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Adar VI

ואף גם זאת—“And Nevertheless . . .” The Great Enigma of World History

“And nevertheless. . .” This is the age-old promise cited in a *מגילה י"א* (מגילה י"א) reflecting upon the perils and deliverance which Israel has experienced since the beginnings of its *galuth*. Among these are the mortal danger and the miraculous rescue that are commemorated each year during the month of Adar.

ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ איביהם לא מאסתים ולא געלתים לכלתם להפר בריתי אתם—“And yet nevertheless, even though they are in enemy country, I have not despised them, nor have I rejected them, to destroy them utterly, to break My covenant with them, for I, ה', remain their God” (Leviticus 26,44).

This promise is the first half of the concluding sentence of a Biblical passage in which all of Jewish history, with all its glories and sorrows, was outlined even before so much as one day of it had come to pass. Uttered at the cradle of the Jewish nation, this passage depicts the centuries of horror through which the Jewish people will have to pass if it becomes unfaithful to its mission.

Nothing is omitted from this picture: fear and terror, affliction and disease, privation and hunger, exile and despair, and even the most horrible fate that could befall any person, any class or any nation—that they should become קרי, “accidental,” with no rights anywhere, belonging nowhere, with no one paying attention to their needs or claims, tolerated only as long as the others, those who consider themselves entitled to rights and freedom, feel that this would bring them benefit or gain.

All this is depicted in that dire prediction of Israel's future. The Children of Israel are seen in the “enemy country;” they are charged with the theft of the very ground beneath their feet, of the very air they breathe. They are “despised;” they have forfeited that which should have been “their wisdom and their insight in the eyes of the nations,”

the ideals that should have shown to the nations of the earth how the Name of God shines upon Israel and that should have won Israel the respect of the world. They preferred to compete with the cavalries of the nations, with the armed might of the princes, with the politics and the political sagacity of the sovereign states. They attempted to vie with the others on a level not permitted them, when in fact it was their mission to teach the nations by their own example, in life and history, that such trappings of material power are secondary, transitory and wanting.

And so the Children of Israel lost the respect of the nations, with whose physical prowess they were never meant to compete. Because they regarded the very core of their existence as merely "accidental," they were repaid measure for measure in that their existence truly became "accidental" * in the midst of an arrogant mankind, armed with violence, which could only see that the exiles who accidentally had been scattered among them lacked the foundation upon which they, the nations of the world, had built their glory and greatness. There is among the nations no eye which appreciates that quiet grandeur, that everlasting might which should shine all the more brightly during the dark periods of Israel's history; an ideal which—if only the exiles themselves had perceived it as their one true remaining treasure—would have placed Israel as a shining light upon the horizon and would have presented even these remnants to thinking men as the miracle nation, worthy of their respect.

The nations, aware that Israel does not have what they consider the trappings of power, do not understand the greatness which Israel does in fact possess. Therefore Israel finds itself "despised" in enemy country, without personal and civil rights, scorned as a lowly worm among earth's creatures. The Biblical prediction portrays the Children of Israel as "rejected" everywhere, a foreign body, disruptive, troublesome, an obstacle to the unity of the host nation, intruders whom the nation גערל, must literally eliminate or disgorge if it is to regain its balance.

The Jews are the only element that cannot be absorbed by the state; they are a problem for which political wisdom cannot find a solution,

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* See the author's rendering of Leviticus 26,40–41 in his Commentary: "... they have walked with Me (only) by chance" as compared to the conventional English rendering: "... they have walked contrary to Me." [Ed.]

an entity which no political authority can encompass. Any Haman-type policy will treat them as עם מפורד ומטרד בין העמים ("a people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples"—Esther 3, 8), a nation that, despite its dispersion, stubbornly insists on remaining apart from all the other nations, a nation that, with its strange laws and customs עם שונות מכל עם ("their laws are different from those of every people"), has introduced a foreign element into the orderly pattern of the host country's development. By refusing to submit every aspect of its life to the laws of the king ואח רחי המלך אינם עשים ("neither do they keep the king's laws"—), this nation, of course, demonstrates that there is indeed one area that cannot be touched by the laws of the state, that eludes governmental regulations, one entity which, if need be, will openly resist the king's power, defying the terrors of shackles and prisons, torture and execution. This nation proclaims the truth that there is one power before which even a king's majesty fades away, one authority before which the might of sovereign states evaporates. It is therefore the most eloquent protest against the absurd notion that all things, including man with his God and his conscience, must look to the state for the license to exist. Such a nation naturally enables any Haman to label it as a group whom the king's absolute authority cannot afford to tolerate ולהניחם אין שיה להניחם ("it does not profit the king to tolerate them"—Esther 3, 9).

As a consequence, the description of Israel's future predicts that, over the centuries to come, nations and statesmen will not devote thought and effort to finding ways of dealing justly and humanely with these exiles in their midst, promoting their prosperity, affording them a livelihood, and aiding them in their pursuit of happiness. Instead, the aim of the nations and their leaders will be לכלחם, "to destroy them," to diminish them, to wear them down until they cease to exist.

יכתב לאברם ("let it be written that they be destroyed"—Esther 3, 9). The purblind policy of Haman was to demand a royal decree authorizing him to exterminate the Jews. Antiochus sought to attain the same objective with a sword in his right hand and with all the cunning of seduction in his left, appealing to the senses and befuddling the mind. That which cannot be exterminated physically by murder could well be vanquished morally by diabolical, gentle seduction; a policy that persistently employs both violence and temptation to achieve its ends may be sure of success. This is indeed the policy which has poisoned the air breathed by the unfortunate exiles over hundreds and even

thousands of years. Haman's example is followed only from time to time if someone's patience has worn thin, or if a Haman runs afoul of a Mordecai and seeks to slake a base thirst for revenge or an even more sordid avarice under the guise of concern for the welfare of his country. By and large, the atmosphere in which the history of the exiles unfolds follows the pattern set by Antiochus. The unfortunates have been subjected to the pressures and the ridicule of crude force on the one hand, and the satanic smile of seductive temptation on the other, in the hope that they will be destroyed physically and morally at the same time.

And then the Roman-Christian world took a certain book from the hands of that very despised and rejected nation which had been marked for destruction, and hailed this book as a promise of the world's redemption and of their own deliverance from the corruption of paganism. The adherents of this creed even began to worship a son of these exiles as their divine savior, and to revere that book and that son as the foundation of all future civilizations and of the advancement of salvation on earth. Then they felt they could no longer dismiss out of hand the suggestion that the origin, the destiny, the history and the teachings of these scattered exiles had been attended by a "special Divine element." At that point the urge to destroy the Jews was given an intellectual rationalization: the "Divine" element that had been manifest in these exiles had become a thing of the past; the Jews themselves had cast it aside and therefore God had scattered them among the nations, להפך בריחי אהם, "to break My covenant with them."

At one time, it was claimed, the Jews had indeed been the Chosen People, whom God had blessed and found worthy of bringing about the salvation of the world. But now they are the pariahs whom God Himself has despised and rejected. He Himself has canceled His covenant with them and marked them for destruction. Therefore those who hate, oppress and persecute the Jews are performing a sacred task that is pleasing to God. מושלו יהלילו נאם ה' ("They that rule over them bring them misery in the name of God"—Isaiah 52, 5). That spirit which might have salvaged the fate of the Jews had turned the hatred and persecution of Jews into a religion, thus cutting off even the last hope of the exiles.

The Biblical promise foresees all these developments. ואף גם זאח בהיותם בארץ איביהם לא מאפתים ולא געלתים לכלחם להפך בריחי אהם כי אני ה' אלקיהם. "nevertheless, even though they are in enemy country, I have

not despised them, nor have I rejected them, to destroy them utterly, to break My covenant with them; for I ה', remain their God." As the *מגניחה* explains, "I did not despise them in the days of the Chaldeans, I did not reject them in the days of Haman, to destroy them utterly in the days of the Syrian Greeks, to break My covenant with them, for I, ה', shall remain their God for that future in which no state and no nation will have power over them any longer, לא מאסתים בימי כשדים ולא געלתים בימי המן לכלתם בימי יונים להפר בריתי אתם בימי רומיים אני ה' אלקיהם לעתיד בהם (Yalkut). לבא שאין כל אומה ולשון יכולה לשלוט בהם (Exodus 8,15). "Even if they have lost their homeland, even if they are strangers in enemy country, I have not become their enemy. They have not lost Me; they still have Me." Even if all the shrewdness of the Chaldeans, all the trickery of the Greeks, all the power of the Persians and all the secular and clerical prowess of Rome were to join forces to portray this nation as the most despicable, depraved nation on earth, they would not succeed. They will never be able to destroy it, not even spiritually; they will never succeed in erasing Israel's spiritual, God-ordained significance from the minds of men—not even from their own. Much against their will, though they may have stormed at Israel over centuries, they will ultimately have to stand, hat in hand, filled with awe and admiration, before the historical phenomenon of this nation. Israel's miraculous survival amidst its raging foes, its wonderful resilience, its spiritual and moral vigor in the midst of all its sufferings, will force its enemies to concede grudgingly that this is, indeed, the "finger of God" אצבע אלקים הוא (Exodus 8,15). God was with the Children of Israel—and within them—not only in the remote Biblical past in Palestine but He is with them, and within them, still, even today, amidst the woes inflicted upon them by European perversity. He said כי אני ה' אלקיהם, and He has kept His promise.

The words "and nevertheless . . ." in God's promise, and "indeed" in the reluctant concession by the nations, have transformed the whole history of the Jewish people in *galuth* into a most glorious monument to God. They have set up this nation, in its dispersion, as the great enigma of world history that defies all predictions, demolishes all *a priori* concepts of history and mocks the statistical pragmatism of historians, a nation that compellingly proclaims God, קרא הדרת מראש ("He that called the generations from the beginning"—Isaiah 41, 4), as the one Guide of all human destiny, and morality, as the sole invincible, indestructible force in the lives of men and nations.

However, the *מתניחא* does not merely skim the surface; it does not simply review the phases of Jewish *galuth* history in the light of the Biblical promise; it does not only trace the survival of God's covenant with Israel through the historic fact that Israel in dispersion did not succumb to the power of the Chaldeans, to the arrogance of Persia, to the spirit of ancient Greece or to the sword of Rome. The *מתניחא* stresses that this is not the only proof of God's almighty power and of the awe-inspiring protection He extends to Israel before the eyes of the nations. (הן הן גבורותיו הן הן נוראותיו: ילקוט—רברים י', י"ז; יומא ס"ט) It delves deeply into the history of the centuries of Jewish *galuth* to show us, in every generation, that though Israel has strayed far from God, God is still near to Israel and that, though Israel has been dispersed among the nations, God still desires His people. True, the fall of the Jewish state attests to the moral perversion and spiritual decline of the Jewish people. But as the *מתניחא* demonstrates to us, the Jewish nation retained its moral and spiritual superiority and remained close to the awakening, enlightening and reviving nearness of God. Israel's moral perversion and spiritual decline were never so complete that they could have destroyed that deep-rooted, God-seeking core of life, that deep-seated loyalty which awaits irradiation from the light of God. As a consequence, Israel was able to produce, in every age, men imbued with the Jewish spirit and with Jewish loyalty, men who, by their teachings and their personal example, by word and by action, swept the whole nation along with them, lifting it far above the pitfalls of perversion and corruption to the heights of learning and loyalty. Israel won the respect of a hostile world, forcing the astounded nations to realize that God is still not only *with* Israel but also *within* Israel, so that even a mouth (Balaam) opened to curse Israel was forced to bless it: לא מאסתים בימי כשדים שהעמרתי להם דניאל ("God is with him, and the homage to a king is in him"—Numbers 23, 21). חנני מישאל ועזרי' ולא נעלתיים בימי המן שהעמרתי להם מרדכי ואסתר לכלתם בימי יוניים שהעמרתי להם שמעון הצדוק ושמעוןאי ובניו ומתתי' כה"ג להפר בריתי אתם בימי רומיים "I did not despise them in the days of the Chaldeans, for I raised for them Daniel, Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah. I did not reject them in the days of Haman, for I raised for them Mordechai and Esther. I did not allow them to be utterly destroyed in the days of the Greeks, for I raised for them Simon the Just, the Hasmonean and his sons and the High Priest Mattathias. I did not break My covenant with them in the days of the Romans, for I

raised for them Rabbi Judah the Prince and the Sages of later generations.”

This is how the *מתינתא* explains the Biblical verse, pointing out that God was not only with us and did not only save us from destruction in all these trying stages of *galuth* history, but that His nearness and His protection were demonstrated by the fact that He never despised or rejected us, that He never marked us for destruction and never broke His covenant with us. For even during the worst periods of our exile He created in our midst the tools to bring about our deliverance, men who stood at the peak of the Jewish spirit and who knew, even in the days of harsh trials, how to raise their people to their own high moral and spiritual level through their teachings and their personal example.

Was there ever a time when the cry *כי מאס ה' בהם*, “God despised them!” (Jeremiah 6, 30) seemed more justified than it was when Judah succumbed to the Chaldeans and when the princes and tribes of Judah were exiled to Babylonia? The Sanctuary, founded by God Himself, lay in ruins and the throne established by God had been toppled. Israel had lost the land that God had given to it. The remnants of the nation that should have stood erect as a Divine Sanctuary among the nations were forced to dwell in the lands of their enemies. Israel had brought this misfortune upon itself, by its own acts; the catastrophe had come as a result of Israel’s sins, in accordance with God’s explicit sentence, because Israel had opened its gates wide to idolatry and to defection from God’s Law. If we read the admonitions and castigations of the prophet who had been sent to warn the people almost two centuries before the disaster struck, and if we read how the kings conducted themselves despite the warnings, we are led to believe that, truly, the last spark of the fire from Sinai had died within the heart of the nation and particularly in the hearts of its leaders and rulers.

“Nevertheless. . .” It was precisely from the royal family and the Jewish elite *ומן המלוכה ומן הפרתמים* (“and of the royal seed, and of the nobles”—Daniel 1, 3) that Nebuchadnezzar chose youths to train them in Chaldean studies and culture for service at his court. But among these youths of royal lineage there were one Daniel, one Chananiah, one Mishael and one Azariah, who, when Israel in exile made contact with the customs and usages of its Babylonian overlords, stood firm amidst the enticements of the gently caressing atmosphere of the king’s court, and showed to all future *galuth* generations how

Jewish youths and men should withstand tests such as these. The kitchen at court, whose delicacies these Jewish courtiers refused to sample, the royal idol before which these Jewish men refused to bow, the fiery furnace that could not deter Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah from their commitment, and the threat of the lion's jaw that could not keep Daniel from reciting his prayers three times each day even in the lion's den—these were the shining reminders which, in centuries to come, were to light, for thousands upon thousands of Jewish souls, the path that led them to embrace death with all its terrors for the sake of the loyalty they owed to God and to His Law. To this day the story of Daniel at Belshazzar's feast affords to Israel and to a marveling world a splendid example of Jewish spiritual nobility before which the power of kings and the erudition of savants pale into insignificance. If a generation which was condemned to חורבן and גלות could produce men such as these, then there could never be a generation "despised" by God, not even during its worst periods of corruption. Israel had sunk very low indeed by the measure of the high standard of its Divine mission, but even in its worst time of demoralization it always shone brightly above the darkness that had enveloped the mind and spirit of a pagan world.

Then came ימי המן, the days of Haman. Not even by the waters of Babylon did all of Israel join in the Psalmist's vow, אִם אֲשַׁכַּח יְרוּשָׁלַם ("If I forget you, O Jerusalem" - Psalms 137,5). Not every Jew had remained standing unbowed before the king's pillar in the plain of Dura, as described in the third chapter of Daniel (הִשְׁחָחוּ לְצֶלֶם בְּבִקְעָה) דורא "they cast themselves down before the image in the plain of Dura"—(מגילה י"ב ע"ב ע"פ מדרש"א). And when the Babylonian empire was replaced by the mild regime of Persia, which took pride in uniting so many different peoples and tongues beneath its scepter, and which most graciously invited also the exiles of Judea to bask in the sunshine of its imperial court, the sons of Judah were unable to resist these blandishments. In return for a condescending smile from crowned mortals, they began to ignore basic precepts of God's will (וְהוּוּ מִסְעֻדָּהוּ) "they partook of his banquet"—(מגילה י"ב). They felt that in the face of so much kindness they no longer needed to cling to their "rigid, self-isolating" loyalty to the Law. One kind of tolerance, they argued, deserved another. It seemed to them that whatever they might lose by forsaking God's covenant would be amply compensated by their future friendships with princes and nations—until Haman roused

them from the drunken stupor that would have ended in their death. Haman shocked them into the realization that unfaithfulness to God would not buy Israel the lasting friendship of men.

Jew-hatred cannot be bought off. Regardless of whether you confront the Jew-hater as a whole Jew, a half-Jew, a quarter Jew or a one-eighth Jew, even if you drink with him and dine at his table—as long as you have not become entirely one of his own, you will remain for him the *עם מפורד ומפורד וגוי*, the isolated nation that has set itself apart from the others by virtue of its religious laws.

Indeed, is the Jew-hater not right in his attitude with regard to half-Jews, quarter Jews and one-eighth Jews? If you are a whole Jew, if you consider the Law of God inviolable in both theory and practice, you can cite the will of God as your explanation for any behavior of yours that sets you apart from the non-Jew. In that case the way of life which separates you from the Gentile world cannot be ascribed to your arrogance, or to any contempt on your part for non-Jewish ideas and practices; it is not a creation of your own will and resolve but a discipline which you follow because God has commanded you to do so. You can prove this to the Gentile from your Holy Scriptures which he himself may revere as Divine Law. And in any event—if hatred were capable of logic and rationality—you could easily demonstrate to him the absurdity of the hatred he has for you, supposedly because of your peculiar, alien way of life.

But if you are no longer a whole Jew, if you yourself no longer regard the Law of God as Divine, holy and inviolable, how will you answer the Jew-hater if he considers any observance you may have retained from that Law, anything that still sets you apart from the non-Jew, as nothing but proof of your obstinate arrogance? How will you explain to him your failure to discard those remnants of God's Law which you still observe, your refusal to cease being a half-Jew and to become a complete Gentile? You can no longer cite God in your support because you have refused Him your obedience by defecting from His Law. Therefore it is no longer His will but only your pleasure that shapes your way of life. Not God but only you yourself can now justify your behavior in the eyes of your Gentile neighbor. Precisely by seating yourself at his table despite your Jewishness do you give Haman the license to slander you as a member of *ישנו עם אחר* ("a certain people . . .").

Such Hamanic periods of Jewish half-heartedness and consum-

mate Jew-hatred cause the Jewish people to appear as truly “rejected,” as having forfeited both worlds. It has broken its allegiance with God and failed to win the friendship of men. The nations at whose doors it begs for admittance regard it as not yet “ready” for acceptance in their midst and therefore will not let it in. Simultaneously, Israel excluded itself from the Divine covenant that was meant to preserve and sustain it forever. At such times Israel seems irretrievably lost, hovering precariously between heaven and earth. “Nevertheless. . .,” God declares, לא געלחים בימי המן שהעמדתי להם מרדכי ואסתר, “I did not reject them even in the days of Haman, for I raised for them Mordecai and Esther.” He raised Mordecai, איש יהודי, the “Jewish man,” who, as the Sages put it, מוכתר בנימוסו (“was crowned by his dignity”), who regarded God’s Law as his crown, his pride and the source of his manly dignity. Mordecai maintained his Judaism without compromise, no matter what befell him. He was a Jew in exile, and he remained a Jew—and nothing but a Jew—even as uncle to the queen and minister to the king. And just as he was the instrument of the physical deliverance of the Jewish people, so, too, he became one of the most important co-workers in the spiritual upbuilding of the Jewish people for the impending millennia of exile. God also raised Esther, the lovely daughter of Judah who, even on her way to the king’s throne, did not forget the Jewish spirit and the Jewish way of life in which she had been reared at her guardian’s home. Even as queen of Persia she remained a Jewess, risking her crown and her life to save her people.

A generation capable of revering Mordecai and Esther as its pride and joy must still have had healthy roots and branches; the spirit of vacillation and defection could not have been so deeply entrenched in Israel as one might have thought (הם לא עשו אלא לפנים—מגילה י”ב).

The example set by Mordecai and Esther, and the catastrophe almost wrought by Haman, were sufficient to bring the Jews under Persian rule to their senses, so much so that ליהודים הייתה אורה ושמוחה וששון ויקר (“the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor”—Esther 8,16); they once again honored the חררה as their light and the מצוה as their joy, their bliss and their glory. Henceforth, the Jews in the Persian-Babylonian exile cultivated חררה ומצוה so diligently that Babylonian Jewry was able to produce such a man as Hillel, who brought new life and a new flowering of Torah learning from the land of exile to the Jewish homeland.

This brings us to the "days of the Greeks," ימי יוונים, in which, even more than in the days of Haman, Israel seemed inexorably doomed to **לכלות**, utter destruction. Haman, having despaired of destroying Israel spiritually because Israel had proven "stubborn and incorrigible," had resolved to bring about its physical extermination. The Greek ruler, on the other hand, believed that his gods could conquer the minds and spirits of all men and consequently should also be able to subdue Israel. He used a combination of physical torture and material enticements to destroy Israel both morally and spiritually. Ever since the Persian armies had retreated before the Greeks, the nations had come to believe that the European spirit would be able to overcome the powers of the Orient. They felt it to be the mission of European civilization to subdue and Europeanize the peoples of the Orient. Driven by this conviction, the hero of Macedonia (Alexander the Great) drew his sword and, by conquering all the nations in his path as far to the east as the river Indus, turned his ideas into reality that not even his premature death could reverse entirely. His generals divided his empire among themselves with the result that the wealthiest and most civilized countries of the Orient came under the rule of Greek dynasties.

A few generations later, there emerged a Greek ruler so fanatically certain of the worldwide triumph of Hellenism that he set out on a merciless, ruthless campaign to enforce his visions of victory. That was the prince under whose rule Judea, too, became a province of the Syrian-Greek empire. Antiochus Epiphanes viewed the Jewish spirit and the Jewish way of life as an insult to the Hellenist spirit that, in his view, was destined to conquer the world. He therefore decided to use both the enticements of seductions and the terrors of violence to convert Israel to his way of life, or else to destroy it. He had some cause for believing that he would be able to conquer the Jews, for he could see that the elite of the Jewish state already clearly tended toward Hellenism. There were priests and leaders who found themselves unable to resist the blandishments of Greek culture, which appealed to their senses, and the prospects of civil rights under Antiochus, which appealed to their self-interest. As a matter of fact, members of the Jewish priestly caste had encouraged him to start his campaign of conversion. And since the leaders of the nation, the "educated," the "intellectuals" and the rich had already espoused the cause of "Reform toward Hellenism" in their own conduct and in the education of their children, Antiochus could easily dismiss the people's

people and their descendants were shown, by way of consolation and instruction, that even in such peril of spiritual eclipse and extinction, Jewish loyalty and the Jewish spirit will never perish entirely from among the people of God. לא מאסחים ולא געליחים לכלהם. Even in Israel's darkest hour, God will find in the midst of His people a Hasmonean family which will be strong enough to raise His Law and His Sanctuary from the most abject degradation, from virtual elimination, back to the heights of triumphant light and glory.

Then came the final, most critical phase in the history of the Jews in *galuth*: the Roman *galuth*, in which the Jews were scattered all over the world and the fulfillment of Israel's destiny seemed indefinitely postponed. Even the scions of the Hasmonean family had broken faith with the spirit of their forebears. They, who had so triumphantly withstood the spirit of Hellenism, proved to be no match for the enticements of self-indulgence and the temptations offered by the politics of the Roman Caesars. The descendants of the Hasmoneans themselves invited Rome to become Judea's patron and arbitrator, and soon Rome's iron foot succeeded in crushing the structure of the Jewish state from without because Israel had become hollow from within. As a consequence, the sons of that nation had to leave their land. They lost their home, their morale, and very soon also their dignity and their human rights. They were swept farther and farther into the groundswell of a world in ferment, a world struggling from decay toward the impending dawn of a new life.

The world became increasingly hostile toward the Jews. Despite the differences that divided them, the nations of the world were united in their hatred and contempt for the Jews. Indeed, before too long, they set up their hostility to the Jews as a fiendish principle of religion, and they inculcated into their children, from earliest infancy, articles of faith that sowed the seeds of hatred and contempt for the "accursed, rejected Jews." The Roman empire and the Roman Church, the Catechism and the Codex presented the unfortunate Jews as pariahs, barred from God's mercy and therefore also from any claim to human justice and compassion.

Yet for all that, God's grace did not abandon them; God in His mercy did not permit them to be destroyed. Despite scepter and crozier, stones and sticks, ghettos and prisons, expulsions and burnings at the stake, God preserved them as a wonderment to the world.

In all these developments was God's almighty promise, אף גם זאת

“nevertheless . . .” fulfilled only by the protection He extended to the Jews from without? Or was His supreme power not also demonstrated, precisely during those centuries of utter darkness, by the inner life which the Jews managed to unfold despite their misery? Israel’s flowering from within, during those dark ages, is the most convincing proof for any thinking Jew (or non-Jew) that ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ אתם were in enemy country, God had not despised them, nor rejected them, to destroy them utterly, to break His covenant with them להפך בריחי אתם בימי רומיים שהעמדתי להם בית רבי וחכמי הדורות.

Consider the spiritual life which the Jews developed especially during the centuries of their Roman *galuth*! Look upon the strength and happiness which this spiritual flowering brought us, enlightening and ennobling our hearts and minds, our domestic and communal lives! See how this spiritual life, and the strength and happiness it afforded us from within, gave us the courage and perseverance to absorb every blow aimed at us from without! Review before your mind’s eye the splendid procession of those men of the spirit whom God, in His grace and loving kindness, raised, like pillars of fire, to guide every generation in this, our darkest period of *galuth*!

Seeing these wonders, what blind, fumbling stupidity would assert in all seriousness that God had canceled His covenant with the Jews when they were dispersed in the lands of the Roman empire?

Look at the exiles that were dispersed throughout the lands of the Roman empire, and then look at the Roman empire which dispersed them! Certainly, Rome could proudly call herself the “Eternal City” and look down with contempt upon Israel, whose very life-blood was draining away at her feet—Israel, that nation which had dared to contest Rome’s mission to conquer and to save the world. When Rome defeated Judea, she stood at the pinnacle of her imperial power. The fall of Jerusalem was one of the last conquests Rome won for her empire. When Rome planted her eagles upon the hills of Zion, a trembling world, from Britannia in the north to Hispania in the west and Judea in the south paid tribute to Rome. By that time Rome had already passed the climax of her glory. She collapsed beneath the burden of her own weight because her colossus had become rotten from within.

But even as Rome fell, her spirit triumphed over those that had defeated her, and before long, the spirit of Rome had placed a double

yoke of dominion over the necks of the nations. For centuries the Roman law which went forth from the City of the Seven Hills imposed upon the peoples of Europe that absolute order which dictated their relations with one another and their relationship with their God. To this day, the talons of the Roman eagle, grasping this double bolt of lightning, terrestrial and celestial, maintain a firm hold on the political and religious life of civilized nations. Would not the Roman spirit of Esau be right to consider itself the Divinely-appointed master of this earth? Would it not be justified in regarding itself as the heir to the blessing and the covenant which God had once bestowed upon the nation of Jacob, a nation which He Himself had subsequently driven from its homeland and which He Himself, through His "law" and His "church," had debarred for centuries from human rights and Divine grace? Would the genius of Rome not be right, then, if it proclaimed in scornful arrogance that God had delivered the Jews into their hands, להסד בדחיי אדם, in order to break the covenant He had made with Israel?

Yet for all that . . . even as he lies in the dust, with the Edomite foot of Rome upon his neck, Jacob has every right to look Rome firmly in the eye. Before conceding that he had been defeated and destroyed and that his oppressor was indeed the triumphant heir to his own mission to save the world, Jacob could ask Rome just how much peace and salvation, how much happiness and prosperity, her world dominion had brought to mankind, how much freedom and right, how much enlightenment and edification her Church had bestowed upon the souls of men. Jacob could question her about the ruined cities, the incinerated hovels, the tortured bodies, the broken hearts, the enslaved peoples, the fallen nations, the despairing spirits and the duped minds that resulted from the rule of Rome. He could point to the fanaticism she hallowed, the truths she denied, the scorn she had heaped upon humanity, the insults she had dealt to human dignity, the crime, the desolation, the misery and the vice that ran rampant under her dominion. Jacob could point to all these historical outrages and lodge the most eloquent protest against the mad delusion that the Esau spirit of Rome had brought happiness and salvation to the world.

In contrast, he need only point to the spiritual paradise which he saved from the ruins of all his other possessions, and the men whom God has "appointed" for him at all times, amidst all our misery, as loyal keepers and cultivators of this garden of the Jewish spirit. He

could point to the upholders and nurturers of the Jewish spirit and of Jewish knowledge in the midst of all the sufferings of *galuth* that Esau's dominion has inflicted upon the nation and upon its spirit. And then Jacob could say to Esau: Would you really label a nation whose spirit and knowledge could celebrate victories unparalleled anywhere else on earth as "rejected and accursed by God?" Would you deny that, even in the midst of the darkness you have inflicted upon them, the Ark of the Covenant of God's Law has traveled with that nation at all times? That the glory, the grace, the blessings and the spirit of God still bring new life and happiness to the last of Israel's surviving sons? When you behold a people in whose midst God has caused His spirit and the knowledge of His Word to live and flourish unlike anything else on earth, would you indeed dare to assert that God has canceled His age-old covenant with them long ago?

Yes, unlike anything else on earth, you need not look back all the way to the spiritual heroes of our remote antiquity; you need look no further than *של בית רבי וחכמי הדורות* (the house of Rabbi Judah the Prince and the Sages of the later generations), the chain of Israel's Sages that has continued unbroken ever since the days of Rabbi Judah the Prince, the friend of the Roman emperor Antoninus, a ruler in whom the spirit of Esau showed respect and understanding for the spirit of Jacob, for the first time and perhaps the only time for many centuries to come. Look upon these men as they pass through the growing darkness of the ages, see what they meant to us and what they accomplished, and then try to find even one parallel to their character and to their achievements! Search the whole earth, if you will, for another nation in whom the elements of spirit, thought and knowledge were not merely reserved for individual thinkers but became the very soul of an entire nation! Look for another nation whose collective intellectual bent labored with unflagging zeal for one and a half millennia to develop one single area of knowledge, a nation within which knowledge was not merely the prerogative of a few ivory-tower thinkers, the kind comforter of philosophers behind prison bars, but the consolation, the wealth, the strength and the inspiration of an entire people.

Jacob and Esau have been engaged, almost simultaneously, in endeavors which, on the surface, appear identical in character. Almost in the same centuries during which the imperial dynasty of Rome codified Roman law and developed the Church of Rome, creating the two factors that have molded the civilized world and the disseminators

of world civilization to this day, the **בית רבי**, the House of Rabbi Judah the Prince and **הכמי הדורות**, the chain of Sages who continued his work, were engaged in the codification and development of the Law and the "Church" of God, thereby ensuring the harmonious development of Jewish life everywhere, even in dispersion throughout the Roman world, upon the foundation of the Word of God. But Rome's endeavor was the work of men, sustained in a manner worthy of Esau: by power and by the sword. Israel's endeavor, by contrast, was the work of God and had neither power nor weapons to assist it. In fact, every sword on earth was drawn against it and all the powers of the world made war upon it. It survived only within the life and the spirit of one nation, a spirit that shone brightly even in the midst of utter darkness, a life that flourished even amidst the graves of the dead.

The prophet (Jeremiah 16, 19) predicted that the nations would come to God from all ends of the earth, declaring: **אך שקר נחלו אבותינו** "Our fathers have inherited nothing but falsehood, folly in which there is no profit." They will realize that, of all the traditions they have inherited from their ancestors, the only ones that have brought them true happiness and salvation were those that had come to them as pollen from the tree of life so quietly and patiently nurtured by Jacob. These are the ideals for which the traditions of their own fathers could serve only as frail, temporary vessels. Then they will look into the camp of Jacob, and there they will behold the fruits which that tree, nurtured by the "House of Rabbi and the Sages of the generations," have yielded in the midst of all the upheavals of past centuries, bringing light, exaltation and happiness to the people of Israel.

To be sure, the nations had been aware of these facts for centuries, but only in that still-distant day will they learn to understand and appreciate them. This is what elevates the mountain of God over all the other mountains; this is the reason why all the hills uphold the mountain of God and bow to its might. It is to this mountain that all the nations of the world will flock. They all will come to the mountain of God, to the House of the God of Jacob, so that they may be taught about His ways and that they, too, may walk in His paths. Then, at long last, the nations will learn one Law and one Torah that will teach them to put the sword and the spear aside and to establish peace on earth. This will be that Law and that Torah for which **בית רבי וחכמי הדורות**, the House of Rabbi and the Sages of all subsequent generations lived and worked. Only then, in retrospect, will the nations truly

understand that ואף גם זאת, “even though they are in enemy country, I have not despised them, nor have I rejected them, to destroy them utterly, to break My covenant with them, for I, ה', remain their God”

ואף גם זאת בהיותם בארץ איביהם לא מאסתים ולא
געלתיים לכלתם להפר בריתי אתם כי אני ה' אלקיהם.