

"WAS IST DER CHOCHMAH? WHAT IS THE POINT?"

A BIBLE LESSON

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ONE OF MY FAVORITE STORIES INVOLVES A MAGICIAN WHO WAS ENTERTAINING THE ASSEMBLED PASSENGERS ON A LUXURIOUS OCEAN LINER. TRICK AFTER TRICK FAILED TO IMPRESS THE AUDIENCE. EITHER THE MAGICIAN DIDN'T QUITE PULL THE TRICK OFF OR THE AUDIENCE HAD SEEN THE SAME TRICK DONE BETTER BY A MORE PROFESSIONAL MAGICIAN. IN DESPERATION, THE MAGICIAN BLURTED OUT, "YOU THINK I'M NOT A GOOD MAGICIAN, DON'T YOU? WELL, I CAN BLOW THIS WHOLE SHIP UP IF I WANT TO WITH ONE FLICK OF MY WRIST". THE AUDIENCE WAS UNIMPRESSED AND BEGAN TO WALK OUT ON THE MAGICIAN. IN ANGER AND FRUSTRATION, THE MAGICIAN REACHED IN HIS POCKET AND TOSSED AN EXPLOSIVE INTO THE CENTER OF THE FLOOR. WITHIN SECONDS, THE SHIP HAD EXPLODED AND WAS SINKING. BODIES WERE STREWN ALL AROUND. WITHIN MINUTES, ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THE LUXURY SHIP WAS A FEW BOARDS BEING TOSSED ABOUT BY THE WAVES. THE MAGICIAN MANAGED TO HOLD ON TO ONE OF THESE BOARDS TO SAVE HIS LIFE. HE THOUGHT HE WAS THE ONLY ONE ALIVE, BUT ABOUT TEN MINUTES AFTER THE EXPLOSION, HE SAW A BEARDED MAN, WEARING A LONG BLACK COAT AND A HAT, SWIMMING FURIOUSLY TOWARDS HIM. EXHAUSTED AND DAZED, THE SWIMMER, OBVIOUSLY AN ORTHODOX JEW, SEIZED THE MAGICIAN BY HIS COAT LAPELS AND ANGRILY ASKED, "NU, WAS IST DER CHOCHMAH?". FREELY TRANSLATED, THIS MEANS, "WHAT IS THE POINT YOU WERE TRYING TO MAKE FROM THIS DEMONSTRATION?". THE STORY SUGGESTS THAT THE BEARDED MAN COULD TOLERATE THIS GREAT ACT OF DESTRUCTION ONLY IF IT HAD SOME GREAT PURPOSE. COMING FROM THE TRADITION IN WHICH HE WAS RAISED, HE COULD NOT ACCEPT SUCH A TRAGEDY IF IT WAS MEANINGLESS. BEFORE HE DIED, HE HAD TO KNOW WHAT BENEFIT, WHAT POSITIVE MEANING, WAS BEHIND THIS VIOLENT DEED.

THE STORY IS A FABLE. IT NEVER HAPPENED, BUT IT IS A TRUE STORY NONETHELESS, FOR IT TELLS US SOMETHING VERY REAL ABOUT THE JEWISH PEOPLE. THROUGHOUT THEIR 4,000 YEARS OF EXISTENCE, THEY HAVE ASKED THE QUESTION, "WAS IST DER CHOCHMAH?", "WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?". ALWAYS THEY HAVE ASKED QUESTIONS IN THEIR QUEST FOR UNDERSTANDING. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF HUMAN LIFE? WHAT IS GOD? WHY DID HE CREATE THE WORLD? WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MAN IN THE WORLD? WHAT LAWS SHOULD WE ESTABLISH TO GOVERN HUMAN SOCIETY? WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE?

AS IT SEE IT, THE BIBLE IS A MAJOR EFFORT OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE TO PROVIDE AN ANSWER TO SOME OF THESE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS. IF THIS IS THE CASE, THEN WE HAVE TO READ THE STORIES IN THE BIBLE NOT SO MUCH FOR THEIR LITERARY VALUE, AS TO DISCOVER THEIR MAIN THEME AND MORAL. TO READ THE EARLY CHAPTERS OF

GENESIS, ESPECIALLY, WITHOUT LOOKING FOR THE MEANING BEHIND THE STORIES, IS TO MISREAD THEM AND TO IGNORE THE GENIUS OF OUR ANCESTORS. OF EACH STORY, WE MUST ASK, "WAS IST DER CHOCHMAH?", WHAT WERE OUR FATHERS TRYING TO TEACH BY THIS STORY?

WHY DID GOD REST?

TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE BEGINNING STORY WHICH ATTEMPTS TO DESCRIBE THE MANNER IN WHICH THE WORLD WAS CREATED. NOW, IF OUR FATHERS REALLY KNEW HOW THE WORLD WAS CREATED, THEY WOULD HAVE TAKEN MORE THAN A FEW SENTENCES TO REVEAL THIS MYSTERY OF THE AGES. SINCE THEY REALLY COULD NOT HAVE KNOWN HOW THE WORLD WAS CREATED ANY MORE THAN MODERN MAN KNOWS, THEY CONTENTED THEMSELVES WITH A FEW GENERAL STATEMENTS. I BELIEVE THE DEEPER MEANING OF THE CREATION STORY IN THE BIBLE IS TO BE FOUND IN THE STATEMENT, "ON THE SEVENTH DAY GOD RESTED." I BELIEVE THAT THE ENTIRE SCHEME OF CREATION IN SIX STEPS IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE A FOUNDATION FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF A NEW AND RADICAL INSTITUTION INTO HUMAN SOCIETY, THE INSTITUTION OF THE SHABBAT, THE SABBATH.

WE IN MODERN TIMES ARE QUITE ADJUSTED TO THE FACT THAT HUMAN BEINGS NEED TIME OFF FROM THEIR LABORS TO REST, BUT AMERICA WAS 100 YEARS OLD BEFORE LAWS WERE PASSED LIMITING THE NUMBER OF HOURS CHILDREN COULD WORK. IN ANCIENT TIMES, SLAVERY WAS AN ACCEPTED PART OF EVERY SOCIETY UNTIL IT WAS ELIMINATED BY THE HEBREWS. THEIR FIRST STEP IN ELIMINATING SLAVERY WAS TO DECLARE THAT ON AT LEAST ONE DAY A WEEK NO HUMAN BEING, SLAVE OR NOT, COULD BE COMPELLED TO WORK. BUT HOW WAS THIS IDEA TO BE PRESENTED IN SUCH A WAY THAT THE GREEDY KINGS AND NOBLES WOULD ACCEPT IT? THE TRUTH WAS THAT THE KINGS AND NOBLES WOULD NOT ACCEPT SUCH A CONCEPT EXCEPT UNDER COMPULSION. THE ONLY AUTHORITY THEY WOULD RESPECT, OTHER THAN THEIR OWN, WAS THE AUTHORITY OF THE GODS, AND THEY WOULD NOT ACCEPT THAT UNLESS THE PEOPLE, AS AN ENTIRETY, ACCEPTED A GIVEN IDEA AS BEING OF DIVINE ORIGIN. THE GENIUS OF THE EARLY JEWS WAS THAT THEY CONVINCED THE PEOPLE THAT GOD RESTED HIMSELF ON THE SEVENTH DAY AND COMMANDED THAT NOT ONLY EVERY HUMAN BEING BUT EVERY BEAST OF BURDEN HAD THAT PRIVILEGE ALSO. THE PEOPLE SO CLUNG TO THIS CONCEPT OF THE SABBATH THAT THE KINGS AND NOBLES HAD TO ACCEPT IT.

THOSE WHO READ THE BIBLE TODAY AND PICK APART THE CREATION STORY ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT IS INCONSISTENT WITH MODERN SCIENTIFIC THEORY OBVIOUSLY FAIL TO UNDERSTAND THE CHOCHMAH, THE DEEPER HUMAN MEANING BEHIND THE STORY. SUCH CRITICS SHOW THEIR IGNORANCE OF THE HUMAN NEEDS OF THE ANCIENT SOCIETY, AND THEY MISREAD THE INTENT OF THE STORY.

NOW YOU MAY ASK, RABBI, DID GOD REALLY REST ON THE SEVENTH DAY? IF YOU PROMISE NOT TO TELL ANYONE, I WILL TELL YOU THAT I REALLY DON'T THINK SO. I THINK OUR FATHERS USED THIS CONCEPT FOR VERY HUMANE PURPOSES AND THEN WENT ON TO OTHER THINGS WHEN THEY NO LONGER NEEDED THIS IDEA. FOR EXAMPLE, THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT, AS STATED IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS, TELLS US THAT WE SHOULD OBSERVE THE SABBATH BECAUSE GOD RESTED ON THAT DAY. IN THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY, WRITTEN A LONG TIME AFTER THE BOOK OF EXODUS, THE COMMANDMENT IS RESTATED. THIS TIME,

THE SUPPORT FOR THE SABBATH, NOW AN INGRAINED INSTITUTION OF THE ISRAELITE SOCIETY, IS NOT THAT GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY, BUT THAT GOD BROUGHT ISRAEL OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT. WHY DID OUR FATHERS SEE FIT TO CHANGE THE AUTHORITY BEHIND THE SABBATH LAW? MY GUESS IS THAT THE INSTITUTION OF THE SABBATH WAS NOW SO SOLID IN THE NATION THAT THE AUTHORS NO LONGER NEEDED THE OLDER IDEA, WHICH EVEN THEY NOW CONSIDERED QUAIN. IN FACT, OUR PRAYER-BOOK, WHICH IS OVER 2,000 YEARS OLD, TELLS US THAT GOD NEVER RESTS. THE PRAYER-BOOK READS, "B'CHOL YOM M'CHA-DESH MA-AH-SAY V'RAY-SHIT, EVERY DAY GOD RECREATES THE DEEDS OF CREATION." THE AUTHORS OF THE PRAYER-BOOK APPARENTLY UNDERSTOOD THAT CREATION IS A NEVER-ENDING PROCESS, AND GOD CERTAINLY DOES NOT NEED TO REST. MY ASSUMPTION IS THAT THE AUTHORS OF THE CREATION STORY IN THE BIBLE KNEW THIS AS WELL, BUT THEY WOVE THEIR STORY OF THE CREATION ALONG LINES THEY THOUGHT WOULD MOST BENEFIT THE SOCIETY OF THEIR TIME. SOME MIGHT CALL THIS MALICIOUS CONTRIVING. I CALL IT GENIUS. OUR ANCESTORS NOT ONLY HAD AN EXALTED VIEW OF THE WORLD, THEY KNEW HOW TO WRITE A STORY TO SUPPORT THAT VIEW.

WHY WAS EVE TAKEN FROM ADAM'S RIB?

LET US CONTINUE TO ASK THIS KEY QUESTION, "WAS IST DER CHOCHMAH?" ABOUT OTHER ASPECTS OF THE BOOK OF GENESIS, AND WE WILL UNDERSTAND JUDAISM THE BETTER FOR IT. SOME OF THE WOMEN LIBBERS HAVE TOLD US THAT THE BIBLE IS A MALE CHAUVINIST BOOK, BECAUSE, IN CREATING MANKIND, GOD IS DESCRIBED AS CREATING THE MALE FIRST AND, THEN, CREATING THE FEMALE FROM HIS RIB. SUCH A CONCLUSION PROVES THAT THESE PARTICULAR LADIES WERE NOT READING THE BIBLE WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE "CHOCHMAH" BEHIND THE STORIES. THE CREATION STORY CLEARLY SAYS THAT ALL HUMAN BEINGS ARE CREATED "BIDMUT ELOHIM, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD". IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO READ VERSE 27 IN THE FIRST CHAPTER AND LEAVE OUT THE LADIES. THE CHAPTER READS, "AND GOD CREATED MANKIND IN HIS OWN IMAGE, ... MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM". THE AUTHORS OF THE BIBLE WERE OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED LEST SOMEONE UNDERSTAND THE WORD FOR MANKIND AS MEANING JUST THE MALE, SO THEY IMMEDIATELY INSERTED AN EXPLANATORY PHRASE. "THIS MEANS", THEY SAID, "MALE AND FEMALE". THERE IS SIMPLY NO DOUBT ABOUT IT. OUR ANCESTORS, THE JEWISH AUTHORS OF THE BIBLE, BELIEVED THAT WOMAN AS WELL AS MAN WAS CREATED "BIDMUT ELOHIM", IN THE DIVINE IMAGE.

NOW WE HAVE A FURTHER QUESTION. IF THE CREATION STORY SAYS IN THE FIRST CHAPTER THAT GOD CREATED MAN AND WOMAN AT THE SAME TIME, WHAT IS THE NEED, WHAT IS THE CHOCHMAH, FOR THE SECOND STORY ABOUT GOD CREATING WOMAN FROM ADAM'S RIB? WELL, YOU HAVE TO READ THE STORY TO FIND THE ANSWER. IF THERE IS A SECOND STORY OF CREATION IN THE BIBLE, THERE MUST HAVE BEEN A SECOND CHOCHMAH, AN ADDITIONAL POINT, THE AUTHORS WANTED TO MAKE. THE MORAL FOLLOWS THE STORY AND READS, "THEREFORE SHALL A MAN LEAVE HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND SHALL CLING UNTO

HIS WIFE, AND THEY SHALL BE ONE FLESH". HERE WE HAVE IT. THE STORY IS TOLD BECAUSE THE AUTHORS WANTED TO SHOW THE SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE. THEY APPARENTLY KNEW, WHAT FREUD LATER TAUGHT, OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TENDENCY FOR A MAN TO CLING TO HIS MOTHER RATHER THAN TO HIS WIFE. THE STORY OF ADAM'S RIB IS IN THE BIBLE TO TEACH THAT A MAN MUST CONSIDER HIS WIFE THE DEAREST THING IN HIS LIFE, FOR, AS ADAM SAID AFTER THE SURGERY, "THIS (SHE) IS BONE OF MY BONE AND FLESH OF MY FLESH....".

JEWISH TRADITION AND LEARNING DOES NOT END WITH THE BIBLE. THE MIDRASH IS THE COLLECTION OF STORIES THROUGH WHICH THE RABBIS INTERPRETED THE BIBLE. ONE RABBI IS QUOTED IN THE MIDRASH AS SAYING THAT THE ORIGINAL BEING CREATED BY GOD WAS NEITHER MAN NOR WOMAN, IT WAS BISEXUAL, AND THE SEPARATE MALE AND FEMALE WAS THE LATER RESULT OF SUBDIVISION. PERHAPS, THIS VERY OLD STORY ABOUT AN ORIGINALLY BISEXUAL BEING WAS THE BASIS OF THE STORY THAT ONE OF THE SEXES EMERGED OUT OF THE OTHER. AT ANY RATE, THE RABBIS CONCLUDE THAT SINCE MAN AND WOMAN WERE ONCE ONE FLESH, EVER SINCE THEY WERE SEPARATED, THEY HAVE SOUGHT EACH OTHER OUT AS IF TO RESTORE THEIR ORIGINAL UNITY. THIS IS WHAT MARRIAGE IS ALL ABOUT, THE RABBIS TELL US. IT IS A CONTINUING EFFORT TO SEARCH FOR THOSE THINGS THAT MAKE TWO PEOPLE ONE UNITY.

EVEN THOUGH OTHER ANCIENT PEOPLES BELITTLED THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN, THE VERY DIFFERENT ISRAELITE ATTITUDE IS CONSISTENTLY CARRIED FORWARD IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT. NOWHERE DO WE HAVE A STATEMENT IN OUR BIBLE SUCH AS IS TO BE FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE CHRISTIAN TESTAMENT, WHICH SAYS, "AS THE MAN IS THE SERVANT OF GOD, SO THE WOMAN IS THE SERVANT OF MAN....".

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, THE JEWISH BIBLE, MIRIAM HAS A SIGNIFICANT PLACE ALONGSIDE MOSES AS ONE OF THE LEADERS OF EARLY ISRAEL. IT IS SARAH, AND NOT ABRAHAM, WHO MAKES THE CHOICE AS TO WHICH CHILD IS TO BE THE HEIR. DEBORAH IS AS MUCH A JUDGE AND PROPHETESS AS SAMUEL IS LATER A JUDGE AND PROPHET. IN OTHER WORDS, EVEN IN THOSE MOST ANCIENT DAYS A WOMAN COULD BE THE TOP LEADER OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE. THE VERY REASON THAT SO MANY LEADERS OF WOMEN'S LIB TODAY ARE JEWS IS THAT THEY ARE ALREADY AMONGST THE MOST LIBERATED WOMEN, BECAUSE OF THEIR CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND.

WHY IS THERE A SEXY BOOK IN THE BIBLE?

NOW, THE BIBLE IS MUCH MORE THAN A COLLECTION OF STORIES EACH WITH ITS PARTICULAR MORAL. THE BIBLE HAS LENGTHY HISTORIC PARTS WHICH ACCURATELY REFLECT THE EVENTS OF THE ANCIENT PERIOD. EGYPTIAN AND BABYLONIAN TEXTS, AS WELL AS ARCHAEOLOGY, CONFIRM THE FACTS DESCRIBED IN OUR BIBLE ON THE HISTORIC LEVEL; BUT THE NON-HISTORIC BOOKS SOMETIMES TELL US MORE ABOUT OUR ANCESTORS THAN, SAY, THE BOOK OF EXODUS OR JUDGES OR THE PROPHETS OR SAMUEL OR EZRA AND NEHEMIAH - ALL HISTORIC BOOKS. CONSIDER NOW THE BOOK "SHIR-HA-SHIRIM, THE SONG OF SONGS". WHY IS THIS SEXY BOOK IN THE MIDDLE OF A SOPHISTICATED SERIES OF BOOKS DEDICATED TO THE WORSHIP OF GOD? CERTAIN WOULD-BE ESCAPISTS FROM JUDAISM TELL US TODAY THAT THE JEWS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PURITANS WITH A NARROW

VIEW OF SEX. THIS BIBLICAL BOOK DISPROVES THAT WHOLE THEORY. THE YOUNG LADY IN THE STORY SAYS ABOUT HER YOUNG LOVER, "HE HATH BROUGHT ME TO THE BANQUETING HOUSE AND HIS BANNER OVER ME IS LOVE....LET HIS LEFT HAND BE UNDER MY HEAD, AND HIS RIGHT HAND EMBRACE ME...." (Ch. 2: 4, 6). STILL LATER, THE YOUNG LADY SAYS, "BY NIGHT ON MY BED I SOUGHT HIM WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH: I SOUGHT HIM, BUT I FOUND HIM NOT. I WILL RISE NOW AND GO ABOUT THE CITY IN THE STREETS AND IN THE AVENUES, I WILL SEEK HIM WHOM MY SOUL LOVETH..." (Ch. 3: 1-2). THE MALE LOVER, IN TURN, TALKS TO THE YOUNG LADY AND DESCRIBES HER IN THIS FASHION, "BEHOLD THOU ART FAIR, MY LOVE; BEHOLD THOU ART FAIR; THINE EYES ARE AS DOVES BEHIND THY VEIL; ... THY LIPS ARE LIKE A THREAD OF SCARLET... THY NECK IS LIKE THE TOWER OF DAVID...THY BREASTS ARE LIKE TWO FAWNS THAT ARE TWINS OF A GAZELLE..." (CH. 4: 1-5). THERE FOLLOW WORDS WHICH SEEM TO INDICATE A SEXUAL CONSUMMATION. THE LOVER GOES ON (CH. 7) TO DESCRIBE THE YOUNG LADY'S THIGHS, HER NAVEL, AND HER BELLY.

NOW, IF WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND OUR TRADITION WE HAVE TO ASK THE QUESTION, WHY IS A SEXY BOOK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BIBLE? WE ASSUME THAT THOSE WHO SELECTED THE BOOK WERE TRYING TO MAKE A POINT. WHAT POINT? WERE THEY ATTACKING THE PURITANS OF THEIR DAY WHO WERE AFRAID OF SEX? RABBI AKIBA, THE FAMOUS RABBI, WAS ONE OF THOSE WHO SAT ON THE COUNCIL WHICH SELECTED THE BOOKS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE BIBLE. WHAT MADE HIM SAY, "'THE SONG OF SONGS' IS THE HOLIEST OF ALL THE BOOKS IN THE BIBLE"? SOME SCHOLARS SAY THE CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY WHICH CONSTITUTES THE BOOK ARE SYMBOLIC OF THE GREAT STRUGGLE GOING ON IN JUDEA IN THE SECOND CENTURY. THE KING, WHOM THE MAIDEN DESPISES, STANDS, THE SCHOLARS SAY, FOR THE FOREIGN CONQUEROR OF JUDEA, THE ROMANS. THE MAIDEN HERSELF, WHOM THE KING IS WOOING, IS ISRAEL. THE PEASANT LOVER, WHOM SHE ADORES, COULD BE GOD HIMSELF OR THE MESSIAH - THE JEWISH KING WHO, WHEN HE COMES, WILL OVERTHROW THE ROMAN KING AND WIN THE MAIDEN, ISRAEL, FOR HIMSELF. MAYBE THE SCHOLARS ARE RIGHT, AND THE "SONG OF SONGS" WAS A SECRET UNDERGROUND BOOK USED TO KEEP JEWS LOYAL TO THEIR TRADITIONS; BUT, IF SO, WHY WAS A SEXY BOOK CHOSEN FOR THIS PURPOSE? EVEN IF THE SCHOLARS ARE RIGHT, AND THE BOOK HAS ITS MORE PROFOUND MEANINGS, THE SELECTION OF THE BOOK SHOWS THAT OUR ANCESTORS WERE NOT AS AFRAID OF THE HUMAN BODY AND OF SEX AS SOME MODERNISTS WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE. THE PRESENCE OF THIS BOOK IN THE HEART OF OUR HOLY BIBLE OUGHT TO BE PROOF FOR ANY BUT THE MOST PREJUDICED THAT JUDAISM HAS NEVER BEEN AN ASCETIC RELIGION. IT IS NOT WE WHO HAVE HELD UP ST. PAUL AND THE MONKS AND THE NUNS AS SYMBOLS* OF THE HIGHER WAY OF LIFE. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE HAVE TAUGHT A MIDDLE WAY BETWEEN ABSTINENCE AND THE INDISCRIMINATE SHARING OF ONE'S BODY. IN THE BOOK, "THE SONG OF SONGS", SEX IS JOINED TO LOVE. THE SEX IS OPEN AND FRANK AND WARM, BUT IT ISN'T PORNOGRAPHIC. IT ISN'T SEX FOR SEX'S SAKE OR FOR EXPERIMENTATION'S SAKE OR FOR THE SAKE OF KICKS. IN THE "SONG OF SONGS", SEX INVOLVES LOVE, AND LOYALTY, AND SACRIFICE, AND IT IS ENRICHED FOR ALL OF THESE REASONS.

* As abstainers from sexual relations.

THE HEBREW BIBLE IS, INDEED, AN AMAZING BOOK. IT IS, AS YOU KNOW, THE WORLD'S ALL TIME BEST SELLER. SOME PEOPLE READ IT TO STUDY THE HISTORIC FACTS OF THE PERIOD FROM ABRAHAM TO DANIEL. OTHERS READ THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE FOR THE MAGNIFICENT STORIES IT CONTAINS. WE CAN READ IT FOR THESE REASONS, TOO, BUT WE OUGHT TO HAVE A MORE COMPELLING REASON. IT WAS, AFTER ALL, WRITTEN WITH THE LIFE'S BLOOD OF OUR ANCESTORS. WE SHOULD READ THE BIBLE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT OURSELVES AND TO GAIN INSIGHTS INTO THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE WHICH CAN HELP US SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS IN MODERN TIMES. WE SHOULD READ IT TO REDISCOVER FOR OURSELVES WHAT OUR ANCESTORS PAINFULLY LEARNED ABOUT THE NATURE OF GOD AND HIS PLAN FOR MANKIND.

WE LIVE IN AN AGE, THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, WHEN MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE SAYING, THERE IS NO CHOCHMAH IN LIFE; THERE IS NO MAIN CENTRAL PURPOSE WHICH EXPLAINS THE REASON FOR HUMAN LIFE AND WHICH OUGHT TO BE THE GOAL OF SOCIETY. THESE SAME PEOPLE ARE SAYING THERE ARE ONLY MILLIONS OF INDIVIDUAL GOALS AND MILLIONS OF INDIVIDUAL PURPOSES, WHICH ARE UNRELATED TO ONE ANOTHER.

AS A JEW, I REJECT THIS CHAOTIC VIEW OF MANKIND, JUST AS MY ANCESTORS REJECTED THIS SAME VIEW WHEN THE CANANITES CHAMPIONED IT AND WHEN THE GREEKS CAME TO SUPPPORT IT. AN INCREASING NUMBER OF PEOPLE TODAY ARE INTERESTED LESS IN PLANNING AND DESIGN AND MORE IN ISOLATED "HAPPENINGS". AS A JEW, I APPLY THE SAME QUESTION TO ONE HAPPENING AS I DO TO ANOTHER, "WAS IST DER CHOCHMAH?" I ASK OF EACH EVENT I WITNESS, "HOW DOES IT RELATE TO A GRAND DESIGN FOR THE UNIVERSE?".

"THE SCNG OF SONGS" WOULD TEACH US THAT THE JEWS BELIEVED IN ENJOYING LIFE. THEY BELIEVED IN THE IMPORTANCE OF PASSION, BUT THEY ALSO BELIEVED IN THE IMPORTANCE OF DUTY. IT IS OUR DUTY AS JEWS TO KEEP LOOKING FOR THE KERNEL OF ORDER IN A CHAOTIC WORLD. IT IS OUR DUTY TO FIND THE UNIFYING STORY BEHIND THE MANY MEANINGLESS AND DESTRUCTIVE STORIES OF OUR TIME. TOO MANY PEOPLE TODAY ARE LIKE THE MAGICIAN IN OUR OPENING STORY. IN THEIR DESPERATE EFFORT TO BE APPRECIATED, TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES, THEY THROW EXPLOSIVES CAPABLE OF DAMAGING THE SHIP OF SOCIETY ON WHICH WE SAIL. IT IS TIME WE GAVE LESS HONOR TO THE FRUSTRATED MAGICIANS, AND MORE ATTENTION TO THOSE WHO SEARCH FOR CHOCHMAHS. WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS NOW IS NOT MAGIC, BUT PURPOSE.