

RECONSTRUCTION—A PROGRAM

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THE NEED OF RECONSTRUCTION

When we accepted the citizenship of the countries in which we Jews live, we covenanted ourselves to become an integral part of the general population, and to assume the same civic responsibilities as our non-Jewish fellow citizens. Culturally and spiritually as well as politically, our aim is to be part and parcel of the non-Jewish life about us. We no longer have our own vernacular; we are no longer governed by Jewish law in secular matters; we are no longer educated in exclusively Jewish schools. *Yet we need not give up either our continuity with the Jewish past or our unity with the rest of contemporary Israel.* We can maintain both, provided we can devise a method of integrating them into our effort to live up to the highest ideals of citizenship.

Most of the methods that have been proposed consist of attempts to fit Judaism into the religious denominational pattern. A religious denomination is a group united by a common world-outlook and by a way of life which it regards as the most effective, if not the only, means to salvation, and which differentiates that group from all others. Since religion was the most conspicuous and significant element in the life of our people throughout the past, it is assumed to be the one element through which our twofold need for continuity and unity can best be satisfied. Since religious differences are tolerated in the modern state, it is believed that Jews can manage to survive as a religious denomination, even if, in other respects, they are no different from non-Jews.

But what exactly is the Jewish religion?

According to the original version of Reform Judaism, the Jewish religion consists of universal and eternal truths to be derived from our sacred writings. Those truths are not in the category of Jewish laws and distinctive cultural forms, which are purely national in character and, therefore, obsolete, now that Jews are either willing or expected to renounce their nationhood. Neo-Orthodoxy has reacted against Reform's abandonment of all that was distinctively Jewish. It has sought to conserve intact, under the aegis of religion, all of the traditional institutions, the customs, the rituals and the moral legislation of Judaism. But, in order to do so, it has had to adopt a religious dogmatism

and authoritarianism that can not reckon adequately with social and intellectual change. Conservatism has sought a compromise between Reform and Neo-Orthodoxy, but so far has succeeded neither in formulating a definitive ideology of its own nor in developing a specific code of observance.

In addition, many Jews find it difficult to subscribe to any of the religionist formulations of Judaism. None is compatible with their world-outlook. They contend that religion is no longer an essential element of Jewish life. In the interests of political freedom and equality, it has been found necessary to separate church and state, and to relegate religion to the individual conscience. The position taken by the Jewish secularists is that if Jews expect to find a place in the modern world, they, too, should remove the problem of religion from their public agenda. They would have the Jews reconstituted into a modern nation like every other nation.

How this secularist proposal can help the American Jew solve his inner problem is, indeed, difficult to see. As a matter of fact, it is only another way of saying that Jews cannot remain Jews, unless they are willing to resume life in a land of their own, on a basis similar to that of every other nation. If there were countries where the experiment of allowing a large measure of cultural and political autonomy could be tried again, it might be possible to have a secularist Jewish life. It is doubtful, however, whether such an experiment would be tried again, since the first one has proved to be unsuccessful. The secularist solution is thus not a solution. Rather is it a way of accepting the dissolution of Jewry in the Diaspora.

If we are to interweave our own historic way of life with the life which we must share with our neighbors, we have to rethink our beliefs, reorganize our institutions and develop new means of self-expression as Jews. Since our problem is to keep alive that which differentiates us Jews as a group from the rest of the world, it is of the utmost importance to have a definition that corresponds with fact. It is certainly not true to fact that religion, or a particular set of beliefs about God, with practices related to these beliefs, is all that distinguishes the Jews as a group from non-Jews. *If Judaism is to mean that which unites Jews into an identifiable and distinct group, then it is a religious civilization. As such, Judaism is the ensemble of the following organically interrelated elements of culture: a feeling of belonging to a historic and indivisible people, rootage in a common land, a continuing history, a living lan-*

guage and literature, and common mores, laws and arts, with religion as the integrating and soul-giving factor of all those elements.

The peoplehood, the culture and the religion of the Jews are one and inseparable. Their mutual relationship may be compared to that which exists among the three dimensions of physical body. They correspond to the three concepts referred to in the popular dictum: *Israel, the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are one.*¹ In this statement, "Israel" represents peoplehood; "Torah," or Israel's way of life, represents culture; and "The Holy One" represents religion. The purpose in pronouncing them one is to stress the fact that none of the three terms can even be understood except in relation to the other two. Jewish religion, Jewish peoplehood and Jewish culture are all aspects of the same reality, and each is meaningless apart from its relation to the totality of Jewish life.

In the light of that conception of Judaism and of the contemporary inner and outer challenge to Jewish life, the problem we have on our hands reduces itself to the following questions:

In the first place, what has to be done, socially and culturally, to enable the present generation of Jews to feel its oneness with all the preceding generations of the Jewish people?

Secondly, how shall we reinterpret our tradition, so that it can be rendered compatible with a reasonable conception of naturalism and an ethical conception of nationalism?

Thirdly, how can we make room in Judaism for diversity of world outlook and religious practice, and have as the test of Jewish loyalty mainly the sincere desire to have Jewish life survive, grow and exert a salutary influence on human life in general?

The reconstruction of Jewish life and thought will thus have to consist in the pursuit of the following objectives:

1. The rebuilding of Eretz Yisrael as the creative center of Judaism.
2. The creation of an adequate social structure for democratic Jewish communal life in the Diaspora.
3. The redirection of Jewish education to conform with the conception of Judaism as a religious civilization.
4. The revitalization of Jewish religion.
5. The stimulation of Jewish cultural creativity in literature and the arts.
6. The participation of Jewry in social movements that seek ampler freedom, stricter justice and better cooperation among men and nations.

ERETZ YISRAEL

For the culture and religion of Judaism to survive and flourish anywhere in the Diaspora, they must have rootage in the life of a thriving Jewry in Eretz Yisrael. Under the most favorable circumstances, it is impossible for an ethnic minority to retain its civilization indefinitely, without continual replenishment from some self-sustaining fountain of cultural creativity. As we Jews are constituted today, with our widely divergent interests and beliefs, a Jewish Commonwealth in Eretz Yisrael has become indispensable to us, individually and as an indivisible people. What the Crown is to England, that Eretz Yisrael is to the Jewish people—a symbol both of continuity and unity.

What Eretz Yisrael has come to mean to us Jews can, perhaps, best be conveyed by a recent description of several hundred displaced Jews, huddled together on a rotting ship in the sweltering sun of Haifa Bay. They were seeking entrance into Eretz Yisrael. The reporter found "thin, ill, hollow-faced men and women from every trade and profession living in the most degraded and debased of human conditions." Nevertheless, the musicians and theatrical artists managed to give concerts and entertainments every night, so remarkable was the morale of those on board. When any one of them would be asked how they were able to withstand their trials, their answer always was, "But look we can already see Eretz Yisrael. We are only a half mile away."² The plight of those displaced Jews may be regarded as symbolic both of the situation in which the Jewish people as a whole finds itself today and of the extent to which it depends upon Eretz Yisrael for whatever morale it possesses.

If the life in Eretz Yisrael is to fulfill the highest aspirations of Jews everywhere, it must be built on foundations of social, political and economic justice. Eretz Yisrael must be protected from the exploitation which is a concomitant of a competitive economic system, and the *halutzim* (pioneers) must be encouraged in their efforts to base Jewish economy on cooperative labor.

Eretz Yisrael must again become the cultural and spiritual center of Jewry, which looks to it for the *renaissance* not only of Hebrew language, literature and art, but also of Jewish religion and law. Jewish religion in Eretz Yisrael should be freed from the authoritarian control of the Orthodox rabbinate, and made responsive to the vital needs of an intellectually alert, democratic, and progressive modern community.

The development of Jewish legal institutions, which was arrested in the Diaspora from the time that Jewish communities lost their civic autonomy, will have to be resumed in Eretz Yisrael. Out of these institutions there will emerge a code of Jewish conduct and practice applicable, also, to life in the Diaspora.

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JEWISH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN THE DIASPORA

To enable Judaism to function as a civilization in the Diaspora, Jews will have to avail themselves of their democratic right to organize for the pursuit of their common interests. The religious divisions among Jews and the progressive loss of communal autonomy since the beginning of the nineteenth century have left Jewry without any organizational structure to reflect even the degree of community of interest that still unites it. No form of human life can be whole or healthy except in an environment that strives for wholeness. We often speak of a Jewish community, but what goes by that name is only a congeries of organizations and agencies, not one of which includes all Jews or represents all Jewish interests. Most Jews belong to some association that has a vestige of Jewish life. They belong to Jewish burial societies, if to no other. Their affiliation with any Jewish group is largely a matter of accident, and the particular function which that group performs often represents for its members all that there is to Judaism. The conception of Judaism as a religious civilization, however, demands that Jewish life be viewed *as a whole*, and that every partial expression of it be evaluated according to what it can contribute to the totality of Jewish life. That totality, on the other hand, must justify itself by its ability to enrich the life of every group and each individual within Jewry.

From this point of view, not all Jewish associations and institutions can be of equal importance. Most of them are important, and some are indispensable, to a wholesome Jewish life. Some are of relatively little value. Others, like Jewish partisan political clubs, are mischievous. Every Jew must, therefore, learn to evaluate these organizations in accordance with a definitely constructive philosophy of Jewish life, and affiliate with those that offer him the best opportunity for service to Judaism, in accordance with his own individual needs and opportunities.

The nearest approach at present to communal organization is the Jewish community council. These councils are as yet young and inexperienced, and have to overcome many handicaps, before they can

function adequately as instruments of Jewish civilization. Nevertheless, they represent great potentialities for the reconstruction of Jewish life, and we should do all in our power to help them establish themselves and develop to the point, where they will be able to outgrow their present limitations.

As yet these councils are hampered by the evil effects of that very anarchy in Jewish life which they are making a valiant attempt to reduce. Their constituent organizations are still too suspicious of one another, and guard their own autonomy too jealously to delegate to the council the necessary authority for important activities. Moreover, they are too unacquainted with the vital needs of Jews and with the spiritual resources of the Jewish heritage to collaborate vigorously and effectively in those communal activities which would make the individual Jew feel that it is worth his while to be a Jew and a member of a Jewish community. It is, therefore, incumbent upon those who have the future of Judaism at heart to guide the Jewish institutions with which they are affiliated in ways that will make those institutions more intelligently cooperative for the enrichment of Jewish life. The principle to be persistently championed is: *Maximum collaboration among different organizations for the purposes that they have in common, without imposing restrictions on purposes that they do not share.*

On the basis of this principle, community councils, representing every legitimate Jewish group in a given locality, can be organized and operated to advantage. They can conduct or direct all activities on the value of which there is a general consensus among constituent organizations. It should also be the function of the community council to facilitate collaboration among those of its constituent bodies that have interests or functions in common. Thus, all congregations with similar ideologies, whether Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform, should be urged not merely to be formally associated but to consolidate and promote their common interests.

Similarly other functional groups—educational, cultural, recreational and philanthropic—should be encouraged to cooperate with one another in every way possible. This deliberate stressing of *common* rather than *competing* interests, combined with respect for differences of point of view, has the inevitable effect of strengthening the Jewish corporate spirit. It can in time overcome the prejudices, institutional rivalry and contentiousness that at present deter our so-called Jewish communities from serving the purpose of a true community. That purpose is to make the collective experience of the group and its accumu-

lated cultural resources contribute to the self-fulfillment of every one of its members.

Causes like Zionism, the protection of Jewish rights, the care of refugees, overseas relief, and the promotion of Jewish research and higher education demand organization on a nationwide scale. But such organizations must no longer be permitted to work independently of one another, and at cross purposes with the various local institutions. They must be united in a body consisting of democratically elected representatives of two kinds of organization—(1) of local Jewish community council, and (2) of national organizations representing intercommunal causes.

Such an organization of Jewry would give it, for the first time since the abolition of the ghetto and the autonomous Jewish *kehillot*,³ a structural form that would enable Judaism to function vigorously as a religious civilization. It would make adherence to Judaism mean participation in a collective effort to achieve economic security, political freedom, physical health, cultural self-expression, ethical character, religious orientation—all of which contribute to human self-fulfillment.

4

JEWISH EDUCATION

Important as is this task of reorganization, it is not enough. Structure is not life. A living organism is more than an organization. It has an awareness of self; it has needs and desires, memories and anticipations; it recognizes values. Civilizations perpetuate themselves by transmitting to each generation their acquired culture and ideals, in ways that inspire in the individual the sentiments of loyalty and self-identification with the collective personality of the group. This process is what we mean by education. *To conceive of Judaism as the civilization of the Jewish people involves the recognition of Jewish education as both a personal and a communal function of paramount importance.*

Education, in this sense, is not only the conscious effort of the group to equip each succeeding generation with the requisite knowledge, and to imbue it with the requisite loyalty to carry on the civilization on which the group depends for its survival. It, also, includes all those unconscious influences making for loyalty which come from the whole visible and tangible environment created by the group. Long before the child's schooling begins, he is subject to these environmental

influences in the home; and long after he may have severed his connection with all efforts of the community to provide formal education for him, he is still subject to the influence of the cultural milieu in which he finds himself.

One of the major difficulties of preserving Judaism in the Diaspora arises from the fact that it is difficult for Jews as a minority group to create, in the environment in which they spend the greater part of their working day, visible tokens of Jewish civilization. But this difficulty can in large measure be compensated for, if the home environment is made Jewishly educative. The home environment is under our control, and the technique of utilizing it for the preservation and enhancement of Jewish life is one that has been admirably developed in Jewish tradition.

The influence of the home environment on the entire personality is out of all proportion to the amount of time spent in it. For in the home, the struggle of power between individuals is minimal, and the communion of love and mutual helpfulness maximal. In the home, therefore, we are susceptible to influences that demand the subordination of selfish, individualistic interests to the higher values of civilization. That is why our tradition has invested the home with the symbols of Jewish religion that proclaim the personal and social values experienced by the Jewish people: the *mezuzah*,⁴ the Sabbath candles, the Hanukkah *menorah*,⁵ the *kiddush*⁶ cup, and other ceremonial objects. These give at once a distinctive character to the home, which makes its occupants aware that they are Jews. Such sacred objects associate Judaism with the holiness or supreme worth of life.

The same is true of religious observance in the home: the observance of Sabbaths and festive days, the religious celebration of events in personal life—*Berit Milah*,⁷ *Bar Mitzvah*⁸ and *Bat Mitzvah*,⁹ the dedication of a home, the rites associated with mourning. New religious rites for significant events not provided for by tradition, such as marriage anniversaries, the naming of a daughter, and similar occasions, might well be added, for we should never look upon traditional ritual as final and complete. Conformity with Jewish dietary regulations may well be included among the influences making for a visible Jewish environment in the home. Such regulations possess value as religious folkways which express the desire of our people to sanctify life, by associating every detail of their daily regimen, down to the preparation of the food we eat, with the idea of serving God.

But ritual easily lapses into perfunctory formalism. The Judaism of the home cannot, therefore, be adequately expressed, if limited to tradi-

tional and ritualistic forms. There are needed other visible tokens of Judaism associated with the creative aspects, particularly of modern Jewish life. Bookshelves should contain Jewish books, and magazine racks, Jewish periodicals. Jewish pictures should grace the walls, and Jewish art objects adorn the rooms. Jewish music should resound from whatever musical instruments are used, and Jewish songs should be sung in the home on every appropriate occasion.

In these ways, as well as by the precept and example of parents, *the Jewish home should serve as the primary educational instrument for preserving Jewish civilization.* It will protect Judaism not merely against influences that are destructive of social values generally, but no less against the disintegrating tendencies to which all minority cultures are exposed. In conceiving the home not merely as a means of perpetuating the physical life of the people, but of perpetuating and enriching its spiritual culture, it becomes an influence for the sanctity of family ties, the purity and stability of marriage, parental responsibility and filial loyalty. A Jewish home that does not function in this way is not only not Jewish; it is not a home.

Thus Jewish education, like charity, begins at home; but it must not end there. *If the role of the Jewish community is to help every Jew attain self-fulfillment, it can do so only by providing for him at every stage of his development the knowledge and insight he may need to solve the major problems that confront him as a Jew in his personal life.* For this the home is not enough. Nor can we depend on the influences of environment without specific direction and guidance.

Every civilization has found it necessary to perpetuate its culture through the medium of the school. Particularly is this true of Judaism which has made of *talmud torah*, the study of our sacred literature, a religious obligation. That obligation it conceived not as limited to childhood, but as in force throughout life. The ideal of *talmud torah* has broken down in our day and must be reinstated. We cannot permit Jewish knowledge to become a specialty intended only for rabbis and professional scholars. We cannot tolerate a condition in which Jews can confess, without shame, ignorance of the most elementary facts about our Jewish heritage. We cannot submit to a condition in which the crassest ignorance of Jewish values is no bar even to Jewish communal leadership. It is there particularly that Goethe's saying applies: "Nothing is more dangerous than *active* ignorance."

A way should be found to make it a matter of conscience for every Jew to devote some portion of his time to self-education in Torah, and

to seek for his children the best Jewish education available. But education in Torah must be conceived in more comprehensive terms than it was conceived in the past. Torah must be understood to mean any branch or product of Jewish culture, from the dawn of Jewish history to the works of contemporary writers and artists. No Jew who values Judaism can be exempt from the pursuit of *talmud torah*. As long as he identifies himself as a Jew, he has the opportunity and the obligation of deepening his understanding of Judaism and his penetration into its values and needs. This is no child's play. Hence *Jewish education must be primarily adult education.* Only adult Jews who are educated in Judaism are capable of educating children in Judaism whether through the school or the home.

Where Jewish education can employ the medium of the Hebrew language it should do so. There is no more potent influence for self-identification with a people than the use of its language. Those adults who have acquired a knowledge of the Hebrew language, or are in a position to acquire it, should make it a point to read Hebrew books and periodicals. Hebrew literature is today rich enough in all branches of culture to afford intellectual and esthetic pleasure, as well as religious edification, to any cultured Jew.

But ignorance of Hebrew need not today, as it did once, prove a complete bar to the study of Torah, as we have defined it. An extensive Jewish literature exists in the English language. In addition to works by Jews and on Jewish themes written originally in English, there are English translations of almost all of the great Jewish classics—the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrashim and post-Rabbinic writings. The reading and studying of this literature can usually be pursued to best advantage in association with others equally interested. Study groups facilitate discussion and a creative exchange of ideas and experiences.

While it is necessary to stress the duty of every Jew to educate himself and his children in Judaism, the individual by himself cannot accomplish much in this direction, without the cooperative ability of an organized Jewish community. Even separate institutions, such as synagogues, schools, community centers and other organizations, can accomplish little when working by themselves. Particularly in the education of the child, tasks of supervision, teachers' training, text-book preparation, and many other directive and administrative tasks demand that Jewish education be thought of as a community project. With due regard to the ideological differences among existing Jewish groups, these must not be permitted to interfere with collaboration in all those aspects

of the educational process in which they are not involved. Jewish schools of each community should collaborate through a central bureau to the maximum extent that is consistent with the purposes and principles of the several institutions.

The insistence that Jewish education be regarded not merely as a personal but as a communal responsibility arises not only from considerations of efficiency and expediency. It is based on the inherent relationship of education to communal life. Education is the process by which the Jewish community preserves its identity and achieves the purpose of its existence, which is, to have the collective experience of the group enrich the personality of the individual. *Where Jewish education is neglected, the whole content of Judaism is reduced merely to an awareness of anti-Semitism. Judaism ceases then to be a civilization, and becomes a complex.*

Though we should seek the maximum of communal responsibility for Jewish education and urge the organized collaboration of all Jewish educational agencies, we cannot attach equal value to all their different endeavors. We should guide the efforts of Jewish educational institutions of the adoption of programs that are consistent with the conception of Judaism as a religious civilization, the civilization of the Jewish people. We should utilize the Jewish cultural tradition for helping the individual Jew to live happily as a Jew, and to contribute to the welfare of the Jewish and American communities and of mankind in general. The content of such an education will inevitably include the Hebrew language, Jewish history, Jewish literature, Jewish current events, Jewish music, and Jewish art. Above all, it must stress that aspect of Jewish civilization which expressed the Jew's conception of his place in the world, his relation to the Jewish people and its relation to the rest of humanity. In short, education in Jewish religion is to be not merely instruction in beliefs and ritual practices. Its aim is to develop a sincere faith in the holiness of life and a sense of responsibility for enabling the Jewish people to make its contribution to the achievement of the good life.

5

JEWISH RELIGION

The traditional version of Jewish religion is adequate only for the rapidly dwindling number of traditionally minded Jews. Almost all Jews who have come under the influence of the modern world-out-

look find that version of Jewish religion not only unrelated to the needs of contemporary life, but incapable of being fitted into the thought patterns of a modern minded person.

Hitherto, Jews, both among the rabbinate and among the laity, confronted with the challenge of historical science and philosophic outlook, have managed to work out for themselves some kind of reinterpretation, whereby they transpose the traditional religious values into the modern idiom. But there is a wide gap, in all that pertains to Jewish religion, between the thinking of our scholars and men of learning and the actual information imparted in the classroom and the pulpit. That gap must be bridged.

The need for reconstructing the religious phase of Jewish life arises from the effect which the growing knowledge of the part played by religion in the life of mankind has had on the traditional ideas concerning the origin and function of religion. As a consequence of the historical and comparative approach to all cultural phenomena, which is part of modern naturalism, religion can no longer be regarded either as a supernatural revelation vouchsafed to an individual or a people, or as a philosophical doctrine in the mind of an individual, and by him communicated to his fellows. How we are to view religion will be discussed at length in the second part of the book. Among the conclusions there arrived at is the one that religion is the product of a people's life, the soul of its civilization. It is not merely a parenthesis; life can *not* be spiritually, or in any other way, complete without it. It is the effort to discover what makes life worthwhile, and to bring living into conformity with those laws on which the achievement of a worthwhile life depends.

Faith in God means faith that there is an unfailing Power at work in the universe. In the striving for self-fulfillment, man can count on that Power to aid him, provided he conforms with the conditions, inherent in the nature of the universe. Those conditions are conceived variously, in accordance with the particular stage of cultural development. Since all civilizations depend on the willingness of their adherents to cooperate in the pursuit of ends considered to be life-enhancing, they cannot dispense with religion. Even when they avow atheism, their atheism rests on certain unproved assumptions which they consider contributory to self-fulfillment of the group. The loyalty that they expect is essentially a religious loyalty, although they will not admit it, for it assumes the inherent and supreme value, or holiness, of their own civilization.

The religious element in a people's civilization is objectified in those institutions, places, historic events, popular heroes and all other objects of popular reverence to which superlative importance, or sanctity, is ascribed. *These sancta, the attitude toward life that they imply and the specific observances that they inspire, together constitute the religion of a people.* In Jewish civilization, such *sancta* are, among others, the Torah, the synagogue, Sabbaths and holy days, the Hebrew language, Moses and the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the Sages. American civilization also has its *sancta*: Washington and Lincoln, the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, Thanksgiving Day, the Fourth of July and other national holidays, the Stars and Stripes. They, and what they imply, represent American religion. The American Jew sees no contradiction in reverencing both constellations of *sancta*. No civilization can exist without *sancta*, without a religion; and no religion can originate or continue to operate, except as an element of a people's civilization.

Since, then, every civilization has religious *sancta*, what do we mean when we speak of Judaism as a religious civilization? We affirm the truth that the Jewish people, under the leadership of its Lawgivers, Prophets and Sages, considered the chief function of its collective life to be the fostering of its *sancta*. It sought *consciously* to make its collective experience yield meaning for the enrichment of the life of the individual Jew. That is how the entire life of the Jew came, in time, to be invested with *mitzvot* (divine commands), designed to impress on him the moral and spiritual values which had emerged from the process of Jewish living. The *berakot* (benedictions), which precede the performance of these *mitzvot*, imply that those *mitzvot* are intended to sanctify, that is to confer worth on, Jewish life.

Without this religious emphasis, it is inconceivable that Judaism could have survived in the Diaspora until the present time, or that it will survive in the future. When a people lives on its own soil, its civilization perpetuates itself with a minimum of conscious purpose. Not being challenged by any competing civilization, its adherents take its *sancta* for granted, and think of them only occasionally, while they devote most of their energies to the pursuit of secular, individualistic and materialistic interests. But when our people was exiled and its state destroyed, the only way in which Judaism could survive at all was by stressing its *sancta*, and emphasizing their value for the individual as well as for the group.

This was true during the Middle Ages, when Jewish communities

were autonomous and Jews were excluded from Gentile society. It is even more obviously true in our day when, in democratic countries, Jews live simultaneously in two civilizations.* Under such conditions, Jews have no motive for retaining a connection with the Jewish people, unless they derive from that connection values which they cannot find elsewhere. Moreover, these values must be relevant not only to life in an exclusively Jewish environment, but to life in the two civilizations in which the Jew lives. Now, *of all Jewish values, the most universal are those that make the Jew feel he has a place in human society, and that help him to understand what he must do to fulfill his destiny as an individual, as a Jew and as a member of the human race.* Those are the religious values of Judaism. Without them, the Jew is uprooted, socially impotent and unhappy; he becomes a drifter.

But these values cannot be realized if we abstract Jewish religion from the rest of Jewish civilization, and treat it as if it consisted merely in a particular conception of God, one that differs from the conception held by other religions. The difference between Jewish religion and all others does not consist so much in the uniqueness of its conception of God, as in the uniqueness of its *sancta*. Loyalty to Judaism need, therefore, involve no pretensions to religious superiority. Jewish religion differs from the other religions not in being *unlike* them, for they too, have *sancta* that help them to salvation or self-fulfillment, but in being *other*, in having *sancta* that are the products of Jewish historic experience and not of the historic experience of other branches of human society. *We are faithful to Jewish religion, not because we have chosen it as the best of all religions, but because it is ours, the only religion we have, an inseparable part of our collective personality as a people. If some of us find that religion unacceptable in the form in which it has come down from the past, there is nothing but inertia to stop us from making it acceptable.*

Jewish religion can have no meaning apart from the Jewish people and the totality of its spiritual heritage. We ought not therefore speak of *Jewish religion* and *Judaism* as if they were synonymous terms. *Judaism* refers to the whole of Jewish civilization, just as *Hellenism* refers to the whole of *Hellenic* civilization and *Americanism* to the whole of *American* civilization. *Jewish religion*, on the other hand, signifies those beliefs and practices centering in the idea of God, with which the Jewish people assesses the values of its civilization, and seeks to implement them. It thus interpenetrates all elements of Jewish civiliza-

* See below p. 94 ff.

tion or Judaism, as a man's personal ideal affects all of his conscious behavior. That does not mean that religion accounts for the full significance of those elements, or that they are to be derived from it alone.

Jewish religion is that aspect of Jewish civilization which gives it purpose, direction and a definite orientation to the life of nature and of mankind. To this end, Jewish religion utilizes all the other aspects of Jewish civilization, which constitute, so to speak, the bodily organs of Judaism. These must include: (a) the heritage of Jewish tradition, (b) contemporary efforts to insure Jewish survival, such as the upbuilding of Eretz Yisrael and the organization of Jewry on a local, national and international scale, and (c) all Jewish cultural interests, including Hebrew and Yiddish languages and literature, folk ways, ethical standards and esthetic forms. Apart from this body of Jewish civilization, Jewish religion cannot function. Apart from Jewish religion, these various perceptible functions of Judaism would lack coordination and wholesome direction; Jewish life would become increasingly morbid and frustrated, lacking in self-assurance, steadfast purpose and that inner peace which comes from whole-souled dedication to a worthwhile cause.

In the light of this analysis of the place of religion in Judaism, the indifference to religion on the part of so many modern Jews becomes understandable. In part, that indifference is due to the fact that Jewish religion is identified in the minds of most Jews with a particular traditional doctrine to which they find it intellectually impossible to subscribe, rather than with the whole process by which a living civilization evolves its *sancta*. In part, it is due to that social disorganization to which attention was called when community organization was discussed. Religion is a function of community life; therefore, it thrives or languishes equally with all other aspects of Jewish civilization, in proportion as that life is vigorous or feeble.

This gives us a clue to what can and should be done to revitalize Jewish religion. In the first place, it has to be emancipated from bondage to dogmatism. This bondage inheres in the fear that any departure from the specific doctrines that were taught as religion in the past undermines religion itself. But this fear is seen to be groundless when we regard Jewish religion as a function of Jewish civilization. A living civilization is, of necessity, a changing civilization, but in changing itself it does not lose its identity any more than does an individual in passing from childhood to maturity. The same principle applies to the religious aspect of a civilization.

To make revitalization possible, the *sancta* of religion must be reinterpreted in each generation so that their meanings are relevant to the needs of that generation. *Tradition must not be a source of authority*, imposing restrictions on the creativity of later generations, *but a source of wisdom and morale awakening new creative powers*. When *sancta* have become meaningless, they cease, in the nature of the case, to be *sancta*. But this need not trouble us so long as a people lives and creates, for then it produces new *sancta*. To keep religion vital, religious thought must be free. It is a sad commentary on the present intellectual level of religious thought that the *free thinker* continues to be identified in the popular mind with an atheist. Voltaire describes two Athenians conversing about Socrates, and one saying to the other; "That is the atheist who says there is only one God."

Freedom of religious thought will, of course, emancipate religion from all association with magic and supernaturalism. *Jewish religion should discountenance the use of ritual for the purpose of influencing the course of events in other ways than by its influence on the mind and heart of the worshiper*. Nor should any ritual that is morally or esthetically offensive be retained merely because, in an earlier stage of Israel's culture, it was legally enjoined. We should frankly accept the conclusion to which all modern and enlightened people have come, that the realm of law—that is, of standardized behavior enforced by social penalties—must not extend to matters of ritual.*

Stated affirmatively, Jewish worship should be directed to influencing the worshipers to bring their lives into harmony with God as the Power that creates and determines the conditions by which man in general, and the Jewish people in particular, can achieve an abundant and harmonious life. All that is not intellectually and emotionally attuned to this purpose should be eliminated. But that is not enough. We must encourage the writing of new devotional literature, prayers, meditations, and hymns that express the religious experiences of our generation. Traditional forms should be retained, wherever these have something of positive value to contribute to the services, but they should be supplemented by additional material relevant to the interests, needs, problems and ideals of our day.

What has been said of worship is no less true of every other religious activity of the synagogue and the home. In all the emphasis should be on universal values. The distinctiveness of Jewish religion must not appear in any difference of aim between it and other ethical religions.

* See below, p. 394.

That distinctiveness must consist solely in the fact that Jewish religion assumes special responsibility for the Jewish sector of the front in the battle against evil and, accordingly, uses the resources which are available in Jewish tradition for the discharge of its responsibility.

The foregoing views on Jewish religion are not set forth with the expectation that all Jews would subscribe to them. They are intended mainly for those Jews who do not find the prevailing versions of Jewish religion acceptable. This raises the question of how to deal with the multiplicity of conflicting ideas in the matter of religion. The diversity of religious belief and practice which prevails among us is usually treated as if it were a calamity, or at best a necessary evil to which we must resign ourselves. And yet no modern, democratic civilization, which insists on freedom of conscience, is conceivable without diversity in men's attitude toward religion. *If Judaism is henceforth to be based on the principle of democracy, it should accept religious diversity as a normal expression of human life.*

To be sure, our people will have to undergo considerable re-education in their ideas about religion, if they are to understand how it is possible for several versions of Jewish religion to coexist within the frame of Jewish civilization. We shall have to live with the fact that the kind of religious approach that appeals to the rational type of mind does not appeal to the romantic type of mind, and vice versa. Temperament, cultural background and other factors condition our personal choices. Therefore, we cannot expect all Jews to think alike in their religion. We should respect convictions honestly held and sincerely lived up to. We dare not suppress the free expression of religious beliefs or doubts, or segregate ourselves from those who differ from us in matters of religion. *The recognition of the right to be different is compatible with unity; it removes factional rancor and makes possible cooperation for common purposes.* Such cooperation in turn widens and deepens the area of like-mindedness, and prevents religious diversity from developing into conflict or schism.

6

CULTURAL CREATIVITY

Emphasis on religion should not be interpreted as minimizing the importance of the so-called secular aspects of Jewish culture. Whatever enriches Jewish life can only help to re-enforce Jewish religion. Among

the activities that enrich Jewish life, the arts must occupy an important place. Even in the ghetto, art was never completely lacking, although the scope of artistic expression was limited; the arts did not receive the attention that a modern civilization would accord them. In the reconstruction of Jewish life, we should make up this defect. We cannot afford to have the individual Jew find *all* his esthetic experiences outside the sphere of Jewish civilization. It was precisely the frustration of their esthetic interests by the limitation of their Jewish environment that led Heinrich Heine and many of his generation to abandon Judaism altogether. That situation must not be repeated.

It need not be. As long as Jews react emotionally to the conditions of their life as Jews, there exist the potentialities of a Jewish art, since art arises from the effort to make emotional experience permanently significant. This is true whether the medium be literature, music, drama, the dance, or any of the graphic or plastic arts. Jewish art can express the experiences of Jewish life in a way that lifts that life above the commonplace, the sordid and the drab. The magic of the arts can renew the radiance of Jewish life.

What consciousness is to an individual, culture is to a people. A people's culture finds expression in history, literature and art. The only way in which a member of a people can share its collective consciousness is by learning its history, reading its literature and fostering its art. The Jewish people has possessed all these means ever since it became aware of itself as a people. But though it possessed them to an intense degree, the range was limited: The last century-and-a-half has witnessed a remarkable widening of the range of Jewish culture. This began with the writing of Jewish history in the modern spirit. Although much progress has been made in historical scholarship, little has been made in translating that scholarship into youth and adult education. The same is true of literature. During the last century-and-a-half there has been a vast output of literature, modern in form and content, which reflects the spirit of the Jewish people, and which can take its place alongside the best in other national cultures. This literature is written mainly in Hebrew and Yiddish, but much of it also in the dominant languages of the Occident. Once again what is needed is to select and organize from that vast wealth enough to constitute a cluster of Jewish literary values as part of modern culture.

As for the arts, we are only at the very beginning in the process of creating a modern Jewish art. We have highly talented Jews in all the fields of art, in music, drama, dance, painting, sculpture and architecture,

but most of our people still lack the understanding that, unless all these arts begin to function in Jewish life, there can be no Jewish life in the Diaspora. If Jews are to continue living as Jews despite anti-Semitism, it is imperative to have Judaism spell deep joy for the harassed millions of our people in Western lands. That joy can be derived from nothing so much as from the flowering of the creative arts. These are the means of conveying the wide range of emotions that seethe in the hearts of Jews.

We should, therefore, be interested in giving an artistic form to every aspect of Jewish life. Jewish worship should be esthetically developed; its symbols, rites and music made beautiful and stirring. It should be elaborated with a view to making it not merely sensuously pleasing, but appropriately expressive of the religious values it is designed to impress on us.

The architecture of synagogues, school buildings, and other Jewish institutions should not merely express good taste according to accepted standards and conventional canons; it should express the meaning and purpose of these institutions and the spiritual motives, in response to which they have come into being. If Jewish artists were commissioned to solve some of these artistic problems arising out of Jewish communal life, we should soon have the beginnings of a Jewish art in America, and Jewish artists would find scope for their talents within, as well as without, the area of Jewish life.

A conscious effort should be made to encourage appreciation of Jewish art in Jewish schools, community centers, youth organizations and cultural groups of all kinds. The development of Jewish art is frequently inhibited by an awareness of its present stunted condition. Institutions hesitate to exhibit Jewish art because they do not feel that it can compete favorably with the art of other groups which have a long artistic tradition behind them. They sometimes profess fear that in stressing Jewish art, the artistic taste of Jews would be fed on inferior products. This fear is groundless; Jews are not limited to the enjoyment of Jewish art only. If it is true that Jewish art is at present inferior, this should constitute a challenge not only to the Jewish artists, but also to the Jewish public to stimulate Jewish artistic creativity. Not every painter can be a Raphael or a Rembrandt; but when many lovers of beauty apply themselves to painting and are encouraged by having their works exhibited and critically evaluated, the chances of producing a Raphael or a Rembrandt are enhanced.

A considerable quantity of significant Jewish art has been produced of which even the Jewish public, with sadly few exceptions, knows nothing. This must be brought to its attention. Moreover, the failure to appreciate a work of Jewish art does not always result from its lack of artistic merit. As often as not, it results from the public's unfamiliarity with the Jewish values that the artist is trying to express. No valid art criticism is possible without an understanding of what it is the artist is trying to communicate through his art. If the patrons and directors of Jewish institutions were more imbued with Jewish culture, they would often see merit in Jewish artistic products that now leave them unmoved. The development, for example, of Jewish music in Palestine is proceeding apace, yet a noted writer there has occasion to complain that so little of this flowering of Jewish music is known in America.¹⁰ It is heartening, indeed, to learn that a change for the better is beginning to be noted in the field of Jewish music. "Jewish music," we are told in a critical survey of recent achievements in that field, "has come to play an increasingly important role in our institutional life. Under the impact of the tragic world events, creative artists who were formerly indifferent to their ethnic roots have revealed a more positive acceptance of their Jewishness, and have grown more aware of the need for a spiritual self-identification with the Jewish cultural tradition."¹¹

7

ETHICS

Conscious community interest in the promotion of art is something new in Jewish life; not so, Jewish concern for the improvement of human relations. From time immemorial this has been a major interest of Jewish civilization. The conception of the fatherhood of God, which plays so important a part in Jewish religion, was based on the Jewish perception of the essential brotherhood of man, on the insight that a community of interest binds together the entire human race, and that this community of interest must transcend all differences.

The realization of the ideal unity of the human race cannot be effected by imposing one uniform standard of conduct upon all men. Implied in the concept of brotherhood is the sort of unity that prevails among brothers in a happy family in which all members help one another to achieve, each his own purposes. It is unity of cooperation made possible by mutual understanding and sympathy. That is the

social ideal of Judaism, its vision of the Kingdom of God, after which it would pattern human society.

This means that Judaism must strive for the establishment of a social order that satisfies simultaneously two contradictory requirements: the maximum of human cooperation and the maximum of personal liberty. The two most imperious impulses in the human being, sex and power, are not to be suppressed or denied, but humanized and spiritualized. The task of ethics is to get men and women to be self-commanding. To this end, *Judaism must seek an equitable distribution not merely of the material goods needed for human living, but also of responsibility and power in the control of human affairs.* Jews must learn to defy the blackmail of anti-Semitic reactionaries and have the courage to commit themselves to social idealism. *In its religion and its ethics, Judaism dare not content itself with easy edification; it must engage in daring moral adventure.*

All Jewish institutions, and particularly Jewish religious institutions, must endeavor to sensitize the Jew to those social evils that impede the realization of a better world. They should render him allergic to violence, corruption, exploitation of every kind. True, none of these evils affects Jews exclusively, and none can be remedied by the exclusive action of Jews. Nevertheless, Jews have special reason for dedicating themselves to the elimination of these evils. Wherever there is social injustice or international, interreligious, interracial or interclass conflict, the distribution of the Jews as a small minority among a large Gentile population jeopardizes their safety. Unlike powerful nations that live in compact masses on their own land and exercise political sovereignty over it, dispersed Jewry cannot possibly find security so long as inhumanity is anywhere in power. *Only when a just social order prevails throughout the world, can the Jewish people find peace, and Jewish civilization thrive.*

The Jewish community in the modern world cannot, therefore, content itself with merely trying to govern justly the relations between Jews and their fellow-Jews, as it was able to do when Jews were segregated in ghettos. The Jewish community in our day should organize the participation of Jews, in cooperation with other communities, in the struggle against poverty, disease, ignorance, oppression and war.

But to qualify for participation in this struggle, Jewry must set its own house in order. *The Jewish community is not free from the evils that beset society in general, and must accept full responsibility for carrying on the fight against them on its own sector of humanity's front.*

The fact that these evils are not limited to us Jews does not exempt us from this responsibility. If conditions of urban life are corrupting the purity and stability of the Jewish home, it is small comfort that the homes of others are similarly affected. We must take measures to remedy the situation. If crime and vice exist among Jews, we must combat them, and not console ourselves with statistics to show that the incidence of such crime and vice is less among Jews than among others. If corrupt Jewish politicians prostitute the synagogue and other Jewish communal agencies to serve their personal ambitions, we must eliminate the abuse, and not apologize for it by blaming it on general political conditions. If money can buy positions of leadership in the Jewish community and interfere with the freedom of the pulpit, the freedom of Jewish education and the freedom of the Jewish masses to advance their interests and welfare as they see fit, then the Jewish community must shoulder the blame, until it has abolished these evils.

At present, we Jews are content to abide by the ethical standard of the majority population. What that standard is has recently been stated in one of America's most serious periodicals: "By the time people have reached fifty, they have fallen into two groups—the great group that hasn't made as much money as it hoped and is bitter about it, and the smaller group that has been financially successful and whose members can't understand why they are unhappy at home, or fight with their business partners, or have no conversation except damning all reformers. All that both groups really ask for is a modicum of good food, enough liquor and tobacco, a sports interest, and a reasonable amount of fornication."¹² None of the higher interests of human life, religion, patriotism, social justice, or international peace is ever given more than lip service. All of them are swept away by the periodic manias for reckless spending and money-making that grip the land.

If we wish to foster Jewish group solidarity, we must live up to a higher ethical standard than the average. No other justification for our remaining an identifiable minority will avail. We have, of course, the great moral axioms like the Ten Commandments, the ethical teachings of the Holiness Code, the inspired admonitions of the Prophets and moral maxims of the Sages. These are trumpet calls to the good life. But what today constitutes the good life must be set forth as specific guidance in the vast maze of conflicting interests and duties and loyalties. Even more important, however, than a series of Jewish ethical codes for the manifold of complex situations would it be to have the Jewish social agencies function as instruments of a wholesome moral

atmosphere and public opinion which would banish moral turpitude from Jewish life. By these and other means must we Jews demonstrate that to us religion which takes refuge in "ideals" and fails to make action square with aspiration is not only humbug but sacrilege.

We should do our utmost to keep bright the honor of the Jewish community. We should in all institutions with which we are affiliated protest against any attempt to confer positions of responsibility and dignity upon disreputable men. Lavish gifts for communal purposes must not be regarded as justifying the appointment of the donors to positions of importance, unless they are morally, intellectually and Jewishly qualified for them. Rather should such gifts by unworthy persons be regarded as "the hire of prostitution" which must not be brought into the House of the Lord.

All this implies the development of public sentiment in behalf of moral responsibility and of high ethical standards in all Jewish communal activities and relationships. We should interest ourselves in establishing decent standards for employees of Jewish institutions and decent standards of security in the tenure of their positions. We should insist on scrupulous adherence on the part of institutions to oral and written agreements. Disputes and conflicts of interests between persons and between individuals and the community should be settled by fair methods of adjudication or arbitration, conducted by Jewish communal agencies, rather than by the courts. That would save the good name of Jewry from being tarnished by the reputation that we are a litigious people.

We must endeavor to ban unfair methods of competition between rival institutions and between rival candidates for positions in the service of Jewish communal agencies, religious, educational and philanthropic. We should not be deterred from exposing evil conditions in Jewish life by fear of scandal, when the evils cannot be removed without exposure. It is important to avoid the defamation of Jewry, but it is even more important to prevent *hillul hashem*, the desecration of the name of God, which results from the cynical disregard of ethical values and from condoning social corruption.

Only a Judaism calculated to bring out all that is best in human nature, and to guide us Jews in applying that best to all our human interests, can command sufficient loyalty to insure its survival and advancement. America is a cultural melting pot. Cultural differences that do not contribute to the realization of universal human values

are bound to vanish. It is generally recognized that all men need to be rooted in a religious tradition, and that it is to the various historic religions, older than America itself, that the American nation looks for the strengthening of its own morale. It looks to Judaism, and rightly so, to accomplish this for its Jewish citizens. *That expectation is an unequalled opportunity for us Jews not only to retain our group life in this country, but also to achieve a religious orientation that might prove of great value to the religiously starved mankind of our day.* This is the unique chance which the God of history has given us; let us not fumble it.