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Introduction

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THE

GREATEST ETHICAL TEACHERS



THE HEBREW PROPHETS



Meaning

The man who set the example for all the other prophets was Moses. The
prophets (nabi'im) were those men or women chosen by God to evaluate
his deeds and to the Hebrew people or to those other nations with whom
the Hebrew interacted. The prophets were sometimes called, "God's
ambassadors", in the words they related to the people in the earthly realm
were not merely words, they were commands. Once spoken by the prophet,
the word became reality.

The Hebrew view of the world was that it was intended to conform to
God's ideal system. When human rulers tried to build human society to
suit their own interests, God would send a messenger to challenge
them. The Hebrew Bible tells us that not until the appearance of the Hebrew

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The prophet protected through a series of miraculous spiritual experiences
of a human line of God. Egypt was the ancient nation of the ancient
Near East in the 14th century BCE before the coming of the Hebrew
people. It is thought to have lived in the ancient story of "The Burning
Bush" (Exodus 3). Moses is called to be the Hebrew prophet, but he
is to say, he is not worthy to challenge the King of Egypt, Pharaoh,
the God of the Hebrews. Since the King of Egypt was considered to be a
god, the human system of events which led to the Exodus is really a battle
between two gods. It is also a battle between two ways of life. Pharaoh
represented the established view that "might makes right". The God of the
Hebrews is revealed as a God who came about the weak and the suffering.
While it is Moses, with Aaron's help, who stands before Pharaoh to
oppose the challenging gods, Pharaoh clearly understands that his opponent
is a divine one. He simply does not appreciate the power of that God.

Moses establishes the pattern for the prophets to come. A prophet is one
with the courage to stand up to the power of kings, although he himself
has no army power. A prophet is one who risks his life to say, "Our God
is greater than yours or hers". Even in the light, there were no prophets
in Israel. Because he was the first to realize the standards of the
Hebrew God, Moses is considered a prophet.

Moses is not alone in the great tradition. In the world, he was different
from the prophets who came later. They came into an already society
which has already established its laws. Moses had to help between the
complexities of a world that was not yet the state of Israel. As a ruler of the
ancient Israelite society, Moses is more than a prophet.

Introduction

When I was a teen-ager, I knew I was a Jew, but I didn't know why. At this critical stage of my life, I was fortunate enough to become a student in a class on the biblical prophets. Longing for great role models to follow, I was suddenly introduced to the greatest group of ethical teachers in human history. When President Franklin Roosevelt wanted to compliment Justice Brandeis for his passion for the poor, Roosevelt called Brandeis, "Isaiah", after the Hebrew prophet. When Jesus wanted to teach about forgiveness, he quoted the prophet Hosea. When Martin Luther King wanted to inspire his people to stand up for their rights, he reached time and again for the Hebrew prophets, who dreamed of a peaceful world where compassion and justice would reign. Jesse Jackson keynotes almost every one of his speeches with a prophetic quotation.

One cannot live as a Jew in the profound sense, unless he/she becomes enmeshed in the life and times of the Hebrew prophets and brings those concerns and passions to bear on modern problems.

The following is a brief introduction to the major prophets as depicted in our Tanach (Hebrew Scripture).

Moses

The man who set the example for all the other prophets was Moses. The prophets (n'vi'im) were those men or women chosen by God to mediate the divine will to the Hebrew people or to those other humans with whom the Hebrews interacted. The prophets were sometimes called, "God's spokesmen", but the words they relayed to the actors in the earthly drama were not mere words; they were commands. Once spoken by the prophets, the word-command (davar) became reality.

The Hebraic view of the world was that it was intended to conform to God's ideal pattern. When human rulers tried to mould human society to fulfill their own ambitions, God would send a spokesman to challenge them. The Hebrew Bible tells us that not until the existence of the Hebrew people did God's ethical plan for the world become clear, and God used this unique people to educate the world as to the divine plan.

The education proceeded through a series of encounters against advocates of a lesser idea of God. Egypt was the premier nation of the ancient Near East in the 14th century BCE (before the common era) when Moses is thought to have lived. In the famous story of "The Burning Bush" (Exodus, ch. 3), Moses is called to serve as God's prophet, that is to say, he is asked-commanded to challenge the King of Egypt in behalf of the God of the Hebrews. Since the King of Egypt was presumed to be a god, the famous series of events which led to the Exodus is really a battle between two gods. It is also a battle between two ways of life. Pharaoh represented the established view that "might makes right". The God of the Hebrews is revealed as a God who cares about the weak and the suffering. While it is Moses, with Aaron's help, who stands before Pharaoh to speak the challenging words, Pharaoh clearly understands that his opponent is a divine one. He simply does not appreciate the power of that God.

Moses establishes the pattern for the prophets to come. A prophet is one with the courage to stand up to the power of kings, although he himself has no such power. A prophet is one who risks his life to say, "Our God commands that humans be free". Seen in this light, there were no prophets before Moses, because he was the first to mediate the intentions of the true God (some call Abraham a prophet).

Moses is also known as the great legislator. In this sense, he was different from the prophets who came later. They came into an Israelite society which had already established its laws. Moses had to help fashion the constitution or legal framework for the state of Israel. As builder of the ancient Israelite society, Moses is more than a prophet.

Elijah and Elisha

Elijah and Elisha are the two best examples of the miracle-working prophets. They may be best remembered for their apparent miracles, but we are most interested in them, because they have some of the characteristics of the Classical or Literary Prophets who followed them.

It was Abraham, according to our midrashic stories, who taught the radical Jewish view that God was the Creator of nature but not in nature. In his famous "cave" experience, Elijah learns for all of us that God is not manifest in the earthquake, the storm, or the fire, but rather in the "still small voice". Presumably this is the inner voice that impels us to God-like deeds (1 Kings 19:9-12).

Elijah seems most like the later Literary Prophets when he challenges King Ahab on the occasion in which Ahab's foreign born and Baal-worshipping Queen Jezebel kills the farmer Naboth, in order to confiscate his ancestral farm (1 Kings 21:1-16). Mediating the disapproval of God, Elijah declares to Ahab, "Does the king dare to murder and take possession also?" The prophet continues, "Surely royal blood will be spilled on the very spot where Naboth was unjustly murdered", (see verses 17-23).

Having publicly denounced the nation's ruler, Elijah had to flee for his life and return to the fugitive existence which had so long been his through the reign of this King and Queen who eroded the Mosaic laws as well as the worship of the God of Israel. (see chapter 19:1-3).

We will see in our later discussions that the Literary Prophets did not rely on the performance of miracles to shore up their status as prophets. Why did Elijah and his student-successor, Elisha, resort to these demonstrations? Fundamentalists would answer that these prophets simply had greater powers. Some scholars believe that Elijah and Elisha appealed mostly to the population in the hill country where a tradition of miracle working seers existed, and the "miracles" were necessary to win support for their ethical pronouncements. So it was that these prophets brought a dead person back to life¹; fed many with a little food²; cured disease³; parted the waters to walk on dry land⁴; and Elijah himself ascended to heaven in a whirlwind.⁵

It may well have been that the performance of such miracles were a necessary part of the intense competition with the prophets of Baal who were the special favorites of Jezebel and some of the other Israelite monarchs. Nonetheless, in their concern for social justice, Elijah and Elisha were partial models for the later prophets. Certainly they were uncommon men of great courage. In their time they were giants, and their charismatic qualities still endear them to most Jews in modern times.

Notes: (1) 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:32-37. (2) Kings 4:42-44.
(3) 2 Kings 5:1-14. (4) 2 Kings 2:8, 14. (5) 2 Kings 2:11.

* The Literary (or Classical) Prophets are the prophets described in the biblical books that bear their name, i.e. Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others.

Tradition tells us that God handed down the law (Torah) to Israel "by the hand of" or through Moses. Some of our teachers say that Moses and the "Elders" legislated the law after searching their hearts as to what God would want them to do. Whichever view we accept, some of the great teachings attributed to Moses are:

1. The Ten Commandments (Exodus, Ch 20, Deuteronomy, Ch.5).
2. The basic laws of property and person (EX. 22, 23).
3. The Holiness Code (Leviticus 19), which includes such teachings as the requirement to imitate God in His holiness (v. 2); Thou shalt not take vengeance (v. 17); Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (v. 17); Thou shalt love the stranger as thyself (v. 34); Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind (v. 14).
4. Moses is credited with the first labor legislation, the establishment of a day of rest for all living things, not only humans, (EX. 20:9); the requirement of kindness to one's enemy (EX. 23:4,5); profound concern for the poor and the stranger (Ex. Chapter 6,9).

The Hebrew Bible, or Tanach, tells us that there has never been another prophet like Moses, "who spoke to God face to face" (Deut. 34.10). Perhaps Moses is the greatest prophet because he established the pattern for mediating God's commands. The prophets* who came after him might be considered the defenders of the constitution that Moses helped to establish, but they are more than that.

* The Hebrew prophets were different from the earlier seers and visionaries of other peoples. See the chapter, "The Seer-Priest and the Prophet in Ancient Israel" by Dr. Harry M. Orlinsky in his book, "Essays in Biblical Culture And Bible Translation".

Amos

(References to chapters and verse are to the biblical Book of Amos. Follow the Hebrew Bible (Tanach) as you read this essay).

"Amos and Andy" was the name of a famous radio comedy team decades ago before TV. Many of us remember that show with pleasure, but some of us don't know that the namesake of the comedian Amos was the great Israelite prophet (about 760 BCE and later). We have seen in the case of the earlier miracle-working prophets, like Elijah, that the function of the prophet was "to defend the Constitution". i.e., to stand on the side of the ancient democratic law and defend the rights of the poor against those in power.

Amos, like the prophets who followed him, understood (a) that he was personally chosen by God for this purpose; (b) that God spoke to him directly and commanded him to take certain specific actions; (c) and that once proclaimed, the word-command of God became reality, i.e., it set in motion events that accomplished that which God desired.

We have seen that when Elijah condemned King Ahab's confiscation of the land of Naboth that the prophet had to flee for his life. Still the prophets fulfilled their dangerous mission. The courage of Amos is revealed when the high priest of the royal sanctuary at Beth-El commanded him to leave the country (to leave Israel, the northern kingdom, and to go to Judah, the southern kingdom), Amos not only continued his proclamations against the government and the priests, but he further told the priest that calamity would befall his family, because he opposed God's commands (Ch 7:10-17).

Amos was a simple herdsman when he received God's call to act as His mediator. In highly poetic language, Amos tells us that all of Israel's neighbors will be punished for their injustices, but Israel will be punished the most (Ch 1:3-2:3). Why would Israel be punished more than others, because God says, "You only have I known intimately", (3:2). Amos tried to teach his people that chosenness meant added responsibility. Like the other great prophets, he admonished Israel, in God's name, to set an example for the other nations. The Israelites could not be like the other peoples. They had to be different, kadosh; they were set aside as God's people, and that was an awesome burden.

Amos attacks those who treat human beings as merchandise and sell those who cannot pay their debts into slavery (2:6). He attacks those religious leaders who defile their sanctuaries by separating ritualistic observance from ethical conduct (3:14). The same people who so studiously observe the worship rituals "cast righteousness to the ground" (ch 4:4, 5 and 5:7). In the name of God, Amos calls for an end to burdensome taxes that impoverish previously free landowners (5:11). He seeks balanced justice in the courts without favoritism to the rich (5:15). In one of the great poetic proclamations, Amos quotes God as declaring to hypocritical worshippers, "I hate, I despise your religious convocations... Take away from Me the noise of your hymns... I will not accept your offerings...but let justice well up as the waters and righteousness as a mighty stream" (5:21-24)*

The message that Amos mediated to the affluent people of his society, who did not seem to be disturbed by the suffering of the poor, might well be directed to many of us today (see 6:4 ff):

**"Woe to you... who lie upon you beds of luxury...
And dine lavishly... Who entertain yourselves inventively
And drink bowlfuls of wine and adorn yourselves with expensive perfumes
But are not concerned for the hurt of the people!"**

Amos, like the Classical Prophets who followed him, was convinced that the longer that injustice was tolerated, the more intense would be the violent reaction. This reaction, Amos declared, would be directed by God Himself as the ally of the poor. It is from this period which marks the height of the affluence of the ancient Israelite kingdoms that the decline of the kingdoms begins, but, strangely, it is also in this period that we have our greatest group of ethical teachers who have been a resource and inspiration to the rest of the world for almost three thousand years.

Note: Quoted by Martin Luther King in his famous Washington speech

Isaiah

(Follow the references in your Hebrew Bible (Tanach) for deeper enrichment. References are to chapter and verse in the Book of Isaiah).

The Classical or Literary Prophets reigned primarily during the time of the divided kingdom. When Solomon died, his son threatened to be a severe ruler, and the southern tribes created the kingdom of Judah while the northern tribes retained the name Israel. Isaiah (the first prophet bearing that name) served from about 740BCE. The unified nation was not a great military power. The divided nations became pawns in the struggles of the great military nations, Babylonia, Egypt and Assyria. The prophets did not interpret international events in terms of the power struggle between the nations. For them the international problems were but a reflection of the internal domestic problems. A morally strong Israel (or Judah), they never doubted, would defeat its international rivals. A morally corrupt Israel would be conquered by its powerful enemies.

Like Amos, Isaiah attacked the great show of ritualistic religion in his time as being hypocritical (1:11-17). He denounced the elaborate sacrificial worship and said in God's name, "I cannot endure iniquity along with the solemn assembly" (v. 13). He admonished the people to "Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow" (v. 17).

How would the nation be able to oppose their mightier adversaries? "If you follow the ancient law, you will eat the good of the land, But if you rebel, you will be devoured by the sword" (v. 19, 20). Isaiah spoke of the need to purge existing rulers, "I will purge away the dross... and will restore you judges as of old...; Then shall you be called the city of righteousness" (v 25, 26).

The God of Isaiah was not just the God of Israel. He was the God of all nations. What He desired was international peace. It is from Isaiah that we get the famous prophecy that adorns the Isaiah Wall at the United Nations in New York: "And He shall judge between the nations... And they shall beat their swords into plows, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war any more" (2:4)

Like the other prophets, Isaiah is greatly concerned about the growing cosmopolitan attitude towards religion, as in our own day. This relaxed attitude led to the infiltration of other religions into Israelite practice. Idols began to appear in many Israelite homes. The problem with idols was that they represented other gods and associated with them were other lifestyles. The God of Israel was the only God associated with a moral law (or Torah).

Like Amos, Isaiah criticized the very leaders of the people. "The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders (political advisors) of His people, and the princes thereof: "It is you who have eaten up the vineyard; The spoil of the poor is in you houses; What mean you that you crush My people, And grind the face of the poor?", declares Him who creates and commands the stars" (3: 4, 15).

Isaiah criticizes the fashion oriented women who have no concern for the poor, "who walk with stretched-forth necks, and wanton eyes, ...mincing as they go," (3: 16-17). When the reaction to injustice occurs, declares the prophet, these wealthy women will be stripped of their finery and suffer grievously (3: 18-26) because of their indifference, (to the needs of the people).

The businessmen who were concerned only with profit were not spared the prophet's lash. He declared, "Woe unto them that join house to house and field to field, till there be no room for others, and the wealthy dwell all alone" (5:8). The problem, said the prophet, is that those who live only to amass wealth "regard not the work of the Lord" (5:12).

The prophet bemoans the decline of the old value system. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil: That change darkness into light, and light into darkness... Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes..." (5: 20-21). Does this not sound like a description of our own time, when so many have substituted their own personal standards for what used to be a commonly accepted moral system? The prophet wants the people, high and low, to know that God will act to reinstate justice (5:25). He will employ the armies of foreign nations to punish His own people who seem unable to establish the just system He has ordered for them (5: 26-27).

Isaiah talks about the righteous king who God will raise up to replace those present kings who ignore His law (11: 1-9). This future king is described in ideal terms, and the period of his reign is described as a kind of paradise :..."with righteousness he will judge the poor...and the wolf shall dwell with the lamb...They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain..." (11: 1-9). Some Christians claim that this passage refers to Jesus, although there is nowhere a mention of a divine being.

That Isaiah never thinks in terms of the Christian idea of forgiveness associated with Jesus seems quite apparent. Christianity teaches that forgiveness is only obtained through belief in Jesus and his redemptive sacrifice. Isaiah teaches that with reasoning and moral behavior, forgiveness will be granted. He says in the name of God, "Come now and let us reason together", the Lord declares; "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow... If you are obedient (i.e. to the law), you shall eat the good of the land..." (1: 18,19).

Hosea

(Use you Tanach to look up the references to chapter and verse in the Book of Hosea).

Israel had divided into two kingdoms at the death of Solomon. The northern kingdom retained the name Israel and had its capital in Samaria. At first, the strongest in the military sense, the northern kingdom was also the most volatile. Living in the shadow of the mighty Assyria to the north and east, Israel suffered from political intrigue and short-reigned monarchies.

In spite of the constant threat to its independence, Israel thrived economically. The relative prosperity kept its people from concerning itself too much about the ancient democratic religious law or the brit-covenant with God. The prophet Hosea (middle of the 8th century BCE) complained that the people had forgotten God. "They boast, 'I have become rich, I have obtained wealth' (12:8).¹ "Therefore", said the prophet in the name of God., "Samaria shall bear her guilt, for she has rebelled against her God..." (14:1). Hosea was disturbed by the Israelites who made contracts, sealed them with an oath in God's name, and then violated them (10:4). This was taking God's name (Adonai) in vain.²

1. "Old Testament", Jewish Scriptures
2. Contracts were sealed by saying "as my God, Adonai, Lives, I will perform this contract". Then, the oath was signed.

A sign of the falling away from God and His moral law was the increasing number of pillars indicative of the worship of foreign gods (10:1). "As his prosperity increased, his pillars increased". Since the worship of these foreign gods did not involve obedience to a Torah, this kind of idolatry weakened the moral fabric of the society. The prophet castigated the priests who introduced animal totems to their worship (10:5). He prophesied an end to the northern monarchy because the king was a party to the violations of the covenant (10:7).

The prophet symbolized the waywardness of his people through significant events of his life. He deems himself to have been commanded to marry a prostitute, just as Israel prostituted itself from her husband, God, and she worshipped other gods (1:2,3 and 3:1). The names of the prophets' children are symbols of God's future actions (The son is Jezreel, "God will sow, i.e. punishment", and the daughter's name is "lo-ruchamah, God will not show compassion". (1: 3-6)

The relationship of God to Israel is spoken of in terms of the marriage relationship (or the parent-child relationship). What God and His prophet want is that Israel will turn aside from its alien gods and return to the ancient covenantal law (2:18-20). As a sign of the renewed covenant, God will betroth Himself anew to Israel forever (2:21-22). The magnificent poetry of this betrothal is said when a traditional Jew binds himself to God through the tephillin in the morning prayer:

*"And I will betroth thee unto Me for ever;
Yes, I will betroth thee unto Me in the righteousness and in justice
And in loving kindness and in compassion
...And thou shalt know the Lord".*

Like the prophet Amos, Hosea tells the people that God doesn't desire the pompous hypocrisy of elaborate ceremonials. What he wants is loyalty to the whole range of the democratic law:

"For I desire covenant loyalty and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offering (6:6). This phrase was later to be repeated by Jesus, according to the New Testament.

Hosea knows full well that Israel is about to be conquered by mighty Assyria, and while he advises the people that repentance (return to the law) will save them, he knows that the die is cast. He wants the people to understand that their suffering is due to their violation of the covenant, and he assures them that God will ultimately forgive them and cause them to return to the land. As Amos emphasizes God's concern for justice, so Hosea emphasizes God's forgiving nature. The prophet proclaims in God's name:

*"How shall I surrender thee, Israel,
My heart is turned within Me
My compassions are kindled together.
I will not execute the fierceness of My anger...
For I am God and not man...
And I will not come in fury" (11:7-10)*

Hosea makes it clear that God is determined to maintain the covenant relationship, and He will do whatever is necessary to keep the partnership going.

Jeremiah

The Prophet of Hope

(References are to chapter and verse in the biblical Book of Jeremiah. Read along).

Jeremiah is generally called "the prophet of doom", He could as easily be called "the prophet of hope", for like most of the other Classical or Literary prophets, he foretold the negative consequences that immoral action would bring upon the people, but he also promised that things would go well, if the people were true to their covenantal responsibilities. Like Hosea, Jeremiah pleaded with and goaded the Judeans to show "hesed, covenant loyalty". The prophets did not interpret the threat of stronger military powers in terms of power politics. Their view of international events was that God was the authority behind the moves of all nations, and kings were His pawns and instruments. God would cause Assyria to invade the northern kingdom (Israel) and Babylonia to invade the southern kingdom (Judea), because the Israelites were violating their contract, and God had a contract with only one people. In other words, the prophets read international events solely in terms of Israelite morality.

In Chapter 21, we read of one of the extraordinary events in the life of Jeremiah (about 625-575 BCE). The Babylonians are besieging Jerusalem, and the Judean king, Zedekiah, sends an emissary to Jeremiah to ask him to intercede for God's help against the invader (21:10 1-2). Jeremiah has apparently decided (been told by God) that the Babylonian invasion is God's way of dethroning the wicked Zedekiah and establishing a new and more just Judean king. The prophet responds to Zedekiah's plea with these words spoken in God's name, "I myself will fight against you with an outstretched arm and with a strong arm, even... in anger and fury..." (31:4-6) Jeremiah advises the people of Jerusalem not to resist the invaders but to "go over to the invaders" (v. 8-10).

We have here the classic example of the teaching, "Not my country right or wrong, but my country must be right". Jeremiah speaks of a higher patriotism, loyalty to God, Who proclaims that a regime cannot stand in Judea unless it observes the democratic covenant.

Jeremiah makes clear what a king of Judea must do to win God's support (22:1-5). He must "execute justice and righteousness" and protect the weak, the stranger, the fatherless, the widow, the victims of oppression (v. 3).

You can understand that Jeremiah's teaching was seen as treason by the Judean king and by his cohorts, the High Priest and the aristocrats. Pashur, the Chief Priest, throws Jeremiah into prison (20:1-2). He was later condemned to die at one trial but was released after a second trial (26:1-19). Interestingly, the court that released him was a secular court, composed of the princes and the people. They countered the religious court which had condemned him saying, "This man...has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God" (v.16). In other words, there was a tradition of freedom of conscience in ancient Judea which was unparalleled in the ancient Near East. Compare now the results of the trials of Jeremiah, about 600 BCE, with the trials of Jesus as described in the New Testament. Jesus was first condemned by a religious court (consisting of priests appointed by the Romans) and the condemnation was upheld by the Roman secular court. Apparently, Rome did not have a tradition of free speech. The charge against both men, Jesus and Jeremiah was treason.

The victory of the Babylonians was, at least in its initial stages (586 BCE), a victory for the poor Judeans, for the Babylonians gave much of the land which had been progressively amassed by the wealthy into the hands of the poor as a political maneuver. The upper class was taken into exile, which was a common technique to keep them from revolting against their conquerors.

In the final days, Jeremiah enjoined the people to use their time in exile constructively, not to despair, but to build as best they could. The exiled Judeans succeeded in developing one of the great Jewish civilizations in Babylonia. They lived there from 586 BCE to approximately 1950 CE, 2400 years. The Talmud was prepared in Babylonia, and some Rabbis came to call that country the new Israel (42:7-12). Jeremiah knew that Babylonia would be a much better haven for the Jew than Egypt, a neutral land at the time (42:13-17).

Jeremiah prophesied the doom of Judah only if those in power did not change their ways. When the success of the Babylonian invasion seemed inevitable, he became the main source of hope. Jeremiah said that God would make a "new covenant" with both Judah and Israel which would be engraved on the hearts of His people, and this time the people would be loyal (31:31-34). Some Christians teach that God forever rejected the Jews and the "new covenant" is with the Christians. It is impossible to read that conclusion into this 31st chapter which clearly states that the new covenant (testament) is to be with the Jews. Further, this prophet, traditionally associated with doom, took a highly optimistic step even in the waning hours of the losing battle against the invader. He purchased the field of his cousin who could not hold on to it. He made this purchase as a symbol of that time to come when Jews would again buy and sell land as free persons in a free Judah and free Israel (32:6-15).

Prophetic Living

There have been other heroic ethical teachers down through human history but never a group so singularly dedicated as the Hebrew prophets. That their active influence endured over hundreds of years in ancient Israel and Judea is also a reflection of the greatness of the religiously motivated democratic tradition of these peoples. The ideals and goals of the prophets were the ideals and goals of the Jewish people at its best over a protracted period of time.

Many oppressed groups in subsequent ages have relied on the teachings of the prophets, as God's spokesmen, even as they rely on them today.

Jews especially should know the life and times of the prophets intimately. Jews, as the people of Jeremiah and Hosea and Moses, should be dedicated to what might be termed "prophetic living" today. As Isaiah proclaimed to the Jews of his time, God has called you

"...To loose the fetter of wickedness,
To undo the bands of the yoke,
And to let the oppressed go free...
... To deal your bread to the hungry,
And to shelter the outcast in your house", (58:3-7)

The duties of the prophetic Jew are never done.

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