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Letter to the Editor. Redemption

René Gutman*

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This article and its notes were essentially inspired and written on the basis of the phenomenological essays of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.

I

The halakha has never despaired of man, whether as a natural being integrated into his physical environment or as a spiritual personality in the face of God. This sufferance on the part of the halakha is not without reserve. It asks the man to purify himself in order to attain his full fulfilment. In describing the future redemption of Israel, Isaiah speaks of purification as an indispensable condition of redemption: ואביבה ידי עליך ואפרכב כבד, גדיגך, "I will eliminate your slag as with soap" (Isaiah 1:25). Similarly, our Sages have consistently asserted that the goal pursued by the Torah and the *mitzvot* is that of the purification of the human being (1). In other words, redemption is the *sine qua non* of a meaningful existence endorsed by halakha.

What does halakha mean by redemption or purification? The analysis of a liturgical text will help

us to answer this question. Among the blessings contained in the *birkot hacha'har*, which we say every day thanking the Almighty for having given us every morning a full and active life, there are two which, a priori, appear synonymous and therefore redundant. The first is "*ozet Israel biguevourah*", "who girds Israel with power," and the second "*hanoten layaef koa'h*" (2), "who gives strength to the weary." It seems that our liturgists have established a semantic difference between *koa'h* and *guevourah* (strength and power). If they had considered the two terms absolutely synonymous, they would not have formulated two blessings, as only one would have sufficed.

What does *koa'h* mean? This word refers to the ability which God has bestowed upon man at birth. Essentially his physical strength, the ability to do such work that requires an unusual amount of physical vigor. This is the dominant meaning he has in the Bible (3). The *koa'h* in this sense

is not an exclusively human quality, since it refers in most aspects to the possibilities of man as a natural being. Animals share with the man all his biological abilities, so that the quality of *koa'h* applies to man and beast as well. *Koa'h* is not a unique gift bestowed to man by the Creator, but rather it is integrally part of all the functions of the natural universe.

What is *guevourah*? In contrast to *koa'h*, it is a gift that God has exclusively offered to man and shows the unique situation of God in creation, his unique charisma and his election.

Man as an animal with immediate, mechanical and constant vital functions received the *koa'h*. Man as a distinct personality different from the beasts and the birds of the fields, who confronts nature in a spirit of reflection and inquiry, possesses the quality of *guevourah* (4). He does not share it with anyone (5).

2

Guevourah, in the context of biblical narratives and hymns, denotes the possibility of attaining victory, beating the enemy who attacked you. The Scripture uses this term almost exclusively as regards the exploits of the warrior, the victor. It evokes combat, and it means that one of the fighters has carried out a victorious action.

The victory *guevourah* identifies with is not merely a military victory, nor, moreover, a triumph which would result only from human numbers or superior materials. On the contrary, it happens that the combatant who is defeated on the battlefield is the one who emerges as a *guibor*, the conqueror in a higher historical sense, in preference to the one who seems to have won (6). The *guevourah* is sometimes inversely related to the *koa'h*, to the degree of physical strength available to man. The greater the force exerted, the less one is obliged to manifest *guevourah*. Conversely, the weaker one is, the smaller the chances are, the more sublime the action of the *guibor*, which disregards practical reasoning in order to resort to "absurdity." Thus, a new element is introduced into the *guevourah* gesture, namely heroism or the action undertaken contrary to human logic and practical human judgment. This sort of action often leads to final victory. There are situations in life where utilitarian approaches and net logical processes are powerless, whereas a sudden and spontaneous leap in the absurd (to use a Kierkegaardian expression) can save man when he is in total distress. This irrational and unrealistic action is heroic, and is identified with the *guevourah*.

3

ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר דוש דמכ כי אם ישראל כי שרית עם אלומים ועם אמים ותוכל

"Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." (Genesis 32:29)

Jacob emerged victorious from an absolutely formidable encounter; He had firmly maintained his mysterious adversary during a whole night of sadness, fear and solitude, until the dawn of the following day. Was Jacob's victory logically predictable? Was he certain of his victory? Obviously not. He was alone, weak and disarmed, a novice in the art of war. His opponent was a powerful professional warrior. Why did not Jacob go to the enemy who was attacking him in the dark? He acted "absurdly" and contrary to all rational practical considerations. In other words, he acted heroically. He, Jacob the solitary, defenseless, dared to fight against a powerful adversary. He, who had manifested such a sense of business and the acuteness of a pragmatic mind during his prolonged stay at Laban, suddenly made the leap into the "absurd", in the darkness of an unusual, horrible night. He refused to yield to a superior force and declared war on an invincible enemy. What Jacob manifested was not *koa'h* but *guevourah*, heroism, which always appears when reason

despairs and logic retreats. At dawn, the defenseless Jacob, solitary and not illogical, found himself, against all odds, the victor, the hero. The impossible and the absurd had triumphed over possible and logical: it was heroism, not logic that had won the battle. Is it only the story of a single individual? Is this not actually the story of Knesset Israel, an entity engaged in an "absurd" struggle for its survival for thousands of years?

4

At this point, we can note that the story about Jacob differs from the classic epic. For the classical man, heroism was intrinsically an aesthetic category that fascinated him by its splendor and glory. The classical man was an esthete, endowed with a demonic quality: he aspired to immensity. His creative fantasy was boundless and aimed at reaching the impossible. He suffered from frustration and disenchantment, for no man, even the most accomplished aesthete, can ever cross the Rubicon that separates the finite from the infinite. In his suffering, the classical esthete invented the image of the hero. The mere myth of the hero gives him unlimited consolation. At least, he thought to himself, there was an individual who dared to do the impossible and accomplish greatness. In short, the hero of the classical man was a superb figure, whom, he

identified himself with in order to satisfy his eternal vanity. The cult of the hero is basically a cult of the ego. The classic idea of heroism, which is aesthetic in its very essence, does not include the element of absurdity. It is intrinsically dramatic and theatrical (7). The hero is an actor who plays to impress an admiring public. The crowd applauds, the chronicler records, innumerable generations later admire, bards and minstrels praise the hero. The classic heroic act, as I have already said, is the work of a frightened and disenchanted man who tries to attain immortality and permanence by identifying himself with the heroic character on the stage. It is not a way of life. It lasts but for a moment, vibrant and powerful, but soon the man returns to the non-heroic atmosphere of his daily life.

In contrast to classical aesthetic heroism, biblical heroism, depicted in the account of Jacob, is not nourished by an ephemeral mood or a passing state of mind. It is perhaps the central motive of our existential experience. It constantly pervades the human mind, giving man a strange feeling of tranquility. In our conception of the world, the hero does not succumb either to frenzy or excitement. Biblical heroism is not played out in ecstasy but rather in contemplation. It is not noisy but suffocated, not dramatic or spectacular but mute. The individual, instead of sporadically undertaking a

heroic act, constantly lives like a hero. Jacob was not content to act heroically under the impulse of the moment. His action denoted a firm and determined way of living; He did not try to impress anyone. This sort of heroism lasts for as long as man is aware of his singular character.

5

Jacob had victory at dawn, when the mist began to rise. His opponent was defeated and Jacob was ready to consume his victory. The mysterious enemy was at his mercy. All he had to do to give a positive conclusion to the fight was to destroy him, thus eliminating the threat of another attack. But he acted differently, and contrary to what others would have done in his place. When the moment came when he could have enjoyed his victory, he released the attacker and set him free. What was the reason for such an act? Naturally, the adversary had begged him to give him back his freedom: ויאמר חנלחני כי עלה השחר: "Release me, for the dawn has come." (Genesis 32:27)

But why did he listen the plea of a man who shortly before had been determined to annihilate him? The defeated adversary did not even promise not to do it again. To release such a dangerous demon was "unreasonable". It is this very delusion which gave the act the quality of

heroism, and which may serve as a model for halachic heroism.

6

What is heroism in halakha? What does the halakha recommend to us so as to achieve a heroic stature? The answer is that we must make a dialectical movement. Halachic redemption expresses itself in a paradoxical movement in two opposite directions: surging forward boldly and withdrawing humbly.

The heroic experience of man is antithetical, it has two opposite poles. The man advances only to retreat better, thus reversing the direction of his movement.

The Torah wants the man, bold and adventurous in his quest for possibilities, to act heroically, and at the last moment, when victory seems to be within reach, to stop short, turn around and operate retreat. At the most exalted moment of triumph and realization, he must renounce the ecstasy of victory and undergo a defeat with his own hands. This is how Jacob acted. He embarked on a dialectical performance. He did not consume his victory, but rather chose to free the adversary he had defeated and could have destroyed. By freeing the defeated enemy, he defeated himself. He withdrew from a position he had won by his courage and

strength of mind. He is engaged in a backward movement.

II

The halakha teaches that at any level of our total existential experience, whether aesthetic-hedonistic, emotional, intellectual, moral or religious, one must engage in a dialectical movement by advancing and retiring alternately. Halakha knows the task that the Creator has assigned to man ויברך אתם אלוקים וכו' ומלאו את הארץ וכבשה' "Fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1: 28). The man was called to face the opposition of nature and to walk briskly towards victory.

The biblical man is about to subdue his environment. And yet, when the conquest is within his reach and there are no longer any obstacles in his way, the victorious man, to whom it would be enough to reach out and take possession of all that his heart has ardently desired, must change course and begin a retreat. When conquest is near, he must arouse defeat and yield the spoils he coveted for so long. The movement is dialectical: the forward march ends in a retreat, which, in turn, leads to a resumption of the forward march. Once the man withdraws from the position he has gained by many efforts and sacrifices, he can move forward again. The halakha encouraged him once more to seek

greatness, immensity, to make bold experiments with his freedoms, to seek feverishly to conquer. And again, she'll order him to stop and turn around. The dialectical movement, however incomprehensible it may be to modern man, forms, as we have already said, the very heart of life according to halakha. In a word, it teaches man how to conquer and how to lose, how to take the initiative and how to give up, how to succeed, how to invite defeat, and how to resume the fight for victory.

1

The idea of redemption through the dialectical movement is manifested in all the halachic rules that govern human life, but this doctrine of dialectical catharsis is nowhere more frequent than in the aesthetic-hedonic domain.

In this domain, how does man purify himself? By engaging in the dialectical movement, retiring at the very moment when passion is at its height. The more he feels the strength of the grip of physiological instinct, the more exhilarating the prospect of hedonistic satisfaction is, the greater the redemptive power of dialectical catharsis, the recoil movement.

בטנך ערמת חיטים סוגה בשושנים " - אדם נושא " אשה בן ל' שנה בן מ' שנה, משמוציא יציאותיו הוא בא לזקק לה והיא אומרת לו כשושנה אדומה ראיתי ופורש ממנה מיד. מי גרם לו שלא יקרב לה, איזה

כותל ברזל יש ביניהם ואיזה עמוד ברזל ביניהם, איזה נחש נשכו, איזה עקרב עקצו שלא יקרב לה? דברי תורה כרויכש שנושנה שנה 'בה' ואל אשה בנדת טומאתה לא תברב. "וכן מי בהביאו לו תמחוי של חתיכות, אמרו לו בלנפ נפל שם ומשך ידו ולא טאמו. מי גרם לו שלא לטעום, איזה נחש נשכו שלא יטעום ואיזה עקרב עקצו שלא יקרב ויטעם אותם? דברי תורה כרויכש שנושנה שכתוב בה "כל בלב Your belly is like a millstone of wheat, lined with roses. It often happens that a man takes wife at the age of thirty or forty. When, after having spent much, he wants to unite with her and she says to him "I saw a pink or red spot", he turns from her immediately. What drives him to withdraw and get away from her? Was there a metal barrier between them, did a snake bite him, did a scorpion sting him? ... A meat dish is placed in front of someone and it is said that forbidden fat has fallen onto it. He removes his hand from the food. What prevented her from tasting it? Did a snake bite him, did a scorpion sting him? These are only the words of the Torah, words as sweet as roses. (Chir HaChirim Rabbah on Chir HaChirim 7, 3)".

The spouses are young, they enjoy all their physical strength and are passionately in love with each other. They both waited patiently for this meeting. Just one more step and their love would have been consumed, their dream come true. Suddenly, the bride and her husband retreated. Gallantly, like a chivalrous knight, he

manifests a paradoxical heroism. He admits his own defeat. There is nothing fascinating about his withdrawal. It is not a spectacular gesture, since there are no witnesses to admire and compliment. The heroic act did not take place in the presence of exalted crowds; no bard will celebrate these two humble and modest youth. It happened in the privacy of their home, in the silence of the night. The young man turned around, like Jacob did once. He withdrew when the outcome seemed assured. This kind of divine dialectical discipline is not limited to conjugal life, but extends to all areas where there are instincts and temptations. He who is hungry must renounce the pleasure of taking food, whatever temptation may be. He who possesses property must renounce the pleasure of an acquisition, if this is forbidden by halakha and morality. In a word, the halakha requires man to develop the ability to withdraw (8). Naturally, as we have clearly shown above, man is called, as a result of this withdrawal movement, to advance again towards a total victory.

2

The Torah demands a redemptive action not only in the hedonic world of man, but also in his emotional universe. In the carnal hedonic field, redemption is expressed in the movement of withdrawal towards

something external, for example the withdrawal of the bridegroom from his bride, or the renunciation of food by the hungry man. But in the emotional sphere, the redemptive act consists in withdrawing or disengaging oneself from one's own inner world, renouncing something that is part of oneself, such as feeling, mood or state of mind. Are we really capable of withdrawing from ourselves, of rejecting the feeling which grips us with considerable force, of disregarding an experience that is sometimes irresistible? The halacha says so.

The Torah has formulated laws that govern man's conduct, for example, "thou shalt not kill," "thou shalt not bear false witness." It also tried to control its inner life. Laws such as "thou shalt not covet," "thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart" are part of the halachic normative system as well as those which relate to the external acts of man. In a word, the halakha believes that there is a morality not only of acts but also of feelings. Man is the master of his own emotional world, he is capable of disowning emotions or feelings, whether obsessive or powerful, when they appear prejudicial, and inversely to assimilate redemptive emotions into his personality. According to the halakha, redemption in the emotional field consists of active human

interference with the emotive experience.

Let me give an illustration of the halakhic idea of an inner withdrawal or emotional redemption. The high priest Aaron had a catastrophe. The happiest day of his life, when the Sanctuary was inaugurated and where he took office, two of his sons died. Death is always that terrible evil that man cannot accept. It is certainly unacceptable for a father whose pain of the loss of a son knows no limit, how much more for the excessive death of two sons who entered the sanctuary to worship and serve God, and have been devoured by a fire coming from Him. These are the words which Moses spoke to Aaron immediately after the disaster: Moses said (...) "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, so that you will not die and that He will not become wrathful against all the congregation. But your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, shall bewail the burning which the Lord has brought about. You shall not even go out from the doorway of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the Lord's anointing oil is upon you." (Leviticus 10: 6-7)

Moses enjoined Aaron and his children not to mourn for Nadav and Avihu. Aaron and his two surviving sons were ordered not to shed a tear for them. Why ? Because the priests constituted a community marked by

the anointing that was dedicated exclusively to the service of God. The inalienable right, which is that of any relative, to mourn the death of a child, has been denied to Aaron and his sons. The consecration of a priest to God is absolute, demanding, and integral. God claims not a part but the whole of the human personality. The totality of its existence, in its external and internal manifestations, is consecrated to God. Aaron belonged to no one, not even to himself, but to God alone, so he was not even free to devote himself to the pain of the loss of his two sons; he had no private world. Even his heart belonged to God. What does all this mean in psychological terms? God wanted Aaron to disown the strongest emotion in man- the love for a child. Is it possible? As for the modern man, I would not dare reply. As for the biblical man, we read that Aaron acted according to the commandment of God: ויעשו כדבר משה, "They conformed to the word of Moses" (Ibid.). Aaron withdrew himself. He gave up being a father. This sort of recoil movement amounts to total abnegation. It is an act which is certainly redemptive, because it is certainly heroic. As such, it is much more sublime than Aristotelian aesthetic catharsis, which Judaism does not accept. It is not only Aaron, but the whole community of the covenant that God has called to serve

Him. Once man has entered into the service of God, whether as High Priest or as a humble ordinary person, his commitment is not partial, but total. It is subject to the divine call to perform an absolute interior withdrawal. Here halakha frequently intervenes in the most intimate and personal moments of our lives, and has demands on us which often seem too rigid and formal to the profane.

Let's take an example. We all know the law according to which a religious holiday interrupts the period of mourning for the seven nearest relatives. If someone has begun to observe the chiva period shortly before the festival begins, the chiva is canceled. But let us not forget that the confession, the mourning, in the halakha, consists not only in the fulfillment of certain external rites. There is more than that. It is the inner experience of a sombre despair, a total existential failure, the absurdity of being. It is a horrible and overwhelming experience that shakes faith and exposes the illusion of self-consciousness. Similarly, the injunction of *simhat yom tov* (the duty to rejoice during the feast) involves not only ceremonial acts, but also a sincere experience of joy. When the Torah decreed וְחִמְצַת בַּחֶגֶךָ, "Thou shalt rejoice in thy feast" (Deuteronomy 16:14), it is not a playful rejoicing, an artificial gaiety, or a kind of superficial hilarity, but the profound

and overwhelming experience of spiritual joy, serenity and peace that stem from faith and the awareness of God's presence. Let us now imagine the following concrete situation. The bereaved, who has just buried a beloved wife or mother, returns home from the cemetery where he left a part of himself, where he witnessed the derision of human existence. He is in the mood to question the validity of our entire system of values. The house is empty, dreary; each piece of furniture reminds him of the beloved person he buried. The smallest corner is filled with memories. And yet, the halakha addresses this solitary mourner by murmuring: "Get up from your mourning; Remove the ashes from your head; Change clothing; Light the candles for the feast; Recite over a glass of wine the kidush that glorifies God for having given us festivals of joy and sacred periods of joy; Pronounce the blessing *chehe'heyanou*: "May you be blessed (...) Who kept us alive, preserved us and allowed us to reach this moment"; Join the joyful community and celebrate the feast as if nothing had happened, as if the beloved one whose death you were crying was with you. The halakha, who can sometimes be very tender, understanding and accommodating, may on other occasions act as an implacable censor who demands obedience. It suggests man, broken in

his body and soul, overwhelmed with the burden of an absurd existence, to change his mood, to reject his pain and to choose joy. Let's repeat the question: is such a metamorphosis of the state of mind of an individual possible? Can one pass without transition from desolation and absolutely gloomy despair to a joyful confidence? Can the experience of monstrosity be replaced by the feeling of the most intense meaning? I have no right to judge. But I know people who have tried to achieve this greatest of all miracles. The jump is certainly heroic. It is less spectacular than the death of an Achilles, yet it is more heroic, more redemptive, because it takes place in the humility and silence of a dark night of solitude.

3

Judaism has insisted on redemption elsewhere, namely in the intellectual sphere. It emphasized the redemption of the *logos* by arguing that there is an unrehabilitated cognitive gait, in the same way that there is a not rehabilitated carnal instinct. When I say that there is a cognitive approach, it is not a mythical thought that ignores scientific method and precision, but the most modern system of scientific research. The latter can be considered unredeemed if the scientist does not subject his cognitive act to external purification, which consists of a dialectical

movement: moving forward to a probable victory and then retreating into a state of defeat. Allow me to explain: when I speak of cognitive withdrawal or self negation it is not to suggest that the scientist should conduct his research without rigor or without end. On the contrary, every scholar is guided intuitively by an ethical norm which urges him to seek truth assiduously, without taking rest before having it at hand. Cognitive withdrawal is not related to scientific research as a logical operation, but rather to the experience of the values involved in scientific work. Knowledge is not an impersonal performance that can be computerized and emptied of all its content of rich and picturesque experience. Rather, it is part of the connoisseur as a living person, with all its complex emotional experiences and value judgments. Knowledge is perhaps the most vibrant and touching experience, apart from religious experience. It carries within the whole personality, sometimes like a gentle wave that infuses the scientist with a sense of tranquility and serenity, and sometimes as a powerful blade that raises the soul to its depth and elevates it to ecstasy. As we have already mentioned, the purification of knowledge designates something that occurs not within the formal logical domain but within the lived experience.

Cognitive catharsis consists of discovering the unknowingness of the being. To devote oneself to knowledge and to scientific research, *ipso facto* presupposes the recognition of the eternal mystery, an awareness that grows with the progress of knowledge, which deepens to the rhythm of the triumphant march of intelligence Human, and which becomes more disconcerting, confusing and demanding with every breakthrough of knowledge. We often ask ourselves a question of type Kohélet: can man really know? Indeed, he is always confronted with the paradoxical situation of solving a problem only in order to discover another which is more complex and more general than the first, and whose appearance was provoked by the very solution of the preceding one.

Moreover, man discovers that the scientific act and the *mysterium magnum* belong to different domains. Science explores a world of its own conception, a world of relational constructions, made of a series of freely created concepts. The *mysterium magnum*, which is implanted in our qualitative environment, consists of sounds, colors, touches, fragrance, sensations of heat, humidity and so on, and can never lend itself to scientific interpretation or explanation. What the scientist does is not to explain the qualitative

phenomena, but to create a parallel quantitative order of abstract mathematical correspondences which he manipulates with great freedom, since ultimately they are creations of his own mind. There is no scientific explanation for our real problem: what is the essence of the qualitative world in which we live? Of course, there is a creative possibility of reproducing a process, which is very useful with regard to technology, and which gradually puts our environment under the control of man. But the paths of creation that we feel, love and fear, to which we are mixed body and soul, remain unexplored. This is why the cognitive experience contains not only the intoxication of knowledge but also the terror and reverence of the great mystery of the unknown and uninterpretable being, the universe as a qualitative rather than a quantitative entity.

If the scholar time experiences the ecstasy of knowledge and the anguish of confusion at the same, if he simultaneously feels the sweetness of triumph over being and the pain and despair of defeat by being, then his act of cognition is purified and rehabilitated. It is then and only then, that this act becomes heroic. It is then and only then, that scientific experience is marked by humility and not by arrogance.

Redemption requires two basic forms of acquiescence from the scientist. First, as we have already said, he must recognize that at best he can attain knowledge and understanding of cosmic processes when he translates them into abstract quantitative concepts, but also that intelligence Human will never be able to understand the link between the mathematical idea and the event, between the formula, which is a product of the mind, and the patterns of behavior of organic and inorganic matter. Second, that the moral law can never be the object of legislation in absolute terms on the part of human intelligence. Any attempt at scientific research, however gradual, aimed at replacing the moral law engraved by the hand of God on the two Tables of the Law at Sinai by rules of conduct decreed by man is illegitimate. Adam tried to legislate on the moral standard, and he was driven out of Paradise. In modern times, modern man undertakes a similar process, which shows his pride and arrogance, and is doomed to failure.

4

Man must be ready to accept defeat not only in the carnal and aesthetic, emotional or intellectual world, but also in the moral and religious world, in his relationship with God (9). He must be able to admit that, whether willingly or unwillingly, he is subject

to dialectical movement even in his encounter with God, even when it is certain that God is close to him and that it is enough for him to throw himself into the embrace of his Creator. There is an unredeemed moral and religious experience, as there is an unredeemed body and *logos*. Let us be candid: when one has not redeemed his religious life, one can become self righteous, insensitive, or even destructive. The history of the Crusades, the Inquisition and other outbursts of religious fanaticism confirm this thesis. Judaism has approved man by declaring that he contains a spark of the divine. He has never subscribed to the philosophy that man is intrinsically sinful. On the contrary, we have taught that the moral challenge facing man and the opportunities available to him are unlimited. The man seen by Judaism is a potentially good and progressive being. But he is often the prey of an insurmountable, irresistible force that pulls him down. The ascent of the mountain of God often turns into a tumble down this mountain. The impetuous and passionate rush to God can suddenly become a flight from Him. Man moves towards the fulfillment of his destiny in a zig zag line, the progression being frequently replaced by regression, proximity to God by the dark night of separation. Not only do we rise, but we fall again, then we rise again only to fall one

more time. Moral fault and guilt are woven into our very existential fabric. No one can claim to be perfect, that existential experience has been cleansed of any selfish, unworthy, brutish motive. In a word, the Bible has confidence in man, but it is also very suspicious of him.

Redemption of religious life consists precisely of the consciousness of long periods during which man is at an infinite distance from God. The periodic states of ecstasy engendered by the feeling of closeness to God alternate with the states of despair which even the prophet encountered during the exile from the presence of the Almighty. These long periods of black despair (*hester panim*) contain the redemptive element that purges and redeems religious life.

The breaking of the Tables of the Law is an experience that every engaged individual must go through. It was only after Moses lost everything he had sought that he had gone up to Mount Sinai to receive not only two new Stone Tables, but also a radiant face and the great mission of transmitting and teaching the Torah to the alliance community. During the long journey of life, at one time or another, one must reach the absurd stage where one is bankrupt and abandoned. The Bible, with ruthless honesty, has reported such experiences of failures in the lives of

the greatest of us. Man must be aware of this tragic fact, which he will face sooner or later if his metaphysical destiny is to be realized.

Great is the man who has never faltered, but the one who stumbled, fell and rose again (10). Sin is a reality, not just a potential threat. The perfect man never existed (11). If man is not aware of the inherent contradiction in the very core of his personality, he lives in a world of illusion and leads an unredeemed existence. No matter how we call this state of mind full of sufficiency: self-satisfaction, pride, arrogance or stupidity, it is the manifestation of a crude state of mind.

It is then that the idea of Teshuva emerges and communicates to man the message of redemption. How does this redemption express itself? In the ability of man to cast a critical eye and admit failure, in the courage to confess his fault, plead guilty, in accepting defeat. The cry of Judah, the cry of an aristocrat and a judge, to acknowledge that he was wrong and that the poor prostitute was right - ויכר - "She is more righteous than I" (Genesis 38, 26), was a great redemptive act, which purified him and redeemed his life. Reciting *vidoui*, confession, is the greatest of all virtues, the most heroic act. It is redemption par excellence. הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם עשות משפט

ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם אלקיך
 "Man, you have been told what is good, what the Lord is asking of you: just to practice righteousness, to love goodness and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6: 8)

Paraphrasing, I would say, "Man, you have been told you what is good, what the Lord is asking of you, nothing but to boldly advance, to triumph over your environment and subdue it, then to humbly step back when victory is within thy grasp."

Notes

1. See, for example, the following statement of the Midrash: רב אמר לא נתנו המצות אלא להרביץ את הבריות וכי מה איכפת ליה להקב"ה למי חטוהט מן הצואר או? מי חטוהט מן העורף הוי לא נתנו המצוות אלא להרביץ את הבריות. Rav said, "The mitzvot was given only to cleanse the men. Indeed, what difference does it make to God that a beast is slaughtered by the neck or by the nape? Rather, the mitzvot was given to purify men (Bereshit Rabbah 44).
2. Ozer Israel biguevourah is one of the blessings enumerated in the Talmud (Berakhot 60b); the oldest reference to hanoten layaef koa'h is medieval (see Tower and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, sec 46 and commentators).
3. In later Hebrew, this basic meaning extends to include all the senses (eg, koa'h hareiyah, sense of sight, koa'h hashemiyah, hearing).
4. The apparent exceptions to this rule must be understood either figuratively (eg Proverbs 30, 30) or as elliptic formulations (eg Psalms 147, 10, where the psalmist speaks of the guevourah not of the horse but of his rider).

5. The two qualities, koa'h and guevourah, have been attributed to the Almighty, kivyachol, because He is the source of all the cosmic forces (koa'h, for example, in Isaiah 40:26 and Nahum 1, 3) as well as the charismatic human heroism (guevourah, in Deuteronomy 10, 17).
6. The Talmud (Yoma 69b) explains why the men of the Great Assembly (Anchei Knesset HaGuedola) were called: משה אמר הא-ל הגדול הגבור... אתא דניאל אמר נכרים מעבדתםיבנ בבניו, איה גבורותיו? לא אמר גבור... אתו אינהו ואמרו אברבה זו היא גבוררת גבורתו בשובש את יצרו שנותן ארך אמים לרמים. Moses said, "O Lord, guibor" (Deuteronomy 10:17) ... came Daniel, who said, "Aliens are servants of his children, where is his guevourah?" He no longer said guibor ... The men of the Great Assembly came and said: this is precisely his guevourah, that he dominates his anger and is prolonged with the wicked. Did not the men of the Great Assembly interpret guibor and guevourah in terms of a heroic gesture, which defies the koa'h and makes a reality of the impossible? These great men identified guevourah as withdrawal and defeat.
7. For Aristotle, in his Poetics, the theme of tragedy is a noble and impressive act, whose function is the catharsis of emotions eleos and phobos (pity and terror), in other words the pleasant relief of the public, its liberation of emotion
8. איזהו גבור? הבשובש את יצרו? Who is a guibor, a hero? He who knows how to overcome his instincts (Pirkei Avot 4, 1).
9. The withdrawal in the moral and religious sphere is different from the withdrawal in the other spheres. In other areas, the Torah requires man to voluntarily withdraw from certain

conquered positions, whereas in the moral and religious sphere, withdrawal is identified with the awareness of imperfection and fault.

10. See Maïmonides, *Les Huit Chapitres*, Ch. 6

11. See *Ecclésiaste* 7, 20