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Sivan V

“Everything that God Has Spoken We Will Do and Hear!” (Exodus 24,7)

For the three thousand one hundred and seventy-first time, the day on which “God entered among us from Sinai, radiated His Light upon us from Seir, revealed Himself from the mountains of Paran, came from among the myriads of the Holy Realm, and caused us to receive the Law of fire from His Right Hand” makes its appearance among us. For the three thousand one hundred and seventy-first time we stand in spirit with our forefathers at the base of the flaming mountain. We hear the Voice of our God as He gives the Law, and we call out to Him our unanimous: “Everything that God has spoken we will do and hear!” For the three thousand one hundred seventy-first time we rejoice over this Law and make a solemn resolution to transmit it to our children and grandchildren just as we received it from our fathers and grandfathers.

What is this Law to us, this Law over which we rejoice and which we intend to transmit to our children? What has it been to us in all of these many centuries? What is it to us today after all of these centuries? What will it be to our children and grandchildren in all of the centuries of the future?

What is this Law?

It is the *milk* of our infancy. What the mother’s breast is to the newborn life of the body, this Law is to the newborn life of our spirit and heart. It generates the spark of awareness of God in the child’s breast. It teaches the child’s mind to think “creation” when viewing each object that enters into the child’s field of vision, whether it comes from the earth or from the sky.

The Law teaches us to honor and fear, to love and admire the Creator and Master, the Father and Lord, in everything that we encounter. It teaches us to consider ourselves as His Work, His creatures, His children and His servants. It causes us to think about and comprehend the world as a whole, and above all our own little world in the light of His Teachings and Precepts.

The Law renders our microcosmic little world a paradise in which the Voice of God speaks to us periodically. By means of its Authority which both sanctions and refuses consent, which rules and prohibits, the Law shapes our world into one of order and Law. Even great men among us submit to this world of order and Law with reverence and joyfulness. We see this, and it has a powerful effect on us. Even great men fulfill this Law with sincerity and enthusiasm, with joy and honesty. This order and Law awakens us and educates us to be obedient to God; such obedience embodies all of the value, meaning, bliss and joy of our lives.

The Law was the *milk* of our nation's childhood, too. When Israel was "the youth" whom God loved and whom "He summoned from Egypt as His son," He led him into the training ground of the wilderness—into the sea of perpetually shifting sand where the rocks glare in the heat and there is no green farmland or flowering meadow, where emptiness and desolation surround man. There He put His Law into the youth's hand and told him: if you have this, you have everything; if you uphold this, you uphold everything; if you practice this, you are everything; if you obey this, the world obeys you!

And He taught him to know the power of this Law: he who does not let go of this Law and walks in its Ways with joy passes safely even through wastelands protected at all times by God's kindness and guided by God's Light. This Law goes before him in his journeys and levels all hills and fills all ravines. It keeps away all thorns and breaks the sting of the scorpion. It subdues the rage of serpents and provides water from the rock and bread from the heavenly heights. It places every human dwelling and every soul in every human dwelling under the special protection of the nourishing, preserving, and gladdening benevolence of the heavenly Father. It leads those who follow Him through the desert into the Land where milk and honey flow.

—Yet for those who let go of this Law and do not walk in its Ways with confidence and joyfulness, there is no blessing in what they achieve by their own efforts.—They dig the graves of lust for themselves and perish in the desert without hope.

What is the Law?

It is the *fire* of our youth. It awakens all feeling for what is humanly great and noble in our heart. It fills us with enthusiasm for our own

Life-Calling. It pours life and strength into all of the fibers of our body. It leads our spirit to knowledge of the Truth. It urges our heart toward love of justice and goodness. It kindles the awareness of our own dignity and significance.

The Law ennobles the senses, steels the arms and inspires our entire being with the one resolve: to serve God with all of the buoyancy of our spirit, with every beat of our heart, with all of the strength of our arms. It fortifies us to live and die in His Service and for Him, for the realization of His Will on earth. It charges us to take responsibility for our own lives and destinies, with all of the resoluteness that the consciousness of being in His Service engenders, whether in our own tiny individual spheres of life or in the larger sphere of our national life as a whole; in whatever earthly place or situation His Will places us.—

The Law, however, is as much the purifying and consuming fire of our youth as it is the nourishing fire of our youth. It cleanses our nature of impurities. It does not tolerate lying or craftiness in our soul. It does not tolerate arrogance, self-seeking, hate, vengefulness, anger, violence of temper, covetousness, envy, lecherousness, or self-indulgence of the heart. It eradicates all wickedness and vileness from within us.

Instead, it makes room within us for truth, honesty, modesty, devotion, love, forgiveness, composure, gentleness, contentedness, benevolence, moral cleanliness, and nobility of mind to fill our whole nature. In this way we might each one of us become internally a microcosm of the divine in which everything that is noble and pure in human nature thrives, glorifying God.

Yet the same Law may consume us and cause us to perish in dissoluteness and meanness if we bar its purifying power from entering into our nature. From a cleansing fire, it may become a consuming fire.

It was the *fire* of our nation in the time of its youth. It created our Joshua and Gideon, D'vora and Yael, our Saul and David as symbols of national deliverance. It created our Ruth and Boaz, our Hannah and Elkana as ideals of family life. It awakened our Samuel and Elijah, our Elisha and Hulda, our Hezekiah and Josiah to be its soldiers and representatives among the people. It kindled the fire of inspiration in the breast of our D'vora and Chana, of our David, Asaph and Heman. It blew the breath of song and prayer over the strings of their harps and the strings of their hearts.

The Law touched the lips of our Isaiah and Jeremiah, of our Hosea and Micah, of our Amos and Malachi. It awakened the entire chorus

of men who, aflame with zeal for the divine, offered themselves to God to be heralds of His Word, to be proclaimers of His Will, to be vehicles of His "hammer and fire" discourse, wherewith to break the rock of cruelty and dissolve the impurity of sin.

The Law became a purifying and consuming fire to our nation even in the time of its youth. Ever since, it has continued to forge that core, that שארית ישראל within the nation. This core, this remnant, succeeded in preserving a Torah-loyal family life, holy to the Blessed One, amid even the heathen practices which permeated Judea and established their hold even upon the upper strata of Jewish government.

It was a family life that became the cradle of that illustrious series of Divinely-inspired men and women whose flashes of fiery inspiration give testimony to the depth and breadth, the holiness and nobility that characterized the Jewish home even in the time of an Achab and an Achaz. Pillars of fire—the fire of the Divine Word—rose from these homes with a radiance that penetrated all the centuries of mankind.

And when the purifying fire of the Law reclaimed the core of the nation but the remainder of the people rebelled—along with the high circles of the state—the fire of purification became a consuming flame and burned the Temple and the Altar to the ground. It burned down the palace of the king and the palaces of the great. The faithful core was rescued from this flame, but the edifice of the Jewish state which had become heathen went up in smoke behind them.—

What is this Law?

It is the *light* of our manhood. It illuminates our eyes and, from the totality of truth, lets us glimpse what we need to know to function on this earth. Not to comfort us for the darkness of this world with a dim preview of the light of the next world does this light come. On the contrary, it is precisely the life of this world that is illuminated by this light and is the object of its teachings and ordinances. And not just a narrow corner of life, but life in its broadest conception and greatest perfection.

This light—the Law—conducts us step by step through all of the relationships of individual, family, and civic life, the life of the spirit and the mind, of the body and the instincts, of word and deed. It guides the life of the household, the community, the individual nation, all nations, humanity—whose past it illuminates and whose future it charts. And as for the present, it lets us see its significance as the product of the past and the progenitor of the future.

The Law is a light which becomes brighter the purer we keep it, the more fully we devote ourselves to its radiance. Its radiance enables the Jewish man to walk through life with his eyes open, knowing what he is, what he should be, and what is the meaning for him of the individual and community life going on around him.

The Law gives us a standard by which to distinguish the true from the false, the pure from the tainted, right from wrong, what is beneficial from what is unsuitable—all according to the undeceivable judgment of Godly Truth. It gives us a standard by which resolutely and firmly to travel His Road without audacity and without recklessness, without contempt for man and without worship of man, without conceit and without self-abasement, but rather with the Godly lamp in hand. Thus equipped, we can travel our road without fear, calmly and earnestly, prepared for all eventualities.

It was the *light* of the manhood of our nation. It was the brightly glowing flame of inspiration in the breast of the prophets; and the purifying, and life-giving fire upon the household hearths which spawned such prophets.

Yet, it was also the torch of destruction for all that developed on Jewish soil for the sake of heathen glimmer, sensuality and lust; and all that developed on Jewish soil in opposition to the Law's own spirit and earnestness, in opposition to its Truth and inspiration.—

And afterwards, when as a result of this neglect and opposition, this Law was expelled along with the Jewish people, it became the Light of wisdom in the breast of the earnest core of men and women who claimed it for themselves and kept it alive. In exile, this Law could develop in even greater richness and purity, as Jewish life shed the husk of political independence. The less a nationhood offered fulfillment and luster, the more the Divine Law itself became the source of all triumph and achievement in the Jewish sphere. And this remained true even when, for a brief period, home soil was once again permitted to the dispersed people. Our people waged its wars, and won its victories, not on the battlefield but in the fertile hearts and minds of the nations with whom they came in contact.

What a bright radiance of "wisdom" the light of the Law became in the virile breast of our people! All around them everything began to develop. Whole cultures sprang up and faded away. Everything flourished that the ancient world, winding laurels about itself, recorded upon the pages of history as the greatness of splendor of its own culture and power, to be admired by all posterity unto eternity.

Persian, Greek, and Roman world empires celebrated their vic-

ories of intellect and power. The world prostrated itself at the feet of these all-conquering civilizations and basked with envious, blandishing homage in the radiance of their splendor and culture.

All the while, in little Judea, a core of men within the nation lived their own lives, wound the laurels of homage in honor of completely different values. These men found the paths of their Calling within the orbit of a completely different sun. And they built foundations of a completely different structure in anticipation of a world-conquering future. The Law was their value system, the Law was their sun. It was the Law for which they built the future of their nation and the future of mankind.

In vain did Persia unfold the impressive solemnity of its pomp. In vain did Greece develop the brilliance of its science and the gracefulness of its art which pleased the spirit and heart. In vain did Rome display the world-conquering genius of its statecraft. The light of the Law that shone upon Jewish men allowed them to recognize a lie under any wrapping—no matter how gleaming. It armed them against all temptations of Greek and Roman philosophy which appealed to the senses; and against all enticement offered by Greek and Roman practical wisdom which favored self-interest.

And when for the second time the temple, priesthood, state, and kingdom of Judea sealed their own downfall through the apostasy from God's Law—to fall prey to the Roman sword—the core of the Jewish people emerged from the debris and ruins of an unprecedented destruction. They carried with them the lamp of the Godly Law, triumphantly confident, toward an unparalleled period of wandering through the nations of the world.

What is this Law?

It is the *wine* of our old age. It renders the physical winter of our life the spiritual summer of our existence. The storms of youth are transfigured, the struggles of manhood resolved. It has not caused the youth to strive in vain, nor the man to struggle in vain on his paths. Dedication to the Law has deprived neither the youth nor the man of anything worth having.

Everything noble and true that they achieved and for which they struggled, has now become the unfailing spiritual harvest of the old man. The laurel of the richest achievement of life adorns his temples. He has nothing more to become. He has become. He is. And now he stands, a monument to the power of the Divine Law.

This Law shapes men, moving within the circle of the living in order to spread the rich seed of its fruits. In its journey it attracts those who are receptive, inspiring them to join together in dutiful fulfillment of the Divine Word. And this is the result—

The old man's body has aged. But his spirit and his heart are fresh and warm as in youth, lucid and strong as in manhood. The innocence of childhood still lives in his heart. The fire of youth still burns in his breast. The light of manhood still shines in his eyes.—Yet, all of it is more mature, more thoughtful, more complete, more self-secure; all of it more developed.—

For the Divine Law is the wine in which the milk of childhood, the fire of youth, and the truth of manhood flow to the old man in ever newer, richer freshness until the time comes for his God to guide him, ripe for a new future, onto a still higher, richer path of life.

This Law was—and is—the *wine* of our nation's old age, of its maturity. As Judea's state and temple collapsed under the tread of the Roman legions, the Roman world itself—its own states and temples included—was already putrid internally and decomposing rapidly. There then came a long succession of centuries, in which aging, dying, decomposition, disintegration, separating into atoms, and fitting together into new forms in raw and barbaric beginnings constituted the history of the nations of mankind on earth.

There was only *one* nation that had already surmounted death, that had already *become* and did not have to become any further. This nation was not affected by this decomposition process, by this journey through death to a belated new life. It remained the only living nation amid the corpses of all the other nations. This nation was Israel, our nation.

In Israel's subjugation, Rome's emperors celebrated the last historical triumph of the Roman eagle. But by that time, Israel had become what was necessary for its triumphant historical journey through the lands and through the ages.

There was now no longer any Jewish state or Jewish temple, but individuals and households had been lastingly won to the Divine Law—which they preserved tenaciously as their only safeguard. In this Law they possessed what Rome, with all its imperial splendour and might, could never possess. The hollowness of the Roman achievement was revealed in the wretchedness of its homes, the barbarousness of its leaders, the oppression of its lower classes. But in the Jewish home, all delusions lay behind.

Israel had but one desire: to live a complete human existence on the

soil of the Law; to draw upon all of the Truth and to realize all of the sanctification, all of the justice, and all of the love that this Law teaches and commands for the sake of the redemption of mankind. Israel sought no lands or empires, no thrones or palaces. It sought only the four walls of a dwelling, in order to develop within them a Divinely-permeated personal, familial, and community life of fulfillment of the Law.

They wished to live in this way until it would please the Ruler of the Ages, their God, to judge them mature enough for a still more complete and higher fulfillment of this Law in a new national existence which would then be everlasting. In this new existence, they will perceive that all of their achievements hitherto have been only preparation and beginning. All along, ideas were their victories, good deeds their trophies.

Truth was written on their standards, gentleness in their hearts. Industriousness built their homes, chasteness their marital relationships, justice and love their communities.

Yet round about them, all of the loftier impulses of humanity—knowledge and freedom, justice and mercy, morality and love—fled before the power of madness and brutality which gripped the raging mob. The most humane man now found refuge only in the lowly dwellings of Jewish streets. The ghetto walls, intended to scorn the Jew, became his deliverance.

Every Jew and every Jewish home throughout the world became a monument to Divine Providence and the power of Divine Law. This power confers happiness, inspires with enthusiasm, protects and prepares, restrains and encourages. It renders a person capable of all, emboldens him in everything, and gives him everything. Nowhere did there exist so much peace and guiltlessness, so much cheerfulness and bliss, so much spirit and vigor, so much humaneness and passion for justice, so much freedom and equality, human ennoblement and brotherliness, as in Jewish hearts and Jewish homes!

A wondering world sought to discover the secret talisman that bestowed upon the despised, ridiculed, maltreated Jew this self-awareness, this self-respect, this spiritual resilience, this cheerfulness, this morality, this humaneness, this spiritual comfort, this courage, and this defiance of death.

What was the secret ingredient that enabled him to go about his life's task quietly and firmly amid a world which had only hatred and contempt, only ridicule and oppression for him?

Ultimately the world will learn that this talisman, this secret ingredient that enabled the Jew to achieve the greatest triumph of survival in the history of mankind, was nothing else than the Divine Law.

There are some who believe concerning the Godly Law that the Father of humanity bestowed it precisely upon the most unfortunate, scoffed-at human being in the race of man as a cruel bit of mockery at the expense of mankind. The purpose? To show man what he should be and yet *cannot* be. A moment's reflection banishes this theory to the junkyard of outdated views. This Law comes not to highlight man's past failings, but to chart the future redemption of mankind.

The cynics do not recognize that this Law is the wine of consolation, the wine of courage, the wine of inspiration, the wine of strength, the wine of cheerfulness and joy to all who "study it and practice it!"—

What is this Law?

It is *water*, the spring of our purification and rebirth. From the beginning, this Law was intended to have as its bearers among mankind only tiny Israel, and among Israel often only a small minority. A small core was to be the bearer of this Law until the completion of the first era of world history, at which time "His People, without exception, will take its place as the flowering of repeated plantings by God."

The Law does not tremble when apostasy thins the ranks of its loyal adherents, even when only a "tenth" remains and even when this tenth is continually decimated—*ועוד בה עשרייה ושבה והיתה לבער*—. The Law acknowledges that Abraham, too, was only *one man* when God called him and entrusted to him the future of an entire nation—a nation that would live by this Law.

The Law already survived periods of total abandonment, only to witness a new generation arise in which were gathered around it the sons and grandsons of defectors. The Law has had adherents, yea even martyrs, whose fathers and grandfathers imagined that they could strut on its ruins.

The God of this Law has promised "that He will not abandon His People and will not relinquish His inheritance." He has assured His nation that He would continue to plant the branches of Abraham until they all became one sapling blessed by God and existing for His glorification.

For the Law is not only the milk of our infancy, the fire of our youth, the light of our manhood, the wine of our old age. It is also the water, the spring of purification and rebirth in all periods of our history.

The spirit with which He invests His words, the blessing with which He endows His enactments, have always caused a Hezekiah to follow upon an Achaz, a Josiah to follow upon a Manasseh.

It is these qualities, inherent in the Law, which have always caused presumptuous rashness of Hellenists and Sadducees to yield before the Maccabean earnestness of the Perushim. It is these qualities which have somehow attracted descendants even when the fathers had to be abandoned. This will again hold true in the future.

Let Hellenic unrestraint and Sadducean fraud again take hold of our "scholars and rich men." The time is fast coming when the Divine Law will again be a spring of purification and a fountain of rebirth for the nation that has abandoned it.

Then, when the Festival of the Giving of the Law comes around once again, all of us—not just a small core but everyone whose fathers once swore an oath to this Law at Sinai—will celebrate in this Law the Law of their lives, the nourishment of their infancy, the enthusiasm of their youth, the enlightenment of their manhood, the joy and blissfulness of their old age, and the fountain of their rebirth. And they will gather together once more and with one voice proclaim:

כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע!