

Mordecai Kaplan on Nature

July 11 Darchei Noam Minyan M'chadesh

God the Life of Nature

Our fathers acclaimed the God Whose handiwork they read
In the mysterious heavens above And in the varied scene of earth below,
In the orderly march of days and nights, Of seasons and years,
And in the checkered fate of man.

Meantime have the vaulting skies dissolved; Night reveals the limitless caverns of space
Hidden in the light of day, And unfolds horizonless vistas
Far beyond imagination's ken. The mind is staggered,
Yet soon regains its poise, And peering through the boundless dark,
Orients itself anew By the light of distant suns
Shrunk to glittering sparks. The soul is faint
Yet soon revives, And learns to spell once more the name of God
Across the newly visioned firmament.

*Lift your eyes, look up;
Who made these stars,
He who marshals them in order,
Summoning each one by name.*

God is the oneness that spans the fathomless deeps of space And the measureless eons of time,
Binding them together in act, As we do in thought.
He is the sameness In the elemental substance of stars and planets,
Of this our earthly abode And of all that it holds.
He is the unity Of all that is,
The uniformity of all that moves, The rhythm of all things
And the nature of their interaction.

*He binds up the Pleiades in a cluster
And loosens the chains of Orion;
He directs the signs of the Zodiac
And guides the constellations of the Bear.*

God is the mystery of life, Enkindling inert matter
With inner drive and purpose, He is the creative flame
That transfigures lifeless substance, Leaping into ever higher realms of being,
Brightening into the radiant glow of feeling, Till it turn into the white fire.

And though no sign of living thing
We cannot deem this earth,
Alone instinct with God.

Break the eternal silence of the spheres,
This tiny speck in the infinitude,

By that token
Are all the worlds bound

Which unites the worlds in bonds of matter
In the bond of Life.

*It is He who forms the mountains
And creates the wind,
And reveals His inner mind to man;
He who makes the dawn and darkness,
Who marches over the heights of earth;
The Lord, the God of hosts, is His name.*

God is in the faith
The fear of loneliness, of helplessness,
God is in the hope
Cleaves the dark abysses
God is in the love

By which we overcome
Of failure, and of death.
Which like a shaft of light,
Of sin, of suffering, and of despair.
Which creates, protects, forgives.

THE MEANING OF GOD IN MODERN JEWISH RELIGION;

P. 188.: By utilizing the nature festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot to recall historical experiences, the Jews directed the human mind to the consciousness of history as an ethical and spiritual influence in human life. In the Jewish festivals both nature and history are given their due share of recognition. Both the creative powers in the physical world and the spiritual forces in the human world that make for personal and social redemption are treated as manifestations of the divine. Despite the emphasis upon the manifestation of God in history, Jewish religion would not have its adherents forget that God is also manifest in nature. Thus, in addition to Pesach recalling the Exodus, it retains its character as a harvest festival and Sukkot marks the final ingathering of the produce of the fields and the orchards, as well as Israel's journeying in the Wilderness. Giving thanks for the yield of the earth is not compatible with regarding things earthly as a necessary evil. The purpose of the nature aspect of the Pilgrimage Festivals is not to keep alive the magical attitude of primitive civilization, but to awaken in us a sense of gratitude for the material benefits which we enjoy through the bounty of nature. Such gratitude is bound to translate itself into a realization of the responsibility as to the manner in which we employ that bounty. It is only then that we are likely to become aware that the material blessings we enjoy are not so completely ours as to enable us to gratify with them some passing lust or fancy. "The earth and all that it contains belong to the Lord".

