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A GLIMPSE AT ETERNITY FROM A HOSPITAL DUNGEON

Dear Friends,

As I lie in bed in a chamber in a hospital dungeon trying to recuperate from the agonizing effects of the stroke that afflicted me last Sunday evening, I am taking the liberty to give vent to my introspective analysis of my condition and of the nature of the human soul in general. It is needless for me to mention that I am a religious person. I am not only a religious person and a scion of an outstanding Rabbinic family in Israel but in addition I am also a religious type—what is designated in modern psychology as a *homo religiosus*, a person who is intuitively inclined to consider everything from a religious perspective. Obviously, as a religious person I have always believed in the existence of a soul extraneous to the body. Secular people, even atheists, also believe in the existence of a soul. However, there is one striking difference between the belief in the existence of a soul entertained by secular people and the belief in the existence of a soul entertained by religious people. When secular people speak of the soul, they consider it to be exclusively immanent in the body, very much like the color of an apple immanently contained in the apple. According to the point of view of secular people, the human soul must expire with the death of the body. However, according to the view of religious people the soul is a separate spiritual entity which can exist extraneous to the body and does not expire with the body. Hence, the religious concept of immortality of the soul. As I mentioned before, as a religious person I have always believed in the existence of a soul extraneous to the body. Until last Sunday evening, however, my belief in the existence of a soul extraneous to the body had been grounded in *Emunah* (faith). It was not something that I could perceive

through the senses. The stroke that afflicted me wrought a spiritual metamorphosis in my whole *weltanschauung*, on my whole outlook on life. As of Sunday evening my belief in the existence of a soul extraneous to the body is not only based upon a religious orientation but is something that I am perceiving through my physical senses as a biological sensation.

Everybody knows that when a person is carried he has a biological sensation of carrying another person. When I had the stroke attack last Sunday evening the paramedics put me on a stretcher and placed me in an ambulance car to be taken to Evanston Hospital, where I was hospitalized. As I was carried on the stretcher by the paramedics, I had a biological sensation of being carried by the paramedics and similarly the paramedics had a biological sensation of carrying me. It was not something that was grounded in faith or in cognitive understanding. It was something that I perceived through my senses. As a result of the numbness wrought by the stroke in the left side of my body I am under the impact of a sensation that the left side of my body is completely detached from me and that I am only the carrier of my left leg, of my left arm, of my left shoulder, etc. I know that this sounds irrational. However, I cannot refrain from giving vent to my feelings and my sensations. Every time I raise my left arm or my left leg I feel a biological sensation analogous to the sensation I would perceive prior to the stroke whenever I picked up a heavy child. It is as if I had been completely detached from my left leg and my left arm.

The crucial and excruciating question that flashes in my mind now as I am lying in bed in a chamber in the hospital dungeon is how it is that prior to the stroke I did not perceive this sensation every time I raised my left arm or my left leg.

There is a second question that flashes in my mind now which is even more excruciating than the first question; namely, how is it that even now I perceive the biological sensation of being a carrier of an arm or a leg only when I raise my left arm or leg but not when I elevate my right arm or right leg. Whenever I raise the right arm or right leg, I don't perceive the sensation of lifting a foreign object, but I feel that I am just raising my right arm or my right leg. Only when I raise my left arm or my left leg do I perceive a biological sensation of lifting a heavy foreign object completely detached from me. This biological sensation I perceive all the time when I make a movement with my left side, whether it is a minute movement or substantial movement. It seems to me that my left side is not "me"—only the right side of my body is "me." The left side of my body is a foreign organ that was attached to me. I constantly labor under the impact of the psychic notion that I am a double personality. There is in me a right-side sensory person who is quick and elegant and is a rapid

advancer and there is in me a left-side sensory person who is not elegant but clumsy and slow. Every time I am asked by the physical therapist and medical technologist to make a movement that involves coordination of the use of the right hand with the use of the left hand, I get the impression that I am a teacher of a class that consists of two students, one of whom is a rapid advancer and alert and brilliant and sharp, while the other is an extremely slow learner who is relatively dull and not responsive. And in order to realize a coordinated action by the right and the left hand I have to aim at two objectives: one—to galvanize the potential of the left-side sensory person; two—to instill patience and perseverance in the right sensory person so that it will not fall prey to frustration and depression.

These two excruciating questions—why I am now perceiving a biological sensation of lifting a heavy object every time I raise my left arm or left leg while I did not perceive this biological sensation prior to the stroke, and why even now that I am the victim of a stroke I don't perceive this biological sensation when I raise my right arm and right leg, have been obsessing my mind constantly since Sunday evening. What is the answer to these two excruciating questions? I think that this phenomenon and personal experience of mine constitutes a very significant empirical datum on the extraneity of the human soul. The fact that I am now constantly under the impact of a biological sensation of carrying a foreign detached object consisting of the left side of my body corroborates the proposition that the human soul is a separate entity having an identity of its own and extraneous to the body. Only the cosmic artist has made a harmonious blend and synthesis of the body and the soul in such a well-integrated pattern that empirically the soul appears to be immanent in the body. This is why a person in good health never perceives the biological sensation of being the carrier of the various organs of his or her body. The reason is that in a normal person the body and soul are synthesized and integrated in such a beautiful and well-integrated pattern that for all practical purposes the soul appears to be immanent in the body. Hence, no biological sensation of being a carrier of the organs of one's body. However, when a person becomes afflicted by a stroke, as I was for example, then a minute looseness takes effect in the well-integrated pattern and harmonious blend of soul and body. Consequently the afflicted person is able to perceive the biological sensation of being sustained and carried by the soul within him which is essentially not immanent in the body but extraneous to the body. This is the true significance of the language I used at the beginning of these remarks: that the stroke on Sunday evening wrought a spiritual metamorphosis in my whole *weltanschauung*, an outlook on life and the world. Prior to the stroke on Sunday evening, May 29, 1983, my

belief in the extraneous existence of the soul was grounded exclusively in *Emunah* or faith. Now my belief in the extraneous character of the soul and immortality of the soul is grounded in a physical perception through the biological senses.

This is the gist of my glimpse at eternity from a chamber in a hospital dungeon. I want to point out that when I use the expression "from a chamber in a hospital dungeon" I do not mean to criticize the service of Evanston Hospital. On the contrary, in my remotest imagination I could not visualize better service than that given at Evanston Hospital by the doctors and the nurses. The doctors and the nurses at Evanston Hospital manifest a humanitarian concern for all the patients in the hospital. The expression "from a chamber in a hospital dungeon" is merely descriptive of the agonizing condition that overtakes a handicapped body and an anguished heart tossed by numerous and multifarious feelings of frustration, loneliness, detachment and abandonment.