

SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The Collected Writings

VOLUME I

THE JEWISH YEAR

PART ONE

NISSAN — AV

*Published for the
Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer Foundation
and the
Samson Raphael Hirsch Publications Society*

Philipp Feldheim, Inc.
New York — Jerusalem

meal, no priest extends the cup, no priest breaks the bread. When the heart seeks God, its Redeemer, a priest is not required. Among this people, everyone is a priest; every dwelling a temple, every table an altar, every father a priest of God calling each son and daughter to the same priesthood—such is the nation of these Divinely redeemed ones.—And when, after partaking of the bread of servitude, they praise *their* Deliverer with the cup of Redemption.—O that mankind would then say “Amen” for *its own* Redemption;—O that the day might come when this toast to Jewish freedom and to the Jewish Deliverance were understood throughout the world!—

4—And one more time fill the cups and dedicate the fourth cup to the Selection of the Jews as the People of God!

ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם

To “the freeing from burdens,” “Liberation,” “Redemption,” the first three cups are dedicated. These are concepts guaranteed to all peoples, promised to all, and unique to Israel only in that they take the form of symbols for their eternal cognizance. However, the Selection as God’s People, to which this last cup is dedicated, signifies Israel’s special position in the world, Israel’s Divine Mission among the nations, Israel’s vocation and destiny in world history. For

“when Israel went out from Egypt, the house of Jacob
from a people of alien tongue,
then Judah became His Sanctuary,
and Israel His Domain”—

then Judah became a living *temple* of God, a living people of Sinai wandering through history as ordained by God. And then Israel became the Divine *domain* through observance of a *way of life* wholly governed by God.

ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם “and I take you to Myself as My People!” Thus their Redeemer had spoken. And with this “selection”—the culmination of their earlier “freeing from burdens,” “liberation” and “redemption,”—he gave them their purpose and goal, to be striven for eternally.

The Jewish people gave themselves to God—and God chose them

to be *His Sanctuary and His Domain*, "*And I take you—to Myself—as My People!*"

Such short, concise, meaningful words: *לי לעם* *to Me as My People!* And the unwavering, unchanging gravity of: *ולקחתי אתכם* *I take you!*

The entire Torah, the entire Jewish Law of God is nothing other than the explanation of these two words: "*לי לעם*, *to Me and My People,*" and the entire history of Israel, which exceeds three millenia, is anchored in the firm promise of: "*ולקחתי אתכם* *I take you!*"

The redeemed-by-God are united in the one concept of "God." They are to find in Him their spiritual bond and their national unity. This concept "God and His holy Will" permeates and shapes their entire individual and collective life. From this a nation is to emerge that is governed by God in all of its thoughts and feelings, movements and deeds whether in the life of the individual, of the family, of the community, or of the nation. Its individual well-being, its national glory, and its eternal peace on earth are all based on its fulfillment of His Will.—Its entire national life is established by God and guided and regulated by Him, trusting and depending on Him, favored and blessed through Him.—All of this constitutes the ideal that God offers to His redeemed ones through His Law.—The education of His People for this ideal, the periods of loyalty and the periods of desertion, the wavering and the perseverance of this nation on the way to this goal, the strong Hand of God "which never lets go of its People and never releases its Possession," all of this constitutes the history of this nation. It is a history designed to lead this People, after dark millenia of anguish and privation, at last to the summit of perfection.

However, we are still far from achieving this ideal. We still waver in this direction or that; we still have not been completely reconciled to the idea of being God's People, and have repeatedly shown that it is not enough for us to be the People of God. The shining, alien splendor of the nations has still not lost its seductive hold on our hearts; therefore, the time of trial is not yet past, and we are still unable to greet joyfully the morning rays of our long-awaited day of the nationhood of God.

—However, despite all this, Israel—even in this half-heartedness of our way of life, in this twilight of our destiny—need not be ashamed of its past. There is no nation that could look back on its history and see as few blemishes as Israel can. Israel may take pride in its historic

journey among the nations. Judah indeed became God's Sanctuary, and indeed Israel became God's Domain!

Observe the *Select* ones at the great table which extends around the world: They still have a right to fill the cups joyously and commemorate with praises to God their Selection as the People of God! They have a right to refer to themselves as the People of God. They have earned this name at great cost. If in times of good fortune they failed to be aware of their task, in times of stress they have proven themselves worthy of their Mission. They have shown an astonished world what it means to remain true to one's conscience, to one's duties, and to one's God.

They have affirmed their earnest intention to be Jews by undergoing an historical ordeal which has lasted thousands of years. At all times they determined to cling to their Lord and Master to the death. They were content to build their homes in the most neglected places if they could but have a family life, pure in conduct, motivated by love, and dedicated to the spiritual spreading of the Divine Word.

But in order to be able to live in this manner, they had to deny themselves all worldly pleasures and honors. As a result, they have had to bear all of the oppression and scorn, the tortures and torments of a blind hatred.

And while a demented world danced, laughing and mocking, upon the graves of Jews, they yet carried forward the standard of light. They implanted in mortal man the belief in a better mankind of the future; in a Divine kingdom of truth and right, in a world of sanctification and duty, of love and atonement.

And for that reason they fill the goblets and dedicate the fourth cup to Him Who proclaimed thousands of years ago: "I take you to Myself as My People." Throughout the course of the millenia He has kept His resolution. Because of this, they fill the goblets, and the Jewish national anthem flows from their lips. This hymn expresses the joy and the sorrow, the struggle and the triumph, the trials and the hopeful trust which are felt in the Jewish heart. And in all of this the eternally close providence and guidance of the Omnipotent One is reflected-(הלל).

He is not only the One God of the heavens but also of the earth. He raises the poor up from the dust. He arranges for the slave a place among the free, and for the dwellings of man He prepares the blissfulness of a happy family life.—

Redeemed Judah became His Sanctuary and Israel His Domain.

All of the brutal oppressors collapse before the intervention of the Divine Omnipotence in Jacob's behalf (הללוּי).

But while we drink the cup of the "Selection," we also sing of the bitter times, the years of night and of seeming abandonment, during which Israel was subjected to raucous mockery and laughter: "Where then is their God?!" Hence the plea: "Not for our sake, but for Your sake manifest Yourself once more so that your love and eternal faithfulness can be discerned!" This is what Israel cries out from its nocturnal suffering while holding fast to the trust that God is indeed the only God; that He is the God Who wills and speaks, Who sees and hears, perceives and acts, and intervenes in the course of history; that His thoughts carry the future of humanity in their bosom. Men vainly attribute to imaginary forces the powers of will and speech, perception and providence. But before God all illusion dissipates. (לא לנו)

And therefore Israel can be confident. He Who once remembered them will always return to them with blessings. He bestows upon them a blessing that increases steadily in all succeeding generations. He transforms them into an immortal people wandering throughout His World to proclaim with everlasting praises His Might and His Providence. (ה' זכרנו)

And therefore Israel derives contentment even from the anxious moments during the night of its trials. Death agonies and fear of the grave may seize them. They may experience only distress and misery. But they can call out to their God. They know that God hears them. God is as gracious as He is righteous, and He is merciful even when sitting in judgment.

The Jew is content in the knowledge that he does *not* understand the events of the ages, gladly allowing himself to be ridiculed as the naively believing Jew. It is enough for him to know that God protects the meek. And when he stumbles, God raises him swiftly with His wondrous help. That is how he can remain calm and at peace amidst all the suffering. He knows that his God has always watched over him, and has not only guarded his soul from death, but has also kept his eyes from tears and his foot from slipping.

Then he walks before God—alone—upon the graves of the entire past; he alone before God in the lands of the living. He alone believes in the truth of the Word that he professes no matter how much he is bowed down; he alone, in that seemingly endless odyssey about the earth, has the courage to accuse all humanity of self-delusion (אדוקתי).

And therefore, whenever he recalls all the manifestations of divine

providence, he joyfully raises the cup of Salvation and pronounces the Name of his God. They who are dispersed make a solemn resolve to remain true to the task and to persevere until God gathers them together in unity once more as His People. They know that even these dark times, which bring them to the brink of destruction, are fraught with significance in God's Plan for humanity.

Indeed, in the loyal service of their God they can feel themselves happily free from all other bonds. They thank God for their Mission, so full of trial, and they carry out their task in the Exile, until the day when God will gather them once again as His People within the boundaries of His Temple in the midst of Jerusalem. (מה אשיב)

And then the benefits of their Selection come to the fore. The love and truth of the only God radiate brilliantly toward all mankind of the glorious destiny of Israel. Not only Israel, not only the House of Aaron, but the God-fearing among all nations are called upon to recognize this love and truth of the only God, and to unite with Israel in the same declaration of faith: that the source of all good is God alone, and that His Love is present in every age! (הללו הודו)

The Jewish people stand as the heralds of God, as the symbol of the Divine Revelation which shines forth from the unfolding historical destiny of the Jews. Their history is nothing other than a monument to the omnipotent rule of God and at the same time to the victorious strength that comes from the knowledge of Him and the dedication to His Name.

Having been cast into the midst of the millenia-long struggle of the world, Israel had only the belief in the One God as its weapon and its banner. Armed with the Name of God it fended off the centuries of attack, and when there was hardly a nation that was not hostile toward it,—“Israel faced all of them alone with but the Name of ‘God’”—and they emerged triumphant from this struggle. “You have continually desired to bring about my downfall,” says Israel to the nations through the ages, “but God has helped me! My triumphant resistance and the power of my song lie in Him.”—That I was able to sing and to be victorious has been brought about only by God, because He was my help.

The call of salvation which emanates from Israel's history now penetrates into the dwellings of *all* the righteous: “only *God's* Right Hand is victorious, *God's* Right Hand is exalted.” And therefore the Jewish nation does not die but lives, in order to proclaim the deeds of

God. God sent His People sufferings in order to educate them, but He did not let them perish.—And wherever justice is established on earth, the portals open for His People to enter and proclaim God, and all of the righteous follow.

Long have those who fancy themselves masters at creating human happiness disdained Israel as a useless building block, but now—they have become the foundation stone of the edifice of Salvation!

—This radiates forth as God's Deed, unfathomable to men's minds. This is the day that consummates the progression of the centuries. All the joy and bliss of mankind unfold in God, to Whom all men now turn for healing from God. Only from God do they seek the successful outcome of every human activity. (מִן הַמִּצְרָה, אָנָּה)

Israel greets them all, they who come in the Name of God, and shows them the blessing that can be found only in a house dedicated to the Word of God. The all-powerful victory of God was attained solely for the sake of the Light that God has lit for Israel. The righteous among the nations must therefore hold their offering of homage in abeyance until the ancient Sanctuary rises once again in Zion in its entirety—"You are my Strength, I declare my faith in You, You are my God, I extol You," speaks every human heart—and: "Give homage to God! He alone is good. His Love is present in every age" exults Israel forever, in the chorus of human brotherhood united under God—(בְּרוּךְ הוּא).

This is the Jewish national anthem that has accompanied Israel from century to century, from millenium to millenium. Even today this anthem flows from the lips of God's chosen ones, seated around the great world-wide banquet table. The song will continue to reverberate until its purpose is achieved on earth, and all of mankind joins the gathering around this table. It will reverberate until all mankind raises this cup of Salvation together with God's people and strives to enter with them into the Divine Light. Together they stand ready to accept their historic destiny from God's Hands; together they shout the motto: "*Give homage to God, He alone is good, His Love is present in every age!*"