Review Essay
Exposition as High Art

Society and Self: On the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.
By Gerald J. (Ya'akov) Blidstein. OU Press, New York, 2012.

By: Lawrence Kaplan

I

Rabbi Professor Gerald J. (Ya'akov) Blidstein, Professor Emeritus of Jewish Thought at Ben-Gurion University and a recipient of the Israel Prize in Jewish Thought, was one of the most distinguished students of the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and over the past twenty-five years—in particular since the Rav's death in 1993—has written many essays about the writings of his teacher. These have now been collected and have appeared under the title *Society and Self: On the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, the volume under review.

Blidstein begins his Introduction with the following remarks:

> The materials presented in this book reflect, by and large, my thoughts regarding the writings of the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, over the last decades. As I look at these essays, I realize that I engaged mostly in exposition, which is perhaps a natural stance for a former student to adopt. By and large, I address the question: What does the Rav say? (p. 11)[1]

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[1] All page numbers in parentheses refer to Gerald J. (Ya'akov) Blidstein, *Society and Self: On the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, OU Press, New York, 2012.

Lawrence J. Kaplan received his BA from Yeshiva College, his MA and PhD from Harvard University, and his rabbinical ordination from Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. He has taught at McGill University since 1972, and is currently Professor of Rabbinics and Jewish Philosophy in its Department of Jewish Studies. In 2011-12 he was a Tikvah Fellow at the Tikvah Center for Law and Jewish Civilization of the New York University Law School.

These remarks, of course, reflect Blidstein's genuine modesty and integrity. In truth, however, these very lucid and incisive essays, devoted primarily to exposition and consisting in large measure of penetrating readings of key texts of the Rav, reflect the unique blend of thematic discussion and commentary form, scholarly synthesis and textual exegesis, literary sensitivity and conceptual rigor, found in all of Blidstein's writings. One thing is clear: if what we have in these essays is "mostly ... exposition," it is exposition as a high art.

First, even when the points he makes are well known, Blidstein phrases them with his customary elegance and insight. Thus in speaking of "the priority generally attached to the halakhic over the aggadic," Blidstein notes that this priority "reflects the central role of the community. For halakhah is normative, obliging all members of the community equally..., as against the often individualistic, idiosyncratic, and moderately non-normative quality of the *Aggadah*. Put another way: the language of halakhah, its basic forms are often communal" (p. 95). The point itself is not new, but rarely has it been expressed with such deftness. I particularly like the exactness and nuance of Blidstein's description of the *Aggadah* as "moderately non-normative." This seems to me to get it just right.

One more example: In discussing the Rav's claim that, in Blidstein's words, "the identity of the Jewish people moves on two levels..., both covenantal..., the Covenant of Fate (*brit goral*) and the Covenant of Destiny (*brit ye'ud*)," Blidstein remarks that this is "a maneuver that is characteristic of R. Soloveitchik's midrashic method—we shall encounter it in *The Lonely Man of Faith* [=*LMF*]—but that may have been borrowed from his halakhic method. Simply put, R. Soloveitchik frequently discovers contrasting characteristics in ostensibly unitary or homogeneous topics (p. 65)." Again, the point has been made before,[2] but rarely with such concision and precision. Indeed, "contrasting characteristics in ostensibly unitary or homogeneous topics" is about as neat a definition of the Brisker method of "*tzvai dinim*" as I have come across.

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[2] See, for example, Reuven Ziegler, *Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Jerusalem: Urim, 2012), pp. 27-28. This important recent work is perhaps the most thorough examination of the Rav's thought.

But praiseworthy as Blidstein's style may be, what ultimately counts is the substance of his "exposition." Precisely here, however, he has a special contribution to make. As is well known, the Rav was both a rabbinic figure of the first rank—indeed, he is considered by many to have been the outstanding traditional rabbinic scholar and jurist of the second half of the twentieth century—and also a creative theologian and philosopher who mastered the entire western tradition of philosophical and scientific thought. The dazzling scope of his writings, ranging from the most complex and technical halakhic discussions to the most complex and technical philosophical discussions and incorporating between these two poles *Aggadah*, *Derush*, Biblical interpretation, phenomenological analysis, autobiographical reflection, and much else, is also well known. Consequently, as has often been pointed out, very few of the Rav's students are qualified to explore that full range, and they either, to oversimplify somewhat, focus more on the Rav's philosophical writings or more on his halakhic writings. Blidstein, as someone who is equally expert and at home in the fields of Halakhah, Midrash, and Jewish thought, is one of the Rav's few students qualified to examine the broad spectrum of his writings in their rich and colorful variety, though I would note that he does not engage in the analysis of the Rav's more technical philosophical writings.

Any division of the essays in *Society and Self* is, to a certain extent, arbitrary. Thus Blidstein's essay "Letters on Public Affairs," an extended review and discussion of *Community, Covenant, and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications*, deals, as the essay's title indicates, with what one may term the Rav's public thought broadly speaking; at the same time a major section of the essay consists of a penetrating examination of three English responsa of the Rav, and thus deals with his more strictly halakhic writings. That said, we may, nevertheless, divide the essays into four categories: the essays "A Religious-Zionist Thinker?" "Letters on Public Affairs," "The Jewish People," and "'Fate' and 'Destiny'" focus on the Rav's public thought, the "Society" in the title; the essays "The Covenant of Marriage" and "Death" focus on the more personal existential side of the Rav's thought, the "Self" in the title; the essay "The Norms and Nature of Mourning" deals with the Rav's halakhic writings; and the essay "Biblical Models" deals with the Rav's hermeneutics, his phenomenological readings of biblical texts. Of course, as indicated above, this division is very rough, and there is much overlap between these categories. As we saw, "Letters on Public Affairs" deals both with the Rav's public thought and with his halakhic writings; "Biblical Models" deals not only with the Rav's hermeneutics, but, treating, as it does, both "Kol Dodi Dofek" and *LMF*, touches on both the Rav's public thought and his more personal, existential thought; the essay "The Norms and Nature of Mourning" focusing, as it does, on the Rav's treatment of "grief—the internalization of mourning—as a norm, not as a natural emotion" (p.134), raises existential issues; and, finally, "The Covenant of Marriage," insofar as it shows how the Rav uses "Scripture as his source of guidance" and that for him "the creation of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis is a formative narrative" (p. 117), raises the issue of hermeneutics. Nevertheless, in my discussion of Blidstein's essays I will try to keep as much as possible to my fourfold division, moving from Blidstein's discussion of the Rav's public thought to his discussions of the Rav's personal existential thought, his halakhic writings, and, finally, his hermeneutics.

II

Blidstein, as is well known, has written widely and deeply about the various institutional frameworks in which the Jewish collective has expressed itself in Talmudic, medieval, and modern times, whether rabbinical, political, or communal, their modes of operation and claims to authority. It should not be surprising, then, that half the book's essays deal with the Rav's public thought. To be sure, as Blidstein points out in his essay "The Jewish People," "the individual is at the heart of Rabbi...Soloveitchik's writings" (p. 77). Indeed, in his essay "A Religious-Zionist Thinker?" Blidstein goes so far as question whether the Rav can be considered a Religious-Zionist thinker, inasmuch as that "the discussion of the Zionist or Religious-Zionist problem constitutes only a small portion of his work. The great majority of his articles deal with other issues: the nature of the spiritual experience, the nature of the halakhic experience, the standing of the individual vis-à-vis the community, and the like" (p. 21).[3] Still, as Blidstein observes, "the focus on the person ... should not obscure the fact that the community, and specifically the Jewish community of course, has also been a central concern of the Rav" (p. 77).

Blidstein notes the Rav's subtle balancing act in adjudging which has priority, the individual or the community. On the one hand, "the community transcends the person and bestows upon him the forms of spiritual life and the possibility of God's forgiveness and acceptance"; on the other, "the community is constituted by virtue of the ontological loneliness of the individual" (p. 83). Indeed, Blidstein points out, "Immediately after describing *Knesset Israel* as a 'metaphysical entity,' the Rav asserts that 'the personalistic unity and reality of a community, such as *Knesset Israel*, is due to the philosophy of existential complementarity of the individuals belonging to *Knesset Israel*'" (p. 83).[4]

Of course, to revert to an earlier point, the Rav "discovers contrasting characteristics in [the] ostensibly unitary or homogeneous topic..." of the community, as he does elsewhere. Here Blidstein discusses, as is to be expected, the majestic community of Adam the first and the covenantal community of Adam the second, as developed in *LMF*, as well as the people of the covenant of fate and the nation of covenant of destiny, as developed in "Kol Dodi Dofek" and other essays of the Rav.[5] I will return to Blidstein's discussion of the majestic and covenantal communities later. Here let me say a few words about his discussion of the two covenants, particularly the covenant of fate.

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[3] In his Introduction Blidstein modifies his contention. "In one of the essays of this volume, I argued that the Rav was not a Zionist thinker. This may have been a hasty superficial judgment. But I would still assert that Israel and the Zionist enterprise are not at the center of the Rav's thought" (p. 12).

[4] Citing "Community," *Tradition* 17:2 (1978): 9-10.

[5] See "Brit Avot" in *Ḥamesh Derashot*, edited and translated from the Yiddish by D. Telsner (Jerusalem, 1974), pp. 87–97 [= "The Covenant of the Fathers," *The Rav Speaks: Five Addresses* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 135–152]; and "'Iyyunim be-Malkhuyot, Zikhronot, ve-Shofarot," *Yemei Zikkaron*, ed. M. Krone (Jerusalem, 1986), pp. 155–164.

Blidstein maintains that "even one who argues that the creation of the concepts of 'covenant of fate' and 'covenant of destiny' was directed primarily at the Zionist reality, to the problematic attitude toward religiously non-observant Jews in the context of the return to Zion and the establishment of a state" (p. 23) must agree that that "is not the real topic of the piece.... For the State of Israel is, primarily, a secular reality, and it graphically represents the secularization of Jewish peoplehood in the modern world.... The true topic of 'Kol Dodi Dofek,' then, is the character of the modern Jewish people, or more precisely the integration of this reality into the world view of the believing Jew.... It is likely, then, that the existence of the secular Jew and his community provided the problematic that R. Soloveitchik undertook to confront in 'Kol Dodi Dofek'" (pp. 64, 66).

This point is well taken; still as one of those who argued "that the creation of the concepts of 'covenant of fate' and 'covenant of destiny' was directed primarily at the Zionist reality, to the problematic attitude toward religiously non-observant Jews in the context of the return to Zion and the establishment of a state," I believe that Blidstein underplays the Zionist setting. In my essay "Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and Dr. Isaac Breuer on Jewish Identity and the Jewish National Revival,"[6] I showed how as late as 1944 the Rav, in a major published discourse,[7] used many of the motifs later found in "Kol Dodi Dofek," but without any mention of a covenant of fate. The 1944 discourse sets forth an unambiguous indictment of modern secular Jewry, which is seen in a wholly negative light, and leaves no room, no ground for cooperation, between religious and secular Jewry. What then led to the shift in the Rav's view?

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[6] "Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and Dr. Isaac Breuer on Jewish Identity and the Jewish National Revival," *Jewish Identity and the Postmodern Age: Scholarly and Personal Reflections*, Charles Selengut ed. (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon, 1999), pp. 51–55.

[7] "Kuntrus Halakhah ve-Aggadah," *Musaf Ha-Pardes* 17:1 (1944): 22–44.

In my essay I showed how the Rav in that discourse combined his indictment of modern secular Jewry with a call for a Jewish national revival, a revival set against the background of the destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust. But, I suggested, such a combination proved to be unstable and untenable. For how can one laud the Jewish national revival without according at least some measure of religious credit to the major group promoting that revival, namely, the secular Zionists? Moreover, the Rav was very well aware that the religious Zionists could not promote the national revival on their own. Thus, to come to "Kol Dodi Dofek," the Rav there sets a great task before religious Jewry: to transform the covenant of fate into a covenant of destiny, the people into a nation; while, at the same time, he criticizes it sharply for what he perceived to be its failure to respond to the voice of the Beloved knocking, to the call of the historic moment, to the divine act of *Ḥesed* expressed in the establishment of the State of Israel. There is no doubt that he realized that, for the meanwhile, religious Jewry would be a junior partner in the task of national renewal.

Moreover, as Blidstein himself concedes in another context—a point to which I shall return soon—there are places in his writing where the Rav does not seem to have absorbed the full dimensions of the secularization of the Jewish people. In sum, without denying Blidstein's argument that "Kol Dodi Dofek" grapples with the secular character of large segments of the Jewish people in the modern era, it still seems to me that it is the Zionist context which constitutes the primary framework for the Rav's discussion of this secularization and for his creation of the concepts of covenants of fate and destiny.

Regarding the moral content of the covenant of fate, Blidstein appears to waver. In the brief essay "'Fate' and 'Destiny,'" Blidstein incisively compares and contrasts the Rav's view of the covenants of fate and destiny with the very similar view of Martin Buber in his 1936 essay "On Nationalism." In that essay, Buber, like the Rav, distinguishes between the people of Israel fashioned by "fate," and the Israelite nation created by "a great inner transformation." For both Buber and the Rav, the nation was created by the revelation at Mt. Sinai, though, as Blidstein points out, for the Rav that revelation was first and foremost a revelation of the Law, while for

Buber it refers to a personal divine address calling for "a living relationship" with God.[8] The more significant difference between the two though, Blidstein notes, is that, "for Buber the decisive fateful moment [in the fashioning of the people] was the exodus from Egypt, whereas R. Soloveitchik focuses on the Egyptian bondage itself" (p.107). As a result, Blidstein argues, "According to Buber, the people fashioned by 'fate' forms for itself a cultural mold and way of life .... This activity also exists for the Rav, with respect to the solidarity established among the slaves and the like, but nevertheless the difference is clear. According to Buber, the struggle with fate is active, whereas according to R. Soloveitchik, the people formed by way of the covenant of fate is fundamentally passive" (pp. 106-107). Blidstein continues to elaborate on this difference between Buber and the Rav, concluding that for the Rav "the covenant of fate is defined ... in an almost minimalist fashion from a moral perspective, almost like preserving the body until the soul is returned to it" (p. 108).

However, in his primary discussion of "Kol Dodi Dofek" in his essay "The Jewish People," Blidstein strikes a different tone. To be sure, he correctly insists there that for the Rav "Egypt and Sinai, the Jew of fate and the Jew of destiny and purpose clearly reflect a hierarchical order" (p. 90). But he goes on to note—and how could he not?—that the Rav in describing the covenant of fate "tells us about the values that emerge in a people that must struggle to ensure its physical survival: mutuality, sympathy, self-sacrifice, *ḥesed*. These are functional values of the collective, to be sure, but they also require the individual to transcend his own selfish concerns, and as *ḥesed* resonate deeply in the Jewish consciousness" (p. 91). We have come very far in this "moral perspective" from a mere concern with "solidarity," from a minimalist definition of the covenant of fate. Indeed, the values of *Ḥesed*, loving-kindness, and *Kedushah*, holiness, which, for the Rav, exemplify the covenants of fate and destiny respectively, constitute the primary ways whereby the individual, as the Rav always emphasized, imitates God.[9]

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[8] Buber, Martin, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* (Oxford and London: East and West Library, 1946), pp. 130-131.

This emphasis on *Ḥesed* as constituting the leading moral virtue of the covenant of fate again needs to be understood within the essay's Zionist setting. In the section of "Kol Dodi Dofek," "The Obligation of Torah Jewry to the Land of Israel,"[10] the Rav calls on Orthodox American Jews to increase what he views as their inadequate financial support for the state and, in particular, for religious institutions in the state, to "establish more religious kibbutzim, build more houses for religious immigrants, [and] create an elaborate and extended system of schools."[11] In this context he launches the following remarkable accusation. "We Orthodox Jews suffer from a unique illness that is not found among non-religious Jews (with a few exceptions); we are all misers! In comparison with other American Jews, we do not excel in the attribute of *Ḥesed*."[12] This section precedes the sections on the covenants of fate and destiny.[13] But in retrospect it becomes evident that in terms of financial support of the State of Israel and its institutions secular American Jews, in the view of the Rav, turn out to be more committed to the covenant of fate than Orthodox American Jews.

Another major theme of the Rav's public thought discussed by Blidstein is the Jewish people as a source of authority. This, putting together different discussions of Blidstein, takes place on three levels. First, as Blidstein notes in speaking of the Rav's religious Zionism, though the Rav "bases the standing of the state on its halakhic significance" (p. 28), "this does not mean that his attitude toward [both the land and state] exhausted itself solely in halakhic terms" (p. 28). Blidstein proceeds to eloquently elaborate:

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[9] I would like to thank my friend and former student Jason Kalman for reminding me of this point.

[10] *Fate and Destiny: From the Holocaust to the State of Israel*, translated by Lawrence Kaplan (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 2000), pp. 35–41.

[11] Ibid, p. 39. I have paraphrased here very slightly.

[12] Ibid, p. 39.

[13] Ibid, pp. 42–63.

> Zionism obligates every Jew, inasmuch as he harbors "yearnings of the generations."[14] In other words, a Jew who has an organic, natural, healthy, and normal connection to his people, its fate and destiny, its memories, hardships, and hopes, will want to participate in the building of the land and the establishment of the state, and return to Zion. The voices of the generations denied this are clearly heard; they resonate in his soul. The Rav does not see in the fact that essential elements of the state are secular something to prevent the "yearnings of the generations" from identifying with it. The main thing is the craving for the collective return to the Land of Israel, which includes an independent political foundation.... Regarding the Land of Israel and the state, as in other matters the Rav did not seek analytic or even halakhic support in the strict sense of the term; he listened to the generations speaking in his blood. (p. 28)

Second, Blidstein notes, the Rav extends Maimonides' view that "one of the bases of Talmudic authority as a whole is the consent of the people" by arguing that "popular consent is given an institutional concretization—the great Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin is thus understood as having a dual function, for it expresses the will of the people Israel as well as pronouncing opinions and decisions in its role as the major organ of Oral Law" (pp. 95-96). Here Blidstein discusses the Rav's famous *ḥiddush* that the Great Court's authority to constitute the Jewish calendar derives from its being the representative of the Jewish people. This enables the Rav to solve the problem as to how the calendar can continue to function authoritatively if the Great Court no longer exists, the answer being that in the absence of the Great Court this power reverts to the people. As Blidstein points out, the Rav offers two variants of this solution. In an earlier variant "what is really crucial are the calculations done by

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[14] The citation is from "Al Ahvat ha-Torah u-Geulat Nefesh ha-Dor," in P. Peli, ed., *Be-Sod ha-Yaḥid ve-ha-Yaḥad* (Jerusalem: Orot, 1976), p. 418.

'the Jews of the land of Israel,'"[15] while in a later one what is crucial is "the practice of Jewry as a whole"[16] (p. 96).

This later variant, however, Blidstein indicates, raises an intriguing problem. The Rav writes, "Now *Knesset Israel* sanctifies... the holidays and New Moons by its ritual practice.... The entire people fix the calendar through the calculations, and the celebrations of the holidays and New Moons according to these calculations function to set the calendar."[17] But, as Blidstein notes, "we all know—and so does Rabbi Soloveitchik—that the 'entire people' no longer celebrates the holidays" (p. 97), certainly not in a halakhic mode. We need not enter into Blidstein's insightful discussion of this conundrum, except to note three things. First, Blidstein confronts here the issue I raised earlier, namely, to what extent the Rav absorbed the full dimensions of the secularization of the Jewish people. But second—and here we arrive at the very heart and soul of the Rav's faith—Blidstein suggests that if the Rav's halakhic theory simply refuses to accept the reality of the secularization of the Jewish people, it may be because

> Halakhic theory, in this case at least, is more than analytic description. It is also a statement of faith. Here (and elsewhere) the Rav asserts that the Jewish people, which is incomprehensible to him outside its covenantal commitment, will return to its vocation of holiness. Messianic faith, he declares, is "faith in the Jewish people." (p. 98)

Yet—and this is the third point—Blidstein soberly concludes:

> Ironically it is precisely the description of the authority immanent in the Jewish people that suggests how far contemporary Jewish life actually is from its sacred vocation, and the argument for the indispensability of this authority, which suggests how fragile the sacred existence of this people is today. The calendar—at least on the theory developed by the Rav—is living on borrowed time, and not the calendar alone. (p. 98)

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[15] *Kovetz Ḥiddushei Torah* (Jerusalem, n. d.), pp. 47–65.

[16] *Shi'urim le-Zekher Abba Mari*, I (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 2002), pp. 147–152.

[17] Ibid, p. 148.

The third level on which the authority of the people operates relates to the people's practice more broadly conceived. In his well-known halakhic essay, "Shenei Sugei Massoret" ("Two Types of Tradition"), the Rav writes:

> There are two traditions: 1) One tradition relates entirely to a tradition of study, debate, give and take, and halakhic rulings based on intellectual considerations. This sage offers a reason for his view, and another sage offer a reason for his competing view, and they take a vote, as the Torah pictures it for us in the periscope regarding the rebellious elder (Deut. 17:8-13); 2) the tradition of practice constituted by the behavior of the entire Jewish people regarding the performance of commandments. This tradition is based on the verse "Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders, and they will tell you." (Deut. 32:7)[18]

The Rav, as his wont, elaborates brilliantly on the nature of these two traditions and the differences between them. In particular, he uses the concept of a tradition of practice to answer the well-known problem as to why the *Amoraim* can't disagree with the *Tannaim* or for that matter why the *Geonim* can't disagree with the *Amoraim*, given Maimonides' ruling (*Laws of Rebels* 2:1) that in matters of exegesis and reasoning a later court can controvert the law proclaimed by an earlier court and "judge in accordance with what appears to them to be the law" even if the later court is not as great as the earlier one in wisdom and numbers. To enter into an examination of the Rav's answer here would, however, take us too far afield.[19]

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[18] Ibid, p. 249.

[19] Ibid, pp. 256–259. It is surprising that the Rav does not mention that this question was raised by the *Kesef Mishneh* in connection with the authority of the *Mishnah* in the latter's commentary on *Laws of Rebels* 2:1 and does not explain how his answer differs from the *Kesef Mishneh*'s. Again this is not the place to elaborate, but it seems to me that the Rav's answer is superior to the *Kesef Mishneh*'s, insofar as the Rav's answer, unlike the *Kesef Mishneh*'s, does not require any explicit acceptance on the part of "the later generations ... not to disagree with the earlier ones." The discussion of the *Kesef Mishneh*, in turn, became the starting point for the famous de-

Blidstein, unfortunately, does not have that much to say about "these two forms of traditional authority" (p. 103). He does, however, make the challenging claim that the Rav's analysis of these two types of tradition, "that of scholarly analysis and decision and that of life lived by the people itself" (p. 103), "dovetails perfectly" with his famous description of two other types of tradition, the tradition of the fathers and that of the mothers. It would follow that the tradition of the fathers is one of "scholarly analysis and decision," while the tradition of the mothers refers to the "life lived by the people itself." I cannot agree.

In his very well-known essay "A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne" the Rav writes:

> We have two massorot, two traditions, two communities…—the massorah community of the fathers and that of the mothers. Father teaches the son the discipline of thought as well as the discipline of action. Father's tradition is an intellectual-moral one…. Mother [teaches]… that Judaism expresses itself not only in formal compliance with the law but also in a living experience…that there is a flavor, a scent and warmth to the *mitzvot*.[20]

I would suggest, then, contra Blidstein, that far from the traditions of the fathers and of the mothers "dovetail[ing] perfectly" with the traditions "of scholarly analysis and decision and … of life lived by the people itself," the latter traditions are two subcategories, two aspects of the tradition of the fathers.

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bate between the Ḥazon Ish and Rav Elḥanan Wasserman on this issue. The exchange between Rav Elhanan and the Ḥazon Ish can be found in the former's *Kovets 'Inyanim*, 3, ed. R. Zalman Drori (Jerusalem, 1983), pp. 191–216. For further discussion, see Benjamin Brown, *The Ḥazon Ish: Halakhist, Believer, and Leader of the Ḥaredi Revolution* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2011), pp. 405-406; idem, *He-Ḥazon Ish: Halakhah, Emunah, ve-Ḥevrah* (Doctoral thesis, Hebrew University, 2003), Excursus 12; Chanah Kehat, "Bittzur Ma'amadah shel ha-Torah be-Mishnat he-Ḥazon Ish," *Yeshivot u-Batei Midrashoth*, ed. E. Etkes (Jerusalem, 2007), pp. 330–337, and my forthcoming essay, "The Ethos of Submission, Union with the Spirit of the Torah, and Confronting the Challenges of the Times: The Ḥazon Ish."

[20] "Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne," *Tradition* 17:2 (1978): 75.

In truth, the Rav's multiple and varying analyses of the concept of tradition serve as a perfect illustration of his ability to "frequently discover contrasting characteristics in ostensibly unitary or homogeneous topics." First, in "A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne" the Rav differentiates between the tradition of the fathers and that of the mothers. The tradition of the fathers is intellectual-practical, while the tradition of the mothers is experiential. Then *within* the intellectual- practical tradition of the fathers the Rav in "Shenei Sugei Massoret" differentiates between the intellectual tradition "of scholarly analysis and decision" and the practical tradition "of life lived by the people itself." Finally, within the intellectual tradition itself the Rav in his essay "Kevi'at Mo'adim 'al pi ha-Re'iyah ve-'al pi ha-Ḥeshbon,"[21] *further* differentiates between an intellectual tradition handed down through a process of teaching and study from teacher to student and an intellectual tradition where the oral Law, *aside* from being handed down through the standard process of teaching and study from teacher to student (*limmud*), is formally *transmitted* (*mesirah*) as a theoretical-intellectual discipline. That is, here the teacher, who himself is one of the *Ḥakhmei ha-Massorah*, one the those Sages who are part of and constitute the ongoing chain of tradition, does not only teach his students, but formally transmits the oral Law to those very few students of his who are worthy so that they in turn become yet another link in that chain of tradition. And, as the Rav emphasizes, "This act of transmission ... constitutes a process and an institution by itself."

The analysis contained in the above paragraph may perhaps best be presented in the form of the following chart:[22]

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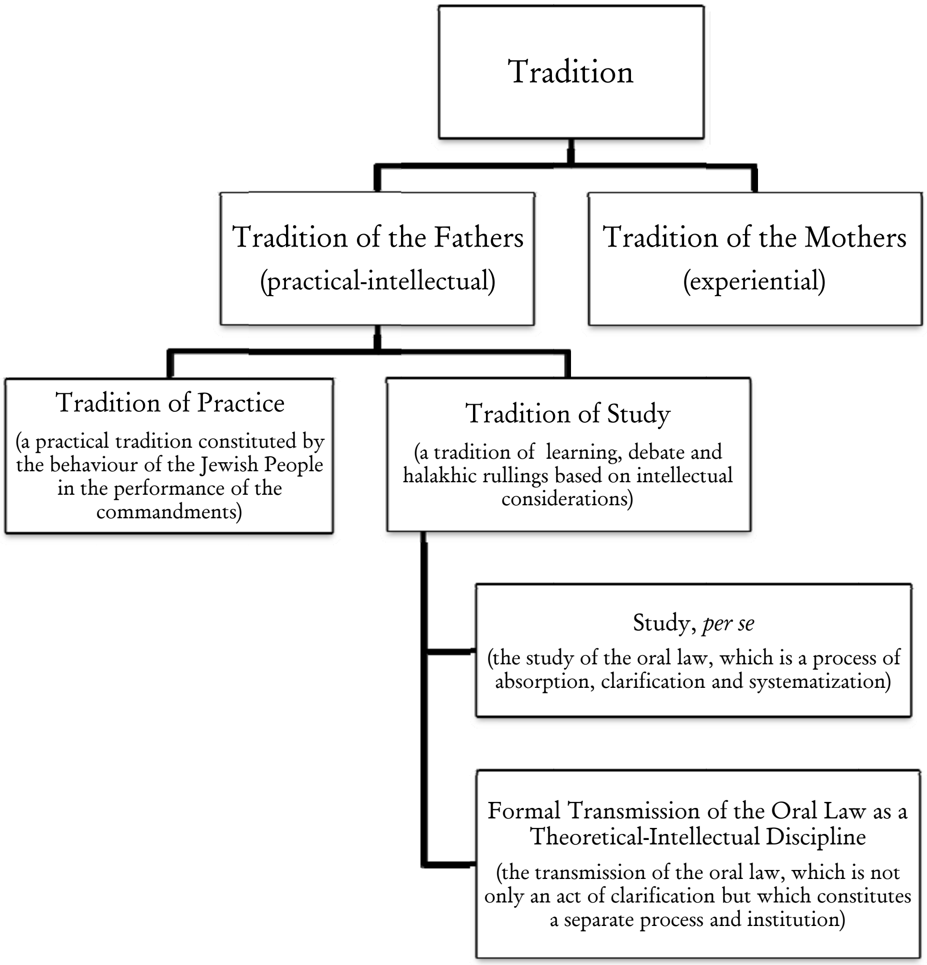
[21] "Kevi'at Mo'adim 'al pi ha-Re'iyah ve-'al pi ha-Ḥeshbon," *Kovetz Ḥiddushei Torah* (Jerusalem: Makhon Yerushalayyim, n.d,), pp. 60–62. Cf. the Rav's oral discourse, "Seguliyyuto shel Sefer Mishneh Torah," ed. Rabbi Zev Gotthold, *Mahanayyim* 4:2 (1992): 8–29.

[22] I will discuss this at greater length and with full documentation in my forthcoming study "The Rav on the Multi-Functional and Multi-Faceted Nature of the Massorah."


Tradition
Tradition of the Fathers
(practical-intellectual)
Tradition of the Mothers
(experiential)
Tradition of Practice
(a practical tradition constituted by the behaviour of the Jewish People in the performance of the commandments)
Tradition of Study
(a tradition of learning, debate and halakhic rullings based on intellectual considerations)
Study, *per se*
(the study of the oral law, which is a process of absorption, clarification and systematization)
Formal Transmission of the Oral Law as a Theoretical-Intellectual Discipline
(the transmission of the oral law, which is not only an act of clarification but which constitutes a separate process and institution)

Blidstein's review-essay of *Community, Covenant, and Commitment* contains much rich discussion of the Rav's public thought. He provocatively claims that one ought to group together the Rav's discussions of "interreligious dialogue and contact with the Catholic Church before the issuance of the Vatican Declaration on the Jews, Orthodoxy's relationship with the Conservative movement and its rabbis, and (even!) the relations between Orthodox rabbis and non-rabbinic Orthodox agencies" (pp. 46-47).

He admits that "On the face of it these groupings seem quite different from one another: What does the Pope have in common with the leader of Mizrachi" (p. 47)? Yet he convincingly argues that "the Rav sees in each of these contexts the need to strike a balance (that will differ from case to case, of course) between drawing closer and keeping one's distance, thereby setting the boundaries of cooperation and estrangement" (p. 47). Here we will concentrate on Blidstein's analysis of the Rav's view regarding interreligious dialogue and contact with the Catholic Church.

As Blidstein indicates, the philosophical foundation "the Rav posited … for rejecting [Interfaith] dialogue" in his famous essay "Confrontation" "had already been set into place in his 1950 letter to [Professor Milton Konvitz of Cornell University and intended to be read by] Cornell's President" (p. 49) regarding the "Depiction of Human Images on Stained Glass Windows in an Interfaith Chapel." In that letter, the Rav expresses his opposition to the very idea of an interfaith chapel, though, interestingly enough, he had been informed that the decision to build it had already been made and was not on the table, arguing, to cite Blidstein's paraphrase, that "every faith community has its own structure, forms of expression, and content, and that these cannot coexist within a single architectonic space" (50).[23] It is particularly noteworthy, Blidstein stresses, "that the Rav manages to deny legitimacy of a shared house of worship for Jews and Christians without ever hinting at the possibly that Christianity has the status of idolatry" (pp. 42-43).

Actually, this letter and others from the early 1950s anticipate the Rav's position as set forth in "Confrontation" even more fully than indicated by Blidstein. For, as is well known or should be well known, the Rav's rejection of interfaith theological dialogue is only one side of the theological coin he mints in that essay. In the essay the Rav speaks of a *double* confrontation, "a universal human and an exclusively covenantal confrontation."[24] The "universal human confrontation" is the confrontation of humankind and the cosmos. Here Jews "stand with civilized society shoulder to shoulder over against the great [natural] order that defies us all."[25] The "exclusively covenantal confrontation" comes into play in connection with the "personal confrontation of two faith communities,"[26] and it is in this connection that the Rav rejects interfaith theological dialogue on the ground of the uniqueness and incommensurability of different faith commitments.

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[23] *Community, Covenant, and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (Jersey City, N.J. Ktav Publishing House for the Toras HoRav Foundation, 2005), pp. 8-9. Actually, Rabbi Helfgot already anticipated Blidstein's point. See p. xvii.

[24] "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6:2 (1964):17.

Both in his letter of 1950 to Professor Konvitz and in his letter of 1953 to Rabbi Theodore Adams regarding Orthodox participation in Communal Tercentenary Celebrations, the Rav clearly adumbrates this theme of a double confrontation. Thus in his letter of 1950 he writes:

> We identify ourselves with our gentile neighbors in all matters of collective endeavor—social, political, and cultural activities. There should be no retreat on the part of the Jew from full participation in all phases of national life and we are committed to all of America's institutions. However, the worship of God is not a social or collective gesture, but is a genuinely individual, most personal, intimate and tender relationship which cannot be shared with anyone else.[27]

The same note is struck in his letter of 1953:

> As to interfaith celebrations we are ready and willing to encourage such projects as long as they are held within the confines of secular activities. No joint worship, however, can be encouraged. We are loyal citizens of our great country and are committed to all its institutions, political, economic, and educational without any reservation or qualification, as are all other Americans. Hence joint action and common effort are commendable in all areas of mundane endeavor. Yet one's relationship to, worship and dialogue with God, is an inner experience most intimate, most personal, most unique. Each com-

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[25] Ibid, p. 20.

[26] Ibid, p. 21.

[27] *Community, Covenant, and Commitment*, pp. 8-9.

> munity worships God in its singular way. "*Gleichschaltung*" distorts the very essence of the religious experience.[28]

I have treated this point at some length because, as David Shatz has noted,[29] many people in discussing "Confrontation" focus only on the Rav's emphasis on the importance of the "exclusively covenantal confrontation" and his consequent rejection of interfaith dialogue, ignoring his emphasis on the equal importance of "universal human confrontation" and his consequent affirmation of the need for Jews to "stand with civilized society shoulder to shoulder over against the great [natural] order that defies us all."[30] It is important then to show that not just the Rav's rejection of interfaith dialogue had its philosophical roots in his letters from the 1950s, but his broader theme of the need for Jews to perform a double confrontation also had its roots in those letters.

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[28] Ibid, pp. 113-114.

[29] David Shatz, "The Rav's Philosophical Legacy," in *Memories of a Giant: Eulogies in Memory of Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Michael A. Bierman (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2003), p. 315.

[30] In this connection it is revealing to contrast the Rav's view regarding the typological meaning that the presents that Jacob sent Esau had for the "unprotected, helpless, abandoned ... and despised" Jews "during a long Diaspora night," with the typological meaning that they have for Western, particularly American Jews living in free and open societies. During the long Diaspora night, the "Jew would try to contend with the cruelty of his enemies and oppressors simply by appeals and pleading, through bribery and gifts. 'And he took of that which he had in hand as a present for Esau his brother' (Gen. 32:4). In truth, the Jews successfully annulled many cruel edicts by these means." See "The Everlasting Ḥanukah," in *Days of Deliverance: Essays on Purim and Ḥanukah*, eds. E. Clark, J. Wolowelsky, and R. Ziegler (Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House for the Toras HoRav Foundation, 2007), p. 135. [This essay is a translation—significantly abridged in places—of "Ḥanukah, 1951," *Yiddish Drashos and Writings*, ed. David Fishman (Jersey City, N.J. Ktav Publishing House for the Toras HoRav Foundation, 2009).] For Jews living in free and open societies the presents that Jacob sent Esau signify that "We are determined to participate in every civic, scientific, and political endeavor. We feel obligated to enrich society with our creative talents and to be constructive and useful citizens" ("Confrontation," pp. 28-29).

III

As noted earlier, the two essays in Blidstein's collection that focus on the more personal existential side of the Rav's thought are "The Covenant of Marriage" and "Death." Indeed, love, sexuality, and marriage, on the one hand, and suffering, evil, and death, on the other, form the two poles around which much of the Rav's personal thought revolves. If the Rav, thus, as Avi Ravitzky has maintained,[31] is the philosopher of the Song of Songs,[32] he is also the philosopher of Koheleth. Again, there is much of great interest in Blidstein's analysis, and I will focus only on a few select points related to his essay "The Covenant of Marriage."

In this essay, a wide ranging survey and analysis of *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*,[33] Blidstein emphasizes the uniqueness of the work.

> The six essays in this volume are dedicated to marital and parental relationships as a Jewish and human phenomenon. It

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[31] Aviezer Ravitzky, "Kinyan Ha-Da'at be-Haguto: Beyn ha-Rambam le-Neo-Kantianism," *Sefer ha-Yovel li-Khvod ha-Gaon Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik*, eds., Shaul Yisraeli, Nachum Lamm, and Yitzhak Raphael (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1984), Vol. 1, p. 125, and throughout the article. Note how in the English version of Ravitzky's article, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Human Knowledge: Between Maimonidean and neo-Kantian Philosophy," *Modern Judaism* 6:2 (1956): 157 and throughout, the phrase "pilosof shel Shir ha-Shirim" is translated either as "the philosopher of the religious personality" or as "the philosopher of the dialectical religious personality." In general, a comparison of the article's Hebrew and English versions indicates that Ravitzky's richly allusive Hebrew style has been greatly attenuated in the English translation.

[32] Of course, I am using this phrase metaphorically. As is well known, for the Rav the Song of Songs may not be interpreted according to its literal, but only according to its allegorical meaning. See *And From There You Shall Seek* (Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House for the Toras HoRav Foundation, 2008), note 1 (pp. 151–153).

[33] *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships* eds. David Shatz and Joel Wolowelsky (Jersey City, N.J.: Ktav Publishing House for the Toras HoRav Foundation, 2000). I wrote a review of this work in *Judaism* 50 (Fall 2001): 491–499. While there is some slight overlap between my review and Blidstein's, we generally focus on different aspects of the essays; our reviews thus nicely complement one another.

> seems to me that the very writing of these essays during the late 1950s, the surprising decision to devote so much attention to the problems and challenges of marriage and family life, is in itself of great significance for understanding the Rav's world and personality. There is even a certain daring to this choice, as the Rav does not refrain from relating to the erotic component of marital union. I am not familiar with another Jewish treatment of the issue similar to the one found in this book: a gaping divide stands between it and contemporary religious writing dealing with marriage. (pp. 111-112)[34]

In addition to his discussion of the Rav's views on "the erotic component of marital union," Blidstein also touches on the Rav's views regarding the issue of gender, which on the whole he finds to be rather traditional. One point, however, he singles out for particular attention.[35]

> In light of this traditional attitude to gender, I found great interest in the section the volume's editors named "The Tragedy in Motherhood." Indeed, the Rav himself uses the term "tragedy" in this context….This assessment is based on the fact that Abraham (who sits "in front of the tent") responds to the angels' question "Where is Sarah, your wife," with the answer, "Behold in the tent," inside, concealed,… despite the im-

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[34] But see now Rav Shagar, "Ahavah, Romantikah, u-Berit," *Nehalekh be-Regesh: Mivḥar Ma'amarim Yotse le-'Or Likrat Yom ha-Shanah ha-Rishon le-Histalkuto* (Efratah: Makhon Kitve ha-Rav Shagar, 2007), pp. 271–286. Note that on pp. 281-282, Rav Shagar praises the novelty and, to use Blidstein's adjective, "daring" of the Rav's approach to marriage, family life, and sexuality and proceeds to build his own approach to these sensitive issues, in large measure, on that of the Rav, while, at the same time, modifying the Rav's approach in light of his, Rav Shagar's, own well-known post-modernist commitments. I suspect that the Rav would have been unhappy both with the praise and with the modifications. A full comparison of the approaches of these two major figures regarding these critical issues is an important desideratum.

[35] Indeed, as Blidstein noted in a "Letter to the Editor" he wrote to *Judaism* Magazine in response to my own review of *Family Redeemed*, "the point … is brief, but it exceeds in originality and daring much of the other more lengthy discussion." See "Communications," *Judaism* 51:4 (Summer 2002): 380-381.

> portance of her work. The woman is found deep inside the tent, hidden, and her presence is passed on through her husband. Sarah's concealment—and that of all women—is not interpreted here in a favorable light. According to the Rav's homiletical reading of the passage, the dialogue between Abraham and the angels embodies the price that a woman must pay. The Rav reminds us that Abraham's historic role came to an end with Sarah's death...The message is clear. "Why do people not know the truth" that Abraham's work was in large measure the work of Sarah? "And yet... we say [in our prayers] 'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob,' but not 'God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, and God of Leah and Rachel,' even though they had an equal share in the Creator of the World."[36] According to the Rav, it is here that "the tragedy manifests itself with all its impact."[37] The term "tragedy" is significant. The tragic is inherent, almost unpreventable, in reality—the human-social reality or the religious-halakhic reality, as in our case. ...It is interesting to see how the Rav leads the homily to the halakhic realm, and in this realm—to prayer and its formulations, issues that were so close to his heart. (pp. 118-119)

While the Rav, in this section cited by Blidstein, states that the Matriarchs "had an equal share in the Creator of the World" with the Patriarchs, he, of course, does not mean that their shares were identical. How did their shares differ, and how were they equal? I would suggest the following.

This section is from the essay "Parenthood: Natural and Redeemed." In this essay the Rav distinguishes between the mother's and father's missions in the covenantal community, the father's mission or teaching role being intellectual in nature, the mother's experiential. This distinction, of course, is almost identical with that drawn in "A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne" between the intellectual-practical tradition of the fathers and the experiential tradition of the mothers. However in "Parenthood" the Rav takes the theme of the two missions or the two traditions one step further than he does in "A Tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne." In

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[36] Family Redeemed, p. 120.

[37] Ibid, p. 120.

"Parenthood" the Rav makes the additional point that "in normal times, when routine decisions are reached," the father takes the lead.[38] However, in times of crisis, "when the situation ... requires instantaneous action that flows from the depths of a sensitive personality," it is the mother "who steps to the fore and takes command."[39] It follows, then, as the Rav states, that it was the biblical Matriarchs who, in times of crisis, had the primary responsibility for transmitting the covenant.

In light of the above, we may say that the phrase in the liturgy: "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob," refers to the fact that in normal times it was the Patriarchs who had the primary responsibility for transmitting the covenant; but in times of crisis it was the Matriarchs—Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel—who bore that responsibility. Of course, I hasten to add, all this does not diminish in the slightest the "tragedy" inherent in Sarah's reality, a tragedy manifested, as the Rav notes, in our saying "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob," and not "God of Sarah, God of Rebecca, and God of Leah and Rachel," even though "they had an equal share in the Creator of the World." All it does is to clarify the Rav's view as to differing but equal shares the Patriarchs and Matriarchs had in the Creator of the World.

Blidstein, along with many others, notes that sacrifice, retreat, defeat, and submission "are central values in the Rav's thought," (pp. 145-146), and that they particularly come into play in connection with marriage and sexuality. He sums up the Rav's position thus.

> Marriage requires, first and foremost, mutual sacrifice. The reference, of course, is to the creation of an existential space in which the couple can both live together and as separate individuals. But marriage involves sacrifice in another sense as well. The two parties sacrifice sexual freedom...in marital life itself, where total abstinence is demanded at the time of the woman's monthly period.... According to the Rav, at issue is simple and painful abstinence that leads to catharsis. (p. 114)

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[38] Ibid, p. 116.

[39] Ibid, pp. 116-117.

Blidstein elaborates on this point in his essay “On Death.” There he notes that “retreat, sacrifice, and failure in the Rav’s teaching are almost always found in dialectical movement… Almost without exception, man falls solely in order to rise again with increased strength. He falls only so that he may know how to achieve true ascent” (p. 147). In this connection Blidstein returns to the role of sacrifice and retreat in marriage and sexuality.

> David Hartman correctly noted that the Rav’s use of the motif of falling in Eve’s formation from the body of Adam in his sleep also comes to teach the interpersonal and moral lesson that man is asked to make room for the existence of the other, which translates into the sacrifice of the personal ego.[40] This is also the story of the bride and bridegroom who sacrifice their happiness on the altar of halakhah: “Sex, if unredeemed, may turn into a brutal ugly performance.... Sex, therefore, is in need of redemption.... What action did Judaism recommend to man in order to achieve this purpose? The movement of withdrawal and defeat.”[41] Retreat comes in the midst of life so that the continuation should be more delicate, more human. (pp. 147-148)

Blidstein in these two passages has put his finger on something very important about the Rav’s conception of sacrifice; however, it requires spelling out. Indeed, here we may yet again “discover contrasting characteristics in ostensibly unitary or homogeneous topics.” For, as I have argued elsewhere,[42] the Rav operates with two conceptions of sacrifice, one found primarily in *LMF* and “The Community,” the other in ‘‘Majesty and Humility’’ and ‘‘Catharsis.’’

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[40] Blidstein refers here to David Hartman, “Love and Terror in the God Encounter: The Theological Legacy of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik” (Woodstock, Vermont, 2001), pp.108–111.

[41] Blidstein cites here “Majesty and Humility, *Tradition* 17:2 (Spring 1978): 36.

[42] Lawrence Kaplan, “Rav Soloveitchik’s The Lonely Man of Faith in Contemporary Modern Orthodox Jewish Thought’’ (in Hebrew), Rabbi in the New World: The Influence of Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik on Culture, Education, and Jewish Thought, eds. Avinoam Rosenak and Naftali Rothenberg (Jerusalem: Magnes Press and Van Leer Institute, 2011), pp. 147–176.

In *LMF* sacrifice is essentially connected with withdrawal in order to recognize and make room for the other, both human and divine. Limiting ourselves to the human other, it means that Adam the second must withdraw in order to make room for the other, in order to listen to and hear what the other has to say in his or her otherness, for only thereby is true communication and consequently true community possible. In "The Community," in like manner, the recognition of another's existence is "*eo ipso*, a sacrificial act, since the mere admission that a Thou exists in addition to the I is tantamount to *tzimtzum,* self-limitation and self-contraction."[43]

In "Majesty and Humility" and "Catharsis," by contrast, sacrifice means that "at every level of [one's] total existential experience"[44] the individual gives up, withdraws from, if only temporarily, whatever he "desires the most."[45] This act of withdrawal, of self-defeat is, for the Rav, the true heroic act. Man, whenever "victory is within reach ...stop[s], turn[s] around, and retreats."[46] Defeat here is an intra-psychic category, one basically unconnected with the presence of an other, whether human or divine. It is an *akedah* experience in the precise sense of the term, as man sacrifices that which is most precious to him only to re-acquire it once again.

To return, then, to Blidstein's two passages about the Rav's view on marriage cited above, it is clear that in both passages he begins with *LMF* and "The Community" type of sacrifice where one withdraws in order to make room for the other, and then moves to the "Majesty and Humility" and "Catharsis" type of sacrifice where defeat is an intra-psychic category.

I still believe that my claim that the Rav operates with two different conceptions of sacrifice is fundamentally correct. However, in light of both Blidstein's discussion and further reflection on my own, it seems to me now that I failed to properly discern the link between the two. In truth, both conceptions of sacrifice are linked to interpersonal ethics. However, in the conception of sacrifice found in *LMF* and "The Community," the connection between sacrifice and interpersonal ethics is clear and immediate, for by sacrifice the Rav means withdrawal precisely for the purpose of recognition of the other and of the other's needs. The conception of sacrifice as self-defeat found in ''Majesty and Humility'' and ''Catharsis'' is also connected to interpersonal ethics, but given the intra-psychic nature of this type of sacrifice, the connection is indirect. The Rav argues that such self-defeat is a heroic, cathartic act, a "divine dialectical discipline,"[47] whereby man purges himself of pride and arrogance and develops a sense of humility and critical self-awareness. Presumably, such refinement of character can have only positive ethical consequences on the interpersonal level. Thus we may say that the intra-psychic type of sacrifice found in ''Majesty and Humility'' and ''Catharsis'' refines and purges an individual's personality so that he is sensitized to the existence and needs of the other and is thus better able to withdraw in order to make room for him or her, thereby performing the *LMF* and "The Community" type of sacrifice. It is this link, I believe, Blidstein has in mind when at the end of the second passage cited he first quotes the Rav's assertion that through withdrawal and defeat—the ''Majesty and Humility'' and ''Catharsis'' type of sacrifice—man redeems sex and purges it of any possible brutal and ugly aspects, and then comments, "Retreat comes in the midst of life so that the continuation should be more delicate, more human"—the *LMF* and "The Community" type of sacrifice.

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[43] "The Community" (above, n. 4), p. 15.

[44] "Catharsis," p. 44.

[45] Ibid, p. 46.

[46] Ibid, p. 43.

IV

As noted earlier, Blidstein deals with the Rav's halakhic writings both in his review-essay of *Community, Covenant, and Commitment* and in his essay "The Norms and Nature of Mourning."

The first section of Blidstein's review essay (pp. 39–46) is devoted to a penetrating examination of three English responsa of the Rav: 1) the aforementioned letter "On the Depiction of Human Images on Stained Glass Windows in an Interfaith Chapel"; 2) "On Directing Foundlings to Jewish Welfare Agencies"; and 3) "On Drafting Rabbis and Rabbinical Students for the U.S. Armed Forces

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[47] Ibid, p. 46.

Chaplaincy." As Blidstein notes in the introductory section of his essay, these responsa are of particular importance in shedding light on the Rav's conception of halakhah and providing a corrective to the impression one might receive from his more theoretical writings. Blidstein comments, "the Rav's essay *Ish ha-Halakhah* often is cited as proof that he viewed the halakhah as the realm of the a priori, impervious to social reality, and as subject to a method partaking more of mathematics than of the human sciences.... But that reading of *Ish ha-Halakhah*, taken alone, can afford a one-sided picture" (p. 38).

Of special relevance to this issue, Blidstein points out, is the Rav's "methodological pronouncement" introducing his responsum on "Drafting Rabbis and Rabbinical Students for the U.S. Armed Forces Chaplaincy." Blidstein explains:

> [This] methodological pronouncement included a two-fold statement of reservations about the "objective" model of halakhic decision-making. First, every intellectual activity (including even aspects of natural science) combines formal components and human intuitive components; in our case he declared his intuition was to approve the project... Second, one must distinguish between but ultimately combine "pure halakhic formalism which... places the problem on an ahistorical conceptual level... [and] applied halakhah which transposes abstractions into central realities.... Under this aspect I gave thought not only to halakhic speculation but also to the concrete situation." It is likely—though not certain—that the intuitive component of the project pertained primarily to the practical decision. In any event, it is clear that the Rav was not about to adopt the "mathematical" model of the halakhic process so admired within certain segments of Modern Orthodoxy—a model envisioned as automatically spitting out halakhic solutions solely on the basis of objective expertise. (pp. 44-45)[48]

I would like to take a closer look at the Rav's responsum "On the Depiction of Human Images on Stained Glass Windows in an

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[48] It is, of course, not too hard to discern from Blidstein's use of the metaphor "spitting out" his own view of this model.

Interfaith Chapel," which, I believe, sheds clearer light on the interplay of halakhic and extra-halakhic in his responsa. Blidstein first presents the Rav's basic argument:

> The Rav begins by declaring that he cannot base his response on formal halakhah, but must look as well "to central historical realities with their deep-seated philosophical meaning."…That leads him to a passage in Tractate *Avodah Zarah*, from which one can only conclude that the greatest of the *amora'im* permitted the presence of a non-cultic human statue in the synagogue and that this teaching can be seen as normative.… But the Rav then goes on to find that Judaism historically did not act in accordance with this view and, as a practical matter, forbade the presence of images in the Synagogue. This approach …was consistently followed in synagogues built in Christian Europe, and remains the practice to this day.
>
> Here the impact of Christianity proves decisive. In the Christian milieu, the Rav argues with outstanding cultural sensitivity, every human figure found in a cultic site instantly becomes a cultic figure—a consequence of the basic Christian belief in Jesus as man-god …. These circumstances are quite different, then, from those of Babylonian synagogues in Talmudic times. (p. 40)

To cite the Rav, "To what our sages in a non-Christian Babylonia did not object, our forefathers in Christian counties were quite susceptible."

Blidstein, after this summary, goes on to argue that the Rav's "treatment here of the halakhic sources … provides …an illustration of his comment that when he decides a halakhic issue, he has 'always been guided by a dim intuitive feeling which pointed out to me the true path,' and that 'my inquiry consisted only in translating vague intuitive feeling into fixed terms of halakhic discursive thinking.' That is so even though the argumentation here is far from halakhic, as the Rav himself acknowledges" (p. 41).

But, we may ask, is the argumentation in this responsum "far from halakhic," and does the Rav acknowledge this? Indeed, immediately after making the observation cited above that "To what our sages in a non-Christian Babylonia did not object, our forefathers in Christian counties were quite susceptible," the Rav goes on to say, "I wish to emphasize that this [unequivocal iconoclastic attitude of Judaism toward the display of human images in houses of worship in Christian countries] was not merely a medieval addendum to the law but it expresses its very spirit."

I believe that Blidstein himself in the contrast he implicitly draws between the permissible "presence of a *non-cultic* human statue in the [Babylonian] synagogue" and forbidden presence of "a human figure" in synagogues in a "Christian milieu," inasmuch as it instantly "becomes a cultic figure," has provided us with the key for understanding the Rav's *halakhic* argument, but again the point needs to be spelled out.

The Rav in his brief presentation of the "formal halakhic viewpoint" regarding images first notes: "There are two fundamental prohibitions against the making of images. One deals with the making or possessing of idols ... and is not limited to a specific design.... The second ... applies to the making of [certain] images even if it not be for cultic but artistic purposes."

He then adds—and this serves as the basis of his entire argument—"It is also prohibited to create or possess any design which is usually associated with a cultic or religious motif, though the objective meaning of this design is purely artistic."

It is this *halakhic* principle which enables the Rav to combine here a formal-halakhic analysis with the taking into account of "central historical realities." For if we are speaking of a design "the objective meaning of [which] is purely artistic," what is it that determines whether or not this design "is usually associated with a cultic or religious motif," if not "central historical realities?" Here then sensitivity and responsiveness to historical and cultural change are built into the *very fabric* of the halakhic principle. Thus the Rav's main point is that in "non-Christian Babylonia" a human image in a synagogue was *not* "associated with a cultic or religious motif," while in Christian Europe it was. Indeed, after emphasizing that "the unequivocal iconoclastic attitude of Judaism toward the display of human images ... in Christian countries ... was not merely a medieval addendum to the law but it expresses its very spirit," the Rav goes on to explain, "As I have emphasized before, the law prohibits the representation of any figure or form which ... alludes to a cultic motif, and the human figure in the synagogue"—and here we may add in Christian Europe though not in non-Christian Babylonia—"though its objective meaning be of an artistic nature, comes under this category."

One can also raise the broader question as to how extensive a light these three responsa shed on the Rav's conception of halakhah, particularly halakhic *pesak*. One must remember that these responsa, which indeed make use of "axiological premises" and "philosophico-historical" considerations, were all written in the space of five months from December 1950 through April 1951, and, at least on the basis of current information, appear to be unique. Moreover, as is well known and as Blidstein surely knows, the Rav when describing the halakhah in *Ish ha-Halakhah* "as the realm of the a priori, impervious to social reality, and as subject to a method partaking more of mathematics than of the human sciences" is speaking of the halakhah as an ideal system, and *not* of halakhic pesak. It is only with his essay "Mah Dodekh mi-Dod," written in 1961, that we find the view of halakhah as a formal, abstract, self-contained system extended, albeit not entirely, to the realm of pesak. Certainly the need to combine, when engaging in pesak, "axiological premises" and "philosophico-historical" considerations with a formal-halakhic analysis, though not absent entirely in "Mah Dodekh mi-Dod," plays a peripheral role. One could then maintain that the Rav shifted from a more values-oriented approach to *pesak* in the 1950s to a more formalistic approach in the 60s. I put forward this possibility very tentatively, for our current knowledge of the Rav's halakhic activity qua *posek* is incomplete, but it serves to remind us that while these three responsa indeed possess great intrinsic interest, it is not clear whether they are truly representative of that activity over a period of forty years.

Blidstein's essay "The Norms and Nature of Mourning" begins with the observation that while "a not insignificant body of analysis, interpretation, and commentary to ... the Rav's view ... of the nature and ends of halakhah, his descriptions of the halakhic process, and 'how' one does halakhah,... nevertheless little has been done ... in actual treatment of the Rav's specific halakhic studies" (p.121).[49] His essay itself consists primarily of a lucid and incisive summary and analysis of two major essays of the Rav found in *Shi'urim le-Zekher Abba Mari* [*SZAM*], "Tum'at ha-Kohanim le-Shiv'at ha-Kerovim" ("Priests Rendering themselves Impure on the Death of one of the Seven Closest Relatives") and "Aveilut" ("Mourning"). "The first... deals with the obligation that priests render themselves impure on the death of one of the seven closest relatives, despite the general ban on priestly impurity.... The [second] ... directly confronts the performative norms of mourning as well as its essential internal correlates and manifestations" (pp. 123, 127).

The question arises to what extent these *shi'urim* and the others in *SZAM* are representative of the Rav's *derekh ha-limmud*, as contained in the bulk of his *shi'urim*. Blidstein does not address this question directly, but touches on it indirectly when considering the issue as to whether these *shi'urim* should be viewed as being in the traditional mode or not. In the body of his essay he asserts:

> The *shi'urim* I shall discuss proceed in the traditional mode. The Rav first assembles a list of textual anomalies and contradictions and then proceeds to solve the series of problems by presenting an overall thesis—analytical, of course, rather than textual or historical—which accounts for the earlier puzzling phenomena. (p.122)

However in the appended note Blidstein expresses second thoughts.

> I would no longer characterize the Rav's *shi'urim*, given in memory of his father and subsequently published, as being in the traditional mode.... Most traditional work is anchored in a

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[49] For a similar observation in a different context, see Neria Guttel, "On Ways of Teaching Talmud in Our Generation: Preliminary Notes to Rabbi Shagar's *Be-Torato Yehege*" (in Hebrew), *Netuim* 17 (2011): 157-158, particularly note 23 (p. 158). For "actual treatments of the Rav's specific halakhic studies," see Avinoam Rosenak, "Pilosophiyyah u-Maḥshevet ha-Halakhah: Keri'ah be-Shi'urei ha-Talmud shel ha-Rav Soloveitchik le-'or Modelim Neo-Kantianim," *Emunah bi-Zemanim Mishtanim*, ed. Avi Sagi (Jerusalem, 1997), pp. 275–306; and Lawrence Kaplan, "Review Essay: *Worship of the Heart*," *Hakirah* 5 (2007): 79–114.

> specific text, broadening out to other texts only as ramifications (or contradictions) of the initial source. Thus it is hardly true ... that traditional halakhic study assembles a list of anomalies and then proceeds to solve the problems by presenting an overall thesis. Traditional halakhic commentary, rather, tends to focus on single sources, interpreted through an initial hypothetical thesis, which is then refined by the dialectical interpolation of more and more sources.... In these *shi'urim* the Rav, on the contrary, makes an initial presentation of numerous sources that require resolution in the guise of an overall thesis. (p. 122, note 2)[50]

It is somewhat surprising that Blidstein in recording his change of mind does not advert to the already well-known debate between Rabbis Elyakim Krumbein and Avraham Walfish[51] regarding the question I raised earlier as to whether the *shi'urim* in *SZAM* can be viewed as being representative of the bulk of the Rav's *shi'urim*, Krumbein arguing yes, Walfish no, for certainly *those shi'urim* are in the traditional mode. In particular, the argument Walfish presents in support of his position anticipates the distinction Blidstein draws in his note and seeks to account for it as well.

> It is only to be expected that *SZAM* would differ in its rhetorical structure from most *shi'urim* of the Rav, given the unique forum in which it was given: a mass audience, before whom a single lecture would be delivered, as opposed to the bulk of his *shi'urim*, which were delivered before his students, with whom he met on a regular basis for consecutive study of a single text. It is no wonder that such a lecture would focus much more heavily on concept than on text ... [as opposed to] the daily

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[50] Note the similarity between the Rav's method in *SZAM* and that of Rav Yitzhak Hutner in his multi-volume *Paḥad Yitzhak*.

[51] See the exchange between them in *Lomdus: The Conceptual Approach to Jewish Learning*, ed. Yosef Blau (Jersey City, N.J. Ktav Publishing House for the Orthodox Forum, 2006): Elyakim Krumbein, "From Reb Hayyim and the Rav to Shi'urei ha-Rav Aharon Lichtenstein: The Evolution of a Tradition of Learning," pp. 229–297; Avraham Walfish, "The Brisker Method and Close Reading: A Response to Rav Elyakim Krumbein," pp. 299–321; and Elyakim Krumbein, "Beyond Complexity: A Response to Rav Avraham Walfish," pp. 323–332.

> *shi'urim* [which] focused on the text, on the concepts emerging from the text, and on the methodology the Rav was practicing and teaching.[52]

Whether the two *shi'urim* examined by Blidstein are representative of the bulk of the Rav's *shi'urim* or not, they are both certainly of great intrinsic interest and importance, and, as stated above, his summary and analysis of them both lucid and incisive. Blidstein shows how in both *shi'urim* the Rav "mounts questions that penetrate to the very heart of the topic discussed and molds the myriad particulars of the halakhic discussion into a broad synthetic structure. He deals with details, of course—no authentic halakhic discussion could ever forego that—but details are not trivia." Here I will focus on Blidstein's discussion of the essay on "Aveilut."

As Blidstein notes:

> This essay indicates that both performance and internalization are halakhic components of mourning. To be more specific: mourning requires both patterned ritual activity and individualized emotional activity, that is to say, grief.... Both are equally halakhic. The internalized activity, in other words, is not the "aggadic" correlate of the performed ritual.[53] Rather ritual and emotion are both normative... This, of course, is a claim that the Rav makes frequently. (p. 127)

Blidstein, of course, is referring to one of the best-known innovative insights, *ḥiddushim*, of the Rav, namely, his distinction between the *ma'aseh ha-mitzvah*, the indispensable means whereby one performs a commandment, and the *kiyyum ha-mitzvah*, the actual fulfillment of the commandment. This distinction enables the Rav to incorporate at least part of the realm of subjective religious experience into the inner sanctum of Halakhah.

Normally, the Rav points out, *ma'aseh* and *kiyyum* coincide. Thus, for example, one performs the commandment to eat matzah by eating matzah, and that very act of eating constitutes the fulfillment of the commandment. The same holds true for most commandments. However, the Rav contends, there are central and fundamental "experiential" commandments—my term—where performance and fulfillment do not coincide, where the performance is an outward act but the fulfillment is an inner experience.

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[52] Walfish, "The Brisker Method," pp. 306, 308.

[53] This position of the Rav should be contrasted with that of Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel for whom "internalized activity" and subjectivity are always aggadic. I hope to elaborate upon this contrast in a forthcoming article.

This, of course, as I just stated, is a very famous *ḥiddush* of the Rav, and many scholars, including myself, have discussed it at some length.[54] Examples of such "experiential" commandments are prayer, repentance and (according to some *rishonim*) the recitation of the Shema.[55] What is relevant here, as Blidstein notes, is the Rav's claim that both mourning and rejoicing on festivals are examples of such "experiential" commandments. Indeed, as Blidstein further notes, the halakhic principle that a mourner does not follow his mourning practices on a festival, inasmuch as the positive commandment to "rejoice on thy festival" (Deut. 16:14) overrides the commandment to mourn, the clear implication being that mourning and festival rejoicing are mutually exclusive, serves to indicate that both mourning and festival rejoicing fundamentally require the attainment of an inward emotional experience, mourning that of grief, rejoicing that of joy. To cite Blidstein's paraphrase of the Rav's argument:

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[54] See Yitzhak Gottlieb, "'Al Gishato ha-Hilkhatit shel ha-Rav Y. D. Soloveitchik," *Shanah be-Shanah* (1993-1994): 186–197; Lawrence Kaplan, "The Multi-Faceted Legacy of the Rav: A Critical Analysis of R. Hershel Schachter's *Nefesh Ha-Rav*," *BDD* (*Bekhol Derakhekha Daehu: Journal of Torah and Scholarship*) 7 (1998): 63–65; Shlomo H. Pick, "Le-Darko shel Ha-Grid Soloveitchik, zt"l, be-Limmud ha-Torah," *Mo'adei ha-Rav* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2003), pp. 24–26; and David Shapiro, "*Ma'aseh ha-Mitzvah* and *Kiyyum ha-Mitzvah*," *Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Pesach, Sefirat ha-Omer, and Shavu'ot* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2005), pp. 53–67.

[55] With respect to prayer and the recitation of the Shema, see Lawrence Kaplan, "Review Essay: *Worship of the Heart*" (above, n. 49); and with respect to repentance, see idem, "Hermann Cohen and Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik on Repentance," *Hermann Cohen's Ethics*, edited by Robert Gibbs (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006), pp. 213–258.

> Now mourning and holiday ritual do not rule each other out as behavioral norms; it is possible to eat the holiday sacrifices while unshod and unshorn. The point, R. Soloveitchik argues, is that mourning and holiday joy are internalized emotional states before they are performed rituals, and these emotional states are in total conflict. (pp. 127-128)

Of course, one may ask: Granted that grief and joy contradict one another, is it not possible for these contradictory emotions to coexist in the psyche of the mourner? In truth, and this point is not noted by Blidstein, for the Rav there is a deeper inward contradiction between mourning and holiday joy, a contradiction on the level of consciousness. Here the Rav sets forth the following equations: Rejoicing = Standing in the Presence of God (*'amidah lifnei ha-Shem*), while Mourning = Distancing from the Presence of God (*hitrahkut mi-lifnei ha-Shem*). And it is this fundamental contradiction between the *consciousness* of standing in the presence of God and the *consciousness* of exile and separation from Him that is responsible for the commandment of festival rejoicing cancelling the commandment of mourning.[56] (Indeed, also in the other examples cited previously—prayer, repentance, and the recitation of the Shema—the inner fulfillment is not just an emotional experience, but involves an awareness of a special type of relationship with God.)

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[56] "U-Vikashtem mi-Sham," p. 211, n.19 [= *And From There You Shall Seek*, p. 197]; and "Be-'Inyan Avelut," pp. 193–195 [= "The Essential Nature of Mourning," pp. 78, 81-82]. Note, however, the comment of Rashi in *Sukkah* 25a, s.v. *hatam tarid tirda di-reshut*: "For even though a mourner is obligated to practice the rites of mourning and abstain from wearing shoes and washing and anointing himself in order to display honor on behalf of his dead relative (*kevod meito*), he is not obligated to grieve." According to Rashi, then, we may understand the conflict between *avelut* and *simḥat Yom Tov* as the contradiction between the heart's joy, which constitutes the inner *kiyyum* of the holiday rituals of rejoicing, and the display of honor to one's dead relative (*kevod meito*) achieved by means of the rites of mourning. For it is *kevod ha-met* that understandably requires that ordinarily one refrain during *avelut* from acts which cause one to rejoice. To be sure, a mourner on an ordinary day is permitted to eat meat and drink wine, but that is because those activities are not ordinarily seen as expressions of joy. However, on Yom Tov, the whole point of eating meat and drinking wine is to thereby attain the inward experience of joy. I discuss this view of Rashi at much greater length in a forthcoming article, "Can the Halakhah Suspend One's Emotions? Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Rashi, and Maimonides on the Laws of Mourning."

Be this last point as it may, Blidstein succinctly shows how the Rav's claim that the commandment of mourning refers first and foremost to the internalized emotional state of grief enables him to account for otherwise perplexing and problematic halakhic phenomena. In response to those who "may view the Rav's assertion that mourning is both behavioral and internalized ... [as] reflect[ing] a modernizing Protestant bent," Blidstein correctly notes that "despite the modern terminology the halakhic analysis seems to be autonomous" (p. 132). Indeed, as Blidstein points out, the Rav, as is to be expected, invokes in support of his thesis a number of *rishonim*, particularly the anonymous disciple of R. Yeḥiel of Paris "for whom this internalization is a consistent motif." Somewhat surprisingly, particularly in light of his great interest in and extensive and illuminating writings on Maimonidean Halakhah, Blidstein does not mention that the Rav devotes considerable energy and ingenuity to arguing that the view that the commandment of mourning refers to the internalized emotional state of grief is also espoused by Maimonides, though in none of his works does Maimonides make the point explicitly.[57]

Blidstein emphasizes that while he has "summarized and occasionally interpreted," he has "not evaluated or attempted a critique" (p. 133). Therefore I do not feel it is appropriate to present here my own critique of the Rav's views, which, in any event, I will present in a forthcoming article of mine.[58] But I would like to take issue here with a point that Blidstein raises in *support* of the Rav's thesis. He argues that "the claim that grief itself possesses normative status ought to come as no surprise. A significant component of the mourning process is, after all, *niḥum aveilim…. Niḥum* presumes, clearly, that grief—to which consolation responds—is normatively present" (p. 121). I cannot agree. The reality of the mourner's grief as a natural emotion is, indeed, normatively present in the sense that it imposes upon *others* the obligation of *niḥum*. But I do not see how this means that the mourner himself is normatively obligated to experience grief, much less that this inner experience of grief constitutes the fulfillment of the commandment to mourn.

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[57] Indeed, in my forthcoming article referred to in the previous note, I argue that it is preferable to understand Maimonides' view regarding the essence of mourning as reflecting the *kevod ha-met* approach of Rashi as opposed to the inner grief approach of the anonymous disciple of R. Yeḥiel of Paris. For the meanwhile, note that Maimonides in *Hilkhot Aveilut* uses the term grief (*tza'ar*) only in connection with *sheloshim* and not *shiv'a*.

[58] See my previous two notes.

Despite this minor caveat, I again wish to commend Blidstein for the skill and deftness with which he summarizes and analyzes the Rav's halakhic thought as contained in these two *shi'urim* from *SZAM*. It is Blidstein's confrontation with the *substance* of the Rav's halakhic thought, with the "it" and not just the "about it," that lends particular weight to his more general reflections on that halakhic thought in the last section of his essay. In that section Blidstein convincingly suggests that the Rav isn't so much presenting a philosophy of halakhah, as he is presenting an interpretation, a hermeneutic of halakhah, which, Blidstein notes, is a hermeneutic in a dual sense. Not only does the Rav attempt to "provide… a coherent 'text,'" but he also attempts "to 'interpret' halakhic ritual behavior, to render [it] coherent and meaningful" (135-136). We have here, Blidstein observes, "A hermeneutic of halakhic behavior—a hermeneutic that draws upon halakhic concepts, values, and, in our case, psychological and emotional facts" (p. 136).[59] Above all,

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[59] I find it hard, however, to agree with Blidstein's claim that this hermeneutic led the Rav beyond the famed Brisker focus on the "what" to raise questions of "why." Thus Blidstein maintains that "especially as regards the priest's impurity, the Rav was not only concerned with how priest behaved, but with why he behaved in that way, that is to say, with the meaning of his behavior; it was an act of mourning" (p. 136). It seems to me that that this is still in the realm of "what," particularly in light of Maimonides' view in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Positive Commandment # 37 (cited by Blidstein on p. 124, n. 5) that this mandated impurity is simply identified with the imperative of mourning. I admit, though, that this is a complex matter. See in this regard the differing emphases of Walfish, "The Brisker Method," pp. 313-314, and Krumbein, "Beyond Complexity," pp. 331-332. While Walfish argues that "the boundary between 'understand-

Blidstein concludes, in the Rav's work, as in "certain facets of the work of people like [Peter] Berger, [Clifford] Geertz, [Charles] Taylor, [Michael] Walzer, and others..., norms are taken ... as tools of world-building and world-perceiving" (p. 138).[60] This extremely important observation deserves careful analysis, but such an analysis would take us beyond the bounds of this already greatly distended review-essay.

V

As noted already, the essay "Biblical Models" deals with the Rav's hermeneutics, that is, his phenomenological readings of biblical texts, focusing on "Kol Dodi Dofek" and *LMF*. Blidstein argues, I believe correctly, that *LMF* "works much more closely with the biblical narrative" than does "Kol Dodi Dofek," and that while the latter is more of a homily, "one could describe [the former] as genuine hermeneutic" (p. 69). A major component of Blidstein's essay is his comparison of the Rav's reading of the "exodus experience—bondage, release, Sinai"— in "Kol Dodi Dofek" with that of Martin Buber as found in his 1936 essay "On Nationalism" (pp. 64–69), and of his reading of the two creation stories in *LMF* with that of Karl Barth, as contained in the (almost 300 page!) forty-first section of *Church Dogmatics*. I have already discussed Blidstein's "Kol Dodi Dofek"/"On Nationalism" comparison. It would be worthwhile to analyze as well his *LMF*/*Church Dogmatics* comparison, but I must leave that elaborate task for another occasion. Here I will focus on Blidstein's discussion of the Rav's reading of the two creation stories in *LMF*.[61]

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ing' and 'teleology,'" that is, between "what" and "why," "is not ironclad" (p. 312) and, like Blidstein, he sees the Rav as, at least in his "experiential" *shi'urim*, moving precisely in this direction, Krumbein maintains that "the Rav's innovation in the realm of *Oraḥ Ḥayyim* is that experience is in fact the 'what' of Halakhah" (p. 332).

[60] Blidstein graciously acknowledges that I made a similar point in my (wrongly entitled?) essay, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Philosophy of Halakhah," *Jewish Law Annual* 7 (1988): 162.

[61] See, however, notes 67 and 68, for some brief remarks about Barth's readings.

Blidstein notes that the Rav, as is well known, "rather than harmonizing away the distinctions between these [stories],...pushes them to the limit,...mak[ing] a sharp distinction between First Adam and Second Adam, between the person created in Genesis 1 and the person created in Genesis 2. First Adam may be majestic and dignified, but covenantal dialogical existence is bestowed on Second Adam" (pp. 69, 74).

He explains:

> Jewish tradition ... is not committed to any single understanding of the "image of God" in man, which leaves R. Soloveitchik fairly free to cast the net of his imagination or alternatively to exploit this motif for his own purposes. Moreover ... he tends to read materials—even biblical materials—in a mode that suggests contrasts ... at least as much as continuities, a habit of mind possibly deriving from halakhic studies. In this particular case, he pursues his own agenda, which has as a dual focus the ... affirmation of technological man and the painful awareness of the gap between utilitarian fulfillment and true covenantal existence" (p. 74).

All this is certainly true. But we need to dig deeper. For the Rav, First Adam's relationship with God in Genesis 1 is set within a cosmic framework. Man's image of God in the first creation account refers, for the Rav, to his "inner charismatic endowment as a creative being"[62] that enables him to dominate his environment and thereby achieve dignity and majesty. Most important, "In doing all this Adam the first is trying to carry out the mandate of God.... [The striving for majesty and dignity] is a manifestation of obedience to rather than rebellion against God."[63] Particularly, man in *LMF*, both Adam the first and Adam the second, has a religious awareness of God mediated through the cosmos. Adam the first has a "pure rational religious awareness," which is a product of his creative cultural consciousness that picks out elements that point to the infinite.[64] Adam the second as well, *prior* to his revelational covenantal experience, has an "aboriginal," cosmic religious experience.[65] This is a genuine living experience, receptive in nature and distinct from man's creative cultural consciousness, where the individual searches for the mysterious fascinating personal God hidden within the qualitative sense world. (Indeed, there is a cross-over here, going in the direction from Adam the second to Adam the first, for Adam the first constructs his "pure rational religious awareness" by borrowing "some component parts" from the transcendental, "aboriginal," cosmic religious experience of Adam the second and "translating" them into cultural religious categories.[66]) In a somewhat similar vein, the Rav in *And From There You Will Seek* speaks of the significance and necessity of the rational religious experience. This, like the "aboriginal," cosmic religious experience of Adam the second, is a genuine living experience where God is sought out as the Hidden Intellect standing behind the qualitative sense world, but, unlike the "aboriginal," cosmic religious experience of Adam the second which is receptive in nature and distinct from man's creative cultural consciousness, the rational religious experience is active in nature and part of the individual's creative cultural consciousness. To be sure, the Rav is critical, to a greater or lesser degree, of all these forms of a cosmic approach to God, viewing them all as insufficient and staunchly, indeed passionately, maintaining that the covenantal revelational religious experience is absolutely fundamental and indispensable. Still, while all these cosmic approaches to God are inadequate, none are illegitimate. Given all this, one can understand the contrast the Rav draws between cosmic Adam the first of Genesis 1 and covenantal Adam the second of Genesis 2, privileging the latter but still valuing the former.[67]

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[62] *The Lonely Man of Faith* (Jerusalem: Maggid, OU Press, 2012), p. 8.

[63] Ibid, pp. 12-13.

[64] Ibid, p. 66.

Blidstein comments as well on the Rav's understanding of God's relationship with Adam and Eve.

> God [for R. Soloveitchik] is a covenantal partner *with* Adam and Eve.... On the level of human dynamics R. Soloveitchik

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[65] Ibid, pp. 15–17, 35–38, 67–69.

[66] Ibid, pp. 66-67.

[67] It is, by contrast, not surprising that for Barth, who strongly rejects any natural theology, any approach to God via the cosmos, both Adams are covenantal figures.

> argues that it is the presence of God—a commanding presence that demands mutual commitment to the goals He sets down—which introduces substantive content and value to the human relationship. Yet, by entering into the covenantal relationship, God also commits Himself to the human pair. Both this commitment and the intimacy it implies are adumbrations of God's relationship with His people Israel, a relationship of mutual commitment and intimacy. For R. Soloveitchik ... the covenant between these two humans includes God as a third partner. (pp. 74-75)[68]

Here, of course, we clearly see the Rav's Halakho-centrism. What "introduces substantive content and value to the human relationship" is God's "*commanding* presence" (emphasis added). As Blidstein goes on to say, "R. Soloveitchik ...posits a relationship that is covenantal [only] if it strives toward a normative goal.... Dialogue here has a halakhic character" (p. 75).

In noting the Rav's insistence that it is God's "commanding presence" that "introduces substantive content and value to the human relationship," Blidstein appears to be referring to the following passage from *LMF*:

> Only when God emerged from the transcendent darkness of He-anonymity to the illumined spaces of community knowability *and charged man with an ethical-moral mission* [emphasis added] did Adam *absconditus* and Eve *abscondita*, while revealing themselves to God in prayer and unqualified commitment—also reveal themselves to each other in sympathy and love on the one hand and common action on the other.[69]

But where in Genesis 2 does God charge Adam and Eve "with an ethical-moral mission?" Blidstein suggests that perhaps this reading "responds ... to God's matchmaking role" (p. 72). Indeed, as

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[68] For Barth, on the contrary, as Blidstein notes (p. 74), "the covenant between Adam and Eve prefigures the covenant between Israel and God.... Adam and Eve embody ... the ideal covenant—that which inheres not only in the ideal relationship of man and woman or even Israel and God, but of Jesus and the Church."

[69] Ibid, pp. 50-51.

Blidstein notes, the Rav in describing how "Adam the second was introduced to Eve by God"[70] states that "God ... summoned Adam to join Eve in an existential community molded by sacrifice and suffering, and ... Himself became a partner in this community. God is never outside the covenantal community; He joined man and shares in his covenantal existence."[71] As Blidstein comments, "this reading, needless to say, hangs virtually by a hair" (p. 72). Indeed, even with the Rav's midrashic expansion of Adam the second's being introduced to Eve by God, it is still difficult to see where in this "introduction" God charges them "with an ethical-moral mission."

Perhaps the Rav may also have in mind the verse "And the Lord God took the man and placed him the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). For the Rav this is a duty with which Adam the second is charged.[72] The Rav understands this duty thus. "God...summoned Adam the second to retreat." Here "humble man makes a movement of recoil, and lets himself be confronted and defeated by a Higher and Truer Being." He thereby achieves redemption, and "a redeemed life is *ipso facto* a disciplined life."[73] Again, this is reading a great deal into the biblical text. Moreover, the verse never actually speaks of a charge to cultivate and keep the Garden. Neither the word "va-yomer," "And He said," much less the word "va-yetzav," "and He commanded," is used. Finally, this "charge" takes place before the creation of Eve.

What is striking and requires further examination is that the Rav in *LMF never* cites the verses forbidding the eating of the tree of knowledge. "And the Lord God commanded the man saying: 'Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for on the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'" (Gen. 2:16-17). These verses play an important role in "Confrontation," and an absolutely critical one in *The Emergence of Ethical Man* [=*EEM*]. In "Confrontation" the Rav cite these verses and comments, "With the birth of the divine norm man becomes aware of his singularly human existence."[74] In *EEM* these verses form the key transition from natural man to ethical man. After citing these verses the Rav comments:

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[70] Ibid, p. 31.

[71] Ibid, p. 31.

[72] Ibid, p. 8.

[73] Ibid, p. 26.

> The first ethical norm is disclosed to man.... The Torah [here] used the verb "*va-yetzav*," "He commanded."... Va-yetzav ... means command. A new law in all its uniqueness was imposed upon [man].... Man suddenly experienced an ethical imperative which was prompted by autonomous, unique interests, unknown to natural man. He suddenly gained insight into a new force, an ethical one. With the *va-yetzav* of divine command, with the dawning of the ethical experience, man began to experience his selfhood, his personalistic existence.[75]

Given this view that "va-yetzav" contains the divine ethical norm, it is difficult to see why the Rav in *LMF* does not appeal to these verses in support of his claim that God "charged man with an ethical-moral mission." To be sure, these verses, like the verse "And the Lord God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15), take place before the creation of Eve. But the Rav in *EEM*, basing himself on Eve's use of the plural in the verse "God has said, 'You shall not eat (*lo tokhlu*) of [the fruit of the tree]'" (Gen.3:3), argues:

> This ... clearly implies that both Adam and Eve were enjoined from consuming the fruit.... Apparently, the norm given to Adam was binding even with regard to the woman. The unity of the I and the thou, the "and he shall cling to his wife," asserted itself in the common sense of moral duty, ethical solidarity, and also in responsibility... Both are partaking of the same destiny with all its ramifications; coexistence is synonymous with ethical sympathy. What had been a command to Adam became a moral dialogue, an ethical conversation between the I and the thou.[76]

The similarity between the Rav's claim in *LMF* that God's "charging man with an ethical-moral mission" was followed by Adam and Eve's "reveal[ing] themselves to each other in sympathy and love on the one hand and common action on the other" and his claim in *EEM* that "What had been a command to Adam became a moral dialogue, an ethical conversation between the I and the thou" is striking. So the mystery as to why the Rav in *LMF* never cited the verses forbidding the eating of the tree of knowledge remains.[77] One thing though we may state with confidence. The very fact that the Rav's claim in *LMF* that, to cite Blidstein's paraphrase, it is God's "commanding presence ...which introduces substantive content and value to the human relationship" as a reading of the Scriptural text "hangs virtually by a hair" serves only to drive home even more strongly his Halakho-centrism.

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[74] "Confrontation" (above, n. 24), p. 9.

[75] *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, ed. Michael Berger (Jersey City, N.J. Ktav Publishing House for the Toras HoRav Foundation, 2005), pp. 86–88.

[76] Ibid, p. 96.

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[77] In correspondence with Prof. David Shatz, I pointed out to him the absence of any citation in *LMF* of the verses forbidding the eating of the tree of knowledge and asked him whether he had any thoughts on the matter. Shatz replied, "I have felt ... that despite the materials about prophets, norms, and revelation, the very concept of divine command in *LMF* is not as conspicuous as one would expect.... [The Rav] stresses (as I see it) friendship and the like, rather than legislation.... Also, since, in the end, the command was disobeyed, and the Rav has things to say about that he did not want to go into in *LMF* (desire, etc.), he left the reference to the norm vague." Shatz's comments are insightful and thought-provoking, though his claim that "the very concept of divine command in *LMF* is not as conspicuous as one would expect" is somewhat at odds with my emphasis on *LMF*'s halakho-centric nature. In his emphasis on the centrality of friendship in the essay, Shatz's approach to *LMF* is similar to that of Shira Wolosky in "The Lonely Woman of Faith," *Judaism* 52:1-2 (2003): 3–18. (I discuss and critique Wolosky's approach in "Rav Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith* in Contemporary Modern Orthodox Jewish Thought" [above, n. 42], pp. 152–155.) To pick up on the last sentence of Shatz's comments, I would note that the Rav's portraits of the two Adams in *LMF* are rather static, as contrasted with his more developmental portraits of man in "Confrontation" and *EEM*. The rather static and, indeed, wholly positive portrait of Adam the second might have led the Rav to avoid bringing to the fore in *LMF* Adam the second's failure to obey the divine command and all its negative consequences.

VI

Beyond the specific themes in the Rav's thought that Blidstein treats in *Society and Self*, he raises two broader issues. First, Blidstein in his essay "Letters on Public Affairs" takes note of the "growing dispute over [the Rav's] cultural legacy and personality. The dispute pits those who account for his modernist vision and his openness to general learning as post-facto (*be-di'avad*) submission to the needs of the hour as against those who see these traits as authentic aspects of his identity" (p. 39).[78] While Blidstein does not, except perhaps indirectly, seek to adjudicate this dispute in that essay, he does directly address himself to one critical aspect of it in his essay "The Jewish People." There Blidstein, in speaking of the Rav's depiction of Adam the first in *LMF*, raises the following striking paradox.

> R. Soloveitchik does indeed allow man's technological ability a significant role in the Divine scheme: "majestic" First Adam ... fulfills a godly mandate by subduing the physical world and perfecting it. But this positive appropriation of this major characteristic of Western civilization is not accompanied by a corresponding imperative to appropriate Western culture, its philosophical or literary achievements. This assertion seems improbable or at least paradoxical, with regard to the Rav, whose major writings are suffused with modern Western philosophy and literature, and whose very intellectual world is constructed, at least in part, with materials provided by modern culture. Yet the paradox is a fact; the Rav is a paradigm of the synthesis of Jewish and Western culture, but he nowhere *prescribes* this move or even urges legitimacy. (p. 81)

This "paradox," in turn, leads Blidstein to pose the following disquieting question. "Are we to assume, then, that this silence discloses a measure of ambivalence, as though the Rav is hinting that he cannot fully approve of involvement in Western culture, or even that there is no systematic way to make it part of the spiritual curriculum" (p. 81)?

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[78] Blidstein in his footnote to this passage graciously refers the reader to my essay, "Revisionism and the Rav: The Struggle for the Soul of Modern Orthodoxy," *Judaism* 48 (1999): 290–311, describing it as "an overview of the matter (from a particular perspective)." Indeed, my article was written "from a particular perspective," one that I would like to believe is largely shared by Blidstein himself, at least the Blidstein of *Society and Self*.

But how does he answer it? Here, despite Blidstein's assertion in his Introduction that "except for editorial adjustments I have not made changes in the essays I wrote over the years" (p. 11), the answer he provides in the original version of his essay, published in *Tradition* in 1989, differs significantly, certainly in tone and perhaps also in substance, from the one he provides in the version found in *Society and Self*.[79] Here is Blidstein's *Tradition* answer.

> One may explain that technology complements Jewish spirituality, but does not compete with it, as do philosophy, literature, and so on; consequently, only Jewish sources can provide Jewish values. Thus—and this a classic move—the non-Jewish material will be presented simply as Torah insights presented in a different language, as it were.... Put less systematically, the Rav finds the categories and insights of Western philosophy and its literature and psychology to be an accurate description of reality, and as such they need no explicit defense.[80]
>
> And here is Blidstein's *Society and Self* answer.
>
> Technology is ... concrete and materialistic; it raises the standard of living, but does not necessarily enhance our spiritual or even human quality—nor is that its intention. Technology, then, needs rabbinic approval and even defense. This is, of course, not true of philosophy, literature, music. These, despite their potential dangers, are intrinsically related to the noetic

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[79] Indeed, Blidstein in the *Society and Self* version of the essay softens the nature of the paradox, as compared with the essay's *Tradition* version. Thus, in the *Tradition* version after the sentence "the Rav is a paradigm of the synthesis of Jewish and Western culture, but he nowhere *prescribes* this move or even urges legitimacy," Blidstein goes on to write, "The Rav constructs his thought within the categories of Western culture, but nowhere explicitly assigns a specific role to this culture." This last sentence in omitted from the *Society and Self* version.

[80] "On the Jewish People in the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," *Tradition* 24:3 (1989):20. I am not certain whether the "less systematic" part of Blidstein's answer coheres with the first part of his answer.

> and spiritual component of human existence. It is obvious that they should be cultivated and that the Jew who strives for a fuller spiritual existence will be open to their message and impact. The Rav's silence would derive, then, from the example he provides. How after reading *Ish ha-Halakhah* could one imagine that Max Scheler and William James are not required reading? Indeed, that they would not contribute to one's spiritual formation? (p. 81)

Readers can decide for themselves the distance between First Blidstein and Second Blidstein. Presumably those "who account for [the Rav's] modernist vision and his openness to general learning as post-facto ... submission to the needs of the hour" will prefer Blidstein's first answer, at least its first part,[81] while those—like myself—who "see [the Rav's modernist vision and his openness to general learning] as authentic aspects of his identity" will prefer his second answer.[82]

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[81] See the previous note.

[82] Both David Shatz and I have referred in earlier essays to Blidstein's discussion in the original *Tradition* article. Shatz in several of his articles convincingly points to a number of places where the Rav implicitly assigns a positive religious role to Western culture. See Shatz, "The Rav's Philosophical Legacy" (above, n. 29) pp. 312–314; "Practical Endeavor and the Torah U-Madda Debate," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 3 (1991-1992): 143, n. 62; and above all, "Ha-Madda ve-ha-Toda'ah ha-Datit be-Haguto shel ha-Rav Soloveitchik," *Emunah bi-Zemanim Mishtanim* (above n. 47), pp. 333-334. In my essay, "The Multi-Faceted Legacy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," *BDD* 7 (Summer 1998) [appeared in 1999], p. 60, n. 18, I note that while it is true that nowhere in the Rav's published writings does he "explicitly assign a specific role to [Western] culture," he does, in at least one major public address, explicitly assign it a very positive role, indeed. Thus in a Yiddish address to the Rabbinic Alumni of Yeshiva University on the subject of *Shirah* (Song), the Rav speaks of the two peaks, the two worlds, of Torah and Western culture, and of the individual's need to live on both these peaks, in both these worlds, and to move back and forth between the two. And the Rav adds that though, on the one hand, there is an abyss between these two peaks, and that no one—not even the Rambam—succeeded in building a complete and fully adequate bridge between them, on the other hand, the peaks must be brought into contact, into relationship with one another;

The second broader issue Blidstein raises is that of the Rav's uniqueness. Here Blidstein's answer is unambiguous. As he states in the conclusion of his review of *Family Redeemed*:

> By placing this volume alongside the Rav's halakhic works, we are reminded once again of his uniqueness. Despite recent attempts to blur and even sully his singularity, the written words speak for themselves. (p. 120)

Yet written words rarely "speak for themselves." They require highlighting, exegesis, and interpretation, precisely the skills at which Gerald Blidstein excels. Not the least of the many contributions, then, that *Society and Self*, with its inimitable blend of scholarly precision and literary power, of erudition and insight, makes to our understanding of the Rav's person and his thought is not just to remind us of his and its uniqueness, but to enable us to re-discover and appreciate that uniqueness for ourselves, ever new and ever fresh. ❧

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they must understand one another. "We want the man who studies Gemara to understand the other peak, the entire physical-mathematical world and the philosophical interpretation of that world differently than the dry mathematical physicist who dwells entirely in the realm of the profane, in the secular work-a-day world; and we also want to bring that experience, that understanding, that depth and exactitude that we acquire while on the other peak, the peak of culture, into the peak of holiness, of Judaism, in order to deepen it and broaden it and gain new insights into it. We must bring the beauty of Yefet into the tents of Shem." An (unfortunately rather poor) Hebrew translation of part of this Yiddish address may be found in "Ramattayim Tzofim," *Ha-Adam ve-'Olamo* (Jerusalem, 1998), pp. 73–83. Compare my English translation, found immediately above, with the Hebrew translation, or rather weak paraphrase, in "Ramattayim Tzofim," p. 83. More recently, a fine English translation, if somewhat paraphrastic in places, of the address appeared. See Avishai David, "Beshalah: Hallel over the Miraculous and the Ordinary," *Darosh Darash Yosef: Discourses of Rabbi Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik on the Weekly Parashah* (Jerusalem and New York: Urim Publications and OU Press, 2011), pp. 146–155. Unfortunately, one of the places R. David chooses to paraphrase is precisely the essay's conclusion where the Rav urges the necessity of bringing the peaks into contact with one another. The full force of that conclusion does not, then, come through in R. David's translation as (I believe) it does in mine.