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Talmudic Judaism and Society

The Relationship of the Talmud to Judaism and the Social Attitudes of the Talmud's Adherents

I have received a friendly request to prepare a brief, easily understood presentation of the role of the Talmud in Judaism and its impact on the social attitude of its adherents. Unfortunately, the present century, so widely acclaimed for its humanitarianism and respect for justice, seems about to end on a note of profound disillusionment for all genuine humanitarians. Truths long regarded as a basic part of mankind's spiritual heritage are questioned again, and prejudices believed dead and buried long ago have been resurrected, with alarming consequences.

Rabbi Hirsch wrote this essay in 1884 at the request of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor (1817–1896), founder of the renowned Yeshiva of Kovno and acknowledged spiritual leader of Russian-Lithuanian Jewry. The essay was written to counteract the campaign of vilification conducted in Czarist Russia against the Talmud. It was claimed that the Talmud made its adherents a menace to society, encouraging them to be devious and deceitful, particularly in their dealings with non-Jews, and instilling in them a distaste for honest toil. In his essay, Rabbi Hirsch explains the Torah *Weltanschauung* on the basis of some 150 selected passages from the Talmud and other Rabbinic literature, carefully chosen and explained to show how much stress the Talmud places on honesty, morality and diligence, and how the Talmud teaches the Jew to be a decent, law-abiding member of society and a loyal citizen of the country in which he resides.

Through family ties, the Grand Duke of Hessen-Darmstadt was close to Czar Alexander III. Rabbi Dr. L. Asher Marx (1842–1925) of Darmstadt was friendly with the Grand Duke who, in turn, was willing to use his influence with the Czar on behalf of Jewry. Having received Rabbi Hirsch's essay through Rabbi Marx, the Grand Duke arranged for it to be sent directly to the Czar. The essay achieved its purpose; Rabbi Spektor's apprehensions that the Czarist government might close Talmudical academies and prohibit new printings of the Talmud did not materialize at that time. (Ed.)

The chief victims of this intellectual and cultural regression have been the Jews. Once again, sworn enemies of the Jews are seeking to bring before governments and councils of state the so-called "Jewish problem," which one would think was laid to rest long ago. The purpose of these attempts is to call into question the inviolable equality to which Jews, along with others, are entitled before the law. Unfriendly elements are encouraging the revival of base, sinister hatred and envy among populations that had long been accustomed to accept and respect the Jew as an equal citizen whose honesty, industry, public-spirited generosity and philanthropy had earned him the recognition and good will of his fellow countrymen.

From time immemorial, wherever Jews suffered, the Talmud has been their companion in adversity. Wherever Jews became victims of prejudice, the Talmud, too, became a primary target. Indeed, mindless prejudice was always quick to blame the Talmud for what it considered to be the pernicious influence of the Jew on society. The result was that even well-meaning people, who were in no position to refute these notions because the Talmud was literally a closed book to them and who regarded the Talmud not as an inalienable part of Judaism but merely as an appendage grafted onto it, began to think that the Jews would do well to repudiate the Talmud. They claimed that if the Jews were to rid themselves of the Talmud, it would serve not only their best interests but also the interests of their fellow citizens among whom they lived. They held that if modern Jews would gradually distance themselves from the Talmud, it would be a sign of genuine progress in our modern era.

These considerations, supported by recent trends questioning the standing of Jews in society, prompted the request that I prepare a concise, readily understandable synopsis of the relation of the Talmud to Judaism and to the social attitudes of the Jews. I have been requested to cite pertinent passages from the Talmud in as faithful a translation as possible, so that even a non-Jewish reader who is free from prejudice can form a correct opinion, on his own, with regard to the influence of the Talmud on the lives of its adherents.

I gladly undertook this task and hope that with these pages I have accomplished it to the best of my ability. Wherever possible, I have selected texts that have become particularly imbedded in the consciousness of the Jewish nation and consequently have played a decisive role in molding fundamental Jewish ideas and principles.

It is hoped, therefore, that these modest pages will help enlighten those who favor truth over preconceived notions. May these pages be noted and studied particularly by those who, because of their public office and sphere of activity, are in a position to influence the fortunes of their Jewish fellow citizens, and may the day not be far distant when the recognition of truth and the respect for justice and right will bring about the fulfillment of our common hopes for universal human happiness and prosperity.

Hardly another literary classic has had so profound an impact on the spiritual, moral and social development of an entire nation, from the earliest recorded days of its existence to our own present time, as has the Talmud. Long before they were recorded in writing at the beginning of the third century of the Common Era, the contents of the Talmud had taken root in Jewish hearts and minds as an oral tradition and law. This fact is amply documented in the writings of Josephus and Philo, and also in the early religious sources of Christianity. For the Talmud is nothing less than a faithful written record of the detailed explanations, interpretations, definitions and discourses handed down by tradition to elaborate upon laws presented in precise but only very spare outline form in the written text of the Bible. The essence of these traditions reaches back to none other than Moses, who handed them to his people, along with the written Word of God, as teachings of the same Divine origin, for the purpose of implementing and observing the Written Law of God. During the forty years that the Children of Israel wandered through the wilderness, Moses labored without cease to commit these traditions to the memory of his people.

These elucidations, transmitted by word of mouth, were already implicit in the written text of the Word of God because it would be impossible to observe the precepts of the Written Law correctly without the elucidations and details transmitted through the Oral Law. Indeed, it will be obvious to any thoughtful reader of the Biblical text that all the laws of God were initially taught to the people of Israel orally, so that the entire Law was already known in detail to the people by the time Moses handed the written Biblical text to them before he died. Even a simple reading of the original text of the Bible requires a knowledge of the Oral Law. To this day our Torah scrolls are written without vowels, accent marks and verse divisions, all of which date from a much later period, and which were introduced only to per-

petuate the traditional reading, lest it be forgotten by future generations. So we see that even an ordinary perusal of the Biblical text is based on an oral tradition, a tradition from the same generations and individuals who also transmitted to future generations the elucidations contained in the Talmud. And if all the denominations of Christianity accept the Jewish Bible, the "Old Testament," as a basic source for their faiths, this shows that Christianity, even with its straightforward reading of the Biblical text, is grounded in the Talmudic tradition. As early a teacher as Hillel made this clear to one heathen who had asked to be received into the Jewish fold, declaring himself ready to accept the Written Law but stipulating that he should not be required to accept the Oral Law. Hillel refused the man's request, pointing out that he would not even be able to read the Written Law without recourse to the Oral Tradition.

The practical observance of the Law of God set down in the Biblical text requires an oral explanation of its contents, so much so that even those later Jewish sects that rejected the Talmudic tradition found it necessary to create a tradition of their own. Except for a small surviving group of Karaites, all these sects have vanished from the scene. The one, sole historic Judaism that has consistently followed its Divinely-ordained path among the nations through all the centuries of history, down to our own day, is Talmudic Judaism, the Judaism upheld, nurtured and preserved by the traditions set down in the Talmud.

In addition to these traditions that date back to Moses, the Talmud is replete with opinions, instructions, rulings and expositions from expounders and sages of later eras. This material, the Halachah, represents inferences, applications or elucidations derived from those earlier traditions that date back to Moses; the Halachah is a continuation of the earlier traditions and has the same binding authority. Furthermore, there is the Aggadah, which consists of personal views, sayings, parables, etc., and does not claim the same binding authority as the Halachah.

Actually, the Talmud consists of two distinct parts. The older of the two, the Mishnah, contains the traditions initially transmitted orally and later written down in the form of terse statements, which themselves are in need of elaboration. Originally, these elaborations were passed on by word of mouth, but 250 years after the Mishnah had

been written down, they, too, were recorded in a work we know as the Gemara. The Gemara, with its many volumes, is probably unique in world literature. It is for the most part a stenographic record of discussions that took place in the houses of study. We consequently find in it a vast collection of opinions, some of which are mutually opposing and contradictory. Only the final results of these discussions have binding authority; they have been set down systematically in our codes of Jewish law.

It would seem clear even from this spare outline that the Talmud is not a mere addendum to Judaism that could be arbitrarily discarded without changing the basic character of Judaism. On the contrary, the Talmud is the one source from which Judaism emanates, the one foundation upon which Judaism is built, and the living soul that shapes and preserves Judaism. Judaism, as embodied in the historic phenomenon of the Jewish people and as manifested in the intellectual and moral qualities that even its enemies cannot deny, is a product, through and through, of the teachings contained in the Talmud and of the educational process inspired and guided by these teachings.

The unique qualities associated with the Jews and Judaism can be traced back directly to the teachings of the Talmud. It is the Talmud that inspired the purposeful manner in which the Jewish people has passed through all the vicissitudes of time and fate; the patient, trusting and courageous perseverance of the Jewish people even amidst the most cruel trials and sufferings; the willingness of the Jewish people to make sacrifices for its convictions, to be cast down but never broken, bowed but never crushed, to be slaughtered rather than desert its faith. It is the Talmud, too, that has taught the Jewish nation its sense of duty, its obedience and loyalty to princes and ruling authorities. The Talmud bids the Jews to give firm and loyal support to the ruling authorities in times of revolution and upheaval. Furthermore, the Talmud has taught the Jews to maintain and demonstrate good will toward their fellow citizens of other faiths, regardless of whether such good will, justice and humanity are reciprocated. It is the Talmud that has taught the Jews to endure abuse and brutality without ever yielding to the impulse to repay their foes measure for measure.

It is the Talmud, too, that has nurtured the intellectual talents and interests that have characterized members of the Jewish people from time immemorial and that were cultivated and preserved by them

without outside assistance. Without help from any government, indeed, in the face of downright disrespect and discrimination from the ruling powers, the Jews succeeded in preserving their aptitudes to such an extent that when, thanks to the good will of our new era, they were allowed to emerge from their enforced isolation, they turned out to be—much to the amazement of the world—the full intellectual equals of their non-Jewish fellow citizens. It is the Talmud that has instilled into them the personal virtues of moderation, diligence, benevolence and thrift—and at the same time of generosity toward humanitarian, philanthropic and educational causes. It is due to the Talmud that the Jews are characterized by such an uprightness that it is highly unusual, even now, to find a Jewish name in the statistics of crimes against life, morality or property. The Talmud has instilled into its followers the virtues of family life that make for happy marriages and for loving relationships between parents and children and brothers and sisters. The Talmud engenders a communal way of life characterized by the readiness of its members to make sacrifices and by the selfless, devoted loyalty of its leaders.

All these qualities, which are typical of the average Jew, which certainly have brought no shame upon him, and which are so obvious that even enemies of the Jewish nation cannot help but acknowledge them, are a direct result of the Talmud. In fact, ever since the modern generation has, in varying degrees, distanced itself from the Talmud, the consequence has been a marked decline in some of these virtues.

After all, it was the Talmud which, with its liturgical creations and customs, transformed the daily life of the Jew into one continuous course of exhortation and training in the fear of God. The laws of the Talmud remind the Jew at every turn, when he partakes of food or other pleasures, when he beholds a wonder of nature, at every joyous or sad occasion in his life, to look up to God Whose sovereignty he has been taught to perceive and to revere in the history of nature and mankind. In fact, the doctrine of the spiritual and immortal character of the soul, along with the belief in a world to come where a dutiful life will be rewarded and dereliction punished—fundamental tenets that provide so firm a foundation for punctiliousness in religious observance and for persevering devotion to duty—are only implied in the written text of the Bible; it was left to the oral tradition of the Talmud to explain them in detail.

The enemies of the Jews and the adversaries of Judaism claim that the Talmud is a menace to society. This canard has been accepted even by some well-meaning people who are in no position to judge for themselves whether these claims are founded on fact. There are those who contend that the Talmud encourages deviousness and cunning, that it permits Jews to practice deceit, robbery and all manner of dishonesty in their dealings with non-Jews, that the Talmud makes Jews unwilling to work, that, in general, the Talmud looks down on honest toil, craftsmanship and agriculture and is to blame for the preponderance of Jews in business and commerce.

Yet the well-documented truth is just the opposite of these accusations, which are the result of hatred, illusion, ignorance, unintentional misinterpretation or deliberate distortion of fact.

Now that the so-called "Jewish problem" has emerged once again into the forefront of public discussion, and in view of the undeniable close link between the Talmud and every aspect of the spiritual and moral life of the Jew, both as an individual and in his relations with others, we cannot be indifferent to what others think of the Talmud. We must especially not be indifferent to those persons who, by virtue of their intelligence and their authority, are in a position to influence the attitude of the masses toward truth and justice and who therefore can affect, even indirectly, the fortunes of the adherents of Judaism.

In view of all the foregoing, it should be desirable, to say the least, for us to cite verbatim, from the Talmud and from the legal codes based upon it, those passages which most eloquently document our statements concerning the significance of the Talmud as the sole source of true and authentic Judaism. Far from being a menace to society, it should be demonstrated that the teachings contained in the Talmud have played a predominant role in helping promote and maintain the general welfare of the Jews and in ensuring their high moral standard.

We will begin by refuting the false accusations that have been made against the Talmud, clearly documenting the utter untruth of these allegations.

The Talmud on Honesty and Integrity

The Talmud teaches that when some day you will be called to account before God, the first question addressed to you will be

whether you were always scrupulously honest in your dealings with others (Shabbath 31a). Let your yea be yea, and your nay be nay. Your thoughts must never be inconsistent with your words. Even when you have not yet legally bound yourself to a proposed business transaction, remember that He Who punished the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Tower of Babel will also punish him who does not keep his word. Even a deviation from a mere verbal promise is considered an act of dishonesty (Baba Metzia 49a). One who adheres to his resolves even though he has never put them into words is singled out for special praise. One sage in the Talmud once received an offer for an article of merchandise. He could not respond to the offer because he was otherwise engaged. Thinking that his offer had been too low, the customer raised it. Thereupon, when the sage was able to respond, he sold the article to the customer for the original price, explaining that before the customer had raised his offer, he, the sage, had already made up his mind to accept the original offer (see Rashi, Makkoth 24a).

It is forbidden to cheat a customer or a vendor, regardless of whether he is a Jew or a Gentile, or even to deceive him with smooth talk; if a person knows that the article he wishes to sell is defective, he must not conceal that knowledge from his customer. It is likewise forbidden to make the merchandise look more valuable than it is or to diminish its value by changing its composition or ingredients (Maimonides, Laws of Selling, Chapter 18). Larceny or robbery, no matter how trivial, is forbidden; it is equally forbidden to withhold from another person that which is rightfully due him, regardless of whether he is a Jew, a non-Jew or an idol worshipper. It is even forbidden to steal an article in jest, or with the intention of eventually returning it to its rightful owner or making restitution for it. Even the temporary use of an object without the knowledge of its owner is regarded as robbery (Maimonides, Laws of Robbery and Lost Objects, Chapter 1; Baba Bathra 88a; Baba Metzia 43b). It is forbidden to purchase an article that one has reason to assume was stolen, or to purchase anything from a person whom one has reason to suspect of being a thief (Baba Kamma 118b). If, by some error, a guest at a banquet or a visitor at a house of mourning had his clothes exchanged for those of another person, he must not use the garment or garments left for him by mistake (Baba Bathra 46a). Any evasion of taxes or customs duties

imposed by the authorities is regarded as theft, pure and simple (Baba Kamma 113a; Maimonides, Laws of Robbery and Lost Objects, 5:11). One may not even break off a piece from a bundle of straw or a piece from a branch of a bush to use as a toothpick, for if everyone were to do that, then, before long, nothing would be left of the straw or the bush, and its owner would have lost it all (Choshen Mishpat 359:1).

Many acts that are not regarded as outright larceny or theft are prohibited by Rabbinic law in accordance with the principle that any act that even resembles wrongdoing or could lead to it must be avoided. This principle is applied in every area of religious law. For instance, a Nazirite who has vowed to abstain from drinking wine and eating grapes should be cautioned to avoid even coming near a vineyard (Shabbath 13a; Pesachim 40b, *et al.*). Consequently, regulations to guard us from breaking the law are known as "fences around the law." These "fences" include prohibitions against various forms of gambling or betting; evidence submitted by professional gamblers was not admissible in court. One who kept pigeons was forbidden to release his birds close to the loft of another lest pigeons belonging to the other party might come to roost in his own loft (Sanhedrin 25a).

In addition to theft of physical property, the Talmud condemns what it calls "theft of ideas or opinions" (Chullin 94a and b). Thus, a person must not behave in such a manner as to allow another person to form a better opinion of him than his true character would warrant, even if this would not be detrimental to the other party. It is explicitly stated (Chullin 94a) that it is forbidden to misappropriate another person's ideas or opinions also if that person is a non-Jew. The following incident is cited as a case in point: One Talmudic sage administered a stern rebuke to his servant because the latter had given to a ferryman, a non-Jew, a chicken that was *trefe* (i.e., prohibited as food for Jews because it was defective), leaving him with the impression that the bird was kosher (i.e., permissible as food for Jews). This was considered deception even though the defect in the chicken would have made no difference to the non-Jewish ferryman, who could have eaten the bird without harming himself or acting against his religious beliefs. Also classed as "mental theft" is any *captatio benevolentiae* [attempt to "capture" another by excessive demonstrations of good will], e.g., invitations or offerings of lavish gifts when one knows that the other party will not accept them, and so forth.

Rabbinic law places particular stress on the punctilious observance of the Biblical laws concerning honest weights and measures (Leviticus 19, 35–36 and Deuteronomy 25, 13–16) and goes into painstaking detail (Baba Bathra 88a–90b; Maimonides, Laws of Theft, Chapters 7 and 8) on how to ensure accurate weights and measures and how to avoid any possibility of error in weighing, measuring and figuring. The Talmud points out that the punishment for dishonest weights and measures is even more severe than that decreed for sexual transgressions (Baba Bathra 88b; Maimonides Laws of Theft 7:12), for while the latter are offenses only against God, the former are sins also against our fellow men. The latter can be expiated by sincere repentance, but in the case of the former complete expiation is usually not possible, for using false weights and measures would require that the guilty party make restitution, and as a rule he cannot know whom he has cheated and by how much. We are also warned repeatedly (Laws of Theft, Chapter 8) that in this case, too, it is irrelevant whether one deals with a Jew or an idol-worshipping non-Jew. One who cheats another with weights and measures is guilty of a transgression and must make restitution. Cheating a non-Jew by deliberate errors in figuring is similarly condemned. Concerning one who commits transgressions of this type, it is written (Deuteronomy 25,16), “For an abomination to God, your God, is anyone who does such things, anyone who does wrong.”

The Talmud goes into extensive detail about the importance of fulfilling any obligations one has undertaken as a debtor, custodian or paid worker, etc. Let us single out only a few typical cases in point from the abundant material dealing with this subject. Payment of one's debts is regarded not only as a legal obligation but as a religious duty (Arachin 22a). Delinquency in such cases when the debtor is in a position to pay is severely censured (Maimonides, Laws of Loans 1:4, 2:2). If a man borrowed 100 florins and repays them one florin at a time, this is acceptable as repayment, but his creditor has a right to be angry with him (Baba Metzia 77b). Borrowed money must be managed with care to avoid any loss to the creditor. Let the preservation of your fellow man's property be as dear to you as that of your own (Maimonides, Laws of Loans 1:3; Chapters of the Fathers 2:17).

You must not make any use of money or objects entrusted to you for safekeeping, not even temporarily. If you do so, it is tantamount to

robbery (Baba Metzia 43a and b). Under certain conditions, this is true even if you have only begun to use the objects and have not completely carried out your plans for their use (Baba Metzia 44a).

Just as an employer must not withhold any wages due to a worker in his employ, so, too, the worker is obliged to give his full time and energy to his employer. He must not work for another employer during the night. He must not deprive himself of food he needs and give it to his children, for by so doing he detracts from the energy he owes to his employer and diminishes his productivity. He must give his employer all the time for which he has been hired and not waste his time by stopping too often in his work (Maimonides, *Laws of Paid Labor* 13:7; *Choshen Mishpat* 337: 19, 20). He must not even interrupt his work to rise when a person passes by in whose presence he would ordinarily have to rise as a sign of respect (*Yore Deah* 244:5).

On Ways of Making a Living

The Talmud attaches great importance to a person's earning an independent living so that he will not need charity. The Talmud stresses that a person must seek to achieve economic independence by every means within his power, as long as he attains it in an honest manner. One should not be ashamed of any work one may have to do and should be willing to suffer any amount of hardship in order to avoid becoming dependent on others.

The Talmud holds work in high esteem, citing the principle, "Great is work, for it honors the worker" (*Nedarim* 49b). If you see an animal that fell dead in the street, get to work and skin it then and there, so that you may earn some money. Do not say, "I am a priest, or an important person; this work is beneath my dignity" (*Pesachim* 113a). "Live on the Sabbath no better than during the week rather than to be dependent on others for help" (*Pesachim* 112a). "Accept work that you would normally find repulsive rather than be in need of help from your fellow men" (*Baba Bathra* 110a).

The Sages of the Talmud had such high regard for their scholarship that they refused to "make it a spade to dig with," as they put it (*Chapters of the Fathers* 4:7). They taught without remuneration and supported themselves mainly with other work: handicrafts, farming or small business. Just as they themselves did this kind of work for their

livelihood, the Sages urged others to do likewise (Kiddushin 30b). As much as it is a father's duty to instruct his son in Jewish religious law, it is his duty to teach him a craft. According to one view, any type of honest work was as good as a manual skill, but others held that a father should see to it that his son learn a manual skill even if he were to choose some other type of work, for only the manual trades can assure a steady income (Kiddushin 30b). The Talmud holds manual skills in high esteem. Manual skills will always be needed in this world; therefore, "fortunate he who has acquired a good craft" (Kiddushin 82b). "A famine may last for seven years, but it will not pass through the door of a skilled artisan" (Sanhedrin 29a). "Love work and do not aspire to a high position" (Chapters of the Fathers 1:10). "He who fears God and lives from the work of his hands is doubly fortunate, for he will be happy in this world as well as in the world to come" (Berachoth 8a). A father should teach his son a trade that is least likely to lead to wrongdoing and also will leave him sufficient time for study (Kiddushin 82a). A father should also not teach his son an occupation which will bring him into close contact with women.

The Talmud also thinks highly of farming, even though it is aware that some people prefer to enter business. The Talmud tells of one sage who passed a field where the ripe ears of corn, swaying in the breeze, seemed to wave to him in greeting. Said the sage to them good-humoredly, "You can wave to me all you want, but it is still better to be in business than to work with you" (Yebamoth 63a). But the view generally found in the Talmud is different. A person who does not have a field of his own is not considered a proper man, for it is written (Psalms 115,16), "[God] gave the earth to the children of men." Grow your own produce instead of purchasing it from others. Even though the cost may be the same, the produce you have sown yourself brings more blessings (Yebamoth 63a).

In the enumeration of Divine punishments in Deuteronomy 28,66 the words, "Your life will always hover at an uncertain distance," are interpreted as referring to one who purchases his supply of grain from year to year. The words that follow, "You will live in apprehension night and day," refer to one who buys his supply of grain from week to week, and the final words of the verse, "You will have no faith in your life," refer to one who has to go to a bread dealer for his daily supply of bread (Menachoth 103b). "He who tills [literally, "serves"] his own

soil will have his fill of bread" (Proverbs 12,11); this is explained to mean that only one who works his own soil like a farmhand will have enough bread to eat (Sanhedrin 58b).

From all the above we can clearly see how strongly the Talmud urges that every person should possess and till his own soil and obtain his food supply from his own farmland. In accordance with agricultural conditions in the Talmudic era, a farm was considered prosperous if it was divided into three equal portions devoted to cereals, olives and vines (Baba Metzia 107a).

We are told in the Midrash Rabbah to Genesis 12,1 that when God commanded Abraham to go to the land that would belong to him and to his descendants, and he saw the inhabitants of Mesopotamia eating, drinking and making merry, Abraham said, "May it be God's Will that my portion should not be in this land." But when he came to the hilly terrain of Tyre at the border of Palestine and saw the inhabitants busily weeding their fields at the right time and working their soil diligently at the proper season, he said, "May it be God's Will that my portion should be in this land." Thereupon God said to him, "To your descendants will I give this land."

These words indicate how keenly aware our Sages were of the moral value of farming, which required regular working hours. In the same spirit, Jewish religious law is centered on the soil; all the Jewish festivals are associated with farm labor and agriculture. Yissachar, the tribe celebrated for its intellectual prowess, was a tribe of farmers. The words of the Prophet Micah (4,4), "They shall sit every man beneath his vine and beneath his fig tree," describe the Jewish ideal of national prosperity.

This ideal survived even after the Jewish people had been driven from their land and forced to live in other lands as exiles. A glance into the voluminous Order of Zeraim, which contains the religious laws concerning agriculture, as well as into Tractates Baba Kamma, Baba Metzia and Baba Bathra, which deal with civil law but also discuss agricultural questions, should be sufficient to show how much the Sages of the Talmud knew about the characteristics of various agricultural species and about the requirements for the care of crops, plants and trees, depending on such factors as the quality and location of the soil. Such familiarity with the problems of agriculture could have been gained only through personal experience in farming; it proves that the

Sages not only preached the benefits of agriculture but actually practiced in their own lives what they preached. In fact, they and their disciples were so completely dependent on farming for their livelihood that one master of Rabbinic law considered it necessary to request his many students not to attend his lectures during the spring and fall seasons so that they could devote all their time during those seasons to sowing and reaping and have no worries about their food supply for the rest of the year (Berachoth 35b).

Needless to say, Jews were engaged in business and industry also during the Talmudic period. These pursuits were just as indispensable to the nation's prosperity as agriculture. The farmer himself was dependent on business. What would he have done with his produce if there had been no merchants to buy the products of his work and sell them elsewhere? This relationship of mutual benefit is already described in the Pentateuch, where we read of the fraternal, mutually beneficial ties between the tribes of Yissachar and Zebulun, the former devoted to agriculture and study, and the latter to business and commerce (Deuteronomy 33,18).

Nevertheless, the Sages of the Talmud cautioned against excessive involvement in business and trading activities. They said that "there is no blessing in money earned from trade with overseas countries" (Pesachim 50b). While farming affords some free time for study at the end of the day's work and particularly during the winter season, experience has shown that merchants and businessmen often stop studying altogether (Eruvin 55a), and that one who is too deeply immersed in business will not grow in wisdom (Chapters of the Fathers 2:6). Hence the admonition: "Limit your business activities and gain [more] time for continuing your spiritual education" (Chapters of the Fathers 4:12). Only if you limit the amount of time you devote to business will you be able to add to your knowledge (Chapters of the Fathers 6:6).

We have already noted that the Sages did not make use of their scholarship as a source of income. Each of them therefore had to engage in some other occupation; hence they also pointed out: "An excellent thing is the study of the Law combined with an occupation that yields a living. Study of the Law without some kind of work cannot endure" (Chapters of the Fathers 2:2).

The passages quoted above, which represent only a small selection from among many others, should be sufficient evidence to refute the

notion that the Talmud is hostile to honest toil, especially farming. If, during the centuries that followed, Jews in European countries became strangers to agriculture and were more conspicuously drawn to business and commerce, it was not the fault of the Talmud, nor was it due to any inherent Jewish distaste or lack of aptitude for farming. The fault lay solely with the hostile attitude of the nations and peoples that either categorically forbade Jews to acquire land or else subjected land purchase and ownership by Jews to such severe restrictions as to make it virtually impossible for Jews to become farmers. In addition, farming, more than any other occupation, requires that those who engage in it enjoy a secure legal status. As long as Jews did not enjoy equal rights and equal protection under the law with their non-Jewish neighbors and had to live in constant fear of being driven from hearth and home by a willful bureaucracy or by the unleashed hatred of a bigoted populace, Jews were not free to devote their skills and energies to agricultural pursuits. This was the reason why Jews were forced to concentrate on acquiring movable goods that they could take with them wherever they might be forced to flee, and to cultivate skills with which they could make a living for themselves and their families, no matter where they might find themselves.

Unless we are very much mistaken, there is no question but that, given freedom, equal rights, and the time needed to become adept at this particular occupation, which really requires training and habituation from early youth, Jews will ultimately return to agriculture, the ancestral pursuit which they loved and which was intimately linked with their original destiny as a nation.

The Jewish Attitude Toward Government Authorities and Gentile Neighbors

The Talmud relates that when God sent the people of Israel into exile, He adjured them never to attempt to retake the Promised Land without official authorization to do so, but to wait patiently until God Himself would bring them back to their homeland. God also adjured the people of Israel never to rebel against the nations that received them into their midst. At the same time, however, He adjured the nations not to oppress the people of Israel unduly (Kethuboth 111a).

The Jewish people has kept its two vows throughout all the centuries of its long exile. The Jews never attempted to retake their land by force, and they never rebelled against the governments in whose lands they had found asylum. The Talmud incorporated into our daily prayers the assurance of our ultimate return to the land of our fathers and the restoration of the Temple in order that the Law of God may then be carried out in its entirety upon the soil of the Promised Land, which this Law has claimed as its own from time immemorial. This restoration will come hand in hand with the dawn of the Kingdom of God on earth, which will bring everlasting peace to the whole world, because at that time all mankind will recognize God and unite to worship Him by living a life of duty, justice and mercy.

According to that same Talmud which proclaims this promise and those hopes as fundamental components of Jewish belief, any self-willed attempt on the part of its adherents to return to the Land would be an act of criminal rebellion against the Will of God; the Jews must leave the fulfillment of the Divine promise to the Will of God, Who alone can sound the call for their ingathering. Until that time, the Jews are expected to endure their exile patiently in the lands to which they have been scattered, to love those lands as their fatherlands, to promote the welfare of those countries, and to conduct themselves as loyal subjects to their rulers and faithful compatriots to their fellow citizens, even as Jeremiah (29, 1–7) bade them do when they were exiled to Babylonia.

In keeping with these admonitions the Jews, at all times, have proven to be the most loyal and law-abiding citizens of every land in which they resided. The Talmud has set down the rule that is binding upon us all: "The law of the land is law"; i.e., any law that a government has declared to be the law of the land is binding upon us also and we are duty-bound to obey it scrupulously (Baba Kamma 113a). On the basis of this principle the Talmud, as already noted earlier, regards any evasion of government-imposed taxes or customs duties as outright theft, and our Code of Jewish Law (Choshen Mishpat 369:6) specifies that this is applicable even to taxes levied only on Jews. R. Nissim (Nedarim 28a) further elaborates on this principle, pointing out that the land is the property of its sovereign lord, who permits Jews to settle in his land only under the condition that they obey its laws.

We are told: Never forget the respect you owe to the government (cf. Zebachim 102a). There is no greater power on earth than that

which is in the hands of a sovereign (cf. *Gittin* 56a). A servant under orders from a sovereign is to be regarded like the sovereign himself (*Baba Kamma* 113b). A government can translate its laws into action; if it is determined to move mountains, it will find ways of doing so rather than retract its resolve (*Baba Bathra* 3b). Pray for the welfare of the government because if people had no fear of it, society would disintegrate in mutual warfare (*Chapters of the Fathers* 3:2). Any government authority, even the lowest official, must be respected as if he had been appointed by Divine decree, because he has been authorized to preserve law and order in the area assigned to him (*Berachoth* 58a). Accordingly, our synagogue liturgy includes a prayer for the sovereign and his government, and the Talmud prescribes a blessing to be recited when seeing a non-Jewish king: "Blessed be God Who has given of His glory to mortal men" (*Berachoth* 58a).

As we have already noted earlier in this essay, in the section entitled "The Talmud on Honesty and Integrity," the Talmud explicitly states that we must deal honestly and justly with all people, including heathens and idol-worshippers. Any deviation from the rules of justice and right, any wrong done to any person in buying and selling, any fraud or deception in measuring, weighing, figuring or counting, no matter who is being cheated, is an abomination before the Lord. The Talmud also stresses that, in addition to justice, we must practice the basic rules of humanity toward all people, including heathens and idol-worshippers. We are bidden to support their poor, visit their sick, bury their dead (*Gittin* 61a), give assistance and respect to their old (*Kiddushin* 32b), and acknowledge their outstanding scholars and scientists by reciting, when we see them, a benediction praising God for having given of His wisdom to mortal men (*Berachoth* 58a).

The foregoing applies to our dealings with all people, including heathens and idol-worshippers. But over and beyond this, the Talmud teaches us that non-Jews who recognize and worship the God of heaven and earth as proclaimed in the Bible, and who fully accept the fundamental rules incumbent upon all men, such as the prohibitions against murder, theft and adultery, etc., are to be placed on an equal level with Jews when it comes to our performing the duties all men owe to one another. They are entitled to look to us not merely for justice but also for active charity and compassion (*Maimonides, Laws of Kings* 10:12).

The Sages of the Talmud are the teachers of probably the only reli-

gion that does not claim that it alone holds the key to salvation. Instead, they teach that the righteous of all nations have a portion in the world to come (Sanhedrin 105a). According to the Talmud, the Mosaic Law is eternally binding only upon the people of Israel. All others are regarded as wholly righteous in the eyes of God as long as they obey the seven Noachide laws. In this spirit, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 59a) comments in connection with Leviticus 18,5 that a non-Jew who observes the laws given to him by God is an equal of the High Priest, for it is written: "Keep My statutes and My social ordinances which *man* [not only Jews] must carry out and through which he gains life." Likewise, Isaiah 26,2 does not read "Open the gates so that priests and Israel may enter" but ". . . so that a *righteous nation* that keeps the faith may enter." In Psalms 118,20 we do not read "This is the gate of the Lord; priests, Levites and Israel shall enter into it" but ". . . the *righteous* shall enter into it." In Psalms 33,1 we are not told "Exult, O priests, Levites and Israel, in the Lord" but "Exult, O *righteous ones*, in the Lord." Finally, the Psalmist (Psalms 125,4) does not pray "Do good, O Lord, to the priests, the Levites and to Israel" but "Do good, O Lord, to the *good*."

All the foregoing makes it clear that God's nearness, bliss and salvation is promised to every person who loyally and scrupulously carries out the duties laid down for him by God. As one Talmudic sage explicitly states: "I call heaven and earth to witness, be a man a Jew or a non-Jew, man or woman, manservant or maidservant—only according to their actions will the spirit of holiness rest upon them" (Tanna de be Eliyahu on Judges 4,4).

On the basis and in the spirit of the Talmudic teachings cited above, the scholars of Jewish law throughout the ages have exhorted their brethren to be ever mindful of their duty as Jews toward the governments and the peoples in whose midst and under whose protection they dwell. In particular, they have been at pains to stress that, while in other respects their views and ways of life may differ from those of Judaism, the peoples in whose midst the Jews are now living have accepted the Jewish Bible of the Old Testament as a book of Divine revelation. They profess their belief in the God of heaven and earth as proclaimed in the Bible, and they acknowledge the sovereignty of Divine Providence in both this life and the next. Their acceptance of the practical duties incumbent upon all men by the Will of God dis-

tinguishes these nations from the heathen and idolatrous nations of the Talmudic era. Even in the case of the latter, the Talmud commanded us to practice justice and mercy in our dealings with them, albeit with some limitations. But the peoples in whose midst we live today are regarded by the Talmud as the complete equals of the Jews and therefore entitled to our active charity and compassion in every respect. The Sages of Jewish law point out how much it is our duty to show gratitude toward the sovereigns and nations who grant us asylum and protection today, especially when we consider that Scripture (Deuteronomy 23,8) commanded us even concerning the Egyptians, in whose land we endured the most crushing burden of slavery, "Do not cherish unfriendly feelings toward the Egyptian, for you were permitted sojourn in his land."

Nearer our own day, toward the end of the eighteenth century, such noted Rabbinic authorities as R. Ezekiel Landau, R. Eleazar Fleckeles and R. Jacob Emden* dealt extensively with this subject in their writings. R. Jacob Emden in particular emphasizes this in his commentary on Chapters of the Fathers 4:13: "We should consider Christians and Mohammedans as instruments that will help bring about the recognition of God by all men on earth. While the [heathen] nations worshipped their idols and denied the existence of God, and thus recognized neither the power of God nor the principle of reward and punishment, the existence of Christians and Mohammedans helped disseminate among the nations the awareness of God's existence, and introduced into the most distant lands the realization that there is a God Who rules the world, Who rewards and punishes, and Who has revealed Himself to men. Indeed, thinking Christian scholars have not only taught the nations to accept the written revelation but have also acted as defenders of the oral revelation which is equally of Divine origin. For when vicious people from our own midst, sworn enemies of the Law of God, conspired to abrogate the Talmud and to do away with it, there arose from among the non-Jews defenders who fought against these attempts . . ."

Only malevolent enemies bent on distorting the truth could deny

* R. Ezekiel Landau (known by the title of his work *Noda bi-Yehuda*) of Prague (1713–1793); R. Eleazar Fleckeles of Prague (1754–1826); R. Jacob ben Zvi (Yavetz) Emden of Altona (1699–1776). (Ed.)

that, by and large, the Jewish people has gladly and conscientiously followed the Talmud's teachings concerning our duty to obey the authorities and to deal with our non-Jewish compatriots in accordance with the dictates of justice and humanity.

We believe that the Talmudic passages we have quoted verbatim in these pages should demonstrate the baselessness of the notion that the Talmud has a pernicious influence on the social attitudes and relationships of the Jews. These quotations should show that, on the contrary, the Talmud knows how to instill into the hearts of its adherents those principles of integrity, diligence and loyalty which, planted in the soil of scrupulous religiosity, help in such large measure to promote the general welfare. As we have stated at the outset, the praiseworthy qualities which characterize the Jewish nation, and which even the adversaries of the Jews do not deny, must be seen as products, through and through, of the teachings contained in the Talmud and of their impact on Jewish education and character training.

In the pages that follow, we would like to cite additional passages from the Talmud to give the reader a more complete picture of Talmudic law. However, we will limit ourselves to only a few samples from the abundant treasure of Talmudic wisdom dealing with such topics as character building, the attitudes and ethics of the individual, of marriage and of family life, and concepts of charity, humanity and communal living.

Education, Character Building, Jewish Attitudes and the Jewish Philosophy of Life

To the Sages of the Talmud, education was a matter of the utmost importance. In their view, the teachings of Judaism as set down in Scripture and transmitted by word of mouth were not the private preserve of a privileged elite. The Rabbis regarded Jewish learning as the heritage of the entire nation, to be acquired and preserved by each and every son of that nation, regardless of his daily occupational pursuits. Note also that Jewish learning is not concerned with the supernatural things of the world to come but with the realities of our world here below. It deals with the past history of our world, the religious, moral

and social responsibilities incumbent on the individuals and communities in our own present day, and the goals toward which we must work for the future. As a result, a study of the teachings of Judaism provides good training for a logical perception and evaluation of things, conditions and circumstances. At the same time, Jewish learning is so broad and universal in character that it happily welcomes any other fields of study that aspire toward an understanding of the realities of nature and history.

When a male infant is born, his father's friends and acquaintances express the wish that the boy may grow up to acquire this learning, to establish a home and family of his own, and to perform good works. We have already noted the Talmudic statement that when eventually we appear before God's judgment seat, the first question addressed to us will be whether we were always honest in our dealings with others. According to the same Talmudic source, the next question will be: Were you completely absorbed in your business pursuits or did you set aside a fixed time each day for continuing your studies? (Shabbath 31a). The first petition in the three daily services of the Jewish liturgy is a petition for knowledge, understanding and wisdom (Berachoth 33a). One who neglects to acquire the right knowledge has virtually forfeited his claim to God's mercy. But one who has the proper knowledge and understanding becomes a building brick in the restored Sanctuary (Berachoth 33a). No one is truly poor except one who lacks knowledge (Nedarim 41a). However, our Sages care only for straight thinking; they have no use for the sort of sophistry which, as they put it, tries to force an elephant through the eye of a needle (Baba Metzia 38b), and they give examples of distorted thinking to which they strongly object (e.g., Kethuboth 17a).

But all knowledge and learning have value only if they are utilized for building a God-fearing way of life. The fear of God is the true edifice of life; knowledge is only the door to it. Woe to him who builds a door without having a house! Indeed, the fear of God is not only the object of all knowledge but is itself the proper basis with which to obtain knowledge. One who has knowledge but is not God-fearing may be compared to one who has the keys to the rooms inside but not the key to the door of the home. How, then, is he to enter the house? (Shabbath 31a and b)

But a man can become God-fearing only by his own efforts. The

Talmud tells us that whenever a child is about to be born, his appointed angel comes before the throne of God to ask, "What will become of this human seedling? Will he grow up to become strong or weak, wise or simple-minded, rich or poor?" But the angel does not ask whether the child will grow up to be good or wicked because everything comes from the hands of God except the fear of God (Niddah 16b). Examine your character constantly and carefully consider every step you take (Sotah 5b). Mend your ways until the day before your death, and since you do not know when that day will be, consider every day as if it might be your last. Let your whole life be one of continuous self-improvement (Shabbath 153a). Keep your garments clean at all times and see that they remain free from even the smallest stain, for you do not know when you will be summoned to appear before your Creator (Shabbath 153a). This world is like the vestibule before the world to come; prepare yourself in the vestibule so that you may be able to present yourself properly for the audience before God (Chapters of the Fathers 4:21).

Let the Creator be your example. He is merciful and gracious, forbearing, abundant in loving-kindness and truth; He clothes the naked, tends the sick and comforts those that mourn. See that you emulate these qualities and these mercies, for you have been told: You shall walk after Him, walk in His ways, become like Him (Sotah 14a). For your soul has been created in the image of God. It is pure and seeing, yet unseen, like God; it fills its own world, the body, just as God fills the universe. Although your soul, like God, is nowhere to be found, yet it supports the body and survives it even as God will endure after the world is gone; it is unique in your body even as God is unique in His universe (Yalkut on Psalm 103).

One hereditary trait in the Jewish personality is mercy. A Jew who is not merciful toward God's creatures is certainly not one of the children of our father Abraham (Betzah 32b). He who shows mercy toward his fellow creatures will in turn be shown mercy from Heaven, but he who shows no mercy toward his fellow creatures cannot expect mercy from Above (Shabbath 151b). The Talmud tells the following story about that most honored master of the Law, the compiler of the Mishnah, Rabbi Judah the Prince: A calf that was being led to slaughter sought refuge with the master and, crying, hid its head in the folds of the master's robe. But the master said, "Go, because this is the

purpose for which you were created." Thereupon it was decreed Above that because Rabbi Judah had shown no mercy, he would be punished with long spells of physical pain. One day his maidservant was about to drown some young weasels that had infested his house. "Let them be," the master said, "for God's mercy is upon all His creatures." And because he had thus shown mercy to the small creatures he received mercy from Above and his pains stopped (Baba Metzia 85a).

The Talmud teaches us to be economical with our possessions and not to waste them. One who burns more oil than he really needs violates the prohibition against the wanton destruction of property (Deuteronomy 20,19). The Biblical prohibition against cutting down a fruit tree is extended to include the purposeless destruction or waste of any useful article (Shabbath 67b). At the same time, however, the Talmud tells us that it is our duty to open our hands at all times for charitable and humanitarian causes. It teaches us to set aside one-tenth of our annual profits for charitable purposes. The Jews obeyed this behest so punctiliously that it was considered necessary to limit contributions to a maximum of one-fifth of the donor's profits so that he himself should not be forced to appeal to charity (Kethuboth 67b).

The Sages remind us incessantly of our obligation to give charity; they provide detailed instructions for the proper manner of performing charitable acts both in private and in public (Kethuboth 67b, *et al.*). They issue stern warnings against any attempt to evade this solemn obligation (Kethuboth 68a, Baba Bathra 9, 10).

On the other hand, our Sages urge us to restrict our standard of living to a minimum so as not to become dependent on charity ourselves. However, such self-imposed hardships are regarded as sin if one carries them so far as to endanger his own health or that of his family. One who accepts charity even though he does not need it will not be allowed to leave this world without becoming dependent on support from others. Conversely, one who would be entitled to assistance but does not accept it will not leave this world in his old age without himself having become a benefactor of the poor (Peah 8:9).

The Talmud considers the prevention of impoverishment, by making outright gifts or loans or by helping a person establish his own business, to be more important than the giving of charity (Shabbath 63a). More than monetary charity, the Talmud values acts of loving-kindness, such as giving aid, care, comfort, renewed hope, support,

helpful advice and guidance to the poor, the sick, the suffering and the abandoned (Sukkah 49b), and encouraging others to do likewise (Baba Bathra 9a).

But above all, the Talmud appeals to us most earnestly to treat the poor and the afflicted with love and kindness. The poor must be helped to understand that they are not despised because of their misfortune but that others feel for them, that they are regarded as brothers, as children of the same Father, and that we only regret that we cannot help them more. He who shares his bread with the poor will receive the blessings enumerated in Isaiah 58,7–9 [“. . . then shall your light break forth as the morning, and your healing spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you. The glory of the Lord will take you in. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am.’”]. But if, in addition, he comforts the poor with kind words, sharing with them, as Isaiah puts it, not only his bread but his soul as well, he will earn also the eleven blessings enumerated in 58,10–12 [“And if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted souls then your light shall rise in darkness and your gloom shall be as noonday; and the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and make your bones strong . . .”] (Baba Bathra 9b). Conversely, if you give to the poor in an unfriendly manner, the unkind expression on your face will take away the credit from what your hand has given (SeMaG 2:162).

We are urged in particular to be especially gentle and considerate in our dealings with the afflicted, with strangers, widows and orphans, and notably with women. We are reminded how sensitive they are to every rude word or action and how easily their feelings may be hurt. We are bidden to remember the word of God: “When they cry to Me, I will certainly hear their cry” (Exodus 22,22). All the gates of heaven are locked except the gates through which the cries of one who has been wronged will pass (Baba Metzia 59a and b; Maimonides, *Laws of Deoth* 6:10).

The Sages also repeatedly warn us against insulting, offending, abusing or humiliating not only those less fortunate than ourselves but also any other human being. Verbal abuse of one’s neighbor is a far more serious offense than harming his property. Amends can be made for the latter but never for the former. One who publicly humiliates his neighbor or calls him a vile name will have to pay a heavy price for it

in the world to come (Baba Metzia 59a and b; Maimonides, *Laws of Deoth* 6:10).

An offense which the Sages condemn most harshly and which they warn is liable to the most severe punishment from Heaven is that of evil gossip. They define this as any talk that may jeopardize another person's happiness, peace or personal honor, even if such talk is founded on fact, let alone if it is slander based on outright lies. This includes divulging another person's secrets or discussing his private affairs. Our Sages even caution us not to speak well of another person in the presence of people who might be expected to speak ill of him in order to offset the good that has been said (Arachin 15 and 16). Let your neighbor's honor be as dear to you as your own. One who seeks to gain honor for himself by demeaning the dignity of his neighbor loses his portion in the world to come (Chapters of the Fathers 2:15; Maimonides, *Laws of Deoth* 6:3).

The Sages of the Talmud continually urge us to acquire and cultivate those virtues and positive attitudes that will encourage us, and make it easy for us, to fulfill our obligations toward our fellow men. Conversely, they caution us against acquiring and tolerating in ourselves those vices and negative attitudes that will make it difficult, if not impossible, for us to behave as we should toward our neighbors. The faults against which the Talmud warns us in particular include pride, anger, contentiousness, violence, obstinacy, impudence, stubbornness, insolence, flattery, mendacity, suspicion, inordinate ambition, avarice, greed, envy, implacability, malice, ingratitude, malicious joy at the misfortunes of another, melancholy, levity, spite and misanthropy. Conversely, the Talmud has high praise for such virtues as modesty and humility, placidity, patience and forbearance, placability, peaceableness, flexibility, decency, friendliness and affability, truthfulness and straightforwardness, gentleness, moderation and temperance, self-control, generosity, contentedness, gratitude, the ability to rejoice at the good fortune of others, serenity, earnestness, discretion, loving-kindness, truth, loyalty, and good cheer.

We will now cite a number of passages from the ethical teachings of our Sages to illustrate their approach. Arrogance is no less an abomination before the Lord than idolatry; it is tantamount to denying the existence of God. God says concerning the arrogant person: The two of us cannot live together in this world. One who goes about

with haughtiness drives the Presence of God away from the earth so that it retreats to its dwelling place on high. When God planned to reveal Himself, He ignored the lofty mountains and the tall trees and descended, instead, to the lowly Mount Sinai and the thorn-bush. Thus God removes His Presence from the arrogant and dwells among the humble instead (Sotah 4b and 5a).

An angry man is driven by a power that should have no place within the human soul and concerning which we are told, "There shall be no alien God within you" (Shabbath 105b). If you learn to control your anger you will not sin, just as you must be careful not to get drunk lest you be tempted to sin (Berachoth 29b). When a man is angry he is open to all manner of evil that will lead him to Gehinnom; he even ignores God, forgets what he has studied and becomes a fool (Nedarim 22b). There is nothing to be gained from anger. An angry man has nothing except the effects of his anger (Kiddushin 41a); his life is not worth living (Pesachim 113b). God loves him who is able to control his anger, who does not become drunk and who does not always insist on his full rights (Pesachim 113b). A quarrel is like a river that bursts its dam. If it is not diverted at the very start, it rushes on and the flood can no longer be stopped (Sanhedrin 7a). Of those who take insults without retaliating, who accept abuse without returning it, who do everything for the love of God and rejoice even in their sufferings, it is written: Those that love Him are like the sun when it emerges from the clouds in all its glory (Shabbath 88b). Be slow to anger and easy to pacify (Chapters of the Fathers 5:14). One who shrugs off an injustice done to him will be forgiven for any injustice he himself has done. One who is forgiving will be forgiven by God (Rosh HaShanah 17a). Be as pliant as a reed, not as unyielding as the cedar. The storm that topples the cedar will spare the pliant reed (Ta'anith 20a). Fortunate he who does not answer back; he avoids a hundred evils (Sanhedrin 7a). How can one recognize the moral superiority of a person? He is the first to fall silent during an argument (Kiddushin 71b).

Pluck the stubble from your own garment before you pluck it from the garment of your neighbor. Clean yourself before you clean your neighbor (Baba Bathra 60b). Before you tell your neighbor to remove a splinter from his eye, make certain that he should have no occasion to tell you to remove a beam from your eye (Baba Bathra 15b). Judge all men favorably (Chapters of the Fathers 1:6). Do not judge your fellow man until you have been in his position (Chapters of the Fathers

2:5). Do not be indifferent to the opinion others have of you. Just as a man should appear guiltless before God, so should he see that his conduct should appear justified before men and beyond suspicion (Jerusalem Talmud, Shekalim 9a).

Do not cast the "evil eye" of envy upon your neighbor's good fortune. Rather, look kindly with a "good eye" upon his prosperity and rejoice in his happiness (Chapters of the Fathers 2:13, 14). Envy, greed and thirst for honor deprive a man of his world (Chapters of the Fathers 4:28). Do not be jealous of anyone; you will get the reputation to which you are entitled, you will receive the position that is due you and no man can take away what is intended for another (Yoma 38b). Be content with your portion; he who is content is rich (Chapters of the Fathers 4:1). It is not given to everyone to sit at two tables (material prosperity and spiritual ascendancy; happiness in this world and bliss in the next) (Berachoth 5b). Do not covet a shoe that is too large for your foot (Kiddushin 49a).

The mood in which you stand and pray before the Lord should be neither gloom nor hilarity but the joy at having performed one's religious duty (Berachoth 31a). A sigh breaks half, indeed all, of man's strength (Berachoth 58b). Jocularly and frivolity lead a person to sin (Chapters of the Fathers 3:17). One who has no cause to feel conscience-stricken is not afraid. Fear brings sorrow in its wake. But, let man always remember that whatever God does is for the best (Berachoth 60b). It is scant comfort for a mourner to be told, "What can you do?" (Baba Kamma 38a). Do your duty and do not ruminate; you do not have the mental capacity to penetrate the mysteries of God (Berachoth 10a).

If sufferings come upon you, examine your conduct. If you find no fault in yourself, review the Law of God to acquaint yourself thoroughly with your duties as a Jew. If you still fail to find any shortcomings in yourself, accept your sufferings as evidence of God's fatherly love, intended to train man and to bring him ever closer to perfection through a process of trials and purification (Berachoth 5a). Let man do his part and not rely on miracles (Kiddushin 39b). At the same time, let him never despair; even if he already feels the edge of a sharp sword at his throat, let him not cease praying to God (Berachoth 10a).

The gravest transgression discussed in the Talmud is "the desecration of the Name of God." This is defined as an act that not only

involves a transgression of one's own against the Law of God but also causes others to disparage the reverence that should be placed above all other considerations and should be demonstrated by punctiliously observing all His commandments. The consequence of such reprehensible acts is that "the Name of God loses power in the eyes of others."

According to Talmudic law, it is the responsibility of every individual not only to observe God's Law punctiliously in his own life, but also to see that his brethren do likewise. He must do everything in his power to keep his fellow Jews among whom he dwells from sinning and to urge them to remain faithful to their duties. He bears a heavy burden of personal responsibility if he could have acted to prevent wrongdoing but failed to do so out of indifference. But his guilt by association is graver still if his personal example leads others to turn their backs on the dutiful loyalty they owe to God (Shabbath 54b and 55a).

The Talmud teaches that the commandment "You shall love the Lord your God" includes the duty to inspire all men, by your personal example, to love and revere the Name of God. What do men say of one who diligently studies the Written and Oral Laws, sits at the feet of sages in order to improve his character, speaks courteously to others, is pleasant in his relations with others and honest in his business dealings? They will say of him: Fortunate he who studied the Law; fortunate his father who taught him the Law; fortunate his teacher who instructed him in the Law. Woe to those that do not study the Law! Do you not see how pleasant are the ways, how correct the dealings, of one who has studied the Law? Of such a person it is written (Isaiah 49,3): "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified." On the other hand, what do men say of one who indeed diligently studies the Written and Oral Laws, but does not speak courteously to others, is not pleasant in his relations with others and not honest in his business dealings? They will say of him: Woe to him who studied the Law; woe to his father who taught him the Law; woe to his teacher who instructed him in the Law. Fortunate are those who have not studied the Law, for look at this man who has studied the Law! See how ugly his behavior is, how perverse his ways! Of such a person Scripture says (Ezekiel 36,20): "Those are the people of the Lord, and they have deserted His soil" (Yoma 86a, according to Ein Ya'akov).

The seriousness of this transgression is relative. The more highly a

person is respected by his fellow men and the more his actions are accepted as an example for others to follow, the more careful must he be to lead an exemplary life because any wrongdoing on his part can easily lead to this most serious of sins. He must avoid even a semblance of transgression and must not permit himself to do even that which may be permitted to others. This applies also to the Jewish people as a whole. The Jewish people was chosen to disseminate among mankind the knowledge of God and of man's duties toward Him. Jews are therefore held to a higher standard than the rest of mankind. The priests in turn are held to a higher standard than other Jews, and the teachers and all others who are known to be familiar with the Law, and hence expected to know what is right and wrong in the eyes of God, are held to a higher standard than all the other members of the Jewish people (cf. Yoma 66a). The principle applied in all these cases is: A person who enjoys respect and recognition is different (Baba Metzia 73a; Shabbath 51a, 142b; Mo'ed Katan 11b, *et al.*).

In particular, Jews are urged again and again to be mindful of the special obligations entailed in their dealings with non-Jews. A Jew who commits an act of injustice against another Jew has transgressed only one prohibition. But a Jew who commits an act of injustice against a non-Jew is guilty, in addition, of the gravest sin of all, a "desecration of the name of God." He should know full well that the hallowing of God's Name is part of Israel's mission and one purpose of Israel's dispersion among the nations (SeMaG 1:2,152: 2:74).

The Family

Of all the Jewish concepts distorted by preconceived notions, the most conspicuous one must surely be the status of women in ancient Jewish history. The low regard with which women were held among the peoples of the Orient was simply applied also to the place of the Jewish woman of old, without taking into consideration that the views and customs of Judaism are the product of influences that have nothing to do with those that shaped the nations of the Orient. They are derived from a Teaching and a Law of which not even a trace can be found in the history of other nations. The truth of the matter is that probably no other nation has a literature that deals more justly with

the dignity of women and the significance of their functions, a literature in which the woman of valor is accorded more genuine praise and honor, or in which she is assured of a more gentle, respectful, considerate and loving treatment from her menfolk than does the literature of Talmudic antiquity. Here again, we will cite a number of examples by way of illustration.

God has endowed the female sex with greater spiritual talents; hence, women attain spiritual maturity at an earlier age than males (Niddah 45b). During times of national calamity, such as the period of Israel's enslavement in Egypt, it was the women who kept their courage and presence of mind, comforting and sustaining the men; it was because of their merit that the children of Israel were eventually delivered (Sotah 11b). Similarly, when the entire nation became guilty of the most grievous transgressions, as in the case of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32) and Israel's rebellion following the return of the spies (Numbers 13), it was the women who refused to be drawn into the errors of the men; it was they who, as our Sages put it, defended and upheld that which the men had attempted to destroy (Midrash Rabbah on Numbers 27,1). The reward promised by God to women is greater than that promised to men—particularly because of the women's influence in the spiritual and moral education of their children and in the continued studies of their men (Berachoth 17a).

The wife is characterized as her husband's "home" (Yoma 2a). A man who has a valiant wife is considered rich (Shabbath 25b). A man who has no wife has nothing (Nedarim 41a); he has no joy, no blessings, nothing good, no knowledge, no comfort and no peace (Yebamoth 62b). A man without a wife is not a whole person (Yebamoth 63a). A man whose wife has died finds himself in a world that has gone dark; his steps become shorter (since he no longer has the companion whose support and approval gave him the confidence he needed in his undertakings) and his plans go awry (since he no longer has the counselor whose wisdom gave him strength) (Sanhedrin 22a). The death of a man is felt more deeply by his wife than by anyone else, and the death of a woman is felt more deeply by her husband than by any other person (Sanhedrin 22b).

These views form the basis for the Talmudic teachings with regard to the rights and the treatment to which women are entitled. Concerning a man who loves his wife as much as he loves himself and respects

her more than he respects himself, who raises his sons and daughters in the proper way and marries them off at an early age, Scripture says (Job 5,24): "And you shall know that your tent is in peace" (Yebamoth 62b). Let every man be protective of his wife's honor because it is she who brings blessings and prosperity into the home. Honor your wives and you will become prosperous. If your wife is short, bend down to her and listen to what she tells you. Never be abrupt with your wife; if you are ever forced to oppose her, always draw her near to you with your right hand even as you push her away with your left. Be careful not to hurt your wife's feelings; she is very sensitive and her tears flow easily (Baba Metzia 59a). Never play the tyrant in your home. One who causes others to fear him excessively can easily cause serious crimes. Whatever you have to say to members of your household, say it to them calmly (Gittin 6b,7a). But just as it tells husbands how to behave toward their wives, so, too, the Talmud specifies the duties of wives toward their husbands (Kethuboth 59b). Marriages should be characterized by the love, intimacy, peace and friendship enumerated in the blessings prescribed by the Talmud as part of the Jewish wedding ceremony (Kethuboth 8a). If a husband and wife are what they should be, and conduct themselves as they should, God will abide with them (Sotah 17a).

The marriage laws of the Talmud reflect profound wisdom, deep insight into human nature as such, into the characteristics of the sexes and into the various aspects of marriage and family life, and a most circumspect study of conditions liable to promote or hinder domestic happiness. This is most evident in the rulings formulated by the Rabbis. Here, again, we see evidence of tender consideration for wives and daughters. We will cite only two of these legal provisions. First: the wife rises with her husband but does not descend with him (Kethuboth 61a). This means that if the standard of living to which the wife was accustomed in her parents' home was higher than those of her husband, then, unless the wife expressly waives this right, it is her standard of living that must be maintained. She cannot be required to lower her standards to those of her husband. On the other hand, if her husband's standard of living was higher than her own, his standards are the decisive factor. Second: if a man dies without leaving sufficient assets to provide for his sons as well as his daughters, his estate must be used to provide for the daughters, even if it means that the sons must live on

charity (Kethuboth 108b). The general rule is that women have priority over men in questions of support, as in the allocation of funds from public charities, the principle being that women must be shielded from humiliation (Kethuboth 67a and b). To provide a dowry for needy brides is one of the most praiseworthy causes in Jewish charity (Yore Deah 249:15).

The commandment "Honor your father and your mother" is given extensive study and discussion in the Talmud. We will cite only a few cases in point. To begin with, we are taught that this commandment is not dependent on the gratitude that children owe their parents. It has nothing to do with what parents have done for their children. The children's obligation to honor their parents would not be canceled if the parents, due to economic or other justifiable circumstances, had done little for their children, and is not restricted to cases where children eventually become so fortunate as to be able to support their parents. The commandment to honor our parents is not based on filial gratitude but on a demand made by God that we should give our parents respect similar to that which we owe to Him; in other words, by honoring our parents, we actually give honor to God (Kiddushin 30b).

The obligation to honor our parents requires undeviating compliance, limited only by the obedience we owe to God Himself. The obligation to honor parents is waived only if they ask us to do something that is in violation of God's Law (Baba Metzia 32a). Children must treat their parents with the utmost respect. They must never contradict them or even confirm a parent's statement without being expressly requested by the parents to do so. They must not interrupt when their parents are talking. They must never speak disrespectfully to their parents, or about them. They must exercise self-control even if their parents treat them with flagrant injustice, do them serious harm or injury, or subject them to undeserved public humiliation. During a discussion on this subject in the house of study, one Talmudic sage cited his own behavior as a case in point. He related that he assisted his aged mother by offering her his back as a footstool whenever she got into or out of her bed. Thereupon his colleagues said to him, "You have not yet paid her half the honor due her. Has she ever thrown your purse filled with money into the sea in your presence without your protesting?" (Kiddushin 31b).

The duty to respect and revere one's parents is not confined to

childhood or youth but applies equally in maturity, and, indeed, in old age. The obligation does not cease even after the parents have died (Kiddushin 31b). At the same time, parents are urged not to make it difficult for their children to perform their filial duties, particularly not to provoke adult children to a point where they might sin by rebelling against them (Mo'ed Katan 17a). The duty to honor one's parents also includes respectful behavior toward older brothers, step-parents and parents-in-law (Kethuboth 103a).

A father is obligated to see to it that his children are trained and educated to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities they will need for the performance of their religious duties and for their secular pursuits. The father must do his best to help his children establish homes of their own (Kiddushin 29, 30; Yebamoth 62b; Kethuboth 50a). Parents are solemnly cautioned against practicing discrimination among their children or playing favorites; they are reminded of the disastrous chain of events that resulted from the silken trimming Jacob had placed on the coat of his son Joseph to set him apart from his brothers (Shabbath 10b). Parents must never be abrupt with their children. A parent should draw his child close with his right hand even when he is forced to repulse him with his left hand (Sanhedrin 107b).

The Community

The individual alone is weak and a mere mortal; according to the Talmud, only the community is strong and immortal even on earth (Zebachim 88b; Temurah 15b; Yalkut on Amos 9). The most precious spiritual and moral values of Judaism have not been entrusted to the individual but to the community to uphold and defend. It is the duty of every Jewish individual to join the Jewish community of the place where he resides and to help establish, maintain and promote that community, to assist it in its functions and in performing its obligations to the best of his ability (Chapters of the Fathers 2:5; Baba Bathra 7-11). The establishment and maintenance of institutions required for the performance of religious duties, for education and for charity is one of the primary obligations of every Jewish community (Tosefta Baba Bathra 8:4; Baba Bathra 8b and 21a). It is one of the most important duties of the Jew to occupy himself wisely, selflessly, con-

conscientiously and actively with the affairs of his community. All those who work for the community should do so from the purest, most selfless motives in order to comply with the Will of God. If they do so, the merit of their forefathers will stand at their side and their own righteous deeds will endure forever (Chapters of the Fathers 2:2).

Even within larger communities, the same spirit that led the Jewish population to form religious communities, united for the purpose of promoting "Torah, worship and good deeds" (Chapters of the Fathers 1:1), has also inspired the establishment of smaller, independent organizations known as *Chevroth*, which aid and complement the religious and humanitarian activities of the community. This tendency to organize for religious and humanitarian purposes is deeply rooted in Talmudic Judaism and has been nurtured with singular devotion from time immemorial (Berachoth 63b; Sukkah 51b; Mo'ed Katan 27b; Chaggigah 9b). Thus, there always have been "Talmud Torah societies" for the religious education of needy children or for the informal study of the Torah by adults, as well as *tzedakah* and *gemiluth chasadim* societies, and societies for an infinite variety of charitable purposes, for tending to the sick, burying the dead, and so forth.

In many larger communities, workers and artisans representing various occupations would form organizations of their own for worship, study and mutual aid. Instead of spending their evenings after work at taverns, members of these organizations devoted their free time to worship and to spiritual and religious uplift. Even during the worst of times, these organizations, maintained with selfless devotion and working solely for religious and humanitarian causes, saved Jewish populations from degenerating into a demoralized proletariat by preserving and nurturing an interest in moral and spiritual values even among the lowest classes.

We believe we may limit ourselves to the passages cited above, even though we could have quoted ten times that number. We consider these passages sufficient material for any unprejudiced, understanding reader to form a true and objective judgment with regard to the spirit and the character of the teachings contained in the Talmud. We believe we are not wrong in assuming that any political entity should be happy if its members were to allow their personal, family and communal

lives, as well as their relations with sovereigns and authorities, to be guided by the spirit that pervades the principles reflected in the teachings of the Talmud. We believe, therefore, that adherence to the teachings and principles of the Talmud is a worthy gift that the sons of Judaism can bring to any political entity that has admitted the Jews to its communal life. It can only serve the best interests of the public welfare in any political entity if its Jewish members let their religious convictions, as well as their personal and public lives, remain under the guidance of the spirit that pervades the Talmudic tradition. We believe it is certainly not a sign of progress when so many Jews of the present day seem to have loosened their bonds of loyalty to Judaism as handed down by Talmudic tradition, and familiarity with the Talmud and its teachings no longer finds a place in the education of the young and in the spiritual life of the old.

Admittedly, the Jewish people as individuals have yet to achieve the ideal of complete devotion to their religious and moral obligations. But then the same is true also of individual members of any other religious faith. Admittedly, there are indeed Jews who are unscrupulous and dishonest. But the unscrupulous and dishonest behavior of these individuals is not a result of their Talmudic Judaism. On the contrary, it is in direct contradiction to the Talmudic tradition. Anyone who would judge the teachings of the Jewish religion by the dishonesty and unscrupulousness of certain Jewish individuals would be just as gravely mistaken as those who would presume to blame the teachings of the Christian faith for the monstrous, shocking crimes which certain individuals born and raised in Christianity have perpetrated against life, morality and property and which are inscribed on almost every page of the world's most recent history.

Throughout history there have been noted Christian scholars who were among the few with a true understanding of the Talmud and who defended it against its slanderers by demonstrating that these accusations against the Talmud were based either on deliberate distortions of fact or on woeful ignorance. This ignorance resulted in baseless condemnations of the Talmud, condemnations that had a devastating effect also on the life and the welfare of hundreds of thousands of human beings.

Prominent among early Christian defenders of the Talmud was

Reuchlin,* who, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, set forth convincing arguments to save the Talmud from destruction. According to Melanchthon, the threat to the Talmud at that time came from the Jewish apostate Pfefferkorn, who had launched his intrigues in hopes of extracting ransom money from the Jews. Closer to our own day there is Professor Dr. Franz Delitzsch, who demonstrated the utter baselessness of the charges concocted against the Talmud by Rohling. There also exists a *Gutmeinung über den Talmud* by Carl Fischer, censor, examiner and translator in Hebraica, originally written in Prague and published posthumously in Vienna in 1883. In this brochure the author set forth his own views on the purity, the usefulness and significance of the Talmud, documented with excerpts from the writings of numerous recognized Christian scholars. According to one noteworthy reference from the Fischer brochure, the Talmud at one time was held in such high esteem by the Catholic Church that Pope Clement V issued a decree calling for a public reading of the Talmud to Christian audiences.

Perhaps our own compilation of excerpts from the appropriate Talmudic sources will help eliminate the prejudices still harbored today against the Talmud and its adherents and will prepare the ground for a more objective view of Talmudic Judaism.

* Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522). Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) was a student of Reuchlin. Johannes Pfefferkorn (1469–after 1521) converted to Christianity ca. 1504. Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890) was a German Protestant theologian and a scholar in Bible and Judaica. August Rohling (1839–1931) was a clergyman active in Germany. Carl Fischer (1755–1844), a Christian Hebraist, was librarian at the University of Prague and a government-appointed censor. (Ed.)