

Genesis 1:28

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
וּכְבֹּשְׁהָ וּרְדוּ בְּדֹגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיַּה הָרֶמֶשׂת עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

“God blessed them (Adam and Eve) and said to them, ‘Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky and all the living things that creep on earth.’”

Genesis 2:15

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם וַיִּנְחֵהוּ בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעֲבֹדָהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ:

God took the man (Adam) and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to care for it.

Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:28

בְּשַׁעַה שֶׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת אָדָם הָרִאשׁוֹן, נָטְלוּ וְהִחְזִירוּ עַל
כָּל אֵילָנֵי גֵן עֵדֶן, וְאָמַר לוֹ, רְאֵה מַעֲשֵׂי כַּמָּה נְאִים וּמְשֻׁבְּחִין הֵן, וְכָל מֵה
שֶׁבָּרָאתִי בְּשִׁבְיָךְ בְּרָאתִי, יֵתֵן דַּעְתְּךָ שְׁלֹא תִקְלַקֵּל וְתַחְרִיב אֶת עוֹלָמִי,
שָׂאֵם קִלְקֵלֶת אֵין מִי שִׁיתִקֵּן אַחֲרֶיךָ

“In the hour that God created the first human, God took Adam before all the trees in the Garden of Eden and said: ‘See my works, how fine and excellent they are! Now think upon this and do not corrupt and destroy My world, for if you destroy it, there is no one to restore it after you.’”

Psalms 24:1

לְדָוִד מְזֻמָּר לַיהוָה הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוֹאָהּ תִּבְלַ וַיֵּשְׁבֵי בָהּ:

Of David. A psalm. The earth is the LORD's and all that it holds, the world and its inhabitants.

Psalms 115:16

הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לְבְנֵי-אָדָם:

The heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth He gave over to man.

Genesis 1:27

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא
אֹתָם:

And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Deuteronomy 31:20

כִּי־אָבִיאוּ אֶל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאֲבוֹתָיו זָבֵת חֶלֶב וְדִבַּשׁ וְאָכַל
וְשָׂבַע וְדָשְׁן וּפָנָה אֶל־אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְעִבְדוּם וְנֶאֱצוּנִי וְהִפֵּר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי:

“When I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey that I promised to their ancestors, and they eat their fill and grow fat, they eventually turn to other gods and serve them, spurning Me and my covenant.”

Isaiah 5:8

הוֹי מִגִּיעֵי בַיִת בְּבַיִת שָׂדֵה בְּשָׂדֵה יִקְרִיבוּ עַד אָפֶס מִקּוֹם וְהוֹשְׁבֵתֶם
לְבַדְכֶם בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:

“Ah, those who add house to house and join field to field until there is room for none but you to dwell in the land!”

Micah 2:1-2

הוֹי חֲשִׁבֵי-אָוֶן וּפְעֵלֵי רָע עַל-מִשְׁכְּבוֹתֵם בְּאוֹר הַבֶּקֶר יַעֲשׂוּהָ כִּי יֵשׁ-לְאֵל יָדָם:
וְחָמְדוּ שָׂדוֹת וּגְזְלוּ וּבְתֵימִים וְנָשְׂאוּ וְעָשְׂקוּ גֵבֶר וּבֵיתוֹ וְאִישׁ וְנָחֲלָתוֹ: (פ)

“Ah, those who plan iniquity and design evil on their beds; when morning dawns, they do it for they have the power. They covet field and seize them; covet houses and take them away. They defraud people of their homes and people of their land.”

The Gerunds of Godliness

I want to refocus the classic benedictions. Healing the sick, . . . clothing the naked, . . . releasing the bound, . . . raising up the fallen are the "divine activities" found not there or here, in me or within you, but in the relationship between our human and nonhuman environment. Godliness is in the activity of doing justly, healing the sick, raising the fallen, supporting the disadvantaged, uniting the real and ideal.

To believe in Godliness is to believe in the verbs and adverbs that refer to the activities of divinity. To behave in a Godly fashion is to realize in one's life the attributes of Godliness that are potential in all human and nonhuman energies. Atheism is not the disbelief in the reality and goodness of the noun but disbelief in the reality and goodness of the attributes. The question to be asked of those who seek God is not whether they believe in a noun that cannot be known but whether they believe in the gerunds of Godliness: healing the sick, feeding the hungry, supporting the fallen, pursuing peace, loving the neighbor. The imperatives of Godliness call the seeker to imitate the ways of Godliness.

The idea of Elohuth or Godliness that favors verbs over nouns has roots in the tradition. Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: "We have no nouns by which to express His essence; we have only adverbs by which to indicate the ways in which He acts." For Heschel, a noun presupposes comprehension. Calling God by name means that we know Him in the manner that we know other noun names. But in the Bible, Moses' constant demand to know God's name is rejected. God is "I am what I am" or "I will

be what I will be" (Exodus 3:14). God is not a static noun but a dynamic verb encompassing past, present, and future states of being. God is not a subject or an object. God is known only in relationship and only in situations that bear upon man.

The focus on the Godly attributes that make up Godliness instead of viewing God as an unknown subject noun possesses a venerable history. Both mystic and rationalistic Jewish theologies agree on the unknowability of God in itself whose essence cannot be named or pronounced or seen. For the mystics the infinite God is concealed and beyond the reach of our intellect. The rationalist Moses Maimonides agreed that God's essence is unknowable and that even His qualities may be grasped solely in terms of what they are not. Thus God's goodness, life, and power mean at most that God is not evil or lifeless or impotent. If we know anything about Divinity, it is not God the noun but God the verb, not God the inscrutable person but God's knowable qualities that may be emulated. What is it then to know God? The prophet explained that when the king "judged the cause of the poor and needy, then it was well with him. Was this not to know Me, saith the Lord?" (Jeremiah 22:16). Godliness is behaved. Godliness is believed through doing justice, in caring, in curing, in protecting. To behave in Godly fashion, is this not to know the divine? The twentieth-century thinker Franz Rosenzweig asserted, "Truth is a noun only for God; for us it is an adverb."

Is Godliness One?

No prayer is more embedded in Jewish consciousness than the one enunciating God's unity: "Hear O Israel the

Harold
Schulweis,
*For Those
Who Can't
Believe:
Overcoming
Obstacles to
Faith*

be different in kind from, and thus unaffected by, everything else going on in the world? Why nurture the myth that humans are not the ones who shape, interpret, and have to live by halakha? Is it possible we are expected to ignore humanity in order to live by Torah law, to stand above the vicissitudes and inconsistencies of the temporal world?

In my view, such an approach is devastating to halakhic culture. It yields a Torah not rooted in life, emaciating the lived spirit that is meant to shape the law in its evolving applications. It asks of halakhic Jews commitment to systems of law alien to their own sensibilities. Every halakhic commitment then becomes an *akeida*-like experience of self-sacrifice: I have suspended all of my deeply held ethical values; I live by a law in which I have no presence; I am the ghost of a human being who stands in the image of God. In this theology, denying what we know about ourselves is the true religious moment. This seems to me a recipe for disaster. To the extent that we suppress our own reality, observations, and values, we condemn ourselves to spiritual emptiness from within and without. If the system attempts to make us deny what we know, it risks the encroaching sense that it must hang precariously on an irrational thread.

I have a strong intuition that Soloveitchik felt traditional Orthodoxy was losing ground against secular culture in the marketplace of ideas and could only survive by creating a barrier against having it be subject to comparative cultural studies and historical critique. But what is the price paid for this permanence, and who are the personalities and cultures it produces? I hold rather that the more tradition is steeped in the lived reality of the intellectual culture of our time, the more vibrant it becomes, the more it retains our respect. To build ghetto-like mansions to safeguard the tradition is to admit that Judaism cannot survive in an open society. It means choosing the brittle security of a "permanent" system over a system that absorbs and allows itself to be impacted by contemporary life in all its shifting cultural contingency. It means acknowledging that calling the halakhic system "divine" doesn't strengthen it, any more than calling it "human" detracts.

In my view, taking into account our humanity is precisely what God asks the Jewish people to do in covenantal halakha. This is a key

point of divergence from Soloveitchik, for whom surrender and self-sacrifice, not empowerment, is the key feature of halakhic spirituality. I believe that God encourages us to expand our intelligence and build a system that takes into account all the changes that have taken place in the world. A human being affirms his or her lived reality and brings it into the presence of God.

For this reason, I find there to be something deeply inhuman in Soloveitchik's approach to halakhic spirituality. Notwithstanding his profound influence on me and my profound gratitude to him as a student, I must part company with a view of halakha that takes it out of history and out of human experience. Is the price of loyalty to deny what I know to be true? Does it tell me I have to put on different eyes? I do not think that loyalty to and love for this tradition requires exiting history, or exiting life.

Which God Will Guide Halakha—Lover of Permanence, or Hater of False Things?

Rackman and Soloveitchik represent two strongly articulated, strongly opposing approaches to halakha. Soloveitchik's approach has the benefit of supplying a strong answer to the question, how do we deal with a world we have no control over? If history is our enemy, if it always has the potential to turn against us—"A new king arose over Egypt ..." (Exod. 1:8)—it makes sense to create a theology that frees us from having to respond to the chaos of lived history. Soloveitchik's halakhic theology lifts its practitioners beyond contingency, to a timeless revelatory dimension in which lived experience is stripped of normative relevance or impact. By adopting a worldview that refuses to validate subjective experience of reality over traditional descriptions of reality, we may transcend the human sense of vulnerability to history, contingency, and chaos.

The Talmudic passage quoted above, in which the Men of the Great Assembly are lauded for restoring the words of the liturgy removed by Jeremiah and Daniel, ends on a powerful note. We will recall that these two prophets omitted the words "powerful" and "awesome" from their prayers, because they did not witness God acting

David
Hartman,
*The God Who
Hates Lies:
Confronting
and Re-
Thinking
Jewish
Tradition*

Of course, this, too, is a metaphor, but the presence of a second way of seeing our journey helps to release us from the singular hold of the first.

But once we have let ourselves question the vertical metaphor of our ancient cosmology, a great deal more is questioned as well. The God above might come down onto the mountain once, at a particular place and time, to talk with those gathered there. Since God is outside the world, revelation is a unique and unusual event. But can the God within, the one who speaks to every human heart, have the same relationship of "choosing" with the Jewish people? If God is none other than the innermost heart of reality, is not all of being equally an emanation of the same divine Self? Is Judaism not just the human symbolic language into which we Jews render the universal, inward God's silent, pre-verbal speech, just as others translate it into verbal symbols of their own heritage? And can the internal God be the source of authority in the same way as the Fellow on top of the mountain, the One who could, according to the Midrash, hold it over our heads, even as we agreed to receive Torah, saying: "If not, here you will be buried"?

Most basically, it would seem that the God within is not *other* than ourselves in the same clear way as the God above. The vertical metaphor allowed for distance: "If you do not do good I will turn far away, rising to the seventh heaven, far beyond your ability to reach Me." But the hidden God buried deep within the self feels more like one who ever longs to be discovered, and the process of finding God is not to be clearly distinguished from the deepest levels of self-discovery. What we are likely to find is the truth of the mystics: The individual self and the cosmic Self are one. The Judaism that will emerge from a turn inward will then be something like a version of what Aldous Huxley and others have called the *philosophia perennis*, a single truth that underlies all religions, though expressed and taught in the specific symbolic language of the Jewish tradition.

The theology that will speak to today's seekers will be a Jewish non-dualism, a spiritual vision that seeks to transcend the most basic barriers between God and world, self and other. This is not the religion of God the Creator, who fashions a world outside Himself and sits over it in judgment. It is rather that of God the One who enters into the dance of multiplicity, who dons the coat of many colors and thus is to be found and discovered throughout the world, amid the great richness and diversity of existence.

This is also not the religion of God the Revealer in its classic form: The God who makes manifest His arbitrary will, backed by threat of punishment and promise of reward. Rather it is the God of that beautiful maiden dwelling in the castle who, according to the Zohar, reveals a bit of her face to the lover who passes by her gate day after day.⁶ *We discover ever more of God's self and will as we seek to live in God's presence.* Torah is not a finite body of laws and teachings, codified in details of praxis down to the *nth* degree. It is rather an endless well of wisdom, present in the texts, commentaries, and traditions of our ancestors, to be sure, but living in us only because we keep our hearts open by our own practice. It is the presence of divine energy that we find within, renewed each day, that makes our teachings living Torah and not dead letter.

The first Hasidic masters knew this well and taught it unceasingly. That voice was mostly lost in later Hasidism's rush to preserve tradition.⁷ But it is our task to recover and renew that voice. It should speak out from within a deep commitment to practice and love of

6. Zohar 2:99a-b. Included in Daniel Matt's *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (New York: Paulist, 1983), p. 124f.

7. A particularly interesting and dynamic notion of Oral Torah, as a teaching fashioned of the deeds of the righteous in each generation, is to be found in the *Sefat Emes*, a key Hasidic work by Rabbi Judah Leib Alter of Ger (1847-1904). My edition of that work, including selected texts, translations, and contemporary personal responses, is soon to appear through the Jewish Publication Society.

Arthur Green,
*Restoring
the Aleph:
Judaism for
the
Contemporary
Seeker*