

## WHAT IS A JEW? (BE THOU A BLESSING)

WHAT IS A JEW? THE PREJUDICED NON-JEW HAS A QUICK ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION, BUT FEW MODERN JEWS CAN KNOWLEDGEABLY SUPPLY AN ANSWER. THE CONFUSION IN THE MIND OF THE AVERAGE JEWISH PARENT IN AMERICA, IS REFLECTED IN THE ATTITUDES OF OUR CHILDREN. JUST RECENTLY, I WAS TOLD THAT THE SON OF ONE OF OUR MEMBERS MAKES CERTAIN THAT HIS FRIENDS DO NOT SEE HIS HEBREW SCHOOL BOOKS, BECAUSE HE DOESN'T WANT THEM TO KNOW THAT HE IS A JEW. A JEW, HE HAS BEEN TOLD BY HIS NON-JEWISH FRIENDS, IS SOMETHING EVIL. THE BOY HAS NOT OBTAINED FROM HIS PARENTS, ENOUGH INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL MATERIAL TO MAKE HIM PROUD TO BE A JEW. YOU MAY BE CERTAIN THAT THE SELF-HATRED REFLECTED BY THIS LAD, IS TO BE FOUND IN YOUR CHILD ALSO, AT LEAST TO SOME DEGREE, FOR OURS IS A GENERATION OF JEWS, WHICH, BY AND LARGE, DOES NOT KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A JEW. *We want to out*

*Children*

THE FRENCH PHILOSOPHER, JEAN PAUL SARTRE, HAS WRITTEN, "A JEW IS ANYONE THE NON-JEW BELIEVES TO BE A JEW". SARTRE REFLECTS THE WORLD WAR II VIEW OF SOME EUROPEANS, THAT THE DEFINITION OF A JEW IS, "ONE WHO IS THE OBJECT OF PERSECUTION". IT IS IN THIS SENSE, THAT THE NAZI LEADER, GOERING, DECLARED, "I DETERMINE WHO IS A JEW".

*Traceable to the*

FOR THE NAZIS, JUDAISM WAS A MATTER OF BLOOD. THIS DEFINITION, STRANGELY PARALLELS THE DEFINITION GIVEN BY SOME TRADITIONAL JEWISH TEACHERS, WHO HOLD THAT A PERSON BORN OF JEWISH PARENTS, IS A JEW, NO MATTER WHAT HE MAY BELIEVE OR DO, AND NO MATTER IF HE CONVERTS TO ANOTHER RELIGION. ~~FOR THEM~~, THIS TRADITIONAL VIEW IS AKIN TO THAT OF THE CATHOLICS, WHO HOLD THAT A CATHOLIC IS ANYONE BORN OF A CATHOLIC MOTHER. EVEN THOUGH THAT PERSON, SO BORN, MIGHT BECOME A PROTESTANT OR A JEW, THE CATHOLICS CONSIDER HIM AS A CATHOLIC.

THERE IS A DEFINITION FOR THE JEW, ATTRIBUTED TO BEN GURION, WHICH DIFFERS SHARPLY FROM THE TRADITIONAL DEFINITION. THE ISRAELIS CONTENT THAT, TO BE A JEW, ONE MUST BE A NATIONALIST; ONE MUST BE EAGER TO MIGRATE TO ISRAEL. BEN GURION, IN HIS MORE PATRIOTIC MOMENTS, WOULD HOLD THAT BEING JEWISH IS NOT A MATTER OF BLOOD, BUT A MATTER OF IDENTIFICATION WITH THE MODERN ISRAELI NATION. LET US OBSERVE THAT, WHETHER YOU ARE DEFINED AS A JEW BY BIRTH, OR DEFINED AS A JEW BECAUSE OF YOUR NATIONALISTIC ASSOCIATION, YOU NEED NOT BE A RELIGIOUS PERSON, *as we understand the term.*

NOT MANY YEARS AGO, THERE WAS A MOVEMENT IN OUR COUNTRY, KNOWN AS THE FOLK-SCHULE MOVEMENT. THIS WAS FOUNDED BY JEWS WHO DID NOT BELIEVE IN GOD, AND WHO WERE BASICALLY, SOCIALISTS. THEY WISHED, HOWEVER, TO PRESERVE WHAT THEY CALLED JEWISH CULTURE, SO THEY FOUNDED SCHOOLS WHICH TAUGHT JEWISH HISTORY, FOLK-WAYS, AND THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE. FOR THESE PEOPLE, BEING JEWISH WAS A MATTER OF ADHERING TO A CERTAIN KIND OF CULTURE. *merely*

IN RECENT YEARS, A RABBI, BY THE NAME OF MORDECAI KAPLAN, HAS TRIED TO CREATE A JEWISH PHILOSOPHY FOR MODERN TIMES, WHICH EMBRACES ALL OF THE MANY DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS CONCERNING JEWISH IDENTIFICATION. ACCORDING TO RABBI KAPLAN, A MAN SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A JEW UNDER HIS OWN TERMS! IF HE IS JUST A ZIONIST, AND NOT RELIGIOUS, FINE. IF HE IS RELIGIOUS IN THE CEREMONIAL SENSE, BUT NOT ETHICALLY ORIENTED, FINE. IF HE IS JUST A CULTURAL JEW, FINE. BEING A JEW, ACCORDING TO KAPLAN, MEANS BEING ANY ONE OF THESE THINGS. RABBI KAPLAN'S *Personal* RELIGIOUS VIEWS ARE WORTH READING, BUT HIS ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN TERMS OF "ANYTHING GOES" CAN, IN MY OPINION, LEAD ONLY TO THE DILUTING OF JUDAISM, AND TO THE WEAKENING OF JEWISH LOYALTY.

LET THE RECORD BE CLEAR. REFORM JUDAISM DOES NOT AGREE WITH THOSE WHO CONTEND THAT BEING JEWISH IS A MATTER OF BLOOD AND BIRTH. WE DO NOT AGREE WITH BEN GURION THAT TO BE A JEW, YOU MUST NECESSARILY WISH TO BECOME A PART OF THE ISRAELI STATE. WE DO NOT AGREE WITH RABBI KAPLAN ~~AND HIS RECONSTRUCTIONISTS~~ THAT ANYONE WHO WANTS TO BE A JEW CAN DEFINE HIS OWN TERMS, AND BE ACCEPTED AS A FULL PARTNER. WE BELIEVE IN THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLOWING INDIVIDUAL LATITUDE, YES, BUT WE SAY THAT TO BE A JEW, YOU MUST VOLUNTARILY ~~BE A PART OF~~ THE JEWISH RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY.

*A Jew can be a naturalist / or an internationalist / or a socialist / or a capitalist / or a culturalist but he must also, in the very least, be a religiousist*

THE CENTRALITY OF RELIGION

THERE ARE THREE KEY <sup>PARTS TO</sup> ~~WORDS IN~~ OUR DEFINITION. THEY ARE:

- 1.) VOLUNTARILY ASSOCIATION
- 2.) RELIGIOUS
- 3.) COMMUNITY

UNTIL THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FIRST TEMPLE ABOUT 2500 YEARS AGO, OUR ANCESTORS WERE TWO THINGS. THEY WERE MEMBERS OF A NATIONAL STATE, AND MEMBERS OF A RELIGIOUS GROUP. EVER SINCE THAT TIME, HOWEVER, MORE JEWS HAVE LIVED OUTSIDE OF ISRAEL THAN INSIDE ITS BORDERS. THE RABBIS OF THE BABYLONIA EXILE SAID, "BABYLONIA IS OUR ISRAEL". JEWS LIVED IN BABYLONIA FOR 1500 YEARS. THEY LIVED IN LARGE NUMBERS FOR 700 YEARS IN SPAIN, AND BUILT A WONDERFULLY CREATIVE COMMUNITY THERE. FOR 2000 YEARS, THE LAND OF ISRAEL HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT A MEMORY TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE. IN SHORT, DURING THE GREATER PART OF OUR HISTORY, JEWS HAVE BEEN HELD TOGETHER BY THEIR RELIGION ALONE. THE ONE THING THAT JEWS IN AFRICA, ASIA, EUROPE, AND THE AMERICAS HAVE IN COMMON, IS THEIR RELIGION. THIS FACT WAS CLEAR EVEN TO <sup>the Biblical</sup> JONAH, WHO, WHEN HE WAS QUESTIONED BY HIS FELLOW SAILORS AS TO HIS COUNTRY, REPLIED, "I AM A HEBREW, AND I FEAR THE LORD, THE GOD OF HEAVEN, WHO MADE THE SEA AND THE DRY LAND". JONAH DID NOT MENTION AT ALL HIS BLOOD TIES, OR EVEN THE LAND OF HIS ORIGIN. WHAT MADE HIM A HEBREW, WAS HIS BELIEF IN THE GOD OF ALL CREATION, WHO WAS BEYOND NATIONAL TIES.

ISN'T THIS CRYSTAL CLEAR ALSO, WITH ABRAHAM? ABRAHAM'S PARENTS WERE PAGANS, YET ABRAHAM IS CONSIDERED THE FIRST JEW. BECAUSE OF HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE JEWISH STATE? HARDLY. ABRAHAM WAS A NOMAD, A HERDSMAN, WHO TOOK HIS SHEEP TO ANY AREA WHERE THE GRASS WAS PLENTIFUL. ABRAHAM IS CONSIDERED THE FIRST JEW, BECAUSE HE WAS THE FIRST TO BELIEVE IN GOD AS MODERN, CIVILIZED MEN UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPT. HE WAS THE FIRST TO MAKE A COVENANT WITH GOD; ~~NEEDING TO FOLLOW THE LAWS OF GOD, THAT, THROUGH ABRAHAM'S ACTIONS, ALL THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD MIGHT BE BLESSED.~~ <sup>was</sup> HERE IS THE REAL MEANING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A JEW. IT MEANS TO BE A PARTICIPANT IN A COVENANT, A BRIS, WHICH IS FOREVER BINDING, A COVENANT WHICH BINDS THE JEW TO DO THE WORK OF GOD, THAT THROUGH THE JEW, MANKIND MIGHT BE BLESSED. AS ONE READS THE BIBLE, ONE CANNOT HELP BUT BE CONVINCED THAT THE LEADERS OF OUR PEOPLE CONSIDERED THEMSELVES TO BE THE AGENTS OF GOD IN PROJECTING A CERTAIN KIND OF PATTERN FOR MANKIND.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS BY MOSES, IS A MAJOR STEP FORWARD IN THE OUTLINING OF THAT PATTERN, BUT MOSES AND HIS SUCCESSORS CREATED HUNDREDS OF OTHER LAWS WHICH SPELLED OUT IN DETAIL WHAT THE HEBREWS UNDERSTOOD AS THE GOD-ORIENTED, OR THE HOLY LIFE. A THOUSAND YEARS AFTER <sup>Abraham</sup> ~~MOSES~~ THE GREAT PROPHETS UNDERSTOOD THEIR ROLE AS JEWS, EXACTLY AS ABRAHAM UNDERSTOOD IT. ISAIAH TAUGHT THAT THE ROLE OF THE JEW WAS TO BE AN OIR L'GOYIM, A "LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS", A TEACHER, A SPREADER OF KNOWLEDGE, THE LEAVEN IN THE DOUGH, THE THORN OF CONSCIENCE.

*The first to view religion as a working relationship between man and his creator. The Biblical text tells us that Abraham was told that if he followed the laws of God, he would be blessed, & through his actions,*

## WHAT IS A JEW? (BE THOU A BLESSING)

ISAIAH APPEARS AS THE JEW PAR EXCELLENCE WHEN HE DESCRIBES HIS MISSION IN THESE TERMS, "...THE LORD HAS ANNOINTED ME TO BRING GOOD TIDINGS TO THE AFFLICTED, HE HAS SENT ME TO BIND UP THE BROKENHEARTED, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES, AND THE OPENING OF THE PRISON TO THOSE WHO ARE BOUND...."

THROUGHOUT THE GLOWING PAGES OF THE PROPHETS, ONE THOUGHT DOMINATES, MISSION, PURPOSE, LEADERSHIP, COVENANT.

THE NOTION OF COVENANT OR MISSION IS THE HEART OF JUDAISM, YET THE FATE OF THE JEW IN THE MIDDLE AGES IN EASTERN EUROPE WAS SO BLEAK, THAT HE FORGOT HIS EXALTED ROLE IN THE WORLD. IT WAS IN THE 18TH CENTURY, THAT THE FOUNDERS OF REFORM JUDAISM, THEMSELVES THE MOST LEARNED ORTHODOX RABBIS, REVIVED THE BASIC IDEA OF MISSION. WE TEACH FERVENTLY TO THIS DAY, THAT JUST AS ABRAHAM COULD BE A JEW WITHOUT BEING BORN OF JEWISH PARENTS, SO, CONVERSELY, ~~BEING~~ BEING BORN OF JEWISH PARENTS DOES NOT MAKE ONE A JEW. BEING A JEW, MEANS ENTERING INTO ~~A~~ COVENANTS, A COVENANT; BEING A JEW, MEANS UNDERTAKING A TASK. HISTORICALLY, JEWISH IDENTIFICATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN A MATTER OF BELIEF AND ACTION. IT HAS BEEN A MATTER OF MIND AND DEED. IT HAS BEEN A MATTER OF CONSCIOUS DEDICATION TO THE SANCTIFICATION OF LIFE.

MEANINGFUL SUFFERING

OUR CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AGREE THAT ONE OF THE GREATEST MOMENTS OF OUR BIBLE IS ACHIEVED IN THE 53RD CHAPTER OF ISAIAH, WHERE ISRAEL IS DESCRIBED AS THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF GOD. IF YOU SHOULD ASK, AND THE QUESTION IS ALWAYS THERE, WHETHER IT IS ASKED OR NOT, IF YOU SHOULD ASK, WHY SHOULD ONE CHOOSE TO BE A JEW, WHEN BEING A JEW INVOLVES THE POSSIBILITY OF SUFFERING, THE PROPHET ISAIAH SUPPLIES THE ANSWER. THE DEEPEST MEANING OF LIFE IS ACHIEVED WHEN AN INFORMED PERSON MOVES FORWARD TO DO THE NEEDED THING, EVEN AT THE RISK OF SUFFERING. IT IS NO TRAGEDY THAT THE JEW SUFFERS, WHEN HE SUFFERS BECAUSE HE IS ACTING TO SANCTIFY HUMAN LIFE. THE TRUE TRAGEDY OF SUFFERING, IS PRESENT WHEN THE SUFFERER DOES NOT KNOW WHY HE SUFFERS; THE TRUE TRAGEDY FOR THE JEW COMES WHEN HE IS NOT MOTIVATED BY HIGH PURPOSE, AND, WHEN HE SUFFERS JUST BECAUSE HE WAS BORN OF JEWISH PARENTS.

I HAVE HEARD CHRISTIAN MINISTERS SAY, "THE GREATEST PROOF OF GOD IS THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE". DO YOU THINK FOR A MOMENT, THAT THAT PEOPLE WOULD STILL EXIST WITHOUT AN INORDINATE SENSE OF PURPOSE. NEITHER A PEOPLE, <sup>nor</sup> AN INDIVIDUAL, CONQUERS GREAT SUFFERING UNLESS THE LIGHT OF A BURNING GOAL LEADS THEM ONWARD.

I AM CONVINCED THAT, IF YOU ARE A KNOWLEDGEABLE JEW, YOU WILL BE BETTER ABLE TO FACE MANY PROBLEMS IN YOUR LIFE. IF YOU <sup>personal</sup> PLAN YOUR LIFE IN SUCH A WAY THAT YOU STRIVE TO BECOME A SERVANT FOR CAUSES BEYOND YOUR PERSONAL HAPPINESS, YOU WILL SINK ROOTS INTO THE EARTH THAT WILL BE IMPERVIOUS TO ANY HURRICANE OF PERSONAL DISASTER. ONE'S ENTIRE LIFE, CAN BE HEIGHTENED BY INFORMED SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AS A JEW. WHEN ALBERT EINSTEIN WAS ASKED WHY HE SO RELENTLESSLY PURSUED HIS THEORY OF RELATIVITY, PROVING THE RELATIONSHIP OF MATTER AND ENERGY, HE REPLIED, "I WAS SO CONVINCED OF THE UNITY OF THE WORLD!" EINSTEIN NEVER HESITATED TO POINT ~~OUT~~ THAT, FOR HIM, BEING A JEW MEANT A ~~DRIVE TOWARDS~~ DEMONSTRATING THE UNITY OF MANKIND AND THE WORLD. WAS IT NOT THIS SAME DRIVE WHICH CAUSED MOSES TO PROJECT THE HYPOTHESIS THAT GOD WAS ONE AND NOT MANY, AND DIDN'T THE LIFE

*IF you understand that each human being contains in himself the highest & the deepest meaning, & if you understand that you have a key-role to play in the shaping of the world, then*

OF MOSES SEEP DOWN INTO THE BONES OF EINSTEIN WHO WAS A STUDENT OF JUDAISM. IN 1934, EINSTEIN WROTE CONCERNING JEWS, "THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE FOR ITS OWN SAKE, AN ALMOST FANATICAL LOVE OF JUSTICE, AND THE DESIRE FOR PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE -- THESE ARE THE FEATURES OF JEWISH TRADITION, WHICH MAKE ME THANK MY STARS THAT I BELONG TO IT." EINSTEIN, TOO, SUFFERED. HE WAS DRIVEN OUT OF GERMANY BY HITLER, BUT HIS EXPERIENCE ONLY HEIGHTENED HIS DESIRE TO SERVE MANKIND. TRULY, THROUGH HIM, ALL THE NATIONS OF THE WORLD WERE BLESSED.

ON THIS YOM KIPPUR, LET US BE REMINDED THAT TO BE A JEW MEANS TO ENTER INTO A CONTRACT WITH GOD. THE PERSON WHO DOES NOT VOLUNTARILY ENTER INTO THIS COVENANT TO SANCTIFY LIFE, IS NOT A JEW! TO BE A JEW MEANS TO TAKE PERSONALLY THE WORDS GOD SPOKE TO ABRAHAM, SAYING, "BE THOU A BLESSING".