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In the Beginning Was the Cry

Finally the end came. The *aharit hayamim*. Not exactly the "End of Days" of which the prophets of Israel had spoken, but the end of life on earth. Scientists had never been able to decide whether or not the world had come into being as the result of the "Big Bang," but life on earth had certainly disappeared in a big bang. Human genius had penetrated into the remotest recesses of nature and had unraveled its sources of energy. Man had gained control over unlimited stores of power. The choice was in his hand—to use this power for good or for evil. Confusing scientific advancement with human progress, he had become more and more alienated from the human aspects of his own existence. Unavoidably, he fashioned the big bang and with it his own destruction.

Before creating man, God had taken counsel with His angels. Angels, pointing to the evil that would inhere in human nature, advised Him against bringing man into the world. But God refused to accept their advice. He explained that He, the Infinite One, was in need of a Good that could not be found in the heavenly spheres, one that only man could provide.

At first it was difficult to understand the divine reasoning, but God insisted—His Good was His divine Being. It existed because He was. It could not be otherwise. So with His Truth. It could never be challenged. God could never be tempted. But He desired a different kind of Good, one that could be challenged by Evil. God wanted a truth that maintained itself against all adversaries. He needed the Good and the Truth that would be fruits of the earth. So He took the

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chance and made man. Now that all was over, perhaps the risk had been too high. Would it have been better if He had listened to the counsel of the angels and not created man?

But all was not lost. There was still Resurrection. God had built a safety valve into the risky adventure of making man. Man's saga of self-destruction might yet be redeemed. Resurrection would be the New Beginning designed to reveal and to justify the meaning and purpose of God's old creation.

After the long age of darkness and death, new life was breathed into earth's ruins. Once again the Light of Creation lit up the sky. New plants and trees covered the earth. Rivers again flowed with living waters. Birds and animals returned to their rebuilt nests and lairs. Then, the trumpets sounded and slowly the graves opened. Millions of people emerged, clothed in new dignity. Would all the hopes of man now find their fulfillment?

Suddenly all was silent. It was like the silence of the Old World, when all nature held its breath waiting for the word from Sinai. Now the hallelujahs of the New World had ended in the stillness of expectation. All awaited the New Word, the Ultimate Revelation. But gradually the silence of the New Hope was invaded by a silence of divine embarrassment. The New Word was not heard. Was Resurrection faulty, too?

The New Man looked around searchingly. Then he beheld the blemish in all that new glory. There they stood—the Girl, the Sister, the Mother, the Man—motionless, in complete separateness, indifferent to the new life, to its hope and promise. Indignation rose against the Four. They were delaying the ultimate fulfillment. As each continued in his isolation, indignation gave way to anger. Was it the beginning of hatred? Was mankind, awakened to new life, reverting to the vices of the old Adam? Something must be done to resolve the mystery. As the tension approached its breaking point, the heavenly court asked for the records. Who were the Four? Was some experience haunting their memory? Was it a memory from the hour of their death?

The records were brought and the members of the court began reading.

The Girl was sixteen years old. She had met her death in a German death camp by a bullet fired at her head by a member of the Sonderkommando. Among the millions forced into the gas chambers, she alone had survived. By some freak chance, she was pushed face down into a pool of water which protected her against the poisonous fumes. She heard and

saw it all. The cries, the despair, the chaos. As the bodies piled up around her, the stronger climbed over the weaker towards the air not as yet contaminated. Many lost control of their bodily functions, their excrements covering those below. When all was over and the Sonderkommando came to remove the bodies, they found the Girl still breathing. They took and hid her for several days, but the moment came when they had to rid themselves of the incriminating burden.

The Sister lived in the Warsaw ghetto. Of her entire family only she and her brother had survived. Together they found refuge in an attic. During the day they searched for food; at night they clung to each other for warmth against the cold. One afternoon as they were climbing the stairs to their room, the brother collapsed and died. It was late Friday afternoon, Erev Shabbat. The men whose task it was to collect the bodies of the dead could no longer be called. The dead boy remained lying on the stairs until Sunday. Every time the Sister left the attic to find food, she had to step over her dead brother. One day the Sister's turn came.

The Mother with her baby were hiding in a bunker with some other Jews. German police were hunting them down. When they approached the bunker, the baby started to cry. There was no other way. The Mother strangled her child.

The Man had gone through the same hell that millions of others had endured. What was known about him was learned from diary entries scrawled in the cover pages of an old prayer book. The diary contained nothing that was not known from a multitude of similar records. It concluded with the words, "I was standing behind the electrically charged barbed wire fence. In front of me I saw the road to Warsaw. I looked at the road . . ."

Was it the strange behavior of the Four that was preventing completion of the miracle of Resurrection? The New World was longing for the New Word, without which all would be vanity. What did the Four want? True, the Girl had witnessed horror no human could comprehend, but did she not see that all death had been redeemed:—that from deepest degradation man had risen to new dignity and beauty—that alive around her were the companions from the gas chamber? And why the indifference of the Sister to her brother? He stood there clothed in new strength, waiting for a sign of joyous welcome. But none came. And the Mother—how heartless she seemed! Her child had been returned, all the promises of babyhood

blooming in a maturing beauty. It was longing for a motherly embrace. How could she ignore her child! But the darkest blemish was cast by the Man. He stood behind the electrified barbed wire. Why remember such banality?

The New Word was still not heard. God remained speechless. The tension was becoming unbearable. Suddenly, Father Abraham stepped forward to the divine throne with a daring that astonished the heavenly court. He who had once boldly pleaded the cause of Sodom was pleading once again.

"Almighty God, do you not understand? The Four did not die of bullets, of lethal fumes, of bodily hurt. They died of contempt for what used to be called life—like the Man who stood behind the barbed wire fence, in front of him the road to Warsaw. 'I looked at the road,' he wrote. Why did he remember it? Perhaps it was important to remember it in order to save his last words for a surviving generation. What was he saying to you, God?"

"Was it not this? 'I looked at the road. All I wanted was to be able to go for a walk along that road to Warsaw. What kind of a world is it, God, where human wickedness will not let you go for a little walk?' It was then that he died, overwhelmed by the absolute absurdity of life. What is it they want? What can you give, God, to those who want nothing? The Four want nothing. They have lost all desire for life, for existence, even for Resurrection.

"Almighty God, you are omnipotent. You restored life to the dead earth. You resurrected the human race which inhabited the earth through many generations. Your utterance, 'Let there be!' restored to life the millions of Jews whose ashes had been scattered to all the winds of time. But the Four ceased to be because their souls died. They died of absurdity.

"Almighty God. You are omnipotent! But how do you resurrect dead souls?"

Once again complete silence filled the universe. At last, God spoke: "Abraham, my beloved son, I cannot."

A wailing filled the New Creation. God's cry reached the Four like a pleading embrace. The child, frightened, turned to her mother: "Mother, do you hear? Who is crying?" The Mother, seeing her child as if for the first time, hugged and kissed her and explained: "That is poor God crying. But never fear, my child. There will be another day and another and another, and we all will yet make Him smile."