

In Appreciation

This book, **When You're Older You'll Understand – *Rekindling the Religious Questions of our Youth***, is printed from a previously undiscovered, unpublished, and undated manuscript written by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis and virtually buried in a remote corner of a room at Temple Valley Beth Shalom occupied by the Schulweis Institute Library. It seemed appropriate, no, obligatory, that we bring this document to see the light of day so that it may illuminate the thinking of as many people as possible, as do Rabbi Schulweis' words and ideas continue to illuminate so many throughout the world with his writings and oratory. It is in this spirit that the Harold M. Schulweis Institute Library has published this book to be available as part of our celebration of Rabbi Schulweis' 90th year.

Quoting from Rabbi Schulweis' introduction to this book,

"For the believer there are no questions and for the unbeliever there are no answers." From my own experience with believers and unbelievers I draw another conclusion. I have known many religious believers with profound doubts and many unbelievers with spiritual yearnings open to religious answers. Thoughtful believers question, earnest unbelievers are not deaf to real answers

The chapters of this book were written to help counter the derision of religious culture in our time.

Our first objective is to revisit the religious questions of our youth and to disinter those prematurely buried questions.

Our second goal is to present our own responses to the conventional approaches that left lacunae in their wake, obstacles to confidence in the wisdom of tradition.

The approach in this book is rooted in the Jewish tradition. I am convinced that it is applicable to other religious traditions as well."

Rabbi Schulweis, we dedicate this book to you with love and appreciation for sharing, with us, your passionate conviction that by adhering to the principles of ethics, morality, and conscience, we can create goodness in the world. You have opened our minds and given voice to care about ourselves, our society, and the strangers among us. You walk alongside the world's great sages and philosophers on the same path that will lead us to change the world to create a better tomorrow for ourselves, our society, and our generations to come.

The Harold M. Schulweis Institute

October 2014

With special thanks for document preparation and publication assistance to Aaron Djalilmand, Janet Djalilmand, and David Tobman of Automation Co.

Harold M. Schulweis Institute ©2014



Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis was born in the Bronx, New York in 1925 to secular parents who respected Zionism and Jewish traditions. His early Jewish education was influenced by his grandfather, Rabbi Avraham Rezak, who introduced him to the Talmud. In 1945, Schulweis graduated Yeshiva University with a degree in philosophy. Later Schulweis enrolled in the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he studied under Mordecai M. Kaplan and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Schulweis also studied modern philosophical and theological thought at New York University, where he met his wife Malkah.

Schulweis' first pulpit was Temple Beth Abraham, a Conservative Jewish congregation in Oakland, California in 1952. Among the innovations he introduced was the inclusion of women in minyanim and bat mitzvah ceremonies for girls. Instead of sermons, he used the allotted time for questions and answers and innovated a change from a one-way sermon to an interactive learning experience through the participation of the entire congregation in Torah discussions. He successfully expanded this program when he joined Temple Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California, in 1970.

In over forty years as the Senior Rabbi of Temple Valley Beth Shalom (VBS), Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis established a unique living legacy of scholarship, creativity, ethical action, and spiritual expression. Rabbi Schulweis has been instrumental in the development of synagogue programs such as the Synagogue Havurah Program (since adopted nationally), Para-professional Counseling Center, Para-Rabbinics, Jews-by-Choice, Outreach to the Developmentally Disabled (Shaare Tikvah) the VBS Day School, as well as addressing the issues of Jewish education and interfaith dialogue.

In 1986, Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis established The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR) to fulfill the traditional Jewish commitment to hakarat hatov, the searching out and recognition of goodness. To this end, the JFR is committed to assisting those Righteous Gentiles who rescued Jews during the holocaust. They are often reluctant to ask for help; they acted without expecting reward then or now. However, as Rabbi Schulweis realized, it is our duty to honor and support them.

He is also the Founder of Jewish World Watch (JWW), a leading organization in the fight against genocide and mass atrocities. Since its founding in 2004 based on Jewish experience and values, JWW has grown from a collection of Southern California synagogues into a global coalition that includes schools, churches, individuals, communities and partner organizations that share a vision of a world without genocide. Currently focused on the ongoing crises in Sudan and eastern Congo, JWW partners with on-the-ground organizations to develop high-impact projects that improve the lives of survivors and help build the foundation for a safer world.

Rabbi Schulweis has authored many books, including: *Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion* (Prentice-Hall), *For Those Who Can't Believe* (Harper Collins), *Finding Each Other in Judaism*, and *In God's Mirror*. His *Evil and the Morality of God* (Hebrew Union College Press) is regarded as a classic, and was republished by KTAV in 2010. He has also published two books of original religious poetry and meditations—*From Birth to Immortality* and *Passages in Poetry*. His recent book, *Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey* (Jewish Lights), was named Winner of the **2008 National Jewish Book Award: Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice**. Also in 2008, he shepherded the compilation of biographical essays by over 50 Jews by choice, published by Valley Beth Shalom and entitled *Under the Shadow of Thy Wings*, which has been republished under the title *Judaism: Embracing the Seeker* (KTAV, 2010).

Honors and Awards

- **Global Soul Award**, Jewish World Watch, 2009
- **2008 National Jewish Book Award** (Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice): *Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey*
- **Daniel Pearl Award**, Anti-Defamation League, 2008
- **John Allen Buggs Humanitarian Award**, Los Angeles County, 2008
- **Spirit of the Immortal Chaplains Award**, 2006
- **The Beautiful People Award** for Outstanding Community Service, 1999
- **Simon Greenberg Award** for Distinguished Leadership, 1999
- **Distinguished Alumni Award**, Pacific School of Religion, 1998
- **Crown of the Good Name Award**, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, 1994
- **Martin Buber Award**, American Friends of Hebrew University, 1992
- **Eisendrath Bearer of Light Award**, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1991
- **Human Relations Award**, San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council Committee, 1991
- **Doctor of Humane Letters**, Honoris Causa, University of Judaism, 1983

- **Doctor of Humane Letters**, Honoris Causa, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1975
- **Israel Prime Minister's Medal**, 1975
- **United Synagogue Social Actions Award**, 1965
- **Invitation to tour West Germany from Federal Republic of Germany**, 1965

Through his initiatives and innovations in Jewish communal life, worship, Jewish ethics, ecumenical dialogue, and Jewish learning, Rabbi Schulweis has enriched the lives of Jews and non-Jews around the world. His work has shaped modern Judaism.

When You're Older You'll Understand
Rekindling the Religious Questions of Our Youth

© 2014 Harold M. Schulweis

Outline

THE INTENTION OF THE BOOKX

CHAPTER I

THE ANSWER IN THE QUESTION, THE QUESTION IN THE ANSWER..... 1

- "Really" Questions..... 1
- Later3
- Street Theology.....5
- Know How to Answer Yourself 6
- "Where" Questions..... 7
- Reframing the Question 10
- Touch My Love 11
- Preparing the Ground for Spirituality 11
- Natural Mysticism 12
- Fear of the Question and the Answer 14

CHAPTER II

SUSIE'S CABBAGE PATCH DOLL..... 16

- Petitionary Prayer 18
- Susie's Prayer 19
- How Should Susie Be Answered?..... 21
- Magic and Prayer 22
- Vain Prayer 23
- The Petitioner 26
- The Divine Image within 28
- God Also Prays 29
- Repentance Prayer 31
- The Penitent As Actor 33
- Is Prayer Flattery? 34

CHAPTER III

BIBLICAL MIRACLES – TRUE OR FALSE?	37
Normalizing Miracles.....	39
Getting Help from the Tradition	41
Moralizing Miracles	42
The Miracle Worker	45
Miracles and Medicine	46
Miracles and Wisdom	47
How to Teach Miracles	48
Preparing the Child for The Wonder Signs Of The Miraculous	50
The Miracle of the Human And Divine Encounter	51

CHAPTER IV

"DID GOD REALLY SAY?" THE TRUTH AND MORALITY OF REVELATION	54
True or False?	54
The Bible as Religious Poetry	56
Noah's Ark	57
Sodom and Gomorrah	58
The Mockery of Literalism	58
Whose Revelation? God's Word or the Voice of Satan?	60
Religious Audacity	63
God Accepts the Covenant	67
Commander and Commandment	69
Morality of The Bible: Is It Fair?	71
Biblical Heroes	73
The Humanity of Biblical Heroism	74
In What Sense is the Bible Sacred	75

CHAPTER V

EVIL AND THE TWO FACES OF GOD	78
Unpacking the Question.....	80
Question Begging	83
Letter from a Congregant	84
God as Elohim, Lord as Adonai	86
The Religious Reality Principle	87
Causes and Curses	89
The Quest for Meaning	90
Adonai--Lord	91
The Monotheism of Lord and God.....	92

Monotheism and Twin Human Inclination	95
Acceptance and Transformation	97
Will and Faith	100

CHAPTER VI

GOD AS VERB: A CLASS DISCUSSION.....	105
The Hyphen	105
Another Languageing of God Talk	107
A Class Experiment.	108
Teaching Godliness	110
The Pedagogy of Godliness	113
God as Person or Personal	114
Praying Differently	116
Oneness	119
Some Affinities Between Godliness And Traditional Theology	120
Beyond Humanism	122
Theistic Humanism	124
Is There God without Human Beings?	129

CHAPTER VII

rites of passage to spirituality

Ritual Rationale	132
Ritual Pedagogy	133
The Theology of Obedience	134
The Ritual Circles of Godliness	136
Where Is Godliness?	137
The Enlarging Self	137
Rites of Passage	139
1. The Myth and Spirituality of Marriage	139
A. The Myth of the Androgynous	140
B. Marriage, Creation and Redemption	141
C. The Mixing of the Cups	142
D. Birth and Covenant	143
E. The Eighth Day	145
F. Naming.....	146
G. The Self and Its Environment	146
H. Life Affirmation	147
2. Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Their Parents.....	148
A. Parental Narcissism	149
B. Who Owns The Child?.....	150
3. Death	151

A. The Reality Principle of Acceptance	152
B. Acceptance	153
C. Holding On	154
D. Memory	155
E. Conservation of Spiritual Energy	155
F. The Afterlife	156
G. Two Worlds or One	158
4. Community: The Companion Through the Passages.....	159

CHAPTER VIII

THE CIRCLES OF PARTICULARISM AND UNIVERSALISM: "EITHER A JEW OR A HUMAN BEING"

The Case For Particularism.....	162
Pseudo Universalism	166
The Interdependence of the Circles	169
The Calendar and Jewish Identity	170
Rosh Hoshana: Jewish Universalism	170
Yom Kippur: The Self and the World	172
The Shofar: Particular and Universal	173
The Self	173
Passover: The Nucleus of Extended Family	175
The Question	175
The Passover Circle of Humanity	176
Sukkot: To Dwell with People	178
Two Tales of Spiritual Identity.....	179
Shavuot: Self-Revelation	181
The Decalogue and the Self	183
Finding Oneself.....	184

Epilogue

THE MISSING EPILOGUE.....	186
---------------------------	-----

INTRODUCTION

THE INTENTION OF THE BOOK

"For the believer there are no questions and for the unbeliever there are no answers." From my own experience with believers and unbelievers I draw another conclusion. I have known many religious believers with profound doubts and many unbelievers with spiritual yearnings open to religious answers. Thoughtful believers question, earnest unbelievers are not deaf to real answers.

Most people neither question nor answer. They neither affirm nor deny with much enthusiasm. They tolerate the clichés of conventional religion, register their children in religious school, on occasion attend a religious service, and overwhelmingly answer in the affirmative when pollsters ask whether they believe in God. Affiliated or not they constitute the silent majority. When it comes to religious discourse this major constituency is mute. The contemporary crisis of the religious condition is characterized by their neutrality.

How did they become so religiously indifferent? In their youth, they had exciting religious questions to ask. The questions were ignored, staved off or poorly answered. The theological vacuum created was filled with fragmented images of stories, wishful fantasies, street theology. As adults they think of themselves as having outgrown religion. Like the bedtime prayers they recited when they were young but no longer pray, religion is something for the children. If they send their children to religious school it is to know about ritual, not to practice it; to know about history, not to be involved in a way of life; to belong, not to believe.

In polite society they may feign embarrassment about their lack of religious culture or practice. Their confessions are hardly compelling. Certainly religious illiteracy can be remedied by study and houses of worship are available to them. When they are further pressed it is clear that it is not lack of access to religious

instruction or institution that stands in their way. They simply don't believe. In their words, they are "not the religious type".

And by "religious type" they mean the credulous, blind believers, the followers who assume a posture of passivity and obedience. Should the matter be further pursued the religiously disaffected confess that worship bores them and that what they remember of religious instruction between the years from nursery to confirmation violates their common sense. They look back at their religious school teaching as largely wasteful, infantile, rote, and irrelevant. Some who in their adult years faced personal crises, sickness, dying, death, felt let down by the implausibility of the theological response to their "Why me?" questions, and even insulted by what they took to be the insensitivity of theological rationale. Still they talk wistfully for something they vaguely call spirituality. If not the religious type, they nevertheless would be "spiritual". The dead gods leave ghosts behind, half feared, half revered.

Not all their complaints are justified but not all their discontents are ungrounded. They were taught mechanically without wisdom or philosophy. They were taught sacred texts, the Bible, the prayer book with a plodding literalism. Robbed of the poetry of religion and the depth of its pluralistic approaches, they perceive tradition as monolithic, authoritarian, unchanging and unreal.

How did it happen that in the minds of so many profound biblical myths were turned into fairy stories, the ethics of ritual transmitted as rote gestures, loyalty to a people transformed into xenophobic parochialism, miracles twisted into forms of magic, prayer as exercise undistinguished from rubbing Aladdin's lamp, a loving God transposed into a sadistic seeker of revenge, true believers into masochists? It is frustrating to observe the trivializing of a deep and complex tradition and the adulteration of so many of its beliefs and practices. It is embarrassing to encounter

the ridicule of religion made easy by simplistic teaching. The chapters of this book were written to help counter the derision of religious culture in our time.

Our first objective is to revisit the religious questions of our youth and to disinter those prematurely buried questions. Those first questions about God, prayer, miracles, the Bible, evil, revelation were in truth questions about the reality of the world and the reality of ourselves. The resurrection of these inquiries is important not only for the sake of revising the religious curriculum of our children but for enlivening the spiritual lives of adults.

Our second goal is to present our own responses to the conventional approaches that left lacunae in their wake, obstacles to confidence in the wisdom of tradition. The task is like that of the Biblical prophet Elisha who when he beheld the child listless, still, appearing to be dead, closed the door. "And he went up and lay upon the child and put his mouth upon his mouth and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands and stretched himself upon the child and the flesh of the child waxed warm. The child sneezed seven times and the child opened his eyes." (II Kings 4: 34)

The approach in this book is rooted in the Jewish tradition. I am convinced that it is applicable to other religious traditions as well. This book is written to offer other ways to appreciate the sacred and the spiritual within the tradition. There is much in the tradition that is untaught, sometimes ignored or repressed. But let it be said at once that the tradition is too complex, in parts too contradictory, to claim that mine is a seamless presentation of the one and only authentic tradition. Any attempt to carve a coherent philosophy out of the multiple elements of a four millennial religious civilization must inevitably engage in theological gerrymandering. In structuring my own approach, select certain texts, insights and authorities and give them greater weight than others. The magnanimous reader

will call this choice philosophy, the less generous will judge it as bias. They may both be right.

I have found in my teaching and reading that most religious questions are framed in either/or boxes. Their hard disjunctive presentations invite either/or answers. Matters are either literal or symbolic, either revealed or invented, either true or prevarication, either divine or human, either particular or universal. The dichotomous form of either/or questions sets a trap for the answerer. For the structure question insinuates that the options presented by the questions are exhaustive. Either/or is inhospitable to third alternatives. The framing of the question presumes that an answer from either side of the disjunctive precludes the other. "Either a fool or a knave." But perhaps neither or both. "Either he believes that there are proofs of God's existence or he is an atheist." But perhaps neither or both. More than logic is involved here. Rampant "either/or-ism" reflects a pervasive split thinking inimical to religious wholeness. Dichotomous thinking is intolerant of religious creativity, impatient with both/and resolutions and with anything less than all or nothing answers. It accepts only absolute answers as the marks of lucidity and dismisses theological modesty as symptoms of equivocation. I have followed the strictures of Isaiah Berlin, a historian of ideas, who challenged the misleading premises of philosophy that he traces to the Platonic ideal. With Berlin I do not believe "that all genuine questions have only one true answer; that those answers are knowable, and that the answers, all compatible with one another, together form a single, coherent goal."

This book is not for everyone. It is for those who cannot go home again using old routes but who are determined not to remain religiously homeless. Home is too important to be cast aside. Home contains sacred rooms that call for renovation. To be proudly inhabited the religious home must not be destroyed but lovingly reconstructed.

There are a number of untraditional responses to theological questions. I am emboldened to present my own approach to religious tradition by the response of a courageous nineteenth century rabbi, Menachem Mendel of Kotzk. Chastised by some elders for deviating from the conventional ritual practices and thinking he was once asked, "Why can't you follow in the footsteps of your revered father?" He replied, "But I do. My father didn't follow in the footsteps of his father nor do I."

In many of the chapters I have used letters to God, questions and observations of young and older children. I have found them to be revealing of our own adult unarticulated doubts. One such letter by a youngster to God relates to my own discomfort with gender language. Sarah writes, "Dear God, Are boys better than girls? I know you are one but try to be fair." Sarah picked up her theological information somewhere. It should come as no surprise. God's masculine gender is embedded in the syntax of our grammar. I have tried to use "he/she" or "one/they" in order to avoid any insinuation of God's masculine nature. But at times have found neutralizing the gender to be a clumsy and distracting circumlocution. I want Sarah at least to know that my conception of God is not only beyond gender but beyond anthropomorphism. "God is not a man". (Numbers 23:19)

Each of the chapters centers around different religious questions, the manner in which conventional theology responds to them and the way in which I propose approaching them.

Chapter I: The place of God

We discuss the strategies used to avoid answering the probing questions of young people, and analyze the subtlety in the framing of the religious question. What are the hidden presuppositions taken for granted by the questioner? We illustrate the discussion by answering the "Where?" question e.g. "Where is God?"

Chapter II: On prayer

Questions revolving around the efficacy and purpose of prayer. Does God hear prayer? Does God really answer prayer? Can we pray for anything? What is the role of the petitioner in prayer? Are prayers of praise really forms of flattery? Do we in our prayers ask for miracles?

Chapter III: On miracles

Are the miracles we read about in the Bible true or false? How is belief in miracles different from belief in magic? Are there miracles today? In a scientific universe how are miracles to be taught to youngsters?

Chapter IV: On revelation

What in the Bible is to be understood literally and what symbolically? How do we know whether the voice that commands is that of God or of Satan? What if the voice of conscience conflicts with the voice of revelation?

Chapter V: On evil

How do we cope with the "Why me?" question asked by the sufferer? If God is the cause of all things that happen, is evil God's curse? What is God's relation to natural evil? What differences are there between *Elohim*---God and *Adonai*---Lord and how do they affect the way we understand and respond to tragedy?

Chapter VI: On God as a Verb

Is God a verb or a noun? What is God without human beings? Does godliness imply the existence of a person? How do you pray to godliness? Is humanism enough? How is the map of godliness to be drawn?

Chapter VII: Rite of passage

What is more important ritual or ethics? Why do we observe rituals? Is obedience to God the only reason for observing rituals or are there other rationale? How do rites of passage, from birth to death, relate to the search for godliness? Where is the individual self found in the circles of family, community, humanity?

Chapter VIII: Particularism/Universalism and the Jewish Calendar

Is my essential loyalty to my people or to humanity? Are the Jewish holidays celebrated particularistic or universalistic? What do the festivals contribute to my personal spirituality?

CHAPTER I

THE ANSWER IN THE QUESTION, THE QUESTION IN THE ANSWER

"Man is the question he asks about himself before any question has been formulated. It is therefore not surprising that the basic questions were formulated very early in the history of mankind nor is it surprising that the same questions appear in early childhood as every observation of children shows."

—Paul Tillich

"REALLY" QUESTIONS

Children are born philosophers. They come into our lives with the sense of wonder; and out of wonder philosophy springs. "He was not a bad genealogist," Plato wrote, "Who said that Iris, the messenger of heaven, is the child of Thaumias, the god of wonder." Children come to us, at home and at school, with wonder wrapped in a rising inflection. Questions are the birth pangs of philosophy and theology.

What do they ask? Mostly "really" questions. Did the serpent "really" speak to Eve in the Garden of Eden? Did Noah "really" gather all the beasts and the animals and the fowl in his ark? Are our prayers "really" heard and "really" answered? Was it "really" right for God to harden Pharaoh's heart and kill the first born? A bit older they may ask speculative "ify" questions. "If God is all powerful can He make a stone so heavy that He Himself cannot lift it? If He can, then He is not all powerful. If He can't, He is not all powerful." Does He know His own future? Does God have to do what He knows He will do? If God can do anything, can He square a circle?"

They are not unusual questions for young people to ask. "It may sound strange but I began to ponder creation when was still a little boy what is time? What is space? What is eternity? Infinity? How can something be created from nothing? God has created the world but who created God?" These recollections of the late novelist Isaac Baashevis Singer is echoed in many autobiographic accounts of early childhood.

Like so many young people, Singer began to study the book of Genesis with faith and with doubt, and like so many, he found that the more he read the more questions and answers assailed him. "If God could have created Adam by the words of His mouth, why did He have to cast a deep sleep upon Adam to form Eve from one of his ribs? Why since God is a God of mercy did He accept the sacrifice of Abel and not of Cain? Didn't He foresee that this would cause jealousy and enmity between the two brothers?"

Nominally, the questions are about God and prayer and Bible stories. Some were triggered by Sunday school and home accounts of the tradition. But the questions are not simply about serpents and magical rods or logic. They are about the religious understanding of reality. What is the world really like? What can I trust? Whom can I trust? What can I expect? What can I hope for? What in me is real? What in the world is really real that is, truly important? The religious inquiries of our youth are the most important questions we may ever ask. The answers that define reality affect our self-understanding, our morality and morale. As the poet, Wallace Stevens put it "We live in the description of a place, not in the place itself." Religion is the description of the place we inhabit.

LATER

What happens to the questions of our youth? How is it that by the time we have grown up the questions are no longer asked? What happens to the vaunted wonder of childhood?

My first teacher of religion was my grandfather. An erudite man, he taught me how to translate the Biblical text, and how to pray. He was patient and proud of my questions. Not all my questions. He was patient with my questions about the meaning of words, grammar, places, dates, facts, questions of "where" or "what" or "how". But not patient with "what for" questions, particularly those that challenged the meaning and purpose of conventional teaching.

"Was it fair for Abraham to frighten Isaac at the altar?" Why did David and Bath Sheba's infant die because of their sins? These "follow up" questions to my grandfather's factual accounts of the Bible lessons, he felt, interrupted the serious study of the text. After such intrusive questions my grandfather would pinch my cheek affectionately and characteristically respond with the Yiddish word "*shpayter*" which means "later". "Later" meant that when I was older I would understand, when I was older I would be answered. The questions were frozen, to be thawed out later. But "later" never seemed to come. I grew older, the teachers changed, the texts were new, the questions posed differently but the response was much the same. "Later" I began to suspect was a conspiracy of avoidance, not limited to my grandfather. Teachers practiced similar strategies of delay.

The given rationale for theological procrastination varies. Sometimes the questions asked could not be dealt with because they were claimed to be beyond the conceptual or linguistic grasp of the youngsters. The

discussion called for was not "age appropriate". Children at this age were too literal minded to think abstractly.

Or it was argued that text, ritual and prayer skills were more important than answering theological inquiries. Judaism it was argued is a religion of deeds, not creeds, a matter of behaving not believing. And so with one blow against dogma, the whole of theological culture is dismissed. Religious questions can wait. Moreover, troubling questions such as those about the suffering of innocents and the goodness of God belonged to the "perennial questions" of theology. The antique origin and irresponsibility of those eternal questions was used as justification to relegate the real answers to some vaguely future time "later." If the patriarchs and philosophers throughout the ages couldn't find satisfactory answers, who are you and I to ask? Respect for antiquity can intimidate many a probing question.

Even in advanced classes of religion, the perennial problems were deftly smothered. Religious issues were historicized. Existential questions and answers were academically traced to Philo or Maimonides or Buber; and we were quizzed about who said what and when. In seminaries, scholarship muffled the contemporary spiritual pertinence of the religious question. No personal, contemporary answers were necessary. Quotations would suffice.

There are ways of not answering. But there are also ways of answering that can freeze the excitement of the questioner. One such answering technique is the pervasive use of the "God" word to dissolve all questions: "why are babies born," "why is the sky blue," "why did grandma die?" The single word answer is "God". To use the God word is to be granted instant omniscience. "God" is the monosyllabic term that obviates the need for complex explanations. But that three letter answer to all questions slams the

door on all further inquiry. "What is small and gray and runs around the park collecting nuts for the winter?" the Sunday school teacher asked. A bright child answered, "I know the answer must be God but it sure sounds like a squirrel." The child had mastered the teacher's game. The all purpose "God" word seals the juices of religious curiosity. The game is soon outgrown.

The questions that children ask may also be readily damned by faint praise. The questions are repeated by parents and teachers proud of the precociousness of the child. The questions are as cute as a curtsy, but not to be taken seriously. In the marvelous compilation of *Letters To God* by Eric Marshall and Stuart Hample we read theological gems from youngsters. "Dear God, I wrote you before. Do you remember? I did what I promised but you didn't send me a horse yet. What about it? Louis," or "Dear God, I got left back. Thanks, Raymond" However childishly formulated the children's letters entail serious religious questions to be answered seriously. In their fashion, Louis and Raymond are asking questions about the efficacy of prayer and the justification of God in the face of evil. How and what they are answered at the time they are asked will help shape their attitude towards religion. The questions are not "kid stuff" to be staved off by condescension.

STREET THEOLOGY

What happens to questions ignored? Like hope deferred, questions unanswered make the heart sick. In its wake, cavities of disbelief are formed. In religious schools prayer, Bible, miracles, God, belief and practice are taught in a theological vacuum. How can the prayer book be taught intelligently without anticipating questions of the limits of petition or the legitimacy of asking God for intervention? How can the Bible be taught

without foreseeing the snares of literalism that run against the grain of common sense and scientific plausibility?

The "later" syndrome creates its own void. Like sexual knowledge, when questions are avoided the vacuum created by postponement will be filled with street theology. When religious instruction is unmindful of the moment and occasion that prompts the question, street theology will fill the emptiness. The superstitions of our youth are retained in our adulthood as authentic old-time religion. Ideas of God, prayer, miracles are woven out of fragments of images picked up from cartoons, movies, television, hear-say. As Erik Erikson noted, "We never meet any person, not even a new-born, who never has an environment." Researchers of religious development have observed that a large part of the population begins to construct belief and disbelief systems about God and the universe by the time children are four to six years of age. Even children who come from non or anti-religious homes have vivid ideas of God. Ideas of God are picked up from the air.

"Later," if it ever arrives, comes too late to correct the idols of imagination. By the time "later" comes, the child, now adult, has had imprinted the rumors of authentic "old time religion." When in their formative years youngsters are deprived of maturer ways to understand religion newer, different approaches presented "later" are resisted as alien. The time for answering questions is in the formative years when they are asked here and now.

KNOW HOW TO ANSWER YOURSELF

When we know how to answer the religious questions for ourselves we find it less difficult to translate the answer into the language and concepts of our young. Most of the excuses used to explain our inability to answer

religious questions of children are justification for our own adult theological inadequacy. It is not that children are too immature to understand, but that adults are too confused and uncertain of their beliefs. Few adults today resort to the "stork" legend to account for the birth of a baby on the grounds that children cannot comprehend the complexity of conception. Few educators would argue that the "stork" story should be taught until "later" when the child can understand the ways of the birds and the bees or the anatomical charts. Whenever I seem not to know how to answer the religious question, or seem not to understand the question, whether posed by child or adult, I suspect that the question is hiding in me. Their questions are mine, even if I have never been aware of them. The teacher-student relationship in some ways resembles the relationship of Hasidic guide and disciple. A Hasidic master was praised for his uncanny ability to understand his disciples whenever they came to him with stammering confessions of their sins. How did he know the secrets of the heart? He explained, "I don't find it difficult to know their transgressions, because when I listen attentively, I discover that their transgressions are only different forms of my own. When once I failed to recognize the sins of a man who came to confess them to me, I was truly frightened. Then I knew from my not knowing that I must be hiding some transgression from myself." Often the religious educator's claim not to know how to answer is less a testimony to his modesty than a confession of the concealed doubt within.

"WHERE" QUESTIONS

It happens at every religious school assembly. The teachers have encouraged the children to ask the spiritual leader whatever religious questions are on their minds. The children are excited. Their hands wave

wildly, the faces are intense and the question is almost always the same, "Where is God?" By this time I should know how to answer. Am I not, as one of my children teasingly remarked, "God's answer man." But how to answer, particularly since I know how often first answers lay the ground of religious belief. "Where?" I could point skyward. The children have heard prayers that refer to "Our Father who art in heaven" and have seen enough movies where the camera moves heavenwards towards the billowy clouds suggesting the place from which the voice of God emerges.

But it is not only rude to point, it is downright misleading. Does God dwell in the heavens? Do I mean to perpetuate that spatial image of the divine? I recall reading one of the Dear God letters written by a child leaving St. Patrick's cathedral observed, "Dear God, You sure live in a nice place."

I could tell them that God is nowhere in particular but that like the air God is everywhere. To that kind of answer it is reported that Danny said, "I don't want God to be everywhere. Want God to be somewhere." By "somewhere" he means that he wanted God to be real. For him seeing, is believing and pointing, is proving, and space. is the place for the real. In response to the "where" question, God is sometimes spoken of as invisible. "Does it mean that God is like a ghost? "No. God is 'in you.'" "Is God 'in you' like a hiccup or a sneeze?" It evokes a tittering response. "Where" questions are question begging. "Where" implies place, some physical location for God. It inveigles the answerer to reply in accordance with the question's implicit spatial presupposition.

Years ago I came upon another way to handle the "whereness" question. I applied an insight of my colleague, Harold Kushner, to the school assembly situation. At this particular assembly I told the children that I would

try to answer their "where" question if they answered my question "When is God?" Without a moment's hesitation the children volunteered a whole set of answers. "God is when I was sick in the hospital and when my friends wrote me letters and when my parents came to see me and when the nurses were so kind." "God is when the family is together celebrating my birthday." etc. There is a valuable lesson here for parents and teachers. When we provide "when" experiences to draw upon we furnish the memories out of which belief is formed.

Something important occurs when the question is reformulated from "where" to "when". The mind's eye is directed from place to time, from location to events when God is no longer understood in spatial terms. "Where" invites place answers. "When" suggests time and occasion. Many theological ideas that are reified by "where" questions, e.g. where is heaven? Where is hell? Take one different dimension when transformed into "when" questions. Reformulate the question, from "where" to "when" and a wholly different perspective of the religious view of reality is encouraged, at once more plausible and deeper in meaning.

Many questions are difficult to answer not because we do not have the right answers but because the very framing of the questions rules out the type of answers we would prefer to give. Questions often entail assumptions that need to be unpacked before answers can be given. It is important that the questioner understand why certain answers cannot be given as they are framed. Our suggested reformulation of the question from "where" to "when," for example, does not mean "I don't know" or "you are wrong" but "I don't think of God or prayer or miracles in the way that your question

presupposes. I offer some relevant illustrations of answering a question by restructuring it.

REFRAMING THE QUESTION

Martin Buber relates a conversation between a nineteenth century Rabbi of northern white Russia and the chief of the gendarmes. The latter, learning that the prisoner was a Rabbi, asked him "How are we to understand that God, the All-Knowing, said to Adam when he was hiding in the Garden of Eden, 'Where are you?'" "Do you believe", answered the Rabbi, "That the Scriptures are eternal and that every era, every generation, every man is included in them?" "I believe this" said the jailer. The Rabbi continued, "Well in every era God calls every man 'Where are you in your world? So many years and days of those allotted to you have passed and how far have you gotten in your world?' God says something like this, 'You have lived 46 years. How far along are you?'" When the chief of the gendarmes heard his age mentioned he pulled himself together, laid his hand on the Rabbi's shoulder and cried, "Bravo" but his heart trembled.

The surface question is about logic, how to square God's all-knowing nature with God's apparent ignorance of the place Adam had hidden. The Rabbi's response quite consciously did not deal with the literal question of external place. He treated the "where" question as if it referred to the inner space of the gendarme's inner self. The question turned from a logical and external inquiry into an existential, inner concern. The Rabbi's answer uncovered for the gendarme a deeper layer to his question. Every human being turns his existence into "a system of hide-outs" escaping the responsibility for his or her life. The Rabbi's answer redirected the gendarme

to consider the depth of his question and thereby proposed another meaning in the Biblical story.

"Where is God?" the child asked. "Whenever we let God in" he was answered. The answer refocused and expanded the mind-set of the questioner.

TOUCH MY LOVE

Returning to the "Where is God?" question, how can we teach children to think of God other than as a physical, concrete being? In our home the children were put to bed at night with some conversation and a prayer. This particular evening my daughter, then either 6 or 7 years of age, asked the perennial question, "Where is God?" after the prayer proclaiming that God, the Lord is one. Where is the Lord who is One located? An essay by Sophia Fahs. An extraordinarily thoughtful religious educator, used a fascinating game to answer the "where" question. I decided to try her game with my daughter. I asked her to "touch my arms." She did. I asked her "touch my chest." She did. I then asked her "touch my nose." She did. I then asked her "touch my love." Here she stopped for a moment and reached out to touch my chest, pointed out that she had done so before. She then touched my arms and I told her that she had done that before. "I know you love me," I repeated. "Now touch my love." She could not. She smiled. The religious game was not lost on my daughter.

PREPARING THE GROUND FOR SPIRITUALITY

What was the theological exercise designed to accomplish? On the face of it, the child's question "Where is God" was not answered. The exercise did not speak of God directly. The exercise did not even mention God. But

the meaning of the question was understood to be about God's reality. The exercise enabled the child to experience "things" that were very real and very important though clearly intangible and invisible. The intent of the game was to prepare the ground for the child's understanding of the reality of non-material, "spiritual" matters. In the spiritual growth of the child there will be many questions and answers touching on the non-material qualities ascribed to God such as mercy, or justice, or peace, or truthfulness. Like touching love, the attributes of God cannot be seen or touched or located in the manner that tables, chairs and clocks can. The "where" questions of the child were not dismissed as wrong. "Where" questions simply do not apply to such non-material realities.

For some, the religious exercise may appear too oblique. But such detours are not dilatory. There is too great an impatience to offer religious answers, too great a temptation to rush to "God". God comes at the conclusion of the argument. The Book of Genesis does not begin with the name of God. God's name comes after the words "in the beginning" are read. Where religious education is properly directed towards experience and growth, God is not the first but the last word. The religious exercise was the early opening of a hopefully on-going dialogue about the reality of godliness.

NATURAL MYSTICISM

The "touch my love" paradigm introduces the child to a natural mysticism. There is a wonder and surprise in feeling love and failing to touch it, in knowing love and being unable to verbalize it. Theologians consider "ineffability", the inability to express certain experiences in words, as a sign of mystical experience. The mystery experienced in "the touch my love"

paradigm does not come from another world different from the one in which we live and breathe. The mystery experienced is not based on a split universe, material and spiritual, natural and beyond nature. The power, mystery and significance of transcendence, something beyond the limits of the five senses, is experienced in earthly love. The transcendence I introduce through the game is not other-worldly, super-natural nor can it be simplistically reduced to physical terms. But the transcendence of spirituality, as in love, includes a material environment. Like love, the spiritual life is relational. Transcendence means that there is a reality greater than myself or herself but that includes us both.

As we will see in the later chapters, godliness, like love, is not "in me" or "in you" but between us. Love is not "in" the subject or "in" the object but "between" them. Ask the child to hug or embrace himself/herself and it becomes apparent that another is needed for love to be experienced. Like God, love calls for relationship with another. In Judaism the importance of "betweenness" is expressed in its liturgical laws. Acts of holiness, from the recitation of the mourner's kaddish to the public reading of the Torah requires a quorum of community. The highest form of communion with God is through community. This concept of "betweenness", articulated by the philosopher Martin Buber, is a major religious insight. I do not explain the various religious implications of the single religious exercise to my daughter now. But these first steps will be helpful in developing her religious sensibilities. The heart and mind need preparation. There is another preparatory lesson in the religious exercise. It draws attention to the un-coerced character of such relationships. Love cannot be controlled, willed, manipulated, cannot make you love me. "To make love" is a vernacular idiom that suggests that the other is a material commodity, to be bent or twisted to one's own needs and

wants. Tables and chairs can be "made." Love is a relationship that cannot be manufactured or ordered. The Biblical imperative is to respect, honor parents. It cannot command that parents be loved. Even God cannot force people to love Him. Therein lies the uniqueness and mystery of the love of God.

FEAR OF THE QUESTION AND THE ANSWER

My grandmother was fond of quoting a Yiddish folk-saying: "One cannot die of a question". The aphorism is apt because there is an understandable apprehension in answering the openness of the child's question. Questions are not as innocent as they appear. A question, the psychologist Fritz Perls used to say, is a statement with a hook on it. The hook was not intentionally put there to catch the answerer like the prosecuting attorney's celebrated catch-22 question: "And when did you stop beating your wife?" The questioner may not even suspect that the question is an answer in disguise. Still, attached to the interrogative hook lies the bait of unnoticed theological assumptions. The answerer must be careful that he does not swallow the question hook, line and sinker.

Questions are not pre-suppositionless. For that reason alone, they must be examined with care. In the chapters dealing with prayer, miracles, revelation and evil we will see how questions such as "Does God hear my prayers?", "Why are miracles not performed today?", "Why did it happen to me?", force unintended answers upon us. The framing of the question prejudices our answer. To escape that entrapment, appropriate answers may call for questioning of the question. All questions must be understood but not all questions are legitimately formulated.

Carlye Marney is quoted as having said, "A window shut open is as useless as a window shut closed. In either case you've lost the use of the window." The twin failures in much of religious education derive from the dogmatism that shuts out the air of inquiry and knocks the spirit of curiosity out of the questioner; and from the directionless approach of pseudo-liberalism that confuses openness with lack of conviction. Religious educators are not asked to impose their answers upon the child, but they are obligated to offer guide posts so that the searcher does not feel stranded in no-man's land. If every religious question presupposes an answer, every religious answer presupposes a theological way. Educators who have not thought through their religious philosophy are in no position to answer the religious needs of the child.

The primary challenge facing religious educators is not how or what to answer the child, but how or what to answer the question for themselves. These teachers who are open to everything in general because they are committed to nothing in particular, are unlikely to develop a serious religious sensibility in the child. The concern is not whether educators are theologically liberal or conservative but the extent to which they have thought through their position. Without religious conviction, they are prone to evade the question and create a theological black hole. As Chesterton observed "Where man ceases believing in something, it isn't that he believes in nothing; but that he then believes in anything." Religious nature abhors a vacuum.

CHAPTER II

SUSIE'S CABBAGE PATCH DOLL

"PRAYER IS POETRY BELIEVED IN"

—George Santayana

On the Sabbath morning Berel naturally proposes that his son accompany him to the synagogue, to pray.

"Father, I'm not going," answers the new doctor. "What is it, son? Are you ashamed to be seen with me?"

"God forbid, Father! What an idea!" "Is it because you're a doctor, and a doctor isn't supposed to pray to God or praise Him?"

"No, that isn't it, Father."

"What is it, then?" "All right, I'll tell you." The old man puts down his prayer shawl and takes a seat. The young man begins to expound.

"Father, I want you to imagine that you're a rich man; so rich that a few rubles more or less don't mean anything to you. You're rich, and opposite you lives a poor widow, a poor, sick widow; maybe with a lot of children; and she needs help. What would you do?".. Help her, of course.")

"Would you wait for her to come and beg, would you wait for her to fall weeping at your feet? . . . "What on earth for? As long as I know. . .

"Well, is God better or worse than you?"

"What kind of question is that? . . .

"Well!" crows the son triumphantly. "If God is better than you, and He knows of Himself what poor, sick, weak stand up in front of you and start praising you to your face: 'Oh, what a tailor! The true tailor! The only tailor! , . . .

"It would make me sick, of course," said the old man impatiently. "And why is that? Because you are not foolish, to take pleasure in foolish praise."

"Yes, but."

"No buts, Father! God is wiser than we; do you think He needs our praise? Do you think He wants you to stand up three times daily and tell Him to his face: 'Oh good God, Oh wonderful God, Creator of heaven and earth.' Doesn't He know it better than you?" The old man sank into meditation, then suddenly started up. "You're right! . . . he exclaimed.

"Absolutely right! But a Jew has to pray, doesn't he?"

The vignette by the Yiddish and Hebrew writer Y. L. Peretz typifies the way of not answering. Berel has handled his son's critique of prayer with the adroitness of an expert in jujitsu. He has parried his son's thrusts of logic and morality by stepping aside, not responding to the attack at all. Instead of answering his son he appeals to the habits of the heart, the duty to pray. The sound of prayer is more important to him than theological soundness, the responsive prayer more significant than the assent of the head. Berel's dismissal of his son's challenge is like the rabbi who, when approached by a parishioner complaining that he could not pray because he was suffering from a headache, answered "and what has the head to do with the heart?" Berel offers his son an invitation to decapitated prayer, head out, head in. But prayer has a mind of its own that will not be ignored. Prayer has a moral and intellectual culture without which prayer is reduced to habit not

believed in. Of itself aesthetics lacks the theological background that faith demands.

PETITIONARY PRAYER

Prayer begins early in our lives. It is the first religious act performed at bedside, at the religious school assembly, in the sanctuary, the house of prayer. While there are multiple forms of prayer including those of praise and of thanksgiving, the heart of prayer for most people is based on something wanted, needed, asked for. Many of the first and lasting religious questions revolve around the efficacy of prayer. Does petitionary prayer really work? Does the world as religion understands it respond to our requests? Does a worshipped God care enough to intervene in our lives? If God does not intervene is it because He can't or because He won't?

First answers are the building blocks of our theology. They build on each other vertically and horizontally. Vertically, because yesterday's answers will be applied to tomorrow's questions. Horizontally, because what we say about prayer will affect the religious understanding of miracles, evil, revelation the nature of God and of the human being. No answer is an island unto itself. Who is wise? He who can foresee the consequences of his answers.

Questions too are not islands. They are attached to invisible territories of unquestioned certitude. Proper answers must often call for the disentanglement of unsuspecting presuppositions caught in the skein of the question.

SUSIE'S PRAYER

As an example of such entanglement, listen carefully to Susie's question. At age 6 Susie wants to know whether God hears prayers. She has picked up from parents, teachers, peers, the cinema, cartoons, that if you are in need or in trouble and you pray honestly God will help you. She had prayed hard and long for a Cabbage Patch Doll like those other friends have. But to no avail. She wonders whether God really hears her prayers.

She asks her religious school teacher who had been inspired by a theologian who dealt with just that sort of question. She transmits to Susie his religious approach. "I would say to the child 'yes God hears our prayers.' And if the child wonders why her prayers were not answered, I would tell her 'In that case, God said no.'" The educator's answer seems reasonable enough. While God is neither deaf nor mute, He is not forced to say "yes" to every petition. Other religious educators agree with the "God says no" response. One writes, "When God does not seem to answer a selfish, shallow and sometimes cruel prayer, the petitioner may well exclaim 'there is no God'. We might even 'thank God there is not the kind of God who will respond to the most ignoble of human wishes'." Susie may be satisfied with that answer. She even may be convinced that her prayer was a little less than noble, a bit selfish and shallow. Susie, for the moment, may be satisfied with "God said no". But answers have afterlives and a religious educator must think ahead.

Years later, Susie's mother finds herself in the hospital gravely ill. The family is upset and Susie prays that her mother be made well. Tragically, her mother dies. Susie did not pray selfishly nor for ignoble wishes. Did God say no? Was the negative response from God due to something she had done wrong or something her mother had done wrong or her father or someone

else to offend God? The question and answer will reappear in other forms. Did God say no to victims of the Holocaust? The path from Susie's Cabbage Patch doll to the agonizing questions of evil is shorter than the educator may suspect. The problem of evil that theologians call "theodicy", the defense of a good and powerful God in the presence of evil, has its origins in questions like Susie's first inquiries and given answers. How the child's question is understood and how she is answered provide the formative materials out of which her theology is fashioned.

Susie's questions and the teacher's answers are not idiosyncratic. Other youngsters like Susie have asked, "If I pray for Grandma will she, get well quicker?" To this question a prominent theologian responded, "Since all petitionary prayers must be accompanied by the idea 'let her get well if this is Thy will and if this is not Thy will, Thou knowest best', acceptance of this has no devastating affect on this prayer." He goes on to explain that the purpose of such prayer is to put our will in tune with that of God's. To the second grade child who asked about the effectiveness of her prayer he answers "We do not know. We can, however, pray in the assurance that Grandma's health is in God's loving care. But we must remember that we do not know the will of God." The answer is consistent with much of conventional theology. I am troubled by that response. At a critical juncture, it covers itself with the shawl of pious agnosticism. The defense of God on the grounds of our ignorance will not work. We do not know what God wills, or why God wills, but we surely know that whatever He wills must be for the good. When Grandma's painful illness is prolonged despite our prayers, we know from conventional theology that whatever His reasons may be, He must have answered "no" to our petitions.

Susie's doll question and the answer that she received are prototypical of others. The questions and answers will return in different forms. The momentary answer that at one time staved off the question is the calm before the storm. Did God say "no" to the seven incinerated astronauts of the space shuttle Challenger or to the citizens of Chernoble or to the children of Auschwitz? Is that what religion believes to be the way the world works and the way God works in the world? Is the will of God, known or unknown, the real reason or true cause of the tragic effect? Are the natural calamities we experience, earthquake, volcano, drought, properly traced to the "acts of God"?

On the heels of the first answer about reality others will follow to question its morality. "Is it fair?" Does the will of God reflect the justice of His decisions and is God's morality to be imitated in my own life? The ghosts of first answers live on to haunt us. We will discuss in greater detail the problem of evil in chapter five. Here we are asked how we would respond to Susie.

HOW SHOULD SUSIE BE ANSWERED?

The philosopher Whitehead's caveat, "Seek simplicity and suspect it" is especially pertinent for the religious educator. We are impatient with religious questions. We are provoked by straightforward questions to offer quick, simple verbal answers. We are tempted to answer "yes" or "no," particularly when the question is framed in the either/or form. Either God answers prayer or God does not answer prayers. To say "no" seems to deny the purpose of petitionary prayer. To say "yes" is to wonder why God has chosen not to respond affirmatively to our prayers. Moreover, to simply say that God answers prayers without qualification is to give rise to Susie's next question: Can I pray to God for anything? We are caught on a sharp disjunctive hook.

Before plunging into the quick answer, the responsible religious educator must remember that there is no simple meaning to religious terms such as "prayer" or "miracle" or "God". Logicians have properly argued that we must distinguish "naming" from "meaning". The fact that we use certain names in common does not indicate that they have a common meaning. "God," "prayer," "miracles" like "democracy," "freedom" and "liberty" are names we use with radically different meanings.

What does Susie mean by "prayer" when she asks her question? She has picked up the notion that religious people believe that you can pray for anything. If you pray honestly and fervently to God, prayer can achieve whatever the believing heart desires. It is not surprising that Susie believes, for example, that she can pray for a Cabbage Patch doll or for an "A" on her arithmetic test. How shall we responsibly teach her otherwise without frustrating her confidence in prayer?

MAGIC AND PRAYER

Susie must be educated to distinguish prayer from magic. Prayer is not magic. Magic uses formulas, charms, incantations that are thought to exercise powers that can influence natural events. Magic is concerned with changing the external world. Magic's goal is to produce results. Mature prayer has different purposes. Prayer is concerned with energizing the means to achieve ends. Prayer is not wishing results. Contrary to the popular lyric, prayer wishing will not make things true. Prayer is not a congregational audience responding to Peter Pan's pleadings by clapping wildly that Tinkerbell's life not be extinguished. It is not like rubbing Aladdin's lamp to bring forth the Genie who will grant our wishes. There are no short cuts in authentic prayer.

Were Susie taught the religious limitations of prayer early, she would know that she cannot pray for just anything she may desire. If she were taught the proper tradition about the scope of prayer, Susie would not ask to pray for an "A". What however can she pray for? She can pray for the means to achieve her desired goals. She can pray for the patience and discipline to study. She can pray for the wisdom to appreciate that it is the mastery of the subject matter, not the acquisition of a grade, that is the true mark of growth. To know for what to pray is crucially important for her religious development. She is not too young to be taught the tradition of responsible prayer. It is wrong to teach her prayer as magic with the hope and expectation that she will learn better later.

In teaching the limits of prayer and its distinction from magic, the religious educator prepares the child to understand the parameters of reality and the dangers of magical thinking. Magical thinking is unreal and leads to the disillusionment of the self and the world. A rabbinic teaching notes that "he who extends his prayers and expects fulfillment will in the end suffer vexation of the heart as it is written 'hope deferred makes the heart sick.'" Magical thinking introduces false hope and a dependence upon illusory means. Additionally it leads the believer to depend on the magician. Magic denigrates human knowledge and the rational competencies that help us describe what is real.

VAIN PRAYER

Susie's guides should know the Jewish tradition. Think before you pray. Thinking is prologue to prayer. For prayer is based upon knowledge of what is real, a matter essential for the realization of the ideal aspired. In the Jewish tradition, one is not to pray when intoxicated or confused. "A person whose

mind is not at ease must not pray since it is said, 'he who is in distress must not make decisions'" (Erubin 65a). Prayer leads to decision. Prayer has consequences. The liturgical world of the sane and sober is not the prayer world of the disordered and inebriated. Before I can pray, I must know something about what the world is really like. The ideal intent of petition is grounded in the real possibility in the world. There are reasonable and unreasonable prayers. In the standard daily Jewish prayer book, the very first prayer in a series of petitionary prayers is the prayer for intelligence: "You grace the human being with knowledge and give him to understand". Berel's son was never taught that cognitive character of prayer. He was never taught the authentic characterization of prayer as expressed in the writings of the Jewish thinker J. S. Soloveitchik. "To pray means to discriminate, to evaluate, to understand -in other words to ask intelligently." Prayer is about this world and it must respect the world that God has created.

Somewhere in the course of Susie's and Berel's son's religious education they should have been exposed to the tradition's reality principle and its relationship to reasonable prayer. The rabbinic tradition, for example, insists that petition to reverse the past is to utter a "vain prayer". As an illustration of "vain prayer" the Talmud cites the petition that the embryo of a woman advanced in her pregnancy should be a male child. In the eyes of tradition that utterance is a worthless prayer. Prayer must respect the reality of the irreversibility of time. A prayer for God to alter events that have already taken place is an ignorant petition. The Talmud offers another instance of "vain prayer". If when returning from a journey, a person hears the sound of lamentation in the city and prays, "May it be Thy will that they who make lamentation be not of my house", such a prayer is vain. (T. Berachoth 54a, 60a) While the past cannot be changed, its meaning can be interpreted.

You cannot pray that an amputated limb should spring to life. But you can pray for the inner strength to deal with the loss. You cannot pray for the resurrection of the lost organ but you can give thanks for the miracle of prosthetics. Not to pray for a result that defies the laws of nature or contradicts the laws of logic does not reflect on God's lack of power but acknowledges the reality that God has created. Converting prayer into magical thinking is characteristic of street theology that like street sex knowledge slips into our home beliefs as authentic wisdom.

In one of his religious rulings, the philosopher Maimonides writes, "One who whispers a spell over a wound, at the same time reciting a verse from the Torah, one who recites a verse over a child to save it from terrors and one who places a scroll or phylacteries on an infant, to induce it to sleep, may not be in the category of sorcerers and soothsayers, but they are included among those who repudiate the Torah; for they use its words to cure the body whereas these are only medicine for the soul, as it is said, 'they shall. be life unto thy soul' (Prov, 3: 22) On the other hand, anyone in the enjoyment of good health is permitted to recite verses from the Scriptures or a psalm, so that he may be shielded by the merit of the recital and saved from trouble and hurt. Prayer is no surrogate for medical attention. Prayer on its own will not cure cancer. Prayer can however alert the patient's attention to his or her own curative powers. Prayer can inspire the researcher to devote his mind and heart to the discovery of cure. There are boundaries to prayer, but within those limits there are energies to be called upon. To direct our attention to those energies is to turn to the petitioners themselves who must hear the words of their mouths.

THE PETITIONER

In a "Dear God" letter the child wrote, "Why do I have to pray when you know everything that I want anyway?" It was signed Louis. Louis asks the same type of question Berel's son asked in the Peretz episode cited at the beginning of the chapter. There is a curious omission in the typical questions posed about prayer. It is as if the petitioner were superfluous. If God is God, who needs the petitioner to pray? How redundant to pray my desire to an all-knowing, good and perfect being.

The kind of prayer questions asked by Louis and Berel's son arise from a theology of a split universe that separates God and man, and that ultimately sets God over against man. Divinity gives, humanity receives. God wills, judges, rewards, punishes, forgives, hears, responds. Humans are the grateful or trembling recipients of God's power. Given such a master-servant portrayal, the answer to prayer comes downward from above. In this vertical theological mind-set (God up there, the worshipper down here) the supplicant is conceived of as a passive, dependent individual who throws himself upon God's goodness and power. The petitioner has little to do. At best his hope is that in praise or petition he may move a personal God to act. Accordingly the kinds of questions asked about prayer are directed upward towards God alone. Does God hear? Does God answer? Does He respond "yes" or "no"? Does He intervene? Does He know the needs and wants of the petitioner? Is God moved by prayer? Naturally what is left out of these questions is the role of the petitioner himself. The human supplicant neither asks nor is asked questions about his own role in prayer.

We would direct the questions posed by Louis or Berel's son toward themselves. "Do you hear your own prayers? Do you know what you want

and whether what you want is worthy of being prayed for? Do you answer your prayers? Are you moved by your prayers?"

These reflexive questions are in effect inquiries about the reality of the self. "Who am I who lifts his voice in prayer to an Other? What is my power and my energy and my will and how do they affect the outcome of the prayers I pronounce?"

The questions are now focused on the petitioner himself. They follow as consequences of "covenantal theology". In covenantal theology, the model of the prayer relationship is not that of king to subject, or master to servant, or shepherd to sheep. Covenantal prayer is a two-sided relationship of co-creators, co-sanctifiers, and co-suplicants. The covenantal petitioner is not a helpless recipient of an other's will, judgment and act. The covenantal petitioner understands himself as an essential partner with the Divine Other. The prayer of dialogue in no way lessens the potency of the Divine Thou but it raises up the power and the responsibility of the human partner and brings the Divine other into the world of personal and collective history. Covenantal prayer reflects covenantal theology. When the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, was asked the proper posture for prayer, how one is to bow before God, he replied "We must go down and down but not too low and not too often. For we may forget how to lift our heads to heaven." We dwell "in the shadow of God," another disciple explained. When we are bent over the shadow of God contracts. When we stand erect the shadow of God is extended.

To many, the reflexive character of prayer and the power it urges upon the worshipper may seem untraditional, even un-Jewish. But that is not the fault of the tradition. Samson Raphael Hirsch, the nineteenth century neo-

orthodox author of Horeb, informs us that "to ask for something is only a minor section of prayer." For Hirsch the Hebrew term for prayer (tefillah) is derived from the verb (pallel) which means to judge. Prayer is a form of self-judgment, self-examination to correct his ways so that they may conform with the ideals of the covenant. It is the self who is the target of prayer. Who is the self addressed?

THE DIVINE IMAGE WITHIN

An anonymous legend tells of angels who grew jealous at the thought that God intended to create a new mortal in God's own image. They conspired to steal the divine image. Where should it be hidden from Adam's grasp? One angel suggested that it be concealed in the heavens, another that it be buried in the seas. But the shrewdest angel argued that those remote parts would be the first places Adam would search out. "Let us hide the divine image in the human being. It is the last place that Adam would look for divinity."

The power of covenantal prayer derives from the central Biblical affirmation of the Divine image implanted in the human being. The pivotal Biblical verse in Genesis has consequences of enormous significance both for human-divine relationship and interpersonal and intra-personal relations. "And God created the human being in His own image, male and female created He them." (Genesis 1: 27) This radical Biblical idea grounds a common universe of discourse between the two significant others of the covenant. The worshiper is not an ear into which orders are shouted nor an automaton to be moved about by another.

In covenantal prayer, the petitioners cannot pretend that they do not know or cannot will or cannot act responsibly. Prayer is a way of discovering

who it is that is praying and to what end. "Did not thy father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know Me? Saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 22:15). Covenantal petitioners are not dealing with a God who hides what is morally required of them. The moral competence and comprehension of the human petitioner is prefigured in the Bible's account of God's intention before deciding to punish Sodom and Gomorrah "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am doing for I have known him to the end that he may command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and justice " (Genesis 18: 20) Between God and man is a compact that transforms prayers of dependence and acquiescence into prayers of interdependence, self-judgment and responsibility. In covenantal prayer there is more than something to be asked for or pleaded. There is something to be answered and to be done by the petitioner.

GOD ALSO PRAYS

"In true prayer, God is both He to whom we pray and He who prays through us". This arresting formulation by the philosopher theologian Paul Tillich expresses the unique status of the Divinely imaged character of the human petitioner. Following our approach it means that God prays through the Divine within us. We are blessed with the God given talent to think, feel and realize the ideals that reside in us as potentiality.

Bearing this covenantal theology in mind, we would respond to the question "Does prayer move God?" in the following manner. Prayer moves God only and if you who pray are moved to act. If you pray and do not hear, or pray and do not attempt to respond, you are caught in magical

thinking. If you expect God to move while remaining still yourself, you convert prayer into a form of telekinesis, the production of motion in objects without contact. Prayer turns into an indolent operation of the remote control. Prayer becomes a verbal surrogate for work on the self, on the community, on the world.

One-sided vertical prayer lays the burden of petition on the other. It invites indolence. For covenantal prayer, to petition the Healer of broken spirits and bodies, while in the same breath violating the dictates of physical and mental hygiene is a blasphemous contradiction. To pray to the Divine Other for life while puffing cigarettes is liturgical hypocrisy. To pray to God who brings peace on high as He does on earth without lifting human voice or finger to assure peace trivializes the reciprocal obligations of prayer. There is nothing that the worshiper can rightly pray for that does not demand from the petitioner effort, change and intervention. The object of petition is to energize the petitioner to act beyond the threshold of the sanctuary. The very question that Louis and Berel's son ask –"If God knows what we need or want, what point is there to petitionary prayer?" is a by-product of the stereotypic theological rupture in the divine-human relationship they were taught. We answer that it is not God, the Other who needs to know the secrets of your hearts desires, but you who ask who need to know what you want, whether what you want is morally desirable, and whether there are reservoirs of energy in you and the community that you have left untapped. Moses at the edge of the Red Sea and before the pursuing Egyptian charioteers asks God to intervene. It appears as a prayer of piety. But Moses is rebuked by God, "Wherefore criest thou to me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward." (Exodus 14:15) Faith in the Other is necessary but not sufficient for authentic prayer. Prayer entails faith in the divinely reflected

image of the self within the human petitioner to go forward. In the mysticism of the Kaballah, the power of the worshipper to affect the power of God makes of prayer an activating agency. In the language of the Zohar, "From an activity below there is stimulated a corresponding activity on high: If there is no impulse from below there is no stirring above." The mystical and rational humanism within the Jewish tradition energizes the worshipper to act. In the Jerusalem Talmud, with a change of vowels, the Biblical verse "I [God] have brought you out of the land of Egypt" is transformed into the audacious reading "I [God] was brought forth with you from Egypt."

REPENTANCE PRAYER

In a discussion on the nature of repentance, the Talmudist and theologian J. B. Soloveitchik boldly proclaims, "The human being must rely upon himself; no one can help him. He is his own creator and innovator. He is his own redeemer; he is his own messiah who has come to redeem himself from the darkness of his exile to the light of his personal redemption". Elevation of the human partner raises the personal involvement of the co-suplicants in prayer. God asks of the human being, but little lower than Himself, to assume responsibility for helping perfect the incompleting world. God has needs, demands, requests of the creature He formed with free will and whom He refuses to alter from without. Both partners in history and prayer are held in a covenant of reciprocity and interdependence.

Prayer affects change. God Himself is said to pray for internal change. In an imaginative discourse, one of the rabbinic sages cites God's reflexive prayer, "May it be My will that My mercy suppress My anger" (T. Berachoth 7a). That is the type of inner change that humans may imitate in their prayers. To pray, for example, that my nose be shortened or that my eyes be

spaced wider is illustrative of vain prayers and prayers in vain. Such prayers for change fail to satisfy the double criteria for mature prayer: reality and morality. The words of prayer however well intentioned do not realistically work to alter the defects of the body. Prayer is no surrogate for cosmetics or plastic surgery. To use them as such is to trifle with the sanctity of prayer. Such unrealistic, magical petitions are additionally offensive to the morality of prayer. Prayer must be worthy. The initial spelling of the word "worship" was "worthship." The two are etymologically and theologically related. The petitions for aesthetic change are vain prayers.

The purpose of petitionary prayer is to change the character of the worshipper. The petition does not expect God to alter human character. Such petitions shirk human responsibility. God does not change human character. As Maimonides wrote in his *Guide to the Perplexed* (Part 3, Chapter 32). "The nature of man is never changed by God by way of miracles". As Maimonides explained, to expect God to change the nature of any person would render the mission of the prophets and the giving of Divine imperatives altogether superfluous.

The change of human character that prayer intends to cultivate speaks to the Divine image within the petitioner. The prayer of repentance confronts the petitioner with the "likeness" of God which human errors have marred. Repentance prayer is confident of the capacity of the petitioner to control his emotions, to create a "second nature" that will enable the repentant to live a second time. Then the petitioner may declare "I am another person and not the same one who did these things". The petitioner is co-creator. If God is said to create something out of nothing, the human petitioner may be said to create something out of something within.

THE PENITENT AS ACTOR

Berel's son and his peers complain that in conventional prayer they feel themselves dependent and bored. They feel irrelevant in such one-sided prayer. In conventional prayer there is nothing for them to initiate or to do other than to confess, bow the knee, submit and await the work of the Supreme Artisan. They read the major prayers as confession of human impotence: "We are like clay in the hands of God, like clay in the hands of the potter, like stone in the hands of the mason, like glass in the hands of the blower, like cloth in the hands of the weaver, like silver in the hands of the silversmith." The analogies are overwhelming. They suggest that the worshiper is a malleable substance to be worked upon, hammered, pounded and shaped by someone other.

Covenantal theology assigns another task to the petitioner. The worshiper is more than a bundle of instincts, drives, and innate dispositions beyond his control. Prayer calls upon the petitioner to work on himself. In Rabbinic Hebrew prayer is called "Avodah" which means work. The worshiper knows the flaws in the material with which he has to work. That knowledge respects the reality principle about human nature. But reality can be stretched. Reality sets limits on magic but not on possibility. The aspirations of the ideal are real. Prayer calls for transformation.

In the sense that David was in the marble before Michelangelo touched it, the ideal of a Divine image is in the soul before it was touched by prayer. The worshiper is a sculptor who bears in himself the divine image drawn by the hands of God. Awareness of his status and talents, he is mandated in prayer. "Withdraw into yourself and if you do not like what you see, act as a sculptor. Cut away here, smooth there, make this line lighter,

this one purer. Never cease carving until there shines out from you the godlike sphere of character." (Plotinus)

IS PRAYER FLATTERY?

Berel's son complained that prayers of praise must sound sycophantic to an all-knowing God. There is something excessive in the adulations showered upon God. Berel's son is in good company. The Rabbis in the Talmudic period expressed similar uneasiness with excessive praise. "If a man seeks to praise God excessively he is banished from the world". The Rabbis restricted the praises of God in prayer not to dampen their adoration but as Rabbi Jacob said: "They knew of their God that He is truth loving and they did not flatter Him. The praise with which Moses had praised Him was enough for them" (Midrash Psalms on 19: 1). The sages went so far as to ridicule the prayer leader who praised God by adding attributes of adulation. When he finished his praying they jibed at him: "Have you exhausted all the praises of your Lord? What is the use of all those adjectives?" (Talmud Berachoth 33b).

Berel's son tells his father that in prayer he is made to feel obsequious bribing God with flattery to gain favors for himself or others. His religious discomfort is common and widespread. How are we to deal with his feeling that prayer is largely the fawning of a subservient supplicant. The praise of God far from being the flattery of a servant before the master I understand to be praise of the spiritual self that yearns for actualization. Praise of God expresses the link between Divinity and Humanity that resides in the radical idea of "Imitatio Dei", the imitation of God. Applied to prayer it transforms adulation of an Other outside into moral imperatives demanded from within. When Moses seeks to know God's way and God's glories (Exodus 33:13, 18) he is enlightened by God's self-revelation. What is revealed, to him is God's

mercy, compassion, forbearance, goodness, truthfulness, loving-kindness. These attributes of divinity provide the religious ground for the moral emulation of God. In covenantal prayer, praise of God is not a fawning acknowledgment of the powers of another. It translates into the worshipper's commitment to consecrate the earth given to the human being for care and improvement. "Imitatio Dei" is the ambition of prayer. It insists that the ways of God are accessible to the, human being. The imitation of those ways are the spiritual consequences of belief in the human resemblance to God. The pragmatic consequences of imitation is expressed in a revealing statement found in the Talmud (Sotah 14a) "How are we to understand the Biblical verse, Deuteronomy 13:5? 'After the Lord your God ye shall walk'." Is it possible to walk after the Holy Presence given that God is a devouring fire? It means to walk after His attributes: As He clothes the naked, do thou clothe the naked; as He visits the sick, do thou visit the sick; as He comforts the mourners, do thou also comfort the mourners, as He buries the dead, do thou also bury the dead". Far from sycophantry, praise of God is the model of our own spiritual character. Praise of the God who created us serves as the benchmark against which the worshiper judges himself and even more audaciously criticizes the ways of God. For as the ideal of the Divine praised serves as a stimulus to activate, it functions even as a critique of an overly passive God. Psalm 44 was recited daily in the Temple by the Levites to awaken God. "We have not forgotten then or been false to Thy covenant. Our heart has not turned back nor have our steps departed from Thy way that Thou shouldst have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with deep darkness. If we have forgotten the main of our God or spread our hands to a strange God will not God discover this? For He knows the secrets of the heart. Nay for Thy sake we are slain all the day long and are accounted as sheep for the

slaughter. Rouse thyself. Why sleepest Thou, O Lord?" Covenantal prayer properly understood is neither subservient nor imperious. It presents a two way bridge on which I and Thou may meet. . . .



CHAPTER III

BIBLICAL MIRACLES – TRUE OR FALSE?

"A miracle cannot prove what is impossible; it is useful only to confirm what is possible"
–(Maimonides Guide To The Perplexed III, Chapter 24)

Menachem Mendel of Kotzk maintained that "whoever believes in miracles is a fool; and whoever does not believe in miracles is an atheist". Can we avoid the paradox of the Rabbi of Kotzk? Can we believe in miracles without folly or disbelieve them without apostasy? Once more we are boxed into an either/or question that forces us to choose between either blind faith or godlessness. The responsible educator will resist being caught in the either/or vise. The educator should question the questioner. To answer a question with a counter question is not always a way of avoiding an answer but sometimes a legitimate request for clarification. Is there a single meaning to miracles? What does the tradition admit as evidence of a miraculous event? Are miracles restricted to the records of the Bible or are there miracles experienced today? Miracles are taught in the religious school and celebrated at home at certain festivals to publicize the goodness and greatness of God who cares enough to intervene in history on behalf of threatened innocents.

Miracles aver that there is more to the world than meets the naked eye. The world is not as flat and impersonal as a deterministic view of the word would portray it. Miracles are blessings that evoke thanksgiving from us. "Dear God." My teacher read us the part where all the Jews went through where the water was and got away. Keep up the good work. I am Jewish. Love Paula." Paula is thankful. When she grows older she will likely find miracle

stories more troubling. She will be filled with questions about their credibility. Did the splitting of the sea or the visitation of the ten plagues really happen? Why do we not speak of miracles today? Is it because the world today is not like the world in the days of the Bible? What has changed – the people, the Bible or God?

These are not children's questions alone. Adults have those questions too but they have learned to repress their doubts. When parents are asked such religious questions they turn into referral agents. "Ask your teacher". But teachers too do not want to appear impious or ignorant. So as not to appear disbelieving, teachers usually teach the Biblical account literally. So as not to appear naive, they sometimes add a "scientific" account of the same event. They then find themselves entangled on the twin horns of biblical and scientific literalism, a dilemma illustrated by the tale of Joey. Before Passover his father asks him what he has learned in school about the crossing of the Red Sea. Joey explains that Israeli engineers had laid pontoons across the sea so that the Israelis could cross over safely. Later, the same engineer corps detonated the floating bridges and caused the pursuing Egyptians to drown. His father is incredulous and refuses to believe that was what was being taught in school. Joey responds, "You'd never believe the story the teacher told us"

Joey, the teacher and the father are all caught between conflicting sensibilities. Normally, the religious and scientific plausibility assumptions are kept on separate tracks. When they sometimes intersect, choices must be made to avoid an oncoming collision. Joey tried to make sense of the Red Sea story not by denying the Biblical account but by making the miracle credible. He imposed a scientific grid upon a supernatural account. Such

heroic attempts to harmonize these opposing interpretations invariably fail. The naturalistic account does not satisfy the religious intention of the supernatural miracle, and the literal supernatural interpretation simply flies in the face of the common sense reality principle. By and large most teachers in religious institutions teach the Biblical miracle literally, the way they were taught when they were young. They surmise that the religious institution in which they teach prefers it that way. They may rationalize their choice of teaching with the shibboleth "when they grow up they will know better". That is however poor consolation for bad teaching. Is the Bible a fantasy to be shed in maturity? Is the Bible a form of children's entertainment not to be taken seriously by adults? Will children grow up only to wonder what else they were taught in their formative years that is to be outgrown?

How miracles are taught provides the child with a key to understanding a host of related religious questions including the reality of Divine revelation, the truth of the Bible, the credibility of the prophets' message. The answers about miracles cannot be treated in isolation.

NORMALIZING MIRACLES

Fundamentalists treat miracles literally. The outstretched hand of God, the rod of Moses, the turning of the water into blood, the rivers filled with frogs, the dust turned into gnats, the affliction of the Egyptian population with flies and the cattle with pests, the visitation upon people and beasts with boils, the covering of the earth with hail and locusts, darkness and the death of the first born, are events interpreted verbatim. Non-fundamentalists equally revere the Bible but are embarrassed by the implausibility of its miracle events. To give the text credibility, they are inclined to naturalize the miraculous. But in the course of making the miracle palatable for the

scientific appetite, they deaden its theological meaning. In some biblical commentaries, for example, the ten plagues visited upon Egypt are explained along naturalistic lines. Between June and August the Nile turns to a dull red because of the presence of vegetable matter; that is followed by the production of slime which breeds frogs; when decomposed, frogs beget flies that in turn spread disease germs attacking animals etc. The scientific translation of Biblical miracles promises to let the teacher and student have their supernatural cake and eat it naturally too. But the transposition falls between the stools missing the seat of our religious concern. If the Biblical report of the plagues are natural phenomena, in what sense are they miraculous? And if it is only the coincidence of their occurrence that is miraculous, the real question is not whether the plagues can be explained scientifically but whether the coincidence is a matter of chance or of events purposed by a divine designer. No scientific account of the plagues offers information about their purported divine intent. From a religious perspective the translation of the Bible into naturalistic literalism is besides the point. Not "how" and "what" but "who" and "what for" are presupposed in the questions about the truth of miracles. Are these plagues, however they may occur, the outcome of a divine intelligence to free the slaves from Egypt or are they accidents of nature that just happened to benefit the pursued? Is it serendipity or God's intervention that miracles commemorate?

Consider a further example of the irrelevance of the scientific explanation of an event that is experienced and reported. The Bible reports, "And Moses stretched forth his hand towards heaven and there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days, they saw not one another neither rose any from his place for three days; but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10:22). To explain the anomaly of there being

darkness in Egypt yet light in the land of Goshen where Israel dwelled, Dr. J. H. Hertz's Bible commentary calls upon the expert witness of Professor Mahler who identifies the ninth plague of the darkness with a solar eclipse of March 13, 1335 B.C.E.

While Egypt proper was darkened, it did not extend as a total eclipse to Goshen. Hence, all the children of Israel had light in their habitations". Hertz in his commentary adds that "the eclipse of January 24, 1925 was not visible in the lower half of New York city ninety sixth street making the southern limit of the path of totality." What the "scientific" literalists fail to see is that naturalizing an event has no bearing on its religious status. Belief in miracles implies faith in the occult purpose working behind curtain of history. Not science, but theology is challenged to explain the meaning of miracle.

GETTING HELP FROM THE TRADITION

The contemporary religious educator would be better served by adapting the rabbinic moralization of the miracle than by following the scientific normalization of the miracle. For many of the rabbinic commentators what is important is not how the plagues happened but what they signify. They found in the character of the plagues a moral symmetry, a lesson of poetic justice. The Nile River which Pharaoh worshipped as a god is turned into blood, a symbolic punishment for throwing the innocent male children into the river. The land is filled with frogs because the Egyptian frog goddess of fertility is Heat who assists women in labor. With poetic irony the blessings of the goddess of fertility worshipped by the Pharaoh jealous of the fertility of the Israelites are turned into curses. The darkness of the dungeons blots out the sun god. Similar symbolic explanations flow from the moral

conviction that "Whatever measure a man metes out, shall be measured to him again."

The events of the plagues then are to be taught moral metaphors. To translate the metaphors of the Psalmist (Psalm 114) into scientific terms would only trivialize the psalm: "The sea saw it and fled, the Jordan turned back in its courses, the mountains skipped like rams, the hills like young sheep." It is not the literal interruption of the regularity of the natural order of the world that evokes the psalmists wonder but trust in the power of morality in history to triumph over nature that is sung. Mature faith is not a product of an alleged supernatural change in nature, but trust in the moral purpose that transforms life. Faith without the claim of miracle is superior to faith that depends on miracle.

"Dearer to God is the proselyte who has come of his own accord than all the crowds of Israelites who stood before Mt. Sinai. For had the Israelites not witnessed the thunders, lightnings, quaking, mountain and sounding trumpets they would not have accepted the Torah. But the proselyte who saw not one of these things came to surrender himself to the Holy One and took the yoke of heaven upon him." (Tanchuma on Lech Lecha)

MORALIZING MIRACLES

Moderns are not alone in their ambivalence towards miracles. The rabbinic tradition reveals its own internal conflicts. On the one hand, miracles demonstrate the divine character of nature and history. The Biblical idea of creation in time is itself the ground of all miracles. Creation implies the act of a free, divine will, the possibility of spontaneity, change and freedom. Creation, the greatest miracle of all, means philosophically that the world is not governed by the wheel of eternal necessity. With the miracle of creation,

the pagan idea that the world is a recurring cycle in which nothing new beneath the sun can take place is rejected. To accept miracles is to deny that "only that shall happen which has happened, only that occur which has occurred." (Ecclesiastes 1:9) Belief in miracles expresses faith in the transforming possibilities within nature and history in opposition to the view of impersonal determinism that weighs down the oppressed with hopelessness. Miracles are associated with the rescue and saving of the helpless. Miracles to serve as signs of divinity must have a moral design. This is said in praise of the positive side of belief in the miraculous.

On the other hand, the rabbinic sages were alert to the permeable border that separates miracle from magic. They were distrustful of magical thinking and of the ease with which magic slips into the domain of the miraculous. Consider the way the rabbis treated a miraculous event explicitly recorded in the book of Numbers chapter 21. Here the people are punished for their transgression by God who sends fiery serpents to poison them. Moses prays for the peoples' life and is answered. He is commanded by the Lord, "make thee a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole and it shall come to pass that everyone that is bitten when he sees it shall live. Then Moses made a serpent of brass and sat it upon a pole and it came to pass that is a serpent had bitten any man, when he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived". On the face of it we have in the Biblical account the unambiguous marks of a supernatural miracle. The miracle comes as a response to prayer and it saves those poisoned by the serpents. The sages however will not accept this scripturally validated miracle literally. Instead they ask "but could the serpent slay or keep alive?" They will not accept such an interpretation. They explain the Biblical story as a moral lesson teaching that "when the Israelites directed

their thoughts on high and kept loyal to God they were healed, otherwise they pined away" (Talmud Rosh Hashana 3:8).

Such rabbinic refusal to accept a Biblical account of a miraculous event literally is not idiosyncratic. The rabbis deal with a similar miraculous event recorded in Exodus 17:11 in much the same way. There Israel prevailed in its battles with the Amalekites only when Moses' hands were raised but were defeated when he let his hands down. The rabbis protest: "But could the hands of Moses promote or hinder the battle? That cannot be." Why can't it be? It is unacceptable because to the sages the story smacks of magical thinking. The rabbis will explain the event allegorically. Whenever the people retained their belief in God, were loyal to His word and turned their faces toward the heavens they were victorious, but when their faith flagged they were defeated.

To lessen the disruptive character of divine intervention in nature, the rabbinic tradition asserts that Biblical miraculous events such as the manna, Moses' rod, and Noah's rainbow were created before they occurred, on the eve of the first Sabbath of creation in the twilight (Ethics Of The Fathers V, 6). The veneration of God's creation is not in the violation of natural law but in its intelligent order. So the sages saw in the apparent aberrations of nature what the philosopher Wolfson called "a pre-established disharmony." Divine wisdom and goodness lay not in rupturing God's reign of universal law with anomalies but in the reliability of the steady order of the world. Faith is not dependent upon miracles. Miracles depend upon faith. And faith, far from blind, is a deeper way of seeing.

THE MIRACLE WORKER

The religious educator who is reluctant to teach miracles literally has traditional backing to draw upon. The Biblical and rabbinic tradition suspect the infiltration of miracle working into faith and with that incursion the threat to human autonomy and responsibility. The Bible is wary of the sleight of hand of the charismatic. "If there arise among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams and gives you a sign or a wonder and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spoke to you saying 'let us go after other gods which you have not known and let us serve them,' you shall not heed the words of the prophet or the dreamer of dreams, for the Lord God is testing you to see whether you love the Lord God with all your heart and soul." (Deuteronomy 13:2) Not the medium but the message is to be heeded. Not the charisma of the personality but the character of the content of prophecy must be validated. The success of miracle signs and wonders are irrelevant to the truth and morality of the message.

In the Bible itself the medium of many of the miraculous event before the Red Sea is Moses' rod. According to one commentary the Egyptians were convinced that it was the rod that produced the plagues and divided the sea. Therefore, according to a rabbinic interpretation, God said to Moses "Cast away thy rod so that they do not say, were it not for the rod he would not have been able to divide the sea." (Midrash Exodus Rabbah 21:9) The rod of its own has no intrinsic power. Indeed Moses striking the rod against the rock to force it to bring forth water in the desert acts sinfully, though, on the face of it, the rod produced a miraculous occurrence. Because of his abuse of the rod, Moses is denied entrance into the promised land. So it is not the rod but the moral purpose to which it is put to use that makes the sign

significant. Miracles to be worthy of the name must serve as a moral purpose. Our own age is not immune to manipulating spiritual leaders who exploit their followers by performing faith healings, signs and wonders. The religious tradition is forever threatened by charismatic hucksters who prey on the yearning of people for short cuts to divine power that magic promises.

MIRACLES AND MEDICINE

There were and are true believers who, in the name of piety, look askance at human invention on the grounds that it supplants Divine intervention. History records controversies in which the pious even sought to ban medicine because such human activity was deemed to be an arrogant displacement of faith in God. If God afflicts us with illness, He and no other can and should cure the afflicted. To circumvent God's will by human ingenuity reflects adversely on God's exclusive sovereignty. For such people, true faith is gazing upon the desert icons of the brazen serpents. Only lack of belief in the miracle turns to medicine and physicians for help.

Maimonides vigorously opposed this perversion of piety. In his Commentary of the Mishnah Peshachim 410 he wrote "According to their stupid and corrupt fantasy, if someone suffers from hunger and turns to bread and by consuming it heals himself from his great suffering, shall we say that he has abandoned trust in God? They should be condemned as great fools. For just as I thank God when I eat for His having provided something to satisfy my hunger and to give me life and sustain me, thus should I thank Him for having provided that which heals my sickness when I use it". To depend upon miracles is to belittle the divinely given intelligence and moral responsibility of human beings.

MIRACLES AND WISDOM

Faith is no protection against carelessness. A key discussion in the Talmud highlights the respect for human intelligence and the reality principle that inform healthy minded faith.

A strong claim is made by some sages in the Talmud that people engaged in fulfilling a religious precept are never harmed. The assertion is challenged by other Rabbis who cite the case of a son who dutifully obeyed his father who had asked him to fetch some eggs from the nest in a tree. The son ascended a ladder and following Biblical precept chased away the mother bird so as to spare her the anguish of seeing her eggs taken away. On his return to his father with the eggs in hand the son fell from the ladder and was killed. Where then the Rabbis asked was the promised reward for the son? The question was further bolstered by two scriptural verses promising longevity to those who honor their fathers and mothers and to those who dismiss the mother bird before taking the eggs from the nest. (Deuteronomy 5:16; 22:6) Does God then not keep His word? Rabbi Eleazar rose to explain the apparent contradiction. The son had chosen to stand on a precarious rickety ladder so that his fall was likely. "One must never stand in a place of danger expecting a miracle to protect the faithful." (Talmud Kiddushin 39b) Rabbi Eleazar goes on to note that the prophet Samuel who trusted in God yet would not go to King Saul though the Lord commanded him to do so. Samuel's reason for not obeying God is approved for where injury is likely, one must not rely on miracles. "And Samuel said, how can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me." (1 Samuel 16:2) Trust in God is not disregard of reality. Wisdom is an essential aspect of faith.

HOW TO TEACH MIRACLES

The philosopher Abraham Joshua Heschel would occasionally open his evening lectures with an announcement to the audience that he had just experienced a miracle. He went on to explain to the puzzled audience that he had just observed the setting of the sun. For Heschel, the miraculous is discovered through the faithful eye and is not to be looked for in the strange events in nature but in the ordinariness of our existence. "To pray," he wrote, "is to take notice of the wonder, to regain a sense of the mystery that animates all beings, the Divine margin in all attainments".

How shall we meaningfully present the idea of the miraculous to modern sensibilities? I am guided by the biblical Hebrew term for miracle "nes" which means "sign". Its Hebrew synonyms ("oth", "mofeth") in the Bible are translated as signal, standard, ensign. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Bible, Semeion is used, which refers to a sign. A miracle is an event that signifies something of "sign-ificance", something that makes an important difference in my life or in the life of my community. A miracle is an intimation of transcending meaning. The sign-miracle does not refer to something beyond or contrary to nature. It refers to events and experiences that take notice of the extraordinary in the ordinary, the wonder in the diurnal, the marvel in the routine.

The tradition calls such events "hidden miracles", those not explicitly mentioned in the sacred texts as coming from God's will. Hidden miracles are all about us. A major prayer recited thrice daily is worded to thankfully acknowledge "Thy wonders and Thy miracles which are daily with us evening, morn, and noon". The signs of transcendence are discovered within the ordinary course of living.

This understanding of the miraculous runs counter to the conventional notion that miracles are found in the inexplicable and the irrational. The twelfth century philosopher, Maimonides, observed the oddness of those who cannot see the greatness and goodness of God in the natural and who oppose scientific to supernatural religious explanations. If, Maimonides illustrated, you explain to some pious sages that it is God who sends a fiery angel to enter the womb of a woman and form the fetus there, they would accept it as a religious account of God's power and wisdom. They would marvel at the miracle that the "angel" is a body formed of burning fire whose size is equal to a third part of the whole world. But they would be repelled by the explanation that God "has placed in the sperm a formative force shaping the limbs and giving them their configuration". They would foolishly shirk from the idea that this natural force is what is meant by the "angel" (Guide To The Perplexed, Part II, Chapter 6).

To see the divine in the natural and the rational, and in the application of human intelligence and goodness is a part of the Jewish tradition that is rarely taught or preached. It is as if somehow human talent and human dedication compromise the glory of God.

They once asked Rabbi Baruch of Mezbizh why in the hymn God is called "creator of remedies, awesome in praises, doing wonders." Why should remedies stand next to wonders and even precede them? He answered: "God does not want to be praised as the lord of supernatural miracles. And so, here, through the mention of remedies, nature is introduced and put first. But the truth is that everything is a miracle and a wonder."

PREPARING THE CHILD FOR THE WONDER SIGNS OF THE MIRACULOUS

How can religious educators, parents and teachers alike, sensitize the child to the signals of divinity in the normal course of nature? The child has cut his hand in the playground. The wound hurts and bleeds. The child is frightened and is helped by his teacher to wash his hands, cleanse the wound, apply an antiseptic and bandage. Days pass and the bandage is removed to reveal the forming of a scab. What may be learned from this event? What can the class be taught? The ordinary healing process is a marvel that should not be taken for granted. The curative process depends upon intrinsic healing forces within the body, the intelligent application of medicines, and the expression of care and concern of friends. The miraculous is a transaction between that over which we have little control and that over which we have some control. It is a partnership between the "given" and the transformed. Left unattended, the bruise may well have festered. The washing, the application of the medicine and the bandaging are essential parts of the healing. But the scab formed cannot be said to have been accomplished by the will or wisdom of the child. The wonders of healing exhibit a collaboration between potentiality and actualization, between the conscious and unconscious powers. Healing points to the human and to that which is beyond human powers.

Other exercises may alert the child to the natural wonders about him, the signals of spiritual reality. The philosopher, Mordecai M. Kaplan, suggested the phenomenon of growth as a religious teaching opportunity. The child enters the class at the beginning of the term. Every child's height is measured and recorded. At the end of the term the children's height is re-measured. The children have grown. What accounts for their growth? Clearly

it relies upon the human care of the self, proper nutrition, exercise, sleep.. But the human contribution is not sufficient. There is something beyond human effort that accounts for the normal mystery of human growth. The collaboration of human and non-human energies enter into the miracle of growth.

THE MIRACLE OF THE HUMAN AND DIVINE ENCOUNTER

These kinds of exercise offer alternative theological approaches to miracles. They help overcome the notion that the measure of the miraculous is in the violation, not the regularity, of natural law. They teach further that human beings themselves have something to do with the performance of miracles. The latter is a point in great contention. Much of conventional theology is apprehensive about the human dimension in the religious explanation of miracles, indeed in the account of anything that is religious. Much of conventional theology begins by contrasting the human and the Divine but ends by seeing the two as antagonistic opponents. Though this bias predominates the teaching of popular theology, it is only a part of the whole of tradition. Because religious humanism is overlooked in the popular teaching of religion, we call attention to those insights within the body of tradition that do not excommunicate the human from the realm of the Divine. The theistic humanism within the tradition has a critical bearing on our treatment of religious thought. We have seen earlier that the petitioner has a vital part in the fulfillment of prayer. Similarly the person of faith has an important role in both perceiving and implementing the normal miracles in our daily lives.

Theological humor is as rare as it is revealing. One anecdote relevant to our discussion of the miraculous tells of a man stranded on the roof-top of

his home, surrounded by waters of a flood. He prays to God to be saved. A rowboat with rescuers comes by and offers him safety. He turns them away, confident that God will save him. A helicopter flies overhead, lowers its rope ladder. The pilot urges him to climb the ladder. He turns the pilot away resolute in his faith that God will save him. The waters rise and in disappointment the imperilled man protests to his maker, "I am a believing man and have always proclaimed my trust in you. Why have you, Lord, forsaken me?" The echo of the heavenly voice responds, "But my son, I sent you the men in the rowboat and you dismissed them. I sent you the pilot and you refused his help. Why have you forsaken Me?"

Faith is a way of seeing and a way of responding to what is seen. The idea of the miraculous that excludes human action and reaction to events, like that of prayer that excludes the worshipper from the petitions, misses the opportunity to find and contribute to the divine within nature and humanity. The exclusion of the human from the Divine in the name of religion is at the source of many complaints by those who find that religion discounts the human contribution. An alienating faith excludes the human from the divine and sets them in opposition to each other. Dean Inge warned "Do not fancy yourself attracted to God when you're only repelled by man."

God is not reached by subtraction, but by the addition of humanity to His name. A classic rabbinic colloquy expresses insight into the binding human-divine relationship that bears upon the notion of sign miracles. Rabbi Akiba is challenged by the pagan Tineus Rufus, "Whose deeds are greater, those of God or of man?" Akiba replies "Greater are the deeds of man". The pagan must have been shocked. To provide evidence for this conclusion, the Rabbi brings forth sheaves of wheat and loaves of cakes. Which is

superior? Unarguably the loaves of cakes excel. The point of Akiba's demonstration was not to lower God or elevate man but to point out the wrong headedness of Tineus Rufus' split thinking. For he had presented Akiba with an either/or alternative. Either God or man, either the deeds of God or the deeds of man are superior. Such a misleading dichotomy is blind to the symbiotic relationship between God and man. Akiba's sheaves of wheat represent the givenness of God e.g. seed, water, soil, sun which men did not create. The cakes represent the human transformation of that which is potential into actuality. The "motzi" benediction is not over the sheaves of wheat but over the baked bread. Attention must be paid to the daily sign miracles. A broken piece of bread is of equal importance to the divided sea. "The human being receiving his daily bread is as wondrous a marvel as the cleaving of the Red Sea" (Pesikta Rabbah 152a). Similarly, the "kiddush" benediction is not over grapes but over the product that is brought to controlled perfection by human hands and human intelligence. It is wine, not grapes, that represents the fullest expression of humanly holy.



CHAPTER IV

"DID GOD REALLY SAY?" THE TRUTH AND MORALITY OF REVELATION

"The Bible has clothed itself in the outer garments of the world and woe to the person who looks at the garment as being the Torah. Hidden from the external literal view is the root soul of all"

—The Zohar

TRUE OR FALSE?

The first question the wiliest of the beasts of the field put to Eve began "But did God really say?" The serpent raised the kind of question that bedevils the claim to know God's revealed word. Eve heard God's warning not to eat of the fruits of the tree lest she die. But in her report to the serpent she added on her own the prohibition to touch the tree. The serpent exploited the looseness of Eve's account. According to legend, the serpent pushed her against the tree to prove to her that she would not die and that her fears were unfounded. The infallible word of God is received by the fallible ear and reported by the fallible mouth of human beings. Between revelation and reception lie worlds of interpretation.

From the time of the Garden of Eden to our own days the question of God's word is much the same, "Did God really say?" Is the Bible the record of the word of God? Is it true or false? Are its narratives fact or fiction? Is the prophet a truth teller or a prevaricator?

Before us is spread a net of hard disjunction. Again the educators must be aware of the either/or snare. To begin with, they must keep in mind that not all alternatives to the either/or question have been exhausted. The prophet, for example, need be neither truth-teller nor liar. The prophet may

have erred in his report or may have reported God's words in figurative language which others take literally. The prophet may have misunderstood or been misunderstood. Indeed, one of the rabbis asked "Did God really command Abraham to burn Isaac in the fire?" God said to Abraham "I have not broken My covenant and I have not changed My words." (Psalms 89:35) "I did not tell you to slaughter Isaac, only to raise him up." (Genesis Rabbah 56:8)

Particularly misleading in the either/or alternative under consideration are the use of terms like "true" or "false". The assumption is that they are judgments applicable to all kinds of experience. But is a musical composition true or false, a portrait or painting true or false, a poem true or false? Consider two books, one written by an eminent ophthalmologist, Dr. Smith, describing in meticulous detail a complicated surgical operation on Mr. Jones' eyes. The procedure has resulted in restoring the sight of Mr. Jones. The other book was written by Mr. Jones describing the same operation, revealing his fright, anxiety, pain and his exultation after the bandages were removed from his eyes and he could make out the outline of objects for the first time. Which of these books is true or false? Which account is truer than the other? Which is more revealing, more credible, more important? The reality of each author's experience is unarguable. A single criterion of truth and falsehood cannot be applied in the same manner to both books. Objective truths and subjective truths have different criteria and different meanings. Each book has a different intention and includes and excludes diverse interests of the event. In what sense then are the Genesis narratives of the Bible true or false, truer or falsier than a scientific account of the same events?

THE BIBLE AS RELIGIOUS POETRY

The Bible is not a camera nor a reporter's journal recording the "where", "what" and "when" of events. The Bible is a work of art, a sacred song, a poem in quest of meaning and purpose. No less a traditional figure than the nineteenth century Talmudic authority Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin maintained that the entire Pentateuch was written in poetic form and that "it possesses the nature and the central character of poetry. Consequently, one must be aware of the allusions and figurative expressions of poetry to appreciate the meaning of the Bible." (Ha'amek Davar, Introduction To Genesis)

A classic mystic text of the Zohar assails the literalism that strips bare the symbolic meanings in the Bible. "Perdition take anyone who maintains that any narrative in the Torah comes merely to tell us a piece of history and nothing more. Were the Bible a mere book of tales and everyday matters, we could compose a text of even greater excellence" (Zohar 452a).

Reinforced in religious schools is the prevalent notion that the more literal a text is interpreted, the truer it is; the more symbolically understood, the less true. To read a text literally, it is popularly felt, is to take it most seriously. But more often the converse is true. Literalism trivializes. It counts the rungs of Jacob's ladder oblivious to the meaning of the vision in Jacob's dream. It enumerates the animals in Noah's ark without asking why the event finds an important place in the sacred text.

NOAH'S ARK

A not untypical comment made by a professor of molecular biology recently published in a major national magazine illustrates the thinness of literalism. The issue at hand dealt with the veracity of the Bible and in particular that of the story of Noah's ark. The professor wrote "Given the dimensions of the ark and its wooden construction, the first stiff breeze would have broken it up. Its capacity was only a fraction of what was needed for the animals and their food supply not to speak of their specialized requirements for housing". The professor missed the song of the saga. Literalist teaching engenders literalist questions from students who in turn are countered by their teachers with literalist answers. Literalism turns teachers into apologists of the literal word as if as in this instance the function of religious education was to demonstrate that the ark was strong enough, the provisions adequate enough, the archeological search for the remains of the vessel on Mt. Ararat proof enough that the story was true. The focus on literalism distracts attention from the meanings of the great narratives of the Bible. Few literalists deal with the moral symbolism of the Noah story and its religious lessons for a Post-Diluvian World. Few draw attention to the story's focus on the human capacity for self-destruction and the singular ability of a single person to save the world? Absorbed with the verbatim account, they miss the moral implications of the Noah drama wherein God reformulates the original covenant with Adam, makes concessions to the fragile character of man and comes to terms with human nature. They fail to note the grand insight that Noah's saving of a single life is to save a world. How many students remember the Noah episode as a fairy tale?

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Whether the Biblical report is based on a natural event is inconsequential for appreciating the moral and spiritual truth of the narration. Educators challenged to demonstrate the veracity of the moral-spiritual drama of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah fool themselves into thinking that geological evidence of cities in the lower Jordan valley which were destroyed in a catastrophe of nature verifies the truth of the Biblical report. They may think that the conflagration of petroleum and gas seepages occasionally started by a lightning in the area of Sodom and Gomorrah argues for the credibility of the Biblical story. But the meaning and pertinence of the Bible story does not stand or fall with the scientific plausibility that cities were destroyed. The Bible is concerned with the moral implication of the event, not with its physical cause and effect. The Bible is not geology. The story of Sodom teaches that violence is self-destructive, that cruelty is contagious, that the end of the world is not God's doing but a consequence of human dereliction. Archeology is an enterprise distinct from the religious educator's task to uncover the spiritual layers of scriptures.

THE MOCKERY OF LITERALISM

The kind of religious instruction that sticks to the verbatim text ignoring its figurative meaning invites the ridicule of sacred texts. There is hardly a verse in the Bible that cannot be subject to such taunting. "And God said let there be light." Taught literally it evokes literalist questions that provide a field day for comedic monologues. "If God speaks does it mean that God has a larynx? In what language or dialect does He speak? Did He speak these words before the creation of the universe took place? How could light have been created before the fourth day when the sun and moon and lights in

the firmament of the heaven were created?" Blinded by the literal text, the symbolic role of light as illumination and wisdom is unseen. The biblical story of the creation of the world through the agency of a word rather than as a result of battles between the gods as in pagan thought is untaught.

More than a few adults remain convinced that the revolutionary Biblical idea of the human being created in God's "image" and "likeness" means that God literally possesses human features and emotions like our own. Educators who fail to explain the role of metaphor in the Bible, must take responsibility for leaving child and adult with primitive images of God's nostrils, breath, hand, eyes, heart and flesh, as the barest glimpse of the forty first chapter of Job readily attests. Not to anticipate the ridicule that these metaphors taken literally will produce in the child, not to prepare the student for the poetry of the Bible is to ignore the religious philosophic tradition that struggled against casting God in the mold of human features and human emotions (anthropomorphism, anthropopathism) It is to leave the student vulnerable to simplistic "scientific" diatribe.

The religious legal tradition has its own interest in resisting a literalist interpretation of the Bible. The mischievous misinterpretation of the "eye for an eye" passage (Exodus 21:24) derives from literalist reading. The rabbis in the Talmud argued that the verse, literally interpreted, could not have been the intention of the law. They understand that a literal reading would reduce the law to absurdity. How could the law be applied to a sightless person who blinds the eye of another; or a toothless offender who knocks the tooth out of the mouth of another? Literally applied, the law is inoperable. The law is rendered applicable only when it is interpreted as the sages did as requiring monetary compensation for the injury, pain, medical care, loss of time, and

shame of the aggrieved. In countless cases rabbinic interpretation liberated the believer from the slavishness of a verbatim reading of the text. Far from getting closer to the meaning of the text, a nearsighted literalism distorts the moral and spiritual truth of the word.

WHOSE REVELATION? GOD'S WORD OR THE VOICE OF SATAN?

Revelation, the self-disclosure of God's will, is a central belief in religion. For many, divine revelation is the final word of truth and the ultimate argument for morality. If in prayer we speak to God, in the Bible God speaks to us. The invincible prelude of the patriarch's and prophet's declarations is "thus saith the Lord". A divine voice addresses us.

But how do we recognize the Voice? Is it God's Voice or our own we hear? Is revelation a human invention or a divine intervention? One need not read Freud or Feuerbach to raise these kinds of doubts.

The nightmare of belief in revelation rises from the question of its avowed source. Is it God's voice or that of Satan that is heard? Satan's diabolical tricks include ventriloquism, the devil's uncanny talent to throw his voice into God's mouth. How can we identify the authentic voice of God? Some scholars of the Bible are indeed troubled by two conflicting verses in the Bible referring to the same event -the provocation of David that leads to sin and punishment. In one case the instigation is said to come from God (II Samuel 24:1) and in the other it is said to come from Satan (I Chronicles 21:1).

If this contradiction seems too rarefied, we may turn to the more familiar instance of Abraham who hears two divine voices surrounding the binding of Isaac. Following the Biblical text, Abraham hears two divergent voices: the voice of God who commands the binding of Isaac and the voice

of the Angel of the Lord who orders Abraham to stay his hand. (Genesis 22:2, 12) Which of the two revelations is to be followed? Interpretations of the meaning of this root story diverge significantly. The religious educator cannot teach the story without owning to a philosophy of revelation.

The two major and different interpretations of Abraham's faith reflect two divergent conceptions of revelation. Conventionally the binding of Isaac is taught to confirm Abraham as the "knight of faith" whose fidelity to God transcends his love of his son. Abraham on trial has passed the test of unconditional obedience. In the liturgy Abraham is remembered for his willingness to sacrifice the promised future of his people out of trust in God.

What else could a believer in God do but obey the directives of the voice? Surely the believer cannot question God's intention with a human moral measuring rod. God and humans do not stand on level ground. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). The man of faith must therefore exclude ethics from his consideration. Human moral conscience cannot be allowed to contradict the Divine imperative.

The alternate interpretation within the tradition emphasizes the over-riding countermanding revelation of the Angel of the Lord. On this reading the angel is symbol for voicing Abraham's moral conscience. Abraham's acceptance of the voice of the Lord's angel over that of God's commanding voice expresses his faith in a moral God. Following such a view the philosopher Immanuel Kant placed in Abraham's mouth a response of conscience opposing the voice of God commanding infanticide: "That I ought not to kill my son is certain beyond a shadow of a doubt; that you, as you appear to be, are God, I am not convinced and will never be even if

your voice resounded from heaven". What appears on the surface to be defiance of God is consistent with the affirmation of the God whom Abraham met at Sodom. Kant's response is congruent with the earlier Biblical stance of Abraham who hearing God's threat against Sodom and Gomorrah challenged the morality of God's plans: "Wilt thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" Neither the Biblical nor the rabbinic tradition regard Abraham's opposition as *lase majesta*, a treasonable act against divine sovereignty. On the contrary, Abraham's dissent is grounded in an assent to God's goodness and fairness. It is an argument against God in God's name. "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that the righteous be as the wicked; that be far from thee: shall not the judge of all the earth do justly?" Abraham's direct confrontation of God is worthy of one who knows himself to be a partner of God. Job's assault on God was less worthy than Abraham's because Job "made himself the colleague of heaven." (T. Baba Bathra 16a) Job had asked for a third party, an intermediary to intercede in the altercation between him and God. "Would there were an umpire between us that he might lay his hand upon us both." (Job 9:33) But Abraham sought no umpire, only for God Himself whose divine justice would vindicate him even against God. Abraham appeals to God against God in the name of God. No intermediary is needed and none can substitute for. This face-to-face encounter expresses both Abraham's courage and God's integrity.

Far from being chastised for his divine dissent, Abraham is treated by the tradition as a religious personality who exceeds the acquiescent piety of Noah. Abraham, the man of faith, knows that he is not dealing with a morally inscrutable deity. God does not wish to hide from Abraham "God's righteousness and justice." (Genesis 18:19) On the contrary, Abraham is given

to know the attributes of God so that he may command his children and his household after him "That they may keep the way of the Lord." (Genesis 18:17-19) Abraham's deeper loyalty to God is expressed in his dissent from God's earlier revelation.

In this second interpretation of revelation Abraham's angelic conscience does not stem from an alien non-divine source. Conscience is an internal revelation of the spirited self formed in the human being with God's blessing. The exalted role of conscience in religion is regrettably not taught in religious school. It is either ignored or treated as heretical consent, an obstacle to faith in revelation. Lamentably, the sources in the tradition that favor the dignity of conscience and their implications for the character of faith are repressed. In religious schools, the religious audacity in the character of Hannah, Elijah and Moses who "spoke insolently against heaven" and who "hurled words against heaven" are not as much as whispered. (Talmud Berachoth 31b -32a) The omission of such material leaves in its wake the notion of the religious personality as a limp "amen" sayer whose essential character is subservient obedience. There are many other traditional sources that suffer the same fate of omission. We cite a few major illustrations from the body of tradition that have no hearing in religious training.

RELIGIOUS AUDACITY

A number of untaught passages from rabbinic literature raise the stature of human conscience and its role in fashioning the hero of faith.

"There are three things said by Moses to the Holy One to which the latter replied 'You have taught me something.

Moses, interceding for Israel on the occasion of Israel's making of the golden calf and God's anger, declares "Sovereign of the universe, how can Israel realize what they have done? Were they not reared up in Egypt and are not all the Egyptians worshippers of idols? Moreover, when Thou gavest the Torah Thou didst not give it to them, they were not even standing nearby. As it says 'And the people stood afar off'. Thou gavest it only to me. As it says and unto Moses He said 'Come up unto the Lord.' When Thou gavest the commandments Thou didst not give it to them. Thou didst not say I am the Lord your God but I am the Lord thy God. Thou didst say it to me. Have I sinned?"

"By your life said the Holy One, you have spoken well. You have taught Me something. From now onward I shall use the expression I am the Lord your God."

The second occasion occurred when the Holy One said to him "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. Moses said to Him 'Sovereign of the universe many are the wicked who have begotten righteous men. Shall the latter bear some of the iniquities of their fathers? Terah worshipped images, yet Abraham his son was a righteous man. Similarly Hezekiah was a righteous man, though Ahaz was his father. So also Josiah was righteous, yet Amon his father was wicked. Is this proper that the righteous should be punished for the iniquity of their fathers?" The Holy One, blessed be he, said to Moses "You have taught Me something. By your life I shall cancel My words and confirm yours." As it says "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers." (Deuteronomy 24:16)

The third occasion took place when the Holy One said to him "Make war with Sihon. Even though he does not seek to interfere with you, you must open hostilities against him." Moses however did not obey but in accordance with what is reported in the Bible, he sent messengers to Sihon. The Holy One said to Moses "By your life I shall cancel My own words and confirm yours. As it says when thou drawest nigh unto a city to fight against it then proclaim peace unto it." (Bamidbar Rabbah 19:33)

Far from being considered acts of insubordination, these acts of independence demonstrate the tradition's appreciation of the triumph of moral conscience that even over-ride the divine imperative. Conscience itself is shown to play an indispensable role in revelation. Conscience serves as a spiritual corrective of voices heard. The tradition of moral conscience wrestles with the voice of revelation and prevails.

One further stunning illustration points to the revelation of moral conscience even when contending with divine decree. One of the rabbis comments on the odd verse in Deuteronomy 9:14 in which God says to Moses after seeing the dancing of the children of Israel around the golden calf, "Now therefore let Me alone that My wrath may wax hot against them." The rabbi notes "were it not explicitly written it would be impossible to say such a thing." "Let me alone" is God's response to Moses who took hold of God in the manner that a man takes hold of the garment of his fellow. Moses standing before God says "Master of the universe I will not let go of You until you forgive and pardon Your people." Then God replies to Moses "But I cannot retract an oath that has come from My own mouth." And Moses responded "Did not You give me the power to annul vows? Surely the law states that if the, maker of an oath cannot break his word, he can consult a

scholar who may absolve him. God, come to me." Moses wrapped a prayer shawl around his shoulders like a sage while God stood before him. Moses asked God "Do you regret your oath to destroy this people?" And the Holy One responded "I regret the evil which I intended to do against My people." Then Moses declared "You are free from Your oath. There is here no vow and no oath." (Exodus Rabbah 43:4) What may shock conventional theology is in this dissenting tradition the highest tribute that may be paid to the God of morality who finds delight in His children of moral conscience. These distinctive dimensions within the tradition are regrettably untaught and uninterpreted in religious schools or pulpits. Instead, students, children and adults, are taught a subservient, portrayal of the religious personality whose relationship to the voice of revelation is largely passive. Contrary to that depiction of acquiescence, the imaginative rabbinic passages cited revel in the joy with which God accepts the faithful dissenter. Before the expression of conscience, the Master of the universe registers no insult or anger. The God of revelation incorporates the moral critique of His disciple with satisfaction: "By your life you have taught Me. By your life I shall record these words in your name." More than God's modesty is revealed in His proud acceptance of the human moral criticism. God's approval of human protestation assumes an alternative conception of revelation and of the religious personality. What legitimates this confrontational dialogue between God and the human prophet as elaborated by the rabbinic imagination, is an appreciation of the moral covenant that is as binding upon God as it is upon the human person.

GOD ACCEPTS THE COVENANT

In a rabbinic passage (T. J. Rosh Hashanah 1:3) the contrast is drawn between a King upon whom the law is not binding and who if he issues a decree may choose to obey it or have only others obey it. "Not so the Holy One. When He issues a decree He is the first to obey it Himself as it is stated "And they shall observe My observances, I am the Lord. I am He who was the first to observe the commandments of the Torah."

God chooses not to live outside the moral law. He lives within the boundaries of morality and that enables the universe of discourse between God and human beings. The voluntary submission of God to the moral law emboldens the prophet to express his criticism of the Lord without fear that it will be treated as an act of rebellion. The condescension of God raises the human interlocutor without lowering the divine respondent. The dignity of both is elevated through this deeper understanding of the reciprocal covenant and the shared revelation.

In the more popular view, revelation is a word cast down from above to below, the word of an active Revealer to a passive recipient, a word from an active Commander to an ordered soldier of God. The customary model of revelation taught is that of a mysterious voice rising from the midst of a quaking mountain at Sinai altogether on smoke, surrounded by thundering and lightning. In that depiction, the people are kept at bay, and cannot come too close to the mountain nor take full part in the revelation encounter. They cannot or will not hear. Overwhelmed, they call for an inter-mediator. "You speak to us", they say to Moses. And this reliance upon Moses is deemed an act of reverent obedience.

The contrary religious approach from another side of the tradition accepts human moral protestation as a vital element in the revelation transaction. Here revelation is not a finished statement handed down from heaven to earth, nor a human invention projected from below. Revelation is an encounter that will not be split into separate parts and separate places, "above", "below", "divine", "human". The human element in revelation is inescapable. Whatever the origin or stimulus of revelation, the sacred voice of the commandment is necessarily heard by human ears, interpreted by human minds, filtered through human sensibilities. Therein lies the humanity of its reception and the plurality of its interpretations. The rabbinic tradition stresses that when the voice went forth at Sinai, it reached each person with a force adjusted to the receptivity and power of each one. Revelation is giving and receiving, hearing and interpreting, an interplay of reverent attention and conscience. Conscience, on this view, is not a foreign element threatening the divine imperative but a God-given wisdom ("conscience" – with wisdom) entailed in the exalted idea of divinely imaged men and women. Donor and recipient are not rivals but co-respondents of revelation. The two-sided divine-human reciprocity in revelation finds its poetic articulation in the words of Wallace Stevens. There are peak moments such as those we have cited above when "The mind that in heaven created the earth and the mind that on earth created heaven, were, as it happened, one."

Revelation is an experience, individual or collective, that overwhelms and surprises the human being. Conscience, the still, small internal voice of God, is indispensable for identifying the moral character of external revelation. If morality is not the precondition for revelation, anything may be permitted by the sounds of thunder and lightning. Abraham at Sodom,

Moses before the golden calf, the protestation of the prophets are part and parcel of the interactive process of revelation. Revelation as process is not restricted to a single verbal set of orders given one time alone or at one place alone.

COMMANDER AND COMMANDMENT

To paraphrase the penetrating question asked of Euthyphro by Socrates—"Is the revelation moral because God revealed it or did God reveal it because it is moral?" The framing of the either/or question sunders morality from religion, and humanity from divinity. In our view the goodness of the commandment as evaluated by the recipient and confirmed by his conscience helps overcome the divisive bifurcation in Socrates' either/or inquiry.

Not everything reported as heard from God is necessarily revealed. Not every act or declaration of a prophet is to be heeded. Prophecy must be evaluated in terms of its moral coherence with the entire body of the tradition. The authority of the prophet requires more than the word of the prophet. Equally, the authenticity of revelation requires more than the overpowering voice of the commander. Martin Buber argues that a believing Jew who has to choose between "God and the Bible, chooses God; "the God in whom he believes, Him in whom he can believe". The instance that provoked Buber's assertion is his reading of the section in the Bible where King Saul is punished because he spared the life of his enemy Agag, the Amalekite out of compassion, contrary to the instruction of the prophet Samuel who instructed him in the name of the Lord. Buber comments, "Nothing can make me believe in a God who punishes Saul because he did not murder his enemy". "Nothing" expresses Buber's moral certainty that God

could not morally have ordered such a punishment. Buber's close associate and friend, the late Ernest Simon, similarly personalized his own esteem of human autonomy. "Were someone to demonstrate to me that the oral law understands the commandment 'not to kill' as a prohibition against the killing of Jews by Jews alone, I would not accept the explanation of the commandment, and I would rely on autonomy." The conscience of moral autonomy offers critical criteria for the authenticity of revelation.

Just as we have argued earlier that the role of the worshipper and perceiver is critical for prayers and miracles to work, we contend that the human recipient is crucial for understanding the meaning of the revelation. The hyphen in the Divine-human relationship is the symbol of the moral covenant that binds Giver and Receiver. The covenant runs both ways. It is to the glory of God that He binds Himself to the covenant and subjects Himself to the same moral standards as those promulgated to man. One moral law in heaven as on earth.

The elevated status of the human being is troublesome for those who regard man as totally subordinate to God. We are drawn to Martin Buber's insight that "God needs man independent as partners in dialogue, as comrades to work as one who loves Him." (Eclipse of God, p.75) God does not want man ignorant. "The Lord will do nothing but He reveals His secret into His servants, the prophets." (Amos 3:7) God is not morally inscrutable, a voice of mystery to be obeyed, even if the words run counter to moral sense and intelligence. "I have not spoken in secret, in the place of the land of darkness I said not unto the seed of Jacob: Seek ye Me in vain." (Isaiah 45:19) The correlation between speaking and hearing, revealing and receiving, appearing and being seen, is critical for the interdependence of religion and

ethics. God and the human being, crown of His creation, are essential for the understanding of revelation.

MORALITY OF THE BIBLE: IS IT FAIR?

Judging by many of the questions raised by children and adults, what is disturbing to them is less the factuality than the morality of the Biblical event. Not whether or not God's act or statements really happened but whether what happened is really moral. The late Trude Weiss-Rosmarin, a serious educator, even urged that the book of Genesis not be taught to children because she felt that so much of its narrative was plainly unethical. What she asks are the lessons that the child can learn from the first book? They will be upset by God's favoritism in accepting Abel's offering and rejecting Cain's, by the aggressive conduct of Jacob who wrested the birthright blessings of Esau through subterfuge and the provocation of mother Rebecca, by the folly of Jacob's offering a coat of many colors to his son Joseph that initiated a cycle of sibling disasters. Added to her list are similar moral doubts heard by the attentive ear. Was God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart fair? Was God's testing of Abraham's loyalty to Him by commanding him to sacrifice his son a moral act? Was Sarah's resentment of Hagar and Abraham's casting out of Hagar and her son Ishmael a just decision?

Dr. Rosmarin may have overstated the case. The Book of Genesis should be taught honestly, fully and not defensively. The ethical question she has raised will be raised by children and adults. Their questions must be respected and answered thoughtfully and at the time they are raised. They are not impious questions and they are not outside the circle of tradition.

Not all the questions about fairness in the stories are well founded. Some of them are based on misreadings of the text and some on

misunderstanding of the intent of the narrative. To begin with, it is not necessary in order to justify the sanctity of the Torah to defend all the acts of its heroes or even all the decisions of God. The rabbis of the tradition were secure enough to express their own doubts about the morality of many of the acts and statements attributed to God and persons. Students who ask unnerving questions ought not be made to feel as if their doubts express heresy and the answerers need not feel that their role is that of an apologist. It is important to recall that in the book of Job it is those who would defend God, not the challenging Job, whom God rebukes. It is the apologists of God who are called "plasterers of lies". "Will you speak falsely for God, and speak deceitfully for Him? Will you show partiality towards Him, will you plead the case of God? Will it be well with you when He searches you out? Can you deceive Him, as one deceives a man? He will surely rebuke you, if in secret you show partiality" (Job 13:7-10). Those properly educated in the tradition will not cower before God or human beings.

Let us consider the critique of Dr. Rosmarin regarding the Bible's treatment of Cain and Abel. A rabbinic commentary on the passage in which God explains to Cain the consequence of his murdering Abel: "the voice of thy brother's blood cried unto me" (Genesis 4:10) includes the following interpretation. Rabbi Simeon Bar Yochai explains the brother's cry as Abel's protest not against Cain but against God's impartiality. In explicating Cain's argument with God, the rabbi offers the following parable "Think of two athletes wrestling before the king; had the king wished, he could have separated them. But he did not so desire and one overcame the other and killed him; he, the victim cried out before he died 'Let my cause be pleaded before the King'. The voice of thy brother's blood cries out against Me". Far from apologetic, the tradition comes to the defense of Cain.

How many are graduated from their religious schools without ever having heard the protesting voice of the prophet Habakkuk "How long O Lord shall I cry and Thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto Thee of violence and Thou wilt not save. Why dost Thou show me iniquity and beholdest mischief? And why are spoiling and violence before me? Thou that art of eyes too pure to behold evil and that canst not look on mischief, wherefore lookest Thou when they deal treacherously and holdest Thy peace when the wicked swallow up the man that is more righteous than he?" (Habakkuk 1:2, 3, 13) The student of Judaism must become aware that the prophet is no "yes" man. The ideal prophet defends the people against God, and God against the people, insisting upon both the honor of the son (Israel) and the honor of the father (God). [Mechilta, Tractate Pischa] The student's challenge about fairness stands within a proud heroic tradition.

BIBLICAL HEROES

The Bible does not preach ethics in the manner of a didactic moral text. Particularly in the narrative stories of Genesis, the Bible does not explicitly telegraph its moral messages. The Jacob, Esau and Joseph sagas to which Dr. Rosmarin alludes as less than moral, are dramas of moral consequences. The Biblical reader should be instructed to follow the trail of events. Jacob who is introduced as holding on to the heel of Esau in Rebecca's womb manipulates Esau to surrender the birthright. The same Jacob must wrestle with his angel of conscience at the ford of Jabbok, earn his blessings, have his name and character changed by his inner struggle and emerge lamed from the battle. Jacob whose career starts in the shadow of subterfuge is himself victimized by subterfuge as in the episodes of the trickery of Laban who disguises Jacob's promised bride and the deception of his sons who

pretend that the favored son was devoured by beasts. Nor does the tradition spare Jacob from criticism for usurping the birthright of his brother. In a powerful commentary, (Genesis Rabbah 67:4) we read that when Esau heard the words of his father that his blessings were given to Jacob, he "cried out a grievous cry." Rabbi Hanina derives from this expression a moral lesson. "Whoever maintains that the Holy One is lax in dispensing justice is grievously mistaken. God is longsuffering but ultimately collects His due. Jacob made Esau break out into a cry but once but was punished in Shushan, the castle, "and he cried with a loud and bitter cry." (Esther 4:1)

THE HUMANITY OF BIBLICAL HEROISM

To the argument that the Bible's heroes are flawed and as such not model heroes for children, the teacher has an opportunity to teach the honesty and integrity in the Bible. None of the heroes and heroines of the Bible is deified. Moses, the hero of the Exodus, is deleted from the Passover Haggadah text and his burial place left unknown lest it be turned into a shrine. David, from whose lest the Messiah will spring, is depicted as an adulterer. Biblical heroes without exception are all portrayed as fragile and fallible persons in accord with the observation of Ecclesiastes that "there is no righteous person upon earth who does good and sins not". To its credit, the episodes of questionable morality in the lives of its leaders are not glossed over in the Bible. When Jacob the father of twelve sons doles out his blessings at the end of the book of Genesis, he forthrightly informs Reuben that his natural rights as a firstborn must be forfeited because of Reuben's infidelity. "Unstable as water have not those the excellency; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed, then defilest it -'he went up to my couch'". Similarly, Simeon and Levy are brethren whom Jacob denounces for using weapons

of violence in their deceit. "For in their anger they slew men and in their self will they houghed oxen. Cursed be their anger for it was fierce and their wrath for it was cruel. I will divide them and Jacob and scatter them in Israel".

IN WHAT SENSE IS THE BIBLE SACRED?

Given the evidence of the fallibility of the heroes of the Bible and some of the moral short comings even of God, what does it mean to call the Bible sacred? If we mean by sacred that the Bible is inerrant, its heroes infallible, its morality complete, the notion of the sacred text seems desecrated.

There is another way of understanding the sanctity of the Bible. The Bible is holy not as the last word but as the first word of an unending tradition. Within the Biblical text itself, there is evidence of growth in moral tone and substance. In the first of the revealed thirteen attributes of God. (Exodus 34:6) God is described as "keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and upon the children's children unto the third and unto the fourth generation." That notion of inherited guilt and punishment is explicitly repudiated in the canonized Bible. We read in Ezekiel 18:20 and Jeremiah 31:30 "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him". The Bible and its teachings do not end with Deuteronomy. Its moral growth is coextensive with the mind and life of the people who revere it.

The very text of Exodus about the visitation of evil cited above is lifted from the Bible by the rabbis and introduced into the festival liturgy but with startling changes. The liturgy read at festivals states "keeping mercy unto

thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin and acquitting." The boldness of the rabbinic omission of the phrase "by no means clear the guilty" in the prayer offers further testimony of the conscious evolutionary character of morality within the tradition itself.

Nor is moral evolution restricted to the Biblical period. The hardening of the heart of Pharaoh, for example, troubles both rabbinic and philosophic commentators of the tradition. They recognize that if an external force, namely God, interferes with the Egyptian ruler's free will, Pharaoh was wrongly punished. Maimonides in a astute observation notes that the Bible often attributes actions to God while omitting the human and natural element as cause of the event. That God may be said "to harden the heart of Pharaoh" is true but only in the sense that God is the cause behind all causes. God gave Pharaoh the power to choose that includes the power to coarsen his own will and thereby lose his capacity to choose rationally and morally. As Maimonides' (*Guide to the Perplexed*, Part II, Chapter 48) writes "The prophets sometimes omit the intermediate causes and ascribe the production of an individual thing directly to God saying that God has made it". It is not God who hardened the heart of Pharaoh, but Pharaoh himself whose cruel habits forfeited his free will. Habits instilled by human beings can create a second nature that prevents freedom to be expressed.

The heroes and the text are holy. "You shall be holy persons unto me" (Exodus 22:30). Rabbi Mendel interpreted this to mean that the holiness of human beings should be human. God has numberless angels and He has no need of additional angels. "Let your holiness be human and let your human deeds be human."

The Bible, in Buber's words, is "humanly holy". It is written in the language of men and women to be understood accordingly. A rabbinic legend describes a dialogue between the angels who are jealous of God's gift of the ten words to Moses. They insist that God should give the Decalogue to the deserving angels and not to mortals of flesh and blood. There then ensues a debate between the angels and Moses on the mountain over the propriety of human or angelic possession of the law. Moses asks the angels if they had ever felt the desire to steal, or to commit adultery or to blaspheme. The angels are aghast at the questions. They are flawless and without the capacity to sin. Moses then answers "Then it is clear that this book is not meant for you. It is meant for errant, finite human beings who are tempted to transgress". The Bible is "humanly holy". The broken tablets of the law, those that Moses allowed to fall from his arms, at the sight of his people dancing before the golden calf, were not discarded. The broken tablets were placed in the tabernacle of holiness perhaps to remind us that the sacred is not in perfection but in the struggle towards moral growth.



CHAPTER V

EVIL AND THE TWO FACES OF GOD

"How can anyone of clear conscience call good in the Deity what he would reject as intensely evil in man?"

—Brand Blanshard

Having heard it said that God created each of us in His image and likeness, the child asked "Why then are there so many ugly people?" The question may elicit a smile but replace "ugly" with "deformed" and we are confronted by the chilling problem of evil. In more poignant form, it is expressed in the letter sent to Miss Lonelyhearts in the Nathaniel West novel of the same name.

Dear Miss Lonelyhearts –

I am sixteen years old now and I don't know what to do and would appreciate it if you could tell me what to do. When I was a little girl it was not so bad because I got used to the kids on the block making fun of me, but now I would like to have boyfriends like the other girls and go out on Saturday nights, but no boy will take me because I was born without a nose - -although I am a good dancer and have a nice shape and my father buys me pretty clothes.

I sit and look at myself all day and cry. I have a big hole in the middle of my face that scares people even myself so I can't blame the boys for not wanting to take me out. My mother loves me, but she cries terrible when she looks at me.

What did I do to deserve such a terrible bad fate? Even if I did do some bad things I didn't do any before I was a year old and I was born this way. I

asked Papa and he says he doesn't know, but that maybe I was being punished for his sins. I don't believe that because he is a very nice man. Ought I commit suicide?

Sincerely yours,

"Desperate"

Why her? It is the Achilles heal of religious faith and its question appears in multiple forms and at various stages of life. The question is freighted with different meanings. To begin with, the "why" in "why me" questions are not the same as the "why" in questions about facts e.g. why does metal expand when heated? Not all statements with rising inflections are requests for information. "Why me?" is not always a call for explanations. In the context of personal tragedy, "Why me?" is less a request to understand than a cry pleading to be understood, an outcry for recognition rather than a call for cognition. "Why" here means "woe". What is called for is not a good answer but a compassionate response. The presence of a caring friend, the comfort of a supporting arm is morally appropriate. At moments of personal crisis, theology seems out of place. Nonetheless, the need for emotional comfort does not obviate the obligation to respond to the intellectual and moral challenge embedded in the "Why me?" question. Emotional solace does not quiet the demands for an adequate religious answer.

UNPACKING THE QUESTION

Why me?" questions are singularly resistant to scientific answers. Explain the congenital deformation of a child's feature or the fatal car accident or the death of a person caught in a tornado with medical, police, or meteorological reports and they will be accepted by the sufferer only to be followed by the same sort of question. "I understand the X-rays, statistics and scientific data.

I understand 'how' this event happened but not why this happened to me or mine and now." "Why me?" questions are carried in theological luggage which when carefully unpacked reveal a bagful of beliefs hidden in the question.

For the questioner raised in a conventional religious culture, "Why me?" means "what for". "Why me?" presupposes a universe of design in which the bad things that happen to us are seen as judgments on our moral behavior. It opens a world of blame and guilt towards someone, God, Satan, self or others. "What for" insinuates a "who", some purposing agent who is the personal cause behind the tragic event. "Why me?" assumes a moral universe governed by a superior will with a purpose of His own. Given that religious expectation, nothing will be accepted as an adequate explanation that assigns human tragedy to an unintended accident or an impersonal natural event. Viruses, congenital defects, mechanical defects, acts of war or of nature are only means used for a deeper purpose by a Judge who decrees and passes sentences.

For such a mind-set, secular explanations are at best surface accounts. They lack "meaning" by which is meant some super-human significance not formed out of the inventions of the self, but out of the revelation of deep

spiritual intention an external source. Economic, psychological, sociological or physiological explanations of misfortunes may account for the "how" but not the "what for" that the "Why me?" question asks.

A religious "what for" orientation is evident in the Joseph story. Joseph's brothers thought that their bad behavior accounted for their lot in Egypt. But Joseph offers the religious meaning of the events that have befallen them. "And now be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life and God sent me before you to give you a remnant on the earth and to save you alive for a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God; and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 45:5f) What appears to be coincidences or the effects following human motivations e.g. the sibling rivalry that leads to the selling of Joseph to the Ishmaelites, Joseph's escape from the schemes of Potiphar's wife, his interpretation of the baker's and chief butler's dreams in the dungeon, are from the Biblical view all incidental to the final purpose of the Grand Designer. Joseph accepts no series of events flowing from natural causes as explanation of their situation. He offers a sacred history shaped by a supernatural moral intelligence.

There is grandeur in such a religious interpretation of the history of individuals and nations and consolation in the belief that the lives of people are not governed by natural causes but by moral judgments and ends. But against those advantages are the offenses to our common sense and morality. Human tragedy inundates us with questions of incredulity and resentment. Is this the way the world really works? Are my acts, seemingly the results of my decisions, only echoes of another will? Is the tyrant merely a rod

of God's chastisement and his deeds only shadows of a Divine will? Is every misfortune that befalls me or mine a punishment for some transgression, known or unknown? Is every tragedy a judgment upon me or mine by the Supreme Judge who gives and takes away? Are hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, drought, flood all "acts of God", visitations of His displeasure upon an erring humanity? How is the suffering of innocents, the torment of the ailing newly born related to a compassionate deity?

The "who" and "what for" answers of "Why me?" questions open a Pandora's box. God's defenders, compelled to square the presence of evil with the presence of a good and powerful deity, raise a dust of questions and then contend that the questioner cannot see. Arguments are spun to explain away the moral incongruity of events. Chief among them is the claim that God's ways are mysterious, His thoughts not ours. If so, then what we mortals may think of as evil may be good in God's eyes. Who are we to judge the Judge of all the world? Or God may mean to test us through chastisements of love. Suffering may be a favor in disguise. Our sufferings on earth may be working off deserved punishment in order to assure us the joy of receiving the full treasury of merits in the world to come. Another world, another time, the ultimate "later" answer.

Given an inscrutable God, God's defenders are free to indulge in theological mind reading, speculating over the secret intention of God's will. Before a God whose morality and wisdom are beyond human morality and reason, what we call good or bad, justice or injustice, reward or punishment, only reveal the conceits of human assessment. Theodicies—the justification of God's ways in the presence of evil—are not difficult to invent. Which facts, after all, can possibly falsify a belief system in which the very meaning of

good and evil is unknowable. Our modest confession of ignorance renders God's act invincible. The disparity of the suffering of innocence or the prosperity of the wicked are dissolved by shoulder shrugging agnosticism. Who can know the unknowable?

One of the threatening consequences of such free wheeling justifications of Providence is the pious abdication of human moral comprehension. "Who are we to evaluate God's mysterious ways?" Modesty of this sort encourages a masochistic stance. "We must be deserving of punishment" is the conclusion offered by the God-defending friends of Job. Job's "why me?" is not answered, need not be answered. His moral competence has been taken from him. In the concluding of the Book of Job chapter we discover a muted Job, made utterly subordinate. "Wherefore, I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42) The earlier dialogue between Job and God that rested upon a common moral discourse has been broken by an inscrutable God whose ways will brook no moral dissent.

QUESTION BEGGING

"Why me?" questions are difficult enough but they are rendered imponderable because the framing of the question sets severe limits on possible answers. The only answer to "Why me?" that will be allowed is dictated by the hidden assumptions of the question. "Why me?" is question begging. From the start, it rules out any answer that challenges the taken for granted world view of the questioner, namely the correlation between adversity and sin as God's judgment. In an open society, that faith assumption is doubted and with that disbelief, the shaking of the foundation of conventional faith.

LETTER FROM A CONGREGANT

I received the letter before the Day of Atonement.

"Until this morning I have spent the High Holidays, if not in the spirit of fear and trembling before a God of justice, then at least in the sure knowledge that it is appropriate to review my actions of the past year, to give real thought to my failures and to resolve to be a better person and a better citizen. Until this morning I know the central liturgy of the holiday well but before this year I had approached it in an abstract, intellectual manner. This year, I could not do so. Several months ago I had surgery for cancer and I felt very keenly as I approached these days that in a real sense my fate for the coming year has been written if not in a book of judgment then in my own body. I look forward to health but I may not be granted it. As I read, the questions of the service were familiar. 'How many shall pass away and how many shall be born; who shall live and who shall die?' But the response "repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severe decree" -for the first time carried a terrifying implication. It seemed to me as I read this that my own liturgy was binding my fate to my behavior, that my illness, seen in this light have been the result of some terrible unknown transgression, and that the ultimate punishment for failure to discover and correct it could be my death. I do not believe this -not with my head nor with my heart. Nevertheless, as a committed Jew who takes language very seriously and believes in community prayer, would be forced to repeat the central cornerstone over and over should I attend services for Yom Kippur. It seems today that my

choice is a terrible one: to flagellate myself emotionally by joining my congregation or to spare my feelings by isolating myself from my family, my friends, my community. It is a choice I never believed I would have to make. I know there must be others in our congregation who sit suffering silently, as I did today, who wish to join Jews around the world at this time but find the price too high to pay. I do not write expecting an easy answer Holocaust literature has taught me that there may be no answer at all. I write instead because I must, because to muffle my sadness and my anger will destroy something in the commitment that I have worked so hard to build. I write with pain hoping that from the expression of my dilemma will grow some insight, some way to cope.

With respect & affection,
Sally

The letter refers to a major prayer recited throughout the High Holidays. Its text reads: "On New Year's Day the decree is inscribed and on the Day of Atonement it is sealed. How many shall pass away and how many shall be born? who shall live and who shall die? Who shall attain the measure of man's days and who shall not attain it? Who shall perish by fire and who by water? Who by sword and who by beast, who by hunger and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who by strangling and who by stoning, who shall have rest and who shall go wandering, who shall be tranquil and who shall be disturbed, who shall be at ease and who shall be afflicted, who shall become poor and who shall wax rich, who shall be brought low and who shall be exalted? But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severe decree."

Sally and a much larger constituency has been confused by the prayer. How do I answer her letter? Do I think that her cancer is linked to her behavior? Do I have an explanation of her illness superior to that of her oncologist? Do I trace her suffering to sin? And do I believe that the pain and terror and death are manifestation of God's "severe decree"? Common moral sense convinces me that there are misfortunes like those that befell Sally that have no bearing whatsoever upon the character or conduct of the afflicted. Any linkage between suffering and transgression is immoral. It is clear to me that the claim of a religious correlation between sin and suffering contradicts the belief in a just and compassionate God and is cruel towards the suffering patient. The prayer, taken as Sally and most worshippers read it, describes a fatalism that spawns anxiety, guilt and dread with every illness and death.

The theological correlation between natural pain moral transgression was inconclusively debated among the rabbis. Within that tradition, I side with those authorities who concluded that "there is death without sin and suffering without iniquity." (T. Shabbat 55b) But more is demanded of me by Sally. Sally's letter seeks another theological approach to suffering, another approach to God, another understanding of the religious view of reality. What does God have to do with her illness? What is God's role in her tormented life?

GOD AS ELOHIM, LORD AS ADONAI

Moses sought to discover God's name. According to one rabbinic interpretation God revealed to Moses that He is called according to His deeds. "When I judge My creatures I am called Elohim (God), when I wage war against the wicked I am called Sabbaoth (the Lord of hosts), when I

suspend judgment for a person's sins I am called El Shaddai (God Almighty), when I have compassion upon My world I am called Yahweh." (Exodus Rabbah 3:6)

There are many names of divinity in the monotheistic tradition. Among them are two prominent ones used in the Bible and in prayer: "God" and "Lord", in Hebrew "Elohim" and "Adonai." Popularly they are used interchangeably, but according to rabbinic thought they each describe a different character and function of Divinity. They each respond differently to the "Why me?" question. Yet, despite their different meanings it is important to bear in mind that Elohim---God and Adonai---Lord are One. Together they offer a balanced religious response.

While there are traditional grounds for the distinction between God and Lord, the elaboration and application to our discussion is my own. Elohim---God is the term used exclusively in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. Elohim there refers to the God of creation, the God of nature, the Ground of Being. Elohim---God forms the world with natural laws, not moral laws; with the laws of gravitation, not the laws of revelation. Elohim---God is the cosmological cause of the world as it is. Elohim---God describes the reality principle in the Biblical view. In contrast, Adonai---Lord characterizes the ideality principle, the normative realm, the world as it ought to be.

THE RELIGIOUS REALITY PRINCIPLE

A series of important theological discussions in the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 54b) elucidates the reality principle within the rabbinic tradition and is associated with the nature of Elohim---God. They portray the amoral character of creation that holds profound implication for the problem of evil. Because this seminal idea is rarely considered in conventional theology and

because it figures importantly in my own, I present the following rabbinic text at some length, interspersed with my comments.

The discussion begins with some philosophers who ask the rabbinic elders in Rome "If your God has no desire for idolatry why does He not abolish it? The rabbis reply "If it were something of which the world has no need that was worshipped, He would abolish it." But people worship the sun, moon, stars and planets; should He destroy the universe on account of fools? The world pursues its natural course, and as for fools who act wrongly, they will have to render an account."

Two further illustrations in the course of the discussion are offered with the same crucial refrain: "the world pursues its natural course". "Suppose a man stole a measure of wheat and went and sowed it in the ground; it is right that it should not grow, but the world pursues its natural course and as for the fools who act wrongly they will have to render an account." This is followed by another example. "Suppose a man has intercourse with his neighbor's wife; it is right that she should not conceive but the world pursues its natural course and as for the fools who act wrongly they will have to render an account."

The tradition knows "what is right". But it knows as well that the world of nature is no court of justice. Nature seen through the eyes of Elohim---God views an amoral natural universe. To see the natural world as if it were governed by judgments upon our moral behavior would convert every natural event into an ethical verdict, an earthquake into a juridical sentence, a drought into a punishment, a rainfall into a reward. It would engender a spiritual animism in which ghosts and 4emons reside in lesions of the skin and leprous outbreaks, and benign spirits in the growth of grains in the field. One

cannot expect to learn morality by living according to nature for the single reason that nature is morally neutral. Nature's ways are not right or just. Nature neither validates nor proscribes thievery or adultery. As illustrated in the above cited passage, biology is a moral, the procreative process is indifferent to matters of legitimacy. The eleventh century philosopher, Yehudah Halevi characterized Elohim---God as governing the world "without feelings of sympathy with one or anger against another". Elohim---God rules impartially. While humans attribute feelings and motivation to Elohim---God. He never changes from one attribute to another. "The imitation of God" which expresses the ethical implications of belief—. . . as God is merciful, just, loving, so be thou merciful, just, loving" —is not the imitation of Elohim, the God of nature but of Adonai, the Lord of morality.

Elohim---God created the world. But it is Adonai---Lord that is frustrated by the human abuse of God's power. It is Adonai---Lord that regrets the human violence and pollution of the world which Elohim---God created. (Genesis 5:5) Rabbi Simeon Ben Lakish in the Talmud imagines the conflict within God---Lord. "The Holy One declared 'not enough that the wicked put my coinage to vulgar use, but they trouble Me and compel Me to set my seal thereon.

CAUSES AND CURSES

Elohim---God is the God of natural causes. Every event has a cause but not every cause is morally intentioned. The earthquake, the deformity, the cancer may be explained in terms of natural causes and consequences but not in terms of reward and punishment.

There is order and intelligibility in the universe created by Elohim---God. The child born of addictive parents, for example, suffers as a consequence

of substance abuse by its parents but those consequences are badly misinterpreted when seen as a divine judgment. A cause is not a curse. A consequence is not a punishment. This is the meaning of "Nature pursues its own course". To understand events as natural consequence is not a mark of impiety. In the universe of Elohim---God, the scientific account of tragedy is not contrary to the religious explanation.

But the full religious account cannot be reduced to the scientific explanation alone. The moral figure of Adonai---Lord enters to complement the full religious configuration.

THE QUEST FOR MEANING

To find meaning in adversity, religious apologists often take refuge in the notion that suffering is the path to meaning. Suffering to them is not for naught. Through tragedy the afflicted gain a deeper level of meaning. That logic is a legacy of medieval theology that defends the goodness of God despite the evidence of undeniable evil. Poverty is justified since without it the motivating drive for philanthropy is gone. Sickness is justified as the spur to medical research. Pain is justified because it helps the cultivation of character. Theological justification is filtered down and popularized. "At birth, deny a child vision, hearing and the ability to speak and you have a Helen Keller. Raise him in abject poverty and you have an Abraham Lincoln. Stab him with rheumatic pain until opiates are needed and you have a Steinmetz." This genre of justification naturally aggravates the feelings of those victims of affliction who did not or could not turn their adversity into virtue. Unintentionally, it points an accusing finger towards those who are not able to rise above their misfortune of moral inadequacy.

Further, it implicates God morally for intentionally visiting suffering for the sake of finding meaning. But meaning is not in the deafness, blindness and muteness. The latter are consequences of nature pursuing its own course. Nature has causes and consequences; and causes and consequences are not judgments of punishment. Lightning and thunder burn homes and fields. They do not punish. That is not their intention. Meaning is discovered in the way we direct the course of nature through our divinely given exercise of intelligence, courage, hope and faith. These energies are associated with Adonai---Lord, the world of "ought" that complements the world of "is".

Elohim---God and Adonai---Lord are good. But the goodness which Elohim---God creates and declares "it is good" refers to the amoral fact of being. To be is good and this applies universally to all of existence, to serpents and doves, to droughts and seas. The goodness of Adonai---Lord refers to moral goodness that favors human beings and their growth, not just being in general. Elohim---Lord is the locus of nature's power. Adonai---Lord is the locus of moral goodness.

ADONAI---LORD

Elohim---God places reality limits on our aspirations. It teaches us to accept the world as it is. False expectations of God and nature are the soil out of which false guilts are cultivated. Acceptance of the limitations of God and nature and human nature helps prevent the disillusionment bred by over-idealization.

But the reality principle in religion includes ideality. The ideal is what is "really real". The world of "is" and the world of "ought" are not the same, but they are interdependent. We cannot jump from "is" to "ought" or from "ought"

to "is". But each is crucially important to the other. What we can or cannot do helps us determine the stretch of what we ought or ought not to do. And what we ought or ought not to do guides the actualization of our potentialities. Elohim and Adonai are united as are the realms of the real and the ideal.

Elohim---God points to those areas over which we have no control. In our earlier discussion of prayer, we noted how the reality principle keeps prayer from becoming magic. We cannot pray away our tumors, or our paraplegia.

When we summon courage to overcome our depression, the paralysis of our will we draw upon Adonai---Lord. In the liturgy of petition and hope, it is not Elohim---God but Adonai---Lord who is addressed. The prayers will not of their own change the outer nature of our affliction but they may well affect the inner resolve, the spirit of love, hope, courage, wisdom trust. Both God and Lord describe reality. God---Elohim provides the "givenness" of energies out of which Adonai---Lord transforms the world.

THE MONOTHEISM OF LORD AND GOD

In the first chapter of Genesis it is Elohim---God alone who creates the universe. The first time that the name Adonai---Lord is introduced in the Bible is in the second chapter of Genesis, verse 5. "When the Lord God made earth and heaven -when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil, but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth, the Lord God formed Adam from the dust of the earth." Not until man is joined with nature is Adonai joined with Elohim. Adonai comes to the humanistic foreground of

the natural background of Elohim. Adam is taken by the Lord God to till and tend the Garden of Eden. (verse 15)

Elohim and Adonai are dualities that belong together. The God of nature and the Lord of history, the God of reality and the Lord of ideality are complementary powers. Their interdependence is affirmed in the six words which are twice daily recited in prayers. "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). The Oneness of Lord means that Divinity unites the real and the ideal into a holistic view of reality. In the standard formulation of the traditional benediction Adonai---Lord and Elohim---God appear side by side. "Blessed art Thou O Lord, our God who " The unity points to the aspiration of integration and balance. The last prayers recited at the end of the Day of Atonement, call for the leader and the congregation to repeat aloud seven times the identity of the two names of God. "Adonai---Lord is God---Elohim." The threat to the wholeness of Divinity is in sundering its two vital dimensions.

The events of life and death, drought and conflagration in the prayer that Sally referred to are amoral neutral events that point to the God of nature. They may be said to be caused by God in the manner that the philosopher Maimonides understood divine causation. Maimonides wrote that everything that is produced in time must necessarily have a cause that has produced it. "In its turn that cause has a cause and so forth until finally one comes to the first cause of things, I mean God's will and free choice. For this reason, all those intermediate causes are sometimes omitted in the dicta of the prophets and an individual act produced in time is ascribed to God. . . (Guide Part II, chapter 48). In this regard everything that occurs good and bad—including the fires, floods, droughts and famines—may be traced to

Elohim---God as the divine author. That applies to the first section of the prayer Sally reads.

When, however, Sally recites the verse "Repentance, Prayer and Righteousness" in the conclusion of the prayer, she relates to the power of Lord---Adonai, source of the ideals that transform the givenness of nature into ideal ends.

Her acceptance of Elohim---God's nature, does not mean acceptance of impotence. The reality principle does not stand in opposition to the power of hope, heart, will—the ideality of Adonai. Through emulating the attribute of Adonai, the moral meaning of her life is clarified.

In a private meeting Sally asked what meaning in life remained especially when meaning for her was tied up to the raising up of her children and her family. Meaning for her she asserted was in raising her children to be strong, to help them learn how to cope with the abrasiveness of life, to teach them to face the challenge of adversity. Now, that death was imminent, that meaning had disappeared.

It is here that the Adonai---Lord dimension is crucial. "Your children, Sally, know how sick you are. And in your sickness you teach them lessons they will cherish the rest of their lives. Sick and suffering, you teach how to love, how to cling to faith, living you teach. Dying you also teach." Sally's faith, courage and attitude observed by her family is her meaning. A rabbinic legend concludes "the righteous are informed of the day of their death so that they may hand the crown to their children."

MONOTHEISM AND TWIN HUMAN INCLINATION

How are the two faces of God related to the human face that confronts evil? The two dimensions of divinity—the nature of Adonai and Elohim—have their analogue in the traditional view of human nature. "Yezer Ha-tov" and "Yezer Hara"—the good and evil inclinations are complementary dualities that are essentially one.

The rabbinic insight into human nature is shaped by 20 monotheistic theology. For monotheism, there is no Satan. Satan may be used literarily as God's adversary in the prologue to the book of Job, but within the tradition, Satan is no separate primordial force threatening God. That there are evils in the world, the reality principle of the tradition does not deny. But monotheism does not cast those evils into an independent Devil. To set Satan and God into authors of darkness and light is to view the world as a warring dualism of two separate sources. In monotheism evil derives its powers, however they may be abused, from one God who "forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates evil" (Isaiah 45:7). The two inclinations, good and evil are created by One and the same Divinity, Elohim---Adonai. In a rabbinic passage the "Evil Inclination is joined with mercy and envy as three good qualities created in this world by God." (Fathers of Rabbi Nathan, 9a)

Towards evil there is in monotheism an ambivalent assessment. Evil is not good but it is not entirely irredeemable. More than salvageable, there are aspects of evil that are necessary for preserving civilization. The ambivalent character of evil is portrayed in the account of creation found in the classic book of Jewish mysticism the Zohar. (II, SOb) Rabbi Yizhak said "At the time God created the world and desired to reveal the depths of His being from out of the hidden, the light came from the darkness and they

were joined together. Because of this out of darkness came the light and out of the hidden came the revealed and out of the good came evil and out of mercy came severe judgment. And everything is intertwined with everything else the Yezer Ha-tov and the Yezer Hara, the right and the left."

Creation is depicted as an admixture of good and evil in which each has its proper place. The "Yezer Hara"—the evil inclination—is itself a neutral energy, akin to the libido. Loosened from the good inclination, evil introduces havoc into the world. But in its proper place it may play an essential role in preserving life and civilization. The evil inclination therefore is not to be destroyed but to be controlled. Both impulses are to be respected, both are to be used in our love of God. Just as the energies of nature are morally neutral and like electricity capable of producing light or conflagration, so the evil inclination is morally neutral but capable of either consecrating or desecrating the world. The diverse elements in human and non-human nature must be accepted as given from God---Elohim but used wisely and carefully in the name of Lord---Adonai.

An arresting Talmudic myth (Yoma 69b) captures the odd ambiguity of evil, its potentiality for sanctification and desecration. The evil inclination is described as coming forth from the Holy of Holies like a young, fiery lion. Seized hold of and imprisoned by the sages for three days, the incarceration of the evil temptation proves to be no blessing. "They looked in the whole land for a fresh egg and could not find it." The libido is necessary for life as the rabbis elsewhere pointed out "Were it not for the evil inclination a man would not build a house or take a wife or beget children or engage in business?" (Genesis Rabbah 9: 7)

After the imprisonment of the evil inclination, the sages faced a taunting dilemma. To kill the evil inclination would be tantamount to destroying the world to free the evil inclination would allow its mischief to roam free. They counseled together and thought that they would pray for "half-mercy". They would, as it were, split their prayer in half. Let the libido of the evil temptation be preserved but let it be limited to lawful acts. Let lust exist but be restricted to one's own spouse. Let competition prevail but be limited to legitimate businesses. The telling answer they received from heaven was that "Half measures are not granted from Heaven." The world that is created does not come to us compartmentalized, packaged into separate parts marked "good" or "bad". Monotheism's world is an admixture that requires from its citizens the wisdom of differentiation, the exercise of moral choice.

In the tradition, the evil inclination is no separate satanic force struggling against God. The human goal therefore is not the extirpation of the evil temptation but its control for ideal ends. The good and the evil inclinations have their roots in divinity, in the left and right hand of the Creator as the mystics say. The human ideal is to live in equilibrium with the dual inclinations within us. Ideally the human image mirrors the complementary features of Elohim and Adonai. It reflects the ideal of monotheism.

ACCEPTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION

How does this theological background affect the response to "Why me"? The integration of Adonai---Elohim and the balance of good and evil impulses prepares the ground for the wisdom of acceptance and transformation. To acknowledge God---Elohim is to accept the reality

principle that protects man from projecting his own fantasies onto the world order. Falling from a mountain top, the laws of gravitation are indifferent to the fate of saint or villain. It might be right for the saint to land safely. But to live with such an expectation is to live falsely. Illusion ends in disillusion. False expectation leads to cynicism, or to the futile speculations over the questionable virtue of the good, or to doubts as to the alleged goodness and power of the God of gravitational laws. The ideals of heaven are rooted in the reality of earth.

The reality principle associated with Elohim---God is not the last or only wisdom of monotheistic faith. Adonai---Lord in no way denies the reality principle but expands the parameter of reality so that it includes the reality of ideals, the real powers of aspiration and the exercise of human will to repair the incompleting world. Severed from Elohim---God, ideals are unmoored in the world of real possibility. Severed from Elohim---God, belief turns into illusory thinking. Hopes are dashed, disillusionment sets in, belief is ridiculed, deeds are discouraged.

Severed from Adonai, the horizons of Elohim are narrowed to the status quo. Without Adonai, acceptance of the world turns into resignation. To live with Elohim alone is to know Nature but not the possibilities for transformation. Belief in the Lord---Adonai, the source for moral activism empowers the will to mend the tattered fabric of the world. The hyphen between Elohim---Adonai describes not only the oneness of the two faces of divinity but the constant transaction between them. Within the believer, this interaction is manifest in the assessment of the real and the ideal. Realism errs by giving up too soon on the ideal possibilities. Idealism errs by over-idealizing the will.

Where does reality end and ideality begin? The borders of each are permeable. Therein lies the adventure of faith, determining what is to be accepted and what is to be transformed. The living God and Lord resists static limits. Monotheism entails a constant wrestling over the moving borders of the real and the ideal.

How does a theology that flows from an integrated view of Elohim and Adonai better prepare persons for the adversities that inevitably confront them? Much of the disillusionment that follows upon the heels of tragedy are due to illusory notions about the nature of God and man. Over-idealization envisions a perfect world in which good and prosperity and evil and adversity are strictly correlated. Perfectionism of this kind ignores the wisdom of Elohim, the limits of the world. On the other side, acquiescence in the name of reality overlooks the truth of Adonai. Combined, Adonai---Elohim cultivates a melioristic stance, a belief in the betterment of the world. This balanced view of acceptance and transformation is encapsulated in the rabbinic statement "Everything created during the six days of creation needs work. The mustard seed needs to be sweetened, the lupine needs to be soaked in water, the wheat needs to be ground, and even man needs to be repaired." Everything is incomplete. The world is not perfect, but it can be made better. For this task the human being is uniquely equipped. There is no evil inclination in beasts. They live according to their nature. The human being however can develop a second nature. The realistic view of wholeness holds together Elohim and Adonai enabling the believer to better tolerate the simultaneous presence of inconsistencies and contradictions that tear away at the monotheistic faith. There is a time to accept and a time to reject, a time to acknowledge limitation and a time to transcend and

transform. But neither response denies the unity and comprehensiveness of the larger reality known as Elohim---Adonai.

WILL AND FAITH

No theology, rooted in reality, can transform the sorrows of personal tragedy into joys. But theology can, at the very least, avoid pouring the salt of guilt and blame into the open wounds of suffering. Theology can at least, not turn piety into masochism or divinity into a punitive power.

There are consequences to belief. It affects our attitude and our behavior. The religious measure of acceptance and transformation is a corrective wisdom in a secular society that has transferred all its trust from the divine to the human will.

Symptomatic of that secular "willism" are the number of articles and books that appear daily with testimonies of the curative powers of the will to triumph over sickness. One such best selling book by an oncological surgeon, Bernie Siegel, sights with approval a statement from the late Norman Cousins who claimed that patients divided themselves into groups. "Those who are confident they would beat back the disease and be able to resume normal lives and those who resigned themselves to prolonged and even fatal illnesses." Dr. Siegel himself offers numerous accounts of miraculous recoveries from illnesses in defiance of the gloomy prognostications of medical experts. He cites anecdotes from "exceptional patients" who will not go quietly onto the gurney. These are the so called "bad patients" whose will to triumph over illness has turned victims into fighters. In his book *Peace, Love and Healing*, Dr. Siegel quotes with approval, a novelist who writes that "illness doesn't strike randomly like a thief in the night. Certain kinds of people at certain points in their lives will come down with certain ailments. You can almost predict it."

Secular faith in voluntarism places an inordinate trust on the human will to both avoid and overcome illnesses. It proffers a theology of optimism that curiously boomerangs upon the believer. If "Why me?" searches for a "who" that is traditionally found in God's will, the secular theology of optimism finds the "who" in the self, in the patient himself. The self takes the place of God and with it follow a number of consequences. Self assertion is the dominant mood of this secular theology of optimism. In the language of one celebrated psychologist, "I am me. Therefore everything that comes out of me is authentically mine because alone chose it. I own everything about me, my body, my mind, my eyes. I own my fantasies, my dreams, my fears, my triumphs, my failures, my mistakes. I own me and therefore I can engineer me. I am me and I am okay." One may well appreciate the bolstering of assertiveness and the opposition to blaming others for things that affect me. At the same time, one must be wary of the negative consequences of such willfulness. With the virtual omnipotence of the self, there is indeed no one to blame for the cancer, nor for the failure to recover except one's own self. But here the patient suffers double jeopardy. Contraction of an illness and failure to recover present themselves as twin failures of will.

If conventional theology accuses the sinner for his suffering in order to defend God, this form of willful optimism blames the patient for his failure to act in the manner of the recovering exceptional patient. The focus is shifted from "Why me?" to "Why not me?" As one patient expressed it to me after reading the kind of literature concerning exceptional patients "What's wrong with me? I have tried, God knows, I have tried. I have gritted my teeth, I have taken the chemotherapy: I have given and received love—why can't I will myself into wellness like those others?"

Soldiers who return safely from the war while their comrades lay strewn on the battlefield, often report "survivor guilt." "Why did I live while the others died?" Ordinary patients who hear of "exceptional patients" whose attitude has helped them triumph over their sickness report a "victim's guilt." "Why do they deserve recovery and not me?"

What is lacking in this over-assertive optimism is a mature religious outlook that can provide a balanced view of the ideality of Adonai and the reality of Elohim. The role of Elohim is needed to temper the exaggerated confidence in the omnipotence of the human will. It is needed to avoid the self-recrimination that follows from the tyranny of the will.

In our society, we raise our children with the secular theology of the little red engine. "I think I can, I think I can I knew I could." Faith in will revives, redeems and cures. The reality principle of Elohim is needed to sober up the intoxication of the omnipotent human will. The religious reality principle informs the patient that cancer is not willed and that it is not a punishment for the inability of the patient to will his cure.

Distinctions must be drawn. Some things can be willed but others cannot. Smiling can be willed, but not happiness. Eating can be, willed but not hunger. Reading prayers can be willed but not belief.

Sally would know how I explain, "How many shall pass away and how many shall die?" in the prayer. I take the catastrophe mentioned in the High Holiday prayer to refer to what philosophers call "natural evil," the events that originate independently of human action. The causes of these are morally neutral. They may be ascribed to God as Elohim, the God of Nature. Some philosophers refer to "metaphysical evil" which results from the basic fact of finitude and limitation within the created universe. Such evil is likewise

amoral. Imperfection is unavoidable in created things. And there are other evils that human beings originate. There are those intentionally caused moral evils over which I do exercise control and for which I fear responsibility including the obligation to repair the injury caused.

As I interpret the prayer that enumerates sickness, defects, accidents, earthquakes, tornadoes there is no moral reason to assume personal guilt or need for expiation. The tragedies are not God's punishment nor God's reward. They are not results of the moral acts of God or immoral acts of the devil. These catastrophes are not brought into the world because of my transgression or those of others. Innocence is not exempt from natural evil and that is tragic. But the tragedy must not be compounded by inventing moral reasons for its occurrence. Sally's disease is fault free. It is not a sentence of God. The laws of physics are totally unlike moral laws. Sally's cancer is not the product of a will or a failure of will, neither hers nor God's.



CHAPTER VI

GOD AS VERB: A CLASS DISCUSSION

"Surely this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens that you should say 'who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us that we may observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea that you should say 'who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us that we may observe it?' No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to observe it."

—(Deuteronomy 30)

The youngster in Sunday school is working intensely with crayons on her paper. Her teacher asks what she is drawing. She answers casually, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The teacher, spotting a budding heretic, pointed out "But my dear, no one knows what God looks like." The child answers, "They will when finish."

We wink at the child's naiveté yet while we know that God has no physical features most of us still carry about mental pictures of God from our school days. Translated onto canvas, ours would most likely be drawn vertically, the figure of God "above" and that of man "below".

Where and how do the divine above and the human below meet? What is the role of the hyphen in divine-human relationship?

THE HYPHEN

The hyphen is an enigmatic sign. As a punctuation mark it may be used either to divide or to compound words. Theologically the hyphen in divine-human relationship is equally ambiguous. On one theological view, the hyphen is meant to separate the divine and human subjects. It indicates that the divine and human are more different than they are alike. The more

defensive theology grows, the more the two subjects are distanced and gradually transformed into opposing forces. Despite the verses that emphasize the likeness of God and human beings, the hyphen accentuates the unlikeness of the two subjects. "For My plans are not your plans nor My ways your ways." (Isaiah 45) As we noted in our earlier discussion of evil, conventional theology worries that too great an intimacy between the divine and the human renders God more vulnerable to human critique. To protect God from the moral criticism of Job or of Abraham before Sodom and Gomorrah, the two subjects must be kept apart. The reciprocal covenant that allowed for a moral dialogue between the Divine and human person now turns into a one-sided imperative from above below.

The other theological positions views the hyphen as a connecting link with the intention of emboldening the human subject to dialogue even with the divine other without cringing. In raising the human subject up to the level of the hyphen, the covenant retains a two way reciprocity. Morality is in heaven as it is on earth. God is subject to the same moral restraints as the human subject.

The extreme views on either end pull against the hyphen. Fearful that humanistic bias would convert the divine-human hyphen into an equivalence sign, those on the theological right insist on treating the hyphen as a subtraction sign: God without the interference of the human person. Fearful of the absorption of the human into the divine side, the theological left blurs the non-human divine side of the hyphen.

The struggle over the hyphen of divine-human relationship has been evident in our discussions of prayer, miracle, revelation and evil. The gist of the questions and answers revolved around the weight and scope that

religion assigns to either side of the divine-human hyphen. How much does the efficacy of prayer depend upon God's answer to human request, and how much upon the human response to the petitions of his heart? How much weight should be assigned to the revelation of God's word, and how much to the inspired interpretation of the human subject? How much is attributed to God's initiative, and how much to the character of the human reaction to threatening circumstances in understanding the miraculous?

A good deal of the discontent with conventional religion complains of the low estate that the theological right has assigned to the human personality. The discontented feel themselves irrelevant in prayer, passive in revelation, superfluous in history, blamed in evil. The defenders of the divine side of the hyphen hear in such complaints humanistic arrogance and insubordination. At the root of the tension lies the pervasive disjunction: either Divinity or Humanity. Religious moderates are challenged to preserve the binding character of the hyphen without eliminating the dignity and power on both sides of the divine-human intersection. To this end we propose another way of understanding the role of the two co-signatories of the hyphenated covenant.

ANOTHER LANGUAGING OF GOD TALK

Establishment religion has admittedly fallen on hard times. Spirituality rather than religion is the favored term of our era. Martin Buber differentiated between the two when he wrote "Religiosity induces sons who want to find their own God to rebel against their fathers; religion induces fathers to reject their sons who will let their father's God be forced upon them." These days, the generational contrast between fathers and sons is less sharp. There is a shared inter-generational embarrassment with God language, a felt

foreignness about religious culture, a sense that something is artificial about religion. The strained formality with official religion is exemplified in Voltaire's attitude towards religion. Voltaire once walked the street with a friend when a religious procession passed. Voltaire the skeptical philosopher doffed his hat in token reverence. His friend asked, "Monsieur Voltaire, have you become religious?" Voltaire explained, "When God and I pass each other, we salute but we do not speak." That attitude I sense in teaching older and younger groups. There are few indications of apostasy but much evidence of a general discomfort with religion. Along with this alienation from conventional religion, there are signs of yearning for "spirituality" or "religiosity."

A CLASS EXPERIMENT

In one of my confirmation classes with youngsters 16 and 17 years old, I sensed an estrangement from academic religious discourse. When we discussed the traditional proofs for the existence of God the class enjoyed the intellectual exercises that attempted logical demonstration of God's existence, but they were not personally compelled to believe in God. God as First or Final cause had nothing to do with their lives, their real concerns or their interests. Another beginning was called for. I thought of the insightful statement by a Hasidic master, Menachem Mendel of vitebsk, who confessed "All my life I have struggled in vain to know what man is. Now I know that man is the language of God." Perhaps a wiser way to teach the religious conception of God would be to begin with teaching the religious conception of the human being. The founder of Hasidism once punctuated the verse "Know what is above you" to read "Know what is above—from yourself." The way to God was through the depths of the self. The way to

theology may begin with a religious anthropology. The focus of our class discussion shifted. We began not with God talk but with human talk. The students spoke not of God's attributes but of their own ambitions, fears, hopes, the things that moved them and were important to them. They listed some of their values—love, compassion, justice for the downtrodden, the need to defend the most fragile members of the community, the poor, the homeless, the sick, the submerged community, the importance of combatting the pollution of the waters and the air. Now came the matter of language.

Listing a number of theological statements on the blackboard, I asked them whether they believed that

1. **God is loving**
2. **God is just**
3. **God is compassionate**

Most of the class expressed reservations about their belief in those propositions. They were unsure of the existence of God as a separate being. Having gone through discussions of the problem of evil, they were unwilling to assert that God possessed the benevolent attributes listed.

I turned the propositions around. They now read:

1. **Loving is godly**
2. **Doing justice is godly**
3. **Expressing compassion is godly**

The reaction to the inverted statements was markedly positive. They understood the qualities and activities that now were the main subjects of belief. These propositions they found unarguable. They found these properties of divinity real, important, credible, natural, accessible.

TEACHING GODLINESS

What had happened as a result of the new formulation of the customary theological statements? In terms of grammar, the present participle had replaced the noun. But far more than syntax was involved. The attention of the class shifted to the verb, to the doing, acting, behaving, feeling they identified as godly and not to the noun that named an independent subject. In the conventional formulation, the subject was the noun "God"; in the inverted formulation the subject was on the activities. Switching the subject and predicate made a difference. In the conventional format, the question was directed to the noun God. Do you believe in the existence of an independent, sovereign, inscrutable, super being or super-person in whom the qualities are lodged? Is the noun real?

In the inverted formulation, the question was "Do you believe in the reality of the qualities themselves? Is having compassion, expressing loving care, doing justice, being truthful worthy of veneration and emulation?" Are the verbs real?

Why was it easier for them to link the adverb godly with the virtues listed than to assert the existence of an unknowable subject whose ways and thoughts are not ours but to whom we ascribe virtues? For one thing, the virtues or qualities or attributes were accessible to them. They knew, understood, experienced them. Those qualities were manifestations of godliness (Elohuth). They understood what it means to develop those virtues

in themselves or in others, what it means to act in a godly fashion. But that was not true of belief in God who in Himself or itself is unknown and unknowable as both religious mystics and rationalists agree. They knew what the qualities were when they were expressed in human behavior; but who can claim to understand the attributes that inhere in God and are used by God? As some member of the class put it, "Is God's love or justice or mercy like the love, justice or mercy we humans know or experience?" Isn't goodness when ascribed to God qualitatively different from goodness that is attributed to human beings? Surely the difference between God's goodness and human goodness is not a matter of degree but a difference of kind. But if so, then what we humans call good God may call evil, and what we humans call evil may in God's eyes be good. To be humanly holy is not like God's being holy. "

Is goodness godly?" The class overwhelmingly answers yes. "Is God good?" They answer, "Who can know?" The meaning of the virtues change according to whether they are applied to God's conduct or to human behavior. More than doubt about the meaning of goodness when ascribed to God is troubling to the class. What is challenged is the ethics of belief in an unknowable Subject. John Stuart Mill himself argued vigorously, "To say that God's goodness may be different from man's goodness, what is it but saying, with a slight change of phraseology, that God may possibly not be good?" This possibility so incensed Mill that he burst into uncharacteristic resentment. "I will call no being good who is not what I mean when I apply the epithet to my fellow creatures, and if such a being can sentence me to hell, to hell I will go." The double standard of God-terms like good, just, etc. when applied to God and to human beings introduces moral havoc. An interesting argument

over the claims of the know-ability of the qualities broke out between two students.

Student A: How do you know that goodness is godly? What proof do you have?

Student B: Well, what proof do you have that anything is good?

Student A: I know that something is good because God says so. I mean I know it's good to honor my father and my mother because God said so.

Student B: But how do you know that the God who said so is Himself good? *Student A:* What do you mean?

Student B: Don't you have to know what good is before you, you can call God good?

Student A: Give me an example of what you're driving at.

Student B: How could Abraham criticize God for what He was planning to do with the people of Sodom and Gomorrah unless Abraham knew beforehand what goodness and justice were? How else could he argue with God and tell Him that He is not acting in a proper manner? "Shall not the judge of all the earth do justly?"

Student A: But people don't always agree on what is good. There has to be a God to tell us what is good.

The issue was joined. Student A holds that faith in the Subject noun God validates our moral judgments. For him whatever the divine Subject declares is good because it is the divine Subject who says so. God's word is self-validating. He denies any external criterion for evaluating the goodness of an imperative that is spoken in the name of God. Student B insists that we must know what is good or just or fair on grounds independent of the status of the alleged author. We have to know what is good before we can claim that God is good. The knowledge of what is godly comes logically before the attributes may be ascribed to the noun God. Aside from the question as to whether it is God or Satan whose voice we hear (discussed in chapter four), does God mean the same thing we humans ordinarily mean by good or just or holy?

THE PEDAGOGY OF GODLINESS

The encounter led me to wonder what my task is as a religious educator. Is it to teach belief in the existence of the Noun or to teach belief in the reality of the predicates, those verbs, adverbs, adjectives we identify as godly?

It was easier to persuade the class in the godliness of the attribute than in the reality of the Noun. As one student put it, "You're making belief in God obvious." To revere godliness was self-evident. But why should making belief obvious be faulted? Must faith be incredulous in order to qualify as faith? Did God have to be inaccessible, remote, unintelligible so as to be the proper object of veneration and emulation?

I think not. Godliness is as real as my self, its relationships and identity. Godliness is "very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in they heart, that thou mayest do it." (Deuteronomy 30:13) I think that whether God or godliness is

the subject of belief, godliness pedagogically is prior to God, the attribute is logically and educationally prior to the Noun. In terms of effective teaching, an introduction to the encounters of godliness defines what is meant by .God and Divinity.

In the course of conversation, I was asked what a theology of godliness would regard as atheism since belief in God as a noun was not necessary for faith. My answer was that for godliness atheism was disbelief in the reality and sanctity of the attributes not in disbelief in the Subject God as Noun. Not to believe in the values ascribed to godliness is an expression of atheism. Agnosticism about godliness is not doubting whether God is a Subject but doubting the reality and significance of the qualities called divine. While my grandfather's supernatural conceptualization of God and my own are different, they converge in our agreement on the attributes ascribed to divinity. Which is truer, the conventional Noun form of God or the verb form of godliness? "Truth," Franz Rosenzweig wrote, "Is a noun only for God? For us, it is an adverb. We are called upon authentically and wholeheartedly to live truthfully in accord with what we have been given to understand of the truth." There are no short cuts to "truth". Truth's distance and complexity should make religious claims more modest. To live humbly with God is no small compensation for surrendering the absolute claim of infallible truth.

GOD AS PERSON OR PERSONAL

Jean Piaget in his *The Child's Conception of the World* tells of a little girl of nine who asked, "Daddy, is there really a God?" The father answered that he was not very certain. The child volunteered, "There must be really, because he has a name." To have a name is to be real and by name she and we have in mind a noun, a word that designates a person or a thing.

Doesn't godliness (elohuth) need a Subject into which to deposit their godly attributes of verbs and adverbs and adjectives?

It is difficult in a culture that cannot speak or think about divinity without using the substantive name of a Noun to conceive of the reality of godliness. Grammatically verbs, adverbs and adjectives must belong to something or someone. But is that requirement a conventional matter of grammar, a habit of mind or a reflection of the way things are? I think it is more a cultural bias of syntax than an argument for conceiving God as a Noun, and more specifically a personal noun.

The class returned to a repeated question: "God is spoken of as a Person. Is godliness (elohuth) a Person?" Discussing the question, I proposed that we distinguish "personal" from "person". "Person" is a noun and to believe that God is a person or super-person raises a whole series of questions. Is this Super-person a person like ourselves? Does the person feel as human persons do or change as human persons change or have needs or wants or emotions as human persons do? What traits of personality can we ascribe to this Person?

But "personal" is not "person"; and not merely because the latter functions as an adjective. Godliness is personal in the sense that the qualities it envelopes are values that are personally important in our lives. People live and die for godliness. They struggle and give their substance, security and lives for freedom, for peace, for the preservation of a tradition, for justice though none of these ideals are persons. We tend to personify ideas and ideals and qualities. There is nothing wrong in speaking of God as if God were a person. We are picture makers. But the pictures are not of persons. We picture justice as a woman whose eyes are bound by a cloth before a set

of balanced scales. But justice is not a Person. Love is real and personal but it is no evidence of the reality of Aphrodite. Warring is real and personal but it does not warrant belief in the existence of the god Mars. We know of atrocities, callousness, cruelty and torture. These demonic qualities are real and affect us personally. But they do not argue for an embodiment in the person of a Mephistopheles. Evil is personal and is made more vivid by portraying him as a tail-hooked devil. But evil is not a person. The reality of personal experience cannot be conjured with the experience of a Person.

There are further problems with personification. The noun reification of qualities into persons tends to deflect attention from human responsibility. It is tempting to point a finger at a person, to locate evil outside in the Person of God or Satan. But evil is traceable sometimes to the amoral eruptions of nature or the negligence or malice of human beings and societies. Evil is personal enough without being transformed into a malevolent super-Person. The refusal to invest goodness or evil with personhood does not make it less personal. Godliness is not a Person but it is the reality most personally sought and fought for in our lives.

PRAYING DIFFERENTLY

High on the list of questions raised in class was the role of prayer within the theology of godliness. How does the inversion of noun and verb, of subject and predicate affect the way we pray? If God is not a Noun, not a Thou or It or Person, how do we pray to godliness and to what end?

We opened the prayer text to the daily set of morning benedictions.

The first service read as follows:

Blessed art Thou Lord King of the universe who clothes the naked.

Blessed art Thou Lord our God king of the universe who releases the bound.

Blessed art Thou Lord our God who raises up those that are bowed down.

There were some negative responses to the prayer from the class. Was it God, the Noun, "up there" who "really" clothed the naked? Tell that to the poor. Or "released the bound." Tell it to the hostages. Or "raised up those who are bowed down." Tell it to the depressed. I suggested retaining the traditional formula of the prayers but giving it a different interpretation in accordance with the method of inversion we applied to theological statements. Following that approach the prayer asserts that whatever or whoever helps clothe the naked is divine; that all that release the bound is godly; that all that raises up those bowed down is godly. "That" refers to human and non-human energies which are used to accomplish the ends for which the benediction is given. In inverting the subject and predicate of the prayer we intend to direct the worshipper to the verbs, adjectives and adverbs of godliness. The predicates in the benedictions do not focus on the mysteries of an inscrutable noun. We know fully well what is meant by healing the sick and clothing the naked and lifting up those who have fallen. We know most importantly that knowing means for the worshipper to actively participate in the achievement of the ends that are praised as divine.

In our earlier discussion of prayer in chapter 2, we wrote that when we pray to God we pray through the godliness in and between us and our community. The purpose of prayer is not to move the God Noun so that it accomplishes those ends on our behalf. We pray for the wisdom and will to realize in our own lives the godly ideals expressed in prayer. Without our

attention and involvement, prayer is no service to God. The worshippers are preeminently relevant to the outcome of the prayer.

Rabbi Ben Zoma presented a model way to unpack the concentrated liturgical formula that concedes the human-divine transaction. It may serve as a meditative explication of the prayer over bread. Ben Zoma used to say, "What labors Adam had to carry out before he obtained bread to eat. He ploughed, he sowed, he reaped, he bound the sheaves, he threshed and winnowed and selected the ears, he ground them, and sifted the flour, he kneaded and baked and then at last he ate; but when I get up, and find all these things done for me. And how many labors Adam had to carry out before he obtained a garment to wear. He had to shear, wash the wool, comb it, spin it and weave it, and then at last he obtained a garment to wear; whereas I get up and find all these things done for me. All kinds of craftsmen come early to the door of my house, and I rise in the morning and find all these before me." There is godliness in a piece of bread and in a garment that predicate prayer cultivates. The same Ben Zoma sought to open the heart to gratitude for the human society in which we live and the amenities we enjoy. He used to say, "What does a good guest say? 'How much trouble my host has taken for me? How much meat he has set before me? and all the trouble he has taken was only for me sake.'" What does a bad guest say? 'How much after all has my host put himself out? I have eaten one piece of bread, one slice of meat all the trouble my host has taken was only for the sake of his wife and his children.'" What does Scripture say of a good guest? "Remember that thou magnify His works whereof men have sung." Gratitude for the goodness of human beings is remembering the works of godliness.

Ben Zoma's prayer commentary horizontalized the vertical formula of traditional liturgy. He broadened the scope of the prayer. When prayers of gratitude are enlarged to include the human factor, the liturgy unites heaven and earth, hallows God's creation of the universe and the works of human hands. I shared with the class a humorous anecdote with theological implications. It is told of a farmer who at harvest time showed a visiting rabbi the field of corn and wheat he had cultivated. The rabbi declared, "Give thanks to God, my son. For you and He are partners in this harvest." The farmer responded, "Rabbi, you should have seen this field when God was the only owner." The benediction of thanksgiving is not to take away praise of the worshipper but to include it in the praise of God.

ONENESS

No prayer is more embedded in our religious consciousness than the prayer enunciating God's oneness. "Hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is One." The class took "God is one" to mean that God was not two, in opposition to dualism or that God was not three, in the manner of Christian trinity. They now asked in what sense is godliness one inasmuch as it is made up of multiple attributes e.g. compassion, wisdom, justice?

They understand Oneness numerically. All the attributes were deposited in one subject much as the qualities of a table, color, shape, size—are lodged in one substantive noun. But how may the attributes of divinity be said to be one when they have no single noun in which to dwell?

I responded that the attributes are united not by a common place but by a shared purpose. The attributes need each other. Wisdom, for example, is an important attribute, but without compassion it sours into manipulative power. Smart people, even those with advanced academic degrees, can

be cruel. Wisdom must be balanced by the other attributes of divinity. Compassion unqualified can turn its virtue into vice. Compassion without justice can lead society into a havoc of anarchy. The same interdependence of the attribute apply to them all. To declare the Oneness of godliness means that the virtues worthy of adoration and imitation are interdependent and when integrated, present the harmony of wholeness. It is precisely idolatry that threatens the Oneness of godliness by adoring single attributes as if they were the whole of divinity. As the Zohar proclaims, "Woe to the man who compares God with any single attribute of God." The unity and wholeness of godliness is yet to be achieved. That goal is the purpose of the spiritual adventure, to unite and balance the attributes of divinity in the world and in the self. On that day godliness will be one and the name of godliness one.

SOME AFFINITIES BETWEEN GODLINESS AND TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY

I wondered about the granular of theology and how much it unconsciously affected the way we think about God and religion. Nietzsche once remarked, "We shall not get rid of God until we get rid of granular." But it all depends on the kind of granular we chose to use. Getting rid of a certain kind of grammar may rid one of a certain kind of God, but another syntax may open us to another kind of divinity. Yehudah Halevi, the eleventh century philosopher, suggested that the Biblical name for the Lord is -YHWH - four Hebrew letters that formed three Hebrew words "Hayah-Hoveh-Yihyeh", was-is-will be. The name of YHWH is the fused union of the past, present and future of the verb to be. YHWH, was-is, will be is not a static Noun. YHWH - was-is-will be is a dynamic verb of all verbs expressing divine activities. "God

said to Moses: Tell them (the people) that I am now what I always was and always will be." (Exodus Rabbah 3:6)

Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that "we have no nouns by which to express His essence; we have only adverbs by which to indicate the ways in which He acts". A noun should be avoided in speaking of God's nature, Heschel continued, because a noun presupposes comprehension. The world we encounter is one we "apprehend not one we comprehend."

Since it is so widely agreed by rationalists and mystic religious thinkers alike that the God as Noun expressing essence is beyond human comprehension, and since whatever we know of Divinity is known through the attributes that relate to our lives, then our proposal to give priority to the predicates over the Subject enjoys a venerable ancestry. Our pedagogical inversion of religious statements is less radical than it may appear at first blush. Our understanding of Elohuth—godliness is more compatible with both mystic and rationalist philosophic thought than with the grammar of conventional theology that separates noun from verb. We agree with both mysticism and rationalism on the unknowability of God as God is in itself. In the tradition, God-in-itself cannot be named, pronounced or seen. Naming God is prohibitive because it flirts with idolatry. Idolatry is naming a part of Divinity as if it were the whole of it.

For the mystics, the Infinite God (Ein Sof) is concealed, dwelling unknown in the depths of its own being, beyond all cognitive statements. For Maimonides the preeminent rationalist theologian, God's existence is known but His qualities can be understood only as negative attributes in terms of what God is not. God's goodness, life and power mean at most that God is not evil, not lifeless, not powerless. The Biblical dialogue with Moses is taken

seriously. "Thou canst not see Me and live." (Exodus 33:20) Following these classic insights, we maintain that all we know of God are the ways we experience the attributes ascribed to Him. God as a Noun is the unknowable Infinite "Ein Sof." Godliness "Elohuth" we know as verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. If we know anything of Divinity it is not the God Noun but God verbs. We know the adjectives of godliness, the attributes which we are to behave in our relationships with the world. "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him. Was this not this to know Me, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 22:16) The Noun in itself does not lend itself to emulation. It is too mysterious to be spoken of. As Ludwig Wittgenstein advised in another context, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent." The verbs and adjectives of godliness describe the model activities for human behavior. As justice is godly, be thou just. As compassion is divine, be thou compassionate. We know godliness through the caring, creating, curing, raising up the fallen. To believe in their reality, in their ultimate significance, in the need to sustain, protect and cultivate these qualities in our lives, is the soul of faith.

BEYOND HUMANISM

Our critique of conventional theology thus far has come mostly from the human side of the hyphenated divine-human relationship, from the fear of being swallowed up by God. The critique needs correction. For the elevation of the human subject casts a shadow that threatens to eclipse the splendor of the non-human divine light.

I use the term "non-human", not to deny the divine in the human but to focus on those powers over which the human subject has no control. An aphorism in the Ethics of the Fathers refers to two events on the spectrum of

living through which the human person comes to acknowledge his dependence. "Against thy will art thou formed, against thy will art thou born, against thy will dost thou live, and against thy will thou dost die."

In birth one recognizes the non-human "givenness" of life. We did not create ourselves. We did not invent the capacities to procreate. Part of the wonder of birth is the unknowability of the talents which may emerge from this protean matter. Towards the mystery of embryonic "givenness" there rises a natural gratitude to something beyond ourselves. That gratitude challenges the conceit of the self-sufficient self.

On the outer edges of the precipice, the human being confronting dying and death experiences the threat of non-being, the narrowing of choices and the loss of power. At such moments, a terrifying lucidity tears away at the hyperboles of human autonomy and throws the person to his knees. Dying, the very person who has been raised to the heights of being but little lower than God, now crawls in the shadow of the valley of death. The commendable autonomy of humanism is called up short by the implausible angel of death. At such times we hear the whisper of one of T. S. Elliot's characters: "I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker, and I have seen the Eternal Footman hold my coat and snicker and, in short, I was afraid." Fear has its wisdom. Out of such fear, our brooding imperfections, myriad irritations, petty anxieties take on new proportions. Out of fear, a greater appreciation of mystery, the unknown, the unpredictable and a yearning for transcendence.

Along with birth and death there is the human confrontation with radical evil, the trauma of facing sinister forms of evil that no mitigating circumstance can explain or excuse. Here human helplessness and

hopelessness turn the human face towards transcendent powers, not ourselves. There is danger in fear that paralyzes and terror of the unknown that converts mystery into a sanctuary of ignorance. But these must be integrated with moments of awe that temper the vaunting aspirations of humanism with appropriate modesty and wonder. The wise Preacher, Ecclesiastes, recognized the human limitations before cosmic forces. "No man has authority over the life-breath, to hold back the life-breath. There is no authority of the day of death. There is no mustering out from that war. Wickedness is powerless to save its owner." (Ecclesiastes 8:8)

Between the conceits of certain forms of humanism and the denigration of humanity in certain forms of theism, there is a more balanced theistic humanism that reflects the insights of Elohim---Adonai monotheism.

THEISTIC HUMANISM

Bertrand Russell criticized the shallowness of a pragmatic humanism that binds on the surface of this planet the whole of its imaginative material; which feels confident of progress, and unaware of non-human limitations to human power." De-hyphenated from Divinity, humanism proves thin. The limitations of humanism are in the non-knowing of death and in the misknowing of evil. A religious humanism acknowledges the reality of both and is able to call upon the two dimensions of divinity we have spoken of earlier, namely that of Elohim---God and Adonai---Lord, to cope with death and evil. A theistic humanism sustains the human person in extremis who learns to use the wisdom of acceptance and transformation. Two Biblical instances illustrate the applicability of both wisdoms.

The response of acceptance is exemplified in II Samuel 12:19-23. King David now knows that his child is dead. "And when David saw that his

servants whispered together David perceived that the child was dead and David said unto his servants 'Is the child dead?' Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his apparel; and he came into the house of the Lord and worshipped; then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him and he did eat. Then said his servants unto him 'What thing is this that thou hast done? Thou didst fast and weep for the child while it was alive, but when the child was dead thou didst rise and eat bread.' And he said, "While the child was yet alive I fasted and wept for I said who knoweth whether the Lord will not be gracious to me that the child may live but now he is dead wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him but he will not return to me."

There are times when fasting and weeping are no longer appropriate forms of piety. David's strength and wisdom lies in acknowledging the futility of prayer that would fancy to change the course of nature.

The critical issue of mature faith is in determining when acceptance is appropriate and when it is premature resignation. When is optimism false and when is hope spiritually appropriate? One biblical illustration of the refusal to acquiesce to a fated verdict is drawn from the thirty eighth chapter of Isaiah and elaborated by the rabbis in the Talmud. (Berachoth 10a)

When King Hezekiah was ill, the prophet Isaiah was summoned by the Holy One to the king's bedside. "And Isaiah the prophet, son of Amoz came to him and said, 'Thus saith the Lord, set thy house for thou shalt die and not live. . . What is the meaning of. . . thou shall die and not live'? Thou shalt die in this world and not live in the world to come. Hezekiah said, "Why so bad?" Isaiah replied, "Because you did not try to have children." The king said, "The

reason was because I saw by the Holy Spirit that the children issuing from me would not be virtuous." Isaiah said to him, "What have you to do with the secrets of the All Merciful? You should have done what you were commanded and let the Holy One blessed be He do that which pleases Him." Hezekiah said to him, "Then give me now your daughter, perhaps through your merit and mine combined virtuous children will issue from me." The prophet replied, "The doom has already been decreed."

The king said, "Son of Amoz, finish your prophecy and go. This tradition I have from the house of my ancestor even if a sharp sword rests upon a man's neck he should not desist from prayer."

This saying is also recorded in the names of Rabbi Johanan and Rabbi Eleazar. "Even if a sharp sword rests on a man's neck, he should not desist from prayer. As it says, 'Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him.' Similarly, Rabbi Hanan said, 'Even if the Master of dreams says to a man that on the morrow he will die, he should not desist from prayer.' For it says 'for in the multitude of dreams are vanities and also many words, but fear thou God.' Therefore straightway Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord."

In another rabbinic comment Hezekiah's response to the prophet sent by God includes the detailed rebuke by the king. "Said Hezekiah: It is customary that a person, when visiting the sick should say, 'may mercy be shown upon you from Heaven.' When the physician comes, he tells the sick 'Eat this and do not eat that, drink this and do not drink that.' Even when he sees him near death he does not say to him 'Set thy house in order' because this might upset him. You, however, tell me 'Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live.' I pay no attention to what you say, nor will I listen to

your advice. I hold on to nothing else than what my ancestor said, "For through the multitude of dreams and vanities there are also many words, but fear thou God." (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 5:6)

The encounter between the prophet and the king concludes with the announcement that the prayer of Hezekiah proved effective. As reported in the book of Isaiah, the prophet who prophesied Hezekiah's imminent death is the very one chosen to tell the king that the Lord has heard his prayer, seen his tears and has added fifteen years to his life. Hezekiah who has triumphed over Isaiah's doomsday prophecy sings a prayer of recovery, "Truly it was for my good that I had such great bitterness. You saved my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast behind your back all my offenses."

The cited Biblical and rabbinic statements are tales of limitation. We note that Hezekiah is chastised for his decision to be celibate on the grounds of the predicted immoral character of his unborn children. He is wrong because the future is open and no human prediction ought to foreclose it. Prophecy in the tradition is conditional and is abused when it precludes the possibility of persons to change themselves. Jonah is frustrated when in foretelling the sad fate of Ninevah he does not reckon with the power of human repentance to annul the verdict of prophecy. Isaiah too is properly rebuked by the king for his premature surrender to the announced decree of death. "Hope must never die too far ahead of the patient."

It is different with the instance of King David. The die was cast, the child no longer was alive. The remaining wisdom was that of acceptance. David must rend his garments, mourn his loss, recite his acceptance. "The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away." He then is to wash and anoint himself, eat and reenter the land of the living. This is the wisdom drawn from his

awareness of Elohim---God. But Hezekiah, while dangerously ill, is not yet dead. There are options left to him and it was right for him not to cave in to Isaiah's judgment even though that judgment was offered at God's bequest. Asked to define the essence of wisdom Robert Frost answered, "True wisdom is the ability to act when it is necessary on the basis of incomplete information."

What is bracing in Hezekiah's repudiation of Isaiah's doomsday prophecy is the King's affirmation of life. This attitude has filtered down into the spirit of the Jewish folk and its tales. One such story tells of a poor man who is gathering sticks of wood in the forest, packing them in a torn sack, throwing it over his bony shoulders and then stumbling, the sticks scattered to the earth. Frustrated he cries out to God –"Send me the angel of death and take me from this earth, for I am sick and full of sorrow." His prayer is answered and before him appears the Angel of Death asking, "You called for me?" "Yes, yes," stammered the frail man, "Could you help me gather these sticks?" However frustrating our lot, health and life are sacred and worth struggling for. For a one-day child who is ill, the sages taught, the Sabbath may be violated. For a King David deceased it may not be desecrated." (Shabbat 15, b)

The values of theistic humanism incorporate both dimensions of divinity. Humanism without Divinity retains its commendable optimism and its belief in the transformative powers of human persons. But optimism is not hope. The distinction is important and one that is made by Christopher Lasch. Optimism presumes the automatic or inevitable progress in life, the sure victory of goodness. Unlike optimism, hope is aware of the moral regressions in history and life's tragic dimension. Hope is not optimism that has evolution

automatically on its side. Hope is more like the religious virtue of "Emunah," what Erik Ericson called "the favorable ratio of basic trust over distrust." There are unknown and unknowable aspects of reality that cannot be ignored. How is trust to respond to the unknowable? The Talmud states that forty-nine doors of understanding out of fifty were opened to Moses. Someone asked "How could Moses continue without the fiftieth door?" He was answered, "Seeing that it was closed to him, Moses substituted faith." Theistic humanism balances God---Elohim with Lord---Adonai. Both are encounters in the dialectic between acceptance and transformation.

IS THERE GOD WITHOUT HUMAN BEINGS?

The class asked other questions. One of the more persistent ones had to do with whether God or godliness could be said to exist without human beings. Since I had emphasized the human awareness of godly qualities they wanted to know whether there is God without man? In attempting the answer, I had them turn to one of the major prayers in the liturgy of the Day of Atonement. That prayer reads:

*"For we are Thy people and Thou our God.
We are Thy children and Thou our Father.
We are Thy servants and Thou our Master.
We are Thy congregation and Thou our Portion.
We are Thine inheritance and Thou our Lot.
We are Thy flock and Thou our Shepherd.
We are Thy vineyard and Thou our Keeper.
We are Thy work and Thou our Creator.
We are Thy faithful and Thou our Beloved.
We are Thy loyal ones and Thou our Lord.
We are Thy subjects and Thou our King.
We are Thy devoted people and Thou our exalted God."*

The prayer expresses a unique correlation between God and human beings. Can there be parents without children, teachers without students, a shepherd -without sheep, or a king without subjects? A former teacher who once had students surely exists as a person, but is not presently a teacher. Without owning or being hired for the care of sheep a person may exist but not as a shepherd. Without subjects, a deposed king exists as a person, but not functionally as a king. They may all be former teachers, shepherds and kings but not now. Equally, Elohim---God without human beings exists but not as Adonai---Lord. The covenant expresses the interdependent correlation of God and people as expressed in the Biblical verse (Exodus 6:7) "And I will take you to me for a people and I will be to you a God: and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who brings you out from the land of Egypt." God as Elohim exists without man or people. Had chapter 1 of Genesis omitted the creation of the human being, God would remain Elohim, but not as Adonai. For Adonai---Lord is a relational concept and one inextricably bound to human beings. Only when God enters into relation with Adonai is the name Lord God introduced. (Genesis 2:5)

In the mystic tradition of the Zohar, before creation God was unknown and unknowable. Only after creation did He reveal Himself to the human being, make known His attributes and His name Adonai---Lord. Like most partnerships, that between God and the human person is frequently strained. But the divine-human interdependence is crucial for both. In a daring formulation, one of the Hasidic masters maintained that the human person and God are each only a half-finished form. Rabbi Baer of Mezritch boldly explained the verse in Numbers 10: 2 "make thee two trumpets of silver, of a whole piece shalt thou make them." The Hebrew word for trumpets "hatzetzzerot" he took as two words "hatze-tzurot", halves of forms. God and

the human being are incomplete. God without man is not Lord of the earth. Man without God is not fully human but only a biological entity when together the two form a true unity. In the union, neither identity is reduced, both are fulfilled.



CHAPTER VII

rites of passage to spirituality

"We are instructed by words and educated by our eyes"

—Carl Burckhardt

We have thus far dealt with theological questions and answers. But religion is not theology alone. Religion is a matter of belonging and behaving as well as believing. It envelopes feelings, sentiments, obedience, loyalties, the celebration of the sacred, the joys of ritual choreography, hand and heart. Pascal was right. "The heart has reasons which reason does not understand." The difficulty with the aphorism is that it sets emotion against reason and presents false options e.g. "is Judaism a religion of the head or a religion of the heart?" "What is really significant in tradition—ritual observance or ethical behavior?" "Which is more important—obedience to the mandates of ritual behavior or understanding the rationale for observance?" In the case of observance, dichotomizing thinking isolates rituals from rationale. Pascal was only half right. The head too has its reasons that the heart does not understand. There is a passion in knowing and an ecstasy in understanding that affect the emotional life of the believer. The Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, according to one rabbinic reading, are two different names for the same Edenic.

RITUAL RATIONALE

There is a rigorous religious view that suspects offering rationale for ritual observance. According to it, giving reasons for observing "mitzvot" only sows the seeds of apostasy. The educational philosophy of such a theology of observance limits instruction to the "how," "where," and "when" of practice.

Quite deliberately it avoids "what for" rationale. A classic argument against offering reasons for obeying the law is found in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 21b). One of the sages wonders why the reasons for the commandments of the law are not revealed in the Bible. Another Rabbi explains that violations of the law would result from revelations of rationale. He cites as evidence a presumed incident in King Solomon's life. Solomon, the epitome of wisdom, knew the reasons why the biblical injunctions against a king multiplying wives and acquiring horses were prohibited. (Deuteronomy 17:16-17) The stated reasons for the prohibitions were to prevent the king from being enticed by alien persons and foreign ways and thus turning from the God of Israel. The biblically revealed reasons for the proscriptions convinced Solomon that he could circumscribe the law with impunity. He acquired wives and horses but stumbled and fell. The tradition concludes from such incidents that it is preferable to observe the laws because they are commanded by God than to observe them on the basis of one's own reasons. (Kiddushin 31A) Observance may not be justified by logic or ethics or by any external rationale. Obedience to the Commanding voice is the one and only trustworthy reason to follow the law. All other rationale, psychological, sociological, philosophical, ethical, are not only speculative but precarious. For should the rationale for the divine commandment prove faulty, the ground beneath it would collapse and with it the practice of observance as well.

RITUAL PEDAGOGY

The theology of obedience sustains a behavioristic psychology. It argues that people believe what they do more than they do what they believe; and that people feel what they do more than they do what they

feel. Believing and feeling follow upon behaving. From the time of the revelation at Sinai the response "we shall do" has ideally preceded "we shall hear". To reverse the order may move the head and heart but not the hand.

The emphasis on the priority of ritual practice avoids the over intellectualization that substitutes knowledge by description for knowledge by acquaintance. Knowing is not doing. Theory frequently ends in "absolutism," in the talk about observance—the gap between theory and practice of ritual remains. To fill that gap behavior should be taught independent of rationale.

THE THEOLOGY OF OBEDIENCE

But it is the very severance of ritual from rationale that lends credence to the charge of the mechanical character of ritual and to its denigration and non-observance. The conventional religious paradigm is patterned on the creditor-debtor model. Ritual is like a debt to be "prayed off". Doing "the rite thing" for the creditor needs have little spiritual value for the debtor. Within the tradition itself a wariness towards ritual behaviorism is evident. Contemporary complaints about the boredom and routinization of ritual have their roots in the prophetic tradition. The prophet Isaiah speaking in God's name warns, "Because that people has approached Me with its mouth and honored Me with its lips but has kept its heart far from Me and its worship of Me has been a commandment of men learned by rote, truly I shall further baffle that people with bafflement upon bafflement; and the wisdom of the wise shall fail and the prudent shall perish." (Isaiah 29:13,14) Despite the unhappiness with perfunctory performance, the arguments against offering rationale insist that once the alleged reason for observance falters, the duty to observe collapses, Consequently the one unflinching motive for observance

is obedience to the Divine commander, That contention however ignores the contemporary religious crisis that rejects the commander-subject paradigm. And if all ritual observance is predicated on belief in the commander, once that faith foundation is shaken, the entire edifice of observances crumbles, We contend to the contrary that the viability of observance is better assured by the versatility of rationale. The ritual is an inherited text that is kept alive by continual commentaries on its meaning. The text of ritual is enhanced by the discovery of new meanings for its practice. Should one rationale fail, another is offered to infuse relevance. Therein lies the creativity, vitality and adaptability of a living people. The history of ritual offers ample testimony to the spiritual genius of the people who continue to uncover the layers of meaning in the observance. The multiplicity of different Passover Haggadoth, for example, has enhanced the Passover celebration and enlarged the circle of Jews around the Seder table. The body of ritual may not change but the spirit of the rationale changes with the different stages in a peoples' life.

The Passover Haggadah after the Holocaust and after the establishment of the Jewish state has brought with it new rationale for old observance. In our view ritual and rationale, practice and meaning belong together much as the phylacteries bind the heart, soul, mind and hand of the human spirit. Obedience to the commander, as the exclusive rationale for acting out his orders, as we have seen in an earlier chapter, raises serious ethical questions about the place of conscience in revelation. Obedience theology raises equally serious spiritual questions about the meaning of ritual and its effect upon the character of the observant. In a closed society, whether imposed by others or self-imposed, the commanding voice ordains. In an open society, the teaching voice must persuade. Non-compliance in a closed society ostracizes. In an open society, the punitive powers for non-

observance are non-existent. Theology that may be totally neglected in authoritarian societies becomes far more essential in a voluntaristic society. Absent the belief in a Divine commander whose prescriptive and proscriptive are written in a sacred manual and executed by His officers, laws and practices depend on rationale to motivate performance. Why, other than the fact that it is thus written, am I to observe this rite in this manner? With the rejection of the will to obedience to the commanding voice, arguments drawing upon resources of tradition and innovation and the needs of a people are needed to strengthen its liturgical and ritual life. The yearning for "spirituality" as opposed to "religion" may reflect the repudiation of the theology of obedience and a thirst for a theology of persuasion.

THE RITUAL CIRCLES OF GODLINESS

Early on in teaching my classes, I suggested that the students draw their mental picture of God. Most drew a vertical, two-tiered diagram with God "above" and nature and human beings "below." After proposing our own inversion of religious beliefs, described in the previous chapter, members of the class challenged me to draw my picture of Godliness. Where in my mental map were the verbs and adjectives of Godliness to be located? Where are the arenas where the manifestation of Godliness may be experienced, identified and elevated for veneration and imitation? Drew on the blackboard a map of orientation. The drawing of Godliness rationalization, single-tiered in the shape of open, overlapping and expanding concentric circles.

Self Family Community Humanity

The diagrammatic depiction of godliness would be correlated with the circles of life passages and the rites of identity.

WHERE IS GODLINESS?

Why had the circle of godliness been left out? I explained that godliness was not found in a closed, discrete circle. Godliness is not isolable, a separate time or place to be reached independent of the other circles. Godliness is not depicted as an isolated sphere because it does not take place outside the other domains of relationship. Godliness is the circle of circles, the relation of relationships, the identity of identities. To make the point clearer I offered an analogy. I drew a diagram of the "spirit of the synagogue". The Synagogue was drawn as multiple distinct circles of congregants, rabbis, cantors, choir, the sanctuary, the Ark of Holiness, the prayer book and bibles, the social hall, classes in the school, officers of the Board, past members, etc. But where in all these discrete circles was the "spirit of the Synagogue"? It was not drawn, not because the "spirit" is not real but because the "spirit" is qualitatively different from the other circles represented. "The spirit of the synagogue" is found within, between and beyond the circles of relationship that constitute the Synagogue. The "spirit" is not like the books or arks or benches or eternal light or worshipper of the synagogue. Godliness is not a locale that can be reached by skipping over any of the other circles of relationship. The circles of relationship are interdependent. There are no short cuts to godliness. Godliness hovers over the deep of relationships.

THE ENLARGING SELF

Why is the self-drawn as the innermost circle? However we may try, we cannot jump out of the skin of our individual selves. Whatever voices we may hear or texts we may see or experiences we may feel are all filtered through

our human selves. If we are spiritual beings we are humanly spiritual beings. I know of no other circle than the self that remains so constant a referent in my relationships with the world. While we begin with the self we do not end with the self. The self grows as it enters the different circles of relationship which are sacrificed in the rites of passage. The self is the first not the last circle in the journey towards godliness. Within the tradition, there are far-reaching claims that in descending into the depths of one's own self we wander through all the dimensions of the world. Gershom Scholem, the major authority on Jewish mysticism, explains that the mystic in his own self "finally lifts the barriers which separate one sphere from the other" and therein transcends the limits of natural existence. "Without, as it were stepping beyond himself, he discovers that God is all in all." Jewish mysticism thus became an instrument of psychological analysis and self knowledge.

In more naturalistic terms, the enlarging self is a sacred vehicle for the discovery of godliness. When asked why the Torah was given in the wilderness, one of the late rabbinic commentaries asserts that the wilderness was chosen to teach us that "if a person does not search himself as a wilderness, he will not understand the words of the Torah." (Pesikta de Rav Kahanah 12:20) The philosopher Abraham Heschel once asked, "Unless God is as real as my self how can I pray?" I in turn ask how real then is my self? Who am I as a self? The diagram of godliness is a map of orientation that locates the coordinates of my real identity. In religious thinking what is real about me is defined by the divine image in whose likeness I was formed. The reality of my self is mirrored in the image of "Elohuth" or godliness. That image serves as the standard of reality. In classical theology God is the most real, "ens realissimum." In my relationship to the divine image I become aware of the likeness of my self to God. "It was with a special love that it was made

known to the children of God that they were created in God's image" (Ahoth 3: 18). When I am true to the image of godliness I am real. When I am false to that image I am inauthentic, less than real.

The image of godliness is no icon. It is not to be treated as an object or subject. It is found only in relationship. Godliness refers to the spirit in relationships in the manner analogous to our discussion of "the spirit of the synagogue". My identity as a self is revealed in my relationship with others. "Who am I?" is short hand for "Whose am I?" Upon whom can we trust and depend to sustain and nurture our spiritual reality? We find confirmation of our identity in relationships, particularly in moments of transition from one stage of developing self to another. Religion provides us with rites of passage that sacralize our unfolding identity. The rites of passage that punctuate the rhythm of our lives are not isolated gestures detached from interpretive rationale. As we will see passages properly celebrated in rites are accompanied by myths and legends and explanations that transmit spiritual meaning.

rites of passage

1. THE MYTH AND SPIRITUALITY OF MARRIAGE

The first philosophical comment in the Bible attributed to the Lord God declares, "It is not good for the human being to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). In the Garden of Eden, Adam need not labor with the sweat of his brow nor till the soil, clearing it of thorns and thistles. There is no enmity between him and the beasts of the forest. Adam lacks nothing except an other. Not any other, not the other of cattle nor the fowl of the air nor the beasts of the field (Genesis 2: 20) but an other to whom he can say thou. Another like himself who is bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh and spirit of his spirit. Such an other

like himself is created by God whom Adam names woman "ishah." (Genesis 2:23) Not coincidentally, only after naming her "woman" (ishah) is Adam himself called "man" (ish). It is through the human other that Adam achieves the status of humanity.

In union there is separation. As in every passage from one stage of identity to another, there is in marriage the twin process of separation and attachment. "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife so that they become as one flesh" (Genesis 2:26). A new identity is formed which necessitates a break with an other identity. Both son and daughter are to leave their parents to shape their enlarged identities. The husband is not the father nor the wife the mother. The rites of marriage dramatize the transition into new identities and new loyalties. The syntax of relationship is transformed from "I, me and mine" to "we, us and ours." Communion between I and Thou, whether between bride and groom or God and self, is not a merger that blurs the individual integrity of each. Such absorption of self and other denies all possibility of genuine dialogue. As one of the nineteenth century religious masters playfully and 'concisely expressed this crucial insight, "If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you. But if I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then I am not I and you are not you."

A. THE MYTH OF THE ANDROGYNOUS

Out of the biblical account of the creation of Eve, elaborate myths of ancient wisdom emerged. One such legend notes the grammatical oddness of the biblical text. "In the image of God created He him; male and female created He them." (Genesis 1:27) How are we to account for the gender switch from "him" to "them"? Rabbinic imagination portrays the first human

being, Adam, as an androgynous male and female within one undifferentiated self. The hermaphrodite is self sufficient. All is within it, still Adam despairs of loneliness. The Lord God splits the bisexual facade separating the male and female parts. The popular idiom "my better half" derives from this myth. The myth teaches us about identities and relationships. We are born incomplete and in search of wholeness. Love is not the incestuous embrace of the self. It requires another who is not the extension of one's own self, an appendage of one's ego, an ear into which one may shout one's own ambitions, fears, fantasies, angers. Love is endangered by absorption. The separation symbolized by the mythic splitting of the facade emphasizes the uniqueness of the marital partners. It asks for distance in togetherness.

Marriage is a paradigm of human and divine co-existence. Within the tradition, love and marriage are major metaphors of spiritual relationships. In Hebrew, the word for love is "ahavah" and since every letter has its numerical equivalent, the sum total of "ahavah" is 13. Twice 13 is 26 which in alphabetic form makes up the name of *YHWH*, the Lord. From this equivalence, one commentator observes, that whenever two people love each other with all their heart, soul and might, there God resides. Godliness dwells between us.

As in love, Godliness is not found in the surrender of the self to the other. It is experienced in interdependence between friends and lovers, between self and community, between particular community and humanity, between self and spirituality. "If you would believe in God, love."

B. MARRIAGE, CREATION AND REDEMPTION

At the end of the wedding ceremony the bridegroom is asked to break a glass; an odd gesture at a ceremony whose benedictions give praise to

God's creation and His creation of mirth and exultation, pleasure and delight. It is, not coincidentally, the only rite of passage that contains a blessing for the creation of joy. I relate the shattering of the glass with the creation story as conceived by the sixteenth century mystic, Isaac Luria. For him, creation was not a consequence of God's expansiveness but of His self-contraction. The universe filled with divinity left no space for human beings and their fallibility. To grant human beings the joys of creativity and free choice God of His own withdrew into Himself. Again, separation is indispensable for authentic relationship.

But since a universe without God cannot sustain itself, God sent out a light of splendor to warm and enlighten the world. The world vessel could not contain the fire of God. It cracked and the sparks of divinity escaped to be scattered throughout the world and stubbornly lodged in husks. The sparks remain in the dark crevices of the universe waiting to be redeemed from captivity by God's co-creator, the descendants of Adam and Eve.

The glass shattered by the groom signifies the fragmented world, the brokenness of the human condition. The bride and groom who share the gift of love pledge not to forget the destruction of the temple, the ruins of Jerusalem. They are urged not to hoard their talent for compassion and righteousness for themselves alone but to enter the world, to make whole that which is divided, and bind the bounds of humanity.

C. THE MIXING OF THE CUPS

A ritual of some two millennia instructs bride and groom to each hold their own cup of wine. They pour a portion of their wine into an empty cup, representing the vessel of the world devoid of love. The mixing of the wine

dramatizes the co-mingling of their lives, their strength in each other. No one knows where his or her contribution of wine begins or ends.

Marriage is a consequence of choice, a conversion without loss of identity. "Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, your God, my God. Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. Thus and more may the Lord do to me, if anything but death parts me from you."

D. BIRTH AND COVENANT

The biblical verse that immediately follows immediately on the report of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and includes the prohibition of their eating from the Tree of Life states: "And the man knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain and said 'I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.'" (Genesis 4: 1) Denied immortality, Adam and Eve give birth to a child, their blood and flesh bond with the future. Kept away from the tree of life they are consoled with this-worldly immortality of a child. They will not murmur in narcissistic indifference "After us the deluge" for after the deluge they will be present in the child.

The first imperative of the first human beings is to multiply and fructify and fill the earth. Bearing a child carries cosmic significance. God "created the world not in vain. He formed it to be inhabited" (Isaiah 45:18) with the birth of a child the identity of the self enters community.

Who is this infant who is born and into what circle is the infant born? In existential dread Blaise Pascal cried out "Cast into the immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant and which know me not, I am frightened." In the Jewish tradition the child is neither ignored nor ignorant. A series of rabbinic legends

imagine that the unborn soul is provided with angels who teach the soul the entire Torah. Shown heaven and earth, the consequences of good and bad behavior, the soul pleads with God not to enter the world. "I am well pleased with the world in which I have been living since the day on which Thou didst call me unto being. Why dost Thou now desire to have me enter this impure sperm, I who am holy and pure and part of Thy glory?" God consoles the soul. "The world which I shall cause thee to enter is better than the world in which thou hast lived hitherto and when I created thee, it was only for this purpose." The infant enters the world pure of body and of spirit, uncontaminated by any stain of original sin.

Before birth, the angel strikes the babe on the lip (which is said to explain the odd indentation on the upper lip of humans). With that blow the infant forgets all he has learned from the time that the soul was instructed. The infant is born incomplete but not totally ignorant. There is in the memory of the soul a latent wisdom that will be released through living. The infant who suffers celestial amnesia is not ignored on earth. The infant is born into a family that at the covenant rite pledges to enter the infant in the study of Torah, the nuptial canopy and the practice of good deeds. From birth, the infant enters the promised environment for his spiritual identity. When the infant is brought into the room where the covenant ritual is to take place, all the adults present rise as a gesture of respect for a human being. "Blessed be the one who arrives." A rabbinic statement expresses the spiritual humanism that informs the ceremony. "Wherever you see the footprints of human beings God stands before you. Wherever a human being walks abroad, he is preceded by a company of angels calling out, 'Make way for the image of God.'"

E. THE EIGHTH DAY

The child is no stranger to the world that is better than the one from which he has come. Moreover, the child is to make of this world an even better one than he has found. The male child is covenanted through the circumcision of the flesh, the procreative organ, and quite specifically on the eighth day of his existence. Parallel covenant themes and ceremonies in our times are celebrated for the female infant.

The eighth day is legally and symbolically significant. Should the eighth day fall on a Jewish festival or on the Sabbath, the circumcision covenant must nevertheless take place. On the eighth day the infant has lived through a Sabbath. The child has lived through seven days of creation and as such is no alien figure thrown into a hostile world. The child belongs to this world and on the eighth day when the child is covenanted to God he/she becomes more than a part of nature. He/she is co-creator and co-responsible with God in the vocation of all human beings, to repair the world. The child is born into a family of purpose. All things created in the first six days require further correction for all things in the world are incomplete e.g. mustard seed and vetches need sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and the human being needs correction. The act of circumcision is taken by some sages to symbolize the need for the improvement of the self. There is something essential to be done with this unfinished world by human beings. Other higher mammals are more completed in the fetal stage than are human beings. They enter the world with highly specialized drives and instinctual structures. But humans, unfinished at birth, must create their world, not out of nothing but out of the something given them at birth. More than the other mammals,

humans are dependent on the environment and themselves for repair and growth.

F. NAMING

The child enters the world from a world of benediction into a world of benediction. When the child is brought into the room for the purpose of the circumcision-covenant, all the adults present rise to declare aloud "May he who comes be blessed." The child is to be respected. The child comes with no maledictions attached to his nature. Not that it is expected that the child will not sin for it is understood "that there is no one good human being upon earth who does good and does not sin" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). If the child will sin it will not be because of some inherited flaw within but because of the natural vulnerability in its humanity. Children sin not because they are born sinners but because, being human, they are likely to transgress. The nature of that sin is significant. The sin is not a supernatural flaw that can be corrected only by supernatural intervention. What is to be repaired can be done only through the deed and mind of the self. No intermediary can be called upon to do that work. No one sins for the child and no one can expiate the transgressions of the child of God.

G. THE SELF AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

The infant is born into the circle of family that assigns him/her a name. The name the child is given carries along with his/her own first name the first names of his/her father and mother. The name is a dream, a hope and a mark of spiritual identity.

The infant is born into the family and into the circle of community. Whenever possible, a "minyan" of ten persons, the nucleus of community is

present at the induction. Such a quorum is required for all acts of sanctification. Communion requires community. The boundaries of the self do not end at the epidermis of the skin. The severed umbilical cord does not detach the fetus from its communal placenta. At birth the child belongs. Not even the absence of circumcision nullifies the connection with the community. Not even an act of conversion into another faith obliterates the irreversible identity of a covenant. So powerful is the circle of identity that a Jew however he may transgress remains a Jew in the eyes of the community.

Should the father for whatever reason, even if the reason is ideological, fail to have the child circumcised, the obligation to enter the child into the covenant belongs to the community. "Though my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will take me in" (Psalm 27). Should the infant be fatherless it is again the community that embraces the child and offers this prayer "Thou, God of all flesh, Father of orphans. Be thou .a father unto him and he will be a son unto Thee. May his entering into the covenant be a comfort and solace to his mother and all his family."

H. LIFE AFFIRMATION

Godliness is for the sake of life. However important it is for the child to be circumcised on .the eighth day, even if the eighth day coincides with the Day of Atonement, there is one marked exception. If the infant is ailing the circumcision must be delayed until the child recovers. That ritual law reflects the tradition that is based on the sanctity of life. "You shall therefore keep My statutes and Mine ordinances which if a man do he shall live by them, I am the Lord." The rabbis emphasized that the statutes and ordinances are to be lived by and not to die by.

2. BAR/BAT MITZVAH AND THEIR PARENTS

The circles of identity remain open. To leave father and mother in order to cling to another is not to end our filial relationships with parents. The open circles mean that the character of identity of the self is expanded and in that sense its identity is altered. All the rites share the wisdom that passage means to let go of one ring so as to grasp hold of another.

There is consequently an ambivalence of feeling in the celebrant and in the other members of the family. Bar/Bat Mitzvah sacralizes the new spiritual identity of the adolescent. Both the child and the parent need to voluntarily let go of each other in order to find other attachments. Standing on the threshold of adulthood, the adolescent lets go of something of the security of dependence. To be a Bar/Bat Mitzvah is to become a person now subject to moral and legal imperatives. This is clear from the custom of having the father pronounce a benediction before some congregations after the child completes the benediction over the Torah. The father recites "Praised be he who has released me from the responsibility of this one." The child is now accountable and henceforth is counted in the "minyan" that constitutes community. According to a rabbinic insight the "yetzer tov" or good inclination is developed on the thirteenth year of a child's existence (Abot D'rabbi Nathan 16:3). Before the thirteenth year the libido prevailed. On the thirteenth year conscience is born, with that birth the parents must let go. Such a release is an act of courage and wisdom. The parent must step back a little so as to allow the adolescent to step forward. The Bar/Bat Mitzvah at the Synagogue service stands on his/her two feet to lead the congregation in prayer and the Torah without parental support. The first of the blessings on the occasion of the child's birth—study of Torah, marital

canopy, practices of good deeds has been publicly fulfilled. The induction of the child into maturity is exhibited in the mastery of the biblical text.

The reins of the family circle are somewhat loosened. Knowledgeable parents understand that at such a time of transition the family circle must release the restraining tether. The passage encourages the mutual cutting of incestuous ties. It is not good to be alone; but it is not good to deny the adolescent the opportunity for aloneness.

When parents live for and through their children they not only violate their own growth but that of their children. As with the union of husband and wife, here too love requires distance.

A. PARENTAL NARCISSISM

Spousal narcissism threatens to turn the marital partner into a proud possession of the other self. Parental narcissism threatens to turn the child into a performing "naches" producing commodity, more an extension of the ambitions of parents than a uniquely inviolable self. The neo-orthodox rabbi-philosopher, Samson Raphael Hirsh in the mid-eighteenth century addressed parents with an inspired piece of counsel. "If you regard the daughter entrusted to you and the son entrusted to you as sacred charges whom you should bring up not for yourself but for God so that they may become a worthy daughter in Israel or a worthy son in Israel—if you allow this thought to dominate your whole treatment of your children—their upbringing, their protection in body, in heart and in mind, their education, their vocational training, their complete equipment for their future living—then you will achieve God's blessing."

"But if you wave on your children 'they are mine' and where you should behold them as human and in addition Jewish offspring, you see instead your daughter as a future housewife or businesswoman or as an attractive beauty and wit or brilliant in her knowledge, as one who should be a source of support and joy and honor for you—or, especially in the case of your son, instead of educating him for the one all-embracing purpose connoted in the designation 'human and Israelite', you seek only a mercenary dividend in your efforts for him and bear in mind only the designations: businessman, craftsman, artist, scholar—and you allow all the sublime that is connoted by the term 'human and Israelite' to be superseded by commercial terms—then please do not speak of heavenly blessings of children. . . ."

B. WHO OWNS THE CHILD?

The rites of passage that enable the self to break out of its insularly narcissism reveal a new understanding of identity. In marriage we have seen how the "I" recognizes the insufficiency of its self prepossession and the discovery of the "thou". In birth there is the discovery of the "we" of the community; in confirmation parental awareness of the uniqueness of the adolescent self.

Who owns the child? In the "pidyon haben," a rite that takes place on the 31st day after the birth of the first born, but one that spiritually applies to all human births, the child is redeemed from service in the temple. Behind that ritual of redemption is the pervasive notion in the tradition that human beings do not own anything. They own neither land nor cattle nor beasts nor spouse nor child nor self. The child is not ours. The child is not created in our image to be shaped and formed in accordance with our ambitions. The child is created in God's image and therein lies the child's reality, identity and

worth. This principle underlies the rites of Bar/Bat Mitzvah. Parents are not owners but custodians of life who must respect the divine image in their children who are created with God's breath into the nostrils of the child. The child is no slave to our ambitions. There is no privately owned creation. "Sanctify unto Me all the first born, whatsoever opened the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine."

Persons are borrowers and not owners on this earth. No creation is a commodity to be done with as one wills including one's self. In warning against enslavement of others God declares, "For they are My servants that I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondsmen." (Leviticus 25:42) At the Bar/Bat Mitzvah parents accompany their children to the threshold of adulthood. Wise parents learn to internalize the insights of the poet Nissin Ezekiel, a Jewish poet in India:

*"Protect my children from my secret wish to make them
over in my image and illusions.
Let them move to the music that they love dissonant
perhaps to me."*

3. DEATH

If the rites of passage sacrifices identity, define our spiritual reality and locate our place in the circles of relationship, death threatens to destabilize and disorient the circle of the self. In which circle of relationship is the deceased self to be found? Where is the self of the mourner who feels so identified with the deceased? The mourner stands at the graveside, at the threshold between the living and the dead, between the world we know and the world from which no one has returned.

A. THE REALITY PRINCIPLE OF ACCEPTANCE

The tradition allows no camouflage of the grave, no flowers whose beauty and scent cover up the ugliness and odor of death. There are few positive attitudes towards death. The orthodox philosopher and legalist, J. B. Soloveitchik describes the tradition as abhorring death, decay and disillusion. Typically he writes that death defiles, "a corpse defiles; a grave defiles; a person who has been defiled by a corpse is defiled for seven days and is forbidden to eat any sacred offerings or enter the temple."

No one is more demeaned than the deceased. The corpse is a metaphor for enslavement, passiveness, helplessness. Addressing God, the man whose soul is full of troubles feels himself "counted with them that go down to the pit". A man of no strength he says "I am free among the dead, like the slain in the grave, whom Thou remembers no more and are cut off Thy hand." (Psalm 88)

The deceased is free from all commandments. There is nothing for him to do on earth. Symbolically the fringes of the prayer shawl that are placed over his shoulders are cut or removed. The deceased is no longer subject to imperatives. The deceased has no duties to be performed, nothing for which he may be praised or blamed. "The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." (Psalm 115) And all go down into silence.

Death insults the image of divinity and the artist who formed it in his likeness. The Pulitzer Prize winning poet Agnon suggests that the kaddish, the mourners' prayer sanctifying and magnifying God's name, is meant to console not the mourner but the Creator for whom the loss of a human being diminishes His dignity.

The mourner dies a little in the death of his relative. While the dead relatives lie before him, the mourner is exempt from the recitation of prayer, the donning of the phylacteries, the declaration of the "Shema," the pronouncement of God's oneness and the love of God, and from all precepts laid down in the Torah. (Berachoth 3:1) Like the tearing of the fringes on the prayer shawl of the deceased, the mourner tears his own clothing. According to some thinkers the tearing is a rite of resentment, an act of anger against the promise of life. The process of mourning involves separation and attachment, acceptance and transformation, a relationship to Elohim---God and Adonai---Lord. With all the anger surrounding death, respect for the dignity of the deceased is preserved. The casket remains closed throughout the funeral service out of respect to the memory of the person whose autonomy has been taken from him. In death, the person has become" in the rabbinic idiom, "one who is seen but who cannot see" (*nireh v'aino roeh*). To expose the corpse to an open casket and to allow those assembled to look at him comes too close to treating the person as an "it". The casket is closed in memory of an active, willing, free personality.

ACCEPTANCE

There are limits imposed upon mourning. Excess in mourning is not considered an act of piety. "Who mourns excessively for the deceased, mourns for another." (Moed Katan 27:2) Maimonides in his Laws Of Mourning (13:11) articulates the Jewish reality principle, the religious understanding of the way of the world. "One should not indulge in excessive grief over one's dead for it is said 'weep ye not for the dead neither bemoan him'" (Jeremiah 22:10). Maimonides interprets the prophet to mean that the mourner must

not weep too much for the deceased. -"For this is the way of the world and he who frets over the way of the world is foolish."

Working out the grief of the bereaved helps the mourner return to the land of the living. The mourner is not left alone. The mourner is surrounded by a minyan of 10 persons without whom the kaddish for his deceased cannot be recited. Holiness requires community. The mourner in his grief may wish to separate himself from the active community to mourn in isolation. But the community will not abandon him. At the funeral the community accompanies the mourners to the grave. The Hebrew term for funeral is "levaiah" which means accompaniment. The community escorts the bereaved and the deceased to the threshold of the interment. At home with his family the bereaved are guided back to life in the company of community. According to popular custom, at the end of the seven days of mourning the friends and neighbors of the mourner bid him rise from the low bench and walk with him around the neighborhood so that the mourner may reenter the circle of the community. The community is at the side of the mourner before, during and after the death. Seven days of mourning are juxtaposed to the seven days of creation. In death a part of creation has been lost. It requires seven days to restore the memory of the lost and to rebuild the life of the mourner.

There is consolation in the knowledge that those we love loved us and prayed for our health and happiness. To build and sing and love again is tribute to their deepest aspirations for us and ours.

HOLDING ON

What of the deceased? Is the deceased swallowed up into oblivion? What remains after the casket is lowered, the black ribbon torn, the earth

covered over the open grave? The deceased is kept in the circle of the living community through the art of memory. At the anniversary of death (Yahrzeit) and the Yizkor commemoration of those who have died, prayers of remembrance are recited within the household of the community.

Memory is an act of resurrection that raises from oblivion the gestures, words and deeds of the deceased. The deceased will not be forgotten. Memory sifts through the cremated ashes of the past to find the smoldering sparks of divinity and to raise them.

MEMORY

The relationship with the deceased is expressed in the daily prayer as God's "keeping faith with those who sleep in the dust". This promise of fidelity the worshipper shares by remembering. In remembering we testify to the immortality of influence of the deceased. The wisdom, character and goodness of those we mourn have yet to play an important role in our relationships. The writer Chesterton called tradition "the democracy of the dead" because it gives voice and votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. "All democrats," he wrote, "object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father." Those who are remembered created memories that continually register in the decisions of our lives.

CONSERVATION OF SPIRITUAL ENERGY

On the first day of his creation, Adam's world was a constant surprise. Everything was new to him, everything unexpected. At twilight Adam looked up and beheld the sinking of the sun beneath the horizons, the lengthening

of the shadows on the earth and the environment enveloped in darkness. Frightened, he was convinced that the world was coming to an end. In terror, he flung himself to the ground and his hands stretched out to touch two stones. Upon one stone was marked the word "afelah," darkness; on the other stone was marked the term "maveth," death. Adam rubbed the stones together and from the friction there was emitted a spark of light. He kindled a fire, made of it a torch and was comforted throughout the night. In the morning, the sun rose and there was light. Adam had discovered the way of the world. The legend is instructive. It reminds us of the capacity of the human spirit to make a torch-light out of darkness and death. The immortality of the deceased depends on the living as well as the dead. The dead have done whatever they could to perpetuate their immortality. In death they are dependent upon the living. The living, holding on while letting go, are charged to transform the spiritual energy of past lives into contemporary forces for good.

THE AFTERLIFE

What happens beyond the circles of the living? It is a matter of no small interest that questions of the afterlife are rarely asked by Jews though they are often inquired about by Christians. Despite the rich rabbinic literature, despite the daily prayers that refer to "calling the dead to eternal life" and the yizkor prayers that speak of paradise, in practice the afterlife does not function as a major Jewish belief. Rarely if ever does the eulogy delivered or the Holocaust theodicy presented call upon the resurrection of the dead or the disposition of the soul in heaven as comfort and explanation. This despite the many contacts between Jews and Christians.

A major orthodox thinker, J. B. Soloveitchik avers that Jewish law is not at all concerned with the transcendent world. Despite all the praises of the everlasting tranquility and eternity of the hereafter, the religious man of Halachah (Law) prefers the real world, by which he means "this world". For it is only here that the human being "possesses powers to change anything at all".

Jewish this worldliness is related to the activism of the Jewish tradition. The strong religious humanism in Judaism may be easily misunderstood by those who hold a vertical view of the divine-human relationship. This is interestingly illustrated by a folk story of a pious disciple who boasted to his rabbi that he had saved the soul of a beggar who had come to him for a meal. He gave him the meal but first required of him to recite the "minchah" afternoon prayer, then to wash his hands and recite the appropriate blessings and thereafter to recite the motzi prayer over the bread. The rabbi surprisingly showed his displeasure. "There are times, my son, when one must act as if there were no God in heaven or on earth." Hearing this, the disciple protested "Shoulder have acted as if there were no God, not have him pray nor wash nor recite benedictions?" The rabbi responded, "When a person is in dire need and comes to you for bread, you must act as if there were no God in the universe, as if there were no one on earth but you to help him." The disciple continued, "Have you then no responsibility for his soul?" The rabbi answered "No. You are to take care of your soul and his body, not vice-versa."

He was quoted by his disciples to have said, "An angel has a thousand tongues but no pocket with coins for the poor." The Jewish tradition speaks not of saving souls but of saving human lives. "He who saves a single life is

considered as if he has saved an entire world." Not conversion of the soul but sustenance of the body is the task in this worldly humanistic tradition.

Moshe Leib of Sasov once explained to his disciples why God created disbelief in this world. "Even atheism is needed so that we may not find excuses to allow the poor to starve by putting their demands off and counseling them to trust in God and in the joys of the world to come."

TWO WORLDS OR ONE

The five books of the Bible make no reference to the world to come, neither to resurrection nor to heaven or hell. These beliefs entered much later into the Jewish tradition. Yet, the yearnings of the soul for an afterlife found repeated expression in the Talmud and in the later traditions.

The injustice of this world, the suffering of good people, inspired belief in another world in which to live. The world to come is a protest against the status quo in which poverty, illness and wars crush the human body and soul. The world to come may be exploited by those who seek excuses to delay forever the tasks of lifting the fallen this day, but it may serve as well as a reminder that the world in which we live is incomplete, unfinished, unsatisfactory. We have therefore drawn the circles open. Whereas in Greek philosophy, perfection was depicted as a circle finite and closed, the Jew Philo was the first to have placed a higher value on the infinite. The after-life is directed towards the infinite openness of the future, towards the messianic hope.

The after-life need not be understood vertically as another place and another world. It may be horizontalized so that the vision of the world to come serves to energize people to create a better society within history and

in our times. Noteworthy is the fact that the mourners' kaddish prayer itself does not refer to another place, another world or another time but to the consecration of human energy here and now towards the sanctification of the powers of godliness. within the rabbinic tradition there is a determination to hold on to both worlds. "Better is one hour of repentance and good works in this world than the whole life of the world to come; and better is one hour of bliss in the world to come than the whole life of this world." (Ethics of The Fathers 4:17)

COMMUNITY: THE COMPANION THROUGH THE PASSAGES

An ancient legend of the Jews speaks of the creation of Adneh Sadeh, a "man of the mountains" whose features were that of a human being. Except that he was fastened to the ground by means of a navel string upon which his life depends. He is attached to his immediate environment and cannot wander far beyond the tether of his life support. Should the cord snap, the man of the mountains would die. In this he is different from the Adam of Genesis. The human Adam has no such limits. His umbilical cord is severed at birth freeing him to move, wander, change and grow. This freedom marks his humanity.

Freedom calls for separation and separation runs like a thread through the rites of the enlargement of the self. To move from one circle to another the human person expands his identity and his relationship to the world.

There is always some risk in entering another circle of relationship. The warmth and security of the more intimate circle is challenged by the extension of the self into a wider arena of relationship. One of the significant functions of the rites is to accompany the self through the thresholds of one orbit to the other. The "minyan" as an extended family of the self is the portable presence

throughout the stages of the identity of the self. Community is the constant referent in the benedictions of the rites of passage and in the prayers recited in the crises of individual sickness and dying. "May God have mercy upon you and send you a perfect healing among all the sick of Israel." "May God comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." When a death in the family occurs that coincides with the festivals of the community, the law maintains that the mourning period for the relatives is postponed. The joys of the community supersede the sorrows of the family. The family and the community are not in conflict because the immortality of the deceased is tied to the eternity of the community. As the sages wrote "The community does not die."

The circle of community helps overcome the temptations of familial selfishness, the phenomenon that the sociologist Edward Banfield identified as "a moral familism". The term refers to the closed family circle in which members live only for the family and owe nothing to those outside the family. In "familism" charity not only begins but ends at home. Moral obligations are circumscribed by the boundaries of the family and all who dwell without its borders are strangers. Community and its celebration of passages helps break through the shell of privatism that restricts the network of relationships to bloodlines. The rites of passage that sanctify our identity are not events that are done and away with. The covenant, the naming, the bar/bat mitzvah, the marriage are not left behind. The identities remain with us even as we enter into new stages and relationship. The distinctiveness of each of the circles of godliness must be preserved for the sake of the unifying wholeness of divinity. While each circle has its unique role, we must not live too much in anyone circle. It is true of all the circles of relationship. The chapter that follows deals specifically with the conflict between loyalty to

the circle of community and to that of humanity. It appears as a major obstacle in the way of Jewish identity and fidelity.



CHAPTER VIII

THE CIRCLES OF PARTICULARISM AND UNIVERSALISM: "EITHER A JEW OR A HUMAN BEING"

"The extended lines of relations meet in the Eternal Thou"

—Martin Buber

The transition from the circle of community to the circle of humanity is fraught with tensions. Circles may be drawn to include or to exclude the other. Do I in entering the circle of humanity leave my people behind, or does fidelity to my own require that I lock myself within the confines of parochialism? Does the leap into the wider periphery of the circle of humanity necessitate severance from the faith and fate of my particular community? Or does love for my community cool my humanitarian ardor? Which circle, community or humanity deserves a higher rung in the hierarchy of identities and relationship? The questions are crudely framed as either/or polarities. Is my essential identity that of a Jew or that of a human being?

THE CASE FOR PARTICULARISM

The loyalists of particularism suspect those who wander from the communal family into the circuit of humanity. They warn of the seductiveness of foreign cultures whose promises of Emancipation and Enlightenment end in the loss of identity. The allurements of humanism, internationalism and universalism conceal the forbidden bittersweet fruits which, tasted by a gullible people, lead to their expulsion from their native Garden of Eden. Much too late assimilationists may admit. . . they made me the keeper of the vineyards but my own vineyard have I not kept. . . . (Song of Songs 1:6)

The penalty for assimilation into universalism is double alienation. Stranded at the threshold of two circles, the assimilationists can neither accept the rootedness of their particular community nor feel accepted by the internationalist community. They constitute the marginal Jews forever in search of their authentic identity. Sooner or later the assimilationists melt into anonymity or form a negative community. They either disappear or are transformed into anti-anti-Semites.

The journalist Isaac Deutscher, himself a self-declared "non-Jewish Jew" can find no identity other than that which is thrust upon him by anti-Semitism. "If it is not race then what makes me a Jew? Religion? I am an atheist. Jewish nationalism? I am an internationalist? In neither sense am I therefore a Jew. I am, however, a Jew by force of my unconditional solidarity with the persecuted and exterminated. I am a Jew because I feel the Jewish tragedy as my own tragedy. . . Deutscher admits that. . . the greatest re-definer of Jewish identity has been Hitler."

Sidney Hook, the late professor of philosophy, confesses that he and many Jews like him were so enthralled by the promise of universalism that they came to regard the suffering of their own people as parochial sentiment in conflict with their grander idealism. "We were sensitive to the national aspirations of all other persecuted people, were positively empathetic with them. Yet when it came to our own kinsfolk, we lapsed into a proud universalism. We did not for a moment deny our Jewish origins but we disapproved of what we thought an excess of chauvinism."

Offering no such apology and far more strident in her defiant universalism Rosa Luxemburg, the international socialist of Jewish dissent, turns in anger on her fellow Jews. "Why do you persist in pestering me with

your peculiar judenschmerz? I feel more deeply for the wretches on the rubber plantations of Puto Maya and the negroes in Africa whose bodies are footballs for Europe's colonial exploitation."

Jewish particularists are sensitive to this sort of pseudo-universalism that borders on Jewish self hate. Surveying history, particularly after the Holocaust, they find the vision of universalism naive and dangerous for Jewish survival and uniqueness. They judge the world at large and what passes for western civilization to be corrupt and contaminating influences that must be kept at arm's distance. The proper antidote to assimilation and the loss of authentic identity is withdrawal into the confining circle of the particular community. A dramatic expression of this strategy of introspection is found in a Talmudic report. When one of the rabbinic sages expresses his admiration of the engineering feats and aesthetic contributions of the Romans, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai responds cynically. "All these structures were made for themselves. The market places are to put harlots in them, the bridges to levy tolls for them, the bath houses to pamper their bodies." Rabbi Shimon sees nothing praiseworthy in Roman civilization. He and his son Eleazar escape from that world into an isolated cave where for twelve years they lead a life of prayer and study. Once when they left the cave and came upon men plowing and sowing a field they exclaimed bitterly "People forsake life eternal for the business of temporal life." Aghast at the sight of what they take to be the misuse of time and energy they look with anger at society and whatever they looked at was immediately consumed by fire. Whereupon a heavenly voice cried out "Have you come to destroy my world? Get back to the cave." (T. Shabbat 33b)

Notwithstanding the divine rebuke of the cave mentality, a rising number of loyalists insist that to enter the circle of humanity is necessarily to slough off fidelity to the circle of the particular community. Universalists on their part, maintain that to be attached to one's own community is to betray their solidarity with the lot of humankind. Both sides err. Both sketch mutually exclusive circles oblivious to the overlapping interdependence of the circles. Their either/or mind-set shuts from view all mediating alternatives.

To drop the values and loyalties of one's particular community in order to enter the world community is foolhardy and unnecessary. An important passage from the rabbinic tradition (T. Sanhedrin 39b) distinguishes the self-annihilation of the community through subservient imitation of the Gentile world from the creative assimilation that enriches the particular community. The rabbis are disturbed by the apparent biblical contradictory instructions of God. In one passage cited from the book of Ezekiel, Israel is chastised for "not having followed the ordinances about you. (Ezekiel 5:7) Yet in another passage from the same book Israel is rebuked for "having followed the ordinances of the nations about you." (Ezekiel 11: 12) Rabbi Joshua Ben Levi is credited for resolving the apparent contradiction. He explains that the latter passage refers to Israel's passive absorption of the corrupt features of the nations about them. The former passage rebukes Israel for its failure to select the elements of wisdom and beauty of civilization at large for the good of its own community.

The transaction between the particular and the universal is not unlike the human assimilation of food that comes from sources outside ourselves and which we incorporate by a process of assimilation. The food is digested and absorbed to strengthen the organism. To decline such help from outside

the self is to condemn oneself to starvation. But when certain substances prove inimical to the growth and health of the organism, they should be rejected. To incorporate, for example, a religious ideology that repudiates the reason for existence. of Judaism and the uniqueness of the Jewish people e.g. Jews for Jesus, would be suicidal. The dynamic of transaction between the circles of relationship calls for the discriminating intelligence "to eat the date and throw the kernel away." The sages advised "Eat the nut and wash the mud and filth away from it."

The militant particularism that rejects the whole of western civilization is not merely provincial but in the process endangersthe creative viability of Judaism. The abuse of science and technology in Auschwitz and in Hiroshima do not justify the wholesale rejection of the positive contributions of civilization. What such perversions rightly teach is to be aware of the moral neutrality in all forms of energy and to filter through its own particular values the positive aspects of the culture at large. To reject science, the humanities and the arts because they are sometimes perverted to evil use is to curse the sun and the moon because of the idolaters who worshipped them.

PSEUDO UNIVERSALISM

Pseudo particularism cannot see the forest for the trees. Pseudo universalism cannot see the trees for the forest. Cut off from its particularistic roots, universalism loses the natural ground of its ethos. Universalism does not spring fully blown from the head of its own visions. Its values arise out of particular concrete relationships within the family and the community. It is natural to love one's own family more than the families of others, and the height of naivete to believe that eliminating the loyalty to one's own family will yield greater love for the families of the earth. To the contrary, the natural

sympathy toward one's own family and people prepares the ground for Cultivating generosity towards others, The philosopher Josiah Royce reminded pseudo universalists that when the spread of philanthropy and sympathy was "not founded upon a personal loyalty of the individual to his own family and to his personal duties" it became "notoriously a worthless abstraction."

To paraphrase George Santayana, to love humanity in general is as promising as the attempt "to speak in general without using any language in particular." The community, in this case Judaism, is the particular language out of which is formed a syntax that addresses humankind. The Bible originates from the needs and intuitions and revelations to a particular people. But its wisdom and ethics burst out of the private domain into the public domain of humanity. The Holocaust that devastated one third of the Jewish people is a uniquely Jewish tragedy, but its lessons are for all of humanity. "When a Jew is beaten down," Kafka wrote, "it is mankind that falls to the ground."

Martin Buber rejected the criticism of those universalists who urged him to liberate Hasidic teaching from its "confessional limitations" and to proclaim it as "an unfettered teaching of mankind" Buber retorted that in order for him to speak to the world what he had heard, he was not bound to step into the street. "I may remain standing in the door of my ancestral home: here too the word that it uttered does not go astray."

The God to whom Israel prays is "the sovereign of the universe" and its voice is not limited to Jewish ears alone. It is out of the intense and close relationship with a particular people that Jewish universalism sounded its resonant conviction. "I call heaven and earth to witness that whether it be

man or woman, slave or handmaiden, the Holy Spirit rests on each according to his deeds." (Tanna de be Eliyahu) That which is ennobling in the particular community enters the world of the universal.

The governing biblical imperative "to love thy neighbor as thyself" (Leviticus 19:18) implies that the love for others depends upon a proper love of oneself. It is a shallow altruism that disregards the strength derived from a healthy egoism. In the cultivation of altruism pragmatic wisdom does not turn from the values, intensity and concreteness of relationships in family, friends and community. To the pseudo universalists who would skip over the narrower circles so as to embrace humanity at large, the response of Ellie Wiesel is very much to the point. "If you try to start everywhere all at once you get no where, but if you start with a single person, someone near to me, a friend or a neighbor, then I can in turn come nearer to others."

Egoism and altruism, the self and others form interdependent circles. The point is finely illustrated by the folk story of the rabbi to whom a wealthy disciple came to boast of his abstemious way of life. The disciple told the rabbi that he deliberately denied himself fine meats and expensive wines and was content to live on bread and water alone. To his surprise and to the puzzlement of the other disciples the rabbi chastised him. "My son with all your wealth it is wrong for you to eat and drink bread and water. You must eat and drink with satisfaction and with joy that which you can afford." The rabbi later explained his dissatisfaction with the ways of the wealthy disciple. If this man treats himself so shabbily, imagine how he will respond to the beggar who comes to him hungry asking for food. He will think to himself "If I am content with bread and water, he should be content with eating rocks and sand." It is noteworthy that the Biblical tithing for the poor came only

after those who tithed rejoiced with "whatever thy soul desires, for oxen or for sheep or for wine or for strong drink." (Deuteronomy 14:26) Magnanimity does not stem from parsimony. Universalism does not derive from self abnegation.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE CIRCLES

All the circles of identity are to be held together. The bias which favors one circle and excludes others is the lure of idolatry. Every circle is susceptible to such isolated veneration.

The ideal of the unity of godliness directs us to hold in one grasp all the circles of identity in family, friendship, community, humanity and self. "The extended lines of relations meet in the eternal Thou" or, in our language, meet in the sacred center of godliness.

Held together, the circles correct the excesses of each. Without the concreteness of particular family and community, universalism readily turns into an abstraction embracing the wind, or into a thinly disguised imperialism: "there is one way for your salvation and it is ours." Without the larger view of universalism, loyalty to a particular community easily succumbs to the conceits of chauvinism. Without the circles of family and community and humanity, the self-shrivels into provincial egoism. Left alone, the outer circles of community and humanity intimidates the self to the point of suffocating the integrity of its individualism. "If individualism understands only a part of man, collectivism understands man only as a part." (Buber)

The struggle for monotheistic wholeness in our personal and collective lives entails overcoming the segregation of the circles. 'God's oneness is to be sought on all levels of the expanding circles. As God is one, seek to become one. In the philosophic\poetic expression of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook:

"There is one who sings the song of his own self, and in himself binds everything. Then there is one who sings the song of his people and cleaves with a tender love to Israel. And there is one whose spirit is in all worlds, and with all of them does he join in his song. The song of the self, the song of one's people, the song of man, the song of the world—they all merge within him continually. And this song, in its completeness and its fullness, rises to become the song of holiness." (Oroth ha-Kodesh, volume II, 1938, p. 458)

THE CALENDAR AND JEWISH IDENTITY

In the previous chapter, we treated the individual rites of passage from birth to death as moments in which our identity is sacrificed and the relationship with other beings are understood as opportunities to discover the attributes of Godliness. We now turn to the collective rites of passage of a people that highlight through its annual celebration of festivals and the commemoration of fasts, the values associated with its birth, adolescence, adulthood and its confrontation with persecution and death. The holy days are another important way to respond to the "where is godliness" question. Godliness is discovered in sacred time, when a people elevates inviolable moments from its collective history to be relived and interpreted.

ROSH HASHANA: JEWISH UNIVERSALISM

The New Year is observed with and within the Jewish community. It is a festival for, of and by the Jewish people. But the unique Jewish universalism in the Jewish New Year is ignored by those who draw too narrow a circle around its meaning.

Rosh Hashanah is not the birth of the Jewish people nor does it, as other religious calendars do, commemorate the birth of its founder. The

Jewish New Year marks the creation of the universe and the birth of Adam and Eve, the progenitors of humankind.

The language of the High Holiday prayers is particularist---universalist. Its liturgy does not begin and end with a particular community. The comprehensiveness of its universalism is unmistakable. "This day the world was called into being; this day all the creatures of the universe stand in judgment before thee as children or as servants. "Rosh Hashanah is the birthday of humankind. It addresses all of creation. 'On this day every creature stands in judgment and is recorded for life or for death. Who is not brought to account on this day?' In the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah the first covenant with Noah, the progenitor of humankind after the deluge is recalled. It cites God's remembrance of Noah "and every living creature and all the cattle that were with him in the ark."

The evidence of Jewish universalism is apparent in the arresting selection from the Bible for the first day of Rosh Hoshanah. The Torah selection read aloud to the Jewish congregation deals with Hagar, the Egyptian wife of Abraham and their son Ishmael. In that biblical episode the angel of God responds to Hagar's plea and protects her and her son both stranded in the wilderness. It is on the second day of Rosh Hashanah that a parallel story of the intervention of the angel of God on behalf of Isaac and Abraham is told. On the days that commemorate the birth of God's creation, the sages chose to remember both God's concern for Ishmael and Hagar and of Isaac and Abraham. The particular-universal nexus is made manifest in the twin readings of the Jewish New Year.

YOM KIPPUR: THE SELF AND THE WORLD

The same spirit of Jewish universalism is evident in the rabbinic tradition that chose the book of Jonah to be recited in the synagogue of the afternoon of Yom Kippur. Jonah epitomizes inauthentic particularism. He willfully turns away from delivering the message of Jewish universalism determined as he is not to preach to the non-Jews of Nineveh. What has a Jewish prophet to do with non-Jews? Jonah chose to burrow himself in the cave of the whale's body. For his narrowness of spirit, Jonah is chastised. His prophecy of doom against Nineveh is nullified out of respect for the repentance of its citizens. Jonah had not understood that Yahweh is the "God of heaven who made sea and dry land" (1:9), who rules the sea, commands the wind and reveals Himself in a foreign land. Jonah had chosen to forget that God's mercy is everywhere and over all His works. "And when God saw their works that they turned from their evil ways God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not." Jonah chose to deny the world redemptive character of Judaism. Jonah is not deemed an ideal prophet because while he the honor of Israel, he offended the honor of God. (Mechilta Bo) The ideal prophet is solicitous both for the honor of the Father (God) and of the son (Israel). Jonah chose to ignore Abraham's courageous contention with God on behalf of the non-Jews of Sodom and Gomorrah who were not of his kin or kith or faith. Out of misplaced loyalty to his people, he forgot that he was a child of Abraham who was promised from the start by God "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 12:3)

THE SHOFAR: PARTICULAR AND UNIVERSAL

The shofar or ram's horn is blown in the Synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and at the end of Yom Kippur. Natan Sharansky, the heroic Jewish refusnik, offers a pertinent interpretation of the sounding of the shofar. He notes that the ram's horn is narrow at one end and wide on the other. Nothing happens if you blow into the wide end. "But if you blow into the narrow end, the call of the shofar of the shofar rings loud and true."

The parable is particularly appropriate for Sharansky's biographical encounters. Active on behalf of the cause of Jewish immigration, he struggled as well for the rights of Pentecostals, Catholics, Ukrainians and Crimean Tartars. Sharansky came to realize in the prisons of the Soviet Union that there was no exclusive either/or choices between loyalty to his Jewish roots or to the ideals of universalism. "Only he who understands his own identity and has already become a free person can work effectively for the human rights of others." In retrospect he observed that helping other persecuted people became part of his own freedom only after he had returned to his Jewish roots. Either Jew or human being is a false and even pernicious choice.

THE SELF

Every festival contains multilayered relationships. The circle of the family, community, humanity are involved in the proper celebration of the festivals. It is the self however, that seems most to be eclipsed by these outer circles. The felt neglect of the self elicits from people raised in a society that extols individualism the complaints of religious irrelevance for the individual. Not coincidentally, inattention to the individual is one side of the same coin

that misses the universalism in Judaism. What is relevant to the individual in the Jew is most applicable to the "everyone" of universalism.

We must look for the individual in the feasts and festivals of the community. Few holy days place greater emphasis upon the self than does Yom Kippur. No group historical events are associated with its fast. Yom Kippur commemorates no splitting of the sea, wandering the desert seeking the shelter of the tabernacle, receiving the revelation of God at Sinai or celebrating a victory over the enemy: There are virtually no external ritual symbols upon which to rely e.g. *lulav*, *ethrog*, *succah*, *kiddush*, meals. On Yom Kippur, the individual cannot hide behind history or ritual or the skirts of community. The self is stripped bare of ceremonies and wears a white "*kittel*" reminiscent of the shroud of death. The self must confront its own mortality and its own transgressions. No one can sin for the self or expiate for the self or die for the self.

The litany of confessions of the self that are enumerated in the Yom Kippur liturgy do not deal with transgressions between God and the self or between community and the self. They concentrate on the relations between the individual and self. The transgressions listed do not deal with ritual violations or even of deeds that are subject to the judgments of the courts. The sins refer to self injury, to the abuse of the inner life beyond the reach of the law.

Judaism is incorrectly but frequently taught as a religion that is concerned solely with deeds and acts. But significantly the transgressions confessed to the Day of Atonement have to do with emotions, sensibilities, feelings, attitudes that are in the private domain of conscience. The injuries deal with hardening of the heart, anger, greed, causeless hatred, envy,

bragging. Maimonides for one, corrects the one-sided emphasis on ritual and ethical public behavior in his Laws Of Repentance (7:3), "Do not say one need only repent of sinful acts such as fornication, robbery, theft. Just as a person needs to repent of these sins involving acts, so persons need to repent of any evil dispositions that they may. Hot temper, hatred, jealousy, greediness, quarreling, scoffing, eager pursuit of wealth or honors, greediness in eating and so on. They are graver than sinful acts for when one is addicted to any such disposition, it is difficult to give them up. II The self and collective judgment of the Day of Atonement reach into all the circles of human relations.

PASSOVER: THE NUCLEUS OF EXTENDED FAMILY

Passover celebrates the birth of the Jewish family. It is observed in the home and one of its aims is to induct the child into the family. The family traces its spiritual identity back to its extended origins, to the tribes whose family tree are enumerated in the opening chapter of Exodus.

The Passover Haggadah or narration is the family album of the Jewish community. It focuses upon the initiation of the child into the world family of the Jewish people.

THE QUESTION

"On Passover", the author Israel Zangwill said, "Jews eat history." Around the seder table everyone partakes in the symbols and substance of the family meal, the old and the young, the wise and the less wise. Grandchild and grandparent taste the bitterness of slavery, the saltwater of the tears of oppression, the dry and hard bread of affliction. The narrative intends to transmit the shiver of history to the uninitiated. The history Jews eat gives rise

to inquiry. If not the child must be encouraged to ask. The very hierarchy of "four sons" or "four children" in the Haggadah places on the bottom of the list those children who cannot or will not ask. They must be encouraged to ask not simply as a way to gain information but as a ritual act of freedom. Slaves do not ask. Slaves lower their eyes, bite their lips and remain mute. The Passover ritual law has a philosophy of its own. It states that if there is no one around the *seder* table to ask the questions, neither children nor wife nor extended family nor friends, then the one who celebrates the Passover must ask himself the question. No one is too learned or too pious to be exempt from the inquiry that for children is part of the induction rites into the community of free persons. The answers to the four questions are obliquely given. The importance is not the answer but the 17 courage and dignity of asking the question.

THE PASSOVER CIRCLE OF HUMANITY

The Passover celebrated at home and in the synagogue is mindful of the world community. The opening sentence of the Hagaddah opens the door of the home to all people. "Let all who hunger come and eat. Let all who are in need come for the Passover." The first wording of the invitation, according to the commentary of Rabbi Jacob Emden, is directed to non-Jews, to those "who are hungry for bread." The second half is for Jews who need to celebrate the Passover. Emden's comment is based on the Talmudic obligation to feed both the poor of the Jews and of the Gentiles, to visit the sick of both, to bury the deceased of both and to comfort the bereaved of both. (T. J. Demai 4:6)

The people who are enjoined to recall their suffering in Egypt are biblically mandated "You shall not abhor an Egyptian because you were a

stranger in his land." (Deuteronomy 23:8) Why not abhor those who has ruled with such a fierce hand? The rabbinic commentator, Rashi, among others explains that we are to remember that it was Egypt that opened its land to the children of Israel when there was famine in the land of Canaan.

Evil must be remembered but goodness must not be forgotten. Therefore, there should be a place for mentioning Shifra and Puah, the two Egyptian midwives who defied Pharaoh's edict to drown the male children of Israel in the Nile. The daughter of Pharaoh must be remembered as one who violated her father's decree and reached out to save the infant Moses and to raise him, and thereby offer his model to the world community.

In the synagogue as well the ethos of Jewish universalism is pronounced during the six last days of Passover. While the Hallel psalms are normally recited on all the holidays, on the last days of Passover some are deliberately deleted. Who can sing of the idols who have mouths, ears, noses, hands, and feet but who can not speak, hear, inhale, touch or walk while the their worshippers drown in the sea (Psalm 115)? Who on these days coincident with the drowning of the Egyptians can praise God for his deliverance from our pursuing enemies while they met with such a tragic end (Psalm 116)? There is natural joy in the Passover victory but there is no gloating. When the angels in exultation praised God, the God of Israel and of the world silenced them "My children drown in the sea and you sing songs of praise?" The joy of victory is diminished and the wine from the cups is spilled because the means to victory tragically involved the death of God's children. There is something missing even in the midst of the joy and song and laughter around the table. The cup of Elijah stands untouched. A Hasidic rabbi introduced a ritual wherein the empty cup of Elijah is passed around

the table and every participant asked to contribute some wine into the empty cup. When the cup is returned to the one who is conducting the Seder, he proclaims aloud "Israel is not redeemed except through their own hands." Passover is not only to remember yesterday.

Both authentic particularists and authentic universalists must come to understand that Jewish universalism does not rise from alien sources but from native soil. Both would profit by reading again the origins of Jewish concern for God's creation. They would do well to read again the prophecy of Isaiah who declared in God's name "Blessed be Egypt my people and Assyria the work of my hands and Israel mine inheritance." The God of Israel and the God of the universe is one. The God who is concerned with the children of Israel is large enough to distribute His blessings to all the families of the earth.

SUKKOT: TO DWELL WITH PEOPLE

If on Passover Jews eat history, on Sukkoth they dance theology. Four different agricultural species are held together in hand, waved and shaken three times in all directions, east, south, west, north, up and down. The species include a *lulav* (palm branch, a myrtle, and a willow) along with an *ethrog* (citron). The verses from the book of Psalms which accompany the ordering of this waving read "Give thanks unto the Lord for He is good, for His kindness endures forever" and "We beseech thee O Lord save us." But according to the ritual tradition the waving is suspended at the mention of the name Lord. One does not point anywhere when the name of the Lord is mentioned. If God were pointed to "there", the other places of God would be excluded. God is not spatially located. A gesture of theological import is taught in ritual choreography.

Each of the species represents a different character of the human spirit. The aroma of each of these species refers to the fragrance of good deeds and the taste of these species refers to reason. The species are interpreted to typify the different virtues in human beings. There are people who like the *ethrog* possess both taste and aroma and are gifted with the power of knowledge and the practice of good deeds. There are persons who like the palm *lulav* bear fruit but have no aroma, are involved in the practice of goodness but not in learning. Persons who like the myrtle carry fragrance but bear no taste are ethically involved but neglectful of study. And there are those persons who like the willow lack both taste and aroma are poor in learning and in practice. Yet the willow is essential for the ritual act and in its absence the entire ritual act is unfulfilled. The ritual is instructive. It teaches the observant that to exclude the unlearned and the socially inactive is to diminish from the wholeness of the people. Holding the four species is a ritual of inclusion, a drama embracing the entire community. Waving the four species is a ceremony of wholeness, the ingathering of diverse talents. But the ideal of integration is not totalitarian. Its unity precludes grinding down differences in order to present a common substance. Wholeness as opposed to totalitarianism does not cast out the recalcitrant or excommunicate those whom some deem useless.

TWO TALES OF SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

Holidays come not only with rituals and prayers but also with stories and anecdotes, with legends and myths. They provide the melodies for the lyrics of the text. Rabbi Pinchos of Koretz, a scholar, and master of the Talmud, once prayed that no one would interrupt his studies or come to him with their troubles that robbed him of the time with his books. His prayer was granted

and he now had ample time for study. Before the festival of Sukkoth arrived Rabbi Pinchos sought help from his neighbors to build his Sukkah booth but his answered prayers for solitude and study kept all his neighbors away from him. He had the Sukkah built without the joy of community. On the evening that custom urges the dwellers in the Sukkoth to invite guests and friends to share a festive meal, no one from the rabbis village felt welcome to come. He ate and drank and prayed and studied alone. The rabbi then appealed to the patriarchs and the religious heroes of Judaism to come and join him as "honorary guests" who according to the tradition come to visit the hosts throughout the seven days. But on this festival no one would come. As Abraham explained "I do not enter the homes which are closed to my children." Rabbi Pinchos came to understand that in order to be a member of the people of the Book who are needed more than books. He therefore prayed that his early prayers should be nullified and that he should be interrupted in his study with people who come to him for counsel. The story expresses the importance of human relationship. It warns of the self who would come to God without relationship to God's children, and of the limits of study.

The story calls to mind another told generations later by a modern interpreter of Hasidim, Martin Buber. He recalled that in his early youth he had preferred to have dealings with books rather than with persons. Books are pure, dependable, made of spirit and the word. Books offer manna. But persons extend "the brown bread on whose crust I break my teeth." Persons are a mixture "made up of prattle and silence." In his later years Buber confessed "I knew nothing of books when I came forth from the womb of my mother and I shall die without books with another human being's hand in my own. I do indeed close my door at times and surrender myself to a book, but

only because I can open the door again and see a human being looking at me."

Stories transmitted to family and friends around the Sabbath and festival tables create the memories that help fashion the character of godliness. Once such folk tale is told of Rabbi Mordecai of Neschiz to whom the citizens of his small village entrusted a sum of money so that on the week before Sukkoth he could travel into the city and purchase on behalf of the . Congregation a fine citron ("ethrog") so that the festival ritual on Sukkoth could be performed by the villagers. Rabbi Mordecai left for his mission and halfway there came across a man crying before his horse that had died. The man was a wagoner and now that his animal was dead he had no means of support. The rabbi gave him the bag of money which his villagers had entrusted to him and returned towards his home. When he returned, the villagers asked to see the ethrog and the rabbi explained what had happened. "What are we to do then on the festival of Sukkoth?" the villagers asked of him. He replied, "Do not worry. The whole world will recite a blessing over the citron and we will recite it over a dead horse." The story was told and is retold to remind us that ritual is not an end in itself. There is more than knowing the law by heart. There is also knowing the heart of the law. Properly understood, the story rejects the either/or, ritual or ethics option. The Rabbi's response to the wagoner's lot is no deprecation of ritual but a fulfillment of ritual's ethical intent. The inter-personal relationships between self and God (ritual) and between self and human others are complementary.

SHAVUOT: SELF-REVELATION

The festival of the weeks or Shavuot centers upon the revelation of the dialogue. The disclosure of the ten words at Mt. Sinai opens with an

introductory statement unique in the Torah in that it does not indicate to whom the divine words are addressed. It begins "God spoke all these words saying." (Exodus 20: 1) To which circle are the words addressed? Are they directed to each individual self or to the community of the children of Israel at large or to the circle of humanity? Or perhaps the words are addressed to all.

The ten words are said by some rabbinic commentators to have been simultaneously translated into all the languages of humankind. The school of Rabbi Ishmael interpreted the verse from Jeremiah (23:29) and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces' as a reference to the splitting up of every single word that went forth from the Holy One into the languages of the seventy nations of the world." Another rabbinic legend adds to this universalistic hue the observation that the revelation by design took place not within any national borders but in the wilderness, in the public domain for all peoples to hear.

But the Jewish particularistic---universalistic orientation is particularly evident in the assignment of the book of Ruth as the text to be read and studied on the festival of Shavuot. Ruth is a born Moabites and of Moab it is written (Deuteronomy 23:4) "An Amonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord forever." Despite this proscription and its biblical reiteration in Nehemiah (13:1), it is Ruth the born Moabites who becomes the great-grandmother of David, Matriarch from whom King David and King Solomon are descended and from whom the Messiah is destined to descend. As if to stress the universalistic message the book of Ruth ends with a genealogy that is traced to Peretz, the son of Judah, and of the pagan

Tamar a Canaanite woman who are part of the Messiah's ancestry. The Jewish particularistic---universalistic nexus can have no more dramatic illustration than a vital genealogical connection that has its roots in the past and fulfillment in the future.

THE DECALOGUE AND THE SELF

The Ethics of the Fathers includes the "writing on the tablets" as one of the ten things that were created on the eve of the Sabbath. The rabbis elaborate that the Decalogue described in the Bible as words written on both sides of the tablet referred to the letters that were cut through the stone the reading of the words from either side. Miraculously the cut out letters did not fall but were held in place. The legend of the letters legible on both sides suggests the double sided applicability of the Ten Commandments for both interpersonal relationship (between person and person, and person and God) and intrapersonal relationships (between the person and his/her own self). The introversion of meaning, a method characteristic of the Hasidic mode of interpretation, illuminates the relevance of the individual self.

It is written "Thou shalt not murder." But read intra-personally, from the other side of the tablet, the words mean that you are not to murder yourself. We are given blessing and curse, life and death and told to 'choose life that thou mayest live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). There are ways to choose death, to die a thousand deaths, to eat away at oneself through tortures of self-recrimination and neurotic guilt, through unreasonable demands of perfectionism. The other side of murdering another warns against the many ways of suicide.

The reverse side of bearing false witness against another is bearing false witness against oneself. It is forbidden to testify against oneself, to make

oneself out to be wicked, to see only fault in oneself and to deny the goodness in oneself. It is again one thing to be unfaithful to another and another to betray one's own integrity. It is one thing to covet the talents and possessions that others have. But the reflexive side refers to self-coveting, the envy of what one has but does not know or appreciate. As a Hasidic master put it in paradoxical form, "Better to desire what one has, than to have what one desires."

The variety of relationship intertwine. Rabbi Simchah of Bunem taught, "It is written 'ye shall not wrong another.' But do not forget not to wrong yourself." The Festival of Shevuoth is designated as "the time the Torah was "given" us. Why was it not called "the time that we 'received' the Torah? Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk answered "the giving took place on the day commemorated by the feast but the receiving takes place at all times." The avenues of Revelation are as open and varied as the routes of relationship. The attributes of godliness are revealed in nature and in history, in festivals and fasts, in the family and the community, in humanity and in the self.

FINDING ONESELF

I could find no finer poetic articulation of the circles of relationship that lead to the wholeness of godliness than the words of the philosopher mystic Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel. "Each individual must first find himself within himself; then he must also find himself in the world about himself; his society, his community, his nation. The community must first find itself within itself; then it must find itself in all of humanity. Humanity must first find itself within itself; then it must find itself in the world. The world must first find itself within itself; then it must find itself within the universe which surrounds it. The surrounding universe in its generality must first

find itself within itself; then it must find itself in the highest category of universality. Universality must find itself within itself; then it must find itself in the fullness that fills, in the highest light, in the hub of life, in the Divine light." The integrity of each circle and its distinctiveness must not be blurred or skipped over. "Separation is for the sake of unification." Godliness is one and includes all.



The Missing Epilogue --- A Message from Rabbi Schulweis

Rabbi Schulweis planned to write an epilogue to this book to especially encourage its reading by younger generations. He feels strongly that they should read this book to find some of the answers to their unanswered religious questions which are at the root of discovering the role of their own spirituality and Judaism in the modern world.

Unfortunately, he is unable to personally write the epilogue, and this message has been created on his behalf. It would be impossible to author this epilogue in his style; his sweeping oratorical and brilliant written command of language cannot be duplicated or imitated. We have, however, liberally used some of the words that he has written and spoken to deliver his message to the readers. If this book will advance some of his philosophy of applying dialectic reasoning in our understanding and practice of Judaism, we will have at least partially accomplished his wishes.

Rabbi Schulweis thinks deeply about the inquisitiveness, idealism and energy of our young and the potentiality of combining this enthusiasm with over 4000 years of Judaism and the wisdom of Torah. He takes pride that Judaism, with its teachings of philosophy and theology, has survived and enriched global populations. He believes that we are currently in the midst of a global depression evidenced by worldwide unrest in this last half of 2014 with rampant Ebola, terrorism and economic inequality. He foresees that questions of human and civil rights violations might spawn another populous movement towards protecting these rights. That, as the oldest religion of the monotheistic religion, Judaism has something important to say and to contribute to Tikkun Olam.

He wants the younger generations, blended with the wisdom and knowledge of their adult counterparts, to play an important global role, best achieved if they understood their own hereditary DNA and their own roots in the beliefs and behaviors that follow from our teachings of morality, justice, and ethics. That understanding comes from a discourse of questions and answers.

Rabbi Schulweis wrote that children are born philosophers. They are uninhibited in their questions, first of the physical world that they see and touch, and then the spiritual world asking who they are and why they are. "Ought" is one of his signature words and reflecting upon the questions and answers that we all should ask – What the world "ought" to be like. What we "ought" to be like. How "ought" we treat the stranger and each other. How "ought" we treat the earth that sustains our lives. Questions are the birthpangs of philosophy and theology. As his grandmother said, "No one ever died from a question." Rabbi Schulweis asks: "What happens to these questions of our youth? How is it that by the time we have grown up the questions are no longer asked?"

He relates in his first chapter that his grandfather was quite adroit about answering biblical questions of "where, what or how," the tangible measures of our existence. But not, "why" or "what for." After such intrusive questions his grandfather would pinch his cheek affectionately and characteristically responded with the Yiddish word "shpayter" which meant "later." "Later" meant that when he was older he would understand, when he was older he would be answered. "Later" never seemed to come.

Rabbi Schulweis very often prefaces as well as closes his sermons and lectures instructing us all that "it is important to teach this to your children and grandchildren." He believed that the synagogue must be such a place of learning, of prayer, of hope, of joy, of action. Just because we grow more knowledgeable through the years, our idealism and our inquisitiveness should not diminish; neither should our questions. Neither should our answers. Rather than rekindle the religious questions of younger generations, he wants to keep these fires burning so that they are also in the mainstream of adult thinking and reflection.

'L'dor V'dor does not mean to him only passing down from old to young; rather, much like the ladder which is the subject of many of his parables, this phrase defines a pathway by which learning and wisdom can move in both directions.

Rabbi Schulweis teaches us that when we know how to answer the religious questions for ourselves, we are then able to translate the answer into the language and concepts of our young. "It is important to teach this to your children and grandchildren." That is why he wrote this book for you.