COMMITTEE VII
In Search for Understanding
Among the Monotheistic
Religions

DRAFT - 9/15/87
For Conference Distribution Only

JUDAISM - A WAY OF LIFE

by

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The Sixteenth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences
Atlanta, Georgia November 26-29, 1987

Judaism - a way of life

I would like to open with two preliminary remarks - the first one pertaining to the historical aspect of Judaism, the second to its phenomenology. Historically Judaism like Christianity developed as exegesis, interpretation or re-interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in order to adapt its laws to changing historical conditions and in order to render its basic conceptions in the spiritual genre of the respective generation[1].

The second remark concerns the very character of Judaism. It would be misleading to define it as religion in terms of private individual experience or in the sense of a fixed dogmatic system. Indeed, these are very important ingredients, but they are only partial aspects of a cultural phenomenon, assuming national and universal dimensions, and aiming to embrace the totality of human existence with its individual and political repercussions. Therefore I am inclined to accept Buber's definition in his book "Königtum Gottes" (Kingdom of God), who describes the Sinai covenant as a theological-political event (ein theopolitischer Akt), because on that occasion God was proclaimed King of the whole nation, this proclamation being of paramount importance in shaping the mentality and the social-political scheme of Israel.

In the first part of this paper I shall discuss the political character of this covenant in the Bible and in later

Judaism. The second part contains the analysis of a concrete example pertaining to the socio-economic rythm of Judaism. In this analysis I shall dwell on the sources concerning the Sabbath and the Sabbatical and jubilee years.

The third part will demonstrate the individual dimensions of biblical monotheism by a close reading of some psalms which will show us the affinity between the social communual and individual aspect of Judaism.

1

Sinai Covenant and Kingdom of God

It is a commonplace that the basic religious experience which forged Jewish thought and mentality for all generations is the Divine revelation at Mount Sinai; this is conceived as a tremendous collective occurence in which the whole nation participated. True, the biblical sources telling about it are dressed in legendary attire, but nevertheless they reflect a primeval historical event which took place shortly after the exodus, and left its deep imprint on the spirit of the nation. Later rabbinic sources, which florished during the second commonwealth and afterwards, further developed the myth about this encounter. They contend that the whole nation including all men and women, children and slaves, as well as all future generations borne in the course of

Jewish history were present, actively participating in the coronation ceremony of God as King of Israel. In this act they solemnly committed themselves to being his vassal people, and accepted all personal and collective obligations resulting from it[3]. In short, the Sinai covenant which is the very setting of biblical monotheism and later Judaism places under obligation all generations of Israel.

The classical description of this communal experience is found in the book Exodus, chapters 19-20, 24 and in Denteronomy 33:5. The core of the literary compound Ex 19-24 is the scene of the covenant ceremony between Israel and God, depicted in the narrative section contained in chapters 19 and 24, which embrace the Decalogue (ch. 20) and the most ancient biblical collection of laws, the so-called Book of Covenant (chs. 21-23). As modern biblical research has convincingly demonstrated, exposition and style of these and similar sections of the Bible have a close affinity to the vassal treaties of the Hettite Kings of the second millenium, these also bearing witness to the very ancient character of the respective biblical sources and their concrete political meaning

Its core is ch. 19:3-8 - verses 3-6 which contain the Divine decree, written in poetical language, and verses 7-8, written

in narrative prose reporting about the unanimous response of all participants, i.e. of the whole nation.

The following is the Divine decree:

"Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel.
You have seen what I did to the Egyptians,
and how I bore you on eagles' wings,
and brought you to myself.
Now, if you will obey my voice,
and keep my covenant
you shall be my possession (vasall)[4a]
among all peoples,
for all the earth's mine.
And you shall be to me a Kingdom of priests
and a holy nation.

The following verses tell us about the response of the people: "So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. And all the people answered together and said: All that the Lord has spoken we will do".

These verses are the very nucleus of biblical monotheism and Judaism, implying that the religious experience, i.e. the

Divine revelation to Israel is meaningful only in the covenantal context, the main concern of which being the commitment of the whole nation to adhere to the commandments of the Lord in individual and communal life. God is here conceived of as King of Israel, lawgiver, judge and commander in chief in times of war (Ex. 15:3. Judges 5).

This regime is utopian because its supporters declined every kind of human kingship, government and bondage.

This scheme worked about 250 years, which divide between the Exodus from Egypt and the establishment of Israelite Kingship. During this period every-day life was regulated by the ancient tribal institutions, in times of war a charismatic judge making his appearance in order to return to his former daily occupations immediately after having vanquished the enmy. These judges far from being regular rulers were rather conceived as momentary emissaries of God, their only task being to restore the Kingdom of God which was endangered by the inroad of the enmy.

Gideon's rejection to Kingship proposed to him by the elders of Israel after his victory over Midian, is typical of the utopian mentality common to these generations,

"Then the men of Israel said to Gideon: "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson, for you have delivered us from the hand of Midian".
Gideon said to them: 'I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the Lord will rule over you (Judges, 8:22-23)[5].

Jotham's parable in the adjacent chapter (9:7-15), written in the same spirit, has been described by Buber as the most important anti-monarchical piece of world literature. Anyhow, the concrete political meaning of the Kingdom of God, in contrast to its late mystical internalizing and spiritualizing re-interpretation is the antithesis to human rule as represented in the traumatic historical memory from Egypt, the house of slavery.

This political utopia collapsed only under the military strokes of the Philistines during the 11th cent BCE, whose technological and organisational superiority brought them this short-lived victory over Israel (1 Sec. 4). In order to survive it became imperative for Israel to change the political system and to establish human kingship (1. Sam 10-11), the transitional crisis of this emergency being reflected in 1 Sam 8. Despite the fact that Samuel, who adhered to the ancient utopian conception, had to give in to the demand of the elders, the structure of this new political system was fundamentally different from that of other ancient NE models. In contradistinction to these absolute regimes Hebrew monarchy rose from popular election and divine nomination by the prophet, and was subject to prophetic criticism.

According to the ancient Egyptian view, Pharaoh was God incarnate and in Mesopotamia the king was considered the chosen servant of the gods who ruled the country. In both cases the King was

mediator between the people, the gods and nature. In Egypt the participation of Pharaoh , the God incarnate, in the cult guaranteed the integration of man and nature, whilst in Mesopotamia kingship was conceived as a divinely ordained political order. But the Hebrews knew that they had introduced it on their own initiative, in imitation of others and under the strain of emergency. Hence the king did not become a necessary bond between the people and the divine powers innate in nature. On the contrary, it was during the kingless period that the people had been singled out by the Lord, as indicated time and again: "Ye are the children of the Lord our God... and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself above all the nations that are on the earth" (Dent.14:1-2). Moses said to Pharaoh: "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn, and I say unto thee: Let my son go, that he may serve me" (Ex. 4 :LL-23).

The awareness of the Hebrews that they are a chosen people is the permanent feature in their history. But this chosenness far from being a historical prerogative, was rather considered as a covenantal commitment. The prophets interpreted it as the obligation to adhere to the social and moral stipulations of the covenant. This chosenness meant also sacrificing the greatest good ancient NE religion could bestow: the harmonious integration of man's life with the life of nature.

The biblical accounts stress the orgiastic joys of the Canaanite cult of natural powers ; this cult also offered the serene awareness of being one with the universe. In this experience ancient oriental religion rewarded its devotees with the peace of fulfilment. But the boon was available only for those who believed that the Divine was immanent in nature.

Biblical monotheism, however, rejected precisely this belief, which assumes an ontological-biological bond between the divine world nature and man. The transcendence of the God of Israel precludes any possibility of mystic or orgiastic union with him[7]. He is beyond creation, transcending every phenomenon . The only way to communicate with him is prayer. Moreover, He is holy, which also means that all values are ultimately his. The transcendentalism of monotheism prevented kingship from assuming the significance which it possessed in Egypt and Mesopotamia. It excluded in particular the idolization of the King, who in the Egyptian view was God incarnate, instrumental in the integration of society and nature by his participation in the cult, as indicated above.

The Hebrews believed nature to be void of divinity; therefore it was worse than futile to seek harmony with created life, when only obedience to the will of the Creator would bring peace and salvation. This fundamentally anti-naturalistic and anti-monarchic approach to life was developed later by the Pharisees into a democratic system. According to this system the nation was ruled solely by the traditional law which was taught, interpreted and imposed by the Sanhedrin, the highest judicial institution composed of the sages, the outstanding scholars of this law. The members of the Sanhedrin including the president were elected, and decisions were taken on the basis of majority rule alone[8].

A famous rabbinic legend from the first or second century C.E. exemplifies this religious mentality, which was based on the awareness that the only binding interpretation of the Divine law was the rational decision taken by the democratic majority of the Sanhedrin.
According to this legend (Babylonian Talmud, Baba-Metzia 59,a-b), the president Rabbi Elieser ben Hyrkanos attempted to turn down a majority opinion of the Sanhedrin in a halachic question by performing some miracles. But the Sanhedrin - seemingly under the influence of Rabbi Yehoshua, his main opponent - rejected this performance as irrelevant. So R. Eliezer invoked

a divine voice, which responded immediately to give evidence in favour of his opinion. Now Rabbi Yehoshua stood up quoting Deuteronomy 30:11-12, 14: "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven... but the word is very near you", saying that since the Sinai revelation the Torah is no more in heaven, and no heavenly voice is entitled to change decisions of the Sanhedrin. After this incident Rabbi Eliezer was excommunicated and urged to retire.

So we can say that the Jewish way of life as crystallized in the Bible and in Rabbinic law and literature is in a certain sense the forerunner of modern democratic conception. I emphasize "forerunner" because modern democracy has been duely described by Jean Jacques Rousseau as the creation of "volonté général" (the public will), whilst in ancient Israel the primary source of law was God. The Bible, however, underscores that the Sinai covenant was the free commitment of a whole nation. Moreover, this unique political scheme was different from theocracy, for God decreed his will by the prophets and by the charismatic judges, as against historical theocracies which were manipulated by a priestly caste according to its vested economic and social interests.

Again, the late kingless transformation of the Kingdom of God during the second commonwealth and afterwards was the work of the "literates" the sages, the scholars of the law, who

taught and expounded it according to their rational principles of exegesis in accordance with the needs of their generation.

The historical myth of the covenant which the prophets enlarged into an utopia of a society based on justice, righte mercy and love assumed in the messianic visions of Isaiah, Jeremiah[9] and Yecheskel (Is. 2:1-4; 11:1-16. Jer. 30-31. Yecheskel 36; 40-48). universal dimensions , embracing the whole mankind. It is precisely this optimistic idea which revolutionized the whole western mankind. The social and moral elements inherent in it were to become the cornerstone of the French revolution. The luxurious flowering of utopian schemes during the 17th, 18th 19th and 20th centuries, attempted to put these ideas in modern secular terms of political, economic and social thought, postulating a preordained harmonious and perfect scheme of things, to which men are irresistably driven, and at which they are bound to arrive[10].

In short, these conceptions which were of paramount importance during the formative age of modern democracy, belong to the Jewish heritage stemming from biblical and talmudical sources.

2.

The socio-economic utopia of the covenant

What is the character of the way of life contained in the biblical and in the Rabbinic sources? How was the idea of the kingdom of God translated into the rythm of every-day life? Instead of abstract definitions let us describe it by a concrete example, i.e. by the analysis of the stipulations pertaining to the Sabbath the sabbatical and the jubilee years[11], their impact on society, on the one hand, and on personal individual religiosity, on the other.

Let us begin with the analysis of Levitieus 25, the main biblical source pertaining to the sabbatical and jubilee years. The body of this law[12] is contained in vs. 1-13, the major part of the chapter, vs. 14-54, being composed of legal amendments concerning the jubilee year; these seem to have been added during the First Commonwealth, when the ongoing process of urbanization changed the social structure of Israel and Juda. In any case, these amendments bear testimony to the fact that these laws are not late priestly inventions, as many scholars contend, but were activated during the First Commonwealth. It may be assumed, that the amendments were added during the reign of Solomon and/or during the reign of the Omri dynasty in Israel, when the process of urbanization had reached its pinnacle. Then the lawmaker exempted the inhabited areas of the walled cities as well as the land which

had been sold by the temple administration from the jubilee year provisions that required - additionally to the release of all slaves - the return of all land to their original owners, thus restoring the economic equilibrium by re-establishing the ancient parcelling from the owners parcelling of the country between the tribes and families according to their size at the time of the Israelite conquest. The same may be said of the ancient laws of inheritance (Num. 27:9-11; 36:1-9) which expressly mention the preservation of "the ancestral plot" as its aim. The uniqueness of the sabbatical and jubilee provisions becomes evident in comparison to old Mesopotamian "mīsharum" provisions[13], which contain stipulations relating to the cancellation of debts and the release of slaves. Nevertheless, there exist two outstanding differences between biblical land provisions and these royal decrees from the ancient Near East:

1. These regulations were decreed by some Mesopotamian kings haphazardly according to their political considerations and interests. On the other hand, the sabbatical and jubilee years which were conceived as a divine commandment, returned in a fixed cyclical order.

2. The "mīsharum" provisions were intended to improve the social and economic conditions as may be gained from the preamble stating "Because the king establishes justice in the country..."; but as a matter of fact only a small social layer in whose welfare the king was interested took advantage of these provisions. On the

other hand the biblical provisions of the sabbatical and jubilee years were relevant to the society as a whole, thus creating a life rhythm which shaped the character of the whole nation.

The special nature of this rhythm may be gained by the literary affinity of these provisions (Lev. 25) to the clause relating to the Sabbath. It should be emphasized that the stylistic formulation of the ancient Sabbath laws (Gen. 2:1-2; Ex. 20:8-11) was directed against the Mesopotamian concept of the shapattu. Modern Near Eastern research[14] has taught us that shapattu was in Babylonia the fifteenth day of the month: another institution which also seems to be related to the Hebrew Sabbath were the "ill-fated days" of the Assyrians, which followed one another after intervals of seven days. The shapattu seems to have been a day of prayer and sacrifices, called "the day of the rest of the heart" when men calmed their gods by cultic performances. As to the ill-fated days, these were, according to Assyrian sources, days of bad luck when people were advised to refrain from performing their regular daily business. The date of these days as well as that of shapattu was fixed according to astronomical calculations starting with the new moon, thus symbolizing the dependency on the rotations of the celestial bodies which were revered as divine beings. As against this, the Sabbath passage which is the conclusion of the story of Creation (Gen. 2:1-2) emphasizes three times that it was on "the seventh day" that God finished His work, rested and blessed the seventh day.

The Sabbath commanment is based on the argument that He rested on the seventh day, thus severing the Sabbath from any affinity with the heavenly bodies. The Sabbath rest assumes here cosmic dimensions (Ex. 20:11-12; 3: 17), corresponding to the rest of the Creator after six days of work. It is indeed conceived as a kind of collective "imitatio dei"; including every human being created in His image, and the domestic animals, as written: "You and your son, and your daughter, your man servant and your maid.servant, and your cattle, and your sojourner who is within your gates (Ex. 20:10). Other sources emphasize the humanitarian aspect, i.e.: "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your ass may have rest, and the son of your bondmaid, and the alien, may be refreshed" (Ex. 23:12); Dt. 5:14-15 even mentions in this context the liberation of Israel from the house of slavery. The provisions of the Sabbatical and jubilee years extend the principle of rest and refreshment to the whole nature including the country (Lev. 25:4). The rhythm of the sabbatical and jubilee years is based on the number seven like the Sabbath, as may be demonstrated by the following comparison: "Six years you shall sow your field and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits: but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of

solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord" (Lev. 25:3-4). Like the Sabbath, the jubilee year is hallowed to God and it aims to demonstrate His exclusive ownership of the country: "...for the land is mine, for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23). The stipulations regarding the sabbatical year require that the land be left fallow, thus encompassing the natural environment in the process of regeneration and refreshment which is essential to the ecological stability of human society. This is the first human legislation to take care not only of the inner social structure but also of the environmental conditions - a fact which has been neglected by most modern social schemes. Additionally it should be emphasized, that by leaving the produce of the fields during that year to the use of everyone, conditions of relative economic equality are created which embrace the whole social structure.

The jubilee rhythm which is seven times seven plus one completes the egalitarian tendency by annulling all land transactions which have been executed during the last fifty years and restoring the land to those families to whom it was allotted after the conquest from the Canaanites. This is itimately intertwined with the release of all slaves and their return to their families and their ancestral plots. The major tendency inherent in this ancient legislation is the guarantee of human freedom in the

Kingdom of God, where God is conceived as the single ruler: "For to me the sons of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt"(Lev.25:55).

The legislation of the sabbatical and jubilee years allude to the land in anthropomorphic language demanding that the land be allowed to rest. On parallel lines the prohibitions regarding sexual relationships have been formulated. Israel is warned to guard these prohibitions, saying: "That the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out" (Lev. 20:22). Again in the following admonition to the people against forsaking the jubilee regulations Israel is threatened with destruction and exile: "Then the land will enjoy its Sabbath as long as it lies desolate" (Lev. 26:34); "As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest... and enjoy its Sabbaths" (ibid vs., 35, 43). Thus the land is conceived as the full partner of man in the process of regeneration and refreshment. These three concentric life cycles aim at severing the life of Israel from the natural life cycle with its inherent death and destruction. The inner cycle, the seven-day week including the Sabbath, is conceived of as the imitation of the Creator's rest; it bestows on the whole society the principle of rest. The cycle of Sabbatical year widens its orbit by including the land, thus creating the ecological equilibrium vital for the stability of every

society and enabling relative economic egality by exempting the fresh harvest in the fields from private ownership. The jubilee cycle completes the egalitarian tendencies by restoring all land to its original owners and by commanding the release of all slaves, thus establishing the principle of freedom based on the utopian social concept of divine kingship.

But the Hebrew lawmaker is aware that equality and freedom can never be obtained completely in this world: "For the poor will never cease from the midst of the land". (Deut. 15:11). The life rhythm to be created by the legislation will however draw Israel towards the ideal goal, but the goal as such is out of human reach. In other words, the transcendant character of Utopia will be an eternal challenge to Israel.

This new life rythm is one aspect of Biblical monotheism, which in the course of time had undergone transformations leading to the development of Judaism. As I pointed out above, Judaism is to a great measure the result of constant exegesis and re-interpretation of the Bible in response to the needs of the Jewish people in their struggle for survival in a hostile world and under fluctuating social and historical conditions. The sacred canonized texts had to be interpreted or re-interpreted in the light of these changing conditions. This process did not come to an end at some specified time, but continues up to the present. When the

text of the Bible was fixed, the activities of biblical interpretation were centered in the Talmud and the Midrashim. When the Talmud was completed (circa 500 C.E.) and its text set, the process of interpretation was carried on in the responsae literature and in the commentaries which generated super-commentaries etc. If, as Jewish tradition teaches, the oral law was given at mount Sinai together with the written text, it would appear that the practice of treating the text as always requiring interpretation began from ancient times and has continued up until the present. This method of interpretation is the most important device of the Jewish spirit in order to be able to stand simultaneously in the classical chain of tradition and in the contemporary world. Each age living in its particular cultural and intellectual milieu had fashioned its way of being faithful to the teachings of Judaism whilst accomodating itself to the social and intellectual reality of the period concerned. Indeed, the Rabbis extracted the principle of exegesis from the biblical verse: "Is not my word like as fire, saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer.23:29). They interpreted this to mean that just as the hammer breaks the rock into many pieces, so is the Tora open to a multiplicity of interpretations (Rashi to Gen. 33:20 and B. Shabbat 88b).

Against this background we should appraise the changes pertaining to the provisions of the Sabbatical year which have been introduced by one of the outstanding Rabbinic authorities of the first century, Hillel the Elder[15]. Originally one of the central provisions

pertaining to the sabbatical year was the annulment of all debts - a provision of major importance in a society based on agriculture (Deut. 15:1-6) which was constantly threatened by the vicissitudes of nature. Hillel observed that towards the sabbatical year potential creditors used to refrain from lending money, thus causing grave damages to trade and commerce which then already played an important role in economic life. In order to overcome this obstacle he invented a juridical device which practically abolished cancellation of debts at the sabbatical year (Shebiit 10:3,4), justifying this revolutionary ammendment by the very text of the original provision, saying: "Take head lest there be a base thought in your heart and you say 'The seventh year the year of release is near' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin in you (Dt. 15:9).

This is only one example of hundreds of amendments and new provisions introduced by the Rabbis thanks to their free, liberal and creative exegesis of the biblical text, an exegesis which in many cases amounts to a reinterpretation of the tradition.

A very recent attempt to translate into concrete facts the ancient social trend of the Bible combining justice, freedom and equality is the Israeli Kibbutz and Moshav; these are the

communal and the cooperative settlements which have been established in Israel since the beginning of this century. The basic egalitarian principle of the Kibbutz says: "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs".

Moreover, every member of the Kibbutz is also member of the general assembly, which decides democratically on all issues, electing its secretariat and all persons to represent the Kibbutz towards the outside world. True, both the Kibbutz and the Moshaw are the outgrowth of modern secular socialist ideas, which florished during the nineteenth century. But we should bear in mind, that it was Moses Hess[16], a prominent Jewish socialist philosopher and forerunner of modern Zionism, brought up in Jewish tradition, who first tried to render Jewish social tradition in terms of modern socialist thought. I dare say that both these social structures, the Kibbutz and the Moshaw, which had such a deep impact on modern Israel, translate biblical morality into concrete social creations. Indeed, the setting of this new society is biblical social morality, which reached its pinnacle in the admonitions of the prophets, who taught the primacy of morality[17] over the cult, as the prophet Micha puts it:

"He has showed you, O man, what is good,
and what does the Lord require of you;
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God (Mic. 6:8).

(cf. also Isaiah 1:10-17. Jeremiah 22:13-17. Amos 5:21-24 etc.).

Summing up our previous observations, we contend that the major tendencies underlying the laws pertaining to the Sabbath and the sabbatical and jubilee years are of the following:

1) To integrate every human being, every domesticated animal and lastly the country in the process of refreshment and recreation. Thus, the importance of Sabbath rest which sometimes is described as a social, humanitarian institution, takes on cosmic dimensions. The theological expression of the egalitarian tendency inherent in it has been formulated in terms of imitatio dei.

2) To integrate man, society and nature by constant application of regulatory stipulations, aiming at the abolishment of the major distortions in the economic equilibrium and at the restoration of freedom.

3) To overcome the dangers of death and destruction inherent in the orgiastic natural cults of ancient Near-Eastern religions by the establishment of a rythm of steady refreshment and recreation corresponding to the rythm of the Creator, severing every affinity to the natural rythm, which is paramount in paganism.

4) By manifold methods and devices of exegesis and reinterpretation the Rabbis were endeavoured to adapt the spirit of the law to fluctuating social conditions by changing or abolishing provisions which no longer fit the new historical framework.

5. Modern liberal democracy as well as some variations of modern socialism render the biblical heritage in terms of modern social thought.

3.

Individual Piety

And now to the individual aspect of biblical monotheism and later Judaism, its classical source being the book of Psalms, where individuals in various life-situations invoke God in prayer, lamentation, supplication, hymns of thanks-giving, hymns of praise etc., etc.[18].

The moments of intimate prayer reflected in this great lyric poetry show the path to self-transcendence and to blissfulness ~~which they~~ enjoyed in the presence of God. In most cases this feeling is inextricably bound with cultic experience, the privilege of sojourning in the House of the Lord (Ps. 15:1, 23:6, 24:3 etc.) and participating in the ceremonies of the congregation (Ps. 26:6-7; 42:5; 55:14-15; 63:17).

The cry of the persecuted and poetry-stricken that reverberates throughout the Psalms is a declaration that man's aloneness with his suffering means that God has abandoned him, while the joy radiating from the hymns of praise and thanks-giving expresses a sense of God's nearness on the part of one who has been

delivered from great distress. The central motif common to many psalms is the longing for God's nearness. They speak in these cases about "beholding the beauty of the Lord" (Ps. 27:4) or the like. But there are also Psalms which give evidence to an encounter with God, to the experience of His presence, without any reference to cult, thus reflecting a general existential feeling which forged the mentality of these poets (Ps. 27:12, 31:17 34:2-4,40:8-11, 63:2-4 etc.), who hailed the Lord as their refuge, stronghold, salvation, saviour, rock etc. (2 Samuel 22:3, 47; Ps. 18:3, 47; 28:1; 62:3, 7 etc.) The most intimate psalms, however, are devoid of any metaphorical language , rather giving evidence to an experience of direct dialogical relationship.
True, some psalmists express the vast distance between the earthly and the heavenly in terms like "the awesome God" (47:3; 66:3,5 etc.), the Holy one of Israel(71:22, 78:41 etc.); others even avoid mentioning His holiness and speak rather of His holy name (33:21; 103:1, 106:47 etc.), employing additional terms to express the vast distance between the earthly and the heavenly. However, the sense of awe reflected in these terms does not justify Rudolph Otto's assumption[19] of the feelings of dread, of the daemonic or numinous, which man feels in God's presence, or his assertion that this dread is the identifying mark of every religious experience. True, there are spiritual conditions in which God is sensed as

"mysterium tremendum, as an anonymous entity radically different from human experience - the "Wholly Other" (das ganz Andere). However such spiritual conditions are atypical of the Bible, albeit some fragments of the ancient folk belief that attributes demonic characteristics to God are scattered here and there (Ex. 4:24-26; Lev. 10:1-2. II Sam. 6-8. Job 4:13-20). The God of Israel is a personal God, the God of justice, truth, loving kindness and mercy; He is the antithesis of the anonymous and the demonic. The book of Psalms is a monumental testimony to man's longing for God's nearness, for a lifelong dialogue with Him.

In this context I would like to mention Ps. 73. We read there:

> Nevertheless I am continually with thee;
> thou dost guide me with thy counsel,
> and afterwards thou wilst receive me to glory.
> Whom have I in heaven but thee?
> And there is nothing upon earth
> that I desire besides thee.
> My flesh and my heart may fall,
> but God is the strength of my heart,
> and my portion for ever.
> But for me it is good to be near God
> I have made the Lord God my refuge,
> that I may tell all of thy works (vs.23-28).

This is one of the most ardent descriptions of the total change of personality which occurred during the moments of prayer. The psalmist really entered a communion with God.

The new outlook of life is now so different that even the fear of death gives way to unlimited confidence and trust in God. But in contrst to mystic experience, which tends to become internalized, these believers felt a strong desire to communicate with their fellow men, to announce to the community the greatness and mercy of the Lord, which they had experienced.

Another believer who was saved from death assures the Lord saying:

> I have told the glad news of deliverance
> in the great congregation
> I have not hid thy saving help, within my heart,
> I have spoken of thy faithfulness and thy salvation;
> I have not concealed thy steadfast love
> and thy faithfulness from the great congregation
> (40: 9-10).

In essence, the living experience of Divine grace was so compelling that man felt obligated to reform sinners and to become God's messenger to the cultic congregation and to his fellowmen in order to proclaim His works to the multitudes. Religious experience became a social message, based on mutual social responsibility - a dominant motif in the admonitions

of ancient wisdom and Torah literature.

Mystics and philosophers like Søren Kiergegaard yearned for God in their loneliness, far away from man and the world. Contrarily, the homo religiosus reflected in the biblical psalms encounters God only when integrated into the community; moreover, he feels the inner constraint to communicate with his fellow men, to tell them about the mercy and grace of the Lord, to become the emissary of the Lord.

Self-transcendence as reflected in Psalm literature has a double meaning: it reflects the feeling of communion with God and simultaneously reveals man's active approach to his fellow man as an emissary, who proclaims the greatness of God. As against the ego-centered blissfulness of the mystic, the psalmist and in his wake the homo religiosus of Rabbinic literature realize their ego only when being in creative contact with the community and fellow man.

The Psalms are a main source of Jewish piety up to the present. Their impact on all periods of Jewish religiosity and creation is paramount - be it the piety of the talmudical sages, of the Hebrew poets of the middle-ages, of Chassidim or modern Hebrew literature. From this rich treasure-house I would like to mention

only two prayers of one of the outstanding figures of Chassidism- Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev (Poland), who lived during the second part of the 18th century. According to the legend, on solemn occasions he used to interrupt the fixed prayers of the congregation by his spontaneous overflowing outbursts of intimacy towards God, speaking in the Yiddish vernacular. The prayer I have in mind reflects both elements we observed in the Psalms: the feeling of intimacy in the presence of God and the orientation of the prayer towards the community; in this case he did not reprove or reprimand the congregation but... God in His glory[20].

The first prayer, called the "Dudele" is quoted by Buber in his chassidic opus as classical example of dialogical relationship . It reads:

Master of the Universe
I will sing a song to Thee,
Where will I find Thee?
And where will I not find Thee?
Where I go, there art Thou,
Where I stay, there art Thou,
Only Thou, Thou alone,
Thou again, and only Thou.

When things go well - Thou,
And, alas, when things go ill - Thou.
Thou art,
Thou wast,

Thou wilt be.
Thou reignest,
Thou didst reign,
Thou wilt reign.

In heaven art Thou,
On earth art Thou,
Above art Thou,
Where I turn
And where I stay
Thou, Thou, Thou.

The second one which testifies best to Levi Yitzhak's love of Israel is his personal Kaddish, an event that became a poem: While leading the congregation in prayer on Rosh-Hashanah, the Rabbi of Berditchev, grieving over Israel who despite its sufferings persisted in sanctifying His name, broke from the fixed words of the Hebrew liturgy to cry out in the Yiddish folk tongue, that not only the people, but the Lord as well, understood, summoning the Lord to judgement[21]:

Good morning to You, Lord, Master of the Universe
I, Levi Yitzchak, son of Sara of Berditchev
I come to You with a Din Torah from your people Israel.

What do You want of Your people Israel?
What have You demanded for Your people Israel?

For everywhere I look it says "Say to the Children of Israel"
And every other verse says "Speak to the Children of Israel".

Father, how many nations are there in the world?
Babylonian, Persians, Edomites.

The Germans, what do they say?
Our Kaiser is a king;
The English, what do they say?
Our Empire is an Empire;
And, I, Levi Yitzchak, son of Sarah of Berditchev say:
Magnified and sanctified is Thy Name.

And I, Levi Yitzchak, son of Sarah of Berditchev, say:
From my stand I will not move
And from my place I shall not move
Until there be an end to all this
Magnified and sanctified is only Thy name.

It was in 1958, when the great Negro songer Paul Robson, be his memory blessed, at a special concert in Moscow sang this song, the renowned Kaddish of R. Levi Yitzchak, when tremor passed through the auditorium. The song became a rallying cry among the frightened Jews of Moscow for weeks to come. Indeed, it became one of the first songs of the resurrection of Russian Jewry after forty years of oppression by the Communist regime.

R. Levi Yitzchak's intimacy with God was so deep that he dared summon Him to judgement on behalf of his people Israel.

To say after the horrors of the haulocaust and the miracles of the resurrection of "the dry bones" of Israel since the establishment of the State of Israel the intimate praise of God and his being summoned to judgement are still integral parts of our prayer. But the dimensions have grown to such an extent that many of those who argue against God are no more able to praise him. This is the great problem of our generation.

NOTES

1. On the vast scholarly literature on this topic see Ephraim E. Urbach, The Sages, Their Concepts and Beliefs, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1969, pp. 1-14 (Hebrew).

2. M. Buber, Königtum Gottes, Berlin, 1936.

3. B. Uffenheimer, Sinaibund, Prophetie und Israel's Erwähltheit, Freiburger Rundbrief, 34, 1982, pp. 115-128.
idem, Sinai, Nevu'ah u-Bechirah Be-polemos Ḥasal, Molad, 39-40, 1980, pp. 91-110 (Hebrew).

4. B. Uffenheimer, Ancient Prophecy in Israel, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 1981 (2nd ed.), pp. 70-114.

4a. B. Uffenheimer, Segulah, Beth Mikra, 71, 1977, pp. 427-434.

5. Ancient Prophecy, pp. 121 ff.

6. Henri Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1948, pp. 79-88, 231-250, 295-312, 337-346.

7. E.E. Urbach, see note 1, pp. 502-538, on this problem which pertains to the essential differences between pagan and monotheistic myth, see B. Uffenheimer, Myth and Reality in Ancient Israel, in: S.N. Eisenstadt(ed.), The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations, State University Press of New-York, 1986, pp. 135-168.

8. E.E. Urbach, see note 1, pp. 502-538.

9. B. Uffenheimer, From Prophetic Eschatology to Apocalyptic, in: Z. Baras (ed.), Messianism and Eschatology (Hebrew), The Historical Society of Israel, Jerusalem, 1983, pp. 27-72.

10. J. Talmon, Origins of Totalitarianism and Democracy, 1952.

11. B. Uffenheimer, Utopia and Reality in Biblical Thought, Immanuel, 9, 1979, pp. 5-15.

12. S.E. Loewenstamm, Yovel (Hebrew) Encyclopaedia Biblica vol. III, cols. 578-581.

13. J.J. Finkelstein, Some New Misharum Material and its implications, in B. Landsberger Festschrift, ed. Güterbock, Jacobson, The Oriental Institute of Chicago, 1965, pp.233-246.
F.R. Krauss, Ein Edikt des Königs Ammi-Saduqa von Babylon (Studia e documenta ad iura Orientis antiqui pertinentia V), 1958.

14. M.D. Cassuto, From Adam to Noah (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1953, pp. 33-44.
Y.H. Tigay, Sabbath, Encyclopedia Biblica (Hebrew) Vol. VII, cols. 504-517.

15. Menachem Elon, Jewish Law (Hebrew), The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 418ff.

16. The most informative work on this subject is: Eduard Silberner, Moses Hess, Geschichte seines Lebens, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1966.

17. Y. Kaufmann, Toledot Ha-emunah Ha-Yisraelith, Bialik Foundation and DVIR Ltd. Tel-Aviv 1947, vol. 3, pp. 8-1 English abridged translation by M. Greenberg, The Religion of Israel, Schocken Books, New York, 1972, pp. 343ff.

18. See B. Uffenheimer, Prophecy, Estasy and Sympathy, Vetus Testamentum, Congress Volume (in print).

19. R. Otto, Das Heilige, Marburg 1936, pp. 13-41. (English translation: The Idea of the Holy... idem, Aufsätze das Numinose Betreffend, Stuttgart/Gotha 1923.

20. Samuel H. Dresner, Levi Yitzhak of Berditshev, Hartmore House, New-York - Bridgeport, 1974, p. 106.

21. idem, p. 86.