

5. EVENT

The spheres of heaven saw Your splendor, then they tottered.
 The waves of the abyss quietly descended when You departed.
 And how shall the souls reside, there where your secret lives,
 where fire rages through rocks, so that in blazes they burst apart.
 But their heart becomes strong through You, if You will strengthen them,
 that they thank You, as do the spirits who see Your Being.
 Therefore, the praise of all souls shall rise to You, oh Lord,
 for words of praise find You, whom they splendidly envelop.

5] Revelation is both experience and event. It is a genuine experience only because and if it was also an event; it is a genuine event only because and if it can become an experience again and again. The present age shies away from this connection. It would like (in the most diverse forms, and by the most diverse means) to confine God to the "at night" of experience and to divert his path to the day of event. But God does not allow any of his paths to be diverted. For him the event is no more remote than the experience, and nature no more inaccessible than the soul. Nor will He be pulled down even in nature into a coarse objectivity, as the faint-hearted fear: He will surely take care of that.

Today it is no different, say, in the war that was such a revelatory event for mankind, than it was at Sinai. The Midrash relates that there, too, each of the assembled nations heard something different, and each responded in a different way. It is the response that matters—here, too.

Therefore, this powerful little poem, part of the liturgy of the festival of liberation (the first of the three festivals that celebrate a historical revelation¹), plunges at once into the abyss of the question as to how any souls can withstand the fiery core of the mystery revealing itself. It realizes that it is from revelation itself that the strength to bear it must come, and does come. And thus in gratitude and praise man finds himself once more after the event, just as he did after the experience.

1. The "festival of liberation" is Passover, celebrating the Jews' exodus from Egypt and slavery. *Shavuot* (Pentecost) celebrates the "giving of our Torah" at Mount Sinai. Presumably Rosenzweig is thinking of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles) as the third of "the three festivals that celebrate a historical revelation," but its connection to a historical revelation is less obvious than the other two.

28. WITH YOU

I was with You, before the travails of earthly life—
 May I now harbor your spirit and increase it.
 If I had strength to stand, would you disturb me?
 and power to walk, would you prevent it?
 And my thoughts—remain Your thoughts.
 What I begin—how could I do without You.
 You I seek at the time of grace—hear me;
 Equip me with the shield of Your grace.
 Call me to service at Your gate,
 and awaken me to the honor of Your name.

28] The Jewish poet had no need of Platonism to tell him what Isaiah (45:4) and the Psalmist (103:14 and 139:1) already knew and what had been told to Jeremiah in so many words at the time of his calling (Jeremiah 1:5¹)—that even before a human being enters life, God already knows and loves him (the Hebrew language expresses both, untranslatably, in one word). Knowing this constitutes a foundation of our life, sustaining us even more than does the hope for what is awaiting us beyond the grave; for this hope is grounded only in that knowledge, which possesses an inner certainty proved in life itself. Every birthday confirms this certainty. Thus did my unforgettable teacher of Torah, Nehemia Nobel,² preach concerning the soul's awareness of its own descent from God in a sermon he delivered on his fiftieth and last birthday.

1. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee, and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee; I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations."

2. Rabbi Nehama Anton Nobel (1971–1992) was a German Orthodox rabbi and leader, as well as a Mizrahi Zionist leader. He was author of several exegetical works and known for his inspiring, erudite, and topical sermons. He studied at the Berlin-Seminary, as well as under Hermann Cohen at the University of Marburg. He was rabbi successively in Cologne, Koenigsberg (briefly), Leipzig, Hamburg, and finally Frankfurt (1910–1992). Rosenzweig and Martin Buber published a jubilee book for him in 1991.