

Books by
Abraham Joshua Heschel

THE WISDOM OF HESCHEL

A PASSION FOR TRUTH

ISRAEL: AN ECHO OF ETERNITY

THE INSECURITY OF FREEDOM

WHO IS MAN?

THEOLOGY OF ANCIENT JUDAISM
[two volumes]

THE SABBATH

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S

MAN'S QUEST FOR GOD

GOD IN SEARCH OF MAN

MAN IS NOT ALONE

MAIMONIDES

ABRAVANEL

THE QUEST FOR CERTAINTY IN
SAADIA'S PHILOSOPHY

THE PROPHETS

GOD

In Search of Man

A Philosophy of Judaism

Abraham Joshua Heschel

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX • NEW YORK

28 A Science of Deeds

THE SUPREME ACQUIESCENCE

Knowledge of God is knowledge of living with God. Israel's religious existence consists of three inner attitudes: engagement to the living God to whom we are accountable; engagement to Torah where His voice is audible; and engagement to His concern as expressed in mitsvot (commandments).

Engagement to God comes about in acts of the soul. Engagement to Torah is the result of study and communion with its words. Engagement to His concern comes about through attachment to the essentials of worship. Its meaning is disclosed in acts of worship.

If God were a theory, the study of theology would be the way to understand Him. But God is alive and in need of love and worship. This is why thinking of God is related to our worship. In an analogy of artistic understanding, we sing to Him before we are able to understand Him. We have to love in order to know. Unless we learn how to sing, unless we know how to love, we will never learn how to understand Him.

Jewish tradition interprets the words that Israel uttered at Sinai, "all that the Lord has spoken, we shall do and we shall hear" (Exodus 24:7), as a promise to fulfill His commands even before hearing them, as the *precedence of faith over knowledge*. "When at Sinai Israel said *we shall do and we shall hear* (instead of saying, we shall hear and we shall do), a heavenly voice went forth and exclaimed, "Who has revealed to My children this *mystery*, which

the ministering angels enact, to fulfill His word before they hear the voice."¹

A heretic, the Talmud reports, chided the Jews for the rashness in which he claimed they persisted. "First you should have listened; if the commandments were within your power of fulfillment, you should have accepted them; if beyond your power, rejected them." Indeed, Israel's *supreme acquiescence* at Sinai was an inversion, turning upside down the order of attitudes as conceived by our abstract thinking. Do we not always maintain that we must first explore a system before we decide to accept it? This order of inquiry is valid in regard to pure theory, to principles and rules, but it has limitations when applied to realms where thought and fact, the abstract and the concrete, theory and experience are inseparable. It would be futile, for example, to explore the meaning of music and abstain from listening to music. It would be just as futile to explore the Jewish thought from a distance, in self-detachment. Jewish thought is disclosed in Jewish living. This, therefore, is the way of religious existence. We do not explore first and decide afterwards whether to accept the Jewish way of living. We must accept in order to be able to explore. At the beginning is *the commitment, the supreme acquiescence*.

A LEAP OF ACTION

In our response to His will we perceive His presence in our deeds. His will is revealed in our doing. In carrying out a sacred deed we unseal the wells of faith. *As for me, I shall behold Thy face in righteousness* (Psalms 18:15).

There is a way that leads *from piety to faith*. Piety and faith are not necessarily concurrent. There can be acts of piety without faith. Faith is vision, sensitivity and attachment to God; piety is an attempt to attain such sensitivity and attachment. The gates of faith are not ajar, but the *mitsvah* is a key. By living as Jews we may attain our faith as Jews. We do not have faith because of deeds; we may attain faith through sacred deeds.

A philosophy of Judaism

A Jew is asked to take a *leap of action* rather than a *leap of thought*. He is asked to surpass his needs, to do more than he understands in order to understand more than he does. In carrying out the word of the Torah he is ushered into the presence of spiritual meaning. Through the ecstasy of deeds he learns to be certain of the hereness of God. Right living is a way to right thinking.

The sense of the ineffable, the participation in Torah and Israel, the leap of action—they all lead to the same goal. Callousness to the mystery of existence, detachment from Torah and Israel, cruelty and profanity of living, alienate the Jew from God. Response to the wonder, participation in Torah and Israel, discipline in daily life, bring us close to Him.

What commitments must precede the experience of such meaning? What convictions must persist to make such insights possible? Our way of living must be compatible with our essence as created in the likeness of God. We must beware lest our likeness be distorted and even forfeited. In our way of living we must remain true not only to our sense of power and beauty but also to our sense of the grandeur and mystery of existence. The true meaning of existence is disclosed in moments of living in the presence of God. The problem we face is: how can we live in a way which is in agreement with such convictions?

THE DEED IS THE RISK

How should man, a being created in the likeness of God, live? What way of living is compatible with the grandeur and mystery of living? It is a problem which man has always been anxious to ignore. Upon the pavement of the Roman city of Timgat an inscription was found which reads: "To hunt, to bathe, to gamble, to laugh, that is to live." Judaism is a reminder of the grandeur and earnestness of living.

In what dimension of existence does man become aware of the grandeur and earnestness of living? What are the occasions in which he discovers the nature of his own self? The necessity to diagnose

and to heal the condition of the soul? In the solitude of self-reflection the self may seem to be a fountain of beautiful thoughts and ideals. Yet thought may be a spell, and ideals may be worn like borrowed diadems.

It is in *deeds* that man becomes aware of what his life really is, of his power to harm and to hurt, to wreck and to ruin; of his ability to derive joy and to bestow it upon others; to relieve and to increase his own and other people's tensions. It is in the employment of his will, not in reflection, that he meets his own self as it is; not as he should like it to be. In his deeds man exposes his immanent as well as his suppressed desires, spelling even that which he cannot apprehend. What he may not dare to think, he often utters in deeds. The heart is revealed in the deeds.

The deed is the test, the trial, and the risk. What we perform may seem slight, but the aftermath is immense. An individual's misdeed can be the beginning of a nation's disaster. The sun goes down, but the deeds go on. Darkness is over all we have done. If man were able to survey at a glance all he has done in the course of his life, what would he feel? He would be terrified at the extent of his own power. To bind all we have done to our conscience or to our mind would be like trying to tie a torrent to a reed. Even a single deed generates an endless set of effects, initiating more than the most powerful man is able to master or to predict. A single deed may place the lives of countless men in the chains of its unpredictable effects. All we own is a passing intention, but what comes about will outlive and surpass our power. Gazing soberly at the world man is often overcome with a fear of action, a fear that, without knowledge of God's ways, turns to despair.

OUR ULTIMATE EMBARRASSMENT

The seriousness of doing surpasses the sensitivity of our conscience. Infinite are the consequences of our actions, yet finite is our wisdom. When man stands alone, his responsibility seems to vanish like a drop in the ocean of necessity. It is superhuman to be re-

God in search of man

sponsible for all that we do and for all that we fail to do, to answer for all the causalities of one's activities. How should we reconcile infinite responsibility with finite wisdom? How is responsibility possible?

Infinite responsibility without infinite wisdom and infinite power is our ultimate embarrassment.

Not things but deeds are the source of our sad perplexities. Confronted with a world of things, man unloosens a tide of deeds. The fabulous fact of man's ability to act, *the wonder of doing*, is no less amazing than the marvel of being. Ontology inquires: what is *being*? What does it mean to be? The religious mind ponders: what is *doing*? What does it mean to do? What is the relation between the doer and the deed? between doing and being? Is there a purpose to fulfill, a task to carry out?

"A man should always regard himself as though he were half guilty and half meritorious; if he performs one good deed, blessed is he for he moves the scale toward merit; if he commits one transgression, woe to him for he moves the scale toward guilt." Not only the individual but the whole world is in balance. One deed of an individual may decide the fate of the world. "If he performs one good deed, blessed is he for he moves the scale both for himself and for the entire world to the side of merit; if he commits one transgression, woe to him for he moves to the side of guilt himself and the whole world."²

A META-ETHICAL APPROACH

What ought we to do? How ought we to conduct our lives? These are basic questions of ethics. They are also questions of religion. Philosophy of religion must inquire: why do we ask these questions? Are they meaningful? On what grounds do we state them? To ethics, these are man's questions, necessitated by the nature of human existence. To religion, these are God's questions, and our answer to them concerns not only man but God.

"What ought I to do?" is according to Kant the basic question in

ethics. Ours, however, is a more radical, a meta-ethical approach. The ethical question refers to particular deeds; the meta-ethical question refers to all deeds. It deals with doing as such; not only what ought we to do, but what is our right to act at all? We are endowed with the ability to conquer and to control the forces of nature. In exercising power, we submit to our will a world that we did not create, invading realms that do not belong to us. Are we the kings of the universe or mere pirates? By whose grace, by what right, do we exploit, consume and enjoy the fruits of the trees, the blessings of the earth? Who is responsible for the power to exploit, for the privilege to consume?

It is not an academic problem but an issue we face at every moment. By the will alone man becomes the most destructive of all beings. This is our predicament: our power may become our undoing. We stand on a razor's edge. It is so easy to hurt, to destroy, to insult, to kill. Giving birth to one child is a mystery; bringing death to millions is but a skill. It is not quite within the power of the human will to generate life; it is quite within the power of the will to destroy life.

In the midst of such anxiety we are confronted with the claim of the Bible. The world is not all danger, and man is not alone. God endowed man with freedom, and He will share in our use of freedom. The earth is the Lord's, and God is in search of man. He endowed man with power to conquer the earth, and His honor is upon our faith. We abused His power, we betrayed His trust. We cannot expect Him to say, Though thou betrayest me, yet will I trust in thee.

Man is responsible for His deeds, and God is responsible for man's responsibility. He who is a life-giver must be a lawgiver. He shares in our responsibility. He is waiting to enter our deeds through our loyalty to His law. He may become a partner to our deeds.

God and man have a task in common as well as a common and mutual responsibility. The ultimate embarrassment is not a problem of solitary man but an intimate problem for both God and man. What is at stake is the meaning of God's creation, not only the

A philosophy of Judaism

meaning of man's existence. Religion is not a concern for man alone but a plea of God and a claim of man, God's expectation and man's aspiration. It is not an effort solely for the sake of man. Religion spells a task within the world of man, but its ends go far beyond. This is why the Bible proclaimed a law not only for man but for both God and man.

For Thou wilt light my lamp (Psalms 18:29). "The Holy One said to man: Thy lamp is in My hand, My lamp in Thine. Thy lamp is in Mine—as it is said: *The lamp of the Lord is the soul of man* (Proverbs 20:27). My lamp is in thine hand, to kindle the perpetual lamp. The Holy One said: If thou lightest My lamp, I will light thine."⁸

THE PARTNERSHIP OF GOD AND MAN

Just as man is not alone in what he *is*, he is not alone in what he *does*. A mitsvah is an act which God and man *have in common*. We say: "Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with *His* mitsvot." They oblige Him as well as us. Their fulfillment is not valued as an act performed in spite of "the evil drive," but as an act of *communion* with Him. The spirit of mitsvah is *togetherness*. We know, He is a partner to our act.

The oldest form of piety is expressed in the Bible as walking *with God*. Enoch, Noah, walked with God (Genesis 5:24; 6:9) "It has been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee: only to do justly, to love mercy and *to walk humbly with thy God*" (6:8). Only the egotist is confined to himself, a spiritual recluse. In carrying out a good deed it is impossible to be or to feel alone. To fulfill a mitsvah is to be a partisan, to enter into fellowship with His Will.

WAYS, NOT LAWS

The moral imperative was not disclosed for the first time through Abraham or Sinai. The criminality of murder was known to men

before; even the institution to rest on the seventh day was, according to tradition, familiar to Jews when still in Egypt. Nor was the idea of divine justice unknown. What was new was the idea that justice is an obligation to God, *His way* not only His demand;⁴ that injustice is not something God scorns when done by others but that which is the very opposite of God; that the rights of man are not legally protected interests of society but the sacred interests of God. He is not only the guardian of moral order, "the Judge of all the earth," but One who cannot act unjustly (Genesis 18:25). His favorite was not Nimrod, "the first man on earth to be a hero" (Genesis 10:9), but Abraham: "I have chosen him that he may charge his sons and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19). The Torah is primarily *divine ways* rather than *divine laws*. Moses prayed: "Let me know Thy ways" (Exodus 33:13). All that God asks of man was summarized: "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee . . . but to walk in all His ways" (Deuteronomy 10:12).

What does it mean, asked Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, when said: "Ye shall walk after the Lord your God"? (Deuteronomy 13:5). "Is it possible for a human being to walk after the *Shechinah*; has it not been said: For the Lord thy God is a devouring fire? But the meaning is to walk in the ways of the Lord. As He clothes the naked so do thou also clothe the naked; as He visited the sick, so do thou also visit the sick; as he comforted mourners, so do Thou also comfort mourners" (*Sotah* 14a).

THE DIVINITY OF DEEDS

Not particular acts but all acts, life itself, can be established as a link between man and God. But how can we presume that the platitudes of our actions have meaning to Him? How do we dare to say that deeds have the power to throng to Him? that human triteness can become attached to eternity?

The validity of science is based upon the premise that the struc-

God in search of man

ture of events in nature is intelligible, capable of being observed and described in rational terms. Only because of the analogy of the structure of the human mind to the inner structure of the universe is man able to discover the laws that govern its processes. What about events in the inner and moral life of man? Is there any realm to which they correspond? The prophets who knew how to take the divine measure of human deeds, to see the structure of the absolute light in the spectrum of a single event, sensed that correspondence. What a man does in his darkest corner is relevant to the Creator. In other words, as the rationality of natural events is assumed by science, so is the divinity of human deeds assumed by prophecy.*

Thus beyond the idea of the imitation of divinity goes the conviction of *the divinity of deeds*. Sacred acts, mitsvot, do not only imitate; they represent the Divine. The mitsvot are of the essence of God, more than worldly ways of complying with His will. Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai states: "Honor the mitsvot, for the mitsvot are My deputies, and a deputy is endowed with the authority of his principal. If you honor the mitsvot, it is as if you honored Me; if you dishonor them, it is as if you dishonored Me."⁵

The Bible speaks of man as having been created in the likeness of God, establishing the principle of *an analogy of being*. In his very being, man has something in common with God. Beyond the analogy of being, the Bible teaches the principle of *an analogy in acts*. Man may act in the likeness of God. It is this likeness of acts—"to walk in His ways"—that is the link by which man may come close to God. To live in such likeness is the essence of imitation of the Divine.

TO DO WHAT HE IS

In other religions, gods, heroes, priests are holy; to the Bible not only God but "the whole community is holy" (Numbers 16:3). "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, a holy people" (Exodus

* See above, p. 104.

19:6), was the reason for Israel's election, the meaning of its distinction. What obtains between man and God is not mere submission to His power or dependence upon His mercy. The plea is not to obey what He wills but to *do* what He *is*.

It is not said: Ye shall be full of awe for I am holy, but: Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy (Leviticus 19:2). How does a human being, "dust and ashes," turn holy? Through doing His mitsvot, His commandments. "The Holy God is sanctified through righteousness" (Isaiah 5:16). A man to be holy must fear his mother and father, keep the Sabbath, not turn to idols . . . nor deal falsely nor lie to one another . . . not curse the deaf nor put a stumbling-block before the blind . . . not be guilty of any injustice . . . not be a tale-bearer . . . not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor . . . not hate . . . not take vengeance nor bear any grudge . . . but love thy neighbor as thyself (Leviticus 19:3-18).

We live by the conviction that acts of goodness reflect the hidden light of His holiness. His light is above our minds but not beyond our will. It is within our power to mirror His unending love in deeds of kindness, like brooks that hold the sky.

LIKENESS IN DEEDS

Mitsvot, then, are more than reflections of a man's will or transcripts of his visions. In carrying out a sacred task we disclose a divine intention. With a sacred deed goes more than a stir of the heart. In a sacred deed, we echo God's suppressed chant; in loving we intone God's unfinished song. No image of the Supreme may be fashioned, save one: our own life as an image of His will. Man, formed in His likeness, was made to imitate His ways of mercy. He has delegated to man the power to act in His stead. We represent Him in relieving affliction, in granting joy. Striving for integrity, helping our fellow men; the urge to translate nature into spirit, volition into sacrifice, instinct into love; it is all an effort to represent Him.

"THE GOOD DRIVE"

To fulfill the will of God in deeds means to act *in the name of God*, not only *for the sake of God*; to carry out in acts what is potential to His will. He is in need of the work of man for the fulfillment of His ends in the world.

Human action is not the beginning. At the beginning is God's eternal expectation. There is an eternal cry in the world: *God is beseeching man* to answer, to return, to fulfill. Something is asked of man, of all men, at all times. In every act we either answer or defy, we either return or move away, we either fulfill or miss the goal. Life consists of endless opportunities to sanctify the profane, opportunities to redeem the power of God from the chain of potentialities, opportunities to serve spiritual ends.

As surely as we are driven to live, we are driven to serve spiritual ends that surpass our own interests. "The good drive" is not invented by society but is something which makes society possible; not an accidental function but of the very essence of man. We may lack a clear perception of its meaning, but we are moved by the horror of its violation. We are not only in need of God but also in need of serving His ends, and these ends are in need of us.

Mitsvot are not ideals, spiritual entities for ever suspended in eternity. They are commandments addressing every one of us. They are the ways in which God confronts us in particular moments. In the infinite world there is a task for me to accomplish. Not a general task, but a task for me, here and now. Mitsvot are *spiritual ends*, points of eternity in the flux of temporality.

ENDS IN NEED OF MAN

Man and spiritual ends stand in a relation of mutuality to each other. The relation in regard to selfish ends is one-sided: man is in need of eating bread, but the bread is not in need of being eaten. The relation is different in regard to spiritual ends: justice is something that ought to be done, justice is in need of man. The sense of

obligation expresses a situation, in which an ideal, as it were, is waiting to be attained. Spiritual ends come with a claim upon the person. They are imperative, not only impressive; demands, not abstract ideas. Esthetic values are experienced as objects of enjoyment, while religious acts are experienced as objects of commitments, as answers to the certainty that something is asked of us, expected of us. Religious ends are *in need of our deeds*.

A SCIENCE OF DEEDS

Judaism is not a science of nature but a science of what man ought to do with nature. It is concerned above all with the problem of living. It takes deeds more seriously than things. Jewish law is, in a sense, *a science of deeds*. Its main concern is not only how to worship Him at certain times but how to live with Him at all times. Every deed is a problem; there is a unique task at every moment. All of life at all moments is the problem and the task.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 28

¹ *Shabbat* 88a. See also the passage from *Midrash Hazita*, quoted in *Man is Not Alone*, p. 93.

² *Kiddushin* 40b.

³ *Leviticus Rabba* 31, 4.

⁴ "The ways of God differ from those of man; whereas man directs others to do a thing whilst he does nothing, God only tells Israel to do and to observe those things which He himself does." *Exodus Rabba* 30, 9. See *Jerushalmi Rosh Hashanah* 1,3, 7a.

⁵ *Tanhuma* to Genesis 46:28.

29 More than Inwardness

BY FAITH ALONE?

The claim of Judaism that religion and law are inseparable is difficult for many of us to comprehend. The difficulty may be explained by modern man's conception of the essence of religion. To the modern mind, religion is a state of the soul, inwardness; feeling rather than obedience, faith rather than action, spiritual rather than concrete. To Judaism, religion is not a feeling for something that is, but *an answer* to Him who is asking us to live in a certain way. It is in its very origin a consciousness of total commitment; a realization that all of life is not only man's but also God's sphere of interest.

"God asks for the heart."¹ Yet does he ask for the heart only? Is the right intention enough? Some doctrines insist that love is the sole condition for salvation (Sufi,² Bhakti-marga), stressing the importance of inwardness, of love or faith, to the exclusion of good works.

Paul waged a passionate battle against the power of law and proclaimed instead the religion of grace. Law, he claimed, cannot conquer sin, nor can righteousness be attained through works of law. A man is justified "by faith without the deeds of the law."³

That salvation is attained by faith alone was Luther's central thesis. The antinomian tendency resulted in the overemphasis of love and faith to the exclusion of good works.

The Formula of Concord of 1580, still valid in Protestantism, condemns the statement that good works are necessary to salvation and

rejects the doctrine that they are harmful to salvation. According to Ritschl, the doctrine of the merit of good deeds is an intruder in the domain of Christian theology; the only way of salvation is justification by faith. Barth, following Kierkegaard, voices Lutheran thoughts, when he claims that man's deeds are too sinful to be good. There are fundamentally no human deeds, which, because of their significance in this world, find favor in God's eyes. God can be approached through God alone.

THE ERROR OF FORMALISM

In trying to show that justice is not identical with our predilection or disposition, that it is independent of our interest and consent, we should not commit the common error of confounding the relation of man to justice with the relation of justice to man. For although it is true that we ought to do justice for its own sake, justice itself is for the sake of man. To define justice as that which is worth doing for its own sake is to define the motive, not the purpose. It is just the opposite: the good, unlike play, is never done for its own sake, but for a purpose. To think otherwise is to make an idol of an ideal; it is the beginning of fanaticism. Defining the good by the motive alone, equalizing the good with the good intention and ignoring the purpose and substance of the good action, is a half-truth.

Those who have only paid attention to the relation of man to the ideals, disregarding the relation of the ideals to man, have in their theories seen only the motive but not the purpose of either religion or morality. Echoing the Paulinian doctrine that man is saved by faith alone, Kant and his disciples taught that the essence of religion or morality would consist in an absolute quality of the soul or the will, regardless of the actions that may come out of it or the ends that may be attained. Accordingly, the value of a religious act would be determined wholly by the intensity of one's faith or by the rectitude of one's inner disposition. The intention, not the deed, the *how*, not the *what* of one's conduct, would be essential, and no motive

other than the sense of duty would be of any moral value. Thus acts of kindness, when not dictated by the sense of duty, are no better than cruelty, and compassion or regard for human happiness as such is looked upon as an ulterior motive. "I would not break my word even to save mankind!" exclaimed Fichte. His salvation and righteousness were apparently so much more important to him than the fate of all men that he would have destroyed mankind to save himself. Does not such an attitude illustrate the truth of the proverb, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions"? Should we not say that a concern with one's own salvation and righteousness that outweighs the regard for the welfare of one human being cannot be qualified as a good intention?

Judaism stresses the relevance of human deeds. It refuses to accept the principle that under all circumstances the intention determines the deed. However, the absence of the right intention does not necessarily vilify the goodness of a deed of charity.⁴ The good deeds of any man, to whatever nation or religion he may belong,⁵ even when done by a person who has never been reached by a prophet and who therefore acts on the basis of his own insight,⁶ will be rewarded by God.

NO DICHOTOMY

The cause of nearly all failures in human relations is this—that while we admire and extol the tasks, we fail to acquire the tools. Neither the naked hand nor the soul left to itself can effect much. It is by instruments that work is done. The soul needs them as much as the hand. And as the instruments of the hand either give motion or guide it, so the instruments of the soul supply either suggestions or cautions. The meaningfulness of the *mitsvot* consists in their being vehicles by which we advance on the road to spiritual ends.

Faith is not a silent treasure to be kept in the seclusion of the soul, but a mint in which to strike the coin of common deeds. It is

not enough to be dedicated in the soul, to consecrate moments in the stillness of contemplation.

The dichotomy of faith and works which presented such an important problem in Christian theology was never a problem in Judaism. To us, the basic problem is neither what is the right action nor what is the right intention. The basic problem is: what is right living? And life is indivisible. The inner sphere is never isolated from outward activities. Deed and thought are bound into one. All a person thinks and feels enters everything he does, and all he does is involved in everything he thinks and feels.

Spiritual aspirations are doomed to failure when we try to cultivate deeds at the expense of thoughts or thoughts at the expense of deeds. Is it the artist's inner vision or his wrestling with the stone that brings about a work of sculpture? Right living is like a work of art, the product of a vision and of a wrestling with concrete situations.

Judaism is averse to generalities, averse to looking for meaning in life detached from doing, as if the meaning were a separate entity. Its tendency is to make ideas convertible into deeds, to interpret metaphysical insights as patterns for action, to endow the most sublime principles with bearing upon everyday conduct. In its tradition, the abstract became concrete, the absolute historic. By enacting the holy on the stage of concrete living, we perceive our kinship with the divine, the presence of the divine. What cannot be grasped in reflection, we comprehend in deeds.

SPIRITUALITY IS NOT THE WAY

The world needs more than the secret holiness of individual inwardness. It needs more than sacred sentiments and good intentions. God asks for the heart because He needs the lives. It is by lives that the world will be redeemed, by lives that beat in concordance with God, by deeds that outbeat the finite charity of the human heart.

Man's power of action is less vague than his power of intention. And an action has intrinsic meaning; its value to the world is in-

God in search of man

dependent of what it means to the person performing it. The act of giving food to a helpless child is meaningful regardless of whether or not the moral intention is present. God asks for the heart, and we must spell our answer in terms of deeds.

It would be a device of conceit, if not presumption, to insist that purity of the heart is the exclusive test of piety. Perfect purity is something we rarely know how to obtain or how to retain. No one can claim to have purged all the dross even from his finest desire. The self is finite, but selfishness is infinite.

God asks for the heart, but the heart is oppressed with uncertainty in its own twilight. God asks for faith, and the heart is not sure of its own faith. It is good that there is a dawn of decision for the night of the heart; deeds to objectify faith, definite forms to verify belief.

The heart is often a lonely voice in the marketplace of living. Man may entertain lofty ideals and behave like the ass that, as the saying goes, "carries gold and eats thistles." The problem of the soul is how to live nobly in an animal environment; how to persuade and train the tongue and the senses to behave in agreement with the insights of the soul.

The integrity of life is not exclusively a thing of the heart; it implies more than consciousness of the moral law. The innermost chamber must be guarded at the uttermost outposts. Religion is not the same as spiritualism; what man does in his concrete, physical existence is directly relevant to the divine. Spirituality is the goal, not the way of man. In this world music is played on physical instruments, and to the Jew the mitsvot are the instruments on which the holy is carried out. If man were only mind, worship in thought would be the form in which to commune with God. But man is body and soul, and his goal is so to live that both "his heart and his flesh should sing to the living God."

But how do we know what the right deeds are? Is the knowledge of right and wrong to be derived by reason and conscience alone?

There are those who are ready to discard the message of the divine commands and call upon us to rely on our conscience. Man, we are told, is only under obligation to act in conformity with his reason and conscience, and must not be subjected to any laws except those which he imposes upon himself. Moral laws are attainable by reason and conscience, and there is no need for a lawgiver. God is necessary merely as a guarantee for the ultimate triumph of the moral effort.

The fallacy of the doctrine of autonomy is in equating man with "the good drive," and all of his nature with reason and conscience. Man's capacity for love and self-denial ("the good drive") does not constitute the totality of his nature. He is also inclined to love success, to adore the victors and to despise the vanquished. Those who call upon us to rely on our inner voice fail to realize that there is more than one voice within us, that the power of selfishness may easily subdue the pangs of conscience. The conscience, moreover, is often celebrated for what is beyond its ability. The conscience is not a legislative power, capable of teaching us what we ought to do but rather a preventive agency; a brake, not a guide; a fence, not a way. It raises its voice after a wrong deed has been committed, but often fails to give us direction in advance of our actions.

The individual's insight alone is unable to cope with all the problems of living. It is the guidance of tradition on which we must rely, and whose norms we must learn to interpret and to apply. We must learn not only the ends but also the means by which to realize the ends; not only the general laws but also the particular forms.

Judaism calls upon us to listen *not only* to the voice of the conscience but also to the norms of a heteronomous law. The good is not an abstract idea but a commandment, and the ultimate meaning of its fulfillment is in its being *an answer* to God.

Man had to be expelled from the Garden of Eden; he had to witness the murder of half of the human species by Cain out of envy; experience the catastrophe of the Flood; the confusion of the languages; slavery in Egypt and the wonder of the Exodus, to be ready to accept the law.

We believe that the Jew is committed to a divine law; that the ultimate standards are beyond man rather than within man. We believe that there is a law, the essence of which is derived from prophetic events, and the interpretation of which is in the hands of the sages.

We are taught that God gave man not only life but also a law. The supreme imperative is not merely to believe in God but to do the will of God. The classical code, *Turim*, begins with the words of Judah ben Tema: "Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion *to do* the will of your Father who is in heaven."⁷

What is *law*? A way of dealing with the most difficult of all problems: life. The law is a problem to him who thinks that life is a commonplace. *The law is an answer* to him who knows that *life is a problem*.

In Judaism allegiance to God involves a commitment to Jewish law, to a discipline, to specific obligations. These terms, against which modern man seems to feel an aversion, are in fact a part of civilized living. Every one of us who acknowledges allegiance to the state of which he is a citizen is committed to its law, and accepts the obligations it imposes upon him. His loyalty will on occasion prompt him to do even more than mere allegiance would demand. Indeed, the word loyalty is derived from the same root as legal, *ligo* which means "to be bound." Similarly, the word obligation comes from the Latin *obligo*, to bind, and denotes the state of being bound by a legal or moral tie.

The object of the prophets was to guide and to demand, not only to console and to reassure. Judaism is meaningless as an optional

attitude to be assumed at our convenience. To the Jewish mind life is a complex of obligations, and the fundamental category of Judaism is a *demand* rather than a *dogma*, a *commitment* rather than a feeling. *God's will* stands higher than *man's creed*. Reverence for the authority of the law is an expression of our love for God.

However, beyond His will is His love. The Torah was given to Israel as a sign of His love. To reciprocate that love we strive to attain *ahavat Torah*.

A degree of self-control is the prerequisite for creative living. Does not a work of art represent the triumph of form over inchoate matter? Emotion controlled by an idea? We suffer from the illusion of being mature as well as from a tendency to overestimate the degree of human perfectibility. No one is mature unless he has learned to be engaged in pursuits which require discipline and self-control, and human perfectibility is contingent upon the capacity for self-control.

When the mind is sore from bias and presumption, from its inability to halt the stream of overflowing vanity, from the imagination clawing in darkness toward silliness and sin, man begins to bless the Lord for the privilege of serving in faith and in agreement with His will. Time is never idle; life is running out; but the law takes us by our hand and leads us home to an order of eternity.

There are positive as well as negative mitzvot, actions as well as abstentions. Indeed, the sense for the holy is often expressed in terms of restrictions, just as the mystery of God is conveyed *via negationis*, in *negative theology* which claims we can never say what He is; we can only say what He is not. Inadequate would be our service if it consisted only of rituals and positive deeds which are so faulty and often abortive. Precious as positive deeds are, there are times when the silence of sacred abstentions is more articulate than the language of deeds.⁹

A SPIRITUAL ORDER

There is a sure way of missing the meaning of the law by either atomization or generalization, by seeing the parts without the whole or by seeing the whole without the parts.

It is impossible to understand the significance of single acts, detached from the total character of a life in which they are set. Acts are components of a whole and derive their character from the structure of the whole. There is an intimate relation between all acts and experiences of a person. Yet just as the parts are determined by the whole, the whole is determined by the parts. Consequently, the amputation of one part may affect the integrity of the entire structure, unless that part has outlived its vital role in the organic body of the whole.

Some people are so occupied collecting shreds and patches of the law, that they hardly think of weaving the pattern of the whole; others are so enchanted by the glamor of generalities, by the image of ideals, that while their eyes fly up, their actions remain below.

What we must try to avoid is not only the failure to observe a single mitzvah, but the loss of the whole, the loss of belonging to the spiritual order of Jewish living. The order of Jewish living is meant to be, not a set of rituals but an order of all man's existence, shaping all his traits, interests, and dispositions; not so much the performance of single acts, the taking of a step now and then, as the pursuit of a way, being on the way; not so much the acts of fulfilling as the state of being committed to the task, the belonging to an order in which single deeds, aggregates of religious feeling, sporadic sentiments, moral episodes become a part of a complete pattern.⁹

It is a distortion to reduce Judaism to a cult or system of ceremonies. The Torah is both the detail and the whole. As time and space are presupposed in any perception, so is the totality of life implied in every act of piety. There is an objective coherence that holds all episodes together. A man may commit a crime now and

teach mathematics effortlessly an hour later. But when a man prays, all he has done in his life enters his prayer.

A THEOLOGICAL EXAGGERATION

Jewish tradition does not maintain that every iota of the law was revealed to Moses at Sinai. This is an unwarranted extension of the rabbinic conception of revelation. "Could Moses have learned the whole Torah? Of the Torah it is said, *Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea* (Job 11:9); could then Moses have learned it in forty days? No, it was only the principles thereof (*klalim*) which God taught Moses."¹⁰

The Rabbis maintain that "things not revealed to Moses were revealed to Rabbi Akiba and his colleagues."¹¹ The role of the sages in interpreting the word of the Bible and their power to issue new ordinances are basic elements of Jewish belief, and something for which our sages found sanction in Deuteronomy 17:11. The Torah was compared to "a fountain which continually sends forth water, giving forth more than it absorbs. In the same sense, you can teach (or say) more Torah than you received at Sinai."¹²

In their intention to inspire greater joy and love of God, the Rabbis expanded the scope of the law, imposing more and more restrictions and prohibitions. "There is no generation in which the Rabbis do not add to the law."¹³ In the time of Moses, only what he had explicitly received at Sinai [the written law] was binding, plus several ordinances which he added for whatever reasons he saw fit. [However] the prophets, the Tannaim, and the rabbis of every generation [have continued to multiply these restrictions].¹⁴

The industrial civilization has profoundly affected the condition of man, and vast numbers of Jews loyal to Jewish law feel that many of the rabbinic restrictions tend to impede rather than to inspire greater joy and love of God.

In their zeal to carry out the ancient injunction, "make a hedge about the Torah," many Rabbis failed to heed the warning, "Do not consider the hedge more important than the vineyard." Exces-

A philosophy of Judaism

sive regard for the hedge may spell ruin for the vineyard.¹⁵ The vineyard is being trodden down. It is all but laid waste. Is this the time to insist upon the sanctity of the hedges? "Were the Torah given as a rigid immutable code of laws, Israel could not survive. . . . Moses exclaimed: Lord of the universe, let me know what is the law. And the Lord said: Rule by the principle of majority. . . . The law will be explained, now one way, now another, according to the perception of the majority of the *sages*."¹⁶

A great Jewish authority offers the following remarks on our theme:

How did the generations prior to Sinai attain spiritual integrity? How can we say that the patriarchs stood as high or higher than the community of Israel, since in their time the commandments were not yet given and so all their acts of piety could be voluntary service but not commandments? The Rabbis have taught that history can be divided into three periods: the age of chaos, the age of Torah, and the prelude of the Messiah. The patriarchs lived in an age of chaos during which His holy presence could only be found in a very veiled form. Yet despite the darkness and the barriers they were able to discern seven commandments. He who attains a little under such difficulties is counted as having as much merit as one who attains much in a time of plenty. Whoever was able to perceive and maintain the seven commandments of Noah during the age of chaos did as much as one who keeps all the Torah in a time when God's word was more full.

The power to observe depends on the situation. So in this age, we are not obligated to fulfill the laws of the Temple, and the little that we do is counted as equal with the observance of those who were able to fulfill the laws that were possible in the time of the Temple.

In the time of Abraham, it was not amiss to neglect the commandments, for the time for their fulfillment had not yet come. Each word and each deed of the law has its own time in which it can and must be kept.¹⁷

¹ *Sanhedrin* 106b.

² Ignaz Goldziher, *Vorlesinger ueber den Islam*, Heidelberg, 1910, pp. 167 ff; D. S. Margoliouth, "The Devil's Delusion of Ibn Al-Jauzi," *Islamic Culture*, x, (1936), p. 348. "The Brethren of the Free Spirit," who emerged in the thirteenth century, taught that God could best be served in freedom of spirit and that the sacraments and ordinances of the Church were not needed. "As man is essentially divine and is able through contemplation and withdrawal from things of sense to know himself united with God, he can in his freedom do what God does, and must act as God works in him. There is, therefore, for the free man neither virtue nor vice. God is all, and all is God, and all is His." "Such is the virtue of love and charity that whatever was done in their behalf could be no sin. . . . Have charity and do what thou pleasest." J. Herkless, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. II, pp. 842f; H. Ch. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition*, N. Y. 1909, vol. II, p. 321.

³ Romans 3:28. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is knowledge of sin." On the theological implications of the whole problem, see Z. La B. Cherbonnier, *Hardness of Heart*, New York, 1955, ch. XI.

⁴ Said Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah: "Scripture says (Deuteronomy 24:19), 'When you reap your harvest in your field, and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless and the widow.' You see, it states immediately afterwards, 'that the Lord your God may bless you.' Scripture thus gives the assurance of a blessing to one through whom a meritorious deed came about (the feeding of the stranger), though he had no knowledge of what he was doing (since he forgot to remove the sheaf from the field). You must now admit that if a Sela (a coin) was tied up in the skirt of one's garment and it fell from it and a poor man finds it and supports himself by it, the Holy One, blessed be He, gives the assurance of blessing to the man who has lost the Sela." *Sifra* to 5:17, ed. Weiss, p. 27a.

⁵ Halevi, *Kuzari* 1, III.

⁶ Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Book III, 17; see, however, *Mishnah Torah*, Melachim 8, 11.

⁷ *Abot* 5, 20.

⁸ A. J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, p. 15.

⁹ A. J. Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, ch. 4.

¹⁰ *Exodus Rabba* 41,6. Rabbi Simon ben Lakish did claim that the entire content of the Jewish lore was given to Moses at Sinai, *Berachot* 5a. However, Maimonides, in discussing the dogma of the Oral Law, maintains merely that the general forms of observing the Biblical laws, such as *sukkah*, *lulav*, *shofar*, *tsitsit*, originated in Moses, but not the countless details which arise in exceptional cases and which are extensively discussed in rabbinic literature.

¹¹ *Pesikta Rabbati*, ed. M. Friedmann, Wien, 1880, p. 64b; *Numbers Rabba*, 19. According to a medieval scholar, everyone who labors in the Torah for its own sake may discover meanings and laws "which were not given even to Moses at Sinai." Alfred Freimann, Yehiel, the father of Rabbenu Asher, on the study of the Torah, in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume*, New York, 1945, (Hebrew), p. 360.

God in search of man

¹² *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 21.

¹³ Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller, *Tosefot Yom Tov*, preface.

¹⁴ Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, *Shne Lubot Haberit*, p. 25b. See Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim*, 23, *sub humra*.

¹⁵ *Genesis Rabba* 19, 3.

¹⁶ *Jerushalmi Sanhedrin* IV, 22a. See *Pne Moshe*, ad locum; also *Midrash Tehillim*, ch. 12.

¹⁷ Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, *Shiur Komah*, Warsaw, 1885, p. 45f.

30 The Art of Being

ONLY DEEDS AND NOTHING ELSE?

Life arranged according to halacha looks like a mosaic of external deeds, and a superficial view may lead one to think that a person is judged exclusively by how many rituals or deeds of kindness he performs, by how strictly he observes the minutiae of the law, rather than by qualities of inwardness and devotion.

Does Judaism glorify outward action, regardless of intention and motive? Is it action it calls for rather than devotion? Is a person to be judged by what he *does* rather than by what he *is*? Is conduct alone important? Have the mitsvot nothing to say to the soul? Has the soul nothing to say through the mitsvot? We are commanded to carry out specific rituals, such as reciting twice a day "Hear O Israel . . ." or setting of the *tefillin* on arm and head. Are we merely commanded to *recite* "Hear O Israel . . . God is One," and not to *hear*? Is one's setting of the *tefillin* on head and arm merely a matter of external performance?

No religious act is properly fulfilled unless it is done with a willing heart and a craving soul. You cannot worship Him with your body, if you do not know how to worship Him in your soul.¹ The relationship between deed and inner devotion must be understood, as we shall see, in terms of polarity.

A CRY FOR CREATIVITY

Observance must not be reduced to external compliance with the law. Agreement of the heart with the spirit, not only with the

A philosophy of Judaism

letter of the law, is itself a requirement of the law. The goal is to live beyond the dictates of the law; to fulfill the eternal suddenly; to create goodness out of nothing, as it were.

The law, stiff with formality, is a *cry for creativity*; a call for nobility concealed in the form of commandments. It is not designed to be a yoke, a curb, a strait jacket for human action. Above all, the Torah asks for *love: thou shalt love thy God; thou shalt love thy neighbor*. All observance is training in the art of love. To forget that love is the purpose of all *mitsvot* is to vitiate their meaning. "Those who think that the performance is the main thing are mistaken. The main thing is the heart; what we do and what we say has only one purpose: to evoke the devotion of the heart. This is the essence and purpose of all mitsvot: to love Him wholeheartedly."²

"All ye do should be done out of love."³ The end of our readiness to obey is the ability to love. The law is given to be cherished, not merely to be complied with.

Jewish observance, it must be stressed, takes place on two levels. It consists of acts performed by the body in a clearly defined and tangible manner, and of acts of the soul carried out in a manner that is neither definable nor ostensible; of the right intention and of putting the right intention into action. Both body and soul must participate in carrying out a ritual, a law, an imperative, a *mitsvah*. Thoughts, feelings ensconced in the inwardness of man, deeds performed in the absence of the soul, are incomplete.

Judaism stresses the importance of a fixed pattern of deeds as well as that of spontaneity of devotion, quantity as well as quality of religious living, action as well as *kavanah*. A good deed consists not only in *what* but also in *how* we do it. Even those mitsvot which require for their fulfillment a concrete object and an external act call for inner acknowledgement, participation, understanding and the freedom of the heart.

It is true that the law speaks always of external performance and rarely of inner devotion. It does not rigorously insist upon *kavanah*. There is wisdom in this reticence. The Rabbis knew that man may be commanded to act in a certain way, but not to feel in a certain

way; that the actions of man may be regulated, but not his thoughts or emotions.

There are, therefore, no detailed laws of kavanah, and kavanah may, indeed, run dry in the mere halacha. To maintain the flow of kavanah we must keep alive the sense of the ineffable, that which lies beyond kavanah.

GOD ASKS FOR THE HEART

Jewish observance may be divided into two classes: into duties that call for both external performance and an act of the soul, and into duties that call only for an act of the soul. Thus the mind and the heart are never exempted from being engaged in the service of God. The number of precepts which call for external performance as well as for an act of the soul is limited; whereas the number of precepts which are exclusively duties of the heart to be carried out in the soul is endless.

We exalt the deed; we do not idolize external performance. The outward performance is but an aspect of the totality of a deed. Jewish literature dilates on the idea that every act of man hinges and rests on the intention and hidden sentiments of the heart, that the duties of the heart take precedence over the duties to fulfill the practical precepts. They are binding upon us "at all seasons, in all places, every hour, every moment, under all circumstances, as long as we have life and reason."⁴

No other area of observance required such strict adherence to formalities as the ritual at the Temple in Jerusalem. The description of the rules and customs according to which the ceremonies of sacrifice were conducted occupies almost a whole section of the Mishnah. Significantly, however, the two main tractates of that section begin with a statement about the inner attitude of the priest, stressing the principle that the validity of the ceremony depends first of all upon what goes on in the mind of the priest. Having set forth all the minutiae of the priest's performance, the editor of the Mishnah resumes the original principle and concludes the

God in search of man

second tractate with a statement that almost sounds like a proclamation: "It amounts to the same, whether one offers much or little—provided one directs his heart to heaven." The good Lord may pardon every one that directed his heart to seek God . . . though he was not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. (II Chronicles 30:18-19.)^{4a}

To the ancient Rabbis the pursuit of learning, of Torah, was one of the highest goals.⁵ Did that conception imply that in the eyes of God the scholar in the house of learning stood higher than the peasant in the field? It was a favorite saying of the scholars in Yavneh:

I am a creature of God,
My neighbor is also a creature of God;
My work is in the city,
His work is in the field;
I rise early to my work,
He rises early to his.
Just as he is not overbearing in his calling,
So am I not overbearing in my calling.
Perhaps thou sayest:
I do great things and he does small things!
We have learnt:
It matters not whether one does much or little,
If only he directs his heart to heaven.⁶

There is much that Judaism has to say to the mind and to the soul, and there is much that the mind and the soul must give to Judaism. There is no Judaism without love and fear, wonder and awe, faith and concern, knowledge and understanding.

"God asks for the heart," not only for deeds; for insight, not only for obedience; for understanding and knowledge of God, not only for acceptance.

Impersonal obedience is not what the Bible requires. The harshest words of the Book of Deuteronomy are directed against him who did not serve the Lord "with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart" (28:47). The ways of the Torah are "ways of pleasantness, and all

her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is everyone that holds her fast" (Proverbs 3:17-18). Must we not learn how to taste the joy, the pleasantness, the peace and the happiness that emanate from the Torah?

The main function of observance is not in imposing a discipline but in keeping us spiritually perceptive. Judaism is not interested in automatons. In its essence obedience is a form of imitating God. *That* we observe is obedience; *what* we observe is imitation of God.⁷

WHY KAVANAH?

If a deed is good in itself, why should it be considered imperfect if done without the participation of the soul? Why is kavanah necessary?

A moral deed unwittingly done may be relevant to the world because of the aid it renders unto others. Yet a deed without devotion, for all its effects on the lives of others, will leave the life of the doer unaffected. The true goal for man is *to be* what he *does*. The worth of a religion is the worth of the individuals living it. A mitsvah, therefore, is not mere doing but an act that embraces both the doer and the deed. The means may be external, but the end is personal. Your deeds be pure, so that ye shall be holy.

A hero is he who is greater than his feats, and a pious man is he who is greater than his rituals. The deed is definite, yet the task is infinite.

It is a distortion to say that Judaism consists exclusively of performing ritual or moral deeds, and to forget that the goal of all performing is in *transforming* the soul. Even before Israel was told in the Ten Commandments what *to do* it was told what *to be*: *a holy people*. To perform deeds of holiness is to absorb the holiness of deeds. We must learn how to be one with what we do. This is why in addition to halacha, *the science of deeds*, there is agada, *the art of being*.

A philosophy of Judaism

TO DO IN ORDER TO BE

Man is not for the sake of good deeds; the good deeds are for the sake of man. Judaism asks for more than works, for more than the *opus operatum*. The goal is not that a ceremony be *performed*; the goal is that man be *transformed*; to worship the Holy in order to be holy. The purpose of the mitsvot is *to sanctify* man.

The more we do for His sake, the more we receive for our sake. What ultimately counts most is not the scope of one's deeds but their impact upon the life of the soul. "He who does a mitsvah lights a lamp before God and endows his soul with more life."⁸

Man is more than what he does. What he does is spiritually a minimum of what he is. Deeds are outpourings, not the essence of the self. They may reflect or refine the self, but they remain the functions, not the substance of inner life. It is the inner life, however, which is our most urgent problem.

The Pentateuch consists of five books. The Code of Law (*Shulchan Aruch*) consists of only four books. Where is the missing part of the law? Answered Rabbi Israel of Rushin: the missing part is the person. Without the living participation of the person the law is incomplete.

The Torah has no glory if man remains apart. The goal is for man to be an incarnation of the Torah;⁹ for the Torah to be in man, in his soul and in his deeds.

THE IMMANENCE OF GOD IN DEEDS

Where is the presence, where is the glory of God to be found? It is found in the world ("the whole earth is full of His glory"), in the Bible, and in a sacred deed.

Do only the heavens declare the glory of God? It is deeply significant that Psalm 19 begins, "The heavens declare the glory of God," and concludes with a paean to the Torah and to the mitsvot. The world, the word, as well as the sacred deed are full of His glory. God is more immediately found in the Bible as well as in acts of

kindness and worship than in the mountains and forests. It is more meaningful for us to believe in the *immanence of God in deeds* than in the immanence of God in nature. Indeed, the concern of Judaism is primarily not how to find the presence of God in the world of things but how to let Him enter the ways in which we deal with things; how to be with Him in time, not only in space. This is why the mitsvah is a supreme source of religious insight and experience. The way to God is a way of God, and the mitsvah is a way of God, a way where the self-evidence of the Holy is disclosed. We have few words, but we know how to live in deeds that express God.

God is One, and His glory is One. And oneness means wholeness, indivisibility. His glory is not partly here and partly there; it is all here and all there. But here and now, in this world, the glory is concealed. It becomes revealed in a sacred deed, in a sacred moment, in a sacrificial deed. No one is lonely when doing a mitsvah, for a mitsvah is where God and man meet.

We do not meet Him in the way in which we meet things of space. To meet Him means to come upon an inner certainty of His realness, upon an awareness of His will. Such meeting, such presence, we experience in deeds.

TO BE PRESENT

The presence of God is a majestic expectation, to be sensed and retained and, when lost, to be regained and resumed. Time is the presence of God in the world.¹⁰ Every moment is His subtle arrival, and man's task is *to be present*. His presence is retained in moments in which *God is not alone*, in which we try to be present in His presence, to let Him enter our daily deeds, in which we coin our thoughts in the mint of eternity. The presence is not one realm and the sacred deed another; the sacred deed is the divine in disguise.¹¹

The destiny of man is to be a partner of God and a mitsvah is an act in which man is present, an act of participation; while sin is an act in which God is alone; an act of alienation.

God in search of man

Such acts of man's revelations of the divine are acts of redemption. The meaning of redemption is to reveal the holy that is concealed, to disclose the divine that is suppressed. Every man is called upon to be a redeemer, and redemption takes place every moment, every day.¹²

The meaning of Jewish law is disclosed when conceived as sacred prosody. The divine sings in our good deeds, the divine is disclosed in our sacred deeds. Our effort is but a counterpoint in the music of His will. In exposing our lives to God we discover the divine within ourselves and its accord with the divine beyond ourselves.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 30

¹ Bahya Ibn Paquda, *The Duties of the Heart*, ed. Haymson, New York, 1925, vol. I, p. 4.

² Hachayim, ms. Munich, in *Otsar Hasafrut*, vol. III, p. 66.

³ *Sifre* to Deuteronomy 11:13.

⁴ See Paquda, *The Duties of the Heart*, ed. Haymson, vol. I, p. 7.

^{4a} According to *Moed Katan* 9a, the Day of Atonement was not observed in the year in which Solomon's Temple was inaugurated, because the people were engaged in the joyous festivities of the consecration of the Temple. When the people felt perturbed because of their failure to observe the holy day, a voice from heaven came forth and announced: "All of you are destined for the life in the world to come."

⁵ *Mishnah Kiddushin* 4:14.

⁶ *Berachot* 17a. Yavneh was the seat of a famous academy of Talmudic learning, established by Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70.

⁷ The Talmud condemns the Pharisee who says, "What is my duty that I may perform it?" *Sotah* 22b. "God is not satisfied with deeds done merely in a spirit of obedience to a command; He wants mainly that the heart should be pure and aim to attain true worship. The heart is king and guide of the organs of the body. Hence, if the heart cannot persuade itself to worship God, the worship rendered by the other members of the body can have but little worth. Hence the verse, *My son, give me thy heart* (Proverbs 23:26)." M. H. Luzzatto, *Mesillat Yesbarim*, ed. M. M. Kaplan, p. 140.

⁸ *Exodus Rabba* 36, 3.

⁹ "The divine Torah should become the very essence of man, so that a person can no longer be conceived as man without Torah, as little as he can be conceived as man without having life." Rabbi Moshe Almosnino, *Tefillah Lemoshe*, p. 11a.

¹⁰ A. J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*, p. 100.

¹¹ "Shechinah is the mitsvah," *Tikkune Zohar*, VI; see *Zohar*, vol. I, p. 21a.

¹² See above, p. 50.

42 The Spirit of Judaism

THE MEANING OF SPIRIT

Religion becomes sinful when it begins to advocate the segregation of God, to forget that the true sanctuary has no walls. Religion has always suffered from the tendency to become an end in itself, to seclude the holy, to become parochial, self-indulgent, self-seeking; as if the task were not to ennoble human nature but to enhance the power and beauty of its institutions or to enlarge the body of doctrines. It has often done more to canonize prejudices than to wrestle for truth; to petrify the sacred than to sanctify the secular. Yet the task of religion is to be a challenge to the stabilization of values.

Deep in our hearts there is a perpetual temptation to worship the imposing; to make an idol of things dear to us. It is easy to adore the illustrious. It is easy to appreciate beauty, and hard to see through the masquerade of the ostentatious. Had a poet come to Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom, he would have written songs exalting its magnificent edifices, its beautiful temples and monuments of worldly glory. But Amos of Tekoa upon his visit to Samaria did not speak of the splendor of the "house of ivory" nor sing the praise of the palaces. Looking at them he saw nothing but moral confusion and oppression. Instead of being fascinated, he was appalled. "I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his palaces," he cried out in the name of the Lord. Was Amos not sensitive to beauty?

A philosophy of Judaism

We must not regard any human institution or object as being an end in itself. Man's achievements in this world are but attempts, and a temple that comes to mean more than a reminder of the living God is an abomination.

What is an idol? A thing, a force, a person, a group, an institution or an ideal, regarded as supreme. God alone is supreme.

The prophet abhors idolatry. He refuses to regard the instrumental as final, the temporal as ultimate. We must worship neither mankind nor nature, neither ideas nor ideals. Even evil should not be idolized, but instrumentalized. The evil urge does not spell doom; it can be integrated in the service of God. It was possible for Rabbi Meir to remark: "And God saw it was very good—very good is the evil urge."

Even the laws of the Torah are not absolutes.¹ Nothing is deified: neither power nor wisdom, neither heroes nor institutions. To ascribe divine qualities to all of these, to anything, sublime and lofty as it may be, is to distort both the idea it represents and the concept of the divine which we bestow upon it.

Having passed the abyss of paganism, Judaism is often a lonely, unperceived voice raised against man's converting instrumentals into finals. We are a challenge to the sovereignty of any one value: whether it be the ego, the state, nature, or beauty. Judaism has disturbed the inflexibility and isolationism of values, lifting the natural to the moral, dissolving the esthetic in the sacred, seeking to shape the human in the pattern of the divine. It has not only detested beauty when produced at the price of justice; it has rejected the ritual when performed by the morally corrupted. Even religion itself, worship, was not considered to be an absolute. "Your prayers are an abomination," said Isaiah to the exploiters of the poor. Stay away from the synagogue, wrote the Gaon of Wilna to his household, if you cannot abstain from envy and gossiping about the dresses of your fellow attendants.

Nothing exists for its own sake, nothing is valid by its own right. What seems to be a purpose is but a station on the road. All is set in the dimension of the holy. All is endowed with bearing on God.

To be a Jew is to renounce allegiance to false gods; to be sensitive to God's infinite stake in every finite situation; to bear witness to His presence in the hours of His concealment; to remember that the world is unredeemed. We are born to be an answer to His question. Our way is either a pilgrimage or a flight. We are chosen to remain free of infatuation with worldly triumphs, to retain independence of hysteria and deceptive glories; never to surrender to splendor, even at the price of remaining strangers to fashion.

This is what we mean by the term *spiritual*: It is the reference to the transcendent in our own existence, the direction of the Here toward the Beyond. It is the ecstatic force that stirs all our goals, redeeming values from the narrowness of being ends in themselves, turning arrivals into new pilgrimages, new farings forth. It is an all-pervading trend that both contains and transcends all values, a never-ending process, the upward movement of being. The spiritual is not something we own, but something we may share in. We do not possess it; we may be possessed by it. When we perceive it, it is as if our mind were gliding for a while with an eternal current, in which our ideas become knowledge swept beyond itself.

It is impossible to grasp spirit in itself. Spirit is a *direction*, the turning of all beings to God: *theotropism*. It is always more than—and superior to—what we are and know.

THE SPIRIT OF JUDAISM

Is there a unique expression for the spirit of Judaism? Is there a term that would convey its singular nature?

Let us turn to the text of the Ten Commandments, the most representative monument of Jewish teaching, and see whether such a term can be found. The Ten Commandments have been translated into all tongues, and its vocabulary has become part of the literature of all nations. Reading that famous text in any translation, Greek, Latin or English, we are struck by a surprising fact. All words of the Hebrew text have been easily rendered by English equivalents. There is a word for *pesel*: a graven image; there are words for

God in search of man

shamayim, for example, and *erets*: heaven and earth. The whole text has been faithfully translated into English and yet it reads as if it were originally written in English. But, lo and behold! There is one Hebrew word for which no English equivalent has been found and which remained untranslated: *Sabbath*. "Remember the Sabbath Day." In the Greek of the Septuagint we read *Sabbaton*; in the Latin of the Vulgate *Sabbatum*; in Aramaic *Shabbatha*; in the King James version the *Sabbath*.

Perhaps Sabbath is the idea that expresses what is most characteristic of Judaism.

What is the Sabbath?² A reminder of every man's royalty; an abolition of the distinction of master and slave, rich and poor, success and failure. To celebrate the Sabbath is to experience one's ultimate independence of civilization and society, of achievement and anxiety. The Sabbath is an embodiment of the belief that all men are equal and that equality of men means the nobility of men. The greatest sin of man is to forget that he is a prince.

The Sabbath is an assurance that the spirit is greater than the universe, that beyond the good is the holy. The universe was created in six days, but the climax of creation was the seventh day. Things that come into being in the six days are good, but the seventh day is holy. The Sabbath is *holiness in time*.

What is the Sabbath? The presence of eternity, a moment of majesty, the radiance of joy. The soul is enhanced, time is a delight, and inwardness a supreme reward. Indignation is felt to be a desecration of the day, and strife the suicide of one's additional soul. Man does not stand alone, he lives in the presence of the day.

THE ART OF SURPASSING CIVILIZATION

Lift up your eyes and see: who created these. Six days a week we are engaged in conquering the forces of nature, in the arts of civilization. The seventh day is dedicated to the remembrance of creation and the remembrance of redemption, to the liberation of Israel from Egypt, to the exodus from a great civilization into a

wilderness where the word of God was given. By our acts of labor during the six days we participate in the works of history; by sanctifying the seventh day we are reminded of the acts that surpass, ennoble and redeem history.

The world is contingent on creation, and the worth of history depends on redemption. To be a Jew is to affirm the world without being enslaved to it; to be a part of civilization and to go beyond it; to conquer space and to sanctify time. Judaism is *the art of surpassing civilization*, sanctification of time, sanctification of history.

Civilization is on trial. Its future will depend upon how much of the Sabbath will penetrate its spirit.

The Sabbath, as experienced by man, cannot survive in exile, a lonely stranger among days of profanity. It needs the companionship of the other days. All days of the week must be spiritually consistent with the seventh day. Even if we cannot reach a plane where all our life would be a pilgrimage to the seventh day, the thought and appreciation of what the day may bring to us should always be present in our minds. The Sabbath is the counterpoint of living; the melody sustained throughout all agitations and vicissitudes which menace our conscience; our awareness of God's presence in the world. It teaches us to sense the delights of spirit, the joys of the good, the grandeur of living in the face of eternity.

What the Sabbath is among the days, the consecrated man, the *talmid chacham*, is among us, the common people. The consecrated man is he who knows how to sanctify time. Not deceived by the splendor of space, he remains attentive to the divine tangent at the whirling wheel of living.

The Sabbath is more than a day, more than a name for a seventh part of the week. It is eternity within time, *the spiritual underground of history*.

In the language of the Jew, living *sub specie aeternitatis* means living *sub specie Sabbatis*. Every Friday eve we must kindle the lights in the soul, enhance our mercy, deepen our sensitivity.

The Sabbath is one day, *Shabbesdikeit* is what should permeate

A philosophy of Judaism

all our days. *Shabbesdikeit* is spirituality, the epitome and spirit of Judaism.

The great dream of Judaism is not to raise priests, but a people of priests; to consecrate all men, not only some men.

"And why was not the tribe of Levi granted a share in the land of Israel? . . . Because it was dedicated to the worship of God and His ministry. The vocation of the tribe of Levi was to teach the multitude the upright ways of the Lord and His righteous judgments. . . . But not the tribe of Levi alone was consecrated thus. Every human being born into this world whose spirit stirs him and whose intellect guides him to dedicate himself to the Lord in order to minister to Him and worship Him and to come to know Him, and who acts in conformity with God's design and disembroasses himself of the devious ways which men have sought out, becomes sanctified with supreme sanctity."⁸

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 42

¹ See above, p. 326.

² Compare A. J. Heschel, *The Sabbath*.

³ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Shemitah ve-Yobel, 13, 12-13.

43 The People Israel

THE MEANING OF JEWISH EXISTENCE

There is a high cost of living to be paid by a Jew. He has to be exalted in order to be normal in a world that is neither propitious for nor sympathetic to his survival. Some of us, tired of sacrifice and exertion, often wonder: Is Jewish existence worth the price? Others are overcome with panic; they are perplexed, and despair of recovery.

The meaning of Jewish existence, the major theme of any Jewish philosophy, is baffling. To fit it into the framework of personal intellectual predilections or current fashions of our time would be a distortion. The claim of Israel must be recognized *before* attempting an interpretation. As the ocean is more than what we know about it, so Judaism surpasses the content of all philosophies of it. We have not invented it. We may accept or reject, but should not distort it.

It is as an individual that I am moved by an anxiety for the meaning of my existence as a Jew. Yet when I begin to ponder about it, my theme is not the problem of one Jew but of all Jews. And the more deeply I probe, the more strongly I realize the scope of the problem: It embraces not only the Jews of the present but also those of the past and those of the future, the meaning of Jewish existence in all ages.

What is at stake in our lives is more than the fate of one generation. In this moment *we*, the living, are Israel. The tasks begun by

God in search of man

the patriarchs and prophets, and carried out by countless Jews of the past, are now entrusted to us. No other group has superseded them. We are the only channel of Jewish tradition, those who must save Judaism from oblivion, those who must hand over the entire past to the generations to come. We are either the last, the dying, Jews or else we are those who will give new life to our tradition. Rarely in our history has so much depended upon one generation. We will either forfeit or enrich the legacy of the ages.

THINKING COMPATIBLE WITH OUR DESTINY

Understanding Judaism cannot be attained in the comfort of playing a chess-game of theories. Only ideas that are meaningful to those who are steeped in misery may be accepted as principles by those who dwell in safety. In trying to understand Jewish existence a Jewish philosopher must look for agreement with the men of Sinai as well as with the people of Auschwitz.

We are the most challenged people under the sun. Our existence is either superfluous or indispensable to the world; it is either tragic or holy to be a Jew.

It is a matter of immense responsibility that we here and Jewish teachers everywhere have undertaken to instill in our youth the will to be Jews today, tomorrow and for ever and ever. Unless being a Jew is of absolute significance how can we justify the ultimate price which our people was often forced to pay throughout its history? To assess Judaism soberly and farsightedly is to establish it as a good to be preferred, if necessary, to any alternative which we may ever face.

The task of Jewish philosophy today, is not only to describe the essence but also to set forth the universal relevance of Judaism, the bearings of its demands upon the chance of man to remain human. Bringing to light the lonely splendor of Jewish thinking, conveying the taste of eternity in our daily living is the greatest aid we can render to the man of our time who has fallen so low that he is not even capable of being ashamed of what happened in his days.

We were not born by mere chance as a by-product of a migration of nations or in the obscurity of a primitive past. God's vision of Israel came first and only then did we come into the world. We were formed according to an intention and for the sake of a purpose. Our souls tremble with the echo of unforgettable experiences and with the sublime expectation of our own response. To be a Jew is to be committed to the experience of great ideas. The task of Jewish philosophy is to formulate not only these ideas but also the depth of that commitment in vivid, consistent thinking. The task of Jewish philosophy is *to make our thinking compatible with our destiny*.

Life appears dismal if not mirrored in what is more than life. Nothing can be regarded as valuable unless assessed in relation to something higher in value. Man's survival depends on the conviction that there is something that is worth the price of life. It depends upon a sense of the supremacy of what is lasting. That sense of conviction may be asleep, but it awakens when challenged. In some people it lives as a sporadic wish; in others it is a permanent concern.

What we have learned from Jewish history is that if a man is not more than human then he is less than human. Judaism is an attempt to prove that in order to be a man, you have to be more than a man, that in order to be a people we have to be more than a people. Israel was made to be a "holy people." This is the essence of its dignity and the essence of its merit. Judaism is a link to eternity, kinship with ultimate reality.

A sense of contact with the ultimate dawns upon most people when their self-reliance is swept away by violent misery. Judaism is the attempt to instill in us that sense as an everyday awareness. It leads us to regard injustice as a metaphysical calamity, to sense the divine significance of human happiness, to keep slightly above the twilight of the self, enabling us to sense the eternal within the temporal.

We are endowed with the consciousness of being involved in a history that transcends time and its specious glories. We are taught

A philosophy of Judaism

to feel the knots of life in which the trivial is intertwined with the sublime. There is no end to our experience of the spiritual grandeur, of the divine earnestness of human life. Our blossoms may be crushed, but we are upheld by the faith that comes from the core of our roots. We are not deceived by the obvious, knowing that all delight is but a pretext for adding strength to that which is beyond joy and grief. We know that no hour is the last hour, that the world is more than the world.

ISRAEL—A SPIRITUAL ORDER

Why is our belonging to the Jewish people a sacred relation? Israel is a *spiritual order* in which the human and the ultimate, the natural and the holy enter a lasting covenant, in which kinship with God is not an aspiration but a reality of destiny. For us Jews there can be no fellowship with God without the fellowship with the people Israel. Abandoning Israel, we desert God.

Jewish existence is not only the adherence to particular doctrines and observances, but primarily the living *in* the spiritual order of the Jewish people, the living *in* the Jews of the past and *with* the Jews of the present. It is not only a certain quality in the souls of the individuals, but primarily the existence of the community of Israel. It is neither an experience nor a creed, neither the possession of psychic traits nor the acceptance of a theological doctrine, but the living in a holy dimension, in a spiritual order. Our share in holiness we acquire by living in the Jewish community. What we do as individuals is a trivial episode, what we attain as Israel causes us to grow into the infinite.

The meaning of history is to be a sanctuary in time, and every one of us has his part in the great ritual. The ultimate meaning of human deeds is not restricted to the life of him who does these deeds and to the particular moment in which they occur.

Religious living is not only a private concern. Our own life is a movement in the symphony of ages. We are taught to pray as well as to live in the first person plural. We do a mitsvah "in the name

of all Israel." We act both as individuals and as the community of Israel. All generations are present, as it were, in every moment.

Israel is the tree, we are the leaves. It is the clinging to the stem that keeps us alive. There has perhaps never been more need of Judaism than in our time, a time in which many cherished hopes of humanity lie crushed. We should be pioneers as were our fathers three thousand years ago. The future of all men depends upon their realizing that the sense of holiness is as vital as health. By following the Jewish way of life we maintain that sense and preserve the light for mankind's future visions.

It is our destiny to live for what is more than ourselves. Our very existence is an unparalleled symbol of such aspiration. By being what we are, namely Jews, we mean more to mankind than by any particular service we may render.

We have faith in God and faith in Israel. Though some of its children have gone astray, Israel remains the mate of God. We cannot hate what God loves. Rabbi Aaron the Great used to say: "I wish I could love the greatest saint as the Lord loves the greatest rascal."

Israel exists not in order to be, but in order to cherish the vision of God. Our faith may be strained but our destiny is anchored to the ultimate. Who can establish the outcome of our history? Out of the wonder we came and into the wonder we shall return.

THE DIGNITY OF ISRAEL

Belonging to Israel is in itself a spiritual act. It is utterly inconvenient to be a Jew. The very survival of our people is a *kiddush hashem*. We live in spite of peril. Our very existence is a refusal to surrender to normalcy, to security and comfort. Experts in assimilation, the Jews could have disappeared even before the names of modern nations were known. Still we are patient and cherish the will to perpetuate our essence.

We are Jews as we are men. The alternative to our existence as Jews is spiritual suicide, disappearance. It is *not* a change into some-

God in search of man

thing else. Judaism has allies but no substitutes. Jewish faith consists of attachment to God, attachment to Torah, and attachment to Israel.

There is a unique association between the people and the land of Israel. Even before Israel becomes a people, the land is preordained for it. What we have witnessed in our own days is a reminder of the power of God's mysterious promise to Abraham and a testimony to the fact that the people kept its promise, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither" (Psalms 137:5). The Jew in whose heart the love of Zion dies is doomed to lose his faith in the God of Abraham who gave the land as an earnest of the redemption of all men.

The people of Israel groaned in distress. Out of Egypt, the land of plentiful food, they were driven into the wilderness. Their souls were dried away; there was nothing at all: no flesh to eat, no water to drink. All they had was a promise: to be led to the land of milk and honey. They were almost ready to stone Moses. "Wherefore hast thou brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" they cried. But, after they had worshipped the golden calf—when God had decided to detach Himself from His people, not to dwell any more in their midst, but to entrust an angel with the task of leading them out of the wilderness to the Promised Land—Moses exclaimed: "If Thou Thyself dost not go with us, take us not out of the wilderness" (Exodus 33:15). This, perhaps, is the secret of our history: *to choose to remain in the wilderness rather than to be abandoned by Him.*

Israel's experience of God has not evolved from search. Israel did not discover God. Israel was discovered by God. Judaism is *God's quest for man*. The Bible is a record of God's approach to His people. More statements are found in the Bible about God's love for Israel than about Israel's love for God.

We have not chosen God; He has chosen us. There is no concept of a chosen God but there is the idea of a chosen people. The idea of a chosen people does not suggest the preference for a people based upon a discrimination among a number of peoples. We do not say

that we are a superior people. The "chosen people" means a people approached and chosen by God. The significance of this term is genuine in relation to God rather than in relation to other peoples. It signifies not a quality inherent in the people but a relationship between the people and God.

Harassed, pursued with enmity and wrong, our fathers continued to feel joy in being Jews. "Happy are we. How good is our destiny, how pleasant our lot, how beautiful our heritage." What is the source of that feeling?

The quest for immortality is common to all men. To most of them the vexing question points to the future. Jews think not only of the end but also of the beginning. As parts of Israel we are endowed with a very rare, a very precious consciousness, the consciousness that we do not live in a void. We never suffer from harrowing anxiety and fear of roaming about in the emptiness of time. We own the past and are, hence, not afraid of what is to be. We remember where we came from. We were summoned and cannot forget it, as we wind the clock of eternal history. We remember the beginning and believe in an end. We live between two historic poles: Sinai and the Kingdom of God.

Upon thy walls, O Jerusalem,
I have set watchmen,
All the day and all the night
They shall never be silent.
Ye that stir the Lord to remember,
Take no rest,
And give Him no rest
Till He establishes Jerusalem,
And makes it a praise in the earth.

Isaiah 62:6-7

Acknowledgment

The present volume is a continuation and application of some of the ideas in *Man Is Not Alone*.

For valuable suggestions, the author is grateful to Professor Maurice Friedman, to Professor Fritz Kaufmann, and to Rabbi Jacob Riemer who have read all or parts of the manuscript. For the warm friendship of Mr. Roger W. Straus, Jr., I am deeply indebted.