

## CHAPTER XLVII

## THE MORAL ELEMENTS OF CIVILIZATION

1. Because Judaism sees the attainment of human perfection only when the divine in man has reached complete development through the unimpeded activity of all his spiritual, moral, and social forces, it insists upon the full recognition of all branches of human society as instruments of man's elevation, either individually or collectively. It deprecates the idea that any force or faculty of human life be regarded as unholy and therefore be suppressed. It thus rejects on principle monastic renunciation and isolation, pointing to the Scriptural verse, "He who formed the earth created it not a waste; He formed it to be inhabited."<sup>1</sup>

2. Accordingly Judaism regards the establishment of family life through marriage as a duty obligatory on mankind, and sees in the entrance into the marital relation an act of life's supreme consecration. In contrast to the celibacy sanctioned by the Church and approved by the rabbis only under certain conditions, and exceptionally for their holy exercises by the Essenes, the Tannaite R. Eliezer pronounces the man who through bachelorhood shirks the duty of rearing children to be guilty of murder against the human race. Another calls him a despoiler of the divine image. Another rabbi says that such a one renounces his privilege of true humanity, in so far as only in the married state can happiness, blessing, and peace be attained.<sup>2</sup> It is significant as to the spirit of Judaism that, while other religions regard the celibacy of the priests and saints as signs of highest sanctity, the

<sup>1</sup> Isa. XLV, 18.<sup>2</sup> Yeb. 62 a, b.

Jewish law expressly commands that the high priest shall not be allowed to observe the solemn rites of the Day of Atonement if unmarried.<sup>1</sup> Love for the wife, the keeper and guardian of the home, must attune his heart to tenderness and sympathy, if he is to plead for the people before the Holy God. He can make intercession for the household of Israel only if he himself has founded a family, in which are practiced faithfulness and modesty, love and regard for the life-companion, all the domestic virtues inherited from the past.

3. Another moral factor for human development is industry, which secures to the individual his independence and his dignity when he engages in creative labor after the divine pattern, and which rewards him with comfort and the joy of life. This also is so highly valued by Judaism that industrial activity, which unlocks from the earth ever new treasures to enrich human life, is enjoined upon all, even those pursuing more spiritual vocations. "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings."<sup>2</sup> "When thou eatest the labor of thy hands, happy art thou and it shall be well with thee."<sup>3</sup> In commenting on this last verse, the sages say: "This means that thou wilt be doubly blessed; happy art thou in this world, and it shall be well with thee in the world to come."<sup>4</sup> Again they say, "No labor, however humble, is dishonoring,"<sup>5</sup> also: "Idleness, even amid great wealth, leads to the wasting of the intellect."<sup>6</sup> Moreover it is said, "Whoever neglects to train his son to a trade, rears him to become a robber."<sup>7</sup> True, there were some among the pious who themselves abstained from participation in industry, and therefore proclaimed, in the same tenor as the Sermon on the Mount, "Behold the beasts of the field and the birds of heaven, they sow not and reap not, and their heavenly Father

<sup>1</sup> Yoma I, 1.<sup>2</sup> Prov. XXII, 29.<sup>3</sup> Ps. CXXXVIII, 2.<sup>4</sup> Ber. 8 a.<sup>5</sup> Ned. 49 b.<sup>6</sup> Keth. V, 5, 59 b.<sup>7</sup> Kid. 29 a; comp. R. Simeon b. Yohai, Mek. Beshallah, 56.

cares for them."<sup>1</sup> But these formed an exception, while the majority of Jewish teachers extolled the real blessing of labor and its efficacy in ennobling heart and spirit.<sup>2</sup>

4. Neither does Judaism begrudge man the joy of life which is the fruit of industry, nor rob it of its moral value. On the contrary, that ascetic spirit which encourages self-mortification and rigid renunciation of all pleasure is declared sinful.<sup>3</sup> Instead, we are told that in the world to come man shall have to give account for every enjoyment offered him in this life, whether he used it gratefully or rejected it in ingratitude.<sup>4</sup> Abstinence is declared to be praiseworthy only in curbing wild desires and passions. For the rest, true piety lies in the consecration of every gift of God, every pleasure of life which He has offered, and using it in His service, so that the seal of holiness shall be imprinted even upon the satisfaction of the most sensuous desires.

5. Judaism, then, lays special emphasis upon sociability as advancing all that is good and noble in man. The life of the recluse, according to its teaching, is of little use to the world at large and hence of no moral value. Only in association with one's fellow-men does life find incentive and opportunity for worthy work. "Either a life among friends or death" is a Talmudic proverb.<sup>5</sup> Unselfish friendship like that of David and Jonathan is lauded and pointed out for imitation.<sup>6</sup> Through it man learns to step beyond the narrow boundaries of his ego, and in caring for others he will purify and exalt his own soul, until at last its love will include all mankind.

6. "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend," says the book of Proverbs,<sup>7</sup> and the sages derive from this verse the doctrine that learning does not thrive in solitude.<sup>8</sup> A single log does not nourish the

<sup>1</sup> Kid. 82 a.

<sup>2</sup> Abot. I, 10; II, 2; B. B. 11 a.

<sup>3</sup> Taan. 11 a.

<sup>4</sup> Yer. Kid. IV at the close.

<sup>5</sup> Taan. 23 a.

<sup>6</sup> Abot. V, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Prov. XXVII, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Taan. 7 a.

flame; to keep up the fire one must throw in one piece of wood after the other. This applies also to learning; it lacks in vigor, if it is not communicated to others. Wisdom calls to her votaries on the highways, in order that the stream of knowledge may overflow for many. For both the culture of the intellect and the ennobling of the soul it is necessary that man should step out of the narrow limits of self and come into touch with a larger world. Only in devotion to his fellows is man made to realize his own godlike nature. In the same measure as he honors God's image in others, in foe as well as in friend, in the most lowly servant as well in the most noble master, man increases his own dignity. This is the fundamental thought of morality as expressed in Job, especially in the beautiful thirty-first chapter, and as embodied in Abraham,<sup>1</sup> and later reflected in various Talmudic sayings about the dignity of man.<sup>2</sup> Everywhere man's relation to society becomes a test of his own worth. The idea of interdependence and reciprocal duty among all members of the human family forms the outstanding characteristic of Jewish ethics. For it is far more concerned in the welfare of society than in that of the individual, and demands that those endowed with fortune should care for the unfortunate, the strong for the weak, and those blessed with vision for the blind. As God Himself is Father to the fatherless, Judge of the widows, and Protector of the oppressed, so should man be. "Works of benevolence form the beginning and the end of the Torah," points out R. Simlai.<sup>3</sup>

7. It is in the life of the nation that the individual first realizes that he is only a part of a greater whole. The nation to which he belongs is the mother who nourishes him with her spirit, teaches him to speak and to think, and equips him with all the means to take part in the achievements and tasks of

<sup>1</sup> See J. E., art. Abraham.

<sup>2</sup> I Abot. IV, 1; B. K. 79 b; Ber. 19 b.

<sup>3</sup> Sota 14 a.

humanity. In fact, the State, which guarantees to all its citizens safety, order and opportunity under the law, and which arranges the relations of the various groups and classes of society that they may advance one another and thus promote the welfare and progress of all, is human society in miniature. Here the citizen first learns obedience to the law which is binding upon all alike, then respect and reverence for the authority embodied in the guardians of the law who administer justice "which is God's," and hence also loyalty and devotion to the whole, together with reciprocal obligation and helpfulness among the separate members and classes of society. The words of Jeremiah to his exiled brethren, "Seek ye the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the Lord for it, for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace,"<sup>1</sup> became the guiding maxim of Jewry when torn from its native soil. It impressed upon them, once for all, the deeply rooted virtues of loyalty and love for the country in which they dwelt. To pray for the welfare of the State and its ruler, under whose dominion all citizens were protected, and so in modern times for its legislative and administrative authorities, has become a sacred duty of the Jewish religious community. To sacrifice one's life willingly, if need be, for the welfare of the country in which he lived, was a demand of loyalty which the Jew has never disregarded. "The law of the State is as the law of God"<sup>2</sup> taught Samuel the Babylonian, and another sage of Babylon said, "The government on earth is to be regarded as an image of God's government in heaven."<sup>3</sup>

8. But, after all, the community of the State or the nation is too confined in its cultural work by its special interests and particular tasks ever to reach the universal ideal of man, that is, a perfected humanity. Where the interests of one State or

<sup>1</sup> Jer. XXIX, 7; comp. Abot. III, 2.

<sup>2</sup> B. K. 113 a and elsewhere.

<sup>3</sup> Ber. 58 a.

nation come into conflict with those of another, far too often the result is enmity and murderous warfare. Therefore there must be a higher power to quench the brands of war whenever they flare up, to cultivate every motive leading toward peace and harmony among nations, to impel men toward a higher righteousness and to obviate all conflict of interests, because in place of selfishness it implants in the heart the self-forgetfulness of love. Religion is the power which trains peoples as well as individuals toward the conception of one humanity, in the same measure as it points to the one and only God, Ruler over all the contending motives of men, the Source and Shield of all righteousness, truth, and love, the Father of mankind as the only foundation upon which the grand edifice of human civilization must ultimately rest. Thus it teaches us to regard the common life and endeavor of peoples and societies as one household of divine goodness. Every system of belief, every religious denomination which transcends the limits of the national consciousness with a view to the broader conception of mankind, and binds the national groups and interests into a higher unity to include and influence all the depths and heights of the human spirit, paves the way toward the attainment of the mighty goal. In the same sense the united efforts of the various classes and societies or States for the common advance of culture, prosperity, national welfare and international commerce, as well as of science and art, tend unceasingly toward that full realization of the idea of humanity which constitutes the brotherhood of man.

9. Not yet has any religious body, however great and remarkable its accomplishments may have been, nor any of the religious, scientific, or national organizations, much as they have achieved, performed the sublime task which the prophets of Israel foretold as the goal of history. Each one has drawn to itself only a portion of mankind, and promised it success or redemption and bliss, while the rest have been

excluded and denied both temporal and eternal happiness. Each one has singled out one side of human nature in order to link to it the entire absolute truth, but at the same time has underestimated or cast aside all other sides of human life, and thereby blocked the road to complete truth, which can never be presented in final form, nor ever be the exclusive possession of one portion of humanity. Judaism, which is neither a religious nor a national system *solely*, but aims to be a *covenant with God* uniting all peoples, lays claim to no exclusive truth, and makes its appeal to no single group of mankind. The Messianic hope, which aims to unite all races and classes of men into a bond of brotherhood, has become an impelling force in the history of the world, and both Christianity and Islam, in so far as they owe their existence to this hope and to the adoption of Jewish teachings, constitute parts of the history of Judaism. Between these world-religions with their wide domains of civilization stands the little Jewish people as a cosmopolitan element. It points to an ideal future, with a humanity truly united in God, when, through ceaseless progress in the pursuit of ever more perfect ideals, truth, justice, and peace will triumph,—to the realization of the kingdom of God.

## PART III

## ISRAEL AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

## CHAPTER XLVIII

## THE ELECTION OF ISRAEL

1. The central point of Jewish theology and the key to an understanding of the nature of Judaism is the doctrine, "God chose Israel as His people." The election of Israel as the chosen people of God, or, what amounts to the same, as the nation whose special task and historic mission it is to be the bearer of the most lofty truths of religion among mankind, forms the basis and the chief condition of revelation. Before God proclaimed the Ten Words of the Covenant on Sinai, He addressed the people through His chosen messenger, Moses, saying: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself. Now therefore, if ye will hearken unto My voice, indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be Mine own treasure from among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation."<sup>1</sup>

2. The fact of Israel's election by God as His peculiar nation is repeated in Deuteronomy, with the special declaration that God had found delight in them as the smallest of the peoples, on account of the love and the faith He had sworn to the Patriarchs.<sup>2</sup> It is accentuated in the Synagogal liturgy,

<sup>1</sup> Ex. XIX, 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> Deut. VII, 6-8; X, 15; XIV, 2. Comp. Schechter: *Aspects*, 57 ff.