Chapter 2

Judaism: The Battle for Survival, the Struggle for Compassion

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2.1 Understanding Judaism—Self Definition and Otherness

2.1.1 Locating Israel's Story: Creation and Covenant

Judaism is the religion constituted by the story of one particular people and its relationship with God—the people of Israel and the story of its life under God's covenant.[1] This story is told first and foremost in the Hebrew Bible, whose narrative shapes Jewish awareness. As the constitutive story, read and interpreted for thousands of years, it suggests the basic ways in which Israel understands and positions itself in the world and in relation to the rest of humanity. It is significant that, as a story concerned mostly with Israel's particular relationship with God, expressed through such notions as covenant and election, the biblical narrative begins with the story of creation of the world. While that which is unique in Israel's self understanding occupies center stage in the biblical story, the contextualization of Israel's particular story in the framework of creation forces our attention to revisit, time and again, the relationship between the particular and the universal. Israel's story cannot be read apart from the story of creation, the story of all of humanity. Ultimately, Israel's very particularity is an attempt to realize a potential that is grounded in creation. It therefore belongs properly to all of humanity and constitutes part of the ultimate hope and vision held by Judaism for all of humanity.

[1] For a presentation of Judaism in such narrative terms, see my *Israel in God's Presence: A Theological Introduction to Judaism for the Christian Student* (Hendrickson Press, forthcoming).

Judaism's very formation implicates it in notions of otherness and in the attempt to find the appropriate relationship to the Other. Its story is a story of setting apart, of forming a particular individual relationship, at the exclusion of other relationships. Whether we locate the beginnings of Judaism at the covenant made with Abraham[2] or at the covenant made with the collectivity of Israel at Mt. Sinai,[3] Israel's story is one of relationship. The making of the covenant, much like the marriage relationship to which it is compared by the prophets,[4] is one of particularity that implies some kind of exclusion and the creation of otherness. A relationship has been formed with this particular one, not an other, and the very formation of the relationship creates an Other, the Other who is not part of the particular relationship. As identity thickens, through association with God, land, people-hood, and teaching, all identity markers become points of demarcation—Our God vs. theirs, our teaching vs. theirs, and so on. This is particularly important to understanding the anti-pagan polemic that characterized much of the biblical literature and helped differentiate biblical Israel from the religious cultures of its neighbors. Understanding otherness is thus the flip side of the identity of Judaism, constructed as it is on the fundamental separation involved in the establishment of a particular relationship.[5]

Because Israel's identity is so deeply intertwined with a sense of separation and particularity, one must recall time and again how its story is contextualized in relation to creation. Israel's story is intended to fulfill a goal that is ultimately shared by all of humanity. Its particularity is thus deeply universal. We may consider sin and failure as the factors leading to the formation of a particular relationship.[6] Or we may consider particularity and individuality as fundamental to the nature of humanity and therefore an essential component of the biblical teaching and world view, illustrated by one specific particularity—Israel's.[7] Either way, that which is particular is ultimately a pointer to that which is universal, suggesting that the lessons, paradigms and benefits of particularity are ultimately of universal significance. Judaism's liturgy, its yearly cycle as well as its theology and religious reflection, all give manifold expressions to the creative tension between two fundamental constitutive moments in Israel's life and theological self-understanding: creation and covenant, the universal and particular. Failure to strike an appropriate balance between these two perspectives will have deleterious consequences on Judaism's attitude to the Other and ultimately on its own self-understanding, and on its ability to fulfill its destiny, the purpose for which its particular relationship was forged.

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[2] See Genesis, chapters 15 and 17.

[3] See Exodus, chapter 19.

[4] See Hosea, chapter 2 and Ezekiel, chapter 16.

[5] For present purposes, it is sufficient to recognize that the establishment of relationship and identity involve exclusion and otherness. The present essay will not engage the other way in which identity and otherness are related, namely how identity is constructed through adversarial relations to the other. The recognition of this dimension of identity construction is significant for a critical assessment of historical positions taken within Judaism to other religions. See below n. 49.

[6] This is a fair reading of the sequence of the biblical narrative, leading from creation, through the respective sins of the generations of the flood and the tower of Babel, to the formation of a particular relationship with Abraham, in Genesis 12.

[7] This understanding was recently suggested by Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum, 2002) p. 50 ff.

The Biblical creation story furnishes us with some important insights on humanity and its unity. Unlike all other forms of life, that are created, according to the diversity of species, humans alone are not created in species.[8] The Bible thus presents us with a vision of a single humanity, issuing from a single common ancestor. Rather than creation according to species, the Bible tells of creation according to the image and form of God, thus endowing humanity with qualities that allow it to share in God's reality; all of mankind thus shares in the divine image.[9] This affiliation with the divine is at the very least a source of respect for the life and dignity of others. It is also the basis of the biblical prohibition of bloodshed—man was created in God's image.[10] But the concept of man's creation in God's image does not seem to provide a firm enough basis for establishing an attitude to the other. With the exception of the creation story and the just cited appeal to it, nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible does man's creation in God's image figure again. Post-biblical Jewish thought may appeal to the image of God as an important aspect of how to consider the non-Jew, the Other, but the Bible itself opts for other strategies.[11] In the present context, it may be pointed out that the man created in God's image lacks the particularity that comes with identity. Man as created in God's image lacks all the specificity that allows us to distinguish between ourselves and others. Moreover, it is man as an individual, thus as an archetype, that is referred to through the image of God. The human person as organized through collectives, through competing means of establishing identity—social, national, religious, etc.—cannot adequately be addressed through the notion of the image of God.[12] Perhaps this is also why the concept has played a relatively minor role in shaping the attitude of Judaism to the Other and why other means of addressing particular others have had a more decisive role in the history of Jewish expression.

For Buddhist view of unity of human species see p. 112.

Compare observation in Islam that God created all humanity from a single soul, p. 84.

For Christian view on image of God see p. 52.

Historically, not all manifestations of Judaism have succeeded in maintaining the ideal balance between the two constitutive poles of creation and election. The vicissitudes of Jewish history, the sense of suffering and oppression that has endured for thousands of years of exile, have produced some forms of Judaism that are relatively withdrawn from the outside world and isolated from Israel's purpose in relation it. In all likelihood, there exists a strong relationship between historical circumstances and the balance of extroverted and introverted Jewish self-understanding. The present essay approaches the question of the attitude to the Other by trying to articulate an ideal balance, not by describing one or another model or precedent of historical Judaism.[13] But before we can embark on ideals, we must attempt a

[8] Contrast Genesis 1:11 and 21:24 with verse 26.

[9] Throughout the generations, a variety of understandings of the image of God have been offered. Some classical options are analyzed in Yair Lorberbaum, *Imago Dei: Rabbinic Literature, Maimonides and Nahmanides*, PhD dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997. An English version of this dissertation is forthcoming from University of California Press.

[10] Genesis 9:6.

[11] That the image of God is not a major theological concept in rabbinic thought is one of the theses of my "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature,"*Harvard Theological Review* (87:2), 1994, pp. 171–95. Lorberbaum, *Imago Dei* suggests that the concept is of greater significance than it seems at first sight.

[12] See also below n. 49.

[13] Nevertheless, one cannot avoid the recognition that there is no ideal vantage point, fully divorced from the particularity of historical context. I must therefore state that my own formative

deeper understanding of what creates otherness in a Jewish context. Let us then turn our attention to a consideration of the very identity and definition of Judaism.

2.1.2 Judaism—Peoplehood and Religion

Judaism is unique among the world's religions. Though it is considered a world religion, properly speaking it is the religious way of life of a particular people, the people of Israel. Membership in the religion is identical with membership in a people and vice versa. The relationship between these two components of Judaism's identity is not free of tension; indeed, membership in a people and adherence to a set of beliefs and practices can be competing claims. This is one of modern Judaism's fundamental existential issues, especially when Jewish identity is related to membership in a modern nation-state, the state of Israel. The tension between these key components of Jewish identity finds contemporary political expression. It is relevant also to a consideration of core religious and theological issues. The subject of the attitude to the Other is significantly affected by the dual perspectives of people-hood and religious faith.

For thousands of years, Israel has suffered from adversarial relations with other nations. A bitter history of exile, suffering and anti-Semitism, culminating in the attempt to implement a "final solution" to the "Jewish problem," has left the Jewish psyche embittered, suspicious and inhospitable. Xenophobia is a natural consequence of such a painful history. Fear of the Other, caused by repeated suffering and persecution by the Other, has become second nature. Regardless of how favorable the present political climate may be, Jews are always anxious about unexpected changes that may threaten their security and survival. With the founding of the state of Israel, the survival instinct and the attendant fear of the other have been focused largely upon the future of the nation-state. The seemingly perpetual war with some or all of its neighbors, in which Israel has been engaged since its birth, continues to provide justification for the basic fear of survival that is endemic to the Jewish psyche. From the perspective of the Jewish people, xenophobia and the deep rooted survival instinct are inseparable. Indeed, the Jewish people is deeply fearful of its collective survival.[14]

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perspective is conditioned by my living in the modern-day state of Israel, and to a large extent it is colored by some forms of religious-Zionist theology. It is conceivable that some of the ways in which Jewish history is presented in this essay might be different were the essay written from the perspective and ideology of the Jewish diaspora. I seriously doubt, however, that the ultimate attempt to strike a balance between the formative poles of creation and covenant would yield different results if approached from a different historical Jewish perspective.

[14]This encapsulation of Jewish history ignores many moments of positive coexistence and good relations between Jews and others in their host countries. Here, more than anywhere else in this paper, I may be expressing my Israeli vantage point. Still, it seems to me this sense of permanent anxiety is relevant even to societies where Jews have found a home and become full members in all walks of life. Little has changed in the collective psyche over the past thirty years, since the analysis of Jon Groner, "Beyond Xenophobia, Jewish Fears and American Realities," *Response* 24, 1974–5, pp. 7–14. Nevertheless, the counter-testimony of many positive instances of excellent inter-group relations throughout Jewish history is most relevant to the present discussion. Such moments may suggest alternatives to ingrained attitudes, and writings produced in such societies (such as medieval Al-Andalus) will often present attitudes that can serve as a corrective to attitudes formed under hostile historical conditions.

But Judaism is not identical with the Jewish people. Judaism is a teaching, a spiritual vision. And Judaism's spiritual vision of the Other is quite distinct from attitudes born of history and implanted in the psyche of the Jewish people. Of course, it is not always easy to draw a neat distinction between expressions of the victims' state of mind and the "higher" teachings of Judaism. These teachings, articulated in tomes of scriptural commentaries, works of rabbinic erudition and a range of philosophical and theological reflections, often bears witness to the pained history of the Jewish people. Attitudes to the Other, born of circumstances of hatred and persecution, find expression as part of Judaism's teaching. Nevertheless, the present discussion will proceed from the distinction between these two fundamental components of Jewish identity – people-hood and religious teaching. At the very least, this distinction bespeaks the complex nature of the task at hand, reflecting upon "Hostility, Hospitality and the Hope of Human Flourishing." Hostility and hospitality are attitudes of a people, even when reflected in religious teaching. By contrast, a vision for the flourishing of the Other is only a matter for religious teaching. History and religious vision must both be taken into account when suggesting an ideal view of the Other.

Predictably, the present paper will suggest that Judaism's vision for the Other is far more expansive than attitudes articulated as expressions of the people's historical contact with others. However, due to the interdependence of historical perception and theological vision, the attitude to the Other is often circumscribed by what historical conditions permit. For this reason, fresh theological articulation of Judaism's vision of the Other must be attempted in a constantly renewable effort to disengage the attitude to the Other from the particularities of individual historical circumstances. Such fresh articulation will obviously best be carried out under historical conditions of security that allow the mind to be elevated beyond the concerns of continuing survival. Historically, we do indeed find periodic novel attempts to articulate Judaism's attitude to the Other as part of its spiritual concerns. Such articulations typically take place in Jewish societies that enjoy relative security and stability.[15] The second part of the present essay will offer some thoughts in this direction.

2.1.3 Hostility and Identity—The Lesson of Abraham

Humanly speaking, separation and the concomitant sense of otherness it creates might lead to hostility. The Other, whether the unknown other or the well known other from whom one seeks to separate, may be the object of hostile behavior. Such hostile behavior may further strengthen group identity, but such a possibility is far from the Torah's vision of how particularity should engage with the Other. A consideration of some of Israel's formative experiences, as these involve relations with the Other, is relevant here. Both wandering and exile are crucial to the founding moments of Israel as a people and a religiously covenanted community. The confession of faith and gratitude, pronounced in historical times at the Jerusalem Temple upon bringing the first fruits as an offering and repeated annually since the destruction of the Temple as the key text underlying the recitation of the Passover Haggadah,

[15] Examples that come to mind include the works of Elijah ben Amozag and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook.

is found in Deuteronomy, chapter 26. The opening verse of this confession reads:

> A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down to Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous.[16]

Both wandering and exile are recognized as formative experiences, and they were followed by God's liberation and the ultimate entry into the land, the fruits of which are offered together with the recitation. Wandering was the lot of Abraham, our father. The biblical story of Abraham commences with the command that Abraham leave his home and go to an unknown country; the wandering of our first ancestor relates to specific blessings.

> Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kin and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."[17]

Abraham is promised progeny, a great nation. But his wanderings are also related to what may be considered the Other, in the widest possible sense—all families of the earth. The wanderer moving from place to place is a blessing to all. The attitude of heart and mind of the one on the move, seeking God's ultimate resting place, is one of openness and generosity. The story of Abraham's wanderings is one of such openness to the other.[18]

Exile is a less benign form of wandering. Abraham's children experience the first Jewish exile in Egypt. Israel as a people was born and shaped by this formative exilic experience. As the Zohar states: "When God wished to make them a unified people, a whole people, and to bring them close to Him, had they not first descended to Egypt and been cleansed there, they would have not become His single people."[19] The exile in Egypt is formative in another sense as well. It has shaped Israel's historical experience, providing the archetypal experience that is to be repeated time and again ever since. Hence, the celebration of the exodus from Egypt is never only a commemoration of an event in the distant past. All later exiles are subsumed under this archetypal exilic experience. The Passover Haggadah, the liturgical text celebrating the memory of the exodus from Egypt, makes repeated reference to the continued relevance of the formative exilic experience in every generation: "In every generation, each person is required to see himself as if he left Egypt."

[16] Deuteronomy 26:5.

[17] Genesis 12:1–3.

[18] One notes with interest, that Abraham enjoys peaceful relations with his neighbors. The only instance of war involving Abraham, in Genesis 14, is fought on behalf of Lot, and it does not reflect his own normal pattern of relations. Furthermore, as many scholars have noted, the book of Genesis does not portray the Patriarchs in struggle with idolatry. See Robert Cohn, Before Israel: the Canaanites as Other in Biblical Tradition, *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn, (New York: New York University Press, 1994) pp. 74–88.

[19] Zohar I, 83a.

Our survival is continually at stake, much like that of the Israelites in Egypt. Like them in former times, we too depend on God alone for our salvation.

What are the effects of such an exilic experience on the attitude to the Other? The victim of exile is naturally far less open than his ancestor who enjoyed the freedom of wandering, calling God's name in all places to all he encountered. The victim, by contrast, seeks his own liberation and the fall of his oppressor. His own freedom and wellbeing are uppermost in his mind, even at the expense of the oppressor. The natural reaction to the war of survival, to the experience of exile, is thus one of protective turning inwards. The Other cannot be part of one's spiritual purview when one's physical survival is at stake. However, Natural reactions do not always convey the highest spiritual ideals; so it is too with the memory of exile. Thus, as we shall presently see, the Torah reshapes the memory of the exile, transforming it beyond the range of human reactivity. An experience that might have yielded a closed withdrawn attitude is recast in terms that evoke compassion, understanding and generosity towards the Other. Such recasting cannot take place while the people are imprisoned in Egypt. It requires the safety of homeland and the distance of time.

2.1.4 Hospitality in the Land—Implementing the Lessons of Exile

Israel's attitude to the Other is not limited to formative exilic moments. It is also a consequence of other historical times and conditions, in which Israel enjoyed freedom, sovereignty and independence. Under such conditions the Torah seems to transform the natural reaction to the historical oppressor, suggesting instead another lesson and another attitude that may be borne of the exilic moment.[20] In the security of homeland, the harshness of historical memory is transformed to a compassionate vision of the Other.

The moral lesson learned from the memory of suffering, perhaps even the transformation of that memory, is accomplished through the Torah's reference to the *ger* and through appeal to Israel's own similar status in Egypt. Ninety-two times the Torah issues commands concerning how the *ger* should be treated. Who is this *ger*? Literally translated as "foreigner," "alien," or "sojourner," the *ger* is the outsider, one who dwells within the nation, but is not of it. Historically, it is not clear how, if at all, the formal status of the *ger* was defined. Most scholars would agree that the kind of formal conversion processes that developed in later Judaism were not yet in practice in biblical

[20]Jonathan Magonet, "Guest and Hosts," *Heythrop Journal* 36,4 1995, p. 415, makes the very fine point that the frequent repetition of the admonition concerning the foreigner suggests that it is not simply an affirmation of the natural state of Israelite generosity but an awareness that a different psychology must be created, even imposed, on the newly emergent nation. Once we consider the Torah's laws as combating and transforming natural human tendencies, we may go further and reflect on the depth of instinctual xenophobia. The papers collected in *The Sociobiology of Ethnocentrism*, ed. V. Reynolds, V. Falger and I. Vine (University of Georgia Press, 1986) suggest that the roots of xenophobia can be traced biologically to other species. Xenophobia is thus not exclusively a human social phenomenon. Just as the Torah addresses various animal components of the human person and of human behavior, it may address this one as well. The tension between Jews and Judaism, that underlies my presentation, can thus be seen in the framework of a wider theory of how the Torah's commandments address human nature and seek to transform it.

times. Hence, the *ger* would be any foreigner living in the midst of ancient Israelite society, even if he had not consciously taken up full membership in Israel and its faith.[21] When the Torah envisions Israelite society, it takes great care to address the status of the outsider, the foreigner.

Two key imperatives emerge from the Torah. The first is the absolute legal equality of the *ger*, who is to enjoy the same status as the Israelite in all matters, both legal and ritual.[22] The other is the loving attitude the Torah commands in relationship to this outsider. The same section of the Torah in which the classical command to love one's neighbor as oneself appears[23] includes also the express commandment to love the *ger*.

> When an alien (*ger*) resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."[24]

Full equality and love of the stranger, the alien, are thus justified by appeal to the historical memory of Israel's exile in Egypt. The admonition and its reasoning are repeated time and again in the Torah.[25] It appears in all fundamental legal collections within the Torah.[26]

The Torah seems to make the following point: We are not to treat others as we ourselves have been treated. The formative exile in Egypt should sensitize us to the condition of the stranger and the alien, teaching us how not to inflict upon others the suffering that was inflicted on us.[27] The Torah's point is not only one of legislation; it is also one of human psychology and sensitivity. "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."[28] Israel's experience in Egypt sensitized them in a particular way, making them aware of the heart, or feeling, of the *ger*. Israel is to be permanently marked by this sensitivity, acquired through its own suffering.

These words of the Torah continue to resonate down to some of the most recent formulations of what it means to be Jewish in today's world. Thus, in the words of Emmanuel Levinas:

> The traumatism of my enslavement in Egypt constitutes my very humanity, that which draws me closer to the problems of the wretched of the earth, to all persecuted people. It is as if I were

[21] Magonet, p. 416.

[22] See for example Exodus 12:48–49.

[23] Leviticus. 19:18.

[24] Leviticus 19:33–34.

[25] See Exodus 22:20 and Deuteronomy 10:19.

[26] The Book of the Covenant in Exodus 22, the Holiness Code in Leviticus 19, and the covenantal blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 27. I would not go as far as Magonet, p. 416, in claiming that how one treats the outsider is the ultimate measure of the nature and quality of the new society in the making, but it is an important component thereof.

[27] In the context of this formulation, it is interesting to recall the golden rule (in its negative formulation: Do not do unto others etc.), as articulated in the famous story of Hillel and the convert, in Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a, according to which the key rule from which the entire Torah can be derived. The Torah's injunctions in relation to the *ger* may be the earliest expression of this golden rule.

[28] Exodus 23:9.

> praying in my suffering as a slave, but with a pre-oratorial prayer; as if the love of the stranger were a response already given to me in my actual heart. My very uniqueness lies in my responsibility for the other.[29]

The Torah's instructions for how to treat the *ger* provide perhaps the most powerful grounding for a concept of hospitality and acceptance of the Other as an equal part of society, a grounding that is based on Israel's historical memory, but even more specifically on the quality of soul and heart produced in Israel through its exile in Egypt. The concept of hospitality encountered here goes beyond the power relations of the host making space for the guest. Power relations are dealt with through the insistence that all be equal before the law, thereby flattening differences of power. But the biblical concept of hospitality involves more, it involves love as fundamental to the practice of hospitality. We are thus commanded not only to treat the *ger* fairly, but to love him.

Significant as these teachings are, it would be wrong to assume that these key biblical teachings can provide us with an adequate description of Jewish society's attitudes to the Other. Historical circumstances have made these attitudes far more complex.

2.1.5 The Struggle for Survival

Historical Judaism—The Movement of Introversion

Even before presenting some of the social-scientific data regarding xenophobia in contemporary Israel, we may safely state that the Torah's teachings do not necessarily reflect the standard attitudes towards the foreigner in our midst found within various manifestations of Jewish society. Of course, the Torah's ideals never cease to inspire and to draw one to the height of their vision, but other forces that significantly constrict the vision of hospitality suggested by so much of biblical legislation have operated within Jewish history and continue to operate within Jewish society today.

Numerous influences have determined that these biblical texts and teachings have not been the sole shapers of the Jewish attitude to the outsider. Foremost among them is the fact that Jewish history continued where biblical legislation left off. The latter recalled the memory of a past exile under circumstances of present-day independence. But such independence was to be lost for thousands of years, with a harsh and enduring exile taking its place. The teaching of hospitality to the outsider could no longer set the tone of Jewish relations to the other. To the extent that the Torah's legislation makes a statement concerning Israel's psychology and the sensitivity it acquired through suffering in Egypt, this sensitivity was to give way to a hardness born of continued suffering. Israel's lot had become a continued battle for survival. Anti-Semitism has been a formative force in Israel's history at least since Roman times.[30] Living in the face of persecution and the enemy had raised the wall between self and Other. The possibility of hospitality all

[29] Emannuel Levinas, "Difficult Freedom," in Sean Hand ed., *The Levinas Reader*, Cambridge, 1989, p. 252; cf. also p. 202.

[30] See Daniel Schwartz, "Antisemitism and Other Ism's in the Greco Roman World," *Demonizing*

but vanished in the face of a reality in which hostility was a basic mode of being. The victim could not show hospitality, and the victim without a land had no place in which to do it, even if so inclined.

The concern for survival continues to dominate Jewish awareness; perhaps no other nation in the world is as concerned, even obsessed, with its own continuity and survival. The sense of threatened survival characterizes Jewish existence wherever it is. It takes on special weight in the context of the Jewish state, fighting an enduring physical war for its survival. But concern for survival is also concern for the continuity of the Jewish people in spheres other than military and security. Demography and culture are no less the battlefields on which the war of Jewish survival is fought. Intermarriage, cultural assimilation, and loss of collective identity, both in the state of Israel and in the Diaspora, are collective concerns that continue to shape the public Jewish agenda.[31] These concerns focus public awareness inwards. Despite over half a century of independence of the Jewish state, the mental frame of mind of its leaders, and of leaders of the Jewish world at large, is that the battle for survival is far from won. Such inwardness of concern perpetuates attitudes and priorities typical of Israel's long battle for survival, making the attitude to the Other less of a central concern that it seems to have been for biblical legislation.[32]

Changes in historical circumstances are only part of why the biblical ideal of accepting the alien is not readily implemented within Jewish society. Conceptual development within Judaism plays an important role in this context as well. We noted above that the identity of the alien, the *ger*, in biblical times may have been left vague, allowing various kinds of strangers and foreigners to be embraced by the overarching welcome offered to the *ger*. Later Judaism could not tolerate such lack of clarity. One of the hallmarks of rabbinic Judaism is its quest for clarity, definition and the establishment of clear boundaries. A subject as fundamental as membership in the community of Israel could not be left to vague definitions and would have to be strictly defined. The rabbinic approach to the law, the halakhah, insists on clear cut boundaries that distinguish clearly between one considered a Jew and one who is not. One may conjecture as to the historical circumstances that led to the insistence on clearly demarcated boundaries; whatever the case, they are real

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the Other, Antisemitism, Racism and Xenophobia, ed. Robert Wistrich (Harwood, 1999) pp. 73–87. Some scholars date anti-Semitism still earlier; see Yehezkel Kaufmann, *A History of Israelite Faith* (Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 1920) vol. 8, pp. 440–443 [Hebrew].

[31] In the modern world, questions of identity are inseparable from the very definition of nation-states, particularly as they are challenged through the existence of multiple ethnic identities. See *Identity and Intolerance, Nationalism, Racism and Xenophobia in Germany and the United States*, ed. Norbert Finzsch and Dietmar Schirmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). In this sense, the problem the state of Israel faces has commonalities with issues faced by other modern Western nations. But the particular history of the Jewish people and the uniqueness of Israel as the only Jewish state provide an important perspective on what is also a wider problem.

[32] To the outside observer, concern with the alien may be as essential to Israel's faithfulness to its identity, expressed through its covenantal obligations, as concern with perpetuating the people and their spiritual heritage. Thus, Gary M. Burge, *Who Are God's People in the Middle East?* (Grand Rapids, 1993) pp. 74–75, points to the biblical obligations towards the alien, as fundamental to the covenant, and hence to Israel's faithfulness to its spiritual calling. That such a perspective comes from the outside is, in part, testimony to the introverted quality of Jewish awareness. It also reveals differences in understanding who is the biblical *ger*, as these differentiate biblical and post-biblical Judaism, as I shall presently suggest.

and have become normative.[33] Regardless, one can also understand these developments independently of any historical circumstances.[34] Definitions and the clear demarcation of boundaries characterize the rabbinic approach to the Torah as a whole. The need to define membership in the community goes hand in hand with the formalization of the process of entry into the community and the fixing of clear rules and rituals for entry into the community of Israel, conversion.[35] Following these changes, the basic antinomy is no longer between Israel and the alien amongst them, but between the Jew and the non-Jew. A heightened sense of difference, otherness, and potential conflict characterizes the rabbinic attitude to the Other. The Other is now considered apart from the community and no longer as an outsider who becomes part and parcel of society, its norms and celebrations.[36]

What, then, of the biblical *ger*? For the rabbis, he is no longer the outsider, the alien, but the convert, the one who was outside the people and formally entered through conversion. The rabbis recognize two types of *gerim* (pl.), one who has fully entered the people of Israel and one who has undertaken a minimal standard of religious observance, without receiving full membership. It is easy to read the various biblical references to the *ger* in relation to either one of these models. Still, even if the formal application of the term remained possible and the meaning of biblical scripture could be upheld, a fundamental change occurred within Jewish society. Instead of society accepting an Other within it, now the Other had to become a part of it, forfeiting the sense of otherness and becoming part and parcel of the people. Seen from the eyes of later rabbinic tradition, one is hard pressed to account for why the Torah should go to such great lengths in addressing the rights and the status of the *ger*. After all, the *ger*, at least one type of *ger*, is a full fledged member of Jewish society. Just as in present day Judaism there is no need for a massive educational effort aimed at accepting of such a convert as a full member

[33]Such insistence may be historically related to heightened tensions between Jews and non-Jews and the beginning of the introvertive movement within Judaism. It may also be related to increased Torah observance among gentiles, creating the need to establish clear boundaries. Ultimately, we are unable to pinpoint the precise historical circumstances that led to the development of the laws of conversion as found in rabbinic literature. See also the next note.

[34]See Shaye J.D.Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, (University of California Press, 1999) pp. 198-237. Probably because he dates the ceremony to the second century, Cohen sees the ceremony as a "vehicle by which the rabbis attempted to regulate and formalize what until then had been an entirely personal and chaotic process" (p. 236). It is significant that this understanding, highlighting the internal processes of tradition, makes no attempt to offer a broader inter-group perspective, against which the conversion ceremony should be understood. Lawrence Schiffman, *Who Was a Jew?* (Ktav, Hoboken, 1985), suggests an earlier, pre-Christian, date for the conversion process. While Schiffman is concerned with inter-group relations, these focus only upon how the definition of identity functioned in a Jewish-Christian context, after the categories had come into being. Schiffman does not suggest what historical forces gave rise during second Temple times to new definitions of group identity.

[35]See Gary Porton, *The Stranger within Your Gates* (Chicago: 1994) p. 7.

[36]Such redefinition obviously has far reaching legal consequences. We have seen the biblical insistence on one law applying to Israel and to the *Ger*. Once the *Ger* is understood as the full fledged member of the community of Israel, the question of the nomic status of the outsider, now the non-Jew, emerges with full force. The morally problematic distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in the context of financial rulings are, as Steven Fraade has shown, an almost inevitable consequence of the logical application of certain premises, central among which is the association of Torah and its nomic status to Israel. See Steven Fraade, Navigating the Anomalous: Non-Jews at the Intersection of Early Rabbinic Law and Narrative, *The Other in Jewish Thought and History*, p. 145 ff.

of society, it seems unlikely that the Torah would have to expend such great energy towards the sole aim of accepting the convert as a full member of society.[37] Clearly, a major transformation has taken place. The upshot of this transformation is that conceptually there is no more room for the alien, for the Other.[38] The Other, the biblical *ger*, loses his otherness and becomes one of us. With this conceptual redefinition, perhaps the most important biblical resource for the present topic, hospitality to the stranger and the alien, loses much of its sway.[39]

We note with fascination how little of rabbinic literature is actually concerned with the *ger*, in comparison with the careful attention paid to him by the Torah and later books of the Bible. Outside of commentaries on biblical references to the *ger*, we have very little rabbinic concern, reflection, admonition or interest in his status. Liturgical evidence is also suggestive. An examination of the term *ger* in the Jewish prayer book indicates that almost all references are found in quotes from biblical texts, primarily the Psalms, where God's love for the *ger* and similar notions appear. In contrast, I have been able to locate only one reference to the *ger* in the entire corpus of rabbinically composed prayers—and these are the core prayers of Jewish liturgy.[40] One of the benedictions of the *Amidah*, the principle Jewish prayer, addresses the lot of the righteous who trust in God. In a list that mentions various righteous members of society, we come across mention of the *ger tzedek*, the righteous convert, who deserves God's reward. Such emphasis is very different from the central position the *ger* occupied in biblical literature. While for biblical literature, attention to the *ger* can be considered a major expression of ethics and morality, for the rabbis the individual *ger* is more succor and support for the people and religion under duress than a serious moral challenge, facing

[37] It is conceivable that a nation that is tribally structured would indeed have a harder time integrating elements that do not fit into patriarchal family structures. But if that were the issue, something should have been said concerning *gerim,* family, and tribe structures. Despite hundreds of references to the *ger*, nothing is known of their relationship to Israeli tribal structure, and this suggests the place of the *ger* in biblical society should not be construed in light of how later converts were absorbed into Jewish society.

[38] The famous "God-fearers" who crowded the synagogues of late antiquity are apparently not to be found in rabbinic literature. It seems the rabbis, operating through a series of legal definitions, could not accommodate them within their world view. They are, perhaps, the closest we can get to an Other, who is not in opposition or antagonistic to the continued wellbeing of the Jewish people. Their absence from rabbinic literature underscores the radical conceptual transformation characteristic of rabbinic literature. The question of the historical existence of the God-fearers is, however, a more complex question, and my suggestion is only one of several ways of making sense of the historical data. Issue 12,5 of *Biblical Archaeology Review,* (1986) devoted to the question of "The God-fearers—Did they Exist?" still offers a good overview of this complex issue and various perspectives on it.

[39] One could, of course, attempt to uphold the biblical message in relation to the *ger toshav*, the second type of *ger*, who has not become a full member of the people of Israel and who therefore continues to maintain some sense of otherness within society. However, as spelled out in the body of the paper, interest in the subject of the *Ger* decreases so markedly in rabbinic literature that one cannot ignore this radical shift, even if the biblical texts can be read in light of this later categorization. In any event, the category of *ger toshav* is more of a theoretical construct than it is a concrete reality, affecting the life of Jewish society in late Second Temple and Talmudic times. Later authorities, in fact, make it a purely theoretical category, that cannot even be applied, due to various secondary considerations. See Maimonides, *Laws of Idolatry* 10, 6.

[40] I am unable to locate additional references to the *ger* in liturgies or in textual traditions composed in communities that were able to freely accept converts to Judaism. Thus, the possiblly negative attitude of host nations to Jewish conversions does not seem to account for the paucity of reference to *gerim*.

society as a whole.

Rabbinic definition of the *ger* and how his status is attained is important to the consolidation and definition of Judaism, but it shapes and defines Judaism in more than one way. Beyond the legal definition of membership in the people and its religious identity, it shifts the definition of what constitutes the community and its primary moral and religious concerns. If concern for the alien could be suggested as a governing if not definitive concern of biblical religion, for rabbinic Judaism the clear establishment of the Torah's norms emerges as the defining religious force. Society is not defined by its treatment of its minority or its alien members. Rather, the individual alien is redefined in accordance with the norms and boundaries of Torah that he or she consciously undertakes through conversion. Thus, Jewish society is defined as a society of Torah, allowing Israel to proceed with the safety of structure provided by law through the course of its bitter history. The gain at this point in history outweighs the loss. As Israel once again enters exile it is far more concerned with its own security and survival than with the status of the stranger in the stable majority Jewish society that is no more.

Amalek—Israel's Perpetual Enemy and the Struggle for Survival

For Christian view on Amalek see p. 57.

Theological teaching and the wounded psychology of the victim go hand in hand. A nation seeking to make sense of its continuing suffering, coping with the ubiquitous oppressor, finds in Scripture the lens through which reality is perceived. We have already encountered the biblical teaching of hospitality. But there is also a biblical teaching of hostility. This teaching is not directed to the alien within society but to a distinct and particular Other who dwells beyond the border of Israelite society. In fact, encounter with Israel's primordial enemy took place in the first instance beyond the border of civilization, as Israel wondered from place to place in the desert. Exodus 17 narrates how Amalek attacked Israel in the desert. Following the description of the battle with Amalek, we encounter the outstanding statement, according to which Amalek is not only Israel's enemy but God's enemy.

> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." And Moses built an altar and called it, The Lord is my banner. He said, "A hand upon the throne of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."[41]

The war with Amalek is thus perceived as an eternal continuing war, God's own war. Later in Scripture the Israelites are commanded to remember Amalek's attack in the desert, they were faint and weary, and to wipe out his memory.[42]

The hostility shown to Amalek seems to draw on Israel's survival instinct. Amalek threatened Israel's survival in a fundamental way, without any due cause, as though hurting Israel was a goal in and of itself. It is conceivable that

[41] Exodus 17:14-16.
[42] Deuteronomy 25:18.

the commandment to wipe out Amalek's memory is itself based on the likelihood that such vicious antagonism is likely to emerge anew, thereby once again threatening Israel's existence.[43] The war with Amalek is thus part of Israel's wider battle for survival. Amalek is a physically close but psychologically distant Other, threatening Israel's survival, drawing forth a hostile response, based on the instinct for self-protection.

In biblical times, Amalek was an identifiable people. Post-biblical Judaism recognizes that Amalek is no longer a distinct ethnic enemy, as indeed many of the biblical peoples are no longer recognizable. Yet, Scripture speaks of an eternal war with Amalek. If all biblical texts invite a hermeneutic of continuity and relevance, regardless of changed circumstances, this is especially true of a text that is self-consciously trans-generational. We can readily see how one would arrive at the understanding that Israel, along with God, has an eternal enemy. Because this enemy is not identified as a particular people, it can be elevated to the level of a principle. Consequently, all of Israel's concrete historical enemies that seek to annihilate Israel's existence can be seen as manifestations of the general principle of Amalek. A nation perpetually exposed to violence, hatred and attack could come to see its enemies as expressions of a higher principle of enmity; thus, all enemies are Amalek.

The above reconstruction is not in any way a universally acknowledged formal teaching of Judaism. It cannot be, since Amalek cannot be historically identified with all of Israel's enemies, and since Israel's classical foes, like Christianity and Islam, were typologically identified with other biblical figures, Esau and Ishmael. Nevertheless, there exists a popular notion that is backed by understandings that are semi-halakhic, that any enemy at any time may be identified with Amalek, when it seeks to destroy Israel.[44] Beginning with the rabbis who read the story of Esther in light of the Amalek-principle,[45] later generations of homileticists and popular thinkers would time and again identify the concrete enemy with the metaphysical principle of Amalek, as they did for example, with Nazism.[46]

In seeking to portray the complexity of the Jewish attitude to the Other, and in seeking to establish the balance between the teaching of hospitality and the teaching of hostility, as these emerge from Jewish sources, one must recognize that Judaism also contains its teaching of hostility to the Other. This teaching is deeply imbued in Jewish awareness, not because of its theologi-

[43] Many halakhic authorities have understood the biblical story in this way. See the discussion of Yakov Medan, The Story of Amalek, God's Command and Morality—Are They Compatible?, *The Other: Between Man, Himself and the Other* (Tel Aviv, 2001) pp. 367–401 [Hebrew].

[44] For a discussion of whether or not the commandment to wipe out Amalek is halakhically applicable at present, see Medan. In referring to a semi-halakhic understanding, I refer to the position of Rabbi J.D. Soloveitchik, who, in a distinction typical of his brand of talmudic scholasticism, distinguishes between the person and the ideology of Amalek. See J.D. Soloveitchik, *In Aloneness, In Togetherness: A Selection of Hebrew Writings*, ed. P. Peli (Jerusalem, 1976) pp. 392–3. While the rhetoric appeals to halakhic categories and distinctions, the homiletical context of the passage is significant and leads me to classify this position as semi-halakhic.

[45] Haman is an Aggagite, Esther 3:1. This is understood by the rabbis as indicating descent from Amalek's King Agag (1 Samuel, chapter 15). Thus, even though the historical enemy is Persian, the conceptual or archetypal enemy is Amalek. The fact is highlighted by the readings of the Torah before and during the feast of Purim, Exodus, chapter 7, and Deuteronomy, chapter. 25, the two Amalek texts.

[46] See also J.D.Soloveitchik in Abraham Besdin, *Perakim Bemachshevet Harav* (Jerusalem: 1984) p. 136.

cal centrality but on account of the historical centrality of the experience of suffering and enmity. A hostile history extends the teaching of hostility from ancient memory to a present continuum that upholds a dualistic view of reality.[47] Reality is thus divided into two groups, we the victims and they the oppressors, perpetually and eternally caught in a battle of hostility, rooted ultimately in God's own war.[48]

Xenophobia in Contemporary Israel[49]

All strangers are not Amalek and all Others are not out to destroy Jews or Israel. Yet, the impact of thousands of years of persecution on the psyche of the people of Israel seems to be measurable in terms of their attitudes to the Other, and inhospitable attitudes to the Other seem to figure highly among them. Our discussion has long shifted from the teaching of Judaism to attitudes of Jewish people. What follows will focus in particular on attitudes that have been studied within the state of Israel. The centrality of the state of Israel to the people of Israel suggests that these findings are significant to any discussion of the Jewish attitude to the Other. Beyond that, it is likely that findings in other geographical locations may not be dissimilar. Let me begin

[47]The outsider may legitimately pose the question: why not let go of all past memories, for the sake of the quality of future life. A response to such a challenge is twofold. On the one hand, we recognize that memory does play a constitutive role in the formation of the Jewish psyche. See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1982) especially chapter 1. Forgetting does not seem to be one of the available educational options in handling the pain of historical memory. Rather, as we saw in an earlier section of this paper, memory may be transformed and recaptured in appropriate ways. Thus the choice is not between remembering and forgetting but between ways in which historical memory may be channeled and applied constructively in the present. This leads to the second, and more crucial consideration—forgetting, as well as the transformation of memory, are only possible when hostility is a matter of the past. From the perspective of Jewish experience, such a point in time has not yet come. Thus, present enmity draws upon ancient paradigms in trying to make sense of a hostile reality. Such reality cannot be ignored; it must be transformed.

[48]Before concluding the discussion of mandated hostility and the struggle for survival, one must at least acknowledge one major topic left untreated by the present essay. The biblical battle against idolatry takes shape both as an anti-pagan polemic and as the commandment to conquer and destroy others. The biblical world view is thus inhospitable to paganism, and Israelite society is commanded to be equally inhospitable. The battle against idolatry lies at the heart of Jewish self-understanding and is considered crucial for Judaism's survival. It is so fundamental that it continues to influence present-day attitudes to other religions in the modern state of Israel, forcing the question of whether some contemporary world religions should or should not be considered idolatrous. Israel's first Chief Rabbi, Isaac Herzog, took the conscious ideological stance that all forms of Christianity, as well as most forms of world religions, do not fall under these biblical, and later halakhic, categories. See Rabbi Isaac Herzog, "Minority Rights According to the Halakhah," *Tehumin* 2, 1981, pp. 169–179 [Hebrew]. Nevertheless, biblical precedent and latter day halakhic discussion force upon us the realization that our discussion of the status of the "Other" addresses the Other primarily as a person, devoid of specific, let alone competing, religious identity. The question of Judaism's attitude to the religious other is too broad and too complex to be engaged in the present context; the entire subject is in need of careful reconsideration and redefinition from a contemporary Jewish perspective.

[49]I would like at the outset of this part of my discussion to clearly divorce it from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Readers of earlier drafts of my paper mistakenly read parts of my paper as supporting one position or another in the conflict. I have studiously avoided any such contextualization of my paper. Any broad theological and historical sweep must ultimately address concrete political and historical tensions, but the present paper is relevant only to a very partial range of the religious and historical issues involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

by sharing the conclusion of a recent study on xenophobia in Israel.[50]

The grim past of the Jewish people has not checked hate. On the contrary, past suffering may have contributed to the diffusion of xenophobic attitudes. The Jews, who encountered so much suffering in the recent past, seek isolation and distance themselves from others. A vast majority of Israelis would like to close the state's gates and leave "others" outside its borders.[51]

I am struck by the extreme contrast between how past suffering is supposed to have sensitized us to the suffering of the Other, according to the Torah's instruction, and how in reality past suffering seems to have increased hostility to outsiders. In reacting this way, I do not criticize the pain of victims nor their feelings, nor do I despair of the possibility of the Torah's vision ultimately being implemented.[52] I only note the nearly impossible goal of the Torah to transform human nature through its teaching and commandments, enjoining love and acceptance of others, where natural human reactions would lead to closure and exclusion of others.

Some additional points of interest emerge from the above mentioned study, which measured attitudes towards three distinct groups of "others": Ethiopian Jews, foreign workers and Arabs. Such nuancing is significant. Even though hatred towards Arabs far exceeded hatred towards the other two groups, various degrees of inhospitality and hostility were present in relation to Ethiopian Jews and even more so in relation to foreign workers. Israeli attitudes to foreign workers are notorious. Tens of thousands of them are treated in ways that are anything but a direct expression of the biblical commandment to love the stranger.[53] From the educational perspective, this suggests that one should not simply dismiss or explain away all manifestations of xenophobia, hostility and suspicion as derivative of Israel's continuing battle for survival.

Hate is an illness that cannot easily be compartmentalized. Hate of the outsider manifests an attitude of being that is bound to find expression within as well. In thinking of inhospitable attitudes to the Other in contemporary Israel, one must therefore recall that the Other is not always the Other without but is often the Other within. The authors of the study here cited noted instances of xenophobic attitudes towards Ethiopian Jews, a visible Other within. Yet, exclusionary, inhospitable, and at times outright hostile attitudes have been part of internal social group relations since Israel's establishment. Tensions between Jews from Western countries and those from Arab countries, broken down at times by more specific geographic places of origin, are

[50]The following discussion is based on Ami Pedahzur and Yael Yishai, "Hatred by Hated People: Xenophobia in Israel," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 22, 2 1999, pp. 101–117.

[51]Ibid., p. 115.

[52]Is the tension between a religion's ideals and the ways these are lived by believers not universal to all religions? In any event, much of what is surveyed in this section are not attitudes of believers but attitudes of a national entity that is composed of believers and non believers, with a strong preponderance of the latter.

[53]Without unduly belaboring the point, one cannot help but reflect upon the fact that the nonprofit organization devoted to helping foreign workers in Israel is the same organization that handles the cases of hundreds of women who are imported, at times kidnapped, to Israel, as part of a prospering modern sex-slave trade. Israel is one of the world's leaders in this domain. It is only in the recent past that the complicity of wide sectors of Israeli society and officialdom has been broken. Still, the absolute silence of the official religious voices regarding this modern Israeli abomination must derive to some degree from the ills spelled out in the body of this paragraph.

the darker side of the magnificent job of absorption and integration of millions of Jews from different social and geographical backgrounds in the effort to shape Israeli society and establish its identity.

The Role of the Other in Constructing Israeli Identity

Authors of the study on xenophobia in Israel point to one factor that I find both comforting and alarming. Unlike xenophobia in other countries, which is often motivated by economic concerns such as the competition for employment or housing, Israeli xenophobia is motivated by ideological and principled concerns. Israeli xenophobia is thus not of a piece with the type of xenophobia usually encountered in the Western world. Rather, the negative attitude to the other grows out of the attempt to establish one's own identity; in the process of identity establishment, the Other plays a crucial role. Cultural incompatibility, accentuating differences from the Other, is a natural source of hostility. This is, some suggest, the root of anti-Semitism.[54] There is, however, a profounder sense in which the Other is significant for the construction of identity.[55] It has become a commonplace of contemporary philosophy that one needs the other in order to construct one's own identity. In a dialogical context such a perspective means one thing; in an antagonistic context it means quite another. Israeli antagonism to Arabs seems to be based, at least to some extent, on the role that Arabs as an Other play in the shaping of Israeli identity. Especially where there is an identity crisis, as there is indeed in modern day Israel, "the calm self-certainty that might facilitate unproblematic relations with the minorities gets lost. Then society turns to historic myths promising to solve the crisis of identity; on the other hand, this very search for origins breeds exclusion of the others".[56] Israel thus needs the Arab as an Other, to help determine the human limits in relation to which Israeli identity can be constructed.

Some contemporary theorists have suggested that cultural identity is a site of conflict. Thus, Arabs are a significant other for Israelis not just in terms of the limits of their individual tolerance or what they individually perceive their culture to be, but even more importantly in terms of how uncertain they are about who they are as a people.[57]

One expression of this process is the way in which Israeli and Arab identities are created and sustained in an effort to establish Israeli collective identity.[58] A more extreme form of the same process is how group identity can be sustained through hate of the other. Hateful attitudes to Arabs far exceed "security needs," nor can they be justified as merely reactions to Arab hostility.

[54] See Michael Marrus, "Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Historical Perspective," *Patterns of Prejudice* 28,3 1994, pp. 77–81. In this context Marrus offers the comforting thought that in today's world, in which difference is an increasing attribute of the other, anti-Semitism is on the decline.

[55] See Shalom Rosenberg, "The One and the Other—The Ontological Roots of Politics," *The Other*, p. 53 [Hebrew].

[56] Pedahzur and Yishai, p. 105, citing other authors.

[57] See Silverstein's introduction to *The Other in Jewish Thought*, p. 5, where the work of Virginia Dominguez is cited. At times Silverstein's reformulation of Dominguez' theory is more convincing than the argument provided by Dominguez herself.

[58] This is the thesis of Virginia Dominguez, *People as Subject, People as Object, Selfhood and Peoplehood in Contemporary Israel* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

Rather, a far more complex process of "othering" the Arab takes place, as part of modern popular Israeli society's own construction of its identity. Politics of hate play a significant part in such "othering."

There are multiple senses in which the construction of identity in opposition to the Other is undesirable. If hate is even partly generated by such processes, that should, in and of itself, alert us to the negative ramifications of use of the Other, in an antagonistic context, as the basis for identity formation.[59] As a matter of principle, constructing one's identity *only* in reaction to an Other may betray a deeper sense of loss of self and identity. A famous Hassidic dictum, attributed to Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk states: "If I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then neither you nor I truly is; but if I am I, because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then both I am, and you truly are." Self may be constructed in dialogue with the Other, but it cannot be defined exclusively in reaction to the Other. Modern Israel's identity crisis will obviously not be solved through the projection of an Other, let alone a hated Other, any more than the reality of a common enemy provides sufficient grounds for the existence of Israel itself.

It is striking to note how a slogan that once defined Israel's purpose has all but ceased to be heard in the public arena. Israel's early years were accompanied by a vision of an Israel that is to be a "light unto the nations," consciously echoing a prophetic phrase.[60] The slogan conveyed a sense of purpose and a vision of Israeli identity. This vision certainly stood in relation to others, yet it was based on a sense of self and purpose, finding expression in a calling and an example to the world. Such slogans are no longer heard. Israeli society's grapplings for its identity have forced it to turn inwards in search of its identity rather than outwards in fulfillment of a mission.

2.1.6 The Hope of Human Flourishing

Judaism's Need for the Rediscovery of God

We have seen how Jewish history, the life of the people, and the teachings of Judaism mirror one another, reflecting a complex dynamic. On the one hand, Judaism's teachings are closely indebted to social and historical processes affecting the people of Israel. On the other, religious teachings can help elevate the lived experience of history to spiritual heights, providing meaning and direction, and raise the people of Israel beyond the vicissitudes of history and their natural reactions to them. How then does Judaism as a religious system stand in relation to the processes just described?

In the most obvious sense, Judaism could be construed as the alternative to natural human reactions, to the spread of hate, and even to the various complex attempts to construct contemporary human identity, both personal and collective, through human machinations. But portraying the relation only as one of a contrast or a corrective oversimplifies matters. Judaism too

[59] Establishing the validity of some of the parallels that readily come to mind, to situations in which Jews have been on the receiving end of other people's hostility, lies beyond my own field of expertise.

[60] Isaiah 42:6 and 49, 6. In the absence of clear religious content, the phrase has also undergone significant secularization, for example: appeal to the contributions of Jews to science and medicine.

is trapped, to some extent, in the same introvertive dynamics that characterize the psyche of Israel. Just as the fledgling state of Israel over the course of its short history has moved from a sense of self awareness and mission that reached out to others to a more self-involved, enclosed mode of being, so Judaism too has undergone similar transformation. The ongoing battle for survival and the attempt to flourish under hostile circumstances may account for both. Thus, Judaism itself is in need of spiritual revival.

This revival may emerge from the picture I attempted to paint in the first part of this essay, where I highlighted the tension between the national/ethnic component of Judaism and its religious/spiritual dimension. One cannot overstate the effects of history on attitudes of the Jewish people, affecting in turn the teachings of Judaism. But it is not enough to excuse the Jewish people's failure to live up to the highest biblical ideals by appeal to the suffering of Jewish history. The key to transformation may lie in our ability to address the imbalance between spiritual teaching and collective history. The covenantal reality in which Judaism is grounded brings together two parties—God and Israel, in a vision that ultimately must serve as a blessing for humanity. If due to the circumstances of history, Judaism has come to place too great an emphasis on the human component of the covenant—upon the life of Israel itself, surely to repair this imbalance we must seek the rediscovery of God as the central orientating principle of our spiritual lives. Judaism is in need of more and more teaching of God, as a balance to its own engagement in the life of the people. It is in need of a spiritual revival.

The rediscovery of the living God as the ultimate heart of Judaism may allow Judaism to consider its own contribution to humanity from a vantage point significantly broader than that informed by its history and suffering. In many ways, awareness of God as the conscious center of the entire religious system may allow Judaism to discover its deepest commonalities with humanity. One interesting way of illustrating this idea is by appeal to some of the later biblical developments that concern the notion of the *ger*. In the book of Chronicles, we find appeal to our status as aliens, *gerim*, not on account of the exile in Egypt, but because being alien is fundamental to human existence. "For we are aliens and transients before You, as were all our ancestors; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope."[61] We are not aliens because of a particular historical event, but because of the very nature of what it means to be human, living forever in the shadow of death, a vision all humanity shares. Death provides the deepest bond of brotherhood for humanity. Yet, the status of *gerim* is one that is lived "before You", in God's presence. Thus, it is God who is the ultimate host, while we are all aliens in His sight. In God's sight, all humans are *gerim*.[62] Thus, to take but one example, shifting perspective from human society to the presence of God allows us to reconsider relations between peoples and to find the deepest bond of brotherhood.[63] The present essay opened with a consideration of creation (importantly: in the image of God) as the basis of common humanity. It continued with the commonality of human experience, evoking the memory of

[61] 1 Chronicles 29:15.

[62] I am reminded of Bishop Krister Stendahl's wonderful maxim: "In God's eyes we are all minorities".

[63] Might this shift in perspective also create more space for hearing each other's stories, wandering as sojourners in an alien world?

Israel's status as *gerim* in Egypt. We now come to what may be the most significant perspective based upon which human unity may be recognized—our common existence in God's presence and the transience of that existence.

Bringing God back to the center of the religious conversation allows us to embark upon the third part of our theme: The hope of human flourishing. In this context we shall seek to address Judaism's vision for the flourishing of humanity. What vision does Judaism hold out for all who are not part of its own religious system? Perhaps it is better to speak of visions, rather than of a single united vision. In any event, what shall interest us most is the attempt to construct such a vision with God at its center.

The Flourishing of the Other—Visions of Judaism

Judaism's vision of human flowering and its contribution to such flowering is determined, to a large extent, by the breadth of the lens through which Judaism examines the world at large, which in turn hinges on the dual nature of Judaism, suggested above. From one perspective, Judaism is the life of a covenanted community and the story of its particular covenantal relationship with God. Covenant, like marriage, is a personal relationship that does not perforce carry wider implications for others, beyond the establishment of the relationship itself within the wider societal context. On the other hand, Judaism as a system of religious teaching relates to a universal God. When God, rather than Israel or its covenanted way of life, is placed at the center of the religion's economy, obvious ramifications for Israel's mission to and vision for humanity emerge: Judaism's knowledge of God should be translated and transported to all people. Various forms of Judaism have historically placed greater emphasis on one pole or the other, thereby producing Judaisms that emphasize to greater or lesser degrees the religion's mission to humanity. Accordingly, one can suggest two visions of what Judaism's message for humanity, its view of human flourishing, might be.

The narrower, more introverted vision is typical of the greater part of Judaism since rabbinic times. This vision for humanity is captured in legal terms, aiming at the regulation of the moral life of humanity. According to this vision, Judaism's teaching for the world revolves around the spreading of what are known as the seven Noachide commandments. These are basic moral obligations that Judaism considers indispensable to what it means to be human and that must serve as the basic fabric of all society. These commandments are, for the most part, a series of prohibitions: idolatry, blasphemy, murder, forbidden sexual relations, theft, and eating the flesh of a living animal; the seventh commandment entails the establishment of a judiciary system. There exists a standard understanding of Judaism, according to which Jews are commanded to observe 613 commandments, while non-Jews are required to observe only seven. This spiritual vision for non-Jews does not extend beyond the fulfillment of these obligations. Non-Jews who seek further spiritual advancement may join the ranks of Judaism and undertake the full religious life it offers. Thus, the reply to the question of what Judaism has to offer to humanity would be an ordered moral life.[64] However, such

[64]The obvious drawbacks of this vision have led to broadened understandings of the Noachide commandments that incorporate more spiritual dimensions, either by increasing their number

a moral life seems to fall short of the kind of concerns that religion, taken in its fullest sense, has. Significantly, no relationship with God is developed through the Noachide commandments. God is acknowledged through the prohibition of idolatry, but such acknowledgement is not tantamount to a full relationship.[65]

The alternative vision for humanity grows from an understanding of God, rather than from an extension of the notion of commandment to include the non-Jew. Knowledge of God and the possibility of establishing a divine-human relationship are uppermost here. Not surprisingly, this vision is echoed primarily in biblical prophetic texts. Despite changes in Jewish religion in the rabbinic period, this vision finds continuing expressions, as the biblical texts are echoed time and again by later writers. Human knowledge of God, leading to a personal relationship of the two, can be understood in terms of conversion to Judaism but also independently of conversion, affirming humanity's potential to come to know God in a variety of ways. The prayers of the high holy days, themselves a biblically infused creation of the rabbinic period, offer a vision of humanity, considered from the perspective of the universal knowledge of God.

> God and God of our fathers, reign over all the universe in Your glory, and be exalted over all the earth in Your grandeur. Shine forth in the brilliance of Your majestic might over all inhabitants of the world, Your earth, so that every creature may recognize that You have made it, and so that whatsoever You have made may see that You have formed it, and that everything that has breath in its nostrils may say, "God, the God of Israel, is King and His kingdom rules over all things.

The deepest Jewish vision for human wellbeing is thus the knowledge of God. This vision, of course, does not conflict with the moral vision of the seven Noachide commandments, but complements and expands it.

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or by expanding the significance of the seven. Perhaps the most significant expansion is the demand, made by Maimonides, that the seven Noachide commandments be practiced on the grounds of belief in mosaic revelation. See Maimonides, *Laws of Kings and their Wars* 8,11. Significantly, for Maimonides, observance of the Noachide commandments is also salvific, ensuring a place in the world to come, since it is based on some relationship with, or Knowledge of, God. This in turn opens the gate for additional religious components to enter the Noachide relationship. I discuss this dynamic in my *Israel in God's Presence*, forthcoming. For other dimensions of a spiritual understanding of the Noachide commandments, consider the contemporary statement by Yirmeyahu Bindman, *The Seven Colors of the Rainbow* (San Jose: Resource Publications, 1995).

[65]The vision of an ordered moral life is obviously not unique to Judaism. Thus, considered from the perspective of other world religions, the common view of the Noachide commandments as Judaism's vision for humanity offers nothing unique, a fact made graphically plain in recent work by Hans Kung on global ethics as expressing universal religious moral teachings. While this may be considered a weakness, in turn leading to the broadening of the religious significance of the Noachide commandments, from another perspective the universality of the teaching of the Noachide commandments is also a strength, because the category possesses great interpretive potential. It has allowed later rabbinic authorities to interpret the religions of Christianity and Islam and to validate them in Jewish terms. Rabbi Yakov Emden provides a good example for how the Noachide commandments offer a hermeneutical category for interpreting other religions. See Blu Greenberg, "Rabbi Jacob Emden: The Views of an Enlightened Traditionalist on Christianity," *Judaism* 27, 1978, pp. 351-368. See also David Novak, *The Image of the Non Jew in Judaism: an Historical and Constructive Study of the Noachide Laws* (New York: Mellen Press, 1983).

Both visions of what Judaism has to offer the world are largely a matter of theory, of prayer at best. There is very little by way of a program of action for the spreading of God's knowledge among non-Jews. Judaism is a bruised religion, far too vulnerable to undertake an active program of mission or teaching to the nations.[66] Also the seven Noachide commandments are more of an internal concept than a concrete educational program for the nations.[67] Judaism has thus more of a vision for the wellbeing and the flourishing of humanity than it does a concrete path or program, that it actively implements.

2.2 Towards a Constructive Theology

At this point, I move to the second part of my presentation, a constructive theological one. It would be presumptuous to assume that what follows is my "contribution" to the spiritual revival of Judaism. It does, however, flow from my understanding of the necessity of such revival and from my awareness that any such revival must be based on new theological and spiritual articulations of Judaism's teachings. It is thus my personal expression of a need rather than a presumptuous attempt to fulfill it.

My own presentation of how Judaism can be seen and understood may be read as a theological response to the difficulties and complexities that characterize it, as described above. This response is dialogical in a number of ways. It is a theological dialogue with history and with the current form of Judaism; it is also a dialogue with particular voices within tradition. What follows may be considered a dialogue with the teachings of a Hassidic thinker who has had a profound influence on my own thinking, Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (1772–1810).[68] Based upon various historical data presented in the first part of the paper, as well as a conceptual framework drawn from Rabbi Nachman's teachings, what follows constitutes an attempt at a fresh statement of Judaism's vision of the Other, as well as its ultimate goal and message. My dialogue with R. Nachman's teachings may take his ideas beyond the scope and context initially intended by him. Personally, I feel my extension of his ideas is true to their inner intent and coherence.

Finally, it is also a dialogue with other world religions. It is my personal

[66] I leave aside the complicated question of the meaning of these biblical prophecies concerning the knowledge of God in a world in which two other religions that preach belief in the one God have sprung forth from Judaism.

[67] One notes with great interest that Judaism's greatest missionary teacher of the past century, the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of Lubavitch, not only engaged in an extensive program to bring Jews back to Judaism, but also engaged in an aggressive public campaign to spread knowledge of the seven Noachide commandments.

[68] While the following section is conceived as a contemporary reflection in light of Rabbi Nachman's teachings, much of what follows is by no means exclusive to him. Some of the key concepts presented below may be grounded in various biblical and rabbinic dicta. Rabbi Nachman provides the conceptual framework that brings these ideas together as part of a unified, broad understanding that can be translated to a contemporary theological reflection. One could arrive at many of the following reflections based upon earlier sources and concepts, such as "ways of peace" and other concepts that have governed Jewish attitudes to others over the generations. However, a broad application of such precedents would be more homiletical and at times more apologetic. Applying the integrated thought structure of a later thinker, such as Rabbi Nachman, permits a theological expos that is free of some of the awkwardness of broad application of traditional maxims.

conviction that part of Judaism's spiritual revival must come through its rediscovery of the meaning of being religious in a sense other than the historical/national sense that conditions so much of Judaism or the behavioristic focus on ritual that dominates so much of contemporary "religious" life. Inter-religious dialogue thus has a great theological contribution to make to Judaism. In this context, I cannot ignore the possibility that the theological statement I shall attempt below is also dialogically informed, in relation to other religions. It is hard for someone aware of other religions to elevate the concept of compassion to a position of great theological significance, as I shall presently do, while ignoring the centrality of the concept in other world religions, primarily Buddhism. While I believe the intuitions that follow grew from my own reflections in a Jewish context, I am also aware of ways in which my thinking may have been influenced by the thought of other religions. But if this is indeed the case, it provides still further proof for the usefulness of dialogue with other religions for stimulating one's own theological reflection and creativity. I genuinely believe the thoughts that follow flow from the deepest concerns of Judaism and are at least an adequate, hopefully an inspiring, way of reframing the concerns and goals of Judaism as they have been analyzed in the first part of this paper.

I shall now attempt my own theological statement of Judaism and its message, especially as this concerns the Other. I shall do so by examining the concept of compassion. Compassion will be examined first through a reading of several teachings of Rabbi Nachman. Following that, I shall apply some of Rabbi Nachman's insights to the question of Judaism's purpose and its view of the Other.

2.2.1 Compassion in the Thought of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav

Rabbi Nachman's teachings are contained in a work called *Likutey Moharan*. Section 64 in this work is one of Rabbi Nachman's most famous and commented upon teachings.[69] The opening statement reads as follows:

> God created the world because of His compassion, because He wanted to reveal His compassion, and if the world had not been created, to whom would He show His compassion? Therefore He created all of creation, from the beginning of the emanation to the final center point of the physical world, in order to show His compassion.

This statement leads to a discourse in which Rabbi Nachman discusses various metaphysical issues, including the problem of theodicy. Placing compassion as the goal and ground of creation will color one's view of all that takes place within the created order. Even those instances of suffering and cruelty that challenge faith are to be recognized ultimately as expressions of divine compassion.

[69] I have recently discussed this teaching in great detail in my "Speech, Silence, Song—Epistemology and Theodicy in a Teaching of R. Nahman of Breslav," *Philosophia*, 30, 2003, pp. 143–187.

In other contexts, Rabbi Nachman affirms compassion as fundamental to the nature of creation. Commenting on Deuteronomy 30:11–12, where an unspecified "commandment" is said to be close to heart and present, Rabbi Nachman describes compassion as omnipresent or as visible to all.[70] Similarly, the world is described by Rabbi Nachman as full of compassion, just as God is all-compassionate.[71] The association of compassion and creation is thus well established in the thought of Rabbi Nachman. That divine compassion is the purpose of all of creation allows us to consider the relevance of compassion to an all encompassing view of the goal of Judaism and the purpose of life.

Compare Buddhist view on compassion on p. 128.

Compassion is not a spiritual quality that is cultivated independently of other aspects of the spiritual life. Rabbi Nachman relates compassion to *Da'at*. *Da'at* can be understood as knowledge, understanding, awareness or consciousness. In other words, there is a relationship between a person's degree of evolution of consciousness and his or her capacity to show compassion. As *Da'at* grows, so does compassion.[72] In a telling and painful admission, Rabbi Nachman discusses our ability to draw forth God's compassion upon us. He states: "There is no one who is able to pray in such as way as to draw forth divine compassion, because no one recognizes sufficiently the greatness of God."[73] Peace and compassion grow to the extent that *Da'at* grows.[74]

Compassion is also an expression of faith, a concept closely related to the concept of *Da'at;* only one who has true faith in God can have full compassion.[75] Compassion is thus related to the movement away from self into the presence of God, and it is grounded in the existential perspective that relies upon God alone in fullness of faith. The true leader must be motivated by compassion alone and not by any desire to rule. Until faith has been perfected, true compassion is not available, and one should not undertake leadership positions.[76] Faith stands in opposition to idolatry, Judaism's classical enemy. Hence, compassion emerges as the attitude of being that is the opposite of what an idolatrous attitude would engender.[77] If Israel is understood as a people whose task and message are to combat idolatry, this can be recast in terms of compassion—the people whose task it is to spread compassion. Rabbi Nachman offers the following acronym for the name of Israel: EL SHADAY YITEN LACHEM RACHAMIM—The Lord Shaddai will give you compassion.[78] Compassion may thus be said to be fundamental to Israel's character.

[70] Teaching, 105.

[71] Part 2, 49.

[72] This association is repeated numerous times in Rabbi Nachman's teachings. See Teaching 119; Part 2, Teaching 7.

[73] Teaching, 105.

[74] Teaching 56, 6.

[75] Teaching 18, 3.

[76] See Teaching 18, 3 and Part 2, Teaching 7.

[77] 18, 3 and Part 2, 62.

[78] Part 2, 62. Rabbi Nachman's application of this acronym is less concerned with the identity of Israel and its presentation in terms of compassion. Rather, he emphasizes the fact that compassion is given into Israel's hands and should therefore be understood in human terms as well, not only in terms of a divine goodness that might manifest as harshness on the human plane. The conceptual potential of this acronym exceeds the application made of it in context. This broader application of the acronym is in keeping with the tenor of Rabbi Nachman's general reference to compassion in relation to Israel.

God is the source of compassion, so in having compassion we emulate God. Such emulation is conscious, and it allows the drawing forth of divine compassion in reaction to the human practice of compassion. Israel is called to act in accordance with the thirteen attributes of divine compassion.[79] The notion of emulating God is, in and of itself, an important source for various forms of supererogatory behavior. Spiritual ideals that cannot be exhausted through legislation can be cultivated through the aspiration to emulate God.[80]

Compassion is received through giving to others.[81] Life may thus be seen as a school for compassion, providing opportunities to give and thereby to receive and to grow in compassion. Anger and cruelty are constantly overcome and transformed to produce compassion. The spiritual path is thus one of transformation of natural tendencies to their opposite, producing compassion as its fruit. This process of transformation will be realized only in the messianic future. It is only with the ultimate expansion of *Da'at* in the eschaton that compassion shall prevail, putting an end to human cruelty and anger, and ushering in the messianic peace.[82]

Compassion finds practical expressions. One of them is the ability to judge favorably, seeking virtue rather than fault. This theme is significant in Rabbi Nachman's teaching. The attempt to view both self and other in a favorable light, seeking virtue, is transformative, growing in a person those positive qualities that have been found and advancing his or her progress.[83] However, compassion must not be naive. The recipient of compassion must be worthy of it. Having compassion on the wicked can have adverse effects. Self-defense calls for care in the exercise of compassion, which must not be shown to one who instead of growing compassion in himself will take the power of compassion and apply it to cruelty.[84]

2.2.2 Judaism and the Teaching of Compassion

Following the teaching of compassion, as it emerges from the writings of Rabbi Nachman, I would like to offer an overview of the various topics of the present paper, seen through the lens of compassion. I believe the following summary statement allows us to address Judaism's call and mission, the purpose of the spiritual life and the attitude to the Other, both in the concrete

[79] See *Sichot Haran* 89. The idea of emulating divine compassion underlies the classic kabbalistic moralistic work of Rabbi Moses Cordovero, *The Palm Tree of Deborah*. Rabbi Nachman does, however, acknowledge our inability to adequately awaken divine compassion through emulation of this divine quality.

[80] The possibility of compassion to others being grounded in the emulation of God may be related biblically to the notion of the stranger. If we were strangers to whom God showed His compassion, we may be called to show similar compassion to other strangers. Emulating God's compassionate attitude to the stranger may serve as an alternative path to the recollection of our own alien status in Egypt. See Deut. 32:10, Ezekiel, chapter 16, and Meir Malul, "The Origins of the Israelite People in its Self-Perception—the Motif of the Other and the Foundling," *Zion* 47,1, 2002, pp. 5-18 [Hebrew].

[81] Teaching 119. See also Part 2, 4, 9.

[82] See Teaching 56, 6.

[83] Part 2, 1, 14 associates compassion with finding virtue. This association is found also in *Sefer Hamidot*, s.v. *Rachmanut*. A classical statement of Rabbi Nachman's teaching on finding virtue is Teaching 282.

[84] See Part 2, Teaching 7.

ways occasioned by common living and through a consideration of Israel's ultimate message and contribution to others.

The identification of Israel and compassion allows us to put forth the notion that compassion is constitutive of Israel's identity. Various rabbinic dicta speak of compassion as one of the fundamental traits of the Jewish people, Abraham's descendants.[85] Indeed, Israel's history of suffering has produced extraordinary qualities of charity and communal support within the people. I believe one is not exaggerating in seeing loving-kindness, charity and compassion as traits of Jewish society, throughout history, down to present times. However, much of this compassion and loving kindness is directed inwards, towards members of the Jewish community. If compassion is constitutive of Israel's identity, we should also consider its role in Israel's relations with other peoples.

Such compassion might find expression in the battle against idolatry. For Rabbi Nachman, the greatest form of compassion is the removal of ignorance. Israel's battle against idolatry should therefore not be construed as a triumphalist move of one particular truth over another, but as an expression of compassion, in eradicating false perception and spreading *Da'at*. But more interestingly, compassion can also serve as the yardstick for distinguishing between various forms of the religious life. If idolatry is associated with cruelty and compassion with faith, the religious life can be measured not only by doctrinal claims but by the quality of life it engenders in its believers. Where compassion is found, there God is found, and vice versa. The boundaries between higher and lower forms of religious life may thus not overlap the group identities of the religious communities. Each religion may contain both idolatrous and compassionate forms. Judaism's role is to uproot idolatry, first within itself,[86] and later from the world. Whatever Judaism may have to contribute to the world should therefore be judged by the yardstick of compassion—does it enhance and grow compassion? Is it born of a compassionate movement of heart, or is it merely an expression of national self aggrandizement?

As we have seen, compassion is not natural and may necessitate the transformation of natural reactions and tendencies. Having presented the adverse effects of Israel's painful history on its attitudes to the Other, we must raise a highly challenging question for contemporary Jewish spirituality. Can Judaism rise above its role and reaction as victim? Can the continuing battle for collective survival make space for a vision that does not cast the Other only in the role of persecutor and aggressor? If Jewish history is understood as a spiritual training through suffering, provided by God for His chosen people, we must ask how Israel's suffering can be integrated and transformed as part of a wider vision of Israel's spiritual growth and its contribution to the world. One answer that presents itself for our examination is the teaching of compassion, suggested here.

Can Judaism adopt an attitude of compassion towards its enemies? This is perhaps one of the most challenging questions one can place before it, and it

[85] See, for example, Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 79a; Deuteronomy Rabbah (Lieberman), Ekev 4, etc.

[86] Idolatry is used by Rabbi Nachman as an internal category, and not only as a category by means of which other religions are assessed. See, for example, Part 2, 62.

is doubly hard when the battle for survival continues. Compassion does not mean giving in to an enemy that seeks to destroy us. We have already seen the limits placed on the showing of compassion in situations of cruelty. But a deeper existential attitude of compassion, grounded in the fullness of the *Da'at* of God, may serve as a corrective to the excessive inwardness that so marks the Jewish people. Judaism has long resisted the idea of loving the enemy, partly because the idea is so strongly identified as Christian. Addressing the enemy, addressing the Other, and addressing life through the compassion that is already ubiquitous in God's creation may not have the same objectionable ring. If compassion and loving kindness are extended from within Jewish society to the Other, Judaism may find itself close to the fulfillment of the prophetic vision with which it was entrusted, able to handle the pains of history in a transformative manner.

In any event, compassion can serve as a helpful category through which Israel's attitude to the Other, as developed in the earlier part of this paper, may be perceived. Perhaps it would be truer to the intention of the Torah to consider the various commandments to love the *ger* as, in reality, commanding a compassionate attitude toward such a person. Compassion can be awoken through the evocation of the memory of our own exile in Egypt. Though the Torah legislates it, love can not be commanded; but recollection and reflection may awaken an attitude of compassion towards the Other. Compassion is certainly the appropriate reaction to the memory of the common human fate of death and the transience of life, making all humans *gerim*. If the suffering of later Jewish history has wiped away the tenderness of heart that the recollection of our bondage in Egypt was to produce, surely a deeper reflection on the meaning of all of human life, in the presence of God and death, may draw forth a compassionate response.

Reflection is a key to the awakening of compassion. It is only the unreflective self that can perpetuate attitudes of hate and hostility. Much of biblical life and Jewish history can provide us with reflective resources through which an attitude of compassion to other people can be developed. Thus, exile as a phenomenon relevant to all human beings may emerge already from the opening human story of the Bible, the exile from Eden.[87] From another perspective, recognizing that we are in God's presence and on God's earth is also a necessary corrective to some of the harmful spiritual consequences of a protracted existential battle, focusing on people and on land. Almost from the very start, Israel's attempt to establish a homeland has been accompanied by confrontation, with the inevitable ensuing hardening of attitude towards the aggressor. We do well to recollect a third biblical context in which we are called *gerim*. "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants."[88] Facing God Himself and trying to live by the laws set by Him for living on the land evokes a deep tension between the sense of possession and owning that characterize the narrative of the conquest and the humble recognition of our own alien nature. This dual perspective must be kept in mind. Affirmation of rights for homeland must be tempered by an awareness of the transience of all of human life and of how, even in our own homeland, we are but aliens and strangers. One of the

For continuation of concept of ger *into Christianity see p. 60.*

[87] Compare Magonet, p. 410.
[88] Leviticus 25:23.

greatest prices we pay for our continuing war is that it makes us forget some of our most fundamental religious perceptions.

The teaching of compassion may also serve us as a way of approaching anew Judaism's message and teaching for others. We noted above the insufficiency of the seven Noachide commandments as a spiritual path for people who are not part of the Israelite covenant. I suggest the seven Noachide commandments be considered as expressions of Judaism's teaching of compassion. Such compassion must be based on a minimal recognition of God, the source of all compassion, hence the prohibition against idolatry, itself associated with cruelty, as Rabbi Nachman suggests. Following the establishment of that minimal attitude to God, the seven Noachide commandments ensure a minimum of compassion, in human relations to other humans as well as to animals. Thus, the prohibitions against murder and theft, the obligation to set up judiciary structures and last but not least, the prohibition of showing certain kinds of cruelty to animals, are all expressions of this wider ethic of compassion, here translated into a basic legal code. Such legal expression falls short of the fuller dissemination of the spiritual teaching of compassion. Such teaching is accomplished through Judaism's teachings about God's being and presence. As Rabbi Nachman has taught us, the measure of knowledge of God is also the measure of compassion.[89]

Judaism may thus affect the world on two levels—through the teaching of compassion and through the law of compassion. Law provides the basic guarantee for compassionate behavior. This is true of the laws governing Israel's behavior towards the alien and is offered by Israel to others as a fundamental way of living. But beyond law lie the spiritual vision, the understanding, the quality of compassion as a mode of being that cannot be contained within the confines of law. The people of Israel may not always be able to ascend to the heights of the vision of Judaism, because the pains of history may not allow them to transcend their own suffering. It is then that law, Jewish law as well as the law of the Noachide commandments, provides a minimal harbor, anchoring the ideals of Judaism in practice. Ultimately, as all law must be subsumed as part of the spiritual reality that gave birth to it, so too Judaism's law of compassion must be subsumed in a higher teaching of the knowledge of God and of human compassion that Judaism has to share with the world.

When we consider what teachings Judaism has to share with the world, we do well to recall some of Judaism's special treasures. The entire range of Judaism's extra-legal spiritual teaching—including its teachings about God—is not usually considered by Jews as part of what they have to share with others. Hence, exquisite teachings regarding attitude to the Other, care for proper speech, control of the passions, ways of approaching God and so much more are usually considered in-house treasures that do not fall within the purview of Judaism's contribution to humanity. I would argue that, if Judaism is to be true to its ultimate calling, it must spread the teaching of how it has come to know God and to live in His presence beyond the confines of Judaism. I suggest neither conversion of all people to Judaism nor extending the range of the halahhah to include others. Simply, the expansion of awareness and consciousness that has been achieved within some parts of Jewish society must

[89] See Deuteronomy 10:8, where the attitude to the *ger* is grounded in the knowledge of God's greatness.

be made available to others as part of Judaism's mission to the world, a mission of *Da'at* and of compassion.

Some words are in order, in this context, also concerning Israel's archetypal enemy, Amalek. Why is Amalek such a terrible enemy? Most traditional answers emphasize the threat he poses to Israel's existence. However, another answer emerges from the sources as well. Amalek is the epitome of cruelty.[90] His was an unnecessary war; it did not serve the needs of his own survival. His cruel attitude to the wandering weak people places him as the antithesis of what Israel is to represent in the world. One cannot show compassion to one who is cruel. The ramifications of that would be self destructive. Amalek too is to be seen as part of the continuing threat for Israel's survival. But not every enemy is Amalek. The threat Amalek poses is unique inasmuch as it threatens the fundamental moral fabric of Israelite society—compassion.[91]

2.3 Concluding Reflection

Historical circumstances provide opportunities for the growth and transformation of religion. Israel's history of pain and persecution provides an opportunity for the development of a teaching of compassion, even if this teaching awaits such times as when Israel is dwelling in safety on its land. But history may offer other kinds of opportunities as well. Rabbinic Judaism established boundaries between self and Other in ways that are probably stricter than biblical literature had envisaged. These boundaries are now once again slipping away as the certainty of the distinction between self and Other is gradually undermined; as contact increases, boundaries become more permeable and new identities are constructed and sought. This change also provides us with an opportunity to return to biblical teachings that have all but fallen into oblivion through history and through the reinterpretation of tradition. Along with them comes an opportunity to reawaken the spiritual resources of Judaism in an attempt to address contemporary crises, advancing beyond the common and predictable human reaction to history. Through these opportunities Jews and Judaism, and others along with them, can grow.

Yet Judaism is not alone in facing such challenges and opportunities; it is not alone in its need to grow. If Judaism has lost sight of fundamental elements of its calling, it may need the help of others to realize and regain them. The loss of sense of mission, "a light unto nations" is not only a consequence of undue introversion; it also expresses a genuine perplexity as to the nature of this light. What can Judaism actually teach and share about God, beyond the most formal and rudimentary truths? As part of its own spiritual revival, Judaism must seek answers to such questions. One path through which the answer may be discovered is conversations with others: those who have God,

[90] See Mishnah, Kiddushin 4, 14.

[91] Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeschutz in his *Ya'arot Devash*, Part 2, homily 9, poses the following question: Why do we not forgive Amalek? After all, forgiveness is a noble religious virtue. According to Eibeschutz, the natural reaction should indeed be one of forgiving. The Torah must go against the natural kindness of Israelites in commanding a war against Amalek. The justification for this war is that there is no compassion in Amalek. Similar reasoning may also be offered for the Torah's prohibition for receiving Ammonites and Moabites into Israeli society (Deuteronomy 23:4). The teaching of hospitality to the Other cannot extend to the cruel Other.

those who don't, and those who have God in a different form. Part of the contemporary context that challenges Judaism to rediscover its ultimate calling involves an openness to the Other, in a movement that is profounder than the one way transmission of inherited knowledge. If Judaism is in crisis, one dimension, perhaps ever so small, through which it may be helped to rediscover its ultimate mission, is the mutual exchange that inter-religious dialogue offers. It is my humble conviction that the importance of the dialogue is not only as a means for Judaism to share its own wisdom and knowledge of God but also as a means to rediscover its own identity and calling. Through contact, challenge and a genuine openness to other sojourners on God's earth, Judaism may be helped to rediscover its ultimate teaching for itself and for humanity. If through history so much of what is essential to Judaism was eclipsed, the new emerging historical paradigms, offered by dialogue at its best, may hold the promise of the rediscovery of self, in conjunction with the Other.