

David S. Shapiro

Rabbi Shapiro, a member of *TRADITION's* Editorial Board and a renowned scholar and author, is Rabbi of Congregation Anshe Sfard in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY

I.

On the fifth day of creation God commanded the waters to teem with swarms of living creatures. On this day the fish and birds were created. For the first time the Creator conferred a blessing on His handiwork.*

God blessed them, saying: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply in the earth."¹

In this passage, the Hebrew root for blessing—*barekh*—a keyword in Genesis, appears for the first time.

On the sixth day the earth was commanded to bring forth living creatures, cattle, creeping things and beasts of the earth. God saw that what He had made was good. He therefore decided to create man in His own image. Man was to have dominion over all that moves in the seas, in the air, and on the face of the earth. The blessing which the Creator had pronounced on the creatures of the fifth day was now repeated in behalf of the last and choicest of His creatures—Man. God created man male and female.

God blessed them, and said unto them: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."²

*The English texts cited are taken from the new JPS Torah, the old JPS Bible, the Soncino Talmud and Zohar, with minor alterations added.

Be Fruitful and Multiply

The Creator Who endowed all forms of life with the capacity to grow and propagate, who made "fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it"³ did not bless the vegetable kingdom. This denial did not result from the inability of the earth or vegetation to receive the Divine blessing. If the earth can be cursed⁴ it can also be blessed. Moreover, it is clearly stated in Deuteronomy:⁵

Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us.

The earth can be blessed as well as the fruit of the earth:

Blessed shall be . . . the fruit of your land;⁶
He will bless your bread and your water.⁷

Why was there no blessing extended? Obviously a blessing directed toward the inanimate world would be meaningless, since it has no *raison d'être* for independent existence. Once animate life emerged, the Divine blessing could become operative and meaningful. Vegetation was to serve as food for both man and beast. The blessings bestowed upon the latter would ultimately redound to plant life which was to function as the means of sustenance for all living creatures.⁸

According to Genesis the Divine blessing was accorded to the fish and birds and finally to man. Why were the higher animals not blessed? This question has been variously answered in the ancient and medieval sources.⁹ However, it appears to this writer that the blessing is all-inclusive and comprises all gradations of life, beginning with the fish and culminating in the highest form of created being—Man. The Scriptures cite only the two extremities of animate life, implying thereby that all intermediate levels were included.

There may also be another reason. The blessing of endless propagation was conferred on the fish and the fowl who live in areas uninhabitable by men. Their fruitfulness cannot conflict with the welfare of human beings. However, the prolificacy of animals who occupy the dry land would make clashes with the human race inevitable. The blessing of fruitfulness was there-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

fore extended only to man and not to the other creatures who dwell on the dry land.¹⁰

After the Flood, once more, the Bible tells us, the blessing of fruitfulness was conferred upon man. This time the animals were not included in the blessing. They were, however, included in the covenant which protected them from extinction.¹¹ The blessing of fertility was later extended to Abraham and Sarah¹² as well as to Ishmael.¹³ Through Isaac, Abraham was to be blessed with seed as numerous as the stars on high and as the sand by the seashore.¹⁴ This blessing was likewise repeated to Jacob¹⁵ in the early days of his life as well as later.¹⁶ The blessing that out of their seed a great nation would arise, great in spirit as well as in numbers, was invoked upon both Abraham¹⁷ and Jacob.¹⁸ The blessings that Biblical personalities confer on their children or grandchildren is chiefly that of fertility. Thus the members of Rebekah's family, before sending her off with Eliezer to be given in betrothal to Isaac, bless her: "Our sister, may you grow into thousands of myriads."¹⁹ This is the benediction wherewith Isaac blessed Jacob,²⁰ and Jacob his grandchildren, Menasseh and Ephraim.²¹ The blessing given to Joseph²² is also of the same character.

Like the blessing that was granted to man originally: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth," so the children of Israel received the Divine blessing when they came down to Egypt: "The children of Israel were fruitful and prolific, they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them."²³ The fulfillment of the Divine promise aroused the envy of the Egyptians who sought ways and means of reducing the numbers of the children of Israel. When God became angry with the children of Israel and was determined to destroy them, He promised Moses that He would make of him a great nation. Moses appeals to God in the name of the Patriarchs and the oath made to them to multiply their seed like the stars above.²⁴ Balaam in his oracles calls attention to the fulfillment of the promise to the forefathers.²⁵ In his last address to Israel, Moses refers to the fulfillment of God's blessing which has multiplied Israel like the stars of the heaven, to which the lawgiver adds his own benediction:

Be Fruitful and Multiply

May the Lord, the God of your fathers, increase your numbers a thousandfold, and bless you as He promised you.²⁶

The reward of obedience to the commandments of God would be prevention of miscarriage.²⁷ God will multiply them so that there will be no barren one among them, neither male nor female.²⁸ The reverse will happen if God's commandments will be disregarded.

You shall be left few in number, after having been as numerous as the stars in heaven.²⁹

The great blessing for the human species is thus fertility. Not because more hands were needed to operate farms or to engage in defense. That the blessing of fertility included all animate beings (particularly those whose usefulness to man is less obvious) precludes its having a utilitarian purpose. The first chapter of Genesis does not conceive of the blessing of fertility as associated with labor, aggression or defense. In this chapter God has designated the grass and the fruit-tree to serve the need for food of both men and animals. The hard labor to which man was subjected and the need for many hands to assist him in his back-breaking work was not contemplated in the original plan of creation. Genesis pictures a pacific world in which there is no conflict between man and man or between man and other creatures. Neither does it envision internecine warfare within the animal kingdom.³⁰ The blessing of fertility seems to emanate from the great creative joy that God had in His world and its creatures. "May the glory of the Lord endure forever; let the Lord rejoice in His works."³¹ According to the Aggadah these words constituted the song of the universe when creation was completed.³² The joy of God in His work was reflected in the response of His creatures who broke forth in a universal paean. "God saw all that He had made and behold it was very good."³³ God so loved the world and above all the animate world and man that He poured forth upon them with the greatest abundance the blessing of creativity that enables every species to reproduce life according to its kind. The blessing of fertility is associated with God's vision of the world and

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

life as good, as we read in Genesis 1:21-22:

God created the mighty sea-creatures and every living thing that creeps which the waters brought forth in swarms; and all the winged birds of every kind; God saw how good this was; God blessed them saying: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth."

The vision of the goodness of life preceded the blessing and motivated it. The creation of man in God's image likewise motivates the blessing of fertility for man.³⁴

II.

God's blessing can be converted into a commandment; just as to be a blessing is a benediction as well as a commandment.³⁵ Commandments can be issued to man alone. Other creatures procreate instinctively. Man can organize and discipline his procreative activity. He can consciously limit it; he can destroy it; he can use it indiscriminately, perversely, and self-destructively. Other creatures mate seasonally. For man mating knows no limitations.

More than in any other, it seems that the universe has run riot in the area of reproduction. The teeming seas, the jungles luxuriant with an infinite variety of vegetation and endlessly spreading foliage, are evidence of a Divine blessing upon which no limits have been placed. The procreational drive in man, that area which is the least disciplined and the least amenable to control, that which seeks an outlet for itself in normal and abnormal patterns of behavior, that which has often been thought of, rightly or wrongly, as the source of man's sublime aspirations, as well as source of his degeneration, the all encompassing libido, is very likely what it is, a fierce and so uncontrollable in its demands, so expansive and so unyielding to limitations, just because it is the product not only of Divine creativity, but of a Divine blessing. In the case of man, the blessing has been hedged around by a Divine imperative.

The Biblical text reads:

Be Fruitful and Multiply

God blessed them, and God said unto them: "Be fruitful and multiply."³⁶

The subject *God* is repeated twice. The blessing extended to other creatures has but one subject: "God blessed them saying: 'Be fruitful and multiply'."³⁷ The two phrases in the case of man imply a commandment in addition to the blessing.³⁸

Likewise in the ninth chapter of Genesis, in which the blessing of God bestowed upon man after the Flood is recounted, we read:

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."³⁹

There is here also a doubling of the phrase as found in the first chapter of Genesis without the repetition of the subject God. However, in order to insure against any possibility of error, the phrase was repeated immediately after the prohibition of bloodshed:

As for you be fruitful and multiply; abound on the earth and increase on it.⁴⁰

In the light of the above, the Oral Tradition has declared procreation a religious duty, an imperative placed upon man by the Divine Law, a commandment whose purpose is to channelize a wild instinct and subject it to the conscious control of man's intelligence for the purpose of the perpetuation of the human species.

The commandment is thus formulated in the Book of the Commandments of Maimonides:⁴¹

God has commanded us to be fruitful and multiply with the intention of preserving the human species and this is what the Scriptures state: "As for you, be fruitful and multiply."

The Book of Training⁴² likewise cites procreation as a positive commandment, the first of the commandments, the first chapter of Genesis serving as his proof-text.

The problem may be raised as to what Maimonides meant

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

by the statement that the commandment to be fruitful is to be guided by intention. If literally interpreted we would be led into the difficult and endless argumentation as to whether the performance of any commandment must be accompanied by intention or not—a moot halakhic question.⁴³ Very likely the requirement of intention does not apply in the case of a commandment involving action and resulting in positive achievement.⁴⁴ Of course, one should have in mind the fulfillment of God's will, but lack of intention does not necessarily invalidate a religious act.⁴⁵ Maimonides may have meant rather to define the limits of the commandment. It is binding only insofar as it contributes to the preservation of the species in accordance with the demands of the law.⁴⁶ Once one has done his share towards this goal one is no longer obligated.

III.

Two specific Halakhic problems emerge at this juncture. Is the duty of procreation binding on women or only on men? Is it a universal obligation or does it apply only to those who received the Torah at Sinai? In other words, are women and non-Jews under obligation to marry?

The answer to the first question is given in an ancient Mishna:⁴⁷

A man is commanded concerning fruitfulness and multiplication, but not a woman; Rabbi Yochanan ben Berokah said, "Concerning both of them it is said: 'Male and female He created them, God blessed them and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it.'"⁴⁸

The Gemara immediately raises the questions: How do the Sages (who disagree with Rabbi Yochanan ben Berokah) cope with the text in Genesis which seems to imply that the commandment to be fruitful applies to male and female alike? The answer given is that the Sages hold that the duty of procreation applies to the male sex since the Biblical text is speaking of activities that require boldness and aggressiveness. Mastering the earth properly belongs to men, since it involves prowess

Be Fruitful and Multiply

and relentless expenditure of physical energy. All activities included in the text, since they are associated with mastery of the earth, thus become functions of masculinity. The opinion of the Sages is based on the attitude generally accepted in civilized societies that it is the man who seeks out the woman and not vice-versa. There is some degree of aggressiveness involved in seeking out a mate which is not in harmony with the essential or ideal character of woman.⁴⁹ The Talmud phrases it in a somewhat different manner:

Why is it written: "When a man will take a wife," and not vice-versa "When a woman will be taken by a man?" Because normally a man seeks after a wife and it is not normal for a woman to seek after a husband; whoever loses an article goes out in search for it.⁵⁰

Another reason given by the Rabbis in the Talmud is that in the case of Jacob the commandment is couched in the singular, implying that only the male is enjoined. The plural form in Genesis 1:28 and 9:1, 7, must consequently be understood as referring to the blessing as well as the commandment, the blessing for both, the command for one.⁵¹

A rationale for the exemption of women from the obligation of procreation is given by the great Gaon of this century, Rabbi Meir Simchah Ha-Kohen of Dvinsk, in his Biblical commentary.⁵² He writes:

It is not amiss to assume that the reason why women are exempt from the obligation of procreation is grounded in the reasonableness of the judgments of the Lord and His ways. The Torah did not impose upon Israel burdens too difficult for a person to bear . . . Women whose lives are jeopardized by conception and birth were not enjoined . . .

However, some of the medieval Sages maintained that, although women were not included in the specific commandment of propagation, they are nevertheless obligated by the commandment implied in Isaiah.⁵³

For thus says the Lord the Creator of the heavens, He is God, He fashioned the earth and He made it, He has established it; He did not create it to be waste, He has fashioned it so that it will be inhabited.

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

The question arises whether the passage of Isaiah is merely a paraphrase of the blessing or commandment contained in Genesis or whether it contains an additional injunction. The basis for this query is the employment in the Mishna of the quotation from Isaiah rather than the standard "Be fruitful and multiply" of Genesis.⁵⁴ A prophetic statement is generally assumed to be of secondary status in its legally binding character to a Pentateuchal injunction. The Tossafists, nevertheless, regard the passage from Isaiah "He has fashioned it so that it will be inhabited" as entailing a comprehensive imperative obligating everybody without exception. Even where the Pentateuchal commandment does not apply the Isaianic principle is operative. Consequently, according to the Tossafists, women have an obligation to participate in the fulfillment of the Divine plan for mankind so that the earth will be inhabited and not remain desolate.⁵⁵

While for the Tossafists the passage from Isaiah possesses the character of a principle, an *a priori* imperative, because of which a world exists in which the Torah and its commandments can play a central role and in which the sovereignty of the Creator will be recognized, for other sages Isaiah's words simply paraphrase Genesis. Thus Maimonides in his Code does not cite the verse from Isaiah. In his Code he rules that it is permissible for a woman to remain unmarried or even to marry a woman who is barren,⁵⁷ although she should marry to avoid suspicion of unsavory behavior.⁵⁸

Maimonides' view seems to be substantiated by the Tosephta:

A man is not permitted to live without a wife, but a woman may live without a husband; a man is not allowed to drink a root-drink for the purpose of rendering himself impotent; a woman may drink a root-drink to render herself sterile; a man may not marry a woman who is barren, old, or wombless, or one who is too young or incapable of bearing children; but a woman may marry even a eunuch; the castration of a male involves specific Biblical penalties; the sterilization of a female does not involve specific Biblical penalties.

The opinion of the Tossafists might be reconciled with the rulings of the Tosephta only if we are to assume that a woman

Be Fruitful and Multiply

may remain unmarried after she has already fulfilled her procreative obligations in accordance with the Isaianic principle. This explanation would also apply to other items included in the Tosephta.

Other passages in the Talmud seemingly confirm the Maimonidean view. A woman who demanded a divorce from her husband on the grounds of childlessness was granted her request only when she supported her claim with the need for a child to sustain her in old age. She is under no obligation to bear children and the desire to fulfill the first commandment may not serve as grounds for divorce. Judith, the wife of Rabbi Chiyya, suffered greatly in child-birth and drank a potion to sterilize her because her husband told her that a woman is not bound by the commandment pertaining to fruitfulness.⁵⁹

The point-of-view of the Tossafists, in respect to the above-cited cases, may be understood in the light of the following. Specific commandments directed at individuals are compulsory. It is the duty of the courts to see that they are enforced.⁶⁰ The statement of Isaiah is not apodictic. It is not a direct commandment, but a statement of purpose. A statement of purpose imposes a moral obligation but is not legally enforceable. Moreover, a specific commandment may not be modified except where explicit conditions are stipulated for such modifications. The fulfillment of a general directive is placed in the hands of the Sages who determine the prerequisites for its implementation.⁶¹ Thus women would be exempt from bearing children whenever their health was thwarted, even if their lives were not endangered. Perhaps Maimonides' understanding of the Isaianic principle and that of the Tossafists are not too far removed.

An additional rationale for the exemption of women from the commandment to be fruitful has been suggested by Rabbi Meir Simchah Ha-Kohen.⁶² "It is possible," he states, "that the reason why the Torah has exempted women from the obligation of procreation is that the natural desire for marriage is stronger in women than in men. According to the Talmud a woman prefers, under all circumstances, to marry rather than remain single, a disposition nature has implanted in woman that is

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

stronger than any legal injunction. The observance of this commandment may lead to the possibility that a man who has no children might marry another woman who can bear him children. The Torah does not in any way contravene nature. To compel a woman who cannot have children with her husband to leave him and seek another man is contrary to nature. She cannot be required to leave her husband whom she loves and accept another man whom she does not love. Only in the case of a man who may marry a wife in addition to his present one may this rule apply."⁶³

Relative to our earlier remarks that the commandment of propagation was intended (in addition to its obvious purpose) as a means of subduing and channelizing man's most powerful impulse, it might be said that the need to conquer this drive is not as necessary in the case of women as it is in the case of men. Woman has a stronger urge for domesticity than man, but she is not dominated by the sexual impulse to the same extent as he is. She is more chaste and more reserved for psychological as well as biological reasons.⁶⁴

IV.

A view has been expressed that even if there is no obligation on the part of woman to bear children, she is nevertheless, unavoidably involved in the *mitzvah*. In this respect marriage is a *mitzvah* for woman as well as for man.⁶⁵ Rabbi Nissim ben Reuben⁶⁶ as well as Meiri adopt this opinion.⁶⁷ In citing the ruling on the basis of which the latter sages draw their conclusions, Maimonides likewise employs the term *mitzvah*:

It is the duty of a woman to become betrothed by herself rather than by proxy.^{68a}

It seems that Maimonides understands the *mitzvah* in this context in the same manner as Rabbi Nissim and Meiri. In the light of our comments above on the Isaianic principle, the opinion of these sages on this matter may be more readily understood.^{68b}

Another perspective on this problem is suggested by a pass-

Be Fruitful and Multiply

age in the Book of Jeremiah.^{68c}

Take wives and give birth to sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons, and your daughters give to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters and multiply there and do not decrease.

From Jeremiah's message of encouragement to the exiles in Babylonia the Talmud derives the ruling that it is the duty of a father to facilitate the marriage of his daughter by providing her trousseau. This duty is considered Biblically binding.^{68d} An early Rabbinic work, *Sheeltoth*, cites this passage as one of the proof-texts making marriage and procreation a religious obligation.⁶⁹ Maimonides, however, in line with his view that there is no commandment of procreation for woman, regards Jeremiah's injunction that the father make provisions for his daughter to enable her to marry not as Biblical law, but as a rabbinic enactment.⁷⁰ It is possible that Maimonides also related the injunction of Jeremiah, in addition to the above considerations, to another rule expounded in the Talmud Yebamot 62b. In Maimonides' paraphrase: "The sages have instructed a person to marry off his sons and daughters as soon as they mature, for, if allowed to remain unmarried, they will fall into a life of sinfulness or preoccupation with sinful fancies."⁷¹ The duty of the father to marry off his daughters would not necessarily, on this basis, be included in the category of the laws of procreation, but would rather be regarded as a derivative of the Biblical law: "Do not profane your daughter to lead her into harlotry, so that the land will not fall into harlotry and the land filled with lewdness."⁷²

It appears that the Palestinian Talmud⁷³ is inclined to accept the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan ben Berokah that would make propagation a religious obligation for women. The Babylonian Talmud favors the reverse view. The *Poskim* (Codes) for whom the Babylonian Talmud generally carries greater weight gave preference to the opinion of the latter. What the ideological differences were that gave rise to the divergent views of the Palestinians and Babylonians is not clearly discernible.

The opinion that though a woman is not commanded, yet for her participation in the fulfillment of procreation consti-

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

tutes a religious virtue is expressed in the Midrash *Tanchuma*⁷⁴ and the medieval *Lekach Tob*.⁷⁵ In these texts it is stated that man is more obligated than woman. It may be that what is implied is that in the case of woman the fulfillment of the religious obligation is altogether voluntary and cannot be enforced by religious courts.

V.

The prevailing halakhic view that woman is not obligated to fulfill the commandment to "be fruitful and multiply," at least not in the same sense or to the same extent as man, is, as pointed out, motivated by a rationale which is apparently paradoxical but not actually contradictory. Woman may not be compelled to build a family because essentially she is not the one to seek out, she does not possess the aggressiveness necessary to initiate those processes that lead to the establishment of a family. On the other hand, the lack of aggressiveness makes a commandment superfluous since by nature woman is endowed with those subtleties and subconscious stratagems that enable her to gain the end nature intended for her. These stratagems cannot be activated by a fiat. Again, woman's very life is at stake in the process of birth. She cannot be ordered to place herself in so hazardous a position, although she is, of course, not forbidden to seek marriage and children, since these activities are part of the natural order. It would also be unnatural to compel her to seek another husband if her first was infertile. Nor is the commandment leading to marriage necessary in her case as an instrument of subduing or tempering a tempestuous passion. The prevailing halakhic rulings appear to be grounded in profound insights into the nature and behavior of the sexes under normal circumstances.

However, there may be an even more profound significance to the exclusion of woman from the formal halakhic obligation of procreation, whether as a motive or a by-product. A quotation from a recent publication on the revolt of women in modern Islam may shed some light on this subject:

Be Fruitful and Multiply

Motherhood was the main role conferred on woman by tradition, which considered them lacking in physical and mental qualifications, especially for the two highest roles in Islam, warrior and religious man. Self-preservation of the society also put a premium on having children . . . The childless wife is an object of contempt, often said to be cursed by God, and she is the common victim of divorce. One Cairo working mother summed up the attitude by saying that "a woman is not considered a woman unless she has had children."⁷⁶

The release of the Jewish woman from the commandment of procreation has made possible the evolvement of a concept of woman as a personality and not as a child-bearing machine. Certainly woman is involved in the commandment to preserve the race, but it is her privilege to determine whether she becomes involved or not. The rabbinic opinion on this subject and its formulation in Jewish law may have been the first stage in the full emancipation of woman.

The freedom of woman from the obligation to propagate may be viewed also from another vantage point. Woman has from time immemorial been regarded in all ancient religions as the fertility symbol *par excellence*. The orgiastic rites and the institution of sacred prostitution in the worship of the goddesses of fertility, whether as Astarte, Aphrodite or Venus, were accepted as an integral part of man's religion. The liberation of woman from the obligation of procreation would tend to disassociate her from serving as a symbol of fertility. The props would thus be removed from under one of the oldest pagan rites known to man.

That the exception of women from the commandment of procreation is not contrary to the literal meaning of the Biblical text is confirmed by Genesis 2:24:

Therefore shall a man forsake his father and mother and cling to his wife.

It is man who abandons his parents' home to seek a wife and not vice versa. The comment of Philo on this passage is in harmony with our remarks above:

And most excellent and careful was it not to say that the woman

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

should leave her parents and be joined to her husband—for the audacity of man is bolder than the nature of woman . . . but that for the sake of woman man is to do this. ⁷⁷

VI.

Is the commandment of procreation applicable to non-Jews as well as Jews? On the surface it would seem obvious that the obligation devolves upon them as well, for was this commandment not given to Adam and Noah, the fathers of the human race? Thus one of the great Codifiers of early times, Rab Achai of Shabcha⁷⁸ explicitly states that the commandment is of universal scope. However, most of the Codifiers have maintained that a non-Jew may remain celibate and not thereby evade the fulfillment of the Divine commandment.

The ground for the exclusion of Gentiles from this commandment is to be found in the Talmud⁷⁹ which states:

Every commandment that was given to the sons of Noah and repeated at Sinai applies to both Israel and the sons of Noah; a commandment that was given to the sons of Noah and was not repeated at Sinai is intended only for the sons of Israel and not for the sons of Noah.

This declaration implies that the Sinaitic revelation is the source of the commandments that bind both Israel and the nations. The Noahide revelation as such is no longer a living tradition among the nations of the world,⁸⁰ and is known only through the Torah given at Sinai. Hence the acceptance of the Noahide commandments must be based upon the Written and Oral Law which alone have preserved the record of the Noahide revelation. One who observes these commandments because of their reasonableness is regarded as a wise man, but not as a servant of God.⁸¹ Whatever was repeated at Sinai from the original revelation was directed both to Israel and humanity at large. What was not repeated was removed from its former area of application and limited to Israel.⁸² The commandment of procreation was not repeated at Sinai. Therefore, it no longer applies to the Noahides.⁸³

Be Fruitful and Multiply

The question, of course, arises as to the reason for the exclusion of Noahides from the obligation to propagate. Perhaps the fact that the sexual instinct had been used perversely by the Generation of the Flood and had been elevated to a Divine status⁸⁴ was responsible for its removal from the sphere of Divine commandments. The preservation of the species would be assured by the very dint of a most powerful human drive.⁸⁵ It may, moreover, be possible that once the earth was replenished with human beings, the commandment was removed from the Noahides and transferred to the children of Israel who were few in number⁸⁶ to ensure their physical survival as well as the continuance of their covenant with God unto future generations.

The Noahides were regarded by the Talmud as totally oblivious of their original covenant with God, and are therefore no longer considered to be bound by it. However, they are still bound by the law of reason which includes practically all the Seven Noahide Commandments.⁸⁷ No law of reason renders procreation an obligation towards God anymore than eating or drinking. The Noahide who reaffirms his bond with God by accepting his Commandments as obligations imposed by God on all mankind at Sinai may also once again include procreation within the scope of his commandments.⁸⁸ Again, the Isaianic principle that God has not created the world to be desolate but to be inhabited would include all human beings within its scope.

VII.

How large a family need one raise to fulfill his obligation?
The answer is contained in the Mishnah:

A man shall not abstain from the performance of the duty of the propagation of the race unless he already has children. As to the number, Beth Shammai ruled two males, and Beth Hillel ruled: male and a female, for it is stated in Scripture, male and female created He them.⁸⁹

According to the Talmud, for Beth Shammai, Moses, who had two sons before he separated from his wife,⁹⁰ provides the example for the sufficiency of two sons. Another version of the

TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

dispute between the two schools is cited by the Talmud in the name of Rabbi Nathan. According to this version the school of Shammai requires a minimum of two sons and two daughters whereas the Beth Hillel requires a son and a daughter. The case of Cain and Abel and their twins provide Beth Shammai with evidence for their view. A third maintains that for the school of Shammai the minimum is a son and daughter and for the school of Hillel a daughter or a son. The opinion of the Hillelites is based, according to Raba, on the grounds that, since the reason for the commandment to propagate is to assure the survival of mankind, the birth of one child is to be considered as helping to fulfill that goal.⁹¹

Beth Shammai's view, the fulfillment of the commandment of procreation in the masculine gender (regarded as the authentic tradition by the Mishnah) reflects the more aggressive, the more militant outlook as well as an intense zeal for the centrality of the study of Torah in Israel. The strength of the Jewish people and its survival depend on its men who study Torah, who defend the borders of its homeland, who till its soil and who carry the word of God to the farthest ends of the earth. The school of Hillel are more tolerant and universalistic in their religious orientation. They look to Creation as the source for their opinion. The Shammaites take Moses, the builder of the Jewish people as their paragon, especially, since according to tradition he was close to their school's emphasis on the quality of justice.⁹² The prevailing halakhic opinion is, of course, that of Beth Hillel.⁹³

VIII.

The significance of the commandment of procreation is brought out in a number of Aggadic passages.

Rabbi Eliezer stated, "He who does not engage in the propagation of the race is as though he sheds blood; for it is said, 'Who so sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed,' and this is immediately followed by the text, 'And you, be ye fruitful and multiply.'" Rabbi Jacob said: "As though he has diminished the Divine Image; since it is said, 'For in the image of God made He man,' and this is

Be Fruitful and Multiply

immediately followed by, 'And you be fruitful.'” Ben Azzai said: “As though he sheds blood and diminishes the Divine Image; since it is said, ‘And you be ye fruitful and multiply.’”

In another passage we read:

Our Rabbis taught: “And when it rested, he said: ‘Return O Lord unto the ten thousands and thousands of Israel,’” teaches that the Divine Presence does not rest on less than two thousand and two myriads of Israelites. Should the number of Israelites happen to be two thousand and two myriads less one, and any particular person has not engaged in the propagation of the race, does he not thereby cause the Divine Presence to depart from Israel!” Abba Hanan said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer: “He deserves the penalty of death; for it is said, ‘And they had no children,’ but if they had children they would not have died.” Others say: “He causes the Divine Presence to depart from Israel; for it is said, ‘To be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee’; where there exists ‘seed after thee’ the Divine Presence dwells among them; but where no ‘seed after thee’ exists, among whom should it dwell! Among the trees or among the stones?”⁹⁴

The duty of procreation is in these Aggadic passages viewed from three perspectives. Firstly, human life is envisaged as a value *per se*. Shedding man’s blood is the most heinous of crimes. Failure to perpetuate human life (to the extent that one has the obligation to do so) is tantamount to a diminution of human life, and hence is morally equivalent to murder. Secondly, man is the Image of God on earth. By failing to reproduce himself he deprives the world of the quality of Divinity, which reflects itself in each new life. Thirdly, a life dedicated to the service of God is specially precious because it helps to bring about the fulfillment of the goal of creation, God’s dwelling among the children of men.⁹⁵

Another motivation for procreation is contained in the statement of Rabbi Assi:

The Son of David will not come before all the souls in their storehouse will have been disposed of.⁹⁶

According to this opinion procreation is a process whereby homes are being prepared for souls upon the earth and the ful-

