

## EPILOGUE

In *Genesis 3*, God called out to Adam, *Where are you?*, after Adam had bitten into the forbidden fruit and was hiding from God. It is the first question asked in the Bible and it is the primordial question.<sup>1</sup> God knew where Adam was, the question was whether Adam knew. The real meaning of this question was where do you stand in this world – who are you? What does God want you to do? What have you done with your life? Are you moving towards God, or moving away? These are the fundamental questions of why are we here.

In the *Book of Job*, God speaks about the continuous cycle of death and rebirth with all of nature and with all creatures in chapters 38 and 39, while the reader attempts to comprehend why the struggle between good and evil, why the freedom and why bad things happen to innocent people. Likewise, Job, symbolizing the Jewish people, experienced the cycle of death and rebirth as Job is reborn and restored at the end but not by his efforts but by his faithfulness to God. In the end, Job repents and responds to God by acknowledging God's plan of continual creation with simply *Therefore I declared, yet I understand nothing. It is beyond me. I shall not know!* Job 42:3.

The Jewish peoplehood has survived not by winning in history, but by responding to death and destruction with the rebirth of life and the affirmation to God. Those who live in the presence of God are not exempt from suffering, but they know that *though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.* Psalm 23:4.

When God called out Abraham's name in *Genesis 22:1*, Abraham replied *Hineni!* - *'Here I am!'*, which did not mean here I am in this place, but "Here I am for You!"<sup>2</sup> When Jacob was leaving *Eretz Yisrael* for the long Egyptian exile of his people, God came in *night visions* to Jacob to symbolize the Jewish exile from the Land but not exile from their God. He would always be with them: *God spoke to Israel in night visions and He said, 'Jacob, Jacob,' And he said, 'Here I am.'* And He said, *'I am the God – God of your father. Have no fear of descending to Egypt, for I shall establish you as a great nation there. I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up . . .* Genesis 46:2-4.

When God called out to Moses in *Exodus 3:4* from the burning bush, Moses replied *Here I am!* in total readiness to carry out the will of God. Faith is not a matter of affirming a belief in God, but of declaring "Here I am, Your servant," denoting both humbleness and willingness. As Abraham Heschel expressed in *God In Search of Man*, "Where are you" also represents God's search for man as man "going out to meet Thee I found Thee coming toward me." All of human history as described in the Bible can be expressed as man's search for God and also God in search of man. However, God is not in the world; the world is within God.

But who are we? When, we are asked "What is your name." How do we answer this question? Your name has been carried by others who have preceded you. The

question is linked to “Where are you?” When called by Name, you must know your Name for you to answer – “Here I am” - in order to enter into a relationship with God and to understand His plan for your life.

What is your name - is a question tied to our identity and if we are Jewish any assault on our name is an assault on Jewish identity and an assault on God. I have realized that God determines Jewish identity and to deny this identity is to deny God’s plan for our life. Even born a Jew, still we must stand and stay “Here I am.” Each of us must stand alone, in the fullness of our being, before God, and attempt to understand what God wants of us. What is the correct path? Is it God’s voice we are hearing?

During President Kennedy's famous Berlin trip in the 1960's, he said to the crowd that the proudest boast that a person could make today is "*Ich bin ein Berliner.*" He was wrong. The proudest boast that a man can make not just today, but over the past 3,500 years, is "I am Jewish!" That boast was made as the last words remembered from Daniel Pearl before he was murdered by Islamic terrorists. How strong is our faith?

Do you fear the God of Israel? Whether a man has the “fear of heaven” or not is up to man’s free will.

*As a father is merciful towards his children, so has the Lord shown mercy to those who fear Him. For He knew our nature; He is mindful that we are dust. Frail man, his days are like grass; like a sprout of the field, so he sprouts. When a wind passes over it, it is gone, and its place recognizes it no more. But the kindness of the Lord is forever and ever upon those who fear Him, and His righteousness is upon children’s children, to those who keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commands to fulfill them. Psalms 103:13-18.*

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; foolish ones scorn wisdom and discipline. Proverbs 1:7. [Fear of God and subordination to Him, foster a thirst for wisdom and knowledge. (Rashi)].*

*. . . and He said to man, ‘Behold, the fear [awe] of the Lord is wisdom, and refraining from evil is understanding!’ Job 28:28.*

Judaism has a message to a world that is threatened by *Islamic Jihadism* and a world that is searching for God and morality. Judaism was never just only for Jews for it delivers a message to all humanity of justice, equality, compassion and the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person. When God elected Abraham and said *all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you [Genesis 12:3]*, the message God gives to the world of the eternal existence of the Jewish people to be the light of God through the *Torah* to the nations, is not just a message for Jews, but for *all the families of the earth*. This message will renew and strengthen Christian faith through the realization of the Truth of the scriptures as the Holy Word of God. Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach wrote:

*Every nation is chosen for something. Every person is chosen. When I say we are chosen do you know what we have to bring down to the world? The realization that everything is chosen. We are here to let everyone know that they too are chosen. This is OUR 'chosenness.' The world should know that we are not just living and doing our thing then dying. Everyone has to say 'I am chosen.' We all have a mission in life and this is OUR function. We are chosen to show the world to not ever ever ever give up!*<sup>3</sup>

Franz Rosenzweig wrote that the continued existence of the Jewish people stands as surety for the truth of Christianity.<sup>4</sup> Professor Didier Pollefeyt wrote in *Christology after Auschwitz: A Catholic Perspective* that the Christian church must acknowledge the reality, in which it exists, is understood only when Israel's continuing covenant with God is both recognized and confessed as essential to it.

Judaism seeks to draw the presence of God into the world through *Shabbat* and the Jewish holidays. The entire *Shabbat* experience anticipates the future messianic redemption and provides a foretaste of the Kingdom. As summarized by Rabbi Greenberg, the *Exodus* holiday, Passover, is followed 49 days by the covenant acceptance, *Shavuot*, when on the 50<sup>th</sup> day the people stood before Mt. Sinai and accepted the covenant with God, the experience of revelation – the *Torah*, and then the redemption way, the long journey to the Promised Land, *Sukkot*. On Passover, God committed to the covenant by an act of redemption. On *Shavuot*, standing at Sinai, the Jewish people responded by accepting the *Torah*, the teaching that guides the way of the Jewish people for an ongoing relationship of God.

As explained by Rabbi Greenberg, the Passover/Exodus paradigm at the historical, material and spiritual levels is a continuing event of good overcoming evil, of God's love overpowering death, of freedom and redemption, as witnessed by the slavery and genocide of the Holocaust and the redemption of Israel reborn. Appropriately, the name of the ship that launched the nation when attempting to bring Jewish Holocaust survivors to Israel was the *Exodus '47*.

The Exodus event is an ever-recurring redemption of humanity whenever people open up and enter into the experience. Remembering the history of Israel is fundamental to the religious life of Christians, in which Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross relives the Exodus from Egypt, a person's conversion repeats the crossing of the Jordan as the Jewish people entered the Promise Land, and the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples on Pentecost parallels the giving of the *Torah* on Mt. Sinai.<sup>5</sup>

The most important message in the *Torah* is that regardless of our fall from God, He provides always the power of repentance and the opportunity to renew our relationship with Him. The original tablets of the Ten Commandments marked the initial revelation to Israel at Sinai, a gift of grace. The making of the golden calf brought forth the concept of repentance and the return to the everlasting covenant. For the breaking of the first tablets of the Ten Commandments led to their replacement, in which the second tablets were greater than the first, by bringing forth the power of repentance and redemption.

The Sadducees were connected to the Temple priesthood and the government.<sup>6</sup> The Pharisees were rooted in the openness of the covenant to interpretation through the written and oral *Torah* and all of Israel could be priests and every kitchen table could be an altar where food could be served and eaten as an offering before the Lord. The Sadducees believed that the destruction of the Temple and the Roman expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem cut Israel off from its main channels of communication with the Divine and the end of the Jewish religion. Christian Jews concluded that the covenant was broken. The Sadducees and their followers over the next two centuries attempted to restore the Temple with the revolt against Rome in 117 A.D. and the major revolt in Judea in 132 A.D. and the Sadducees disappeared.<sup>7</sup>

The rabbis, the descendants of the Pharisees, understood this *churban* as God calling the Jews to a new level of covenantal relationship. The Temple had been destroyed, but the Divine Presence was everywhere, yearning for the Jews to uncover it and through *Torah* study the will of God could be discerned. The day of the destruction of the Temple Rabbinic Judaism was fully born out of the *churban*. The *Talmud* says that “On the day the Temple was destroyed, the Messiah was born.”<sup>8</sup> Some rabbinic rabbis taught that on the day of destruction a messiah was born, not yet revealed and active in the world but bringing hope through a deeper level of covenantal relationship with God.

Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read in earshot of the people, and they said, ‘Everything that the Lord has said, we will do and we will obey!’ The Jews declared their resolve to “do and obey” whatever God would command – even before the commandments were issued. The declaration has remained for all time the anthem of Israel’s faith in God and devotion to His word. The concept of prayer and the synagogue was developed by the rabbis to carry on the covenantal dialogue.

Whenever I walk up to the *Kotel* in the eternal city of Jerusalem, I stand and think about my chain of generations who for centuries prayed “Next year in Jerusalem” (*Leshanah haba’ah biyrushalayim*). I think of my distant and unknown family that died in the Holocaust and do they ask me - what have you done through your life with our lost future that was denied to us? *And who knows whether it was just for such a time as this that you attained the royal position! Esther 4:14.* Like the *Book of Esther*, will it be a story of an assimilated Jew, accepting one’s Jewishness as a decisive statement and taking up the Jewish cause and fate?

For my chain of generations before me, I stand at the *Kotel* for I know the reason why I am here and who my name is, the compass of my life, and I pray *Kaddish*, the Memorial Prayer for the Dead, and realize that God has always been in control and that He has a plan for our lives that He sets in motion in generations before we are born into this world. In centuries ago, Rabbi Akiva had said that “Everything is foreseen, yet freedom of choice is given,” for God knows exactly what will happen, but nevertheless we are not compelled to act in any particular way.<sup>9</sup> Even if my choices in life were and are influenced by arrangements imposed by God, I must have made and still must make the effort of choices under God’s illumination.

God controls everything except man's free will. While we are given freedom to act, God's divine plan will ultimately happen and God will use man with or without his knowledge. For God has elected by grace a remnant of the Jewish people to exist to the end of the age.

*. . . you will be gathered up one by one, O Children of Israel. Isaiah 27:12*

*For I, the Lord, have not changed; and you, the sons of Jacob, you have not perished [your existence as a people guaranteed forever]. Malachi 3:6.*

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<sup>1</sup> Elie Wiesel and Philippe-Michaël de Saint-Cheron, *Evil and Exile*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1990), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> David Patterson, *Overcoming Alienation: A Kabbalistic Reflection on the Five Level of the Soul*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2008), p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, *Israel is Living G-d is Living: The teachings of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach*.

<sup>4</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, (1<sup>st</sup> English ed. 1971), p. 415.

<sup>5</sup> Goldman, David p., *How Civilizations Die (And Why Islam is Dying Too)*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2011), p. 221.

<sup>6</sup> Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1998), p. 72.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2004), p. 114.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver Leaman, *Evil and Suffering in Jewish Philosophy*, (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1995), p. 82.