

CHAPTER TEN

Myth, Reality and the Judaic View of God

Some question the use and inclusion of the Old Testament in the context of Oriental religion, however, at least three characteristics of Oriental religions, whether in the **Tao** of Lao-tzu, in The Book of Tea, or Zen text of Okakura, or in the Memphite Egyptian mythology offer the presumption of some kind of an influential link. Those three characteristics are: first, the predominant presence of breath, as being the way from and to the life source, secondly, the source of life being invisible and intangible and, thirdly, of the unnameable and the interior characterization of the source of life as the heart coupled with the mouth, as in **Ptah**.

Yhwh and Oriental breath,
unnameable and found in the heart.

Just as the **Tao** is intangible and unnameable, so too is **Yhwh**. Indeed, the Orthodox Jews so expressed this "name" as to omit the vowels to signal its being unnameable and inexpressible. Were the vowels included, any one of the first three of the ten commandments within the **Torah**, or Law would be broken and a Jew pronouncing such a name stood before **Yhwh** as a blasphemer!

The second characteristic of breath also is significant. The Orthodox Jewish **Yhwh** breathes into the dust and the result is the **Zelem** who is **adamah**, literally, out of the dust, or Adam, as meaning mankind, literally, an androgenous being as the origin of **ishshah**, literally, **ish**, man and **ishshah**, woman.. [**Genesis**, 2:5-8, and 2:8-25; biblical quotations come from: The Jerusalem Bible (Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1966)] Thus, **Yhwh**, the Creator produces an image and likeness, the human being, male and female. The Creator God, therefore, produces as the result of a verbal breath a myth called the human being. The name of this myth is **Adam**, out of the dust!

Scripturally, *mythos* directs
and gives meaning to *logos*,
myth speaks through reason.

The third characteristic relates to breath coupled with the heart and the Egyptian mythology, specifically the Theology of Memphis an inscription on a monolith erected at the direction of King Shabaka

about 700 B.C. Its purpose is threefold: first, to trace the lineage of **Horus**, secondly, to show that Memphis has been the seat of the king since mythical times and to prove that **Ptah** is the creator of all. **Ptah**, breathes life into **Nefertem** as a lotus flower out of which arises the Sun God, **Re**. As such, **Ptah** is the "heart and tongue which belong to the **Ennead**", or nine Egyptian Gods, so **Ptah's** hieroglyph is inscribed as a mouth in the form of a heart and, thus, shows the breath of life coming from the heart as an act of love. So, the Egyptians view **Ptah**, the highest Egyptian God as a heart and the seat of **Ptah's** thoughts and **Ptah's** tongue repeats these thoughts by means of the creative word.

Both the books of **Deuteronomy** and **Leviticus** seem to echo this **Ptah**, the greatest Egyptian God:

Listen, Israel: **Yhwh**, or God is the one **Yhwh**. You shall love **Yhwh**, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let these words I urge on you today be written on your heart. (**Deuteronomy** 6:9)

To say, however, that the Jews had an idea of God is to speak a contradiction in two senses: first, the Old Testament account of **Yhwh**'s dealings with the Judaic people set them apart as different from all other people who had "graven images" of God. Indeed, the uniqueness of the Orthodox Jews and the Old Testament is that among nations who elaborated many gods, a case in point being the Egyptians who had an **Ennead**, even though **Ptah** was the greatest, the Jews claimed but one:

If a prophet...arises among you and offers to do a sign or a wonder for you and the sign or wonder comes about; and if he then says to you, 'Come, then, let us follow other gods (whom you have not known) and serve them', you are not to listen to the words of that prophet...**Yhwh**, your God is testing you to know if you love **Yhwh**, your God with all your heart and all your soul. **Yhwh**, your God you shall follow, him you shall fear, his commandments you shall keep, his voice you shall obey, him shall you serve, to him shall you cling. (**Deuteronomy** 13:2-6)

Secondly, the Orthodox Jew could neither represent or name "God" - given the the first three of Moses' Ten Commandments, namely,

As Yhwh, "is who is" is a "living God", unique and inexpressible as is any living being.

You shall have no gods except me.
You shall not make yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything in heaven or on earth beneath or in the waters under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, Yhwh your God, am a jealous God and I punish the father's fault in the sons, the grandsons and the great-grandsons of those who hate me; but I show kindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.
You shall not utter the name of Yhwh your God to misuse it, for Yhwh will not leave unpunished the man who utters his name to misuse it. (**Exodus**, 20:1-6)

To act contrary was blasphemy. To make an image of God was idolatry.

This rigorous view of an imageless God surfaced with Xenophanes, was reasserted by Heraclitus, reoccurs in Lao-tzu and reappears with Mohammed who claimed to be an orthodox worshiper of **Yhwh**, until rejected by Jewish Rabbis in a public debate. Moses underscores this imageless God as he returned from the "forty days" on Sinai to find that Aaron and the Jewish people had made a golden calf so all could worship before it on the "...feast in honor of **Yhwh** (**Exodus**, 32: 1-24). **Exodus** (3:1-4:17) emphasizes the Old Testament fact that **Yhwh** is reality, or "being", **Elohim**, "is who is", a "living God" rather than an idea, a human anthropomorphism which even the 6th century B.C. Greek Xenophanes had condemned.

Secondly, however, Jews are just as human as any other people and, as Campbell and Eliade show, all people have symbols and use myths to explain the unspeakable, namely, the human being's relationship to God and God's relationship to the human world. So, even prior to Moses' celebrated meeting with the burning bush (**Exodus**, 3:1-15), the Orthodox Jewish rabbi writers record God's decision to make man and woman in **Genesis** :

**Yhwh shall help Moses speak
and tell him what to say.**

God created man in the image (**Zelem**) of himself, in the image of
God he created him, male and female he created them. (1:27)

Even **Genesis**, therefore, describes God as making images and likenesses of the Creator self, so male and female become Old Testament symbols through which the divine manifests transcendence into the human world of time. We may infer from this text that we look at God when we view human beings. The eleventh century Talmudic scholar, Moses Maimonides describes this symbol within his Guide for the Perplexed, far before Eliade or Campbell, and, yet, he explains it within the context of his depiction of **Yhwh** as **Elohim**, "is who Is", the "living God", not an idea of God. Prior to Maimonides, only one other major prophet, Isaiah repeats this theme as he describes the redemption of Israel:

...pay attention, remotest peoples.
Yhwh called me before I was born,
from my mothers' womb he pronounced my name.
He made my mouth a sharp sword,
and hid me in the shadow of his hand.
He made me into a sharpened arrow,
and concealed me in his quiver.
He said to me, 'You are my servant (Israel)
in whom I shall be glorified';
while I was thinking, 'I have toiled in vain,
I have exhausted myself for nothing';

and all the while my cause was with **Yhwh**,
my reward with my God.
I was honored in the eyes of **Yhwh**,
my God was my strength.
And now **Yhwh** has spoken,
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
to gather Israel to him:

'It is not enough for you to be my servant,
to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back the survivors of Israel;

I will make you the light of the nations
so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.' (*Isaiah*, 49:1-6)

Two aspects of this prophecy are interesting in the context of Judaic history: first, this description is consistent with the *Genesis*

***Yhwh* speaks through the prophet's mouth as the means to instruct the chosen people to do *Yhwh*'s work.**

description of the creation of male and female. Just as male and female are a manifestation of *Yhwh*, so Israel is the presence of *Yhwh* in the world. Secondly, Israel is described as having a mouth which is a sharp sword, a sharpened arrow, even a "servant in whom I (*Yhwh*) shall be glorified" as well as the people through whom *Yhwh* will work the salvation of all people. This *Isaiah* reference returns us to the *Exodus*' text wherein the *Elohim's* presence through the burning bush describes Moses' mission as *Yhwh's* "mouthpiece." Moses counters:

But, my Lord, never in my life have I been a man of eloquence, either before or since you have spoken to your servant. I am a slow speaker and not able to speak well. (*Exodus* 4:10)

***Elohim* answers:**

Who gave man his mouth?...Who makes him dumb or deaf, gives him sight or leaves him blind? Is it not I, *Yhwh*? Now go, I shall help you speak and tell you what to say. (*Exodus* (4:11-12)

Of course, as we shall see when we treat of the *New Testament*, this discussion and symbolism reoccurs in numerous places within the *New Testament*, but nowhere more specifically than within the very beginning of *John's Gospel* (1:1-18). John describes the origin and mission of the *Logos* of God, literally Greek for "speech", the "Word made flesh", Jesus Christ. This description takes on the characteristic of myth, that is, the *sacred* transcendent God as shining through the *profane* human nature; the *sacred* Light of God as shining in the *profane* darkness. So, just as the *Old Testament* presents the Jewish people as those through whom all people will return to the God from whom they came and specifies Moses as *Elohim's* "mouth", so the *New Testament* describes the Jew, Jesus Christ as the "word of God, made flesh". Both Testaments describe the instruments, Israel and Christ as human "profane" instruments through which *the sacred* manifests presence to humans.

Briefly, therefore, *Old Testament* prophets describe Jews as *Yhwh's* presence on earth, *Yhwh's* instrument through which *Elohim* will work on earth, the *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*, *I am who I am*, of *Exodus* (3:13-20) who gives Moses his mission; and whom John describes as Christ, "God with us" the Divine nature present through a complementary human nature who does "His Father's work", Thus, as in myth, so in the bible, male and female, the Jewish prophets and even the Jews themselves and then material human nature become those worldly realities through whom the divine manifests transcendence within presence throughout the world. Such is the Judaic description of the relationship of male, female, the Jewish prophets, the nation and the material world to *Yhwh*. Both *Old* and *New Testament*, therefore, portray the relationship of human being to God verbally, that is, by way of the *word*, whether the prophet in the *Old* or the "Word of God made man," Jesus Christ, in the *New Testament*.

One other fact is relevant, as we place the Judaic view of *Yhwh* within the context of myth and religion: the prophet's description of *Yhwh's*

relationship to the Jews and human beings. **Genesis** merely describes God's relationship to the world and human beings as creator whose "spirit hovered over the water" (1:2), an apparent reference to a bird hanging in the air over its young in a nest within **Deuteronomy** (32:11). Yet, this description changes when the relationship of **Yhwh** to male and female is stated. Both **Genesis'** accounts register this change. The first specifies "in the image of God he created them" whereas the second states:

Yhwh, God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils breath of life, and thus man became a living being. (**Genesis** 2: 7)

The biblical text, therefore, symbolizes a humanly personal relationship between **Yhwh** and human beings and this relationship is

further depicted by the prophets Isaiah and Hosea - we shall see how the New Testament, Indeed, both **Leviticus** (19:18-19) and **Deuteronomy** (6:9) speak of **Yhwh** "writing" love upon the hearts of human beings, love of **Yhwh**, self and neighbor. Jesus Christ built upon, yet redefined this relationship through the "Our Father". Christ claimed a human nature, "emptying himself to become man," as St. Paul described the Incarnation. Thus, the New Testament adds the dimension of biology to the "image and likeness" relationship to **Yhwh**; that relationship now becomes familial, a universal family, not at all an ethnic or Jewish one, that of "the Father" with Christ as our brother. Yet, even Isaiah and Hosea, Old Testament prophets describe **Yhwh's** life-causing or living relationship to human beings by using the twin biological relationship of a mother to a child within her womb and the marital relationship of husband to wife.

Scripturally, Yhwh is the "living God" and, therefore, the source of life for the living.

For Zion was saying, '**Yhwh** has abandoned me; the Lord has forgotten me.'

Does a woman forget her baby at the breast,
or fail to cherish the son of her womb?

Yet even if these forget,
I will never forget you. (Isaiah 49:14-15)

Yhwh calls Israel home through Hosea, who calls his wife, an adulterous home, from death to life.

Hosea compares **Yhwh** to a husband whose wife, in this case Israel has become a prostitute and has worshiped the images of the God Baal, the oriental Canaanite God. **Yhwh** states that he will lure his

wayward wife, Israel back to himself.

Then she will say, 'I will go back' to my first husband,
I was happier then than I am today.'

That is why I am going to lure her
and lead her out into the wilderness
and speak to her heart.

I am going to give her back her vineyards,
and make the Valley of Achor a gateway of hope.
There she will respond to me as she did when she was young,
as she did when she came out of the land of Egypt.

When that day comes - it is **Yhwh** who speaks-
she will call me, 'My husband, no longer will she call me, 'My Baal.'

I will take the names of the Baals off her lips,
their names shall never be uttered again. (*Hosea 2: 8-20*)

This statement is interesting because the prophet reiterates that "it is **Yhwh** who speaks". Thus, from the viewpoint of myth, Hosea identifies these words as the revealed speech of **Yhwh**. The Old Testament divine, for all the Orthodox Jew's warning against and condemnation of blasphemy and idolatry transcends the human prophet and becomes present to Israel through the prophet; the sacred speaks its presence within the human world through the tongue of the human prophet. Then that prophet describes the divine relationship to human beings biologically, as a mother who never forgets the child of her womb and as a spouse whose husband always loves her and welcomes her back no matter what she does or has done - remember the significance of this Hosea comparison, since Moses ordered that the adulteress caught in adultery be stoned to death, but never forgiven. Thus, if we "believe" in the Testaments, we might question ourselves, if we do not follow the advice of Hosea, imitating **Yhwh**'s love of Israel as a prostitute in welcoming a spouse who has committed adultery back to our loving embrace.

Yhwh, Old and New Testament Difference in Myth

In spite of the common use of myth between primitive religious people and the Old Testament Jews, a difference appears between the Old and New Testament use of myth. When we compare the Old Testament use of **Yhwh** and a shepherd with the New Testament use of Christ with a shepherd, a dramatic difference appears. The Old Testament text comparing **Yhwh** with a shepherd comes from the prophet Ezekiel whereas the New Testament text comes from the *Gospel of St. John*. The Old Testament use of shepherd is judgmental, even condemnatory and exclusive:

...**Yhwh** says this: I am going to call the shepherds to account. I am going to take my flock back from them and I shall not allow them to feed my flock. I mean to raise up one shepherd, my servant David, and to put him in charge of them and he will pasture them; he will pasture them and be their shepherd...No more will they be a prey to foreign countries, no more will they be eaten by wild animals in this country...And men will learn that I, their God, am with them and that they, the House of Israel, are my people. (*Ezekiel, 34: 1-31*)

The shepherd myth of the Old and New Testament differ.

The New Testament text, on the contrary, is compassionate, peaceful and inviting:

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd is one who lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, since he is not the shepherd and the sheep do not belong to him, abandons the sheep and runs away as soon as he sees a wolf coming, and then the wolf attacks and scatters the sheep; this is because he is only a hired man and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And there are other sheep I have that are not of this fold, and these I have to lead as well. They too will listen to my voice and there will be only one flock, and one shepherd. The Father loves me because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me; I lay it down of my own free will, and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power

to take it up again; and this is the command I have been given by my father. (*John 10: 1-18*)

A second, more dramatic difference between the *Old* and *New Testament* view of the relationship between **Yhwh** and Israel and the relationship between the people of God and God is found in a comparison between the celebrated "Our Father" of the *New Testament* and David's *Psalms* No. 119, the longest of 150 psalms of the *Old Testament* and the one used for Hebrew language instruction.

The *New Testament* "Our Father" is biological whereas the *Old Testament* Yhwh of *Psalms* No. 119 is political.

The "Our Father" is found in two of the three so-called synoptic (literally, "one eye," or "same viewpoint" gospels, that of *Matthew* (6:7-15) and *Luke* (11:1-8).

Our Father in heaven
may your name be held holy
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us.
And do not put us to the test,
but save us from the evil one. (*Matthew*; 6:7-15)

David's 150 psalms were the Orthodox Jewish prayer and replicated the Jews' covenant history with Yhwh.

The dramatic difference is obvious. *Psalms* 119 is one of the prayerful songs of David, but symbolically of Israel to **Yhwh**. The attitude is not that of a

child to a father, rather, it is that of a warrior to a commanding general, or, a war God, more powerful than Zeus. The basic premise is contractual. Israel, as the "chosen people" for its part, obeys the laws of God, so "living **Yhwh**" for its part, accompanies Israel in the "tabernacle," even going to war, killing, even eliminating enemies who are not Jewish.

The Jews and **Yhwh**, therefore, have a unique relationship, unlike that of any human peoples to God. So, David seeks a **quid pro quo**. The orthodox Jews, in other words conceived **Yhwh** to be their political "avenger and protector" within this human world. Of course, *Hosea* also viewed the relationship to be analogous to that between a wife and spouse, as did the *Old Testament Canticle of Canticles*. But, the *New Testament*, on the contrary, looked at God as a biological father, the source of life and nourishment; the only limitation upon the Father's forgiveness was the limitation we placed upon it, since in the measure we forgave others and ourselves, so the Father would forgive us! David hardly showed such forgiveness to the enemies of Judaism.

The importance of this *Psalms* 119 to the understanding of Orthodox Judaic, denominational religion cannot be overemphasized for two reasons: first, *psalm* in Hebrew means "song", and, as the longest psalm within the 150 written by David, is **the** "liturgical" prayer of the Jew. Secondly, *Psalms* 119 was written according to the Hebrew alphabet, from **Aleph** to **Taw** and, therefore, was the primary grade reading text for all Jewish children. This psalm was **the** instrument of their learning to read and write, the first *Psalms*

they committed to memory - so, Judaic education is radically religious, following upon the nature of the covenant between **Yhwh** and Israel. Thus, Orthodox Jewish parents insure that their children, particularly the first born male, but also females learn Hebrew, the language of their *Torah*, their sacred scriptures, the story of their covenant history and direction for their future lives. Furthermore, when *Psalm 119* is compared to the *Book of Job* a parallel comparison appears which reinforces this Jewish view of **Yhwh** as creator and protector.□

The *Book of Job* presents the story of a "good, orthodox Jew", and, therefore, one favored by **Yhwh**, the giver of all the goods of this world. Traditionally, the Orthodox Jew viewed business success, similar to the success of Job, that is, as a sign of **Yhwh**'s favor. (We shall see that John Calvin, early follower of Martin Luther, adopted this Orthodox, Judaic view as the tangible "proof" of God's favor in lieu of the Catholic sacrament of confession as a visible sign of God's forgiveness and mercy.)

Job had land, crops, animals, children, servants, everything and the devil argued that these earthly gifts were the occasion of Job's denominational religious belief. So the devil proposed a codicil for the "covenant contract" between **Yhwh** and the Jewish people. The codicil consisted in the devil being given **Yhwh**'s permission to take these earthly gifts from Job. The devil contended that lacking these earthly gifts Job would abandon the Jewish covenant and his worship of **Yhwh**. **Yhwh** agreed to this "test" of Job with one exception, the Devil could do anything, but could not harm Job physically. (This *Old Testament* "test" seems to be the "test" to which Christ refers within the celebrated "Our Father.")

Thus, this belief of covenant Jew, that **Yhwh** would kill Jewish enemies and bring the Jews peace on earth carried over into the *New Testament* and the Jewish rabbis and lawyers looked for Christ to be a political and warrior King, after the symbol of David to lead them in war against the Romans (*Matthew 11:2-15*, *John 5:31-47*). In addition, the *Old Testament* Rabbis contended that **Yhwh** would favor the Jews with earthly goods and success, including long life, if they obeyed laws of the covenant, as dictated by Moses within the *Torah*, or laws, found within the first five books, or *Pentateuch*. Both physical and material benefits were the effect of keeping the laws of the covenant and belief in **Yhwh** -- a contention that both Luther and Calvin re-asserted as the principal foundation proving that protestant Christianity, at that time, specifically Lutheranism and Calvinism was the "true religion," in the face of their rejection of the Catholic Church and the Pope, as the successor to Peter.

Yet, notwithstanding the warlike character of *Psalm 119*, a moving appeal for mercy and forgiveness of enemies and those who hurt us is made within the *Old Testament* by the prophet, Ben Sirach, **Ecclesiasticus::**

Resentment and anger, these are foul things too, and both are found with the sinner. He who exacts vengeance will experience the vengeance of the Lord, who keeps strict account of sin. Forgive your neighbor the hurt he does you, and when you pray, your sins will be forgiven. If a man nurses anger against another, can he then demand compassion from the Lord? Showing no pity for a man like himself, can he then plead for his own sins? Mere creature of flesh, he cherishes resentment; who will forgive him his sins? Remember the last things, and stop hating, remember dissolution and death, and live by the commandments. Remember the commandments, and do not bear your neighbor ill-will;

remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook the offence.
(*Ecclesiasticus*: 27;30-28;8)

Sirach, a later prophet, probably influenced by Hellenic, Greek culture and philosophy appeals to the Jew to remember the covenant as the motivation for forgiveness of those who hurt them, thereby alluding to the fact that *Yhwh* continued to forgive Israel for repeated violation of the commandments and the covenant Moses concluded with *Yhwh*. This forgiveness is personified within the prophet Hosea as a spouse forgiving an adulterous wife.

Moses Maimonides is the first Orthodox Rabbi to use human reason as a tool to understand the Jewish faith, *Torah* and covenant.

Yet, notwithstanding this appeal of Sirach, the central difference between the Jewish prayers to *Yhwh* within the *Old Testament* and that between the *New Testament* person and the "Our Father" taught by Christ is found in one line: "And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us". The Jews, as exemplified by David, their general and king, assumed that their observance of the law, according to the covenant, entailed and promised reciprocal protection of Israel and destruction of Israel's enemies because of Israel's loyalty. Whereas the Christian's forgiveness of enemies' sins against us personally is the condition of the Father's forgiveness of our own sins as the basis of Christ's message to us through the *New Testament*.

Moses Maimonides, *Torah*, Prophet and Human Nature

Maimonides contends that the Orthodox Jew must be virtuous in order to be saintly.

Moses ben Maimon, born in 1135, died in 1204, entitled his most famous work the *Guide*

for the Perplexed, first transcribed in 1190. The *Guide* is a commentary on the *Old Testament* or the *Pentateuch*, also called the *Torah*, literally, *The Law*. Maimonides used reason, specifically the philosophic approach of Aristotle to explain the *Torah* for the average Orthodox Jew. This commentary records the first time in Judaic history an Orthodox Rabbi's use of reason to explain prophecy and changed the historical course of scriptural analysis and interpretation. Maimonides dedicates the *Guide* to those who studied theology, sought knowledge and who "...while firm in religious matters are perplexed and bewildered on account of the ambiguous and figurative expressions employed in holy writings". Maimonides employs philosophy as a linguistic and methodological tool, thus uses reason to analyze the meanings of scriptural statements. As a matter of fact, his demonstration that *Yhwh* exists uses the same basis in Aristotle, motion to being as did Aquinas within the so-called *five ways* (*The Guide for the Perplexed*, Part 1, Chapters I and following; Part 2, Chapters II-XIV.)

At the same time, Maimonides wrote what is referred to the *Abot*, in English, *Eight Chapters on Ethics*. This work is unique within Jewish literature. Maimonides states unequivocally that the holiness of the Jewish prophet depends upon the virtue of the Jewish prophet. So, the twelfth century A.D. Maimonides states that to be holy the Orthodox Jew must be natural, that is virtuous. Sanctity requires virtue. His "Foreword" observes:

Now, there is nothing that ranks so high with us as saintliness, unless it be prophecy, and it is saintliness that paves the way

to prophecy...putting into practice the teachings of this tractate (*Abot*) leads one to prophecy...because upon it depends a number of ethical principles.(p.3435)

Moderation in action and honesty in living are as necessary to the virtuous human being as they are to the prophet of *Yhwh*.

Notwithstanding, therefore, the "purity" of the Orthodox Jew's *Yhwh*, as well as the necessity to worship *Elohim* with purity of heart, "...with one's whole heart, mind, soul and being..." Maimonides reminds us of Socrates within the

Apology, as he insists that being human and acting ethically is the basis for that "saintliness", or holiness necessary to prophesy. Thus, we may say that Maimonides sees that scriptural language uses figurative and symbolic languages, what Eliade and Campbell call "myths". Yet, Maimonides also sees that the Orthodox Jew must base any prophetic expression of *Yhwh*, any myth on the solid basis of human nature, ethical actions, that is, human actions based upon the principles of reason.

Maimonides looks upon the use of reason and human actions as ethical just as *Yhwh* viewed creation, as "good." This is why these *Eight Chapters* are chosen within this consideration of the *Old Testament* as a B.C. originated denominational religion. (Both protestant "reformers," Luther and Calvin might have avoided a faulty theology had they not have persisted in a faulty philosophy, "might," that is, if they had read Moses Maimonides!) Maimonides' A.D. *Old Testament* view of human nature is perfectly compatible with a B.C. biologist, Aristotle, and his view of human being. As a matter of fact, Maimonides considers such a view of human nature essential and necessary to an Orthodox Jew's holiness and, thereby formative to future and contemporary *Old Testament* prophets.

Central to Maimonides' *Eight Chapters...* is the view that physical health and spiritual health are analogous. What contributes to physical health also contributes to spiritual health and vice versa. So, just as the physician who seeks to cure the body must have a perfect knowledge of the soul and its activities, so also must he who tries to cure the soul know how to prevent it from becoming diseased and how to maintain its health:

Maimonides sees that reason provides that balance to the human being which is basic and necessary to the prophet when he speaks about *Yhwh*.

Know that the human soul is one, but that it has many diversified activities...You know that the improvement of the moral qualities is brought about by the healing of the soul and its activities. Therefore, just as the physician, who endeavors to cure the human body, must have a perfect knowledge of it in its entirety and its individual parts, just as he must know what causes sickness that it may be avoided, and must also be acquainted with the means by which a patient may be cured, so, likewise, he who tries to cure the soul, wishing to improve the moral qualities, must have a knowledge of the soul and its totality and its parts, must know how to prevent it from becoming diseased, and how to maintain its health. (*Chapter I, p. 38*)

The soul's healthful state is due to its condition, and that of its faculties, by which it constantly does what is right, and performs what is proper, while the illness of the soul is occasioned by its condition, and

that of its faculties, which results in its constantly doing wrong, and performing actions that are improper. (*Chapter III, p. 51*) Chapter II began with the observation that "...transgressions and observances of the Law have their origin only in two of the faculties of the soul, namely, the sensitive and the appetitive, and that to these two faculties alone are to be ascribed all transgressions and observations". (*p. 47*) Of course, the solution to both is reason, the characteristic activity of being human. Reason is the source and solution to human living:

Reason, that faculty peculiar to man, enables him to understand, reflect, acquire knowledge of the sciences, and to discriminate between proper and improper actions. Its functions are partly practical and partly speculative (theoretical), the practical being, in turn, either mechanical or intellectual. (*p. 43*)

But, what is characteristic of human reason? Human reason is a measurer, a faculty which balances, as able to steer between those twin rocks of disaster, too much and too little, as Odysseus steered between the twin rocks guarding the entrance to the Mediterranean when he journeyed home:

"...no prophet received the gift of prophecy unless he possessed all the mental virtues..."

Good deeds are such as are equi-balanced, maintaining the mean between two equally bad extremes, the too much and the too little. Virtues are psychic conditions and dispositions which are mid-way between two reprehensible extremes, one of which is characterized by an exaggeration, the other by a deficiency. (*Chapter IV, pp. 54-55*)

This twelfth century, orthodox Jew, Maimonides proposes interesting medicine for people who are vicious, a proposal not so common today, notwithstanding our "wise" science and technology:

Let us take...the case of a man in whose soul there has developed a disposition of great avarice...one of the most detestable of defects...If we wish to cure this sick man, we must not command him merely (to practice) deeds of generosity, for that would be as ineffective as a physician trying to cure a patient consumed by a burning fever by administering mild medications, which treatment would be inefficacious. We must, however, induce him to squander so often, and to repeat his acts of profusion so continuously until that propensity which was the cause of his avarice has totally disappeared. Then, when he reaches the point where he is about to become a squanderer, we must teach him to moderate his profusion, and tell him to continue with deeds of generosity, and to watch out with due care lest he relapse either into lavishness or stinginess. (*Chapter IV, p. 59*)

Cure by practice of the opposite is therapy typical of the biologist Aristotle,. Aristotle teaches by proposing opposites within his *Organon*. What is interesting is that Moses Maimonides accepts such instruction as the mode of learning to be virtuous, to be humanly alive so that one may then be prophetic, to be divinely alive. Yet, why should this even be interesting since Maimonides views the *Torah*, or divine *Law* as being complementary to the natural law? Both seek to bring forth life, nurture growth and reproduce life. The natural struggle is to live, grow, reproduce, protect life and to live more fully; so too is the spiritual struggle:

The perfect *Law* which leads to perfection - as one who knew it well testifies by the words, 'The Law of the Lord is perfect restoring the soul; the testimonies of the Lord are faithful making wise the simple' - recommends none of these things (such as self-torture, flight from society, and so forth). On the contrary, it aims at man's following the path of moderation, in accordance with the dictates of nature, eating, drinking, enjoying legitimate sexual intercourse, all in moderation, and living among people in honesty and uprightness, but not dwelling in the wilderness, or in the mountains, or clothing oneself in garments of hair and wool, or afflicting the body. (*Chapter IV, p. 63*)

Maimonides observes that the *Law* forbids both revenge, or bearing a grudge and wrath, or anger. Indeed, he points out that *Yhwh* withdrew the gift of prophesy from Elisha and punished Moses for these extremes. Just as virtues are "either intellectual or moral":

Maimonides about the human being: "If I am not for myself who will be for me?" So, holiness begins with humanness.

Similarly, vices are intellectual, as ignorance, stupidity, and want of understanding; or they are moral as inordinate lust, pride, irascibility, anger, impudence, avarice, and many other similar defects, a list of which we have given and explained in Chapter IV. Each of these defects is as a partition separating man from God, the Most High. This is what the prophet meant when he said, 'But your iniquities have ever made a separation between you and your God,' which means that our sins - which, as we have said, are the evil qualities - are the partitions which separate us from God. (*Chapter VII, pp. 80-81*)

Again, we notice the absence of any negativity about human nature from Maimonides, the Orthodox Jewish Rabbinical scholar and teacher, similar to that we find in Luther or Calvin relative to the sinful human being. Sins are nothing more or less than "evil qualities" to Maimonides, just as virtues are "good qualities."

Maimonides contends that the Orthodox Jew must be virtuous in order to be saintly.

Maimonides, however, observes that "...no prophet received the gift of prophecy

unless he possessed all the mental virtues and a great majority of the most important ones". (*p.80*) So, he contends that the "duty of man" is "to subordinate all the faculties of his soul to his reason" and that man "must keep his mind's eye fixed constantly upon one goal, namely, the attainment of the knowledge of God...as far as it is possible for mortal man to know Him". (*Chapter V, p. 69*) Maimonides maintains, therefore, that the very life of the human being depends upon living according to reason and that living such a life enhances the human's very life because living according to reason predisposes and brings humans to knowledge of the "living God."

So, his only design in eating, drinking, cohabiting, sleeping, waking, moving about and resting should be the preservation of bodily health, while, in turn, the reason for the latter is that the soul and its agencies may be in sound and perfect condition, so that he may readily acquire wisdom, and gain moral and

intellectual virtues, all to the end that man may reach the highest goal of his endeavors...The purpose of all this is to restore the healthful condition of the body, but the real object in maintaining the body in good health is to acquire wisdom. Likewise, in the pursuit of wealth, the main design in its acquisition should be to expend it for noble purposes, and to employ it for the maintenance of the body and the preservation of life, so that its owner may obtain a knowledge of God, in so far as that is vouchsafed to man. (*Chapter V, pp. 69-79*)

Maimonides calls our attention to the fact that the *Law* urges us to this same goal:

Such striving does the Almighty require of us, according to the words, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might," that is, with all the faculties of your soul, each faculty having its sole ideal the love of God. The prophets, similarly, urge us on in saying, "in all your ways know Him," in commenting upon which the wise men said, 'even as regards a transgression...' meaning thereby that you should set for every action a goal, namely, the truth, even though it be, from a certain point of view a transgression. (*Chapter V, pp. 73-74*)

Maimonides points out that the *Torah* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* have the same goal.

Maimonides adds that even philosophers "...maintain that though a man of self-restraint performs moral and praiseworthy deeds, yet he does them desiring and craving all the while for immoral deeds, but, subduing his passions and actively fighting against a longing to do those to which his faculties, his desires, and his psychic disposition excite him, succeeds, though with constant vexation and irritation, in acting morally". (Chapter VI, p. 75) Then, he concludes: "This is manifestly an agreement between Scripture and philosophy." (p. 76) After all, how can nature, or the natural faculties within the human soul and body discovered by reason contradict the scriptural word of Yhwh as revealed by the prophets? Just as the word of reason is true, so the word of the prophet is divine; thus, both logos as reason and mythos as word speak truth.

Maimonides, therefore, is not surprised to find that "...a few moral imperfections lessen the degree of prophetic inspiration".(Chapter VII, p. 81) After all, if immoral actions are unhealthy for and weaken the quality of healthful human living, would not these same immoral actions affect our spiritual health and consequently the quality of our relationship with the living God? Of course, a problem arises, namely, does not the health or illness of a person depend upon nature, so also does not the health or illness of this same person depend upon the living God? Medical science finds that many diseases are inherited; are not people created with defects which affect their spiritual health? Maimonides cites the view of the philosophers as evidence that virtuous health or vicious disease is the result of human free choice:

We, on the contrary, are convinced that our Law agrees with Greek philosophy, which substantiates with convincing proofs the contention that man's conduct is entirely in his own hands, that no compulsion is exerted, and that no external influence is brought to bear upon him that constrains him to be either virtuous or

vicious, except inasmuch as, according to what we have said above, he may be by nature so constituted as to find it easy or hard, as the case may be, to do a certain thing; but that he must necessarily do, or refrain from doing a certain thing is absolutely untrue...Moreover, it would be useless, in fact absolutely in vain, for man to study, to instruct, or attempt to learn an art, as it would be entirely impossible for him, on account of the external force compelling him, according to the opinion of those who hold this view, to keep from doing a certain act, from gaining certain knowledge, or from acquiring a certain characteristic...In reality, the undoubted truth of the matter is that man has full sway over all his actions. IF he wishes to do a thing, he does it; if he does not wish to do it, he need, not, without any external compulsion controlling him. Therefore, God very properly commanded man, saying, ‘ See I have set before you this day life and the good, death and evil...therefore choose life,’ giving us, as regards these, freedom of choice. (Chapter VIII, pp. 87-88)

Maimonides comments that “...man has become the only being in the world who possesses a characteristic which no other being has in common

“...a few moral imperfections lessen the degree of prophetic inspiration.”

with him...that by and of himself man can distinguish between good and evil, and do that which he pleases, with absolutely no restraint. (Chapter VIII, p. 92) He finally concludes his Eight Chapters with a quotation from the rabbinical ethical sayings: “If I am not for myself who will be for me?”

Moses Maimonides places the burden of living or dying, living virtuously or viciously, being spiritually healthy or ill on each human being, something with which we find neither of the protestant reformers, Luther or Calvin would agree. Whereas the twelfth century A.D. rabbinical scholar and teacher Maimonides placed the responsibility for being spiritual squarely on the human’s use or abuse of reason, Luther and Calvin lay the responsibility on pre-destination, as being given the “faith in Jesus Christ.” Being Jewish might have been special to Moses Maimonides and being chosen by *Yhwh* through the covenant might have been sacred, neither being special nor being sacred supplanted being human.