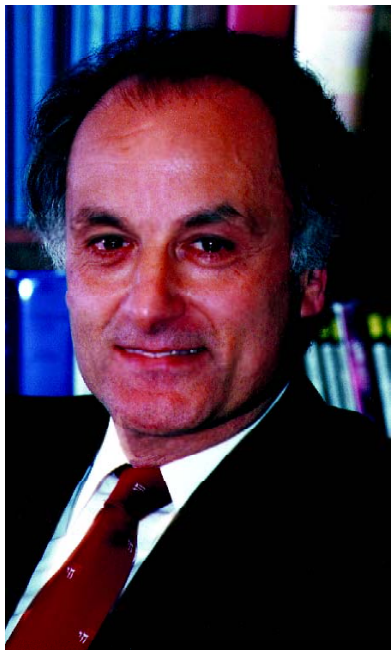


"Neither Angel nor Beast"



Jacques B. Doukhan, D.H.L., Th.D.

company of their brethren.

It is often because humans thought themselves incarnated angels that they started to condemn others, closing themselves to their truth. It is also because humans defined themselves as an animal that they rejected the dimension which opened them to the mystery and to the infinity of God. In fact, the human person encompasses both of these dimensions, rendering any attempt to define him/her senseless.

In this issue of *Shabbat Shalom*, three persons will speak about the misery and the grandeur of the human person and will help us to unfold the mystery of human nature—each one from his/her own perspective.

Dr. Jean Zurcher will reflect on the nature of the human being from a philosophical point of view: What is human nature made of? Professor Henri Baruk will address the same question from a psychiatric point of view, but also by reference to Hebrew thinking and will eventually deal with the delicate question of mental balance. Dr. Edith Eva Eger, a clinical psychologist and a survivor of Auschwitz, will conduct her reflection from within her personal struggles in life and from her human experience as a counselor. The message of each person is different and loaded with special insight.

Yet the same loud echo of the ancient truth is sounded.

The human person is not definable; he/she is not, as traditionally believed, a static amalgam of elements, but a dynamic whole, a mysterious being. In this era of computers where all is reduced to formulas and mechanical operations, one must remember this. For we may well, in this euphoria of technical success, kill man and woman—their grandeur, their beauty, and their truth.

On the horizon of this culture which is becoming more and more generalized, the worst can be expected. We come to lose the idea of individuality, and from there the duty to respect and receive the other in his/her difference, no matter how incomprehensible. This is the lesson from all the abuses sanctioned by history, abuse against the Black and against the Jew, abuse against the stranger, but also abuse ancient, yet still unresolved, against the woman. All oppressions are born of this, of a mentality which must define, making each of us a potential victim, and nourishing anguish. Unless neither angel nor beast, we come to rediscover the value of the question mark, the sense of the infinite, the sense of what escapes all tentatives of definition.

Already before the philosopher Pascal, the rabbis of the *Midrash Rabbah* had understood that man was neither angel nor beast. "If God created man it is because he was not content with the angels and the beasts" (*Gen. Rabbah* 14:3, 4).

In reality, the identity of humans derives from both angelic and beastly dimensions. Abraham Heschel defines the ideal of the Hebrew as being both "human and holy." Holy in that they are bound to God and given a vocation separating them from nature and other human beings. Human in that they are of earthly substance, of "flesh and blood." They are then expected to enjoy their bodies, and walk in joy and love in the