emphasized in the words "what is wrong is the seeing," meaning, that providential care is present, only not observed by the blind man.

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> THERE WAS a certain lame Jew who heard people telling of a place of idolatry, in which every lame man who went there was cured at once. "I shall go there," said he, "for maybe I shall also be cured."
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> He went there and spent the night with the other cripples who were there. At midnight, when they were all asleep except he, he saw a demon coming out of the wall with a cruse of oil. He anointed all the sick men there except the Jew. The Jew asked him: "Why have you not anointed me?" He answered: "If you are a Jew, why have you come here? Does a Jew go to a place of idolatry? Surely you know that there is nothing real in idolatry, and I mislead them in order that they should hold firm in their error and not have any share in the World to Come. But you, why have you come running to idolatry instead of praying for the Holy One and Blessed One to heal you? And now know that it was your time to have

[111] "Faith," pp. 250 - 251.

been healed tomorrow, but because you have done this you will never find any cure at all."

Therefore a man should have trust only in the Holy and Blessed One who is a divine King and heals freely.[112]

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BLIND MEN were brought to a house that had been prepared for them in all respects. In it everything had been placed in its most suitable position and arranged as best suited their requirements and needs. In it had been prepared beneficial ointments and a wise physician to treat them and improve their sight. But they disregarded the treatment of their eyes and paid no attention to the physician who was engaging in treating them, but went about the house doing harmful things because of their blindness. Wherever they went they stumbled over those objects that had been prepared for their benefit and fell on their faces. Some of them were injured and some sustained fractures, and they suffered greatly and were in a very bad way. Then they complained about the houseowner and the builder, and dispraised his deeds, for to them he seemed to have done everything badly and wrongly, supposing that he had no good and kind intentions for them but had only wished to cause them injury and suffering. Indeed, this led them to lose faith in the goodness and kindness of the owner of the house.[113]

A variation of the same parable:

A BLIND man entered a house and stumbled over the oil flask or some dish and other household utensils. "Why is it," said he, "that you have

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[112] Original sources cited as ed., A. Jellinek, Bet ha-Midrash, (Leipzig, 1853 - 78), Vol. I, 71; see also Zohar haddash (Midrash ha-Ne'elam),(Amsterdam, 1701), 12; Ma'asseh Buch (Amsterdam, 1723), No. 191. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 48, p. 1204.

[113] Original source cited as Bahya ibn Pakuda, Hovot ha-Levavot ed., Y. Ben-Ya'akov, (Leipzig, 1856), Vol. II, p. 33. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book IV, No. 56, p. 1349.

placed all these objects in the way? And why do you not put each of them back in its proper place?"

To which they answered: "Know that each of the objects is in its place, and what is wrong is the seeing."[114]

5. Faith-as-Dependence:

Reliance on God and trust in the mystery of the Divine merges into the concept of dependence. Dependence works in at least two clear ways in Jewish stories. First it provides a motivation for Jew's participation in the stories, imperatives and rituals of Jewish life. The Jew acknowledges faith-as dependence through faith-as-obedience. Secondly, in a Jewish world where God is conceived as interacting with history, dependence is reinforced in the idea that the Divine is a player in decisive events. "God [is seen] as the one who was active and knowable within, but always transcendent over, such saving and revelatory events."[115] The first story displays both aspects of faith as dependence by affirming the power of prayer and faith to influence God on whom we are dependent. This indicates, of course, that we are not exclusively dependent, for we also have the power to influence or manipulate God's intentions. God is regarded as participatory in the event because the prayer of Rabbi Aboab is answered positively by God. The prayer is the acknowledgement of the dependence of the Jews upon God. The second story depicts the might over evil that is conferred upon the Baal Shem Tov when he fathoms the importance of dependence upon God.

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[114] Original source cited as Al-Ghazali, Mozne Tsedek, trans., Abraham ben Hasdai, (Leipzig, 1839), 156 - 157. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book IV, No, 57, p. 1349 - 1350.

[115] "Faith," p. 252.

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RABBI Isaac Aboab of blessed memory was blind in one eye. The reason was that at the time of the expulsion from those places the Jews took an oath not to be broken that if there was a drought they must stand and pray and entreat until they brought generous rains of good will and blessing down to the earth. It was upon this condition that the king allowed the Jews to live in his country.

Now in those days, long ago, when the said rabbi was alive there was a drought for no rain fell upon the earth. Then they entreated the said rabbi to pray for rain on behalf of the Jews. So he took his place in the synagogue and engaged in prayer and entreaty before the Lord his God. When they took the holy Torah out of the Ark, he began to preach on the biblical portion concerning the story of Isaac, the subject of his sermon being: "The water is ours! The water is ours!" (Gen. 26: 20) Then he cried a great and bitter cry and said: "Lord of the Universe! It is known fully well at Your Glory Seat that Israel is in distress at the hands of the nations because of the lack of rain. For we are compelled to bring generous waters of blessing and good will down to the earth. Have pity on Your people and the flock You pasture. 'The water is ours! The water is ours!'" Indeed, he all but contended with the Power on high, crying: "I shall not move away from here until You have mercy on Your people!"

Then the heavens clouded over and their prayers were answered, thanks to him. But he came down from his place with only one eye.[116]

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IN HIS early youth Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1700 - 1736) used to help a teacher, fetching the children to their class and taking them home, conducting them to synagogue to learn to give the proper responses in prayer. Whenever the children were walking, they used to sing with their sinless voices, and he sang with them in a pleasant voice with much enjoyment, being heard for a great distance. There was much satisfaction in heaven, as much as at the songs that the Levites used to sing in the

[116] Original sources cited as ed. A. Neubauer, Medieval Jewish Chronicles (Seder Hakhamim ve-Korot ha-Yamim), (Oxford, 1887), Vol. I, 142; Yossef Sambari, Divre Yossef, ed., A. Berliner, (Berlin, 1896), 48 - 49. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 239, pp. 793 - 794.

Temple. As a result it became a time of good will in heaven. Satan went there on one occasion when the gates were open, for he realized that this was a serious matter and feared that the time might come when he would vanish from the earth. So he appeared in the image of a wizard. When the helper was walking with the children and singing happily, he transformed himself into a werewolf and attacked them. They all fled away in their fright, a few of them became ill, and that ended the satisfaction in heaven.

Then the lad remembered how his father had once told him not to fear anything because the Lord was with him; so he strengthened himself through the Lord his God. He went to the parents of the children and persuaded them to entrust the children to him once again for he would overcome the beast in God's Name, and it was no reason for the children to be deprived of their studies which are so important. And the parents listened to him.

Then Israel took a good, strong stick with him. When he went singing happily with the children, the werewolf attacked them again. He dashed at it and hit it over the head, and it died. Next day they found the corpse of the Gentile wizard lying on the ground. After that, the young Israel was appointed the guard of the house of study.[117]

6. Faith as the Experience of the Holy:

As I have discussed above, this concept is spoken about by Rudolf Otto and Abraham Joshua Heschel. It is the indescribable, inexpressible recognition of the mysteriousness of the Divine. Since this is an ineffable characteristic, it may only be recognized in the experience of the aesthetic, moral or intellectual.[118] The two stories below illustrate faith as the experience of the holy in different ways. In the first tale the concept is conveyed in a didactic lesson that one man teaches another. In the second

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[117] Original source cited as Shivhe ha-Besht, (Lemberg, 1908), 7. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 337, p. 928.

[118] "Faith," pp. 252 - 253.

story, we are told of an experience of the followers of the Baal Shem Tov in which they were so cognizant of the holy that they were rendered speechless.

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REMEMBER the man who went away on his own in order to know the secrets of creation and how and why the world was created. Of this he was always thinking. One day he rose early to go to the riverbank as was his practice. For when the sages of old wished to think wise thoughts, they would leave the city and walk in order that the body should grow weary with the soul.

So he walked along the riverbank thinking of the purpose of this world and how it was created, and whether it was a new creation or time-old and what is below and what is above, and what is within and what is without. And there he saw a man standing by the river with a little hole before him that could not hold a jug full of water. In his hand was a vessel with which he filled the jug from the river and then emptied it into the hole.

The other ran to him and asked: "What are you doing?" And he answered: "It has occurred to me that I should put into this hole all the water that has passed through this river and that will in future pass through it from world's beginning to world's end." "This is complete craziness," said the other, "and absolutely impossible." "Even more crazy and less possible," answered the man, "is what you are trying to know!" And he vanished before his eyes. He sought for him and could not find him, and then he knew a divine awakening had come to him in order to turn him back from his error and restore him to the proper way. And he no longer set his heart to think about such matters.[119]

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[119] Original source cited as Shemtov Ibn Falaquera, Sefer ha-Mevakkesh, (Haag, 1772), 66 - 67. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book IV, No. 87, p. 1372.

> AT THE CLOSE of a certain New Year's festival some of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov's followers were at their meeting place outside the town, seated around the table. But not one of them could speak, for they all could clearly feel that Messiah would come at once.
>
> On that very day their master and rabbi had preached about the prayer: "Blow a great ram's horn for our freedom ..."[120]

7. The Community of Faith:

Faith is seen as more than an individual experience between a person and the Divine. There are times when the community experiences the Divine as a group, as in prayer or as in the Sinai experience. There are also times when the community confers authority on social organization such as marriage and death, war and commerce. Faith is sanctioned through these community experiences and the community is validated through the experiences in turn.[121] The tale of the holy city of Hebron speaks of a tiny righteous community (illustrated by their eager participation in the *mitzvah* of welcoming the stranger, *hachnasat orchim*) who were desirous of a quorum for prayer for Yom Kippur so they could participate fully in the liturgy of the day. Ten men were needed so that each individual could experience the full spirituality of the Day of Atonement. Their wish is fulfilled with the advent of a special visitor. The next story is of a man who went out of his way to empathize with those who are bereaved. Because of his actions he is rewarded with the community rallying to mourn him at his passing. Here the community sanctions *gemilut hasidim* (righteous acts) at the time

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[120] Original source cited as Emunat Tsaddikim (not in bibliography), No. 6, p. 7, (abridged) Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 373, p. 969.

[121] "Faith," p. 253.

of death, and the community in their gathering together to mourn becomes validated as an entity in return.

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HERE IS A TALE of the holy city of Hebron, may it be rebuilt speedily and in our days!

In former time there were few Jews in Hebron. Indeed, there was barely a *minyan* or prayer quorum of ten to pray together, save when Jews came from other hamlets and villages to prostrate themselves at the tombs of the holy patriarchs before the cave of Machpelah. But the residents were God-fearing and wholehearted scholars and sages, holy and pious, dispensing charity and showing hospitality with full devotion. Whenever two guests came there, a great dispute between them ensued. One would say: "Let me be his host," while another would insist: "Let it be my merit to have him at my table." The man to whom he was allotted as guest would rejoice as though he had found a great treasure.

But when the eve of Atonement came, there were no ten men to pray together on the Holy Day. They grieved very much and went out into the road all day long, some in this direction and some in the other, searching and watching until their eyes gave out; yet nobody came near them. But towards evening as the sun declined and grew dim, an old man suddenly appeared with a long beard that was white as refined silver, with torn and faded garments and swollen feet and a full sack on his shoulders after the fashion of a wayfarer, and he was bowed low. When they saw him, they came running to meet him with great joy and said: "Come in peace!" And he answered them with peace. Then they took him to their homes and set food and drink before him. He ate hastily and went to pray with them. After they had clad him in fine white garments, they asked him his name, and he told them: "Abraham." And their joy at heart was beyond all telling.

At the close of the Holy Day they cast lots between them as to who should be his host and take pleasure in his presence. The lot fell on the synagogue attendant. All the others were astonished and mournful that he should have been the one, but the attendant was also God-fearing and concerned for the word of the Lord, and he rejoiced very much indeed. But his gladness was transformed to mourning, for as they were walking home together the old man suddenly vanished from his side. "Rabbi Abraham!" he cried. But there was no answer at all.

He wept loudly and bitterly and searched for the man in all directions, returning from time to time to the synagogue thinking that he might have gone by some other way, that he might have lost himself where none could see him. Then he ran to the congregation and told them what had happened. When they heard this, they all suddenly began to tremble in fear and in one voice cried out on the attendant that he had not kept his eyes on him when they went together and had gone by some round-about way, because he was in a city of strangers and might have found himself amidst Gentiles who might have slain him. And their joy was transformed into grief and sighing. With their food still in their mouths they began running and seeking him amid the marketplaces of the Gentiles.

There was not a house where they did not seek for him in all the crannies and cracks all that night through until the dawn. Then they went home to sleep after their toil and distress from both the service of the day before and their grief at night. But the attendant grieved more than all of them together.

Now as he lay drowsing on his couch, barely a moment after he closed his eyes, he saw this wayfarer, Rabbi Abraham, standing before him with his face bright with the radiance of the firmament and shining like lightening and garbed in magnificent array that was full of jewels that dazzled like the bright sun. The attendant quivered and shook and fell into a dreamlike state. But before he could open his mouth to ask what this was or why it was, the wayfarer said to him: "Do you wish to know who I am? I am Abraham the Hebrew, your father, whose body rests here in the cave of Machpelah. I saw how grieved you were because you did not have the quorum of ten to pray, and that was why I came to you. But as for you, do not be sorrowful. Rejoice and be very glad, for this will be a year of blessing and prosperity beyond all bounds."[122]

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[122] Original sources cited as S. B. Hotsin, ed., Ma'asseh Nissim (Baghdad, n.d.), No. 10; Naphtali Hirsh ben Elhanan, 'Emek ha-Melekh, (Amsterdam, 1653), 14; Ma'asseh Adonai, (Lemberg, 1852), 18 - 19; Ele'azar 'Araki, Sefer ha-Ma'assiyot, (Baghdad, 1892), No. 114; Sha'are Yershalayim, (Warsaw, 1873), 43; A. Druyanoff, ed., Reshummot (annual), (Tel Aviv, 1922), Vol. II, 483. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 287, pp. 515 - 517.

> THERE WAS a certain man who had this private practice: When a man was mourning, he would return home without shoes and would grieve with the mourner.
>
> Now on the day he himself died it was the Ninth of Av. And all the congregations of the region had gathered to that city, and they were all walking barefoot.[123]

8. Faith and Worship:

Stories that encompass faith and worship describe the origins of customs and rituals, while simultaneously providing a validation of their performance. Worship may be seen as the

> ...interrelation between myth and ritual: myth came to be read as validation, in the deeds of the ancients or of the gods, of what the ritual now enjoined upon believers; and ritual acquired a new dimension by being understood as not merely outward ceremonial performed *ex opere operato* but as the repetition in the believer's actions of what the myth recited in words about the divine actions that had made the world and founded the community. Amid an infinite variety of ritual forms and liturgical prescriptions, therefore, worship has defined faith.[124]

Part of the purpose of the first story is to provide a rationale for the custom of burying the dead and establishing this ritual as a righteous act. Burial is an act in the graveside service, it is a liturgical action explained and validated by the tale. In burial, we are re-enacting the circumstance of this tale. The second story is also a foundation myth for rationalizing a liturgical practice. In this case it is the recitation of the *Untaneh Tokef* prayer.

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[123] Original sources cited as Sefer Hassidim (Frankfurt, a.M., 1724), Para. No. 434; Y. H. Wistynezki, ed., Sefer Hassidim, (Berlin, 1891), Para. No. 1360. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 116, p. 1261.

[124] "Faith," p. 253.

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THE DOG that used to watch over Abel's flock guarded Abel [after he was dead] from all the beasts of the field and birds of heaven. And Adam and his helpmate used to sit and weep and mourn for him. They did not know what they should do with Abel, since they did not have the commandment of burial.

Now a certain raven came, one of whose companions had perished. He took it [his companion] and dug in the earth and hid it before their eyes. Then Adam said: "I shall do what the ravens do!" And he took Abel's corpse and dug in the earth and hid it away.

The Holy and Blessed One has rewarded the ravens well in this world. And what reward has He given them? When they beget their children, they see that they are white and flee from them, thinking that they must be little serpents. But the Holy and Blessed One gives them their food without stint. Furthermore, they cry out for rain upon the earth and the Holy and Blessed One responds to them.

That is what is referred to in the Psalm (147:9): "He gives the beast her food, the young ravens when they caw."[125]

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THIS WAS copied down in an old prayer book, letter by letter, from the copy of the manuscript written by our Rabbi Isaac of Vienna who wrote the work *Or Zarua* (Light is Sown), who testifies that he found this story in the very handwriting of Rabbi Ephraim, the son of Rabbi Jacob of Bonn.

Rabbi Amnon of Mayence was a leader in his age and wealthy and of high pedigree and handsome. And the lord and princes of Mayence began to demand conversion of him, but he refused to listen. But when they spoke to him day after day and he would pay no attention, the lord

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[125] Original sources cited as Pirke Rabbi Eli'ezer, (Venice, 1544), Ch. 21; (compare - ed., S. Schechter, Midrash ha-Gadol, (Cambridge, 1902), Gen. 4:16; Shim'on Ashkenazi, Yalkut Shim'oni, (Frankfurt a.M., 1687) Part Mishle, Para. No. 683; Rashi on Bava Batra, 8a; another version - Yehudah Hadassi Eshkol ha-Kofer, (Eupatoria, 1836), 24d. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 8, p. 16.

became very insistent with him. And when they bore down strongly on him, Rabbi Amnon said to them: "I want to consider and think the matter over for another three days." This he said in order to defer them. But no sooner had he left the lord than it came to his mind that he had said something in which there could be an element of doubt; and he was gravely concerned.

On the third day the lord sent for him, but he refused to go. So the king brought him against his will and spoke to him sternly. Then Rabbi Amnon gave answer: "I shall sentence my own self. Since my tongue spoke falsehood, let it be sentenced to be cut out!" For he wished to hallow the Lord, since he had uttered words that implied a doubt regarding the Deity. But the king answered: "I shall not cut out your tongue for it spoke truth. But I shall cut off the feet which did not come to me, and I shall torment the entire body." So he gave orders and they cut off his hands and his feet. At each joint they asked whether he was prepared to convert; and he responded: "No!" When they had finished, the king ordered that he should be set down in a certain place with all the joints of his fingers beside him, and they sent him home. That is why he was called Amnon, "man of faith," because he believed in the Living God.

After these things had happened, Rabbi Amnon ordered that on New Year's day he should be taken to the synagogue beside the prayer leader. And during the *Kedushah*, the hallowing prayer, he said to the prayer leader: "Wait for me a little while, and I shall hallow the Name." Then he declared in a great voice: "Therefore let all the sanctity go up to You as I have hallowed Your Name for the sake of Your kingdom and Your unity!"

And then he continued: "Let us declare this day's mighty sanctity, for it is of dread anxiety."[126] And he continued with the whole prayer. When he completed it, he vanished from the eyes and was not to be seen, because God had taken him. But on the third day he came in a vision of the night to our Rabbi Kalonymus son of our Rabbi Meshullam and taught him the entire hymn. And he ordered him to send it throughout the Dispersion of Israel.

That is why the Jews of Germany have established the practice of reciting this prayer on the New Year's day.[127]

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[126] The *Untaneh Tokef* prayer.

[127] Original sources cited as Gedaliyah ibn Yahiya, Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah, (Zolkiew, 1801), 44; David Conforte, Kore ha-Dorot (Berlin, 1845), 21; Yehiel Heilprin, Seder ha-Dorot, (Warsaw, 1897), Part I, Folio 109; Ele'azar 'Araki, Sefer ha-Ma'assiyot, (Baghdad, 1892), No. 64. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 213, p. 416.

9. Faith-as-Credo:

Often faith is defined by specific belief statements. In story, faith as credo is illustrated by exempla of people obeying a *mitzvah* and the rewards that such faith bestows. The following two stories are examples of men obeying the injunctions or creeds outlined in the Ten Commandments. The first story deals with the commandment of remembering Shabbat and the second with the commandment of honoring one's father and mother.

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"REMEMBER the Sabbath day to keep it holy," we find in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8).

It is told that a certain butcher had this practice: Whenever he found a good animal, he would set it aside in honor of the Sabbath. If he found a better one the following day, he would eat the first one and keep the second.

It was found that by reason of the Sabbath his whole life was spent well and easily. Finally he merited to have a table and dishes and spoons of pure gold.[128]

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RABBI Hiyya bar Abba said: "One man may feed his father pheasant and destroy him, while another may set him grinding at the millstones and bring him to eternal life."

It is told that a certain Jew used to bring his father two pairs of pigeons every day and give him to eat and drink. One day his father said to him: "My son, how does it come that you bring me two doves to eat each day?" And his son answered him: "You blear-eyed hound, eat what

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[128] Original source cited as ed., S. Buber, Midrash Aggadah, (Vienna, 1894), Exod. 20:8. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 80, p. 620.

I have brought you and do not ask where it comes from." So he fed his father with doves, but he himself will inherit Gehinnom.

It is also told that the government once decreed that any man sitting idle and not engaged in some craft would have his hands and feet cut off. Now every day a certain man used to work at the mill, while his father sat on a couch. One day the king's men came there. "Father," said the son, "you grind at the mill and I shall lie on the couch." So the king's men found him on the couch and brought him before the king and cut off his hands and feet. And that brought him to eternal life, because he saved his father.[129]

10. Faith and Tradition:

The latin *traditio* means to "hand down." It is the basis of the concept of received faith and belief. It is the chain of story that explains to us the world's existence and our part within it. It is the stories that explain our inheritances. It is the specifications of rituals to be performed and it is the guide to people's actions. It is the world-view upon which the community is founded.[130] The first story explains the tradition of how Israel came to inherit the land of Canaan to the exclusion of another potential heir. The land is portrayed as a God-given inheritance which Jacob received when Esau rejected it for the wealth of his father instead. It is the story behind the faith, the tradition of Israel's claim to her land. The second story shows the faith and belief that a tradition is continued in the writings of a medieval rabbi. Moses the

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[129] Original sources cited as A. Jellinek, ed., Bet ha-Midrash, (Leipzig 1853 - 78), Vol. I, 76; col. and Y. D. Eisenstein Otsar Midrashim, ed., (New York, 1915), Vol. II, pp. 455 -56 (Yerushalmi, Pe'ah I, 15c; Kiddushin I, 61b; Bavli, Megillah, 31a-b); Moses Gaster, ed., The Sefer ha-Ma'asiyot (The Exempla of the Rabbis), (London, 1924), No. 192 - 93. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 82, p. 621.

[130] "Faith," p. 254.

prophet approves of the Rambam's work, portraying it as a legitimate continuation along the chain of tradition that interprets Torah.

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WHEN ISAAC died, he left all his cattle and possessions and all that was his to his sons. Then Esau said to Jacob: "Let us take what our father left us and divide it into two parts; and I shall choose mine." "We shall do so," answered Jacob; and he took everything that Isaac had left them in the land of Canaan, the beasts and the riches and all the property, and he divided it all into two in the presence of Esau and his sons. Then he said to Esau: "Here it all is before you. Now you choose for yourself the half you wish to take with you."

After that he went on: "Brother, listen to what I have to say to you. The Lord God of heaven and earth spoke to our fathers Abraham and Isaac, saying: Unto your seed shall I give this land as an everlasting heritage. Now here is all our father left, in front of you, and here is all this land in front of you. Choose whichever of them you prefer. If you desire the whole land, take it for you and your offspring forever, and I shall take this wealth. But if you desire the wealth, take it with you, and I shall take this land for myself and my children as an everlasting heritage."

Now Nebaioth, the son of Ishmael, dwelt in the land there with his sons, and Esau went that very day to take counsel with him, saying: "Jacob spoke to me in such and such a way, and answered me thus and thus. Now let us hear your counsel." And Nebaioth said to me: "What kind of thing is Jacob telling you! See how all the men of Canaan are dwelling secure in their land, yet Jacob says that he and his offspring will inherit it forever! Now you go and take all your father's wealth and leave your brother Jacob in the land as he said."

So Esau returned to Jacob and did all that Nebaioth, the son of Ishmael, had counseled him. He took all the wealth left by Isaac, the souls and the beasts and the cattle and the property and all the wealth, giving nothing whatever of it to his brother Jacob. But Jacob took the land of Canaan from the River of Egypt to the River Euphrates, taking it as an everlasting possession likewise for his sons and offspring after him forever; also the cave of Machpelah in Hebron, which Abraham had purchased from Ephron to serve as a burial ground, did Jacob take from his brother Esau for himself and his offspring forever. And Jacob wrote all these matters in a deed of sale and purchase which he signed, with faithful

witnesses for all that was recorded. And these are the words that he wrote in the document:

"The land of Canaan and all the cities thereof, Hittite and Hivite and Jebusite and Amorite and Perizzite, all the seven nations of the Canaanites from the River of Egypt to the River Euphrates, likewise the city of Hebron which is Kiriath-arba and the cave that is therein - Jacob has purchased all of these from his brother Esau at a price to be held as a possession by him and his sons and as an inheritance for his offspring after him forever."

Then Jacob took this deed of purchase and sale with its signatures and binding seal and the ordinances and the open document; and he placed them all in an earthenware vessel so that they might be preserved for many a day. And he placed them in the hands of his sons.

But Esau took what his father had left him at his death from his brother Jacob. He took all the property, man and beast, camel and as, ox and sheep, silver and gold, jewels and crystal, and all the wealth that had belonged to Isaac, son of Abraham. There was not a single thing of all that Isaac left at his death which Esau did not take. With all this, he went to the land of Seir the Horite, he and his sons, returning to their own place, turning away from his brother Jacob and his sons. And Esau found his place among the sons of Seir and never returned to the land of Canaan from that day forward.

And so the land of Canaan remained a heritage of the sons of Israel forever, while Esau and all his sons inherited the land of Seir.[131]

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OUR RABBI Moses ben Maimon spent ten years in his chamber and did not go out until he completed the *Mishneh Torah* (Repetition of the Torah) or *Yad ha-Hazakah* (The Strong Hand). On the night that he completed it his father our Rabbi Maimon came to him in a dream with another man. And our Rabbi Maimon his father said to his son: "Here is Moses our Master!" The Rambam was startled and alarmed, but Moses our Master said to Rabbi Moses ben Maimon: "I have come to see what you have

[131] Original source cited as Sefer ha-Yashar, (Venice, 1630), Folios 92 - 93. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 26, pp. 66 - 67.

done." And when he viewed the work on which Rabbi Moses had spent ten years, he said: "May your strength increase!"[132]

11. Faith and Knowledge:

"Faith and knowledge" refers to the recognition of truth, either based in the legacy of the original myth or communicated through a second channel of revelation. It is a specific type of knowledge with "superior claims: an arcane character, a transcendent content, privileged channels of communication, or divine certainty (or all of the above)."[133] The first tale refers to the reward that faith and knowledge confer upon the individual. The tractate *Hagigah* becomes personified to ensure that a God-fearing man who continually studied her is buried and mourned with due honor. The second story of the Maggid Dov Baer and the Besht illustrates the immense potential power in the study and understanding of divine knowledge. This is emphasized as the teacher becomes invisible with the power of the wisdom being probed and by the direct parallel made to the Sinai experience, when the Israelites were made privy to divine knowledge in the form of Torah. The recognition of the truth of these revelations strengthens faith as well as understanding.

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[132] Original source cited as H. Y. D. Azulai, Shem ha-Gedolim, edited by T. Ben-Ya'akov, (Vienna, 1864), I, 62. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 208, p. 763. (Fragment)

[133] "Faith," p. 255.

A CERTAIN God-fearing man used to go alone to a place where he studied tractate *Hagigah*. He went through it and repeated it again and again until he knew it very well and could recite it by heart. And he knew none of the major tractates of the Talmud but always studied and repeated this one.

When he departed this life, he was alone at home and nobody knew of his death. The likeness of a woman came and stood by his body and burst into weeping and lamentation. She moaned aloud and cried until a crowd of people had gathered, and then she said to them: "Mourn for this pious man and bury him and honor his coffin, and you will merit life in the World to Come. For he honored me all his life long and I was neither abandoned nor forgotten."

At this, all the women gathered and sat with her, and they made a great and mighty lament for him. The men prepared his shrouds and all the needs of his burial and buried him with much honor, while the women wept and wailed. "What is your name?" they asked her. And she answered: "My name is Hagigah."

No sooner had the man been buried than the woman vanished. Then they knew that it was the tractate *Hagigah* which had appeared to them in the form of a woman at the time of his decease in order to mourn for him and lament him and assure him that he was buried with honor, because he always repeated that tractate and devoted himself to its study.

Now this is simply a matter of comparison. This pious man had studied only the one tractate and received such treatment. So think how much more will be gained by any person who studies much Torah and teaches it to others and establishes many disciples.[134]

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THE MAGGID Rabbi Dov Ber (d. 1772) frequently fasted from Sabbath to Sabbath and was very ill. His kinsfolk compelled him to go to Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, and he spent several weeks in his city.

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[134] Original sources cited as Yitshak Aboav, Menorat ha-Ma'or, (Mantua, 1573), 72; Yalkut Sippurim, (Warsaw, 1905), Vol. II, 102; another version Ya'akov Luzzatto, Kaftor va-Ferah, (Basel, 1580), 71; Ele'azar Shenkel, Ma'assim tovim, (Podgorze, 1900), No. 24; Tsevi Hirsh Kaidanover, Kav ha-Yashar, (Frankfurt, a.M., 1903), XIV, 30. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 111, p. 643.

On one occasion Rabbi Israel sent his gabbai at midnight to summon Rabbi Dov. He came and found him seated, wearing a wolfskin turned inside out and a small crown on his head. Then Rabbi Israel asked Rabbi Dov whether he had studied the wisdom of the Kabbalah. "Yes," answered Rabbi Dov.

Now on the table lay the ancient Book of the Palaces.[135] Each passage there begins: "Rabbi Ishmael said, Metatron, Prince of the Presence, told me ..." And Rabbi Dov read a page or half a page of it. Then Rabbi Israel said: "That is not how it is to be interpreted. I shall tell you its meaning!" And he explained the passage to him.

Suddenly Rabbi Israel trembled and rose and said: "We are engaging in the Work of the Chariot,"[136] and I am seated!" And he explained the rest of the chapter standing. As he spoke, he drew a circle around Rabbi Dov, who no longer saw Rabbi Israel but only heard his voice. There were terrifying lightnings and thunders.

This was the receiving of the Torah. And in this way Rabbi Dov received Rabbi Israel's approach to the Torah, which was connected with the source of his soul, amid lightnings and thunders.[137]

SUMMATION

The story is a vehicle that contains multi-layered paradigms of faith and spirituality. No story alone can accommodate the full picture of how Judaism and Jews experience their faith and spirituality. The storytelling tradition must be scrutinized as a whole body of literature to gain an inkling of the complexity, and an understanding

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[135] Bin Gorion notes: "*Sefer Heikhalot*, an ancient pre-kabbalistic mystical classic. The reference is probably to the book of Enoch of the Merkavah mystics, which tells of Metatron guiding Ishmael, a tanna of the second century, through the heavenly palaces." See Bin Gorion, Book II, p. 971.

[136] Bin Gorion notes: "*Ma'aseh Merkavah*, studies based on Ezekiel's vision of the chariot, one of the two fundamental elements of Jewish mysticism in talmudic and post-talmudic times." See Bin Gorion, Book II, p. 972.

[137] Original source cited as Shivhe ha-Besht (Lemberg, 1908), (abridged), 37 - 38. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 377, pp. 971 - 972.

of the many meanings that faith and spirituality can potentially have for Jews on a national and an individual level.

It is virtually impossible to know which paradigm of faith and spirituality will resonate with which person at which time. If Jews are not introduced to the myriad meanings that faith and spirituality can have for them within their tradition, and are limited in their acquaintance of what can be meaningful, then their chances of finding meaning are dimmed. We therefore need to create within individuals a wide base of experience of faith and spirituality so that they may find their niche within the tradition.

Aside from the plot of the story meaning is conveyed through symbol. Jewish narratives are highly symbolic. The symbols both give the story depth, and are themselves given depth through the story. Whenever we are exposed again to a symbol with which we are familiar, we come to it with resonances of past exposures, the myriad meanings we have gleaned through stories. The symbol becomes for each individual charged with layers of meaning. The following chapter will expand on the role of symbol in story and examine three symbolic complexes of faith and spirituality in medieval stories.

CHAPTER THREE

AN EXPLORATION OF THREE SYMBOLS OF FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY IN JEWISH STORIES

Amol iz geveyn, once upon a time ... we were told stories. The Jewish stories we were told provided models for our developing sense of faith and spirituality. Within these stories are contained symbols and symbolic complexes. Joseph Campbell analogizes the role of symbol in myth (though it has a wider application to all of a culture's stories) to the workings of his computer:

> I have had a revelation from my computer about mythology. You buy a certain software, and there is a whole set of signals that lead to the achievement of your aim. If you begin fooling around with the signals that belong to another system of software, they just don't work ... You must understand that each religion is a kind of software that has its own set of signals and will work.[1]

Symbols and symbolic complexes are the "signals" that enable Jewish stories to be effective, that ensure the compatibility of one Jewish story with another, so that they interact to create the cultural software that "will work." Embedded within these symbols and symbolic complexes are the paradigms of Jewish faith and spirituality which have been effective in the past and have the potential to be effective in the present.

This chapter will explore a definition of symbol and draw out the relationship between symbol and story, and symbol, faith and spirituality. I will then take three

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[1] Campbell, Power, p. 25. Clifford Geertz makes the same point. See Geertz, p.94.

archetypal symbolic complexes of faith and spirituality in the Jewish story-telling tradition, and through the story as illustration, explore the varying messages that the symbolic complex imparts. These symbolic complexes are [1] the efficacy of prayer [2] the miracles of Elijah and [3] the Messiah. Finally, I will explore how the resonances within these symbolic complexes have relevance for the contemporary Jew.

THE DEFINITION OF SYMBOL

The origins of the word symbol is Greek, from *symbolon*, literally meaning a "token of identity verified by comparing its other half."[2] While various scholars have offered differing definitions, I will be using "symbol" in the sense that Clifford Geertz understands it, that is, "... any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serve[s] as a vehicle for a conception - the conception is the symbol's "meaning"..."[3]

A sign, by contrast, refers to a specific object, act, event, quality or relation that has no meaning beyond what it is in one context. A symbol does not contain flat uniformity, but is versatile and malleable in different contexts, making meaning as each context layers upon the other.[4] Symbols echo in their social contexts in a variety of ways, affording them a depth beyond that of signs. The symbol's meaning/s possess

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[2] "Symbol" as defined in Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary.

[3] Geertz, p. 91.

[4] Lawler, p. 365.

some wider social or cultural value, either positive or negative.[5] Thomas Fawcett explains that they "get beyond the empirical to meaning and value."[6] Michael Lawler suggests: "... a sign announces what it signifies in the present, a symbol makes present what it signifies."[7]

In effect, a symbol work as a metaphor or an analogy drawn from the realm of human or cultural experience.[8] The symbol once formed as a metaphor conveys meaning and molds the experience of the participant in the culture. The experience is "suspended in the metaphor, waiting."[9] This is known as the symbolic process -

> ...that one thing, usually concrete and particular, stands for something else, usually abstract and generalized, and becomes a focal point for thoughts and emotions associated with that referent, or a trigger for a set of habits associated with it.[10]

The symbolic process is, as Campbell described, the "software" that makes the culture work. The participant in the culture on a conscious or unconscious level must be able to perceive and be willing to participate in the analogy in order for the particular system to function.[11]

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[5] Svein Bjerke, "Symbolism And Magical Acts," in Religious Symbols And Their Functions ed. Haralds Biezais (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1978), p. 169.

[6] Fawcett, p. 30.

[7] Lawler, p. 365.

[8] Regina Coll "Challenging And Reclaiming Symbols" in Religious Education 80, no. 3 (Summer, 1985), p. 375.

[9] Berryman, p. 276.

[10] "Symbolism" in The Encyclopedia Of Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1987) 14: 204.

[11] Fawcett, p. 48.

The symbol is potentially a powerful piece of "software." Regina Coll talks of the ability of symbols "to capture us, to integrate us into themselves."[12] Paul Ricoeur writes: "The unique power of symbol ... is its capacity to point us to the non-linguistic, non-semantic roots of experience."[13] The deep structure of symbol provides a sense of unfathomable essence to the human mind.[14]

PARALLELS BETWEEN SYMBOL AND STORY

Stories impart social meaning through plot and through symbol.[15] Lonergan and Bernard argue that symbols are in fact a

> more elementary type of story: they are inner or outer events, or a combination of both, that intimate to us at once the kind of being that we are to be and the kind of world in which we become our true selves.[16]

Peter Berger suggests that stories and symbols undergo three steps in our mind, thus forming their meaning for us and in society. He labels these steps or processes: (a) externalization (b) objectivation and (c) internalization. Externalization is "the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and mental activity of

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[12] Coll, p. 375.

[13] As quoted in Alan M. Olson, "Myth, Symbol, And Metaphorical Truth," in Olson, p. 108.

[14] Fawcett, p. 366.

[15] Lawler, p. 364.

[16] Lonergan and Bernard, p. 34.

men."[17] In terms of symbol and story this is the meaning-making process. Berger's second step is objectivation, which he describes as "the attainment by the products of this [physical and mental activity of men] ... of a reality that confronts it original producers as a facticity external to one and other than themselves."[18] In conjunction with the third step of internalization, "the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness," it combines to produce culture.[19]

Thus akin to story, the symbol is essentially an act of human creativity[20] that comes to pervade every aspect of human life.[21] The symbol is part and parcel of the activity of meaning-making, demonstrating the human ability to transcend the mundane.[22] It is a special type of expression, different from that of ordinary human speech because once formed, it develops an independent life of its own.[23] The article on "Symbolism" in The Encyclopedia of Religion observes:

> ...In one sense symbols are our own human creation and therefore our own responsibility. Yet in another sense symbols seem to have a life of

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[17] Berger, pp. 3 - 4.

[18] Berger, pp. 3 - 4.

[19] Berger, pp. 3 - 4.

[20] Fawcett, p. 30.

[21] Berger, p. 6.

[22] Waardenburg, p. 44.

[23] Waardenburg, p. 43.

> their own, or rather to point to a dimension of human experience that stubbornly resists our very control.[24]

The externalized story and the externalized symbol speak to us simultaneously on the conscious and unconscious level, to the id, ego and superego, as well as the ego-ideals. Through them inner psychological phenomena are given symbolic form.[25] They live in reserve until the lessons they have to teach us need to be drawn upon.[26]

Due to its constant use, the symbol becomes an archetype, and in being so it preserves a cultural message.[27] For example, Abraham in the biblical story is recognized as being loyal and faithful to God. This loyalty and faithfulness is translated into Abraham's "merit." A Jew understands the merit of our forefather Abraham as referring to his actions in the Genesis narrative and also the subsequent stories that use this archetype. But more than that, the merit that Abraham accrued in his loyalty to God becomes a paradigm for all within Judaism to aspire towards. Abraham is more than a person in our anhistory; he becomes a symbol. As such, Abraham (i.e. the values, attitudes and behaviors that he embodies) becomes expressed in a variety of means through the culture - dreams, myths, ritual, theology, mysticism, music. Our understanding of the symbolic archetype is more extensive in Judaism than the few biblical stories we have inherited about Abraham.

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[24] "Symbolism," p. 207.

[25] Bettelheim, p. 36.

[26] Waardenburg, p. 63.

[27] Bean and Doty, pp. 93, 107.

The symbol may simultaneously speak of conscious and unconscious wishes, or of religious meaning, or of revelatory power.[28] Thus, like story, the symbol helps us respond to the decomposition of patterns. It provides complex paradigms that we can probe to look for new patterns of meaning.[29] The symbol's intricacy allows it to be understood on different levels that may resonate singularly or concurrently in individuals depending on their stage of life and their circumstance.[30]

Both symbol and story are adopted as paradigms in forming the psyche of the individual and the nature of their society. In Berger's terms, they are objectified and internalized. Society becomes the human product which is the sum of the process of externalization, objectivation and internalization.[31] Similarly, Geertz would refer to stories and symbols as "extrinsic sources of information" that provide a blueprint for cultural patterns.[32] They also become paradigmatic for our individual understandings and behavior that make up a culture.[33]

The presence of symbol and story keeps a culture open.[34] The fluid and ever-changing nature of a symbol allows for constant dialogue of our imagination with the

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[28] Waardenburg, p. 48.

[29] Torop, p. 75.

[30] Waardenburg, p. 48.

[31] Berger, pp. 3 - 4.

[32] Geertz, p. 92.

[33] Torop, p. 15.

[34] Bean and Doty, p. 96.

past. Because the paradigm of symbol and story can evolve when confronted with new circumstances, they are the tools for vitality within a society. The symbol evolves in reaction to new situations responding with new layers of meaning. Simultaneously, the symbol is able to provide a thread of continuity in its role as the stable base through which concepts of the past are expressed and concepts of the past and present may evolve. The symbol has the authority of that which is pre-existent and the new meaning assigned it sustains relevancy for the present and the future.

To be part of a culture means to adopt of its symbols. In Chapter One I explored Vivian Gussin Paley's classroom community that was formed by each child's participation in each other's stories, which then combined to become the group's stories. Just as stories form the process of bonding in this community, so do the symbols used. Paley writes:

> "Creeping downstairs" come from Ira. Every year certain phrases are planted and take root, the shoots continually coming up in stories and in play ... The use of a communal symbol is a tangible demonstration of socialization as the agreement to share blocks and dolls ... "Creeped downstairs" is a literary and cultural event. Whenever an idea is borrowed I call attention to the fact, but it is not within my power to manufacture a symbol. Each group chooses its own verbal manners.[35]

Story and symbol are unique cultural expressions within their grouping. Yet symbols, like stories, also display overlap between cultures. There are many works which explore this notion - James Fraser's The Golden Bough is essentially about the widespread commonality of stories and symbols. Joseph Campbell in The Hero With A Thousand Faces explores heroic archetypes that are present in different cultures and

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[35] Paley, pp. 40 - 41.

the commonality that is found between them. The story and symbol, in addition to being the unique markings of their own culture, is also an expression of the common human experience.[36]

The primary understanding of Jewish symbols comes from the stories in which they are set. The particular of the Jewish symbol is derived from the *gestalt* in the stories in which it is placed. The symbol becomes particularly Jewish because of how it is used in Jewish story. As the symbol accrues anhistorical meaning from its original contexts, it in turn shapes the stories. Each time it is mentioned in a new story, the symbol brings with it the multi-faceted nuances that have become imbedded within it. It provides the story with the Jewish *gestalt*.

The poem, the prayer, the song, the painting, any form that expresses the symbol, for their potency become reliant on the knowledge of the stories and the stratum within the symbols provided by the stories. Culture is literally shaped by the story and the symbol. Hence, the stories and symbols of Judaism should be viewed as primary tools in Jewish education.

SYMBOL, FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

The religious reality is a social and cultural one. It is a reality that is made up of a network of religious symbols that raises questions of meaning and suggests

[36] Fawcett, p. 28.

possible answers.[37] Religions are cultures that suggest there is meaning beyond the objective observation. There is a reality that cannot be expressed in words but that may be evoked through symbol and the combination of symbols in story. Waardenburg writes:

> ...a religious symbol is an expression of something that is perhaps not at first sight but only in the last analysis considered fundamentally real, like a firm point where one can find an orientation and truth. Such a symbol can have a definite point of reference, for instance a remembrance, an emotion, an action, or a certain set of words which are more or less fixed and between which one can choose. A symbol can also refer to something indefinite, such as an indeterminate power or reality, or evoke certain more or less arbitrary associations. It can bypass all determinations and designate some kind of pure transcendence ...[38]

The symbol expresses the meaning beyond objectified meaning. It carries the codes of the way ethereal notions of faith and spirituality have been perceived by generations before, and they resonate as true because they speak from the experiences of those past generations.[39] More than this, the symbols of the past are effective because in the "repetition of history" they speak again to the new generation who receive them. Once formed, the symbol is given permanency in the religion because of the truths it embodies.[40] Ultimately, if the symbol loses meaning it is not retained in the rubrics of a people.[41]

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[37] Waardenburg, p. 49.

[38] Waardenburg, pp. 49 - 50.

[39] Fawcett, p. 35.

[40] Waardenburg, p. 47.

[41] Fawcett, p. 35.

The deep description demanded by concepts such as faith and spirituality are evoked well by the opaque nature of symbol. The symbol's evocative and dense nature permits the participant to contact and even experience the ultimate reality in a meaningful way.[42] In the last twenty years we have seen a resurgence of people searching for symbols, paradigms, stories and expressions of faith and spirituality. The re-emergence of the oral storytelling movement, the interest in so called New Age practices, and people's yearning for spirituality are, I believe, obvious expressions of this need for the ethereal or emotional by those impoverished by reason alone. The challenge for those of us who are Jewish parents and educators is to inspire our children with the symbols and stories of the Jewish tradition, so that they can recognize faith and spirituality within their own heritage rather than looking outside its bounds.

The symbol and story only maintain their potency if one concurs to participate in the symbol. Once the symbol is seen as simply description, in Paul Tillich's words, it becomes a broken symbol.[43] Symbols becomes flat as their meanings are explicitly explained and they verge on the dangerous edge of losing their meaning for the religious adherent. The break-down of symbols in the nineteenth and twentieth century came about with an objective analysis of meaning. It was thought that all of life could be rationalized and understood in a scientific manner.[44] Many symbols became

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[42] Fawcett, p. 9.

[43] Fowler, p. 180.

[44] Fawcett, p. 31.

irrelevant as their meaning was expressed in analytical words, or rejected in concept as being irrational. Something was lost in this rationalization process which produced a flatness of being.

Recognizing the danger of outlining and rationalizing the meaning of symbols, it is quite an awesome task for one within a culture to search out the potential meanings of symbols. Judaism is a culture that has never shied away from explication but rather has revered it as an art form.[45] When it is done with the acknowledgement that any such exploration can only touch the surface of the meanings within a symbol and the acknowledgement that not all the layers of a symbol can be delineated, then the religious person may be more struck with awe at the depth of the symbol than disturbed by a shallow description of its power.

AN EXPLORATION OF THREE SYMBOLIC COMPLEXES OF FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

Stories are one of the vehicles through which symbols express themselves within a culture. To understand how the religious symbol works in the story context it is necessary to ascertain the meaning of the symbol and to understand its meaning for its socio-cultural context. To do this, I have picked a number of stories to flesh out each symbolic complex. The stories were chosen because they illustrate the varying themes around each symbol that were current in the medieval tale. In teasing out these

[45] Schwartz, Gates, p. 77.

themes we may ascertain what messages such stories conveyed for their own time and might convey for us as modern Jews.

Efficacy Of Prayer

To call efficacy of prayer a symbol or symbolic complex shows how the repetition of a specific type of theme in stories can produce a metaphor-symbol in a narrative collection. Prayer is a basic component of Jewish practice. The traditional Jew is commanded to pray three times a day, to say blessings for various acts and phenomena. There are prayers for life cycle events, for Sabbaths and Festivals and Fast Days.

The frequent use of prayer in our Judaism would suggest that prayer is perceived to have some efficacy. The question is how that effectiveness is to be defined and understood. As Ernst Simon, Gerald Blidstein and Dudley Weinberg suggest in their essays in Jakob Petuchowski's volume Understanding Jewish Prayer, there are many ways and levels that we can understand such a concept.[46] This section will peruse the medieval Jewish folktale to search for an understanding of how peoples from this time perceived prayer and its efficacy. Each story was chosen because it revealed many aspects or a unique point in how the symbolic complex was discerned.

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[46] See Ernst Simon, "On the Meaning of Prayer"; Gerald J. Blidstein "The Limits of Prayer: A Rabbinic Discussion; and Dudley Weinberg "The Efficacy of Prayer" in Jakob J. Petuchowski, ed., Understanding Jewish Prayer NY: Ktav, 1972, pp. 100 - 137.

Together these stories build a picture and understanding around efficacy of prayer for Jews.

The symbol may be seen as a paradigm for perceptions and behavior when the need arises for the Jew. Efficacy of prayer in these stories becomes a paradigm for faith, a sustaining symbol for the Jewish people's sense of existence, while simultaneously sketching the line of relationship between God and humanity.

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> THERE WAS a great increase in pollution, and Rabbi Israel was informed from heaven that if he and another pious Hasid and Moses the shepherd were to unite, they could defeat it. So the Rabbi joined together with that other Hasid and they went to a certain town to seek this man Moses, and made inquiry about him. There people told him that he was a simple shepherd out on one of the hills. They went after him and found him. His flock was scattered over all the hillsides, while he stood beside a cistern, crying aloud with all his strength: "Sweet God, how can I serve You? If You had a flock to tend I would tend it for nothing!" He leaped from one side of the cistern to the other, crying: "For the sake of the Lord I leap across the cistern!" Such things he did with much delight and fervor all day long.
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> Rabbi Israel saw that this man served God even more fervently than he did. He went to him and said: "I have something to talk to you about." Moses answered: "I am a daily hireling and have no right to stop my work in order to talk to you." "Why, you stop your work," said the rabbi, "in order to leap backwards and forwards across the cistern." The shepherd answered: "I am entitled to stop working for the sake of the Lord, otherwise I have no right to do so." Then the rabbi said to him: "I also have to talk to you concerning a matter which has to be done for the sake of the Lord." Then this Moses began to grow fervent in his service and desire to such a point as cannot be imagined. Rabbi Israel saw that his service was cleaving the very windows of the heavens and was smashing the husks of evil (the demons). He said to him: "There is somebody who wishes to destroy the foundations of our faith." "Who is it and where is he?" then the shepherd asked with the utmost fervor.
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> Rabbi Israel realized that his words were making an impression, and he began teaching him the Jewish faith. He asked him: "Do you have

any cistern and spring here for washing and immersion?" Let us go and immerse ourselves there, and I shall teach you the Lord's Torah." "Below on the hillside," said Moses, "there is a flowing fountain." In that self-same moment he removed himself from the hilltop to the fountain at the bottom. There they immersed themselves, both he and the rabbi. Then the rabbi began to teach him the Hebrew alphabet. He spoke to him and told him that the Temple was destroyed, and now was the time to pray on account of the Exile of the Shekhinah, and that he should pray together with him and his companion in order that the Redemption might come more swiftly.

Now there was a great commotion in heaven, where Samael had grown very strong indeed. God was doing one thing against the other. They allowed Samael a brief period, and said that if he could disperse the three righteous men who were praying below, he would prevail, but if not - then the Messiah of Righteousness would come and there would be Redemption. And the work of Satan succeeded. There was suddenly a great fire in the neighboring town and all the bells began ringing for the townsfolk to assemble to put the fire out. Moses the shepherd began trembling and ran for his sheep. Rabbi Israel asked him: "Where are you running? And why?" And Moses answered that he could hear the bells ringing and undoubtedly the masters of the flock knew that he had abandoned the sheep, and now they would come here. And the shepherd no longer wished to stay with them but ran back to the hillsides.

Then Rabbi Israel understood that Samael had been strong enough to part them in order that nothing should come of their prayer. And Samael wished to injure him and his friend the Hasid as well, but the Lord delivered them.[47]

Prayer is seen as an extremely powerful and efficacious tool in some folktales. On the simplest level in this story we learn that when said by the right people, at the right time, in the right manner, it has the power to bring forth the Redemption. Hasidic stories are pervaded by this yearning for Messianic times and the belief that prayer and kavannah have the power to accomplish this aim. Rabbi Israel has a revelation that if he, a certain Hasid and a shepherd called Moses combined their

[47] Original source cited as ed. Dov Ehrmann, Devarim 'arevim I, (Muckacs, 1903-4), No. 19. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 367, pp. 962 - 963.

fervent prayer towards God they would have this potential. He therefore makes a journey to find this shepherd to teach him how to pray in the correct manner, so that the three protagonists can pray for the Redemption together. An assumption is implicit that a certain style of prayer is the most effective.

A theme which emerges from this story is the ultimate effectiveness or efficacy of prayer. The message of: if you do not succeed the first time, try again, is inherent in the story. This time prayer was thwarted by Samael, but next time the right people are in the right place at the right time with the right kavannah, prayer may bring about the Redemption. Underlying the story then is a reassurance for those who pray and whose prayer seems to be unanswered.

The use of three protagonists in the story is significant. Firstly three is seen by the tradition as the number which constitutes a community when one blesses God. This is most well known from the requirement of three men for the inclusion of the *zimun* (invitation) in the *Birkat Ha-Mazon* (Grace After Meals). The combined prayers of a holy community are seen to have a potentially powerful effect.

From a psychological perspective the use of the number three in story often refers to the id, ego and superego[48] or in the terms of transactional analysis to the child, adult and parent. This relationship is easily traced in the three characters of our story. Rabbi Israel is clearly the teacher/parent/super-ego figure that is designing to bring about the Messiah. The Hasid is the adult/ego, who sees the reason in such a plan and therefore as a consenting co-conspirator does not need to be so dimensional

[48] Bettelheim, p. 102.

in our story. Moses the shepherd, with a name and a profession that suggests his leadership potential, is at heart a child/id.

Ultimately, it is the child, who is difficult to discipline and who fears the repercussions of authority, who thwarts the efforts to bring about the Redemption. When Moses is tricked by Samael into not concentrating on the prayer-task at hand, the possible efficacy of the prayer comes to nought. The last paragraph of this tale shows Rabbi Israel realizing that the destructive outer forces that have tempted Moses are potentially a threat to himself and the Hasid. All are vulnerable to good and bad influences. We may choose to set up barriers or to succumb. The *kavannah* (intention and attention) of the pray-er is crucial.

This is clearly a story that speaks of the power of prayer by a small specific group of individuals and the power of prayer within our communities and within us. On the simplest level this is the tale of three righteous protagonists whose prayer could have a powerful effect if Samael had not interfered. On another level this story teaches the potential of a community to bring about Redemption through their prayer. And on yet another level it teaches the powerful capacity of each individual to bring about Redemption if every part of their being - id, ego and super-ego - is involved in the prayer process. It is a tale which emphasizes the promise that prayer may possibly be rewarded in the end.

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A CERTAIN man was a shepherd and did not know how to pray. Yet every day he said: "Lord of the Universe! You know full well that if You had beasts to herd and were to give them to me I would tend them without charge though everybody pays me; for I love you." Now he was a Jew.

On one occasion a scholar passed that way and found the shepherd praying. "Fool," said he, "do not pray like that!" "And how should I pray" asked the shepherd. Whereupon the scholar taught him the order of the blessings, and the "Hear, O Israel" prayer and the other prayers, in order that he should no longer say what he had been accustomed to say. But after the sage went away, the shepherd forgot all that he had been taught and could not recite it. He was also afraid to say what he had formerly said, because the scholar had warned him not to.

Now in a dream at night the scholar saw those who said to him: "If you do not tell him to say what he was accustomed to say before you met him, and if you do not go there, then know what evil is awaiting you. For you have robbed Me of one of those who is assured of the World to Come!" The scholar went at once and told the man.

Now here there was neither knowledge of the Torah nor good deeds, merely one who thought to be good. God regarded this as a great thing, for the Merciful One always seeks the heart.[49]

Like the last story, there is an emphasis in this tale on the *kavannah* upholding the prayer. Here we are told that the humble, uneducated prayers of the shepherd are efficacious. Their efficacy lies not in a concrete manner clear to us in this life, but in an abstract sense, because their purity guarantees his place in the World to Come. We are instructed through the tale that the efficacy of our prayers may not be immediately self-evident to the pray-er and those that surround him or her.

This tale also teaches that the fixed rubrics of prayers recommended by the rabbis are not the only correct way to pray, but that any prayer, when said by a pure and loving heart, can be effective in evoking God's benevolence. This sends a clear

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[49] Original source cited as Y. H. Wistynezki, ed., Sefer Hassidim (Berlin: Mekitse Nirdamim, 1891), para. 5 - 6. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 112, p. 1259.

societal message to both the intellectually abled within Judaism and the common folk who are not so educated. It teaches the educated not only that their *kavannah* is important but that the prayer of anybody of any intellectual stratum is acceptable to God. To the less educated, this folktale confirms the validity and the power of their prayers.

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A CERTAIN MAN begot several sons who all died. He prayed unto Him: "Lord of the Universe! If you give me the merit of seeing a son who studies the Torah, and whose wedding I shall celebrate, I shall then invite all the students and poor and orphans of the city to be present at the marriage ceremony." The Holy and Blessed One heard him, and in due course a son was born whom he named Mataniah, meaning that he was a gift of God. He taught him much Torah, and when he brought him to the bridal canopy, he invited all the students and poor and orphans in the city, and he filled six houses with the sages and the wise.

Now the Holy and Blessed One sent the Angel of Death in the form of a poor man who said to the bridegroom: "Do me a kindness and give me a place among the students!" To which the bridegroom replied: "Those whom I had to invite I have already invited." He asked three times, but he did not wish to invite him. Then he pushed his way through to the canopy where the bridegroom saw him, and it seemed to him that this was a man wearing filthy garments. The bridegroom declared: "It was not enough that you pushed me aside and came to the canopy but you are wearing filthy clothes too!" And he went away ashamed.

After that, the bridegroom went to take his joy with the bride. While the poor were rejoicing, the man knocked at the door. The bridegroom went and saw him and became very angry, saying: "How long will you show your impudence! I have already driven you away from the feast and now you have to come here! Go away!" Thereupon the Angel of Death went and stood beside his bed like a pillar of flame rising from earth up to the sky. "Who are you?" asked the bridegroom, and he answered, "I am the Angel of Death, come to take your soul."

At this, the bride cried out, "Lord of the Universe! Will You falsify Your Torah, where You have written in Deuteronomy (24:5): 'When a man

has taken a bride, he shall not go out with the army, nor shall he be required for any other business; he shall be free for one year for the sake of his household, to rejoice with the wife he has taken!" Now it is neither a month nor a week nor even a single day! Lord of the Universe, let me conceive from him, so that I should not be considered a harlot!"

And indeed, the Holy and Blessed One heard her prayer and sent the Angel of Death away, and she delivered her husband from death.

What were her good deeds? Her mother used to draw water every day and give it to schoolchildren. She was an old woman, and her daughter used to take the stick and put it in her mother's hands and support her. She would carry the water and tell her mother: "Mother, continue this commandment all your life long. And if you cannot, I shall do it in your name!" And she did this all her life. Thanks to her fulfilling that commandment, she delivered her husband from death.

Of this it is said in Proverbs (31:10,21) "Who can find a worthy woman, for her price is far above rubies! ... Her house hold shall have no fear of the snow, for all her household are clothed in scarlet." For snow is always the Angel of Death, who is half snow and half fire.

And that is the story of Rabbi Mataniah.[50]

There are two sequences of prayers which are acknowledged in this tale. The first prayer sequence is that of Rabbi Mataniah's father who prays for a male child who will survive through to the time of *Chuppah*. The prayer is answered but it is decreed from on high that the boy child that results will only survive to the wedding. Imbedded in this story is a warning to be precise in the nature of one's prayers. For it is implicitly understood that the father did not mean his prayers to be taken so literally. His real desire was for a son who would attain longevity. The underlying message regarding the efficacy of prayer in this tale is that one should be aware of the

[50] Original sources cited as A. Jellinek, ed., Bet ha-Midrash, (Leipzig, 1853 - 78), Vol. I, 83; Y. D. Eisenstein, ed., Otsar Midrashim (New York, 1915), Vol. II, p. 458. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 8, pp. 1076 - 1077.

repercussions for what one is praying. If the prayer is efficacious, is that what the prayer truly desires?

The newlywed wife's prayer, the second prayer sequence in this story, tells of the merit of the righteous to have their prayers answered positively. Her accrued merit and her wise line of argument with God in the form of a prayer ultimately saves her husband from the terrible clutches of the Angel of Death. The message for the reader is that the prayers of the righteous are heard, and are sometimes rewarded. The story highlights the value of good deeds as strengthening the likelihood that a person's prayer will be answered. In addition, this example teaches that when a prayer is reasonable (as indicated by the detailing of the woman's line of argument) there is more a likely chance for it to be granted. Such a concept would have been comforting to those who strove to lead good Jewish lives through the performance of *mitzvot* and whose prayers were reasonable.

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A dilemma was created by the image that the prayers of the righteous were efficacious, for in real life this was often not the case. Several solutions are offered in the next three stories.

> IN THE DAYS of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the head of the Hasidim, there was once a need for rain, for the heavens above were closed. So people came to the rabbi in regard to this matter. He told those who made the request that because of manifold sins all the gates of prayer

had been closed. The only remedy he could advise was that some important people should go to such and such a place where they would find a certain man whose name was thus and thus. If they could persuade him to make the request of His Blessed Name to send the rain, then the rain would come.

So the men went there, supposing that if the great rabbi sent them to such and such a man, he would doubtless be an outstanding hasid or cohen. But when they came to that town and asked after the man and his character, the local people told them: "There is no holy man here with a name like that. But there is a certain drunkard who has the name you are asking about, and he lives in a wooden hut near So-and-So." The men went to the householder and asked him about the drunkard, telling him why they had come. The householder laughed at them and said: "What do you want of that drunkard who has his eyes in the bottle from morning till evening? Before it is properly light and people can recognize one another he puts on his prayer shawl and tefillin and prays a little while. At an early stage in his prayers he removes this garb of majesty and drinks a little measure of spirits until he becomes drunk as Lot and drops on his bed and lies like a stone until the next morning. That is what he does every day. But still," added the householder, "if you do want to talk to him, see to it that you catch him before he has begun drinking."

The messengers kept to their rabbi's instructions and made it their business to come to the drunkard before dawn. They saw how he prayed the early section of the prayer with the utmost devotion. When he removed his tefillin and wished to tip his bottle and drink the spirits, they would not permit him to drink until he had promised them that the Lord would send rain. After much entreaty he said, as it were to himself: "Lord of the Universe! Your people Israel need rain. Please open Your hand and give them blessed rains from Your good treasury, as much as they need!" After that, he began drinking his spirits as usual, and the heavens clouded over and there was a great fall of rain.

When the messengers returned to Rabbi Israel, they asked him to explain how this was and by what great merit this drunkard had so much power. He told them how in his former incarnation the man had been a perfect saint with whom nothing wrong could be found except the venial sin that he sometimes said the early part of the prayers without putting on the prayer shawl and tefillin. So his sentence was that he should come back to this world in order to repair what he had formerly warped. The pious man had wept very much, declaring that he feared he might do more damage, heaven forbid, than what he had to repair if he were born again. So they declared his sentence; namely, that he would pray with full intent every morning until he finished the first part of the prayers, wearing prayer

shawl and tefillin. Afterwards he would look into the bottle in order that he should not go wrong either by day or by night.[51]

A common motif in biblical and medieval Jewish tales is the need for rain, which can be brought by efficacious prayer. A drunkard, seemingly a sinful fellow, prays effectively to God when no one else in Israel is able to succeed in their prayers to God for rain. It appears that God pays heed to those who imbibe spirits and sleep all day (that is, who are not righteous), rather than those who involve themselves in a righteous life.

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov acts as an interpreter for the Jew perplexed by this dilemma. His explanation informs us that all is not as it seems: the drunk in this life was a *tsaddik* in a previous life. His manner atones for a prior sin and prevents him from sinning again. The efficacy of the drunk's prayer is thus due to the merit of his actions and thoughts, just merit that the onlooker would find difficult to perceive. The message is clear to the listener of the tale. Efficacy of prayer is, as they first thought, dependent on one's acts. But not just the acts of this life, but also the deeds of previous lives. The answering of prayers is more complicated than the vision of the naked eye, and the understanding of the human mind. There is a larger plan beyond our comprehension which can explain the unaccountable.

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[51] Original source cited as Dov Ehrmann, ed., Devarim 'arevim, (Muckacs, 1903-4), Vol. I, No. 30. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 364, pp. 957 - 958.

ON FRIDAY, the fifth of the month, at twilight on the eve of Sabbath, the day of rest, the enemies and foes of the Lord came to the pious men of Xanten (in the lower Rhine region). The foe came upon them at the hour that they were hallowing the Sabbath day and sitting down to eat bread, and they had hallowed the day by saying the *Kiddush* prayer and uttering the blessing "Who brings bread forth from the earth" over the Sabbath loaf. They heard and it was the sound of the oppressor, and the savage waters came down upon them, and they ate no more that first mouthful of bread. Then the leader of them all began: "Son of Aaron the Priest, you are worthy of greatness, alas, alas for those who are lost and will never be found again. My harp has turned to mourning and my lyre to the sound of weeping." All those who heard his voice as he prayed said: "This is indeed the sound of the harp and the lyre, the drum and the flute." His prayer mounted aloft to the Seat in Heaven of Him who lives forever, where it becomes a crown and diadem on the head of the Most High God, King who is King of Kings, the Holy and Blessed One.

But a decree had been issued, so that there was a kind of copper sheet between us and our Father in Heaven, and it blocked off our prayer, and we found none to plead our cause, not even one in a thousand, even though God's intention was to test the generation so as to announce to all, and among the hosts on high, their love of God. And so indeed King David (this should be Solomon) said: "Therefore the maidens love You." (Cant. 1:3)[52] And he also said: "For Your sake we have been slain all the day long, we have been reckoned as a flock for the slaughter." (Ps. 44:23).

Then the pious and the faithful priest who was greater than his brothers began and said to the community who were seated at his table: "Let us say the blessing over food to the living God, our Father in heaven, for the altar is now ready, and the table prepared before us. And now let us rise and go up to the House of the Lord and do the will of our Creator with speed; for the foe has come against us today. Therefore let every man slay on the Sabbath day his son and his daughter and his brothers, and let the day be a blessing for us! And let no man take pity either on himself or on his companion. And let the last to remain slaughter himself by cutting his own throat with his knife or else stab his belly with his sword, so that these impure ones and the hands of evil should not pollute us with their abominations. Rather, let us offer ourselves as a sacrifice to the Lord, as whole offerings on high and approach the altar of the Lord; and we shall be in the world that is all of it day, in the Garden of Eden

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[52] Bin Gorion notes: "The word "maidens" (*alamot*) being so close to the word "mightily" (*alimut*) that it could read: "Therefore they loved You mightily."" p. 426. Another rendering for the word: "*al mavet*" meaning "unto death" or "on account of death," rendering the quotation as, "Therefore they loved you unto death."

and in the Resplendent Light, where with our own eyes we shall see His honor and greatness; and each and every one of us will have a golden diadem on his head in which precious stones and pearls are set. There we shall sit among the saints who are the foundation of the world and eat our repast in the company of the righteous in the Garden of Eden, and we shall belong to the company of Rabbi Akiva and his companions and be seated on thrones of gold under the Tree of Life; and each and every one of us shall point Him out with his finger and say: 'Here is our God the One in whom we have hoped, let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.' And there we shall observe the Sabbaths, for here in this world of darkness we shall not be able to keep the Sabbath and observe it as required."

All of them answered aloud with the same words on the same heart: "Amen, so may it be and may it be His will!" Then our pious Rabbi Moses began to say the blessing after food, because he was a priest to the Most High God and he blessed: "Let us bless our God at whose bounty we have eaten!" And they responded after him: "Blessed is our God," and so on. Then he blessed: "May the Merciful One take vengeance in the days and before the eyes of those who remain after us and avenge the blood of His servants that has been shed or may be shed in future. May the Merciful One deliver us from wicked men and forced conversion and idolatry and the pollution and disgusts of the nations!" And he also said many other blessings regarding this event by reason of the evil that was overshadowing them, as has been told me by my fathers and the other elders engaged in the holy work who saw this great feat.

When they rose from the table, the pious man said to them: "You are the sons of the Living God, so now say together and aloud: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One!'" And they did so. "Now do not delay any longer for the time has come to make sacrifice of our souls before Him."

On the Sabbath eve at twilight they sacrificed themselves as an offering to the Lord in place of the evening daily offering, and themselves became, as it were, the daily morning offering. And as he who finds spoil rejoices in his spoil, and as the gladness of the harvest, so they rejoiced and were happy to act in accordance with the Temple service of our God and hallow His great and holy Name. And all of them came glad and rejoicing before the Lofty and Exalted God. Of their like it has been said in the Psalm (19:6) "As a bridegroom who comes forth from his canopy, rejoicing as a warrior to run a race." So they rejoiced in running and entering within the innermost chambers of the Garden of Eden. And it was

of them that the Prophet Isaiah prophesied (64:3): "No eye has seen, O God, save You, who works for the one who waits for Him."[53]

This tragic story set in the era of the Crusades illustrates the dire circumstances that Jews often found themselves in, and the lengths they would go to rather than compromise their beliefs. It is also a story that speaks of the quandary for Jews when their prayers were not answered and not effective. The *raison d'etre* provided is that the prayer came too late, since the fate of the community had already been decreed, and thus all their prayers were obstructed from efficacy. Any Jew, hearing this story from their torrid history would learn that a decree in heaven once made is near impossible to overturn, and would have to come to terms with the idea that not always is a prayer answered positively, even when said by the most righteous.

Despite this barrier to a prayer's effectiveness, the tale shows a conviction that God heard the prayers of the community (as they ascended and became a diadem on God's head) and that the act of prayer is not totally in vain. The community maintains its faithfulness as the blessings before and after meals are said, the *Shema* before death is uttered and as they became part of the evening service through the sacrifice of their lives.

The message to that and other generations faced with horrific decisions is that the reward for faith is not in this world but in the world to come. Their prayers and

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[53] Original source cited as A. Neubauer and M. Stern, Hebräische Berichte über die Judenverfolgungen zur Zeit der Kreuzzüge, (Berlin, 1852), 21 - 22. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 221, pp. 425 - 427.

action hold merit in the eyes of God, whose reward is guaranteed. The story depicts this vividly with the image that the congregation has merited to dwell in the Garden of Eden among Rabbi Akiva and the other righteous company. Comfort is to be found in the ultimate eternal reward. The efficacy of prayer is found in the afterlife.

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IN THE LANDS of Spain there used to be holy congregations before the decrees of 1096, and a great city before God was there, a city and mother in Israel. Now there was a certain king there who wished to expel them a number of times. Now in that city was a pious and very humble head of the court who was also very wealthy and found favor in the king's eyes. And every time he took thought to expel the Jews, this pious man would change his decision and bring his evil to naught.

Now it came to pass that the king grew angry with the Jews and gave orders to expel them. Then all the members of the congregation came to that pious man and asked him to go to the king and intercede on their behalf in order to annul the decree as he had done from time to time. But the work of Satan succeeded by reason of our many sins, and they came to the pious man at the time of afternoon prayer. And he told them that he would go to the king together with them but would first recite the afternoon prayers, because the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But they entreated him, saying: "This is likewise a great commandment, to deliver all Israel, and now is a good time with the king. You will pray afterwards." So the pious man acted accordingly and went to the royal court with them. When the king saw him, he was very pleased and ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him. Then the man considered to himself that the king would doubtless be prepared to cancel the edict of expulsion, and spoke of other matters with the king. Meanwhile a certain priest came from the distant lands of the realm and flung himself at the royal feet and uttered a long and impressive blessing of the king in the Latin tongue. When the pious man saw that the time for the afternoon prayers would soon be over, he went into a corner to pray, thinking that he had time for this before the priest would complete this long blessing. But while the pious man was praying, that priest rose to his feet and ordered all those who stood by to respond "Amen" to the blessing in order that it might be fulfilled. All of them said "Amen"

together, but since our pious man did not understand their language, he did not respond for he did not wish to interrupt his own prayer.

Then the priest asked: "Have all those present responded 'Amen?'" And they all answered "Yes." Then he asked again: "Did the Jew answer 'Amen?'" And they answered: "No, because he is praying yonder."

When the priest heard that the Jew had not responded Amen, he plucked the hairs of his beard and cried aloud bitterly: "Woe and alas for this evil deed, for the blessing will not be fulfilled on account of that Jew who never responded 'Amen!'" And when the king heard his words he grew very angry indeed and turned cruel towards him. He ordered his attendants to slay the man and cut him up into pieces. They did so, slaying him with bitter torments, and cut him up and placed the pieces within a robe which they brought to his home. And after that the king expelled all the Jews.

Now there was another pious man there who was the friend of the slain man, and he knew the latter's piety. He began to question and complain of the qualities of the Holy and Blessed One, but thought to himself that doubtless his friend must have done some transgression in secret, for was it possible to suspect the Holy and Blessed One of inflicting judgement without trial and cause? So this pious man fasted and wept and prayed and entreated to be informed from heaven what sin his friend had done to be slain in this untoward fashion. He isolated himself in a room where he sat wondering about the slain man, until the latter came to him in that room by day. The pious man was exceedingly shaken and trembled. But the slain man said: "Have no fear or dread!" Then the living man spoke to him, saying: "I know that you were very pious indeed, but now tell me why the Lord did this to you? What was the reason for this great wrath?"

Then the slain man answered: "I shall tell you the truth. I have never performed any transgression, but the Holy and Blessed One is precise with his pious ones to a hair's breadth, and most people are not particular by reason of our many sins. On one occasion my little son said the blessing over bread, and I heard him say it and did not respond 'Amen.' Then the Holy and Blessed One remained patient with me until what befell when I stood before a flesh-and-blood monarch and did not respond 'Amen' when he was blessed, and he grew exceedingly enraged. Then I was sentenced for not having responded 'Amen' to my son's blessing. And know it is proper for you, my friend, to tell your children and children's children and all others about this matter and warn them to respond 'Amen.'"

And the pious man flew away.[54]

This is a story also set in a time of great terror in Israel, fraught with expulsions by monarchs and conflicts with the Christian church. This story has as its major motif the neglect of a pious man to say "Amen" on two separate occasions. What can we learn from the motif of "Amen"? To begin with, the perception is that the proper response to prayers is required by all. The etiquette and order of prayer is not a vain persuasion but rather has a protecting, magical quality when performed in the correct manner. it should be adhered to for every person's benefit.

Efficacy lies, this tale asserts, in the protection that our prayers unbeknown give us through following their requirements, rather than the efficacy that we can plainly perceive when our prayers are directly answered. The pious man's life was in jeopardy because of his failure to utter "Amen," or conversely, he was protected by responding "Amen." Therefore the story imparts the message to the listener that prayer and its responses are important because they sustain a person to some extent. This story thus teaches that the efficacy of our prayer lies in the correct responses and in the sustaining power that they have unbeknown to us. While prayers may seem ineffectual in their specifics, they may have been more efficacious than we can fathom.

Beyond the major motif of "Amen" is another prayer within the tale that may be seen as effective. The friend prays to be able to make sense of the pious emissary's

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[54] Original sources cited as S. B. Hotsin, Ma'assim tovim, (Baghdad, 1890), No. 6, pp. 11-12; Y. S. Farhi, 'Osseh Pele, (Leghorn, 1902), Vol. III, 17 - 19. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 230, pp. 434 - 435.

death. Answered by a vision from the afterlife, he is then able to fathom the opaque nature of the events. We have therefore, a paradigm within this tale, of prayer as divine enlightenment. Efficacy lies in the answer sent to the friend in a dream.

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IN A CERTAIN city there was a man who did good deeds and was righteous in his qualities and was among the saints of those days, faithful with God and men alike, an elder of high degree. And he had a wife of good pedigree, as lovely as the moon and as bright as the sun. So righteous was he and so saintly that he never looked at her full beauty. Now the woman longed for a youth of the city, and the desire for him flamed within her heart.

During the wheat harvest when her thoughts were set on her desire, and she longed and yearned as though she were on fire, their festival came round with joy and timbrel sound. And there they were all glad and gay, and the man gave his wife a goat kid. In the late afternoon when it was time to rest, the man went away so as to pray and utter praises for the day.

"Prepare the table and the lamp," he said to his wife, "and I shall go to pray in the house of prayer." Then his wife stood at the gateway to look out on the young men. And the youth of her heart came singing through the street and strode toward her on his feet till he came to the entry of her home. And the woman blocked his way and caught him by the robe and saw how big and handsome he was, and impudently then said she: "The debts of youth I have paid today and all my vows are gone away, and indeed my heart would choose to die unless you love me without delay. Yet the sages of old have warned and say: 'Whether you vow or whether you pay, you must fulfill what is required without delay.' Also they say that vows and oaths can be washed away in case of need and urgency. And likewise both of oaths a man's wife dies because her needs must be fulfilled as urgently as any commandment. Now indeed I have hope in you, come into the house with me and let us eat, and have your fill of my beauty and shining face, and I shall pay the vow I made to the Lord."

And the youth replied: "You have judged me well for I greatly desire your company, and I open my mouth wide for the rains of your friendship. But it does not seem a proper time to me and I fear the master of the house, you see, and what he may do in his jealousy." "I know your

thoughts full well," said she, "and long to bear your love with me, and my heart and soul are caught in the desire of thee. More than the calf desires to suck, the cow desires to give him milk." And she went on seducing him with her words and smooth speech, saying : "My husband, the Lord preserve him and give him aid, is a penitent man indeed and clean and proper in his affairs, and this his very face declares. He has not looked on my beauty or given me my woman's fee. And he is the leader of his company in going to the prayer house, you see. Long after the others have gone he stays, and in the morning before the dawn he prays more than they and the likes of them, blessing before and after them with much imploring and entreaty and weeping for forgiveness there. So now come into my chamber fair. Come in, good sir, you may come here and have no fear."

So he went into her room there, mounting up full many a stair, and they ate and drank and did rejoice, and made their offering and sacrifice. "Young man, in your youth rejoice," said she, "and have no fear or grief, but rise in the morning betimes and come to me and desire nothing but my beauty. Do not delay but come with speed for my husband goes early to pray indeed, and weep and entreat as is his practice. Those deeds of his are strange methinks, and now look on my loveliness, I say, and think thereof and go, and return without delay." And the young man went home in the proper way, and the woman was trapped and caught in her own desires and longing.

Then she swiftly prepared dainty food with cinnamon and fragrant spices, and decked the house with carpets of rich design made of Egyptian yarn, and set out her lights as she did desire, and she cooked and baked and poured her wine and eke her table she prepared. When her husband had ended his prayers after his style, he returned to his home where he found everything in wait, bed and table and chair and light. "Be blessed," then to his wife he said, "in every tongue and language of people and tribe, you do better than ever before, my wife!" He swiftly sat down and took his ease, and when he had eaten as much as did please, his gentle wife to him then said: "Now we have feasted and eaten our bread, come tell me the matters you studied and said."

And thereupon the man began to tell some of the matters he knew full well, and he said, said he: "Come now, my wife, and listen to me, for these are the words of the Lord, you see, all properly dressed and well expressed by ancient sages concerning women. And this is how a good woman should be. Worthy in all things and modest too, and swift in serving her husband like you, happy with him and glad when he's glad, and giving ear to his every word so that he never may need to call twice. And she should fear him like heaven's own voice, and love what he loves and hate what he hates, and keep his sorrows and his joys in mind, and when he wakes and when he sleeps. Let her not hate what he loves or love

what he hates or lay his secrets bare or hold his high qualities in low esteem; and let her respect his family and his kin. Let her abandon, thus they say, her own laws and practice and customs in every way, and never dare to ask him for jewels and raiment and such vain store. Whatever he gives she should not despise whether it be little or much, and let her love the food he enjoys and make it for him without any noise. When she rises or sits down, let her keep his hours and not her own, and listen and not be a chatterbox and stay where she is and not gad about. Wise and prudent let her be, tending her home as befits her inner majesty, with words of kindness that she should say. And furthermore: let her bedeck herself modestly so that none may think of her wantonly, and never should she be wayward or rude, or try to rule or to intrude. She should not show him an angry face or make him think he is in disgrace, but hold him to be of consequence when any man comes to bow down to him. Let her hold no grudge against him in her heart, but pray for him and cherish him as the apple of her eye and bless him every day.Of such as she does Proverbs (31:10) say: "She is worth more than rubies in every way." Now if she does all this, as she must, the heart of her husband in her will trust. After these things that I have said, I shall praise the Lord indeed for bringing me these thoughts back to mind concerning the virtues of womankind. And these words are meant for you in truth, to guide you in your grace and youth."

After my lady had heard his each and every word, she rose and took hold of his robe and said as she bowed down to him: "Those are very wise and understanding utterances, that are worthy of the table of the Lord, and since you were right in all your praise I hope I shall find favor in your eyes, my lord, as you may know full well." So the man did not dwell long at the table, but they both stood up in haste after they had eaten and said their grace, and made for the withdrawing room and there they lay and pleasured one another, and they played together and were gay.

Early in the morning the man awoke from the arms of slumber and said to his wife: "Rise up, my love, and prepare my clothes, for my thoughts are all ready to serve the Lord. Now bestir yourself to tend your home and prepare your food with every kind of condiment and spice that will make it tasty and nice, and then take thought for the way to the synagogue, where you can pray and give thanks for our goodly share and our bright living here, for the day is holy before our Lord."

And the woman said, most sad and meek: "Husband, do not think it is sin if I speak and tell you I shall not leave my house in case I do not finish all I should. And now to make sure that I do not lose my share, you redeem it for me while you are there and pray for us both to increase our praises and thanksgiving. For the women of this city are very hard and harsh, and each of them looks to her own desire, and speaks bitter words about her husband. They are worthless one and all, and busy with things

that are shameful, and foolish withal. Each one goes beyond the other in her words and they are no fit company in the synagogues for uttering entreaties and praise. All they wish is to have the young men gaze at them and go up there to be seen. When I heard their secrets and come to know them I said: It is my duty to keep away from every wicked and mischief-making heart, and far better for me to keep apart. Husband, by your head I swore, and by the Lord in my own soul, what is more, that I should not leave my door but retain my honesty. And a woman's presence is not needed anyway, nor is she required for the prayers today, while the scholars long ago did say: "Women are free from every command which must be performed at some fixed hour."

And the man said: "Bless the Lord who gave you these thoughts and introduced such a graceful soul within you, so that you bring the words of worthless foolish women to naught. This I can call a woman indeed. And now stay at home and do whatever you need, and I shall pray for you!" And the man went his way to pray before his King, as I dare say.

He had barely left his home when the young lad hastened to the room. He signalled to the woman with his staff, and she saw him and opened the door and began to laugh and urgently she said to him: "Come, blessed of God, why do you stand without? For the man has left his home, he has gone out." So he entered in all the pride of his youth, and they ate and they drank like lustful couples in truth, and stretched out on the earth at least seven times and took their pleasure together. And when they consumed all their delight together, the young man went his way, while the woman swiftly prepared food and drink and veiled herself and sat down in her place.

Her husband returned from the house of study magnificently garbed, and she rose and stood before him with eyes downcast and prostrated herself seven times at least and conducted him to his own place to prepare for the feast. All his friends and family came to visit him and his wife, and asked: "Is all well with you both?" And they said: "All is well!" And then the man sat down to eat with the woman in goldspun robes on his right hand, and they rejoiced in their feast and holy day.

And the days sped by in transgression and sinning gay, and the man did not know the deeds of his wife or how guileful and tricky her heart was. But in due season when every harlot feels the pinch and all the rebels as well and will engage in any trick to fulfill their appetites and desires, the young man wished to play at dice and he went away from his father and went to a house for gambling and play as is the practice of all the wayward ones to this very day. And he threw the dice and lost all he had, his money and belongings and the clothes in which he was clad. He hid himself all that day and made up his mind to flee, being quite ready to forget his father's house, but he hired a beast to ride, and then he lay

down. At night when it was time for prayer at about the midnight hour, the husband woke up and went to pray as is the fashion of the devout.

Then, too, the young man prepared to go his way and to flee from his city and escape from all who knew him. And he called to the woman to open to him at once and told her: "I am leaving my home and shall room afar and abandon all who are my own." Then the woman said to him: "Do not deprive me of the joy I have in you, I shall accompany you!" And from her husband's home she took the best she could find in silver and gold and garments fine and ornaments and jewelry. And the young man entered and took all her husband's good in the way of anklets and bracelets and necklets and earrings and jewels, all worth their weight in gold and more. They hired another strong, choice beast and each one took his load and placed it on his ass, and in spite of the weight they took all they could. Then they departed by night, lean with lust and scorched with inner heat, and they turned their faces towards a distant land.

In the morning when all hearts are gay, the husband ended his confessions for bygone evil-doing. He went running home and found the gate open and gazed and saw that his home had been robbed. It all stood naked and bare. He went to his storeroom and found nothing there, and he said: "Surely my innocent wife must have lent our belongings to an orphan bride, so as to give her a good start in life." For the ninny did not know that his horns had begun to grow. "Now I shall wait till she arrives, and I shall know the good deeds of this worthiest of wives."

So he waited until the day was high, but there was no sign of her, and he grieved to himself and said: "I must go and find out what has come about." So he rose and looked for her everywhere but received no answer to his questions. He came as far as the city gate, and there he met a man who was late in returning from a journey, and this man knew him and understood what had befallen: "Indeed," said he, "you are the penitent living most worthily, and you were sure that your wife was most modest and innocent, yet she is a miserable whore, for I met her not long before with young So-and-So, racing as though they had a long way to go, and their donkeys carried a double load, and they are a long way off on the road, and nobody will be able to overtake them."

When the worthy man heard this, his face was covered with shame, and he burst out weeping and moaned and wailed and did exclaim: "Indeed, by my righteousness I have been polluted, alas, for I have nothing more to say. For today because of my shame and reproach and grief and sorrow, as I must avouch, has been my dedicated prayer, and my penitence has ill availed me, I declare. Had I behaved with all the overweening pride and been forceful man and lord at home I would have known about my wife and all her wicked life, and I would have watched her in my pride and I would have seen when she lusted and when she lied. But penitence beguiled me and I was seduced, so now I drink this cup my wife has left

me to the dregs and I shall pass my days in mourning day by day as though I were rotting away. And now, you penitent, depart from the way of penitence and choose yourself the way of cruelty and wickedness for fear that what has happened to me may happen to you and all your splendor be broken by the grief that has broken me, till you are a proverb and lament, a shame and a byword!"

So the man returned home after he had ended his sigh and his moan. And he was left in sorrow and shame, a dolt for all men to blame. His joy by sighing was replaced and he could feel he was indeed disgraced, his radiant visage was defaced, his honor had become reproach, and his beauty was nothing more than booty.[55]

This poetic folk tale provides yet another message and nuance about prayer and its efficacy. It is a warning that being too immersed and too reliant on prayer is a path to failure. This story teaches that while it is commendable to have a foot in the ethereal world of prayer and righteousness, it behooves the individual to have a foot in the earthly practices and realities. Too much of either approach can lead to deception and downfall. In this story the righteous man is deceived by the seeming goodness of his wife because he is not grounded or interested in the mundane but emphasizes in his life the act of prayer and righteousness alone. This blinder makes him an easy target to deceive and is his eventual undoing as she seeks the earthy pleasures and runs away with her lover and his possessions. The lesson for the reader is the importance of moderation in prayer and in life.

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[55] Original source cited as Yitshak ben Sahula Meshal ha-Kadmoni, (Frankfurt, a.O., 1780), Vol. II, 25 - 28. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 30, pp. 1157 - 1163.

ONCE UPON a time a certain boy went to sea and came aboard a ship. In this ship were people of seventy different nations. A great storm began on the sea. Each and every one carried a little figurine of his god round his neck. When the storm began at sea, each of them took his god in hand and embraced it and kissed it and cried aloud to it, saying: "Come, save us from this distress." But it did not help in the least. They tore the hair of their heads and the hair of their beards and prostrated themselves (before these gods of theirs, but to no avail).

When they saw that it did not help them at all, they said to one another: "There is no value in idolatry! We have a boy here, and we believe he must be a Jew." Now this boy was poor, and when he saw the storm beginning he went down below deck and fell fast asleep. The men went down to him and said to him: "Look in what distress we are, and how can you sleep? Come call to your God, maybe He will support us so that we shall not be lost."

Then the boy stood below the ship's deck and prayed unto the Lord, saying: "I pray You, Lord of the Universe! Let Your power and might and great Name be known this day and remember Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to whom You took oath by Your own self, and now let all the people admit that You are a God of truth, and let them know that You are a merciful and gracious God!"

The Holy and Blessed One signed to the sea at once, and it ceased its raging. And they sailed at ease.

When they came to land, each of them bought himself food. And they said to the boy: "Buy yourself food as well." "What are you asking of a pauper like me?" said he. "I have nothing with which to buy." "You are not poor," said they, "but very rich; but all of us people are poor for we cried to our gods who do not respond. But you, wherever you go, your God answers you!"

"Fools!" said he to them. "It seems to me that your gods who hang round your neck are very far away. But my God seems to be far away from me when He is near at hand, as the Psalm says: 'The Lord is near to all who call upon Him' (145:18). And Moses also said (Deut. 4:7): "For what great people is there that has a god so close to them as the Lord our God is whenever we cry unto Him.'" At this, they all began to declare: "Your lips utter truth."

The Holy and Blessed One said to Israel: "My sons, love Me and declare the unity of My name at the morning, afternoon and evening prayers, and I shall guard you by day and night." As it says in Psalms: "Behold, the Guardian of Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (12:1-4).[56]

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[56] Original sources cited as Hibbur Ma'assiyot ve-ha-Midrashot (Verona, 1647), No. 20 (Tosefta, Nidda V, 17; Yerushalmi IX, 13b); Ele'azar Araki Sefer ha-Ma'assiyot (Baghdad, 1892),

With all the proof to the contrary through the ages - exile from their land, oppressive regimes and religions - Jews needed stories that strengthened their reliance on God. They needed to be reassured that sometimes God answers their prayers positively. This story provides us with a Jonah-style motif of a ship vulnerable in a stormy sea, and only the God of Israel is able to quiet the tempest. This occurs when God answers the prayer of a poor lad, to the shame of representatives of the other seventy nations (the traditional representation of the rest of the world) on the ship, whose gods did not answer their prayers.

This polemical thrust is emphasized more intensely through the details of the story. The young Jewish boy was not of the elite of the Jewish community. He did not need to go above board, but could pray from below the deck and still have his prayer answered. The supremacy of God and the relationship of the Jewish people to their God, intangible as the Divinity may be, is pictured as the most effective and tangible of bonds. Through prayer all storms become surmountable as long as one has faith and trust in God. The effectiveness of prayer lies in the strength of this relationship. God has more power than any other deity to rectify crisis to a sense of normality and equilibrium. Only to God can true efficacy of prayer be attributed, for other gods, though more tangible through their presentation as idols, are in fact less tangible in answering prayer.

No. 20; Yalkut Sippurim, (Warsaw, 1905), Vol. II, 11 - 12. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 66, pp. 607 - 608.

Summation

The frequent occurrences of prayer and efficacy as an issue in Jewish stories, means that "efficacy of prayer" becomes a symbol of faith and spirituality in the literature. The stories provide paradigms of responses to prayer and what our expectations should be with regard to prayer's efficacy.

The stories convey the idea that prayer is a powerful instrument through which humanity can manipulate their destiny although ultimately destiny is in the hands of God. Praying to God is seen to be an activity that has sustaining power in formulaic forms and in forms from the heart. This tension between *keva* and *kavanah* coexists in the stories.

Although powerful, prayer is not to be relied upon alone for ones well being. There are stories that advocate a life balanced by prayer and realistic expectations and acts. The image given to the symbolic complex is one that takes into account the realities of life.

Prayer is accessible to everybody whether they be rich or poor, wise or simple, and its efficacy is strengthened by righteous acts and by logical and reasonable expectations. Just as prayer might answer an individual's questions in life it might also raise questions. The mystery behind the seeming contradiction underlying God's providence and the way prayers are answered is connected to the knowledge of the world beyond our ken. The efficacy of prayer may be reliant on deeds of which we are unaware, or the answer may be deferred for the world to come. Questions raised

about divine justice and the answering of prayers are delegated to the realm of the unknowable.

The tenor of the symbol of efficacy of prayer is that it provides a paradigm of how faith and spirituality might be expressed by an individual. The stories containing this symbolic complex model answers to doubts that can be raised by reliance on prayer as well as the sort of answers that might be expected by an individual. These two elements merge in the story so that it becomes a powerful symbol of hope. Through prayer we might effect our destiny and commune with God. Our faith and spirituality is strengthened by this possibility.

The Messiah

The concept of the Messiah in Judaism is one that directs the thoughts of the Jew through time to a point where the world as we know it (i.e., the vagaries of history and nature) will be brought to a triumphant end. The Messiah is a symbol because his existence is the conjecture of a culture. Descriptions in stories, liturgy, texts, songs provide us with its depth and concrete form. Just as history had a beginning (*Bereshit*) so will it have an end. This end became a dominant passion, a time to work towards and anticipate. That end will be heralded by the Messiah, who himself became a symbol of what could be.

How important such a symbol must have been to a people whose present was not always ideal, who lived in hope that the tenuousness of their historical situation

would cease. The promise of a person bringing salvation and ending their torment, the promise that the cycle of exile and punishment would end, had sustaining power personally and nationally. The following stories combine to give us a picture of the main streams of thought surrounding the Messiah during the medieval period. They are witness to the vision of faith that is found in the Jewish people.

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> ONE DAY Rabbi Isaac Luria and the companions went to Gush Halav, to the tomb of Shemaiah and Abtalion, and he concentrated with them on special formulas. After he had completed this, he told the companions in the name of Shemaiah and Abtalion to pray to the Lord that Messiah ben Joseph should not pass away in their days.[57]
>
> In his great humility he did not reveal that he himself was this Messiah until the day of his death.[58]

This is a story that speaks of the great rabbi of the Kabbalah, Rabbi Issac Luria, and his potential to be the personification of the Messiah ben Joseph for his generation. As a renowned and righteous man of his generation, he is identified as a candidate for the messianic role. In this tale, the rabbi is aware of his candidacy.

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[57] Bin Gorion notes: "Shemaiah and Abtalion were the fourth pair (*zug*) of leading exponents of oral law in the time between the Maccabean revolt and the rule of Herod (37 - 4 B.C.). Each such pair held the office of *nasi* (prince) and *av bet din* (head of the court). According to Jewish tradition, Messiah ben Joseph was to be a forerunner of the Davidic Messiah. Bin Gorion, Book II, p. 872.

[58] Original sources cited as Shelomoh Meinsterl, Shivhe he-Ari, (Jerusalem, 1905), 8; see also S. H. Meinsterl, ed., Kitve Shevah Yekar u-Gedulat he-Ari, (N.p., n.d.), 47. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 292, p. 872.

Filled with humility he does not reveal to his disciples the possibility inherent within him until just before his death. Such humility about revealing one's identity is a common theme among the true Messiah figures in the medieval Jewish story.

Another aspect revealed regarding the Messiah is that he can be forced to reveal himself through the prayers and formulae of the righteous. Jews have the ability within them to uncover who is the Messiah. With the death of their teacher the disciples were to learn that their prayers at the tomb of Shemaiah and Abtalion were unsuccessful, for Rabbi Isaac had been the Messiah for whom they were waiting, yet the time had not yet come for him to be revealed upon the earth. His death allayed all hope for that generation. Yet the hope endures, for if the Messiah was present in that era, surely he would be present in another.

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> IN THE YEAR five thousand three hundred and thirty four (1574 C.E.) Rabbi Masud ha-Cohen of Deraa came to Rabbi Hayyim [Vital] and told him of a certain man, outstanding in his generation, who could foretell the future. His name was Abraham Shalom, and he had told him to go to Rabbi Hayyim and greet him and tell him in his name that Rabbi Hayyim was Messiah ben Joseph. He was to go to Jerusalem and dwell there for two years, and after the first year the Spirit of the Lord would move within him. Thereafter there would be a dispute concerning him between the men of Jerusalem and the men of Galilee, in which the men of Egypt would aid the men of Jerusalem. Yet in spite of all this the men of Galilee would succeed in bringing him back to dwell in Galilee. Thousand and myriads of Israel would gather unto him there and he would reign over them and teach them Torah. And then he, Abraham Shalom, would also come to Galilee where he would be Messiah ben David while Rabbi Hayyim would be Messiah ben Joseph - providing that the generation would be worthy of it.

In the year of the creation five thousand three hundred and thirty-even (1577 C.E.) Rabbi Hayyim went to Egypt where another sage from Deraa came to him and told him how Rabbi Abraham Shalom had prophesied all that Rabbi Masud had said concerning him.

Two years later Rabbi Hayyim was delivering a sermon to a congregation in Jerusalem one Sabbath morning. A certain woman who was there related that all the time the rabbi was speaking she saw a pillar of fire above his head while Elijah of blessed memory was supporting him on the right. When the rabbi ended his sermon, the pillar of fire vanished and Elijah departed.

In due course, Rabbi Hayyim went to dwell in Damascus and there as well the selfsame woman saw a pillar of fire over his head. This was during the additional prayer on the Day of Atonement when the rabbi was praying for the congregation. Now this woman was accustomed to seeing visions while awake, and she was correct in whatever she said from her childhood onward.

This happened in the year five thousand three hundred and thirty nine (1579 C.E.). Rabbi Hayyim then returned to the Holy City one day. In the morning the Ishmaelite guardian of the temple, who hated the Jews, came to him, kissed his hands and his feet, and entreated him to bless him and write him a charm to be hung around his neck. And the rabbi asked him: "What has happened to you? I know that this is not your way." And the guardian answered: "Indeed, I know that you are a holy man of God. After all, I serve in the temple. Last night about midnight when I left the entrance of the temple the moon was as bright as midday. I lifted up my eyes and saw you flying through the air above the temple for a whole hour."[59]

This story reads as a historical account of some circumstances in the life of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, the disciple of the kabbalistic master the Ari. It teaches several beliefs about the Messiah. The beginning of the tale imparts the idea that there is a concept of two messiahs, that of Messiah ben Joseph who will precede and herald the Messiah ben David. This is a talmudic concept in origin. The Messiah symbol is

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[59] Original source cited as Shivhe Rabbi Hayyim Vital, (N.p., n.d.), 2 - 3. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 296, pp. 875 - 876.

clearly delineated into two parts. Details provide depth and knowledge of the nature of the symbol, so that when and if the fulfillment of the Messiah eventuates, the people will know who and what to expect.

Secondly, this tale indicates to us that the Messiah is to be found in a well-known person of that generation. Rabbi Hayyim Vital was a known and respected rabbi in his community, a disciple of the Ari. Rabbi Abraham Shalom was also famous for the accuracy of his prophecies within his own community. It is understood that individuals seen as outstanding Jews and leaders of their generation had the potentiality to be the leaders for which all Jews and history were waiting.

The tenor of this story also underlines the idea that the time of the coming of the Messiah, the movements of this individual, and who this individual was, could be predicted through prophecy and signs. Rabbi Abraham Shalom foretold his own greatness and that of Rabbi Hayyim Vital in great detail. The story implies that these facts were foretold accurately and the matters as told came to pass.

The certainty of the messianic greatness of Rabbi Hayyim Vital is re-confirmed by a woman known for the accuracy of her visions. She twice confirms the accuracy of the prophecies in her visions. Affirmation also is found in the testimony of a "neutral" Ishmaelite guard who had caught Rabbi Hayyim Vital in the act of performing wonders. The implication is that such signs are only within the capabilities of the Messiah.

Significantly, nowhere among these accounts do we have Rabbi Hayyim Vital declaring that he was the Messiah ben Joseph. The particulars are presented by a

secondary source. This is a story of prophecy and speculation, designed not only to speak of the greatness of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, but also designed to provide hope to the listener. For if in that generation the time of the Messiah was near, then perhaps in the future another man of renown would fulfil the longings of Jews for the Messiah.

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ONCE Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov set out on a journey early in the week and was accompanied by one of his chosen young men. When the wagon left the city gate, the wagoner tied the reigns to the wagon, and the horse went on by itself, departing from the highway and going by some winding byway. The wagoner fell asleep, and although this journey went across some way that had never been trodden even by beast before, it was exceedingly fast. They journeyed this way all week long and on Thursday evening they came to a place where the grasses were as tall as a man. There the horse stood still, and the wagoner woke up. Then the rabbi said to him: "Take the bucket, look for a well at this spot, and draw us water to drink." The wagoner went and found a well and drew fresh water and brought it to the rabbi, who said the blessing over it with utmost devotion and drank it. Then he gave some to his companion and said to him: "You too say the blessing with utmost concentration!" And he did so.

After that, the wagoner went back to his place and again fell asleep, and the horse went on as before all that night and the following day which was Sabbath eve. The young man feared that they would spend the Sabbath in the field for he saw no inhabited place, and he felt very sad. But that afternoon they came to a village, where the horse stood still near a ruinous building on the outskirts of the village. Rabbi Israel climbed down from the wagon and entered the ruin, and the young man followed. In this ruinous building dwelt an old leper, without a sound spot on him from foot to head, his body being full of wounds and boils while his wife and children were dressed in rags.

When the rabbi opened the door, the old man rejoiced and ran to meet him crying out: "Peace be with you, my rabbi and teacher!" And the rabbi also rejoiced; and if you never saw how glad and happy they both were, you have never seen joy in all your life. After that, both of them went into another room together and chatted there for about half an hour.

Then they took their leave of one another with an affection as great as that of David and Jonathan; and they parted.

So Rabbi Israel and the young man took their places in the wagon again, the wagoner fell asleep, and the horse went its way. It was barely an hour before the Sabbath eve when suddenly they found themselves at the gate of a great and mighty city. The wagon entered the city and stopped at the home of a tailor, where they requested to stay. The Gentile wagoner woke up and brought their belongings into the house. By now it was time for the afternoon prayer. Rabbi Israel took his place at the reader's stand to pray with a bare quorum, and he prayed very loudly and with the utmost devotion. He spent the Sabbath day there and did a number of strange deeds. At the close of the Sabbath after the *Havdalah* he ordered that the horse should be harnessed and made his way from there, overleaping the road.

Now you must understand that Messiah is to be found in this world in each and every generation, actually garbed in a physical body. If the generation is worthy he is prepared to reveal himself, but if, heaven forbid, it is not worthy he departs. Now that old leper had been set apart to be our righteous Messiah, and it was his great desire to spend some friendly time with Rabbi Israel before the Sabbath day. For he expired when the Sabbath was over.[60]

This story tells of a strange journey that climaxed in the meeting of the Messiah and the Baal Shem Tov. In the company of the Baal Shem Tov are a wagoner who fell asleep when he mounted his wagon, and a tsaddik who is peripheral to the events except to bear witness to their occurrence. This tale may be read symbolically. Rabbi Israel might be understood as a metaphor for the people Israel who wander the world in exile searching and awaiting the Messiah. Even when by happy fate they encounter the Messiah, as the stories tell, there is a parting since it is not time for him to appear yet. The wagoner who let go of the reins, can be understood as a paradigm

[60] Original source cited as Sippurim nora'im, (Munkacs, 1894), 6 - 8, (abridged and retold). Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 347, pp. 938 - 939.

for the listener in his or her own search for the Messiah. If they would only let go of the reins (i.e., let God control their paths) then the Messiah might be found.

The Messiah is found by Rabbi Israel among a ruinous building on the outskirts of a village. The depiction of the Rabbi getting down and wandering through the ruin where he meets the Messiah is reminiscent of the story from B.T. Berachot 3a, when the rabbis meet Elijah in ruins as God is heard mourning the destruction of the Temple. The ruins in this story can be connected by the reader to the ruins of the Temple which legend says will be rebuilt at the time of the Messiah. Such a connection recalls the deep resonances that the listener/reader has when reading this "new" story about the Messiah. Motifs of the past lend an authenticity to the story, and are given new life as they are incorporated into this later tale.

The image of joy that the leper Messiah found when encountering Rabbi Israel suggests that the Messiah figure is attracted by righteousness and especially righteous figures. In this way Rabbi Israel models for Israel the type of person that will merit knowing the Messiah. On the individual level he is the paradigm for a whole future generation who will merit the Messiah revealing himself to them. So the encounter on the journey also comes to teach a lesson to each generation, that the Messiah is a reward for their faithfulness.

A different image of the persona of the Messiah is presented in this tale. Our previous stories had emphasized the speculation that the Messiah was one of the learned and great men of their times. This story represents a different tradition, that the Messiah lives in this world as a poor and afflicted man. Some stories even present

an image of him being from those who have been brought most low in society, the beggar.

A well known story of the Messiah as an afflicted beggar which is often quoted, is the aggadic tale found in B.T. Sanhedrin 98a, where the Messiah is depicted sitting at the gates of Rome, removing and binding his bandages one by one. This story adopts the image of the afflicted beggar. In this tale the Messiah is portrayed as an old leper who lives in dire poverty, and whose final wish is to spend some time with the righteous Rabbi Israel.

The role of the Messiah as a beggar suggests that in even the most unlikely person greatness may be found. The identity is concealed from our ken. With this knowledge, the tradition demands that every Jew be respectful and esteem every individual whom they encounter. For who knows who and where the Messiah will be found? This is a similar motif to the concept of the thirty-six righteous men that dwell in every generation. Their identity too is beyond our ken, and the possibility that any person may embody one of these individuals, leads us to be more respectful in our relations with others.

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> IN THE YEAR five thousand three hundred from the Creation (1539/40) a ship arrived from Venice, bearing a certain old man from the south named Kuriel who had been a master of three great ships, and his brother was a cardinal in Rome. This old man had abandoned all his power because of his love for the holy Torah.

This is what happened. In his land of Portugal a certain prophecy had been revealed to one of the king's friends, but he did not declare it. After fourteen years the angel reappeared to him and said that if he did not declare what he was told he would slay him. Then the man said to himself: "Woe is me if I declare the prophecy, for the king may arrest me and put me in prison; and woe is me if I do not declare it, for I shall be slain by the angel!" But he went to the king and told him of the prophecy.

And this was the nature of the prophecy: In two years from that day a redeemer would arise of the seed of King David, may he rest in peace, and would bring all the kingdoms back to His Torah and faith. All of them, all the nations, would serve His Blessed Name, and he would burn away all idolatries and idolaters in the world. The first sign would be that on that night a star with a long tail would appear above the royal palace. And the second sign was that within thirty-eight days from that very day the grand inquisitor would perish. And the third sign would be that in two years to the very day, the king himself would die.

The two first signs were fulfilled precisely as the man declared. And when the king saw this, he appointed his little son to reign while he was still alive, for he feared the third sign, dreading that he himself would die, and in his place would reign another who was not his offspring. As for the seer, he placed himself in prison in accordance with his very own words.[61]

This tale elaborates on the theme that the Messiah may be predicted by visionaries. Here a visionary foresees the Messiah's coming as preceded by specific signs and portents. In this tale a reluctant visionary has achieved this knowledge through an encounter with an angel, and only delivers this wisdom to the king when threatened with death fourteen years later by the same angel.

The signs that he foresees as preceding the messiah's advent, consist of a comet, the death of the grand inquisitor and the death of the king himself. The king, when he saw the first two signs fulfilled outwitted the third, his own death, by ceding

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[61] Original source cited as Shivhe Rabbi Hayyim Vital, (N.p., n.d.), 19. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 245, pp. 454 - 455.

his throne to his son. In playing havoc with fate, the story implies, he undermined the coming of the redeemer to Israel as well as saving his own life. The lesson gained is how tenuous is the Messiah's coming, and that human intervention can prevent its occurrence.

The tale elaborates on what life will be like for Jews when the Messiah comes and brings redemption. This messianic vision is one of ultimate victory for the Jews who are oppressed by grand inquisitors and kings during the period of the Inquisition. Even though the king may be triumphant in his plans this time around, ultimately the Jews and their God will be victorious over the unpleasantness in which they now dwell, when Torah will be the mainstay of the world and all shall worship God.

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> A THOUSAND years ago there was a season of good will and it was the time for our righteous Messiah to reveal himself. There was then a great man who was fit and worthy to be the Messiah. And Satan went on high and began to argue against him. But they told him the age was worthy of Messiah and this great man was worth to be Messiah because he had not performed any sin. Then Satan requested that he should be given time in order to test him. Maybe he would succeed in causing him to stumble and fail in something. They agreed to this on high.
>
> Satan appeared on earth in the likeness of a most exceedingly learned woman, whose fame spread abroad, far and wide. All kinds of wonders were told everywhere about her novel interpretations of Torah. She journeyed from city to city till she came to the city where the great man lived, and the scholars of the city visited her. She told them all kinds of novel interpretations with much dialectics and casuistry. The more they heard the more they were astonished. And she added every time, "If your rabbi here were only prepared to come to my lodging place, I shall be prepared to give such novel interpretations as no ear has ever heard."

> Day after day the scholars told the rabbi what she said, but he was not prepared to go to her house. Still, after many days had passed his friends persuaded him and he went there. She displayed her powers and knowledge, and the rabbi was startled at her great proficiency in Torah. Then once again she said if everybody went out and she and the rabbi remained alone, then she would tell him even greater and more novel interpretations and elucidations. They did so, and the rabbi remained alone with her in her room for several minutes.
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> That marked the end of the vision and the hope came to nothing, and the good will did not emerge from potentiality to actuality.[62]

That the Messiah's arrival continued to be delayed became a dilemma that begged explanation. Stories often provided anecdotes around this theme. In the previous story, the Messiah's appearance is thwarted by a king who craftily outwits the signs that will bring about the messiah's disclosure. In this story, the time once again was ripe for the Messiah to appear on earth, and there was a righteous man who walked the earth that was worthy of such a role.

In this tale Satan is the intercessor who prevents him from deserving this function. Coming to earth in the form of a beautiful woman, Satan tricks the righteous man into doing a forbidden act, spending time alone with a woman to whom he is not espoused[63]. In doing so, the rabbi's righteousness is compromised and the Messiah does not appear in that generation.

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[62] Original source cited as A. H. Mikhelson, Dover Shalom, (Prezemysl, 1910), No. 363, p. 71. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 439, pp. 1028 - 1029.

[63] That the bait is a woman, and specifically a woman that teaches Torah, is a sexist image. But the issue in this analysis is not the social message of the image for our generation, but that the potential Messiah succumbs to any bait at all.

Like tales of unanswered prayers, such stories were not designed to undermine the people's sense of hope. Quite the opposite, they are designed to bring Jews a sense of faith and hope in the promises of their tradition, as well as underscore the need for perfect propriety so that the promises would eventuate. The Messiah has almost come in previous generations, and it is only one misdemeanor of a past generation which has prevented him from coming. Thus it is possible for each generation to reach the stature deserving of the Messiah and perhaps see the time of the Messiah's advent.

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RABBI Joshua Heshel of Opatow, who was a great rabbi among the Hasidim in the lands of the Exile, used to say that he had returned to earth ten times. In his earlier incarnations he had been once a king, once a prince, once a high priest, and once the head of the Exile. On one occasion his Hasidim found him sitting thoughtfully. When they asked him what he was thinking of, he told them: "I was wondering when I remembered my high degree in those early times and considered what I am now."

While they were speaking, an emissary from the rabbis of the Holy Land came and brought the rabbi a letter of appointment to the presidency. The men of Volhynia in the Holy Land had appointed him president of their association. The rabbi rejoiced exceedingly and made a feast in honor of the emissary. When he departed to return to the Land of Israel, he gave him a sum of money and requested him to purchase four ells of land on his behalf in order to bury him in the city of Tiberias beside the tomb of the Prophet Hosea.

On the night that the rabbi passed away in Exile somebody was heard knocking at the windows of the meeting house of that community and a voice was heard calling: "Come out to accompany your President Rabbi So-and-So on his last way!" When the members of the committee went out, they saw thousands of souls proceeding with the bier of the rabbi and accompanying him to the graveyard. On the spot which he had purchased they afterwards found the form of a new grave. They made inquiry and learned from them that the rabbi had died on the day the voice was heard.

> It is said that an hour before the demise of Rabbi Joshua he sat up in his bed and wept and wailed at the length of the Exile, and he cried: "Why are the footsteps of the son of Jesse so late in coming? My master and rabbi, Rabbi Levi Isaac of Berdichev, declared before he died that when he went up on high he would neither rest nor be still until he brought the Redeemer. But when he went up there and reached the higher palaces and saw the lofty degrees and ascents, he forgot his vow. But I shall not forget it."[64]

The striving for the Messiah is seen as a lifelong endeavor that continues even beyond this life. That Rabbi Levi Isaac after his death ceased to labor for this cause in the comfort of heaven is perceived as a set-back in achieving the goal. Rabbi Joshua Heshel swears on his deathbed that he will not forget, will not desist from lobbying for the Messiah to come. Such resolution carried through to the heavenly realm, where he is closer to God and may have more clout, serves as a role model for all who are witnesses through the tale. The struggle of each individual and each community to merit the Messiah's appearance on earth is a worthy one which must be continued at all times and against all odds. Faith in the endeavor is the utmost necessity.

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> AT THAT TIME, in the year four thousand one hundred and eighty-four from the Creation (423/24 C.E.), there arose a certain man in the city of Canaris (in the island of Kandia, which is Crete) and his name was Moses.

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[64] Original source cited as Menorah ha-tehorah, (Przemysl, 1911), 37 (retold). Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 415, pp. 1010 - 1011.

He declared that he had come down from heaven to redeem them like Moses our Master.[65]

Then he said that he would divide the sea for them and bring them to the land of Israel. He passed through that land and incited them to come on the prescribed day when he would divide the sea for them. All of them came on the prescribed day and flung away their silver and their gold, taking with them only what they could carry themselves. Now when they came to the mountain, men and women flung themselves into the sea, trusting and believing in Moses, who would cause them to pass dryshod. Many of them drowned in the depths, while some were saved by the fishermen.

They wished to seize this Moses, but he fled no man knows whither. And many of the Jews who were in Kandia changed their faith because they were so ashamed.[66]

As many as stories there are of people who are messiahs unrevealed, there are stories of messiahs who reveal themselves and turned out to be pretenders. These stories are often disastrous in consequence. This specific tale is of a self-declared "false messiah" called Moses. Disaster struck as people were drowned when the salvation at the Red Sea by Moses our Teacher was unsuccessfully re-attempted by the pretender and his followers.

That these stories so often end in disaster teaches a lesson to Jews about their faith in the coming of the Messiah. Their faith and trust and hope must not be so intense, that they are rendered gullible and vulnerable by false claimants. While there must be striving and hope for the Messiah, there also must be eyes open to reality. For

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[65] Bin Gorion notes another version: "He said that the time of the wondrous End had come and he was a reincarnation of Moses our Master." Bin Gorion, Book I, p. 352.

[66] Original sources cited as Menahem Man ben Shelomoh ha-Levi, She'erit Yisrae'el, (Amsterdam, 1771), VI, 25; Me'ora'ot Tsevi, (N.p., 1838), 51. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 182, p. 352.

if the Messiah is a false one, then one's hopes may be dashed. Such despondency is illustrated int this tale explicitly, as the Jews of Kandia change their faith, rather than face taunts for the shame this fellow brought upon them and their community.

The problem, of course, is to be able to discern the real Messiah from the false messiahs. In this genre of tale faith in the false messiah ends in disaster. Yet in other stories insufficient faith in the Messiah also leads to disaster. This juxtaposition suggests the careful path one must tread in expecting the Messiah to come.

Summation

The Messiah is a symbol of the faith of the Jews throughout the ages, that the destiny of the world will see better and joyous times in which Jewish dreams of an idyllic existence will be fulfilled. This dream of the Messiah's advent can be brought about through the righteous acts and thoughts of the individuals in every generation. The desire for the Messiah is so strong that it is told that the Rabbis see it a cause to strive for in this world and the next.

Stories that speak of how the Messiah may be predicted, or that he awaits unrevealed in each generation provide paradigms of hope to the generations of Jews that await better times. Disappointment when the Messiah is not revealed is abated by stories of intercessions, of human frailty interfering, and always with a hint that next time the Messiah is ready to reveal himself, that a new generation might be blessed with his advent.

The persona of the Messiah is left ambiguous in the stories. Traditions of two Messiahs, of one of the great rabbis being the Messiah, of the Messiah being one of the poor and afflicted people are seemingly contradictory. The multiple traditions that are maintained in Jewish story as authentic visions make the persona of the Messiah even more mysterious. Who knows when and where he might appear or who he may be? Yet the hope exists, the faith is maintained, that when the Messiah comes, life will improve for the Jews.

Miracles Of Elijah

Elijah, unlike the Messiah, is given a specific character in Scripture. Yet our image of Elijah is not simply the prophet of the biblical tales. Elijah has been able to live on in the people's imagination because he never died but rather got whisked away to heaven in a fiery chariot, thus appearing in our anhistory again and again. He has become more than his original character, a supernatural figure who is present for the Jewish people, appearing generation after generation at their side. Elijah becomes one of the mediator figures between the upper and lower realms, communicating to select individuals divine knowledge.

The Elijah of our understanding today is a symbol created by the lore of the Jewish people, a supernatural helper that often appears to us at times of crisis to assist or save us from our doom. Just as he is the forerunner of the Messiah, he is the

messenger that brings small salvations to the Jewish people, the forerunners of greater salvations.

In other tales his central role is to teach us moral and ethical behavior. Often in lore he is also connected with the life cycle events of the Jew - the *brit milah*, the wedding, the funeral. In each of these ways Elijah is fleshed out as a symbol of faith, as a guiding and protecting supernatural figure who is concerned for the Jewish people whatever their situation.

The following stories encompass many of the themes associated with Elijah as a symbol. Because Elijah stories are so numerous, I have limited my discussion to those stories which contain the "miracles" of Elijah - whether the miracle be prophecy, magical acts, disguise or other feats. Elijah is the doer of miracles, the wonder worker for the people who need the hope that his supernatural abilities can bring to their lives. The images combine together to construct a symbol for the Jewish people.

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ONCE THERE was a pious man who became poor, and he had a worthy wife. Finally he became a hired man. On one occasion he was plowing in the field. Elijah, whom it is good to mention, chanced by him in the likeness of an Arab and said to him: "You have seven good years: When do you desire them, now or at the end of your days?" "Are you a wizard?" said the pious man to him. "I have nothing to give you but go away from me in peace."

But he returned to him three times. On the third occasion the man said to Elijah: "I shall go and take counsel with my wife." He went to his wife and told her: "Somebody has come bothering me three separate times, saying: 'You have seven good years: When do you desire them, now or at the end of your days?"

"Let them be today," said she to him. He avoided his children and returned to Elijah and said: "Let me have them now." "Go home," said Elijah, "and before you reach the entry to your courtyard you will see the blessing awaiting you at home." Now there his children were sitting, digging down in the earth, and they found a treasure on which they could maintain themselves for seven years, and they went and called their mother. So before the pious man even reached the gateway his wife came out to meet him and told him. He praised the Holy and Blessed One at once and felt at ease.But his worthy wife said to him: "The Holy and Blessed One has already drawn a thread of kindness down for us and has given us a living for seven years. So let us engage in deeds of charity during these seven years, and then maybe the Holy and Blessed One will add to us of His bounty." They did so; and whatever they did, she told her little son: "Write down whatever we did!" And he did so.

After the seven years were over Elijah the Prophet, whom it is good to remember, came and said to him, "The time has come to take back what I gave you." "When I took it," said the pious man, "I only did so as my wife desired. So when I return it I shall return it only with my wife's knowledge." He went to her and said: "The old man has already come to take back what is his." "Go and tell him," said she to her husband, "if you have found people more faithful than we are, I shall give you your pledge." The Holy and Blessed One observed their words and deeds and the acts of charity they had performed and added more goodness for them, thus fulfilling the words of Isaiah (32:17): "And the work of righteousness shall be peace."[67]

Elijah is pictured as the angel of good fortune who brings fortunate tidings to the worthy. Elijah stories will often present a picture of Elijah bestowing magical gifts to the deserving with certain conditions. The miracle occurs when the prophecy of wealth is fulfilled as the pious man's children find a treasure at the family's gateway which is sufficient enough to sustain them for seven good years. Seven good years

[67] Original sources cited as ed., S. Buber Midrash zutta, (Berlin, 1894), Ruth 4:11; Shim'on Ashkenazi, Yalkut Shim'oni, (Frankfurt a.M., 1687), Part II, No. 607; Eliyahu ha-Cohen Me'il Tsedakah, (Lemberg, 1856), No. 443. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 63, pp. 1220 - 1221.

reminding us of course, of the seven good years of plenty in Egypt in the Joseph story.

The wisdom of the wife in this story is not just in her advice to take the fortune in the present but also in her inception of the use of the money for *tzedakah*, and recording those acts of lovingkindness. She has a plan for overcoming the limitations of the conditions. And indeed, when Elijah comes to take away the fortune which was only promised to the family for seven years, she has a bargaining point with the prophet that they should be allowed to maintain their fortune.

This narrative emphasizes that Elijah is merely the emissary of such good tidings and not their source. For it is clearly not Elijah's decision to give or take away the affluence of the family, but God's choice. When the Holy and Blessed One observed the list of righteous deeds, the merit of their case had to be acknowledged, and God permitted Elijah to allow the family to maintain their comfortable living style. This tale affirms the greatness and the miracles that Elijah may perform but also recognizes clearly the source of their power.

Faith in this story is manifested in the reward of the upright lifestyle and the giving of charity. That Elijah may come and intervene and reward those who are good brings a concept of reward and hope to those who struggle daily in a religiously faithful manner and see no immediate rewards for their behavior. Elijah the benefactor may possibly come and execute a miracle on their behalf, and they too may be rewarded for their faithfulness.

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RABBI JOSHUA ben Levi fasted for many a day and prayed to his Blessed Creator that he might be allowed to see Elijah, whom it is so good to remember. And at length Elijah appeared to him and said: "What do you desire of me? I shall fulfill it." Then Rabbi Joshua said: "I long to accompany you and see what you do in the world in order that I may benefit from it and learn much wisdom. "You will be unable," Elijah told him, "to bear all that you see me doing, and it will trouble you if I should tell you the reasons for my deeds and works." At this, Rabbi Joshua told him: "My lord, I shall not ask and I shall not be a trial to you nor shall I bother you with questions, for all my wish is to see your deeds and nothing more." So Elijah made a condition with him that if Rabbi Joshua should ask him to explain the reason of his deeds and signs and wonders, he would tell him; but also if he did so ask, Elijah would leave him at once.

So they set out together until they reached the home of a poor and needy man who had nothing more than a cow in his courtyard. The man and his wife were sitting at the entry. They saw the wayfarers coming and went to meet them and wished them peace and rejoiced with them and offered them the best in their home. They brought before them whatever they had to eat and drink. So they ate and drank and spent the night there. When morning came, they rose to depart. Elijah said a prayer over the cow, and it died at once. Then they both went their way.

Rabbi Joshua saw what had happened and was astonished and confused, saying to himself: "What this poor man received did not befit the honor he showed us. Surely something else could be done instead of slaying his cow when he had no other," and he said to Elijah: "Good sir, Why did you slay the man's cow after he had honored us so much?" But Elijah answered: "Remember the condition which we agreed to, that you would remain silent and say nothing; but if you wish us to part from one from another, I shall explain." At this, Rabbi Joshua stopped asking questions.

They both went on all day long. At evening they came to the home of a wealthy man who disregarded them and did not set out to honor them in any way. There they stayed without food or drink. Now in his house this wealthy man had a fallen wall which he should have rebuilt. In the morning Elijah prayed, and the wall was restored of itself. They both went away from there. Rabbi Joshua continued to be puzzled and grieved by Elijah's deeds. But he controlled his impulse to ask him questions.

They went on all day long. In the evening they reached a synagogue where there were benches of gold and silver, and each person

was seated in his place according to his proper worth and esteem. "Who will feed these poor men tonight?" asked one; and another answered: "The bread and water and salt which will be brought here for them will be enough." So they waited but they were not treated with due and proper courtesy; and they stayed there until daylight. In the morning they rose and went their way, but first Elijah said to the people in the synagogue: "May God make you all leaders!" Then they continued all day long. Rabbi Joshua became even more puzzled and grieved, but he said nothing.

They reached a certain city as the sun was declining. There the townsfolk saw them and came to welcome them with great delight. They received them gladly and rejoiced with them and took them to the best of their homes, a large house of theirs, and there they ate and drank and lodged with much honor. In the morning, Elijah prayed and then said to the townsfolk: "May the Holy and Blessed One set only one leader among you!"

Now when Rabbi Joshua heard this , he could no longer control himself or remain silent after all he had seen Elijah do and he said to him: "Now let me know the secret of all this." And Elijah answered: "Since you wish to part from me, I shall explain it all to you and inform you of the reasons behind all you saw. As for the man whose cow I slew, it had been decreed that his wife should perish that day, but I prayed to God that the cow might serve in her place. I also saw that the woman would bring much benefit and great advantage to their home. Then there was the man whose wall I set up for him. If I had left this to him, he would have gone down to the foundation and would have found a vast hidden treasure of gold and silver, which was why I built it for him. In any case the wall will soon collapse, never to be rebuilt.

"Then there were the men for whom I prayed that there should be many lords and leaders among them; for that will harm them greatly and lead to great disputes in their counsels and thoughts. For wherever there are many leaders, the place is ruined and destroyed and blameworthy. Then there were the men for whom I prayed that they should have a single head. That will be to their benefit and advantage because they will bring their thoughts and deeds to a common purpose and will rejoice, and there will be no disputes among them, and their counsel will not chop and change, nor will their thoughts be reversed. For as the proverb says, Too many captains sink the ship. And people also say: The city is settled under a single head."

And Elijah also told him: "Before I leave you I wish to tell you how you can prosper. If you see a wicked man prospering, do not envy him or be surprised, for it will prove to be to his disadvantage. If you see a righteous man grieving and suffering all his life and toiling to weariness and hungering and thirsting and naked and lacking for all things, or suddenly suffering, do not let it enrage you and do not permit your

impulse to mislead you or to doubt your Creator. Bear in mind that He is righteous and His judgement is righteous and He observes all the ways of a man. And who can upbraid Him, saying: "What are you doing?"

After that they bade one another farewell, and Elijah went on his way.[68]

This story portrays Elijah as the agent of God's justice and as the intermediary or interpreter who makes the divine ways intelligible to humanity. The motif of the Prophet Elijah is the vehicle through which reward and punishment are distributed. As often as Elijah brings good fortune to the righteous, he is shown as inflicting punishment on the immoral person. His role provides a check for the moral and ethical behavior of the Jew. In his meting out providence for good or bad actions, he embraces the spirit of Elijah we know from the Bible. In the Bible this does not make the prophet popular, and in the story too. we are unsure whether to feel favorably towards the prophet because of the seeming oddities in his sense of justice. Since the prophet here is the agent of God, the ultimate questions of strange justice deal with God's providence.

In this legend we are exposed to the mysterious ways of the prophet (and God) through the eyes of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi who accompanies Elijah on his business. The first thing we learn from the travels is that the actions of the prophet Elijah do not

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[68] Original sources cited as Nissim ben Ya'akov Hibbur yafeh min ha-Yeshu'ah (Sefer ha-Ma'assiyot), (Ferrara, 1557, Amsterdam, 1745), 4 - 6; Hibbur Ma'assiyot (Hibbur Ma'asiyot ve-ha-Midrashot), (Verona, 1647), 22 - 24; Eliyahu ha-Cohen Me'il Tsedakah, (Lemberg, 1856), No. 432; A. Jellinek, ed., Bet ha-Midrash, (Leipzig 1853 -1878), Vol. V, 133 - 35, Vol. VI, 131 - 33; Ele'azar 'Araki, Sefer ha-Ma'asiyot, (Baghdad, 1892), No. 12; Y.S. Farhi, 'Osseh Pele, (Leghorn, 1902), Vol. 1, Folio 31. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 112, pp. 644 - 646.

always seem to make sense to humankind. What seems to be unjust punishment is actually reward, what seems to be reward is actually just punishment. The concept that reward and punishment are beyond human ken because we cannot ascertain all the facts with our limited knowledge helps put into perspective seeming unfairness in the world.

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ONCE THERE was a certain man who was very rich indeed and had much land, but he had no oxen with which to plow it. What did he do? He took a bag of money amounting to a hundred dinars and went off to a city in order to purchase oxen or cows with which to plow his land. On the way he met Elijah, whom it is good to mention, and he said to him: "Where are you going?" "To a village," said he, "in order to buy oxen or cows." "But add," said Elijah, "If His Name decrees!" "Whether His Name decrees or does not decree," said the man, "I have my money with me and I shall do what I need." "But without success!" said Elijah.

He went on the way to do what he needed and his bag of money fell. When he came to the village of the oxen to do his business, he stretched out his hand to take the bag in order to pay the money and found nothing. So he went back home in great annoyance and took more money, and he went to another village in order that Elijah should not meet him. On the way Elijah met him in the likeness of an old man and asked him: "Where are you going?" "To buy oxen," he answered. "But add," said Elijah, "if His Name decrees!" "Whether His Name decrees or does not decree. I have my money with me and am afraid of nothing!" And he hurried off on his way. As he was walking along, Elijah made him feel very tired and he lay down by the wayside and slept. Then Elijah took the bag of money from him, and when he woke up he found nothing. So he went home very annoyed and took money a third time and set out again.

Elijah, whom it is good to mention, met him and asked: "Where are you going?" "To buy oxen, if His Name decrees," said he. "Go in peace and be successful!" said Elijah. And the prophet, whom it is good to mention, restored him all his money, replacing it in his bag, and the man knew nothing. So he went on to buy his oxen and found two red cows

which were without blemish.[69] "How much are these cows?" he asked their owners who told him: "A hundred dinars." "I do not have a hundred dinars with me," said he, but he thrust his hand into his bag where he found three hundred dinars. So he bought the cows at once and did all he needed, likewise purchasing oxen to plow his lands, and afterwards he sold the cows to the king for one thousand golden dinars.

So let every man who wishes to do anything be careful to say: If His Name decrees." For he cannot know what may happen from evening to morning. Indeed, Ben Sira remarked in this connection: "Between morning and evening the world may be destroyed."[70]

A story where Elijah teaches a moral lesson: that one must be respectful of God, acknowledging human limitation, because all is in God's hands. Through changing his appearance and through using cunning, Elijah is able to teach an arrogant landowner the importance of accrediting God with the credit due. Each miracle that he performs - disguise, bringing on sleep, swiftness of hand, looks like a bout of misfortune has met the arrogant man. By refusing to add the words "If His Name decrees" to his desire to buy oxen for his land, he is thwarted by the prophet until he learns that respecting God is the only way that he will accrue fortune for himself.

The prophet teaches the importance of divine acknowledgment. Just as God through Elijah may bestow fortune upon humankind, so may God through Elijah connive to take that fortune away. Faith as faithfulness and faith as trust is recommended to those who wish to prosper and have things go well for them. It is

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[69] Bin Gorion notes: "A red cow was used for special ritualistic purposes. See Numbers 19." See Bin Gorion, Book III, p. 1239.

[70] Original source cited as M. Steinschneider, ed., Alphabet of Ben Sira (Berlin, 1858), 9. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 72, pp. 1238 - 1239.

only when our land-owner learns the lesson of where his good fortune comes from that he is enabled to buy his oxen - of a quality which he would not have been able to afford under previous circumstances.

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THE KHALIF AL-MUATHASAD, who reigned from the year eight hundred and ninety two until nine hundred and two according to the Christian reckoning, decreed an overwhelmingly evil decree against the Jews, as Ahasuerus did by the counsel of Haman. And maybe this decree might have led to slaughter and destruction. But when this wicked lord whose name was Ibn Abu al-Bagal brought the khalif the writ of the order prepared for the governors of the cities and provinces so that the khalif might seal his name thereon, the khalif was busy with another matter. Therefore the signature on the writ containing this evil decree was delayed until the following day.

However, that night the same thing happened to the khalif as had happened to the Persian king with regard to Bustanai, prince of the Exile. In a vision of the night he saw a certain man who smote him with his hand and forced him to sit down against his will and said to him: "Take great care not to lay your hand on the Jews. If you act against my order, know that you will be severely punished, and your hands and feet will be cut off!" And the man went away leaving the khalif (who was now awake) sitting up bitter and fearful, for it seemed to him that all this had happened to him just as he was waking up. Now all around that palace in which the khalif slept stood his guards who numbered forty men during each of the watches of the night. The khalif commanded that the guards should enter the palace. And feeling quite secure in their presence, he lay down to sleep again. And, lo and behold, the aforesaid man appeared to him a second time and said: "What will it profit you to shed the blood of innocent men? Your guards will not be able to see me or know me, for I am Elijah. I have already commanded you once. So be very careful to refrain from extending your hands against any Jew in any fashion whatsoever. Otherwise I shall reap judgement upon you." The khalif wakened again from his sleep in great apprehension, and at that time he remembered Natira, who was one of the leading Jews of Babylon in those days.

After this the khalif said to Natira: "Who is Elijah?" And Natira answered: "May the Lord bring deliverance to the ruler of the faithful! He is Al-Khidhr!"[71]

And the khalif asked him: "Is Al-Khidhr concerned about the Jews?" And Natira replied: "O my lord! Thus have we received and inherited from the Books of the Prophets, may they rest in peace: Although the Jews are a weak and feeble people, yet God has not abandoned them and will not abandon them, for this is what he promised them through Moses the Prophet, may he rest in peace: 'Likewise this as well, when they are in the lands of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them and reverse My covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God!'" (Lev. 26:44). And he recited the entire section to him and translated it at the khalif's request. The khalif then also informed him what had happened to him and showed him the documents containing the decree against Israel. And the khalif commanded Natira to take possession of Ibn Abu-al-Bagal, of his person and money and all his possessions, and do with them what he thought fit.

So the Children of Israel remained in peace and tranquility without any distress or calamity for the nine and a half years that Al-Muathasad reigned.[72]

This Purim-style story presents Elijah the Prophet as the protector and savior of the Jews. His appearance in a dream to the Muslim Khalif, led to the rescue of the people from annihilation. This was a miracle for the Jews of that place and time. Elijah is often presented as the agent of rescue of a Jew or of the Jewish people. This image of the prophet as an agent of salvation is akin to the image of the Messiah who has a similar role. Rather than ushering in the end of time, the salvation of Elijah provides a foretaste of messianic salvation, appropriate to his role as "forerunner of the

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[71] Bin Gorion notes: "Elijah is known in Muslim religious legend as "Al-Khidhr" or "The Green Prophet." Bin Gorion, Book I, p. 402.

[72] Original sources cited as A. Harkavy, ed., Haddashim gam yeshanim (Birkat Avraham), (Petersburg, 1885), 2nd series, Vol. I, 38 - 40. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book I, No. 204, pp. 401 - 402.

Messiah". To have this image of Elijah who could intercede on their behalf when times grew tough taught the Jews to have faith that they might by some miracle get through the unfortunate predicaments they found themselves in. Elijah, as a symbol of miraculous salvation provided a model of hope, so that even in the darkest of moments they could see a glimmer of deliverance in the future. Anticipation of hope and salvation was created in their own experience.

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> THERE WAS a man in the Land of Beauty, which is the Land of Israel, whose name was Rabbi Solomon of blessed memory. He was innocent and upright and God-fearing and turned way from evil. One day when he was alone in the synagogue standing studying at the lectern, Elijah the Prophet, may he be remembered for the World to Come, appeared to him and said: "Know that I am the Lord's messenger to inform you that your wife will conceive and bear you a son whom you are to name Isaac.[73] He will begin to deliver Israel from the power of the evil spirits (the *Klippot*, or the husks). Many souls which have been reincarnated not in human forms will be saved through him. He will reveal hidden secrets of the Torah and will make a commentary on the book of the holy *Zohar*, and his name will be known throughout the world. Therefore be very careful not to have him circumcised until I come and take him on my knees to be his sandak."
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> As soon as he ended his words, he vanished. All that day Rabbi Solomon stayed at the synagogue, weeping and praying to the Lord after this fashion: "Master of the Universe!" Fulfill these tidings which You have made known to me, and although I am not fit and worthy, yet for Your sake, not for mine, perform this; let not my transgressions lead to any annulling of the tidings You have brought me!" That night he went

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[73] Bin Gorion notes: "Rabbi Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1534 - 1572) was the founder of a school of mystics. His teachings were recorded by his disciple Rabbi Hayyim Vital Calabrese (1543 - 1620). The name Ari is an abbreviation of *Adonenu* (our master) Rabbi Isaac. In Hebrew *Ari* also means a lion, and hence he is often referred to as *ha-Ari ha-Kaddosh*, "the holy lion." See Bin Gorion, Book II, p. 852. The prophecy of Elijah to Rabbi Solomon is reminiscent of the prophecy given to Manoah's wife in Judges 13.

home and did not reveal the secret even to his wife. But Solomon knew his wife and she conceived and gave birth to a son who filled the whole house with light. And the man rejoiced with his offspring.

On the eighth day they brought him to the synagogue for circumcision according to the custom. His father gazed through all the four corners of the synagogue to see whether Elijah, whom it is so good to mention, had come as he had promised; but he did not see him. All the people began urging him: "Go over and hold your son for the circumcision!" But he answered that all his kinsfolk had not yet come. About an hour passed in this way but Elijah had not come. Then he said bitterly to himself: "Since Elijah has not come, it is because of my transgressions that the tidings have not been fulfilled.

While he was still weeping, Elijah suddenly appeared and said: "Weep not, servant of the Lord, come to the altar and present your offering which is perfect. Take your place upon my seat and I shall circumcise the boy. Indeed, I delayed in order to know whether you would do what I told you or not." Then Elijah took the boy from the woman and circumcised him, though no man saw him except the father. No sooner was the boy taken home than the circumcision was found to have healed like that of a boy who was circumcised several years before. The boy grew and was weaned and was taken at once to school, where he began to learn more that the children of his age.[74]

This birth story of the Rabbi Isaac ben Solomon, the Ari, attributes to the baby greatness, through the prediction by Elijah of his birth, and Elijah's presence at the circumcision. In this tale Elijah is the agent of God who is bestowing divine prediction and blessing upon the newborn infant. Elijah's prediction of the birth places the prophet in a stereotypical prophetic role, where he foretells not only the birth, but the great deeds of the awaited child in the future. This suggests that there is some divine pattern in the world, that all births and events are pre-planned from the beginning.

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[74] Original source cited as Shelomoh Meinsterl, Shivhe he-Ari, (Jerusalem, 1905), 2. Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 273, pp. 852 - 853.

This sense of divine plan would provide the Jew reading the story with a sense that their life too must have purpose.

Elijah is shown as the tester of faith. He delays his presence at the *brit milah*, to see if the father is truly worthy of having a son who would fulfil his prophecy. Rabbi Solomon passed the test, for rather than feeling angry that Elijah had neglected to turn up at the occasion, he felt that the lack of Elijah's presence must be due to some misdemeanor that he himself had inadvertently committed.

The image of Elijah being the *sandak* for the Ari at his circumcision, fits well with the tradition that Elijah is present at the circumcision of every Jewish child as portrayed by the presence of an Elijah's Chair. Here Elijah is presented as physically present, as the one who performs this ritual operation on the baby, although unseen by all but the father. Miraculously, the child is healed in a phenomenally quick manner as proof of the miraculous quality of the ceremony and of the child.

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ONCE THERE was a pious old man. When his time came to die, he summoned his three sons and commanded them that they should never quarrel with one another in order that they should never come to take an oath. For he himself had never taken an oath all his life long.

When he died he left a garden of spices behind, which it was their duty to guard in turn against thieves. During the first night when the oldest son was lying in the garden Elijah the Prophet came and asked him: "My son, do you wish to study Torah, to be wealthy, or to wed a beautiful woman?" The son answered: "I desire much wealth." So Elijah gave him a coin, and he became very wealthy."

On the second night the second brother lay in the garden and Elijah came and asked him the same questions. He said that he wished to study

the whole Torah. Then Elijah gave him a book, and from it he knew the whole of the Torah.

On the third night the youngest brother slept in the garden. Elijah came to him and asked what he desired. He desired a beautiful wife. "In that case," said Elijah, "you must travel with me." And the two of them set out on a journey.

They spent the first night at a house belonging to a wicked man. During the night Elijah heard the chickens and geese saying to one another: "What sin did this young man do that he should take the daughter of this householder as his wife?" When Elijah heard this, he understood and they journeyed farther.

Next night they lodged again in a house where Elijah heard the chickens and the geese speaking together and saying: "How did the young man sin that he should take the daughter of this householder, when they are all so wicked!"

Next day they rose early in the morning and journeyed farther. That night they stayed at a house whose owner had a beautiful daughter. And Elijah heard the chickens and the geese telling one another: "How does this young man merit to marry a woman who is so beautiful and God-fearing!"

So when the morning came Elijah rose early and arranged a match between them, and they made the wedding and returned home in peace.

God gave them all this because he had observed the last will and commandment of his father.[75]

It is not only with the ceremony of *Brit Milah* with which Elijah is associated. A large number of Elijah stories have the prophet making marriages among humankind. In this tale we are told of three brothers who through respect of their father's wishes merit reward from the prophet. The first son when given a choice for his reward desired wealth, the second son when given an option chose Torah, and through miraculous means the prophet is able to fulfil their requests.

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[75] Original sources cited as Ma'asseh Buch, Yiddish, (Amsterdam, 1723), No. 46 (see also trans., Moses Gaster, Ma'asseh Book, (Philadelphia, 1934), No. 157). Story told in Bin Gorion, Book III, No. 67, pp. 1225 - 1226.

The third son chose as his grant a beautiful wife. and is thus required to take a trip with the prophet to find the appropriate woman. Not any woman would do, because this is a reward for his meritorious action. So the prophet spends much of the story listening to the cackle of chickens and geese to find out if the daughters of the household with whom they are staying are worthy to be the bride of the younger brother. In the first two houses the daughters are found to be less than praiseworthy, but in the third household a righteous and beautiful maid is found for him to espouse.

Honoring the wishes of the father by all sons is seen as deserving of tribute in this story. On a literal level the father may be understood as a parent in a family, but on a cosmic level the father figure could be understood as God. The rewards for acceding to the father's wishes are wealth, Torah and a good wife. This may be understood as the rewards for all who are observant of God's commandments. Elijah is once more the supernatural being that bestows good fortune and manipulates events so that all achieve their remuneration as befits them.

Summation

Elijah the prophet is seen primarily as a messenger from God, the emissary that carries out God's will on earth and interacts with humans. As God's messenger Elijah can convey good fortune, reward and hope. He can interact with us at life cycle events, reminding us of God's presence and will at these occasions. He can save us from dire destinies and as an intermediary between God and ourselves can reveal and interpret

justice in the world. Elijah can teach us morality and expectations, mete out justice, test our faith. All of these deeds can be perceived in his miracles that are consistent with the prophet's supernatural nature.

Elijah's role as a messenger between the upper and lower realms conveys physically the connection between us and God's will which is so unfathomable. Elijah becomes the interpreter for us, so that we can concretize what is required of us and God's providence. Making the relationship tangible between God, God's expectations and ourselves, helps inspire our faith and spirituality and our loyalty to God. For our limited human senses can respond more affirmatively to the tangible than to the intangible.

Elijah the symbol provides hope that the Jews are favored by God, who watches out for them and will see that ultimately justice will prevail on their behalf. The stories of Elijah in the tradition, like the symbolic complexes of efficacy of prayer and the Messiah, provide a paradigm that comforts the Jewish people, a paradigm that expresses hopefulness about their future.

RELEVANCE FOR THE CONTEMPORARY JEW

The three symbolic complexes that we have illustrated—efficacy of prayer, the Messiah concept, and the miracles of Elijah—all pertain to the faith and spirituality of Jews. Within these various symbols and stories we can find role models, expectations, and the promise of reward for faith-as-faithfulness, faith-as-obedience, faith and works, faith-as-trust, faith-as-dependence, faith as the experience of the holy, aspects of the

community of faith, faith and worship, faith as credo, faith and tradition and faith as knowledge. Every story contains different resonances of faith. Each of these stories and these symbols affirms faith and spirituality and the sustaining power that this may bring to the individual.

Recent psychological studies have attempted to measure the effects of hope on people.[76] The results have suggested that success in one's goals is directly related to the amount of hope that one has. It has been demonstrated as a "real" factor in attitude and survival. People who are imbued with hope see their goals in a more challenging and positive perspective. They are more likely to succeed.[77] It is possible that Jewish faith and Jewish spirituality have survived and are strengthened by those examples of hope. For without hope, our faith and spiritual concepts would seem vain in the face of the prickly history through which we have survived. It would not be worth the culture continuing.

The symbols and stories of the past can offer us patterns for faith and spirituality and hope for the present. The symbols of the past have been reused over time because they have a "satisfactory nature ... the power to evoke a response in man."[78] Within the truths of the symbols and stories of our ancestors we may find the seeds for truths and meaning for ourselves.

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[76] C.R. Snyder, Sheri Harris, John R. Anderson, Sharon A. Holleran, Lori M. Irving, Sandra T. Sigmon, Lauren Yoshinobu, June Gibb, Charyle Langelle, Pat Harney, "The Will And The Ways: Development And Validation Of An Individual Differences Measure Of Hope," in Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology 60, no. 4 (1991), pp. 570 - 585.

[77] Snyder, et. al., p. 580 - 582.

[78] Fawcett, p. 35.

The trend of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century has been to challenge the symbols of the past, to find a new rational way of thinking, leaving many feeling empty of faith and spirituality and the hope they give us. The latest tack is to return to an older way of interacting with symbols, by challenging dominant symbols through their reclamation.[79]

The power of the symbols of the past can re-emerge, be remodelled for the present, to provide paradigms that reignite feelings of faith and spirituality among Jews. Again and again in history mythologies have been rejected with great enthusiasm only to emerge at a later point in time revitalized and more powerful than ever.[80] The symbols in Judaism hold truths that still can resonate in the depths of our psyche, and through embracing the old forms and taking new forms, these symbols can achieve a more commanding influence in our lives.[81] As Thomas Fawcett suggests:

> There can be no new song until the angelic voices have first been heard to sing it in heaven. Only then can the theological task be given the depth out of which a new hymn of the universe may come.

To evoke faith and spirituality in Jews, we must bring them into contact with the faith and spirituality of the past and create paradigms of symbol and story that hold true for the present. The "software" we have inherited can be rewritten, revitalized. There are many ways that this has been done and may be done in the modern Jewish story. The symbols can and must re-emerge in new stories, new prayers and new songs that speak to Jews today and in the future.

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[79] Coll, p. 373.

[80] Fawcett, p. 191.

[81] Fawcett, p. 245.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARDS THE CREATION OF STORIES USING SYMBOLS OF FAITH

Amol iz geveyn, once upon a time we lived and we were told stories:

THERE ONCE was a worldly traveller who had visited exotic and wonderful lands both near and far. Occasionally he would travel through a certain town and enthrall all its inhabitants with tales of his voyages.

As time went by, the worldly traveller grew old, and he decided to settle in that town. The people would visit him to listen in wonder to his adventures abroad, and to imagine themselves experiencing such adventures. Finally they convinced him to write it into a book. So even after the worldly traveller passed on, the townsfolk remained enthralled by the stories of his travels.

This book which brought so much joy to generations of the townsfolk came to be seen as one of their most precious possessions. They put it into a glass case so that it could be preserved to give joy to each generation.

As the book grew yellow and faded with age, the townsfolk made a decision. They would only take the book out once a year, to read and perpetuate the tales held within.

In the next generation, as the edges of the book began to brown with age, the townsfolk would point to this book and tell the tales they had heard from it in their childhood to their own children.

Over time the book came to be regarded as holy, and because of its sacred status it lay untouched under glass, venerated yet never read. The new generation forgot what was truly written within its pages. They pointed at it and whispered of the amazing journeys held within. Yet the book was never opened...

.... and nobody ever goes abroad to experience life as did the initial worldly traveller.[1]

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[1] Thanks to Rabbi Steven Rosman for telling me this story in one of our conversations.

THE LOSS AND RECAPTURE OF TRADITION

We, in the modern 1990's, are the inheritors of a recent religious past where storytelling has became secondary to theological discourse. J. A. Hutchinson has pointed out that until this century the first type of religious language was the immediate encounter with symbol and myth, and the second type of encounter was the theological statements which stemmed from the stories and symbols.[2]

Modern culture has desacralized our world by trying to frame all in "scientific" reasoned statements, and by belittling that which cannot be contained simply in doctrine. The storytelling process has become secondary, marginalized it to the activities of children. Culture has been unpacked, symbols reduced to signs, and rituals reduced to magic. Our religious beliefs, our faith and spirituality have been judged on purely secular terms.

As Peter Berger states: "One of the most obvious ways in which secularization has affected the man in the street is as a 'crisis of credibility' in religion."[3] The renewed interest in finding spirituality in our lives is the consciousness that not all can be comprehended intellectually. There is a level of relating in the world which is ethereal, which can only be comprehended by the senses. Paradoxically, in the age of rationality this was understood about with such feelings as love and hate, yet was found hard to legitimize in areas of faith and spirituality.

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[2] Quoted in Fawcett, p. 245.

[3] Berger, p. 126.

When told the stories of our culture, individuals are swaddled in the symbols and plots that can help them express their spirituality and faith. Such feelings are too deep to be expressed in declarations alone. The symbol and the story allow for the deep expression of these ideas and feelings. But as tales have ceased to be told, or have been edited according to our modern doctrines, we and our children have lost the ability to understand and key into the plots and stories of our religion, that comprise the complete "software" system (as Joseph Campbell would understand it). Thus the program has struggled to work efficiently. Thus we have lost the ability to perceive the sacred through our own culture.[4] Mircea Eliade maintained that:

> In an important sense ... the fates of religion and symbols are bound up with one another. When symbols lose their power, the religious traditions they inspire gasp for breath; when religious traditions fall apart, the symbols they organize lose much of their collective vitality.

The symbols of our Jewish past, as tied up in our stories, had much power and sustaining vitality for our ancestors. As we have edited out that which we could not logically comprehend, we have lost the tools for expressing faith and spirituality that their treasure-house of wisdom bequeathed to us.

Yet they are not lost to us irrevocably. We have the legacy of the texts and stories and prayers that we can read and retell and discover for ourselves. Bringing these texts back into our lives will re-articulate a structure of expression for our faith and spirituality to which we can cleave and find again the depth within Judaism. Joseph Campbell laments society's loss of the classic myths:

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[4] Fawcett, p. 272.

> Greek and Latin and biblical literature used to be part of everyone's education ... It used to be that these stories were part of the minds of people. When the story is in your mind, then you see its relevance to something happening in your own life. It gives you perspective on what's happening to you. With the loss of that, we've really lost something because we don't have a comparable literature to take its place. Those bits of information from ancient times, which have to do with the themes that have supported human life, built civilizations, and informed religions over the millennia, have to do with deep inner problems, inner mysteries, inner thresholds of passage, and if you don't know what the guide-signs are along the way, you have to work it out for yourself. But once this subject catches you, there is such a feeling, from one or another of these traditions, of information of a deep, rich, life-vivifying sort that you don't want to give up.[5]

The same can be said for the Jewish myths and stories. They can inform us anew and give us all sorts of road maps and instruments of expression if we let them catch hold of us.

The last twenty years have seen a revival of people allowing themselves to be mesmerized by the art of storytelling. The rebirth of the storytelling movement, suggests William Bausch, has many sources. A reaction to the impersonal nature of television, a reaction to the loneliness people feel in their lives, a reaction to a society filled with computer printouts. The story in contrast engages the mind and permits the savoring of words. Whatever the reason in the secular realm, suggest Bausch, there are many reasons for a revival of storytelling in the religious world. He suggests that fundamentally all the reasons boil down to a remark by William James: "I do believe

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[5] Campbell, Power, p. 2.

that feeling is the deeper source of religion, and that philosophic and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue."[6]

THE CAPTIVATING ANEW

Re-entering the collective imagination of Judaism will allow us to establish connections and rebuild mythologies.[7] As Vivian Gussin Paley suggests: "The fantasies of any group form the basis of its culture."[8] To reconnect with the old symbols is more effective than trying to create brand new ones, because of the psychological investment people already have in them. Symbolic complexes such as efficacy of prayer, the Messiah and the miracles of Elijah may not be fully fleshed out for us, but they have the authority of ancient wisdom, they prick our ancient or newly cognizant memories and elicit emotional responses from us. The issues have remained perennial, even though some of the classic responses seem problematic to moderns. The old contexts can provide new background for ancient and modern insights.[9]

The stories of our tradition contain the symbols of our tradition. As they are told and retold they have the power to strengthen our faith and spirituality so we have

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[6] Bausch, p. 10.

[7] Paley, p. 5.

[8] Paley, p. 5.

[9] Coll, p. 379.

a religion more fortified in fervor. The stories contain a power that we need to recapture.[10] The role of the modern teller is to convey the metaphors.[11]

The parent, relative, teacher, rabbi who narrate our tradition are imparting a magical gift to the listener. They become what Sondra Higgins Matthaei has termed a "faith mentor."[12] A faith mentor is both a guide, a guarantor, a mediator and a model of faith and spirituality.[13] Through the story as their tool they can convey powerful messages and notions that are impossible to convey except in metaphorical form.

Yet a symbol and story that are just received, and not interacted with actively, risk becoming a fossilized or dead symbol and story. We must do more than live the story. We must become the storyteller and the story. Just as our ancestors assimilated the messages of the past and rendered new creations for the future, to sustain the symbols and stories for generations to come, we must participate in the telling of the stories of Judaism, and must set forth on new journeys and tell new tales, using the tools that our ancestors have given us.

The folk story through the years was passed from one generation to another and, because of the predomination of its oral form, was able to change and grow as metaphor and meaning layered one on the other, and as universal resonances were discovered with each retelling. The late nineteenth and twentieth century saw the

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[10] Torop, p. 5.

[11] Campbell, Power, p. 73.

[12] Sondra Higgins Matthaei, "Faith Mentoring In The Classroom," in Religious Education, 86, no. 4 (Fall, 1991), p. 540.

[13] Matthaei, pp. 541 - 543.

decline of the oral form of storytelling. Apart from family stories, and the few creative individuals who like to spin a yarn, storytelling in this century has largely been generated in a written form.

Rather than passing the story from one individual to another, from one generation to another, and then setting it down on paper, the "author" first wrote the story and then it is told. In this sense the literature of our time is not the traditional "folktale." It does not have the opportunity to be refined by the folk through its retelling and crystallized into a universal form. It will take many years of writing and rewriting tales by different authors for the story and symbol to evolve their most meaningful manner using this methodology. It is ironic in this technological age when things usually occur more quickly, that the meaning-making of the story process should be slowed down.

The concept of an author has also made the "folk" more passive in telling stories. It has had the repercussion of removing individuals from the process of being involved in the making of the story. Although people still read stories to their children, they perceive storytelling as a profession rather than an inheritance. Like the townsfolk in the tale at the beginning of the chapter, we are left just to point at the books and stand back with awe at the memories of the tales within. We wait for someone to come and narrate the tale or set out the tale for us. If anything has been learned from my research it is the notion that we must actively and consciously, on a wide scale, re-enter the process of storytelling, so that we can educate the generation to come on the

meaning of faith and spirituality for ourselves, and perhaps, set paradigms for the future in our tales.

MODERN STORYTELLING METHODOLOGIES

The aim of this chapter is to explore different ways that the modern storyteller can invoke the faith and spirituality for which the modern Jew searches. For this purpose, I will explore some methodologies that modern writers have used in interacting with the symbols and stories of our tradition. I will then in conclusion write three stories, using each of the symbols of faith explored in Chapter Three - efficacy of prayer, the miracles of Elijah and the Messiah - employing some of the methodologies forthwith outlined.

Methodologies

> I stand in the chain of narrators, a link between links; I tell once again the old stories, and if they sound new, it is because the new already lay dormant in them when they were told for the first time.[14]

Many differing methodologies and styles have been used by modern Jewish writers as they have once again interacted with the texts and symbols of the past. They may be used singularly or in combination with each other, to create an ambiance of

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[14] Quotation from Martin Buber. Cited in David C. Jacobson, Modern Midrash: The Retelling of Traditional Jewish Narratives By Twentieth Century Hebrew Writers (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 17.

intertextuality that locates them within the tradition of Jewish storytelling. In the telling and re-telling of tales, in oral or in written form, these are some of the possible techniques that have been used and might be used in future tellings.

1. Retelling: Some narratives attempt to preserve the plot, characterization, and style of traditional stories, while making some adjustments to meet the norms of contemporary writing. Bialik and Rawnitzki's Sefer HaAggadah and Bin Gorion's Mimekor Yisrael would be good examples of this.

Bialik refers to this process as restoration or *tikkun*, appropriating the hasidic notion and applying it to the emendation of the text. His hope was that this transformation would make the stories more accessible to the modern Jew and they would thus be able to find meaning and contemporary relevance in them.

2. Changing of Details: There are many ways that details can be changed to give a whole new twist to a tale. The plot might be similar to an older tale, but certain details changed so that new meaning may be construed.[15]

A character can be thrown into a different light by writing the story from a more sympathetic or a more critical point of view thus showing a different perspective.[16] When this technique is used in the retelling, a strong resemblance can be created between to what the protagonist does in the traditional narrative and what s/he

[15] Jacobson, p.53.

[16] Jacobson, p. 92, 120.

does in the retold version. Other stories apply the persona of a character of older stories to certain situations or actions, juxtaposing the persona with a modern situation, casting the modern rendering of the hero or heroine in a different light from the ancient rendering. Sometimes this contrast is projected so that the hero or heroine in the modern version becomes the exact opposite of the persona of the traditional version.[17]

Another technique that exemplifies a detail change is resetting a tale into a different time period so that a different message might be gleaned. This creates a parallel and a juxtaposition between the two times.[18] Through the changing of details, the meaning of an older tale may be expanded or a totally new message suitable for the modern reader may be rendered.[19]

3. Synthesis: There are many possible elements that can be synthesized to form a new Jewish story. An author might combine the images and symbols from ancient legends and rendering them anew through fresh juxtaposition.[20] An author might also include the synthesis of two or more sources to create a new tale.[21] Synthesis might

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[17] Jacobson, p. 184.

[18] Schwartz, Gates, p. 66 - 67.

[19] Jacobson, p. 75.

[20] Jacobson, p. 49.

[21] Jacobson, p. 49. Schwartz, Gates, pp. 62 -63.

also mean the incorporation of personal details and feelings or new situations into a tale.[22]

Another method of synthesis which is commonly employed by modern authors is the combining of the characteristics of Jewish storytelling traditions with the characteristics of other storytelling traditions, such as modern European, American, Asian etc.[23] In modern Jewish literature, the European model of writing came to be a significant influence, and its application is purposefully done by some to teach something about Jewish culture.[24] Howard Schwartz categorizes these authors as belonging to the realistic school, noting that they may seem divorced from the traditional models of Jewish stories, though Schwartz notes that the realism of the Jewish folktale can be seen as an influence in some of these stories.[25]

4. Transformation: The author will take a biblical or post-biblical text and transform it to represent a contemporary reality. Sometimes this imbues the message with a subtle change, sometimes this technique turns the text totally on its head.[26] This creates a counter-history, as the past is reinterpreted to reflect the present.[27]

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[22] Schwartz, Gates, p. 62.

[23] Jacobson, p. 72.

[24] Jacobson, p. 80.

[25] Schwartz, Gates, p. 49.

[26] Jacobson, p. 3.

[27] Jacobson, p. 6.

Another example of this tactic is when authors engage in a process that Alan Mintz calls "figuration." Characters of the past are imbued with new characteristics that reflect the values and experiences of the present.[28] This provides a new twist to an old backdrop.

5. Allusions: Writing a story that alludes to the tradition while not speaking directly from it. Many of the stories by modern Hebrew writers fall into this category.[29]

A different type of allusion can refer specifically to the message of an older tale, symbol, or value of the past or render a new message that contains echoes of symbols, values, and messages past.[30] In the latter case, the allusion within the tale would be ironic, providing the opposite of an earlier story's intents,[31] creating a fresh allegory so that the modern reader may gain new meaning.

The authors who immerse themselves in allusions regard the religious and cultural heritage from which they take their symbols, plots, style and characters as an invaluable treasure-trove. But simply because the Jewish tale leaves a deep imprint does not mean they are devoid of other influences. The traditional becomes the frame on which the modern author weaves his or her retelling.[32]

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[28] Jacobson, p. 6.

[29] Jacobson, p. 7, and Schwartz Gates, p. 57.

[30] Schwartz, Gates, p. 55.

[31] Schwartz Gates, p. 72.

[32] Schwartz, Gates, p. 59.

6. Mimicking: Mimicking aspects of tales of yore is another way of lending authenticity to a more modern story. Using traditional plot structures or themes found in earlier tales creates a chain of tradition. Embracing motifs that appear regularly in older tales as themes in newer ones is also another form of imitating.[33]

Mimicking might also include a claim of antiquity by attributing the tale to an ancient author or an ancient oral tradition.[34] One could also suggest through the title of the tale that the story comes out of the tradition, for example the use of words such as *"Ma'aseh"* or "biblical," might lend such authenticity.[35]

Another technique of mimicking is the adoption of structure, for example, the tale-within-a-tale sequence often found in aggadic literature.[36] One might also use traditional techniques of explication like *peshat* (contextual meaning), *remez* (the use of allegory and metaphors), *derash* (deeper implications of the language) and *sod* (understanding the symbolic level of meaning within the tale), and writing these possibilities into modern tales.[37]

Language might be employed in such a way that a mythic dimension is created, implying a connection with a distant past.[38] Thus newer stories can be made to read as

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[33] Jacobson, p. 25; Schwartz Gates, p. 69.

[34] Jacobson, p. 68.

[35] Jacobson, p. 69.

[36] Schwartz, Gates, p. 65.

[37] Schwartz, Gates, p. 83 - 89.

[38] Jacobson, p. 70.

if cut from the same cloth as lore of days past.[39] This traditional parlance can make a new statement relevant to contemporary situations,[40] creating new models of Jewish thought.

Taking a folktale and retelling it in such a way works to preserve the scope of the original and simultaneously adds new meaning and intent.[41]

7. New Issues: There are stories that broach new issues that were present in an insignificant way, or not present at all, in the tales of the tradition. New technology or understandings in the scientific realm demand a rethinking of values that can be conveyed in the newer tales. The modern perspective of the importance of self and self-knowledge might emerge in the rendering.[42] Or stories might introduce issues that were largely unspoken of in Jewish stories before, like domestic violence, or the sexual aggression that men show to women.[43] Or the story may revise old issues like the relationship between men and women, and present them in a new light, thus creating a different paradigm.[44]

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[39] Schwartz, Gates, p. 50.

[40] Jacobson, p. 107.

[41] Schwartz, Gates, pp. 52 - 53, 63, 71.

[42] Jacobson, p. 115.

[43] Jacobson, p. 86.

[44] Jacobson, p. 127.

New stories have and are being created out of the details of new situations for Jews and of Judaism.[45] There may be a view to regenerating Jewish culture or Jews or placing them in a new light,[46] or a view to critiquing Jewish culture and Jews, illustrating a negative aspect or aspects.[47] The Jewish symbols and plots can be turned on their head for such a purpose.[48]

Two experiences in the twentieth century have had a profound effect on modern Jewish storytelling: the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. These provide new backdrops for stories, and completely new stories that have been introduced into the mythology of Jewish anhistory. Holocaust stories provide us with accounts of the viewpoints of the victims and the guilt of those who survived.[49] Stories that find their origins in the re-establishment of the State of Israel after two millennia broach the question of the identity and significance of the Israeli.[50] The honest duality of criticism and loyalty is often a feature.[51]

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[45] Jacobson, p. 61.

[46] Jacobson, p. 94.

[47] Jacobson, p. 101.

[48] Jacobson, p. 88.

[49] Jacobson, p.139.

[50] Jacobson, p. 180.

[51] Jacobson, p. 161.

Some Holocaust stories will use biblical images and idioms to tell their tales.[52] David Jacobson suggests:

> In so doing, they set up a significantly ironic association between the traditional world of faith and the biblical stories and the modern Holocaust world of radical doubt and meaninglessness. Nevertheless, their attempt to associate the world of the Bible with the world of the Holocaust implies a strong desire to find some continuity between the meaning of traditional faith and the meaning which might be found in the experience of the Holocaust.[53]

The old in contrast with the new story, is a result of the new theological thinking and rethinking that is going on in our times.

Stories about Israel speak of the uses and abuses of power, and render comparisons between modern and ancient Israel.[54] They ask questions about how to turn an ancient culture of the past that had been uprooted into a new culture.[55] Biblical characters and plots often reflect on modern situations.[56]

In the writings of second-generation Israeli writers the idealization of earlier periods encompasses even the time of the establishment of Israel and its idealism. This is often used in contrast to the criticism of a more contemporary period. The recent story being retold in a newer story.[57]

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[52] Jacobson, p. 133.

[53] Jacobson, p. 133.

[54] Jacobson, p. 153.

[55] Jacobson, p. 154.

[56] jacobson, pp. 167 - 178.

[57] Jacobson, p. 179.

Another new issue which has a profound influence on modern telling is the feminist and post-feminist movements. Many modern Jewish tales have begun to create a feminine tradition of storytelling. Changing the viewpoint of a story to that seen through the eye of a woman, or elaborating on the untold story of a woman/women, creates a whole new perspective in the tradition.[58]

Another not so new, but certainly more potent conception which has gained fervor in this century, is the questioning of God's presence within the anhistory created by the tales. Especially after the Holocaust, such doubts increasingly enter the narrative literature of our people. Some new tales, in the light of modern atheism or agnosticism, revise ancient tales from a more human perspective divorced from the role of the divine within them,[59] or divorced from a faith in the divine.

8. Elaboration: One type of elaboration is the fleshing out of details or concepts or a way of life so that the modern reader can gain an appreciation of it.[60] The beauty of the ancient past is often not so clear to a modern's ken. By providing details the modern author can help his or her contemporaries gain lessons or an appreciation of the past.

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[58] Jacobson, p. 68, 119. There are an increasing number of volumes of stories that are written with the aim of imposing a woman's perspective on the past. One such volume is Jane Sprague Zones (ed.), Taking the Fruit: Modern Women's Tales of the Bible (San Diego: Woman's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, 2nd ed. 1989).

[59] Jacobson, p. 122.

[60] Jacobson, p. 31.

Another type of elaboration can be the ramification of a tale that is complete or seemingly incomplete.[61] This can construct new and old messages and provide insight to the listener. However the modern authors/tellers mold the new story, whatever technique or methodologies they employ, by their very interaction they become part of a chain of our tradition, part of a chain of tellers who have sought to express truths to the Jewish people and who, through their linking of the insights of past and present, provide paradigms for the future, part of a chain that will fashion Jewish conceptions of faith and spiritual awareness.

THREE NEW STORIES

Efficacy of Prayer

For most of the twentieth century, the oral story became a less primary form of conveying tales. The exceptions lie with those rare individuals who are natural born storytellers and those who pass family stories from one generation to another. One of my favorite stories growing up was the tale of how my mother's family arrived in Australia. It is a story of improbability and travel and romance, set against the Jewish backdrop of Passover and the international character of the Jewish community. To retell it faithfully would be to set down for the first time an oral tale that has been refined from one generation to another.

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[61] Schwartz, Gates, p. 68.

Yet it seems to me this tale lends itself to more than a simple retelling. A contemporary concern within the Jewish communities that I have mixed in is the difficulty of matchmaking Jew to Jew. Finding the right Jewish partner in life is a daunting task for parent and children. This is a story that speaks to those concerns, and offers hope that there is someone out there for everyone. Romance can come to your doorstep in the strangest of ways, and problems which seem insurmountable can be surmounted. I have added to this tale of faith and hope an extra element of faith, that being the symbol of efficacy of prayer. I do not know if my Aunty Rachelle ever prayed to meet the right man in her life, but if she did, then surely her prayers were answered.

In this rendering I have consciously employed several of the techniques we have explored in this chapter. I have expanded upon an already extant oral tradition, expanding it with fresh symbols - the efficacy of prayer and the role of God Whom has been making matches since finishing the creation of the world.[62] I have also drawn phrases and images from the Song of Songs and employed them in a more modern tale.

The use of the Song of Songs is symbolic on several levels. Firstly, the story of the Song of Songs tells of a search for one's lover. Here too the young lovers chased each other around the world. Allegorically, the Song of Songs has been understood as a description of the relationship between God and the Jewish people. In this story God still interacts with young Jews by answering prayers and making

[62] Genesis Rabbah 8.

marriages. Finally, the Book of Song of Songs is read on Passover, and this story is set against the backdrop of this festival.

IT WAS Passover in Egypt. The household had been busy cleaning and making the appropriate preparations for the season. There was much to do in the hotel, especially this year. Rachelle was a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley, the obedient child of her parents, the youngest of four children. As she helped in the preparations she sighed, and as she cleaned out her cupboards her mind wandered over the present.

Her brother Leon was in Hong Kong working for a merchant shipping company. Passover would not be the same without him. And for her, another Passover alone. The boys she met in Cairo and the ones who came up to the hotel with their families, they all seemed so familiar and unexciting. She despaired at ever finding someone to marry. She sought but found him not. "God," she prayed out loud, "Couldn't you perform some sort of miracle in our time? If all your time in heaven is spent making matches, then why can't you find someone for me?"

As the sun set on *seder* evening, the visitors came trooping into the dining room. Not only were there Jewish families that had come up from Cairo to spend *seder* by the sea, but with the war going on some of the foreign Jewish soldiers were invited.

Among them was a tall young man with dove-like eyes. He was seated by Rachelle, and between the repartee of the *haggadah*, they made animated conversation, she with her purring Egyptian intonations and he with the an almost British- sounding accent.

The next few days saw Clifford and Rachelle become almost inseparable. As they wandered the shores of the sea together Rachelle could only think that her prayers had been answered. But with the war on, the young man was too soon whisked away, and though they kept in touch by letter, Rachelle pined to be with her young Australian soldier. And as he returned to Australia he too yearned to set out, swift as a gazelle, to be with her.

In those days it was not appropriate for a young girl to travel to the other side of the world to join a not so well known man in a not so well known country. Yet Rachelle's yearning grew day by day. Her parents finally wrote to her brother Leon, and asked him to travel the seas once more and search out this far-away place and this far-away family.

Leon set out on this journey, and came to the distant land, where he saw that life was blessed and he met the family, who were

honorable. "Send Rachelle to me," he wrote in a letter to Egypt, "and I will take care of her." So her parents prepared her for a long journey from the shores of Egypt to the shores of Australia, and she travelled there to her beloved brother and to marry the man who was the answer to her prayers. The man who had captured her heart, and she his.

That Passover was the beginning of a love that would last a lifetime. And also that Passover was the beginning of our family's exodus from Egypt to these sunburnt shores.

The Miracles of Elijah

I first heard a version of this story at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee, in 1992. I was just beginning to contemplate writing a thesis around storytelling and faith. I had the opportunity to sit down and do some brain-storming with a wonderful storyteller whom I had just met, Peninnah Schram. When she heard that this was the area I was interested in, she related to me a story told by Elie Weisel that she felt exemplified faith, where a man gets pulled across a death pit by a vision of his father, and alongside him his friend is saved by holding onto his coat. Yet it is not Weisel's story that I am going to tell, rather a new and quite different version of this tale that introduces Elijah as a worker of a miracle that saves the lives of those who might have perished.

This story can be classed among the new stories that come out of the experience of the Holocaust. It purports to be an experience from this abominable time in history. A man is surrounded by death on all sides like the children of Israel were surrounded by Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea. There seems no way out, except to go

forward and trust. This new tale combines an incident of genocide with a miraculous salvation of at least one individual by the elusive Elijah.

> A CAVERNOUS trench. Dark deep earth staring up at their eyes. And around them the eyes of Aryan soldiers, boys, guns in ready. Evil eyes. Stripped, they were no longer they, stripped of dignity.
>
> "When I say," one bellowed. "Jump. If you make it across, you will live."
>
> A shudder went through the crowd. A shiver through the man. "Hold my hand. Trust in me," said his neighbor. He looked into his pupils. They were calm. He wondered. "Hold my hand," he repeated. He did.
>
> "Jump!"
>
> The man closed his lashes. Opened them. They were on the other side. The cutting edge of earth. The soldiers. The eyes. Fifty feet behind.
>
> "How?" he gasped. He looked for his neighbor. "Where?" The man with calm pupils was gone. He had held his hand. They had jumped together. He had pulled him across. "Who?"
>
> Then he realized that this was no ordinary man. It is said that Elijah, whose name is good to remember, works on earth in ways our eyes cannot see.
>
> And the man lived to tell this tale.

The Messiah

One of the stories that was related in Chapter Two under the rubric "Faith as the Experience of the Holy" was as follows:

> AT THE CLOSE of a certain New Year's festival some of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov's followers were at their meeting place outside the town, seated around the table. But not one of them could speak, for they all could clearly feel that Messiah would come at once.

> On that very day their master and rabbi had preached about the prayer: "Blow a great ram's horn for our freedom ..."[63]

This abridged story I found both captivating and compelling because it appeared unfinished. In reading many of the legends of the Messiah in preparation for this thesis, I connected the followers of the Besht sitting around the table with the image of a messianic banquet which recurs in the literature.[64]

In Raphael Patai's book The Messiah Texts an article in the Hebrew newspaper *Haaretz* is quoted telling of a new custom that has emerged among the Hasidim, the heirs of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov in our day. It said:

> Habad Hasidim are organizing "Messiah-banquets" on the seventh day of Passover, towards evening, following the instructions of their leader, the Rabbi of Lubavich.
>
> The instructions are based on the Hasidic tradition according to which the Ba'al Shem the founder of Hasidism, used to have a festive meal on the last day of Passover, towards evening. He called this meal "Banquet of the Messiah," for on that day it was possible to receive divine inspiration about the revelation of the light [i.e. the coming] of the Messiah.
>
> The Rabbi therefore suggested that an effort be made that every Jew should hold a "Messiah Banquet," and should also try to have others participate in it, in order to bring about a strengthening of the faith in the coming of the Messiah soon.[65]

It did not take much of a leap of the imagination to disconnect the New Year of the Besht story from Rosh HaShanah and connect it to Passover, the beginning of the Jewish calendrical year. The seventh day of Passover is of course the end of this new

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[63] Original source cited as Emunat Tsaddikim (not in Bin Gorion's bibliography), No. 6, p. 7 (abridged) Story told in Bin Gorion, Book II, No. 373, p. 969.

[64] See Raphael Patai, The Messiah Texts: Jewish Legends Of Three Thousand Years (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1979), p. 235 - 246.

[65] Patai, Messiah, p. 246.

year festival. As these two accounts merged together for me, I created from the sparks a new story of origins and of faith in the coming of the Messiah.

Methodologies used in the creation of this story include the desire to elaborate a tale which seemed incomplete, because the Messiah did not come despite the faith of the Besht's followers. There is also a merging of two traditions to create anew the vision of faith, that one day the Messiah will come if we will it with such fervor. The message is that the end of days and the redeemer are only delayed by our lapse of intent on bringing this future into fruition.

> AT THE CLOSE of Passover some of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov's followers were at their meeting place outside the town, seated around the table. Before them lay the Banquet of the Messiah.
>
> And not one of them could speak, for they all could clearly feel that Messiah would come at once. Divine inspiration rested in the room, and the heavens above trembled at the power of their belief.
>
> Then a dish crashed, their heads turned, and hope was dashed.

THE TELLING OF OUR STORIES, THE TRANSMISSION OF OUR SYMBOLS, AND THE BUILDING OF OUR FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY

The importance of informing ourselves and the generations to come with the stories and symbols of the Jewish tradition is paramount to the forming of a viable sense of faith and spirituality. Without providing the tools for religiosity, it cannot be expected that people will have the ability to find meaning in their tradition. It is the task of parents, educators, cantors, rabbis and all who care about Judaism to tell the

stories of our tradition and imbue our culture with the full capacity to find the meaning construed in the past and applicable to our time.

The challenge cannot end simply with familiarization. Each past generation has added to the anhistory of our people by interacting with the stories of the past and creating stories for the present and the future. Learning from the allegory at the beginning of this chapter we need to become the traveller willing to traverse the sea to exotic places in search of adventure, and not just the townsperson who sits at home waiting to hear the tale.

By telling stories of past and present we help create the future and its understandings. In writing them we become the instigators of those understandings. Today we must begin to live and tell stories to increase the possibilities that future generations will utter, with a sense of Jewish conviction, the words, "Ani Ma'amin - I believe..."

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