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TOWARD A TOPICAL COURSE OF STUDY ON RABBINIC LITERATURE FOR THE HIGH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT OF THE REFORM RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

By Stanley T. Relkin

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

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

1962

Referee, Professor Sylvan D. Schwartzman

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Digest

This is a proposed textbook for a course on rabbinic literature in which the writings of the rabbis are not only presented, but they are arranged topically and interpreted so that a Jewish philosophy of history and a Jewish theology emerge.

Judaism did not cease at the close of the Biblical period, but continued to develop its individual character. The rabbis made the Bible live by their interpretations. Thus, the study of rabbinic literature is the study of Judaism's growth into an enduring religion. Judaism continued to live because the rabbis had an answer to tragedy, that is, the suffering of the good man. The rabbis were able to transfigure suffering into the heavy burden which every brave and courageous man carries in order to redeem the world. The rabbis envisage Israel as God's partner. Israel helps a weak God increase his strength and complete a yet unfinished, imperfect world.

Midrash is the "faith" of Israel. It contains Israel's ideas on God, man, time and event. It is a serious confrontation of important problems and answers them in the freedom of expression and greatness of thinking which myth alone insures.

Selections from the Midrash are grouped together under the subjects of the love of God and Israel for each other; suffering and its implications for God and man; the implications of man's task as God's partner; the rabbis' views on desire, education, family, ethics and the Messianic age.

A discussion on the necessary balance between Halakah and Agada in order to maintain a true Judaism, and a factual section on the composition of the rabbinic literature comprise the two sections of the

Appendix.

The purpose of the textbook is not only to impart the Midrash of the rabbis but to give the student a meaningful and substantial Jewish theology - that man has responsibilities and God grows with man.

Introduction

Jewish Religious Education has the obligation to teach not only Jewish content but to inculcate Judaism as a religious way of life. Reform Jewish religious education has strived to do this always. The education of our children is of great importance and through the years, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations has published many textbooks toward this goal. Some texts, in the personal opinion of this writer, have been successful and some have not. Textbook writing is a difficult task. There is so much to do and so much material to impart.

The majority of textbooks until recently have been concerned with Bible, systematic history, history taught via personalities, ethics, holidays, life-cycle ceremonies, and anthologies covering periods of Jewish literary creativity. The teaching of religion, even in confirmation texts, has been lacking. The texts have imparted Jewish knowledge and information, but usually failed to organize material under topics or a meaningful pattern of religious belief. Except for the work of my teacher, Rabbi Sylvan D. Schwartzman, Ph.D., Professor of Jewish Religious Education at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (Cincinnati campus), his students, and a sparse number of other writers, few textbooks have been published with these considerations.

In the Reform Jewish religious school, there has been an awakening to the importance of post-biblical literature. In 1937, Rabbi Leon I. Feuer's "Jewish Literature Since the Bible" appeared. It was followed by a second volume, co-authored with Dr. Azriel Eisenberg. The first volume is a selection of Jewish literature from the period after the Bible, up to and including the Hassidic period. The sequel is the literature after the Hassidic period, up to and including Reform Judaism

and Israel. This two-volume work is arranged by author and/or work, not by topic. Other texts used for this material have a similar format; however, they were originally published as anthologies for adult readers and not for the use of the religious school.

These texts follow the customary thought that either the teacher or the student will arrange the material into topics or a pattern of Jewish belief. The result is that either the material is not taught or is taught by few teachers who are so unusual and well-educated in things Jewish, that they can arrange the material into a meaningful religious presentation. One must admit, however, that the "Teacher's Book" for the above named first volume is helpful and gives necessary background material.

There is a need for a textbook on the rabbinic literature, in which the material is arranged topically, and moreover, demonstrates to the student that the literature is part of, represents and supports a religious view of life. This, I attempted in this thesis, "Toward a Topical Course of Study on Rabbinic Literature for the High School Department of the Reform Religious School." I have tried to show that the rabbinic literature was an outgrowth of and therefore supported and can still support a living Judaism. There are many difficulties in writing such a text, and I hope that this work will help solve them.

The most radical departure in this textbook is its radical theology, which denies the omnipotence of God. In this light, I have tried to discuss the problem of theodicy in order to provide a meaningful answer. It is my contention that our youth must be shown a Jewish theology which can withstand the battering of cynicism, atheism and agnosticism. Only if Judaism can answer the thorniest questions, can it have a place in the lives of our children.

I must acknowledge my great debt to Dr. Henry Slonimsky, Professor Emeritus at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (New York campus). He has influenced my thinking and given me, though I have never had the honor of meeting him, a most meaningful Jewish theology. The text is for the most part a paraphrase of his article in the Hebrew Union College Annual of 1956, volume xxvii, titled, "The Philosophy Implicit in the Midrash." I reasoned that if his writing inspired me with religious meaning and purpose, how much the more so, could it inspire our Reform Jewish youth. So, I have attempted to transmit his thoughts to the children of Israel. I make no claim for originality. The thesis is an attempt to create a textbook which will be the vehicle for his thinking. The faults in the text are mine.

I greatly appreciate the help of my teacher, Rabbi Sylvan D. Schwartzman. He first suggested the idea of a textbook on rabbinic literature to me and has helped me clarify in my own mind, the direction I have taken. I thank him greatly for helping me over the trying periods of writing the thesis and hope that it has not fallen too short of his expectations.

Finally, I am grateful to Mrs. Max M. Schiff for the many 'silent ways' she has aided me.

S. T. R.

CHAPTER I

Is The Bible Enough?

I

Is The Bible Enough?

When we consider our religion and its foundations, most naturally we turn to the Bible. The Bible is the beginning, just a part of the study of Judaism. It is the fundamental book which has influenced all Jewish expression. The ideas which our people have developed about God and man arise from the interpretation of the Bible with respect to our long history, and it is this literature, which arose after the Bible, which made the Bible a living book.

Thus, to know the Bible is not enough. The Bible remained an important book only because it was continuously interpreted with attention to contemporary events and it is these interpretations which enabled Judaism to live on with continued growth and vitality.

You may raise an objection and say that it is necessary to study only the Bible, because the Bible is the classic record of western civilization and the foundation of Judaism. This is true. However, the Bible is also the foundation-book of Christianity and Islam, and each molded the Bible into a new religion. Moreover, the Judaism of the Bible not only changed during Bible times, but it developed and grew after the period of the Bible itself. This development is recorded in the rabbinic literature and became the basis for future Jewish development. Thus, to understand Judaism properly, it is necessary to study how Jews developed the Bible.

Studying the literature of the rabbis is more than historical curiosity. From it we may learn possible solutions and approaches to present day problems. People, no matter when they lived, faced problems.

Fundamental problems have not changed and yesterday's answers are helpful guides for today. We are the products of our past, and as Jews, our religious thinking comes from the Bible and all subsequent Jewish literature and history. Thus, the rabbinic literature which is part of our past, must be part of our concern.

In a comment on the Exodus from Egypt, the rabbis picture the Israelites standing at the Red Sea, the Egyptians in pursuit and the waters not yet parted. It is a time of terror and a time of decision. The comment reads:

> "The Israelites at the Red Sea were divided into four groups. One group said: 'Let us throw ourselves into the sea.' One said: 'Let us return to Egypt.' One said: 'Let us fight them'; and one said: 'Let us cry out against them!"

(Mekilta, Lauterbach, 1, p. 214)

The rabbis are describing the alternatives a man has when making an important decision. The Red Sea is a symbol for crisis, a part of every important decision. It represents the difficulties which challenge everyone and the problems without which there is no living. The four groups are symbols for the way an individual may respond to his challenge. They are:

1. "Let us throw ourselves into the sea." -- The only way is suicide. Let us surrender life and hope.
2. "Let us return to Egypt." -- The only way is to give in, or to return to former conditions. Let us surrender hope but stay alive.
3. "Let us fight them." -- The only way is to affirm our existence. We may be successful and we shall surrender neither life nor hope.
4. "Let us cry out against them." -- Perhaps by curses, incantations and oaths we can succeed. Let us shout and scare them away.

These are the alternatives. An individual chooses and thereby decides how he will view life.

The incident at the Red Sea did not occur once but repeats again and again. Life is like the Red Sea and we are always standing on its shore. It demands our full attention because whatever we do influences the future. So, the Israelites stood by the Red Sea and made a decision in favor of life and hope. The Maccabees faced their Red Sea and made a decision in favor of life and hope. In 1941, the United States stood on the shore of its Red Sea and made a decision in favor of life and hope. Every day, each individual stands on the shore of his Red Sea and decides. The future is open. This is what the rabbis teach.

Study of rabbinic literature can bestow upon our lives the added dimension of meaning and purpose. We have only to seek it. We can explore the thoughts of the rabbis and experience how they fashioned the Bible into a living book. We can live today by learning from the past.

Is the Bible enough? The answer is that for a deeper appreciation of our religion, to learn how Judaism becomes a meaningful way of life, we must go beyond the Bible.

A large and great body of rabbinic literature is named the Midrash or Agada. In contrast to the legal codes, the Midrash is a collection of thoughts on living. In this literature the rabbis freely discuss

religious themes and are free of the requirements of fixing specific ritual law with derivation and exactness. It is the reaction of the Jew to his environment and the interpretation of his special situation. It is a fountain of faith and assurance in an enemy environment. It is the grand acceptance and understanding of the world.

Midrash strives to be faith and is on an equal footing with halakah, the law. The distinction often drawn between Judaism and Christianity, that Judaism is a religion of deed and Christianity a religion of creed is but partially true for they combine both elements. It is misinterpretation by scholars looking for surface differences and easy explanations which produces facile descriptions. These scholars often interpret Judaism through the eyes of the later New Testament, while forgetting that Jesus's own statements are Jewish. In addition, the belief in Jesus as divine forces Christianity to emphasize and require creedal formulations.

On the other hand, Judaism is not a religion without faith. There must be an idea of the intent and purpose of law and ritual to generate the piety which surrounds them. Thus, Judaism is a religion of both "faith" and"works," each equal, each feeding and altering the other. In Judaism, "faith" and "works" sustain each other, and are the double foundations upon which Judaism rests. The Midrash is this "faith" and one of Judaism's foundations.

In the Bible, Israel is a chosen people destined to live in a land flowing with milk and honey. Good fortune is to greet the people Israel and out of Zion is to come forth the Law. In fact, they find the situation is reversed. Israel is <u>not</u> the central figure and the nations do <u>not</u> go up to Jerusalem. Israel suffers. Rome persecutes the chosen

people. The Biblical prophecy is not fulfilled.

How does a people reconcile its position in the real, actual world with the image handed down in the Bible? What kind of thoughts can it have about God? Is there a God? What should man do? What is the future? Why should Israel suffer? Does Israel have a special mission? Is there any reason to Have faith? In the Midrash, the rabbis' ideas about life were crucial, not their practices.

These are the questions which troubled the rabbis. It was easy to disregard them when times were good, but with misfortune answers were necessary. The people wanted explanations, comfort and consolation. They accepted the code of law which regulated their lives but they needed assurance and encouragement to keep from despair, to win over doubt and develop ground for faith. And so, there grew up in Judaism this body of literature to which the people turned. In it is the "faith" of a people, their deep thoughts on God, man and every other important topic of life.

The Midrash is aware of its difficult task. It states:

> "Dost thou wish to know Him who spake and by whose word the world came into being? Study Agada: for through such study thou canst get to understand the Holy One blessed be He and to follow in His ways."
>
> (Sifre 85a)

Is the Midrash theology or philosophy?

Theology and philosophy are subjects dealing with the study of God, His ways and how they relate to human nature and conduct. The terms <u>philosophy</u> and <u>theology</u> are Greek in origin, and refer to carefully developed sets of propositions, one following the other in logical sequence. The Midrash, on the other hand, maintains the form

of a story. Ideas and images influence the reader. It is a painting in which the artist, by subtle color and form, influences the thinking of the viewer. The Midrash suggests thoughts which are too bold to commit to cold logic. It expresses itself freely and mirrors the aspirations and longings of man. Only with the boldness of myth, story and legend can there be depth of thinking and expression.

When the Greeks first came into contact with the Jews they were puzzled. They wondered what kind of people they were. The Greeks decided that the Jews were philosophers. However, there is a great difference between the Jewish and Greek quest for knowledge. The Greek quest for knowledge is an answer to what the Greeks consider a basic human drive, the desire to know. Wonder is a natural experience for man and the raising of questions gives rise to philosophy. Israel, though, comes to philosophy through tragedy, a desire to understand how they can be beloved and at the same time suffer. What is the answer to such a paradox?

The rabbis were capable of producing sets of dry, logical statements, each sentence following the other in a rigid, formal way. But they did not want to set down their search for ideals and values in legal fashion. They saw that this would suffocate any development of new thought. If they wrote out their thoughts in creed-like style there would be little room for pushing to greater frontiers of speculation. Thus, by story and myth they captured free thinking and expression. With this qualification, the Midrash is Jewish Theology and a Jewish Philosophy of history. It is the rabbis' understanding of God, man, suffering and Israel's role in the world. Out of the pain of experience, Jewish philosophy, Jewish theology and the Jewish mission are born.

The mission of Israel is the task of bearing the Torah from God to the rest of the world. The world, however, is unwilling and refuses God, Torah and Israel. The sufferer, Israel, thus carries the heavy burden for the world.

Israel stands for the good and noble man everywhere. His task is to help the world improve, and by so doing declare the kingdom of God. He must bear the Torah which "stands for goodness, for the visions and ideals and values, or light of God in which we see light. God, besides being this light and vision which we behold, is also such power, such real actual power in the universe, as is committed and has already been marshalled for the victory of the good." (Henry Slonimsky,"The Philosophy Implicit in the Midrash," Hebrew Union College Annual, Volume XXVII, Cincinnati, 1956, p. 237)[1]

The task is enormously difficult. How difficult it is to increase the power of the good! How difficult it is to convert the ideal into the real! How difficult is the task of the noble man who finds himself destined to be a suffering hero! Could he surrender this commission! But it rests in man's power to take on the task and bring about the ideal.

Here is the paradox: The noble and courageous man suffers. He

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[1] All quotations attributed to Henry Slonimsky appear in the same article. Therefore, hereafter only the page number will be cited.

carries the burden and sorrow for his fellow man and the world. This is the dilemma of the religious life: to be God's beloved and chosen and yet suffer.

Yet this very dilemma gives meaning and purpose to man's existence. If the righteous man is God's suffering hero, then God, which is that power for the triumph of the good, is small. It is for the good and courageous man to increase this power. Man and God must work together, as mutual partners to increase the power for good. It is a joint task in which the heroes are man and God.

God and man working together, growing together, also suffer together. Man needs comfort and consolation. This is Midrash.

The Midrash says:

"In the former days when people had change in their pockets they liked to listen to some word from Mishnah and Talmud; but now that money is gone, and especially since we are sick because of the ruling power, people want to hear something from the Bible and from Agada."

(Pesikta Kahana, p. 101b)

"In the past people had some change in their pocket and a man liked to listen to Mishnah and Halakah and Talmud; but now that money is gone, and especially since we are sick through the oppression, nobody wants to hear anything but words of Benediction and Consolation."

(Cant. R., Romm, p. 15a)

These two versions of the same passage, the second one older than the first, show us that Midrash offers benedictions and consolations to the suffering heroes. They may suffer "because of the ruling

power" or be "sick through the oppression," in any case the Midrash gives comfort.

The comfort and consolation is not the application of soothing medication or pain-killing cream. It is the strengthening of an individual's body, defining purpose and giving the sufferer courage to go on. It is a faith which gives the tragic hero reassurance and the will to remain alive.

The Midrash often concludes a section with a messianic goal, about the time when suffering will no longer be necessary and the world will acknowledge the kingship of God. It tells man that there is meaning in history, in the events before him; and that the good may suffer but should not despair.

Therefore, the basic theology and philosophy of history which the Rabbis see in the Midrash and the Bible is this: "That the Torah will be made real in the end, and that all men will accept it in the end, that there is a far-off goal towards which all history converges, and that time and event are no mere welter or chaos but a meaningful process, and that the protagonist in the progress is a tragic-heroic figure, wounded and smitten but undismayed." (Slonimsky, p. 238)

This is real religion, to hope continually for the goal and work towards it.

CHAPTER II

Love and Suffering

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Love and Suffering

"'For I am love-sick.' (Cant. 2:5). The congregation of Israel says to God, 'Lord of the world, all the sickness which thou bringest upon me are only for the purpose of making me love thee .... All the sicknesses, which the nations bring upon me are only because I love thee..... though I am sick Thou still lovest me.'"

(Cant. R., Romm, p. 15a)

This Midrash is the setting for a Jewish interpretation of history. God and Israel are mutual partners, in love with each other. Love has overpowered Israel. It interferes with well-being. It invades and almost destroys. It promotes jealousy and envy. Yet, though the nations hate Israel:

"Many waters cannot quench love."

(Cant. 8:7)

"Many waters: these are the nations of the world. Cannot quench love: the love which God bears to Israel, as it says, 'I have loved you.' (Mal. 1:2) Or, many waters cannot quench love: these are the idolators, for even if all the idolators were to assemble to quench the love between God and Israel, they would be powerless, as it says, 'Yet I loved Jacob.' (Mal. 1:2)

(Cant. R., Romm, p. 40a; Exod. R., Romm, p. 79a; Num. R., Romm, p. 7a)

God and Israel are bound together in love. Together, they bring

to the world the power of the good. The nations try to destroy the union and extinguish this love, but they cannot. "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." (Cant. 8:7). God's love for Israel is strong. The bond cannot be cut.

Sparked by this love, the rabbis were comforted. It was fitting for them to say:

> "'The Lord appeared of old unto me, saying, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." (Jer. 31:3). It does not say, 'with abounding love,' but with 'everlasting love.' For you might think the love with which God loves Israel was for three years or two years or a hundred years. But it was a love for everlasting and to all eternity."
>
> (Tanna de be Eliyyahu, p. 31)

God loves Israel exceedingly, but Israel's love is greater. Israel's love for God leads to death and martyrdom. Israel's difficult task is to have a life of meaning and purpose within the dimension of suffering. This life-situation defines Israel's role among the nations.

> Rabbi Akiba said: "I will speak of the beauty and praise of God before all nations. They ask Israel and say, "'What is your beloved more than another beloved' (Cant. 5:0)....that you die for Him, and that you are slain for Him," as it says, 'Therefore till death do they love Thee,'[1] and, 'For thy sake

[1]This is a pun from Cant. 1:3 which reads, "Therefore do the maidens love thee,' which can, if read as an unpointed, unvocalized Hebrew text, be made to read, "till death do they love Thee."

> are we slain all the day.' (Ps. 44:22).

Rabbi Akiba extolls God before the nations. The nations of the world want Israel to join them:

> "'Behold,' they say, 'you are beautiful, you are mighty, come and mingle with us.' But the Israelites reply, 'Do you know Him? We will tell you a portion of His renown: my beloved is white and ruddy; pre-eminent above ten thousand.'" (Cant. 5:10).

The nations are ready to join Israel:

> "When they hear Israel praise Him thus, they say to the Israelites, 'We will go with you,' as it is said, 'Whither has your beloved turned Him that we may seek Him with you,'" (Cant. 6:1).

Israel answers as a true lover:

> "'You have no part or lot in Him,' as it is said, 'My beloved is mine, and I am His.' (Cant. 2:16)."
>
> (Mekilta, Lauterbach, II, p. 26)

Love is a closed relationship between the two lovers. Love is lost to the outside world. It admits admirers only after desire is truly demonstrated. Then there is a sharing with the surrounding world.

What produces this love? What gives an individual the strength to withstand suffering? How can man love God and feel related to God in a common cause? How is man inspired to be a partner with God in which God's power is not all-powerful? What is the vision which sustains such a spirit?

The vision is the realization that this is an unfinished and growing world. The world has growing pains and all life suffers

growing pains. It is through suffering that a higher world comes into being. It is through suffering that the human being grows and a greater and higher soul emerges. Growth is painful and pain is a concommitant of growth.

Suffering is part of living. But if we rise above our own pain and add to our burden the burdens of others, we establish a meaningful and higher existence. Only by so doing does suffering become not what we sadly resign our lives to, but the badge of the brave and courageous. We transform our lives from the image of the animal, to walk in the image of God.

The sufferer has transfigured his suffering. His burden is heavy. He carries with him the pain of others and he knows that his thwarted efforts must persist. He is rejected and broken in spirit as his message falls upon an unwilling world. The writers of the Midrash knew this well. They write:

> "R. Abba ben Yudan said: All that God has declared to be unclean in animals He has pronounced desirable in men. In animals he has declared 'blind or broken or maimed or having a wen' to be unfit (Lev. 22:22), but in men He has declared the broken and contrite heart to be desirable. R. Alexandri said: If an ordinary person uses broken vessels, it is a disgrace to him, but God uses broken vessels, as it is said, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart' (Ps. 34:19)."
>
> Lev. R., Romm, p. 11a)

Another version reads:

> "R. Alexandri said: 'If an ordinary person makes use of broken vessels, it is a disgrace, but the vessels used by God are all broken ones, as it is said, 'The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart' (Ps. 34:19); 'Who healeth the broken in heart' (Ps. 147:3); 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit' (Isa. 17:15); 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart O God thou wilt not despise' (Ps. 51:19)."
>
> (Pesikta Kahana, p. 158b)

The difference in the two versions is interesting:

"....but God uses broken vessels....."

"....but the vessels used by God are all broken ones...."

All the broken-hearted are God's service vessels. They are God's instruments of service. How deep is this insight which has its beginning in the Psalms, the record of man's suffering and longing for God.

The righteous, the courageous, are also the sufferers. Their righteousness emerges under pressure.

> "'My beloved is unto me as a bag of myrrh' (Cant. 1:13) ....Just as myrrh is the most excellent of spices, so Abraham was the chief of all righteous men. Just as myrrh gives off its perfume only when brought into the fire, so the worth of Abraham was not known till he was cast into the fiery furnace....."
>
> (Cant. R., Romm, p. 12a)

The Midrash continues:

> "Just as oil is improved only by beating, so Israel

is brought to repentance only by suffering."

(Cant. R., Romm, p. 6b)

"When Abraham stayed at home he was like a flask of myrrh with a tight fitting lid and lying in a corner. Only when opened and scattered to all the winds can its fragrance be disseminated. Hence, 'Get thyself away' (Gen. 12:1), go and expend yourself."

(Cant. R., Romm, p. 6b;

Gen. R., Romm, p. 79a)

Must pain be the catalyst which releases the message of hope to the unfinished world? Should God try the righteous?

"The Lord trieth the righteous" because they can withstand the test.

"R. Jonathan said: 'The Lord trieth the righteous' (Ps. 11:5). The potter does not test cracked vessels; it is not worth while to tap them even once, because they would break; but he taps the good ones, because, however many times he taps them, they do not break. Even so God tries, not the wicked but the righteous. R. Jose B. Hanina said: 'The flax dealer who knows that his flax is good, pounds it, for it becomes more excellent by his pounding; and when he knocks it, it glistens the more. But when he knows that his flax is bad, he does not knock it at all, for it would split. So God tries not the wicked, but the righteous. R. Elazar said: A man had two cows, one strong and one weak. Upon which will he lay the yoke? Surely upon

the strong. So the Lord trieth the righteous."

(Gen. R., XXXII, 3)

So, the rabbis interpret Jewish history. "My beloved is mine and I am his that feedeth among the lilies" (Cant. 2:16), is reinterpreted: "God's rod comes only upon those whose heart is soft like the lily" (Cant. R., Romm, p. 19a). God tries the fine and good, the lilies, not the unworthy and wicked. "The Lord trieth the righteous" (Ps. 11:5).

What do these parables imply? They say that the good must bear the burden of the bad and the strong the load of the weak. It is the dignity of man to bear not only his burden but to alleviate his weaker brother is the height to which man can rise. Those who make no attempt to carry their burden and therefore the burden of others are unworthy of a love-partnership with God.

Israel's suffering is atonement for the world:

"As the dove stretches out her neck to the slaughterer, so do the Israelites, for it is said, 'For thy sake are we killed all day long' (Ps. 44:22). As the dove atones for sins, so the Israelites atone for the nations, for the seventy oxen which they offer on the festival of Tabernacles represents the seventy peoples so that the world may not be left desolate of them; as it sayd, 'In return for my love they are my adversaries, but I am all prayer' (Ps. 109:4)."

Israel accepts her role:

"As the dove, from the hour when she recognized her

mate does not change him; so the Israelites, from the time when they recognized God, have not changed Him."

(Cant. R., Romm, p. 13a and p. 23a)

For the sake of the righteous, blessing comes into the world: "It is the righteous, for whose sake blessing comes to the world. It is a Sanctification of the Name (God) that when the righteous are in the world, blessing comes to the world; when the righteous are removed from the world, blessing leaves the world. The house of Obed-Edom was blessed because of the Ark (II Sam. 6:10). If because of the Ark, which could receive neither reward nor punishment, blessing came to a household, how much more does blessing come because of the righteous for whose sake the world was created."

(Sifre Deut., p. 77b)

The world exists because of the righteous. The world was created for them, and it is they who benefit, improve, and bring blessing to it.

The Jews lived with suffering. In the Bible Job and the magnificent image of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah (see chapter 53; it was so magnificent that it influenced and clothed the figure of Jesus) dealt with it. In the rabbinical literature, the rabbis coined two phrases, "sufferings of love" and "sufferings are precious." These were their answers. Suffering became a sign of God's love. They accepted suffering as a distinctive mark. They transformed suffering from a sign of punishment to a symbol of affection. This was the rabbis' answer. It is an answer of unusually high import.

The idea we have selected from the Midrash leads to the conclusion that this is an imperfect world. If the world were perfect suffering would be unknown. The world is unfinished and growing. The righteous are the noble individuals obligated to perfect the world.

What kind of God permits a suffering, imperfect world? Is God unwilling or unable to act? The answer is not that God is unwilling or unable but that man in his greatness and god-like image takes upon himself the yoke which rests upon God. Thus, "sufferings of love" are a sign of God's love. God is faithful. God is loved. But man must be willing to do His task and share His image.

Man proclaims God in a world where His power, the light and vision of the true and good and beautiful, is small. Man works for God and makes Him great. This is the burden of the religious soul.

CHAPTER III

God Needs Comfort

CHAPTER III

God Needs Comfort

As man suffers, God suffers. How bold is the idea that God suffers! The Midrash pictures God's helplessness and weeping. How audacious the idea of God weeping! Yet, the picture of God weeping expresses an idea which cannot be conveyed otherwise. The image declares the truth as the human mind perceives it (and in Agada freedom of expression is assured). This human insight is the conclusion that God is finite (as opposed to infinite), lacking the quality of complete omnipotence. He waits for man.

God weeps!

> "When God remembers his children who dwell in misery among the nations of the world, he causes two tears to descend to the ocean and the sound is heard from one end of the world to the other."
>
> (Berakot 59a)

When Israel lost the Temple in Jerusalem a suffering God shared His defeat with His people Israel. "I am with him in his distress." (Ps. 91:15).

> "In the hour when God determined to destroy the Temple, He said, 'So long as I was in its midst, the nations could not touch it; now I will hide my eyes from it, and I will swear that I will not connect myself with it until the end;[1] then the enemy can come and destroy it.' At once God swore with His right hand, and drew it back, as it is said, 'He drew back his right hand on account of the enemy' (Lam. 2:3).

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[1] This has reference to the time of the End, the Messianic era.

Then the enemy entered the Temple and burnt it. When it was burnt, God said, 'Now I have no dwelling-place in the land; I will withdraw my Shechinah[2] from it, and ascend to my former place, as it is said, "I will go and return to my place until they acknowledge their sins"' (Hos. 5:15). Then the Lord wept, and said, 'Woe is me, what have I done? I caused my Shechinah to descend because of Israel, and now that they have sinned, I have returned to my former place. Far be it from me that I should be a laughing stock to the nations and a scorn to men.' Then Metatron[3] came, and fell on his face, and said, 'I will work, but thou must not weep.' Then God said, 'If thou sufferest me not to weep, I will go to a place where thou hast no power to enter, and I will weep there, as it is said, "My soul shall weep in secret places"' (Jer. 13:17). Then God said to the angels of the service, 'Come, we will go, you and I, and we will see what the enemy has done to my house.' So God and the angels of service set forth and Jeremiah went in front of them. When God saw the Temple, He said, 'Assuredly, that is my house, and that is my place of rest, into which the enemy has come and worked his will.' Then God wept and said, 'Woe is me for my house. Where are you my sons? Where are you, my priests? Where are you, my friends? What can I do for you? I warned you,

[2]Shechinah, in rabbinic Hebrew, is the word for God's presence. It comes from the biblical Hebrew word, to dwell. God and the Shechinah are separate. The Shechinah is the unseen manifestation of God.

[3]The name of a Talmudic archangel in God's service.

but you did not repent.' Then God said to Jeremiah, 'I am to-day like a man who had an only son, and he set up for him the marriage canopy, and he died under it. Do you not grieve for me and my sons? Go, call Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Moses from their graves, for they know how to weep.' Then Jeremiah said, 'I do not know where Moses is buried.' God said, 'Go to the border of the Jordan and lift up your voice and cry: "Son of Amram, stand up and see how the enemy has devoured your flock."' So Jeremiah went to the cave of Machpelah, and he said to the Patriarchs, 'Arise, for the time has come when you are summoned before God.' They said, 'Why?' He replied, 'I know not,' because he was afraid lest they should say, 'So it is in your days that this evil has befallen our sons.' Then Jeremiah went, and stood by the border of Jordan and cried, 'Son of Amram, arise, the time has come that you are summoned before God.' He said, 'Why is it to-day more than on other days that I am summoned before God?' Jeremiah replied, 'I do not know.' Then Moses left Jeremiah, and went to the angels of the service, for he knew them ever since the giving of the Law. He said to them, 'You ministers of God on high, do you know at all why I am summoned before God?' They said, 'Do you now know that the Temple is laid waste, and Israel driven into exile?' Then Moses cried and wept till he came to the Patriarchs. Then they, too, rent their clothes, and they laid their hands on their heads, and they wept and cried until they came to the gates of the Temple. When God saw them, He 'called to weeping and to mourning and to baldness and to girding with sackcloth' (Isa. 22:12). If this verse

were not written, once could not dare say it.[4] Then they all went weeping from one gate of the Temple to another, as a man whose dead lies before him. And God mourned and said, 'Woe to the King who has succeeded in His youth, but not in His old age.'"

(Lamentations R., Intro. Romm, p. 6b)

The passage leaves little to the imagination. God weeps and demands comfort. The message stands out boldly: God is not perfect in power; he is "the King who has succeeded in His youth, but not in His old age."

In the Jewish calendar, the ninth day of the month Av (Tish'ah be'Av) is the day the Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. and the Romans in 70 C.E. The Sabbath immediately after this day is distinguished by a special Haftorah portion, Isaiah 40:1-26. The Sabbath is called Sabbath Nachamu because the Haftorah begins with the Hebrew word nachamu, "comfort ye." The Midrash discusses the many ways the text can be read. The rabbis are thinking of an unpointed Hebrew text (without vowels), which could be read with varied punctuation and meaning. The basic text from Isaiah is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Isaiah 40:1). What is the meaning? Who is to be comforted? Is God to comfort His people or the people to comfort their God?

The Midrash sets the scene. God asks the prophets to go to Jerusalem and comfort His people. Thus one interpretation of the text is, "Comfort ye, O, prophets, comfort ye My people." But the prophets' comfort is ineffective. The people refuse to be comforted. Then God says that He and the prophets will bring comfort together. This is another interpretation of the text. The rabbis change the vocalization for the Hebrew

[4]That entire sentence has reference to the boldness of the idea and the audacity of its utterance.

word, my people, ammi, to immi, with me, so that it reads, "Let us go together and bring her comfort." Again, the comfort is ineffective and there is a question as to the power of comfort. The answer implied is that comfort is of little help. God, who tries to comfort but does not succeed, is the object of pity.

The interpretations of the text continue. "O My people, comfort Me, comfort Me." This parable is given to support the reading:

"For the matter is like as if a king had a palace or a vineyard, which enemies had destroyed. The king needs comfort, not the palace or the vineyard. But the Temple is God's palace, and it lies waste and Israel is His vineyard. Therefore, O my people, comfort me, comfort me."

(Pesikta Kahana, p. 128a)

Comfort is of little succor. It is difficult to feel and know the pain which another experiences.

Tragedy can destroy life. Although the rabbis preached the value and purpose of suffering they themselves were unable to bear it. In reality, no one desires suffering and no one should suffer. The outlook of the rabbis was neither masochistic nor sadistic.

This story illustrates the reaction of the rabbis to their own suffering:

"R. Elazar was ill, and R. Johanan went in to visit him. He saw that he was lying in a dark room, so R. Johanan bared his own arm, and a brightness radiated therefrom. He then noticed that Elazar was weeping. He said to him, 'Why weepest thou? Is it because thou hast not applied

thyself sufficiently to the teaching of Torah? We have learnt that it matters not whether one does much or little, so long as he directs his heart to heaven!...After a while he said to him, 'Are thy sufferings dear to thee?' He replied, 'Neither they nor the reward they bring....'"

(Berakot, p. 5b)

The rabbis were human beings. The reply, "Neither they nor the reward they bring," or another version, "I want neither the suffering nor their reward" (Cant. R., Romm, p. 19a), is their frank and human reply to the higher statement that "God's sufferings are precious," that God has sent "sufferings of love."

Suffering cannot be endured when it becomes torture and shatters the roots of life. The rabbis recognized that it can be cruel and intolerable.

"R. Hiyya b. Abba said: 'If a man said to me, "Give your life for the sanctification of God's name," I would give it, but only on the condition that I should be killed at once. But the tortures of the "Time of the Persecution" I could not endure.' What was then done? They brought iron balls and made them white hot upon the fire, and put them under the armpits, and so they took their lives, or they drove pieces of reed under their nails, and so they took their lives....They let their souls be taken away for the sanctification of God's name."

(Cant. R., Romm, p. 16a)

The rabbis saw the dilemma of the sufferer's unanswered seeking

for God's help.

"'I sat not in the assembly of them that make merry nor rejoiced. I sat alone because of thy hand' (Jer. 15:17). 'I sat alone,' says Israel to God, 'but there are two kinds of being alone. I am well acquainted with the one and am quite content with it, namely to sit alone in devotion to Thee, to absent myself from felicity a while and for all while, to stay away from their circuses and theatres, to sit alone through all the successive hatreds of the world, alone and not alone, for I had Thee. But when Thou, for whose sake I sat alone, when Thou turnest Thy hand against me, then I am truly alone, alone and desolate.'"

(Lam. R., Proem III, Romm, p. 1b)

Thus, in commenting on the Book of Job, the rabbis were surprised that God succumbs to trickery and simply hands the hero, Job, over to Satan with the provision, "Behold, he is in thy hand, only spare his life" (Job 2:6).

"R. Johanan said: 'If it were not expressly written in the Bible, it would be improper to speak of God as behaving like a man whom others can trick and who can allow himself to be tricked...."

We note the role of Agada. It is that highest form of expression which permits freedom and therefore greatness of thinking. The parable continues:

"R. Isaac said: 'Satan's pain was greater than that of Job, for God's offer resembled that of a master who orders his servant to break the cask but preserve the

wine.'"

(Baba Batra, p. 16a)

Suffering is an act of bravery. It is the dynamic action of the courageous man, in partnership with God, perfecting and completing the unfinished world. It is not a task for cowards but the purposeful life of the brave and true man everywhere who shares God's image and Israel's noble goal.

CHAPTER IV

Man's Task

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God and Israel are partners. They work together and they need each other. God and Israel are so identified with each other, that he who hates God, hates Israel also. God so loves Israel that His Presence, the Shechinah, goes with Israel wherever Israel goes. But Israel must be righteous. It must deserve the radiance of the Shechinah and merit God's love. Israel must make God the only object of its concern and love, and by so doing proclaim and keep His Presence, the Shechinah, on earth.

In the beginning of time, sinners caused the Shechinah to leave the earth, but righteous of Israel caused it to return.

> "R. Aibu said that when Adam sinned, the Shechinah withdrew to the first (and lowest) heaven, when Cain sinned to the second, in the generations of Enoch (Father of Methuselah, just before Noah), to the third, in the generations of the flood to the fourth, in the generation of the Dispersion of Tongues (Tower of Babel), to the fifth, through the sin of the men of Sodom to the sixth, and through the sin of the Egyptians to the seventh (and highest) heaven. Then six righteous men arose, and they brought the Shechinah back to earth. For Abraham brought it back to the sixth heaven, Isaac to the fifth, Jacob to the fourth, Levi to the third, Kehat (Son of Levi) to the second, and Amram (father of Moses) to the first. Moses finally brought it back

> from the upper world to the lower world (i.e. to earth). For indeed the wicked cause the Shechinah to ascend from the earth, while the righteous cause it to dwell on the earth....."

God and Israel exist as lovers only as objects of each others' love. Israel must be careful to make God the object of its devotion and merit to justify God's love. How is this reciprocated?

The Midrash begins:

> "'And let them that hate thee flee before thee' (Num. 10:35)."

What does this verse mean? How do the rabbis interpret it?

> "Had God enemies? It means: whoso hates Israel is as one who hates God....He who rises against Israel is as one who rises against God....And he who helps Israel helps God....And so each time when Israel is subjugated by the empires, the Shechinah, as it were, is subjugated by them....And when it says, 'Because of thy people whom thou hast redeemed unto thee from Egypt, a nation and his God' (II Sam. 7:23), R. Akiba comments: 'Had we not a direct Scripture it would be impossible to say it, namely this: Israel said to God, 'Thou hast redeemed thyself'....And thus we find that wherever they went into exile the Shechinah went with them....They were exiled into Babylon, the Shechinah went with them....to Elam, the Shechinah went with them....And when they return[1] the Shechinah will return with them. For it says, 'And the Lord thy God will bring back

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[1] A reference to the Messianic Age.

thy captivity' (Deut. 30:3). It does not say will cause to return but and He will return, that is, God himself will return."[2]

(Sifre, ed. Friedmann 22b)

The most striking element of rabbinic thought is God's dependence on man. God depends on man for strength and growth, or failure and demise. It is an emerging world and man by his actions either increases or decreases God's power.

This is not reading a new and modern thought into the Midrash. It is there! It is clearly and unambiguously stated. It may not be the predominant view; however, there is no one, definite, predominant opinion in the Midrash. The concept of a finite God in a growing, emerging world, dependent on his co-partner, Man, is definitely there. Those who state this view know they are doing so and are aware of its radical implications.

The texts speak out strongly:

"R. Azariah in the name of R. Judah b. Simon said: 'When the Israelites do God's will, they add to the power of God on high. When the Israelites do not do God's will, they, as it were, weaken the great power of God on high.'"

(Lam. R., Romm, p. 15a)

Another passage:

"'Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and I am God'

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[2]The verb tense is not in the causative, and thus the verse from Deuteronomy may be translated, And the Lord, thy God, will return with thy captivity (those who were captive, meaning Israel). This is an example of rabbinic interpretation of a Biblical text.

(Isa. 43:12). That is, when ye are my witnesses, I am God, and when ye are not my witnesses, I am, as it were, not God."

(Midrash Ps., Buber edition, p. 255a)

And still another:

"'Unto thee do I lift up my eyes, O thou that sittest in the heavens' (Ps. 123:1). This implies that if I did not lift up my eyes, thou wouldst not be sitting in the heavens."

(Midrash Ps., Buber edition, p. 255a)

Israel's lack of faith and turning to idolatry weakens the power of God.

""Thou didst forget God that formed thee' (Deut. 22: 18). Each time that I sought to do you good, you weakened the Power on high. You stood by the Red Sea and said, 'This is my God, and I will praise him' (Ex. 15:2), and then you returned and said, 'Let us make a captain, and let us go back to Egypt' (Num. 14:4). You stood at Mount Sinai and said, 'All that the Lord has spoken to us we will do,' and I sought to do you good, but you returned and said to the calf, 'This is thy God, O Israel.' Lo, whenever I seek to do you good, you weaken the Power which is on high."

(Sifre Deut. p. 136b-137a)

Professor Slonimsky summarizes the meaning behind these passages: "There is no intention of blasphemy here....it is merely an expression

of the thought that God by himself is an abstraction, i.e., an unreality, as of course man by himself is by the same token abstraction and unreality. The real significance and value of stressing the correlation, or as we shall say the polarity, between God and man, is that in our opinion it is the only way, the only directing guide towards an acceptable, credible and viable theology of the future. Only if we distinguish God from the rest of the universe....as that part of the universe which not merely has the insight and will but is also reaching out for the power to implement its insight and will in order to realize the idea; and only if we distinguish man from the anthropoid ape which he still largely is, as the being correlated with God in the high drama of ushering into reality a new and higher world; only then can the elements of a real authentic religiosity, worthy of the future and adequate to create a future, have room for deploying their power. Thus prayer as the communication between two related powers (numerically two, not just autosuggestion or whistling in the dark) becomes at least possible; thus the relation between God and man becomes a beneficent circle of give and take, each growing and profiting by the other; thus God and man can give each other comfort and forgive each other their mistakes; thus God and man can insist on an active program and a goal, rather than be content with a gorgeous and infinite display of imagination and drama." (p. 264).

Man's challenge rests in what he does to shape and form the world. It is man's decision.

"The Rabbis say: Let a man ever regard himself as if he

were half-guilty and half-deserving; then if he fulfils one command, happy is he, for he has inclined the scale towards merit; if he commits one sin, woe to him for he has inclined the scale to guilt.'....R. Elazar b. Simeon said: 'The world is judged by the majority, and the individual is judged by the majority. If a man fulfils one command, happy is he, for he has caused the scale for himself and for the whole world to incline towards the pan of merit; if he has committed one sin, woe to him, for both for himself and for the whole world he makes the pan heavier. By his one sin he has made himself and the world lose much good....!"

(Kiddushin, p. 40a)

Maimonides, the great medieval Jewish philosopher, borrowed and intensified this concept. Note the effect one commandment (the good deed) or one sin can do, not only on the individual himself, but "the whole world."

"Every man should look upon himself throughout the year as though his merits and failings were equally balanced, and also to look upon the whole world as though it were half deserving and half guilty. Now if he commit but one sin more, then by this simple sin he causes the scale of guilt to preponderate both with regard to himself and to the whole world and consequently brings destruction upon it. On the other hand, if he fulfils but one single commandment more, then by this single good deed he causes the scale of merit to preponderate both with regard to himself and to the whole world,

and consequently brings destruction upon it. On the other hand, if he fulfils but one single commandment more, then by this single good deed he causes the scale of merit to preponderate both with regard to himself and to the whole world, and consequently brings salvation and deliverance both upon himself and them, as it is said, 'The righteous man is the foundation of the world' (Prov. 10:25), meaning that he who acts righteously causes the merit of the whole world to preponderate and by this means brings about its deliverance."

(Maimonides, Hilkot Teshuva, III 4)

The idea developed from this rabbinic doctrine is that the commission of a sin preponderates (causes the balance of the scale to change) for "the whole world and consequently brings destruction upon it." The opposite occurs with the doing of the good deed. The mitzvah, (the commandment or good deed) "brings salvation and deliverance both" upon the world and the individual. In simpler words, man has the responsibility and power to help the world progress and grow or retrogress and die.

The challenge asked of man is extraordinary. Man has the freedom to do as he pleases. He may choose God or he may reject God. The world waits for man. God waits for man. God needs man's help to redeem the world. It is God's will to have man as a partner in His continuously ongoing creation.

CHAPTER V

The Implications of Man's Task

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The previous chapters have described Israel's staggering role. The rabbis did not underplay the difficulty and enormity of Israel's mission, nor the frightening aspects of Israel's martyrdom. Israel's everyday job is possible. Israel is to be "a light unto the nations" and by precept and example persuade them to accept the One God. This is not a new thought, but reflects the period when Israel actively sought proselytes.

Israel, by accepting God, is obligated to convert others. The rabbinic commentary on Lev. 5:1 is straightforward.

"It is written, 'If he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity' (Lev. 5:1). If you do not proclaim my Godliness to the nations, I will punish you."

(Lev. R., Romm, p. 10b)

"R. Elazar said: 'God scattered Israel among the nations for the sole end that proselytes should wax numerous among them.' R. Hoshaiah said: 'God did Israel a benefit when He scattered them among the nations.'"

(Pesachim, p. 87b)

"Hosea says: 'And I will sow her unto me in the land' (Hos. 2:25). When a man sows a measure he expects a harvest of many measures. Thus God exiled Israel among the nations only in order to increase the number of proselytes who will join them."

(Pesachim, p. 87b)

Proselytes are equal to Israel in every respect, and dear to God. "It is written in Hos. 14:8, 'They that dwell under his shadow shall return.' R. Abbahu said: 'These are the proselytes who come and take refuge under the shadow of the Holy One. "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:12).' 'They shall revive as the corn' (Hos. 14:8). They shall become as integral a part of Israel as the inborn. And they shall grow as the vine, as it is said, 'Thou has brought a vine out of Egypt, thou didst cast out the peoples and didst plant it.' (Ps. 80:8). God says, 'The names of the proselytes are as dear to me as the wine which is poured out upon the altar.'"

(Lev. R., Romm, p. 2a)

"Dearer to God is the proselyte who has come of his own accord than all the crowds of Israelites who stood before Mount Sinai. For had the Israelites not witnessed the thunders, lightnings, quaking mountains and sounding trumpets, they would not have accepted the Torah. But the proselyte, who saw not one of these things, came and surrendered himself to the Holy One, blessed be He, and took the yoke of heaven upon himself. Can anyone be dearer to God than this man?"

(Tanhuma, Buber edition, p. 32a)

The attitude towards the proselyte is developed in this magnificent Midrash:

"'The Lord loves the righteous' (Ps. 146:8). God says, 'I love them who love me.'....Why does God love the righteous? Because they have no inheritance or family. The Priests and Levites form a household, as it is said, 'O house of Aaron and O house of Levi, praise the Lord' (Ps. 135:19,20). If a man desires to become a Priest or Levite, he cannot do so, because his father was not one, but if a man wants to be righteous (i.e., a proselyte), he can do so, even if he be a heathen, even though he has no father's house, as it is said, 'Ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord.' (Ps. 135:20). It does not say, 'O house of them that fear the Lord,' but 'Ye who fear the Lord,' that is, they who have no 'house,' but of themselves have vowed themselves unto the Lord and love Him. Therefore God loves them.

"The Holy One loves the proselytes exceedingly. To what is the matter like? To a king who had a number of sheep and goats which went forth every morning to the pasture, and returned in the evening to the stable. One day a stag joined the flock and grazed with the sheep, and returned with them. Then the shepherd said to the king, 'There is a stag which goes out with the sheep and grazes with them, and comes home with them.' And the king loved the stag exceedingly. And he commanded the shepherd saying: 'Give heed unto this stag, that no man should beat it'; and when the sheep returned in the evening, he would order that the stag should have

food and drink. Then the shepherds said to him, 'My Lord, thou hast many goats and sheep and kids, and thou givest us no directions about these, but about this stag thou givest us orders day by day.' Then the king replied: 'It is the custom of the sheep to graze in the pasture, but the stags dwell in the wilderness, and it is not their custom to come among men in the cultivated land. But this stag who has come to us and lives with us, should we not be grateful that he has left the great wilderness, where many stags and gazelles feed, and has come to live among us? It behooves us to be grateful.' So too spake the Holy One: 'I owe great thanks to the stranger, in that he has left his family and his father's house, and has come to dwell among us; therefore I order in the Law: "Love ye the stranger."'

"'The Lord guards the proselytes' (Ps. 146:9). They are greatly to be protected, so that they should not return to their original evil ways. Beloved are the proselytes, for everywhere the Scripture places them side by side with the Israelites.....'Hence we learn that the proselytes are as the Israelites,'....'Them that honor me I will honor' (I Sam. 2:30).

"These are the proselytes who honor God, in that they leave their evil ways, and come and take refuge under the wings of the Shechinah; therefore God honors them....

Who is a God like Him who loves those who love Him, and draws near to Him the far as well as the near?....Nor must you think that God draws near only the proselytes or 'righteousness,' who become proselytes for His Name's Sake, but in regard to those who become proselytes not for His Name's sake, we find that God requites the wrongs done to them....God says, 'If you keep far off them that are far, you will end by making far off them that are near.'....God brings near the far, and supports the far as well as the near. And not only that, but He offers peace to the far even before He offers it to the near, as it is said, 'Peace, peace to the far and to the near.' (Isa. 17:19)."

(Num. R., Naso, 8:2-4)

The theme of the ingathering of the proselytes is predominant in rabbinic thinking. A climax of the prayer book, a rabbinic creation, is the great verse from Zechariah:

"On that day, the Lord shall be One and His name
shall be One."

(Zech. 14:9)

This theme is continued in the High Holyday liturgy with the following anonymous poem, over 1200 years old:

"All the world shall come to serve Thee
And praise Thy glorious Name,
And Thy righteousness triumphant
The islands shall acclaim.
And the peoples shall go seeking

Who knew Thee not before,
And the ends of earth shall praise Thee,
And tell Thy greatness o'er.

"They shall build for Thee their altars
Their idols overthrown,
And their graven gods shall shame them,
As they turn to Thee alone.
They shall worship Thee at sunrise,
And feel Thy Kingdom's might,
And impart their understanding
To those astray in night.

"They shall testify Thy greatness,
And of Thy power speak,
And extol Thee, shrined, uplifted
Beyond man's highest peak.
And with reverential homage,
Of love and wonder born,
With the ruler's crown of beauty
Thy head they shall adorn.

"With the coming of Thy Kingdom
The hills shall break into song,
And the islands laugh exultant
That they to God belong.
And all their congregations
So loud Thy praise shall sing,
That the uttermost peoples, hearing,
Shall hail Thee crowned King."

The acceptance of Judaism is not the result of intellectual discussion. It may also demand a life of exemplary action ending in martyrdom. Akiba, one of the greatest of rabbis and Jews, died a martyr's death. He died refusing to deny the One God. He breathed his last breath with the echod of the Shema on his lips, proclaiming to all that his love of God would not diminish. Martyrdom, itself, is a declaration of faith and an act of proselytizing for it demonstrates how the martyr values his religion. The following passage is one of the accounts of Akiba's death:

"When Akiba was being tortured, the hour for saying the Shema arrived. He said it and smiled. The Roman officer called out, 'Old man, art thou a sorcerer, or dost thou mock at thy sufferings, that thou smilest in the midst of thy pains?' 'Neither,' replied Akiba, 'but all my life, when I said the words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and might," I was saddened, for I thought, when shall I be able to fulfil the command? I have loved God with all my heart and with all my possessions (meaning might), but how to love Him with all my soul (life) was not assured to me. Now that I am giving my life, and that the hour for saying the Shema has come, and my resolution remains firm, should I not laugh?' And as he spoke, his soul departed."

(Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot, p. 14b)

Judaism is not all suffering and death. It acknowledges, also, our all too human aspirations. It is this balance and perspective which makes Judaism a classic religion. It recognizes the need to view the world in perspective and accept it with a "grand understanding." The four Midrashim which follow are examples of this.

The Jew's desires are as human as his fellow-man's. A famous Midrash based on the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, describes Jacob's dream as he sleeps in the open, using a stone for a pillow. He wants complete assurance of success.

"It is written, 'Fear not, my servant Jacob' (Jer. 30:10), and 'Jacob dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven' (Gen. 28:12). R. Samuel B. Nachman said: 'The ladder stands for the Princes of the peoples of the world, for God showed to our father Jacob the Prince of Babylon rising seventy rungs, the Prince of Media fifty-two, the Prince of Greece one hundred and eighty, and the Prince of Edom (which symbolizes Rome) rising, but how many rungs was not known. In that hour Jacob feared, and he thought, 'Perhaps for Edom it will be all rising and not falling.' Then God said, 'Fear not, Jacob; even if he rises, and sits near me, from there I will cast him down,' as it is said, 'Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, says the Lord' (Obad. 1:4). R. Berachyah said: Hence one may learn that God showed to Jacob the

Princes of Babylon, Media, Greece and Edom rising and falling."

So far the story depicts small Israel against all the empires and powerful Rome, but Israel is destined to win. The continuation of the Midrash, however, shows that Jacob is afraid. He fears that he will not succeed and will descend the ladder also. He wants assurance and does not trust God. Thus, Jacob, meaning Israel, is punished.

"And God said to Jacob, 'Thou too wilt rise.' And Jacob was afraid, for he thought, 'Perhaps I too shall fall.' But he believed God not; therefore he did not rise. And God said, but now as you did not believe and did not rise, your descendants will be enslaved by four kingdoms of the world with taxes and forced supplies and fines and poll taxes.'

Jacob fears that the punishment will last forever, but is comforted by the verse in Jeremiah.

"'Therefore fear thou not, O Jacob, My servant,' saith the Lord; neither be dismayed O Israel; for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; And Jacob shall again be quiet and at east,....for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee...." (Jer. 30:10,11).

(Lev. R., Romm, p. 42a)

The next Midrash is more poignant. The Israelites have experienced the revelation at Mount Sinai. They see the mountains and

hills quake, but then without concern they return to idolatry. They make the golden calf. As Moses descends the mountain with the tablets of the Law, he notices that the Ten Commandments have disappeared, as if they were never there. He breaks the tablets on the foot of the rock, unable to say a single word. Then comes a decree which changes the course of Israel's life:

"At that moment, a decree was issued concerning Israel that they would from now on have to study those Words (the Torah) in the midst of distress, grief and hunger."

(Seder Eliyahu, ed. Friedmann, p. 117)

When will Israel recognize the Messiah? Would they recognize him if they met him face to face?

"R. Joshua b. Levi met Elijah at the mouth of the cave of R. Simeon B. Yohai. He said to Elijah, 'Shall I enter the life to come?' Elijah replied, 'If it so please the Master' (meaning God). Then he asked him, 'When will the Messiah come?' Elijah replied, 'Go, and ask him.' 'But where is he?' 'At the gate of Rome.' 'And what is his mark?' 'He sits among the wretched who are laden with sores and wounds; all the others uncover all their wounds, and then bind them all up again, but he uncovers and binds up each one separately, for he thinks, "Lest I should be summoned and be detained."' The R. Joshua went and said to him, 'Peace be with thee, Master and Rabbi.' He replied, 'Peace be with thee, son of Levi.' He said, 'When is the Master coming?' He repliedy 'Today.' Then R.

Joshua returned to Elijah, who said, 'What did he say to you?' He replied, 'Peace be with thee, son of Levi.' Elijah said, 'Then he assured to you and to your father (a place in) the world to come.' The Rabbis said, 'He spoke falsely to me, for he said he would come to-day, and he has not come.' Then Elijah said, 'He meant, "Today, if ye would but hearken to His (God's) voice"'" (Ps. 95:7).

(Sandhedrin, p. 98a)

The idea is further developed by the Jewish philosopher, Judah Halevi, that if <u>all</u> the Jews were to assume their responsibilities for just one day, the power of such an act would overcome the order of the world and usher in the Messiah and the Messianic Age. Naturally, he recognized that this was beyond man!

This chapter concludes with a corrective to Israel's suffering. It is a caution and a warning not to make a cult of suffering.

"Any affliction in which Israel and the Gentiles are partners (meaning that both suffer) is an affliction, but any affliction of Israel by itself is not an affliction."

(Deut. R., Romm 103a)

This does not contradict the philosophy of Jewish history, whereby Israel carries the burden of suffering for the redemption of the world. It is a caution against overdoing suffering. Israel suffers, Israel has suffered. This is imprinted on world-history.

The idea of Israel, The Chosen People, stands at the center of Jewish history. The rabbis accept this but also describe God's choosing of Israel within a universal thought pattern. The other nations were offered the Torah, but Israel was the only one to accept. Saying, in a way, that other nations had the opportunity to possess the Torah, but did not trouble or desire to do so.

"'They encamped in the wilderness' (Ex. 19:2). The Torah was given in public, openly in a free place. For had the Torah been given in the land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: You have no share in it. But now that it was given in the wilderness publicly and openly in a place that is free for all, everyone wishing to accept it could come and accept it."

(Mekilta, Lauterbach, Vol. II, p. 198)

God shopped among the nations when he wanted to give away the Torah. He did not come to Israel first.

"The nations of the world were asked to receive the Law, in order not to give them an excuse for saying, 'Had we been asked, we might have accepted it.' They were asked, but they did not accept it, as it is said, 'The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them' (Deut. 32:2), that is, He reveal Himself to the children of Esau, the wicked, and said to them, 'Will you receive the Law?' They said, 'What is written therein?' He said, 'Thou shalt not do murder.' They said, 'That

is the inheritance which our father left to us, as it is said, "By the sword shalt thou live."' (Gen. 27:40). Then He revealed Himself to the children of Ammon and of Moab, and said to them, 'Will you receive the Law?' They said, 'What is written in it?' He said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' They said, 'We all spring from one adulterer, as it is said, "And the daughters of Lot became with child by their father" (Gen. 19:36); how can we receive the Law?' Then He revealed Himself to the children of Ishmael, and said, 'Will you receive the Law?' They said, 'What is written in it?' He said, 'Thou shalt not steal.' They said, 'Our father was given this blessing, "He will be a wild ass among men, his hand will be against every man" (Gen. 16:12); how can he receive the Law?' But when He came to Israel, they all said with one accord, 'All that the Lord has said, we will do and we will hear' (Exod. 24:7)."

(Mekilta, Lauterbach, Vol. II, p. 234)

The text from another version (Sifre, Friedmann, 142b) continues:

"There was not one nation among all the nations whom God did not visit and knock at their door and speak to, leaving it to those who were willing to come and receive the Torah."

The other peoples had the opportunity to receive the Torah, but they refused. They wanted to continue in their ways and not accept the obligation the Torah would place on them.

The rabbis were quite inventive in their attempts to show that

everyone had an opportunity to receive the Torah.

"God gave the Torah in the third month (Exod. 19:1). Why in this month? Because it is in the Zodiacal division of the Twins, so that the Gentiles should not have an excuse for saying, 'If He offered us the Torah, we would have fulfilled it.' So God said, 'See, I have given the Torah in the Twins, so that Esau, Jacob's twin (note that Jacob was later renamed Israel), may come and learn Torah and become a proselyte.'"

(Tanhuma, Buber edition, p. 38b)

The rabbis never thought that the Jews were perfect people. They had their shares of thieves, adulterers and probably murderers. The rabbis recognized the common bond between all people and that all are human. Thus, it was difficult for them to explain Israel's choice by God. God's love and choice of Israel was arbitrary:

"'We have a little sister' (Cant. 8:8). In the time to come, all the guardian angels of the nations of the world will come and accuse Israel before God, saying, 'Sovereign of the Universe, these worshipped idols and these worshipped idols, these were whoremongers and these were whoremongers, these shed blood and these shed blood. Why do these go down to hell while these do not go down?' God will say to them, '"We have a little sister:" just as a child, whatever it does is not reproved because it is but a child, so however much Israel may be defiled by their iniquities

throughout the year, the Day of Atonement comes and atones for them.'"

(Cant. R., Romm 40a)

So, God favors Israel and shows favor to Israel because it is a child, and like a child may be irresponsible. Therefore the Day of Atonement comes once a year, to cleanse and make the child innocent again.

"In the time to come the guardian angels of the nations will come to accuse Israel before God and they will say: 'King of the Universe, these worshipped idols and these worshipped idols, these acted lewdly, these shed blood and these shed blood. Why then do these go down to Gehinnom (the nether world), while these do not go down?' Then God will answer them saying: 'If that is so, let all the peoples go down with their gods to Gehinnom and so it is written (Micah 4:5), "For let all the peoples walk each one in the name of its god."' Said R. Reuben: 'Were it not written in the Scripture, it would be impossible to say such a thing, namely, "For by fire will God be judged" (Isa. 66:16). It does not say judges (the verb in the present tense) but is judged (the verb is in the passive tense).'"

(Cant. R. p. 40a and Mid. Ps. Buber edition, p. 11a)

This Midrash implies that all peoples, Israel included, will go down to hell with its own particular God. In hell, God will save Israel. The rabbis do not pretend that this is rational, or for

that matter, that there is any rational basis for God's love of Israel. Their conclusion borders on the thought that there is no reason for love.

Choice is greater than love, it implies destiny and purpose. Though an individual Jew may not recognize or accept the destiny and role as God's partner, the choice rests upon Israel as a group. It is there and imposes special burdens and responsibilities. God does not play favorites. He demands that his messenger and partner act the role. And so:

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities."

(Amos 3:2)

CHAPTER VI

What Judaism Means

Philosophers have speculated on the problems of life for many years and in the Midrash, which is Jewish theology, the rabbis present their solutions. These are the solutions abstracted and formulated as ideas in and of themselves. They are the Jewish theory of tragedy, which differs from other academic and pagan viewpoints, the concept of man as God's partner, and an idea of grand Humor.

The idea of man as God's helper and partner in creation leads to two significant developments. The first concerns the future - if man is God's helper and co-creator then the future is wide open. There is no such thing as predestination. The world is a growing world. It is a world in which time is not imagination, but is real. The world is in process and perfection is to come, rather than having been at the beginning and destroyed. The second concerns the give-and-take relationship of man to God - it is a relationship of polarity. There is change and growth of man and God, each needing the other. This further means that life is to be active. There is a doing, and life is not empty and nothing, as preached in Catholic Christianity and Buddhism. Man can do something, but he has to act, to do it!

The final thought is Humor. It is not the comical, witty joke which brings on laughter (the small humor) but it is a perspective, mellowness and peace of mind towards life's confrontations (the grand Humor). It is deep, very deep, and highly treasured. It is the result of deep tragedy.

Tragedy is the undeserved punishment. It is the good man receiving the reward which should go to his opposite, the evil man.

The highest form of tragedy is when the best man suffers the most.

Popular opinion holds that the good are always rewarded and that there is a relationship between leading a good life and happiness. Goodness and integrity, the ingredients of a virtuous life, are rewarded by bliss and happiness. This is the thinking of Job's friends, who insist that Job must have sinned but does not remember his wrongdoing, and now is receiving his just punishment. This opinion is commonly believed and remains even after the facts are examined. It is deeply ingrained and endures though man may know that such is not the case. Punishment may not be a reward for sin.

The view of most traditional religionists is that though suffering may not be punishment for sin, the virtuous life is rewarded in the future, in the life to come. This is also the opinion of many philosophers, who say that God makes an adjustment between deeds and rewards in another world. Thus, morality and order have a base and foundation in the world. Other philosophers argue that sufferings are part of the consciousness of an ultimate world-mind, an Absolute. They are elements in the unfolding of events and are necessary for the experience of a supposed God. The good and pure do not suffer for nothing, but will eventually find an explanation.

The authentic and genuine theory of tragedy rejects this. The hero suffers and by suffering grows in greatness. There is no reward for his suffering. The transfiguration of suffering by the mechanisms of the Absolute is, in reality, an insufficient explanation, because how suffering is transformed is not clear and is an illusion, playing with words. In addition, if suffering is transfigured, it does not help the sufferer and his torture. It does nothing for the sufferer.

In the genuine theory of Tragedy, the tragic hero accepts suffering. This is part of his greatness. He is the celebrity and the center of the growing world. He grows with the world. His reward is to increase in maturity and greatness.

The Jewish theory of tragedy emphasizes man and man's greatness. Man stands by himself. He does not anticipate a reward or relief. Man has greatness within himself and by himself. Judaism's tragic heroes stand courageously. The Suffering Servant (Isaiah, Chapter 53) -- God permits injustice and remains in the background. Job - God is wrong and succeeds by bullying. Akiba - Akiba proclaims God, but God is silent and powerless.

The highest pagan theory of tragedy accepts all the suffering of life because of the wonders of life, provided that the hero is willing to pay such a price. Purpose or plan, however, is lacking. There is no God. The individual is afloat and battling to remain alive. He is adrift in an ocean of Becoming and must eventually face his death. The significant difference, however, in these two high theories of tragedy is that in the Jewish view, although God seems absent and impotent, the heroes declare God. They proclaim that belief in God is a necessity. The heroes say that God exists in a godless world and in that way courageously call Him into being. This is the supreme difference; the heroes give strength to God in a growing and emerging world and thereby add to God's substance. Prometheus, on the other hand, the hero in Greek tragedy, is an atheist; man is a god unto himself, and man exists by and with himself cut off from his very Being.

Both the pagan and the Jewish theories advocate that man be active and refuse to merely exist. In the Pagan opinion, the tragic hero accepts the pain and sufferings of life because of life's marvels,

wonder and beauty. The sufferings will repeat again and again without diminution. The Jewish view, on the other hand, contends that the suffering and tortures of life can be transformed. It is man's purpose to convert them, to diminish them and have them undergo a metamorphosis so that they become something other than what they are.

The injunction to the brave and noble man is "to act out of love and to rejoice in sufferings." Man must accept sufferings but call them precious. They are a sign of God's love. He must save God's image by his own image and cover up for God's impotence. By so doing he declares to all that there is and must be a God. It is by such heroics that God is real and His dominion will flourish. The hero must believe that sufferings will not repeat themselves in the same form and intensity. He must believe that the world is in process and that by his bravery the good is constantly increased. God can and will be made One and the world improved. God works through man, and man and God are emerging together in a world which is not yet finished.

Jewish thinking is time-centered, meaning temporal rather than eternal. The victory and triumph of the good will not just happen. It will only come about by effort expended through time. The creation is unfinished and the future is an open question. The Messianic goal, "On that day the Lord shall be one and His name shall be one" (Zech. 14:9), is yet to be realized. This Biblical verse is part of the daily prayer service, inserted at the end of the Alenu, the Adoration. Its grammatical structure, the use of the future tense, indicates that it is an ideal to be attained whose enactment is so difficult that the Hebrew phrase for the unification of God, yichud hashem, is also a synonym for martyrdom.

The Union Prayer Book paraphrases the Hebrew of the Adoration most beautifully:

"Let us adore the ever-living God, and render praise unto Him who spread out the heavens and established the earth, whose glory is revealed in the heavens above and whose greatness is manifest throughout the world. He is our God; there is none else.

"We bow the head in reverence, and worship the King of kings, the Holy One, praised be He.

"May the time not be distant, O God, when Thy name shall be worshipped in all the earth, when unbelief shall disappear and error be no more. Fervently we pray that the day may come when all men shall invoke Thy name, when corruption and evil shall give way to purity and goodness, when superstition shall no longer enslave the mind, nor idolatry blind the eye, when all who dwell on earth shall know that to Thee alone every knee must bend and every tongue give homage. O may all, created in Thine image, recognize that they are brethren, so that, one in spirit and one in fellowship, they may be forever united before Thee. Then shall Thy kingdom be established on earth and word of Thine ancient seer be The Lord will reign forever and ever.

"On that day the Lord shall be One and His name shall be One."

The next idea, the concept of man as God's partner, each influencing the other, each improving and advancing the other and each existing in a polarity of give and take, is that supreme element of a theology which has hope for the future. There are two pitfalls in religion. One is the completely transcendent God, namely a God that goes beyond the evidence of experience. The second is a humanism which is reliant on itself, establishing man in a godless world alienated from himself. If we are to avoid these two failures, transcendentalism and humanism, we must see the world as the interaction between two powers, man and God, who are the poles of the growing world. In the emerging world they must do something for each other, for either they help each other or they do not need each other.

Prayer can thus become meaningful. It is then the relationship of two powers striving for each other, the alliance between a soul and a great source of strength. They must meet each other. They do meet, for the Book of Psalms is such testimony, and William James's scientific study, Varieties of Religious Experience, is also evidence of such a meeting. "What does God give? Light and support for faith. What does man give? Faith and added power." (Slonimsky, p. 278).

If two powers can help each other, then each is greater than the other. "God is greater as source and giver of light. Man can be greater in what he develops and offers as return gift to God." (Slonimsky, p. 278). This is not a paradox. Examine the evidence: When Abraham demands of God, "That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that so the righteous should be as the wicked; that be far from Thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly" (Gen. 18:25, about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah), he teaches God what justice is. Abraham is better than God. Isaiah's

Suffering Servant is more loving and Job is braver and more truthful. Akiba's suffering is more heroic and more in the image of God than God. These figures enlarge God and give Him new visions. It is through them that God realizes his own potential.

This above thought needs further explanation. It is the concept of a product being greater than that which produced it. With time, this happens in every creation. An effect becomes greater than its cause and not necessarily equal to it. It speaks of a fundamental difference between science and religion. Science operates on the theory that nothing is ever lost or gained. A product can be broken down to its component parts, and its parts into elements and these are never lost or gained. But is there not something lost or gained with every death? Yes, the elements return to their primary form, but what they were before is gone and may not be duplicated. A human being cannot be duplicated. Science cannot reproduce feelings, character and personality. This aspect of religion, the sanctity of human life, can never be washed away.

The world gives birth to saints who are greater than anything else the world has. The saints and brave men give meaning to the world. They stand erect and spark the atmosphere around them. How do you know! When you are touched by one, you know! You immediately sense the meaning and purpose which they give to life and therefore to those around them. But the world, having given birth to them, also cannot sustain them and they perish.

Man stands at the crossroads. It is his job to act. It is his job to say that the world is not simply the eternal recurrence of pain and beauty while he stands by without hope. The world is alive and

growing. There is a great consciousness in which we all participate and which can be enriched by its own spirits. The world can be changed by the suffering heroes who appear forgotten. Man has to act! God must become more than the creative act and this is man's task, to bring the Shechinah back to earth.

How does man restore the Shechinah? Man must be an example of God's most eminent and exalted possibilities. Man makes God real and uplifts the world. God and man then become partners, lovers and mutual comforters. They forgive each other. God must forgive man his failings and man must forgive God for His share and lack of power in overcoming the suffering of his saintly messengers.

This implies two thoughts. First, that life is not a drama on a stage. It must and does have purpose. Second, that life is not empty and nothing (the view of Buddhism and Catholic Christianity), but that there is wonder, thrill and meaning in living. Life is the process of growth, which is creation. Creation is always something new. Life is always new and has substance and weight. Life's hero says, "Go and do," not, "Give up and die."

We have presented an exalted picture of the Jew. The Jew, by God's arbitrary choosing, is the center of world history. The catalyst to goodness and process by which the world endures. The Jew saw this in perspective. He saw it with Humor, that is, Humor with a capital H, not the small joke-filled humor but Humor which wonders why should God even choose the Jew. It is grand Humor, which sees the small side of everything big. It is the acceptance, the grand acceptance of life's turmoil, with a smile, with grand Humor. The Jew carries his burden. "How odd of God to choose the Jews!"

CHAPTER VII

Practicalities and the Messiah

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Practicalities and the Messiah

The crowning portion of our study of rabbinic literature is the idea of the Messiah. This is the summit of religious thinking and is supported by the understanding that all men are one and that they have a future.

Before we climb to the apex of our study, the Messiah, let us consider certain subjects of rabbinic thought on practical aspects of living.

All life is motivated by desire. The things a man craves, the wealth and possessions he wants, this is representative of the way of the world. Everyone desires, and without this motivation life would be extinguished. Practically all religions consider desire evil because without it, would man be tempted into sin? The rabbis, however, take a healthier view. They do not believe that desire is necessarily, nor that man was born, evil. They do not want to extinguish desire, for if desire is quenched life is annihilated.

The rabbis call desire the yetzer. Most scholars translate this word as inclination. The church calls it lust. In any case, the rabbis do not consider the yetzer evil. They say that there is a good yetzer and a bad yetzer, and even the bad yetzer (which some scholars translate, the evil inclination) is good, for without the bad yetzer life could not exist.

The rabbis comment on the phrase, "Behold it was very good" (Gen.

1:31) from the story of creation and derive a salient lesson.

> "'Behold, it was very good' (Gen. 1:31). R. Nahman b. Samuel said: This is the evil yetzer. But is the evil yetzer very good? Yes, for if it were not for the evil yetzer, man would not build a house, or take a wife, or beget a child, or engage in business, as it says, 'All labor and all excelling in work, that is a man's rivalry with his neighbor' (Eccl. 4:4)."
>
> (Gen. R., Romm, p. 24b)

Desire leads to love, and love leads to marriage. The rabbis were conscious of the special devotion which man and wife have for each other and the bonds of respect which love produces between children and family. The honor given to one's parents was paramount.

> "The Rabbis say: 'Three combine in the making of men: God and father and mother. If men honor their father and mother, God says, "I reckon it to them as if I dwelt among them, and as if they honored me."'"
>
> (Kiddushin, p. 30b)

The honor due a wife was most important.

> "Rab said: 'Be careful not to hurt your wife, because woman is prone to tears and sensitive to wrong.' R. Helbo said: 'Be careful about the honor of your wife, for blessing enters the house only because of the wife.'"

The influence of a good wife was considered instrumental in helping a husband.

"There was once a pious man who was married to a pious woman, and they had no children. They said, 'We are no profit to God.' So they divorced one another. The man went and married a bad woman, and she made him bad; the woman went and married a bad man, and she made him good. So all depends upon the woman."

(Genesis R., Bereshis, 17:7)

The love of children was great. It was the duty of man and wife to have children. The statements about children in the Midrash testify to their special status.

"'They that are planted in the house of the Lord' (Ps. 92:13). R. Hana b. Pazzi said: 'While they are yet saplings, they are in the house of the Lord; these are the little children who are in school'"

(Numbers R. 3:1)

Care and training of children are an obligation. One of the reasons Jerusalem was destroyed was:

"R. Hamnuna said: 'Jerusalem was destroyed only because the children did not attend school, and loitered in the streets.'"

(Shabbat, p. 119b)

The rabbis recognized the desires of man. They recognized that everyone, even they, had a tendency to lust. They did, however, extend caution:

"We find that to every sin God is long-suffering, except to the sin of unchastity. R. Azariah said:

'All things can God overlook save lewdness.'"

(Lev. R., Ahare Mot, 23:9)

Education is of great concern to any group wanting to keep its individuality and character. Education is concern for the future and the future is a concern for children. It is a high respect for the past and a hope to make the future even greater. Education and self-creation, which it becomes, combine together as Judaism's distinctive sign.

The Torah was awarded not as a reward for past greatness, but for the guarantee of future possibilities.

"When Israel stood to receive the Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: 'I am giving you my Torah, bring me good guarantors that you will guard it.' They said: 'Our fathers are our guarantors.' The Holy One, blessed be He said to them: 'Your fathers are unacceptable to me...Yet bring me good guarantors and I shall give it to you.'....They said: 'Master of the Universe, our prophets are our guarantors.' He said to them: 'The prophets are unacceptable to me.... Yet bring me good guarantors and I shall give it to you.' They said: 'Behold, our children are our guarantors.' 'For their sake I give the Torah to you,' as is written, 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast Thou founded strength' (Ps. 8:3)."

(Cant. R., Romm, p. 7a)

Learning Torah was incomplete. It was necessary for actions to be based on this learning. The Midrash speaks:

> "'Ye shall diligently guard these commandments to do them' (Deut. 6:17; 11:22). Lest a man might suppose, if he guard the words of the Law, he can sit quiet and need not do them, it says: 'To do them.' If a man learns the words of the Torah, he has fulfilled one command, if he learns and guards them, he has fulfilled two; if he learns and guards and does them, there is no one greater than he."
>
> (Sifre Deut. p. 84b)

The rabbis examined life honestly. They did not sugar coat their hopes and desires. They accepted the fact that though all men are born equal spiritually, some are born more intelligent than others, some better looking, and some more gifted. The Midrash makes this point clearly. In commenting on the Hebrew words tohu and vohu (they are in the second verse of the first chapter of Genesis), which are usually translated "unformed" and "void," the Midrash translates them "bewildered" and "astonished." The rabbis derive an important and far-reaching lesson from this translation.

> "R. Abbahu said: 'This may be compared to a king who bought two slaves on the same bill of sale and at the same price. One he ordered to be supported at the public expense, while the other he ordered to toil for his bread. The latter sat bewildered and astonished: 'Both of us were bought at the same price,'

> exclaimed he, 'yet he is supported from the treasury whilst I have to gain my bread by my toil!' Thus the earth sat bewildered and astonished saying, 'The celestial beings and the terrestrial ones were created at the same time: yet the celestial beings are fed by the radiance of the Shechinah, whereas the terrestrial beings, if they do not toil do not eat. Strange it is indeed!
>
> The Midrash continues, further emphasizing the lesson:
>
> "R. Judah b. R. Simon said: Compare this to a king who bought two bondmaids, both on the same bill of sale and at the same price. One he commanded not to stir from the palace, while for the other he decreed banishment. The latter sat bewildered and astonished. 'Both of us were bought on the same bill of sale and at the same price,' she exclaimed, 'yet she does not stir from the palace while against me he has decreed banishment. How amazing!' Thus the earth sat bewildered and astonished saying, 'The celestial and the terrestrial beings were created at the same time: why do the former live forever whereas the latter have to die?' Hence, 'And the earth was tohu and vohu,' (bewildered and astonished)."
>
> (Gen. R., 2:1)

It is difficult to question our fortune. There are few answers, and if there were, what could we do about it? The only thing we can do is to act and live with the endowments we possess. This is the answer of the Midrash. Do not sit "bewildered and astonished," every one can have something to complain about. The thing to do is to live in spite of limitations.

Another thought of the rabbis is that mistakes are not forgiven. All is recorded and cited, nothing is forgotten. The idea is found in the sayings of the Fathers.

> "Everything is given on pledge, and a net is spread for all the living: the shop is open; and the dealer gives credit; and the ledger lies open; and the hand writes; and whosoever wishes to borrow may come and borrow; but the collectors regularly make their daily round; and exact payment from man, whether he be content or not; and they have that whereon they can rely in their demand; and the judgment is a judgment of truth; and everything is prepared for the feast."
>
> (Sayings of the Fathers 3:20)

The symbols here stand out clearly. Life is a banking transaction, almost a savings account. Only what is deposited can be withdrawn. In the end, man can add up his deposits and see whether he has enough for the final judgment. The judgment is a true judgment for the account books are open for all to check. But God is gracious. He is long-suffering before he makes his collection, and when he begins to collect he takes a long time in collecting. (This thought is found in the Pesikta de Rav Kahana, p. 161b.)

Man is caught. Not only will God collect, but He is judge, prosecutor, expert and witness. The cards are stacked and the dice are loaded. How can man get a fair trial? The situation is grim. Can the world be run by strict justice alone? The Midrash says, if such is the case it could not endure.

> "'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' (Gen. 18:25). R. Levi said: Abraham said to God, 'If thou desirest to maintain the world, strict justice is impossible; and if thou desirest strict justice, then the world cannot endure. Thou canst not hold the cord at both ends at once. Thou desirest the world, and thou desirest justice. Take one or the other. Unless thou art a little indulgent, the world cannot endure.'"
>
> (Gen. R., Romm, p. 79b)

The world cannot endure on strict justice. The Midrash teaches that justice must be tempered with mercy and mercy must be tempered with justice. This is the way of the world. This is how life is lived every day.

What about religion and God's law? Should God be angry when His people have forsaken the Law, or should he temper his wrath? The Midrash replies by interpreting the verse, "They have deserted me and have not kept my Law" (Jer. 16:11).

> "God says, 'Would that they had deserted me, and kept my Law, for if they had occupied themselves with the Law, the leaven which is in its practice would have brought them back to me.' That is why R. Huna said: 'Study the Law, even not for its own sake, for through being occupied with the Law, even not for its own sake, you will come to fulfill it for its own sake.'"
>
> (Pesikat Kahana 121a)

This is invariably true. "Ethics inevitably lead in the end to religious assumptions: the fate of the good, and of the good man, can never content itself with the defeats this life offers. It demands conservation; it has to have the faith that the best things are also the most eternal. And the dialectic (i.e., the continuous conversation) which subsists between the good and the religious is of deep concern to us all and needs to be understood. A man can be said to believe in God only insofar as it is an inference from his behavior, and then his saying so is unimportant. He can say he believes in God and really be an unbeliever and denier by his life. He can in rare cases say he does not believe in God and still have his life belie the denial; there have been great saints who were indifferent to professing God, such were men like Shelley and Eugene Debs and John Stuart Mill and others who were rooted in the divine no matter what they said. The last mentioned is particularly interesting because he is a confirmation of the text in the Midrash. His posthumous "Three Essays on Religion" land in religious belief after a lifetime of agnosticism and freethinking, because his profound interest in the good forced him into religious assumptions, and that is a phenomenon of utmost interest to all students of this question." (Slonimsky, pages 284-5).

We now come to the Messiah. This is the height of Jewish thought and stands by itself. The prophets raised religion from the particular to the universal, from the tribal ritual to justice and goodness for all. The prophets made religion the concern for all men, and thus the concept of the unity of all man. The Messiah is the thought which crowns these ideas. At first, the Messiah was to be the redeemer of

Israel, but later he develops as the savior and redeemer of the world. He ushers in a reign of peace and goodwill for all and brings on the Kingdom of God on earth.

The Messiah is the future. This is the sharp cleavage between Christianity and Judaism. In Christianity, the Messiah has come. In Judaism, the Messiah has yet to arrive. Christianity condemns itself by looking to the past. Judaism looks to the future.

In the rabbinic literature, what does the Messianic Age promise? Almost everything - the practical and the plausible and the impracticable and the improbable. It was natural for the rabbis to indulge in fantasy, but even though their speculations sometimes bordered on the fantastic, sobriety prevails even then. In the Talmud, Mar Samuel says:

"There is no difference between the present world
and the days of the Messiah except the oppression
by the great kingdoms alone."

(Berokot, p. 34b)

Maimonides, who lived after the period we are considering, nonetheless, summarized the views of the rabbis. He says that in the Messianic Age there will be no change in the way nature operates. The world will continue in its usual way. However, there will be no hunger, war, envy or hatred, and in their place the nations will have a surplus, the economy of all countries will be so rich that man will have the opportunity and leisure to devote himself to the study of religion (in Hilkot Melakim 12:1,2 and 4).

The Agada, permitting itself free imagination, comments on the Messianic Age, yet it contains feasible goals.

"Ten things will the Holy One, blessed be He, renew in
the world to come:

(1) He will illumine the world; as it is said, 'The sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light' (Isa. 40:19). Is, then, man able to gaze upon the Holy One blessed be He? But what will He do to the sun? He will illumine it with forty-nine times greater brilliance; as it is said, 'The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold the light of seven days' (Isa. 30:26). Even when a person is ill, the Holy One, blessed be He, will order the sun to bring him healing; as it is said, 'Unto you that fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings' (Mal. 3:30).

(2) He will cause running water to issue from Jerusalem, and whoever has an ailment will find healing there; as it is said, 'Every thing shall live whithersoever the river cometh' (Ezek. 47:9).

(3) He will cause trees to produce their fruit every month and all persons will eat of them and be healed; as it is said, 'It shall bring forth new fruit every month....and the fruit thereof shall be for food, and the leaf thereof for healing' (Ezek. 47:12).

(4) All ruined cities will be rebuilt and no waste place will remain in the world. Even Sodom and Gomorrah will be rebuilt....as it is said, 'Thy sisters Sodom and her daughters shall return to their former estate' (Ezek. 16:55).

(5) He will rebuild Jerusalem with sapphires; as it is said, 'I will lay thy foundations with sapphires' (Isa. 54:11) and 'I will make thy pinnacles of rubies' (Isa. 54:12), and those stones will shine like the sun so that idolators will come and look upon the glory of Israel, as it is said, 'Nations shall walk by thy light' (Isa. 60:3).

(6) 'The cow and the bear shall feed together' (Isa. 11:7).

(7) He will assemble all beasts, birds and reptiles, and make a covenant between them and all Israel; as it is said, 'In that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field' (Hos. 2:18).

(8) Weeping and wailing will cease in the world; as it if said, 'The voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her' (Isa. 65:19).

(9) Death will cease in the world; as it is said, 'He hath swallowed up death for ever' (Isa. 25:8).

(10) There will be no more sighing, groaning, or anguish, but all will be happy; as it is said, 'The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come with singing to Zion' (Isa. 35:10).

(Exodus R., Romm, p. 29b)

The Midrash is interesting because it depicts the hopes of a people. First let us mention the more feasible of these ten hopes. The first three deal with healing. Thus there will be a greater sun, healing waters and healing fruits. The fourth refers to the rebuilding of waste cities and includes Sodom and Gomorrah. The eighth, as does

the tenth, promises that there will be no more sighing, groaning, weeping and wailing, because the causes of such suffering will be lacking. Therefore, sickness, poverty, hatred and war will be abolished. These are six of the more feasible hopes, which we strive toward today.

The fifth hope, the rebuilding of Jerusalem as the glory of the world, is a restating of the more spiritual thought, "And nations shall walk by thy light" (Isa. 60:3). This is a physical description of a spiritual goal.

The sixth aspiration advocates peace in the animal world, and the seventh a covenant between Israel and the animal world. This is a pious hope. It is an enlargement of the desire for peace in the world of humans and a way of saying that the human world at war is no better than the animal world. Both are worlds where blood has been shed unnecessarily. So, let the peace of the human world permeate the animal world also. It is an interesting and touching wish.

The ninth hope, the desire to abolish death, is most interesting. The question may be asked, what would life be like in a world without death? How would the world sustain itself? What would happen to the gigantic population? Perhaps physical death is not suggested here, but the abolition of that which destroys the good, of that which destroys heroism, of that which destroys efforts for a better world, of that which destroys love. Evil in our mythology is synonymous with death. Therefore the ninth hope is the wish that evil be swallowed up forever.

The Messianic Age will be glorious but when will it come? The Messianic Age will come when man is ready, worthy and able to bring it on. A striking picture in the Midrash to the Book of Psalms is that of the angels coming to God and asking when the New Year will come (meaning the Messianic Age). God answers that man has it in his power

to usher in the New Year because man has it in his power to halt bloodshed, poverty, weeping and groaning.

The rabbis, however, forbid calculating the arrival of The Messiah. They understood the inherent dangers:

> "Cursed be they who calculate 'The End,' because they argue that since 'The End' has arrived and the Messiah has not come, he never will come; but wait for him, as it is said, 'Though it tarry, wait for it' (Hab. 2:3)."
>
> (Sanhedrin p. 97b)

The rabbis knew that many dates had been set for The Messiah's coming. The dates came but the Messiah did not. Therefore, they legislated against such superstition and quoted the prophet Habakkuk, who preached that Israel must wait for the Messiah no matter how long he takes.

In addition to good conduct bringing on the Messianic Age there was the second condition of suffering. When the degree and quantity of suffering is fulfilled, then the Messiah will come. It is to Israel's credit, however, that the rabbis accepted the burden of Israel's suffering as free atonement for the world.

The last distinction of the Messianic Age will be that man will again speak one language.

> "When God confused the speech of the builders of the Tower of Babel, He said, 'In this world, by reason of the evil inclination, my creatures are at variance; they are divided into seventy tongues. But in the world to come (i.e., the Messianic Age)

they will all be equal. All with one accord will call upon my name and serve me, as it says, "For then will I restore to the nations one pure tongue that they may call, all of them, upon the name of the Lord and serve Him unanimously"' (Zeph. 3:9)."

(Tanhuma, Buber edition, p. 28b)

Thus, the Messianic Age will mark the unity of mankind. There will no longer be seventy tongues, each warring for prominence, but there will exist "one pure language." This will be the seal of man's unity and the enactment of the prophetic utterance, "On that day, the Lord shall be One and His name shall be One" (Zech. 14:9).

A CONCLUSION

A CONCLUSION

The world is growing. It is young in years. The future is open and awaits the contributions of those who will mold it. Though the individual dies, his work lives in the nation which contains it. The nation does not die, but may continue to influence the future and build towards the crowning triumph of the good.

It is difficult for a nation to endure. The world has seen peoples come and go, and when they have survived their crisis, they usually become dilapidated, wasted, lifeless and inert. India and old China are testimony to this. But a people can live and the Jewish prayer, "Renew our days as of old," is the belief that this is so.

Professor Henry Slonimsky, to whom I am deeply indebted and who expresses, better than anyone else, the underlying thought of the rabbinic literature, sums up the task facing the Jewish people.

> "A tragic destiny has served to keep the Jewish people lean and alert. It has been bad for the nerves but good for the soul. But there are constant imminent dangers; as of today, urbanization, over-sophistication, almost complete absorption into a bourgeoisie, loss of self-respect, loss of belief, and loss of the tragic-heroic sense of destiny. These are dangers which in the case of any other people would be felt as decisive, radical, insuperable. But the Jewish people has always lived in an atmosphere of extremes and not by rules but by exceptions. The incidence of decimation and attrition has been enormous throughout its history; it is the descendant of the minority of minorities; it has always

felt its centre of gravity to reside in a 'remnant,' in an ideal Israel which, like the bird Phoenix, has risen from its own ashes. Heroic measures are needed, but heroic measures will be found by the new great Jewry of this country on which the fate of future Judaism so largely depends.

"The heroic measure consists in nothing short of a renewal of life, the rejuvenation of the old life, and we can proceed to specify its elements. First, the warmth of emotion in which alone the religious sentiment can find refuge and love; and religion is one name for that renewal of life. Mythology is another name for it: a high mythology, a high sense of mission, a cult of the Jewish people, like the cult of Jesus in the Christian religion, as incentive to further greatness because of the greatness already given; further, the emotions which feed the sense of calling and distinction, such as tragic protagonism in a heroic drama. Jews need such a climate of the mind to be wooed back to their faith, to feel pride in it and to spearhead it into the future. We need something to believe and love, a great mythos about ourselves, such as we have had since God spoke to Abraham, and such as has continued through Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones' coming to life and Yehuda Halevi's parable of the dying seed transforming the world's soil and mud into a glorious tree: a credible and viable mythos capable of being embraced and loved. I quote in praise of mythos a thinker

and poet who has meditated on a similar problem for his own people.

"'By myth I do not mean a fiction,' says William Butler Yeats, 'but one of those statements our nature is compelled to make and employ as a truth though there cannot be sufficient evidence....Myth is not a rudimentary form superseded by reflection. Belief is the spring of all action; we assent to the conclusions of reflection but believe what myth presents; belief is love, and the concrete alone is loved; nor is it true that myth has no purpose but to bring round some discovery of a principle or a fact. The saint may touch through myth the utmost reach of human faculty and pass not to reflection but to unity with the source of his being.' (Wheels and Butterflies, N.Y. 1935, pp. 91, 121)."

(Henry Slonimsky, pages 289-90)

APPENDIX

Section A

Halakah or Agada?

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Halakah or Agada?

The rabbis developed both Agada and Halakah. Agada and Halakah represent the two emphases within Judaism. Agada is "faith," and the Halakah is the law which governed every aspect of living and enumerated the deeds which had to be done. Halakah is the "works" alongside the "faith" from which it springs.

The history of Judaism can be described as the tension between Agada and Halakah. There is need for both, and one of the important problems which constantly repeats itself is the balancing of these two elements. In the Bible (the Hebrew Bible, of course), both strains, Agada and Halakah, are equally maintained. The Prophets' writings and the Hagiographa represent Agada. The codes of the Pentateuch are the Halakah.

The dynamic balance between the prophetic and the legal in the Hebrew Bible was maintained when the rabbis created the Torah reading cycle. The weekly selection of the Torah and its accompanying Haftorah (from the Prophets) is selected not only on the basis of similarity of subject, but to demonstrate the contrast between the need for law and the need for spirit. If the Torah portion is a description of ritual sacrifices, the Haftorah will be the denouncing of those whose sacrifices are unaccompanied by righteous living. Thus, the balance between "faith" and "works," Agada and Halakah, is written into the very fabric of Judaism.

As part of the natural order, this is a dynamic balance. When law solidifies, it dissolves into spirit, the excess of spirit produces law.

Hasidism, a form of joyous pietism, which began in the eighteenth century, was a reaction to the over-emphasis of Halakah. The Hasidim proclaimed that the intense study of legal codes and rabbinic pilpulism did not serve God. In the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism was a rejection of dry Halakah as the vehicle which supported a true and living faith. Judaism demonstrates this dynamic balance between "faith" and "works."

Though a legal code eventually hardens and its adherents lack true reverence and devotion, direction and law are necessary. How can an individual show the outward sign of his inner feelings? "The most glorious spirit in the world will evaporate into thin air and even into self-righteous gush, if not given honesty and reality by a hard discipline of doing and behavior, of observance and performance. This is a basic matter of physiology and psychology. You cannot have a living organism without a skeletal framework, or a building without a scaffolding, and you cannot have a pure life of the spirit without issuance into hands and legs, without articulation and organization of the medium in which it is to work. That medium is the body and time." (Slonimsky, p. 240).

It is difficult to succeed, if not generally impossible, without hard work. The practice of medicine without the foundation of medical schools and its study and training is questionable. The achievement of adulthood means that the individual has gone through a cycle of growth and learned how to provide for himself. Any goal implies discipline and work. So, too, with the spirit of Judaism, Agada. To have great thoughts and noble ideas it is necessary to merit them. It is necessary to follow through, not by the mouthing of words but, by actions which support them. Grandiose statements mean nothing unless there is a body

to enact them. Spirit must have a body in which to dwell. A body without spirit is like volatile gas, taking the size and form of its container.

What is the ideal balance between Halakah and Agada? Is it possible to toss away the Halakah and live with Agada only? Jesus was a Halachic Jew, but Paul contended that the "moral law" is of no use or obligation. Faith alone, he said, is necessary for salvation. Could such a grand concept work or did the church itself fall back upon "works" which must support faith? The famous statements by Jesus with regard to the Sabbath are of interest. He claimed, quoting earlier Jewish law, that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Jesus, however, could not do away with the Sabbath. He made use of the day. He preached and worshipped on the Sabbath and himself emphasized a need for law. Paul claimed that a man truly "in Christ" could not sin. Although the statement is appealing, it is meaningless. Could anyone by merely believing in Christ not sin? Is not sin, in some form or other, a part of our very lives? The Christian claim of doing away with the law is mockery.

In A Jewish Understanding of the New Testament, by Samuel Sandmel, there is clear evidence for the need for law.

> "The urgent need for some regulation was due not only to a prevalent diversity, but also to the logical circumstance that the abolition of the Law of Moses, as urged by Paul, could seem to imply the complete absence of any regulation. Though the Pauline doctrine of liberty implied that proper attitude would yield proper conduct, some even in Paul's own day interpreted liberty to mean that there was in conduct no issue of

good or bad. Both in Paul's time and in later days such libertines were a vexing problem to the church.

> "The dilemma before the church was that libertinism was increasingly more intolerable, yet a revalidation of the Law of Moses was no longer possible -- indeed, not at all desirable. One way out of this dilemma was taken by the Epistle of James; it accepted the Pauline premise of the primacy of faith, but insisted that overt conduct ("works") was important, too, for salvation. Although the Epistle thereby pointed to conduct as a somewhat relevant norm, it fell short of what to Christians would have been the pitfall of re-establishing the Law of Moses.
>
> "A similar but more far-reaching way out of the dilemma is the substance of the Gospel According to Matthew. Beyond the position taken by James, Matthew was not content that works should be only a random Christian criterion. He introduced something quite new and for its time a significant landmark: church law. This he accomplished by portraying Jesus as a lawgiver who provided a new manual of regulations for believers. The new Law of Christ was not the same as the old Law of Moses; Jesus was a newer and greater lawgiver who laid down a better and more valid law which displaced and supplanted the Law of Moses."
>
> (pages 144-5).

It is impossible to live without Halakah. It is important to understand that one need not abolish law to have spirit. Law and spirit, Halakah and Agada, both need and sustain each other. Reform Judaism and its emphasis on the spirit (Agada) and silence on the law, must face the problem. Can Judaism be reduced to a few pithy sayings, which do not cause a single difference in the lives of those who mouth them? The basis of all Judaism has to be an involvement with Halakah, a sense of discipline, and the serious question facing all of us is, "How much?"

The need to interpret and eliminate Halakah goes back to the Bible. Jeremiah, one of our great prophets, decries the popular emphasis on circumcision and advocates a more spiritual attitude:

"Circumscise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, Ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem;

(Jer. 4:4)

"Behold, the days come saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah....I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart I will write it...."

(Jer. 31:31-33)

The Book of Deuteronomy restates the law:

"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart...."

(Deut. 10:16)

And yet, the ceremony of circumcision has persisted. Which of the two demands shall we as moderns follow, the circumcision of the heart or the circumcision of the flesh?

Here is the case in point. Should not the circumcision of the heart be the distant goal for all good and brave men? However, should

the circumcision of the flesh be eliminated? Will the reminder of the need for a world where all have written the law of God on their "inward parts" be forgotten eventually? The rabbis' interpretation of the ritual of circumcision is not a barbaric act but the sign of a covenant that God sealed with a continuing stream of chosen people, who are working for the advent of a new order for all men.

Halakah does not eliminate Agada, nor does Agada eliminate Halakah. On the surface they appear mutually exclusive, but they are both equal segments of Judaism's foundation. It may be compared to mature love. The mature individual understands that the love for his wife, children and parents form an integral whole. One does not exclude the other. So with Halakah and Agada. They form a profound, integral whole. The question before us is, if there can be no true Judaism without Halakah, then how much Halakah should there be?

APPENDIX

Section B

APPENDIX

Section B

The adaptation of Judaism to changing times necessitated Biblical interpretation. The Roman capture of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple (on the ninth day of the month of Av in the year 70 C. E.), in addition to the growth from an agricultural to an urban society, led to the creation of a vast body of rabbinic literature. This vast body of rabbinic literature is the interpretation of the "Torah."

The rabbis interpreted the Torah. The customary translation for Torah is Law. A better translation is "doctrine" or "teaching." Although Torah is technically the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses, it represents all of the Bible, just as today it may connote all of sacred Jewish learning.

The Torah was called the "Written Law" and according to Jewish tradition, it had been written down by Moses at Mount Sinai. The body of law which developed from the interpretation of the Torah was called the "Oral Law." It was not written down but taught by word of mouth, from one generation to another, from teacher to student. By this method, the Oral Law remained flexible and constantly changed to meet new demands.

The Oral Law grew so large and complex that its study became highly specialized. The men who were qualified to interpret the texts of Bible and expound the Oral Law were first called Tannaim (teachers). This is the name given to rabbis before the Oral Law was finally codified and became the basis of the Mishnah.

The Mishnah was codified (that is, written down as law) around

the year 200 C. E. by Rabbi Judah the Prince. He was the authority and leader of Jewish community in Palestine until his death, approximately 220 C. E. He is called Rabbi Judah the Prince, because the office he occupied was that of Nasi, which means prince or patriarch.

The Mishnah is divided into six main divisions or orders. They are: (1) Zeraim (seeds) - laws concerning agricultural practice and tithes, including regulations on the liturgy; (2) Moed (season) - laws concerning the Sabbath, festivals, and fasts; (3) Nashim (women) - laws concerning marriage and divorce; (4) Nezikin (torts) - laws concerning real estate, injury to the person, inheritance, court procedure and testimony and the Sayings of the Fathers, the maxims of the Tannaim; (5) Kodashim (sanctities) - laws concerning offerings and ritual in the Temple and (6) Teharoth (purities) - laws concerning defilement and its absolution. The six orders are further divided into 524 chapters. The Mishnah records the majority opinion which is the official law, and the opposing views. By so doing, the Mishnah did not fix the law, but stimulated its study and further research.

The Mishnah was the official law book. It was discussed and interpreted in two academies, one in Babylonia and the other in Palestine. The members of these academies, called Amoraim (speakers, expounders) commented and enlarged the Mishnah. Their discussions were recorded in what is now called the Gemara. The Gemara combines with the Mishnah to form the Talmud. We have two collections of proceedings, one from Babylonia (which is the larger and goes into greater detail), and one from Palestine; they are the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud.

The Talmud cannot be considered a literary work in our sense of the word. It followed the system of the Mishnah but contained many

digressions. A member might illustrate his point with a story or digress from the subject at hand to medicine, astronomy, zoology, history or legend. All this is recorded faithfully in the Talmud.

In addition to the Talmud, there are older collections of legal material. The Mekilta is a commentary on the legal portions of Exodus. The Sifra is a commentary on Leviticus and the Sifre (pronounced sifray) is a commentary on the legal portions of Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The subject matter of rabbinic literature is thus divided into Halakah (law) and Agada (the non-legal material). We have observed what Agada or Midrash is in the main portion of this book. It was the exposition of a Biblical text, but was the reflection of the moral, ethical and religious conversations of the rabbis.

There are great collections of Agada or Midrash. The most important is the Midrash Rabbah (the Great Midrash). It is a commentary on the Pentateuch, and the Five Scrolls. The statements which went into the Midrash Rabbah were compiled during the fifth and twelfth centuries, and some scholars assign to it an even older date. Midrash Tanhuma is a notable collection of midrashim on the Pentateuch, believed to have been put together by a Palestinian rabbi named Tanhuma who lived in the last half of the fourth century. Another collection is the Pesikta de Rav Kahana of the sixth century, which was read on the festivals and special Sabbaths, and the Midrash on the Psalms which appeared recently in English translation.

This is but a short discussion of the rabbinic literature. The student is suggested to read the Introduction to "Everyman's Talmud" by the Rev. Dr. A. Cohen. A fuller historical background and discussion of rabbinic literature is presented there.

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