The Fundamentals of Judaism

Steven E. Langnas

Israel—The People

THE expressions Hebrew, Israeli, and Jew have often been used interchangeably and as synonyms. The Bible calls Abraham *Ibri*, Hebrew, meaning "from the other side," probably because he immigrated from the other, eastern side of Euphrates. Abraham's grandchild Jacob had an additional name, Israel. Therefore, his twelve sons and their descendents were called Children of Israel, the nation or people of Israel. The word Jew comes from Judah, the most prominent of Jacob's sons. Jew became the name for the entire people who, in the Judean kingdom, survived the downfall of the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 before the Common Era, while Israel's ten tribes were led into captivity. Nowadays for that reason, the people are called Jewish, their belief Judaism, their language Hebrew and their country Israel.

The people of Israel started as one family, descending from Abraham the Hebrew, who lived ca. 3800 years ago. The monotheistic belief represented by Abraham and the "covenant with God" he concluded, continually renewed by these descendents, characterized this family as followers of a special faith. The family did not impose any exclusive claims to this faith—quite the opposite—it also tried to include those of different beliefs.

This family, suffused with God, and those who joined them increased in numbers. They viewed the Torah as their Basic Law received from God and appropriated the country promised them by the Lord as their homeland. They developed the character of a nation, a people with a common language living in a specific geographically defined area, which had common memories, shared a mutual destiny, and pursued national independence.

Based on their mutual origin, the Jews everywhere consider themselves members of one family—surely a large and often widely—scattered family, but nevertheless still one family. The membership in this family is transferred by the mother. The child of every Jewish woman is considered a member of the family. But the affiliation with Judaism was

never exclusively restricted to birth. It was open to everyone at all times, and whoever shares the faith with this family is welcomed into it. Thus, someone who has converted to Judaism is not only a partner in the faith of the children of Israel, sharing their heritage and privileges, but also takes on the burden and sufferings.

By its acceptance into the Jewish faith, the converted person joins the Jewish people; by accepting the religious duties of the present and the spiritual tasks of the future, this person is simultaneously committed to the mutual past.

In the emphasis and respect of the particularities, this unique family reflects the noblest form of the universe. The universality inherent in the Israeli faith finds its expression not only in its theology and in vision of the future, but especially in the make-up of its people. This apparently "exclusive" people comprises people of all skin colors and an enormous spectrum of cultural ideas. Despite the differences existing between them and the multifarious languages they speak, Jews consider themselves related—as brothers who descend from one Semitic family. And, even though it is religion that unites them and outsiders are absorbed as members into Judaism because of their conversion, this feeling of being related is extremely strong. In fact, Jews who rebel against the faith and its fundamentals and have rejected its commandments continue to be considered as Jews. In most cases, they continue to feel connected with this community, which lets the secret of this family appear to be even more unfathomable.

Even though it is a people of small numbers, separated and varied, Israel was never a people that withdrew. Even though it stood alone for itself, it never stood apart. Jewish history is closely tied with that of all other nations and kingdoms. "Jews," writes Ernest van den Haag, "have participated to a greater degree in the history and development of humanity, influenced, founded, and expedited more and especially suffered greater than any other people." The history of the Jews and the rest of the world have mutually impacted one another even if western scholars under the influence of a society dominated by Christianity often tended to regard the role of the Jews and Judaism in the wrong light and to treat everything pertaining to Jews and Judaism in a condescending manner.

Although Jews and Judaism have been disowned, rejected, objected to, persecuted and restricted in all eras, the people itself and its holy books have often put forces into motion that had—as a consequence—significant revolutionary changes and progress in the western religions, natural and medical sciences, and the social philosophies. The contribu-

tions of individual Jews in all areas of creative works, the promotion of human knowledge, the alleviation of medical illnesses, the development of trade and commerce, fill entire libraries. The traditional Jewish emphasis on social righteousness through social action has perceptible consequences up into modern times.

If a people numerically insignificant to such a degree—"the smallest of all nations," ham'at mikol ha-amim, to quote the words of the Torah—has demonstrated such achievements and survived for so long regardless of all assimilation or even annihilation attempts, something larger must be behind all this, apart from the ability of a people as such.

Israel—its God

"Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is ONE" (Deut. 6:4).

These words give expression to Israel's deep conviction of the existence of one indivisible God through whose will the universe and all contained in it was created.

In a radical renunciation of polytheism and idolatry, Abraham the Hebrew was the first to express this monotheistic faith and therewith became the progenitor of the Hebrews, or, as they were later referred to, the Israelis or Jews.

Abraham was not the first person to emulate this spiritual truth. Even the Torah mentions that Henoch and Noach, having lived before Abraham, were righteous men who "walked with God." They, too, believed in the existence of one spiritual being, worshipped it and lived in accordance with its wishes. There may have been others also. Maimonides believed earlier humanity knew of the one and true God, but their insights and faith in him were lost. Historians might find reports of other men who expressed similar creeds earlier. But, it was Abraham who is regarded as the founder of the first monotheistic belief of the world because it was he, contrary to others whose monotheism resembled an oasis in a spiritual desert, drying out and disappearing with their death, who devoted himself to the propagation of his faith. He passed his faith to his son Isaac, from whom it was passed to his son Jacob (Israel) then to his twelve sons, the founders of the tribes of Israel and from there into the current of Israel's history and that of the whole of humanity. "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice...." (Gen. 18:19).

The existence of God, the creation of the world through His will or God's concern about the perfection of what He created can, of course,

not be scientifically proven.

The concept of the divine to which the Jewish people persistently clung allowed no compromise regarding the all-embracing character of God, His spiritual nature, and His unity.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," read the first words of the Torah. He is the God of the cosmos. "I am the Lord your God, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery," are the first words of the Ten Commandments on the occasion of that historical revelation to Israel. The universal God is the same God Who brought freedom to Israel and to Whom Israel declared its subservience.

The Jewish concept of God is that of a moral God demanding virtuous, ethical lives and justice from all of humanity. He is a universal God reigning over the entire world. If the expression "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" or the "God of Israel" is used in Jewish prayer, this does not mean that God belongs solely to the Jews or that He is their special God.

This would indicate, either God's reign is limited or there are other gods who take care of other peoples. By saying "my father" a child does not deny that the man of whom it speaks is also the father of its brothers and sisters.

The expression "God of Israel" indicates a particular relationship that Israel believes to have with the universal God based on the covenant, a covenant He made with Abraham and which was repeatedly renewed and confirmed on later occasions during the odyssey of the people.

If we say "God of Israel," this is only to remind us of the covenant with the universal God, unto whom the whole of humanity is subordinated.

The Jewish concept of God allows Him no physical attributes. The expressions in the Torah "God's face," "God's hand," "God's feet" and "God's throne" are symbolic figures of speech, because there is no other linguistic possibility to describe certain attributes of God. Only inability of the human language to formulate things in the spiritual world in words causes such phrasings. Concerning this, the sages of the Talmud say "The Torah talks in the language of people." In this sense, the spiritual attributes of God are summarized as follows: 'God, God, Omnipotent, merciful and kind, slow to anger, with tremendous [resources of love] and truth. He remembers deeds of love for thousands [of generations], forgiving sin, rebellion and error. He does not clear [those who do not repent] [...]'. (Ex. 34:6–7). This paragraph, known as "the thirteen attributes" (midot), refers "exclusively to the inexhaustible love and the eternal righteousness of God. This is deeply rooted in Jewish

consciousness as the highest expression of the essential nature of God through the human language." (J. H. Hertz in a Commentary on the Daily Prayer Book).

The Jewish concept of God also rejects any compromise concerning the spirituality of God. Likewise, the idea that a human could become God or that God adopted a human form is repulsive to the Jewish religious spirit. Jewish reason and faith cannot accept the idea that the infinite divinity could be restricted to the dimension of the mortal.

In addition, the Jews were prohibited from the visual portrayal of God. The second of the Ten Commandments: "Do not make any picture nor any kind of portrayal, ... do not subjugate yourself to it and do not serve it" was understood in such a manner that this referred not only to those cases in which the worshipper really believed a picture is God, but also to those in which it saw a God-representing symbol in the picture. The sin of the golden calf did not consist of the Israelis suddenly rejecting their belief in God, but in that they insisted that He could be portrayed by a tangible picture.

If we speak of God as "our father" and of the people as the "children of God," we mean all people who walk in His paths and are thus children of the Lord in the spiritual sense.

If we use the technical achievements of people and its growing capacity to control the physical world in order to question the role of God, then these achievements are not exactly a part of the blessings given to humankind by the Eternal Entity. "And God blessed them; and God said unto them: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creepeth upon the earth'." (Gen. 1:28).

The faithful person humbly sees not God's absence in these wonderful achievements, but rather His presence:

> "When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers,
> the moon and the stars, which Thou hast established;
> What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?
> and the son of man, that Thou thinkest of him? ...
> Thou hast made him to have dominion over the works of
> Thy hands; ...
> O the Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:3–10)

The person, viewing God with disbelief, is tempted to see himself as an omniscient creature, subject to no laws or rules other than those it estab-

lishes itself. To worship humankind in general or one special person in particular is the worst form of idolatry there is, as the person, due to his conferred intelligence and his spiritual capacity is God's most highly developed creation.

To bear the consequences of yoke of the heavenly kingdom means to shed the yoke of human domination and dictatorship. "You should be my servants," says God, "and not servants of my servants." The people are given the choice. Some think they can choose the middle course between these forms of subservience and, in this way, be free from both. This hope has always proven to be illusory. If it is not the one form of subservience then it is the other. The Jewish people has made its choice.

Israel—its Torah

In the center of attention of faith in a living God stands the Jewish conviction that He somehow imparted his commandments and intentions to the creature that He endowed with a free will and that He urged it to be an obedient servant. The entire entity of Judaism is based on the acknowledgment of a spiritual experience, which was granted to our predecessors as a community, as well as later spiritual revelations of the prophets of Israel. The unusual historical event I refer to is the heralding of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, seven weeks after the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. God's will was also revealed in the written Torah that Moses recorded based on the divine prophecy during the forty years after the exodus from Egypt. Along with the five books of Moses, the Pentateuch, we believe God's will is also expressed in the oral tradition, the oral Torah. This also originated in Sinai, was revealed there to Moses who then taught it to the religious leader of Israel himself.

The written Torah itself points to this oral form of transmission. The oral Torah, explaining and detailing the written Torah, was passed on from generation to generation until it was finally written down in the 2nd century of the Common Era and created the cornerstone of the Talmud.

Non-traditional Jews consider the Torah an inspiring writing by great men, a document of the effort of people to come closer to God. In accordance with this view, there is nothing eternal and nothing divine in the Torah. It can contain errors, just as they can happen to great people. If this is the case, how could they be more competent regarding questions of behavior or in the embodiment of the truth as the ethic of Aristotle, of someone like Kant or Spinoza? If it were only a law of ethics compiled

by people, everyone would be entitled to leave out, change or improve whatever they don't like, and even according to the mood of each generation and every religious leader. That is exactly the opinion on which the non-traditionalists based themselves in order to justify the wide-ranging changes they have introduced into the Jewish practice.

If one attempts to envisage the special nature of God's revelation to Israel and the prophets, it becomes clear that the Torah is a recording through which God is trying to come closer to mankind. If it is to possess any kind of lasting value or truth, it must not be seen as an intellectual product of people, but must be seen as God's will, which he imparted to mortal and finite people. No interpretation of Judaism is valid in Jewish eyes if it does not presume God as the source of the Torah.

What is the Torah? Seen technically, it is the five books of Moses. That is the Written Torah (Tora sche-Bichtav). The parchment roll on which it is written and which is preserved in the Holy Ark (Alt: holy chest) in the synagogue is referred to as the Torah Scroll (Alt: roll) (Sefer Tora). In a certain sense, this is actually the constitution of the Jewish people. But, this constitution was not proclaimed by people, but revealed by God. The Torah also includes the Oral Torah (Tora sch-B'alPeh), which "Moses received [...] from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua. Joshua transmitted it to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly." (Ethics of the Fathers, 1:1).

The Oral Teachings contain the finer points of the commandments, the details concerning general principles of the Torah, and the manner in which the commandments are to be applied. For example, the Torah prohibits "work" during Sabbath. What is meant by "work?" How is the term "work" defined regarding Sabbath? Excepting the suggestions, such as the work of gathering wood, lighting a fire, cooking and baking, the Written Teachings say nothing further about this—but the Oral Teachings do.

The Written Torah commands that animals used as food are to be slaughtered "as I have commanded."

How is this slaughter to be carried out according to Jewish rites? Which rules are to be applied during this ritual slaughter? The Written Torah does not say—but the Oral one does.

The Written Torah prescribes the death penalty for various crimes. Which legal rules and procedures are to be observed before such a sentence can be passed? Where are the limits? The Written Torah does not say—but the Oral one does.

Finally, the Oral Torah was recorded in writing. During the 2nd centu-

ry of the Common Era, it was recapitulated in the Mishna, which then created the cornerstone for the Gemara. This consists of the comprehensive notes and minutes of the discussions regarding various cases and from various legal disputes conducted by the sages. Together, Mishna and Gemara constitute the Talmud.

The Torah, Written and Oral, is thus the teaching that instructs people how they are to live. Although it mainly speaks to Israelites, instructions for all people can be found in it. It deals with every aspect of human life. Ritual laws, usually considered to be "religious," are only a part of the entirety of the commandments. The commandments of the Torah, its statutes and rules, include the entire spectrum of human and social behavior. The Torah asserts its administration of justice in areas other religions allocate to ethical or moral domains or which belong to the jurisdiction of civil or penal law. Even its non-legal parts and those containing no statutes emphasize intellectual truths and grant insight into the finer, non-legal, ethical and moral behavioral norms.

The rest of the books of the Hebraic bible, recorded during the space of many centuries, consist of the Prophets (Nevi'im) and the Writings (Ketuvim). These books contain the teachings of the prophets during 700 years of Jewish history. They relate the prophets' vision of God and their perpetual fight to lead the people toward more closely observing the teachings of the Torah; from their struggle against the many false prophets and priests who often misled the masses, causing them to alienate themselves from God and the Torah. One of these books is the inspiring Book of Psalms, which reflects the deepest religious feelings of the people.

The Torah, together with Nevi'im and Ketuvim, is called the Tenach. (Non-Jews refer to it as the "Old Testament," but for Jews it still constitutes the only Testament). However, in the broadest sense, Torah-study does not mean only engrossment in the written and oral teachings, but in the entire subject matter touched on by Rabbinical legislation and interpretation of the Torah, as this developed through the centuries, because the Torah was always a living law, constantly applied by the people to actual, often changing conditions. Even though these annotations must be considered a consequence of human efforts, they are an integral part of the entire subject matter of religious justice, for the Torah grants them an authoritative position to change laws according to necessity: "And thou shalt do according to the tenor of the sentence, which they shall declare unto thee from that place which the Lord shall choose; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they shall teach thee. According to the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment

which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do; thou shalt not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare unto thee, to the right hand, nor to the left." (Deut. 17:10–11).

The Torah is the embodiment of the Jewish faith. It comprises the conditions of the covenant of the Jewish people with God. It is that which makes a Jew a Jew.

Halacha—The Jewish way

In Judaism, articles of faith and religious theories cannot be separated from certain acts. The theology of Judaism is largely contained in the Halacha, in the Jewish legal system, which does not deal merely with theory, but mostly with practice. If one can say that Judaism is based on the dual principle of the sovereignty of God and the holiness of the individual, this philosophy, as all its philosophical foundations, is clearly reflected in the Halacha.

Halacha is the general term for Jewish law; it also means the final authoritative decision concerning specific questions. In the first instance, it is based on the biblical statutes and commandments in the Written and Oral Torah, then upon the entire rabbinical legislation and decrees, including the religious-judicial decision, written down throughout the ages by the great rabbinical scholars in the form of responses and commentaries. All these constitute an authoritative basis and lay down the legitimate precedence cases for the process of religious-judicial decisions continuing in our era. The word Halacha itself means "the path one treads." Halacha is practice, not theory; Halacha is law, not philosophy. Although faith is the basis from which Halacha developed, its main emphasis is: action.

The Halacha deals with the correct application of the commandments (Mitzvoth) in every situation and in every state of affairs.

(The Mitzvoth of biblical origin are essentially unchangeable. Those of rabbinical origin can be modified under certain circumstances and conditions through authoritative and authorized scholars).

Halacha deals with ethical obligations and religious duties.

Halacha as the Jewish legal system includes all aspects and every relationship of life, whether between people themselves or people and God. Therefore, the Halacha does not only deal with such areas normally properly considered ritual and religion, but also with those generally allocated by non-Jewish scholars to the areas of morals and ethics or civil and criminal law.

To the same degree as one can say that the Halacha is all-embracing,

one can also say the Jewish religion is all-embracing. There is no area of human behavior with which it does not deal, or about which it does not give instructions.

Since all aspects of life can be considered subordinated to the directives in the Halacha, the Jewish religion—if understood correctly—cannot be seen as merely something consisting of many parts of life or separate from other aspects and interests. A person's eating habits, sex life, business ethics, social life, pleasures, artistic fulfillment—all of these stand under the auspices of the religious law, the religious values, and the spiritual guidelines of Judaism. The Jewish religion cannot be separated from any other part of life and is not content merely with ritual acts that have a mystical significance in a supernatural world. If it is perfectly and exactly observed, the Jewish religion is life itself and confers the values to guide the entire life.

This corresponds to the nature of the religious tradition passed on to the Jews. For this reason, the prophets fought just as forcefully for social justice and the elimination of poverty as they spoke out for the sanctification of Sabbath and the abolition of idolatry. All books on Judaism emphasize the fact that Judaism represents a way of life, that it means action and not only faith. Although the central role played by religious teaching cannot be overlooked, the emphasis lies on action. The idea of Jewish faith is not done justice in religious teachings or declarations, but in the practical application of the Torah, Mitzvoth ma'assijot.

The conceptual truths and their values mean little if they are not transformed into a way of life. The Halacha is the means of applying the concepts and values in daily life. Halacha prescribes the means to put theory, principles and faith into concrete terms. The Halacha, its focus directed towards the application of and compliance of the commandments (Mitzvoth), is used to define that which otherwise lies in the world of the abstract and simultaneously to sanctify that which otherwise lies in the world of the mundane.

The Halacha is the Jewish way to secure and eternalize the Jewish way of life. If one leaves the Halacha unheeded or rejects it, the Jewish way of life will gradually disappear; and with its disappearance, the special and cultivated values of Judaism will fade away. This does not happen all at once; it may take one or two generations, but it does occur. This process is called assimilation. It starts when Jews renounce the obligatory character of the Halacha and ends with the disappearance of Judaism. This is not just a matter of polemic, but of a historical fact that has unfortunately been repeated over and over under various conditions and circumstances. And there where every clear observance of Judaism

has disappeared, a threatening anti-Semitic crisis remained the only thing that halted the total physical assimilation of the Jewish people.

"Love thy neighbor as thyself"——The Leitmotif of Ethics and Morals in Jewish Life

Let us now take a glimpse at the Jewish world of charity. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is a fitting title for a lecture on Jewish ethics and morals because this sentence is the cornerstone of our entire system of human behavior. A famous story in the Talmud (Shabbos 31a) illustrates the all-embracing importance of this biblical sentence. "A pagan came before Shammai (a famous rabbi)," and said to him: "Make me a proselyte but on condition that you teach me the entire Torah (The Torah is the name of the first five books of the bible, but it is also a generic term for the entirety of Jewish teachings), while I am standing on one foot!" Shammai drove him off with the builder's measuring rod that he had in his hand. When he appeared before 'Hillel' (another famous rabbi), he told him: "Teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot!" Hillel replied: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Now go and learn it!" And the pagan converted to Judaism.

Hillel's words "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor" is the other side of "love thy neighbor as thyself."

It is very impressive to say charity is the basis of the Jewish system of ethics and morals, but to really comprehend this system we should ask ourselves the question: what exactly is meant by loving our neighbors as we do ourselves. Let us be honest: Our self-love is very strong. Is it really possible to love another person as one loves oneself? We can answer this question with another question: Why did Hillel not answer the pagan directly with our biblical verse "love thy neighbor as thyself?" Why did he use the negative formulation of this sentence? "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor."

If one wants, one can read a quantitative relationship in "love thy neighbor as thyself." It means, we are obliged to love each person to exactly the same degree as we love ourselves. That is almost impossible! Yet, the negative formulation helps us to understand this command in the qualitative sense. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, a Rabbi in Frankfurt am Main about 150 years ago, explained the implications of this concept more precisely. "Love thy neighbor" thus does not mean: "Love the personality of your fellow-man," but "Love his well-being as your own." If he mourns, we should grieve for his suffering. We should

rejoice in his happiness as our own. We should contribute to his well-being with the same joyfulness as if it were for our own well-being. And we should avert suffering from him, as if we are affected ourselves. If we fulfill the demand of recognizing the well-being of our fellow-man as a condition for our own welfare, if we do not see someone else's success as an obstacle to our own, then we know that we love our neighbor in the qualitative sense.

This definition sounds very nice, very idealistic. But, what does it mean in reality? How shall we transform this definition of charity into practice? We will see that the Jewish ideology of charity is defined in a very practical, feasible manner.

One of our greatest teachers, Moses Maimonides, having lived in the 11th century, describes exactly what charity is (Hilchos Avel 14):

To attend to the sick, to console the bereaved, to fit out the poor bride so that she can marry, to take care of passing travelers, to do all that is necessary for the funeral of a deceased, and also to gladden the young couple on its wedding day. Those are the acts of love one is to practice oneself, personally, with one's own energy and for which there is no defined dimension.

Rabbi Yaakov Tzevi Mecklenburg, who was active in Germany in the 19th century, offers us an additional list of criteria how we can fulfill charity:

Be true and not insincere to your fellow-man, treat your fellow-man with respect. Ask about his welfare, sympathize with his sorrow, be friendly to him, give him the benefit of the doubt, be prepared to make efforts on his behalf, be willing to lend him things when he needs them.

Even if we are not called upon to love our fellow man to the same extent as we love ourselves, this list is yet very challenging. A lot is demanded of us to fulfill with the commandment of neighborly love.

Why does God want us to look after our fellow humans and to stand by him in good and bad times anyway?

Firstly: we know that every person is created in the image of God. If we treat our fellow-man with love, we automatically show our love of God.

Secondly: We must never forget that the verse containing the commandment of altruism reads: "Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord." The emphasis is placed on "I am the Lord." Without God and His directives, we cannot get along with our fellow-man. Human legal systems without godly content do not last long on the stage of history. And we know what a mockery the human legal system

has made out of righteousness. Yes, if God is not present in a human legal system, the basis of altruism is not strong enough to survive.

There is another reason why it is worth fulfilling the commandment of charity: It is stated in Psalms (121:5), that the eternal shades us—He is our shadow. How can we understand this simile? Just as our shadow does everything we do, God treats us as we treat our fellow-man. If we are generous with God, God is also generous with us.

The first words of every introduction into Jewish daily life must speak of goodness, because we believe that the Jewish faith and the observance of the rituals are especially directed at perfecting human relationships and creating a better society.

The "good heart" is a demand of the Talmud for a truly devout and law abiding Jew. The lack of a "good heart," which can be revealed in innumerable things, is considered a flaw in the religious perfection of the individual. An ethical action, a deed of good or charity carried out without ulterior motives, performed only in the belief that it is God's will, falls absolutely in the category of a religious act and fulfills a religious commandment. It is a legitimate religious experience, because it grants spiritual satisfaction. The Talmud says, "Whoever always strives to be pious and holy, should comply with all secular law." (Baba Kamma 30a). These laws deal with financial, civil, and criminal matters. Likewise, acts of injustice, cruelty, dishonesty, fraud, and unfriendliness, are considered both offenses against God and crimes against humanity. They are seen as severe religious sins, perhaps even more serious than violations against rituals.

"If someone studies the scriptures and oral teachings, and attends on the disciples of the wise, is honest in business, and speaks pleasantly to persons, what do people then say concerning him? 'Happy the father who taught him Torah, happy the teacher who taught him Torah; ... for this man has studied the Torah ... look how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds!' But if someone studies the Torah, attends on the disciples of the wise, but is dishonest in business, and discourteous in his relations with people, what do people say about him? 'Woe unto him who studied the Torah, woe unto his father who taught him Torah; woe unto his teacher who taught him Torah!' This man studied the Torah: 'Look, how corrupt are his deeds, how ugly his ways!'" (Joma 86a). If a religious scholar or law-abiding person acts in a way that provokes such a comment, this is considered to be a desecration of the godly name, one of the most serious spiritual offences.

To emphasize the godly order of values, a Talmudic sage teaches, "When they first bring a person to his [final] judgment, they ask him,

'Did you deal faithfully in business?'" (Shabbos 31a).

The biblical call to walk God's path was understood since earliest times as an appeal to the people to emulate God's attributes of compassion and goodness. "It hath been told thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord doth require of thee: only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." (Micah 6:8).

This constant emphasis on righteousness, compassion, and goodness over a long time did not remain without consequences: Compassion and social justice were distinguishing features in Jewish community life already a long time before the Common Era and remained so throughout the centuries.

Classical philosophy praises the four cardinal virtues: courage, righteousness, wisdom, and moderation. But, in Jewish ethics, the attributes of generosity, pity, sympathy, and mercy are cherished.

Although the entire sphere of Jewish laws can be divided into laws dealing with the relationship of people to their creator and those dealing with the relationships of people among themselves, both fields often overlap. As far as that goes, even the ritual commandments appear to carry along ethical consequences, as the purpose of many details lie in the perfection of the ethical-moral attributes, which observe these rituals. Many biblical commentators saw an ethical basis in such prohibitions such as mixing milk with meat or eating blood. There, where the ritual compliance itself did not contribute to such a purpose, the sages often provided the ritual with meaningful exegeses, which emphasize the moral standards and the ethical values. (For instance, the exclusion of leaven for Passover was taken as an occasion to equate leaven with pride and arrogance and to admonish the Jews to eliminate these also).

It is assumed to be a psychological truth that behavioral ideals can be better anchored if they are connected to concrete, everyday actions, as when they are only derived from symbolic or philosophical abstractions. The ethical imperative and values of Judaism may have their strength and historic durability exactly because of their ritualistic foundations. We should not underestimate the fundamental role of rituals in the development of ethics and character development.

A constantly current topic in Judaism is death after a life of goodness, "to do that which is good in the eyes of people and good in the eyes of God" (Sifre Deut. 12:29). One cannot understand Judaism and cannot experience it without understanding this goal of sanctity. If one separates one's ethics of probity and righteousness from the spheres of Kashrus und Sabbath (laws on purity and holy days, ed. note.), if one divorces compassion and mercy from the moral of religious family life,

one neither understands nor lives Judaism. The love of God cannot be separated from the love of people. The fulfillment of those commandments that transform love of one's fellow men into actions is no less imperative as the fulfillment of those that symbolize the love of God. If someone thinks they can manage without one or the other, they will discover too late that they carry neither of them in themselves.

Glossary

Gemara: literally: Supplementation; the Talmudic rabbinical discussion based on the *Mishna*

Halacha: Legal rule, binding religious-legal tradition

Hillel: historic scribe (1st B.C.); antagonist of *Shammai*

Mishna: literally: instruction; oral transmission attributed to Moses and the prophets; basis of the *Talmud*

Mitzvah/Mitzvoth: Commandment(s), religious commendable act(s)

Shabbos = Sabbath

Shammai: *Hillel's* competitor

Talmud: literally: Teaching; most important book of Judaism after the bible; legal code; consists of the *Michna* and *Gemara*

Torah: 1. the 5 books of Moses (Pentateuch); 2. the binding revelation of legal transmission; 3. the entire religious-historical tradition

(*Glossary written by the ed.*)