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REMEMBERING AND HISTORICAL AWARENESS

Most of us are acquainted with the following historical events found in the daily prayer book at the end of morning services:¹

In order that you shall remember the day of your leaving the land of Egypt all the days of your lives . . . ;

Guard yourself . . . lest you forget the things that your eyes saw . . . the day that you stood before God at Horeb;

Remember that which Amalek did to you on the way as you left Egypt . . . desecrate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens . . . it shall not be forgotten;

Remember that which God did to Miriam on the way as you left Egypt;

Remember that Sabbath and keep it holy . . . ;

Remember—do not forget—how you angered God in the wilderness.²

Or, consider “You shall not intimidate the convert (*ger*), for you *know* the soul of the convert since you too were strangers (*gerim*) in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9). Indeed, that the study of Jewish history is, in and of itself, a duty has often been inferred from the passage — “Remember the days of old; consider the years of each generation.”³ The key operational term in these phrases is remember. Presumably, we are being enjoined by the Torah to remember and, hence, to know these historical events. However, a basic philosophic inquiry that all students of history must make is how, or by what means, can we *know* the past? From this point of view, we are concerned with these past events not as things in themselves but as things known

to the historian. "We are asking, not what kinds of events they were and when or where they took place but what it is about them that makes it possible for historians to know them."⁴ Consider, for example, the following situations: Jones, cheering John F. Kennedy in Dallas as the latter drives by him on November 27, 1963, sees him shot and is witness to all the ensuing commotion. Smith, on the other hand, an infant at the time, reads in a history book some thirty years later that John F. Kennedy was shot, etc. Both are aware of the data but which one can truly say that he *knows* — with certainty, immediacy and consistency — these events? We shall return to this question.

Jewish history, inasmuch as it is a record of past events, also needs answers to these questions in the form of a tenable epistemology — a theory of knowledge. Such an inquiry bears considerable importance to the thinking Jew in that the entire course of our lives is highly intercoordinated with the history of the nation as a whole. Every prayer, every Sabbath and every festival draws symbolic sustenance from Israel's historic past. And this certainly involves the problem of remembering.

They (the festivals) all bear one characteristic and together express one idea. All of them are perpetuations of the active Divine manifestations which occurred at the creation of Israel . . . They are sanctities which bring about the ever-fresh revival of Israel's spirit by our absorbing the one fundamental idea that God is the founder and Sustainer of Israel in body and mind. The festivals, therefore, are primarily of national significance.⁵

In fact, the entire well-known system of Hirschian symbolism assumes that, ". . . in order to determine the symbolic character of an object or act, one must take into account the natural, social and historical relationships and especially an object's connection with the personalities of the originator and of the persons addressed."⁶ To Hirsch, the Jewish nation is the only people which does not *believe* in God and in His providence but *knows* of them. "Unto thee it was shown that thou mightest *know* that the Lord, He is God; there is none else besides him."^{6a} "The Jewish people are the only repository of the Revelation of God and His will to mankind . . . Once this knowledge of God and of His Revelation

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of the Law had been experienced by the people of Israel in a fashion which was empirically certain and admitted of no doubt, *it was their duty to hand it down as knowledge, and not as belief, to future generations* (italics mine).⁷ Thus, our epistemological question increases in its relevance.*

Historical knowledge bears on the context of Jewish belief, *sui generis*. The Biblical exhortation that bids us remember the exodus from Egypt, a concept which is embodied in the ceremony of Kiddush, written in the phylacteries and which is potentiated in the holiday of Passover . . . besides its individual importance as an historic event . . . personifies the belief in God's providence and involvement in history.¹¹ It would follow that the *content* of our belief in God's providence would only be as good as the quality of our knowledge about the historical events that personify that providence.¹²

Finally, our epistemological inquiry has ramifications with regard to the credibility and validity of the concept of a Jewish nation, inasmuch as the latter rests upon an historic heritage. Judah HaLevi claimed that the source of our belief descends from the "whole of Israel who knew these things through, first from personal experience and afterwards through uninterrupted tradition which is equal to the former."¹³ Now it seems that this tradition can and should also be interpreted via our inquiry: how

* Interestingly, however, in Grunfeld's introduction to Hirsch, he states, "The relationship of the Jew to God is therefore, not the outcome of a 'personal encounter' in the sense of the modern Jewish existentialists. It is based on experience, an uninterrupted tradition from one generation to another—vicarious experience—is the basis of our knowledge of God for all time to come."⁸ I think he is mistaken here. First, our present knowledge of God, Revelation, etc. rests on a more wholesome foundation than "vicarious experience"—it rests upon a form of first-hand experience: archetypal re-experiencing. Second, the existentialists do grant, I think, that the historical experience is the rational foundation of our belief in God. What they stress, however, is that each person must experience this history within the context of a personal encounter. This emphasis on individual encounter was stressed by the *midrashim* relevant to the story of creation.⁹ It is written that each person at Sinai experienced the *Shekhinah* in an unique, individual manner. The existentialists had merely added that we, today, must also re-experience Revelation, etc., in individual ways. But this in no way detracts from the strength of the basis *masorah*—if anything, it deepens its import and meaning.¹⁰

certainly can we know this tradition? It is one thing to say that one *believes* that the Torah was given at Sinai, for example, because one's rabbi told him so and because his rebbi's rebbi told the latter so, etc., but with what justification could such a person say, "I *know* that the Torah was given at Sinai."?

Let us now return to our case of Jones and Smith. I suggest that only Jones can say that he knows of the historical event in question. One aspect of knowledge that he has over Smith's is that Jones formerly lived the event. When they both remember the event, say, twenty years later, Jones "knows" the event because he is *re-living* it whereas Smith is merely *knowing of* a tradition.

This idea of re-living history (originally suggested by Collingwood) bears considerably upon our present inquiry. When an historian asks why David killed Uriah the Hittite, he is really trying to re-live the thoughts that David cogitated which caused him so to act. In order for an historian to be able to say that he knows that David assassinated Uriah, he must re-think and reconstruct the entire situation that had occurred and the way in which the historical agents, themselves, experienced the event. In this fashion, intuitional re-living eliminates the problem faced when the historian is presented with little more information about an event than some old records and arrowheads. By re-living the event, the historian actually transcends history's greatest nemesis: the limits of time and space.¹⁴

I believe that there is evidence to suggest that Judaism subscribes to an epistemology entailing the re-living of historical events. *Ramban* has formulated a rule enabling us to recognize the relevance and timelessness of the event of Jewish history when he emphasized that "The deeds of the Fathers are a sign for the children."¹⁵ The forefathers of Judaism: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, *et al.*, are to be considered the ethical exemplars of the Jewish people, for it was with them that the God-Man dialogue that defines the relationship of each Jew to his Creator began.¹⁶

What is a *sign*? I think that a sign does not simply mean that we refer consciously to the precedented activities of the forefathers or that we may imitate them when we make our plans, although this is certainly part of it. What is being hinted at here

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is the possibility that the basic historical events and biographical data of Jewish history are considered as *archetypes* that are an inherited and latent part of the Jew's collective unconscious. It is this intrapsychic endowment which allows us to re-live Jewish history and is, in turn, what allows us to be able to *know* Jewish history.¹⁷

Archetypes—a concept which demands more attention than I can give it in the confines of this paper—are composed of mankind's earliest experiences with the real world. The information culled from these experiences, argued Carl Gustav Jung, is conceptualized in a thought-form that can create mental schema which correspond to some aspect of the real environment.¹⁸ Accordingly, man's experience in the real world will always be a by-product of (1) an inner predisposition towards perceiving the world in a certain manner, as indicated by a specific archetype and (2) the actual nature of objects-in-the-world. The important point is that they are not a learned characteristic of personality but are already present in the substrata of the psyche.¹⁹

What I would like to suggest is that the "deeds of the fathers" *qua* "sign for the children" is a set of archetypes of specific significance to the Jew. We could well say that, "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are not principles to be comprehended but are lives to be continued. The life of he who joins the covenant of Abraham continues the life of Abraham. For the present is not apart from the past. 'Abraham is still standing before God.' Abraham endures forever. *We are* Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."²⁰ This rabbinic maxim seems to suggest that certain historic trends are rationally accessible to the mind through archetypes.* Using this concept we can easily find further evidence of historic facts that were felt to be contained in the psyche as archetypes.

Tradition tells us that all of the children of Israel who existed

* Rather than merely re-enacting an historical event outside of its time, which would violate the event's historic essence, I am suggesting that the historian is actually re-enacting events whose image is retained "in-time." Historical facts, thus, can retain their essential temporality, i.e., *qua* historical event they are time bound, and yet can be truly relived years after their origination. This would readily assuage J. W. Meiland's criticism (in his *Scepticism and Historical Knowledge*, p. 81).

and the souls of those who were to exist were assembled at Sinai to hear Moses give the law.²¹ There is a practical application that is based on this tradition: a Jewish slave who refuses to accept his manumission at the appropriate time has his ear bored against the doorpost.²² The commentaries explain that “the ear that heard at Sinai” of that man shall have no other master but God deserves to be so castigated, measure for measure.²³ Obviously, the basis for this reasoning was that all Israel was at Sinai. While I would not deny the literal interpretation of this tradition its place, let me only suggest that it takes on a fuller meaning when understood archetypally, viz., Israel’s experience at Sinai is carried as an archetypal experience that is ever active in the depths of every Jewish personality. It might very well be the latent force behind the personality of those Jews who, even when no longer normatively religious, so violently resist moral stagnation, social corruption and political tyranny. Revelation—and its truths—is an event which we continue to experience through the archetype of Sinai.

Even in daily prayer we find indications of the rabbinic recognition of the efficacy of archetypes. In the petition prayers (*tachanun*) recited on Monday and Thursday, we entreat God “see before you the sacrifice of *one* for the sake of Israel.”²⁴ At first glance, this passage refers to the sacrifice of Isaac, yet the author conspicuously deleted the specific name. I conjecture that this was done to show that the sacrifice of Isaac is a symbol for all the altruistic suicides and martyrs that have occurred in Jewish history. It was Isaac’s original experience with self-sacrifice (even the potential for self-sacrifice) that created the archetype for such selflessness throughout time. It now represents the potential for any Jew to give his life for God and nation.

Finally, the *medrash* refers to the following incident.²⁵ Rabbi Yehudah HaNassi once addressed a letter to the Emperor Antoninus by referring to himself as “Your servant, Yehudah, to the Emperor Antoninus.” When R. Yehudah’s colleagues asked him why he so denigrated himself to a mere temporal ruler, he responded, “Am I better than our father Jacob, who called himself ‘servant’ in deference to Esau?”^{25a} Certain commentators have asked why R. Yehudah felt that the situation of Jacob

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and Esau could serve as a justification for his actions since the *medrash* also mentions that the consensus of Talmudic opinion did not look upon Jacob's humility in that case with approval?²⁶ The response offered is that once Jacob opted to humble himself in the presence of Esau, the initial experience for the archetype of such behavior throughout Jewish history originated. Moreover, the archetype concretized itself with the repetition and reinforcement of this defensive attitude toward 'Esau' throughout later Jewish history. Thus, R. Yehudah, though he lived some fifteen hundred years after Jacob, acted as he was predisposed to act by a latent but powerful archetype for such action. He, after conscious reflection on this subliminal prompt, chose to follow its suggestion. Indeed, he could truly be able to say that he *knew* what Jacob meant when the latter said 'your servant' for he had re-enacted a past patriarchal action.

In conclusion, I have suggested that re-living Jewish history through archetypes called the "deeds of the fathers" facilitates or, indeed, makes possible the fullest observance of many of the precepts and *zachor* imperatives that were mentioned at the outset of this paper. We no longer "imagine" ourselves as if we left Egypt, we do not assume that we were, somehow, at Horeb and we do not merely review the historical accounts of the Torah. On the contrary we say, "I was at Sinai, Amalek fought with me and I, left Egypt."

The Jewish soul compresses five thousand years of history within it. It follows that in order for a Jew to know himself he must be aware of the history of his people. The Bible would, accordingly, be an affirmation of this collective experience of the people of Israel with God. We each re-experience this collective encounter with God on an individual basis.²⁷ Indeed, "We live in the Jews of the past with the Jews of the present."²⁸

NOTES

1. A custom established by the kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572) who declared that, "He who recited these six remembrances daily is assured a portion in the world-to-come."

2. Deuteronomy 9:7; this refers to the incident of the Golden Calf.

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3. Deuteronomy 32:7, see also *Toledot Am Olam*, Rothenberg, p. 15.
4. Collingwood, R. G., *The Idea of History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 3, whose concept of "re-living history" impressed me with its relevance to Jewish history.
5. Hirsch, Samson Raphael, *Horeb*, London: Soncino Press, 1968, p. 85.
6. *Ibid.*, p. cx-cxi.
- 6a. Deuteronomy 4:35. See, however, note 12, *infra*.
7. *Ibid.*, p. xlIII.
8. *Ibid.*, p. xlIV.
9. Haggigah 13a; Mechilta Exodus 15:3.
10. See Guttman, Julius, *Philosophies of Judaism*, New York: Schocken, 1970, p. 72-73, for Saadia's views on tradition and historical knowledge.
11. "Remember this day that you went out of Egypt . . ." Exodus 13:3; "And you shall tell your sons . . ." Exodus 13:8. Cf. *Sefer HaChinuch* § 21.
12. However, I refer the reader to the *Chinuch* § 25. Here, an important distinction is made between the actual basic precept of faith, *emunah*, which requires only that one believe in God's Oneness and that He redeemed us from Egypt. This belief can be purely verbal. On the other hand, to be able to justify this belief is already a *mitzvah min ha-muvcha*, a supererogatory level of the precept. Thus, we must grant that he who "merely" believes in these historical events is certainly fulfilling the basic precept of *emunah*.
13. Judah HaLevi, *The Kuzari*, New York: Schocken, 1971, p. 47.
14. The issue I have raised here is by no means a simple one. It involves no less of a controversy than that between the Positivists and the Idealists with regard to the exact nature of historical knowledge. Space limitations have prohibited a lengthy discussion of the relevant aspects of this debate. The interested reader may inquire with the author. Some of the useful sources on the topic were: Meiland, J., *Skepticism and Historical Knowledge*, Random House, 1965 (p. 81), White, M., *Foundations of Historical Knowledge*, Harper and Row, 1965 (p. 3, 148), and Walsh, W. H., *Philosophy of History*, Harper and Row, 1960 (p. 44).
15. Ramban, Genesis 12:6; Sotah 34b.
16. "I have known him (Abraham) to the end that he may command his children and his household after him; that they may keep the way of the Lord" (Genesis 18:19).
17. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik has also made reference to the import of re-living past experiences of Jewish history. While he does not use the term *archetype*, he makes it clear that the ability to experience history as an ontical mode of time-in-the-present is fundamental to religious awareness. "Experiential Memory . . . recalls experiences by evoking the feelings of the past event . . . whatever was horrible and frightening should be remembered as horrible and frightening, no matter how much time has elapsed since the event transpired . . . In short, when remembering the past, the Jew re-lives the event as if it were a present reality." In *A Conspectus of the Public Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik: Shiurei Harav*, New York: Hamevaser, 1974, p. 55-56. What I have added is the relation of re-living Jewish history to *Maaseh Avot Simon Lebanim*

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and how, in fact, one is able to re-live our history.

18. The interested reader who desires a more detailed discussion of how Jung's so-called esoteric theorizations can be fitted in with modern psychohistory may, again, inquire of the author or read: C. G. Jung, *Man, Myth and Symbol*, Macmillan, 1973, "Structure of the Psyche", *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959, p. 342, "Archetypes and the Unconscious", *Works*, Vol. 9, 1, p. 136, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, Random House, 1961.

19. The archetype of *mother*, for example, produces in the mind of the subject a preconception that is composed of characteristics of motherhood as all mankind has experienced it. These schema are influential—never causative—in determining how a child will perceive his real mother.

20. Heschel, A. J., *God in Search of Man*, New York: Harper and Row, 1955, p. 201.

21. *Midrash Shemot Rabba* (Yitro) 28:4.

22. Exodus 21:5, 6.

23. Rashi, *loc. cit.* and *Kiddushin* 22b (Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai . . .).

24. *Ve'hu Rachum*, par. 4—probably composed during the persecutions of the seventh century (Birnbaum).

25. *Bereishit Rabba* 75:6.

25a. This occurred on the eve of their historic encounter.

26. *Avnei Eizal*.

27. Dimont, Max, *Jews, God and History*, New York: New American Library, 1962, p. 351.

28. Heschel, *op. cit.*, p. 423.