Man, the Pinnacle of Creation

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Judaism is not the religion of the Bible. It is founded on the Bible but is not identical with it. Biblical religion differs from classic Judaism as the seed differs from the flower that finally blossoms from it. Judaism has been a living faith that never became static and unchanging. Each generation has deposited something of its own experience to enrich the total treasury of Jewish wisdom that comprises the Jewish tradition. The classic character of Judaism was given form by the Sages who created the Midrash and the Talmud. A more generic term for the Sages is "Rabbis," and we call the Judaism as formulated by them "rabbinic Judaism."

It will be helpful to review the transformation that biblical religion underwent in the process of becoming classic, or rabbinic Judaism, so that we might acquire a better insight into the nature of man as the Rabbis saw it.

The Hebrew Bible seeks to teach man how to live in the existential world, the world of nature, the world of history, the world of social relations. The different books of the Bible reflect diverse interests and tastes; they reveal both the divergent minds of the men who gave them literary form and the particular setting of locale and historical circumstances in which they arose. But those who determined the selection of the books to be included in the biblical canon sought unity amidst diversity. And there is added such a unity that underlies the varied experiences recorded in biblical literature. The unity consists in the conviction that the existential world is man's home, that finite existence fulfills a divine vocation, and that man, by

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ordering his life within a certain discipline, vindicates his own life as that of the world which God saw fit to bring into being.

The Bible begins with the story of the Creation. The Book of Abraham has within its framework the story of the Creation as well. One of the main functions of the Creation story is to declare the world of material being, the world of man and nature, as a divine creation, as an embodiment of "good." It is to declare the dignity of man, his primacy in the order of existence. It is to declare that his life is subject to divine imperatives, that he is under obligation "to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it."

Other biblical stories help round out the vision of man, of his place in the world, of the eminence to which he is called, as well as of the depths to which he may fall, of his need to struggle in order to meet the claim of his Creator which continues to press on him.

God is pictured as charging one man and his family, in whom he sees an embodiment of his dream, to go forth to the world as his emissary, to lead the families of the earth to the knowledge of God and his law of righteousness. The one man and his family become the founder of a people who are given the mandate to continue the work till it shall finally be accomplished.[1]

The Oral Torah, as it developed in Judaism, remained with the basic conceptions of the Bible. It only sought to clarify and to implement these conceptions. The goal that underlies the Oral Torah is the same that pervades the written Bible. It is to define more clearly man's responsibilities to God and to the rest of creation, and to chart his duties toward the emergent goals of history, the establishment of the messianic age of justice, freedom and peace, of the universal knowledge of God, and the universal obedience to his will.

The Rabbis broadened the biblical recognition of the universal worth of all men, regardless of religious affiliation. The dimension of universality is always present in the Bible, whether expressed or not. Abraham's call has as its motivation that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed,"[2] through him. So it is seen that the Bible, Jewish writings, and the Book of Abraham are emphatic in their inclusion of all peoples in God's concern and in the recognition that all men have the

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[1]Genesis 12:1-9, Book of Abraham 2:3.
[2]Genesis 12:3, Book of Abraham 2:9.

capacity to respond to God's word in deeds of penitence and in growth toward moral and spiritual perfection.

The Rabbis placed the dimension of Jewish universalism into doctrinal terms. Probing into all the implications of the verse,"Ye shall therefore keep My Statues and Mine Ordinances, which if a man do he shall live by them,"[3] one teacher asked, "Whence may it be demonstrated that a non-Jew, when he conforms to the moral law of the Torah, becomes the equal of a High Priest in Israel?" From the words, "which if a man do he shall live by them" (the term being universal and referring equally to Jew and non-Jew). Similarly it is said, "This is the law of mankind, Lord God."[4] It is not stated: "This is the law of the Priests, Levites and Israelites, but (the more inclusive term) the law of mankind." In similar manner, too, scripture does not say, "Open the gates that Priests, Levites and Israelites may enter."[5] And again it does not say, "This is the gate of the Lord, Priests, Levites, and Israelites shall enter into it," but, "the righteous shall enter it."[6] Likewise, it does not say, "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye Priests, Levites, and Israelites," but, "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous."[7] And finally, it does not say, "Do good, O Lord, to the Priests, Levites, and Israelites," but, "unto the good."[8] It is thus abundantly demonstrated that even a non-Jew, provided he adheres to the moral discipline of the Bible, is the equal of the highest ranking priest in Israel.[9]

Thus both Jewish literature and the Book of Abraham view man with utmost dignity. Dr. Hunter says about man: "Of all of God's creations, Man is His masterpiece."[10] Both literatures proclaim that man is created in God's image. Both aim at the same goal and that is: Through the emulation of the Godhead, to the best of one's ability, one can and must become like God.

A problem of comparable importance in Genesis 1:26, which describes the creation of man, rendered literally, thus reads: "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.'" In what sense was man created in God's "image" and after his "likeness"? Does this imply that God

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[3]Leviticus 18:5.
[4]II Samuel 7:19, a possible rendition of the original Hebrew.
[5]Isaiah 26:2.
[6]Psalms 118:20.
[7]Psalms 33:1.
[8]Psalms 125:4, which clearly refers to good men among all nations.
[9]*Yalkut Shimeoni,* on Leviticus 18:5.
[10]Hunter, p. 99.

is endowed with a particular shape or form? And with whom did God consult when he resolved to fashion man? Many different interpretations of this verse are available. The image of God, in which man was created, has generally been applied, in Judaism, to his moral and spiritual sense which differentiate him from other creatures in the scale of life and make man truly human. The plural "Let us make man," has been interpreted by some commentators, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra among them, as a plural construction, but is really singular in substance meaning. E. A. Speiser, who translated the Book of Genesis for the Anchor Bible, renders this verse in the singular: "Thus God said I will make man in my image after my likeness." The new Jewish Publication Society translation of the Pentateuch, the Torah, also renders this verse in the singular: "And I God said, I will make man in My image, after My likeness." The latter is followed by a clarifying footnote that the translator took the Hebrew plural forms as plurals of majesty.

It is stated simply that God created man "in His own image."[11] Nothing being stated of the matter used in the act of creation. But in another portion of the story, it is related how God "formed man from dust of the earth."[12] Note that the word here translated "dust" is quite often in biblical Hebrew as a synonym for "clay."[13] It is readily recognized that this is a theme frequently encountered in scripture.[14]

The very fact that the creation of man in the two books' description is an exception to the rule of creation by divine fiat, and that solely in the case of man is the material from which he is made explicitly mentioned, implies emphasis upon a unique position for man among the created things and a special relationship to God. This, indeed, is reinforced in many and varied subtle ways. It is as though, for the climactic performance, the usual act of will was reinforced by an act of divine effort. Man, alone, has the breath of life blown into his nostrils by God himself. Only by virtue of this direct animation did man become a living thing, drawing directly from God his life source. The creation of nothing else in the cosmogonic process is preceded by a divine declaration of intention and purpose,

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[11]Genesis 1:27, Book of Abraham 4:26, 27.
[12]Genesis 2:7, Book of Abraham 5:7.
[13]Genesis 11:3, Job 10:9, 27:16, 30:19.
[14]Job 4:19, 10:9, 33:6; Isaiah 29:16, 45:9, 64:7.

"Let us make man."[15] Man, in fact, is the pinnacle of creation, and the entire story has a human-centered orientation.

So much is noticed regarding a special status accorded man in the cosmos that the relationship between God and man is *sui generis*. Furthermore, the story reiterates the theme of man being actually created in the "image of God."[16] The phrase, "in the image of God," is difficult to explain but must be associated with the immediately following divine blessing: "Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, and bird of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."[17] Also:

> And the Gods said: We will bless them. And the Gods said: We will cause them to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it, and to have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.[18]

This exclusive distinction endows man with power over the animal and vegetable worlds and confers upon him the right, nay the duty, to exploit the resources of nature for his own benefits. In this setting the idea of man "in the image of God" must inevitably include within the scope of its meaning all those faculties and gifts of character that distinguish man from the beast and that are needed for the fulfillment of his task on earth, namely, intellect, free-will, self-awareness, consciousness of the existence of others, conscience, responsibility, and self-control. Moreover, being created "in the image of God" implies that human life is infinitely precious. Such indeed is the meaning given to the phrase: "Whosoever sheds the blood of man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God was man created."[19] Man is possessed with honor, purpose, freedom, and a tremendous power.

Yet the preeminence of man over beast is not the same as total independence. This is where the vivid picture of the clay origin of man comes into play once again. The figure is suggestive of the activity of a potter molding the malleable raw material into the desired shape. The very verb used in the second account of the creation of man—"yatzar"[20]—is the same

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[15]Genesis 1:26, Book of Abraham 4:26.
[16]Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1, 9:6; Book of Abraham 4:26-27.
[17]Genesis 1:28.
[18]Book of Abraham 4:28.
[19]Genesis 9:6.
[20]Genesis 2:7, 8.

form from which the Hebrew word for "potter" is drawn. Most significantly the terms for "creator" and "potter" may be expressed in Hebrew by one and the same word, "yotzer." This figure is a well-known biblical symbol evocative of the notion of God's absolute mastery over man.[21] Human sovereignty can never quite be absolute. It must also be subject to the demands of a higher law, the divinely ordained moral order of the universe. Man has glory and freedom, but at the same time, inescapable dependence upon God.

Therefore, Jewish and LDS tradition look upon man as the crown and glory of creation. He is at the center of the drama of life. In him is the purpose of all existence on the way to fulfillment. This doctrine becomes apparent over and over again in the biblical story and in the Book of Abraham which portrays all stages in the appearance of life as but preliminary to the great moment when man enters upon the scene. It is expressed in the declaration that God made man in his own image. It never loses sight of the finite character of man, his smallness, his unworthiness when compared to the perfection that is in God. But at the same time, it sees in man the closest approximation to the divine which a creature may attain.

The Psalmist expressed it thus:

> O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth! . . . When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast established, what is man and the stars which Thou has established, what is man that Thou are mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou has regard for him? Yet Thou hast made him but a little lower than the angels and has crowned him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of Thy hands, Thou hast put all things under his feet . . . O Lord our Lord, how glorious is Thy name in all the earth![22]

The psalmist was aware, that from the perspective of God's majesty, man was too trivial to merit his mindfulness, but as he saw it, God had nevertheless crowned man with glory and honor and had made him preeminent in the hierarchy of existence.

This estimate of man has often been challenged in the modern world. The challenge has derived from various sources. Some have pointed to man's lowly origin, as revealed in the

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[21]Isaiah 29:16, 45:9ff; Jeremiah 18:21.
[22]Psalms 8:2, 4-7, 10.

scientific studies of the evolution of life on earth. Instead of being the direct creation of God, a noble being separate and distinct from the rest of existence, man appears in the findings of Darwinists as an integral part of evolution. He has sprung up traceable stages from the most primitive beginnings of life, and his immediate ancestor was in the ape family to whom he bears many striking resemblances.

Others have mocked the claim of man's alleged greatness by citing the new astronomy which began with Copernicus. Vast is the universe that modern astronomy reveals, and man is like a speck of dust, and even less, before the stupendous beings, the stars and planets without number that move in their orbits in cosmic space. The earth itself, which is man's home, has been dethroned from her ancient eminence. She is no longer conceived of as the center of the solar system with sun and moon and stars to render her homage by illuminating her darkness. She is but a tiny planet in a universe of planets and revolves as they all do in endless gyrations on a path around the sun. Astronomers, moreover, are increasingly drawn to the opinion that other planets, too, have life on them, and who knows whether a race of creatures more intelligent and nobler than man may not inhabit another planet-home somewhere in space.

And man has also been mocked because of his mortality. He is here today, and for a while, struts proudly across the scene of his labors. But in the midst of all his plans and ambitions, his breath departs, and he must drop everything to which his hands cling to lovingly. What significance can be attached to life when it must be lived against this knowledge of ultimate doom for which there is no reprieve?

The most serious challenge to man's alleged greatness is his moral failure. There are episodes of wisdom and goodness in the human scene, but how infrequent and fleeting they are! Man has continued to betray beastly qualities. All kinds of dark forces are operative in his nature. He has disappointed the hopes placed in him by continued displays of folly and meanness.

It is one of the grossest errors made by some protagonists of religion as well as by some of its detractors to take the biblical story of creation as a complete account of the origins of life. The biblical account offers only the sketchiest generality, and it is clear that it is intended to deal with questions other than normally dealt with in science. The biblical story seeks to communicate certain religious values. It seeks to convey a value

judgment concerning life, concerning the world at large, and specifically concerning man. It expresses through this account the deepest conviction of Judaism and Mormonism, that existence had its origin through the action of a beneficent Creator, that the world is the embodiment of his design, that it is purposive and friendly to man, and that man himself is the apex of the creative process.

It is not the study of how man developed, of the stages through which he passed before reaching his present status; those issues vital to Judaism, in the story of man's origin, are the value judgments involved.

Is man immodest in claiming greatness for himself because astronomically speaking he is so insignificant?

If there be intelligent beings on other planets, then it is not contrary to biblical thought to assume that they certainly share in man's dignity. For within the realm of the physical, there is continuity in the universe. It can be assumed, within the realm of the ever-probing related fields of science, that the basic properties of matter, the basic laws of motion remain the same in all the worlds of all the galaxies as they are on earth. Otherwise a science of astronomy would have been impossible. Hence, is it equally justifiable to assume a similar continuity in the spiritual? If intelligent life exists on any planet in the universe other than earth, it may be far ahead of terrestrial man or behind him, but it is undoubtedly of the same stuff. For consciousness is the most precious element in the treasury of creation, its culminating point in the surge of life. And wherever there be creatures with these properties they must be seen as bearing the divine image in themselves. In such an eventuality, God's wonders would indeed be even greater than man ever surmised.

Whatever the Lord has made is intrinsically good: whatever he planted in our nature is directed toward a good purpose. No area of life illustrates this more profoundly than sex. Considering the onerous commitments which a mate assumes to his partner, a powerful drive is needed to overcome a person's clinging to privacy, to singleness. This drive is present in the call to sexual gratification felt by all creatures at certain stages in their development. Sexual union is the convergence of divine energy on its continuing objective to create and perfect life. The very first commandment of the Bible is: "Be

fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it."[23] The basic imperatives of life are written in the human heart no less than in the texts of the scripture.

The painful dilemma of man is to discover the golden mean, the proper direction he is to give each claim in his nature. This is a prize he must earn at great cost, and he must enlist toward its achievement all the resources open to his life, the fruits of reason and revelation and the knowledge gained through experience, his own and that of the race.

The raw or unrefined play of the instinct is what is sometimes described in Jewish tradition as the *yetzer ha-ra,* the so-called "evil inclination." It is balanced by what has been called *yetzer ha-tov,* the "good inclination." The Rabbis denied that there is anything intrinsically evil in man, for God would not have fashioned what is wholly evil. It is evil only in the sense that it is often misdirected. The Rabbis present this thought in commenting on Genesis 1:31: "And God saw everything He made and behold, it was very good."[24] "Very good," the Rabbis explained, referred to the two impulses, the *"yetzer ha-tov"* and *"yetzer ha-ra,"* the good impulse and the evil impulse. But it was asked: "How can the evil impulse be called good?" The answer was: "Were it not for that impulse, a man would not build a house, marry a wife, beget children, or conduct business affairs."[25]

The battle for man's moral refinement is a battle between these two impulses. The so-called evil impulse presses us to follow its way without regard to the limiting and refining considerations that are to describe in proper expression. The good impulse cautions man in the name of these refinements, asking him to set bounds and conditions for the fulfillment of his gratifications. It reminds him of other values that might be at stake; and if he does not listen, it continues to speak to him, to rebuke him for his failure, and to fill him with remorse. The tug of war goes on in all men. The evil impulse holds man in bondage to the self that he habitually is, while the good impulse bids him transcend it. At other times when man becomes subject to strong passions which seek to breake the dikes of his behavior patterns and destroy the refinements built around his instincts, then the good impulse plays a conserva-

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[23]Genesis 1:28.
[24]*Bereshit Rabbah* 9:7.
[25]*Bereshit Rabbah* 9:7.

tive part, bidding him to hold these dikes and not permit them to yield to the sweep of raw and undisciplined energy.

This is a struggle which truly tests a man. Ben Zoma said: "Who is mighty? He who controls his passions; and so it is written in Proverbs 16:32. 'He who is master over his own spirit is mightier than he who conquers a city.' "[26]

Both impulses are subtle in their operations. The evil impulse has in its armory all kinds of powerful weapons to deceive man and keep him in bondage to his baser self. It whispers enticing words casting all kinds of allure over the zone that is forbidden. It can rationalize its propositions and robe them in seemingly virtuous trappings. And once a person yields, it weaves a fabric of habit, strong and unbending, to keep in bondage to itself, so that he can extricate himself only at the cost of the greatest exertions.

But let no one underestimate the weapons in possession of the good impulse. It affects those it seeks to heal with all kinds of therapeutic afflictions. Those who lead empty, uncreative lives, it smites with boredom and with a sense of emptiness in life. Those who transgress, it smites with a sense of guilt. It fills some lives with a discontent with themselves and their world and sends them dreaming, yearning for something better than what exists.

Man is born with original sin, in the sense that the "evil impulse" begins its operations as soon as life begins. But this is only half the story. Man is also endowed with original virtue, and from the moment he is born, the "good impulse" begins to propel him toward the heights.

Modern psychology has dwelt at length on this subject, testifying to this dual aspect of man's nature. John Dewey and James H. Tufts put it thus:

> Confining ourselves for the moment to the native psychologic equipment, we may say that man is endowed with instinctive promptings which naturally (that is, without the intervention of deliberation of calculation) tend to preserve the self, and to develop his powers; and which equally . . . tend to bind the self closer to others and to advance the interests of others. . . . Any given individual is naturally an erratic mixture of fierce insistence upon his own welfare and of profound susceptibility to the happiness of others—different in-

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[26] *Ethics of the Fathers* 4:1.

> dividuals varying much in the respective intensities and proportions of the two tendencies.[27]

Even Sigmund Freud, who has often spoken of the dark forces operative in human nature, concedes a wide range of nobility in man. "It is no part of our intention," he declared, "to deny the nobility in human nature. . . . We dwell upon the evil in human beings with a greater emphasis only because others deny it, thereby making the mental life of mankind not indeed better but incomprehensible."[28] One psychologist has read these tendencies in the very beginnings of organic life:

> When the first living cell divided to form two cells, when it gave up its life for two others, we have the beginnings of true altruism. . . . Altruism is the very nature of living matter . . . an integral part of life.[29]

Man, as he is, yields many clues to his greatness. But he is only a fraction of himself. He is still a creature in transition. Many qualities of moral excellence lie dormant in his nature, waiting to reveal themselves as man attains a greater maturing. Only as man succeeds more fully in refining his "raw" nature will it be possible to judge what it means to be truly human.

As the noted scientist, Alexis Carrel, has expressed it:

> Man is simultaneously a material object, a living being, a focus of mental activities. His presence in the prodigious void of intersidereal spaces is totally negligible. But he is no stranger in the realms of inanimate matter. With the aid of mathematical abstractions his mind apprehends the electrons as well as the stars. . . . He appertains to the surface of the earth, exactly as trees, plants and animals do. . . . But he also belongs to another world. A world which, although enclosed within himself, stretches beyond space and time. And of this world, if his will is indomitable, he may travel over the infinite cycles. The cycle of Beauty, contemplated by scientists, artists and poets. The cycle of Love, that inspires heroism and renunciation. The cycle of Grace, ultimate reward of those who passionately seek the principle of all things. Such is our universe.[30]

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[27]John Dewey and James H. Tufts, *Ethics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. 43.

[28]Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (trans. J. Riviere, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1952), p. 123.

[29]G.B. Cutten, *Instincts and Religion* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), p. 43.

[30]Alexis Carrel, *Man, the Unknown* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), p. 320.

Jewish tradition and the Book of Abraham therefore view man from the same perspective. Both claim that man is created in God's image. Both help round out the vision of man, of his place in the world, of the eminence to which he is called as well as to the depths to which he may fall. Both reject the modern view held by some that man has a lowly origin and therefore should not be considered as the pinnacle of Creation. And in answer to man's moral failure, the two traditions are emphatic in their inclusion of all people in God's concern and in the recognition that all men have the capacity to respond to God's word in deeds of penitence and in growth toward moral and spiritual perfection.