

# The Jews and Their Judaism

By Morris Speizman

Periodically, much of the activity on the radio and TV throughout the country will be prefaced by the following remarks: "The opinions that you are about to hear are those of the speaker, and do not necessarily represent the policy or opinions of this station." In the same sense, what follows reflects the opinions of a layman who has the temerity to rush in where rabbis fear to tread.

Who are the Jews and what is Judaism? Is it a religion? A race? A nation? A way of life? Some thinking Jews have evolved a theory that Judaism is a "religious civilization", as is Catholicism, Islam and many other similar religiously-oriented groups of human beings.

All of these so-called civilizations cross national boundaries at will, and we often have the spectacle of the Catholic in the United States, for example, who engaged in the service of his country during a war with Germany in which Catholics were his opponents. In the same sense, we have seen Jews serving in the Army of the United States in World War I against Austrian Jews. This is but one aspect of the "civilization theory" — a civilization is more than merely a group, a race, a nation or a way of life.

If this description of a civilization holds true, then we do have a bond which unites mankind through the various sub-civilizations within the framework of our Western World. And by Western World, we really mean the entire world, for a civilization must of necessity include the incompatible as well as the pleasant. So we must refer to Communism as a sub-civilization.

One of the earliest known historians was a Greek by the name of Herodotus. He wrote

at length and in extreme detail about all of the nations of his day. It is thought that he wrote at the time when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Judah and the first Temple in Jerusalem. And yet, there isn't a single mention of the Jews in his entire volume. Why not, we wonder? Perhaps it was because the Jews alone stood forth for the sanctity of the individual person, made in God's spiritual image. All of the other nations of that day have perished, but today the Jews alone can trace their historical continuity, back to the days of Abraham. The question arises — why?

I choose to believe that it is because Judaism has given dramatic and lasting expression to the great ideals by which we live. Students of ancient histories and civilizations tell us that monotheism was not the exclusive conception of the Jews. But, it was Abraham who gave dramatic and lasting expression to the ideal of one God and to the dignity of the human being (Isaac's Sacrifice). There may have been other, and there undoubtedly were other codes of ethics long before the time of Moses, but it was he who gave dramatic and lasting expression to the ideals of ethical conduct through the divinely given and divinely inspired Ten Commandments. Later on, Amos and Jonah gave dramatic and lasting expression to the idea of a Universal God, a God of the Philistines as well as the Jews. (The story of Jonah emphasizes this so well!)

Later on, another prophet, Jeremiah — surprisingly enough — in addition to being the conscience of mankind, also gave dramatic and lasting expression to the ideal expressed in Chapter 9, Verse 23, "I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice and righteousness in the Earth, for these are the things that I

delight in."

Isaiah gave dramatic and lasting expression to the ideals of God's Kingdom of Universal Peace and Equity. Hosea portrayed a God of Forgiveness, Mercy and Love.

These are all basic religious values which have affected not only Jews throughout history, but have by their transmutation, affected the daughter religions of Christianity and Islam. They are ideals, guideposts and ground rules for living, which have been evolved by all peoples. The only claim that Judaism has in this respect is that it gave dramatic and lasting expression to those ideals through the Bible, the greatest inheritance which has been vouchsafed to Western civilization.

Judaism is a blend — a blend of idealism, of the highest monotheistic thought, bound up with a very earthy approach to the reality of God as a Divine Power, who dictates every action, of every life, in all the Universe.

On one hand, Maimonides, the greatest rabbi of the Middle Ages, reiterated the concept which has always been true of the highest level of Jewish theosophical thought — namely, that God is Universal, that He is incorporeal, that there is no way for mere human beings to envisage His existence, unless it is by the product of His mighty acts.

On the other hand, we have the constantly recurring personal approach to the Deity which is repeated over and over again, from Abraham's dialogue at Sodom, down through the centuries. A personal plea, a spiritually "face to face" contact between man and his Maker. While this may seem a curious anomaly, the contradiction is not to be seriously considered. Jews do not take literally the human attributes used to describe God. They consider these as

figures of speech used to express God's Grandeur and Power.

In Isaiah, for example, we find the expression, "The mouth of the Lord has spoken." This does not mean that God has a mouth and speaks as human beings. When Isaiah used the phrase, he meant that the words which had come out of his own mouth were inspired in him by God, and that he was merely the instrument of God's message to the people. What Isaiah intended to convey was that God is the source of all inspiration, the author of all wisdom. In this poetic statement, he paid tribute to God's presence, which had imbued him with the strength of heart and mind, to speak words that would endure for all time.

We Jews have very few, if any, dogmas. None, as a matter of fact, aside from the one central dogma of the existence of God. "I am, I was, and I will be." This belief in the Supreme Being is basically all that is required of Jews, in order to



become children of God, in the spiritual sense. And if we return to the ideal expressed by Amos of a Universal God, we find again that the God whom we worship is the same God Moslem worships today, yes — the same God that all of us worship. "He is the Eternal timeless rock of Faith and Love on which rests our Universe and which is the original source of being for all life in all the Universe."

Judaism is not only a matter of belief in the great goodness of the Divine Power of God. Judaism also commands its followers to so discipline themselves that they will live their lives to be worthy of God's mercy here on this Earth as well as in the Hereafter.

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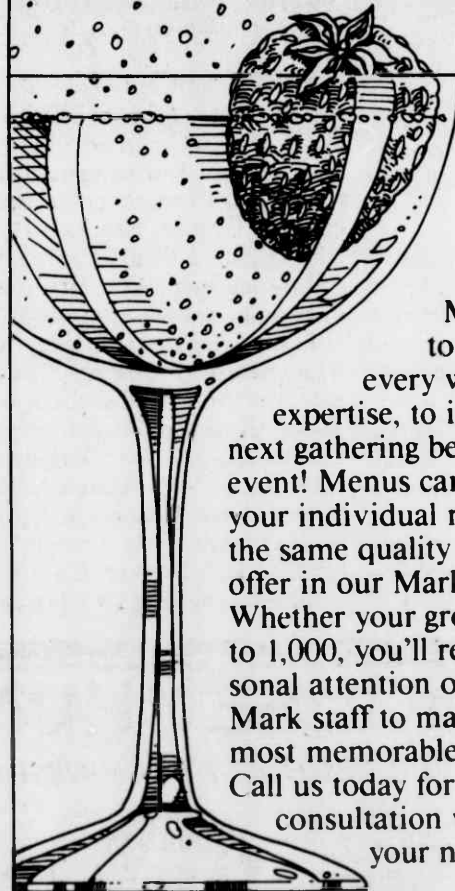
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