

HOW A RABBI FOUND PEACE

Personal Testimony of Dr. Max Wertheimer

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Born in Germany of orthodox Jewish parents, my earliest childhood impression was of my parents rising in the morning very early in order to spend a long time reading the Hebrew prayers. Even in the cold winter, before fires were kindled for their physical comfort, they carried on faithfully these early devotions. Insofar as their knowledge of God was concerned, they were a devout and God-fearing couple.

From the ages of five to fifteen my training was in a Jewish school, in Orthodox Judaism. A scholarly Hebrew instructed me in the five books of Moses.

I went to the Gymnasium for my classical training and later was apprenticed to a manufacturer, doing office work. My associates at that time led me into the sinful pleasures of the world, and although I attended synagogue and read my Hebrew prayers on the Sabbath, I drifted from the faith of my fathers.

A parental decision to send me to America to pursue my classical education brought me to Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. I graduated in 7 years, having meanwhile taken my degrees in letters and Hebrew literature, and 4 years later my Master's degree. We studied the Old Testament, translated it from Hebrew into the vernacular, went through Jewish history and beginning to the present day, and learned the oral laws.

After finishing the rabbinical course, we were publicly ordained and inducted into the rabbinical office. My first call was to Dayton, Ohio, where I officiated as rabbi for 10 years, during which I made many friends and received many tokens of love, which I treasure highly.

In my Friday evening lectures, I spoke on social, industrial and economic questions, monotheism, ethic culture, the moral systems of the Jews, etc. In the Saturday morning addresses I took weekly sections of the Pentateuch, followed by a corresponding section of prophets. On Sunday I taught Sunday School from eight in the morning until five in the evening, with one hour intermission for dinner.

In 1895 a series of meetings was held in the Christian Church of Dayton, with various denominational pastors giving addresses on their religion. I stood proudly before the audience of professing Christians and told them why I was a Jew and would not believe in their Christ as my Messiah and Savior. I gloried in Reformed Judaism that acknowledged no need of an atoning sacrifice for sin, a religion of ethics, which quieted qualms of conscience through a smug self-righteousness. In the audience sat a humble aged woman, a devout Christian, who was deeply stirred as she listened. "O God," she prayed, "Bring Dr. Wertheimer to realize his utter need of that Savior he so boastingly rejects. Bring him if necessary, to the very depths in order that he may know his need of my Lord Jesus Christ."

What unforeseen forces were brought into action of that woman's heart-cry! How perfectly satisfied with life I was that day: I had a young, attractive, accomplished wife, was rabbi of the B'nai Yeshorum Synagogue, had a beautiful home, a comfortable income, a place of prominence in the community, had become an honorary member of the Ministerial Association, was a member of the Present Day Club, served as chaplain in the Masonic Lodge, and was a popular speaker before women's clubs, schools, civic organizations, etc. Had you visited my library at that time you would have found a wide range of reading. I had every book Bob Ingersoll wrote, read them, and corresponded with the author. I was an oft-invited guest speaker in every denominational church in the city. I was satisfied with life! My wife and I enjoyed the musical treats. We had a large home, two servants, and a beautiful baby boy and daughter, Rose.

Suddenly there came a change! My wife was taken seriously ill, and in spite of many physicians and specialists, she died, leaving me a distraught widower with two little children. After the funeral, I put Rose in the care of my mother-in-law, advertised for a house keeper for myself and boy, and found myself the most miserable of men. I could not sleep. I walked the streets, striving to forget the void, the vacancy in my heart and life. My dreams of a successful career and serene domestic life were shattered. Where was comfort to be found? The heavens were brass when I called on the God of my fathers! How could I speak, as a rabbi, words of comfort to others, when my own sorrow had brought me to despair. I investigated Spiritism, but found it utter fallacy. I attended meetings and read the literature of Theosophy and Christian Science, only to find it

futile and hopeless. My experience was comparable to Job's when he cried: "*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope*" (Job 7:6). The tenth year of my rabbinical office drew to its close.

I decided not to accept re-election, and resigned. I wanted to think over things! I would study! Where is the spirit and soul of one who was such a gifted pianist, who gave charm to life, who made existence so sweet? What had become of all the faculties, the intents and purposes of that active keen mind? I turned to my Bible!

I studied about Judaism, but it answered no questions, satisfied no craving of my heart. Then I began reading the New Testament and comparing it with the Old Testament. Many passages were read, pondered, meditated upon. One made a definite impression: the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, eleventh verse, last clause: "*By knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.*" Here was the only mention of that phrase, "*My righteous servant,*" I said to myself: "Who is that *righteous servant*?" I argued: "Whoever that '*righteous servant*' of Jehovah is, of one thing I am sure: he is not Israel, because the prophet declares Israel to be a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a leprous nation. *The righteous servant* of Jehovah must be One who is holy. If it isn't Israel, who could it be?" I decided it must be Isaiah. But in Isaiah 6 I found it could never be the prophet Isaiah for he confesses himself to be a guilty sinner and a man of unclean lips in God's sight.

"*My righteous servant.*" Who could it be? Then I began to study the context of the 53rd Chapter and in Isaiah 50:6 I found, "*I gave My back to the smiters.*" I pondered that: Who gave his back to the smiters? In the beginning of the chapter it says, "*Thus saith Jehovah.*" Jehovah is the only speaker in the chapter. Jehovah gave his back to the smiters? Had God a back? When and why was it smitten? Who smote it? Further I read: "*Who gave his cheeks to them plucked off the hair.*" And still further: "*I hid not My face from shame and spitting.*" What did all this mean? Who had been so abused? When? Why? Did Jehovah have all these human characteristics? I studied more and more various prophetic utterances. In Psalm 110:1 it is written: "*The Lord said to my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.*" Here was David himself, speaking of his own seed and calling Him "*Lord.*" How did He get up there? Why didn't God specify? Why didn't He speak so plainly to Israel that every Jew could understand?

In confusion I decided to begin at the first chapter of Isaiah and read the book through. I was stopped at the ninth: "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government*

shall be upon His shoulders; His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” Here was a most incomprehensible thing!

I was faced with the doctrine of the Trinity. We Jews have a popular monotheistic slogan: “*Sh’ma Isroel, Adonai, Eloheynu, Adonai, Echod.*” The word “*echod*” means *one*. Upon that word the doctrine of unity of Jehovah is rooted and grounded, the entire philosophy of Judaism is based. Taught by the rabbis for ages, that word “*echod*” means *absolute unity*.

Now I could not believe it; my teaching was wrong!

I began to study the word, and I discovered it meant, not absolute unity, but **composite unity**. Let me illustrate: Adam and Eve became one flesh; the Hebrew for *one flesh is bosor Echod*, a **composite unity**. Moses sent twelve spies into Canaan, and they returned bearing a gigantic bunch of grapes. That cluster of grapes is called in Hebrew *Eschol-Echod*. With hundreds of grapes on the stem it could not have been an absolute unity; they are called in Hebrew “**one cluster.**” **Composite unity**. There was an uprising of the tribe of Dan, and their carnalities disgraced Jehovah and His name and character. The other tribes rose in rebellion and asked God which of them should go forth first to fight the Danites. God answered: “*Let the tribe of Judah go first.*” That is what I want you to see: at that time Judah was composed of 700,000 fighting men, and they “**stood up as one man**” (In Hebrew: *Ish Echod*). Here again **composite unity**: thousands **acted as one!**

These and other Scriptures showed conclusively that **Echod cannot be an absolute unity**.

God revealed Himself to Abraham as Almighty (**El Shaddai**). The first letter of this word is “*Schin*”: it has **three strokes joined as one**. This letter is on the top of the phylacteries and on the casing of the door posts. *Jews have always taken this letter as symbolical of the “Godhead” because it had three strokes (one for each Person in the Trinity), joined together as one, to show unity.* But another question troubled me: if He who was on the cross was truly an incarnation of “**Jehovah**”, *then who was in Heaven?* I turned to the eighteenth of Genesis. Abraham had *three visitors; two angels and the third* he addressed fourteen times as “**Jehovah.**” Later two went away, but the third said to Abraham:

“Shall I hide from Abraham that which I shall do? I am going down to Sodom and Gomorrah to see whether to see whether or not they have done altogether according to the report which has come to Me. If not I will know I am going to destroy the cities.”

Abraham interceded for them, the Lord went His way, and Abraham went home. Now here is the point: We find Jehovah inspecting the moral condition of Sodom and Gomorrah and refusing to spare them because not even ten righteous citizens could be found within their borders. But in this same chapter we have this statement: *“Then Jehovah rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from ‘Jehovah’ out of Heaven.”* How and why could there be two Jehovah’s, one walking the streets of Sodom and another in heavenly places? It must be one omnipresent Jehovah! Then if that were true, He could simultaneously both in Heaven and with and in Jesus on the cross.

Another problem succeeds it: *“Why is the name ‘Jesus’ never mentioned in Hebrew Scriptures?”* I studied this question.

Imagine my surprise when I found that 275 years before Christ, King Ptolemy Philadelphus summoned men from Palestine, and bade them translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek vernacular. They took the Pentateuch first and when they came to the name *“Joshua”* they translated it *the book of “Yesous”*, written with a *circumflex over it to show there had been a suppression of Hebrew that could not be expressed in Greek*. When Joshua went into Canaan with the other eleven spies, he was called *“Yehoshua” (Jehovah is the Saviour)*. That is exactly what the word **“Jesus”** means.

I could hold out in unbelief no longer; I was convinced of **the truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus**. I cried:

“Lord, I believe that Thou as Jehovah Yesous hast made the atonement for me. I believe that Jehovah Yesous died for me. I believe Thou hast made provision for me! I believe Thou hast the ability and power! From henceforth I will publicly confess Yeshua as my Saviour and Lord! Thus after months of searching I was convinced that Jesus was the righteous servant of Jehovah (Jehovah-tsidkenu), “The Lord our righteousness!”

On March 30, 1904, I publicly confessed Christ in the Central Baptist Church, and having been licensed to preach, doors readily opened to me. I was persuaded to enter Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Ky., from which I graduated after a year of study. Mr. Icenbarger, at my

request, called a council of Dayton Association of ministers, and 35 Baptist pastors assembled in Central Church questioned me relative to my personal faith and doctrine. My ordination took place that evening, my first call came from Ada, Ohio, where I served as pastor for five years. From there The New Covenant Mission of Pittsburgh, of which Maurice Ruben was founder and superintendent for many years, called me to be their pastor-evangelist. After two and a half years of this ministry, I was convinced that God was calling me to a wider sphere in preaching the Gospel to both Jew and Gentile, depending upon the Lord for the support of myself and family. In 1913, we returned to Ada, the little flock over which I had been under-shepherd for five years, being very dear to our hearts.

I started out in Bible teaching and God was ever faithful. Were I to write of all the manifestations of His goodness and grace, it would fill a book. Critical operations, publication of my books, supplying all our needs, He never failed to care and provide. **In Christ I have found my only abiding comfort for every sorrow.**

As a rabbi I had yearned to give the bereaved some hope on which to lean, but how could I give that which I did not possess? I gave sympathy, but in times of ‘heart aching grief’ and tragedy, sympathy is of little comfort. But to the heartbroken how satisfying and glorious are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.”

And again:

“Verily, verily I say unto you: He that heareth My Word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath (possess now) everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but IS passed from death unto life.”

There is but **one eternal life**. There is but **one source of eternal life**: that is **God’s Son**. What a great and glorious message we, His redeemed ones, are commissioned to deliver today.