

A Rabbinic Perspective *By Rabbi Seymour Rosenbloom*

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Credo, Part III



Earlier this year, I began a series of articles that would appear periodically based on my sermon on the second day of Rosh HaShanah which explored the Credo of Edmond Fleg. Born in Geneva in 1874, Fleg grew up as an assimilated Jew. As an adult, he had a spiritual awakening. He wrote the Credo for his then unborn grandchildren as a way of explaining his transformation into a committed Jew, and what it meant to him to be a Jew. This is the third installment in this series. The full Credo is found in Seder Avodah, page 945.

In this Credo, Fleg affirms that his faith in Judaism is grounded in the fact that "it demands no abdication of my mind." He goes on to establish what this faith demands of our soul, our essential nature and being. He writes:

*I am a Jew because the faith of Israel
asks every possible sacrifice of my soul.*

We often say that Judaism values life over every other value. But even this is not absolute. Judaism affirms that there are values that are higher than life itself, values without which we cannot live, and for which we must give up our lives. We cherish the memory of those who died as martyrs, sacrificially, "Al Kiddush HaShem," who died "Sanctifying God's Name."

Martyrdom is not a call we are often faced with in this day. But through the centuries, the perpetuation of the Jewish faith, indeed, the continuation of Jewish identity, did at times require the sacrifice of one's very life. On *Rosh HaShannah* and *Yom Kippur*, the central prayer of the liturgy, the "Unetaneh Tokef" is ascribed to Rabbi Amnon who submitted himself to die a torturous death rather than convert from Judaism. The Martyrology on *Yom Kippur* afternoon recounts with sorrow the lives and deaths of ten ancient martyrs of our people who died in the Rabbinic period, among them Rabbi Akiba and Rabbi Yishmael.

But not every act of "sanctification" requires the supreme sacrifice of death. It can also be an act of adherence to principle and virtue, even when it results in one's own detriment, whether a loss of money, status, or influence.

Sometimes in today's world we focus only on what we are seeking in life. Some people boast that it did not matter who they had to "step on" to get what they want. The ends, we are told, justify the means. Judaism teaches that this is not life at all. Attainments we do not achieve with honor are false accomplishments, and those who take the "easy way" by cheating others or engaging in unfair business practices will never know the true sense of satisfaction that comes with achievements gotten honorably.

It is this sense of morality, individual integrity, the willingness to acknowledge a higher goal than even one's own fortune or status, indeed, even one's life itself, that Fleg so admired in the teachings of Judaism.

He then adds:

*I am a Jew because in every place
where there are tears and suffering the Jew weeps.*

A Jew does not stand back from the suffering of human beings. Not just family, but all humanity. Not just Americans, but all nationalities. Not just that of Jews, but we weep even for the suffering of our adversaries.

Many of us know the *Midrash* that teaches that after the Israelites were rescued at the Sea, and the pursuing Egyptians drowned behind them as the waters receded, the Angels in Heaven began to sing and rejoice. God silenced them, saying "My children are drowning in the Sea, and you think you can sing and rejoice?"

This month we will mark Israel Independence Day. I have never forgotten a speech given after the Six Day War by then General Yitzhak Rabin, of blessed memory. He spoke of the price of victory, the pain that he and other Israeli soldiers felt as they saw their friends killed in battle.

And then he added a line that I have never forgotten. He said, "I know that even the loss of Arab life causes us much grief and pain." Imagine. The very enemy. Yet the death of its soldiers causes grief and sorrow among the victorious troops.

I remember thinking to myself at the time: This is the embodiment of the teaching of the *Midrash*. We rejoice in our triumph. We do not rejoice that even our enemy had to die in the process. It is this sensitivity that makes us worthy as a nation.

In every place where there are tears and suffering the Jew weeps.

Sometimes they call us the original bleeding heart liberals.

To many it is a term of derision.

I believe it should be an appellation of pride.

It is part of my Credo.

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