ORTHODOX JUDAISM IN A WORLD OF REVOLUTIONARY TRANSFORMATIONS

I.

Looking at the world today, what impresses one most at a first glance is the emergence of vast power blocks, like the U.S.A., the Soviet Union, Red China. States and countries like the British Empire, France, Germany, which only a few decades ago were mighty and influential on a universal scale, have been reduced to second and third rate powers. Today, Jews may well ask themselves the question: What is the significance of Israel, the people and the State, on the world scene in the context of present-day world history? History has become the battleground of giants. To what does a small people like the Jews amount in a world dominated by a few colossi of overwhelming might and power?

The question is induced, in particular, by the rise of the State of Israel. Through the ages Jews longed for it and hoped for it. When the State finally came, it was the culminating triumph of Jewish survival through the darkest experiences of human history. Yet, one cannot help pondering the question: Coming, as it did, in the atomic age, did not—perhaps—the State of Israel...
come too late? What a difference it would have made to millions of Jews, who perished in pogroms and concentration camps, what a difference to the entire position of the Jewish people in the world today, had the establishment of the State of Israel come one or two centuries sooner! In the earlier days, the Jewish Problem held a major position in the Zionist analysis of the Jewish situation. The problem was seen as the homelessness of the Jewish people. It was believed that national sovereignty in the ancient homeland was the solution. However, in this age of the colossi, how much security is to be derived even from national sovereignty in a small state like Israel? We realize today that a state of this kind, notwithstanding its remarkable achievements and the industry and bravery of its citizens, may not be more secure than the individual Jew was during his long exile. In the world of the giants a state, too, may be “homeless.”

The question as to the significance of the Jew in the context of present-day world history may of course be raised even more poignantly as regards the position of the Jew in the rest of the world. From the ancient lands of Jewish history on the European continent, Jews have been eliminated as a source of any kind of influence. In Soviet Russia Jewry and Judaism lie prostrate under the heavy yoke of communism. Only on the American continent, and chiefly in the U.S.A., does a large Jewish center exist, whose members, enjoying the freedom of citizenship in a great democracy, take their place—and may make their mark—in every field of human endeavor. But notwithstanding the Jewish position on the American continent, it is extremely doubtful that any significant role may be ascribed to the Jew in the broader context of present-day human history. As the result of the radical transformations that have taken place the world over in our generation, all the major issues of human existence, issues of politics, economics, technology, human welfare and progress have become more and more universally comprehensive. They are dominated by the universal powers: the power blocks of the atomic giants and the explosive energy of the vast population blocks like China, the African and South American continents.

The world is being organized in global terms. What is the significance of the Jew in this global phase of human history? About
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a generation ago, the German historian Mommsen called the Jews and Judaism the ferment of history. Has the Jew become now a *quantité négligeable* on the world scene?

II.

So it would seem—at first glance, if we evaluate the world transformation in quantitative terms only. However, looked at from the angle of a qualitative interpretation, there is yet another view which presents itself to the observer. The emergence of the colossi also illustrates the futility of power as an arbiter of history. In our days it has become a commonplace to state that man, having amassed so much power that he may destroy life and civilization on a global scale, must learn to renounce power as a means of ordering or controlling relations between people and nations. It is true that at the moment the potential of sheer physical force is used as a deterrent and peace is preserved by a balance of terror. Quite clearly, however, such a situation cannot continue indefinitely. The fear of the colossi of each other is a very shaky foundation for a lasting peace. If that is all on which man may base his hope for the future, there is little ground for optimism. In such a situation, the delicate balance of terror is bound to break down sooner or later and bring in its wake the dreaded universal conflagration. The inescapable demand of the historic moment requires the honest renunciation of material force in the dealings of the nations and power blocks with each other. But the honest and wholehearted renunciation of the use of power and might implies the genuine embracing of ethical and moral principles for the ordering of the life of all mankind. This is no longer mere sermonizing; it has become the "iron law" in this new phase of global history. Be decent or perish!

From the point of view of a philosophy of history the present phase offers an intriguing phenomenon. Man has known for a long time that the use of force against man was evil. But how was force to be defeated in history? By the use of greater force. Thus, mankind was caught in a vicious circle. Every defeat of power led to the rise of more power. And more power only intensified the power competition between the nations. In our days
history teaches us the solution to the problem: force is being weeded out from history by its own surfeit. Whereas in former times what nations could do with power induced them to use it, today the very immensity of power gathered in human hands compels man to surrender its use against his fellow-man. Power has overreached itself and, thus, it has defeated itself. Philosophically speaking, this is a rather amusing phase in the dialectics of history. For some time now Marxists have been declaring about the "iron laws" of dialectical materialism. One phase follows upon another with inescapable necessity—slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and—the ultimate culmination—communism. Each phase carries within itself the seeds of its own disintegration; each phase perishes of its own surfeit. In a sense, this was a rejection of the Jewish concept, as formulated by the prophet: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." Dialectical materialism denied any influence to the spirit, to ideas and ideals. Today, the dialectics of history is carrying mankind into a phase in which, "but by My Spirit," is no longer an ideal, but practical politics, the basic requirement of human survival. Dialectical materialism has suffered its own dialectical defeat. The scientific and technological transformation of the human situation demands the spiritual reformation of man and nations. It is the irony of history that, when materialism has reached its greatest triumph—in world-embracing capitalist and communist power blocks—it has been outmaneuvered by a higher dialectics of the spirit.

It is, of course, true that mankind as a whole is psychologically not yet prepared for the dialectical need of survival by the might of the spirit. The present moment follows upon an age of materialism of the capitalist as well as the communist brand, of disenchantment, of the surrendering of ideals, of "the death of God," of cynicism and despair. For quite some time yet man will have to survive by the balance of terror, if he is to survive at all. However, the significance of our age as the dialectical self-defeat of physical force remains unaffected by the lack of human understanding.

A slow awakening to the meaning of our age is already taking place. The significance of the new human situation is sinking in
gradually. The communist insistence on co-existence, the nuclear test ban, initiated by the two great powers, the civil rights movement, are all part of the same pattern. They represent the beginning of the renunciation of force in history and of the basing of relations between men and nations on ethical principles. From the specifically Jewish point of view the most interesting aspect of this development is the recent ecumenism of the Roman church. Students of Western civilization are well aware of the fact that for long centuries the Church has been the major source of intolerance and persecution. No one knows this better from personal experience than the Jew. What a difference it might have made in modern Jewish history if this new spirit of ecumenism, as it promises to affect the Jew, would have come over the Church two to three centuries sooner! Actually, it could not have occurred sooner, because this new departure is really a modern political necessity. Any policy of intolerance on the part of the Church would implicitly justify a policy of intolerance on the part of the communistic power block against the Church. Neither is there any hope left now of winning over to Christianity the vast populations of the awakening continent of Africa by the word of God that follows in the wake of the conquering colonial sword, as used to be the case in the past. Here, too, "but by My Spirit" has become practical politics. Rome’s ecumenism is the Christian counterpart to Moscow’s co-existence. It too is an outcome of the dialectical self-defeat of materialism.

The meaning of the world transformation, as it has taken place in this generation, is to be recognized as the task, imposed upon mankind today, to render the Spirit effective as a history-making force.

III.

Only because such is the nature of the challenge that confronts man in this hour is there a point in inquiring into the role destined for the Jew in this new phase of human history. One should have thought that the Jew was ideally suited both by temperament and historic experience for the task that faces mankind. Has he not survived because of the truth of the words, "but by My Spirit?"
Has he not proved by his very survival that "My Spirit" is indeed a determining factor in history? Has he not proved it long before the present dialectical self-defeat of Chayil and Koach in this atomic age? In his The Meaning of History, Nicholas Berdyaev wrote the following about the meaning of Jewish history:

I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint. And, indeed, according to the materialistic and positivistic criterion, this people ought long ago to have perished . . .

One might say that the new historic situation requires of mankind what God demanded of the Jew from the beginning. Mankind is entering upon its "Jewish era" or else, upon the era of self-immolation. What is the role of the Jew in this "Jewish era" of world history?

It is a tragedy that in this hour, so eminently suited for the Jewish performance in history, the Jew is silent. As regards the central issues of man's existence and survival in this age, the Torah, as we are able to understand it, is silent. In the circles of Reform and Conservative Judaism in America, Jews try to establish their standing as an adjunct to the so-called Judeo-Christian tradition. It is essentially a "me-too" stance. Judaism, too, is for all the noble things which are affirmed by Christianity. Otherwise, in the realm of original thought, it is Buber and Buber again. Buber's however, is more a mood than a thought. It is so popular because it is akin to the mood of Christian preaching. No one among us, comparable in stature to a Barth, Tillich, Maritain, or Jaspers, is coming to grips with what has been called man's predicament in our times.

There may, of course, be among us some marginal groups that maintain that the human situation as such is not our concern, that our task is to live within "the four cubits of the Halakhah," to keep to ourselves, withdrawn from the world and its problems. Assuming this were possible, we reject the suggestion that it is the historic task of Israel to be the Neturei Karta of the nations. It is not
our function in history to have no function but wait, with a sense of a universal superiority, for Acharit Hayamim (the end of days), when we shall be gloriously justified. Nor do we believe that such an attitude is one of strength. It is rather an indication of one's inability to articulate the teachings of Judaism significantly in relationship to the contemporary issues of human existence. It is not very well known that Maimonides rejects the generally accepted distinction between Chukkim and Mishpatim. According to him the Chukkim are to be interpreted rationally no less than the Mishpatim. And, indeed, in the concluding part of his Guide he proceeds to offer "reasons" for the Chukkim as well. Most interesting is the justification of his method. He bases it on a verse in Deuteronomy, which says: "Observe therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples, that, when they hear all these statutes, shall say: 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' " Maimonides argues cogently that if the Chukkim (statutes) are to evoke the admiration of the peoples for their wisdom, their meaning must be accessible to reason. Maimonides, of course, was not concerned with an interpretation of Judaism that would make an impression on the gentiles. At the root of his concern was the realization that truth, a valid idea, must have universal relevance. It is not necessary that it should be accepted by all, but it should be possible to formulate it in intelligible terms. It should be possible to express it so that it may command the respect of thinking human beings.

However, not only is it not the intention of Judaism that the Jewish people should become the Neturei Karta to the nations; the Jewish situation is such that the Jew cannot withdraw from the world. In the Ghettos of Eastern Europe this might have been a possibility (and even there only in a rather limited sense). It is comparatively easy to withdraw from a world from which one is anyway excluded to a very large extent. The two major centers of Jewish life today are in America and the State of Israel. On the American continent the Jew as an individual is placed in the midst of a larger world; in the State of Israel it is a Jewish people that is so placed. Neither in America, nor in the State of Israel can the Jew exist in isolation. In this country as well as in Israel
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we are involved in all the issues of the age. If Judaism is silent on all the pressing problems of present-day human existence, it is because we have not grasped the significance of the transformation in the Jewish situation. The change from the European Ghetto to the new Jewish center in America is no less radical than the one which has been effected by science and technology in the world at large. The rise of the State of Israel after two millenia of exile has in fact brought about a far more revolutionary transformation in Jewish history than the one accomplished on a world scale by the conquest of space and the harnessing of atomic energy.

These transformations in Jewish history, too, have their dialectics. The very freedom of America tends to undermine tradition, to dilute inherited values, and to dissolve Jewish identity. Assimilation looms large over the Jewish horizon in this country. The very freedom, for which Jews have been longing for so long, threatens Jewish survival. The possible vanishing of the American Jew has become a matter of very real concern. We are approaching the dialectical self-defeat of freedom. The dialectics is even more glaringly manifest in the State of Israel. Having waited for it through the ages, the great miracle did occur, the State did become a reality. But now that we have it, one cannot help wondering: does it by itself render meaningful the long wait, the endless Galut, the suffering, the martyrdom? It hardly keeps the promise of security for the Jews that live in it. In the state of Israel the Jew is confronted with the dialectical defeat of sovereignty. In final reckoning, the State depends for its survival on divine protection no less than the Jew ever depended on it in his exile.

What then is the answer to the problems presented by the dialectics of Jewish history? Is it the rejection of civic freedom in America or of national sovereignty in Israel? Apart from the impossibility of attempting it, it would be as foolish as the rejection of scientific progress and technology because they confront man with the problem of human survival. As on the world scene scientific progress poses the most fateful challenge to the spirit of man, so on the Jewish scene the dialectics of emancipation as well as of national sovereignty present the most heart-searching challenge to the spirit of Judaism. As on the world scene the task is to make the spirit effective as a history-shaping force, so in
the specifically Jewish application of that task the responsibility is to render Judaism effective in conditions of increasing civil liberty and in circumstances of national sovereignty. Never before in history has Judaism been confronted with such a challenge. Indeed, this is our specific role in this age of revolutionary transformations—to meet the challenge of the times as they reach us in our specific situation. No nation or group of people, no religion or culture has any other role in the universal context of history but that of meeting the demands of the times as they confront it in its own specific conditions and circumstances. The manner in which one discharges one's responsibility determines the significance of the role that one fulfills.

The insignificance of the Jew today in material and quantitative terms need not much disturb us. In this hour the future of the entire human race is in jeopardy. As the result of the dialectical self-defeat of sheer brute force, “the giants” too are safe only to the extent to which the great spiritual change of the man of our days is accomplished. What is most disturbing is the spiritual ineffectiveness of Judaism in its confrontation with the challenges of the new situation. The role of Judaism in the world today is indeed of small consequence. Judaism has become ineffective in all its branches, mainly because we of its orthodox branch are unwilling to accept and, therefore, refuse to understand the radical change that has taken place in the world at large, as well as in the situation of the Jew the world over.

IV.

In the main we insist that Judaism must be carried on as if nothing had happened. We do this on the numerous levels of Jewish existence. We do this in our attitude to Kelal Yisrael, in our approach to the Jewish people. In the early days of the struggle against Reform tendencies in Judaism, toward the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, men like the saintly Chatam Sofer would fight Reform with Issurim and Charamim, interdicts and bans. In those days this method could be justified. The great historic Jewries of Europe were still intact. There was extant a rich tradition of Talmudism, of piety, of re-
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religious observance and practice. The Reformers were a small minority that deviated from the established way of life of the people. Moreover, they themselves were familiar with what they rejected. The situation is fundamentally different today. The old Jewries are no longer. Everywhere we have new Jewries, which lack strong traditional ties and history. They do not as much reject as they do not know. The problem is not rebellion, but ignorance and boredom with Judaism. The task has been to bring Judaism to the people. Instead of accepting the responsibility, Orthodoxy in America proceeded to read out the masses from Judaism with Issurim, that made an impression only on a very few, and by an intolerance that repelled many. Closely related to the responsibility of bringing Judaism to the people is the task of articulating the teachings of Judaism in a medium of contemporary significance. Living as he does in the midst of the world, the modern Jew will be led to Judaism by being taught the relevance of Judaism in a universal context. However, the need to formulate Jewish teaching in philosophically and theologically meaningful terms was not recognized. The efforts undertaken by some toward that end were often proscribed or frowned upon; at best they were tolerated.

Unfortunately, on the level of Halakhah, too, ineffectiveness is the prevailing phenomenon. We have not succeeded in developing the application of Halakhah to the complexities of a scientific-technological age. (There is no need to list any examples in this context. They are only too familiar to those who come up against problems of this kind.) In most cases there is no genuine Pesak (Halakhic decision). This is, of course, especially true in the State of Israel. The approach to the Halakhic problems affecting the functioning of the State, as well as the existence of the people in it, is essentially still the same as was the approach to Halakhic questions as they arose in the Shtetl. Not only is there as yet no technique of application of Halakhah to the conditions of Israel's sovereignty, in most cases there is even a refusal to acknowledge that our generation has been confronted with the challenge of learning and developing the method of applying the principles of the Torah to this fundamentally new condition. Most regrettable is the fact that often Halakhah is taught and applied in a
spirit of insufficient sensitivity toward ethical and moral problems, inherent in the conditions and practices of modern Jewries. This is not said as a criticism of Halakhah itself, but in the form of self-criticism of our being unable to render Halakhah effective in conditions of our times. One who believes that there is no Judaism without Halakhah and who is also convinced that Halakhah does have the intrinsic and inexhaustible capacity to deal adequately with every possible situation that may arise in the life of the Jew cannot but sadly point to the present ineffectiveness of the technique of Halakhic application of Torah to life.

In some of its aspects the present dilemma of Jewish existence is a deepening continuation on a world scale of the problems with which Samson Raphael Hirsch was confronted in nineteenth century German Jewry. On the one hand, traditionalism in the Talmudic-Halakhic sense was still deeply rooted in German Jewry. Frankfort-on-the-Main had been the community of giants of Talmudic scholarship like the Pnei-Yehoshua and the author of the Haphlaah and the Makne. Their spirit must have been still very much alive at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When Hirsch's famous letters appeared in 1838, the Chatam Sofer was still alive. He had gone to Pressburg from Frankfort. His great teacher, Rabbi Natan Adler, proceeded S. R. Hirsch by not much more than one generation. On the other hand, Abraham Geiger was a contemporary of Hirsch. The reform movement was taking deep roots in German Jewry. Rabbi Hirsch found himself between the two camps: the one one-sidedly Talmud-oriented, the other reform-bent. Some of his insights are well worth recalling. Speaking of reform Jews in the seventeenth of his Nineteen Letters, he said:

Do not be angry with anyone! Respect them all! — for they all feel the damage; they all desire that which is good, as they understand it; they all intend the salvation of their brethren — and if they have not recognized that which is good, if they have failed in the grasping of the true, the guilt is not chiefly theirs. An entire generation is guilty with them. Therefore, respect the intention but regret these efforts; weep as you examine them.

Surely, if these words were valid in 1838 in the midst of a community with an uninterrupted tradition of centuries of Jew-
ish learning, piety and religious practices, how much more true are they in the second half of the twentieth century, in the midst of Jewries that have only recently arisen, mainly from the uprooted remnants of past generations! But what did Samson Raphael Hirsch mean by the guilt that was carried by an entire generation? He was rather critical of the one-sided Talmudism of his days, of the old orthodoxy that cared little for an intellectually meaningful interpretation of Judaism, for which the times were calling. This is one of the reasons that induced him to compose his major work, Horeb, the essay on "the duties of Israel." The orthodox disregard for an intellectual presentation of Judaism that could speak meaningfully to the new generation was the guilt that was responsible for the spread of the Reform. In the eighteenth of the Nineteen Letters Hirsch spoke of the confrontation of the two camps, the old and the new. The Reform he described as the movement which believed that the spirit of Judaism was dead. While not lacking noble intentions, it was attempting to help Jews by severing the life nerve of Judaism, because of ignorance. Having sacrificed the contents, it was trying to save Judaism by the polishing of external forms. However, to the Orthodoxy of his time he referred as Mitzvat anashim melumada, Judaism inherited but not understood, "without the spirit," "afraid of awakening the spirit," Judaism "carried about on the hands like a holy mummy." The work commenced in Western Europe by men like Samson Raphael Hirsch and Ezriel Hildesheimer was cruelly crushed by the latest phase of European barbarism. Today, a tragically weakened Jewry is still facing the same problem the world over. The nature of the confrontation between the camps is essentially still the same. Orthodoxy in America and in the State of Israel is anxiously bent on preserving Judaism. But, to use Samson Raphael Hirsch terminology, it is dangerously close to carrying Judaism on its hands as if Judaism were "a sacred mummy." On the other hand, Reform and Conservative Jewry are still attempting to save Judaism by "polishing the forms" and pouring away the essence. The relative insignificance of Judaism in the context of modern history is mainly due to our inability to meet the specifically Jewish challenges of the times.
Orthodoxy must answer the call of Judaism’s present-day destiny. First of all we have to return to a wholehearted acceptance of the relationship between Torah and Israel as it is originally inherent in Judaism. Accordingly, Judaism is not a religious sect but the religious way of life of a people. A sect is clearly defined by its dogmas. And indeed the more definite and the more narrow the dogmas the more distinguishable the sect. It is of the very nature of a sect that those who do not adhere to the dogmas are eo ipso excluded. A people cannot afford the luxury of exclusiveness. A people claims all its children. Judaism that strives to become the possession of all Israel does indeed claim every Jew, no matter what he believes at any one moment. Because of this it is most unwise—and hardly in keeping with the intentions of Judaism—to allow narrowly defined dogmatics to become the basis of solid ideological divisions within Israel. According to Jewish teaching, God keeps “the gates always open to receive anyone who wishes to enter.” Similarly, the Ikkarim (principles) that should determine ideological divisions in Israel, should be so formulated as to leave the gates wide open for communication with the broadest possible sections of Kelal Yisrael. We suggest that the recognition of three principles are sufficient to become the foundations of ideological unity. They are the belief in a personal God, in Torah Min Hashamayim (that the Torah was revealed by God to Israel) and Torah shebaal peh, the inseparable connection between the written Torah and the oral tradition. Jews who acknowledge these principles, even though they may disagree with each other in matters of interpretation and application, should be looked upon as belonging to the same ideological grouping. Once the basic principles are affirmed, differences in interpretation should not be permitted to become dividing walls between Jew and Jew. This does not mean that all interpretations should be considered equally valid. It does, however, mean that the wrong interpretation from anyone’s point of view is not to be allowed to become a different “branch” within Judaism.
There is an old and respectable tradition to which such an approach may refer. Rabbi Josef Albo, a disciple of Rabbi Hasdai Crescas, who in his turn was a distinguished disciple of the Great Alfasi commentator, Rabbenu Nissim, in the opening part of his Sefer Haikkarim struggles with the task of defining the term Kofer be’Ikkar (a heretic). The problem was most pressing for him, since his own teacher had disagreed with Maimonides’ listing of the fundamental principles of faith. He had before him the disagreement on the subject of the Ikkarim between Maimonides, Nachmanides, and Crescas. Was it conceivable that each one of these giants of tradition and Halakhah would call the other two koferim be’ikkar because they did not agree with his own definition of ikkarim? Albo’s solution of the problem is that a kofer be’ikkar is a person who is fully aware that a principle is fundamental to Judaism and yet rejects it. He, however, who acknowledges the principle, but interprets it in a manner, which from the point of view of valid tradition or Halakhah is unacceptable, would be a chote beshogeg, one who sins inadvertently, but not a kofer be’ikkar.

What we suggest here is not a matter of tolerance, but a vital feature of our understanding of the relationship between the people of Israel and the Torah. The reduction of Judaism to an exclusive sect or “church,” however strict otherwise such a sect may be in religious observance, however devoted to Jewish learning and scholarship, represents a falsification of Judaism itself.

What, however, is to be the attitude towards other Jews, who may reject the above three principles of Jewish faith? How should one relate oneself to the secularists or atheists among us? Even they are claimed by Judaism. This is a valid Halakhic principle. They too are part of Kelal Yisrael. In practice this means that cooperation should be sought with all sections of Jewry in matters affecting Kelal Yisrael. However, even in the area of our basic ideological disagreement with them, tolerance is the inescapable demand of the situation. It is politically as well as morally unavoidable. We claim it for ourselves; we cannot deny it to others. How can we protest the discriminatory treatment of Jews anywhere in the world, if we ourselves are not willing to adopt an attitude of tolerance toward other Jews whose beliefs and prac-
tices we reject? This of course has its specific relevance for the position of Judaism in the State of Israel. There the principle of tolerance has not only political and moral importance, but should be adopted in the highest interest of Judaism itself. Genuine religious beliefs are not acquired by compulsion. The failure of Christianity in the history of Western civilization has rightly been ascribed by historians and philosophers to its becoming the official state religion under Constantine the Great and to its proceeding from then on to impose itself on the European tribes and nations with the power of the state rather than by that of the word of God. The spirit cannot be forced. One cannot but agree with J. S. Mill's argument that the very need to have to justify a truth against the arguments of those who reject it, helps to clarify and to deepen one's own convictions. This is also implied in the meaning of the dictum: "Know what to answer the heretic!" One may add to this that the more vital a truth the more valid this principle. Every vital truth is by far richer in its contents than is consciously realized. It is when one is compelled to defend it on the intellectual or spiritual level that it reveals itself more fully to the honest inquiry of the human mind and the sincere longing of the human heart. Not politics but persuasion will bring Judaism to the people in Israel. The very need to find the way for Judaism to the heart of the people requires of the believer to delve more deeply into the truth of his religious faith. It is one of the ways to protect a faith from degenerating into "a holy mummy."

The method of persuasion which must be adopted is inseparable from the intellectual work that has to be undertaken on the entire compass of Judaism. We have to create a philosophical and theological interpretation of Judaism that may be significantly articulated in the context of the social, moral, and religious issues of the time, with a view to the human predicament of the age. In present conditions, it is a prerequisite for learning how "to answer the Epikoros." Without it, the method of persuasion cannot work.

Finally, we have to learn anew the wisdom of the Halakhic application of the Torah to the conditions of the Jew and the Jewish people. The first step to be taken in this direction seems to be a psychological re-orientation on the part of the contemporary Halakhist. He must make an honest peace with the historical
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reality of the scientific-technological civilization in the midst of which the Jew lives today and he must accept enthusiastically the reality of the State of Israel. The Halakhist must learn to understand the functioning of this new civilization, its scientific foundations, its technological processes. Without such new learning no valid Halakhic decisions are possible. This, of course, asks for a new concept of Jewish education. The Talmudical one-sidedness of old must render Halakhah ineffective in large areas of Jewish existence. The needs of Halakhic Judaism themselves call for an integration of secular learning with Torah education. The positive attitude of the Halakhist toward the State of Israel brings in its wake the acknowledgment that he Halakhic problems arising out of the existence of the State claim our foremost attention and do require speedy solutions. It also requires the honest acknowledgment of the fact that, as of this moment, we are singularly inept in our grasping of Halakhic principles in their relationship to conditions of Jewish national sovereignty. We have to learn how to transplant Halakhah from the Reshut Hayachid (private realm) of our Exile to the Reshut Harabbim (public realm) of statehood.

It is very likely that the need of the moment calls for a new method of Halakhic study, a method which, though new, is yet closer to the original classical essence of Halakhah than the one which is at present followed in most Yeshivot and by most Halakhic scholars. The lack of effective relatedness between life and Halakhah distorts the very nature of Halakhah. Rabbi Joseph Albo in the Sefer Ha'Ikkarim (III:23) raises the question: What need was there for an oral tradition, Torah she-baalpeh? Why was not the entire Torah given in writing? In answering the question he maintains that "it would be impossible for God's Torah to be complete in a manner that it should suffice for all times. For the details that are forever new in the affairs of men... are too many to be included in a book. Therefore, only general principles were given to Moses verbally at Sinai, which are only hinted at in the Torah, so that the sages of each generation may with their help establish the new particular (of the Halakhah)." This, to our mind, is the function of Torah she-baalpeh. It is the discipline that applies the principles of the Torah to the continually changing
situations through which the people of the Torah are passing in history. The principles themselves do not change, but their application to life varies as life itself changes. Without a thorough understanding of the conditions to which Torah must be applied, and their ready acceptance, Halakhah cannot function. In an interesting passage in the tractate of Ketuvot (57a), Rashi explains the meaning of the well-known talmudic dictum: "Elo ve’elu divrei E-lohim chayim — Both are the words of the living God." The gist of the explanation is that when two teachers disagree in the Talmud, their disagreement is not regarding the principle involved in their discussion; they disagree in the evaluation of the situation. One gives his decision in the light of one principle, the other in the light of another, because the facts before them are seen differently. And Rashi concludes: "The reason for an opinion changes according to the variation — however small — in the facts." It is doubtful that in the entire history of our people "the facts" have changed more radically than in our own generation. Yet, we refuse to acknowledge that "Hataam mithapekh left shinnui ha’davarim." It really means that about eleven centuries after Anan, we are eliminating the oral tradition by turning the entire body of the Torah she-baalpeh into a new type of a Torah she-biktav. In order to find the solution to the numerous and weighty problems of Halakhah raised by the entirely new situation in which the Jewish people find itself today, one must learn to respect not only texts, but life too, one must love not only the Torah but Israel too.

The new method of Halakhic study will be clearer to the classical method of past ages by its vigorous rejection of the mental acrobatics of the Pilpul, by continuous return to the sources, with a vigorous intellectual discipline of truth-seeking, in the spirit of a harmonizing love of Torah and life. Once again, we recall the words of Samson Raphael Hirsch. After having described the nature of the confrontation between the old and the new in Judaism, as we have quoted him above, he continues by saying:

There is only one way to salvation — where we have sinned, there must the atonement begin: forget the inherited opinions and misconceptions about Judaism: return to the sources, Tanach, Midrash, Shas; read them, study them, grasp them — for the sake of life . . .
Orthodox Judaism in a World of Revolutionary Transformations

There seems to be no other way of arresting the present trends, which in Reform and Conservative Jewries lead to a continuous dilution and loss of the essence of Judaism, and which in Orthodoxy is threatening to mummify Judaism as a mere religious sect. Only by putting our own house in order will creativity return to Judaism. Only by regaining the creativity of Judaism can we hope to play a significant part in this new phase of human history.

VI.

It is true, "return to the sources . . . for the sake of life," is far from being an answer to the very serious Halakhic problems of our times. It is not even a guide to the actual solutions. But let us be honest and humble and let us confess the truth: no one has the answers at this stage. The solution does not lie in Halakhic reforms, but in the authentic application of valid Halakhic principles to the radically new situation. It is comparatively easy to devise so-called Halakhic reforms; as easy as it is pointless. What is needed is not reformed but functioning Halakhah. Not Halakhah has broken down, but our mastery of the technique of its application to the new conditions. This is the main reason why the scanty efforts to solve the problems arising from the encounter between Halakhah and the modern conditions of Jewish existence, which have been undertaken here and there, have been so little successful. What is possible at this juncture is what has been accomplished: a piecemeal shoring up of crumbling defenses.

It is of decisive importance that at this moment we do not impatiently clamor for solutions of particular problems. The time for genuine answers is not yet. What we may do — and dare not leave undone! — is to prepare the ground for the day of the answers. What can be done and what needs doing is, first of all, a thorough understanding of the radical change which the Jewish situation has undergone the world over. Halakhic Judaism must make genuine psychological peace with the change. It should accept it not as something imposed, but as the opening of a new phase in the history of Judaism, a new challenge, harboring new opportunities for Jewish realization. The new conditions, especially as given with the emergence of the State of Israel, must be
acknowledged and affirmed as the life of the Jewish people; their claim to our attention must be respected. The life of the people is entitled to our concern no less than Halakhah is to our obedience. Only the adequate importance which the Halakhist is willing to accord to the realities of Jewish existence will open the doors of Halakhah, at which the problems of our new Jewish life have been, thus far, knocking in vain.

Such genuine psychological peace with the new situation that is to be established in the outlook and mentality of Halakhic Judaism is the very first step. Nothing can be achieved without it. Only with such new mentality and outlook is it possible to return to the sources... "for the sake of life." Unless we ourselves stand in the midst of this life, unless we call it our very own, we can do nothing for the sake of life. To return to the sources does not mean dealing with this specific problem or the other, impatiently awaiting solutions that are at this juncture of necessity but of little avail. At this hour, the "return" is still essentially an academic task. It means taking a fresh look at Halakhah, "ke'ilu hayom netatiyam," as if it had been addressed specifically to our own situation; studying it "lishmah," for its own sake, but letting it speak to hearts and minds that are filled to overflowing with love for all Israel, that are encompassed about by care and concern for the living reality of the daily existence of the Jewish people, and that are, at the same time, besieged by the Halakhic predicament of our times. With such an attitude and approach to the study of the Torah the new technique of Halakhic application to the problems of the new age will emerge from the very heart of Halakhah. Those who are aware of the issues may have their ideas how "the return to the sources... for the sake of life" should be attempted. The ideas may be valid or not. They could not represent a program or a guide; at best they would be preliminary working notes for those who are ready for this kind of a return. A program must itself be the result of the return. As Halakhic Judaism approaches Halakhah with the new mentality and new urgency, Halakhah itself will teach us how to study it and how to investigate it for the sake of life. While no definite program or guidelines for the solution of problems are possible at this stage, it is safe to say that the task that is awaiting us is beyond the strength of indi-
Individuals wrestling with the issues in isolation. Those who are poignantly aware of the Jewish predicament of our era and who also believe that the return to the sources for the sake of life holds the promise, ought to become an articulate and recognizable group in the camp of Halakhic Judaism. Either in the State of Israel or in the U.S.A., there ought to be an institute of higher Jewish learning and research programmatically dedicated to the task of returning to the sources for the sake of life and with a view to the Jewish predicament of our times in its comprehensive sense, as we have tried to outline it in this essay.

No one can prove that what is suggested by us is indeed the way that will one day enable us to give answers and find solutions. Ultimately, it is our act of faith in the vitality of the Torah that is required of us, faith that the Torah has indeed been addressed to every generation of Jews and to every situation in which Jews may find themselves; that, because of that, the answers to the problems of each generation are indeed contained in the Torah; that it is for us to accept the Torah daily anew, in the true sense of the word, in order to hear and to listen to the word that is being spoken specifically to us today. We realize that, especially from the Orthodox point of view, considerable risk may be involved in the new departure contemplated in this essay. Chances in thought as well as deed may have to be taken. Mistakes may well be made. But any road along which one may really walk, any genuine way of life always involves intellectual, moral, and practical risks. He who wishes to live meaningfully has to take them. We may perhaps refer to a passage in the opening pages of the Guide. Apparently, Maimonides had some compunction about presenting Judaism in a philosophically rationalistic garb, or at the least anticipated criticism because of it. To justify his venture, he makes the following remark:

I have relied on two premises. The one is what is said in the Talmud in a case of this kind, i.e., “It is time to work for the Lord; they have made void Thy Torah.” The second premise is the tenet of the sages: “Let all your deeds be done for the sake of Heaven.”

It is worth noting that Maimonides does not quote his first “premise” directly from Psalms, but from the Talmud (Berakhot 63a),
where the Midrashic interpretation is given: When it is time to work for God, even precepts of the Torah may be voided. We shall not dare follow him that far. But certainly, when it is time to work for God, as surely it is time now, one is justified in taking risks — as long as one does it cautiously and wisely, as long as one does it in an attitude of continuous heart-searching, with the desire and the hope that one may be permitted to do it for the sake of Heaven.