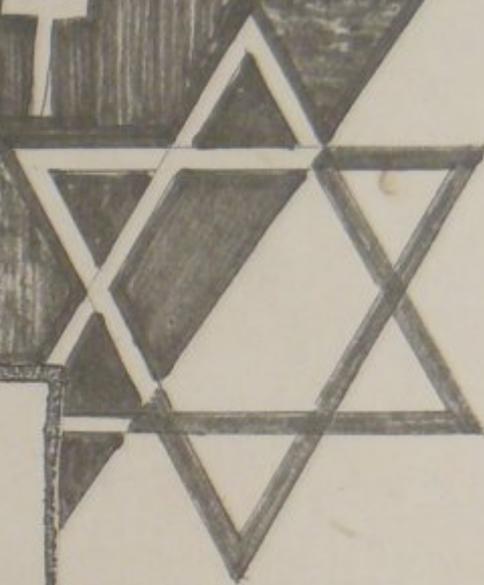


# JUDAISM BEYOND DOUBT



REV. LAWRENCE RIGAL

**Judaism Beyond Doubt**

**or**

**Judaism Makes Sense**

**or**

**The Proselyte Book**

*Rabbi Lawrence Rigal*

2010 Web Edition

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## Introduction to the Web Edition

*Judaism Beyond Doubt* is a book which Rabbi Rigal wrote and used as a textbook for his conversion students. There is no one definitive version as it was always in a state of flux. Even its title is ambiguous. We found one copy with the title crossed out and replaced with *Judaism Makes Sense*. The 1998 electronic copy, on which this version is based, was without any title and in a folder simply called “prosbook”, presumably reflecting its generic title of *The Proselyte Book*.

We do not know when he started working on the book although it must have been the early 1980s at the latest. We have three complete dot matrix printed copies, bound in A4 ring binders and dating from the mid-late 1980s. Photocopied illustrations were stuck on manually. One copy is dated 1985 and sports a, possibly spurious, ULPS logo on the title page. This is the only one with any date on it. The next copy is similar and may be slightly earlier or later. The third is definitely a slightly later copy with extensive handwritten notes for a fairly major update written on it. No printed copy matching that update has been found and we were uncertain whether the update was ever completed until we found the 1998 electronic copy on Rabbi Rigal's PC. A fourth incomplete copy was found, which was the only one with a cover illustration, which is reproduced as the cover illustration for this web edition, showing Rabbi Rigal's then title of “Reverend”. The original text was most likely written on a Sinclair QL and it is unknown how this later came to be on the PC. Most likely it was retyped from scratch.

The 1998 electronic copy is complete but obviously unfinished. Not all chapters have all their illustrations and the final chapter was a plain text file without formatting. The files for the chapters were all dated 1998, each corresponds to a chapter in the printed versions with revisions. Only Rabbi Rigal's introduction is entirely new material and shows a desire to expand its scope beyond conversion students to a more general audience. This edition is based on those files.

It is unknown why Rabbi Rigal ceased working on the book or whether an even more recent draft exists. From 2002 onwards Rabbi Rigal started writing about Judaism for a more general audience through his website [jewish-customs.co.uk](http://jewish-customs.co.uk) and he may have felt that this, and his other projects, superseded the need for this book.

Despite being unfinished we feel that the book is worth publishing. Rabbi Rigal worked on it for more than a decade, and possibly for much longer, and it is a substantial body of work that may be of interest to those who wish to learn about Judaism from a progressive point of view. The book was always in a state of flux and, following its reassembly into a single document, this web edition is as good and complete a snapshot of it as it is possible to obtain.

*Daniel Rigal on behalf of the Estate of Lawrence Rigal (11/10/2010)*

Notes:

- Any internal references to page numbers in the book refer to an older printed version and should not be relied on.

## **Introduction to the 1998 Edition**

The Rabbis told a story about Abraham the first Jew. They said that due to the persecution of the wicked King Nimrod. Abraham was born in a cave and abandoned there by his mother. When the infant came to the mouth of the cave and saw the stars in the sky twinkling he said to himself: "How wonderful they are - these must be our gods." But before long the sun rose and he said: "This is far brighter, the stars are not gods, the sun is God." When night fell the sun set and the moon appeared. He said: "the sun is not God" the moon must be God." When the dawn came again, he thought to himself - None of these is God for none is all powerful and each gives way to the other, there must be a God who controls the sun, moon and stars.

So say the Rabbis, the child Abraham thought and reasoned and came to the conclusion that God exists. ( ) This idea is later confirmed for Abraham when he hears God speaking to him in prayer and in a vision.

Few people can develop a belief in God for themselves as the Rabbinic legend said that Abraham did. Most need help and guidance to reach this conclusion. That is one of the purposes of this book.

It is intended for all those who feel that they do not know enough about Jewish beliefs and teachings. It is intended for the believers who are seeking to find out more, for the doubters who are not sure what they believe and for the stranger who knows nothing. It seeks a modern approach to Judaism, and at times will argue against some of the older beliefs of Judaism. But at the same time it is not trying to convey a radically new approach to Judaism it is rather putting forward our ancient teachings in a new light. Wherever possible the early sources for ideas are quoted in the

The book attempts as far as possible to follow the method of Abraham in the Rabbinic story and to come to beliefs by reasoning; but we must remember that belief is something we come to by both emotion and reason. And anyone wishing to be a Jew should not be content with Judaism as a faith or a teaching; but should attempt to live it as an active religion for Judaism is a religion based upon prayer, study and deeds. (Avot 1,)

*Rabbi Lawrence Rigal (8/9/1998)*

# **1. TOWARDS A MODERN BELIEF.**

## ***UP THE GARDEN PATH.***

There is a peculiar little story in the Talmud of four Jewish scholars who entered Pardes (Paradise or the garden). They were Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Elishah Ben Abuhau and Rabbi Akiva. Before they started Rabbi Akiva said to them: "When you get to the stones of pure marble do no say 'Water, Water.' The story goes on to tell that Ben Azzai looked and died; Ben Zoma looked and went mad; Elishah ben Abuyah cut the plants (gave up Judaism); Rabbi Akiva alone left in peace. (Chagigah 14a)

The story is not quite so puzzling when you know all the allusions. Pardes was the garden of mystical speculation about God. The stones symbolise God Himself, perhaps referring to the foundation stones of the throne of God. Water was seen by the Greeks as one of the four basic elements, and the most important one from which the world was made. Therefore, the four scholars were trying to discover the essence of God by mystical speculation. Rabbi Akiva was warning his colleagues against relying on Greek philosophy. The story points out that ancient Rabbis believed that too much mystical speculation was dangerous, for it caused the death of Ben Assai, drove Ben Zoma mad, caused Elishah ben Abuyah to leave Judaism. Today, we would say that Greek philosophy is worthy of study; but we would not rely entirely upon it. We would also see the need a certain amount of mystical speculation, but again we would not rely entirely upon it.

This book is written for all those who feel that they do not know enough about Jewish beliefs and teachings. It is intended both for those believers who are seeking to find out more, and for the modern Elishah ben Abuyahs, who have doubts about God and about Judaism. The book does not attempt to enter the garden of mystical speculation, it is more an attempt to seek a modern rational approach to Judaism. It does not seek the extreme or the exotic in Judaism; but instead it searches for reasonable answers.

## ***SECOND-HAND RELIGION.***

Several Jewish prayers begin with the Hebrew words: "Elohenu velohay avotenu", which mean "Our God and God of our fathers." The Rabbis explained why the word 'God' is repeated in this phrase by saying that our concept of God is not always the same as that of our parents. God does not alter, it is only our human idea of Him which changes.

The word 'God' has been used for thousands of years, and its meaning is often taken for granted. Different people think of Him in different ways. We often begin by thinking of Him in the way that our fathers or grandfathers thought; but when we find that we can no longer accept all of these old ideas, we begin to doubt and some even reject God completely. However, what we should be doing is searching for a modern concept of God, which accords with our modern thoughts.

## ***THE OLD MAN IN THE SKY.***

Sometimes the problem is caused by the way that we teach our children. Some of the most beautiful and moving stories in the Bible describe miracles or wonders performed by God. When these are read to children, whether or not the teacher intends to do so, he often conveys the idea that God is an old man in the sky. One lady told how all through her childhood she used to think of God as an elderly man, sitting up in the air floating

somewhere over her school, which was situated at the end of her road.

By the time that we reach adolescence, we have rejected this idea of God, in the same way that we no longer believe the fairy stories which we were told at the same age. Some put the Bible stories right out of their minds and regard them as totally irrelevant, while they get on with the tasks of learning and living. Such people fail to realise that the Bible stories usually contain truths and values which the fairy stories rarely have. Many Bible stories are not intended to be taken literally, they were just teaching aids for putting across values to a people with little education.

There are relatively few Jews who believe that God is 'an old man in the sky.' God is more usually seen as (a) the Force or Power that brought the universe into existence, (b) the Ideal of Goodness, Righteousness and Truth, which is the source of our ideals of conduct, and providing us with Laws and Commandments, (c) the great Spiritual Power in the universe to whom we pray, and who answers those prayers with inspiration, guidance and support.

The first of these three concepts we may come to accept by using our reason, the second by consulting our conscience and the third through our emotion or by some religious experience. This book will give teachings to which the reader should apply his own reasoning, judging them in the light of his own conscience; but as to the third aspect, this book can do no more than describe religious experiences and leave it to the reader to try the path of prayer and meditation.

## ***QUESTIONING RELIGION.***

The modern age, with its acceptance of scientific method, teaches us to question all facts. So, today, there are many who question the basic teachings about God. The early Jewish view was that God exists, and that man should believe and should not question. For centuries Jews have held this sure, simple faith. Sustained by this belief, they have been helped to live through many persecutions and troubles, which would probably have broken those not guided by such strong teachings. This simple faith is no longer available to those who have been taught to question.

Asking questions about religion can have two possible results. It can destroy faith completely or else in finding answers to our question, we may come to believe more strongly. For the answers can lead to a reasoned faith, which can be more helpful in the modern world than the unquestioning faith of our grandparents. Sadly, we tend to undervalue such a reasoned faith. We compare our religion to the simple piety of our forbears, and then feel that somehow we are inferior. Yet faith which comes through questioning is probably a healthier religion, for questioning helps to remove superstition, and self-questioning makes hypocrisy impossible. Even the idea of a perfect piety and faith of the past is not strictly true. The Bible mentions cases of doubt, the Talmud sometimes speaks of the Epicuros, the doubter, and the story of Elishah ben Abuyah is yet another example.

The modern believer will have doubts from time to time in his life. As long as he can say that most of the time he believes, or that as a result of his questioning, most things point to the likelihood that God exists, then he should class himself as a believer. Such a belief is not so unwavering as the old simple faith of the past; but it can be more honest, more reasonable and certainly it can help him to face the problems of life today and in the future.

## 2. WHY RELIGION?

Before looking at a specific religion like Judaism, we should first ask the question: What is the need for religion at all?

Some people have argued that religion has only succeeded in creating enmity and wars, while others maintain that for the individual it has provided superstitions and vain hopes which have prevented him from playing a proper role in the class struggle. These concepts of religion show very jaundiced views both of religion and of history. For such people totally ignore the fact that the teaching of all religions is that man should live at peace with his neighbour, showing him love and consideration. They also choose to forget that most of the world's moral and ethical standards have come originally from the teachings of religion. Neither do they give credit to those social reformers who, from the time of the Hebrew prophets, have found their inspiration for change in the ideals of their religion. Many of those who seek justice and freedom from oppression have been motivated either consciously or unconsciously by religious teachings.

If we take, for example, the struggle for racial equality for the coloured people in America, we see that the words of their songs, the Negro spirituals, come directly from the Bible. Even a more recent song like "We shall not be moved" owes much of its imagery to Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17, verses 7 and 8.

The wars waged and the hatred aroused in the name of religion did not reflect what those religions actually taught about brotherly love and the ideal of peace. It was not the religions which were wrong, but the adherents of those religions, who expressed their own prejudices and hatreds, and claimed that they represented religion. There have been some exceptions like the Holy Wars of Islam or the Crusades of Christianity, where religion itself has caused wars. Equally, however, there have been many cases of conscientious abjection and of movements for peace, which have come out of religion. Ghandi's passive resistance was just as much a product of religion as were the wars of the Crusades. If one looks dispassionately at history, one sees that religion has constantly tried to teach peace, love, freedom and justice; but in different lands and ages certain leaders have failed to be guided by these teachings.

### **FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS.**

Where did our religion come from? The Bible speaks of God giving it to man; but it also speaks of man's duty to seek out truth from God. Modern forms of Judaism believe less in a religion which has been forced upon us, and rather more in a religion which has been sought from and inspired by God.

It is probably no coincidence that Moses found God in the wilderness of Sinai on a deserted mountain, and that Abraham also came to believe in God, while wandering in the lonely Negev desert. Amid the vastness of the universe and in the silence of thought, man begins to question. His questions often lead him to religion.

From early times man has asked himself:

- Why was everything as it was?
- How did he get here?
- For what purpose had he been created? What was expected of him? Was there a right way to behave?

- Where was he going to? What would happen to him after his death? What would eventually happen to the world?
- Does an outside fate or destiny rule our lives?

These and other questions like them stirred the mind of man. Eventually, he developed a concept of God and of man, which answered the questions to his satisfaction. Without religion, life seems to have no meaning or purpose. Without religion, lives gain an added quality, with ideals to aim for and standards to live by.

### ***THE NEED FOR RELIGION.***

Why are people so unhappy with registry office weddings, and why do they seek out ministers to conduct funerals of people who had little to do with religion in their lifetime? At times of crisis in our lives, we feel the need for contact with eternal values and we seek strength and guidance from outside ourselves, not just human help, but help from a Force or Power beyond us. If human help alone were sufficient, then the Registry Office wedding would satisfy; but for many of us it does not.

It is not only the ceremonies which show that we have a real need for religion. Many people say that they do not pray, but when they are in a difficult situation they find themselves saying: "Please God..." or "God, Help me!" Both of these are forms of prayer. There is an inner need for a personal faith, which shows itself in people when they least expect it. Some people brush it aside when they experience it, while others recognise it as a call to religious belief.

### ***A COMPLETE SYSTEM OF THOUGHT.***

A religion is not just a few beliefs put together. It should be a complete philosophy, which enters all spheres of our lives. Judaism is one such religion and it has an integrated series of beliefs. It should be viewed as a whole, but a reader can not take a general view without also looking at detailed points of belief.

As the various beliefs interconnect in a unified whole, it is difficult to start at any one point. Even when we have started looking at one belief, it is often necessary to refer to other beliefs which link up with it. For this reason, in this book it has been necessary to include a number of cross-references between chapters.

The Bible tells us where to start when it says: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Proverbs 15, 33.) The expression 'fear of the Lord' is probably better translated as 'reverence for the Lord' and therefore means a belief in God. We will therefore begin by looking at Jewish teachings about God.

מזל טבת גדי



### **3. BELIEF IN GOD.**

"Moses said to God: 'I pray that You show me Your glory.' God said to him: 'I will make my goodness to pass before you, and I will proclaim the name Adonai before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will be merciful to whom I shall show mercy. But you can not see My face; for no man sees My face and lives.' And the Lord said: 'Behold there is a place by Me, and you shall stand upon a rock; and it shall come to pass, while My glory passes by, that I will cover you with My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.'" (Exodus 33, 19-23.)

The language of God's reply to Moses seems to be deliberately vague, implying that here lies the greatest of mysteries. The story is obviously not intended to be taken literally, for God does not have a back or a hand; but in this story there is a deep truth. Over the ages man has tried to understand God. In effect, he has tried to see God's face. The human mind, however can not grasp the whole greatness of God. So man, like Moses, can only see God's back. By this, it means that man is permitted to see where God has been. We can see the works of God, and from what we see of these, we can conclude that there is a God. We should note that Moses asks to see God's glory; but what God shows him is His goodness. We too are permitted to see a little of God's goodness. Perhaps it is that the goodness of God is His glory.

Over the years, vast numbers of people have believed in a God of one sort or another. Often they have tried to prove that God must exist. Some of these proofs are listed below:-

#### ***ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN.***

The first proof bases itself on one aspect of God's goodness. This is the apparent design or pattern within the universe. (This will be dealt with more fully in chapter 7, which describes God as Creator.) Greek philosophers like Socrates, pointed out that the universe, as we observe it, is not a chance or haphazard affair. There are clear signs of order or pattern, if not an actual plan. This design or order implies that there is some intelligent being behind it, initially shaping it and later continuing to affect its development to high forms.

#### ***THE FIRST CAUSE.***

Plato and Aristotle believed that all things happen in the world by following a pattern of cause and effect. Everything that happens must have something to cause it to occur. They then asked what caused the first stage of the creation of the universe. They said that there must have been one great First Cause, which started the chain of cause and effect.

There is a danger in this proof that, because God is the great unknown First Cause, when mankind discovers a little more of how the universe was created, then people might think that that reduced the unknown area at the beginning, and therefore cut down that part which is attributed to God. So, as man finds out more and more, God and the part attributed to Him will grow less and less. This can be answered by saying that any new discovery about creation only reveals to us how that First Cause operated or, to put it another way, it tells us a little more about how God's act of creation took place.

## ***THE MORAL ARGUMENT.***

More recent thinkers have argued that it is widely recognised that man has a sense of right and wrong. We do not always act rightly; but we are aware when we do wrong or sin. This awareness of right and wrong is explained as existing because there is a Being of absolute moral perfection, who originally shaped and now influences our minds, so that we may select right from wrong.

## ***THE HISTORICAL ARGUMENT.***

If we look at the history of the world and particularly at that of the Jewish People, it seems that history has a shape and a purpose in the following respects:

- (a) We seem to be moving from ignorance to knowledge, from barbarism to civilisation.
- (b) One would have thought that history would always show that the strong defeated the weak; but sometimes the inspired few have managed to win through because they were inspired by an ideal.
- (c) This applies particularly to the Jewish people. We were inspired by the teaching of Torah (Revelation). After the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE we had no land of our own and Jews spread throughout the world. As minorities in different lands, we have been persecuted and oppressed. Under such circumstances, most peoples would have assimilated and disappeared within one or two generations. Almost miraculously we survived. When one country expelled us, another was prepared to open their gates. Some see the remarkable survival of the Jews as a sign of outside influence upon history. Certainly without our religion and its inspiration, we would have disappeared many centuries ago.

Some of these four arguments are debatable, and the reader may feel that certain ones do not ring true for him. What matters is not that all of them must be convincing; but that provided that just one is acceptable, then it seems reasonable to believe in God. Even if none of these seems to the reader to be totally convincing proof, it is still necessary to keep an open mind. There remains one other proof, which has probably been the main reason why people over the ages have believed in God. That is personal experience.

## ***CONVICTION FROM EXPERIENCE.***

In coming to a conclusion about God, we should take into account the evidence of thinkers, both now and in the past, who have had religious experiences, which convinced them that God exists. Were they all deluded or imagining things? From the time that Abraham first believed, there have been prophets, psalmists, wise men, mystics and rationalists, who have believed in God's existence. Together with this fact, we should also realise that belief in God can not be taken in isolation. A belief in God is part of a philosophy of life which gives coherence, a rationality and a purpose to the universe and to our life in it. Without that belief, our life has less meaning.

None of these proofs is satisfactory unless it appeals to our own reasoning, our beliefs and our feelings. However logical the argument might be, most people would not be persuaded to believe unless their feelings were also in sympathy. From this we must conclude that religious beliefs are usually more dependent upon experiences, feelings and emotions than upon reason. If the reader has already had a religious experience of some kind, for example, has felt helped, strengthened or guided through prayer, then all the above proofs are really unimportant, because he will already believe.

There is an old story of an army chaplain who walked into a room, just in time to hear someone say that no one had been able to prove to him scientifically that God exists. The chaplain replied that he was also worried, because no one had been able to prove to him theologically that science exists. The language and method of each is different. We do not expect there to be a scientific proof that God exists; but if there were ever to be a scientific proof that God does not exist, we would have to listen and judge it in the light of reason and emotion as we did the philosophical proofs above.

The Bible does not really attempt to prove that there is a God. From the start it assumes that there is a God, and describes how that God created the universe, how he selected the descendants of Jacob for a special purpose and revealed the Torah to them, and then influenced history in order to preserve that people for their special role. Although not attempting to prove His existence, the Bible describes God's actions in such a way that bears out these proofs. For the Bible, like the Moses story it contains and quoted at the beginning of this chapter, tells us where God has been

The Bible begins with a statement and not with a reason: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1,1) and the first of the Ten Commandments is: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from a place of slavery." (Exodus 20, 2.) Perhaps this should be our starting point too. Then we should go on to read, to study, to pray and to practise, so that we immerse ourselves in our religion and see if it works for us as it has done for so many others.

### ***THE BELIEF OF LILY MONTAGU.***

One of the founders of the Liberal Jewish Movement in Britain was a remarkable lady called Lily Montagu. In an autobiographical book entitled 'The Faith of a Jewish woman', she tells how in 1917, she was asked to read the Haftarah (the Prophetic reading) at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue. (At that time there was only one Liberal Synagogue.) Lily Montagu was therefore the first woman to participate in conducting an adult Jewish service in Britain. She was later given the title of Lay Minister and fulfilled the role of a Rabbi. That first Haftarah was Isaiah chapter 55, and she explains its significance in her book in this way:

"This chapter seems to me to carry within itself the essence of pure religion. It contains a call to man to seek God, and an assurance that that search is undertaken with sincerity and faith, all other of life's activities will fit in according to a correct measure of values. The chapter gives glorious assurance that God will cause goodness to triumph, and that, as He rules by law, we can count on His law to lead to the establishment of righteousness. Moreover, we find in these verses the wonderful comfort for all seekers after truth, who, in spite of their love and faith, must ever remain to some degree perplexed and bewildered. 'God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His ways are not our ways.' We have no power to explain God. If we could, we should be Gods ourselves. Our minds can conceive only a part of His activity. The perfect whole is beyond us. So we must give rest to our souls. We must make active effort to reach nearer God: we can be sure that He is waiting for us and helping us: we can be sure that He is Love and Goodness, Justice, Truth and Beauty, all the good things for which we hunger; but we can receive only that which our human hearts and minds can contain."

## **RELIGION AND SCIENCE.**

In the nineteenth century, the publication of Darwin's work about the Theory of Evolution led to a heated dispute between theologians and scientists. Religion and Science are not really in conflict, for as the anecdote about the army chaplain showed, they are not dealing with the problem in the same way. The scientist observes first and then reasons out conclusions or laws. He is trying to describe events, phenomena, sequences and laws. So that he is most concerned with HOW things occur. The religious person tends to see God's hand in the ordering of the world, so that when he sees an event occur, he looks for its purpose or reason. He is more concerned with WHY things happen.

When a scientist reads the stories of Creation in the first chapters of the book of Genesis, he will probably look to see whether the accounts agree with the evidence of Astronomy, Geology, Palaeontology, etc. When a religious person read the same chapters, he looks for the purpose of creation. He sees that when the Bible describes how the climax of the creation story was the establishment of the Sabbath day, which was called holy, it teaches that the creation of the world and the eventual creation of man should lead to holiness and righteousness. The Rabbis also asked why only one man, Adam, was created. They drew the conclusion that God created man in this way, so that at a future time no one could say that his father was greater than someone else's (Sanhedrin 4,5.)

The approaches of Religion and Science are not necessarily contradictory. There are many religious scientists. Some of these manage to keep their science and their religion in separate compartments; but a more satisfactory approach is to try to align the teachings of religion and science. This is why it has been necessary to develop a modern form of Judaism to take account of scientific thought. (see further in chapters 7 & 19.)

Ultimately, Science and Religion can not exist without each other. For if Religion tries to ignore scientific truth, it will find itself behaving like the Church when it made Galileo deny that the earth went round the sun. On the other hand, Science can not do without Religion, for when new scientific discoveries are made, like those on nuclear fission or genetic engineering, it is necessary for Religion to give moral guidance as to how these discoveries should be used. Only in this way can we avoid much evil and suffering in the world.

## **4. GOD IS ONE.**

Although Judaism has many teachings about how we should live our lives, it has remarkably few teachings about what we should believe. Israel Abrahams once said that the one dogma of Judaism was that it had no dogma. Compared with other religions, we place rather less emphasis on detailing our beliefs about God, and considerably more on itemising exactly how we should behave as a result of our belief in God.

Maimonides, the mediaeval Jewish philosopher, suggested that because the human mind can not fully understand the greatness of God, we should not try to say exactly what God is, and therefore we should limit ourselves to saying what He is not. Sometimes, however, the same idea may be expressed either positively or negatively. For example we can say that God did not have a beginning nor will He have an end, or we can say that He is eternal. Both mean the same thing.

Of the few positive statements of belief that Judaism does make, by far the most important is the belief that there is only one God. This very simple statement contains a vast truth. It is a truth which later was accepted by some other religions. The widespread acceptance of this teaching should only serve to remind us of Judaism's great influence on the religious thinking of the western world.

### ***THE UNITY OF GOD.***

The statement that there is only one God occurs many times in the Bible; but the occasion that is best known is the Shema. This passage is used as a prayer, which is said in both morning and evening services. The first line of this states: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." (Deuteronomy 6, 4.) These words have become the most important statement of Judaism, and now one might say that they are the motto of the Jewish people. When in the past, Jews were killed for their beliefs, it was thought to be of special merit to die with these words on one's lips. There is a tradition that when Rabbi Akiva was being tortured by the Romans, because he continued to teach Judaism despite their forbidding it, these were his last words. He explained the following passage: "You shall love the Lord your God... with all your soul" to mean "even when He takes away your soul at death." (Jerusalem Talmud Berachot & Sotah.) To this day, the Shema appears in all Jewish prayer books at the conclusion of the prayers to be said on one's death bed.

### ***THE UNITY OF MAN.***

The belief that there is only one God leads us to other conclusions. If various peoples believe in gods with different names, and yet in reality there is only one God, then they are praying to the same one God; but calling Him by different names and thinking of Him in a different way. The belief in one God therefore, leads on to a belief in the unity of mankind. The prophet Malachi although he thought the idea to be dangerous, expressed it best when he said: "Have we not all one Father, has not one God created us all?" (Malachi 2, 10.)

### ***ASPECTS OF GOD.***

Just as they thought originally that there were different gods for different things, so some people have said that there are two distinct ways of thinking about God. One is that He is above, over or outside the world, because He created it and rules it from above. This

called being 'Transcendent'. The other idea is that He is close to all those who live on earth, influencing us through prayer and mediation. This is called being 'Immanent'. We might think of these two ideas as being distinct or even contradictory, but Judaism teaches that God is one, and that He is both far and near at the same time. For a human being this would be impossible, but for God it is not. God is not limited by space. He is everywhere. So He can be over us and near to us at the same time.

The Hebrew Bible uses two main terms for speaking about God. One is Elohim, which is usually translated as 'God'. The second is the four lettered name of God (Yod, He, Vav, He), which today we pronounce as 'Adonai', and this is usually translated as 'Lord', though some versions translate it as 'The Eternal'. The Rabbis noted the use of these two Hebrew words and asked why sometimes one was used and sometimes the other. They eventually said that



*God as King. The Hebrew word Melech(King) the transcendent God. Illuminated letters from 13th century German prayer book.*

Elohim can sometimes be translated as 'Judges', and so when Elohim is used, God is judging the world with justice. They also said that Adonai means God showing His merciful side. It was thought that Justice and Mercy seemed to be working against each other. It was pointed out, however, that if you try to seek justice without mercy, you do not in fact achieve true justice, for it is then heartless. If on the other hand a judge was always merciful, then he would always let everyone off and by so doing would be encouraging others to do wrong. This would not be a kind and merciful thing to do. So really, justice and mercy should go hand in hand. God, therefore, is both just and merciful at the same time, and although each name represented God showing either His just or His merciful side, in reality, He is One and combines both tendencies in His special Oneness.

## **A SINGULAR UNITY.**

The Hebrew word Elohim has a plural ending, and doubters often asked if this was so, how could there be only one God. The Rabbis pointed out that in Hebrew you can tell whether a noun is singular or plural by whether the verb that follows it is singular or plural. (So also in English we would say 'God says', but 'the gods say'.) In several places the Bible speaks of God creating the world, and in each case the verb is in the singular. For example, the Bible begins with the words: 'B'reshit bara Elohim.' The word 'bara' is the singular form. Therefore the text shows that the world was created by One God and not by many, as the questioner thought. (Ibn Ezra on Gen. 1, 1. and Rashi on Gen. 1, 26.)

When the Christian religion began, Paul introduced the idea that although there was only one God, he thought that that one God was a trinity. Christianity teaches that the three parts are (1) God, the Father, (2) God, the Son and (3) The Holy Ghost. As Jews, we find it very difficult to understand this idea. We find it hard to see how a trinity can be a unity. The three parts of the Christian concept of God seem to be like separate characters, rather than separate characteristics. It certainly seems to weaken the simple purity of the Jewish

teaching of the unity of God.

So far, in speaking about the unity of God, we have spoken about Him being one. But also involved with the word 'one' is the idea of uniqueness. He is not only one; but no one and no thing is at all like Him. He stands alone. Nothing can be compared to His unique perfection. Because He is unique, it is sometimes difficult for us to speak about Him. Our choice is either to use human terms, which are really inadequate, or else to use special words, chosen for the purpose of portraying God. As a result of using these special words, the language of prayer books tends to differ from that used in daily life.

## 5. GOD IS SPIRITUAL.

### ***IDOL WORSHIP.***

Throughout the Hebrew Bible one message is hammered home again and again - the idea that it is wrong to worship idols. We find this in the Ten Commandments when it says: "You shall not carve yourself an image, the likeness of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not worship them nor serve them." (Exodus 20, 4 and Deut. 5, 8) Isaiah puts over the same message using sarcasm. He says of the idol worshipper: "He cuts down cedars; or he chooses to holm tree or an oak ... Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats flesh, he roasts meat and is satisfied; also he warms himself and says: 'aha I am warm, I have seen the fire!' And the rest of it he makes into a God, his idol; and falls down to it and worships it; he prays to it and says: 'Deliver me, for thou art my god!' (Isaiah 44, 14 - 17.) Isaiah is saying how foolish it is to worship a piece of wood or a stone and pray that it will save us. That message was very important at an early stage of Judaism, for the Jews were surrounded by peoples who worshipped idols of one kind or another. Today, there are few people in the western world who worship idols of stone or wood.



*The Tenth Plague. The killing of the first-born and the destruction of the Egyptian idols, which according to the Midrash (Mechilta etc.) occurred at the same time. Leghorn Haggadah. 18th Century.*

We still read these passages about idol-worship for two reasons. Firstly, although we do not actually worship carved idols as gods, there are many people in the modern world who "worship the work of their hands." (Isaiah 2, 8. etc.) In other words they seem to regard certain material things as very important in their lives - things like money, or possessions like a car or a new appliance. We call them status symbols. We do not actually pray to them; but we do devote much of our lives, in time and effort, to working to possess them. Apart from the individual doing this in his personal life, our society does the same thing on a wider scale. So technology or nationalism have also become objects of veneration. If we accept that worship is serving or working for a god, then these things have become our modern idols.

The second reason for reading these passages is because we still find some people in the world, who worship their spiritual God, surrounded by, or even praying before, statues or

images. Certain groups of Christians seem to have many statues in their churches. They do not actually worship the saint or the carving of Jesus; but they do seem to need the carved image in order to focus their thoughts and prayers. For it is often hard for people to worship a God who has no shape or form. In the middle ages the Rabbis were asked on several occasions whether Christians were to be considered as idolaters. Despite the fact that at this time Jews were suffering considerably at the hands of Christians, and might have been expected to be rather anti-Christian, they stated that the Christians were not idolaters. Some said that as descendants of Noah, they were worshipping God, but they were adding on to the Deity, and though this was not allowed for Jews, it was permitted to them. Others said that Christians did not actually worship an idol; but that they used the image to help them to worship God. Of course, not all Christians even do this. Some avoid all such statues in their churches and just have a cross without the figure of Jesus on it.

### ***GOD IN HUMAN FORM.***

Not only did the Jewish religion forbid the worship of idols, but it put forward the positive idea that God is purely spiritual. God has no shape or form. Referring to the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Bible says: "Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form; there was only a voice." (Deut. 4, 12) A spiritual God without any physical characteristics is rather difficult to talk about. Even the writers of the Bible sometimes speak of God as if He were human. So we find Him described as smelling a sacrifice (Genesis 8, 21) or having a hand, (Exodus 33, 22 etc.) or a face. (Numbers 6, 25.) These verses should not of course be taken literally. Some of them are poetic ways of speaking, and in some cases, they were just examples of using human characteristics to describe God, because we have a limited vocabulary concerning God. Talking about God as if He were human, is called anthropomorphism. In early times, when the Bible was translated into Aramaic (Targum), they went out of their way to avoid all these anthropomorphisms, because at that time they thought it wrong to talk of God as having a human shape. These translations date from as early as the first century B.C.E.

The Romans, who worshipped Gods of different kinds which were often shown as stone images, found it very difficult to understand the Jewish religion, where God was pure spirit. The story is told of the Roman general Pompey, that when he went to Jerusalem, he visited the Temple. As he was shown round the various courts, he became very impressed by the building and its architecture. He learnt that as one went further into the building, it became more and more holy, until one came to the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest was allowed to go, and then only on one day in the year. Pompey was anxious to see what was at the centre of this peculiar religion. So he forced his way into the Holy of Holies and found the secret of Jewish worship - the room was empty. The Roman anti-Semites invented the story that he found there the head of an ass. This story was probably spread to hid the truth, because the Romans found the worship of an invisible spiritual God to be an embarrassing puzzle.

### ***WHY GOD CAN HAVE NO SHAPE.***

If for a moment we were to assume the opposite, and suppose that God did have an actual shape, then we would have to say that at any moment of time, that that shape was in some particular place in space. Then if God was in that place, He could not be anywhere else. In other words, as soon as God has a particular shape or form, He then would limit Himself, and could no longer be truly transcendent or immanent (see chapter 4) or it would also mean that He could no longer be close to everyone at the same time. Because this

would be the result of Him having an actual shape, it is clear that He can have no form. He must be pure spirit.

### ***THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SPIRITUAL.***

Some people, who are used to everything around them having a physical shape, find it hard to think of such a spiritual God. To explain to children, it is sometimes helpful to ask them to think of air. Air is all around us, yet we can not see it. Most of our lives we take air for granted, yet without air, we would not survive for a couple of minutes. Now this is only a childish explanation, because air is not spiritual, it is only invisible. It has a physical constitution, for it is made up of a mixture of gases like oxygen, etc. The example is only useful so far as it teaches that it could be possible for God to be everywhere at the same time, without our being able to see Him. It can also show that something which we can not see, can still be very important to us, so important that it is a matter of life and death whether it is there.

The idea that something without material shape or form could be so important is still difficult for some people to accept. We are brought up to study material things, to seek reasons, causes and effects. We are not really taught much at school concerning spiritual things. Therefore, some people tend to feel that if something is spiritual, it is either not real or not important.

Let us take one spiritual quality as an example. Let us take love. Is it real or is it imaginary? Anyone who has experienced love will tell you that it is real. They might well say that it is the most important and real thing in their life. The love of someone can make us act in certain ways, spur us on to make greater efforts and it can affect our moods, making us happy or sad, depending on whether that love is returned. There are few who would brush love off as something imaginary or valueless

If we take beauty - the beauty of a piece of music - that too can arouse emotions. One can analyse the notes of that music; but the quality of its beauty is hard to define. Yet that beauty is very real to those who appreciate it.

We can go on to speak about things like truth, justice, freedom or honesty. Each is a spiritual value. Each is important in our lives, and yet it has no shape or form. These are just a few of the things that we experience which show that spiritual things do matter to all of us.

## 6. GOD IS GOOD.

Zeus, the chief god of the Greeks, is usually pictured as sitting on a throne on Mount Olympus, grasping a handful of thunderbolts, which he was waiting to throw at those who displeased him. The Greeks told how this great god of theirs once took a fancy to Leda, the wife of Tyndareus. So Zeus changed himself into a swan, forced his attentions on her, and she eventually bore twins, who were called Castor and Pollux. The Greeks saw nothing particularly strange in a god committing adultery or even rape. In fact many of their gods indulged in various kinds of immorality and wickedness.



*Carving of Leda and the swan, surprisingly found on a sarcophagus in the Jewish burial caves at Beit Shearim in Israel. c. 2nd Century C.E.*

### **A JEWISH IDEA.**

Today few people believe that gods would do such evil. It is a basic concept of God that He is good, holy, righteous, loving and just. It was the Jews who gave this idea to the world. Abraham, the first Jew, and the first person to believe in one God, was shocked when he was told that God intended to destroy all the inhabitants of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. He questioned God on this and said: "Will You destroy the righteous with the wicked, perhaps there are fifty righteous people in the city?....Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Genesis 18, 23-25.) From that time, Jews have taught that God is good.

It is possible that there is more than coincidence in the fact that the English words 'God' and 'good' are almost alike. Some people think that they may come from the same root meaning.

The Bible teaches that God is good and that He taught mankind what is good and right, when He revealed His teachings to our Jewish ancestors on Mount Sinai. For God wanted justice, righteousness and peace to exist on earth. (We will go more deeply into how God revealed his teachings in a later chapter.)

The teaching that God is good can be understood in a slightly difference way. By definition God is good and perfect. He is then the perfection of goodness and justice, the ideal of righteousness and truth. In Him is the perfection of these ideals. We therefore call Him holy. He is also the source of these ideals in the world.

As human beings, we can only grasp a little of His great perfection; but every time that we strive for more perfect justice, deeper truth or more ideal perfection in moral or ethical behaviour, we are seeking out the God of perfect goodness. That perhaps is what the Bible meant when it tells how Moses asked to see God's glory and God showed him His goodness. (see page 5.) If we each seek God's goodness, we will find His glory.

### **A GOOD GOD LEADS TO GOOD PEOPLE.**

We seem to have a feature inside us called conscience, which helps us to choose between right and wrong. Some see that conscience as one of the ways by which God influences us. Certainly, the conscience itself is influenced and shaped by our own

religious teachings and by those of our parents. Because God influences religious teachings, He also influences our consciences. We will see later that one of the Jewish teachings about man is that he was made in the image of God - not the physical image, but the spiritual image. This means that there is something God-like in everyone. We can see our reason and our conscience as God working both in and through us. Every time that we listen to the voice of our conscience, we are co-operating with God in trying to make a better world. We therefore come to a greater understanding of God if we search for higher truth, righteousness, justice, mercy and peace. And by doing this we also come closer to Him.

It would not be right to say that God is love, truth or justice, so much as that these ideals can be found in God to perfection. Over the years, He has revealed some part of these ideals to man, and He has also been the spiritual power which has stimulated man to try to attain these ideals in his life. God can be thought of as both the spiritual ideal of all good and also as the inspirer of these qualities in the world.

### ***IN WHOSE IMAGE?***

Voltaire said: "If God made us in His image, we have certainly returned the compliment." More recently, some have maintained that we have made the idea of God in man's own image. Certainly, man formulated a belief in God; but is He just a figment of our imagination? The question is: did we put forward the idea of a perfect God because men are good, or did man get the idea of goodness from a perfect God?

We know from observation that all men are not good, and that no man is good all the time. We each do wrong sometimes. If man was creating an idea of God as man writ large, then that God would have been both good and bad. He would have been like the gods of the Greeks and the Romans, which were indeed giant human beings placed either in heaven or on Mount Olympus. They each had their faults, and their actions showed their weaknesses. The idea of God put forward by Judaism is of a God, who is different from man, because He is perfect. Judaism also maintains that that perfect God has revealed some of His perfection and ideals to man by revelation and inspiration. By saying that man learnt goodness from God, it clearly refuted the argument put forward later, and it did so some 3,000 years before Voltaire's argument was even suggested.

## **7. GOD AS CREATOR.**

### ***THE EARLY LEGENDS.***

From earliest times, men have paused to ask the question how did they come to be on earth. They answered this simple by saying that they were the children of their parents, and that their parents were in turn children of their parents and so on. Sooner or later, they began to ask where did the first men and women come from. At the time that this question was first asked, they could not supply a scientific answer, so they had to turn to ancient legends.

Some of these legends found their way into the Hebrew Bible. The first two chapters of the book of Genesis contain two such legends. The first tells how God spoke and the world came into existence in six stages called days. The second chapter tells how God gathered some dust together and shaped Adam, breathed into his nostrils and made him into the first living man. These legend should not be taken as literally true in every detail.

### ***THE TRUTH BEHIND THE LEGENDS.***

When we say that these stories are not to be taken literally, it does not mean that they are totally untrue. Every English school-child learns of the story of Sir Francis Drake and the Armada, telling how the news of the first sighting of the Armada was brought to Drake while he was playing bowls on Plymouth Hoe. Everyone wanted to rush to sea to defend their country; but Drake calmly said: "We have got sufficient time to finish our game of bowls and beat the Spaniards as well." It is a fine story; but it is unlikely that it is historically accurate or true. Should we then not teach this story? This tale has been told from generation to generation, not because it is true in every detail; but because it contains a truth within it. Whether Drake was or was not playing bowls does not matter, the story reveals a truthful picture of Drake's character as a nonchalant, swashbuckling kind of person who was both self-confident and brave. If Drake had been playing bowls at that time, it would have been the sort of remark that he would have made.

In the same way, although the legends of creation are not to be taken literally, nevertheless they contain deep truths. For instance, they teach that there was an outside Force or Power which caused the universe to exist, that the climax of creation of life on earth was the creation of man as a thinking, reasoning being, and that man was given the power to control other creatures on earth.

### ***SCIENTIFIC THEORIES.***

Many modern scientists, who have observed that the universe is expanding and that the galaxies are moving apart, believe in the Big Bang Theory. This seems to agree with the Biblical account by saying that the universe started with an immense initial explosive act of creation. We can not say that this proves the Bible to be correct, for it is only a theory. It does not explain where the matter or the energy came from, nor does it say what caused the bang.

After the first matter and energy were there, some people think that life on earth developed partly due to scientific laws of behaviour and partly due to chance. They say that certain laws existed which shaped the universe, the galaxy, the solar system and the earth; that life on earth started as the result of chance and that after that, life forms developed

following the laws of evolution, and in this way man was eventually evolved.

The key thought is that there was one chance event (the initial creation of life) and a whole series of automatic laws operating, which together created the known universe and life upon earth.

The way that this view is expressed often seems to imply that through natural laws science created the universe. The laws of nature or of science, which man has discovered, were not made by man. They were discovered and formulated by various scientists; but the laws themselves existed undiscovered since the time of creation. When matter and energy were created, the laws which governed their behaviour were created at the same time. So we may well say whoever or whatever created the matter and the energy also created the laws of nature and the laws of science, which went with them. When someone says that the world was created by the laws of science, then they are saying that the world was created by the Force or Power that created those laws and fixed the way that nature should behave.

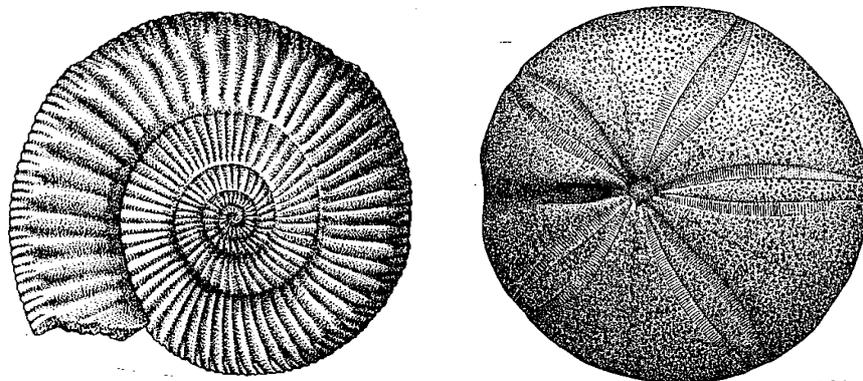
### **WAS IT ALL CHANGE?**

As to the question of chance playing its part in the creation of life, scientists now talk of laws of probability and it is possible to work out the chance of life beginning if all the appropriate ingredients are there. The various elements for example amino-acids, various gases, sunlight, etc. were present over millions of years with millions and millions of molecules, so it on one occasion they produced a living cell, it was not so odd. But if we get to the situation where there are rules governing chance behaviour, can we say that the creation of the first living cell was an accident? Or would it be better to say that this cell was created after a carefully planned and calculated process of random behaviour? Even the apparent chance process of the creation of life may indeed have been a deliberate act of creation.

If the creation of first life and the evolution which followed it were purely a matter of chance, then we would not expect to see so much law and order in the universe.

### **SIGNS OF ORDER.**

The author has a hobby of collecting fossils. When he goes out to a new site, he knows the date of the soil, but he does not know exactly what fossils he will find. While searching through soil and rocks, he looks for anything with a recognisable shape or pattern. Rock



*Two fossils. An Ammonite and an Echinoid dating from the Jurassic period, the age of dinosaurs, showing distinctive shapes and patterns.*

and pebbles may have any irregular shape; but fossil remains of living things usually have identifiable shapes often with some kind of pattern on them. It is extremely rare that chance creates a stone that has the shape or appearance of a fossil, but a closer examination soon shows that it is not a fossil, for it does not have the detailed shape that living creatures have.

There is another kind of pattern which can be found in the universe. If you look at something vast like the solar system, you will observe that at the centre there is a nucleus, called the sun, and round it rotate the planets in their orbits. If you look at something small like the atom, you will find that it has the same pattern. At the centre is the nucleus and round it travel electrons in their orbits.

Once we find that there is order, pattern or rules within the universe, we immediately look to see what caused this. Many years ago, before we gained so much knowledge of science, Rabbi Akiva said: "As a house implies a builder, a dress a weaver, a door a carpenter, so the world proclaims God its Creator." (Midrash Temura.)

### ***LAWS OF NATURE.***

One explanation for the orderliness in nature is that the laws of nature, which govern all life, have helped to shape the forms of nature. The laws of nature are not just laws by which nature behaves, they have also permitted the world and life itself to exist.

One well-known set of laws are the laws of gravity. If the universe had been created without the laws of gravity, the earth would not revolve round the sun at a more or less fixed distance. We would either move closer and scorch or move away and freeze to death. Secondly, the earth would have no atmosphere, and even if there were clouds, the rain would not fall. More important perhaps, we would not be able to walk about the earth as we do, we would be floating weightlessly like astronauts and we would have to develop a system of tethering ourselves to the earth, so as not to float off into space. It is very clear that we rely on the laws of gravity in order that we can carry on our daily lives. Without such laws, we would not be living on earth and the earth would not exist as a solid planet. The creation of these laws was as important as the creation of matter and energy.

The Bible reports one event when nature seems to have gone mad, even if it did not quite break its own laws. This event was the flood. This again was a legend rather than an historical truth. At the end of the flood when the rainbow appears, God promises: "While the earth remains, the cycle of seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, day and night shall not cease." (Genesis 9, 22.) This is saying that man can rely upon the laws of nature from then on.

The term 'Laws of Nature' means that way that nature works, or the way that the world runs and came to be what it is. We have the choice of saying that these laws are just chance or saying that they have some overall plan, pattern or purpose. Whether or not they were designed to do so, these laws have made it possible for there to be life on earth. They have created order. They have created beauty. They have led to progress and advancement in life. From all this it seems that we can detect behind these laws a Creator or a Directing Force in nature. The laws themselves describe how that Force works.

### ***DIVERSITY OF CREATION.***

If we examine the world in which we live, we cannot fail to be impressed by the diversity of nature. We have identified vast numbers of animals, birds, fishes and insects, and also

of plants and trees. Each variety has its own special characteristics which identify it. When we examine any living creature in detail we are struck by the intricacy of its composition, the marvellous way in which its parts function, and in so many cases the sheer beauty of its form.

The Talmudic Rabbis referred to the diversity of nature when they said: "When a human king mints coins with his face upon them, each face is identical to the next. When the King of Kings made man, He made every one a separate, identifiable individual though each one is made in the image of God." (Sanhedrin 39a.)

### ***THE BEAUTY OF CREATION.***

We have spoken of order and diversity, perhaps we should not pass over another characteristic, which is beauty. In each generation painters and poets have tried to describe the beauty which they saw around them. Who can list the beauty of nature? A flower or a sunset, a landscape or seascape, the song of a bird, the colours of tropical fish, the flight of a gull or the shape of a feather in its wing, all these and so many more, are signs of the beauty all around us. One of the prayers of the morning service contains the passage: "How wonderful are Your works, O Lord! In wisdom have You made them all; the earth is full of Your creations. Let all praise You, Lord our God, for the excellence of Your handiwork, and for the glowing stars which You have made; they shall glorify You for ever. We praise You, O Lord, Creator of light."

We have now invented gadgets to help us examine our universe better. The results of their use has not diminished the wonder of creation. Whether we look through a microscope at the smallest things in nature, or whether we use a telescope to look at the vast galaxies in distant space, we continue to be increasingly impressed by the grand design of the universe and by its great beauty.

### ***EVOLUTION.***

When fossils were first found, some people thought that they had been placed on earth by the Devil. Some of the fossil shells were called by such names as 'Devil's Toenails' and Ammonites (see picture on page 22) were sometimes called snake-stones. When, later, they were recognised as belonging to creatures which had lived centuries ago, this caused problems. By using the dates and ages of characters in the Bible which are mentioned in the text, it is possible to calculate the date of Adam and Eve. The early Christian scholars worked it out to be 4004 B.C.E. While the Jewish calendar makes 1984 correspond with 5744 years after creation.

Great ingenuity was used to account for fossils. Some said that as these were covered by sand and sediment, they were clearly creatures which perished in the flood. Others clung to a literal interpretation of the Bible and said that when God created the world, He also created fossils and placed them in the earth in order to fool man.

It is now widely accepted that fossils are very old indeed. The two illustrated above are about 170 million years old. This, of course, makes them considerably older than the mere 5,744 years that the Jewish calendar says that the world has existed. Today most Jews accept that the calendar is useful as a way of recording official Jewish dates, but it is not a basis for estimating the age of the earth or life upon it.

It is now generally accepted that life began in the sea with simple single-celled creatures. Very gradually, these creatures developed into more complex multi-celled organisms.

From these there developed worms, shell fish and later ordinary fishes. Some of these sea creatures adapted to life upon land and became amphibian, and eventually their descendants left the sea and became land animals. Originally these were mostly lizard-type animals, both small and large. Some of the largest of these were Dinosaurs. After a long chain of development, there were mammals and eventually primates. Human beings are descended from these ape-like creatures. The brain gradually got larger and more developed, so that they became capable of thought and speech. When we look at this long process, we see that, whether or not the changes were due to chance, it is clear that this process of evolution has meant a gradual development from simple to complex forms, and from primitive to more advanced creatures. When we look back at this, it does not seem to be entirely random or purely a matter of chance. It appears to have a direction and also probably a purpose. As stated earlier, direction and purpose usually mean that there was someone or something directing or guiding it.

The fact that creation took millions of years rather than six days, does not make it any less wonderful. It is less miraculous and more understandable to the human mind; but we still have to marvel that it took place at all.

Darwin's theory of evolution did not rule out God; it just described how He worked. Long before Darwin, the morning prayer quoted above, described God as "renewing every day the work of creation." If we accept the idea of a Divine Power continually directing the process of evolution towards more advanced forms of life, then we can gain a new insight as to the meaning of this particular phrase.

## **8. OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD.**

### ***INFINITE.***

In chapter 5, it was said that God has no shape or form, and that He is spiritual and not physical. He is not limited by size or place, He is everywhere. Another way of saying this is to say that He is infinite. The Rabbis told many stories which illustrate this idea of God. For example, it is told how a heretic once said to Rabbi Gemaliel: "You rabbis declare that wherever ten people (a minyan) gather for prayer, the Shechinah (the presence of God) is amongst them. How many Shechinahs are there?" The Rabbi then called in one of the heretic's servants and hit him with a wooden spoon. "Why did you hit him?" the man asked. "Because," said the Rabbi "the sun is shining in the house of an infidel." "But the sun shines all over the world." said the unbeliever. To which Rabbi Gemaliel replied: "If the sun, which is one of a million myriads of God's servants, can be in every part of the world, how much more so can the presence of God spread throughout the entire universe." (Sanhedrin 39a.)

### ***ETERNAL.***

Just as we can say that God is not confined to any one place, so can we say that He is not confined to any one time. When we spoke of God creating the universe, this idea required that He existed before the universe came into being. From this we see that God must be eternal. He would also continue to exist if or when the universe came to an end. There is a Rabbinic tradition that God created other universes and destroyed them before He created the present one. (Genesis Rabba 3, 7.)

It is not easy to visualise the idea of something being eternal. We can think of a lifetime, a century or even dates in historical time. We find it hard to think of the 3,500 million years that the earth has existed, and the ages of the galaxy and of the universe are even greater; but eternity is only an idea to us of something beyond our experience. Because we live in a world of cause and effect, we might be tempted to ask where did God come from? But we should realise that God is not completely understandable by our limited human minds. We can only visualise eternity and infinity as abstract ideas. Perhaps this is what Isaiah meant when he said: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord." (Isaiah 55, 9.)

### ***OMNISCIENT.***

One of the basic concepts of God is that He is absolute perfection. This perfection is of goodness and righteousness; but it is also of knowledge and truth. This means that if He has complete knowledge of absolute truth, then He must know all things. At first, this idea of complete knowledge is almost as hard to grasp as infinity and eternity; but if we accept that God created the universe, then we can understand a little better how the Creator can have complete knowledge of all His works.

The Creator of the universe must know all about the laws which govern that universe; but some people wonder whether God has complete knowledge about each individual creature in it. Does God know everything we think and say? In the past people have believed that He does know. Those people who do not believe in a personal God would say that God knows about the universe in general, but that He does not concern Himself

with every minute details of every living creature. Others would say that the infinite God has infinite knowledge and therefore knows our inmost thoughts.

### ***OMNIPOTENT.***

God, who created the universe, is clearly the source of great power, and there is no force or power which can be compared to His. But one may ask whether God can do anything that He wishes. For example can He break the laws of nature?

When the universe was created an order was built into it, so that we are able identify the laws of nature. These God-given laws or rules of nature seem to hold for all time, and yet there are accounts in the Bible of events which seem to imply that God worked miracles and suspended the laws of nature so that He could make something occur. We read that during a battle, the sun stood still in the sky to enable Joshua to defeat the Amorites before it got dark, (Joshua 10, 13.) or that God commanded Moses to raise his staff over the Red Sea and made it divide so that the people could walk across on dry land. (Exodus 14, 15ff.)

Many people can not believe that God actually did these things. Even the Rabbis of very early times stated that when God created the world, He built into it certain planned miracles from the beginning: "At the creation God made a condition with the sea that it should be divided for the passage of the children of Israel, with the sun and moon to stand still at the bidding of Joshua, with the ravens to feed Elijah, with fire not to injure Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, with the lions not to harm Daniel and with the fish to vomit out Jonah." (Genesis Rabba.)

Today we would seek for other explanations for these events. Perhaps it just seemed like the sun stood still, or that it was just a poetic way of describing it in history. Concerning the Red Sea, the Bible says that a strong east wind blew. (Exodus 14, 21.) It would seem therefore, that this might have been a natural, event and the only miracle was the timing which was so fortunate for Moses.

Such explanations lead us to conclude that God is very powerful; but that He does not break His own laws of nature. For if He has to break a law for some reason, than it implies that that law was not perfect. He therefore works through His own laws and does not break them. Some people, however, maintain that God is quite capable of breaking His own laws, but that He does not choose to do so.

### ***PERSONAL GOD.***

The concept of God has been so real to generations of Jews and also to people of other religions, that we have spoken of God as 'He' and addressed Him as 'Thou' or later as "You". The prophets believed that God inspired them and had told them what to say; and throughout history, people have felt the voice of conscience speaking to them and spurring them on to lead better lives. This feeling that God speaks to us and that he cares for , loves us and is concerned for each one of us, is expressed right through our literature and in our prayerbook.

The two most frequent ways of referring to God are found together in a well-known prayer, said on the High Holy Days, known as the Avinu Malkenu. This means "Our Father, Our King."

The concept of the kingship of God, means that He is the great and powerful Being who rules the world by decreeing the laws of nature, who directs its development through

evolution and who instructs mankind how to lead their lives, by revealing to them ideals of behaviour and by giving them laws and commandments.

The concept of God as Father means that He is seen as a loving Father who cares for us in many ways, for example He provided for our welfare by placing us in a world filled with food, etc. He also listens to prayer, and inspires us to lead better lives. God as King is Transcendent. God as Father is Immanent. (see page 10.)

In more recent times, some Jews have questioned the concept of an Immanent God. For them it was all right to speak of God as a Force, a Power, or a Spirit, but they could not bring themselves to see Him as a Father. By definition, no Jew can see God as a person, but many see Him as a personal God, who relates to each of us individually. Others find the personal nature of god as hard to accept. This may even have led some Jews to reject a belief in God completely. However, it should still be possible for such Jews to believe in God as a powerful Force or Spirit.

Whether or not we accept the idea of a personal immanent God, it should still be possible for us to pray to God as 'Father'. Firstly, because as Creator He participates with parents in every act of creation of new life. Secondly, He can be seen as a father-figure, showing both power and authority.

The reader will find that in this book God is often referred to as if He were a force or power, so as not to deter those who can not believe in a personal God. However, it is impossible to avoid using the personal pronoun 'He'. It would not be satisfactory to use the impersonal 'it' because we use this for inanimate objects which are lifeless. One of the early interpretations of the Divine Name of God is that it is connected with 'living' or 'existing', so it would be most inappropriate.

In using the word 'He', we do not mean to imply that God is male. He has no shape or form, and so God is neither male nor female. He is God. His nature is so different from ours, that using human terms to describe Him must always be unsatisfactory.

Those who think of God only as transcendent often find difficulty in praying. (This is dealt with more fully in a chapter on prayer.) Ultimately, how each of us thinks of God is our own concern. Provided that we do not take up non-Jewish beliefs, we remain Jewish. If someone believes only in a transcendent God, he is still a Jew. And if someone believes in a God who is both immanent and transcendent, he too can be a Jew, for One God can be both immanent and transcendent at the same time. For a God unlimited by space can be both near and far simultaneously.

## 9. JEWISH TEACHINGS ABOUT GOD.

The belief in God is fundamental to Judaism. No one can call himself a Jew in the religious sense if he does not believe in God. About some religious ideas it is possible for Jews to hold different views; but not about the existence of God.

To believe in God means more, however, than to acknowledge His existence. It is not enough just to believe that there is a God. To believe in God also means to FEEL that He exists. It means, further, to realise that we are individually related to Him. There are three elements in the belief in God.

- 1) the intellectual element, i.e. belief with the mind;
- 2) the emotional element, i.e. the feeling of God; and
- 3) the personal element, i.e. the feeling for God: a sense of individual relation to Him, the sense that we have something to do with Him and that He has something to do with us, that we are bound to Him and He affects us. (Israel Mattuck, 1947.)

\*\*\*\*\*

God is great beyond our finding out, but he is ever nigh to them who are of a humble and contrite spirit, giving strength to the wary, courage to the faint of heart, and consolation to the sorrowing; as it has been said: As a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth those who revere him. The love of God gives strength, courage and hope. (Liberal Jewish Prayer Book vol. 1, 1924.)

\*\*\*\*

God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance. (Abraham Heschel, 20th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

Hard as the world is to explain with God, it is harder yet without Him. (Claude Montefiore, 20th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

Three things conspire together in mine eyes  
To bring the remembrance of You ever before me:  
The heavens, for whose sake I recall Your name,  
The earth I live on, that rouses my thought with its expanse,  
And the musing of my heart when I look within the depths of  
myself. (Solomon Ibn Gabirol, 12th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

There is no distinction between Your divinity, Your unity, Your eternity and Your existence; for it is all one mystery. (Solomon Ibn Gabirol, 12th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

...Dimly we have seen a vision; fitfully we have felt a presence; and faintly heard a voice not ours. The blazing stars, particles too small to see, the mind reaching out, the smile of children, the eyes of lovers, melody filling the soul, a flood of joy surprising the heart, a helping hand, the apprehension of mystery at the core of the plainest things - all these tell us that we are not alone. They reveal to us God, the vision that steadies and sustains us. (Service of The Heart, p. 93 1967.)

\*\*\*\*

Lord, where shall I find You,  
Whose place is hidden and high?  
And where shall I not find You,  
Whose glory fills all space?

Far space is Your dominion,  
Yet You dwell in the heart of man.  
You are the refuge of the near  
And the haven of those far-off.  
You dwell among the Cherubim,  
You are enthroned above the clouds.

Your hosts adore You,  
But You transcend their praise.  
All space can not contain You,  
Still less an earthly house!

Yet though exalted above men  
In high and lonely majesty,  
You are closer to them  
Than their own spirits and flesh.  
Their own lips testify  
That none but You are their Creator.

Who shall not revere You,  
Whose will is their command  
And who shall not invoke You,  
Whose love sustains their lives?

I long to reach You;  
I call to You with all my heart.  
And on my way towards you,  
You come yourself to meet me!  
In the wonders of Your creative power, I perceive You;  
In the holiness of Your sanctuary, I find You.

Who says he has not seen You?  
The heavens and all their host,  
In silent songs of praise,  
Declare Your glory.

Can God truly dwell in man?  
How dare we think so,  
Whose origin is dust?  
And yet we know that You, the Holy One, dwell  
Wherever men sing Your glory  
And tell forth Your praise.  
(Judah Ha Levi, 12th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

He is the eternal Lord, who reigned  
before any creature had yet been made;  
When all was done according to His will,  
Already then His name was King.

And after all has ceased to be,  
Still will He reign in solitary majesty;  
He was, He is and He shall be  
In glory.

And He is One; there is none to compare to Him,  
Or to consort with Him;  
He is without beginning, without end;  
And all power and dominion are His.

And He is my God, my living Redeemer,  
And my rock in time of trouble and distress;  
He is my banner and my refuge,  
My benefactor when I call upon Him.

Into His hands I entrust my spirit,  
When I sleep and when I wake;  
And with my spirit, my body also:  
The Lord is with me, I will not fear.  
(Adon Olam. Anonymous c. 12th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

We need no ladders to the sky, we need only ... observe the structure and functions of  
man's organs ... to know that the Creator exists. Job said (19,26.) "From my flesh shall I  
see God." (Abba Mari Yarhi, 14th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

God's wisdom and power in creating an ant or a bee is no less than in making the sun and  
its sphere. (Judah Ha Levi, 12th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

God left unfinished the north corner of the world and said: "Whoever claims to be god, let him complete this corner!" (Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer)

\*\*\*\*

O God to whom shall we compare You, Who are without equal?  
By what image speak of You,  
Whose seal all nature bears?  
You are high above the constellations,  
And majestic beyond all thought.  
How then can words define You,  
Or tongue describe You,  
Whom no mind can grasp,  
Nor eye perceive?

This world of Yours bears witness  
That there is none but You.  
It manifests Your wisdom  
And bears the impress of Your seal.

Before the mountains were brought forth  
Or the pillars of heaven set up,  
You dwelt in Your divine abode  
Of limitless depth and height.  
You sustain the world, it does not sustain You;  
You pervade it, it does not contain You.

The mind is powerless to grasp You;  
The tongue grows weary seeking to explain You.  
The thoughts of the wise are confounded;  
The wit of the quick too slow.  
"Awesome in praise," we call You;  
But You are far beyond all our praises.

How great is Your might, and how wonderful,  
Pervading heaven and earth!  
You are very deep, who can find You?

Only Your works do we perceive,  
And Your faithfulness to those who worship You;  
Only Your righteousness do we encounter,  
Only Your Teaching do we understand.  
Your presence is near to those who turn to You,  
Though far from those who turn away.  
The pure of heart behold You and have no need of light.

They hear You with their minds  
Although their ears be deaf.  
They proclaim unceasing Your majesty:  
"Thrice Holy is the Lord of Hosts!"

(Judah Ha Levi. 12th Century.)

\*\*\*\*

The Rabbis taught that when someone saw shooting stars, earthquakes, thunder, storms and lightening they should say the blessing: "Blessed art Thou, O lord our God, King of the universe whose strength and might fill the world." (Berachot 9, 2.) When someone sees a beautiful animal or a beautiful tree they should say: "Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the universe hath such things in His world." (Berachot 58b.)

\*\*\*\*

The Kобрiner Rabbe asked his Chasidim: "Do you know where God is?" He then took a piece of bread, and showing it to them he said: "God is in this piece of bread. Without the Lord showing His power throughout nature, this piece of bread would not exist." (19th century.)

\*\*\*\*

When our eyes behold the beauty and grandeur of Your world, we see the wisdom, power and goodness of its Creator. (Service Of The Heart. 1967.)

\*\*\*\*

A heathen asked Rabbi Joshua ben Karha: "Why did God speak to Moses from a thorn bush?" Rabbi Joshua replied: "If He had spoken from a carob tree or a sycamore, you would have asked the same question. But so as not to dismiss you without an answer, God spoke from a common thorn bush to teach you that there is no place where God is not, not even a thorn bush." (Exodus Rabba)

\*\*\*\*

In every place where I cause my name to be remembered, I will come to you, and I will bless you. And from there, if you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Exodus 20, 21 and Deuteronomy 4, 29 as used in Liberal Jewish Prayer Book vol. 1, 1924)

\*\*\*\*

There is a Rabbinic saying "God's seal is truth." It was pointed out that the letters of emet, the Hebrew word for truth, are the first, middle and last letters of the alphabet, so they show that He is the first, middle and last of time. (Genesis Rabba.)

\*\*\*\*

For You are Judge and Arbiter, Expert and witness.  
You write and You seal, record and recount.  
You remember deeds long forgotten.  
You open the book of records,  
And what is written there proclaims itself,

For it bears the signature of every human being.

The great shofar is sounded;  
The still small voice is heard,  
And all who dwell on earth  
Stand arrayed before You.

As a shepherd seeks out his flock,  
and makes his sheep pass under his staff,  
So do You muster, number and inspect  
The souls of all the living,  
setting an end to every creature's life,  
And decreeing its destiny.

But repentance, prayer and good deeds  
Annul the severity of the judgement.

(U-n'taneh Tokef prayer used on High Holy Days. Early Mediaeval.)

\*\*\*\*

Rabbi Azariah in the name of Rabbi Judah ben Simon said: "When the Israelites do God's will, they add to the power of God on high. When the Israelites do not do God's will, they, as it were, weaken the great power of God on high. (Lamentations Rabba)

\*\*\*\*

"The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount." (Deut. 5, 4.) Rabbi Jonanan said: "A thousand people look at one statue and each say: "It is at me that the statue is looking." So God looks at every single Israelite, and says: "I am the Lord *thy* God." (speaking to him personally and not using 'your' as to a group of people.) Rabbi Levi said: "You can learn the same lesson from everyday life. One voice can enter ten ears, but ten voices can not enter one ear. Yet God hears the prayers of all His creatures as if they were one prayer, as it says 'O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee does all flesh come.' (Psalm 65,2.) It does not say 'prayers' but 'prayer'. (Pesikta Rabbati)

\*\*\*\*

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul;  
He leads me in right paths for His name's sake.  
Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for You are with me.  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.  
(Psalm 23.)

## 10. WHAT IS MAN?

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your Fingers,  
The moon and stars which You have established,  
What is man, that You are mindful of him,  
And the son of man, that You have regard for him?  
Yet You have made him little less than divine,  
And You have crowned him with glory and honour.  
You have given him dominion over the work of Your hands,  
You have set all things under his feet.*

These are the words of the eighth psalm. When we look at man's position in the universe, we can see that he is very special. It is not only because we are human, and therefore regard ourselves as important, that we say this. When we try to take an objective view of ourselves, we must conclude that we are able to think and to communicate in ways that other creatures can not. The fact that I am writing these words down and at a later time you can read them and understand my communicate. We humans are the species that has learnt to shape the world in which we live to a greater extent than any other creature. Birds build nests, beavers build dams and ants organise colonies; but none of these is as sophisticated as a modern city, nor can their work compare to the technology and skills of the human race. We have discovered many scientific marvels, although as yet we do not always use our knowledge in the best ways. It is not only our human skills that matter, but also the moral judgement which governs how we use those skills. The fact that our generation questions the direction in which civilisation is going, indicates that man has been given not only an ability to shape the world around him, but also a mind and a moral judgement which enables him to assess the ethical and moral quality of his actions. As far as we know, no other creature makes this kind of self-judgement.

### **IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.**

The Bible tells us that "God created man in His own image" and continues "Male and female created He them." (Genesis 1, 27) We are made "in the image of God" or as the psalmist says "little less than divine", because we have a little of God's divine spirit inside us. We can appreciate the goodness of God and so we can be influenced to seek the higher things of life. We do not only seek to satisfy our animal desires. We are part of the animal kingdom, and yet there is more than just animal in our make-up.

There is a Midrash on Genesis 2, 7, which tells how God made man out of the dust of the earth and breathed into it and so created Adam. The Midrash says that God took dust from different places on earth and that some was brown, some was black, some was white and some was yellow, and this taught that all the different races are really part of one human race. The Midrash also says that God took some soil from off the Temple Mount in Jerusalem to show that in man's make-up there is also a spiritual part (Targum Jonathan). The Hebrew word used for the 'breath of life' which God breathed into man's nostrils is 'neshamah'. This word also means 'soul'

### **WHAT IS MEANT BY SOUL.**

The spiritual part of man was originally called in English 'soul'; but the word 'spirit' is probably better. The word 'soul' seems to be going out of date, and is rarely used in normal

speech. However, we do use the word 'spirit' in a number of senses. We might say that someone 'showed a lot of spirit' or that someone else had 'the spirit of adventure' or that an army had 'a good fighting spirit'. Each of these refers to something intangible inside people, which led them to take a particular attitude or to do some special thing. This would make us think of the soul or spirit as some intangible part in us which influences us to think, feel or act in certain ways. Judaism has spoken of the soul as the divine part in man. We may also regard the spirit as the important part in us, which makes us the individual we are. It is the key to our personality. In colloquial speech the spirit of a person is his essential character, and we would agree that our spirit is the essential part of a human being. The more developed the soul, the more human we are; and the more 'soulless' we are, the more inhuman we become.

In the past, Judaism has also gone on to teach that the spiritual part in us, because it is divine in origin, is the part in us which seeks God and which enables us to contact Him and be influenced by Him. Today, many, who see God influencing us through our reason and our conscience, might go on to see these as the sphere of the spirit. Inevitably, the soul or spirit is hard to define because it is spiritual. Any medical man who says that he has dissected many human bodies but has never discovered a soul in any of them, is making two false assumptions. Firstly, he is apparently looking for a material soul with a shape and physical characteristics. It is as if he were searching for God by seeking to see His shape or form or by looking to see where God lived. The soul being something divine has no shape or form and by definition is pure spirit. His second mistake is to search for a soul in a corpse. The spirit or soul is connected with life and a living person. The spirit only exists in a body during the body's lifetime. At death it leaves the body and returns to God. So even if it were possible to see someone's spirit, it would never be found in a corpse after death.

### ***THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT.***

Christianity, the daughter religion of Judaism, seeing that the soul was divine and the body as human, put forward what seems to us to be a rather unhealthy idea of body and spirit. In the New Testament Paul speaks of "sinful flesh" (Romans 9, 3.) and in his letter to the Galatians lists many things as "works of the flesh" amongst these he puts: immorality, licentiousness, idolatry, envy, jealousy, anger, selfishness, drunkenness, etc. He contrasts these with "the fruits of the spirit", which he says are such things as: love, joy, peace, kindness, etc. (Galatians, 5, 17 - 20.)

Judaism does not teach that the flesh is sinful or that the desires of the flesh are necessarily wrong or evil. By itself, the body is neither sinful nor pure, it is the physical shell which houses our spiritual selves. We may use that body either to sin or to do as God wishes. Because we are part of the animal kingdom and are descended from more primitive animals, we have within us certain animal characteristics and desires. These desires are not all evil. Our sexual desires, in so far as they lead to the creation of a family and to the continuance of the human race, can clearly be seen to be good. Our appetite for food and drink, if taken in moderation, are necessities of life, and must be seen as being in accordance with God's will. The satisfaction of all these desires must be governed by certain rules of conduct. These rules are clearly laid down in Judaism in the Torah with its later interpretations. Paul was right to say that the satisfaction of these desires CAN lead to sinful ends; but he was not right to say that they MUST ALWAYS be regarded as sinful.

## ***THE TWO IMPULSES.***

The Jewish view of man is that he has within him conflicting impulses - an impulse to do good and an impulse to do evil. In Hebrew, Yetser Ha-Tov and Yetser Ha-Ra. The Rabbis refer to a verse in the Bible to back up this idea. "What does it mean when it said: 'Then the Lord formed (VAYYITSER) man', and spelled it with two Hebrew letter yods? When the Holy One, Blessed be He, created man, He made him with two impulses (yetser), one good and one evil." (Berachot 61a.) This teaching does not correspond with the Christian concept of body and spirit, for in Judaism both the impulses are of the body. These impulses were seen as things inside us rather than as outside forces working upon us. The most important teaching was that man has a choice whether to follow these impulses or to reject them. So man is not made good or evil, he has to choose the right path for himself. The choice is seen as a real one. Neither impulse has control over us, we decide which to follow. In interpreting Genesis 4, 7: "If you do not do well, sin lies at the door; and its desire shall be towards you, but you can rule over it." Rashi says that this refers to the Yetser Ha-Ra; the evil inclination, which is continually trying to make you sin, nevertheless you may rule over it, if you desire to.

The impulse to do evil does not always lead to bad results. For in a comment on the verse: "And God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good." (Genesis 1, 31.) The Rabbis point out that this was said after the creation of man, and so must refer to both his impulses. "But," they ask, "is the impulse to do evil really very good?" They answer: "Were it not for the evil impulse, man would not build a house, marry a wife, beget children or conduct business affairs." (Genesis Rabba)

It is also taught that we may serve God with our evil impulse. In a commentary on Deuteronomy 6, 5. "And you shall love the Lord with all your hear (levavecha)." It was asked why the word levavecha was written rather unusually with two letter bets? To which the answer was given that the two bets stood for the two impulses which were in our hearts. (Sifre quoted by Rashi) This therefore means that we should love or serve God with the impulse to do evil as well as with our impulse to do good. How can we do this? We can control that impulse and use it for good ends. The Rabbis pointed out that acquisitiveness was seen to be the result of selfish desires and so was attributed to the Yetser Ha-Ra. But, they said, when a man marries, he uses that acquisitiveness to provide for the needs of his wife and children, and so was turning the Yetser Ha-Ra to good ends.

So far, like the news media, we have paid most attention to the Yetser Ha-Ra; but we should not take the Yetser Ha-Tov for granted. The Yetser Ha-Tov helps us to improve the quality of our own lives and also spurs us on to care for others. When we follow this inclination we are co-operating with God to make ourselves and the world a little better.

## **11. REWARD AND PUNISHMENT.**

### ***WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER?***

Several times the writer of the book of Proverbs asks the question: "Why do the wicked prosper?" This question has produced many answers. The book of Job in the Bible provides several such answers. The book makes it clear that Job, an exceedingly good man, is made to suffer because it was God's way of testing him and finding out how loyal he really was. This is an answer which is not easy for us to accept, because we feel ourselves to be rather more than just experiments in God's hands. (but see fuller explanation on P. 55.)

Elsewhere in the book, Job is shown to be not sufficiently humble, for he questions God's actions, and therefore it implies that Job deserved some punishment. Another answer is found in the passage which says that God knows much more than we humans know, and so He can be just, and yet because of our ignorance, appear to us to be unjust. This last answer teaches a more tolerant approach to our fellow men. For if we get to know people properly, we find that everyone has in them some good. Therefore someone who seems to us to be totally evil, may have good characteristics about which we are unaware. Yet another answer is that in our eyes the wicked may seem to prosper, but we do not see all their lives. The criminal who gets away with the proceeds of his fraud or robbery, may be punished by not being happy with his ill-gotten gains. He may be plagued by a guilty conscience or be continually looking over his shoulder to see whether the law is catching up on him. Certainly, he will feel less pride and satisfaction than someone who has earned his wealth by hard work. In this way, too, we may not always see a full picture, when we are but casual observers.

After the Bible was completed, the Jews developed various sects. One of these was the Pharisees. They solved the problem by saying that we should not look to see reward and punishment only in this life. They taught about life after death and developed the idea of reward and punishment occurring after death, when we would be judged for our actions. From this idea, the Christians and Muslims developed their mediaeval concepts of heaven and hell. Although there were some Jews in the middle ages who spoke of heaven and hell, this idea never attained the importance which it still has in parts of these religions.

Perhaps the best answer to the problem of rewards and punishments occurs in the saying of ben Azzai in Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) where he says: "The reward for doing a mitsvah (commandment) is another mitsvah and the punishment for a sin is another sin." (Avot 4, 2.) By this he meant that if we sin once, it is just that much easier to do the same thing again. And so we drop our standards and descend to a lower kind of life. While one good action performed makes it easier to do another and leads to self-improvement and a greater satisfaction in life.

We must ultimately admit however, that we do not know the answer to the problem with any certainty, and that perhaps the book of Job was right to say that we are not able to know all the answers. Therefore for our own peace of mind it would be better for us to trust the God of Justice to be just.

### ***THE SINS OF THE FATHERS -***

The Bible contains within it different attitudes to reward and punishment. The Ten

Commandments which are very old, speak of God "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto the thousandth generation of them that love Me and keep My commandments." (Exodus 20, 5-6) However in Deuteronomy 24, 16, which is probably rather later, it says: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers, every man shall be put to death for his own sin." The same point of view is expressed by the prophet Ezekiel who poses the question that if there is a wicked man who wrongs the poor or steals and this man has a son who sees all the evil that the father has done and yet remains honest and upright, will he be punished for his father's sins? Ezekiel answers his own question by saying: "The person that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." (Ezekiel 18, 2-20.) This passage clearly teaches that we must each take responsibility for our own actions. The mediaeval Rabbinic commentators like Rashi say that the Ten Commandments should be understood to say that God "will visit the iniquity of the father's example and also hate God; and that He shows mercy to the thousandth generation if they continue to "love God and keep His commandments." This interpretation reverses the original meaning in line with Deuteronomy and Ezekiel, for by this explanation, each generation is responsible for their own sins.

The idea of responsibility for sin carries with it the need for repentance and atonement. For this reason, we have a penitential period of the year, ending with the Day of Atonement. The Ezekiel passage continues: "But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all My statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live." (Ezekiel 18, 21-22)

### ***COMMUNAL RESPONSIBILITY.***

Besides the individual's responsibility for his own actions, we must remember that as individuals we belong to groups, such as our religious group, our political party, our town, our country, our firm, our club, etc. If that group takes an action, we are linked with that action because we are part of the group, and we bear some of the responsibility for the rightness or wrongness of that deed. The amount of responsibility will depend on the amount that each person can influence the decision. In a democratic country an elector is more responsible for his country's actions than someone under a totalitarian regime, which is not influenced by public opinion.

We may illustrate communal responsibility with the case of a country declaring war. The citizens of that country must then expect to suffer from the effects of their country's action. Sadly, when evil is done, sometimes the innocent are made to suffer. So in war there are often civilian casualties. If the country chose to go to war rather than solve their dispute by diplomatic negotiations, then those civilians share in their country's guilt. Their deaths were a direct result of national decisions, and we can regard them as a kind of punishment. It is not a punishment brought on from outside, so much as an evil deed bringing with it its own punishment. What is more difficult to understand is when those who die are not from the aggressor nation. The problem of this kind of suffering is discussed in chapter 13.

## 12. LIFE AFTER DEATH.

### ***BELIEFS OF THE PAST***

The Jewish teachings about what happens to us after death have changed over the centuries. The Bible is not very clear on the subject. In several places people are described as "sleeping with their fathers," (Deuteronomy 31, 16.) and in other places as "going down to Sheol." (Job 21, 13.) Sheol was thought to be a shadowy place somewhere under the earth, and was described as "the land of gloom and deep darkness, the land of gloom and chaos, where light is darkness." (Job 10, 22.) Although all souls or spirits went down to Sheol and so were reunited with the souls of dead relatives, they were thought to sleep there in darkness for ever "till the heavens are no more, they shall not wake, nor be aroused out of their sleep." (Job 14, 12.)

We also find references to some kind of future life. "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol, and brings up again." (1 Samuel 2, 6.) During the period of the later books of the Bible we find beliefs beginning to change. At this period, they start putting forward the idea that as reward for good and punishment for evil did not always seem to take place in our lifetime, they must occur after death. So the Book of Daniel states: "And many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life; and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12, 2.) The books written immediately after the Bible contain firm teachings about life after death, saying that the good will be rewarded. In the Apocrypha, we find the story of Hannah and her seven sons, who chose martyrdom for Judaism, because they believed that they would be rewarded after death. (2 Maccabees Ch. 7.)

At this time, the Pharisees differed with the Saducees. Both were sects of Jews, but the former believed in life after death and in resurrection, while the Saducees rejected a belief in both. This is an example from our history which shows that variations of belief and practice can exist side by side in Judaism. It was the Pharisaic teachings of life after death which were taken over into Christianity, when shortly after, that religion was started.

Reward and punishment were achieved by the righteous going to the Garden of Eden and the wicked going to Gehinom (the valley of Hinom, outside Jerusalem). This was seen by some as the entrance to Sheol. However, the Talmudic Rabbis said that no one stayed in Gehinom for more than twelve months. (Rosh Ha-Shanah 17a.)

The Rabbis made a distinction between 'Ha-Olam Ha-Ba' (the World to Come), which was existence after death, and 'Atid La-vo' (the Ultimate future), when the Messiah would eventually come and resurrect the dead. At times the Rabbis could be very specific about these beliefs. They said that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem by a certain gate and that the resurrection would occur then. They considered the plight of those who died outside Israel, and said that tunnels would open up under the ground and that the corpses would roll along these until they reached the Holy Land, where they would be resurrected. (Palestinian Talmud, Ketubot 35a.)

Some Jews who lived in the East, were influenced by the teachings of the surrounding religions, and began to believe that our souls went back to occupy the bodies of other human beings or even animals. This idea runs into difficulties with the growth of populations, for where do the extra souls required come from? This idea of a re-use of souls never became widespread in Judaism.

## ***A MODERN VIEW.***

Judaism is a religion which is concerned with life more than with death. The Jewish teachings about death receive little emphasis. Consequently, we would find quite a variety of beliefs among modern Jews. They would range from a rejection of any belief in life after death through to people who believe in the Garden of Eden and Gehinom.

Probably, most Jews would reject both extremes. It would seem unlikely that God, who seems to have taken so much care over the creation of the universe, would give us life with nothing to follow it. It seems equally unlikely that any existence which we have after death is physical. It is clear that our material body is either buried or cremated and does not continue as it did in life. The only part that can continue to exist is our spirit or soul. This is entirely spiritual and so any existence must also be spiritual too. The Garden of Eden and Gehinom are seen as physical places for a physical life, and therefore few people now believe in them.

We can not know for certain what kind of existence there is after death, because few or none return to tell us about it. Remembering how the book of Genesis told how Adam was formed from dust, Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) said: "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12, 7.) This puts forward the positive idea that the spirit, the part of man made in the image of God, eventually returns to God and is reunited with Him. As all spirits do the same, we become united with the spirits of our loved ones. This reuniting with God means that the restless spirit, which in its life in the body was always searching for answers, will after death be reunited with the God of Truth, and so will be at peace, with all questions answered. Certainly, all agree that any existence after death will be tranquil and peaceful, without any of the worries, cares or pains of this world carried over into the spiritual world of the next.

The concept of reward and punishment; which played so great a part in mediaeval Christianity as heaven and hell, was hardly taught in Judaism. The main problem of sorting people into black and white is that most of us are grey. No one is totally evil without any redeeming features, no do we know of anyone who is totally good without any blemishes. So everyone would merit some reward and some punishment. The concept of an everlasting hell is not acceptable, if we believe in a just and merciful God.

## ***A MODERN VIEW OF RESURRECTION.***

Today, there are relatively few Jews who believe in a resurrection of the body when the Messiah comes. We know that the atoms of our physical body do get transformed into earth or dust, and we can not see any likelihood of them being reformed into our body again at any future time. If we think about it, our bodily shell is scarcely worth resurrecting; for the essential part in us, the part that really makes us what we are, is spiritual. We can visualise the continued existence of the spirit, but not of the body. Because of this, we have had to alter certain prayers in our prayer books to reflect this modern belief. In one of the blessings of the Amidah we have taken out the words referring to God as "M'chayei ha'metim" (who gives life to the dead) and have replaced it with another old phrase "Chayei olam nata b'tochenu" (who has planted within us eternal life.)

A second practical result of not believing in bodily resurrection is that it is no longer necessary to insist on burial of the body. Liberal and Reform Judaism see nothing wrong with cremation. It was occasionally practised in Biblical times (1 Samuel 31, 12-13; Amos 6, 10 & Jeremiah 34, 4-5.) The main concern now is that we should show respect to the dead and to the body itself, and cremation is often more respectful to the dead than some

burials. Similarly, the ultra-Orthodox concern for avoiding autopsies is not shared by those who believe in a spiritual existence after death only. Neither would we raise any objections to those Jews who wish to leave some of their organs for transplanting after death. If we no longer believe in resurrection of the body, then neither autopsies nor transplants are seen to be wrong; but instead may well help to relieve suffering in others.

## ***FORMS OF SPIRITUAL EXISTENCE.***

Up to now, we have referred to a spiritual existence, where the spirit returns to God. We may wonder whether the spirit does not in some circumstances remain with us on earth. Many people who have experienced the death of someone close to them, will tell you that they have felt the presence of their spirit, often long after death. Such a spiritual presence is always reported as beneficial. People are at first awed by it, but not frightened. Apart from this very personal experience of the spirit of a loved one, the continued influence of the spirit of the dead may take many forms:-

When a composer, a painter or an author dies, their creative work survives them. Their spiritual ideas are with us in the work that survives. A stone mason may achieve the same effect with a building that he has helped to make, a cabinet maker with a piece of furniture, and so on. We can all live on through our creative work. The more of ourselves that we put into our work, the more our spirit survives in that work. Perhaps this is what the Psalmist meant by the verse: "Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands." (Psalm 90, 17.)

Parents who put their ideas across to children, have a strong influence upon them. In a sense they have passed over some of their spirit to them. When the parent dies, the children can preserve their ideals or values and often many of their mannerisms. In a real sense, we continue to exist spiritually in our children; but it does not stop at one generation. For these children may well pass on some of these things to their children, and so on.

Following on from this, we can derive other ways in which our spirit can continue in this world. Firstly it does not have to be a parent-child relationship which produces this effect. The teacher-child relationship is probably just as strong in influence; but anyone who passes on to someone else an idea or an ideal, by word of mouth or by example, can have similar influence after their death. Every day, in our contacts with other people, we are doing just this. As we learn from other people, they learn from us. We all preserve a little of the spirit of the people that we meet. Sometimes we pass on some of that spirit to yet other people. It is rather like the ripple effect when a pebble falls into a pond, spreading outwards from the source. Some of us make a bigger splash than others. Those with a stronger personality or a greater spirit will naturally affect people more. On a mundane level we may understand the idea better if we consider a member of a family getting out of bed the wrong side. One tetchy member of the family can pass on his tetchyness and make everyone miserable; but equally, a cheery smile may brighten up someone else's day and they may well pass it on to someone whom the first person never sees.

Another way in which our spirit lives on is when we are part of a group - a Synagogue, a club, a political party, a social group, a committee or something else of this nature. If we participate actively in such a group, we give some of ourselves - some of our spirit. What we have given does not cease at our death, it may continue long afterwards. When that group survives, a part of us survives too. As Jews, we are very conscious that we are part of the Jewish people. Part of our spiritual survival is linked up with the continuing existence of the Jewish people. To the next generation, our generation will be seen as part of their

heritage and their tradition. The more that each of us contributes to the Jewish people's survival, the greater will be their heritage and the greater will be the influence of our spirit.

## ***SPIRITUALISM***

There are those who believe that the spirit of the dead can be summoned with the help of a medium to communicate with the living. Such people, usually called Spiritualists, have been known at times to use trickery to produce their effects; while on the other hand other people have received genuine messages through mediums at seances, which have helped them considerably.

In the Bible, there is an account which tells how King Saul made the witch of Endor raise the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel. (1 Samuel Ch. 28.) The spirit of Samuel seemed rather reluctant to appear; but eventually did so. Elsewhere, there are other passages which make it clear that a Jew is forbidden to consult ghosts or familiar spirits. (Deuteronomy 18, 11.) This may have been because the priests of the surrounding nations often used to do this. Today, many Spiritualists also seem linked to a branch of the Christian Church.

Certain bereaved people feel tempted to seek out their loved ones through Spiritualists. This is not a wise thing to do, because, while we are emotionally upset, we can easily be taken in by a false medium. It would be far more sensible for such a person to think about their dead friend, remember their words and deeds, and to try to continue their aims and purposes in life. By living in the way that they would have wanted, we can feel ourselves close to them and can also feel their spirit close to us. In fact we will be enabling their spirit to live on through us.

Judaism's emphasis upon life has meant that although we should remember the dead and mourn for them once the period of mourning is over, we should try to start leading our own lives again without them, but in a way that they would have wanted.

## ***REPORTS OF THOSE WHO CAME BACK?***

A few years ago, Dr. Raymond Moody published a book called 'Life After Life', in which he recorded interviews with medical patients who had suffered a "heart-death" and had been revived, or with people who had come close to death in other ways. He found that their accounts of their experiences were remarkably similar. He put these together in one general picture as follows:

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance; as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.

After a while he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a "body," but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm spirit of a kind he has never encountered before - a being of light - appears before him. This being asks him a question, non-verbally, to make

him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to the earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love, and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.

This is a general statement, other reports quoted are more personal accounts. They appear to ring true; but, we must be careful how we regard them. We should remember that none of these people actually died by having a "brain-death", and to that extent their reports may not be a death experience. However, they appear to be about as near to such an experience as we can get, and they are remarkable in their unanimity of experience, and they may therefore help us to understand death a little better. The reports that the patient felt that he was watching his own body from the outside and from a distance, sounds like the spirit being separated from the body. The part that did the watching was the essential part, while the body was lying there as an inert shell. It seems to be describing the independent separate existence of the spirit.

The report also contained the ideas of meeting with loved ones, reuniting with God (the light), and it speaks of intense feelings of joy, love and peace. Patients with whom this author has spoken have told him of similar experiences to those in Dr. Moody's book. This book does not prove anything about life after death; but at the very least it reveals what people think subconsciously about death, and at best it can help us to understand the nature of the spirit of man a little better.

### ***A THOUGHT ON DEATH.***

"If there is to be birth, there must be death. Unless there were departures, a time would quickly come when there would be no arrivals, since the area of the finite earth would be filled. We can imagine a world in which there was neither birth of death; but not a world in which there was one without the other.

If some Messenger were to come to mankind with the offer that death should be overthrown, but with one inseparable condition that birth should also cease; if the existing generation were given the chance to live for ever, but on the clear understanding that never again would there be a child, or a youth or a girl, or adolescent love, never again new persons with new hopes, new ideas, new achievements: ourselves for always and never any other - and if the answer to that Messenger were to be given by the light of dispassionate reason, could there be a doubt what it would be?"

(Viscount Herbert Samuel, 'Belief and Action.' as quoted in the Memorial Service for Yom Kippur in Gate of Repentance.)

### **13. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL.**

There are some things in religion which are still puzzles, for which we have only partial answers. One of these is the problem of evil. The question is, if God made the world, why did He not make it without evil and suffering? Various answers have been given to this question, and the best way to begin is to look at certain specific problems.

#### ***EARTHQUAKES.***

Let us first look at an earthquake which suddenly occurs in an area, destroying the houses in towns and villages, often killing many people. An insurance company may call it 'an act of God'. Certainly, if God is the Creator of the world, He must have build in earthquakes when He created it.

An earthquake results from the movement of tectonic plates in or near the earth's surface. A small movement of these vast areas of the earth's surface can cause a large earthquake. This movement occurs as a result of natural forces in the earth's crust. It is not a sudden capricious act of fate, nor is it God bringing punishment for some wrong that has been done, as people used to believe.

If we look at other natural events which have been regarded in a similar way, it will help us to see what our view of earthquakes should be. Another phenomenon which frightened early man in a similar way was lightening. An early theory was that it was the god Jove in a rage, hurling thunderbolts upon his enemies. Today, most school children learn that lightening is the discharge of electricity in an electrical storm and that thunder is the sound of that discharge. We no longer see it as the wrath of a god or gods. More than this, now that science has explained the phenomenon, man has learnt to protect his most important buildings with lightening conductors, and so, much of the danger of lightening destroying buildings can be avoided. Nor does a thunderstorm take us by surprise as it used to do, the weather forecasts often warn us of the likelihood of a thunder storm long before it is due.

In many ways the earthquake is similar to lightening; but our knowledge of earthquakes is not as complete as the knowledge of electrical storms. We know the areas where earthquakes are likely to take place; but the one important thing that we can not yet do, is to predict exactly when and where any one earthquake will occur. Scientists have been able to identify some early signs of an impending earthquake, and it seems that it is only a matter of time before this work is sufficiently far advanced for them to give warnings of earthquakes in the same way that they can predict thunderstorms.

We might therefore say that the main reason why earthquakes still take human life is that our ignorance does not let us predict a quake sufficiently early or sufficiently accurately so that we can evacuate the danger area before they take place.

#### ***CANCER.***

The second example, cancer, is a disease feared by many to such an extent that they find it hard to talk about. It is thought to be an evil because of the pain and suffering associated with it and because it usually grows hidden from the human eye. In the popular mind it is also feared because it is supposed to be incurable. In fact, some cancers can now be cured completely, others are controllable and yet others can be partially controlled so that the patient can lead a normal life for many years. However, the present state of medical

knowledge does not permit us to say that we can control or cure all cancers. Much research is being carried out on the disease and hopeful signs are occasionally found, so that most doctors say that sooner or later we will be able to cure all cancers.

A generation ago, tuberculosis was spoken of in the same hushed tones, because at that time it was a dreaded disease. We have learnt to treat it, and few people die of T.B. today. It seems that, like an earthquake, the evil of cancer still exists because of our ignorance of how to cure all cancers.

### ***IMPERFECT BABIES.***

The third example of evil is that of babies being born with congenital illnesses or deformities which cripple them mentally or physically. There are various causes for these conditions. Some are inherited diseases and in those cases, it is the parents who take a risk of handing on the disorders when they plan to have a baby. In some instances they are unaware of the risk; but in others they do know, yet fail to prevent the birth by contraception. In other cases it is the medical profession who fail to diagnose the condition before birth or who fail to advise or perform an abortion in time. In all of these cases, we could say that they were at least partially caused by the actions or inactions of men and women.

There are, however, a series of conditions which result from chance defects in the genes. Some of these are as yet unpredictable or unidentifiable before birth. For these, our ignorance is again the cause.

There is still the question of why these defects in the genes should occur at all. The theory of evolution tells of occasional slight variations of genes which cause small or large changes in the species. If the variation is beneficial, then the variant survives and may help others to survive; but if it is bad it will not be passed on and soon die out. These defects in the genes are the price we must pay for having progress in evolution. Looked at individually they seem to be evil; but taking a broad view, they can be seen to be part of a larger picture, which is on the whole good, because it leads to progress and advancement in the evolution of the human race.

### ***THE HOLOCAUST.***

The fourth example, which troubled many people who lived through it, is the Holocaust. They ask how was it that God let so many Jews, Gypsies and other people die in concentration camps? One is left wondering what they expected God to do. Was He expected to perform a modern miracle? Was the earth expected to open and swallow up the S.S. guards as the Bible said it swallowed up Korach? (Numbers 16, 32.) As many people do not believe that miracles against the laws of nature occurred in Biblical times, it would follow that they would not expect such miracles to take place in the 20th century. (see pages 27-8)

In the revelation given to man God has made it clear that it is morally wrong to oppress minority groups (Exodus 22, 21.), that one should not kill (Exodus 20, 13.) and that if you have a servant working for you, you should treat him well. (Deuteronomy 24, 14.) God also taught that justice, freedom and mercy should be practised by men on earth. So that when the Nazis herded Jews into concentration camps and tried to exterminate them systematically from off the face of the earth, they were not acting on behalf of God; but were deliberately defying God and going against His teachings. When the German people voted the Nazis into power on an anti-Semitic platform, when the nations of the world

stood by doing nothing, and failed to stop the Nazi persecution of the Jews, treating Nazi Germany as a civilised humane country, trading with them and sending teams to the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936, then the peoples of the those countries shared the responsibility by aiding the Nazis by their action or inaction as the case may be. When eventually a few countries like Britain and France decided that aggression and injustice had gone far enough and that evil had to be destroyed, and when they finally listened to the ideals of God's teachings and were prepared to stand up and fight for them, then a war began which eventually brought an end to the injustice, the race hatred and finally to the Holocaust itself. It was only when people followed God's teachings that the evil was eventually destroyed. God's teachings were there all the time, it was men who failed to live by them. The evils of Nazism came about not because of God; but because of man's failure to listen to the teachings of God.

Many other cases of man's inhumanity to man, which we can see in the world are due to the same reason. If people would only treat each other as God has taught them to, then much of the evil and much of the suffering would not exist. When someone goes against God's teachings by robbing, fighting, killing, swindling or many other crimes, then innocent victims have to suffer from the results of the evil that has been done. If a group of people deliberately create an unjust society, where freedom is curtailed or where race-hatred is fostered and persecution is practise, then the persecuted, the oppressed and the under-privileged will suffer for the evils of that society. Whether it is an individual, the society or the state who does the evil, we should not blame God. It is clearly the fault of the people concerned who have failed to listen to God's teachings.

### ***OTHER EVILS OF THE WORLD.***

The examples which have been quoted show that many of the evils which we blame on God are due either to man's ignorance or to his deliberate turning away from God's teachings. These are just four examples, they do not provide a complete answer to the problem. There are many other evils which are built into the world around us and which have been there since the creation. What can we say about those evils which can not be explained by similar reasoning?

1. We must realise that what seems evil to us, may not really be so. Some people would say that death is an evil. Others would reply that life without death would be a greater evil with its interminable boredom. And yet others would reply that existence after death makes death just a transition to a better state. (see chapter 12.)
2. There are many events which looked at in a narrow view appear evil; but when looked from a distance are seen to be part of a larger canvas which is generally good. The problem of mutations which cause congenital disorders, which is mentioned above, is an example of this.
3. If however, our minds were incapable of visualising this larger picture, then something might appear evil to us, which in reality was part of something good. To the All-knowing God something may be good and beneficial, which seems to our limited minds to be evil. As Isaiah said in God's name: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, My ways, saith the Lord." (Isaiah 55, 8.) If we believe that God is good, then we must trust that He knows what He is doing, even if we can not always understand it.
4. Another idea is that some of the things which are thought to be evil, are there to test us. This is the theme of the book of Job. Many people only reveal their true character in the face of difficulties. We would not know of their bravery or courage if they had not had to

face evil or suffering. It is well-known, for example, some of the greatest works of art were the result of anguish, suffering or the facing of evil.

This idea, that some of the evil is there to test us, may help us to understand another query. It is all very well to explain that the suffering from earthquakes and cancer is due to man's present ignorance; but one can ask further why was there any need to create them at all? Carried to its logical conclusion, we should ask why could the world not have been all-good and all-perfect? If we had been placed in such a perfect world, we would have been happy for a time, like the legend of Adam in the Garden of Eden (Genesis Ch. 3.); but soon it would have become an empty, purposeless existence. If there were no problems to solve, no difficulties to overcome, no wrongs to right and no new facts to discover, life would be very dull, boring and pointless.

These thoughts about the problem of evil are very far from being the complete answer. They are just a few suggested solutions to a few problems. Ultimately, the only answer is to

say that the human mind can not fully understand the purposes of God, and so some problems may never be solved by man. This brings us back to trusting God to be concerned with total good, even it at times it seems to us as if certain things were evil. This apparently is the conclusion of the book of Job, for after God has revealed some of His greatness to Job, in chapters 40 and 41 Job admits: "I know that You can do all things and that no purpose can be withheld from You. Who is he who hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore have I uttered things which I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." (Job 42, 2-3.)

## 14. FREE WILL OR FATE.

### ***THE TALE OF RABBI AKIVA.***

Once when Rabbi Akiva was travelling, he arrived at a certain town and looked for lodgings for the night; but at every house he called he was turned away. Resignedly, he said: "Whatever the All-merciful does is for good," and he went and spent the night out in a field. He had with him an ass, a cockerel and a lamp. A gust of wind blew out the lamp, a weasel came and ate the cockerel and a lion came and ate the ass. Rabbi Akiva still said "Whatever the All-merciful does is for good." That same night, brigands attacked the town and carried off many who lived there. The next day, realising that the noise of the cockerel or of the ass and the light from the lamp would each have given away his position, Rabbi Akiva went back into the town and said to the survivors "Did I not tell you 'Whatever the All-merciful does is for good?'" (Berachot 60b.)

The Talmud does not tell us whether the surviving inhabitants appreciated his remarks. This story is told to illustrate the fact that some things which seem at the time to be evil, may in the end turn out to have a good purpose. The Talmud was saying that the killing of the two animals and the extinction of the lamp happened in order that the life of Rabbi Akiva could be preserved. There is also a hint that the attack on the town may have been a punishment for the inhabitants refusing hospitality to the Rabbi. So the story suggests that there is retribution and there is a destiny or fate which rules our affairs.

This idea of fate has been held by people in all generations. For some, it was an impersonal fate, and for others like the Rabbis of the Talmud, it was God who ruled our destinies. More recently, it has been suggested that a belief in fate or destiny is an idea which grew up because people could not explain the events which happened to them. We now recognise that our world is one of cause and effect; but we also see that there are some things whose effect is so difficult to predict that we regard them as random, for example when we flick a coin to choose ends at the start of a football match. There are also certain things in nature which are called random behaviour as they too are unpredictable

In the story of Rabbi Akiva, if there was a strong wind that night, then there was always a chance that the light would blow out. In those times lions and weasels were not uncommon in the area, and there were quite a number of robber bands who attacked towns and villages. The story is told to show the coincidence of all these happening together in the right sequence. That was regarded as fate. It is not quite so certain that the townspeople would have regarded the events in quite the same light, and certainly the robbers would have taken a very different view. The attack on the town was not likely to have been a chance affair. They would have met together and planned the raid in advance. As far as they were concerned in no sense was their raid a punishment for the villagers being inhospitable to Rabbi Akiva.

Just because there are events which we are unable to foretell, it does not mean that they are preordained by fate. In the case of the Rabbi Akiva story, the unknowable causes were the strength of the wind, the hunger of the lion and the weasel and most important, the plan of the robbers. All of these, apart perhaps from the strength of the wind, were unknown factors to the Rabbi or to the town's inhabitants, that is why they tended to see in them the hand of fate.

The Bible expresses different views as to whether man has free choice. For on the one hand, God hardened the heart of Pharaoh (Exodus 9, 12 etc.) so that he would not let the Israelites leave Egypt, implying that Pharaoh was not permitted to make a choice of action. Elsewhere, however, we find that at Mount Sinai, when the Israelites were frightened to approach God and actually hear His revelation, they sent Moses to bring back God's teaching. At that time God said: "Would that they had such a heart as this always, to fear Me and keep My commandments." (Deuteronomy 5, 26.) It was seen from this, that after giving the Torah, God could only hope that man obeyed His commandments. Talmudic Rabbis expressed the idea in the saying: "Everything is determined by heaven, except the fear of heaven." (Berachot 33b.)

### ***THE PARADOX.***

It is perhaps significant that it was about Rabbi Akiva that the story was told, for Rabbi Akiva took a particular interest in the problem of fate. He is quoted as saying: "All is foreseen, but freewill is given." (Avot 3, 19.) By this is meant that the All-knowing God knows everything that has happened and that will happen. To which some would ask, if God knows what will happen then we have no choice, for it has been decided in advance. Rabbi Akiva was saying that it was not decided in advance, it was only foreseen, and that we have the freedom to make real choices. He would probably have said that God knows our inner feelings so well, that he knows which way that we will choose. There are some Psychologists who would support the idea that many of our choices are predictable from a study of the individual's background, environment, upbringing and character. Despite this, we can not help feeling that we do make real choices, and that if we really want to, we can break the mould and start again in a different way.

### ***THE ANSWER.***

If then man has this free choice, does God not bring about events in the world? Many people today would not see God as sending a particular gust of wind to blow out a lamp or a certain weasel to eat the Rabbi's cockerel. The wind and the weasel are both part of God's creation. In that sense they come from God; but we find it hard to believe that they were sent on a special mission by God. God does influence the world. He does this through man. He has taught us what is right and has given us ideals of behaviour. If someone chooses to act according to the highest teachings of religion and of God, then those actions will have been caused by God's inspiration. In that case, God has caused the event to happen by showing man what was required of him, and then man has chosen to follow God's teaching.

We see from this how important our choice is. If God works in the world through men and women, then the more who listen to God's guidance and who choose to live according to His teaching, then the more that God will be influencing the world. Conversely, if people fail to make that choice, then we will be producing the Godless world, that was feared a few years ago, when they spoke of "the death of God." Of course, the everlasting God is there all the time; but His influence will not be felt in the world unless people choose to follow His teachings. Perhaps that is why the Bible reported God as hoping that the people would continue to revere Him and keep His commandments.

### ***HOROSCOPES.***

In earlier times, before the spread of modern knowledge, most people believed that fate ruled their lives. Perhaps, because the stars were apparently altering their position in heaven, they came to the conclusion that somehow the position of the stars and planets affected the events that befell us.

In Talmudic times the Rabbis referred to a Pagan as an Akum. Akum is an abbreviation of the Hebrew words Avodat Kochavim Umazalot, which means worshipping stars and constellations. The Hebrew for a constellation is Mazal. So the common expression Mazal Tov which most people use for "Good luck" means literally a good horoscope. It has therefore proved remarkably difficult to remove these superstitious ideas about fate from our religion. Despite the condemnation of the Rabbis, the Am ha-arets (the more ignorant Jew) has tended to preserve old customs and superstitions without thinking about what they really mean. We therefore find the Zodiacal signs appearing in the decoration of early Synagogues. It may be that they conveyed the idea of the cycle of the passing years rather than any astrological beliefs. To illustrate how difficult it is to remove these folk customs, just imagine how difficult it would be for Rabbis to stop congregants from calling out "Mazal Tov" when a bridegroom breaks the glass at a wedding. The persistence of such superstitions despite teachings against them can be seen from the fact that Jeremiah disapproved of Astrology as long as 2,500 years ago when he said: "Learn not the way of the nations, and do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven; even if the other nations are dismayed at them." (Jeremiah 10, 2.)

## **15. SIN, REPENTANCE AND ATONEMENT.**

### ***WHAT IS SIN?***

The word 'sin' is not used frequently in speech today, except to refer to sexual transgressions. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines sin as "a transgression of the Divine Law and an offence against God." In other words sin is doing something which God does not want us to do or not doing something which He does want us to do.

The Bible tells us that when God gave Moses the two tablets of the Law, He revealed something extra, He pronounced His holy name before Moses and said: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin; and by no means clearing the guilty ." (Exodus 34, 6-7.) This passage, in Hebrew beginning 'Adonai, Adonai', is sung on a number of occasions in the services at the High Holy Days and it also provides the source for some of the Jewish teachings about sin and atonement. It was seen as showing that God is a forgiving God and as listing three categories of sin:

PESHA (Transgression) has the meaning of rebelling; and so is used to describe a person who transgresses by deliberately rebelling against God and His teachings. If a man does not accept God or His revelation of right and wrong, and so deliberately flouts His laws, then he is a transgressor. ('Transgressor' means someone who 'goes across' rather than going along the path of God.)

AVON (iniquity or Crookedness) has the meaning of bending or twisting from the way of God. This usually refers to an action of someone who is twisted in character, so that he chooses a path which differs from the path of God. He branches off from the way.

CHET (Sin or misdemeanour) means to miss the target, and is used to describe an arrow that has not gone far enough to reach the target. (The word 'Torah' is thought to be connected with the action of shooting an arrow, and so it might be considered as the target to be aimed at.) Chet can refer to someone who is weak in himself and does not persevere in reaching his moral targets, or to someone who fails to keep on the right path through lack of effort or will-power. Most sins of omission are classed as chet.

These meanings are just guides, because, having defined them in this way, the Rabbis did not always use them with these precise meanings. However, these definitions do help us to understand the different kinds of sin.

### ***REPENTANCE***

These definitions of different kinds of sins all point to the fact that one who sins is not doing what God wants or is not living up to the highest that he can conceive. Sinning leads one away from the path which leads to God. So each time that we sin, we go further away from God and His ideals.

In previous times, they used to think that there was one right path through life that all should follow. Today, we would more probably feel that there is not just one right path; but that certain paths are better than others, and that those paths lead us nearer to God. Much of the imagery of the English language is based upon the idea of right paths. We talk of "the straight and narrow path", or "crooked", while those who do not sin are respected for being "upright citizens", they are also sometimes said "to be going straight."

The Hebrew word for repentance can be long and difficult, and can be divided into four stages:

1. **AWARENESS OF SIN.** It is first necessary for us to look at ourselves and to assess our actions, to see whether our deeds and our motives accorded with the highest teachings of Judaism. In this we need to be careful, as we tend to practise a kind of self-deception, making excuses to ourselves for wrongs that we have done.

2. **CONFESSION OF SIN.** Where we find that we have failed or done wrong, we have got to admit this to ourselves. Where the offence is against God, we should confess to God in prayer. Where the sin against God was in fact also an offence against our fellow man, then we should try to put the matter right with this person first, before confessing to God. Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah said: "For transgressions that are between man and God the Day of Atonement effects atonement; but for transgressions that are between a man and his fellow, Yom Kippur effects atonement only if he has first appeased his fellow man." (Yoma 8,9.)

3. **REGRET.** Next we should feel sorry that we have done those things that were wrong or that we failed to do the things that were right.

4. **ATONEMENT.** The last stage is a change in attitude, to resolve to do right in future. It was the Jewish philosopher Maimonides who said: "Perfect repentance is where an opportunity presents itself to the offender for repeating the offence and he refrains from committing it, because of his repentance, and not out of fear or physical inability." (Mishneh Torah.)

## **ATONEMENT.**

In Judaism, all stages of repentance and atonement are solely between a person and God. There is no one in between. Confession is not made to a Rabbi or to a Cohen (a descendant of the priesthood), but to God. At one time this was not the case. Originally atonement was made by a sin offering in the Temple. The gift of the sacrifice was made through a priest, whose task it was to actually sacrifice the animal. In the Temple on Yom Kippur, the High Priest used to make atonement on behalf of the whole House of Israel. The sins of the people were symbolically placed upon a goat, which was either pushed off a cliff or sent into the wilderness.

The goat used for carrying the sins has entered the English language as "the scapegoat". Quite apart from the cruelty to the animal involved, it is clearly an unhealthy idea. Strangely, it has survived in Judaism in a modified form. A few of the most Orthodox Jews on the afternoon of Rosh Ha-Shanah (New Year) perform a ceremony of Tashlich, when they go to a sea or a river where there are fish, and symbolically cast their sins into the water. Some throw bread crumbs onto the water. At the same time they say: "And You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7, 19.) There is also the ceremony of Kaporet, which is still observed by a few Jews today. On the eve of Yom Kippur they take a live chicken and swing it round their heads and say: "This is my substitute, this is my exchange, this is my atonement. This foul will go to death, and I shall enter on a good and long life with peace." After this they kill the chicken. This is little more than a rather barbaric superstition and some Jews today replace the chicken by money wrapped in a handkerchief. After the ceremony, they give the money to charity. Both these ceremonies are carried out by only a minority of Jews. For both Tashlich and Kaporet are to be condemned because they give the impression that a ritual act like this might free us from the responsibility for our sins and gain for us forgiveness. In reality repentance is not a

quick ritual act of the body; but a lengthy process of the heart and mind. It is interesting that Kapores is a Yiddish word not Hebrew. For this is an Ashkenazi custom (Central European) while some Sephardi Rabbis objected to it because it was not a proper form of atonement.

The reference in the ceremony of kaporet to death is linked with an old idea of how God judges us at the High Holy Days. He records our deeds throughout the year, and if He thinks us worthy, he preserves us for life, and if unworthy, he sentences us to death as a punishment. The purpose of the Kaporet was to avoid this fate by substituting the chicken's life for ours. In the U-n'tanah Tokef prayer (see page 34.), God is depicted as sitting up in heaven, noting our actions in the book of records.



The modern Jew does not see God in this way. He is certainly not keeping record books. Although we say "may you be inscribed in the book of life" as a greeting for New Year, we do not mean that we are asking God to inscribe us in His ledger book; but that we inscribe ourselves by our repentance and good deeds. Because of its old-fashioned concepts of God, the U-n'taneh Tokef was left out of the early Liberal Prayer Books for the High Holy Days. The reason why it has been put back into the Liberal 'Gate of Repentance' (page 93.), is not because we believe in that kind of judgement, that kind of punishment of that kind of fate. The sole reason it was included was for the last line, which says: "But repentance, prayer and good deeds annul the severity of the judgement." (page 94.) The repentance and prayer mentioned should take place especially during the ten penitential days and on Yom Kippur in particular. The good deeds should take place after Yom Kippur, as a result of our repentance and as a sign of our atonement.

As a result of our repentance and of our prayers on the Day of Atonement, we feel ourselves much closer to God, and our lives closer to His ideals. Lily Montagu used to say that the word 'Atonement' could be written 'at-one-ment' because at the end of the day we should feel at one with God.

## 16. PRAYER - WHY AND WHAT.

### **WHAT PRAYER DOES.**

When man first realised that there was a power in the world greater than himself, he was filled with fear. He began to want to make that power act favourably towards him, and so he started to offer sacrifices. These were made at holy places like special trees or boulders. Later, when temples were built to their gods, people continued to offer sacrifices in their new temples.

Judaism started in the same way; but gradually we began to realise that what was meant by the English word 'fear' was perhaps not the best way to describe our relationship to God. For Judaism taught love and reverence for God. The Hebrew Bible uses the phrase 'Yirat Adonai', which is usually translated as 'Fear of the Lord'; but it can equally well be translated as 'Reverence for the Lord.'

It was the Hebrew prophets who first began to question the custom of offering sacrifices. Some said that sacrifices must be offered in the right spirit. (Amos 5, 21-24; Isaiah 1, 11-17) While Hosea said: "Take with you words and turn to the Lord; say unto Him: 'Forgive all iniquity, and accept that which is good; so will we render for bullocks the offering of our lips.'" (Hosea 14,3) In the Talmud we find this verse being quoted as the basis for replacing sacrifices by services of prayer. So, once the Temple was destroyed and sacrifices were forced to stop, services of prayer were conducted in Synagogues to replace them. To this day, Synagogue services take place at the same time of day and bear the same names, as the sacrifices that used to be in the Temple. We therefore find that the main services are Shacharit (Morning), Minchah (Afternoon) and Ma-ariv (Evening).

The word 'service' literally means serving God. If you love and revere someone, then you naturally want to do what they want by serving them lovingly and by showing them respect. If we direct our thoughts towards God, then we find ourselves being influenced by Him. This influence may be of many kinds. It may be added strength or courage when faced with a difficulty, guidance to help us solve a moral problem, a sense of being surrounded by love which makes loneliness easier to bear, peace of mind or sometimes the reverse - a stirring of conscience, which makes us take a certain course of action. These and other similar feelings can come to us as a result of our prayers.

In many ages, people have felt helped by their prayers. Jeremiah said: "If you seek Me, you will find Me, if you search for Me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29, 13.) The poet Judah Ha-Levi said concerning prayer:

Longing, I sought Your presence;  
Lord, with my whole heart did I call and pray,  
And going out towards You,  
I found You coming to meet me on the way.

By which the poet meant that we could experience God in prayer, provided that we take the trouble to pray in the first place. He also meant that even though at times God seems remote and distant and impossible to reach, when he, the poet, tried to seek God in prayer, he found that God was closer than he had thought, for He seemed to be coming to meet him.

## **WHY WE STILL PRAY.**

The Jerusalem Talmud says: Consider how high God is above the world. Yet if a man enters a synagogue and stands behind a pillar and prays in a whisper, the Holy One, Blessed be He, listens to his prayer ... Can there be a God nearer than this, who is as near to His creatures as the mouth to the ear? (Berachot 9, 1.)

Those who believe that God is near to them or Immanent (see p. 10.) should have little difficulty in praying. Those who believe in God only as transcendent, as a great Force or power over and above the world, often find prayer more difficult. This is particularly so when they do not believe in a personal God.

Provided that we have some kind of a belief in God, it should be possible for us to pray. Most people who believe in God, accept that He created the universe. If we accept this, then every time that we see, hear, taste, smell or touch any created thing, which seems good or beautiful, we may well feel like wanting to thank or praise God who created it. Judaism has a long list of set blessings for special occasions or circumstances. Many of these are expressions of our feelings of gratitude to God. There are blessings to be said when we smell fragrant spices, see a shooting star, see the sea, come into the presence of a wise man or we eat a particular fruit for the first time in that year. Although we may not agree with the attitude by which these blessings become either an empty legal duty or an unthinking ritual, nevertheless we can see merit in recognising these things as part of creation and in acknowledging the fact by praising God, the Creator. This reasoning applies also to much of the daily, Sabbath and Festival services, where many of the prayers and blessings voice our thanks to God for the world which He created.

If we think of God as being ideally perfect and good, and as being the Force or Spirit in the universe leading us to ideals of goodness, then every time that we try to improve ourselves, we are trying to approach nearer to God. So prayer to a perfectly good God can help us to understand goodness better, and can also spur us on to improve ourselves and lead better lives. Many of our prayers are concerned with goodness, holiness, righteousness, truth, peace and justice, etc. Prayers on these subjects can inspire us to seek these ideals more consciously and more conscientiously.

If we believe that our power of reasoning came from God and that our conscience is, at least in part, God influencing us and inspiring us for good, then we will find that praying helps us to open up communication between God and man. When our thoughts are concentrated on the words of our prayers, our consciences may well be pricked or a train of reasoning started, which will eventually lead us to improve ourselves, our lives or the world around us.

Some people feel a little guilty when their minds begin to wander off during their prayers. They may or may not be right to feel guilty, depending on what kind of thoughts these are. If such mind-wandering leads them into further contemplation of an idea in one of the prayers, if they are thinking of ways to translate the prayer's ideals like justice, peace or freedom into practical actions to achieve these aims, or if they are worried about some problem concerning a choice of action and they look at it afresh in the light of that prayer, then this mind-wandering is a positive outcome of prayer. If, however, their thoughts are on irrelevant matters and were due to lack of concentration or to an avoidance of facing up to the ideas within those prayers, then these thoughts should be pushed out of their minds until after the time of prayers.

## **TYPES OF PRAYER.**

Most people think of prayer as asking God for something; but there are other kinds of prayer as well. Some of our prayers are still PETITIONS for one thing or another. In our prayerbooks, however, there are many prayers of PRAISE and THANKS. Every blessing which begins Baruch atah Adonai is really a praise of God. It means "You are blessed, praised or thanked O Lord." In some Liberal Jewish prayerbooks this is translated "We praise You O Lord." Often these prayers praise God for having some characteristics like 'Source of peace' or 'The Holy God.' Other prayers praise Him for having done something, for example, 'Creator of the fruit of the vine.' Very often these are prayers of thanks. On a Friday night before eating the Challah, the Sabbath loaf, we praise God for 'bringing bread from the earth.' The word lechem (bread) is also the general term for food. We are therefore praising God for creating the world so that edible things grow on the earth; but we are also thanking Him for that particular Challah and for the meal we are about to eat.

It has often been pointed out that Jewish services start with prayers of praise and thanks and only after we have said these, do we go on to make our petitions. After all, what kind of people would we be if we only prayed when we wanted to ask God for something? Looked at another way, prayers of praise help us to realise the insignificance of man and the greatness of God. Only when we appreciate our place in the universe are we really in a position to ask for something.

There is a fourth kind of prayer, which in Judaism we find most frequently round the Penitential period. These are prayers of REPENTANCE or CONFESSION. Naturally, they can also be said at other times of the year. The Hebrew word for praying is hitpalel, which is in the reflexive form. This implies looking into oneself or judging oneself.

The types of prayer described so far, are often the more formal prayers which we find in printed prayer books. There may also be informal prayers, which we make up and say from our hearts in times of emotional feeling. Prayer, as a communication with God either beyond or within us, can take many forms. Beside the four forms mentioned above there is also MEDITATION. The contemplation of ourselves and the world around us, of our place in the universe and of the Creator of that universe; all help us to feel closer or more attuned to God and His world. Meditation of this sort may take place during the silent parts of a service or it may be during some quiet moment when we are alone. Such meditation is often helped by our surroundings, a particular building, open countryside or just the sound of music. It has been suggested that our ancestors came to an understanding of God because they were often alone in the open places of the Negev or Sinai. Each person may find that something different helps him to meditate. For some it may be a sunset or the multitude of stars in the night sky, for others it may be a symphony, a picture or the words on a printed page. Such mediation is really private prayer, and it may have even more influence upon us than the more formal public worship. In the past, Judaism has tended to regard such meditation as less important than formal services at set times. However, it has always regarded the attempt to come closer to God as a required aim. So the Chasidim speak of D'vekut (cleaving to God) and they regard it as one of the aims of Jewish prayer.

## **WHAT SHOULD WE ASK FOR?**

Not all prayers are equally good. There are some things which it would be wrong to pray for. For example, it would be pointless praying for something which is impossible. Similarly, it would be wrong to ask for God to work a miracle for us. Even if we believed that God could break His own laws of nature, it would be presumptuous to expect Him to do so for

us. The Rabbis gave as an example of bad prayer that of a man who came home from work and in the distance heard a cry of pain or alarm from one of the houses in the village, but he did not know from which house it came. The man prayed: "Please God, may this not be from my house." (Berachot 54a.) This is wrong firstly, because it is a selfish prayer. If it was not from his house, then it had to be from someone else's. Secondly the Rabbis speak of it as a vain prayer because it is an impossible prayer. For when the prayer was said, the event had already taken place and God could not be expected to move the trouble from one house to another. Thirdly, many people would say that God does not interfere in this world in material things, He only affects the spiritual. Having criticised the prayer, we must however realise that this was a very natural thing to pray. It just shows how easy it is to pray for the wrong things.

If we are asking God for something, we should not ask for material benefits, we should confine our requests to spiritual and moral things. The Bible tells us how Solomon, when he became king, had a dream in which God asked him what he would like as a gift. Instead of asking for wealth or long life, he asked for wisdom to rule his people well. The Bible then says that God thought that this was a worthy prayer, and granted it. (1 Kings 3, 10ff.)

If a prayer is said which includes other people, it is clearly better than a prayer solely for oneself. For this reason, many Jewish prayers have been written using 'we' instead of 'I'.

### ***PRAYERS FOR THE SICK.***

In recent years, it has become apparent that the mind and the body are both involved in matters of health. It is now generally recognised that people can have psycho-somatic illnesses. This term means that the mind of the patient causes or brings on real physical illness or conditions. This is not just an imagined illness; but a real condition, caused by the mind. If the mind can cause an illness, then it can also help to cure it. This is certainly so of psychosomatic illnesses and it is probably so of other illnesses as well.

What effect does prayer have upon us? The early belief was that it persuaded God to take certain actions on our behalf. Today, most people would probably say that prayer alters our attitude or mood. Prayer to God can bring peace, calm, confidence, resolve, etc. from Him. If a sick person prays, it may well help the healing processes to take place inside them. For if our prayer can affect our attitude of mind, and if our mind can affect our health, it is clearly possible for prayer to aid our recovery.

At this point, it is necessary to state that prayer is only one means of helping in our cure, it is no substitute for recognised medicine. There are a few extremists in other religions who do not consult doctors, because they believe that faith and prayer are all that are necessary. God who reveals knowledge to man, has guided doctors to a greater understanding of sickness and of healing. If we reject medicine, we would be rejecting part of the knowledge that God has given to man. The ideal solution is that medicine and prayer should go side by side, for each can help the other.

As an example of the need for man to work with God, and not just to rely upon miracles alone, we find an interesting interpretation of the story of the Manna which they ate in the wilderness. It says in the book of Exodus (16, 16ff.) that although the Israelites were told to gather as much as they each required to eat, and some gathered a little and some gathered much, but when they measured it they found that each had gathered exactly an Omer per person. Commenting on this, Bachya said: "If it was always going to amount to an Omer, why were the people told to gather as much as they required?" He went on to

say "This is to teach that man must do what is necessary and not rely entirely on miracles happening for him."

So far, we have spoken about prayer by a sick person for his own recovery, what about prayers for the recovery of someone else? I personally, feel that these too can have an effect. Although it is not fully accepted by all scientists, many believe that telepathy is possible. This means that one person can convey a thought to another person without speech passing. This is particularly likely to happen when deep emotions are involved. If we pray for the recovery of a loved one, I think that it is quite likely that the sick person is subconsciously aware of our prayer. If that is so, then once our prayer is in their mind, the same process described above for prayers for our own recovery, can take place for them.

When speaking of people critically ill, it is generally recognised that it is not always possible for doctors to say whether a certain patient will or will not recover. Of two patients with a similar condition, one may live and the other may die. If asked why, some will tell you that the first patient had a greater will to live than the second. This intangible 'will to live' is perhaps the thing that is strengthened by our prayers. If the patient feels that others care, that others want them to recover and are praying for them, then they make an extra effort to get better. This is not just conjecture, there have been many cases recorded of this taking place. One can argue that this might have occurred without the prayers. No scientific tests have been carried out, because few are prepared to forgo the help of medicine, just to test the power of prayer. I therefore feel that either when the sick person is far away, or if he has lost consciousness so that normal communication is impossible, then prayer is a very real possibility to aid recovery.

We should consider what sort of prayer a sick person should say. It would be wrong to pray for a miracle and say "Please God make my illness disappear." It is only slightly better to ask God to cure the illness. Surely we should pray to God that the natural healing processes of the body should be aided and strengthened. If we consider that God works through men, then our prayers should be directed to influencing the people concerned. We can pray for strength, courage and patience for ourselves. We can pray for our doctors and nurses that they will have the skill, insight and understanding to minister to and cure all the sick in their care.

The Talmud says that before going to be cupped for blood-letting, one should say "May it be Your will, O Lord, my God, that this operation shall be a cure for me, and that You heal me, for You are a faithful healing God, and Your healing is sure, since men have no power to heal, but it is the practice with them to do this." Abaye did not approve of this prayer, quoting a teaching of the school of Rabbi Ishmael, he says "It is written (in Exodus 21, 19) 'He shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.' From this we learn that God has given permission for the physician to heal." (Berachot 60a.) This is a rather quaint way of saying that God has permitted the medical profession to learn how to heal people. Ben Sirach stated this well when he said: "The Lord has imparted knowledge to men, that by their use of His marvels He may win praise; by using them the doctor relieves pain and from them the pharmacist makes up his mixture. There is no end to the works of the Lord, who spreads health over the whole world." (Ecclesiasticus 37, 6 - 8.)

Prayers for recovery from illness can be found in most daily prayer books. In Service of the Heart they are on page 436.



*Public Worship. Reading the Haggadah in Synagogue on the Sabbath before Passover.*



*Home Prayer. A mother lights the Sabbath lamp on Friday night. Both illustrations from Sefer Minhagim. Amsterdam, 1695*

## 17. PRAYER 2. - WHERE AND HOW.

Since the fall of the second Temple in the year 70 C.E., if not before, Judaism has taught that there are two religious centres - the Synagogue and the Home. They were seen to be of equal importance. If we examine the observances and the ritual objects connected with Sabbaths and Festivals, more than half of them take place in the home. This used also to be true of other religions; but over the ages, some of them have concentrated more on a central house of worship, and so have let the home become less important.

In part, this may be due to the influence of a priesthood wishing to keep the worship under their control, while in Judaism the worship has not been regarded as the sole responsibility of the Rabbis or of the Priests (Cohanim). Any Jew who can read clearly and well is permitted to conduct services. The importance of the home as a Jewish place of worship may have been influenced by centuries of persecution. For in some lands and ages, it was not always possible to build synagogues or to hold public services; so that the only way to preserve and practice the religion was to pray at home. The Rabbis said that our home should be a Mikdash M'at, a small sanctuary.

Even in Judaism, there is now a danger that some home prayers and observances are moving into the Synagogue building. The increase in importance of the late Friday night service with candles and Kiddush, the communal Seder, the communal Succah and Chanukah services held in the Synagogue may all be seen as moves in this direction, if they are regarded as a replacement for, rather than as an addition to, the observances in the home.

In the home, prayer may be either by individuals or by the whole family. Morning and evening prayers may often be said alone. While grace at meal times, the rituals of Sabbaths and Festivals, etc. are usually family occasions. The text for prayers for both individual and family worship can be found in most prayer books; but these prayers are just a guide. It is perfectly possible and highly desirable for families or individuals to add their own prayers. Extra prayers can be said for special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, etc. This can also be done for an illness or for any problem that may arise. Families with younger children should include a number of prayers which the children can understand and relate to. By their nature, family prayers can be less formal than public worship, and ideally they should be interesting and enjoyable for children. Above all, they

should be sincere and natural expressions of the feelings of those who are praying.

Public worship usually takes place in a Synagogue; but it can take place anywhere. The Talmud defines a congregation for public worship as consisting of at least ten Jewish males over the age of thirteen. This number is called a Minyan. Only if there is a minyan, may certain prayers like the Kaddish be said or the scroll and Haftarah (Prophetical section) be read. The reason for the number ten being required is that a congregation is called an Edah. The Rabbis looked in the Bible to see where the word 'Edah' was used referring to the least number of people. They found this in Numbers 14, 27. When the twelve spies, which Moses had sent, returned from Canaan, two gave a favourable report and the remaining ten were pessimistic. At one point these ten are referred to as 'an evil congregation'. From this they derived the minimum number required for public prayer. Today, Liberal Jews would regard women as equally qualified to form a congregation. The logic used to determine the number shows that if by chance, someone had used the word 'Edah' to refer to a smaller number of people, then our Minyan would have been less. Therefore, Liberal Jews do not feel themselves prevented from saying certain prayers by lack of numbers. It seems wrong to prevent some people from praying and gaining benefit from their prayers, because they are one or two short of a Minyan, particularly if when we count the women as well there are then the magical ten.

Having said that, we should still recognise that one of the strengths of communal worship is that it takes place as a group activity. Very often, we can get strength and encouragement by being surrounded by others like ourselves and by feeling part of the community. Happier occasions are made happier by a big crowd, and more comfort can be gained on sad occasions if numbers are greater. Rabbis have often noticed that the occasions when congregants come up to them and say: "That was a nice service" are usually the ones where there was a large congregation. This seems to show that the most important people for creating the right atmosphere for prayer are the congregation themselves. This probably accounts for the fact that attendance at services was regarded as a religious duty. It was one that gave benefit to the individual and also to the rest of the congregation. It was Hillel who said: "Do not separate yourself from the community." (Avot 2, 5.)

## ***HOW TO PRAY.***

It is very presumptuous to tell people how to pray, for prayer is a very personal thing. One can only offer advice rather than give instructions. The first piece of advice is just to make the effort and try it. If someone is not used to praying, they might find that regular prayers take some getting used to. Some people get disappointed with prayer because they are looking for a sudden revelation or a quick reply as soon as they pray. The real benefits of prayer and praying may not be obvious for some time. So the next piece of advice is when starting to pray again, do not just do it once, but persevere over a reasonable period of time.

Perhaps the best help for those wishing to pray is to look at a few sayings of Rabbis and teachers over the ages:

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When someone asked the Tzanzer Rebbe what did he do before he prayed, he answered that he prayed that he might pray properly.

\*\*

Rabbi Eliezer says: "He who makes prayer a fixed task is not praying properly." What is meant by 'a fixed task'? Rabbi Jacob ben Idi in the name of Rabbi Oshiah said: "Anyone whose prayer is like a heavy burden upon him." The Rabbis say: "Whoever does not say it in a manner of petition." Rabbah and Rabbi Joseph both say: "Whoever is not able to insert something fresh into it."

\*\*

One must not stand and say the Amidah (One of the main parts of the service) except in a serious frame of mind. The pious ones used to wait an hour before saying the Amidah, in order to direct their hearts to their Father in heaven (Berachot 5, 1.)

\*\*

Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus said: When you pray know before whom you stand. (Berachot 28b.)

\*\*

Rabbi Jose ben Halaftha said: AT worship cast down your eyes and lift up your heart. (Yebamot 105b.)

## **18. REVELATION - THE OLD VIEW.**

### ***WRITTEN & ORAL TORAH.***

For many years Judaism taught the following ideas:

God created the world and set man upon it. He selected out the descendants of Abraham for a special purpose, to give them His teaching (Torah). In fact, the whole purpose of creating the world was so that God could reveal the Torah.

The Bible says: "And when He had made an end to speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, God gave to Moses, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God." (Exodus 31, 18.) Tradition states that at Mount Sinai, God did not only give the Ten Commandments, He gave the whole Torah. But more than this, the Torah which He gave was in two parts. One part was written down. This was the Five Books of Moses (the first five books of the Bible.) The other part was conveyed orally, and contained various interpretations, details and legal judgments for specific cases, which were not included in the Written Torah. This second group of spoken revelations was known as the Oral Torah. Moses taught this Oral Torah to Joshua, and they said that from then on there was a continuous chain of tradition from Moses to the present day. The Mishnah states: "Moses received the Law at Sinai and passed it on to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets; and the prophets committed it to the men of the Great Assembly ... Simon the Just was one of the last of the Great Assembly ... Antigonus of Socho received the tradition from Simon the Just ... " (Avot 1 1ff.) From then on, they record a continuous chain of Mishnaic and Talmudic Rabbis. In this way they link themselves directly to the teaching of Moses.

The idea that there was an Oral Law given at the same time as the written Torah was derived from a number of verses in the Torah. For example, Moses says: "Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God has commanded me, that you should do them in the midst of the land where you are going in order to possess it." (Deuteronomy 4, 5.) The 'statutes' were thought to be the Written Torah and the 'judgments' to be the Oral Torah.

By taking both the Written and the Oral Torah back to Mount Sinai, they were both seen as coming directly from God. They therefore had the highest authority possible for any law. It also meant that it was perfect. For a perfect God would hardly give a law which was not perfect or eternal. It was therefore written in the Torah: "You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish it." (Deuteronomy 4, 2.) All this meant that God only revealed His teaching to man on one occasion, at Mount Sinai. Samson Raphael Hirsch expressed this view when he said of the Biblical Prophets: "They were not to be law-giving prophets, for the Law both Written and Oral, was closed with Moses, and transmitted to the people directly, and it stood above the prophets." (Horeb 35.)

The impression one might get from this is that Judaism and its laws have not altered since the time of Moses. In fact, the Rabbis developed certain set rules for interpreting further laws from the Biblical text. In this way, it was possible to adapt the Law to a certain extent for changing circumstances.

They stopped carrying out large sections of the laws when history made it impossible for them to keep them. When the Temple was destroyed, they had to stop observing all the laws concerning sacrifices. When the Jews began to spread throughout the world, the Rabbis said that Jews living outside Palestine need not observe the various agricultural

laws, which they said were required to be observed only by those who lived in the Holy Land. One example of such a law was the law of Sh'mittah, which required farmers to let their land lie fallow for one year in seven. (Leviticus 25, 1-7.)

They also added extra laws. In many cases these laws were "making a fence round the Torah." (Avot 1, 1.) Such laws were more strict or precise, so as to avoid the risk of someone breaking the existing law by ignorance or mistake. Because of this, most new laws were more restrictive. It was very rare that a new law was introduced which was more lenient. When a new law was made, if it was derived from an interpretation of a Biblical verse, then it was thought to have the authority of that verse. In that sense it was seen also as having come from God.

### ***MITZVOT - COMMANDMENTS.***

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three sections: Torah (Law), N'vi-im (Prophets) and C'tuvim (Writings). The initial letters of these three Hebrew words are put together to form the word 'TeNaCh', which is the Hebrew word for the Bible. The Torah, the first five books, contains many laws and commandments. There are many more than just the Ten Commandments, with which everyone is familiar. The Rabbis went through the text and listed every time that we were commanded to do or not to do something. Although the various lists differed slightly, they all agreed that there were 613 commandments. In Hebrew these were known as the Taryag Mitzsvot. (Taryag contains the Hebrew letters which add up to 613, rather like DCXIII.) The Rabbis went further and said that of these commandments, 248 were positive commandments telling us to do something, and 365 were negative commandments forbidding us to do certain things. They went on to point out that 248 was what they then thought was the number of bones in the human body, and 365 was the number of days in the solar year. They therefore said that we should carry out the commandments with all our bodily power every day of the year. Makkot 23b.)

The word 'Mitzvah' means commandment. Some people think that it means a good deed. This is because many of the positive commandments are good deeds. Such things as caring for the needy or visiting the sick are mitzvot. Other Jews are inclined to see Judaism as a series of ritual practices and observances. Such people are remembering the ritual mitzvot, but are forgetting the moral and social mitzvot, which tradition says are equally important. Judaism is a religion which enters all aspects of life; therefore many of the mitzvot are concerned with matters which some other religions might regard as secular. Commandments about sexual relations between husband and wife or about the conduct of business transactions are seen in Judaism to be part of the concern of religion. The concept is that God has revealed to man laws about how he should behave in all aspects of life.

### ***THE HALACHAH.***

The commandments of the Bible, together with the interpretations of the Rabbis provided the basis for Jewish observance and practice. All the time, Jews were asking their Rabbis questions about what they should do under certain circumstances, and the Rabbis would discuss amongst themselves what the law was in such cases. Many of the established Rabbinic rulings were recorded in the Mishnah of about 200 C.E. Discussions on these Mishnaic rulings are to be found in the Talmud of about 500 C.E. Very often these discussions led to new decisions. Once the Talmud was completed, the Rabbi continued to make other decision. Sometimes they made official pronouncements (Takkanot) and sometimes their rulings came as written answers to questions (Responsa). During the

Middle Ages several attempts were made to gather up all these decisions into codes of law. The sum total of all the Rabbinic laws and rulings is known as the Halachah. The word means 'walking'. Some think that it is called this, because this is the way that we should walk through life, while others say that it shows that the law itself should move or develop.

### ***THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDY.***

In view of the fact that Judaism is based upon revelation of God's teaching, it follows that a good Jew should take pains to find out what that teaching is. The way to do this is to study. Study does not just mean reading the Bible. The interpretations of the text are as important as the text itself. Many of the laws and teachings of Judaism are based upon interpretations. The most learned Jews are seen to be those who are familiar with the Talmud and Rabbinic interpretations of the Law, rather than just with the Bible alone.

It is important to read the Bible, for this was the starting point of our religion; but it would be better to read it with a commentary. A good commentary will bring out meanings which the average reader would not at first see.

The synagogue service was originally centred about study. Even today, the most important part of the Sabbath morning services are the two readings from the Bible. The first is from the Torah and the second is called the Haftarah and is taken from the N'vi-im. (On some special Sabbaths the number of readings is increased.) The Rabbis, who valued study very highly, were fond of praising it and of emphasising its importance. There was a long-running discussion as to which was more important study or the doing of good deeds. Some Rabbis believed that as righteousness was the ideal to be aimed at in life, carrying out the mitzvot was more important than study. While others said that study was more important, because it led to the doing of good deeds.

## **19. THE BIBLE - A NEW LOOK.**

The Jews have been called the People of the Book. That book was of course the Bible. The Hebrew Bible has been regarded as holy by generations of Jews. Its contents were carefully copied and preserved by Jews who specialised in knowing the text of the Bible. These specialists were known as Soferim (Scribes). The word Sofer is connected with the meaning 'to count', and the Soferim, in their concern for preserving the text, used to count every letter of the books which they copied, to make sure that they had not left anything out. Apart from the Soferim, there was also a long tradition of Jewish scholars who commented on the sense of the words of the Bible in order to seek out their deeper meanings.

With the development of scholarship and science in the nineteenth century, various scholars decided to apply the new techniques, used in the study of classical texts, to the writing of the Bible. In this scientific approach, they looked at the Bible with a critical eye. The word "critical" does not mean that they were criticising or finding fault with the Bible. What they were trying to do was to look at the Bible with a scholarly or unbiased point of view.

### ***LOWER CRITICISM.***

Their studies were divided into two areas. The first called Lower Criticism, looked at the Bible to see if the text was accurate in its wording and spelling, etc. This process had started with the Soferim who, in the early centuries, placed dots over certain letters to show that there was some uncertainty as to what was the correct text. It was continued by the Masoretes who preserved the text over the centuries, and made various notes, which are now sometimes found at the foot of the page, and which show that certain words were to be read differently from the way that they were spelt. In Hebrew the traditional readings are known as the K'ri and the written word as the c'tiv.

The modern scientific approach to language made use of comparisons with sister languages, of grammatical knowledge and the study of old manuscripts of the Bible in Hebrew and in translation. Occasionally, by putting a translated text back into Hebrew, they discovered that the original translator must have had a different text from the one we now have. After all this, the general opinion was that the text of the Hebrew Bible has been remarkably well preserved. This was born out in 1946, when the dead sea Scrolls were discovered in caves in the Judean Dessert. These writings contained texts of some of the books of the Bible, and were some 800 years older than any complete Hebrew Bibles then known. Although there were a few differences in the spelling of words, the most remarkable thing was how close they were to our Bible today.

### ***HIGHER CRITICISM.***

The second area of study was concerned not with the letters of the text, but with what the text said. By looking at the contents, they tried to find out who wrote each book and when it was written. This kind of study needed detective work and logical reasoning. Sometimes they compared the books of the Bible with one another, and sometimes they compared them with other old writings. They used such things as the study of the development of the Hebrew language to date the passages, as well as the more obvious method of dating the historical events mentioned there with what was known of the same events from other sources.

These methods of Higher Criticism were not entirely new, for Abraham Ibn Ezra, the Jewish commentator of the 12th century put a few cryptic notes in his commentary showing that he felt that the order of the verses and the historical dating were rather peculiar. Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza, the 17th century philosopher, who was born a Jew, but later separated from the community, also seemed to be aware of the conclusions of Higher Criticism. For many students of the Bible, quite independently, came to similar conclusions; but these were first clearly expressed by the German scholar, Dr. J. Welhausen in 1878.

The most important result of these studies for the Jews was that they threw a completely different light on the five books of Moses. Until then, Jewish tradition had always attributed all the five books to Moses. It also said that God had inspired Moses to write them, for at least in part, He had dictated the actual words to Moses. The new studies showed that the five books could not all have been written by Moses, and that they were probably written during a period of several hundred years after the time of Moses.

These conclusions were arrived at as the result of much thought and study, and it is not easy to sum it all up in a couple of pages. The following are just a few points which lead to these conclusions and do not do full justice to their reasoning:-

(i) EVIDENCE OF LATER KNOWLEDGE.

a) There is an account of the death of Moses and the mourning for him. (Deut, 34.) This could hardly have been written by Moses.

b) "The Canaanite was then in the land." (Genesis 12, 6.) The writer clearly knew of a time when the original inhabitants of Canaan were no longer living there. This did not happen for many centuries after the death of Moses

c) "Before there reigned a king over Israel." (Genesis 36, 31.) Saul, the first king, reigned more than 200 years after Moses. The writer must have lived after this date.

(ii) DUPLICATIONS.

On many occasions the same story is told more than once.

a) The ten Commandments occur in Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5. Although the actual commandments are the same, the wording differs slightly.

b) There are two different accounts of the Creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

c) On three occasions, one of the Patriarchs pretends that his wife is his sister. In each case they run into trouble for doing so, and it is unlikely that a family would try the same thing more than once. Abraham deceived Pharaoh in this way (Genesis 12, 13.). Abraham does it again with Abimelech (Genesis 20, 2.) and his son Isaac also does this with Abimelech (Genesis 26, 7.) The three accounts are probably variations of one original story.

These are just three examples of many repetitions which occur in the five books.

(iii) CONTRADICTIONS.

Some of these duplications contradict each other.

a) In Genesis 6, 19 Noah was told to take two of each animal into the ark; but in Genesis 7, 2 he is told to take seven pairs of every clean animal and one pair of every unclean

animal. (It is not said how Noah was to tell the difference between clean and unclean, for this was not revealed until many years later when Moses was on Mount Sinai.)

b) There were contradictions as to how some proper names arose. For example Bethel is named in Genesis 28, 17f and in 35, 15.

c) Some laws like those of sacrifices contradict each other. In Exodus 20, 24 sacrifices may be offered anywhere; but in Deuteronomy 12, 14 they are only allowed 'in the place which God shall choose.' i.e. in the Temple.

#### (iv) DIFFERENCES IN STYLE.

There appear to be different literary styles side by side.

a) Many of the stories in Genesis and others of the five books are simple well-told stories of great human interest.

b) There are some sections which are dry, uninteresting lists of family trees. These dull chronicles may have been written by the great story-teller of (a); but it seems unlikely.

c) The legal section seem to be in a third style, but even within this there are differences of format. Some laws are in the form of orders telling us not to do certain things. While others take the form: if you do so and so then the punishment is such and such.

#### (v) DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE.

The differences in style are usually accompanied by a change of vocabulary. One style seems to use one group of words, while others have a different range of words. For example we speak of calling a spade a spade, while some official document might call it a digging implement. The choice of words is particularly noticeable in the way that God is referred to. Sometimes they use Adonai (Lord) and other times Elohim (God).

#### (vi) DIFFERENCES IN BELIEF ABOUT GOD.

One can detect at least three views as to how God works:

a) In Genesis Ch. 1, God just speaks and things happen.

b) In Genesis Ch. 2, God has to actually come down to earth to gather dust to make Adam.

c) In Genesis 22, 11, God sends an angel to stop Abraham killing his son Isaac.

It is rather unlikely that one person would hold these three views of God at the same time.

#### (vii) TRIBAL HEROES AND VILLAINS.

In some places like in the Joseph stories, one or more of Jacob's sons, who were the ancestors of tribes, are picked out as heroes and others as villains. And side by side we can see the reverse picture. It appears that one writer favoured one group of tribes while a second writer favoured a different group.

Although by themselves, each of these might have little significance, when they are all put together, they make a very persuasive argument. This is particularly so, if one remembers that the examples quoted above are only a few out of many similar cases, illustrating the same point.

The result of these studies is that most scholars now agree that the five books originally thought to have been written by Moses, were in fact written by different authors over a long period of time. The differences in attitude to the ancestors of the tribes may well be due to the fact that they date from after the time of Solomon, when the kingdom was divided into two (Israel and Judah), and different tribes lived in each area. Each kingdom would naturally make out that their own ancestors were heroes. It is therefore probable that two of the authors lived in different kingdoms.

In two places in the Bible there are accounts of the reading of the scroll of the Law. It says in each case that certain changes were made in religious observances after reading it. It implies that these particular laws were unknown until it was read. Providing that this was not a lack of memory on their part, then it would seem that each account tells of the addition of extra laws.

In 2 Kings 22, 8, it tells how they found a Law Book hidden in the Temple. The religious changes which they made at that time, make us think that this Law Book was probably most of the present book of Deuteronomy. This would place it in the seventh century B.C.E. which is some six centuries after Moses. In Nehemiah chapter 8, it describes how Ezra the scribe read a Law Book which he had brought back with him from Babylon. He read it out loud to the people giving explanations as he read it. He did this in one day. The time seems too short for him to have read all of our present five books. We therefore must conclude that this was probably about the last group of writings to be added. This occurred about eight centuries after Moses.

### ***THE AGE OF THE TORAH.***

It would therefore appear that some of the five books which had been claimed to have been written by Moses, were indeed written many hundred years later. Because they were written at this late stage, it does not necessarily mean that they did not exist earlier as an oral tradition. Some parts of the five books are indeed very old and go back to the time of Moses or even before.

If we compare the poetic styles of Biblical Hebrew with that of the surrounding peoples of the same period, we conclude that some of the poetry must be of a very early date. In the same way some of the blessings and the curses found there are probably also very early.

If we look at some of the stories like that of the flood, we see that they seem to be closely connected to some of the Babylonian legends. It seems that the early Hebrew writers took these legends, removed the pagan references and added Jewish ideas and Jewish values, so that they now appear to us to be fully Jewish. In their Babylonian form they are older than Moses.

Precisely when they were first written down as Jewish stories is difficult to say, for we have no examples of Hebrew writing from anywhere near the date of Moses. In all probability these stories were often passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth, and this accounts for the variations that existed in the duplicated stories mentioned above.

### ***THE EFFECT ON BELIEF.***

Once these duplications and contradictions have been pointed out, some people might be tempted to say that the Bible was less holy. However, one could equally well argue that because two different traditions have come up with the same ten commandments, even if they are spelt slightly differently, that this shows that they are doubly holy. Certainly, when

reading the Bible, what had previously been one confused story, can now be seen as two or more clearer stories interwoven. These stories can now be understood more easily.

Before these theories were put forward, the five books were thought to come from Moses and so from God. Because all the laws were given by God, it was not thought right for man to question them, he just had to obey them. Once it was seen that these laws date from later than Moses, we then have laws written by men. Sometimes these men were inspired by God and sometimes not. The Laws, therefore, no longer have for us an automatic stamp of God's authority. It is now necessary for us to examine the laws to see whether they are good and just and therefore come from God, or whether they were not perfect and therefore the product of limited human minds. Looking back in time, we can sometimes see ways that some of these human laws could have been improved, this immediately shows us that they could not have come from a perfect God. This new approach requires a more thoughtful attitude to Jewish laws.

## 20. REVELATIONS - A NEW VIEW.

### *HOW GOD INFLUENCES THE WORLD.*

Before suggesting ways that God influences the world, we must first cast aside certain older ideas. Some of these have been mentioned in earlier chapters.

We have said (in chapter 8, p.29) that God does not work miracles. In other words, He does not arbitrarily change the laws of nature so that special events can happen.

Secondly, God does not arrange in advance how people will behave, so that no choice is left for us. He is not a puppet-master and we are not mere puppets. (see chapter 14.)

Nor do we believe any longer that God sends angels or messengers to make certain things happen on earth according to His will. Although this is describes in the Bible, we now regard this as picturesque story-telling rather than as a literal description.

If God does not alter the laws of nature, He does not force us to act in certain ways, nor does He send angels to make things happen. How then does He influence the world?

Firstly, He has created the universe with certain laws or rules of behaviour, which we call laws of nature. He has therefore laid out a vast, overall, general plan. (chapter 7.)

Secondly, He reveals some of His ideals of righteousness and goodness to the mind of man. When man chooses to follow God's ideals, then God is working in the world. God and man are, in effect, in partnership. For God works through man by inspiring him with ideals of behaviour. Although the ideals are set before man, man has the choice whether to follow those ideals. Man is not an unthinking robot forced to do the will of its controller.

The way that the mind of man receives these ideas is not quite the same as is described in some places in the Bible. Within its pages, the Bible tells how God spoke to various people. Very often, they appear to have an actual conversation with God. While the prophets, in giving their message to the people, say: "Thus spoke the Lord ..." In a sense, God did speak to them; but not in the same way that one human speaks to another. There was not an actual external voice. God is good and righteous. When a person ponders over a problem and comes to see that a certain course of action is better, more just or more right, then he understands what God wants. Sometimes these ideas come to us after prayer, meditation or study and they come into our heads without prompting. They seem to come from outside us, and as they reveal to us some of the goodness and perfection of God, we say that they come from God. We might say that they come from our conscience or our reason; but both of these are God's gifts to man. The Biblical prophets were certain that such ideas came from God, and spoke of having had a vision or revelation. A vision did not necessarily mean that they had seen God, so much as that they had seen what God wanted. Jeremiah records his first vision in this way:

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying : "I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then said I: "Lord God, behold I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." But the Lord said to me: "Do not say I am only a youth, for to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatsoever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of men, for I shall be with you to deliver you from their hand." says the Lord. Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said: "Behold I have put my words in your mouth." (Jeremiah 1, 4-9)

It is not necessary to take this literally. When he says that he is only a youth, he is expressing his initial diffidence about speaking in a prophetic way. When he said that touched his mouth, it is clearly a symbolical act, and he probably uses this to illustrate the fact that he felt inspired by God.

The prophets seem to be very special sort of people to receive such inspiration and the Jewish people were remarkable in having so many prophets. The prophets did not feel themselves to be special, and they looked forward to a time when all people would have the same sort of awareness of God's teachings. When Moses was told that two people, Eldad and Medad, were prophesying (speaking the word of God) in the camp, he did not see them as a threat to his status as a prophetic leader, for he said: "I wish that all the Lord's people would be prophets." (Numbers 11, 29.) Jeremiah optimistically looked forward to the future saying: "Behold the days come," says the Lord"... that I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man have to teach his neighbour, and each his brother saying: "Know the Lord!", for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest." (Jeremiah 31, 31-34.)

### ***NOT IN HEAVEN.***

The Talmud (Baba Metsiah 59b.) tells the story that once Rabbi Eliezer tried to prove a certain point of law by use of every argument; but the other Rabbis would not accept his point of view. He then said: "If I am right, may this Carob tree move a hundred yards from its place." The tree moved; but they said: "No proof can be got from a Carob tree." Then he said: "May this stream prove it." The water in the stream thereupon began to flow backwards uphill. They said: "Water can not prove anything." He then said: "May the walls of this house of study prove it." The walls of the house of study bent inwards, as if they were about to fall. Rabbi Joshua then spoke sternly to the walls and said: "If the learned dispute about the Halachah, what has this to do with you?" Therefore, for the sake of Rabbi Joshua the walls did not fall down; but for the sake of Rabbi Eliezer they did not become completely straight again. Rabbi Eliezer then said: "If I am right, let Heaven prove it." Then a Bat Kol (a Heavenly voice) spoke: "What have you against Rabbi Eliezer? The Halachah is always according to his view." Rabbi Joshua then got up and said: "The Torah is not in heaven." (Deuteronomy 30, 12.) What did he mean by this? Rabbi Jeremiah said: "The Law was given to us at Mount Sinai. We no longer pay attention to a Heavenly voice. For it is said in the Torah at Sinai: "You shall decide according to a majority decision." (Exodus 23, 2.) (and not according to a more recent revelation from God.)

The object of this story is to express the traditional view that God gave one revelation at Mount Sinai and that our task now is only to interpret that teaching. Even if we should hear the voice of God speaking to us, we should take no notice, because once the Torah has been given, the Law is the Law, and even God can not change it. This explains why they distrusted prophecy. The quotation in chapter 19 from Samson Raphael Hirsch saying that the prophets were not law-giving prophets was really saying the same thing. So also was the Talmud when it said that prophecy ended with the end of the Bible.

### ***PROGRESSIVE REVELATION.***

Today we would probably take a different attitude. If God is the God of truth, knowledge and righteousness, then He revealed some of these to man. As He revealed all other knowledge gradually, so does He reveal religious truth. Whether in medicine or mathematics, science of philosophy, we gradually gained our knowledge over the

centuries. The same is certainly true of our moral and ethical ideas, and these are part of our religion.

We have seen that revelation is God influencing the mind of man through reason and conscience. The Bat Kol of the Talmudic story is in reality far more likely to be the "still small voice" of conscience, which tells us what is right or wrong.

We now understand that God has made only one creature - man, with such a brain that he has the ability to reason so well and with a conscience to know right from wrong. The Bible describes this when it says: "God made man in His own image." (Genesis 1, 27.) Man has both special abilities and also special responsibilities to other creatures around us. Every time that a human being visualises a higher concept of justice or of righteousness, a little more of God's ideal justice or righteousness has been revealed to him.

If our conscience and our reason tell us that it is wrong for one human being to possess another as a slave, then that is a higher revelation of God's will than are those verses in the Five books of Moses, which accept slavery as normal. The Torah lays down laws on the treatment of slaves which make their lives a little bit more bearable, for instance, that slaves should not work on the Sabbath. However, the Bible does not forbid slavery altogether. In this, it was obviously influenced by the social customs of the surrounding peoples who kept slaves, without any such laws to protect the rights of those slaves. Since the time of the Bible, Jews and others have advanced a long way over this question of slavery.

If we accept the idea that God reveals His ideas to man through conscience and reason, then we should see that the authors of the Biblical books were probably inspired to write their words by their consciences and reasoning. They often stated that God had told them to say certain things, by this they meant that God had permitted them to perceive certain truths. Today, we are also able to receive the same kind of influence; but in our generation, we no longer speak of our concepts of ideal behaviour in the same way as the prophets did and we rarely admit that they come from God. Just because our doubting generation does not give credit to God for its ideas of justice and right, it does not alter the fact that man does still receive inspiration and revelation from God. The old traditional approach continues to influence us and, either consciously or unconsciously, we think that prophecy has ceased long ago. If we fail to recognise that God can and does influence us today, as He has influenced other generations in the past, then we are failing to realise some of God's true greatness. The fact that our generation is also receiving new and higher ideas of justice, freedom and morality means that we have all an important role to play in improving the world and making it a better place to live in.

### ***FLAWS IN THE TRADITIONAL THEORY.***

The idea that God reveals Himself to man progressively is in direct contrast to the old view expressed in chapter 18, where God was thought to have revealed both the Written and Oral Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, and that since then, the Torah has been passed on through the generations. This traditional view has been disproved in several places:

- 1) The Five Books of Moses which were thought to have been dictated to him, are now recognised as having been written by several authors from different periods of time as long as 600 or 700 years after Moses. (see chapter 19.0)
- 2) The chain of tradition in Avot 1 (quoted in chapter 18) by which the Oral Law was thought to have been handed down, has a number of sizable gaps in it.

3) The Oral Torah was composed later than the Written Torah and was probably largely Pharisaic in origin.

The first point has been dealt with at length in the last chapter. With regard to the second point concerning the chain of tradition, this chain is usually listed as: Moses, Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets, the Great Assembly, Simon the Just, Antigonus of Socho and then a series of Rabbinic leaders. Moses certainly passed over command to Joshua (Deuteronomy 31.) According to Joshua 24, 1 some elders survived Joshua. But during the period of Judges which followed Joshua, there was not continuity of political leadership and it is extremely unlikely in such disorganised times that there was a continuity of religious tradition. Various laws of the Written Torah were not even observed, so it seems even less likely that Oral Laws were preserved. Evidence of this lack of tradition during this period can be found in Nehemiah 8, 17 which states from Joshua to Ezra (about seven centuries) they did not build Sukkot. In 2 Kings 23, 22 it states that from the period of Judges until the reign of King Josiah they did not keep Passover properly.

As for the Prophets, they were less concerned with the legal side of Judaism than with the spiritual. On several occasions they condemned over-emphasis on ritual and asked for more attention on the ethical and spiritual side. They were remarkable people, but they are unlikely candidates for the preservation of the Oral Law.

The Great Assembly or the Great Synagogue dates from the end of the exile in Babylon about 440 B.C.E. History at this period is rather hazy for we know little about it. Did the Assembly continue until 300 - 280 B.C.E. when Simon the Just was High Priest? How did he manage to pass on tradition to Antigonus of Socho, who was active about 200 - 180 B.C.E.? From all this, it does appear that the chain has a number of weak links.

The third point concerns the Oral Law itself and its date. The purpose of the Oral Torah was to provide detailed laws where the Written Torah was not sufficient, and to fill in the gaps which were not covered. Therefore there had to be a Written Torah first before there were any gaps to be filled in. This makes the Written Torah older than The Oral Torah. Another pointer is that many of the laws of the Oral Torah are Midrashic, that is derived from a verse of the Written Torah, which obviously had already to be in existence. We also know that one of the differences between the Pharisees and the Saducees was over this Oral Torah, and this is most likely if that Oral Torah was fairly new. An old tradition would not have been questioned. We must therefore date this Oral Torah from the third or second century B.C.E.

### ***WHY THIS TRADITION?***

If it was so clear that the Oral Torah did not go back to the time of Moses, why was it necessary to have such a theory? The answer is the same as for the written laws of Moses. If one can say that the origin of the Oral Torah was with Moses, then it gives the fullest authority to it. After all, the authority of Moses was the authority of God, and it was this Divine stamps of authority which was required.

In the books of the Bible, the authorship of the various books was sometime unknown. There was a tendency to link the books of a similar character together. For example, because Solomon was said to be wise, all the books of Wisdom were attributed to him. In the same way, because Moses was a law-giver, many later laws became associated with his name.

The authority of both the Written and Oral Laws by the traditional view depends upon us accepting that God gave or dictated these laws to Moses. Many modern Jews do not

accept the story of revelation on Mount Sinai as true in every detail. We can accept that some important event connected with laws occurred there. It was not dictation so much as inspiration. We also believe that these laws, though inspired by God, were written by men. When a man writes laws, however inspired with ideas, he must have certain prejudices which colour that inspiration. He is rather like a painter, who is inspired to paint a certain subject. The final picture will depend not only on his inspiration, but also on his artistic skill and upon the style in which he paints it. So a picture painted by say Rembrandt will look very different from the same subject painted by Van Gogh or by Picasso in his cubist period.

When faced with the conclusion that the Torah is partly Divine and partly human in origin, we have two further problems. Firstly, how do we know which parts are from God and which from man? And secondly, what authority does the Torah now have as a result?

### ***THEY HUMAN ELEMENT.***

To separate God's part from man's is not easy, because as God's part was written down by man, we sometimes find a mixture of God and man in a particular law. From our idea of God and His inspiration, we would say that God is good and that any law His must also be good. It then follows that the way to judge whether a law comes from God's inspiration is to look and see if it is just, right and true for all time. If on looking back, we find that it was unjust or prejudiced or needed some improvement, then it was of human origin. Dr. Claude Montefiore summed it up by saying: "The book is not good because it comes from God; it is from God as far as it is good. The is not true because it is from God; it is from God so far as it is true." (J.R.U. Manifesto, 1909.)

### ***AUTHORITY.***

When we have to judge whether a law is just or not, we have to use our reason and our conscience. Both of these were given to us by God. In a sense then, we are consulting God to find out if the law is from Him.

If we reject the truth or justice of certain laws by saying that they now seem bad, unjust or because they show signs of human prejudices, do we then undermine the authority of the remaining laws?

In so far as we say that some laws were not dictated by God, we have removed one sort of authority from them; but the authority which we have removed was an unquestionable, dictatorial authority. We have replaced it by another authority. If we look at a law and see that it is just, fair and good, and it is one that has stood the test of time, then we say that it was inspired by God. It has its authority in the truth of that law. That authority is backed up by the voice of our conscience and the voice of our reason. As an example of a law which was clearly not a good law, we find one which says that if there is a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not listen to the voice of his parents, who is a glutton and a drunkard, then he shall be stoned to death. (Deuteronomy 21, 18-21.) Even in early times, they were so troubled by this law, that they said that no one was ever put to death according to this rule.

As an example of an inspired law there is: "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were a stranger in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 23, 9.) This law clearly tries to stop the suspicion and prejudice against strangers that can easily be aroused. It was a good law then and it is a good law now, and, sadly, after some 3000 years we still do not always live by it. Everything points to the fact that it is an ideal to be

aimed at, and so we believe that whoever wrote it must have been inspired. In a sense its rightness and its justness is its authority.

## 21. ISRAEL, PAST AND PRESENT.

### ***THE COVENANT.***

When two people get married in Synagogue, there is a service of consecration of the marriage at which God's blessing is called upon the couple. At the same there is a legal contract drawn up called a Ketubah (Written Document) which the bride and groom each sign and which is duly witnessed. In this contract the bride and groom promise to love and care for each other. (In the Orthodox Ketubah the wording is somewhat different.) The central part of the wedding service is when the bridegroom places a ring on the bride's finger and says the old formula "Behold you are consecrated to me by this ring, according to the law of Moses and Israel." Today many brides give the groom a ring also, and in Liberal and Reform services the bride often makes the same declaration as the groom. The bride then wears the ring as a sign that she is married and as a reminder of the promises they have given. During the service they also drink out of the same cup of wine. There are, of course, other rituals like the breaking of the glass, etc. but these are not strictly part of the making of the marriage contract.

This contract or covenant of marriage is very similar to the covenants which we find in the Bible. There were certain basic things required to make a valid covenant.

- a) Person A promised person B something.
- b) B promised A something in return.
- c) Usually, the two parties shared something. (Often food)

There are several important covenants mentioned in the Bible. The first was Between God and all mankind. This was the covenant with Noah. (Genesis 8, 15 - 9, 17.) In this covenant God promises that He will never again bring a flood to cover all the earth and that He will ensure that the cycle of the seasons will continue regularly without fail. In return, God expects man to observe certain basic rules. (Genesis 9, 1 - 7.) These were later interpreted to be the Seven Laws of Noah. The Rabbis said that all people, Gentiles and Jews, were expected to observe these basic laws. Any non-Jew who did observe them was regarded as righteous. More was expected of Jews. They were required to keep 613 commandments. In the Noah story, the rainbow was the sign of the covenant, and it may be significant that rainbows appear to join heaven and earth. Noah offered a sacrifice and this was the sharing of food. For a spiritual God could not eat; but the smoke and the smell going up towards heaven represented God's share.

In the next mention of a covenant the two parties concerned are God and Abraham. (Genesis 17.) Here, God promises to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and to his descendants. This is apparently the beginning of the practice of circumcision. The text is not exactly clear what part circumcision plays in the covenant. It may be Abraham's side of the covenant. It may be the sign of the covenant or it may be the sharing, for part of the flesh of Isaac his son was given back to God and the remainder of the child continued to belong to Abraham. It is possible that circumcision was all three. And so Abraham's circumcision was his side of the covenant, Isaac's circumcision was the sharing and the circumcision of future generations was the sign of the covenant.

The third and most important covenant is that between God and the children of Israel which took place at Mount Sinai. The main theme of this covenant is that God would be our God, if we would be His people. (Leviticus 26,12 and Deuteronomy 26, 17-19.) In this

case the parallel between the covenant and the marriage contract is very close. The Hebrew Prophets often refer to God and Israel being in a kind of marriage relationship. (Isaiah 54, 5; Jeremiah 2, 2; Hosea ch. 2.) Later, the Rabbis interpreted the love poems of the Song of Songs as speaking of the love that existed between God and Israel. (Targum and Midrash) How was Israel expected to be God's people? The answer was by observing God's commandments. So the Ten Commandments are sometimes referred to as the covenant. (Deuteronomy 4, 13.) As to what is the sign of the covenant, some see this as the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 9, 9.) While others see the observance of the Sabbath, one of those commandments as the sign. (Exodus 31, 16-17.) There is also a rather peculiar story of how oxen were killed as a peace offering and half of the blood from these animals was scattered over the altar and the other half was sprinkled over the people, presumably to show a sharing between God and Israel for the sake of sealing the covenant. (Exodus 24, 5-8.) The differences of opinion as to precisely what were the constituents of these covenants is probably due to the different sources of the five books, mentioned in chapter 19.

We therefore see that the covenants which God made were with a changing group of people. First He began with all mankind, then He narrowed it down to the descendants of Abraham (including the Ishmaelites) and then finally the covenant at Mount Sinai is with the descendants of Jacob or the children of Israel, as Jacob was later called. In this way the Bible teaches that the Israelites had a special relationship with God. The Bible sees this as an on-going relationship which was meant to last, for it says: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. (Sinai) Not only with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, all of us who are alive here this day." (Deuteronomy 5, 2-3.)

The name 'Israel' today is used almost entirely to refer to the state of Israel. Originally it referred to Jacob, then to his descendants as a people and then later to the northern of the two Jewish kingdoms. In this chapter and the next we are using Israel to describe the people rather than the state.

### ***THE CHOSEN PEOPLE.***

How odd  
Of God  
To choose  
The Jews.

This little ode was written by Hilaire Belloc in one of his anti-Semitic moods. There were several answers to it. One from a Christian point of view was:

Not odd  
Of God;  
His son  
was one.

One Jewish answer was:

Its not so odd.  
The Jews chose God.

The whole concept of 'the Chosen People' has caused a lot of problems. Some modern Jews are embarrassed by the idea, which they sometimes see as presumptuous. Some

non-Jews are upset by it, thinking that it implies that the Jews regard themselves as superior in some way. Occasionally we find an anti-Semite referring sarcastically to 'one of the chosen race'.

However, these objections are really groundless, because the idea of the Chosen People does not imply any kind of superiority of one people over another. If we go back and look at the Bible and examine the place where this concept is mentioned, we get a different idea of what it meant:

"For you are a holy people unto the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be His own treasure. (Am Segulah) out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you because you were more in number than any people (for you were the fewest of all peoples) but because the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore unto your fathers, has the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 7, 6-8.)

The Bible states that it was not because we were a great and powerful people that we were chosen, in fact it stresses that we were slaves who had to be rescued from slavery in Pharaoh's Egypt. It was not therefore because we had any special merit as a people. In the Bible we are often called a rebellious and stiff-necked people. (Proud and not humble before God) What seems to have caused the selection of Israel was the merit of the Patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For it says: "Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them." (Deuteronomy 4, 37.)

What then were the promises which God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? After Abraham showed his obedience to God and went as far as to start to sacrifice his son Isaac, God appeared to him and said: "because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the sea shore." (Genesis 22, 16-17.) God also promised Jacob: "Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall be your descendants; and the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give to you, and to your descendants after you will I give this land." (Genesis 35, 12.) These passages in Genesis are concerned with the material side of the possession of land, later the Bible speaks of the moral and spiritual side of the choice of Israel. Some may read these verses and see God arbitrarily selecting the Israelites as a special people; but in fact, the Bible clearly shows that it is Abraham's decision to obey God and His commands that makes God give the first promise to him. The phrase 'Am Segulah' which is translated 'own treasure' first occurs just before the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai where it states: "If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own treasure from among all the nations ... and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exodus 19, 5-6) In this passage it is clear that the selection of Israel depends on Israel carrying out its side of the covenant. Israel would only be a special people if we listened to God's commands and obeyed them. It was not just God choosing us; but we also had to choose to obey Him. Unless we did as God wanted, we would not be special in any way nor would we be holy. That is why one answer to Belloc's poem was that the Jews chose God.

It is certainly significant that the idea of the Chosen People occurs close to the account of the giving of the Ten Commandments in both Exodus and Deuteronomy. There is a Midrash which says that God offered the Ten Commandments to each of the seventy nations upon the earth; but each in turn refused to accept them or to obey them; because each nation found something which was inconvenient for them to keep. The pirate nations

could not accept 'You shall not steal.' The brigands could not accept 'You shall not murder', and so on. Finally God came and offered them to the children of Israel. The Israelites did not ask what they contained, and before they even knew what the laws were, they agreed to accept them. (Mechilta.) This Midrash is based upon Exodus 19,9 where just before the giving of the Ten Commandments the people are reported as saying: "All that the Lord has spoken, we will do." It is also based upon Exodus 24,7 where the people say: "We will do and we will hear." The Rabbis noted that the doing comes before the hearing. This Midrash is again teaching that the reason why God chose the Jews is that the Jews chose God. This teaching of the Midrash is far more acceptable to the modern mind than the misconception that God arbitrarily picked Israel from all the nations for His special favour. It also follows from this idea, that Israel will only remain the Chosen People as long as they continue to choose to obey God. Once we stop devoting ourselves to God's service we become like any other people. We would then lose our special identity and disappear as a recognisable group.

### ***THE TASK OF ISRAEL.***

In a number of places the prayerbook refers to the fact that God has chosen Israel. One important place where this is done is in the blessing before the reading of the Scroll. In this blessing we praise God "who chose us from among all peoples to reveal to us His Torah." This blessing clearly shows that the idea of the Chosen People was less concerned with our merit than it was with our duty to serve God.

We were chosen to be the group to whom God would reveal His Torah. This teaching was to be given to us so that we could pass it on to others. Isaiah expressed this idea when he said: "It is too light a thing that you should be My servant only to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel, but I will set you as a light to the nations, that you may be My salvation to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49, 6.)

The Israelites had therefore been given the task of teaching all other peoples about God and about the way that He wanted people to behave. Certainly, if one looks at the prophets among the Hebrew people who taught and left books of sayings, it is remarkable how many there were. The Hebrew Bible contains books by three 'major' prophets and twelve 'minor' prophets. Of these, some like the book of Isaiah are probably the work of two or three different prophets gathered together in one book. There are also some important prophets who did not have books of their own, but whose teachings are reported. These include names like Elijah, Elishah, Nathan and Huldah. This string of prophets shows that the Hebrew people did seem to have what Rev. Vivian Simmons used to call "a genius for religion."

Some may think that our ancestors were rather presumptuous to think that they could teach the world about religion. Yet if we try to cast our minds back to those days, we should see that the Biblical ideas about religion were far in advance of those of the surrounding peoples. Idol worship was universal and many of the religions had quite obnoxious practices. Human sacrifices were not unknown and archaeologists have found the bodies of sacrificed children under the foundation stones of some buildings. Some of the Pagan temple priests and priestesses were just prostitutes. Even the civilised countries like Greece and Rome had many gods who were worshipped in the form of idols and these gods were far from being fine examples of morality and righteousness. Amongst religions like these it was not difficult to see how someone, who was filled with the ideas of the Hebrew prophets, could feel that they could teach the rest of the world the truth about religion.

This idea, that they had the task of teaching others about religion, eventually became an historical fact. For of the peoples of the ancient world, Greece gave culture in the form of art, medicine, mathematics and philosophy; Rome gave us civilisation like law, roads, drainage and baths etc. But it was the Jews who gave the western world its religion and its standards of morality.

The Rabbis had an interesting proof that we were to be witnesses for God. They pointed to the first lines of the Shema (Deuteronomy 6, 4.) and said that we should note how it is written in the Scroll, in a Mezuzah and in Tephillin. For there we find that the letter 'ayin' of the word 'Shema' and the letter 'daled' in the word 'echad' are written larger than all the surrounding letters. (This is a long-standing tradition of the scribes, and was probably done to ensure that the words were read correctly.) But the Rabbis said that if you take these two large letters and put them together they make the Hebrew word 'Ed' which means witness. So whenever we say the Shema and carry out its teachings, as it is our duty to do, then we are being God's witnesses. (Jacob ben Asher, Ba'al Ha-Turim to Deuteronomy 6,4.)

Having seen how much that we have influenced the world's religious thinking one might then wonder whether we had completed our task. Are we still to be God's witnesses of servants? Sadly, we see that although we live in a nominally Christian country, yet there are many people around us who have no religion at all. Many of these seem to value material things higher than spiritual concerns. Even those who have religious beliefs seem to come close to idol-worship and their view of God does not seem to have the purity of the Jewish idea of One God. If we look to other countries, we see many evils of both belief and practices which result in injustice to women or harshness in legal judgements. Some Christian countries curb individual freedom by banning contraception, abortion or divorce. Many Communist countries have turned away from religion and have unduly restricted the freedom of choice of their citizens, for what they consider is the good of the state. This is just a short list of a few of the areas where the world would benefit from Jewish teachings.

At the time of writing there are other areas which are causing grave concern: South Africa, where a Dutch reformed Church seems to be giving its backing to a nationalist government which is clearly discriminating prejudicially between its white, black and coloured citizens, Northern Ireland, where bigoted sectarian religious education has produced a divided community filled with distrust and hatred, a world situation, where rich nations have such high standards of living that people are perpetually worried about being overweight, while in poorer countries people are undernourished or dying of starvation. We also see that although the prophets spoke of the need to beat swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2, 4 & Micah 4, 3.) Many countries spend vast sums on armaments while their own citizens lack proper health care, education or the necessities of life.

The world is far from perfect. It often has its priorities and values wrong. Its basic ideas of morality, righteousness and justice often need correcting. Because there is so much wrong in the world, the role of the Jews as a people teaching ideas and principles of good and right behaviour, is not yet complete. In fact, we might well argue that the world is in greater need of these teachings today than it has ever been.

### ***THE SUFFERING SERVANT.***

The middle section of the book of Isaiah, often known as Deutero-Isaiah, contains a series of very fine poems about God's servant or servants. This servant is described as suffering because he is the servant of God.

The servant's task is to "set justice in the earth." (42.4.) to be "a light to the nations." (49, 6.) and "to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners from the dungeon and those that sit in darkness out of the prison-house." (42, 7.) The servant is clearly identified as Israel: "Thou are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified," (49, 3.) also "and yet hear O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen..." (44, 1. and see also in 44, 21 & 43, 1.) It seems that here Israel is being treated as a unity and so the servant is spoken of in the singular. The same servant is spoken of in chapter 53 as "despised and rejected of men," (v.3.) and that "he was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth." (v.7.) By being God's servant and living by His teachings, we have often marked ourselves out as being different, and as a result we have suffered prejudice and persecution. It was as if Isaiah was predicting all these persecutions. In fact, the persecutions occurred most where the society was sick or unjust and people needed a scapegoat whom they could blame for their troubles. They therefore picked the small easily-identified Jewish minority in their midst. Isaiah said: "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." (54, 5.) Whether or not Isaiah was trying to foretell what would happen many centuries later, history records a remarkable series of persecutions of the Jews. The persecutions were closely linked with the special character of the task or mission of the Jews. It would have been possible to have converted to the majority religion in some periods, and by so doing escape persecution; but there was always a loyal group who kept up their religion and passed it on to the next generation.

No gentile should feel jealous that the Jews were chosen, for this has brought so much suffering upon us. In *Fiddler On The Roof*, after some persecution, Tevye turns round to God and jokingly asks: "Why could you not choose someone else for a change?"

## **22. ISRAEL - THE FUTURE.**

### ***REDEMPTION.***

We Jews have been a persecuted minority throughout most of our long history - from the time of Pharaoh in Egypt onwards. We suffered at the hands of Haman, the Greeks, the Romans, and in various Christian and Muslim countries. In this century was the worst persecution of them all, the Holocaust, when millions of Jews were murdered by the Nazis.

Throughout all this time, we have tried to understand why all this suffering has come upon us. Many teachers like Jeremiah (chapter 5.) and Ezekiel (chapter 7.) have said that because we did not obey God's teachings, we were being punished. The second Isaiah said that we were to be suffering servants to God, and that suffering went with our task of teaching others about God. (see previous chapter.) Later teachers have said that the Jews are like a barometer in society. If the Jew is suffering, then the society in which he is living is probably in a poor way, filled with injustice. If the Jew is living in peace, then the society is a just and good one.

During all the centuries of persecution, the Jew has always hoped for a time when the suffering would end, when all oppression and injustice would cease and the world would be a happy place to live in.

The Bible frequently speaks of God redeeming the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. The practice of redeeming from slavery existed in society in the past. It was possible for someone to pay the owner of a slave compensation money and in return he would then release that slave from his service. In some instances the payment was not in cash but in goods or services. The act of redeeming was usually carried out by a relative. In the case of Egypt, God was the Redeemer. He accomplished the redemption through Moses and Aaron. Following a series of natural disasters or plagues, the Egyptians came to believe that it would be better if the Hebrews were to leave. In the Bible this is portrayed as God deliberately bringing these troubles on the Egyptians so as to force them to free the Israelites. In later times, the Jews would look back on this event and hoped that God would again redeem them from suffering and persecution. Some Jews, who felt that they were exiled from their homeland, also hoped that God would cause them to return to the Holy Land, just as He had led the Israelites there under Moses and Joshua.

The Jewish concept of redemption was concerned with the removal of suffering and misery from the Jewish people and from other people too. This was the negative side of the idea. There was also a positive side. Freedom from Egyptian slavery led straight to Mount Sinai, to our voluntary acceptance of the Torah and of God's commandments, which in turn led to higher standards of morality and righteousness. In the same way the future redemption from suffering would lead to the beginning of a wonderful age under God's rule when there would be peace, justice, righteousness and brotherly love and when evil would be no more. This was the ideal for which the Jew hoped and prayed, and for which he worked. This ideal was always preserved by the Jews throughout all their sufferings, and it inspired us to greater efforts and filled us with hope.

The Jewish concept of suffering in the world was not the same as that of Christians. For Christians tended to see most of the evil and suffering as the result of one act of Adam and Eve which caused "The Fall", and from this original sin mankind has to be redeemed. For the Jew, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden did not play such an important role in

religious thought. Today we would take the story as a folk legend, but even in early times, Judaism did not teach that all the evil of man was the result of this one act of disobedience by Adam. For Judaism, evil occurred whenever men or women failed to obey God's teachings or when they failed to live by those ideals which God gave to man. What mattered was whether all the gentile nations observed the seven basic laws of Noah. Did they avoid such things as murder and robbery and did they set up just law courts? While the Jewish people were expected to obey all the 613 commandments. If the Jews failed to obey God, they would suffer as a people. If the other nations failed to keep the basic laws of Noah, then society would be evil and everyone would share in the general suffering that would result.

In this view, it was not one act of "fall", but a whole series of acts of disobedience which caused the evil and suffering in the world. Although in the early days the Jews thought that there would be one individual act of redemption, which would clear up the whole evil situation, in more recent times it has been seen as a more gradual process, where all the various acts of disobedience must be redeemed by a series of acts of redemption.

### ***THE AGE OF THE MESSIAH.***

One of the earliest views about redemption was that it would come about by the work of a Messiah. The word 'Messiah' comes from the Hebrew word 'Meshiach' which means 'anointed one'. In early times two kinds of people were anointed, that means they had oil poured over them as a way of starting them in their new office. These two groups were kings and high priests. To this day, the British monarch is anointed with a few drops of oil at the coronation. This ceremony is probably based upon the Biblical custom.

In the period after the close of the Bible, there were some Jews who believed that the Messiah was to be a king and some who thought he was to be a priest. The Essenes, who were a Jewish sect at this period, believed in two Messiahs, one a king and one a priest. The kings of Judah, the southern kingdom around Jerusalem, had been descended from King David.

After the Babylonian invasion and the exile which followed, this line of kings came to an end. It was natural for the people to long for political independence and once again to have a king of their own. They therefore saw the Messiah as being a human king descended from King David, who would change the political state of the world, so that the Jewish people would be free from oppression and could live once again in peace in a just society. (This is the reason why the New Testament gives a family tree trying to show that Joseph was descended from David in Matthew 1, 1-17. and Luke 3, 23-51. However, it also claims that Joseph was not the father of Jesus, because it relates the story of the immaculate conception and the virgin birth.)

The idea of a priestly Messiah was that he would bring back religious values to society so that it would become righteous and just. The reason why Jesus was not accepted as the Messiah was that he was not seen to have been successful in fulfilling either concept of the Messiah. Although he had a number of devoted followers, he did not noticeably affect the morality or righteousness of society in his day, nor did he achieve any lightening of the Roman oppression. He was neither a priestly Messiah, who by his teachings corrected the evils of society, nor was he a kingly Messiah who by his political leadership forced a change to take place.

What then was the Jewish concept of the Messiah? There are many accounts in Rabbinic literature. Maimonides said in the 12th century: "In the days of the Messiah there will be no

hunger or war, no jealousy or strife; prosperity will be universal, and the world's occupation will be to know the Lord." In the Talmud, there is a story which tells how Rabbi Joshua ben Levi met Elijah and asked him when the Messiah would come. "Go and ask him," Elijah replied. He told Rabbi Joshua that the Messiah sat among the beggars at the gates of Rome. The Rabbi asked how he would know which was the Messiah. Elijah said that all the beggars have sores and wounds on their flesh and they wash and dress them. The other beggars wash all their wounds at one time and then bind them all up, while the Messiah just does one at a time so that, if he should be summoned, he could leave at a moments notice. Rabbi Joshua immediately went to Rome, found the Messiah and asked him when he was coming. The Messiah replied: "Today." Rabbi Joshua went away happy and returned home. A little later, however, he met Elijah and complained to him that the messiah had lied for he had not yet come. Elijah then told him that the Messiah had been quoting Psalm 95, 7 where it says: "Today, if you will hearken to My voice." (Sanhedrin 99a.)

In this story the Rabbis are teaching that it is not sufficient for us to just sit back and wait for the Messiah to put the world right for us. It is necessary for each of us to listen to God's voice, to carry out His teachings, and so make a better world, then the Messiah would come with his perfect age.

It was also said that the Messiah would come when every Jew observes two Sabbaths properly. (Shabbat 118b.) Once we all do this, we will be observing God's teaching, and the age of the Messiah would have arrived. This is a very parochial view of the Messiah, but we can see what the Rabbis were trying to teach. Kafka stated it very neatly when he said: "The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come on the day after his arrival."

Such teaching now means that the responsibility for creating a better world can not be pushed off onto the shoulders of a Messiah who is to come at some future date. The responsibility rests upon each one of us. If we would all live according to the ideals of Judaism, then the world would be perfect, and so, as the Messiah told Rabbi Joshua, the age of the Messiah could begin today.

Over the years, the concept of the Messiah has therefore changed and developed. In early times they concentrated more on who would be the Messiah, how they would recognise him, etc. They said that Elijah would come and herald in the age of the Messiah. This was based upon Malachai 4, 5. Later we began to concentrate on the Age of the Messiah, what would it be like, how could we help to make it come?

As a result of such thinking, we find a Chassidic Rabbi saying: "Each Jew has within himself an element of the Messiah, which he is required to purify and cultivate. The Messiah will come when Israel has brought him to the perfection of growth and purity within themselves." (Stretiner Rebbe) By this he meant that if we all work together, we will between us bring the Age of the Messiah. From this concept grew the idea that we are all co-workers with God in creating a better world.

## ***CO-WORKERS WITH GOD.***

How does one work with or for God? The old answer was to say that whenever a Jew carried out one of the mitsvot, he was doing one of God's commandments and was therefore working for God. When carrying out one of the ritual mitsvot it is usual to say a blessing which contains the words "asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav" (praising God who has sanctified us by His commandments) These blessings therefore remind us that when we

carry out God's commandments they make us more holy. They also help to make the world a better place.

A modern Jew would go along with this idea, but he would not define working as just carrying out the accepted 613 commandments. He would see God commanding us through reason and conscience. For these help us to see injustice or evil around us, and they can also cause us to work to remove such evils from the world.

The Bible said that we should be "a kingdom of priests and a holy people." (Exodus 19, 6.) If carrying out the commandments and serving God makes us more holy, then every time that we work with or for God to make the world a better place, both we and the world around us become more holy. The role of the priest is not confined only to religious ritual, it is also to serve God in the widest sense. When we do this, we are in a way fulfilling the role of the priestly Messiah. That is why the Chasidic Rabbi said that the Messiah (or Messianic Age) would come when Israel has brought him to the perfection of growth and purity within themselves.



*Chinese Jews worshipping in the K'ai Feng Fu Synagogue. From an 18th Century drawing.*

## 23. WHO IS A JEW?

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines the word 'Jew' as:

1. A person of Hebrew race; an Israelite (Originally a Hebrew of the kingdom of Judah; later any Israelite who adhered to the worship of Jehovah as conducted at Jerusalem).
2. (transferred) Applied to a grasping or extortionate usurer, or a trader who drives hard bargains or deals craftily. 1606.

The dictionary tries to record the way that words have been used. It does not try to pass judgement on what ought to be the definition. If we wished to

define a Jew, we could not use the second of these meanings. The fact that it is listed records the prejudice that existed against us. In 1606 when they quote the word as having been used with this meaning, no Jew was allowed to live openly in England as a Jew. Only a few Marranos (secret Jews) had lived there since 1290 when all Jews had been expelled. It is just possible that this usage came about following the performance of Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice in 1596.

These definitions show that the word 'Jew' has been used in different ways by different people, and that in some cases it is not used correctly. Just because a word is used in popular speech in a certain way does not necessarily mean that this is the correct meaning.

If we rule out the ignorantly prejudiced second definition, we must then concentrate on the first. When we look at this carefully, we see that this is not a single definition, it is three separate definitions put together. For it says that a Jew is:

1. A member of the Hebrew race.
2. A Judean national.
3. A follower of the Jewish religion.

Not long after the foundation of the state of Israel, when Ben Gurion was Prime Minister, he wrote to various Jewish leaders throughout the world to find out their views as to who was a Jew. Israel had declared that any Jew who wished to settle there was entitled to Israeli citizenship. The working of this law, called The Law Of Return, depended on upon a precise definition of who was a Jew. For a number of religious purposes like Synagogue membership, marriage or burial, it is necessary to be clear as to who is considered to be a Jew.

There were therefore various reasons why Ben Gurion asked his question. Let us first examine the three answers provided by the dictionary to see if they are correct.

### **RACE.**

The dictionary spoke of the Hebrew race; but no recognised race exists by that name. Other people speak of the Jewish race; but strictly speaking there is no such thing. The

nearest racial type or classification is the Semitic race. The term 'Semitic' describes the families of Shem, Ham and Japhet, the three sons of Noah. Ham is described as the ancestor of the African peoples and his descendants had names like Mitsrayim (Egypt) and Cush (Ethiopia). Japhet was the ancestor of the European peoples and his descendants had names like Javan (Greece) and Tarshish (thought to be in Spain), while Shem was the father of the middle Eastern peoples and his descendants included Asshur (Assyria) and Aram (where Abraham's family came from). From this we see that the Shemitic or as it is now called the Semitic race includes Arabs as well as Jews. Such a definition would not have helped Ben Gurion to sort out applicants under the Law of Return nor would it help Synagogues to decide who qualify for membership.

Adolph Hitler, whose anti-Semitic feelings are well-known, backed up his prejudices by some crack-pot ideas about races put forward by Alfred Rosenburg. The Nazis believed that the Aryan race (the Germans) was superior, and that all other races like Slavs, Jews or Gypsies were inferior and worthless. It was this mad theory which led to the murders of millions of people. The Nazis carried out all kinds of research to try to prove the existence of a Jewish race. They measured the sizes and shapes of noses and faces and they recorded the colour of hair and other characteristics of many Jews. They naturally satisfied themselves that their ideas were correct. Sadly, this Nazi myth of Jewish race is still believed in by some people in the world today.

The Jews of Germany were in fact a closely-knit group. They were Ashkenazim (Jews of Central Europe). If there had been Sephardim present (Jews from Mediterranean countries), the Nazi statistics would have been very different. Jews throughout the world display different racial characteristics in different places. The Jews of Europe tend to be white, the Jews of Yemen, Iraq and Iran are tan coloured and the Jews of Ethiopia and some from Cochin are black. At the turn of the century there were also yellow Jews in China; but that community has now died out.

There have been some identifiable characteristics due to a small group of people continually trying to marry within the group. So it is a medical fact that Ashkenazi Jews are about four hundred times as likely to be carriers of Tay Sachs disease than any other group of people; but Sephardi Jews do not have this problem. (Tay-Sachs disease is a condition appearing in infants and occurs when both parents are carriers of a particular gene. This disease usually shows up in the first six months of life as a degeneration of the nervous system, which is usually fatal. It is now possible to be tested to see whether one is a carrier.) If Jews had always married partners who were born of Jewish parents, and if there had never been any conversions, then probably there would be very clear racial characteristics. However, we do know that over the centuries many people have converted to Judaism. The group which most affected the Ashkenazi Jews was the kingdom of Khazars in the Crimean area, which accepted Judaism in the 8th century C.E. and its citizens converted in bulk. Today, there must be a large number of Jews with Khazar blood in them. There were also many conversions in Roman times and under the Maccabees (1 Maccabees 2, 45-46.). Each of these were sufficient to spoil the purity of a Jewish race, if it ever existed. In ghetto times there were occasional marriages between Jews and gentiles; but once the ghetto walls were down, the number of such marriages increased greatly.

One reason for the myth of a Jewish race is that Ashkenazi Jews can usually recognise other Ashkenazi Jews by their appearance; but when it comes to recognising Indian Jews, Yemenites or Falashas, they usually fail miserably. From all these facts it can be seen that the Jews are not a single separate identifiable racial unit. It is therefore, not possible to say that a Jew is a member of a Jewish race and to identify him solely by his racial

characteristics.

## **NATIONALITY.**

From the time of Saul in 1033 B.C.E. to the end of the reign of Solomon in 933 B.C.E. there was one unified kingdom; but after Solomon dies, the country was divided into two separate kingdoms. The larger in the North was called Israel and the smaller in the South around Jerusalem was called Judah. Israel was overrun by the Assyrians in 721 B.C.E. and its population was scattered or assimilated, while Judah continued under its own kings until the Babylonian exile in 586 B.C.E. After the exile, Judah was allowed to maintain its identity and did so under Persians, Greeks and Romans. It was during this period that the inhabitants of Judah began to be called Jews. For much of this time, many of those who worshipped the Jewish God lived in Judah or Judeah, as it was sometimes called. We therefore find religion and nationality being closely connected. By the time that this period came to an end, there were sizeable Jewish communities living in Babylon, Egypt and parts of the Roman Empire. From this time onward, being a Jew did not depend on the country in which one lived. The central Temple had been destroyed, Synagogues were built in all places where Jews then lived and Judaism became an international religion. It is for this reason that the dictionary says that a Jew "was *originally* of the kingdom of Judah", for in later times they were of many different countries.

In recent times, a Jewish state has been established again. There are some Jews who believe that to be fully a Jew we should live in the Jewish state. For this reason they speak of those who live outside it as being in exile (Galut). A small number of those who live outside actually feel themselves to be in exile. Some non-Jews think about us in the same way. So we find that some of the anti-Semitic slogans daubed on walls throughout the world say in various languages: "Jews go home." But like the second definition in the dictionary, we should not use these prejudiced ideas as a basis for a definition of who is a Jew.

Nationality implies a national identity. That is a homeland and a national culture. If the Jews were a nationality during the middle ages, then they were a nation without a land of their own for 1,800 years. Some Jews have claimed that we do have a national culture. This is only partly true. The religious language Hebrew was a common link for all Jews, but so was Latin the religious language of Roman Catholics for many years; but this did not make them a nation. Some see Yiddish (a mixture of Hebrew and German, etc.) as the Jewish language (Yid means Jew); but Yiddish was only the language of Ashkenazi Jews, and Sephardi Jews had other languages like Ladino (Hebrew and Spanish), Italkian (Judeo-Italian), Zarfatic (Judeo-French) and Arvic (Judeo-Arabic). The inscription under the picture in the Leghorn Haggadah shown at the beginning of Chapter 5 is an example of Ladino. The Spanish is written in Hebrew characters.

The lack of a uniform language meant that Jews did not have one national culture, but several different ones. These were all part of our Jewish heritage and of our history. This history, however, shows the Jews to be international rather than national.

Reports in the newspapers of clashes between Israelis and their neighbours often refer to them as "Arabs and Jews" instead of "Arabs and Israelis". This again is an inaccurate use of words, and it helps to create the mistaken impression that all Israelis are Jews or that all Jews are Israelis, some of whom are in exile.

It is interesting to see how one becomes an Israeli and how one becomes a Jew. The two processes are not the same. To become a Jew, you have to apply for conversion to the Jewish religion. This fact clearly shows that nationality is not the answer to the question as to who is a Jew, and it seems to clinch the argument in favour of the third possibility -

religion.

## **RELIGION.**

It follows from the last point, that if one can become a Jew only by conversion, then being a Jew is solely a matter of religion. This is the nearest we can get to defining a Jew under one of the three headings provided by the dictionary. The word 'Jew' then is equivalent to the word 'Christian' rather than to the word 'English'. So it is then possible to describe someone as a British Jew. 'British' is the nationality on his passport and 'Jew' describes his religion. In the past Zionists and other nationalists have poked fun at this kind of definition, for although it is an accurate use of words, it does not completely ring true. Because Judaism is a different kind of religion to Christianity, one can not make an exact parallel. If one describes a British Jew as a Briton of the Jewish faith, it sounds odd. This is because Judaism is not just a faith, it is also a way of life. Being a Jew is not just a matter of an individual holding certain beliefs in private, it is much more being part of a family or community who live in certain ways, as a result of their beliefs.

If we kept strictly to the religious definition of a Jew, we would be forced to say that any person born of Jewish parents, who did not believe in Jewish teachings or who did not observe Jewish practices was not a Jew, in the same way that Christianity only accepts those who believe. Although in theory, this might be what we ought to do, in practice Judaism does not cut such people off from it. We would say of such people that they are "lax Jews", "bad Jews", "unaffiliated Jews", "secular Jews" or "non-practising Jews"; but in each case we still call them Jews. An old tradition teaches that even if a Jew converts to another religion, he is still regarded as someone who could repent and return and be welcomed back without any difficulty being placed in his way. (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 268, 12.) Those people who have drifted into nothingness have not gone as far as those who actually convert to another religion, and it is clear that we should not cut them off from us by denying that they are Jews. The way for them to return must always be left open.

We must recognise that the tradition, which says that someone converting to another religion is still a Jew, dates from the time when Jews were forcibly converted to other religions. Today when conversions are voluntary, we should respect people's beliefs. Our reason and our emotion tell us that such converts to other religions are no long Jews, and perhaps we should expect them to undergo some conversion ceremony if they wished to be Jewish again. Some Rabbinic authorities used to require this in the middle ages.

Recently some rather odd religious groups have sprung up. One called "Jews for Jesus" is both muddled in their religious beliefs and inaccurate in the use of the word 'Jew'. If someone believes in the divinity of Jesus and in the Trinity, he is a Christian and not a Jew. This was confirmed in the case of Father Daniel, who was born a Jew, converted to Christianity and was living as a monk in a monastery on Mount Carmel. When he applied for Israeli citizenship under the Law of return, his request was denied on the grounds that he was no longer Jewish.

Because Judaism is a religion of practice rather than dogma, it is only on rare occasions that we have hounded someone out of the community because he was a heretic. The extreme Orthodox sections have sometimes said that those Jews who did not carry out various practices were not proper Jews; but they have rarely attacked them on matters of belief. The only exception is that of attacks on Progressive Jews over the issue of the complete unquestioning acceptance of Jewish Law, both written and oral; but even here it is usually the resulting practices that seem to matter to them more than the beliefs which

gave rise to those practices.

From all this we can see a conflict of ideas. Judaism is a religion and the decision as to who is a Jew should be made on religious grounds, but old traditions tell us to be lenient. This may well be either because of the persecutions which forced conversions in earlier times, or because they were aware of the smallness of the number of Jews in the world and this did not warrant any further reduction. The original reasons no longer exist to the same extent, but the old tradition still remains.

### **ONE OF A PEOPLE.**

If race and nationality are not correct, and if religion should be the deciding factor, but practical problems prevent us from applying it too rigidly, then we need another category which was not included in the dictionary entry. What is needed is something more comprehensive than religion, but a word that is not as specific as nationality.

For this we need to go back in history. Originally our people were all descendants of Abraham and of Jacob (Israel). For this reason we were called the Children of Israel. At first we were a family, then a group of tribes. We still feel ourselves close to our fellow-Jews. It is a closeness which is almost like being one of a family. At the time of writing, people of all religions in the Soviet Union are suffering from discrimination and state interference because of their religious activities. Jews throughout the world are very concerned about the injustices inflicted upon their fellow Jews. They are protesting, campaigning,, writing letters and visiting the Refusniks (People refused permission to leave Russia so that they can lead a fully Jewish life as they wish). Compared to these activities by Jews, the efforts by Baptists on behalf of their fellow Baptists, or of Jehovah's Witnesses on behalf of their co-religionists, seem muted and almost non-existent. The Jew feels very strongly that the Russian Jew is his brother. In many cases, we feel close because we still have relatives in Russia. Because of persecution and exile, it is quite common to find that the Jewish family often extends across the borders of countries and even continents. Such families often manage to preserve a unity and closeness which defies geographical distance.

The Jew feels an affinity with his fellow Jews which is more than just a shared religion. The religion is very important; but it is not all. It is also a shared heritage, a shared history and a shared role in history. The heritage includes languages like Hebrew, Yiddish Ladino, etc. It includes Jewish literature and Jewish music and even Jewish recipes for foods. The history is one of persecution and anti-Semitism. The shared suffering has brought us together, where affluence and peace have tended to cause us to drift apart. From all this it is clear that while we are not a nation with a specific nationality, yet we are united in other ways, so that we often seem like a vast family. As we are too big to be called a family or even a tribe, it is best to describe us as a people. This term is sufficiently vague to include most of the interpretations which individual Jews make of the link that binds us all together. We are therefore a people with a shared religion. Some would say that we are a religious people.

While the correct definition of a Jew must remain that of religion, perhaps the most all-embracing and practical description of Jew is a person who is an adherent of the Jewish religion, a member of the Jewish people and an heir to the Jewish heritage.

## **CONVERSION.**

It has always been possible to convert to the Jewish religion; but at different times in our history and in different countries, it has varied in ease or difficulty. In the Bible, there are several examples of people who were not born Jewish, but who were later recognised as Jews. The best known example is that of Ruth. She was a Moabitess who married a Jewish husband without converting to Judaism at the time. When her husband dies, she accompanied her Jewish mother-in-law, Naomi, back to join her Jewish relatives in Bethlehem. Although Naomi tried to dissuade Ruth three times, she remained firm in her intentions saying:

"Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you." (Ruth 1, 16-17.)

At that time, this declaration was sufficient for her to be accepted as a Jewess. Note that her declaration contains a commitment both to a belief in God (religion) and to being part of the Jewish people.

Once the Bible had been completed and Rabbinic Law had been established, then conversion became more complicated. The applicant had to satisfy a Bet Din (Rabbinic Court) of at least three Rabbis of his or her suitability, and, if male, had to be circumcised. All converts had to have an immersion in a Mikvah (Ritual Bath). The Mikvah was used to cleanse someone from some physical or ritual uncleanness, for example after menstruation. So for proselytes, it was meant to wash away the uncleanness of a Pagan past. This kind of symbolism is insulting and has no meaning for a modern convert, and so Liberal Judaism does not require it. Instead of making a ritual act like circumcision or immersion the point of entry in to the religion, Liberal Judaism has introduced a short ceremony in synagogue before the open Ark, at which the convert makes a solemn declaration of loyalty and which concludes by the Rabbi asking God's blessing upon him or her. This ceremony contains the passage from the book of Ruth quoted above.

In both Progressive and Orthodox conversions a period of study and observance is required before the convert is accepted. In Orthodoxy this period can vary from about six weeks in some places to about five or six years as it is at the moment in Britain; but it should be remembered that Britain is one of the most difficult countries in which to obtain an Orthodox conversion. Liberal Judaism lays down a minimum period of at least a year, so that the convert sees all the festivals of a Jewish year, and this also allows time for them to change their beliefs and way of life.

Because the Liberal movement does not require Mikvah for its converts and because ruling of Progressive Rabbis are not accepted by Orthodox Rabbis, Liberal and Reform converts are only certain of recognition amongst those movements. The Reform movement in Britain have recently introduced Mikvah in an attempt to gain recognition for their converts; but they still find that their converts are not accepted by the Orthodox because their Bet Din is not recognised. The Liberal Movement discussed the idea of introducing Mikvah and rejected it, partly on the grounds that the symbolism was out of date and irrelevant to the modern convert, and partly because Liberal Jews do not use a Mikvah for other purposes, so it would be unreasonable to require a convert to do something which other Liberal Jews do not observe.

## **JEWISH STATUS.**

In Biblical times the status of the child followed the father, so the tribe to which one belonged depended on one's father and not one's mother. This practice is still preserved amongst the Orthodox, where the Cohanim (priests) and the Levites are still classified in the same way. It is also clear that this also applied when a number of important people in the Bible married non-Jewish wives. So when Joseph married Asenath, the daughter of a Pagan priest of On (Genesis 41, 45.) his sons Ephraim and Manasseh were thought to be good Jews, and when Moses married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest, (Exodus 2, 16-22.) their children too were regarded as Jews. The original custom was that if the father was an Israelite, then his children were too. Later, this changed and in Rabbinic times the child followed the mother. Once that happened, it was necessary to create stories that Asenath was of Jewish origins. (Targum Yerushalmi to Genesis 41, 45.), and that Zipporah and her father were converts. (Exodus Rabba; Tanhuma.)

During the Rabbinic period it became the custom to regard as a Jew anyone who had a Jewish mother or anyone who converted. This now remains the custom within Orthodoxy today. In the present time, when there are no ghetto walls to separate ourselves from the gentiles around us, there are naturally more cases where a Jew and a non-Jew meet and fall in love. Such marriages are discouraged by all sections of the Jewish community; but once it has happened, one still has to classify the children. In Orthodoxy, it is purely a matter of birth, if the mother is Jewish then her child is Jewish, no matter what the father is. If the mother is not Jewish, no matter how hard the father tries to bring up his child as a Jew, that child can only become Jewish by conversion. The usual reason given for this rule is that they think that the mother has the greatest influence upon the religion of the child. However, it is more probable that it was the only sure way of identifying children, because they always knew who the mother was, but they could not always be sure of the father.

The definition of a Jew, stated previously, mentioned religious belief and practice, membership of the Jewish people and pride in ones Jewish heritage. If, as often happens, the non-Jewish mother is apathetic to her original religion, but the Jewish father remains strongly committed to Judaism, then the father may well ensure that his children learn about Judaism at a Jewish school, observe Jewish practices in his home and he may take them to Synagogue so that they grow up feeling themselves to be Jewish and proud of their Jewish heritage. In such a case, it may seem wrong to reject them just because the mother is not Jewish. On the other hand, one may have a Jewish woman married to a gentile, and she may not bother to teach her children anything about Judaism and may even let her husband take them with him to Church, so that they may be quite ignorant of their Jewish heritage. It seems both unreasonable and unjust to accept these children automatically as Jews and the first family as not Jewish. The Liberal movement recognises how unjust this is, and judges each case of Jewish status of a child of a mixed marriage on its own merit. If the children have been brought up as Jews, the Liberal movement will recognise them as Jews provided that evidence can be given of that Jewish upbringing. If the children were not brought up as Jews, then they must undergo a course of study and convert. In this way, it is more understanding of the Jewish father who has tried to raise his children as Jewish, and more strict concerning the Jewish mother who has failed in her Jewish duties. The result is that belief, practice and upbringing are regarded as more important than an accident of birth. The Reform Movement in Britain follows the Orthodox practice in this matter.

The same principle is applied to Jewish parents adopting an infant. Orthodoxy required evidence that the natural mother of the infant was Jewish. Because of the need for

confidentiality, it is often impossible to produce such evidence, even in cases where the mother was known to be Jewish. Liberal Judaism gives such adopted babies Jewish status, provided that the Jewish parents are intending to bring them up as Jews. This prevents the children being treated differently from other children and stops discrimination against adopted children.

Liberal Judaism therefore assesses Jewish status from a different set of rules from those used by Orthodoxy. Liberal Jews regard these rules as an advance, because they are more reasonable and more just than the old laws. If they are more just, then they must be more in accord with the will of a just God. We therefore believe that these laws are closer to the Torah, the revelation of God's will for man, than were the old laws that existed in the past.

## **24. THE STATE OF ISRAEL.**

### ***THE NEED FOR A JEWISH STATE.***

The modern Zionist movement was started by Theodor Herzl, an Austrian Jew who had allowed his religion to lapse. Herzl was a reporter on the Austrian paper, *Neue Freie Presse*, and was in Paris covering the trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in 1894-5. Dreyfus was a Jewish officer in the French army, wrongly accused of spying for Germany. He was found guilty and imprisoned on false evidence, largely due to an orchestrated campaign of antisemitism in the French popular press. The assimilated Jew, Herzl was suddenly confronted by the ugly manifestation of religious prejudice against his people. He was shaken by the experience, and came to the conclusion that if the public opinion of an educated and tolerant country like France could be stirred up to such a level of antisemitic hatred so that an innocent man was condemned to a harsh prison sentence, then there was no future for the Jews living as a minority in any land. He suggested the idea that there should be a Jewish state. Through Herzl's personality, influence and diplomacy, this longing for a Jewish state became a political force and took the name of Zionism.

Herzl's idea was not new. During the nineteenth century, others had suggested that there should be a Jewish state; but they did so for other reasons. That century saw a number of peoples gain independence and a state of their own, and so it was not surprising that some of the Jews felt that they also should be allowed to become self-governing in a land of their own.

For centuries before this, Jewish prayers had voiced the hope for a future Jewish state when the Messiah would come, the Temple would be rebuilt and all the scattered Jews would return and live in the Holy Land in peace.

These three approaches to the Jewish state reflect three different concepts. Herzl envisaged a haven from Antisemitism. The 19th century idea was that of a separate Jewish state like other nations of the world. While the liturgy was praying for an ideal Jewish state, where justice and peace would reign.

### ***A HAVEN FOR THE PERSECUTED.***

Herzl's idea that it was important for Jews to have a place to which they could flee, has sadly proved to be necessary on many occasions. Since Herzl proposed the idea in 1895, the pogroms of Tsarist Russia, the persecutions in Rumania, the horrors of Nazi rule, the Arab violence in countries like Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Egypt or Algeria which took place after the founding of the state of Israel, the intolerant regimes of South America and the Communist oppression of religion in Russia have all provided waves of immigrants to Israel. One is tempted to say that because there has been so much antisemitism in the past, that there will always be antisemitism. This view shows no faith in humanity and no hope for the future. Religious and racial hatred are not necessarily going to be with us always. It is possible to envisage a time when such prejudice will be thought obscene and shunned by everyone. That time could come will before the Messianic Age. The Holocaust, with the destruction of millions of Jews by the Nazis, so shocked the world that it has already become more difficult to be racist or antisemitic. With proper education, fair laws and good leadership, it could be possible to remove racism completely.

Whether or not the persecution of Jews ceases in the near future, it is still a very negative purpose for a Jewish state to exist solely to provide a safe haven for the oppressed. It is certainly necessary to have such a haven; but it is rather like saying that the reason why we put reading rooms in Public Libraries is so that old people can have somewhere to go to avoid the cold in winter. The Jewish state has far better reasons for its existence.

### ***A NATION LIKE OTHER NATIONS.***

Following the War of Independence in 1948, Israel devoted all its energy into becoming an efficient modern state. In this, they were highly successful. With regard to such things as education, democracy, medicine, agriculture and military power, Israel stands out above all the other countries of the Middle East and compares favourably with many western nations.

Jews as individuals value their Jewish identity. They worry continually whether they are becoming less Jewish and are assimilating. If the Jewish state is only trying to be like other nations without trying to be Jewish, then this would be assimilation at the national level. Happily, Israel does try to be Jewish in various ways.

The Bible tells a story of a previous occasion when Jews wanted to be like all the other nations. During the period of the Judges, various natural leaders arose to rule the people. The last of these was Samuel, who was both religious and secular leader. When he grew old, the people approached him and said: "Make us a king to judge us like all the other nations." The Bible goes on to say that "the thing displeased Samuel," and he warned them that the king might be a despotic ruler, forcing them to work like slaves for him, taxing them heavily and generally oppressing them. Samuel consulted God, and God said: "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say to you, because they have not rejected you, but Me from being king over them." (1 Samuel 8, 5-18.) This teaches that the people should abide by the rule of God rather than the whims of man.

As it turned out, the first three kings were Saul, David and Solomon. Saul suffered from mental illness and was unstable in his latter years. David fell in love with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his subjects, and ordered that the husband be sent into the most dangerous part of the battle so that he might be killed. (2 Samuel ch. 11.) And as Samuel had warned, Solomon, despite his reputation for wisdom, proved to be a despot whose harsh rule eventually forced the kingdom to divide into two. (1 Kings 12, 1-17.)

The way that all these discreditable events are recorded in the Bible, shows that the Biblical writer wanted us to learn from experience and that a king should set an example and live by the highest standards of Judaism so that the state would have Jewish values. (See also Deut. 17, 14-20) In other words, according to the Bible, the Jewish state should not be just like all the other surrounding nations; for the Jewish state had higher standards to live by. It is often said that if the Israelites acted wrongly and desecrated the Holy Land, then they would not be thought fit to dwell there any longer. (Deuteronomy 11, 8-9 & 32 46-7, etc.)

After the Babylonian Exile, prophets explained the disaster by saying that it was all due to the people failing to live by God's teachings. (Ezekiel 36, 17-19.) The covenant that God made with Israel concerning the land of Canaan was dependent on the Israelites being God's people and obeying His commandments. (Deuteronomy 11, 22-23.) If the Israelites failed to keep their side of the covenant, then there was no need for God to keep His side. (Deuteronomy 28, vs 58, 63 & 64.)

## ***SETTING AN EXAMPLE.***

In chapter 21, we saw how the Jewish people were to be a light to the nations." It was explained there, that the individual Jew had to do this by showing his religion to his non-Jewish neighbours by the way that he lived. Every good deed was Kiddush Ha-Shem, the sanctification of the name of God, and every bad deed brings discredit upon God and upon our religion. Judaism is not only the faith of individual Jews, it is also the religion of the Jewish people. Judaism sets standards for communal life and so a group of Jews may also set an example to others. Therefore a Jewish state could show the non-Jewish nations how one should conduct both internal and external affairs in accordance with Judaism's teachings of justice, righteousness and peace.

The Jewish ideas of equality and justice produced a new concept of communal living in Israel when they developed the Kibbutz. The Kibbutz was the product of both Judaism and Socialism. It produced a life-style which was unique. The Kibbutz has served as an example to others, and now other people have begun to copy it. Not everyone thinks that Kibbutz life is suitable for them; but all would recognise that Kibbutzniks are seeking to create an ideal form of community.

## ***THE BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY.***

Judaism sets very high standards, and just as it is difficult for the individual to live up to them, so it is hard for the state. Very often it falls short in one way or another, and then its critics are all too ready to condemn it. At such times, the supporters of the Jewish state ask why people judge it more harshly than other states. Why, they ask, are there two sets of standards. The answer to the question is that a backward nation with low moral awareness can not be expected to behave in the same way as an educated people with high moral principles.

Israeli leaders see that other politicians and diplomats are constantly making compromises between what is ideal and what is expedient, and they ask why can they not do the same. The answer is that each time that an Israeli leader fails to act according to Jewish teachings, they bring discredit upon Judaism. As Israel is the only Jewish state in the world, all eyes are focused upon it. A Christian or a Muslim country which fails in the same way, is far less noticeable, because it is one among many. The Jewish people have been God's servants, and we have had to suffer because we were His servants. This role of the suffering servant is hinted at in Isaiah. (ch. 52, 13 & 53, 3.) It may be that as the Jewish state is also God's servant, it has to suffer these criticisms as part of its role.

We must conclude, therefore, that of the three reasons for the existence of a Jewish state, Herzl's idea of a haven for the oppressed is too negative a concept, the 19th century idea of a nation like other nations was already partially rejected in the Bible and would produce a state no better than many of the modern states, whose peoples suffer from lack of justice, freedom or democracy. The only satisfactory *raison d'etre* for a Jewish state is that it should NOT be a nation like other nations, but that it should set an example of Jewish living. It should therefore strive to be an ideal state. Its purpose is not just mere existence, but existence on a higher moral level. This was the hope expressed in the prayers of centuries for an ideal Jewish state in the Messianic Age. One of the prayers quotes Isaiah 2, 3: "And many people shall go and say come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." In other words Zion was to be an example to others.

## **ATTITUDE TO ZIONISM.**

There were originally several objections to Zionist ideas. The Orthodox said that the establishment of a Jewish state and the gathering in of scattered Jews was to be the work of the Messiah, and they believed it was wrong for man to try and do his work for him before he came. There are still Ultra-Orthodox Jews, some even living in Israel, who disapprove of the state and who refuse to speak Hebrew except for religious purposes.

A second group of Jews said that for centuries they had been trying to get equality for Jews in the various countries in Europe, and that once a Jewish state was established, some of these countries would feel that their Jews might owe loyalty to another country. They feared that their rights might be taken away, and that they would be regarded as a foreign element and so become the focus of persecution. Zionists who believed in a Jewish state hoped that all Jews would eventually live there, and so they felt that this argument was irrelevant. Looking back, we can now see that the resurgence of Jewish nationalism sometimes has caused both individuals and states to regard Jewish citizens of their countries as not being truly loyal citizens of their country.

A third argument put forward was that Zionism was based upon the idea of a future Jewish nation. It therefore encouraged Jews to express their Jewishness in a purely secular way. As was seen in the last chapter, being a Jew is not a matter of nationality, it is religion plus a feeling of being part of a people with a heritage. At the turn of the century, when Zionism began to take root in Britain, the founders of Liberal Judaism were forming a Jewish Religious Union, whose aim was to attract back to a modern form of Judaism, those Jews who were drifting away from the religion. As they feared that some of these lapsed Jews might choose to express their Jewishness in secular nationalism rather than through religious belief and observance, they therefore felt it necessary to oppose Zionism and to put forward the religious way for Jewish survival.

Of these three arguments, only a very small number of Ultra-Orthodox Jews still believe that they should wait for the Messiah before returning. The second argument that Jews outside Israel would suffer because of its existence has proved true on occasions; but most Jews today would say that on balance, if it is necessary for us to suffer so that the state can exist, then we must suffer. The cause of that suffering is not Zionism, but the attitudes of those countries to their minority groups. As to the third question of the method of ensuring Jewish survival, we can still see a clash of opinions, but it is no longer seen as an irreconcilable difference. There are non-religious Jews whose Zionism keeps them identifiable as members of the Jewish people. If there had been no state of Israel, they might well have assimilated completely. However, we can also wonder if there had been no such secular nationalist way of showing their Jewishness, how many more would have remained religious Jews? A number of Zionists in this country and of Israelis in that country openly claim not to be religious, and this seems to show that at least in those cases, they see Zionism as providing an alternative rather than an additional form of Jewish identity. We must conclude, however, that there is no need that religion and Zionism should be in conflict. It is perfectly possible to be a religious Jew and a Zionist at the same time and the term 'religious Jew' can of course refer to a religious Progressive Jew or a religious Orthodox Jew.

Perhaps the question of Zionism is now really a dead issue. For Zionism meant originally a belief in the need to create a Jewish state. That state was established in 1948. There is no need for Zionism any longer. What is needed is something slightly different - support for

the state of Israel, and this probably what most people mean when they describe themselves as Zionists.

## ***THE STATE OF ISRAEL.***

Since the foundation of the state of Israel, the view point of world Jewry has swung round to almost total support for the state. Jewish life in the Diaspora (Jewish communities outside Israel) has become more and more influenced by Israel, and we are now in a better position to appreciate its value. Not necessarily in order, the following are some of the reasons why Jews settle there.

1. It is claimed that only by living in a Jewish state can one lead a full Jewish life. For a Jew who lives in the Diaspora, the Sabbath may be spent in the Synagogue and in the home; he can hardly fail to be aware that around him his non-Jewish neighbours are not observing the Sabbath. The shops are open, buses and trains are running as usual and at times the activities of gentiles interfere with his Sabbath peace. In a Jewish state this is not the case. If one walks in Jerusalem on a Saturday, you can not fail to feel the peace and quiet of the Sabbath, for the day is clearly different from the other days of the week. In the same way, the Jewish festivals, which are public holidays, gain a new importance. In Israel, children learn Jewish history and literature in school as a matter of course; and Jewish parents do not have to decide whether to allow their children to attend non-Jewish assemblies while recognising the strength of this argument. We must however add that although it is difficult to lead a Jewish life outside Israel, it is not impossible.

2. In the Diaspora, the great influence of the majority culture and religion is reducing the Jewishness of the Jews. There is both religious assimilation and social assimilation taking place. There has been a great increase in the number of Jews marrying non-Jewish partners due to the increased social mixing in education and at work. If this trend continues, it is feared that the Diaspora communities might cease to be Jewish in a few generations. However, assimilation is not an automatic process, it is a voluntary one, in which the individual makes his own choice. The answer to assimilation is to give Jewish youngsters a love for and a pride in their heritage, and then they rarely want to assimilate. In fact, with the increasing number of conversions to Judaism of the non-Jewish partners of mixed marriages the number of Jews and their Jewishness may well be increasing, as some studies in U.S.A. have shown.

3. Another argument is that God wants the Jewish people to live in Israel. He promised the land to Abraham for his descendants, and so we should live there now. Many past Rabbis taught that we should return there and so they preserved prayers for such a return. Probably the best known is that in the Seder service at Passover, where we end by saying: "Next year in Jerusalem." However, it is at least questionable whether the promise of the land was for eternity. It was certainly dependent upon the Jews obeying God, and the dispersion is often explained as punishment for disloyalty to or disobedience of God. It is also doubtful whether this promise was anything more than a folk-legend. It is certainly possible to believe that it is now God's will that some Jews at least, should remain outside Israel to show non-Jews at first hand what is God's teaching. Although the majority opinion of the Rabbis was that all Jews would eventually go and live in Israel, there were some who saw a positive purpose in the dispersion. Rabbi Berakiah when commenting on the verse "Now the Lord said to Abram: Get you up out of your country.." (Gen. 12, 1.) said; To what was Abram like? A bottle of Myrrh with a tight fitting cork, lying in a corner, so no one could smell it; but as soon as it was taken out and uncorked its fragrance spread far and wide. Similarly the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Abram "Travel from place to place

and your name will become great in the world." (Genesis Rabba 39,, 2.) By this, he meant not only the name of Abraham; but also the teachings of his religion would become more widely known.

4. Some of the 613 mitzvot, commandments, were dependent upon life in the Holy Land. So, they say, that if a Jew goes there he will be able to fulfil more of the commandments than if he lived elsewhere. However, these mitzvot are largely agricultural and have little importance for today's urban Jews, and from the Progressive point of view we believe that we can do God's will by other means than the 613 mitzvot.

5. The state of Israel has given a sense of pride to the Jew. At one time the image of the Jew was that of a small bent tailor, meekly submitting to persecution. Israel has altered that image to that of young men standing tall and firm against aggression. The achievements of the state in many fields of life have made Jews throughout the world feel proud and helped them to become more confident in themselves. In recent years, the justice and morality of some of Israel's policies have been questioned, and some Jews have lost some of that pride.

6. Israel has become an important centre of Jewish study. When the second World War ended, the Jews found that about one third of the Jews living in the world in 1939 had been killed, and that many centre of Jewish life in Europe had been totally destroyed. These centres before the war, had provided much of traditional Jewish scholarship and learning. Many of the survivors of the Holocaust settled in Israel, and in a way it has tried to replace the lost centres of learning. Its universities, colleges, schools and Yeshivot are providing a new Jewish education. Its printing houses are producing new Hebrew books of great scholarly merit.

Zionists see Israel as the rightful centre of Judaism and of Jewish knowledge; but as yet, it can not claim to be the most important centre. For there are more Jews in the United States, and American Jewish scholarship is at least equal to that of Israel. Many international Jewish organisations have moved their headquarters to Israel, so as to make their centre there. This is no empty gesture. For in the minds of many Jews, Israel is the centre, even if as yet it only holds a minority of world Jewry.

We may therefore conclude that it is highly desirable that there should be a Jewish state: but that each individual must decide for himself whether he wants to live there. Probably none of these arguments decides the issue, for what usually matters most is an emotional feeling. When they visit Israel, many Jews feel a sense of belonging, of being at home or of returning to their roots. It is usually some feeling like this which makes them decide to go on Aliyah (settle in Israel.) Some will be struck by the sense of Jewish history which surrounds them and others by the fact that almost everyone whom they meet in the street is Jewish. Few Jews who visit Israel for the first time return unmoved or unchanged. Somehow it touches a spot in every Jewish heart. The energy, enthusiasm and creative spirit found in Israel is often a great attraction. What prevents them from taking the step of settling is often timidity, apathy or family and emotional ties which prevent people from settling there.

### ***THE DIASPORA AND ISRAEL.***

There is no need to tell Jews that they should support Israel; for almost without exception, Jews throughout the world feel a strong emotional attachment to the state. This shows up particularly when Israel is attacked either militarily or verbally. If there are any Jews who do not feel emotionally involved with Israel, a short visit there is usually sufficient to make

them feel a new love and concern for it.

The Zionist idea that all Jews are part of one nation, and that ultimately they should go and live there, is not shared by all Jews. Most British Jews do not feel that they are citizens of Israel, living in exile in Britain. If they felt that way, by now they would have gone to settle there. It is, therefore, possible to describe Jews outside of Israel as being in the Diaspora (dispersed); but it is not universally acceptable to speak of this as Galut (exile). Although we do not feel ourselves to be Israeli Jews in exile, we still feel that we have strong emotional ties with Israel, which we do not have with other countries. For we can not help feeling close to a Jewish state with so many Jewish people and Jewish institutions. We can not forget that so much of our early history took place in that land. The Geographical place names stir up so many memories for us that we feel a deep bond with Israel, both as a land and as a people.

Jews throughout the world are deeply concerned with the fate of Israel, and equally the state takes an interest in the various Jewish communities throughout the world. It is the only state in the world which is sure to express their concern when Jews somewhere suffer persecution. By its mere existence, it helps to keep 'secular Jews' under the Jewish umbrella. But more than this, Israel has begun to take on some responsibility for the scattered Jewish communities. It sends Israelis to help in education and youth work. This helps to stop assimilation and loss in those communities and it increases their Jewishness; it also encourages these young people to go on Aliyah. Aliyah is a mixed blessing, because by taking away some of the younger generation, it helps to create communities with high proportions of elderly Jews.

The Jews of the Diaspora feel that they want to support Israel in every way possible. They donate to the J.I.A. (Joint Israel Appeal) and to other Israeli charities, they buy Israeli goods and go on holidays there. Without the financial and political support of the American Jewish community, it is doubtful whether Israel would still exist. We can therefore see that the Diaspora needs Israel and Israel needs the Diaspora.

The Diaspora needs to support Israel, partly because Israel deserves that support, and partly because by supporting Israel we are helping ourselves and our people. After only one generation of its existence, most Jews could not bear to contemplate a world without the state of Israel.

## ***DUAL LOYALTY.***

On page A51, mention was made of the phrase "an Englishman of the Jewish persuasion". This has sometimes been used in the discussions as to where a Jew owes his loyalty. This catch-phrase tried in a few words to sum up a rather complex situation. The phrase was strongly attacked by some Zionists. Apart from being archaic in language using 'English' for 'British' and 'persuasion' for 'religion' its basic idea, that we are English by nationality and Jewish by religion, is still correct. However, this catch-phrase is not satisfactory as a complete answer in two respects. In speaking of 'the Jewish persuasion', it did not take into account the fact that Jews are linked to each other by more than a shared belief, and that an Englishman of the Jewish persuasion feels closer to a Frenchman of the Jewish persuasion than does the average Englishman to the average Frenchman.

Secondly, the phrase puts nationality first and religion second. This may be accidental. If there were ever to be a conflict between being British and being Jewish, it would have to be decided by our consulting our reason and our conscience, and by judging the situation in the light of the ideals of justice, righteousness and truth. It should never be solved by

saying "my country, right or wrong." This applies whether the country involved is Britain or Israel. We should only support a country\_ if its moral position is seen to be acceptable. As things like justice and morality are the teachings of religion, we clearly must put religion before nationality. Where however, there is no conflict, then it does not matter if a British Jew has a love for British institutions at the same time that he has a love for Jewish ones. In our modern world, such dual loyalties can help to cement peace by forming links across national boundaries.

### ***ANTISEMITISM AND ANTI-ZIONISM.***

Jews have recently been attacked throughout the world in a campaign of anti-Zionism. There are many who think that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are the same thing. They maintain that it is just another excuse to attack the Jews. If we examine this anti-Zionism, however, we see that in its origins, it is directed against the existence of the Jewish state or against some of the actions of the state.

From this beginning, it has developed into a political campaign against Israel, often orchestrated by Arabs; but it has also been fostered by extreme left-wing politicians. In some Communist countries like Russia, anti-Zionist articles have been published in state-controlled newspapers aimed at creating bad feelings against all Jews, not just Zionists. They attacked Jews just for being Jews. They set up Jewish stereotypes in the readers minds, and claimed that Jews were both villains and traitors to the Communist state.

One success of the anti-Zionist campaign was to get the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1975 to approve a motion saying "that Zionism is a form of racism or racial discrimination." All this motion achieved was to show how the General Assembly could make mistakes and that it could be manipulated by power blocks. For Zionism is a nationalist movement, seeking to establish a Jewish state. It is clearly not racist, because apart from the white Jews of Europe who settled in Israel, there were also tan Jews from Yemen, brown Jews from India and black Jews from Ethiopia. It is an irony of history that it was racialism which caused Herzl to launch the Zionist movement, and now Zionism itself is being accused of being racist.

Although some who attack us are both against the Jewish state and against the Jews as a religion or as a people, others concentrate only on one aspect. So it is possible for a British Fascist to be against the Jews in Britain, but approve of the state of Israel as a place to which they could send surplus Jews. Such a person is antisemitic but not anti-Zionist. One may also find an Arab opposed to the Jewish state, who regards the Jewish religion with respect and has no ill-feeling towards Jews living outside the state of Israel. Such a person is anti-Zionist but not antisemitic.

It is necessary to make a distinction, for antisemitism which condemns someone for being a member of a people or for holding a certain religion, is subject to the Race Relations Act in British law. It is despicable and immoral, for it is similar to being against someone because he has a certain colour of skin. While anti-Zionism, however mistaken it may be, is a political point of view, and in theory, is no more racist than Zionism itself. The confusion arises when someone attacks both the Jewish state and the Jews as a religious people at the same time, then they are being both anti-Zionist and antisemitic simultaneously

## **25. JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY.**

It is not easy to compare two religions like Judaism and Christianity, because each has within it many variations of belief and practice. Judaism has its Liberal, Reform, moderate Orthodox, ultra-Orthodox, Chasidic etc. The Christians have even more sub-divisions. There was a split between the Roman Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, and since the Reformation there have been various Protestant and Non-Conformist groupings. Many of these have their own specific beliefs and practices. As far as possible, comparisons will be made between the more generally held views of Judaism and Christianity.

### ***COMMON GROUND.***

In the course of this chapter the various differences between the two religions will be highlighted; but in considering those differences, we should not ignore the vast areas where ideas are shared. In religion it is all too easy to focus attention on divisions and controversies and to forget the areas of agreement, which we tend to take for granted. Because Jesus, the central figure of Christianity, was born a Jew, lived as a Jew, and died as a Jew most of his teachings were Jewish. (Some people say that all his teachings were Jewish.) Christians, therefore, recognise the Hebrew Bible as a Holy Book, which they call the Old Testament. Most of the teachings that it contains have entered into Church doctrine. The vast majority of the ideas about morality and ethics are the same for the two religions. The whole system of communal prayer and congregational worship is similar. Even the observance of holy days, which at first sight seems so very different, is in fact closely related in the two religions. Christianity took over Jewish festivals and gave them other significance. So Easter was made to correspond with Passover, and was deliberately made movable to try to make it fall on the same date. Whit Sunday came seven weeks later, corresponding with Shavuot. Christian harvest festivals have similarities with Sukkot, Christmas was made to fall in the middle of winter as did Chanukah and the Christian Sabbath was modelled on the Jewish Sabbath; But it was deliberately moved to a Sunday to make a distinction between the two religions. This change was finally confirmed at the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E. Until that date Christianity had been virtually a sub-division of Judaism.

### ***PAULINE CHRISTIANITY.***

Jesus of Nazareth, the Jew, went round the country preaching Judaism. Eventually the Romans crucified him as they had crucified thousands of other Jews under their oppressive rule. After the death of Jesus, Paul who was also born a Jew, developed new teachings about the significance of Jesus' life and death. It was Paul's teachings about Jesus which formed the basis of Christianity and which eventually made it into a separate religion. On some of the key issues, Jesus' words as quoted in the Gospels, are very obscure. His parables are open to different interpretations. In some cases his answers to questions seem to be deliberately evasive, particularly when he is on trial. (eg. Matthew 27, 11 - 14.)

### ***DIFFERENCES IN BELIEF.***

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW.

THE JEWISH VIEW.

1. After Paul, Christianity taught that God actually came down to earth in the body of Jesus, and that Jesus was the son of God. By this it was not meant that he was just the son of God, as every person is the child of God - a person with some of God's spirit inside them. The New Testament contains the story that Jesus was not born as the result of a normal sexual act; but that Mary, his mother was a virgin, and that God was his actual father.

2. Following on from this, God was no longer seen as a pure unity, as is taught in the Hebrew Bible. Christianity still speaks of God as One; but says that that one is a Trinity, composed of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

3. As a result of this belief, when praying to God the Father, Christians sometimes pray to or through Jesus. A number of Christian prayers end: "through Jesus Christ, our Lord." Whether the worshipper believes it or not, these words imply that he is praying through Jesus to reach God, the Father. In the same way, some Roman Catholics pray to or through Mary and even through various saints.

God is a Spiritual Power, who has no shape or form. If He were to come to earth in the shape of one human being, He would be limiting Himself in space and time. This limitation can be seen in the problems which a black person has in worshipping a white Jesus, or that a white person has in worshipping a brown Jesus (as he probably was), or that some women have in worshipping a male God. To the Jew, God is too great to be limited to one sex, to one colour, to one place or to one brief period of time.

The Jew believes in the unity of God. To the Jew, the Christian idea of a Trinity contradicts this belief in a unity. It seems to water down the purity of the Jewish belief.

The Jew prays directly to God and needs no one between him and God to help him reach God. When a Christian kneels before the figure of Jesus on the cross and prays to him, it seems very close to idol-worship. Even when the crucifix has no image of Jesus upon it, some Christians have treated it with the superstitious veneration of an idol worshipper. However, the Rabbis of the past deliberately avoided classifying Christianity as idol worship. Moses Isserles in the Shulchan Aruch, (Yore Deah 146, 5.) said: "The peoples among whom we live (Christians) and Muslims are not idolaters." They were classified as a Ger Toshav, a person who lived among the Jews and renounced idolatry, but who did not become a full Jew.

4. Christianity teaches that Jesus was the Messiah (Anointed one). The Greek word for this is 'christos'. Therefore he was called Jesus Christ, which means Jesus the Messiah.

5. Paul developed the idea that when Adam sinned and was expelled from the Garden of Eden, (Genesis Ch. 3.) mankind fell from grace. This idea of Original Sin teaches that all human beings are born in a state of sin. It is not that they are necessarily sinful: but that they share the sin of Adam.

6. Paul also taught that when Jesus died on the cross, he was atoning for the sins of all mankind, by giving up his own life for them. It was seen as an act of self-sacrifice for the benefit of mankind. The term for this is vicarious atonement, and is based upon a Christian interpretation of the suffering servant passages in Isaiah (Ch. 42 - 54.)

The Jewish idea was that the anointed Messiah would redeem the world from sin and evil and would create a world filled with justice and peace. It is clear that such a world has not yet arrived and so the Jew can not accept that Jesus was the Messiah. (See Chapter 22.) Many people in Jewish history have claimed to be the Messiah; but none has fulfilled the role of redeeming the world from sin and evil. As he is not the Messiah, it is wrong for a Jew to refer to Jesus as 'Christ'.

Judaism teaches that every baby that is born starts with a clear record. He has within him two impulses, one to do good and another to do evil. But man has a choice how he behaves. If he chooses to disobey God, then he sins. The modern Jew would see the Garden of Eden as a legend, which symbolised the perfection of the original creation. This idea of perfection in the past does not agree with our modern concept of evolution. So similarly, a fall from a mythical state of paradise is also unacceptable.

The suffering servant poems which refer to a servant of God who suffers for the sins of others, state quite clearly that that servant is the Jewish people. (Isaiah 44, 1.) As a minority group in many countries, we have found that when the regime was cruel and unjust, we Jews suffered most. At those time we suffered for the sins of others. (See Ch. 21) We did not take away those sins, for each person has to atone for his own sins.

7. In order for the individual to share in this act of atonement, it is necessary for him to believe in Jesus. For the Christian, atonement from sin comes from a belief in Jesus as the son of God and as forgiveness, we must try to put the matter right with the person we have wronged. So the Jew only fully atones for sin when he behaves rightly afterwards.

Atonement for sins against God comes through confession of those sins to God, through prayer, repentance and a deliberate effort to change our ways and not sin again. For sins against our fellow men, before asking God for

8. Salvation (reward after death) also comes through a belief in Jesus. Therefore only those who believe in Jesus are regarded as finding favour with God and meriting reward. This accounts for Christianity's constant efforts to try to convert people to their religion.

For the Jew, "the righteous of all nations have a place in the world to come." (Maimonides, Hilchot Teshuvah 3, 5.) It is not a matter of belief but of righteous behaviour. If a non-Jew is righteous, he would gain more merit than a Jew who acts wickedly. The Jew, therefore, has been less interested in making converts.

### ***DIFFERENCES IN EMPHASIS.***

1. THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT. Because of the account of the resurrection and the emphasis upon salvation, Christianity has laid greater stress on life after death. Judaism while believing in a continued spiritual existence after death, has always tried to concern itself with living in this world. It has avoided talking too much about death and the afterlife.

2. BELIEF AND PRACTICE. Christianity has laid much emphasis upon belief and refers to itself as a faith. While Judaism feels a little uncomfortable being called 'a faith', and prefers to speak of itself as a religion or as 'a way of life'. For the Jew, the prime task is to do God's will as expressed in the various commandments and as revealed by our conscience. A good Christian is a believer, while a good Jew is a practising Jew.

3. ATTITUDE TO SEX. Christianity has at times taken certain attitudes towards sex, which were probably based on sayings in the New Testament. The great emphasis placed upon the virginity of Mary and the rather negative attitude of Paul to marriage (1 Corinthians 7, 36-38.) has meant that Christians have at times seen the ideal state as that of virginity and thought that the most pious people should be celibate. So the Christian religion has established monasteries and created orders of monks and nuns. Various parts of the Church have insisted that their ministers remain celibate. It has been suggested that some Christians have seen the original sin of Adam as being sexual intercourse with Eve, and that when a baby is said to be in a state of sin, this is because it was born as the result of a sexual union. However, this is not the general view of Christianity. Judaism has regarded sexual intercourse in marriage as a good thing, speaking of it as one of the religious duties of a husband. It is also the duty to have at least two children. Only in one period was there anything like a monastery, when the Essenes had settlements which segregated the sexes. The Essenes, however, were never regarded as the mainstream of Judaism. The

concept among Christians of a holy man being a hermit seems strange to Judaism, which requires a Jew to be part of a community and of a family. (Avot 2, 5.) Following verses in the New Testament, (Mark 10, 9 & Matthew 19, 6.) Christianity was opposed to divorce and remarriage. Judaism following Deuteronomy 24, 1 reluctantly permits divorce provided that it is for valid reasons and that it is carried out in a proper manner.

4. FAMILY AND HOME. Jews look with pride at Jewish homes and compare them favourably with those of their Christian neighbours. Jewish families on the whole tend to be more united and closer than those of gentiles. This is partly due to the fact that Judaism has many observances and practices which take place in the home. Christianity, which also used to have some observances like grace at meal times and regular prayers and Bible reading, has largely allowed them to drop out. As a result, the religion is much more Church-centred, while Judaism is still both Synagogue-centred and home-centred. The closeness of the Jewish people is one of the better legacies of centuries of anti-Semitism and religious prejudice, for these forced us in on ourselves.

5. THE FLESH AND THE SPIRIT. (See chapter 10) Christianity has at times separated the flesh and the spirit, seeing the desires of the body as "sinful", and the things of the spirit as holy and good. Judaism does not make this distinction. Instead we see ourselves as having drives and inclinations to do good or evil and teaches that we have the power to control the desire to do evil and that we can choose good in life.

### **FALSE DIFFERENCES.**

LOVE AND JUSTICE. There have been a number of other points which have been suggested as differences between the two religions. Some Christians maintained that the Old Testament God was a God of Justice, while the New Testament God was a God of Love. The Hebrew Bible mainly uses two terms for God, Adonai and Elohim. Elohim was taken by the Rabbis as God acting with His attribute of Justice and Adonai was God acting with His attribute of Mercy. The concept of Mercy is almost identical to what Christians mean by Love. But even the attribute of Justice in the Hebrew Bible contains within it an element of love and concern. For the Just God sought justice for the orphan, the widow and the stranger. (Deuteronomy 10, 18; Exodus 22, 21-22, etc.) In fact, both religions see God as both loving and just. Would the Christian who speaks of a Loving God ever deny that He was also just? In a similar way, the Jew who often speaks of the justice of God also speaks of His love.



*In the middle ages Jews were sometimes forced to debate with Christian ministers for the entertainment of the royal court. This 16th Century woodcut shows the Jews wearing the required Jew's hats.*

LAW AND FREE CHOICE. It has also been suggested that Judaism is a religion of Law, while Christianity speaks of free choice. This may be due to the fact that Paul rejected much of the Jewish concept of Law. However Christianity replaced the rule of Law by the rule of Dogma. With Christianity's emphasis on faith as compared to Judaism's emphasis on practice, the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope or the Protestant 39 Articles of faith correspond roughly with the Orthodox idea of the authority of Jewish Law. We

therefore find that both religions have elements of both Law and free choice. The more traditional or authoritarian branches of each religion tended to favour Law or Dogma, while the more progressive or non-conformist sections allowed more free choice.

## ***STUDY.***

At times the two religions take different but parallel courses. This is so in the case of study. Both religions have a tradition of fostering study. In Christianity this was centred round the monasteries and was largely the task of select monks or clergymen. In Judaism the great Rabbis had schools of students, who were trained to be Rabbis or teachers. In Judaism the words of the Shema remind parents of their duty to teach their children.

Judaism's emphasis on the carrying out of God's commandments has meant that it was necessary for the average Jew to study enough to know what the commandments are. The central part of the Sabbath morning service are the readings of the Torah and from the Prophets. The Church took over this practice and read from the Gospels and the Epistles. Christians still refer to such a reading as 'the lesson', which underlines the fact that its original purpose was study.

In recent years, the two religions have broadened their areas of study, so that there is more study of each other's religions. Various organisations, like the Council of Christians and Jews and the London Society of Jews and Christians, now exist to enable people to exchange views and to gather information, which help us to live side by side with mutual respect and friendship.

## **26. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE JEWS.**

The main object of the writers of the new Testament was to make their readers believe in Jesus as the Messiah and as the son of God. They were not really concerned with giving an accurate account of history. At times, the writers took liberties with the facts in order to put over their religious views. If there was a good miracle story in another literature, they would sometimes adapt the story and make Jesus the miracle-worker. If they found a quotation in the Hebrew Bible which they could apply, they would insert details into their story to make it appear that events in their time had been foretold in the past. So, in Zechariah 9, 9, it states that the king would come into Jerusalem "mounted upon an ass, on a foal, the young of a she-ass." (Translation of the New English Bible, which shows that one animal was intended.) Matthew describes how "the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon." (Matthew 21, 6 - 7. King James version.) For the sake of making a prophetic verse come true, he describes how Jesus is given the difficult task of riding on two animals, possible at the same time.

The four gospels, which describe the life and teachings of Jesus, were written down in their final form many years after the death of Jesus. Their dates range from about 40 to 100 years after the crucifixion. Although they may have been written using some early accounts, the time gap allows errors to creep in, undetected by actual eye-witnesses, who were by then either elderly or dead.

The passage of time also made a difference to the attitude of these writers to the Jews. Jesus and the original disciples were all Jews and they were trying to make their fellow Jews accept the idea that the Messiah had come. For many years these followers of Jesus were regarded as Jews and not as members of separate religion, as we regard them today. Consequently, the earliest Christian writings shared the Jewish hatred of the Roman occupiers. They did, of course, speak out against some Jewish beliefs and practices; but they were not really anti-Jewish, for that would have meant being against themselves. Later, as the Christians sought converts from gentiles in the Roman empire, they had to switch from being anti-Roman to being against the Jews. So we find them clearing the Romans of the responsibility for killing Jesus, and putting the blame on the Jews. They even introduce a story of Pilate washing his hands, to show that he did not accept any responsibility for the death sentence of Jesus.

The accounts in the New Testament have had some unfortunate results. For centuries, these stories were read to illiterate congregants, and sermons were preached on how the Jews killed Jesus. The result of this was that in mediaeval times mobs often attacked the Jewish quarter of the towns, and sometimes killed numbers of Jews. If one looks at the occurrence of such pogroms against the Jews, one sees that a very high proportion took place at the Easter period, when the Church was teaching and preaching about the crucifixion.

If we examine history in the light of other literature besides the New Testament, it is possible to see that a great injustice has been done to the Jews by these New Testament accounts.

### ***THE TRIAL OF JESUS.***

This section is largely based on a pamphlet with the same title written by Dr. Mattuck and published by the Liberal Jewish Synagogue.

It is generally thought that the Last Supper was the festival meal on the first eve of Passover, which later became known as the Seder. According to the New Testament, Jesus was arrested that evening after the meal and was apparently tried that same night at the home of Caiaphas, the High Priest, (Matthew, Mark & John) or the next day. (Luke) It tells how the Jewish trials resulted in a recommendation to the Romans that Jesus be put to death. The Roman Procurator, Pilate, interviewed Jesus and did not find him guilty of anything; But, bowing to the clamour of the Jewish crowd, he allowed the death sentence to be carried out. Those who attended the Jewish trial were Caiaphas, scribes and elders (Matthew) and also the chief priests. (Mark and Luke) This would have meant that the trial was before a Sanhedrin or at least a full Beth Din. (Rabbinic Court of 72 or 23 respectively.)

We know, however, that once the sun had set on that evening, the festival of Passover had started and therefore it was a Yomtov (full festival day), and no Jewish court would have met on such a day as no work was permitted to be done. (Leviticus 23, 7 and Numbers 28, 18.)

According to Mark 14, 56 - 59 two witnesses came and spoke against Jesus, but their testimony did not agree. In Jewish law, at least two valid witnesses were required in capital cases. (Deuteronomy 17, 6 & 19, 15.) and a lying witness would not have counted. Mark and Matthew say that Jesus was tried by night and sentenced in the morning (the night and the morning being part of the same day), while Luke says that he was both tried and sentenced in the morning. Jewish law required that in a capital charge, the sentencing could not take place on the same day as the trial, to allow for careful consideration of the case. (Sanhedrin 4, 1.)

It is said that this court sought to sentence Jesus to death and did actually recommend the death penalty to Pontius Pilate. (Matthew 26, 59 & 66, Mark 14, 55 & 64.) Even if a law court would meet on the first day of Passover, it would not have tried a capital charge at night time, as the Mishnah states that all capital cases must be tried by day and the verdict must be given in the day time. (Sanhedrin 4, 1.) The Mishnah, although written down about 200 C.E., contains laws which were in existence long before that date. It is therefore probable, but not certain, that this law applied in the case of Jesus. Under Roman rule it was not permitted for Jewish courts to put people to death. (John 18, 31; Jer. Talmud Sanhedrin 1, 18a; Bab. Talmud Sanhedrin 41a.) When permitted to impose the death penalty, Jewish law as stated in the Bible laid down the methods which could be used; but these did not include crucifixion, which was a Roman form of execution.

The charge for which the death penalty was thought to have been imposed was stated to have been blasphemy (Matthew and Mark), while Luke says that it was because Jesus was accused of "perverting the nation, forbidding them to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he was the Messiah, the King." (Luke 23, 2.) Jesus' claim to be the Messiah can in no sense be regarded as blasphemy, for the Jews believed that the Messiah would be human. The question was whether his rather mystical references to being the son of God were taken in the way that later Christians took them, that is as a divine son of a Divine Father, or as a general expression of God's fatherhood of all men.

If they did feel that the charge of blasphemy had been proved, then the Bible states that the punishment for blasphemy was stoning to death. (Deuteronomy 13, 10. & Leviticus 24, 16.) On the other hand, we know that the Romans often sentenced people to crucifixion, particularly those whom they thought had rebelled against Roman rule. Luke's account of Jesus being accused of encouraging the people not to pay taxes, of perverting the nation and of claiming to be king could all be seen as threats to Roman authority. The account of

how they hung a sign on the cross mockingly saying that he was the king of the Jews, (Matthew 27, 37 etc.) seems to indicate that his were his religious teachings.

It would therefore appear that the gospels' accounts of the Jewish trial do not ring true, and that the accounts of the Roman interrogation before Pilate seem incorrect, when they say that Pilate could find no guilt in him. The sign on the cross describing him as king shows that the Romans regarded him as a rival authority and a trouble-maker. Incidentally, Pilate, whom the New Testament portrays as wise, understanding and fair in judgement, was in fact so cruel that in 36 C.E. the Emperor Tiberius had to recall him to Rome because there were so many complaints about his conduct, and another Procurator was appointed in his place.

Because of these distortions of what happened, we must be rather suspicious of the accounts of the reactions of the Jewish crowd, which is said to have called for the Romans to crucify Jesus. It seems unlikely that a Jewish crowd would call upon the Romans to inflict the Roman punishment of crucifixion on a Jew, just because he claimed to be the Messiah or the son of God. These accounts were probably included to free the Romans of responsibility for the death of Jesus and partly to show that Jesus' life and death were foretold in the Hebrew Bible. Certainly, Jesus is said to refer to the need for these events to proceed so that "the scriptures shall be fulfilled." (Matthew 26, 54 & Luke 22, 37, etc.)

### **THE PHARISEES.**

In many places in the New Testament it refers to the Pharisees as hypocrites and sinners. (eg. Matthew 23, 13 - 19.) Because of the repetition of the accusation in other gospels and in other places, one might think that the accusations were true. In fact, Jesus and his original disciples were themselves Pharisaic Jews. There was a certain amount of Essene influence on John the Baptist, but the other main group, the Saducees, did not seem to have strong links with these early Christians. The Saducees were the priestly party connected with the hereditary priests who ministered in the Temple, while the Pharisees were the more democratic group, who were more a party of the people, they respected anyone who was learned in Torah. The Pharisees were the force behind the growth of Synagogues, where the Torah was read and studied. Jesus and his disciples also went among the people, and one of the most important Pharisee teachings was the doctrine of life after death, which was taken over into Christianity. The Saducees did not believe this.

Jesus' Pharisaic background made him acceptable as he went round the country preaching, but some of his teachings were in opposition to Pharisaic ideas. For example, he advocated a relaxation of the Sabbath Laws, and on the Sabbath he even healed some people who were not critically ill. The Pharisees only allowed the breaking of Sabbath Laws if there would otherwise be danger to life. Jesus and his disciples were not over worried about the strict observance of Jewish Law. The Pharisees and the scribes who were responsible respectively for the study of the Law and the preservation of Biblical texts, were naturally upset by the laxity of Jesus and his followers. They naturally criticised Jesus and the disciples and attacked their approach to Judaism. The response of Jesus was not "to turn the other cheek", but to attack the Pharisees and accuse them of being hypocrites.

It would be impossible at this distance in time to say that no Pharisee was ever a hypocrite; but there is nothing in the many writings left by them which supports the New Testament allegations. Rabbinic leaders like Hillel were known to be wise and good men, who practised what they preached. One only needs to read the Mishnah and the Talmud to see what fine people they really were. The best collection of their teachings is in the Pirkei

Avot (Ethics of the Fathers).

The Pharisaic Rabbis shaped Judaism at a time when the Jews suffered the loss of their religious centre, the Temple, and when they were being held under continual Roman oppression. It was these Pharisees who gathered the laws of the Mishnah, and started the work of the Talmud. It was they who were responsible for starting Jewish schools, fostering study in Judaism and for building Synagogues. They transformed Judaism from the nationalistic religion of the Bible and the Temple to the more universal religion of the Synagogue and the home, which was to survive centuries of persecution in various lands.

### ***MONEYCHANGERS IN THE TEMPLE.***

There is an account of Jesus visiting the Temple in Jerusalem, which says: "Jesus went into the Temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the Temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves." (Mark 11, 15.) This gives the impression that instead of worshipping in the Temple, the Jews used to trade.

The Temple itself was not just a building in which services of prayer were said. The Temple complex covered a large area. In a central position was the Temple building itself (1), this stood in the Courtyard of the Priests (2). In this courtyard stood the altar, where all the sacrifices took place. In front of this courtyard was the Courtyard of the Israelites (3) and in front of this again was the Courtyard of the Women (4). All this area was surrounded by a high wall (5) with large gates. This area was forbidden to anyone who was not a Jew. All of this took in a much larger area which was open to the general public(7). The moneychangers and the dove-sellers had their stalls in the portico which ran along the inner side of the boundary wall of this outer courtyard (6). Any transactions going on would not interfere in any way with the worship in the inner courtyards.

The moneychangers and the sellers of doves were not just traders seeking a profit; they were part of the Temple sacrificial organisation. A number of the offerings made in the Temple involved money. This had to be made in the "Shekel of the Sanctuary", which was larger than the coins then in current use. What was involved were such things as the Trespass Offerings (Leviticus 5, 15 - 16.) or certain vows (Leviticus 27, 2 - 3.) and a Temple tax of half a shekel per person based upon Exodus 30, 13. The moneychangers used to exchange the lightweight Roman coins into Tyrian Shekels which were thought to be similar to the heavier old Shekels of the Sanctuary. They only had a limited number of these heavier shekels. People had to exchange their money before they could make their offering or pay their tax. The moneychangers were therefore necessary to enable people to participate in the traditional way.

The doves were also required for sacrifices. The Bible specifies which animals and birds were required for which occasions, and doves were often required. (Leviticus 14, 22.) The dove sellers helped the poor and those who came from distant places to join with others to offer sacrifices. It is impossible for us today to say whether the people who ran these stalls were profiteering: but we do know that they were providing a necessary service. These traders both in their position and function might be compared to the bookshops which you find in the Cathedral Close which surrounds many English cathedrals today.

This story of Jesus and the moneychangers is perhaps one of the best proofs in a negative way that Jesus could not have been the son of God. For it is significant that he chose to attack the moneychangers and not the far greater wrong of the sacrifices themselves. Surely 'the Son of God' would know that God does not want men to kill animals especially

for Him? Granted that the Temple was destroyed about 40 years later and all sacrifices then stopped; but in those 40 years, thousands of animals and birds were killed in the mistaken belief that God wanted it. And this was all because Jesus failed to protest that sacrifices were taking place. Other Jewish teachers of the time also failed to protest about the sacrifices and this only goes to show that they and Jesus were only men of their age.

The reference to moneychangers has sometimes been mixed up in the minds of some Christians with money-lenders. During the mediaeval period Jews made their living largely by being money-lenders. This was forced on them by their Christian neighbours, as they were barred from joining any of the craft guilds and so they were prevented from taking up the normal trades. At the same time Christians thought it was wrong for them to lend money with interest, so they forced the Jews to do it for them. Money-lenders are never popular, particularly with those who borrow from them, and so we find that a picture grew up of the typical Jew being a Shylock. This period of Jewish money-lenders was long after the episode of Jesus and the moneychangers, and yet it is still being confused by people even today.

## **27. JUDAISM AND ISLAM.**

If Judaism has much in common with Christianity, then it has even more in common with Islam. When we look at those areas where Judaism differs with Christianity, we find that in almost all of them, Islam agrees with the Jewish point of view. The word 'Islam' means surrender or submission to the will of Allah. In Judaism, it corresponds with the idea, that when we say the Shema, we are accepting upon ourselves "the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven." (Berachot 2, 2. etc.)

The Muslim says that all creation, every plant, tree or animal, spends all its time doing the will of its Creator. For God created the universe and planned the purpose of everything. Only man has been given the choice whether or not to do God's will. If he lives by the teachings of Islam he will be doing the will of Allah. So man too can do God's will every moment of the 24-hour day, if he eats, sleeps and does everything according to the teachings of Islam.

Islam, like Judaism, is not just a faith, it is also away of life. It should enter into the home, and also into politics, finance, law, etc. In this it is parallel to Judaism, where we emphasise the need for a Jewish home, and also the duty to observe Jewish values in business and in daily life. The numerous blessings that a Jew should say on various occasions in life, and the range of Mitsvot (commandments), both ritual and ethical, which Judaism gives to the Jew also ensure that the practice of Judaism is not confined to the Synagogue building. In neither religion is faith the all-important thing that it is in Christianity. It is important, but only as part of the total religion. It gives the background reason why the various observances are carried out and why life has to be lived in a certain way.

The emphasis on doing and on living the religion, which we find in both Judaism and Islam, means that differences in practice or in ritual seem to be overemphasised, while similarities in belief are often underestimated. and not sufficiently recognised.

### ***THE BIRTH OF ISLAM.***

Islam as a religion owes its origin to Muhammad, who lived in the 6th - 7th century C.E. Muhammad was an Arab trader living in Mecca, in what is now Saudi-Arabia. In his travels he met a number of Jews and a few Christians. His teachings were therefore influenced by both Judaism and Christianity, but mostly by the former. When he reached the age of forty, he became concerned with the moral standards and the idol-worship of the Arabs of Mecca. His main concern was to try to get these Arabs to worship the one God, whom he called Allah. This emphasis on the worship of one spiritual God naturally makes his teachings very close to Judaism.

He began by teaching that the Arabs were a Semitic people descended from Ishmael (the son of Abraham and Hagar, see Genesis 16, 15.) At the earliest stage of his teachings, he considered his teachings as a return to the teachings of Abraham. He thought that he was only teaching in Arabic those laws and judgements, which God had given to other peoples in other languages. When his teachings were found unacceptable by the Arabs of Mecca, he moved with a handful of followers to Median in 622 C.E. When he got there he was disappointed that the Jewish community of the town would not recognise that he was teaching a form of Judaism. When he found that he was not accepted by the Jews, he began to alter some of the practices of his religion to suit his followers better. Instead of praying towards Jerusalem, as he had done originally, he started to pray towards Mecca.

He dropped the fast of the tenth day of the first month (corresponding to Yom Kippur) and replaced it with the fast for the month of Ramadan. He discontinued the Sabbath as a day of rest on Saturday, when no work was done, and instead made Friday into a day of communal prayer and gathering together.

Muhammad gained support for his ideas in Medina and eventually developed the idea of Jihad, (holy war). This taught that it was good and right to fight to spread the ideas of Islam. He attacked and occupied Mecca, converting the inhabitants to the new religion. With Muhammad's political acumen and the driving force of a new militant religion, Islam began to spread through much of Africa, Asia and Europe. Eventually, in Europe it reached up through what is now Greece and Yugoslavia almost as far as Vienna. It conquered much of Southern Russia and in the West it spread into Spain and reached the centre of France.

### ***THE QUR'AN.***

Islam is based upon the Qur'an, the book which contains the teachings of Muhammad. He claimed that these teachings had been given to him by the Angel Gabriel. (Surah 2, 91.) The Qur'an has 119 chapters called Surahs which are each divided into verses. The source quoted here gives both the surah and the verse. The Qur'an contains Muhammad's version of many Bible stories. He includes in these stories some of the Rabbinic Midrashic legends, which gathered around the text in later times. For instance he tells how Abraham entered a temple and smashed all the idols except the largest, and when accused of the destruction, Abraham said that it was the big idol which was responsible, and that they should go and question him. By this he was trying to teach that idols can neither speak nor act. (21, 59 - 64.) This is an adaptation of a story in Genesis Rabba 38, 13 where Abraham is left in charge of his father's shop selling idols, and he breaks all except the largest, with the same teaching in mind. There are many other examples of stories from the Talmud and Midrash being used in this way. This shows that Muhammad did not just read the Bible and take the stories straight from it. It is now generally thought that Muhammad could neither read nor write, therefore he gathered his stories by listening to Jews tell them, and as they did so, they put in Midrashic additions. The Qur'an itself was probably compiled some twenty years after Muhammad's death.

The Jews of the area refused to accept Muhammad as a true prophet and teacher. The probable reason for this was that they soon realised that he was not teaching the Biblical stories correctly. For example, he maintained that the son whom Abraham tried to sacrifice was Ishmael (Surah 37.) and not Isaac (Genesis 22.) He also said that Abraham was an Arab who founded the Ka'ba, the large stone, probably a meteorite, at Mecca. There are a number of confusions or mistakes in the Qur'an. For example, Haman is described as a servant of Pharaoh (28, 38.) rather than as a minister to Ahasuerus (Esther 3, 1.) It is also said that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the sister of Aaron (19, 29.). This was probably due to a confusion between Mary and Miriam. For Miriam is the Hebrew for Mary.

### ***A HADITH OF OMAR.***

There is a Hadith (a saying of or about Muhammad, not included in the Qur'an) which sums up Islam's most important beliefs and practices. It was recounted by Omar, the second Caliph (ruling 634 - 644 C.E.):

One day while we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah, there appeared before us a man, whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black; no

signs of journeying were to be seen on him. He walked up and sat down next to the prophet. Resting his knees against his and placing the palms of his hands on his thigh, he said: "O Muhammad, tell me about Islam." The Messenger of Allah said: "Islam is (1) to testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, (2) to perform the prayers, (3) to pay Zakat (Tsedakah, gifts to the poor), (4) to fast in Ramadan and (5) to make a pilgrimage to the house (the Ka'bah in Mecca), if you are able to do so." He said: "You have spoken rightly." We were amazed at him asking and saying that he had spoken rightly. He said: "Tell me about Iman (Emunah, faith or belief)." He said: "It is to believe in (1) Allah, (2) His angels, (3) His books, (4) His messengers and (5) the Last Day (of judgement), and to believe in divine destiny, both good and evil thereof." He said: "You have spoken rightly." He said: "Tell me about Ihshan (right action)." He said: "It is to worship Allah as though you were seeing Him, and while you see Him not, yet truly He sees you." He said: "Then tell me of the hour (of the Day of Judgement)." He said: "The one questioned about it knows no better than the questioner." ...Then he took himself off and I stayed for a time. Then he said: "O Omar, do you know who the questioner was?" I said: "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said: "It was Gabriel, who came to teach you your religion."

This Hadith lists five duties required of a Muslim and also five basic beliefs of Islam with a sixth less basic belief. Characteristically, it lists the duties before the beliefs, because practice is regarded as very important in Islam. But, to understand the religion and how it is related to Judaism, it is better to compare the beliefs first, then to look at the practices, which have developed as a result of those beliefs.

## 1. BELIEF IN ONE GOD.

Muslims worship Allah. Allah is the name of God in the same way that the four Hebrew letters - Yod, He, Vav, and He - spell the name by which Jews used to call God. Today, we no longer pronounce these letters, and instead we read Adonai, which is usually translated 'Lord'. The Arabic name Allah is connected linguistically to the Hebrew word 'Elohim' (God). Muslims, like Jews worship a single spiritual God. We therefore find that the two religions are worshipping the same God, only the Muslims call Him Allah and the Jews speak of Him as Adonai or Elohim. This similarity is not surprising, seeing that Muhammad deliberately taught the Jewish conception of God to his Arab Neighbours.

## 2. BELIEF IN ANGELS.

Although the Bible refers to angels, they do not play as big a part in Jewish beliefs as they do in Islam. Not all the sources of the Five Books of Moses believed that God worked through angels. (See p. 97) In the middle ages, Maimonides and others said that angels had no physical bodily existence, and so they said that references to angels should be taken allegorically and not literally. The Encyclopaedia Judaica states: "It is only among the small fundamentalist sections, such as some of the Hasidim as well as the oriental Jewish communities, that the literal belief in angels, which for so long characterised Jewish thought, is still upheld." References to angels which do occur occasionally in the prayers of Orthodox Jews have been omitted from Liberal prayer books, except in the poetical passages.

In Islam, however, the belief in angels is still held by many



*Winged angel in Prague Haggadah, 1526. Illustrating the fact that God did **not** free the Israelites from Egypt by means of an angel.*

of its followers, and much depends upon that belief. Muhammad said that he received the revelation of God from an angel. So, if a Muslim denies the existence of angels, he would be questioning the authority of the Qur'an. It is for this reason that the belief in angels is basic in Islam, while in Judaism it is unimportant. The Qur'an has many references to angels, and Muslims have never felt able to discard such a clear and strongly held belief which was taught them by Muhammad himself.

### 3. BELIEF IN THE QUR'AN.

Muslims accept the Qur'an as coming from God through the angel Gabriel, who spoke to Muhammad. They have continued to accept the Qur'an as a holy book, and they believe that its teachings are perfect and for all time and can not now be changed. This makes Islam almost fixed and in this respect it is similar to Orthodox Judaism with its resistance to change and development in belief or practice. A Jew may perhaps regard the Qur'an as a holy book; but he would not accept it as being perfect and true in every detail. As stated above, the text of the Qur'an alters some of the Bible stories. It does this sometimes deliberately and sometimes because of its author's lack of knowledge of the text of the Hebrew Bible. Jews today, on reading the Qur'an would still feel, as the Jews of Muhammad's day felt, that Muhammad had altered the stories so much that they could not use the book as a means of teaching.

When accused of making alterations or inaccuracies, Muhammad countered by saying that the Jews were either concealing these teachings or that over the ages the text had been changed and the original teachings had been lost. (6, 91.) Not being literate himself, he had little regard for the written evidence of books, and yet, strangely, Islam has given complete authority to his sayings in the Qur'an. To this day, modern Muslims will still say that Muhammad's versions of the Biblical stories are correct and that the Bible accounts are wrong. Christians accept the text of the Hebrew Bible and only differ from us in their interpretations of certain verses; but Muslims disagree on the content of the text itself, offering alternative versions of the stories.

### 4. FAITH IN GOD'S PROPHETS.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam have different ideas about prophecy. Jews see prophets as people who speak out the word of God. (The work for a prophet is a navi, which means a spokesman.) Early Christian commentators used to believe that a prophet was someone who foretold the future, particularly concerning the coming Jesus. While the Muslims consider a prophet anyone whom God has spoken to.

The result of this Islamic idea is that Muslims classify various people as prophets whom the Jews do not consider as such. For example the Qur'an describes Adam, Abraham, David and even Jesus as prophets.

Islam teaches that all the prophets who came before Muhammad are to be respected. At first sight, this seems to be a broad-minded and tolerant attitude. However, the same tolerance does not extend to the teachings of those prophets. Muslims believe that Islam is the teaching of God, and that when God taught it to Muhammad it was not the first time that it had been revealed. They believe that God revealed Islam first to Adam and then to all the later prophets. If the teachings of these prophets are contrary to those of the Qur'an, then either the earlier prophet failed to understand the revelation correctly or else their teachings had not been preserved accurately. For the Qur'an is seen as perfect. The result is that they honour the names of previous prophets like Moses and Jesus; but they say that their teachings have not been faithfully preserved and that the books which contain their words are wrong.

Moslems do not believe that Jesus dies on the cross, they believe that he was taken down alive after a short time and some believe that he was replaced by Judas, who apparently looked like Jesus. They do however believe that Jesus was a prophet. From the Jewish point of view, both Jesus and Muhammad claimed to be speaking the word of God, and in so far as their teachings were from God, they can be regarded as prophets. However, it has often been pointed out that Jesus taught little new, for almost all his teachings came from his Jewish background. It was Paul's teachings about Jesus which were the new and distinctive parts of Christianity. In the same way, Muhammad's teachings seem to be derived almost entirely from Judaism with a very little taken from Christianity. If there was little new in the teachings of Jesus and Muhammad, then it would be preferable to regard them as teachers or preachers rather than as prophets.

Islam claims that Muhammad was the last of the prophets and that his revelation was both complete and perfect. Therefore they do not believe in any further prophecy coming to man, nor in man learning anything more about God or what He requires us to do in life. In this respect, Islam's attitude to the Qur'an is almost identical to Orthodox Judaism's attitude to the Five Books of Moses. Just as Orthodox Judaism believes in an oral Torah, so Islam preserves sayings of Muhammad which were not included in the Qur'an. A saying of this kind is called a Hadith.

The essential point is that for the Muslim all revelation ceased with the death of Muhammad. Islam teaches that man will never again receive any revelation from God. This sees man's religious knowledge as static and without a chance of any development, except for new interpretations of the existing text. According to this view, no greater spiritual truths, no deeper knowledge of God's Being, no higher concepts of morality and ethics will ever be revealed to man. There is no concept of Progressive Revelation in Islam, and there has been no appreciable progressive tendency in the religion.

#### 5. THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT.

Islam teaches that after death one is buried and sleeps until the Day of Judgement. At that time, everyone will be resurrected and their bodies reassembled and then they will be judged. Those found worthy will go to Paradise, and those who do not will be sent to Hell, where they will remain for ever. In many ways this view is similar to some part of Mediaeval Judaism; but as has been explained in chapter 12, most modern Jews no longer accept this. In Islam, the beliefs in resurrection, judgement, Paradise and Hell are still held very strongly. In Judaism, only the idea of judgement is the universally believed, resurrection is a teaching of Orthodox Judaism but is not accepted by many modern Jews, and a belief in Heaven and Hell has probably been discarded by all but a tiny minority. A merciful God would not inflict an everlasting Hell, and in the Jewish view it is impossible to divide people into clear-cut categories of good and evil, as most people are a mixture of both. The Jewish legend that God judges us at Rosh Ha-Shanah and inscribes us either for life or death, goes on to say that God is unable to judge us in this way and that He postpones the judgement until Yom Kippur waiting to see how we will behave in the meanwhile.

#### **FATE.**

The Hadith of Omar also listed a belief in divine destiny as one of Islam's basic beliefs. However, most Muslims would regard the five beliefs listed above as the basic beliefs, and a belief in fate or destiny as being something that was debatable. Despite the popular idea that Islam is a fatalistic religion, the idea of fate is one that is being widely discussed by Muslims, and one can no longer say that it is a universal belief of Islam.

## ***HOLY WAY.***

Muhammad put forward the idea that it was right in certain circumstances to wage war to conquer peoples in order to convert them to Islam. This Holy War was known as Jihad. As a result of this idea, Islam spread through North Africa, much of Asia and parts of Europe. First came military conquest then came conversion.

Judaism has a long tradition of wanting others to convert to our religion starting with Abraham, of whom tradition says that he taught people about the One God. Whenever the Jews were independent they had their share of wars; but none of these was fought in order to make converts. When Joshua fought and conquered Canaan, he did so to capture the land for settlement, not in order to spread Jewish beliefs. The Bible tells us that many centuries later Pagans were still living in the land (1 Kings ch. 18, etc.) and so they either had not tried to convert them or else they were not very unsuccessful. The only occasion when mass conversions followed a Jewish conquest was during the period of the Maccabees. At that time many thousands converted. (1 Maccabees 2, 46.) The war, however, was not fought in order to spread religion, it was to stop the idol-worshipping Greek religion being forced upon them, and therefore it was for religious freedom and not for religious coercion. Many of those who were forced to convert at that time were descendants of Jews who had lapsed from their religion.

Apart from this episode, Judaism, unlike Christianity and Islam, has been content to wait and let converts seek us out, rather than go and search for them or even try to force them. The Jews in the middle ages suffered so much from fanatical Christians and Muslims who sought to save their souls, that we have avoided doing the same to others.

## ***THE DUTIES OF ISLAM.***

The Hadith of Omar listed five duties, one of which contained two parts. Of these the Jew would find himself in agreement with about half of these: namely to proclaim a belief in One God, prayer, and to give to charity. Of the remaining requirements, although they show the two religions to be different, they tend to show parallel development rather than confrontation. These differences should be attributed to the different culture and heritage of the two religions. So the need to fast at Ramadan is parallel to the need for Jews to observe fasts and festivals. The need to express a belief in Muhammad is equivalent to the need for Orthodox Jews to accept that God gave the Five Books of Moses by divine dictation. The duty to visit Mecca seems to have no Jewish equivalent today; but it does roughly correspond with the Biblical command that three times a year (Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot) every male Jew should go to the Temple in Jerusalem. (Deuteronomy 16, 16.) This custom naturally ceased when the second Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E.

From this, we can see that if we look for connections in the practices of the two religions, we will find them, and that both in beliefs and in practices the two religions are very close.

## ***INTERCHANGE OF IDEAS.***

When it began, Islam borrowed much from Judaism. The basic belief in One God, the code of morality and many other beliefs and practices were taken and then adapted to make them suitable for the Arabs amongst whom Muhammad lived. For example, prayer three times a day in Judaism became enlarged to five times a day and a restful Sabbath on Saturday became a prayerful day on Friday.

This influence was not all a one-way process. Once Islam spread, there was also a growth

of learning and knowledge in the Arab world. The Islamic empire outstripped all the other parts of the world in education and culture. While Europe was going through its dark ages, the courts of Muslim princes were filled with poets, philosophers, doctors and scholars of all kinds. The Jews who by this time had spread throughout the world, formed minorities in both Christian and Muslim countries. From about 900 C.E. they learnt much from their Muslim neighbours. The great 'Golden Age' of Spanish Jewry came about largely because of this Muslim influence. Jewish philosophers like Maimonides read the works of Muslim philosophers, and his 'Guide For The Perplexed' was written originally in Arabic and only later translated into Hebrew. Hebrew poets like Judah Ha-Levi and Ibn Gabirol copied the styles, metres and subject matter of the Arabic poets. The whole system of grammar in Hebrew was copied from Arabic grammars of the same period. Jewish Art and architecture were also based upon Islamic styles. The three Synagogue buildings which survive from pre-expulsion Spain all have an Islamic style. (Two synagogues are in Toledo and one in Cordova.)

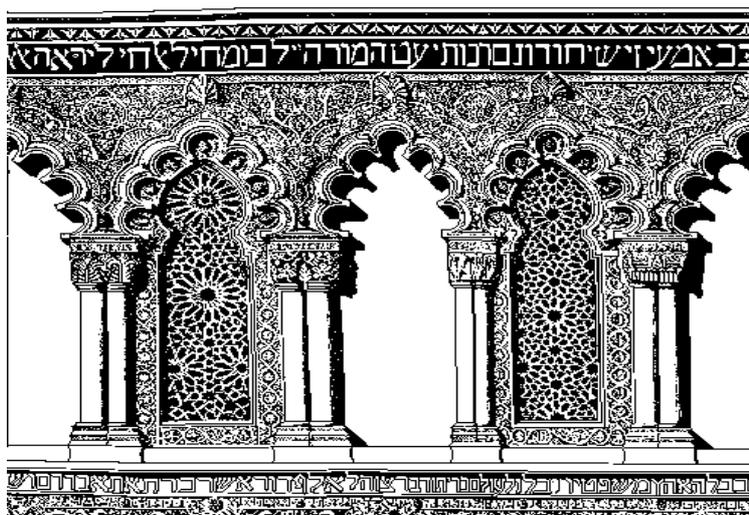
### **RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT.**

At its commencement, Islam was very close to Judaism in belief. However, because the two religions developed separately, they drifted a little further apart. Each religion developed its own laws by interpretation and also by case law, occasionally Judaism introduced some new legislation. Such laws were almost always more restrictive, because a modern Rabbi found it very hard to overturn a ruling of a previous Rabbi of repute. One example of change was that while Islam has continued to permit a man to marry up to four wives, Ashkanazi Rabbis about the year 1000 C.E. introduced a ban on polygamy.

The period of ghetto life for the Jews led to virtual stagnation in Judaism. It was only when the Jews came out of the ghettos, that the need for progress and reform became apparent. As a result, many changes of belief and practice have taken place in the last two centuries. Islam on the other hand, has maintained that the Qur'an was perfect, and so did not favour any change which added or took away anything. Many of its beliefs like those in Paradise and Hell, in angels or in Satan seem to us to be mediaeval. Even some of the prescribed punishments for breaking Islamic laws, like that which requires that the hand of a persistent thief should be cut off, seem brutally old-fashioned, and the position of women and the dress they are required to wear seem degrading. The decision of some countries to call themselves Islamic states agreeing to abide by Islamic law seems to the western Jew to put back the clock. It may be that some of these countries will modernise, and that Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, will learn to progress. Unless it does advance, Islam will by default move further away from its sister religions.

### **SUMMING UP.**

In this chapter a number of differences between Judaism and Islam have been highlighted; but



*The Synagogue del Transito, Toledo, Spain.  
c. 1360 showing strong Moorish influence*

these should not be taken out of perspective. For the two religions are really very close to each other, and each has influenced the other's thinking. Because Judaism was such a strong influence upon Muhammad, the vast majority of Islamic teaching is Jewish in origin. To the casual observer looking only at observances the two religions seem far apart; but the more one examines them the closer they appear. The Orthodox Jew who puts on his Tallit and Tephillin and stands facing Jerusalem saying the Shema in Hebrew seems very different from the Muslim who washes his hands and feet and then kneels and prostrates himself facing Mecca and says in Arabic: "La Ilaha illallah." We should set aside the outward signs of ritual, the washing, the garments, the language and the exact direction faced, and we should look at the actual thoughts and the words which are said, for these are the most important part of religion. If we do this we find that the Jew says: "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." and the Muslim says: "there is no God but Allah." These have the same meaning.

Muhammad took Judaism and made of it a religion suitable for Arabs. Islam's language and literature, its customs and its laws all developed in a different setting from those of Judaism. So the outward signs have grown more different; but the inner thought is remarkably close. It is a sad fact of history, that in recent years Israeli and Arab have often seen themselves as enemies, because of the dispute of ownership of the holy land. Even if Israeli and Arab should fight, it does not mean that the religions Judaism and Islam are in conflict. Both religions regard Jerusalem as a holy city. For although Muslims pray towards Mecca, they still regard Jerusalem as a holy place. As a result of the political and national disputes, Jew and Muslim have tended to keep apart and regarded each other with suspicion. The Arabic word Salaam and the Hebrew word Shalom both mean peace. They are closely related words in closely related languages of closely related peoples, and yet in this last generation there has been little peace between them.

## 28. JUDAISM AND OTHER ISMS.

### ***ATHEISM.***

There are two categories of people who do not have a sure faith in God - Atheists and Agnostics. The Agnostic says that he is not sure whether or not God Exists, while an Atheist believes that there definitely is no God. Judaism takes a different attitude to each of these two positions.

The Atheist has certain clear beliefs. For him there is no force or power directing the universe. Everything was created by pure chance and since then evolution has continued by certain scientific rules. Man is not inspired by any spiritual power, and he came to his ideas of right and wrong entirely by himself.

Such a view runs entirely counter to the basic teachings of Judaism. Judaism starts from the basic belief in One God and goes on from there to speak of that God revealing the Torah and teaching ideals of right behaviour. The Rabbis often divided Judaism's beliefs into three areas: God, Torah and Israel. A child of Jewish parents who claims to be an Atheist is denying that there is a God, he denies any authority to the Torah and so is left only with a concept of the unity or the peoplehood of Israel. He therefore rejects two thirds of Jewish belief. At best he is but 33 per cent of a Jew.

One might therefore assume that an Atheist can not be a Jew. In the purely philosophical sense that is so; but we have been very unwilling to cut anyone off from Judaism. So we now find a number of people who are the children of Jewish Parents who claim to be "secular Jews", by which they mean Jews by birth but not by belief. As was pointed out in chapter 23, being a Jew is primarily but not entirely a matter of religion. In the past, Judaism has never said that such people are completely outside the Jewish fold. They have always given them the opportunity to return (the word 'teshuvah' means both returning and repentance, see page 62.)

The Bible attacks the Atheist by saying: "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." (Psalm 14, 1 and Psalm 53, 1) It also says "Reverence for the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Proverbs 15, 33.) The idea being that if someone cut himself off from God's influence, he could not be truly wise, because he was ignoring the most important fact in the universe and also isolating himself from the influence of perfect goodness and perfect Truth.

Apart from this, there is little reference to Atheism in the Bible or Rabbinic literature. They were far more concerned with people worshipping many gods than with someone believing that there was no God at all. There was, however, one occasion when Rabbi Reuben was visiting Tiberius that he was asked: "Who is the most hateful person in the world?" He replied: "The person who denies his root (i.e. his Creator, God)." He went on to explain that a person who denied the existence of God also denied the authority of Torah and so did not feel bound to do good in his life. (Tosefta, Shavuot 3, 6.) From this story we can see that Judaism has been less concerned with belief than with right behaviour. The Rabbi thought that the Atheist was hateful not so much for his Atheism as for his lack of commitment to leading a good life.

Neither the Bible nor the Talmud tried to give a unified or comprehensive series of beliefs about God. At that time, actions were thought to be all-important. Gradually, from the middle ages onward, some Jewish thinkers tried to list Jewish beliefs. The most notable of these was Maimonides (1135 - 1204) who formulated 13 basic beliefs. Eventually it was

seen that observances and ritual practices which were carried out without an underlying belief were empty gestures and often came close to hypocrisy. Today we find that beliefs are regarded as far more important in Judaism than they were in the days of the Talmud. This change is particularly noticeable in Liberal or Progressive Judaism.

Some Liberal Jews would be inclined to say that the child of two Jewish parents, who becomes a convinced Atheist, is no longer a Jew. However, because of the smallness of our numbers, it is a dangerous thing for us to exclude any potential Jews. As it has been the practice in the past to give these people the opportunity to return to Jewish belief, so we do not actually seek to exclude them now. We do this in the hope that their Atheism may give way to a belief in a modern concept of God.

Atheism is a fairly recent phenomenon. Today we find Atheists who lead good lives. Such people might have "a place in the world to come" as the Rabbis would have said of righteous gentile. The question is would they be regarded as Jewish? In so far as they had a Jewish mother, they would be entitled to a Jewish funeral. And although such a funeral would have meant little or nothing to the dead Atheist, it is often of considerable comfort to the grieving relatives. It is not that the Synagogue shuts its doors against the Atheist, but rather that most Atheists would say that they would be hypocritical if they went to Synagogue, and so they stay away.

## **AGNOSTICISM.**

The Agnostic is quite different. He says that he doubts whether there is a God. When faced with such doubts a person may take one of two courses of action. He may say that because he doubts he will not bother with religion, or he may say that because he is not certain he will try to find out more and so resolve his doubts one way or the other.

Many Agnostics opt for the first course, because it is easier. Any Jew who takes that course is voluntarily opting out of his religious heritage. Again, it is not the Synagogue which is driving him out, it is he that is failing to go to the Synagogue to try to seek answers to his questions.

If he were to go, he would find that many of those who attend also have questions to be answered and have their doubts from time to time. In a Progressive Synagogue where the worshipper is encouraged to think and to question, there must be times when people doubt. The modern form of faith is not so simple nor so unquestioning as the faith of previous generations. But even those earlier generations also had their doubts. The writers of the Psalms were deeply religious people who at times felt that God was very near and real to them; but at other times they too had their doubts. Psalm 22 begins: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou far from helping me? O my God, I pray in the daytime, but Thou hearest not." This is but one example where faith faltered and beliefs are questioned.

If a Jew has doubts and goes to Synagogue, reads books, speaks to his Rabbi and tries to study and pray to seek the truth, then that Agnostic is welcomed into the community. Few religious Jews would claim to have perfect faith. As there will always be the greatest mystery at the centre of religion, all of us are searchers after truth. Different individuals are at different places in that search; but one of the purposes of a Synagogue is to enable us to search together. If two seekers after truth study and discuss together, they will often find that one may have found insights into one problem while the other may have found answers to another difficulty. So they are each able to help the other.

Study and discussion are ways to help us in our search. So also are prayer and

meditation. A well-known prayer or a familiar Biblical passage is still capable of providing us with new insights of truth, even when we read the words for the hundredth time. In many cases doubts arise because of the way that we were taught about religion when we were children. An Agnostic is often questioning an unacceptable teaching which he received as a child, in doing so he may well come to find different and more acceptable answers suitable for his adult mind. We welcome Agnostics into the community because we hope that they will find answers to their questions and work their way through to a more satisfying belief. Of course it is possible that they might not find answers and instead may become convinced Atheists. This is a risk that we must take. As many of our regular congregants have been Agnostics at some time in their lives and have later found convincing beliefs, so we think that with sufficient effort by the Agnostic and help from the congregation, most of these doubters would be able to follow the same path. This attitude may seem a rather patronising; but we also find that the questions of a doubter often serve to stimulate the thoughts of the believer, so that he too seeks new answers. The Agnostic may therefore help believers in the same way that the believers hope that they may help the Agnostic.

## ***HUMANISM.***

Some date Humanism as beginning with Protagoras in the fifth century B.C.E. when he said: "Man is the measure of all things that are: of those that are not, they are not." The word 'Humanist' comes from the word 'human', for the Humanists regard man as most important, and tend to ignore the concept of God. They may or may not be Atheists, though today most are. Humanism is a philosophy based upon observation and reasoning rather than upon revelation. It places on man the responsibility to develop his own capabilities to the full and makes man totally responsible for the future of the world. For Humanists do not believe that God influences the world in any way.

The main differences between Judaism and Humanism therefore are firstly, that Humanists do not believe in God revealing Torah to man and secondly, they do not believe in God continuing to influence the world. When a Humanist says that he does not believe in God interfering in the world, he may be agreeing with what many modern Jews believe when they reject the idea of God performing miracles which are against His own laws of nature. Humanists, however, usually go further and reject the idea of God influencing us through our prayers and thoughts. If they take this view, it explains why they reject the idea of God's revelation to man. For the Jew who reads the Torah in Synagogue every Saturday and at other times, it seems obvious that man has received God's teachings, for there in front of him is the scroll containing that revelation being read to us. We may not agree on exactly how these teachings were given to man; but clearly the Torah contains eternal truths, so we accept them at the writers' own valuation of them - teachings from God. The Prophets and other writers of the Biblical books clearly state that they were being influenced by God. There seems to be no valid reason for doubting their own descriptions of how they came to teach their ideas.

Rejecting revelation of right and wrong, Humanists see ideal behaviour as that course of action which does the greatest amount of good to the greatest number of people. In many respects Jews would agree with Humanists. After all, it was Hillel who in the first century C.E. said: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour." (Shabbat 31a.) All Jews would wish to develop our human possibilities to the full, we would want to do the maximum good to others and we also see man as being responsible for making a better world. But in personal behaviour, a Jew is not only concerned with seeking the maximum

good for others, a Jew believes that God has revealed and still does reveal ideals of right behaviour to man. The task for the Jew is to try to do God's will, he does this by doing good and resisting evil. This may not be quite the same as the Humanist's ideal. Judaism is not only concerned with people. Something may be right or wrong in itself, and this may have no apparent affect on other people.

One of the Ten Commandments tells us that we should not covet anything that belongs to our neighbour. (Exodus 20, 14.) The act of coveting, by itself, does no actual harm to our neighbour, and probably the Humanist would not regard it as wrong; while for the Jew, it is a wrong attitude of mind, which could lead us to worse actions and therefore it is to be avoided. (The Rabbis explained in the Mechilta that coveting could lead to stealing, etc.)

Apart from their rejection of revelation from God and of God's influence upon the world, there is little else which separates Jews from Humanists. Many Humanists are fine people and Humanism often leads to right action. Judaism with its teachings of ideal behaviour of right and wrong often has even higher standards to live by. We could therefore see Humanism as an incomplete part of Judaism. Its moral and ethical ideals are just slightly less than those of Judaism, while its belief that man is the central figure of the world or universe seem rather presumptuous when compared with Judaism's view of man. For although Judaism regards man as the most advanced of God's creatures, he is still a rather insignificant being clinging to the surface of a large globe, while God is the infinitely great spiritual Power, Creator and Sustainer.

## **COMMUNISM.**

While Humanism places man as most important, Communism places the working man - or the proletariat as the great authority. In Soviet Russia and some other Communist countries, the state has taken over the role of the proletariat. So that now the ideal of a good action is that which is done for the good of the state and the most immoral action is something done against the interest of the state.

In Soviet Russia, religion is seen as irrelevant and to some extent as something which stands in the way of the class struggle. Car Marx spoke of religion as the opium of the masses, and most Communist states discourage religion as far as the can. Children are often taught in schools that religion is only superstition. Judaism is singled out for special treatment in Russia, because being a Jew is rather more than having a religion. The Russian Communist leaders want to make their Russian people into a vast Communist state, unified by Communist ideals. Because the Jews have links with their fellow Jews outside the Soviet state, they are sometimes seen as a threat to that unity or as undermining the Communist state.

Communism aims to improve the lot of the working man and to care properly for the elderly, the young and the less privileged in society. This corresponds closely with the Biblical command for us to care for the orphan, the widow and the stranger found frequently in Deuteronomy. This kind of idealistic society can be seen in some Kibbutsim in Israel.

The Soviet Union has added on the concept of the state as the great authority. The result is that the freedom of the individual has had to be greatly limited. Freedom of speech, freedom in art, freedom to think and to worship have all been affected by this doctrine of the importance of the state.

When we compare this to Judaism, we see that in Judaism, although there is the great authority of God and of Torah, the individual is still given the freedom to think and reason

for himself. Judaism teaches that man's free choice is important and that obedience to divine commands should be as a result of choice made in the light of the individual's reason and conscience. As it says: "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice, and cleaving to Him." (Deuteronomy 30, 19-20.)

The Soviet discouragement of religion which amounts almost to persecution, reminds the Jews of the actions of Antiochus in the books of Maccabees. The strict controls which prevent Jews from the decrees of Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. Moses pleas to Pharaoh "Let my people go!" has often been quoted by the refuseniks and their supporters throughout the world. The festivals of Passover and Chanukah emphasise the need for freedom of thought and freedom for people to worship in the way that each individual feels is right.

To sum up, it is perfectly possible for an individual to be both a Communist and a Jew; but it is often very hard to be a Jew in a Communist state, particularly if that state deliberately tries to stifle religion. However, we should remember that it is not essential for Communist states to do this. While the Jews of Soviet Russia are given a very hard time, Jews in Romania and Yugoslavia are permitted to practice their religion in comparative freedom.

## **29. VARIATIONS WITHIN JUDAISM.**

Because of centuries of persecution, the Jews were forced in upon themselves and they became a very close community. Many believe that this closeness reflects a uniformity in religion. They are often surprised to discover that the Jewish world has within it quite a wide range of belief and practice. This kind of diversity has been with us throughout our history. In the first century B.C.E. Saducees, Pharisees and Essenes were three distinct divisions of Judaism. In the Talmud, the arguments between the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel represented different approaches to religion, and it is interesting to see that the more lenient views of Hillel were eventually accepted rather than the stricter views of Shammai. In the middle ages the philosophy of Maimonides and the speculations of Jewish mystics led to similar divisions of opinion. Divisions of another kind developed during the period when the Jews were spread out in the world and travel was both difficult and dangerous. We find at this time that Jewish communities developed customs and practices which marked them out as distinct.

### ***SEPHARDIM AND ASHKENAZIM.***

In Britain the best-known distinction is between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim. Sephardi Jews can trace their origins back to Spain, Portugal and the Mediterranean area. The Ashkenazi Jews originated in central Europe in places like Poland, Germany and Russia. (The Hebrew for Spain is Sepharad and for Germany is Ashkenaz.)

If we look, we can find many differences between the religion of the Sephardi and the Ashkenazi Jew. Few of these differences are matters of belief, almost all are concerned with laws, practices and customs.

In Biblical times a Jew was permitted to marry more than one wife. In later times, polygamy was discouraged and became rare, particularly amongst European Jews. A decree was eventually issued about 1000 C.E. by the Ashkenazi Rabbi Gershom of Mainz forbidding Jews to marry more than one wife. For a time Sephardi Jews were permitted a number of wives, while Ashkenazim were not. The Sephardim then followed suit; but the Jews of Yemen never followed Rabbi Gershom's ruling, and when Yemenite Jews fled to Israel in 1948, a number took more than one wife with them. The civil law of Israel does not permit them now to marry more than one.

The most famous of all the law codes in the middle ages was the Shulchan Aruch of Joseph Caro. Caro was a Sephardi, Jew who in 1567 wrote this compendium of laws and practices. An Ashkenazi Jew, Moses Isserles, went through this code, adding the Ashkenazi view where there was a difference. One of the reasons why the Shulchan Aruch became so important was that it gave the two distinct sides of Judaism side by side.

As an example of differences in laws, at Passover when the Jew is forbidden to eat any leavening, there is a difference in the classification of rice. The Ashkenazim do not allow it to be eaten while the Sephardim permit it. This is a difference in interpretation of the law, other food differences are due to custom. There are many dishes regarded in Anglo-Jewry as being traditional Jewish food. To be precise, they are Ashkenazi Jewish food. The Sephardim have quite different traditional foods. So also do Jews in other areas.

If we compare the services in Ashkenazi and Sephardi Synagogues we find that each has its own prayerbook. Although The basic prayers are more or less the same, each will have parts which are special to them. This is particularly noticeable in some of the poems and songs which are included. Each preserve their own traditional poetry. In some cases well-

known prayers and hymns have extra lines added. For example the Sephardi Adon Olam is much longer.

The other obvious difference is in the pronunciation of Hebrew. Certain letters and vowels are pronounced differently. The tunes for the hymns and for the cantillation of the scroll reading are also different. The Ashkenazi Jew tends to look back rather nostalgically at Yiddish. Yiddish was the daily language of Ashkenazi Jews in the past, while Sephardim in the more distant past used to speak Ladino.

We therefore find that the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim have the same religion; but each seems to have its own regional accent. Such regional differences do not end there. Before the Holocaust, there were differences among Ashkenazi Jews. So a Polack, a Jew from Poland, differed from a Litvack, a Jew from Lithuania, etc. More than this, we find that Sepharad and Ashkenaz are not the only areas which can be identified. The Yemenite Jews, the Bokharian Jews, the Morroccans, the Indians and the Falashas can each be identified by the content of their services and by their customs.

### ***THE CHASIDIM.***

In the 18th century the Baal Shem Tov, a Jewish school teacher and preacher living in Podolia (Southern Russia) came to the conclusion that Judaism as it then was practised and taught, was not coming over to the average village. He felt that Rabbinic Judaism with its emphasis upon the study of detailed laws failed to appeal, and suggested instead that Judaism should be more concerned with the personal experience of God. He also felt that penances, fasts and solemnity were not the most important aspects of Judaism, he therefore advocated Jewish experience of God through music, singing and dancing and he favoured joyful worship.

This simple folk religion proved popular at the time. The Chasidim taught more by illustrative stories and by parables based upon the biblical text and less by the traditional method of detailed study. The Rabbinic scholars did not look with favour on the new movement. They accused the Chasidim of Pantheism (worshipping God in nature) and they disapproved of the lack of emphasis on study. For a time there was a rift between the Chasidim and their opponents whom they called Mithnagdim. Gradually, they each influenced the other. Rabbinic Judaism became a little more homely, and Chasidism gained a Rabbinic side.

After the death of the Baal Shem Tov, other leaders began to assert their authority. They developed the idea of teaching by example. Chasidic students began to study every move of their Tsaddik (leader) and they studied the teachings of previous leaders. Gradually study came back into Chasidism; but so also did a stagnating orthodoxy. By copying the smallest actions of the Tsaddik and holding this up as the ideal, the younger generation tended to preserve every details of the past and to shun any new development. This can be seen by the dress of the modern Chasid, who still wears the long black Kaftan of 18th century Poland or Russia. The warm fur hats (streimels) kept for the Sabbath, were very suitable for the Russian climate, but seem out of place in the Mediterranean heat of Israel.

The gradual change of a lively innovative trend of Judaism into a narrow-minded, restrictive and static orthodoxy should serve as a warning to Progressive Jews. If Reform or Liberal Jews ever find themselves turning the reforms of one generation into the fixed unchangeable practice of the next, then they will be in danger of going the same way.

The Chasidim have now developed customs, ritual, prayers and music which are different from the remainder of Judaism in certain respects. They have also developed different

groupings within Chasidism, which can be detected by slight variations in the style of dress. The attitudes of these groups can vary. So one group of Chasidim may be firmly against the state of Israel, saying that a Jewish state should not be established until the Messiah comes, while another group will support Israel and encourage its members to settle there.

One sad result of Chasidism is that because of their flamboyant following of the exotic in Judaism with such things as Peot (side locks), beards and old-fashioned dress, and because they call themselves Chasidim (Pious ones), they have fostered the idea that anyone who does not observe these laws and customs is not pious or is not such a good Jew. Some Mithnagdim even feel a little inferior to them in their Judaism. As has been pointed out, such obscure customs and laws are not necessarily the will of God; and also that there is much more to Judaism than the ritual commandments. Ethical mitzvot are at least as important as the ritual ones, so also are prayer, meditation, study, sincerity and intellectual honesty.

### ***ORTHODOX AND PROGRESSIVE JUDAISM.***

So far we have seen that there can be variations in the forms of Orthodoxy. This can be seen also in the various Synagogal bodies which exist in Britain. The main groupings of Synagogues are (1) The United Synagogue, (2) The Federation of Synagogues (3) Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. These three groups are of varying degrees of Orthodoxy; but they are unified by giving at least nominal recognition of the authority of the Chief Rabbi. There is also (4) a number of independent unaffiliated synagogues. Most but not all of these accept the rulings of the Chief Rabbi. Beside these groups, the others who do not feel themselves under the Chief Rabbi are (5) the Sephardim, who are Orthodox. The non-Orthodox groupings are (6) the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, (7) the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, there has also been an attempt to form a Conservative Movement in Britain; but most of its members are also members of one of the above seven groups and so as yet, it can hardly be classified as a separate group of Synagogues in Britain.

In order to understand the difference between Orthodox and Non-Orthodox we must look back into history. Originally Judaism was a religion which changed and developed. It is possible to trace such development both within the Bible and also in the time since the Bible was completed. The Rabbis of the Mishnah and Talmud were consciously changing and shaping Judaism. After the completion of the Talmud, in the mediaeval period, when persecutions were common and Jews were shut away in ghettos, Judaism became more rigid and unchanging. This slowing down of the rate of development was strongly influenced by the process of codifying Jewish Law, which took place at this time. Because of the complexity of Jewish Law, some Rabbis decided that it would help people if all the various laws were listed in a logically-ordered code of laws. Once these codes appeared, there was less discussion about what was the correct practice and people began to follow these codes exactly, so that development in Judaism virtually stopped.

While the Jews had to live in ghettos, this stagnation of religion did not greatly matter. In the 18th century, however, some European countries tried to bring Jews out of the ghettos and give them a modern education. Once they had received a wider education at the new Jewish Free Schools, these 'modern' youngsters found themselves applying their critical minds to their religion. When they did this, they found that some of the existing practices and laws badly needed altering. As Judaism had lost its ability to make rapid or large changes, they felt that it had to be radically reformed by non-traditional methods.

The first Reform services took place in 1810 in the Synagogue attached to the Jewish Free School in Seesen in Germany. The main innovations at these services were some prayers and hymns in German so that people could understand them, Confirmation for both boys and girls (Barmitsvah and Batmitsvah), organ music to accompany the singing, shorter services and a regular sermon. Up to that time sermons had rarely been given in Synagogue. Despite Orthodox opposition Reform Synagogues became established, first in Germany, then in the United States and later in other countries. In Britain, the first Reform Synagogue was the West London Synagogue, which was consecrated in 1842.

The early Reformers made these changes for practical reasons. They wanted the services to be aesthetically acceptable, the prayers to be meaningful, the ceremonies to express their inner feelings and the laws to be just and right. To those who criticised them for making changes, they pointed out that historical research showed that Judaism had in the past been a developing and changing religion, and that they were restarting that tradition of development. This argument did not satisfy the Orthodox, who by then had come to think of Judaism as an ancient unchanging religion. The opponents of Reform raised a number of objections, but most were based on the question: "If God gave the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, the Torah both Written and Oral was of Divine origin and therefore perfect, so what right had any man to alter it?" Eventually when the findings of Higher Criticism became known (see page A21), many Jews no longer believed that God actually dictated the Law to Moses, instead they believed that the Torah was written by a number of inspired people. However inspired they were, they sometimes included some of their own human ideas, and it was some of these which now urgently needed changing.

Some early Reformers made a distinction between the Written Torah which they accepted and the Oral Torah which they did not. But this was soon seen as an over-simplification, for parts of each were fine and good and parts of each were clearly out of date, irrelevant and sometimes even unjust or wrong for modern society. Ultimately, we find that these laws had to be judged in the light of modern knowledge by reason and conscience to see whether they were just, good and true.

### ***DIFFERENCES IN BELIEF.***

1. The first and basic difference between Orthodox and Progressive Judaism is that Progressive Jews believe that God revealed His truth progressively to man over a long period of time, and that God continues to inspire and influence us through our reason, our conscience and through prayer to know more of His truth. This we call Progressive Revelation. Orthodoxy believes that God revealed His teachings on Mount Sinai, both the Written and Oral Torah and that never again has He revealed His truth to man.

From this one difference most of the others follow, so Progressive Jews believe:-

2. That men and women should be equal before God and should play an equal part in the religion. In Orthodoxy they play a different role which often makes women appear inferior, except in the home.
3. That Jewish Law should not discriminate against women. Orthodoxy, preserving unchanged laws from the ancient East, where women played a different role in society, still has laws on such subjects as Agunah, Get (divorce), Chalitsah, Adultery, etc. which are harsher on women than on men.
4. We no longer look forward to the time when the Temple will be rebuilt and sacrifices of animals etc. will again be offered.

5. Because we do not want to offer sacrifices in the future we see no reason to preserve the hereditary distinction between Cohanim (Priests), Levites and Israelites.
6. We look forward to a more perfect time in the distant future called the Messianic Age, and see this being achieved by a gradual improvement brought about by all people working together. We do not believe that a single person called the Messiah will come and put the world right for us.
7. We do not believe that in the Messianic Age all Jews will have been gathered to live in Israel. The Messianic Age will be international not national.
8. We teach about the continued existence of the spirit after death; we do not believe that the body will be resurrected.
9. We regard practices as means of expressing our inner religious feelings and beliefs, we do not regard them as ends in themselves. They should not be regarded as commandments from God which have to be carried out without questioning.
10. We believe that the worshipper needs to understand the prayers which he says, and that if he does not understand Hebrew, then until he does it is permitted to pray in the language which he does understand.
11. We believe that as the Jewish calendar is no longer fixed by observation, no doubt about dates exist, and therefore there is no longer any necessity to observe the extra days of festivals, which because of these doubts were added outside Israel.

There are also some areas in which we would place different emphasis upon certain things from the Orthodox:-

- a) We probably place a greater emphasis upon the Moral and Ethical side of Judaism as compared to the ritual side than does Orthodoxy. This is not a difference, as moral teaching has always been an integral part of our religion, but it has sometimes been partly ignored.
- b) We place a greater stress upon universalism, and this results in our religion being less insular and inward-looking. This is seen in the prayers which we say for other people besides Jews and in our efforts to make contacts with other religions.
- c) We place more emphasis on the spirit rather than on the letter of Jewish Law.
- d) We place a greater emphasis upon the Mission or Task of the Jewish people to lead the world to improve.
- e) We place more responsibility on the individual Jew to choose the right path through life.

### ***PRACTICAL RESULTS.***

Following on from these beliefs, certain practices were changed. Besides the changes of the early German Reformers of shorter services, some prayers in the language of the country, instrumental music played to enhance the service and regular sermons, we also find other changes like permitting the family to worship together by not separating men and women, prayers were altered in line with these new beliefs and new prayers were added. The Synagogue has been arranged with a reading desk at one end rather than in the middle, this allows the Rabbi to give his sermon facing the whole congregation.

The result of these changes was that the rather disorganised services of the past were replaced by services in which the people said prayers in unison, where the congregants

would understand and follow the services, and therefore they were not bored and tempted to chatter. Because of the good decorum and because they understood what they were praying, people went home from those services feeling spiritually uplifted and helped.

In matters of law and status many changes had to be made. Inequalities between men and women had to be removed, as did some out-of-date laws like Agunah and Chalitsah. (Agunah means 'chained' and refers to a woman whose husband is thought to be dead, but she cannot prove it. She was not allowed to remarry and was 'chained' to her first husband. Chalitsah is where a man died childless, then the widow was not allowed to remarry until she first went through a ceremony with the dead man's brother. This ceremony is objectionable and involves spitting.)

The laws of Judaism were looked at in the light of modern knowledge and circumstances. When the Jews lived in small towns and villages, they were not permitted to travel more than a limited distance on the Sabbath. Today, many Jews do not live in Jewish areas, and have homes more than this limited distance away from the nearest Synagogue, should they then stay away on the Sabbath? Some 'Orthodox' Jews travel by car and park round the corner. This is clearly hypocritical and is condemned by both Orthodox and Progressive Rabbis. Progressive Jews ask themselves the question: Is it the will of God that I should stay at home or is it that I should go to Synagogue? Is travelling by car work, and disturbing to the peace and rest of the Sabbath? They conclude that modern methods of travel can not be compared with say saddling and riding a donkey which had to be done in the days when this law was made. They feel that the modern Jew finds more rest in riding to Synagogue not less, and that it is clearly better to go to Synagogue and pray, study and meet other Jews than it would be to stay at home uninfluenced by the Jewish community or by Jewish worship.

This example of travelling to Synagogue on Shabbat is just one of many cases where the spirit of Jewish teaching is followed rather than the letter of the law. We must ask ourselves what is right, what is just, what is good, what does God require me to do? These questions seem more important pointers to us to right action than asking: what is the strict law in this case? We do not ignore past laws; but we believe that we must judge them in the light of knowledge, our reason and our conscience.

This puts more responsibility upon the individual Jew to choose the right course. In turn, this leads to more thought and probably also to more commitment by the Jew. There are dangers in this approach to religion. If the Jew does not consult his reason and his conscience, and takes the easy course or if he follows others down a particular road without thinking, he may mistakenly believe that he is doing right. But such an approach is not that of Liberal or Reform Judaism. Progressive Judaism is not that of Liberal or Reform Judaism. Progressive Judaism is not a do-as-you-like religion, it is a do-what-is-right religion. For this, it is not only necessary for the Jew to consult his conscience, but that conscience also needs to be an informed or developed conscience.

Orthodox Jews who have been brought up to see Judaism as a series of laws and commandments, find it difficult to understand this approach. To them it sometimes seems the easy way out and that Progressive Jews are doing just what they want. In fact, it may be more difficult to be a good Progressive Jew because before taking any action we should think, reason and ask ourselves if what we are doing is right, while an Orthodox Jew just follows the Law without thinking or questioning. Sometimes a Progressive Jew may impose upon himself stricter laws than his Orthodox brother. For example, in the case of the status of children of mixed marriages where a Jewish-born mother does not bring up her children to be Jewish (see page A56) or the case of marriages within the Penitential

period, which are not permitted in Liberal Judaism because the celebration does not fit in with the mood of penitence at that time, but which are permitted by Orthodoxy on certain of those ten days. Ease or difficulty should not be the way that we should judge religion, but rather whether it leads us towards righteousness. Religion should be an aid to right living rather than an obstacle course.

The second problem for Orthodox Jews is the lack of uniformity in Progressive Judaism. Being used to a law being universally applied, they are puzzled by Progressive Jews using their reason and conscience, and therefore sometimes coming to different conclusions. So one Liberal Jew may save his best cigar to smoke on the Sabbath just as he might save his best food for Sabbath meals, while another may stop smoking because in two senses it spoils the Sabbath atmosphere. They may find it hard to see that each is honouring the Sabbath in his own way. What matters is that each is remembering and observing the Sabbath day to make it holy or special, and so is keeping to the spirit of the Sabbath. (For the Orthodox Jew smoking is not permitted because it involves the kindling of a fire.)

From all this, we can see that there is also a difference in the role of the Rabbi in each case. In Orthodoxy the Rabbi is seen as the expert on Jewish Law and tells his congregants what they must or must not do. In Progressive Judaism the Rabbi's role is to inform and advise his congregants, so that each Progressive Jew is in a position to make the right decision in the light of knowledge, his conscience and his reason.

### ***REFORM AND LIBERAL DIFFERENCES.***

Three terms have been used in this book to describe non-orthodox Judaism: 'Reform', 'Liberal' and 'Progressive'. 'Reform' and 'Liberal' are the general names of two separate groups of Synagogues. The term 'Progressive' was introduced to include both Liberal and Reform, and it has been used in that sense in this book. However, as those Synagogues with Progressive in their title all belong to the Liberal Movement, and as the title of the Liberal Movement is the Union of Liberal And Progressive Synagogues, the word 'Progressive' in recent years has become more associated with Liberal than with Reform. The terms 'Liberal' and 'Reform' were used in the opposite sense on the continent of Europe before the war, and even today some Liberal Synagogue there are more like the Reform Synagogues in Britain than the Liberal, while Reform Synagogues in the United States are often closer to the Liberal in Britain.

The Reform and Liberal movements have much in common, and Britain is the only country where there are two such movements. (In the United States they have a Conservative Movement which was at one time moderately Orthodox, but in recent years has become almost Progressive.) In Britain the student Rabbis for both the Liberal and Reform Movements are trained together at the Leo Baeck College, and therefore it seems only a matter of time before the two movements join together.

Neither Reform nor Liberal Jews accept the Written and Oral Law as totally infallible and binding. Each has made changes in the light of modern knowledge and changed circumstances. The difference between the two movements is only in the degree to which modernisation has taken place.

The Liberal Movement began in 1902 because the Reform Synagogues at that time had not made sufficient changes. The Reform still had almost the complete service in Hebrew and kept men and women separate. Nevertheless, when the Liberals started, the West London Synagogue invited them to hold services there. The offer was refused because they required the Liberals to keep the sexes separate and because they wished to have

some control over the content of the services.

Since 1902, the Liberals have become more traditional in practice and the Reform more Progressive, so that the two movements are closer together today. In the intervening years discussions have taken place on several occasions on the subject of closer cooperation or merger. Up to the time of writing, much cooperation has taken place; but no agreement has been reached over merging.

The practical differences have been narrowed down to three:

1) The status of children of mixed marriages. The Reform follow the Orthodox system while the Liberal attitude is as explained on page A56.

2) Get. (Jewish Divorce) The Liberals recognise a civil divorce as terminating the Jewish marriage, and will allow remarriage. They advise women to obtain a Get from their ex-husbands to protect any future children. If the ex-husband refuses to cooperate and give a Get, they will remarry her without a Get. Before they will remarry a civilly-divorced man, they require him to offer a Get to his ex-wife so as not to place her in a position where she may be blackmailed. The Liberal Movement do not attempt to supervise the writing of a Get for they know that it will not help the couple or their children as it will not be recognised. They also see the Get as being sexist both in language and in practice. Those who wish to protect any future children they may have are advised to go to an Orthodox Bet Din for a Get.

The Reform require divorced people to give or obtain a get and their Bet Din does supervise the issuing of Gets. However, these Gets are not recognised as valid by Orthodox Rabbis and therefore do not prevent future children from being labelled as Mamserim for ten generations. (A Mamser is a child of a union forbidden in the Bible.) The Liberals do not approve of the Reform Get procedure, because it permits a man to divorce his wife; but it does not permit a woman to divorce her husband. Where a woman wants a divorce and the husband refuses to give it, the Reform Bet Din practises the legal fiction of the court giving the wife a Get as if on behalf of the husband.

3) Mikvah. The Reform require converts to go to a ritual bath, the Liberals do not. (see page 131f for a fuller explanation)

There is also a difference in approach.

4) It has been argued that these three differences are really outward signs of deeper differences. For when making decisions the Reform pay more attention to past legal rulings and the Liberals are more concerned with justice, reason and modern knowledge. The Reform have made a greater effort to make their practices appear kasher in the eyes of the community, while the Liberals are more concerned with trying to be honest, sincere, just and fair in their rulings. The concept of a legal fiction, to which the Reform sometimes have to resort, seems unacceptable to the Liberals, who feel that it demeans both Judaism and the Law. While lack of regard for legalism amongst the Liberals worried some of the more traditional members of Reform. It is perhaps significant that where the Reform movement have a Bet Din, who claim that they are applying a reformed or modernised Halachah (code of laws), the Liberals have carefully avoided using the legal term 'Bet Din' and speak of their Rabbinic Board, with a similar function.

When we looked at the differences between Orthodox and Progressive, we found that there were at least eleven differences in belief and five differences of emphasis. There were also innumerable differences of practice which, were not listed. Between Reform and Liberal there are no differences of belief, only one difference of emphasis or approach and

three differences of practice.

It seems to some members of the two movements that the differences between Liberal and Reform are very great, while to others they are not. We should not forget that the things which we share are far greater than the things which divide us. In reality, the three differences of practice are relatively unimportant parts of Judaism, which could well be bridged with good will on both sides. Far more difficult is the difference in approach or emphasis which pervades the two movements, and which could be a source of friction in the future.

At the moment the two movements overlap. Although in general, the Reform is slightly to the right or more traditional, there are some Liberal congregations which are more traditional than some Reform congregations. and one congregation is affiliated to both movements. The problem arises not in the middle of the range, but with the right wing of Reform and, to a small extent, with the left wing of the Liberals. If a formula could be worked out which did not require complete uniformity of practice, and which was a genuine compromise, then there might be a chance of the two movements coalescing.

### ***THE NEW LONDON CONGREGATION.***

Following the publication of his book "We Have Reason To Believe" which restated the view that the Five Books of Moses were not all written by Moses, Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs was declared to be unsuitable to occupy the pulpit of an Orthodox Synagogue. In 1964 some of his past congregants helped him to found an independent Synagogue. Rabbi Jacobs claims to be Orthodox, because he strictly observes Orthodox practices; but his teachings concerning the authorship of the Bible undermine the authority of the Torah. Therefore in practice he is Orthodox, while in belief he is not.

This illustrates an anomaly in the use of the term 'Orthodox'. This name is borrowed from Christianity and is derived from the Greek words meaning 'right or correct in opinion'. It therefore refers to belief; but in the Jewish community it is used to describe someone who practices according to the old ways. It would be better to describe Rabbi Jacobs as 'Orthoprax' rather than as 'Orthodox'. The New London Synagogue has affiliated to the American Conservative Movement.

### ***THE ANGLO-JEWISH COMMUNITY.***

All the accounts in this chapter may give the impression of a very divided community. There are differences; but there are also things which unite us. The Anglo-Jewish community has a large representative committee called the Board of Deputies of British Jews which discusses matters of communal interest. At the Board, representatives of Synagogues of all the varieties described in this chapter sit down together to make decisions for the common good. When there is a religious matter to be discussed, the Board has to consult all the Jewish religious leaders. These are the Chief Rabbi for the Ashkenazim, the Hacham for the Sephardim and the Chairman of the Council of Reform and Liberal Rabbis.

When it comes to charitable work or matters concerning the state of Israel, the community works together fairly amicably. The ties which join the Jewish people together are usually stronger than the differences of belief and practice which exist.