1

Exile and Return and the Response of the Torah

Reorganizing the Past to Face the Crisis of an Uncertain Future

The decades from 538 to 450 B.C.E. marked the period of the generative crisis that produced the initial systemic statement of Judaism, the Torah, also known as the Pentateuch or as the Five Books of Moses. The Hebrew word *torah* is translated "Instruction." The concept of "Torah" or "instruction" would replicate itself in nearly all subsequent Judaic religious systems of the social order, whether continuous with the Pentateuch, as in the case of the Mishnah, Talmud, and Midrash of rabbinic Judaism, or later. The Torah drew upon older traditions of pre-exilic Israel but came to formation and closure in response to the destruction of the first temple and the exile of the political classes of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. and the subsequent initial return from exile around 538 B.C.E. The Torah reached its final form starting with those who returned to Zion beginning in 538 B.C.E., and came to define what we now call Judaism by around 450 B.C.E., when Ezra proclaimed it the foundation-document of what would be the restored temple of Jerusalem (completed ca. 415 B.C.E.).

The process that yielded the Torah was precipitated not by the destruction of 586 B.C.E., but by the restoration from exile beginning about 538 B.C.E. The period of the formation and closure is in two parts: the first, between the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C.E. and the return to Zion in 538 B.C.E., a time of despair; and second, from 538 B.C.E. to the closure of the Pentateuch by Ezra in about 450 B.C.E., a time of renewal. In the former

period, the temple lay in ruins, and the Israelites in Babylonian exile settled down for a wait of indeterminate length. Whether or not they could conceive of returning to Zion is difficult to say; they had no reason, while Babylonia ran the world, to think that they might soon go back to the lost land. But when the Persian world-ruler, Cyrus, conquered Babylonia and restored exiled peoples to their lands, including Israel to the land of Israel, the idea of a return to Zion, lost a half-century earlier, seemed a practical possibility.

Now it was in that latter period in particular, beginning with the return in 538 B.C.E. and ending when Ezra proclaimed the Torah in 450, that Israel found itself facing a profound question, one that could have yielded despair. It was this: if Israel had once lost the land and returned, could the people lose the land again? Then, what defines the condition of its enduring tenure, explaining how to prevent another exile and assuring that the present return would endure? What are the rules, and what is the significance of this sequence of events? For the situation of the people Israel in the land of Israel had been transformed from a given to a gift, an immutable fact of nature into a transient condition, a variable of politics.

What is meant by "from a given to a gift?" The nation restored to its land may be compared to a condemned man reprieved from the scaffold. To such as he, nothing loses its astonishing quality. Nothing ever can look the same as it did before. Life cannot be taken for granted, as a given. It becomes a gift, each day an unanticipated surprise. Everything then demands explanation, but uncertainty reigns.

Returning to Zion beginning in 538 B.C.E. Israel thus found itself in the position of the condemned man accorded a wordless reprieve and removed from the scaffold. For how long? The Torah answered that question and did so explicitly through the story that it narrated and the laws and prophecies that it vouchsafed. Responding to that uncertain moment, the Pentateuch of Ezra, attributed to Moses, resolved the crisis of an uncertain future. The unsettling events experienced by Israel in the aftermath of 586 B.C.E. and then 538 B.C.E. were seen as part of a larger pattern. Those happenings were transformed into the paradigm of loss of the land of Israel and restoration to that land—exile and return—that would characterize Judaisms as they would take shape for the next two and a half millennia, and as competing Judaic religious systems continue to thrive today. That is why the analogy—the condemned man reprieved for no clear reason and at risk still of being hanged—captures the situation of Israel after the return to Zion in 538 B.C.E. prior to the formation of the Torah-book. The Pentateuch transformed inchoate traditions into a cogent, rational system capable of solving a critical problem of Israel's existence in the mid-fifth century B.C.E.

Consider the crisis of hope faced by those who returned to Zion from 538 B.C.E. forward: What now? For since the land of Israel had once been lost, could it not be lost again? Holding the land and losing it (again)

was a possibility scarcely thinkable before 586 B.C.E. (except by the pre-exilic prophets, and then perhaps after the fact) that became entirely plausible from 538 B.C.E. The return, like the condemned man's reprieve, carried with it no terms or conditions other than those set by the pagan Persian king of kings, Cyrus. Anything could happen, and no one knew why. Accordingly, the critical issue was: how shall we act so as never again to lose the land? Is this reprieve only so that the executioner can get a longer rope, or has he, indeed, been pardoned? The Pentateuch came to closure to answer the questions Israel needed to ask: for how long would Israel retain Zion, and what were the conditions of its reprieve?

For Israel, therefore, the return to Zion raised a question that turned a chronic complaint into an acute crisis. The prophets had long insisted that Israel's history tracks its moral condition. God punishes Israel for sin. Why Israel, elect of God, suffers defeat and disaster at the hands of idolaters was thus a question long ago answered. The prophets' explanation of the defeat, destruction, and exile as a consequence of Israel's sin had now to extend to the return to Zion. Then, more to the point, how long could Israel hope to possess the land once lost and then recovered—therefore forever after held in an uncertain grasp, with open arms? It is that uncertainty, that crisis of an uncertain future, that defines the context in which Judaism made its initial—and definitive—statement in the Pentateuch. There Israel was afforded the answer to the urgent question of exile and return. In the Five Books of Moses, therefore, Judaism reorganized records of the past to face the crisis of an uncertain future.

What was the Pentateuch's response to the crisis of the return to Zion and the uncertainty that accompanied the return? The Pentateuch, formed through the amalgamation of a variety of received narratives, laws, prophecies, and other written and oral traditions, explicitly answered the question: God has bound himself to a covenant with Israel. Israel was commanded to form an abode worthy of God's presence, in the land that had vomited forth prior, unworthy inhabitants and had been set aside by God for Israel. If Israel observes the conditions of the covenant as set forth in this Torah, it will retain the land and prosper in it. If, as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 and other passages state in so many words, Israel violates the terms of the agreement, God will punish the people by sending them into exile from the land. But with repentance and atonement comes the possibility of restoration.

The Torah thus set forth the terms and conditions of the covenant between Israel and God concerning the land. This it did by organizing the received writings of pre-exilic Israel into a sustained, continuous narrative of Israel's corporate life and history—all of them recast to take account of current events and shaped to the governing paradigm. In this exemplary pattern of Israel's relationship to its land, Israel's past was reorganized to face the crisis of an uncertain future. Specifically, the rules that are shown to govern from Creation forward would set forth the

terms and conditions of holding the land. So the key was to discern the pattern exhibited by unfolding events. Then with the past teaching lessons, the future would present no crisis, only opportunity.

What was this pattern? Judaism treated the tales of Adam and Israel as corresponding. Specifically, the paradigm encompassed the genus, humanity, and the species, Israel and non-Israel. Each of the species conformed to the same pattern, one of sin and exile. Both were shown to have undergone the same experience of exile by reason of sin. But Israel now had the opportunity of return: the Torah and its laws made all the difference. Adam did not know about the power of repentance to overcome sin and bring about reconciliation and restoration. Through the Torah, Israel did. So by fulfilling the Torah, Israel would retain the land that it held on the Torah's conditions and stipulations.

We see this construction of matters through the formulation of the later rabbinic sages. They not only mastered the details of Scripture but also grasped the pattern and possessed a conception of the whole. They in so many words compared Israel's experience of loss of the land to Adam's experience of loss of Eden. They found in the Pentateuch two corresponding stories: the prologue representing humanity in the person of Adam, and the main narrative concerning Israel, Adam's surrogate. Here is how they read the loss of the land in the context of the loss of Eden, Israel's story in the setting of Adam's:

Genesis Rabbah XIX:ix.2

A. R. Abbahu in the name of R. Yosé bar Haninah: "It is written, 'But they [Israel] are like a Man [Adam], they have transgressed the covenant' (Hos. 6:7).

B. "'They are like a Man,' specifically, like the first Man. [We shall now compare the story of the first Man in Eden with the story of Israel in its land.]

C. "'In the case of the first Man, I brought him into the garden of Eden, I commanded him, he violated my commandment, I judged him to be sent away and driven out, but I mourned for him, saying "How . . ." [which begins the book of Lamentations, hence stands for a lament, but which, as we just saw, also is written with the consonants that also yield, 'Where are you'].

D. "'I brought him into the garden of Eden,' as it is written, 'And the Lord God took the Man and put him into the garden of Eden' (Gen. 2:15).

E. "'I commanded him,' as it is written, 'And the Lord God commanded . . .' (Gen. 2:16).

F. "'And he violated my commandment,' as it is written, 'Did you eat from the tree concerning which I commanded you' (Gen. 3:11).

G. "'I judged him to be sent away,' as it is written, 'And the Lord God sent him from the garden of Eden' (Gen. 3:23).

H. "'And I judged him to be driven out.' 'And he drove out the Man' (Gen. 3:24).

I. "'But I mourned for him, saying, "How . . . "' 'And he said to him, "Where are you"' (Gen. 3:9), and the word for 'where are you' is written, 'How . . .'

J. "'So too in the case of his descendants [God continues to speak], I brought them into the land of Israel, I commanded them, they violated my commandment, I judged them to be sent out and driven away but I mourned for them, saying, "How . . . "'

K. "'I brought them into the land of Israel.' 'And I brought you into the land of Carmel' (Jer. 2:7).

L. "'I commanded them.' 'And you, command the children of Israel' (Ex. 27:20). 'Command the children of Israel' (Lev. 24:2).

M. "'They violated my commandment.' 'And all Israel have violated your Torah' (Dan. 9:11).

N. "'I judged them to be sent out.' 'Send them away, out of my sight and let them go forth' (Jer 15:1).

O. "' . . . and driven away.' 'From my house I shall drive them' (Hos. 9:15).

P. "'But I mourned for them, saying, "How . . ." How has the city sat solitary, that was full of people' (Lam. 1:1)."

This view of the whole then asks us to read the Pentateuch not as a collection of laws and stories, poems and prophecies, but as a coherent and accessible paradigm, a patterned account of what it means to be "Israel." And it invites reflection on the difference between Adam and Israel—that is to say, how Israel can recover the land in a way that Adam could never recover Eden.

The rabbinic sages later on would take up the narrative of the Torah and recast it into an account of the norms of Israel's social order. Their recapitulation of the Torah's story regulates relationships between Israelites and corporate Israel, among Israelites in their units of propagation and production, and between corporate Israel and the ever-present, always-sentient God. The details coalesce to yield a clear picture of an entire social order, its relationships and its points of stability and order. Rabbinic Judaism undertakes to realize in the everyday and here and now of the

Jews' communal existence the imperatives set forth in the Torah for the formation of God's abode on earth.

Their perspicacity in the reading of Scripture identifies for us how in the Judaic context the Pentateuch forms a coherent reply to the acutely urgent question facing the generation to whom in 450 B.C.E. the Pentateuch was addressed. The answer of the Pentateuch to that question is: Israel holds the land *conditionally.* God in the Torah has stipulated the conditions under which Israel can keep the land, and, he has specified the reasons that explain why those that were there before Israel lost it. These are made explicit in Leviticus 26. And the rabbinic sages, reading the story whole and complete, formed of the Pentateuch a design for Israel's social order, detailing the ways in which the kingdom of priests and holy people could form an abode worthy of God's presence in its midst. That is how the past was reorganized to meet the crisis of an uncertain future. The paradigm of exile and return began in the mind of the priestly sector of Israel and did not arise from, and merely describe the facts of, a perfectly secular experience of going into exile and returning home. The whole was a reconstruction and act of imagination.

But I have gotten ahead of my story. As we shall now see, what happened in 586 B.C.E. and after, and what the paradigm fabricated out of what happened, do not correspond entirely. Scripture said, in both the Torah and the prophetic-historical books, that Israel suffered, atoned, attained reconciliation, and renewed the covenant with God. What the Pentateuch added was the idea that the renewal of the covenant of the Torah, the covenant of Sinai, is signified by the return to Zion. Now, as I shall explain, only a minority of the people, Israel, in fact had undergone these experiences. But the Israelite system of the Torah made normative that experience of exile and return as the realization of Israel's alienation and reconciliation.

The Israelite system expressed by the Five Books of Moses as well as some of the prophetic books selected as events only a narrow sample of what had happened, and imparted to that selection of events meanings actually pertinent to the experience of only a few. In its original statement, the system of the Torah after 586 B.C.E. did not merely describe things that had actually happened, normal events so to speak, but selected among events. In actuality some Israelites went into exile, some did not; some of the exiles would return to Zion, but many did not. The selected events were thus rendered normative and mythic. The Pentateuch then turned an experience of part of the people into the only paradigm of experience.

Let me spell out how the first crisis and consequent response created Judaism—the Judaism that would privilege Scripture, and within Scripture, the Pentateuch and the social experience raised to the norm in that writing.

The Turning Point of 538–450 B.C.E.

The way of life of the Judaism that set the norm for the Second Temple period was that holy way of life depicted in the Five Books of Moses, the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch encompasses four originally distinct sources. Three—J (the Yahwist, where "the Lord" is God's name), E (the Elohist, where "God" is God's name), and D (the Deuteronomist, the account in the model of Deuteronomy)—derive from the period before 586 B.C.E. One, P (the priestly strand) came to closure in the period afterward. From our perspective, the Judaic system represented by the Pentateuch came into being when the several sources became one—that is, the Five Books of Moses as we now know them. And that work was accomplished by priestly redactors in the time of Ezra.

While, as I have emphasized, the Judaism represented by the Pentateuch of ca. 450 B.C.E. drew abundant materials from the period before 586 B.C.E., such as the Yahwist's and Deuteronomist's writings, the statement that the Torah of Moses made all together derived from and expressed the viewpoint, both in proportion and emphasis, of the priesthood. That is why a large portion of the Pentateuch devotes time and attention to the matter of the cult, that is to say, the centrality of sacrifice, the founding of the priesthood and its rules, and the importance of the temple in Jerusalem. That further explains why many of the texts in the Torah are aimed at explaining the origin, in the patriarchal period, of the locations of various cultic centers prior to the centralization of the cult in Jerusalem, the beginnings of the priesthood, the care and feeding of priests, the beginnings and rules of the sacrificial system, the contention between priestly castes, e.g., Levites and priests, and other matters. The Pentateuch in this way laid emphasis upon the service of God through sacrifice in the temple, conducted by the priests, and upon Israel's living of a holy way of life as a "kingdom of priests and a holy people"—all in accord with God's message to Moses at Sinai. But, of course, "God's message to Moses at Sinai" has effectively come to mean "the priestly redactors' message to Israel in Babylonia." There the priests drew together the elements of the received picture and reshaped them into the fairly coherent set of rules and narratives we now know as the Pentateuch.

Although making ample use of ancient texts, the framers of the Pentateuch as we now have it flourished in Babylonia after 586 B.C.E. and conceived as their systemic teleology the return to Zion and the rebuilding of the temple—hence the centrality of the tabernacle and its cult in the wilderness-narratives. So the Judaism of the priests imparts to the scripture of that first setting its ultimate meaning: response to historical disaster followed by (to the priests' mind) unprecedented triumph. Their vision is characterized as follows by Humphreys.

> In the priests' narrative the chosen people are last seen as pilgrims moving through alien land toward a goal to be fulfilled in another time and place, and this is the vision, drawn from the ancient story of their past, that the priests now hold out to the scattered sons and daughters of old Israel. They too are exiles encamped for a time in an alien land, and they too must focus their hopes on the promise ahead. Like the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness, they must avoid setting roots in the land through which they pass, for Diaspora is not to become their permanent condition, and regulations must be adopted to facilitate this. They must resist assimilation into the world into which they are now dispersed, because hope and heart and fundamental identity lay in the future. Thus, the priestly document not only affirms Yahweh's continuing authority and action in the lives of his people but offers them a pattern for life that will ensure them a distinct identity.[1]

The net effect of the priests' pentateuchal vision of Israel, that is, its worldview seen in the aggregate, lays stress on the separateness and the holiness of Israel, all the while pointing to dangers of pollution by the other, the outsider. The way of life stresses distinguishing traits of an Israel that is distinct from, and threatened by, the outsider. The fate of the nation, moreover, depends upon the loyalty of the people in their everyday life to the requirements of their covenant with God, so history forms the barometer of the health of the nation. In these ways the several segments of the earlier traditions of Israel were drawn together so as to make the point peculiarly pertinent to Israel in exile, in that very same place from which Abram had departed in his quest for the promised land at the very beginning of the family-people that became Israel. It follows that the original Judaic system, the one set forth by the Pentateuch, answered the urgent issue of exile with the self-evident response of return. The question was not to be avoided, nor was the answer to be doubted. The center of the system, then, lay in the covenant, the contract that told Israel the rules that would govern: Keep these rules and you will not again suffer as you have suffered; violate them and you will. At the heart of the covenant was the call for Israel to form a kingdom of priests and a holy people.

If we ask ourselves for a single passage to express the priests' Judaism, we look to the book of Leviticus, which concerns the priesthood above all, and its version of the covenant, which is at Lev 19:1–18 (RSV translation):

> And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to all the congregation of the people of Israel, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.
>
> "Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father and you shall keep my Sabbaths; I am the Lord your God.

[1] Lee H. Humphreys, *Crisis and Story: Introduction to the Old Testament* (Palo Alto: Mayfield, 1979), 217.

> "Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the Lord your God.
>
> "When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the morrow, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned with fire. If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination, it will not be accepted, and every one who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned a holy thing of the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from his people.
>
> "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field to its very border, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner. I am the Lord your God.
>
> "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. And you shall not swear by my name falsely and so profane the name of your God; I am the Lord. You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God; I am the Lord.
>
> "You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go up and down as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand forth against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord.
>
> "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason with your neighbor, lest you bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord."

This mixture of rules we should regard as cultic, as to sacrifice; moral, as to support of the poor; ethical, as to right-dealing; and above all religious, as to "being holy for I the Lord your God am holy." The pastiche all together portrays a complete and whole society: its worldview, holiness in the likeness of God; its way of life, an everyday life of sanctification through the making of distinctions; its Israel, a people distinct from all others and called *Israel.* But, as we know from other writings of the time, the Priestly Code conceived of a very special *Israel,* an Israel characterized by genealogical "purity." That meant, in this postexilic context, separation from not only the nations but also from those Israelites who had not undergone the experience of exile and return to Zion.

The definition of who is Israel lay at the foundation of the system, which was shaped to answer that urgent question of social explanation. For along with the revelation of the Torah of "Moses," Ezra insisted that the Israelites divorce the wives they had taken from the "peoples of the

land." Now, as a matter of fact, the peoples of the land were none other than descendants of those Israelites who had not gone off into exile in Babylonia. They had remained behind, and had not undergone the paradigmatic experience of exile and return. *Israel* was comprised, in the priests' version, only by those who had gone into exile.

The book of Leviticus contains a clear statement of the consequence of violating the covenant, and that is geared to the events of the recent past:

> "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season. . . . But if you will not hearken to me and will not do all these commandments . . . I will do this to you: I will appoint over you sudden terror . . . and you shall sow your seed in vain for your enemies shall eat it. . . . Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate while you are in your enemies' land. . . ." (Lev 26:3, 34).

The Judaism of the priests therefore defined as its generative question the loss of the land—and its eventual restoration. It ignored the Jews in Babylonia. It failed to acknowledge the Jews in Egypt, settled for some time in a large community. It positively rejected the inhabitants of the land, who had no reason to answer the question of how to prevent the events of the recent past from happening ever again. That Judaism gave as its answer the formation of a separate and holy society, *Israel,* a people *Israel* returned to the land of Israel. The Judaic system of the Pentateuch, forming the normative system throughout the Second Temple period—from the return to Zion ca. 538 B.C.E. through Ezra's proclamation of the Torah about 450 B.C.E., to the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.—therefore responded to the loss of the land *and* its restoration to the Israelites' possession. Israel must obey the rules of holiness, because by keeping its half of the covenant, it could make certain God would uphold the other half: "And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid" (Lev 26:6 RSV). For the next five hundred years, the Judaic system of the Pentateuch predominated.

What we learn from the crisis and response is that religion does not merely respond to random events. Rather, it selects as normative happenings that it recognizes as enormously consequential. Religion—in the case of Judaism in its formative age and writings—does not describe and ratify in sacred terms the secular events understood in a worldly way. The generative logic and paradigmatic forms of religion, in the case of Judaism, take shape within the interiority of imagination. They only then, having taken shape, impart their pattern upon the social order. In the case of Judaism, the Torah's religion imparts its pattern upon the social world and polity of Jews. The Torah does not merely *record* history; the Torah *creates* history. Stated in more general terms: a particular experience, transformed by a religious system into a paradigm of

the life of the social group, becomes normative and therefore generative for culture and society.

Let us stand back and see matters whole: the Pentateuch made its statement through a protracted narrative. Setting out its story as "the Torah of Moses," it delivered its message through its account of events of a long-ago past. Specifically: a single, continuous story begins with the creation of the world and proceeds to the making of man and woman; the fall of humanity through disobedience; the flood that wiped out nearly all of humanity except for Noah, progenitor of all subsequent humanity; the decline of humanity from Noah to Abraham, followed by the rise of humanity through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (also called Israel); the twelve sons of Jacob; to exile in Egypt, and, ultimately, Sinai. There, in the wilderness, before Israel's entry into the land, the scriptural narrative continues, God revealed the Torah to Moses, and that revelation contained the terms of the covenant that God then made with Israel, the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In the Pentateuch we deal with a composite of materials. It was only after the destruction of the first temple in 586 B.C.E., followed by the return to Zion, that these diverse and free-standing materials—two versions of Creation, two versions of the Noah-story, for example—were joined into a single, composite account. Then the Torah, to be privileged as the earliest statement of a religious system and structure that the world calls "Judaism," came into being. It transcended its origins as a pastiche of received stories, some old and some new. All were now revised for the purposes of the final authorship. By the term "authorship" I mean those who brought it into being as redactor-authors, those who took older material and restructured and rearranged it, but who also brought into that material some of their own work. It was not in the aftermath of the loss of Zion but in consequence of its restoration that the pentateuchal redactors wrote the origins of Israel, the Jewish people: beginnings shed light on the ending, the ultimate restoration of Israel to Zion, Adam to Eden, that would be eternal.

How so? In light of Israel's ultimate destiny, which the redactors took to be Israel's loss of *and restoration to* the land, the origins of the people in its land took on their cogent meaning. Israel thus began with its acquisition of the land, through God's promise to and covenant with Abraham, and attained its identity as a people through the promise of the land, in the covenant of Sinai, and the entry into the land, under Joshua. Had Israel not sinned, the story would have concluded then. But Scripture proceeds, in the prophetical books, to record what happened next, which was one sinful event after another. The story from the entry into the land to the loss of the land recorded the descent of Israel from its climactic moment, with the entry into the land comparable to the entry of Adam into Eden on the eve of the first

Sabbath. That, at any rate, is how Judaism would read matters, in line with the implications of the Pentateuch.

Israel's history thus forms the story of how, because of its conduct in the land, Israel lost its land, first in the north, then in the south—and that despite the prophets' persistent warnings. From the exile in Babylonia, the authorship of the Torah recast Israel's history into the story of the conditional existence of the people, with their existence measured by their possession of the land upon the stipulation of God's favor. Everything depended on carrying out a contract: do this, get that; do not do this, do not get that—and nothing formed a given, beyond all stipulation. The task of that authorship was to interpret the condition of the present, and their response to the uncertainty of Israel's life beyond exile and restoration underlined the uncertainty of that life.

The formation of the Pentateuch and its explanation of history made two important points. First, the pentateuchal traditions specified that Israel stood in a contractual relationship with God. God had revealed the Torah to Israel, and the Torah contained God's will for Israel. If Israel kept the Torah, God would bless the people, and if not, God would exact punishment, in the form of loss of the land, for violation of this covenant. Second, the prophetic writings emphasized that God shaped history—those particular things that happened that made a difference—in a pattern that bore deep meaning. Not only so, but whatever happened reflected God's will, which the prophets (beginning with Moses) conveyed. Ultimately organized so that the prophetic writings appear to foretell the destruction that would come, the prophets' warnings therefore contained a message entirely harmonious with the basic message of the Pentateuch.

As a result of the events of 586–450 B.C.E., the loss of the land and the return to Zion, with the subsequent rebuilding of the temple, Judaism in all its forms began. The religion commenced with the formation of the Pentateuch. We may therefore say that, while the (genealogical) Israel of the Torah of "Moses" traces its origins back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and while historians tell the story of Israel from remote antiquity, that continuous and unfolding religious tradition we know as Judaism—in all its forms—begins with Scripture. And Scripture as we have it commences with the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. The Torah as we know it came to its literary formation in response to the destruction of the first temple by the Babylonians and the subsequent return to Zion, with the critical uncertainty precipitated by those events. That is, the generative question to which the Pentateuch (and prophetic collections) responds becomes acute with the recovery of the land in full knowledge that the land was lost and can be lost again—that restoration, not the loss alone, precipitated the purposeful work of reconstructing the past as guide to the uncertain future.

The Torah in Context: Exile and Return

Accordingly, the Torah represents an act of selection, construction, and imagination, not a mere writing down of things that happened and *post facto* interpretation thereof. That becomes self-evident when we realize that the actual experience of exile and return affected very few Israelites, excluding both those who never went into exile and those who never came back, on the other—certainly by far the greater part of the people, Israel. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah, not to mention the post-exilic prophets, attest to the complaints of the minority that returned to Zion against the majority of those who remained in the land and never left, on the one side, and the majority of the descendants of the exiles of Babylonia, who stayed where they were, on the other. Then to whom, first of all, did the Pentateuch speak? Not many. Few Israelites actually underwent the experience of exile and return that the Pentateuch treats as normative for all Israel.

But it was the corresponding and joined experiences—its exile, then return—on which the pentateuchal narrative focused and attained coherence. So the process of selection and revision of the past in light of the issue of the future represented an act of fabrication and imagination, not of mere description and interpretation of social facts of palpable experience. That fact—I cannot overstress—shows us the true character of the Pentateuch's Judaic religious system, the one that would predominate and be realized in the Mishnah and the Talmuds and midrash of rabbinic Judaism. It began by making a selection of facts to be deemed consequential, and hence represented as historical: those that made history, embodied its structure and pattern. It further succeeded by ignoring, in making that selection, the experiences of others who had a quite different perception of what had happened—and, for all we know, a different appreciation of the message.

But even among those who returned to Zion, the Pentateuch framed matters in accord with the acute concerns of only a minority. For who among the returned exiles made all the difference? They are those who saw the restoration of the temple as critical, its destruction as definitive of Israel's condition, its rites as paramount in Israel's existence. Then who stands behind the ultimate composition of the Pentateuch? It is—as we have already noted—a document given its final character by the priesthood, the caste in the Israelite social order comprised of those most affected by the destruction in 586 B.C.E., and by those most motivated to return from 539 B.C.E. onward. The fact that the ones who came back, and, by definition, many who were taken away, were priests made all the difference, as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah indicate. For to the priests, what mattered in 586 B.C.E. was the destruction of the temple, and what made a difference was the restoration of Zion and the rebuilding of the

temple. To them the cult was the key, with the temple the nexus between heaven and earth.

What attitude flowed from the normative experiences of the elect? The nation—as seen by the priests, as defined by the priests, its components as hierarchized by the priests at the apex—restored to its land may be compared, as I said at the outset, to a condemned man reprieved from the scaffold. The comparison fails, to be sure, because we are dealing with a public, communal event: a small group of people offering the entirety of the community a vision to be shared collectively and realized corporately. While the consciousness of life as a gift of grace changes things for the survivor alone, the return to Zion—cast as it was into the encompassing language of the Five Books of Moses—imposed upon the entire nation's imagination and inner consciousness the unsettling encounter with annihilation avoided, extinction postponed, life renewed—temple restored as portrayed in the priestly books of Leviticus and Numbers.

What defined the issue as framed by the pentateuchal compilers? The events selected as paradigmatic, exile then return, were interpreted as a paradigm of death and resurrection. But the events did not concern the individual—centuries would pass before corporate restoration formed the model for individual resurrection from the grave. Rather they concerned corporate Israel, and the death of Israel was understood as its ceasing to be different from all the nations. From the encounter with the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C.E. followed by the return to Zion beginning in 538 B.C.E., the issue was, and would remain, a simple one. It was: Who is Israel, what does it mean to be Israel, and what are the rules that define Israel as a social and political entity? The unstated premise throughout is that the answers to these questions make all the difference in the world.

First Comes the System with its Inner Logic

The consequence of this account of the recognition of the crisis and the formulation of the response cannot be overstated: the entire Judaic system of the social, religious, cultural, and political orders set forth by the Pentateuch constitutes an act of imagination and invention. It is a generative logic that is autonomous of the social order but definitive of the social order come to expression in writing. First comes the system with its inner logic, then follows the identification of the crisis and the formulation of the response. The principal givens of the Torah's paradigm, in fact, speak out of the inner structure of the system. They express its logic, which is not a logic intrinsic to or dictated by, events—even events selected and reworked. The systemic data—the givens—apply its premises, not the mere facts, the random data of Israel's common life in either Babylonia or the

land of Israel. Again from the perspective of a vast population of Israel—Jews in Egypt, Jews who remained in the land, and Jews who never left Babylonia—the system spoke of events that exercised no special claim, no privilege in the formation of the social order. The sense of exile came from the corporate myth—Israel belonging to the land, with Israel's possession of the land indicating its moral condition—and the aspiration to return contradicted the facts of the successful migration to the new loci of Babylonia, Egypt, and elsewhere.

Reconsider, then, the perspective of the Jews who remained in the land after 586 B.C.E., or of those who remained in Babylonia after 538 B.C.E. For both groups, for different reasons, there was no alienation, and consequently, no yearning for reconciliation. Then the normative corresponded to the merely normal: life like any other nation, wherever it happened to locate itself. True enough, treating exile and return as normative imparted to the exile the critical and definitive position. It marked Israel as special, elect, subject to the rules of the covenant and its stipulations. But, as we now realize, for much of Israel some other system must have existed, and not the system of the normative alienation constructed by the Judaism of the Torah by the (priestly) exiles returning to the land.

For to those who stayed put, the urgent questions of exile and return, the self-evidently valid response of election and covenant, bore slight relevance, asked no questions worth asking, provided no answers worth believing. That is why, when we want an example of a religious system creating the social order of culture and imagination, we can find few better instances than the power of the conception of Israel expressed by the Pentateuch to construct a system in imagination, then to realize it in the social order. That is to say, here is a system invoking its inner logic, its moral calculus, to tell people not only the *meaning* of what had happened but also *what had actually happened.* That is why I earlier claimed that the system begins whole, fabricated out of its inner logic, only then to create for Israelite society a picture of what it must be and therefore had to have been. That sense of heightened reality, that intense focus on the identification of the nation as extraordinary, represented only one possible picture of the meaning of events from 586 B.C.E. onward. But we do not have access, so far as I know, to any other but the system of the Torah and the prophetic and historical writings as framed by the priests and given definitive statement under the auspices of the Persian's Jewish viceroy in Jerusalem, namely, Nehemiah, with Ezra as counselor.

The central issue is this. The paradigm embodied in the Pentateuch of possession, sin, dispossession, repentance, and return began as a paradigm alone and not as a set of actual events that later redactors transformed into a normative pattern or paradigm. The conclusions generated by the paradigm designed by these redactors, it must follow, derived not from their reflection on things that actually happened but from the logic of their own paradigm—and that alone. That paradigm, however, would

come to create expectations that could not be met by the paradigm's immediate, assumed answer. From this failure of the existing paradigm to meet expectations from the then existing paradigm, the resentment captured by the myth of exile would be renewed, while at the same time the paradigm set the conditions for resolution of this resentment and thus would resolve the crisis of exile with the promise of (yet another new) return. This self-generating, self-renewing paradigm formed a self-fulfilling prophecy that all Judaisms since have offered as the both generative tension and central structure of their systems.

To summarize: the paradigm that imparted its imprint on the history of the day did not emerge from and was not generated by the events of the age. First came the system, its worldview and way of life formed whole most likely by the priestly caste. Then came the selection, by the system, of consequential events and their patterning into systemic propositions. And finally, at a third stage (of indeterminate length of time) came the formation and composition of the canon that would express the logic of the system and state those "events" that the system would select or invent for its own expression. Since chief among the propositions of the system as defined by the Torah of Moses is the notion of the election of Israel effected in the covenant, we may say that Israel—the Israel of the Torah and historical-prophetic books of the sixth and fifth centuries—selected itself. The system created the paradigm of the society that had gone into exile and come back home—and, by the way, the system also cut its own orders, that contract or covenant that certified not election but self-selection.

How the Pentateuch Met the Challenge of 538–450 B.C.E.: Why Did Pentateuchal Judaism Endure?

Here then is the upshot. Judaism is formed out of the encounters with crisis and response. At both of these moments facts are formed out of acts of social imagination. Neither moment embodies the given, records the mere facts of the matter, or writes down an account of how things are—the ordinary human condition. At the very foundations of the original and generative Judaic paradigm is the Torah's reformation, the paradigmatic explanation it could give to the sequence of events from 586 B.C.E. when the Israelites were exiled to Babylonia to about 450 B.C.E. when they had returned to Zion and proclaimed the Torah as God's explanation of Israel's existence. And there we find not history—what is compelling in events viewed as givens. Rather, it is history systemically selected, therefore by definition invented, and not described. That would make slight difference—everyone understands the mythopoeic power of belief—except for one thing.

It is the fact that a particular experience, transformed by a religious system into a paradigm of the life of the social group, has become—been made—normative and therefore generative. That particular experience itself happened, to begin with, in the minds and imaginations of the authorship of the Pentateuch, and not in the concrete life or in the politics and society of Israel in its land and in exile. No one of course imagined that the temple lay in ruins; that was a fact. But people clearly differed about its restoration and reconstruction as the incessant complaints of the post-exilic prophets about the neglected condition of the altar attest. No one denied that some of Israel had stayed home while others had gone into exile. Again, opinion surely differed as to the exclusion of those who had not undergone the normative experience of alienation and return, opinion surely differed. That is proved by a simple fact. It was only by force that Ezra and Nehemiah effected the dissolution of families of Judeans—those who had gone into exile and now returned—married to locals.

The same is so for a long list of systemic givens. All of them represent acts of choice. None of them, as a matter of fact, constitute matters of self-evidence—except to those to whom by reason of systemic logic they were self-evident. It follows that it is the Pentateuch—and the Pentateuch alone—that says that Israel died and was reborn. It is the Pentateuch alone that imposed its selective paradigm upon events, insisting Israel was punished through exile and then forgiven. Those who had not gone into exile had not atoned. Those who did not return could not enjoy the full merit of forgiveness embodied in the rebuilt temple and its restored atonement-rites. And the upshot, as the Pentateuch portrayed matters, was this: To be Israel is to have gone into exile and returned to Zion—in not an individual but rather a familial or a genealogical sense. The very normative standing of that experience defined what was at issue in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, who imposed upon the Judaean society of the fifth century the norm of exile and return—that is to say, of death and resurrection. Only with the conception of return do the stories of Adam and Israel correspond.

Now the question presents itself: Why did pentateuchal Judaism endure, and how has the original paradigm survived from then to now? For it is one thing to explain how a system took shape, another to account for its long-term effect. One reason covers the near-term; another allows us to explain its long-term power of self-evidence.

The Near-term Explanation

Pentateuchal Judaism survived because the institutions of politics and government established by Israel restored to the land lay in the hands of the priests. Ezra enjoyed the support of Nehemiah, satrap of Jerusalem for the Persian government, supported by troops when force was

needed, sustained by the priesthood when persuasion sufficed. Not only so, but the written-out revelation of Sinai, the Torah, enjoyed the status of God's word to Israel and enjoyed the privilege of self-evident truth. So the pentateuchal system in its original, fifth-century context—the Judaism that (speaking descriptively) constituted the normative system through the Second Temple period—flourished because the priests had the power to make it stick.

The reason for this is clear. First, the priests were the ones who organized and set forth the Torah revealed by God to Moses at Sinai, as the Jews would revere it. They furthermore controlled the political institutions of the country as the Persian government established them. Consequently their perspective, with its emphasis on the temple cult and its critical role in sustaining the life of the land and the nation, predominated in defining public policy. And the temple government had the necessary political support to sustain its authority. It furthermore laid forth the Torah as its political myth, so not having constantly to resort to force. Since the Torah of Moses at Sinai defined the faith, explained what had happened, and set forth the rules for God's continuing favor to Israel, the final shape and system of the Torah would make a deep impact on the consciousness and attitude of the people as a whole.

The Long-term Explanation: From System to Paradigm

But the social and political arrangements of the restored Zion themselves underwent change over time. So why did the system persist beyond its initial context, becoming paradigmatic even in other times and places and circumstances? The more important question is why its structure proved definitive long after the political facts had shifted dramatically—indeed, had ceased to pertain at all.

The pentateuchal Torah formed a self-sustaining paradigm, both asking its question as it was declaimed in worship from week to week and answering it with the force of self-evidence: this is the Torah of Moses at Sinai. Speaking in psychological terms, the Pentateuch both precipitated tension, with its insistence on life as a gift and not a given, and resolved the tension. It recapitulated the reasons for resentment but also restored repose. This process of resentment and remission formed a self-validating experience at once intellectual and psychological for the Israel for whom, and to whom, the Torah spoke as God's word. And that was the larger part of the Jews as an ethnic body, though—as the social evidence shows—not all Jews at any one time, and not all Jews everywhere.

With the continuing authority of the Torah in Israel, the experience to which it originally constituted a profound and systematic response was recapitulated, age after age, through the reading and authoritative exegesis of the original Scripture that preserved and portrayed it: "Your descendants will be aliens living in a land that is not theirs . . . but I will punish

that nation whose slaves they are, and after that they shall come out with great possessions" (Gen 15:13–14). The long-term reason for the persistence of the priests' Judaism as the self-evidently valid explanation of Israel's life therefore derives from two facts, only one of which matters.

True, the institutional consideration introduced above should not be forgotten. The Scriptures themselves would retain their authority. As the Torah became the primary document for Israel beyond Jerusalem with its temple, priesthood, and offerings, Scripture gained its own authority, independent of the circumstance of society. The priests' paradigm therefore imposed itself even in situations in which its fundamental premises hardly pertained. Accordingly, when the world imposed upon Jewry questions of a different order, the Jews would then go in search of more answers—an additional Torah (hence the "Oral Torah" of rabbinic Judaism)—and even different answers. But even then, a great many Jews continued to envision the world through that original perspective created in the aftermath of destruction and restoration—that is, to see the world as a gift instead of a given and themselves as chosen for a life of special suffering but also special reward.

But that explanation on its own begs the question. For the reason does not account for the continuing assent to, and acknowledgement as authoritative of, those Scriptures. Something within the scriptural message itself must serve to account for the persistence of the pentateuchal system.

The second reason is that that system in its basic structure not only addressed, *but also created,* a continuing and chronic fact of Israel's inner life. Israel was taught to see itself—to repeat my favored formulation—not as a given, a social order by its historical nature, but as a gift subject to conditions and stipulations. Israel could cease to exist, and therefore now endured by God's grace. The sense of uncertainty about the future, the dependence on God's blessing and intervention for the maintenance of its social order, marked Israel as the ever-dying people from the complaint of Abraham:

> Some time later, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. He said, "Fear not, Abram; I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord, God, what can you give me, seeing that I shall die childless, and the one in charge of my household is Dammesek Eliezer!" Abram said further, "Since You have granted me no offspring, my steward shall be my heir."
>
> Genesis 15:1–3 (NJPS translation)

Scripture captures at the very outset of Israel's existence the uncertainty of a small, defeated nation, exiled from its land and therefore challenged to sustain itself in a situation of cultural adversity. There is nothing natural, nothing given, about Israel's existence. But—so the generative myth insists—under certain conditions, Israel will endure, becoming as

numerous as the stars in the heaven. To state now the long-term explanation with emphasis: *the pentateuchal system sustained itself by creating unmet expectations and then explaining why they were not met but might yet be.*

In simple language, the system both provoked resentment and afforded remission from the consequent distress. It both identified the urgent question that it answered and created the conditions in which that question would be recapitulated, generation by generation. So long as the people perceived the world in such a way as to make urgent the question that Scripture framed and to make self-evidently valid the answer Scripture gave, Scripture enjoyed that power of persuasion beyond all need for argument that imparted to it self-evident status. The myth of the Pentateuch as God's revealed will to Israel retold itself because the Pentateuch both selected and accounted for the condition of the Israel to which it spoke. And that interval of self-evidence—Israel elect but in exile until certain conditions be met, Israel of an uncertain future but master of its own fate through keeping the covenant—lasted for a very long time, even to today. Most, though not all, Judaic systems of the social order recapitulate the paradigm of exile and return, resentment and remission.

I therefore see two reasons for the perennial power of the priests' system and perspective. One was the persistence of the generative tension, precipitated by the interpretation of the Jews' life as exile and return, that had formed the critical center of the Torah of Moses. Therefore the urgent question answered by the Torah retained its original character and definition, and the self-evidently valid answer—read in the synagogue every week—retained its relevance. With the persistent problem renewing, generation after generation, that same resentment, the product of a memory of loss and restoration joined to the present recognition of the danger of a further loss, the priests' authoritative answer would not lose its power to persist and to persuade. But the other was that people saw what was not always there, because through the Torah of Moses they were taught to. To state the matter simply: religion (the particular Judaism at hand) did more than merely recapitulate resentment.

Sacred Persistence

That is why the second of the two reasons—the one explaining the long-term power of the Judaic system of the priests to shape Israel's worldview and way of life—is the more important: the question answered by the Five Books of Moses persisted at the center of national life and remained, if chronic, also urgent. The answer provided by the Pentateuch therefore retained its self-evident importance. The question persisted, to be sure, because Scripture kept reminding people to ask that question, to see the world as the world was described, in Scripture's

mythic terms, out of the perception of the experience of exile and return: the stipulative character of Israel's corporate existence. But the pentateuchal Israel's social world matched the governing myth. Israel was few, weak, and uncertain of itself and subject to the will of others, incorporated as it was in world-empires from 586 B.C.E. onward. So if its existence depended on God's favor, the theology matched the sociology of the group.

To those troubled by the question of exile and return—that is, the chronic allegation that Israel's group-life did not constitute a given but formed a gift accorded on conditions and stipulations—then, the answer enjoyed the status of (mere) fact. Keep the Torah and all will go well. And the Torah extended the range of the covenant to even humble matters of ordinary, everyday life: sanctification of the here and now. The human condition takes on heightened intensity when God cares what you eat for lunch, on the one hand, but will reward you for having suitable food, on the other. For a small, uncertain people, captured by a vision of distant horizons behind and before, a mere speck on the crowded plain of humanity, such a message bore its powerful and immediate message as a map of meaning. Israel's death and resurrection—as the Torah portrayed matters—therefore left nothing as it had been and changed everything for all time. But the matter—central to the history of Judaism—demands yet another angle of analysis. We have to ask what was at stake, and so penetrate into the deepest layers of the structure to state the issues at their most abstract and general. For the sacred persistence in the end rested on judgments found self-evidently valid in circumstances remote from the original world subject to those judgments.

Not only did the systemic theory of Israel correspond to social reality, but the way of life realized the system in everyday activities. The reason for that obsession—that is to say, the persistence of the exegesis of the everyday as a sequence of acts of sanctification—was the Torah's encapsulation of the experience of the loss and recovery of the land and of political sovereignty as normative and recurrent. Israel, because of its amazing experience, had attained a self-consciousness that continuous existence in a single place under a long-term government denied others.

And this worldview reinforced and explained the social facts. There was nothing given, nothing to be merely taken for granted in the life of a nation that had ceased to be a nation on its own land and then once more had regained that (once-normal, now tenuous) condition. Transforming received traditions into a coherent statement of its own, pentateuchal Judaism took shape as the system that accounted for the death and resurrection of the Jewish people and pointed for the source of renewed life toward sanctification now, and salvation at the end of time.

The codification and closure of the law under Ezra produced the Torah as a law code that laid heavy emphasis on the exclusivist character of the Israelite God and cult. "Judaism"—that is to say, the priestly Judaism of the Pentateuch—gained the character of a cultically centered

way of life and worldview. Both rite and myth aimed at the continuing self-definition of Israel by separation from and exclusion of the rest of the world. Order against chaos meant holiness over uncleanness, life over death. The purpose was to define Israel against the background of the other peoples of the Near and Middle East with whom Israel had much in common, and, especially, to differentiate Israel from its near-relations and neighbors, e.g., the Samaritans, in the same land. The issue of who is the other persisted, extending beyond the nearest frontier in the definition of the other: the woman, the slave, and the minor to the near-Israelite; the Gentile; and later on, to the Christian (sharing common Scriptures) as a special kind of non-gentile-Gentile; and on and on.

Acute differentiation was required because the social and cultural facts were precisely to the contrary: common traits hardly bespeaking clear-cut points of difference, except of idiom. The mode of differentiation taken by the Torah literature in general, and the priestly sector of that literature in particular, was cultic. The meaning, however, also was social. The power of the Torah composed in this time lay in its control of the temple which it made pivotal and focal. The Torah literature—with its concerned God, who cares what people do about rather curious matters, and the temple cult, with its total exclusion of the non-Israelite from participation, and (all the more so) from cultic commensality—raised high those walls of separation and underlined such distinctiveness as already existed. The life of Israel flowed from the altar; what made Israel *Israel* was the center, the altar.

A Successful System for this Israel's Social Order

The reason that the pentateuchal system retained self-evidence is now clear. The social forces that lent urgency to the issue of who is Israel would endure. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this ongoing confusion about the distinctive identification to be assigned to Israel would define the very framework of the social and imaginative ecology of Jews who formed communities. So long as memory remained, the conflicting claims of exclusivist Torah literature and prophecy of a people living in utopia, located in no particular place, while framing its vision of itself in the deeply locative symbols of cult and center, would make vivid the abiding issue of self-definition. At issue was, and is, life, its source and its sustenance. For if we ask why the temple with its cult proved enduringly central in the imagination of the Israelites living in the land, as indeed it did, we have only to repeat the statements made by the priests of the temple. These explain the critical importance of cult and rite.

If we reread the priestly viewpoint as it is contained throughout the Torah—especially in the books of Leviticus and Numbers—this is the pic-

ture we derive. The altar was the center of life, the conduit both from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. Therefore, all things are to be arrayed in relationship to the altar. The movement of the heavens demarcated and celebrated at the cult marked out the divisions of time in relationship to the altar. The spatial dimension of the land was likewise demarcated and celebrated in relationship to the altar. The natural life of Israel's fields and corrals, the social life of its hierarchical caste-system and the political life (this was not only in theory by any means) all centered on the temple as the locus of ongoing government—all things in order and in place expressed the single message. The natural order of the world corresponded to, reinforced, and was reinforced by, the social order of Israel. Both were fully realized in the cult, the nexus between the opposite and corresponding forces of heaven and earth.

The lines of structure emanated from the altar. And these lines of structure constituted high and impenetrable frontiers to separate Israel from the Gentiles. Israel, which was holy, ate holy food, reproduced itself in accord with the laws of holiness, and conducted all of its affairs—both affairs of state and the business of the table and the bed—in accord with the demands of holiness. So the cult prescribed and defined holiness. Holiness meant separateness. Separateness meant life. Why? Because outside the Land of Israel, the realm of the holy, lay the domain of death. The "lands" are unclean. The Land of Israel is holy. For the scriptural vocabulary, one antonym for "holy" is "unclean," and one opposite of "unclean" is "holy." The synonym of "holy" is "life." The principal force and symbol of uncleanness and its highest expression are death. Thus the Torah stood for life, the covenant with the Lord would guarantee life, and the way of life required sanctification in the here and now of the natural world.

To conclude: the Pentateuch, the Torah of Moses, created the world that it revealed, which in no way corresponded either to the world out of which it emerged or to the one to which, for the following centuries, it spoke. And how to account for the persistence of the paradigm? The life of the group is uncertain, subject to conditions and stipulations. Nothing is set and given, but all things—land and life itself— are a gift. But what actually did happen in that uncertain world—exile and then restoration—marked the group as special, different, select. The condition for the continuing power of the Judaic system of the Torah not only required the recapitulation or renewal of resentment, but also what was required to restore hope. That condition was the constant renewal of the resentment precipitated and provoked by the discrepancy ever present in the Torah's own system. The Torah of Moses therefore did more than recapitulate resentment. In age succeeding age, the Torah generated that resentment which powered the system.

Since the Pentateuch's formative pattern imposed that perpetual, self-conscious uncertainty, treating the life of the group as conditional and discontinuous, Jews have asked themselves who they are, and from

then to now they have invented Judaisms to answer that question. Accordingly, on account of the definitive paradigm affecting their group-life in various contexts, no circumstances—not in the land, all the more so not in the Diaspora—have permitted Jews to take for granted their existence as a group. Looking back on Scripture and its message, Jews have ordinarily treated as special, subject to conditions, and therefore uncertain, what (in their view) other groups enjoyed as unconditional and simply given. Why the paradigm renewed itself is clear: this particular view of matters generated expectations that could not be met, hence created resentment—and then provided comfort and hope that made it possible to cope with that resentment. To state my thesis with appropriate emphasis:

> *Promising what could not be delivered, then providing solace for the consequent disappointment, the system at hand—the Pentateuch read whole and complete and in sequence—precipitated in age succeeding age the very conditions necessary for its own replication, its own persistence.*

To be "an Israel" within any given Judaism from the Pentateuch to now—where "Israel" is the social component of a Judaism—has meant to ask what it means to be Israel. The original pattern meant that an Israel would be a social group whose existence had been called into question and affirmed—and therefore always would be called into question, and remained perpetually to be affirmed. Every future Judaism then would find as its task the recapitulation—and reaffirmation—of the original Judaism. Each successive Judaism made its own distinctive statement of the generative and critical resentment contained within the questioning of the given structure, a deep understanding of the uncertain character of the existence of the group in its normal location in the midst of the permanence that (so far as the Judaic group understood things) characterized the life of every other group but Israel.

What for everyone else was a given, for Israel was a conditional gift. What all the nations knew as certain, Israel understood as uncertain: exile and loss, alienation and resentment, but instead of annihilation, renewal, restoration, reconciliation, and (in theological language) redemption. So that paradigmatic experience, the one beginning in 586 B.C.E. and ending about 450 B.C.E. and written down in the Torah of Moses, made its mark. That pattern, permanently inscribed in the Torah of God to Moses at Sinai, would define for all Israels over all time the resentment that demanded recapitulation: leaving home, and coming home.

There have been many Judaisms, each with its indicative symbol and generative paradigm, each pronouncing its worldview and prescribing its way of life and identifying the particular Israel that, in its unique view, is Israel, bearer of the original promise of God. We begin with the one important augmentation of the Torah of Moses at Sinai—appropriately, the point at which the paradigm itself perished, and the pattern of exile and return would require renewal.