

THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE-JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION
New York School

"THE DOCTRINE OF MAN IN BERESHITH RABBAH"

By Harold Silver

Mr. Harold Silver's thesis entitled "The Doctrine of Man in Bereshith Rabbah" consists of an introduction on the general character of the Midrash, followed by three chapters dealing with the views held by the Rabbis, first, on the inner nature of man, secondly, with the meaning of man's freedom, and thirdly with the prototype of the ideal man as embodied in Abraham.

Reduced to clear statement the first chapter expounds the Rabbinic doctrine of the Yetzer Ra as not evil but on the contrary as the driving force in man, -- in modern language as the libido or life-force which needs to be channelled in the right direction but without which we cannot live.

The second chapter deals with the rabbinic conception of man's freedom, and amidst considerable homiletic material sets forth the great doctrine of man as a genuine originative source alongside of and under God, according to the maxim.

If the author would consent at some later date to re-work the same material from a more detached and steady point of view, he would, I think, furnish a genuine contribution to this important subject.

The thesis has been done with great zeal and thoroughness, and I suggest the mark of B+.

Dr. Henry Slonimsky

Feb. 1951

THE DOCTRINE OF MAN

IN

BERESHIT RABBAH

by Harold Silver

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Rabbi and Master of Hebrew Letters**

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INTRODUCTION

OUR MAIN TEXT - BERESHIT RABBAH

? noteworthy embodiment (or exemplification)
A SINGULAR EXEMPLAR OF MIDRASH HAGGADAH.

ISRAEL'S REWARDING "SEARCH" OF ITS SCRIPTURE

INTRODUCTION

I

The technical term MIDRASH HAGGADAH, as is well known to students of Judaism, refers to the monumental "search" of our ancient Rabbis which they directed to the ancient verses of our Torah. Prompted by their people's religious-ethical genius, a rich share of which they were heir to, driven by their dynamic preoccupation with the moral improvement of their people, for which that great spiritual gadfly was responsible, inspired by their unshakable conviction that in the Holy Writ of God is contained, either on the surface or under the layers of Biblical Writ, infinite ennobling rules of conduct for the guidance of men and women of all generations, and aided by their ingenious hermeneutic (exegetic) rules for that fruitful interpretation of the Biblical verse, - for all of these provocative reasons our ancient Rabbis proceeded, assiduously and lovingly, to make that historic "search" of their Scriptures which resulted in that monumental literature of religious and moral edification, traditionally known as MIDRASH OR HAGGADAH. The technical process by which this unique moralistic literature was arrived at is known as MIDRASH HAGGADAH, to distinguish it from MIDRASH HALAKAH, a similar, but somewhat different, process, by which our ancient masters of the HALAKAH (LAW) attempted to deduce from Scripture a new law, to find authority for an established but unwritten tradition, or to modify or nullify old outworn laws.

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(811)

The term MIDRASH derives from DARASH, to search, investigate, expound, interpret particularly the Scriptures. The term HAGGADAH (הגדה), derives from the verb HIGGID (הגיד), meaning to report, to explain, to narrate. While the verb HIGGID in our Rabbinic literature sometimes introduces halakic (legal) explanation, the noun HAGGADAH is used only in contradistinction to HALAKAH, and means a tale, a narrative, an explanation, a homily. HAGGADAH stands for, as the term MIDRASH has in time come to stand for, the whole content of the non-legal part of the old Rabbinic literature, which is now found interspersed in our various Talmudic sources and in the TARGUMIM of the Bible, and is more copiously gathered into our many special Midrashic compilations, such as our own chosen text of this study, BERESHIT RABBAH, or ⁱⁿ the other nine collections known as MIDRASH RABBAH, of which the former is first in order of this great collection. When the two terms MIDRASH HAGGADAH are used jointly, it applies, as was above indicated, to the process by which our Rabbis made their monumental "search" of the Scriptures in order to find therein interpretations, illuminations, or explanations in a moralizing or edifying manner.

"If thou wishest to know Him at whose word the world came into being," the old Masters of the Haggadah affirmed, "then learn the HAGGADAH, for through it thou shalt know

*the verb
tells us
teachings*

much more

e.g.

*"theology",
philosophy*

necessity

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the Holy One, praised be He, and follow His ways." (Sifre to Deut. 9.22)

In this arresting sentence, one may immediately sense the simple and lofty purpose of our entire Midrashic literature.

Theodor, a modern authority on the Midrash, in his article (a) on MIDRASH HAGGADAH, cites in connection with this arresting sentence on the HAGGADAH an oft-quoted passage of Zunz, "the Master of Midrashic Study", and observes that the opening words of Zunz's passage which we cite below, are really a paraphrase of the high praise of the HAGGADAH by the Masters of the HAGGADAH themselves:

"The HAGGADAH, which is intended to bring heaven down to the congregation, and also to lift man up to heaven, appears in this office both as the glorification of God and as the comfort of Israel." (b)

Theodor himself, in the same place, has a fine passage, which because it indicates so well the far-flung moral sweep and lofty purpose of the HAGGADAH, is also worthy of citing in the same connection:

"Indeed, the HAGGADAH, being exegesis from a religious and ethical standpoint, undertook to influence the mind of man and to induce him to lead a religious and moral life, 'that he might walk in the ways of God'. In conformity with

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(a) Jewish Encyclopedia, VIII, P. 550

(b) Zunz, Gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden (1832), 1st. ed., pp. 349 et seq. - the basic work for the study of our Midrashic literature.

through a special reading
yes, history & suffering

the conditions of its time, it neither could nor would limit itself to the simple interpretation of Scripture, but included in its ever-widening circle of discussion and reflections on the Scriptural text the highest thoughts of religion, philosophy, mysticism and ethics. It interpreted all the historical matter contained in the Bible in such a religious and national sense that the heroes of the olden times became prototypes, while the entire history of the people of Israel, glorified in the light of Messianic hopes, was made a continued revelation of God's love and justice. For this reason, the importance for modern Jewish science of the study of HAGGADAH can not be overestimated." (c)

(d)
While, as Maximon observes, Midrashic exegesis, known as hermeneutic rules, is complicated, technical and at times arbitrary, it invariably portrays a purpose that is at once simple and lofty. Maximon goes on to explain that "as a rule the endeavor of the Rabbis to unveil what they considered to be the latent meaning of Scripture had as its motive a nobler end. They exploited their logical capacity to the utmost in order to impress upon the people a lesson in ethical principles and moral action, in understanding Divine Justice, the cosmic order, and the course of history of mankind and of Israel. Thus, as Maximon explains, when R. Akiba,

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words

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(c) Op. cit. P. 350.

(d) The Encyclopedia of Jewish Knowledge (1934), S.B. Maximon, article on The Midrash, P. 353,

the extremist in the application of hermeneutic rules, interpreted the verse WITH ALL THY SOUL to mean EVEN IF HE SHOULD TAKE THY SOUL AWAY, it was not an empty phrase, for the great Master was also the great Martyr. Or, when Rabbi Abun gloried in the expensive gates which he had provided for a Synagogue, R. Mana remarked, quoting the prophet Hosea, FOR ISRAEL HATH FORGOTTEN HIS MAKER AND BUILT HE-KHALOTH (היכלות).

~~*****~~ The Hebrew word HE-KHALOTH may mean either palaces or temples. The prophet here denounces Israel, who in his opulence has built himself palaces; but the sage used the word in its second connotation, TEMPLES. Nothing is changed in the text, but the great lesson is clear and refreshing: true religion is not in need of magnificent temples; people begin to build them only after the spirit of religion has departed from their midst.

From these random snatches, we may sense at once, as Maximon observes, that MIDRASH HAGGADAH "centers about universal values and eternal verities." Important, too, is his further observation that the Midrash, above all, contains "a great though fragmentary system of ethics which is still awaiting reconstruction." May we add that toward this challenging task, the present writer has humbly attempted in the following chapters to make his modest contribution on the important theme he has chosen.

Thanks to this lofty religious-ethical-philosophical sweep and profoundly appealing nature of its contents, our

Midrashic literature inevitably became an important EDUCATIONAL factor in the life of the Jewish people throughout the centuries. While the teacher of the Law directed the people's actions, the preacher, as Maximon observes, by offering his teachings in a popular and effective manner, motivated those actions, thus instilling spirit into the body of the Torah. Thus perhaps the greatest achievement of our HAGGADAH was that it made the noblest Jewish teaching accessible to the uneducated and the simple, who in consequence came to realize that the Torah was not the exclusive heritage of a few learned individuals but of the whole people. And this is why it served not only as the recreation of the young, as well as the old, scholar at school and in the academy, but also as the delight and inspiration of the unlearned, thus shaping the mind and molding the character of the entire people.

A few observations are in place here on the style, history, and structure of MIDRASH HAGGADAH.

The style of the Midrash, as ^{we} will have occasion to observe in the following chapters, in many of the verbatim citations thereof on the various phases of our subject, is succinct and direct. Because of the unique brevity of style and obscurity of expression in many places, (which are often made obscure by the faulty texts that have come down to us), the mistaken notion has arisen in some circles that the Rabbis of the Midrash were either unacquainted with standard sentence

structure, or else they were simply unable to fashion their religious and philosophic messages in the more classical literary form of the time. In answer to this, Maximon forcefully states that "the Midrashic teachers and ~~authors~~ are fully conscious of the individuality of words and of the vitality of organic sentences. It fact, it was for this reason, ^{CORRECTLY} he insists, that they are sparing of words, at their better moments, and think in terms of sentences when we would think in terms of chapters. As writers, "they are comparable to pearl polishers rather than to architects. They strung pithy maxims and observations on one string, regardless of the organic relation between the individual gems and often introducing irrelevant matter that possessed charm for them."

A few remarks as to history ~~on~~ development of MIDRASH HAGGADAH. As Theodor observes in his above mentioned monograph, the entire wealth of our Haggadic Midrash has been preserved in a series of very different works, which, like all works of traditional literature, are the resultant of various collections and revisions, and the contents of which originated a long time before they were reduced to writing.

As to the long history of the creation of MIDRASH HAGGADAH, which covers as much as a thousand years, it is interesting to note that traces of MIDRASH HAGGADAH are already found in the Bible itself. As Epstein points ~~out~~ ^(e) out, we find in

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(e) Forward to MIDRASH RABBAH, Soncino edition (1939), by I. Epstein, P. XII.

Chronicles passages which are Midrashic glosses, supplementing in [^]may details the narratives in the Book of Kings. **II** Chronicles (24.27) mentions a Midrash to the Book of Kings, and II Chronicles 13.22 makes reference to the Midrash of Iddo, the Prophet. "We may then suppose", Epstein further observes, "that we have in Chronicles the first elements of Haggadic Midrash handed down in writing in their original form."

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It is equally interesting to learn that much Midrash Haggadah, is found in early often mixed with foreign elements, ~~non~~ non-Rabbinic literature, in the Apocrypha, in Pseudo-Epigrapha, in the works of Josephus and Philo and the remaining Judaeo-Hellenistic literature. and their immediate successors, the ZUGGOT (from c. 450 to 10 BCE), It was, however, in the time of the Sopherim that the development of Midrash Haggadah received a mighty impetus and assumed definite form. It was then that the foundations were laid for public services which were soon to offer the chief medium for cultivating [^]homiletical Bible Exegesis. But Midrash Haggadah reached its highest development in the great Mishnaic-Talmudic period, between 100 and 500 of our present era, during which creative period all the different branches of Midrash Haggadah were fully worked out.

With the close of the Talmudic period, creative Midrashic activity came to an end. In the post-Amoraic and Geonic period Midrashic activity was restricted to the field of collecting and revising the transmitted Midrashic literature. As Epstein

observes in the above mentioned Foreward, the Karaite insurrection in the eighth century was favorable neither to Halakic nor to Haggadic activity. However, as a medium of literary expression, the Midrash did not fall into disuse even after the Talmud had long been complete, and Midrashim were compiled down to the eleventh century. Thus our entire Midrashic activity, beginning faintly in late Biblical times, and more definitely with ^{TANNAITIC TIMES, AND VERY LIKELY MUCH EARLIER,} ~~early~~, thus covers a long period of ~~over~~ ^{over} 1000 years.

In its period of efflorescence, in the Amoraic period (220-500 ~~CE~~), Haggadic exegesis was assiduously cultivated by the most eminent Rabbis, some of whom are praised in particular as being "learned in the Haggadah" (^{תלמידי חכמים} Baki ba-Agada); and it became a special branch of traditional science for the "Scholars of the Haggadah" (^{רבני חכמים} Rab-Banan di-Agada). It was the subject of study in the schools, and furnished an inexhaustible supply of material for the ~~sermons and discourses~~ which were delivered on Sabbaths and feast days and which followed the Scripture lesson and formed a part of public worship, or could be separated from it at need. Opportunity, moreover, often arose, both on joyous and on sad occasions to resort to Haggadic expositions for words of comfort or of blessing, for farewell discourses, etc.

A few observations, finally, as to the form or structure of our Midrash Haggadah:

At the Schools, Midrash tended to assume the form of running

commentaries to individual books of the Bible; while at the synagogue it developed into homilies, or sermons, organized on more or less the same plan: a) - an opening introduction (proem); b) - the main theme which revolved around a few verses of the Pentateuch portion (Sedra) assigned for public reading on that day; c) - a concluding note of consolation or messianic hope. Accordingly, when a later generation reduced those expositions and homilies to writing, they resulted in two classes of Midrashim: EXPOSITIONAL AND HOMILETIC Midrashim.

Strack lucidly explains the distinction between the expository Midrashim and homiletical Midrashim, as follows: the expositional Midrashim comment on the Scriptural text according to the order of the verses or join thereto the Haggadists' tales, parables and the like. The oldest of this class are the Tannaitic Midrashim, the MEKILTA (on Exodus), Sifra (on Leviticus), and Sifre (on Numbers and Deuteronomy), whose earliest ^{date} component parts from the second century, but have been edited not earlier than post-tannaitic times, and contain both halakic and haggadic material. The others of this class are the purely Haggadic Midrashim, such as BERESHIT RABBAH, perhaps the oldest of the latter genre, which were compiled after the completion of the Talmud, about 500 A.D. The expositional Midrashim of the purely Haggadic genre, have this distinctive mark, - that the individual parashas (sections) are prefaced by proems which

were derived from Haggadic discourse.

The homiletical Midrashim, as Strack explains, handle individual texts, for the most part the beginnings of Scriptural lections. These lections are either: (a) the Pentateuchal pericopes according to the triennial Palestinian cycle, ~~whereon~~ rests the divisions of the Pentateuch into 154 to 175 Sedarim - we call such homilies Tanhuma homilies because of their employment in the Tanhuma Midrashim; or (b) those sections of the Pentateuch and the prophetic books which were designated according to the Pesikta cycle for the festivals and special Sabbaths - we call them Pesikta homilies. Each homily, or, as the case may be, each parasha, opens with a number of proems (^{נחמ}petiha from ^{נחמ}patah) by joining the text to a verse, mostly outside the Pentateuch, preferentially from the Hagiographa. The proems are followed by the exposition. The longest haggadic elucidation is, as a rule, attached to the first significant verse. The greater number of the discourses close with citations of Scriptural verses having reference to the future glory of Israel. (f)

BERESHIT RABBAH (Genesis Rabbah) - ~~the main text of~~
~~the text~~ meaning probably the GREAT Midrash on Genesis, the text ~~with~~ which my thesis is primarily concerned, is, ~~and~~ as we have already noted, adjudged to be one of the oldest ex-positional Midrashim.

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(f) Introduction To The Talmud and The Midrash, H.L. Strack (JPS), pp. 204-5.

A widely current tradition ascribes the composition of this Midrash to the Palestinian Amora of the first Generation, Oshaia or Hoshaya, who lived in the 3rd century C.E.. The first proem of BERESHIT RABBAH begins with his name. This tradition, ~~Epstein~~ says, may mean that Hoshaya was responsible for the work in its original form, but undoubtedly much of the present work was added later and swelled its size, and it is possible that it was then given the name BERESHIT RABBAH (THE GREAT BERESHIT) to distinguish it from the original work, which was naturally of much smaller compass. The material on the first pericope of BERESHIT has been compiled on a far more lavish scale than that on the other eleven pericopes; its 29 chapters constitute more than a quarter of the whole. This had led to the theory that ^{the latter} ~~that~~ may have formed part of a larger Haggadic work on Genesis, which was either lost or remained incomplete. This larger work may have been called BERESHIT RABBAH to distinguish it from the present small work preserved in the other eleven pericopes of this Midrash, but subsequently, the name was applied not only to the first pericope but to the whole.

The first scholar mentioned in BERESHIT RABBAH is, as was mentioned above, R. Hoshayah Rabbah, and this has given rise to yet another theory that the name BERESHIT RABBAH is a contraction of BERESHIT DE RABBI HOSHAYAH RABBAH (THE BERESHIT OF RABBI HOSHAYAH THE GREAT.) This theory, however, as Epstein states, is negated by the fact that in the best MSS.,

*alter
(as there was a
later Hoshaya)*

this Rabbi is simply called R. Hoshayah, not R. Hoshayah Rabbah. But whatever its origin, the designation RABBAH, which originally belonged to Genesis alone, was subsequently applied to the other Midrashic works on the books of the Pentateuch as well as ~~ON~~ the five MEGILLOTH, and thus ten distinct works of different structure, ~~also~~ of later dates of composition, ~~==~~ [with the exception of EKAH RABBAH (on Lamentations)], were ^(g) eventually included under the single title MIDRASH RABBAH.

BERESHIT RABBAH, as we previously stated, is an expository commentary which almost to the end follows the text of Genesis verse by verse, and, especially in the earlier chapters, almost word by word, skipping only bare genealogies and repetitions which required no fresh remark. Moore points to the expansiveness of BERESHIT RABBAH in regard to the Creation, and Adam and Eve in the Garden, where a whole chapter of comment is sometimes devoted to one or two verses of the text. This part of the work is of peculiar interest, he says, in that *(particularly on the unity of God)* it sets forth the Biblical teaching on these points, in reply to cavils of objectors and in opposition to the theories of alien philosophies. Moore also interestingly points out that it is highly probable that some of the contributors were acquainted with Philo - with his ideas, if not with his writings - which is not strange, since R. Hoshayah had his school at Caesarea and was contemporary with Origen, whose biblical studies brought him into association with Jewish scholars.

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(g) Op. cit., pp. XXVIII-XXIX.

*Consult Bach's
Article in early JQR*

Echoes of such discussions in Caesarea or elsewhere may be heard here and there in BERESHIT RABBAH. The opponents are by this time Catholic Christians and the Jewish polemic is outspokenly directed against the deification of Christ, as (h) in the utterances of R. Abahu.

BERESHIT RABBAH, as we have already observed, ^{begins} on a very large scale, nearly one fourth of the whole work being given to the section BERESHIT alone. Toward the end (from about Genesis 44), it is much more cursory, and the method changes. It is suggested, Moore says, that it may have been left incomplete and the deficiency supplied by other hands and from different sources. The whole of BERESHIT RABBAH is divided into parashas. Strack remarks that in the majority of printed additions, the number of parashas is 100; MSS. and editions vary between 97 and 101, but almost all witnesses are uniform with regard to the first 94. The basis of the division is according to the small parashas, pethukoth and sehkhmoth, of which Genesis has 43 plus 48, in part also according to the Sedarim of the triennial Palestinian cycle of Sabbath (1) lections.

From the little we have already said about the Midrash known as BERESHIT RABBAH, the ^{basic} reasons for our choosing it for the main text of our exposition of the Rabbinic Doctrine of Man is not far to seek. Aside from its being one of the

(h) Judaism In The First Centuries of The Christian Era, G.F. Moore (Harvard), 1927, Volume I, pp. 164-165.

(i) Op. cit., P. 218.

Oldest of our homiletical Midrashim, it is an extensive and important Midrash, exemplifying all points of Midrashic exegesis, ~~and~~ forms a complete commentary on the important and provocative first book of our Bible. It is therefore needless to add that, as such, it contains authoritative, ~~and~~ rich material for our very important subject.

For these good reasons, then, we have chosen ^{Midrashic text} for our main / on our subject ~~the~~ BERESHIT RABBAH. However, while the latter IS our main text, we have, nevertheless, **availed** ourselves of the privilege and necessity of occasionally making excursions into the other parts of our Midrashic literature, as well as also Talmudic sources, in order to complement the points made on the various phases of our subject. It is important to note in connection with the latter citations, that though they hail from Midrashic sources of various dates and forms, they all breathe forth - as does our entire Midrashic literature covering a period of at least a thousand years of creativity - a unified, lofty purpose and outlook.

It is my hope that at some future date, in connection with my planned post-graduate studies, I may explore my present important subject more fully throughout the entire Midrashic literature.

A prayerful hope may not be out of place in my conclusion of this Introduction.

Our present study of the Doctrine of Man, ~~homiletically~~

embedded in this ancient Midrashic text of BERESHIT RABBAH, occurs in a period of low ebb in the spirit of Western man, what with the disparagement in many intellectual quarters of the time-honored sense of man's dignity, and the dispirited state of mind of the present generation as a result of having suffered two world wars and ^{its} being faced with the imminence of a new atomic global war that can destroy civilization.

It is the confident and sober hope of the present writer, as a result of a sympathetic study of the thoughtful ethical wisdom of this ancient Palestinian and related texts, that despite their great age and their quaint ^{old-world} homiletic style, some of their major religious-moral insights, which have appealed to this writer on the subject of Man, may prove ~~an~~ heartening and helpful to us of today who are woefully beset with many ~~morally~~ paralyzing pessimisms as to the nature and future of Man.

With ^{this} declaration of faith, inspired by our study of the Doctrine of Man in our ancient Text, let us now address ourselves to our subject, which we discuss below under the three chapter headings, viz:

1. The Rabbinic Attitude on The Nature of Man
2. The Rabbinic View of The Dignity of Man
3. The Rabbinic Prototype of The IDEAL Man, as Personified In The Figure Of Israel's First Great Patriarch - Abraham.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RABBINIC VIEW OF THE NATURE OF MAN

CHAPTER ONETHE RABBINIC VIEW OF THE NATURE OF MAN

To bring the Jewish picture of human nature into sharper focus, it will be helpful to briefly summarize first the Christian conception of it which has been ^{the} dominant view of our Western World.

The view of human nature of Paulinian Christianity, which is held today not only by traditional but even by liberal Christian theologians, and which lurks even in the pro-God philosophies of Existentialism, categorically maintains that a severe dichotomy exists in man's basic nature between his body or his flesh and his spirit. In the flesh dwells the corruptive seed of evil, which is traced to that historic rebellion of man against God in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. What power for good there is in man, according to this view, resides in his spirit, and that power is perpetually at odds with man's sinful flesh. "Paul", Moore says, "represents the dualism of Hellenic thought when he describes the tragedy of man as a losing struggle between the aspirations of the mind and the impulses of the body. 'I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that is in my members.' " (Rom. 7.23) ⁽¹⁾

The Paulinian conception of man as a creature originally beset by sin took shape in Paul's mind, among other reasons, because
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(1) JUDAISM In The First Centuries Of The Christian Era, The Age Of The Tannaim, George Foot Moore, (Harvard University Press), 1927, Vol. 1, P. 486.

of his need for justifying his theology of the crucified Christ.

The Jewish conception of human nature, on the other hand, rejects outright the Paulinian idea of a dichotomy in human nature. Man's nature, or, as the Rabbis refer to it, the YETSER, as Silver has fully shown in his chapter on the YETSER ⁽²⁾, is an all-embracing unity. The seat of evil, as well as of good, the Rabbis hold, is neither in the flesh nor in the spirit, as distinct from each other, but rather in the HEART. By "heart", the Rabbis have in mind, not the physical heart but, as Porter put it, "the thinking and willing subject, the moral person, the inner self." ⁽³⁾ The word "heart" is used quite often by the Rabbis in the sense of YETSER.

The Sifre, one of the early Halakik midrashim on Numbers and Deuteronomy, interprets Deut. 6.6 (~~LET~~ THESE BE AGAINST THY HEART) as follows:

From here R. Josiah derives the admonition that we must adjure the YETSER.

So Psalm 109.22 (MY HEART - LIBBI - IS WOUNDED WITHIN ME) is interpreted by the Rabbis to mean that David's Evil Yetser has been wounded or conquered, thus placing David in the same category with the righteous patriarchs whom God made to taste

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(2) THE ETHICS OF JUDAISM FROM THE ASPECT OF DUTY, Maxwell Silver, (Bloch), 1938, Chapter IV, pp. 148-184.

(3) THE YETSER HARA, A Study In The Jewish Doctrine Of Sin, in Yale Biblical And Semitic Studies, N.Y., 1901, P. 110.
C. F. PORTER

in this world the bliss of the world to come, namely, complete dominion over the YETSER HA-RA. (B.B. 16b-17a)

Again, as Silver points^{out}, because the word 'heart' occurs in two forms lev and levav, the Rabbis very ingeniously saw in the double bet of levav a suggestion of the two YETSARIM - the YETSER HA-RA and the YETSER TOB (about which latter we will have much more to say later on) and in the single bet of lev,
(4)
of the one YETSER RA.

Thus we find the Mishnah interpreting Deut. 6.5 as follows:

AND THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART
means with thy two YETSARIM - with the Evil YETSER and with the Good YETSER. (M. Berakot 9.5)

An important point, which the Rabbis stressed was the fact that while the heart was also the seat of evil, there is no special depravity connected with the heart. The heart, being the Rabbinic all-embracing term for man's nature, was also, and just as importantly, the seat and source of all of man's emotions, reason, moral and spiritual qualities. In the words of the Rabbis:

All of man's wisdom is nowhere but in the heart. (Eccl. R. 1.16)

We thus see that the Rabbis' starting point for a discussion of man's nature was their clear-cut recognition that man's nature, "heart", or YETSER includes the WHOLE of man - both his body and his mind. Man, according to the Rabbis, is
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(4) See Silver, op.cit., p. 153.

a unity. In his personality are contained two major impulses or tendencies, the impulse, inclination or ability to discern and to do what is evil and what is good. The Rabbis further homiletically deduced this conception from the verb 73"1 in Genesis 2.7:

THEN THE LORD GOD FORMED (73"1) MAN OF THE DUST OF THE GROUND AND BREATHED INTO HIS NOSTRILS THE BREATH OF LIFE, AND MAN BECAME A LIVING SOUL.

The Rabbis declare ^{that} the two YODS in the word 73"1 represent both the evil and the good impulses. (Gen. R. 14.4)

There is a constant struggle, the Rabbis maintain, between these two impulses within man's heart or soul or YETSER - man's behavior being the visible result of this battle. Moore is quick to point out that in the Rabbis' conception this "duality of impulse" does not make for a duality in man's natural constitution, wherein the evil impulse, ~~as in~~ ^{as in} Paulinian Christianity, resides in the body, or the flesh, while the good impulse proceeds from the soul. Such a dichotomy in human nature, Moore correctly maintains, is completely alien to Rabbinic thought. (5)

The Rabbis, in referring in their homilies to man's nature, or YETSER, usually describe it as YETSER HA-RA - meaning Man's Nature that is Inclined to Evil. In this obviously disparaging description of man's nature, it is evident that the

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(5) Op. cit. P. 485.

Rabbis frankly admit that man's nature IS naturally inclined to evil, though they eschew the Paulinian doctrine of the total depravity of man. This last point will become clear, we believe, from our following ^{analysis} of the Rabbis' conception of the YETSER. For the present, let us merely put on record the telling morning prayer in our Prayer Book on this point:

O, my God, the soul which Thou hast placed within me is pure.

Despite their insistence, however, that man's YETSER or nature is not originally or inherently evil or depraved, the Rabbis are realistic enough to point to the many and dangerous inclinations in man's nature toward evil.

Thus the Rabbis, in the following Midrashim, give the devil YETSER his devilish due. In their expository Midrashim describing how the YETSER RA influences the lives of men toward evil, we incidentally note again what fine psychologists our Rabbis were. In the following Midrashim, in fact, we find many of the insights of modern psychologic thought.

One Rabbi, commenting upon the verse Sin Coucheth/At The Door, remarks that the Hebrew verb ROBETS, used here to describe the YETSER, is in its masculine form and not in its feminine form. The reason is, he says, that sin, at first, is weak, like a woman, but then it grows strong like a man. R. Akiba said:
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At first it is like a spider's web, but eventually it becomes like a ship's rope, as it is written, WOE TO THEM THAT DRAW IN INIQUITY WITH TRIFLING CORDS AND SIN AS IT WERE WITH A CART-ROPE (Isa. 5.18). R. Isaac said: At first it is like a (passing) visitor (פְּסִיחַ), then like a guest (פְּלוֹג) who stays longer, and finally like the master of the house (בַּ'ק).

R. Tanhum b. Marion said: There are dogs in Rome that know how to deceive men. One dog goes and sits down before a baker's shop and pretends to be asleep, and when the shopkeeper dozes off he dislodges a loaf near the ground (thus scattering the whole pile), and while the onlookers are collecting the scattered loaves he succeeds in snatching a loaf and making off. (Thus sin pretends to sleep until it catches its victim off guard.) (Gen. R. 22.6)

The Rabbis correctly saw the Evil YETSER as beginning its dominion over man at birth, and continuing to reign over him throughout his entire life, even unto his death. Thus the Rabbis, in commenting on Eccl. 4.13 (BETTER IS A POOR AND WISE CHILD THAN AN OLD AND FOOLISH KING), ask: Why is the Evil YETSER (supposed by them to be referred to in this verse as the old and foolish King) called old? And they answer: Because it accompanies man from his infancy until his old age. (Eccl. R. 5.15)

Only death, the Rabbis maintain, delivers man from the

YETSER: ~~Why~~ was death decreed upon the righteous? Because as long ^{as} they live they have to struggle against the YETSER RA; but when they die they have rest. This ^{is} based on Job 3.17, "There the wicked cease from troubling." (Gen. R. 9.7) Silver makes a significant point in this connection. He states that: "This justification of the 'ways of God', while simple indeed, voices a very profound moral truth, namely, that man's moral battle is never done. Even the righteous, who have made righteousness their life's purpose, have their inseparable 'human nature' to contend against through their entire life. The moral man, in order to reach out after the ever-widening horizons of Duty, will always be called upon to struggle against the discordant forces of his own nature." (6)

The most ~~notorious~~ manifestations of the Evil Impulse, the Rabbis affirm, are the blatant sins of sensuality, or lust, or the adulterous passion. The Rabbis are frank enough to chalk up a black mark on this particular score, even when it concerns some of Israel's noblest personages. No one, but no one, goes scot free of these lustful inclinations. There is a famous legend in this connection concerning R. Akiba and R. Meir, two of the greatest and most saintly characters of the Tannaitic period. The legend has it that these two sages mocked at those who could not withstand the sins of adultery, but they themselves were saved

(6) Op. cit., pp. 160-161.

only by divine intercession from falling victims to Satan ^q in this instance personified ³⁵ by the YETSER RA) who disguised himself in the form of a woman. (Kid. 81a)

Greed is another manifestation of the Evil Impulse. Even the Patriarch Abraham needed God's help to save him from this impulse. For, concerning Abraham, it is said, ^(Genesis 14.22) I HAVE LIFTED UP MY HAND UNTO THE LORD, THAT I WILL NOT TAKE A THREAD, NOR A SHOE LATCHET NOR AUGHT THAT IS THINE. ^(Sifre on Deut. 6.6)

Revenge, cupidity and violent anger are even more blatant manifestations of the YETSER RA. Of violent anger, it is reported that R. Jochanan b. Nuri said that it is the "craft of the YETSER " ^{וְיִשְׁרָאֵל לֹא יָדָע} (umanato shel YETSER RA): "Let one who in anger tears his garments, breaks his vessels, casts away money, be in thine eyes as one who practises idolatry. For this is the craft of the YETSER RA. Today, it says to him: Do this; tomorrow, do that; till it says to him, go practise idolatry, and he goes and does it." (Shab. 105b)

Vanity and conceit are also added to this long catalogue of the YETSER RA. Thus R. Ami tells us that when the YETSER RA sees a conceited man, it says of him 'He is mine, as Proverb's 28.12 has it: The fool (YETSER HA-RA) has hope of him. (Gen. R. 22.3)

We even find the YETSER RA, as Schechter wittily observes, egregiously solicitous of the welfare of the family. For when a man experiences an urge to perform a Mitsvah, or generous act to his fellows, the YETSER RA says to him: Why should you do

this charitable act, and thereby diminish thy wealth? Instead of giving it ~~to~~ others, give it rather to your own children. But the YETSER TOB, on the contrary, admonishes him, Do perform the good deed! (Gen. R. 36.3)

The YETSER also induces a disbelief in judgment after death. Thus R. Eleazar ha Kappor admonishes: Let not thy YETSER assure thee that Sheol is a house of refuge, for perforce wast thou framed and born, perforce dost thou live and die, and perforce thou art to give account and reckoning. (Abot 4.22)

In fact, our poor YETSER RA is so bad that even God, Himself, has no good word for it:

Thus R. Hiyya Rabbah states: Wretched indeed is the dough against which its baker testifies that it is bad, as it is said, FOR THE YETSER OF MAN'S HEART IS EVIL FROM HIS YOUTH (Gen. 6.5). So Abba Jose Torti agrees: Wretched indeed is the leaven, that the One who created it testifies against it that it is evil, as it is written, (Ps. 103.14) FOR HE KNOWETH OUR YETSER, HE REMEMBERETH THAT WE ARE DUST. (Gen. R. 34.10)

The YETSER is further described as misleading men not only in this world but as even testifying against them in the world-to-come. (Suk. 52b)

From all the above, it is apparent that there is hardly a sin which the Rabbis fail to ascribe to the YETSER RA. It is therefore not surprising to find the Rabbis even going to the lengths of personifying ~~the~~ the YETSER RA but only poetically, it should be

stressed, in the following malignant terms: uncircumcized, unclean, man's enemy, man's stumbling block; the hidden one, and the satanic spirit within his soul. (Su'k. 52a; cf. Shab. 105a.)

For those of us believing souls, who often wonder why God, in his infinite wisdom, should knowingly have implanted such evil dynamite as the YETSER HA-RA in man's soul, R. Aibu, with his crisp Rabbinic sense of humor, daringly concedes that God himself openly admitted that it was a regrettable error on his part to have created that evil urge within man: "Had I not created an evil urge within man," the Rabbis imagined God saying, "he would not have rebelled against me!" (Gen. R. 27.4)

It is important to inject the point here that while the Rabbis candidly dwelled upon the many evil manifestations of man's nature, this was done not with the idea, as in Paulinian Christianity, to point up the fact that the evil in man's nature is some external monstrous force with which man is incapable of dealing. On the contrary, the Rabbis' main purpose, as Silver brings out in his chapter on the YETSER, was simply MORAL EXHORTATION - to warn man against underestimating the difficult task, which they considered man's supreme duty, of disciplining his YETSER or nature that is naturally inclined to evil. "All this," he says, "was but an expression of the Rabbis' realistic conception of human nature. This was but their first strategic step in

the battle for the moral education of man, which they strenuously made their own."⁽⁷⁾

The surprising thing, however, is that while the Rabbis in the Midrash, as we have just seen, vividly dwell upon the evil manifestations of human nature, and are fully aware of the havoc that they wreak upon man's life, they, at the same time, perceptively insist that these impulses that are naturally inclined to evil, are INDISPENSABLE to man's individual life and, above all, to his social life, in which the Rabbis were vitally interested. The evil in man, they affirm, is not evil in itself. It is only so when improper use is made of by man of these impulses that are admittedly inclined to evil. That is to say, even our EVIL impulses are POTENTIALLY good.

The following remarkable Midrash, which in an important way profoundly summarizes the Rabbis' conception of the YETSER, especially as it concerns the potential good that is at the basis of all of our so-called inclinations to evil, is the following one, credited to R. Samuel b. Nahman:

In explanation of the verse AND BEHOLD IT WAS VERY GOOD (Gen. 1.31), this Rabbi homiletically interprets the word HINEH-^(נחמ) BEHOLD, in this verse, as standing for the Good YETSER and VE-^(נחמ) HINEH-AND BEHOLD, for the Evil Impulse, and continues as follows: Is the Evil YETSER, then, very good? Certainly! For without it, man would not build a house, nor marry, nor beget children, nor

(7) Op. cit., P. 167.

engage in trade. (Gen. R. 9.7)

A certain amount of self-seeking, of pursuit of personal gain and power, though it may easily lead to evil, the Rabbis correctly maintain, is absolutely indispensable for the continuance not only of life itself, but even of the so-called higher life. Our evil propensities, viewed in this light, must therefore be adjudged as POTENTIALLY good rather than being regarded as INHERENTLY evil.

Our Evil Impulses can, then, according to the Rabbis, in another significant Midrash, be considered as the potential servant of man:

The YETSER RA, when properly joined to the Good YETSER, is actually regarded as man's helpmate. A man had two cows, R. Isaac tells us, one meant for ploughing, the other not. If he wanted the latter to plough also, he puts the yoke on both. Should you also not join the Evil YETSER to the Good, and so be enabled to turn it ~~whether~~ you will? So David prays, (Ps. 86.11) UNITE (THE DOUBLE YETSER OF) MY HEART TO FEAR THY NAME. We are to praise God with the Evil as well as with the Good YETSER. (Mid. Teh., ed. Bub. P. 376)

The Rabbinic conviction of the potential good of even the YETSER HA-RA not only highlights the very crucial difference between the Jewish and Christian conceptions of human nature, but also ^{that of} the ideal life's disciplines that flow therefrom. Paulinian
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Christianity, with its hard and fast dualism of the flesh and the spirit, ^{which considers} ~~with~~ the flesh as the source of all evil and ^{the} hope-
less victim of an external satanic power, Paulinian Christianity was obligated to prescribe for the Christian saint a course of conduct, which is traditionally known as Asceticism - the complete abnegation or denial of the flesh and the disparagement of, even the flight from, this world and its social life. And by the same logic, Paulinian Christianity ^{denied} ~~was~~ as the ideal for the average man a maximum suppression of man's so-called earthly drives as the supreme preparation of the individual soul for ~~the~~ bliss in the world to come.

The Rabbinic tradition, on the other hand, thanks to the above described unitary conception of man's nature, logically and hopefully rejects, by and large, this ascetic way of life and the utter disparagement of this life and this world, while, at the same time, it just as fervently cherishes the belief in an after-life. The Rabbis' view of this life, which, it goes without saying, loyally bases itself upon that of their great spiritual predecessors - the great Prophets of Israel - is THIS-WORLDLY in the highest sense of the term, and is nobly socially-centered. This world and its social life, so the Rabbis teach, is the fruitful place for the development of man's highest spiritual personality, despite the inevitable accompanying evils of this world and notwithstanding the inescapable evils of man's omnipresent YETSER HA-RA.

A According to the Rabbis, following the leading thought on this subject of the prophets of Israel, man can attain his noblest life, not by disparaging, not by shunning this life, or by escaping its social responsibilities, nor by suppressing his human instincts. Man can accomplish this rather by his all-out active identification of himself as an individual with the entire social life of humanity, by exerting his fullest efforts to establish justice, righteousness and peace on earth, which, as we know, is the eternally challenging messianic ideal of the great Prophets of Israel, as stated in the famous passages of Isaiah 2.2-4:

AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THE END OF DAYS, THAT THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOUSE SHALL BE ESTABLISHED AS THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAINS, AND SHALL BE EXALTED ABOVE THE HILLS; AND ALL NATIONS SHALL FLOW UNTO IT; AND MANY PEOPLE SHALL GO AND SAY: COME YE, AND LET US GO UP TO THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD, TO THE HOUSE OF THE GOD OF JACOB. AND HE WILL TEACH US OF HIS WAYS, AND WE WILL WALK IN HIS PATHS. FOR OUT OF ZION SHALL GO FORTH THE LAW AND THE WORD OF THE LORD FROM JERUSALEM. AND HE SHALL JUDGE BETWEEN THE NATIONS, AND SHALL DECIDE FOR MANY PEOPLES; AND THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOUGHSHARES, AND THEIR SPEARS INTO PRUNING HOOKS; NATION SHALL NOT LIFE UP SWORD AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANY MORE. (Cf. Isa. 11.1-9 and Micah 4.1-4.)

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In logical harmony with this conception of the supreme importance of man's active social life toward attaining socially creative saintliness, we may quote the following significant Rabbinic statements which elucidate what Silver calls Judaism's social-healthy mindedness. In accordance with this sound social outlook, we find the Rabbis disapproving of self-imposed abstinence from wine and other salutary pleasures. Thus R. Simeon ben Lakish teaches that a vow of abstinence is like an iron collar about a man's neck, and one who imposes upon himself such a vow is like one who finds such a collar lying loose and sticks his head into it.

In a similar vein, we find R. Jonathan teaching that one who takes such a vow is like one who builds an illegitimate altar, and if he fulfills it, like one who sacrifices upon such an altar. (Jer. Nedarim XI, 41b)

Again, interpreting Numbers 6.11 (FOR THAT HE SINNED BY REASON OF THE DEAD (NEFESH)), which Biblical passage treats of the vows of abstinence of the Nazarite, we find R. Eleazar ha-Kappar teaching that the Nazarite had to make an atonement by sacrificing for having sinned against his own soul (NEFESH) for denying himself wine. Such a man is called a sinner, and A FORTIORI, if one who has denied himself only wine is called a sinner, how much more the one who denies himself the enjoyment of everything! (Nazir 22a)

So Rab, whose very thoughtful teaching on this subject is well known: A man will have to give account on the Judgment Day for every good thing which he might have enjoyed and did not. (Jer. Kid., 66d, end.)

And, finally, we note in this connection, R. Eliezer's significant death-bed parting words to his disciples. When the disciples of R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus asked him on his death-bed the question, What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? - he counselled them to be careful about the honor of their fellows, to watch wisely over the education of their children, and when they pray to consider in whose presence they stand. (Ber. 28b) We may profitably compare this socially-sober counsel with the extreme other-worldly answer to the same question given by Jesus, who after counselling obedience to the commandments (The Decalogue) advises the questioner to sell all his property and give the proceeds to the poor. (Mark 10.17; cf., Matt. 19.6; Luke 18.18.)

In our above exposition of the Rabbinic conception of ~~the~~ YETSER HA-RA, we had occasion to mention the other highly useful conception of the Rabbis which they called the YETSER TOB. We may now proceed to our exposition of this great Rabbinic doctrine, which is very closely and very fruitfully tied to the Rabbinic doctrine of the YETSER, or the YETSER HA-RA, that is, man's nature that is naturally inclined to evil. According to

the Rabbis, despite the fact that man's YETSER, or nature, possesses the many inclinations to evil that were enumerated above, it, at the same time, also possesses its YETSER TOB, its GOOD YETSER, or its many good, or, what we would call today, its socially constructive tendencies^x for the good of both the individual and society.

How awaredly they were of the fact as to
 No matter ^{NEVERTHELESS} how oppressively the forces of evil within man's heart may continually plague him, the Rabbis ^{NEVERTHELESS} tenaciously clung to their conviction in man's inherent ability, thanks to this innate YETSER TOB, to cope with those evils. The Rabbis, being children of their age, also took seriously the Garden of Eden Story of the Fall of Man as inspired truth. However, they did not allow themselves, because of this historic Fall, to fall along with St. Paul into the bottomless pit of despair concerning man's supposedly all-sinful nature. Man fell from God's grace because of this so-called Fall, it is true. However, the Rabbis, fortified by their conviction ^{of} ~~in~~ the existence, deep in man's nature, of the YETSER TOB, held out to ALL men of the generations succeeding that lamentable Fall the morale-lifting hope that man continues to possess within the depths of his own personality the self-redeeming power to lift himself, to a very appreciable measure at least, by his own moral and spiritual boot-straps, as it were, up out of the morass of evil and sin, and thereby ^{to} restore himself to God's former grace.

Never doubting for a moment the existence in man's nature of that important power in it which they called the YETSER TOB, and ^{of} its persistence even after the Fall, the Rabbis, as good psychologists, were nevertheless fully aware that man's YETSER TOB and its many inclinations to the Good, were unfortunately in operation, not on the surface or in the forefront of his heart or mind or life, as the YETSER HA-RA is, but are in existence in the deeper layers of his soul. This being so, it is the job of Religion and Morality to EDUCATE (in the original Greek meaning of the term - EDUCO - to lead out ^{to lead out}) man's YETSER TOB, to draw it out with the aid of all the moral stamina that is within ^{him} to the surface of his life. And, again, as good psychologists, realizing the primacy and power of the YETSER HA-RA, the Rabbis fully realized that in order to accomplish this great feat, a mighty battle ~~must~~ ^{most} be staged - a battle that takes no less than a life-time, between the embattled forces of the YETSER HA RA and the no less embattled, ~~but~~ ^{through} submerged forces of the YETSER TOB.

In the following pregnant Midrashim, we will have occasion to note the Rabbis' realistic picture of this ever-continuing battle, and, above all, the Rabbis' realistically conceived weapons which they pointed up for that more or less successful battle of Man against the YETSER RA - that grand moral battle ~~battle~~ which may aptly be called - OPERATION YETSER TOB.

The primary weapon to be employed in the battle against man's ~~evil propensities~~, according to the Rabbis, is the study and practice of the precepts of the Moral Law, i.e., the all-embracing Torah.

So God said to the Israelites: My sons, I created the Evil YETSER. I created for it the (moral) law as a remedy ^{ה'סלח} ~~(TAVLIN)~~ spice or seasoning. If you are occupied with the Law, you will be delivered unto its hand, as it is said, (Gen. 4.7) IF THOU DOEST WELL, SHALL IT NOT BE LIFTED UP? But if you neglect the Law, you will fall into its power. (Kid. 30b)

Lazarus' remarks, in this connection, are worth noting:

"The most important factor, however, in the Rabbinical view of man is not that his natural instinct is two-fold, and that from the first the Evil Impulse was held to be accompanied by the Good Impulse. There is ^{is} another, a more universal and comprehensive thought: God created the Evil Impulse, but He also created the Torah, the moral law, as a spice for it. It is thus not a question of man's natural aptitude, not even of his aptitude for good. The Law that releases man from the trammels of the natural instinct...this is the momentous consideration."⁽⁸⁾

There is a legend that the angels objected to God's readiness to give the Torah to Israel, whom they considered as mere "flesh and blood", and therefore, in their opinion, unworthy of

(8) THE ETHICS OF JUDAISM, M. Lazarus, (JPS), 1900, Part II, pp. 107-08.

the Torah. Despite their objections, however, God gave the Torah to Israel. The important reason, according to the Rabbis, why God did so, was because the angels lacked an Evil YETSER, and therefore had no need of the moral discipline of the Torah, while Israel, or Man, because of the very fact of their being "flesh and blood", that is, human, and therefore possessing the Evil YETSER, did stand in need of it. We are therefore told by R. Joshua b. Levi:

When Moses ascended to heaven, the ministering angels said unto the Holy One, blessed be He, Sovereign of the Universe, what has one born of a woman to do among us? He has come to receive the Torah, was the divine answer. What! said they unto Him, art Thou about to bestow unto flesh and blood (Ps. 8.5) that cherished treasure...? WHAT IS MORTAL MAN THOU THOU ARE MINDEFUL OF HIM, AND THE SON OF THE EARTH THAT THOU VISITEST HIM? (IBID), O God, our Lord, is not thy name already sufficiently exalted in the earth? CONFER THY GLORY UPON THE HEAVENS. (Ibid. v. 2) The Holy One, blessed ~~be~~ He, then called upon Moses to refute their objections. Whereupon...Moses said to the angels:...Of what use can the Torah be to you?...What is written in it?... THOU SHALT NOT MENTION THE NAME OF ~~THY~~ GOD IN VAIN (Ex. 20.7). Is there business amongst you?...Again, what else is written there? - HONOR THY FATHER AND MOTHER (Ib. 20.12). Does jealousy exist among you? Does the Evil YETSER exist among you? The angels

at once confessed that the Holy One, blessed be He, was right, for it is written, (Ps. 8.2) O LORD, HOW EXCELLENT IS THY NAME IN ALL THE EARTH, and no longer is it written (as in Ibid. v. 2) CONFER THY GLORY UPON THE HEAVENS. (Shab. 88b-89a)

The Rabbis, however, were not so naive as to imagine that mere pre-occupation with the STUDY of the Torah was sufficient to guarantee protection against the Evil Inclination. The Rabbis were insistent that man, armed with a thorough appreciation of the moral law, should then bestir himself to continuous moral action, inspired by the study of the Law, against the YETSER HA-RA. Thus Rabbi Levi b. Hama in the name of Simeon b. Lakish teaches:

At all times let man stir up his Good YETSER against his Evil YETSER, for it is said, (Ps. 4.5) BESTIR YOURSELVES, AND SIN NOT. If he conquers it (the Evil YETSER), it is well, but if he does not, then he should study the Torah, for we read, (Ibid.) COMMUNE WITH YOUR HEART...(Ber. 5a)

Another significant weapon, according to the Rabbis, with which man can give battle to his YETSER, is his own sharp awareness of his brief circuit in his earthly tour of duty. This pregnant thought is well brought out at the end of the Midrash of R. Levi b. Hama, which we quoted above: "If he conquers it (YETSER HA-RA), then it is well, but if not, he should then remind himself of the day of death, for it is written, AND BE STILL, SELAH. (Ber. 5a)

Sober thoughts as to man's inevitable death are desirable in that such thoughts place a considerable restraining influence upon our inordinate wants or lusts. Far, however, from the aims of the Rabbis is the thought ^{that} the fear of death should cramp our mortal style, so to speak, to the extent of throwing us into the clutches of pessimism or to obligate us to an ascetic retreat from the healthy routine of social living. To lead a full, rich social life, tempered with the sober realization that it is brief, and that it is virtually a crime not to derive the highest moral and intellectual good out of the few short years allotted to us - such a life is definitely in the Rabbinic purview. In this connection, the Rabbis but echo the eternal moral for man, which is richly embedded in the Psalmist's verse, which we Jews appropriately recite at the funeral rites of our beloved departed:

SO TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS, THAT WE MAY GET US A HEART OF WISDOM. (Ps. 90.12)

Another significant weapon, in our offensive against the YETSER, concerns man's resort to Divine assistance through prayer to help man deliver himself from his evil impulses. The Rabbis are of the opinion that without God's aid, man could not wholly resist the indefatigable assaults of his YETSER RA. Strong faith in God, they insist, inspired by constant supplication of God, helps man to ward off ~~his~~ feeling of inadequacy against the power of his evil impulses. Faith and prayer give us the inner strength,

courage and inspiration to give our Evil YETSER effective battle. Our liturgy is well stocked with prayers to assist us in our periods of doubts and moral misgivings. Our morning prayer reads:

BRING ME ~~NOT~~ INTO THE POWER OF SIN, TEMPTATION, OR SHAME, AND BEND MY YETSER TO SUBMIT ITSELF TO THEE; AND KEEP ME FROM EVIL ~~ME~~ AND EVIL ASSOCIATES, AND LET ME HOLD FAST TO THE GOOD YETSER AND TO THE GOOD ASSOCIATES. (Ber. 60b; for other prayers on this subject, see Ber. 16b, 17a.)

A final means of combatting our YETSER, according to the Rabbis in the Midrash, is by way of sincere repentance. The Sages said: "After God decided to create the Evil YETSER, he began to regret it, but prepared the cure before the affliction, and created Repentance." (Schechter says of this quotation that it is quoted by a commentary to Aboth in Ms. [in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary], forming a kind of YALKUT to this Tractate [22a]. The use of the word ELOHIM in the text would point to the YELAMDENU as the original source.)⁽⁹⁾ (See also Gen. R. 38.9 and 21.6.)

The state of sin, no matter how heinous, is never final in Judaism. Nor must man despair because of the number of his sins. When David, and after him Ezra, said, "Our iniquities are increased over our heads and our trespass is grown up to the heavens," the Holy One, blessed be He, answered, "Fear not because of this thing, even if they (the sins) reached the very

(9) SOME ASPECTS OF RABBINIC THEOLOGY, S. Schechter, (The MacMillan Co.), 1909, Note 3, P. 314.

heaven, and if you do repentance, I will forgive; and not only the first heaven...but even if they reached the very throne of Glory, and if you will do repentance, I will receive you at once (as it is said): O ISRAEL, RETURN UNTO THE LORD THY GOD. (Hos. 14.1) (PESIKTA RABBATI 155a)

In connection with the Rabbinic idea of Repentance, it is recorded that God gave warning (by certain phenomena in nature) and opportunity for repentance to the generation of the Deluge (ABOTH de RABBI NATHAN 132), the generation of the Tower of Babel^x (Gen. R. 38.9), as well as the men of Sodom, in spite of their own rebellion against God. (Numbers R. 10.1)

"It is further assumed that great moral catastrophes were almost providentially brought about", says Schechter, "with the purpose of setting the good example to sinners that no sin is so great as to make repentance impossible. As such examples, are cited: David, who committed the sin of adultery; and the whole congregation of Israel, the contemporaries of Moses, who worshipped the golden calf. Neither David nor Israel, considering their high moral standing, were, the Rabbis declare, capable of such crimes, but it was brought about against their own will, as just stated, to give a claim for repentance in the future both in the case of the individual, ~~as~~ as David, and in the case of the whole community, as ^{that} ~~in the case~~ of the golden calf, in which the whole of Israel was involved, and thus showing that there is no room for despair of reconciliation

with God, be the sin ever so great and all-embracing."
 (10)
 (See Ab. Zar. 4b and 5a and Shab. 65a.)

The key thought in the Rabbinic approach to Repentance is that while there is nothing which can stand in the way of the penitent, regardless of the magnitude of the sin - the door always remaining open - there must be an element of mutual repentance, so to speak, as between man and God. While God is always on hand to meet man more than half way, as a Father to a son, man must exert every conceivable effort in that direction. Here, man's inherently good impulses, usually dormant, can be activated by man in order to assist him in "returning to his Father", to overcome his evil impulses, and to rediscover the moral path of life.

It is obvious from the foregoing that what the Rabbis aimed at through their above mentioned catalogue of weapons against the Evil YETSER was to stimulate man's effort toward the development of what modern ethics calls MORAL HABIT, which in turn **leads to** the development of character and makes moral living "second nature" to man. By proper use of the mentioned moral weapons, the individual can increasingly →

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(10) Op. cit., P. 317.

develop such moral habits as will enable him to control the evil tendencies of his nature for his individual good as well as for that of mankind.

After all that has been said above in exposition of the Rabbis' conception of the YETSER HA-RA, it is hardly necessary again to point out to the reader that the above-mentioned weapons were not at all intended by the Rabbis to eradicate man's evil drives. To do so, even if this were possible, would not only virtually de-humanize man, but would above all deprive man of the potential base of good that lies in them.

Summarizing our exposition of the Rabbis' view of human nature from the modern point of view, as Silver does, we get the following very constructive thought on the subject:

Each age, we know, has a strong tendency to disparage out right the wisdom of the ancients on all things and to think of itself as the absolute innovators in all realms of human thought. May we, then, point out to our contemporaries that in the realm of modern social psychology, we are confronted with a twentieth century principle of human behavior concerning man's nature which our Jewish sages of over twenty centuries ago took for granted, namely, that by attempting to eradicate our evil drives, we thereby thwart our entire dynamic life-force from realizing its highest usefulness for the individual and for society.

The remarkably modern outlook of the Rabbis on the subject of human nature stands out even more sharply when we examine the main tenets of modern social psychological thinking

| Yes

and note the striking parallels between the latter and that of the **Rabbis**. This school of thought, even like our Sages of old, sees no arbitrary cleavage in man's nature. It rather views human nature as Gestalt - as a totality of all of man's instincts or innate tendencies. These are so constituted as to make for the preservation of both the individual and society. Those which primarily make for the former, modern social **psychology** calls man's self-regarding or egoistic tendencies (what our Rabbis refer to as YETSER HA-RA), the latter, **it terms** man's SOCIAL instincts (or what the Rabbis call the YETSER TOB).

By self-regarding instincts, social psychologists mean such innate instinctive tendencies as anger, jealousy, rivalry and secretiveness. Among the social instincts or sentiments are sympathy, affection, pity and sex-love.⁽¹¹⁾ Any given individual is **NATURALLY** an erratic mixture of fierce insistence upon his own welfare and of ~~profound~~ susceptibility to the happiness of others. Modern Social Psychology, incidentally, **as SILVER contends** strongly confirms the Rabbinic contention that our self-regarding or naturally-inclined-toward-evil instincts, if properly **DISCIPLINED**, can make for society's survival and well-being. **"We find many of** our self-regarding instincts, in some of their manifestations, **directly** making for socially significant consequences. **while** Anger, for instance, is reckoned as a primarily self-regarding emotion, expressing itself in a feeling of resentment against personal hurt, **it**

.....
 See SILVER
 (11) Op. cit., P. 12.

may at times be also wholly other-regarding or socially beneficial, as in the case of the indignation aroused by a hurt or wrong inflicted upon another who is within range of our sympathy. Anger, then, becomes nothing less than MORAL indignation; and moral indignation is the foundation of our all-important social sentiment of Justice. (12)

The Rabbinic claim that the raw, unrestrained impulses of ~~that~~ man are naturally inclined to evil are actually the raw foundation upon which man's sacred and higher life is built - this claim of the Rabbis is heartily supported by Modern Social Psychology. The latter firmly believes that man has dormant in the rich, fertile lome of his personality - in our YETSER HA-RA, to use the Rabbis' terminology - the very roots of his higher life. "It is thanks to these native social endowments of our self," Silver says, "that in the early social development of man, group morality came into being, and that later, when the various forces of individualism broke the stout bonds of group life and its group mores, CONSCIENCE was enabled to emerge, ushering in, in turn, the stage of personal, reflective morality." (13)

It is important to note that while due recognition is given to the element of social coercion in the province of the moral life, ^{to} and the impelling power of the persuasive social message of reason to motivate man to seek his own highest good in that

(12) Ibid., P. 16.

(13) Ibid., P. 16 at bottom of page.

of society's, neither social coercion nor reason alone, Silver brings out, could compel the alleged non-social or anti-social man to conform to the requirements of social conduct, if it were not for the signal existence of the deeply embedded social impulses, or the innate roots of the moral life (the YETSER TOB), in the very fibre of man's nature.

Needless to point out to the reader, ^{in summation of the thesis of this chapter} that the above-mentioned exposition ~~of~~ ^{of} the Rabbinic conception of the moral nature of man breathes forth an enheartening message that speaks of both human dignity and hope. That contemporary man stands in great need of this message, ~~no~~ one will deny.

In our next chapter, we shall attempt to elaborate upon the significant implications of the above described Rabbinic conception of man's moral nature.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RABBINIC VIEW OF THE DIGNITY OF MAN

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Our analysis of the Rabbinic conception of human nature in the previous chapter has, we believe, shown that, according to the Rabbis, man's nature (YETSER), while naturally inclined toward evil (YETSER HA-RA), is basically and potentially good, inasmuch as it possesses a powerful agent for the good (YETSER TOB) which is fully capable, under proper moral discipline - or through the development of moral habits - of transforming man's raw, uncultivated animal impulses into a rich life of moral purpose.

This great doctrine of the Rabbis, of the existence in man's nature of the Good Impulse that has the power to harness and discipline man's untutored impulses for his highest good and happiness - a doctrine which is obviously of great inspiration for the spirit of man - also presupposes the Rabbis' other equally morale-building doctrine of what is traditionally called man's Freedom of the Will, or what we call in modern terminology, Moral Freedom, or, perhaps more correctly, man's power of ethical choice. This means, of course, that while there is no such thing as absolute Freedom of the will, man, by his increasing development of moral habits, can and does grow in his power of ethical choice, or in his ability

to/do the right rather than the wrong in a given moral situation.

As we know, ~~this~~ fundamental Jewish doctrine of the Freedom of Man's Will, or of his innate potential of ethical choice, is contained in the famous and arresting statement in the book of Deuteronomy:

I HAVE SET BEFORE THEE LIFE AND DEATH, THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE. THEREFORE CHOOSE LIFE! (Deut. 30.20; cf. *ibid.* 11.26-28.)

In complete faithfulness to this Biblical affirmation of the fundamental Jewish doctrine of the Freedom of Man's Will, is Akiba's equally arresting and **justly** famous statement:

Everything is foreseen (by God), yet freedom of choice is given (to man). (Abot 3.15)

This pregnant statement of Akiba's is given in the meaningful form of a paradox. As the student of medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy knows, volumes of hair-splitting philosophical discussion were written in both camps on the subject, aiming at a rational reconciliation between the belief in the Freedom of Man's Will and God's Foreknowledge or Omniscience. And, as we know, some medieval philosophers felt themselves compelled to deny man's moral freedom in order to leave full room for God's Foreknowledge or Omniscience. In Akiba's just mentioned great paradox on the subject, we note that Akiba,

not as a technical philosopher, but in his own thoughtful way, is aware of this problem; yet, while offering no solution of the problem which the paradox contains, he nevertheless is satisfied, as a matter of bold faith or religious conviction, to accept BOTH doctrines of God's omniscience and man's moral freedom for the potent reason that he finds the former necessary for an adequate conception of God and the latter as an indispensable aid toward the development of man's character and toward the fortifying of man's sense of inner dignity.

The present writer would here hazard ~~the~~ opinion that this dual affirmation is quite valid even from the modern religious point of view.

Another fine Rabbinic confirmation of Akiba's famous paradox, stated somewhat differently, is the following one of R. Hanina:

Everything is in the power of Heaven, except the fear (or worship) of Heaven. (Ber. 33b)

Equally so is this Talmudic dictum:

God in his Providence determines beforehand what a man shall be, and what shall befall him; but not whether he shall be godly or godless, righteous or not. (Mid. 16b)

A similar Rabbinic statement on the subject is that of R. Levi:

Six organs serve a man; over three he is master, and

over three he is not. Over the eye, ear, and nose, he is not master, for he sees what he does not wish to see, hears and smells what he does not wish to hear and smell. Over the mouth, hand, and foot, he IS master. If he desires, he studies the Torah, while if he wishes, he engages in slander, and if he wishes, he blasphemes and reviles. With hand he can dispense charity, if he wishes, while he can rob and murder, if he so desires. With his feet he can go to the theatres and circuses, while if he wishes he can go to the synagogues and to the houses of study. (Gen. R. 67.3) (Shall we add that we wouldn't be so severe today on "the theatres and Circuses". As we know, however, the latter were a worse lot in the Rabbis' times than they are in our own day.)

It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the very existence of the YETSER TOB in man's nature, which was brought out in our first chapter, definitely implies, according to the Rabbis, man's possession of moral freedom. If, as the Rabbis have taken pains to argue, man's Good Inclination can, through man's full use of the Rabbis' recommended weapons of fighting the YETSER RA, conquer man's inclinations to evil, then it obviously follows that man does possess, at least potentially, moral freedom:

And should you argue that the Evil Desire is not in your power (i.e., you cannot come to grips with the basic problems of moral living), then 'surely it is safe in thee', and I have already written for you in the Torah, 'and unto THEE is its desire (i.e., the Evil Inclination), but thou

mayest rule over it!' (Gen. R. 22.6; cf. Gen. R. 34.10.)

That this fundamental Jewish doctrine of man's moral

~~freedom~~ is faithfully adhered to, not only in Rabbinic literature, but also in post-Biblical, non-Rabbinic literature, ~~and~~ we can see from the following significant statements

on the subject by the following famous Jewish authorities:

Philo has the following to say in his comment on the above-mentioned Biblical statement in Deut. 30.15-20:

God made man unrestrained and free, acting voluntarily and of his own choice, to the end that, being acquainted with bad things as well as good, and acquiring conceptions of honorable and shameful conduct, and thinking clearly about right and wrong and all that has to do with virtue and vice, he may habitually choose the better and avoid the contrary. For this reason the Divine word is written in Deuteronomy: BEHOLD, I HAVE PUT BEFORE THY FACE LIFE AND DEATH, GOOD AND EVIL; CHOOSE LIFE! (14)

The following is Ben Sirach's statement on the subject:

Say not it was the Lord's fault that I fell away...say not, He led me astray...He made ~~man~~ from the beginning and left him to his own counsel. If thou wilt, thou wilt keep the commandments, and to deal faithfully is a matter of choice. He has set before thee fire and water; thou canst stretch out thy hand to whichever thou wilt. Before man are life and death, and whichever he chooses will be given

(14) See Moore, JUDAISM, Vol. 1, PP 458-9. Quod deus sit immutabilis c. 10 # 46-50. (ed. Mangey, 1, 279 f.)

him. (Ecclus. 15.11-17)

In the same vein, but in different wording, we find the same confirmation in the famous Apocryphal work, known as the Psalms of Solomon:

Our deeds are in the choice and power of our soul, to do righteousness and iniquity in the works of our hands. (9.4)

The two above-stated great and interrelated doctrines of the existence of the YETSER TOB in man's nature and of man's possession of moral freedom obviously indicate the Rabbis' great anxiety to expatiate and fortify the great doctrine, first taught, as we know, and as we shall have occasion below to indicate, by the prophets and sages of our Bible, of the innate Moral Dignity of Man. This ever-uplifting doctrine for man we also find implied and further fortified in the Rabbinical tradition of the so-called Noachian Laws.

These Noachian Laws in Rabbinic tradition are what we would describe today as those unwritten moral laws of mankind which pre-existed the Sinaitic Revelation, and, in the opinion of the Rabbis, were binding upon all mankind from the time of Adam. Basing their views on Genesis 2.16: AND THE LORD GOD COMMANDED THE MAN, SAYING, etc., the Rabbis declared that the following six commandments were enjoined

upon the first man, Adam: not to worship idols; not to blaspheme God's name; not to kill; to establish courts of justice; not to commit adultery; and not to commit robbery. A seventh commandment was added after the Flood: not to eat flesh that had been cut from a living animal. (Gen. R. 16.6; cf. *ibid.*, ~~24.5~~ 24.5; San. 56b; and Ab. Zar. 8.4.)

An examination of the just listed Noachian Laws reveals that they are predominantly moral laws which apply to ALL men regardless of their race or religion. In the tradition of the Rabbis, these fundamental moral laws were practised as a matter of course long before the Sinaitic Revelation, from the advent of the very first man, by all the peoples of the world. It was the Rabbis' correct insight that no human group could function without the existence of some measure of fundamental moral law. It was their conviction, therefore, that man did not have to wait for the Sinaitic Revelation to discover the moral law. In other words, it was the Rabbis' contention that the Moral Law is not a matter of mere Divine Fiat, decreed at a certain period in the history of man, but is something INDIGENOUS to man, from the time man appeared on the scene. A very interesting Midrashic story, which follows, intriguingly confirms this important Rabbinic thought: -

There is the story that R. Jannai, when once walking in the road, saw a man of exceeding effusiveness (Matneth Kehunah, commentary by Issachar Ber Ashkenazi [16th and 17th centuries])

renders: 'distinguished in dress, like a scholar, so that R. Jannai mistook him for one'). ^{The Man} ~~He~~ said to him: Would you, Rabbi, care to accept my hospitality? R. Jannai answered: 'Yes', whereupon he brought him to his house and entertained him with food and drink. He (R. Jannai) tested him in (the knowledge) of Talmud, and found that he possessed none, in Haggadah, and found none, in Mishnah, and found none, in Scripture, and found none. Then he said to him: 'Take up (the wine-cup of benediction) and recite Grace'. The man answered: 'Let Jannai recite Grace in his house!' ^{l.e.,} (Regard yourself as quite at home and recite grace yourself.) Said the Rabbi to him: 'Are you able to repeat what I say to you?' 'Yes', answered the man. Said R. Jannai: 'Say: A dog has eaten of Jannai's bread' ^{l.e.,} (has eaten bread with Jannai). The man rose and caught hold of him saying: 'You have my inheritance, which you are withholding from me!' Said R. Jannai to him: 'And, what is this inheritance of yours which I have?' The man answered: 'Once I passed a school, and I heard the voice of the youngsters saying: THE LAW WHICH MOSES COMMANDED US IS THE INHERITANCE OF THE CONGREGATION OF JACOB (Deut. 33.4); it is written not THE INHERITANCE OF THE CONGREGATION OF JANNAI, but THE INHERITANCE OF THE CONGREGATION OF JACOB. Said R. Jannai to the man: 'How have you merited to eat at the table with me?' The man answered: 'Never in my life have I, after

hearing evil talk (calumny, backbiting), repeated it to the person spoken of, nor have I ever seen two persons quarrelling without making peace between them.' Said R. Jannai: 'That I should have called you dog, when you possess such good breeding (derek-eretz: ~~highly principled behavior~~ ^{RIGHT CONDUCT})'...For R. Samuel b. Nahman said: (The duty of) DEREK-ERETZ preceded the TORAH by twenty six generations. (Since the duty of DEREK-ERETZ commenced with the very first man created, while the TORAH was not given until Moses, twenty six generations later). This is (implied in) what is written, 'TO KEEP THE WAY OF THE TREE OF LIFE' (Gen. 3.24). (First, Scripture mentions) the way (DEREK), which means DEREK-ERETZ, and afterwards (does it mention) 'THE TREE OF LIFE,' which means the TORAH. (Lev. R. 9.3)

Silver forcefully confirms this Rabbinic insight in his clarifying discussion of THE AUTONOMY OF THE MORAL LAW. He states that:

"Judaism...regards the moral law so fundamental as to recognize it as an inescapable law that is ~~spant~~ from and antecedent to Revelation. Judaism, in brief, recognizes the moral law as grounded in reason, in human nature, in man as a social being. Revelation commands it, to be sure, but even 'were it not written, it would on grounds of reason have to be written.'...As far as Judaism is concerned, the function of Revelation, as it relates to the moral law, was not to DECREE TO MAN A NEW STATUTE, CERTAINLY, NOT TO

decree something foreign and extraneous to man, but rather to CONFIRM to man something that already was known to him and was fundamental in his nature from the time man appeared on the scene. In accordance with Judaism, then, the authoritarian function of Revelation is to HALLOW the moral law, *to give it its special divine sanction, to give to the moral law* as it expresses itself in duty - ENTHUSIASM, in the literal sense of the term, i.e., divine inspiration or motivation. ^{m'15)}

We have then, according to the Rabbis, in the profound moral implications of the Rabbinical doctrine of the Noachian Laws yet another verification of the Jewish doctrine of the moral dignity of man. *yes*

In Judaism, the idea of man's moral ^{DIGNITY} is, as we know, first powerfully stated in the unique Biblical doctrine, that man was created in God's own Image:

AND GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS IMAGE, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD
CREATED HE HIM. (Gen. 1.27)

The Rabbis' Midrashic elucidation of this spiritually liberating Biblical doctrine comes out very forcefully, and morally very usefully, in the following Midrashim:

Dear (to God) is man in that he was created in the Divine Image; **still** more dear in that it is known to him that he was created in HIS image, as it is said: IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE MADE MAN. (Abot 3.14)

.....

(15) Ethics of Judaism, P: 114-7; see there also his discussion of the NOACHIAN LAWS, *88-88 f. and 133 f.*

The morally fruitful thought here shines forth particularly in the second part of this great Midrash, viz.:

Still more dear in that it is known to him that he was created in His image.

In other words, in man's realization that he is created in God's own Image of Holiness and Righteousness. For once man realizes this supreme challenge, he cannot fail to make this realization a most potent incentive to ethical conduct.

One of the practical moral effects of this profound realization is strikingly brought out by the Rabbis in the following Midrash:

See that thou do not say, inasmuch as I have been despised, my fellow shall be despised with me; inasmuch as I have been cursed, my fellow shall be cursed with me. R. Tanhuma said, 'If thou doest thus, reflect upon whom thou dost despise - IN THE IMAGE OF GOD MADE HE HIM. (Gen. R. 24.7)

Still another incisive moral application of man's realization that he was created in God's image is the well known comment of R. Akiba on the great biblical verse:

WHOSO SHEDDETH MAN'S BLOOD, BY MAN SHALL HIS BLOOD BE SHED: FOR IN THE IMAGE OF GOD MADE HE MAN. (Gen. 9.6): R. Akiba lectured: He who sheds blood is regarded as though he had impaired (God's) likeness. What is the proof? WHOSO SHEDDETH MAN'S BLOOD, etc. What is the reason? FOR IN THE IMAGE OF GOD MADE HE MAN. (Thus, as Freedman notes, murder is punished by death because it impairs God's image, as it

.....
(15a) H. Freedman, English Translator (with M. Simon) of BERESHIT RABBAH, Soncino Edition of MIDRASH RABBAH.

were.) (Gen. R. 34.14; cf. for another fine Midrashic passage on the Image of God, Gen. R. 8.9.)

We may aptly recall here the famous verse of the Psalmist in praise of man:

WHAT IS MAN, THAT THOU ART MINDFUL OF HIM? AND THE SON OF MAN, THAT THOU THINKEST OF HIM? YET THOU HAST MADE HIM BUT LITTLE LOWER THAN THE ANGELS, AND HAST CROWNED HIM WITH GLORY AND HONOUR. (Ps. 8.5-6)

In the following Midrashic homily on the subject of the stature of man in relation to that of the ministering angels of God, in whose existence the Rabbis, children of their age, believed, we again find the Rabbis' high estimation of man. In this Midrash, we note the very interesting and perceptive reason, alluded to in our first chapter, why the Rabbis place man on an even higher rung than the angels, namely, because man, unlike the angels, possesses the YETSER RA and therefore is compelled to nobly struggle against its evil machinations:

Thus we are told by R. Judah ben Ila'i, interpreting Job 38.7 (WHEN THE MORNING STARS SANG TOGETHER, AND ALL THE SONS OF GOD SHOUTED FOR JOY): The angels said in the presence of the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Master of the World, why are we not allowed to intone our song here in heaven BEFORE Israel sing their song below on earth?' And the Holy One, blessed be He, answered: 'How shall you say it BEFORE Israel?

Israel have their habitation on earth; they are ~~born~~ of woman, and the Evil YETSER has dominion in their midst, and nevertheless they oppose the YETSER and declare My Unity every day, and proclaim Me as King every day, and long for My Kingdom and for the rebuilding of My Temple.' (Pseudo-Seder Eliahu Zuta [~~Nishpahim~~], ed. Friedman, p. 56.) (For other Midrashic instances on the subject of man's superiority to the angels, which however are not as important as the one cited, cf. Gen. R. 8.10; Sifre on Deut. 32.3, and Gen. R. 21.1.)

The Rabbinic conviction of the essential moral dignity of man impelled the Rabbis to conceive of man's relationship ~~to~~ ^{to} God as no less than that of an indispensable, mutually helpful partnership. Because God, according to the Rabbis in the Midrash, was so impressed with the strength, earnestness and dignity of man's moral striving, He desired to effect an active partnership with His mortal child in the moral work of this world. This Divine desire to associate with man in order to foster the moral work of this world is forthrightly stated in the following Midrash:

R. Samuel B. Ammi said: From the beginning of the world's creation, the Holy One, blessed be He, longed to enter into partnership with the mortals. For what will you: If it is a matter of time reckoning, it should say either one, two,

three, or first, second, third, etc. (i.e., in ^{the} Biblical enumeration of the days of Creation), but surely not one, second, third! (In other words, as Freedman in his note on this Midrash says, the creation narrative should either state one day, two days, three days, etc., or the first day, the second day, etc. Instead of which it states ONE DAY, and continues with THE SECOND DAY, THE THIRD DAY, etc. Hence YOM EHAD [One day] really means: the day when God designed to be AT ONE with man, His handiwork. The world thus requires the harmonious cooperation of God and man, and its [moral] harmony and unity are broken only when man sins.) (Gen. R. 3.9)

In the following Midrash we have a breathless and terribly man-challenging interpretation of the significance of this God-Man partnership:

And if you do this, says God, if you constitute yourself one (moral) communion, in that very hour, I rise higher. I am exalted beyond my former station. (Lev. R. 30.)

Need we add that only one who is powerfully convinced of the essential dignity of man, as was this ~~man~~ ^{Hasidist}, could dare believe that Israel's, or mankind's highest moral endeavors could so affect God as to exalt even Him "beyond His former station."

Another illustration of the reciprocal influence of the actions of man upon God and vice versa is reflected in the following daring Midrash:

I WILL SHOW HIM THE SALVATION OF GOD (Ps. 50.23). R.
 Abbahu said: This is one of the scriptural passages which
 show that the salvation of God is identical with the salvation
 of Israel, (as it is written), THE SALVATION THAT IS THINE
 IS (ALSO) OURS (Ps. 80.3). (Lev. R. 9.3)

The same theologically bold but man-exalting thought is
 brought out in another Midrash:

Every time that Israel performs God's will, God's very
 strength and dominion are enhanced. And, contrariwise, God's
 power decreases with proportionately less moral behavior on
 the part of man. (Pesikta de Rab Kahana, 26.10; cf. Lam. R.
 1.33) x

The same thought is stated in Midrash Gen. R. 30.10,
 which ends:

We need His proximity...He needs us to glorify Him.

What a mighty challenge to man to rise to the highest
 in his own nature, is this great Rabbinic doctrine of man's morally
 dynamic partnership with God!

In the highest thought of the Rabbis, ~~that~~ ^{that which,} in this Man-
 God partnership, influences God to bring blessing upon man,
 is man's moral deed. In this, of course, the Rabbis but hewed
 closely to, indeed strongly re-inforced, the teachings of
 the Biblical prophets, lawgivers and sages. It is a well-
 recognized fact by now that Judaism's great contribution to
 religion - the legacy of the Great Prophets of Israel - was

that God is Justice and Righteousness, and that the true religious life, in the immortal words of the Prophet Micah, is "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." ^(6.8) This thought is eloquently illustrated in the following Midrash:

AND THE NIGHT WAS DIVIDED AGAINST THEM (Gen. 14.15). R. Benjamin B. Jephtheth said in R. Johanan's name: The night was divided of its own accord. The Rabbis say: Its Creator divided it. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Abraham has labored with Me at midnight. (Freedman points out that Abraham's rescue of the captives, being a noble action, is regarded as working with and assisting God.) Therefore, I, too, will act for his sons at midnight.' And when did that happen? In Egypt, as it says, AND IT CAME TO PASS AT MIDNIGHT (Ex. 12.29). R. Tanhuma said: Some state this in a different form. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'Abraham went forth at midnight, therefore I too will go forth with his sons at midnight,' as it says THUS SAITH THE LORD: ABOUT MIDNIGHT WILL I GO OUT, etc. (Is. 11.4) (Abraham and the ~~prototypical~~ role that he plays in the Midrash will be taken up in the next chapter.)(Gen. R. 43.3)

The same thought is even more nobly and touchingly brought out in the following Midrash:

...R. Joshua interpreted in R. Levi's name: THE LORD IS GOOD TO ALL, AND HE INSPIRES MANKIND WITH HIS (SPIRIT OF) COMPASSION, (Ps. 145.9). R. Abba said: Should a year

of famine commence tomorrow and men show compassion to each other, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will also be filled with compassion for them. In the days of R. Tanhuma Israel had need of a fast, so they went to him and requested: 'Master, proclaim a fast.' He proclaimed a fast for one day, then a second day, and then a third, yet no rain fell. Thereupon he ascended (the pulpit) and preached to them, saying: 'My sons! Be filled with compassion for each other, and then the Holy One, blessed be He, will be filled with compassion for you!' Now while they were distributing relief to the poor they saw a man give money to his divorced wife, whereupon they went to him (R. Tanhuma) and exclaimed, 'Why do we sit here while such misdeeds are perpetrated!' 'What then have you seen?' he inquired. 'We saw So and so give his divorced wife money.' He summoned him and asked him, 'Why did you give money to your divorced wife?' 'I saw her in great distress,' replied he, 'and was filled with compassion for her.' Upon this R. Tanhuma turned his face upward and exclaimed: 'Sovereign of the Universe! This man, upon whom this woman has no claim for sustenance, yet saw her in distress and was filled with pity for her. See, then, that of Thee it is written, THE LORD IS FULL OF COMPASSION AND GRACIOUS (PS. 103.8), while we are Thy children, the children of Thy beloved one, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, how much the more shouldst Thou be filled with compassion for us!' Immediately the rain descended and the world enjoyed relief. (Gen. R. 33.3)

Though many of us today, we may note parenthetically, may not believe with the Rabbis in the power of man's great moral deeds to influence God to actually bring rain upon a dry humanity, we can nevertheless not fail to be inspired with the tremendous moral message of this Midrash.

The fundamental importance ~~in~~ Judaism of the principle of Justice, both in God and in man's social life, ⁽¹⁶⁾ is provocatively brought out in the following two Midrashim, which stress the idea that man establishes his partnership with God in this world supremely through the instruments of social justice:

He who does a moral deed, as for instance, the judge who pronounces a righteous judgment, thereby associates himself with God in the work of creation. (Mekilta Yitro 13.27) ⁽¹⁷⁾

Every judge who judges a true judgment according to its truth, the Writ gives him credit as though he had become a partner with God in creation. (Shab. 10a)

This feeling of co-partnership, co-craftsmanship with God in the work of righteousness in this world, may, in the thought of the Rabbis, inspire every ideally aspiring person with the fortifying belief that every one of his seemingly insignificant moral efforts really counts in the larger work of the universe. We note this in the following Midrash:

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(16) See JUSTICE AND JUDAISM by Maxwell Silver for a complete exposition of this theme.

(17) Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael, Vol. II, P. 179, translated by Jacob Z. Lauterbach (JPS), 1949.

FOR THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS, HE LOVETH RIGHTEOUSNESS; THE UPRIGHT SHALL BEHOLD HIS FACE (Ps. 11.7). R. Tanhuma in R. Judah's name and R. Menahem in R. Eleazar's name said: No man loves his fellow craftsman. A sage, however, loves his compeer, e.g. R. Hiyya loves his colleague and R. Hoshaya his. The Holy One, blessed be He, also loves his fellow-craftsman. (Freedman comments that He is righteous and loves those who are righteous, who are in that respect His fellow-craftsmen.) Hence, FOR THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS, HE LOVETH RIGHTEOUSNESS: THE UPRIGHT SHALL BEHOLD HIS FACE applies to Noah, as it is written, AND THE LORD SAID UNTO NOAH: COME THOU...FOR THEE HAVE I SEEN RIGHTEOUS BEFORE ME.

Rabbinic Judaism's universality has, as we know, been questioned by the champions of its daughter-religion, the allegation having been made by them ad nauseam that the Rabbis, in their pronouncements, have woefully failed to rise to the high universalistic stature of the Prophets of Israel and, of course, of Christianity. It is, therefore, no less than fair to point out in this connection that the doctrine of the essential dignity of man, which the Rabbis have taken such great pains to establish, was applied by them not merely to Israel, or to the Jew, but to MAN, as such, be he Jew or Gentile.

We bring the following Midrashim to disprove the said allegation. Our first citation is a late Midrash, which elo-

quently speaks for itself on the subject of the broad universalistic note in Rabbinic Judaism:

I call heaven and earth to witness that, whether Israelite or non-Israelite, whether man or woman, whether male or female slave, the Holy spirit rests upon man, as such, according to his deeds. (Seder Eliahu Rabbah, ed. Friedman, P. 48.)

Our second citation very pointedly reinforces this universalistic breadth of Rabbinic Judaism:

Why was only a single man created? the Rabbis ask. - That no one shall be able to say, My forefather was greater than yours.

Again, the question was asked: Why was a single man created? A single man was created to teach thee the he who destroys one person, the Scripture imputes it to him as though he had destroyed the whole population of the world, and he who saves one human life, Scripture imputes it to him as if he had saved the whole world. (San. 4.5)

In this connection, we cannot refrain from citing the thoughtful and celebrated discussion between R. Akiba and Ben Azzai on the subject as to which is the most comprehensive law in the whole Torah? Akiba argues that it is found in Leviticus 19.18: BUT THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF. Ben Azzai, on the other hand, contends that it is found in Genesis 5.1: THIS IS THE BOOK OF THE GENERATIONS OF ADAM. IN THE DAY THAT GOD CREATED MAN, IN THE LIKENESS OF GOD MADE HE HIM.

In other words, Ben Azzai finds the most fundamental doctrine of the law in the idea of the common brotherhood of mankind: all men were created in the image of God. (Gem. R. 24.8; cf. Sifra, Kedoshim, Perak. 4, ed. Weiss, 89b; Jer. Nedarim, 41c, middle.)

Our final citation on this subject needs no comment. We refer to the well known passage in the Sifra, on Lev. 18.5:

We are taught in the name of R. Jeremiah: 'If you ask whence we learn that even a Gentile who obeys the Law is like the High Priest, the answer is found in the words, 'which if a MAN (i.e., ANY human being) do, he shall live by them' (ibid.) . So again, it is said, 'this is the law of MANKIND, Lord God' (2 Sam. 7.19), not 'This is the law of priests and Levites and Israelites'. And again, 'Open the gates that a righteous Gentile, keeping faithfulness may enter by it' (Isa. 26.2), and not, 'Open the gates that there may enter priests, Levites and Israelites'. And again, 'This is the gate of the Lord; the RIGHTEOUS shall enter by it (Ps. 118.20), ^{and} not 'priests, levites, Israelites'. ^{Rejoice, ye priests and levites and Israelites, but} It ~~does not say~~, 'Rejoice, ye RIGHTEOUS in the Lord' (Ps. 33.1). Nor is it written, 'Do Good, O Lord, to the Priests, Levites Israelites', but, 'Do good, O Lord, to the GOOD' (Ps. 125.4). Hence it follows that even a Gentile who obeys the Law is like the High Priest. (Sifra Ahare Mot, PEREK 13, ED. WEISS, 89b) ⁽¹²⁾

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- (12) For a full discussion of Universality in Rabbinic Judaism see Chapter VI, The Moral and Universal Scope of the Jewish Idea of Duty, in ETHICS OF JUDAISM, by Maxwell Silver.

All these reasons, then, -

- (1) Man's possession of the Yetser Tob - or his Inclination to the Good, or ^{to} the moral life,
- (2) Man's moral freedom,
- (3) the autonomy of the moral law,
- (4) the Biblical and Rabbinic doctrine that man was created in the Divine Image,
- (5) Man's co-partnership with God, and
- (6) the equality of all men, -

-all these potent reasons, as we have seen, have fortified the Rabbis in their man-redeeming insight of the essential Dignity of Man. It is now wonder, then, that this exhilarating conception has ignited the Rabbis' imagination to weave an intriguing pattern of legends around the origin of Adam - the first man - in order to further bring forward this lifting idea for man. We cite the following very interesting Midrashim in this connection:

R. Tanhuma, in the name of R. Banayah and R. Berekiah in the name of R. Leazar said: He created him (Adam) as a shapeless mass extending from one end of the world to the other. Thus it is written, THINE EYES DID SEE MINE UNFORMED SUBSTANCE (Ps. 139.16). R. Joshua b. R. Nehemiah and R. Judah b. R. Simon in R. Leazar's name said: He created him filling the whole world. How do we know (that he stretched) from east to west? Because it is said, 'Thou hast formed me behind (AHOR)

and before (KEDEM, i.e., East). From north to south? Because it says, SINCE THE DAY THAT GOD CREATED MAN UPON THE EARTH, AND FROM THE ONE END OF HEAVEN UNTO THE OTHER (Deut. 4.32). And how do we know that he filled the empty spaces of the world (from the ground to the sky)? From the verse, AND LAID THY HAND UPON ME (as you read, WITHDRAW THY HAND FROM ME (JOB 13.21) - Adam is being pictured as lying upon the ground while God lays his hand, which is in heaven, upon him (Gen. R. 8.1; cf. Gen. R. 21.3, and Gen. R. 24.2).

A similar thought, showing the Rabbis' conception of man as the chief creature of creation, is contained in the following Midrash:

THEN THE LORD GOD FORMED MAN, etc. (Gen. 2.7)...refers to Adam, who was the HALLAH, the completion of the world. (Gen. R. 14.1) (Jer. Shab. 11 explains that man was considered as the HALLAH of the world, namely, as the most sacred part of creation. HALLAH is the Priest's share, or the most sacred part of the dough, according to Biblical law - Numbers 15.17-21)

The same thought about man's pristine, unique stature in Creation, but with an additional characteristically Jewish moral note, is given in the following two Midrashim:

(1) R. Berekiah said in the name of R. Samuel b. Nahman: Though these things were created in the fulness; man's height, his immortality, etc., yet when Adam sinned, they were spoiled. They will not again return to their perfect state until the son of Perez (i.e., Messiah) comes...

(2) AND THE LORD GOD CALLED UNTO THE MAN AND SAID: WHERE ART THOU * AYENKAH? (Gen. 3.9). 'How (EK) hast thou fallen! Yesterday (thou wast ruled) by My will, and now by the will of the serpent; yesterday (thou didst extend) from one end of the world to the other, whereas now (thou canst hide) amongst the trees of the garden! (Gen. R. 19.9; cf. Gen. R. 16.1 and Gen. R. 21.3).

The above just ~~intimated~~ ^{in these midrashim} additional characteristically Jewish moral note is, that man's stature was cut down to size, as it were, only because of man's sin. This serious fact, disconcerting though it is, was in the case of the Rabbis, however, mitigated by the equally characteristic Jewish note of moral optimism, inherent in the Rabbis' man-redeeming idea of the YETSER TOB, as well as in the Prophetic assurance of the coming of the Messianic Age, the coming of which the YETSER TOB, so they taught, hastens. Despite his sin, man has the power, thanks to his YETSER TOB, so the Rabbis were convinced, to restore himself to his pristine moral stature.

In our concluding remarks of this phase of our subject, it is enlightening to compare the Rabbis' just described ~~low~~ ^{lofty} view of man's worth with the disparaging conception of man which is loudly but pathetically paraded in some areas of modern thought. As an illuminating example of the modern tendency to disparage man, which, as we know, is an unfortu-

nate but not an altogether justified reaction on the part of some modern thinkers ~~t~~oward our new scientific revelation of the universe, such as Evolution, we may cite the following well-known quotation ~~from~~ Bertrand Russell:

Brief and powerless is man's life; on him and all his race, the slow sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned ⁽¹⁹⁾ despite the trampling march of unconscious power.

Other modern writers, such as J. W. Krutch, in his essay, THE MODERN TEMPER, as Silver points out in his THE WAY TO GOD, even go further than Russell in the disparagement of man. Russell, as we note in the just quoted passage, finds a redeeming feature in man's ~~would-be~~ pathetic life, in the

(19) Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell, 1927 (The Modern Library), pp. 14-15.

Hebraic note of man's unconquerable idealism in the face of the utter precariousness of his existence, both as individual or race. Such writers ^{AS} ~~A~~ Krutch go to the extremes of arguing that even man's moral life is no credential for his traditional claims to essential dignity!

Against this vicious modern tendency of disparaging man's sense of inner dignity and ^{DESTINY} ~~A~~ so harmful to man's motivation to his highest moral and spiritual endeavors, the Jewish Prophetic counter-doctrine of the essential dignity of man, which the Rabbis, as we have seen, so persuasively elaborated and reinforced, evidently ^{Deserves} ~~deserves~~ a new and thoughtful hearing in our dark and spiritually chaotic times. Our modern, second-thoughts on this subject, we believe, may induce us to vigorously re-embrace the presently much-disparaged Jewish Prophetic and Rabbinic insight of the Dignity of ~~Man~~, not only because of its morale-building value for the pessimism-ridden man of today, but also because our re-examination of the nature of man does not at all compel us to throw overboard the invaluable man-redeeming doctrine of the Dignity of Man.

The Jewish Prophets and Rabbis, by embracing and championing the idea of the moral worth and dignity of man, which was anchored in their collateral ^{UNSHAKABLE} ~~conviction~~ conviction of the existence in this universe of that "Power not-ourselves that makes for righteousness", enabled them, and through them their disciples, to believe in the ultimate triumph of ~~Man~~ and the spirit

of ~~Man~~ ^{heroic} in the universe, despite whatever discouragement to such belief their times presented. May it not be the part of wisdom for contemporary man to re-examine the salutary wisdom of the great doctrine of the Dignity of ~~Man~~, in celebration of which our Rabbis in the Midrash intoned the above described great psalm?

CHAPTER THREE

THE RABBINIC PROTOTYPE OF THE IDEAL MAN
AS PERSONIFIED IN THE FIGURE OF ISRAEL'S
FIRST GREAT PATRIARCH - ABRAHAM.

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In the course of the previous two chapters, we have attempted to describe and to reassert the Rabbis' century-old morale-building doctrine of the intrinsic worth, the inherent moral dignity of man.

We have tried to show how our Rabbis in the Midrash, rather than deprecating man's importance in the moral and spiritual ~~spectacle~~ drama of the world, as have done, to the hurt of the spirit of modern man, many theologians and philosophers of our times, have, on the contrary, more wisely offered man the healing chalice of great meaning to every one of his moral and noble actions. Because of the existence of his Impulse for the Good within the depths of his personality, man, so our Rabbis helpfully assure us, is enabled to build an ever more noble life for himself and society, despite all the besetting obstacles within and outside of man.

This challenging doctrine of our Rabbis finds its complete personification in the heroic figure of Israel's first Great Patriarch - Abraham. Upon him, therefore, our Rabbis

in the Midrash lavished a lion-sized share of their ~~honi~~
~~lotic~~ ingenuity and love.

To the Rabbis, in fact, Abraham serves as the prototype of Ideal Israel - the ideal Jew - the ideal man. Let us note first, in the following Midrashim, the lofty stature to which our Rabbis in the Midrash raised Abraham before God and man.

Among the brief but glowing characterizations of him, we note, among others, that Abraham is characterized as "the eyeball of the world" (Gen. R. 42.7), and as "the Prince of God" (Gen. R. 42.5). Lengthier characterizations of the ~~first~~ Patriarch, in the same lofty vein, are found in the following Midrashim:

(THEN THE LORD GOD FORMED) THE MAN: for the sake of Abraham. (Freedman interprets the definite article "hay" in HA-ADAM as THE man, i.e., the OUTSTANDING man - Abraham.) R. Levi said: It is written, THE GREATEST MAN AMONG THE ANAKIM (Joshua 14.15): MAN means Abraham, and ~~why~~ is he called the greatest man? Because he was worthy of being created BEFORE Adam; the Holy One, blessed be He, reasoned: He (Adam) may sin and there will be none to set ^{things} ~~it~~/right. Hence I will create Adam first, so that if he sins, Abraham may come and set things right. (Gen. R. 14.6; cf. ibid., 12.9; 15.4; Ex. R. 28.1, et passim.)

An ancient Midrash has a parable of a King who planned building a palace. He dug in several places seeking proper ground for a foundation; at last he struck rock beneath,

and said, Here I will build; so he laid the foundations and built. Just so when God sought to create the world, He examined the generation of Enosh and the generation of the Flood, and said, How can I create the world when these wicked people will rise up and provoke me to anger? When He saw Abraham who was to arise, He said, Now I have found a rock on which to build and establish the world. For this reason He calls Abraham a rock (Tsoor), (Isa. 51.1f.). (Yelammedenu in Yalkut, I, # 766, on Num. 23.9; cf. Matt. 16.18.)

• You will find that all the signal inventions (NISIM, miracles) that were wrought for Israel were for Abraham's sake (פְּנֵי אַבְרָהָם). The Exodus from Egypt was for his sake, for it is written, He remembered His holy word unto Abraham, His servant, and brought out His people with joy, etc. (Psalm 105, 42f); the cleaving of the Red Sea into parts (Psalm 136.13); ...the cleaving of the Jordan (Josh. 3.14f.); ...the giving of the Law was for his sake, for it is written, THOU HAST ASCENDED ON HIGH, THOU HAST LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE, THOU HAST TAKEN GIFTS AMONG MEN (Psalm 68.19). (Yelammedenu in Yalkut on Josh. 13.16, II, # 15).

And in the same vein, the Rabbis exclaimed:

Abraham obtained possession of BOTH worlds; for his sake this world and the world to come were created. (Tan. ed. Buber, HAYYE SARAH, # 6.)

The inevitable question arises, what supreme qualities did the Rabbis discover in the Biblical story of Abraham so ~~as~~ to inspire them, with the aid of their great religious and ethical gifts and interests, ^{as} to homiletically draw out of the life of the first Patriarch as recorded in Genesis a picture of a man of such great, indeed, ^{of such} cosmic proportions? The germinal inspiration on this great theme was, of course, the exhilarating hope expressed by God in the the Biblical story concerning Abraham, namely, that Abraham was to become a blessing to the world. And as the Rabbis saw it, this ^{was} indeed what Abraham did become:

AND IN THEE SHALL ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.
(Gen. 12.3)

The Midrash picks up this inspiring theme: ...As dew is a sign of blessing to the world, so art thou (Abraham) a sign of blessing to the world. (Gen. R. 39.8)

A blessing, in other words, through his exemplary, many-faceted life of righteousness. In the same spirit, the following Midrash:

He (Abraham) smoothed with the hammer and beat all mankind into one (moral) path. (Gen. R. 40.7)

The Rabbis are very specific in defining the nature of the blessings that Abraham's career is to spell forth. Commenting upon the above Biblical verse: AND IN THEE SHALL ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED, the Rabbis, identifying Abra-

ham here, as in many other Midrashim, with Ideal Israel, state:

Now if that is meant in respect of wealth, they (the nations) are surely wealthier than we! But it was meant in respect of (moral) counsel. (Gen. R. 39.12)

Again, R. Levi said: No man ever priced a cow belonging to Abraham (in order to buy it) without becoming blessed, nor did a man ever price a cow (to sell) to him without his becoming blessed. Abraham used to pray for barren women, and they were remembered (i.e., they conceived); and on behalf of the sick, and they were healed. R. Huna said: It was not necessary for Abraham to go to the sick person, for when the sick person merely saw him he was relieved. R. Hanina said: Even ships travelling the sea were saved for Abraham's sake! (Gen. R. 39.11)

The following Midrash is even more specific on the subject of Abraham's righteousness:

HE THAT WALKETH RIGHTEOUSLY (Hosea 3.15) alludes to Abraham, as it is written, TO THE END THAT HE (Sc. Abraham) MAY COMMAND HIS CHILDREN...THAT THEY MAY KEEP THE WAY OF THE LORD TO DO RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE (Gen. 18.19), AND SPEAKETH UPRIGHTLY (Isa. 33.14), as it is written, THE UPRIGHT ONES (THE PATRIARCHS) DO LOVE THEE (SONG OF SONGS 1.14), HE THAT DESPISETH THE GAIN OF OPPRESSIONS (Ib.), as it says, I WILL NOT TAKE A THREAD OR A SHOE LATCHET (GEN. 14.23),

THAT SHAKETH HIS HANDS FROM HOLDING BRIBES (Isa. loc. cit.) (Gen. R. 48.6).

Perhaps the strongest Midrash, pointing up Abraham as the prototype of Justice or Righteousness is the following:

R. Reuben said: Righteousness (the attribute of Righteousness personified) cried out and said: If Abraham will not perform me, NONE will perform me! (Gen. R. 43.3)

Thus the Rabbis of the Midrash refer to Abraham as the righteous beacon of the world:

And God said: YEHEE OR - LET THERE BE LIGHT - this alludes to Abraham, as it is written WHO HATH RAISED UP ONE FROM THE EAST, WHOM HE CALLETH IN RIGHTEOUSNESS TO HIS FOOT (Isa. 41.2). (Gen. R. 42.3)

We shall have more to say about Abraham's great concern for justice and righteousness below.

Abraham's hospitality, not only to friends, but also to strangers, is perhaps the most famous of his many virtues. The classic verses in the Bible touching upon Abraham's exemplary hospitality are to be found in Genesis 18.1-8. Bere-shit Rabbah is replete with examples of Abraham's unique hospitality:

R. Abbahu said: The tent of the Patriarch Abraham opened at both sides. R. Judan said: It was like a double-gated passage. Said he (Abraham): If I see them turn aside, I will

know that they are coming to me. When he saw them turn aside, immediately HE RAN TO MEET THEM. (Gen. R. 48.9)

Commenting upon the Biblical verse THE WISE IN HEART WILL TAKE GOOD DEEDS (Prov. 10.8), the Rabbis say that this refers to Abraham; WILL TAKE GOOD DEEDS: the region of Sodom was now desolate and travellers had ceased, with the result that his (Abraham's) stores were now in no way diminished; therefore he said: Why should I allow hospitality to cease from my house? And he went and pitched his tent in Gerar. (Gen. R. 52.3)

According to R. Nehemiah's views...Abraham used to receive wayfarers, and after they had eaten and drunk he would say to them, Now say Grace. ~~When~~ they asked what to say, he would reply, Blessed be the Everlasting God, of whose bounty we have eaten. Hence it is written AND CALLED THERE ON THE NAME OF THE LORD, THE EVERLASTING GOD. (For other examples of Abraham's hospitality, see Gen. R. 54.6; *ibid.*, 56.5; 54.2; 52.1 ~~et passim~~ et passim.)

Abraham's famous virtue of hospitality was matched by his passionate and unique concern for justice and righteousness, not only on the part of man but even on the part of God.

The classic example of Abraham's love of Justice for his fellow man is writ large in the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah story (Genesis 18). Herein, as we all remember, Abraham daringly

questions God as to whether in His determination to destroy these cities and all their people because of the latter's heinous acts of vice and oppression, WILT THOU INDEED SWEEP AWAY THE RIGHTEOUS WITH THE WICKED? (Gen. 18.23) Abraham, we note in this story, is vitally concerned lest even ten righteous or innocent persons be unjustly condemned to destruction by God for the sins of the entire evil group. SHALL NOT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DO JUSTLY? (Ibid. v. 25)

We note in the following Midrash the Rabbis' equally prophetic demand in behalf of Divine Justice for even the possible few innocent or righteous human beings:

WILT THOU INDEED SWEEP AWAY THE RIGHTEOUS WITH THE WICKED? R. Huna said in R. Aha's name: WILT THOU INDEED (HA-AF) SWEEP AWAY (TISPEH): Thou confinest anger, but anger cannot confine Thee. R. Joshua b. Nehemiah interpreted it: The anger which Thou bringest upon Thy world, wouldst Thou destroy therewith the righteous and the wicked! And not enough that Thou dost not suspend judgment of the wicked for the sake of the righteous, but Thou wouldst even destroy the righteous with the wicked! (Gen. 18.23)

It is interesting to note, in passing, that the Rabbis' thoughtful idea of the fundamental principle of Justice, with the prophets, ^{ought} by which they ^{ought} were convinced God rules mankind, ^{be} in due deference to man's inevitable human frailty, made up of a proper balance between what they call MIDDAT HA-DIN (the

quality of strict legal justice) and MIDDAT HA-RAHAMIN (the quality of mercy.) To the Rabbis, therefore, true Divine Justice in its dealing with man must properly allow for the indispensable element of mercy or love. ⁽²⁰⁾ This important Rabbinic theologic doctrine is glowingly brought forward in connection with Abraham in the following Midrash:

R. Azariah commenced in R. Aha's name thus: THOU HAST LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HATED WICKEDNESS, etc. (Ps. 45.8) R. Azariah in R. Aha's name referred the verse to our father Abraham. When Abraham, our father, stood to plead for mercy for the Sodomites, what is written there? THAT BE FAR FROM THEE TO DO AFTER THIS MANNER (Gen. 18.25)....R. Levi commented: SHALT NOT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DO JUSTLY (Ib.)? If Thou desirest the world to endure, there can be no absolute justice (justice untempered by mercy), while if Thou desirest absolute justice, the world cannot endure. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Abraham: THOU HAST LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND HATED WICKEDNESS: THEREFORE GOD, THY GOD, HATH ANNOINTED THEE WITH OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE THY FELLOWS (Ib.). (Gen. R. 39.6)x

We note significantly in the last observation of the Midrash that God readily approves and glowingly lauds Abraham for his great concern for real justice in the world on the

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meaning what? Forgiveness & indulgence

(20) For a full discussion of this important Rabbinic theologic doctrine, as well as of the principle of Justice as fundamental in the Jewish idea of God, as well as in Jewish ethics, see JUSTICE AND JUDAISM IN THE LIGHT OF TODAY, by Maxwell Silver (Bloch), 1928, chapter III.

part of both God and man.

In connection with this entire pregnant Biblical story of Abraham's insistence with God in behalf of Justice, as well as in the Rabbis' equally fine homilies on the same, it is important to observe that the main intention of both the Biblical authors, as well as that of the Rabbis, was not, as may appear from a superficial reading of these passages, an indictment, as it were, of God's Providence, but was meant to be rather an eloquent emphasis of the doctrine fundamental to Jewish religious thought, namely, that Justice and Righteousness are and must be fundamental not only in Jewish ethical but also, as to be logically expected, in the Jewish God-conception.

It is also important to observe that inherent in this plea of Abraham for Justice, is the highly perceptive Rabbinic conviction of the innate dignity of man, of which we have spoken in our previous chapter. It is provocative to note that even though the Rabbis themselves were finally convinced, after their many Midrashic reflections on God's Justice concerning the doom of Sodom and Gomorrah, that there really were not even a few righteous persons in those evil cities, and that therefore the doom pronounced upon those cities was justly carried out by the God of Justice, (see Gen. R. 49.4 and 10; 50.1 and others), it is significant to observe that the Rabbis, nevertheless, refused to

give up even Sodom and Gomorrah as an absolute ^{hopeless} proposition. This is eloquently evident in the following thought-provoking and self-explanatory Midrash:

Arise, take thy wife and thy two daughters that are found. R. Tobiah b. R. Isaac said: Two finds (would spring from them), Ruth the Moabiteess and Naamah the Amoniteess. R. Isaac commented: I have found DAVID my servant (Ps. 59. 21): where did I find him? In SODOM! (GEN. R. 50.10) (The student will recall, in this connection, that according to Jewish tradition, David was a descendant of Ruth. See Ruth 4.17 ff.)

Abraham, as the ideal Hebrew in Rabbinic tradition, was naturally considered by the Rabbis in ^{addition to} still another important role, namely, as the Father of Proselytism, or, in their own words, as the one who brought mankind "under the wings of the Schechinah."

Convinced, as ~~XXXXXXXX~~ ^{he} was of the high usefulness of his faith, as a man of broad human sympathies, and following the principle of Noblesse Oblige, Abraham, as the Rabbis saw it, considered it his duty to convert the rest of mankind to that faith, so that they, too, may profit therefrom.

Ideal Jewish Proselytism, as personified by Abraham's exemplary moral conduct, was never intended, according to the Rabbis, merely for the sake of adding greater numbers to the Jewish ranks, but in order to bring greater UNITY to mankind. Thus R. Berekiah, commenting upon the verse, WE HAVE A LITTLE SISTER - AHOT (S.S. 8.8), says: This refers

to Abraham (who, as Freedman notes, by proclaiming the unity and oneness of God, the corollary of which is the unity and brotherhood of man) united (IHAN) the whole world (by his moral conduct). (Gen. R. 39.3) (For other significant quotations regarding the Rabbinic characterization of Abraham as the Father of Proselytism and as Proselyte-maker, see Gen. R. 39.13; *Ibid.*, 39.6; 42.8; and 48.8.)

The Rabbis in their characterization of Abraham as the ideal Hebrew thus point up here the universalistic element in Judaism, which we pointed out in our preceding chapter, but which, as we know, has been much unjustifiably questioned by the Evangelists of Judaism's daughter-religion.

One of the greatest tributes paid to Abraham by the Rabbis was their reference to him as a Prophet, and in the grand Hebraic tradition (Gen. R. 49.2) as a convinced believer in and preacher and doer of Righteousness. In this capacity as Prophet, the Rabbis went out of their way to emphasize that Abraham eschewed the universal, morally-stultifying belief of the ancients in Astrology, or Fate. This is pointedly brought out in the following Midrash:

R. Judah b. R. Simon said in R. Johanan's name: He lifted him above the vault of heaven; hence He says to him, LOOK (HABBET) NOW TOWARD HEAVEN, HABBET signifying to look down from above. (Hence, as Freedman notes, thou art now ABOVE thy fate, and canst ignore it.) The Rabbis said: (God said to him): THOU ART A PROPHET, NOT AN ASTROLOGER, as it says

NOW THEREFORE RESTORE THE MAN'S WIFE, FOR HE IS A PROPHET
(Gen. 20.7).

The Midrash continues in this connection:

In the days of Jeremiah the Israelites wished to entertain this belief (in Astrology), but the Holy One, blessed be He, would not permit them. Thus it is written, THUS SAITH THE LORD: LEARN NOT THE WAY OF THE NATIONS, AND BE NOT DISMAYED AT THE SIGNS OF HEAVEN, etc. (Jer. 10.2): Your ancestor Abraham wished to entertain this belief long ago, but I would not permit him. R. Levi said: While the sandal is on your foot, tread down the thorn; he who is placed below them fears them, but thou (Abraham) art placed above them. (You are superior to the influence of the planets, as Freedman notes.) So trample them down (ignore them). (Gen. R. 44.12)

Significantly enough, this Midrash continues:

R. Judan said in R. Leazar's name: Three things nullify a decree (of evil), viz., PRAYER, RIGHTEOUSNESS AND REPENTENCE.

That is, according to the Rabbis, when man practises righteousness and all that it implies, he is then enabled to liberate himself from his imagined shackles of external fate. He is then enabled to become a Prophet, as in the case of Abraham.

As Prophet, Abraham thus points up the invaluable lesson

to the man of today that an increasingly active moral life which, as we noted previously, gives man increasing moral freedom, may help him also to overcome his new fatalism, parading in new spirit- paralyzing dogmas of "scientific" or economic "determinism", and inspire him, too, with the liberating faith that it is within his moral power to ~~re-~~ reconstruct his presently war-ridden and pessimism-filled world into a world of justice and peace.

We, who are familiar with the lives of the Jewish Prophets, know that one of their morally dramatic traits was that they dared to stand ALONE - even against the whole world. It was therefore natural for the Rabbis to discover this very inspiring trait in their ideal man, Abraham, whom, as we have just seen, they lifted to the status of Prophet. This is strikingly brought out in the following Midrash, wherein the Rabbis ingeniously discover this prophetic trait in Abraham in the very nationality of their great hero - HA- IBRI:

AND GOD TOLD ABRAM, THE HEBREW (HA-IBRI). R. Judah said: HA * IBRI signifies that the whole world was on one side (eber) while He (Abraham) was on the other side (eber). (Gen. R. 42.8; cf. Gen. R. 39.3)

It goes without saying, finally, that Abraham, as the Rabbinic ideal man, is characterized as the supreme exemplar

of religious faith; - such faith as bespeaks supreme courage, and is prepared for even the supreme sacrifice; such faith as may enable man to transform his entire world; and, above all, such faith as may even enable man, at rare mystical moments in his life, to even attain an immediate vision of the reality of the Godhead. On this subject of faith, as illustrated in the Rabbinic character of Abraham, let us reflect upon the following Midrashim:

Our first Midrash speaks of the great courage that faith gave to Abraham:

The Rabbis commenting upon the verse IF SHE BE A WALL WE WILL BUILD UPON HER (S.S. 8.9), say: If he (Abraham) resists (the forces of evil and despair) like a WALL, He (God) will build up (a defense) for him. (According to Freedman, Maharzu, commentary by Ze'eb Wolf Einhorn, translates: a world will be built upon him; he shall be the ancestor of a new world order.)...Said Abraham to God: Sovereign of the Universe: I am a Wall (ibid. v. 10): I stand as firm as a wall; AND MY BREASTS LIKE THE TOWERS THEREOF (ib.): My sons are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, THEN WAS I IN HIS EYES AS ONE THAT FOUND PEACE (ib.): He entered (the fiery furnace) in peace and left it unscathed. (Gen. R. 39.2)

Our second Midrash speaks again of the courage that was Abraham's, which was inspired by faith, in the face of, even such obstacles that would incline the man lacking great faith

to give up his battle and satisfy himself by **futilely** questioning God's Providence:

R. Phinehas commenced his discourse in the name of R. Hanan of Sepphoris: **HAPPY IS THE MAN WHOM THOU CHASTISETH, O LORD** (Ps. 94.12), yet should he object (call God's justice into question), then **TEACHEST OUT OF THY LAW** (ib.): what is written of Abraham? **AND I WILL BLESS THEE, AND MAKE THY NAME GREAT** (Gen. 12.2). As soon as he set out, famine assailed him, yet he did not protest nor murmur against Him, but, **AND ABRAM WENT DOWN INTO EGYPT!** (He retained his faith, and (because of it) went on to Egypt.) (Gen. R. 40.2)

Our following Midrash speaks again of faith that gives courage, but such courage that is prepared for the supreme sacrifice, for what our Rabbis called, KIDDUSH HA-SHEM: the Sanctification of God's Name:

The Rabbis commenting upon the verse, **HE LED FORTH (VAY-YAREK) HIS TRAINED MEN**, etc. (Gen. 14.14), said: It was they who turned a wrathful countenance (HORIKU PANIM) upon Abraham, saying, **FIVE KINGS COULD NOT DEFEAT THEM, YET WE ARE TO DEFEAT THEM!** R. Nehemiah interpreted it: He turned a defiant countenance (HORIK PANIM) to them and exclaimed, I WILL GO FORTH AND FALL IN SANCTIFYING THE NAME OF THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED BE HE! (Gen. R. 43.2)

Our next Midrash speaks of the courage of faith that enables an Abraham to affirm his faith in the reality of God

despite the ever-present faith-disparaging anomalous problem of evil in the world:

NOW THE LORD SAID UNTO ABRAM: GET THEE OUT OF THY COUNTRY, etc. (Gen. 12.1). R. Isaac commenced his discourse with HEARKEN, O DAUGHTER AND CONSIDER, AND INCLINE THINE EAR; FORGET ALSO THINE TOWN PEOPLE, AND THY FATHER'S HOUSE (Ps. 45.11). Said R. Isaac: This may be compared to a man who was travelling from place to place when he saw a building in flames. (Freedman notes here that similarly Abraham saw the world being destroyed by the flames of vice and wrongdoing.) Is it possible that the building lacks a person to look after it? he wondered. The owner of the building looked out and said, 'I am the owner of the building.' Similarly, because Abraham, our Father said, 'Is it conceivable (in view of the anomalous condition of the world) that the world is without a GUIDE?' The Holy One, blessed be He, looked out and said to him, 'I am the GUIDE, the Sovereign of the Universe.' (Gen. R. 39.1)

Need we add the great implication of this Midrash, that Abraham, the great Rabbinic exemplar of supreme faith, believed that, nevertheless, God is "the Guide, the Sovereign of the Universe!"

Our last two Midrashim on the subject of faith speak of Abraham's faith eventuating in its supremest development into an awareness of that precious-sought bond between

man and the SHECHINAH, to use the Rabbis' celebrated term for the the Presence of God.

And needless to add that according to the Rabbis, who, ^{loyally} as on all other teachings, followed on this profound subject the teachings of their spiritual predecessors, the Prophets of Israel, Abraham's awareness of this bond was ultimately inspired by his profound and many-faceted life of Righteousness. It was indeed Abraham's exemplary life of ^{עֲשׂוֹת חֲסִידִים} GEMILUT HASADIM (deeds of ~~loving~~ ^{kindness}) - to use the celebrated Rabbinic term for the Biblical term ^{צְדָקָה} TSEDAKA or Righteousness - which the Rabbis so abundantly found and so gloriously celebrated in the life of Israel's first Patriarch, that, according to the profoundest reflections of the Rabbis, supremely wove the ever-more ^{tangible} ~~intangible~~ bonds between him and God. We cite in this connection the first of the two Midrashim just referred to:

R. Abba b. Kahana said:...The real home of the Shechinah was in the nether sphere; when Adam sinned it departed to the first Rakia (firmament); when Cain sinned, it ascended to the second Rakia; when the Generation of Enosh sinned, to the third; when the Generation of the Flood sinned, to the fourth; the Generation of the Separation of Tongues, to the fifth; with the Sodomites, to the sixth; with the Egyptians in the days of Abraham, to the seventh. But as against these, there arose seven RIGHTEOUS men. Abraham,

Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram and Moses. And they brought it (the Shechinah) down again to earth. Abraham (brought it down) from the seventh to the sixth, Isaac from the sixth to the fifth, Jacob from the fifth to the fourth, Levi from the fourth to the third, Kohath from the ~~third~~ to the second, Amram from the second to the first, while Moses brought it right down below. R. Isaac said: It is written, THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL INHERIT THE LAND AND DWELL (VAYYISHEKENU) THEREIN FOREVER (Ps. 37.29). (Gen. R. 19.7)

Our second Midrash on this subject even more directly brings out the Rabbis' persuasive conviction, as it was that of the Prophets, and as it is, ^{throughout,} that of Judaism's, that it is through man's religiously inspired moral life at its profoundest, as in the case of Abraham, that God in the end DOES stand REVEALED! -

THE SECRET OF THE LORD IS WITH THEM THAT FEAR HIM. The Rabbis commented: At first the secret of the Lord was with them that feared Him; later it was with the UPRIGHT, as it is written, BUT HIS SECRET IS WITH THE UPRIGHT (Prov. 3.32); ...Now the Holy One, blessed be He, said: This Abraham is God-fearing, as it says, NOW I KNOW THAT THOU ART A GOD-FEARING MAN (Gen. 22.12); this Abraham is upright, as it says THE UPRIGHT LOVE THEE (S.S. 1.4). Hence, AND THE LORD SAID: SHALL I HIDE FROM ABRAHAM, etc. (That is to say, God DOES

reveal Himself to the righteous.)(Gen. R. 49.2)

May I note here, in conclusion, how many of us today, in our regrettably fruitless search ~~for~~ some concrete evidence of the reality of God in the world, unfortunately overlook the ever-beckoning and highly promising path of moral living as the royal road to God, as exemplified by Abraham and the Prophets and Sages of Israel. The challenging conception of God as Moral Personality in our lives, is richly and vividly outlined for us in MAXWELL SILVER'S THE WAY TO GOD, to which we have had occasion to refer in our previous chapters. Silver's main thesis is that religion, when properly understood, is the conscientious living of a day-by-day moral life, and that the moral life, when allowed to increasingly express itself in every facet of our personal and social life, can help us mortals to brush, as it were, the Divine cheek at some rare mystical moment during our earthly pilgrimage. (For a full exposition of this religious and philosophical theme, I commend the above work to the reader's thoughtful attention.)

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