

the feeling of pride. If throughout your life you had felt yourself to be the servant of God, if you had laboured as the servant of God, if you had felt the blissfulness of such service, and in this bliss had striven upward towards God and had loved Him, loved Him as the One without Whom you are nothing, being something only from Him and through Him and with His support—both you and your deeds—would you know anything of pride? If you became proud, at that moment you would, so far as lies in you, rob all the previous achievements of your life of their value; for what would they be if they were not done with the intention of serving God? But, above all, at that moment you would open the door to sin and would deprive yourself of all capacity for good deeds in the future; for in pride you become careless, and, unnoticed, the beast in you takes you by surprise and breaks loose from his chain, and, forthwith, in pride selfishness awakes and you step out of the choir of God-worshippers and become an idol unto yourself.

96 Beware of pride! Sin has no greater friend than pride. It was pride which, along with lust, caused the first human beings to sin, which made them take the liberty like gods of determining for themselves what was good or evil. It was pride, the pride of possession, which led Cain to murder his brother. It was pride, the pride of possession, which led mankind to Babel, to deny God and deify themselves. It was pride, the pride of possession, which, along with love of pleasure, caused our fathers in the land of God to forget the laws of God and so deprived them of the prosperity which had made them proud. It is pride which even today must precede every sin; for can you in the moment of sin still reflect that what you are misusing is not yours—and if you could think of it would you misuse it? Pride and pleasure-seeking are the begetters of most sins. Pleasure-seeking makes you desire what is evil, and pride impels you to work for it in spite of the Divine prohibition; therefore beware of pride.

97 Instead of pride make modest humility your characteristic, that genuine humility, ענוה, which feels itself really dependent on God with all that it has; which looks upon itself as poor and as rich only in God, and therefore regards everything as being a means lent to it for carrying out God's will. This is the humility which recognizes itself as having been presented to the world and not the world as having been presented to itself, in order that it may bring to every creature with which it comes into contact as much blessing as God lends it strength to produce, and therefore sees in this its only claim to existence. Hence it is poles apart from that false humility which, in order to avoid the need for doing something, feels itself faint and sinks feebly into sluggishness. On the contrary, because it recognizes the claim of all beings on itself, and

knows only this claim, it rouses itself with redoubled strength to beneficent activity, and it reaches its crowning point in חסידות, that noble love which is nothing for itself and all for others, and, forgoing even its legitimate rights, devotes itself utterly and completely to the general good. It is also poles apart from that false חסידות which, unlike the true, instead of immersing itself in life and being everything for others, withdraws from life and, while being nothing for itself, is also nothing for others, and leaves others to be for it. The greatest man who ever lived became such through ענוה; this is the only one of the great qualities of Moses which Scripture praises. David too, who was never vindictive and who devoted his whole life both in thought and deed to his people, is an example of חסידות in practice. Acquire ענוה and you cannot sin.

13

COVETOUSNESS

תאווה

Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, nor his field, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbour's.
DEUT. V, 18.

Ta'avah (תאווה) is the longing to make oneself the centre of an ever-expanding circle of possessions, or to draw an ever greater volume of them into one's own range whether in the shape of immediate enjoyment or the means of enjoyment. God has implanted this impulse to self-enlargement in every creature, and has given a share of it to man also, for whom the number of desirable possessions is increased by the category of mental enjoyments and advantages. 98

This impulse is necessary; for on it God has based the economy of His creation, since every being, in striving for itself, unconsciously places itself at the service of the Divine world order, and, while thinking that it serves itself only, serves the world. It is necessary in man also; for so long as man is not aware of his mission to enter the circle of God's servants, or is not so keenly aware of it as to be stimulated to active efforts on its behalf, if he does not possess this impulse he will remain quite inactive and will be the least useful of creatures. Hence God's wisdom has so ordered matters that even the commonest man—and he above all—has this impulse, and so, even though he makes not God or God's world but himself the object of his activity, he is at any rate active 99

in this endeavour, and with this activity, however little he may know it or intend it, is the instrument in God's hands for perfecting the world of Nature and man. But, of course, on the strength merely of this activity he is only on the level of the plant and the animal, and even below them, since he was born for higher things.

100 Whereas you, son and daughter of Israel, are to be neither plant nor animal but human being, and in this human vocation you must feel yourself to be called upon to serve not yourself but God, with all that you are, with all that you have and will have, and with your enjoyments and actions, and dedicate yourself freely with your whole being to God. If through this you have become a true Israelite, you will not feel *ta'avah*, you will not strive for any enjoyment or possession for yourself, you will strive in everything for means of doing things pleasing to God. You will be consciously and with set purpose the servant of God in the most animal expression of your animal nature as in the most spiritual expression of your spiritual nature. As a fully-fledged Israelite you will know nothing of *ta'avah*, in which you are yourself the objective. What you want is not to collect around yourself the greatest possible circle of possessions, but to make yourself a centre from which as large as possible a collection of works pleasing to God streams forth, and to take your place, with the whole range of your activities, in the great circle of created beings the holy and exalted centre of which is God.

101 But if you have climbed to this highest stage of Jewish life, beware above all of misusing this impulse. In all inferior beings God has set barriers to this impulse itself, in order that no one of them should in obedience to it go beyond what is necessary and good for itself. Their desires do not of themselves go further than this, and therefore this impulse of itself is wholly beneficial. Not so with man. For just because man should of his own free will restrain this impulse with the help of God's law, and at the highest point completely transform it from service of self into service of the world according to the will of God, for that very reason this impulse in him does not of its own accord restrain itself in the slightest degree. It is true that his immediate enjoyment is limited by the mutability of his body. But as against this, he has invented for himself much artificial enjoyment. There is, for example, the striving for possessions which provides enjoyment and is in itself unlimited, since it is not a momentary enjoyment in which the pleasure dies away in the moment of enjoyment, but what it promises and assures is indeed in the future, and therefore offers boundless enjoyment, like the future itself. Hence it comes about that for the man who does not set limits to his unrestrained impulse the universe itself and eternity in the end become too small to satisfy his lustful yearnings.

Unspeakably frightful are the consequences of *ta'avah* when it exceeds 102 the bounds of the necessary and good. It destroys all happiness in life, it perverts all human actions, it tears up the charter of Divinity in man; there is no misery great or small, no sin great or small, which has not its roots in *ta'avah*. What you have has no value for you; only what is not yet yours attracts you, and this, too, loses its value on being acquired. Thus you have no joy in life so long as anything exists and lives and possesses and enjoys outside your sphere. And if you adopt such an attitude of hostility against all other beings and their happiness, you must in the end succumb and be the loser in the fight which is waged by society and the Divine order against one who isolates himself. Yes, all suffering is in very truth nothing other than the product of *ta'avah*; for *tzaroth*, sufferings, are nothing but a limitation of personality. But if you never went beyond what is permitted to you, three-quarters of your suffering would be unknown to you. But in fact you often risk all that is permitted for the attainment of but one forbidden thing—and then you destroy for yourself the happiness of your life.

But above all—for how would the destruction of happiness be possible 103 otherwise?—it destroys all activity worthy of a man and produces only sin and crime. At the moment in which you give yourself up wholly to the *ta'avah* for any object or any enjoyment, at that moment you declare war on all beings around you, on God and on His law, for, dominated by *ta'avah*, you stop at nothing which is within the range of your powers; and when you reach that limit, you lie fuming at the barrier which still lies across your path between you and the object of your desire. Where *ta'avah* draws, *torah* cannot abide, for where mind and disposition set themselves up as the directive forces of life, how can there be room for the law which desires to implant the promotion of the will of God and the salvation of the world as the mission of life? Where *ta'avah* rules, *mitzvah* must give way, for the latter binds you not for your own benefit but for that of others; and *mishpat* also must give way, since it sets up the rights of others as the limit to your pursuit of wealth. *Chok* must also give way, since it declares the subordinate creation to be your brother-creature and fixes the law of God as a limit to your caprice and cupidity. *Eduth* testifies in vain to you in the name of humanity and Judaism, since you have feeling for yourself alone and for the lustful brute within you. Nor can *Avodah* make you virtuous, since you come before God only with your unrestrained desires, and you crawl before Him or feel resentful against Him according to whether He furthers or hinders your desires. Yes, every sin and every crime is only a product of *ta'avah*, for, one and all, they are nothing but a scorning of the Divine law for the satisfaction of one's own desires. Therefore beware of *ta'avah*, of all covetous yearning for objects and enjoyments which

you do not possess, and, above all, for those which God forbids you to pursue. And do not say: it is only my thought and feeling, it is not action. Action will not be absent if you do not master thought and feeling, and before you are aware of it your uncontrolled desire has robbed you of all your Horeb ornaments which conferred on you the dignity of a man and an Israelite, and you are left a naked, lustful, ravenous beast.

104 Against this misuse of *ta'avah*, against this longing for enjoyments and objects forbidden by the law of God, particular warning is given by the text which we have quoted, and which, not without purpose, has picked out among all forbidden enjoyments and objects those in the possession of others. For in this prohibition the pursuit of the object is not a sin in itself but becomes a sin only through the idea of the other personality which is associated with it. And where, at the same time, desire is stimulated by the actual sight of the ownership and enjoyment, this is the case in which *ta'avah* comes most sharply into conflict with the prohibition and is most quick to scorn it.

105 How then can you guard against unbridled *ta'avah*? And how can you attain that high level of character in which *ta'avah*, cupidity, is changed into *ahavah*, love of the Lord? Only one thing can lead to this, and in it lies all virtue and all happiness. This one thing is to have a proper idea of life. Value your life not according to possessions and enjoyments, but according to good deeds; and again value your actions only according to their relation to the means which you possess and acquire. It is not how much or how little you *have* that makes you great or small, but how much or how little you *are* with what you have, how much or how little you utilize what has been lent to you for action in the service of God—that is it which makes you great or small. And if with your little you have fulfilled three-quarters of your duties while another with his plenty has done only one-quarter of his, even if this one-quarter were incomparably more than the three-quarters you have done, you are still greater than he. For your whole life is only a task, and your possessions and enjoyments means for performing this task; the provision of the means belongs to God alone, while the performance of the task according to the scope of your means constitutes your only greatness. Certainly it is part of this task, where you have the power and where religion allows, to pursue these good things and these means of enjoyment, not, however, as an object in themselves but as a means of fulfilling the duties imposed by God. Only so will self-sufficiency and contentment, and with them happiness and virtue, be your lot; you will remain serene and good in every position in life, whatever be the extent of your possessions and enjoyments.

SELF-SANCTIFICATION

התקדשות

And now, Israel, what does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul; to keep for thy good the commandments of the Lord, and His statutes, which I command thee this day? Behold, unto the Lord thy God belongeth the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, the earth, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you, above all peoples, as it is this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

DEUT. X, 12-16.

For I am the Lord your God; strive therefore for holiness, and ye will be holy; for I am holy.

LEVIT. XI, 44.

Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy; for I am the Lord your God.

LEVIT. XX, 7.

Son and daughter of Israel, recognize your mission in what the Lord your God requires of you, and render yourselves fit to fulfil it properly. This fitness lies not in the possession of material means, nor of knowledge, nor of skill, but first and foremost in purity of heart, in sincerity of disposition, and in holiness of endeavour. It lies, above all, in keeping your heart and disposition free from anything which can come between yourself and your mission, and filling them with that whole-hearted devotion which your mission requires. See, my friends, it is not sufficient to take up life's task casually and to bring to it at best the mere *desire* to live the good life. You must first bring yourselves into a state in which you will be able to *live* the good life, otherwise your wish will remain just a wish; and it will be the first of your wishes which will cease to be even a wish.

God's law itself teaches you what is the principal requirement: Circumcise the sensuality of your heart, break the obstinate pride of your nature, and then seek to acquire holiness. You have already recognized that *ta'avah* and *ga'avah*, lust and pride, are the begetters of every sin and the enemies of a Divine mission; and everyone carries them in himself—one more, one less, one consciously, another unconsciously. Subdue them and root them out to the last fibre. This is the work to which this text summons you; and then when you have cleared the field, plant in it holiness, which dedicates your whole being to the service of God.