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Nissan III

The Four Sons

Spring is here. Joyfully the lark in the air and the worm in the grass welcome it. Nature itself emerges in order to take part in the new life, to enjoy and to increase the magnificence of the Creation. And if it were the six thousandth spring that is greeting the earth, it would always be new, it would always bring fresh delight, as if it were greeting us for the first time.

Spring is a Divine messenger that is always anticipated with longing; its presence is always new. It has always new strength, new life, new courage, and new solace to bring. Always it has new questions to suggest, and in its womb it carries ever new solutions for old questions. This is what spring means for all ages:

—The infant in the wet nurse's arms is carried for the first time toward the rays of the spring sun. Overwhelmed, he closes his eyes, but nevertheless absorbs the delightful bath of mild spring air through all his pores.

—The young boy flits butterfly-like from flower to flower and stands still near every beetle. But he will not remain still. Everything attracts him. He wants to see everything, touch everything, sample and test everything. He has a heart full of questions about the many-colored world that is opening itself full of life around him.

—The youth, eager to realize his dreams, strolls through the meadows which are enclotted in splendor. His soul is imbued with a sense of harmony from viewing it all. The mighty One, Whose greatness expresses itself in this thousand-fold life, becomes evident to him there. His Omnipotence creates all, His goodness provides for all. His Law determines the order of all of this and regulates it.

—The young man understands that God's world should be beautiful just as paradise is beautiful. And so he is seized by the longing to rise harmoniously to similar beauty and to avoid any discord in this concert of existence of which he is a part. And so, he looks around

longingly for the Word that will explain the Law of *his* life, and the Hand which might lead him on the way to life and to serene fulfillment.

—The grown man contemplates the awakened world and, in this world full of beauty and order, he sees only the reflection of that still higher world, that still higher order of harmonious beauty. The Law of his life teaches him to strive restlessly, in spirited, free activity, for the realization of a better world. This Law has planted eternal spring in his breast. He possesses the Law which the youth, in the spring of his life, can only search for.

—The aged man smiles in the spring sunlight and receives from nature, which has awakened from its winter hiding place, the announcement of his own rejuvenation. Happy and cheerful, he strolls full of expectancy toward his goal, through the dark portals of a narrow passage.

Only the work of *man* ages, only the heart of *man* needs the stimulus of novelty to rouse him and capture his interest. “Once again?” yawns the satiated human heart at the second appearance of a product of man that was greeted with rapture and joy when it first appeared.

But whatever God’s Word established, shines on in a youthful eternal freshness. We welcome it with ever increasing gladness each time it returns. It brings new delights in its inexhaustible treasure. It knows how to enthrall the aged man and his grandson always anew.

Thus the ever new, ever young Creation.

Thus also the ever new, ever young, ageless Divine Law. Just as it was thousands of years ago, it still is the “soul-refreshing,” “wisdom-bestowing,” “heart-rejoicing,” “eye-illuminating,” “permanence-imparting” Torah. It is still the “treasure more precious than gold” to descendants as it was to ancestors, the “spiritual taste sweeter than honey.” (Psalms 19)

Even if you, as often as a hundred times, attempt the comprehension of His words and the contemplation of the mitzvoth which He instituted, not only will you always *want* it to be new, it *will* always be new for you. New facets continually offer themselves to your consideration. Your thoughts are continually opened to new splendor. The more familiar you become with this Law, the less you are satiated when you draw refreshment from its wellspring.

Thus too the festivals which this Divine Law has brought us. Every festival day, every Sabbath shines forth to you in “nuptial splendor”

and invites you to a new betrothal of your whole existence to the spirit of Godly consecration which every festival and Sabbath brings.

Look at the festivals, these everlasting flowers in the bouquet of the daughter of Zion! They have proven their lifegiving, rejuvenating power in all the stormy centuries of the past. Proof of their efficacy is the strong and serene survival of an entire people who are summoned to be a part of world history along a path beset by tears and tribulation.

No matter what had taken place during the week or year, the Sabbath and the festival days came and, touched by their Godly magic, the Jewish people arose always new, a queen among nations.

And now comes this Festival of festivals, this birth festival of the Jewish people, Pessach, the spring celebration of the immortal people of God! No newly crowned king is welcomed for the first time in his kingdom as this Festival is welcomed by Israel today for more than the three thousandth time!

Where is the prince for whom an entire people in all its ranks, transforms every house, every hut into a place of homage after weeks of preparation; for whom a people would busily strive to eliminate from even the most inconspicuous corner every trace of food not bearing the imprint of His will? Where is the prince who is met by the sound of such a greeting of loyalty from millions of hearts over the whole wide world, like the sound of the Hallelujah-exultation which greets this Festival on the Seder-night?

Such a reception is taken for granted by this Festival. From the child, the boy, the youth, the man, and the aged man,—from everyone it expects the friendliest welcome. Gazed at in wonder by the child, questioned by the boy, guessed at by the youth, understood by the man, the entire depth of its content wishes to lay the founding basis of the Jewish Calling, always renewed, for every age level and stage of development. It brings the child, the boy, and the youth together with the man and the elder like no other festival, so that together they will raise up the childish wondering to understanding. They will answer the boy's questions to his satisfaction and will reward the young man's investigations. They will invite the germination and budding of the Jewish spirit to unfold at the altar of this spring festivity.

Should we not for once listen closely to how God expects us to bring up our youth to do His holy Work? Should we not be able to learn from Him in our time?

1.

“Say to your son on that day: for the sake of this, God acted on my behalf when I went out of Egypt!” (Exodus 13, 8). Lead your child to the table set with matzah and bitter herbs—יכול מראש חדש ת”ל ביום ההוא יכול מבעוד יום—ח”ל בעבור זה. Do not begin your educating work with discourses and sermons about religion. You do not win your child by speeches and preaching. Let your child *see you* in happily devoted *fulfillment* of the Godly commandments. Your child may still be שאינו יודע לשאול, still unknowledgeable how to ask. He may still be unable to acknowledge your earnestness and piety with anything but incomprehending wonder. את פתח לו, you open his mouth for him and teach him the reason for your happiness, and the meaning of your earnestness. Teach him the whole importance of the acts which he sees you performing.

בעבור זה—*not because of my prowess and my warlike valor*. I had to bend my neck patiently for generations and take burdens upon my shoulders. Unable to prevent it, I had to let my nursing infants be torn from the bosoms of their mothers and be dragged to death in the waves. It was the nation which ruled over me that excelled with its prowess and warlike boldness. And its kings carried their triumphant warfare unto the most distant parts of the known world.

—*Not because of my treasures and my wealth*. For centuries I had remained a stranger on the soil that supported me. I had sunken to the position of a slave, whose shirt which covered his nakedness he could not call his own. And I had to beg for clothing and utensils from my masters when they drove me out to freedom. But it was the nation I served which was wealthy. It thrived on agriculture, craftsmanship and trade, and it led a life that was pleasurable to excess.

—*Not because of my science and arts*. My sons and daughters had to search for straw, bake bricks and carry burdens early and late under the whip of brutal taskmasters. They had no time to think about the development of the spirit. They had no leisure time, spirit, or mind to devote to even one thought about science and art. Alas, they were unable to listen closely even to one word of Redemption because “their spirit was broken, and the work was so hard.”

Far more did the nation for whom I slavishly carried bricks and

mortar excel in art and invention, in scholarship and science. —The monuments of their glory, their wealth and their art—yea, the monuments of my debasement and my unspeakable misery—still stand on the banks of the Nile.

זה בעבור זה—*only for the sake of these precepts* has God acted on my behalf. I had the courage to fulfill them and the spirit to comprehend them. And I had the courage to raise them up as the banner of my freedom and of my Redemption in the face of my taskmasters.

זה בעבור זה—for the sake of these commands, with which I raised myself up to the One God, of Whom their wise men, in their wisdom, knew nothing. With these commands I threw myself into the arms of the Unrivalled One, Whom my taskmasters denied. With them I gave myself up unto the possession of the Unparalleled One, against Whom my taskmasters opposed themselves. For the sake of these commandments I walked in the service of this Peerless One, בעבור זה, for their sake.

For their sake עשה ה' לי, God has acted for me. He was strong, to compensate for my simplicity. In return, I accepted upon myself those observances as the signs of my homage, the expression of my devotion, the word of my obedience. And what I achieved on earth in loyalty to His command, He looked upon from above. He recognized it and heard it, and He descended and succored me.

This is what these commands meant to me. As such they have *proven* themselves to me in the most solemn hour of my historical existence, בצאתי ממצרים. When death glided over me and my children, my life and the lives of my children were still in bondage, yet God summoned me to life and to freedom.

The Angel of Death passed over my dwelling on its way to the palace of the king. In mortal fear, the ruler himself beat upon the door of my hut and drove me out to freedom. Why? Because these precepts had transformed my hut into a temple of the Holy One, because I had gathered my children around these Divine precepts, because God had seen the sign of our unified devotion to His commands. That is why He directed death and slavery past my dwelling.

This is what the commandments meant to me, and this is what they mean to me still. They are the language in which my God and I speak to each other. They are the signs of my homage, the words of my devotion, the expression of my obedience. With them I consecrate

myself and everything that is mine to Him. And He sees my signs and understands my language and knows my obedience and receives me and my home into His blessing and His protection.

Hence my gladness and hence my earnestness. I know what these precepts mean to me. They are the eternal bond that binds me to my God. Through them is ה' לי, God is mine, my deeds belong to Him, and my destiny is safeguarded by Him. And this is no mere promise and no vague hope, no mere reassurance and consolation.

בְּעִבּוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי: My entire past is guarantor for me, my entire past is evidence of the power and importance of these commandments. When God first gave His commandments to me, He established the basis for all future deliverance and Redemption. He established life and freedom as the reward for these commandments, as it says: "because of them He acted in my behalf when I went out of Egypt." I have *learned by my experience* what these precepts mean for me.

And finally בצֹאֵחִי מִמִּצְרַיִם, "when I went out of Egypt!" בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאלו הוא יצא ממצרים! That is the great basic requirement of your education. Do not say that, for the sake of the mitzvoth which they once performed, God acted *on behalf of our people* in general. Also do not say that for the sake of these mitzvoth God acted *on behalf of our fathers*. Rather, say that "God acted *on my behalf* when I went out of Egypt!"—for the sake of the mitzvoth which I will perform evermore.

Approach your son then not as father to child, but in the relationship of priest and representative of your people to its offspring. Speak with him in the name of your nation, and say to him that the name "Jew" brings him into the Divine Covenant. Let your enthusiasm for God be fresh and unaging, and let your child look upon you with fresh, ageless enthusiasm.

Do not celebrate with him the remembrance of an old story of bygone times. Let what the fathers experienced be *your* experience. Let what the fathers bequeathed be to you as certain as if you personally had witnessed it. It is as if over *your* head the Angel of Death had glided, as if *your* hand had borne the chains of enslavement, as if *you* had experienced the great Divine Redemption. Practice your precepts and celebrate your Redemption not as an event of our past history, but rather as the foundation and basis of your own present, and as the condition for your own future salvation. Then your child will receive the legacy of Redemption and the legacy of the consecration of his life

in equally vigorous terms from your hand. He will feel as if he had gone out of Egypt with you, received God's commandments with you. The Redemption and Consecration will then recur every Pessach, in the unaging freshness of youth, and all the Jewish generations will carry before God the immortal bond of His commandments in the spirit of an unending Spring.

This is the basis of every Jewish upbringing: חנוך, consecration. חנוך, the consecration of our sacred things, is not performed by means of sermons and devotional prayers. It is achieved through action, through performance, through deeds: חנוך of the altar by means of קרבן, חנוך of the priest through עבודה, חנוך of our houses of God through the *genuine* Divine service which is held there.

Thus, חנוך requires of our children active fulfillment of the Divine precepts. Throughout Judaism, and therefore also in Jewish education, נעשה must come before נשמע. And God expects this חנוך, this initiation of our youth into Judaism, to come from the father. Every father is capable of it, and where the father neglects it, it can scarcely be compensated for by anyone or anything else.

All the textbooks, all the catechisms of the "Jewish religion," all the teaching aids—of whatever name—that had been invented as surrogates for the consecration of our youth in the home—all will be of no avail. Yes, even the best teachers and schools cannot replace the table at which your child sees you perform the precepts of your God with joyful earnestness. There, you transmit the precepts of your God to the hands of your child to be actively fulfilled, and you say to him: **Look, בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים!**

Do you sincerely wish to have the good fortune to see your children live as Jews? Then first perfect yourself as a complete, genuine Jew. Not erudition, but rather sincere, faithful, genuine example wins your children for God. Fulfill the commandments of your God with the pure heart that is attainable by everyone. With this attitude, carry out the Will of your God; show your homage, your devotion, your obedience.

Let there always be present in your mind what this homage, this devotion, this obedience have meant to you throughout your history. Never forget that they alone were the qualities which won and held for you the Godly consecration which makes your life blissful, protects you, and blesses you throughout all ages. Only to the extent that בעבור זה עשה ה' לי, only to the extent that these precepts have caused God to

be *your* God, will you attain that sincerity and that joyfulness which consecrate every Jew as a priest of God. In this way the Jew becomes capable of transmitting, by his living example, this consecration in pure form to the minds and hearts of our youth.

2.

והיה כי ישאלך בןך מחר לאמר מה זאת? (Exodus 13, 14) And now, after you have laid the broad foundation for a cheerfully sincere, active obedience, your child already stands with you on the soil of the living Divine Service. He has learned from you to fulfill all the precepts of your God sincerely and joyfully. In fulfilling them together with you, he has the awareness that the token of your homage, the sight of your devotion, and the proof of your obedience are rendered to God with each of these precepts. He knows that God rewards every such fulfillment with His blissful, sanctifying, and protecting consecration.—

When your child, having matured, now directs this question to you: מה זאת, he is seeking not the reason for but rather the deeper meaning of these Divinely commanded acts. מה זאת, why does God designate just these acts as the sign of our worship, our devotion, and our obedience? ואמרת אליו, do then respond to him, for God told us immediately upon giving His first commandments of פסח מצה מרור, תפליך, בכורות, that we should not only not avoid such questions, but expect and solicit them. God wants us to conduct a searching inquiry into the meaning of the acts that He commanded us to perform.

All of these acts are primarily signs of our worshipful, devoted obedience to God. This obedience should remain the fundamental and sole motive for fulfilling them, for all of us whatever our age, and whatever degree of knowledge and understanding we possess.

Although these acts are primarily signs of our obedience to God, God has at the same time designated them as a means of speaking to us, and as symbols to stimulate us. He has established them to be a means of awakening our thought processes, and of impressing eternal truths ever anew upon our souls. In the practice of the Godly precepts, the idea of the obedience that pays homage to our One Master and Lord should inspire us completely. But the practice itself should lead us and our children to the searching question—מה זאת? Meditation upon the Godly precepts, and penetration into their inner meaning

and connection, offer to our heart and mind an eternally fresh nourishment.

וכי ישאלך בנך מחר לאמר מה זאת? And now when the practice of these precepts prompts your child to ask the question: מה זאת?, you should answer him in the following way: בחזק יד הוציאנו ה' ממצרים, "With might has God led us out of Egypt from the house of bondage!" Observe here the basic concept: "With might has God led us out of Egypt from the house of bondage!"

It was not the normal progression of history that brought us freedom. Of course, the ever wakeful eye of our Father and His Almighty Hand rule eternally also over all "natural" occurrences in the development of the world. But only the spirit enlightened by God seeks Him in the "normal," and only the mind already elevated by God's Revelation venerates Him in the unobtrusive, in the "ordinary" happening.

Man, untouched by Revelation, ignorant of God's invisible Hand in every "natural" and "predictable" event, will refuse to acknowledge a "signal" emanating from the Almighty—unless it entails breaking the laws of nature, unless it is a miracle. Thus, to the mere warning of Moses and Aaron, he will have no other reaction but to say, shrugging: מי ה' אשר אשמע בקולו: Who is God, that I should hearken to His Voice, לשלח את ישראל, to relinquish what is mine, according to the laws of nature and the natural right of the owner?

This man sees the laws of nature operating in the same way today as yesterday. Because of this, he forgets to look around for the One Who established these Laws. He overlooks the One Whose greatest marvel is just the constancy of His laws and the inexhaustible depth of His designs. Thus he turns a blind eye to the many things that elude his calculations and remain eternal riddles.

The word "chance" in the mouth of mortals is perhaps the greatest tribute that we unconsciously render to the omnipresent workings of the living God. Because it is with this word that we confess the shortcomings of our understanding, the inability of the laws of nature discovered by us to explain all phenomena and occurrences.

However, the laws of nature are not "eternal" laws. They have their Lord and Master Who established them, and Who remains their Lord and Master *after* He established them. The laws do not exist because He established them once upon a time, but rather because He still perceives their existence as being good. No blind necessity and no

blind chance rule above our heads. On the contrary, we must honor Him and only Him for His shaping of "the natural order of things."

In order to hold all of this truth up to mortal man, to give him eternal evidence of this truth, God stepped out of "the natural order of things" which veils Him and His workings from the simple beholder.

He inserted a נס, an historical event, into the midst of the natural order of things. This historical event can be seen—in its origin, its course, its existence throughout all ages and changing circumstances—to be completely contrary to the normal way of the world. It destroys all "laws of nature" and every calculation that can be devised by man's intellect. This event was so contrary to normal "nature" that it stands out in its uniqueness as a "banner" ("נס" literally meaning: banner, signal— and only in a transposed sense—miracle.), a banner high above all else. It shouts to all generations of men: Recognize through *כי לה' הארץ* *מה*, that the earth is God's. *אני ה' בקרב הארץ*, that amid all of the phenomena and occurrences of the world, He is the personal, living God!

However, this נס, this wonder with its enormous impact on world history, this banner proclaiming God, is none other than the Jewish people. Yes, it is we, the Jewish people, in our absolute godliness, from the first moment when God saw us dying on Egyptian soil, and His *חי*, "arise and live!" called to us with a mighty voice. It is we, the "Banner" still living after overcoming thousands of different kinds of death.

Not the natural order of things, but rather God with His *חוק* *יד*, His overwhelming might, has given us freedom and life. The natural order of things had allowed us to go to ruin in slavery and misery in Egypt. There, proud concepts of man's moral freedom—the freedom that makes him in a small way resemble God—lay buried in nature deification, in the madness of the caste system. There, the Egyptians tried to transform us into a *בית עבדים*, a pariah caste. Serfdom was to be ours from the cradle. When we arose to freedom, our odds were slim, according to the "natural order of things:"

—The God-denying obstinacy of the supremely powerful ruler;

—the oppression of slavery, intensified to the point of dehumanization;

—the extinguishing within us of all belief in ourselves and all courage to help ourselves. These had been extinguished to the last spark, so that even when we became free, the mere sight of our former masters was enough to make us want to return to the slave-yoke;

—and Moses, whom we are so inclined to credit with leading us to freedom,—how very unsuited he was for such a task, according to the Divine Book! How lacking this shy, modest person was in everything required of a national liberator! “Who am I, that I could go to Pharaoh and that I could lead Israel out of Egypt?” “Because I will be with you,” came the Divine response. “And just this—(that you cannot find within yourself the courage and the strength for such a task)—just this is the sign that testifies for you that I have sent you!”

Our freedom and our whole existence in the history of the world are purely the work of the *חוק* *יד*, of the directly intervening Hand of God. As the Hand of God raised us aloft “upon eagles’ wings,” it overturned all predictions, based upon the natural order of world events, which called for our downfall. Our freedom and our life had to be wrenched from the overwhelming prevailing circumstances. With might, God led us out of Egypt, the land that plotted to keep us enslaved from our very cradles on. These facts are the granite foundation of our existence and our Calling. With them stands or falls our entire significance.

That God raised us *יד בחוק* up to freedom—this elevates *יציאת מצרים* and our whole subsequent existence into a *נס*, a Divine symbol, that proclaims God not only as Creator, but also as Sovereign of the universe, Judge, Father, and Redeemer amid the history of man. This alone makes *יציאת מצרים* the *אצבע אלקים*, the Finger of God, that draws attention beyond Nature to God, above the blind compulsion of natural law to the sovereign Lawgiver Who is its Master. It points beyond the ineluctability of human history, twisted as it is by human licentiousness, to the Almighty Who rules in righteousness and love. Above the multiplicity of forces and powers in nature and history, *יציאת מצרים* guarantees to man the existence of the One, Unique, Sovereign, Living God.

That God raised us to freedom *יד בחוק* makes *יציאת מצרים* at the same time the basis of our unique Calling. Through it God has “purchased us for Himself,” as the Text reads. We belong to God through and through—for every errand on which He sends us, for every task with which He entrusts us.

No drop of blood throbs in our veins, no cord quivers in our nervous system, no fiber twitches in our muscles, no sentiment moves our hearts that does not make us belong more fully to Him. No thought illuminates our brain, no ground supports our weight, no breeze wafts past us that does not join us to Him. No ray of sunlight

They were powerless as before, except that the Hand of God was strong and the taskmasters feared His Hand. His power had broken man's defiance, and in terror of *Him* they drove their slaves out to freedom!

The מצה tells of this event and is therefore a confirmation of the fact: בחוק יד הוציא ה' אתכם מזה; the מצה is a sign to remind us of the thoroughly Godly character of our historical origin.

"And let this be for a sign on your hand and for a perpetual remembrance between your eyes, so that God's Law shall be on your mouth, for ביד חזקה, with an overwhelming Almightyness, has God led you out of Egypt!"

With חמץ and מצה you demonstrate each year the thoroughly Godly character of your origin. Thereby, however, you do not celebrate the mere memory of an event belonging to the past. In this Godliness of your origin is rooted the dependence upon God of your whole present existence, with all its vicissitudes, in every moment of your life. Because your freedom is entirely God's work, therefore your soul and body, which have become free, belong to God. He acquired you when He delivered you. Every thought of your mind, every beat of your heart, every act of your hand is *His own*.

Therefore, "let it be for a sign on your hand and for a perpetual remembrance between your eyes, that with overwhelming Almightyness did God lead you out of Egypt, so that His word, His Teaching, His Law should live in your mouth." He intends that you take the design of His Will as the only pattern for your deeds, and direct your eyes only upon His Will!

Thus from חמץ and מצה come חמליץ.

While חמץ and מצה attest to our utter powerlessness in the hour of Redemption, and thereby to the thoroughly Divine nature of this Redemption, קדושת בכורות, the consecration of the first-born, reminds us of another aspect of the Redemption, namely, the God-denying defiance of our taskmasters, which could only be broken when God touched their precious lives with the finger of death.

"When therefore your son asks you one day, מה זאת," when he looks upon this consecration of the Seder service, "then say to him: בחוק יד, with force did God lead us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage. There, Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, and then God slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of

man to the first-born of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to God every male animal that is the firstling of its mother's womb, and the first-born of my sons I redeem. Therefore, let it be to you for a sign on your hand, and for a diadem between your eyes, that *בְּחֹק יְיָ* God brought us out of Egypt."

That midnight hour, in which the triumphant Right Hand of God restored to you house and property, summoned you hence forward to freedom and independence. It returned your most precious treasures, your children, to the bosom of their devoted fathers. That midnight saw you blissfully once more within the family circle before your God. By contrast, it showed you the palaces and huts of your taskmasters whose finest offspring were stricken with death.

Pharaoh did not wish to surrender even his last, most despised slave to the Divine command. And so he had to pay for this God-denying defiance with the death of his most treasured son.

This event guides you through the entire period of your God-given independence. With regard to Him nothing is your own. You place your greatest treasure at His disposal. In your first-born you consecrate to Him everything living within your family. Everything, everything that breathes for you breathes for Him, and when you redeem your first-born son, say to yourself and to him, "Because we consecrate our children for the holiness of the Law of our God, we acquire blessing and prosperity for ourselves in exchange for them."

However, the consecration of the first-born that results from the night of death for the Egyptians also calls out a stern warning for all of our possessions: *אם לא תפדה וערפתו!* Whatever you do not redeem by acknowledging your debt to God, you yourself will bring it to an end!

And again, not only at the moment when you raise your first-born up to God in a fatherly feeling of intoxicated bliss, but your whole life long let this dependence upon God by all living Jews be remembered by you. What the Divine Omnipotence had to wrest from Pharaoh by fear of death, shall be for you not only the veiled sign on your hand, the quiet lever of your actions, but your ornament and your beautification; let it be your pride and diadem! Let it be the ennoblement of your forehead—that God's Hand acquired you from out of Egypt. Be you His own, and know no higher dignity, no higher bliss, no higher freedom than to remain His own. Let all of your thoughts be absorbed in His Service: *והיה לאות על ירכה ולטוטפת בין עיניך כי בחזק יד הוציאנו ה' ממצרים!*

3.

It is God's Will that you initiate your child into the fulfillment of His precepts by means of a living example, but at the same time it is His Will that you answer your boy's questions. Your son asks of you to set forth to him the purpose and significance of the precepts that God's Word had revealed. Then the precepts, in whose fulfillment your child gives evidence of his homage, his devotion, and his obedience to God, become at the same time a meaningful guide for his soul and his mind. They fill him with the truths of the Divine teaching.

This is your task, above all with those precepts that God's Word expressly designated as *אזרח* and *עדות*, whose performance is for us as signs and testimonies which accompany us throughout life. Through them, God speaks to us and reminds us again and again of Him and of the duty of carrying out our mission.

Most of these "signifying and testifying" precepts are rooted in *יציאת מצרים*. They are to bring to ever riper and more complete consciousness this fact of our origin with all of its consequences for the various aspects of our existence and our Calling.

Our birth, *יציאת מצרים*, is the Divinely laid foundation of our entire Jewish essence. So much is this the case, that reflection upon it is not limited to once each year with the return of its commemorative days. Not only is it to be firmly retained by means of signs upon the hand and head; not only must it be verbally expressed daily, early and late, when we rise up and lie down—but it should, in fact, *never* depart from our thoughts, because it must form the root and the basis of all of our thoughts, feelings, and actions. The Divine Law has thus spread the remembrance of it throughout our entire life in sign, word, and deed for the express purpose, *למען תזכור את יום צאתך מארץ מצרים כל ימי חייך*—“that you should reflect upon the day of your departure from Egypt all the days of your life.”

Indeed, this concept, powerful like no other, is also best suited to arm us for our uniquely Jewish mission amid a world that is filled with ideas so different from ours. It is a world which holds completely different concepts as true, guides itself by completely different principles, and strives for entirely different goals as the purpose in life.

The concept *בזוהך יד הוציאנו* has the answer to all questions, and soothes all doubt. It affords protection from all errors, and preserves

us alert, fresh, happy, and strong in the service of God. **יציאת מצרים** is thus no mere children's story, no mere article of faith in our boys' catechisms. It is the talisman for our youths and men, it is the starting point to which we are continually to relate.

The manner of this relating to **יציאת מצרים** will be more earnest and determined the more mature we become, the more our spiritual and emotional life unfolds itself, the more we come in contact with the outside world, the more we walk in thoughtful contemplation concerning the world and our destiny in it. Even our study of the Divine Law secures the Law within us only if we are fully aware of our roots.

We read in the Divine Law: "When your son asks you one day, 'What are the testimonies and provisions of the Law that God, our God, commanded you?', then say to your son: 'We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and God led us out of Egypt with overwhelming might. God sent signs, and great and painful wonders upon Egypt and upon Pharaoh and upon all his household before our eyes.

'But us He led out from there in order to bring us here, to give us the land that He had sworn to give to our fathers. Then God commanded us to practice all of these laws (**את כל החקים האלה**) in order to evince the awe of God, our God, that He should preserve us alive as on this day for the sake of our continual salvation. We will be dutiful only when we meticulously fulfill this *entire* Law in the presence of God, our God, as He has commanded us.'" (Deut. 6, 20–25)

It is our matured son, it is the inquiring Jewish youth that is presented to us here. He has recognized God as his God; he has understood Him in His relationship to the totality of the Jewish nation; he refers to Him as "our God." He is already familiar with the Divine Laws from daily practice. He knows **עדות**, with their testimony, their warning, their solemn reminder and instruction in the practices which accompany us on our journey through life. He knows **חוקים**, the laws which keep our strivings and our senses within the boundaries of purity and sanctity. He knows **משפטים**, the conditions which regulate our social life according to the requirements of justice. He knows also the source from which he must draw the complete knowledge of this Law of his life. It is not only Scripture, the Book, it is the Tradition of the father to which he turns. He asks the father concerning the precepts that God—his as well as his father's—commanded for him and for all future generations, **אשר צוה ה' אלקינו אתכם**.

And now, observe. His question—"what are the testimonies?"—does not at all relate to the Pessach festival and its laws. Neither in his

question, nor in all of his previous utterances, is the Pessach festival even mentioned. He desires to "learn." He wishes to get to know the testimonies, the precepts, which God entrusted to the fathers to be bequeathed to the sons. His desire is for the study of the Law in general. And how does the answer read? ואמרה לבנך עבדים היינו לפרעה ובמצרים וכו' Here you see the only genuine "Introduction to the study of the Mishna and the Talmud!"

Do not sit down at the feet of your fathers and your teachers as long as you do not stand with them on one and the same soil, the soil of the foundation that was laid with יציאת מצרים. Leave the great volumes unopened if you do not from the outset bring with you the basic sense in which their contents should be studied and can be comprehended. יראה קדמה להכמה is written over the gate that leads to the Holy of Holies of the knowledge of the Law; fear of God issued the passport to wisdom!

Are you a true Jew? Do you feel yourself to be a son of those whom God acquired in Egypt with a strong Hand to be His servants, and whose eyes God opened at that time in order to see His work on earth? Are His commandments, therefore, in all of their diversity, His עדות, His חוקים, His משפטים, without exception fundamentally חוקים to you, as this answer calls them exclusively—אם כל החקים האלה—Do you accept them as חוקים, "Laws" which you cannot alter? Do you acknowledge that behind them stands the Will of your Lord and Master as the ultimate cause that secures them from all tampering? Do you firmly realize from the outset that "Tzedakah," the righteousness of your life, the dutiful performance of *your* Mission, can only consist in fulfilling *all* of the commandments of your God? Do you commit yourself to fulfill all of them with meticulous exactness and only *entirely the way He commanded them*? כי נשמר לעשות את כל המצוה הזאת לפני ה' אלקינו כאשר צונו.

If so, then enter through the gate which is the entrance to His Sanctuary. Learn, study, think, investigate. Pray to Him that He might teach you "to behold the wonder of His Law."—All of your learning, studying, thinking, investigating, and penetrating into the secrets of His Law will only make the devotion of your practice more complete. It will only serve to increase the blessedness of your Service and to cement the bond of your obedience more firmly.—The deeper you penetrate, the higher the goal will be to you. The more you investigate, the more humble you will become, the more deeply you will bow before the sublimity of the Divine Law. If you understand one portion

or you think you understand it, while another matter confronts you as a riddle, you will fulfill both with equal earnestness, with equally blissful and joyful devotion. נצדקה תהיה לך כי נשמור לעשות את כל המצוה הזאת לפני ה' אלקינו כאשר צונו.

Thus, יציאת מצרים, with all that it implies, is the prerequisite for לימוד התורה. It is at the root of the ancient נעשה ונשמע, the ancient Jewish devotion, which centuries ago (Sabbath 88a) branded us in the eyes of the אפיקורוס as the עמא פזיזא, the reckless nation “whose mouth rushes ahead of its ear,” קרמיתו פומייכו לאורנייכו. May we remain this “reckless nation!”

They, “the Apikorsim,” do not know the granite foundation upon which this unconditional devotion rests. They do not consider that when נעשה preceded נשמע, this נעשה, this acceptance of *all* commandments without inquiry was preceded by יציאת מצרים, that magnificent experience, unique in world history. It in fact transformed our whole existence and raised us up “on the eagle’s wings of God” to an entirely different level of perception.—

The words of our Sages also seem to have formulated the wise son’s question and answer in this sense. We read in the חכם מה הוא מכילתא: אומר מה הערות והחוקים והמשפטים אשר צוה ה' אלקינו אתכם אף אתה פתח לו בהלכות (ס”א כהלכות) הפסח אין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן does not concern פסח at all, *begin* his instruction, nevertheless, with הלכות הפסח. Introduce his לימוד התורה with הפסח (or, according to another opinion: begin speaking to him as on the Seder-evening: עבדים היינו וכר). Say to him: אין מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן, that the last sentence of הלכות פסח teaches “eat nothing more after the Pessach!”

We should eat from the Pessach lamb with enjoyment until we are satiated. The Pessach should satisfy us and should represent everything we need. After having concluded our meal with the eating of the Pessach we should not negate the enjoyment of this Mitzva by adding a dessert, a final course. We should carry the Pessach-reflection with us through life; every step that we take should be governed by it.—אין—אין מעבירין טעם פסח מפיו פסח נאכל על השובע—מפטירין אחר הפסח אפיקומן

4.

But God’s Message has counted not only on the innocent, wondering child, the inquiring boy, the searching young man; it anticipated

not only times in which Jewish youth grow into adulthood standing harmoniously side by side with their parents and, because of the example and instruction at the paternal table, progressively mature in preparation for entrance into the halls of Torah-science. God also foresaw times in which the bond between the younger and older generations would be torn.

There would be times when the younger generation would no longer participate in the celebration and fulfillment of the Law which their elders practiced. They would contend not only that they are not required to receive anything further that is holy from the hands of their elders, but that, on the contrary, their mission is to combat the Torah way of life of their elders by means of criticism, and to counter their elders' loyalty to the Law with destructive irony.

There *would* be times when the father seats himself with joyful earnestness at the Seder, but the "progressive" son passes by the table with derisive mockery and interjects the heart-breaking taunt: מה מה הטורה הזה? "What does this Service mean to you? העבודה הזאת לכם?! "What is the meaning of this inconvenience with which you trouble us each year?" בשורה רעה נתבשרו ישראל באותה שעה שואף החוררה עתידה להשתכח, ויש אומרים בשורה טובה נתבשרו ישראל באותה שעה שהן עתידין לראות בנים ובני בנים. One opinion of the sages here exclaims, "A sad prophecy did Israel receive here: that the Torah will fall into oblivion!" Another opinion states, "A joyful prophecy did they receive here, because it was prophesied to them that they would have sons and grandsons!"

Is this second prediction a joyful prospect because it looks beyond the fallen *sons* to the *grandsons* who will return? Is the prediction joyful because of the thought that even the times of desertion of the Torah need not dishearten us or cause us to despair, since the Torah foresaw such times as well, foresaw them from the very beginning? Is it joyful because just in preparing us for this hardship it issues the guarantee that the hardship will pass? And because despite these periods, the eternal carrying forward of the Divine Law in unmarred freshness will come about?

But, what should be said to the members of this fallen generation who, in their apostasy, fancy themselves to be the "progressives," and deride the loyal elders as "backward?" *To them nothing should be said!* The Divine Word teaches in relation to the wondering child, the inquiring boy, and the searching youth: והגדת לבנך: ואמרת לבנך, ואמרת אליו, והגדת לבנך:

tell your son, say to him, say to your son. But in relation to the scornful generation it does not say **ואמרתם אליהם**, but simply **ואמרתם**, because to *them* you have nothing to say. They expect no instruction from you. They have, indeed, "advanced" so far beyond you that they wish to instruct *you*. They wish to move you, by means of their "refined" mockery, from your stale "narrow" views, which appear to them to be burdensome encumbrances, up to their level, up to the bright, easy unrestraint of their "progressiveness."

What would you have to say to them? They, after all, do not speak in order to receive instruction, but in order to instruct *you*, to reason with *you*. They are not tolerant enough to countenance silently your "different orientation." They do not yet feel so secure about their defection that they do not see in your loyalty a reproach which bothers them. They still love you too much to be able with a calm eye to see you biased by "foolish prejudice."—

What would you have to say to that generation? Do not expect that your words, or the most brilliant arguments in defense of your ancient Divine Law, can cause their hearts to return. Continue to devote your life to the belief in the Divine origin of the Law, and you will find the profound happiness of your life in this belief. But as for that generation—it might long ago have carried this entire belief to the grave!

The key to the hearts of this estranged generation rests in the Hands of God. Only experience can bring them back, the experience of the hollowness, the nothingness, the bleakness and emptiness of all those delusions into whose arms they have thoughtlessly thrown themselves. One day those hearts will once more be filled with yearning for the happiness of possessing the ancient Truth which was thrown away. One day these words will be put in their mouth: **אלכה ואשובה אל אישי** (Hosea 2, 9), "I would fain return to God, to my ancient loyalty; because I was happier then than now!"

You must wait for such a time. Until then *you* have *nothing* to say to *them*. You have nothing to say to *them*, even in response to their ridicule.

Altogether silent you may not be. To the extent that God's Word does not teach you **ואמרתם אליהם**, all the more firmly does it require **ואמרתם**! The less you have to say to *them*, the more resolutely and clearly must you in general express what the Divine precepts are to *you*. All the more firmly and distinctly must you testify to the blessed joyfulness that you find in the fulfillment of the precepts. All the more

clearly and unambiguously must you set your conviction against their doubt, your loyalty against their apostasy, your determination against their wavering. You must show the vigor of your life as compared to their degeneracy, and set your joyful earnestness against the vapidness of their easy way and raucous delights.

The more impertinently and scornfully this generation says, מה ואמרתם, "What does this Service mean to you?" **העבודה הזאת לכם**, all the more clearly, all the more resolutely must you express it: זבח פסח הוא לה' "It is a Pessach-offering-of devotion to God, Who passed over the dwellings of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians whereas our dwellings He spared!" All the more distinctly and firmly draw their attention to the unshakeable historical foundation upon which rests your whole Jewish existence and your entire joyful devotion in the Service of God. No doubt can shake this foundation, and no sophistry is capable of brushing it aside. And even today, the historical existence of every Jew and every Jewish home bears witness to it.

ואמרתם! Suppose that people around you are silent. Or that all around you suggest that one should be ashamed of being a Jew. They intimate that one must not walk in broad daylight with God's commandment. They hint that one must no longer dare open one's mouth on behalf of the Divine commandments. "ואמרתם!" Open your mouth! Be not silent! Show and declare aloud that the precepts that you fulfill are to you the highest ideal. Proudly state that they are the bond which binds you with God, that, like the fathers in Egypt once did, you still consecrate yourself and your home to God by means of these precepts. Fearlessly assert that you stand before God in their fulfillment and with their fulfillment, and that therefore people's praise or censure have not the slightest effect on you.

Declare aloud that you consider *yourself* and others like you to be the progressive ones. Do not hesitate to say that you recognize the fulfillment of the Divine commands as the only progress. Affirm that God Himself laid down the performance of His precepts as the only condition to His choosing of Israel in Egypt.

Only this fulfillment, this obedience, separated the Jew from the Egyptians, the Jewish home from the dwelling of the Egyptian. For the sake of this fulfillment of the precepts, God passed over the Jewish dwellings as He brought death into the houses of the Egyptians. Declare aloud that to fulfill God's commandment is to let oneself be

carried upon God's "wings of eagles." Say that not to fulfill His command is to sink down into the Egyptian abyss. . . . it is to journey back into the Egyptian night out of which God's compassion raised us.

With such a clear, resolute confession, you rescue yourselves and your children from the debasement of a generation gone mad. You yourself place before this generation the shining beacon by means of which they will have to find their way back, when the time for their return arrives one day.—

Accordingly, Sages in the *מכילתא* and in the *הגדה* regard this *ואמרתם* וזכר *פסח* of the Torah not as a reply directed *to* the sons, who have confronted you with the disparaging words: *מה העבודה הזאת לכם*, but rather as a general declaration. They have therefore not their own words as an *answer* to the fallen-away son. Rather, they have formulated a declaration using the same words with which the significance of these precepts should be introduced early on to the wondering child's mind: *בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים*. For the sake of this Service—which seems to you to be a useless bother, a burdensome yoke—did God act when I went out of Egypt!

Just with this formulation have they shown that *vis à vis* the apostate you must go back to the most elementary fact, to the foundation of Jewish consciousness which must be laid in the minds and hearts of Jewish children. They have shown that all that remains is to return to the Jewish ABC, the basis of everything Jewish, and that every Jew who denies it commits himself to apostasy.

As long as this Jewish ABC is not acknowledged, as long as it is not recognized with simple honesty, without equivocation, and without any reinterpreted "i.e.," as long as it is not accepted as historical fact that *בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים*, that *יציא מצרים* affixes the Divine seal upon all of our *מצוות*; that the *performance* of these *מצוות* constitutes the only condition for our being chosen and delivered from Egypt, then there is nothing further to discuss with him. Words in explanation of the *מצוות* have a purpose only for him who still fulfills the *מצוות*.

One who does not fulfill the *מצוות* and enters the sphere of their fulfillment only with derision, has just with this non-fulfillment already effected his desertion of God and of the Jewish nation as a whole, *כפר בעיקר, הוציא את עצמו מן הכלל*. In his case, nothing remains but firmly and clearly to make him aware of his desertion. He must be told that, since he emancipates himself from the fulfillment of the *מצוות*, he

has, in doing so, already torn the only bond that binds us all to God and to the entirety of the Jewish nation. He has destroyed the basic condition that brought about our Redemption and Election.—With such principles as his, Israel would never have been redeemed אלו היה נגאל—שם לא היה נגאל—

The decisive awareness of this is perhaps the only thing that can bring him to his senses.—

ברוך המקום ברוך הוא, praise be to Him, to the Supporter of all ages, in Whom all developments find their ultimate point of origin and their limit. Praise be to Him! ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו ישראל ברוך הוא, praise be to Him Who gave His Law to the people of Israel. Praise be to Him כנגד תורה אחר חכם ואחד רשע אחד תם ואחד שאינו יודע לשאול, Whose Law anticipated and presupposed all developments, אחר חכם ואחד רשע אחד תם ואחד שאינו יודע לשאול.

His Law anticipated the son who inquires with wisdom as well as the scorner in his apostasy, the one who asks in his innocence as well as the one who looks on wonderingly, lacking the ability to reflect. It anticipated the wise youth as well as the wayward youth, the young boy as well as the little child. Praise be to Him! He has foreseen all, and has prepared His Law for all. And just for that reason, His Law is eternal, as is His people. It accompanies His people in all stages of their development.

And times may come when the maturing generation says disparagingly to the older generation, מה העבודה הזאת לכם, Still . . . other times will come when the young joyfully ask “concerning the testimonies, laws, and rightful order that God has entrusted to every older generation for transmittal to the generation following it” . . . when all of Israel, young and old, rally themselves around the *one* principle: וצדקה תהיה לנו כי נשמר לעשות את כל המצוה הזאת לפני ה' אלקינו כאשר ציונו “we will only do justice to our duty if we fulfill this entire Law with meticulous care in the presence of our God, as He has commanded us.”—