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THE UNITY THEME OF THE UNIVERSE

THE HISTORY OF MAN AND THE HISTORY OF EACH MAN

We are, as the British-American poet W.H. Auden once said, “history making creatures.”¹ We make this history together with our God. As Jews, we cannot allow ourselves to be passive observers, swept along by the events that others make. We are a history-making people! To make history is to build. It is to take a three-thousand-year-old legacy and to move it consciously forward. To be Jewish is to feel the pulse of the past, harness it, and leave the world a better place for the next generation.

Elisha Wiesel, son of Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, put it like this:

When I said Kaddish [for my father] for eleven months, I was not just connecting with him; I felt connected with his forebears as well. I had a real sense of history, going back thousands of years, of what it meant to be part of a lineage with certain traditions, rituals, and values. For almost 2,000 years, when a parent has passed away, the Jewish child has said Kaddish. There

1 W.H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 278–79.

is something profound about that. As I prepare my own son for his bar mitzvah and watch my daughter learning Hebrew, despite this crazy modern life with all of its distractions, I have this same sense of history and continuity. I think about where I came from, where I am, and where my Jewish children will go in the future. That's deeply meaningful and very grounding.

A NEW DEFINITION OF INDIVIDUALISM

Contemporary society believes that each individual needs to reinvent himself from scratch. The alternative, it is presumed, is to be stuck with outdated and irrelevant traditions, where everyone is forced to be the same.

But Judaism takes a different position. Not only is our starting point Divine and sublime, but there are well over a hundred generations of Jewish genius to build on! We begin our journey perched on the shoulders of giants. It is then up to each individual to create their own personal legacy and become someone entirely unique.

This leads to a profound idea on the meaning of individualism.

We have the gift of Sinai and 3,000 years of Jewish genius on which to build our own personal legacy.

The Western concept of individualism is that each person gets to invent himself, provided that he or she does not harm anyone else in the process.

The Jewish idea of individualism is that each individual provides his or her unique contribution to the ultimate perfection of mankind.

In other words:

- In the Western world, it is “live and let live.”
- In the Jewish world, it is “I *need* your contribution, and you *need* mine. I need you to be you, and you need me to be me. I need to find ways to help you fulfill your potential, and you need to help me fulfill mine.”

In the course of this book, we will see that this approach, far from limiting innovation or dampening man's entrepreneurial spirit, is actually a great enabler for these things and much more. Our highest aspirations

as individuals use the same exalted guidelines as our aspirations as a global community. They reinforce rather than undermine each other.

The history of mankind is intertwined with the history of its most remarkable people, i.e., the Jews. In that history, every individual is irreplaceable.

As we weave our threads of understanding throughout this section into a whole fabric, what will emerge is that we—as humans and as Jews—are not only active participants in history, but that God created a deliberately incomplete world and empowered us to complete it.

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Quantum physics has shown that two particles can be entangled or, to use an alternative word, coupled.² These particles may be on two sides of the universe, yet a change in the properties of one of them—say, their spin—will lead to an instantaneous change in the other particle. Einstein called this “spooky action at a distance.”³ Since nothing can travel faster than the speed of light (not even information), these particles cannot be communicating with each other. The only explanation is they must be the same particle, separated into two expressions. This tells us that the entire universe is, in fact, a grand unity.⁴

Four basic forces underline this universe: the strong force, the weak force, the electromagnetic force, and the force of gravity.⁵ Scientists

2 Entanglement was first discovered by the Austrian-Irish physicist Erwin Schrödinger in the early 20th century.

3 The physicist Lawrence M. Krauss explains that actually, it is much more weird than that because quantum mechanics says that the actual spin direction of either electron is not determined in advance of the measurement; the only thing that’s certain is that the spins of the two atoms are anti-aligned, i.e., that their spin is pointing in opposite directions. Even stranger, until they have been measured, both electrons are actually spinning up and down at the same time. Because the two electrons are in a single quantum state—because they are entangled—the moment I measure the spin of one electron, I fix the direction of spin of the other electron. It’s as though, by flipping one coin and coming up “heads,” I force another coin to come up “tails.”

4 Scientists have actually entangled many particles in the laboratory, and there is nothing to prevent all of matter from being in a state of entanglement.

5 The strong force holds the nucleus of an atom together. The weak force creates radiation. The other two forces are well-known. They are the force of gravity and the electromagnetic force.

believe that these four forces are really one force. They believe that only one force emerged from the Big Bang but at a very early stage (around one thirty-seventh of a second), the universe had cooled sufficiently for this one force to divide into four different expressions—the four forces we have today.

Since the 1980s, thousands of scientists dedicated their lives (and many tens of billions of dollars) to prove this. Smashing sub-atomic particles together at very high speeds, they hope to recreate the super-hot conditions that existed soon after the Big Bang when the forces were still united. In fact, they have managed to combine three of the four forces,⁶ and are now working on showing that the last one (gravity) is also a part of this grand unity.⁷ Scientists believe that by showing that these four forces are one, they will produce a TOE—a theory of everything.

But why set out on such a search to begin with? Why not just accept that there are four forces? The answer is that it is an axiom of science that correlates unity and truth. They believe that the deepest truth is unity. Why do scientists believe in unity so deeply? It is because they are sensing the secret behind the structure of the world.

Entanglement and combining the four forces are nature's way of revealing a second overarching theme of this section, indeed the whole book. It is the unity-theme of the universe. Let us explain this in Torah terms.

THE THREE “TENS”

In Judaism, ten symbolizes a thing in its entirety. It is the first unit of one after one itself. Only God can be one. Only God is a pure unity.

6 At first, scientists combined the weak force with the electromagnetic force into the electro-weak force. Then they combined this force with the strong force into a GUT—a grand unified theory. Although scientists can only see these combinations for micro-seconds when they smash particles together and briefly create very high temperatures, they predicted the existence of new particles, which they were then able to measure.

7 Gravity is more difficult to combine with the others because the others are forces within the atom; they operate at a quantum level, whereas gravity is a macro-force. Scientists believe that their best shot at a breakthrough on this is to translate the idea of gravity into quantum terms—quantum gravity.

Before creation, there was only God. After He created the world, there was multiplicity—the Creator and the created. Each created being, in turn, had its own identity.

The events of the Torah unfold into a listing of ten events exactly three times.⁸ Nothing is coincidental in God's gifts to mankind. So, this curious fact must mean something:

- The first “ten” happened when God created the world. There were Ten Sayings of Creation.⁹
- The second “ten” was in Egypt—the Ten Plagues.¹⁰
- Finally, at Sinai, we received the Ten Commandments.¹¹

We cannot create one, but we can create the next unit of one. We can unify the multiple parts into a new gestalt, i.e., a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. We can, as the physicists have shown, entangle all of reality to show that they really all connect to one source. In Judaism, this new unity is expressed by the number ten. So, whenever we see ten of something, we are seeing a whole process—every angle—combined to create a new reality.¹² We are seeing the first unit of one in the creation itself.¹³

In other words, the Ten Sayings of Creation tell us that the world had a beginning, and that beginning must therefore have been for a

8 There are two other important “tens”—the Ten Tests of Abraham (*Ethics of Our Fathers* 5:3) which, according to the *Maharal* (ibid.), means that Abraham was challenged from every angle; his entire personality had to be actualized to pass these tests. In addition there are the ten times the Jewish people tested God (Numbers 14:22). However, the tests of Abraham are not clearly listed as such in the Torah, while the ten times that the Jewish people tested God (enumerated in the Talmud, Tractate *Arachin* 15a) were generated by the Jewish people, not God. Hence I only count three times in the text. According to the *Maharal* (ibid.), what this means is that Abraham was challenged from every angle; his entire personality had to be actualized to pass these tests.

9 Genesis, chap. 1, as per *Ethics of Our Fathers* 5:1. The first verse, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” is the first of these ten. See Chapter 20, “The Holiness of the Ten Commandments,” fn 19, for the verse numbers where all Ten Sayings appear.

10 Exodus, chaps. 7–12.

11 Ibid. 20:1–14.

12 *Maharal, Derech Chaim on Ethics of Our Fathers* 5:2–3.

13 Ibid. 5:1.

purpose, for it would contradict God's absolute perfection to create something without any purpose.

The Ten Plagues confirmed that God not only created the world at the beginning of time but that He continues to play an active role in the running of the world—the idea of Divine Providence. He is involved in our lives. It matters not whether this is in the form of the open miracles of the plagues, or the form of the hidden daily miracles of nature. To Him, it is all the same.¹⁴ He is the God of history, unfolding His radical Divine plan.¹⁵

The Ten Commandments represent the inner, spiritual content, the purpose of the Ten Sayings of Creation.

The Ten Commandments represent the inner, spiritual content—the purpose of the Ten Sayings of Creation. The outer, physical garments are the laws of nature. The natural world may be a thing of wonder, but it reveals no purpose. The inner, spiritual form of this world of nature is the spiritual world of the Ten Commandments. They give meaning and content to the world.

Moreover, the Ten Commandments began the process whereby the Torah entered the physical world,¹⁶ giving the world not only its purpose but a means of achieving it. Without this, man as a physical being would have no way of cleaving to God in this world.¹⁷ The spiritual and the physical realms would have remained totally separate. After the Torah was given, a mechanism was provided where the body could soar together with the soul, and the two were united once again.¹⁸ So did King David put it: “The Torah of God is pure, it restores the soul.”¹⁹

Ten, ten, and ten. God created the world; He continues to be involved in it; and He gave it its moral and spiritual purpose. The long road to human understanding begins with these three “tens.”

14 *Ramban*, Exodus 13:16.

15 Deuteronomy 32:7 urges us to notice the Divine plan of history as it has unfolded through the generations.

16 *Sefat Emet*, *Parashat Yitro*, Year 5632.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

MAN THE RESPONDER AND MAN THE INITIATOR

We, as mortal and limited humans, had no part in the Ten Sayings of Creation. In fact, we were created without the involvement of our choice, just like the rest of creation. The Ten Plagues were also completely beyond our control.

On the other hand, the final “ten,” the Ten Commandments, are truly ours. The Torah was offered to man, and it was up to us to accept it.²⁰

<p><i>The Ten Commandments represent the inner, spiritual content—the purpose of the Ten Sayings of Creation.</i></p>	<p>We were and are given the autonomy to determine what our own inner spiritual and moral reality will be.</p> <p>At Sinai, the Jewish nation “bought into” core spirituality by entering a covenantal relationship with God and accepting the Torah, which was the expression of that covenant. We accepted the Torah.</p>
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The word “Torah” has two meanings:

- It is connected to the root word *harah* (הרה), which means to become pregnant or fertilized. The Torah is God’s means of implanting the seeds of spirituality and morality in man.²¹
- It also means a book of teaching, from the root of *hora’ah* (הוראה); from which *moreh* (מורה), a teacher, is also derived. If God has a purpose for man, He has to have a way of communicating this. This is the Torah. Without it, the Jews would not have made history. They would not even have survived.

This book, the Torah, came not only to teach us wisdom—the subject of Section 3—but also holiness, the subject of our next section. That holiness and that wisdom translate into a practical plan of perfection of the human personality. That is the subject of the final section of this book.

20 Exodus 24:7.

21 Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Genesis 26:5; Leviticus 18:4; and *Horeb*, para. 327. Rabbi Hirsch points out that Torah is in the causative (*hiphil*) form—to plant a seed in someone else.