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JUDAISM AND THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

Literature, and indeed all the arts, have always been closely connected with religion but their relationship is not a simple one. Genetically, they both come out of the same matrix.[1] In early societies, all literature is religious in the broadest sense of the word. Certain aspects of early religion were literary in an oral or written form, and these aspects were related to magic and wonder.[2] Secular literature eventually broke away, but it was formed in a religious womb. In fact, it is hard in early societies to separate religion and literature.

Psychologically, literature and religion are also closely related inasmuch as they affect humans in similar ways. Terms like creativity, illumination, inspiration, joy, wonder, tragedy, atonement, penance, retribution, conversion are common to the discussion of both. Both exercise a fascination over the mind and hold the participant. They may give us grief, joy, and a sense of release.

Axiologically, they are also related because both deal with moral issues, are predicated on similar values, and stress goals which are alike. Both claim a special kind of commitment and either urge or assume values, often the same values. Traditionally, literature has always been connected with morality and wisdom, and it may even claim kinship with religion in its adherence to certain irrationalities. Literature has its red heifers, too, as Roman Jakobson and other scholars of stylistics have shown. In their ideal form both present values such as peace, pleasure, endurance, faith in life, and hope. Literature, because it stresses certain values, has in the past offered, and even today

offers, a substitute for religion. To Matthew Arnold, culture—and for him culture in its highest form is great literature—was a substitute for religion, and he hoped it would elevate man as religion aspired to do.

Literature has always been accompanied by literary criticism as religion by theology. Before either of these subjects was formalized, they existed as attempts to explain the activities towards which they were oriented. Literary criticism is found wherever literature is found, attempting either to explain or to evaluate it. Clifford Geertz, the distinguished American anthropologist, has told me that he knows of no society in which literary critics cannot be found. Criticism, although it arose relatively late as a formal discipline, is not then an excrescence on the body of literary creation as romantics would have it. It is its inevitable accompaniment. Theology is a comparable aspect of religious practice, and its development as a separate discipline is also relatively late. Both literary study and religious study have methods and approaches in common just as the subjects on which they depend have.

Judaism as a religion is especially a literary religion—as are Islam and Christianity. It shares with them a book which is revealed, but it differs from them in its emphasis on criticism, not to speak of the contents and limits of the book. The supreme revelation in Judaism took the form of a book of which it was believed that every letter was mystically and correctly placed. It is a book of law with the story of how that law came to be revealed. The Pentateuch is both a revelation and a relation of how that revelation came about. The Jewish revelation is both itself and the circumstances which authenticate it. It is its own guarantee. Since then, its prime method of interpreting its revelation, both oral and written, has been by a kind of literary criticism. In fact, in Judaism, hermeneutics is itself a religious act. A major way we worship God is by learning, and we have been told that on three who study Torah together the *Shekinah* rests.

The normal process of reinterpretation which is found in all text-oriented religions has become itself a religious act. Traditional Judaism as well as other varieties, even deviant sects, have considered this method worship as well as a normative

activity. By hermeneutics and literary criticism, we discover the Divine will; and the Divine will has provided us with this method in order to give us help in keeping His will. God has not only given us a Law, but a method of keeping it and of understanding its seventy faces. Furthermore, He has given us an oral tradition which supplements His written Law and its method. This, too, is subject to literary analysis and debate.

The claims made for literature in the modern period have paralleled the traditional claims of the Judeo-Christian religions. Aesthetics for some has been a substitute for religion. Art is, as we have seen, a substitute to some men for the traditional consolations of religion. The Romantic Movement elevated the artist, who claimed a special power and whose life and being were admired. We can glory in Shakespeare or Goethe, as religious men have gloried in God's messengers and prophets.

Literature has never claimed as much of its adherents as religion has, but it sometimes has come close to it. The nature of the creative act and the mystery of artistic creation always fascinated men, but in the nineteenth and early twentieth century it became a major center of attention. Artists were honored and almost worshipped. As early as 1755, Samuel Johnson, in the Preface to his *Dictionary,* wrote, "The chief glory of every people arises from its authors." Actors and musicians, all those in the popular arts in these days of mass media, attract immense popular acclaim and frequently gain great wealth. They are the "stars," the "demi-gods," the "heroes" of our age, just as earlier, Dickens and Tennyson and Victor Hugo were the subjects of passionate interest.

Even earlier, literature gave us wisdom and strength to endure. Down to fairly modern times, literature shared with religion an emphasis on wisdom. Literature was didactic, even if not only didactic. Literature in great language urged us to pursue virtue or to avoid vice through the creation of existentialistic situations. Aristotle recognized the purgative value of tragedy, and Plato paid a compliment to the power of art by banning most of it from his Commonwealth. When we go back to primitive times, as we have said above, literature and religion are sometimes hard to separate from each other. Homer func-

tioned as a Bible in ancient Greece.

Literature, however, offers ecstasy and delight as well as wisdom for man's salvation. Judaism, as well as Christianity and Islam, offers man a transcendent goal—the perfection of man and the Divine vision. Through learning, obedience to the Law in its ritual and moral aspects, Judaism claims that we may attain perfection—and ultimately, when God wills it, transform the world at the time of the Messiah, and finally enjoy the company of the Divine, for which man was, in the last analysis, made. Literature is a competing religion without such transcendent claims, but it does offer its adherents a way of life and joy.

The difference in attitude toward the texts of religion and literature are immediately obvious, yet both require, even if they don't always get, careful reading from their adherents. We recite poems and rejoice in their language. We sing the Torah and our prayers with full fervor. The units out of which the texts are made—the words or even the letters or sounds—may be regarded as sacred and holy. Texts in both literature and religion transfix us and both urge on us action. With Judaism, we have a special sanction to act, for it is through action, through the performance of the *mitzvot* that we carry out the Divine imperatives and, in effect, imitate Him, and foreshadow and thereby obtain redemption. Furthermore, the Bible itself is a literary revelation. God reveals Himself in literary forms—songs, narrative, praise-poems, proverbs, and so forth. The Bible is, in much of its extent, full of literary beauty. God even quotes other literature in the Pentateuch as any author might. God cites, to take one example, the proverbs and taunt songs which are recited over the destroyed city Heshbon of the Moabites by the Amorites (Numbers 21:27ff). This is a fact of the highest significance for those who are exploring the relations of literature and religion.[3]

Thus, the story of the intellectual relations between religion and literature is complex and by no means easy to disentangle. That they share common notions and ideals is quite clear. I do not, of course, wish to gloss over their differences, but merely to indicate some very basic similarities. Of all academic disciplines,

literature comes closest to religion and, in particular, literary study comes closest to Judaism because of its use of certain methods and its particular relations to a divine book.

Yet Orthodoxy has always been suspicious of secular literary study, more suspicious of it than of the natural and social studies. I, of course, recognize that in this, modern Jewish tradition has merely been following every other modern tradition. In fact, one may say that ever since the beginning of a literature distinct from religion, literature has been the subject of suspicion. It debased morals, it imitated reality, it was useless. Why study it? What good does it do? These are recurrent questions. Although there is some sympathy for the arts in the current youth movements and much suspicion of natural and social sciences, organized literary study is still the object of opprobrium.

As for Jewish suspicions of literature, we may look at the *Book of Job*. The rabbinic tradition, which is a pietistic tradition, has had difficulty with it, because it is based on a questioning which is foreign to the post-exilic Jewish stance. When they did discuss the book, the rabbis stressed the frame of the story and not the magnificent debates which form the core of the book. It, along with *Proverbs* and *Daniel,* finds no place in our liturgy at all. It does not easily assimilate into the talmudic tradition, but it does correspond to an underlying question which humans, if they are fully human, must face and not run away from. This suspicion of literature has thus been carried to the Bible itself, for *Job* is literary in an almost secular way—the most purely literary book in the Bible. Nor could it like the *Song of Songs* be easily allegorized.

Above and beyond a general human suspicion of literature and its study, Orthodox Judaism has had a special antagonism to them. When the Talmud recognizes secular sciences, it is mainly mathematics, medicine and astronomy that it talks about. After all, these subjects have some religious use. Jehudah ha-Levi may have amused himself in his youth with writing love poems, but these were youthful aberrations. Even today, sociology and political science have their uses in understanding the Jewish people, but what does literature do unless it argues for obedience to the Law or helps to dramatize the lives of great

Jewish heroes? Agnon may be much admired because of his great literary powers, but who can spend much time reading him if one is really a religious man? When we go to Shakespeare, Dostoyevski, Sophocles, matters are even worse. Even more useless are literary criticism and study.

These are good reasons for this Orthodox suspicion of secular literature and literary criticism. Literary criticism became an academic subject in the heyday of nineteenth-century historicism. It, too, was heavily historicist and very much concerned with sources and origins. The methods of literary criticism in the hands of the higher critics of the nineteenth century, the Wellhausen School, produced the documentary criticism of the Bible with its J, E, and P, not to speak of other letters. Confident dogmatism about the evolution of religious ideas led to a breaking up of the unity of the books of the Bible and a late dating for much of it. Abstract schemata determined historical facts; and in some hands it was even assumed that the Pentateuch was largely the work of Ezra and his successors.

Furthermore, literature itself in the late nineteenth-century was in the grip of either a naturalism or/and aestheticism, both of which were conceived as possible seductions to sensuality and immorality. The bad reputation of many artists and the outspoken quality of much art in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries could only increase the suspicions of the religious. Literature described the worse aspects of life and, in some cases, it was felt, glorified them. Zola's defense of Dreyfus hardly made up for *Nana* and *Germinal*. Other books praised inactivity and decadence. Huysman and Wilde could scarcely expect rabbinic support. Yet, as the Jews came in contact with Western culture, their own secular literature in Hebrew and Yiddish was born. Literature had its appeal even to the ghetto.

In more recent years, from about 1915 on, the West has seen a growth of what might be called nihilistic literature in which despair, alienation, and death assumed sovereignty. This nihilism grew out of certain aspects of the Romantic Movement as Mario Praz has shown. And recently, the glorification of violence, dope, and sex on a scale not seen since Petronius has alerted all to the dangers of secular literature. Of course, not

all modern literature is of this type, but some of the most appealing sort is.

Moreover, secularism is rampant in any case—to encourage the study of secular literature is like putting coals on a fire to put it out. I am not denying that educated Orthodox Jews would not have, if they were English-speaking, Shakespeare and Dickens in their houses, but really commited Jews would tend to look on most secular literature with some suspicion. However, what I shall argue here is that literature in many of its forms has something to give to the awareness of our tradition and to our religious sensitivity.

The usual emphasis is on what religion can bring to help us in the teaching and study of literature. I do not want to deny this fact, both from a practical and from a theoretical point of view. It is obvious that a knowledge of the Bible, at the very least, is an indispensable element in the understanding of the literature of the Western tradition. It is also true that some of the methods of Biblical criticism can be applied to literary texts. But in a broader sense, we can argue that being a Jew increases one's sensitivity to literary values—to the concrete, to beauty as in holiness and to the value of law. Just as it has been argued that the Incarnation increases literary awareness,[4] it may also be argued that a sense of Jewish identity "contained and expressed in the body of the people of Israel and in the triangle Israel-God-Torah, which has brought a wholeness of existence and a singular, unextinguishable conception of the significance of human life into the world,"[5] enhances literary appreciation. The sense of incarnating Israel and bearing God's presence about the world in one's own existence through his chosen people, though perhaps only held by a few, is a powerful stimulus to the literary imagination. All of this, of course, is an ideal state of affairs. Religion increases one's sense of the tension between the horizontal through time, and the vertical which transcends time and binds together the past, present, future. A sense of this tension pervades much great literature in its combination of temporality and eternity—when one lives this same diversity in unity in the rhythm of the Jewish year, one can be made aware of this paradox in literary form. One can, as T. S. Eliot

says, "apprehend the point of intersection of the timeless/With time . . ."

However, my subject is the rarer one—the influence and possible influence of literature on religion and in particular Judaism. I shall argue that although keeping the Law is and must be the main concern of Judaism, some awareness of secular literature and literary criticism can support that goal and can be a most needed supplement to certain aspects of Jewish life which will further enrich it. Furthermore, the methods of literary study, in spite of some of the past results, can actually help us to understand as far as human understanding can go, some of the meanings of our complex and mystery-laden destiny. We have been told to meditate on the Law day and night, but some time spent on the "great tradition" of literature will not be wasted. Like Maimonides, who believed that even though reason cannot take us all the way, we must use it as much as possible, I believe we should travel with the study of worthy secular literature as far as it will take us.

One does not have to be a Hegelian to recognize that all religions, indeed all conceptual systems, contain certain tensions and contradictions. In Christianity, one of these obvious tensions is between faith and works. In Judaism, there is no doubt that there has always been a tension between letter and spirit. Both must be held in that kind of sensitive balance that allows both, full assent and rights without destroying the other which perpetually intrudes itself. As my colleague and good friend, Isadore Twersky writes,

> Halakhah itself is a tense, vibrant, dialectical system which regularly insists upon normativeness in action and inwardness in feeling and thought. It undertook to give concrete and continuous expression to theological ideals, ethical norms, ecstatic moods, and historical concepts but never superseded or eliminated these ideals and concepts. Halakhah itself, therefore, in its own behalf, demands the coordination of inner meaning and external observance—and it is most difficult to comply with such a demand and sustain such a delicate, highly-sensitized synthesis.[6]

Letter does not automatically bear spirit, but makes spirit possible. True spirit cannot exist without letter. Law controls

in order to give us freedom, but the temptation is to rest in the letter or ignore it altogether for spirit. Only by keeping both can we fulfill our religious destiny—as the prophets remind us again and again.

One major function of great literature is to combine concreteness with significance, and he who understands great literature keeps in mind both the particular and the universal. Literature can thus help to reduce the tension between letter and spirit by increasing our sensitivity to the real and the ideal. Not all literature either aims at or succeeds in subsuming the particular in the universal and argues for spirit through the outer letter, but much of it does. Nor can we always tell: even some of what seems nihilistic today may actually not seem so fifty years from now.

We are all aware of the literary beauties of the Bible. Yet few writers have made us aware of what these consist in—either those connected with the majesty and power of the Hebrew or those inherent in the subject matter as revealed in the great translations. Erich Auerbach, only some twenty-five years ago in the first chapter of his famous book, *Mimesis*, gave us one of the first really profound analyses of the depth sense of Genesis, especially as contrasted with Homer. This notion of inwardness conveyed by Auerbach is not only a paradigm of what I have been arguing for—the importance of the inner when based on the outer—but also makes us appreciate in concrete terms the greatness of our Bible. To Islam, the beauty of the Koran is a telling argument for its divine origin. This is no less true of the Bible.

Auerbach's analysis is concentrated on the *Akedah* story. He tells us how it gives us a sense of background and is multilayered in spite of its scarcity of details. The following chapter in Genesis has another episode which recreates the past and makes it very much alive. It tells the story of Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah from the Hittites for a burial place for his beloved Sarah. Here facts have become universalized and the universals have become particularized.

The negotiations with Ephron, the agreement, the bargaining, add up to an incident in the story of Abraham, not the greatest

or most memorable in his life story, but most characteristic of the style, tone, and texture of these early stories. Its vividness brings alive this little bit of Oriental bargaining, and the characters of the two men; one slightly afraid but still anxious to get his money; the other sure of himself but not wishing to do anyone out of anything. The meaning does not come primarily from its repetition of a primal pattern or myth but from the significance of the events in terms of a thematic linear pattern. The meaning in its uniqueness is taken up into God. We have an historical and literary interpretation of the historic.[7]

I cannot pursue this matter further, but this incomplete literary analysis of a chapter of the Bible reveals something yet further about its meaning. Without an imaginative sense of what we are reading in the sacred text, we cannot truly see a basic level of this book. An imaginative sense alone is not enough, but it can open to some minds a sense of beauty which can hover over the learning and the traditional lore, leading to a true beauty of holiness. An understanding of early literary genres will help us to comprehend the Bible and even the other sides of our rich religious story. To understand the form of the *Mishneh* in terms of its literary tradition makes it more meaningful when we study it. Literary methods are used by Jewish scholars in their legal reasoning just as logic is used. But notions like genre, type of literature—form criticism, if you like—have rarely been employed. Once a religious commitment has been made, obedience is necessary, but speculative literary analysis cannot be anything but enriching. The modern world cannot be wished away. Only by possessing a sense of the mystery of God's ways can we truly be worthy of our heritage.

The study of literature deepens our sense of human destiny. When we read Sarpedon's speech to Glaucos, before they fight, in the *Iliad* (12:33 ff.),

> Ah, friend, if once escaped from this battle we were for ever to be ageless and immortal, neither would I fight myself in the foremost ranks, nor would I send thee into the war that giveth men renown, but now—for assuredly ten thousand fates of death do every way beset us, and these no mortal may escape nor avoid—now let us go

> forward, whether we shall give glory to other men, or others to us.
> (Lang, Leaf and Myers' translation, The Modern Library, p. 220.)

This heroic speech appears very different in a Judaic light. Our sorrow is increased at Sarpedon's noble bravery if we see it in terms of God's will. In terms of a religious commitment, a sense of human tragic value leads us to Divine values. By increasing our awareness of human joy and sorrow, of comedy and tragedy, literature can lead us to a deeper sense of God's presence and powers—provided, of course, that we have taken the leap of faith or are willing to trust our tradition, which is a less individualistic way of accepting the religious imperative than a leap. Literature is both style and meaning. In the meaning, we learn through actual example or through the haunting power of words the great basic truths of life—and even of God. Any element which increases our sense of the world and the divine must be supportive of religion and, in particular, a religion so closely geared to life and survival as is Judaism. We are links in a chain the end of which must come, but how and when we know not. The "yoke of the kingdom" embraces a law, but it also embraces on another level a faith and a hope. We do not need the modern theology of hope which has now replaced the death of God as a current theological development to know what hope is. Both literature and Judaism finally stand for hope. Even nihilistic literature betrays some sign of it—at least in the commitment to writing.

Literature is not only the concrete, but it certainly makes strong use of the concrete and the particular. It is distinguished from philosophy by the extensive use of imagery, details, particulars, not to speak of its repetitions, ambiguities, and deviances, which give it a certain amount of self-reference. It claims, for the most part, reality and it attempts to authenticate itself. As David Hume wrote, "Poets . . . though liars by profession, always endeavor to give an air of truth to their fictions; and where that is totally neglected, their performances, however ingenious, will never be able to afford much pleasure."[8] I have attempted in an article elsewhere to trace the attempt to establish an air of truth or plausibility especially to tales.[9] To me,

it is a relic of the religious and magic origin of art in which the reproduction had to reveal truth (unless deliberately and openly violated) if it were to be effective. This tribute to truth even when truth is being violated is a very important aspect of the literary art and links modern literature, especially narrative, to myth and history, all of which reflect a society in which imitative magic and the power of the word flourished.

The commitment to realism is widespread in literature. Literature is realistic in many ways, even when it casts an idealistic veil over reality. It is realistic in its attempts, as I have shown, to authenticate itself. Like the Bible, it also has the problem of self-authentication. It is realistic insofar as it presents in words, something of life. It is realistic insofar as it strikes us as being worthwhile, i.e., real. These meanings go much beyond the so-called realistic schools of the nineteenth century. Realism as a phase of literary history is much less significant than the realistic aspects of all literature at all times.

The writers of the Bible used the concrete to help impress on us the truth of what is said. Rashi raised the question of why all of Genesis and a number of chapters of Exodus precede the actual legal part of the Bible. Whatever his answer may have been, I think I know one reason. The Law had to be presented in its context, for how it was delivered is a presupposition of believing and obeying it. It, too, had to be authenticated by the truth of the circumstances which produced it. The Song of Songs has given us a rich mystical tradition in the form of human love. Whether these were love songs spiritualized or mysticism embodied in a human love story, the force of the real people creates the power of its spiritual story. Some Greeks knew of the oneness of God, but it was an abstract notion. In the Jewish tradition, we hear God tell us: "Hear O Israel the Lord your God is one." We are not only to know that He is one, but we are to hear that He told us that He is one.

Realism in the sense of particularity is the stuff out of which Judaism was built. A strong realistic sense in its many meanings is needed to live the spiritual life. Literature can help us to that end; it strengthens our sense of the real. It embodies in the eternal here and now, the glory of the world. We need the hand

of God and the voice of God, and we need not be bothered by these and other anthropomorphisms if we have a strong sense of existence. Analogy may enable us to have some faint sense of God, maybe only his negations. But without the literary imagination born or developed in us, we cannot both appreciate the world and see the reflections of the Divine in it.

Finally, literature fills out the ethical dimension of life. It enables us to look deeply into the situation of our ethical decisions. Because the ethical *mitzvot,* for the most part, reflect reason and natural law, we tend not to take them seriously as we might. They possess none of the mysteries of the *hukim.* They can be easily explained by common sense. On the other hand, ironically, they are the hardest to keep because they demand sensitivity and imagination. The ritual laws are hard to understand but, given a commitment, easier to keep. They also demand self-probing and imaginative re-creation, but usually they afford no deep dilemmas of conflicting interests.[10] The halakhic dilemma is of a different order from the ethical dilemma.

Now, I do not mean to suggest that one can keep properly any of the laws without some imaginative and sensitive powers, but the ethical demands much more of us. Nor is it always easy to distinguish ethical and ritual laws. Is the observance of *Yom Kippur* an ethical or a ritual commandment? It is hard to say. It has something of both. At times, the ethical depends upon the ritual and the ritual upon the ethical. Yet, we can make distinctions of degree. *Yom Kippur* is certainly more ethical than, say, the counting of the *Omer.* Both are commanded by God and both are certainly theoretically of equal importance. Yet, in practice, the first is widely obeyed among Jews and the second only fitfully—for good reasons. Yet even the counting of the *Omer,* has its rational and even ethical side. It is no easy matter, then, to separate the ethical and ritual. In fact, Maimonides believed all *mitzvot in* principle were capable of rational explanation. Not all authorities have followed him. But in any case distinctions can be made.

In my youth, the major thrust of Christian apologetics *vis-a-vis* Judaism was the superiority of its ethics over that of its ancestor. Much ingenuity in this thrust was devoted to explain-

ing away awkward elements in the Jewish Bible. It was, for instance, argued that although Judaism did know the "Golden Rule," it only knew it, unlike Christianity, in a negative form. Besides resting on the unproven assumption that the positive form is higher in ethical value than the negative, such an argument conveniently ignored the negative form found in many early Christian texts and the positive form found in some Jewish texts. However, all that was in the heyday of religions as ethical systems and belief in evolution and progress. We don't hear such arguments much any more—they ring rather hollow after Auschwitz—although the idea that Christianity is the true Judaism and that Judaism is irrelevant and fossilized is by no means dead.

Even with the passing of such an attitude, it is certain that the ethical must continue to be a major concern of religious thought and comparison. It is here that literature can make its contribution by fleshing out the ethical dimension and making more real sense of the ethical reality. It may increase our sense of the complexity of ethical decisions, but, finally, it will make us more aware of the ethical dimensions of what we do.

I am well aware that this appeal for the proper use of literary material as a supplement to living the Jewish life is not going to receive much support. A Jew caught up in the demands of halakhah is not ordinarily likely to feel that supplements are necessary. Furthermore, if he does read secular literature, it is bound to be of a very circumscribed type. I am also aware that religion makes deeper and more insistent demands on us than literature. To a religious man, no other subject or system can be a competitor in any sense to religion. Everything else must of necessity be of lesser importance. Nonetheless, I believe that literature strengthens the imagination of man and that the Jewish mind needs imaginative strength as much as other minds do. As Traherne wrote, "Men do mightily wrong themselves when they . . . neglect to see the beauties of all kingdoms." Even more they wrong God.

Literature at its best reinforces the spirit without weakening the letter. It clothes the spirit in the appropriate letter and enables man to penetrate through the exterior into the interior by

training the imagination. We belong to a sacred tradition embodied in a people which was chosen by God for a special destiny not yet worked out. Just because of this high mission, the temptation not to question, not to understand, not to re-create our tradition is great. It is here also that great literature helps us to understand outer and inner and their dialectical tension and to re-create perpetually our heritage in enlightened action. Obscurantism may shut its eyes and its ears, but those who can will see and listen. With this secular knowledge, we can be led back to the time when literature had its magic role to fulfill and opened up deep layers of religious experience.

A recurring theme in the Bible is the by-passing of the eldest son. The youngest son does not always carry on the tradition, but usually it is not the oldest. When we list Seth, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Joseph, Ephraim, Moses, Samuel, Saul, David and Solomon, we are not listing eldest sons. Perhaps this apparent irrationality is because God wants to show us that the election is not mechanical, that it does not automatically fall on the oldest sons, in spite of primogeniture, that the glory of Israel is always dependent on the mystery of God's choice[11] and not on man's laws or even God's laws. The Law functions partially to reduce and encompass the unexpected, to enable us to control the new, to bring God into everyday life in a predictable manner. Yet a religion which is alive must also recognize that certain essences escape the capture of law and rule. The irruption of the irrational into the rational, the surprising into the expected, the unknown into the known must always be allowed for. The universe escapes in some final way our intellectual net. An awareness of this in some form, an awareness of God's mysterious ways, is a necessity for the really religious spirit. It is this sense that study of great literature strengthens. There are other routes to this sensitivity, but the broadest and most direct road is through the literary imagination that delights in the unexpected within the expected. Literature presents in a heightened way, the uncontrolled within the controlled.

Jewish creativity has been in Aggadah as well as Halakhah, and both fertilize each other. Literary understanding leads us to support law and to see it not as a barren set of rules but as an

opportunity for creativity. Only through law and rule can true creativity emerge. Literature in its ideal form can help us to understand that, for as Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger writes: "Thus, true to its name, the Halakhah does not serve as the final goal of the Jew, but rather as the way, guiding him in the domain of covenantal imperatives."[12]

Young people today in America are turning to religion again—unlike the story of the past seventy years, when they fled it. We must be ready for them. The large crowd which worships at Harvard every Saturday morning is asking for a revitalization of our faith and our Law. The literary imagination is one of our chief aids. Let us not neglect it. It will aid us in two ways: by reinforcing the inner spirit of our religion without weakening its outer core and by helping to change us who profess Judaism to an awareness of this inner spirit. We can wrestle along with Job and finally repent in dust and ashes. What I am finally asking for here is not for another crutch to support religion but a new religious awareness which will include the literary imagination to revivify our deepest religious commitment.

NOTES

1. "Literature begins . . . in that undifferentiated period of society where culture is mainly oral, where history, philosophy, religion and politics are all united in a common mythical complex, which the poet is largely responsible for remembering, arranging, and transmitting." Northrop Frye, "The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism," *Daedalus* 99 (1969-1970), 338. Cf. "We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind." Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (New York, 1969), 223 (written in 1936).

2. Aristotle (*Poetics* 4, 7ff [1448 ff]; cf. *Rhetoric* I, 9, 1ff [1366a ff]) says that literature arose out of praising and blaming. He connects praising with lyrics, hymns and epics and blaming with satire and lampoons. As we now know, a ruler employer professional poets to sing his praises and hurl curses at his enemies like Balaam. For a typology of early literary genres, see Jan Vansina, "Once Upon a Time: Oral Traditions as History in Africa," *Daedalus* 100 (1970-71). 451. On the topic of primitive satire, see R. M. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton, 1960).

3. I owe this argument to the keenness of Professor Yohanan Muffs of the Jewish Theological Seminary who made these points in the discussion following the delivery of this paper.

4. See, for instance, Father William F. Lynch's fine book, *Christ and Apollo, The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination* (New York, 1960). Cf. "It [Christianity] is not simply one ideology among others: It has a special relevance to literature because, beyond all other ideologies, it is incarnational; and it has a special force in proving that relevance because it is realistic about human limitations." Vincent Buckley, "Criticism and Theological Standards" in *Poetry and Morality, Studies on the Criticism of Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, and F. R. Leavis* (London, 1959), p. 215.

5. Quoted in *Mosaic* (Harvard Hillel) 12 (1971) 45 (reprinted from *Midstream* Jan. 1970).

6. "The *Shulkhan Aruk*: Enduring Code of Jewish Law," *The Jewish Expression,* ed. Judah Goldin, Bantam Books (New York, 1970), 336 (reprinted from *Judaism* 16 [1966-67]).

7. See Paul Ricoeur, "Symbolique et temporalité," *Herméneutique et Tradition, Actes du Colloque International,* Rome, 10-16, janvier 1963. Bibliothèque d'histoire de la philosophie (Rome and Paris, 1963), p. 19.

8. *Treatise of Human Nature* I, iii, 10, ed. C. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1928 ed.), p. 121.

9. "Authenticating Realism and the Realism of Chaucer," *Thought* 39 (1964), 335-358.

10. I may here be a little unfair to the ritual laws. David Weiss-Halivni spoke at the discussion following this paper of the literary quality of Halakhah, perhaps, he said, greater than that of Aggadah. Halakhah of course includes ethical and ritual *mitzvot,* but it is possible that the mystery of finding the exact meaning of the ritual laws may be as sensitive a task as ethical decisions.

11. I owe this notion to my good friend Professor Shemaryahu Talmon.

12. "Covenantal Imperatives," *Samuel K. Mirsky Memorial Volume, Studies in Jewish Law, Philosophy, and Literature,* ed. Gerson Appel (New York, 1970), p. 12.