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No. 1

A SKETCH OF MARC CHAGALL

When Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav said: "Each tongue of grass has its own tune; it is beautiful to hear the field of grass sing" — he was a poet. But when he added: "When you pray in the open field, the grass and flowers enter into your prayers and give them power to ascend to heaven" — the Jewish poet and mystic was speaking. The Jewish artist creates a work whose symbolic significance is rich with the spirit and ideals of his people. Marc Chagall — painter — is such an artist.

Chagall was born in Vitebsk, a small town on the river Dvina in White Russia; and here is his soul, in a small, poor, little world, "sad and joyful," from which he draws men and things. And from these memories of an ancient tradition and way of life, with the love and sympathy which often come from suffering, he creates a warmth, a tenderness, a softness of canvas which is great art because it contains the soul of a poet and dreamer, a soul steeped in humanity, and Jewish art because the soul and the dreams carry with them the sighs and prayers of his people.

We see "The Rabbi of Vitebsk," a poor beggar transformed on canvas; we meet Chagall's eight sisters, his brother, the father who worked in a herring depot; and we watch his uncle play the rabbi's song in vigorous Chasidic spirit on a violin which appears in wedding processions, on rooftops, in the hands of a fish or a goat. And we see things, given a human significance and esteemed by an artist who reaches out to the lamp, the clock, the samovar, the candlestick, the menorah and the kiddush cup. These home and synagogue objects the artist recalls and uses in his pictures in what appears to be an illogical grouping, but is really of composition which is the basis of the paintings' metaphorical character, where common values connect images, as in so much of modern literature. (His pictures have been compared to the poetry of Rimbaud).

Candles in the Dark Street (La

Mort) of 1908 illustrates subject and structure — the pervasion of youthful memories and the emergence of a whole which encompasses and becomes more than these disparate elements. John Sweeney reports about this unusual painting: "In his autobiography ('Ma Vie') Chagall recounts an anecdote of his Lyozno grandfather. In the course of festivities, one Sukkoth, or Simhat Torah, his grandfather was found to be missing. They searched on all sides for him. Finally, it was discovered that his grandfather had climbed to the roof because the weather was so good and was sitting there quietly regaling himself on raw carrots.

"When we add to this story the phrase he employs of his Uncle Neuch's musicianship ('He played the violin like a shoemaker') we recognize in these combined recollections the iconographic source of both the fiddler seated on the rooftop and the shoemaker's shop sign in the upper left-hand corner of the picture.

"Then as we turn to another recollection in his autobiography, that of his first encounter with death, we find the rest of the subject matter of the picture: 'One morning before dawn suddenly I heard cries from the street below my window. By the feeble glimmer of the night lamp I managed to distinguish a woman running alone down the deserted street. She waved her arms, sobbed, begged the neighbors who were still asleep to come to save her husband as if I, or my fat cousin sound asleep in her bed, could cure or save a dying man.' A few paragraphs further on: 'The dead man, solemnly sad, is already stretched out on the ground, his face lighted by six candles. In the end they carry him away. Our street is no longer the same. I do not recognize it.' From the past, what seem to be conflicting parts emerge as a harmonious whole.

Chagall is not, then, a realist. He came to Paris in 1910, lived through both prewar cubism and postwar surrealism, took something from both, was captured by neither. In 1933 he painted a picture called "Solitude." A Jew sits in a meadow, his head cov-

ered with a white mantle, a Torah clasped tenderly in his arms. Near him on the ground a cow rests on her knees, under her chin a violin and bow. Above, in the sky, there is a small figure with wings — an angel. In the background are visible the cupolas of a church and distant small houses of a village. The animal looks like a cow, but not really; it has a human eye; the Jew does not belong in the midst of a field with a Torah. And the realist is displeased.

For the artist clung to his own haunting evocations of nameless gaiety and wistful sadness, in a weightless world of objects flung aloft by some superhuman juggler and suspended in mid-air, perhaps, or in a world where a double-faced being with cello-like body plays while a goat, sitting on a chair and fiddling, stretches his neck upward to listen. And all gives the impression of a technicolor film, in which images and events follow each other closely, taking us to a world very far from our objective reality.

Isaac Kloomok wrote: "The taller the tree, the deeper and wider its roots spread in the soil — and the greater the artist, the deeper he is rooted in the heart and soul of his people, reaching down to the subsoil which is common ground of all humanity." The words are a fitting tribute to the art of Marc Chagall.

Shera Steinberg.

References: Work on Marc Chagall by Paolo D'ancona, Isaac Kloomok, and TIME magazine.

RESULTS OF BOOK SALE

Hillel's first book sale held during the week of Hanukkah was a huge success. In our efforts to clear the library of books on non-Jewish content, and to raise money to buy more volumes related to Judaism, over \$90.00 was raised. Throughout the year, if you have any books which you would care to donate please do so, for we will plan on having another sale at the end of the year.

Nothing in a minority so offends a majority as its weakness in numbers.

Rabbi's Column

WHAT IS

JEWISH

LITERATURE?



No subject interests me less than alleged Jewish contributions to civilization. Most of the contributions referred to, although important and made by estimable individuals, have nothing Jewish about them. It is very educational to learn that the writer of "Way Down Upon the Swanee River" was partly Jewish by origin, but his popular compositions do not constitute a contribution to Jewish music. The attempt at the posthumous conversion of Albert Einstein to some kind of pious Jew makes as little sense as claiming Stephen Foster in the field of Jewish music.

We must apply, it seems to me, the same criteria to a consideration of the nature of Jewish literature. Jewish literature does not necessarily comprise all or even most of the literary creations made by people known to have been Jews. Jewish literature is literary creativity concerned with a Jewish theme and written with the high purpose of bringing the impact of Judaism (conceived in the broadest sense) to bear on the life of our pagan and idolatrous world. This criterion excludes the clever contrivances of successful writers like Herman Wouk, while it may include some of the great productions of a non-Jew like Thomas Mann. Jewish literature is the belles-lettistic expression of Jewish history and life.

Thus far, our spade work has merely served to push the quest for definition one step further back since we are now confronted with the problem: what is Jewish history? The history of the Jewish people is not merely the secular account of what transpired during the life of a folk called the Jews. Jewish history is sacred history in the sense that its dominant theme is the encounter of God with Israel.

The great literature of our people thus contains the stories, sagas, poems, dramas, essays and novels written in relationship to the faith of Israel and with the purpose of bringing the value heritage of Judaism vividly and compellingly before Is-

rael and the world. In this sense the Bible is the greatest collection of Jewish literature, although we must always beware lest in using this terminology we fall into the error of assuming that the Bible is merely literature. After the Bible come the great expansions of Biblical law and lore in the Talmud and a subsequent thousand years of rabbinic literature including the nonlegalistic Midrashim and the Responsa which rabbis sent from the academies in Babylonia to the communities of the far-flung diaspora.

The medieval period was also marked by the rebirth of Hebrew poetry, a form of literary expression which had been dormant for some time since the writing of the Biblical Psalms. Some of the medieval poetry was highly stylized, making use of recondite allusions and acrostics, through which the author's name may be deciphered. Other medieval poetry, however, like that of Jehudah Halevi (also noted as the author of the philosophical dialogue *Kuzari*) was of lyric quality, utilizing vivid images and eventuating as highly evocative writing.

With the dawn of emancipation we witness the exfoliation of Jewish literature into many new forms, including the less representational aspects of contemporary poetry. In the State of Israel we see the beginning of an entire renaissance of literary form, making use of contemporary Hebrew. Judgment on the value of this literature must await the crystallization of Jewish life in the new environment and, for most of us, the availability of a larger volume of material in translation. Meanwhile, it is surely a reasonable expectation that Jews living in Israel and writing once more in the Hebrew language will make an authentic contribution to Jewish literature.

As in past ages, Jewish literary creativity will not be limited to those living in the land of Israel. Wherever Jews live one will find writers concerned with relating the values of their Jewish heritage to the problems of contemporary existence. An example of the use of Jewish motifs in contemporary literary form may be found in the works of Ludwig Lewisohn who portrays his spiritual odyssey in a series of books, both fictional and in essay form. The future for writing with Jewish motivation and understanding in depth is unlimited as young people filled with a love of their heritage begin experimentation in new forms.

Rabbi Joseph H. Gumbiner.

Lipset Talk

On November 29, Dr. Seymour Martin Lipset, Associate Professor of Sociology, addressed the Israeli American University Group on the subject "Minority Groups in America." This article will attempt to give an account of some of the remarks made by Dr. Lipset in his talk and in the question and answer period which followed.

American history has in a sense been the history of its minority groups. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries German, Irish, English, Czech, Italian, Eastern European groups, etc., came to the United States. The immigrants were generally poor, had little education, and entered society at the bottom strata, finding employment in poorly paid jobs of low status. This was especially true in urban areas, which are most important in a study of minority groups in America as it was primarily in these areas that tensions between different groups arose.

Various undesirable characteristics and traits were associated with the new immigrant groups by the well-to-do and the middle class. When an immigrant group threatened to move up in the social structure, tension would arise manifesting itself in acts of prejudice and discrimination.

Tension and the subsequent prejudice have functioned as indices of progress, not retrogression on the part of the minority group. As long as a minority occupies the bottom level in society, tension does not arise. For example, when the Jews began to enter the middle class in sizable numbers, anti-Jewish prejudice first occurred. Another example may be noted in the correlation of active resistance to the Negro with his attempt to raise his level in society.

The resistance an immigrant group encountered depended on the degree to which its cultural and physical characteristics differed from the already established group. Thus, white Protestant minorities met with the least resistance, while the Negro has encountered the greatest amount of resistance. The situation varied in different parts of the country depending on the nature of the dominant group. In 1848 in San Francisco the first wealthy families were Jews, giving rise to the curious situation of gentiles trying to be accepted into

the Jewish upper class. This is probably the one place in the country where the Jews rose to the top before there was any effective social structure.

Minority groups have played an important part in the American political scene. The Federalists, Whigs, and modern Republicans have been composed primarily of Anglo-Protestant elements, while the old Republicans and modern Democrats have been made up of lower status ethnic and economic groups including such minorities as Jews, Catholics, and later the Negro. As ethnic tensions developed, political parties attempted to profit by them so as to gain votes. In fact, much of American politics can be explained in terms of ethnic groups.

In "triple melting-pot" America (the superseding of ethnic groupings in America by the three primary religious groupings), ethnic groups are often replaced by religious affiliation, although there is considerable variation from group to group. There is more security, politically and socially, in stressing the religious above the ethnic roots in Judaism; many things once considered secular are now housed in the synagogue since religion has become "legitimate." The nature of Jewish religion has differed sharply from what it was in Europe, so that much of contemporary Reform and Conservative Judaism is not much different from Protestantism. This is an example of the sociological phenomenon whereby the values of a minority are frequently taken from the values of the dominant group. Jewish religion has, as its contemporaries have, become a sign of middle class conformism. It is difficult to say what the long term trend in the Jewish group will be. The intermarriage rate is increasing, although it is still not alarmingly high. It is unlikely that contemporary Jewish religion will constitute much of an internal force against intermarriage and eventual assimilation. The current religious revival is an institutional revival without a revival of real religious feeling. Hence, the return of the synagogue as an institution will not be much of a bulwark against assimilation. It is to be remembered that the above is predicated on the assumption that there will not be a sharp deviation from present trends due to some unforeseen future events.

Fred Goldbaum.

SOME COMMENTS ON REVELATION

The question, "Is revelation a needed concept in Judaism?" does not arise for the Orthodox Jew. For him, Judaism is based upon the divine revelation of the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai. Judaism without the notion of revelation would thus be for him unthinkable. The question only significantly arises for those who are unable to accept the Orthodox version of Judaism, who feel that some modification or reinterpretation of traditional Judaism is desirable. It is these people who have to decide whether to accept the traditional notion of revelation, reinterpret it, or reject it altogether. This article will describe critically two contexts in which the problem of revelation arises for Jews and then indicate a way in which the problem may profitably be treated.

Many religious thinkers have justified the inclusion of a concept of revelation in their theology on the grounds that without revelation, it would be impossible for man in his natural historical setting to find out the will of God, who is outside of history and nature.

In reply to this position it can be maintained with plausibility that the will of God makes itself known through the natural interaction of man with his environment. One does not, then, need to postulate a "break-through" of God into history, into the natural order of things, in order to explain the possibility of man's discovering the will of God. Furthermore, the notions of "the will of God" and "outside of nature and history" are themselves so vague and obscure, that to use them in order to justify the idea of revelation is of dubious merit.

Let us turn now, from this general theological problem (which affects Jews, if at all, only as it affects thinkers from other religious traditions) to a problem which affects Jews directly. It has often been maintained that without looking upon the Jews as God's chosen people, one has no reason to remain a Jew, that without believing that the Jews are the possessors of a special revelation from God given to Moses on Mount Sinai all *raison d'être* for Jewish existence is gone.

Those who adopt the above position make the mistake of looking upon Judaism as a set of beliefs which one must accept in order to be an authentic Jew. Judaism is not prim-

arily a system of beliefs but fundamentally a civilization, a people which is bound together by a common history, common experiences, and the awareness of a common future. Surely, there is enough to be found in the history of the Jewish people, in its distinctive culture, in its unique ethical and religious contribution to mankind, and in the sacrifice and martyrdom of Jews through the ages, to motivate one who was born a Jew to identify with the Jewish people and participate in its life, even if one cannot accept the historicity of the revelation at Sinai.

In discussions about revelation, it is common to hear both sides hurling epithets at each other. Thus one often hears a person committed to a traditional account of revelation yelling "naturalist" or "humanist" at his opponent, the implication being that such a person is of arrogant character and worships and overestimates man's capabilities. On the other hand, one who is attacking the traditional view of revelation will often accuse his opponent of being "irrational," "narrowminded," "a believer in magic." Yet, a brief glance at our experience finds some of the most ethical and humble people among the naturalists and humanists and some of the deepest and most rational thinkers among those believing in some kind of revelation. Evidently, a man's actions are, at least to some extent, independent of his theological position.

It is entirely natural and even desirable that there be differences of opinion within Judaism on the matter of revelation. For a particular person, his make-up may be such that holding to a traditional account of revelation aids him in leading an ethical and personally rewarding life. For others, the traditional notions might stand as a hindrance to leading the best kind of life of which he is capable; by reinterpreting or altogether rejecting the concept of revelation, he is best able to follow the ethical dictates of his conscience. Too often one concludes from the fact that a particular point of view is personally satisfying and "true" for him that it is satisfying for everyone and true for all men for all time. Such dogmatic positions tend to divide Jews and to drive many outside of the Jewish people. An attitude of flexibility and respect for differences of opinion on matters such as revelation is needed if Judaism is to survive the disintegrating forces which beset it in our time.

Fred Goldbaum.

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The rejection on the part of most "modern" Jews of the traditional doctrine of revelation is not a surprising phenomenon. The twentieth century is disinclined toward this view of the historical actuality of revelation for two understandable — though nonetheless invalid — reasons. The one is the apparent incompatibility of revelation with the modern religious sensibility; its inability to find a place in those categories of religious thought which have been a product of the whole modern outlook. The other is the apparent uselessness of divine revelation when both historical facts and religious norms are explainable in terms of naturalistic and humanistic hypotheses.

It would be impossible in this short space to fully outline those characteristics of modern religious thought which supposedly clash with the doctrine of revelation. The argument, however, seems to be essentially this: revelation implies an otherworldliness, a supernaturalism which runs counter to modern enlightenment and which expresses a naivete which a mature modern religious outlook should have left behind. Such an argument both ignores the historical *de facto* nature of the Jewish religion and misunderstands the implications which are involved in a doctrine of revelation. The genius of the Jewish people has been its ability, in the face of otherworldliness and in spite of its moments of extreme mysticism, to maintain the essential unity of God and the world, to maintain the religious import of the this and the here and the now, to maintain a religious outlook which, if it is to be called a supernaturalism, is certainly radically different from the Christian supernaturalism which we usually associate with the term. And while it has clung to the essential unity of the religious and the ethical, the Divine and the mundane, it has never relinquished its belief in the historical actuality of God's revelation at Sinai. This has been possible simply because revelation involves supernaturalism only when that supernaturalism has been assumed as a starting point. Supernatural revelation views God as inhabiting an extra-mundane, extra-temporal heaven, and revelation is the incursion of God into history and time. Judaism, however, would have God inexorably involved in the universal saga of human history and the particular destiny of His people Israel, and revealing himself in history from a vantage

point already within that history. The revelation at Sinai is then the meeting of two historical actualities, God and Israel, a meeting in which God chooses to reveal himself to a people who choose to open their hearts to the experience of his presence.

The significant issue is thus not between naturalism and supernaturalism, but rather between humanism and theism. The issue is whether man can rely solely upon the powers of his reason for the solution of his condition, or whether he need go outside of himself and posit his faith in the actuality of his experience of God. For Judaism to accept the former position is to lose itself in the bankruptcy of liberal humanism and "ethical culturism."

But revelation is more important to Judaism for another reason. Even though God be accepted, if revelation is impossible, then there is significance only to the universal human situation. The divine law and the promise of redemption are related to myself, my people, my historical situation. It is only through the historical actuality of revelation that the unique existential covenant between Israel and God takes on meaning. It is only through revelation that the particular onus of the Jew becomes significant. The leap of faith which asserts the relevance of religious experience to the human situation must thus be supplemented by a faith which asserts the possibility and actuality of revelation, and thus establishes the relevance of the here and the now before God. Only thus does the God of mankind become the God of Israel, does the God of the philosophers become the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The historical revelation at Sinai is the "macrocosm" of which the individual, existential religious experience of each Jew is the "microcosm." Each of us is led by God out of Egypt and stands before Sinai. If we open our heart to God's presence, the historical unique revelation will be reenacted. The *panim al panim*, I-Thou experience of God will be repeated in the unique historical experience of each of us as individual; members of Israel; the God of mankind will thus become our individual, . . . personal God, just as at Sinai, the God of mankind became the unique God of Israel.

Louis Kosman.

HILLEL SILVER TEA IS GREAT SUCCESS

On November 18th, the first Hillel Silver Tea to be held in Northern California took place at the Founda-

EDITORIAL

This issue should provide a good deal of discussion, if not ample stimulation of a cultural sort. Let us voice our modest desire, that those persons who feel themselves able and willing acquire writing material and let their thoughts flow full and free. Your articles will not only be greatly appreciated by our readers, but will also give us an opportunity to obtain a wider range of opinion and criticism in our issues. That is, unless you prefer to allow your paper to degenerate and become nothing more than a circular for Hillel events, becoming, in essence a "flyer."

Perhaps if more of you are to take time in the future to visit Hillel and acquaint, or reacquaint, yourself with its library, lounges, and pleasant people, you might feel more inclined to participate actively in some of its functions. After all, if Hillel is destined to serve you and you do not take advantage of the opportunity, it is serving no purpose.

Norman Nayfach

tion from two to five in the afternoon. The affair, which had for its theme "a shower of silver to nourish the seeds of learning," was under the chairmanship of Mrs. Frank Langfelder, of San Francisco, Central California Conference President of B'nai B'rith, and Mrs. Maurice Zucker, of El Cerrito, Area Hillel Chairman for B'nai B'rith Chapters.

Following the Tea a program was presented, at which the guest speaker was Rabbi Jehudah M. Cohen, Pacific Regional Hillel Director. Greetings were offered by the chairmen of the event, as well as Chester M. Zeff, Hillel Counsellor at the San Francisco and Peninsula colleges, and Rabbi Joseph H. Gumbiner. Four students participated in the program; they were Lou Kosman and Deena Zonlight who presented several folk song selections; Jacob Naor, talented pianist; and Fred Goldbaum who offered an interesting run-down of the Hillel program to the assembled B'nai B'rith members and other friends of Hillel.

About 250 people attended this Tea, and approximately \$550 was raised, 60% to go toward the program and Work Scholarships at the Berkeley Foundation and 40% to the four Counselorships in this area. Hillel is deeply grateful to all the B'nai B'rith Women who put in a great deal of time and effort to create a beautiful and successful event.