

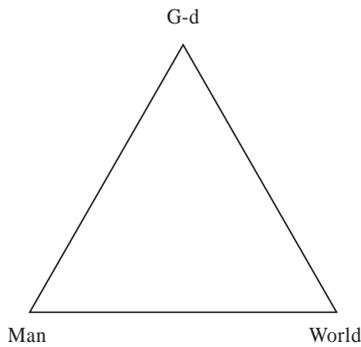
The Scriptures and Us

Shalom Rosenberg

I took upon myself a difficult task in writing an introduction to a book of illustrations about the Scriptures or, put another way, in writing a kind of introduction to the Scriptures. Once I read a very beautiful short article by a man who had written a critical piece regarding Tractate 'Baba Kama' as if this book had just now been first published, describing its various aspects to his readers. He even predicts that the ox of 'Baba Kama' may one day merit a very large rating. In fact, I have experienced mixed emotions in the writing of this introduction, both one of elation combined to a certain extent with that of absurdity. How could one feel otherwise when writing an introduction to a book which is at once the foundation of Judaism as well as one of the pillars of world civilization, a book that is the umbilical cord which attaches and binds me to my past and my future and from which my elusive present is nourished. After having discarded numerous drafts, I will endeavor to achieve this task, with the assistance of a conception which was suggested by one of the great intellectual thinkers of the 20th century, Franz (Judah) Rosenzweig in his book, 'The Star of Redemption'. These ideas, in addition to a number espoused by various other intellectuals, are detailed in my book, 'In the Path of the Kuzari'.

The roots of western civilization are nourished by two sources: Greece and Israel, i.e., Athens and Jerusalem. Scholars spanning the generations believed they found a clue in the Scriptures regarding this matter as indicated by the coalition of Shem and Japheth, the sons of Noah, in a passage from (Genesis 9, 27) which states "G-d enlarge Japheth And he shall dwell in the tents of Shem". There exists a basic partnership between Shem and Japheth yet despite this association there remain fundamental differences of opinion. It is at this crossroad that we encounter the uniqueness of the Scriptures. In these writings we may view the entire human intellectual effort in its attempt to solve the riddles which are indicated by the 3 vertices of a philosophical triangle: G-d, World, Man (illustration of Magen David with G-d, Creation, World, Redemption, Man, Revelation going clockwise).

Despite thousands of years of philosophical speculation, G-d, World and Man remain an enigma. A central question, which has always engaged humanity is: What do



I know about G-d? This is the theology or knowledge of G-d in classical Hebrew philosophy. However, mankind also wanted to arrive at an understanding of the World (cosmology) and an understanding of Man (anthropology). In search of a key to understand the World and Man, various scientists developed the study of physics in an attempt to reveal the laws which direct the world and psychology which would investigate and research man. These are two infinite areas about which we know only a minute amount today. One stretches outward to an infinity which stands outside of Man while the other extends inward into the infinity which exists within Man. However, beyond these scientific questions, which have engaged mankind, philosophical questions still persist which scientists are not equipped to investigate, questions which can never admit to an ultimate solution.

Thus far, three focal points have dominated the center of our search. However, other kinds of problems arise when we are not referring to the vertices themselves, but rather to the relations that exist among them. This was the precise starting point in Rosenzweig's thought. There is one fundamental assumption in the Scriptures and it is that relationships exist among these vertices, that is, among G-d, the World and Man. The Scriptures teach us that the relationship between

G-d and the World is based on the idea of creation, that of G-d and Man is built on Revelation and that of the World and Man is founded on Redemption. If we join the two triangles together, we get one of the classic symbols of Judaism, the Star of David. Rosenzweig referred to the Star of David as the Star of Redemption which was named after the last vertex of the star. We do not have a reliable, historical explanation of the Star of David. Rosenzweig's insight contributed philosophical depth to this wonderful symbol. The diagram succeeds and remains vital because it possesses the ability to continually enrich Man through the generations in all of his speculative reflections. It constitutes a basic lexicon of religious thought, a kind of schematic summary of the principles upon which Jewish thought has been based throughout the generations. The star also constitutes a means of successfully presenting in a general way the existential and intellectual problems which confront us and assists us in deliberating upon a solution.

According to Rosenzweig, in the dialogue between Athens and Jerusalem, the second triangle embodies the dispute between the two. It fundamentally differentiates between the two very disparate views, which create different worlds. According to Rosenzweig, the first triangle is to some extent, jointly shared by Greece and Israel. It appears to me, however, that we must correct a false impression which is liable to arise from this assertion. The first triangle is not identical in the two conceptions and the entire star embodies in diagrammatic form, the principles which characterize the Scriptures.

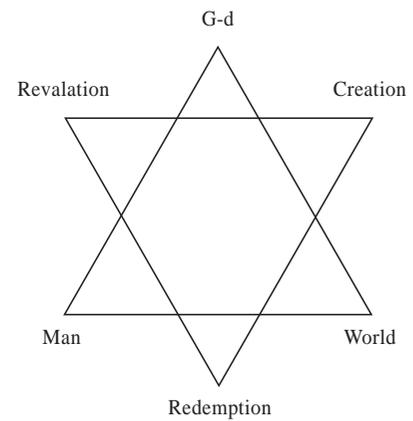
Whoever reads the history of human ideas, knows that the figure of the first triangle is not trivial. The very fact that it is a triangle constitutes a philosophical assertion of the first order. We will begin from the simplest matter which is, that before us, are three different vertices and that G-d and the world are separate! Inherent here is one of the great differences distinguishing the scriptural view and the pagan view and subsequently, between the views presented by Jewish thought with those of various other intellectual approaches. The difference between them is not merely numerical. In paganism, all which exists in the world is attributed to the "Graces" or to the Law of Blind Fate, which determines all that happens and which takes no consideration toward that which happens

in the world. Even the gods who are found within the world, are ruled by the blind forces which control the world. The gods themselves do not always understand what is happening. In the Scriptures, G-d is found outside of the world. This idea is of paramount importance toward everything which touches upon morality. G-d, who is found outside of the world, constitutes for us a kind of Archimedic point, from which our moral view is conceived. The Greek world was guided by the principle that Nature is the measure of all things. Nature is held up to be the test for beauty as well as for morality. It may be concluded from this approach that if we study how Nature behaves, we may also learn the Law of the Jungle. In marked contrast, when the Hebrew Prophets taught us that in the end of days, the wolf will dwell with the lamb, they criticized Nature and established that it cannot serve as the measure of man's actions. This profound moral revolution initiated by the Scriptures became possible only because of the daring thesis which supposed that G-d is to be found outside of the world.

In addition, this simple triangle expresses a remarkably audacious idea in that it designates an independent vertex to Man. If we were to ask a scientist to position Man on this triangle, he would probably assign Man on the vertex which is designated World. This is not the case with our triangle. In Man's being assigned an independent position on the vertex, one of the fundamental principles of the Scriptures is related, namely, the idea of freedom whose offspring is the idea of responsibility - responsibility toward the individual and history.

The second triangle adds three ideas which are characteristic of Judaism: Creation, Revelation and Redemption.

The idea of *Creation* teaches us that the world did not come about by mere chance but rather was the free creation of G-d. The world was not created as a matter of chance, nor was it created as a matter of necessity. The world is a work emanating from G-d's free will. For us in the modern world, *Creation* means competing with those systems of thought which attempt to explain the world even as they expunge the name of the Almighty from our consciousness. However, it should be clearly understood that this struggle occurs on a plane which is to be found beyond the scientific realm. To explain this we may resort to a fictitious thought experiment. Let's say that there comes to Earth a being from another planet whose knowledge is considerably more advanced than ours. He brings with him three central symbols of knowledge: a comprehensive encyclopedia, a super computer and sophisticated equipment capable of receiving any data regarding the environment from great distances and which is able, let's say, to evaluate blood tests from a distance with the help of a laser beam. Now, let's pretend that this being arrives in the Jerusalem area on Memorial Day (Yom Hazicharon). He lands in a hidden corner on Mount Scopus, just a few minutes before 11:00 A.M. without anyone having taken notice of him. He sets up his equipment and observes, examines and records (automatically, of course) everything that is occurring and just as this is being done, a siren is heard at 11:00 A. M. He sees people stop their cars as if this were being done as part of a well coordinated symphony. The spaceman asks his computer, what's going on? The super computer, which has control over all of the equipment, gathers the data and responds, "The car stopped because the driver, whose code is Y126, applied the brakes which subsequently closed the electric circuit." Regarding this strange question, the computer will give an answer which is based



on equations dealing with the exchange of energy. The energy which was previously stored in some fashion in the body of the man turned into chemical energy, into electrical energy, into mechanical energy and stopped the car. If this visitor from another star would persist with his questioning, the computer would be able to provide him with a history of changes dating back millennia. The answer given by the computer is in fact, correct to a certain extent. It gives a physio-chemical answer, however it fails to provide an explanation regarding the significance of the car's coming to a halt. In order to understand why the car stopped, it is insufficient to posit mere physical equations. For this, Man must enter into the underlying secret of mankind, into the world of language and symbols.

Now, let's return to the analogy. There are two different views regarding the world. Science investigates the equations of physics, chemistry and biology whereas we are interested in another matter altogether. Let's say that science could answer the question of how life appeared. Let's say that it was even capable of creating life from organic material. All of these things still would not answer the crucial questions regarding whether this was a result of sheer coincidence or of conscious direction and more specifically, why did this happen? This brings us to our first thesis: *Creation*.

We also contend with approaches which attach no significance to the idea of Revelation, that is, they recognize no Torah given from Heaven. One of the heroes of the Soviet Revolution, Leon Trotsky, a Jew, once published a book in which he explained his behavior against the Bolsheviks' enemies. At that time, he took hostages and killed them. When he was asked, "How could that happen?" he answered that it was necessary to direct that kind of question to one who believed that there is a book in Heaven in which what is good and what is evil is written in black and white. Only such a man could rightfully be approached with this argument. Whoever does not believe that such a book exists, for him there is no absolute good and evil. Everything is permitted and is good if only it advances the revolution. All the rest is evil or at any rate, not good. This is the loss of the distinction between good and evil.

Through our belief in *Creation*, we declare that the world did not result as a matter of coincidence, but rather the fingerprints of the Creator may be detected in it. Through our belief in *Revelation* or *Torah from Heaven*, we profess that Man is not alone in the world. He is not an isolated being because G-d "takes an interest in him". This bond is well exemplified in the Torah and in the writings of the Prophets. The significance of the bond indicates that not everything is equal, that there is good and evil in the world.

From the idea of *Redemption*, we claim that there is a "future" for the history of Mankind. G-d created the world, yet the world never ceases to be built and Man is a partner in this enterprise. By means of Revelation, we become able as well as obligated to bring Redemption to the world. Fortified by our belief, we contend with those who present an alternative Redemption, though in our time, our struggle is as much with those who have utterly despaired of the idea. These people uphold an ideal which has adopted the slogan, "here and now", and which has become a dominant influence in literature and the theatre.

Let us again draw a triangle, but this time, inserting another terminology in the vertices. If we were asked to supply three terms which constitute the principal ideas in the basic Jewish lexicon, we would in my view, be obligated to choose the words, faith,

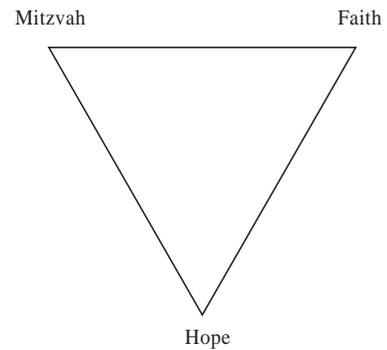
mitzvah, hope. These words, in creating an additional triangle, are bound up with the three dimensions of Man. Man possesses (1), a conscious dimension ("the soul that resides in the brain"), he aspires to know, (2) the practical dimension ("the hand") with which he works and changes the world and (3) the emotional dimension ("the heart: desires and thoughts of our heart"). Judaism addresses Man in these three dimensions. Man's consciousness is called to *faith*. His actions are summoned to perform the *mitzvah*. His emotions are enjoined to *hope*. It is hardly a coincidence that the national anthem is called "Hatikva" - The Hope. These three elements relate to the scriptural idea concerning Man's approach to his historical and biographical problems and distress. It applies to what later times would refer to as *confidence*.

The difference between faith and hope is interesting and may be explained in various ways. As diverse thinkers have stated, there is a *belief that* - and there is a *belief in*. I believe both of these ideas to be true. However, there is yet another level of belief that is expressed as I believe in "somebody", I trust in him. This belief is hope. The "I believe... in the coming of the Messiah" is not just knowledge, but is first and foremost the emotional disposition of the heart. It is *hope*.

Three ideals: *Faith*, *Mitzvah*, and *Hope* comprise the arena of our struggle in the modern world in which the antagonists are forever discarding one form and clothing themselves in another. Many contend that the world was conquered by science and that we require nothing more. However, beyond the realm of facts, exists the realm of values. *Mitzvah* means that there is indeed a difference between good and evil and the performance of a *mitzvah* brings about a strengthening of *faith*. The third vertex in the triangle is *hope*, that is, hope for Redemption. In my view, this triangle constitutes the Jewish message to Mankind in the post-modern world.

So much for scriptural philosophy, even though the Scriptures are not a philosophy book. The Scriptures relate to history and the human story from a G-d perspective. Prophecy penned editorial pieces in reaction to what the Scriptures had witnessed. The Scriptures are not restricted within the bounds of abstract ideas. It translated ideas into specific actions and emotions in what were reactions to the events of the time. One who browses through the pages of this collection of Scriptural pictures sees worlds unfolding before him. Seemingly, our encounter is with historical and biographical events, however, lying behind the picture and the story, is a complete world of ideas, emotions and actions. Though no easy task within such a limited framework, I would very much like to bring the reader to feel in touch with these worlds. Therefore, I chose to focus on one motif, which is present in the majority of the pictures in this book and I hope that this example will not merely illustrate the stated point, but will also shed some light upon the overall world of the Scriptures.

There are domains, which in order to observe, we must approach and even use a microscope. In contrast, there are other spheres in which just the opposite occurs and in order to discern them, we must distance ourselves from them and use a telescope. We lose the details but as compensation, are able to see an overall picture. Near the Knesset in Jerusalem, there is a clock made of flowers. An ant that is walking among the flowers may have a micro-view and discern the array of flowers. However, only Man can distance himself from the picture and see the "macro-view", that is, he may discern the clock, which is a product not of the details, but of the total structure. At this point I would request



from the reader that he distance himself from the text and attempt to view the Book of Genesis as if by means of a telescope.

Sigmund Freud taught us about the centrality of the Oedipus Complex. This complex symbolizes the conflict between fathers and sons in their various dimensions and delves into the tension and rivalry between the generations. Freud relied on the mythology and culture of the Greeks in discovering the Oedipus Complex based on the Oedipus myth. In contrast, there can be no doubt that the conflict which absorbs the Book of Genesis is not that which exists between fathers and sons but rather that which erupts between brothers. Genesis begins not with the murder of a father, but with the murder of a brother - the murder of Abel by his brother, Cain. Genesis concludes with the selling of a brother in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Moreover, in Genesis, we encounter struggles between various other brothers, including Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, and even prior to that, there is the conflict between Shem and Japheth against Ham as well as that between Abraham and Lot. "And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle." (Genesis 13,7). Abraham attempts to calm the dispute. "And Abraham said unto Lot; 'Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee,... for we are brethren.'" In fact, in observing from a distance, it seems clear that the Book of Genesis is attempting to teach us that conflict between brothers is the central problem in our lives, hence, the great beckoning toward the consciousness of brotherhood. The French Revolution viewed three ideals as comprising the roots of modern democracy: Freedom, Equality and Fraternity. Two hundred years of history have taught us that Freedom is relative and that absolute Equality is an illusion. The Book of Genesis views the ideal of Fraternity to be of central importance. From here it may be concluded that in every war there is something resembling a war between brothers. All men must return to the words expressed by the prophet Malachi as a call to all of humanity. "Have we not all one father? Hath not one G-d created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?" (Malachi, 2, 10)

What solution is there to the conflict between brothers? The last line in the story of Abraham and Lot tells of their painful separation. "Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left" (Genesis 13, 9). This separation determined the borders between Israel, Ammon and Moab. Similarly, there was a separation between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Laban and subsequently, between Jacob and Esau. The meeting between Jacob and Esau would be an encounter of reconciliation but it was also one of separation. In this way, the historical borders between Israel and Edom would be determined.

In the story of Joseph and his brothers, in the last chapters in Genesis, we learn about a solution of a different nature. The brothers meet and are reconciled. The conflict between Joseph and the brothers headed by Judah produced one of the most tragic events in Jewish history, the split between the kingdom of Judah and that of the kingdom of Ephraim. Here the solution is not one of separation, rather, the brothers must learn to dwell together. This is the reason why in the Torah portion *Vayigash*, in which the brothers reunite, we read the *Haftorah* about the vision of Ezekiel regarding the uniting of the people in the end of days. "Behold I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them unto him together

with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick and they shall be one in My hand" (Ezekiel 37, 19-20). In the conclusion of the Book of Genesis we in fact learn about the reconciliation between the brothers which is to be a future based on the mutual cooperation of all.

The happy conclusion of human history will be possible only when solidarity reigns among the brothers. In the words of the sages, the Redemption will come by way of the mutual cooperation between Joseph and Judah, Moshiach Ben Yosef and Moshiach Ben David. However, much more is indicated by this reconciliation. The reconciliation of the brothers with Joseph in Egypt happens when Judah is prepared to release his brother, Benjamin, at the price of his freedom. After the murder of Abel, G-d asks Cain: "Where is Abel, your brother?" and Cain answers him, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis, 4, 9). Judah's actions prove that indeed, "I am my brother's keeper". The Book of Genesis has now arrived at its conclusion. Judah's action serves as a kind of rectification for the primeval murder of Abel by Cain. The responsibility which was thrust upon Judah may be interpreted as his taking upon himself the suffering of another. This is the brotherhood of the Book of Genesis.

The Scriptures want to educate the world. Has it succeeded until today?

I would like to answer this question with the assistance of a story written by Shai Agnon, "Whole Bread". Agnon tells us about one man, whom the protagonist of the story met:

As I was dragging along, one old man knocked on the window. I bowed my head and saw Dr. Yekutiel Na'aman standing by the window. I ran to him and I was overjoyed because he is a great and wise man and his words are pleasant... His lips were somewhat open and a kind of rebuke was hanging upon them and his enormous beard, which had turned grey, was creased and ran in waves like the great sea at a time when it is raging... I reflected and began to speak about his book.

There were extremely different views about this book. There are some sages who say that everything written in it was from the mouth of the Master (...) Yekutiel Na'aman's writing did nothing to add or detract from his words. And so says Yekutiel Na'aman. And there are those who say that this is not so, but that Na'aman wrote everything himself and ascribed his words to one Master who no man has ever seen.

Yekutiel Na'aman is none other than Moshe Rabeinu, "the faithful servant", who according to Chazal, (sages) also had the name of Yekutiel. Dr. Na'aman informs us that "what is written is from the mouth of the Master (...) he wrote". There are not three elliptical points here, as is customary, but four, a hint about the ineffable name of G-d, which contains four letters. Dr. Na'aman gave us the book and his book is none other than the Torah. Opinions are divided about it. The book itself claims to be a revelation, Torah from Heaven. There are many who deny this: "There are those who say that the book is not revelation but rather it was Na'aman himself who wrote it and ascribed his words to one Master who no man has ever seen." However, Dr. Na'aman claims that the ideas of the Torah constitute a breakthrough which reaches from beyond our world, coming from Heaven to the daily reality overflowing with interests, hatred and desire.

Of course, even those who do not believe in Revelation and in the holiness of

the book, appreciate it as a literary creation of the first order. According to Agnon, Dr. Na'aman takes no interest in this evaluation. The protagonist tells us: "In order to give satisfaction to Dr. Na'aman, I effusively praised his book, saying that everyone acknowledges it to be an incomparable piece of work. Yekutiel turned his face from me and left." Dr. Na'aman is not interested in literary criticism. He is fighting for the truth. He is fighting for commitment. Dr. Na'aman calls the protagonist to commitment as a direct consequence of the Revelation. The first commitments of man are to his family, to his sons and daughters, all of whom post-modern Man is sometimes inclined to forget in the name of self-realization. Dr. Na'aman gives the protagonist "a bundle of letters to bring to the post office and to dispatch them with responsibility!" Responsibility! In today's Hebrew we would say, "a registered letter", but the archaic Hebrew is crucial for us in order to understand the hint. The letters that we must send with responsibility are in fact, the *mitzvot*, the obligations which are imposed upon us. Now, we may skip a number of passages to focus on another major point in the story:

Before long, I was standing by the post office... Until I requested to enter, a carriage passed by and I saw a man sitting there... I looked up and I saw that it was Mr. Gresler. This is the Mr. Gresler who was the headmaster of the agricultural school abroad, except that when he lived abroad, he would ride on a horse whereas here, he was traveling in a carriage...

To the protagonist of the story is added another central character, Mr. Gresler, whose description resembles that of Satan and the evil inclination. The main irony in the description is certainly to be found in Mr. Gresler's accompanying us to the land of Israel, just when we thought that our idealism had left him behind us. The protagonist relates: "This Mr. Gresler is my acquaintance, one of my special acquaintances. Since when have I known him? It could possibly be that I know him from the day that I know myself. And I would not be exaggerating if I said that from the day that I know him, our love has never ceased. Even though the whole world loves him, I can say that I am more dear to him than anybody else, as he has troubled himself for me and would show me all kinds of pleasures. When I grew tired of these pleasures, he would amuse me with words of wisdom..." Mr. Gresler represents the hedonism and the science of the modern world which has distanced us from the Scriptures. However, the protagonist confesses that Mr. Gresler had caused a fire, in which his house was burnt and all of his possessions went up in smoke. The protagonist relates to us how Gresler intentionally ignited a cigar in his neighbor's store "and burned the entire house." This same neighbor, who was responsibly insured, received money for his goods and I, who had not insured my acquisitions, fell into despair. What remained to me from the fire, I spent on lawyers as Mr. Gresler tempted me to sue the city, which did not save my house, and not only that, they made the fire larger. That night, the firemen made a party and got drunk, filled their glasses with whiskey and intoxicating liquors and when they came to put out the flames, they merely added to the fire."

It is interesting here to once again encounter "responsibility". In modern Hebrew we would apply the term of "insurance". The neighbor's store was "responsibly" insured, unlike the attic of our protagonist, which was also burnt. Responsibility is the morality which was constructed with the letters. The lack of responsibility in the case of the letters is intertwined here with a responsibility of another kind. The fire was a biographical event

in Agnon's life but for me it symbolizes the destruction of European Jewry, a time when both firemen and nations looked on and not only did not rescue but also contributed to the destruction.

An allegorical description provided by Agnon tells the fate of the Scriptures in its battle to change reality. The Scriptures still wait for Mankind to heed its words. Has it failed in its task? Agnon includes this sentence when he describes the meeting between the protagonist and Dr. Na'aman:

This is not the place to interpret the nature of this book. However, this needs to be said, that from the day that it was published in the world, the world has changed somewhat for the good, that a few men have rectified their actions and a few have changed their natures and there are some who direct their limbs to do everything they possibly can to conform with what is written in the Book.

We, the people of Israel, attempt to walk in the footsteps of the Book and direct our limbs "to do all that we can to fulfill what is written in the Book". We direct our "limbs" when we should have been directing our hearts yet there is much to be said even for this. As to the world? Regarding this, Agnon correctly stated, "from the day that the Scriptures were given, the world has changed somewhat for the good." "Somewhat!" Nevertheless, we are still inclined to believe that the Redemption will come and that the world will change as a result of the Book. And this will occur if the world will take upon itself "responsibility".