

# A Plea for Orthodoxy

By

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**T**HAT it is desirable to cultivate feelings of kinship between individuals seems axiomatic. The attachment between children and parents, between members of the same family, or citizens of the same town or State, is felt by all to be conducive to happiness. The fact that friends and critics have only praise for the manner in which communities like the Parsis of India, the Scotch the world over, or the Jews, look after their poor, may be taken as one of the criterions which show that commonwealths are benefited by the grouping of masses of population into brotherhoods, friendly societies, and the like, when such groups, in their turn, are wisely co-ordinated for the good of all. Thus it is that in all civilized countries the conditions of life have improved with the granting of self-government to municipalities. The United States of America has prospered through its organization in a number of self-administering States; and, in a similar way, Russia may be expected to make rapid strides from the moment she allows the many communities within her territory to attend, as best they can, to the problems within their respective spheres.

Improvement is founded on these lines through all grades of life, the efficiency of units being raised by the grouping into unions, and the efficiency of unions by a combination into larger groups. The melting of crude elements and of remnants of wreckage in a crucible is often very profitable but only as a transient condition. In the development and



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(born in Odessa, in 1860), one of the leading scientists of our time, studied at the University of Odessa, taught physiology at the University of Geneva, later associated with Pasteur in Paris, and became one of the pioneers in the new science of bacteriology. In 1893 he was engaged by the British Government to cope with the plagues in India, and in the accomplishment of this task he discovered his notable vaccines against cholera, typhus, and other plagues. The late Lord Lister declared that Mr. Haffkine's work was of incalculable benefit to the populations of India, and one of the great advantages gained by India from her connection with the British Empire. Mr. Haffkine's rare opportunity to study different races and religions, in addition to his great attainments in science, give exceptional authority to his words in behalf of orthodox Judaism, which he has steadily believed in and practiced.



life of an individual such a condition occurs on the dissolution of tissues, or histolysis. Were this stage to abide, we would have—instead of a potent and accomplished being like the butterfly or the bee, formed of highly individualized systems of organs—a reversion to the condition of a sponge or of a mass of amorphous plasma. Similarly—in the case of associated organizations, for example, the military—if units forming companies, battalions, regiments, brigades, etc., were to give up their respective *esprit de corps* and their grouping into distinct bodies, an army would melt into a crowd. The secret of success in most departments in which one country excels over another is discoverable, not so much in differences between the inhabitants as individuals, as in the existence of a better welded system of specialized unions in one country than in the other. Japan and China, the Slav countries and Turkey, British India and the Native States of the East Indies, may serve as illustrations of this fact. In such a system of specialized unions, a brotherhood built up of racial ties, long tradition, common suffering, faith and hope, is a union ready-made, differing from artificial unions in that the bonds existing between the members contain an added promise of duration and utility. Such a union takes many centuries to form and is a power for good, the neglect or disuse of which is as much an injury to humanity as the removal of an important limb is to the individual. I believe Jews recognize these facts in regard to their own brotherhood, and most of them are earnestly concerned with the question of how to preserve such a brotherhood in the circumstances now prevailing.

### *Talismans That Preserve Racial Ties*

COMMUNITIES, even more than marriages, are made in Heaven; but suitable lines of conduct are necessary to maintain communal life, just as they are necessary to maintain a united married life. Even kinsmen belonging to the same families gradually become estranged from each other, unless external circumstances keep them together, or unless they make deliberate arrangements for preserving a mutual bond. How much more easily must ties be lost between individuals not so intimately connected. Community of interests is the most powerful binding force between people; but often common interests most essential and vital for the group as a whole are not palpably obvious to individual members; and when they are so obvious—as in the case of partnerships, companies, trusts and similar combination, or else in situations of common danger—they are, without exception, of a temporary nature. In the case of the Jews, their brotherhood has to withstand the loss even of a common soil. That racial and historic ties are of very great help, and that they need to be carefully and jealously guarded, is beyond question. This, indeed, is the instinct which guides governments and learned societies, archaeological, historical



and others, in searching for relics of a common past, and in preserving such relics (in which often no material utility of any kind can be detected) as precious possessions, whose destruction or injury is prevented by penalties of the law. As inducements to unity, however, inanimate relics of a long past must necessarily take a place second to that of close kinsmanship or common parentage; and yet, even in the case of the latter, the centrifugal forces operating in the daily struggle for existence are more potent than sentimental ties. To lessen such forces, measures are needed of a character hidden in the intricacies of human nature; their significance and necessity, therefore, escape us when we deliberate on the matter in a deductive way, from *a priori* standpoints. And so, in the course of their long existence, in biblical and post-biblical times, the Jews have often been in positions of great peril, sometimes on the very verge of extinction, and such positions have always occurred, essentially, in one and the same way.

The knowledge of how to keep a community like ours together, in spirit, while physically scattered throughout the world and living among an overwhelming majority of other communities, has been carefully handed down to us by our ancestors. But Jews grow easily confident of their knowledge and understanding, and make light of the instructions given them. Perhaps the most comprehensive summary of such instructions is compassed in the words of the Commandment, in which we are told *to speak unto our children the words of our faith at the time of resting in our homes and when traveling on the road; when lying down and on waking up; to bind, for a sign, a reminder of that faith upon our hand and fix it between our eyes; to write it upon the door-posts of our houses and our gates.* According to this we are to teach the Torah to our children and remind them of it daily and hourly; and to have, for ourselves, signs of our faith as a reminder; for only by such constant reminder can that faith be kept alive in our hearts and our souls. It is known, indeed, to all, that the moment man loses the habit of a rule or a line of conduct, he loses faith, without effort or deliberation, in the source and sanction of that conduct. When he awakens to the fact, the conclusion is already formed in him that the old practice was the lot of the unenlightened. On examining the conditions of any of the now living communities, it will be found that the plan of continuous reminder is acted upon, in one way or other, consciously or unconsciously, in the daily life of all of them, and mostly in objective, material ways, so that manifestations of this procedure are seen easily, in all directions. National costumes or uniforms are such reminders. The Sikhs of India—a race of men widely renowned as much for their physical advantages as for their many commanding moral and social traits—have a fundamental law which forbids shaving or cutting the hair. The men wear and dress their hair like women; and their long beards are twisted into ropes and wound over the head. There is thus no mistaking a Sikh



wherever met—in an Indian village bazaar or a drawing-room in London; and whether prince or peasant, a man who disobeys this law ceases by the same act to be of the Sikh community. Living as they do in a land of many races, who vary in blood, sentiment, morals and culture, this powerful people have come to know that for a group of human beings to preserve their cohesion, well-defined and continual manifestations are necessary, acquiescence in which is a declaration of allegiance to the group, and neglect of which is a betrayal, since it endangers the group's bonds and existence. Military captains and empire-builders all reckon with this fact. When Australia conceived the plan of somewhat modifying for herself the design on the Union Jack, people in Great Britain grew alarmed. In an analogous manner, the United States of North America, acknowledging as they do community of blood, civilization and sentiment with the "Old Country" and with the States of Canada, Australia or New Zealand, are keenly jealous of their own national colors. Illustrations of this kind will occur to all who turn their thoughts to the matter; and in every case the practices concerned are dictated by the fact that, except where group feeling is maintained by continual reminder and ever-enacted effort, man slides back into the "melting pot," and the gains of history and tradition, treasures of experience and wisdom, are lost.

### *Old-Fashioned "Kashruth" and the Up-to-date Microscope*

**I**N the circumstances in which Jews live today, a good many of them find it difficult and sometimes impossible to carry out all the traditional customs of their community. I believe the majority of such Jews view their position as an accidental and temporary one, however long it may last, and seek no sanction for that position and no means of perpetuating or extending it to others. The community as a whole views in the same manner its inability to carry out the rites of sacrifice and certain other sacerdotal practices which were obligatory at the time of the Temple. These rites, however, have not been abrogated. In this attitude there is both unfailing reverence for the sanctity of religious institutions, and manifestation of the ancient faithfulness and tenacity of the race, which have enabled it to correct and atone for many shortcomings and to tide over great misfortunes. Inability to do the thing acknowledged to be right carries with it its own justification, and no other is desired.

While this is the position in regard to some of the traditional practices, many usages and rites of great beneficence and importance remain within the reach of all Jews, in every condition of life. Thus, for instance, since the advance of the researches in microbiology, it has become known that a remarkable provision for preserving health underlies the thorough removal of the blood from the heart and vascular system of animals intended for food, as immediately after death the blood is rapidly invaded by



microbial germs and spreads infection throughout the rest of the tissues. Similar provisions are represented in the rejection of carcasses showing tainted tissues, which the microscope has now revealed to be nests of parasitic organisms; in the purification of meat by means of crystal salt, which is a preservative of great potency, yet perfectly harmless to man; in the discarding of vessels touched, even momentarily, by an unclean object, as such a contact suffices to contaminate them with germs of disease; in the sterilization by boiling water or live fire of utensils so contaminated, —in short, in all the procedures which constitute the orthodox Jewish laws of *kashruth*.

Apart from these surprising facts, the laws of *kashruth* are enjoined in the Bible; they have been obeyed since remotest antiquity; and the careful performance of their prescription has served as much as anything else to keep alive in the Jew the consciousness of his Judaism and to preserve his purity of race, just as analogous prescriptions of the Brahminical ritual have protected some of the purest strains of Aryans. In contrast to not a few of our co-religionists who have no occasion for weeks and months together, while attending school, office, or places of business, to bestow a thought on their creed or their people, the Jew who keeps *kashruth* has to think of his religious and communal allegiance on the occasion of every meal, wherever his lot may be cast at the time; and on every such occasion the observance of the law constitutes a renewal of acquiescence in the fact that he is a Jew and a deliberate acknowledgment of that fact. The recognition so obtained from the individual, the family circle, or the persons assembled in a social gathering, is an ever-present bond between the members; and it is with profound insight and justice that the rabbis visit with reprobation those who omit that acknowledgment. Certainly, this attitude of the rabbis is of incomparably deeper meaning and justification than that which prompts the military to insist on a soldier saluting his flag or honoring his uniform. The arrangements needed in the circumstances of modern life for carrying out the precepts of *kashruth* are accessible to all who earnestly care; and at a time when discipline and co-ordination are more necessary than ever, because of the risks of dissolution which threaten our more and more scattered Jewish communities, observance of these rules should be fervently demanded by all of our elders and religious teachers.

### *The Ancestral Tongue as a Vital Bond*

ONE of the most striking reminders which a people have of their national unity is contained in the language they speak and in the formation of the auditory and vocal apparatus resulting from the use of that language from childhood. In this, as in many other matters, modern Jews, being citizens of many countries, are at a disadvantage, in that they



are denied such a reminder of national unity; but they have the language which their ancestors spoke when they lived together. Instruction in ancient Hebrew is within the reach of children of tender years, when taught along the traditional Jewish lines; and such instruction is found, in a surprising manner, to develop the children's capacity for learning of any kind, linguistic or other. The holding of religious services in Hebrew connects Jewish worship intimately with the Bible, and thus contributes to placing the influence and solemnity of that worship on a plane far above the occurrences of daily life. In addition, there is the fact that *prayer*—as the expression of a longing for consolation and help, or for achievements which we find beyond our limits of strength; or as the craving for sympathy when we are disheartened and alone; or as an outburst of thankfulness in moments of great happiness—is common to all, including “atheists.” But the consecrated way in which Jews spend the time reserved for introspection and prayer, the particulars and order of the service in which that time is employed, and the texts with which we have been accustomed to associate our devotional feelings, are Jewish, and bind Jews together by a faithful identity of procedure.

The bonds so constituted have been made common to us by the toilsome effort of many generations of teachers. When, in such services, variations are admitted; and, more particularly, when the vernacular is introduced on an equality with the hallowed Hebrew rendering of the texts, the principles on which rests the exclusive position and sanction of our books of prayer are shattered at a stroke; the people of the one Synagogue are broken up into sections; and a gradual absorption of such sections into the great non-Jewish congregations surrounding them, who have similarly altered and translated the Jewish ancestral praying texts for their devotional solemnities, is facilitated. In the eyes of Jews and Gentiles alike, acknowledgment and emphasis of our lineal descent from the people of these texts and of the Bible is contained in the fact that our religious worship is clothed in the form handed down to us by our forefathers. This is by far of greater significance and necessity to us than, for instance, the use of Welsh to Welshmen, of Polish to the Poles, or Finnish to the Finns, all of whom recognize in their language an asset the loss of which would practically annihilate their nationality, and which they prize above any other. Among ourselves, up to this day, Hebrew makes the most widely divergent members of the race feel brothers and sisters. I recollect how on one occasion many years ago, while wandering about the environs of Aden in the company of a British officer, I came across two elderly men apparently in the last degree of destitution, dressed in rags, barefooted, and looking spiritless and forlorn among the rocks of that wild region. At the sight of Europeans, the men tried to move out of the way; and I cannot recall now what it was that made me utter to them tentatively—as they seemed



Arab outcasts—the first words of the *Shema*. The community between us of blood and faith burst forth at the first sounds; and those individuals, to all appearances so lowly and obscure, recovering themselves at the moment, smiled meekly and went on whispering the text. It passed through my mind, while I was viewing their demeanor, that possibly the acquaintance these men had with one domain of learning, at least, was of incomparably greater depth and intimacy than my companion and I could pretend to in any domain.

It is not inevitable that children or the grown-ups in Jewish families should be ignorant of Hebrew, or should stand on any low level in their knowledge of it; but even though not every child or adult be in a position to interpret and pronounce personally a judgment on all portions of the texts, the utterance of prayer in our ancestral tongue remains a religious and social experience which nothing else can equal.

### *The Consecration of Distinctive Dress*

WE come now to a matter which no doubt presents difficulties to many of us. The late Sir Moses Montefiore is said to have kept the traditional skull-cap on even when in the presence of the Queen. By that statement concerning him, certainly, a sublime trait in the nature of the man is intended to be indicated, and is indeed effectively indicated. When we see a man acting thus, or, still more, when we meet a man keeping to the traditional attire of the Sephardi or Ashkenazi Jew, or a woman, in an alien environment, wearing the wig of the orthodox married Jewess, there is no need to inquire if they acknowledge allegiance to their people,—the answer is plainly evident. Therein lies the enormous significance of a national dress. But obviously many among us are not in a position to do likewise. On his repeated visits to Russia and Poland, Sir Moses Montefiore pleaded with his co-religionists there for the abandonment of their distinctive costume, which was drawing upon them the cruel opposition of their neighbors. A great many in Russia and Poland, as elsewhere, have been brought to yield on this point. But there is the command that, *throughout their generations, the children of Israel should make unto them a garment having on the border of its fringes a ribbon of blue, so that they may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them.* For the Jew who, in dressing for the day, spares a moment to pay regard to the consecrated thread and puts on and wears his *Talis koton*, it becomes impossible, throughout the rest of the day, whether he be student, merchant, soldier or magistrate, not to bear witness, in one way or another, to the faith that is in him. While a large number of us omit to conform with this command, Freemasons the world over have learned its purport and have followed it up by elaborate arrangements, so



that their covenants be kept before their worshipful brothers by ever-present reminder.

*Youth Owes Deference to the Wisdom of the Forefathers*

MAN is, no doubt, a gregarious being by nature, but this tendency binds him to small groups of individuals only—the family, the clan, or the people he knows. When the group grows in numbers and is left to its own inclinations, it falls asunder and disintegrates. Practices necessary to keep together large communities are, therefore, not innate in man, just as many branches of knowledge and activity necessary for what we have come to call civilized life are not innate in him. In regard to all such matters there arises the necessity of training and inculcating habits, which involves effort, restraint and discipline, and cannot, in itself, appeal to the young. In youth, all are inexperienced and to the same extent unhesitating and assertive. The blood flows hot in the veins; passion and the pursuit of pleasure, prosperity and eminence—necessary and laudable at that time of life—prevent us from viewing clearly wider issues and pausing long enough to meditate on the interests of the race as a whole. The stores of observation and thought accumulated by calm and far-sighted elders, who have fought through life's struggles and possess knowledge essential for guarding the destinies of a nation, are not perceivable to the young, and the value of such knowledge is unknown to them. On account of these inevitable circumstances, debates and arguments between parents and children, the aged and the young, are seldom fruitful; and it is fortunate when trust and affection and other qualities of the heart are there to supplement and assist the reasoning. The success of the British nation has, no doubt, been in a considerable measure promoted by the education given to the youth of the leading classes, who for generations were sent away from home to the great public schools of Eton, Harrow and others, and were trained in an attitude of deference and a habit of yielding willingly to their elders and superiors and to their own elected captains. Jewish youths, on the other hand, are often under the impression that restraint is tyrannical and illiberal, unless the reason and justification for all acts is made clear to them. Unfortunately, what they are not aware of is that at their period of growth and development, and in regard to matters far more essential than any they can learn at school, the terms they ask for are unrealizable; as unrealizable as, let us say, for a butterfly at the stage of a caterpillar to conceive how life and the world will appear to it when it enters its arena as an *imago*. And so, when left to act according to its lights, youth does away readily with precedents, traditional practices and all the invaluable guidance which is embodied and crystallized in ancestral rituals and rites. Wherever this course has a free way, disappointment and failure follow, from causes fatal and apparently unaccountable, with,



as a last stage, disappearance of the actors from the scenes of the world. Thus, the two seemingly recondite sections of that momentous commandment are bound together in natural sequence:

“Honor thy Father and Mother;  
“That thy days may be prolonged upon the land which the Lord thy God  
giveth thee.”

*The Heritage of Generations is Not to be Idly Tested by Logic*

THE negative attitude of the youth towards national customs becomes the more perilous when parents—who, as a rule, see clearly the extreme importance of being trusted, in many matters blindly, by their children—do not perceive as clearly the gravity of the instructions left to them by their own fathers and forefathers. Complaisance and encouragement are then shown by seniors to a neglect of traditions sometimes affecting the very existence of the people; relief from limitations and trouble involved in observing the law is welcomed under the guise of emancipation; and an eagerness is stimulated to copy what to the inexperienced and uninitiated glitters as the superior ways of a latest-phase civilization. It would be hard to find an illusion and self-deception better calculated to destroy our own inheritance of culture and learning and our ancient brotherhood. No parent or communal leader, not even the most enlightened, can expect to discover by his personal experience what a nation has learned in the thousands of years and the endless vicissitudes of its existence; and no man or woman need be ashamed to obey, on the faith in the wisdom and solicitude of their people, a rule of guidance the inwardness of which their own learning has not enabled them to penetrate.

Those of us who incline to be over-insistent on knowing the *rationale* of all things lose perhaps some sight of the fact that all our understanding consists only of a reminiscence—approximate and terribly incomplete—of events as they strike us and of their sequence. None of these do we understand any further; and so we obey, without reflecting on our dignity, sensations of hunger, taste, cold, passion, all of which have been bred in us to ensure our preservation and welfare, and none of which we understand. Our knowledge of the origin and essence of *all* “laws of nature” is in this condition. A great deal of formulated instruction reaches us through man; and much of such instruction is man-made and we can investigate and question its reason and derivation, and at times correct it; but the most fundamental rules of conduct, which have been handed down to us through the traditions of untold generations, have their sources as far removed from the vision of individuals as is the origin of the laws of nature. The free-will and nobility of our youth will be shown in the joyful acceptance of the faith and commands bequeathed to us by our nation. It so happened that for many years in my personal career I found myself



deprived of intimate communion with fellow-Jews. Throughout those years I obtained consolation and support from endeavoring to observe our specific laws to the best of my knowledge and ability. I did so not because apprehension of personal consequences was present in my mind; but because of the conviction, in which, I think, I was not mistaken, that disobedience on the part of any one of us contributes to the bringing down, in due course, of punishment and ruin upon the whole of our kinsmen and race; and to that apprehension and fear no man or woman should hesitate to yield.

*The Approach of Modern Science to the "Adon Olam"*

THE labor and care required for carrying out our religious laws not only do not justify any attempt to simplify or abrogate them, but constitute one of the essential objects of our endeavor in carrying them out in their integrity. For it is in the performance of obligations calling for thought and effort that the character of men and their loyalty are trained and tested, and the object of their loyalty is made dear to them and bound up with their lives. Thus, even to this day, fervent devotees of all faiths consecrate themselves to an austere life and even inflict pain and martyrdom on their bodies; and similarly, during a struggle and suffering for the safety of their country are a people uplifted and their unselfishness and patriotism exalted. It is well in this connection to think of the sacrifices now being borne by the youth of many countries in defence of their nations. The purport of the observances demanded of the Jews is no less far-reaching than that of the efforts made on battlefields. In the light of such efforts it may appear a minute matter, for instance, to teach one's children the Hebrew blessing of the bread and to accustom them to pronounce that blessing on the necessary occasions. Yet it is right to say that even the mere silent thinking of these few words by the members of our race is an act of defence and self-preservation more efficacious than conquests in war. For if a Jew remembers, at the time of partaking of food, and makes the benediction in the authentic words used by his fellow-Jews since time immemorial the world over, he revives in himself, wherever he be at the moment, communion with his unyielding and imperishable race, together with the spirit and honorable obligations thereby involved.

Acquisitions and conquests inevitably draw aggression upon their possessors and sooner or later change hands; but so long as the children of Israel will keep on uttering religiously, at the time of sitting to table, the few consecrated words of that benediction, *so long will the Lord sustain them, and they will not fear the myriads of people that around beset them;* and as long, clearly, will they continue to be presented among the nations of the earth. Such a result is at least as desirable as the existence and



preservation of any people or race, or any community or nation, that man has yet formed. Both common sense and scientific thought, which sanction the formation and up-keep of all brotherhoods, entitle us in the highest degree to strive for the preservation of our brotherhood and for the continuance of the spiritual influences of our people. Indeed, Science itself would not have existed were it not that Jewish piety, learning, and unrivaled penetration and clarity of thought have freed the mind of man of the condition in which the phenomena of nature appeared to him actuated—and thus explained—by the free-will of separate independent deities.

Alone of all religious and philosophic conceptions of man, the faith which binds together the Jews has not been harmed by the advance of research, but on the contrary has been vindicated in its profoundest tenets. Slowly and by degrees, passing through innumerable stages in an analysis of the life of animals and plants and of the elemental phenomena of heat, light, magnetism, electricity, chemistry, mechanics, geology, spectroscopy, astronomy, Science is being brought to recognize in the universe the existence of one power which is of no beginning and no end; which has existed before all things were formed and will remain in its integrity when all is gone; the source and origin of all, in itself beyond any conception or image that man can form and set up before his eye or mind; while all things perceivable as matter and force are subjected to his inquiry and designs. This sum total of the scientific discoveries of all lands and times is an approach of the world's thought to our *Adon Olam*, the sublime chant by means of which the Jew has wrought and will further work the most momentous changes in the world. As immutable as is his religious philosophy, so immutable are the canons of morality which he has been contending for throughout the ages and is contending for now. Truly, no law of nature operates with more fatality and precision than the law according to which those communities survive in the strife for existence that conform the nearest to the Jewish teachings on the relation of man to his Creator; on the ordering of time for work and rest; on the formation of families and the duties of husband and wife, parents and children; on the paramount obligations of truthfulness and justice between neighbor and neighbor and to the stranger within the gates. By dint of endless trials and failures, the Nations are coming to recognize in the Commandments handed down to them by the Jews the only possible foundation of a prosperous and orderly life.

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