

*Kol Dodi Dofek:
It Is the Voice of My Beloved That Knocketh*

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*THE COVENANT AT SINAI
AND THE COVENANT IN EGYPT*

When we probe the nature of our historical existence we arrive at a very important insight, one that constitutes a fundamental element of our world-view. The Torah relates that God made two coven-

ants with the Israelites. The first covenant He made in Egypt: "And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God" (Exodus 6:7); the second covenant, at Mount Sinai: "And he took the book of the covenant . . . and said: 'Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you in agreement with all these words'" (Exodus 24:7-8). (The third covenant, "These are the words of the covenant . . . beside the covenant which He made with them in Horeb" [Deuteronomy 28:69], is identical in content and goals with the covenant at Sinai.)¹⁰ What is the nature of these two covenants? It seems to me that this question is implicitly answered at the beginning of our essay. For just as Judaism distinguishes between fate and destiny in the personal-individual realm, so it differentiates between these two ideas in the sphere of our national-historical existence. The individual is tied to his people both with the chains of fate and with the bonds of destiny. In the light of this premise, it may be stated that the covenant in Egypt was a covenant of fate, while the covenant at Sinai was a covenant of destiny.

THE COVENANT OF FATE

What is the nature of a covenant of fate? Fate in the life of a people, as in the life of an individual, signifies an existence of compulsion. A strange necessity binds the particulars into one whole. The individual, against his will, is subjected and subjugated to the national, fate-laden, reality. He cannot evade this reality and become assimilated into some other, different reality. The environment spits out the Jew who flees from the presence of the Lord, and he is bestirred from his slumber in the same manner as the prophet Jonah, who awoke upon hearing the voice of the ship's captain demanding that he identify himself in both personal and national-religious terms.

This sense of a fate-laden existence of necessity gives rise to the historical loneliness of the Jew. He is alone both in life and in death. The concept of a Jewish burial-plot emphasizes the Jew's strange isolation from the world. Let the sociologists and psycholo-

gists say what they may about the incomprehensible alienation of the Jew. All their explanations are naught but vain and empty speculations which do not shed any intelligible light on this phenomenon. Jewish loneliness belongs to, is part of, the framework of the covenant of fate that was made in Egypt. In truth, Judaism and separation from the world are identical ideas. Even before the exile in Egypt, with the appearance of the first Jew—our father, Abraham—loneliness entered our world. Abraham was lonely. He was called Abraham the Hebrew, *Avraham ha-Ivri*, for “all the world was to one side (*ever ehad*) while he was to the other side (*ever ehad*).”¹¹ When Balaam saw the Jewish people dwelling tribe by tribe, he apprehended the mystery of the solitary mode of Jewish existence and proclaimed in a state of amazement: “Lo, it is a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (Numbers 23:9). Even if a person achieves the pinnacle of social or political success, he will still not be able to free himself from the chains of isolation. This paradoxical fate has preserved both the separateness and the uniqueness of the Jew despite his supposed integration into his foreign, non-Jewish environment. Even as politically powerful a person as Joseph, who ranked next to the king of Egypt, lived separately from Egyptian society and dwelled alone in his tent—“And they set on for him by himself . . . and for the Egyptians that did eat with him, by themselves” (Genesis 43:32). Before his death, he pleaded with his brothers: “God will surely remember you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (Genesis 50:25). Despite my greatness and glory, I am bound up with you and with your survival, both in my life and in my death. This special, incomprehensible reality of the individual clinging to the community and feeling alienated from the foreign, outside world became crystallized in Egypt. It was there that the Israelites raised themselves up to the rank of a people, peoplehood signifying both togetherness (the Hebrew word for “people,” *am*, is related to the Hebrew word *im*, meaning “with,” “togetherness”)¹² and the uniqueness that derives from togetherness. This consciousness of a covenant of fate

in all of its manifestations is an integral part of our historical-metaphysical being.

When the Jew, with this sense of his special, unique fate, confronts God face to face, he encounters the God of the Hebrews, who reveals himself to man from out of the very midst of the experience of loneliness and necessity, from out of the very midst of the consciousness of the fate which seizes hold of an individual and overcomes him. The God of the Hebrews does not wait for man to search for Him, to freely invite Him into his presence. He imposes His rule over man, against his will. A Jew cannot expel the God of the Hebrews from his private domain. Even if he violates the Sabbath, defiles his table and bed, and strives to deny his own Jewishness, his membership in the Jewish people, he will still not be able to escape the dominion of the God of the Hebrews, who pursues him like a shadow. So long as a person's nose testifies to his origins, so long as a drop of Jewish blood courses through his veins, so long as physically he is still a Jew, he serves the God of the Hebrews against his will. Neither counsel nor understanding can prevail against Him. Yea, if the Jew who rejects his people ascends heavenward, yea, if he takes the wings of the morning, there would the hand of the God of the Hebrews take hold of him. Whither shall the Jew go from the spirit of the God of the Hebrews, and whither shall he flee from His presence? “And they said: ‘The God of the Hebrews hath met with us. Let us go, we pray thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice unto the Lord our God; lest He fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword’” (Exodus 5:3). To disregard the commands of the God of the Hebrews will, in the end, result in calamity and destruction.

The covenant of fate expresses itself as well in positive categories which derive from the consciousness of a shared fate. There are four aspects to this rare mode of consciousness.

First, the consciousness of a shared fate manifests itself as a consciousness of shared circumstances. We all find ourselves in the realm of a common fate which binds together all of the people's dif-

ferent strata, its various units and groups, a fate which does not discriminate between one group and another group or between one person and his fellow. Our fate does not distinguish between aristocrats and common folk, between rich and poor, between a prince garbed in the royal purple and a pauper begging from door to door, between a pietist and an assimilationist. Even though we speak a plethora of languages, even though we are inhabitants of different lands, even though we look different—one may be short and dark, the other tall and blond—even though we live in varying and unequal social and economic conditions—one may dwell in a magnificent palace, the other in a miserable hovel—we still share the same fate. If the Jew in the hovel is beaten, then the security of the Jew in the palace is endangered. "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews" (Esther 4:13). Both Queen Esther, garbed in royal apparel, and Mordecai the Jew, clad in sackcloth, were caught in the same web of historical circumstances. *Haverim kol yisrael*, "All Israel are knit together"—We will all be pursued unto death or we will all be redeemed with an eternal salvation.

Second, the consciousness of shared historical circumstances results in the experience of shared suffering. The feeling of sympathy is a fundamental feature of the consciousness of the unifying fate of the Jewish people. The suffering of one part of the people affects the people as a whole. The scattered and dispersed people mourn together and are comforted together. *Tefillah*, prayer, *ze'akah*, the human outcry, and *nehamah*, comfort, are all formulated, as I emphasized above, in the plural. The pleas that ascend from the abyss of affliction are not restricted to the suffering and pain of the individual supplicant. They include the needs of the entire community. When a person has a sick relative, he cannot pray for him alone but has to pray for all the sick of Israel. If one enters into a mourner's home to comfort him and wipe away a tear from his grieving face, one directs one's words of comfort to all who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem. The slightest disturbance in the condition of a single individual or group ought to grieve all of the various seg-

ments of the people in all of their dispersions. It is both forbidden and impossible for the "I" to isolate himself from his fellow and not share in his suffering. If the premise of shared historical circumstances is correct, then the experience of shared suffering is the direct conclusion of that premise.

A preacher of the last generation put it well. He said that the Jewish people may be compared to the man with two heads, concerning whom the question was posed in the house of study: How is he to be viewed for purposes of inheritance? Does he take two portions like a dual person? Or does he take one portion like a single unified individual?¹⁵ One may similarly ask: Has the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the lands of its exile and its taking root in its various surroundings resulted in its spiritual and psychic dissolution? Or has the unity of the people not been abrogated, despite the fact that it has grown many heads, that it expresses itself in a multitude of languages and cultures, in differing customs and varying practices? In a word: Is the Jewish diaspora a unity or not?

The answer—the preacher continued—to the question of the unity of the Jewish people is identical with the ruling issued in the house of study regarding the question of the unity of the two-headed heir. Let boiling water be poured on one of his heads, stated the judge, and let us see the reaction of the other head. If the other head cries out in pain, then both heads blend into one complete and unified personality and the heir will take one portion. However, if the second head does not feel the pangs of the first head, then we have two personalities coupled together in one body and they take two portions.

The same holds true with regard to the question of the unity of the Jewish people. The authoritative ruling is that as long as there is shared suffering, in the manner of "I will be with him in trouble" (Psalms 91:15), there is unity. If the Jew upon whom divine providence has shed a beneficent light, and who consequently believes that, at least with respect to him, the venom of hate and rejection has been expunged from his surroundings, still feels the troubles of the people and the burden of a fate-laden existence, then his link with

the people has not been broken. If boiling water is poured upon the head of the Jew in Morocco, the fashionably attired Jew in Paris or London has to scream at the top of his voice, and through feeling the pain he will remain faithful to his people. The fragmentation of the people and the blurring of its image are concomitants of the absence of the feeling of sympathy.

Third, shared suffering finds its expression in the awareness of shared responsibility and liability. When Israel went forth from Egypt, Moses and Aaron fell down upon their faces, pleaded with God, and said: "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will Thou be wroth with all the congregation?" (Numbers 16:22). This prayer accomplished the aim intended for it by Moses and Aaron, the shepherds of their people, Israel; God agreed that they had acted properly in setting forth their plea and punished only the congregation of Korah. However, God's display of this particular mode of *hesed* was only temporary. On a permanent basis, the "I" is held responsible for the sin of his fellow, if it was in his power to rebuke him, to protest against his behavior and induce him to repent. A collective ethico-halakhic responsibility devolves upon the entire Jewish people. The individuals coalesce into one ethico-halakhic unit, possessed of one conscience and an all-encompassing normative consciousness. The halakhah has already declared that all Jews are guarantors for one another. Consequently, the halakhic ruling is that a person who has already discharged his obligation to fulfill a commandment can still perform the commandment for his fellow Jew who has not as yet performed it and thereby enable him to discharge his obligation. The fact that the first person has already performed the commandment does not result in his being included in the category of those who are exempt from a particular obligation, who cannot enable the many to discharge their obligation. The "I" is not himself exempt as long as his fellow has not performed the commandment required of him. A special covenant was made in order to effect the mutual *arevut* (suretyship) of all Jews for one another. This covenant received its expression in the blessings and curses on Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. It is based on

the idea of peoplehood that God revealed to Moses in Egypt. From the idea of peoplehood the covenant of mutual *arevut* directly followed. Moses, the master of the prophets, in referring to this covenant of *arevut*, emphatically proclaimed: "that He may establish thee this day unto Himself for a people and that He may be unto thee a God" (Deuteronomy 29:12). In speaking thus, he used the same phrases employed to describe the covenant in Egypt, "And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God" (Exodus 6:7). Here the concept of shared fate has risen from the plane of socio-political suffering to the plane of ethico-halakhic *arevut*. We are all mutually responsible for one another, we are all each other's guarantors, as the verse states: "but the things that are revealed belong unto us and our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this Law" (Deuteronomy 29:28).¹⁴

Shared responsibility is not only a theoretical halakhic idea; it is also a central fact in the history of the Jewish people in respect to its relationship to the nations of the world. Our neighbors have always condemned all of us for the sins of one of us; they have, thereby, transformed the rhetorical talmudic query, "Shall Tuviah sin and Zigud be punished?" (Pesahim 113b), into a daily reality that does not even surprise anyone. The identification of the actions of the individual with the deeds of the people is a fundamental feature of our history. Our enemies will not allow the individual Jew to remain isolated in his own private, separate sphere. They take him out of his four cubits into the public domain, and there they make use of him in order to level a harsh indictment against the entire community. This criterion they apply only to Jews and not to other nations. No one has ever accused a particular Russian or Chinese of being an agent of international communism simply because racially he belongs to a people who have instituted a communist regime in their own country and seek to forcibly impose their cruel reign on the entire world. In contrast to this logical and humane approach which is applied to other peoples, the Jewish people, as a whole, on account of the deeds of a few Jewish apostates, is libeled as being an adherent of communism. We have still not been cleared of this libel.

Again, the various explanations of this phenomenon offered by scholars are unsatisfying. It makes no difference if the root of the problem is assigned to the psychic-conative sphere or the political-historical sphere. Such scientific classification is of no value; the phenomenon remains opaque and mysterious. For us, as religious Jews, there is only one answer to this enigma: it is the hand of the covenant of fate that was made in Egypt regarding the absolute uniqueness of the Jewish people which manifests itself through this otherwise incomprehensible reality.

The commandment of the sanctification of the divine Name and the prohibition against the desecration of the divine Name¹⁵ can be explained very well in the light of this principle of shared responsibility and liability. The actions of the individual are charged to the account of the community. Any sin he commits besmirches the name of Israel in the world. The individual, therefore, must answer not only to his own personal conscience but also to the collective conscience of the people. If he behaves properly, he sanctifies the name of Israel and the Name of the God of Israel; if he sins, he casts shame and disgrace on the people and desecrates the Name of its God.

Fourth, shared historical circumstances give rise to shared activity. The obligation to give charity and perform deeds of lovingkindness derives its force from the all-penetrating and all-encompassing experience of brotherhood. The Torah, in laying down these commandments, uses the term *ah*, "brother," instead of *re'a*, "fellow." "And if thy brother be waxen poor . . . then thou shalt uphold him . . . and he shall live with thee" (Leviticus 25:35). "Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy needy brother. . . . Thou shalt surely open thy hand unto thy poor and needy brother in thy land" (Deuteronomy 15:7, 11). The confrontation with the people's strange and unusual fate-laden existence endows the Jew with a unifying consciousness in the field of social action. The common situation of all Jews without distinction—whether manifested on the objective level as shared historical circumstances or on the subjective level as shared suffering—opens up fountains of mercy and lovingkind-

ness in the heart of the individual on behalf of his brethren in trouble, which indirectly affects him as well. Maimonides formulated this idea in his unique style, at once highly concise and overflowing with ideas:

All Israelites and those who have attached themselves to them are to each other like brothers, as it is said, "Ye are the children of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 14:1). If brother shows no compassion to brother, who will show compassion to him? And unto whom shall the poor of Israel raise their eyes? Unto the heathens, who hate them and persecute them? Their eyes are therefore uplifted solely to their brethren.¹⁶

We have stated that it is the consciousness of the fate imposed upon the people against their will and of their terrible isolation that is the source of the people's unity, of their togetherness. It is precisely this consciousness as the source of the people's togetherness that gives rise to the attribute of *hesed*, which summons and stirs the community of fate to achieve a positive mode of togetherness through ongoing, joint participation in its own historical circumstances, in its suffering, conscience, and acts of mutual aid. The lonely Jew finds consolation in breaking down the existential barriers of egoism and alienation, joining himself to his fellow and actively connecting himself with the community. The oppressive sense of fate undergoes a positive transformation when individual-personal existences blend together to form a new unit—a people. The obligation to love one another stems from the consciousness of this people of fate, this lonely people that inquires into the meaning of its own uniqueness. It is this obligation of love that stands at the very heart of the covenant made in Egypt.

THE COVENANT OF DESTINY

What is the nature of the covenant of destiny? Destiny in the life of a people, as in the life of an individual, signifies a deliberate and con-

scious existence that the people has chosen out of its own free will and in which it finds the full realization of its historical being. Its existence, in place of simply being the experience of an unalterable reality into which the people has been thrust, now appears as the experience of an act possessing teleological dimensions, replete with movement, ascent, striving, and attaining. The people is embedded in its destiny as a result of its longing for a refined, substantive, and purposeful existence. Destiny is the flowing spring of the people's unique exaltation: it is the unceasing stream of supernal influence that will never dry up as long as the people charts its path in accordance with the divine Law. A life of destiny is a life with direction; it is the fruit of cognitive readiness and free choice.

The covenant in Egypt was made against the Israelites' will. God took them unto Himself for a people without consulting them beforehand, as the verse states: "And I will take you to Me for a people" (Exodus 6:7). The covenant at Sinai, in contrast, was first presented to the Israelites before it was made. God sent Moses to the Israelites to bring them His word, and Moses returned to God with their response. The halakhah views the covenant at Sinai as a contract that can only be drawn up with the knowledge and consent of the party assuming obligations for the future, in this instance the community of Israel. The proclamation "We will do and obey" (Exodus 24:7) constitutes the foundation of the acceptance of the Torah.¹⁷

What is the content of the covenant at Sinai? It consists in a special way of life which directs man's existence toward attaining a single goal, a goal beyond the reach of the man of fate, namely, man's imitation of his Creator through an act of self-transcendence. The creative activity which suffuses the covenant of destiny flows from a source unknown to the man of fate. It derives from man's rebellion against a life of sheer facticity, from the desire pulsating within him for more exalted, more supernal modes of being. The deeds of lovingkindness and brotherhood which are interwoven into the covenant at Sinai have as their motivating force not the Jew's strange sense of isolation, but rather his experience of the unity of a people for-

ever betrothed to the one true God. The absolute unity of God is reflected in the unity of the people bound to Him eternally. "Thou art One and Thy Name is One, and who is like unto Thy people, Israel, one nation on earth?" Jewish fellowship in this dimension is a result of the special filial relationship the members of this people enjoy with God. "We are Thy children and Thou art our Father." (Maimonides emphasized this motif in the passage we cited earlier.) At Sinai, God raised on high the covenant of fate which He made with a community which, against its will, finds itself alone, a community the members of which perform deeds of lovingkindness on behalf of one another as a result of this externally imposed isolation and separateness, and transformed the covenant of fate into a covenant of destiny which He made with a community possessing will and desire, a community sanctifying itself and directing itself toward encountering God. The "people," lacking direction and purpose (the Hebrew word for "people," *am*, as we have already noted, is related to the word *im*, "with"), became a "nation," which signifies a community possessing a distinct communal countenance and collective physiognomy (the Hebrew word for "nation" is *goy*, which is related to the word *geviyah*, "body").¹⁸ The *am-hesed*, the people of lovingkindness, was raised on high and became a *goy kadosh*, a holy nation.¹⁹ Holiness, which expresses itself in the form of an authentic mode of being, is the very foundation of the shared destiny of the nation.²⁰

When the man of destiny confronts God he beholds the God of Israel, who reveals Himself to man only with His consent and at His invitation. The God of Israel enters into a relationship with finite, creaturely man only after the latter has sanctified himself and purified himself from all uncleanness and pollution, and awaits, with passion and longing, this wondrous encounter. The revelation of the God of Israel does not take place under all circumstances and conditions. Such a revelation demands a special spiritual state, as set forth in the divine command, "Be ready for the third day" (Exodus 19:11). Without such preparation, such readiness on the part of man, the God of Israel will not just randomly and casually reveal

Himself. The God of Israel does not take man by surprise. Rather, He responds to man's fervid plea. However, the God of Israel takes no interest in the person who does not passionately yearn for Him with a longing that expresses itself in and takes the form of concrete actions. While the God of the Hebrews pursues man against his will and takes no heed of his opinions or wishes, the God of Israel consults with man prior to the encounter. Already in Egypt the Almighty revealed Himself to Moses not only as the God of the Hebrews but also as the God of Israel, who awaits man and invites him to serve Him. "Thus saith the Lord, God of Israel: Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness" (Exodus 5:1).

CAMP AND CONGREGATION

In order to explain the difference between the people of fate and the nation of destiny, it is worth taking note of another antithesis, namely, the antithesis between camp (*mahaneh*) and congregation (*edah*). The Torah has used both terms together in speaking of the Israelites. "Make thee two trumpets of silver, of beaten work shalt thou make them; and they shall be unto thee for the calling of the congregation and for causing the camp to set forward" (Numbers 10:2).

Camp and congregation constitute two distinct sociological phenomena, two separate groups lacking any common features, devoid of any symbiotic relationship. The camp is created as a result of the desire for self-defense and is nurtured by a sense of fear; the congregation is created as a result of the longing for the realization of an exalted ethical idea and is nurtured by the sentiment of love. Fate reigns, in unbounded fashion, in the camp; destiny reigns in the congregation. The camp constitutes a particular stage in the historical development of the people, while the existence of the nation is identical with that of the congregation.

The camp, by its nature, does not constitute a distinctly human

phenomenon. In the animal kingdom as well, we can already discern the glimmers of this phenomenon. There, too, the camp serves as protection against harm. Let flocks of sheep and cattle suddenly sense that danger is lurking somewhere, and, overcome by panic, they will confusedly stream down from every green mountain and high pasture and hastily herd together, interlock their horns, and press their heads one against the other. Fear finds its instinctive mechanical expression in the quest for survival through sheer physical contiguity. The primitive urge for individual mute creatures to come together in face of opposition and danger and form one camp is a basic feature of the animal instinct.

In the human realm as well, the camp is created only as a result of fear. When a person is terror-stricken by his involuntary fate-laden existence, he grasps his own helplessness and joins with his fellows both for protection from and victory over the enemy. The organization of a camp serves as a military tactic. Consider the phraseology used by the Torah: "When thou goest forth in camp against thine enemies" (Deuteronomy 23:10). The camp is born out of the dread of extinction and annihilation, out of the fear imposed upon it by fate. From the camp there emerges the people. The Israelites in Egypt were a camp to begin with; when God freed them they attained the rank of a people.

However, the congregation constitutes a distinctive human phenomenon; it is an expression of man's powerful spirit. The congregation is a typically human creation, a creation imbued with the splendor of the human personality. The congregation is created not as a result of negative factors, as a result of the fear of fate that pursues the man who senses his misery and weakness, but as a result of positive drives. The foundation of the congregation is destiny. A congregation is a group of individuals possessing a common past, a common future, common goals and desires, a common aspiration for a world which is wholly good and beautiful, and a common, unique, and unified destiny. The beginning of the congregation is grounded in the traditions of the Patriarchs, in the people's heritage, reaching back to its obscure dawn, while its end is rooted in a

shared eschatological vision. The Hebrew word for "congregation," *edah*, is related to the Hebrew word for "witness," *ed*. The members of the congregation are witnesses.²¹ And to what do they bear witness if not to events that are long since past, and to a wondrous future that has not yet arrived? The congregation encompasses not only the individuals living in the here-and-now but all who have lived and all who will live, from time immemorial until the eschaton. The dead, who have long since passed away, continue to abide in the realm of the congregation; and those who are yet to be born are already living in its domain. The congregation is a holy nation that has no fear of fate and is not compelled to live against its will. It believes in its own destiny, and it dedicates itself, out of its own free will, to the realization of that destiny. The covenant in Egypt was made with a people born from a camp; the covenant at Sinai was made with a holy nation.

CONVERSION THROUGH CIRCUMCISION AND IMMERSION

The individual's participation in the fate and the destiny of the chosen people-nation, and his experience of belonging to Keneset Israel, the Jewish community, as a complete entity which actualizes, through its historical existence, the two ideas of *hesed*, lovingkindness, and *kedushah*, holiness, together—such participation and such an experience of belonging are indissoluble and indivisible. The covenant at Sinai consummated the covenant in Egypt. Destiny attached itself to fate; both became one distinct covenantal unit. It is impossible to formulate a world-view that opposes the unity of the people of lovingkindness and the holy nation; that which belongs together cannot be sundered. A Jew who participates in his people's suffering and fate but does not bind himself to its destiny, which expresses itself in a life of Torah and mitzvot, violates a fundamental principle of Judaism and impairs his own singularity. Conversely, a Jew who does not grieve over the afflictions of his people, but seeks

to separate himself from the Jewish fate, desecrates the holiness of Israel, even if he observes the commandments.²²

Therefore, a Gentile who comes to attach himself to the Jewish community must accept upon himself the yoke of both covenants. He must enter into the magic circle of Jewish fate and, in a spirit of holiness, dedicate himself to Jewish destiny. Conversion consists in a person's joining himself to both the people formed by the covenant in Egypt and the holy nation formed by the covenant at Sinai. Take heed of a fundamental principle: There can be no partial conversion, and one cannot relinquish even the slightest iota of either of the two covenants. The devotion to Keneset Israel, both as a people whom God, with a strong hand, took unto Himself in Egypt, a people with its own history, suffering, sense of mutual responsibility, and commitment to deeds of mutual aid, and as a holy nation, committed, heart and soul, to the God of Israel and to His ethico-halakhic demands—this dual yet unified devotion is the most basic foundation of Judaism and the most fundamental feature of undergoing conversion.

Therefore, the halakhah has ruled that a convert who is circumcised but does not immerse himself, or immerses himself but is not circumcised, is not a proper convert until he is both circumcised and immerses himself. The act of circumcision (*milah*) was the charge given to Abraham the Hebrew, *Avraham ha-ivri*, the father of Jewish fate; it was performed by the Israelites in Egypt prior to their sacrificing and eating the paschal lamb, the symbol of the redemption from Egypt. For this reason it signifies the people's special fate, its isolation and its involuntary singularity. Circumcision is the *ot*, the sign incised in the very physical being of the Jew. It is a permanent sign between the God of the Hebrews and His people, a sign that cannot be effaced. If the flesh does not have the covenant of fate impressed upon it, then the singularity of the people is missing and the Gentile remains outside the bounds of the covenant in Egypt.

The act of immersion (*tevilah*), in contrast to that of circumcision, denotes the integration of a person in a great destiny and his

entry into the covenant at Sinai. The Jews were charged with the commandment of immersion prior to the revelation of the Law at Sinai.²³ Immersion signifies purification and ascension from the profane to the sacred, from an ordinary, prosaic life to a life replete with an exalted vision. When the convert arises from his immersion, a spiritual reality suffused with destiny is newly formed within him, and he becomes sanctified with the holiness of Israel. It is not for naught that the act of acceptance of the yoke of the commandments is linked with the act of immersion.²⁴ For immersion, at its core, has as its sole purpose the representation of the experience of the revelation of the Law and of the ascension of a people, through a freely assumed obligation to perform the divine command, to the rank of a holy nation. If a Gentile was circumcised but did not immerse himself, he lacks that personal bond to Jewish destiny. Such a Gentile has disassociated himself from the covenant at Sinai and from an ethico-halakhic identification with the holy nation. In the conversion formula to be found in the Book of Ruth, both these aspects are set forth, and their gist is succinctly expressed in its last two phrases; "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God" (Ruth 1:16).

who reigned before him. See 1 Samuel 13:13-14. Already, at that moment, the divesting of the kingship from Saul's descendants had begun. There, as well, Saul could have mended his sin through repentance.

7. This concept is expressed by Rava in Sanhedrin 72a: "Rava said: 'What is the reason for the [law of the thief] breaking into a house? Because it is certain that no man is inactive where his property is concerned. Therefore . . .'"

8. Maimonides, in Laws of the Temple 6:16, states almost explicitly that the fact that the second sanctification, wrought by Ezra, remains in effect for its time and for eternity is grounded in the same reason he uses to explain why the holiness of the Temple precincts was not nullified. Physical destruction cannot expel the divine presence from the heap of ruins. [Cf. P. Peli, ed., *Al ha-Teshuvah* (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 300-308; and *Shi'urim le-Zekher Abba Mari Z"l*, vol. 1, pp. 169-175. *Translator*]

9. Judah Halevi, *Kuzari* 2:24.

10. See *Yalkut Shimoni* on Deuteronomy 29:11, s.v. *shalosh beritot*; Berakhot 48b: "It [the Torah] was given with three covenants," and Rashi ad loc.

11. Genesis Rabbah 42:8.

12. See R. David Kimhi, *Book of Roots*, s.v. *im*: "This word refers to joining and cleaving. And the word *am* [people] is derived from it because an assembly of individuals and their joining together with one another is termed an *am* [people]." See, as well, Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, s.v. *am*.

13. See Tosafot, Menahot 37a, s.v. *O kum gali*; and *Shitah Mekubbezet* ad loc., par. 18.

14. Sotah 37b; Sanhedrin 43b; and Rashi on Deuteronomy 29:28.

15. See Maimonides, Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 5:11.

16. Maimonides, Laws of Gifts to the Poor 10:2.

17. The talmudic opinion that "the Holy One, blessed be He, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask" (Shabbat 88a) expresses the idea that the Almighty suggested to the Israelites that they accept the Torah and devote themselves to Him of their own freewill in order, thereby, to live as a holy nation, instead of living an involuntary, fate-laden existence that might be compared to having a mountain overturned upon one like an inverted cask. See Tosafot ad loc., s.v. *kafah* and *moda'ah*. [See "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition* (Spring 1965), p. 28, note **, for a different approach. *Translator*.]

18. See R. Jonah ibn Janah, *Book of Roots* (translated from the Arabic into Hebrew by R. Judah ibn Tibbon and edited by Wilhelm Bacher, Berlin, 1896), s.v. *goy*. See, as well, R. David Kimhi, *Book of Roots*, s.v. *goy*: "R. Johan [ibn Janah] states that the word *goy* can refer to an individual: for example, in the verse 'Wilt Thou slay a person [*goy*] even if he be righteous?' (Genesis 20:4)." [See *Sefer ha-Rikmah*, translated from the Arabic into Hebrew by R. Judah ibn Tibbon and edited by Michael Wilenski (Berlin, 1929), chap. 28 (27), p. 307. *Translator*.] See also Solomon Mandelkorn, *Concordance*, s.v. *goy*: "It refers to individuals, members of one people,

who have become, as it were, one body." See, as well, Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, s.v. *goy*. There are times, however, when we find the word *goy* used to describe a herd of animals: for example, "For a nation (*goy*) is come up upon my land" (Joel 1:6, referring to a plague of locusts). It is understood that in referring to animals the word is being used in a derivative sense. See Radak and Rashi ad loc. See, as well, the commentary of the Gaon of Vilna to Isaiah 1:4, "Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity," where the Gaon states: "The word *am* refers to a group of many people, a multitude . . . while the word *goy* refers to those who adhere to a code of behavior. . . . And this is what our sages said [in the Haggadah] in commenting on the verse 'And he became there a great . . . nation' (Deuteronomy 26:5): 'This teaches that the Israelites were distinctive there.'"

19. The phrase "a holy people" (*am kadosh*) signifies a community that has elevated its peoplehood to the rank of holiness; it is, therefore, identical in meaning with the term "holy nation" (*goy kadosh*).

20. Jewish uniqueness began to be forged in the Egyptian crucible of affliction. This historical suffering fashioned the image of the community as a nation possessing a distinctive character and its own individual countenance, and, thereby, prepared it for that great and exalted moment when God made a covenant of destiny with it at Sinai. The verse "The Aramean [Laban] sought to destroy my father [Jacob], and he [Jacob] went down into Egypt, and he became there a great . . . nation" (Deuteronomy 26:5) testifies to the birth of Jewish uniqueness in Egypt. How fine is the interpretation of this verse offered by our sages: "This teaches that the Israelites were distinctive there." Nationhood and distinctiveness as a special well-defined entity are one and the same. In truth, the entire purpose of the bondage in Egypt was to create this people-nation of Israel. The Israelites went down into Egypt as the sons of Jacob but went up from there as a people bound to God and as a nation ready for the revelation of the divine presence and for God's making a covenant of destiny with them at Sinai. "When God wanted to make his [Abraham's] descendants a unique people, a perfect people, and to draw them near to Him, had they not first gone down into Egypt and been refined there, they would not have been His special people" (*Zohar* I, 83a). "However, until they went down into Egypt they were not yet a nation. . . . It is written, 'as a rose among the thorns, so is my love among the daughters' (Song of Songs 2:2). The Holy One, blessed be He, desired to make Israel according to the supernal pattern, so that there should be one rose on earth, even as it is on high. Now the rose that gives out a sweet aroma and is conspicuous among all other roses is the one that grows among the thorns" (*Zohar* II, 189b).

21. A congregation can also signify devotion to a destructive ideology by individuals who are plotting evil: for example, "this evil congregation" (Numbers 14:35) and "that he fare not as Korah and his congregation" (Numbers 17:5).

22. See Maimonides, Laws of Repentance 3:11. "One who separates himself

from the ways of the community, even if he does not commit transgressions, but disassociates himself from the congregation of Israel and does not perform commandments in their midst and does not share in their troubles and does not observe their fasts, but goes his own way as one of the Gentiles and as if he were not one of them—such a person has no share in the world-to-come.”

23. Maimonides, Laws of Forbidden Intercourse 13:1–3, basing himself upon the baraita in Keritot 9a, states clearly that there was no immersion in Egypt and conversion took effect through circumcision alone, and that it was at Sinai that the Jews were commanded for the first time to immerse themselves in order to undergo conversion. Maimonides states: “Israel entered into the covenant by way of three rites—circumcision, immersion, and sacrifice. Circumcision took place in Egypt, as it is said, ‘but no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof’ (Exodus 12:48). Our master, Moses, circumcised the people. . . . Immersion took place in the wilderness before the revelation of the Torah, as it is said, ‘and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments’” (Exodus 19:10). Maimonides explains the statement in the sugya in Yevamot 71a (“But in truth [the text ‘A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat thereof’ (Exodus 12:45)] comes to include a convert who was circumcised but did not immerse himself”) as referring to the Passover offering in all generations subsequent to the Exodus but not to the Passover celebrated in Egypt itself, for in Egypt, according to all opinions, conversion was effected, fully and completely, by circumcision alone. Similarly, Maimonides interprets the statement of R. Joshua in Yevamot 46b (“Our forefathers also underwent immersion”) as referring to immersion at the time of the revelation of the Torah, as the plain meaning of the verses cited in the sugya seems to indicate. However, Maimonides would admit that the “mothers,” i.e., the women, immersed themselves even in Egypt, as stated clearly in the sugya there. For one cannot say that the women immersed themselves only prior to the revelation of the Torah and not in Egypt. Such an assertion would run up against an insuperable objection, already raised and emphasized by Rashi in his commentary ad loc., s.v. *be-imahot*: “And their wives immersed themselves, as the gemara explains later on; for if they did not immerse themselves, then through what [act] did they enter under the wings of the divine presence?” To paraphrase Rashi, some act is required for conversion to be effected. Similarly, the Tosefta, Pesahim 8:18, states that those handmaidens in Egypt who did not immerse themselves could not eat of the Passover offering. This holds true according to the first anonymous tannaitic view cited in the Tosefta as well as according to the view of R. Eliezer b. Yaakov. See Rabad, critical gloss to Maimonides, Laws of the Passover Offering 5:5. In truth, we could claim that even the males immersed themselves in Egypt, in addition to being circumcised, and that at Sinai they were commanded to undergo a new, second immersion necessitated by the revelation of the Torah, which conferred an added measure of holiness upon them. According to this view, every act of conversion, including the conversion which took place in Egypt, requires immersion. In support of this view, one may

adduce the position of many *Rishonim*, including Maimonides (Laws of Forbidden Intercourse 13:12), that the second immersion of a slave—the immersion after he has been freed—is a scriptural requirement, inasmuch as he is acquiring an added measure of holiness, and now, as a free person, is attaining the complete measure of the holiness of Israel. It is understandable, then, that the Jews at Sinai, upon entering into the covenant of the Torah and the commandments, required an additional immersion, over and above the immersion that had taken place in Egypt. One could argue that even the *Nimmukei Yosef* [see *Nimmukei Yosef* on the Rif, Yevamot 16b, s.v. *kiddushav kiddushin*], who states that the immersion of the slave after he has been freed is only a rabbinic requirement, would concede that the Israelites were required to immerse themselves at Sinai. One can distinguish between the case of the slave who already (upon becoming a slave) had been converted through circumcision and immersion, and via these rites had entered into the covenant, and the case of the Israelites at Sinai, who had to acquire an added measure of holiness, since they were entering into a second covenant. With reference to a slave, the view of the *Nimmukei Yosef* is that his being emancipated does not confer an additional measure of holiness upon him but, rather, removes a legal impediment. The slave's holiness is complete upon his undergoing circumcision and immersion. However, as long as he is a slave his servitude prevents him from being obliged to observe the positive time-bound commandments and forbids him to marry an Israelite woman. However, if the servitude is nullified through his being set free, then he is lacking nothing. It is for this reason that there is no scriptural requirement of immersion upon his emancipation. However, the Israelites at Sinai acquired a new level of holiness, a level of holiness that did not exist beforehand. Therefore, they required a second conversion rite and consequently a second immersion.

One may ask: Why didn't the Israelites require the symbolic letting of the blood of the covenant (*halafat dam berit*) at Sinai as well? The following answer may be suggested. Circumcision, which always precedes immersion and by itself does not confer the holiness of Israel upon an individual, need not be undergone a second time (through the symbolic letting of the blood) when an additional measure of holiness is conferred upon a person. All we require is that an individual have had a proper circumcision for the sake of conversion; and if such a circumcision took place, then, even though at that time he only attained a lesser measure of holiness, he need not undergo the symbolic letting of blood when he attains a greater measure of holiness. Similarly, the slave who is freed does not undergo the symbolic letting of blood, even though he is now obliged to perform new commandments and is acquiring a greater measure of holiness, inasmuch as, to begin with, he underwent a proper circumcision for the sake of the conversion of servitude. However, immersion, which completes the act of conversion and gives rise to the holiness of Israel, has to be undergone a second time when the convert ascends from a lesser level of holiness to a greater level.

We are, however, confronted with a problem on examining the view of Nahma-

nides. Nahmanides, in his *Hiddushim* (Novellae) on Yevamot 47b, s.v. *nitrafeh*, states that if a convert first immersed himself and then was circumcised, the conversion is valid. According to this view, then, there can be times when circumcision comes at the conclusion of the conversion process. If that is so, we should reverse matters and require the symbolic letting of blood and not immersion in a case where the person is acquiring a greater measure of holiness.

In order to answer this problem we must examine another statement of Nahmanides. In his *Hiddushim* on Yevamot 46a, s.v. *sheken mazinu*, Nahmanides is of the view that the Levites, who had been circumcised prior to the Exodus for the sake of fulfilling the commandments and not for the sake of conversion, did not require the symbolic letting of blood. Nahmanides states: "This being so [that the Levites had been circumcised beforehand], how did they enter under the wings of the divine presence? But they underwent the symbolic letting of blood. It would appear to me, however, that in terms of the law requiring circumcision [for the purpose of conversion], the Levites did not require the symbolic letting of blood, for they were already circumcised. Npr may they be compared to a circumcised Arab or a circumcised Gibeonite [who does require the symbolic letting of blood if he is being converted]. For since he [the Arab or the Gibeonite] never received a command of circumcision, it is as if he is not circumcised at all." It is clear from Nahmanides' statement that circumcision, unlike immersion, is not an integral part of the conversion process. Rather, its purpose is to divest the convert of his status as an *arel* (one who is uncircumcised). If the convert was not circumcised, he cannot acquire the holiness of Israel, for a person who is an *arel* cannot enter into the covenant. Therefore, if a person is converting and he has already been circumcised, he can [forgo the symbolic letting of blood and] immerse himself for the purpose of conversion. A circumcised Arab, since he was not circumcised for the purpose of conversion, is regarded as an *arel*, as is stated in Nedarim 31b, Yevamot 71a, and Avodah Zarah 27a. Therefore, when he converts he must undergo the symbolic letting of blood. However, the Levites, who were descendants of Abraham and were circumcised in accordance with God's commandment to their father Abraham, did not require the symbolic letting of blood.

In light of this premise we may now answer our question as to why, according to Nahmanides who is of the opinion that at times conversion is concluded by the act of circumcision, we should not require circumcision [or, to be more precise, the symbolic letting of blood] for the sake of acquiring a greater measure of holiness.

We have seen that circumcision does not really belong to the conversion procedure; its whole purpose is exhausted in divesting a person of his status as an *arel*. It is for this reason that a person who is already circumcised and is consequently not an *arel* need not undergo the symbolic letting of blood when he ascends from a lesser level of holiness to a greater level. Immersion differs fundamentally from circumcision, for immersion is an act which gives rise to the holiness of Israel and

constitutes an integral part of the conversion procedure. Therefore, in order for a person to acquire a greater measure of holiness, immersion is required, but not the symbolic letting of blood. Nahmanides, however, [despite his agreement with the above] is of the opinion that immersion can take place before circumcision, for even though the convert does not become an Israelite immediately upon emerging from his immersion, the immersion, nevertheless, is effective for the future. Once he is circumcised and not an *arel*, the immersion that took place prior to the circumcision effects the conversion and gives rise to his status as an Israelite.

The question as to whether circumcision is part of the conversion procedure or whether it serves only to divest the Gentile of his status as an *arel*, which status interposes between him and the holiness of Israel, is dependent on a dispute between the *Rishonim* as to whether the presence of a court is required when the convert is undergoing circumcision.

From certain statements of Maimonides (Laws of Forbidden Intercourse 13:6, 14:5-6), it would appear that his view is that the presence of a court is required only for immersion. Therefore, it would seem that according to Maimonides, circumcision serves only to remove the Gentile's status as an *arel*, which status serves as a legal impediment to conversion. [The presence of a court is required for the conversion procedure. Since a court is not required for circumcision, it is evidently not part of the conversion procedure. *Translator*.]

The *Tur* (Yoreh De'ah: Laws of Converts 268) and the *Shulhan Arukh* (Yoreh De'ah: Laws of Converts 268:3), on the other hand, require the presence of a court for circumcision as well as for immersion. [This would indicate that circumcision is part of the conversion procedure. *Translator*.] Moreover, the very same view is set forth explicitly by Nahmanides in his *Hiddushim* on Yevamot 45b, s.v. *mi lo tavlah*. This would appear to controvert our assumption that the sole purpose of circumcision, according to Nahmanides, is to divest the convert of his status as an *arel*. The very fact that Nahmanides requires the presence of a court during circumcision indicates that the act of circumcision is an act which effects conversion and therefore must be an act of the court. Our original question arises anew. Why didn't the Levites undergo the symbolic letting of blood at Sinai since their circumcision, to begin with, was not undergone for the sake of conversion?

(To be sure, Nahmanides in his *Hiddushim* on Yevamot 45b, s.v. *mi lo*, agrees with the view of the Tosafot, Yevamot 45b, s.v. *mi lo*, that immersion and circumcision, if done for the sake of performing a commandment, are sufficient [for conversion, even if they were not performed for the sake of conversion]. In support of his view, Nahmanides cites a statement from the Palestinian Talmud, Kiddushin 3:12. However, this view of Nahmanides would still not serve to resolve our problem. Circumcision and immersion for the sake of performing a commandment can qualify as valid elements in the conversion procedure only after the laws of conversion were revealed and the ruling was established that conversion takes place

through circumcision and immersion. In such a context, circumcision and immersion effect conversion even if they were done for the sake of performing commandments and not for the sake of conversion. Included in the intent of the commandment is the commandment as an act effecting conversion. However, the Levites were circumcised in Egypt before the Israelites were commanded to circumcise themselves for the purpose of conversion, of entering under the wings of the divine presence. This being the case, their circumcision could not have constituted an act of conversion, since the Israelites were only charged with circumcision for the sake of conversion afterwards.)

It would appear that Nahmanides is of the opinion that circumcision constitutes an integral part of the conversion procedure only as long as the convert has not already performed the commandment of circumcision properly. But once he has performed the commandment, it would not be part of the procedure. Circumcision, as an act of conversion, only takes effect when the individual is lacking in the performance of the commandment of circumcision. Therefore, a circumcised Arab who converts requires the symbolic letting of blood because his circumcision is of no value, and through the symbolic letting of blood he will fulfill the commandment of entering into the covenant of our father Abraham, which is an inextricable part of the commandment of circumcision. However, the Levites, as descendants of Abraham, had already fulfilled the commandment of circumcision in all its fine details, and had completely discharged their obligation. Therefore, they did not require the symbolic letting of blood. For what would they accomplish thereby? It follows that their conversion was effected by immersion alone, as is the case with women or with one whose male organ has been cut off. Thus Nahmanides, at the conclusion of his discussion of the Levites, states: "Therefore, the Levites are adjudged as women, so that they would enter under the wings of the divine presence through immersion." Therefore, when a convert ascends from a lesser to a greater holiness he does not require the symbolic letting of blood, for he completely fulfilled the commandment of circumcision previously. In contrast to circumcision, immersion is part of the conversion procedure not because one is fulfilling a commandment or discharging an obligation through its performance. For immersion, aside from its significance as an act effecting conversion, does not constitute any type of legal performance. Therefore, immersion, in terms of its conferring upon one the holiness of Israel, can be undergone many times, and every time one acquires a greater measure of holiness, one requires immersion.

24. That the acceptance of the yoke of the commandments accompanies immersion, inasmuch as immersion gives rise to the status of one's being an Israelite, is almost a truism. This view is set forth in the sugya in Yevamot 47a-b and seems to be implied as well by Maimonides' statements in Laws of Forbidden Intercourse 13:12 and 14:6 (the latter ruling being based on the above sugya). Rashi, in his commentary on the sugya, s.v. *u-modi'in oto*, makes the point explicitly: "Since

he acquires the status of a convert through immersion, therefore, when he undergoes the obligatory immersion he must accept upon himself the yoke of commandments." However, the Tosafot, Yevamot 45b, s.v. *mi lo tavlach*, states that the acceptance of the yoke of the commandments can precede immersion.

Maimonides, in Laws of Forbidden Intercourse 13:17, states: "A convert who was not examined or who was not informed about the commandments and the punishments [for transgressing them], but was circumcised and immersed in the presence of three laymen, is deemed a [valid] convert." I once heard from my father and master [R. Moses Soloveitchik] of blessed memory, that Maimonides does not mean to say that a person who converted with the intention of not observing the commandments is deemed a valid convert. Such a notion would subvert the entire concept of conversion and the holiness of Israel, which exhausts itself in our obligation to fulfill God's commandments. Maimonides' position is that the acceptance of the commandments, unlike immersion, does not constitute a distinct act in the process of conversion that would require the presence of a court. Rather, acceptance of the commandments is a defining feature of the conversion process that must be undergone for the sake of fulfilling the commandments. Therefore, if we know that the convert, at the time of immersion, is willing to accept the yoke of the commandments, the immersion effects conversion even though there was no special act of informing the convert about the commandments and his consenting to fulfill them, since the convert intends to live the holy life of an observant Jew. It would appear, however, that the view of the Tosafot, cited earlier, is that the acceptance of the commandments is a distinct element in the conversion process and, consequently, that the law necessitating the presence of a court refers to the court's presence at the act of acceptance. Only this act of acceptance—and not immersion—requires the presence of the court.

Nahmanides, in his *Hiddushim* on Yevamot 45b, s.v. *mi lo tavlach*, states: "Even a male convert who accepted [the commandments] upon himself prior to his being circumcised must once again accept [them] upon himself when he immerses himself." It would seem, at first glance, that according to Nahmanides there is an act of acceptance of the commandments which takes place at the time of circumcision. However, one might suggest that Nahmanides is not referring to a special act of acceptance of the commandments at the time of circumcision, but, rather, is characterizing the general nature of circumcision. Circumcision must be undergone for the sake of obligating oneself to fulfill the commandments. This interpretation of Nahmanides' view is similar to the explanation offered earlier with respect to Maimonides' position. Maimonides, however, is of the opinion that the absence of a distinct act of acceptance of the commandments does not constitute any legal impediment to the validity of the conversion. Nahmanides, on the other hand, agrees with the Tosafot that there is a distinct act of acceptance of the commandments and that it requires the presence of a court. However, Nahmanides believes that

aside from the distinct act of acceptance, both circumcision and immersion must be undergone for the sake of being obliged to perform the commandments, that is to say, for the sake of conversion.

25. Maimonides, *Laws of Kings and Their Wars* 5:4, writes the following regarding the seven nations of Canaan: "It is a positive commandment to destroy the seven nations, as it is said: 'But thou shalt utterly destroy them' (Deuteronomy 20:17). If one does not kill any of them that falls into one's power, one transgresses a negative commandment, as it is said: 'Thou shalt save nothing that breatheth' (Deuteronomy 20:16). But their memory has long since perished." The Radbaz, in his commentary *ad loc.*, notes that the source for Maimonides' concluding comment, "But their memory has long since perished," is the statement of Rabbi Joshua in *Mishnah Yadayim* 4:4: "Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up and intermingled all the peoples."

It is, however, striking and passing strange that Maimonides, in setting forth the commandment to wipe out Amalek, does not add the concluding phrase, "But their memory has long since perished." Thus states Maimonides in *Laws of Kings and Their Wars* 5:5: "Similarly it is a positive commandment to destroy the remembrance of Amalek, as it is said: 'Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek' (Deuteronomy 25:19). It is also a positive commandment to remember always his evil deeds and the waylaying [he resorted to], so that we keep afresh the hatred manifested by him, as it is said: 'Remember what Amalek did unto thee' (Deuteronomy 25:17). The traditional interpretation of this injunction is: 'Remember,' by word of mouth; 'Do not forget,' out of mind, that it is forbidden to forget his hatred and enmity." It would appear from Maimonides' statements that Amalek is still in existence, while the seven nations have descended into the abyss of oblivion.

One may query: Why didn't Maimonides apply R. Joshua's principle that "Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up and intermingled all the peoples" to Amalek as he did to the seven nations? The answer to this question is very simple. Scripture testifies that Amalek is still in existence. Note what the Torah states: "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). If that is the case, then it is impossible that Amalek be completely destroyed before the coming of the Messiah. As the sages state: "The [divine] throne will not be whole and the [divine] Name will not be whole until the descendants of Amalek are completely blotted out" (Midrash *Tanhuma* on *Ki Teze*, end; and Rashi on Exodus 17:16). But—where is he? I once heard the following answer from my father and master [R. Moses Soloveitchik] of blessed memory, namely, that any nation that conspires to destroy *Keneset Israel* becomes, according to the halakhah, Amalek. My father and master added: We have been charged with two commandments concerning Amalek. The first is the obligation to blot out his memory. This obligation devolves upon every person with reference to an individual Amalekite and is set forth in the verse "Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek" (Deuteronomy 25:19). The

second is the readiness to do battle as a community against the people Amalek. This requirement is set forth in the verse, "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). Thus, if any people seeks to destroy us, we are commanded to do battle against it when it rises up against us, and this battle of ours is an obligatory war (*milhemet mizvah*) on the basis of the verse from Exodus, "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." However, the obligation to wipe out individual Amalekites, as set forth in the verse from Deuteronomy, applies only to genealogical descendants of Amalek. Now it is true that Maimonides' ruling also includes the obligation to blot out individuals, an obligation which does not apply to any nation other than Amalek, even if that nation seeks to destroy the Jewish people [and this obligation is no longer in force, since there are no longer any identifiable genealogical descendants of Amalek]. Nevertheless, since the obligation to do battle against Amalek as a people would apply to such a nation, Maimonides did not use the phrase "But its [Amalek's] memory has long since perished." There still exists a category of Amalek [as a people] even now after the peoples have been intermingled [and there are no longer any individual Amalekites].

Perhaps the above is the basis for the ruling of Maimonides in *Laws of Kings and Their Wars* 5:1 that a defensive war waged by the Jewish people against an aggressor is an obligatory war. Such a war falls under the rubric of "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." To be sure, Maimonides in his ruling singles out the war against Amalek for special mention [which would seem to indicate that the war against Amalek and a defensive war against an aggressor are two separate categories]. Nevertheless, one may maintain that a war waged by the Jewish people against an aggressor who seeks to destroy it still belongs to the category of the war against Amalek. Note carefully the sugya in *Sotah* 44b, s.v. *Amar R. Yohanan*.