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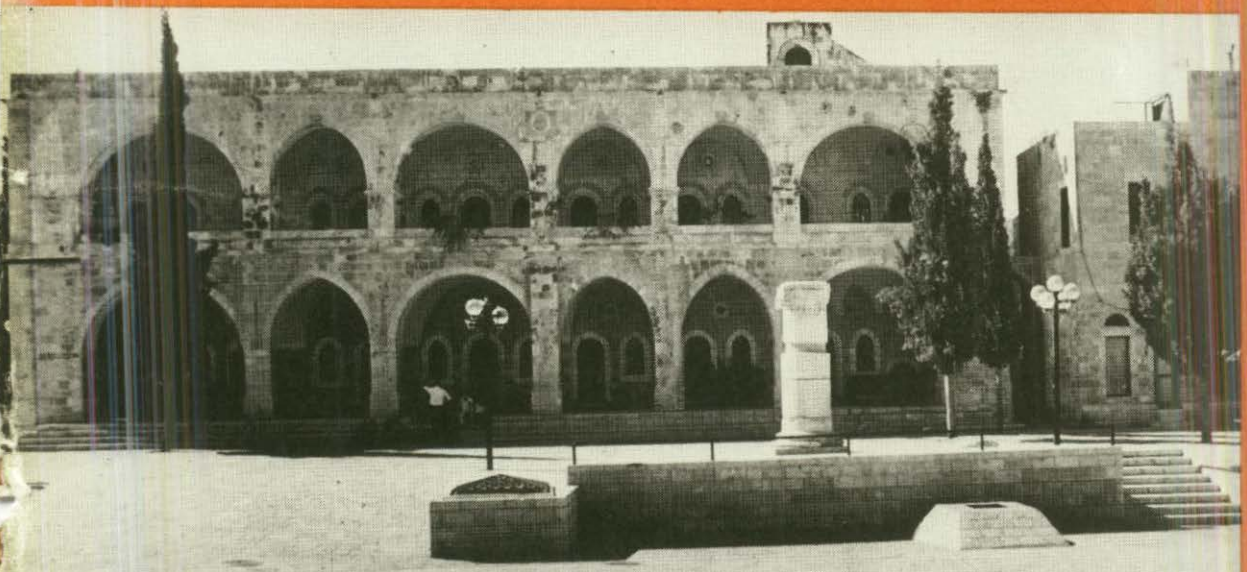

המרכז העולמי לתנ"ך בירושלים

Vol. XII, No. 4 (מ"ח) SUMMER 1984

THE WORLD JEWISH BIBLE SOCIETY

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OUR BIBLICAL HERITAGE

A Quarterly Published by the

WORLD JEWISH BIBLE SOCIETY

Founded by David Ben Gurion and Zalman Shazar

An affiliate of the Department of Education and Culture in the Diaspora of the World Zionist Organization

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דפוס רפאל חיים הכהן בע"מ, ירושלים

Printed by Raphael Haim Hacohen Press Ltd., Jerusalem

TWO RIGHTEOUS MEN: ISAIAH AND HEZEKIAH

By CHAIM ABRAMOWITZ

Throughout history, even as in our own times, small nations were dominated by the power of a "superpower". Since nothing is static, a superpower maintains its strength only as long as it retains its vitality and initiative. When it reaches the point of self-satisfaction with its attainments and becomes convinced of its invincibility, arrogance and self indulgence begin to mark its deterioration. It then helplessly falls apart when smaller subject nations seize the opportunity to throw off its yoke. This newly acquired freedom is usually short lived because, being weak and divided, they become easy prey to the next rising power. Sometimes a "superpower" may retain its influence and reputation long after it has lost its real strength. In the eighth century BCE Assyria was an example of the former and Egypt of the latter. A small country, like Judah or Israel (Ephraim), had to throw in its lot with either one or the other. Making the wrong choice could prove disastrous. Any prophet who urged them not to get involved and whose message was — בטחו בה' עדי עד — *trust in God* (Isaiah 26:3) *and He will protect you* was considered by many people and leaders as *a fool and of mad spirit* (Hosea 9:7). They were just dreamers who did not understand real-politik.

THE YOUTH OF HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah was born in such an era. Up to the age of nine[1] he saw his grandfather Jotham rule and prosper in the same spirit of monotheism as did his great grandfather Uzziah,[2] even though neither emphasized the centralization of worship in the Temple in Jerusalem.[3] When he was nine years old, his

1. Since he was twenty five years old when he ascended the throne (II Kings 18:2) and his father, Ahaz ruled for sixteen years (ibid. 16:2), it follows that during the first nine years of his life his grandfather was king. 2. II Chronicles 26:ff. 3. II Kings 15:34–35.

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grandfather died and his father Ahaz became king. A new spirit entered the royal household and its influence spread to the aristocracy and to the common people. Instead of putting his faith in God he went to solicit the aid of others. When Rezin king of Aram, and his junior partner Pekah, king of Israel, planned to attack him, he turned to Tiglath-Pileser, king of the new and growing superpower Assyria for help, and in return offered him a large tribute and his abject submission.[4] Tiglath-Pileser was of course happy to oblige because his power would now extend to three more countries. He could rule Judah as a benefactor and Israel and Aram as a conqueror.

Hezekiah, during his teenage and early manhood, saw his father stray from the faith of his grandparents with dire results. He saw that, when Aram and Israel banded together in an attempt to conquer Judah, his father and the people he led became frightened men: His father's *heart and the heart of his people quavered like the leaves of the trees in the forest before the wind.*[5] Having lost faith, they were in no mood to listen to the assurances of the prophet that they have nothing to fear *of the two burned out sticks of Rezin and Pekah.*[6] His father had sought help not from the God who made his grandparents so strong and succesful[7] but from foreign gods who help those who sacrifice to them.[8] Losing faith in his own God meant losing faith in himself and, disregarding Isaiah's warning,[9] he turned to Tiglath-Pileser for help even though this temporary surfeit meant loss of independence. Young Hezekiah may have been repelled by his father's abject desire to please his new masters by introducing their type of service and even making a copy of their altar to replace the ancient hallowed one in the Temple.[10]

HEZEKIAH ASCENDS THE THRONE

When Ahaz died and his son Hezekiah ascended the throne, all the negative impressions accumulated during his father's reign came to the fore. A contributing factor may have been the memory of the prophetic vision of a

4. II Kings 16:7.
5. Isaiah 7:2.
6. Isaiah 7:4.
7. II Chronicles 26:3–15, 27:1–7.
8. *Ibid.*, 28:23.
9. Isaiah 8:7–8.
10. II Kings 16:10–18.
11. It is interesting to note that of all the kings of Judah after Rehoboam, only Ahaz and Menashe, the two idol worshipping kings, do not have God's appellation as part of their names.

glorious reign for him.[12] He began his reign with a public disavowal of his father's ways and a return to the service of God.[13] He broke up every form of idol worship including Nehushtan[14] though it was a relic from the days of Moses, and he centralized all services and sacrifices around the Temple. He even tried, without much success, to rally some of the ten tribes. He wished to do everything properly. He instructed the Kohanim and the Levites to offer the sacrifices, play the instruments and sing the songs exactly as David did, since his prophets' instructions represented the will of God. It is strange that in his zeal and fervor to return the Temple to its previous glory, he relied solely on his own authority. It was he who tried to instill fervor in the priests and the Levites,[15] it was he who prayed to God to forgive the people, who ate the Passover lamb בלא ככתוב[16] not according to the law. He neither requested nor received assistance in any form from Isaiah, or from any other prophet, nor advice on whether any procedure in his reformation was "favorable in the eyes of God."

Perhaps the reason for the estrangement between the two great men was their differences in outlook on what is of greater importance in the service of the One God in whom they both believed. King Hezekiah, trained in etiquette, protocol, law and order, saw in קרבנות sacrifices, and in hallowed Temple procedure what was of paramount importance to his God. The prophet Isaiah regarded morals, justice, and care for the less fortunate as the primary intent of the Law of God. To emphasize his point, he went to the other extreme of denying any importance, and even imputing negative importance to sacrifices and ritual, unless the former was present.[17] One wonders, however, how Isaiah felt when he was not asked to take an active, or at least an advisory role in the new effort to return to the service of the One God. Since their aim was common and there was no judicial or moral perversion in Hezekiah's reign, the prophet obviously found no fault in the king's action or he would have voiced his disapproval, as he did in the days of his father.[18] However, since there is no record of his having publicly praised, or at

12. Isaiah 9:5–6.

13. II Chronicles 29–31.

14. II Kings 18:4 Nechushtan was the copper snake put up by Moses in the wilderness as a cure for snake bite. Later it was deified, perhaps by Ahaz, since there is no previous mention of it.

15. II Chronicles 29:1–11.

16. *Ibid.* 30:18.

17. Isaiah 1.

18. Isaiah 7.

least approved of Hezekiah's actions, we can only guess at his feelings, especially when we recall Samuel's anger when Saul did anything without his specific approval.[19] As a matter of fact, there is no mention of any direct contact between Isaiah and Hezekiah until the fourteenth year of his reign. When threatened by Sennacherib, Hezekiah took the initiative and sent messengers to the prophet.

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF ISAIAH

Isaiah's active interest in the well-being of his people, his deep concern in the political developments of his time and his keen insight are undeniably mirrored in his prophecies. However, instead of facing Hezekiah directly, as he did Ahaz,[20] he preferred public exhortations[21] and demonstrations against the pro-Egypt faction in Judah. Though he succeeded through public pressure in having Shebna, a leader of the group urging dependence on a foreign power,[22] removed from his influential position as general manager of the palace (אשר על הבית), and called for Eliakim as his replacement, he could not get rid of him completely. Shebna remained as the Scribe (סופר), a position important enough to be included among a delegation of three who came to see the Assyrian general[23] and then Isaiah.

Fourteen years after Hezekiah ascended the throne in Judah, and eight years after the fall of Samaria, the capital of Northern Israel, Jerusalem was in mortal danger. Hezekiah tried to prevent a confrontation by sending his regrets for his former break to Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, and by sending him a bribe.[24] When he failed and saw that Sennacherib's march on the city was inevitable, he realized his error in thinking that by partial submission he could attain peace and retain his independence. He prepared for the defence of the city and inspired his people with his deep faith in God.[25] At the same time he still hoped for the possibility of avoiding the inevitable by sending a committee of three, which included both Shebna and Eliakim, to listen to Rab-shake, the Assyrian general's terms for lifting the siege.[26] Fortunately, in his arrogance, Rab-shake spelled out clearly that he meant the dissolution of the Judean state. Perhaps there were people then who claimed that "he only says this for public consumption but he

19. I Samuel 15.
20. Isaiah 7:3 ff.
21. Isaiah 22:20.
22. Yalkut Shimoni II:212.
23. II Kings 18:18.
24. II Kings 18:13–16.
25. II Chronicles 32:2–8.
26. II Kings 18:18.

really doesn't mean it," but even Shebna and his followers could not accept Rabshake's terms officially.

HEZEKIAH TURNS TO ISAIAH FOR HELP

Even the common rank and file were firm in their determination to fight when they heard that the alternative meant being uprooted from their homes and sent to a "better place." Under these critical circumstances Hezekiah finally turned to Isaiah for help. Even then he did not go himself. He sent his aforementioned committee and the elders of the priesthood instead. In the ensuing sequence of events: Isaiah's prophecy that the Assyrian army will leave its siege and return home, Sennacherib's threat to return, Hezekiah's prayer, Isaiah's assurance that God heard his prayer and the miraculous destruction of the Assyrian army overnight – there is merely mention of the exchange of messages but no person-to-person contact between the king and the prophet.

We hear of Isaiah's first visit to Hezekiah when the latter became seriously ill, but instead of words of comfort, he greets him with the cold blooded and matter of fact divine message: "You are going to die."[27] Our Sages, in their clarity of perception saw that there was something wrong between the "two righteous men."[28] We can both sympathize and empathize with Hezekiah in his predicament: God in whom he placed his trust was going to let him die at a time when his city was threatened with destruction. In his despair he turned to God in prayer. Just then Isaiah returned with the good news that the Lord heard his prayer and that fifteen healthy years had been added to his life span. It is of little wonder that he asked for a sign. He was uncertain whether the second prophecy was authentic or just an expression of comfort and well wishes, of the kind that Micaiah said when he was asked by Ahab whether he and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, should go to war: Go and prosper, and may the Lord hand them to you.[29]

27. II Kings 20 and Isaiah 38. It seems that the entire incident was unpleasant to the author of Chronicles, so he omitted it entirely.

28. See Berachot 10a: Rabbi Hamnuna said: Hezekiah said, "Isaiah should come to me, as Elijah came to Ahab." Isaiah said, "Hezekiah should come to me as Jehoram came to Elisha." God made Hezekiah ill, and Isaiah had to visit him. When he was told that he will die, Hezekiah retorted, "Son of Amoz, go home. It's never too late to pray."

29. I Kings 22:15.

Ahab felt that the prophet was merely being polite, so demanded to be told the "truth". He then prophesized that Ahab will die in that battle. Similarly here, to assure himself that the prophet Isaiah was telling the "truth", Hezekiah asked for a sign, though it is difficult to understand why it is easier for the shadow on the sundial to advance ten degrees than to recede.

A SHADOW BETWEEN TWO RIGHTEOUS MEN

From a cursory review of events during Hezekiah's reign we become aware that there was a shadow in the relationship between the two righteous men in the words of Rabbi Hamnuna. Hezekiah was convinced that the fact that he returned and brought his people back to God through a hallowed ritual and Temple worship was in itself a guarantee of divine protection. Isaiah who had always placed greater stress on morality and justice, probably felt left out and somewhat insulted that, after the long struggle with Ahaz, he was not consulted more actively by the son who discarded his father's ways. In the light of that silent conflict, we can understand the final confrontation between the two as described by the authors of Kings and Isaiah, but omitted by the author of Chronicles, though he was obviously familiar with the incident.[30]

Hezekiah was happy and impressed by the fact that his cure came as a result of his personal appeal to God and with Isaiah's application of a mash of figs. When the King of Babylon sent a delegation with gifts and congratulations on his recovery, Hezekiah preferred to forget old animosities and distrust and welcomed them with open arms, boastfully showing them all his possessions. In the keen political insight of Isaiah, Babylon was not some distant country, but a rising superpower. Now that the precedent of personal contact had been made, Isaiah came in person to make the king aware of his grave mistake. "Not you but your children and grandchildren will suffer the consequences." The king, in no mood to listen to the prophet's dire predictions, heard only the "not you" part of it. "All right, if this is the will of the Lord, as long as there will be peace in my time," was his strange reply.[31]

Doing nothing to correct his mistake and cooperate more fully with Isaiah, he brought destruction to his people in little more than a century later.

30. II Chronicles 32:25–26.

31. Based on II Kings 20:14–19.

THE ENIGMA OF ELIHU

By SHIMON BAKON

THE BOOK OF JOB

When Maimonides[1] advanced the opinion that Job is a parable "conceived for the purpose of explaining the different opinions which people hold of Divine Providence", he reflected the views of a Sage in the Talmud[2] who claimed: איוב לא היה ולא נברא אלא משל היה – "Job did not exist, nor was he created, but is a parable". This was violently opposed by R. Samuel bar Nachmani who insisted on his historicity.

In the same pages of the Talmud there is further disagreement on authorship, date and meaning. On one point they all agreed: Job was a Holy Book, dealing with the existential relationshop between man and God, and a Living Book, whose great teachings were applicable to everyman and to every generation. Though Job seriously questions God's involvement in the affairs of men and even accuses Him of injustice, there was never any doubt on the part of Rabbis to include it in the Canon. Whether this was because of God's revelation in the Whirlwind, or because some ascribed authorship of this book to Moses, or because in the end Job repents, is a moot question. In fact, this book was seen fit to be read to the High Priest on Yom Kippur eve. בזמן שבית המקדש היה קיים היו קוראים באיוב לפני כהן גדול בליל יום הכפורים. "ובמה קורין לפניו: באיוב, בעזרא ובדברי הימים" (משנה יומא פ"א, ד). This ready acceptance throws a perplexing light on the snide remark of Froude,[3] who calls it "unequalled", while saying: "How it found its way into the Canon, smiting as it does through and through the most deeply *Jewish prejudices*, is the chief difficulty about it now".

1. Moses Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, translated by M. Friedlander, Dover Publication, N.Y. p. 296.
2. Baba Bathra 15a.
3. James A. Froude, *The Meaning of Job*, The Voice out of the Whirlwind. Selected by R.E. Hone, Chandler Publ. Col, San Francisco, Cal. p. 202.

Dr. Bakon served as Director of Jewish Education for the communities of Bridgeport, Conn, and Springfield, Mass, before settling in Israel. He was also on the staff of Boston Hebrew College, lecturing on Jewish Philosophy and Education. At present he is Associate Editor of Dor le Dor.

That the Book of Job is one of perhaps five or six transcendent products of literary excellence in the history of world literature, dawned upon mankind perhaps only in the last two hundred years. George Foot Moore[4] considers it "the greatest work of Hebrew literature that has come down to us, and one of the greatest poetical works of world literature". Thomas Carlyle[5] characterized it as "the greatest thing ever written with pen. There is nothing written in the Bible, or out of it, of equal literary merit."

ENTERS ELIHU

While there is unanimity among scholars, thinkers, and poets as to the great literary merits of the Book of Job, there is considerable disagreement on Elihu, his speeches, literary quality, and even authenticity. Two contrasting assessments will suffice to illustrate this point.

Bewer[6] suggests "that it seemed incredible to a later poet that Job should have won the debate, so he added Elihu's speech . . ." (it) says nothing new . . . he interrupts the connection between Job's challenge and God's appearance . . ."

Cornill,[7] on the other hand, writes: "In the entire range of Holy Writ there are few passages which in profundity of thought and loftiness of feeling can compare with Elihu's speeches. In content they form the summit and crown of the Book of Job".

Bewer, it must be stated, is not alone in his denigration of the Elihu chapters. He merely represents a school of thought, regrettably shared by some modern Jewish scholars, which detracts from the speeches of Elihu for one or more of the following reasons:

1. Elihu's sudden appearance, without prior notification, among Job and his friends, seems to disturb the continuity between the final speech of Job and the Voice from the Whirlwind. When his plea *Oh that I had One to hear me, let the Almighty answer me* (31:35) is about to be answered, what then is the meaning of Elihu's interposition?

4. *O.T. Literature*, 1913, p. 233.
5. As quoted by Gordis, *The Book of God and Man.*
6. Julius A. Bewer, *The Literature of the O.T.*, Revised Ed. Columbia Univ. p. 329.
7. C. Cornill, *Introduction to the Canonical Books of the O.T.*, N.Y., 1907, p. 424.

2. Elihu's speeches are a mere interpolation of a later, more conventional poet, who would not concede the point made by Job that he was suffering without having sinned, thus impugning God's justice.

3. Having "rudely intruded" in the debates, Elihu has little of note to contribute. Thus Reichert[8] in his introduction to the Soncino Commentary on the Book of Job, makes this rather uncomplimentary remark: "We wait in suspense for the wisdom of Elihu, and although he delivers himself of four speeches in succession, he seems to throw little further light upon the mystery of suffering".

It is mainly to criticisms levelled against Elihu's speeches, that this article will address itself.

A YOUNG INTRUDER

The four dramatis personae, Job and his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, have been engaged in a series of disputations, bearing on the problem of suffering. In essence, Job had insisted on his innocence, implying that he had been chastized for no obvious reason. His friends, however, maintaining the traditional faith, claim that the justice of God makes it imperative for Job to have sinned. Their disputations, ending in a heart-rending soliloquy on the part of Job, are exhausted. It is at this moment that Elihu, the son of Berachel the Buzite, apparently a bystander who had listened to the discussion, speaks up in anger. It is crucial to our understanding of the role assigned to Elihu, to note how he begins his speech: (32:6)

I am young and you are old
Therefore was I afraid to voice my opinion in your presence.

Here we find a rationale why, up to this point, he had not spoken up. Let us listen now to his continuation: (32:9)

Age should speak and the years teach wisdom
But it is the spirit in man and the breath of the Almighty
That gives understanding.

8. Job, V.H. Reichert, Soncino Press, p. xvii.

9. A.B. Davidson, *The Book of Job*, The Voice out of the Whirlwind: The Book of Job, Selected by R.E. Hone, University of Redlands, Chandler Publishing Co., San Francisco, p. 72.

He expresses his anger with the "old men" who should have been able to refute Job's cynicism; but "old men" has another layer of meaning: tradition. Tradition does not always have the answer. It is the spirit in man inspired by the "breath of the Almighty" that may find an answer to the troublesome problem of evil and suffering. What Elihu proposes in answer to this vexing problem will be presented later. Here, at this instance, we meet for the first time in Biblical literature with a young, angry man who reminds us of a period in German literature known as "Sturm und Drang" (32:19) when he storms:

> *Behold, my bosom is like wine which has no vent*
> *Like new wineskins, ready to burst.*

This sounds like an authentic outcry of a young genius who, fired by inner promptings and by the breath of the Almighty, has something to say, and will say it to "find relief" (32:20). We will find that, contrary to Reichert, he has novel and worthwhile ideas.

AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE WHOLE

As we noted before, the authenticity of Elihu's speeches is questioned by many modern commentators. One of the reasons given is that, once he finished his discourses, he fades away. No response is coming forth from either Job or his friends. Abruptly we are treated to God's Voice from the Whirlwind with no one deigning to pay attention to Elihu. However, on looking deeper, we discern an organic connection between all parts of the Book of Job, with Elihu performing an essential task of tying them together.

Let us begin with the Prologue. Satan, the arch-cynic demeaner of human dignity, challenges God (2:4–5)

> *Skin for skin. All that man hath will he give for his life. But stretch forth Your hand and touch his bone and flesh, I wager, he will curse Thee to Thy face.*

Accepting the challenge, God, as it were, stakes His reputation on the nobility and integrity of Job. This book may almost be subtitled: Righteousness on Trial.[9] To the reader, the outcome is a foregone conclusion. He is aware of the wager between God and Satan, and he knows that God's faith in the greatness of His

creature, the crown of His creation, will be justified.

It is otherwise with Job, the innocent victim of the wager. He cannot understand the magnitude of his suffering. Even if he sinned, where is the proportion between guilt and punishment? Therefore, to his mind God is unconcerned with the suffering of man. Indeed He is unjust, treating the wicked and the righteous with equal unconcern. In the course of his speeches Job had pleaded that he was innocent, that God's persecution of him was undeserved, and that God should answer him directly. Now He responds to his third wish, through the theophany of the Whirlwind. Strangely no answer is given him to the problem of suffering, but the very fact of His appearance is for Job sufficient vindication.

Elihu, preceding the Voice from the Whirlwind, attempts some tentative answers to the mystery of suffering, from the limitations of the finite mind of man. One should pay close attention to the greatest of Jewish philosophers, Maimonides,[10] when he interpreted the Book of Job as that "wonderful book . . . which explains the different opinions *which people hold* on Divine Providence". Exalting Elihu above Job and his friends, who hold various views, Maimonides makes him the representative of the authentic Jewish view on Providence.

Finally, by referring to the advent of a coming storm from which God will eventually address Job, and by pointing to the mystery of daily Creation and the miracle of harmonious nature, Elihu anticipates the final message: Viewing with awe His handiwork, we will be saved from the error of thinking that we can comprehend either Him, His creation or His justice. And, removing man from the error of egocentricity, we may be better equipped to deal with misfortune.

HIS AUTHENTICITY

"Job had the last word, and his disputants had to withdraw from the field. But later pietists could not take this view of the argument and added two appendices".[11] The appendices Finkelstein refers to are Elihu and even the Voice out of the Whirlwind. To him these two chapters are interpolations and lack authenticity. He is not the only one who denies authenticity to the Elihu speeches.

10. Maimonides opus cited p. 296 (Emphasis mine).

11. Louis Finkelstein, *The Pharisees* J.P.S., Philadelphia, Vol. I, p. 234.

Various scholars present their reasons in the name of "unquestioned" scholarship. Finkelstein believes that the original version only dealt with the dispute between the friends who continually claim that "righteousness has its rewards" and between Job who "points to the adversity of the good and the happiness of the sinful". To Tur-Sinai[12], another Jewish scholar, the Elihu portion is "younger than all the parts of the book". He claims that the original poem was written in Aramaic, then translated into Hebrew, while the "Elihu portion was written in Hebrew after the translation of the main part of the book". Others advance their arguments against the genuineness of the Elihu speeches (32–37) on the basis of style.

In all this controversy the opinion held by Robert Gordis[13] is refreshing. As to interpolation, Gordis cogently argues that if the Sages responsible for the Holy Canon did not consider the Book of Job as meeting their standards of piety, all they had to do was to consign it to the Geniza, where it would have shared the fate of other books not fit to be included in Holy Scripture.

If language and style of the Elihu speeches are somewhat different from the rest of the chapters, Gordis suggests that this may be due to the possibility that this Book was the life work of the author, with the Elihu speeches written at a much later period in the author's life. To illustrate his point, Gordis brings the example of "Faust" by Goethe. Anyone comparing the first with the second part would find it difficult to believe that both parts were by the same author.

It is this writer's opinion that if there are weaknesses in style in the Elihu chapters, this is due to a characteristic weakness in classical Hebrew expression, namely the logical and analytical presentation of ideas. The speeches of Elihu contain some new and profound ideas, and to express them in poetical form, was a formidable obstacle, even for the brilliant author of Job.

A NEW THEODICY – LÄUTERUNGSLEIDEN

Elihu, in attacking both the conventional views of the friends and the rebellious attitude of Job, offers a novel answer to the problem of suffering. I do not know whether it was Budde who coined the marvellous concept of "Läuterungsleiden", namely God's disciplinary measure to prevent man from falling into deeper sin,

12. N.H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job*, A New Commentary. Kiryath-Sefer p. xxviii.
13. Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man*, University of Chicago Press.

to characterize Elihu's approach to the meaning of suffering. But it was Budde[14] who stated: "Ausdrücklich gelehrt wird es (das Läuterungsleiden) von Elihu allein" — It is Elihu alone who teaches expressly this concept as a means of purification through suffering.

A schematic presentation of the three viewpoints is here in order. The friends in all their disputations had been unshakable in their firm belief that God is just. Consequently, suffering is the wage of sin. Job, on the other hand, has been steadfast in his assertion that he is unaware of any guilt. Thus, to him, God is unjust or uncaring. He claims (33:1, 10, 13)

Pure am I without guilt,
Yet God invents complaints against me
For He considers me His enemy
(and because) He is stronger than man
He answers none of man's words.

In his desperation Job had called on God to answer him directly.

Elihu's position, as developed in his four speeches, is as follows: God's justice is unimpugned. He sends suffering and pain as a warning. This suffering is not necessarily the consequence of sin. To the complaint of Job that "He answers none of man's words" Elihu suggests that He is indeed caring and *speaks through one means or another, though man takes no notice* (33:14). He may appear in dreams, which He sends as a warning to man. He even sends pain and illness so as to prevent man from falling "into the pit". In His graciousness there is available *an intercessor to vouch for man's uprightness.* He gives man the opportunity to change and return to Him (33:24–26).

He prays to God and He is favorable unto him
And He restoreth man to his righteousness.

Elihu represents a turning point in the problem of theodicy. He is not concerned with the whys of suffering but with the lessons to be learned from it. In its implications, the concept of Läuterungsleiden is as profound and its ramifications as broad as Isaiah's concept of the "Suffering Servant". God is not arbitrary. He uses the "rod of suffering" not to punish, but to educate. There is less causal

14. K. Budde, *Das Buch Hiob*, Göttingen 1896, p. XXXV.

relationship between guilt and punishment and more between sin and discipline. Precisely because God cares especially for man, with his potential for righteousness, He sends His warning signs.

A NEW THEODICY – THE IMPERFECT MORAL UNIVERSE

Any great literary work has many dimensions. The unmatched religious poet who authored the Book of Job, while developing a basic theme, touches on side-issues which may assume equal importance. It is due to this multi-dimensionality that many interpretations of the same work arise.

It has occurred to this writer that Elihu, in developing a new theodicy from an admittedly human standpoint, is simply leading us to a recognition that any theodicy is the human response to a deep faith in a just God on one side, and the bitter, everyday experience, according to which evil has gained the day while the righteous suffer. In the final analysis there is no answer. God's Voice confirms this point. The overwhelming mystery and harmony prevailing in Creation and nature are merely hints that order and harmony also prevail in the sphere of God's moral rule, and both spheres are equally incomprehensible to mere man. The inexplicable paradox, so beautifully expressed in Psalms[15]

> *What is man that You art mindful of him . . .*
> *Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than angels . . .*

fits here. Man is so little in His Presence, yet *God's eyes are on man's ways and He sees all his steps.* (34:21).

It has not been noted that Elihu's speeches make a subtle difference between God, ruler of the moral universe and the destinies of man, and God, Creator and Manager of the universe of nature. Elihu states unequivocally that He is just and bases it on the axiom that *how can one who hates justice, rule?* (34:17). Thus, to Job's complaint

> *I am innocent, but God has taken away my right* (34:5)
> *. . . it does a man no good to be in favor with God* (34:9)

Elihu proposes (34:11)

15. Psalm 8:5–6.

According to a man's deeds God requites him
And according to his ways He orders his destiny.

How then do we explain the blatant injustices so prevalent in our society? Though Elihu does not state it explicitly, there seem to be imperfections in our moral world, primarily caused by man himself. Thus Elihu (34:10)

Far it be from God to do evil
And from the Almighty to do wrong.[16]

The burden is on man, for (34:30)

When He allows a godless man to rule
It is because of the sins of the people.

INSINCERITY AND ARROGANCE

According to Elihu, man is inclined to be insincere in his relation to God. He is plagued by what moderns call the "foxhole religiosity" (there is no atheist in a foxhole). Such a man will cry out to God when oppressed, but does not burst out in song of praise and says: (35:10, 11)

Where is God my Maker, Who sends forth song in the night
Who teaches us more than the beasts on the earth
And makes us wiser than the birds.

To those who approach Him for the wrong reasons God will *hide His face and does not answer.* Another flaw in man's makeup is his innate arrogance. It is this arrogance of which Job is accused when he uttered (35:7) *What advantage is it for you, what good is it to avoid sin.* The last statement is especially insidious. It seems to imply that there is no use for a good deed, since no reward for it is forthcoming from God. To this Elihu responds (35:8)

Your wickedness affect only a man like yourself
And your righteousness, a fellow being.

16. Isaiah 45:7. We note a discrepancy between this and Isaiah's teaching: *I form the light and create darkness I make peace and create evil.*

For if you sin, how do you injure Him
If you are righteous, what are you giving Him?

Thus it is unbecoming for man to expect reward from God. For He is too exalted above man to be affected by whatever he does. However, man's deeds have a profound influence on one's fellowman![17] Man's worst imperfection is his propensity to project his standards of conduct and his knowledge onto the Almighty. Perhaps the key to the understanding of Elihu's message is to be found in the following two verses (36:3, 26)

I will marshall my knowledge from every quarter	אשא דֵעי לְמֵרחוק
As I justify my Creator.	ולפועלי אתן צדק

If this is truly the meaning of this difficult verse, then Elihu has attempted to marshall his arguments from every possible human angle to convince Job of his error, and to justify God. However, in actuality He is not in need of justification, for

Behold God is great, beyond our understanding	הן אל שגיא ולא נדע
The number of His years is unsearchable	מספר שניו ולא חקר

It is incumbent upon us to *extol His work of creation . . . though they can see it only from afar* (24, 25). In contemplation of this work of creation we are reduced to our essential smallness. As Elihu describes the incomparable majesty of God as manifest in nature, there are signs of a gathering storm, in which He will eventually address Job. In the final speeches, out of the Whirlwind, there is no need anymore to mention Elihu. Having marshalled his knowledge and conveyed his thoughts, he is done. It is now left to God Himself to chastise the friends and to extol Job. For even Elihu had not been aware of the cosmic machinations that had brought about Job's suffering. Thus the Book ends in a grand affirmation of a hopeful view of man and his essential nobility.

THE ENIGMA OF ELIHU

למה דרך רשעים צלחה — Why does the way of the wicked succeed? asked

17. This imperative is not the same as Habakkuk's: Man shall live by his righteousness — That is: righteousness is its own reward, irrespective of consequences!

Jeremiah.[18] How can this be reconciled with God's righteousness? Jeremiah, the first to raise the question, gave no answer. Isaiah's[19] response to the same question was the "Suffering Servant". Israel, a loyal servant of God, chosen to serve as the religious and moral teacher of mankind, will suffer. It is no penalty. In fact, it is a showing of a special and loving relation to His people. Such a response may have satisfied the vexing problem of Israel's degradation, but what of the suffering of an innocent individual? The "Läuterungsleiden" is Elihu's answer to the same problem, projected unto an individual.[20]

Thus, a spiritual kinship exists between Isaiah and Elihu. But who *is* Elihu? We will, in all probability, never know, just as we shall never know who wrote that masterpiece, Job. However, let us engage in speculations following some interesting clues.

1. Of all the dramatis personae in Job, Elihu is the only one called by a full name: Elihu ben Berachel, the Buzite, of the family of Ram.

2. Is there special significance attached to "Elihu" and "Buzite"?

a) Is "Elihu" merely a fictitious name, sharing the משל – parable existence of the entire book? Is he a symbol of Elijah, anticipating the theophany, as Gordis suggests? Or is he a real person?

b) What is the meaning of "Buzite"? Is this designed to lend added weight to the supposed antiquity of the Book, reaching back to Genesis (22:21) where Uz and Buz are brothers, sons of Nahor, brother of Abraham. Thus we would have Job from Uz and Elihu from Buz. Or is it to bring Elihu, the Buzite, into closer relationship with another famous "Buzite", namely the prophet Ezekiel? If so, was it not the latter who had mentioned *Job, Noah and Daniel* who *could deliver but their own soul by righteousness* (and not the sinning land)[21].

Though a spiritual kinship with Isaiah was suggested before, there are

18. Jeremiah 12:1.

19. Isaiah 52:13, 53:14.

20. See my article in Dor le Dor, V,2, *The Doctrine of Reward.* Jeremiah and Ezekiel had addressed themselves to a different aspect of the same problem, why children should suffer for the sins of the fathers. "Fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Jeremiah 31:39, Ezekiel 18:2). The answer is, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 13:3). Each individual is responsible for his own destiny.

21. Ezekiel 14:14.

commentators who saw a more direct relationship between the author of Job and Ezekiel. Amos Hakham[22] has called attention to R. Berachjah who had this intriguing comment on a verse in the Song of Songs (שיר השירים רבה): הביאני המלך לחדריו This verse points to two who hinted at deep mysteries: Ezekiel with his מרכבה and the Voice with Leviathan and Behemoth. It is Amos Hakham who also poses the question: Does the author of Midrash Shir ha-Shirim suggests that it is Elihu who is the author of the Voice, and, perhaps, of the entire Book of Job? Whether it is so or not, it would be a most gratifying guess that it is Elihu, from the school of Ezekiel the Buzite, perhaps even from his own family, who is the enigmatic author of Job.

22. Amos Hakham, ספר איוב, p. 21.

JUSTICE FOR ESAU

By EDMUND BERG

Year after year I work my way through the weekly portions of the Torah. So I come year after year to the portions which deal with Esau's life. Whenever I get through with them, I ask myself: "Why is it that Esau always was, and to the present day, is so much disliked. Not only that! But that he is always the culprit, an abomination, a scoundrel par excellence, that he is accused of having committed every imaginable crime?" I am sure: some of you still know the expression "Eissef" which is the Polish-Hebrew pronunciation of עֵשָׂו to denote something uncouth, cruel, debasing, of bad taste.

In rabbinical literature all kinds of charges against Esau are made, and upheld to the present day.

His evil disposition is apparent already in his mother's womb by maltreating his twin-brother Jacob. His character is vicious. His shameful conduct brought on the death of his grandfather Abraham. Esau slew the great hunter Nimrod, and decapitated him. The same he did to two attendants of Nimrod. He indulged in blasphemous speeches, and in denials of immortality. Jacob's conduct toward his twin brother is accounted for by the fact that Esau had always refused to share his sumptuous meals with him. Esau was a hypocrite, but played the good son. Outragous vices (like murder and rape) are charged against him. His mother Rebecca read Esau's character right. She knew by mysterious foresight what degraded peoples were to descend from him. So she resorted to a justifiable strategy in order to circumvent his receiving the firstborn's blessing. Esau was not successful on the day of his chase for venison for his father; he was detained by all kinds of mishaps so that Rebecca and Jacob had time to prepare the substitute – venison for Isaac. Esau threatened to avenge this deception. But Jacob left home.

Grief at the idolatrous practices of Esau's wives caused Isaac's blindness. Another rabbinical source has it: that Isaac had lost his sight *previously* from the

We are happy to publish an address of Mr. Edmund Berg, our nonagenarian member in Chicago. His previous articles appeared in the Winter 80/81 and Summer 81 issues of Dor le Dor.

effort not to see Esau's evil deeds. In Genesis Rabba we read: "He who raises a wicked son or disciple, in the end goes blind." In another Midrash we find that Esau commissions his son Eliphaz to kill Jacob. But Jacob bribes Eliphaz to spare his life. Esau is much vexed by the action of his son: the refusal to kill Jacob.

Laban deeply angered at Jacob's departure, which came so suddenly and unexpectedly, incites Esau to attack his brother on his way home. Angels are sent by God to help Jacob. Esau and his men flee. Then Esau resolves to turn around, and to go and meet Jacob who receives him with brotherly affection.

Many years later Esau comes down from Seir to Canaan upon hearing that his father Isaac is dying. Jacob and Esau with their sons bury Isaac in Machpelah. Then they divide the property, Esau taking all the movable property with him to Seir.

The Rabbis emphasize the fact that Esau' hairy appearance marked him a sinner, and his red color indicated his blood-thirsty propensities. His successors were the Edomites, and later on in history the name "Edom" is used to denote Rome. But in one thing the Rabbis of old agree: they praise Esau's filial piety, and also the fact that he married at the age of forty, in imitation of his father.

In the "Zohar" (which means "Radiance"), compiled as a commentary to the Pentateuch by a 13th century Spanish cabalist named Moses de Leon, we read: "Because Esau respected his father, his descendants rule the world," and "Esau's tears brought about Israel's exile."

Ehrlich has this to say: "The Torah stresses the fact that Cain, Ishmael, Esau, Reuben, and Manasseh, all of whom were firstborns, were cursed and lost their birthrights, to teach us that the consecration and sacrifice of the firstborn were an abomination in the eyes of God."

To this I would like to remark that

1. the Torah does *not stress* this fact, but merely reports or narrates,
2. in Esau's time (to say the least) the sacrifice of the first-born was not practiced any more by Abraham's descendants,
3. how about Shem, and perhaps also Abraham, and many other first-born sons that might be mentioned, who were not cursed?

With regard to Isaac's *blessing* Ehrlich has this to say: "Apparently Isaac has only one blessing. For Esau he offered advice only. The suggestion that Isaac did

not recall the blessing because it was a magical formula and therefore worked by itself, is far fetched. That there was such a belief in antiquity with regard to blessings is, of course, true. But there is no trace in Genesis of the power of magic, except in the story of Joseph as the Biblical narrator describes *Egyptian* beliefs and practices.

I may as well add that in Isaac's blessing, or rather so-called blessing of Esau, the name of God is not mentioned at all.

Rabbi Solomon Goldman in his commentary to "Bereshith" says in reference to Esau: "Hunting was never popular among Jews. Of no Israelite king has it been reported that he pursued this sport. Herod, king of Judea from 37–4 B.C.E., who was an enthusiastic hunter, was an Idumean (Edomite). Esau's vocation or avocation reminds us of Nimrod. According to Professor Einstein, Walter Rathenau once expressed the opinion that a Jew who professes to enjoy the hunt, is lying. Ernst Toller related of himself that having once shot a deer, the beast's sad and plaintive eyes pursued him for the rest of his life."

And later on Rabbi Goldman says: "The Biblical narrator does not portray Jacob as an immaculate saint, nor Esau as an unrepentant sinner."

In the same vein Friedmann comments: "Genesis details without the least hesitation the misfortunes that befell Jacob, the hardships he experienced, and how, despite his father's blessings, he had to humble himself before Esau. It was only after his purification and refinement in the crucible of sorrow that his (Jacob's) character was approved of by God, and his name was changed to Israel."

Whatever I mentioned so far, are some of the charges brought up against Esau. Few indeed are the voices heard in his defense.

Two of them – and this is interesting and characteristic at the same time – come from two women.

Bertha Runkle in her "Song of the Sons of Esau" has the following:

> "O canny sons of Jacob, to fret and toiling tied,
> We grudge you not the birthright for which your father lied;
> We own the right of roaming, and the world is wide"

The other lady is Mrs. Anne Grant of Laggen who writes in her book "The

Highlanders": "The hunter Esau, who pursued the chase through the forest of Mount Seir was bred in the same pastoral tent, and under the same patriarchal dominion with the shepherd Jacob, who fed his flocks in the adjoining plain, and seemed equally solicitous to obtain the paternal blessing. Yet hardened by his manner of life, Esau was sturdy and self-righted, and evidently an object of terror to those who had injured him, though the sequel shows him generous and brave."

The English novelist Thackeray (1811–1863) says: "I used always to pity Esau – and I think I am on his side – though Papa tried very hard to convince me the other way."

And now let us go to the source, the only source that deals with Esau's life: the first book of the Pentateuch, Genesis, and judge him unbiased, without prejudice or preconceptions which we carry with us since our childhood.

As to (Esau's) grandfather Abraham's death the Bible does not mention anything that could possibly give a clue to the statement that grief about Esau's conduct caused Abraham's death. We read only this: "The total length of Abraham's life was 175 years. So Abraham came to his death, dying at a ripe old age, an old man, *satisfied with life*; and he was gathered to his fathers."

Let us have another short look at Esau's "mishpoche." His mother's (Rebecca's) brother was Laban, and we know from the biblical record that he was not a gentleman. We know that he badly cheated his nephew Jacob, and lied to him several times in vital matters. The Pessach-Haggadah makes this statement: "Pharaoh decreed destruction only for the males, but Laban intended to eradicate all."

Did Esau have any of his uncle's traits or features? The inheritance factor once in a while plays such unpleasant tricks. But no speculation! Let us stick to the record!

Already while Rebecca was pregnant, she realized that she would give birth to twins, and she was shocked when she felt that the two were already fighting within her. In a desperate mood she exclaims: "אִם־כֵּן לָמָּה זֶּה אָנֹכִי".

Different translations:

I. If it is to be thus, on whose side am I to be?

II. The King James-version: "If it be so, why am I thus?" Rashi gives these words the following meaning: "If the sufferings of pregnancy are so great, why did I long for children?"

III. The Vulgate translates: "Why did I conceive?"

At birth Esau came first. We read: "He was born red, his whole body like a hairy garment." The real meaning of the word "Esau" is unknown, the usual explanation, "densely haired", being very improbable. Five sentences later Esau's other name "Edom" is introduced. Admoni (red) and se'ar (hairy) are perhaps intended respectively as a play on the words Edom, the Edomites, and Seir, the country they occupied.

Isaac loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob. Esau loved the outdoor life, the chase, the fields and forests; but "Jacob became a man of peaceful pursuits, making his home in tents." This translation "of peaceful pursuits" shows already prejudice against Esau. The words in Genesis are "אִישׁ תָּם". תָּם (we know the one questioning son in the Pessach Haggadah) means nothing else but simple minded, innocent, upright, straightforward. Such a man does not always harbor just "peaceful pursuits."

One day Esau comes home exhausted and hungry from a hunt, apparently too tired to get himself something to eat. He sees Jacob preparing some "red stuff", and he asks him to give him some of "that red there", "for I am famished." Rashbam (Rabbi Shemuel ben Meir) says in reference to these words: "Weary and famished, Esau spoke in haste, and thus repeated himself." And then, upon Jacob's request, the sale of the birthright takes place. Esau has to swear an oath to Jacob, and he does it after saying: "Here I am at the point of death; so of what use is a birthright to me?" The Septuagint translates Esau's words "הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוּת" to "now I am dying (of hunger)." Some commentators have suggested that Esau was referring to the risks involved in hunting. And the biblical narrator concludes: "Thus lightly did Esau value his birthright."

Let us follow-up Esau's character up to this point. That there are fights between the two boys in their mother's womb, we surely cannot blame either one. A charge against the unborn Esau must be judged as sheer nonsense. Not even Rebecca could know who was fighting whom.

Later on, can we blame Esau for his love of the fields, for his love of nature? If the Jew of the last millennia does not like the hunt, can we – with any claim to justice – draw parallels between the Jewish life of today, or for that matter, of the time when the Talmudic Sages lived and the time of Esau when our ancestors were herdsmen?

When we follow the text of the Bible, the narrator mentions that Esau married two women of the people of the Hittites, one of the neighboring nations. But Isaac, and more so Rebecca, had "Tzores" through them. Did we never after that hear in human history that there were "Tzores" between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law? Joseph and Boaz married non-Israeli women; so did Moshe Rabenu. Why put a special blame on Esau? Just because it is Esau?

And now we read that Isaac calls Esau who immediately goes to his father, and is asked to hunt and prepare some game for him. Mother Rebecca hears this. The Midrash on Genesis makes this short comment: "Women are eavesdroppers, and Rebecca proves it."

Now follows the story how Jacob, on urgent request of his mother, and with her help, deceives his old, blind father and gets the first-born's blessing. And hardly has Jacob left his father when Esau appears with his venison, properly prepared for his father, and asks for a blessing. When he hears that his father has given the blessing already to Jacob, who came בְּמִרְמָה (which is translated "under false colors," the real meaning being "with cunning, fraud, deception"), then Esau cries loudly and bitterly: "Jacob stole my birthrigh, and now he has stolen my blessing." And he asks his father: "הֲלֹא־אָצַלְתָּ לִּי בְרָכָה?" "Have you not kept a blessing for *me*?"

So Isaac says a few comforting words to Esau, and Esau walks away. Now – so we are told – he hates Jacob, and resolves to slay him after their father's death. Rebecca knows this, and persuades Jacob to leave the family and to go to his uncle Laban's house. And Jacob leaves.

When after Jacob's departure Esau sees that his two Hittite wives cause so much grief to his parents, he takes another wife of *his* family: a daughter of Ishmael who is a son of Esau's grandfather Abraham . . .

Evaluating this period of Esau's life we have to say: he proves his filial piety to his father by fulfilling without question or hesitation his desire for some tasty food. He comes back, prepares the game properly, brings it to his father, and – gets the shock of his life: Jacob has received the first-born's blessing in the meantime. Can we blame Esau for crying out aloud? He surely must have valued highly his father's blessing; otherwise he would not have acted the way he did. And at least we have to give here Esau the benefit of the doubt when he resolves to slay his brother. How often might anyone of us have said or thought, when we

were really mad at somebody, with clenched fists and teeth: "Boy, I could kill that guy!" Did we really mean to kill? Would we really have done it? Why then make a murderer "a limine" (from the beginning) out of Esau? – One Midrash tells us: "When Esau heard that Jacob had received their father's blessing, he let fall two tears, and for each of these tears one Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed."

Now follows the story how Jacob works on uncle Laban's farm, and how he is deceived several times by Laban over all those years. And finally we see Jacob journeying back home with his wives, children and herds. He is very much afraid that Esau may come and kill him, his wives and children. So he divides all his possessions into two "companies" (the English translation of the word מַחֲנוֹת).

As a gift for Esau he assembles a great herd of all the different kinds of his animals, in order to appease him. That night Jacob wrestles with an angel, and has his name changed to "Israel." Next morning, in his great fear, he sees Esau coming towards him, accompanied by 400 men. Jacob bows down seven times to the earth until he reaches Esau. Quote: "Then Esau *ran* (וַיָּרָץ) to meet Jacob, fell on his neck and kissed him, so that they wept." Esau asks who all those around Jacob were, and Jacob introduces his wives and children to Esau. And Esau asks: "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answers: "To win my lord's favor." Esau answers: "I have plenty, my brother; keep what you have." But Jacob urges him twice to accept the gift; he even says (and this sounds a little sacrilegious to me): "It is like seeing the face of God for me to see your face." Finally Esau accepts the gift, and offers, for safety's sake, to accompany Jacob's people and herds. Jacob thanks Esau for his kindness, but mildly refuses by saying that his young children and animals would not be able to travel fast, but much too slowly for Esau and his men. But Esau urges Jacob to let at least some of his men accompany Jacob's people and herds for safety's sake, an offer politely declined by Jacob. Whereupon Esau starts back on his way to Seir. Years later, upon hearing of his father's death, Esau comes down from Seir with his sons, and together with Jacob and *his* sons they bury their father Isaac.

Right after this the Bible gives us the long list of Esau's descendants. About his death we hear nothing. . . . In my report I omitted nothing. I related the life story of Esau as it has come to us through the only source we have. I ask: "What is so

bad in this man Esau that the prophets (e.g. Obadiah and Malachi), the Rabbis of old, the Rabbis of our time, and a most scholarly layman like Maurice Samuel in his work "Certain People of the Book," made him an abomination? There is hardly a crime he is not accused of. There must be a reason for this debasing and degrading "slander" as I am tempted to call the traditional descriptions of Esau's character. Is it just for establishing and maintaining ideological and pilpulistic controversies, so that we may have on one side Jacob and all the good qualities of man, and on the other side Esau and all the bad qualities of man? If so, where is the – within the Jew deeply rooted – feeling for justice, for מִשְׁפָּט־צֶדֶק, for just judgment?

You may have *this* feeling about Esau: "If our prophets and our great geonim, if our whole tradition condemn this man Esau, then he must have been wicked indeed." But why? I cannot see it from the record of his life.

But then, much to my delight, and to assuage my own anguish about Jewish injustice, we finally, read in Deuteronomy 23:8 some kind of exoneration, a micro צו! a mini אֲשַׁמְנוּ, with reference to our injustice, the words: "לֹא־תְתַעֵב אֲדֹמִי כִּי אָחִיךָ הוּא" "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite, for he is thy brother." And in verse 9: "The children of the third generation that are born unto them (the Edomites) may enter into the assembly of the Lord."

There is *one* branch in Esau's family, the Amalekites, about whom we read in Exodus, chapter 17: *And Joshua weakened Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword . . . And the Lord said unto Moses: ". . . I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven . . . And Moses said: ". . . the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.*

Where on earth is a family in which, in the course of time there is *not* a black sheep-branch?

The great philosopher Jacob Klatzkin (1882–1948) once wrote: "The weak-minded change their opinions because they are easily influenced by others, and the strong-minded change their opinions because they have complete mastery of their opinions."

My hope is that we have plenty of strong-minded amongst us who will be able to change their opinions about Esau, our brother.

"EXCESS": THE HIDDEN ROOT OF EVIL

By JOSEPH HECKELMAN

It is common knowledge that good and evil are polar opposites. Obviously! Surely this has always been the case. With little effort we can bring all kinds of proofs to mind – the Tsaddik, the very good person – and the Rasha, the very bad person – are polar opposites. In the literature of the Qumran Caves, the Children of Light and the Children of Darkness are opposites; the yetzer hatov, the good creative impulse, and the yetzer hara, the evil creative impulse, are polar opposites.

Or are they?

It is this writer's contention that in their Biblical usage the key words "tov" (טוב) and "ra" (רע) cannot always be understood as having this opposite moral dimension: Rather, that their meaning is quite otherwise – they are *connected*, with one being the natural, undersirable *extension* of the other. And awareness of this dramatically sharpens one's perception, replacing vague, platitudinous terms with focused imagery.

Words sometimes undergo modification with time. This modification is sometimes such that it obscures the sharper meaning as used long ago. By going back and uncovering the original sense in which such words were used, we recover fuller understanding of what the text originally meant to convey. Thus "tsarah" (צרה) is the word for "trouble", but its root TSR means a physically narrow place. The purpose of this paper is to explore a further step reaching to the more physical root meaning of "tov" as *properly limited*, and of "ra" as an *excessive extension* of that which when limited, is defined as *tov*.

Perhaps the clearest illustration is Chapter 24 of Jeremiah. Yeconiahu (Yehoyachin), King of Judea, together with the leadership of the people, have

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been exiled to Babylon. There remained in the land a newly appointed puppet king, Zidkiyahu, and his followers. The prophet compares them to two baskets of figs. The figs in one basket are "tovot m'od" (very good) – these are properly ripe figs. The other basket contains figs that are "ra'ot m'od" (very bad), which are so spoiled that they cannot be eaten.

Consider: Is there not only one way in which these "bad" figs are likely to be bad? They must be *overripe*. That is, they have passed through the *good* stage (tov) of proper ripeness, and gone on to the *excess* development of overripeness (ra). In the text the analogy continues, stressing the correct behavior of the exiles who have left the land when they did, as the good fruit was taken from the tree at the proper time. On the other hand, Zidkiyahu and his retinue are remaining in the land too long: They are overripe and rotten.

The basic root meaning of *ra*, then, is "excess". In some contexts it can only be understood in this way and in some, application of this concept adds illumination. Thus, "tov", good, is a particular thrust or development limited to a measure that is appropriate – and the identical thrust or development carried beyond that point to *excess* is "ra". And does not evil, in the moral polar sense, really mean that which is *excessively* negative? Is not "ra-am" (רעם) (thunder) great, *excessive* noise?

Upon reflection – and only upon reflection – we find that our tradition testifies to this, when it speaks of all-inclusive "yetzer", generally in a negative sense. That is, it is the nature of the yetzer to go beyond the yetzer hatov (the good, limited creative urge) and become yetzer hara (the creative urge carried to excess). Stepping away, and looking at the entire process, one sees the continuum. If one is in the midst of a road or a climb, right and left, up and down, are opposite. But if one is able to take an all-encompassing overview, one becomes aware of the basic continuity.

Since the logic of an argument is rarely as persuasive as an appeal to authority, the writer was delighted to come across the following statement by the Talmud scholar Adin Steinsaltz, while polishing this paper:

> In Hebrew good attributes are called "good measures", which suggests that the excellence of a quality is determined by its proportion, not by its being what it is in itself, but by its properly related use in particular

> circumstances. Everything that is not in the right measure, that relates out of proportion to a situation, tends to be bad.
>
> The good is thus that which is contained within proper limits, and the bad, that which breaks out and goes beyond these limits; and it does not matter whether this exceeding of boundaries is positive or negative, restrictive or excessive, whether refusal of affection or even generosity in love . . .*

Let us proceed with specific Biblical examples.

Genesis 8:21 – Following Noah's burnt offering of the ritually edible animals and fowl after the flood, the Lord observes to Himself that He will neither again curse the earth because of man nor strike all the living creatures He had made: "For man's urge is to *ra* from the time he first begins to move". Is God stating that man is born naturally wicked? Surely this is not Jewish doctrine! Rather, the Torah here is teaching a profound truth: That yetzer, the creative urge, tends to move beyond the *limit* that is *good*, onward to *excess*, which is what wickedness is. Man is born with the potential to reach wickedness, and the ability – thru the development of self-control – to limit himself to the good. As the Lord had tried to encourage Cain earlier (Genesis 4:7): "If you will do *tov* you will carry (your burden – i.e., control your anger)". ("Cain" implies zealousness, passion, anger).

Genesis 24:50 – Abraham's trusted servant Eliezer has journeyed north to seek a wife for Isaac. "And Lavan and Bethuel answered, 'The matter has come from the Lord and we cannot speak to you *ra* or *tov*'" It would appear that "more or less" is considerably more precise than "evil or good".

More than a generation later, Lavan chases after Jacob and is about to catch up with him in the mountains of Gilead. *Genesis 31:24* – "And God came to Lavan the Aramean in a night dream and said to him: "Control yourself lest you speak to Jacob from *tov* to *ra*". If we understand "good or evil" – Lavan is being forbidden to speak to Jacob at all: And this is clearly not the case. Rather, the last half of the verse can be better understood as ". . . lest when you speak with Jacob you go from the *proper* (limits of polite conversation) to *excess* (anger).

The picture of the seven cattle in Pharoah's dream (Genesis 41:9 ff) describes the appearance of the seven cattle in terms of *raot toar* (רעות תאר), and *ra* in

* Steinsaltz, Adin *The Thirteen Petalled Rosed*, Basic Books, N.Y., 1980, p. 104.

other forms. Surely there is no moral implication of evil – rather, that their appearance is *excessively* thin, they look *excessively poor.*

Genesis 44:34 – Judah to Joseph in Egypt: "For how can I return to my father with the lad (Binyamin) not with me lest I see that *ra* which will then find my father". "Evil"? Hardly. Rather, *deep excess misery.*

When Jacob is about to bless Joseph's two sons, he speaks *(Genesis 48:16)* of the "angel who redeems me from every *ra*", that is, every *trouble* (excessively bad situation).

Exodus 32:22 – "And Aaron said, 'May my Lord not be angry with me. You have known this people and know how it is *b'ra"* (ברע). *'Bent on going to extremes'* communicates considerably more than the vague 'evil'.

Exodus 33:4 – Following the trauma of the golden calf, the Lord states that He will no longer accompany the people 'in their midst'. "And the people heard this *ra* decree and mourned". Would the Torah describe God's decree as evil? Rather, we understand *ra* here as "extreme".

Leviticus 27:10 – The bringer of sacrifices is warned not to exchange the particular animal: Neither "*tov* be*ra* nor *ra* be*tov*". *Tov* is a properly formed animal, *ra* is an animal with a visible flaw, something *excessive*, oversize or undersize.

Further discussion of the animal's physical characteristics:

Deut 15:21 – "And if there is in it (the animal) any flaw – lame of blind, any flaw *ra* . . ." is similar. Since there is no such thing as a good flaw what we are being told is that a very minor flaw might be acceptable – but a *major* or *excessive* flaw comparable to the animal's being lame or blind, is not. The reference is to the first born animal which is routinely to be sacrificed unless it has a *major* flaw.

In chapter 11 of Numbers, everyone over-reacts.

Numbers 11:1 – "And the people murmured *ra* in the Lord's hearing". The nature of the murmuring is obviously negative; we don't need *ra* to tell us that. Rather, the people murmured *excessively* – and therefore the Lord became angry.

Numbers 11:10 – ". . . and the Lord became very angry and in the eyes of Moses it was *ra*". Could the Lord's reaction be *evil* in the eyes of Moses? Hardly; but Moses could well feel that it was *excessive* or overdone.

Numbers 11:11 – "And Moses said to God, "Why did you do *ra* to your servant?" . . . Could God do evil to Moses? Rather, "Why did you (burden) your servant *excessively*?

Numbers 20:5 – "And why did you take us up out of Egypt to bring us to this *ra* place. Not a place of seed and fig and vine and pomegranate, nor is there any water to drink". What is being described is not a morally evil place, but a place *excessively* barren: Utterly without food or water for sustenance.

Several examples of "tov vara" as a linked unit:

Deut 1:39 – ". . . And your children who do not today know *tov vara* (טוב ורע).

Genesis 2:9, 17 – There are two references to "the tree of the knowledge *tov vara* . . ."

Genesis 3:5 – ". . . and you would become like higher beings, knowing *tov vara*".

Genesis 3:2 – ". . . as one of us to know *tov vara*".

In all the above, "sufficiency and excess" appear to be more focused than the more usual, vague "good and evil".

Deut. 28:35 – In the course of detailing the terrible curses that will fall on the people if they forsake the Torah, the text says: "The Lord will strike you with boils, *ra* . . . from which you will not be able to be healed; from the sole of your foot to the top of your head". *Bad* boils? Is it possible for boils not to be bad? Rather, we are meant to understand an *excessive* multitude and intensity of boils.

Deut. 30:15 – "See I have set before you today Life* and ha*tov*, or Death* and ha*ra*". Since "Life and ha*tov*" here is defined as living within the framework of the limitations of the laws of the Torah, "Death and ha*ra*" must surely mean breaking out of these limitations: To *excess*.

SAMUEL

I Samuel 1:8 – Hannah is utterly miserable over her failure to become pregnant. "And her husband, Elkanah, said to her, 'Hannah, why do you cry and why do you not eat and why is your heart *ra* . . .'" Wicked? Hardly. Rather, "excessively sad".

* The prefix "ha" suggests capitalization.

CHRONICLES

II Chronicles 33:9 – "And Manasseh led the people of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem astray, to do *ra*, greater than the peoples whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel" (when they first conquered the land of Canaan more than 500 years earlier). Here, *ra* clearly is 'more excessively bad': Worse.

ISAIAH

Isaiah 45:7 – "Creator of light and builder of darkness. (He who) makes shalom and builds *ra*". Just as light and dark are opposites, so must shalom and *ra* be opposites in this context. "Shalom" is not that peace which simply means the absence of war. Rather, it is wholeness, completeness. The opposite of wholeness/completeness is a situation in which either something is lacking, making incompleteness – or something is extra, destroying the balance of completeness. In the context of this verse too, *ra* is not "evil", but "excess".

In transposing this verse to the sidur (as the first bracha preliminary to the Shma) the text was changed, with *ra* replaced by "creator of everything" – that is, that which is whole, complete, proper (shalom) – and everything else: That which is excessive, incomplete, improper.

Isaiah 56:2 – "Fortunate is the person who will do this and the son of man who will hold fast to it, keeping the Shabbat from violation and keeping his hand from doing any "*ra*". *Ra* here can be best understood as *excess*: Engaging in activity outside the limited framework of the Shabbat.

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel 8:9 – ". . . hato'ayvot har'aot . . ." (התועבות הרעות) is translated (JPS) ". . . the wicked abominations . . ." but this is a redundancy: By definition, all abominations are wicked: If the adjective is to add anything, it can only be to emphasize how *exceedingly* great these abominations are. Further, this parallels "to'ayvot gdolot" (great abominations) in verse 6 of the same chapter.

PSALMS

Although in many Psalms the conventional understading of *ra* (evil) fits rather well, *Psalms 140:12* is an exception. Here we have a phrase "ish hamass ra" (איש

חמס רע), in which *ra* clearly modifies hamass. Yet the standard JPS translation finds it necessary to modify the text, translating "the violent and evil man". The Soncino footnote is an improvement, suggesting "evil man of violence". However, even this overlooks two facts: 1) That violence (except in defense) is normally viewed as evil; 2) that there are degrees of violence. What is being described here is a man so terribly violent that he deserves to be hunted down and eliminated. Thus, the simple translation we suggest: "The *extremely* violent man".

Violence in itself is excessive behavior. Verse 2 of the same Psalm uses *ra* and hamassim as synonyms. It is likely that the final "m" in "hamassim" is used in the sense of the enclitic "m", to convey "great" or "very", rather than the Hebrew plural. Thus, rather than "Save me, Lord, from the wicked man; keep me from the person of violences" – we would render, "Save me, Lord, from the man who is out of control; keep me from the very violent person".

Psalm 23:4 – "Though I walk in the valley as dark as the shadow of death I will not fear *ra* for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff do comfort me". The conventional 'I will fear no evil is beautiful, familiar poetry. But it inot a very apt translation. Can one be comforted against *evil*? Or, is it not rather *fear* against which one is comforted? Thus "lo ira ra": 'I will not fear *greatly*', or, 'I will not fear *excessively:* In the naturally frightening dark valley, the psalmist is comforted against excessive fear by knowledge of God's presence. Note that he is not totally free of fear: If that were the case, the text would read "lo ira", instead of "lo ira ra".

Psalm 106:32 – "...va ye *ra*..." (וירע): And Moses was dealt with *excessively harshly* because of them" (the complainers at Meribah) is certainly more felicitous than "and (God) treated Moses *wickedly* because of them.

PROVERBS

The famous paean of praise to the superb everywoman with which the book of *Proverbs* closes includes the verse (31:12): "She rendered him *tov* and not *ra* all (or, each of) the days of her life". Upon reflection, is not the conventional "good and not evil" quite inappropriate? In this listing of the fine qualities of this outstanding archetype of Woman – surely, that she might render her husband "evil" is utterly inconceiveable. However, to assert that for all of her zeal she is

not a workaholic but keeps things in balance, is very much in place. Thus, "She renders him *tov*: All in proper proportion; and not *ra*: Nothing in excess – – – each of the (busy) days of her life".

JOB

Job 2:7 – ". . . And he (Satan) smote Job with pestilence *ra* . . ." Since there is no such thing as a good pestilence, to specify an evil pestilence is silly. Rather, the intent must be *severe* or *excessive* pestilence.

Job 5:19 – "From six affliction will he save you, and the seventh will not impinge upon you *ra*". To say that the seventh 'will not impinge upon you evil' is to say that there will be no seventh affliction . . . We do much better to understand that the seventh affliction 'will not impinge upon you *excessively*'.

KOHELLET

Kohellet 1:13 – "I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun. This is a matter of *ra*, which God gave man to be burdened with". Can it conceivably be an evil matter to study and probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun? Clearly not. The New JPS (1969) translation is sufficiently unhappy with that concept that here it arbitrarily translates the word *ra* "unhappy". Here too, we suggest "excess" as more apt and basically correct. "This is a matter of *excess*" – it is simply too much for man's mind to master all that goes on in the world. The mind of the author is overburdened and overwhelmed: He is frustrated by his awareness of an enormous number of things happening under the sun; he wants to encompass them but cannot because they are too numerous.

Kohellet 4:8 – . . . And for whom do I (endlessly) work and deprive myself of *tovah?* This too is transient and it is a matter *ra*". *Tov* (ah) here we see as "satisfaction", *ra* as too much involvement. The verse describes an ancient workaholic . . .

Kohellet 9:3 – "There is *ra* in all that is done under the sun, for the same event awaits all. And the hearts of men are full of *ra* and empty urging in their hearts, during their lives; and afterwards – to the death". To begin with the second half of the verse: The hearts of men are full of excessive, pointless yearnings; in the

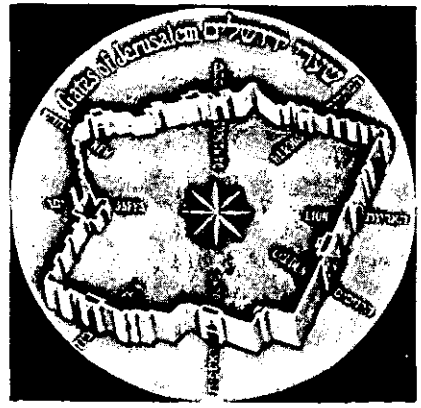
end they die (unfulfilled). "Surely, there is *exceeding* (sadness) in all that is done . . ."

Kohellet 12:14 – "For every act God will bring to judgment, although all has apparently disappeared (since it is past); whether *tov* or whether *ra*". Whether it has been within the appropriate limit, or whether it has gone beyond, to excess – each past act will be judged.

MAHZOR

And, in our High Holy Day liturgy, in the refrain, "Yet, repentance, prayer, and charity transform the *ro'a* (רוע) of the decree", the word "ro'a" surely cannot mean 'evil' – God's decree cannot be evil – it must mean 'excessive' (i.e., virtually unbearable) impact of the decree. That is, tshuva, tfilla and tsedakah so change the one who is praying, that he is able to bear the excessive weight of the decree.

The above sampling is not intended to be exhaustive – only persuasive. At the same time, we re-emphasize that we have not sought to quarrel with every listing of *ra* as evil. In some instances, "evil" is indeed the best translation. But in the above and in many verses not cited, even where "evil" is a good (sic) translation – awareness of the underlying sense *excess* does significantly sharpen one's understanding. It sharpens one's understanding not only of the particular verse, but of the very nature of evil in our world.



JUDAH AND TAMAR—A SCRIPTURAL ENIGMA

By STUART A. WEST

Following, as it does, the first climactic point of the Joseph story – his being sold into slavery in Egypt – the story of Judah and Tamar seems to be an irrelevant digression away from the main subject of the Biblical narrative. However, a careful study of Genesis 38 reveals both the significance of this enigmatic chapter and its relevance to Joseph's story.

The opening words of the chapter, *And it came to pass at that time*[1] and the information given in later chapters of the Book of Genesis, place the time span of the events recorded as occurring between the sale of Joseph and the descent of Jacob and his family to Egypt, a period of twenty-two years.[2] The question this raises is whether indeed these events could have all occurred within so short a period of time. A summary of Genesis 38 will suffice to demonstrate the problem.

At about the time of Joseph's being sold into slavery in Egypt, Judah left his brothers and went to Adullam in the Shephelah, where he married the daughter of Shua, a Canaanite, who bore him three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. When he grew up, the first-born son, Er, married Tamar, whose origins are not stated, but who was probably a local girl and therefore also a Canaanite. Unfortunately, Er died without Tamar bearing him any children, so the duty fell on Judah's second son, Onan, to become a substitute for his dead brother by entering into a levirate

1. Gen. 38:1.

2. Joseph was 17 years old when he was taken to Egypt to be sold as a slave (Gen. 37:2). He was 30 years old when he appeared before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams (Gen. 41:46). The ensuing 7 years of plenty were followed by 7 years of famine, as he predicted (Gen. 41:29–30), and it was after 2 years of the famine that he revealed himself to his brothers (Gen. 46:6), when, as grand vizier of Egypt, he persuaded them to come with their father, Jacob, to dwell in the land of Goshen. 22 years had passed since he "was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews" (Gen. 40:15).

3. See Ibn Ezra on Gen. 38:1.

4. Cassuto, U., *Biblical and Oriental Studies* – Vol. 1: Bible, 1973, p. 39.

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marriage with his widow in order to provide offspring in the brother's name. By practising coitus interruptus, Onan deliberately frustrated the purpose of the levirate marriage and thereby incurred Divine displeasure, so that he too died. Judah, fearing that his sole surviving son, Shelah, might suffer a similar fate, persuaded Tamar to go and live as a widow in her father's house until such time as Shelah would have grown up. In the event, Judah failed to keep his promise to his daughter-in-law. Time passed, whilst Tamar waited in vain, but following the death of Judah's wife, she saw the opportunity to seize the initiative herself. As there seemed little chance of her marrying Shelah, she devised a plan to ensure that Judah himself would fulfil the levirate duty of his son, albeit unwittingly. Disguising herself as a cult prostitute, she waylaid Judah while on his way to Timnah for sheepshearing. Though he promised her a young goat from his flock as payment for sleeping with her, she nevertheless demanded from him a pledge, pending fulfilment of his promise. So it was that, at Tamar's request, Judah left with her his seal, cords and staff – objects of a personal nature, the ownership of which he could not deny. As a result of their union, Tamar conceived. Judah, although unaware of the identity of the woman with whom he had had sexual relations, nevertheless condemned Tamar to be burnt at the stake, when he heard that she was three months pregnant as the result of playing the harlot. Tamar's reaction was to send Judah his seal, cords and staff with a message admitting to her pregnant condition by their owner. Judah, recognizing the objects as his, acknowledged them and admitted his own guilt in the matter:

> *'She is more righteous than I; inasmuch as I gave her not to Shelah my son'.*
>
> Genesis 38:26

Subsequently, Tamar gave birth to twins – Perez and Zerah.

Is it really possible that these events could have occurred within the period of only twenty-two years? The problem is exacerbated by the information given later as to the names of the children of Israel, who came to Egypt with Jacob. As regards Judah and his sons, the Torah states:

5. Ethics of the Fathers 5:24.
6. Rashi on Gen. 38:7.
7. Gen. 46:8–27.
8. Gen. 46:27.

> *And the sons of Judah: Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Perez, and Zerah; but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.*

The perpetuation of a deceased's name through his brother marrying his widow and begetting offspring was later to find expression in the law of the levirate:

> *If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not be married abroad unto one not of his kin; her husband's brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother unto her. And it shall be, that the first-born that she beareth shall succeed in the name of his brother that is dead, that his name be not blotted out of Israel.*
>
> Deuteronomy 25:5–6

Indeed, it was for his failure to perform this duty that Onan was punished, although rabbinical authorities have enlarged the nature of his sin to read into it a prohibition against masturbation generally. The Zohar, in particular, refers to one "who wilfully spills his seed" (13) as worse than a murderer . . . because a murderer kills another man's children, but he kills his own, and he spills very much blood. Hence it is written of such a one particularly: 'And the thing which he did was evil in the sight of the Lord (14)". Be that as it may, the fact remains that masturbation was not Onan's sin; it is quite evident from the words of Scripture that he actually practised coitus interruptus:

> *And Onan knew that the seed would not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest he should give seed to his brother.*
>
> Genesis 38:9

In the new JPSA[15] translation of the Torah the Hebrew words — אם בא אל אשת

9. Cassuto, U., *Biblical and Oriental Studies — Vol. 1: Bible*, 1973, pp. 38–39.
10. Judges 8:30.
11. Cassuto, U., *Biblical and Oriental Studies — Vol. 1: Bible*, 1973, p. 36.
12. Num. 26:5–62.
13. Zohar 1:219b.
14. *Ibid.*, quoting Gen. 38:10.
15. i.e., Jewish Publication Society of America.

אחיו – are rendered in the English – "whenever he joined with his brother's wife" – which is perhaps more accurate than the traditional translation – "when he went in unto his brother's wife". It should also be borne in mind that Onan was not punished just for practising coitus interruptus, but because he did so in violation of his duty to consummate a levirate marriage. Nevertheless, through the apparent misunderstanding of the Biblical text, the English language gained the word – Onanism – defined by the Shorter Oxford Dictionary as "self-abuse, masturbation".

The real importance of Genesis 38 is its link with the story of Joseph. It had been Judah's idea to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites[16], following which a goat had been killed and Joseph's coat of many colours dipped in its blood[17], so as to trick Jacob into believing that his favourite son was dead. The deception worked as planned:

> *. . . and they sent* (וישלחו) *the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said* (ויאמרו)*: 'This have we found. Know now* (הכר נא) *whether it is thy son's coat or not.' And he knew it, and said* (ויכירה ויאמר)*: 'It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces.'*
>
> Genesis 37:32–33

Compare this passage to the action of Tamar, after Judah had ordered that she be burnt at the stake for harlotry:

> *. . . she sent* (שלחה) *to her father-in-law, saying: 'By the man, whose these are, am I with child'; and she said* (ותאמר)*: 'Discern, I pray thee* (הכר נא)*, whose are these, the signet, and the cords, and the staff.' And Judah acknowledged them, and said* (ויכר יהודה ויאמר)*: 'She is more righteous than I; forasmuch as I gave her not to Shelah my son.'*
>
> Genesis 38:25–26

R. Johanan succinctly comments in the Midrash Rabbah[18], "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Judah: 'Thou didst say to thy father, הכר נא[19]; as thou

16. Gen. 37:27.
17. Gen. 37:31.
18. Gen. Rabbah 85:11.
19. Gen. 37:32.

livest, Tamar will say to thee, הכר נא." In Cassuto's opinion[20], the parallel expressions in the two passages are intentional, in order to demonstrate that Judah was being punished measure for measure for the grief that he had caused his father by instigating Joseph's sale into slavery. Cassuto explains that, just as Judah and his brothers *sent* Joseph's coat to Jacob and asked him, הכר נא, so too, Tamar *sent* to Judah the objects by which he could be identified and asked him, הכר נא. In the same manner as Judah and his brothers had forced their father to identify the coat and had caused him to suffer so much grief by allowing him to assume Joseph's death, so also was Judah forced to identify his own signet, cords and staff sent to him by Tamar, acknowledge her superior righteousness and accept his own culpability.[21]

There is yet another link between Genesis 38 and Joseph's story in that the theme of seduction is carried through to the following chapter, in which Scripture relates the unsuccessful attempts by Potiphar's wife to seduce Joseph[22]. In contrast to Judah, Joseph did not yield to temptation and whereas Potiphar's wife was a would-be adulteress, prepared to accuse Joseph of attempting what she had herself wanted[23], Tamar was a woman with high principles, faithful to the duty of levirate marriage, although the onus of such duty was not her responsibility.

Comparison with Ruth, the Moabitess — who, seven generations later[24] married Boaz[25], the descendant of Judah and Tamar — shows that both Tamar and Ruth had much in common. Both were widows and non-Israelites, who nevertheless displayed a strong loyalty to the people of Israel. Whilst Ruth said to her mother-in-law

> *'. . . thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God . . .'*
>
> Ruth 1:16

Tamar's actions of themselves indicated a similar attitude. In the words of Benno Jacob, "Ruth speaks that which Tamar thought"[26]. He regards Tamar as not

20. Cassuto, U., *Biblical and Oriental Studies — Vol. I: Bible*, 1973, pp. 30–31.
21. See Ibid., p. 31.
22. Gen. 39:7–12.
23. See Gen. 39:14–18.
24. This can be deduced from Ruth 4:18–21.
25. See Ruth 4:13.
26. See Jacob, B., *The First Book of the Bible — Genesis*, 1974, p. 263.

only Judah's equal, but even surpassing him in moral rectitude[27]. When Judah was ready to have her burnt at the stake for harlotry, she had the fortitude and forebearance to reveal to him his misjudgment of her without in the least way causing him embarrassment. Thus, we read in the Talmud, "It is better for a man that he should cast himself into a fiery furnace rather than that he should put his fellow to shame in public".[28] The Talmud cites as its authority the action of Tamar as recorded in Genesis 38:25, because she did not mention Judah's name, even though her life was threatened. It was up to him, as Jacobson puts it, "to admit his responsibility or to let her perish"[29]. To his credit, Judah admitted his responsibility and thus Tamar survived to become the instrument through whom the Divine promise to Jacob was fulfilled, viz. –

> *'. . . and kings shall come out of thy loins . . .'*
>
> Genesis 35:11

Later, on his deathbed, Jacob indicated to his sons that the future royal line would be descended from Judah and Tamar:

> *'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,*
> *Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,*
> *As long as men come to Shiloh;*
> *And unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be.'*
>
> Genesis 49:10

According to Nachmanides, the meaning of this verse is that the sceptre shall not depart from Judah to any of his brothers, because the king of Israel will be of the tribe of Judah[30]. However, it is the enigmatic phrase – "as long as men come to Shiloh" – that is of most significance. Both Benno Jacob[31] and Plaut[32] note the importance of Shiloh as a religious centre before the sanctuary was moved to Jerusalem,[33] and they regard this pronouncement as a promise of reconciliation

27. See Ibid., p. 263.
28. Tractate Berachoth 43b.
29. Jacobson, B.S., *Meditations on the Torah*, 1969, p. 47.
30. See Nachmanides on Gen. 49:10.
31. See Jacob, B., *The First Book of the Bible – Genesis*, 1974, pp. 331–332.
32. See Plaut, G., *The Torah – A Modern Commentary: Genesis*, 1974, p. 468.
33. See, e.g., Judges 21:19.

of the two kingdoms into which the nation split following the death of Solomon[34], at which time the kingship will come from Judah (i.e., the southern kingdom) and will be proclaimed at Shiloh (i.e., in the territory of the northern kingdom). In the words of Isaiah:

> *Ephraim shall not envy Judah,*
> *And Judah shall not vex Ephraim.*
>
> Isaiah 11:13

In their context of Isaiah's prophecy of the Messianic Age, when the stock of Judah shall spring forth afresh[35], the blessing of Jacob reveals the message of Genesis 38. Once again Isaiah expresses the thought so well:

> *Before she travailed, she brought forth . . .*
>
> Isaiah 66:7

Citing these words, our Sages in the Midrash Rabbah observe that before Israel's first enslaver (i.e., Pharaoh) was born, the last redeemer (i.e., Perez, the ancestor of David and, therefore, of the Messiah as well) was born[36].

Far from being an irrelevant digression from the story of Joseph, Genesis 38 is an essential link in the chain of events. As the sale of Joseph into slavery presaged the advent of Israel's bondage in Egypt, the Torah injected into the narrative a note of hope for the future. Whatever the tribulations that lay ahead for the Children of Israel, they could look forward to the time of redemption and nationhood with their own king, descended from the line of Judah. Furthermore, with its Messianic implications, the message of Genesis 38 remains pertinent to this day, the everlasting hope for redemption in Zion for the scattered remnants of Judah throughout the Diaspora today.

34. See 1 Kings 12:20.
35. See Isaiah 11:1, from which this can be inferred.
36. Gen. Rabbah 85:1.

A GUIDE TO ISAIAH — CHAPTER VII

By CHAIM PEARL

The introduction to the Book of Isaiah and the former chapters can be read in earlier issues of Dor le-Dor.

The events described in this chapter took place in 735 B.C.E. At that time the dominant power was Assyria, which had regained its military supremacy after a temporary decline. Syria, to the north of Israel then joined forces with the kingdom of Israel, and the new confederacy attempted to inveigle the southern kingdom of Judah into an alliance against Assyria. Ahaz, king of Judah, resisted, and the rulers of Syria and Israel then tried to subdue the southern kingdom of Judah and Jerusalem by force, planning to depose king Ahaz and to set up a puppet king amenable to their political aims.

The Bible tells us that Ahaz was terrified, but Isaiah counsels him: "Don't worry about these two firebrands, they and their land will be destroyed". He goes on to warn Ahaz, however, that the real danger will arise from the clash of the two superpowers, Egypt in the southwest and Assyria in the northeast, who fought for supremacy over western Asia. Since the Jewish kingdom was situated between them, it was a battle ground for political intrigue and military invasion by the powers. An important emphasis is seen throughout Isaiah's counselling. His is a policy of strict neutrality. He is against involvement. Instead he advises quiet confidence and faith in God.

In the event, everything predicted by Isaiah took place. Syria (732) and Israel (722) were destroyed by Assyria. Judah was invaded by Assyria (701) but survived, and the succeeding years were filled with Egyptian-Assyrian conflict.

* * *

2. *The house of David* Meaning of course King Ahaz. The rabbinic

Rabbi Dr. Chaim Pearl, rabbi emeritus of the Synagogue Adath Israel of Riverdale, New York, was formerly the spiritual leader of the Birmingham Hebrew Congregation, England. He is the author of several acclaimed books on Judaica. He now lives in Jerusalem.

commentators say that the king's name is not mentioned because he was wicked and did not deserve to be named. In the first verse his genealogy is emphasised, suggesting that he was saved because of the merit of his ancestors.

Aram is confederate with Ephraim Aram is the biblical name for Syria. The chief city is called Aram Damascus. Ephraim is here the name of the northern kingdom of Israel, because its first king, Jeroboam, was an Ephraimite.

3. *Shear Yashub thy son* Isaiah had two sons, both of them given symbolic names. The elder of the two here mentioned, has a name which means "The remnant will return", and he would have been a constant visible reminder to the people of one of the prophet's central concepts, viz., that after the destruction a faithful remnant of the people will return to rebuild the land and the people. The presence of Isaiah's son at the meeting with the king was a deliberate and meaningful message of hope at that critical moment.

At the end of the conduit pool . . . Geographers of the Holy Land place this a little distance west of the city; in a place used by people to wash their clothes. It appears that Isaiah thus intended his words to the king to be heard by the common masses.

The son of Tabeel Syria and Israel were exasperated with the obduracy of Ahaz and planned to replace him on Judah's throne with a puppet king. It was not known who this Tabeel was. Some rabbinic commentators connect the name with a form of Hebrew "al tov" meaning a "no good".

8. *Within three score and five years shall Ephraim be broken . . .* If this prophecy was given around 735, then it was only thirteen or fourteen years before the kingdom of Israel was destroyed by Assyria. It is therefore difficult to reconcile the reference to the sixty five year interval mentioned in this verse unless it is calculated, as some scholars suggest, from the time Israel's destruction was foretold, many years before.

9. *If ye will not have faith . . established* "Faith", *emunah*. "Established", *teamenu*. Both come from the same Hebrew root and form a nice play on the word sounds. But beneath the literary device there is a profound idea which is

that personal and national strength derive only from an unshakeable faith in God.

10. *And the Lord spoke.* through the prophet.

11. *In the depth or in the height* "Ask for any kind of sign whether it is in the ocean or in the skies."

12. It might seem strange that the oriental monarch refused such an invitation, but it is clear that he just did not want to be convinced by Isaiah.

13. *He said* i.e., the prophet.

14. This is a famous and troublesome christological verse which Christian commentators throughout the centuries have mistranslated and misinterpreted.

Then Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, the prophet himself suggests one, and points to "the young woman" who is about to give birth and will call the name of the child "Immanuel". This child will live in the critical period of Assyria's siege of Judah.

Now Christian commentators, at least those who always read signs in the Hebrew Bible for antecedents indicated in the New Testament, have made much of the phrase "behold the young woman shall conceive and bear a son". The Hebrew for "young woman" is here *almah*, which they translated "virgin", implying that it refers to Mary the virgin. But, in the first place, such a translation is unwarranted. In addition, the historical background of the passage with its contemporary relevance makes the Christian theological exegesis bizarre. Suffice to say, that modern Christian scholars have discarded their strange interpretation.

Who then was the young woman? We really don't know; nor is it terribly important. It is reasonable to suggest that Isaiah, addressing himself to a crowd, pointed to a young woman to emphasise a lesson in a dramatic way. Several prophets used visual aids to illustrate their message. As we saw, Isaiah used the names of his own children for the same purpose. Involving the name "Immanuel", meaning God is with us, fitted in with Isaiah's emphasis.

15. The young man will reach maturity after the invasion of the land when the people will survive on wild honey and the natural produce of ownerless goats.

16. An extension of the previous verse in which the destruction of Syria and Israel are explicitly stated.

17. Then Assyria will turn its attention to the southern kingdom of Judah and lay siege to it.

From the day that Ephraim departed from Judah The rebellion of the ten tribes of the north, after the death of King Solomon to form the separate kingdom of Israel. That was the most disastrous event in the history of the monarchy.

18–20. Judah will be invaded. Egypt and Assyria will fight each other in the buffer state of Judah.

The prophet uses insect metaphors to represent the two powers. Egypt is the fly – associated with the fly infested waters of the Nile, and Assyria is the bee. In both cases the metaphor is expressive of the swiftness of the enemy.

18. *The Lord shall hiss* The prophet emphasises that God uses these nations for His purpose. They act as agents of His design.

20. The metaphor is changed. Assyria is the destructive razor living "beyond the River" Euphrates. Cutting off the beard means to deal ignominiously with Judah, since the beard was a mark of manly pride and dignity.

21–25. The economic situation after the invasion. There will be no agricultural activity, and the field will be left forsaken and filled with thorns. The only means of survival will be from the milk and curds of a few flock.

23. *A thousand vines at a thousand silverlings* Very choice tree plantations will be overrun by wild growth.

24. *With arrows and with bow shall one come* To defend oneself against highway men and wild beasts.

25. *For the sending forth of oxen . . . sheep* The forsaken and neglected land will become the natural place for wild and unatended animals.

* * *

FAMOUS AND NOTEWORTHY QUOTATIONS TO COMMIT TO MEMORY

4.

הִשָּׁמֵר וְהַשְׁקֵט אַל תִּירָא וּלְבָבְךָ אַל יֵרַךְ

Keep calm, and be quiet; fear not, neither let thy heart be faint

This was Isaiah's encouragement to King Ahaz. It is a beautiful and strong expression of confidence.

9.

אִם לֹא תַאֲמִינוּ כִּי לֹא תֵאָמֵנוּ

If ye will not have faith, surely ye shall not be established

Faith is the most powerful force in the life of a man. Without it, he can achieve very little; but with it he can achieve magnificently. For the religionist, the quality of faith is real only when it is faith in God. This in turn accompanies the individual only when he knows that his cause is just. The prophet applies the lesson here to the national situation since the power of faith on the part of the nation as a whole is always a determining factor in its affairs.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Torah: A Modern Commentary

by W. Gunther Plaut

Reviewed by Abraham Ruderman

Why another commentary on the Torah? Whereas most commentaries offer piecemeal interpretations of the text, in this commentary the Torah is treated as a unified whole, with emphasis on the way it made its impact on history. Furthermore, while ancient assessments are included for their historical interest, the Torah is regarded as a living textbook for the Jew, fully relevant in understanding the moral problems of every age.

A distinction is made between that which is legend, law, ethics and history. It shies away from a literal interpretation of the text, such as: the creation of woman from Adam's rib or a speaking serpent. Even the ancient Sages who believed in the divine authorship of the Torah failed to take the text literally. They looked behind the text for hidden meaning and invariably disagreed on the meaning of a text. This is the approach of this Commentary.

The Commentary is divided into three parts:

1. The Hebrew text is known as the Masoretic version (from Massorah or textual tradition). It was produced in Tiberias in the 10th century C.E. The English translation is that of the recently translated version of the Jewish Publication Society, a translation distinguished for its scholarly and linguistic merit. This translation incorporates many concepts emerging from new discoveries of language usage and archeological discovery.

2. The second part consists of textual notes and is arranged by verse and number. It provides the plain meaning of the text (פשט) and includes explanation of terms, names and notations in linguistic difficulties.

3. The third part consists of brief essays following each unit which explain the intent of the Torah and its relevance for modern man. Frequently alternative explanations are provided because the Torah often offers parallel ideas.

Each of the Five Books of the Torah is introduced by a chapter by Professor William W. Hallo of Yale University, an eminent authority on Near Eastern literature. With his vast knowledge of Near Eastern literature, Professor Hallo sheds much light on ancient myth and legend which have parallels in the Torah. While the traditionalist is apt to regard these parallels as superfluous, to the liberal they indicate that the Torah was not written in a vacuum and serves to exalt the Torah version from a religious and ethical view. The liberal approaches

in most cases mesh with the traditional interpretation. The author recognizes that the specific events of Israel's history find little validation in extra-Biblical sources and accordingly must be considered unique. For example, the account of their own enslavement in Egypt, the reference to the fleshpots of Egypt, the land of milk and honey and the collective entry of the Israelites into a social contract reveal their uniqueness and testify to their authenticity. No other people based so much of its humanitarian legislation on their memory of their Egyptian slavery, providing Israel with their distinctive concept of social justice.

An exciting feature of this Commentary is a section called "Gleanings" which includes selective expositions of the text quoted from the Midrash, early and late commentaries and modern Biblical scholars. For example: Commenting on Joseph's sojourn in Egypt, the Midrash suggests that the secret of Jewish survival is due to the following: the practice of charity, the avoidance of slander, the retention of the Hebrew language and the preservation of traditional names.

A delightful section called "Literary Notes" is included after groups of two or three chapters. Here is an example: Why is Moses considered worthy of receiving God's call? Moses is filled with a passion for justice even though he neglects caution. He struck the Egyptian who beat the Israelite and became an exile from his country. At the well in Midian, Moses heard the cry of the outraged and proceeded to the rescue. He made no distinction between Jew and Gentile. His concern was between right and wrong. That is why he was worthy of receiving God's call.

THE TORAH, edited by Gunther Plaut, is divided into the traditional portions of the week by which Jews from time immemorial dated the week of the year. At the end of each of the Five Books, one finds the traditional Haftarah, the reading from the prophets, together with appropriate optional readings.

Here is a Commentary which fills the need of any Jew or non-Jew, with open mind and a searching heart, who is accustomed to ask questions about the host of subjects recorded in the Torah.

REFLECTIONS OF READERS

WILLIAM BLAKE AND BIBLICAL IMAGERY

By RAPHAEL LEVY

It is well known that one of the main literary sources of imagery in English poetry is the Bible. In this note I should like to indicate how William Blake (1757–1827) combines most effectively several biblical and original images in his poem "Mock on, mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau" to criticize some aspects of eighteenth century thought. First let us look at the poem itself:

> Mock on, Mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau:
> Mock on, Mock on; 'tis all in vain!
> You throw the sand against the wind,
> And the wind blows it back again.
>
> And every sand becomes a Gem
> Reflected in the beams divine;
> Blown back they blind the mocking Eye,
> But still in Israel's paths they shine.
>
> The Atoms of Democritus
> And Newton's Particles of light
> Are sands upon the Red sea shore,
> Where Israel's tends do shine so bright.

The sand is an original and most accurate image for the atomistic view of mankind and human relations fostered by certain elements in the enlightenment outlook represented by Voltaire and Rousseau, Newton and Democritus... What Blake perceived was that atomism in the moral and social sphere may be succinctly summarized as the view that the valid answer to the question "Am I

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my brother's keeper?" is "no." Blake indicated more specifically some of the effects of this outlook in his great poem "london" where he writes:

> How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
> Every black'ning Church appalls;
> And the hapless Soldier's sigh
> Runs in blood down Palace walls.

Even the Church, which set itself up as the guardian of orphans, sent them to be chimney-sweepers where they were frequently asphyxiated by the cinders, and the palace feels no concern for the hapless soldier.

The wind, on the other hand, is the wind of Divine inspiration frequently invoked by the prophets, and in this poem symbolizes Divine inspiration or more generally the biblical conception of man as created in the image of God, but equally the intrinsic relatedness and mutual responsibility of human beings as the wind unites the entities in its flow. "You throw the sand against the wind / And the wind blows it back again" is a highly effective way of asserting through images that the biblical conception of man will overcome the atomistic notions of the philosophers.

The second stanza introduces the biblical image of the 'beams divine' which went before Israel "in a pillar of fire by night to give them light" (Exodus 13:21) or shone brightly at Mount Sinai when "the Lord had come down upon it in fire" (Exodus 19:18). The divine light can transform the sand into Gems.

The third stanza illuminates the transformation; "the Atoms of Democritus / And Newton's particles of light" become symbols of redemption since they are "as sands upon the Red Sea shore" and serve equally to recall the Divine promise.

> *I will bestow My blessing upon you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands on the seashore; and your descendants shall seize the gates of their foes.*
>
> Genesis 22:17

We thus see how in the small compass of this brief lyric Blake intertwined several biblical and original images to produce a concentrated masterpiece which incisively and keenly judged some intellectual trends of his century.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

I have to find fault with Rabbi Chaim Pearl's translation and comment in your Spring 1983 issue of the First Chapter of the Book of Isaiah. His designation of "mishpat" as "justice" without modifiers, especially in verse 27, leaves me in a quandary. To Rabbi Chaim Pearl this verse is "a concise and beautifully worded ideal" (p. 168).

As a former administrator of a part of the New York City court system and as a practising attorney, I would not know how to formulate an order or decree to carry out, to effectuate ציון במשפט תפדה. What specific measures are we to take to accomplish this ideal?

Here we come upon the problem of translation. Oftimes there is no direct equivalent from one language to another of a particular term; for example in the recently exhibited in Israel motion picture, "An Officer and A Gentleman", there was no equivalent in the advertising for "gentleman". Also, in one language the favored equivalent might have overtones not present in the other. We encounter these difficulties when translating "mishpat" as "justice".

The term "justice" has many meanings: merited reward or punishment; the establishment of rights according to the rules of law and equity; the principle of rectitude in the dealings of men with each other; the maker of decisions in accordance with the foregoing.

"Justice" was one of the cardinal virtues of the Greeks, and later of the Romans; it was the personification of social and moral duty. Today under this term we include fair and equitable arrangements and treatment between strata of society, between rulers and the governed, between groups, races, religions and nationalities.

If we are going to translate "mishpat" as "justice", which of these meanings of "justice" was Isaiah referring to? Surely not the "social justice" which Rabbi Chaim Pearl claims in his comment on verse 17.

The ordinary meaning of "mishpat" is the body of laws, whether of legislative origin or developed through custom or precedent, to be used in arriving at a decision or judgement, as well as the decision or judgement arrived at. "Mishpat" also refers to the administration of the law, i.e., the judicial system, the mechanisms for invoking the judicial process.

Isaiah told us what he meant when he used the term "mishpat". He was not referring to some broad abstraction; he referred to a specific condition in Israel at the time in need of change.

Twice Isaiah used the combination "mishpat tzedek", in Chap. 1:21, and in Chap. 58:2. This juxtaposition occurred earlier in Deuteronomy 16:18, in which the meaning is unmistakable: correct or proper decision or administration of law. Indeed, Isaiah told us in verse 23 of

Chap. I that public life was corrupt, "rulers were confederates of thieves, everyone loves a bribe, itches for a gift, they do not give the orphan his right, and the widow's cause never comes before them". (New England Bible, 1970 Ed.) In view of the solicitous attitude of the Pentateuch towards the widow and the orphan (Deuteronomy 10:18, 14:28–9, 24:17, 19, Exodus 22:21), this last was a heinous offense.

In verse 21 Isaiah seemed to be saying that the city that once rendered clean and correct justice now adjudicated as if by a whore and by men who destroyed the law (were guilty of miscarriage of the administration of the law).

Isaiah wanted these conditions eradicated. In verse 17 he stated: *Cease to do evil, and learn to do right, pursue justice, champion the oppressed* (the wronged) (or correct the violent man), *give the orphan his rights, plead the widow's cause* (New England Bible, 1970 ed.). He was not seeking in verse 27 the establishment of some abstraction or philosophic ideal as Rabbi Chaim Pearl implies.

Hertz in his footnote to verse 27 implies that there will be new judges; and in regard to verse 26 Hertz suggests that there will be judges like those that were in the time of King David: judges who are capable of the true and correct administration of the law, impartial, who do not take gifts, fees or bribes, who are open and available to all, protective of the widow and of the orphan.

The Rabbis have since instituted measures for the protection of the widow and of the orphan (in regard to whom they have created the office of אפיטרופוס for the protection of the orphan's property).

Shalom,
Nathan Grossman
Brooklyn, N.Y.

FOURTH TRIENNIAL INDEX

Fall 1981 through Summer 1984

Arranged by Chaim Abramowitz

This triennial index lists the articles published in "Dor le–Dor" in Volumes X, XI, and XII. The first triennial index appeared in Vol. III, No.4; the second in Vol. VI, No.4; and the third in Vol. IX, No.4.

INDEX ACCORDING TO THEME AND TITLE

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* Only in the Diaspora

* רק בחוץ לארץ

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דף יומי

We add here the daily Talmud page followed by the Jewish Community

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3. *Old Testament Abstracts* The Catholic University of America, Washington DC 20064

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החברה היהודית העולמית לתנ"ך 02-245751

Dor le Dor is published in Jerusalem for the benefit of the English speaking public and is directed to knowledgeable Jews who wish to further their understanding of Jewish Scripture.