GOD IN SEARCH OF MAN
A PHILOSOPHY OF JUDAISM

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1) When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion- its message becomes meaningless. [Page 3]

2) Is our religious attitude one of conviction or a mere assertion? Is the existence of God a probability to us or a certainty? Is God a mere word to us, a name, a possibility, a hypothesis, or is He a living presence? Is the claim of the prophets a figure of speech to us or a compelling belief? [Page 9]

3) Biblical religion is an attempt to teach about the Creator of all things and the knowledge of His will. The Bible does not intend to teach us principles of creation or redemption. It came to teach us that God is alive, that He is the Creator and Redeemer, Teacher and Lawgiver. [Page 16]

4) For all the appreciation of reason and our thankfulness for it, man’s intelligence was never regarded in Jewish tradition as being self-sufficient.

   a. “Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and do not rely on thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). [Page 19]

5) The substance of Judaism is given both in history and in thought. We accept ideas and recall events. The Jew says, “I believe,” and is told, “Remember!” His creed contains a summary of basic ideas as well as a summary of outstanding events. [Page 21]
6) God’s goodness is not a cosmic force but a specific act of compassion. We do not know it as it is but as it happens. [Page 21]

7) If a man says to you, I have labored and not found, do not believe him. If he says, I have not labored but still have found, do not believe him. If he says, I have labored and found, you may believe him. It is true that in seeking Him we are assisted by Him. But the initiative and intensity of our seeking are within our power. If thou call for understanding, and lift up thy voice for discernment; if thou seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures; then shalt thou understand the awe and fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. [Page 27-28]

8) To pray does not only mean to seek help; it also means to seek Him. [Page 27]

9) God is waiting for man to seek Him.

   b. “The Lord looked forth from heaven upon the children of man, to see if there were any man of understanding that sought Him” (Psalms 14:2) [Page 30]

10) The Greeks learned in order to comprehend. The Hebrews learned in order to revere. The modern man learns in order to use. [Page 34]

11) If the world is only power to us and we are all absorbed in a gold rush, then the only god we may come upon is the golden calf. [Page 36]

12) During the medieval epoch in Europe, the theologians were the chief sinners in respect to dogmatic finality. [Page 44]
13) Ecclesiastes is not only saying that the world’s wise are not wise enough, but something more radical. What is, is more than what you see; what is, is “far off and deep, exceedingly deep.” Being is mysterious. [Page 54]

14) “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8–9) [Page 61]

15) The ultimate is not a law but a judge, not a power but the father. [Page 68]

16) The beginning of awe is wonder, and the beginning of wisdom is awe. [Page 74]

17) “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness on the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 9:22–23).

18) There is thus only one way to wisdom: awe. Forfeit your sense of awe, let your conceit diminish your ability to revere, and the universe becomes a market place for you. Wisdom comes from awe rather than from shrewdness. It is evoked not in moments of calculation but in moments of being in rapport with the mystery of reality. The greatest insights happen to us in moments of awe. [Page 78]

19) Nature is not part of God but rather a fulfillment of His will. [Page 97]
20) The soul’s urge to rise above its own wisdom—is the root of religious faith. For faith is an act of freedom, of independence of our own limited faculties, whether of reason or sense-perception. It is an act of spiritual ecstasy, of rising above our own wisdom. To have faith is not to capitulate but to rise to a higher plane of thinking. To have faith is not to defy human reason but rather to share divine wisdom. [Pages 117-118]

21) There can be no honest denial of the existence of God. There can only be faith or the honest confession of inability to believe—or arrogance. [Page 119]

22) Man is free to seek Him and free to ignore Him. Only he who endeavors to purify himself, is assisted from above. Only he who sanctifies himself a little, is endowed with greater sanctity from above. [Page 129]

23) All of human history as described in the Bible may be summarized in one phrase: God is in search of man. [Page 136]

24) For faith does not remain stationary. We must continue to pray, continue to obey to be able to believe and to remain attached to His presence. [Page 137]

25) Israel is not a people of definers but a people of witnesses. [Page 140]

26) Without God’s aid, man cannot find Him. Without man’s seeking, His aid is not granted. [Page 146]

c. “Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts” (Malachi 3:7)
27) It is within man’s power to seek Him: it is not within his power to find Him. All Abraham had was wonder, and all he could achieve on his own was readiness to perceive. The answer was disclosed to him; it was not found by him. [Page 147]

28) Faith is sensitivity, understanding, engagement, and attachment; not something achieved once and for all, but an attitude one may gain and lose. [Page 154]

29) We do not think Him, we are stirred by Him. We can never describe Him, we can only return to Him. We may address ourselves to Him; we cannot comprehend Him. We can sense his presence; we cannot grasp His essence. [Page 160]

30) The Bible is an answer to the supreme question: what does God demand of us? [Page 168]

31) Man is meaningless without God, and any attempt to establish a system of values on the basis of the dogma of man’s self-sufficiency is doomed to failure. [Page 169]

32) There is only one source: the will and wisdom of the living God. [Page 171]

33) The cardinal sin in thinking about ultimate issues is literal-mindedness. [Page 179]

34) The word of God is the power of creation. He said Let there be, and it was. [Page 181]

   d. Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock to pieces? (Jeremiah 23:29)
35) Perhaps this is the meaning of the burning bush. A new element was brought into being: fire that burns but does not consume. It indicated a new order in God’s relation to man, namely, that to reveal He must conceal, that to impart His wisdom He must hide His power. It made revelation possible. [Page 191]

36) The Bible is the quest for the righteous man, for a righteous people [Page 197]

   e. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of man, to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God. They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one. (Psalm 14:2–3)

37) The incidents recorded in the Bible to the discerning eye are episodes of one great drama: the quest of God for man; His search for man, and man’s flight from Him. [Page 197]

38) Judaism is a way of thinking, not only a way of living. And this is one of its cardinal premises: the source of truth is found not in “a process for ever unfolded in the heart of man” but in unique events that happened at particular moments in history. There are no substitutes for revelation, for prophetic events. Jewish thought is not guided by abstract ideas, by a generalized morality. [Page 197]

39) This is at the core of all biblical thoughts: God is not a being detached from man to be sought after, but a power that seeks, pursues and calls upon man. The way to God is a way of God. Israel’s religion originated in the initiative of God rather than in the efforts of man. It was not an invention of man but a creation of God; not a product of civilization, but a realm of its own. Man would not have known Him if He had not approached man. God’s relation to man preceeds man’s relation to Him [Page 198]
40) Judaism is a religion of history, a religion of time. [Page 200]

41) The Bible asserts that man has given himself neither his existence nor his wisdom; that both are derived from the will of God. It teaches us also that certain insights come to us not by the slow process of evolution but by His direct, *sudden grant*. [Page 207]

42) Prophetic inspiration must be understood as an event, not as a process. [Page 209]

43) An aesthetic experience leaves behind the memory of a perception and enjoyment: a prophetic experience leaves behind the memory of a commitment. Revelation was not an act of enjoyment. God spoke and man not only perceived but also accepted the will of God. Revelation lasts a moment, acceptance continues. [Page 213]

44) How significant that Moses was not praised for wisdom or heroism; he was not, like Solomon, the wisest, but rather the humblest of men. [Page 232]

45) Know that there is a level of knowledge which is higher than all philosophy, namely prophecy. Prophecy is a different source and category of knowledge. [Page 233]

46) Man’s destiny is to be a partner rather than a master. There is a task, a law, and a way: the task is redemption, the law, to do justice, to love mercy, and the way is the secret of being human and holy. [Page 238]
47) The Bible is mankind’s greatest privilege. The Bible is not an end but a beginning; a precedent, not a story. It’s being embedded in particular historic situations has not deterred it from being everlasting. It is not an epic about the life of heroes but the story of every man in all climates and all ages. Its topic is the world, the whole of history, containing the pattern of a constitution of the united mankind as well as guidance toward establishing such a union. It shows the way to nations as well as to individuals. It continues to scatter seeds of justice and compassion, to echo God’s cry to the world and to pierce man’s armor of callousness. [Page 239]

48) The Bible is not behind the times; it is ages ahead of our aspirations. Its aim is not to record history but rather to record the encounter of the divine and the human on the level of concrete living. [Page 243]

49) The Bible does not deal with divinity but with humanity. [Page 244]

50) In almost every cult and religion certain beings, things, places or actions were considered to be holy. However, the idea of the holiness of an entire people, Israel as a holy people, is without parallel in human history. [Page 245]

51) God does not reveal Himself; he only reveals His way. Judaism does not speak of God’s self-revelation, but of the revelation of His teaching for man. [Page 261]

52) Judaism is not a purely a Biblical religion. The oral Torah is, in part, older than the written Torah. The Sabbath, we are told, was known to Israel before the event at Sinai took place. [Page 274]
53) A Jew is asked to take a leap of action rather than a leap of thought. Right living is a way to right-thinking. [Page 283]

54) The oldest form of piety is expressed in the Bible as walking with God. Enoch, Noah, walked with God. [Page 287]

55) Jewish law is, in a sense, a science of deeds. Its main concern is not only how to worship Him at certain times but how to live with Him at all times. Every deed is a problem; there is a unique task at every moment. All of life at all moments is the problem and the task. [Page 292]

56) To Judaism, religion is not a feeling for something that is, but an answer to Him who is asking us to live in a certain way. [Page 293]

57) Judaism stresses the relevance of human deeds. It refuses to accept the principle that under all circumstances the intention determines the deed. [Page 295]

58) The dichotomy of faith and works which presented such an important problem in Christian theology was never a problem in Judaism. To us, the basic problem is neither what is the right action nor what is the right intention. The basic problem is: what is right living? And life is indivisible. The inner sphere is never isolated from outward activities. Deed and thought are bound into one. All a person thinks and feels enters everything he does, and all he does is involved in everything he thinks and feels. [Page 296]
59) The world needs more than the secret holiness of individuals inwardness. It needs more than sacred sentiments and good intentions. God asks for the heart because he needs the lives. It is by lives that the world will be redeemed, by lives that beat in concordance with God, by deeds that outbeat the finite charity of the human heart. [Page 296]

60) The supreme imperative is not merely to believe in God but to do the will of God. [Page 299]

61) Judaism is not another word for legalism. The rules of observance are law in form and love in substance. The Torah contains both law and love. Law is what holds the world together; love is what brings the world forward. The law is the means, not the end; the way, not the goal. One of the goals is “Ye shalt be holy.” [Page 323]

62) The translators of the Septuagint committed a fatal and momentous error when, for lack of a Greek equivalent, they rendered Torah with nomos, which means law, giving rise to a huge and chronic misconception of Judaism and supplying an effective weapon to those who sought to attack the teachings of Judaism. That the Jews considered Scripture as teaching is evidenced by the fact that in the Aramaic translations Torah is rendered with oratia which can only mean teaching, never law. [Page 325]

63) Even God’s relation to the world is characterized by the polarity of justice and mercy, providence and concealment, the promise of reward and demand to serve Him for His sake. [Page 341]

64) Polarity is an essential trait of all things. [Page 341]
65) There is no halacha without agada, and no agada without halacha. [page 341]

66) Piety is unconditional loyalty to the holy. The pious man is he who seeks attachment to the holy. [Page 346]

67) Living is not a private affair of the individual. Living is what man does with God’s time, what man does with God’s world. [Page 356]

68) We fail and sin not only in our deeds. We also fail and sin in our hearts. Evil in the heart is the source of evil in deeds. [Page 364]

69) The biblical answer to evil is not the good but the holy. [Page 376]

70) To be contrite at our failures is holier than to be complacent in perfection. [Page 403]