

The Limits of the Exercise of Freedom

I believe with a wholehearted faith that the covenant mission should be pursued under conditions that fully respect every individual image of God. After all, if the means contradict the ends, the ends cannot be achieved. Therefore, the covenant is based on freedom and the right to choose for one's self. The dignity of choice includes the right to be fully informed and educated, to freely associate with others, to create friendship, families and associations to advance every cause, to participate in selecting who shall lead in the tasks of life and government and society, to follow and practice the religion of one's choice, to voluntarily follow and learn from

whatever models one chooses. All these freedoms must be exercised with full respect for one's own and one's fellow human beings' rights.

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Therefore, there should be covenantal restraints in all exercise of power, consciousness, relationship and freedom. These restraints are best accepted voluntarily but may be legitimately incorporated into law as well as into political, economic, social and legal structures.

I believe with a wholehearted faith that the Jewish people is called into covenant not by its own merit but by the gracious love of God; that Jews, individually and collectively, are chosen to serve as teachers, as models and as co-workers with humanity in the task of perfecting the world; that Jews have already served disproportionately and in distinguished fashion in these roles but that the task is not yet finished.

I believe with a wholehearted faith that other peoples, individually and collectively, are called not by their own merits but by the gracious love of God to be partners, to serve as teachers, models and co-workers in the covenantal task. All people, including Jews, should be allowed and helped to freely carry on their mission in mutual love and understanding. Everyone should be educated, inspired, corrected in accordance with their infinite dignity.

The Work of the Covenant Continues

I believe with a wholehearted faith that in this generation the Jewish people was totally assaulted with endless cruelty and put to mass death under conditions of systematic and total degradation. Yet, neither the people nor its divine partner yielded hope or lost faith in the promise of final perfection. Rather they renewed the covenant, increased life, reasserted the infinite value of

each and every image of God, took power in the land of Israel and elsewhere to advance the cause of life and the dignity of human beings starting with their own but extending outward. By so doing, Jews renewed their classic role as teachers, models and co-workers. As is to be expected of human beings, Jews' behavior in these roles was flawed. But they have been worthy of their covenantal task which is yet unfinished.

I believe with a wholehearted faith that this is an appropriate time for all people to respond to the mass death and inflicted degradation of this century by increasing their efforts to perfect the world. This includes reviewing their own traditions, faiths, cultures, systems and institutions and, out of mutual love, removing all sources of hatred, indignity, denials of infinite value, equality and uniqueness of the other, intentional or unintentional. It is a time to work together to turn freedom, power and affluence into blessings for all. In this time, the Jewish people has a blessed opportunity to serve as a light unto the nations as well as to be illuminated by the example and inspiration of others. Acting together, this generation can make its contribution to insure the final triumph of life.

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A legacy of belief

Ronnie Horn

I believe that in the beginning there was chaos, and when light appeared, order limited chaos, but did not overcome it. Light was separated from dark, the present from time and life from the inanimate. But because differentiation is dynamic--change, possibility, and therefore free will, co-exist with order and chaos persists.

In the framework of these necessary conditions, I believe that God is the ever-present potential, in nature and humanity, to sustain order's challenge to chaos and to support and nourish life. Despite accident, disease, confusion, hatred and violence, I see God at work in the surprise of unexpected kindness; in skill, reason, righteousness, love and mercy; in the gifts of genius and the shock of beauty; and in the abundance, tenacity and resilience of life itself.

Yet God, as potential, can only resist chaos with the force that we give order and creativity in our lives, or that civilizations give these qualities in history. In the Book of Job, God may have "laid the earth's foundations", but if Job had not gone back to work, risked love again and dared parenthood, God could not have restored Job's family or fortune.

The Nature and Content of Our Covenant

I believe that human dignity, uniqueness and free will are distorted not only by unjust, oppressive authority but by the chaos of poverty, illness, fear and irrational disconnections of behavior and consequence. For this reason, the Jewish people maintains a covenant with its children--a 3,500-year-old teaching system that transmits a core of tested, evolving insights about the reality of and potential for order in the universe, and about our capacity and obligation to sustain and expand that order in daily life.

This covenant is, at heart, a narrative communicated in part by ritual, and passed with accretions and changes from generation to generation.

In the story, the life-sustaining order we call "God" entered history through the consciousness of one people. I believe there are other such partnerships, but in this one, we are the tale-tellers, discerning the pattern, and we are the actors playing it out. As we choose life with justice and compassion, order will triumph; when chaos breaks through, either without collusion or despite our best efforts, order itself suffers with us. Yet, if we fail to keep the story alive and to teach it to the next generation, the order that gives history its meaning and purpose will be forgotten. We cannot let that happen.

The Locus of Authority Outside the Self

I believe that every Rosh Hashanah, as Isaac lays before us on the altar, we relearn in our blood and bones that no external authority is absolute, not even God as understood by Abraham before that moment.

All that we have between our poised arm and the triumph of chaos is our own free will, our capacity to test and evaluate the demands of authority from whatever source, and our instinctive expectation that true authority will conserve and protect life and help us make sense of the world.

The site of this lesson became the foundation of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; and the place of *Hineni*, acceptance of personal responsibility, the center of our people's spiritual and communal identity.

The Diaspora

I believe that when we speak of "the Diaspora", we are declaring that wherever we are, if we are not in Israel, we're not in the center, not yet home. To be honest, I

live only partly in this "Diaspora", and don't have a word for the other Jewish place in which I find myself.

Throughout Jewish history, creative religious development has sprung from economic, social and political change, and in this generation, our covenantal teaching system has collided with circumstances that are genuinely new for Jews everywhere. Israel, only 45 years old, is still working out its synthesis of Jewish values and sovereign national power. Jews of the former Soviet Union, after generations of repression, are staring at the feast of freedom like the child at the Seder who lacks vocabulary even to frame a question. And American Jews are confronting not only the challenge of transmitting the

covenant story in an open, secular society, but the necessity, given new understandings of women's roles, sexuality and the power of medical science, of redrawing the very lines that define our concepts of order.

Perhaps we need a new paradigm, for as all three communities struggle to affirm life, oppose chaos and continue the covenant story, the Jewish place in which I find myself--though outside of Israel--does not feel peripheral.

Death and the End of Days

I believe that the finale of the traditional covenant narrative--that, in the "end of days", order will triumph over chaos and death--works metaphorically to extend and frame history as an *eruv*, on Shabbat, extends the boundaries of the single home to embrace the community. These images ask us to look beyond our immediate concerns; to broaden our vision of space and time; and to comprehend the common human struggle as progressive, purposeful and ultimately unified.

Yet, beautiful as they are, these are not my stories: the *eruv* because I am not part of a community that accepts halakha's circumference as binding; the "end of days" because I believe that aging, death and chaos are intrinsic to life. Earthquakes will destroy; rogue cells will metastasize. That is the world.

I believe one can accept death, but genuinely grieve violent and premature deaths and personal loss; accept the reality of chaos, but not havoc and suffering. These are tough distinctions: to love life fully, hate its impediments, and respect the finitude that makes every day of health and peace precious.

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