

SAUL REVERE

What if we called a meeting and there was nothing to worry about? The Jews would indeed feel that the End of Days had come.

The Christians go around officially talking about "Good News", - that is, the coming of Jesus. That is what the word *evangelist* means, in its Greek origins: the messenger of good news. If the Jews had such messengers, we might have to call them *malangelists* (or, perhaps *tsurisangelists*). If we had any graven images it might be of a Saul Revere riding around the Jewish countryside, crying: "The worst is coming! The worst is coming!"

Of course, a certain amount of worrying is mandatory for the Jew. Because we are Jewish, we have a moral burden- that is, we constantly have to choose between doing what is right and doing what is wrong -and that is a constant source of worry. Indeed, we passed that moral burden on to Christianity* and some people, such as Sartre, say that is the root cause of anti-semitism. Westerners who no longer want that burden, blame the Jews for placing it like a yoke around their neck.

One might compare pagan Greek folk-tales with Jewish folk-tales. The Greek tales laid much of what happened to the random activities of the gods, mortal man being helpless and therefore choiceless. If you can't affect your destiny, why worry about it? Greek fables prevalently had sophisticated points to make, about wisdom and survival. Jewish animal fables - as embedded in the spoken legends which grew up alongside the scriptures- had *moral* points to make, relating to the Ten Commandments.

In the ancient Jewish legend, the cat and the mouse were originally great friends and companions. But one day, the mouse came covetously to God and complained that there was not enough for the two of them to eat. This was the first step in the mouse's intrigue to get permission to kill and devour the cat.

But God said: "O thou unclean reptile, thou shouldst have been warned by the example of the moon, who lost part of her light because she spoke ill of the sun, and what she lost was given to her opponent. The evil intentions thou didst harbor against thy companion shall be punished in the same way. Instead of thy devouring her, she shall devour you." Thus, because of the mouse's moral felony she is chased by the cat to this very day.

Well, Jews do indeed have to worry about their moral choices, because there are choices and there are consequences. In that sense, it might be correct to say that the Jews invented worry as a social phenomenon. And such worry has built a human civilization.

But by the same token, Jews have a mandate for joy - not only joy for the gift of their life, but joy when they live -make moral choices- as they should. "Nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his works," says the Bible.

Thus, Jewish joy always centers in the family because that is the nexus of all moral choices, from which all genuine "good works" radiate out. And that is why the continuity of that family is such a big thing for Jews. "Man is the only creature on earth that has come to have knowledge of his grandparents and his grandchildren," wrote Rabbi Leo Baeck. And so, simply, in our grandchildren, do we see the crucial link in humanity, in civilization. Our joy in grandchildren is not nearly so abstract, but neither is it unconnected.

Of course, there is also the continuing concern about what the world is about to do to us at any given time, but that, too, is only part of the total fabric of our lives. Perhaps Saul Revere should vary his message now and again.