

***Lectures of Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik:  
The Relationship between Halakhah, Aggadah,  
and Kabbalah***

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## Editors' Introduction

These “Lectures of Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik: The Relationship between Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah” (the *Lectures*) are based on the notes of Rabbi Dr. Robert Blau taken during Rav Soloveitchik’s lectures at Yeshiva University, ca. 1950.

Robert Blau has *semikhab* from RIETS and received an MA in Jewish Studies from Columbia University under Salo Baron and a Doctorate from the Jewish Teachers Seminary under Horace M. Kallen. He taught Jewish Studies at Stern College, and for 45 years gave a *shiur* at Congregation Shomrei Emunah in Boro Park. He is the author of *אפנה ואשנה* which contains original essays and summaries of Rav Soloveitchik’s major *shiurim* and which is now being prepared, in an expanded form, for its third printing. This *sefer* also contains a four-page article, *קבלה, אגדה, הלכה* (pp. 106–109) which summarizes their main features as elaborated upon in the *Lectures*.

These *Lectures* can be viewed in the context of the philosophical program Rav Soloveitchik lays out in *The Halakhic Mind*, written ca. 1944. In *The Halakhic Mind*, he argues that Halakhah—a term he uses in a broad sense—should be used as the source material to create Jewish philosophy. In our *Lectures*, Rav Soloveitchik makes it clear that the triad Halakhah-Aggadah-Kabbalah can be viewed as a single unit.

The *Lectures* are numbered I through XVIII but two of them, XII and XV, are missing. Nonetheless, the overall structure of the *Lectures* appears to be intact: 1. Creating a philosophy of Judaism from Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah; 2. Characteristics and structure of Halakhah; 3. Halakhah enhanced by Aggadah; 4. Halakhah enhanced by Kabbalah; 5. Shabbat in light of Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah; 6. Confronting evil; and 7. The universe is a single unit and every aspect within it, throughout time, has meaning.

The *Lectures*, in most cases, are well detailed and Rav Soloveitchik’s voice can be discerned throughout. Nevertheless, a certain amount of editing was required: sentence structure, punctuation, missing words, references, and misquoted texts. The editors without any notations of such editing made all such corrections.

The original text we received contained passages within (parentheses). These were either added by Robert Blau to explain or clarify, and/or they reflect asides made by Rav Soloveitchik during his lectures. The editors also inserted additions and clarifications. These insertions are shown within [square brackets]. When a word or phrase should be deleted, it is indicated within {curly brackets}.

There were no footnotes in the original text. The editors added all footnotes. Likewise, the editors added the Table of Contents and the chapter and paragraph headers.

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After the editing of the *Lectures* was mostly complete, Jeffrey Saks, the editor of *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, brought to our attention that they too are in possession of notes on the Rav's lectures with a similar title, in their case by Rabbi Yaakov I. Homnick (the "Homnick Notes"). We agreed to share our corresponding notes and indeed, before we finalized the *Lectures*, we were able to clarify some ideas based on the Homnick Notes. We are grateful to *Tradition* and its editor Jeffrey Saks for sharing their notes, and for their friendship, congeniality, and cooperation.

After some discussion, the editorial boards of both journals decided to each publish its own set of notes, which partially overlap and complement one another. Following the appearance of both versions, a jointly published *Tradition/Hakirah* print edition will be made available for purchase from the websites of each journal.

While both sets of lectures contain overlapping material, it is not clear they are from the same lecture. If they were given in different semesters, the Rav was known to rework his material when teaching a topic a second or subsequent time. This may account for the significant differences in the two sets of notes: the overlapping information is more detailed in the Homnick Notes while that of Blau contains a wider set of topics. We look forward to other curious scholars solving this dilemma.

A scholarly effort combining the Homnick and Blau Notes into a single concise and coherent unit would be a great gift to the Torah world and would further elucidate the Rav's philosophical project: defining the phenomenological experience and the typological characteristics of Halakhic man as shaped by the triad of Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah.

## Lecture I

### 1. Creating a Jewish Philosophy from Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah

Without Halakhah, Aggadah and Kabbalah would exist in a vacuum. The study of Halakhah is a science and it has its own methodology.<sup>1</sup> One must be trained mentally and intellectually to understand it. The difficulty in understanding Halakhah results from misunderstanding its methodology. The “Existential Movement” in philosophy tries to have the philosopher free himself from the fetters of the scientific method and speak about the ambiguous nature of what is being investigated.<sup>2</sup> It is easier to do the latter.

The same is true of Jewish thought. It is easy to philosophize about Hasidism by telling a few stories, but doing so about Halakhah, Kabbalah, and Aggadah is difficult. All roads lead to Halakhah, but no attempt has yet been made to create a world formula from Halakhah.<sup>3</sup> That is the topic

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<sup>1</sup> On methodology, see Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, translated from the Hebrew by Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: JPS, 1983), p. 19. See also the speech “*Gerus* and *Mesorah*.”

(<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/767722/rabbi-joseph-b-soloveitchik/gerus-mesorah-part-1/>) where Rav Soloveitchik speaks about the intellectual and epistemological tools (of the Brisker method) used to understand Halakhah.

<sup>2</sup> Existentialism, as it was understood, is a broad philosophical movement exploring a variety of themes, like dread, death, being, and absurdity. Prominent existentialists include Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, Sartre, Barth, and Tillich. Perhaps most significant in this context is existentialism’s prominent theme of human choice as the central fact of human nature.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Halakhic Mind: An Essay on Jewish Tradition and Modern Thought* (NY: Seth Press, 1986) does indeed lay out Rav Soloveitchik’s proposed method of developing Jewish philosophy out of the sources of Halakhah. This sentiment is summarized on pp. 101–102: “To this end there is only a single source from which a Jewish philosophical *Weltanschauung* could emerge; the objective order—the Halakhah... Out of the sources of Halakhah, a new world view awaits formulation.”

In *Halakhic Mind*, Rav Soloveitchik argues for the creation of Jewish philosophy out of Halakhah. In our *Lectures*, he suggests using Halakhah, Aggadah and Kabbalah. This is not necessarily a contradiction. In *Halakhic Mind*, pp. 90–91, Rav Soloveitchik writes, “For were we to analyze the mystery of the God-man relationship as reflected in the Jewish religious consciousness from both traditional and modern aspects, it would be necessary that we first gather all objectified data at our disposal: passages of the Holy Writ pertaining to divinity and divine

of these lectures.<sup>4</sup>

### **A Jewish Religious Experience Is Heterogeneous**

Like any other religious experience,<sup>5</sup> a specific Jewish religious experience is heterogeneous: a multiplicity of motives and incommensurate ideas. It does not simplify man's access to himself and the world; it complicates it.<sup>6</sup> The religious mentality may be investigated on various planes. This would produce many paradoxes. Philosophy speaks of multi-valued logic.<sup>7</sup>

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attributes; the norms regulating the God-man contact such as the norm of love and fear of God; moments of tension between God and man, as in the case of Job; many halakhic problems where certain attitudes of man toward Divinity have found expression; all forms of cult liturgy, prayer, Jewish mysticism, rational philosophy, religious movements, etc. Out of this enormous mass of objectified constructs, the underlying subjective aspects could gradually be reconstructed." The term "Halakhah" in its broad sense can indeed include Aggadah and Kabbalah.

<sup>4</sup> The phrase "...a world formula from Halakhah" appears to refer to Rav Soloveitchik's philosophy of halakhah project. See, for example, Heshey Zelcer and Mark Zelcer, *The Philosophy of Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 54–172, esp. pp. 54–55. For a brief introduction, see *ibid.*, p. 2, "Soloveitchik... reformulated the *ta'amei ha-mitzvot* question. Instead of asking for the reason something is commanded, or for what purpose, he tells us to ask instead what effect the commandment has upon the person performing it. The Hebrew word '*ta'ami*' here means 'taste' rather than 'reason.' In Soloveitchik's philosophical program, the *ta'amei ha-mitzvot* problem asks how a specific commandment 'tastes' to the one who performs it. More precisely, if slightly less literally, what is the experience of fulfilling a commandment? To understand the totality of what it is to be a Halakhic Man, one thus needs to study and define that which shapes his world, the facts of his religion, its objective data—the Halakhah, in its broadest sense."

<sup>5</sup> Rav Soloveitchik may have in mind William James' largely Christianity-focused *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (NY: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004) which documents numerous religious experiences.

<sup>6</sup> See Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, pp. 129–143, fn. 4. For example, "Religion is not, at the outset, a refuge of grace and mercy for the despondent and desperate, an enchanted stream for crushed spirits, but a raging, clamorous torrent of man's consciousness with all its crises, pangs, and torments." p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, since Aristotle, a logical system assumed the principle of the Excluded Middle (for all statements, either it or its negation is true). Aristotle himself, however, discovered cases where this was inadequate. Early 20th century logicians like Łukasiewicz, Post, Kleene, and Reichenbach began to consider logics that allowed for alternate truth value schemes in order to both speak about different contexts that are not amenable to classical logic and to resolve paradoxes. Early multi-valued logics include systems that allow for True, False, and

The same with religious experience. A and B cannot be both A and B. But religious experience is sometimes A, B, or A and B.<sup>8,9</sup>

### **The Jewish Religious Experience Is a Product of Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah**

We will limit ourselves to a fragment of Jewish religious experience. We will take three aspects of the Jewish religious experience and distinguish it from the general religious experience and from the exclusive Halakhic experience:

- 1) Halakhic
- 2) Aggadic
- 3) Kabbalistic or mystical

The prism through which the white light of primordial religious experience came is interesting. No one tried to find the transition from dry acceptance to mystic acceptance. To consider these three, we must understand that in their formalized, institutionalized form, all three contribute something uniquely Jewish. No other religion has such a triad.

These three can be traced to primordial and primeval sources. They lend themselves to a threefold method of investigation:

- 1) **Logos** [word/reason]:<sup>10</sup> The religious experience may merge with the intellectual drive to stimulate both the search for knowledge and offer clues. A stimulant-satisfier, at this stage it is subject to intellectualization and is subjected to abstract terms. Religion may then express itself through *logos*.
- 2) **Ethos** [character]: It may also express itself through the *ethos*—through the imperative [the laws of God]. Since the *lulav* brought into focus an ethical mode of behavior, there has been a new era

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Indeterminate, or True, False, and Possible. Thus, there have been proposals to use infinite valued logic to resolve the sorites paradox, three-valued logics that add “Possible” as a truth-value to resolve Aristotle’s sea battle problem, etc.

<sup>8</sup> The Homnick Notes, which mentions the principle of the Excluded Middle, is clearer, “The philosophy of nature speaks of multiple-valued logic. It wants the exclusion and the elimination of the Aristotelian Excluded Middle. In religion, the Excluded Middle is wrong; A and B and at times, B and A together.”

<sup>9</sup> Therefore, for a Jew, the religious experience can be made up of all three: Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah, or any combination of these three.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle taught in his *Rhetoric* that the ability to persuade an audience relies on three things: *logos* (reason of the argument), *ethos* (character/credibility of the speaker), and *pathos* (emotion of the hearer).

of objectification. Serve God through the ethical norm, it said. How? By imitating His ways, which are not only infinitely kind but ethical (*Hasid*). Ethics in Judaism is *Hassidut*. (*Mussar* is the instilling of discipline.) Ethical religion means a practical performance indicating a desire to raise oneself in an attempt to reach God and serve Him. Laws and codes form an integral part of the religious experience. A carefree religious life is nonsensical; the pressure of the religious norm must be felt. Rambam in the last chapter of the *Moreh Nevukhim* states that if the intellect does not lead to ethics, it is meaningless.<sup>11</sup> There should be no discrimination between logic and ethics. Logic is *eo-ipsa* [by its very nature] ethics.

- 3) **Ecstasy:** Religion also has a close affinity to the ecstatic experience and is very often ecstatic, especially in modern times.

The intellectual contact is more difficult, more formal, and cooler than the ecstatic performance, which is very heated and passionate; it is a fiery experience, imaginative and impulsive. The tendency of the religious ecstatic person is to bridge the gap between him and God. In the ecstatic act, man and object try to merge. There is an attempt at self-transcendence and expansion of the human personality to the infinite. The religious ceremony expresses itself best in ecstatic categories such as the Eucharist or Holy Communion with bread and {wafer} [wine]. It is an ecstatic experience for the person who believes in it. Try to rationalize it and it loses its value. That is why rationalized religion cannot understand this ceremony. Kant said he could not understand how by mumbling something you establish contact with God.<sup>12</sup>

### **No Jewish Philosopher Understood Judaism as a Solely Ecstatic Religion**

Some religions emphasize all these things; others emphasize only one aspect. Catholicism emphasizes the ecstatic aspect; mysteriousness is what makes the sacrament so important. Protestants (more liberal Lutherans) emphasize the ethical motive. Thomas Aquinas used his religion as a means for solving universal problems.

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<sup>11</sup> אלא אמר כי ההתפארות היא בהשגתי ובידיעת תארי, כלומר מעשיו, כעין מה שבארנו באומרו הודיעני נא דרכיך וגו', ובאר לנו בפסוק זה כי אותם המעשים אשר חובה לדעת אותם ולהתדמות בהם, הם חסד ומשפט וצדקה (מורה ג:נד).

<sup>12</sup> See Immanuel Kant. *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 169.

No Jewish philosopher experienced Judaism as a solely ecstatic religious experience, because it is a form of romanticism, a gesture of despair, a love of the past, a longing to return to a past which is not as rational as the present.<sup>13</sup>

## Lecture II

### **Judaism Is Rational, Ethical, and Ceremonial-cultic**

Judaism has a threefold aspect. **1.** It is a rational edifice and interpretation of God, world, and man, and their interrelationship. **2.** Judaism is also an ethical religion; no scholar will deny this. **3.** Judaism also contains ceremonies and cultic rituals.

[Judaism is rational:] The rationalism of Judaism can be proved from the Bible, which traces reality to its source. The fact that there is a philosophy of Judaism also indicates its rational character. But even Rambam sinned by reducing Judaism to only an intellectual and rational experience.<sup>14</sup>

[Judaism is ethical:] Proof of its ethics are the Ten Commandments.

[Judaism is ecstatic:] There is also something in Judaism which despairs of ethics and logos and desires an immediate contact with God. Through the ecstatic-ceremonial, the Jew hopes to make contact with God. One would be inclined and tempted to identify three aspects: Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah [with this threefold aspect of Judaism]. The first method is intellectual, the second ethical, the third ecstatic. There is some truth in this, but to identify the universal religious experience with this triad would be naive.

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<sup>13</sup> See Moshe Sokol, "Transcending Time: Elements of Romanticism in the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik," *Modern Judaism* 30(3), 2010, pp. 233–46.

<sup>14</sup> See Rav Soloveitchik's critique of Rambam in *Halakhic Mind*, pp. 88–99. See, e.g., p. 93 "Thus, he [Maimonides] would explain a religious norm by an ethical precept, making religion the handmaid of ethics."



## 2. Halakhah: Its Characteristics and Structure

### Halakhah Applies Itself Solely to Man and to Concrete Realities Surrounding Him

Is the method of intellectualization<sup>15</sup> the same as the Halakhic method? Halakhah as an intellectualizing method is unique in its selection of subject matter. While the universal quest for knowledge desires to gain insight into God and His transcendence, Halakhah applies itself only to man and the concrete realities surrounding man. Halakhah has meticulously refrained from talking of God, soul, immortality, etc., and has always avoided transcendental metaphysical rationalization.

Rebbi in *Seder Ha-Mishnayot* never mentioned God's name, only *Shamayim*, Heaven. Angels are not mentioned. The Mishnah was written in the most concrete and pragmatic method the human mind has ever devised. Sometimes we feel that Halakhah had a sense of fear and shame in treating transcendental topics and actually exercised<sup>16</sup> and imposed self-restraint. Halakhah deals only with reality, plants, death, disease, agronomy, force, classification of species, economic and political life, etc. Its subject matter is completely identifiable with social and physical science. Halakhah never paid attention to dreams or to the decisions of prophets. No person who claims contact with the transcendental can be allowed to solve a Halakhic problem, which is a purely human affair. Interference with Halakhah by a prophet [qua prophet] is punishable by death. The human mind decides Halakhic problems. The Halakhic experience is logical, rational, and finite, and the method of Halakhah is based on logical principles. Halakhah and human intellectual creativity—*hiddush*—are the same. Halakhah gives the widest freedom for interpretation. There are few dogmas in Halakhah.

### Halakhah Is Very Close to the Modern Way of Living

The halakhic goal is the consecration of reality and to let God descend into our life, not to raise man to God.<sup>17</sup> This is done by bringing about

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<sup>15</sup> Intellectualization, as used here, is the process of analyzing something using reason and logic.

<sup>16</sup> The Homnick Notes does not contain the word “exercised.” It reads, “We sometimes have the impression that the Halachah was hampered by the fear, or the shame to treat transcendental topics and therefore imposed a self-censorship—rather than trying to understand the transcendental world...”, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> See Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, “The only difference between *homo religiosus* and halakhic man is a change of course—they travel in opposite directions. *Homo*

the realization of the Divine imperative as it expresses itself through concrete and real experience and by giving man [and God] a *modus vivendi* [means of coexisting].

In this regard, Halakhah is very close to the modern way of living. The medieval type would indulge in pleasure and fantastic extravagance. Modern man does not do that because he is disciplined by science. The more science progresses, the more it will control man. Methodically, Halakhah too is a discipline of life, and modern man should be able to better understand this discipline than medieval man. Modern science has cut out carnal extravagance.

The idea of *kedushah* in Halakhah is not the Hellenistic *pléroma*<sup>18</sup> (bright white light of mysticism) but a temporal life, which is consecrated to God by realizing the Halakhic norm.

### **Halakhah Purged Judaism of All Mystical, Magical, and Ceremonial Elements**

The greatest contribution of Halakhah to Judaism consists in purging Judaism of all mystical, magical, and ceremonial elements, while even a civilized religion like Christianity has mythical designs in its practical side. Thomas Aquinas' systematization and St. Augustine's skill could not break the myths that are part of the basic religious experience of Christianity. The sacraments and most {phrases} [phases] of human development are sheltered in myths and mysticism. The mythical character of the Christian service does not demote it to a lower rank or cancel its cultural worth. Halakhic Judaism has eliminated the mythical element and the Jewish performance is deprived of the myth.

How did Halakhah do this? The sacrament is impregnated with metaphysical cosmic proportions and implies some metaphysical change—like baptism changing personality. Marriage is a metaphysical merger. By eating the wafer there is participation in God. But Halakhah stripped

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*religiosus* starts out in this world and ends up in supernal realms; halakhic man starts out in supernal realms and ends up in this world. *Homo religiosus*, dissatisfied, disappointed, and unhappy, craves to rise up from the vale of tears, from concrete reality, and aspires to climb to the mountain of the Lord... Halakhic man, on the contrary, longs to bring transcendence down into this valley of the shadow of death—i.e., into our world—and transform it into a land of living” (p. 40).

<sup>18</sup> See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken Books, 1946) p. 44, “The throne world [as described by Ezekiel] is to the Jewish mystic what the *pleroma*, the ‘fullness’, the bright sphere of divinity with its potencies, aeons, archons, and dominions is to the Hellenistic and early Christian mystics of the period...”

mitzvot of all metaphysical attachments. It did not want the performance of the mitzvah to become a sacral act and actually resented the cultic performance.

How did Halakhah transform the mitzvah into an intellectual performance? (The Christian service brings the prayer into direct contact with God, while *tefillah* takes for granted man's closeness to God.) The method used for this is almost scientific: atomization and mathematization. Science itself uses the myth. The atomic theory is mythical and cannot really be conclusively proved.

### **Halakhah Is Similar to the Scientific Method**

What is the difference between a scientific method and a mythical approach?

1) In the act of mathematization—were science to try to penetrate and interpret matter, it would become mythical, but it leaves this to the philosopher. Science does nothing but establish relationships. Science is not interested in the essence of the world but rather in relationships which are expressed functionally by formulae. If the scientist would ever try to investigate electricity as a power he would become a mythologist, but all he does is measure it. The scientist measures light and its results and relationship to others, but he is not interested in finding out what light itself is.

2) Science never explains reality; it merely duplicates it. [Alfred North] Whitehead [1861–1947] called it the bifurcation of reality.<sup>19</sup> It gives formulae which correspond to the world. Fact in science is converted into method, substance into formulae, and the cosmos into a system of interdependencies.

The same can be said of the Halakhic method.<sup>20</sup> Halakhic mathematization breaks the concrete act into a number of interdependencies.<sup>21</sup> The totality is atomized and reconstructed piecemeal.

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<sup>19</sup> See Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 1920), esp. ch. 2 where Whitehead discusses the “bifurcation of nature.”

<sup>20</sup> See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek* (Jersey City: Toras HoRav Foundation/Ktav, 2008), “Deep investigation is not required to see that halakhic thought, rooted in revelational foundation, cannot control its own postulates as does scientific thought. It has to accept them as they are. Nevertheless, halakhic thought, too, enjoys great, marvelous freedom,” p. 109.

<sup>21</sup> E.g., the Brisker method. See Zelcer and Zelcer, *The Philosophy of Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, pp. 45–49. In a 1975 recording of Rav Soloveitchik about the Brisker method he states, “You know very well that I place a great deal of emphasis

For example, if having a Christmas tree would be a mitzvah, the *maskehba* on it would first take up how many branches it must have, what kind it must be, how it has to stand, etc. The result would be a series of intellectual laws, a mathematized tree, an atomized tree. The concept of *hadar* [beauty] in *lulav* is almost converted in Halakhah to quantity: *yavesh* [dry], etc. If Halakhah wanted it to be esthetic, it would leave it to the individual. *Hadar* is esthetic or is supposed to be, but Halakhah specifies what kind of *lulav* you should have. A beautiful *lulav* may be *passul* [invalid], and vice versa. Halakhah almost destroys the esthetic experience.

Halakhah intellectualizes and rationalizes mitzvot. By doing all this it purges the mitzvot of all magical, cultic, and mythical elements. Out of a sacramental rite emerged a series of intellectualized laws. This was the entire tendency of Halakhah because a mythical religion may bring man to the most degenerating performances. The intellectualization, the breaking down of mitzvot, is the Halakhic method.

The most characteristic proof of this is the Halakhic concept of prayer. There is the hymn or ecstatic prayer, and the selfish prayer. Jewish liturgy is almost entirely purged of the hymn—the hymns we now have were introduced later. Halakhah actually prohibited hymns<sup>22</sup> which are not really rational prayers in which man and God meet in a common platform, but an outburst of the soul which realizes the inaccessibility of God. There is very little thought in a hymn. The only feeling in a hymn is the

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upon the intellectual understanding and the analysis of the halakhot; you know that this is actually what my grandfather, זצ"ל, introduced, and you know, I have told it so many times and I will tell it again, our methodology, our analysis, and our manner of conceptualizing, and inferring, classifying, and defining things, halakhic matters, does not lag behind the most modern philosophical analyses, [which] I happen to know something about. We are far ahead of it. The tools, the logical tools, the epistemological instruments which we employ in order to analyze a *sugyah* in say [the Talmudic discussions of] *Heskas ha-Batim*, or in *Shabbos* or *Bava Kamma* are the most modern, they are very impressive, the creations of my grandfather. Anyway, we avail ourselves of the most modern methods of understanding, of constructing, of inferring, of classifying, of defining, and so forth and so on.” For the complete recording see, [https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/767722/Rabbi\\_Joseph\\_B\\_Soloveitchik/Gerus\\_&\\_Mesorah\\_-\\_Part\\_1](https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/767722/Rabbi_Joseph_B_Soloveitchik/Gerus_&_Mesorah_-_Part_1).

<sup>22</sup> וכן לא ירבה בכנויים של שם ויאמר האל הגדול הגבור והנורא והחזק והאמיץ והעיוזו שאין כה באדם להגיע בסוף שבחיו אלא אומר מה שאמר משה רבינו עליו השלום (רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ט:ז). ועיין שולחן ערוך, אורח חיים (ק"ג:ט)

inaccessible grandeur of God. The hymn-like *Ha-aderet Ve-ha-emunah*<sup>23</sup> is repetitious, bombastic; and there is no progression of logical thought but a progression of feeling which culminates in ecstasy. The *Shemoneh Esreh*, the characteristic Jewish Prayer, however, is progressive in thought. It sees God not as inaccessible; He can be spoken to of our needs. This prayer bears no resemblance to the Christian service. Jewish Prayer is a dialogue between man and God.<sup>24</sup> The hymn is a monologue.

### Lecture III

#### Halakhah and Ethics

Halakhah absorbed the ethical norm and did not distinguish between the purely ethical norm [i.e., ethics] and the cultic performance [i.e., mysticism]. Even the ethical scheme was intellectualized. For example, Shabbat, which belongs in the cultic sphere, was placed on the same plane with the laws of *leket* and *peah* [*Va-yikra* 23:22]. There is complete equality in all mitzvot, whether ethical or esthetical in nature. Halakhah did not discriminate between the ethical and cultic experience while we ourselves would tend to see a difference between the two. In Halakhah, there is no line between *bein adam le-havero* [man to fellow man] and *bein adam la-Makom* [man to God]. In Maimonides they are combined in one book and in Halakhah they are all combined in a continuum. All the norms were placed on one plane. The concept of *rasha* is in both, as is *malkot*. Halakhah has quantified and intellectualized and purged the mitzvot *bein adam la-*

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<sup>23</sup> *Ha-aderet Ve-ha-emunah* might, according to Rav Soloveitchik, thus be subject to the prohibition of Rambam, *Hilkebot Tefillah* 9:7. See above footnote. Nevertheless, *Ha-aderet Ve-ha-emunah* remains an integral part of the weekly Sabbath prayers, *nusah Sefarad*.

<sup>24</sup> Here Rav Soloveitchik refers to Jewish Prayer as a dialogue. This appears to contradict a later statement in these *Lectures* where he refers to Jewish Prayer as a monologue, “Man approaches God in prayer, but whether God answers him is not discussed by Halakhah. The Halakhic act is a monologue on the part of man only, not a dialogue between man and God.” Perhaps here, in this section, Rav Soloveitchik is referring to Jewish Prayer as understood by Halakhah/Aggadah, which he describes later as, “but while Halakhah is skeptical of man’s ability to reach God, and believes only in the value of one-sided striving, Aggadah is more optimistic and shows God as helping man to contact Him.” See also later, “God in Aggadah responds to man...”. For a more elaborate discussion of Jewish Prayer see Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Blessings and Thanksgiving* (NY: OU Press; Stamford: Maggid Books, 2019) esp. pp. 183–184 where he contrasts Jewish Prayer with Christian ceremonial prayer.

*Makom* and the mitzvot *bein adam le-havero* of all cultic and symbolic and metaphysical implications and significances. There is in Halakhah much that is in the realm of theoretical potentiality and no realization. This is true of the concepts of *ir ba-nedabat* [a corrupt city, *Devarim* 13:13–19], and *ben sorer u-moreh* [a rebellious son, *Devarim* 18–21].<sup>25</sup> Even the death penalty is made so difficult to bring about that it can be said to be in the realm of potential.

What is the main mark of distinction between Halakhah and the ethical norm? Ethical experience expresses itself in a total and complete drive toward its goal. The ethical norm is a primordial whole, while the Halakhic consciousness is a mass of detail and a summative experience. There is not in the history of the world a real code of ethics. Even Aristotle gave only principles, but no codes, no enumerative norms and details.

Why is there no such code? A codified ethics would present a paradox: while Halakhah is itself an ethos and ethos does not lend itself to atomization, breaking down ethics would mean annihilation of the ethos. The drive of the ethical norm is an all-encompassing drive, and every ethical norm must touch on a primeval total experience. The final decision of whether or not the ethical experience has been fully performed is, and has to be, the individual and his conscience. The ethical consciousness is far more intangible than the Halakhic, and can therefore never be realized. The fulfillment of the ethical imperative is incapable of attainment, but the Halakhic imperative is finite and within human reach. The redeeming feature of the Halakhic experience asserts itself in the joy of fulfillment while that of the ethical norm asserts itself in the joy of striving.

In Halakhah you either have or have not fulfilled a mitzvah. There is no middle road in Halakhah. You either perform a mitzvah or you do not. You cannot say that a man has and has not fulfilled something. But the principle of the Excluded Middle has no application in the ethos. A man in the ethos can be said to have fulfilled and have not fulfilled what he has tried to do, because the ethical norm and character is infinite. Man can never attain the stage of full ethical realization. Ethos is an unattainable idea, while Halakhah is an attainable ideal. Halakhah is exoteric and attainable to all; ethics is esoteric and only a few can participate in it because it is an ideal.

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<sup>25</sup> Requiring *eidim ve-hatra'ah*, witnesses and prior warning.

### **The Religious Experience: Passionate, Loving and Yearning, and Striving Toward God**

The expression “rabbinical legalism” was popular among Christian theologians.<sup>26</sup> This expression implies that Halakhah is a series of formal laws broken into many segments. If by tearing down these laws into these pieces, Judaism has lost sight of the religious, passionate experience and love and yearning and striving toward God, then this definition or experience, which implies this loss, is correct. They consider the Jewish religion frozen into the juridic [i.e., judicial proceedings] and legalistic norms of Halakhah.<sup>27</sup> But the Halakhic norm is not a juridic or legalistic norm. The latter is a social norm, which regulates human interdependencies, while Halakhah applies itself also to a new relationship, the one between man and God.

A legal system is ridiculous for a Robinson Crusoe, but there is Halakhic legislation for such a figure. The Halakhic norm is thus both social and individual. The *bein adam le-havero* is only a medium through which man serves or sins against God. The Halakhic experience is religious in the sense that there is happiness in it, it is uplifting, while the law-abiding citizen enjoys little happiness when, say, he obeys the law and pays his taxes. There is nothing in the juridic experience which inspires the personality of man, while in the Halakhic experience, the human personality finds a sense of loftiness, and human existence finds affirmation. The Halakhic experience is associated with *simbah*, while the juridic experience is not.

### **Halakhah Atomizes and Then Unifies**

There are definite trends in Halakhah which aim toward unification. Halakhah, when it finishes its atomization and breaks everything down into simple elements, reverses the procedure and unifies.

Shabbat, halakhically, is mostly an aggregate of “do nots,” an aggregate of norms prohibiting certain acts. This aspect of it is similar to legalism (criminal law is an aggregate of “do nots”). The elementary Halakhic method is that of analysis, and here the particle, the single act, plays the

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<sup>26</sup> See e.g., Zelcer and Zelcer, *Philosophy of Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, “Second, it is Soloveitchik’s response to what he took to be a general misperception in theologians like Otto, Schleiermacher, and many others, who perceived Jewish law as an ossified legal code, devoid of spirituality, long gone stale a thousand years before. Schleiermacher’s conception—which was likely absorbed from his counterparts in the Jewish Enlightenment, the *haskalah*—is particularly wrongheaded but in a way that is difficult to grasp from outside the halakhic system” p. 128.

<sup>27</sup> The reference here is to Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Rudolf Otto, etc.

main role. Shabbat is an aggregate of laws. Prayer is an aggregate of *berakhot*. A *berakhah* is also an aggregate of elements: *Shem, Malkhut*. The *halakhah* is stoic, quiet—Being, not Becoming. This is the elementary or primary method without which there could be no Halakhah.

The second method presupposes wholeness, and the aggregate experience is replaced by the totality experience. Here Halakhah sheds its metric and quantitative character and takes on the discovery of a within, a finality, and an essence to what has been taken apart, and it tends to demonstrate the religious yearning in man. Halakhah here does not want to frustrate man's desire to express himself through religious experience. But this does not make the Halakhic act cultic. The Halakhic act lends it meaning and content. The Halakhic beginning is in the direction of formalism but its ending is in a philosophic mood of totality of experience.

For example, the laws of *avelut* [mourning] appear to be a complex set of laws regulating man's behavior for a certain period of time, the laws being formalistically derived from *pesukim*. At first glance, there is nothing of any real psychical [i.e., affecting the human mind] in *avelut*, only a conglomeration of details. But a perusal of the numerous items of *avelut* proves that its true significance lies in an inward act.<sup>28</sup> All these objective laws express one basic feeling: the incomprehensibility and tragedy and even absurdity of death. Many details of *avelut* demonstrate this feeling. What is the difference between studying this through details and studying it through the whole, its philosophy, its appraisal of death, etc.? Simply, that the Halakhic scholar investigated each law not under the aspect of the whole, just like the physiologist who studies the body as the idea has not in mind the final purpose of the body. The investigation is tissue by tissue, chemical reaction and physical laws, and the fact that all this produces life is strictly a coincidence.

The same is true for the Halakhic scholar. [Initially, for example,] he might be unconcerned with the whole aspect of Shabbat, its totality, its philosophical implications. He is not concerned with the ultimate goal, only with each separate law. But this is only the first step. It does not stop the scholar, after completing this examination, from molding it all into a unified whole. Prayer is another example. Prayer is broken down into time, method, system; yet the Halakhic concept of prayer is an inner performance, an *avodah she-be-lev*. It is not a mechanical act but a subjective performance. When [the totality of] prayer is investigated we cannot start without *avodah she-be-lev*. Halakhah has both the analytic and the structural

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<sup>28</sup> See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Out of the Whirlwind* (Toras HoRav Foundation, 2003), esp. pp. 9–30, for Rav Soloveitchik's discussion of *avelut*. See Zelcer and Zelcer, *The Philosophy of Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (142–145) for analysis.



method. The same is also true of *keriat shema*, which is an aggregate of norms, which also requires *kabbalat ol malkhut Shamayim*.

Where did Halakhah find the structural method, the method of the whole? In certain mitzvot which did not lend themselves to [objectification]: יחיד ה', ודבקה בו, אהבה, יראה. These mitzvot could not be quantitatively measured. Halakhah is formalistic when it analyzes; it becomes a philosophy when it structurizes.

Is this reversal strictly a Halakhic method or also a scientific method? A simultaneous use of these methods would be absurd. But used at different times on the same subject it can be understood. The physicist's world is abstract and qualitative. The quantitative world to the scientist is an aggregate, to the average mind a structural whole. The physicist's world is an aggregate, a summative total. But this physical formula is not final and does not completely satisfy man as to the mystery of the universe: What? Why? Reality as a whole has never been explained. And while it may not be the concern of the scientist, it certainly is the concern of the philosopher-scientist who takes over the task of unifying all this aggregate into an essential, primordial unity of the whole, not of the aggregate which is a formal and not an essential unity. This is mainly the task of the philosopher. After atomization, science reaches its pinnacle. The scientist tries to build a structure and find an immanence within. All of this is precisely the method of Halakhah: analysis and the unity of the whole.

At this point, Aggadah makes its appearance. As long as Halakhah was engrossed in analysis there can be absolutely no Aggadah. But when Halakhah begins to talk of structural patterns and the whole, the result is the appearance of Aggadah. The Halakhic structural method and the Aggadah form one continuum and it is difficult to distinguish between the two.<sup>29</sup>

What are the basic methods of arriving at the structural whole and how does Aggadah tie in with Halakhah?

## Lecture IV

When Halakhah begins to make a structure whole out of the premises drawn from the atomization process, it enters into the realm of Aggadah.

We will now attempt to find out and unfold the structural aspects of Halakhah. We may be guided in this investigation by the classic triad,

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<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note how the Rav's analysis of Halakhah and Aggadah parallels Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' description of science and religion: "Science takes things apart to see how they work. Religion puts things together to see what they mean." See *The Great Partnership* (Schocken Books, 2011) pp. 6–7.

God-world-man, of which the philosophy of religion talks. God deals with the world and man. [1] Man encounters God in a transcendental experience and [2] again as an immanent experience. [3] [Man] also regards the world with him[self] as an integral part of it, yet still as an individual (duality of man). Judaism added two more aspects: [4] the historical continuum in time and [5] the end of all time. We will now investigate all five ideas in light of a structural whole.

### **Man's Relationship to God: Man Tries to Contact God**

God is the center of gravity of the Halakhic order of atomization which actually tries to break down the religious experience. Halakhah is not godless. It is not an atheistic order based on neutral objectivity, even though it takes the color out of the religious experience. The accusation that Halakhah is cold is based mainly on ignorance. Halakhic Rabbinic legalism differs from state legalism (like Roman law) in that while the latter objective is finite (as in the well-being of society), the former's objective is a mundane performance but it nevertheless presumes a transcendental goal. There is God in Halakhah. It is not an empty shell like any other piece of state legalism. The final objective for one who complies with Halakhic rules is the attainment and approach to God.

The Halakhic act spells [out] man's relationship to God, and yet it does not assure man of reciprocity on the part of God. The Halakhic act is one-directional. It is man who tries to contact God, but there is no assurance that God is reciprocating this attempt. Not even in *tefillah* does Halakhah say that God will fulfill man's prayer. Man approaches God in prayer, but whether God answers him is not discussed by Halakhah. The Halakhic act is a monologue on the part of man only, not a dialogue between man and God. Halakhah never promised Divine response to the acts of humans.

### **God's Relationship to Man: God Imposes His Ethical Will upon Man**

The idea of *sekhbar* for a mitzvah is a secondary and minor motif; the important thing is the act. *Sekhbar* here means salvation. Halakhah does not hold out salvation as the guiding motif of performing the Halakhic act. Halakhah is rooted in a theocratic, imperativistic, world formula. God is the Ruler. Our task is that of blind self-discipline. Omnipotence by Halakhah is conceived as an ethical, imperative imposition on God's part, not

as the imposition of the cosmic will. God imposes His ethical will upon man and imposes on man conformity to His laws.<sup>30</sup>

For example, a corporate state can impose its power on the people to obligate them to perform its laws. And a corporate state has inherent power, not power given it by the people. God too makes man unconditionally duty-bound to fulfill [His laws]. Theocracy is the ethical dominion of God over man. To Halakhah, the major attribute of God in relation to the world is not intellectuality, but will. God's Will is the goal that has to be attained by man.

Aquinas introduced God as Intellect. Maimonides said the major aspect of God was Will.<sup>31</sup> Of course, there is intellect too, but the main characteristic is will—*ratzon*. The old Kabbalah tried to conceive of *keter* as intellect. This is the thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalah. To them the highest attribute was *hokhmah*. Later Kabbalah in Palestine made *keter* into *ratzon*. So here is the same controversy.

Historical parallels are remarkable. The Merkavah mysticism, which flourished in Mishnaic and Talmudic times mostly in Palestine as described in the books of the *Heikhalot*,<sup>32</sup> presents a parallel to the concept of God prevalent in Halakhah. The main difference between Merkavah mystics and classic mystics lies in one detail: the Merkavah mystics were our greatest Halakhic scholars. Rabbi Akiva was one of them. The school was an esoteric one and entry into it was difficult; one of the most important qualifications was Halakhic scholarship. Later, [when the Zohar was published,] the esoteric character of the mystics vanished and most mystics were not Halakhic scholars at all.

The vision of God described by the Merkavah mystics is Divine Majesty cosmocracy; God is the inaccessible King, unapproachable God. Halakhah in its primary stage is unaware of the immanence of God or His

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<sup>30</sup> See Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek*, p. 35. "When God reveals himself to man, He does so not in order to realize an intellectual, scientific goal—to tell him about the cosmic drama—but to command him and give him the responsibility for keeping laws and statutes, positive and negative commandments. The God of Sinai is the God of the Will, the Inscrutable One who commands us to follow a unique way of life without explaining why or for what purpose."

<sup>31</sup> אלא כל התארים הללו לא חשובים אלא מבחינת יחסים שונים בין ה' יתעלה לבין ברואיו, כלומר שהוא יכול לברוא מה שבורא, ורוצה להמציא את המצוי שהמציא בו ויודע מה שהמציא (מורה נגעים).

<sup>32</sup> *Heikhalot*, lit. palaces, are a group of texts relating to visions of ascent to Heavenly palaces. These texts include *Heikhalot Rabbati*, whose main speaker is R. Yishmael, *Heikhalot Zutritti*, whose main speaker is R. Akiva, and *Sefer Heikhalot*, also titled *Third Book of Enoch*. See *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972) 10:500.

indwelling (*shekhinah*) in the world. When Halakhah speaks of God, it uses *Shamayim*, which indicates that God is over and outside of us. It sees God as exalted, supreme, overpowering, and majestic.

*Nishmat* is an old *tefillah* and bears the traces of an exalted hymn composed by a Merkavah mystic. המלך היושב על כסא רם ונשא. God is not immanent, but way over us. God's goodness is an act of condescending grace. He comes down to us and helps us, but always with the majestic gesture of a king who is extraneous to this world. But at the same time God is the ruler of the world not only in the cosmocrational sense, but in the ethical sense.

The Merkavah mystic feared to approach the majesty of God. But later Kabbalists like Ba'al Shem Tov did not fear, because there was the concept of *shekhinah*, and fear of God was replaced by the love of God. The mystical experience actually senses reality (modern man is losing his mystical sense.) Mysticism is not a fantasy or *imagination*. A mystical experience is an experience of which we are simply incapable—just like a musical or ethical experience.

To Halakhah, the only bridge through which man can contact God is, on the one hand, the command of God giving the order and laws to man, and the part man does to carry out the laws. But God speaking on Har Sinai is also a monologue; man is silent. And when man speaks, God is silent. Self-negation to Halakhah is not inherent in the feeling of indebtedness on the part of man to God.

### **Man Is Not Mere *Afar va-Efer*, Dust and Ashes, but Has Worth**

Ashkenazic hymns emphasize the cosmic power of God and the nothingness of man. This is metaphysical dependence—humility and self-negation on the part of man. But the ethical dependence does no such thing. In this experience, man discovers his own value, because if man is nothing, then why did God bother at all with man?<sup>33</sup> The mere fact that God

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<sup>33</sup> In Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, pp. 66–72, Rav Soloveitchik elaborates on the dialectical nature of man who is both great and worthless: “In the depth of his consciousness he is entangled in the thicket of two contradictory verses. One verse declares, ‘When I behold Thy Heaven, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the star which Thou hast established; what is man, that Thou art mindful of him?’ (Ps. 8:4–5), while the other verse declares, ‘Yet Thou hast made him but a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and honor. Thou hast made him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet’ (Ps. 8:6–7)... Halakhic Man *has* found the third verse—the Halakhah. He, too, suffers from this dualism, from this deep spiritual split,

demands compliance to His will on man's part is a sanction of man's existence and an approval of his worth. Halakhah never had a feeling of humility, but one of modesty, *anavah*. Halakhah does not demand self-deprecation, because ethical dependence justifies man while metaphysical dependence undermines the basis of human existence. Halakhah is devoid of the createdness consciousness—man is not mere *afar va-efer*, dust and ashes, but has worth. The Merkavah mystics converted metaphysical dependence from ethical dependence. You can find the feeling of self-depreciation and worthlessness. All this is the atomizing method of Halakhah.<sup>34</sup>

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but he mends the split through the concept of Halakhah and law,” pp. 68–69. See analyses in Zelcer and Zelcer, *The Philosophy of Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, pp. 154–155.

<sup>34</sup> Although this is the last sentence in the paragraph, it appears to be more appropriate as the first sentence of the following paragraph.

### **3. Halakhah as Enhanced by Aggadah**

#### **Halakhah Can Only Deal with Atomization; Aggadah Deals with Life as a Whole**

The structural method shapes a new approach. This does not deal with laws but with action. In scientific methodology, the application of the structural method, especially in psychology, is necessary because atomization started with mathematics, which is all ideal, but when it comes to concrete realities, we cannot atomize indefinitely because life appears to us as a concrete whole. As long as Halakhah revolves in the ideal atomization it is all right, but when Halakhah wants to enter real life, action, and practice, a structural whole is necessary. The primary method of Halakhah deals with constructs like mathematics, while the structural or Aggadic method of Halakhah looks at man as a whole integrated with reality.

#### **Aggadah Is Halakhah in Action**

Aggadah is Halakhah in action. The structural Halakhah focuses itself upon a personality—a human—who is to fulfill the Halakhic orders. Aggadah speaks of personalities engaged in the fulfillment of the Halakhic norms and assures us of the possibility of attaining this fulfillment. Aggadah sees the mitzvah as an experience and as a mode of expression of a lonely soul searching for its place in the world and for its relation to God. There is zest and beauty and immanence in the religious act as seen by Aggadah. How does it do this? By considering man as a personality fulfilling the Halakhic norms.

What is the man-God relation in Aggadah? Halakhah has a theocratic monologue relationship. The Aggadah relationship is sympathetic and warm. God in Aggadah responds to man, joins man and cooperates with him. Aggadah attempts to close the gap separating man from God. It does not emphasize the exaltedness of God but tries to humanize God. Aggadah coined the idea of *shekhinah*, or the indwelling of God in the world, in contrast to the Halakhic *Shamayim*, which indicates the remoteness of God.

#### **In Halakhah, Man's Communication with God Is One-Sided; in Aggadah, God Helps Man Contact Him**

We must not confuse the Aggadic humanization of God with the pagan mythos, which is polytheistic. The main difference [between the Aggadic conception and paganism] is not only the number of gods but also that [in paganism] man and God meet on an identical plane. [In paganism,] the

difference [between man and the gods] is only one of degree: man is mortal, the gods immortal. Aggadah, on the other hand, is just as conscious as Halakhah of the chasm between man and God, but while Halakhah is skeptical of man's ability to reach God, and believes only in the value of one-sided striving, Aggadah is more optimistic and shows God as helping man to contact Him. There is no transcendence in the mythical gods, but there is in the Halakhic-Aggadic [conception]. Aggadah never overlooked the uniqueness of God. God is not human, but the God-man relationship is human. In the myths, the gods are human but the relationship is not human; it is full of tricks, cunning, hate, etc. Metaphysical otherness and mutual reciprocity are less {constant} [frequent] than the myths; still, Judaism insists on such a paradoxical and illogical relationship. Even Maimonides admitted this and accepted this relationship: God is unique and other than man. Still, His relation with man is a communal one.

### **Halakhah Envisions God as Majestic; Aggadah as Sympathetic Toward Man**

This concept is deeply embedded in Judaism. God is remote and near, King and father, אבינו מלכנו. The image of God is antithetic. There is intercourse between God and man. Yet God is transcendent. Moses argued with God and spoke to Him almost as an equal. Later [*Shemot* 34:6] ויעבור ויקרא. ה' על פניו ויקרא. Moses is overawed by the transcendence of God. The Halakhic motif is *majestas dei* [majestic God]; the Aggadic motif is *sympatus dei* [sympathetic God].

## Lecture V

### **Halakhah Requires 'Will' to Follow the Law and 'Intelligence' to Study the Torah**

Pure Halakhah involved a voluntaristic approach to God. All we know of God is His word or will. Human will has to identify itself with the Divine will. Man then is a voluntaristic personality.

*Retzono shel adam*, the will of man, is the only way of contacting *retzono shel Hashem*, the will of God. In addition to the voluntary personality, there is an aspect of intelligence—*talmud Torah*—which Halakhah makes necessary. The mitzvah of *talmud Torah* achieved cosmic proportions in Halakhah. One is not only duty-bound to comply with the Divine will but also to understand it. Man in Halakhah is both will and intellect, ethos and logos. What Halakhah eliminates completely is the emotion. However, it

is difficult to see a real human personality in the light of Halakhic philosophy. Man to Halakhah is an abstract, postulated personality not really investigated by Halakhah. There is also a lack of primordial personalistic unity. Halakhah by the summative approach has atomized not only the religious experience but the human personality as well.

### **Halakhah Observes Only Whether Man Did or Did Not Observe the Commandments**

Man to Halakhah is an aggregate, a sum total of compliances with Halakhic rules. There is only synthetic unity, not primordial unity. Halakhah does not try to penetrate into the core of personality but observes only the surface behavior of man. There is no depth to the personality of man, just surface observation. Did he or did he not perform a mitzvah? That is all Halakhah wants to know. It is not interested in motifs or subjective emotions, only in man's behavior. Inwardness is relegated to a second place in Halakhah, which judges man only by his behavior. The Halakhic personality of man is both abstract and summative, more of a shadow than a real personality.

### **Aggadah Sees Man in All His Diversity**

Aggadah, which replaced the formal act with concrete multicolored experience, involved a new humanistic philosophy. Man to Aggadah is not an abstraction but a concrete primordial entity. Aggadah sees man in all his diversity and paradoxicality. Aggadah discovered man's tragedy, defeats, strivings, hopes, and incongruity. All of this can be proved from Aggadah. Man's tragedy is found often in Aggadah. His existence at times appears meaningless and at times teleologically organized, etc. For Aggadah, man is a creature and comrade of God who together with God is involved in the mysterious cosmos. He is heading toward either doom or salvation. "Creature" here is used in the sense of a created being. Man in Aggadah has tremendous potential and opportunities. He is the only creature who can encounter God in an I-Thou relationship. Perhaps Aggadah is even anthropocentric.

### **Halakhah Sees Nature as Immutable; Aggadah, as Involved in the Cosmic Process**

Aggadah displays a definite tendency to humanize nature. To Halakhah, nature is an objective domain where man has the opportunity to consummate his Halakhic aim. There is a wide gap in Halakhah between objective nature, which is either dead matter or an unintelligent instinct (animal),



and man who is subjective and has relation to the ethical norm (which nature does not). Halakhah thinks it absurd to charge nature with morality.

Morality and humanity are synonymous in Halakhah. Halakhah construed nature as immutable. The Halakhic fulcrum is the unchangeable cosmic process. God is both a supreme ethical authority and cosmocratic ruler. Nature must follow blindly the Divine command. Man has the choice of sin. Both are subject to a changeless Divine will.

Aggadah installed the sympathetic relationship between God and man and also in nature. God and man are involved in the cosmic process, so the cosmos too is involved in this relationship. Nature is either friendly or hostile to man, never indifferent. There are moral patterns in nature and the world as a whole is ethically minded (panpsychism) and sensitive. Aggadah knows of ethical corruption in nature [*Beresbit* 5:11]: ותמלא הארץ חמס, etc.

The promise of eschatological salvation in Aggadah is held out to the whole world, not only to man. The community of interest established between God and man was extended to the world at large—humanization of the world, notwithstanding the fact that Aggadah was fully aware of the natural law. It conceived cosmic events not in terms of processes but in terms of acts.

### **Miracles Are More at Home in Aggadah than in Halakhah**

An act indicates a performance and relates to a certain intelligence behind the act, while the process is in itself an act and indicates no force or intelligence behind it. This does not necessarily mean the cosmos has a soul, but that there is a cosmos behind the process we see going on and we are aware only of its acts and manifestations. The miracle is more at home in Aggadah than in Halakhah. (The only transcendental concept in Halakhah is *nevuah*, because it is one of the fundamental bases in Judaism. Still the role of the *navi*, as far as conveying the laws, was limited. *Nevuah* is one of the structural aspects of Halakhah.)

### **Aggadah Introduces Man into the Historical Continuum; Halakhah is Ahistorical**

Aggadah introduces man into the historical continuum, while Halakhah is ahistorical and shows no interest in creative, living historical time. Halakhah operates in a timeless dimension. Concreteness of time and histori-

cal figures is not important. Only Halakhah could ask why the Torah began with בראשית and not with החדש הזה לכם,<sup>35</sup> because Halakhah wanted to make the Torah solely a code of law. Halakhah was not interested in historic action, just as the mathematician does not care when or who Archimedes was. Halakhah gives no information about its scholars, about their historical importance. Many Halakhic scholars had little concept of history, just as a physicist might not know when Newton lived; it does not make much difference in his calculation. Chronology, historical background, politics, spiritual trends were of little importance to Halakhah, which is timeless. This is the strength of Halakhah. Even *takkanot* were later investigated in the light of their intellectuality, not in the light of their historical background.

Halakhic realization is not embedded in historical consciousness. Halakhah stands above the flux of time. No one performing a mitzvah or a norm is conscious of being part of an historical continuum. Time plays an insignificant role in the Halakhic performance. Aggadah, however, is historically conscious and its historicity has two parts: Aggadah sees a religious act as one thread in a historical continuum. The Halakhic act seen from the viewpoint of Aggadah is sanctified by countless previous generations. Historical flux becomes an entity.

For example, Halakhically, *yetziat Mitzrayim* is atomized: *hametz, Pesah, Seder*, etc. (a very formalistic approach to a historical event). But in Aggadah, *yetziat Mitzrayim* is not just a starting point for the Jews to be lost sight of as time advances but is an integral part of every Jew's experience. Every Jew is supposed to see himself as taking part of that moment. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is externalized. The Jew leaps through history and feels closer to Moses [*yetziat Mitzrayim*, etc.] than the Greek to Aristotle or European to Bastille Day, because the collective memory of Jews is more enduring than universal history.

This is because the Jew tries to escape the present and return to the past, or go to the future, *emunat ha-mashiah*. But this is not the sole reason. Without Aggadah in Halakhah such a concept (the historical continuum) would not be possible. This continuum made possible the feelings of historical proximity. There is a real relationship between the true Aggadic Jew and Abraham, Moses, and Creation.

Our calendar begins with Creation. We identify ourselves not only with real physical history (*yetziat Mitzrayim*) but also with metaphysical history, בראשית ברא אלקים. This proximity was brought about by Halakhah and exploited by Aggadah.

<sup>35</sup> "אמר רבי יצחק לא היה צריך להתחיל התורה אלא מהחודש הזה לכם" (רש"י בראשית א:א). ועיין במקורות שהובאו שם בחומש מהדורת "תורת חיים".

## Lecture VI

Change and beginning always presuppose a directed time-stream moving in one direction, and the concepts of Before and After emerge. Direction is always from the Before to the After. Events must run from an irreversible past into our anticipated future. Such an unfolding of time is a necessary presupposition of Becoming. You change from what you were to what you will be.

Physics knows of no such process, and the cosmic process for physics is reversible. Movement can go from A to B or from B to A. Future and past do not exist and are only plus and minus directions which can be explored simultaneously. The law of conservation of energy shows this. There is no Before and After, since the Before can be recaptured as much as the After. Of course, practically there is some energy lost—the law of entropy—and this means no reversibility, but theoretical physics rejects the single directed stream of time.

In the spiritual and historical realm, there is the law of Becoming, the stream of time—a long, continuous Heraclitian flux. Therefore, time in history is irreversible. Therefore, the historical time consciousness involves remoteness. Physics has spatialized distance, not the feeling of separateness and otherness with regard to the past that the historian feels. Distance does not measure remoteness. A historical event can be a short time in the past, yet the feeling of remoteness toward this event can be very great. For the historian, time is the wellspring of life and of death, while for the physicist there is no life or death in time, but only distance.

Man associates his past with nihilism and an unbridgeable gap separates the Before from the Now. Man may even look upon himself in the past as a stranger. To an older man his youth may be strange and problematical. This gap between the present and the past may be one of the main tragedies of man.

### **Aggadah Operates with the Idea of Reversibility**

The Aggadah is aware of the idea of Becoming, of the Heraclitian aspect, yet it also operates with the idea of reversibility. To Judaism time is an eternal flux, yet the past does not disappear in the stream of nihilism. Time is both a steady moving stream and reversible. The concept of *teshuvah* which corrects an evil no longer in existence, which is retroactive, shows

the reversibility of time.<sup>36</sup> For Judaism, the present represents an ever-present past. The religious experience operates with cyclic motion, not straight motion. Remoteness is almost non-existent in Jewish history. There is distance, but not remoteness. There is a long distance between now and Abraham but there is no remoteness. The main cause of this unique attitude toward the past, aside from our desire to escape our tortured present, was and is the Halakhah, which, being timeless and ahistorical, converted great events into *ahistorical* events.

### **Aggadah Sees History as Repetitive, Reenacted throughout the Ages**

Aggadah introduced into Jewish history the idea of the transmigration of historical situations. There are historical archetypes in history, which are almost Platonic in feeling and interpretation. Archetypes can be people, situations, and occurrences. So, history is repetitive. This is not a metaphysical transmigration but historical. The same role is reincarnated throughout the historical continuum. There is identity in history in spite of its dynamics. Where are these historical archetypes for Aggadah? In the Bible! The Bible is the book of history reenacted throughout the ages. Therefore, Abraham is an archetype reenacted time and again, and this is the feeling of closeness Judaism associates with history.

History and religion for Aggadah are the same. For Halakhah, the religious act is strictly performed *per se*. The law of Shabbat is not identified with the fact that so many millions of Jews perform this law, etc. To Aggadah, the religious motif can never be isolated from its historical perspective. Religious imperatives are associated with the historical motif. Abraham made *Shabarit*, Isaac *Minbah*, and Jacob *Ma'ariv*. When we pray we identify with the *Avot*. This identification is found time and again in Aggadah.

### **For Aggadah, *Aharit Ha-Yamim* Are Distant Days within the Continuum of Jewish History**

What does Aggadah mean by *aharit ha-yamim*? Is the Messianic era the era of the full realization of Jewish history when the cycle of history will be

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<sup>36</sup> See Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* 2:3, esp. p. 115, "...an examination of the cause located in the past in light of the future, determining its direction and destination. The main principle of repentance is that the future dominates the past and their reign over it in unbounded fashion." For a fuller discussion of the "retro-active" effect, see Zelcer and Zelcer, *The Philosophy of Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, pp. 149-151.

closed and stopped? *Aharit ha-yamim* does not mean the end of days, but the distant or latter days which will be included within the continuum of Jewish history. The Messianic era must be excluded from the eschatological world. The Messianic message is historical and is part of the historical continuum.

Rambam [*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:1–5] saw in the Messianic era an historical era devoid of most imperfections. To Aggadah, the Messiah is a personality charged with the task of a certain historical nature. The Messianic era indicates only a new phase in the historical process wherein the concrete natural order will no longer clash with man's ideal historical realization; the concrete historical order and the ideal order will not clash. The human ethical act will harmonize with the mechanical act. The Messianic promise is only that the historical tempo will be increased but not full historical realization. The task will be brought to a close by *olam ha-ba*.

Rambam [*Hilkhot Teshuvah* 8:2] interprets *olam ha-ba* to be the immortality of the soul.<sup>37</sup> To Ramban [*Sha'ar ha-Gemul*], it is the end of time, a perfect world which is ahistorical, outside this world, and will come when history is consummated. *Olam ha-ba* is outside, at the end of history and is eternal.<sup>38</sup> To Judaism, eternity means an unlimited existence in time—endless time, not an existence outside of time. This concept of eternity is shown by the word *olam*, which means endless and also world, indicating the idea of eternity associated with the world and time.

But the Jewish concept of eternity is really not too clear. *Olam ha-zeh* is the world of action and *olam ha-ba* is the world of accomplishment, which means the reversibility of Jewish history, the full community living a metaphysical existence. The *yemot ha-Mashiah* are a period of preparation and education for the future *olam ha-ba*.

## Lecture VII

### Aggadah Looks at the Historical Time Continuum as the Source from Which *Olam ha-Ba*, or Eternity, Will Spring Forth

Aggadah works in two dimensions: the historical or time continuum and *keitz ha-yamim*. God reveals Himself in both. In contrast, the Christian viewpoint considers the present as the dividing point between the eternity

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<sup>37</sup> העולם הבא--אין בו גוף וגווייה, אלא נפשות הצדיקים בלבד, בלא גוף כמלאכי השרת (רמב"ם, הלכות תשובה ח:ב).

<sup>38</sup> כל אלו דברים ברורים שהעולם הבא האמור בכל מקום אינו עולם הנשמות והשכר המגיע להם מיד אחרי המיתה אלא עולם שעתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא לחדשו לאחר ימות המשיח ותחיית המתים (רמב"ן, שער הגמול א).

from the beginning of the world and the eternity after the extinction of time. This intense period does not fit into eternity. Aggadah looks at this period as the source from which *olam ha-ba* or eternity will spring forth. Traces of *olam ha-ba* can be discovered in the Here and the Now in the finite world. There is no tension between time and eternity; time brings about eternity. The quintessence of the Jewish concept of *olam ha-ba* is Divine proximity and immanence as is shown [*Berakhot* 17a] by צדיקים יושבין ועטרותיהם בראשיהם ונהנים מזיו השכינה. This proximity can be obtained in *olam ha-zeb* too. Christianity, in time, has no physical contact with God or Jesus, but in eternity there is this contact, “Jesus walks the earth” as a physical being.

Jewishness does not have this physical contact in either world. The contact is always spiritual and differs only in degree. But even in this world, man’s spiritual contact with God by doing the mitzvot, etc., can come about and is a part of the spiritual contact of *olam ha-ba*. *Hazal* said that an hour of repentance and performance of good deeds in this world is better than *olam ha-ba* [*Avot* 4:17]. Why? It is equal to *olam ha-ba* in spiritual contact and better than *olam ha-ba* in that it is active and dynamic, while *olam ha-ba* is not. The human concrete existence with all its corruption may in moments rise in supreme beauty and surpass the world of bliss. These moments, of course, are very, very rare. But theoretically *olam ha-ba* can be experienced in temporality. Torah life raises man to eternity in the midst of temporality. This is the Jewish concept. The Jew is not anxious to die so he can enjoy *olam ha-ba*, because he can experience *olam ha-ba* in this world. This is why Judaism placed such great emphasis on *pikuah nefesh*, saving life.

Aggadah thus fits into these five aspects:

- 1) Intimacy with God.
- 2) Man.
- 3) Historical man running toward his doom.
- 4) Historical continuum.
- 5) *Olam ha-ba*.

### **Aggadah Is the Treasure of Our Philosophical Thought When It Is Combined with Halakhah**

Because of its strange and paradoxical form of presentation, Aggadah was not treated seriously by many great Halakhic scholars and *Rishonim*. Aggadah is the creation of *darshanim* and was presented in diluted and distorted form to the masses. Very profound remarks were phrased to appeal to the common man. For example, when they describe the I-Thou relationship

they describe God arranging a dance for *tzaddikim* [Ta'anit 31a]. We often find ideas presented as parables, metaphors, similes, etc. That is why it is difficult for us to now understand these ideas. But this does not mean that we should read into Aggadah philosophical systems which do not exist in it. Objectivity is very important. Aggadah is the treasure of our philosophical thought if it is combined with Halakhah.

### **Halakhah Combined with Aggadah Creates an Intense Religious Experience**

Thus, the Halakhic imperative turns from formality and abstractness in the first phase, to an intense religious experience in the second phase. The Halakhic experience then becomes a subjective, ethical, and infinite experience. Halakhah from the standpoint of atomization is a *factum* (complete, rigid, unchangeable); from the structural experience it is an *actum* (being, becoming, not rigid). From the atomization view, the performance of a religious act is simply one of fulfillment. From the Aggadic view, this performance is a joy of expectancy. Halakhah, in its primary aspect, prepared the material used to form the primordial structural whole of Aggadah. There is always a tradition of logical thinking and epistemological analysis in Halakhah, but not in *pilpul* and casuistry introduced in Poland. The Vilna Gaon reintroduced the exact methodology of Halakhah. Even before the Gaon, the Maharshah and others made attempts to look through the thickness of *pilpul*, but the Gaon succeeded in shattering [*pilpul*] and resuscitating the old logical analysis of Halakhah.

The religious experience is an ethos experience, a relation not only to man, but also to God. The Greeks understood ethos to be the social relationship between man and man, not man and their gods. Ethos in the religious experience {understands} [entails] a dynamic, teleological continuity whose goal is unattainable. Even man's striving for economic power is an ethos—but a distorted ethos. The desire to strengthen a corporation on the part of a financier and to make it greater and greater has no end and this unattainable goal is an ethos. Ethos means an infinite object and an unattainable goal. The same is true of science. The problem grows with the solution. The universe is irrational, infinite, incapable of being truly understood, etc. The more the scientist discovers, the less he knows, the more mysterious the universe. This search and striving of science for an infinite object is an ethos.

#### **4. Halakhah as Enhanced by Kabbalah**

##### **The Mystic's Relation to God Is Passive, One of Surrender, Resignation, Peace, and Harmony**

Jewish Kabbalah has never identified itself with religious subjectivism. [For the non-Jewish mystic,<sup>39</sup>] the religious norm loses its significance. The subjective attitude of introspection and sinking into oneself replaces religious dynamics. Spontaneity is replaced by receptivity, movement by motionlessness. The mystic freezes his own personality and receives. He does not act. Peace is the motif of the mystic. The catalytic dizziness is one of the methods the mystic employs to attain Divine association. A mystic is self-enveloped by an infinite selflessness. The mystic becomes part of infinity. Emotionalism is an outstanding experience of the mystic, both the philosophic and personal mystic. The philosophic or impersonal mystic is not based in an organized religion but an impersonal philosophic source.

Plotinus arrived at his superb mystical formula not through adherence to church doctrine but to Platonic philosophy. That is why it is called Neo-Platonism. It is a mystical experience with an impersonal God, and it completely ignores the religious experience. God is too distant and abstract to concern Himself with man's existence. Plotinus describes God as the primordial Oneness devoid of all anthropomorphic characteristics. He is beyond existence and activity and is the root of everything. God is the unconditional One because He is beyond everything, being the root of everything. Man must sink into selflessness, the apathy of endlessness, to experience God. Personalistic mysticism—Kabbalah in part, for example—is closer to God, speaks of God as a bridegroom, and is mostly associated with institutionalized religion.

This has always been the undercurrent of great civilized religions. Personalistic mysticism sees God as a friend, a comrade. But this relationship between both the philosophic and the personalistic mystic to God is not dynamic but passive, not one of passion but of surrender, resignation, peace, and harmony.

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<sup>39</sup> Here Rav Soloveitchik is using “mystic” to refer specifically to a non-Jewish (perhaps Christian) mystic. In other places he uses “mystic” to refer to a Jewish Kabbalist. The context usually reveals the type of mystic to which he is referring.



## Lecture VIII

### **Jewish Mystics Ascribed Great Importance to the Concrete Dynamic Religious Act**

Visionary mysticism [such as that of the Christian mystic] (St. Theresa) [of Avila] is nonexistent in Jewish Kabbalah, except for Abulafia, and this is outside the true core of Kabbalah. Christian mystics always spoke of their own experiences, [while] Jewish mystics [such as] (Etz Ha-Hayyim) speak in general, abstract terms. There is a certain sense of modesty in the Jewish mystics which kept them from writing about themselves. The Jewish mystic never yielded himself to a nirvana, but remained dynamic.

The Christian Church was at first very suspicious of its mystics. Some of our greatest Jews (Nahmanides, Karo, Maharal, and the Vilna Gaon), [however], were our greatest mystics. Jewish mystics did not believe in passivity and ascribed great importance to the concrete, dynamic religious act. Halakhic observance was the cornerstone of Kabbalah. While Christian mystics generally did not pay attention to religious dogma, Jewish mystics, in an effort not to ignore Halakhah, always tried to find the symbolic significance of every Halakhic detail.

### **The Religious Commandment Was Interpreted by the Kabbalistic Mystic as Divine Order Impregnated with Transcendental and Cosmic Significance**

The Kabbalistic perspective rests on Halakhah. Even theology was Halakhic to the Jewish mystic: his fulcrum is to be found in Halakhic law. The religious commandment was interpreted by the Kabbalistic mystic not allegorically {as Maimonides did} but as Divine order impregnated with transcendental and cosmic significance and endowed with meaning of cosmic proportions. A mitzvah has universal meaning and forms a miraculous bridge spanning the gap between finitude and infinity. The measure of Divine presence in this world is determined by the measure of religious practice in the world. An increase or decrease in religious activity carries a similar increase or decrease of the Divine presence. (Hirsch's objection to this is that it makes the mitzvah a magical mechanism.)<sup>40</sup> Torah to Kabbalah is pure Divine thought. God reveals Himself through written (*Torah she-bikhtav*) and unwritten (*Torah she-be'al peh*) letters. Identification with God can be attained through the study of the Torah.

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<sup>40</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch. *The Nineteen Letters of Ben Uzziel*, Bernard Drachman, Tr. (Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1899), 187.

Many great scholars {Maimonides for one} could not understand and rejected many parts of Aggadah, but Kabbalah accepted Aggadah completely and used it as raw material for its own views. For example, there is an Aggadic saying which medieval philosophers {Ramban, Rambam} [e.g., Ibn Ezra<sup>41</sup>] could not understand. This is the story [Bereshit 28:11–18] of the argument of the stones which Jacob used to sleep on.<sup>42</sup> This *aggadah* baffled the rationalists. It was of course prompted by the Aggadic idea that physical matter serves the human being. It was clothed in story form to appeal to the average mind. It wanted to show the [Jewish] community the [connection or overlapping] interests between the human being and the world at large; that man is part of a great scheme of being and not merely thrown in among a mass of dead, unfeeling matter. Kabbalists interpreted it so that Jacob is *tiferet* (synthesis of Abraham-*hesed* and Isaac-*din* or *gevurah*). The stones are symbols of the seven basic ideas—*sefirot*—out of which the world came into being. The conflict is that of *hesed* and *din*, and the stones merged and found harmony in *tiferet*, or Jacob.

### Halakhah Never Took Exception to Kabbalah

Halakhah never took exception to Kabbalah; there was no genuine tension between the two as there was between Rambam and other Halakhic scholars of his time, even though the Kabbalah is full of ideas that Halakhic scholars could have fought against bitterly. This is because Kabbalah is founded on Halakhah<sup>43</sup> while the *Moreh Nevukhim* could have been written even without any real Halakhic scholarship. The ideas in the *Moreh Nevukhim* could have been written without the quotations from *ma'amarei Hazal*, but Kabbalah had to have a Halakhic background. That is why Halakhic scholars accepted the Kabbalah. Kabbalah may be considered under Halakhic-Aggadic aspects.

<sup>41</sup> מאבני המקום. טעמו אחת מאבני המקום (ראב"ע, בראשית כח:יא). ועיין ברבנו אברהם בן הרמב"ם, "אין טעמו כי הקים מצבה מן אותה האבן היחידה אשר שם מראשותיו אלא טעמו כי הקים מצבה מכמה אבנים מאבני המקום ואותה האבן אשר שם מראשותיו" (שם כח:יח).

<sup>42</sup> ויקח מאבני המקום, וכתוב ויקח את האבן, אמר רבי יצחק מלמד שנתקבצו כל אותן אבנים למקום אחד וכל אחת ואחת אומרת עלי יניח צדיק זה ראשו תנא וכולן נבלעו באחד (חולין צא עמוד ב).

<sup>43</sup> In *Lecture IV* Rav Soloveitchik notes that while early mystics were great Halakhic scholars, those during the publishing of the Zohar were not: "The main difference between Merkavah mystics and classic mystics lies in one detail: the Merkavah mystics were our greatest Halakhic scholars. Rabbi Akiva was one of them. The school was an esoteric one and the requirement for entry into it was difficult, and one of the most important qualifications was Halakhic scholarship. Later, when Kabbalah published the Zohar, the esoteric character of the mystics vanished and most mystics were not Halakhic scholars at all."

Without doubt, the mystic experience is an ecstatic, out of mind or insane experience. There is an act of self-transcendence on the part of the mystic, who wishes to contact God. The Aggadic experience is logical and expresses itself in basic religious categories. There is nothing incomprehensible about the Halakhic or Aggadic objective religious experience. It is a logical experience and the religious act is a functional one. It may achieve an association with God but never an identification with Him. Halakhah and Aggadab never introduced an equation of man and God. But the mystic operates within a logical vacuum. Thomas Aquinas said mysticism was experiential, not theoretical, cognition of God—there is sensuality in the experience of God. The desire of the mystic to see God as good [*Tebillim* 34:9] 'טעמו וראוי כי טוב ה' is actually epistemologically absurd. How can the invisible, the root, the absolute spirit be seen and felt?

### **The Experience of the Unseen and Unreal God Is Real to the Mystic**

Yet the experience of the unseen and unreal God is real to the mystic. The mystic performance is illogical. How can an infinite being be experienced and felt by our finite narrow feelings? But this is what the mystic does. Attachment or merger with God was a favorite expression of medieval mystics. Hence many antithetic concepts which are illogical and absurd to the rational mind are understandable to the mystic. There are no problems to the mystic because problems are possible to the logical mind only and the mystics defy logic. There is no problem of contradiction to the mystic because there is no logic. Contradiction can exist only in a logical realm.

To Aggadab, the relation between God and man is functional and sympathetic. There is an effort on the part of God to get in touch with man. Both God and man may encounter each other only functionally, but there is absolutely no metaphysical association between God and man. The gap is still present.

### **In Kabbalah, Man Aims toward a Merger with God, Not toward a Relationship with Him**

Kabbalah tries to establish this metaphysical relation between God and man. Man in Kabbalah travels in the destination of a merger with God, not a relation with God. The Divine embrace is the goal of Kabbalah where love denotes metaphysical proximity or fusion. This mystic idea is based on a basic desire of man toward anti-immanence [to retreat from

Him].<sup>44</sup> To Halakhah, God is Divine Majesty, a ruler—*kevod malkhuto*—Who gave us laws to follow. To Aggadah, God is sympathetic toward man. He suffers with man as a comrade, etc. God is not a majestic deity but a sympathetic deity. To Kabbalah, God is the origin—source (*makor*)—and man’s striving toward God is identified with man’s striving to be reunited with his origin.

The love of God is the love of the origin or ontic *patria*. This is the idea of fatherhood—*avinu*—in the sense of source, not of someone to pass one’s troubles to. We long for God as the root of our existence (the mother-child relationship is mainly a biological one, a deep and close and insoluble relationship. The father-child relationship is a human relationship, a social relationship, the need of which is purely spiritual and it is caused by a longing for the origin which is irrational). Love in Kabbalah is manifest by adhesion to God or being joined by and to God.

Both Baḥya ibn Paquda<sup>45</sup> and Maimonides laid stress on God as the root of all existence. This is the concept developed by Kabbalah. God is an origin and this origin reveals itself in everything that sprang forth, and this is the affinity that prevails between God and man. God is the homeland, *patria*, of the mystic.

## Lecture IX

### To Kabbalah God Is Not Viewed as “Cause” but as *Shoresb*, the Source

What is the essential difference between the scholastic and theological “*causa prima*” to the kabbalistic *makor*? For theology, the *causa* and the effect are not identical. *Causa* brought the effect but the effect exists now by its own right. But to Kabbalah, it is not “cause” but *shoresb*. The cause is manifest in the effect and is the effect, there is an integrated relationship, while in “*causa prima*” there is a dynamic relationship. The cause makes the effect but there is no integral part of it after the effect has come into being. (Maimonides, [e.g., *Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah* 1:1,] always used the word *mamtzi* instead of *bara*—the first implies an extension of the Creator into our being so that He is still part of the created things, while

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<sup>44</sup> See Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek*, “The spirit fears God because it is impossible for it to exist in His presence. It loves God and runs after Him because it is impossible for it to exist without Him, outside of Him,” pp. 64–65.

<sup>45</sup> כי העילות כל אשר תעלינה למעלה תתמעטנה בתחלתן עד אשר תהיינה מגיעות אל שרש המנין והוא אחד האמת והוא הבורא יתברך (חובת הלבבות, שער היחוד, פרק ט)

*bara* means a severance between Creator and created; Maimonides wanted to emphasize the affinity between Creator and created.)

### **The Main Motif of Kabbalah Is to Reunite Man with God, but Also to Maintain Separateness**

What was the main motif, the moving force of Kabbalah? To reunite man with God. How did Kabbalah attempt to attain this? Kabbalah, of course, denied the separate existence of the world. The world was not separate from God. They did not want to say that God was in nature, because that would make a semi-god out of man. Kabbalah tried to unite man with God—*devekut*—and also to maintain the separateness or bi-polarity of man and God. This almost paradoxical concept is what Kabbalah tried to formulate.

### **All That God Created Are Symbols Representative of Him**

How did they do this? Their premises were that the world does not exist autonomously outside of God. The objective or separate appearances of the world are the means by which God reveals himself. He crystallized, as it were, His Divine image in the world order. God speaks through the created who are symbols representative of God. God reveals Himself in symbols: world, cosmos, consciousness, and all other phenomena. God is identified by these, just as a human personality is identified by his objective or separate and unique appearances. The hands, eyes, clothes, voices, etc., are symbols of a personality. They are not identical with it because personality is a mysterious, amorphous thing—they are symbols of it. Symbol is a postulate of the human mind without which we could not understand anything. Human personality is by definition unique and not universal and because of this uniqueness there can be no real identification of one personality by another. There is nothing in common between one personality and another personality. The same gap that separates man from God (God's uniqueness, otherness) also separates man from man—by personality. The human personality is transcendent as far as another human personality is concerned.

How can we understand this personality? By the symbols already described. We supplement the incomprehensible and mysterious personality with symbols as appearances. The core of personality can never be understood or known. What then are the symbols of God? The word, natural law, a person's own personality and everything else in the world. In the human personality, there is no possibility of recognition unless the person reveals himself through acts, speech, etc. The same is true of the Divine personality of God, which reveals itself in everything. (The reason that

man cannot conquer the essence of nature is because nature never reveals itself to man.) Therefore, God is transcendent just as a man's personality is transcendent from another's. So too, God is immanent in symbols just as man is. God appears to the world, but He is not the world. Neoplatonic mysticism actually said that God was in the world and was the world. Kabbalah said that the world was an appearance of God, a symbolization of God. God is, to Kabbalah, the origin Who is symbolized through the world. The root reveals itself through the branches.

### **Kabbalah and the Religious Experience**

What is the religious experience for Kabbalah? If man were able to reduce himself to the core of his personality and then route his personality backwards, toward the beginning, he would not experience God, because there is a vacuum between God and man, but he would find that his personality is nothing more than a symbol and an expression of God.

Man cannot identify God, but man going backwards can understand that he is a manifestation of God. Man reaches out for Divinity but never reaches it. The same is true when man, through introspection, attempts to understand the core of his own personality. He tries but he cannot.

### **Symbolic Pantheism Is the Main Motif of Kabbalah, Not Metaphysical Pantheism**

To Kabbalah, God is symbolized. Man, if he reverses creation, will discover his own metaphysical purpose in the world—that he is only a symbol. Symbolic pantheism is the main motif of Kabbalah, not metaphysical pantheism. Even mitzvot to Kabbalah were symbols. *Tefillin* are symbols; the *shel yad*—meaning the *sheva sefirot*—is a retracing toward God and the *ve-erastikeh*<sup>46</sup> is a “merger” with God. The *shel rosh* means the three main *sefirot* of *hokhmah*, *binah*, and *keter*—the retracing process is continued to *keter*, the highest *sefirah*, but there we stop and cannot cross the vacuum to God.

The mitzvah is a symbolic performance. The religious performance is an act that serves to retrace for man the stream of happening since Creation and to show man that his true essence is only a symbol representing and expressing an unapproachable and infinite God. The religious experience for Kabbalah is the reversing of the act of creating and eliminating symbolization, to meet God stripped of His symbols. It is an infinite act. Kabbalah constantly tries to construct a bridge outside the world toward

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<sup>46</sup> וארשתיה לי לעולם וארשתיה לי בצדק ובמשפט ובחסד וברחמים. וארשתיה לי באמונה ונדעה את ה'. (הושע ב: כא-כב)

God. This idea is based on the hope that somewhere in man—the soul—there is a piece of Divine being which constantly tries to move toward the deity, not through the medium of symbols. This is a dynamic striving. To other mystics there can be identification with God; to Kabbalah there can never be true identification but only a *telos* [end goal], an understanding that man is nothing more than the symbols of God.

## Lecture X

### **The Entire World with All Its Contradictions Are Symbolizations of God**

There are no sacraments (deeds of transcendental value and importance) in Halakhah and Aggadah. But is this true also of Kabbalah, where the mitzvah takes on such cosmic proportions? The sacrament reaches into the metaphysical sphere and the sacramental act is endowed, so to speak, with magic, exerting an influence over a transcendental being—the sacramental act involving both the finite and infinite being. Is this the same as the Kabbalistic mitzvah?

To answer this, we must first develop the historical aspect of Kabbalah. To Kabbalah, the historical order is not separate from the objective natural order. Historical and natural revelation run parallel, and Halakhah and Aggadah say the same. But to Kabbalah, all of the world with all its contradictions and polar equations (finite, infinite, matter, spirit) are symbolizations of God, and all forms of reality express an inexpressible mystery; and if they all express the same mystery they are all commensurate and identical. (The symbol is an expression of an inexpressible thing and is often illogical. The allegory is a logically cohesive story making a logical point.)

### **Historical Realization Is Not a Human Affair but a Divine Affair**

Is there in Kabbalah the idea of historical realization which is the core of the Aggadic conception of history, where each generation contributes its share to the historical *telos*? Does Kabbalah know of this realization? To Kabbalah, historical realization is not the human affair that Aggadah makes it. Rather, it is (if Kabbalah talks of history) a Divine affair. Creation in Kabbalah is a Divine act synonymous with Divine revelation, and synonymous too with descent and withdrawal on the part of God. In order to create the world, God had to abandon His self-contained repose,

as it were, and begin “to move toward the outside,” and concede the existence of something else beside Himself. Infinity is all-inclusive, uniqueness. Nothing else exists.

### ***Tzimtzum*, the First Performance of God, Is a Great Divine Tragedy**

The first performance of God was *tzimtzum*, contraction.<sup>47</sup> Infinity and finitude now exist simultaneously. *Tzimtzum* is considered by the mystics as an act of degradation and sacrifice, as it were, on the part of God. God began to reveal Himself in finite, concrete, temporal symbols and this itself means not only condescendence but also self-imposed limitation and arrest on the part of God. This act of symbolization imprisons God in a finite world. His perennial indwelling in this finite world is a self-imposed exile. He is imprisoned in an objective order ruled by necessity. There are two aspects of God in Kabbalah: the *Ein Sof* [the Infinite], Who cannot be approached and remains outside the world, and the Being Who dwells in the world and is symbolized by the world. *Shekhinah* is the Divine substance which has fallen into concrete existence. Creation to Kabbalah is a great divine tragedy, the true unity of God was disturbed by the introduction of a diversity of aspects by which we can see Him.

This concept is Halakhic and Aggadic too. Even the Bible expresses this idea of a multitude of appearances representing one Being. On the verse *אֱלֹהֵינוּ ה' אֵלֵינוּ* in *Humash* [*Shemot* 20:2], Rashi says that God spoke, saying He was one God, even though He appeared in many places under different aspects.<sup>48</sup> *Hazal* had an aversion toward an excessive multiplication of Divine attributes and limited it to three<sup>49</sup>—and even these three are incomprehensible. Also, *Hazal* assigned a special importance to the *Shem Havayah* [Tetragrammaton], which expresses the unchangeability and

<sup>47</sup> The Halakhic understanding of *tzimtzum* is found in Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, p. 48: “Infinity contracts itself; eternity concentrates itself in the fleeting and transient, the Divine Presence in dimensions and the glory of God in measurements. It is Judaism that has given the world the secret of *tzimtzum*, of ‘contraction,’ contraction of the infinite within the finite, the transcendent within the concrete, the supernal within the empirical, and the divine within the realm of reality. When the Holy One, blessed be He, descended on Mount Sinai, He set an eternally binding precedent that it is God who descends to man, not man who ascends to God. When He said to Moses, ‘And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them’ (Exod. 25:8), He thereby revealed the awesome mystery that God contracts His divine presence in the world.”

<sup>48</sup> לפי שנגלה בים כגיבור מלחמה ונגלה כאן כזקן מלא רחמים... הואיל ואני משתנה במראות אל תאמרו שתי רשויות הן, אנכי הוא אשר הוצאתיך ממצרים ועל הים... (רש"י שמות כ:ב)

<sup>49</sup> הגדול הגבור והנורא. עיין יומא סט עמוד ב, ועיין ירושלמי ברכות פרק ז הלכה ג.



unity of God. We cannot pronounce this name [in this world] because we see God under many aspects, but in *olam ha-ba* it can be said because there the unity of God can be comprehended.

Actually, God, by revealing Himself through symbols to make Himself more or less understood by finite minds degrades Himself—just as the clown who may be a very serious person degrades himself while he is acting, because he deliberately conceals his true personality. God conceals His true personality so that the finite being should have at least a little understanding of Him. *Geulah* to Aggadah was human; to Kabbalah it was introduced into the Divine sphere. God Himself needs redemption. History to Kabbalah is the rhythm of Divine revelation, the drama of Divine self-exile, self-sacrifice, and self-imprisonment for the sake of His world and for the sake of Divine redemption, which would be the final goal.

### **To Kabbalah, Redemption Is a Divine Affair with a Human Act; to Aggadah It Is a Human Affair Aided by a Divine Act**

To Aggadah, redemption is a human affair aided by a Divine act. Kabbalah reversed it: redemption is a Divine affair with a human act. Man “helps” God heal the metaphysical breach in creation. Man will free the *Shekhinah* from suffering, loneliness, and humiliation. Man will cause all worlds to unite or separate, and by his performance will cause all representations of God to merge into one whose meaning will break through all concrete appearances. To Kabbalah, man is a finite creature who represents God through all His appearances, while each part of the world represents only a single aspect. Man is destined to become the redeemer of infinity, and history is the realization of this goal. The eschatological realm is where man and God will meet without symbols.

How does man bring this about? By the religious experience, which is not a sacrament but an act of redemption of the *Shekhinah* from the cosmic imprisonment. Kabbalah is separating one aspect of divinity from another, separating the objective order from the divine order. This was brought about by the *etz ha-da'at*. There is nothing metaphysical about this. The objective order is separate and explains itself, but nothing explains the whole of the order. The cosmos as a whole remains for physics a factum. Man by sinning disturbs the Divine order of things by causing a split. When meaning and symbol (which is also divinity) are made separate, symbol becomes a separate entity and a duality of God is introduced.

**To Kabbalah, the Mitzvah Unifies the Symbol with the Meaning**

To Kabbalah, the mitzvah unifies the symbol with the meaning. How? By re-exploring and retracing back to creation and origin. This is done without any metaphysical or magical formulae, but in accordance with a unity with and of God. It must be guided by that principle, interpreting everything in the world as symbolizing God and understanding the unity of God. This is how man can redeem God.

## 5. Shabbat in the Light of Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah<sup>50</sup>

### Definition of “Shabbat”: Stoppage, Cancellation, Discontinuation

The word *Shabbat* in the Bible may mean stoppage, cancellation, to discontinue—not to rest, which is *va-yanaḥ*. Rest or *menuḥab* is a secondary motif in Shabbat. The central motif of Shabbat—for now—is the idea of discontinuation, the stopping of work. Whenever the Torah commands us to watch the Shabbat it always starts with the six days in which man labors. The meaning of Shabbat asserts itself in its separateness and otherness. The Torah compared the two: (the days of labor and the day of no labor). The seventh day is set apart as belonging to God, *Shabbat la-Hashem*. This discontinuation is introduced not in regard to *melakhah* but in regard to separateness and otherness. The Torah, by introducing Shabbat, broke up the continuation of time (measured spatially by a calendar, of course). Shabbat is clearly delineated against the other six days and is unique; it enjoys qualities and traits peculiar to itself. Shabbat as discontinuation demonstrates a singling out of a stretch of time from the time cycle.

How can we demonstrate the separateness of Shabbat? *Melakhtekha* indicates “your work”: the days belong to man. But Shabbat is separated because it was assigned to God and does not belong to man.

The same is true of *shemittah*. Six years are man’s; the seventh year is God’s.

## Lecture XI

### Halakhah: Shabbat Is Delineated from the Other Six Days by Halakhah through *Issur Melakhah*

The Shabbat day is delineated and contrasted against the other six days. How did Halakhah tell us to demonstrate this separateness? By *issur*

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<sup>50</sup> During approximately the same time Rav Soloveitchik was giving his *Lectures*, Abraham Joshua Heschel published his book, *The Sabbath* (1951). In a conversation with Jonathan Sacks (see Jonathan Sacks, “A Hesper in Honor of Rav Yosef Soloveitchik,” *Memories of a Giant*, Michael A. Berman, ed. [Jerusalem and NY: Urim, 2003]), Rav Soloveitchik criticizes Heschel’s work, “What does he call Shabbat? —a sanctuary in time. This is an idea of a poet. It is a lovely idea. But what is Shabbat? Shabbat... is *lamed-tet melakbot*... and their *toladot*, and it is out of that halakhah and not of poetry that you have to construct a theory of Shabbat.” This section of the *Lectures* can be read as Rav Soloveitchik’s vision of how the laws of Shabbat can be used to construct a theory of Shabbat.

*melakhab*, by abstaining from work. By attending to our work for six days and abstaining on the seventh day, we further contrast Shabbat with the other six days.

Halakhically, there is no norm pertaining to work, but there is a mitzvah for contrast. Rambam explains that *muktzeb* was introduced for those who do not work on the remainder of the week (*Hilkehot Shabbat*, 24:14). The seventh day is different from all other days. You shall not follow your usual routine. The *lo ta'aseh kol melakhab* is a consequence of the differentiation. Shabbat is assigned to God. The concept of *issur melakhab* is the Halakhic basis for the laws of Shabbat. Here, Halakhah, Aggadah, and Kabbalah branch out—as far as the contrasting of Shabbat.

The uniqueness which *Humash* gives to Shabbat is found in *Bereshit* [2:3]: ויברך אלקים את יום השביעי. This sentence is the fountainhead of all Shabbat mysticism and metaphysics. Halakhically, this *pasuk* refers to *kedushat ha-yom*—separateness. (Even without knowing the definition of *kedushat*, it means uniqueness.) It is indicative of the specific role and singularity assigned to Shabbat. The primary Halakhic method of atomization defined in *kedushat ha-yom* is the same as *issur melakhab*. Hence, it was purged of all metaphysical terms and aspects.

*Kedushat ha-yom* was endowed by Halakhah with the exclusively negative aspect of *issur melakhab*. To speak of *kedushat* as a unique aspect of the Shabbat, regardless of its *issurim*, is unwarranted. Moreover, the word *Shabbat* itself, Halakhically, is a purely formulated, quantitative word. It is a stretch of time bounded by sunsets which carries with it a prohibition of work.<sup>51</sup>

### Lecture XIII

#### **Aggadah: Man Parallels God's Creation [Six Days] and His Separation [Shabbat]**

The ethical performance expresses itself in the intention to do the act itself. The essence of the ethical act is asserted in the decision and intention. Why then do we require the completion of the ethical act if the essence of it, the fulcrum of the act, is its intention, that it is freely done? Because otherwise, freedom is reduced to a myth without accomplishment. But nature does not always cooperate with us in helping us complete the act. Maimonides therefore said that somehow, if man really wants to, the environment will help him in his accomplishment.

Man was given two promises:

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<sup>51</sup> Lecture XII is missing here.

- 1) His own personality would not hinder him in choosing the ethical object. The choice is voluntary and not dominated by any immutable laws.
- 2) After the choice, man is not free to perform because elements involved may hinder him; but his environment will parallel and help his intention. This is Maimonides' concept.<sup>52</sup>

Man's task in the ethical field does not consist solely of ethical performances but of being ethical, of being an integral part in himself of his ethical acts and intentions. The ethical norm desires the molding of an ethical personality, not only of imitating God's deeds but of imitating His Being and Personality. והייתם קדושים לאלקים [Bemidbar 15:40] amplifies *ve-halakhta bi-drakhav* [Devarim 28:9] and shows the requirement of a holy personality which the Torah considers a mode of existence, *kedushah* being an ethical, not a mystical, term. An ethical performance should be characteristic of the inner being and an expression of the human personality, not merely a factum like eating or sleeping, which has no relation to the abstract ethical or spiritual personality. Even in eating, if a man reveals his personality, the eating becomes a revelation of the personality. Before we spoke of vegetative eating.<sup>53</sup> This is why intention is so important in the ethical realm. But this intention must be realized in the objective realm. The desire for the accomplishment of the intention is very typical of Judaism, which is wary of inwardness [alone].

Work is considered by Halakhah on an ethical level. God not only created the world, but He is, by His very nature, a Creator. Creation, then, was not arbitrary or incidental. *Yotzer* was considered an essential attribute of God by Judah Ha-levi and Saadyah because they considered the *Shem Havayah* as meaning *mehaveh*, "doing or creating." God is incessant, pure active creativity. In the Torah, a parallelism can be found between man as a worker and God as creator. Halakhah, then, thought of work as reflecting a mode of existence in man and as being a part of his existence. God

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<sup>52</sup> See Rambam, *Hilkhhot Teshuvah* 6:3–5.

<sup>53</sup> We could not find in these *Lectures* any prior reference to vegetative eating. See, however, Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek*, pp. 110–114, regarding the act of eating: "The animalistic behavior of eating, upon which man's life depends, has been refined by the Halakhah and transformed into a religious ritual and an elevated moral act," p. 112. See also Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* (Toras HoRav Foundation, 2005) for his views on vegetarianism: "There is a distinct reluctance, almost an unwillingness, on the part of Torah to grant man the privilege to consume meat. Man as an animal-eater is looked at askance by the Torah. There are definitive vegetarian tendencies in the Bible" p. 31.

put Adam in Paradise [Bereshit 2:15] *le-avdah u-le-shamrah*. Work is a form of speech operating with concrete signs. Man reveals himself through work.

### **Meetings Between God and Man in the Bible Are Charged with a Desire for Performance**

In the question of self-realization and revelation, Judaism differs from [Christian] mysticism. To *Halakhab*, the human personality, in order to discover itself, does not have to flee the world. To the [Christian] mystics this discovery meant fleeing the world and sinking into oneself: “By finding myself I find God.” But Judaism rejected this and said self-regulation is achieved not through retreat from the world but through ethical dynamics. God is active and creative, and His essence is expressed through action. Likewise, the human personality must realize itself through action, through externalization. Man’s self-revelation must be through an active life, not a retreat from life. The mystics met God through ecstasy; the prophets met God through missions [Shemot 7:15]: לך אל פרעה, etc. There are no mystical meetings or pure friendship dialogues between God and man in the Bible. [The encounter] is always historical and charged with a desire for performance. There is no meeting of God and man without an apostolic mission. This is not true of the mystics and this is the reason the prophets cannot be regarded as mystics. With the prophets, it was ethical or apostolic; with the mystic it was happiness and merger with God. Judaism, then, considered work as an essence of man and as his revelation.

### ***Meleket Maḥshevet***

#### **In Halakhah: Fulfilling Human Intention through Physical Energy**

What is the work prohibited on Shabbat? The work of manifestation of personality. This is why the intention and thinking is [what makes the work] forbidden—*meleket maḥshevet* is *assur*. The act of work has its beginning in the idealization and intellectual stage and its completion in the act itself. It is all one whole. What, then, would be the definition, *halakhibically*, of *meleket maḥshevet*? The fulfillment of a human intention through the medium of physical energy which is directed at some quality inherent in the objective order of things. Being creative, *metaken*, is determined by the nature of the work itself.

### **In Aggadah: Self-Revelation of Man through Work**

Aggadah would modify the definition of work and add a new element to the idea of *meleket mahshevet*. It adds the self-revelation of man through work. Aggadah defines creativity in terms of the human personality. Man is associated with the objective order of things, and a realization of the objective order of things is a realization of man's own personality. God, as it were, realized Himself through creation. God realized the goodness, kindness, etc., through action. If He were alone, He could not realize Himself. This is exactly what happens to man through work. To Aggadah, then, it is not work which was forbidden on Shabbat, but objectification of the human personality. For six days God revealed and realized Himself and He retreated on the seventh day. The same should be true of man. Man on Shabbat retreats into his own personality, and any act of manifestation of his subjective personal existence is prohibited.

### **Muktzeh: Any Objects Not Designed for Use on Shabbat**

Not only is work forbidden on Shabbat, but there is also *muktzeh*. What is the basis of the *issur* of *muktzeh*? Halakhically, *muktzeh* is any object not designed for use on Shabbat. *Muktzeh* is identical with the concept of *ino mukhan* [not prepared],<sup>54</sup> whether for *akbilah* or *tashmish* [use]. In the Torah, *muktzeh* precedes *issur melakhab*: והיה ביום הששי והכיני... precedes the *parashah* on *Har Sinai* of the universal *issur melakhab* on Shabbat.

### **Melakhah she-Tzerikhah le-Gufah: On Shabbat Man Loses His Mastery of the World**

What is this Halakhic concept? Man's prerogative and ownership rights were limited on Shabbat. Man should not gain new prerogatives, enjoyments, or rights on Shabbat. These should be prohibited. Not only is work prohibited but the work produced on Shabbat as well [i.e., מעשה שבת]. The immediate conclusion from this is that man's control over nature is taken away. Man does not control nature on Shabbat. God told Adam [Beresbit 1:28]: ומלאו את הארץ וכבשוה, etc. Man can exploit his environment for his own selfish ends and for his own welfare. But these rights have no application on Shabbat. In this light we can understand *melakhah she-tzerikhah le-gufah* because the motif of Shabbat expresses itself in the loss

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<sup>54</sup> Above, Rav Soloveitchik says, "Rambam explains that *muktzeh* was introduced for those who do not work on the remainder of the week (*Hilkhot Shabbat*, 24:14)."

of certain rights given him for other days. Work that is characteristic of mastery of the universe is prohibited.

Biologically, man belongs to the animal realm. But he was equipped with technical intelligence which made it possible for him to become master and conquer the world. By “technical intelligence,” we mean pragmatic and practical intelligence, which man has in greater share than the animal. This intellectual endowment made man both the exploiter and master of nature. This privileged condition, acquired by technical intelligence, expires on Shabbat. The Torah says [*Shemot* 20:8] ועשית כל מלאכתך. The possessive, meaning the selfish, specific work of man, which is mastery of the world, stops on Shabbat and man becomes equal with the rest of nature. Human exclusiveness and uniqueness consist in the ability to plan and ideate objective actions, and that exactly was restricted on Shabbat. Another kind of uniqueness was recommended by *Halakha*. But man as an intelligent animal with technical knowledge stops on Shabbat.

### ***Melakhah ki-le’Ahar Yad: Work in an Unusual Manner Is Inadequate to Control Nature***

*Melakhah ki-le’ahar yad*, work in an unusual manner and which is inadequate to control nature (like harvesting with hands instead of with sickle), is not considered work on Shabbat, because the *melakhah* should express human skill and technical knowledge. If it does not, it is not prohibited on Shabbat. The Torah places great emphasis on the rest of animals and slaves. Halakhah says if the slave works for himself, you cannot stop him. This prohibition, then, indicates the cessation of domination and mastery over nature, which includes man too. On Shabbat, man is shifted from the center of creation to the periphery. But this is only in regard to man-animal, endowed with technical intelligence. This does not mean that the same thing happened to man-human, or man-spiritually. The separateness of the day found expression in *sheshet yamim*, and on that day Shabbat-man becomes, from the view of technical knowledge, just another animal.

### ***Me’ilah: Man on Shabbat May Not Intrude on the Sphere of Divine Rights***

What happens to nature on Shabbat? ויום השביעי שבת לה' אלקיך [*Shemot* 20:10] indicates that on Shabbat there is a restoration of Divine rights. Man is juridically an alien in the world. Only God can exploit the world. But certain rights were relinquished to man, who was granted the status of tenancy and the right to become master and exploiter of his environment. Man’s dignity and uniqueness are designated by his mastery over



his environment. On Shabbat, God is restored to His ownership and rule of the universe. Man surrenders his privileges to God and the world becomes consecrated to Him. Man, on Shabbat, may not intrude on the sphere of Divine rights. This is true also of *hekdesb*. The control of man over his environment expires at certain times under certain conditions and at such times, nature assumes a *kodesh* quality and does not belong to man. An intrusion is called *me'ilah*, which means treachery, indicating a breach of trust which, Halakhically, is equated with *gezalah*. Betrayal of trust is called by the Torah *shelihut yad* [lit., sending the hand], which means treachery, and is the same as *me'ilah*.

In regard to God, man's aggressiveness is always called *me'ilah* because man betrays his trust. The *pesukim* dealing with *shemittah* prove unequivocally that both Shabbat and *shemittah* are for the purpose of taking away man's domination over nature. The idea of Shabbat and *shemittah* are identical. There is in the Torah a certain cycle of seven and with each seven a new cycle begins: seven days, seven years, seven times seven years. At the close of each cycle something happens: The restoration of God's prerogatives and man's loss of his privilege. The world is restored to its primordial status and to complete Divine rule. In those days or years, the world assumes a *kedushah*.

## Lecture XIV

### Motifs of Shabbat

#### The *Kedushah* of Shabbat

The *kodesh* of Shabbat is in its inner essence a juridic concept. The world on that day belongs to God. The same is true of *shemittah*, *hekdesb*, etc. God was made by Halakhah into a juridic personality. *Yovel* has all fields returning to their original owners, which was a Divine act. All human transactions are then canceled. Agricultural work is prohibited on *shemittah*. Man is dispossessed of the produce of the land, and the yield of the land is *hefker*. It may be picked up by anyone. The master of the land is placed in the same category as the rest of nature's creatures.

Under such an aspect *meleket mahshevet* may be defined as man's applying his technical intelligence to master the world. On Shabbat this mastery ends and he cannot change, fashion, or form matter. There is a parallel between Divine rest and human rest on Shabbat. God "mastered" matter over a period of six days and rested on the seventh. He withdrew as a Creator and as a dynamic Master who dominated matter through His

technical dominance. He similarly wants man to retreat and relinquish mastery.

Mastery or dominance may be in a physical or metaphysical sense: physically, through energy; the other is by the word or logos. There is also a juridic mastery, which does not imply a change of matter or physical control: someone owns a table and cannot change it physically because he is not a carpenter. On the seventh day God retreated from physical mastery into juridical mastery: from cosmocreator to [cosmocrat].

In regard to man, both concepts are the same. Man ceases from physical mastery but retains his juridic mastery. Yet man's juridic mastery finds expression in physical mastery, and so, from this point of view, even man's juridic mastery ends on Shabbat. In regard to physical creativity, man and God are the same on Shabbat. In regard to juridic ownership, man is on a lower level than God.

So, what happens to man on Shabbat? Does he sink to the level of an animal? This would be contrary to Jewish ideology: *neshamah yeteirah*, etc. What uniqueness does man retain on Shabbat, if any? Here a new aspect of God-man emerges, and this is the God-man community or the covenant relationship.

### **Two Motifs: 1. Creation of the World, and 2. Liberation from Egypt**

There are two motifs in Shabbat: creation and liberation from Egypt, both implying freedom. God created the world and rested on the seventh day; therefore man should not master the world, and he should give freedom to animals, etc. This same freedom motif is found both in the Decalogue in *Yitro* and the Decalogue in *Ve-Ethanan*.

The fact that Shabbat points to *yetzjat Mitzrayim* attests to the God-man relationship. The central motif of the revelation is the *seneh*. The revelation of the four kinds of *genlah*<sup>55</sup> also has one motif: divine sympathy of God toward man and the involvement of God in man's destiny. God then merged His destiny with the destiny of Israel: *Melekh Yisrael* (King of Israel), *Elokei Yisrael* (God revealing Himself through the history of Israel). This concept is a universal and not a national concept of God. And this is the God-man community and this relationship was established by the Exodus. This relationship was not based upon God as a cosmo-creator.

That is why there is no mention of Creation in regard to the Exodus and Sinai. The reason for this is that it would affect the free covenantal relationship and the mutual understanding established with the Exodus. God as tyrant cannot accord with the social importance of the society of

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<sup>55</sup> והוצאתי, והצלתי, וגאלתי, ולקחתי (שמות ג:1-11)

God and man formed by mutual consent and as a result of the favor God did for the Jews. There is no law in *Humash* motivated by Creation except Shabbat. God wanted His relationship to Israel to be a free and social one.

On Shabbat, man's autocracy over nature ends. He must withdraw as master of his environment. The world becomes consecrated to God. And man, because he is an equal part of his environment, consecrates himself to God and joins the community of God-man, which is absent during the six days; if God were present, then man would not be master. The relationship changes from a natural to a covenantal community. In the natural community, both man and God are autocratic; both adapt the world to their needs and rule it. In the covenantal community man is equal to his environment, and God-nature-man forms a mutual social, consecrated, ethical community. To be a member of a covenantal community means the consecration of man to God: **כי אני ה' מקדשכם** [*Shemot* 31:13]. This comes about with man relinquishing his mastery.<sup>56</sup>

## Lecture XVI

### ***Simḥah* and *Tzedakah* Go Together: *Tzedakah* = Shared Sorrow; *Simḥah* = Shared Joy**

Wherever there is {*simḥah*} [sorrow], there is *tzedakah*. *Tzedakah* is not sympathy but a sharing of the person's sorrow and misery. The same is true of *simḥah*; it must be shared with others. This is a specific motif of Shabbat and *yom tov* and is expressed by Halakhah. This, of course, is the motif of the covenantal community, a community not of interests (e.g., trade unions) but of existence.

### **The Motif of *Limud Torah* Is Important for Shabbat**

The motif of *limud Torah*, studying Torah, is important on Shabbat. In Judaism some mitzvot are put above others, not necessarily dogmatically, but because they are central to Judaism and to other mitzvot. *Limud Torah* is a central and all-important mitzvah. *Hazal* defined *avodah she-be-lev* as *limud*,<sup>57</sup> a concept foreign to many philosophers who consider worship an ecstatic surrender, not the purely intellectual act which is *limud Torah*. (The

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<sup>56</sup> Lecture XV is missing here.

<sup>57</sup> See Rambam's *Sefer ha-Mitzvot, aseh* 5: (מדרש תנאים ממדרש הגדול פ' ראה): ואמרו (מדרש תנאים ממדרש הגדול פ' ראה): עבדה בתורתו עבדה במקדשו.

*Tanya* wanted *limud* to be both an intellectual and ecstatic act.<sup>58</sup> It is difficult, however, to use one's intellect when the mind is involved in an ecstatic experience. Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner<sup>59</sup> wanted the intellectual to be completely separated from the ecstatic experience.)

### ***Kavod ve-Oneg and Limud Torah***

*Ḥazal* eliminated all devotional motifs from Shabbat and left only the motifs of *kavod ve-oneg* and *limud Torah*. *Keriat ha-Torah* came before *tefillah*. On Shabbat and Yom Kippur the *Kohen Gadol* interrupted the *avodah* to read the Torah. *Keriat Ha-Torah*, then, is one pillar of *limud Torah* on Shabbat. Another is or was the *derashah*, which was then an act of teaching laws, concepts, and *Ḥumash*, not like the sermons of today.

The double motif of Shabbat (retreat and return talked about before<sup>60</sup>) must be seen against an intellectual and philosophical background.

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<sup>58</sup> ובידיעת התורה מלבד שהשכל מלובש בחכמת ה' הנה גם חכמת ה' בקרבנו מה שהשכל משיג ותופס ומקיף בשכלו מה שאפשר לו לתפוס ולהשיג מידיעת התורה איש כפי שכלו וכח ידיעתו והשגתו בפרד"ס (ליקוטי אמרים פרק ה).

<sup>59</sup> הנה מ"ש בכל לבבכם על ענין התפלה. הוא פשוט ומבואר כוונת הכתוב לב' ענינים. הא' היינו לפנות לבו מטרדת המחשבות. ולהטותה אל הכוונה השלימה לתיבות התפלה בלבב שלם ועומקא דלבא. כמאמרם ז"ל בברייתא ר"פ אין עומדין המתפלל צריך שיכוין את לבו לשמים שנאמר תכין לבם גו' וכדמשמע להו נמי התם מקראי דחנה וחנה היא מדברת על לבה מכאן למתפלל צריך שיכוין לבו. וכמ"ש דוד המלך ע"ה בכל לבי דרשתיך. ובזוהר בשלח (ח"ב סג, ב) כל מאן דמצלי צלותא קמי מלכא קדישא בעי למבעי בעותי' ולצלאה מעומקא דלבא בגין דישתכח לביה שלים בקב"ה ויכוין לבא ורעותא. ולכן אמרו ז"ל (שם ס"פ תפלת השחר) שהמתפלל צריך לשהות וכו' כדי שתתחונן דעתו עליו. והיינו בכל לבבכם שתתמלא כל הלב רק בכונת תיבות התפלה. שאם יעלה בלבו איזה מחשבה אחרת הרי הלב חלוקה בב' מחשבות (ר' חיים מוולוז'ין, נפש החיים, שער ב).

<sup>60</sup> We could not find an earlier reference to this in these *Lectures*. See, however, for example, Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek*, chapter 4a, pp. 29–31, esp. p. 29: “All sapient men search for God, but when the seekers reach the ultimate boundary of reality they become alarmed and retreat. When they confront eternity, with its terrifying spaces that both attract and repel, both encourage and mock—they all cease their journey. Many of them are confused; many are frightened and uproot their faith. Only a few remain steadfast in the face of the mystery and expect salvation from the God they seek. This is the crisis point, and here God reveals Himself from above nature, from beyond the world bounded by time and space.” See also *ibid.* pp. 63–65; 69–80.

## 6. Confronting Evil

Long before Christianity appeared, redemption (not salvation) occupied a central idea in Judaism: *geulah*. And this was a Divine attribute. In Christianity, the need for salvation, born from the prophetic concept of *geulah*, was prompted by the feeling of despair in our world which they considered essentially evil. Existence must be saved from eternal doom. Historically, Christianity is essentially pessimistic because the world is evil. Who can save the world? A man cannot, because man himself is part of the corruption and he himself needs salvation. So Christianity postulated the idea of transcendental salvation, a salvation done by God or God-son. It is suprarational and non-rational. This concept is absurd in the sense that it is illogical, because it contradicts birth-death (they postulated Immaculate Conception, God-son, etc.). Judaism developed a different approach.

### Jewish Religion is Optimistic

The Jewish religion is optimistic. On what is this optimism based? On two foundations:

- 1) The Halakhic approach to the world, or Halakhic optimism.
- 2) Metaphysical optimism as found in the Bible.

### Halakhic Optimism

How do we know, from its method and movement, that Halakhah is optimistic? Simply, because the subject matter of Halakhah is of this world and there is very little in Halakhah that deals with any other world. Obviously, if they dealt with life in this world so extensively, they considered the world worth living in. In Halakhah and in our literature, the *ikekar* [main focus] is this world.

Christianity (Aquinas) spends pages analyzing angels. Judaism never does this. There is a modesty in Judaism toward God, a desire not to get personal. Halakhah can only be realized in this world, and the Halakhic subject matter is the human being with all his drives and desires. Halakhah never tells people to stop enjoying life. Only in this life can you perform the mitzvot.

כיון שמת אדם נעשה חפשי מן המצות [Niddah 61b], and Rebbi cried when he was dying because he would never again be able to perform the mitzvot [Ketubot 103b].<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> והתניא כשחלה רבי נכנס ר' חייא אצלו ומצאו שהוא בוכה אמר לו רבי מפני מה אתה בוכה... א"ל אנא אתורה ומצות קא בכינא (כתובות קג עמוד ב).

The Christian spends all his life preparing himself in a corrupt world so he will be able to perform the word of God in the next world, the world of salvation. But the Jew lives in this world and is told to enjoy life. Confidence in the intrinsic value of natural existence and hope for the realization of Halakhic norms is central to Judaism. Nature may become bad for Halakhah if we lose the Halakhic criterion and become indiscriminate. Halakhah requires of man a sense of discrimination.

### **Biblical Metaphysical Optimism**

The mere fact of creation corroborates the optimistic principle. Were the world corrupt and evil, God would never have created it. God [*Beresbit* 1:31] said on the sixth day: וְהָנָה טוֹב מְאֹד. Rambam quotes this in the *Moreh Nevukhim* [3:10] as an optimistic note. If we say the world is bad, then it must be considered the result of an error on the part of God. Christianity retained the optimistic note of Genesis and said that man, with the eating of the fruit, corrupted the world. Since then, sin has become an integral part of the world. Man cannot undo the evil he has done; God must do this undoing. Christianity, thus, gave man the supernatural power of corrupting to the core a world created by God, and being unable to remove the corruption by himself.<sup>62</sup>

How man can change the metaphysical core of nature is paradoxical and is not explained by Christianity. Eventually there will be salvation eschatologically but in the interim the world is corrupt. At this point, Christianity developed a unique dualism: a negation of all the natural faculties of man, and the formulation of a theology, or a doctrine, to do away with the evil of the world eschatologically. These two trends have been in Christianity since its inception. Jesus and Paul, the Desert Fathers and the monastic orders all preached asceticism and a denial of the things of this world. Christian philosophers tried to formulate a theodicy, to justify God with all this evil. God created man. How did evil come about? Any theodicy must be optimistic. The final concept is that there is no evil in this world.

Aquinas could not escape Greek optimism and tried to adapt it to Christianity. Christianity's idea was to fight evil with non-resistance. Aquinas, who said there is no positive evil, liked the Greek concept that Being

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<sup>62</sup> The Gemara (*Shabbat* 145b-146a) speaks of a corruption to the world brought about as a result of the sin of Eve, except that its effects were reversed by man: at the time of Jacob, or at Mt. Sinai. מפני מה עובדי כוכבים מזוהמין שלא עמדו על הר סיני... ופליגי דר' אבא בר כהנא דא"ר אבא בר כהנא עד שלשה דורות לא פסקה זוהמא מאבותינו אברהם הוליד את ישמעאל יצחק הוליד את עשו יעקב הוליד י"ב שבטים שלא היה בהם שום דופי. See also *Yevamot* 103b, *Avodah Zarah* 22b.

is good and non-Being is evil.<sup>63</sup> If you are sick, it is a lesser good—but it is a good because you exist. Not to exist is evil. There is no evil in life, only in death. Absolute corruption is identified with absolute nothingness. Maimonides believed the same thing. Practically speaking, this was the predominant theory from St. Augustine to Leibniz.<sup>64</sup> To the Greeks, man must live a disciplined life and raise himself to the logos; and this was the Greek solution as to how man can avoid the lesser goods (the evil) of this world.

But the Greeks never advised how to combat evil socially. Why raise [up] the slave when he exists and existence is good? Greek philosophy tried to ignore evil—possibly because most of them had a life of leisure and did not experience evil. Reality was identified with the beautiful, the harmonious. The Greek was confused when he encountered the coincidental, lawlessness in nature. So, there were two solutions: suffering is non-existence and is a myth, for to exist is good and never evil, and the soul does not share the agonies of the body which can be ignored; and suffering is a tragedy, and man, who will never triumph over the irrational element in nature, must submit to it and suffer. This is the solution of the tragedies of Euripides, Sophocles, etc. Christian philosophers rejected the second because it denied free will and order, and accepted the first, as did Maimonides.

## Lecture XVII

Maimonides in *Moreh Nevukhim* [3:10] states there is no evil in the world because the world exists and existence is not evil; it is the antipode of evil. Evil was either completely accepted (historical Christian) or completely rejected (Greek). Halakhah, however, recognized evil and tried an altogether different approach toward fighting it.

A philosophical inquiry may encounter evil on two planes: the metaphysical and ethical.

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.49.

<sup>64</sup> On the problem of evil, Leibniz is known for the idea that we live in the best of all possible worlds. In his *Theodicy*, he spells out the following argument: There are an infinite number of possible worlds. An infinitely good God would only choose the best one. There might have been a world without suffering, but it would not be better. Evil happens accidentally because of a world that maximizes the virtue of free will and imitates God's goodness. God is not the source of evil. He remains holy in permitting this evil because it is the necessary consequence of God creating the best possible world. In the sense that he claims that we live in the best possible world, this is an "optimistic" theodicy.

### **Metaphysical Evil**

To the metaphysician, evil is investigated from the point of view of its nature as an ontic phenomenon and how it fits into the pattern of creation and existence. Aristotle said that evil is found only in matter and is non-existence. The reason we encounter it is because in the world we find both matter and form. Potential was evil, form was good. The metaphysician also wants to understand the responsibility of God with regard to the presence of evil and suffering. This is called theodicy, the justification of God in the face of evil. If we say evil came into the world outside of God, we limit God's omnipotence; if we say God created evil then we limit God's goodness. Aristotle gave the first answer: a co-existence of good and evil, potential and form. But Aristotle did not know of creation. The problem of evil has occupied religious philosophers through the ages.

In the *Book of Job* we find a typical metaphysical approach toward evil. Job was interested in the problem of Divine responsibility in the face of evil. He accused God of arbitrariness and injustice in dealing with man.

### **Evil on the Ethical Level**

We can also encounter the problems of evil on the ethical level. The ethicist's approach is purely functional. The question of what evil is or why evil, which the metaphysicist asks, does not bother the ethicist; he is interested only in how man should live in the face of evil. This last approach is typically Halakhic. Should man despair and surrender to it, or should he resist it and try to improve the world? For the prophets the prime motif was, why evil? The Greek motif was what is evil? The Halakhic motif was how to live with evil; but these are only a matter of stress, as Halakhah had to introduce metaphysical approaches.

If we approach evil solely from the metaphysical viewpoint, we are always faced with great difficulties and paradoxes. God's answer to Job is that he understands nothing of the universe. How can he expect to understand evil? Man is helpless. Hence all his attempts to understand God's ways are fruitless. This must be the final answer if the problem of evil is approached from a purely metaphysical point of view. Job's questions were unanswered, and he repents because he realizes that he asked a question which cannot be answered. Halakhah has followed God's advice to Job. Metaphysical inquisitiveness was replaced by ethical inquiry. Instead of revolting against God, Halakhah said that man should revolt against



evil itself.<sup>65</sup> Revolt against evil, do not revolt against God. This revolt should not be expressed verbally, in despair, grief, but in action, in combating the source of evil.

### Halakhah's View of Evil

Halakhah displays a positivistic and rationalistic approach to evil. Man wars with evil and his aim is to mercilessly annihilate it. This is in regard to moral evil, and also with regard to physical evil like disease, etc. Halakhah had its own approach. Healing was originally a religious performance; Halakhah delivered healing from its cultic aspect. Healing and therapy was made a natural human performance, not a mystery—very much like the scientific approach of today. Of the healing snake in Jerusalem<sup>66</sup> the *Mishnah* [*Rosh Hashanah* 3:8] says, *לְכִי נָחֵשׁ מִמִּית אוֹ נָחֵשׁ מִחַיָּה*. Cure is no cultic mystery, but a natural task on man's part. The *nahash* is for prayer, but it is man's task to help the healing. The *nehash ba-nehosbet* was given a *Mishnah* to offset the growing approach of Jews that connected healing with Divinity alone.

Here Halakhah encounters a paradox. It said God was responsible for evil and misery, *מִפִּי עֲלִיּוֹן לֹא תֵצֵא הָרָעוֹת וְהַטּוֹב*, “Is it not at the word of the Most High, that weal and woe befall?” [*Eikhab* 3:38], and also that man was called to resist it. Man was made obligated to resist evil for which God was responsible. This is paradoxical but this is the Halakhic viewpoint. Evil and suffering were not nonsensical to Halakhah. Evil is not completely negative; it has purpose. If suffering is insensate then man can only despair; but if it has direction and purpose despair is unnecessary: Evil can be a *factum* [a statement of fact] and an *actus* [an act]. Ontologically, existence is monotonous and repetitious. Axiologically, which is subjective, there is evil which is not uniform and monotonous. When man begins to appraise existence and not only states facts but begins to establish values, subjective judgments, suffering becomes distinguishable.

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<sup>65</sup> See also, for example, Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek*, pp. 31–33, esp. p. 32, “Halakhic thought wonders about evil not from a metaphysical standpoint, but from a moral-halakhic perspective. It does not ask why or from what cause, but for what purpose. It is interested not in the causal aspect, but in the teleological element of evil. Its question is a halakhic one: What should man do when confronted by evil, so that he may live and flourish? How can we turn evil into a creative force? How can evil be used to enhance the rule of the good? The Jew first accepts the judgment and then fights the evil, conquers it, and elevates it to the level of the good.”

<sup>66</sup> *הוּא הַסִּיר אֶת-הַבְּמוֹת, וְשִׁבַּר אֶת-הַמַּצֵּבֹת, וְכָרַת, אֶת-הָאֲשֵׁרָה; וְכַתַּת נָחֵשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה מִשָּׁה, כִּי עַד-הַיָּמִים הַהֵמָּה הָיוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקַטְרִים לוֹ, וַיִּקְרָא-לוֹ, נְחֹשֶׁתָן. (מְלָכִים ב' יח:ד)*

Suffering is a spiritual experience. Pain is a psychical experience—a relation between body and mind—belonging in the sensuous realm of man's existence. For example, there is pain among animals, but as far as we know there is no suffering. From a philosophical point of view a toothache causes pain, not suffering. Pain becomes suffering when it menaces man's ontic, ontological character, when it causes man to cast doubt on the worth of his existence. Pain causes suffering when it becomes a menace. When man, because of pain, begins to question existence it causes suffering.

Also, there can be disease without pain and with suffering. Suffering is strictly human and is based on the problem of valuing existence as a goal in which the realization is joy and happiness. If man exaggerates the importance of life, he becomes hypersensitive to pain and suffering, and vice versa. The magnitude of suffering is the function of the appraisal of life, mathematically speaking. This is a stoic motif.

Halakhah never approved of resignation in the sense of a fatalistic view of life. Halakhah wanted activism instead of resignation. But in a case where man cannot help at all, Halakhah wanted submission or resignation.

Because Halakhah saw suffering as an act of God, it endowed it with meaning and claimed it implied a rational and a sensible motif. Therefore, man should not despair of evil but fight it technically, morally, and ethically. If suffering has meaning, Halakhah wanted to retain the meaning, to convert suffering into the realization of its motif.

The Halakhic expression for evil is *tzarah*. First, Halakhah advised using any means to combat *tzarah*,<sup>67</sup> פיקוח נפש דוחה כל התורה כולה. Second, Halakhah advised meeting *tzarah* in a creative, ethical, and moral way: to eliminate the *tzarah*, but retain its meaning and realization. Suffering should always cause the reawakening of the human personality and should be the means by which a bare existence is reactivated; hence, *teshuvah*. Judaism believed that God reveals himself through misery, as in Job, and if man is aware of the Divine message transmitted to him through suffering, he can act in accordance with it.

### **On Shabbat, There Is No Pessimistic Resignation; When Grief Leads to Helping the Sick, It Is Permitted**

The realm of reality asserts itself in Shabbat. The world is returned to God and is raised from the level of fact to the level of the meaningful by which man gives an ethical and moral answer to the problem of evil. Evil on Shabbat is a creative experience and its reality and purpose are asserted. Evil is to be resisted, even on Shabbat, but on the level of the meaningful.

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<sup>67</sup> דחוייה היא שבת אצל סכנת נפשות כשאר כל המצוות (רמב"ם, הלכות שבת ב:א).

That is why *avelut* was eliminated on Shabbat. It is resignation and there is to be no pessimistic resignation on Shabbat. But grief associated with activism, grief which leads to a means of helping the sick person, was not prohibited on Shabbat. *Ante facto* [before the fact of death] grief was permitted [when it leads to helping a sick person], *post facto* [after the fact of death] grief was not permitted. Shabbat conveyed to Halakhah the universe of the meaningful, and in this universe, evil is transported into a creative experience and moral action.

## Lecture XVIII

### **The Core Motifs of Shabbat: Good Will Ultimately Triumph**

To Maimonides, the state and *melekh* revolve around one idea: to combat evil and wage constant war against evil.<sup>68</sup> This explains why Saul lost his kingship. This is found in the first and second chapters of *Hilkebot Melakhim*.

The covenantal society of Shabbat is the symbolic {interpretation} [resistance]<sup>69</sup> of evil. But the core motif of Shabbat is the faith that good will ultimately triumph via the medium of moral ascent and self-redemption. This thought is found in prayers of Rosh Hashanah: **וּבְכֵן תֵּן פְּחָדְךָ**. Evil is thus temporal. Good is eternal.

Redemption is not identical with atonement or salvation. It is a long process of historical realization by understanding the meaning of what is happening. History may be seen as an insensate series of acts determined by causation, or as an axiological progression of the meaningful that implies directedness upon an historical goal. If it is seen as the latter, then there is progression.

History only as a continuum of facts is nonsensical. Jewish history in the last ten years<sup>70</sup> illustrates this. If history is just an occurrence, then it is chaotic, nonsensical, and transient. Aristotle is a good example of this. He did not comprehend the idea of historical becoming and fulfillment, so he discarded it and called it non-existent. While he investigated the

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<sup>68</sup> א. שלש מצות נצטוו ישראל בשעת כניסתן לארץ: למנות להם מלך... ולהכרית זרעו של עמלק... ולבנות בית הבחירה... ב. מינוי מלך קודם למלחמת עמלק... והכרתת זרע עמלק קודמת לבנין הבית... (רמב"ם, הלכות מלכים (א:א-ב)). אין המלך נלחם תחלה אלא מלחמת מצוה, ואי זו היא מלחמת מצוה, זו מלחמת שבעה עממים, ומלחמת עמלק, ועזרת ישראל מיד צר שבא עליהם (רמב"ם, הלכות מלכים ה:א).

<sup>69</sup> Emended as per three paragraphs prior.

<sup>70</sup> These lectures were given ca. 1950, in which case the decade to which Rav Soloveitchik is referring, the 1940s, includes both the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel.

immutable, he ignored the flux of history. He investigated nature because he considered it unchangeable. He had no concept of evolution; genera are, for him, absolutely eternal. But he paid no attention to history.

We are interested in history, however, because in it we see patterns, ideas, trends, and designs from which we can learn. Aristotle said that history is not a science because it does not deal with the eternal and the immutable.<sup>71</sup> This holds only when history is regarded as a series of facts. But if history has meaning, then Aristotle's words are nonsensical. In history, there is necessity and rationality. If history is not sensation (forced on the human) but an experience (where the human participates), then evil must be weaved into it and consequently evil too is endowed with method and purpose. It was Hegel and Heraclitus who believed that the negation of life and evil is a creative force. Aggadah believes in dialectical force, in the purpose of history.

### ***Galut: The Creative Force that Brings About Redemption***

Here is the answer to the problem of Jewish historical suffering: the *galut* is the creative force that brings about redemption. This is the concept of *hevlei Mashiach*. The antithesis of history is the culmination of history and results in the metamorphosis which fulfills history. This is also the idea behind the slavery of the Jews in Egypt. And we can say now that out of the Jewish catastrophe in Europe, the Jewish State was born.<sup>72</sup> History is filled with ascent and descent. The Bible is filled with this.

When does the antithesis become creative? For Hegel it was metaphysical: evil negates itself and drives itself to absurdity. But antithesis can become creative only if man understands its meaning. Marx and Hegel did not answer why the result of an antithesis is better than the evil itself. We say it is so for man and society to understand suffering as endowed with meaning. If this understanding is arrived at on the part of man, then evil becomes creative. But the antithesis completes human incompleteness only when it is placed in the universe of meaning.

### ***Teshuvah: Transforming Suffering to a Positive Force***

*Teshuvah* is associated with *tzarah*, and communal *teshuvah* is associated with distress.<sup>73</sup> According to Rambam [*Hilkebot Teshuvah* 1:1–2; *Hilkebot*

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<sup>71</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* Book IX, 1451b 6–7.

<sup>72</sup> See above footnote.

<sup>73</sup> עיין הרב יוסף הלוי סולובייצ'יק, על התשובה, ערך פינחס הכהן פלאי, תשל"ה, עמ' עז-עז: "איזוהי הכפרה של יום הכיפורים: כפרה היחיד כשהוא לעצמו, או כפרה לכנסת ישראל, ורק

Taanivot 1:1–3] and many others, individual and communal repentances differ. When there is *tzarab*, the person should understand the meaning of the *tzarab* and do *teshuvab*. Suffering must be transformed into a positive force and man must utilize the meaningfulness of evil to combat it. Maimonides goes on to say that if man does not learn from evil but accepts it simply as a meaningless happening, a causation, a fact, then the evil will remain as a fact and this is fatal. Maimonides says, **הרי זה אכזרי**.<sup>74</sup>

Our faith in the meaning of history is not the result of a bidden desire founded only on hope and on a blind dogma. It is common sense. *Teshuvab* without *tzarab* is a silly idea and nothing more than a pure hope which is very unlikely to come true. Our concept of *geulah* is positive activism; it depends upon us to bring it about. It is not just a dream, a hope, but an actuality. Man must participate in *geulah*; therefore, we have the concept of *teshuvab*. Maimonides says [Hilkebot Teshuvab 7:5], **אין ישראל נגאלין אלא**, **בתשובה**.<sup>75</sup> If man does not do *teshuvab* quickly he will learn from history, a long, slow process, that it is only through *teshuvab* that *geulah* can come.

Shabbat symbolizes the universe of meaning which supplants the universe of facts. Man as master over nature is conscious only of facts and not of meaning. Man attains his skill over the factual world. But on Shabbat, when man loses his mastery over nature, he substitutes for it the world of meaning. Shabbat incarnates a history purged of catastrophe and evil and is clothed with meaning and understanding of purpose in history. *Onesh* [punishment] by *beit din* is prohibited on Shabbat [Sanbedrin 35b; Rambam, Hilkebot Shabbat 24:7] because on that day, all mastery of men over men and nature expires.

Shabbat exemplifies the concept of monism: unity of cosmic and historical order. The origin of Shabbat is hidden in cosmogonic history. Man assumes equality with nature and ascends to the heights of meaning and facts which become a unit.

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על ידה ליחיד שהוא חלק ממנה? התשובה לשאלה זו נמצאת בנוסח התפילה של יום הכיפורים, בברכה של קדושת היום: ... מכאן, שביום הכיפורים ישנם שני סוגי כפרה, הכפרה האחת היא אינדיבידואלית, פרטית, לכל יחיד ויחיד בישראל... אבל גם כנסת ישראל בשלימותה, כ'אני' מסתורי אחד, כאשיות עצמית-מיטהרת ביום זה לפני הקב"ה".

<sup>74</sup> אבל אם לא יזעקו, ולא יריעו, אלא יאמרו דבר זה ממנהג העולם אירע לנו, וצרה זו נקרא נקריה--הרי זו דרך אכזריות, וגורמת להם להידבק במעשיהם הרעים, ותוסיף הצרה וצרות אחרות: הוא שכתוב בתורה, "והלכתם עימי, בקרי. והלכתי עימכם, בחמת קרי" (ויקרא כו, כז-כח), כלומר כשאביא עליכם צרה, כדי שתשובו--אם תאמרו שהוא קרי, אוסיף עליכם חמת אותו קרי (רמב"ם, הלכות תעניות א:ג).

<sup>75</sup> כל הנביאים כולן צוו על התשובה ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא בתשובה. וכבר הבטיחה תורה שסוף ישראל לעשות תשובה בסוף גלותן ומיד הן נגאלין (רמב"ם, הלכות תשובה ז:ה).

## Lecture XIX

### 7. The Universe Is a Single Unit, and Everything in the Universe and in History Is Endowed with Purpose and Meaning

For Judaism, history and the cosmic process are imbued with meaning. It is for man to discover this meaning and profit from it.

According to such a philosophy, what is evil? It is the schism or tension that prevails between the factual and the meaning, between the world as a cosmos [an orderly system] and the world as a *macro-anthropos* [lit., a giant man].<sup>76</sup> To Maimonides [*Guide* I:72], *macro-anthropos*<sup>77</sup> meant intellect and ethics.<sup>78</sup> The world and all its happenings are guided by an intellect and are ethical. Meaning in the universe leads to the conclusion that the universe is a unit and a whole. Medieval philosophy gave man the power to either be a microcosm [a little world] or anthropos [a man].<sup>79</sup> The decision lies with man himself.

For the Jew, historical analysis is the insertion of meaning into the cosmos and establishing unity. Isaiah looked forward to this extinction of evil and the triumph of good.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> *Macro-anthropos* is the idea that the universe is an interconnected living entity with soul and reason, lit. “a giant man.” In Kabbalah, the Totality (often illustrated as a man) is symbolized by the Ten *Sefirot* (Emanations): כתר, חכמה, בינה, חסד, גבורה, תפארת, נצח, הוד, יסוד, מלכות.

<sup>77</sup> דע שהמציאות הזו בכללותה היא דבר אחד לא יותר, כלומר כדור הגלגל הקיצוני בכל מה שיש בו הם דבר אחד בלי ספק, כראובן ושמעון מבחינת אישיות... וכשם שבגוף אישי האדם דברים שיש בהן מטרה, מהן שהמטרה בהן קיום עצמו כאברי המזון, ומהן שהמטרה בהן קיום מינו כאברי ההולדה, ומהן שהמטרה בהן צרכיו שהוא זקוק להן במזונותיו וכדומה כגון הידים והעיניים... (מורה א:עב).

<sup>78</sup> Rav Soloveitchik also discusses this in *And From There You Shall Seek*, “Maimonides—who placed the world’s yearning for its Creator in the center of the Jewish perspective, not only as a moral ideal embodied in man’s longing to cleave to his God, but also as a dynamic metaphysical force that engenders the cosmic motion, since the world is an individuum, a great man, a macro-anthropos—also insisted that awe is an inseparable part of love” p. 174.

<sup>79</sup> ודע כי כל זה אשר אמרנו בדמוי העולם בכללותו באחד האדם, לא מחמת הדברים האלה נאמר באדם שהוא עולם קטן, לפי שכל הדמוי הזה ישנו בכל יחיד מיחיד בעלי החיים שלמי האברים, ולא נשמע כלל מאחד הראשונים שיאמר כי החמור או סוס עולם קטן, אלא נאמר זה באדם מחמת הדבר שנתחד בו האדם והוא הכח ההוגה, כלומר השכל, שהוא השכל ההיולי אשר ענין זה אינו נמצא בשום דבר ממיני החי זולתו (מורה א:עב).

<sup>80</sup> וְשִׁפְטָא בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְהוֹכִיחַם לַעֲמִים רַבִּים וְכַתְּלֵהוּ סְרְבוֹתָם לְאֱלֹהִים וְחַנְּיִתוּתֵיהֶם לְמַזְמֵרוֹת לֹא־יִשְׂאָ גּוֹי אֶל־גּוֹי תִּקְרַב וְלֹא־יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה (ישעיה ב:ד)

How does Halakhah understand this task of bringing about the unity of fact and meaning? How is this possible practically in the concrete world? Halakhah is opposed to isolation of the religious performance from the total human performance and places the former on a unique transcendental plane. The conversion of the approach of man to God to something paradoxical and very unique is basically non-Jewish. At present the trend is to say that there are certain alogical patterns in the cosmos which science cannot penetrate, and these patterns are where we may find God. This premise leads to the conclusion that the religious experience contradicts logic and is the experience of the mysterious, the paradoxical. Hence human performance is not universally related to God. [Rudolf] Otto was the father of this kind of philosophy.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, modern man is mainly mundane and his religious experiences are only a segment of his life. Halakhah maintains that there is a direct relation between man and God. The religious experience is not a mysterious one, but a universal and total experience equated with the most total experience of man which is the consciousness of his own existence. Worship signifies an act which brings man into contact with God through a logical, cognitive act and through Halakhic discipline instead of an ethos bound on mystery. Judaism introduced an ethos which is all-embracing.

It would seem that Shabbat would be a mysterious rite: *Shabbat la-Hashem*, etc. But in Halakhah, Shabbat was stripped of all sacral rites. This is where it differs from the Christian and Babylonian Sabbaths, which are sacral and mysterious in nature. The Judaic Shabbat has no cultic or ceremonial act. The consecration of the day to God was accomplished by the total human behavior on that day which excludes *melakhah*, exercising domination, etc.

How can man give meaning to facts? The central theme of Halakhah (not dogma) is the expression of the belief that every fact is endowed with purpose and meaning. To do this, to understand the meaning of the whole, there must be norms in every act of human life. These norms must not be added to experience (as Catholicism does, thereby creating a dual-

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<sup>81</sup> Rudolf Otto was a German Lutheran theologian who studied world religions. He is best known for his work *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1923) in which he analyzes the religious experience. See, e.g., p. 27, "In accordance with laws we shall have to speak again later, this feeling or consciousness of the 'wholly other' will attach itself to, or sometimes be indirectly aroused by means of, objects which are already puzzling upon the 'natural' plane, or are of a surprising or astounding character; such as extraordinary phenomena or astonishing occurrences or things in inanimate nature, in the animal world, or among men."

ism), but must be a part of experience, a unit, a whole. (The word *Halakhah* probably comes from *halakh be-shitato*, “he behaved according to his precepts.”) Everything man does is integrated into meaning. Halakhah creates constructs and ideas because it looks for meanings in the vortex of life. 