

it be taught the Jewish religion of her husband or the mysteries of her own faith? This too is a case of prevention through fences.

Instead of deploring poverty, the Torah strives to prevent it. Hence the commandment to support the weak lest he fall, to lend a helping hand to the man who is still capable of recovering, to show brotherhood which helps rather than charity which degrades whilst it pities.

Judaism teaches that life is not a vale of tears, that we are not all doomed to perdition. Judaism insists that this life, this earth, are God-given and therefore good, that we are capable of achieving all great and beautiful things through our own efforts.

Judaism teaches that nobody stands between man and his Creator, that the gates of heaven are open to us whenever we wish to enter.

The Basis of Judaism

The basis of Judaism is both faith and practice. A true Jew believes in Revelation, the divine origin of the Torah. God created this world and made it good, that is, capable of all goodness. Man must cooperate with God in making of this world a place of purity, justice, and love. The Jew's duty is to lead through example. For this it has pleased God to select the Jew. With this task, and with the evidences from history of the uniqueness of our people, we are to derive due lessons whereby to excel in the righteousness of our conduct.

What Is the Torah to Us?

To us Jews the Torah is the book of God, revealed

to Israel and through Israel to the world, implicitly in its divine origin, the standard of our life. We have seen the overwhelming majority of the world in their meaning. Some have said but none strikes us as intelligent common sense. We have found that Providence has bestowed great blessings upon us. We know why we should love our Torah. The Torah says he is "as thyself" (Lev. xix. 34). We know that the Sabbath is a great blessing and if man adopted it generally the millennium might be nearer. But we keep the Sabbath because God has commanded it. Modern medical science endorses the hygienic and eugenic value of Jewish life, of the strict observance of the dietary and the marriage laws. But we observe these laws because God has commanded them. As divine laws we know they are helpful in every way. We have adopted them not for their helpfulness, but because God has given them.

What Is the Jewish Law?

Jewish law is composed of the oral law and the written law. The latter is contained in the Pentateuch, the Torah proper. The former was for a long time kept unwritten, handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. "Moses handed it down to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the men of the Great Synod, and the men of the Great Synod to the Rabbis" (Mishnah, Aboth I, 1), until with the dispersion of Israel the danger arose

that it might be forgotten. Rabbi Judah the Prince (200 c.E.) finally collected and edited it in the Mishnah. The Mishnah contains the body of Jewish law. As with all other legislation these laws were commented upon to establish their exact force. They were discussed in the Jewish academies of Palestine and Babylonia, and we possess authentic records of these discussions which are called Gemara. About 400 c.E. in Palestine, and about 500 c.E. in Babylonia, they were collected and, together with the Mishnah, were embodied in one great volume, the Talmud. The Talmud is an encyclopedia of Jewish lore and life, for, in addition to the laws, it contains the maxims, parables, and legends which were in vogue through the centuries. Each of the two countries produced its own Talmud, and we have thus the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmudim, of which the latter, more fully preserved, is authoritative for the Jews.

What Is the "Shulchan Aruch"?

These Talmudim contain many thousands of pages of authority and interest to the student; but they are too large and too all-embracing to help the layman in finding the law in every instance. Hence several attempts have been made to excerpt the Talmud or to rearrange it, so that it might be easier even for the unlearned to handle. Maimonides (13 c.) rearranged the Talmud with the view of systematizing its laws, and Rabbi Joseph Caro (17 c.) finally wrote his *Shulchan Aruch*, which in four volumes comprises every aspect of Jewish law: it is our authoritative code. This code, which grew out

of the text of the Talmud together with the many discussions of the rabbis of latter days, is being continually brought up to date by the Responsa (*Teshuvot*) of the Rabbinic authorities, who have to decide with every change of condition how the immutable law of Judaism is to be applied. There is thus an unbroken chain of Jewish tradition connecting the days of Moses with our own. Never in the whole course of Jewish law has any change been made that was not within the law. All new ordinances were the application of precedent to new conditions. Thus, for example, modern means of transportation which could not have been considered in the Mishnah are dealt with in the Responsa, upon the same principles which decided the primitive traffic of Roman days and the regulation of caravans and camels in the time of Palestinian independence.

The Method of Judaism

Because men are eager to proclaim ideals, yet slow to live up to them, God has given us the method of approaching their realization. Ideals must be made tangible for man to grasp them.

Thus, the duty of right thinking, feeling, and acting is suggested to us through the *tefillin*, which every loyal Jew dons each morning. The *tefillin* are laid upon the head, the seat of thought; opposite the heart, the center of feeling; and upon the hand, the instrument of action, to remind us that whenever we think, feel, or act we ought to be mindful of the message of the scroll which the *tefillin* contain: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with

refers not to smug self-approval but to the pride in the heirloom of Israel. All of us, rabbis and laymen, ought to be humble, as we contemplate the deep chasm which separates the Torah's ideal from the common level of our conduct. In that respect too, *an adam yotze min ha-olam ve-batzi ta-avato beyado*¹⁴ — no man dies with half of his spiritual ambition, ethical aim, achieved. But we may well be proud of the set of principles and of ideals which the Torah has proclaimed for us, of the stream of the Jewish tradition, teaching by example, by instruction, in prophetic fervor and through historical realities, how to plant heaven on earth:¹⁵ how to make life more livable, human relations more tolerable; how to hold before men's minds the constant vision of an end of strife, hatred, cruelty, and the beginning of cooperation, mutual understanding, and the establishment, by universal human effort, of life on this globe, noble enough, wise enough, to include every human neighbor and achieve an enduring harvest of the eternal people's eternal prayer: *Yitgadal veyitkadash*.

1. Vay. XXII, 32
2. J. H. Hertz, in his commentary a.l.
3. Yoma 86a
4. Tefillat Minhah. of the Sabbath
5. Pes. 53b; Midr. Tanh. Tetz. 5
6. Succah 52b
7. Abot IV, I
8. II Sam. XII, 7
9. Vay. X, 3
10. B. K. 50a
11. Abot IV, 15
12. Erubin 63a
13. Succah 30a
14. Midr. Koh. R. I, 13
15. Is. LI, 16

THE OPEN DOOR

Just now we chanted: *Ki lekah tov nathati lakhem, Torati al taazovu*: "I have given you a good doctrine, do not forsake my Torah. It is a tree of life to all who hold fast to it and they who support it form a happy circle. Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths bring peace."¹

I should like to talk to you this morning about the modern problem of problems, to walk with you through the valleys in order that you might see the mountain peaks. I shall speak about tension and fear, so that you may gain ease and hope, about death as a fountain of life and the atomic bomb as a source whence we may derive the vision of a happier period of human history.

The text of my words this morning may well be found in the prayer implied in the portion from the Torah. "*Velo yitten ha-mash-bith lavo el batekhem lingof. And the Lord will pass over the door and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.*"²

I

DEATH'S DEMOCRACY

It is fascinating to observe that death to the average person is something that afflicts not himself but others. (The Talmudic phrase for death: "*Bar minan* — may it be far from us" may offer confirmation of this suggestion). Thus death, to our mind, may spell tragedy, disaster, to neighbor or stranger, to friend or enemy, but not to us. With the exception of a few philosophers, men seem unable to conceive of their own

death. For death means annihilation, the complete cessation not only of working and dreaming, but of eating and breathing. It means the absolute end of our relation to things and people. Perchance it is due to the instinct of self-preservation that we cannot possibly imagine our own death.

But there is something else that is arresting. Only death asks for no references. To enter its sombre portals we need no effort, no vitamin, no protection, none of the products of medical ingenuity or electronic know-how. Death is democratic, ever-ready to add to its register. And yet we all shun death, try to postpone it, to forget it. We build big institutions, endow chairs in medical science and social wisdom, we promote nationwide or globe-encircling efforts to prolong life, and to reduce the realm of death.

Yet death also has its promises: children or followers, who carry on our tradition, in whose ideas, actions, lives, we may continue, however attenuatedly, our own record on this globe. There is also the stream of human consciousness, as the Siddur has it: "*Bila ha-maveth*: The Lord destroys the terror of death by the promise of immortality, solving the problem of His people."³

II

NO ATOMIC BIAS

To assure the future, we must face the danger not only of individual death but also of collective destruction. It is only when we have learned to imagine all the implications of atomic warfare that we shall acquire courage and calm and follow-through determination to avert the senseless carnage of a conflict waged with atomic power. There is no illusion

as to any ultimate victory achievable by anyone in such suicidal enterprise.

The danger of the hydrogen bomb calls upon us to use our freedom of will, mind, heart, and action. Never more clearly than today is it our choice: to do or die.

The hydrogen bomb moves in the sphere of utter fairness. It is guilty of no geographic discrimination. If, God forbid, we enter upon its employment to settle issues, there will be no security, even if we flee the city and move to Long Island or Westchester or Florida, or California. The remotest village in the Dakotas or in the Carolinas, the palace on the banks of the Ganges and the golf course in Massachusetts, may be total victims of such war.

The hydrogen bomb knows no religious prejudices. It would annihilate in even measure Catholic, Jew, Protestant, Moslem, and Hindu, and all the heathens near and remote, believers and atheists, rabbi, priest, minister and congregation, choir, beadle and member, and the hangers-on of every club, fraternity or union.

Atomic warfare will slay innocent of color prejudice. White groups and brown, black or yellow, will be its hapless victims without any partiality or preference.

Kivan she-nitan ha-resbuth le-mash-bith le-habbel: "Once the chance is given to the destroyer to afflict he will not distinguish between good and evil," said the rabbis.⁴ Nor is any caste recognized by the hydrogen bomb. The president of the National Bank and the Union Square agitator, the hatred-spouting scoundrel and the peace-loving priest, the scientist and the dock laborer, the babe at mother's breast and the hoary head, the innocent and the guilty, would all be swept away in insane fury of destruction.

III

GHASTLY IRRELEVANCY

We must all be penetrated by the knowledge that atomic warfare means not just disaster or tragedy, but in large measure obliteration. Its horror seems as impossible for us to comprehend as for any man or woman the ultimate annihilation through one's own death. Atomic warfare implies not only that some people will die in slow strangulation, others in sudden suffocation or in lingering exhaustion. It means that because of countless explosions and conflagrations and mass agony of poison and universal ruin, all our plans and hopes become irrelevant, indeed, meaningless; ideas of a great national museum to garner the fairest products of American civilization; plans of the great medical college nationally endowed and nationally developed, that will eliminate one after one the scourging diseases that still afflict men; the inspiring blue-prints for the abolition of slums, of sun-swept new developments for laborers, of tolerable apartments for the underprivileged — together with luxurious hotels, electronic devices, the study of anthropology and the search for vitamin-reinforced foods, jet planes and the ingenuity of dacron, orlon and their various combinations, they all will be not even hour-long bubbles, but foolish castles made of cardboard and skyscrapers as substantial as gossamer, as lasting as spider webs. Once permission has been given to the destroyer to afflict, destroy, no distinction is possible between good and evil, and the dreams, labors, achievements of millennial records will disappear in the tortuous ocean of utter oblivion.

IV

THE CHOICE

Fabulous are both the promise and the menace of today: On the one hand, the abolition of disease, poverty, misery, in the fulness of atomic power harnessed to human welfare; on the other, the disappearance of the human family — in a fury of universal destruction, fragmentized, atomized, dissolved.⁵ "Behold, I place before you this day: *Berakah u-ke-lalah* — *unimaginable blessing and unspeakable curse* — yours is the choice." It seems incredible to assume that the decision will not increasingly be in the direction of cooperation, sanity, and abiding peace.

Indeed, we now apprehend the deeper meaning of our classic designation of the Seder night: "*It is a night of watching — lel shimurim.*". We are living in a moment of human history when we must stay both alert and full of expectation.

We must be alert for every avenue that may promote peace, forewarned against any development that may precipitate hostilities. We must wait, expect, promote, and feel sure about, a universal grass-roots movement towards self-preservation, hence for peace — a consummation due not to any sudden change of human nature, nor to any sudden insights into the moral corruption of war or the spiritual plenty of peace. It will be due to mankind's irreducible core of sanity. It may come from enlightened selfishness, fruit of the instinct for self-preservation. Together they will prevent the unimaginable horror of atomic conflict.

One may be sure that even behind the iron curtain there is no group willing to die wholesale for a dictator's mad

VI

TIME MARCHES ON TOWARDS PEACE

I do not believe that a third world war will come about, not because people have become angelic overnight, but because the experiences of the last two world wars have shown again that wars never settle anything, that we cannot hope abidingly to defeat an enemy through war, or to achieve abiding security through victory.

Our problem is how to come to terms with our neighbors, from whom we differ in economic or religious outlook, in color or in background. We must not deny or explain away such differences. It is wise to agree to disagree, that means to take for granted these differences in outlook, creed, taste and temper. We must allow our neighbor the same safety margin for his emotions as we demand for ourselves. We must view our differences frankly and accept them gracefully. At peace with our neighbor, we can proceed to cooperative effort for all of us. We shall discover friends slowly but in ever-growing numbers. We must combine a vision of the ideal — a classless, warless, expanding and improving society — with common sense awareness of the handicaps, of the need to give and take. Few things are greater than peace. Consistent cooperation, patience, disciplined through our eye on the goal, will keep the human family within the bounds of peace.

Co-existence is the new plan, the new phrase, the new slogan. As long as we can achieve a minimum of cooperation and conformity to international law, we must live together with people with whom we disagree in many respects, but with whom we agree as to the utter folly of universal suicide through war.

Thus, out of the threat of death comes the message of life. Out of the menace of the world war will yet emerge the wonderful tidings to every mother and father, to every brother and sister, to every husband and wife. Indeed, *mah shebasekbel eno mahayev ha-zeman yabayev: What our minds cannot grasp, the logic of events will make true.*⁷ the vision of peace, the hope for peace, the blessed reality of peace — fruit of our understanding, harvest of sustained effort, consummation of religion wedded to statesmanship, of ideals and commonsense underpinned by the conscience and intelligence of a united world.

1. Prov. IV 2, III 18, 17.
2. Ex. XII.
3. Is. XXV, 8.
4. Baba K. 60a.
5. Deut. XI, 26.
6. Cp. Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Malbim and the Zohar on Ex. XII, 42
7. a) Told. Yitzchak on Vayesheb.
b) Resp. Hut ha-Shani, 112