

ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK—

THE LIGHTS OF PENITENCE, THE MORAL PRINCIPLES,
LIGHTS OF HOLINESS, ESSAYS, LETTERS, AND POEMS

TRANSLATION AND INTRODUCTION

BY

BEN ZION BOKSER

PREFACE

BY

JACOB AGUS

AND

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~~316048~~**Cover art:**

The artist, RUTH ANAYA, is Canadian born and educated, and is a noted serigrapher and painter. She attended Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, McGill University, and Sir George Williams College. In 1952 she moved to New York City to continue her studies. Her prints and paintings are internationally represented in prominent private and public collections. She is a figurative expressionist, abstracting freely to convey mood.

RUTH ANAYA, in describing her feeling during the preparation of this book cover, explained, "As I put my pencil to the paper I could feel my right hand moving freely as though guided by the very image I was portraying. He was coming to life with little effort from me—the man, his aura, and his loves—Judaism, God, poetry, Zionism. I know this is how Abraham Isaac Kook wanted to be presented—a man bathed in spiritual light, his aura alive with hues of creativity and practicality and piety, all guarded by the Lions of Judah."



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Editor of the Volume:

Ben Zion Bokser was born in Poland and he came to this country in 1920. He was ordained as rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1931, and he received his Ph. D. degree at Columbia University in 1935. In 1964 the Jewish Theological Seminary awarded him the Doctor of Divinity degree *honoris causa*.

He has pursued a career in the active rabbinate, in the academic field, and as an author. Since 1934 he has held the pulpit of the Forest Hills Jewish Center, except for a two year period during the Second World War when he served as chaplain in the U.S. army. He has also taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and at the Hebrew University, and is presently serving as Adjunct Professor at Queens College.

He has authored twelve books including *Pharisaic Judaism in Transition*, *The Wisdom of the Talmud*, *From the World of the Cabalah*, *The Legacy of Maimonides*, *Judaism and The Christian Predicament*, *Judaism—Profile of a Faith*, and *Jews, Judaism and the State of Israel*. His *Judaism—Profile of a Faith* was awarded a prize by the Jewish Book Council of America as a major contribution to Jewish thought. He also edited and translated into English the Daily, Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book and the High Holy Day Prayer Book.

Rabbi Bokser also serves as program editor of the Jewish Theological Seminary—NBC sponsored Eternal Light radio program. He was a contributing editor of the Encyclopedia of Religion, and his articles have appeared in the Encyclopedia Britannica, and the Encyclopedia Judaica, as well as in leading philosophical and scholarly journals. His writings have been translated into Hebrew, Italian, Spanish and Japanese.

Authors of the Preface

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Preface I

This book will be heartily welcomed by all students of religion and spirituality. The editor does not interpose himself between the reader and the fascinating personality of Rav Kook. Instead, Rabbi Bokser provides just enough guidance and background for the reader to confront at close range the rare genius of a titanic *homo religiosus*. Here are the private meditations as well as the public writings of a great religious leader, who was actively involved in all the facets of Jewish life.

Rav Kook was a mystic, a philosopher and a saint. He was a preeminent Talmudic scholar, respected for his vast erudition and for his bold legalistic innovations. He was also a Lurianic Cabbalist, engaged in cultivating the various grades of mystical ecstasy. At the same time, he responded graciously and at length to all who turned to him with questions relating to the philosophy of religion. However, his main concern was not the salvation of individuals, but the redemption of the Jewish people and of all mankind. As the leading prophet of religious Zionism, he labored and battled with impassioned fervor for the messianic redemption of the Jewish people, through the reclamation of the barren soil of the Holy Land and "the ingathering of the exiles."

His description of his ascent upon and descent from the mystical ladder are all the more significant because such documents are so rare in the entire range of Jewish literature. For various reasons, the experiences of great Jewish mystics were,

if written down, kept out of the public domain and treasured only as part of "the hidden wisdom." Indeed, some historians have even assumed that the Jewish people lacked the capacity to feel the grandeur of the mystic's endeavor to sense the immediate presence of the Divine Being, either for ethnic reasons or because the Jewish religion stressed exclusively the transcendence and incomprehensibility of the Deity. Actually, the Biblical prophets and psalmists sought "the nearness of God" with all the passion of their souls. Philo was a Neoplatonic mystic, two centuries before Plotinus. During the Middle Ages, Jewish mysticism was so heavily overlaid with symbols by the various schools that the tortuous dialectic of the soul in its quest of "clinging to" God (*devekut*) can be discerned only uncertainly. Lurianic Cabbalah in the 16th century revived the mystical endeavor as a way of hastening the advent of the Messiah.

The Sabbataian-Frankist movement awakened the slumbering ghosts of Gnosticism within the Jewish mystical tradition. Then the Hasidic movement burst upon the scene and transformed Cabbalistic mysticism into a popular mass movement, with the various *zaddikim* teaching their trusted disciples to attain at least some levels (*madregot*) of the Holy Spirit (*Ruah ha-Kodesh*), which was conceived as a dynamic flow of grace from the divine Pleroma to the souls of men.

However, even among the *zaddikim* there were few attempts to describe the various psychological states of the mystic, as he rises to the point of total absorption within the highest Emanations and declines thereafter to the "dark night of the soul."

Rav Kook combined an exuberant and lyrical literary talent with the genius of mysticism. Furthermore, he represented with unequalled authority the main currents of Jewish thought. Though he was occasionally embroiled in controversy, he sought to embrace and to harmonize the rationalism of Maimonides with the ethnic romanticism of Judah Halevi and the personal romanticism of Ibn Gabirol, as well as

the contributions of the Cabbalists and the Hasidim. Thus he lived and taught, not as a one-sided philosopher or as a maverick saint, but as an authentic exponent of the "sacred tradition" as a whole.

Hence, the great significance of his writings for the understanding of the entire spectrum of the Orthodox tradition—from the extreme end of naive transcendence in legalistic literature to that of vibrant immanence in the life and thought of mystical pietists.

Indeed, he reached out beyond the boundaries of Orthodoxy to the newly emerging socialists, secularists, spokesmen of liberal Judaism—above all, to the Zionist pioneers in the land of Israel. Determined to find "the holy sparks" in every ideology, he regarded the modern Zionist movement as a direct instrument of God in the furtherance of messianic redemption. Along with the medieval poet and philosopher Judah Halevi, he believed that only in the land of Israel would the genius of Hebraic prophecy be revived, with salutary benefits for all mankind. His closest disciple, Rav David Cohen, titled his own book *Kol Hanevuah* [The Voice of Prophecy].

Rav Kook's writings illustrate the principle of "intersubjective" potency—the deeper we probe into our own being, the closer we come to the understanding in depth of our fellowmen. For he drew his inspiration and his ideas almost entirely from the domain of the Jewish "sacred tradition," with only occasional glances at the intellectual scene of the Western world. Yet, his message is of peculiar relevance to the searching souls of our time, regardless of creedal and ethnic identifications. Briefly, he called for the integration and harmonization of the ideals deriving from all sources, in that all "lights of holiness" derive from God and lead back to Him. The entire range of creation is determined by two currents, which flow in opposite directions—the current of "expansion" (*hitpashtut*), whereby creative power flows from God down to the lowest levels of the material world, and the current of "unification"

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(*bistalkut*), whereby “reflected light” (*bozer*) ascends back toward its source. The first flow enters into and vitalizes the various receptive creatures, diversifying as it descends; the second emerges out of a diverse, fragmented and even distorted existential reality and, in its quest of the divine source, harmonizes, unifies and redeems “the sparks of holiness,” which are scattered throughout the world. In regard to the flow of power and grace from God, we need to render ourselves receptive and open to His love. All religious rituals are designed to serve this end. In regard to the return of the reflected “lights of holiness,” we need to train ourselves to understand in love the ideologies and movements that stir mankind, separating the seeds of love from the shells of collective pride. Hence, the indispensability of training in the disciplines of religious humanism. It follows that religious faith and humanistic culture are not mutually contradictory, but rather are two aspects of the same dynamic, human-divine interaction.

Like Teilhard de Chardin, Kook regarded the process of cosmic evolution as the advance of nature toward divine perfection. Human history, too, moves toward “the Kingdom of the Almighty,” when all forms of evil will be overcome. However, his 19th-century faith in progress was modified by the Cabalistic doctrine of “shattering of the vessels” in this “world of separation.” The emergence of a new ideal may cause a catastrophe because of the unreadiness of humanity to integrate fresh divine power within the established intellectual and social categories.

Evil is not a self-contained force, but a relative absence of the spirit of wholeness. The part seeks to usurp that which belongs to the whole. The lights of holiness are refracted, separated into their components and embodied in different institutions, which may be arrayed against one another. So the very incursion of divine power and grace into the structure of society may result in the fragmentation of ideals, with genuine idealists turning against one another; bifurcating society into

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hostile camps; threatening revolution, war and chaos—hence the crying need today for the spirit of harmonization and unification.

More than in any previous epoch, our age is tragically polarized. In religion, a deep abyss separates the believers of all traditional creeds from the camp of the secularists. The religious community itself is torn between the opposite trends of literalist orthodoxy and the liberal spirit of ecumenism.

Rav Kook addressed himself to this fundamental polarity between fragmentation and unification. He did not pretend to offer a super-plan for the solution of all problems, but his own religious experience led him to believe that the key to human advancement and peace lay in the hearts of people. They could reinforce the ascending, integrating, harmonizing trends in their own souls, thereby also strengthening the same forces in all men and in nature. For all mankind is mystically one body and one soul, and even physical nature is affected by the yearnings of mankind.

Within his own psyche, Kook experienced the dynamics of mystical life—the hunger for illumination by the presence of God and the anguish of the fall from His “nearness.” In spite of his natural shyness, he described the rhythm of his soul in the hope that others would be inspired to follow his example and render themselves fitting “channels” for the flow of divine power and grace, reinforcing the trends toward unification as against those of fragmentation.

Readers of this volume should study it as a splendid hymn, celebrating the unity of God, the world and mankind. Beneath the overlay of beliefs and myths, characteristic of his milieu, they should discern the testimony of a prophetic soul, assuring us that it is in God that we live and move and find our true selves.

Jacob B. Agus
Baltimore, Maryland
June, 1978

Preface II

*"And the people, returned to life, will heed the wealth of
life's secrets."*

From a poem by Rabbi Kook

One cannot overestimate the significance of Rabbi Bokser's achievement in making available in this volume an English translation of the choicest writings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Ha-Kohen Kook, his philosophical works and his poetry. Rabbi Bokser, moreover, presents to the reader Rabbi Kook's world view in a comprehensive, scholarly introduction that enables us to gain a profound understanding of his nature as a spiritual personality. I believe that Rabbi Kook was the best possible choice from the world of modern thought in Judaism to be included among the great masters of the spiritual life.

Rabbi Kook wrote at a time that marked a turbulent turning point not only for the Jewish people, but, in an ideological sense, for the entire world. This was the period of the Jewish renaissance that found its focus in the Zionist movement. This was also the time when historical materialism became an established force in European politics, the time of the Russian revolution and the formation of the communist regime. The materialistic philosophy of life posed a crisis not only in the world of Jewish thought, but in Christian culture as well. Rabbi Kook was of the opinion that Christian culture lacked the strength to withstand the challenge of historical materialism, which attacked it with full force.

In the ten years before the outbreak of the First World War, when he served as rabbi of Jaffa and the southern settlements in Eretz Yisrael, Rabbi Kook devoted his best thinking to the significance of the Jewish renaissance in the framework of the spiritual history of the nations of the world. It was his hope that the Jewish national rebirth would also be the historic occasion for the renewal of the promise of the spirit of Judaism and the spirit of humanity.

All Rabbi Kook's teaching oscillates between these two poles. One is the focus toward the inner world of Judaism, a reassessment of its value system and an attempt at an inner reinterpretation to liberate the creative energies of Judaism so as to function in a contemporary idiom. There is no effort here toward a new definition of Judaism, but rather an endeavor to enhance its will and vitality. If a spirit of rebellion is discernible in the style of his writing, it is the resistance of the tradition to being adapted toward new patterns of thought. The linkage of the broad horizons of the spirit of humanity with the element of the Jewish renaissance are most important here. The other is the clarification toward the outside world, a restatement of the significance of the religious experience as a knowledge of God. This "knowledge" was fed by the utopian spirit that informs all his writings and shaped the modern interpretation of his messianic philosophy.

The utopianism of Rabbi Kook seeks for itself new norms for human consciousness or, to be more exact, it believes in the expansion of that consciousness to a point of overcoming the phenomenological perception, which "fragments" and "confines" existence. Here comes to expression the anguish of the mystic who has discovered, through the trials of his own experience, the unity of existence. He knows the error of the different philosophies derived from following the side roads of the truth, the basic truth not having been revealed to them—the certainty of God's presence in existence. This certainty is the noblest utopian vision of Rabbi Kook, who believed that

this was also the answer to the cultural confusions and the intellectual sorrow suffered by humanity. The logic of his argument maintained that this intuitive truth was given to the Jewish people as the singular bearer of the utopian ideal. They are the people who were tested by the sufferings of their history and by intellectual challenges that prepared them with the keenest vision for a confrontation with the truth.

He does not speak in the idiom of the Middle Ages about the chosenness of the Jewish people. He speaks rather in the widest possible terms of existentialism, in the categories rooted in experience. In his essay "The Culture of the Jewish People" (1909), Rabbi Kook states: "We began to say something of immense importance among ourselves and to the entire world, but we have not yet finished it. We are in the midst of our discourse, and we do not wish, and we are not able, to stop. We shall not abandon our distinctive way of life nor our universal aspirations. The truth is so rich that we stammer; our speech is still in exile. In the course of time we shall be able to express what we seek with our total being. Only a people that has completed what it started can leave the scene of history. To begin and not to finish—this is not in accordance with the pattern of existence."

The stress on Jewish existence as exemplifying "total being" is one of the more typical modes of expression of Rabbi Kook. The message of total being is also the promise of the Jewish people to humanity. Thus he also expresses himself in his important work whose publication began in 1914 but has not yet been completed to this day; that is, the book *Arple Tobar*: "People live with intellectual secondhands, with shadows of shadows from the original illuminations that act on their spirits. The original must be of the very purest. . . . But when the truth is neglected, everything is impoverished and people groan under the burden of the afflictions, the lusts, the sorrows, the declines, the wickedness, the deceptive loves and imaginings, and they are unable to come out of the confusion,

either in this world or in the next. The noble spirits of humanity are therefore obligated to proclaim the name of God, the God of the universe, in His world. And if obstructions developed and individuals cannot summon the whole world to God, in all matters of thought and feeling, then a people must issue the call. The people must call out of its inner being, as an individual of great spiritual stature issues the call from his inner being. For a whole people to proclaim the name of God as an expression of its being—this is found only among the Jewish people” (p. 28).

Who is this “Jewish people” on whose shoulders Rabbi Kook had placed the messianic role at that time? The end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century was a time of the greatest crisis for the Jewish people. The crisis was not external. Pogroms, blood libels and religious persecutions were not a rare occurrence in the history of this people. The greater part of the Jewish people were concentrated in eastern Europe. They suffered the crisis of the *baskalah* [enlightenment] and the emancipation. The classic *yeshivot* that served for generations as centers of Jewish culture were abandoned as the enchantment of the outer world promising equality to the Jews swept away the best of the youth. The Lithuanian Yeshivah of Volozhin, too, gasped for breath in this particular moment of history, when people like the poet Bialik, the writer Berdichevsky and the thinker Rabbi Kook left it. Each one of them “left” in his own way; each one rebelled in his own way. Many of the rebels never returned to the world of Judaism, even after they became disillusioned with the emancipation. But in the very place where you find despair you also find hope—hope for physical survival and the search for a basis of a new spirit of religious faith. Zionism as a movement of liberation and rebirth pointed toward the normalization of Jewish existence in Eretz Yisrael, the land where came to birth the people as well as the idea of Judaism, where the Bible was written and where the prophets struggled for a just society. The dream of restoration

was the domain embraced by Zionism, even of secular Zionism and of the pioneers of the early *aliyot* (migrations). Even when they interpreted this ideal in the spirit of the socialism of their generation, there still clung to it the pulsating presence of the romanticism of the distant past. The creative energy of the Jewish people found its fulfillment in converting the desert into a place of habitation and in the establishment of an egalitarian society. The thinkers of that generation translated the structure of Jewish values into the language of secularism.

This is what Rabbi Kook found when he set foot on the shores of Jaffa in 1904. The secular revolution fed the new Hebrew literature, and it was also a concomitant to the revival of the modern Hebrew language under the sponsorship of Ben Yehuda.

Whoever retained anything of the religious spirit was looked upon as belonging to the world of the Jewish “ghetto,” and his esteem fell among the intelligentsia of the workers in Eretz Yisrael. The world of religion was looked upon as the closed, conservative world, whose time had passed. This was especially so in Eretz Yisrael, because this world was represented primarily by the Orthodox of the old *yishuv* in Jerusalem, which did not look favorably on the Zionist endeavor. Religious Zionism had not yet taken root in Eretz Yisrael in those days.

Who was this Jewish people about whom Rabbi Kook wrote as the bearer of the promise and of the light? Who among the circles described here could accept this ideology? I am reminded of a short story told to me by Rabbi Zevi Yehuda, the son of Rabbi Kook, of his recollections from the Jaffa period. Once the writer Brener—one of the literary leaders of the Labor movement, the writer of bereavement and defeatism, who was murdered some days later in Jaffa by the Arabs—came visiting Rabbi Kook, together with the writer A. Z. Rabinowitz. As he walked hither and thither he said to Rabbi Kook: “Tell me, your honor, how am I to understand this, that

you write about 'light, light, light,' [most of Rabbi Kook's writings are indeed so designated], while I feel the dark in every part of my soul!" This short and sarcastic statement underscores the gap between reality and anticipation, between famished days, and nights for dreaming about life on a new level of greatness as Rabbi Kook hoped for it, a break with the life of confinement in time, and a sweep toward the eternal truth in the bright light of the new promise to the human spirit.

And though the pronouncements of Rabbi Kook appear to stand outside the historic horizon of his generation—and there may perhaps have been some of that character also—all the issues from which they grew were the issues of his generation.

The perspective of his vision is not a continuation of the Jewish mystical writing he had read. He is not the continuation of the Zohar or the Cabbalah of the Ari [Rabbi Isaac Luria] or of any other Cabbalistic work. His mysticism is not only new in its answers but also in its questions. If I have stated that his thought was inspired by realism, I have also stated that the reality was seen from the perspective of secularity. There is therefore the necessity to find an answer to this problem, for this is a paradox difficult to understand, how to explain in a manner reflecting the teachings immanent in the Jewish tradition that an "offending generation" was the generation worthy of seeing the beginning of the redemption and that it was destined to be the bearer of the great spiritual promise that is so tied up with the revitalization of the religious consciousness. However, Rabbi Kook believed that the Jewish people in its totality is the bearer of the promise, and not solely Orthodox Judaism! On the contrary, that Judaism which has narrowed itself to the issues of "tref and kosher" [ritually forbidden and permitted food], the "allowed and disallowed," cannot serve as the source from which will emerge the new song that "the mouth of the Lord shall pronounce" (Isa. 62:2).

The new demands of life brought him to contemplate the sources of human energy, where he hoped to find his answer.

The creative energy was centered in those days in the secular world of the pioneers who wrought the revolution in his time. Those heretics represented for him the wellsprings of renewal, and he was ready to offer a religious interpretation to their heresy. Those who denied with such ardor the sovereignty of God will be ready in one of these historic hours to battle for the great redemption he defined as "a firm will and great force to bring redemption to the world, to purge away all the obscurantism in life, and to overcome all its weaknesses. Everything depends on our will to rise to the heights of the higher holiness, in a continuing and original probing, in a firm hallowing of the flesh and the spirit by imitating God through walking in His ways" (*Arple Tohar*, p. 35).

Rabbi Kook did not believe that there exists an independent zone of the secular. It may be that his perception was influenced by the philosophy of Hasidism, which originally sought to find its way by closing the gap between the secular and the sacred. Perhaps we have here a new incarnation of that position as it came to new life in Eretz Yisrael under new historic and sociological circumstances.

But as to the substance of the matter—he grasped the concept of holiness as the most luminous perspective in which to see the possibility of defining the secular, the possibility of perceiving the transparent nature of existence, or, in his own words, "how the general light that abounds with life and engenders life in the world penetrates all particulars." The "darkness" in which all particulars are set—or if we translate this as existence in time—this brings about the denial of eternity. It is difficult for the human spirit to grasp the link between the fragmentary and the whole, the temporal and the timeless, between matter and spirit, for the "particulars are not [fully] illumined." In the realm of history also it is difficult for a person to grasp the "totality," and therefore he claims that it does not exist. He becomes an "unbeliever."

Rabbi Kook's mysticism claims to have broken this "dark-

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ness." The advantage unbelievers have is that they sounded the cry "We do not see, we do not understand!" But in the potency of the cry there is also the potency for breaking out of it, and thus the crisis serves the force of the transformation. This is how Rabbi Kook defines his belief in this process: "Our temporal existence is only one spark of an eternal existence of the most endless beauty, and it is impossible to bring to fruition the treasure of the good hidden in the domain of the temporal except to the extent of its harmonization with the life of eternity. This inner perception is immanent in the spirit of all existence, and all the spiritual conflicts will be unable to swerve it from this position, but only to clear the path for it; and even that which appears to contradict serves in a deeper grasp of the truth as supportive of it" (*Arple Tobar*, p. 36).

The mysticism of the transparency of existence, which removes the darkness from human consciousness, became the crowning perception in the philosophy of Rabbi Kook at a time when the Jewish people was destined to experience the beginning of redemption, fulfilling a substantive role of utopian messianism in the broadest sense of the term.

The messianic concept in Judaism had for hundreds of years been filled with a utopian content concerning the cosmic order as a whole. But here we have an additional element embracing the ideological issues of Rabbi Kook's time. Not only did the subject matter of mysticism change by including the natural life in this order, but it also served as a stimulus to daily life in Eretz Yisrael.

We must not assume that Rabbi Kook was an odd exception in concerning himself with utopian questions. On the contrary, in the secular camp of the pioneers, too, there was a preoccupation with a socio-national utopianism, especially among the members of the *kibbutzim*, particularly the Gordonia movement established by A. D. Gordon. This man, called "the sage of Degania" [the name of the kibbutz where he lived], was the proud advocate of the "religion of labor"

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and he spoke about the "people of man." The latter is undoubtedly a utopian concept, though it is also a profanation of the classic concept of Judaism that recognizes such corporate terms, as in referring to the "people of Israel." The utopian focus shifted here to the social ethos, in a reassessment of its values.

Despite all this, Rabbi Kook remained a lonely figure as a mystic. His many writings were published only in part and after the passage of many years. Perhaps his metaphysical "hastening of the coming of the end" had in it something to frighten even his closest intimates among his followers.

His vision was altogether one of grandeur and richness, and the heart found it difficult to convey to the lips all that he thought. There was here a kind of fear because of the imbalance between the poor historic situation and the mighty daring of the spiritual claim. The call to break out of the spiritual confinement in which the person finds himself, the testimony to the riches of the spiritual life, and the faith that all existence, of itself, is in a process that by necessity carries it to revelation—these are landmark proclamations of his teaching: "Once the concept of the grandeur of existence has been grasped by the imagination it cannot be voided. It must necessarily endure, and it is endowed with the vitality to battle for its survival; whoever would assault it injures only himself. If a multitude of thoughts are conjured up contradicting it, they are bound to make their peace with it; they will be reconciled to it, it will not be reconciled to them. Everything ascends and does not descend, everything develops and does not become impoverished and retreat" (*Arple Tobar*, p. 41).

Indeed, this is the call of immense significance that is well known to the great mystics.

Rivka Schatz Uffenheimer
Hebrew University
Jerusalem, June 1978

Foreword

I feel privileged to present the major writings of Rabbi Kook in a form that makes them accessible to the English reader. Rabbi Kook belongs among the truly great masters of spirituality in the history of Judaism. The well-springs of illumination were open generously to him, and he drew from them in great profusion. One is astonished at the profundity of his insights, at the far-reaching vision reflected in his writings. They represent a renewal of Judaism in its classic authenticity and its message speaks with remarkable cogency to Jews, as well as to all sensitive spirits in every faith community.

The present study begins with an introductory essay, which presents the basic outline of Rabbi Kook's biography as well as an assessment of his religious philosophy. Then follow in translation his basic writings, each prefaced with a brief prefatory statement indicating the literary and ideological context in which it appeared. These include *The Lights of Penitence* (Orot Hateshuvah); selected essays from his three volume work *The Lights of Holiness* (Orot Hakodesh); *The Moral Principles* (Midot Harayah); ten of his philosophical essays which appeared in different publications; selected letters from his three volumes of correspondence (Igrot Harayah); and his poems. All the translations are original, including the translation of Biblical verses quoted by Rabbi Kook. The reader is forewarned that these may diverge from the translations in the

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standard English version of the Bible with which he may be familiar.

I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance I received in preparing this work from colleagues and friends, and from members of my family. I am especially thankful to Rabbi Salaman Faber who reviewed the English version against the Hebrew original and offered some helpful criticism. Professor Arthur Green read the manuscript and was helpful not only in his comments on the translation, but also in suggesting the arrangement and structure of the work. I am grateful to my wife who assisted me with her critical comments and suggestions, as she has done with all my writings, to my son, Professor Baruch Bokser, for his many stimulating suggestions while this work was in progress, and to my daughter and son-in-law, Miriam and Dov Caravella, whose spiritual sensitivity stimulated my own openness to the spiritual life. My secretary, Mrs. Shirley Tendler, typed the manuscript in the various stages of its development and offered me other technical assistance in bringing this work to completion. I am also grateful to the Mosad Harav Kook and its director, Dr. Yitzhak Rafael, for granting me permission to translate the texts published by the Mosad. Richard Payne, my editor at the Paulist Press, and his assistant, Marianne Papaj, extended to me many courtesies for which I am deeply appreciative.

As I contemplate the unparalleled richness of Rabbi Kook's thought I am moved to offer the prayer enjoined in Jewish tradition on one who is in the presence of a sage in the wisdom of the Torah: "Be praised, O Lord, Sovereign of the universe, who imparts of Your wisdom on those who revere You."

May this work help bring Rabbi Kook's thought to the attention of a larger public that they, too, may be enriched by it, and that by his light they may see light.



ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK
1865 - 1935

Introduction

The Religious Philosophy of Rabbi Kook

The following lines appear in a poem by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook:

Expanses divine my soul craves.
Confine me not in cages,
Of substance or of spirit.
I am love-sick—
I thirst, I thirst for God,
As a deer for water brooks.
Alas, who can describe my pain,
Who will be a violin to express the songs of my grief,
I am bound to the world,
All creatures, all people are my friends,
Many parts of my soul
Are intertwined with them,
But how can I share with them my light?

These lines express a mood that is characteristic of all Rabbi Kook's writings. The theme to which he returned again and again in his poetry as in his prose, is an unsatiable longing for God, an almost ecstatic affirmation of life, of the world, as suffused with the wonder of God's creation, and a struggle to find the word or deed that would illumine other minds with the light that shone so brightly in his.

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He was born to a deeply pious and learned Jewish family in 1865, in Grieve, Latvia, the restricted world of the Jewish ghetto in Eastern Europe, but he was in constant rebellion against all that restricts and narrows the human spirit. He was a prolific writer, but he was also a man of action. He served as rabbi in the Lithuanian towns of Zoimel (1888-1895) and Boisk (1895-1904) and as chief rabbi of Jaffa, Palestine (1904-1919). While stranded by the First World War during a visit to Europe, he served as rabbi of a congregation in London, England (1917-1918). His career was climaxed by his election to the most august rabbinic office in world Jewry, the chief rabbinate of Jerusalem, and of the whole Jewish community in Palestine. He served in this post during sixteen stormy years till his death in 1935. His voluminous writings still await exploration and assessment but it is clear from even a brief acquaintance with his ideas that he belongs among the immortals of thought in the history of Judaism.

Rabbi Kook's thought differs sharply from that of classic Jewish theologians such as Philo, Judah Halevi and Maimonides. The classicists sought primarily to defend their faith against the challenge of various ideologies current in their time: Philo against Greek philosophy; Halevi against philosophic rationalism and against the rival faiths of Christianity and Islam, as well as against the Jewish heresy known as Karaism; Maimonides against Aristotelian naturalism which had a revival in the early Middle Ages and which taught the heretical doctrine of the eternity of the universe. Rabbi Kook's writings are almost wholly devoid of religious polemics. He was essentially an existentialist thinker to whom theological issues as such were of secondary importance. The essence of religion for him was in its existential implications, its concern to bring all life under the discipline of divine ideals. The test of religion at its highest was in the passion it inspires to bend life toward ethical and moral perfection.

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The attempts to prove God's existence by dialectical arguments as an inference from the existing world was for him ultimately a nonsequitur. Every effort to probe God's nature, as He is in Himself, is a sterile endeavor, a presumption, and represents a kind of "spiritual idolatry" (*Orot*, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem 1963, p. 124). We know God primarily through faith, in response to the prompting of the heart. It is only on the level of primitivism that we focus on God as an essence, an entity, apart from the world. As we rise toward maturity our focus shifts from a preoccupation with God as a separate entity to divine ideals, which emanate from God and seek embodiment in the structure of life. These ideals become man's moral imperatives under whose impulse he is forever seeking to refashion his life and that of the world toward truth, justice, freedom and peace.

Rabbi Kook is an example of the Jewish mystical tradition in its pure form. He was inspired by Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague, a Cabbalist who freed the Cabbalah from superstitious admixtures, seeing in it largely a way to the immediacy of God. The immediacy of God shines through all of Rabbi Kook's writings. All things, for Rabbi Kook, were a crust with an inner essence, a divine dimension; seen aright all things have the capacity to reveal the light of holiness.

Rabbi Kook's writings are the direct outpourings of the soul as it contemplates the mystery of being, as it feels the stirring of God. His most significant writings were left in the form of a journal, in notebooks that constitute a kind of spiritual diary. The entries in this diary read like poems or prose-poems, and they are independent meditations, each born in the newness of the experience that continued to unfold day by day. The editor of these works, Rabbi David Cohen of Jerusalem, has attempted to arrange these meditations in systematic categories, but their essentially independent nature

persists and remains unobscured by the attempted systematization.

The thought of Rabbi Kook cannot be conveyed through thematic interpretation. It is, like all poetry, like every art form, to be experienced from within, by direct exposure. It is only to gain some inkling into the kind of ideational world Rabbi Kook inhabited that we offer a glimpse of what an outsider looking in beholds, in purely thematic terms. It must be deemed as no more than a prelude to the experience of studying Rabbi Kook directly, in his own idiom.

The most revolutionary aspect of Rabbi Kook's thought was his role as Cabbalist. He saw the whole universe stirred by the pulsating energies emanating from the divine source of all existence. But his interest in mysticism was not confined to the scholarly and pietistic study of Cabbalistic texts. He saw the divine illumination as an ongoing inpouring of divine light upon those sensitive to receive it, and he portrayed the history of Judaism in terms of an ongoing tension between the new light evoking a constant regeneration of life, and a heritage from earlier illuminations that had become crystallized in hallowed texts, a tension, in other words, between new creativity and tradition. Tradition is a moment in the endless flow of eternity, wrenched from the whole and given shape and form that permits us to continually re-encounter it. But at the same time it distracts us from new light pressing on us. Tradition is precious as far as it goes, but it helps to keep us in the confinement of finitude.

The perception that the hallowed texts do not exhaust the divine-human dialogue and that God is releasing new light upon his world is responsible for his own inner anguish. Rabbi Kook was torn between the traditional pietist and the harbinger of new light. This comes vividly to expression in a short meditation on the "holiness of silence." The summation of this essay is in the final paragraph: "If a person who has risen to the

holiness of silence should lower himself to a particularized form of divine service, in prayer, study, the limited problems of morality, he will suffer and feel oppressed. He will feel that his soul, which embraces all existence, is being pressed as though with prongs, to surrender her to the lowland, where everything exists within a prescribed measure, to the narrowness of a particular path, when all paths are open to him, all abounding in light, all abounding in life's treasures" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. II, Agudah Lehotzoat Sifre Harayan Kook, Jerusalem, 1938, p. 307).

This same tension is reflected in Rabbi Kook's attitude toward the *halakha*. He was a great halakhist and a staunch advocate of halakhic discipline in personal and group life. But he was sensitive to the divine rhythm that evoked the halakhic formulations but of which they are only imperfect expressions. He was a champion of the *halakha* but his heart was continually drawn to the higher reality that transcends it. In one passage he put it thus: "Great anguish is experienced by one who leaves the wide horizons of pure contemplation, suffered with feeling, with poetry of the most exquisite beauty, and enters the study of the confined world of halakhic enactments. . . . A person who is stirred by a soul ennobled with the splendor of holiness suffers frightful anguish at the chains of confinement when he leaves the one branch of study for the other" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. I, Agudah Lehotzoat Sifre Harayah Kook, Jerusalem, 1938, p. 28).

As halakhic authority charged with responsibility for rendering decisions that were to become the norm of law in the Jewish community, he revealed a flexibility that made him anathema to the zealots of the older type of traditionalism. Thus he sponsored a *takkana* that exempted Jewish agriculture from the restrictions of the sabbatical year. The zealots of the old order continue to ignore this *takkana* to this day, and are careful to avoid purchasing agricultural products from Jewish growers during the periods that their calculations tell them fall within the sabbatical year.

Rabbi Kook's thought was dominated by two primary concepts, particularity and universality. All existence was for him an interdependent, organic, universal whole. Each particular individual is endowed with a unique identity, and feels called on to cultivate this identity and to assert it in interaction with other individuals. But particular individuals are not self-sufficient or autonomous. They exist within the pattern of the whole, they are nourished by the whole, and find their purposive fulfillment by contributing the fruits of their unique resources to the life of the whole. In the words of Rabbi Kook: "The more clearly one studies the character of individual human souls, the more baffled one becomes over the great difference between personalities. . . . It is, however, precisely through their differentiations that they are all united toward one objective, to contribute toward the perfection of the world, each person according to his special talent. Surely one must marvel at the higher wisdom wherein by an inner, mysterious power known only to God, these opposites are integrated and related one to the other, so that through the fusion of all the diverse minds and physiognomies, there emerges a unified structure of consummate harmony" (*Olat Rayah*, Mosad Harav Kook, and Agudah Lehotzoat Sifre Harayah Kook, Vol. I, Jerusalem, 1939, p. 388).

This vision of universality that filled Rabbi Kook's world with an aura of harmony and goodness was a discovery toward which one grows in the course of his odyssey in enlightenment. But life as it is generally obscures it, and what one encounters in the world is often hostility and open conflict between individuals and groups, between ideologies and life-styles. All such antagonism, according to Rabbi Kook, derives from an exaggerated isolationist individualism, from a loyalty of persons toward their private world, without realizing that their private world is only a partial, a fragmentary entity that needs to be complemented by the rest of life. It

is born of the failure to orchestrate oneself with the rest of existence, in the universal ensemble toward which all particular beings are meant to contribute. "All the defects of the world, the material and the spiritual," wrote Rabbi Kook, "they all derive from the fact that every individual sees only the one aspect of existence that pleases him, and all other aspects that are uncomprehended by him seem to deserve purging from the world. And the thought leaves its imprint in individuals and groups, on generations and epochs, that whatever is outside one's own is destructive and disturbing. The result of this is a multiplication of conflict" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. I, p. 121).

The individualism that places self-interest in opposition to a concern for others is, according to Rabbi Kook, a false individualism, which distorts life and begets pernicious consequences. It teaches men to see each other as competitors and even as enemies, instead of as what they truly are, sharers in a common adventure, who are meant to collaborate, and thereby lighten their respective burdens. In truth, self-interest merges with a concern for others, self-love expands to include the love of our fellowman. As Rabbi Kook put it: "In the light of the mighty idea of the unity of existence there is eliminated the problem of self-love, which some have made into the source of all sin, and others as the source of all morality. There is only the love for all things, which is in truth an enlightened, a nobler kind of self-love. The distorted love that loves only the puny spark seen in our myopic vision and hates the authentic love—this is a kind of blindness that is foolish as it is wicked" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. II, p. 586).

The world of exaggerated and competing individualisms is a chaotic world, an unfinished world; it is waiting to find its completion through a disciplining by the spirit of harmony that will seek to effect reconciliation and unity. The goal of unity is to be realized not by suppressing any individual, but

by moving all to contain their exaggerations and to find scope in the whole. Rabbi Kook put it thus: "A chaotic world stands before us as long as we have not attained to that degree of higher perfection of uniting all life-forces and all their diverse tendencies. As long as each one exalts himself, claiming, I am sovereign, I and none other—there cannot be peace in our midst. . . . All our endeavors must be directed toward disclosing the light of general harmony, which derives not from suppressing any power, any thought, any tendency, but by bringing each of them within the vast ocean of light infinite, where all things find their unity, where all is ennobled, all is exalted, all is hallowed" (*ibid.*, p., 588).

In Rabbi Kook's world of thought, the love of God carried with it a love for all God's creatures, an openness to all ideas and a continued passion to perfect life through reconciliation, harmony and peace. Said Rabbi Kook, "Whoever contemplates divine ideas in their purity cannot hate or be disdainful of any creature or any talent in the world, for through each does the Creator reveal Himself" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. I, p. 327). But man's response to his fellowman must be more than the negative response of tolerance; it must reach the higher category of love. In the words of Rabbi Kook: "The higher holiness abounds with love, kindness and tolerance. . . . Hatred, sternness and severity are the result of forgetting God and the suppression of the light of holiness. The more the quest for God grows in a person's heart, the more does the love for all people grow in him, and he loves even wicked men and heretics, and he desires to perfect them, for he does indeed perfect them by his own great faith" (*ibid.*, p. 317).

Rabbi Kook called for a sympathetic hearing to all ideas, for in all ideas there is a core of valid truth that waits to be recognized and claimed from its frequent exaggerations in order to enter the process of intellectual and spiritual fermentation by which a larger truth is born. As Rabbi Kook

put it: "Each body of thought has its own logic and all ideas are tied to each other by a systematic relatedness. . . . There is no such thing as a vain or useless thought . . . since each emanates from the same source in the divine wisdom. If there are thoughts that appear futile or empty, the futility and the emptiness are only in the outer garb in which these thoughts are enwrapped. But if we probe into all their inwardness, we shall find that they, too, offer us the sustenance of life. . . . And as man grows in the scale of perfection, he draws upon all ideas, his own and those of others, for the kernel of abiding truth. He is made more perfect through them, and they through him" (*ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 17).

Man's response to the divine dimension in his being, Rabbi Kook generalized, is "a yearning to reveal the unity of the world, in man, among nations, and in the entire content of existence, without any dichotomy between action and theory, between reason and imagination, and even those dichotomies that are experienced are to be united through a higher enlightenment that recognizes the aspect of their unity and their interrelatedness. In the content of a person's life this constitutes the foundation of holiness" (*ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 425).

Impelled by this philosophy, Rabbi Kook developed a remarkable openness toward all people and all ideas, even those toward whom we would normally expect him to be antagonistic. He saw merit even in atheism. Seen in terms of its own profession, atheism is, of course, a purely negative force that would rob life of its highest level of meaning. But when seen in a larger context we may discern here also positive elements. In the words of Rabbi Kook: "All the names and designations, whether in Hebrew or in any other language, give us no more than a tiny and dull spark of the hidden light toward which the soul aspires and calls it 'Elohim,' 'God.' Every definition in the divine *essence* evokes a reaction of atheism. Atheism is a kind of anguished cry to redeem man from this narrow and alien pit. . . . Atheism has a tempo-

rary legitimacy, because it is needed to purge the foulness that has attached itself to religion . . . to extirpate the dross that obscures from man the true light of godliness. . . . Through the clash of these contradictory forces [atheism and traditional religion] will mankind be aided greatly to approach an enlightened knowledge of God. . . . In place of sterile speculations, presuming to probe the divine *essence*, the heart will entertain the enlightened concern with morality and man's higher heroism, which radiate from the divine light and are at all times linked to its source. This will define man's path in life and place him within the sphere of the divine radiance" (*Orot*, pp. 126ff.).

Rabbi Kook felt in full rapport with the pioneering youth who were building the new Jewish settlements in Palestine. They were often hostile to religion, their Jewish self-affirmation was expressed in secular, nationalistic terms, and the general tendency among the pietists who made up the old Jewish settlement was bitterly opposed to them. A fierce feud raged between the pietists and the secularists. The pietists accused the secularists of being the enemies of Jewish tradition who posed a threat to the survival of Judaism; the secularists retorted with the charge that the pietists were decadent and parasitic and blind to the vision of Jewish redemption. Rabbi Kook saw truth as well as falsification in each of these claims, and he sought to mediate one to the other, calling on each to shed its extremism and to embrace what was valid in the other (*Hazon ha-Geulah*, Agudah Lehotzoat Sifre Harayah Kook, Jerusalem, 1941, pp. 203f.; *Igrot Harayah*, Vol. II, Agudah Lehotzoat Sifre Harayah Kook, Jerusalem, 1946, Letter 349). Rabbi Kook's position brought him abuse from many noted rabbis who were shocked by his tolerance toward a youth that scoffed at traditional sanctities, that had arrogated to itself the role of bringing the redemption by the labor

of their own hands, rather than waiting for the coming of the Messiah. One critic accused him of "becoming a Zionist in his old age and sacrificing his soul for the sake of upbuilding Eretz Yisrael." He replied that if being a Zionist is to struggle for the upbuilding of the land invested by God with holiness, where the gifts of the prophecy were bestowed on the Jewish people and divine providence made itself manifest, then it is honorable to be a Zionist. He invited his critic to try to earn the same honorable epithet for himself (*Igrot*, Letter 555).

At the same time Rabbi Kook was critical of the Zionist pioneers because they had reduced Jewish identity to the level of nationalism. What is the highest goal of Jewish nationalism? A Jewish state! "But," declared Rabbi Kook, "a state cannot yield the highest happiness to man. . . . The Jewish people is the base on which God's throne rests, its greatest yearning is for the time when God will be One and His name One. . . ." Nationalist movements are temporary phenomena, which are due to be transcended as man responds to the more universal claims of his nature. A secularly oriented Zionism, he argued, "has sufficient potency to be a theme of propaganda and, to some extent, win adherents for a limited span of time, but secularity cannot offer us a permanent directive for life. Already, since the movement in its secular form has been in vogue for a relatively brief period of time, we feel a drying up of its vitality and a tendency to fragmentation, despite its physical expansion. . . . Those who think that the new nationalist movement can supersede our concern with holiness are in grievous error. . . . This is a mistaken conception that will never take root and will never be able to gain permanent acceptance, either in the thought world of the Jewish people, or among the great and sensitive spirits of the nations. The dimension of holiness must regain its scope in our national and Zionist movement, for only therein is the source of abiding life. This will then revitalize, by its power, the domain of the secular, which is meant to be

auxiliary to it. And this will serve us as the way of penitence, which will heal all of our afflictions and bring near the full redemption" (*Orot*, p. 160; *Hazon Hageulab*, pp. 169f.).

Rabbi Kook stressed often the classic doctrine that the Jewish people were the bearers of a heritage that proclaimed God's word with incomparable power, and that all mankind was meant to be nurtured by it, but he took sharp issue with those who disparaged other religions. In all religions there are authentic elements, "a seeking after God and His ways in the world." It is especially Jews, as the bearers of the universal vision, who should be the protagonists of this principle, but decadence obscured it for them. "At a time such as this," Rabbi Kook wrote, "we must clarify the common elements of all religion, according to the degree of their development, and not be afraid of the customary disdain and deep hostility that lurks in the soul against everything alien" (*Igrot Harayah*, Vol. I, Agudah Lehotzoat Sifre Harayah Kook, Jerusalem, 1943, Letter 194). In Jewish tradition, the feud between Judaism and Christianity and Judaism and Islam is sometimes projected back into the brotherly feud between Jacob and Esau, and Isaac and Ishmael. Rabbi Kook seized on this projection and transmuted it into positive terms, the recognition of the essential brotherhood among the three faiths. "The brotherly love of Esau and Jacob, of Isaac and Ishmael," he wrote, "will rise above the confusions fostered by the evil emanating from our creaturely character; it will rise above them and turn them to light and compassion without end" (*Igrot*, Vol. II, Letter 355).

Rabbi Kook was grieved because of the parochialism that had developed in the Jewish people and caused them to stray from their authentic self. They had often become a self-centered people, forgetting that their destiny was to live in a larger human context, to contribute to the whole and to be

enriched by the whole. He attributed this growth of parochialism to two factors: "the prolonged persecution . . . encountered at the hands of the larger world . . . and because of the radical change in the spiritual and practical pattern of life that set us apart from all other nations under the sun" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. II, p. 557).

This parochialism is, of course, an ironic distortion, for the goal of the Torah is the very opposite; it is to sensitize us to holiness, to the vision of universality as an imperative for the perfection of all life. The true self of the Jew, declared Rabbi Kook, is stirred by a longing that "the light of truth and equity, as deriving from our affirmation of God, be made manifest in the life of the world," and "all our *mitzvot* and customs are but vessels that contain sparks of this great light" (*Ikve Hatzon*, "Hamahshavot," in *Eder Hayakar*, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, 1967, p. 124).

Rabbi Kook criticized the religious leaders of his time because they had contributed to this decadence. They had spurned secular culture. Even the study of Judaism was reduced by them to a concentration on Talmudic dialectics, ignoring the ethical, philosophical and mystical branches of Jewish literature in which the Jewish soul found vivid expression. They were clinging to a conception of Judaism that was narrow, pedantic, indifferent to the world and hostile to all progressive life. The result is, Rabbi Kook pointed out, that when they encounter "the light of knowledge, of some pure and exalted idea, they feel that their spiritual world is slipping under their feet. . . . The reaching out for worldly knowledge to the extent possible is a necessity. If every student of the Torah cannot be expected to master all branches of knowledge, he can be expected to attain familiarity with the general state of culture in the world and its impact on life, so that he may discern the spirit of his generation and thus be enabled to nurture it and improve it" (*Ikve Hatzon*, "Derishat Hashem," in *Eder Hayakar*, pp. 128-9).

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Rabbi Kook discussed this subject often, and sometimes with great pathos and evident pain. In a letter to a correspondent he lamented: "We have abandoned the soul of the Torah. . . . Whoever speaks of this to the shepherds of our people is deemed presumptuous and mad. The hour calls for a mighty act of penitence. . . . We must be radical. With minor compromises we shall correct nothing. . . . Religious faith has dwindled, and is continuing to wane, because its Torahitic foundation has been undermined. No one attends to it. Orthodoxy, in waging her battles with negations, contents itself with vain imaginings that life and reality destroy, destroying also those who propound them. . . . Whoever is strong of heart, who wields a vigorous pen, and his soul is touched by the divine spirit, must go forth to the battlefield and cry out, Give us light. We would see an altogether different picture in our generation if but a portion of our talented people who are knowledgeable in the Torah and gifted with good sense devoted themselves to cultivate the vineyard of the Lord in the area of inwardness, to concern themselves with clarifying the conceptual elements of religion, such as the nature of prophecy, the holy spirit, the redemption and the anticipation of redemption, the redemption of the Jewish people and the redemption of the world, the perfection of the individual and of the community" (*Igrot*, Vol. II, Letter 481). In another letter he wrote in the same vein: "As long as Orthodoxy maintains stubbornly, No, we shall concern ourselves only with the study of Talmud and the legal codes, but not *aggadah*, not ethics, not Cabbalah, not scientific research, not the knowledge of the world, and not Hasidism, it impoverishes itself, and against all this I shall continue to wage battle" (*ibid.*, Letter 602).

Rabbi Kook's program to raise the spiritual state of Jewish life was to encourage a third force as a living embodi-

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ment of his ideal. It may be instructive to quote Rabbi Kook's own words as to how he understood the ideological cleavage in Judaism and the role he envisioned for the so-called third force. In a letter to the Agudat Yisrael, as a message to its annual conference, he offered the following analysis of the situation:

There are three fundamental forces here [in Eretz Yisrael]. One is the old force...largely absorbed in its quest for inner holiness, which thrusts aside whatever bears anything new in any form, which excludes from its schools and yeshivot every foreign language, even the language of the government and country, and every secular study, even that which is most urgent for practical life, which . . . refuses to introduce any changes in response to the demands of new conditions created by the new immigration of great numbers of our brothers from the western countries and from every part of Europe. . . . The second force has emerged only recently and has come to the fore, thanks to recent events in Eretz Yisrael, gaining recognition especially since I have begun my activity in Eretz Yisrael. . . . This is the force that proclaims that it is our duty to revitalize the spirit of God in our people and to gain respect for the Torah and the commandments through the acquisition of all cultural resources active in the world. . . . We must take whatever is good from any source where we find it to adorn our spirit and our institutions. . . . After the study of our holy Torah we must teach our children and our students the practical disciplines that a person needs in life. We shall train them to be brave of heart and agreeable in manner. We shall get them used to Hebrew speech, which is a source of dignity and strength to us in Eretz Yisrael, in addition to the fact that the language is holy and we perform a divine commandment in studying it.

We shall establish vocational schools for youth especially suited for this, and here, too, we shall infuse the living, creative spirit that knows our generation and is capable of influencing it toward the love of all things holy and beloved of God.

The third force is the force of complete secularism, which has discarded everything holy to us, concerning itself solely with mundane needs. . . . It stands to reason that this rejection of everything holy does not remain a mental activity, but it tends to undermine and destroy the foundations of religion and alienates great numbers of our people now settling in Eretz Yisrael from the light of God and His holy Torah. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that, with all this, we have here also a great positive force, a deep love for our people, a firm dedication to extend the practical work of rebuilding Eretz Yisrael, to direct the spirit of our generation to draw closer to the land and the nation, in keeping with the historic character of our people. We have here a force that, despite all estrangement, contains a vital spark of holiness, waiting to be fanned into fuller life, through faithful and loving hands. (*Igrot*, Vol. II, Letter 427)

Rabbi Kook's program to serve the cause of renewal in Judaism involved him in a number of practical steps. He undertook a personal ministry of reconciliation by cultivating both camps and by acknowledging the elements of validity in their positions. He travelled extensively among the colonies and befriended the pioneers with many tokens of personal friendship. He embraced what was embraceable in their programs. He extolled the sanctity of creative labor. He wrote a glowing letter of welcome to the national Hebrew poet, Hayim Nahman Bialik, when the latter arrived to settle in Palestine. He welcomed the establishment of the Bezalel School of fine arts, exulting in this development as promising

a much-needed aesthetic enrichment in Jewish life. He participated in the ceremonies launching the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In many instances he cautioned those to whom he spoke that the pursuits of the Hebrew cultural renaissance must avoid the secularist falsifications of Jewish tradition, but his tone was always positive, and he hailed each development for the positive gains it brought to the cultural renaissance in Judaism.

At the same time he remained a friend of the Old Settlement. He appealed for funds to maintain its schools. He defended them, despite their extremism, as carrying a deep commitment to holiness. Their appearance, their manner, alienated, but beneath their exterior form there was a deep love for the Jewish people and its heritage. He was very critical of Rabbi A. M. Fishman, who had voiced public attack against one of the schools of the Old Settlement, the Yeshivah Shaarei Torah. Our way, he maintained, must not be the negative way of destroying the old or the new. His program called for renewing the old, and hallowing the new (*Orot Yisrael*, 4:4, 8:8, 9:5 in *Orot*; *Ikve ha-Zon*, "ha-Dor" in *Eder Hayakar*, pp. 107-116; *Orot Meofel*, "Orot ha-Tehiah," 9, 21, 23, 34, 46, in *Orot*, pp. 25-85; *Hazon ha-Geulah*, pp. 105, 108, 109, 139, 148-50, 179, 199-304, 232-33, 267, 275-76, 332-33; *Igrot*, Vol. I, Letters 44, 88, 112, 140, 158, 191, 266, 279, 295, 334; *Igrot*, Vol. II, Letters 341, 392, 516, 522, 570, 672, 724).

The most important step he advocated was the creation of a network of new schools whose spirit would reflect the synthesis he advocated. He offered personal sponsorship to the secondary school Tahkemoni launched by the Mizrahi, as an alternative to the Tel Aviv gymnasia, but he was disappointed that it never attained the academic standing of the leftist institution. The goal on which he was especially set was the establishment of a new Yeshivah where a broad conception of Judaism was to be taught. This Yeshivah was to be



established in Jaffa rather than in Jerusalem, in order to avoid a contest with the old pietists.

The new Yeshivah would train the kind of rabbis who would be acceptable to the younger generation, and be able to bring them back to God. The Yeshivah he projected would be quite different from the seminaries established in Western countries, although he hastened to add that many of the founders of these seminaries were great scholars and righteous men who rendered invaluable services to the cause of Judaism (*Hazon ha-Geulah*, pp. 297, 304; *Igrot*, Vol. I, Letters 98, 103, 110, 111, 112, 118, 137, 141, 144, 149, 240, 277, 279, 286, 295, 325, 328; *Igrot*, Vol. II, Letters 647, 650, 653).

Rabbi Kook found a number of kindred spirits who rallied to him. The younger generation, the pioneers who built the nationalist revival, responded to him warmly, but they were not quite ready to embrace his call to holiness. Their very adulation of him, moreover, made him all the more suspect in the camp of the pietists. He found many elements in the Mizrahi, the Religious Zionist party, close to his spirit, but he could not accept its avowed concession to the factionalism by agreeing to serve as a separate party within the Zionist coalition. He wanted to be bolder and more aggressive in challenging the official Zionist slogan, that Zionism as such has nothing to do with religion. He wanted to speak to the entire Jewish people and the Mizrahi was content to be a fragment. At one time he attempted to launch a movement as a vehicle for his views, but nothing came of it (*Hazon ha-Geulah*, pp. 193, 196, 197, 209, 311-313, 314, 315, 332-333; *Igrot*, Vol. II, Letters 394, 497, 534, 555, 571).

He was the Chief Rabbi in Jaffa, and after the British Mandatory Power's recognition of an autonomous Jewish community, he became the Chief Rabbi of the entire Jewish community in Palestine. As such he was the spokesman of the official religiosity of the community, but his colleagues in the rabbinate remained aloof from his views. At one time it was

suggested to him that he call a conference of rabbis to deal with the problems that were on his mind. He replied that such a conference would be futile. "The shepherds of our people are in a deep slumber," he replied. At such conferences these venerable men would bring forth sterile dialectics but they would not face life and its problems. "This is not the way," he continued. "We shall not seek conferences at this time, but we shall create a literature" (*Igrot*, Vol. I, Letter 184).

His gifted pen was the most formidable weapon at his disposal. In addition to his major works in mystical philosophy, which remain to be explored by our generation and by succeeding generations, he wrote poetry, and many occasional essays, and he carried on an extensive correspondence with kindred souls all over the world, offering advice as well as criticism. He wrote to Rabbi Meir Berlin, leader of the Mizrahi, protesting an anti-Arab article in the Mizrahi organ (*Igrot*, Vol. II, Letter 398). He wrote to another rabbi, praising him for a fine work he had published, but criticizing him for not correcting his Hebrew style, and for allowing himself to violate the rules of Hebrew grammar. To the editor of one magazine he wrote a sharp protest because the latter had allowed himself to use abusive language against an opponent. He encouraged one scholar to translate a work on Judaism and make it available among the Japanese, who were on the brink of a break with Shintoism and were likely to find Judaism an answer to their quest for a more vital faith. He wrote to another correspondent urging a respectful attitude toward other religions, asking that Judaism be affirmed in positive terms, for its own merits, without ridiculing the faith of other people (*Igrot*, Vol. I, Letters 112, 194; *Igrot*, Vol. II, Letters 344, 355, 398, 557, 669).

Rabbi Kook's role as an activist with a truly independent spirit that made him fearless when a righteous cause was at stake was shown especially in his reaction to the Stavsky case. A leader of the Labor Zionist movement, Chayim Arlosoroff,

was killed by an unknown assassin in 1933. This was a period of intense feuding between the Labor Zionists and the Zionist Revisionists, an extreme rightist group. The general feeling in the Jewish community, where the Labor Zionists were the dominant group, was that Arlosoroff was a victim of this feuding and that the assassination was the act of a Revisionist by the name of Abraham Stavsky. After a trial by the British Mandatory authorities, Stavsky was found guilty of the murder and was sentenced to death. Rabbi Kook was convinced that political hysteria had created a climate that blurred the rational weighing of the evidence and he launched a campaign to save Stavsky from execution. His efforts were successful, the case was reviewed and Stavsky was finally freed.

The issues with which Rabbi Kook dealt in his extensive writings were varied, but he summed up his position in three basic categories. The Judaism that will rise to its historic authenticity and fulfill its liberating role in civilization will have to be a synthesis of Orthodoxy, nationalism and liberalism. By Orthodoxy he meant conventional religiosity based on the Torah and the commandments, by nationalism he meant the Zionist movement in its far-reaching expressions of Jewish creativity, and by liberalism he meant the general humanist tradition of the Enlightenment, with its characteristic expression in cultural and humanitarian ideals (*Orot Meofel*, "Orot ha-Tehiyah," 18, in *Orot*, pp. 70-72).

Rabbi Kook called for an integration of Orthodoxy, Zionism and liberalism. But this did not represent for him an introduction into Judaism of elements foreign to itself. It represented the very opposite—Judaism's claim to what was essentially its very own. Conventional religiosity had gone dry and reduced Judaism to the formal elements of the Torah and commandments, each pursued in narrow rather than broad terms. But the Torah and the commandments, seen in broader terms, implied the love for the Jewish people that was the heart of the Zionist movement and the humanist ideal that

was the heart of the liberal movement. These three belonged together, to express the goal of holiness in all its manifestations.

Rabbi Kook offered us a noble view of what life ought to be. Why does life fall short of this ideal? Why is the vision of universality so difficult of realization? Why is man held in thrall by parochial loyalties, by a blind clinging to the self and an indifference and even hostility toward those beyond the self? In short, why did God so structure the world that there is so much folly, so much hostility and conflict in it? Rabbi Kook noted readily that God could indeed have created a world in which man, by nature, would be totally enlightened. But this would have robbed life of a precious dimension, the capacity for growth. "All striving presupposes some deficiency" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. II, p. 481), stated Rabbi Kook, and only in a world of imperfection is there scope for ideals and for the striving toward perfection. Indeed, it is the fact that men must struggle against deficiency that authenticates and deepens for them life's values. The love for freedom is forged in part in the crucible of suffering under servitude (*Olat Rayah*, Mosad Harav Kook and Agudah Lehotzoat Sifre Harayah Kook, Jerusalem, 1949, Vol. II, pp. 262f.).

Light is steadily pitted against the dark, and light will increasingly overcome the dark. In Rabbi Kook's words: "Nothing remains the same; everything blooms, everything ascends, everything steadily increases in light and truth. The enlightened spirit does not become discouraged even when he discerns that the line of ascendance is circuitous, including both advance and decline, a forward movement but also fierce retreats, for even the retreats abound in the potential of future progress" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. II, p. 484). This vision of development "gives us ground for optimism in the world" (*ibid.*, p. 555) in the face of all discouragements.

The world, in Rabbi Kook's thought, is a school for human enlightenment. Men now walk side by side in different states of light or of darkness. Many steps in the ladder of perfection must be climbed before the height of a truly universal man is reached. Rabbi Kook at times became lyrical as he wrote on this subject: "There is one who sings the song of his own life, and in himself he finds everything, his full spiritual sufficiency. There is another who sings the songs of his people. He leaves the circle of his private existence, for he does not find it broad enough. . . . He aspires for the heights and he attaches himself with tender love to the whole of Israel, he sings her songs, grieves in her afflictions, and delights in her hopes. He ponders lofty and pure thoughts concerning her past and her future, and probes lovingly and wisely the content of her inner essence. Then there is one whose spirit extends beyond the boundary of Israel, to sing the song of man. . . . He is drawn to man's universal vocation and he hopes for his highest perfection. And this is the life source from which he draws his thoughts and probings, his yearnings and his visions. But there is one who rises even higher, uniting himself with the whole existence, with all creatures, with all worlds. With all of them he sings his song. It is of one such as this that tradition has said that whoever sings a portion of song each day is assured of the life of the world to come" (*ibid.*, p. 458).

The universal man, as Rabbi Kook conceived of him, is one whose sympathies embrace all forms of life, not only the purely human. Rabbi Kook extended his concern to animals. The enlightened man of the future, he felt, was to shun the eating of meat as an act of compassion for animal life. The original man as God created him was to use as his food "every herb yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree yielding fruit" (Gen. 1:29). The eating of meat was first sanctioned to Noah (Gen. 9:3). After Adam's disobedience, when man disclosed his pitifully low moral state, God

compromised and allowed him to be a meat eater. But on reaching his true spiritual maturing he was to return to his original innocence.

In the words of Rabbi Kook: "The thrust of the idealism that continues to develop will not remain forever in its confinement. Just as the democratic aspiration will emerge into the world through the general intellectual and moral perfection, 'when man will no longer teach his brother to know the Lord, for they will all know Me, small and great alike' (Jer. 31:34), so will the hidden yearning to act justly toward animals emerge at the proper time" ("Talele Orot," *Tabkemoni*, vol. I, Bern, 1910, p. 21).

Rabbi Kook went so far as to project the abolition of animal sacrifices in a restored Temple in Jerusalem, which was to take place in the messianic age of the future. In those days the animals themselves will be changed in their psyche, losing their harshness and developing a morally higher sensitivity. "In the future the abundance of enlightenment will spread and penetrate even the animals. 'They will not hurt nor destroy on My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord' (Isa. 11:9). The gift offerings of vegetation that will then be brought as sacrifices will be as acceptable as the sacrifices of ancient days" (*Olat Rayah*, vol. II, p. 292).

The future, as Rabbi Kook envisioned it, favored the light. Man was destined to learn the truth about his nature, about his relatedness to all existence. This was the theme of the goals toward which history was ultimately directed. Jewish tradition expressed this by the conception of a messianic culmination to the process of history. "The illumination to be bestowed by the Messiah," according to Rabbi Kook, "is derived primarily from the philosophy of the unity of all existence" (*Orot Hakodesh*, vol. II, p. 474).

Life itself, in its natural drive for self-perfection, moves us toward this consummation. For we impoverish life and

shrink its scope when we live by parochial loyalties. A sympathetic responsiveness to other people is a boon to them but also to ourselves for we thereby add dimensions to our own being. In Rabbi Kook's words: "The Holy One, praised be He, bestowed mercy on His world by not confining His endowments to one place, one person, one people, one land, one generation or one world, but His endowments are diffused, and the quest for perfection, which is the most idealistic striving of our nature, directs us to seek the higher unity that must finally come in the world. In that day—God will be one and His name one" (*Orot Yisrael*, 5:2, in *Orot* p. 152).

The fact that there is among men widespread ignorance of their true nature and destiny leaves room for those who are enlightened to share in the greatest of life's adventures—to work with God for the advancement of harmony and perfection. When such men see the world "full of feuds, hostilities, persecutions and conflicts, they at once yearn to participate with all their being in the quest that brings about the comprehensiveness of life and its unity, its welfare and its tranquility. When they encounter nations, religions, sects and movements in opposition to each other, they strive with all their strength to harmonize all, to mitigate the breach and to effect unity. . . . They desire that every particular be preserved and perfected, and the collective ensemble be united and at peace" (*Orot Hakodesh*, Vol. II, p. 457).

The yearning to effect unity and perfection in the world is part of the divine strategy to emancipate man from ignorance and parochialism. God has reinforced this with the additional attributes that He has invested in the structure of life. One is the dynamism of the enlightened life; the good that pervades a person draws others to itself. In the words of Rabbi Kook: "Whenever a person raises himself through good deeds, through a higher stirring of his yearning for godliness, for wisdom, justice, beauty and equity, he perfects thereby the spiritual disposition of all existence. All people become

better in their inwardness through the ascendancy of the good in any one of them. . . . Such virtue in any one person is due to spread among the general populace, to stir each one, according to his capacity, toward merit, and thus all existence thereby becomes ennobled and more exalted" (*ibid.*, vol. III, Agudah Lehotzoat Sifre Harayah Kook, Jerusalem, 1950, pp. 314f.).

Another attribute of life that aids man's quest for enlightenment is the phenomenon of penitence, which, for Rabbi Kook, has much deeper significance than the conventional notion of remorse and atonement for specific wrongdoings, in response to traditional admonitions. In truth penitence is a universal and an essentially positive phenomenon, acting on some levels as a natural process, and expressing a revolt against deficiency and the quest for perfection. We are not directed by the automatic workings of our nature to embrace divine ideals, but an affinity, a predisposition for those ideals, is part of us. The ideals that spell out the existential content of our affirmation of God "are inscribed on the human soul, and the deepest yearning hidden in the depths of the soul is to effect the transition of this hidden light from potentiality to actuality . . . in the forms of life itself, the personal and the collective, in deed, desire and thought" (*Ikve Hatzon*, "Avodat Elohim," in *Eder Hayakar*, p. 145). It is this yearning for perfection that sends man to seek a good greater than the good embodied in his present condition and makes him open to the testimony of dreamers who have glimpsed the larger vision. But this yearning is not confined to man. All existence is stirred by an inchoate longing to overcome its alienation from God and return to Him who is the source of its being. "Penitence," declared Rabbi Kook, derives from the yearning of all existence to be better, purer, firmer, nobler than it is" (*Orot Hateshuva*, Yeshivat B'nei Akiba "Or Etzion," Merkaz Shapiro, Jerusalem, 1966, 6:1).

The act of penitence, whether as reaction to a specific

wrongdoing or to a general dissatisfaction with the state of one's life, is free of morbidity. It is, on the contrary, a liberation from morbidity. It is a therapy that cancels out the anguish of remorse and endows a person with a sense of elation for having ascended out of the mire and toward the heights. The penitent who has shed an old self and assumed a new and higher self has in effect been reborn as a new person. He has released by his act a divine song and a divine joy throughout the universe. All existence has been renewed through his renewal. For man is not self-sufficient, he does not live in detachment from the rest of existence. He is linked with all his griefs and all his joys with the whole, and all life grieves when he grieves and exults when he exults. Rabbi Kook summed up this phase of his subject by quoting the well-known Talmudic maxim (Yoma 66a): "Great is penitence for it brings healing to the world, and if but a single person repent, he—and the whole world—are granted forgiveness" (*Orot Hateshuvah*, 3, end).

Another factor in the enlightenment of man, according to Rabbi Kook, is the impact of Judaism's presence in the world. For Rabbi Kook the essence of Judaism, which flows from Jewish monotheism, is the passion to overcome separatism, the severance of man from God, of man from man, of man from nature. It is the passion to perfect the world through man's awareness of his links to all else in existence. It is the rejection of the alleged antagonism between the material and the spiritual. It is the rejection of nationalism as an ultimate center of moral values. It is the rejection of every parochialism that seeks to build man's spiritual home and his structure of values by taking to itself a fragment of life and ignoring the rest. "The Jewish outlook" said Rabbi Kook, "is the vision of the holiness of all existence" (*Orot Yisrael* 7:12, in *Orot*, p. 167f.).

Judaism has exerted an influence on the religious consciousness of the world, but, for the most part, this has been

to the adoption of certain conceptual abstractions detached from the life context in which they appear in Judaism. They were drawn into a religious system that centers its concern on reverence for God as an exalted Being who exists in splendid transcendence from man's world. This tends to separate religion from the ethical goals by which the world may be transformed toward righteousness.

Judaism centers the religious concern not on the divine Being, but on divine ideals, on the goals that God has ever sought to realize in the world of His creation. It is in the very concern to effectuate those goals in the context of a people struggling with the worldly problems of a nation functioning in history that the characteristic of Judaism is disclosed, and its cogency for a larger world service indicated. At stake in the difference between the two approaches is "not the exalted metaphysical truth of the unity of God," declared Rabbi Kook, "but the divine aspect of the passion for equity and righteousness and the mighty aspiration to effectuate these divine ideals in all their strength" (*Ikve Hatzon*, "Avodat Elohim," in *Eder Hayakar*, p. 149f.).

The crisis in Jewish peoplehood as a result of centuries of exile and persecution and the resultant defensiveness it has fostered among Jews have created a distortion in Judaism and its authentic nature has been obscured. We have already noted Rabbi Kook's complaint about the decadence in the Judaism of his time. He was hopeful that the return to Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish renaissance to be engendered by it as a result of the Zionist endeavor would, in due time, also create a religious renewal enabling Judaism once more to be fully itself, and thus to assert a greater influence on world culture. In the words of Rabbi Kook: "A great people exerts an influence not primarily through a detached part of itself but through its total being. As long as the striving for divine ideals and their effectuation in the course of a continuous historical existence does not manifest itself in the nation, the divine Presence is in

exile, and the life-force released by the service of God is in a state of weakness" (*Ikve Hatzon*, "Daat Elohim," in *Eder Hayakar*, pp. 130-141). The ultimate goal of the return to Zion is to enable the Jews once again "to bear the torch of holiness in all its purity before all the nations of the world" (*Hazon ha-Geulah*, p. 178); to enable Judaism to bear witness to Torah in the world, "both a political Torah that would foster peace and freedom . . . and a religious Torah enlightened by the knowledge of divine truth and the love of God's ways in the life of the individual and society" (*ibid.*, p. 202)

Rabbi Kook's vision of a reasserted Jewish service to the world did not mean that he expected Judaism to supplant the other religions of mankind. Rabbi Kook believed that the diversity of religion is a legitimate and permanent expression of the human spirit, that the different religions are not meant to compete but to collaborate. "Conventional theology," he declared, "assumes that the different religions must necessarily oppose each other. . . . But on reaching full maturity the human spirit aspires to rise above every manner of conflict and opposition, and a person then recognizes all expressions of the spiritual life as an organic whole." This does not erase the difference of levels between religions, between higher and lower, between the more holy and the less holy and between the holy and the common. But each has its place in the life of the whole. Each is a path through which God is seeking to raise man to Himself.

Religions can serve one another as a stimulus, as a model to challenge, and invite emulation. There are, too, some elements in religion that one faith may adopt from another. But in some fundamental respects every religion is integrally linked to a people's historical experience, and a faith superimposed upon a people from without will, in a vital sense, remain alien to its life. It is in the harmonious coexistence of the

different religions and their free interaction that a ferment is released and native energies are evoked so that each is aided to make the ascent toward God in its own terms. Each religion is thus a permanent participant in the "ensemble of faiths, and this domain also, where the wrangling of the different faiths once raged, becomes filled with peace and light" (*Tabkemoni*, "Talele Orot," vol. I., pp. 17f.; *Ikve Hatzon*, "Hamahshavot," in *Eder Hayakar*, pp. 122-25).

It is in this perspective that Rabbi Kook viewed the anticipated reassertion of Judaism's service to the world. The goal of Judaism, Rabbi Kook wrote, "is not to absorb or destroy the other faiths . . . but to perfect them and to stimulate them toward a higher development, so that they may free themselves of their dross, and they will then automatically attach themselves to the root of Israel. . . . This applies even to pagan faiths, and certainly so to those faiths that are partly based on the light of Israel's Torah" (*Igrot*, vol. I, Letter 112). This conception of the legitimacy of religious diversity is itself, according to Rabbi Kook, a contribution of Jewish universalism that does not obliterate the particular but integrates it in the ensemble of the larger whole. As Rabbi Kook put it: "When the light of Israel shines in the world and vanquishes the darkness and the mist that has fallen on it through a failure to understand itself, there is at once disclosed in the world the grace of unity that links all forces into one comprehensive whole, while leaving intact the private essence of each one" (*Eder Hayakar*, *ibid.*, "Talele Orot," *ibid.*)

Rabbi Kook's teachings were more than a conceptual system rationally arrived at. They objectified the values that stirred deeply in his own life. In one of the most revealing testimonials about himself he declared: "I love everybody. It is impossible for me not to love all people, all nations. With all the depth of my being, I desire to see them grow toward beauty,

toward perfection. My love for the Jewish people is with more ardor, more depth. But my inner desire reaches out with a mighty love toward all. There is veritably no need for me to force this feeling of love. It flows directly from the holy depth of wisdom, from the divine soul.

"It is no accident, but of the very essence of my being, that I find delight in the pursuit of the divine mysteries in unrestrained freedom. This is my primary purpose. All my other goals, the practical and the rational, are only peripheral to my real self. I must find my happiness within my inner self, unconcerned whether people agree with me, or by what is happening to my own career. The more I shall recognize my own identity, and the more I will permit myself to be original, and to stand on my own feet with an inner conviction which is based on knowledge, perception, feeling and song, the more will the light of God shine on me, and the more will my potentialities develop to serve as a blessing to myself and to the world.

"The refinements to which I subject myself, my thoughts, my imagination, my morals, and my emotions, will also serve as general refinements for the whole world. A person must say, 'The whole world was created for my sake'" (*Arple Tobar*, p. 22).

There were times when Rabbi Kook was discouraged by the storm and stresses of his public life and he longed for solitude and obscurity. It is this that created the tension characteristic of his life. The pathos of his predicament is well expressed in a letter to his son. "The burdensome necessity to involve myself with people impedes me greatly from concentrating on inner concerns. My soul yearns and is thirsty for inner reflection, while the stream of distractions drags it to endless conversations, discourses, sermonizing and thinking about finite matters, set in their narrow framework, to which the simple masses in their imitation-based piety are

accustomed. . . . For Your help, O God, I hope and I shall always trust, to add to Your praise" (*Igrot*, vol. III, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, 1965, Letter 764).

We have a touching letter by him in which he asked to be recommended for an administrative post in a *kolel*, a residence for poor scholars in Jerusalem maintained by a charitable fund from diaspora communities. He complained that the rabbinic office was not in accord with his inclination or his strength. He thought himself qualified for this post that would, at the same time, enable him to live "in the holy city of Jerusalem without the yoke of the rabbinate" (*Igrot*, vol. I, Letter 84). In another letter he expressed the wish that he had the financial means to free himself from his rabbinic labors in order to pursue various literary projects to which he felt drawn (*Igrot*, vol. II, Letter 645). But nothing came of such dreams, and he submitted to life's necessities with all their pressures and distractions.

Rabbi Kook's life was often beset by conflict and controversy. But he himself was a person of unusual tenderness and pacific disposition. This is reflected clearly in the will he wrote in 1919 when he was stricken with a serious illness. Here are his words in this document:

By the grace of God, 21 Iyar, 5679 (1919), between the hours of 9 and 10 in the morning.

My hope is that God, in His mercy, will grant me a complete healing, among the other sick persons of His people Israel, and that in His abundant kindnesses He will enable me to return to Him in love. Especially do I pray that He enable me to mend whatever wrong I may have committed, whether in man's relationship to God or man's relationship to man, and that He grace me with the opportunity to repay my debts.

To my great regret I do not remember all my debts in detail. But I hope that God will bestir me and remind me

of them all, and that He will help me to repay them. Some of those that have come to my mind I wrote down in a small notebook with a white cover, where there will also be found some poems. Some pages that were torn off from this notebook are with Zevi Yehuda*, may he be granted life, and some debts are also recorded there.

Most of the books in my apartment here do not belong to me. May God help me to return them to their owners. In my house in Jaffa, too, there are also many books that belong to others. May God enable me to clarify everything and to set everything in order.

May it be God's will to inspire whomever I may have pained or offended to forgive me with a full forgiveness. As for me, I surely forgive all. On the contrary I regard as a good every pain and humiliation to which I was subjected. May it be God's will that no one suffer retribution on account of me, and may God bestow on all members of the fellowship of Israel only good and mercy.

O Lord, help me and heal me in your abundant mercies, and strengthen me with Your help. Help Your holy people, and hasten the light of Your deliverance and establish Your holiness in all the worlds. Amen.

Resigned, yet anticipating Your help,

Abraham Isaac ha-Kohen Kook

My gold watch and chain is a gift of dear Shlesinger, may his memory be for a blessing, and I have some scruples about the gift. May God enable me to straighten it out properly, in accordance with the precepts of our holy Torah (Harayah, Mosad Harav Kook, Jerusalem, 1960, p. 6).

Rabbi Kook's published writings include four volumes in rabbinic law; a collection of poetry; a treatise on the mysti-

*[his son]

cism of the Hebrew alphabet, the cantillation and vowel signs; a treatise on penitence; a treatise on morals; two volumes of a commentary on the Prayer Book; three volumes of correspondence; three volumes of reflections on God and man (*Orot ha-Kodesh*); and various occasional essays on problems in contemporary Jewish life. But the greater part of his work still remains in manuscript. In 1937 a society was formed to publish the remaining works of Rabbi Kook; thirty volumes were projected. One is awed by the sheer labor involved in this prodigious creation, especially when one recalls that he was not a literary recluse but busily involved in life, that he held an office that was most onerous in its demands on his time and energy.

A definitive appraisal of Rabbi Kook's contributions as a religious philosopher must await the publication of all his writings. What has been published thus far, however, clearly reveals him as a seer of great stature who added a most remarkable chapter to the history of Judaism. He belongs among the great spirits of Western spirituality.

ABRAHAM
ISAAC ROOK-

THE LIGHTS OF PENITENCE, THE MORAL PRINCIPLES,
LIGHTS OF HOLINESS, ESSAYS, LETTERS, AND POEMS

THE CLASSICS
OF WESTERN
SPIRITUALITY

The Lights of Penitence

A Note on the Text

The Lights of Penitence is Rabbi Kook's most popular work. The first edition appeared in 1925 and several newer editions, with a somewhat more amplified text, have appeared since then. The first three chapters were written by Rabbi Kook himself; the rest of the material consists of selections culled by his son, who edited the work, from various other writings. Rabbi Kook touched on the various aspects of penitence in many of his writings.

The conventional conception of penitence sees it as an effort to redress a particular transgression in the area of man's relationship to God or to his fellowman. For Rabbi Kook penitence is the surge of the soul for perfection, to rise above the limitations imposed by the finitude of existence. It is a reach for reunion with God from whom all existence has been separated by the descent to particularity and finitude as incidents of creation. Penitence in man is, in other words, only one episode in the entire drama of cosmic life, which is forever seeking higher levels of development. Penitence begins with the will, but it slowly moves toward implementation in the fabric of life. Its primary focus is the quest for self-perfection, but it overflows into the endeavor to perfect society and the world. The Jewish people is here treated as a link in the chain of being, and the goals of penitence act on it as an autonomous entity; this in turn interacts with the penitence of the individual, and that of the larger world.

Introduction

For a long time now an inner struggle goes on in me, and I feel prodded by a mighty force to speak about penitence, and all my thoughts are focused on this theme alone. Penitence holds a primary place in the teachings of the Torah and in life; all the hopes of the individual and of society depend on it. It embodies a divine commandment that is, on the one hand, the easiest to carry out, since a stirring of the heart toward penitence is a valid expression of penitence, and on the other hand, it is the most difficult to perform, since it has not yet been effectuated fully in the world and in life.

I find myself constantly tending to think and to speak on this subject. A good deal is written on this subject in the Torah, the prophets, and the writings of the sages. But for our generation this subject is still a closed book and is in need of clarification. Our literature, which explores every area where there is manifest the poetry of life, did not probe at all into this wonderful treasure of life, the treasure of penitence. Indeed, it has not even begun to take any interest in it, to discover its character and value, not even from its poetic side, which is a source of endless inspiration. It certainly has thus far failed to touch its practical aspect, especially insofar as it bears on the conditions of our modern life.

My inner being impels me to speak about penitence, but I recoil inwardly from my intention. Am I worthy to discuss the subject of penitence? The greatest spirits of past generations wrote on the subject of penitence, including the prophets, the noblest of the sages, the greatest of the saints, and how dare I place myself in their category? But no reticence can relieve me of this inner claim. I must speak about penitence,

particularly about its literary and practical aspects, to understand its significance for our generation, and the manner of its implementation in life, the life of the individual and the life of society.

Chapter One

Penitence According to Nature, Faith and Reason

We encounter the phenomenon of penitence on three levels: penitence according to nature, penitence according to faith and penitence according to reason. Penitence according to nature may be divided into two parts: the physical and the spiritual.

Physical penitence is related to all transgressions against the laws of nature, and such laws of morals and the Torah as are linked to the laws of nature. Every act of wrongdoing must in the end engender illness and pain, and the individual as well as society is exposed to much suffering as a result of this. After it becomes clear that the person himself, as a result of his misbehavior, is responsible for his distress, he necessarily gives thought to correcting his condition, to conforming to the laws of life, to becoming obedient to the laws of nature, of morality and of the Torah, that he may be renewed in life's vitality.

The science of medicine concerns itself a good deal with this, but this important phenomenon has not yet been fully clarified. We have not yet found the answer to all questions pertaining to physical penitence, to clarify how far it is possible within the delimitations of existence to restore to a person all the losses he sustained as a result of those offenses that damage the body and its functions. It appears that this phase of penitence is linked in a profound way with other forms of penitence—the spiritual phase of natural penitence, and penitence according to faith and penitence according to reason.

The spiritual dimension of natural penitence is more

inward. It embraces the role of what is called the "reprimand of the conscience." It is a requisite of human nature to pursue the righteous path, and when a person strays from the right course, when he lapses into sin, then, if he has not suffered a total spiritual degeneration, his sensitivity will cause him disquiet, and he will suffer pain. He will become zealous to repent, to redress his wrongdoing, until he can feel that his sin has been purged away. This dimension of penitence is very complicated. It is dependent on many subjective and objective conditions, and it is open to many possibilities of misjudgment that one must guard against. This is, however, one of the foundations on which the essence of penitence depends.

After the natural phase of penitence comes penitence inspired by religious faith. This phase of penitence is operative as a result of religious tradition, which frequently concerns itself with penitence. The Torah promises the penitent forgiveness. The sins of individuals and of the community are purged away through penitence. The prophets abound with exalted utterances on the subject of penitence. In a general way all the admonitions of the Torah deal with penitence from the perspective of religious faith. From its conceptual depth flow endless details. A clarification of their basic principles alone calls for considerable discussion and many explanations.

Penitence according to reason comes after penitence according to nature and religious faith have already taken place. It represents the peak of penitential expression. This level of penitence is inspired not only by a natural malaise, physical or spiritual, or by the influence of religious tradition, whether it has induced in the person a fear of retribution or conditioned him to the acceptance of some law or precept. It is also inspired by a comprehensive outlook on life that came to crystallization after the natural and religious phases of penitence had registered their influence. This phase of penitence, in which the previous are included, abounds in endless delight. It

transforms all the past sins into spiritual assets. From every error it derives noble lessons, and from every lowly fall it derives the inspiration for the climb to splendid heights. This is the type of penitence toward which all aspire, which must come and which is bound to come.

Chapter Two

Sudden and Gradual Penitence

In terms of time, penitence may be divided into two parts: sudden penitence and gradual penitence.

Sudden penitence comes about as a result of a certain spiritual flash that enters the soul. At once the person senses all the evil and the ugliness of sin and he is converted into a new being; already he experiences inside himself a complete transformation for the better. This form of penitence dawns on a person through the grace of some inner spiritual force, whose traces point to the depths of the mysterious.

There is also a gradual form of penitence. No sudden flash of illumination dawns upon the person to make him change from the depth of evil to the good, but he feels that he must mend his way of life, his will, his pattern of thought. By heeding this impulse he gradually acquires the ways of equity, he corrects his morals, he improves his actions, and he conditions himself increasingly to becoming a good person, until he reaches a high level of purity and perfection.

The higher expression of penitence comes about as a result of a flash of illumination of the all-good, the divine, the light of Him who abides in eternity. The universal soul, the spiritual essence, is revealed to us in all its majesty and holiness, to the extent that the human heart can absorb it. Indeed, is not the all of existence so good and so noble, and is not the good and the nobility in ourselves but an expression of our

relatedness to the all? How then can we allow ourselves to become severed from the all, a strange fragment, detached like tiny grains of sand that are of no value? As a result of this perception, which is truly a divinely inspired perception, comes about penitence out of love, in the life of the individual and in the life of society.

Chapter Three

Particularized Penitence and General Penitence

There is a form of penitence that addresses itself to a particular sin or to many particular sins. The person confronts his sin face to face, and feels remorseful that he fell into the trap of sin. Slowly he struggles to come out of it, until he is liberated from his sinful enslavement and he begins to experience a holy freedom that is most delightful to his weary self. His healing continues; rays of a benign sun, bearing divine mercy, reach out to him, and a feeling of happiness grows within him. He experiences this at the same time that his heart remains broken and his spirit bowed and melancholy. Indeed this lowly feeling itself, which suits him in his condition, adds to his spiritual satisfaction and his sense of true peace. He feels himself drawing closer to the source of life, to the living God, who but a short time before was so remote from him. His wistful spirit recalls with joyous relief its previous inner anguish, and is filled with a feeling of gratitude. It breaks into a hymn of thanksgiving: "Praise the Lord, O my soul, forget not all His kindnesses, He forgives all Your sins, He heals all your afflictions, He rescues your life from the pit, He adorns you with grace and compassions, He sates you with every good, He renews your youth like an eagle; the Lord performs merciful acts, He vindicates the cause of the oppressed" (Ps. 103: 2-6). How anguished the soul was when

the burden of sin, its dark, vulgar and frightfully oppressive weight, lay upon her! How depressed she was, even if outer riches and honors fell to her lot! What good is there in all the wealth if the inner content of life is impoverished and dry? And how blissful she now is in the inner feeling that her sin has been forgiven, that the nearness of God is already alive and shining in her, that her inner burden has been made lighter, that she has already paid her debt and is no longer oppressed by inner confusion and distress. She is at rest, and filled with an innocent peace. "Return to your peace, O my soul, for the Lord has bestowed His kindness on you" (Ps. 116:7).

There is another kind of feeling of penitence, unspecified and general. A person does not conjure up the memory of a past sin or sins, but in a general way he feels terribly depressed. He feels himself pervaded by sin; that the divine light does not shine on him; that there is nothing noble in him; that his heart is unfeeling, his moral behavior does not follow the right course, worthy of sustaining a meaningful life for a wholesome human being; that his state of education is crude, his emotions stirred by dark and sinister passions that revolt him. He is ashamed of himself; he knows that God is not within him, and this is his greatest misfortune, his most oppressive sin. He is embittered against himself; he can find no escape from his oppressive thoughts, which do not focus on any particular misdeeds; his whole being is as though in a torture chamber. For this state of spiritual malaise penitence comes as the therapy from a master physician. The feeling of penitence, with an insight to its profound nature, its basis in the deepest levels of the soul, in the mysterious workings of nature, in all the dimensions of the Torah and our religious tradition comes with all its might and streams into his soul. A sense of assurance in the healing, the general renewal that penitence extends to all who embrace it, distills in him a spirit of grace and acceptance. He senses the fulfillment of the verse

"I will comfort you as the person who is comforted by his mother" (Isa. 66:13).

Day by day, inspired by this higher level of general penitence, his feeling becomes more firm, clearer, more illumined by reason and more authenticated by the principles of the Torah. His manner becomes increasingly brightened, his anger recedes, a kindly light shines on him, he is filled with vigor, his eyes sparkle with a holy fire, his heart is bathed in rivers of delight, holiness and purity hover over him. His spirit is filled with endless love, his soul thirsts for God, and this very thirst nourishes him like the choicest of foods [lit. "like marrow and fat" as in Ps. 63:6]. The holy spirit rings out before him like a bell, and he is given the good news that all his transgressions, the known and the unknown, have been erased, that he has been born anew as a new being, that the whole world, all realms of being, have been renewed with him, and that all things now join in a chorus of song, that the gladness of God fills all creation. "Great is penitence, for it brings healing to the world, and even one individual who repents is forgiven and the whole world is forgiven with him" (Yoma 86a).

Chapter Four

Private Penitence and Public Penitence – in the World and in the Jewish People

1. The currents of particular and general penitence rush along. They are like the streams of flame on the surface of the sun, which in an unceasing struggle break out and ascend, and endow life to countless worlds and numberless creatures. One is powerless to absorb the multitude of varying colors that emanate from this great sun that shines on all the worlds, the sun of penitence. They are so many, they come with such

mighty sweep, with such wondrous speed. They come from the source of life itself, for whom time is only a limited expression of His providential design. The individual and the collective soul, the world soul, the soul of all realms of being cries out like a fierce lioness in anguish for total perfection, for an ideal form of existence, and we feel the pain, and it purges us. Like salt that seasons the meat, it purges away all our bitterness. It is impossible to express this vastly profound concept. We will place all things in the context of the divine unity, we will invoke the mystical meanings of the names of God: a punctuation mark—a new heaven and a new earth, and all their fullness are contained in it; a letter—and worlds become revealed; words—and [we have before us] countless worlds and multitudes of creations, tranquil and joyous, abounding with a mighty gladness, full of peace and truth. And the soul grows toward perfection.

2. Through penitence all things are reunited with God; through the fact that penitence is operative in all worlds, all things are returned and reattached to the realm of divine perfection. Through the thoughts of penitence, its conceptual implications and the feelings it engenders, the basic character of all our thinking, our imagination and our knowledge, our will and our feeling, is transformed and placed again within the context of the holy order of the divine.

3. General penitence, which involves raising the world to perfection, and particularized penitence, which pertains to the personal life of each individual, including the smallest constituents of special penitential reforms that the holy spirit can itemize in tiniest details—they all constitute one essence. Similarly all the cultural reforms through which the world rises from decadence, the improvements in the social and economic order through this redress of every form of wrongdoing, from the most significant to the minutest ordinances of later sages and the most extreme demands of ethically sensitive spirits—all of them constitute an inseparable whole. "All of

them integrate to form one entity" [based on Zohar II 162b].

4. The nature of all existence and every particular creature, the whole of human history and the life of every individual person, must be seen from one comprehensive perspective, as one essence constituent of many particularities. Then will come readily the perception that will condition the emergence of penitence.

5. In truth one cannot rise to the spiritual level of seeking the reformation of society without a deep inner repentance of every sin and wrongdoing. An individual who has repented in this sense is forgiven and the whole world is forgiven with him. Similarly many may be raised to the ideal state hidden in the soul of the Jewish people through the penitence of one individual who is motivated by the goal of bringing to fruition his people's noblest aspiration for greatness.

6. The highest sensibility in the soul of the people of Israel is the quest for universality. The people aspire for this by the very essence of its being, and this affects all existence. The desire for penitence in its highest form is rooted in this hidden longing.

7. The soul of the people of Israel expresses itself in the striving for absolute justice, which, to be effectuated, must include the realization of all moral virtues. It is for this reason that any moral misdeed committed by an individual Jew weakens his link with the soul of the people. The basic step in penitence is to attach oneself again to the soul of the people. Together with this it is mandatory to mend one's ways and one's actions in conformity with the essential characteristic of the people's soul.

8. The highest form of penitence is penitence inspired by the ideal of honoring God. All other expressions of penitence are auxiliary to it. As our enlightenment progresses, our perceptions are raised to a higher level and the ideal of honoring God with all its comprehensiveness seems too narrow to include the entire sweep of all penitential strivings. Their sub-

stantive content appears too rich to be encompassed by wisdom or God's honor. But the concept of honoring God as the foundation of penitence will become clear at the inception of the enlightenment in the messianic age, and it will be seen as embracing the lower forms of penitence. The larger light of penitence appears initially as negating the lesser light, and rash spirits arise and attempt to formulate ideologies accordingly, but they will fail. The failure results from the claims of the lesser lights, which seemed to have been negated. The great light will continue to do its work and it will not cease until it will be recognized in its higher and lower manifestations. "Repair the breach with the son of Peretz [a metaphor for the Messiah] and pluck a rose from a thorn."¹

9. Various forces will stimulate the emergence of penitence. A special factor in this process will be the anguish felt over the humiliation visited on the great spiritual treasure of our ancestral heritage, which is of incomparable vigor and nobility. This great spiritual treasure derives from the source of life, from the highest order of the divine, which has been transmitted from generation to generation. When one is attentive to it one can find everything in it, everything precious and beautiful, but a crude denial of our religion has led many to detach themselves from this "fruitful corner" and to stray in alien fields, which have no sustaining nourishment for us at all. This great anguish will erupt powerfully and with it will come discretion and moderation to know what positive elements may be garnered from the different paths of straying on which they stumbled. The free stirring of holiness inside the soul will emerge from its imprisonment, and every sensitive

1. The essence of penitence is the surge to perfect life on all levels, which thereby enhances the glory of God. The particularized expressions of this surge often take on purely secular forms and seem remote from the concept of honoring God but the messianic enlightenment will clarify this. Conventional pietists, the "rash spirits," detach God's glory from the various efforts to reform the world on an existential level, but they fail because the excluded values assert their claim. The result is that the reformers and the pietists clash and the glory of God remains in a low state, but this will be set right in the more enlightened state in the end of days.

spirit will begin to drink avidly from this exalted source of life. Then there will be engendered and become revealed, as one whole, knowledge and feeling, the enjoyment of life, a world outlook and a desire for national revival, the redress of spiritual defects and the revitalization of physical vigor, the ordering of the political system and the love for the improvement of the community in good manners and tolerance, together with a lively impatience with everything ugly and evil. To support these goals we need a conditioning of the human heart toward the true inner Torah, the mystical meanings in the Torah, whose influences on ill-prepared students have led so many to reject them and to mock them. It is, however, this very source of life-giving light whose influence on the ill-prepared engenders peril and trouble for the world that will prove to be a source of enduring deliverance. From this source will come the healing light by which to revitalize the community as well as the individual, to "raise the fallen tabernacle of David" (Amos 9:11) and to "remove the humiliation of the people of God from all the earth" (Isa. 25:8)

10. The impudence encountered prior to the coming of the Messiah derives from the fact that the world is ready for the concept that links all particulars within the universal, and any particularity not linked within the larger scope of the general cannot offer satisfaction. If people pursued the study of Torah in this spirit, to enlarge our spiritual perspective so as to recognize the proper connection between the particulars and the universal categories of the spiritual, then penitence and the resultant perfection of the world would arise and come to fruition. However, as a result of negligence, the light of the inner Torah whose pursuit needs a high state of holiness has not been properly established in the world. The result is that the call to regard the particulars as embraced within the general comes at a time that is not ripe for this concept. This has led to the frightful nihilism now rampant. We must make use of the higher therapy, to strengthen the

spiritual disposition so that the realization of the link between the teachings and the actions emanating from the Torah with the noblest of principles will be readily understood on the basis of common sensibilities. Then will the vigor of the spiritual life, in action and in thought, be reasserted in the world. General penitence will then begin to bear its fruit.

11. In the deep recesses of life there is always stirring a new illumination of higher penitence, even as a new light radiates in all the worlds, with all their fullness, to renew them. According to the degree of the light, and the wisdom and the holiness it embodies, do human souls become filled with the treasures of new life. The highest expression of ethical culture and its programmatic implementation is the fruit grown as a result of this illumination. It thus turns out that the light of the whole world and its renewal in its diverse forms depend at all times on penitence. Certainly the light of the Messiah, the deliverance of Israel, the rebirth of the people and the restoration of its land, language and literature—all stem from the source of penitence, and all lead out of the depths to the heights of penitence.

Chapter Five

The Inevitability of Penitence and its Effects in Man, in the World, and in the Jewish People

1. Penitence is the healthiest feeling of a person. A healthy soul in a healthy body must necessarily bring about the great happiness afforded by penitence, and the soul experiences therein the greatest natural delight. The elimination of damaging elements has beneficent and invigorating effects on the body when it is in a state of health. The purging away of every evil deed and its resultant evil effects, of every evil thought, of every obstruction that keeps us away from the

divine spiritual reality, is bound to arise when the organism is in a state of spiritual and physical health.

2. Over against every measure of ugliness that is withdrawn from a person through his inner conformity to the light of penitence, worlds resplendent with higher sensibility come to expression in his soul. Every removal of sin resembles the removal of an obstruction from the seeing eye, and a whole new horizon of vision is revealed, the light of vast expanses of heaven and earth and all that is in them.

3. The world must inevitably come to full penitence. The world is not static, but it continues to develop, and a truly full development must bring about the complete state of health, material and spiritual, and this will bring penitence along with it.

4. The spirit of penitence hovers over the world, and it is that which endows it with its basic character and the impetus to development. With the scent of its fragrance it refines it and endows it with the propensity to beauty and splendor.

5. The stubborn determination to remain with the same opinion and to invoke it in support of a sinful disposition to which one has become habituated whether in action or in opinion is a sickness resulting from a grievous enslavement that does not permit the light of penitence to shine in full strength. Penitence is the aspiration for the true original freedom, which is the divine freedom, wherein there is no enslavement of any kind.

6. Were it not for the thought of penitence, the peace and security it brings with it, a person would be unable to find rest, and the spiritual life would not be able to develop in the world. The moral sense demands of man justice and what is good, perfection—but how difficult it is for a person to realize moral perfection, and how weak he is to conform his behavior to the pure ideal of full justice! How then can he strive for that which is beyond his attainment? Therefore, penitence is natural for a person, and it is this that perfects

him. The fact that a person is always prone to stumble, to deviate from justice and morality, does not discredit his perfection, since the basis of his perfection is the constant striving and the desire for perfection. This desire is the foundation of penitence, which is constantly a directing influence on his way in life, and truly perfects him.

7. Penitence was planned before the creation of the world, and it is for this reason the foundation of the world. The quest for the perfection of life is a phase of its manifestation according to its nature. Since nature, by its own workings, is without probing and discrimination, sin thus becomes inevitable. "There is no man so righteous that he will [always] do good and not sin" (Kohélet 7:20). To nullify the basic nature of life that man shall become a non-sinner—this itself would be the greatest sin. "And one must make atonement for the sin committed against the self" (Num. 6:11).² Penitence redresses the defect and restores the world and life to their original character precisely by focusing on the basis of their highest attribute, the dimension of freedom. It is for this reason that God is called the God of life.

8. The future will disclose the remarkable power of penitence, and this revelation will prove of far greater interest to the world than all the wondrous phenomena that it is accustomed to behold in the vast areas of life and existence. The wonders of this new revelation will draw all hearts to it, exerting an influence on everyone. Then will the world rise to its true renewal and sin will come to an end. The spirit of impurity will be purged away, and all evil will vanish like smoke.

9. The people of Israel, because of their added spiritual sensitivity, will be the first with regard to penitence. They are the one sector of humanity in whom the special graces of penitence will become manifest. They experience a prodding

² As interpreted in Nedarim 10a, that the nazirite vows of abstention were a sin that called for atonement.

to conform to the divine light radiant in the world, which is beyond sin and wrongdoing. Every deviation from this disposition damages the perfection that is characteristic of this people. In the end, the vigor of its life's rhythm will overcome the deviation, and they will attain full health, and they will assert it with great force. The light of penitence will be manifest first in Israel, and she will be the channel through which the life-giving force of the yearning for penitence will reach the whole world, to illuminate it and to raise its stature.

Chapter Six

The Prevalence and Inner Action of Penitence in the Hidden Depths of Man, the World and the Jewish People

1. Penitence emerges from the depths of being, from such great depths in which the individual stands not as a separate entity, but rather as a continuation of the vastness of universal existence. The desire for penitence is related to the universal will, to its highest source. From the moment the mighty stream for the universal will for life turns toward the good, many forces within the whole of existence are stirred to disclose the good and to bestow good to all. "Great is penitence for it brings healing to the world, and an individual who repents is forgiven and the whole world is forgiven with him" (Yoma 86a). In the great channel in which the life-sustaining force flows, there is revealed the unitary source of all existence, and in the hovering life-serving spirit of penitence all things are renewed to a higher level of the good, the radiant and the pure.

Penitence is inspired by the yearning of all existence to be better, purer, more vigorous and on a higher plane than it is. Within this yearning is a hidden life-force for overcoming every factor that limits and weakens existence. The particular

penitence of the individual and certainly of the group draws its strength from this source of life, which is always active with never-ending vigor.

2. Penitence is always present in the heart. At the very time of sin penitence is hidden in the soul, and it releases its impulses, which become manifest when remorse comes summoning to repent. Penitence is present in the depths of existence because it was projected before the creation of the world, and before sin had occurred there had already been readied the repentance for it. Therefore, nothing is more certain than penitence, and in the end everything will be redressed and perfected. Certainly the people of Israel are bound to repent, to draw closer to their original goal to activate in life the nature of their soul, despite all the obstructions that impede the manifestation of this mighty force.

3. The natural fear of sin, in the general area of morals, is the healthiest expression of human nature. It is the singular characteristic of the nature of the Jew in reacting to every form of wrongdoing that violates the Torah and the commandments, the heritage of the community of Jacob. This disposition will not return to the Jewish people except through a program of popular education in Torah, to raise scholarly individuals and to establish fixed periods of study for the general populace. It will not be possible to restore the Jewish people to natural health without a full restoration of its spiritual characteristic, one aspect of which—the most vital one—is the fear of sin, a recoiling from it, and a turning to prescribed penitence if they, God forbid, lapse into any sin. As the people's vitality is strengthened in all its aspects, there will come an end to the maddening restlessness, and our national institutions will resume their concern with reasserting the unique, natural interest in morality among the Jewish people which is so exacting in differentiating between the forbidden and the permitted. All the minutest details in the teachings of the Torah and the sages will then be recognized

as an independent way of life, without which it is impossible to maintain a thriving national existence.

4. The moral defects that originate in a deviation from the natural moral sense complete their effect in a deviation from the divine moral norm by a defection from religion. The repudiation of and rebellion against the divine law is a frightful moral regression, to which a person succumbs only through an absorption in the vulgarity of materialistic existence. For a time, a generation, or some part of it, in some countries or provinces, may remain entangled in this moral blindness, to a point of not sensing the moral decline involved in abandoning the laws of God. But the moral sense does not lose its value because of this. Penitence is bound to come and to be made manifest. The sickness of forgetting the divine order cannot gain a firm foothold in human nature. Like a muddy spring, it returns to its purity.

5. The nature of existence, man's choice of action and his disposition constitute one chain of being that can never be detached one from another. What man desires is tied up with what he has done. The deeds of the past, too, are not eliminated from the thrust of life and its basic disposition. Since nothing is totally eradicated the will can impose a special configuration on past actions. This is the secret of penitence, which God established before He created the world. I mean to say that He expanded the potency of the spiritual life with reference to actions and to existence so that it also embraces the past. The evil deed continues to be reenacted, it causes ugliness and evil, deterioration and destruction, as long as the will did not put a new complexion on it. Once the will has put on it a configuration of the good, it itself becomes a stimulant for good and delight, the joy in God and His light.

6. Actions speak within the soul. Every noble action is generated by a chain of many causes in the realm of the good, the holy. There is no limit to chains of circumstances that were activated in the mysterious realm of the inner life until

this noble action became manifest. And just as every noble action originates in the realm of holiness, so, once it has been effectuated, does it release a light back to its source. It sends waves reverberating backward and enlarges the activities of the zone of the holy, and enhances it through the influence of the lower on the higher. The same process is at work in the opposite direction, with reference to every activity corrupt at its source; just as the impure source generates every corrupt activity, so does the corrupt activity manifest its sickness in the inwardness of the spirit that fashioned it. This will go on until the person who is master of his action and his will, will uproot it from its source through the power of penitence. Then, once it has been integrated within the pattern of love, it will transfer its abode to the depths of the good, and it will send up waves from below to above, just as the good actions, generating the good.

7. At the inception of creation it was intended that the tree have the same taste as the fruit (Genesis Rabbah 5:9). All the supportive actions that sustain any general worthwhile spiritual goal should by right be experienced in the soul with the same feeling of elation and delight as the goal itself is experienced when we envision it. But earthly existence, the instability of life, the weariness of the spirit when confined in a corporate frame, brought it about that only the fruition of the final step, which embodies the primary ideal, is experienced in its pleasure and splendor. The trees that bear the fruit, with all their necessity for the growth of the fruit have, however, become coarse matter and have lost their taste. This is the failing of the "earth," because of which it was cursed when Adam was also cursed for his sin. But every defect is destined to be mended. Thus we are assured that the day will come when creation will return to its original state, when the taste of the tree will be the same as the taste of the fruit. The earth will "repent" of its "sin" and the way of the practical life will no longer obstruct the delight of the ideal, which is sus-

tained by appropriate intermediate steps on its way toward realization, and will stimulate its emergence from potentiality to actuality.

Penitence itself, which activates the inner spirit that had been sunk in the depths of the chaotic and the antithetical to the ideal goal, will enable the aspiration for the ideal to penetrate all the conditioning influences, and in all of them will be tasted the splendor of the ideal goal. It will do this by enlarging the scope of action for the ideal of justice. Man will then no longer suffer the disgrace of indolence on the way of true life.³

Chapter Seven

The Value of Thoughts about Penitence, its Vision and Conception

1. It is in the nature of penitence to endow a person with peace and with solemnity at the same time. Even the mere thought of penitence is a comfort to him. In one tiny glimmer of its great light there is already to be found the noble happiness of a whole world, but together with this it confronts his spirit constantly with the obligation of completing it. This saves him from pride and invests him with a sweet light, which endows his life with great and abiding value.

The vision of penitence transforms all sins and their resultant confusion, their spiritual anguish and ugliness, to concepts of delight and satisfaction, for it is through them that a person is illuminated with the profound sense of hatred for evil; and the love for the good is strengthened in him with a mighty force. Beyond all calculation and knowledge, he finds delight in the joy of remorse wherein he feels that divine

³. This passage is based on the Midrashic homily that attempts to account for the inclusion of the earth in the curse that was pronounced on Adam after his sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis Rabbah 5:9).

satisfaction uniquely experienced by penitents. This feeling comes appropriately together with the sense of refinement released by the heartbreak and the troubled spirit that are linked with the deep faith in liberation and continued assistance.

2. Every thought of penitence joins all the past to the future, and the future is uplifted through the ennoblement of the will inspired by penitence out of love.

3. Through the thoughts of penitence a person hears God's voice calling him, from the Torah and from the feelings of the heart, from the world and its fullness, and all that is contained therein. The desire for the good is strengthened within him. The flesh itself, which engenders the sin, becomes increasingly more refined to a point where the thought of penitence penetrates it.

4. The thoughts of penitence disclose the profound potency of the will. The heroism of the soul is made manifest thereby in all its splendor. The degree of penitence is also the degree of the soul's freedom.

5. I see how the sins serve as an obstruction against the bright divine light, which shines so brightly on every soul, and they darken the soul. Penitence, even if it is only entertained in thought, effects a great redress. But the soul can reach full liberation only when the potential of penitence is translated into action. However, since the thought is tied up with holiness and with the desire for penitence, there is no need to be concerned. God, may He be praised, will surely make available all the circumstances for the attainment of full penitence, which illumines all the dark places in its light. The degree of the penitence achieved is also the measure by which the person's study of Torah is blessed and made clearer. The study becomes clear and lucid. "A broken and contrite heart God will not spurn" (Ps. 51:19).

6. It is necessary to be so profoundly committed to the faith that even by entertaining the thought of penitence one mends a great deal in oneself and in the world. It is inevitable

that after every consideration of penitence a man should be happier and more at peace with himself than he was before. This is certainly the case if he has a firm decision to repent, and has become attached to the pursuit of Torah and wisdom and the fear of God, and especially if the disposition of divine love has begun to vibrate in him. He is then to comfort himself and console his weary spirit and strengthen it with every kind of encouragement, for we have the assurance of God's word: "As a person is comforted by his mother so will I comfort you" (Isa.66:13). If he should recall offenses he has committed against another person and he is too weak to redress them, he must not despair of the great efficacy of penitence. The offenses committed against God of which he has repented have already been forgiven. It is legitimate to assume, therefore, that the residual offenses are outweighed by the greater number that have been forgiven through penitence. However, he must not cease in his vigilance not to stumble over any offense against another person, and to rectify whatever he can of the past through wisdom and great resoluteness. "Save yourself as a deer from the hand of the hunter and as a bird from the hand of the fowler" (Prov. 6:5). But let him not become depressed because of the portion of offenses he has not yet managed to rectify. Instead let him hold firm to the pursuit of the Torah and the service of God with a full heart in joy, in reverence and in love.

Chapter Eight

The Pangs of Sin, the Suffering of Penitence and the Healing of its Affliction

1. The pain felt in the initial inspiration to penitence is due to the severance of the evil layers of the self, which cannot be mended as long as they are attached to and remain part of

the person, and cause deterioration of the whole spirit. Through penitence they are severed from the basic essence of the self. Every severance causes pain, like the pain felt at the amputation of deteriorated organs for medical reasons. This is the most inward kind of pain, through which a person is liberated from the dark servitude to his sins and his lowly inclinations and their bitter aftereffects. "We learn this from the law that liberates a slave if he lost a tooth or an eye on being struck by his master." "Happy is the person whom You instruct, O Lord, and You *teach him out of Your law*"; the latter phrase may be read as meaning "this matter You have taught us from Your Law" (Berakhot 5a).

2. The great pains that overcome the soul as a result of the thought of penitence sometimes appear as a consequence of the fear of retribution. But in their inner essence they are intrinsic sufferings felt by the soul because it is afflicted by sin, which is contrary to all the condition of its being. However, these sufferings themselves cleanse it. The person who recognizes the goodly treasure imbedded in these sufferings accepts them with unreserved love and he is at peace. Thus he rises in many good qualities. His knowledge remains with him, his inner character is improved and the imprint his sins deposited on him is erased. His sins are transformed into reminders of the good, from which a spiritual beauty is revealed.

3. Every sin oppresses the heart because it disrupts the unity between the individual person and all existence. It can be healed through penitence, which is radiant with the light [of the higher influence] of the ideal embodied in universal existence. Thereby it becomes possible for the harmony with all existence to become once again manifest in him; when he repents he finds healing. However, the basis of the anguish experienced is not merely the result of sin itself. It is rather due to the basic nature of sin and the nature of the life process that has become disoriented from the order of existence,

which is resplendent with divine light radiant in all being in unity and high purpose. It is for this reason that those whose lives are basically evil and whose sins are rooted in their thoughts and aspirations and in the dispositions of their hearts become pessimists and see the whole world in such unduly dark colors. They are the ones who complain against the world and against life. They are the masters of the "melancholy spleen" (Zohar II 227b), whose mockery of existence is the laughter of a fool who does not realize that the Lord is good to all (Ps. 145:9).

4. What is the reason for the rage evinced by evil doers? What is the meaning of their anger with the whole world, what is the basis for the bitter melancholy that consumes spirit and flesh, that poisons life, that is found among them? Whence comes this degenerate source? With clear inner certainty we reply to this: All this stems from the source of evil, "from the wicked emanates wickedness" (I Sam. 24:13). The will is free, life dawned that a person might be heroic and truly free. When the will refuses to leave evil reposing in the depths of the soul, it unbalances life, it disturbs the equitable relationship of the soul with all existence, its overall character and its constituent particularities. The disruption of harmony brings about many pains. When it penetrates to the spirit there is an aggravation of suffering that manifests itself in fright, anger, impudence, dishonor and despair. The righteous, the people of goodness and of kindness, the men who know the happiness of life, therefore, call out to the miserable wrongdoers: Come and live, come back, come back from your evil way—why should you die? (Ezek. 33:11). Find delight in the goodness of the Lord and enjoy a life of pleasure and light, of peace and of quiet, of faith and honor, "as dew from the Lord, as showers on the grass" (Mic. 5:6).

5. Every righteous person experiences great anguish because he does not feel sufficiently close to God, and his great thirst remains unquenched. Because of this anguish all his

organs are tense with endless longing, and he finds no peace in all the delights and pleasures of the world. This is in essence the anguish of the *shekinah*, the anguish of the divine Presence, for all life in all the worlds is astir with longing that the supreme perfection of godliness be made manifest in them. This manifestation, in all its expanse and its delights, is contingent on the perfection of the free will in people, with all the talents and the good works that hinge on it. It is for this reason that the righteous always long for the penitence of the general public, and in the inwardness of their hearts they seek to see offenders in a light of innocence, as one seeks life itself, for in truth this is our very life and the life of all worlds.

6. When the righteous perform acts of penance, they reveal the holy light that they find in the dark and broken-down alleys in their own lives. The strategies they devise for themselves to rise out of depression and despair into the bright light of holiness and a nobler level of equity become in themselves great lights to illumine the world. Every person who feels within himself the depth of penitential remorse and the anxiety to mend his flaws—both those whose redress is within his reach and those he hopes to redress in time by the mercy of God—should include himself in the category of the righteous. Through their thoughts of penitence the whole world is renewed in a new light.

7. The whole world is pervaded by harmony. The unifying congruence penetrates all branches of existence. The inner moral sense and its mighty claims represent an echo of the unitary voice of all parts of existence, all of which interpenetrate, and the self is permeated with them and united with all. Every moral severance in thought or deed, in character or disposition, creates many wounds that inflict many inner pains in all aspects of the soul. The basis of these spiritual pains is the disturbing force of withdrawing the light of life emanating from the general order of existence from the life channels of the sinning soul. The purer a soul is the more it will

experience the disturbance of its pains, until it will still the pain in the life-stream of penitence, which flows from the divine source, which mends all the torn parts, and sends forth a life-restoring dew flowing directly from all realms of existence. There will be a reunion, the life-restoring flow will reach the soul that has been restored to its higher life in great mercy and abiding joy.

8. When the anguish, which is the pain of penitence brought about by the person's own spiritual state and that of the whole world, becomes very great, to a point of blocking the creative sources of thought, speech, prayer, outcries, feeling and song, then one must rise in a leap to seek life-giving lights in the source of silence. "The parched land will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water" (Isa. 35:7).

9. When the thinking person withdraws into solitude and his inner spiritual strength is activated, he then feels all the flaws that have damaged his soul because his actions and dispositions are not what they should be. He then suffers a deep sense of anguish and he probes within himself how to mend his flaws. When the inner anguish becomes outwardly manifest with full gravity or when his outer condition deteriorates, as in times of disaster and trouble, then the inner feeling will not be firm. But even then it may lead to its climactic end, for penitence, even when induced by suffering, is still penitence.

10. The inner anguish that is a concomitant of penitence is excellent raw subject matter for poets of melancholy to express through their music and for artists of tragedy to show through their talent.

11. Sins are the essence of melancholy. When the soul undergoes cleansing, it experiences the very essence of its sins, and then does the melancholy of penitence assert itself; a fire of anguish, remorse, shame and a terrifying fear burns inside it. But in this very process it is purified. After some time, when the agitation subsides, it will return to its state of

health, to function again with self-control and self-respect.

12. One must be very cautious not to fall into depression to the extent that it will inhibit the light of penitence from penetrating to the depths of the soul. Otherwise the feeling of depression might spread as a malignant disease throughout the body and spirit; for sin grieves the heart and causes feelings of depression to settle over the festering bitterness of the agitation for penitence. The latter has melancholy aspects but they are like cleansing fire that purges the soul and sustains it on a basis of constant natural joy appropriate to its state.

13. Every sin produces a special anxiety of the spirit, which does not recede except through penitence. Depending on the level of penitence, this anxiety itself is transformed into a feeling of security and firmness of heart. One can recognize the anxiety that comes through in marks on the face, in gestures, in the voice, in behavior, in the handwriting, in the manner of communication, in speech, and especially in the style of writing, in the way one develops thoughts and arranges them. Whenever sin has obstructed the light, there is the defect noticeable. And according to the gravity of the sin, and its relevance for the viewer, will its imprint be discernible to those who look with clear eyes.

14. One cannot overestimate the distress caused by a lack of will for goodness and holiness. Wisdom is of no efficacy except to the extent that it is pervaded by the blessing of the will for the good. Sin inhibits the will from rising to a higher state. One must, therefore, repent in order to purify the will, that wisdom might appropriately assert itself. Especially is it important to repent of offenses against another person, above all, of robbery, which obstructs the ascent of the will. One must vigorously attend to this and trust in God's help to reach a state of perfection that will inhibit one's hands from touching anything tainted with oppression.

15. The despair that registers in the heart is itself an

indication of a refined inner revolt, which stems from a higher recognition of morality and holiness. It is, therefore, fitting that the despair itself shall strengthen a person's heart to be unafraid and to repent of every sin, which will bring him peace and firmness of spirit.

16. When a person entertains the thought of penitence and of mending his actions and feelings, even if it is only in thought, he must not be disturbed because he feels agitated over his many sins, of which he has now become more conscious. This is the nature of this phenomenon. As long as a person is being driven by the coarser aspects of nature and by bad habits surrounding him, he is not so sensitive to his sins. Sometimes he feels nothing, and he sees himself as a righteous person. But once his moral sense is awakened, the light of the soul becomes at once manifest, and by that light his whole self becomes subjected to probing and he sees its defects. Then he becomes agitated with a deep sense of anxiety because of his low state of perfection and his grave deterioration. It is, however, precisely then for him to consider that this awareness and this anxiety that comes with it are the best signs pointing to full deliverance through the perfection of the self, and he should strengthen himself thereby in the Lord his God.

Chapter Nine

The Significance of the Will that is Manifest in Penitence

1. The steady concentration of one's thought on penitence forms a person's character on a spiritual foundation. He continually draws into himself a refined spirit, which places him on a spiritual plane of life.

When the concern with penitence is always active in the heart, it confirms to a person the great value of the spiritual life. The important principle that the goodness of the will is

basic, and all the inclinations in the world are only its implementation, becomes a fixed conviction within himself through the light of penitence that is constantly active in him. Automatically there settles upon him the great influx of the holy spirit as a permanent attribute. A quality of will ennobled by holiness, higher than what is customary among ordinary people, asserts itself increasingly within him. He then comes to recognize the true value of genuine success that depends on the person himself and is independent of external conditions—and this is a will for the good.

This success yields greater happiness than do all treasures and possessions. Only this brings happiness to the whole world and to all existence. For a good will that always abides in the soul transforms all life and all existence toward the good. By looking at the basic nature of existence with an eye for the good, one exerts an influence on existence and on the complicated processes of life so that they emerge from their deficiencies. All things then bloom and live in a happy state, as a result of the spiritual riches and the abundance that is contained in the good will.

This concept, that these fundamental issues hinge only on a good will, is disseminated in the world through "the masters of penitence," for whom penitence is indeed a constant preoccupation. Thus the will is increasingly refined and made better and the world moves toward greater perfection.

The nature of the will that is forged by penitence is an expression of the will immanent in the depth of life, not the shallow will that embraces only the superficial and external aspects of life. The will we speak of represents the most basic essence directing the life process, and this is the authentic nature of the soul. As the will is conditioned to the quest for the good through the profound commitment to penitence, the good becomes a fixed attribute of the soul, and all the resultant effects, all the benefits seeded in the world by the true

penitent, derive from the realm of good. These are the people with enlightened souls in whom is embodied the ideal light of the higher holiness.

2. One's perspective is enlarged through penitence. The basic ideal of the good grows in its embrace to include the beginning of the world to the end, to the last generations. In the sweep of this view, because of its length and width, height and depth, there stands revealed the divine good and mercy in its authenticity, and personal as well as collective existence take on more nobility by being rooted in full equity. The defects that are manifest in the order of life come to be recognized as distortions that are smoothed out in the grandeur of the life of goodwill that flows like a mighty river over generations and epochs. Only fractional aspects of existence are disclosed in each particular generation, but the complete view becomes revealed in the course of the generations when the sweep of the will inspired by penitence endows them all with life and peace abounding with delight. When this becomes revealed it becomes clear that the happiness and the righteous joy have their fixed place from the very inception of things. All that seemed deficient, all that seemed ugly in the past, turns out to be full of majesty and grandeur as a phase of the greatness achieved through the progress of penitence.

3. The essence of penitence brings healing veritably to the entire world. The thrust of the will completes its work with force precisely after it emerges from confinement. Penitents carry on with special vigor the life-force emanating from the good. All actions and all creatures are included within the scope of the will that crystallizes in the person, in all its beauty. The basic essences, the forces and their resultant effects, are thrust in all directions—who has invested them with the light of life, system and order to stimulate the good to avoid evil traps? It is the exalted will, the moral force that is illuminated with divine light. Through the projection of the sensibilities of a holy people do all actions merge into an

integrated whole to carry out the will of the holy King who is exalted in justice and is sanctified in mercy.

4. A weakening of the will through the constant immersion in penitence represents an enfeeblement of body and spirit, which needs therapy. Nevertheless, it also partakes of the refinement and spirituality that purify the spirit, and love covers up every transgression.

5. When one is concerned with penitence it is necessary to differentiate carefully between what is good and what is evil, so that the feeling of remorse and the agitation of spirit oscillating between affirmation and negation focus only on the evil and not the good. Moreover, it is necessary to identify the good that is embodied in the depth of evil and to strengthen it—with the very force wherewith one recoils from evil. Thus will penitence serve as a force for good that literally transforms all the wrongdoings into virtues.

6. Sin blackens the illumination of the higher wisdom that is manifest when the soul is in edifying harmony with all existence and its divine source. This relationship is discernible in such souls in which enlightenment and will function as a unitary entity. Every sinful act disrupts this ideal unity and places the orbit of life outside it. The illumination that flows like a clear spring will not resume its influence on the will that has been profaned unless the person will turn back and be remorseful. Then will the light of penitence, to the degree of its clarity in perception and depth of acceptance, restore the original harmony. "Restore to me the joy of Your deliverance, and let Your generous spirit uphold me" (Ps. 51:14).

7. There is a defect in the lower level of penitence, in that it weakens a person's will and thereby damages his personality. This defect is rectified when the thought of penitence rises to maturity. Then it becomes part of the higher penitence whose aim is not to weaken the will or break the personal character of the individual but to strengthen his will and to heighten his self-esteem. Thereby the willful sins are trans-

formed into a positive force. "When the wicked turns from his wickedness and does that which is lawful and right—he shall live thereby" (Ezk. 33:19).

8. Penitence removes the thrust of the will, which has already been materialized in action and which has reached such a level of potency that it was able to satisfy the mighty claims of morality and religion. But since the divine light has been activated intensely and the will has been disoriented from its original focus, it does not become inert. Instead it acts with its potency on the basic core of the world, to plant in all existence a firm will for light and for good. Thus the previous acts of wrongdoing are transformed into real virtues.

9. Every sin stems from a defect in a person's capacity. The self has become weakened and it cannot resist the inclination to evil. This lack of capacity, when translated to action, weakens the will for the good, and this begets a weakness in perception, and the recognition of the good becomes confused. Penitence sets in after discernment, when one is more keenly sensitive in recognizing the good, which develops fully with the sensitivity to recognize what is evil. Evil authenticates the good. When the basic evil is readily recognized as evil, then does the basic good shine more brightly in its goodness. The more clearly we know the nature of the good and the obscuring effect of sin is lifted through the restoration of the will for the good and the inclination to pursue it, the more is there stirred in the person the resolution to fortify the will for the good in itself and to save it from the defect of sin. The self that has been weakened is compensated by rising from its lowly state and improving its capacity, so that it may function with full vitality in its commitment to the good. Thereby is the capacity to choose truly free, and the good is evaluated without impediment. Automatically the attraction of the spiritual, which is present in every person to draw him to the good, will be activated to strengthen the preference for the good, and to establish the structure of life in the individual

and in society on the basis of the absolute good, whose final word is—the light of God.

10. Penitence, with all its derivative applications in action, together with the underlying spirit that pervades it especially during the days dedicated to penitence, bestows a great benefit in purifying souls, in refining the spirit and purging behavior from its ugliness. But together with this it necessarily bears within itself a certain weakness that even the most heroic spirits cannot escape.

When one shrinks the will, when one restrains the life-force through inner withdrawal and the inclination to avoid any kind of sin, there is also a shrinking of the will for the good. The vitality of the virtuous life is also weakened. It turns out that the person suffers from the cleansing of his moral state the kind of weakness experienced by the patient who was cured from his illness through a strong current of electric shock. It may have eliminated the virus of his illness but it also weakened his healthy vitality. The penitential season is therefore followed by days of holy joy and gladness for the self⁴ to restore the will for the good and the innocent vitality of life. Then will penitence be complete.

Chapter Ten

The Interdependence of Penitence and the Torah in their General Nature and in their Highest Significance

1. Truly full penitence presupposes high vistas of contemplation, an ascent to the rarefied world that abounds in truth and holiness. One can achieve this only through the pursuit of the deeper levels of Torah and divine wisdom concerning the mystical dimension of the world. This calls for

4. The festival of Sukkot and Simhat Torah.



physical purity and moral purity as aids, so that the clouds of lust shall not obscure the clarity of the mind. But prior to all these must come the study of the Torah, specifically the higher Torah for only this can break all the iron barriers that separate the individual and the community from their heavenly Father.

Penitence comes about as a result of a clear assessment of the world, and it in itself, by virtue of its own potency, serves to clarify and elucidate the world.

2. A good indication of valid penitence is a state of inner satisfaction and an illumination of the intelligence in higher perspectives, clarity in the formation of concepts, and holy vigor and purity of the imaginative faculty to concretize the higher perception that embraces all the diverse manifestations of the world.

3. Every sin impedes the calmness needed for the illumination of the mystical dimension of the world. Penitence opens vistas of understanding, even as it in itself is a by-product of understanding.

4. Penitence is a necessity if one is to gain enlightenment concerning matters divine. The strength of will and its enlightenment and intellectual vigor are interdependent. Activities shed light on the higher sources that generate them, and the sensibilities rooted in the realm of the holy, by the very fact of their existence, reveal this source. Therefore whoever is ready for constant cleaving to God cannot be content with any state below this, and there are already present within him conditioning factors, physical and spiritual, that prod him to return to the full cleaving to God. But one cannot reach this except through a profound sense of humility, experienced when the spirit expands with great joy in the light of God. This is engendered in the heart when the perception has registered that cleaving to God, in all its manifestations, is the greatest happiness in life, and that the more impressively this perception is entertained and the more it is adorned by under-

standing, by a lofty spirit, by action, by an established lifestyle, by public enlightenment and by greatness and nobility of soul—the more the happiness of life will increase. As a result of all this the joy of the soul will become more pervasive and the state of cleaving to God will rise to its highest climax, to a point where the grandeur of God will become manifest in the soul. There is no limit to the depth of humility that will be stimulated by this, for how can any person bear himself with pride when he stands before the source of all perfection, the infinite light of the supernal realm that transcends all blessing and praises?

5. How wrongdoing dulls the intelligence, both the intelligence of the individual and the intelligence of society, of a generation and of an epoch! The divine word reaches a person from all its sources, from the Torah, from religious faith, from ancestral customs, from social mores, from his inner sense of equity—all these are channeled from the core reality in the spiritual order and its fullness, in the laws of heaven and earth, and their most basic essence. When degeneration leads him to embrace an outlook on life that negates his higher vision, then he becomes prey to the dark side within him, to his weaker self. The result is that he cannot muster the strength to hold on to the orderly structure of life as it makes its claims on him, whereby he is held back from sin and steered in the way of integrity as God fashioned him. Then it is not merely one aspect of his being that has declined and fallen, it is not merely his fluctuating will that has been weakened, while his spirit in its essential nature, his intellect, and the whole direction of his life have remained in their previous state. It is not so; all things have changed. The operative light of the mind, which is united in the depth of the spiritual essence with all the life forces, which is woven together in one pattern with the moral order embodied in all that surrounds it, below and above—this light is darkened. And this light is the secret of life itself, the vitality in which

the soul finds its sustenance. It is only in purification, in penitence, that the light and life will again become manifest. Thus penitence is the basis of that human culture which is so much sought after.

6. Transgressions and unrefined morals dull the heart, and as long as one's spirit is darkened by them, it is impossible for any objective self-assessment to be cultivated on a broad basis. The seeker who seeks to elevate himself to higher enlightenment will feel this himself, and he will experience a compulsion to reach out for full penitence, so that his higher enlightenment shall not be defective. However, while in the case of all offenses between man and God spiritual penitence restores at once the joy of deliverance, in the case of offenses between man and man there cannot be any restoration until they have been redressed in action. At times there may be impediments that cannot be overcome, and as long as these wrongs have not been redressed they inhibit the light of knowledge, and they automatically impede the full recognition of the general sense of justice and the longing for its expression in life. Nevertheless, through a firm resolution to beware at least for the future of wrongdoing against other persons and to endeavor to mend the past—in the measure that he will fulfill these commitments to penitence, will the spiritual light shine on his soul. And the resourcefulness of the spirit itself will then find him ways to complete his penitence in action, so that the spiritual light, in all its fullness and beneficence, may alight on the soul that is so thirsty for it.

7. When a person raises himself to a higher perception, his sins will act at once to obstruct the supernal light, and the great thoughts decline as a result of the chilling effect of the sins, which are registered inside the heart. Let him then at once repent with a clear penitence, which will restore to him the more happy life as in the twinkling of an eye. To the extent that penitence will be authenticated in action, in his pattern of life, will the fruits of his thought be enhanced and the flow of his perception blessed.

8. This is certain, that one cannot succeed in the study of the mystical dimension of the Torah without penitence. In the study of those lofty subjects the will is joined with the understanding in one entity. When one comprehends the core of those subjects in congruence with the firmness of the will for the good, then one is spurred by a longing for it, and one projects many general and particular strategies as to how to reach it. But when sins form an obstruction, the will is damaged. Since the person cannot rise to the highest level of the will, and, being sunk in the filth of sin he cannot appreciate the importance of the will for the general and the particular good, knowledge cannot grow in him, and the channels for comprehending the secret teachings of the Torah are blocked. It is, therefore, important to strengthen oneself to do penance and to purify the will in order to attain a lucid understanding in the supernal subjects.

9. One cannot enter the spiritual world of mystical knowledge and gaze at the supernal light except through a preceding act of full penitence. When a person confronts the supernal illumination, there is at once revealed to him the splendor of absolute justice and beauty in the supernal holiness, and a fierce pressure is generated in him that he too shall be embraced by that splendor and beauty and that his life shall be rooted in them in all their manifestations. At once he assesses his actions and his morals and sees their defects. Then he experiences remorse and he repents out of genuine love. To the extent that he resolves to walk in the good path, in congruence with the light of the logic of equity—which becomes more ascendent with the illumination in the Torah, in which alone a Jew can find the deepest level of his responsibility—will he become rooted in the supernal world. Without any inner contradiction will his thoughts then become radiant, and the spiritual visions of the higher enlightenment that focuses on the mysteries of the world will rise before his eyes in their full radiance, in accordance with his previous state and preparedness, and in accordance with

his true spiritual vitality and freedom.

10. When one pursues the study of divine subjects by the method of pure contemplation, one experiences within oneself an obstructing veil that screens him from clear perceptions. The soul itself recognizes that this veil consists of the actions and morals that are not good. At once there is astir within the heart the longing for full penitence, for the highest kind of penitence. At times this will not be realized fully until it will be accompanied by sincere prayer. Then will the mighty fountain send forth its flow upon the soul.

11. Prayer and outcries to God and penitence from the depths of the heart expressed in a mending of behavior must precede every grasp of a higher perception. It is impossible for a truly important literature radiant with life-giving illumination to appear without the energizing presence of penitence, which renews the character of the whole world. However, the radiance of the literature of the future appears in sparks of understanding that precede penitence and pervade the spirit in full freedom that stimulates full penitence. This brings with it liberation, preceded by inner and outer forgiveness. This will at once be followed by healing and sustenance and the restoration of the exiles, and a renewal of the authority of judges and counselors who are the pillars of this literature and its founders; evil will then be subdued; justice will ascend; the heart of the people will begin to beat mightily toward Jerusalem; a crown of a fully sovereign nation will appear and all the heart's desires will be fulfilled, in accordance with the prayer of the upright,⁵ which abounds with the love of Him who sustains the universe, who promised and brought it into being.

5. The blessings here anticipated are included in the weekday Amidah prayer.

Chapter Eleven

The Sources of Penitence in the Universal Realms of Being and the Highest Dimension of the Spiritual

1. Penitence comes as an aspect of discernment, and in its highest expression it transforms willful wrongs into merits, and they thus become a force for life. However, penitence, in all its forms, suffers initially from a weakening of the will related to the remorse felt for past misdeeds. It is only subsequently that it changes to joy and a relaxation of the mind due to the higher perception, to the transformation of willful wrongs into merits. More than this is the perspective of wisdom,⁶ which was never involved in the weakening pain of remorse. It sees the merits [of the recycled wrongs] shining as the noon day and it brings with it the joy of God in full splendor without any blunting of shame or sadness, for everything has been converted to virtue, *from the very beginning*, through the manifestation of discernment in the soul. Higher than this is the manifestation of the light of the "universal crown,"⁷ Here is the mysterious vision of the all, that begets all delight, all holiness and good, that includes everything in its holy treasure. This light does not operate by releasing the remorse felt when the divine emanation of discernment is stirred to action. By its light it is revealed that there is no deficiency or darkness at all. There is only the holy light and supernal beauty, the blossoming of life and uplifting illumination. It is beyond the action of discernment that voids [the wrongs, through penitence]. "For the Lord of hosts ordained

6. In the Cabbalah the *sefira* or divine emanation of wisdom, which sees reality in an unfragmented comprehensiveness, is higher than the *sefira* of discernment, which analyzes reality into components.

7. The highest of the ten *sefirot* or divine emanations, in which the divine light or life-force is in its purity without any reduction by the descent toward a material world and hence untainted by sin.

it, and who shall void it?" (Isa. 14:27). It is beyond the action of the *sefira* of wisdom that releases. From here flows only all good, without impediment; evil and ugliness never had any place here, for in truth it was not, it is not, and it will not be. There is only the light of God and His goodness.

2. The holy spirit in its general manifestation embraces in one whole the juncture of all its constituent expressions, those of the will, of the intellect, of beauty, of strength and of morality. It is this, when it acts in its fullness and on its highest level, that gives speech to the prophets, moving them to speak with varying particularization and with thundering power, "like the sound of many mighty waters, a tumultuous sound like that of an army, like the voice of the Almighty" (Ezek. 1:24). This is the spirit that embraces within itself the five expressions of the holy spirit mentioned elsewhere. This spirit also sends forth sparks of penitential light, it manifests itself in the spirit of penitence that is always present in every heart that desires to rise from the pit of sin and its failure—to the holy heights, to visit in the Temple of the Lord.

3. The more deeply rooted penitence is, the more there recedes the fear of death until it stops altogether. It is replaced by the condition commended in the woman of valor: "She laughs at the last day" (Prov. 31:25).⁸ The spiritual reality of the person's true self, like the spiritual reality of the whole world, assumes its projected character, its authentic self becomes explicitly revealed, and death loses its name, and with it the fear and the terror it inspires. The individual identity continues to expand, it becomes part of the general being of the people in a very real fusion, and from there it is absorbed in the general existence of the whole world. As part of universal existence it finds its happiness in the divine splendor, in its great strength, its light and its delight, a richness of life that sends forth the flow of eternal being.

8. In accordance with the literal meaning of the text.

4. The life process is built on the basis of penitence. Particular existences become manifest in progressive descent from the divine to the worldly. This is a kind of deterioration and frightful death, to which the usual declines in the world from level to level, from more to less talent and mastery, cannot be compared. The descent is governed by divine providence, according to an assessment of justice that determines the fate of existences before any creature is created. Included in the supernal mercy alluded to in the verse "the world is built on mercy" (Ps. 89:3) is something of sternness and rigorous law as alluded to in the statement that the spirit of God "hovers over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2).⁹ But this descent bears hidden within itself the basis of subsequent ascent, and even before the ordered structure of time emerged, the ascent was contained in it, and "the great depth of justice and the great heights of mercy" (Ps. 36:7) have kissed. Thus the nature of existence continues to clarify itself, it achieves greater authenticity in the spirit of man. For penitence is his portion and inheritance, and it serves as a symbol for all existence in the greatest heights and the lowest depths. "Lord, You have been our dwelling place from generation to generation, before the mountains were brought forth and You fashioned the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You humble man saying, Return to Me, you children of men" (Ps. 90:2-3). When we realize to what extent the smallest particularities of existence, the spiritual and the material, in miniature, all embody the general principles, and the smallest fragment has elements of greatness in the depths of its being, we shall no longer be surprised at the mystery of penitence that penetrates so deeply the spirit of man, that pervades him from the inception of his thought and world outlook to the minutest details of his acts and the ex-

9. The term for God here used in *elohim*, which describes God in His more austere manifestation, as Judge.

pressions of his character. This process is reenacted in the historical processes of humanity. When we shall understand better the qualitative value of man and his spirit, and the character he gives to existence through his influence, we shall at once discern clearly the luminous relationship between the great, cosmic form of penitence, in its broadest, deepest and highest aspects, and the penitence of the person, the individual and the collective, on whose orbit revolve all the strategies of the practical and the spiritual life. "Out of the depths I have called to the Lord" (Ps. 130:1).

5. The phenomenon of penitence indicates that the basis of every action is the spiritual imprint it leaves on the essence of the self. Since the content of every action is only the concept it symbolizes, which is woven into the basic structure of reality, we must necessarily say that the real world, as it is, is indeed a divided world. Its elements harmonize with each other, but the core of its being is its ideational element, which embraces it but is higher than it and transcends it. Penitence elevates the person and his world to that level, where all existence stands in the clarity of its spiritual content. That world, in the firmness of its spiritual state, is sovereign over our limited world of action. The order of our world of action then follows the imprint deposited in us in the phenomenon of penitence through the process of thought.

6. On the basis of the mystery by which life is governed, every good deed of an evil person takes its place in the realm of evil and impurity, even though, despite this, God does not deny his reward and compensates him in this world for even the slightest virtuous act. This is the way of evil. Certainly every act of wrongdoing and sin of a righteous person, though "he suffers retribution on earth" (Prov. 11:31) and "all about He has set raging storms" [of retribution] (Ps. 50:3), everything follows the rule that the measure of the good bestowed exceeds the measure of retribution exacted, thus enhancing the light of the holy and the good. From this we may infer a

general principle governing the status of nations, that any good action of a wicked nation strengthens the domain of the world's evil and that "acts of kindness of [evil] nations is a sin" (Prov. 14:34). The people of Israel, "a righteous nation committed to faithfulness" (Isa. 26:2), is subject to the rule that those close to Him are held accountable by the Holy One, praised be He, for even the slightest infraction, and are governed by the principle: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I visit on you all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). All sins that are engendered from such a source that is for the most part good, that indicates that in its inner essence it is all good, must truly contain in the core of their being, in its hidden inwardness, a great light and much good. Thus we note that the transgression of the tribes¹⁰ became the means of feeding the whole world.¹¹ In this spirit did the sages ordain the prayer: "Even when they transgress may their needs be before You" (Ber. 28b, 29b). However, this is the rule: The good and the constructive force that emanates from sin needs considerable refining before it can be transformed for the strengthening of all creation, and this refining takes place in the crucible of suffering that purges away pain, that is, it refines the sin that derives from a source that is good. It purges it from its outer ugliness, and establishes it on the basis of its inner essence in which abides the life of truth and holiness. And because nothing of the actions of a righteous person is lost as is alluded to in the verse "His leaf will not wither and in whatever he does, he shall prosper" (Ps. 1:3), every sin of his, even the most minor, must go through refinement. Thus it will be reconditioned to serve the general higher and beneficent purpose for which every gesture of a holy soul has been destined. This is suggested in the verse "For the Lord knows the way of the righteous" (Ps. 1:6)—the

10. The ten brothers who sold Joseph into slavery.

11. When Egypt's food supply, under Joseph's management, fed the world during the time of famine, Gen. 41: 54-57.

Lord knows a realm where the thoughts of no creature can reach. Every form of penitence inspired by love reaches to that inner source, whence all that occurs is good and serves retroactively as an edifice of perfection and equity. The willful transgressions that are transformed into virtues do not need to become new creations, but only their basic source needs to be disclosed. Even the new heaven and the new earth that the Holy One, praised be He, is destined to fashion in the days of the Messiah do not involved a new creation. They are already in existence, as it is written: "As the new heaven and the new earth which I shall make stand before Me"¹²—the text does not say "shall stand" but "stand."

Chapter Twelve

The Influence of Penitence on the Ways of the Spirit, on Life and on Behavior Generally

1. Penitence raises a person above all the meanness to be found in the world, but it does not alienate him from the world. On the contrary, he thereby raises the world and life itself with him. Those impulses that engendered sin are refined in him. The mighty will that breaks all bounds, that influenced him to sin, becomes a living force that engenders great and lofty things for good and for blessing. The grandeur of life inspired by the highest domain of the holy hovers always on penitence and on those who are its champions, for they are the choicest representatives of life, who advocate its perfection, who call for the removal of stumbling blocks and for the return to the authentic good and true happiness, toward the lofty height of true liberty, which becomes a man who ascends toward the higher realm in accordance with his

12. The literal meaning, the usual translation is "shall stand," Isa. 66:22.

spiritual origin and his creation in God's image.

2. The more a person contemplates the nature of penitence, the more he will find in it the source of heroism and the most basic content for a life of practicality and idealism.

3. How we need penitence, how vital it is to illumine the horizon of all life! The spiritual channels are closed because of man's sin. The thirst for God and all its expressions, which embrace the radiance of the moral disposition, its practical aspect and its inner stirring in the soul, are in convulsion. It begins to jerk and stir with a movement of life, but falls again, because the burden of the filth of the transgressions weighs it down. Not only personal sin weighs it down, but even more so, the sin of society. The few noble spirits who seek the light of God suffer because of the sins of society as a whole. Their love for people is boundless. The core of the good in their souls is drawn especially toward the good of society and society is prone to contaminate them with the sins in which it is enmeshed. However, the truly righteous suffer willingly all the obstructions, all the physical and spiritual suffering, their only concern being to serve their goal, to enlighten, to improve, to enhance the good and the light of holiness, to hew a path toward the light of God and His delight, that it might enter every heart and spirit so that all may enjoy the goodness of the Lord, that God might rejoice in his works.

4. Every sin, even the slightest, plants in a person hostility toward some creature and through penitence love is again radiant.

5. When a person sins he has entered the world of fragmentation, and then every particular being stands by itself, and evil is evil in and of itself, and it is evil and destructive. When he repents out of love there at once shines on him the light from the world of unity, where everything is integrated into one whole, and in the context of the whole there is no evil at all. The evil is joined with the good to invest it with more attractiveness, and to enhance its significance. Thus the

willful wrongs become transformed into real virtues.

6. It is impossible to assess the importance of practical penitence, the mending of one's behavior according to the Torah and absolute equity, to make possible all the benefits of the spiritual ascent of the community and the individual. Each practical step in this process holds within its smallest gesture endless thrusts of idealism and breadth of perception that condition it to play its role in the world and in life. But when this step becomes defective, then is voided the strength of all the ideals released into the world. These ideals are analogous to the enormous potential energy imprisoned in one nucleus of an atom to give it its substantive force.

7. Penitence came before the world. The moral law encompasses everything. The claim of the supernal goal becomes particularized into many components. Any action that deviates from the norm, that is not oriented toward its source, is reoriented to its source when the will is mended.

8. The higher form of penitence is inspired by an inner force that derives from an external force emanating from the divine realm. The whole world, the physical and the spiritual, is embraced in a unitary whole. Morality, the impulse for equity and good, represents the central direction of the will of existence. This center, in the particularization of life, must conform to all the surrounding reality, to all existence, in its inner essence as well as its outer expression. Through the inner perception deep within the heart of what is equitable and good one recognizes the action of the moral law that pervades all existence, in the form of a vital, vibrant idealism. In the Torah this moral conformity in all its manifestations is represented in the light of holiness, adapted to each community according to its stature, and to the Jewish people in its most authentic form. The personality that finds in its way of life and its spiritual disposition defects and disharmony in relation to the absolute all, the inner and the manifest, will suffer endless pain and will seek to return to the source of life

and being. It will experience remorse over its straying, and it will return with an anxious heart and with the joy of deliverance. "I have strayed as a lost sheep, seek Your servant, for I have not forgotten Your commandments" (Ps. 119:176).

9. Penitence is, in essence, an effort to return to one's original status, to the source of life and higher being in their fullness, without limitation and diminution, in their highest spiritual character, as illumined by the simple, radiant divine light. The life process lowers us to proliferating fragmentation, which tends to solidify our limited existence, the more it reaches out and becomes involved in action, in undertakings and accomplishments. This creates the impression that our lives are firm and stable. It is for this reason that we feel weak and failing as the will prods us to return to the primary source that transcends all its proliferating particularities. As a result of this weakening of the will, even our spiritual aspiration is weakened. As we ascend on the ladder of penitence we must also hold on to the practical particularizations, with their stirrings, the thoughts and strivings they conjure up, and raise them as well together with the ascent of our inner being toward the divine, to be reunited with our original source. However life breaks down into particularization, it continues to draw light from the original divine light, and it needs to return to the higher realm, together with the essence of our souls. Then we shall not ascend devoid of riches and we shall not fail because of feebleness, for we shall not return naked to the higher realm. We shall have with us our multicolored robes we acquired as a result of the proliferation of all life. We ascend and move on in time, with all the fruits of activity and life that go with it.

10. The moral impulse, with its divine call, enters the soul from the life thrusts of all the worlds. Existence, in its overall character, is sinless. Sin appears only in the goals of particular beings. In the perspective of the whole everything is related in eternal harmony. The actions that manifest the

eternal harmony are pure, devoid of any sin, error or transgression. This kind of life, which inspires such actions, is what the soul seeks. It finds it in the light of the source of all life, the light that is radiant with the light of the En Sof,¹³ to which it is so ardently drawn, to which it is bound and for which it yearns with endless longing. It reaches for it with the higher penitence, the highest freedom, the excited joy of liberation and the awe of the holy of holies, abounding in the wisdom of all realms of being.

11. Penitence is the renewal of life. It is impossible for penitence not to change the quality of life while life continues, and it automatically changes its quality for good even if it takes place on the last day. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years be reached when you will say, I have no pleasure in them, before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark" (Kohelet 12:1-2). Other consolations for wrongdoing are meant only to serve as embellishments to strengthen the will to penitence and to clarify its significance. However, when a person remains fixed in such consolations to a point of neglecting to embrace the values of a life of holiness, remaining sunk in the deep mire of sin, and saying, I am saved—this is the way of death of the idolatry of compromise that summoned the people to worship at the idolatrous shrines of Beth-el and Gilgal, calling: "Bring your sacrifices in the morning, pay your tithes every three days and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving from leavened bread" (Amos 4:4). The behavior that abandons truth and justice and follows the temptations of the heart is heresy that drags along with it every kind of violence and lewdness, while exhibiting its outer facade and saying: See, I am clean. It abounds in empty consolations that cannot stand up in a world of falsehood that is devoid of stability. "The lips of a strange woman drop honey, her mouth is

13. The Infinite, a synonym for God.

smoother than oil, but her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword" (Prov. 5:3-4).

The fruits of beliefs and morals of those raised on the idolatrous culture reflect on its inner character. Its only vitality derives from the holy sparks it appropriated from the living treasure of Israel's faith, which it rejects little by little, until it will make itself bare altogether. "He swallowed up riches and he threw it up, God ejected it from his inside" (Job 20:15). But then will the holy spark that has been absorbed by the nations as something unwanted stir the hearts of many nations, to "turn them to a pure language, to invoke the name of the Lord" (Zeph. 3:9), the God of Israel, "in the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of the knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2). This is not an alien spirit, a spirit of folly and weakness, a spirit of ignorance and moral callousness, that bases its false premises on compromise that is a disgrace to every leader and righteous judge. Only such "virtue" of nations is the source of every cruelty and meanness. "Our God will come and not be silent, a fire devours before Him, and storms rage all about Him. He will call the heavens above and the earth to judge His people. Let His faithful gather, those pledged to Him by a covenant at a sacrifice offering" (Ps. 50: 3-5). "The Lord is a God of justice, happy are those who trust in Him" (Isa. 30:18). "I will make an everlasting covenant with you, fulfilling the mercies promised to David, I have made him a witness to the nations, a prince and commander to the peoples. You will call a nation you know not, and a people that does not know you will run to you, for the sake of the Lord your God and the Holy One of Israel who has glorified you" (Isa. 55: 3-5).

12. It is necessary to summon people to penitence also for the sake of the survival of our people. In what sense is this to be understood? We must be united in our togetherness for the oncoming generations. But our spiritual unity needs to be nourished, and its nourishment consists of a way of life, and

an ideology. When our people are faithful to their pattern of life and thought, then the link of unity remains firm, and it endows additional strength to the ethnic and other forms of unity, though these in themselves are of a passing and changing nature. But when the spiritual phase of our life is weakened, then the spiritual dissension becomes stronger, and the basic unity of race and other external factors will be powerless to hold together the many fragments into which life in its objective and subjective conditioning fragmentizes them.

13. At times an idea descends from its grandeur and from its original purity, because after its realization in practical life unworthy people became involved in it and they darkened its lustre. This descent is not permanent, for it cannot be that the idea embodying the spiritual good shall be transformed into evil. The descent is only temporary and it is also a stepping stone to a new ascent. The people of lowly quality are numerous, and though this attribute [of popularity] is as nothing in comparison with quality, when it is added to quality it becomes its adornment; "when there is a multitude of people the King is glorified" (Prov. 14:25). It is not only preponderant in number but also in physical prowess, the energy and the desire to pursue and to achieve, to establish one's objective through practical steps and a display of strength—all these are more common among people of physical strength who are lacking in spiritual sensibility, which generally tends to blunt physical strength. When an idea needs to acquire a physical base, it tends to descend from its height. In such an instance it is thrust toward the earthly, and brazen ones come and desecrate its holiness. Together with this, however, its followers increase, and the physical vitality becomes increasingly more visible. This continues until the time comes when sensitive spirits girded with the might of divine righteousness are aroused. They rise to the peak of the idea in its original purity, they enter into its inner depth and bring to it the

purity of their own souls, their noble intentions and their innocent thoughts. As a result of this, the general idea, which has been weary and enfeebled, in the numbness of death, because of the spiritual pains inflicted on it by the stabs of the surrounding thorns, so that it is almost devoid of life, becomes aroused and begins to release on all who approach it the dew of life with majestic prowess out of its inner being. Then all who cling to it ascend with its ascent. Even those who embraced it at the time of its decadence, who willfully deviated from the straight road toward the goal embodied in the idea, also ascend with it. As a result of its influence, they turn toward a pure and higher penitence, with wondrous ease, which has no parallel in the manifestations of penitence through the stirring of the good in some individual soul. This process here envisioned will come and will not be delayed. The light of God, which is obscured by dark clouds, which is hidden in the core of the vision of Zion, will appear. It will raise from the lower depths the kingly city, the shrine of God with all its tributaries. With it will ascend all who cling to it, those near and far, for a true renaissance and for permanent liberation.

Chapter Thirteen

The Ways of Spiritual and Practical Penitence

1. One cannot be attached to the core of Israel's nationhood unless one's soul has been cleansed by penitence of its vulgar human traits and low moral attributes or unless one's soul is from the very beginning a pure soul. For the basic disposition of the Israelite nation is the aspiration that the highest measure of justice, the justice of God, shall prevail in the world. Whoever has been stained by any kind of sin, then to the extent of his stain, the desire for justice and for good

will not be operative within him properly. Therefore, he will not be truly linked with the national character of the Jewish people until the stain has been cleansed.

2. In order to remove every barrier between the general divine good and the individual person who thirsts for it, it is necessary to shed every moral defect, in the broadest connotation of the term. This embraces the cleansing of his character traits and the purification of his intellectual presuppositions that condition action. For these register the impact of the divine light on all humanity and all existences in its application to the realm of morals. Similarly, in order to remove the impediments to the perfection of the character of the Jew who robes the abstract essence of the divine good in his own distinctive expression, it is necessary to purge every practical obstruction that acts on the Jewish soul. This goal necessitates full penitence for all the detailed acts of wrongdoing and transgression, on the basis of the written and oral Torah, all of which express the divine soul embodied in the Jew.

3. It is necessary for a person to be united with the divine good in the soul of the community of Israel as a whole, and thereby he will be aided toward penitence. At all times he will be confronted by his shortcomings and sins, which stem from his alienation from the people of God that gave him being and is the source of all the good in him. Let him not hesitate to link himself with the soul of the people as a whole, despite the fact that among some of its constituent individuals there are also wicked and coarse people. This does not diminish in any way the divine light of the good in the people as a whole, and a spark of the divine soul is radiant even in the most fallen individuals. And because the community of Israel holds within itself the divine good, not for itself alone, but for the whole world, for all existence, by cleaving firmly to the soul of the people he will come to cleave to the living God, in harmony with the divine blessing that abounds in all things. The divine presence will then embrace him in all its majesty and might.

4. It is impossible for a person to feel afflicted with the afflictions of the community unless he hallows his ways and perfects his character and undergoes full penitence. The identification with the afflictions of the community with fullness of heart is itself the reward for obedience to divine precepts experienced by those pure of soul, who walk in innocence, who follow the teaching of the Lord.

5. The most original and the best approach to penitence, which is inspired by the light of the Torah in the world, consists in the study of civil law and all those precepts that govern man's relation to his fellowman, as set forth in the legal code, the "Hoshen Mishpat." This is to be studied with the clearest stress on becoming conversant with the contents of the text and with the most profound kind of thematic analysis possible. This will mend all the lapses to which the heart may have drawn one in life, it will establish the principles of divine justice on a firm foundation and it will liberate the soul from the trap of doubt and confusion. It will do this by illuminating the practical life with its clear light. However, one must always sensitize the heart and the mind through the other branches of the Torah, especially so through exposure to the moral influence, on a contemplative level, that is firm and broad, in the life-giving light of meditation on the concepts of God, on the spiritual life, so that the soul may be conditioned for attachment to the divine justice immanent in the legal branch of the Torah, which shows us the way of life. Then will this pursuit serve like a balm to raise the soul and to strengthen it.

6. When the desire for absolute justice, as envisioned theoretically in its spiritual form, grows stronger in the human soul because one has been ennobled by good character and good deeds, and by full penitence inspired by love, then this desire will break out from the ethereal realm and thrust itself to the ground below, and proclaim with force its mission to establish justice on earth. This engenders a special love for the study of those laws that define man's obligations to his

neighbor, and the largest section of the Torah, the laws dealing with money matters, expands further and becomes more clarified, together with all branches of the law that governs the practical life. And since the spiritual dimension of divine justice becomes incorporated in the practical life it becomes stronger, the soul becomes more firm, and its spiritual influence rises to a higher level of clarity.

7. If a person should expect that all his inner impulses and all his faculties rise to holiness all at once in accordance with the spiritual ascent he has attained and, similarly, that all his defects of behavior be mended all at once and be transformed to absolute perfection, he will be unable to maintain his stability and he will not be able to maintain his desire to pursue the way that leads to true perfection. The basis of everything is the ascent of perception, the intensification of the light of the Torah, and penitence in action is to follow closely, at first with reference to future behavior, then with reference to matters of the past that lend themselves to easy mending. Then this will reach out as well to matters difficult to mend, and thus he will continue until he will mend everything. But he must not neglect anything in his spiritual progress as the inner claim of his soul demands of him.

8. The basic difficulty in comprehending the higher life derives from the weakening of the will for goodness and perfection, a result of defects of character and sinful acts. It might indeed be prudent to fast in order to break the potentiality for evil inherent in the realm of the material that impedes the ascent of the will toward higher qualities. But one must consider whether one's spiritual and bodily stamina would be supportive of this. In any case, one must not despair of the will's openness to improvement. Even if many flaws should remain in one's disposition and action, he should anticipate the help of God for a higher deliverance, since God is good and upright, and He shows sinners the way to go.

9. The inner moral sense calls out to man: Son of man,

turn back from your sins! Sometimes the call is so loud that it disturbs all the harmonious balance of life. A person must then rise to a higher spiritual standard in order to stabilize his inner world, but here he will need the help of courage. A person's inner courage must come to his aid when he goes through the most serious spiritual crisis. As a result of the force with which the moral sense exerts its claim on him, a person is sometimes confused and he cannot liberate himself from his imprisonment; his evil traits, his evil deeds, which stray from the way of the Torah and morality, oppress him. He sees his path hedged in with thorns. He sees no way of mending. He feels himself in the grip of outside forces and he cannot withstand them. But out of all these the light of a sun radiating mercy will shine.

10. A person should not be disturbed by impediments in meeting the claims of penitence. Even if his difficulties stem from offenses against other persons, and he knows he has not redressed the wrongs and he finds himself too weak to mend his relations with his fellowman, let him not entertain in his heart any discouraging thoughts that disparage the value of penitence. Undoubtedly, once he redresses wrongs where no impediments interfere, God will also help him to redress satisfactorily those wrongs where he confronts great impediments that he cannot presently overcome.

11. The focus of penitence must always be directed toward improving the future. One should not begin by making the mending of the past an indispensable prerequisite. If he should immediately begin by mending the past he will encounter many obstacles, and the ways of penitence and the nearness of God will seem too hard for him. But if he concentrates truly on improving his future behavior, it is certain that divine help will also be granted him to mend the past.

12. There is a type of person in whose soul the moral claim shines with unusual clarity. After every lofty moral vision that he conjures up, he feels at once the demand to

conform his life to it. Since the flow of images moves with greater speed than the natural process of planning and acting, this person is always grieved and embittered at himself because he cannot meet his obligations and bring to full realization what has been revealed to him by the precious light of morality. At times out of this very holy sensibility comes a fear of the creative process; the person will be unwilling to confront the lofty images where the moral, the scientific and the most spiritual concepts in the realm of the holy all merge—lest he suffer undue anguish. In such a state it is necessary to invoke one's inner strength and to resort to the perception that the core of penitence is in the will, a perception that guides all who follow the path of a higher life, and a higher sensitivity, to enhance the riches of holiness, to strengthen the Torah and magnify it. Let him not shrink because of the moral claims that overwhelm him, but let him confront them with the confidence that the influence, generated by the light of the Torah, will always turn him in the direction of the good, in its highest form, and let him add to his intellectual and imaginative wealth in the free action of the soul that is most relevant for his individuality; and let him not be afraid. "Let the righteous smite me in kindness and correct me, precious oil my head will not refuse" (Ps. 141:5).

13. Great and majestic is the happiness of penitence. The consuming fire of the pain engendered by sin itself purges the will, cleanses the character of the person so that the great wealth in the treasure of the life of penitence grows for him. The person continues to ascend through penitence, through its bitterness and its sweetness, through its grief and its joy. Nothing purges and cleanses a person, raises him to the full stature of a human being, like the profound experience of penitence. "In the place where the penitents stand, even the fully righteous are unworthy to stand" (Ber. 34b).

14. The flame of remorse, which is engendered in a gentle person, through the inspiration of the light of penitence, is a holy fire, a fire that is full of light and warmth, full of life.

When it arises in a pure spirit, in a soul alive and illumined with the light of grace and good sense, endowed with the knowledge of people who have risen to holiness, then it is changed into a mighty, vibrant force, an active force that refines and cleanses, that engenders strength, that removes obstruction and begets a new spirit into all living things. It brings with it a new awakening and a bestirring full of a mysterious vitality. The person becomes a new being, refined and purged; his gaze is toward the heights, toward the higher vistas of knowledge and understanding, which is the generating impetus for penitence. From the light of the vision of the Messiah, from the entire Torah and all the commandments, from all the good deeds and good character traits, will come to him rays of light to illumine his dark paths and his barren ways. Together with his own edifice he will build an edifice for the world and many will walk by his light, which at first he had kindled for himself alone. It was at first a light for one and it became a light for a great multitude of people, and "you will be called a repairer of the breach, a restorer of paths to dwell in" (Isa. 58:12).

Chapter Fourteen

The Ways of Individual Penitence

1. Just as one must raise evil dispositions and thoughts to their original source in order to mend them and to moderate them, so is it necessary to raise low-level dispositions and thoughts to their original source and to illumine them with the light of greatness. Although the latter are good, they are not on a high enough level of goodness, and they do not offer enough illumination. And just as one serves the world by raising the degraded dispositions and thoughts, even more so does one serve and improve the condition of the world by raising the low-level dispositions and thoughts to a higher

level. This quality of raising what is lowly in life toward greatness never ceases at any time, at any hour. This is the meaning of full penitence, which qualifies the truly righteous to attain the virtues of penitents.

2. When one engages in spiritual contemplation one recognizes that his faculties for spiritual perception are dulled because of the defects in the soul caused by sin. The anguish caused by the paucity of light leads to remorse over one's sins generally, and over one's particular sins. Then one will desire with a full heart to cleanse one's actions and dispositions so that the obstruction does not continue to impede the flow of the divine light into the inwardness of the reflective soul. This is the way to the higher level of penitence, the penitence that is worthy of atoning for any misdeeds.

3. At times as a result of the endeavor to cling to a higher level of spirituality all the channels of the spiritual life will focus on the world of higher thoughts, and the body will be disoriented from the soul, with the result that it [the body] will come under sway of evil influences. Subsequently, when the contemplation of the higher spiritual realm has been completed and the life process resumes its normal functioning, the soul will find the body broken, through an impairment of its normal attributes. Then will commence a great and perilous inner conflict. For this reason, penitence, with its focus on mending one's style of life, should precede the ascent in contemplation. Then will one assure some contact between body and soul even during the period of the higher ascent.

4. When one wishes to embark on penitence one must realize that there is nothing to thwart this objective, not even the twenty-four offenses cited as difficult to redress through penitence (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Teshuvah 4:1-6)¹⁴. One must not ignore any inclination to penitence, not even the

14. These cease to be impediments when one has begun to repent for them.

most trivial, saying that the thought that suggested itself is too insignificant for a person of his stature. Nor is he to ignore the call to the highest, saying that it is beyond his reach. Everything merges into one edifice, one world of penitence, which is more precious, greater and more ancient than all worlds.

5. The fact that the would-be penitent is at times confronted by great difficulties, whether in the duties between man and God or in the duties between man and man, should not impede the spiritual essence of penitence. Once there is a reaching for penitence, there is the reality of penitence, and the person involved becomes a new being. As to the misdeeds that require great vigilance to redress them, let him always anticipate that he will redress them; and let him cultivate a special humility as long as there is something he must redress that he has not yet done so; and let him look forward to the time when he will redress everything. Automatically it will turn out that God will help him mend everything, but even before he has had the opportunity to do this, whether because of objective or subjective obstacles, whether his will is not yet resolute enough or he has not yet reached a full determination as to the practical steps to be taken, let him nevertheless hold on firmly to the spiritual phase of penitence. Let him maintain firmly his conviction that in any case he has embraced penitence, which is more precious than anything else in the world, and let him increase his study of Torah, his good deeds, his pursuit of wisdom and his upright behavior to whatever extent he can. And let him offer prayer to his Maker that he be enabled to realize in action those aspects of penitence that still remain unfulfilled, for his own sake, for the sake of all Israel and the whole world, and for the sake of the *shekinah*, that the light of God shine in the world in all its fullness; and let him look forward to the time when all souls will be mended and enjoy the radiance of the divine presence, and all will be sated with goodness and with abounding life.

6. When one performs any action with a mundane motivation, for bodily or animalistic reasons, provided the act itself is permitted, if he has been aroused to repent for this, there is an immediate transformation of all impulses toward the spiritual and the holy. If one has violated a positive commandment and has repented, he is forgiven before he has had a chance to move from the spot (Yoma 86a). When one has performed a legitimate act,¹⁵ immediately after the thought occurred to him to repent, he has risen toward holiness and the act and its generating energy rise with him. The melancholy that follows upon mundane pleasures is immediately turned into the joy associated with the performance of a divine precept. "For the upright of heart there is joy" (Ps. 97:11).

7. When one raises the question: What is the cause for melancholy? it is necessary to reply: The influence of evil acts, character traits and opinions on the soul. The soul, with its penetrating instinct, senses their bitterness and recoils, is frightened and saddened. When the light of penitence appears and the desire for good, in its original authenticity, asserts itself, there is opened a channel for delight and joy, and the soul imbibes from the river of delight. When the disposition to act absorbs the substance of these pleasurable feelings, there emerges the pure, higher moral sense that invests life with its splendor.

8. All melancholy stems from sin, and penitence illumines the soul and changes the melancholy to joy. The general melancholy prevalent in the world stems from the general foulness found in the universe as a result of the collective sin of humanity and the sin of individuals, and from the sins hidden in the earth that come to expression through the sin of man. The righteous who are the foundations of the world and especially the Messiah perform penance for this type of sin and transform it to joy.

¹⁵. But for improper motives,

9. If a person should eat with an improper or low-level motivation and repent immediately after eating, raising his thoughts and his faculties in penitence inspired by love, then he has mended the past. It is as though his initial eating was with a pure motive. The time when the food is digested, when it is appropriate to recite grace after the meal, is more appropriate for this act of elevation, which renders such eating worthy of the priests of God, who eat the bread offered to the Lord: "The priests eat and those who brought the offering are forgiven" (Pes. 59b).

10. Overindulgence in eating, even if it is necessitated by illness, has an element of impropriety, but it would seem that it can readily be elevated toward holiness. However, penitence must certainly be part of this mending and elevation. The increased vigor, when it is directed toward holy purposes, invests with its character the initial event that produced it, even if it was initially the act of overeating, since the latter was forced on the person due to illness or weakness, or the like. This is unlike eating forbidden food where the elevation is very difficult.

11. After the event, when a person has eaten with improper motives, or has stumbled on overindulging in food for which one is called an offender, if he should plan to repent with full penitence after the meal and elevate the holy sparks contained in that meal, there is hope that this would be efficacious. The sincere person should never tire of mending all he can after every meal with penitence out of love, in joy and gladness of heart, without sadness, with contentment in God, with remorse and contrition, pervaded by the grandeur and the strength of holiness. Then he will effect benefits for himself and for the world. Even if it should happen that in the course of the meal he be guilty of some low moments, let him repent and elevate himself and he will yet be worthy of eating "holy bread" in higher holiness, and the offense will be transformed to an influence for good, blessing, mercy and favor.

“He that is of a virtuous heart enjoys a constant feast” (Prov. 15:15).

12. At times it is well to avoid thoughts of holiness and penitence when they come in a spirit of melancholy. The joy that flows from the depth of holiness is greater than other expressions of holiness and penitence. When thoughts of fear and penitence occur to a person in a spirit of melancholy, let him distract his mind from them until his mind becomes more settled. Then he will take on himself all the claims of holiness and the fear of God in a spirit of joy appropriate for those sincere of heart who serve God in truth.

13. There is an inner sadness that stems from an afflicted soul. Especially when the pattern of action is deficient and the responsibility for action is not well defined, does the life force [nefesh] feel its lack, since the faculty for action is close to its sphere. It is otherwise with people who are close to the realm of the practical, whose deficiencies are more diffused in the distant realms of the spiritual. They cannot feel their lack to a point of sadness, and they can be more cheerful by nature. A person who is disturbed by his behavioral deficiency, who is profoundly spiritual in his aspirations, should try to enhance his spiritual sensibilities and harness them to serve the practical world, so that they will illumine the vistas of the practical. Through the resources of the practical Torah they will develop and become a beacon light of the higher penitence that will mend everything, the practical and the theoretical life as well.

14. It is necessary to repent even for deficiencies that stem from bodily weaknesses, for them and for their resultant consequences. However, one must strengthen oneself not to be overly fearful, especially of such deficiencies that were caused by the weakness of the body. We already have the great assurance of divine mercy that God does not regard as a sin anything to which a person was drawn against his will, whether in a positive act, or by a failure to act. And as it is

good for a person to be disturbed by a guilty conscience, so is it necessary for him to be firm of heart, to be ready for God's service in the study of Torah and sincere worship, with a clear mind, to whatever extent possible.

15. Even with reference to offenses that cannot be mended in thought alone, but must be expressed in action, as in the area of human relations, every thought of penitence is of inestimable value, even if it should be inspired by simple fear, the fear of sin. Even the slightest gesture of penitence stirs in the soul—and in the world—great and holy sensibilities. A holy light emanating from the divine realm illumines every inclination toward the good with the splendor of love and the delight of God. Even if there be imbedded in it much dross, its inner grace, its basic holiness—this is worth all the wealth, and all precious things cannot be compared to it.

16. Though sadness and fear are induced by the neglect of Torah and by all the wrongdoing, once we contemplate penitence everything is turned to good, and a person must strengthen himself to trust the mercies of God, praised be He, and to launch on the study of Torah and on acts of divine service, each one according to his level. If it should at times seem to him that the form of penitence suggested by reading books of morals does not correspond to his status, let him probe his status, and let him concentrate especially in doing what does correspond to his status. But let him not neglect altogether what is suggested in the books, and though he can embrace only a very small measure of the prescriptions that are not relevant to him, all levels of the good and the holy must be linked to each other. Together they fuse to form one whole, to be illumined by the light of God and His higher Torah, with the delight of God and His goodness.

17. At times when a person reads books on levels of holiness, he may feel an inner anguish. He must analyze his anguish into its components, and he will discover that occa-

sionally he is troubled because a particular good quality is remote from him, due to his sins. He should then strengthen himself in penitence in order to attain that quality. But he may also find that the quality alluded to in his reading has elements below his level, and he may be grieved over his inclination to content himself within the circumscribed zone of that quality. The person must then clarify to himself how fortunate he will be if he will strive to embrace what this quality has to offer him and to what extent his good fortune also depends on not remaining static at that level, but on going beyond it. "One must always ascend in the realm of the holy" (Ber. 28a).

18. There are two types of excellence in one's spiritual status. One is the effect of good deeds and study, the other is a disposition with which one is endowed at birth. One who attained his status through study and works, if he should suffer decline and need to raise himself again, it will be necessary for him to do so by slow steps and return by degrees. But one whose high stature is primarily due to the disposition with which he has been endowed at birth, through a greatness of soul, even if he fall from high station through inner or outer impediments, it will be necessary for him to return with a major thrust, speedily, with a leap as on the wings of eagles, without considering stages. However, there is also added to the latter type of return the penitence in little things, with attention to particular details relevant to them, except that those are not the primary labor of penitence for one whose core of being is of a higher order. They are only derivative additions, like embellishments that sweeten and aid the main goal—the great and exalted form of penitence.

19. In every stage, in every conception of life, there is a treasure of holiness. When a person leaps toward high visions, beyond his own level, he becomes deprived of the dimension of holiness in the lower levels, which are closer to his own, while he cannot achieve a permanent attachment to the higher

visions since they are too spiritual for him. He must, therefore, return in penitence to the levels he has left behind, with regret and with joy. Nevertheless, let him not forget the impression made on him by the higher levels. Since he ascended let him not go down altogether. Then everything will be turned to the good.

20. A person may note that the more resolute he becomes in pursuing the upright way and the more committed he becomes to the service of God, the stronger the evil impulse becomes in him, to bring him down toward lusts and lowly behavior. Nevertheless let him not regret his efforts, but let him continue with greater resoluteness. As to the obstructions that appeared on his way upward, it is for him to repent, and let him remember the principle that one who erred in the course of performing a divine commandment does not have to bring a sin offering (Shabbat 137a). And let him not be afraid of anything, but let him draw holy fear and penitence from all that happens.

21. The loss of vitality in the will, with its many negative results, is due in great measure to a lack of physical vigor. Though the latter itself is conditioned by many moral factors, in seeking redress through penitence one must analyze the various causes that have weakened the will. He should then attempt overall mending, both in the moral and purely spiritual realm, and in the area affecting the body and the strengthening of its faculties, so that the vitality of his will shall rest on a more perfect foundation.

22. When great visions occur to us, which seem beyond our reach, it is important to know that the remoteness is only physical, and is not due to a spiritual deficiency. Therefore, it is necessary to embark on penitence, so that we might come close to the light of the ideal that has flashed in our thought. But we must avoid depression or self-depreciation that blunts life's vitality. It is to be rather a gentle inner self-criticism, which reduces our unbecoming side and raises our good and

gentle essence. "The right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord acts heroically" (Ps. 118:16).

23. When a person has little faith in the efficacy of his prayer, not because, God forbid, he lacks faith in divine providence, but because he feels depressed over his many sins and the anguish that accompanies his penitence, this will in the end be changed to a great and mighty faith in the power of God's mercy, which will work wonders for him, by the help of God, may He be praised, "who leads the humble in justice and shows the humble His way" (Ps. 25:9).

24. If a person is so low in his self-esteem that, embittered over his moral decline, with his many sins, he cannot find the poise to pursue the study of Torah and the performance of the commandments, to do his worldly work and to socialize with people in peace and with a healthy cheerfulness, then he must realize that with such dispirited condition over his sins, he is certainly a full penitent. This being the case, his status has risen, and he can now calm himself and renew his cheerfulness of spirit to perform all good deeds with a tranquil and glad heart, for God is good and upright.

25. The embarrassment experienced in the heart because of sin, although this is a natural reaction, brings with it, nevertheless, some atonement. If by reflection one deepens the embarrassment, one also extends the zone of forgiveness for all sins. They are all interconnected on the basis of the principle that one transgression stimulates another, and one who is embarrassed over one sin is embarrassed over all. The penitence that takes the form of the fear of God, which is in essence the feeling of shame, embraces a person's entire being and he is forgiven even for such sins as call for a high level of penitence sufficient to atone for all misdeeds.

26. Sometimes bad traits are themselves the retributory consequences of previous sins, and it is not enough for a person to try to cleanse himself of those traits. He will not return to his state of purity until he has taken stock of himself,

and will repent for the sins that caused, as a retributory consequence, the depreciation of his character traits.

27. Insufficient pleasure in the study of Torah results from a deficiency in the soul of a Jew, which needs to be mended through penitence directed to overcome this deficiency. Once one puts his mind to mend this deficiency, the higher light inherent in the nature of the soul begins at once to shine again, and the sweetness of the Torah becomes once again manifest.

28. The brighter the light of penitence shines before study, the clearer will be one's understanding of his study. The potency of the intellect rises as the potency of the will rises, and it attains clarity in proportion to the clarity of the will.

29. The higher penitence that is inspired by a great love and a clear understanding raises the content of study to a level of fruitfulness and creativity that has no parallel in any kind of study pursued independently.

30. Everything helps to elevate the spirit, to achieve a higher level of penitence: all one's knowledge of Torah, all one's general culture, all one's energies, everything one knows about the world and about life, every contact with people, every disposition to equity and justice. When a person feels inwardly ashamed, an unworthiness of body and spirit, he must probe with all his strength all aspects of his deficiency and mend them. He must not attend to this in a superficial way, because this will only lead him to further decline. He must do this with penetrating concentration, and with pure vigor of spirit.

31. It is precisely after a truly pure kind of penitence that one must reimmerse oneself in the world and in life. Through this one restores holiness to its proper sphere and enthrones the *shekinah*, the divine presence, in the world.

32. Whoever neglects the study of Torah lacks the strength to hold his own in a time of trouble. This includes

the neglect of even a single commandment. The Holy One, praised be He, in His great kindness, stirs one to recall in time of trouble all the elements of good and the inspiration to holiness that derive from the teachings of the Torah and the commandments. As a result of the trouble one becomes conscious of every detail in the Torah and the commandments that have been neglected, and one returns in penitence. God accepts this penitence, and out of trouble He brings forth deliverance and relief.

33. One must hasten to repent for every sin, even if it be the most trivial. The delay in penitence is like the delay in removing an impurity in the Temple, or wool and linen in the same garment,¹⁶ or leavened bread on Passover—every moment of delay is a sin by itself; and the accumulation of slight sins becomes a formidable force for evil. Similarly, one who is on a level of high spiritual attainment must repent for every needless word uttered, or even for every necessary and holy word uttered if without inner holiness, good sense or feeling appropriate for his state.

34. On the eve of the Sabbath one must do penance for all that transpired in the course of the week, in order to welcome the Sabbath without any impediment of sin or wrongdoing. At the end of the holy Sabbath, one must do penance for what was covered up by the illumination of the Sabbath, that it may be pure without admixtures, that troublesome matters that are rendered impotent by the holiness of the Sabbath shall not disturb the proprieties of the weekdays, when such defense is not available. This is the reason that the High Priest washed his hands and feet after removing the holy robes on the Day of Atonement. Elements of impurity invade the sanctuary, and because of the magnitude of the light of holiness, seek to attach themselves to him. While the holy service itself dominates the scene they are ineffective, but afterward it is

¹⁶. Forbidden in Deut. 22:11.

necessary to guard against them through a great penitence, in which there is much joy, strength and humility.

35. The fear of God must never be separated from wisdom, but must always be associated with it and draw on it, and automatically exert an influence on it. This applies to the general illumination that inspires the soul with the fear of God and with wisdom as well as to their derivative particulars. The light of wisdom must shine on every detailed element in the fear of God. From every element of wisdom must the fear of God, with all its values—the practical, the moral, the emotional and the imaginative—draw its nourishment. The soul will be illumined through the proper blending of these two great lights, and penitence, delight and joy and life will come to the world.

36. The clear intellectual aspirations raise man above the limited realm of the practical. When they are properly based they encourage him to mend his behavior in the future and they straighten out for him the way of life. But they also remove the obstacles from his doing penance for the past, for his misdeeds do not block his way, since he recognizes clearly to what extent the light of knowledge that prepares for and serves as the basis of penitence uproots all evil from its source, and turns them toward good, and willful sins are transmuted into virtues.

37. If a person should desire nothing less than to be wholly righteous, it will be difficult for him to be a penitent. It is therefore appropriate for a person always to concentrate on the aspiration to be a penitent, to be immersed in thoughts about penitence and in the endeavor to effectuate it in action. Then will his penitence be able to raise him toward the heights, to the level of the truly righteous, and even beyond it.

38. A penitent must walk in higher paths, in the ways of saintliness and holy thoughts. However, there are people born with a nature that enables them to be righteous from the

very inception of their being. If it happened that these people sinned and repented, they can, after their penitence, resume their former life-style, to walk in the way of the righteous, as before, without any noticeable intensification of the constant quest for holiness. But those who by nature have souls that are constantly in need of penitence, they are the ones summoned to be saintly¹⁷ and people of holiness.

39. It sometimes happens that the spirit falls into depression, and the person cannot find any contentment, because he feels the paucity of his good deeds, because of an awareness of his misdeeds and his little diligence in the study of Torah. Such a person should concentrate on the secret potency of thought, realizing that "one who can infer one thing from another—his thought is more highly esteemed by the Holy One, praised be He, than all the sacrifices and burnt offerings." Holy thoughts and higher conceptual images therefore have all the efficacy of sacrifices, with all the rites pertaining to them. They also have the efficacy of the practical aspects of the Torah involving speech [study and prayer], those elements of the Torah that correspond to the cult of sacrifices and derive from them. A man should encourage himself with the realization that at times the paucity of good deeds and study may have occurred because of his great inclination to pursue the secret realms of thought, and it may be that his low feeling is inspired to a great extent by the fact that he did not esteem sufficiently the significance of his thought. Therefore let him concentrate on the perception that the mending of the entire world and the healing of all souls depend on the basics of thought, and let him raise his thoughts to higher realms, to whatever extent he can, and he will reach a level of penitence out of love. "Happy is the people that knows the sound of the shofar¹⁸ O Lord, they will walk in the light of Your presence" (Ps 89:16).

17. Hasidim.

18. The summons to penitence.

40. There are righteous people of such stature that if they should miss for one moment the full measure of cleaving to God, according to their standard, they will feel themselves in the depths of sin, and they meet their crisis through a high level of penitence, through a complete, mighty and august kind of penitence. Even if their cleaving should be complete in only one aspect, in the element of fear alone or love alone, they will already feel a great lapse, and a disruption of the unity of the divine order in the world; and their soul will yearn for the higher penance to redress the wrong.

The upper strata of the righteous who are full of mercy and divine compassion for all creatures, for all the worlds and all who inhabit them, from beginning to end, who are guided with heroism and adorned with the beauty, the beauty of truth—they feel the imbalance in the level of their cleaving to God. If the fusion of fear and love of God should not be fully in proper balance, or one element should outweigh the other, they will return in penitence and raise themselves to the highest realm, whence flow the treasures of holy influences, and they will restore the holy balance to its position. They will mend the defect symbolized by Jacob's limping because of his thigh (Gen. 32:32),¹⁹ and will walk straight. "My foot stands in an upright place, in the assembled multitude will I praise the Lord" (Ps. 26:12). These are the people of integrity to whom God's secret teaching will be revealed always; "with the upright is His secret" (Prov. 3:32). From the radiance of its striving for spiritual excellence, every seeking soul is filled with splendor and life, "and their search for glory releases glory" (Prov. 25:27).²⁰

19. So interpreted in many mystical texts.

20. The usual interpretation interprets the opposite way, as disdain for those who seek glory, but Rabbi Kook detaches this part of the sentence from the rest to give a homiletical interpretation.

Chapter Fifteen

The Basis of Penitence for the Individual and the Community

1. The perception of truth is the basis of penitence. The recognition that the world in all its manifestations is only an emanation from the lowest point of the light of absolute truth in God implants in the heart a clear love for truth, and every expression that negates the essence of truth, whether in speech, in gesture or in action has no basis in the world, it has passed out of existence, and is read out of life. Self-criticism, when it probes deeply into the inner recesses of the soul and assesses properly all that has been done and thought, deepens the feelings of regret for every absence of truth in the phenomena of a person's life. It makes him feel his baseness, his ugliness, his nothingness. Then the person turns back in penitence out of love for the light of truth. A sage in the knowledge of Torah must also recite a verse invoking God's mercy when he retires for the night, to entrust his spirit to God who is the source of truth, to renew him in strength to the service of truth in the Torah, which invokes the attributes of truth, as is suggested in the verse "Into Your hands I entrust my spirit, You have redeemed me, O God of truth" (Ps. 31:6).

2. By right, every endeavor of knowledge should be directed toward the basic ideal of shaping the human will in its noblest form possible, to refine the will, to strengthen it, hallow it, cleanse it, to condition it through various educational disciplines that it shall always aspire to what is noble and exalted. Let the different branches of knowledge concern themselves with finding a way of translating into action all the particulars toward which the fund of goodwill prevalent in the world aspires, and which make up the necessities of the good life, both the material and the spiritual. The peak of their objective, however, must be the refinement of the will itself, its rational clarity and its ideal essence. But woe unto human-

ity when it digresses from the right course, and instead of making the center of all efforts the elevation of the will, leaves the will in its coarseness, without refinement and elevation, and directs all its efforts to satisfy the will's lusts, which flow on like a stream of brimstone, and which bring with them every manner of hell. Then humanity as a whole falls into the frightful and vulgar trap of idolatry, which will be paid for in blood, and out of its depths it will cry out to the God of truth, to return to the holy objective of making the basis of its general endeavor the elevation of the will. Then "you will call and the Lord will answer, you will cry out, and He will say, Here I am" (Isa. 58:2), for "the Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth" (Ps. 145:18). This is the entire basis of penitence: the elevation of the will, and changing it to good, to go out of darkness to light, from the valley of despair to the door of hope. "My people are in suspense about returning to Me" (Hos. 11:7); "return, backsliding Israel" (Jer. 3:12); "return, Israel, to the Lord Your God" (Hos. 14:2).

3. The natural remorse that burns in the heart as an expression of penitence derives from the anguish felt by the soul because it has remained static, instead of meeting its need always to ascend toward higher levels and surely so if it feels within itself that it has suffered decline. If it has altogether fallen from its status, then it has also lost the sensitivity to feel spiritual pain; at the very least it has damaged it and thereby its poignant bitterness will diminish. But the anguish caused by remaining static pierces to the depths of the soul and the pain is very great. The spiritual sensitivity of a soul undamaged by decline is alive and active, and the pain of remaining in a static state, which is against its nature and the antithesis of its reason for being, burns within it like a fire. This can be transmuted into the flame of a great love abounding in a spiritual delight, when the soul will gather strength to return to its objective of ascending, and maintaining firmly at all times this objective to ascend toward greater spiritual heights. "My soul will sing to You and not be silent, Lord my God, I shall

always praise You" (Ps. 30:13).

4. At times the heart suffers inner distress without reason or cause. This emanates from the source of penitence. The supernal light of God's presence reveals itself in the depths of the soul in a highly circumscribed form. This seed needs considerable watering from the fountain of higher knowledge and then it will emerge into the world with many great and celebrated lights, illuminating the whole mystery of life. The tree of life, with its precious fruit, will then manifest itself to the soul, and the person will be elevated and hallowed, and his mourning will be turned to joy, and he will be consoled and gladdened out of his sorrow. "Out of gloom and darkness, the eyes of the blind shall see" (Isa. 29:18).

5. It should not trouble a person's mind that he is highly esteemed in the eyes of people for his sanctity when he has claims against himself. This is the basis of penitence, what inspires all spiritual progress, which brings deliverance to the individual and the entire world. The high esteem accorded him should stimulate within him humility in full measure. By delving deeply into its essence he gains the crown of wisdom. To be vigilant in preserving humility, to infuse it into all the hidden recesses of the soul, one needs the quality of heroism. The outer honors accorded by society strengthen the basis of heroism, which can show itself in full splendor after it has been purged of the abomination of pride.

6. The higher level of penitence whose essence is a holy enlightenment and a firm perception of the delight in God is the basis of the lower level of penitence, which consists of mending behavior, raising the refinement of one's temperament; the basis of the higher penitence is also the basis of the Torah in all its ramifications of roots and branches. If a person should judge that he cannot temporarily fulfill the claims of the lower level of penitence to completion, let him hasten to attend to the higher penitence. In the end he will attain his goal since inwardly he desires to complete both levels of penitence. In due time, the higher penitence will also lead him to

the lower penitence, which consists in hallowing the particularities of behavior and one's bodily characteristics, the cleansing of one's temperament and elevating one's natural disposition. Then his heart and his flesh will sing to the living God.

7. To the extent that a person is aware of his sins, the light of penitence shines with clarity on his soul. Though at the time he had not yet reached a firm resolve to repent in his heart and his will, the light hovers over him and acts to create in him a new being. Even the impediments to penitence diminish in potency and their damage is lessened to the extent that the person knows of them and does not ignore them. As a result of this, the light of penitence begins to shine on him, and the holiness of the higher joy robes itself in his soul's being. Gates hitherto shut begin to open for him, and in the end he will attain that high station in which all the steep places will be made straight. "Every valley will be raised and every mountain and hill will be lowered, and the rugged place will be leveled and the rough places will be turned into a plain" (Isa. 40:4).

8. A person who embarks on penitence may encounter in himself wrongs that impede his penitential efforts, because he feels that he cannot overcome them. But if he does not desist, and holds on to his penitential goal, he will finally succeed in renouncing those wrongs which impede his penitence. Then will the light of retroactive penitence be most potent in him. By its liberation from confinement, from the obstruction of the grave impediments, it will act with a mighty force, and it will become one of the most precious forms of penitence. It is such penitence that effects a breakthrough to render acceptable penitents deemed unworthy of acceptance, like Manasseh and his comrades.²¹ As the fully righteous is deemed unworthy of standing where a penitent

21. The reference is to King Manasseh of Judah who was notorious for his wrongdoings, for his idolatrous practices and his persecutions of the worshippers of God (cf. II Kings, 21: 1-18).

stands, so are ordinary penitents unworthy of standing where penitents who had to overcome impediments stand. Penitents who had to overcome impediments to penitence are to ordinary penitents like the fully righteous is to ordinary penitents.

The principle that is at work in the phenomenon of penitence also applies to prayer. There are conditions that impede prayer. But the person who sees himself confronted by those conditions but who nevertheless holds on firmly to the principle of prayer and calls to God at all times, will, in the end, find all those impediments receding. The illumination that emerges from the obstructions then moves forward with a mighty force, with a higher resolution, and hews a path for many "straying" prayers, his own and those of the world. It is precisely in such a person that the verse in Psalms (118:5) will find its fulfillment: "Out of my distress I called on the Lord, He answered me and set me free. The Lord is with me, I will not fear. What can men do unto me? The Lord has come to my help, and I shall see the fall of my enemies."

9. The desire for penitence, which always abides with a person, is the source of all his virtuous attributes. The depressing thought that is released from the deep domain of penitence is the source of joy. The basic disposition to penitence is inspired by the sense of the awesome perfection of the divine, and it is this that causes sin to be glaringly conspicuous. "You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence" (Ps. 90:8). The very realization that the feeling of being in a state of sin comes, in every case, as a result of a divine illumination acting on the soul—this very thought engenders endless joy and exaltation. The spiritual delight grows together with the depressed feeling in the heart of the one who is involved in the process of penitence. Penitence, according to this, effects liberation for the particular individual. As the divine illumination grows in him, he is liberated from every servitude to the alien forces that have come to dominate him. The whole community, too,

when it is ready to experience the desire for penitence, is at once liberated, through the divine illumination that exerts its influence upon it as a concomitant of the desire for penitence.

10. When one forgets the essence of one's own soul, when one distracts his mind from attending to the substantive content of his own inner life, everything becomes confused and uncertain. The primary role of penitence, which at once sheds light on the darkened zone, is for the person to return to himself, to the root of his soul. Then he will at once return to God, to the Soul of all souls. Then he will progress continually, higher and higher, in holiness and in purity. This is true whether we consider the individual, a whole people, or the whole of humanity, or whether we consider the mending of all existence, which always becomes damaged when it forgets itself. If one should envision that they sought to return to God, without setting themselves in order, this would be a deceptive penitence, through which God's name will be taken in vain. It is only through the great truth of returning to oneself that the person and the people, the world and all the worlds, the whole of existence, will return to their Creator, to be illumined by the light of life. This is the mystical meaning of the light of the Messiah, the manifestation of the soul of the universe, by whose illumination the world will return to the source of its being, and the light of God will be manifest on it. From the source of this mighty level of penitence will man draw the life of holiness embodied in penitence in its true authenticity.

11. Our people will be rebuilt and established, and be renewed in vitality in all aspects of its life through the expansion, vitalization, and perfection of its religious faith, its piety, that is, the divine dimension of its life. All the builders of the people will come to recognize this profound truth. Then they will call out with a mighty voice to themselves and to their people: "Let us go and return to the Lord." And this



return will be a true return. This return will be a base for heroic action. It will release strength and vitality to all the practical and spiritual concerns, to all the pursuits necessary for the rebuilding and perfection of our people, to reawaken it to life, and to make firm its position. Its eyes will open, its soul will be made pure, its light will shine, its horizon will be enlarged, and a born again people will arise, a great, mighty and numerous people will arise, bearing upon it the light of God, and the greatness of peoplehood. "It will arise like a lioness, and like a lion it will lift itself up" (Nu. 23:27).

12. The realization that a decline in the moral state impedes the flowering of literature is a feeling unique to the Jewish people. Only we realize in truth that in order to improve the quality of literature, there is a necessary prerequisite, that the writers first cleanse their souls. We feel in ourselves the great need for penitence so that we might rise to the sublime heights of the noble literature that is uniquely ours, that stems from the wisdom of Israel, whose source is holiness and purity, faith and spiritual heroism.

Chapter Sixteen

The Roots of Penitence and Its Inner Action

1. The basis of penitence is an assessment of the state of the world. The roots of this assessment are above any particular assessment, just as the theory of numbers is above the actual numbers and their detailed configurations. For this reason the essence of the higher penitence is above any detailed assessment of one's condition; such assessment is its derivative. Thus a special installation for accounts was established outside Jerusalem, because Jerusalem itself was "the joy of all the earth" (Ps. 48:3), the place where one experienced the joy

of the higher penitence.²² Concerning this did Adam sing: "It is good to praise the Lord, to sing to Your name, O most High, for You have caused me to rejoice in Your work, I will exult in the work of Your hands" (Ps. 92: 1-2).²³ The latter sentence is to be read in conjunction with the following: "How great are Your works, O Lord, Your thoughts are very deep" (Ps. 92:5), beyond all assessment, for "His understanding is without limit" (Ps. 147:5). The above is higher than the category that declared: "How many are Your works, O Lord," a term subject to number that is relevant for earthly assessment, as stated: "The earth is full of Your possessions" (Ps. 104:24). But the basis of penitence at its source is described thus: "As heaven is above the earth is His mercy toward those who fear Him, as far as east is from west so far has He removed our sins from us" (Ps. 103:11-12). The inspiration to penitence always moves from above to below—from an ascent to a realm beyond assessment to a confrontation of assessment, and from below to above—from an involvement in assessment to the realm of "the lovely everlasting hills" (Gen. 49:26), which was "before the mountains were brought forth" (Ps. 90:2), when "He weighed the mountains in a balance, and the hills in scales" (Isa. 40:12), "for from everlasting to everlasting You are God, You bring man to contrition, saying, Return, you children of man" (Ps. 90:2-3).

2. One of the foundations of penitence, in human thought, is a person's recognition of responsibility for his actions, which derives from a belief in man's free will. This is also the substance of the confession that is part of the commandment of penitence, in which the person acknowledges that no other cause is to be blamed for his misdeed and its

22. Kook gives a new turn to the statement in Midrash Exodus Rabbah, end, that commercial accounts were kept outside Jerusalem because the disturbing uncertainties of the market place were not to mar the peace of Jerusalem.

23. Rabbi Kook alludes here to a Midrashic statement that this psalm was composed by Adam after he had experienced the grace of God's forgiveness.

consequences but he himself. Thus he clarifies to himself his free will and his competence to order his life and his behavior. Thereby he clears the way for returning to God, to renew his life in good order, recognizing that his success will hinge on his turning to the source of knowledge, which is part of the holiness of the light of the Torah, that restores the soul.

After we make it clear to ourselves that the problem of two seemingly contradictory concepts (involved in the issue of free will) pertains only to us, because of our finite minds, but does not pertain to the Creator of everything, the Lord of all laws, the cause of all causes, the source of all wisdom, the architect of all understanding, praised be He, we shall realize that there is room for the concept that man chooses and is free, and also for the one that asserts that he does not choose and is not free, and these matters are continuous with all the forces at work in existence. As long as man has not repented of his sin, has not yet arranged his order of penitence, he remains under the servitude of his own choice and his guilt for all his misdeeds, and all their evil consequences weigh on him. However, after the process of penitence has begun, all his life's deficiencies, all his misdeeds and their bitter results, are transferred into the divine domain and all are reassessed outside the factor of his own freedom and his choice; they are merged within the domain of the higher providence, the providence of God, who effectuated all our works.

All this applies to the evil side of one's behavior. The good side is totally related to man's freedom. As the penitential process is deepened, and the evil dimension of his behavior is severed from his zone of free choice and is surrendered to the higher domain where all is good, for "evil cannot abide with Him" (Ps. 5:5), the deeper becomes the attachment of his good side to his domain of free choice. Thus are the light and the spiritual riches of his life magnified now and for all time, and the person and to some extent all existence rises to greater heights. They are illumined with a higher perception of the

highest good, that a disposition for the good is the universal foundation, the beginning and the end of all existence. "The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works" (Ps. 145:9).

3. In unenlightened quarters of existence there prevails a false fear that extends to the souls of individuals and groups living under oppressive conditions and laws that impinge on their freedom. The penitent is afraid that his sins have already destroyed him, and he is without hope, without realizing that in his very fear lie hidden all the lights of his rescue. The earth itself was afraid and did not grow the tree to its perfection, that its taste be like the taste of its fruit; the moon was afraid of the competition of two kings serving with the same crown.²⁴ Humanity is afraid of the clear and exalted values of freedom; this world is afraid of the emergence of the world to come, which is robed in holiness. But the treasure of faith yields tranquillity, and the basis of fear disappears. "The name of the Lord is a mighty fortress, the righteous run to it and feel secure" (Prov. 18:10). In the holiness of faith the defects of all worlds and all who inhabit them will be mended. "Trust in the Lord always for the Lord God is an everlasting stronghold" (Isa. 26:4).

4. The gentle pain caused by the spirit of holiness and purity embodied in penitence yields a happiness of inestimable magnitude. In this condition man is immersed in the exciting thought of full remorse for all his sins, all his misdeeds and transgressions; his soul yearns with love for everything holy and perfect, it longs for its beloved, its Creator, the Creator of all things, praised be He; with all his heart and soul he seeks ardently to walk with integrity, to be a righteous person who performs acts of righteousness, to be upright and deal justly. Although at the time he may be perplexed how to extricate

24. An allusion to a Midrashic homily that God created sun and moon to shine with the same intensity, but the moon complained, and God diminished it, in Hullin 60a.

himself from the mire of sin, although he may still be unsure how to mend all his past and his course is not yet clearly marked out to him, with many stumbling blocks yet facing him, the will to be good—this is a wind from the Garden of Eden blowing on the soul and filling it with contentment, to a point that even the hellish fires of remorse are turned into a source of delight.

5. Penitence goes together with personal strength. Commenting on the verse "Happy is the man who fears the Lord" (Ps. 112:1), the Rabbis state: "Happy is one who repents while a man" (Avodah Zarah 19a). The context suggests that this means: "Happy is one who is a man [in full strength] when he repents."

6. The pain experienced when one approaches some holy act derives from the fact that at such time the soul is in a state of greater illumination and is more keenly aware of what absolute perfection involves. As a result, it realizes its own limitations and nothingness, and becomes embittered at the circumstances responsible for its lack of strength and vision. But in truth this is the basis for penitence out of love, and every sensitive person should be able to accept this bitterness with a glad heart. The depth of pain will then be changed to the substance of a higher pleasure, in which is manifest an abundance of holy delight.

7. Penitence does not come to embitter life but to make it more pleasurable. The joy of life resulting from penitence emerges out of all those currents of bitterness in which the soul is entangled in its initial steps toward penitence. This is the creative higher prowess, to know that sweetness is drawn from all bitterness, life from all the pangs of death, abiding delights from every disease and pain. This abiding truth registers increasingly in our minds, our feelings, our physical and spiritual natures. The person becomes a new being, and he releases with a resolute spirit the vibrations of a new way of life on all about him. He brings to his generation and to future

generations the glad tidings of joy for the upright, the joy of song out of faith in redemption, with celebration and acclaim. "The humble will increase their joy in the Lord, and the needy ones will exult in the Holy One of Israel" (Isa. 29:19).

8. Full penitence registers two seemingly contradictory effects on the soul: on the one hand anxiety and grief over the sins and the evil in oneself, and on the other hand confidence and satisfaction over the good, since it is impossible for the person not to discover some element of good in himself. Even if at times his assessment is confused and he cannot find anything good in himself, the very realization that sin and evil have produced in him anxiety and distress is itself of great merit. He should be happy, confident and full of vitality because of this measure of good. Thus even while seriously troubled by the emotion of penitence, he should be full of vitality, girded with the zeal for achievement and the joy of life and the readiness to experience its blessing.

9. Penitence in thought precedes penitence in action and penitence in the hidden realm of the will precedes penitence in thought. Penitence in the hidden realm of the will is always penitence out of love, even in the case of those whose penitence in thought is inspired by fear.

10. The higher penitence, the intellectual and the emotional, embraces within itself all lower forms of penitence, with all the details of their arduous self-searching on a spiritual level, in a manner that is gentle and agreeable.

11. A master of the Torah can only repent according to the norm represented by the Torah, and a master of the spiritual life can only repent according to the norm represented by the spiritual life. If a master in Torah should say, I will fast and this will be my penance, his words are meaningless and a dog might as well eat his leftover meal. If a master of the spiritual life should say, I will repent by performing scrupulously some physical, outer act, this is for him no penitence. His penitence must be free, on a high spiritual, refined level,

abounding in the light of the holy of holies, adorned with the elements of the higher life. Then it will bring healing to him and to the world.

12. Penitence has two aspects that we embrace under the categories of higher and lower penitence. The higher penitence is intended for oneself, and the lower is for the world. The one that relates to the inner life of the person himself is always on a higher plane than the one that is directed outwardly. Many a person, when embarking on personal penitence, will require more reflection and to that extent he will diminish his study, he will have to increase his conceptual pursuit and as a result reduce his activities. His primary concern will be to refine his inner being so that he may be cleansed and truly free. All this applies to the higher penitence, the penitence directed to oneself. It is otherwise with the lower penitence, the penitence intended for the world. Here the opposite process prevails, and the necessity is to increase the involvement in study and action, though thereby reducing the attention to thought. At times the very act of reducing the brilliance of thought is a service to the world. The outer world does not grasp thought as it emanates from the divine realm and the logical process operating in full clarity. It is precisely by dulling thought that one can reach the world more readily. It is important to know, however, that we are summoned to embrace both levels of penitence together, and that the lower penitence is like the body or the vessel for the higher. It is necessary to arrange the two in such a way that every gesture of higher penitence will also stimulate the lower penitence to move in a higher direction, and every movement of lower penitence lend added strength to the higher penitence. In their outer forms these two seem to be contradictory, but in their inner essence they are as two lovers who are inseparable.

13. The righteous who have been graced with illumination, who see the whole world in the perspective of the good,

justify everything. In the purity of their illumination, and in their fervor for the good, they remove the defects of the world and every form of wickedness from the source. They see the folly and evil in the world as veils, which only facilitate the shining light, making it possible for the light to illumine our world, but they do not damage or destroy it. This is needed because of the nature of the light itself. A limited holy light would not require dimmers to make possible the enjoyment of its illumination. From its perspective, all coarseness, all materialistic inclinations, and certainly all wickedness and folly are real defects, perverse and sickening, and the soul is soiled by them; the self is filled with indignation and is enfeebled by this existence. It is otherwise with the truly righteous, the masters of pure, divine enlightenment, the men of pure will in whom abides the glow of a higher light. They recognize that the pure light is too potent for the world to bear, and yet it must shine in the world! It is therefore necessary, because of the nature of the world, that there be many veils to screen the light, and these veils are evil and its ramifications. It thus turns out that the latter are included in the providential order of the world. The pain induced by this condition is the pain suffered by the people of limited light who cannot see how all evil is only a veil to facilitate the shining of the light. It is for this reason that the Messiah will come to direct the righteous toward penitence. When these righteous will ascend to the higher penitence it will become clear to them that the great light is infinite and that it is manifest in the world as an expression of great mercy, and that, were it not for the many veils formed by all kinds of wickedness, physical and spiritual, the world would be blurred by excessive light. As a result everything turns out to be a necessary element in the perfection of the world; all the wicked will be reformed and turned toward the good, having become aware of their function. The primary reason for the punishment meted out to the wicked is that they caused pain to the righteous in the world

of finitude. The righteous who stand in the broad realm of the divine come and liberate the wicked from the narrow pit, and all is turned to firmness and joy. "Passing through the valley of fears, they make it into a place of springs; the early rain clothes it with blessing. They go from strength to strength, every one of them comes before God in Zion" (Ps. 84: 7-8).

Chapter Seventeen

The Great Revelation of Penitence in the Life of the Jewish People and Its Revival in Our Lord

1. The revival of the nation is the foundation of the great penitence, the higher penitence of the Jewish people, and the penitence of the world that will follow it.

2. When one desires truly to repent, he may be held back by many impediments, such as mental confusion, or weakness, or the inability to mend some misdeed in the area of human relations. The hindrance may be very great, and he will necessarily suffer heartbreak because he knows the great obligation facing a person to mend his defects, in the best and most complete manner possible. However, since his desire to repent is firm, even if he cannot as yet overcome all the impediments, he must accept the reality of illumination of the will to penitence as the force that purifies and sanctifies, and not allow himself to be swayed by obstructions that have not allowed him to complete the process of penitence. He should reach out to every type of spiritual elevation appropriate for him, on the basis of the holiness of his soul and its holy desire. And as this is true in the case of the individual, it is also true in the case of the community as a whole. There is at work an illumination of penitence in the Jewish people. The renewal of the desire in the people as a whole to return to its land, to its essence, to its spirit and way of life—in truth, there is a

light of penitence in all this. Truly this comes to expression in the Torah: "And you shall return to the Lord your God" (Deut. 30:2); "When you return to the Lord your God" (Deut. 30:10).²⁵ The penitence spoken of is always an inner penitence, but it is covered over by many screens. No impediments or lack of completion can keep the higher light from reaching us.

3. Out of the worldly, too, will emerge the holy, and out of the brazen libertarianism will also emerge the beloved yoke. Golden chains will be woven and arise out of the poetry of free thinkers and a luminous penitence will also arise from the secular literature. This will be the great wonder of the vision of redemption. Let the bud come forth, let the flower bloom, let the fruit ripen, and the whole world will know that the holy spirit is speaking in the community of Israel, in all the manifestations of its spirit. All this will culminate in a penitence that will bring healing and redemption to the world.

4. There has been a rejection of the concept of nature as taught in Judaism and this is responsible for all our confusion in thinking. People try to be wise, and find in speculation and logic what one must find in the nature of being, in the nature of the physical and of the spiritual, in the collective life of the people, and of every individual Jew. This is a violation of the covenant, an abandonment of the Judaic nature in action, in imagination, in feeling and in thought, in will and in existence. There is no other therapy for those who violate the covenant than a return to the covenant, which is firmly linked with the people of Israel. "Return to Me and I will return to you" (Mal. 3:7).

5. The feelings of penitence in all their splendor with all their most profound disturbance of the spirit must come to expression in literature, so that the generation of the rena-

²⁵ Interspersed between these verses are verses that speak of the restoration of the people to their land.

sance will understand in the depths of its being the significance of penitence as a living and vital force, and it will return and find healing. There will surely arise for us a poet of penitence, who will be a poet of life, a poet of rebirth, the poet of our national soul on the way toward redemption.

6. We are delayed on the path toward perfection and we neglect it, because we feel an excessive anxiety when the thought of penitence occurs to us. We feel anguished and feeble because of the disturbing impact of penitence, and for this very reason we push away from our minds this thought that is the source of every happiness, with the result that we remain straying in the wilderness of life. But this condition cannot last. We must gird ourselves with spiritual strength, with the might of the song of penitence. All its engendered distress must be turned to a vibrant song that revives, strengthens, comforts and heals. Then will we have penitence with all its associated reflections as one sweet, pleasant whole, in which we shall meditate always and according to which we shall order every step in life, for our individual and our collective good, in this world and in the next, for the redemption of the individual and of society as a whole, for the renewal of the people and its return from captivity, as in ancient days.

The Moral Principles