REDEMPTION, PRAYER, TALMUD TORAH*

Redemption is a fundamental category in Judaic historical thinking and experiencing. Our history was initiated by a Divine act of redemption and, we are confident, will reach its finale in a Divine act of *ultimate* redemption.

1

What is redemption?

Redemption involves a movement by an individual or a community from the periphery of history to its center; or, to employ a term from physics, redemption is a centripetal movement. To be on the periphery means to be a non-history-making entity, while movement toward the center renders the same entity history-making and history-conscious. Naturally the question arises: What is meant by a history-making people or community? A history-making people is one that leads a speaking, story-telling, communing free existence, while a non-history-making, non-history-involved group leads a non-communing and therefore a silent, unfree existence.

2

Like redemption, prayer too is a basic experiential category in Judaism. We have appeared, within the historical arena, as a prayerful nation. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David and Solomon all prayed. Through prayer they achieved the covenant with God, and through prayer, we expect eventually to realize that covenant.

The Halacha has viewed prayer and redemption as two inseparable ideas. The Halacha requires that the Silent Prayer (עמידה) be preceded, without a break, by the benediction of גאל ישראל, which proclaims God as the Redeemer of Israel.[1]

*This essay was delivered at a faculty colloquim at the University of Pennsylvania, under the aegis of the B'nai Brith Hillel Foundation, May, 1973.

1. אמר ר' יוחנן איזהו בן העולם הבא זה הסומך גאולה לתפלה
R. Yohanan said: "Who has a share in the World to Come? He who adjoins the blessing of גאל ישראל to the Silent Prayer." (*Brakhot* 4b)

What motivated the Halacha to link prayer with redemption? Apparently our Sages considered prayer and redemption to be structurally identical. Of what does this identity consist? In order to answer this question, it would be profitable to subject both ideas to precise phenomenological analysis.

3

Redemption, we have stated, is identical with communing, or with the revelation of the word, i.e. the emergence of speech. When a people leaves a mute world and enters a world of sound, speech and song, it becomes a redeemed people, a free people. In other words, a mute life is identical with bondage; a speech-endowed life is a free life.

The slave lives in silence,[2] if such a meaningless existence may be called life. He has no message to deliver. In contrast with the slave, the free man bears a message, has a good deal to tell, and is eager to convey his life story to anyone who cares to listen. No wonder the Torah has, four times, emphasized the duty of the father — a liberated slave — to tell his children, born into freedom, the story of his liberation.[3] Free man who is eager to tell his story, is always surrounded by an audience willing to listen to his story. The slave has neither a story nor a curious audience. Moreover, he is not merely a speechless being, but a mute being, devoid not only of the word, but of the meaningful sound as well.

4

What is responsible for the dumbness of the slave? The lack of a basic experience, namely that of suffering or distress, which is perhaps the most central aspect of the human I-awareness.

Suffering is not pain. Though colloquially the two words are used as synonyms, they signify two different experiences. Pain

2. The use of the terms *speech* and *word* should not be understood in the colloquial physical sense, but in the metaphysical, phenomenological sense. When I say the slave is speechless, I mean to convey the idea that he is deprived of the meaningfulness of speech.

3. Exodus 12:26-27; 13:8, 14-15; Deuteronomy 6:20-25.

is a natural sensation, a physiological reaction of the organism to any kind of abnormality or tissue pathology. It is, as Aristotle already knew, a built-in mechanical signal that warns man whenever his physical existence is menaced from within; it is an integral part of the body's security system. Pain, as instinctual reaction, is immediate and non-reflective. As such, it is not restricted to humans: the beast is also exposed to and acquainted with pain.

Suffering or distress, in contradistinction to pain, is not a sensation but an experience, a spiritual reality known only to humans (the animal does not suffer). This spiritual reality is encountered by man whenever he stands to lose either his sense of existential security (as in the case of an incurable disease) or his existential dignity (as in the case of public humiliation). Whenever a merciless reality clashes with the human existential awareness, man *suffers* and finds himself in distress.

5

The animal is exposed to pain; so is the slave. When the slave meets with pain he reacts like the animal, uttering a sharp, shrill sound. However, the howl of the beast, like the shriek of the slave, lasts a moment in the darkness and hush of the night. In a split second all is silent again. There is no aftermath to the pain-sensation of the animal or the slave; there follows no complaint, no request, no protest, no question of why and what. The slave does not know suffering, lacking, as he does, the very existential need-awareness which generates suffering. He is never in distress because he has no *human* needs. The needs of a slave are, like his shriek, not human: the etiology of his needs is exclusively biological. The absence of suffering mitigates the sharpness of pain. Former inmates of concentration camps have told me that they had, with the passage of time, become inured to any pain or torture, as if they had been totally anesthetized. They were dumb beings. They not only stopped speaking, but ceased to emit coherent sounds, as well.

The Zohar tells us:

תא חזי כתיב הן בני ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני פרעה ואני ערל שפתים. מאי ואני ערל שפתים והא בקדמיתא כתיב לא איש דברים אנכי וגו' כי כבד פה וכבד לשון אנכי וקב"ה הוה אותיב ליה מי שם פה לאדם וגו' והוא אמר ואנכי אהיה עם פיך ס"ד דלא הוה הן והשתא אמר ואני ערל שפתים אי הכי אן הוא מלה דאבטח ליה קב"ה בקדמיתא אלא רזא איהו משה קלא ודבור דאיהו מלה דיליה הוה בגלותא והוה איהו אטים לפרשא מלין ובגין דא אמר ואיך ישמעני פרעה בעוד דמילה דילי איהי בגלותא דיליה דהא לית לי מלה הא אנא גלא מלה גרע דאיהי בגלותא ועל דא שתף קב"ה לאהרן בהדיה תא חזי כל זמנא דדבור הוה בגלותא קלא אסתלק מניה ומלה הוה אטים קול כד אתא משה אתא קול ומשה הוה קול בלא מלה בגין דהוה בגלותא וכל זמנא דדבור הוה בגלותא משה אזיל קלא בלא דבור והכי אזיל עד דקריבו לטורא דסיני ואתיהיבת אורייתא ובההוא זמנא אתחבר קלא בדבור וכדין מלה מלול הה"ד וידבר אלקים את כל הדברים האלה וכדין משה אשתכח שלים במילה כדקא יאות קול ודבור כחדא בשלימו ועל דא משה אתרעים דמלה גרע מניה בר ההוא זמנא דמלילת לאתרעמא עלוי בזמנא דכתיב ומאז באתי אל פרעה לדבר בשמך מיד וידבר אלקים אל משה.

> And Moses spake before the Lord, saying: "Behold, the children of Israel have not harkened unto me, how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?" How did Moses dare say this? Had not the Holy One already promised him, when he said that he was not eloquent, that He "will be with his mouth" (Exodus 4, 10-12)? Or did the Holy One not keep His promise? However, there is here an inner meaning. Moses was then in the grade of "Voice," and the grade of "Utterance" was then in exile. Hence he said, "How shall Pharaoh hear me, seeing that my 'utterance' is in bondage to him, I being only 'voice,' and lacking 'utterance.'" Therefore God joined with him Aaron, who was "utterance" without "voice." When Moses came, the Voice appeared, but it was "a voice without speech." This lasted until Israel approached Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. Then the Voice was united with the Utterance, and the word was spoken, as it says, "and the Lord *spake* all these words" (Exodus 20, 1). Then Moses was in full possession of the Word, Voice and Word being united. That was the cause of Moses' complaint (v. 23), that he lacked the word save at the time when it broke forth in complaint and "God spake to Moses."[4]

4. Zohar, *Ra'ya Mehemana* וארא.

The text divides the process of redemption in three stages. First it identifies bondage with the absence of both word and meaningful sound, with total silence. Then redemption begins with finding sound while the word is still absent. Finally, with the finding of both sound and word, redemption attains it full realization.

Before Moses came there was not even a single sound. No complaint was lodged, no sigh, no cry uttered. Only an agonizing un-human shriek would penetrate the weird silence of the night. The slaves were gloomy, voiceless and mute. The women did not cry when their infants were snatched from their arms; the men kept quiet when they were mercilessly tortured by the slave drivers. Torture was taken for granted. They thought this was the way it had to be. The pain did not precipitate suffering. They were unaware of any need.

When Moses came, the sound, or the voice, came into being כי אתא משה אתא קול. Moses, by defending the helpless Jew, restored sensitivity to the dull slaves. Suddenly they realized that all that pain, anguish, humiliation and cruelty, all the greed and intolerance of man vis-à-vis his fellow man is evil. This realization brought in its wake not only sharp pain but a sense of suffering as well. With suffering came loud protest, the cry, the unuttered question, the wordless demand for justice and retribution. In short, the dead silence of non-existence was gone; the voice of human existence was now heard.

ויהי בימים הרבים ההם יומת מלך מצרים ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבדה ויזעקו ותעל שועתם על האלים מן העבדה.

> And it came to pass in the course of the many days that the king of Egypt died and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage and they cried and their cry came up unto God . . .[5]

Why hadn't they cried before Moses acted? Why were they silent during the many years of slavery that preceded Moses' appearance? They had lacked the need-awareness, and experienced no need, whether for freedom, for dignity, or for painless existence. They did not rebel against reality; they lacked the tension that engenders suffering and distress. The voice was restored to them

5. Exodus 2:23.

at the very instant they discovered, emotionally, their need-awareness and became sensitive to pain in a human fashion. Moses' protest precipitated this change.

7

Even Moses, the Zohar emphasizes, who helped the people move from the silent periphery to the great center, did not acquire the word until he and the people reached Mount Sinai. Although Moses had the existential *awareness* of need, he had not as yet discovered the *logos* of need which would, in turn, have endowed him with the charisma of speech. When the Almighty advised him that he had been chosen to be the redeemer of the people, Moses argued and was reluctant to accept the mission because the word was not, as yet, given to him; therefore, he was ערל שפתים (slow of speech).[6] Surely Moses had protested; he had killed the tyrant, rebuked the wicked Jew, etc. What he lacked was the logical understanding of the teleology of the גלות - experience, as well as the firm faith in the destiny of the slave-community. He did not believe that those slaves would ever be liberated. Hence, while Moses, and with him the whole community, had already broken out of their silence, they had yet to find the word. Only at Sinai was the logos, both as word and as knowledge, revealed to him. He finally understood the covenantal past, beheld the vision of a great future whose realization was dependent upon him.

II

1

This story is indicative, not only of the political slave of antiquity, but of slavery today, as well. Slavery is not only a juridic-economic institution of the past; it is also a way of life which is still a reality. The unfree man differs, existentially, from the free man: one may, existentially, be a slave in the midst of political and economic freedoms. To use Biblical term-

6. *Ibid.* 6:12.

inology, slavery constitutes a תהו ובהו existence.

What does the existential slave look like? How does existential *tohu va-vohu* express itself in daily life? There are two basic characteristics of which we may avail ourselves in identifying the slavish תהו ובהו existence in every era: 1) Anonymity; 2) Ignorance.

How does the anonymity of man express itself? In the tragic reality of being forgotten. The history of mankind is the history of countless millions of forgotten, nameless people, who have vanished into nothingness, along with their gravemarks (if any). Men come and go, like Peretz's Bontsche Schweig,[7] without leaving a trace or making a mark. The anonymity which envelops man is part of the curse God imposed upon Adam. Man experiences his anonymity as a great loneliness.

If this is true of man in the past, it is certainly true of modern man. Urban life has contributed greatly to the anonymity and loneliness-experience of the individual. When Kohelet said:

כי בחשך בא ובחשך ילך ובחשך שמו יכסה

"For he comes in darkness and departs in darkness and his name is covered in darkness."[8] — he referred not only to the unknown timid soul, to the poor and meek, but to everybody: the great ruler, the daring warrior, the captain of industry and the famous orator. All of these people live in anonymity and darkness and are existentially peripheral, mute beings. All of us, no matter how popular, are people whose destiny consists in being forgotten.

2

Man is not only anonymous, but ignorant as well. Let me qualify: when I say that man is ignorant, I do not refer to his

7. This is how Bontche Schweig is described: "Bontche Schweig's death made no impression whatsoever. No one knew who Bontche was. Bontche lived mutely and died quietly. Like a silent shadow did he pass through our world. At Bontche's circumcision no toasts were raised, no glasses were clinked. At his Bar Mitzvah no rousing speech was delivered. He lived in anonymity like a grey minute grain of sand on the beach of a stormy sea, among millions of identical sand particles . . . no one noticed that one of the particles was picked up by the storm and carried across the sea."

8. Ecclesiastes 6:4.

scientific achievements; in this area modern man is clever and ingenious. What man fails to comprehend is not the world around him, but the world within him, particularly his destiny, and the needs of which he is supposed to have a clear awareness.

Many would say that to accuse modern man of being unaware of his needs is absurd. The reverse, they would maintain, is true. Modern man is aware of many needs; in fact, there are too many needs which claim his attention. An entire technology is bent upon generating more and more needs in order to give man the opportunity to derive pleasure through the gratification of artificially-fabricated needs.

Though this assertion is true, it does not contradict my previous statement that contemporary man is unaware of his needs. Man is surely aware of many needs, but the needs he is aware of are not always his own. At the very root of this failure to recognize one's truly worthwhile needs lies man's ability to misunderstand and misidentify himself, i.e. to lose himself. Quite often man loses himself by identifying himself with the wrong image. Because of this misidentification, man adopts the wrong table of needs which he feels he must gratify. Man responds quickly to the pressure of certain needs, not knowing *whose* needs he is out to gratify. At this juncture, sin is born. What is the cause of sin, if not the diabolical habit of man to be mistaken about his own self? Let me add that man fails to recognize himself because he is man. As man, he was cursed by the Almighty, condemned to misuse his freedom and to lose his own self. In other words, adoption of a wrong table of needs is a part of the human tragic destiny.

The confusion about one's true needs is typical of man as man, without distinction of life-experience. Does the young man understand his basic needs? If he did, we would have no problem of crime, drugs and permissiveness in general. Is the middle-aged man oriented toward his real needs; does he know what is relevant and what is irrelevant to him? If he did, there would be fewer deaths from heart disease. Does the old man know what should and what should not matter to him? Let me speak for myself: I know that I am perplexed that my fears are irrational, incoherent. At times I am given over to panic; I am afraid of

death. At other times I am horrified by the thought of becoming, God forbid, incapacitated during my lifetime. One of my greatest fears is related to the observance of the Day of Atonement: I am fearful that I might be compelled, because of weakness or sickness, to desecrate this holiest of all days.

I don't know what to fear, what not to fear; I am utterly confused and ignorant. Modern man is, indeed, existentially a slave, because he is ignorant and fails to identify his own needs.

3

This principle, that a man often perceives as his own the needs of some other self, finds expression in several areas of Halacha. The central position which תשובה occupies in our system of thought is based upon our belief that man is free to establish himself or to determine his own identity, in either a positive or a negative manner. While, in sin, man mis-identifies and alienates himself from himself, in the case of תשובה he reverses the process of mis-identification: he discovers himself, and "returns" to his true self.

Two Halachic legal concepts, התרת נדרים (the absolution of vows and oaths) and אסמכתא (collateral security with condition of forfeiture beyond the amount secured), rest upon the doctrine of man as self-fooling being. In the case of אסמכתא, the law declares certain agreements null and void, if they were engendered in a mood of overconfidence on the part of one of the participants. We accept that opinion in Halacha which maintains that a contract precipitated by such optimistic anticipation is not always valid,[9] although the contract was signed voluntarily, without coercion. The individual who made the promise is regarded as having been guided by the wrong table of needs, pressed upon him by the "phoney I." Consequently, the agreement is invalid: it was signed, in effect, by the wrong person.

The same principle underlies the concept of התרת נדרים. What is התרת נדרים? One takes a vow or an oath, to engage in or refrain from an action. Later he discovers the difficulties connected with the execution or his vow or oath. He appears before three people, and they dissolve the vow or the

9. *Baba Batra* 168a.

oath, by subjecting him to a cross-examination which results in the conclusion that, had he anticipated the hardship engendered by compliance with the vow or oath, he would never have committed himself. The question arises: why is he absolved? The taking of the vow or oath was a free act; nobody constrained him to do so. The answer is the same as for אסמכתא. In substituting the pseudo-I, with its wrong table of needs, for the true self and the right table of needs, the individual has ceased to be the author of his own deed, of his vow or oath.

III

1

How can one redeem oneself from this kind of slavery? The redemption from Egypt was completely an act of the Almighty: liberty and speech were returned to the people by Him in an act of endless grace and benevolence:

ועברתי בארץ מצרים... אני ולא מלאך

"And I shall pass in the land of Egypt . . . I and not an angel."[10] The case of existential slavery is, however, different: it is up to man, who is charged with the task of redeeming himself from a shadow existence. God wills man to be creator — his first job is to create himself as a complete being. Man, the mute being, must search for speech and find it, all by himself. Man comes into our world as a hylic, amorphous being. He is created in the image of God, but this image is a challenge to be met, not a gratuitous gift. It is up to man to objectify himself, to impress form upon a latent formless personality and to move from the hylic, silent periphery toward the center of objective reality. The highest norm in our moral code is: *to be,* in a total sense, to liberate onself from the bondage of a shadowy *mé on* (to use Platonic jargon) and to move toward the wide spaces of *ontos on,* real, true being, full of song and joy, the crystal-clear accents of speech. Man was commanded to redeem himself in order to attain full being. This can be achieved only through prayer:

10. Exodus 12:12, as interpreted in *Mekhilta* and *Haggadah.*

ונצעק אל ה' — "And we cried unto God."[11] The redemption from Egypt was initiated through prayer.

2

Judaism, in contradistinction to mystical quietism, which recommended toleration of pain, wants man to cry out aloud against any kind of pain, to react indignantly to all kinds of injustice or unfairness. For Judaism held that the individual who displays indifference to pain and suffering, who meekly reconciles himself to the ugly, disproportionate and unjust in life, is not capable of appreciating beauty and goodness. Whoever permits his legitimate needs to go unsatisfied will never be sympathetic to the crying needs of others. A human morality based on love and friendship, on sharing in the travail of others, cannot be practiced if the person's own need-awareness is dull, and he does not know what suffering is. Hence Judaism rejected models of existence which deny human need, such as the angelic or the monastic. For Judaism, need-awareness constitutes part of the definition of human existence.[12] Need-awareness turns into a passional experience, into a suffering awareness. *Dolorem ferre ergo sum* — I suffer, therefore I am — to paraphrase Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*. While the Cartesian cogito would also apply to an angel or even to the devil, our inference is limited to man: neither angel nor devil knows suffering.

Therefore, prayer in Judaism, unlike the prayer of classical mysticism, is bound up with the human needs, wants, drives and urges, which make man suffer. Prayer is the doctrine of human needs. Prayer tells the individual, as well as the community, what his, or its, genuine needs are, what he should, or should not, petition God about. Of the nineteen benedictions in our עמידה, thirteen are concerned with basic human needs, individual as well as social-national.[13] Even two of the last three benedictions (רצה and שים שלום) are of a petitional nature. The person in need is summoned to pray. Prayer and צרה (trouble) are

11. Deuteronomy 26:7.

12. The role of יסורין (suffering) is discussed by Nachmanides in שער הגמול.

13. Vide Maimonides, *Hil. Tefillah* 1:4.

inseparably linked. Who prays? Only the sufferer prays.[4] If man does not find himself in narrow straits, if he is not troubled by anything, if he knows not what צרה is, then he need not pray. To a happy man, to contented man, the secret of prayer was not revealed. God needs neither thanks nor hymns. He wants to hear the outcry of man, confronted with a ruthless reality. He expects prayer to rise from a suffering world cognizant of its genuine needs. In short, through prayer man finds himself. Prayer enlightens man about his needs. It tells man the story of his hidden hopes and expectations. It teaches him how to behold the vision and how to strive in order to realize this vision, when to be satisfied with what one possesses, when to reach out for more. In a word, man finds his need-awareness, himself, in prayer. Of course, the very instant he finds himself, he becomes a redeemed being.

3

What is the structure of liberation through prayer? We find, upon analysis, that the process of redemption of the individual and the community through prayer is similar to the redemption from Egypt, as described by the Zohar. There are three stages: 1) No prayer at all — the silence of atrophy, the absence of a need-awareness; 2) An outcry, a voice, saturated with suffering and sadness; 3) The birth of the word, i.e., the birth of prayer through the word.

It is in the second stage, with the awakening of the need-awareness, that prayer makes its entry. This level of intermediate prayer is not yet תפלה but צעקה, a human outcry: שומע קול צעקה — "Hearer of outcry" — is a Divine attribute. There is, as yet, no word, no sentence; although the emotional awareness has awakened, the logos of need is still dormant, silent. There is not yet a clear understanding of what one is crying for. There is distress and loud human weeping. צעקה is primordial prayer, the voice restored, the word still lacking.

In the final stage, the word appears; the outcry is transformed into speech. Man, at this level, not only feels his needs but under-

14. Vide Nachmanides, comments on Maimonides' *Sefer HaMitzvot,* Positive Commandment 5.

stands them as well; there is a logic of prayer which opens up to man when he is in possession of the word.

4

At this stage prayer is not just a shriek or a cry anymore. It is rather a well-defined thought, a clear conception. צעקה turns into תפלה. We do not know the exact semantics of the term תפלה. Yet one thing is clear: the term is related to thinking, judging, discrimination.[15] In short, prayer is connected with the intellectual gesture. The hierarchy of needs, clearly defined and evaluated, is to be found in the text of the עמידה, where not only the emotional need-awareness, but also the logos of need and with it the human being himself are redeemed. The outpouring of the heart merges with the insights of the mind. To pray means to discriminate, to evaluate, to understand, in other words, to ask intelligently. I pray for the gratification of some needs since I consider them worthy of being gratified. I refrain from petitioning God for the satisfaction of other wants because it will not enhance my dignity.

5

צעקה is not only a phenomenological idea, but a Halachic-religious reality. תפלה, though it represents a more advanced awareness, does not replace צעקה, but co-exists with it. Man, even the most sophisticated and educated, frequently resembles the baby who cries because of pain, but does not know how to alleviate the pain.

In Halachic liturgy, prayer at the stage of צעקה is called סליחות. There are four distinctive characteristics of סליחות: 1) recital of the thirteen attributes of mercy[16] (י"ג מדות); 2) confession (ודוי); 3) repetition of short sentences distinguished by simplicity of form (e.g.

מי שענה לאברהם ... הוא יענינו);

4) reading of prophetic verses of petition or praise. The main

15. E.g. Exodus 21:22; I Samuel 2:25.

16. Vide *Rosh haShanah* 17b.

distinction between תפלה (represented by the עמידה) and צעקה (as represented by סליחות) consists in the absence of strict formulation in the case of סליחות. Prayer as צעקה lacks the gradual development of theme, the structural formalism, and the etiquette-like orderliness which Halacha required of the מתפלל, the prayerful person.[17]

While תפלה is a meditative-reflective act, צעקה is immediate and compulsive. The צועק is not bound by any requirements as to language, flow of words, sequences of premises and conclusions. He is free to submit his petition, no matter how informal, so long as he feels pain, and knows that only God can free him from the pain.

IV

1

When prayer rises from צעקה to תפלה, an experience in which the whole human personality is involved, it merges with another redemptive experience, namely, that of תלמוד תורה. It was for a good reason that Moses and Ezra integrated קריאת התורה into the framework of תפלה.[18] Without ת"ת, it would be difficult for תפלה to assure man of total redemption.

2

What does Torah do for the redemption of man? Permit me to quote the following Talmudic passage:

דרש ר' שמלאי למה הולד דומה במעי אמו וכו' נר דלוק לו על ראשו וצופה ומביט מסוף העולם ועד סופו שנאמר בהלו נרו עלי ראשי לאורו אלך חשך . . . ומלמדין אותו כל התורה כולה שנאמר ויורני ויאמר לי ותמך דברי לבך שמר מצותי וחיה ואומר בסוד אלו־ה עלי אהלי...וכיון שבא לאויר העולם בא מלאך וסטרו על פיו ומשכחו כל התורה כולה שנאמר לפתח חטאת רובץ.

17. These structures are elaborated in Maimonides, *Hil. Tefillah,* chs. 4-5.
18. *Baba Kama* 82a.

> R. Simlai delivered the following discourse: What does an embryo resemble when it is in the bowels of its mother? . . . A light burns above its head and its looks and sees from one end of the world to the other, as it is said, "When his lamp shined above my head, and by His light I walked through darkness" (Job 23:3).
>
> It is also taught all the Torah from beginning to end, for it said, "And he taught me, and said unto me: 'Let thy heart hold fast my words, keep my commandments and live' " (Proverbs 4:4), and it is also said, "When the converse of God was upon my tent" (Job 29:4). As soon as it sees the light an angel approaches, slaps it on its mouth and causes it to forget all the Torah completely, as it said, "Sin couch-eth at the door" (Genesis 4:7).[19]

There is an obvious question: If the angel makes the baby forget everything he taught it, why did he bother to teach the embryo at all? The answer is again obvious. R. Simlai wanted to tell us that when a Jew studies Torah he is confronted with something which is not foreign and extraneous, but rather intimate and already familiar, because he has already studied it, and the knowledge was stored up in the recesses of his memory and became part of him. He studies, in effect, his own stuff. Learning is the recollection of something familiar.[20] The Jew studying Torah is like the amnesia victim who tries to reconstruct from fragments the beautiful world he once experienced. In other words, by learning Torah man returns to his own self; man finds himself, and advances toward a charted, illuminated and speaking I — existence. Once he finds himself, he finds redemption.

3

Intellectual redemption through the study of Torah resembles, in its structure, the redemption through prayer which, in turn, is modeled upon the Zohar's description of the redemption from Egypt. We may speak of it in terms of the Zohar's three stages: 1) We are silent — there is complete intellectual insensitivity and total unconcern. 2) Voice is restored, but speech is lacking; sounds, not words, are audible — cognitive curiosity and amazement awaken. We begin to be annoyed because we

19. *Niddah* 30b.

20. One is reminded, by sheer terminological association, of the Platonic doctrine of anamnesis.

do not understand. We are perturbed by something which is a part of ourselves but which we are unable to define. 3) The word breaks through; there is clear and distinct cognition. Our intellect begins to speak. We have found the charismatic endowment, namely Torah, in the depths of our personality, and, *ipso facto,* we have found ourselves.

Once man gains insight into his true self, by activating the intellect, he finds himself on the road towards discovering ultimate redemption. When man recognizes himself, he dissipates not only ignorance, but also the mist of anonymity. He is not unknown anymore: he knows himself, and finds freedom in his knowledge. He is aware of his needs because he prays; he is aware of his intellectual creative capacities because he studies. He is sure that the needs are his own, and that the intellectual capacities are a part of himself. This twofold knowledge is cathartic and redemptive.

V

When תפלה and ת"ת unite in one redemptive experience, prayer becomes עבודה שבלב.[21] What does this term denote? Not the service by the heart, but the *offering* of the heart; Judaic dialectic plays "mischievously" with two opposites, two irreconcilable aspects of prayer. It announces prayer as self-acquisition, self-discovery, self-objectification and self-redemption. By sensitizing and logicizing the awareness of need man delivers himself from the silence and from non-being and becomes an I, a complete being who belongs to himself. At this level, prayer makes man feel whole: at this level, prayer means self-acquisition. Yet there is another aspect to prayer: prayer is an act of giving away. Prayer means sacrifice, unrestricted offering of the whole self, the returning to God of body and soul, everything one possesses and cherishes. There is an altar in heaven upon which the archangel Michael offers the

21. *Sifre* (Deuteronomy 11:13) interprets ולעבדו both with regards to תפלה and תלמוד תורה (cited by Maimonides, *Sefer haMitzvot,* Positive Commandment 5).

souls of the righteous. Thrice daily we petition God to accept our prayers, as well as the fires — the self-sacrifices of Israel — on that altar (ואשי ישראל ותפילתם באהבה תקבל ברצון).[22] Prayer is rooted in the idea that man belongs, not to himself, but that God claims man, and that His claim to man is not partial but total. God the Almighty, sometimes wills man to place himself, like Isaac of old, on the altar, to light the fire and to be consumed as a burnt offering. Does not the story of the עקדה tell us about the great, awesome drama of man giving himself away to God. Of course Judaism is vehemently opposed to human sacrifice. The Bible speaks with indignation and disdain of child sacrifice; physical human sacrifice was declared abominable.[23] Yet the idea that man belongs to God, without qualification, and that God, from time to time, makes a demand upon man to return what is God's to God is an important principle in Judaism. God claimed Moses' life: He demanded the return of body and soul without permitting him to cross the Jordan. Moses complied, and willingly died the "Death by Kiss." God claimed Isaac and Abraham gave Isaac away. What does prayer mean in the light of all this? The restoration of God's ownership rights, which are absolute, over everything He owns. The call:

ויאמר קח נא את בנך את יחידך אשר אהבת את יצחק וכו' והעלהו שם לעלה וכו'.

"Take thy son, thy only son, whom you love so much . . . , and bring him as a burnt offering"[24] is addressed to all men. In response to this call, man engages in prayer, as sacrificial performance.

2

A new equation emerges: prayer equals sacrifice. Initially, prayer helps man discover himself, through understanding and affirmation of his need-awareness. Once the task of self-discovery

22. *Tosfot Menahot* 110a ד"ה ומיכאל.
23. E.g. Deuteronomy 12:31.
24. Genesis 22:2.

is fulfilled, man is summoned to ascend the altar and return everything he has just acquired to God. Man who was told to create himself, objectify himself, and gain independence and freedom for himself, must return everything he considers his own to God.