



Law. He violated it. And yet he insisted that that was the right thing to do. His aim was to fulfill the whole Torah, and yet, because of personal reasons, he did not practice this Mitzvah.

What would Maimonides have done had he been a rationalizer? Why, with his genius, he could have proved a thousand times over that it is not necessary to live in Palestine. His immense fame and authority would have ensured its acceptance if he said so. Yet he refused to use Reason to justify himself. He would not make his Reason subservient to his own subjective wants and desires. He was a rationalist. He would think first, no matter what its effect on himself, and, whether or not he ultimately was going to be able to conform to it, he was going to use that reason as his guide for the ideal way of living.

It requires the greatness of a Maimonides to do that, to say that what is right is right, regardless of whether I am doing it or not. I wonder how many of us can say that we follow a similar course. Take that very same problem of living in Israel. Before 1948, America's greatest Zionists preached the Zionist doctrine of YISHUV BRETZ YISRAEL, and believed in it implicitly. They were in America only as long as it was necessary to spread the Zionist doctrine. They never expected to have a Satate - and a struggling one - as early as 1948. Yet it was there. And they were faced by the problem: your Reason, as you have expressed it all along, demands that you pack up and settle in Israel; your stomach and wife and business prefer America. And so, overnight, there developed a whole philosophy of Zionism which maintains that Israel is a sort of development house or slum-clearance project for underprivileged Jews, not meant to apply to us. Had these people had some of the greatness of the character of Maimonides, they would have said, yes, I should go there, if I don't I'm wrong, but personal conditions make it impossible, and while these conditions are an explanation, they are not an excuse; I am wrong, I should be in Israel. That would have supported the supremacy of Reason.

Take the matter of Kashruth. There are people who know why Kshruth should be observed. They have been brought up with it, know its religious significance, appreciate its disciplinary value, and understand that G-d's Law should be observed, and that the reason for it is certainly not "health". Yet the social ladder's co-climbers are gentiles or sophisticated Jews who laugh at Dietary Laws. Or, it's just too difficult, or too expensive. And so they don't observe it. Do they say, I should be Kosher, and I wish I were able to? No. They say that we have microscopes and antibiotics to fight trichinosis, and that's the reason for Kashruth, so why bother. Or, they keep Kosher at home, but have not got sufficient spine to do so on the outside. So, instead of admitting doing something wrong, they get themselves a man, who becomes the leader of a group called Reconstructionism, and this little man tells them that it's quite alright and just the thing to do, since the whole business is only a matter of "civilization" and an "expression of Jewish loyalty". That is not Reconstructionism. That is, if we may so call it, Rationalizationism. At any rate, it is anything but Jewish.

I think that that the main difference between Orthodoxy and the other Convenience Cults is simply this, that we believe in Judaism, and believe we should practice. We believe that it is difficult to be perfect in it, and that when we fail to observe, we sin, but it still is right to observe. Whereas the others, when conditions make it inconvenient for them, they violate Judaism, and then change their Religion to fit their practice. As a result, they are always righteous, pious Jews who never, never do wrong. It is convenient to change your moral, ethical and religious codes so easily! We Orthodox Jews do not change our ideals even if our practice fails. In the language of the Rosh Hashanah prayers, we are not AZKEI PANIM who say TZADDIKIM ANACHNU VE'LO CHATANU, that we are righteous and have never sinned, rather ANACHNU VA'AVOSSEINU CHATTANU, we and our parents who trained us thus, we both have sinned. We refuse to change our conception of Good and Evil so that we always come out winning, the saints and not the sinners.

Only this past week one man challenged me, saying, "Rabbi, you speak of Orthodoxy and the necessity to join an Orthodox Synagogue. Yet, tell me, how many of your members are Orthodox Jews? How many observe the Shabbos and eat only Kosher and daven 3 times a day?"

It is a question I get on the average of three times a week. Many of you here tonight may have asked me that question. And you know my answer: pray tell me, how Conservative are the Conservative Jews? Do they, by and large, attend at least Saturday Services - and the same goes for Reform? Do they refrain from ~~we~~ business on the Sabbath? How many refrain from smoking?

But that is only one answer. There is something much more important. And that is, that the member of ~~or~~ worshipper in an Orthodox Synagogue knows that the Torah is TORAS EMESS, a Torah of Truth, that by right he should not ~~work~~ work on the Sabbath, that he should not violate any one of the laws of Judaism. AS LONG AS HE RECOGNIZES THAT FACT, AS LONG AS HE HAS A HEALTHY GUILT-~~FEELING~~FEELING, HE CAN STILL HOPE TO CHANGE SOME DAY AND TO OBSERVE FULLY. He refuses to rationalize and change the law to justify his waywardness. It is simply a matter of intellectual honesty. Honesty - - the proper use of Reason - - tells him that thus is the only kind of genuine Judaism, and honesty tells him that what he is doing is wrong. Rationalization - - dishonesty - - tells him to concoct a new kind of ersatz Judaism to make him appear as a TZADDIK ASHER LO CHATA, a perfect, pious and absolutely infallible Jew. If I work, don't say I'm wrong - say, rather, that in this day and age it is permitted, and therefore I'm just.

No, every sincere member of an Orthodox Synagogue knows that in some way he is doing some things wrong - and that goes for the ~~Abbis~~ Abbis as well. To carve out a Convenience Religion to make me appear as a saint is blasphemous, dishonest, presumptuous and a clear-cut case of rationalization.

The Orthodox Jew, like Maimonides before him, does not change the Halachah merely to satisfy his own wrong-doing. He is not always the saint. He is a sinner too. BUT - - THE REDEEMING FEATURE IS THAT HE RECOGNIZES THE FACT THAT HE IS SINNING, AND THERE IS THUS SOME HOPE THAT SOME DAY HE WILL CHANGE, SINCE HIS RELIGION, HIS IDEALS, ARE ALWAYS THERE TO REMIND HIM THAT HE'S NOT PERFECT AND STILL MUST CLIMB HIGHER ON THE SPIRITUAL LADDER OF LIFE.

Thus, Rationalism leaves room for growth and development. Rationalization discourages anything but the status quo.

The life of Maimonides, his greatest Halachic work - the Code - and his greatest philosophic work - the Guide - have thus taught us that the way of Jewish life is to use the Torah, the Code of living, as our Guide. This great luminary of 750 years ago thus taught not only by word of mouth, not only by pen and pencil, but by life and living as well.

If this is all we can learn from Maimonides, his life ~~has been worthwhile,~~ will have enriched ~~others,~~ ours. We will have learnt that Reason and Faith and Torah are not here to serve as convenient excuses for us; that instead, it is the mission and fulfillment of our lives to mold our characters and way of living in conformity with them. By so doing and so living can we of 1955 share in the greatness that was Maimonides.