

God, the World and me...

Finding Personal Answers

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Questions:

1. In what sense do you believe the Torah to be divine revelation? Are all 613 commandments equally binding on the believing Jew? If not, how is he to decide which to observe? What status would you accord to ritual commandments lacking in ethical or doctrinal content (e.g., the prohibition against clothing made of linen and wool)?

2. In what sense do you believe that the Jews are the chosen people of God? How do you answer the charge that this doctrine is the model from which various theories of national and racial superiority have been derived?

3. Is Judaism the one true religion, or is it one of several true religions? Does Judaism still have something distinctive - as it once had monotheism - to contribute to the world? In the ethical sphere, the sphere of *bein adam l'havero*, what distinguished the believing Jew from the believing Christian, Moslem or Buddhist - or, for that matter, from the unbelieving Jew and secular humanist?

4. Does Judaism as a religion entail any particular political viewpoint? Can a man be a good Jew and yet, say, support racial segregation? Can a man be a good Jew and be a Communist? A Fascist?

5. Does the so-called "God is dead" question which has been agitating Christian theologians have any relevance to Judaism? What aspects of modern thought do you think pose the most serious challenge to Jewish belief?



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I have always felt that Shammai's policy was wiser than Hillel's in their respective reactions to the Gentile who challenged them to teach him the whole Torah while standing on one foot. It is probably better not to try at all than to risk all the ambiguities that must necessarily attend a condensation of one's religious outlook to a couple of thousand words. Nevertheless, out of deference to the preference of the Jewish tradition for Hillel, I am willing to take my chances and come armed with naught but naive trust in the reader's fairness, no matter what his convictions.

(1) I believe the Torah is divine revelation in two ways: in that it is God-given and in that it is godly. By "God-given," I mean that He willed that man abide by His commandments and that that will was communicated in discrete words and letters. Man apprehends in many ways: by intuition, inspiration, experience, deduction and by direct instruction. The divine will, if it is to be made known, is sufficiently important for it to be revealed in as direct, unequivocal, and unambiguous a manner as possible, so that it will be understood by the largest number of the people to whom this will is addressed. Language, though so faulty an instrument, is still the best means of communication to most human beings.

Hence, I accept unapologetically the idea of the verbal revelation of the Torah. I do not take seriously the caricature of this idea which reduces Moses to a secretary taking dictation. Any competing notion of revelation, such as the various "inspiration" theories, can similarly be made to sound absurd by anthropomorphic parallels. Exactly how this communication took place no one can say; it is no less mysterious than the nature of the One who spoke. The divine-human encounter is not a meeting of equals, and the *kerygma** that ensues from this event must therefore be articulated in human terms without reflecting on the mode and form of the divine logos. How God spoke is a mystery; how Moses

received this message is an irrelevancy. That God spoke is of the utmost significance and what He said must therefore be intelligible to humans in a human context, even if one insists upon an endlessly profound mystical overplus of meaning in the text. To deny that God can make His will clearly known is to impose upon Him a limitation of dumbness that would insult the least of His human creatures.

Literary criticism of the Bible is a problem, but not a crucial one. Judaism has successfully met greater challenges in the past. Higher Criticism is far indeed from an exact science. The startling lack of agreement among scholars on any one critical view; the radical changes in general orientation in more recent years; the many revisions that archaeology has forced upon literary critics; and the unfortunate neglect even by Bible scholars of much first-rate scholarship in modern Hebrew supporting the traditional claim of Mosaic authorship - all these reduce the questions of Higher Criticism from the massive proportions it has often assumed to a relatively minor and manageable problem that is chiefly a nuisance but not a threat to the enlightened believer.

Torah is not only God-given; it is also godly. The divine word is not only uttered by God, it is also an aspect of God Himself. All of the Torah - its ideas, its laws, its narratives, its aspirations for the human community - lives and breathes godliness. Hillel Zeitlin described the Hasidic interpretation of revelation (actually it was even more true of their opponents, the Misnagdim, and ultimately derived from a common Kabbalistic source) as not only *Torah min ha-shamayim* (Torah from Heaven) but *Torah she'hi shamayim* (Torah that is Heaven). It is in Torah that God is most immediately immanent and accessible, and the study of Torah is therefore not only a religious commandment per se, but the most exquisite and the most characteristically Jewish form of religious experience and communion. For the same reason, Torah is not only legislation, *halakha*, but in its broadest meaning, Torah - teaching, a term that includes the full spectrum of spiritual edification: theological and ethical, mystical and rhapsodic.

Given the above, it is clear that I regard all of the Torah as binding on the Jew. To submit the mitzvot

**ke-ryg-ma* The proclamation of religious truths, especially as taught in the Gospels.

to any extraneous test - whether rational or ethical or nationalistic - is to reject the supremacy of God, and hence in effect to deny Him as God. The classification of the mitzvot into rational and revelational, or ethical and ritual, has descriptive-methodological but not substantive religious significance. Saadia Gaon, who a thousand years ago proposed the dichotomy between rational and nonrational commandments as the cornerstone of his philosophy of law, maintained that even the apparently pure revelational laws were fundamentally rational, although man might not, now or ever, be able to grasp their inner rationality. At the same time, far greater and more genuine spirituality inheres in the acceptance of those laws that apparently lack ethical, rational or doctrinal content. It is only these performances, according to R. Hai Gaon, that are prefaced by the blessing, "Blessed are Thou ... Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to ..." Holiness, the supreme religious category, contains an essential nonrational core; and this state of the "numinous" can be attained only when man bows his head and submits the totality of his existence to the will of God by performing His mitzvah for no reason other than that this is the will of the Creator. R. Nachman of Bratzlav recommended to his followers that they observe the "ethical" laws as though they were "ritual" commandments. In this manner, the ethical performance is transformed from a pale humanistic act into a profound spiritual gesture. I do not, therefore, by any means accord to ceremonial laws any lesser status than the others. On the contrary, while confident that these *mitzvot shimiyyot* are more than divine whim in that they are ultimately of benefit to man and society, I prefer to accept even the *sikhliyyot*, the rational and ethical, as "ritual" in an effort to attain holiness, the ultimate desideratum of religious life.

(2) It should be unnecessary to have to clarify to sophisticated readers, at this late date, that the Jewish doctrine of the election of Israel is not one of racial or ethnic superiority. The chosenness of Israel relates exclusively to its spiritual vocation embodied in the Torah; the doctrine, indeed, was announced at Sinai. Wherever it is mentioned in our liturgy - such as the blessing immediately preceding

the *Shema*, or the benediction over the Torah-reading - it is always related to Torah or mitzvot. This spiritual vocation consists of two complementary functions, described as *goy kadosh*, that of a holy nation, and *mamlekhet kohanim*, that of a kingdom of priest. The first term denotes the development of communal separateness or differentness in order to achieve a collective self-transcendence. The *halakha* is the method par excellence for the attainment of this goal. The second term implies the obligation of this brotherhood of the spiritual elite toward the rest of mankind; priesthood is defined by the prophets as fundamentally a teaching vocation. The election of Israel "because all the earth is Mine" was understood by Seforno (to Ex. 19:5) to mean, "because I love all the peoples of My world, I have elected you to teach all mankind to call upon the Name of the Lord and serve Him in unison."

These two functions, the tension between which is inherent in the concept of chosenness, are not antonyms, mutually exclusive, but supplementary ideas. In a study of how this doctrine was treated in Tannaitic times, a contemporary scholar has discovered that the greater the emphasis by an individual sage on chosenness and its inescapable particularism, the greater the breadth of his universalism. This separateness of Israel, its "holiness" function, may both result in and be fostered by a sense of alienation. But to assert, as some have done, that it is exhausted by the experience of alienation is to misread the whole meaning of election by eliminating its clear telos, that of holiness. There is no virtue in alienation, or particularism, or an inclination for dissent, for their own sake. They may be characteristic, respectively, of modern man's psychological condition, or the aspirations of Jewish secular nationalism, or the liberal credo; but they are not Judaism. And, ultimately, they cannot nourish the soul or provide an answer for the spiritual yearnings of men.

Can the idea of chosenness give birth to the wild Herrenvolk theories that have proved so catastrophic in our times? Of course, it can, and possibly has (although it never has with Jews). But such noxious notions are not legitimate children of the biblical doctrine of election; they are monsters, genetic mutations. Any idea contains the risk of distortion; and

the nobler the idea, the greater the danger and the uglier the perversion. The concept of government can be reduced to tyranny; must we, therefore, all be anarchists in order to avoid such dangers? Religion can become superstition; democracy, mobocracy; liberty, libertinism; respect, subservience; love, lechery. Shall we abandon the former because they can and often do degenerate into the latter?

The same holds true for the chosenness of Israel. It is a teaching of service and a service of teaching. It is concerned with the attainment of spirituality. Its particularistic aspect, while essential and indispensable, is propaedeutic; its universalist element remains the ultimate telos. Israel may be reluctant teacher, and the world an unwilling pupil. But the methodology of divine pedagogics is rarely directly didactic. The teaching occurs on many levels and is expressed in many ways: by word, by sublime example, and most notably by the very mystery of Jewish history. That Israel is the chosen agent for this education of mankind does not reflect either on the superiority or inferiority of this people - although intimations of both may be found in Jewish literature. The nearest that any major Jewish thinker has come to a biological interpretation of this spiritual elitism is the highly ethnocentric "historiosophy" of Judah Halevi. But only a deliberate misreading of the *Kuzari*, the work in which this idea is proposed, can mistake it for a precursor of modern racism. The whole of the argument is addressed by the rabbi in the book to the pagan king of the Khazars in an endeavor to convince him of the truth of Judaism. At the end of the book, the king converts to Judaism - surely an astonishing conclusion to a tract supposedly elaborating an exclusive doctrine of Jewish racism!

(3) The nature of Israel's priesthood, its teaching to all of mankind, can be divided into two: the social-ethical and the spiritual-metaphysical (the two, of course, are ultimately interrelated). The *halakha* articulated the first in the form of the Seven Noahide Laws" which, in effect, mean civilized behavior. (Nachmanides considers these as seven categories of law, rather than as individual commandments.) These are essentially negative: the rejection of immortality and brutality and lawless-

ness. The only "religious one of the seven laws is also negative: the proscription of idolatry. To this the prophetic tradition adds a second element - the spiritual-metaphysical content of priesthood, positively formulated: the recognition and service of God. This the vision of a day when "the Lord will be King over all the earth," will fill the earth as the waters cover the seas. This acceptance of God, of course, comprehends the good life. Maimonides distinguished between the first and the second of these two elements - the humanitarian-humanistic and the profoundly theistic ethos - by referring to the practitioners of the first as wise Gentiles and to the second by the more honorific term, pious Gentiles.

That a number of these ideas are shared by the major religions, some as a result of Jewish influence and some independently, cannot and ought not be denied. But this by no means relieves Israel of the obligation to pursue its vocation without relaxation. Surely this post-Auschwitz era needs education in civilized conduct as much as did the Canaanites of antiquity; and contemporary man - whose avant-garde theologians have killed what he had of God and directed his religious concerns solely to the worship of a man - needs, no less that the fetishistic primitive, the constant reminder that "the Lord (and not an apotheosized human) is God" and that the Lord is One. And perhaps the most significant teaching, the uniqueness of Judaism, is the coalescence of these very elements - the spiritual and the practical, the theological and the ethical, *aggada* and *halakha*. Judaism has always resisted the effort to foist on it - as metaphysical truth rather than as merely analytical device - the bifurcation of body and soul, of letter and spirit, of ritual and social, of cultus and ethos. The restriction of religion to worship and cult was accepted quite naturally by the ancient pagans, and the confinement of the spirit to cult in modern times, despite all gallant attempts at developing a "social gospel," is one of the sad triumphs of secularism. We have cornered God locked Him up in little sanctuaries, and now complain that we cannot find Him in "the real world." Judaism's unique contribution to modern man may well lie in its insistence that God is very much alive, that He is not absent from society (even "secular" society) for those who invite Him in,

and that the best way to achieve this goal is to release Him from His incarceration in our barren and desiccated temples. In a word: *halakha!* Through a sanctifying of all of life meaning and purpose return to man, God is once again accessible, and human spirit can be affirmed in the very midst of life in all its existential tensions and the wealth of its variegated phenomena. It is through *halakha* that a new relationship is established between the sacred and the secular (Rabbi Kuk referred to them as the holy and the not very holy), and that man can reorient himself toward nature in a manner that affirms joyously the development of technology.

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(1) The simplest doctrine underlying the 613 commandments is the Orthodox one that all of them are derivable from explicit or clearly implied statements in the Torah. Even the elaborated details governing their observance are part of the oral law which was also given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Every correct elaboration of the law arrived at by a competent scholar is only a rediscovery of what was already said on Mount Sinai. Therefore we have no right to classify the commandments in any order of supposed relative importance. They are all God-given mandates.

This doctrine is clear-cut and has long been influential; but by now it has lost its credibility. Only a small proportion of world Jewry still believes that every detail of observance is God-given. Furthermore, the classic doctrine now tends to embitter Jewish communal life, for it leads those who still hold to it to the conclusion that the overwhelming majority of Jews in the world lives in violation of God's clear mandate. There can be no statistics on the extent of present-day neglect of the law, but one has only to think of the Jews he knows: how many of them, even those who consider themselves Ortho-

dox, now obey the Sabbath laws strictly, or the laws of kosher food, or resort to Jewish rabbinical courts in business dealings? When one reads the Orthodox rabbinical magazines, one gets the feeling that Orthodox leadership, to the extent that it is aware of widespread nonobservance, lives in constant apprehension of the effect of this mass nonobservance upon the future of Jewish life. They feel hemmed in. Their outcries about kosher food are generally bitter denunciations or cries of futility. They seem to feel that the Jewish people itself has become a source of dangerous infection to the Jewish law. One may say that they are now defending the fortress of the law against the Jewish people.

All groupings in modern Judaism must face the realities of Jewish religious observance. It is a basic fact. One can either declare the overwhelming majority of Jewry to be sinful and retreat into a fortress, or else consider the widespread nonobservance or selective observance of the 613 commandments as a historical reality to which Jewish thought and theology must be adjusted.

The search for a new theological basis for the commandments took place in Reform. The Reform movement was founded by laymen, not by rabbis. The rabbis were of the second generation of its pioneers. The laymen, disturbed by the growing nonobservance of the commandments, sought no new theology. They thought that aesthetic beautification of the service would solve the problem. The first Reform rabbis knew that mere modernization and beautifying of the service would not be effective. They therefore sought for a doctrinal revision of Orthodox theory, in order to build a Judaism in harmony with contemporary reality. Holdheim declared that most of the ceremonial commandments were national in purpose, while some of them expressed spiritual and ethical ideals. Since the Jews of the world were not a nation any longer, he said, all the national commandments were void. Geiger stressed the evolutionary nature of Judaism: certain ceremonies were now outworn and others might take their place. Frankel, the founder of the Conservative movement, stressed the results of history: all the commandments which were deeply rooted in the Jewish past must, he said, still be held as valid. The

difficulty with all these theories is that one of them gives a clear-cut rule whereby to judge specifically which commandment is incumbent upon us and which is not.

So today the situation remains as it has been for a century and a half. The choice of commandments is left to the emotions and preferences of the individual: and this has brought chaos. There is now a wide spectrum of varying observance throughout the Conservative movement, the Reform movement, and in the congregations which call themselves Orthodox. Hence all the discussion today about the authority of the commandments. The Orthodox can do little more than rebuke or sigh. Reform and Conservative leaders hope to maintain the idea of mitzvot but cannot arrive at a standard of selection. So far no one has come up with any logical doctrine which can convincingly say, "This is essential and this not essential."

My own opinion is that the Jewish people is spontaneously evolving a system of practice, and it must be given more time to work it out. In another generation, perhaps, custom, which is always a vital force in Jewish observance, will tend to clarify itself. For the present, we must use the Jewish legal literature and the codes respectfully but not subserviently. They must be our guides but not our governors until such time as the Jews of the various countries arrive at what corresponds to their feeling as to the essentials of Jewish life. Hillel said (of course in a much more restricted sense): "Let the Children of Israel alone. If they are not prophets, at least they are the children of prophets" (B. Pesachim 66a).

(2) Are the Jews God's chosen people? The question troubled the prophet Amos and his opinion is ambivalent. He said that just as God brought Israel out of Egypt, so God delivered other nations. Therefore all nations are under God's mandate and will be punished for their violations of ethical duty. In his denunciations he includes Israel in a list with Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Amon, Moab. But other of his speeches contain special denunciations of Israel and Judah. Evidently he felt that God's selection of Israel implied some additional intimacy (3:2): "You only have I known among all the families of the earth. Therefore I will visit your transgressions upon you."

The doctrine of the chosen people was the doctrine of a special responsibility, not of a special glory. The prayerbook always couples the idea of "chosen" with "commandments." "With great love hast Thou loved us...and statutes hast Thou taught us." The idea is therefore different from the vauntings of such other peoples who deem themselves unique in order to justify dominance over others. Jewry has been the people to bring the concept of ethical monotheism into the world and has maintained the purity of its God-conception. The idea that there are therefore special obligations to decency and kindness and justice is the actual meaning of the chosen people and is still a real motivation even in the life of modern Jews. When we say, "A Jew ought not to do this sort of thing," we are not scorning anybody, but are taking upon ourselves a higher standard. There is nothing ignoble in our assumption of a duty and in the belief that we have extra responsibilities.

(3) The Christian and Mohammedan religions are understood to be under the Covenant of Noah. Judaism is under the further Covenant of Sinai, which adds special obligatory commandments. Those under the Covenant of Noah are obligated to obey seven commandments (against idolatry, cruelty to animals, murder, etc.) - in other words, to observe ethical monotheism. All who obey these seven Noahide commandments belong to the category of "the righteous of the nations who have their portion in the world to come."

Jewish legal literature is the most trustworthy source for the realistic day-to-day attitude of Judaism toward other religions. Belletristic or polemical literature might be suspect of having been written for the eyes of Gentiles, but the legal literature, especially the legal commentaries, are almost never seen except by Jewish scholars. The importance of the question springs from the fact that anti-Semites have used this Jewish legal tradition in their attempt to prove that Jews and Judaism are hostile to Christians and Christianity and that we are indeed commanded by our law to cheat them and even to destroy them. The fact of the matter is that the ancient repressive laws in the Bible and Talmud were directed against the idolaters. Jews were forbidden to do business with them or to help them in any way. Jewish law,

however, quickly indicated that Mohammedans and Christians were not idolaters at all and that these older laws therefore did not apply.

Thus, for example, Rabbenu Tam, the great French authority of the twelfth century, says that we may make all business contracts with Christians, even when the business requires (religious) oaths to be taken, with the Christians swearing by the saints. Such oaths ascribing additional divinity or semi divinity to others than God would be forbidden to Jews, but is not forbidden to “the sons of Noah.” He says, “These days they all swear by their saints but they do not really ascribe divinity to them. This is not to be deemed idolatry, for they intend their oath to be in the name of Him who created heaven and earth” (Tosfot in B. Sanhedrin 63b, also Tosfot in Bekorot 2b). In spite of “saints,” “Trinity,” etc., Christianity is deemed monotheistic. This opinion is embodied in the codes (see Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 156, Isserles). Moses Rifkes, who fled for his life from Vilna before the Chmelnitzki army in the seventeenth century, and would be expected to be bitter, nevertheless says (Hoshen Mishpat 425:5): “The rabbis made these (repressive) laws against the idolaters of their day; but these nations under whose protection we live believe in God’s creation of the world and the Exodus from Egypt and in many essentials of religion, and all their intentions (i.e. of the oaths they take by the saints and the Trinity, etc.) refer to God the Creator of heaven and earth.” A still later authority, Israel Lifshuetz of Danzig (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), says in his commentary to Mishna Baba Kama (Chapter 4, Note 17, speaking of Christians): “Our brethren the Gentiles, who acknowledge the One God and revere His Law which they deem divine and call it ‘Holy Writ,’ observe as is required of them the seven commandments of Noah.”

All these citations are in small printed commentaries which hardly a Gentile would ever see. They represent not a public-relations point of view but the precise opinion of Jewish law that the Christian religion is a true religion; that Judaism and Christianity are both under divine covenant, the Christians under the Covenant of Noah and we under the more demanding Covenant of Sinai. Therefore Christian-

ity is the true religion for Christians and Judaism is the true religions for Jews.

Would that Christianity had the same respect for Judaism as Jewish law has for Christianity! The Christianity missionary mandate leads them to hope that Judaism will disappear into Christianity. We have no such hope and therefore no such mandate. The list of 613 commandments contains no commandment to proselytize.

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Judaism has its ground in the divine-human encounter, which is ordinarily called “revelation.” This encounter occurred between the divine and the people of Israel. The divine self-disclosure to the community of Israel resulted in the covenantal obligation assumed by our ancestors. They were to be a “kingdom of priests and holy people,” living their individual and communal lives in the presence of God.

The record of this divine-human encounter is contained in the Torah. The Torah (and the rest of the sacred literature of the Jews) is the result of revelation; it is not identical with it. It is the human writing-down of the divine word.

Therefore, the Bible is not infallible. It does not reflect scientific truth (though it may contain it); and it may reflect historical inaccuracies (though it may, and almost always does, reflect historical truth). Both the divine and the human are bound up inexorably in the Torah and cannot be separated or distinguished by means of some formula.

The process by means of which the community of Israel reads the Torah so as to know what is demanded of it in the concrete, historical situation is the process of interpretation called midrash. The history of Judaism is the history both of revelation

and of the interpretation of revelation. Indeed, "Judaism is based on a minimum of revelation and a maximum of interpretation" (A.J. Heschel). Talmudic literature is basically an attempt on the part of the rabbis to reexperience the original revelation and then to confront their own time, to formulate what must be done. This is the meaning of the rabbinic assertion that both the written Torah and the oral Torah are products of revelation.

One of the most important elements of the revelation is the system of mitzvot (commandments) culminating in the system of *halakha*. The purpose of this system is to make concrete the divine demand to be holy and to pursue justice. It is the natural result of the acceptance of the covenant. As the Mishna puts it, first one accepts the yoke of heaven and then one accepts the yoke of the commandments. Through the performance of the mitzvot, the Jew acts out his being set apart as a priest people and opens himself to the experience of the divine. Thus, all the mitzvot (usually counted as 613 - though in effect many fewer are binding since a good many presuppose the existence of the Temple) are theoretically obligatory upon each Jew. However, through the process of interpretation, the tradition has discarded some commandments and added a host of new ones in response to changing conditions. The process of reevaluating the mitzvot through interpretation goes on in the living community of the people of Israel. The mitzvot are not to be seen as a group of Platonic Ideas existing for all time in their perfect and unchanging character. They are the demands of God upon the community of Israel, which lives in time, and they are therefore subject to change, growth, and (all too frequently) decay. Thus, we do not believe that the Bible's toleration of slavery is to be seen as normative. In a real sense the *halakha* is constantly reevaluated by the *aggada*. The community reinterprets and changes its structure of obligations in the light of their ability to express our faith and by their power to evoke faith. Some commandments are legislated out of existence (for example, the canceling of debts in the *shemitta*); others fall by the wayside through neglect (such as the prohibition against eating "new" grain before Passover).

The individual Jew, insofar as he is an active

member of the believing community, is guided in the Law by those whom he accepts as its interpreters. He is also guided by his ability to observe the Law, and this is dependent upon his education and his spiritual preparedness. So long as he is serious about doing the right thing in the sight of the Lord. But he should always aim to incorporate more and more of Jewish obligation into his life. The entire corpus remains as an obligation and a demand. But each Jew seriously and prayerfully should move as high as possible up the "ladder of Jewish observance" as he gains in sensitivity and understanding. What I have been saying is a restatement of Franz Rosenzweig's thoughts on the question of Jewish observance. Actually, I have little to add beyond his formulation.

From what has been said, it is clear that to make sense of Jewish existence it is necessary to affirm the belief that the community of Israel is not a "natural" community. It is a community founded by the divine in order that it be "His people." The doctrine of the chosenness of Israel involves three motifs - covenant, responsibility and suffering. "Chosenness" is not for privilege, but for covenant with God. It involves a relationship with the divine which imposes responsibilities and obligations. This idea is in direct opposition to ideas of inherent wisdom or natural superiority. The Bible is clear in stating that the Jews were not chosen because they were wise or gifted. Israel Zangwill has said that the Bible might almost be looked upon as an anti-Semitic book - because it so frequently and so bitterly criticizes the Jews for their shortcomings and failures. It was the prophet Amos who expressed the motif of responsibility most eloquently: "Only you have I known among the nations of the earth - therefore, I will visit upon you your iniquities." This responsibility means that the Jew by his very being offends totalitarians of all kinds. The Jew - even if he be a non-believer - is perceived as the enemy of those who want to make the nation or the party the sole arbiter of value. It is uncanny that this feeling of chosenness should be found in the deep recesses of the consciousness of most Jews, even if they are different to Judaism. "I have yet to find a Jew who does not in some manner or form exhibit this profound sense of difference and special vocation" (Will Herzberg) is possible, of

course, to misunderstand the doctrine of chosenness and transmute it into the made theories of national and racial superiority. It is also true that some Jews have been guilty of such misunderstanding. But for those who understand the meaning of chosenness in its biblical and rabbinic sense, comparing it to the Nazi abomination or to white supremacy is like comparing a man to a monkey.

Judaism has recognized that the experience of the divine is not limited to Jews. One of the most striking features of rabbinic Judaism is the idea of a covenant made with the children of Noah (that is, before there were any Jews) wherein they too were obligated to observe the seven commandments known as the Noahide laws. These represent a kind of natural religion and ethic. Judaism is the one true religion for the Jew because it is the content of the specific covenant made with the children of Israel. Every Jew is a member of the covenant by virtue of his having been born a Jew or because of voluntary obligation, through conversion. Other peoples have their covenants. I find most cogent and meaningful the double covenant theory of Franz Rosenzweig which sees Christianity as the “Judaism of the Gentiles”: through it they establish their relationship to the divine. These religions, based on the Bible, “carry the word of God to the far islands” (Moses Maimonides). As long as the non-Jew is true to the seven laws of Noah, he fulfilling his obligation. Judaism has wisely postponed the universal acceptance of Judaism until the end of time - that is, it has recognized that in historical times, men will have different religions and worship God in their own way. Judaism and the other religions are like parallel lines which will meet in eternity.

The Jew has much to contribute to the world. His long history and his long attachment to humanistic values and rationality have trained him to extraordinary sensitivity and resulted in phenomenal achievement. The values which inhere in Judaism are important, even vital, for our civilization. But over and above this, the Jews have an obligation to continue to exist as a community, and as such, to stand witness against themselves and against others who are tempted to worship false gods. The Jew waits patiently for the redemption of the world - though he is

bidden to be active in helping to bring it about.

Judaism has accumulated great wisdom which can be applied to the solution of ethical dilemmas. It is lamentable that Jewish scholars and thinkers have not done more to make this known to the wider community. But in terms of ethical obligation, all men are judged by God. We must, therefore, work together with all men of good will in the promotion of humanistic values. There is a basic difference in viewpoint between the believer who sees his ethical obligation rooted in the divine demand and the humanist who knows no outside source for his duty. The latter lives on the so-called unearned increment of the capital invested by his forefathers, who derived their morality from their relation to God. It is possible to start with new axioms such as “peace is war” (as is being done in some totalitarian countries and as might be done in 1984). This does not mean that non-religious people are ethically inferior to religious people. All too frequently the opposite is true. But the moral principles of the religiously committed are more reliably anchored.

Judaism possesses a particular ethical viewpoint. It cherishes the individual as created in God’s image. It commands the pursuit of justice and the practice of mercy. It is realistic about the weakness and potentiality for evil found in human nature. The demand of Judaism is to put these principles into practice in all spheres of human concern. The precise application of the ethical demands of Judaism may be subject to differing interpretations. Jews may thus be Democrats or Republicans, socialists or capitalists. But they cannot at the same time be true to their religious responsibility and be partisans of movements or systems of government which are founded on the supposition that human worth is subservient to the state and that some human beings are not entitled to the dignity which is their as beings created in God’s image. Thus, Fascism, Communism, racism, and other personality-denying ideologies are antithetical to Judaism.

For a long time, Jewish theology followed Christian theology. Today, in several significant ways, Christian theology is returning the compliment. Christian thinkers are beginning to understand the importance of the theological notion of *galut*, of the

believing community as the people of God, and of the importance of the world as the arena where God and man meet. The Jew is not a tourist in the “secular city.” He finds himself on familiar ground. The thrust of the system of *halakha* was to move the area of concern out of the sanctuary into the place “where the action is.” In regard to the “death of God” controversy, the Jewish thinker should be impressed by the sincerity and acuteness of the demand of those who want to make us explain in understandable terms what we mean when we say God. It is also important to realize what tasks we as people must be willing to undertake, what problems we must solve without thrusting the burden on God. “We solve problems one by one; we rely on the One to conquer evil finally” (A.J. Heschel). Insofar as the death-of-God writers have called for clarity and demanded action in the midst of the “city,” they are welcome. But though the Jew has known, only too well, the eclipse of God, he cannot admit His complete absence. Though God may be a hiding God, He is not a hidden God. Of course, the idols whom we sometimes call God must be smashed. The fuzzy ideas we hold about Him must be clarified. From Philo through Maimonides until our own day this has been seen as a religious duty. But as Rosenzweig and others have stressed, the reality of the divine is a datum of experience - a reality different from the world of man. He who does not share this experience has not opened himself up to it.

The aspects of modern thought which are most disturbing are those which lead either to a Prometheanism in which the achievements of man are celebrated, or to a radical anomic in which all standards of value are reduced to human whim or historical accident. The first seems to be present in those who have been overwhelmed by the success of technology; the latter is most prevalent among the social scientists. There are many problems to which Jewish thought must address itself. First and foremost, Jewish thought must try to fathom the meaning of the European holocaust. To many it has meant that faith in God and man vanished in the smoke of Auschwitz; for others, it was a tragic confirmation of the special character of Jewish existence. But for all Jews (and non-Jews as well) it remains the most agonizing question of our age. I believe very strongly that when we wrestle with these awful facts with deep conviction and with open souls we will understand better the meaning of Jewish existence and the majesty and awful grandeur of God.

God, the World and me...

Finding Personal Answers

I know *God* is involved in the world when....

I believe *God* is involved in the world when....

I know what *God* wants from me, from the world by.....

I understand/believe the Torah came by.....

I understand/believe the relationship among *God*, Torah and the world to be...

I understand/believe the relationship between *God* and me is.....
