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## Chapter six

### *How to live*

Modern thinking has often lost its way by separating the problem of truth from the problem of living, cognition from man's total situation. Such separation has resulted in reason's isolationism, in utopian and irrelevant conceptions of man. Reflection alone will not procure self-understanding. The human situation is disclosed in the thick of living. The deed is the distillation of the self. We can display no initiative, no freedom in sheer being; our responsibility is in living.

Where does man come upon himself most directly? Is it in abstract self-consciousness, in the generality of "knowing that I am," of "knowing that I think"? Man encounters himself, he is surprised to know himself, in the words he utters, in the deeds he does, and above all in living as an answer.

It is living rather than sheer being that comes close to man's realness. Being may be applied to a dead horse, but it is the living man we are concerned with. Indeed, the categories used in describing both human being and being human are all the fruits of living.

As sheer being man dissolves in anonymity. But man is not only being, he is also living, and if he were simply to "sur-

render to being," as Heidegger calls upon us to do, he would abdicate his power to decide and reduce his living to being.

To be is both passive and intransitive. In living, man relates himself actively to the world. Deeds are the language of living, articulating the uniqueness of human being, the insights of being human.

The decisive form of human being is *human living*. Thus the proper theme for the study of man is the problem of living, of what to do with being. Living means putting being into shape, lending form to sheer being.

Human living is exceedingly common, exceedingly trite. The repetitiousness of doing, the stereotypes of speaking, deprive us of the dignity of living. Our ability to lend form to our being depends upon our understanding of the singularity of human living.

There is no guarantee or assurance of attaining significant being. It is a mistake to assume that significant being is achieved unwittingly, to let hours go on in order to arrive at the goals of living. Life is a battle for meaning which may be lost or won, totally or partially. What is at stake may be gambled away.

The root of creativity is discontent with mere being, with just being around in the world. Man is challenged not to surrender to mere being. Being is to be surpassed by living. The problem is how to live my being explicitly. Being human is living-in-the-world.

Insufficiency of mere being drives man to more-than-being, *to bring into being*, to come into meaning. We transcend being by bringing into being—thoughts, things, offspring, deeds.

If man's quest for supreme meaning is valid and required

by the truth of being human, and if that quest can only go on by relating oneself to transcendent meaning, then we must affirm the validity and requiredness of man's relating himself to transcendent meaning.

Man's plight, as said above, is not due to the fear of non-being, to the fear of death, but to the fear of living, because all living is branded with the unerasable shock at absurdity, cruelty, and callousness experienced in the past. A human being is a being in fear of pain, in fear of being put to shame.

Anguish is partly rooted in being human and partly due to misconceptions about one's own being as well as to social incompatibilities. The fear of living arises most commonly out of experiences of failure or insult, of having gone astray or having been rebuffed. It is rooted not in being but in the living of our being, in the encounter with other human beings, in not knowing how to be with other beings, in the inability or refusal to communicate, but above all in the failure to live in complete involvement with what transcends our living.

Our failure is due to our regarding the realm of values as a superstructure of existence, deriving the "ought" from the "is," "norms" from "facts," spirit from nature, requirement from measurement.

Human being shares the being of all beings, just as champagne and shoe polish, cheesecake and pebbles. Being human, however, cannot be classified or placed in the series of other beings. Being human, as said above, is an act not a thing. Its chief characteristic is not being but what is done with being.

Being human is the humanization of being, the transmutation of mute givenness. By being human man exceeds sheer being. Being is anonymous, silent. Humanization is articulation of meaning inherent in being.

In the ground of our being the awareness of participating in being does not offer any ultimate firmness. What drives us on mysteriously is the experience of being as an answer, an exclamation.

*To be is to obey*

Heidegger's rhetorical question, "Has the Dasein, as such, ever freely decided and will it ever be able to decide as to whether to come into existence or not?" has been answered long ago: "It is against your will that you are born, it is against your will that you live, and it is against your will that you are bound to give account. . . ." The transcendence of human being is disclosed here as life imposed upon, as imposition to give account, as imposition of freedom. The transcendence of being is commandment, being here and now is obedience.

I have not brought my being into being. Nor was I thrown into being. My being is obeying the saying "Let there be!"

Commandment and expectation lie dormant in the recesses of being and come to light in the consciousness of being human. What Adam hears first is a command.

Against the conception of the world as something just here, the Bible insists that the world is creation. Over all being stand the words: *Let there be!* And there was, and there is. *To be is to obey* the commandment of creation. God's word is at stake in being. There is a cosmic piety in sheer being. What endures as a response to a command.

Philosophically the primacy of creation over being means that the "ought" precedes the "is." The order of things goes back to an "order" of God.

Even evading metaphysical reflection about the ultimate

source of being, an individual will confess that being does not come about as a result of a will to be, since this would presuppose the being of a will. My own existence is not the result of my will to exist. At one moment my life came about, and it is a mysterious loyalty within my substance that keeps me in being.

Man's will to be cannot be separated from his ought to be. Human being completely independent of norm is a figment of the imagination.

The loss of the sense of significant being is due to the loss of the commandment of being. Being is obedience, a response. "Thou art" precedes "I am." I am because I am called upon to be.

Being, as said above, is not the only dimension in which human existence finds itself. Characteristic of human existence is the mutual involvement of being and meaning.

What I suggest is not that first there is neutral being and then values. Being created implies being born in value, being endowed with meaning, receiving value. Living involves acceptance of meaning, obedience, and commitment.

### *Continuity*

A person is responsible for what he is, not only for what he does. The primary problem is not how to endow particular deeds with meaning but rather how to live one's total being, how to shape one's total existence as a pattern of meaning.

Is there a possibility of facing human existence as a whole from infancy to old age, or is man capable of living only in fractions, of going through moments unrelated to one another?

The problem of living may be defined as a problem of rec-

onciliation, of bringing about a *modus vivendi* for the self in relation to all that is, in the midst of which, and in relation to which, he exists; of coordinating the forces that operate in the domain of inner life.

Character education will remain ineffective if it is limited to the teaching of norms and principles. The concern must be not to instill timeless ideas but to cultivate the concrete person. Life is clay, and character is form. How to lend shape, to bring order into the complexity of my inner and outer life? How to coordinate impulses, drives, ambitions? How to simplify the self? The goal is to lend shape to existence, to endow all of life with form.

Right living is like a work of art, the product of a vision and of a wrestling with concrete situations.

We cannot, on the other hand, analyze man as a being only here and now. Not only here, because his situation is intentional with the situation of other men scattered far and wide all over the world. Not only now, because his total existence is, in a sense, a summation of past generations, a distillation of experiences and thoughts of his ancestors.

The authentic individual is neither an end nor a beginning but a link between ages, both memory and expectation. Every moment is a new beginning within a continuum of history. It is fallacious to segregate a moment and not to sense its involvement in both past and future. Humbly the past defers to the future, but it refuses to be discarded. Only he who is an heir is qualified to be a pioneer.

Self-abandonment, permissiveness, reduces existence to a process in which the power to create events is arrested. The wisdom of the individual is not sufficient for the appreciation of the ability to say "no" to oneself. If one fails to accept

the teaching of a tradition, one learns from cardinal experiences, from drastic failures or sudden outbursts of awareness, that self-denials are as important as self-satisfactions.

The teaching of our society is that more knowledge means more power, more civilization—more comfort. We should have insisted in the spirit of the prophetic vision that more knowledge should also mean more reverence, that more civilization should also mean less violence.

The failure of our culture is in demanding too little of the individual, in not realizing the correlation of rights and obligations, in not realizing that there are inalienable obligations as well as inalienable rights. Our civilization offers comfort in abundance and asks for very little in return. Ours is essentially a Yes education; there is little training in the art of saying “no” to oneself.

The most important ritual object is the altar, but the altars are being destroyed.

### *The precariousness of being human*

Being human is a most precarious condition. It is not a substance but a presence, a whisper calling in the wilderness. Man is hard of inner hearing, but he has sharp, avid eyes. The power he unlocks surpasses the power that he is, dazzling him. He has a capacity for extravagance, sumptuousness, presumption. His power is explosive. Human being is boundless, but being human is respect for bounds. The human situation may be characterized as a polarity of human being and being human.

Being human is an imposition of human being on human nature. It requires resistance to temptation, strength in facing frustration, refusal to submit to immediate satisfactions. It can

be discarded with ease and justify a confession: I am inhuman and everything human is alien to me.

There is a drive within us to resist the claim upon our conscience to cultivate existence in conformity with demands. The sense of indebtedness is first blunted and then swept away by pride and the love of property and power. All human and national relationships become reduced to one form only: some dominate, while others are dominated.

Man can be stiff-necked, callous, cruel, refusing to open himself, to hear, to see, to receive. Even the divine image can become converted into a satanic image.

Notwithstanding the inner tension between the claim to be human and the craving to be animal, the alternative is hardly realistic. Mankind has reached a point of no return to animality. Man turned beast becomes his opposite, a species *sui generis*. The opposite of the human is not the animal but the demonic.

Creation has not eliminated absurdity and nothingness. Darkness may be encountered everywhere, and the abyss of absurdity is always only one step away from us. There is always more than one path to go, and we are forced to be free—we are free against our will—and have the audacity to choose, rarely knowing how or why. Our failures glare like flashlights all the way, and what is right lies underground. We are in the minority in the total realm of being, and, with a genius for adjustment, we frequently seek to join the multitude. We are in the minority within our own nature, and in the agony and battle of passions we often choose to envy the beast. We behave as if the animal kingdom were our lost paradise, to which we are trying to return for moments of delight, believing that it is the animal state in which happiness con-

sists. We have an endless craving to be like the beast, a nostalgic admiration for the animal within us. According to a contemporary scientist: "Man's greatest tragedy occurred when he ceased to walk on all fours and cut himself off from the animal world by assuming an erect position. If man had continued to walk horizontally, and rabbits had learned to walk vertically, many of the world's ills would not exist."

Man is continuous both with the rest of organic nature and with the infinite outpouring of the spirit of God. A minority in the realm of being, he stands somewhere between God and the beasts. Unable to live alone, he must commune with either of the two.

Both Adam and the beasts were blessed by the Lord, but man was also charged with conquering the earth and dominating the beast. Man is always faced with the choice of listening either to God or to the snake. It is always easier to envy the beast, to worship a totem and be dominated by it, than to hearken to the Voice.

Our existence seesaws between animality and divinity, between that which is more and that which is less than humanity: below is evanescence, futility, and above is the open door of the divine exchequer where we lay up the sterling coin of piety and spirit, the immortal remains of our dying lives. We are constantly in the mills of death, but we are also the contemporaries of God.

Man is "a little lower than the Divine" (Psalm 8:5) and a little higher than the beasts. Like a pendulum he swings to and fro under the combined action of gravity and momentum, of the gravitation of selfishness and the momentum of the divine, of a vision beheld by God in the darkness of flesh and blood. We fail to understand the meaning of our exist-

tence when we disregard our commitments to that vision. Yet only eyes vigilant and fortified against the glaring and superficial can still perceive God's vision in the soul's horror-stricken night of human folly, falsehood, hatred, and malice.

Because of his immense power, man is potentially the most wicked of beings. He often has a passion for cruel deeds that only fear of God can soothe, suffocating flushes of envy that only holiness can ventilate.

If man is not more than human, then he is less than human. Man is but a short, critical stage between the animal and the spiritual. His state is one of constant wavering, of soaring or descending. Undeviating humanity is nonexistent. The emancipated man is yet to emerge.

Man is more than what he is to himself. In his reason he may be limited, in his will he may be wicked, yet he stands in a relation to God which he may betray but not sever and which constitutes the essential meaning of his life. He is the knot in which heaven and earth are interlaced.\*

Man's being a problem to himself is an expression of his being-challenged. The only exit from his plight is in realizing that his plight is a task rather than misery for misery's sake. We are both challenged and invited to answer what we face.

### *Being-challenged-in-the-world*

An isolated self, "consciousness in general," human nature in the sense of self-sufficient, spontaneous behavior, uninfluenced by intellectual and social factors, is an abstraction.

The pathology of the self will not be understood unless the power that evokes being human, the ultimate evocation of

\* See A. J. Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, pp. 210f.

the self, is properly understood. Boredom, for example, is a sickness of the self-consciousness, the result of one's inability to sense that vital evocation. Despair is due not to failures but to the inability to hear deeply and personally the challenge that confronts us.

How shall we account for this evocation in the heart of human being? Whence this concern for direction that transcends sheer being? It is, it seems, due to the fact that man in his very existence involves a commitment of which he is not conscious. This commitment is lodged neither in his memory nor in his subconscious, and yet it is operative and mysteriously present within existence.

To be sure, man has the power to suppress the challenge by stressing one drive above all others. This procedure often justified and hailed by an ideology amounts to the idolization of a particular drive. Yet, like all idolatry it is eventually abandoned. History is a vast panorama of idols worshiped and idols smashed.

The crisis of man is due to his failure to accept that challenge or, even when accepting it, to acknowledge it as the overriding problem of his total existence.

The world is a problem as well as a task. We find meaning by discovering that the problem is the task, in cultivating the art of sensing our part in the task, in the discovery that the world is a problem as well as an expectation.

Meaning insinuates itself into our existence. We cannot grab or conquer it, we can only be involved in it.

Human living is not simply being here and now, being around, a matter of fact; it is being in a dilemma, being cross-examined, called upon to answer. Man is not left alone.

Unlike the being of all other beings, man knows himself as

being exposed, challenged, judged, encountered. To be human is to be a problem. Is the wondering, wrestling, searching, and quandary a self-inflicted disease? Eliminate the challenge, the wrestling, and man will be deprived of his humanity. Being challenged is not man-made, an attitude, an awareness; it is an essential mode of his being.

The challenge comes upon me. The question is forced upon me. I seem unable to transcend my existence. Yet it is the question that transcends me, that upsets me. Whence does it come? Is it the structure of being human that has a built-in tendency to upset itself, to question itself?

To regard the awareness of being challenged as a myth is itself a myth. The human mind is capable of creating myths. But is the mind itself a myth?

Human living is being-challenged-in-the-world, not simply being-in-the-world. The world forces itself upon me, and there is no escape from it. Man is continuously exposed to it, challenged by it, to sense or to comprehend it. He cannot evade the world. It is as if the world were involved in man, had a stake in man.

The first thought a child becomes aware of is his being called, his being asked to respond or to act in a certain way. It is in acts of responding to demands made upon him that the child begins to find himself as part of both society and nature. Without the awareness of a task to be done, of a task waiting for him, man regards himself as an outcast. The content of the task we must acquire, the search for a task is given with consciousness.

The self is inescapably beset by the questions: What shall I do with my existence, with my being here and now? What does it mean to be alive? What does being alive imply for my

will and intelligence? Its most characteristic condition is discontent with sheer being, generated by a challenge which is not to be derived from being around, being-here-too; it questions and transcends human being. Just as consciousness always posits an idea, as Brentano and Husserl have shown, self-consciousness posits a challenge. Consciousness of the self comes about in being challenged, in being called upon, in the choice between refusal and response.

### *Requiredness*

Human living as being-challenged-in-the-world can be understood only in terms of requiredness, demand, and expectation. Significant living is an attempt to adjust to what is expected and required of a human being.

The sense of requiredness is as essential to being human as his capacity for reasoning. It is an error to equate the two as it is a distortion to derive the sense of requiredness from the capacity for reasoning.

The sense of requiredness is not an afterthought; it is given with being human; not added to it but rooted in it.

What is involved in authentic living is not only an intuition of meaning but a sensitivity to demand, not a purpose but an expectation. Sensitivity to demands is as inherent in being human as physiological functions are in human being.

A person is he of whom demands can be made, who has the capacity to respond to what is required, not only to satisfy his needs and desires. Only a human being is said to be responsible. Responsibility is not something man imputes to himself; he is a self by virtue of his capacity for responsibility, and he would cease to be a self if he were to be deprived of responsibility.

The qualities that constitute personhood, such as love, the passion for meaning, the capacity to praise, etc., can hardly be regarded as demands of reason, though reason must offer direction as to what is worthy of being loved or praised. Their justification is in their being required for being human.

Here is a basic difference between the Greek and the biblical conception of man. To the Greek mind, man is above all a rational being; rationality makes him compatible with the cosmos. To the biblical mind, man is above all a commanded being, a being of whom demands may be made. The central problem is not: What is being? but rather: What is required of me?

Greek philosophy began in a world without a supreme, living, one God. It could not accept the gods or the example of their conduct. Plato had to break with the gods and to ask: What is the good? And the problem of values was born. And it was the idea of values that took the place of God. Plato lets Socrates ask: What is good? Yet Moses' question was: What does God require of thee?

### *Indebtedness*

The most significant intellectual act is to decide what the most fundamental question is to live by.

Ontology inquires: What is being? Epistemology inquires: What is thinking? The heart of man inquires: What is expected of me? Or in the language of the Bible: What is required of me?

The source of insight is an awareness of being called upon to answer. Over and above personal problems, there is an objective challenge to overcome inequity, injustice, helplessness, suffering, carelessness, oppression. Over and above the din of

desires there is a calling, a demanding, a waiting, an expectation. There is a question that follows me wherever I turn. What is expected of me? What is demanded of me?

What we encounter is not only flowers and stars, mountains and walls. Over and above all things is a sublime expectation, a waiting for. With every child born a new expectation enters the world.

This is the most important experience in the life of every human being: something is asked of me. Every human being has had a moment in which he sensed a mysterious waiting for him. Meaning is found in responding to the demand, meaning is found in sensing the demand.

Indebtedness is given with our being human because our being is not simply being, our being is being created. Being created means, as said above, that the "ought" precedes the "is." The world is such that in its face one senses owingness rather than ownership. The world is such that in sensing its presence one must be responsive as well as responsible.

Indebtedness is given with our very being. It is not derived from conceptions; it lives in us as an awareness before it is conceptualized or clarified in content. It means having a task, being called. It experiences living as receiving, not only as taking. Its content is gratitude for a gift received. It is more than a biological give-and-take relationship.

Indebtedness is the pathos of being human, self-awareness of the self as committed; it is given with the awareness of existence. Man cannot think of himself as human without being conscious of his indebtedness. Thus it is not a mere feeling, but rather a constitutive feature of being human. To eradicate it would be to destroy what is human in man.

The sense of indebtedness, although present in the con-

sciousness of all men, is translated in a variety of ways: duty, obligation, allegiance, conscience, sacrifice. Yet the content and direction of these terms are subject to interpretation.

There is no authenticity to human existence without a sense of indebtedness, without an awareness of a point where man must transcend the self, his interests, his needs, without the realization that existence involves both utilization and celebration, satisfaction and exaltation.

Knowing is not due to coming upon something, naming and explaining it. Knowing is due to something forcing itself upon us.

Thought is a response to being rather than an invention. The world does not lie prostrate, waiting to be given order and coherence by the generosity of the human mind. Things are evocative. When conceits are silent and all words stand still, the world speaks. We must burn the clichés to clear the air for hearing. Conceptual clichés are counterfeit; preconceived notions are misfits. Knowledge involves love, care for the things we seek to know, longing, being-drawn-to, being overwhelmed.

### *The experience of being asked*

But to whom does man in his priceless and unbridled freedom owe anything? Where does the asking come from? To whom is he accountable?

Religion has been defined as a feeling of absolute dependence. We come closer to an understanding of religion by defining one of its roots as a sense of personal indebtedness. God is not only a power we depend on, He is a God who demands. Religion begins with the certainty that something is asked of us, that there are ends which are in need of us.



Unlike all other values, moral and religious ends evoke in us a sense of obligation. Thus religious living consists in serving ends that are in need of us. Man is a divine need, God is in need of man. Religion is not a feeling for the mystery of living, or a sense of awe, wonder, or fear, which is the root of religion; but rather the question *what to do* with the feeling for the mystery of living, what to do with awe, wonder, or fear. Thinking about God begins when we do not know any more how to wonder, how to fear, how to be in awe. For wonder is not a state of aesthetic enjoyment. Endless wonder is endless tension, a situation in which we are shocked at the inadequacy of our awe, at the weakness of our shock, as well as the state of being asked the ultimate question.

The soul is endowed with a sense of indebtedness, and wonder, awe, and fear unlock that sense of indebtedness. Wonder is the state of our being asked.

In spite of our pride, in spite of our acquisitiveness, we are driven by an awareness that something is asked of us; that we are asked to wonder, to revere, to think, and to live in a way compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living.

What gives birth to religion is not intellectual curiosity but the fact and experience of our being asked.

All that is left to us is a choice—to answer or to refuse to answer. Yet the more deeply we listen, the more we become stripped of the arrogance and callousness which alone would enable us to refuse. We carry a load of marvel, wishing to exchange it for the simplicity of knowing what to live for, a load which we can never lay down or continue to carry not knowing where.

If awe is rare, if wonder is dead, and the sense of mystery defunct, then the problem of what to do with awe, wonder,

and mystery does not exist, and one does not sense being asked. The awareness of being asked is easily repressed, for it is an echo of the intimation that is small and still. It will not, however, remain forever subdued. The day comes when the still small intimation becomes “like the wind and storm, fulfilling His word” (Psalm 148:8).

Indeed, the dead emptiness in the heart is unbearable to the living man. We cannot survive unless we know what is asked of us.

### *I am commanded—therefore I am*

No one will question the reality and authenticity of the being of a stone. Yet how does man recognize and establish the reality of being human? Is not being human an arbitrary imposition? I never question my animality. But is humanity intrinsic to my being? Is not the very concept of humanity an illusion, a conceit, or an epiphenomenon? *De omnibus dubitandum*. Of one thing, however, I am sure. There is a challenge that I can never evade, in moments of failure as in moments of achievement. Man is inescapably, essentially challenged on all levels of his existence. It is in his being challenged that he discovers himself as a human being. Do I exist as a human being? My answer is: *I am commanded—therefore I am*. There is a built-in *sense of indebtedness in the consciousness of man*, an awareness of *owing gratitude*, of being *called upon* at certain moments to reciprocate, to answer, to live in a way which is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living.

The ultimate validity of being human depends upon prophetic moments. If care, reciprocity, and the quest of man are self-induced or mere functions of the social organism, then

being human must be regarded as an experiment—that failed. The reality of being human depends upon man's sense of indebtedness being a response to transcendent requiredness.

Without such awareness man is spiritually inane, neither creative nor responsible. Man is a commanded being, coming into meaning in sensing the demand.

Failure to understand what is demanded of us is the source of anxiety. The acceptance of our existential debt is the prerequisite of sanity.

The world was not made by man. The earth is the Lord's, not a derelict. What we own, we owe. "How shall I ever repay to the Lord all his bounties to me!" (Psalm 116:12).

### *Embarrassment*

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might; but let him who glories glory in this: that he has a *sense of ultimate embarrassment*. How embarrassing for man to be the greatest miracle on earth and not to understand it! How embarrassing for man to live in the shadow of greatness and to ignore it, to be a contemporary of God and not to sense it. Religion depends upon what man does with his ultimate embarrassment. It is the awareness that the world is too great for him, the awareness of the grandeur and mystery of being, the awareness of being present at the unfolding of an inconceivable eternal saga.

Embarrassment is the awareness of an incongruity of character and challenge, of perceptivity and reality, of knowledge and understanding, of mystery and comprehension. Experiencing the evanescence of time, one realizes the absurdity of man's sense of sovereignty. In the face of the immense misery of the human species, one realizes the insufficiency of all hu-

man effort to relieve it. In the face of one's inner anguish, one realizes the fallacy of absolute expediency.

Embarrassment is a response to the discovery that in living we either replenish or frustrate a wondrous expectation. It involves an awareness of the grandeur of existence that may be wasted, of a waiting ignored, of unique moments missed. It is a protection against the outburst of the inner evils, against arrogance, *hybris*, self-deification. The end of embarrassment would be the end of humanity.

There is hardly a person who does not submit his soul to the beauty parlor, who does not employ the make-up of vanity in order to belie his embarrassment. It is only before God that we all stand naked.

Great is the challenge we face at every moment, sublime the occasion, every occasion. Here we are, contemporaries of God, some of His power at our disposal.

The honest man is humbled by the awareness that his highest qualities are but semiprecious; all ground for firmness is mud. Except for his will to cling to life, what is his abiding concern?

Embarrassment not only precedes religious commitment; it is the touchstone of religious existence. How embarrassing for man to have been created in the likeness of God and to be unable to recognize him! In the words of Job:

Lo, He passes by me and I see Him not;  
He moves on, but I do not perceive Him.

Job 9:11

The sense of embarrassment may be contrasted with the self-assurance of a nonreligious type: "I do not need a God to tell me how to live. I am a good person without going to the synagogue or church." A religious man could never say:

"I am a good person." Far from being satisfied with his conduct, he prays three times daily: "Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned."

I am afraid of people who are never embarrassed at their own pettiness, prejudices, envy, and conceit, never embarrassed at the profanation of life. A world full of grandeur has been converted into a carnival. There are slums, disease, and starvation all over the world, and we are building more luxurious hotels in Las Vegas. Social dynamics is no substitute for moral responsibility.

I shudder at the thought of a society ruled by people who are absolutely certain of their wisdom, by people to whom everything in the world is crystal-clear, whose minds know no mystery, no uncertainty.

What the world needs is a sense of embarrassment. Modern man has the power and the wealth to overcome poverty and disease, but he has no wisdom to overcome suspicion. We are guilty of misunderstanding the meaning of existence; we are guilty of distorting our goals and misrepresenting our souls. We are better than our assertions, more intricate, more profound than our theories maintain. Our thinking is behind the times.

What is the truth of being human? The lack of pretension, the acknowledgment of opaqueness, shortsightedness, inadequacy. But truth also demands rising, striving, for the goal is both within and beyond us. The truth of being human is gratitude; its secret is appreciation.

### *Celebration*

The power of being human is easily dissolved in the process of excessive trivialization. Banality and triteness, the by-prod-

ucts of repetitiveness, continue to strangle or corrode the sense of significant being. Submerged in everydayness, man begins to treat all hours alike. The days are drab, the nights revolt in the helplessness of despair. All moments are stillborn, all hours seem stale. There is neither wonder nor praise. What is left is disenchantment, the disintegration of being human.

How should one prevent the liquidation of one's power to experience everydayness as events? How should one ease the pressures of diluting human being to just being-around?

Events and the sense of surprise are not only inherent in the quintessence of reality and authentic consciousness, they are the points from which misunderstandings of human existence proceed. The question is not where is the event and what is the surprise, but how to see through the sham of routine, how to refute the falsehood of familiarity. Boredom is a spiritual disease, infectious and deadening, but curable.

The self is always in danger of being submerged in anonymity, of becoming a thing. To celebrate is to contemplate the singularity of the moment and to enhance the singularity of the self. What shall not be again.

The biblical words about the genesis of heaven and earth are not words of information but words of appreciation. The story of creation is not a description of how the world came into being but a song about the glory of the world's having come into being. "And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:25). This is the challenge: to reconcile God's view with our experience.

We, however, live on borrowed notions, rely on past perceptions, thrive on inertia, delight in relaxation. Insight is a strain, we shun it frequently or even permanently. The de-

mand, as understood in biblical religion, is to be alert and open to what is happening. What is, happens, comes about. Every moment is a new arrival, a new bestowal. How to welcome the moment? How to respond to the marvel?

The cardinal sin is in our failure not to sense the grandeur of the moment, the marvel and mystery of being, the possibility of quiet exaltation.

The secret of spiritual living is the power to praise. Praise is the harvest of love. Praise precedes faith. First we sing, then we believe. The fundamental issue is not faith but sensitivity and praise, being ready for faith.

To be overtaken with awe of God is not to entertain a feeling but to share in a spirit that permeates all being. "They all thank, they all praise, they all say: There is no one like God." As an act of personal recognition our praise would be fatuous; it is meaningful only as an act of joining in the endless song. We praise with the pebbles on the road which are like petrified amazement, with all the flowers and trees which look as if hypnotized in silent devotion.

To be human involves the ability to appreciate as well as the ability to give expression to appreciation. For thousands of years authentic existence included both manipulation and appreciation, utilization and celebration, both work and worship. In primitive society they were interdependent; in biblical religion they were interrelated. Today we face a different situation.

Man may forfeit his sense of the ineffable. To be alive is a commonplace; the sense of radical amazement is gone; the world is familiar, and familiarity does not breed exaltation or even appreciation. Deprived of the ability to praise, modern

man is forced to look for entertainment; entertainment is becoming compulsory.

The man of our time is losing the power of celebration. Instead of celebrating, he seeks to be amused or entertained. Celebration is an active state, an act of expressing reverence or appreciation. To be entertained is a passive state—it is to receive pleasure afforded by an amusing act or a spectacle. Entertainment is a diversion, a distraction of the attention of the mind from the preoccupations of daily living. Celebration is a confrontation, giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one's actions.

Celebration is an act of expressing respect or reverence for that which one needs or honors. In modern usage, the term suggests demonstrations, often public demonstrations, of joy and festivity, such as singing, shouting, speechmaking, feasting, and the like. Yet what I mean is not outward ceremony and public demonstration, but rather inward appreciation, lending spiritual form to everyday acts. Its essence is to call attention to the sublime or solemn aspects of living, to rise above the confines of consumption.

To celebrate is to share in a greater joy, to participate in an eternal drama. In acts of consumption the intention is to please our own selves; in acts of celebration the intention is to extol God, the spirit, the source of blessing.

What is the purpose of knowledge? We are conditioned to believe that the purpose of knowledge is to utilize the world. We forget that the purpose of knowledge is also to celebrate God. God is both present and absent. To celebrate is to invoke His presence concealed in His absence.

The mind is in search of rational coherence, the soul in quest of celebration. Knowledge is celebration. Truth is more

than equation of thing and thought. Truth transcends and unites both thing and thought. Truth is transcendence, its comprehension is loyalty.

To the sense of indebtedness, the meaning of existence lies in reciprocity. In receiving a pleasure, we must return a prayer; in attaining a success, we radiate compassion. The world is not mere material for exploitation. We have the right to consume because we have the power to celebrate.

Since indebtedness is an essential ingredient of existence, the inability to celebrate is a sign of insolvency, of an inability to pay the existential debt.

There is no celebration without earnestness, without solemnity and reverence.

We are losing the power of appreciation; we are losing the ability to sing. Celebration without appreciation is an artificial, impersonal ceremony. A renewal of our strength will depend on our ability to reopen forgotten resources.

The meaning of existence is experienced in moments of exaltation. Man must strive for the summit in order to survive on the ground. His norms must be higher than his behavior, his ends must surpass his needs. The security of existence lies in the exaltation of existence.

This is one of the rewards of being human: quiet exaltation, capability for celebration. It is expressed in a phrase which Rabbi Akiba offered to his disciples:

A song every day,  
A song every day.

Man in quest for an anchor in ultimate meaning is far from being a person shipwrecked who dreams of a palace while napping on the edge of an abyss. He is a person in full mas-



tery of his ship who has lost his direction because he failed to remember his destination. Man in his anxiety is a *messenger who forgot the message*.

It is an accepted fact that the Bible has given the world a new concept of God. What is not realized is the fact that the Bible has given the world a new vision of man. The Bible is not a book about God; it is a book about man.

From the perspective of the Bible:

Who is man? *A being in travail with God's dreams and designs*, with God's dream of a world redeemed, of reconciliation of heaven and earth, of a mankind which is truly His image, reflecting His wisdom, justice, and compassion. God's dream is not to be alone, to have mankind as a partner in the drama of continuous creation. By whatever we do, by every act we carry out, we either advance or obstruct the drama of redemption; we either reduce or enhance the power of evil.