

VOLUME 13

THE BIBLE SERIES

**A METAPHYSICAL
AND SYMBOLICAL
INTERPRETATION OF**

The Bible

by

Mildred Mann

Seven Steps in Demonstration

Desire: Get a strong enthusiasm for that which you want in your life, a real longing for something which is not there now.

Decision: Know definitely what it is that you want, what it is that you want to do, or have, and be willing to pay in spiritual values.

Ask: [When sure and enthusiastic] ask for it in simple, concise language...

Believe: in the accomplishment with strong faith, consciously and subconsciously].

Work at it ... a few minutes daily in seeing yourself in the finished picture. Never outline details, but rather see yourself enjoying the particular thing ...

Feel gratitude. Always remember to say, "Thank you God," and begin to feel the gratitude in your heart. The most powerful prayer we can ever make are those three words, provided we really feel it.

Feel expectancy. Train yourself to live in a state of happy expectancy ... Act it until it becomes part of you, as it must and will.

These are the seven steps. Follow them and they will bring you whatever it is that you need.

*FORMULA FOR DEMONSTRATION

(A demonstration is answered prayer..
the manifestation of the Presence,
Power and Love of God.)

" **A**sk And Ye Shall Receive,

Seek And Ye Shall Find,

Knock And It Shall Be

Opened unto you"

- *JESUS*

(*The formula is ASK Mildred Mann)

AUTHOR OF

HOW TO FIND YOUR REAL SELF (textbook)

THIS I BELIEVE

LEARN TO LIVE

THE FAMILY OF ADAM AND EVE

THE BIBLE - The Seven Days of Creation.

BECOME WHAT YOU BELIEVE

WHAT IS PRAGMATIC MYSTICISM?

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Thank you, and God bless
you.

Mildred Mann

The Book of Esther, as we know, has its origin shrouded in mystery. While it is the basis for a joyous Hebrew celebration, I personally think it has another and greater meaning.

It shows the triumph of Good over Evil.

The names of the leading characters reveal a similarity to the gods of even more ancient religions, which shows that faith in Good to overcome Evil has always existed.

In our Bible, the marriage between two people of different religions was completely unimportant.

If this story tells us anything, it tells us that prejudice and bigotry have no place with God.

M. M.

II KINGS (Part Two)

Perhaps at this point you may ask the question: is this the way we should evolve? Evolution is a word of many meanings; but basically there are only two ways of evolving the way of knowledge and the way of suffering. Usually we look at evolution in terms of our own development. We know from experience, that life and understanding evolve slowly; but more slowly than either is the growth of intelligence. Emerson was so right when he said: "The planet trembles when God lets loose a thinker on it." The sad thing is, it does not have to be that way, for each and every one of us can evolve in an instant to a completely developed Son of God.

But the progress of the human race is slow; people for the most part do not want to give up what they think at the moment is a good thing. They never realize that a much greater good is within their grasp if they could only raise their consciousness to accept it. Now it is part of the cosmic plan that there will not be one human being who at some time or other - at what time we do not know - will not come into his fulfillment as a Son of God. We must always keep in mind that it will be here on this plane and not on any other; we incarnate on this plane for just that purpose.

We do not realize that we can reach the peak of evolution in the twinkling of an eye. That is what happens in a real conversion and it happens without any forewarning whatsoever. It is not a result of an outside force; it happens because we have the power within us; it happens because that power has evolved to the point where our consciousness is suddenly enlarged. If that can happen, then it stands to reason that the rest of the spiritual road can become completely clear and open to us whenever we want to meet its conditions. To do this we must have complete control of our thoughts and emotions.

This is not so difficult for us when we lead the meta-

physical life. When we have been in metaphysics for even a few months we become very much aware of our thoughts. What we lack at this point is not the awareness of our thoughts but the control of it. When something goes wrong we may become angry suddenly, but soon something inside of us says: "Wait a minute." We reply: "I'm having fun, I want to go on this way." But the voice within us continues: "You're going to get hurt."

True, we may continue on our own sweet way but we at least know we are doing wrong. Then why do we continue to act the way we do? The reason is simple: we may have spiritual knowledge, we do not have emotional control.

Actually if any one of us used only one tenth of what we have learned, we would be amazed at how transformed we would be the following morning. Yes, we learn and know a great deal but we rarely ever apply our knowledge. It is the application of this knowledge that calls for emotional control. That is why every metaphysical student should meditate every morning and every night. For by the daily practice of meditation we learn to control our thoughts and emotions.

Chapter 3 of II Kings contains a strange but fascinating - from a symbolic point of view - incident. "And he (Elisha) went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up, by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them" (3:23-24). Now what does the event of the 42 children signify? Animals, as we know, symbolize in the Bible the characteristics of the subconscious mind and the bears represent the penalty that must be paid for wicked behavior. The numbers 4 and 2 equal 6, and 6 in a positive sense is service; in a negative sense it is selfishness. Thus we are being told cabalistically that there was a great deal of selfishness in Elisha. He liked having his own way and he was not going to be thwarted in achieving it. Furthermore he had a very bad temper. The 42 children symbolize his own off-spring, his negative thoughts. He was consumed with fury (by the bears) about some incident (what it was is unimportant) represented by the mocking children. It is strange that a man of his spiritual development and spiritual power could still be so

torn by negative emotions. But he was. He had a tremendous vanity. This is the great danger for anyone on the path of spiritual development.

When we reach a certain point in our development we have to watch that we do not become egotists. If we do, we can become a force of evil and wreck not only ourselves (as we will eventually) but many others along with us. Whatever we achieve and whatever we strive for must always be motivated by a love and a need for the Presence of the God within. Any other motivation, any other thought, leads us on the road to destruction. This is what this little incident in II Kings shows us very plainly.

Chapter 5 - the healing of Naaman - is one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible and illustrates an interesting and important point for all metaphysical students.

Naaman, the commander-in-chief of the Syrian army, was a leper. He heard that Elisha was a miracle worker and healer, a man who could raise people from the dead and he went to visit him. He brought with him a great entourage and many gifts. Furthermore, he delivered a note to the king of Israel from the king of Syria in which it was commanded that Naaman be healed. The king of Israel sent Naaman to Elisha's house but Elisha did not come out; he stayed within and sent his servant Gehazi to tell Naaman to bathe seven times in the River Jordan. Naaman was infuriated and said: "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper" (5:11). He expected Elisha to perform some trick of magic, after which he would be healed. Surely anything as simple as bathing in a river was ridiculous. How could anything so simple be effective? So he prepared to leave, but before he did so his servant said: "Master, surely there is no harm in trying it." Naaman relented and went down to the Jordan; he bathed seven times and was healed. I know of no other story in the Bible that illustrates the power of healing more clearly.

The reason I think this chapter is one of the most important in the Bible is that it emphasizes the simplicity of the action of God.

It illustrates that there is only one thing that really matters, and that is that the Presence of God will work simply and quietly through us without any outside aid provided - and I emphasize provided - we have faith. Of course the

river did not heal Naaman; he was healed by his obedience to the idea of God. The Jordan symbolizes the raising of the consciousness. Every religion teaches this tenet; it is the only way that we can grow spiritually. That is why I recommend that every metaphysical student have a clear understanding of all the basic religions. We should all read the Upanishads, the Vedas, books about Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and mystic Christianity. Each one of these writings tells the same story, because every religion is concerned with the search of the soul for its God and the means of finding that God.

Do not forget that Elijah was a mystic and that Elisha was an occultist. There is quite a difference between these two types. Elisha was certainly a "miracle worker" but but when it came to the time of his death (it is recorded in 13:20), he was not able to translate his body as did Elijah. Why? Because Elisha, the occultist, did not have enough "purity" to translate his body, and purity of course is the motivating power behind being able to do so. He was occasionally guilty of spiritual pride.

But the only thing you can really criticize Elijah and Elisha for - and it is one of the greatest temptations for anybody with real power, occult or mystic - is that they greatly interfered in the political setup of Israel. It was Elijah who had prophesied that Hazael would be king of Syria, but it was Elisha who carried the prophecy out. You must realize that Elijah's concept of purity was so outraged by what was happening in Israel and in Judah that he was determined to make himself - and if not himself, then Elisha - the "arm of the Lord" that would purify the two kingdoms. Both Elisha and Elijah were terribly concerned because the Jews were falling away from the old religious concept, the Deuteronomic concept of Moses. The ethics of the era in which they lived were certainly a far cry from the pure Mosaic teaching. And they felt that the thing to do was to end the prevailing line of kings. They felt this was necessary for the purification of the Spirit that was Israel, even if it meant the downfall of Israel and Judah. So little by little the kingdoms were whittled down. First Israel went and then Judah. Only 300 years before the kingdom had been united under David. And Israel had been a powerful nation; now all of Israel was in captivity.

Elijah and Elisha greatly affected the lives of the kings of Israel and Judah. And heaven alone knows what final goal they hoped to realize. But unfortunately everything they did to rectify matters resulted in disaster. Of course, that is always a possible danger of the mystic - he confuses his own ideas with the ideas of God. Occultists, *without exception* always have to guard against it. The mystic who attains this kind of spiritual power must learn to see a thing from two points of view - personally as a human being and impersonally, from a cosmic point of view. The real mystic will never direct or force his own point of view on anybody. He will give advice if he is asked, he will give aid if it is sought from him; but he is completely impersonal about the lives of the human beings around him - he never meddles in the affairs of others.

As we continue reading this section we find murder following murder in endless succession until we finally come to the story of Hezekiah (Chapter 18). If the art of prophecy was still being practiced, we have no record of it, for the prophets are no longer mentioned. It is only when we read the story of Hezekiah that we again hear of the influence of a prophet, Isaiah. Hezekiah himself was an outstanding man.

It usually follows that whenever a nation undergoes a reformation (and Hezekiah was a reformer) it is accompanied by a revival of nationalism. And it was Hezekiah's dream to try to restore the Jewish empire. He was forced to pay tribute to the king of Assyria, but he had an idea that he might be able to stop doing so and get part of the empire back. So he consulted the prophet Isaiah and was advised by him to do so. Hezekiah proceeded to make war, and his campaign against the Philistines was successful, until he was beaten in a battle with Sennacherib. Then all he had left was Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he continued on his way, undaunted. At the end of II Kings we find he had made a remarkable comeback. But as the rest of the story is related in I Isaiah, we shall study it there. All in all Hezekiah is the most interesting king we have come across since Solomon.

A great deal has happened to the Jews since the book of Exodus, hasn't it? These people who left Egypt under the guidance of Moses, believed in a tremendous idea. But little by little they lost this idea; they lost their ideal and

finally lost their kingdom and their lives. What we have here is the complete deterioration of a people.

I think that the story of the decline of the Jews is a good example of why the human race does not evolve faster. Spiritual evolution is a very slow process. We cannot advance unless we really work at it. The Israelites did not always have the courage or the strength or the vision of the one God - and without such a vision men stagnate and die. Thus we come now to the end of the Kings of Israel; soon we will come to the end of the Kings of Judah.

It is in this section of the Bible that we find the beginning of the myth of the Lost Tribes of Israel. The tribes of Israel were disbursed - 40,000 people were taken from Samaria alone and sent to what is now Mesopotamia; from there they migrated to many other lands. The ten tribes of Israel were finished, they disappeared and were never found again. In place of the Jews, Sennacherib repopulated the land of Samaria with people who were captives of other wars he was engaged in.

Samaria was a very desolated country, a country overrun by wild beasts. And these captives finally appealed to the king to send them a priest of Israel. For they knew that only a Jewish priest could teach them how to pray to the god of the land and free them from the wild beasts. At that time (700 BC) it was believed that each locality had its own god, and since the Jews had been removed from Samaria, it was thought that Yahweh had gone with them. Therefore someone had to teach the new inhabitants how to worship Yahweh so that Yahweh would return to the land. Sennacherib acceded to their wishes. A Jewish priest was sent to them and he taught them how to worship Yahweh. But unfortunately all of this only resulted in a violent hatred of the Jews towards the Samaritans, a hatred which has continued to flourish down through the ages. In fact, the whole book of Kings is a tragic story, isn't it? It is never pleasant to watch the deterioration and dissolution of a great people.

I have always believed that there are two ways of growth. One is the path of suffering, and the other is the path of Intelligence. God gave us the equipment for the latter, but then inserted and chose the first.

As we read and study the Books of I and II Kings, we begin to understand why we have problems - why we suffer. Do not think that these people, who lived some 3000 years ago, are any different from ourselves. They lived under a pall of fear, doubt and selfishness. And, as we all know, we are living under the same conditions in the Twentieth Century.

However, we do know the Path of Intelligence, and we are slowly making progress. The way of Intelligence is to realize mentally and emotionally that "God has created us in His Image and after His likeness, and has given us dominion over the works of His Hands." Gen. 1:27-28.

M. M.

I CHRONICLES

The author of Chronicle is unknown, but the prevailing opinion is that he was also the compiler of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. If that is the case, the books of Chronicles must have been written between 350 and 250 B.C.

We can compare his approach to history to that of Arnold Toynbee. He too interprets history rather than merely records it as it actually happened. The Chronicler had one purpose in mind and that was to bring people back to the concept of the one God, for they had wandered far from that concept. In this period of their history, the Jews had seen the fall of the Davidic empire and the complete dispersion of the power and glory that had been David's and Solomon's. They had worshipped strange gods and they were now reaping the consequences of doing so. They had reached the point where they no longer cared about any religious concept. The result was that Israel was taken into captivity in 721 B.C. to be followed by Judah in 586 B.C. It was while the Jews were in captivity that the books of Chronicles were written.

The conquerors of the Jews imposed their religion upon them. We all know that nothing in the world will make a person seek something more than to have that one thing forbidden. The Jews were no exception, and as soon as they were forbidden to worship God in their own way, their desire to return to their original belief was revived. It was at this time that the Chronicler wrote his story. But as you read this book you will discover that his account of historical events is not always true. David is almost made into a saint and nothing whatsoever is said about his relationship with Bathsheba; and the Chronicler does not tell us that Solomon obtained the throne by chicanery and murder.

We may forgive the Chronicler for poetic license, for he was only interested in driving home his point. He was determined to revive the flame of Judaism and he constantly reminded the people of their heritage. He did it in a very

beautiful way. He did it by emphasizing the following ideas. First, if people are going to live harmoniously, they must live on a high moral plane. Second, everything is created by God, for God is the one Supreme Power, and He must be worshipped according to the Mosaic Law. But most important of all was the third idea - the fact that God will reveal His ideas to man - revelation was not limited to Moses. God makes His revelations NOW as the living word of Truth. It is for these reasons that the books of Chronicles are important.

The only thing we can censure him for - if we want to censure him at all - is that he was such an orthodox Jew that he insisted that the Levites be the predominant factor in Jewish life. Even Moses never said such a thing. The Chronicler said the Levites must be maintained; they must have complete power and command of the temple rites; they must be fully obeyed. But except for this bias we can sympathize with this man who tried to revive in Israel the hope, faith, belief and glory that it once possessed and can possess again if it will turn back to the one God.

Later on (in the book of Jeremiah) the Chronicler says - and it is a revolutionary concept - that you do not have to return to the temple in Jerusalem to worship your God. You can worship your God wherever you are. To the Jews who were still in bondage this was a tremendous idea. Prior to that they were told that to worship God in the proper way, it was necessary to go to Jerusalem. Since the only means of travel was on foot or by mule, it was an arduous and long journey. But when the Chronicler exalted the Levites, this meant that the Levites could perform their duties in any part of the world; no matter where they were the people could come to them and be blessed.

Here we find a people who realized that God was not confined to a particular locality, as their pagan neighbors believed; we find a people who know that God is Spirit and is to be worshipped in Spirit and Truth. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me". Moses gave them this in the Ten Commandments, and many other teachers have told this to us time and time again. But even today, most of us do not understand what this really means.

Now there are two ways of growth, and the one that the most of us take is very popular - the way of suffering, the way of stupidity. But we do not have to suffer - we can

take the way of intelligence. When we reach the point where we realize that whatever we think, we are - and this includes our concept of God - then we are on the royal road to freedom. I always ask people what kind of God they believe in and every one of them has a different conception of Him. True, my idea of God is not necessarily your idea of God. But as metaphysicians we do have certain ideas in common. We do not intellectually believe in limitation and we do not believe that we have to worship God by going to a particular church or belonging to a particular religious group. We believe that God is Freedom and that we can exercise freedom in worship. We believe that God is Love, Life and Truth, but we differ in the extent of our Belief.

For instance, we know that our substance is from God, who is one Source. If we *really* believe this, we will act in accordance with that belief. But if, for example we fear financial lack, we are limiting the Holy One of Israel. If we believe that God is Life and Energy and that our bodies are temples of the living God, and then say: "I don't feel so well this morning, I wonder if I have a virus", we are limiting the Holy One of Israel. I am not saying that we should not live sensibly, but if we worry over every ache and pain that we have, then our belief in God as Life is very limited. Of course, we must not be fanatic about our beliefs, but we should examine them very honestly. Often we are called upon to prove what we believe in and that is when we know what our beliefs really are. Is it our subconscious mind that motivates us or the Presence of God that lives in each and every one of us? For the moment we are perfectly sure we believe something, that moment we are going to be tested. And whenever we have a test to meet, it always means a choice: will we act in accordance with our belief in the Presence of God or will we run around hither and yon, trying to achieve relief from a problem by some outside means?

What do you believe? *Watch what you do* in a vital circumstance. What is your first reaction? Is it one of panic? Are you calm? Study yourself and find out what kind of God you honestly do believe in.

Through the writings of Ezra, the concept of Judaism was once more reborn and from that time until today that concept has never died. The Jewish empire ended, and the people were scattered; but no matter where they went, no

matter to what country they migrated and lived in, the Jews have always preserved their concept of the one God and they have had the courage to fight for it. Even Hitler, in spite of the millions of people he exterminated, could not exterminate that concept. It is my belief that the flame of Judaism which lit the lamp of Christianity - for Christianity would not have come into existence without Judaism - will in time eradicate all of the barriers between Jews, Christians, Moslems, etc, and culminate in a universal worship of one God, - in Spirit and in Truth.

There is another point that I would like to bring out. Each of the seven great religions has evolved from a mystical concept but it is only Judaism that does not teach celibacy. All the other religions teach that to be spiritual we must forgo every worldly experience, including sex. The Jews do not believe any such thing. On the contrary, they believe that they only attain immortality through their children and they think that the highest way to worship God is to bring children into the world. The Jew trains his children to worship God. He does not believe in doing away with the world for doesn't his Bible tell him, "Thou shalt multiply and replenish the earth"? So the Jew has always believed, and quite rightly, in the concept that one of the true ways to worshipping God is not to deny life, but by bringing life forth.

Beliefs have strange effects on people and if we trace this belief to its very beginning in the Eastern religions, we find it is connected with ancestor worship. (This is one of the reasons why the "Begats" are listed in such a detailed way in the opening chapters of I Chronicles.) This feeling for ancestor worship is still prevalent today and not only among the Jews. We all know people who are proud that they can trace back their lineage to some remote royal family or other (or perhaps to one of the original Mayflower passengers). But to the Jews of the Old Testament, we find that the expression of this idea was a healthy, normal attitude toward God. It is true, of course, that their religious rituals became extremely involved to the point of being absurd. But their idea of God as Life expressed through a happy marriage and the raising of children has made the experience of living a normal life an expression of God as Life and Love. No other religion has ever contributed as much to the continuation of the growth of life, especially in the areas of day-to-day living.

"Sin" is a word that metaphysicians
carely use. Sin not only implies the
breaking of God's law, but also build
up a fear of punishment from the
Almighty. God is Perfect Good and
everything He has created is good.
"God never sends sickness, accident,
temptation, trouble or even death
itself," said Emmet Fox. We bring
these things upon ourselves by our
own wrong thinking, - our doubts, our
fears, our stupidity, and our selfish-
ness.

The only sin we ever commit in the
literal sense of the word, is the sin
of spiritual pride. When we believe
that we are superior to our fellowmen
in race, color, creed and personality,
we are guilty of spiritual pride.

This is the meaning of "lead us not
into temptation, but deliver us from
evil".

M. M.

II CHRONICLES

It is most important that we learn to read the Bible with intelligence and understanding, for most of its books are highly inspired. But the man who wrote Chronicles was not so much inspired as he was a very devout and religious man. He was a man who had a dream, that the nation of Israel should be reunited at any cost.

So when he undertook to write the history of his people (somewhere between 621 B.C. and 521 B.C.) he brought their attention to the old Deuteronomic laws which were re-discovered in the time of King Josiah. His purpose was to imbue these people with the idea that the Law maintained the purity of Israel and that because they had forsaken it, they had gotten into difficulty. He told them that they would be saved if they would restore their religious monotheism and regain their national integrity. This was a very beautiful idea, but sad to say, in spite of the Chronicler's warning, the Israelites were completely defeated. It took more than 2500 years for Ezra's dream to be realized; it was not until 1948 that the state of Israel was re-born.

The history of Judaism is very strange. In Israel today the national religion is orthodoxy and the national spirit is very high, but what the future of this great race will be is uncertain. The present situation reminds me of David and Goliath. Here is this little state of Israel, living off its soil to survive, holding at bay the entire Arab world. But its effort has been so magnificent that I hope this nation will succeed. And there is only one thing the people of Israel do have in addition to their spirit and their belief in their God - that is democracy, *true* democracy.

Indeed what we are now reading in the chapters of Chronicles may be called the prologue to what we are now witnessing in the birth and growth of modern Israel.

Remember we are discussing a nationalistic concept. The Jews were forbidden by Moses to intermingle with other people because all the neighboring tribes and countries were polytheistic and believed in magical cults, some of which are too hideous to mention. Moses trained them to worship the one God, but they limited and qualified that concept. Under David the young nation came into its own and enjoyed harmony, peace and fulfillment. The Israelites prospered under Solomon until he became drunk with his own power and glory and at the end of his life became something of a tyrant.

Most of the kings who came after Solomon were not particularly good ones and shortly after his time a series of revolts led to a civil war between Israel and Judah. The enmity between them lasted for 300 years until the time of Hezekiah and these Jewish tribes gradually reverted to the state they were in before Moses brought them out of Egypt. The writer of Chronicles clearly points out the cause of their undoing. It is true that the Chronicler sometimes tries a little too hard to co-ordinate the Deuteronomic Law with what really happened. The Deuteronomic Law was very explicit. It stated that unless the king and the Levites, and the people, followed this law to the letter "woe unto them". Yet there were a number of kings who did not follow the Law at all and yet nothing happened to them. On the contrary, as we read we find that the kings who really suffered were the ones who were good and tried to live by the law.

Only the kings who fit into his idea of the Deuteronomic Law are pictured as just and wise, even if the historical facts of the case sometimes have to be juggled a bit to square with the idea that is being brought forward.

When Josiah found the scroll of the Deuteronomic Law he called for peace between Israel and Judah and issued an invitation to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. At this time the Israelites were under the domination of the Assyrians and they were forbidden to worship Yahweh. But there was a tremendous spirit among them, for in spite of their captor's prohibition a number of them made the trip to Jerusalem. There was a revival, not only of the worship of Yahweh, but of a national spirit. Regardless of what tribe they

came from, they were Israelites, and so they journeyed to Jerusalem to worship their God.

Unfortunately this desire to worship at Jerusalem led to another concept, one that is so narrow and so typical, not only of Judaism, but of every religious sect, Christian or Jew. God is not limited to a specific temple, church or cathedral. Yet the Jews believed that God is worshipped only in Jerusalem; and He must be prayed to and sacrificed to only at the time of the festivals. This erroneous concept has grown and even colors our modern thinking to a great degree. If you examine closely the various religious sects you will see how true this is.

Wherever you may be, you are not going to get any closer to God than you are right now because wherever you are, God is. The concept that God can only be worshipped in a church is a great stumbling block and it was this that Jesus referred to when He said: "When you pray, go into your closet and pray to your Father in secret and He shall reward you openly". What has happened to that teaching? "The place where you stand is Holy ground", says Deuteronomy and Exodus. And Paul said most beautifully: "Your body is the temple of the living God". This is a complete reversal of the belief - taught in Chronicles - that God must be worshipped in a certain place for only if He is worshipped in a certain place will He give favor.

This concept is dangerous not only to the Jew but to the non-Jew because the moment we think we must worship God in a certain way and in a certain place in order to curry favor with Him - my God, not your God - that moment we create differences among ourselves. This has been one of the dominant traits of Judaism, and Jesus tried to change this attitude when He gave us the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father" applies not only to the Jews but to all humanity. Even today the real meaning of this phrase is not understood. The Mohammedans, the Hindus, the Brahmans, the Taoists, the Jews and the Christians all have a different concept of God and this is the basic cause of all their quarrels and differences. The world will really only have peace when we give everyone the freedom to worship God as he sees fit, - when we all realize that there is only one Intelligence. Whether we call Him God or Brahm or Allah makes no difference, He is still the One Mind. Metaphysics teaches us how to think of God in just this universal way.

We believe in the concept of God and we believe that each individual is a spiritual entity created by God. We believe that the concept of God is true for each human being although everyone's approach to God is individual. We believe that everyone is a child of God, that everyone is a god in the making, and that everyone is free to find his God in his own way. And we believe that only by such a belief can the world progress and grow beyond the narrow structures of sectarian religion - no matter what faith is practiced.

Oddly enough the worship of Yahweh was restored to Israel by a Persian. We are told by the Chronicler that after the wonderful reign of Josiah, Manasseh reverted to polytheistic worship and the practice of magic. Finally Israel was embroiled in war and defeated. The ten tribes were taken in captivity and scattered; only Judah was left.

Cyrus the Persian king sacked Jerusalem and tore down the temple of the city. For a while he instituted the Persian religion, the cult of Mithra, but soon he became so impressed by the Jewish prophets (who were among the captives) that he allowed the Israelites to rebuild the walls of the city and restore their temple and worship God in their own way. And all this was brought about by a hated outsider. It is a strange story, isn't it? It certainly emphasizes the fact that "God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform".

Nobody except ourselves can limit our concept of God. And the only kind of a God that we can have is our own concept of Him. Furthermore, our concept of God, whether we are an early Israelite or a modern American, is completely shown by what we do with our life - not by what we say we think *but* by what we do. Here in Chronicles we are being taught (and we will go into it more deeply in the book of Isaiah) that God, Who is Life, is inanimate until man begins to imagine, or "image" - this by first thinking and then living - not in the form of daydreams, but in a concrete way - only then do we have a concept of God. If your imagination enables you to believe in a God who is All-powerful, that will be your God. Your concept of Him is completely dependent upon what you think (your mentality) and feel (your emotions).

We may say that the concept of God that the Israelites had was a very beautiful but narrow one. We may say that our concept of God is a much more beautiful and profound

one. But we are no different than the Israelites, for regardless of our concept, we too limit our God, we too limit Him by our own fears. "Be still and know that I am God." If we really acted upon this we would be amazed to see how our problems would disappear. This is what we are being told in the book of Chronicles by a very wise man who rediscovered for us and the Jews the Law of His God.

EZRA

At the end of II Chronicles we found that the Jewish empire was scattered, the Israelites were held in captivity, the temple at Jerusalem had been destroyed and the city itself had been razed. Yet, in spite of all this, the book ended on a note of hope, for Cyrus the king of Persia was going to allow the temple to be rebuilt. It is at this point that the book of Ezra begins. Historians are not in argument about the identity of the figure of Ezra. (*The Interpreter's Bible* believes that he was the author of Chronicles.) But it is agreed that the book of Ezra and the one following it, Nehemiah, were once one book although they are now treated separately.

Chronicles, like the book of Ezra, is not completely historical. This seems to disturb people who think it is always reassuring to have the corroboration of historical accuracy to parallel the spiritual unfoldment of the Bible. They feel "re-assured" if they know that the reign of David can be historically proven; or if they know exactly when Solomon, Joshua and Moses lived. My own belief is that the most important thing is the story itself, not its historical authenticity; for me, the story of every incident in the Bible symbolizes various stages of spiritual development. But to return to Ezra, while the book does not give us an accurate history, it does give us the basic facts of an event that actually happened.

Of course, the question does arise: how much of this is the Chronicler's imagination; is he again taking an idealistic idea and building a story around it; or is he really relating things from a point of view that is, to some degree, historically true?

Many of the questions of this book could be answered if we knew who Ezra was and when he actually lived. He

probably wrote the book about 350 B.C. but the exact date is not known. Personally I think he was the Chronicler. (The writers of the Talmud believe the same thing). He certainly had the same idea as the author of Chronicles, and a very interesting one it is.

We begin to see in this book that humanity fluctuates in its growth, due to its fluctuation in its spiritual concepts. For instance, what is the difference between the religious concept of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century? In the nineteenth century religion was "for the masses", for the unenlightened; the "intelligentsia" believed in logic. It was an age when Science was God. The twentieth century is an age of unrest and trouble and wherever we have trouble we have a resurgence of spiritual values. As a result of two World Wars, with no real peace between them, or since, there is a revival of religion. But let us hope that we have reached the stage where we do not need another war to keep religion strong.

The same thing was true of the Jews. Compare the period that we are now studying in Ezra (400-450 B.C.) to the time of Moses (1400 B.C.). Only 900 years had passed since Moses had given them a religion and had made them aware of the Presence of God. Then the Israelites became materialistic and worshipped the gods of other people. All this resulted in the end of Israel as an empire and the end of Judah as a kingdom. The Jews were weakened, defeated and taken captive. They were not only exiled to foreign lands, but foreigners were brought to their lands.

But when people have suffered enough, they will cry aloud to God: "I've had enough, let me get out of it." And these people were no different. They began to listen to their wise men, Isaiah, Nehemiah, Ezra, Haggai, Zachariah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah. They returned to the ways of God, but they had lost contact with the Presence within. So their great passion became the Law.

It is in the book of Ezra that we find the beginning of the influence of ritualism in Judaism. We were told a great deal about it in Leviticus, but in Ezra we find out that the Jews' entire day was occupied with the observance of ritual. In Leviticus one burnt offering was sacrificed in the morning; in Ezra there are two. Ritual was emphasized, its practices were doubled; the Law MUST BE obeyed.

It was due to this narrowness that the Jews got into

difficulties again. If they had really understood the meaning of the concept, promulgated in the last chapters of Deuteronomy – particularly where Moses says: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19) – they would not have gotten into difficulty. Notice that Moses did not say anything about the ritual. The ritual mentioned in the Pentateuch generally applied only to the priests. But the Israelites of Ezra's day believed that if they faithfully practiced ritual, God would restore their kingdom to them. But obeying the outer form of religion will not help us to find God. He is only found deep within ourselves.

I find it most interesting that the book of Ezra emphasizes an idea that we are still fighting today – and that I think is the great tragedy of the human race – the idea of separation. Ezra advocated that the Jews completely isolate themselves from other nations. He did so because the Jews had greatly intermingled with other nations. And he wanted to re-instate in their minds the concept of the one God. But by this time the idea of a pure Judaic race was completely impossible because the Jews had intermarried with the Canaanites, the Moabites and other pagan tribes. Furthermore when Cyrus said he would permit a certain number of Jews to return to Jerusalem, many of them did not want to go because they were living most comfortably in Samaria. In fact, the Jews who remained in Babylon donated money for the others to return. In Samaria "fraternization" had taken place and these expatriated Jews had outgrown the idea of "I am a Jew, therefore I will have no contact with anyone else". But when the Jews rediscovered the beliefs of the old Mosaic Law, they said that the Samaritans were impure, and from then on a civil war raged between the two peoples.

The author of Ezra, knowing the old Judaic idea had been forsaken, tried to re-establish this idea of purity. This fanatical idea made all the trouble, for the Samaritans actually helped the Jews to build the temple in Egypt when the Jews had fled there; on many occasions they had even given them money. But although they followed the Jewish Pentateuch, the Samaritans were not considered "pure". When the temple in Jerusalem was being rebuilt, the Samar-

itans wanted to help, but the Jews were infuriated, refused their help, and called them an "unclean" people. The Samaritans became angry and sought revenge. So it is not surprising that after Cyrus died and Artaxerxes allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem they became a little bit annoyed. Artaxerxes stopped the rebuilding of the temple, and only after a lapse of many years was it finally completed. Actually it was Ezra and Nehemiah who rebuilt the temple and the city of Jerusalem and reinstated the Law; it was Nehemiah who re-established the code.

The Bible does not tell us what the ideas of Ezra and Nehemiah were. Were they narrow and limited? Did they allow only the Jews to participate in building the temple? Did they really try to re-establish the concept of Moses? We have no way of knowing.

The temple was rebuilt and its re-establishment was the beginning of a new Jewish community; more important – there was now a desire to bring the nation back together again. The Jews realized that they had lost almost everything that Moses had given them and that they had to start all over. But the Jews are an ingenious people and wherever they settle they bring a great deal of culture and prosperity to their adopted land.

However, today – particularly in this country – they are losing their pride in their worship. They are no longer fanatical about it and it is a good thing. I am a firm believer in the concept of one religion, a world religion, in which "Our Father" pertains to every human being regardless of race, color or creed. (I don't know how long it is going to take for the world to accept this idea, but I think it will come). Whether a person is an American and a Unitarian, or a Japanese and a Shintoist, he is still a child of God.

But the early Israelites did not and could not understand such an idea. Even today orthodox Jews – and orthodox followers of any religion – cannot understand this. Yet this idea of one religion was the doctrine that Moses really taught. This theme runs through the Old Testament and comes to fruition in the New Testament in the teaching of Jesus. What has happened to His teaching?

It was no different in Ezra's day. The Jews were filled with gratitude because they have been released from captivity; they were back in their beloved Jerusalem; they were

allowed to rebuild their temple; Cyrus even returned their priceless treasures of gold and silver. Then what happened? They argued: "This is for me, not for you. You are not worthy of it; I am". The whole argument started all over again, Moses or no Moses. Yet somehow the rebuilding of temple was completed.

When the altar was built the feast of the Tabernacles – the autumn feast of the harvest – was celebrated. This is interesting because it shows that a remnant of pagan belief was still imbedded in the Jewish mind. This feast took place at the dawn of the first day of the new moon. In those days the new moon signified the beginning of a month and due to the influence of the pagan worship of the Syrians and Assyrians was believed to be a very dangerous period. It was a time of taboos and sacrifices – and rather odd ones too – in fact, magical ones. Ezra and the priests tried to eradicate these curious customs but it took a long time. What we are observing in the book of Ezra is the strange picture of a people who are spiritually proud but mentally ignorant and emotionally adolescent. But above all these people were tremendous workers and in spite of all their difficulties and setbacks they did manage to rebuild their temple.

As we progress in our study of the Old Testament, we see that the same problems that bother us troubled the people of ancient Judea. Take the problem of "purity". To the early Jews purity was a physical concept and in order to be pure, they believed that they had to follow the ritual of the Law; they believed they had to abstain from contact with any person outside their own religion. In Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy we read that Moses told the Jews that they were not to have any contact with anyone outside their own group; but if they did have to engage in commercial dealings with non-Jews, there were certain rules of purification which had to be followed. In the book of Ezra this Mosaic concept of purity is again being emphasized.

In our own day "purity" has an even more peculiar meaning. We consider it a rather old-fashioned word – a word that is quaint and passé. Even metaphysical students misunderstand the concept of purity. They think purity only pertains to extra-marital sexual activity, and that the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery", only refers to an irregular sexual act committed by someone who

is married. Other people have an idea that purity is a gloomy, holier-than-thou state. I am afraid that is a rather limited and misguided idea of a very beautiful concept. The sad thing is that this idea of purity – like Christianity – has never actually been tried.

Do you know what the Bible really means by the concept of purity? Purity is that which is the highest realization of yourself. As a very intelligent man once said: "Purity is to conduct yourself in such a way that you would be perfectly happy to see your whole life reported on the front page of a newspaper".

Now Ezra's main purpose in life was the restoration of the purity of his race, the restoration of the Law and the restoration of the worship of Yahweh. But to do so there were two problems he had to deal with: the problems of mixed marriages and the assimilation of pagan elements in Judaic belief. The Jews had accepted the pagan gods of their neighbors and had added this to their belief in Yahweh. Mixed marriages were becoming more and more common and the Hebrew race was no longer pure in this sense. Ezra was against such marriages and warned the Jews to change their ways.

Do not forget that the original concept of God (Yahweh), in its true meaning, as taught by Moses, was understood by very few people at this time. Ezra knew he had to re-educate the people and somehow he was able to persuade the king of Persia to allow him to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. For Ezra also knew that unless the temple was restored the Jews could never be brought into line, as the temple symbolized "the house of Yahweh" for them. Their primitive ideas were such as to believe that unless Yahweh had a temple in which to live, he was not with them.

Cyrus believed that Yahweh was in exile along with the Jews and that by allowing the Jews to return and rebuild the temple, he was restoring Yahweh to His home. (It was believed that God actually dwelt in the temple). But there was also another reason for Cyrus' action. The territory of that part of the world was divided into various states which were constantly at war with each other. Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes knew that if they made a "buffer state" of Jerusalem they would have protection from Egypt, a country with which they had much trouble. We see a comparable thing happening in Europe today: Western Germany is a

"buffer state" between the Soviet empire and the Free World. We are not helping the Germans purely for altruistic motives; we are doing so really for our own protection. In the same way, Darius, Cyrus and Artaxerxes, who were intelligent men, realized that it was far wiser to have the Jews as allies than to have them as enemies who could commit devastating acts of sabotage. Persia had been at war with its neighbors for many years and while it had won the wars, the country was in a weakened state. When a new king, Cyrus, ascended the throne, he wanted to fortify his position politically, and he felt the best way to do so was to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their temple.

After the temple was rebuilt Ezra re-dedicated it and re-established the Laws of Yahweh. One of these laws is that a Jew cannot marry outside of his faith. There is an interesting incident in chapters 9 and 10 concerning this. When the report of a mixed marriage was brought to Ezra he said (in a very emotional passage) that if the practice would be continued, the holy seed of Abraham would be spoiled. Since then the Jews have interpreted this passage literally.

Now, in metaphysics we do not believe in heredity; we believe in reincarnation. We believe that we incarnate to work out the experiences that we have earned by our past actions in a former life; we believe that we gravitate to the families with which we have certain things in common; whether they are bonds of love or hatred depends on the actions of our past lives. In this life we may be an American and a metaphysician; perhaps in our next incarnation our color or race may be entirely different. All this depends on our behavior during this life. Belief in reincarnation is one of the things that has been omitted by the compilers and editors of the New Testament. But it is there if we know how to interpret it. Jesus himself said, "In my Father's house are many mansions". We believe that nothing in life happens by chance, certainly not our birth and our death; for this is a universe of law and order. I do not believe that any marriage - mixed or otherwise - can spoil the "seed of Abraham"; but I do believe that Ezra gave the Jews many good laws which enabled them to grow for quite a while. However, one thing is always true about people (whether they live in the time of Ezra or of President Kennedy): they rarely accomplish what they start out to do - and this brings us to the next book of the Old Testament, the book of Nehemiah.

NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah is a beautifully written book and the first autobiography in the Bible (except for the last four chapters of Ezra which is also written in the first person). It is interesting to note that this is the one book in the Old Testament that is never disputed, for historically it is thoroughly accurate. There is doubt however about the exact date of its composition. This was probably around 432BC because the book begins in the twentieth year of the reign of king Artaxerxes (that is about 444BC)

Nehemiah was a tremendous figure. Like Daniel, he was a highly educated Jew who rose to a high position at the court of a foreign king. He was Artaxerxes' cup-bearer which in those days was a position of authority. He must have been one of the king's favorites, for a cup-bearer was even closer to him than the prime minister. Nehemiah served him and tasted his wine for him; and he walked right behind the crown prince in any royal procession. But what is most interesting is that Nehemiah was a eunuch (remember that the Jews believed in the fertility of the male). Yet, in spite of his emasculation, this man became the leader of his people.

In chapter I Nehemiah heard from Hanani that there was great trouble in Jerusalem and he sat down and wept. Then he offered a very beautiful prayer to God (verses 5-11). This is the first prayer since the time of Moses that is extremely direct and concise. In it Nehemiah asks his God for mercy and for success in helping his people.

In chapter two, we read that while Nehemiah was serving dinner to the king and queen, the king looked at him and said: "What is troubling you, you look so unhappy?" Again he offered a quick prayer to his God, for he thought

that the king might not be in the mood to hear the reason for his unhappiness, in fact he knew that if the king was so inclined, he might have him executed. But after he had prayed, Nehemiah told Artaxerxes what was bothering him. "Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchers lies waste and its gates have been destroyed by fire" (2:3). He does not mention Jerusalem by name because Artaxerxes had stopped the building of the temple, and the walls had been torn down again.

Now the Persians were also great believers in ancestor worship. At that time the king was preparing his own burial chamber as well as burial chambers for his departed parents and grandparents. So he had great sympathy with Nehemiah and granted his request; the queen also agreed that he should go. Nehemiah then asked the king for protection from the enemy tribes that hated Israel and from the many war hostages that had been sent to Jerusalem and who also were against the Jews. The king also gave him everything he needed to rebuild the temple, including the vessels of gold and silver, which had been part of the captured loot. It is interesting to note that although Nehemiah had to travel through miles of wild country where he ran the risk of being attacked by robber bands, he did not ask the king for a bodyguard. He knew that Yahweh, his God, would take care of him. Before he and his companions set out on their journey, he prayed and fasted for three days. His prayers were heard, for they all arrived safely in Jerusalem.

On his arrival, Nehemiah did not tell anybody why he had come but spent the first three days inspecting the city. Jerusalem was a tragic place; its walls were destroyed and its temple devastated. Finally Nehemiah made himself known, and told the Jews what he had come to do. Although at first there was trouble with some of the neighboring tribes, work on the reconstruction of the temple was started.

At this point I think we should discuss the esoteric meaning of the structure of the wall of the city. In the book of Revelation mention is made of the "city four-square". Now the "city four-square" symbolizes the integrated human-being; and the city of Jerusalem is laid out in four squares. The name of Jerusalem means the "city of peace". (Jeru) Salem comes from the Hebrew word, Scholem, "peace". Unity has a beautiful saying referring to this: "The city of

peace is found in the state of the mind".

It is true that the actual city of Jerusalem has not had too peaceful a history in spite of the meaning of its name, but the name Jerusalem symbolizes the individual who has truly found peace of mind. The Bible itself is an extremely profound and useful textbook of symbolism; if we understand this symbolism we can understand the inner meaning of the incidents related in it. For example, we constantly come across the numbers 7 and 12. 7 is the number of individual completion, individual integration; 12 is the symbol of cosmic integration. There are 7 days in a week, there are 12 tribes of Israel, Jesus had 12 apostles, etc. You will find these numbers all through religious history. In the wall surrounding Jerusalem there were 12 gates that led into the city. 12 symbolizes the individual's five physical senses, and their inner counterparts; for example, sight - clairvoyance, hearing - clairsaudience, etc. Added to these are intuition and instantaneous preception, which are spiritual senses only. The city of peace symbolizes the person who has achieved peace of mind under all conditions.

We are also told that when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of the city he did so in counter-clockwise fashion - first the north wall, then the west wall, followed by the south wall and last, the east wall. In astrology there are the four elements - earth, air, water and fire. The location of the walls are symbols of these elements and signify the four planes of our being. Furthermore we learn that each wall had three gates; and in each astrological segment there are three planets. The symbolic meaning of the names of these gates is interesting. In the north wall which represents the mentality, or air, there was the sheep gate, the fish gate and the corner gate, in the west wall which represents the physical body, or earth, there was the old gate, the gate of Ephraim and Jeshanah gate; in the south wall which represents the emotions, or water, there was the valley gate; the dung gate and the fountain gate; in the east wall which represents the spirit, or fire, there was the water gate, the horse gate and the eastern gate. The spiritual knowledge that is given to us here symbolically is tremendous. We cannot possibly exhaust this knowledge. But the underlying theme is that of the idea of peace, peace that results from complete integration of the soul.

Bible symbolism tells us that Jerusalem is the soul

that has found peace of mind. But there is even more, for Jerusalem leads to Zion. The daughter of Zion is the soul that has made conscious contact with its God. The way in which we enter Jerusalem is through the 12 gates; each gate symbolizes a characteristic that makes up our being. And as we begin to understand ourselves a bit more, we will know where we are on the spiritual path; we will know what we truly are and what we are really doing; we will know our good points and our bad points, until we finally reach that stage mentioned in Revelation, the "city four-square", a city in which there is nothing but light.

So we find the book of Nehemiah a symbolism that pertains to man's spiritual development. We find a pattern of growth that not only is applicable to the history of a people, but on its deepest levels refers to the integration of all humanity.

The book of Nehemiah not only concerns the physical rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem but concerns the rebuilding of the spiritual concept in each and every human being.

But let us return to the figure of Nehemiah. In him we have a leader who lays down the Law and demands that the Jews follow the Law as Moses meant it to be followed. However, he still had difficulties, for as soon as the wall, the gates, and the temple were built, his enemies descended on him en masse and were ready to attack him. But instead of losing heart, he prayed to God for advice, armed the ramparts and frustrated his adversaries. Whatever this man did, he did simply and quietly, and in a very practical way. He never had any doubt about what he was to do. He thought a thing through, prayed about it and then obeyed the dictates of his God; above all he loved and trusted his God.

Even though he was only a minor prophet, he made an indelible impact on Jewish history. He did so in spite of the fact that he did not profess any startling revelations and only believed in praying for practical things. His was a religion of action. He certainly prayed when he got ideas, and his prayers gave him a sense of direction, but he had the stamina and the courage to carry his ideas out. He had a firm belief that God was on his side and would help him

with everything he intended to do. He was absolutely right. For he came to a completely devastated city, inhabited by a captive race; and in a few years he rebuilt the city and

had that people once again worshipping their god, Yahweh, as Moses had taught them to do. Nehemiah is indeed to be remembered; in an age of weakness he was a tower of strength.

In Nehemiah, we begin to understand, at least to some degree, the reason for religious orthodoxy. In chapters 8 and 9 the Mosaic Code is read four times to the people. You remember that it was in the reign of Josiah that the Deuteronomic Law was re-discovered and the people realized how much they had fallen away from their original concept of the One God. This concept had always been interpreted to mean that God had chosen them, they were his "chosen people". He would be their God and they would be His people as long as they followed the Law to the very letter. We know, that the Jews did not follow the Law faithfully, and that each time they disobeyed it they had more and more difficulties. Sometimes they were in such difficulties that it was only through seeming miracles that they were brought back to the ancient teaching. And each time this occurred, the Jews would renew their pledge of faith in the One God.

These people found their way back thanks to the ingenuity and the courage of leaders like Ezra and Nehemiah. Once again the Deuteronomic Law was read, and once again the people were told how terribly they had sinned. They were warned that unless they stopped their sinful ways they would never have peace or fulfillment, for God would be against them. And once more the people renewed their pledge to the One God and swore that they would be good devout Jews.

This time fear had been so impressed upon them that they believed that if they violated the Law, God would utterly destroy them. This fear of not doing the proper things, of not following the ritual that was set forth in the Mosaic Code became so strong that even today there are followers of Orthodox Judaism who still adhere to the traditional rituals. They firmly believe that if they do not do so God will be offended. Such ideas unfortunately are not confined to Judaism; we also find similar misguided beliefs in Christianity.

Nehemiah must have been a most unusual man. Do you realize that in spite of being a eunuch he was a leader of the Israelites? That they accepted this man in spite of

his mutilation and all that it implied? This is indeed amazing, for remember that their idea of a leader was a man who was not only "touched by God" but who also was a man in every sense of the word. Yet he rose to a position where he was able to bring his people back together again. He did this because he had a dream and a burning desire to see this dream realized. And he compensated for his psychological problem - his inability to be a complete man - by bringing his people back to God.

What I find most interesting in these chapters is the psychological attack made on Nehemiah by his enemies. People in those times behaved just as they do today. They were just as ready and as clever and ruthless in their ways to ruin a person's reputation. But Nehemiah was sensitive and intuitive enough to thwart their attempts, and he was able to elude the traps that were prepared for him.

Yet in spite of his many difficulties, Nehemiah made his people agree and pledge to live up to the Mosaic Code. But like the rest of us they, too, found that "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak".

However, there is one concept that definitely belongs to the Judaic teaching, and that is the concept of sin. Judaism is not the only religion that teaches this concept but it emphasizes it more than the others. The word sin is mentioned more often in the Bible than in any other Scriptures in the world.

What do you think the word means? What constitutes "sin"? Is there really such a thing? The word "sin", from the metaphysical point of view, means the breaking of a law, regardless of what the law is. For example, if I meet someone I had promised to telephone but had forgotten to and I say: "I'm terribly sorry, I tried to get you before but your line was busy", I have committed a sin. Why? Obviously I have not committed a terrible crime; but I did break a law, for I did not have the courage to speak the truth. Any deviation from an inner truth (or law) is a sin - in this case due to a lack of courage. No one but myself is going to punish me for committing this sin, but this makes the punishment more definite because I cannot evade it by any legal or moral loophole.

This metaphysical idea of sin is very demanding because it means that *we* must pay, not only physically but psychologically and spiritually, for everything we do, say

or think. This inner realization of truth and sin is the result of our having free will, for we have been given free will by Divine Mind to enable us to make our own decisions. And good or bad we must pay for those decisions.

Some people think that if we are our own judges we can deliberately do things that are wrong. After all, who will punish us?

From the point of view of metaphysics, the sooner we eliminate the idea that there is such a thing as "sin" for which we are punished by God, the more we will grow spiritually. Remember it is not necessary to grow through fear. This is the most foolish and difficult way. We can only grow, in the real sense of the word, through living up to the highest ideas that we know. It is true, of course, that we are not always able to do so because we do not have the courage, the strength, and often, the intelligence. But when we fall, we at least have the courage to face the truth of a situation. Then we pick ourselves up and try again. We do not beat our breasts and cry "mea culpa, mea culpa".

Perhaps at this point you are thinking: if there is no sin, how can there be atonement? We think that if a person physically suffers for committing a misdemeanor he is paying for his crime. Now suppose a man who has committed a murder is brought to justice. He will either be electrocuted or spend the rest of his life behind bars. Is he atoning for his sin? Physically, of course, he is. But social justice is not atonement. Atonement can only result from a complete change of consciousness in the individual and few criminals ever change their viewpoints. But unless a murderer (like Leopold) does so, he is not atoning for his crime, he is merely being punished. The atonement will come later and must be done by himself alone.

At the moment of doing wrong you may not be aware of it, but the moment you become conscious of it, you are beginning to atone for it. You start to feel uncomfortable. You may not want to face the situation, but that is not going to do away with it. We learn to atone for our sins when we realize that we can only sin against ourselves. In Truth and Reality we can never hurt anyone else. This is the esoteric meaning of sin. Only we can reap the consequences of our acts, good or bad. Even Judas only really sinned against himself, for actually Jesus needed him more than he needed any other disciple. Without a Judas there could not have

been a Crucifixion or a Resurrection. Atonement implies a Karmic relationship. We may hurt another person's feelings, we may cause him untold grief - in fact, this is the kind of relationships we are allenmeshed in. However, the person we try to hurt can only be affected; if he allows himself to be. The hurt that we give another, actually hurts us. None of us are invulnerable in our present stage of evolution, but as metaphysicians, we should be on our way to becoming incapable of committing and receiving such negative actions.

We were all created equal by Divine Mind; but some of us learned faster than others, and have accomplished more; some of us have not progressed as far and are more vulnerable to error and hurt. Whose fault is this? Actually, only our own. This is difficult for us to understand, for we all have a tendency to look at only a small segment of life. We do not realize that our life in this particular incarnation is only one of thousands of incarnations. The only life we can see is the present one and we concentrate all our efforts in this one little area of time. We do not know what is behind us, nor do we know what is ahead. We must acquire a much broader viewpoint, we must see life in its wholeness. For only then can we gain some understanding of it; only then can we learn that our destiny is in our own hands. We must realize that our greatest responsibility is towards ourselves, and that the more freedom we have the more careful we must be - if we want to continue to be free.

Such an attitude does not make us smug and self-centered. On the contrary, an understanding of ourselves always gives us a wider understanding of our fellowman. We are no longer quick to take offense, or to be critical, or unkind. We will find that as we develop, we will have a far greater compassion for others and a really strong desire to help those who need our help.

But we can only begin to have such an attitude when we are mature enough to stand on our own two feet and say: "I do not believe that God will punish me if I sin. In fact the only sin I believe in is the sin against myself". And the greatest damage that we can ever do to ourselves is not to live up to our highest beliefs. We know we are far from perfect within. It is true that we do not manifest very much of this perfection yet. But as situations arise in our daily lives, small ones as well as big ones, we should face them in the way of Truth. In this way we shall gradually manifest

that which is within.

These chapters of Nehemiah are very instructive from this point of view. We are told that the Jews were so fear-ridden that they thought that the slightest deviation from ritual law was a sin. Even marriages were broken and children disowned because their parents had not been of the same religion. That these unfortunate individuals were badly treated did not matter because it was believed that God was only pleased when the racial blood was pure. Did these poor children commit a "sin"?

Ezra and Nehemiah, great leaders of a great race, were both good and devout men wholly sincere in their belief in God. Yet they had absolutely no compassion for any person who did not have the same religious belief that they had. We see here the beginning of racial prejudice. Do not forget that the Old Testament gives us more than the historic background and the esoteric teaching of a people. The path of human behavior is spelled out for us, very clearly. We are shown the things that help us to grow and the things that retard our progress.

I grant you that everyone's concept of God is different; God can only be, for you or for me, what we individually think He is. As we open our minds, our concept of God grows. And if our concept of God is that of a narrow confined belief based on what somebody said thousands of years ago, and if we dare not go beyond such a belief, then we do not worship God, we worship a totem pole.

This is a sin, because the Bible tells us: "Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 78:41). We can only find our God by discovering what we ourselves really believe, and by acting in accordance with that belief. If we say we love God, and are not kind to those we do not like, we are not loving God. Our concept of what God is is manifested in our lives; it is not manifested by what we say, but by what we *do*. When our concept of God begins to be a God who is Love, Wisdom, and Spirit, then we begin to manifest His aspects in our daily lives. Then we can truly say we believe in the One God.

We must do something positive about God in our lives. Nehemiah did something positive in so far as he was capable of understanding God. At the end of this book, he says: "Remember me, O Lord for what I have done for this people". True he did much good for his people, but he also

left them a heritage that is not easy for them to overcome; for his God was a narrow restricted God, a God hemmed in by ritual and prayer. If we understand this we will realize that no matter how great and how right another man's concept of God is, we still must find our God for ourselves. Only then can we realize and contact the Indwelling Presence within us and understand the statement: "Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 78:41).

This section points up one of the most important concepts of metaphysics, and that is summed up in the statement, "Ye shall not limit the Holy One of Israel".

As we study these chapters, we become aware of how much the people of the Bible limited themselves. However, we rarely take stock of the mental reservations we all have. If we really believed in the power of God, we all would overcome our problems in the twinkling of an eye. But we have conditioned ourselves to "take things slowly", so therefore our next step should be a periodic check-up on what we think we believe.

Then - compare your actions with your concepts - and you will discover what you have accepted.

"By their fruits shall ye know them." Matt 7:16.

M. M.

ESTHER

There has been much controversy about the Book of Esther. Is it history or is it a legend? Or was it written merely to describe the celebration of a wonderful and exciting festival (for Esther is really a festival book)? Historians do not agree; no one knows how this beautiful little book originated. But one thing is certain, its author is completely unknown. Because of this book, every year the Jews faithfully celebrate the feast of Purim. Purim is a time of rejoicing; in fact it is the only time, with the exception of Channukah, (which is celebrated just before Christmas), when the Jewish people publically give vent to a light-hearted attitude towards life.

Perhaps you noticed an interesting thing. No reference to God is made in the entire book. For this reason it was considered a secular book, and before it was included in the canon of the Old Testament, there was a great deal of controversy among the compilers of the Bible. The only known fact is that Esther became part of the Old Testament around 90 AD and the Christians admitted it into the Christian Bible about 397 AD. Before 90 AD the Jewish historians made no mention of it. One of the reasons for this may be that the events described in the book took place in the eastern end of the Persian empire, a great distance from Jerusalem. In fact, there is not even a reference to Jerusalem. Esther is purely a story of the preservation of a people.

The difference between the significance of Channukah and Purim is very interesting. Channukah commemorates the preservation of the religious liberty of the Jews, while the feast of Purim commemorates the actual physical preservation of the race itself. Channukah celebrates the victory of the

Maccabees over the Syrians, and Esther celebrates the survival of the Jews in Persia. Actually the feast of Purim really has nothing to do with the worship of Yahweh. And because of the events described in it, this book is often regarded as one of the main causes of anti-Semitism. Down through the centuries the claim has been made that regardless of what country the Jews may reside in, and regardless of how much they may have contributed to the culture and economic well-being of that country, they remain a completely isolated group from the people of their adopted country. This, of course, is greatly resented.

Now this question can be looked at from many points of view. All of us have ideals but very seldom are we capable of completely living up to them. The Jews also have an ideal; an ideal they have had since the time of Moses. But they do not always live up to that ideal, any more than you or I always live up to the concept of metaphysics. That ideal is a purity in their worship of the One God, and it is that concept of purity that often antagonizes other people. It was one of the reasons that a great antagonism arose against the Jews in Germany under Hitler; this ideal of an absolute purity that could not be violated infuriated the Nazis. And it was this concept of purity that also antagonized the Persians, particularly Haman. From the historical point of view there is something very interesting that should be mentioned here. The incidents of the story of Esther are supposed to have taken place during the reign of Xerxes I of Persia (485-465 BC). His Hebrew name was Ahasuerus. However, the most important thing that happened during his reign - his unsuccessful attempt to invade Greece - was reported by the Greek historian Herodotus who was a contemporary of Xerxes but is not mentioned in the book of Esther. Because of this omission some scholars believe that it was Artaxerxes (404-358 BC) not Xerxes who reigned during the events of this story.

The opening verses of Esther describe a feast given by King Ahasuerus. It was a splendid feast that lasted for 180 days and celebrated the Babylonian victory of the political war between the nations of Elam and Babylon. The God of the Babylons was named Marduk (In Hebrew he is called Mordecai) and the Babylon goddess who was the first-cousin and the bride of Marduk was Ishtar. (The Hebrew called her Esther). The god of Elam was Humuan (in Hebrew

Hanan). The name of the Elamite goddess is lost in antiquity but it is considered to be similar to the deposed queen Vashti. Whether this is a myth which has been appropriated by the writer of Esther and utilized to tell an exciting story we do not know. The similarity of the names indicated that this could be so. Esther is apparently a Hebrew version of this story.

This is not the only myth that has found expression in more than one religion. Christianity considers itself unique in this doctrine of the Trinity - the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost - but every religion has a slightly different version of the same concept. The Hindus symbolize this as Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva; the Egyptians, Osiris, Isis, and Horus; the Greeks, Pheuma, Psyche, and Soma. Also the idea of the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth, that is the idea of a savior who has been miraculously conceived - that is a tenet of most of the ancient religions. Judaism is one of the few religions that does not have this concept. The only thing comparable to it is the story of the finding of Moses in the bulrushes.

One of the reasons why authorities were hesitant to include Esther in the canon of the Old Testament was that it contained no ethical teaching. It has been argued and discussed by rabbis and ministers as to whether it should have been included in the Bible at all. But the thing that actually influenced its being accepted, according to the Interpreter's Bible, was that the people loved and enjoyed it so much.

The book is a paeon to joy; and celebrates the spiritual victory of the Jews over their enemies, the Persians. Esther is a well-written and exciting story, but there is no psychological motivation of the characters in it. The characters only serve the purpose of carrying the action forward; we are never given the reason for their behavior. For instance, we do not know why Esther was involved in the political intrigues of the court. We only know that she was very reluctant about going to see the King without being summoned to do so. Nor do we know why a war arose between the Jews and the Persians. Indeed, all we are certain of is that Xerxes, a great Persian king, was not too interested in the war. His advisor, Haman, told him there was a certain people (Haman did not mention the Jews by name) who would

not become part of the empire; they were extremely independent and their customs were foreign to the ways of the Persians. The king gave his consent that they should be eradicated without bothering to find out who these people were.

Also Xerxes had married Esther, a Jewess, and apparently lived very happily with her, although it was contrary to the Persian law for the king to marry outside of the Persian religion. However it is not until the end of the story that he realized that she was of a different faith. And he was also unaware that she was the cousin of Mordecai, a man who had saved his life, and had never been rewarded for doing so.

At this point the story becomes beautifully ironic. Haman believes that everything is going his way; for not only has Esther, the queen, invited him to a banquet but the king has honored him and promised to eliminate the Jews. (This probably was the first pogrom in history although it was unsuccessful).

And Haman is glad to be in a position to be able to take revenge on Mordecai for Mordecai would not bow to him. It is interesting to speculate why Mordecai would not do so. Some writers claim that it was contrary to the Jewish law for a Jew to bow to another human being. But Mordecai was Prime Minister to the king of Persia and most certainly had to bow to Xerxes. Other writers say that Mordecai was a descendent of the tribe of Benjamin, and Haman was a descendent of Agag, king of the Amalekites. You remember it was Agag who had made war on Saul and who was finally killed by Samuel. And that feud existed between the descendents of these two tribes. But actually we do not know what was the real cause of the hatred between the two men; we only know that it existed and that they were descendents of these two families.

Haman's wife and friends advised him to "let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and tomorrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made" (5:14). On that night Ahasuerus could not sleep and he commanded that the book of Chronicles be read to him. (According to the Jews, it was God who caused the king's sleeplessness). During the reading, Ahasuerus realized that Mordecai had saved his life when two of his chamberlains

were going to kill him. He asked his servants what honor had been done to Mordecai for this. The servants replied: "Nothing has been done for him". When the king inquired: "Who is in the court?" the servant answered: "Haman". The king then sent for Haman and asked him, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor" (6:6). Haman is overjoyed for he is sure that the king wished to honor him; so he outlined the most beautiful things he could think of. But when the king told him to find Mordecai and do all those things for him Haman was stunned. However he had no choice but to execute the king's command.

In chapter 7, Esther entertained the king and Haman at a banquet and we soon realize that she is extremely fascinating. She was not only a beautiful and accomplished woman but also a very clever one. She knew exactly how to achieve whatever she wanted. The banquet lasted for two days and the suspense of the story is terrific. For the King knew that she had something on her mind but Esther is slow to reveal her purpose. On the second day he asked her: "What is thy petition, queen Esther, and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request?" (7:2). It is only then that Esther said that the adversary and enemy of the Jews was Haman. The king became furious and rushed out of the room into the garden. Haman became terrified and flung himself before the couch where Esther had been reclining, to beg for his life. Actually Haman's action was innocent for in those days people reclined on couches when they dined. But when the king returned and saw Haman, he accused him of trying to rape his wife; Esther remained silent. "As the word went out of the king's mouth, and they covered Haman's face" (7:8). So, ironically, the gallows that had been built for Mordecai was used to hang Haman.

It is interesting to see that on the day of the execution the king gave the house of Haman to Esther and she set Mordecai over the house of Haman. Then Esther beseeched the king to rescind the edict that had been issued for the slaughter of the Jews. But even a king could not repeal a law that had been ordered. All Ahasuerus could actually do was to permit the Jews to defend themselves against the Persian army. (This is probably the only case in history where a king allows an enemy to defend themselves against his own people). So, it was decreed that on the 13th day of the 12th month, Adar, the Jews would be allowed to "lay

hand on such as sought their hurt" (9:3). Then Esther asked for the second day for the Jews to avenge themselves and the king granted it to her. This is the reason why the feast of Purim is celebrated for two days.

The question arises, why was it necessary for the Jews to have the second day? Was it because they really needed it to save themselves or did they ask for the second day only to kill off a greater number of Persians. Did the Jews have to annihilate so many of their enemies to protect themselves (the King James Bible puts the Number at 75,000; the Septuagint 15,000) or was it merely a cruel act of revenge? It is quite a fascinating story, isn't it? And it is a story with absolutely no moral point.

From a metaphysical point of view, all we are shown is the Law of Karma in action, the Law of Cause and Effect. Actually the Jews were extremely happy in Persia; they were given a great deal of freedom and several of them, like Mordecai, had risen to high positions at the court. They had certainly added to the wealth and well-being of the country, and they were good and law-abiding citizens. And don't forget that Ezra, Nehemiah and others were so much in favor with the rulers, they they were allowed to return to Palestine and rebuild the temple there. But as happened so often before, the Jews forgot their religious heritage until suddenly they found their very lives were threatened. In the days of Esther they no longer followed the laws of Nehemiah; in fact this book offers no clues of how much of Judaism was actually practiced. It is only the story of a victory, a victory of these people over Haman who had planned to have them massacred.

Another interesting point that is brought out in the book of Esther is that none of her people objected to Esther's marrying outside her religion. We do not know whether Mordecai believed in the tolerance of this attitude or whether he thought that through his very beautiful cousin he might be able to attain a position of high standing at the court. Anyway the fact that she married the king of Persia did not bother him a bit. It is true, of course, that Mordecai knew that the Jews were in great danger; and being a highly intelligent man he knew that Esther's marriage could greatly aid their cause. The story tells us that Esther was completely obedient to him; he had raised and educated her and

she was greatly devoted to him. She did whatever he asked without question and together they managed to save the Jewish race from their Persian enemies.

This is a secular book and there is only one instance in it that might be called a reference to the action of God. This is where Mordecai tells Esther she must go to the king and intervene for the Jews. She raises the objection that for 30 days the king has not sent for her and it is against the rules of the palace for an inmate of the harem to go to the king unless he commands that she do so. Penalty for such a violation is death. Then Mordecai says that if she does not see the king, she will be killed anyway, for sooner or later he will learn that she is Jewish. (I don't know why the king didn't know that she was). He implies that perhaps it is through the action of God that she had been made queen; perhaps God has willed it that she should help her people. Of course, it may have been that Mordecai was merely being shrewd in order to achieve personal power, but I feel that this passage is one of the few passages in Esther where Mordecai could be saying: "If you don't do what I ask, we're going to get help from somewhere else. But I think that it is very possible that God has placed you where you are to enable you to help your people". Until this incident we do not have any idea of how Esther felt about her people; she only seemed interested in her own welfare. But from this point on she became a different woman. She has the courage to speak her mind and the wit to handle the king in such a way that Haman becomes the victim of his own plot. I feel that although this is a secular book, the writer of it knew that only the hand of God (which, as the saying goes, moves in mysterious ways) could have brought about such an unexpected turn of events.

Before we finish this book, I would like to explain to you the meaning of the name Purim. It was the name of the day selected by Haman for the massacre of the Jews. Now Haman was very superstitious (in fact so was the court of Persia). When he wanted to know the answer to a question, he would cast lots with a handful of straws. The reply depended on the way the straws fell and they were read as some people read tea leaves. By this method he got the date of when the massacre should take place. The word in Persian is *poorah* and the word in Hebrew is *pur*; two days

is called Purim, the day of the lots, the day of death, the day the die was cast. We know how the story turned out and the day of death has become a day of Joyous festivity. The book is indeed ironic, isn't it?