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I

Prayer Is Work, "Avodah"

A. SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PRAYER

In spite of the strengthening of organized religion in America during recent years, it is fair to say that the majority of people today are rather confused about the meaning of prayer. It is a very common experience to hear a person who regularly attends worship services say, "I don't really understand what I am doing," or, "I am not certain to whom I am praying," or, "I do not know whether my prayer is answered or not."

The honest person will have some legitimate doubts as to the best way to communicate with God. He (or she) will find difficulty in defining the image, which is the object of his reaching. He will wonder whether the specific means he uses to relate to God is appropriate and whether the accepted means used by the community in public worship is adequate. He may well find it difficult to measure whether or not his prayer has been answered.

One of the reasons many of us find it difficult to pray is that we think of God in terms of an old man with a beard who sits up in the sky and runs errands for those who make demands on Him. When our particular wish seems not to have been fulfilled, we may wonder if we prayed properly, or whether God is really concerned about us. Some of us conclude that if God is not as our childhood dreams pictured Him to be, then, He has no existence at all. We moderns have been zealous in developing new scientific concepts, but we have been most unimaginative and uncreative where religion is concerned. Perhaps we have been downright fearful of doing original and profound thinking on the subject. For modern people to be able to pray with integrity, they must be able to conceive of a God-image, which uses all the truths laboriously gleaned by humans throughout the ages. In order to be religious, it is not necessary that we conflict with the highest knowledge that science has

discovered. On the contrary, we must use every discovery, concerning both the nature of the physical world and the nature of human beings, to construct a religious view which will be the most consistent with reality and which solicits the noblest expression from us. For example, it was once common to believe that a human being was a creature of small talents, and that he or she was merely the passive recipient of such power as God chose to distribute arbitrarily. Today, we tend to think of God and human beings as partners, interacting with each other in a creation that knows no end. The old emphasis on prayer is indicated in the petition, "God, help me." It may well be that the emphasis more consistent with reality should be, "God, help me to understand how I may work together with You to help myself and others."¹

In preparing to write this book, I interviewed a number of people and asked them if they prayed and how they prayed. I received many different kinds of replies, some startling, some amusing, and some spine-chilling. One woman told me that she does not pray much now, but she used to pray sincerely when she was a young girl. What did she pray for then? "I prayed when I came home later than the permitted hour," she said. "I prayed that my father would not whip me for violating his rule." This young lady told me that if her father did not whip her, she knew that God had answered her prayer.

The air is filled with prayers of a similar nature. Some people pray, "Oh, Lord, let me close this business deal. I need the money." Some girls pray, "Oh, Lord, let this boy fall in love with me." The embattled soldier prays, "Oh, Lord, let the enemy soldier be killed and not me." The perspiring prizefighter prays, "Oh, Lord, let me smash this guy into unconsciousness." Everybody "prays," including scoundrels and murderers, and it is clear that if God answered all prayers, the world would be a miserable place in which to live and quite confusing. Most people pray on the basis of surface whim and thought without weighing the motives that prompt them to pray. When God does not seem to answer a selfish, shallow, and sometimes cruel prayer, the petitioner may well exclaim, "There is no God!" Certainly, a part of that statement, at least, is true. We might say, "*Thank God, there is not that kind of God who will respond to the most*

ignoble of human wishes!"

The prophet Isaiah, 8th century B.C.E., taught that a prayer prompted by greed and not motivated by ethical striving would not be answered. He proclaimed in the name of God:

And when you lift up your hands,
I will turn My eyes away from you;
Though you pray at length,
I will not listen.
Your hands are stained with crime-
Wash yourselves clean;
Put your evil doings
Away from my sight.
Cease to do evil;
Learn to do good.
Devote yourselves to justice;
Aid the wronged...

(Isaiah 1: 15-17)

Isaiah taught that the person who performed deeds of justice and compassion would find God waiting to communicate with him (her). A word which the Israelites have used for prayer is "tefilah" which comes from the verb which has been translated "to judge oneself."² Prayer involves self-judgment, self-improvement. It is a step towards the service of that which is holy and just, a path to the loving-giving life. Isaiah further teaches that if you have helped your neighbor in distress, if you have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and aided those who are persecuted wrongly, if *then* you call, Adonai will answer you.

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If you cry for aid, God will say, "Here I am!" (Isaiah 58:6-9). It is but a summary of this teaching to say, when the person who strives for righteousness prays, he will be strengthened in his being and in his work. Are these not legitimate goals of prayer?

B. THE ANSWER TO PRAYER IS "OF THE SPIRIT"

Our teachers have forcefully contended that God is not a genie who can be conjured up by the rubbing of a magic lamp. Those who expect God to perform their every whim are regarded as merely projecting a power-hungry desire to command all things. Nor is God, in our tradition, a kind of benevolent storekeeper who cheerfully dispenses red bicycles and gold Cadillacs on demand. The essence of Jewish teaching is that God has given to humans not only the physical world, which is capable of sustaining itself, but Adonai or "Lord" (the verbal symbol Jews use for God) has also given to us a creative self (nefesh) which is capable of self-direction within broad boundaries and capable of infinite growth and renewal.³ Beyond this, we are taught, God does not dispense material gifts. Adonai is "of the spirit," and His remaining storehouse consists not of material things but of the more precious gifts of courage, patience and love.

This kind of gift is accompanied by important reservations, however. The spiritual gift is something which has to be used by the recipient before it can show results! Many of us do not seek this kind of gift, because once we have it, we know that we must work at using it. Unfortunately, the thing many praying people want least to do is to work at helping themselves. Let us understand the Jewish definition of prayer. The more ancient Israelite word for prayer is "avodah"; the root meaning is "service-work." Avodah is the specific name given to the formal worship in the ancient Temple which frequently involved a gift by the worshipper to Adonai, their God. There

can be no value to prayer unless the one who prays is prepared to work and to use the gift of courage or strength, which is obtained from God, towards the solving of problems. You might say that our active response is our gift to God, as well as to ourselves.

The classic example of God's answer to the lazy worshipper is described in the book of Exodus. The former slaves to Pharaoh once again demonstrated their lack of courage and their unwillingness to believe in their own free destiny, when they halted before the "Sea of Reeds", commonly known as the Red Sea, and demanded that Moses ask God for another miracle to overcome the obstacles before them. The biblical text tells us that when Moses reluctantly prayed, relaying the request of the people, God replied, "Why do you cry unto me? Speak unto the Children of Israel that they may go forward!" (Exodus 14:15.) A prayer cannot be an attempt to get God to do for us what we can and must do for ourselves; but a prayer for strength to do the task that lies before us is a legitimate prayer and can find its answer. There is a basic Hebrew prayer which goes,

Adonai oz leamo yiten
Adonai yevarech et amo veshalom
May the Lord grant strength unto his people
May the Lord bless his people with peace.⁴

The prayer suggests that when we constructively apply our newly found strength, we will attain to the "shalom," to the "peace" or to the "well-being," which we seek. It has been wisely said that the one who rises from prayer a better person, enriched with new understanding, perhaps revitalized with hope, energized to undertake the task at hand, has had his prayer answered.

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"O LORD, HOW CAN WE KNOW YOU?"

O God, how can we know You? Where can we find You?

You are as close to us as breathing, yet You are farther than the fathermost star.

(Gates of Prayer, p. 180)

A. THE MYSTERY BEYOND

WE ARE TOLD THAT THERE IS A BREATH-TAKING VIEW OF THE SEA from a mountain road on the island of St. Thomas. There is a sign there which reads:

LOOKOUT POINT

(Courtesy of Mountain Top Hotel)

In black crayon, below the lettering, is etched the addition, "*With a little help from God!*" Some of us human beings have almost succeeded in convincing ourselves that we alone have created the world. As we walk down our city streets, which we have made into narrow corridors walled up on each side with stone and metal, we find it difficult to see the objects of nature, the sky, the sun, the stars, which might remind us that the world is not the original work of human beings. The leader of the Soviet nation said a few decades ago, "We shot a star into the sky, too. What has God done that we haven't?" The boast reflects an ignorance of the real nature of the sky. The attention drawn to the moon and the planets by recent discoveries of human beings has awakened a new interest in the secrets of outer space. Inhabitants of the planet Earth have been forcefully reminded that the moon and Mars are, after all, but mere specks in our solar system, and our solar system is but a small area in the galaxy of which it is a part, while space seems to be the home of an infinite number of galaxies. Each time we have made a conquest in the field of science, we have learned that the world and the universe are much wider and deeper than we had ever before

fear (awe) of the Lord (Adonai) is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7; cf. Psalm 111: 10), is even more meaningful in our time of scientific discovery.

J. Robert Oppenheimer, while he served as Chief of the U.S. Atomic Research Project, was asked by TV's Edward R. Morrow on the latter's program called "Person to Person", "Mr. Oppenheimer, how did you feel when you exploded the first atomic bomb?" Mr. Oppenheimer, one of the world's outstanding physicists, replied, "My first response was one of fear; fear that this great secret, this great power potential existed all the time, and we were ignorant of it, and fear that other forces exist now with, perhaps, greater power, and we are ignorant of them also." Only the most informed and the most sensitive people are capable of true fear (awe) concerning the unlocked secrets already in existence. In this book, when we speak of God, we mean the *Author of Reality*, the Creator of the power of the universe, the Being behind "the impenetrable that really exists."

C. THE DISCOVERY OF GOD

Holy, Holy, Holy! The Lord of Hosts! His presence fills all the earth!

(Isaiah 6:3)

To experience God is to experience the mysterious. It is to come into contact with the Author of a reality so much beyond our comprehension that we stand in awe of it and call it "mysterious" (i.e., beyond our understanding). Samuel Morse experienced the power of God when he discovered and mastered the principles making possible the telegraph. Morse worked for years trying to transmit a message across space. When finally, after much experimenting and laboring, Morse succeeded, he exclaimed, "*What hath God wrought?*"² Morse could have claimed that he had invented some new thing, but he knew that he had merely discovered and applied a law that had always existed. When Morse came to know

this reality, he became more acutely aware of the great power of the Creator. In his discovery and in his labor, Morse came into knowing contact with but a small portion of "what really exists," and this small discovery made him tremble in awe and exclaim, "What hath God wrought?" For Samuel Morse, this grand moment of discovery was a prayerful moment. It was a God-contacting, God-experiencing moment. By his diligent labors, Morse had earned an insight into an aspect of God's greatness. This glimpse of but a single feature of God's universe, this view of the divine power, had a humbling effect on Morse, and he experienced a profound sense of adoration. He could say now with Job, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but, now, my own eyes behold You."³

The person who experiences this moment of awe, this awareness of immense power awaiting our use, this embracing of the infinite, finds that in this prayerful moment, "there is life and food for future years"⁴, as the poet expressed it. Some of us come to know God by searching out the secrets of the physical universe; others seek contact with God as the Spirit behind living nature. The poet wrote that in such searchings, "I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of the setting sun, and the round ocean and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the mind of man; a motion, and a spirit that impels all thinking things, all objects of all thought, and rolls through all things..."⁵

D. LIFE FULL OF BLESSING

Just as Einstein stood rapt in awe as he contemplated the order behind the physical universe, so Wordsworth, the great English poet, came to his prayerful moment and to these "elevated thoughts," by contemplating the order and complexity of nature. These prayerful experiences gave Wordsworth a strength and peace that enabled him to conquer many disappointments in the regular routine of his life. Of his prayerful experiences, Wordsworth wrote, ". . . she (nature) can so inform the mind that is within us,

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so impress with quietness and beauty, and so feed with lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues, rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men, nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all the dreary intercourse of daily life, shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb our cheerful faith, that all which we behold is full of blessing."⁶ For Wordsworth, contact with nature was a religious experience. There are many paths to an awareness of God, but any of them can "impress with quietness and beauty," feed us with "lofty thoughts," and so strengthen us that not "all the dreary intercourse of daily life shall e'er prevail against us or disturb our cheerful faith, that *all which we behold is full of blessings!*" Similarly, Shakespeare spoke of nature as revealing the divine power. He wrote, there are "tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything".⁷

For Wordsworth and Shakespeare, the beauty of nature proclaimed a greater Power beyond. For Morse and Einstein, the laws of physics pointed to the power of God. To all of these men, their prayerful searching, their meditations, their feeling through, and acting through to the "mystery beyond" gave a sense of a life full of blessings. This is one of the higher awards of prayer. We can say that prayer is "*reaching for God,*" *reaching for the greater reality, the deeper life.* Through this kind of reaching, one can learn to live with a sense of personal relationship to the dynamic power behind all created things.

Sometimes, as in the case of Morse and Wordsworth, a particular moment may have such impact that we consider it a revelation. What is revealed is another phase of reality. In such a moment, we seem to see, suddenly and forcefully, "into the life of things," and we humbly acknowledge the Captain at the helm of the universe. We say, in effect, "There is a Creator!" Henceforward, our life is changed. It acquires heightened meaning, for we know we are a part of an infinite greatness. This moment of awareness, this prayerful moment, then nourishes our future years with the food of inspiration. Having once come forcefully into contact with such power and beauty, we can never again forget that it is there, and that we are a part of the same stream from which it flows.

We speak more about the discovery of God in our Chapter V.

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III

WHAT ARE WE HUMANS THAT GOD SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT US?

In love You sustain the living; in Your great mercy, You sustain us all. You uphold the falling
and heal the sick...

(Gates of Prayer, P. 199)

A. THE ANSWER OF ISRAEL

1. We Are Made in the "Image of God."¹

SOME WORSHIPERS ASK, "WHAT IS THE VALUE OF THE PRAYERS OF adoration in the traditional Prayer Service?" The function of these prayers is to make us aware that we belong to something infinitely greater than ourselves. They enable us to understand that we are not as small and as impotent as we sometimes think. God does not need our praise, but we need to remind ourselves of the power to which we are linked and from which we benefit. There is a danger, however, in the mere adoration of God as the Author of Creation. Unless we continue to the next step in prayer, we may become convinced of our own insignificance and helplessness. Our teachers do not doubt that the Creator of the Universe and humankind are intimately related. Each Sabbath we pray, "The Creator of the Universe is our Redeemer." The One who places the stars in their orbits is interested in us, too. We are not apart from God's greatness.

The Psalmist has no problem in reconciling this seeming contradiction. He declares (Psalm 8:47), here in paraphrase, "When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have established; what are we that You are mindful of us, and our children, that You think of them? Yet, You have made us but little lower than the angels (or god), and have crowned us with glory and honor. You have made us to have dominion over the works of Your hands

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... " How quickly this Psalm, which we use in our Prayer Service, passes from an adoration of God to a reminder that humankind is God's noblest creation. Indeed, we are appointed by God to share in the management of God's created things (Genesis 1:20-28).

The Rabbis of Eastern Europe, in the nineteenth century, taught, "The greatest evil is when you forget that you are the child of a king!"² This was their way of saying that we humans will live optimistically and creatively only if we remember at all times that we are wonderfully formed by a God who cares. In our highly urbanized and competitive society, it is easy for the individual to conclude that he is an insignificant speck in a swarming mass. The pages of Genesis would teach us otherwise. The text informs us that man and woman are made in the "image of God."³ While contemporaries of the early Israelites taught that the king was divine and that his subjects were a mere shadow of the king's being, the Israelites taught that each person is made of the divine stuff itself!

Prayer is not possible unless you have a reasonable evaluation of your own importance. Those who belittle or hate themselves despair of ever leading meaningful lives and find it difficult to pray. To pray, you must believe yourself capable of change and growth towards the "image of the Divine." Looked at in this light, prayer is an exalted tool leading to the reawakening of the sense of one's own worthwhileness. It is a channel by which the individual river can link itself to the great ocean of life. It is a way of learning, a way of reaffirming the fact that we live in a kingdom greater than the narrow world of the individual. Prayer is a way to the tapping of a power greater than the individual believes he has. It is the process of becoming increasingly a part of the greater life in which we move.

a. The Far-Near God, The God of Love

The truly religious person does not have great difficulty in bridging the gap between the universal

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God and the personal God. Our teachers taught simply, "God is far, and He is near. He is the far-near God."^{4a} Our Reform Prayerbook, *The Gates of Prayer*, reads, "You are as close to us as breathing, and, yet, are farther than the farthestmost star."^{5b} The God of the heavens is the God of the heart.

(1) The One Who Prays Goes in Search of Love

"Deep is Your love for Us, O Lord our God, and great is Your compassion"

(Gates of Prayer, p.302)

Throughout the years, Jews have prayed in a specific way. The morning, afternoon, and evening services of the Jewish Prayerbook, which my teacher, Dr. Henry Slonimsky, has called "the greatest contribution of the Jews to the world," all begin with prayers extolling God as the Author of the vast creation.⁵ Immediately thereafter, however, there is a prayer which teaches that God created the world because of His love for His children.⁶ The morning prayer reads:

a- ha- vah ra -bah a-hav-ta-nu . . .

Deep is Your love for us...

This is the dimension that our religion adds to the discoveries of science. It teaches that the greatest wonder of Creation is that it is the evidence of God's love for His created things. In Judaism, God's love is understood as that which upholds the world. Love is the foundation without which the world would collapse. It is the spirit which holds all the material things together. It is the reasoning beyond the mathematical equations. It is the beginning, the means, and the end.

Small wonder, then, that shortly after the prayer in each service expressing God's love, there follows the prayer, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your mind, with all your strength,

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and with all your being".⁷ For Jews, prayer is, in essence, the process of learning how to receive, give, and use love. Prayer is a turning to the Source of Love, a receiving of the balm, and a way of learning how to pass on this love to others.

The one who prays goes in search of love. He (she) seeks a rapport with the Creator of the universe. He seeks an outlet for his complaints and a source of comfort. Prayer is a way of knowing, through a relationship of trust, what it may be impossible to learn otherwise. Our Scripture tells us that Israel was bound to God with "cords of love."⁸ The group or individual who stands in this relationship to God is able to say, "I am not isolated. I live a meaningful existence. I am wanted. I am bound together with the Heart of the universe and with the created things in it. We embrace each other. We serve and give to each other." Prayer is the way to a partnership with God in the continuing creation. The God of Israel intends that this message be extended through Israel to all humankind.

(2) Who Can Pray?

Only those can pray who are not afraid to love. The fear of trusting, the fear of giving, is a curse which plagues so many adults. Psychologists, like Erich Fromm, tell us that the greatest fear of humans is the fear of giving love.^{9A} So many of us have given our love to parents and older brothers and sisters and have had that love, we think, rejected. Most of us can look back to crucial experiences where we were tricked, teased, or cruelly betrayed by those we thought we had a right to trust. The wound inflicted by a betrayal of trust, by a rejection after we have innocently given our love, is the most painful of all wounds. For some of us, it never heals. Many of our intellectuals, completely alienated from God, militant atheists, are those who, once as children, warmly gave their love to adults and today nourish their wounds. You can sometimes tell how badly this kind of person has been rejected by measuring the degree of his militancy against God, for to him subconsciously God is substituted for the parent who ought to have been loyal and loving and was

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not. The late poet, Allen Ginsberg, had a great anger in him that he projected against God. In a heated argument against Judaism, he is quoted as saying, "At least the oriental peoples have the intelligence not to believe in a supreme deity!" and he compares God to the oppressive CIA.^{9b}

The person who refuses even to try to pray is frequently a person who says, in effect, "I am not going to be fooled again. I am not going to give again and be rejected." These people come to rely completely on their own intelligence and, in some cases, become strong and contributing people, but their super-independence is often a cover for their disappointment. They once were the supreme idealists, the supreme love-givers, who were rejected. For this sin of their parents, they will never forgive God! How unfortunate, for if you cannot trust, you cannot pray. If you cannot give your love, you cannot acknowledge the receipt of love. To deny the urge to love a human being is unnatural; to deny the urge to find a Friend behind the physical phenomena of our world is also unnatural. Each person longs to feel that he is a part of a meaningful universe, that there is a plan at the heart of things, that he is a significant part of the plan, and that the Creator cares for him. *Each person longs to transcend his individual aloneness and to become a part of something greater, in which there is companionship and union. The person who prays learns how to give and to receive, that is, how to be a real companion, how to join himself to other people and to the higher purposes of creation.*

b. Learning the Will of God

It must be understood, however, that by "love, ahavah," the biblical Israelites did not mean Hollywood type romantic love, nor did they mean the merely contemplative love as understood by the ascetic. The Scripture clearly teaches that a person had to demonstrate his love of God by doing justly and by showing mercy to God's creatures. The Prayerbook closely intertwines law and love. God showed His love by the establishment of *mitzvot*, and *chukim*, and *mishpatim*, all words for laws.¹⁰ We are to exhibit our love for Him by following His will as revealed in these laws.¹¹

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Our Prayerbook reads, "Deep is Your love for us, O Lord our God, and great is Your compassion. Our Maker and King, our ancestors trusted in You, and You taught them the laws of life (*chuke chaim*); *be* gracious now to us and teach us. ...Enlighten us with Your teaching (*be-toratechah*), *help us to hold fast to Your Mitzvot (bemitzvotachah)* and unite our hearts to love and revere Your name . . .".¹¹ We need go no farther to show how this modern translation of a most ancient prayer combines God's love for His children with the gift of His laws on the one hand, and man's love for God and obedience to His laws on the other. The clear purpose of this traditional prayer is to have the worshiper feel grateful for God's ordering of the physical and moral world and to solicit the worshiper's obedience to God's wishes as expressed in His varied commandments.

For Jews, the religious life is the law-true life, the Torah-oriented life. While the word "Torah" is used to mean the first five books of the Hebrew Scripture, it is often used in a broader sense to mean all sacred writings including the rest of the Hebrew Scripture plus the law-code known as The Talmud. Traditional Jews, therefore, require performance of all the rituals and customs described in these texts, including, of course, the moral laws.

Liberal Jews allow more individual choice where the ritual is involved and emphasize the moral laws. However they define "Torah", both Traditional and Liberal (Reform) Jews speak of the importance of living the Torah-indicated life. Both groups understand that to do something because God wants us to is to live in communion with God! Such a life is a form of continuing prayer.

Consider, now, that dramatic moment when Moses arduously climbed the mountain to speak with God.¹² Our Scripture does not record the mystic ecstasies experienced by Moses. Instead, it tells us that his communion resulted in the compilation of a group of laws which, in themselves, were living evidence of the reality of God. Moses proclaimed to the people that they could best relate to God by following these laws.¹³

While Moses was atop the mount, however, the mass of the people had urged upon the

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priests the making of an idol, a god that they could see.¹⁴ The people had no patience for the long process that Moses had undertaken with the Elders. They wanted, not the work and responsibility that goes with true worship, but, the emotional frills that are associated with primitive worship forms. We have here the elements of an enduring conflict in religion. There are those, usually the masses, who understand prayer in terms of the peripheral emotional elements of worship, and there are those, like Moses, who understand communion with God as addressing the invisible Author of the Laws of the Universe. Those who danced before the calf at the foot of the mountain were satisfied with the experience of the immediate release of emotion. Those who climbed the mountain in search of a deeper understanding of God understood worship as the continuing search for the will of God and the practice and teaching of His will-law.¹⁵

It is, perhaps, too easy to say that Moses was completely right and the people entirely wrong. It is fair to say, however, that Judaism has placed its major emphasis on worship as "searching for the voice of God," as expressed through the law that undergirds the moral and physical universe. For us, worship and study are, therefore, closely related, when study is motivated by a search for the truths that will aid humankind. It is not by mere coincidence that the Synagogue has been called the "Bet Ha-Midrash, The House of Study," as well as the "Bet Ha-Tefilah, The House of Prayer." In Judaism, these two concepts, prayer and study, are inextricably intertwined.¹⁶ We speak more about the link between study and prayer in Chapter V.

c. The Burning Bush, Personal Communion in a Given Context

Do Jews, then, eschew the emotional power in prayer? Of course not. We are mindful of the fact that the emotional quality of prayer can deepen its significance. On the other hand, we caution against the prayer that is emotionally unbridled and which is not oriented within a certain context. Certainly, Moses experienced the deepest kind of emotional response when he

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"saw" God through the image of the burning bush (Exodus 3:2ff). This was, for him, a profound moment of revelation. So dramatic was the confrontation, that, henceforth, the entire life of Moses was changed, channeled anew by this event. None the less, as intensely personal as that experience was, Moses interpreted the deity in terms of the traditional Israelite context. His imagination did not carry him away. Scripture tells us that Moses knew that he was being addressed by "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). The experience was both unique to Moses and not unique. He met alone with God, but Moses understood that the result of this meeting had to be interpreted within certain limits. These limits were morally conditioned. The result of his moving emotional experience was that Moses realized that he could no longer live in isolation from his people. He had to surrender the safe but passive life in the oasis of Midian. He had to return to Egypt to help his oppressed brethren (Exodus 3: 1-10).

The incident of the burning bush is a dramatic representation of the Jewish understanding of prayer. Prayer cannot be a refuge for those who seek escape from responsibility. It cannot be merely an exercise in emotional release, although it can include that. It must ultimately induce the worshiper to action, in terms of his better self. It must lead to deeds which link the worshiper and his community. We could summarize the experience of Moses in this incident, as follows:

- (1) Moses seems to experience a personal contact with the Divine, immediately and presently (Exodus 3:2).
- (2) He becomes aware of God as the creative power (the flame) that gives continuously of itself and is never consumed (verse 2).
- (3) The Deity, dramatically present, is identified as the historic God of the ancestors. That is, His nature is not changed (verse 6). He is a God concerned with morality and freedom, a *God who cares about the weak and the oppressed*. The text is explicit on this point. It reads (verse 7), "And the Lord said: I have surely *seen* the affliction of My people . . . and have *heard* their cry . . . for I *know* their pains. . . "
- (4) There is a task for the worshiper to perform which leads him to service in behalf

of the community. God says (verse 10), "Come now, therefore, and I will send you unto Pharaoh, that you may bring forth My people . . . out of Egypt."

Those of us who wish to learn how to pray might use this pattern as the framework for our experience. We speak more about this kind of ethically oriented experience when we talk about the Israelite Prophets in Chapter V, Section G.

2. The Relationship of the Jewish Group to God

It is ever a problem for the one who prays to find a way that will enable him to relate to God. Judaism has always pictured this relationship in certain specific contexts. Jews have related to God as Creator, as Law-Giver, as the Author of History, as Covenant Partner and as "Our Father who is in heaven". Our Prayerbook uses other titles for God like "Healer", "The One who... "opens the eyes of the blind", "raises the fallen", "frees the captive", "forgives the sinner". There are many more names identifying the areas in which God operates. Where can we find God? We can find Him at work in any one of these roles. We have referred to the tradition of Moses, which is that the Torah, the law of God, mediates God's presence to us, and we have cited the tradition of the Rabbis that we respond, we "speak" to God, by obeying this law.

a. God as the Author of History

Jews have long considered that God speaks to humans through the events of history. The Decalogue begins with an assertion that seems to be no commandment at all: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). For non-Jews, this is a general statement which may not seem to have the force of a commandment. For Jews, this is the foundation on which the other commandments stand, and we number it as the first commandment. It is a reminder to us of a saving experience when God and our people worked in close cooperation. It serves to bring to life in the present a worshipful moment in the past, when Israel communed with its God. The memory of the Exodus from Egypt permeates almost every Jewish holiday and religious service. The Exodus is for us a dramatic period of God-discovery, and it has helped to sustain us for thousands of years, in spite of suffering and wandering. The Exodus has eternally etched on the Jewish soul the conviction that *"There is One who helps to save. There is a Power that makes for freedom."* The burning memory of our historically recorded relationship with God has helped to keep us alive. This memory is not a detached one.

It is a recall of a personal experience. *It happened to us!*
We experienced the power of God!

Our Scripture states that every Jew, including those yet to be born, stood at Sinai.¹⁷ All Jews are bidden to make the revelation at Sinai a living personal experience. Our Prayer Service today is deliberately conceived to prepare the worshiper to enter into and to make personal to himself the experience of our ancestors. This is why so much of our formal prayer seems to be a lesson in history, a method of teaching, rather than of petition. Narrational or historical teaching is a major feature of the Jewish Prayer Service. It joins the individual to the community of the past and posits that this is one ongoing community throughout the ages.

In the Book of Deuteronomy (26:5 ff), we are told that the individual who brings the "bikurim" or "first fruits" of the harvest to the Temple, as required by law, must offer the fruits and then worship. The prayer begins with a recitation of the history of the experience of the Israelite people with God. It goes: "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. The Lord freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and potents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore, I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O Lord, have given me." Through this recitation, as an act of prayer, the individual rehearses the discovery-experiences of his ancestors and is reminded that, even if he personally has not experienced sudden or powerful revelations, his ancestors did, and he is not separate from their experience.

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This recitative or narrative form of prayer, this recounting of old experiences, this linking of the individual to the past struggles of humans for a life of meaning, is also an important feature of the Seder, a religiously oriented meal in the home on Passover. During the Seder, families recite the experience of the Exodus and conclude, "*We were liberated from Egypt, not just our ancestors.*"¹⁸ This kind of prayer does have profound inspirational value, does give strength to those who participate in the prayer, does help in making life meaningful, does give a sense of self-appreciation to the individual who finds that his personal worth is to be defined in terms of an exalted community effort which spans both past and future.

So much of our Synagogue prayer is in this spirit. Those who participate in our services in an understanding way are released from their sense of isolation and loneliness, and they are linked to the continuing history of an ancient people whose ultimate goals are uplifting to the spirit. In Jewish prayer, the limited strength of the individual is bound to the strength of an enduring Israel and to the eternal God to whom Israel has related for four thousand years.

b. Entering Into the Covenant Relationship

There is still another way, our tradition teaches, in which Jews relate to God. Our Scripture informs us that Abraham, the founder of our faith, made a covenant, a binding agreement, with God.¹⁹ Centuries later at Sinai all Jews, those present and those yet to be born, joined together in affirming this covenant.²⁰ Our responsibility, within the terms of this agreement, is to strive to make the world truly God's kingdom.²¹ To the extent that we fulfill our role within this covenant, we maintain a relationship with and commune with our God. *Even the Jew who refuses,*

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*perforce, to participate in prayers of adoration or petition is not released from the obligation to learn his role in shaping the world towards the image of righteousness and peace.*²²

Our religious tradition strongly binds together the notion of God as Creator and Israel as the teacher of righteousness to the nations. On the Sabbath morning after Sukkot (Tabernacles), we read in the worship cycle in the Synagogue, the Torah portion called "Bereshit", the first chapters of Genesis, telling us of the nature of the Creation.²³ On that Sabbath, we also are bidden by tradition to read the Haftarah from the Book of Isaiah, where the Jews are commanded by God to be "leor goyim-a light unto the nations".²⁴ Just as God created the physical light of the universe, the sun and the moon, so Israel must be God's mediator in bringing spiritual light to humankind. One of the special purposes of the prayer of a modern Jew must be to learn the ways in which he may fulfill his mission as a Jew, that he might share with God the continuing creative process of spreading light.

Let no one feel that Jews, because of their limited numbers, are unable to be a strong, positive force in this direction. As citizens of the United States of America, or Israel, or as citizens of other nations, we can work most effectively towards democratically conceived goals. Jews, as individuals, can work within many existing organizations to strengthen their moral fiber and to expand their horizons. There are not so many dedicated people in this, or any other country, that a few consecrated souls cannot have a profound influence on its development. Modern day Rabbis urge their congregants not to take their covenantal role lightly. The prayers of today's Jews can be moments of consecration to further the more worthwhile causes of the larger community.

3. Other Covenants

Let us here acknowledge that there are good people of other religions than Judaism who speak of their relationship to God as a covenant. We certainly do not want to deny the possibility that Adonai (the God who appeared to Moses) can

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make a covenant with other peoples. After all, we Jews think of Adonai as the "God of the Universe, Melech Ha-Olam". The Israelite Prophets (Isaiah, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Amos) spoke clearly of Adonai's relation to other peoples, and they declared that His Temple would become "a House of Prayer for all peoples". (Isaiah 56:7).

What Jews would oppose is the claim of some from another religion that they stand in the primary relationship to the God of Israel, because they have replaced Israel as God's chosen. The corollary of this teaching is that Israel has permanently fallen from grace. God's love is surely great enough to include many peoples without anyone being displaced. Pope John XXiii has formally expressed a view similar to this. Jews do not have to surrender a belief in the singularity of Adonai's covenant with Israel to accept the possibility that other peoples may regard themselves as having a different kind of covenant.

The importance of my role as a Jew, covenanted to God, is not diminished in the least, nor is it less imperative, because other peoples believe that they, too, are blessed with a covenant. The key point here, of course, is that each people do its work without seeking to dominate or displace the other. The teaching of Rabbi Hillel, reported in the Talmud, comes to mind here: Be amongst the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing it, loving your fellow creatures and drawing them near to the Torah.^{24b}

I was once privileged to be a part of a meeting between top level Christian Evangelists and Rabbis on the West Coast of our country. The Evangelists said, in effect, "Our religion compels us to try to convert you, how can we go about that task without making you angry at us, since we intend only to help you?"

I immediately thought of the teaching of Hillel and suggested that they try to follow his advice, i.e., to teach by the example of unconditional loving and the seeking of peace (shalom-peace, harmony). No doubt the person who lives in this way will attract many followers.

4. Personal Prayer, The Psalmist

As one reads the Psalms in our Scripture, one can detect the pattern of the context in which the Psalmist prayed. The Psalmist prepares for the more profound portion of his prayer by first releasing his fear, anger, and frustration. Having done this, he is then prepared to speak to God on a more exalted level.

Let us refer now to Psalm Seven, as an example. The author of this Psalm first appeals that he be saved from his pursuer "lest he tear my soul like a lion" (vs. 3). There follows a confession of sin (vss. 4-6), then a request that the Lord (Adonai) pour out His anger on the author's adversaries (vss. 7-8). With his fear and anger released, the Psalmist proceeds to a less troubled level of expression. In verse nine, Adonai is addressed not as a friendly ally, as in the earlier verses, but as a neutral Judge of all, the standard by which all humans, including the Psalmist, are to be judged. By praising God, the worshiper reminds himself that God is the source of righteousness (vs. 12), who is the surety for the fact that evil doers inevitably will bring down upon themselves the consequences of their deeds (vs. 17). The prayer ends in the spirit of thankfulness (vs. 18). The one who prays has once more been restored, through the prayer process, to the mood of contentment and happiness with life.

Let us note how far the Psalmist has come in this one prayer. First, there is the hot release of feeling, "the free outpouring of the soul." Then, there is a return to the appropriate context of God as the source of righteousness for all His children. Finally, the worshiper seems restored to a mood of security and tranquility. Is this not a major goal of prayer? Personal problems lose their overwhelming weight as we pray, for prayer is not merely the release of one's innermost feelings. *It is also the ventilating of our thinking in terms of the eternal values of love and justice which one associates with God.* If the Psalmist in this prayer had not conceived of God in the traditional concept of Israel, he would have ended his prayer with his first appeal that his enemy be overwhelmed, but he knows better

than this. He knows that God serves as the standard of righteousness for all humans, and he tries to lift himself to this image. *He tries to make himself over in the "image of God" in this sense.*

The Psalmist diffuses his frustration as he reminds himself that the power of God is ever present and is available to him, as well as to others. This is also the mood of Psalm Thirteen, which begins explosively, "How long, O Lord, will You forget me?" (vs. 2), and concludes, "But as for me, in Your mercy do I trust . . ." (vs. 6). In prayer we can lose our sense of personal loneliness and be reminded that we, too, can be the beneficiaries of the never-ending healing which flows from God. In Psalm Twenty-Two, we can trace the change that comes over the Psalmist as he prays. The Psalm begins "My God, my God, why have You abandoned me?"... (vs. 2). Then, the Psalmist is reminded of the experiences of his ancestors, and he says, "In You did our fathers trust; They trusted, and You rescued them" (vs. 5). The hopes of the worshiper are raised, but he is still not sure that he is worthy of similar treatment. He prays regretfully, "But I am a worm, less than a human" (vs. 7), and again, "my heart is become like wax. (vs. 15). The worshiper works through to a higher note of confidence, and he states, "For He did not spurn the plea of the lowly; He did not hide His face from him; But when he cried unto Him, He listened" (vs. 25). The Psalm ends with the extolling of God as the Ruler of all peoples (vss. 28-32). In this Psalm, we again see the saving grace of prayer at work.

Psalm Twenty-Three constitutes one of the most popular prayers in any liturgy. Although it occurs, of course, in the Hebrew Scripture, and is often used by Jews for both private and liturgical purposes, it is also used for similar purposes by Christians of all persuasions. Why is this Psalm-prayer so popular? Surely, because it appeals to the heart of us all. It deals with human fear and loneliness at the most critical time, but it also encourages us to enjoy life, this marvelous gift of God. It instructs us to believe that God is near and is concerned about us.

While there are many new translations of this Psalm

from the original Hebrew, most of us know best the earlier King James Translation or that used by The Jewish Publication Society Translation (revised in 1955).

Since I believe that it serves the worshiper best to use a text with which he is already familiar, we will employ the more familiar translation here, except for the quaint "Old English" expressions.^{24c} Let us try to understand this Psalm.

- v.1. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- v.2. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

The language is pastoral, but we get the Psalmist's thought easily. God is near and concerned about us. He guides us to gentler and more fertile fields (comfort and prosperity).

- v.2b. He leads me beside the still (comforting) waters.

The imagery of green fields and abundant waters is indicative of the many things God grants us without our even asking.

- v.3a. He restores my soul;

Some interpret this in the simple sense of the tired or weakened person being refreshed and able to stand up to the next task or the next day and its problems. Others interpret this as an actual revival of life after one leaves this world, a re-birth.

- v. 3b. He guides me in straight paths for His name's sake.

He enables us to live that kind of life which is consistent with His teachings (we are not doomed to failure because of our frailty).

- v. 4a. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,
For You are with me;

Even though we come close to death, we will not be afraid,
because we know that God is there with us, We are not alone.

v. 4b. Your rod and Your staff,
They comfort me;

The rod is the symbol of God's sovereignty. He is in command. The staff (the shepherd's staff) is the symbol of God's gentle leading. There is here the contrast of two aspects of God's nature.

v. 5a. You prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies

The prepared table is the symbol of God's approval and support even when trouble is most apparent.

v. 5b. You have annointed my head with oil;

Just as God annoints His chosen king or priest, so He has chosen each of us

v. 5c. My cup runs over

We have more than we need to face life's problems calmly and confidently.

v.6a. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life;

God's bounty and intimate concern is with us at all times,
from infancy through old age.

v. 6b. And I shall dwell in the House of the Lord
forever.

Like one of God's annointed ones, the Priest or the King, we

will enjoy God's House, this glorious world, so long as we may live.

This is an example of how the Twenty-Third Psalm may be used in prayer today. It is a prayer worth memorizing. Of course, if David was indeed the author, it may have a more specific reference in his time and situation.^{24d}

The authors of the Psalms do not think of people as puppets on a string, as the passive recipient of God's power. According to the Psalmist's view, we must participate in our own renewal. *The presence of God is the assurance of a possibility*. We humans have to work together with the Divine to help save ourselves. We cannot do so, however, unless we believe that the possibility for change and growth is always with us. Through prayer, we heighten our belief in that possibility, and we bring ourselves to the point where we can work with God to save ourselves. The experience of the Jew, and other courageous people, through the centuries teaches us that the deeply religious person does not ultimately seek victory or success. The Jew has continued to pray in spite of centuries of persecution and seeming defeat. Why has the Jew continued to find comfort in his relationship with God under these circumstances? One answer might be in the courageous prayer of an east European Jew, who exclaimed after a pogrom, a violent attack on powerless civilians, "O Lord, we will be able to bear all of our suffering, if only we know that we suffer for Your sake!"²⁵

The primary goal of the prayer relationship is not the material well-being or success of the petitioner, but the feeling of support, understanding, and purpose. The function of prayer in time of crisis is to permit the somewhat battered soul to return to life's battles certain that, in spite of defeat in past battles, he is still a loved child of creation with strong support for future struggles and with a sympathetic ally.

Those who are embittered by the buffeting of life might well look to the Jewish people as an example of courage that

will not be denied. In spite of the insane destruction of six million European Jews by the Nazis during the last great war (one-third of the Jews in the world), the Jews have continued to believe in the essential promise of life, in the power for goodness that is God. They have not accepted suffering in a stoic way, saying, "What can we do?" Rather, have they worked to find happiness in creating the sovereign State of Israel and elsewhere, insisting that God intends for all of His children, including the Jews, to find life meaningful. Where do the Jews get this determination to stand up, again and again, after such staggering blows dealt by hate-filled hearts? Apparently, the Jews have a training which is rare and a discipline which is unusual. The recurring optimism of the Jew is rooted in his understanding of God and in his confidence that God intends for all of His children to live a life that is reasonably fruitful. This optimism, this demand on life, is an essential ingredient of the prayer-mood.

B. THE ANSWER OF LOGIC,
The Universe Is for Me, Also

A basic assumption of the founders of Judaism is that God and human beings can communicate. Some people, however, cannot accept this assumption because of certain intellectual or psychological blocks. Let us try to deal now with some of the reasoning behind these doubts. Suppose there were only one person alive in the world ... you! As you walked (or drove) around earth's gardens and picked its luscious fruits, as you drank of its refreshing waters, made clothes of its raw materials, built a home from the living trees, and gazed at its starry skies, you would have to conclude, "All *this is mine*; yet I did not create it. Someone made all this and intended it for me. How fortunate I am!" As you continued to live in the world and learned that it operated as a plan, that the sun arose every morning and set at eventide, that the seasons came and went with regularity, that tides rose and ebbed with rhythm and that even your body followed pre-arranged laws, you would have to conclude that there is a Planner and that these laws are evidence of the Planner's existence. As you observed that

this order was always present, you would come to feel that the presence of these continuing realities was not disassociated from God. You would, ultimately, also begin to realize that the world was not a watch wound up and abandoned by the watchmaker. You would understand that the world was constantly attended with care so that it would not wind down. You would sense the power which was constantly being piped into the world; you would "feel the pulse" of God. In such a situation, if you were the only person in the world, you would know that God cared about you, otherwise, why would the Creator give you such an estate *without your having asked for it?* Since there would be no one else to taste of the fruit, you would inevitably conclude that the fruit was created especially for you. Why? God cares for you. *The gift of this world, is the Divine way of speaking, "Here is an expression of My love."* If you lived alone in the world, it would not be difficult for you to decide that there was a personal relationship between an unseen Creator and yourself.

1. You Are the Center of the Universe, The Problem of Numbers

Suppose now that a second person was seen on the horizon? Would you, then, become angry at the Creator and say, "I thought you made this all for me. You don't really love me!" This is what millions of adults actually say or think every day of their lives. We take the existence of other people as evidence of the fact that God is not concerned or less concerned about us. We ask ourselves, "How is it possible for God to care individually about millions of people?" Surely, this doubt is a projection of our own limited understanding. Our own experience does not extend far beyond that of our immediate family, and possibly a few friends, so we conclude that no one, not even God, could be intimately concerned with more than a few people. (We might grudgingly admit the members of our intimate family to share our God with us.) It is easy to see that this is a small, human limited viewpoint. It is a confining of God's love power to our own human limits of loving. The truth is that humans are not in a position to know how far

God's understanding and love may extend. The very fact that the universe is so large may very well indicate that God has an infinite capacity for love and concern.

Proof that the Divine power and concern extends to things infinitely smaller than the human being is seen by an investigation of the atom. The same meticulous care used in developing the laws which govern the solar system has been used in developing the laws governing the atom. On one's fingertip there are so many electrons and protons^{26a} that you and I, if we could see them, could not count them in our lifetime. Endlessly, the electron revolves around the atomic nucleus, even as the planets revolve around the sun, without a chance of a deviation in their relationship which would destroy their orderly system. *If the range of God's concern extends to matter so small in size as to be invisible in a microscope, how can you and I dogmatically claim that we are too insignificant to be worthy of the Divine concern?*

The Mishnah (the foundation for the Jewish Talmud) reads, "He who saves one soul is as if he had saved the world."^{26b} The truth is that in each soul, in each person, *there is a part of all the greatness that is to be found in the rest of the world. More than that, if each atom is regarded as a complete world (a completely ordered harmony, self operating and independent), then each person is a universe of worlds* made up of many smaller self-operating units. Certainly, a universe (a human being equals a collection of worlds) cannot be regarded as unimportant!

There is a legend, which was popular in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, which teaches us of God's concern for little things. According to the legend, the "Angel of Death" came to take the life of the mother of five children. The mother knew that she had to heed the call, but she expressed the fear that her children would suffer in her absence. The Angel took the woman to the site of a large rock and rolled back the rock. "Do you see the worms which have survived under this rock?", the Angel asked. Then he

continued, "How much more concerned is the Holy One with your children than with these tiny worms which have existed under this heavy rock!" The legend is particularly applicable to the problems of reality, because it admits to the possibility that some tragedy does occur in human life. The mother's life is prematurely taken, but in spite of this tragedy, all is not lost. One setback does not disprove the existence of limitless possibilities for survival and well-being in our world, "even under a heavy rock." Even the worm under the rock has received and is receiving the benefits of life from the Giver of Life.

Humans are not so small as they permit themselves to believe. Each person is a universe of worlds, containing many infinitely smaller systems within himself. More important, it is in the human being that complex and highly developed systems interconnect and flower into being. Mountains are large, but they cannot think. Planets endure millions of years, but they have no heartbeat. Stones endure endlessly, but they cannot give and receive love. You are not an insignificantly small part of the universe; *you are the nexus of the universe! The universe was created so that you might be achieved*, and so that you might, spiritually speaking, grow ever upward. You cannot grow, however, unless you become conscious of your significance and mission. You cannot grow unless you pray, unless you reach upward towards God. You cannot live meaningfully unless you recognize that you can consciously link yourself to the growing and giving Spirit of the Universe. What has the poet (Tennyson) said of the tiny flower?

"Little flower ...

But if I could understand what you are

Root and all and all in all

I should know what God and man is".²⁷

The infinite pipelines of the Creation are in the tiny flower, linking it to all of the resplendent creation. A human being is the crossroads of both the spiritual and physical creation. How precious must he (or she) be! Indeed, according to the Psalmist (Psalms 8:6), he is "little lower than God (Elohim)".²⁸ "He is fully worthy of speaking with God. Only speak, our tradition teaches, and God will

hear. More than one Jewish teacher has taught, "Seek Adonai, and you will find Him!"

2. God Hears, The Problem of Communication

How, you ask? How does *God hear*? *The biblical Israelites* seem to answer, "God hears. We do not need to know how."²⁹ We moderns seem hesitant to make this leap of faith. We will not jump across the narrow abyss that separates our heart from God's. We insist first on a steel bridge across the abyss with road markers and signs. Modern man must know scientifically, before he will honor God with his prayers; but is there ever this kind of complete knowing, and aren't there other kinds of knowing which lead to a grasp of reality?³⁰

Consider this: we did not know half a century ago that the human voice could be transmitted by phone and radio around the world, yet we have discovered the principle that makes this possible (the principle has existed forever). We did not know 50 years ago that a precise picture of the human form could be transmitted by TV via Telstar around the world, yet we have discovered this principle that has existed since the original Creation. Humans can now hear and see around the world and into outer space. Can God do less? The nerves and muscles of our body communicate with each other, without benefit of ears, in a way we ourselves do not understand. We know that our body parts do communicate, however, for the brain tells the arm to move five inches, and it does exactly that. Without the internal communication of our body parts, we could scarcely operate effectively. We can only assume this communication, because we witness the results of the interaction of the various aspects of our physical being. If we cannot understand a system of communication within our physical body, we must maintain a certain humility about our ability to understand communication of a spiritual quality.

The religious person assumes the reality of spiritual communication, because he is a witness to its results. The fact that God may "see" and "hear" in ways of which we are

completely unaware is, at least, an open issue. His lack of ears and eyes, as humans define these terms, would not deprive God of the ability to communicate any more than the communication of human cells is restricted by the absence of these specific objects. God may, indeed, "hear" our prayers far better than we dare dream. For we think of God and humans as two separate extremes, but God may be the ocean and we the river. Our waters may intermingle and our currents influence one another in ways that are beyond our limited comprehension.

3. Gratitude, The Foundation of Prayer; The Berachah

"Great is the gift of life; greater still that we know that
our life is a gift"

(Gates of Prayer, p.231)

a. The Problem of Comparison

As we have indicated, one of the reasons that we may think God does not hear our prayers is that many people seem to fare better in life than we do, when we measure by a certain set of standards. We feel neglected or rejected by God when we see that some people are richer than we; some people have better jobs; some are healthier. It is the comparisons which convince us that God is far away or does not care. This, again, is a childish way of judging. Children measure begrudgingly every gift of a parent to brother and sister. No matter how much each child may receive, he(or she)is convinced that brother or sister has been given more, because each does not receive the same things or in equal measure. It does not matter to a sister that she has received a quart of ice cream , if brother has received a cookie, and she has not. The imagined injustice to the sister seems to cancel out all the love and concern previously demonstrated by the parent. We carry this childish thinking into adulthood. The average American may be miserable because he knows of some people whose homes are 60 feet long, when his is only 40 feet. The person earning \$100,000 a year is upset, because some of his friends are making \$120,000. The lady who owns a warm and attractive Persian lamb coat may envy the lady who owns a mink coat. It is the comparisons which make us wonder if there is a Maintainer of the scales of justice.

The Tenth Commandment is "You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17). Our ancestors knew that comparison leads to the shrinking of the soul, to a smothering of growth, to the

stunting of happiness and well being. We rarely compare our possessions with those who have less than we. We seldom say to ourselves, "I earn \$50,000 a year. This is more than two-thirds of all American wage-earners. This is more than twice the income of most of the residents of Europe, more than thirty times the income of the residents of South America, more than fifty times the income of the residents of China and Africa." We rarely say, "Look how far up the comparative scale I am." On the contrary, we usually say, "But look at those who are ahead of me. This proves nobody cares about me!" How absurd! This is the thinking of the child who feels rejected completely, because he does not seem to be first all the time! One can be the child of a king or queen, with multiple possessions and privileges, even though the royal pair have other children who are magnificently blessed.

b. Making the Gift "Yours"

We can accurately gauge the weight of our gifts as children of this world only if we *do not compare* what we have with the assets of others. *Coveting contracts the soul.* Gratitude expands the soul. Recognition of the countless gifts that one receives just by being born can lift the heart. *Gratitude is part of the foundation of prayer.* For this reason, one of the basic Jewish prayer forms is the "berachah", wherewith the Jew thanks and praises God for such gifts as the ability to see, hear, and think, for food (even so much as the size of an olive) or for the privilege of experiencing a joyous occasion, like the birth of a child, a wedding, a Bar/Bat Mitzvah, or a holiday.

Consider the girl who dashes across the open field thrilled with the joy of being alive. The girl jumps as high as she can for no reason, except that she feels the impulse to experience her own physical power. By this act, the girl expresses her gratitude for the gift of life. Each grateful use of one of God's gifts is, in a real sense, a prayer. Prayer involves use, for in the usage of a power, there comes a recognition of the wonder of the gift. The girl flings her body against the soft breeze, even as she breathes deeply of the Spring air. She seems to pray with the very motion of her body, with the fiber of her being. Leaping, the physical expression of her ecstasy, is her way of saying, "Thanks, O God, for all of this, and it's mine. You gave it to me. I know you gave it to me, and I am

claiming it!³¹ So the leaping goat and the frolicking dolphin pray! So the singing bird prays!

How does the Rodgers-Hammerstein song go?

"Somewhere a bird who is bound
to be heard is throwing his
heart at the sky!"

And how does the synagogue Sabbath prayer go?

"Every living thing praises the Lord"!

We come to a basic point. *The prayer relationship involves the ability to appropriate and to make personal use of the divine gifts which are available to all who will claim them.* If one were alone in the world, one would not doubt that all the beauty and power around was a personal gift. The original gifts of God to humankind are all still present and available for the appropriating. They exist in limitless dimension, if we know where to find them. *The process of prayer involves a becoming aware of the never-ending sources of supply, the learning of how to tap them.* It involves the acquiring of the ability to be grateful for the gifts that are given often before the petition is expressed.

In order to make the world "yours," that is to say, yours also, you must feel a personal relationship with its Creator. You must be able to feel that you are a direct beneficiary and not just an incidental beneficiary of the creation. That is, you must be able to enjoy intimately what you have, and you must be able to say, "Thanks." Religious Jews would say this means that you must consider life a "berachah, full of blessing," and you must be able to recite and live the "berachah"; you must be able to proclaim the prayer of gratitude in word and deed.

c. How Do We Ask for Gifts (Tachnun, Bakkashah)?

Again and again, when I spoke to people and asked them about their understanding of prayer, they would answer, "Prayer is asking for something." This is true only in a special way. In the first place, petition is only one form of prayer. Secondly, the mature person does not petition so much by asking, "Give me," as by explaining, "I need," and asking, "How can I fill my

need?" The answer to your prayer may be in your becoming aware of the gifts available all around you and on your learning how to use and to be grateful for those gifts. Jews have always understood that prayer was firstly, "berachah" (praise or thanksgiving) and not merely ... "bakkasha, asking" or "tachnun, petition". The Synagogue Prayer Service begins with many preliminary prayers of thanksgiving, and, only later in the Service do we find prayers of request. The prayerful person has ultimately to feel with the Psalmist, "This is the day that the Lord has made, let me be glad and rejoice in it" (Psalm 118:24). "This day," such as it is, with its imperfections and failures, is still a divinely given day, with an infinite choice of gifts. Our Prayerbook teaches that within each day the entire range of creation is repeated. It reads, "(The Lord) renews daily the work of creation, "Me'chadesh be'chol yom tamid ma-ase vereshit".³² How wonderful it would be if we could recite this prayer and understand its ramifications! Think into what spirit you enter when you say and mean these words! To pray this prayer means that you are sensitive to the constant birth of things all around you, for just as great miracles took place at the first moment of creation, so now miracles are taking place. How can one be overwhelmed with his personal problems, when he is mindful of the constant creative stream of wonder being piped into the world, all around him and through him!

First, the prayerful person tries to become aware of the creative reality, the giving spirit, all around him. Then, he seeks to acquire what he needs to live a meaningful life. How does he do this? A child would say, "Mother, give me this, or give me that." A mature adult does not pray to God, "God, give me food; give me a good job." An adult is expected to act as an adult. He is expected to help himself. Imagine that a bowl of fruit were placed on a table. A child would ask, "May I have an apple?", and then he is expected to wait politely for a parent to give it to him. An adult is told by his host, "There is fruit on the table. Help yourself." The adult is expected to exercise his adult prerogative of

appropriation. So God says to humankind, "The world is before you. Take what you need", as, indeed, God says in Genesis to Adam and Eve.³³ The prayerful person seeks to become aware of what is "before him." He seeks the understanding and courage to appropriate the things necessary to answer his legitimate needs. The adult "asking" takes the form of, "show me what I must do to meet my needs." *What the adult seeks in prayer is not a handout, but a plan for action.* He asks, "Where?" and "How?" He understands that after the prayer, or as part of the prayer-mood, there is a role for him to play before his needs will be fully met. He knows that the prayer is a prelude to work and the key to a fuller life.

IV

Becoming Aware of Reality

“Opening the Eyes”

The whole universe proclaims Your glory. Your loving spirit hovers over all
Your works, guiding and sustaining them.

(Gates of Prayer, p. 194)

No limits are set to the ascent of man, and the loftiest precincts are open to all. In
this, your choice alone is supreme.

Nahman of Bratzlav (18-19 cent.)

A. “GOD IS IN THIS PLACE” - (Jacob’s Dream)

THE HEBREW SCRIPTURE (TANACH) TELLS US THAT JACOB WAS TRAVELING TO HARAN, AND en route, he spent the night sleeping on a stone.¹ As he slept, he dreamed of a ladder "set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." In his dream, Jacob seemed to hear God's voice, and when he awoke, he said, "Surely, the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."² Then Jacob remarked, "How full of awe is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of heaven."³

The prayerful person comes to understand that this place, wherever he stands, is the House of God, the gate of heaven, i.e., the place where God is present. He becomes increasingly aware of the signs of divinity within him and all around him. Like Jacob, the prayerful person becomes aware that it is possible for him to climb towards heaven (grow

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towards God) from where he stands, and that the angels ("messengers")⁴ of God are those who ascend (i.e., start from earth) to the heavenly (spiritual) heights and bring back to earth the power needed to help humankind. Those who find prayer difficult are those who pray under the mistaken notion that God manifests Himself only through sudden miracles and that God is to be found only in some distant place. They do not share the sense of intimacy that Jacob felt. They are unable to say, "How full of awe is this place (where I am)!"

B. THE REALITY WITHIN

"O Lord, open his eyes and let him see"

The Prophet Elisha (II Kings 6:17)

Prayer involves the process of becoming aware of the resources for change and growth that await our appropriation. Our teachers suggest that the supply for these resources are both within us and around us. They are nearer than we think. There is a Hindu legend which makes the point that we humans do not find the source of our greater strength only because we keep searching in far away places and not within ourselves. The legend goes as follows: "In the beginning, we human beings were like the gods. Then, we sinned, and the chief god decided to remove the human head and to hide it, for within the head is the mind and the way to power. A council of the gods was called. Where should the head be hid? One god said, 'Hide it in the ground'. Another god said, 'Hide it in the ocean' Another said, 'Hide it at the top of the mountain.' 'No,' said the chief god, 'humankind will dig deep into the earth to find it. They will climb the highest mountain, and they will search out the bottom of the seas, but, if we hide it within them, *they will never think to look for it within themselves*.'"⁵

The Hindus used the image of the "head". The Hasidic Jews spoke of the "sparks," the in-dwelling presence of God within us, which ever longs to return to God. These East

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European Jews of the 18th and 19th century taught that God placed a fragment of the divine essence in each human being. (Some taught that the scattering of the divine essence was due to a cosmic accident). This spark of divinity within each individual yearns to be reunited with its Source. It is the divine spark within us, the Hasidim taught, which reaches upward towards more of itself. This reaching, this yearning, is prayer! We learn from the Hasidim that prayer is not merely the best in a person reaching towards "the highest wisdom and beauty" (to use Einstein's phrase),⁶ *it is actually the divine reaching for the divine!*

The Hasidic teaching has greater force than the Hindu legend, for it suggests that the power hidden within us is not merely something that is to be found; it is something that also has its own urging to be found and to find. A teaching hypothesis can point the way to a reality which exists but which is beyond demonstration for the present. Religious Jews have testified to the substantial validity of the Hasidic hypothesis. There are many powers within a human being, many levels of consciousness, many levels of insight, many levels of courage which we humans do not suspect we have, but which are there within us, none the less. *It is the function of prayer to make us more conscious of the levels of power that already exist within us but which await our developing them and thus "calling them into being."* We suggest the image of a well without end. The more we drink from this well, the more there is to drink. It is a well which has its origin in the "Source of Living Waters."⁷ It binds us to God, and flows similarly through all humans, thus binding us to them.

The Hebrew Scripture speaks of the becoming aware of the existence of greater power in terms of "opening of the eyes." This is the ability to see things which exist all the time but are not visible to people who are insensitive and who are unaware of the limitless layers of the creative mystery. For example, when Sarah was without child, she gave her handmaiden, Hagar, to Abraham as a wife, according to the ancient custom, in the hope that Hagar would bear Abraham a child that Sarah, as Hagar's mistress, could claim legally to be her own. Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham. Later, Sarah gave birth to a son, Isaac, and she was fearful that Ishmael might gain the precedence that she wanted for the son

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of her own body. Sarah found reason to send Hagar and Ishmael into the desert.⁸ Hagar was desperate. She was alone in the desert with her young son and soon found herself out of water. She prayed to God for assistance.⁹ The answer to her prayer was that "God opened her eyes."¹⁰ The text reads, "and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water and gave the lad to drink."

We are not led to believe by the biblical narrative that the well was suddenly created for Hagar. The well was there all the time, but Hagar did not see it. Through prayer, her vision and searching ability were sharpened, and she was able to see something she was unable to see before. Her eyes were "opened." She became more aware of reality. This was the answer to her prayers. Through prayer, Hagar gained the courage not to surrender and to continue her search for a solution to her problem. Prayer is a way of saying, "There must be a way out. O God, help me find the way!" When the verbal prayer is over, however, the person still has a role to play. She (or he) has to search for the "way out."

Similarly, the Scripture tells of the time the King of Aram was determined to kill Elisha, the Prophet.¹¹ Elisha and his servant were completely surrounded by an Aramean army of horses and chariots, and the servant tremblingly spoke to his Master, "Alas, my Master, what shall we do?"¹² The Prophet replied, "Have no fear...There are more on our side than on theirs".¹³ Then, Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes, and let him see".¹⁴ "And the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he saw the hills all around Elisha covered with horses and chariots of fire."¹⁵

The story (2 Kings 6:15ff) clearly implies that the "chariots" defending Elisha were there all the time, and Elisha could see them all the time, but the servant could not. Nothing new was created for the servant to see. When his eyes were opened, he merely acquired a power that Elisha (a prayerful, reality-conscious person) had all the time. We are further told,

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as the story goes on, that no battle of chariots was ever joined. Indeed, the "chariots" on Elisha's side were not really chariots at all. The vision was a euphemism to demonstrate that there was also great power on Elisha's side. The enemies of Elisha were defeated, the narrative recounts, because they were smitten with "blindness" (vs. 18). Elisha and his servant were victorious in the battle that never took place, because they had "open eyes", and their opponents were "blind", because they were not able to avail themselves of divinely-bestowed powers (potentially available to all of us).

Most of the people in the world who live narrow lives are "blind" in this sense. For them, the goals of life are the shallow objectives of material gain and personal success. Such people operate with a ten per cent view of the meaning of the world and with ten per cent of the power within their reach. They have no vision, and they do not tap the wellsprings of well-being that would permit them to be content in the absence of agitation and anxiety. Like Hagar, they wander aimlessly in the desert of life, but, unlike Hagar, they never learn to pray, and they never have their eyes opened, They never "see into the life of things." They only use the resources that are immediately visible to them. They live in a world of surface reality. They eat the skin of life, but not the fruit.

C. THE POWER TO GIVE (FORGIVE)

It is worth noting that Elisha and his servant were able to capture the entire Aramean army (because the latter were "blind"), and the army was led to the city of Samaria where the Israelite King captured them without a struggle¹⁶. When the Israelite King asked if he should kill the enemy, Elisha answered, "Set food and drink before them, and let them eat and drink and return to their master" (2 Kings 6:22). The Arameans who had come to kill the Prophet were so overcome with this display of generosity and forgiveness that "they stopped invading the land of Israel" (2 Kings 6:23). The person with "open eyes" learns how to forgive and to be generous, but only the person confident of his own sources of power can

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afford to be forgiving and love-giving. Elisha would teach us not to be over-anxious and not to be so over-concerned with what tomorrow may bring, for there exist forces within ourselves and in the world which will make it possible for us to receive our bread and board. This, certainly, is the meaning behind the story whereby one hundred men are fed with the contents of one small sack (2 Kings 4:42ff). *The person who prays seeks the power of love and the ability to share, and where we share with each other, there is enough for all.*

This same point is made in a story from a Hasidic source.¹⁷ A Rabbi stopped to invite a man who was walking on the road to enter his wagon. The man looked into the wagon and said to the well-known Rabbi, "Rabbi, your wagon is already crowded. I would not want to overcrowd you." The Rabbi answered, "Let us love each other a little more, and we will have a feeling of spaciousness." This ability to love others is kin to the ability to share, and we do not wish to share unless we can feel the depths of our own power. An awareness of this depth comes to us as we pray and as our eyes are opened to the infinite life coursing through us and being fed to us. We become more able to give of ourselves as we become aware that there is a love-spirit in the world, a spirit of infinite life and infinite creative power which is tied to us and is concerned with us.

When Samuel Morse discovered the law of transmitting messages through space, his eyes were "opened". When Oppenheimer observed the results of atomic fission, his eyes were "opened". When Thoreau watched the miracles of nature transpiring around him at Walden Pond, his eyes were "opened". When a medical student first learns the law whereby food is transformed into energy, flesh and blood, his eyes are "opened". When a person forgives another and sees the response of gratitude and love in another, his eyes are "opened." The opening of the eyes means contact with deeper reality, awareness of infinite power, seeing into the life of things, touching the power of God. It was only when Job realized the folly of comparing his lot with the lot of others, and when he took stock of the innumerable miracles from which each human being benefits every day, that he was able to say, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now I have seen

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you with my own eyes" (Job 42:5). Perhaps what Job meant was that his knowledge of God had heretofore been a vicarious experience. He knew God only in terms of what other people told him about God, but now he had meditated, searched his soul, and prayed, and he had found God for himself. He had had a personal contact with the divine power; he had "seen" Him. It was this personal contact which gave Job the sense of serenity which he had been seeking. His personal contact had come about through a growing awareness of the constant creative power always feeding into the world.

D. THE TIME OF CRISIS

I lift up mine eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth.

(Psalm 121:1, 2)

1. "Before They Call, I Will Answer" (Isaiah, Ch. 65:24)

The experience of Elisha and his servant should be helpful to us in a time of crisis. In such a time, many of us unaccustomed to prayer, ignorant of its meaning and its process, and ignorant even of what we should expect to gain from it will, none the less, attempt to pray. Only in crisis do many of us permit ourselves to express a feeling of dependency and thus allow ourselves to tap additional resources other than those we employ in a routine way. Prayer is "the unembarrassed revelation of the soul . . . a free outpouring of the heart..."¹⁸ In most circumstances, the average person is as awkward about prayer as he is about dancing and singing. Who among us feels free to express his deepest joy or grief, hope or despair? As we become more confident that there is a sympathetic ear, we can learn to express our deepest feeling and concerns in prayer.

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In a time of crisis, we are in much the same position as Elisha's servant who, when he saw the menacing Aramean armies, said, "Alas, master, what shall we do?" We recall that Elisha replied, "Have no fear...There are more on our side than on theirs". Elisha could say this confidently, for he was a person who prayed regularly; that is to say, he was a person who was regularly in contact with reality, who was sensitively aware of the miracles (laws) constantly operating within humans and within the universe. The person who does not pray regularly, who is not mindful of the miracles (laws) of life all about us, would find the counsel of Elisha short of reassuring. The untrained person would not know about "those on our side".

In time of critical illness, you will notice that the doctor is always more calm than the patient, for the doctor is a student of the miracles (laws) of the human body, and he is aware of "the forces on our side". He is aware of the healing power that is built into the human organism. He is aware of the emergency resources of the human body in a time of illness. My doctor has frequently said to me, "In most cases, a doctor's function is simply to put the body into a condition where it is free to help itself." If each of us were students of the body, we would be less apprehensive when most illnesses occur, because we would know that "there are more on our side than on theirs". In this case, the enemy is the disease. Time after time, I have seen patients go into the hospital for major surgery with much greater anxiety than the medical facts would warrant. This is perhaps inevitable, since we cannot all have the knowledge of surgeons and an awareness of the body's healing powers which the doctors have. Yet, if we could be fully aware of the forces on our side, our anxiety would be dramatically lessened. *The function of prayer for the person seriously ill is to make him (or her) aware of the power constantly surging within him at all times which makes for his healing, a power that manifests the continuing Divine concern.*

Frequently, the uncontrolled fear of a patient greatly hinders recovery. Prayer can be a way of freeing the body to help itself i.e., to work unhindered towards its own cure, employing the miraculous powers that are God-given and already present. In time of illness, we might well pray:

"O God, I am afraid. Help me to be more confident

that you have anticipated my need and that your divine power is working within me already."¹⁹

Additional suggested prayers for the sick person may be found in our discussion in part D, 4 and 6 of this chapter.

It is not necessary for God to create a new miracle to save the vast majority of the patients who are in hospitals. The "old" miracles, the constantly renewed miracles, the divinely bestowed powers currently at work in human beings, are enough to sustain most of us. We want to be able to tune in to this knowledge, to "see" this reality, if we are to arrive at quiet confidence when we are ill.

2. "It Won't Help Me"

I gave access to them that asked not for Me,
I was at hand to them that sought Me not;
I said: 'Behold Me, behold Me' . . .

(Isaiah 65:1)

Of course, there are many people who feel, "I know of the healing power in the body and of the built-in miracles, but this will not work on me. I am different, I am more sick than the others. I am in greater trouble than they. They got well, but I will not." These are the people who, for some reason, feel forgotten or unwanted by God. These are the people who have not made it possible for themselves to feel that "the universe is for me." This kind of person could feel, if he were alone in the world, that the miracles were meant for him; but since there are other people, he decides that the very existence of these other people means that he has been forgotten. The self-pitier must come to understand that his attitude toward prayer and God is the result of many factors which have shaped his life up to the present. His feeling of estrangement is derived from his past experiences. One poetess has expressed

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her inner melancholy as transforming the world in its image:

"Because I see these mountains, they are brought low;
Because I drink these waters, they are bitter;
Because I tread these gray rocks, they are barren
Because I have found these islands, they are lost . . ."20

The world reflects our inner attitude, and those who can pray are the optimists. They believe that the evil in the world can be transformed. They believe that God is capable of infinite love and concern, and that God's power courses through all of us at every moment. *The problem is not - is God going to help us, but are we going to let God help us? Are we going to pretend that we live in a parched desert when we have a limitless well of life existing within us? The question is not will we receive of God's gifts, but will we use the gifts God already has given us and is giving us?*

Isaiah, the Prophet, reported that God had declared, "Before they call, I will answer . ."21 God has anticipated the fact that the body will occasionally operate ineffectively, and He has provided it with remarkable powers of renewal. This is God's loving gift to us. For the sick person, prayer can be a way to become aware of the miraculous powers for healing which are active within him at every moment. It means the opening of the eyes to the forces that are with us and the realization that these forces represent the loving, living contact with our Creator. The person who practices the art of becoming aware, who prays regularly, will make a better patient in time of crisis than the person who never or seldom prays.

3. The "Knowledge of God"

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the idealized future King of Israel, as one who is to be filled with the "spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord" (Isaiah 11:2). Elsewhere, we note that the Prophets sought to fill the hearts of their people with the "knowledge of God."

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Isaiah equates this knowledge with the "fear of the Lord." Perhaps he meant exactly what Einstein meant when he spoke of the awe that comes to one when he examines the mystery of the universe, and perhaps Isaiah meant what Oppenheimer meant when he said that fear was his first reaction when he first unlocked the secret of atomic power.²² Fear of the Lord can be a by-product of understanding the power and the depth of some of the laws of creation as established by God. *Thus, fear and understanding are opposite sides of the same coin,* It is only the connoisseur who fears that a precious antique may be broken. Only the reverent person, who understands at once the power and the fragility of some aspects of the universe, fears a violation of some of its laws. It is a knowledge which comes only to those who have witnessed a great aspect of reality at work, and the understanding of this power makes the observer aware of the infinitely greater possibilities that lie beyond.

The reverence that comes from this kind of knowledge is a reverence for life and for created things. It is a reverence for the infinite fragility and power of one's own life. It is an awareness of the miraculous laws which make possible our existence and sustain us at every moment. The "knowledge of God" means "knowing (in part) what God knows." God knows, since He is the Author of our universe and Creator of the beings in it, that the human body will recover from most illnesses because of its divinely-set curative powers. When we become aware of this "knowledge," we become capable of calm in the midst of our illness. A friend of mine, who is a doctor, told me he once treated Einstein when the latter was ill in the hospital. The doctor said, "Einstein acted as if the body involved were another than his own. He acted as most people act when they request a plumber to repair the plumbing system in their home." Einstein knew a great deal about the human body, and he had confidence in the training and ability of the doctor and in the curative powers of the body. Because he had this great awe and appreciation of the working miracles within his own body, Einstein was able to be calm about his illness. He was aware of the sustaining power within him.

Prayer is a way of obtaining some of "the knowledge of God." It is a way of gaining

the assurance that in our crisis, as in our daily routine, "Those that are with us are more than those that are against us." *It is a way of reminding ourselves that the Friend who is with us has given us weapons and tools which are equal to the task before us!*

Part of our "weapons and tools" are the assets of our physical being (no less significant than the aspects of our spiritual being). For most of the years of our life we accept the health of our body as something to which we are entitled. We are not even aware, for example, of the miracle of the heart's pumping. Let us suffer a heart attack, however, and we are shocked out of our complacency. Our silent trust suddenly dissipates. We begin counting the heartbeats, as if our failure to count would cause the heart to stop beating. Invariably, the heart patient is afraid to sleep in the night, because he fears the sudden collapse of his physical equipment. Doctors, however, assure us that in the vast majority of cases, the heart patient who makes it to the hospital has an excellent chance of complete recovery. Further, the patient would be much helped if he were able to share the confidence of the doctors. Prayer can be a useful aid in restoring the patient to confidence in the built-in miracles within himself.

The heart patient has to learn to "float" as the swimmer learns to conquer his fear of the water. When the instructor teaches the would-be swimmer, he may first make the student jump feet first into the deep end of the pool. Some instructors do this with infants. The student can learn in this way that the body itself has a buoyancy (built in) that helps it to float. If he now wishes to swim, the student has only to expend a little effort, to learn the proper movements. So the sick person has to learn anew that the universe itself will hold him up, if he doesn't fight it. The heart patient has to regain the confidence that the heart, which has beat billions of times without his aid, will continue, very probably, to pump a billion more times of its own miraculous power. In a sense, the sick person has to learn to float in the world, to relax, and, in quiet confidence, to let the power within him go to work.

4. "You Are with Me"^{23a}

Prayer can help us achieve this kind of rapport with the world, this kind of confidence that the power of God is within us and all around us, providing a buoyancy and a motor power which will sustain us, if we but provide a little energy and direction. So the sick person could pray:

"I am mindful, O Creator, of the unfathomable miracle of my body. I am mindful of Your power within me at all times. I am grateful for the gift of renewal, for the miracle of healing that You have given me and are giving me. Knowing that You are with me gives me the quiet confidence that I will be well."

Surely, something like this is what the Psalmist had in mind when he prayed:

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want . . .

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow

of death, I shall fear no evil, for *You are with me . . .*" (Psalm 23:1, 4) 23b.

This is a good prayer to memorize in its entirety.

Again, we say that one of the reasons people cease to believe in the efficacy of prayer is that they are constantly looking for God to send down new thunderbolts from heaven. It was Elijah, the Prophet, who tried to teach us that God speaks not so much in the thunderbolt (the spectacular event) as within the "still, small voice," (I Kings 19:12). It was Elijah's successor, Elisha, who tried to teach us the importance of searching for God in the things we already have, rather than in running desperately to find new revelations. It was the Patriarch, Jacob, who discovered that "The Lord is in this place, and I knew it not" (Genesis 28:16). God is here, where you are. Open your eyes!

5. In a Time of Death

When we cry out in our grief, O Lord, calm us.

Turn us anew towards life. Let us share once again the warmth of human love that speaks to us of You.

(The full text of this prayer can be found in *Gates of Prayer*, p.624). ^{23b}

There are a few times in life, however, when it seems that "our tools" are not adequate for the task we have to face. Such a situation comes when a person who is dear to us passes away. What, then, is the function of prayer? *Through prayer we strive to change only that which is changeable.* The Hebrew Scripture records a crisis in the life of King David whose son, child of Bath-sheba, was seriously ill. David prayed desperately that the boy's life be saved. He fasted, threw himself upon the ground, and lay there day and night (2 Samuel 12:15ff). Apparently, the boy was too ill for the prayer to be answered, and when he died, David's followers were startled to observe that the King spent almost no time in mourning and showed no trace of bitterness, but, instead, washed himself, dressed once again in his kingly garb, and began to assume the great tasks that lay before him in his role as monarch. When his friends voiced their wonder at the absence of mourning, David replied, in effect, "I have done all I can do for him. I prayed while there was yet hope. I can do nothing more now" (2 Samuel 12:19ff).

David is clearly identified in our history as a prayerful man. Many of the Psalms are attributed to him. He believed in God in an intensely personal way. Perhaps for this reason, David believed (1) You try to change what you can; (2) You must accept what you cannot change; (3) In spite of your loss, you must go on to face the important tasks before you.

Jewish teachers have always encouraged mourning as the evidence of a healthy response to the death of a loved one, but they have fixed outer limits to the period of mourning and have stressed the need of the mourner to return to the arena of life. Our tradition has affixed the more severe period of mourning at seven days, then a moderate period of thirty days, then the outer limit of formal mourning at approximately a year. The specific prayer usually recited during this period is the "Kaddish," a prayer which basically is life-affirming.²⁴ The prayer links the worshiper to the effort to establish God's kingdom on earth. Its theme, in brief, is, "In spite of my loss, I affirm the greatness of God and the

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meaningfulness of life."

In Europe, different notions became associated with the Kaddish and diluted its more basic import. It originally was a prayer said by the meturgamen, or interpreter in the yeshivot, the schools of learning. It was also recited when the students had completed a chapter of study and were about to undertake another. Later, it was read at the death of a great scholar, who, in a way, had come to the end of a "chapter" in his existence. Still later, the prayer was read for all those who had died, and legendary notions became affixed to it. In modern congregations today, the prayer has much of the force of its original meaning. It marks the end of a chapter in a human life, and it marks the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the survivor, a chapter which, according to the prayer, should be God oriented, pointed towards life's higher goals. In the strongest kind of way, then, the Kaddish prayer reminds the mourner that the dead are to serve as an inspiration for serving life with greater zeal.

Some people have the tendency to cling morbidly to the memory of their departed, as if to say, "My whole life was wrapped up in him (her). There is nothing left for me." The Jewish answer is, "Your loss has been great, but you are not alone. God is with you, and God's creative powers are with you. *All that is left is the world!*" Unfortunately, we humans frequently invest all of our love in one person or in a few people. When they are gone, we feel that our world has shrunk, that all the doors are closed to us. How blind we are! In this frame of mind, we can use the wisdom of this kind of prayer:

"O Lord, help me to find a new outlet for
my love. Help me to find someone new to love me.
Help me to find new doors to open and new
causes to serve. Open my eyes to the opportunities
for consolation and happiness around me!"

Since all human beings must eventually die, the continuing meaning of the survivor's

life lies in his linkage to something that constantly endures and to which he has a personal relationship. For the Jew, God, the source of infinite life, has been his enduring Friend. One Rabbi wrote after a particularly frightful pogrom in the European community, "O God, we could not go on, if we did not know that You were with us and that our suffering is meaningful in Your eyes."²⁵ In the midst of his mourning, the Jew has recited the daily prayer, "Every day He renews the deeds of the creation."²⁶ On Friday evening, the Jew has held up his Kiddush Cup and exclaimed, "We do this in memory of the Exodus from Egypt and in memory of the deeds of Creation."²⁷ It is as if the Jew has said each Sabbath, "We shall not despair, because we know that the Power that makes for freedom and creation is with us at this very moment." Let the mourner learn something from the Jewish people which has risen above its suffering. The mourner needs to learn that he has experienced only a temporary blow. He still has, as his allies, God and a world of infinite possibilities. He has to believe this, if he is to triumph over his despair; he has to be willing to "open his eyes" to see the reality that exists.

So many of us say, "I am angry at God for letting my son (wife, husband) die. I will not be happy. I will punish God." This, we must admit, is somewhat like the child who says, "I am mad at Mommy, I won't eat supper. I'll get sick, then see how sorry she will be." Those who punish themselves in this way, block up the channels of prayer and the fuller life. The one who prays goes out to meet a Friend with open heart and open hands. He who prays in sorrow confesses:

"My heart is broken. Help me to heal it. I have no one to love. Help me to find such a person. I have no one to love me. Help me to find someone."

The one who prays must not be ashamed to reveal a broken heart and must seek out new possibilities for loving and giving that are all surely around him. When God seems not to hear our prayer, the problem may well be within us. It may be that we are blocking up the

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channels of communication with our own doubts and conflicts.²⁸

In time of crisis, such as in a time of mourning, the one who prays needs to feel there is Someone (1) who is superior to the process of life and death, (2) who is concerned with his sorrow, (3) who will help him work towards a solution to his problem. Perhaps the solution comes best when we undertake a constructive task. Many parents who have lost a child stricken by a particular disease, say cerebral palsy, have found compensating love from hundreds of other children, similarly stricken, whom they have tried to help. Wives of husbands who have died of cancer, have become ardent workers for cancer organizations. Many people of means, who had hoarded their money before, suddenly decide to give freely to charity in the name of their dear departed. These constructive outlets fulfil the ancient Jewish teaching that the name (the memory) of the departed be "livrachah, for a blessing." The memory of a loved one can hang like a millstone around one's neck, bearing the mourner down. On the other hand, active prayer (the prayerful deed) can help you make the memory of the loved one "a blessing to the living." The death of a loved one need not be merely the closing of an important door to life. If we will actively try to redirect our energies, we will very possibly discover that there are many more doors to happiness than we ever dreamed. Prayer is useful in reawakening our desire to serve others. Even the death of a loved one can serve a constructive cause, if it stimulates us to personal growth and to community serving activity. Frequently, a mourner discovers that he has leaned too heavily on a loved one, and only the latter's death impels the mourner to step forward to broaden his circle of friends and contacts. Sometimes, the mourner discovers that by giving more of himself to others, he solicits a return gift of gratitude and love, and so, the open wound in the mourner's heart begins to heal, as new blood and new life rush to it.

Jewish tradition requires that the mourner either attend the Synagogue during his period of mourning or hold services at home. Standing at the side of other mourners, the individual soon learns that he has fellow sufferers capable of understanding his pain. Reciting the prayers of thankfulness and praise, he is reminded of all the gifts God is

continually giving him. Expressing the prayers of petition, he gains release from his heartache. Proclaiming the prayers committing him to the covenant and task of Israel to fashion the world in the image of love and justice, he gains new purpose.

6. Intercessory Prayer, Praying for Others

Jews have traditionally placed a great deal of faith in intercessory prayer, that is, prayer in behalf of another. The Hebrew Scripture gives us two prime examples of intercessory prayer. In one case, Moses prayed for the healing of the leprous Miriam, “O God, pray heal her” (Numbers 12:13). We are told that after a week, Miriam was healed and at her post in the community leadership. In the other case, as we have previously discussed, David prayed for the survival of his sick son who was born of David’s extra-marital sexual union with Bath-sheba. David, we are told, fasted and lay upon the ground for seven days, imploring God to save the child. Nonetheless, the king’s intercessory prayer did not avail (2 Samuel 12:15-23). In post-biblical times, Jews tended to use intercessory prayer often, although the Rabbis cautioned against vain prayer (one should not pray for that which is manifestly impossible).

Concerning intercessory prayer, our tradition has differing views. One view is reflected in the dictum, “He is a sinner who refuses to pray for his fellow” (the Talmudic tractate Berachot, 12b). A second view is expressed in the dictum, “The prayer of a sick person for his own recovery avails more than the prayer of another” (the Midrashic work Bereshit Rabbah, 53:19).

One of the basic themes of our book is that prayer is work, *avodah*, as done between a human being and God and sometimes leading to activity in behalf of another. Prayer can produce an immediate balm or glow, but it is to be thought of as a process which leads to the action that makes for the answer to one's prayer. Prayer begins with an initial God-contact; this may involve thoughts or words, but the prayer process does not end there. For this reason, this author stresses the dictum of the Midrash, “The prayer of a sick person for his own recovery avails more than the prayer of another”.

Many doctors, even in this rationalistic age, tell us that there can be no question that when a sick person prays to God, he can acquire hope, confidence, and faith, all of which help to turn his body towards its healing. We might pray the kind of brief prayer that Moses prayed in behalf of Miriam, "O Lord, Heal Me", or we might pray after the manner of this lengthier prayer to be found in the Home Prayerbook, published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1994:

"In sickness I turn to You, O God,
for comfort and help. Strengthen within me
the wondrous power of healing that You have
implanted in Your children. Guide my doctors
and nurses that they may speed my recovery.
Let my dear ones find comfort and courage in
the knowledge that You are with us at all times,
In sickness as in health. May my sickness not weaken
my faith in You, nor diminish my love for others.
From my illness may I gain a fuller sympathy for
all who suffer. I praise You, O God, the Source
of healing".

But if we do not pray to God, will He not Heal us? This Rabbi (the author of our book) understands that *God loves us even when we don't remind Him that we want Him to love us*. I believe that the healing power of God is with us at all times, making for our healing whenever we fall ill. I believe with the Prophet Isaiah, quoting God, "Before They call, I will answer".

If this is so, why then should a sick person pray in behalf of himself? Part of the function of prayer, as we have indicated, is to make us more fully aware of what already exists. We pray to make ourselves aware that God has anticipated our problems and is already making for our healing. We don't have to pray, in effect, "God, stop what you're

doing over there and come over here and pay some attention to me.” We have to come to know that “God knows”. As we become more conscious of this reality, we will have a greater sense of God’s presence. We will come to understand that we are never alone in our suffering, and this knowledge, this awareness, can surely help us in our move towards recovery.

This is not to suggest that all patients who pray, regardless of the nature of their illness or wounds, will recover. Prayer is not magic. What it does do is to help us understand that the body is a miraculous creation and that the hundreds of miracles operating within our body at all times do not cease just because part of our body is in trauma. Advocates of the power of prayer want us to understand that the living God is not absent from these continuing miracles. We do not necessarily need sudden miracles. The old, ever-present, ever operative (and ever new) miracles can usually make for our recovery.

‘Suppose’, you might say, “the patient is in a coma and cannot pray for himself. How can we, through our prayers, help make for the patient’s healing?” Or you might ask, “How can we add the weight of our prayers to those of the conscious patient?” In trying to answer these questions, we must recognize that there are several different kinds of intercessory prayer. First, there is the prayer of a friend or spiritual leader along with the patient. The patient may feel, for whatever reasons, too timid to approach God by himself. The patient might feel that he is unworthy of God’s attention, but let others pray along with him, and he feels that the prayer has been more substantial. This kind of joint prayer can be very helpful to the patient’s sense of well-being, can strengthen his resolve, can reassure him that he is important enough to be worthy of God’s concern. Such prayer might be brief at first, and then somewhat longer on a later occasion. Eventually, the patient will come to look forward to these group sessions and to these group meetings with God.

Still another kind of intercessory prayer occurs when the patient cannot actively participate or when he is not present. Most of us are familiar with this kind of prayer as it occurs in a public house of worship, a synagogue, a church or mosque. Many believe that such prayers in a sacred House of God can move God to action when all other prayers have failed. This Rabbi has trouble with the notion that God has to be stimulated by us before He

comes to the aid of one of His children. Surely, God being greater than we, knows what we know, and His caring is greater than our caring. Surely, God is already doing what can be done for the patient, and one of the functions of prayer is to make ourselves more aware that this is so. We band together in the House of God to gather strength from one another, to remind ourselves of the miracle of our creation, to express our anguish concerning the sick person to the God who hears prayer. The House of God is the place where the community comes together. More and more in our urban society, we are isolated from one another. We need to remind ourselves that we are a community of God's children, one family. We need to say together that a part of ourselves has been wounded, and, therefore, all of us are in pain. In the intercessory prayer in the House of God, we name the suffering patient as a part of ourselves. In this sense, intercessory prayer is also a personal prayer; "O Lord, *we* are suffering". On many occasions, when I, as a Rabbi, led an intercessory prayer in the Synagogue, I always tried to lead the worshipers to a greater awareness of what God is surely doing, even without our petition. It is this growing awareness of the caring nature of God which is the mark of a dynamic faith. Yes, we need to pray for the recovery of our friends and loved ones, and in this praying, we hopefully will remind ourselves of the power of God which is greater than our limited minds can conceive.

7. Is God Omnipotent?

Traditional religions teach that God is omnipotent (all-powerful). This is true of Orthodox Judaism also. If God's concern extends to all of His creatures, does this mean that He can solve all problems, heal all wounds? Traditional religions answer in the affirmative but find ways of explaining why God is not present in some cases and in some disasters. It is difficult for orthodox religions that teach the omnipotence of God to justify the premature death of a good person ("God called him/her", "God needs the righteous at His side," and the like).

On the other hand, there are many clergymen who do not accept this aspect of orthodoxy, including this author. If God were omnipotent, we would have a perfect world,

would we not? And good people would never die young; the bad guys would never win; millions of children would not die of starvation every year; young mothers would never be smitten with cancer, etc. On the contrary, we know that our world is far from perfect, and terrible things do happen.

How do we square these facts with a caring God, who we believe to be supporting us at all times? The answer, it seems, must be that while God's power goes beyond our conception of greatness, God is still not omnipotent. God is the author of an infinite number of worlds and galaxies, the creator of the intricacies of atoms, the Source of love and justice, yet He does not control everything, and unfortunate things can and do occur. When I discussed God in this sense with my teenage son, he declared, "If God is not omnipotent, He is not God!", and so most orthodoxies believe. For them, and my young son, God *has* to be omnipotent. Indeed, God may be omnipotent, but if so, it seems He chooses not to be, for it is clear that we live in an imperfect world, often laden with extreme suffering and destruction. The Kabbala, a form of Jewish mysticism, handles this problem through the doctrine of "Tzimtzum", i.e. God willfully withdraws part of His power in certain situations. The Holy Scriptures tell us that God at times "turns His face away" from those who violate His covenant. Some Orthodox teachers will agree that God's help is simply not always adequate. Scriptural and aggadic sources tell us that God suffers when His people suffer.

Some years ago, I was a Rabbi in a small town in New York State. People of all faiths were saddened when a ten year old only-child of a pious family suddenly died. The parents for many years had been unable to have children. They had visited the shrines of their faith all over the world praying for the miracle of a child (the birth of a child is always a miracle). When the boy was born, the parents and all of their friends rejoiced. Now the child was suddenly gone, and the parents were crushed. Their clergyman told them, "It was God's will. God wants the good near him. God has his own special plan for your son." The parents could not accept such a God. They stopped attending religious services.

After about a year of their mourning, a member of my synagogue told the parents, "Why don't you talk to our Rabbi. He has another view of such tragedies. The desperate parents came to see me and told me their sad story. They asked, "How could God do this to

us - to work a miracle for us and then take the child away? Such a special child it was!”

“I don’t think God took your child away from you”, I said; “I think God weeps with you. I know He would have saved your child if He could”.

We all wept together.

The parents began to attend their House of Worship again. They could understand a God who was not all powerful, who suffered when His children suffered. What they couldn’t comprehend was a God who snatched away their precious son, whatever the reason.

If God is not all-powerful, we humans have a greater role in perfecting the world. The Midrash is a collection made long centuries ago of the discussions and speculations of the Rabbis, which is rooted in the Hebrew Scripture. Out of the Midrash comes this story. “To whom was God speaking when Genesis quotes Him as saying, ‘Let *us* make humankind in our image’?”. Their answer – “God was speaking to Adam, the first human being. God said to Adam, ‘Let us, you and I, make humankind in our image’ ”. This story is the ancient Rabbis way of recognizing the awesome role that human beings have to play in creating the future of the human species. We are not to be passive recipients of God’s gifts. We are to be God’s noble partners, not co-Gods, but partners.

One of the great prayers which Christians will recognize from the New

Testament , is, “Lord, what would you have me do?” Those of us who understand the terrible responsibility God has placed on our shoulders might well employ prayer to ask God how we can fulfill our role as His partner-servant. An exalted prayer is to ask, “Lord, what would You have me do?” It could well be that so many imperfect, if not terrible, things happen in our world, because we as God’s partners do not take up our tasks or fail to do them responsibly.

If God controlled all things, we would be mere puppets responding to strings pulled by the Divine hand. A greater God than a mere puppeteer has created His children in such a way that they are free to assume a portion of His power. We are free to grow in His image, to fulfill our potential as spiritual beings, and we can only do that by working at His side.

What it is that we tell our children, “You want to be free? O.K., the other side of freedom is responsibility. You want to be an adult? O.K., act like one!”

I have the faith that God wants us to try to act in a God-like manner, to imitate Him in His qualities of justice and love, and thus to help Him perfect this imperfect world. If we conscientiously assume our role as God's partners, there will be more cures for the sick and fewer disasters. As one German theologian said in commenting upon Hitler's rise to power, "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing to oppose it".

V

GROWING TOWARDS GOD

A. Prayer as a Discipline

The profound meaning of prayer cannot really be grasped unless one understands that prayer is a discipline, which requires rehearsal at regular intervals. The rehearsal, however, cannot always be a "free form" expression. Even the parachutists who fly "free as the birds" in the sky in our newly publicized sport do not leave the success of their mission to sheer chance. These people study the laws which relate to the support of body weight by the air; they know exactly which body angles to assume; and their timing is precise. In short, while it seems that they simply jump into the air from a high altitude, the truth is that they follow well studied guides. Mainstream Judaism does not teach that prayer is a flight into fancy in search of a mystical communion, nor do we teach that prayer is a secretive art available only to a privileged few whom the hand of a far-away god has touched. For most informed and sensitive Jews, prayer is a continuing work relationship with our Creator in dealing with real problems. There are procedures governing the prayer process, and we are bidden to master those procedures

There is in every person the impulse to pray, however dim it might seem to be. The involuntary surge, which seems to come to the fore in time of crisis, reflects a deeply ingrained need in a person to reach out to his roots and reservoir. The wise person will try to understand this need and to channel it in the most constructive way by proper cultivation and exercise. Properly understood, prayer is a process which we shall continue to discuss shortly.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from those who leap into space, where prayer

is concerned are those who do not feel that prayer is a vital issue. It is not a "felt need," to use the psychologist's phrase. Most people accept the existence of a God but do not consciously sense a personal relationship with that God. They are not aware of the magnetic push and pull of which the early Hasidim spoke. Many of us are religious only in a formal sense. We are in much the same position as Voltaire, the outspoken Frenchman of the eighteenth century. The story is told that Voltaire, who was noted for his sharp criticism of the popular concepts of religion, was once walking down the streets of Paris with a friend. They happened to pass a religious functionary carrying an Icon. Voltaire paused, assumed a military posture, and saluted. His friend, somewhat astonished, asked, "Why do you, the staunch critic of religion, pay your respects to God?" Voltaire replied, "God and I do not speak, but we salute!"¹ Most of us do not maintain a regular speaking relationship with God. We prefer to be a member of the religious fraternity from a respectful distance. Our teachers submit, however, that there can be no real religiosity, unless one seeks to "speak" with God, unless one seeks a continuing relationship with the source of love and life. In spite of the difficulties of entering into this kind of relationship in a realistic manner, we hold that the person who wants to live life at its fullest, as a secure and loved person, will zealously search out his roots in the Divine.

B. THE IMITATION OF GOD

The goal of Judaism is to teach and to guide humankind to imitate God. We conceive of God as a just and merciful God, filled with love and forgiveness. Our Scripture teaches that God has commanded us, "You shall be holy because I, the Lord, your God, am holy."² To imitate the divine, one has to realize the divine potential within himself. To ask, how does a person pray, is to ask how do we seek to realize the divine potential within ourselves?

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How do we try to become God-like? How do we try to grow towards God? How do we seek to prepare ourselves to do God's work? Most people think of prayer merely in the formal sense of what a person does when they are in a synagogue or church, or they think of prayer merely in the sense of the words a person pointedly addresses to God. Prayer may be each of these things, but it involves a great many other things. *Prayer is a process which begins with thoughts, involves words and study, and, in a sense, includes the activity for which the thought, words, and study were the preparation.* When this process is in continuous actualization, it might be called "the prayer-state," and a person could be in that state when he is thinking or studying or speaking or acting, but, most profoundly, when these activities merge into one another. We are not talking about something ethereal, then, when we speak of prayer. We are speaking of one step, which is part of many other interacting steps, leading towards a fuller and more meaningful life.

C. OUR GOD-IMAGE

Recently, a young school teacher told me, "When my father was very ill, I prayed for the first time in many years, and I felt uncomfortable. I didn't really know to whom I was praying." This young lady is typical of most Americans today. We pray only in acute crisis, and when we do attempt to pray, we are not even certain of the procedure. For most of us, prayer is an awkward and rare experience. Many highly intellectual people feel awkward at prayer because they are embarrassed that they have no precise definition of God. We, who are raised in a super-rationalistic-scientific atmosphere, call so little upon the knowledge of the heart, that we are embarrassed when, on rarest occasions, we yield to its demands. Nonetheless, it might well be that, as the poet said, "the heart has a mind the mind knows not of."

Maimonides, the great philosopher and Rabbi of the 12th century, taught that the moment we start defining what God is we approach idolatry. His view was that once we start

to say what we think God is, we are defining Him in terms of our limited understanding, which gives us an inadequate definition. Maimonides suggests that when we go so far as to worship this necessarily false definition, we commit idolatry. In the biblical story of Moses, we learn that it is not possible to “see” (understand) God in His deepest essence, yet Moses learned and our Sages taught that we can know God through what He does, by His deeds.³ His created world, the existence of complex and precious human beings, the reality of love, justice and mercy, these are the evidences of divinity which we trace to their source, a Being beyond our fullest comprehension.

1. Our Noblest Projection

Einstein suggested that no matter what we may learn about our universe, and no matter what may be the measure of our attainment towards "the highest wisdom and most radiant beauty," we will never understand the creation and its Creator more than "primitively." In brief, we can gain insights into God's wisdom and power; we can see the beginning or the mist of things, but we can never confront God in His total being. Martin Buber, who has written much on this theme in relatively modern times, assumes this much to be true. Nevertheless, Buber says, people do construct a God image, and "Our construction of a God image shows our greatness. . . . It is our noblest projection."⁴ If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that the image we have of God changes as we ourselves grow in stature, as we climb another rung on the ladder towards the “highest wisdom”. In a way, we could say our image of God is a measure of our own developed being, a reflection of the greatness towards which we are capable of reaching at that particular point of our life.

In the Book of Zohar, the source of Jewish kabbalistic mysticism, probably written

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in 13th century Spain, there are these words, ". . . *But, of a truth, the Holy one makes Himself known to every one according to the measure of his understanding and his capacity to attach himself to the spirit of divine wisdom; a full knowledge is beyond the reach of any being.*"⁵ The "god" in which the agnostic or atheist does not believe, is frequently merely a god-concept which the person once had and has rejected. (The atheist chooses the god-concept in which he prefers not to believe.) The truly religious person must reject many god-concepts as he himself grows in stature, but he most assuredly does not reject God. The religious person understands that his current god-concept is a key which he uses to open one door in God's mansion. When he opens that door and gathers the new truth, the seeker of God must then fashion a new key which will open the next door and lead him to a greater truth, a step nearer to the reality of God. *None the less, each of these concepts has a kernel of truth which they share in common.* Each concept leading to the Divine may have a reality factor which is more true than the limited dimension of the particular concept.

We posit that a worthy concept-vision of the Divine must contain at least the following assumptions:

- a) There is Someone who cares (There is a Friend behind the phenomena).
- b) This Someone created the universe that it might be a blessing to human beings (I am a beloved child of the Divine).
- c) We can increase our blessings by approaching nearer to God, by acquiring an even greater measure of the divine knowledge and power (I have to be a seeker and a worker).

In order to pray sincerely, we do not have to envision a specific God form. This is what Buber meant when he said, "*A religious person senses a reality which is truer than any of his projections.*"⁶ Einstein said, "*...this knowledge of the greatness beyond, this feeling,*

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is at the center of true religiousness."⁷ The mathematician needs only three points to plot an entire circle. The seasoned sailor does not need to see land to know when it is looming in the darkness. The person with a developed understanding of the universe has this same certain knowledge of a God, who, though imageless, nevertheless, leaves certain definite evidence of His power and presence. The person who really prays, feels that he is able to contact this God and to work with Him to solve his real problems.

2. More Than a Concept

The Jewish Prayerbook speaks of "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," as if to suggest that just as each of the Patriarchs had his own personal meeting with God, so each of them came to understand the Divine in a personal, if somewhat different way.⁸ *God ceases to be a philosophic definition only when we go to work with Him; when we attempt to imitate Him; when we attempt to grow towards Him.* Those people who belong to a continuing religious tradition have the advantage of an historically developed concept of God which tells them of the results of concrete experiences of their predecessors down through the ages. By reliving our ancestors' experiences, by working through the kinds of situations they worked through, we come to a greater understanding of God; but we must know that it is the God-work we do ourselves that gives us the clearest understanding of the reality of God.

The existence of God, however, is, of course, not dependent on our definition of Him, but the image we have of Him may determine how we live our lives. Most human beings throughout the generations, have felt the reality of God, in spite of the fact that He was impenetrable. Different generations have interpreted God differently, and have, thus, served Him differently. It is appropriate to say that the understanding Westerners have of God is

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the result of thousands of years of human searching and struggling towards a higher truth.

D. GROWING TOWARDS GOD, THE BECKONING GOD

Once a disciple said to a Hasidic Rabbi, "Master, why is it that God sometimes seems so far away?" The Rabbi replied, "Imagine a father (or mother) teaching a child to walk. He does not hold on to the child. On the contrary, he holds his arms outstretched away from the child, (beckons) and the child walks forward. As the child comes forward, the father moves further away. How else is the child to learn to walk?"⁹ All is not a bed of roses for us on this earth, because were it otherwise, we would never develop into our greater selves. We would never rise towards God. God is near with outstretched arms, but God does not want us to remain infantile. He wants us to develop our own potential. And as we go forward (only seemingly alone), we come closer to God. As we develop our faculties for independent thinking and loving and sharing, we approach the greater reality in life; but each time we move forward, the "Parent" beckons again, and we might say that the reality of God, as we understand it, grows in scope as we ascend the ladder of spirituality. Once we have God wrapped up in a nice pretty package- definition stuffed away in our pocket, we must know that we have a false vision. A God, too well defined, who serves as a crutch at all times, who keeps us in the dependent infantile state, is no God at all but a projection of a childish wish. A mature projection of God (and God is not dependent upon our projection of Him) will picture God in the image of a beckoning God who urges us to grow towards Him in love and understanding. The Hasidim called this growth "redeeming oneself." As we walk forward, drawn by God, we become, in a sense, less dependent on Him; that is, we learn how to fend for ourselves in this world. *The person who prays seeks ways to become more independent;* as he grows towards God, he becomes able to deal with life's problems

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without despairing and without becoming overly anxious or fearful.

It was Jeremiah who prophesied the time when Judeans would not have to teach one another about God, because each person would have the knowledge of God in his heart. The person who goes in search of God regularly (who prays) becomes less dependent (i.e., fulfills his potential as a human being), because he learns what God wants him to know. The religiously developed person communes easily and regularly with God "in his heart" and is sensitive to the nearness of God. He lives and moves in the prayer-state.

Philo, the great Jewish philosopher, who lived in Egypt in the 1st century of this era, wrote, "*He who flees from God, flees into himself.*"^{10a} We can apply this insight here. If going (growing) towards God means coincidentally the development of one's greater self, then he "who flees from God" is one who regresses, i.e., he settles for what he is, he "flees into himself" (his narrow self). The prayer dynamic involves a conscious attempt to improve oneself by the contemplation of a greatness (God) towards which one would like to grow. Thus, our pursuit of God is, in a healthy way, a flight from oneself, i.e., from the stagnating self.

If we accept this image of a Beckoning (and therefore receding) God, we are also saying that our understanding of God grows and changes. As we grow, we are able to conceive of a greater God (our understanding deepens). In a sense, then, the person growing spiritually is ever casting off an old concept of God and seeking a greater concept.

For many people this idea of a progressive growing towards an even greater understanding of God is frightening, because it seems to allow a certain amount of uncertainty. Those who are able to accept this dynamic notion of prayer and religion, however, share the excitement of knowing that God is the more real, precisely because He is not limited in power and scope by small definitions learned as a child.

The truth seems to be that even the Hebrew Scriptures presents God in different

guises as the Israelite people grew spiritually. In their nomadic phase, the Israelites talk of a God who approves of vengeance and is ever ready to punish transgressions, but in the Book of Leviticus we learn that God admonishes us against vengeance. The Scripture reads “Thou shalt not take vengeance but thou shalt love Thy neighbor as Thyself” (Leviticus 19:19). Why the difference in earlier and later teachings, each of which is attributed to God? Is it possible that in the nomadic society, vengeance was considered a desirable procedure, for this is the way primitive justice was maintained? (For Prince Hamlet, vengeance was the inevitable choice. He was compelled to redeem the murder of his father). Later in the more sophisticated and urbanized society of developing Israel, the existence of established courts, cities of refuge, etc. made vengeance unpalatable; therefore, it was assumed that God was on the side of reasoned and objective court procedures. The society had matured, and now there was a more mature understanding of what God wants; therefore, the old notions associated with God were replaced.

Similarly, the Hebrew Prophets give us a more sophisticated view of God. The God who speaks to the Prophets doesn't seem to be interested in sacrifices as a way of worship (as He seems to be in the time of Samuel and Eli). He is more interested in justice and mercy than in elaborate worship. He knows that Israel has earned punishment for grossly violating the covenant, but He cannot bring himself to give her what she has earned. Why? Because He is a God of hesed (covenant loyalty) and compassion (rahmanut), as the Prophet Hosea now understands.

What does God want Israel to do? The Prophet Micah tells us God wants her to do justice (mishpat), to love her covenantal duties (ahavat hesed), and to walk humbly with her God.^{10b} It seems that Israel's biblical religious leaders dared to follow their Beckoning God, and they learned that He is a much greater God than their nomadic ancestors ever imagined.

What the people of Israel accomplished in biblical times, we are challenged to accomplish in modern times- as individuals and as a community, for the knowledge of God

is not a trophy won forever and handed down intact to one's children. The children have to work through to their own understanding. One does not truly know God, unless one achieves the understanding himself. This does not imply that we should discard recklessly the insights our ancestors have garnered. On the contrary, we would be wise to learn whatever we can from the sacred literature and from the great souls who are part of our tradition. It would be folly to think that we have to start from the beginning. In our personal search for God, we have to take along Moses, Hosea, and Jeremiah as our guides. It will take us a long time to know what they know, if indeed, we can ever attain to their religious genius.

E. STUDY AS WORSHIP: Finding God's Will in the Sacred Literature

The teaching of the Lord is perfect, renewing life; the decrees of the Lord are enduring, making the simple wise. The precepts of the Lord are just, rejoicing the heart . . .

(Psalm 19:8-9a)

The Prophet Ezekiel tells us in the biblical book that bears his name (Ch.. 3:1-3) that he was bidden to eat the Scroll of God before he was able to proclaim the words of God. Judaism has had a long and enduring tradition that the religious person must first be a student; he must first "eat the Book." He must first study Torah (the vast religious literature). He must become familiar in detail with the struggle of his forebearers to relate to God. He must make the God-contacting experiences of his ancestors his own; then, he will be the more able to speak to God personally. Bachya ibn Pakuda, Jewish sage of the 11th century, wrote, "The study of the Torah is as tillage is to the soil, ploughing and clearing it." ¹¹

There have been some who have taught that prayer is like inserting an electric light bulb in a socket. The divine current, they say, is always there, and it is simply a matter of

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attaching the bulb (your spiritual self) to realize the potential of light. True, God is ever present, our tradition maintains, but there must be a period of attunement and preparation before one can meaningfully relate to the Divine. Prayer, our tradition teaches, is not merely the result of electrical contact. It is not that easy. Bachya preferred the imagery of farming. The soil must first be tilled, he wrote. It must be ploughed and cleared before one can hope to harvest the crops. Seeds must be planted, the garden must be tended, and there is still the hard labor of harvesting. God does not simply hand us the gift of new strength, Bachya taught. "The aid that comes from God is like the rain that waters the field!" God helps with some essential ingredients. He supplies the earth and the rain. We must plough the field. We supply the work. "The study of Torah is as tillage is to the soil." It is a preparatory step in reaching towards God, in gaining the "knowledge of God." Was it not the Prophet Amos who said, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel," (Amos 4: 12). The Rabbis translated this to mean, you cannot meet God (i.e., pray) unless you prepare for the meeting. A good way to prepare is to study the record of other dedicated and sensitive people who have striven to meet with God and have succeeded. Such a preparation is the study of Torah.¹²

So related was Torah study to worship that some Rabbis called the study of Torah by the name "avodah," the word used expressly to indicate the service of the priestly altar in ancient days.¹³ Although the recitation of formal prayers became the required practice in Judaism, three times a day at fixed times, there were some Rabbis who considered the interruption of study for the purpose of formal prayer as unseemly. For these Rabbis, study and its attendant discussion and thought provocation, was a superior form of relating to God (i.e., it was a prayer-form higher than that of the fixed prayer).

The Rabbis understood by "Torah," not only the first five books of the Hebrew Scripture which bear that collective name, but, also, the vast range of the Jewish

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religious literature, including the Midrash, the Talmud, and the Rabbinic Commentaries. The Talmud included the developed law of the Jewish people and the interpretations of the rabbinical judges when specific cases were tried over the years. For the ancient Jews, "law" was religious and secular at once. There was no distinction. Thus, to study the "law" meant that one studied not only the Scripture (the written Torah) but also the developing rabbinic law (the so-called oral Torah). Through the study of Talmud, one became familiar with countless details in the day-to-day struggle of the Jews to build a humane society based on reasoned law, which was rooted in the authority of the Hebrew Scripture.

This kind of study had, in the last analysis, a practical purpose and application. It equipped the student to understand and apply the laws of the religiously oriented society in such a way as to express his concern for justice and compassion. Contact with the "word of God" in this way informed as well as inspired the student to "love thy neighbor as thyself." Since every detail of the copious record of law cases and commentaries was deemed by the Jews to be rooted in God's will, study of the Talmud became a way to understand and determine the will of God. Such study was the equivalent of saying, "Thy will be done"; only the student went further to determine what that specific will was, so that it might be applied to society.

It can easily be seen that such highly consecrated study can partake of the nature of prayer. It is not, however, mystical or abstract prayer. It is prayer turned towards resolving the day-to-day problems of life. In a sense, those who study the laws of a democratic, modern society with impassioned zeal, seeking to discover and create those laws which enhance humanity, may be said to be close to prayer. Such modern legalists cannot be considered to be praying, however, unless, like the Jews from biblical to modern times, they recognize that human rights are rooted in the Divine will, and unless they work at their task in the full consciousness that contact with the exalted law is also a way to the Divine. The Jews call this consecrated concentration "kavvanah." It is an essential ingredient of all sincere prayers. A familiar dictum of the Rabbis was, "In all Thy ways, acknowledge

Him."¹⁴ For the consecrated person, the most menial task can become an offering to the Divine.

The study of the law, even when it is apparently rooted in the will of God, as in the Talmud, can become a kind of barren intellectualism if those who study it are not constantly mindful of its derivation and its purpose. One of the ancient Rabbis, Ben Soma, taught, "Every day, when a person busies himself with the study of the Law, he should say to himself, 'It is as if this day I received it from Sinai' " (i.e., directly from God).^{15a} Rabbi Johanan taught, "Every person who comes to occupy himself with the Law should regard himself as if he were standing in fire" (i.e., the holy fire).^{15b} It is clear from these dicta that some Rabbis equated the study of the Law with participating in the revelation at Sinai, with exhilarating personal contact with God. In this sense, and in this mood, to study the religious literature is to participate in a revelation and is truly a prayerful experience.

We are advised that the person who studies Torah prayerfully ". . . is made like a never failing fountain, and like a river that flows on with ever-sustained vigor; he becomes modest, long-suffering, and forgiving of insults; and it magnifies and exalts him above all things."^{15c}

F. LEARNING FROM GREAT PEOPLE; "Frontlets Between Your Eyes"¹⁶

There is a second way in which the study of the Scripture and its derivative books can be akin to prayer. In the study of the exploits and trials of great people, it is possible to be inspired to share their goals and their courage. We cannot all come to feel as intimately as Abraham that God walks with us, but we can share his pain at leaving his father's house¹⁷ and

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understand his desire to create a new kind of society in a new land (Genesis 12: 1ff), like the founders of America. From the study of Abraham's experience and its consequences,¹⁸ we can be inspired to act with similar courage in a situation where we have to choose to break with past ties that brought us pleasure. In making this kind of decision, confident in the rightfulness of what we are doing, we can feel with Abraham that God "walks" with us. If we can act with the awareness that our deeds further the cause of freedom and justice, our mood partakes of the nature of prayer.

Suppose that we are confronted by a situation where it seems clear that many righteous people are about to suffer for the errors of a devious few. A study of the biblical text where Abraham contends with God over the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 8:16ff), can inspire us to oppose a wrong decision that seems imminent. The biblical story teaches that God desires the intervention of the righteous in averting disaster. It teaches that we need not accept an obvious disaster as the unavoidable will of God. The story encourages us to try to change anything that can be changed for the better and not to accept disaster stoically. If we can act as an intercessor for good in a current situation, remembering that God wishes to avoid the punishing of the righteous, our action to avert a calamity, an injustice, partakes of the quality of prayer (i.e., we relate to the Divine). My teacher, Dr. Henry Slonimsky, has written,

“And so in prayer we must turn to the great religious geniuses, the Isaiahs and Jeremiahs and Psalmists, and make our own the visions they have seen, the communion they have established, the messages they have brought back, the words they have spoken as having been spoken for us because truly spoken for all men. And by an act of sympathetic fervor, of loving contagion, to achieve their glow, and to fan the spark which is present in all of us at the fire which they have lighted. This does not mean that all the deepest prayers and all the best poetry

and all the highest music have all already been written, and that there is an end to inspiration. The future is open, there is no limitation on the wonder of insight and creation. But we each of us in our time and place have to husband the resources available and to warm our hands at the fires already lighted.”¹⁹

When the religious tradition is studied in such a way that the student identifies himself with the historical actor and is thereby moved to noble action, study becomes a catalyst to that exchange of profound feeling which characterizes prayer. The person who notes that the heroes of our Bible understood themselves to be addressed by God might very well learn to say to himself, "Is God saying this to me also?" God said to Moses, "Free the slaves!"²⁰ He said to Amos, "All peoples are Mine."²¹ He said to Jonah, "Have mercy on the people of Nineveh."²² Is God saying these things to modern humans? We, in modern Judaism, reach an affirmative answer. *The voice of God speaks at all times.* The only question is whether we shall hear it. A person lost in a desert cries out for help. To whom does he call? *To anyone who will hear.* To all who will hear! God calls to all of us, but who among us is sensitive enough, who has the developed spiritual high frequency to hear and to answer like Abraham, "Here Am I," (Genesis 22:1)? God calls to all as he called to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" The problem is that only few hear and answer like Isaiah, "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). The person who recognizes the divine call to serve humankind, the person who hears the call for help, and who places himself in the practical position to serve, enters, in this precise way, into a personal relationship with God, into a prayer-relationship of *avodah*.

1. Living in the Prayer-State

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Great people pray in their own way. Rabbi Leo Baeck was the sainted Rabbi who worked in the concentration camps of Europe during World War II, even though he had the chance to flee. He spent long hours at night with the sick, and he wearied himself daily to uphold the courage of his compatriots. If you approached him at his work and asked him, "Rabbi, let us take time out to pray," I am certain that he would have answered, "I am praying now!" There are some rare souls, such as Rabbi Leo Baeck, Albert Schweitzer, Mother Theresa, and the Hebrew Prophets, whose lives are so continuously spent in noble thoughts and deeds that it might be said of them, "They live in a constant prayer-state."

We pray when we try to reach as high as we can in thought, word, and deed, and when we do so, we are reaching towards God. There is such a thing as a prayerful thought, a prayerful word, and a prayerful deed. For most people, the dedicated interlude of the thought-prayer becomes much diluted as we attempt to translate the thought into action. Our resolve to be kind and loving somehow becomes diffused, as it becomes involved in our daily routine. As we are buffeted around by others, it becomes harder to practice mercy and forgiveness. The thought-prayer is rarely transmitted in its entire force and power to the deed itself, but the prayer process is not fulfilled without the deed.

a. Carrying God's Will as "Frontlets Between Your Eyes"

Our Bible (Tanakh) and Prayerbook (Siddur) ask us to carry the moral laws of God, our dedicated plan for action, "Letotafot bayn enechah," as "frontlets between your eyes," as constant reminders of what we are to do, as a guide for all our deeds, as a measuring rod for all our actions.^{23a} There are some few people, who are capable of almost continuously exalted thought, who carry the concerns of God as "frontlets between the eyes." These people are regularly primed for the prayer-charged deed. For them, there is little difference between the thought, the word, and the deed. These people become godlike in the sense that they do

what they say and think on an exalted level. This kind of elevated character should be our goal. We should strive always to be "touching God," to think and act at the highest level of which we are capable.^{23b}

Please note that those who are in the prayer-state, where thought, word, and deed merge, are not "out of this world." These are people who try to do God's work to meet their own real needs and the needs of their fellow humans. These are people who are not afraid to reach down into the gutter to help the poor and the fallen, and they are not afraid to examine their own heart and to admit their weaknesses, even as they seek the vision and strength to improve themselves. The prayerful person is capable of reaching both high and low. He is both forgiving of human frailty and demanding that humans reach for their greater selves.

It is perhaps easier for us to understand the person who acts in the prayer-state of dedicated action than it is to understand the person who simply prays in thought or word. The Talmud tells us that "a person's deeds must exceed his learning and thinking."²⁴ That is to say, the person who seeks learning merely for its own sake and lives in an ivory tower, detached from the needs of ordinary people, will soon be inwardly corrupted. All of us are familiar with thinkers who become so concerned with precise definitions that they soon philosophize everything into nothingness. We are not concerned here with "out of this world" worshipers, although there can be no doubt that a certain amount of meditation and thinking and studying are essential to self improvement and to prayerful action. In the end, we apply the pragmatic test. *We ask, how has the prayer of this person enabled him to be a more effective human being in the active solution of his real problems and in the solution of community problems?* Real prayer is not concerned with pie in the sky in the bye and bye. It is concerned with fitting a person for citizenship in his family and community. This is why we must look to the activist people who live and move in the prayer-state of dedicated

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action for a demonstration of what we are trying to achieve through prayer.

G. FINDING GOD AS THE SOURCE OF JUSTICE AND COMPASSION;
THE ISRAELITE AND JUDEAN PROPHETS

We have discussed (our Chapter III, A-1-c) how Moses discovered God as one who called him to help free the slaves. Elsewhere we discuss how Moses found God (Adonai) to be the proclaimer of basic ethical laws for humans, both as individuals and as members of society. From Moses also we learned God wants us to imitate Him in His quality of holiness (Leviticus, Chapter 19), and to do this we must love our neighbors as ourselves (Lev. 19:18).

Moses (around 1300-1250 BCE) left a great legacy to those Israelites who followed in his way, but not until the Israelite Prophets do we find a group of teachers -leaders that seem to relate to God in the same profound sense as Moses. The Prophets attempted to lead Israel and Judah through the period 850-500 BCE. Much has deservedly been written about these noble souls, and we certainly cannot devote sufficient space within the limited scope of this book to describe them adequately.²⁵ Nonetheless, in broadly considering the question “Where can we find God?” or “How can we know God?”, we must, however briefly, consider the compelling experiences of these extraordinary teachers and learn from them.

The Israelite Prophets of this period may be said to have found God as “The Source of Justice and Compassion”. Perhaps it would be more correct to say God found them as He had found Moses. God called-commanded them, as individuals in their own time, to be His mediator to His people. It was their task to proclaim God’s word-command as He gave it to them. What they heard as the Divine command were detailed instructions to seek justice, and these instructions as they applied to the current situation were proclaimed by the Prophet before Kings, Priests, and the people, irrespective of the danger to the person of the Prophet. Later, when catastrophe befell the unrepentant ruling class of the two divided kingdoms

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(Israel and Judah), the Prophets mediated the Divine message of forgiveness, mercy, and love.

There is a clear difference, of course, between prophecy as exemplified in Amos, Isaiah, Hosea, and Jeremiah and the kind of prayer of which we are speaking.²⁶ Nonetheless, there is a relationship which we might say is one of gradation. The Prophets related to God on the nth, or ultimate level. You and I can hope to relate to God on a beginning, but still highly meaningful level; and since the prophetic relation to God cuts such a deeply defined path to God as "Source of Justice and Compassion", we can hope to follow this path and find out own way to God.

The distinctive nature of the God of ancient Israel, which distinguished Him from the gods of Canaan, Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia, placed Him in opposition to those values for which these gods stood. No representatives of these other gods spoke of their god as "The Source of Justice and Ciompassion". The religion of these nations was replete with magic, not morality. It is from Abraham, Moses, and the Israelite Prophets that we learn the higher nature of the living God, and it is to that God that we pray. When our picture of God is unclear, let us turn to these great inspired teachers and clarify our thoughts by reviewing their experience.

H. FINDING GOD AS THE CREATOR OF NATURE

There are several ways to attain to the prayer-state and to fellowship with the Divine. Not all of us are capable of the same approaches. By training and psychological background, some of us find one channel more suitable than another. Some of us search for the Great Mathematician who set the electrons whirling. Others sense the Motivating Spirit behind the drama of human history. Some few of us have paused to hear the "still small voice" echoing

from within ourselves.²⁷ Almost all of us, however, are aware of the presence of God when we commune with nature. The Nineteenth Psalm is a prayer few of us cannot utter in complete sincerity. It begins:

The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork...

While no one can comprehend nature in its infinite variety, one can sense the immeasurable creative force behind it by studying just one aspect of nature like the oak tree or the ant. Each facet of nature leads us to the unity behind all the facets. Wherever we intensely peer, we are filled with awe and adoration, and we enter into fellowship with the Creator. We pray in subconscious thought, if not consciously and verbally. The religious person is one who feels that the universal is reflected in the particular, and it is through contact with, and awareness of, the particular in depth that we come into contact with the universal.

The Patriarch Isaac, we are told, "went out to meditate in the field at the eventide."²⁸ The quietness and softness of the field was, to Isaac, a sign of the tranquility he could find by turning from the clamor of his daily routine to reflection upon purposes beyond his personal ambition. Job heard God speak from the "whirlwind" with the swirl of unfathomable creative power that "shut up the sea with doors" and commanded, "Thus far shalt thou come but no further."²⁹ The poet Tennyson found the infinite power of the divine in the "tiny flower" which, to Wordsworth, gave "thoughts that lie too deep for tears." Shelley was awakened to a sense of intensified life by the miracle of the skylark singing. The poet asked the bird,

Teach me half the gladness that thy brain doth know

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Such harmonious madness from my lips would flow
The world would listen then as I am listening now.³⁰

The range of nature is wide indeed, from the ferocious whirlwind to the soft, waving flower, and to all humans, it speaks of power and possibility, of life overflowing; "It speaks to us of Thee, Our God."^{31a}

Many years ago I was impressed by a Time Magazine article on "Faith And The Scientist". The author wrote, "In the postwar technological explosion, scientists have . . . discovered that the more they know, the more remains to be learned . . . They have come to show greater respect for the kind of questions that religion . . . asks. 'Most of the scientists I know,' says Boston University theologian Edwin Booth, 'believe in the immanent principle of life in the organic universe. If they are religious, they call it God. If they are not religious, they have awe and reverence for this principle. But it isn't retired, nor is it personal. *It is greater than personal*; it is absolutely essential to the principle of life itself . . .'"^{31b}

For all of us from poet to scientist, nature and the awesome scope of the physical universe, from solar system to atom, fills us with an awareness of the Divine. For most of us, the contemplation of the beauties of our physical world brings us to the mood that is called wonder, adoration, gratefulness for the blessings that abound around us. The experiencing of this mood heightens our love for life. In this moment akin to prayer, there is no petitioning or asking, but there is an answer to an unexpressed need, to be at one with the heart of life. Our point here is that the person who peers most intently into the heart of things, the person who disciplines his study, will come to a greater awareness of his personal identification with the deepest realities of life.

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I. SEEKING THE REFLECTION OF THE DIVINE WITHIN OURSELVES; SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTING (Heshbon Ha-nefesh)

The ultimate purpose of the study of the sacred literature is not merely to inform us but to transform us, to lead to the inner development of the individual. This is a primary viewpoint of Jewish teachers. *The purpose of all learning and praying is the development of human beings who are able to relate together on the higher levels of love and understanding, who are able to construct and participate in the good society on this earth.* In the end, what is sought is the transformation of the individual and society.

Bachya, writing on the purpose of meditation and study, contended, "My aim is rather to bring to light the root principles of our religion that are deeply fixed in the unsophisticated intellect, those pivot principles of our Torah which are *latent in our souls*. Once we rouse our minds to meditate on them, their truth becomes clear to us inwardly and their bright rays will even be manifest to us externally. The following is an apt analogy. An astrologer went to a friend's courtyard, and divined that it contained a hidden treasure. He searched for it, and found a mass of silver that had turned black and had lost its luster because of the rust with which it had become encrusted. He took some of the metal, scoured it with salt and vinegar, washed and polished it, till it had recovered its original luster, beauty and brightness. The owner then gave orders that the rest of the treasure should be similarly treated. I wish to do the same with the hidden treasures of the heart; namely, to bring them to light and to exhibit their shining excellence so that anyone who desires to draw near to God and cling to Him may do likewise."³² According to Bachya, one of the primary purposes of study is to lead the student to inward reflection to discover his own hidden treasures. When study inspires this kind of reflection, it partakes of the nature of prayer, for it inspires us to reach for the link to the Divine within ourselves. *We must keep in mind, then, that when we seek the " hidden*

treasures" in Jewish lore, one of our primary purposes is to find a way to reveal the hidden treasures within ourselves. We are seeking to develop that within ourselves which is real but latent. To do this, we may have to work at scouring and washing and polishing, but it can be done, and must be done, if we are to attain to our higher spiritual development.

The study of the example of other people who were seekers of God can be helpful to us. When we study the profound searchings of others, we clear our mind of cares and doubts which are most immediately pressing. We are drawn into their heroic struggle for understanding. It is related of one reverential Jew that he used to pray in this way, "O my God, my grief for Thy sake (at not fulfilling my duty to Thee) has annulled all my other griefs, and my anxiety on this account has removed all other anxieties"³³ We are not speaking now of the desirability of building up a strong God-oriented guilt. We speak of losing minor cares in the work for worthwhile causes. We speak of purposeful living. The person who focuses his attention on the more important problems in life finds that his concern for daily material successes and failures diminishes. This is one of the legitimate functions of prayer, the refocusing of our sights.

Medieval Rabbis, like Bachya, understood that prayer was a means to self-development; it was a vehicle for increasing self-awareness and self-knowledge. He wrote, "The benefit of spiritual accounting (one of the types of prayer) . . . consists of the results which the soul develops when it has obtained a clear grasp of what has been set forth . . . There will be formed in you a new and strange supernal force of which previously you had no knowledge as being among your forces . . . You will then obtain insight into great themes and see profound secrets because your soul will be pure and your faith will be strong . . . This will result from the power of that on which you fixed your gaze and the

grandeur of the mystery that was revealed to you..."³⁴ Clearly, this language shows us that Bachya, the philosopher, was also much of a mystic, but his mysticism had rational boundaries and goals.

Bachya seems to be telling us that only as we grow intellectually and morally, can we hope to understand God in a more profound way. Bachya urges his reader to imagine that he is standing on a certain spot, behind and around which there is a figure he cannot see. However, if he takes a plate of wrought iron and smooths it and polishes it, he will be able to use it as a mirror to see the secrets behind and around him. The iron plate, Bachya tells us, is the human soul. The polishing of the plate, to him, represents the training of the soul in the sciences (contemplative) and in moral instruction. The person able to use this polished mirror (i.e., trained soul) will see the "figure" behind and all around. Bachya strongly suggests that as we look into our own sensitized and trained soul, we are able to see the reflection of the Divine! It is the inner searching that leads to awareness of the Divine. Bachya suggests that a mirror (soul) that is unclear will only reveal muddled pictures. Of one who undertakes this discipline, Bachya says, will Isaiah's prophecy (11:2) be true, "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding..." Bachya urges us to search for the hidden treasures within ourselves, and "you will behold the true forms (of things) with open eyes." Like the Prophet Elisha, Bachya believed that the prayerful person was the reality-conscious person who saw the things that existed all the time but which were hidden from the view of the untrained and the insensitive.

For Bachya, who was both a Rabbi and a philosopher, there were two roads leading to a working relationship with God. One road involved the study of Torah. The other road involved the study of philosophy which led to an awareness of the Divine invested within us. As an exceptional human being, Bachya was able to walk both roads.

VI

SOME FUNCTIONS OF PRAYER

A. SPIRITUAL REGENERATION

BEFORE ONE CAN PRAY, HE MUST REALIZE, AS DID THE PATRIARCH, Jacob, that "The Gate of Heaven" is here, wherever one is. We must pray where we are, with what we have. You cannot pray while frantically running. The person who wishes to pray must find a quiet place to rest. When Rebekah first met Isaac, he was in the field meditating, praying. The biblical text reads, "And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide . . ." (Genesis 24:63).¹ No doubt, he went to get away from the burdens of his daily business, to separate himself, if but momentarily, from the small talk of friends and servants, to be alone with himself and with God (Talmud, Berachot, 26b). All of us, especially in our modern, harried world, need these moments when we can walk away from our burdens and commune with the vastness of the universe. In such a situation, we can come to understand that all of the things we think to be of prime importance are really but ripples on the ocean of life. In moments like these, the soul is refreshed, and our perspective of life is enlarged. Comparable to this type of prayer-moment is the calm we feel when we gaze at the sea for a period of time. The huge expanse of the water, the regularity of its movements, the limitlessness of the vision, soon bring us out of ourselves, and the calm of the sea, its power and stability, become part of us, and we become part of it. Gazing at a natural object like the sea, we can gain an insight into the calm and power of its Creator. As we think of the limitless power of our Creator, we are moved to adoration, and in praising God, we empty ourselves of our miseries and take part of the Divine calm and power into ourselves.

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The late Rabbi Louis Binstock told the story of an English engineer who was sent to Africa to supervise a very important project. Laboriously, with the aid of natives he himself carefully trained, the engineer assembled his equipment at an inland site. Suddenly, he received a cable to return home with the valuable equipment immediately, so he organized the natives for a rapid march to the coast. After two weeks of forced marches, the men sat down and refused to move. The exasperated engineer asked the leader of the rebels, "Why, after driving yourself for two weeks, do you now give up when we are almost there?" The leader answered, "My master, we will rest here awhile to give our souls a chance to catch up with our bodies."² People can be so wearied by mental as well as physical strain that they lose all sense of perspective in life. The prayer-moment is the "spiritual break" that we take "to give our souls a chance to catch up with our bodies, the moment when we re-think the problem of where we are going, how we are going, and why. The prayer-moment is the rest moment "in the field at the eventide," or on the shore of the sea of life. It is the moment when we lay down the burden of the daily routine to get out of our own troubles and to let the ocean of life flow through us. The prayer-moment is the moment of spiritual reinvigoration.

1. "A Window to Heaven"; New Horizons

We cannot pray while running. We must first rest to gather our physical and spiritual resources. Prayer requires a studied moment of concentration. "The early Hasidim waited an hour before prayer in order to prepare (or concentrate) their hearts for the "Father in Heaven" (Talmud, Berachot 30b; cf. Berachot 32b). As we rest and free ourselves of frenetic daily cares, we attempt to set our sights on life's broader meaning. We attempt to see beyond ourselves to the next step on the ladder of life which we must climb as we grow

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towards the Beckoning God. It is not necessary for us to encompass the total meaning of life; it is only important, for the moment, that we get a vision of the direction in which we must work and develop as the next phase of a continuing program and a continuing work relationship with God.

The renowned American Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver has told the story of a man who lived with his family in a village ringed by mountains. So far as anyone in the village knew, no human being had ever travelled beyond the mountains. For the villagers, the mountains were the end of the world. When the time came for the man to die, he called his sons to him and made a pact with them. He asked each of his sons to make an assault upon the mountain. The son who brought back the most precious gift would receive the greater portion of the father's fortune. The first son climbed as high as any person had ever been known before to climb, and he came running back to his father after several days with a rare fruit, proof that he had climbed to rare heights. The father was proud and blessed his son. The second son climbed even higher and brought back a berry from a tree no one had ever seen before. The father was thrilled, and blessed him warmly, but worried about the third son. Nothing had been heard from him for too long a time. Finally, after several more days, the third son returned, exhausted but exhilarated. "And what have you brought us, my son?", asked the dying father. The third son replied, "I return empty-handed, father, for I climbed to the top of the mountain where nothing grows, but, oh, my father, I saw the mighty ocean on the other side of the mountain!"^{3a} The story strongly makes the point that the reward for the hardest effort is frequently only a broader vision of a greatness beyond. The third son had returned empty-handed with no gifts for his father, but he alone had learned that the valley, which the villagers thought was the totality of the world, was just the beginning of things. As with this industrious son, so with the industrious worshiper. Properly, one does not pray for material gifts. One prays for a greater vision, for the lifting of purpose, for the increasing of strength, for the spiritual

means of conquering the tasks ahead.

Small wonder that the Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, founder of Hasidism, taught, "Let your prayer be a window to heaven." A prayer should be a way of enlarging one's understanding of the possibilities for growth and change. It is a way of looking out from where one is to where it is possible for one to go. *Our prayer is a movement of our spirit (heart and mind) from where it is now to where it longs to be; it is a movement towards the highest of which we can conceive, towards God.* The defeated person is the one who thinks that he cannot muster enough resources to master the problem he fancies to have overwhelmed him. The prayerful person (the opposite of the defeated person) will commune with his heart, with his better self, attempting to get close to God, and he will come to understand that there are more resources within him and being fed to him, than he has ever imagined. He will come to realize that the seemingly overwhelming problem confronting him is really not so large that it cannot yield to work and patience. How does the Hebrew dictum go? "Chazak, chazak, venitchazek; Be strong, he strong, and you will be strengthened."^{3b}

Frequently, through prayer, our vision is so enlarged that we come to understand that our problem has seemed to be great only because we have built up the problem in our own mind. A perfect illustration of this is in the biblical account of the two spying expeditions into the land of Canaan. The first was ordered by Moses, and the Hebrew spies reported, "We are not able to go up against these people, for they are stronger than we" (Numbers 13:31). The slaves who had fled from Egypt, accordingly, did not assemble the courage to invade Canaan. Joshua ordered the second spy expedition into Canaan a generation later. The second group of spies, children of the slaves, children born

in freedom, reported, ". . . all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us" (Joshua 2:24). Had the refugees from Egypt been able to assemble more courage, they would not have had to wander in the wilderness so long. So we, through lack of courage, wander in the wilderness of doubt and fear, when through communion with the "Power that makes for freedom," we could arouse ourselves to heroic deeds. *Only those who will not accept defeat, who want to conquer fear, will pray*, and they will pray not that the enemy vanish into nothingness, for that is impossible, but that their vision be broadened, that their eyes be opened to see the resources available to them for the battles of life.

2. The Prayer of Maimonides (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon) ; The Heightening of Purpose

A magnificent example of a prayer, in which the person seeks the way to self-improvement, is found in the so-called "Prayer of Maimonides." This prayer is attributed to the renowned Jewish philosopher and religious scholar who was the chief physician to the Spanish court towards the close of the 11th century. The prayer is still used by many doctors today. One version is rendered as follows:

"The eternal Providence has appointed me to watch over the life and health of Thy creatures. May the love for my art actuate me at all times; may neither avarice nor miserliness, nor thirst for glory or for a great reputation engage my mind; for the enemies of truth and philanthropy could easily deceive me and make me forgetful of my lofty aim of doing good to Thy children. May I never see in the patient anything but a fellow creature in pain. . . . Grant me strength, time, and opportunity always to correct what I have acquired, always to extend its domain; for knowledge is

immense and the spirit of man can extend infinitely to enrich itself daily with new requirements. Today he could discover his errors of yesterday and tomorrow he may obtain a new light on what he thinks himself sure of today. Oh, God, Thou hast appointed me to watch over the life and death of Thy creatures; here am I ready for my vocation, and now I turn unto my calling."^{4a}

How much contrast is there between this prayer and the petition of those unlearned in prayer who vainly ask God for material gifts! Let us look more closely at the words of Maimonides. First, he acknowledges the fact that his vocation is one of service to humankind. He prays, "Thy eternal Providence has appointed me to watch over the life and health of Thy creatures." Immediately, Maimonides sets the tone of his prayer as one which is not merely self-seeking. He reflects upon his role in life, his covenant with the Divine. Then, he prays that he be able to free himself from using his high calling merely for financial gain or for the exaltation of his reputation. He prays, "May the love of my art actuate me at all times; may neither avarice nor miserliness, nor thirst for glory or for a great reputation engage my mind; for the enemies of truth and philanthropy could easily deceive me and make me forgetful of my lofty aim of doing good to Thy children." In other words, Maimonides uses this prayer-moment to sharpen his devotion to the cause he serves. The next thought in his prayer is something wealth-seeking professional men and women might well bear in mind. Maimonides goes on to pray, "May I never see in the patient anything but a fellow creature in pain." Some of the professionally trained people in our society look upon their clients as objects to be milked financially, rather than as persons to be helped.

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3. Self-Improvement

Maimonides begins what might be considered a second section of his prayer. This section has to do with self-improvement. He prays, "Give me strength, time, and opportunity always to correct what I have acquired, always to extend its domain, for knowledge is immense and the spirit of man can extend infinitely to enrich itself daily with new requirements. Today, he could discover his errors of yesterday, and tomorrow, he may obtain a new light on what he thinks himself sure of today." Let us note the verbs that Maimonides uses. He asks for strength to *correct*, to *extend*, to *enrich* his mind and spirit. This is the language of a man who seeks daily to climb yet another rung on the ladder which leads to heaven. This is the most exalted form of prayer, for in it, the person is revealed, not as a child seeking hand-outs, but as one mindful of the divine potential within himself which enables him to grow in power and knowledge constantly.

Finally, having purified his thoughts and having fixed his purpose at the highest possible level, Maimonides turns to his task and prays, "Oh, God, Thou hast appointed me to watch over the life and death of Thy creatures; here am I ready for my vocation, and now I turn unto my calling." How pointed are the words, "And now I turn unto my calling," It is a way of saying, "Now that I have strengthened my aims, I shall work to the utmost of my capacity." *This is a primary purpose of prayer at the highest level. Prayer should enable us to turn to our tasks with greater enthusiasm and ability.*

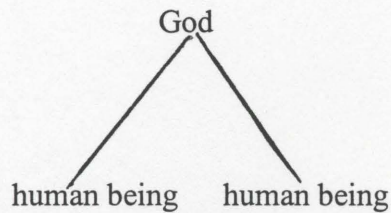
B. PRAYER AND YOUR WORK

When justice burns within us like a flaming fire, when love evokes willing sacrifice from us, then You live within our hearts, and we, through righteousness behold Your presence.

(Gates of Prayer, p. 181)

It might seem to some that the prayer of Maimonides is practical only for those who deal in dedicated callings like medicine and teaching, but the truth is that there are many more vocations where the practitioner has the responsibility to act as if his activities were God-appointed or oriented. The lawyer upholds the law, the policeman protects our lives. The farmer raises our food. The parent raises our children. If the law has declined as a "calling" and has become just another business where the buyer must beware of the charlatan, it is because the lawyers, as a group, have not stressed their calling as defenders of the rights of the individual. That is to say, too many lawyers have not taken advantage of possible prayer moments, like Maimonides, to say something like, "May I never see in the client anything but a fellow creature in need of help." We do not mean to single out the law as an isolated example of a vocation that seems to have declined from the status of an ethical profession. Medicine and teaching seem, in some respects, to have taken on the character of a business which treats the patient or the student as a mere customer or as just another name on the list. Is today's society so constructed that we must conduct our vocation or business in an atmosphere alien from reverent devotion to justice and concern for people? Whether one sells shoes, dresses, or rags, whether one labors as a mechanic or as a clerk-typist, one deals with people, and reverence for people can be manifested in any trade and by anyone at any level in that trade.

One cannot pray unless he understands that he is made in the image of God. That is to say, he must be convinced that he is capable of infinite worth and growth. Similarly, one cannot pray fully unless he understands that other people are made in this image, unless he understands that he can relate to God through reverence for other people. The divine stream flows through all human beings, and the prayerful person becomes increasingly aware of the presence of God within the love-giving, courageous human. The person who is aware of God in the world sees the religious experience as a triangular affair, like so:



God's essence flows between Himself and his human children and between one human being and another. Even as two humans embrace the best in each other, they embrace the Divine." Martin Buber has wisely stated, "Where there is true meeting between one person and another, God is present". In like vein, the ancient Rabbis taught, "When two people study Torah, (the sacred literature) together, God is present."4b

1. The Moment of Decision

In our society, however, the doctrine of "caveat emptor, let the buyer beware," seems to be dominant, especially in the business sphere. The person who is unaware of, or contemptuous of, the worth of his fellow human beings cannot appreciate his own personal worth enough to pray properly. *Respect for human beings, for God's handiwork, is a condition precedent to prayer.* You cannot deceive customers and take advantage of their ignorance all day, and, then, pretend to pray to the God of all humanity when you come home. We must admit that the jungle aspects of our business economy mitigate against the prayer-mood and make the true religious experience extremely difficult. It could well be that we must make some serious reforms in our economy before we can hope to educate people to pray honestly.

People who hold so-called "second-line" jobs, sometimes feel that they are not in a position to bring the prayer-mood into their work. The automobile mechanic, for example, will say, "I can see how the doctor can serve humankind, but how can I deal

religiously in my work?" What the mechanic does affects people indirectly, if not directly. First of all, he may be involved in giving an appraisal on the price of a specific repair job. Since his is a secretive art, complex to most lay people, the mechanic is in a position to deceive readily, or if he has respect for the customer, he can give an honest appraisal. In this way, the mechanic's sensitivity to human dignity is tested. Further, it is possible for the mechanic to do a makeshift or a thorough job in his repair. He can work at a minimum and put the car into operation on a marginal basis, or he can correct the fundamental problems in the car. The character and quality of his work can reveal the mechanic's self-respect and concern for others. It is clearly possible for the mechanic to bring high purpose to his task, but he cannot develop this purpose unless he spends time at regular intervals in meditation and in prayer concerning the direction he is to take in his work. *The prayer-area is frequently the decision area.* The prayer-moment is frequently the moment, when in consultation with one's better self and with a "more of the same," i.e., with God, one decides to take steps that are decent and honest.

2. Working with Purpose

No matter how simple or menial your job, it can be done with a sense of high purpose. Contrariwise, those who are in high places, in spite of their opportunity for service, can belittle their vocation. This is the point of the well known story about the reporter who came upon a group of workmen erecting a building. The reporter first approached a bricklayer and asked, "What are you doing?" The bricklayer replied, "I am plastering bricks together." The reporter then approached the foreman who was supervising a group of workmen handling steel beams. "What is your task?" the reporter queried. The foreman answered, "We take these beams and make them secure enough to support the rest of the building." In such manner the reporter went around to each workman and continually received replies only in a technical sense and very confined in scope. Finally, the reporter

came to an unskilled laborer who was stirring the cement in its trough. Round and round the laborer stirred the cement, a task which required much patience but not a great deal of skill. "Tell me," said the reporter, "what are you doing?" The squat little man quickly replied, "I'm building a House of God!", and with obvious pleasure, he continued his stirring. For the first time the reporter learned that the building under construction was a church or synagogue!

Whether or not we come home from our labor bored or frustrated may depend on the sense of purpose that we bring to our work, whatever its status may be. The prayerful person understands that what he does, however simple, will affect the lives of other human beings. He understands that he is a part of a larger and meaningful whole. The person unable to pray sees himself and his work as isolated. He lives in a blind valley. Through prayer, we try to link our lives to the broader life of the community. Like Maimonides, we can all pray in our own particular way, "May I never see in the customer anything but a fellow creature whose needs I can help satisfy." When this viewpoint becomes inconsistent with the possibility of "making a living," then we need to recast the mould of our economy. If we cannot bring the prayer mood (which involves a reverent sensitivity to people) to our business, we are incapable of real religious expression.

Some years ago, I knew an excellent doctor who suffered a horrible tragedy in her family. One of her children committed suicide in a violent fashion. The child had been troubled throughout his young life (he was about 20 at the time of his death); nonetheless, the doctor, who was used to solving other people's problems, found it very difficult to absorb this terrible blow. Progressively, she became more depressed. In our conversations, she would say things like, "I wonder what life is all about. I wonder if there is any purpose in my carrying on".

I was surprised to hear this kind of talk from a doctor who did so much for so many others. She was, in fact, particularly kind and considerate to her patients. In the midst of her negative remarks, I found myself saying to her, "Have you ever considered that yours are

God's hands, that the work you do is God's work?"

She fell silent. I like to think that this thought started her off on a more positive track. It is a thought we can all carry with us. There is so much work to be done in this imperfect world. God calls us to help Him. Who will hear?

C. MEETING GOD THROUGH MEETING OUR FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS

1. Uniting the Divine Sparks

O Source of life, "may we, created in Your image, embrace one another in friendship and in joy. Then shall we be one family, and then shall Your kingdom be established on earth..."

(Gates of Prayer, p. 618)

We have spoken of the Hasidic Jews of 18th and 19th century Eastern Europe who believed that each person has a divine spark within him which longs to be reunited with its divine source. Prayer, they taught, is the reaching of the divine within us for more of itself. To the Hasidim, there were two ways for the individual divine spark to gather unto itself more of the divine nature. It could reach upward toward its Fountainhead (pray), or it could bind itself to other sparks to be found in other human beings and in other forms of existence. This, too, was a kind of prayer. In a broad sense, then, for the Hasidim, whenever one person bound himself to another person, he was gathering more of the divine unto himself. To love one's comrade was to participate in a uniting of otherwise isolated divine sparks. Love between people was an affecting of a union of divine particles. For the Hasidim, prayer (and love) was the necessary solution to isolation. It was the inevitable response of the divine in us which found isolation unbearable. It was the reaching out for

fellowship, for roots.⁵ Dr. Eric Fromm has expressed in psychological terms this Hasidic viewpoint in his book, "The Art of Loving".⁶

The Hasidim were somewhat opposed to the Talmudists of their day, for the latter taught that God's will could only be determined through the meticulous study of the religious law. The Hasidim taught that the most uneducated person could know in his heart what God wanted. One charismatic teacher (Tzadik) taught, "There are some (i.e. those learned in the religious law) who have the key to the lock on the gate of Heaven, but God prefers that the lock be smashed with one heartfelt sigh!"⁷ The Hasidim, like the authors of the Psalms, stressed the religion of the heart, rather than the religion of the mind. They believed with Bachya, the Rabbi-philosopher, in at least one respect, namely, that the religious and more exalted nature of a human being was "latent in his soul" and awaited only the proper stimulus and channel of release. Further, the Hasidim taught that we could learn as much (or more) from the book of life as from the sacred literature. For them, nature, and especially human beings, were the best revealers of the divine miracles. For the Hasidim, the way to bind yourself to God was to bind yourself to God's created things, to nature and, especially, to your fellow human beings.

Modern teachers strongly support this view. Dr. Miller writes, "God is not an idea to be talked about so much as a personal reality to be experienced. He comes to persons through other persons. He is present wherever there is a loving relationship between human beings."⁸ This is also the central teaching of Martin Buber, who has mediated the teaching of Hasidism to the modern world. "Most of our fundamental religious teaching,"

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says Dr. Miller, "is not in our conscious effort to tell the child anything but in the unconscious and undesigned activities of the parents whose principles propagate themselves even without their desire."⁹

Dr. Miller goes on to say a child first encounters God in his daily life "through the love shown to him by his parents." Thus, parents become "mediators of God to their children" simply by loving them long before the children can understand language. The accumulated knowledge of modern psychology confirms what the Hasidim knew two centuries ago. It confirms what great religious teachers like Rabbi Hillel and others taught over 2,000 years ago.

For the Talmudists, study of the sacred texts was the necessary preparation for meeting with God. Study of the religiously based law was the vestibule down which one must walk before he could confront the King. Maimonides claimed that the study of philosophy was necessary to draw near to God. The Hasidim emphasized the fact that human beings had a way of knowing that was prior to, perhaps even superior to, the intellectual understanding of God. They taught that the preferred way to bring God into the world was to practice the indispensable virtue, love. Once, a disciple asked the Maggid (religious preacher) of Zlotchbov, "How is it that the tradition holds that our Father Abraham kept all the laws, when most of the laws later given to Moses were unknown to Abraham?" The Maggid answered, "All that is needed is to love God. If you are about to do something and you think it might lessen your love, then you will know it is sin. If you are about to do something and think it will increase your love, then you will know that your will is in keeping with the will of God. That is what Abraham did."¹⁰ We can acknowledge the value of this teaching, even while we recognize that it has inherent difficulties.

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We might say that, in essence, the Talmudists stood for the intellectual love of God, the Hasidim for the emotional love of God. In modern times, it is perhaps the attitude of the early Hasidim that we need most. The Talmudists have much to teach us, namely, that where our orientation towards God is too abstract and mystical, it can evaporate into meaningless vapor. On the other hand, the Hasidim can teach us that in a scientifically oriented world which views most things mechanistically, we deeply need a sense of a personal relationship to our Creator and to our fellows.¹¹

2. The Uniqueness of Each Person

O sing unto the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things. . . .

(Psalm 98:1)

The Talmudists taught, in effect, "Study the Torah, discuss it, expound it, reflect upon it, and the divine message in it will be revealed to you." The Hasidim taught, "Study humankind, especially the righteous leader, the Tzaddik. Listen to his words, observe his deeds, watch the way he moves, listen to the sound of his voice, touch him, imitate him, bind yourself to him, and link other people to yourself. The Talmudists taught, "Follow and understand the law, and you will walk the path of God." The Hasidim taught, "Don't simply imitate Moses. Seek your individual greatness. Express the unique power and beauty in yourself, After all, this is how Moses found his way to God. He did not simply imitate his ancestors. He found his own way to God." The Maggid of Zlotchov said, "Just as our patriarchs invented new ways of serving God, each a new type of service according

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to his own character, one the service of love, the other that of stern justice, the third that of beauty, *so each one of us in his own way shall devise something new in the light of the teachings and of service (avodah), and do what has not yet been done.*"¹²

Once Rabbi Rafael asked Rabbi Pinhas, "Why is no human face like any other?" Rabbi Pinhas replied: "Because "man (i.e. humankind)" is created in the image of God. *Every human being sucks the living strength of God from another place*, and all together they make up Man. That is why their faces all differ from one another."¹³ Rabbi Pinhas further said, "In every one there is something precious, which is in no one else. That is why it is said: 'Despise not any person.' " He further taught,

"... The dignity of a palace is no greater than that of a hut, for the two are not alike, and what the lesser accomplishes, the greater cannot. It is the same with the righteous person. Though his value and service be great, he cannot accomplish what the wicked person accomplishes in the hour he prays, or does something to honor God . . ."¹⁴

It is our heritage from the Hasidim that prayer is intensely personal, but since the divinity in each person is only a fragment of the total divinity, some of which is also found in others, prayer necessarily touches upon and involves all other human beings. Rabbi Pinhas taught, "A prayer which is not spoken in the name of the entire community is no prayer at all."¹⁵ That is to say, a prayer which does not recognize the interdependence and inter-connectedness of all people is not, in the profound sense, prayer, for it does not seek to unite the various unique fragments of divinity. Since profound prayer is a uniting element in existence, since it is the expression of the divinity within ourselves, it partakes

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of the nature of divinity. Some of the Hasidim went so far as to say, "*Prayer, in itself, is God*", (that is, the Divine (a fragment) calling to the Divine (the Source of our being))."¹⁶

The founder of Hasidism considered the knowledge of Torah as only the beginning of the kind of knowledge God wished us to have. Like Bachya in the 11th century, the Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, in the 18th century, taught that *beyond the Torah, there is the deeper knowledge that is latent in men's souls, which lies waiting to come into active reality*. The story is told that on Simchat Torah (the Festival of the Rejoicing of the Law), the Baal Shem Tov danced together with his congregation. (Group dancing was amongst males, a feature of this folk religion.) He took the Scroll of the Torah and danced with it. Then he laid the Scroll aside and danced without it. At this moment, one of his disciples said to his companions, "Now our master has laid aside the visible, dimensional teachings, and has taken the spiritual teachings into himself."¹⁷ For the Hasidim, study of the Torah was the beginning. In the end, it was important that each person try to be a Torah, that is, a body of principles and experience tied to God, from which other people might learn.

It is a central view of this book that we have much to learn and review from the God-seekers of the past. Among these are the heroes of our sacred literature, the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Psalmists, and the Rabbis whose work, long centuries ago, resulted in the Talmud and The Midrash.

We have also drawn considerably from the Hasidim of Eastern Europe who brought a fresh and creative spirit to the Judaism of the late 18th and 19th centuries. We have also indicated that the future is open, and there is room for new and additional approaches

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to understanding and relating to God. In this connection, we praise the efforts of some modern Jewish groups such as Reform, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism and the Havurah movement.

The author feels that the reader should understand that the invigorating ideas and insights of the Hasidim of 150-200 years ago have become the property of many Jews today who may not call themselves Hasidim. On the other hand, groups that call themselves Hasidim today may incorporate only some of the insights and spontaneity of their predecessors and, indeed, may have become Orthodox or more Orthodox than the opponents of Hasidism at the time of its early development. The evolution of human history inevitably produces such paradoxes.

D. JOINING PRAYER AND DEED

You are the support of the falling;
Help us to lift up the fallen

(Gates of Prayer, p. 153)

How does one get into the mood to pray? How does one prepare to meet God? There is a story told about the Tzaddik (the righteous leader of the religious community) of Nemirov which supplies an answer. A "mitnaggid," or an opponent to Hasidism, doubted the stories told about the piety of the Tzaddik. To find out for himself the truth of the stories, this Jewish opponent hid under the bed of the Tzaddik on the night set aside for the recitation of the Penitential Prayers offered before Rosh Hashanah. Came the time for prayer, the Tzaddik arose, performed his ablutions, and then, surprisingly, dressed in the

garments of a peasant. The man under the bed had assumed that the Tzaddik would dress in his finery like a king before prayer. Then, the Tzaddik took an ax and left the house. The scoffer followed. The Tzaddik walked to a forest, chopped some wood laboriously, corded it into a bundle, shouldered it, and reentered the town. The investigator saw the Tzaddik stop at a small hut and tap at a window. When the sick widow within was unable to open the door, the Tzaddik let himself in, and offered to "sell" her the wood, for which he knew she had no money. Not wishing to humiliate her, he offered to let her repay him "when" she had the money. He then began to work. He laid the wood in the stove and lit the fire. As he did so, he recited the first part of the prayers for forgiveness associated with the current Holy Day. When the wood burned cheerily, he recited the second part of the prayer. As the fire warmed the house, he concluded the third part of the prayers. Henceforth, when the opponent heard people say that the Tzaddik ascends to heaven when he prays, the newly convinced believer would add, "If not higher!"¹⁸

The Jewish tradition is certain of one thing. *Prayers must not be abstract. They must be preparation for or linked to work in behalf of others or for one's spiritual deepening.* They must truly be avodah, service to the Divine. The Talmud is clear on this point. It teaches, ". . . With what is he to be compared whose wisdom exceeds his works? With a tree whose branches are many, but whose roots are few . . . But what does he resemble whose works exceed his wisdom? A tree whose branches are few, but whose roots are many; the stormiest winds may bear down and rage upon it, but they cannot stir it from its place . . ." ¹⁹ When prayer and the prayerful-deed occur in close association, we have the "prayer-state" typical of a truly great person.

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E. THY WILL BE DONE

...Incline our hearts to love You and to make Your will the law of our life...

(Gates of Prayer, p. 190)

It is not impossible to reconcile the rabbinic (sacred text based) and hasidic approach to Judaism. There were Talmudists who recognized the need for the expression of the emotional God-orientation, and there were Hasidim who recognized the importance of the knowledge of the religious law as an anchor to society. Both the Talmudists and the Hasidim pursued the "will of God" but, generally speaking, the former made contact with God's will through the law derived from an original revelation, and the Hasidim stressed the significance of each human personality as a unique residence of the divine. One Hasidic Rabbi, Rabbi Mikhal of Zlotchov, commented on a verse from the Song of Songs (7:11), in this manner. The verse reads, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me." The Rabbi applied this verse to the prayer dynamic and taught (in paraphrase), "When a person surrenders his selfish desires and seeks to serve God's broader will, then God's desire turns toward that person."²⁰ The implication of this teaching is that when we subordinate our private personal desires to God's concern for the welfare of all, we are helping to make real our new expanded desires. In brief, when we make God's cause our own, when we say, "Thy will be done," we have so joined ourselves to the Divine that we have joined the force of God to the answering of our own will. Then, indeed, "His desire is toward me." Here, again, prayer is conceived as a uniting force, uniting the will of God and His children for the common good.

Thus far in our book, we have discussed many different ways by which one

might discover God and His will. We could conclude that God wants us to be a blessing to others, as, indeed, God said to Abraham, the founder of Judaism.²¹ By taking the time to become aware of the daily blessings we receive from God, the gift of sight and hearing, the gift of life itself with its infinite possibilities for pleasure, the gift of loved ones, we could be moved to become a giver to those less fortunate than ourselves. By studying the history of the human struggle for justice and peace, we could, with the prophet Isaiah, conclude that it is God's will that we work for these goals. By studying the Holy Scripture, we would surely learn that it is God's will that we be most concerned about the weak and the oppressed, the sick and the fallen. (Lev. 19:9-10, 13-15, 34). By studying our Prayerbook, we would be reminded that God is the uniting force behind all nature and peoples, and it is indeed His will that we become His partners to help fashion His Kingdom, a kingdom in which there is a place of honor for all peoples, all races, and all genders.

In this search for the will of God, there is room for all kinds of seekers, for prophets and teachers, for physicists and research specialists, for psychologists and psychiatrists, for nature lovers and poets, for medical doctors and auto mechanics, for historians and philosophers. Each and all of them can be of help in our search for the God who is greater than any of us can ever know, and each and all of them can contribute to our understanding.

We can add to the list the accomplishments of the early Hasidim that they led modern Jews to the brink of mysticism.

F. THE MYSTIC PRAYS

This book is not intended to cover every aspect of prayer. For example, it does

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not dwell on the goals of the mystic in prayer. Mysticism is itself an enormous subject approached in our time by such competent authorities as Gershon Scholem in his seminal work, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*²² and by such current scholars as Rabbi Herbert Wiener, *Nine-and-a-half Mystics, The Kabbala Today*²³, and by Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah, New Perspectives*.²⁴ Seth Kadish includes a contrast between rational and mystical prayer in his broadly inclusive work, *Kavvana, Directing the Heart, in Jewish Prayer*.²⁵ Of course, Martin Buber, himself a non-mystic, has mediated to us *The Tales of the Hasidim*²⁶ and other aspects of the Hasidim of the 18th and 19th century Europe. Our book has drawn a great deal on Buber and on some of the above mentioned scholars.

Suffice it for us to say here that the goal of the mystics in prayer is different in some ways from the goal of the average person like you and me. The mystic is not satisfied with an awareness of God or simply with an inspirational contact. He (or she) wants *to enter into the Divine*, and he wants *to experience the Divine* flowing through him. In some extreme cases, the mystic seeks to become one with God, to lose his own personality in joining himself to God.

The ordinary but religiously oriented person may well pray "O Lord, what will you have me do?" The mystic will pray, "Lord, take me into Yourself". The former prayer is a preface to devoted action. The latter prayer is a preface to experiencing God, almost as an end in itself. The first kind of prayer might be identified with prophetic or socially oriented religion. The latter is the epitome of personal or internalized religion.

It would be wrong to say that these two kinds of praying are completely separate, the one from the other. On the contrary, there is something of the mystic in

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the prophets (the activists) and their disciples, and there might well be something of the prophet in certain mystics; yet the two kinds of praying set off on different missions and tend to fashion their proponents into two different kinds of personalities. Thus, we sometimes say, the mystic is “out of this world”, by which we mean he has completely internalized his religious experiences. On the other hand, we might say of some who are strongly activist in their religious orientation that they are pragmatic, or worldly, and not sufficiently “spiritual” (a much abused term).

It would seem that mystics in various religions tend to have a great deal in common, although they might have a different view of God peculiar to their distinctive religion. In this regard, we must mention the great medieval Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart, a devotee of mysticism who has influenced so many others. Eckhart is quoted as teaching, “ We ought to pray that every member and faculty, eyes, ears, mouth, heart and the senses, shall be directed to this end (i.e. to deny one’s self and to submerge in the will of God) and never to cease prayer until we attain unity with Him to whom our prayers and attention are directed, namely, God”.²⁷ Similarly, the ideal of “Bittul ha-yesh, self-annihilation” is an important one in the religious approach to prayer by some of the Hasidim”.^{28a}

The Hasidim taught that attachment to God (devekut) is achieved by losing oneself through certain prayer techniques. Understandably, only the masters claimed to achieve this union, while Gershon Scholem claims a complete loss of self was not a goal of the Jewish mystics and this distinguished them from other mystics. Since the beliefs of the Hasidic mystics were borrowed in large part from the earlier Kabbala, the goal of their prayer also involved the larger cosmic theme of helping to re-unite the masculine and feminine aspects of the godhead, but this is material for another book than this.^{28b}

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Maurice Friedman discusses the similarities and differences of mystics of the world in his book, *Touchstones of Reality*.²⁹ Friedman quotes Aldous Huxley as describing the mystic's contact with the Absolute as "unitive knowledge" – the union of subject and object in which one loses consciousness of one's self in the greater consciousness of the Divine. Friedman cites T.S. Eliot as saying that in this prayer-state "you are the music while the music lasts".³⁰

William James, renowned author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, speaks of the German idealist Malwida von Meysenbug, who in an experience at oceanside, knelt to pray, and later wrote, " ... I felt that I prayed as I had never prayed before and knew now what prayer really is: to return from the solitude of individuation into the consciousness of unity with all that is..."³¹ If this is what mysticism is, then many of us activists are mystics too, but then, we do not especially call ourselves "mystics", for that title seems to have been pre-empted by those who seem to stress internalized knowing and feeling rather than stressing the impulse to higher levels of relating to one's human brother and sisters.

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VII

PRAYING TOGETHER

The synagogue is the sanctuary of Israel,
born of Israel's longing for God...

(Gates of Prayer, p. 179)

A. FORMAL PRAYER

THE BOOK OF DANIEL INFORMS US THAT DANIEL, WHO LIVED IN THE second or third century B.C.E., prayed three times daily.^{1a} We know that for two thousand years, Jews have had a fixed prayer form to be recited morning, afternoon, and evening. To be sure, there have always been many Jews, great leaders among them, who have stressed the value of the spontaneous prayer, but in addition to the spontaneous prayer, traditional Jews have followed the pattern of the fixed prayers.^{1b}

The last two centuries have witnessed a gradually deepening revolt in the western world against ritual and formalism in religion, a revolt which only now seems to be softening, but there is a great deal to be said for the value of fixed prayer. We have spoken of the content of some of the prayers in the ancient Jewish Prayerbook which still form the core of all synagogue worship today. First, the prayers recognize God as the Creator of all things. Then, we express our understanding that His motivation for the creation was and is the love of His children. We proceed to declare that He is One (and not many), the inference being that all humans are His children, therefore subject to one

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law (will), and bound together by a common parenthood. (Jewish mystics have an additional interpretation. The unity of God is divided in this troubled world, but as we harmonize the world, we help to restore God's oneness).

As the prayer service continues, we are bidden to love Him, just as He loves us, and we are told that we can express this love by meditating upon His laws and by teaching and practicing them. With this foundation established, the body of traditionally fixed prayer, then includes a number of specific "berachot" or "blessings," which express our gratitude to God for His many gifts and solicit His continued gifts of peace, health, and redemption (both personal and societal). Redemption is understood in this-worldly terms.² Even the non-orthodox prayerbooks includes the prayers described above as part of the basic foundation; they also include the traditional prayers for the well-being of Jerusalem and the Jewish people, and they include prayers for the well-being of all humankind.³ All Jewish worship services end with prayers committing the worshiper to labor for a world of cooperative love and peace. We are bidden to repair the breaches in the structure of human society, "For on that day, the Lord will be truly One".

1. Repentance (Teshuvah); Returning to the Task; Collective Sin

The Jewish tradition makes it clear that prayer is but one of three things necessary for the true repentant. The trinity of requirements includes Repentance, Prayer, and Charity or Righteousness.⁴ Repentance in Judaism is a simple process. It includes the elements of prayer and righteous living. The repentant person is taught in Judaism to confess his sins to God, no intermediary is needed, or to the person offended and to

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prepare himself to redirect the path of his life towards the moral law. The proof of a person's repentance is his return to the prescribed conduct. Indeed, the word for repentance in Judaism, is "teshuvah," or "return." Judaism teaches that the forgiveness of God is always assured for the one who sincerely participates in all aspects of the process for "return". The constancy of God is assumed, and the changeableness of His children is hoped for.⁵

An interesting thing about the Jewish Prayer Service is that it contains elements of a group confessional, not only on the High Holidays, but also in the daily Service.⁶ The authors of our Prayerbook assume that the "righteous" are not as righteous as they seem; that, indeed, they are partially responsible for the errors of the "wicked." On the other hand, our sages assumed that the "wicked" are not as evil as they seem, and that their errors are, in part, the result of interaction with other people, who, in subtle ways, have contributed to the wayward performance. Thus, our prayers for repentance require the congregation to confess its errors together, as if each is guilty of the errors of all, and the group is guilty as a unit. This is a significant feature of the Jewish Service, and it indicates a realistic appraisal of the actions of human beings. The errors of the children are frequently the result of the absence of love in the family household, and the crimes committed by a member of a minority group, for example, are frequently tied to the oppression and discrimination he receives from the "righteous" members of the majority group. We all sin in our more or less flagrant mistreatment of one another, our Jewish teachers have taught. How could we pray this way without learning something profound that better equips us to return to our daily tasks determined to act more kindly and sympathetically to those around us?

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Of course, the recitation of formal prayers for forgiveness can have a negative effect if the worshiper feels that in so doing, he substantially fulfills his duty to God and to his fellows. The purpose of all prayer, including the formal prayer, is to lift and inspire. *Prayer is a part of a process, a preparation for the deed of righteousness, the deed that unites the doer, his fellow human beings, and God.* The worshiper who leaves a formal religious Service and says to himself, "It is done," has taken a step backward, not a step forward. He has deceived himself and blocked up the flowing channels of life. He is a worker in magic, not in religion.

2. The Fixed Time for Prayer; Prayer and Ritual

While there is always the danger that some people will misunderstand the purpose of the formal religious Service, the need for the formal Service is becoming an increasing necessity in our society, where everything is allotted a time in the appointment book except the meditative moment. It is dinner at eight, theatre at 8:45..... hairdresser at three..... cocktails at five, board meeting at nine. The pace is truly hectic, but what time is set aside for the moment of communion with one's better self and with God? There are even planned coffee-breaks, but the spiritual-break is often neglected. We live like the trained seal in captivity, completely unaware that instead of performing our tricks on schedule, we could be plumbing the depths of exciting waters. Some synagogues and churches in America have experimented with new kinds of religious Services and have been reasonably successful in attracting new attendance. Many neophytes in religion seem to be responding to this new kind of "appointment." The value of Service attendance, however, is to be measured, not in terms of the number of people in the pews, but in terms of the work done by the attendees within themselves and in relation to their fellow human beings.

We have spoken of prayer as the sheer expression of gratitude (berachah), as petition (bakkashah) and as part of the process of repentance (teshuvah). There are also many Jewish prayers, as in other religions, which are specifically designed to accompany certain rituals. For example, there are specified prayers, usually berachot or blessings, which accompany the kindling of the Shabbat (Sabbath) lights. There are prayers involved in the use of the Sukkot (Tabernacles) symbols. These symbols are the lulav (mixture of certain tree and bush saplings, as indicative of nature's bounty) and the etrog (a citron, as indicative of God's gifts of fruits). Prayers accompany the kindling of Chanukah lights as well as the affixing of the mezuzah to the doorpost of one's home. Of course, there are the prayers before and after meals, the prayers over the unleavened bread (matzah) and the bitter herbs (maror) on Passover. The list is quite extensive for Jews of all groups but even more so for the Orthodox and for many Conservative Jews who follow the Halacha, "The Way", the prescribed path as delineated in the Talmud.

These ritual-attached prayers can be recited in a perfunctory manner, in which case their profound meaning can be lost. For example, the prayer over bread actually translates, "Blessed are You, Oh Lord, Our God, Who causes bread to grow from the earth". The prayer invites us to think a moment about the process through which we are fortunate enough to acquire our food. God is the Creator of the seeds, which we place in the earth (a miraculous growth-causing base), and through the combined efforts of God and human beings, the marvelous thing called wheat or rye emerges, from which we make our sustaining food. The prayer can be a vain formula unless we think about its complex meaning. If we do that, we will become more grateful, more content and humble. We will be reminded that God is ever the Giver, and we humans are the chosen recipients. Why are we so chosen? Our Prayerbook gives us the answer – because the Creator loves us. Our Tanach (Scripture) gives us the answer- because we are God's children.

The prayer over the matzah or unleavened bread eaten on Passover is part of a history lesson so clearly expressed in the Haggadah, the manual used in the Passover Seder or ritualistic meal. We thank God for this half-baked bread which our ancestors ate, even as they fled from the tyrant, Pharaoh. "Let all who are hungry come and eat", reads the Passover manual. The Seder rituals teach us to identify with our suffering ancestors ("feel the taskmaster's blows on your back!") and with all others who suffer today because of oppression or poverty. The Seder prayer manual, rooted in history, can be an incentive to righteous action today.

A ritualistic prayer I have especially loved is the prayer over the Sabbath or Festival wine (the Kiddush, Sanctification). I have been drawn to this prayer because of its beautiful melody (most ritual-prayers are sung) and because of its dynamic themes. The prayer informs us that we sanctify this wine in memory both of the creation of the world and the Exodus from Egypt. The double themes of creation and freedom are interwoven with the theme of redemption, and the recitation of the prayer reminds us that the Power that made each of these things possible exists even now. How can we be less than optimistic, no matter what our present condition, and how can we be less than joyful, if we recite the "Kiddush", the prayer over the wine, meaningfully?

The Jewish ritual-prayers are always declared in the Hebrew language even though they may be translated into the vernacular. I have found over the years that the worshiper sometimes appreciates a prayer spoken or sung in a language he may not completely understand (Hebrew, perhaps), more than the same prayer expressed in English. This may be because the worshiper lets his rational faculties rest while he hears the Hebrew prayer, and his emotions have a chance to come to the fore. This is frequently the worshiper's experience when the "El Moleh" prayer is sung as part of a funeral. The prayer, deprived of its relatively cerebral translation, becomes the vessel for the

worshiper's feelings, and he may even be moved to tears. Observing such reactions to Hebrew prayers on occasion, I have been reminded that religion is not all a matter of the mind. We are not saying here that it is best that our prayers be said in a language one might not understand. On the contrary, we are simply taking note of something observed in certain situations. The important thing is that the worshipers have the opportunity to face God with a measure of spontaneity. I rather think that Latin sometimes serves the same purpose in the Catholic ritual. It helps to create an aura of mystery that can help to open the channels of one's emotions.

3. The Value of Music in Prayer

One can hardly address the subject of prayer without considering the value of music. We know that the ancient Temple in Jerusalem had both musical instruments and singers, and there is evidence that many of the Psalms were presented musically by voice, instruments, or both.

This practice has come down to modern times in most of the houses of worship in the western world. In Judaism and Christianity, prayers are presented by either vocalists or choirs. At many parts in the service, the congregation is invited to sing together. In Orthodox Jewish congregations, the custom is for each worshiper to chant at his own pace at some points in the Service. There can be no question that joint singing helps to weld a congregation together. This being so, what, then, is the prayer function of listening to a soloist or a Cantor, a specially trained musician who leads much of the Jewish Service? It seems clear that listening in a devoted manner can be inspirational. A skilled Cantor or soloist can highlight both the rational and emotional elements of a prayer, although the singer must be careful not to present himself, or herself, as an entertainer, a line often crossed, unfortunately. Some would-be worshipers, who find it awkward to pray verbally, may be able to pray more easily by listening to moving music. A reverent piece

of music can stimulate the release of emotions too long restrained.

No matter how talented a particular Cantor or soloist may be, however, the type of music which is the most moving in a religious Service, when it is correctly presented, is choral music. There is something about a group of voices harmonizing together which can uplift one's spirit and heighten feeling, as no single voice can hope to do. The Church has adapted music from Beethoven, Handel and Mozart for choral purposes, but many lesser known composers of great talent have written music for the Synagogue which bring "thoughts too deep for tears". Among these are Helfman, Schur, Bruch, Goldfarb, Janowski, Adler, Lewandowski, Block, Secunda, Kingsley, and Steinberg, to name just a few. Music in a house of worship should not be of a concert nature. Ideally, it should be an interpretation of the text in the prayer book which adds a new dimension to its meaning and invites the worshiper to make the prayer his own.

Jews are generally most moved by the traditional music to "Kol Nidre, All Vows" on Yom Kippur evening and by the High Holiday music to "Ahvinu Malkaynu, Our Father, Our King". The emotional involvement of the worshipers is the deepest when they know the melody well enough to participate in the singing. (Barbra Streisand has recorded the theme to the latter prayer as composed by Janowski.) The prayer loses something of its emotional appeal when heard in a casual and secular setting.

In like manner, one can feel the piety expressed in the church of some Blacks as they sing the hymn, "Lift Every Voice and Sing". The hymn is fitted especially to the history, experience, and hopes of the American Negro. Even non-Blacks and non-Christians are deeply moved by that hymn. It strikes a deep human chord.

4. "Nothing Happens", The Unmoved Soul

Loyalty to the system of fixed prayers can, of course, go to an undesirable extreme. The Talmudic Rabbis themselves argued against making a fetish of routine prayers. Rabbi

Simeon said, "When you pray, do not make the prayer a form of routine. Let it be rather an appeal to God for mercy and grace (Pirke Avot 2:18). Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus said on his deathbed, "When you pray, realize before whom you stand." We must bear in mind that the fixed prayer is not a prayer, in the highest sense of that term, unless the worshiper makes it his own. The worshiper, it is hoped, will first study the prayer which is the product of the genuine prayer experience of others before him, and, then, put himself in the mood of the prayer. He must, in the ideal relationship, feel the presence of the Divine as he speaks the words. What did the poet say?

"Listen, the mighty being is awake! and doth . . . make
a sound like thunder everlasting!"⁷

It is this mood of awareness for which the worshiper must strive. The fixed prayer ought to prime the pump of feeling, or it is merely a collection of words. The person who says, "I come to services, read the prayers, and nothing happens," is merely revealing the fact that he has done nothing himself to permit the words to awaken thoughts and emotions within himself. This kind of person can also behold a glorious sunset and complain, "nothing happens." This person suffers from spiritual drought. He needs to dig deeply into the rock encrusted around his spirit before the well that is certainly within him can bubble up and work its wonders. In Bachya's image, he needs to polish the metal of his soul before it will reflect the Divine. Only the person who comes to the altar of God with an awakened sensitivity experiences "something happening."

5. "The Hour of Feeling"

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The prayer hour in the Synagogue should be considered the time for piercing to the core of things. It should be shock treatment, reawakening us to the basic realities. It should be what the poet calls the "hour of feeling":

"Love, now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth;
It is the hour of feeling.

One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason;
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

Some silent laws our hearts will make,
Which they shall long obey;
We for the years to come may take
Our temper from today.
And from the blessed power that rolls
About, below, above,
Will frame the measure of our souls:
They shall be turned to love." ⁸

B. DEDICATION TO GROUP GOALS

Our sages taught that when one witnesses lightning, comets, thunder, hurricanes,

or the like, he should pray, "Blessed is He whose almighty power fills the world."⁹ The same sages who found the evidence of God everywhere taught the value of the formal prayer. A person can pray well and deeply when he finds God for himself through nature or through spiritual reflection, but there is another profound meaning of prayer when it is performed in association with other human beings who have come together with the avowed intention of searching as a group for the deeper meaning of life.¹⁰ Clinical psychological tests clearly show that a decision reached by a group can be more binding on each of the participants than a decision reached by an individual acting alone. There are decisions to be made when one is alone, and there are decisions which are best made by the group. Anyone who has felt the warmth and good fellowship present at a congregational Service, anyone who has witnessed the sharing of sorrow at a funeral, or the sharing of joy at a wedding, knows that there are things best accomplished in a group situation. The person who feels that he cannot reach God when he is alone is lacking in probing powers which must be trained and sharpened, but the person who feels that he does not need to share the aspirations and moods of the group is depriving himself of a great support. Rabbi Mikhal prayed, "I join myself to all of Israel, to those who are more than I, that through these my thought may rise, and to those who are less than I, so that they may rise through my thought."¹¹ There is a special quality to group prayer from which - all present may benefit.

When we start talking not about an individual worshiper but about the survival of a group or a people, the fixed prayer becomes extremely important. The fixed prayer in a commonly accepted prayerbook enables us to bind ourselves together, for the prayerbook usually expresses our commonly accepted goals and ideals. The book enables us to become a true community and not just a number of isolated individuals. Further, the book

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links us to our religious ancestors and provides a way for us to pass on our hopes and yearnings to another generation. If the book is not entirely fixed but is open to the addition of prayers that express the particular needs and orientation of our own generation, then it takes on a more vital reality.

Our sages taught that God proclaimed, "He who prays with a congregation is credited with redeeming Me and My children."¹² This teaching reflects the strong Jewish conviction against the fragmentation of the community by those who flee from community responsibility and insist that they can gain nothing from the group. He who wishes to serve God cannot do so merely by living the good, independent life. He can "redeem" God only by working and praying with the community.

Our sages also taught that certain prayers such as the "Kedushah," (taken from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah) should not be recited by one person alone. They were properly recited only in a group. Why did they come to this conclusion? Scripture teaches, "I will be hallowed among the children of Israel," ^{13a} (i.e., not by one child, not by an individual alone, but by the group acting in concert).

In this day, when there are strong pressures upon people to go it alone, we need a place to pray together more than ever. Our ancestors were wise enough to know that when people pray together, they are less apt to engage in flights of fancy; they are less apt to pray selfishly; and they are the more easily reminded of their covenantal task. When Jews pray only when they are alone, they are not able to recite meaningfully the prayer which comes as the climax of our religious service, "Fervently we pray that day may come when all Your children. . . . created in Your image, shall recognize that they are one family." ^{13b} " One of the great goals of prayer is to unite the hearts of all. Indeed our

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Prayerbook reads, "Unite our hearts, that we may serve You in truth."¹⁴

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C. SOME PROBLEMS WITH LITURGY

Notwithstanding all we have said about the value of group prayers, some of our deeper thinkers have reminded us of the difference between liturgy (traditional worship in the Synagogue or Church) and individual prayer. Abraham Joshua Heschel was for many years a Professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative) in New York and was a fellow activist with Martin Luther King in the battle for civil rights. Heschel has written, "Liturgy... harbors a tendency to follow a direction and rhythm of its own, independent of and divorced from the energies of life which brought prayer into being."^{15a} Again, Heschel has written, "The fire has gone out of our worship. Our motto is monotony", (describing the synagogue Service). ^{15b}

Rabbi Jakob Petuchowski, for many years a professor at the Hebrew Union College - JIR (Reform) in Cincinnati, is even a bit more emphatic. In his important book, Understanding Jewish Prayer, Dr. Petuchowski insists, "The divorce of liturgy and living, of prayer and practice, is more than a scandal, it is a disaster".¹⁶

Petuchowski believes that true prayer must be personal, immediate, urgent, real and deeply felt. I recall that Dr. Harry E. Fosdick, the eminent Protestant minister, wrote many years ago, that "prayer is ultimate concern".

Professor Lawrence A. Hoffman, in his book, Beyond The Text, A Holistic

Approach to Liturgy, reminds us that what the worshiper does with the fixed text at the moment of his praying may be a far cry from what the learned authors of the prayers intended".¹⁷ If prayer in the Synagogue or Church is to mean anything, it must become something personal to the worshiper and what it becomes to him (or her) will depend on the worshiper's developed sensitivity, religiosity, understanding, and we must add, it will depend on his need.

Certainly, the fixed prayer is important, at the very least, as a way for us to learn how to pray. For many of us, it is difficult to say meaningfully, "Our Father..." Yet, those who are adept at prayer, tell us that if we say "Our Father" often enough, God will become our Father. They tell us we have to learn to be at ease in this kind of relationship; then the feeling will flow easily and with ever increasing intensity.

We can conclude that there is a role for the private prayer expressed by the individual worshiper in his personal orientation to God, and there is a role for the fixed prayerbook as a base for community prayer and the passing down of cherished tradition.

VIII

Giving Strength to God

JEWISH SAGES HAVE TAUGHT THAT NOT ONLY DO WE GIVE strength to each other, but righteous people help to give God strength. The mass slaughter of millions of Jews in World War II, like other major catastrophes, underscores the fact that the cruelty of one human being to another is a betrayal of God. God must have human agents to administer laws rooted in His nature. Righteous and caring people project God's power into the world. He must have mediators and intercessors as Moses, Jeremiah, and others classically demonstrated. This viewpoint has been championed ably by Dr. Henry Slonimsky, who has written, "They (i.e., God and His children) become allies in the most redoubtable of all struggles and for the greatest of all stakes. . . . But in a very real sense, the fate of God and of the future rests on the heroism of man, on what he elects to do, for he is . . . the focus of decision."¹

The Maggid of Zlotchov expounded on the biblical verse, "You shall be holy; for I, the Lord, your God, am holy."² The Maggid taught, "This is what is meant: *'My holiness, which is the world, depends upon your holiness.* As you sanctify My name below, so it is sanctified in the heights of Heaven'". The Maggid continued, "For it is written: *'Give*

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ye strength unto God.”³ Moshe Idel, an Associate Professor of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, traces the notion of theurgy as one of the distinctive thought structures originating in ancient Judaism and flowing through the Kabbalah into Hasidism. Theurgy is the belief that the activities of humans can affect what happens in God’s realm. (Heaven and Earth are tied together). How does the Jew affect God, according to the Kabbala and Hasidism- through earnest prayer and faithful performance of the prescribed mitzvot, i.e. rituals and deeds of kindness.⁴

Prayer, as we have presented it, is not merely a one-way street. It is a vehicle which is part of a process through which human beings and God strengthen each other. Together, we sanctify the world by serving each other. God has His work, as witness the endless power and caring which He constantly feeds into the universe, but there are certain tasks reserved for us, which we alone can do and must do in moving the mutual cause forward. Again, Dr. Slonimsky has written, "God hands a chalice to mankind which mankind must hand back to Him at the end of days, foaming with its own inner saps and juices, its own sweat and blood and wine, its own infinite experience."⁵

"To act out of love," continues Slonimsky, "and to be willing to bear the suffering which the good and true man must inevitably bear in a world like ours, in a world which is only partly divine and which must be won for God through the efforts of man, that is the deepest utterance of the Rabbis and the culminating idea of Jewish religiosity and of Jewish prayer."⁶

Not God alone. Not humankind alone. But God and His children together,

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interacting and tied together, in a never-ending process of prayer and work (*avodah*).

CHAPTER I

1. This emphasis is not absent from our tradition. It was evident in the "Pittsburgh Platform" in 1885, as adopted by Reform leaders. See *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, David Philipson, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1931, pp. 355 ff. For a more recent treatment of the subject, see "The Idea of God," Rabbi Dr. Eugene Borowitz, Yearbook, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Phila., 1957, Vol. LXVII, pp. 174-186. An important treatment of "The Idea of God" is to be found in *Judaism*, G. F. Moore, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1927, Vol. I., pp. 357-423. See also *Basic Judaism*, Dr. Milton Steinberg, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1947, pp. 31-63, and *God and Man in Judaism*, Rabbi Dr. Leo Baeck, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1958.

2. The article on "Prayer" by Judah D. Eisenstein, in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Funk and Wagnalls Co., New York, and London, 1905, Vol. X, pp. 164 ff., is most informative. See now, p.166 there, "The word 'tefilah' is defined as 'thought' and 'hope,' as representing the means of reasoning and discriminating between good and evil." Many of the traditional prayers are appeals for "wisdom" and "discernment." See also the *Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, revised edition, Ed. by Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, Bloch Publishing Co., N.Y., 1948, p. xi, where "tefilah" or "prayer" is said to come from the root meaning "to judge" or "self-examination."

3. The biblical name for Lord consists of four Hebrew letters which have been read recently by many scholars as "Yahweh", the root being the verb "to be". Jews have reserved the pronouncing of the Lord's name to the High Priest in the Temple on the High Holy Days. In common prayer the letters are read as "Adonai" which means "Lord", although the letters would not indicate such a reading.

4. Psalm 29:11.

CHAPTER 11

1. "What I Believe," *Forum Magazine*, Oct., 1930. See the teaching of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, *Tales of the Hasidim*, P. 232, "Howevermuch a man may learn, he should always remember that he has not even gotten to the first page."
2. These words were originally expressed by the Seer, Balaam, when he blessed Israel in the name of God. For Balaam, the moment of revelation-discovery, involved his beholding the greatness of the people Israel (Numbers 23:23).
3. Job 42:5 following the JPS translation of 1955. Here in modern English.
4. Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey."
5. Wordsworth, *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Shakespeare, "As You Like It," Act 11, Scene I, spoken by Duke Senior. His speech begins, "Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile...". The Duke contends that even adversity has its blessings.
8. Found in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, A.J. Heschel, ed. Susanah Heschel, Farrar-Strauss-Giroux, N.Y. 1996, p.111.

CHAPTER III

1. Genesis 1:26, 27.

2. I heard this from my father. A similar idea is found in *In Time and Eternity*, N. Glatzer, Schocken Books, Inc., N.Y., 1946, p. 23

3. Genesis 1:26-27.

4a. This is a summary view as implied in the teaching that the God who created the world made a covenant with Israel and hears the prayers of human beings. See Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the first Temple (I Kings 8:27 ff.), "But will God really dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this house that I have built! Yet turn, O Lord, my God, to the prayer and supplication of Your servant, and hear the cry and prayer which Your servant offers before You this day."

4b. *Gates of Prayer*, p. 180.

5. *Gates of Prayer*, pp. 55, 82-3. This is the prayer immediately following the "Call to Prayer" which begins, "Borechu et Adonai Ha-mevorach." The translation is, "Praise the Lord to whom our praise is due".

6. *Gates of Prayer*, pp. 56,73. The traditional prayer book follows this procedure even more consistently.

7. *Gates of Prayer*, pp. 57, 323.

8. *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures*, Hosea 11:4, and following Professor William A. Irwin, *Intellectual Adventures of Ancient Man*, H. Frankfort, etc., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1946, p. 229. The standard usage is "bands of love."

9a. Fromm, Erich, *The Art of Loving*, Harper and Brothers, N.Y., 1956, pp. 22-26.

9b. "The Jew in the Lotus," Rodger Kamenetz, Harper, San Francisco, 1995, p. 237 and elsewhere.

10. *Gates of Prayer*, pp. 56,73,83. The morning and evening prayers are only slightly different on this point.
11. *Gates of Prayer*, pp.83-4.
12. Exodus 19:18 ff.
13. Exodus 19:24-20:17. Note (Ex. 20:16,17) that after Moses came down the people said to Moses, "You speak to us...and we will obey, but let not God speak to us, lest we die." Moses then speaks of God's wishes in term of His laws, see Ch. 21 ff.
14. Exodus 32; 1-2.
15. From the text alone (Ex. 32.1-6), it is possible to contend that the people were not worshipping a different God but were engaging in a form of worship not pleasing to the God of Israel (Ex. 32:7, 8).
16. The reader can learn much from a study of *The Small Sanctuary, Judaism In The Prayerbook*, Rabbi Dr. Solomon Freehof, UAHC, Cincinnati, 1942.
17. Deuteronomy 29:9-14, See especially, 29:13, 14, "I make this covenant with its sanctions, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day...and with those who are not with us this day."
18. *The Union Haggadah*, Revised, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Cincinnati, 1923, pp. 20, 22. The exact rendering here is, "It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt." Cf. p. 38, "Not our fathers alone, but us also, did the Holy one redeem..."
19. Genesis 17:2,4.
20. Deuteronomy 29:13-14,
21. We do this by following His moral law (Deut. 30: 10). Involved is man's choice of good rather than evil (30:15-20)
22. The concept of covenant implies that future generations are bound to the agreement entered into by their ancestors. Jews today are under the commandment administered to the ancestors. They cannot escape this moral responsibility.

31. Psalm 107:23 ff. seems to describe the seafaring man as being thus conscious of God at all times.

32. *Gates of Prayer*, pp. 53, 73.

33. Genesis 1.28 ff., "And God blessed them... 'Be fertile and increase, fill the earth, and master it; and rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all living things; (cf. v.29), God said, "See now I have given you every seed-bearing plant...."
The gift is prior to the asking.

CHAPTER IV

1. Gen. 28:10-17.
2. Gen. 28:16.
3. Gen. 28:17.
4. The Hebrew word for angels means "messengers", (Gen. 28:12). The text reads, "... and the angels of God were going up and down on it."
5. This story from Theodore Reik, *Myth And Guilt*, Braziller, New York, 1957.
6. Quoted here, Chapter II-A.
7. Jeremiah 2: 13 and 17:13, "Mekor mayim ḥayyim."
8. Gen. 21:14.
9. Gen. 21:16-18.
10. Gen. 21:19.
11. II Kings 6:14 ff.
12. II Kings 6:15.
13. II Kings 6:16.
14. II Kings 6:17.
15. Ibid.
16. II Kings 6:19-20.
17. *Tales of the Hasidim*, p, 130. Told of Rabbi Rafael of Bershad.
18. *Prayer*, Friedrich Heiler, p. 65.
19. Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn in *Man's Best Hope*, Random House, New York, 1961, seems to support this view. See his discussion involving prayer, pp. 162-185. The Traditional Prayerbook suggests an abbreviated prayer in time of illness which includes the petition, "Even before we call, do Thou answer. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who hearkenest unto prayer." The

Hebrew begins, "Terem nikrah atah ta-a-ne...". *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, revised Edition, Edited by Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, Rabbi, Bloch Publishing Co., N.Y., 1948, p. 158. The Psalmist prayed(55:23), "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you."

20. From a "Lament for Lost Paradise" by Kathleen Raine, the *New Yorker Magazine*, June 9, 1962, p.98.

21. Isaiah 65:24. Commenting on Ex. 20:18 (some texts 20:15), Philo says, "All the people saw the voice . . . it is the case that the voice of man is audible, but the voice of God truly visible. Why so? Because whatever God says is not words but deeds..." *On the Decalogue*, 44-9 (vs.II,pp.29 ff.), quoted in Philo, *Philosophia Judaica*, Ed. Hugo Bergmann, East and West Library, Oxford, 1946, p. 78.

22. Quoted here, Chapter II-B.

23a. Psalms 23:4.

23b. The full text of this prayer can be found in *Gates of Prayer*, p. 624, no. 5. It is based on an original prayer by the author of our book.

23c. *Gates of Prayer*, p. 164

24. *Gates of Prayer*, pp. 629, 630; cf 622 -628 for prayers introducing the Kaddish.

25. This is to be compared to the saying of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, quoted in *Tales of the Hasidim*, p. 213. See now, the quotation from Bachya in Ch.V, I of this book.

26. GOP, pp. 55, 73.

27. GOP, p. 719, I have translated the Hebrew in paraphrase. The message is clearly stated in the Hebrew.

28. The "answer" of God is always there. We are not always able to "hear" it. See note 21 above, (The answer of God is *visible*.)

CHAPTER V

1. *The Meaning of Prayer*, by the Rev. Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, Association Press, N.Y., 1949, can be helpful to all. See pp. 34-35 there.
2. Leviticus 19:2.
3. See Philo on this thought, our note 21, Chap. IV. Man, too, reveals his real nature and beliefs by his deeds. Is not belief in God an inference from one's life? It can scarcely be measured by a mere verbal statement of belief.
4. *To Hallow This Life*, Martin Buber, Horizon Press, New York, 1958. See also, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, ed. by Maurice S. Friedman, Chicago, 1955. Dr. Friedman quotes Buber, p. 242, "The great achievement of Israel is not so much that it has told man of the one, real God, the origin and goal of all that exists, but rather that it has taught men that they can address God in very reality, that men can say Thou to Him, that we human beings can stand face to face with Him, there is communion between God and man." The recognition of God, says Buber, is not limited to any one form, image, or manifestation, for He is everywhere. "Revelation is an *event* (italics this author's) which is *experienced* by an individual or a group of people as an *abiding astonishment* which no knowledge of causes can weaken, as wonder at something which intervenes fatefully in the life of this individual and this group...", *Israel and The World*, p. 97 ff, cited by Friedman, p. 244.
According to Buber, "My own belief in revelation . . . (is that) *we are revealed to ourselves* and cannot express it otherwise than as something revealed," *Eclipse of God*, p. 173.
5. This is part of a commentary on Ezekiel 3:12, which is quoted from the Zohar in *In Time and Eternity*, edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, Schocken Books Inc., New York, 1945, p. 31. This is also the substance of a commentary in *Midrash Tanhuma*, edited by Solomon Buber, Poland Publishers, Wilna, 1885, Yitro 17. The latter states, in effect, God reveals Himself "L'fi koho shel kol echad v'echad," according to each person's individual power to understand. Cf. *The Talmudic Anthology*, Rabbi Dr. Louis I. Newman and Samuel Spitz, Behrman House, Inc., New York, 1945, p. 151, top.
6. The projection which we make is towards a "more" of the same which we have experienced. Where our projection makes us aware of the greater power in the world, which solicits from us a greater hope and a greater desire to serve, we are reaching towards the reality which is God, although we can never encompass Him in totality.
7. Quoted here, in full, Chapter II-A.
8. This is the opinion of the Baal Shem Tov, *Tales of the Hasidim*, p. 48. *The more liberal modern prayerbooks include the matriarchs in this list.*
9. *Ibid.* pp. 64-65 Here, in paraphrase.

10 a. This is from a discussion "On Hiding From the Presence of God", from *Legum Sacrarum Allegoriarum Libri*, as quoted in *In Time and Eternity*, Nahum N. Glatzer, Schocken, Inc., N.Y., 1946, p. 36. Philo used this teaching in the sense that the person who flees from God into himself is the one who claims that he himself is the cause of things that come to pass and not God. Philo does not mean to say that we humans have no role in creation. He is saying that we must link ourselves to the divine mind which created us, and of which we are a part. Actually, says Philo, since God is everywhere, it is impossible to hide from Him. To flee from Him is to flee to unreality. See further on this writing, *Judaism*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1927, Vol, 1, p. 372, and the comments by G. F. Moore.

10b. This is the thrust of Micah 6:8. In his master's thesis, at the Hebrew Union College-JIR, N.Y., on "The Meaning of Covenant (Brit) in the Hebrew Scriptures," this author held that *ahavat hesed* means the love of covenant duty (loyalty), i.e. loving to do what one is obligated to do as a member of the covenant relationship with God. In this sense, *hesed* involves many qualities, like mercy or goodness or loving kindness or even using force in behalf of the covenant partner and thus being perhaps unkind to others. The *Tanakh* translates *ahavat hesed* as "loving goodness".

11. *Duties of the Heart*, Bachya ibn Pakuda, Vol.1, p. 39, from the tractate, "The Service of God"; translated by Moses Hyamson, Bloch Publ. Co., N.Y., 1941.

12. Berachot 30 b, 32 b.

13. *Sifre Deuteronomy* on Deut.11:12, 41. Ed. Friedman, f. 80 a. See now the excellent chapter on "Study" in *Judaism*, Vol. 11. George F. Moore, London, 1950, p. 240 ff.

14. Berachot 63 a, commenting on Proverbs 3:6.

15a. *Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, Yitro 7 (Ben Zoma); cf. *Judaism*, Vol. II, G.F. Moore, p. 242 and his note 6.

15b. *Pesikta*, ed. Buber, f. 200a (Johanan); cf Moore, p. 242 and his note 7.

15c. See Chapter VI of "Chapters of the Fathers" or "Pirke Avot", attributed to R. Meir, as found in *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, S. Singer, Ninth American Edition, Hebrew Publishing Co., New York, 1914, pp. 204-205; and *GOP*, p. 27.

16. From the prayer immediately following the "Sh'ma," *GOP*, p.33; the phrase "letotafot bayn enechah, For frontlets between your eyes" is from Deut. 6:8.

17. Gen. 12:1 ff.

18. Gen. 15:1 ff.; Gen. 17: 1 ff.; Gen. 18:1 ff.

19. From the pamphlet, "Prayer," by Dr. Henry Slonimsky, p. 15, published by Temple Israel, South Orange, N.J. Dr. Slonimsky was for many years Dean of the Jewish Institute of Religion, New York (now the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion). As Professor of Religion there, he inspired many students, including this author. Not all of the approaches in this book stem from Dr. Slonimsky's influence, but if a certain fervor is detected, this is the author's heritage from that master teacher.

20. That is, "Come... and you shall free the Israelites from Egypt." (Exodus 3: 10).

21. This is the substance of Amos 9:7.

22. This is the theme of the Book of Jonah.

23a. GOP, pp. 33, 57, etc.

23b. Traditional Jews have a vivid ritualistic practice dramatizing this concept. At the morning prayer session phylacteries or Tefillin are put on. These include the necessary leather straps or binders with two boxes containing the written command to carry God's laws "as frontlets between your eyes". One box is placed on the actual forehead, and the other is placed on the arm, symbol of action.

24. This is the import of "Chapters of the Fathers, Pirke Avot", 3:12. See GOP, pp. 21.

25. Excellent sources for studying the Israelite Prophets are : "*Understanding the Bible Through History and Archeology*", Harry M. Orlinsky, KTAV Publishing House, Inc. New York, 1972, Ch. VII; and see his "The Seer-Priest", pp. 268-353, in *The World History of the Jewish People*, Vol. III, Judges (1971).

26. The books of these Prophets are to be found in The Hebrew Scripture, along with the books of other important Israelite and Judean prophets.

The author has written a brochure on the Israelite Prophets entitled, "The Greatest Ethical Teachers". It is available by writing c /o Rabbi Herbert Baumgard, 5950 North Kendall Drive, Miami, Florida 33156.

Joseph Blenkinsopp has written an excellent history of Israelite prophecy entitled, *The History of Prophecy In Israel*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, Ky., 1996, revised edition.

For an understanding of the spiritual journey of the Prophets, see Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, Pa., 1962.

27. As did the prophet Elijah, I Kings 19:11ff.

28. Gen. 24:63

29. Job 38:1 ff.

30. "To a Skylark."

31a. *UPB*, p. 51.

31b. *Time*, June 29, 1962.

32. *Introduction to Duties of the Heart*, by Bachya, Vol. 1, p. 18.

33. *Ibid.* See Vol. IV, "The Accounting of the Soul", (*Heshbon Ha-nefesh*), p. 70.

34. *Ibid.* p. 106.

CHAPTER VI

1. This is the translation from "*The Holy Scriptures*," Jewish Publication Society, last printed in 1955. The ancient Rabbis understood the meaning in this sense.

2. *The Road To Successful Living*, Rabbi Louis Binstock, Simon and Schuster, N.Y. 1958, p. 294. Rabbi Binstock quotes, on p. 78, the prayer of a Rabbi afflicted with blindness, "Oh, God, we do not ask for perfect health, but for the power to transmute illness and affliction into service on Thy altar; we do not ask for perfect happiness, but rather for the power to shape suffering into service and tears into triumph of the spirit; we do not ask for a perfect world, but for the power to change and refashion it more clearly after Thy will..."

3a. *Religion in a Changing World*, Rabbi Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, Harper, N.Y., 1930. The story here is paraphrased.

3b. Or ". . . and we will be strengthened."

4a. As quoted in *The World of Moses Maimonides*, Jacob S. Minkin, Thomas Yoseloff, New York, 1957, pp. 149-150. The authorship of the prayer is not certain. Dr. Joseph H. Hertz, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, according to Mr. Minkin (*ibid.* p.150) wrote Sir William Osler that the prayer is the product of a Dr. Markus Herz (1794-1903), a physician in the Jewish Hospital in Berlin. Others hold that the prayer shows the clear influence of Maimonides (see Minkin's discussion). For our purpose, it is unimportant which of these Jewish doctors wrote the prayer. It is the content of the prayer which commands our attention.

4b. So, Rabbi Chenanya ben Teradion quoted from "Chapters of The Fathers", in the Talmud, as found in *Gates of Prayer*, p.21. Here in paraphrase.

5. See the introduction to *Tales of the Hasidim*, especially pp. 3,4. Buber writes there "If you direct the undiminished power of your fervor to God's world-destiny, if you do what you must do at this moment-no matter what it may be!-with your whole strength and with kavvanah, with holy intent, you will bring about the union between God and Shekkinah, eternity and time." Then, Buber continues, "You need not be a scholar or a sage to accomplish this. All that is necessary is to have a soul united within itself and indivisibly directed to its divine goal."

6. See , *The Art of Loving*, Dr. Erich Fromm, Harper and Bros., N.Y., 1956, p.8, "The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed, the source of all anxiety. . . The awareness of human separation, without reunion by love-is the source of shame. It is at the same time, the source of guilt and anxiety. . . . The deepest need of man, then, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness. . . ." The answer of the Hasidim of the 18th century is the answer of the 20th century psychologist. Humans must bind each other together with love.

7. *Tales of the Hasidim*, p. 64.
8. *Your Child's Religion, A Practical Guide for Parents*, Dr. R. C. Miller, Doubleday, New York, 1962, p. 23; cf. pp. 107-108.
9. *Ibid.* pp. 45-46,
10. *Tales of the Hasidim*, p. 149. "Maggid" means literally, "preacher, the one who tells," i.e., the "story," the story with the ethical message. Zlotchov, like most of the small towns where the Hasidim lived, was in Eastern Europe, in the so-called "Pale of Settlement".
11. Hasidism emphasized the joy of the truly religious life. For a study of some of the mystic trends in Hasidism, which are not our primary concern here, see *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Gershom G. Scholem, Schocken Books, Inc., N.Y., 1946.
12. *Tales of the Hasidim*, p. 147.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 127.
14. *Ibid.* p. 127.
15. *Ibid.* p. 126.
16. *Ibid.* p. 125.
17. *Ibid.* p. 53.
18. The fictional story is told by I. L. Peretz, "Oib Nisht Noch Hecher." It is found in translation as "If Not Higher," in the *Prince of the Ghetto*, Maurice Samuel, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1948, pp. 191 ff.
19. The Mishnaic tractate, Avot III ("Chapters of the Fathers"), see *Gates of Prayer*, p.22, (3.22).
20. *Tales of the Hasidim*, p. 149. A similar thought is expressed in "Pirke Avot" 2:4 "He used to say 'Make His will as thy will so that He may make thy will as His will.'" Re-phrased in *Gates of Prayer*, p.18.
21. Genesis 12:2-3.
22. Schocken Book, New York, Revised Edition, 1941, 1946. It was my privilege to "help" Professor Scholem with his English expressions in his lectures at the Jewish Institute of Religion in 1949. His English was admirable.
23. Published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1969.

24. Published by Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1988.
25. Published by Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, New Jersey, Jerusalem, 1997.
26. "*Tales of the Hasidim, The Early Masters*", Schocken Books, New York, 1947.
27. "*Meister Eckhart, a Modern Translation*", by Raymond B. Blakney, Harper Torchbooks, The Cloister Library, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1941, p.4.
- 28a. "*Kavvana*", Seth Kadish, p.166; see note 25 above.
- 28b. Ibid. pp. 154 ff.
29. pp. 221-2, "*Touchstones of Reality*", E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. New York, 1972. In this book Friedman discusses Judaism in relation to Christianity and to the Eastern religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Zen, and Taoism.
30. Ibid, p. 222.
31. Published by Longmans, Green and Co., London, New York, Toronto, 1929, p. 395.

CHAPTER VII

1a. Daniel 6:11. The biblical book tells us that Daniel prayed in this manner even in defiance of a royal decree.

1b. The formation of the fixed prayers grew only gradually. See A.Z. Idelsohn, "*Jewish Liturgy and its Development*", Henry Holt and Co., N.Y., 1931. In his Appendix I, Idelsohn demonstrates the Jewish Elements in the Early Christian Liturgy. Arnold S. Rosenberg, discusses the liturgy and the traditional manner of observances in his recent, *Jewish Liturgy as a Spiritual System*, published by Jason Aronson, Inc. Northvale, N.J., London, 1997.

2. For the traditional pattern and content, see Singer, *The Standard Daily Prayer Book*, Bloch Publ. Co., N.Y., 1951.

3. Orthodox Judaism included prayers for all people, but emphasized the salvation of the Jewish community (i.e. since the community and not the individual was the primary prayer unit, it was natural to include the community immediately involved, Israel). Reform Judaism, born in the 18th century, in an age of increasing democracy and universalism, re-emphasized the message of the Hebrew Prophets of the 7-9th B.C.E. and included another phrase or two in the ancient prayers, stressing the universalistic aspect of Judaism. Basically, the Reform Prayer Book, *Gates of Prayer* leans heavily on the ancient prayers and is original primarily in its selectivity and emphasis. The GOP has made an important contribution to the development of Judaism in the translation of the Hebrew prayers into a poetic English suitable for modern prayer. There are, of course, a number of original prayers.

4. The prophet Micah (6:8) gives a compelling summary of God's requirements as does Isaiah (58:5-7).

5. The daily service contains a prayer for repentance, Singer, p. 56. In translation, it goes, in part, "Cause us to return, O our Father, unto Thy law; draw us near, O our King, unto Thy service, and bring us back in perfect repentance unto Thy presence. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who delightest in repentance." Note that the person who prays seeks to return to the *law* and to God's service. This involves active commitment on the part of the worshiper. See also, *Gates of Repentance*, published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, (revised edition), 1996, N.Y., pp.251-2; 325-6. This High Holiday Prayerbook includes many lengthy prayers on repentance.

6. Singer; pp. 56, 67. The High Holiday prayer lists specific sins for all to confess together. See The High Holiday Confessional in *Gates of Repentance*, and pp. 328-31.

7. Wordsworth, "It is a Beauteous Evening, Calm and Free."
8. Wordsworth, "To My Sister" (italics mine).
9. Berachot, 9th Chapter, 54 a. I have benefited in the preparation of this section from discussions with Dr. Eugene Mihaly, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio.
10. Commenting on Psalm 69:14, ". . . let my prayer be unto Thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time, . . .", the Rabbis taught (Berachot 8a), "When is the time acceptable? When the congregation is praying."
11. Quoted, *Tales of the Hasidim*, p. 150.
12. Berachot 8a. In addition to "praying," the individual must also study Torah and perform works of charity.
- 13a. Leviticus 22:32. See Berachot 21 b.
- 13b. *Gates of Prayer*, p. 618, bottom of page.
14. *Gates of Prayer*, P. 309, middle of page.
- 15a. Quoted by Dr. Jacob Petuchowski, *Understanding Jewish Prayer*, KTAV, New York, 1972, p.69. Cf our note below (15b) and p. 257 in the chapter, "On Prayer".
- 15b. A. Heschel, "The Spirit of The Jewish Prayer", in Part ii, pp. 100 ff. of his book, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, ed. Susanah Heschel, Farrar-Strauss- Giroux, N.Y., 1996.
16. Ibid, p.74.
17. Indiana University Press. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Jewish Literature and Culture Series, ed. Alvin Rosenfeld, pp.2 ff.

CHAPTER VIII

1. "The Philosophy Implicit In the Midrash," HUC Annual, Vol. XXVII, 1956, p. 251, by Dr. Henry Slonimsky.
2. Leviticus 19:2.
3. *Tales of the Hasidim*, p. 149.
4. Those who want to know more about Professor Idel's observations should read his book, "*Kabbala, New Perspectives*," Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1988, Chapter 7, pp. 156-199.
5. See Dr. Slonimsky's essay on "Prayer" in *Essays*, by Dr. Henry Slonimsky, published by The Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati, Quadrangle Press, Chicago, 1967, p. 126. cf *GOP*, p. 668 "...when You are my witness, I am God..."
6. *Ibid*, p. 128.