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THE ÉLAN of a religious culture is frequently symbolized in the one or more hero-images that it produces. The hero is the incarnation of the ideal. Greater than life-size, he represents in perfect measure that which others must try to emulate in whole or in part. The saint and the knight are the two chief hero-images of medieval Europe, as the philosopher and the warrior were of the Greco-Roman age, the monk and the missionary of early Christendom, the many-sided artist of the Renaissance, the gentleman of Victorian England, and the captain of industry of the rapidly expanding American republic.

In Holy Scriptures, we recognize a deliberate design to avoid the exclusive adoration of one hero-image. Moses is by far the outstanding personality, but, we are told, he was ineffective by himself. He needed the help of Aaron and the support of the seventy-two elders. "Man of God" though he was, he was still liable to sin and to punishment. None of the beloved patriarchs, prophets, kings, or priests was either sinless or infallible, though they were "chosen" by the Lord as His elect. Actually, God alone is the hero, and all that man can achieve is to attempt "to walk in His ways." But, God cannot serve as a hero-image, for man is not allowed to imitate Him in all ways; man may not be "jealous," for instance, though the Lord is jealous, for in Him this quality derives from His uniqueness and His absoluteness. And only the Lord is Absolute.

Several hero-images reflect the diverse ideals of the Bible. To the end of the biblical period the priest remains a most revered authority.
Abraham offers tithes to Melchizedek, “the priest of God Most High.”  
And Malachi, the last of the prophets, describes the priest in these glowing terms:

The Torah of truth was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

A priest is universally the guardian of the tradition. He performs the ritual in the ancient, wonted ways, without question and without deviation. His life is hedged about with special ordinances, which keep him undefiled. In Israel, only those born in priestly families, possessing authenticated pedigrees, could officiate. The priests formed a caste of their own, with secrets that were jealously kept from the eyes of the general public. In terms of religious needs, the priest responds to the emotional-mystical phases of piety. To the worshipper, the priest is the surrogate of the Deity. The ritual is mysteriously, magically effective—but only when the priest performs it. The more archaic and irrational the ritual is, the more it symbolizes and dramatizes the mystery of life itself. The priest ministers to the feelings of religion—anxiety, guilt, the need for lustration, the desire to express gratitude and to seek forgiveness. To priests, worshippers come, seeking solace and comfort, the blessing of sharing in the redemptive Grace that flows from above. And if they seek instruction, it is the hallowed precepts of tradition they look for, not original words of wisdom.

The priestly hero-image was included in the Bible, but it was also transcended. Moses announces his intention of founding a “Kingdom of priests and holy nation.” Every Jew is to share in the glory of priesthood, shunning “the unclean” and periodically cleansing himself from “all their defilements.” While the priestly prophet Ezekiel seems to say that the priest alone must not eat unclean and improperly slaughtered meat (nevelah uterefah), the Torah ordains this law for all Jews.

The prophet is probably the most distinctive hero-image of the biblical period. While all religious cultures have priests of one kind or another, we do not know of exact parallels to the classical prophets. The institution of prophecy was, of course, common in the Near East. But while the Canaanite prophets, like the Hebrew “prophetizers,”
were primarily ecstasies, the Hebrew prophets were philosophers as well as rhapsodists, statesmen as well as enthusiasts, religious innovators rather than temple functionaries. The prophet's source of authority is not the tradition, but the living Word, which is like a "burning fire" in his bones. He articulates a personal inspiration, which, he feels, ought to be convincing to others as it is convincing to him.

The prophet is a mediator between the voice of reason and conscience, on the one hand, and the feelings of mystical reverence, on the other. He revitalizes the tradition precisely because it is transformed in his consciousness, by the white fire of religious ecstasy. The prophet sees the heavenly Vision of Perfection, as if it were concrete reality here on earth, but he interprets its meaning in the rational terms of everyday life—the Way of Wisdom.

A renowned biblical scholar pointed to the tension between prophet and priest, as forming the perennial source of self-renewal in the West:

The Judeo-Christian religious continuum is historically a synthesis of two main factors. First, we have a developing pattern of Covenants between God and early Israel, governing faith, ethics and cult. Second, we see the interaction of two distinct elements in periodic tension; an institutionalized hierarchy of religious functionaries and an upsurge of charismatic spiritual leaders. Because of this ever-renewed tension between hierarchy and charisma, the Judeo-Christian continuum has always been capable of periodic self-criticism—a process to which Western conscience owes its persistent revivals of sensitivity.

The Sage is the third hero-image of the Bible. He is the teacher of practical wisdom, which is concerned with the attainment of success and happiness here on earth. The precepts of wisdom were more or less international in character. Such books as Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes deal with human problems in a context that is not specifically Jewish. Since the biblical canon includes the writings of the Sages as well as those of the priests and prophets, it tempers the fiery lava of prophetic revelation with the cool stream of gnomic wisdom that is both practical and universal. The Sage appeals to reason, human experience, or the common mind of man. The tripartite structure of the Hebrew Bible suggests that the wisdom of the Sages derives from God, as much as the prophet's revelation and the priest's tradition. Wisdom asserts, "The Lord created me at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts of
Thus wisdom antedated the Torah in the mind of God. The prophet Jeremiah was inclined to equate the three components of the sacred tradition: "For there shall not be lost the Torah of the priest, the word of the prophet, and the counsel of the Sage." Following is Philo’s description of the stature of Moses as prophet, priest, and philosopher:

We have now fully treated of two sides of the life of Moses, the royal and the legislative. We must proceed to give account of the third, which concerns his priesthood.

... The chief and most essential quality required by a priest is piety, and this he practiced in a very high degree, and at the same time made use of his great natural gifts. In these, philosophy found a good soil, which she improved still further by the admirable truths which she brought before his eyes, nor did she cease until the fruits of virtue shown in word and deed were brought to perfection. Thus he came to love God and be loved by Him, as have been few others. A heaven-sent rapture inspired him, so markedly did he honor the Ruler of the All and was honored in return by Him...

But first he had to be clean, as in soul so also in body, to have no dealings with any passion, purifying himself from all the calls of mortal nature, food and drink and intercourse with women. This last he had disdained for many a day, almost from the time when, possessed by the spirit, he entered on his work as a prophet, since he held it fitting to hold himself always in readiness to receive the oracular messages. As for eating and drinking, he had no thought of them for forty successive days, doubtless because he had the better food of contemplation...

... Afterwards the time came when he had to make his pilgrimage from earth to heaven, and leave this mortal life for immortality, summoned thither by the Father Who resolved his twofold nature of soul and body into a single unity, transforming his whole being into mind, pure as the sunlight.

In the post-biblical period, the three biblical hero-images were blended into a new heroic image, that of the Disciple of the Wise (talmid hacham). This popular ideal emerged slowly, after a number of experiments. The early pietists (hassidim horishonim) of the second century, before the common era, formed probably the basic society of spiritual athletes, out of which there diverged in later years the Essenes, the Theraputa of Philo, the sectarians of the recently found Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Pharisees. In their turn, the Pharisees were pulled apart
by the tensions between a militant activism and a submissive quietism, between zealous exclusiveness and a missionary universalism, between the passion for individual excellence and the ideal of serving the entire community, between the puritanical ambition to control every aspect of life and a human recognition of the virtues of diversity.

After the destruction of the Temple, the ideal of the talmid hacham began to preempt the collective energies of the people. The Sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud were called hachamim, Wise Men, by the people, but they referred to themselves by the less pretentious designation, Disciples of the Wise. This hero-image, the talmid hacham, was modified in subtle and diverse ways in the various lands of the Diaspora. Yet, its basic lineaments may be discerned in life and literature down to our own day.

The Disciple of the Wise is a blend of priest, prophet, and sage. Like the priest, his life is hedged about with numerous rituals, from the moment he awakens to the reading of the Shema in bed. He eats “his secular food in accordance with the priestly requirements of purity.”

The law envelops his life as an Oriental woman is wrapped in garments, from head to toe. He delights in obedience, shunning the very thought of deviation. Rabbi Akiva, incarcerated in jail, was given only a small cup of water, which he could use either to wash his hands, in keeping with the injunction of the rabbis, or drink. He preferred to wash his hands, saying, “I’d rather die than transgress the words of my colleagues.”

Yet, the Disciple of the Wise is a prophet, as well as a priest. In matters of thought, he is restless. Disdaining to force his mind into the rutted grooves of a hallowed tradition, he questions and assays the ancient answers. He seeks to understand “the reasons of the Commandments”; he confronts the realities of the market place and battles for the amelioration of the ills of society; he is cognizant of the ethical dimension, beyond the line of the Law; as an athlete of the spirit, he endeavors to reach beyond the goals of moral perfection to that mystical consumption of Ruah hakodesh, when the Spirit of Holiness lends a Divine resonance to every utterance. His piety is activist, even if not militant, full-bodied and community-minded, even when it plumbs the depths of the soul and aims at the salvation of the individual. In addition, he is also an heir of the Sages, willing “to learn from all men,” keeping his mind open to the varied challenges of the environment, and continuing the tradition of coining brief, memorable precepts for instruction in the
ways of the good life. He is a lifelong student, refusing to decide an issue "in the presence of his master," but he is also a dedicated teacher, who offers instruction freely to all who will listen, even as God confers wisdom freely upon all who listen with heart and soul.

Like the philosopher, the Disciple of the Wise ranks the pleasure of learning as his chiefest delight. His vision of heaven is a gathering of "saints sitting with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the radiance of the Shechinah." But, in this world, the Disciple of the Wise must resist the temptation to withdraw from the community and to contemplate Divine truths in splendid isolation. For, like Moses, he is a "servant of the Lord," entrusted with His work. It is his task to build up the philanthropic and educational institutions of the community and to supervise their operation. Wherever he settles, "the problems of the city become his problems." Like the prophet, he knows that his task is in this world, here and now. "More beautiful is one hour of Torah and good deeds in this world than all the delights of the world to come." But like the pietist, he conceives of Perfection as subsisting beyond the boundaries of "this world": "Better is one hour in the World to Come than all the glories of this world." Like the philosopher, the Disciple of the Wise seeks to achieve a harmony and an equilibrium in which no endeavor is carried to excess. But, like the saint, he dares to scale the heights and storm the heavens, seeking the "nearness of the Lord," with all his heart, all his soul, and all his might. Yet, he knows that to love God is "to be occupied in the upbuilding of the world," not to nurture in serene isolation a glowing ember in the soul, but to labor in the community so that the Name shall be beloved by all.

Unlike the saint, he never forgets the claims of humanity—of family, of work, of innocent delights. He is aware of the "Evil Desire" and of the many ways in which it corrupts man's best intentions, but, like the philosopher, he reveres the regenerative and intellectual qualities of human nature. "I have created the Evil Desire, but man need not be enslaved by it, if he will be guided by Torah." The good life is possible, virtue is attainable, "the Lord created man straight" and "the soul which Thou hast given me is pure"; "a person commits a sin only when the spirit of folly enters in to him." The varied pleasures in life are not evil in themselves, but only when they are abused. Happiness is not only possible, it is mandatory: "And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in all that thou puttest thy hand unto." The
Shechinah rests upon a man only when he is joyous, and a person will have to render an account for the pleasures that came his way, and he did not enjoy.23

The ideal, we recall, is not of an intellectual elite, but of all the people: “Every person should try to imitate the ways of a Disciple of the Wise.”24 In practice, only a few will qualify for this distinction: “Who is a Disciple of the Wise?—He who is worthy of being nominated as a leader of the community.”25

Aristotle speaks of the high-minded man “who is first of all a good citizen,” and “who can rule and be ruled.” The Romans enlarged the virtue of citizenship into the ideal of patriotism. Cicero wrote: “But, when with a rational spirit you have surveyed the whole field, there is no social relation among them all more close, none more dear than that which links each one of us with our country. Parents are dear; dear are children, relatives, friends; but one native land embraces all our loves.”26

Since the Sages did not belong to the governing elite of an independent state, the ideal of citizenship or patriotism assumed among them a different aspect—that of voluntary leadership in behalf of communal needs. They acknowledged the validity of the laws of the imperial government—at least, the later Babylonian rabbis did—“the Law of the government is Law.”27 But they shied away from any close association with the political and military authorities.28 Their patriotism took the form of organizing philanthropic organizations, primarily for the Jews, but by extension also to the entire community.

We are to feed the Gentile poor along with the Jewish poor, to visit the Gentiles who are sick along with the Jewish sick, to bury their dead together with the dead Israelites—in order to multiply the ways of peace.29

As an heir of the prophets, the true disciple is likely to be the storm-center of society. With the vision of Perfection glowing in his mind, he will not be content to submit tamely to entrenched evils: “A Disciple of the Wise who is liked by all the people of the community—it can only be because he does not rebuke them in respect of their duties toward heaven.”30

While humility is the highest virtue, the leader must be proud of his
work and aware of the high worth of his task; hence, in a way, also proud. "A Disciple of the Wise must have one-eighth of one-eighth of pride."  

The Disciples of the Wise supported themselves by their own labors, in order to be independent and unbiased: "Rabban Gamaliel, the son of Rabbi Judah the Prince, used to say: 'It is good to combine the learning of Torah with the acquisition of worldly skills, for sin is overcome when one labors in both directions. Torah without a craft leads to frustration and sin.' " They were to combine the refinement of feeling, the training of the intellect, and the rigors of practical leadership.

Rabbi Hanina, the son of Dosa, used to say: "He whose fear of sin is prior to his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. But if his wisdom is prior to his fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure.

"If his deeds are more than his wisdom, his wisdom will endure, but if his wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom will not endure.

"If one is liked by his fellow men, he is liked by the All-Present; if one is disliked by his fellow men, he is disliked by the All-Present."  

Following are some of the guidelines of the ideal disciple.

Ben Zoma used to say:

"Who is the Wise Man?—He who learns from all ... Who is the wealthy man?—He who rejoices with his portion ... Who is the mighty man?—He who conquers his own desire ... Who is the truly honored man?—He who honors his fellow men ..."  

Rabbi Zadok used to say:

"Do not separate yourself from the community and do not make yourself into a pleader of private causes, and do not make your learning a crown in which to glory or an axe with which to dig." So too Hillel would say, "He who utilizes the garment of a scholar for private purposes is doomed." Hence, you learn that he who makes personal profit from the words of Torah takes his life from the world.  

Yehudah ben Tema used to say:

"Be fierce as a tiger, light as an eagle, swift as a deer and heroic like a lion to do the will of your father in heaven."
Those who are bold-faced will go to hell, those who are shamefaced will go to heaven.\textsuperscript{36}

This is the way of Torah—eat bread with salt and drink water by measure. Sleep on the ground and endure the hardships of life, while you labor in the Torah. If you do this, you will find happiness and goodness—you will be happy in this life and attain goodness in the world to come.\textsuperscript{37}

This is the way of a Disciple of the Wise:

"He is humble and lowly of spirit, alert and world-wise, beloved by people and not domineering toward the people of his own household. While he is ever critical of himself [fearing sin], he judges other people according to their deeds. He says—'all the things of this world, I do not really care for.' He willingly covers himself with dust by sitting at the feet of the wise. No man can see evil in him. He presents his questions logically, and he replies correctly.

"Be as an open vessel, which does not shut out fresh air, and as a deeply plowed field which keeps its waters, like a waxed can which keeps its wine, but also as a sponge which absorbs all things.

"Do not be as a large opening which makes the room drafty, but also not as a tiny opening, in order to avoid staleness and stagnation..."

"Let all your ways be for the sake of heaven. Love heaven, but also fear it. Tremble over the Commandments, but also rejoice in them."\textsuperscript{38}

A Disciple of the Wise must be modest in the way he eats, drinks, washes and oils himself, dresses and carries himself, in his manners and in his deeds... He does not speak in the presence of one greater than he, does not interrupt the words of a colleague; he thinks before he replies; he orders his words, and if he does not know, he admits the fact; he always consents to the truth.

He is in perpetual pursuit of truth, as against falsehood, of faithfulness as against robbery, of modesty as against vulgarity, of peace as against war, of the counsels of elders as against those of youth, of courage as against lust.\textsuperscript{39}

At times the Sages described the path of the Disciple as an endless upward climb, consisting of the mastery of level after level of virtue.

Greater is Torah than priesthood or royalty, for royalty is acquired by thirty rungs, priesthood by twenty-four and Torah by forty-eight—namely:
Learning, training one's ear, disciplining one's lips, the understanding of the heart; by awe and reverence, by humility, joy and purity; by serving the wise, clinging to friends, by discussion, reflection on Scripture and Mishnah; by lessening one's preoccupation with business, the ways of the world, pleasure, sleep, conversation and laughter; by patience, a good heart, trusting the wise and accepting anguish cheerfully; by recognizing one's place, rejoicing in one's lot, hedging his words and avoiding self-righteousness; by being beloved, loving the All-Present, loving people, loving justice, good deeds and rebuke; by shunning honors, pride and authority; by sharing the burden of colleagues; helping them toward the scale of merit and leading them toward truth and peace; reflecting on his learning, adding to what he has learned by the dialectic of questions and answers; learning for the sake of teaching and doing; sharpening the wisdom of his teacher and giving right direction to the tradition that he has heard. . . .

This is how a Disciple of the Wise takes care of his health and his appearance:

Hillel the Elder used to walk part of the way with his pupils, after they left the House of Study. Said his pupils to him—

"Our teacher, where do you go?" Said he, "To do a mizvah." "And what is that mizvah?" said they. He replied, "To wash in the bath-house." Said they, "What kind of mizvah is this?"

He explained, "The pictures and statues of Kings are washed and cleaned by men who are especially designated for this task. It is considered a high honor. But, I, being created in the Divine Image, must surely deem it a privilege to take good care of His image." 41

A Disciple of the Wise is deserving of death, if a blemish is found on his garment. 42

THE MODESTY OF THE HILLELITES

For three years, the houses of Shammai and Hillel debated—each faction maintaining that the law was in accord with its position. Then a Divine echo announced—"These views and these views are the words of the Living God, but the law is in accord with the words of the House of Hillel." But if both opinions are the words of the Living God, why is the
law according to the words of the Hillelites?—Because they were modest and well-mannered. They teach the doctrines of the Shammaites as well as their own; furthermore, they state their opponent's position first, and only then do they give their own opinion.

Hence, we learn that whoever humbles himself, the Holy One uplifts him, and whoever exalts himself, the Holy One humbles him.43

THE DIALECTIC OF TORAH-STUDY

When Rav Kahana came up to the land of Israel [from Babylonia, at the beginning of the third century], Rav advised him, "Don't question the decisions of Rabbi Yohanan for seven years."

He found Resh Lakish, repeating the daily lesson to the pupils. Rav Kahana inquired, "Where is Resh Lakish?" And they said, "Why do you ask?" He answered—"One may pose ever so many questions [in regard to the lesson] and give so many answers." Then Resh Lakish came to Rabbi Yohanan and said, "A lion came up out of Babylonia."

On the following day, Rav Kahana was placed in the first row in front of Rabbi Yohanan. The latter stated one law. Rav Kahana did not question it; then, a second law was proposed; still, Rav Kahana did not question. He was then demoted seven rows, till he came to the last row. Said Rabbi Yohanan to Resh Lakish, "The lion you spoke of turned out to be a fox."

Said Rav Kahana, "May these seven rows count for the seven years that Rav asked me to abstain." He stood on his feet and asked Rabbi Yohanan to repeat the lesson from the beginning. When Rabbi Yohanan stated the first law, Rav Kahana confronted him with one question, then another, so that he was returned to the first row.

Rabbi Yohanan was sitting on seven pillows, and he would remove one pillow for every question that he could not answer. In the end, all the pillows were removed and he sat on the ground.44

Rabbi Yohanan was deeply grieved [over the death of Resh Lakish]. Said the Sages, "Who will undertake to comfort him?"—Let Rabbi Elazar Ben Padat go, for his lessons are very keen. He came and sat before Rabbi Yohanan. Whatever Rabbi Yohanan would say, Rabbi Elazar would support with additional evidence.

Then Rabbi Yohanan cried out, "Are you like Resh Lakish?" Whenever I would state a law, he would put to me twenty-four objections,
then from the questions and answers, the matter would be clarified. But you only say—“let me show you how right you are.” “Do I need you to tell me I am right?”

He then stood up and tore his clothes, crying, “Where are you Resh Lakish? Where are you Resh Lakish?”

THE MYSTICAL POWER OF TORAH-LEARNING

The Disciples of the Wise were heirs of the prophets. “From the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the wise.”

The ideal Disciple of the Wise was, therefore, somewhat of a mystic. His learning was more than an accumulation of knowledge—it was also the attainment of a high degree of holiness. The Divine Presence (Shechinah) was in attendance whenever the Disciples debated the Law.

“From the day when the Holy Temple was destroyed, the Holy One, blessed be He, possesses in His world only the four ells of Halacha.”

In the Talmudic period, the Disciples of the Wise were believed to experience mystical visions and to possess miraculous powers. While this phase of their personality was not always elaborated by way of tales of wonder, mystical potency forms part of the ideal. The Disciple of the Wise is more than a scholar; he is a pneumatic personality, a spiritual athlete, forever striving to approach the Divine Presence and, on extreme occasions, disposing of superhuman powers.

VICARIOUS ATONEMENT

Said Rabbi Yose, son of Abin: “All these years that Rabbi Judah the Prince suffered from toothaches, there was not one miscarriage in the land of Israel and no woman suffered the agonies of childbirth.”

Many legends circulated about the friendly relations between Rabbi Judah the Prince and a Roman Emperor. In one of them, the Emperor exclaims: “I know that even the least one of your disciples is capable of reviving the dead.”

On the day when Rabbi Judah the Prince died, a Divine Echo (bath-kol) came out from heaven and announced: “Whoever was present at the time when he died is invited to the life of the world to come.”
"Ever since he died, there was no longer humility and the fear of sin."  

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

When Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, the last of the prophets died, the Holy Spirit was removed from Israel. Nevertheless, they were able to make use of the Divine Echo (bath-kol). One day, the disciples were sitting in the garret of Guriah at Jericho, when they heard a heavenly Divine Echo announce:

"There is one here who is worthy of the Shechinah resting upon him even as it descended on Moses our teacher, but his generation is not worthy of this honor!"

Then the Sages directed their eyes to Hillel the Elder, and when he died, they said of him—"Oh, the saint, oh, the humble man, a disciple of Ezra."

They said of Rabbi Jonathan, son of Uziel,—At the time when he would sit down to learn Torah, every bird that flew above him would immediately be burned.

The story is told of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai [died c. 80 C.E.] that he was riding upon a donkey, with his disciple Rabbi Elazar ben Arach holding the reins. Said Elazar, "My Master, teach me a chapter concerning the Divine Chariot."

Said the Rabbi, "Did I not tell you that one may not teach about the Divine Chariot save to one person at a time—and he must be one who understands by himself?"

"May I then present to you some teaching that I derived from you?" asked Elazar, and Rabbi Yohanan consented. He descended from his donkey, wrapped his coat around him and sat under an olive tree. "Why did you get off the donkey?" asked Elazar, and his teacher replied:

"Can it be that you will speak of the Divine Chariot, and the Shechinah is with us, and the ministering angels follow after us, and I shall be riding upon a donkey?"

Then Rabbi Elazar, son of Arach, began to preach of the intricacies of the Divine Chariot, and a fire came down from heaven and irradiated the trees of the field, which began to sing their praises to God . . . And an angel cried out of the fire—"This, surely, is the right account of the Divine Chariot."
The Ideal Personality

MIRACLES AND MARTYRDOM

Said Rav Papa to Abaye [early fourth-century Babylonian scholars]:
"Why were miracles performed for the early scholars, but none seem to happen to us? Is it on account of Torah? In the days of Rav Yehuda, they would learn only the Order of Torts, while we learn all six Orders. Yet, the moment Rav Yehuda would remove his shoe [to begin a fast-day] the rains would come down, while we cry and torment ourselves—yet no one minds us?"

Rav Papa replied:
"The early scholars used to give their lives for the holiness of the Name, but we no longer give our lives for the sanctification of His Name."

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CHARITY AND COMPASSION FOR ALL

The Disciples of the Wise were to beware of an excess of piety and zeal. Elijah the Prophet was punished for "demanding honor for the Father, but ignoring the honor of the son (Israel or mankind)." They were expected to concern themselves with the institution of charity and to be charitable to all.

Rabbi Shimeon and his son, Rabbi Eliezar [second-century rabbis], lived twelve years in a cave. Then Elijah came, and standing at the entrance, called out, "Who will tell Rabbi Shimeon that the Emperor had died and that his decree is nullified?" [Rabbi Shimeon was suspected of sympathy with Jewish rebels.]

Then, they came out of the cave and saw people going about their work, plowing and sowing. They cried out, "What? These people neglect the life of eternity and concern themselves with the life of the hour?" Wherever they focused their vision, that place would immediately burn down. Then a Divine Echo (bath-kol) was heard to say:
"Did you come out to destroy my world?—Return to your cave."

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Rabbi Judah the Prince opened his granaries in a year of famine and said,
"You are welcome to enter, if you have mastered the Pentateuch or the Mishnah or the Talmud, or the Law, or the legends—but those who are totally ignorant may not enter."
Then, Jonathan, son of Amram [a disciple] pushed himself to the front
of the line, crying, “Rabbi, feed me.”
Said he, “Did you learn Torah?” and Jonathan replied, “No.”
“Did you learn Mishnah?”
—“No.”
—“By what merit should I feed you?”
—“Feed me, as one feeds a dog and raven.”
He was given a portion of grain. When he came out, Rabbi Judah
was aggrieved—“Woe is me, I gave my bread to an ignoramus.”
Said his disciples, “Perhaps, it was Jonathan who refused to derive an
advantage from his knowledge of Torah.”
Then, Rabbi Judah realized his mistake. Thereafter, he would say:
“Let all enter to be fed.”

Whoever shuts his eyes to the needs of charity, it is as if he worshipped
idols.

Rabbi Eliezar would give a coin to the poor, and only then would he say
his prayers.

The Disciple of the Wise remained the central hero-image of Jewish
life down to the present day, but different aspects of this ideal were
emphasized in the different periods of Jewish life and among the several
schools of thought within Judaism.

The rationalists would stress the philosophical ideal of universality
and harmony—Ha-adam hasholem, the complete or perfect man, who
is at home in all the domains of wisdom. He studies philosophy, follows
the progress of science, reads poetry, even as he faithfully pursues the
ways of Jewish piety in prayer, Torah-study and communal responsibil-
ity. His guidelines are reasonableness and moderation.

The romanticists would stress the superiority of Jewish over secular
studies, and of faith and tradition over reason and the general consensus
of mankind. They would minimize the importance of a sense of balance
and harmony, while they would rhapsodize over the wonder and mys-
tery of the transrational treasure in Judaism and the transnatural vision
of the world to come. They would glorify all that is specifically Jewish,
and restrict their philanthropic enterprises to their own people. They
would still study “external categories of wisdom,” but largely for the
purpose of recognizing the “vanity” of non-Jewish learning and of all
worldly goods. In the minds of the romanticists, the Vision of eternal
life and the World to come triumphed over the concerns of this world and the life of reason.

The great legalists of the Orthodox tradition were frequently neither rationalists nor romanticists, in the philosophic sense. They considered all speculation to be a danger-filled area, bordering on the forbidden. The Law encompassed the whole of life, and meditation upon its intricacies was the noblest task of the Jew. The Disciple of the Wise of this school was a legalist and a pragmatist, satisfying his romantic-mystical interests in private prayer, public worship, and the most scrupulous observance of the rituals.

But, even the dry legalistic Torah-scholar was not a stranger to the occult nuances of mysticism. It was essential to his own self-image. Here are excerpts from a recent book by the master of a Lithuanian, non-Hassidic Yeshiva:

... and in pursuing the dialectic of the law you feel how you are uplifted. Your soul unites itself with the spiritual currents, holy and pure, that flow from above, and you exult in sacred delight. You begin to feel the sacred and exalted joy for which there is no comparison in all the pleasures of this world... You then begin to feel the motivations and arguments of the Law in all the parts of your soul, and the right thought comes to you by itself, and this is a kind of holy inspiration (mein Ruah Haokodesh), like the Holy Spirit... 

He used to say that he would hear and feel a kind of ring above, whenever he would render a difficult decision in matters of law, a ring, which he was certain confirmed and endorsed the truth.59

The mystics and the Qabbalists concentrated on the single goal of achieving direct immediate contact with the Divine. They would, as a rule, spend the first half of their life in mystical studies and exercises, returning to public activity after they had attained certain “levels of holiness.” They would then be honored as “holy men,” whose prayers could work wonders. The Zaddikim of the Hassidic movement in the eighteenth century belonged to this school.

NOTES

7. Proverbs 8:22.
12. Hagigah 18b.
15. Moed Katan 6a.
18. Sifti; Deuteronomy 6:5.
21. Sota 3a.
23. Shabbat 30b; Yerushalmi, end of Kiddushin.
24. Berochot 17b.
25. Taanit 10b.
27. Gittin 10b.
28. Aboth 2:3.
31. Sota 5a.
32. Aboth 2:2.
38. Derech Eretz Zutta.
41. Leviticus Rabba 34.
42. Shabbat 114a.
43. Airuvin 13.
44. Baba Kama 117.
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45. Baba Mezia 84a.
46. Baba Bathra 12a.
47. Berochot 46.
49. Aboda Zara 10a.
50. Kethubot 113a.
51. Sanhedrin 11a.
52. Sukka 28a.
53. Hagigah 14a.
54. Berochot 20a.
55. Genesis Rabba 79.
56. Baba Bathra 8a.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.