

## JUDAISM AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Charles R. Kelley, 1990

On my first and only trip to Israel, from which I recently returned, I visited the memorial park erected by the state of Israel to the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis. Nothing I did in Israel had the impact of the day I spent at Yad Vashem.

### PART ONE

#### **Yad Vashem**

The place is a grassy park on gently rolling slopes in Jerusalem. There are several buildings, sculpture and art work, some of it remarkable, on the grassy expanses. There is a lane of trees, each with an identifying plaque, planted in gratitude for the courageous non-Jews who risked their lives trying to protect the lives of Jews in the holocaust. The children's memorial building is a hall of mirrors kept in darkness, in which the visitor sees myriad candle flames on slopes stretching in every direction, as far as the eye can see, thousands upon thousands of them, representing the one million child victims of the holocaust. One walks through the fields of candles slowly, appropriate music plays in the background, and the names, ages, and places of children who died are read aloud one by one.

In the main museum the history of the holocaust is documented from Nazism's early beginnings. There are photographs, documents, motion picture footage, sound tracks. I went through slowly, read every word, listened to the sound tracks, looked at the faces, the expressions in each photograph. When I became saturated, I stopped and rested, let things soak in.

It was the photographs of the children that spoke most poignantly. I will never forget one photograph of a little boy of 3 looking up at me, a beautiful, open child, with innocent uncomprehending eyes. How did he die? Was it gas or bullets, or worse, the slow death of hardship and starvation? -- It didn't say. Was his body in one of those pits of human remains shown on another wall of photos, remains that were all once human beings who lived, felt joy, relished the taste of food, the color and smell of flowers, who knew curiosity and love and wonder.

It was his need for understanding that spoke from that little boy's eyes, as it was my need for understanding that brought me to Yad Vashem and moved me methodically through their exhibits. Here was the story of the holocaust. This was what happened; this was exactly how it happened. Now why did it happen?

### **Understanding the Holocaust**

Scholarly writings on the holocaust have been of limited help to me. The best volume I found was HOLOCAUST AND REBIRTH, a compilation of lectures on the subject by eminent men, published by and available through Yad Vashem. I learned a lot from the volume, particularly from the lead article, European History as the Seedbed of the Holocaust, by Jacob L. Talmon, Professor of History at Jerusalem's Hebrew University. Professor Talmon traces the history and development of anti-semitism through the centuries. He does this knowledgeably and thoughtfully, but loses me at the crux of his argument, which is that the Jews became stamped as evil in a religious sense, devils that had to be exterminated, and that this view of the Jews caused the revulsion against killing to dissolve.

I disagree with Professor Talmon's position. I don't think that was what happened. The key factor is not the Jews becoming the embodiment of evil, as had been true of the witches and "heretics" burned 300 years before. In the holocaust the key factor was the dissolution of the firm superstructure of Judeo-Christian morality which ruled the west. It was when this morality was replaced among Nazi ideologues by the grandiose paganism of the Nazi theory of race, Aryan destiny and power, that genocide was threatened. It was not a new view within the framework of Judeo-Christian religion, but the replacement of that framework with the "new" religion of Nazism, which tapped into forces old, powerful, pagan and brutal. Nazism had much in common with both pagan folk religion and pre-Christian Rome. It showed this in its energy, its primitivism and cruelty, freed from its Judeo-Christian conscience.

The Jews were less devils to be put to death for their evil than competitors to be vanquished. Jews and Nazis both claimed, in their own way, to be God's chosen people, and both tried to maintain their "purity" of belief and blood. Whenever given a small chance, the Jews excelled intellectually, artistically, professionally, and in business, affronting Hitler's theory of Aryan supremacy. The Nazis' weapon was physical force, and with the dissolution of Judeo-Christian moral constraints, they applied it to exterminate their competitors in their "final solution." I don't believe most of the Nazis participating in or contributing consciously to the holocaust saw the Jews as participants in a Manichean world of evil and darkness. There is always the imputing of evil to opponents in a war, and Jews were the enemy in a "war" which the Nazis sought to win once and for all by physically annihilating the opposition.

So the Jews of Europe were scapegoated and killed by the Nazis, and Yad Vashem is monument to their martyrdom. But missing as yet from Yad Vashem, what is needed to give meaning to the carnage and horror here commemorated, is an understanding of the nature of the battle in which these martyrs were casualties, and the dimensions of the victory that their side won.

The battle was of ideas, above all, of two different concepts of morality. And as the Jews of Europe were decimated physically, the Nazis were decimated ideologically. Never was an ideology more defeated, despised, left the subject of hatred, ridicule and contempt. Remnants of the ideology remain, to be sure, and the forces that underlay it remain to be understood and dealt with, but they are remnants, the tattered and discredited remains of an idea that not so long ago captured the European continent.

I think of it as a battle personified by, on one side, Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, Himmler and the SS, and a huge Ministry of Propaganda, while on the other side were Anne Frank and her little band in the secret annex, plus the good people who cared for and protected them from discovery. What chance did the Nazis have in such a hugely unequal fight?

For ultimately the Nazis had only a defective theory of race, and the primitive morality based on weapons of destruction, power and propaganda, to cope with a young Jewish girl and her goodness and hope, representing the immense and little understood force of a moral system evolved over the 4000 years of Jewish history and planted in the minds of the western world. Against THE DAIRY OF A YOUNG GIRL and all it implied, MEIN KAMPF had little long-range chance.

### **Factors in Jewish Achievement: Culture and Biology**

Viewed over 4,000 years of human history, the Jews have had unparalleled success as a people in their contributions to knowledge, the arts, the professions, and business. They are far above average according to criteria of personal mental health, such as having low rates of psychosis, criminality, suicide, alcoholism and drug addiction. They have close and stable family lives. Although they have very serious faults and problems as a people, they should be considered in the forefront of human evolution. They are doing something right, and in consequence, have learned better than other groups how to live successfully on this earth.

Part of their success is simply a consequence of the emphasis in Jewish life on living successfully on earth, as opposed to a focus on living on earth as a preparation for

an afterlife, or on other unworldly concerns. The wise Jew lives day-to-day life thoughtfully, morally, and joyfully, and as a producer and trader of wealth.

Living *thoughtfully* means valuing knowledge and the processes by which it is gained. Study, scholarship, books, intelligent dialog are in the forefront of Jewish values. A learned and wise scholar is respected above a successful businessman in a typical Jewish community. Living *morally* involves thoughtfulness of conduct. It means examining and choosing between or among courses of action, endeavoring to choose and carry out what is right, with all that that implies. The Jews have devoted more serious concern over the centuries to problems of right and wrong conduct than any other people. Living *joyfully* is to know the basic goodness of life, seasoning thoughtfulness with the joy of discovery, moral choices with joy in the power to think, choose, and act justly, and the rest of daily life with the pleasure of life lived consciously and well. Jews, like the rest of us, don't truly live life consciously and well much of the time but, in my experience, they do a little better on balance than most of us.

Man also lives on this earth as a producer and trader of wealth. Because of their history, the Jews understand better than do most people what this means. Unless someone has provided for us, we human beings obtain what we need and want to live in the world by producing and trading goods or services to others. Some things we obtain by barter, but mostly we use money as a medium for exchange. Jews understand trade and money better than other groups, and frequently push more aggressively to get high value for their sales and purchase, remunerations received and wages paid than many Westerners find seemly. At the same time, Jews are, on average, generous, giving more to relatives, friends and charities than do most groups of people. I see their ways of handling wealth and value, both their aggressiveness in trading and their generosity, as virtues in terms of living in the world, as long as aggressiveness stops short of sharp or unfair practices, and generosity is not neurotically motivated, e.g., by guilt.

Living thoughtfully, morally, joyfully and as a good producer and trader of wealth could be a recipe for a popular article or sermon on how to live, and a correct but inadequate explanation of the success of the Jews by personal growth criteria. These amount to important visible manifestations of more profound and less understood biological and religious factors underlying Jewish character and shaping personal growth. They are not simply racial and genetic although, wishful thinking of egalitarians to the contrary, genetic factors do play a large role in character.

The Jews have been an intelligent vigorous people from their early beginnings. They have endured centuries of persecution and hardship, being driven from one place to another, denied many kinds of employment, having homes and possessions taken from them, and being pressured to convert to other religions. Those who were able and

hardy survived and reproduced, and their aptitudes and hardiness were passed on to their descendants.

Because they relocated from Palestine and lived for centuries in so many other countries in the world, the Jews received large gene infusions from other peoples. Thus Jews from the orient look like Orientals, Jews from Africa are black, Jews from Northern Europe are frequently blue-eyed blondes, etc. These gene infusions have expanded the gene pool that has been subject to the selective pressures of Jewish life.

Cultural factors then shaped the population that developed. Traits that Jewish culture valued had selective relevance. Parent-arranged marriages intensified the selective pressures favoring traditional Jewish cultural values, including the four described above: thoughtfulness, morality, joyfulness of character, and skill in acquiring wealth, and another which I must add, subordination to authority.

Subordination of self to authority is not a positive character trait *per se*, but did contribute to Jewish survival during centuries of persecution. When a highly valued group is subject to life-threatening danger, survival of the group takes precedence over the lives of individuals. Individuals must make sacrifices, sometimes including their lives, if the group is to survive and group values be preserved for future generations. Preserving the group has meant developing practices which subordinate the individual to the group, and create submissive enough members to accept such subordination. This has a great cost, however. The cultural cost has been the undue preservation of antiquated beliefs and practices. The cost in personal growth terms, the central concern of this study, is damage to the individuation process, which for many Jews never proceeds to full maturation. Many Jews never fully mature. We identify the extreme cases as "mama's boys" and "daddy's girls," or "Jewish princesses," the over-dependent children of a culture that historically has fostered dependency and submission to the authority of parents and group as an important value. This over-dependent position frequently gives way in teens and young adult years to intellectual rebellion against establishment values which are identified with parental authority. Over-submissiveness and rebellion are often two sides of the same coin, and both are shy of sexual maturity, i.e., are child or adolescent rather than autonomous adult positions.

### **Personal Growth and the Jewish Religion**

Jewish religious belief and practices, its positions, both explicit and implicit, on the nature of humankind, life and the universe, its origin and destiny, underlie how Jews live. These core religious beliefs affect, and are affected by, the psychodynamics of personal growth. Of course, how I evaluate such beliefs reflects my own. My endeavor is to

discern the psychodynamics and underlying meaning of certain Jewish religious beliefs, practices and myths. This study is the view of one non-Jewish social scientist.

The Jews introduced monotheism into the western world. Ancient civilizations like the Egyptians, Babylonians, Celts, Greeks and Romans, and primitive tribes everywhere, believed in many gods. One god, responsible for the entire universe, was a new idea, slow to spread, but tenaciously held by those raised to believe it. I see it as a new insight, the awareness of a central force, a unifying principle in the universe, a major advance into understanding the deeper mysteries.

The old Jewish god was an all-powerful father, a stern judgmental figure, capable of jealousy, wrath and vengeance. Christianity retreated from this harsh Jewish monotheism. Christians divided God into three parts, the Christian Trinity, plus lesser deities and icons with supernatural power -- angels, saints who performed miracles, and the rest. The clergy became, in many Christian denominations, intermediaries for God, empowered to forgive sins and give blessings, make water holy, transubstantiate bread and wine, etc. Kings were accorded divine right, the Pope infallibility on matters of faith and morals. Christianity is not truly a monotheistic religion. The one god of the Jews became the main god of the Christians.

At the same time, the character of God changed from the stern demanding patriarch of the Jews to the loving and forgiving, more maternal than paternal, Christian deities. Christ was the ultimate human sacrifice, sinless himself, crucified for man's sins. Grace was no longer achieved by living righteously in a tough and demanding world, but by retreating from that world, becoming gentle, soft and good, like a little child, and by believing in Christ as divine and accepting his intercession and intermediation with God.

The Christian view brought a needed acknowledgement of love of the living, best exemplified in the unconditional love of mother for child, as a central dimension of human development. The overemphasis on this dimension, however, encouraged Christians to regress, retreat from adulthood. Instead of being a tool for helping one live and grow, as religion was for the Jews, the Christian religion encouraged retreat from life. Regression toward a childlike character, the veneration of sexual abstinence, and the diminishing of the importance of this life in favor of the Christian afterlife, all reflected downplaying of daily life.

In theological terms this aspect of Christianity was a retreat, in personal growth terms it was a disaster. Yet Christianity is a Judaic religion, the Jewish bible is incorporated into the Christian bible, and the potency of Judeo-Christian morality, though weakened by Christian revisions as a tool for dealing with life, did incorporate the significant added dimension of maternal Christian love. This gave it far wider appeal

than stern demanding paternalistic Judaism. Christianity became a religious force of such vitality and power that it swept away and effectively supplanted the pagan religions of Greece, Rome and Western Europe.

What it could not sweep away was Judaism itself. The Jews hung on tenaciously, through incredible hardship, retaining their emphasis on how life is lived, on thoughtfulness, morality and joy, on the worship, without intermediaries, of a single incorporeal god, and on Judaism's many ancient rituals, laws, and ancillary beliefs in support of them. Jewish monotheism has contributed to the personal growth aspect of Judaism because it is more rational, closer to the deeper nature of things than the myth of the Christian holy trinity.

The many religious laws, rituals, and practices of the Jews, and the beliefs in support of them, are not necessarily rational nor contributors to personal growth. To the extent that a religious observance teaches and affirms rational moral beliefs, celebrates special occasions, and/or remembers and honors the group's history, the observance supports the group and contributes to the individual lives of the observers. To the extent that the religious observance teaches or affirms what is irrational, untrue, or wrong, it supports the group at the *expense* of the personal growth of the individuals comprising it. This important point requires elaboration, as it is central to any attempt to understand the relation of personal growth and religion, any religion.

It is by getting people to accept and affirm their irrational beliefs and practices that religions "hook" people into becoming disciples, "true believers." The ritual affirmation of the special irrationalities of a particular religion solidify the suspension of independent thought and judgment by the believer. The more traditional the religion and orthodox the group of believers, the more extreme their irrationalities and the more fervently they are practiced. The orthodox "fundamentalist" Jews, Christians, and Muslims (and, I'm sure, orthodox Hindus, Sikhs, Shintoists, and others I know little about) are so far separated from their reason that, were they not large groups, they would be declared insane and institutionalized or otherwise prevented from harming people. An honest examination of religion and personal growth cannot ignore the personal destruction orthodox religion of any faith brings. It has kept history replete with bloody religious wars, and turned the nations ruled by it into theocratic totalitarian horrors. The orthodox of the major religions today are (as they often are in history) diligently working to force their irrational beliefs on others. Whether they are disrupting Israel's Knesset, returning Iran to medieval primitivism, killing hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Muslims in fruitless conflict, or laboring to destroy America's separation of Church and State, the problem is the same, the conviction of an orthodox group that a religious text is a revelation from God, and that their duty is to enforce it on non-believers. Such dangerous irrationality should never be excused or action based on it tolerated by anyone valuing freedom.

All that is written, including the old Jewish religious texts, is written by individual human beings. Some are wise, some foolish, but all are fallible. Claiming them to be divine, immutable truth freezes the evolution of the religious thought they contain. An incorporeal god, approached without intermediaries, is as misrepresented by a document claiming divine origin as by an idol or icon. The document is both an idol representing God and a would-be intermediary of the greatest presumption. There are no supernaturally created texts. Our problem is to break free of bondage to belief in the divinity of any religious text, Torah, Bible, Koran or other, without losing the value it contains.

When religious groups move away from supernatural elements of belief and observance, when the old stories come to be seen for what they are, myths and fables, when the rituals and ceremonials no longer seem ways to avoid punishment or obtain favor from a supernatural being, when the supplicant cannot be encouraged to think that his prayer may evoke a miraculous blessing or intervention in the events of the world from an omnipotent being, the religious experience is irrevocably changed. A magical quality is lost, and it is pleasant to believe in magic. Growing up religiously is, like other forms of growth, often difficult and painful. This growth carries with it the suspicion that something important has been lost, as it sometimes has been. Yet change is overdue.

In one respect the Jews are ahead of the rest of the world in this kind of growth. They outgrew polytheism 4000 years ago, to evolve a theological and moral system that has done much to shape the western world, and which has continued to evolve. But over the same 4000 years, they have developed such a mass of ritual, law, and ceremony that is weighted with religious implications of magic, that they have more that is in need of change in the realm of observance than many of their Christian counterparts.

There are grave dangers in the process of extricating oneself from religious irrationality, just as there are wonderful new possibilities that open. The obvious danger is of "throwing the baby out with the bath water," of losing the powerful essence of Judeo-Christian morality, the building of moral character structure, a core aspect of personal growth, in trying to get away from the irrationality in which it is imbedded, the superstition, the cant, the form.

Millions of individuals and two large groups did lose this powerful essence. The Nazis and the Marxists both tried to supplant Judeo-Christian morality with their own. The Marxists were right in many ways -- religion is a deception and "the opiate of the people." Whereas the Nazis substituted pre-Christian pagan morality of power, the Marxists committed themselves to anti-religious scientific materialism which became,



with Marxist economics, a new religion. Someone aptly named it "the opiate of the intellectuals." -- And for all its good intentions, Marxism became a greater disaster than Nazism. It created more misery, imprisoned and killed more people than did the Nazis as it converted a third of the world into gigantic prison camps of totalitarian rule surrounded by armed guards, walls and barbed wire.

Only recently has the communist block of nations begun to shake itself, to extricate itself from its decades of Marxist rule. The world is at last exposed to the economic disaster these decades brought about. The moral effects of exposure to more than two generations of Marxist indoctrination and communist tyranny reaching into every aspect of life remain to be discovered.

This discussion of Marxism, like that of Nazism with which the paper began, is to emphasize that religion plays an important role in the personal growth aspects of Judaism that are my subject, and that it is easy to underestimate its role because we don't understand it very well. Many of the Jews who have had such an influence on the world are Jews only by descent, professing no religion. Three of the most important and direct influences on my own work, Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich, and Ayn Rand, were unbelievers, atheist or agnostic, though of Jewish descent. They are typical of the brilliant creative non-religious Jews of history. Marx himself was also one of these. Unless we account for them entirely in terms of genetics (and I'm convinced genetics is not the whole story) it presents a real problem. Why should the unbelievers of Judaism as a group produce so much? The answer to this question is close to the question I asked myself in making this study of personal growth and Judaism: Why do so many Jews excel?

One thing I find to a notable extent in these brilliant non-believing Jews, aside from their extraordinary creativity, is their strong concern with what are also two central areas of religious belief, origins and morality. The nature of nature and of life, right and wrong, good and evil, the source of human striving. These creative people evolve their own belief system, their own personal religion. Genetics renders them brilliant enough to do so, as it must hundreds of thousands of the world's people, but something else that is not genetic leads them to care, and opens the gate to them using their talent creatively. Jewish tradition and culture does this effectively, even without (and one could almost say, especially without) strong continuing Jewish religious indoctrination. Before one concludes that the disappearance of religious indoctrination contributes to their character and creativity, more must be known. Is the effect lost in a few generations, when the Jewish culture and religion are really diluted away? What will the greatly increasing rate of assimilation of Jews in America do to the excellence of Jews in terms of personal growth criteria? This remains to be seen.

## Summary

To recapitulate, this is a summary of what I believe are, at this point, the positive factors that have contributed to the personal growth, character and achievement of the Jews:

### Biological Factors --

- Vigorous and intelligent stock;
- Severe selection pressure due to centuries of persecution and hardship;
- Genetic contributions from many ethnic stocks.

### Cultural Factors --

- A very strong culture and religion which held the Jews together, so that genetic selection factors operated on them;
- Intensity of belief and commitment to their culture;
- Thoughtfulness, intellectual interests and values;
- Unusual attention to moral concerns;
- Joyfulness in life;
- Effectiveness in producing and trading wealth.

### Religious Factors --

- Monotheism;
- Emphasis on life on earth, as opposed to emphasis on preparation for an afterlife, and on relations with other people above one's relation with God or to things.
- Religious focus on morality, choice, responsibility, right and wrong teaching of moral behavior.

Two negative factors in Jewish culture that affect the personal growth of the Jews are:

- Submissiveness to authority (which has probably been a positive factor in much of Jewish history); and
- Irrational beliefs, rituals, and practices of Jewish religion.

## Note on the Future

I have been asked where I see religion in general and Judaism in particular evolving. I see an increasingly secularized society losing something as it abandons

religious belief, something having nothing to do with the myths, rituals, and formal trappings of religious faith, but having a great deal to do with the nature of God and of morality. In my opinion, a change, an important conceptual advance, is in progress which will, over time, bring together that which is valid in religious and scientific thought. Both science and religion will undergo significant change as it does. The potentially unifying concept is of a natural sentient force, a life force, which has both the properties of a pantheistic impersonal god and of a real and natural force. The change for religion is a natural evolution of the incorporeal monotheistic universal god of the Jews into a force which can be rendered amenable to scientific understanding as the appropriate tools are developed. Thus I see a true marriage of religion and science in the decades ahead of us, with that which is valid in each coming together into the integrated product.

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Responses to this monograph were vigorous and interesting. They were edited into a separate monograph for hard-copy publication, and form PART TWO to this report here.

## **PART TWO**

### **Reader Commentary and Author's Reply to Judaism and Personal Growth**

**Prefatory Note.** Few things that I have written have produced such thoughtful dialog as my article on Judaism. I wish I had digests of the comments received in conversation. Talk evaporates but, fortunately, a few of my readers put their comments in writing, as invited in the article and presented here. I've pared and edited a little, endeavoring to keep the heart of each response and, except for a few clarifying notes, postponed my own reply and discussion until all my correspondents have been heard from. Authors of comments are:

Lois Vincent, Natan Harpaz, Bob Holder, "Michigan Student", Ursula Holloway, Reuven Bar-Levav, and Review of an essay by Bruno Bettelheim, sent by Annikki Kurvi.

Author's discussion is then followed by observations about **Assimilation and the Jews.**

**By Lois Vincent:**

I wanted to write you about your interest in Jews and Judaism and your coming to wonder about right and wrong and moral values.

As I mentioned when I talked to you, the Jewish God of the Old Testament was not paternalistic. I once researched the Old Testament for the idea of "heavenly father" used by Jesus and found practically no mention of it -- only one or two hints. Your idea of the New Testament God, the God you described as maternal and loving seems to me to be the feeling of Jesus idea of heavenly father; I have read, by the way, that to Jews "father" connoted "source." The Old Testament God was a fierce, jealous, tribal God who inspired awe and fear, who protected and punished His chosen people and demanded their obedience.

With your interest in Judaism you should read the Bible -- at least The Torah, the first five books. The Old Testament is the legends, history, law, and literature of the Jewish people. When you read it you should be aware that it was oral for centuries and that the written record is a combination of sources, mainly two sources, and that many stories are repeated. There are, for

instance, two stories of creation, and three of Abraham and Sarah, and more than one version of the laws.

The way the Catholics worship Mary and the saints does have a feel of multiple gods. However the idea of the Trinity is 3-in-1. People pray to God in Jesus name or to Jesus, feeling one entity.

The morality - and the law since the government was a theocracy -- of the Jewish people was based on the ten commandments, given to them by Moses, who was raised as a prince in the courts of Egypt. Don't kill, don't steal, don't lie, don't commit adultery are basic. Four are about relationship to Jehovah. Don't build an image of me. (Abraham was the son of an image-maker in Ur.) Don't worship any other gods. Don't trivialize the name of God, "take it in vain," which is considerably more than don't swear. Keep the Sabbath, one day out of seven, holy. This and the commandment to honor your father and mother are the framework of our western society. The last commandment is most interesting. Don't covet - don't wish you had what someone else has. This is subjective, psychological.

Of course the commandment that was to be taught to children and said going in and going out and carved on the threshold or the mantel -- the one Jesus said was the most important and contained the law of the prophets was Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself. You will find, as I mentioned to you, that instead of images, what the Jews worshipped was physically represented by the book - the Torah -- which they enshrined and still do.

Jesus, of course, was a Jewish boy, trained in the law and scriptures. The first four books of the New Testament are four similar but different biographies of him. It was the Jew Paul who opened the religion of Christ to Gentiles -- the rest of the world. The Jews traded all over the Mediterranean, and the story of what happened to his followers after Jesus was executed is fascinating. The phenomenon of "speaking in tongues," which everyone understood in his own language, should be most interesting to a psychologist. Most of the rest of the New Testament after the gospels is the letters -- mostly Paul's -- written to the various places around the Mediterranean he carried the story of Jesus to. He was a gifted writer. The apocalyptic weird book of Revelations finishes the Bible. It was an allegorical type of writing that was popular in that day. The canon of the New Testament was not chosen from the writings of the time until two or three hundred years after Christ.

The Bible was written on scrolls, not pages, copied by hand, with no punctuation. The rest of the Old Testament after the Torah is a selection of writings -- the history, the prophets, Psalms, songs and poetry, Proverbs, wise sayings, Job, a drama, Song of Solomon, a love poem, stories like Ester and Ruth. The canon of the Old Testament was set by Jews not too long before Christ.

I may be telling you what you already know, but I find that many people raised in traditional chapter and verse reading of the Bible (and worship of the Book) do not. The amazing thing is that a core of beautiful truth has survived, through centuries, translations, and preachers and priests.

I believe that the life force which you call radix may be a manifestation of what some people call God. That it has healing properties you testify to and I have felt from your hands. Some call it the "laying on of hands." You apparently conceive of it as an impersonal force. Have you ever tried to connect with this force -- a process called prayer. This, of course, implies belief - as does the healing process. A generation ago how could we have believed -- in nuclear power, in radio and television, in computers? These are miracles. The urge to prayer of some kind seems universal -- almost instinctual. That you can somehow touch a universal source is a belief that is awesome. That you can engage it to seek your goals is one side of belief, that this power can guide you in what to do is another. This is tantamount to the belief that the life force has human properties -- or vice versa. "Man was made in the image of God."

Which leads to the question: What is right and wrong? Is it God's rules? Is religion's view of right and wrong the wisdom of the ages -- or of a race? The strict Jewish prohibition against certain kinds of meat -- and many things like it in Jewish law -- were they sanitary protection in a hot climate with no refrigeration? The religious ceremony of washing your hands before eating (which Jesus said was just one of a lot of rules burdening people) we now know to be sanitary protection. The extreme penalties against homosexuality might now be explained by the AIDS epidemic. Right and wrong changes and is different in different places. Slavery is an accepted fact in the Bible -- as is polygamy. Our newest ethic is against racism. A changing ethic is homosexuality. The sexual revolution itself has changed peoples' life rules. Has the commandment against adultery been abrogated? Is there a new wrong about sexual repression? And how about the "Virtue of Selfishness?" Is it true

that your first value must be yourself? And doesn't that give excuse for all kinds of actions?

If you don't accept the Bible (read your religion's interpretation of the Bible) or society's rules - that leaves it up to you yourself to figure out what's right and wrong -- a great responsibility. Based on what? Totally on what benefits you? Where are generosity, love, friendship?

These are just thoughts, questions. I have notes here on others -- unorganized and inconclusive as you can see. Shall we say "continued in the next?"

I have just gotten hold of Norman Cousin's book about "Albert Schweitzer's Mission." (A good book) In the epilogue it has some appropriate thoughts about this topic. I quote:

*The main point about Schweitzer is that he helped make it possible for 20th-century man to unblock his moral vision. There is a tendency in a relativistic age for people to pursue all sides of a question as an end in itself, finding relief and even refuge in the difficulty of defining good and evil. The result is a clogging of the moral sense, a certain feeling of self-consciousness or even discomfort when questions with ethical content are raised. Schweitzer furnished the nourishing evidence that nothing is more natural in life than a moral response, which exists independently of precise definition, its use leading not to exhaustion but to new energy.*

further -

*Nature has not been equally lavish with her endowments, but each person has his or her own potential in terms of achievement and service. The awareness of that potential is the discovery of purpose; the fulfillment of that potential is the discovery of strength.*

*But there are vast urges of conscience, natural purpose, and goodness inside him demanding air and release. And he has his own potentialities, the regions of which are far broader than he can even guess at -- potentialities that keep nagging at him to be fully used.*

I quit here in favor of getting this to you. It has been around a while and forming in my mind a lot longer.

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**By Natan Harpaz:**

1. As a whole, the article is a beautifully written brilliant analysis of a very broad and complex subject.

2. It falls short because it treats the Jewish people as if they are one person. Not all Jews are alike; neither is the Jewish God the same for all of them.

3. You are not an expert on Judaism but you write as if you are one. You have not lived as a Jew nor do you know Judaism from your bones -- from your emotional-physiological upbringing experience. Much of Judaism including most of the Jewish rituals affirms life and the pursuit of reality in contradiction to your notion that "the ritual affirmation of the special irrationalities ... solidify the suspension of independent thought and judgment." Your writing is more about cults and primitive religions in which the person subjugates himself to another human who is superior and who is often the intermediary between that person and God (i.e., a priest). Jews have no intermediary between the person and God. The Jew does not subjugate himself and make less of himself before another person or before his God. He does not kneel or bow his head before others as a sign of respect. That would diminish him. The Jew really believes that he was created in the image of God and, therefore, he must be self-respectful and respectful of others. The Jew's relation to authority is not based on fear but on respect and on an ongoing relationship. It is a point of strength not weakness of the Jewish people.

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**By Robert Holder:**

...I have a great respect for a number of Jewish individuals. In fact, one of my major influences, Abe Maslow, was Jewish. Abe became very individually directed from experience with the authoritarian practice of the Jewish culture, the Jewish mother. I find this very interesting because this is a culture in which the female plays a significant role; in this culture, one must slay the mother, and not necessarily the father.

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**By a Michigan Student**

The study "Judaism and Personal Growth" is a priceless work on the study of religion. This article more than any writing has helped me understand



religiosity and authoritarianism. The report broadens the discussion of a life force....

Careful examination of religious beliefs proves important to the study of science, and theory and concepts of the universe as well. Man has separated himself from nature, from life, knowledge from experience, autonomy from purpose. Men are deified or enslaved rather than free.

I have been strongly moved by the significance of this report. Your new work is an open course for knowledge. I am touched more deeply than I could imagine possible. It reverberates within me seeking a place of rest.

Although I have never believed in a "god," I felt very sad for several weeks after reading the article and finally realized I'd been half hoping an afterlife possible. I also feel jilted out of love because of "god" and cheated out of caring and pleasure, and most of all denied respect. I grieve for my life, unrealized love, sexuality, purpose, and autonomy.

No therapy or bodywork I know has addressed the dichotomy instilled by organized religion and popular ideologies or the conflict instigated through suppression of autonomy or the split made by teachings of self-sacrifice or compulsions formed by rules for suffering. Without the resolution of dualism in thought reality is only partial or momentary.

My thinking has been freed. When better than now? New students of Radix are very fortunate.

Thank you, and congratulations.

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**By Ursula Holloway:**

... I asked my mother [a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust], "What makes Jews excel?" She said it was two-fold:

1) Years of study, and debating the Talmud, which has many philosophical and ethical issues.

2) The Jews were denied many professions, especially the military and owning land for farming. Therefore they got into things like handling money, exchanging money, for instance, the Rothschilds, who helped shape nations.

Those were mother's thoughts. I would add that, because of the above-mentioned points, Jews were well equipped to follow intellectual pursuits, coming up with new ideas and thoughts. Mother did not believe in the selective approach. She did say that Jews tended to be smaller and less physical because they were shut out of professions that required physical stamina, etc.

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**By Reuven Bar-Levav:**

...I am glad to send you this response to your article on Judaism and personal growth.

The first page is a masterpiece. It is succinct, poetic, and powerful.... Altogether, I was impressed with the breadth and depth of your handling of this difficult subject. The tone of the entire article is one of self-assuredness and competence, qualities that make it easy to stay with the subject and follow your points one after another. For someone who has been far away from the Jews and who had not shared their experience, like Paul Johnson, you have indeed done a masterful job. I congratulate you on this important beginning of your journey, which (as you say yourself) is no more than an interim report in a continuing study. I believe there are several avenues to go with this material; it may end up as a book, as a series of articles to be published in the general literature such as **Commentary**, or perhaps even as a dialogue book made up of discussions between you and someone else, perhaps even me. If the rest of the work shall be on the level of this beginning I believe you have got some very good prospects.

First of all, I enjoyed reading your comparative contrast between Judaism and Christianity. I wrote on several occasions in the past about the differences between the fathering Jewish god and the mothering Christian one, and you do it more completely and very well. It does not surprise me but it pleases me that you have arrived at the same conclusions independently. Again it shows how, by some strange coincidence of circumstance and upbringing, we share views in diverse fields. Many times I wrote "yes," "yes" in the margins as I read your article. Obviously it is enjoyable to find agreement, especially with one whom I respect.

But, we also have some disagreement, and I wish to merely list them without going into the issues in great detail. Perhaps we'll do so in the future,

either orally or in writing. This outline will give you a few notions about my thinking:

1. I believe Professor Talmon is right, and I agree with him and disagree with you about the fact that the Jews had to become the embodiment of evil before they could be destroyed as human beings. Not being Jewish you have not been sensitized to this issue, and you approach it from the realm of ideas alone. In fact, this is the single most important objection I have to your style of writing on this subject. Based on readings and analysis alone, without knowing more through your bones about the Jewish experience, you speak as an expert in an area where you're not. As you know I'm not overly humble myself, but at least a shade of humility must be associated with true scholarship. This is missing in your article.

To be specific, the Judeo-Christian morality did not "rule the West," as you claim. It only existed there. It is no more than a myth held by some naive 20th century Christians and Jews, especially in America. Here it is possible to exist without too close an adherence to reality. The grandiose paganism of the Nazi theory of race which made the genocide possible was not "new," as you yourself write. It was merely an open expression of what was less obviously present everywhere in the Christian Middle Ages, as well as before and after. Remember that the emancipation of the Jews did not occur until recently. They did not have any civil rights even in the enlightened West until a little over 100 years ago.

The Judeo-Christian morality is a beautifying thin veneer, its existence regularly highlighted by well-meaning opinion makers, but only for as long as they are not personally under excessive pressure. It has wide appeal but only little depth. Underneath, it's often easy to find crass anti-Semitism, based on competitiveness with the Jews that you describe so well. Many decent non-Jews have at least a trace of this; some are fully infected, but everyone involved obviously denies and hides it. The Aryan supremacy of the Nazis only legitimized this dangerous ugliness. One cannot destroy any living creature if one has compassion for all living things. To engage in genocide the Germans had to regard Jews as a non-human abomination, an evil whose extermination would make the world a better place to live in.

Your description of the similarities between Nazism and pagan folk-religion is beautiful. But "its energy, its primitiveness and cruelty" were not "freed," as you claim, from the Judeo-Christian conscience, they were never in

anyway associated with it. The majority of the population throughout the Western world does not really conduct itself according to the Judeo-Christian conscience, and it never did.

We humans are still part of the animal kingdom, subject to the dictates of primitive urges and feelings. Only relatively few live by the commands of any higher morality. Even in the United States, a simple electrical black-out provides an opportunity for widespread looting without shame, "Christmas in July." Most citizens in civilized societies do not act this way, but as you know, irrationality, narcissism, and even brutality are not uncommon in the privacy of many families. This is disappointing and painful, but unfortunately still true. A holocaust can occur again, even in the United States of America. This is why Yad Vashem is so important, this is its mission, its purpose and its role: to remember and to remind.

2. Your analysis on page 4 [re. the Jews living thoughtfully, morally, and as good producers and traders of wealth] is brilliant and in my opinion correct. I believe that this is a true contribution to our understanding of the Jews.

So why did you lose it on page #5 [re. the Jews and subordination to authority]? The question is only rhetorical. I think you lost it because of one important unresolved personality trait of yours that interferes with your brilliant reasoning and with your observations, namely your suspicion and fear of authority. This may also have misled you into the strange racist point of view that gives genetic factors a larger role in character formation than they actually have.

But, above all, from a Jewish point of view, subordination of the self to a higher authority is a positive character trait per se. You have excessive fears about being subordinated because of your personal past experiences with a subjectively unjust, incompetent or arbitrary authority. I have good reasons to assume that these fears are at the root of your libertarian bias and point of view, but the Jews have been successful exactly because they stand for the opposite. I submit that you are about ready now to re-examine this issue also for yourself.

The submission to a higher authority is the reason why Jews cover their heads, unlike the Christians, in religious ritual. The hat symbolizes the boundary between man who is below, and God who is above him. In lowering themselves before the authority of a just and almighty God they do not become midgets, as you noticed. But it helps the Jews in their struggle against their own

narcissistic delusions. They too, like all people, must overcome the unrealistic notion that they themselves are all-powerful.

Thus, Jews raised in the Jewish tradition and spirit have always had a better sense of reality than many others. This helped them succeed in the real world, as you describe so very well. Your own compulsive rebelliousness and your preoccupation with resisting every authority has limited your success, and interfered with your handling of some of your affairs....

3. I believe it is especially presumptuous on your part to claim to be an authority in an area where you are but a casual observer. You fall short here as a social scientist, not having gathered sufficient data. On page #8 you write that the Jews "have developed such a mass of ritual, law, and ceremony that is weighted with religious implications of magic, (that) they have more that is in need of change in the realm of observance than many of their Christian counterparts." Further inquiry will surely prove you wrong, and force you to change this assessment, except for Orthodox Jews. They, like orthodoxies of any kind, indeed are extreme in their beliefs and practices, and therefore not necessarily always representative of the spirit and mainstream philosophy of Judaism. You describe the nature of orthodoxies so very well yourself, on the same page #8.

4. The success of Jews is not genetic. As they culturally assimilate in the United States they lose the character traits that came from centuries of persecution in and hardship and from their subordination to a higher authority. They too become like the population in general - unrealistic, self-indulgent and materialistic, hardly a chosen people. In the process they also lose their respect for learning and for knowledge, and their commitment to moral principles. This happens long before they become genetically mixed, which is why genetics does not explain their unique ways of being. The Jews' "focus on morality, choice, responsibility (and) right and wrong" fades as they assimilate, and they lose their unique advantages that helped them succeed in the past. Self-sufficiency, individual responsibility and community involvement are no longer so central in their lives....

*[Editor's note: After writing the above letter, Bar-Levav continued to develop some of the points made in a not-yet-published article, IN SEARCH OF FELLOW JEWS. The following material from this new article is included here with his permission.]*

Throughout their history Jews have stood for important universal principles and ideas, and they stayed loyal to them and defended them even under much duress and at the cost of much suffering and persecution. In doing so, they ennobled themselves, as does everyone whose life is involved in a cause bigger than the self. Not only did the Jews carry the banner of monotheism, thus striking a major blow against irrationality and magical thinking that are at the base of idol-worshipping, but by accepting the Torah they also committed themselves to living by the rule of law. Thus they affirmed rationality and self-restraint, and by example upheld the principle of respect for life and for property in general. No civilized existence was possible before these principles were established, or without them.

From such early beginnings evolved a long tradition of sensitivity and compassion for all living things, of equal justice for all including the most powerless, and of self-sufficiency, mutual responsibility, and a continuing obligation to study, and to better oneself and the world.

From the Jewish point of view, justice and truth are not bendable, nor are they changeable when external conditions change. Right is right and wrong is wrong, no matter what the mitigating circumstances. "For three principles a person must allow himself to be killed rather than transgress," said the Rabbis of old: Under no circumstances may one participate in the wanton killing of another person, nor engage in idol worship or in incest. Various degrees of personal responsibility and guilt are possible, but the standards themselves are fixed.

... the majority of Jews in the U.S. are at best only partially involved in the observance of the Mitzvot, these 613 do's and don'ts that shape the Jewish code of behavior and ethical life. Their children are essentially raised like all other Americans, not in the Jewish spirit. They too react negatively to the idea of being submissive, even to God. Religious freedom is their concern much more than a religious way of life, humanitarian causes are closer to their hearts than exclusively Jewish concerns, and they like to emphasize what is common to Judaism and Christianity, the so called Judeo-Christian ethic, much more than noticing what separates the two.

Jews nowadays often display ... un-Jewish attitudes about right and wrong.... Having lost touch with some of the basic values and beliefs of Judaism, Jews drink much more now, and more often, and they, like others, also sway quickly and often with the latest moral, political and fashion fads. Not

much is firm in a relativistic world. Yielding and excusing comes easily and wishy-washy, lukewarm points of view generally win the day. Not only is alcoholism more common, but also suicide, psychosis and drug addiction. Consequently Jewish children are emotionally no less troubled, and Jewish families are not as close and stable as they used to be, but almost as disorganized as all others. The extra keen sense of reality that was theirs in the past is not so commonly present anymore....

The unusual and strange political behavior of American Jews is also best explainable by this double trouble with relativism and the difficulties with proper submission to authority. Jews are the most liberal ethnic group of the population, and they sometimes even support candidates who have been openly hostile towards them....Anyone right of center is regarded with suspicion and is, therefore, basically unacceptable.

The persistent anti-authority bias that is routinely pushed by the mass communication media mixes well with the old Jewish fear of being abused by an unjust authority. It has produced Jews who are always excessively permissive, who condone personal non-accountability at least in others, and who tolerate mass psychologic regression as if it were not a social cancer. Such attributes are widespread, but Jews are particularly understanding and particularly tolerant: Such attitudes have been bred into the Jewish character from Biblical days on.

A people who believe in a God who "adopts orphans and defends widows," and who was commanded to do likewise, is predestined to be extra compassionate. And such attitudes have been repeatedly reinforced during a long history of 2000 years....

...Whatever happened to the Lord of Hosts, jealous and vengeful, the one whose memory of wrongs committed extends over generations, the enforcer of the civilized order on unruly man? Where is the God who demands justice without compromise and who refuses to accept excuses, the God of Moses, Elijah, and Jeremiah?

The all-powerful, stern Jewish Father in Heaven is increasingly resembling the God of the Christians, always loving and forgiving, more maternal than patriarchal. In the past, only good deeds and righteous acts would reward the Jew. Now it is almost enough to go to shul on the holidays, give to the UJA, and send the kids to Hebrew school. Traditional Judaism prescribed a highly elaborate and complex code of personal behavior....But not

now. Jews have also become WASPish, compulsively gentle, moderate even under much provocation, soft, always compromising, like good children in a nursery-school world. Their new God accepts well-meaning man unconditionally, like a loving mommy, almost no matter what he does and how he is. He only has to say that he's sorry when wrong.

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*Review of an essay by Bruno Bettelheim. Freedom From Ghetto Thinking, from the book. FREUD'S VIENNA AND OTHER ESSAYS.*

*Bruno Bettelheim, the late psychoanalyst and writer on social psychology, was a Viennese Jew and concentration camp survivor. He had a great deal to say about the Jews that is relevant to this study, including issues of Jewish identity, submission to authority, and "innocence," especially in relation to the Jews of the ghetto and the holocaust. The interested reader should consult the original text. The essay was called to my attention by Annikki Kurvi.*

Bettelheim sees Jewish history as a combination of universalism and provincialism. Jews were the discoverers of monotheism and champions of life under the law, as well as carriers of a narrow and provincial ritualism and code of observance, the latter deteriorating in the ghettos into non-functional ways of living and thinking after the dawn of the enlightenment.

*"It was not just the ghetto Jews' religious life that no longer evolved; their entire outlook, even to matters of dress, education, and language, remained near-medieval." (p. 250)*

The forward-looking progressive elements emigrated from the ghettos, once it became possible not only to escape pogroms and discrimination by local government, but also to escape "the private Jewish tyranny of a suffocating religious tradition." Those committed to seeking freedom left the group, leaving behind those lacking the courage or imagination to conceive of a different way of life. The loss of the freedom-seeking activist element created the ghetto Jew and his ghetto thinking from the submissive accepting remainder, according to Bettelheim:

*"It is exactly the absence of this activist element and the many hundreds of years of "compliance" that explain the ghetto mentality, not any racial inheritance of the Jews." (p. 251)*



The author contrasts the achievement of those who left the ghettos for Europe, America and Israel:

*"Israel lives because long before the Holocaust, the active elements of ancient Jewry had broken with a medieval culture to create a new and entirely different nation. Ghetto religion had no place in it, save as a small anachronistic minority, suffered there out of nostalgia and sentiment. The Israeli Jew had nothing in common with the Jews of the ghetto but a name." (p. 251)*

To remain in their ghetto existence, the ghetto Jew over-focused on Jewish history and ignored the balance of human history:

*"Those who think this way thus believe that what has never happened to the Jews never happened at all." (p. 256)*

According to the author, the ghetto-thinking Jew developed a naivety, a motivated characterological "innocence," protecting him from awareness of the debasement and humiliation of life under the heel of his oppressors, and ultimately from facing the reality of the danger he faced at the hands of the Nazis. This aspect of "ghetto thinking" 'infected Jews world wide:

*"What concerns me here is why Jews both inside and outside Germany felt they could afford to remain innocent when mass murder was rampant. When millions are slaughtered, nobody but a guileless child remains innocent. We are all tainted by it. Why did they (and we) not know, not even wish to know? Why were we (and they) not innocent, but intent on keeping ourselves ignorant? (p. 257)... This innocent ignorance, I believe, is part of a phenomenon that, for lack of a better term, I call ghetto thinking, (p. 258)"*

Ghetto thinking is reflected in the blind submission of the ghetto Jew to the authority of the state, including their cooperation in their own extermination by the Nazis. It was not lack of courage or belief in non-violence, as many of the same Jews who cooperated in their own destruction by the Nazis had served bravely in the armies of the soldiers of the Kaiser and of the Czar in World War I.

*"... submission to a state -- killing others when it so decrees and permitting oneself to be killed when it so demands - is entirely different from non-violence, (p. 265)"*

and,

*"The reason they could not and did not fight back lay in their inner feelings of resignation, in the careful eradication, over centuries, of tendencies to rebel, (p. 267)*

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### **Charles Kelley Responds**

I'm delighted to respond to such thoughtful material, which treats the question broadly, I'll also let myself deal with a few of the broader questions of religion that bear on personal growth.

Lois Vincent's contribution focuses on the religious and moral dimension. Certainly there is much to be learned from study of the Jewish and Christian Bibles. The old and new testaments are fascinating mixtures of literature, history and myth. They are difficult to study objectively, however, due to centuries of religious mystification and coercive government backing of particular religious doctrines and organizations. Some of our differences in understanding old and new testament views of God is semantic rather than real. The Old Testament God that I call patriarchal is fierce and righteous, demanding worship and obedience, even to the point of human sacrifice. (Note how Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac is treated in the Bible as a virtue.) We agree that the New Testament God is gentle, a god of love and forgiveness, more soft and "feminine" than harsh and masculine," thus more "maternal" than "paternal." (I assume that we all, men and women alike, possess both these sides in our character.) Bar-Levav employs this same distinction, and has influenced my own view.

On the nature of Trinity: Christian theologians have tried through the centuries to support the unsupportable view that the Christian Trinity is somehow "three in one," that Christianity is monotheistic. But the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is more than mortal, that the son of God is himself a god, separate in mind and being from the father god. And I view the Holy Ghost as claptrap developed to support the fable of the virgin birth, while angels, one or more devils, and the saints, are each one lesser gods, each capable of the miraculous. Christianity, I repeat, is a polytheistic religion, save perhaps for those denominations that endorse no doctrine of Christ as deity. -- But one can ask, "Are these denominations truly Christian?"

As an aside here, I endeavor to treat religious writing as I do other writing. I consider it to be essential, if we are to discover and use what is most valuable in religion from a personal growth standpoint, that the criteria of truth and value of religious writing be the same as that applied to other writings in the personal growth field. The many and deep irrationalities of religion should be treated as candidly as they would be if they come up in a non-religious context. If Abe who lives across the street from us made known his decision to kill his son in order to please God, or that nice girl, Mary, in the next block, told us she was pregnant and the Holy Ghost did it, we'd know how to understand, if not necessarily how to deal with it. It is religious mysticism that destroys people's rationality in dealing with biblical myths.

I read Mrs. Vincent's letter as supporting the position that there are no supernaturally created texts, and that to hold that the bible - Jewish and/or Christian -- are supernaturally inspired makes the book into an idol or icon. I will go further and state that worship of the book as revealed truth blocks our understanding of the nature of the creative force in the universe, and the moral evolution of our species. She and I agree that moral evolution is a central dimension of personal growth. How do we proceed in trying to make ourselves into better human beings?

Here I sense that we part company. I believe that we make ourselves better morally by our own personal searching and striving. If we're wise, in our search we will pay attention to the wisdom of our forebears. This will include wisdom derived by our forebears from the Bible, Talmud and other religious texts, and the knowledge that these possess have no divinity or special status beyond that of other writings expressing opinions of wise men on profound and difficult questions. I believe that she would not go this far, and is untrusting of a morality defined by each individual for him or herself. "Based on what?" she asks, "Totally on what benefits you? Where are generosity, love, friendship?" But if I am generous, loving, and a good friend, will I not incorporate these qualities into my personal morality?

Mrs. Vincent's comments on life force and deity interest me, and I relate them to the final paragraph of my article. I don't believe in a personal god, i.e., god as an individual super-being that is omniscient or omnipotent. I do believe, as I said, that the life force or "radix" has the properties of both a pantheistic "god in nature," and of a unitary and universal natural force, amenable to scientific understanding.

Further, I believe that we individuate out of this force, which remains, at the deepest level, the source of our being, through which we are connected to, and form a unity with, every other being.

To answer her question about prayer: I don't pray, certainly not to a personified external super-being. This is what prayer seems to be for most people. But to reply more fully to what I think she is asking, I do strive consciously at certain times to open my connection to the force I call "the radix." As I do, I feel, not sinful, but limited and imperfect, not humble and supplicatory, but vulnerable and surrendering, and as an individual, mortal. When I open the connection successfully, there is a giving in of a boundary, a softening of my structure, and it is as if I am "refueled." I feel awe, wonder and a renewal of potency. I believe this connecting can be taught as a tool of personal growth, and perhaps in time I shall try. For now, I would like to understand it better. I leave for Mrs. Vincent the question as to how this relates to traditional prayer.

She closes with that fine quotation from Norman Cousins's book on Schweitzer. The moral dimension of personal growth is important, and little understood! Perhaps the focus on this dimension is the Jews' great strength.

I must agree with Natan HarPaz that Jews are not alike, nor are their beliefs in God all the same; yet I look for common features, points of similarity found widely (though not universally) among Jews. How else can we proceed? Does not Mr. HarPaz do what he criticizes me for when he says, "Jews have no intermediary between the person and God;" "The Jew does not subjugate himself before another person ...;" "The Jew really believes that he was created in the image of God;" "The Jew's relation to authority is not based on fear but on respect...." Do not statements such as these treat all Jews as alike, "as if they are one person?" Some Jews make the Torah an intermediary between themselves and God, and some of them invest a particular Rabbi with special god-given wisdom that they follow as God's word, transmitted to them through this intermediary. Some Jews in the ghettos and in the Holocaust subjugated themselves to authority again and again, as Bettelheim showed. Some Jews believe that the nature of deity is such that no image of God is possible, not even a human image. And many Jews, I contend, relate to authority out of fear.

But Mr. HarPaz and I agree that the concept of one monotheistic incorporeal God, that each person relates to directly, without intermediaries,

comes from the Jews. This concept is a truly great development in human religious history.

I want to delay discussion of the important question that he raises of the Jews' relation to authority until I deal with the Bar-Levav letter, which addresses the question further.

Mr. Holder contributed the striking comment, from Abraham Maslow I gather, about the Jew needing to "slay the mother and not necessarily the father." I interpret this as meaning that in the psychosexual development of many Jews, the principal conflict to be worked through is between the child and the emotionally dominating Jewish mother, rather than oedipal conflict with the father that is more typical of non-Jewish western culture. It's a thought-provoking idea, about which I'm not yet prepared to offer an opinion.

"Michigan Student" is a student and friend of many years who has been interchanging ideas with me for the past year on science, religion and the life force. I appreciate the tribute, and was moved that my article helped her to resolve her own conflict between religion as she was taught it and her rationality, and all that involves. I believe that her letter shows what it means to deal with rather than throw out religious issues as we strive to separate religious wheat from its chaff in our search for growth, for the realization of our human potential.

Mrs. Charlotte Ebert, an elderly Nazi concentration camp survivor, sent her contribution through her daughter, Ursula Holloway. She rates study and debate of the Talmud as of first importance to Jewish achievement. I wonder if it is true that long-detailed considerations of moral questions, continued over years of one's life, do contribute far more broadly than is generally realized to personal growth. If so, we need to know much more about it, and how and why it works. The second point ~ Jews being forced into trading and finance - also makes me ask how these occupations have contributed above others to the personal growth of Jews that undertake them, if indeed they have.

I thank Reuven Bar-Levav for his detailed and thoughtful comments and criticisms. It is interesting, as he states, that despite great differences in background, he and I have over the years found ourselves in agreement with each other on such a large range of issues, on so many of which our viewpoints are far from that of most of our peers.

I believed when I wrote it that the section on Yad Vashem was one of my better pieces of writing, and I was especially glad to have that judgment affirmed.

It is most interesting, of course, to examine areas where Bar-Levav and I disagree, and to pin down, where possible, the locus of disagreement.

I remain unconvinced of his position supporting Professor Talmon, that Jews had to become the embodiment of evil before they could be destroyed in the holocaust. Bar-Levav thinks that I'm handicapped in dealing with this question because I'm not a Jew, and I think he is handicapped because he is one. Forgetting the Jews, and looking more broadly at human experience, Stalin and his crew didn't think the Kulaks of the Ukraine and their families were the embodiment of evil when he took steps to wipe out two million of them. Hitler and the Nazis didn't think Europe's gypsies were the embodiment of evil when they exterminated them far more completely as a group than they did the Jews. By contrast, the "witches" of Salem were seen by their Christian persecutors as evil beings, in league with the devil, in keeping with Professor Talmon's model. The Jews of the holocaust, however, were viewed by most Nazis as inferior human beings, being wiped out to purify and upgrade Europe's racial stock. By contrast again, many Arabs today see Jews as evil in the old Manichean sense, as infidel devils, and would be eager to destroy them for religious reasons rather than pseudoscientific eugenic ones.

I don't think Bar-Levav and I disagree very much about the Judeo-Christian morality being a thin veneer, although it is a highly important veneer, the basis of law and civilized behavior. Most people don't loot, nor do they brutalize others on opportunity, but a large minority do. I agree with him that a holocaust could occur again, even in the U.S., more likely directed against blacks than Jews, but the central point is that mass ethnic murder is possible. And we agree that Yad Vashem is important. I hope that he sees it, as I do, as commemorating part of the human experience, and not primarily the Jewish experience.

I am pleased that Bar-Levav agrees that living day to day life thoughtfully, morally, joyfully and as a good producer and trader of wealth, as I have described these virtues, is a true contribution to our understanding of the Jews and their successes. He then accuses me of having "lost it" in discussing the issue of the Jews and subordination to authority, which he claims is "a positive character trait *per se*," one that gives the Jews "a better sense of reality" than

many other peoples, helping them "in their struggle against their own narcissistic delusions." He holds that my position on this important issue is due to personal issues in my character, namely "my suspicion and fear of authority" which shows in my "compulsive rebelliousness and preoccupation with resisting every authority." This has, he tells me, limited my success.

This reflects the central disagreement Bar-Levav and I have had over our many years of professional association and personal friendship. The weakness of his position on this important issue is shown by his need to resort to *ad hominem* argument. I can reply in kind, that his wrong-headedness on this issue is a character issue due to his unresolved childhood fear of abandonment, which leads him to cultivate excessive dependence in his patients, staff, and children, and to undermine their moves toward autonomous adult existence, independent of his support and control. But while I am confident that this is a true statement, I don't believe that he would agree, nor that this form of argument advances our understanding of the point at issue. I respect his judgment enough to take his allegations about my "fear of authority" seriously. Perhaps they are true in some way that I cannot see; that is the nature of character defenses. I have not had problems of authority in school, in my years in the army, with the law, or in my work history, but I may blind myself. True or false, the *ad hominem* arguments lead us away from the issue, which is, "Do the Jews as a people have a problem of over-submissiveness to authority that limits or damages the striving of many many Jews toward individuation and personal growth?" I believe that I have seen the problem clearly and written about it correctly, seeing both the over-submissiveness and the rebelliousness that it often gives way to as "two sides of the same coin."

I hope that Bar-Levav will reexamine his position, especially in light of Bettelheim's essay which, I believe, shows the problem of Jewish over-submissiveness to authority far better than I have been able to. The tragedy of the forced abandonment of their "holy land" was cultivated by the Jewish religion and intensified by persecutions and pogroms in their countries of residence. It fostered the underlying sense of having been forsaken by God, the resulting reactive religious myth that they were God's "chosen people," and their belief that unswerving loyalty to their group was a supreme value, an extension of their loyalty to God, never to be questioned. This is the basis of the over-submissiveness of the Ghetto Jew, which Bettelheim showed contributed so much to the ease of their destruction by the Nazis in the Holocaust. It also explains Bettelheim's observation that the Israeli Jew is not

submissive. The Israeli Jew has broken with the religious tradition that has fed the submissiveness of the Ghetto Jew, and sees his nation as a real country, with all its worldly limitations and potentialities. The reality in Israel has supplanted the biblical myth of the holy land for God's chosen people. --Except, I should note, for those unfortunate Jewish fundamentalists who prefer to dwell in religious fantasy than to live in reality on this earth, in a real country, an actual piece of real estate, which is theirs to defend and develop.

Over-submissiveness not only is disappearing from Israel's Jews, it is going as well from the Jews of America. As America's Jews shake off the remaining vestiges of life as a persecuted religious minority they gain, at least, the courage to rebel, and at best, the confidence of self-reliance and full personhood. I return to this point below, when I discuss assimilation.

Bar-Levay is but one of the correspondents insisting that genetics is not a factor in Jewish character and achievement. I believe that most social scientists and liberal thinkers discount genetic influences out of hand, largely because of the repugnance of Nazi views of the question. But this is itself an irrational motivation! Selective factors in breeding have produced strains of animals as different in body and temperament as Pit Bulls, Chihuahas, Poodles, Beagles and Chows. Think of the type of intelligence and character required of a good shepherd, a hunting dog, a gentle family pet, a guard dog, -- so very different genetically, as a consequence of selection. Selection affects people also. The strong selection pressures applied to the Jewish people over so many centuries cannot be overlooked by a scientist in a thoughtful study of the Jews. This does not mean that factors such as respect for learning and knowledge are genetically transmitted, of course. Instead, a culture that greatly values learning and knowledge *per se* will produce a selection pressure over the generations that favor the survival of the biological factors underlying the ability to learn, remember and reason. Another culture, by contrast, might exert a different selection pressure because it greatly values, e.g., physical strength and aggressiveness. Even though the two cultures began with the same gene pool, a few centuries would produce profound genetic differences. This is not a "strange racist point of view," but simple biology, and I'm surprised when intelligent people fail to understand it.

I was surprised to see Bar-Levav's vehement objection to my statement that the Jews "have developed such a mass of ritual, law and ceremony that is weighted with religious implications of magic that they have more that is in



need of change in the realm of observance than many of their Christian counterparts." Mr. HarPaz reacted to this paragraph also. The point seems self-evident to me, yet my correspondents are sure that I am wrong. Let me use a few examples of what I mean by a "mass of ritual, law, and ceremony."

- When I share Sunday dinner in a traditional Christian home, someone will usually ask a short blessing prior to our beginning. This half a minute or so is the extent of the religious observance usually practiced. Some more devout will close the meal with a prayer of thanks. When I eat a Shabbat dinner in a traditional (but non-orthodox) Jewish home, there will typically be five minutes or so of specified readings from Jewish texts, and minutely prescribed ritual with ceremonial bread and wine at the outset. The words and procedures will be different depending on the occasion and who is present. Much but not all of the food and wine will have been ritually made ready for the kitchen according to Rabbinical law governing slaughtering of animals, fermenting of wine, and baking of bread.
- The observant Christian is likely to know and endeavor to observe the Ten Commandments; the observant Jew is charged with observing, in addition, the 613 do's and don'ts of the Mitzvot.
- The observant Jew has each male infant circumcised in a religious ceremony performed by a specially trained Rabbi. This practice should be compared to the clitorrectomy of young girls that is common in Muslim cultures, another ritual genital mutilation motivated and rationalized by religious superstition.
- The many and varied Jewish rituals, ceremonies, blessings, asking for forgiveness and other interventions from God are, by their nature, weighted with "religious implications of magic," as are the less numerous traditional Christian practices of the same kind. Among Christians, Catholic and High Church of England observances have more and stricter ritual elements, but these denominations should be compared to Orthodox Judaism. I believe that my remarks are true for comparing middle-of-the-road traditional Christian Protestants and conservative Jews.

Either we live in a world governed by natural law, or in one governed by a supernatural being who intervenes in human lives and affairs, partly in

response to religious rituals, ceremonies, and petitions. Traditional religions that are far from being fundamentalist or orthodox are, nonetheless, replete with practices and observances that are irrational in the extreme. Every religious person, Christian, Jew, Muslim or other, needs to become aware of the irrationality imbedded in the religious observances to which he has become accustomed, as their irrationality is always destructive and often devastating to personal growth.

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Bruno Bettelheim did not write his essay for my study, but I'm glad to have been able to review it in this context. I see it as a valuable contribution. I am especially interested in the mass character changes that have taken place in the Jews of Israel with its establishment as an independent nation, and in those of America as a result of emancipation and increased acceptance into the mainstream of American culture. Bettelheim saw the changes as a good thing. Bar-Levav views them with alarm. For me they offer an opportunity and challenge, the one which motivated me to do this study.

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### **Assimilation and the Jews**

The last section of Bar-Levav's letter and the paragraphs from his unpublished article are a deeply-felt expression of that which is most admirable in that very special human being, the "good" Jew. It is at the same time a sad and moving acknowledgement that the "good" Jew as we know him today is an "endangered species." Survivors of millennia of persecution, wars and oppression, driven from their homeland by the Babylonians, slaughtered by Romans, killed in the Inquisition, persecuted by nation after nation, murdered by millions in the Holocaust, the world's greatest survivors as a people today seem to be being vanquished by a foe they have no way to halt -- assimilation.

In America the assimilation is biological as well as cultural; Jews are intermarrying with non-Jews at the greatest rate in their history. Jewish-Americans are destined for the fate of the Irish-American, French-American, German-American, Chinese-American, African-American and the rest. Mixed ethnic groups lose much of their unique identity as they intermarry and merge with the other groups comprising this nation. Yet the initial and faster progressing assimilation is cultural. Its power shows in that biological stronghold of the Jews, Israel. Israel has become a secular modern Western

society, rather than a religious, traditional Middle Eastern one. The old Jewish culture and way of life is fast being assimilated into American/Western European culture in Israel, as in America. Cultural and biological assimilation go hand in hand, feeding each other. They will not only continue but will accelerate. Most older members of "old-country" ethnic groups deplore the disappearance of the old group's culture, the old values, the old religion and, eventually, mixing and dilution of the old group's "blood," its gene pool. Virtually every smaller ethnic group being assimilated into a larger one has members who are filled with regret at the loss of the traditions they have loved and honored, and which have served them well in their own lives. They typically feel threatened by the "loss" of their members through intermarriage. This old story is part, but not all, of Bar-Levav's lament, in his "search for fellow Jews."

For all the threat it imposes to the Jews, and to other ethnic groups striving to maintain their separate identity, assimilation is in major respects a good thing. Dissolution of prejudice between peoples opens the doors to the exchange of knowledge and values, and later if not sooner, of blood. Horizons are expanded, different forms of living, child-rearing, practices, systems of belief, ways of understanding nature and each other are shared. There is a wider range of choice available at almost every level, from art, music and literature to philosophy and values, to friends and lovers. Wider choice does not guarantee better choice, of course, but for those able to choose wisely, wider choice does make better choices available. My own family illustrates the advantages of assimilation.

I am a fully assimilated Irish-Scottish-French-American Indian-English-Dutch-American. I identify culturally with none of the ethnic groups that have contributed to my genes. The family comprised of my parents' direct descendants has been expanded by marriage and adoption to bring in members of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Swiss, Jewish, Thai, Welsh, Chinese and Asian Indian. Our religions, like pure ethnicities, are widely varied. I do identify with members of this extended family, take pride in their achievements, have concern for their problems and misfortunes, and accept having a responsibility for being available to help any one of them should the need arise. The same identification and sense of responsibility is shown by my brothers and sister and in-laws, though the "code" we all operate under is unwritten and unspoken. The varied ethnic backgrounds of our family members are in themselves an interesting but not a highly important fact about them. Character, abilities, interests, values and beliefs, and chosen line of work, are

each of equal or greater consequence. As a family of world citizens, we have been exposed to a wide variety of people, and our ethnic diversity is the simple result of us each choosing from those available the best we could find. I believe that our diverse family roots were a great advantage in allowing us the widest range of choice, and illustrates this feature of assimilation.

What I cannot explain is the strength of our family bond, independent as it is of common race, religion, or geography. It is like the bond present in many Jewish families, and that, many would agree, provides a solid foundation for character development. There is a fear that this aspect of Judaism will disappear with assimilation, a fear that my own family experience shows is not necessarily true.

As the world shrinks and knowledge and communication grow, artificial boundaries between groups of people crumble. Attractions, friendships and marriages cutting across race and creed are the inevitable consequence. It is not true that these associations are less serious, deep and enduring, than those made within racial and creedal groups. The reverse is often true. With a wider range to choose from, better, more compatible choices can result. Strong marriages with powerful family bonds can and do develop in heterogeneous assimilated families, granted that they may lack a tradition supporting this development, and teaching them important skills and requirements as to how it is done.

I wrote twenty years ago about a major development in human cultural evolution now in progress, the decline of the group or collective stage of human social organization and the beginning of the individual stage (Kelley, 1970; 1974). I wrote in terms of the evolution of purpose, from its roots in biology and instinct (Stage 1 Purpose) into its accelerated development through the creation and evolution of groups as the carriers of knowledge and values and the enforcers of group standards (Stage 2 Purpose), and now advancing into the dawn of Stage 3 Purpose, in which some individuals, precursors of the many to come, choose their occupations, friends, lovers and mates, habits and style of life, beliefs and values, and religion (if they elect to subscribe to one). We are moving from a stage of history when one's character itself was primarily the creation of one's family and the ethnic group he was born into, to a stage where character, after its childhood beginnings, is becoming largely the self-creation of the individual.

But our transition from the last stages of the group or collective stage of purpose into the beginnings of the new individual stage is confused and often chaotic, involving as it does the progressive weakening of groups, of religions and ethnic communities based on a common system of belief, and a consequent breakdown of the old prior to development of the new stage that the human race must now confront. The weakening hold of groups is a necessary prelude to the increased role of the individual.

Bar-Levav observes this breakdown as it affects the Jews, and deplors the result:

*"...the majority of Jews are at best only partially involved in the observance or the Mitzvot... they like to emphasize what is common to Judaism and Christianity ... much more than noticing what separates the two.... Yielding and excusing comes easily and wishy-washy, lukewarm points of view generally win the day.... Jewish families are not as close and stable as they used to be... The all-powerful, stern Jewish father in heaven is increasingly resembling the God of the Christians, always loving and forgiving... Jews have become WASPish, compulsively gentle, moderate even under much provocation, soft, always compromising...."*

Under the persecution of centuries, a stern unbending disciplined way of life was required of the Jews for their survival as a people. This way of life was developed and reinforced by their religious and cultural traditions. The fading of persecution and prejudice is relaxing the requirement, at least in the West. Acceptance and assimilation are breaking down the boundaries between Jew and non-Jew, and the culture of Jew and non-Jew increasingly blend. Cultural assimilation leads to biological assimilation, and that which is distinctively Jewish begins to disappear into the melting pot. I claim that underlying all of this is the development of a new stage of social organization, in which the role and significance of the group itself is changing, becoming smaller. Whether or not someone is a Jew is a decreasingly important fact about him, as who he is as an individual becomes paramount.

The changes among Jews that Bar-Levav (and so many others with him) deplore are only one side of the story. Breaking out of the confines of excessively limiting religious and cultural tradition has opened doors of individual opportunity for Jews, and many have moved through these doors with dazzling careers of creativity and achievement. No small group since the ancient Greeks has done so much. Science, art and music, the professions,

business and finance, the media, all have served as avenues of expression for Jewish creativity and productivity. The question asked about the Jews in the first part of the study, "what opens the gate to them using their talent so creatively?" is still not answered, and we should continue to ponder it, as scholars over the centuries have pondered the creativity of the Greeks. But I can't agree with Bar-Levav that the Jews are losing their creativity and effectiveness with their assimilation. It appears to me rather that there is a freeing of potentialities that takes place as the Jews move out of the narrow and restrictive aspects of their tradition. At the same time, they begin to lose their distinct Jewish identity. At the present, assimilation is going hand in hand with the flowering of Jewish creativity.

But real losses are in store as a consequence of Jewish assimilation. The most highly developed group stands to lose the most from the mixture of cultures. Just as so much of the wisdom of the many groups of my ancestry disappeared with their assimilation, so will much of the wisdom imbedded in Jewish life and culture be lost unless it is sought out and dis-imbedded from that which is antiquated and non-essential in its context, and saved for use after assimilation. In this way values that have been created and sustained by the Jews can be used for Jews and non-Jews alike in an entirely new context. Any such seeking and separating out for future use of Jewish wisdom and values must be done consciously, deliberately by individuals with foresight. It will not happen automatically. It is characteristic of the newly dawning individual stage of purpose for the farsighted autonomous individual to seize the future by an act of thought and, through action guided by that thought, to bend tomorrow in the direction of his will.

This study of Judaism and Personal Growth is a small attempt in this direction. I'm not satisfied that I have found much about what I set out to discover. Nor have I yet succeeded in shaping what has been found into a form that can be used to facilitate the personal growth of students in my professional practice. I am not discouraged, for it is an extraordinary task, one that many have told me I am presumptuous to undertake at all. If it is presumption, I will continue to presume. There are no questions we should not ask, especially in religion, which has for too long been exempt from these rules of skeptical enquiry and debate through which human knowledge grows.

So I invite my readers to continue this study with me, and to broaden its base. Let us concern ourselves with questions of religion and personal growth.

I have said that if we proceed correctly, religious and scientific knowledge will converge, and eventually come together. For me, as my students know, the key to their convergence is the concept of a life force, which is so clearly related to religious concepts of deity. The incorporeal Jewish God, the pantheistic universal spirit or "god in nature," the "orgone" or "radix" of the living body, this is where my studies have always led, and that is the path I will continue to follow.

-- Chuck Kelley February 1991

### **References**

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Downloadable from [www.kelley-radix.org](http://www.kelley-radix.org).