CHAPTER-IV
INTELLECTUAL SURVIVAL THROUGH ETHICAL BELIEFS

Saul Bellow has a deep awareness of the ills of the society but vehemently denies that it is doomed. Waging a relentless battle against the apocalyptic assumption, Bellow seems to have set himself the task of reviving the image of man marred by twentieth century writing. He believes that man, created in the image of God and a little lower than angels has the power to realize himself, even in the present wretched situation. Most modern writers have represented man as miserable and impotent, but have failed to reveal his inherent dignity because they lack the nobler assumption that man is created in the image of God. The writer assumes the function of bringing the word of God, i.e. the search of truth and the purpose of human existence. In short the writer is like a prophet who tells the truth. Like the prophet, the writer fights for his fellows against injustice and tyranny.

The artists’ true vocation is to look with their eyes, discover truth and justice and make a clear estimate of the human condition. No doubt the industrial and technological forces have tended to blur and dissipate the wonder and enchantment of life but the artists act on the conscience of the community and try to restore them. They must also justify life. Many writers of the modern age have shown the individuals as completely dwarfed by the pressures of mass society. Bellow feels that those writers only show a disdain for life. He vehemently deplores the wasteland outlook. The doubly alienated nature of the Americans with special reference to the Jews, their suffering, their quest for identity and the subsequent redemption are the major themes of Bellow’s novels. The spirit of America as seen in Bellow’s novels is largely the spirit of the individual whom he wishes to defend- the individual’s significance. Though many a time, Bellow’s imagination is horrified by the emptiness of modern life; his protagonists keep faith in the human being and in the
possibility of their union with others. In the midst of the difficulties of modern life and terrors of death Bellow creates his own world of hope, optimism, renewal and peace.

All of Bellow’s heroes are ethical individuals. They are all social creatures and they love being with people. His heroes through language, thought and action attempt to rid themselves of the neutrality of society, so ruinous to world solidarity and they attempt to recreate the bond of humanitarianism found in words such as ‘good’, ‘humanity,’ ‘dignity’, ‘responsibility’ etc. A Jewish child’s first commandment from his parents is to be a mensch, to be an ethical, caring, human being. Bellow’s protagonists search for the answer to the question “How should a good man live?” Although Bellow’s heroes are flawed individuals and emotional cripples, in the course of the novel, they attempt to alleviate their condition. This is what makes them as humans, as intellectual survivors and joins them with the human struggle for survival and meaningful existence. An abiding sense of community is essential for recognition, existence, wholeness and survival, and Bellow’s heroes have that abiding sense of community.

Bellow, in his works, voices the Jewish opinion that man, with all his imperfections is basically good. When man expresses his individuality, man is given the freedom of choosing between good and evil but he is encouraged to choose good which is equated both with life and with God. The distinction between the good and the evil becomes the eternal conflict for man, but it is the good which finally goes deep into man’s heart indicating what man’s choice must be. Bellow’s fiction also always emphasizes on the good deeds based on others or what in Yiddish culture is known as maasivtovim. The moral ideal of goodness is given greater attention and importance in Bellow’s novels.

Even the names of Bellow’s protagonists have moral significance. Herzog is a name derived from herz meaning heart, breast, bosom, feeling, sympathy, spirit. At the same time, it is noticed that the ideal is not transcendence of human nature but the ripening of
the very essence of human nature. The individual that Bellow presents is a good man but imperfect. He may be an intellectual, but is often self-centered and at times morose as Joseph in *Dangling Man*, timid as Asa Leventhal in *The Victim*, cheerful as Augie in *The Adventures of Augie March*, infantile as is Moses Herzog in *Herzog* and crazy as is Eugene Henderson in *Henderson the Rain King*. Nevertheless he is a “good man.” It is a matter of perspective, depending on how one views the human being.

Bellow has sought in his fiction for ways to recover a civilized self, assuming that, for all that has gone wrong with our civilization, we can still learn within its context how to live decent, satisfying and really human lives. His primary concern is at the loss of moral and intellectual authority in America even among the rational, the disciplined and the humane. The positive note left by Bellow is that in his novels, Bellow attempts to depict man as having the power to overcome ignominy, though the society is indifferent to him. Man has the power to rise above the indignities heaped upon him by various known and unknown forces. Man has his limitations, so are his potentialities. The best part of man is found not in what he is but in what he would be or wills to be.

Bellow, through his protagonists, is trying to say that it is a difficult business to be human. The problem of being human must be solved individually but man always tries to evade his responsibility by claiming that society is responsible for everything. To-day man is destined to live in the midst of an urban-oriented repressive and materialistic society but he should be competent enough to recover his civilized self. This can be achieved not by rejection of society or by revolution against society but by seeking recovery and by renewing universal connections. Bellow has always rejected the denigration of the ordinary life of the individual and he has tried to show that there is the possibility of finding meaning and significance in such lives. The central thrust in his novels is always the defense of human dignity even in a dehumanized age. Bellow always feels that man’s
fate and his opportunity for nobility are not very different from what they were in the distant past. His constant effort is to define what is humane in modern life. As Schlossberg in *The Victim* says: “It’s bad to be less than human and it’s bad to be more than human. . . . More than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don’t either.” (*The Victim* 119) Bellow has often said that the raising of ethical and moral questions is at the heart of his novels and should be the most important part of literature.

*Dangling Man* is an existential work concerned with the meaning of identity in the modern world, the nature of good and evil, the possibility of fulfillment and in many respects the novel resembles Camus’ *The Stranger* and Sartre’s *Nausea*. A vital existential question is: “How should a good man live; what ought he to do?” (*DM*39) Joseph in *Dangling Man* is confronted with this question during his period of waiting after his resignation from his travel agency job and his waiting to be inducted into the Army. He goes through a painful period of loneliness and self-scrutiny and discovers that all avenues like status, ideology, religion, family and friends are denied to him. The anxiety and despair of his age mar the happiness that he is striving for. As the title aptly suggests, Joseph dangles between the deep desire to achieve and a mental exhaustion that leads to gloominess, between hope and despair. He wants to love, to be loved and be happy but the social constraints restrict him. He continues to live with his wife but he feels that: “the main bolt that held us together has given away and so far I have had no incentive to replace it.” (12). He even wonders how his father-in-law is able to tolerate his insufferable mother-in-law. Joseph is found lacking in the quality of humanness- the power to love. He ignores his friend’s statement that he is: “all fenced around.” (54) He firmly believes that by withdrawing from the reality of life, he can have a more refined conception of the self. He seems to be a moral idealist but not recognized as one by the society. From the beginning, he is shown as an unhappy man but one who has all the potentials of being
good and human. He wants to love but he cannot. He wants success in marriage but it is not possible because he feels he is being looked down upon even by his wife. Joseph is not merely a victim of his society but also a victim of his own psychology. He is one who avoids and refuses to comprehend the natural human limitations. He takes refuge in his diary which is a kind of solitary self-communication. Nothing can enter his world except what Joseph chooses to allow and he cannot think of anything other than himself. As days pass he realizes that he cannot escape or ignore society in which he is born. He says:

“Whether I like it or not, they were my generation, my society, my world. We were figures in the same plot, eternally fixed together. I was aware also, that their existence, just as it was, made mine possible.” (25) At the same time, he claims to be a victim of his age but he is the victim of himself. He hates to be victimized by the underground men who are all self-absorbed with ideals and obsessions which destroy community. Joseph too is an underground man who is able to see things as he wants to see them. What he experiences is the fall from idealism and he indeed becomes a victim and not a beneficiary. Joseph is fully aware that a search for the ideal is impossible because the ideal might never be reached. People always tend to achieve greatness and they have a notion that they are exceptional, unique and set apart:

Now, each of us is responsible for his own salvation, which is in his greatness. And that, that greatness, is the rock that our hearts are abraded on. Great minds, great beauties, great lovers and criminals surround us….The fear of lagging pursues and maddens us.

The fear lies in us like a cloud. It makes an inner climate of darkness. And occasionally there is a storm and hate and wounding rain out of us. (89)

The craze for greatness is noticed not merely in pursuing excellence, it sometimes leads to a disregard of the human as well. What Joseph wants is a “colony of spirits”- a
group whose covenants would be against spite, bloodiness and cruelty. The world now is nasty, dangerous, and crude and if measures are not taken existence would become unbearable and man would be no better than a beast. He even thinks that valid ethical norms can be established by man’s power and willingness to think rationally but he never realized that this would affect his ego and intensify the feeling of loneliness. Isolation does not make a man cultured and refined.

The individual cannot become human by himself. Self-being is only real in communication with another self-being. Alone, I sink into gloomy isolation- only in communicating with others can I be revealed in the act of natural discovery- Isolated or Self-isolated Being remains mere potentiality, or disappears into nothingness.” (Jasper 147)

One of Joseph’s chief ambitions is to found a Utopian colony where spite and cruelty would be forbidden. Therefore he is dismayed to find himself being overtaken by fits of violence. Joseph also fully realizes the impossibility of translating his dream of “the colony of spirits” into reality at his friend Servatius’ party. His hostess Minna Servatius, is insulted by Abt, her old suitor whom she has rejected long ago. Joseph further realizes that he too is earthly and common, and vulnerable to anger, suspicion and humiliation and is an object of pity. His maid-servant smokes in his presence arrogantly. He quarrels with his wife Iva when she asks him to cash her pay cheque thinking that she makes him run errands. He gets angry when an old acquaintance deliberately ignores him. He loses his temper with his adolescent niece and spanks leaving her parents shocked. He manhandles his landlord. He shouts at a bank employee. “He seems to be a human grenade whose pin has been withdrawn.” (147)The truth of mortality also affects him in the form of a dream. He understands that death is inevitable, however great one may be. His dialogue with the Spirit of Alternative makes Joseph realize the truth about himself, through a process of
self-analysis. He is oppressed with the feeling of self-pity and he tells the Spirit of the Alternatives: “I’m a chopped and shredded man.” (164) but again he feels that: “In a sense, everything is good because it exists. Or, good or not good, it exists, it is ineffable, and for that reason marvelous. (29-30). An artist friend tells him that the monstrous city around them is not the real world. The real world is the world of art. Bellow has been quite influenced by W.B. Yeats, a poet whom Bellow admires and he express here almost the same thought that W.B. Yeats focuses in his poem *Sailing to Byzantium*:

Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence
And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
To the holy city of Byzantium.

Unfortunately Joseph is not an artist. His sole interest is in being a good man where as there is nothing great in being good by oneself. “Goodness is not achieved in a vacuum, but in the company of men attended by love,” whereas “I, in this room, separate, alienated, distrustful, find in my purpose not an open world but a closed, hopeless jail.”(92) Joseph cannot be considered as a pessimist in the true sense but an emotional idealist. Finally to come out of the emptiness of life, he joins the army. He presumes that a regimental life would give him a sense of community which is essential for love. No doubt, civilian life indicates freedom even though this freedom is obtained from alienation and isolation. Army life signifies war and death but inactive freedom and isolation lead only to depression and anguish. Joseph has to give up his sluggish life when he joins the army. He can smell death through external factors like war but he can also sense death through internal factors like isolation: “The war can destroy me physically. That it can do. But so can bacteria.” (168). His quest is to discover something that will rescue him morally and ethically, although there is no guarantee of a happy life. Dangling between
alienation and accommodation, he ultimately accepts the sordid reality of war: “War is the gift of the estranged community, yet is reality to which Bellow conforms. This has multiple meanings, war as the death symbol and regimentation as symbol of war implies the poverty of living and inadequacy of freedom.” (Singh 28)

In the present world, everything is valued in terms of physicality. Money is put against goodness, technology has increased the wealth but it has created a poverty of the soul. Physical comfort is promoted with the progress in technology but it has led to the decline of mental strength. When Joseph thinks of this society, he also thinks of its power and its weakness. The world which was good has gone bad. He has a feeling that he is carrying on his back the burden of his society and is wretching in pain. He places himself in wrong contexts and stumbles in a society which is hostile to him. When he is ignored by an acquaintance Joseph says: “He has no business ignoring me. This is always happening to me . . . I have a right to be spoken to. It’s the most elementary thing in the world. . . . When a man obeys an order like that he’s helping to abolish freedom and begin tyranny.”(33-34) This kind of a feeling is due to non-commercial interest in life and due to his desire to live purely and authentically. His failure to come to terms with society can also be attributed to his refusal to surrender himself to the demands it makes on him. Joseph is completely nauseated by the commercialism and materialism that pre-dominates the society in the modern world.

Joseph has an ethical stance towards human values. He can accept killings in the war with dignity but he cannot tolerate the injustice done by deprivation and extravagance as his brother Amos shows. As for Joseph, accumulation is a murder and is worse than dying in the war. Life of honour and dignity is more valuable than social indignity. When Joseph finds that the society lacks human concern, he feels that this will lead to decay of the society. However, the irony is that Joseph all along found it almost impossible to
conform to existing human values, but now he wants to do something for the same society. His effort to return to society is the result of the realization of death. He knows that there is no escape from the reality of death. He personifies death as:

\[\ldots\text{the agent who takes you, in the last unforgiving act, into existence.}\ldots\]

He may come at a climax of satisfaction or of evil; He may come as one comes to repair a radio or a faucet; mutely or to pass the time of day, play a game of cards; or with no preliminary, colored with horrible anger, reaching out a muffling hand; or in a mask of calm, hurry you to your last breath, drawn with a stuttering sigh out of his shadow. (122-23)

Joseph is able to come to terms with what is offered by society when he understands that death is the supreme reality of this world. This reconciliation is what makes him an intellectual survivor. Going to war by joining the army is seeking a relief from the fear of failure, isolation, frustration, irritation, dissatisfaction etc. His joining a large society relieves him of his burden of a separate identity and the burden of isolation and he achieves a collective identity. The goodness and the ‘colony of spirits’ that he has been seeking all his life can be achieved even when he steps into a larger society. He is also able to look at nature as the source of emancipation from isolation and gloominess.

From a state of wilderness he has moved on to the pastoral-stillness in the midst of chaos. There is an overwhelming need for love and joys of life. He realizes that what might save him is the acknowledgment of society and humanity. Finally he is able to keep his faith in humanity, love and grace and this belief gives him the strength to make an attempt of the acceptance of life. In joining the army, Joseph joins society accepting its limitations and takes his place among the mortal men who have their own physical limitations. He dangles no more. He has become rational and subsequently an intellectual survivor.
The problematic theme that Bellow has been handling in many of his novels is whether modern man can attain dignity and can live a good life, judging his own frailties, cowardice and selfish motive. *The Victim* is a novel with ideas and Bellow, in this novel, wishes to reveal the true beauty and dignity of the human being, and his survival through ethical means. Like Joseph in *Dangling Man*, Asa Leventhal the protagonist of *The Victim* feels burdened by a constant struggle against the world because of a difficulty which is both psychological and moral. The theme of the novel is the casting off of Asa’s self-imposed burdens by learning to accept himself and others with an open heart. This can be realized only be admitting that one is merely human, by accepting rather than blaming oneself and others. This theme is very well expressed in a long speech by the Yiddish journalist Schlossberg. As he says:

It’s bad to be less than human and it’s bad to be more than human.

What’s more than human? . . . More than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don’t either.” (*TV* 119) He further says: “What is all the shouting about? A man is nothing, his life is nothing. . . . If a human life is a great thing to me, it is a great thing. Do you know better? I’m entitled as much as you. And why be measly? Do you have to be? Is somebody holding you by the neck? Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down. (120).

The wisdom of Schlossberg is that human life has dignity. Human life has greatness and beauty but the fact remains that it is not sub-human or more than human. Man constantly strives to make himself into a God and in this process he isolates himself from humanity and dehumanizes himself. To be human means to feel human concern, to be responsive to the suffering of others. When a man feels more than human or less than human he gets
detached from humanity and refuses to admit that he is like other men. Man definitely has
difficulties in becoming human but this is the way to choose dignity. Schlossberg, the
theatrical journalist is an impressive man to whom Leventhal is enormously drawn. For
him, to be human means to forgo the desire to be divine and simultaneously to avoid the
temptation to be bestial. It means to accept man as he is. Asa Leventhal, the protagonist is
always filled with fear and guilt that his boss, his brother’s wife Elena, and even his friend
Williston are against him because he is a Jew. He is also a solitary figure with few friends
and a kind of depressive. He feels he is a victim and separates himself from others. He
becomes less than human in his lack of compassion because he demands to be more than
human i.e. perfect and pure. To be human means that one has to confront elements inside
one self that one wishes to avoid. It only means that one has to confront the inhuman
within and without. The Victim is basically a novel about human responsibility and Bellow
probes this theme by placing Asa Leventhal in a series of crucial encounters with Allbee,
the gentile and anti-Semite who feels that the society has become anti-Gentile and
therefore he is a victim. To be a victim is to reject dignity and greatness. The name Allbee
suggests that each man is everyman. As John J. Clayton says regarding the second
epigraph of The Victim:

De Quincy’s vision of the human face upon the ocean is first a single face,
then “innumerable faces,” as the individual is at the same time all individuals, possessing
the dignity not of the exceptional man but of everyman. What can a man do, looking upon
this ocean confronting all those who want? He can recognize the humanity in common
between himself and the others; and he can answer one want-in this he will have
responded to all. (Clayton 51)

Allbee who has a distorted vision of the world judges and acts according to that
vision and his actions are destructive because of the nature of that distortion. He therefore
magnifies Leventhal’s confrontation with Rudiger. Leventhal too sees himself as
persecuted by forces outside himself and his judgments are always based on a faulty view
of the world. Leventhal feels the guilt that the anti-Semite imposes upon the Jew and feels
that in some way he deserves to be persecuted. Leventhal is the eternal Jew accepting his
moral responsibility for a world he never made. He is fully aware of the suffering and evil
which dominate the modern world. He knows something of what it is to be a victim. He is
struggling desperately to survive, though overcome by illness, treachery and malice
around him. Leventhal is convinced that man is the master of his own fate whereas Allbee
believes that men are victims of circumstances and accuses Leventhal of thinking that
Allbee has deserved what he has got. Allbee is considered as the alter-ego of Levanthal,
‘the double’, the ‘distorted image’, ‘super ego’ of Leventhal. Their conversations very
much resemble the conversations occurring between Joseph of Dangling Man and “The
Spirit of Alternatives.”

The epigraph from “The Tale of the Trader and the Jinni” in The Thousand one
Nights seems to imply that Leventhal is not an innocent victim but to some extent he is the
victimizer. He is guilty of causing harm to Allbee. The tale relates how a travelling
merchant, oppressed by heat, sits beneath a tree and eats some broken bread and dried
dates. When he has finished eating, he throws the stones of the dates away. Suddenly an
Ifrit appears and charges the merchant with killing his son. The merchant is puzzled by the
accusation and the Ifrit answers: “When thou atest dates and threwst away the stones they
struck my son full in the breast as he was walking by, so that he died forthwith.”(TV
Epigraph) It never occurs to the merchant that he would kill the son of the Ifrit with the
date stones he casts off. So does Leventhal. He has no intention to enrage Rudiger and
cause Allbee to be fired. Allbee is fired nonetheless but Bellow implies that Leventhal also
has a share in the victimizing business. Allbee also cannot be exempted from his guilt as a
victimizer. Ever since their meeting in the park, he has been haunting Leventhal and turns Leventhal from a victimizer to a victim. Leventhal tries to avoid Allbee and all efforts are made to reject him. At first, to Levanthal, Allbee is: “no more human to him than a fish or crab or any fleshy thing in the water.” (68). He blindly rebukes Allbee for his drunkenness and attributes his present situation to it. Leventhal’s rejection is thematically significant. It is a denial of his own self and his inability to perceive his own true self.

Leventhal may not be responsible for the present situation of Allbee, yet as a fellow human being, he should not turn away from his obligation since Allbee has already appealed to him for assistance. Leventhal gradually begins to accept the responsibility for Allbee’s condition, which, in effect, means that he begins to accept the evil within the human heart. Asa Leventhal, according to Schlossberg’s standards, has become, “exactly human.” This became possible as Asa becomes the other, momentarily he sees himself from the point of view of the other. Leventhal has come to terms with himself. Human, for Leventhal means accountable in spite of many weaknesses. Leventhal accepts the responsibility for his brother’s children during his brother’s absence. He is even ready to take the older boy to live with him. When he accepts responsibility, he feels less guilty. Many people just want to be left alone, too fearful to take on burdens but Leventhal gradually gains a deeper wisdom. He realizes that to think ‘human’ means to be accountable in spite of weaknesses. Leventhal has an honest mind. He wants to do what is right and is capable of humanism. The help he renders to Elena is out of love for humanity and brotherhood and a natural affection for his brother’s family and a sense of responsibility that of taking care of his brother’s family in his absence. Leventhal transcends worldly realities and talks in terms of human concern, a concern which breeds love in mankind. Bellow injects a morality in Leventhal which can cure all human maladies, a concern and a love for mankind. In a society which is disillusioned and lacks
moral commitment, Leventhal is set to evolve a self-definition in relation to society. Love for order in society is the genuine concern which Leventhal aims at. He bears responsibility to Allbee’s welfare and to his brother’s family, respects the social ethics and gains knowledge about human problems. It is, in fact Allbee who educates Leventhal in realizing the reality of victimization, the chaos that prevails in the society, and helps him to realize what is right. Allbee teaches Levanthal that life is not to be taken emotionally but in view of reality. Allbee says:

We don’t choose much. We don’t choose to be born, for example, and unless we commit suicide we don’t choose the time to die, either. But having a few choices in between makes you seem less of an accident to yourself. It makes you feel your life is necessary. The world’s a crowded place, damned if it isn’t. It’s an overcrowded place. There’s room enough for the dead. Even they get buried in layers, I hear…”The world was created for me, and I am absolutely required, not only now, but forever. And it’s all for me, forever.” Does that make sense? (173)

Setting the wrong into right for Leventhal is due to the behaviour of Allbee.

The Bellovian hero is surrounded by reality instructors, rather the Saviours, who show the hero that reality is brutal; therefore he has to be tough, self-seeking, and shrewd and accept the real situation. They also teach the hero that there are possibilities for man, that the hero should cast off his burdens of the past and future and should live in the present, see himself as merely human and then man can be redeemed. For Asa Leventhal one such Savior is Schlossberg. On one occasion Schlossberg explains that men try to be more than human in order to avoid death. At the birthday party held for the niece of Leventhal’s friend Harkavy, Schlossberg says:
Here I’m sitting here, and my mind can go around the world. Is there any limit to what I can think? But in another minute I can be dead, on this spot. There’s a limit to me. But I have to be myself in full. Which is somebody who dies, isn’t it? That’s what I was from the beginning. I’m not three people, four people. I was born once, and I will die once. You want to be two people? More than human? May be it’s because you don’t know how to be one. (229).

To accept oneself one must accept the end of oneself. To avoid facing death is to avoid being human, and to be cut off from the rest of humanity. At the birth day party Schlossberg further tells of the last funeral he attended at which paper grass had been put down to hide the dirt of the grave. Schlossberg says it is an attempt to evade the reality of death, to be more than human.

As the story proceeds Leventhal does become more and more compassionate and understanding. When the story approaches its climax Leventhal seems to begin to be able to tolerate Allbee and also to share the sorrow and responsibility of his brother. Asa has matured by now and is capable of accepting people. Accepting oneself and one’s faults, one can accept other people. The light of Leventhal’s possibility to become human which in turn anticipates his ultimate rebirth can be seen easily. Leventhal is changed permanently, he calls his wife home, becomes healthier, happier and father-to-be. The pregnancy suggests Asa’s potency and promise of a new life. He is now able to lead an orderly life. He at last, comes to realize that a man suffers too when he does not have a job, a place in the world, a seat in humanity. Allbee appears again and he is somewhat in an ameliorated condition. He looks: “more than moderately prosperous in the dinner jacket and the silk-seamed formal trousers.” (261) Bellow ends the novel with an apocalyptic vision. Leventhal and Allbee who meet in the theatre to watch a play, return to their seats
when the curtain bell rings. When they return to their seats in the audience, they symbolically move towards humanity. This return is significant for Leventhal. More than anything else *The Victim* is a novel about how to be human: “Failing to experience any specific sense of relationship with other people and contemporary society, Bellow’s characters respond to a more mystical sense of oneness with some ‘larger body’ which is transpersonal and relates them to the very currents of Being.” (Tanner 462)

To be an individual is a valuable thing, but to retreat into the ego in order to avoid the hazards of human life and community is destructive. Life is a continual struggle, full of frustration, and despair. To become fully human, one must purge himself on his egotism-his destructive self and find his own self in the human community. This new self is never really happy and content, but it is human in the best sense of the word. By admitting that one is not too good for this world, one becomes good enough for it and one becomes human. Humble acceptance of oneself is what makes Asa Leventhal an intellectual survivor. Leventhal is much more at ease with himself. He no longer feels that he is being blamed for everything, and is not ready to blame others for his misfortunes. The novel’s conclusion is no doubt optimistic with Leventhal joining humanity without surrendering to society. He feels more at peace with himself, though his question to Allbee: “What’s your idea of who runs things?” (264) remains unanswered. Men have contradictory views about how things are run-God or Fate. However reconciliation can take place only when the questioning is stopped and acceptance of one’s incomplete state takes place.

*Seize the Day* is a novel about the transition of the protagonist from self-deception to self-renewal. Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist of *Seize the Day* is the least successful of Bellow’s men. In fact, his existence is defined by failures- failure as an actor, husband, father and son. There is nothing in life that Wilhelm is able to cope with adequately and
his story is a series of perversely mistaken choices. The protagonist is, no doubt, presented in a most unfamiliar light but the novel argues that no one however difficult his past may be is a failure, if he is willing to let go of his illusions and if he is able to cling on to certain morals. Bellow, through his protagonist who is in a state of disillusionment finally makes him and his readers understand that man in his mortality has little choice but to “Seize the Day.” Tommy Wilhelm who appears to be a weakling is able to emerge as an intellectual survivor through morals and ethics. Bellow says that man should seize the day because the future is unknown to him. The well-known phrase that stands as title of this novella is a translation of a Latin phrase *carpe diem*, first used by the poet Horace, and generally applied to a kind of literature, usually lyric poetry that encourages a materialistic enjoyment of the present moment on the grounds that life is short.

Wilhelm’s conflict with his father is the central issue in the initial part of the novel and his involvement with Tamkin encompasses the middle part of the novel and his plight as a defeated man and his resurrection is the concern of the last section of the novel. Wilhelm suffers from a profound sense of failure over being unable to make money, the only factor that determines an individual’s status in the materialistic society. He feels that his identity as a father, as a husband and as a son is determined by his financial status. He is even denied of paternal love because of his poor financial status. Tamkin and Margaret also use his desperate financial plight to exploit him. Bellow, here, indicates the power of money and the novel explores the effect of financial failure on a sensitive individual in a society that assesses a man’s worth exclusively in monetary terms. In this modern materialistic world each human being is reduced to an economic entity but it is after losing his money that Tommy Wilhelm is able to find a sense of communion with humanity and in poverty, he is able to recover his dignity.
What Tommy wants from his father actually is not just money but love and concern. The mere touch of his father’s hand thrills: “the foundations of his life.” (STD 44)

Wilhelm always feels the power of love within him: “A man is only as good as what he loves?” he tells Tamkin. (10) His heart craves for love. The demands of the world of business, and success and money have displaced the feeling of love in his heart for quite some time. It is only after all his money has been drained from him by his wife and by Tamkin that the healing power of love asserts itself. As for Dr. Adler his sources of love have dried up in him. For him love is only self-love, generated by his admiration for his own success, for him love and money are identical. That is the reason, why he cannot respond to Wilhelm’s pleas for help. When he says that he will not give him money, he also means he cannot give love. This estrangement between father and son has become the pattern of the world. When he considers Mr. Rappaport he says:

This old man still makes money in the market. Is loaded with dough, probably. And I bet he doesn’t give his children any. Some of them must be in their fifties. This is what keeps middle-aged men as children. He’s master over the dough. Think-just think! Who controls everything? Old men of this type. Without needs. They don’t need therefore they have.

(102)

When Tommy Wilhelm thinks indignantly about his father’s self love, he recalls from his college literature course the line from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73- “love that well which thou must leave ere long.” He feels at first that it referred to his father, but soon he understands that it is for himself. He should love that well- “This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong.”(12) He remembers another poem that he loves. It is Milton’s Lycidas and he quotes the line “Sunk though he be beneath the wat’r’y floor,” (13) and later couples this with a line from Shelley’s Ode to the West Wind “I fall upon the thorns of life, I
bleed.” The lines from poems by Shakespeare, Milton, Keats and Shelly, make a great impact on his mind. These lines voice the needs of his soul and speak of natural human experience - suffering, death, love, and the healing influence of nature. The explosion within the depth of his heart that occurs when he sees the corpse in the funeral chapel is also a realization of his heart’s ultimate need, a gush of love that cleanses his system as he experiences a sense of communism with all mankind.

Tommy Wilhelm excuses his father’s self-love as the fear of death. His most moving thought is what his father’s death will mean for him. He says: “when he dies, I’ll be robbed like. I’ll have no more father.”(92) About his relationship to his father he recognizes, “It’s time I stopped feeling like a kid toward him, a small son.”(11) Tommy Wilhelm’s inability to grow beyond a childish stage of development can be taken as the cause of the whole series of failures of his life. But his childishness is based on his need for love and also his need to give love. After continued rejection by his father, he later realizes that he will have to change his way of thinking: “And why”, Wilhelm further asks, “should he or anybody else pity me: or why should I be pitied sooner than another fellow? It is my childish mind that thinks people are ready to give it just because you need it.” (93) At this point he has matured enough to reverse his self-conception from that of son to that of father to his two sons. He is a forty four year old child and is a pathetic figure. He longs for parental acceptance but does everything to be alienated from his father. He yearns to be independent, but refuses to accept obligations. He desires to be successful but acts foolishly by quitting his job and later by losing his savings in a speculation venture. He is the saddest depiction of a human being, Bellow has ever presented. His character is his fate. But in spite of all his weaknesses, Wilhelm is a man of good will, able to find compassion for his father too, who has nothing but recentness for his son, the father who clings to all he has even when he is aware of the closeness of death.
Tommy Wilhelm seeks forgiveness from his father. Dr. Adler, when confronted with Tommy’s pleas, will not be moved and in the end it is Tommy who must forgive himself. Later, in the subway, he experiences a rush of brotherly love for all grotesque human beings, including him. By extending himself in a moment of human solidarity, he can, like the *Ancient Mariner*, love himself as well, and so expiate his guilt. Tommy learns that the world is absurd but that the human heart is a holy and whole place. He also learns that true compassion for the human condition is the antidote of despair. This makes it very clear that Tommy Wilhelm is a man of ethics. He always longs for sensible truths even when Tamkin assures him that there are only crooked lines. In spite of his wife’s, his employer’s, his father’s, and Tamkin’s betrayal of him, Tommy is determined to get back the good things of life and lead a tranquil life. His final emotional climax is not bitterness at betrayal, but the achievement of love for imperfect people like himself whom he discovers in the underground subway in Chicago and in the funeral parlour. Bellow has given him all the right instincts for intellectual survival and social contract as he identifies with the countless unknown others with whom he shares the human plight.

In fact, what Tommy Wilhelm believes to be his trouble are not his real troubles. He is a moral masochist and his troubles are self-imposed. He has no idea of his self-destructive impulses. However the novel does not end in Tommy’s masochistic acceptance of his role as victim. It ends in hope for a new life. The survival instinct is there in him. Tommy, like all of Bellow’s heroes does not want to cut himself off from other men. Just as Joseph in *Dangling Man* longs for “a colony of spirits” and believes that: “goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by love.” (*DM* 92) So Tommy longs to merge into community. The conclusion of *Seize the Day* is but a re-birth for Tommy Wilhelm. This is a kind of intellectual survival and affirmation of humanity in the face of death. Wilhelm, in the Jewish funeral parlor: “accepts his racial
heritage before the corpse of a stranger, he accepts his human heritage.” (Opdhal 67) By drowning himself in tears, he rises in triumph. He still has to face the troubles that will never go away, but there is the need and urge for survival. Tommy Wilhelm is only crippled but not dead. He appears to be a failure, but he has the potential to survive intellectually.

Man’s soul has existence only when it can love and feel love in return. Modern society, however, has no use for the soul. Kill or be killed is its law and that of material life. Most people are aware of this and their souls have died in the process. Others, who believe in the life of the soul, suffer and eventually get destroyed as they are unable to fight against the law of nature. But such destruction can only affect the pretender soul and the real soul is born as a result as in the case of Tommy Wilhelm. Tommy’s inward journey leads him to a greater self-insight and maturity. Seize the Day is an affirmation of human life. Tommy Wilhelm need not live a life given to him by others and follow a masochistic strategy to preserve his self. This affirmation is found most clearly in the poem that Tamkin presents to Tommy Wilhelm:

If thee thyself couldst only see
Thy greatness that is and yet to be
Thou would feel joy-beauty-what ecstasy
They are at their feet, earth-moon-sea, the Trinity. (75)

When Tommy asks Tamkin: “who this thou is” Tamkin tells him: “Thou is you.”(76)

Bellow’s great achievement in Seize the Day is that he finally forces his readers to see Wilhelm as a kind of hero. Scholars concur that Wilhelm exemplifies the typical anti-hero, which the Nobel Committee defined in 1976 as a man: “who keeps trying to find a foothold during his wanderings in our tottering world, one who can never relinquish his faith that the value of life depends on its dignity, not its success.” In the post-war society
of America, man’s worth is put to test against the growing materialism in which money and power become the measuring norms.

Augie March, the protagonist of *The Adventures of Augie March* who has the innocence of Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and the radiance of Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an easy prey to urban disasters that weaken the simplicity and purity of life. With multiple roles to perform - a petty thief, a union organizer, a salesman, an eagle-trainer, a merchant, a sea-man – Augie is presented as a post-war casualty of materialistic society. Yet he is a man with feelings and emotions who cares very little for money. He resorts to stealing under the influence of Grandma Lausch in order to meet the demands of the family. Thea and Simon also have great desire to amass wealth. They reject Augie when he fails to abide by their desires and Augie is victimized. At the same time, it does not mean that Augie does not have any lust for the good things of life but he is not the type who will be a slave to greed. He has his own limits and he knows where to draw the line. He is guided, to a large extent by morals and ethics:

For Augie, sincerity, simplicity and lack of attraction for materialistic pursuits come naturally as a reflex but he also questions the validity of such an approach to life. It is difficult to assess Augie’s failure in terms of worldly success as he is not quantitative like Simon but qualitative in nature. He lives by abstract values as a “philosophic picaro” and to see his failure in terms of worldly value is to misinform the romantic in him. The danger with which he lives is also the reason which makes him lovable. His foolish approach and stubbornness makes him commendable in a society which evaluates a person in terms of money. (Singh73)
Augie stands for social values, kind gestures, idealism, importance of feelings and independence and many more worthy qualities which overlook the importance of money as supreme, whereas and many others stand for certain values in terms of money, prestige, status and affluence. Augie is also capable of love and sentiment. By giving away his savings to MimiVillars, Augie overcomes the greed in him and expresses the sentiment of sharing and love. After the feticide episode, Mimi speaks of the hardships of life and supports the importance of economic independence and blames Augie’s parents for all his troubles. And Augie remarks philosophically: “It couldn’t have been all accident. On my mother’s side at least I can be sure there is love in it.” (AAM 254). However he does not see this world as a gloomy place with no hope in spite of being in deep trouble. His mother’s weakness, the burden of Georgie, Simon’s greed for power and money and Grandma Lausch’s ageing problems do not deter his strength, tolerance, boldness, coolness, sympathetic nature and farsightedness. These are the qualities through which Augie expresses his faith in love Augie’s dream of a foster home where he would stay with his mother and Georgie, is an expression of love. He says:

I aim to get myself a piece of property and settle down on it. Right here in Illinois would suit me fine, though I wouldn’t object to Indiana or Wisconsin. Don’t worry, I’m not thinking about becoming a farmer, though I may do a little farming, but what I would like most is to get married and set up a kind of home and teach school. I’ll marry - of course my wife would have to agree with me about this – and then I would get my mother out of the blind- home and my brother Georgie up from the South. (456)

Augie even feels that his brother Simon, who is the victim of Moha, should have a child so as to bestow his love as he thinks that parenthood is a relief against materialism. Augie further expresses a keen desire to have children on whom he too can bestow his love.
Augie’s adventures and problems are due to the effects of mechanization in society that has adversely affected the family life in America. In fact his adventures serve the purpose of discovering the meaning of love in urban society. Augie justifies a life that cannot be suppressed by the pressures of evil. Though he steals the books with Padilla, he must ensure a triumph of his life by reading them. He always shows an optimism even when he is bogged down from within. He sees the possibilities of living happily and strives for a better fate. He visualizes success in the face of defeat. He laughs instead of brooding because life has taught him certain values that make him optimistic.

Augie’s innate optimism enables him to describe himself as an “animal ridens” which he defines as someone who “will still refuse to lead a disappointed life.”(536) He is a sensitive, caring, sentimental individual. He has his lapses. His continual association with crime and his involvement in illicit dealings in Europe are there in his life, but his conscience, his hope and search for a worthwhile fate govern his existence ultimately. “I have always tried to become what I am.” says Augie “... what if what I am by nature isn’t good enough?” ... but you must take your chance on what you are ... It is better to die what you are than to live a stranger forever.” (485) However Augie’s quest not only for identity but also for a proper fate is rendered peculiarly difficult by the nature of the world he is born into and by the fact that he has to go through Machiavellians like Grandma Lausch, Basteshaw, Einhorn, Mrs. Renling, Simon, Thea who manipulate and exploit Augie in various ways. It is a world of materialists, exploiting for the sake of more money. Beyond material exploitations there are innumerable other forms of imposition. At a higher level these people try to impose a theory, a version, a system of life on Augie. Augie comments: “To tell the truth, I am tired of these big personalities, destiny molders, and heavy- water brains, Machiavellis and wizard evildoers, big- wheels and imposers - upon, absolutists.” (524) In this world of exploiters and theoreticians, Augie’s principal
ambition is to resist total manipulation. He even wants to resist what one character says as “moha . . . meaning opposition of the finite. It is the Bronx cheer of the conditioning forces. Love is the only answer to moha being infinite” (450)

Augie is consistently interested in the question of fate and finally believes in Heraclitus who says, “a man’s character is his fate”(3) because it is obvious that this fate is also his character. Like Asa leventhal, Augie March accepts the conditions within which we live and even makes a good deal more than them. He is the comic hero who looks at his misadventures and grins. Augie is the Colombus of the commonplace. With his confidence, his appetite for experience, his extraordinary self-awareness, he reminds the speaker of Song of Myself, Whitman. He dismisses his status as a Jew and, Augie is, as he says an American born. Critics have gone at length about his Jewishness. “Augie is a talmid and this is a prime characteristic of a Jew. The succession of men, who counsel Augie, generally at the metaphysical level, are rabbis, if we take the word in its true meaning.”(Guttmann15)

Augie at last comes wholeheartedly to the natural laws, his “axial lines of life… Truth, love, peace, bounty, usefulness and harmony” (454) Augie’s earnest wish is that people should come to each other entirely without any ulterior motive or aggression is praiseworthy. Initially in Augie, a tone of innocent and joyous acceptance of life which later is turned into an ironic and satirical temper is found. This is a sign of his maturity. Augie himself is disappointed in life and his disappointment expands his insight and makes him aware that suffering and agony are an integral part of human experience. Later in Mexico, he receives this important message from the exiled Russian soldier and from his own sufferings with Thea. No doubt, Augie’s attempts to find a high and distinctive fate are hardly successful, and indeed at times he is tired of his adventures. Gradually, he moves towards a form of reconciliation, not with society but with life itself. He can look
back at his life as a series of errors, but he gains the knowledge that life is full of
blessedness and he calls it “amor fati . . . or mysterious adoration of what occurs.”(527) He
is here an intellectual survivor who has great regard for and affinity to the moral values of
life. This is confirmed by the fact that Augie refuses to live a disappointed life though he
knows that life does end with so many disappointments. He intends to discover how most
positively to cope with this fact. He therefore insists on this “universal eligibility to be
noble.” The nobility of life may not be immediately or easily demonstrated or made
visible. Augie can scarcely be said to be leading a noble life, yet there is a gesture of
affirmation and survival instinct in him. His life is not a failure but a life filled with hope
that refuses to accept despair. He is a sort of Columbus. He has a profound knowledge of
human depravity, yet approaches the world with remarkable tenderness. This resilient
nature is perhaps the best defense against nihilism and self-pity. Augie’s life is a life in
which pain and disappointment not only become something to live for they may even be a
source of joy. Augie’s greatest desire is to be no more and no less than human. He only
wishes to retain a moral vision in terms of the axial lines he has discovered.

Eugene Henderson, the protagonist of *Henderson the Rain King* is obsessed with
the desire to redeem himself when he finds that the society is unsympathetic towards him.
He is always put under the pressure of being good from the beginning of the novel and he
is fully aware that he is not what he is expected to be and is greatly affected by other’s
impressions about him. He feels unwanted and he fears death when his old house-maid
dies. Henderson not only has a feeling of uselessness and an inner realization of the need
for proper direction in his life but the strong desire to establish communication with the
outside world. At the beginning Henderson is seen grappling with the problem of
organizing his memories and finds it difficult to cope with the present as it is with Joseph
in *Dangling Man*. He says:
A disorderly rush begins – my parents, my wives, my girls, my children, my farm, my animals, my habits, my money, my music lessons, my drunkenness, my prejudices, my brutality, my teeth, my face, my soul! . . .

And they pile into me from all sides. It turns into chaos. (HRK3).

His massive physic and his appearance are which are somewhat unusual and they are burdens to him. He is six feet four inches tall, weighs two hundred thirty pounds, his neck size is a formidable twenty two. His face is enormous, about as big as the entire body of a child. He says that New York is stamped upon his face: “My face is like some sort of terminal; it’s like Grand Central, I mean - the big horse nose and the wide mouth that opens into the nostrils, and eyes like tunnels.” (51). Though he is proud of his physical strength, he also feels that his enormous size merely intensifies his uselessness. Henderson with his gigantic frame of body, his massive strength, his abundant wealth, uncontrollable energy and vitality often seems to stand “as a symbol of America itself.” (Markies195)

Henderson’s act of violence and acts of the ridiculous are due to his detachment and lack of communication with society. His violence is so uncontrollable that he acts without sufficient reflection. Henderson loses his temper with his tenant tries to shoot their pet cat and refuses to deposit their money. He quarrels with people, falls from a tractor and breaks his leg and hits with his crutches, everyone who crosses his path. He breaks bottles on the beach while holidaying with his family and harasses his neighbors so much so that they prevent their children from playing with his. All these make him an absurd character. Exerting his physical self in this world is only to establish himself but he feels all the more lost. He rebels against everything and everyone and feels that all are against his seeking an answer to what he wants in life. His marriage to Frances is unsuccessful as there was no emotional bond and the relationship was egotistical. Henderson is never able to communicate his feelings of love and concern. His second marriage to Lily is also not
gratifying and it is his disappointment at home that persuades him to go to Africa. Henderson who is blind to the nature and meaning of love, knows of himself only as a thing subject to destruction and he regards love as dubious and not authentic and a mere product of sentiment. But gradually he begins to realize that the necessary relationship with the world and with his family cannot be formed by violence, or drunkenness or senseless fighting. He knows that he must change his life in order to find proper relationships and to discover the values necessary for living a life of purpose and meaning. In Africa he thinks he will be able to explore the eternal question that haunts him: “Who am I? What is this world around me? What can I hope for? What should I do?”

(Schachtel320)

Once again in this novel, *Henderson the Rain King*, Bellow tries to establish through Henderson’s character the necessity of love. However rough, Henderson might appear outwardly, he has a deep desire to be good and this desire is an expression of his love for mankind. He is denied the attributes of goodness and he cries, “Oh, the wrong, the wrong! What can I do about it? What can I do about all the damage? My character! God help me, I’ve made a mess of everything, and there’s no getting away from the results.” (49). Henderson is a loving soul. He is able to derive calmness and peace in Africa when he is disconnected with the materialistic society. The urge to transform himself into a better individual is always there in Henderson and he intends to do something meaningful in life. However he seeks the meaning of life and death not in civilization, but in a savage surrounding. He goes to the deep African jungle to explore his own self and death. He learns about love, about the purity of heart and the humbling of ego from the Arnewi tribe. This he learns from Itelo, when he keeps Henderson’s foot on his head which is an act of accepting not only defeat but also death. He also realizes that it is possible to generate love through happiness which he learns from Queen Willatalte.
Now look at Willatale, the Bittah woman; she had given up such notions, there was no anxious care in her and she was sustained. Why, nothing bad happened! On the contrary, it all seemed good! Look how happy she was, grinning with her flat nose and gap teeth, the mother of pearl eye and the good eye, and look at her white head! It comforted me just to see her, and I felt that I might learn to be sustained too if I followed her example. (79)

It is she who inspires him towards the knowledge of love and happiness. However, in spite of his good intention of providing help to the Arnewis, through overconfidence, he causes great trouble to the tribe. He intends to do something good but something goes wrong by which his goodness is not projected. From this unhappy experience with the Arnewis from whom he wanted to learn more about life, about ‘grun-tu-molani,’ (85) he also learns the meaning of death.

Queen Willatale represents an integrated personality and Henderson notices that “good nature emanated from her.” (71) He feels the radiant heat and the monumental weight” of her breasts, feels as if he “were touching the secrets of life.” (72) He is inspired by her calm and composed disposition even during the time of suffering. However Henderson cannot have salvation through Willatale’s teachings. He who comes here to learn, to seek, and to transform behaves like a Savior to the tribes and his super ego makes him say to the Arnewis:

Do you know why the Jews were defeated by the Romans? Because they couldn’t fight back on Saturday. And that’s how it is with your water situation. Should you preserve yourself or your cows, or preserve the custom? I would say, yourself. Live,” I said “to make another custom. (61-62)
He fails to understand the fact that one should be humble to learn the great secrets of life. He has to give up his tendency to assume divine qualities and must stop running after illusions. He has to learn that love cannot be won by aggressiveness. The Arnewis have provided Henderson with an affirmation of life. This affirmation has fulfilled only part of his need but not all of it, so he has to continue his search for personal redemption. Later from King Dahfu, Henderson learns that “grun- tu-molani”, (85) was just a starting but is not sufficient.

Henderson is now drawn towards morals and values because of his attempt to change his life. In the Arnewi village, he wants to do something for them. All his attempts fail but he learns great lessons. In his attempt to know, more about himself, he also learns about love, truth and reality. From the life-affirming matriarchal Arnewi tribe, Henderson travels to the patriarchal Wariri tribe. King Dahfu of the Wariri tribe and Henderson are drawn towards each other primarily by their mutual need to work out their notions of reality. From King Dahfu and from the Wariri tribe he learns acceptance and also aspiration. The greatest lesson that he learns from the Wariri tribe is the importance of sharing. He shares King Dahfu’s destiny by becoming his friend and he expresses his willingness to learn from him which is an act of humility which is otherwise alien to the nature of Henderson. King Dahfu who is Henderson’s alter-ego wants to change Henderson by forcing to confront and accept reality. He wishes that Henderson combines his acceptance of life which the Arnewis have taught him with an acknowledgement of his own mortality. Hence Henderson’s confrontation of Atti. He is taught to be graceful, at the same time as great as Atti. That is the significance of his imitating her actions. In imitating the lion, Henderson causes acceptance and is willing to merge. He has overcome his fear and the result is in favour of love which means his ego is removed. The significance of the lion is used by Bellow to indicate the progress of Henderson from pigs, frogs and cows to
lion which is the symbol of greatness and magnificence. His imitation of the lion helps him to shake off at least part of his isolated and egocentric individualism. Henderson recognizes that by isolating himself from others, he has become estranged from himself. Before he set out on his quest, it was impossible for him to relate himself to others or even communicate with others. In Africa he is able to remove his ego and acknowledge other individuals. He is able to rise from “I want” to “she wants, he wants, they want.” (286)

During the rain dance ceremony, it is the power of Henderson’s love that enabled him to lift the goddess Mummah due to his perception that he was not lifting a dead object but a living woman. This ritual symbolically suggests that love is the key to Henderson’s spiritual awakening. When he has this awakening he recalls his early life when he had not been estranged from the world but was bound to it by love. Recalling his childhood days he says:

\[
\text{It is very early in life, and I am not out in the grass. The sun flames and swells; the heat it emits is its love too. I have this self- same vividness in my heart. There are dandelions. I try to gather up this green. I put my love- swollen cheek to the yellow of the dandelions. I try to enter into the green.} \\
\text{(283).}
\]

In Africa, in his middle age, Henderson is able to rediscover this intimate bond with the universe. The world is not an adversary but an intimate is the discovery that Henderson makes from his African tour.

Henderson realizes in his conversations with the king, the real nature of goodness. In the present times, people assume that good though valuable is weak and on the contrary evil is spectacular and powerful. King Dahfu, however, feels that goodness is a great value. He says that one has to be lion- hearted to accept the blows of fate and still remain good:
My whole view is opposite or contrary, that good cannot be labor or conflict. When it is high and great it is too superior. Oh, Mr. Henderson, it is far more spectacular. It is associated with inspiration, and not conflict, for where a man conflicts there he will fall, and if taking the sword also perishes by the sword. A dull will produces a very dull good, of no interest.

Henderson learns such moral lessons from King Dahfu. Henderson’s anxiety to move the statue of the Goddess Mummah, is an act of will not goaded by the desire for self-gratification but to prove that he is committed to certain values. When he succeeded in moving the statue he gets immense satisfaction as he has done something that is pure without expecting anything in return. From King Dahfu, Henderson also learns the value of tolerance which he hopes he will be able to use in his American society. Henderson’s experiences not only teach him the value of tolerance, sharing and love but they also enable him to understand the meaning of death and subsequently the knowledge of the mortality of the soul. He also becomes aware of the need to sacrifice oneself for the needs of the community as King Dahfu does. He is very eager to save the king from his imminent death. This is the time he feels that his life acquires a meaning that is in terms of sacrifice. He tells the king: “Your Majesty, move over and I’ll die beside you. Or else be me and live. I never knew what to do with my life anyway, and I’ll die instead”. He becomes wise and redeems his position by learning to live in a society which is loveless. When he sees death so closely in the Wariri camp, he realizes the meaning of life. After achieving wisdom by seeing death so closely, and after learning the importance of communicating lovingly, Henderson hopes to communicate meaningfully with his family and thereby restore order and stability in life. The death of King Dahfu brings about a great transformation which makes him feel that maintaining one’s dignity and accepting
one’s responsibility towards family are very important for being an intellectual survivor. It
is this life-affirming principle of love rather than heroics and this awareness brings a
change in Henderson. King Dahfu’s death is also an eye opener for Henderson. It enables
him to get an insight and also gain knowledge of the mysteries of human life as well as the
universe. It enables him to affirm his faith in life, love and brotherhood. He is transformed
from selfishness to selflessness. He has learned many crucial facts about life. He is now a
more conscious individual - one who can adjust himself to the varying situations of life.
When he sees death so closely, he realizes the meaning of life. He responds to the belief
that love and forgiveness are superior to the expression of wrath and that nobility is a part
of life. The world is no more a mighty oppressor because he has realized that: “I’m not
what I thought I was.” (328). His grief at Dahfu’s death is fierce but now he is a changed
man. This grief moves Henderson with forgiveness rather than anger. There is no doubt
that the feeling of revenge is there in his mind and he would like to crush his enemies:
“like old beer cans” (316) but now he is a tempered man and entreats Romilayu for help:
“Revenge is a luxury. I’ve got to be canny. Hold me back, Romilayu.” (317)Now he has
survived intellectually as he is capable of love and forgiveness. He can return love for
hate. As Dahfu once told him, a brave man: “will not want to live by passing on the wrath.
A hit B? B hit C? - we have not enough alphabets to cover the condition. A brave man will
try to make the evil stop with him.”(214) Therefore instead of slaying the offspring of the
lion that killed King Dahfu, Henderson caresses the tiny cub.

It is in Africa that Henderson realizes that he has spent his days running after
illusions. Finally he comes to terms with reality and understands that reality is inevitable.
His experiences outside his family, in the remote interior of Africa, help him to come to
terms with the realities of the world. Finally we are able to see a radiant Henderson in
harmony with himself and with the world around him. At the beginning he shows his
bestial nature moving with pigs and filled with sensuality but at the end he is ennobled by ‘grun-tu-molani’ and by lions. He carries forth his friend’s soul. He realizes that his spirit is awakened. Now he is prepared to embrace values and he is found becoming larger than life. He is capable of spontaneous love and can adopt an orphan. There is no reconciliation with the world but there is triumph over it. Lily had once asked him whether he knew what love could do. Henderson discovers the answer in Africa: “It’s love that makes reality reality.”(259) In the plane on the way back to America, Henderson makes a great discovery that whatever gains he has made is by love. It is the spirit of love that King Dahfu instilled in him that has cleansed his heart and calmed his demanding voice. Life in communion with nature is harmonious. But man has many duties and responsibilities. The purpose of life becomes fulfilled in discharging one’s duties to society. By accepting his responsibilities Henderson realizes that he cannot stop but has to move on to discharge his duties. As Robert Frost says:

The woods are lovely dark and deep

But I have promises to keep

And miles to go before I sleep

And miles to go before I sleep.

From a sufferer he emerges as a survivor. His decision to join medicine and render service to humanity is a clear mark of his intellectual survival. “He has a deep and instinctive sympathy for the vulnerable, the suffering and the lonely.” (Pearce73)

The Arnewi represent passive suffering and the Wariri arrogant will power. The Arnewis are meek and submissive like their cattle and they are victims and sufferers. The Wariri represent a violent and rebellious folk who can whip even their gods to submission. Human society cannot be progressive either with victims or with rebels. Man should be an integrated person. True life is possible when man gets rid of animal as well as demoniac
instincts in him. Henderson attains this insight and emerges as an intellectual survivor during his arduous journey through the wilderness of Africa. Victory and survival come to him after he has dedicated himself to a struggle with the two tribes. Henderson’s progress and survival are: “from a critical, evaluative, ideological, moralistic response to life to an uncritical, accepting, affirmative response.” (Lewin130). From his African journey, Henderson learns that: “Nobility is not unreal and human greatness is no illusion. Much of his ranting, insatiable egotism has fallen from him and at least his life promises to exhibit both more peace and more purpose.” (Tanner80)

Saul Bellow’s next novel Herzog explores the validity of reviving romantic humanist values in the modern context where life languishes under the wastelandish brutal realism. Commenting on the form and theme of Herzog, Allan Chavkin observes:

The problem for Herzog, the contemporary romantic hero, is how to preserve humanist values in a period in which mass society has accelerated beyond the English Romantics’ worst fear, thereby creating views of man that are fundamentally nihilistic. (Chavkin326-27)

The protagonist of Herzog, Moses Elaknah Herzog, is a fragmented man, unable to fit together into a unified whole. He is trying to answer a social question, namely the values of life, but he does it by a withdrawal from society which in fact closes the door to the ability to discover the values of life. Herzog finds modern life degrading with its total acceptance of materialism and victimhood. Herzog’s soul is also totally affected by the various influences exerted by the city and he to a large extent fits the description of a wasteland figure. He seems to live in a world where all human values are beleaguered by death forces. In such a world he feels estranged. He senses a profound moral decay in the world around him. The irony of the novel is that he cannot decide how to solve the problem of social decay except to talk about it to himself or others through letters. Since
they are never mailed, they are only written, in a sense, it can be said that they are written to himself. The letters of Herzog have a moral purpose. They are full of grave knowledge of the world, deeply concerned with the true seriousness of life and with the worth of things. Herzog is a man of feelings and through his letters to various imaginary readers he expresses his concern regarding morality, brutality and social justice. The variety of letters also suggests that Herzog’s mind is not rigidly focused nor is it completely without orientation. Once, Herzog writes that the human race will be free from human dependency but not he, for he will always need other people. But he has to get rid of his self-imposed burdens and break his silence. He needs to smash down his false self before he can begin a fresh life. Intellect, emotion and perception are at war and Herzog’s tragedy is the loss of control over the situation with none to direct him to think rationally. Some even thought that Herzog was insane and for a time, he himself seems to have thought that he was out of mind. But towards the end, he still behaves oddly but he feels confident, cheerful and strong. He is always exposed to social evils even when he was a young boy but his concerns are his own feelings and his own conscience. But Herzog despite his experiences of failure or despair and despite his awareness that history is driven irrationally by the violent clashing of egos continually affirms his faith in rational humanism. Bellow makes Herzog see that the future of humanity may well depend on the success of understanding. The great lesson that Herzog learns is a return to the compassion of the human heart.

*Herzog* is a prophetic book. Herzog does not predict the future but tells that what he believes must change if there is to be any future for mankind. In his letter to Mermelstein, his intellectual adversary, he asserts his renewed faith in the affirmation of human existence. The conclusion of this intellectual, philosophical and moral reasoning is that he is like any other human being. At this juncture, intellectual survival and the way to overcome pain are more important than conforming to the views of Nietzsche and his
nihilism. With his heart aching, and his mind disturbed, he feels compelled to achieve a balanced life. More true to his namesake, he is someone who respects law, particularly the law of nature. He is suspended between intellects and feeling, between reason and passion but yet Herzog longs for order in this filthy infected world. He goes on searching for the proper definition of the human condition in rational and lawful terms. When Herzog goes to New York to spend a weekend with his old friend, he becomes even more aware of his loneliness as well as the condition of this infected world, in spite of the various activities of the city. He comes under a state of great stress and strain, although he attempts to relate himself to the city. The basic tension is told very clearly by Bellow:

The square shapes (of New York) were vivid, not inert, they gave him a sense of fateful motion, almost of intimacy. Sometimes he felt part of it all-in the rooms, in the stores, cellars- and at the same time he sensed the danger of these multiple excitements. (Herzog 27)

He doesn’t get any mental peace whereas he is constantly obsessed with the thoughts of death and the fear of dying at this point of life in which he had yet to achieve something meaningful. However one of the threads that connect him to life is the awareness of the responsibility he owes towards his children. “He could not allow himself to die yet. The children needed him. His duty was to live. To be sane, and to live and, to look after the kids.”(27)

Herzog always feels that death is inseparable from evil and those who do evil are sick. The court scenes are crucial as they expose Herzog to the stark presence of evil and death in modern life. He witnesses cases dealing with assault and robbery, a male prostitute, and sexual harassment. One of the cases taken for hearing concerns a woman who kills her own child by constantly being violent with the child. The background of the murderess is desperate. She is epileptic, crippled, poverty-stricken, and has been sexually
abused as a child. Her lover, indifferent and senseless, watched while she battered her child to death. The details of the case both disturb and nauseate him. Herzog is sickened by what he hears, for the trial has a personal significance. Early in the novel, Herzog has learned that Madeleine and Gersbach have locked his daughter June in their car. The court scene recalls for Herzog the cruelty to his own child. When he confronts death in the most brutal form in the court, Herzog learns to temper his idealism and prepares himself to attain self knowledge. In fact, Herzog recovers his ordinary human self during his visit to the court room and to the police station where people from all walks of life assemble everyday for some personal or social reasons. His efforts to shape his life according to ready- made ideas from books keep him unaware of the truth of human nature. After reading different kinds of books, he considers himself an extra- ordinary person: “a marvelous Herzog “(93). With various incidents in his life and especially when his second wife divorces him and moves out with his best friend, he becomes aware of the truth of common life. The experiences in the court make him conclude that human life is a nightmare completely devoid of emotions. But when he finds his enemy bathing his daughter with tender affection, he realizes that a wicked man like Gersbach can have the potential for goodness and a good man like himself can have the potential for evil. This incident brings about a change in Herzog’s perception of life. He understands the complexities of human nature. He realizes that:

. . . a man is somehow more than his “characteristics,” all the emotions, strivings, tastes, and constructions which it pleases him to call “My Life.” We have ground to hope that a Life is something more than such a cloud of particles, mere facticity. Go through what is comprehensible and you conclude that only the incomprehensible gives away light. (266)
Later Herzog meets with an accident while taking his daughter to the museum. This shock leads him towards further moral refinement. When the policeman arrests him for not having a license and takes him to the police station where he finds himself: “Down in the ranks with other people – ordinary life?” (287), he behaves like an ordinary person, completely contrary to his earlier posture of defiance. Gradually he loses his egotism and regains his ordinary self which makes him capable of bonding with other people. He returns home at the end: “confident, cheerful, clairvoyant, and strong.” (1). Moses Herzog is always concerned with the dignity of the individual. He has suffered much. At the beginning he describes himself as narcissistic, masochistic, anachronistic, depressive, and jealous which are the various negative qualities of life. He feels that he is a disgrace to himself, unable to live up to his Jewish ideal of a man. The ideal comes also from his father who is a sacred being. It is from his father that he learns to believe in the dignity of the individual. More specifically, the basis for his ideal is Jewish. His standard has always been the Jewish family as he knows it in childhood. Herzog works for a change of heart. He wants to change the world. As his name suggests he wants to be a new law-giver to mankind. He says: “I am Herzog. I have to be that man. There is no one else to do it. After smiling, he must return to his own Self and see the thing through.”(67)

At times Herzog has intention to exhibit violence and brutality. Fortunately it is a good thing that the civilized forces that exist in this world keep him in check. For Herzog, violence is not the way to quiet his inner rage. What he can do to quiet his inner rage and resolve this crisis is to put his emotions into language. Language is his only strength, language is his only compensation. He attempts to explain to his friend Luca Asphalter why he has been spending so much energy on writing mental letters. On many occasions he is troubled by the fact that his problems accelerate due to his inability to love the world. When he recollects his childhood days, he realizes that the ability to love the world is
rooted mainly in attending to others, to the world apart from himself. But towards the end, instead of seeking to contain the world within himself, he now allows the world to contain him. He is restored and there is a new awareness of his responsibility towards the world, towards others, apart from himself. He recovers the gift that he had as a child, to see the world apart from himself and this leads to moral actions. He is restored and he is now an intellectual survivor. Whitman’s poem *In Paths Untrodden* is a celebration of human love and the need for comrades. Whitman affirms the idea of human brotherhood because he believes in it and is fully committed to it. Herzog like Whitman whom he admires, has a desire for such friendship but in practice he in the past has withdrawn from even close contact. However in the end, Herzog is seen moving away from selfhood to brotherhood, to community. He also depicts his faith in humankind’s potential for goodness.

Herzog like his creator refuses to believe that the modern age is worse than any other and he will not finally endorse pessimism. He feels strongly that the potentialities of human life are perennial. There is evil in this world but one must look away from it and go beyond it. The human mind in this age regards itself as monstrous and denies all possibilities of transcendence and this is the wrong path of civilization. He writes:

*Has the filthy moment come when moral feeling dies, conscience disintegrates, and respect for liberty, law, public decency, all the rest collapses in cowardice, decadence, blood? . . . I can’t accept this foolish dreariness. We are talking about the whole life of mankind.* (74-75)

Herzog’s ultimate goal is a kind of transcendental peace, an inner and outer quietness. Finally Herzog renounces his stance as victim and removes the feeling of revenge from his mind. His guilt is also reduced; he has partly forgiven others and he forgives that part of himself which he had projected onto others. By the end of the novel, it is clear that Herzog has reached a new awareness. He develops a new sensitivity to humanity and is able to
affirm the common life. His depression is over and he is able to emerge as an intellectual survivor by way of certain ethics. He is healed and is confident of his ethical values. He now understands that his past idealism and wastelandish brutal realism are two sides of the same coin. After a great mental struggle, he finally achieves the realization that everyday common life is the most divine one. Herzog is a man whose approach to life is analytical and intellectual, however, he is a survivor and this is borne out by the novel.

Herzog is at last prepared to acknowledge the difficult facts and forces of life and he tries to reconcile them and he also finds a middle ground which is essentially the basis of Emerson’s moral philosophy in his poems. Like Emerson, Herzog advocates that mankind is a sum total of physical and spiritual, body and soul, reason and emotion. Herzog realizes that to be human, it is necessary for every individual to harmonize both these, instead of being swayed away by one. Like Emerson, he further believes that coordination of the self and society is a necessary condition. Herzog recognizes the usefulness of both reason and emotion. Certainly his faith in reason or intellect is deep. In a personal note he writes: “The human intellect is one of the great forces of the universe. It can’t safely remain unused.” (311) At the same time his conviction in love, feeling and emotion is intense. He has love and feelings for his family and friends. He had problems because he is given to excess of reason and emotion. Now free of selfhood and elevated and sustained by ethics, he can now be a part of the world. Finally he accepts himself and the world: “I mean to share with other human beings as far as possible and not destroy my remaining years in the same way.’ Herzog felt a deep, dizzy eagerness to begin.” (322) Bellow’s message through Herzog seems to be that, it is not just love for others, but also the love of others in terms of concern and fellow feeling that will create a pleasant world order at a time when the world is overpowered by materialism and selfishness. He craves for love and not deceit as given to him by Madeleine and Gersbach. Finally, Bellow shows
Herzog as a man of compassion. He accepts bitterness and indifference in order to strike an affirmative note in a hostile society. At the beginning, he has apprehensions about the futility of life because people around him are less compassionate and more money-minded. He is driven to choose violence by these pressures and he decides to shoot Madeleine and Gersbach. But ultimately his unsuccessful attempt demonstrates victory of love over love. He realizes the sanctity of life in terms of love and hope. “He solves his problem finally by moving through existentialism to transcendentalism.” (Porter 147).
Tanner also feels that Herzog arrives at a state of gladness when he learns new knowledge and new faith and then he is able to break out of the prison of the self. He no longer struggles with the thought that he is being bullied, cheated, and oppressed in some way by an individual or society as a whole.

In Mr. Sammler’s Planet, Bellow’s protagonist is alienated from society and Bellow’s object in the present novel is to educate his protagonist about the value of life by reconciling him with the world around him and by accepting certain moral values in life which alone can sustain and elevate man in a state of distress. In his prayer over the body of Elya Gruner his nephew, Sammler finally achieves this reconciliation, not only between himself and humanity, but also between the infinite spiritual world and the finite physical world. Elya Gruner represents the one human bond that Mr. Sammler has towards the rest of the world and finally having understood the value of human life, he realizes the need for being at the hospital, a way of respecting human life in its final hour. Bellow presents Mr. Sammler as a heavy-handed moralist in order to establish the main theme of the novel—the idea that human life is very valuable and that human life can be appreciated only when one is in a state of communion with the world around. Mr. Sammler is the portrait of a very special and moving individual who raises great many questions. The Bellow protagonist is capable of confronting the real world in all its harshness. And the
aim of the protagonist is to restore order, stability and love in a society which is losing faith and becoming unconditional. Mr. Sammler’s Planet is full of moral judgments and Mr. Sammler’s survival is the moral message that Bellow endorses.

Mr. Sammler’s experiences of Nazi regime and in the prison camp are responsible for causing a repressed self and at the same time these experiences make him realize as well as promote the necessity of tolerance and love in society. Mr. Sammler derived pleasure and joy while killing the German soldier in Zamosht forest, yet he assesses it as a cruel action. Later, the pleasure and joy that he experienced while killing the German soldier is transferred into a heavy weight on his back- a sense of guilt that oppresses him constantly. After surviving the Holocaust, Sammler feels displaced from those around him. He says to Govinda Lal: “Sometimes I wonder whether I have any place here, among the people. I assume I am one of you. But also I am not.” (MSP189). He is also driven to a state of disinterestedness which takes him further away from the world around him. As the novel opens, Mr. Sammler in a state of in-between and this sets the stage for how the reader should perceive him-as a man who is: “not entirely human.” (114) As Mr. Sammler is lying in his bed, Bellow takes the reader on to the old man’s thoughts: “He thought, since he had no job to wake up to, that he might give sleep a second chance to resolve certain difficulties, imaginatively for himself, and pulled up the disconnected electric blanket with its internal sinews and lumps. The satin binding was nice to the finger tips. He was still drowsy, but not really inclined to sleep.” (MSP1)

As a man disconnected from both life and death, Mr. Sammler plays the role of a detached observer, thus preventing him from actively participating in humanity. As Bellow tells: “Mr. Sammler, forced by life, by fate, by what you like to be disinterested . . . (158) To be disinterested is Sammler’s natural state of being: “And a man who has been killed and buried should have no other interest. He should be perfectly disinterested.” (96).
Impatient with American disorder and disillusioned by revolutions that end in despotism, the old man longs for a ruling class fit to rule. He is totally oppressed in New York where he envisages the craving of the younger generation for money due to loss of faith and hope in life. The deteriorating moral standard of the materialistic society is as horrifying as the Nazi brutalities. The entire New York landscape appears to him as a world because he looks at it through his own moral and philosophical eye. It is a mad city filled with hippies, outlaws, mini-skirts, obscenities, riots and sex obsessed young men. Mr. Sammler rejects the decade’s lunacies, the immoral politics and the feverish life style of the Americans. He is a Jew who believes in tradition and he feels like an alien in a world where old order is vanishing and is replaced by a new one. He realizes that he is in a world of disillusionment, where there is no place for moral values and where freedom in morality is irrationally demanded. Except in Elya Gruner, Mr. Sammler finds the conspicuous absence of human dignity in the people he meets every day. He is distressed and disgusted by the black pickpocket doing his business on the subway and finding that Mr. Sammler has seen him picking the pocket, threatens him by exposing himself to Sammler, by Angela Gruner who confides in him how she has been changing lovers, the students who hoot during his lecture. Mr. Sammler’s confrontation with this kind of reality in New York makes him feel completely misfit and alien. The New York, Mr. Sammler lives in makes one think about the collapse of civilization. As Matthew Arnold said in *Dover Beach*, outwardly the world appears to be a land of dreams but the reality is that in the modern world the word ‘help’ is Greek to everyone. It is really too much on the part of Sammler to believe in ‘help’ in the twentieth century New York city. He finds Feffer, his student fighting with a criminal and being over-powered, sees a crowd of more than twenty people there, but not interfering, asks for help but no help comes. Sammler thinks where there are people, help might be there, but perhaps he did not know that this is the New York where
old moral values are lost and it is very primitive to believe and expect such a thing as help. As a survivor of the Holocaust: “who had seen the world collapse once, Mr. Sammler entertained the possibility it might collapse twice.”(26)

Mr. Sammler is more like an observer and his observations focus on the madness and folly of the age. He is also depicted as a commentator of society and gatherer of information concerning life and death as a Holocaust survivor and has attained the moral authority to utter opinions which might seem arrogant but in reality are rational. Sammler whose name echoes “Uncle Sam” and in Yiddish Zammler means “collector” and in German “storage battery”, stands as a fine observer of the American scene and an exponent of old style humanism. Sammler has spent his life collecting materials from books, personal observations, ideas and many of his thoughts and meditations point to a hopeful faith in the value of mutual respect, commitment, and universally shared rules. His friends and family had made him a judge and a priest. As Shula said: “He is like their guru,” (28) to those whom he comes in contact. Everyone confides his problem in him and seeks his advice.

As the novel progresses, Bellow associates the idea that life is sacred with the idea of the significance of duty. In the conversation between Dr. Lal and Mr. Sammler, at Elya Gruner’s country house, when Dr. Lal argues that duty is hateful and oppressive, Sammler replies:

When you know what pain is, you agree that not to have been born is better. But being born one respects the powers of creation, one obeys the will of God-with whatever inner reservations truth imposes. As for duty – you are wrong. The pain of duty makes the creature upright, and this uprightness is no negligible thing (182)
A man needs to respect creation and human life, and there is also an instinct to survive. Mr. Sammler also is able to survive intellectually when he has a full sense of man’s duty. Obligation towards other people is often what keeps a man connected to life and what motivates him to survive. Mr. Sammler feels an obligation, a duty, towards his nephew Elya Gruner and this duty is the bond between them. He cannot be disconnected with Gruner not merely because of the generosity of Gruner shown towards him but also because Mr. Sammler understands the need for respecting human life in its final hour with an act of communion. In this communion, Mr. Sammler is able to understand the value of human life.

Mr. Sammler also feels that in this materialistic world, Elya Gruner is genuine in relating to the world and he believes in human community and he does not restrain himself as the moderns do in expressing his love for others. Sammler like Elya is a staunch believer in humanism. This is clearly seen in Sammler’s saving the pick-pocket against the brutal attacks of Eisen, his son-in-law. Critics have found fault with Bellow and Sammler for this generosity towards the criminal but Sammler, who is noble-minded, who is a man of morals sees the futility of repaying violence with violence and he sees that the pick-pocket is saved. It may be said that saving the pick-pocket shows Sammler’s moral evolution since he killed the German soldier. Sammler is reconciled with society and he has complete knowledge of the intrinsic value of life and this is the natural knowledge of the soul.

In the end Mr. Sammler tries another form of collecting. He tries to bring Gruner’s family Angela Gruner and Elya’s money hungry, irresponsible son Wallace together before their dying father. He requests both of them to give their dying father some comfort. Mr. Sammler fails in his attempt to convince them but does not fail in his responsibility. No doubt an ordinary imperfect man is dying but he is a man with strength
and resources necessary for sustaining human community. In spite of Elya’s faults, including performing illegal abortions for Mafia connections, he is presented as a good father, good man and good Jew, interested in Jewish position in Europe and Jewish future in Israel. Money has not spoilt Elya. In this novel the hero’s qualities are divided between Sammler and Elya Gruner. Sammler embodies what man should know and Elya how man should act. Mr. Sammler through his words and actions insists that though times are desperate, one can still find value in life. At the end, Mr. Sammler emphasizes the law of commitment which our humanity imposes on an individual. Standing alone beside his nephew’s body, Mr. Sammler utters a heart broken prayer that ends the novel:

Remember, God, the soul of Elya Gruner, who, as willingly as possible and as well as he was able, and even to an intolerable point, and even in suffocation, and even as death was coming was eager, even childishly perhaps (may I be forgiven for this), even with a certain servility, to do what was required of him. At his best this man was much kinder than at my very best I have ever been or could ever be. He was aware that he must meet, and he did meet – through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding – he did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows. As I know mine. As all know. For that is the truth of it- that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know.(260)

Here Mr. Sammler asserts that it is only by loyalty to the “human bond,” to the “contract” implicit in our humanity, that one can safeguard our sense of the self’s value. In his nephew Elya Gruner, Mr. Sammler finds an exemplar of the moral man. Elya, who is a successful doctor despite his dislike for the medical profession, had followed the dictates of conscience and done his best. Though he was not perfect, he was a good man. Like old
Schlossberg in *The victim* both Elya Gruner and Mr. Sammler have a sense of what it means to be human.

Mr. Sammler soon recognizes that he has erred in his estimation of the world around him. His pessimistic vision of the world is replaced with a sense of faith, for as he tells Angela, things may be falling apart, but: “There are still human qualities. Our weak species fought its fear, our crazy species fought its criminality. We are an animal of genius.” (253) Mr. Sammler’s new faith shows his appreciation for human life which enables him to develop an appreciation for human life which subsequently enables him to form a human bond with the people around him. Finally, he invests a human interest in others. He had all the time been regarding his daughter Shula as a lunatic. At last he acknowledges her as his own flesh and blood and worthy of love. He affectionately tells her on the phone that she was a good daughter, in fact the best daughter.

In *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Dr. Govinda Lal is Sammler’s foil and Lal’s position is similar to that of the Spirit of Alternatives in *Dangling Man*. As an Indian, Dr. Lal is aware of the surplus of man in this planet. Life on the moon seems to provide a way of dealing with the problems of vast multitudes. This is also an expression of escaping the human condition. The aged Mr. Sammler, survivor of the Holocaust, with the knowledge that six million of his brethren have been killed, is insensitive to the problem of over-population. His feeling is that earth is a glorious planet even though man has completely made it a horrible place to live in. Sammler’s planet, however, unlike Lal’s is the earth itself and it is really America that is referred to and like Sammler, Bellow is concerned about human survival in this century. Moreover, on the moon, as Dr. Lal’s manuscripts imply, man’s future will not escape the past, all the troubles that he has experienced on the earth will accompany him to the moon. Mr. Sammler recognizes that the human mind if it is ever to rise into the skies and conquer new worlds must begin with the resolve to stop the horrors
that exist in this world. The greatness of Mr. Sammler is that he is able to improvise a set of moral values to survive amidst chaos and disillusionment. He is able to strive against the mad encounters of the inhuman world and his ability to understand the practical problems helps him to come out of his predicament and emerge as an intellectual survivor.

In all of Bellow’s novels one can discern the traditions of the Jewish shtelt. The shtelt conceived of the universe as an ordered and planned whole unit. The modern man’s vision of the universe is totally alien to the shtelt thinking, that finds order, reason and purpose in this universe. In such a universe, human behavior must be rooted in reason, order, purpose, morals and ethics. “The shtelt views the universe as a planned whole, designed and governed by Almighty, who created it from original chaos. It is a complex whole but basically, it is characterized by order, reason and purpose.” (Zborowski and Herzog409). One of the chief tenets of the shtelt faith is its belief that this world exists for man and that his welfare is of paramount importance. Bellow’s fiction is seen to concretize the legendary virtues and pieties of Jewish tradition – the ethical values promoted by the Jewish people such as intense family feeling, a commitment to and respect for the most exalted aspects of human existence, a sense of responsibility for others, sensitivity, love and generosity. The Bellow hero’s struggle is not so much to seek values outside himself as to realize those within. The growth of the heroes into intellectual survivors is to be measured in terms of the fact that they finally discover the values of life which have always remained latent in man but submerged for a while. The utmost need of the protagonist is to know and find out the sustaining values in his own being. Bellow’s fiction in general is moral fiction and it is always concerned with the question of goodness - the failure or success of the sympathetic heart. It believes in man and in the potentiality of man to find joy within the common life, to find the possibility of meaningful existence.