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In Search of Man

A Philosophy of Judaism

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there is another source of certainty of God's existence and one which is more capable of giving us an understanding that goes beyond our mere awareness. To explore that source of certainty is the object of the following inquiry.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 11

¹ W. von Humboldt's celebrated statement that "man lives with his objects chiefly . . . as language presents them to him" (see Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, New York, 1946, p. 9) does not apply to creative thinking. Intuition and expression must not be equated. Thought contains elements that cannot be reduced to verbal expression and are beyond the level of verbalization. Non-objective art may be characterized as an attempt to convey a preconceptual, pre-symbolic encounter with reality. Compare also Philip Wheelwright, *The Burning Fountain*, Bloomington, 1954, p. 18f. For an analysis and critique of symbolism in religion and theology, see A. J. Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, pp. 117-144.

² George P. Adams, "The Range of Mind" in *The Nature of Mind*, Berkeley, Cal., 1936, p. 149. Compare J. Loewenberg, "The Discernment of Mind," *ibid.*, p. 90f.

³ Rabbi Loew of Prague, *Netivot Olam*, netiv haavodah, ch. 2.

⁴ See *Man is Not Alone*, p. 84f.

⁵ *The Guide of the Perplexed*, vol. I, p. 50.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Book II, p. 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Book I, p. 58. *Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?* "Are we to imagine from this that by lifting his eyes upward a man can know and see what is not permitted to know and see? No, the true meaning of the passage is that whoever desires to reflect on and to obtain a knowledge of the works of the Holy One, let him lift his eyes upwards and gaze on the myriads of hosts and legions of existence there, each different from the other, each mightier than the other. Then will he, while gazing, ask: who (*mi*) created these? 'Who created these?' amounts to saying that the whole of creation springs from a region that remains an everlasting *who?* in that it remains undisclosed." *Zohar*, vol. II, 231b.

12 About the Meaning of God

THE MINIMUM OF MEANING

In undertaking an inquiry, we must from the beginning possess a minimum of knowledge of the meaning of that about which we are trying to inquire. No inquiry starts out of nothing. In asking the first question, we must anticipate something of the nature of that which we ask about, because otherwise we would not know in what direction to proceed or whether the result of our inquiry will be an answer to the question we ask.

We ask about God. But what is the minimum of meaning that the word God holds for us? It is first the idea of *ultimacy*. God is a Being beyond which no other exists or is possible. It means further One, unique, eternal. However, all these adjectives are auxiliary to the noun to which they are attached. In themselves they do not express the essence. We proclaim, God is One; it would be intellectual idolatry to say, the One is God. What, then, is the meaning of the noun to which ultimacy or oneness is attached? Is it the concept of the absolute? Is it the concept of a first cause?

To say that our search for God is a search for the idea of the absolute is to eliminate the problem which we are trying to explore. A first cause or an idea of the absolute—devoid of life, devoid of freedom—is an issue for science or metaphysics rather than a concern of the soul or the conscience. An affirmation of such a cause or such an idea would be an answer unrelated to our question. The living soul is not concerned with a dead cause but with a living God.

Our goal is to ascertain the existence of a Being to whom we may confess our sins, of a God who loves, of a God who is not above concern with our inquiry and search for Him; a father, not an absolute.

We must see clearly from the beginning that the minimum of meaning we associate with the word God is that He is alive, or, to put it negatively, He is not inferior to us in the order of being. A being that lacks the attributes of personal existence is not our problem.

This, then, is the minimum of meaning which the word God holds for us: *God is alive*. To assume the opposite, namely that the word God means a Being devoid of life and freedom—inferior to us in the order of being and more finite than ourselves—would immediately invalidate the problem we are concerned with in the same way as the premise that the universe is more finite than our own body would invalidate any effort to explore the meaning of the universe.

Indeed, there are essentially only two ways to begin: to think of God in terms of free and spontaneous being or in terms of inanimate being; either He is alive or devoid of life. Both premises are beyond demonstration, and yet the second premise in the form of saying, God is the great unknown, appears to most people to be more respectable. Let us examine the latter premise.

The statement "God is the great unknown," meaning that He has never become known and can never become known, is an absolute assertion based upon the theory that God remains eternally mysterious. Such a theory, however, is a dogma entailing a contradiction. For by attributing eternal mysteriousness to the ultimate being, we definitely claim to know it. Thus the ultimate being is not an unknown but a known God. In other words: a God whom we know but one who does not know, the great Unknower. We proclaim the ignorance of God together with our knowledge of His being ignorant!

This seems to be a part of our pagan heritage: to say, the Supreme Being is a total mystery, and even having accepted the idea of a first

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cause and its power of bringing the universe into being, we still cling to the assumption that the power that can make possible the world's coming into being has never been able to make itself known. Yet why should we assume that the absolute power is absolutely powerless? Why should we *a priori* exclude life and freedom from the ultimate being?

Thinking of God as a speculative problem may perhaps start out with the premise of God's absolute mysteriousness. Thinking of God as a religious problem which begins with wonder, awe, praise, fear, trembling and radical amazement cannot proceed one step if tied to the assumption that God is devoid of life. We cannot utter words and deny at the same time that there are words, and we cannot in religious thinking say God and deny at the same time that He is alive. If God is dead, then worship is madness.

The problem of religious thinking is not only whether God is dead or alive, but also whether we are dead or alive to His realness. A search for God involves a search of our own measure, a test of our own spiritual potential. To be sure, there are levels of thinking where we can comfortably maintain that God is not alive: on the level of conceit and callousness to the grandeur and mystery of living. In moments when we carry the load of radical amazement we know that to say God is alive is an understanding.

Yet there seems to be a third possibility: God is neither alive nor devoid of life but a *symbol*. If God is defined "as a name for that which concerns man ultimately," then He is but a symbol of man's concern, the objectification of a subjective state of mind. But as such God would be little more than a projection of our imagination.

As the acceptance of God and the rejection of idols are indicated in the first two of the Ten Commandments, the rejection of the symbol is implied in the third commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of God in vain."

Certainly God is more than "a name for that which concerns man ultimately." Only saints are ultimately concerned with God. What concerns most of us ultimately is our ego. The Biblical consciousness begins not with man's but with *God's concern*. The su-

preme fact in the eyes of the prophets is the presence of God's concern for man and the absence of man's concern for God. It is God's concern for man that cries out behind every word of their message. But how do we become aware of His concern?

TWO COROLLARIES

The assumption that God is not to be thought of in terms of lifeless being has two important corollaries. The one concerns *His part* in the process of our understanding Him, and the other concerns *the role of time* in such understanding.

My attempts to become acquainted with a stone or a plant are almost entirely dependent upon my will and intelligence; the plant or the stone has no voice in the process of inquiry and is at all times at my disposal. In contrast, my attempts to become acquainted with another person depend not only upon me but also upon the willingness of the person to be seen and to be understood by me. There may be people whom the person would consider worthy of becoming his acquaintance and others whom he would keep at a distance. And he may treat the same people differently at different times.

Now if we assume God is not a passive object but a Being endowed with at least as much life and will as ourselves, understanding Him cannot be a process that goes on regardless of His agreement. If God is alive, we must assume that He plays a part in our acts of trying to understand Him; that our understanding of God depends not only on man's readiness to approach Him but also on God's willingness to be approached.¹

GOD'S PART IN HUMAN INSIGHT

There is a common misunderstanding of the meaning of divine assistance in Judaism. Admittedly, the hope for it is an integral part of the religious consciousness. Yet we usually restrict it to the practical realm, as if God were expected to assist us in our material but not in our spiritual endeavors. The truth is that for all our aspirations we remain spiritually blind unless we are assisted.

God is not a pearl at the bottom of the ocean, the discovery of which depends upon the skill and intelligence of man. The initiative must be ours, yet the achievement depends on Him, not only on us. Without his love, without His aid, man is unable to come close to Him.²

And yet, "everything is in the hands of heaven, except the fear of heaven."³ Man is free to seek Him and free to ignore Him. Only he who endeavors to purify himself, is assisted from above.⁴ Only he who sanctifies himself a little, is endowed with greater sanctity from above.⁵

THE ROLE OF TIME

Furthermore, if God is not thought of in terms of inanimate being, in terms of a Being that is not endowed with either will or freedom, then we must assume that He is not at all times at our disposal. There are times when He goes out to meet us, and there moments when He hides His face from us.⁶

Leopold von Ranke, the historian, maintained that every age is equally near to God. To a person who thinks in Biblical terms, this statement amounts to saying that every age is equally distant from God. Jewish tradition claims that there is a hierarchy of moments within time, that all ages are not alike. Man may pray to God equally at all places, but God does not speak to man equally at all times. Sinai does not happen every day, and prophecy is not a perpetual process. There are ages when men are chosen to be prophets, and there are ages when the voice of prophecy is subdued.

And yet this does not mean that God is utterly silent in our age. The divine voice has not died away "to an echo from the Judean hills." It may break forth to pierce the dreadful silence in our day. There are many ways and many levels on which the will of God communicates itself to man.

The role of time is also necessitated by the human situation. Since our understanding of God involves the whole person, his mind and his heart, his intelligence and his concern, his experiences and his

attachments, it cannot be regarded as unchangeable, timeless, and universal. Man is not the same at all times. It is only at certain moments that he becomes aware of the heart-breaking inconceivability of the world in which he lives and which he ignores. At such moments, he wonders: what is my place in the midst of the terrifying immensity of time and space? what is my task? what is my situation?

THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION

We cannot succeed in understanding the reasons that force us to attach ourselves to a certainty of God's realness, unless we understand the situation in which we are concerned with the ultimate question.

A legitimate question represents more than what it says. It represents a radical situation which accounts for its coming into being, a *raison d'être* for the presence of the question in the mind. Now the question about God does not always occupy our minds. At times we are pursued by it, at others it seems irrelevant to us. There are times when wonder is dead, when the ultimate question is meaningless; there are times when there is only wonder and the mystery is within reach of all thoughts.

We must, therefore, not deal with the ultimate question, apart from the situation in which it exists, apart from the insights in which it is evoked and in which it is involved. Apart from its human and personal setting it withers to a mere speculative issue. Yet it is as a religious concern that we are dealing with it here.

The ultimate question, moreover, is a question that arises on the level of the ineffable. It is phrased not in *concepts* but in *acts*, and no abstract formulation is capable of conveying it. It is, therefore, necessary to understand the inner logic of the situation, the spiritual climate in which it exists, in order to comprehend what the ultimate question implies. It is a situation in which we are challenged, aroused, stirred by the sublime, the marvel, the mystery and the Presence. We do not choose to raise the question, we are compelled.

The question breaks forth with the realization that it is man who is the problem; that more than God is a problem to man, man is a problem to God. The question: Is there a personal God? is a symptom of the uncertainty: Is there a personal man?

In moments in which the soul undergoes the unmitigated realization of the mystery that vibrates between its precarious existence and its inscrutable meaning, we find it unbearably absurd to define the essence of man by what he knows or by what he is able to bring about. To the sense of the ineffable the essence of man lies in his being a means of higher expression, in his being an intimation of ineffable meaning.

MOMENTS

Thus, unlike scientific thinking, understanding for the realness of God does not come about by way of syllogism, by a series of abstractions, by a thinking that proceeds from concept to concept, but by way of insights. The ultimate insight is the outcome of *moments* when we are stirred beyond words, of instants of wonder, awe, praise, fear, trembling and radical amazement; of awareness of grandeur, of perceptions we can grasp but are unable to convey, of discoveries of the unknown, of moments in which we abandon the pretense of being acquainted with the world, of *knowledge by acquaintance*. It is at the climax of such moments that we attain the certainty that life has meaning, that time is more than evanescence, that beyond all being there is someone who cares.

To repeat, it is only in such moments, in moments lived on the level of the ineffable, that the categories and acts of religion are adequately meaningful. Acts of love are only meaningful to a person who is in love, and not to him whose heart and mind are sour. The same applies to the categories of religion. For ultimate insight takes place on the presymbolic, preconceptual level of thinking. It is difficult, indeed, to transpose insights phrased in the presymbolic language of inner events into the symbolic language of concepts.⁷

In conceptual thinking, what is clear and evident at one moment

remains clear and evident at all other moments. Ultimate insights, on the other hand, are events, rather than a permanent state of mind; what is clear at one moment may subsequently be obscured. Concepts we acquire and retain. We have learned that two plus two equals four, and once we become convinced of the validity of this equation, the certainty will not leave us. In contrast, the life of the spirit is not always at its zenith, and the mercy of God does not at all times bestow upon man the supreme blessings. Flashes of insight "come and go, penetrate and retreat, come forth and withdraw." For this is the way all emanation proceeds—"the light flows out of Him and the light streams back perpetually, from the uppermost heights to the nethermost depths."

The immediate certainty that we attain in moments of insight does not retain its intensity after the moments are gone. Moreover, such experiences or inspirations are rare events. To some people they are like shooting stars, passing and unremembered. In others they kindle a light that is never quenched. The remembrance of that experience and the loyalty to the response of that moment are the forces that sustain our faith. In this sense, *faith is faithfulness*, loyalty to an event, loyalty to our response.⁸

AN ANSWER IN DISGUISE

The ultimate question, bursting forth in our souls, is too startling, too heavily laden with unutterable wonder to be an academic question, to be equally suspended between yes and no. We can no longer ask: Is there a God? In humility and contrition we realize the presumption of such asking. The more deeply we meditate, the more clearly we realize that the question we ask is a question we are being asked; that *man's question about God is God's question of man*.

He who has never been caught in such a radical situation will fail to understand the certainty it engenders. He who absconds, who is always absent when God is present, should explain the reasons for his alibi, and abstain from bearing witness. He who has ever gone

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through a moment of radical insight cannot be a witness to God's non-existence without laying perjury upon his soul.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 12

¹ "For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted; the hill and the watchtower will become dens for ever, a joy of wild asses, a pasture of flocks; until the spirit is poured upon from on high and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest" (Isaiah 32:14-15).

² In the story of Hagar we read: "And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water" (Genesis 21:19). "All men are blind until God opens their eyes" (*Genesis Rabba* 53, 13). When Hagar wandered with her child in the wilderness of Beersheba and could find no water, she cast the child under one of the bushes and went away, saying, "Let me not look upon the death of the child." She did not see what was in front of her, until "God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water." When Balaam went to Moab to curse the people of Israel, he did not see what his ass perceived, until "the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the way" (Numbers 22:31). "It is beyond the power of man to see many things, unless God wants him to see" (*Lekah Tov* to Numbers 22:31). This applies to individuals as well as to the whole people. "They know not, nor do they discern, for He has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see; and their minds, so that they cannot understand" (Isaiah 44:18).

"I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord" (Jeremiah 24:7). "I will make him draw near and he shall approach Me. For who would dare of himself to approach Me? says the Lord" (Jeremiah 30:21). This is why the Psalmist says: "Blessed is he whom Thou dost choose and bring near" (65:5). God is the Teacher, not only the Creator; the giver of wisdom, not only the giver of life. "I am the Lord thy God who teaches thee for thy profit, leading thee in the way thou shouldest go" (Isaiah 48:17). We must search for truth with all our might; we must also pray for His guidance in all our search. "From the end of the earth will I call unto Thee, when my heart faints: Lead me to a rock that is too high for me" (Psalms 61:3). "Lead me where I cannot ascend myself" (Rabbi David Kimchi). We must not despond when our efforts fail. "For the Lord will be with you where your wisdom ends, and will keep thy foot from being caught" (Proverbs 3:26 According to *Jerushalmi Peab* 1, 1). "It is not the great that are wise, nor the aged that understand what is right" (Job 32:9). "Not everybody who studies the Torah becomes wise. Unless God endows man with spirit, he will not be at home in what he knows." *Tanhuma*, ed. Buber, I, p. 193. "He who toils in the Torah, the Torah toils for him." *Sanhedrin* 99b. See also *Megillah* 6b, concerning remembrance.

³ *Berachot* 33b.

⁴ *Shabbat* 104a.

⁵ *Yoma*, 39a. To the life of the individual the principle has been applied that "blessings from above descend only where there is some substance and not mere emptiness." The verse, "I am my beloved's and toward me is His desire" (The Song of Songs 7:11) was taken to refer to the relation between God and man: first I must become His, and then, in consequence, His desire is toward me; first I prepared for Him a place, and then His desire is toward me. Only "if

man endeavors to purify himself and to draw near to God, then the *Shechinah* rests upon him." *Zohar* vol. I, p. 88a-b. For "the stirring above is produced only in response to an impulse from below, and depends upon the longing of that below." *Zohar*, vol. I 86b; see III, 132b. "How may one recognize a person with whom the Holy One is pleased and in whom He has His abode? When we observe that a man endeavors to serve the Holy One in joy, with his heart, soul and will, then we can be quite sure that the *Shechinah* has her abode in Him." *Zohar* vol. II, 128b. "Even the things perceived by our senses we cannot know except through the loving kindness which comes from thee. For light itself we cannot see; our vision is dimmed by it. It is the divine light which gives us the power to perceive light partially and enables our vision to pass from potentiality to actuality. . . . The grace of understanding is more properly bestowed upon those who know Him than upon others." Albo, *Ikkarim*, II, ch. 15, ed. Husik, p. 97f.

⁶ The role of time in religious understanding is often expressed in Jewish literature. Commenting on Isaiah 55:6, *Seek the Lord while He may be found*, the Rabbis pondered the question, what are the times when He may be found? The answer given was: *the ten days of return*, from the Day of the New Year to the Day of Atonement, *Rosh Hashbanah* 18a. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *teshuvah* 2,6.

Isaiah (55:6) said "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near," and David said "Seek the Lord and His strength, seek His presence continually" (1 Chronicles 16:10). Why did David tell us to seek His presence continually? In order to teach us that God is sometimes seen and sometimes not seen, that He sometimes hearkens and sometimes does not hearken, that He is sometimes available and sometimes not available, sometimes found and sometimes not found, sometimes near and sometimes not near. He was once seen, as it is written, "the Lord spoke to Moses face to face" (Exodus 33:11); and then was not seen, as it is written, "Moses prayed, show me then Thy glory" (Exodus 33:18). So also He was seen at Sinai, as it is written, "And they saw the God of Israel" (Exodus 24:10), and "the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring flame" (Exodus 24:17), but then He was not seen, as it is written, "You saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb" (Deuteronomy 4:15), and "You heard the sound of words but saw no form" (Deuteronomy 4:12). When Israel was in Egypt, it is written, "And God heard their groaning" (Exodus 2:24), but when Israel sinned it is written, "And the Lord did not hearken to your voice or give ear to you" (Deuteronomy 1:15). He answered the cry of Samuel at Mitspah, as it is written, "And Samuel cried unto the Lord and the Lord answered him" (1 Samuel 7:9), but again He did not answer him, as it is written, "How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing that I have rejected him?" (1 Samuel 16:17). He answered David as it is written, "I sought the Lord and He answered me" (Psalms 34:5), but again he did not answer him, as it is written, "David besought the Lord for the child" (II Samuel 12:16). When Israel repents, He is available to them, as it is written, "But from there you will seek the Lord and you will find Him" (Deuteronomy 4:29), but when Israel does not repent, He is not available to them, as it is written, "With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord but they will not find Him" (Hosea 5:6). He is sometimes close, as it is written, "The Lord is close to those who call upon Him" (Psalms 145:18) and sometimes far, as it is written,

"The Lord is far from the wicked" (Proverbs 15:29). *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, XXIV, ed. Buber, Lyck 1868, p. 156a. See also *Jerushalmi Makkot*, 2, 31d.

"There are times when God is propitious and ready to dispense blessing to those that pray to Him, and times when He is not propitious and judgment is let loose on the world, and times when judgment is held in suspense. There are seasons in the year when grace is in the ascendant, and seasons when judgment is in the ascendant, and seasons when judgment is in the ascendant but held in suspense. Similarly with the months and similarly with the days of the week, and even with the parts of each day and each hour. Therefore it is written: 'There is a time for every purpose' (Ecclesiastes 3:1) and again, 'My prayer is unto thee, O Lord, in an acceptable time' (Psalm 69:14). Hence it says here: 'Let him not come at every time to the Sanctuary.' Rabbi Simeon said: 'This interpretation of the word "time" is quite correct, and here God warned Aaron not to make the same mistake as his sons and try to associate a wrong "time" with the King, even if he should see that the control of the world has been committed for the time to the hands of another, and though he has the power to unify with it and bring it near to Holiness.'" *Zohar*, vol. III, 58a.

⁷ It must be clearly understood that when one of those who have attained deeper insights "wishes to tell, by word of mouth or in writing, anything of the mysteries which he has grasped, it is not possible for him to expound clearly and systematically whatever he has comprehended, as he would have done in any other science which has an established method of instruction. When he tries to teach others, he has to contend with the same difficulty which faced him in his own study, namely, that matters become clear for a moment and then recede into obscurity. It appears that this is the nature of this subject, be one's share of it large or small. For this reason when any metaphysician and theologian, in possession of some truth, intends to impart of his science, he will not do so except in similes and riddles. The writers on this subject have used many different similes, varying not only in details but in their essential character." Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, introduction, ed. J. Ibn Shmuel, p. 7.

⁸ *Man's Quest for God*, New York, 1954, p. 74; *Man is Not Alone*, p. 165.

13 God in Search of Man

"WHERE ART THOU?"

Most theories of religion start out with defining the religious situation as man's search for God and maintain the axiom that God is silent, hidden and unconcerned with man's search for Him. Now, in adopting that axiom, the answer is given before the question is asked. To Biblical thinking, the definition is incomplete and the axiom false. The Bible speaks not only of man's search for God but also of *God's search for man*. "Thou dost hunt me like a lion," exclaimed Job (10:16).

"From the very first Thou didst single out man and consider him worthy to stand in Thy presence."¹ This is the mysterious paradox of Biblical faith: *God is pursuing man*.² It is as if God were unwilling to be alone, and He had chosen man to serve Him. Our seeking Him is not only man's but also His concern, and must not be considered an exclusively human affair. His will is involved in our yearnings. All of human history as described in the Bible may be summarized in one phrase: *God is in search of man*. Faith in God is a response to God's question.

Lord, where shall I find Thee?
High and hidden in Thy place;
And where shall I not find Thee?
The world is full of Thy glory.

I have sought Thy nearness;
With all my heart have I called Thee,

God in search of man

*And going out to meet Thee
I found Thee coming toward me.*

Even as, in the wonder of Thy might,
In holiness I have beheld Thee,
Who shall say he hath not seen Thee?
Lo, the heavens and their hosts
Declare the awe of Thee,
Though their voice be not heard.³

When Adam and Eve hid from His presence, the Lord called: *Where art thou* (Genesis 3:9). It is a call that goes out again and again. It is a still small echo of a still small voice, not uttered in words, not conveyed in categories of the mind, but ineffable and mysterious, as ineffable and mysterious as the glory that fills the whole world. It is wrapped in silence; concealed and subdued, yet it is as if all things were the frozen echo of the question: *Where art thou?*

Faith comes out of awe, out of an awareness that we are exposed to His presence, out of anxiety to answer the challenge of God, out of an awareness of our being called upon. Religion consists of *God's question and man's answer*. The way to faith is the way of faith. The way to God is a way of God. Unless God asks the question, all our inquiries are in vain.

The answer lasts a moment, the commitment continues. Unless the awareness of the ineffable mystery of existence becomes a permanent state of mind, all that remains is a commitment without faith. To strengthen our alertness, to refine our appreciation of the mystery is the meaning of worship and observance. For faith does not remain stationary. We must continue to pray, continue to obey to be able to believe and to remain attached to His presence.

Recondite is the dimension where God and man meet, and yet not entirely impenetrable. He placed within man something of His spirit (see Isaiah 63:10), and "it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand" (Job 32:8).

Men have often tried to give itemized accounts of why they must believe that God exists. Such accounts are like ripe fruit we gather from the trees. Yet it is beyond all reasons, beneath the ground, where a seed starts to become a tree, that the act of faith takes place.

The soul rarely knows how to raise its deeper secrets to discursive levels of the mind. We must not, therefore, equate the act of faith with its expression. The expression of faith is an affirmation of truth, a definite judgment, a conviction, while faith itself is *an event*, something that happens rather than something that is stored away; it is *a moment* in which the soul of man communes with the glory of God.⁴

Man's walled mind has no access to a ladder upon which he can, on his own strength, rise to knowledge of God. Yet his soul is endowed with translucent windows that open to the beyond. And if he rises to reach out to Him, it is a reflection of the divine light in him that gives him the power for such yearning. We are at times ablaze against and beyond our own power, and unless man's soul is dismissed as an insane asylum, the spectrum analysis of that ray is evidence for the truth of his insight.

For God is not always silent, and man is not always blind. His glory fills the world; His spirit hovers above the waters. There are moments in which, to use a Talmudic phrase, heaven and earth kiss each other; in which there is a lifting of the veil at the horizon of the known, opening a vision of what is eternal in time. Some of us have at least once experienced the momentous realness of God. Some of us have at least caught a glimpse of the beauty, peace, and power that flow through the souls of those who are devoted to Him. There may come a moment like a thunder in the soul, when man is not only aided, not only guided by God's mysterious hand, but also taught how to aid, how to guide other beings. The voice of Sinai goes on for ever: "These words the Lord spoke unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with *a great voice that goes on for ever.*"⁵

The fact that ultimately the living certainty of faith is a conclusion derived from acts rather than from logical premises is stated by Maimonides:

"Do not imagine that these great mysteries are completely and thoroughly known to any of us. By no means: sometimes truth flashes up before us with daylight brightness, but soon it is obscured by the limitations of our material nature and social habits, and we fall back into a darkness almost as black as that in which we were before. We are thus like a person whose surroundings are from time to time lit up by lightning, while in the intervals he is plunged into pitch-dark night. Some of us experience such flashes of illumination frequently, until they are in almost perpetual brightness, so that the night turns for them into daylight. That was the prerogative of the greatest of all prophets (Moses), to whom God said: *But as for thee, stand thou here by Me* (Deuteronomy 5:28), and concerning whom Scripture said: *the skin of his face sent forth beams* (Exodus 32:39). Some see a single flash of light in the entire night of their lives. That was the state of those concerning whom it is said: *they prophesied that time and never again* (Numbers 11:25). With others again there are long or short intermissions between the flashes of illumination, and lastly there are those who are not granted that their darkness be illuminated by a flash of lightning, but only, as it were, by the gleam of some polished object or the like of it, such as the stones and [phosphorescent] substances which shine in the dark night; and even that sparse light which illuminates us is not continuous but flashes and disappears as if it were the *gleam of the ever-turning sword* (Genesis 3:24). The degrees of perfection in men vary according to these distinctions. Those who have never for a moment seen the light but grope about in their night are those concerning whom it is said: *They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness* (Psalms 82:5). The Truth is completely hidden from them in spite of its powerful brightness, as it is also said of them:

And now men see not the light which is bright in the skies (Job 37:21). These are the great mass of mankind. . . .”⁶

Only those who have gone through days on which words were of no avail, on which the most brilliant theories jarred the ear like mere slang; only those who have experienced ultimate not-knowing, the voicelessness of a soul struck by wonder, total muteness, are able to enter the meaning of God, a meaning greater than the mind.

There is a loneliness in us that hears. When the soul parts from the company of the ego and its retinue of petty conceits; when we cease to exploit all things but instead pray the world’s cry, the world’s sigh, our loneliness may hear the living grace beyond all power.

We must first peer into the darkness, feel strangled and entombed in the hopelessness of living without God, before we are ready to feel the presence of His living light.

“And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud” (Genesis 9:14). When ignorance and confusion blot out all thoughts, the light of God may suddenly burst forth in the mind like a rainbow in the sky. Our understanding of the greatness of God comes about as an act of illumination. As the Baal Shem said, “like a lightning that all of a sudden illumines the whole world, God illumines the mind of man, enabling him to understand the greatness of our Creator.” This is what is meant by the words of the Psalmist: “He sent out His arrows and scattered [the clouds]; He shot forth lightnings and discomfited them.” The darkness retreats, “The channels of water appeared, the foundations of the world were laid bare” (Psalms 18: 15-16).⁷

The essence of Jewish religious thinking does not lie in entertaining a concept of God but in the ability to articulate a memory of moments of illumination by His presence. Israel is not a people of definers but a people of witnesses: “Ye are My witnesses” (Isaiah 43:10). Reminders of what has been disclosed to us are hanging over our souls like stars, remote and of mind-surpassing grandeur.

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They shine through dark and dangerous ages, and their reflection can be seen in the lives of those who guard the path of conscience and memory in the wilderness of careless living.

Since those perennial reminders have moved into our minds, wonder has never left us. Heedfully we stare through the telescope of ancient rites lest we lose the perpetual brightness beckoning to our souls. Our mind has not kindled the flame, has not produced these principles. Still our thoughts glow with their light. What is the nature of this glow, of our faith, and how is it perceived?

RETURN TO GOD IS AN ANSWER TO HIM

We do not have to discover the world of faith; we only have to recover it. It is not a *terra incognita*, an unknown land; it is a forgotten land, and our relation to God is a palimpsest rather than a *tabula rasa*. There is no one who has no faith. Every one of us stood at the foot of Sinai and beheld the voice that proclaimed, *I am the Lord thy God*.⁸ Every one of us participated in saying, *We shall do and we shall hear*. However, it is the evil in man and the evil in society silencing the depth of the soul that block and hamper our faith. “It is apparent and known before Thee that it is our will to do Thy will. But what stands in the way? The leaven that is in the dough (the evil impulse) and the servitude of the kingdoms.”⁹

In the spirit of Judaism, our quest for God is a return to God; our thinking of Him is a recall, an attempt to draw out the depth of our suppressed attachment. The Hebrew word for repentance, *teshuvah*, means *return*. Yet it also means *answer*. Return to God is an answer to Him. For God is not silent. “Return O faithless children, says the Lord” (Jeremiah 3:14).¹⁰ According to the understanding of the Rabbis, daily, at all times, “A Voice cries: in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3). “The voice of the Lord cries to the city” (Micah 6:9).¹¹

“Morning by morning He wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught” (Isaiah 50:4). The stirring in man to turn to God is

actually a "reminder by God to man."¹² It is a call that man's physical sense does not capture, yet the "spiritual soul" in him perceives the call.¹³ The most precious gifts come to us unawares and remain unnoted. God's grace resounds in our lives like a staccato. Only by retaining the seemingly disconnected notes do we acquire the ability to grasp the theme.

Is it possible to define the content of such experiences? It is not a perception of a thing, of anything physical; nor is it always a disclosure of ideas hitherto unknown. It is primarily, it seems, an enhancement of the soul, a sharpening of one's spiritual sense, an endowment with a new sensibility. It is a discovery of what is in time, rather than anything in space.

Just as clairvoyants may see the future, the religious man comes to sense the present moment. And this is an extreme achievement. For the present is the presence of God. Things have a past and a future, but only God is pure presence.

A SPIRITUAL EVENT

But if insights are not physical events, in what sense are they real?

The underlying assumption of modern man's outlook is that objective reality is physical: all non-material phenomena can be reduced to material phenomena and explained in physical terms. Thus, only those types of human experiences which acquaint us with the quantitative aspects of material phenomena refer to the real world. None of the other types of our experience, such as prayer or the awareness of the presence of God, has any objective counterpart. They are illusory in the sense that they do not acquaint us with the nature of the objective world.

In modern society, he who refuses to accept the equation of the real and the physical is considered a mystic. However, since God is not an object of a physical experience, the equation implies the impossibility of His existence. Either God is but a word not designating anything real or He is at least as real as the man I see in front of me.

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This is the premise of faith: Spiritual events are real. Ultimately all creative events are caused by spiritual acts. The God who creates heaven and earth is the God who communicates His will to the mind of man.

"In Thy light we shall see light" (Psalms 36:10). There is a divine light in every soul, it is dormant and eclipsed by the follies of this world. We must first awaken this light, then the upper light will come upon us. In Thy light which is within us will we see light (Rabbi Aaron of Karlin).

We must not wait passively for insights. In the darkest moments we must try to let our inner light go forth. "And she rises while it is yet night" (Proverbs 31:15).

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 13

¹ The liturgy of the Day of Atonement.

² "Said Rabbi Yose: Judah used to expound, *The Lord came from Sinai* (Deuteronomy 33:2). Do not read thus, but read, *The Lord came to Sinai*. I, however, do not accept this interpretation, but, *The Lord came from Sinai*, to welcome Israel as a bridegroom goes forth to meet the bride." *Mechilta, Babodesh* to 19:17. God's covenant with Israel was an act of grace. "It was He who initiated our delivery from Egypt in order that we should become His people and He our King," *Kuzari* II, 50. "The first man would never have known God, if He had not addressed, rewarded and punished him. . . . By this he was convinced that He was the Creator of the world, and he characterized Him by words and attributes and called Him *the Lord*. Had it not been for this experience, he would have been satisfied with the name *God*; he would not have perceived what God was, whether He is one or many, whether He knows individuals or not." *Kuzari*, IV, 3.

³ See *Selected Poems of Jehudah Halevi*, translated by N. Salamon, Philadelphia, 1928, pp. 134-135.

⁴ *Man is Not Alone*, p. 87f.

⁵ Deuteronomy 5:19, according to the Aramaic translation of Onkelos and Jonathan ben Uzziel and to the interpretation of *Sanhedrin*, 17b; *Sotah*, 10b; and to the first interpretation of Rashi.

⁶ *More Nebuchim*, introduction, ed. J. Ibn Shmuel, Jerusalem, 1947, pp. 6-7. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by Ch. Rabin, London, 1952, p. 43f. In a somewhat similar vein, we read in the *Zohar*, the Torah reveals a thought "for an instant and then straightway clothes it with another garment, so that it is hidden there and does not show itself. The wise, whose wisdom makes them full of eyes, pierce through the garment to the very essence of the word that is hidden thereby. Thus when the word is momentarily revealed in that first instant those whose eyes are wise can see it, though it is soon hidden again." *Zohar*, vol. II, p. 98b. See also Plato, *Epistles*, VII, 341.

⁷ Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Ostrog, *Raw Yevi*, Ostrog, 1808, p. 43b.

⁸ *Tanbuma*, Yitzo, I. The words, according to the Rabbis, were not heard by Israel alone, but by the inhabitants of all the earth. The divine voice divided itself into "the seventy tongues" of man, so that all might understand it. *Exodus Rabba*, 5, 9.

⁹ *Berachot*, 17a.

¹⁰ According to Rabbi Jonathan, "Three and a half years the *Shechinah* abode upon the Mount of Olives hoping that Israel would return, but they did not, while a voice from heaven issued announcing, Return, O faithless sons." *Lamentations Rabba*, proemium 25.

¹¹ According to *Masechet Kallah*, ch. 5, ed. M. Higger, New York, 1936, p. 283, these passages refer to a perpetual voice.

¹² "This call of God comes to him who has taken the Torah as a light of his path, attained intellectual maturity and capacity for clear apprehension, yearns to gain the Almighty's favor, and to rise to the spiritual heights of the saints, and turns his heart away from worldly cares and anxieties." Bahya, *The Duties of the Heart, Avodat Elohim*, ch. 5 (vol. II, p. 55).

¹³ Rabbi Mordecai Azulai, *Or Hachamah*, Przemysl, 1897, vol. III, p. 42b.

14 Insight

HEAR, O ISRAEL

The voice of God is not always inaudible. "In every generation didst Thou make plain parts of the mystery of Thy name."¹

"Every day a heavenly voice resounds from Mount Horeb, proclaiming: 'Woe unto the people for their disregard of the Torah.'"²

"Every day a voice goes forth saying: 'How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?' 'Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness' (Jeremiah 3:22). But there is no one who inclines his ear. The Torah calls on man, and none pay regard."³

The Baal Shem raised the question: What is the purpose of the voice? If no one ever hears it, of what avail is it? If there is always one who hears it, would he presume to admit it? And would anybody believe him? This is how the Baal Shem explained it: The voice that goes forth from above does not reach the physical ear of man. "There is no speech, there are no words, the voice is not heard."⁴ It is uttered not in sounds but in thoughts, in signs that man must learn to perceive. "A man who does not understand what he is being shown by gesture is not worthy to converse in signs before the king."⁵ All the longings to return to God that come to man, as well as all his inner awakenings of either joy or fear are due to that voice.⁶

"Bless the Lord, ye angels of His, ye mighty in strength, that fulfill His word, hearkening unto the voice of His word" (Psalms 103:

pray: "Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not Thy holy spirit from me."⁸

The way to understand the meaning of *torah min hashamayim* ("the Bible is from heaven") is to understand the meaning of *hashamayim min hatorah* ("heaven is from the Bible). Whatever taste of "heaven" we have on earth is in the Bible.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 26

¹ "He who accepts even one single mitsvah with true faith is worthy that the Holy Spirit should rest upon him" *Mecbilta*, to 14:31, ed. Lauterbach, I, p. 252.

² *Degel Mabneh Ephraim*, Yitro.

³ *Yosippon*, ed. D. Guenzburg, Berditshev, 1913, p. 22.

⁴ *Zohar*, vol. II, 99a; see vol. III, 58a.

⁵ *Seder Eliabu Rabba*, IX, ed. M. Friedmann, Wien, 1902, p. 48.

⁶ Hillel said: "Leave Israel alone. The holy spirit rests upon them. Though not being prophets, they are disciples of prophets." *Tosefta Pesabim* 4,8.

⁷ Isaiah 59:21. "For prophecy will never depart from you," Rabbi David Kimchi, *Commentary*, ad locum.

⁸ Isaiah 51:13. See Targum and Rashi ad locum. This petition is a part of the liturgy of the penitential season.

27 The Principle of Revelation

REVELATION IS NOT A CHRONOLOGICAL ISSUE

Prophetic inspiration may be dealt with on two levels, on the level of faith and on the level of belief or creed. Faith is the relation to the prophetic event; belief, or creed, is the relation to the date of the Biblical books.

It is a serious misunderstanding to reduce the problem of revelation to a matter of chronology. Thus it is frequently assumed that the authority and sanctity of the Pentateuch depend upon the fact that it was written down in its entirety in the time of Moses; that to assume that even a few passages were added to it after the death of Moses is to deny the principle of revelation.

Does the sanctity of the Bible depend on the amount of time that elapsed between the moment of revelation and the moment of committing its content to parchment? If God had wished that certain portions of the Pentateuch which were revealed to Moses be written down by Joshua, would that have detracted from its sanctity? And assuming that the soul of Moses returned to this world after it had departed from the body of Moses, and living in a new incarnation has been inspired to add some lines to the Pentateuch, would that make the Pentateuch less Mosaic?¹ Is it proper to treat the divine dignity of the Bible as if it were a *chronological problem*, as if its authenticity could be verified by a notary public?

The meaning of revelation is given to those who are mystery-minded, not to those who are literal-minded, and decisive is not the chronological but the theological fact; decisive is that which

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fully the meaning of a Scriptural verse, such a question represents an attempt to compare the hardly known with the totally unknown.

Granted that the text of Scripture as handed down to us consists of gems of God and diamonds quarried out of prophetic souls, all set in a human frame. Yet who shall presume to be an expert in discerning what is divine and what is but "a little lower" than divine? What is the spirit of God and what the phrase of Amos? The spirit of God is set in the language of man, and who shall judge what is content and what is frame? Certainly those who presume most are qualified least. There are more things between heaven and earth which will not submit themselves to our judgment than we are willing to admit.

Revelation lasted a moment; the text is permanent in time and space. Revelation happened to the prophet; the text is given to all of us. "The Torah is not in heaven"; we are guided by the word, and it is the word, the text, which is our guide, our light in the darkness of platitudes and errors. We must neither reduce revelation to a matter of fact nor spiritualize the Bible and destroy its factual integrity.

In its present form the Bible is the only object in the world which is not in need of either praise or sanctification. In its present form the Bible is the only point in the world from which God will never depart. This is the book to which Israel deferred; we must tremble to tamper with it.

REVELATION IS NOT A MONOLOGUE

By insisting upon the objective revelational character of the Bible, dogmatic theology has often lost sight of the profound and decisive share of man.

The prophet is not a passive recipient, a recording instrument, affected from without without participation of heart and will, nor is he a person who acquires his vision by his own strength and labor. The prophet's personality is rather a unity of inspiration and experience, invasion and response. For every object outside him,

happened between God and the prophet rather than that which happened between the prophet and the parchment. We accept the authority of the Pentateuch not because it is Mosaic, but because Moses was a prophet.

The dogma of revelation in regard to the Pentateuch consists of two parts: the divine inspiration and the Mosaic authorship. The first part refers to a mystery, the second to a historic fact. The first part can only be alluded to and expressed in terms of grandeur and amazement; the second may be analyzed, examined, and conveyed in terms of chronological information.

Philosophy of religion must deal with the first part. Its concern is not whether the Pentateuch was written down in its entirety during the forty years of Israel's sojourn in the desert, but rather to understand the meaning and the validity of the claim that the will of God reached the understanding of man, and that the Pentateuch is a mirror of God's reaching man; the second part is the concern of theology which must define the dogma of revelation and offer an answer to historical questions.²

The essence of our faith in the sanctity of the Bible is that its words contain that which God wants us to know and to fulfill. How these words were written down is not the fundamental problem. This is why the theme of Biblical criticism is not the theme of faith, just as the question of whether the lightning and thunder at Sinai were a natural phenomenon or not is irrelevant to our faith in revelation. The assumption of some commentators that the Decalogue was given on a rainy day does not affect our conception of the event.³

The act of revelation is a mystery, while the record of revelation is a literary fact, phrased in the language of man.

THE TEXT AS IT IS

Are the words of Scripture coextensive and identical with the words of God?

In the eyes of those who experience daily their inability to grasp

there is a feeling inside him, for every event of revelation to him, there is a reaction by him; for every glimpse of truth he is granted, there is a comprehension he must achieve.

Even in the moment of the event he is, we are told, an active partner in the event. His response to what is disclosed to him turns revelation into a dialogue. In a sense, prophecy consists of a revelation of God and a *co-revelation of man*. The share of the prophet manifested itself not only in what he was able to give but also in what he was unable to receive.

Revelation does not happen when God is alone. The two classical terms for the moment at Sinai are *mattan torah* and *kabbalat torah*, "the giving of the Torah" and "the acceptance of the Torah." It was both an event in the life of God and an event in the life of man. According to rabbinic legend, the Lord approached every tribe and nation and offered them the Torah, before He gave it to Israel. The wonder of Israel's acceptance was as decisive as the wonder of God's expression. God was alone in the world until Israel became engaged to Him. At Sinai God revealed His word, and Israel revealed the power to respond. Without that power to respond, without the fact that there was a people willing to accept, to hear, the divine command, Sinai would have been impossible. For Sinai consisted of both a divine proclamation and a human perception. It was a moment in which *God was not alone*.

The Bible contains not only records of what transpired in moments of prophetic inspiration; it also records acts and words of man. It is incorrect to maintain that all words in the Bible originated in the spirit of God. The blasphemous tirades of Pharaoh, the rebellious utterances of Korach, the subterfuge of Ephron, the words of the soldiers in the camp of Midian, emanated from the spirit of man. What the prophet says to God when addressed by Him is not considered less holy than what God says to the prophet in addressing him.

Thus the Bible is more than the word of God: it is the word of God *and* man; a record of both revelation and response; the drama

of covenant between God and man. The canonization and preservation of the Bible are the work of Israel.

THE VOICE ACCORDING TO MAN

No man is able to hear the voice of God as it is. But "God thunders marvelously with His voice" (Job 37:5) on Sinai. "The voice went forth—coming to each person with a force adjusted to his individual receptivity—to the old according to their strength, and to the young according to theirs . . . and even to Moses according to his strength, as it is said: *Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice* (Exodus 19:19), that is, with a voice which he could endure. Similarly it says: *The voice of the Lord is with power* (Psalms 29:4), namely with the power of each individual. This is why the Decalogue begins *I am the Lord thy God*, in the second person singular, rather than in the second person plural: God addressed every individual according to his particular power of comprehension."⁴

This does not imply subjectivism. It is precisely the power of the voice of God to speak to man according to his capacity. It is the marvel of the voice to split up into seventy voices, into seventy languages, so that all the nations should understand.

WISDOM, PROPHECY, AND GOD

God does not reveal Himself; he only reveals His way. Judaism does not speak of God's self-revelation, but of the revelation of His teaching for man. The Bible reflects God's revelation of His relation to history, rather than of a revelation of His very Self. Even His will or His wisdom is not completely expressed through the prophets. Prophecy is superior to human wisdom, and God's love is superior to prophecy. This spiritual hierarchy is explicitly stated by the Rabbis.

"They asked *Wisdom*: What should be the punishment of a sinner? And *Wisdom* said: *Misfortune pursues sinners* (Proverbs 13:21). They asked *prophecy*: What should be the punishment of a

sinner? And prophecy said: *The soul that sins shall die* (Ezekiel 18:4.20). They asked *the Holy One*, blessed be He: What should be the punishment of a sinner? And He said: *Let him repent, and he will be atoned for.*"⁵

God is infinitely more sublime than what the prophets were able to comprehend, and the heavenly wisdom is more profound than what the Torah contains in its present form.

"There are five incomplete phenomena (or unripe fruits). The incomplete experience of death is sleep; an incomplete form of prophecy is dream; the incomplete form of the world to come is the Sabbath; the incomplete form of the heavenly light is the orb of the sun; the incomplete form of heavenly wisdom is the Torah."⁶

THE UNREVEALED TORAH

The word Torah is used in two senses: the supernal Torah, the existence of which preceded the creation of the world,⁷ and the revealed Torah. Concerning the supernal Torah the Rabbis maintained: "The Torah is hidden from the eyes of all living. . . . Man knows not the price thereof."⁸ "Moses received Torah"—but not all of the Torah—"at Sinai."⁹ And not all that was revealed to Moses was conveyed to Israel; the meaning of the commandments is given as an example.¹⁰ Together with the gratitude for the word that was disclosed, there is a yearning for the meaning yet to be disclosed. "The Lord gave Israel the Torah and spoke to them face to face, and the memory of that love is more delightful to them than any other joy. They have been promised that He will return to them once more in order to reveal the secret meaning of the Torah and its concealed content. Israel implores Him to fulfill this promise. This is the meaning of the verse: *Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth—for Thy love is better than wine.*"¹¹

There is a theory in Jewish literature containing a profound parabolical truth which maintains that the Torah, which is eternal in spirit, assumes different forms in various eons. The Torah was known to Adam when he was in the Garden of Eden, although not

in its present form. Commandments such as those concerning charity to the poor, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, would have been meaningless in the Garden of Eden. In that eon the Torah was known in its spiritual form.¹² Just as man assumed a material form when he was driven out of the Garden of Eden, so has the Torah assumed a material form. If man had retained "the garments of light," his spiritual form of existence, the Torah, too, would have retained its spiritual form.¹³

THE TORAH IS IN EXILE

God is not only in heaven but in this world as well. But in order to dwell in this world, the divine must assume a form which this world could bear, "shells" in which the light is concealed. The Torah, too, in order to enter the world of history, is encased in "shells," since it could not exist or be fulfilled in its perfect form in a world which is stained with imperfections.¹⁴

Just as the *Shechinah* is in exile, so is the *Torah in exile*. Adjusting itself to the condition of man, "the Torah assumed for our eon a strange garb and shells of no beauty or comeliness, such as chapter thirty-six of the Book of Genesis or Deuteronomy 2:23 and many others. To the same class belong many agadic passages in Rabbinic literature which are unsavory and objectionable, and yet contain in concealed form mysteries of the Torah. All this is due to the necessity of veiling the light of knowledge in the garb of the *kelipah* and the unclean powers. God, Torah, and Israel will remain in exile until the spirit will be poured upon us from on high to bring back the captivity for the sake of His Torah and His Name and the good and the holy will be purified from the evil and the shells. . . ."¹⁵

Boldly Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish declared: "There are many verses which to all appearances ought to be burnt like the books of the heretics, but are really essential elements in the Torah." As examples are cited *And the Avvim that dwell in villages as far as Gaza* (Deuteronomy 2:23). *For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the*

king of the Amorites who had fought against the former king of Moab (Numbers 21:26).¹⁶

In its present form, the Torah deals with matters that concern the material relations between man and man. In the messianic eon, a wisdom higher than the one now found in it will be revealed in the Torah. Now we have the Torah, in the messianic eon we will have the crown of the Torah. Thus the wisdom open to us in this eon is but the beginning of its revelation.¹⁷

"For if a man live many years let him rejoice (Ecclesiastes 11:8) in the joy of the Torah and remember the days of darkness, these are the days of evil, for they shall be many. The Torah which a man learns in this world is vanity in comparison with the Torah [which will be learnt in the days] of the Messiah."¹⁸

Isaiah's prediction for the days to come, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation" (12:2), is explained by Rashi in the following way: "Ye shall receive new teaching, for the Lord will widen your understanding. . . . The mysteries of the Torah that were forgotten during the exile in Babylonia because of the distress Israel suffered, will be revealed to them."

The words of Scripture are the only lasting record of what was conveyed to the prophets. At the same time they are neither identical with, nor the eternally adequate rendering of, the divine wisdom. As a reflection of His infinite light, the text in its present form is, to speak figuratively, one of an endless number of possible reflections. In the end of the days, it was believed, countless unknown rearrangements of the words and letters and unknown secrets of the Torah would be made known. Yet in its present form the text contains that which God wishes us to know.¹⁹

IDEA AND EXPRESSION

There is another aspect to the part played by the prophet. According to the Rabbis, "The same idea is revealed to many prophets, but no two prophets use the same expression." The fact that the four hundred prophets of King Ahab employed the same phrases was

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regarded as proof that they were not divinely inspired.²⁰ When in the court of justice two people testifying to the same event use identical language, they are suspected of having conspired to bear false witness.²¹ The prophets bear witness to an event. The event is divine, but the formulation is done by the individual prophet. According to this conception, the idea is revealed; the expression is coined by the prophet.²² The expression "the word of God" would not refer to the word as a sound or a combination of sounds. Indeed, it has often been maintained that what reached the ear of man was not identical with what has come out of the spirit of the eternal God. For "Israel could not possibly have received the Torah as it came forth from the mouth of the Lord, for the word of the Lord is fire and the Lord is 'a fire that consumes fire.' Surely man would flash into blaze, if he were exposed to the word in itself. Therefore, the word became clothed before it entered the world of creation. And so the Psalmist speaks of revelation as 'coals that flamed forth from Him' (Psalms 18:9). The word of God in itself is like a burning flame, and the Torah that we received is merely a part of the coal to which the flame is attached. And yet, even in this form it would have remained beyond our comprehension as long as we are mortals. The word had to descend further and to assume the form of darkness ('arafel) in order to become perceptible to man."²³

Out of the experience of the prophets came the words, words that try to interpret what they perceived. To this very day, these words make present what happened in the past. As the meaning and wonder of the event inspired the spiritual comprehension of the prophet, the meaning and wonder of the Biblical words continue to inspire the understanding of man.

The Bible reflects its divine as well as its human authorship. Expressed in the language of a particular age, it addresses itself to all ages; disclosed in particular acts, its spirit is everlasting. The will of God is in time and in eternity. God borrowed the language of man and created a work such as no men had ever made. It is the task of faith to hold fast to that work, to treasure its mixture of timeliness

and eternity and to continually understand the polarity of its contents.

COMMONPLACE PASSAGES

We have spoken above of the presence of God in the Bible and characterized its quality as holiness in words. However, there are a few passages in the Bible which lead one to feel that God is not present in them; passages either too commonplace or too harsh to reflect the spirit of God.

We shall discuss the problem presented by both kinds of passages.

The question has been asked. "If it is not dignified for a king of flesh and blood to engage in common talk, much less to write it down, is it conceivable that the most high King, the Holy One, blessed be He, was short of sacred subjects with which to fill the Torah, so that He had to collect such commonplace topics as the anecdotes of Esau, and Hagar, Laban's talks to Jacob, the words of Balaam and his ass, those of Balak, and of Zimri, and such-like, and make of them a Torah? If so, why is it called the 'Torah of truth'? Why do we read 'The Torah of the Lord is perfect. . . . The testimony of the Lord is sure. . . . The ordinances of the Lord are true. . . . More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold' (Psalms 19:8-11)?"²⁴

The answer seems to be that the Bible has more than one level of meaning. While most of it is open to unambiguous understanding, much of it remains locked to the literal-minded.

"David prayed: Master of the universe, it is Thy will that I keep Thy words, so 'open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Torah' (Psalms 119:18). If Thou wilt not open my eyes, how would I know? For *though my eyes are open, I know nothing.*"²⁵

"Said Rabbi Simeon: 'Alas for the man who regards the Torah as a book of mere tales and everyday matters! If that were so, we, even we could compose a torah dealing with everyday affairs and of even greater excellence. Nay, even the princes of the world possess books

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of greater worth which we could use as a model for composing some such torah. The Torah, however, contains in all its words supernal truths and sublime mysteries. Observe the perfect balancing of the upper and the lower worlds. Israel here below is balanced by the angels on high, of whom it says: 'Who makest thy angels into winds' (Psalms 114:4). For the angels in descending on earth put on themselves earthly garments, as otherwise they could not stay in this world, nor could the world endure them. Now if thus it is with the angels, how much more so must it be with the Torah—the Torah that created them, that created all the worlds and is the means by which these are sustained. Thus had the Torah not clothed herself in garments of this world the world could not endure it. The stories of the Torah are thus only her outer garments and whoever looks upon that garment as being the Torah itself, woe to that man—such a one will have no portion in the next world. David thus said: 'Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Torah' (Psalms 119:18); to wit, the things that are beneath the garment. Observe this. The garments worn by a man are the most visible part of him, and senseless people looking at the man do not seem to see more in him than the garments. But in truth the pride of the garments is the body of the man, and the pride of the body is the soul. Similarly the Torah has a body made up of the precepts of the Torah, called *gufe torah* (main principles of the Torah) and that body is enveloped in garments made up of worldly narrations. The senseless people see only the garment, the mere narrations; those who are somewhat wiser penetrate as far as the body; but the really wise, the servants of the most high King, those who stood on Mount Sinai, penetrate right through to the soul, the root principle of all, to the real Torah. In the future the same are destined to penetrate even to the supersoul (soul of the soul) of the Torah. Observe that in a similar way in the supernal world there is garment, body, soul, and supersoul. All these are interlocked within each other. Woe to the sinners who consider the Torah as mere worldly tales, who only see its outer garment; happy are the righteous who fix their gaze on the Torah itself. Wine cannot be kept save in a jar; so the Torah

and eternity and to continually understand the polarity of its contents.

COMMONPLACE PASSAGES

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needs an outer garment. These are the stories and narratives, but it behooves us to penetrate beneath them."²⁶

HARSH PASSAGES

We encounter an even more serious problem in a number of passages which seem to be incompatible with our certainty of the compassion of God.

In analyzing this extremely difficult problem, we must first of all keep in mind that the standards by which those passages are criticized are impressed upon us by the Bible, which is the main factor in ennobling our conscience and in endowing us with the sensitivity that rebels against all cruelty.

We must, furthermore, realize that the harsh passages in the Bible are only contained in describing actions which were taken *at particular moments* and stand in sharp contrast with the compassion, justice and wisdom of the laws that were legislated *for all times*.

As said above, we must not equate prophecy with God. Prophecy is superior to human wisdom, and God's love is superior to prophecy. Not every utterance contained in the Bible is to be regarded as a norm or a standard of behavior. We are told that Moses, Elijah, Isaiah were reprov'd by the Lord for uttering harsh words about the people,²⁷ though these words are a part of the Bible (Exodus 4:1; I Kings 19:14; Isaiah 6:5).

An outstanding mark of Biblical writing is its *ruthless honesty*. None of the prophets is pictured as faultless, none of the heroes is impeccable. The Glory is enveloped in a cloud, and redemption is attained at the price of exile. There is neither perfection nor sweetness nor sentimentality in the Bible's approach. Abraham has the courage to exclaim, "The judge of all the earth shall not act justly?" And Job dares to question the fairness of the Almighty. Accusing his friends who offer apologies for God as being "plasterers of lies," Job pleads:

Will you speak falsely for God,
And talk deceitfully for Him?

God in search of man

Will you show partiality toward Him,
Will you plead the case of God?
Will it be well with you when He searches you out?
Or can you deceive Him, as one deceives a man?
He will surely rebuke you,
If in secret you show partiality.

Job 13:7-10

Resignation and acceptance of the inscrutable will of God are expressions of normal piety. In contrast, though *not* in contradiction, stands the prophet who, instead of being unquestioning and submissive in the face of God, dares to challenge His judgment, to remind Him of His covenant and to plead for His mercy. In the spirit of piety, Jew and Christian will accept evil as well as good, and pray, "Thy will be done,"²⁸ while the prophet will plead, "Turn from Thy fierce wrath and repent of this evil against Thy people" (Exodus 32:12).

Abraham challenged the intention of the Lord to destroy Sodom. In the name of God's mercy, we too have the right to challenge the harsh statements of the prophets. Two examples follow:

"Behold, I call upon heaven and earth to witness that the Lord did not say unto Moses that which Moses said in the gate of the camp—'Who is on the Lord's side, come unto me . . . ! Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Put every man his sword on his side' (Exodus 32:27)—But rather Moses the pious one deduced it from his own reason. He thought, if I command the people—'Slay every man his brother, his companion, his neighbor'—the people will protest—Did you yourself not teach us that a court that condemns to death even one person in seventy years is to be considered bloodthirsty? How can you, then, order the killing of three thousand in one day?—Therefore Moses ascribed his order to the authority of the Lord and said, 'Thus saith the Lord.' Indeed, in stating that the Levites carried out the order, Scripture says: and the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses."²⁹

The independence of human understanding and its power to challenge a prophet's claim may be further illustrated by the following legend:

"When Hezekiah fell ill, the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Isaiah, *Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live* (Isaiah 38:1). Said Hezekiah: It is customary that a person, when visiting the sick should say, 'May mercy be shown upon you from Heaven.' When the physician comes, he tells the sick, 'Eat this and do not eat that, drink this and do not drink that.' Even when he sees him near to death he does not say to him, 'Set thy house in order' because this might upset him. You, however, tell me, *Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live!* I pay no attention to what you say, nor will I listen to your advice. I hold on to nothing else than what my ancestor said, *For through the multitude of dreams and vanities there are also many words, but fear thou God* (Ecclesiastes 5:6)."³⁰

THE BIBLE IS NOT A UTOPIA

The primordial light is hidden. Had the Torah demanded perfection, it would have remained a utopia. The laws of the Torah ask of each generation to fulfill what is within its power to fulfill. Some of its laws (for example Exodus 21:2 ff),¹⁴ do not represent ideals but compromises, realistic attempts to refine the moral condition of ancient man.

The supreme aspiration of David, a great and anointed King, was to build a Temple for the Lord which was to be "exceedingly magnificent, of fame and glory throughout all lands." While he was engaged in abundant preparations, "the word of the Lord came to him saying: Thou hast shed much blood and hast waged great wars; thou shalt not build a house to my name" (I Chronicles 22:8; 28:3). Thus the Bible had to deal with the ugly laws of war, though it was aware of the ugliness of war. *The Torah, too, is in exile.*³¹

We must always remember that the Bible is not a book composed for one age, and its significance cannot be assessed by the particular

moral and literary standards of one generation. Passages that were considered outdated by one generation have been a fountain of comfort to the next. Many of us once considered Jeremiah's outcry: "Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations that know Thee not, and upon families that call not on Thy name; for they have devoured Jacob, yea they have devoured him, consumed him, and have laid waste his habitation" (10:25), to be primitive. But what other words could there be to recite when mothers saw how their infants were sent to the gas chambers of Nazi extermination camps? Shall we presume to sit in judgment in the name of morality over those who taught the world what justice means?

There is no simple solution to the problem. We must never forget that there is a higher truth than the one we are able to comprehend at first sight.

While the people of Israel sojourned in the wilderness, Moses was commanded by the Lord to send men to spy out Canaan, the promised land. So Moses chose twelve distinguished men and said to them: Go up and see what the land is, and whether the people who dwell in it are strong or weak, few or many. So they went up and searched the land. At the end of forty days they returned and reported: "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey. Yet the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities fortified and very large. We are not able to go up against this people; for they are stronger than we. There we saw the giants; and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them" (Numbers 13).

The spies were condemned, and their report characterized as slanderous. But why? Their observations were correct; their report was honest.

To say the obvious is not yet to speak truth. When the obvious and the Word stand in conflict, truth is the refusal to rest content with the facts as they seem. Truth is the courage to fathom the facts in order to see how they relate to the Word.³²

These were the last words of Job.

Who is this that hideth counsel without knowledge?
Therefore have I uttered that which I understood not,
Things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.
Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak;
I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me.
I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;
But now mine eye seeth Thee;
Wherefore I abhor my words, and repent,
Seeing I am dust and ashes.

Job 42:3-6

The words in Job 28:13, *Man does not know its order*, refer to the Torah. "Disarranged are the paths of the Torah." If people knew its true order they would know how to revive the dead, how to work wonders, the Rabbis believed.³³

"I am a neophyte in the earth, hide not Thy commandments from me" (Psalms 119:19). "Was David a neophyte? But this is what is meant: just as a neophyte comprehends nothing of the Torah, so does man, though his eyes are open, comprehend nothing at all of the Torah. If David, the composer of all the songs and psalms, said I am a neophyte and know nothing, how much more does it apply to us. . . . For we are neophytes before Thee and sojourners, as all our fathers were (I Chronicles 29:16)."³⁴

In our encounter with the Bible we may take either a fundamentalist attitude which regards every word as literally valid, making no distinction between the eternal and the temporal, and allowing no place for personal or historic understanding, or for the voice of the conscience. Or we may take a rationalist attitude which, taking science as the touchstone of religion, regards Scripture as a poetic product or myth, useful to men of an inferior civilization and therefore outdated at any later period of history.

Philosophy of religion has to carry on a battle on two fronts, trying to winnow false notions of the fundamentalist, and to dampen the over-confidence of the rationalists. The ultimate task is to lead us to a higher plane of knowledge and experience, to attachment through understanding.

We must beware of the obscurantism of a mechanical deference

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to the Bible. The prophetic words were given to us to be understood, not merely to be mechanically repeated. The Bible is to be understood by the spirit that grows with it, wrestles with it, and prays with it.

The prophets make us partners of an existence meant for us. What was revealed to them was not for their sake but intended to inspire us. The word must not freeze into habit; it must remain an event.

To disregard the importance of *continuous understanding* is an evasion of the living challenge of the prophets, an escape from the urgency of responsible experience of every man, a denial of the deeper meaning of "the oral Torah."

CONTINUOUS UNDERSTANDING

The Bible is not an intellectual sinecure, and its acceptance should not be like setting up a talismanic lock that seals both the mind and the conscience against the intrusion of new thoughts. Revelation is not *vicarious thinking*. Its purpose is not to substitute for but to extend our understanding. The prophets tried to extend the horizon of our conscience and to impart to us a sense of the divine partnership in our dealings with good and evil and in our wrestling with life's enigmas. They tried to teach us how to think in the categories of God: His holiness, justice and compassion. The appropriation of these categories, far from exempting us from the obligation to gain new insights in our own time, is a challenge to look for ways of translating Biblical commandments into programs required by our own conditions. The full meaning of the Biblical words was not disclosed once and for all. Every hour another aspect is unveiled. The word was given once; the effort to understand it must go on for ever. It is not enough to accept or even to carry out the commandments. To study, to examine, to explore the Torah is a form of worship, a supreme duty. For the Torah is an invitation to perceptivity, a call for *continuous understanding*.

Taken as vicarious thinking, the Bible becomes a stumbling block.

He who says, I have *only* the Torah, does not even have the Torah. The Karaites claimed to adhere to a purely Biblical religion. However, Judaism is not a purely Biblical religion. Moses was not the founder of Judaism. Long before he was born the children of Israel cherished traditions that dated back to the days of Abraham. The oral Torah is, in parts, older than the written Torah. The Sabbath, we are told, was known to Israel before the event at Sinai took place.³⁵ Not all of the Mosaic teachings were incorporated in the Pentateuch. Numerous principles and rules remained "oral teaching" handed down from generation to generation. And it was concerning both the written and the "oral teaching" that the covenant at Sinai was concluded.

We approach the laws of the Bible through the interpretation and the wisdom of the Rabbis. Without their interpretation the text of the laws is often unintelligible. Thus Judaism is based upon a minimum of revelation and a maximum of interpretation, upon the will of God and upon the understanding of Israel. For that understanding we are dependent upon Israel's unwritten tradition. The prophets' inspirations and the sages' interpretations are equally important. There is a partnership of God and Israel in regard to both the world and the Torah: He created the earth and we till the soil; He gave us the text and we refine and complete it. "The Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah unto Israel like wheat from which to derive fine flour, or like flax from which to make a garment."³⁶

The Bible is a seed, God is the sun, but we are the soil. Every generation is expected to bring forth new understanding and new realization.

The word is the word of God, and its understanding He gave unto man. The source of authority is not the word as given in the text but Israel's understanding of the text. At Sinai we received both the word and the spirit to understand the word. The savants are heirs to the prophets; they determine and interpret the meaning of the word. There is much liberty and much power in the insights of the sages: they have the power to set aside a precept of the Torah

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when conditions require it. Here on earth, their opinion may overrule an opinion held in heaven.

Some of that original understanding and response of Israel was poured into words, conveyed from mouth to mouth, entrusted to writing, but much, of which words were only a reflection, remained unsaid, unwritten, a tradition transmitted from soul to soul, inherited like the power to love, and kept alive by constant communion with the Word, by studying it, by guarding it, by living it and by being ready to die for it. In the hands of many peoples it becomes a *book*; in the life of Israel it remained a *voice*, a Torah within the heart (Isaiah 51:7).

For Israel's understanding of the word was not cheaply or idyllically won. It was acquired at the price of a millennia of wrestling, of endurance and bitter ordeals of a stubborn people, of unparalleled martyrdom and self-sacrifice of men, women and children, of loyalty, love and constant study. What modern scholar could vie with the intuition of such a people? The Torah is not only our mother, it is "our life and the length of our days; we will meditate (on her words) day and night" (Evening liturgy).

Without our continuous striving for understanding, the Bible is like paper money without security. Yet such understanding requires austere discipline and can only be achieved in attachment and dedication, in retaining and reliving the original understanding as expressed by the prophets and the ancient sages.

There is always the danger of trying to interpret the Bible in terms of paganism. As there is *false prophecy*, there is *false understanding*. It is possible to commit murder in the name of the Torah; one may be a scoundrel and act within the letter of the law (Nahmanides). There has, indeed, been so much pious abuse that the Bible is often in need of being saved from the hands of its admirers.

THE ORAL TORAH WAS NEVER WRITTEN DOWN

For centuries the prohibition of writing down "the oral teaching" was regarded as a basic tenet. "Those who write down the halacha

are like those who burn the Torah."³⁷ He "who writes down the agada loses his share in the world to come."³⁸ Then the Rabbis decided to submit "the oral teaching" to the written form. In justification of the bold reform, they interpreted the verse in Psalms 119: 126 to mean: "There comes a time when you may abrogate the Torah in order to do the work of the Lord." Hence, the Rabbis maintained, it is better that one part of the Torah shall be abrogated than the whole Torah be forgotten.³⁹ The accumulation of the vast amount of learning, the scattering of Jewish communities, and the weakening of memory militated against the oral system.

Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk asked: How could the ancient Rabbis abolish the fundamental principle of Judaism, not to write down what is to be kept as an oral tradition, on the basis of a single verse in the book of Psalms? The truth is that the oral Torah was never written down. The meaning of the Torah has never been contained by books.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 27

The author intends to publish elsewhere a detailed study of what the principle of revelation meant in Jewish tradition.

¹ Compare the statement by Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, quoted in Rabbi Abraham Azulai, *Or Hachama*, Przemsyl, 1897, vol. II, p. 145d-146a.

² Maimonides discusses the second claim in his *Commentary* on the Mishnah, while in *The Guide of the Perplexed* he discusses the first claim.

³ "A tradition is current among our people that the day of the revelation on Mount Sinai was misty, cloudy, and a little rainy." Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Book III, ch. 9. Compare Rabbi Isaac Caro (a Spanish Talmudist and Bible commentator who flourished in the second half of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century. He was an uncle of Rabbi Joseph Caro), *Toldot Yizhak*, Amsterdam, 1708, p. 65a.

⁴ *Exodus Rabba*, 5, 9.

⁵ *Jerushalmi Makkot*, II, 31d.

⁶ *Genesis Rabba*, 17, 5.

⁷ It is equated with Wisdom, which says of itself, "The Lord created me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old," Proverbs 8:22. See *Sirach*, 1:4; *Wisdom of Solomon* 9:9. Compare Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. V, pp. 4 and 132f.

⁸ *Shevuot*, 5a.

⁹ Rabbi Yehuda Loew ben Bezalel (Maharal), *Derech Hayim*, Warsaw, 1833, p. 8d. See also above, p. 15.

¹⁰ Compare *Pesikta de Rabbi Kahana*, 4, ed. Buber, p. 39a and *Sanhedrin* 21b.

¹¹ Rashi, *Commentary* on *The Song of Songs* 1:2. See *Tanbuma*, Balak, 14; *Numbers Rabba*, 20, 20.

¹² Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rimonim*, XXI, 6; Korets, 1786, p. 165a.

¹³ Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, *Shne Luchos Haberit*, p. 59a.

¹⁴ Rabbi Abraham Azulai, *Hesed Leavraham*, mayan 2, nabar 12. In regard to the law of Deuteronomy 21:10-14, the Talmud remarks, "The Torah considered the fact of passion." *Kiddushin* 21b.

According to Maimonides, the sacrifices were included in the law because the people of that time would not have been able to dispense with the sacrificial form of worship to which they and all other peoples of that time were accustomed. *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Book III, 32. 46. This motivation is perhaps indicated in Leviticus 17:7, and expressly stated in *Leviticus Rabba* 22,5. see *Zohar*, vol. III, 224a. The sacrificial cult is not mentioned in the Decalogue. It was introduced only after the children of Israel worshiped the Golden Calf. See Abравanel, *Commentary* on Jeremiah 7:22, and Seforno, *Commentary*, introduction to Leviticus. See Zev Yaavets, *Toldot Israel*, vol. I, Berlin, 1925, pp. 154-160.

¹⁵ *Leshem Shevo Veablamab*, Pietrkov, 1911, vol. II, p. 305b.

¹⁶ *Hullin* 60b.

¹⁷ *Toameha Hayim Zabu*, Jerusalem, 1924, vol. III, p. 40.

¹⁸ *Ecclesiastes Rabba*, ad locum.

¹⁹ See *Temunah*, Koretz, 1784, pp. 27a, 30a-31a; Rabbi Moshe ben Joseph di Trani (1505-1585), *Bet Elohim*, Venice, 1576, p. 58b; Rabbi Abraham Azulai, *Hesed Leavraham*, mayan 2, nabar 11; Rabbi Gedaliah of Luninec, *Teshuot Hen*, in the name of the Baal Shem.

²⁰ *Sanhedrin*, 89a. The word *signon* is used in two senses, meaning both idea and expression. See Husik's remark in his edition of Albo's *Ikkarim*, III, p. 84.

²¹ Rabbi Samuel Edels, *Commentary to Sanhedrin* 89b.

²² The Decalogue is given in the Pentateuch in two versions (Exodus 20:2-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-18) that exhibit some variants. The Rabbis solved the difficulty by assuming that both versions were of identical divine origin, and were uttered miraculously at one and the same time (*Mechilta* to 20:8). Ibn Ezra, however, holds that these and many similar variants in the Bible are due to the fact that to Moses the meaning of revelation was essential rather than the word. "Know that the words are like bodies, and meanings like souls; and the body is a vessel for the soul. This is the reason why scholars . . . are careful about meanings but think nothing of changing or using different words if the meaning remains the same." Introduction to the Decalogue in his *Commentary* to Exodus 20; see his *Commentary* to Deuteronomy 5:5. Compare Ibn Adret, *Responsa*, 1, 12; Nahmanides, *Commentary* on Numbers 2:4 and on Genesis 1:4; Ibn Zimra, *Responsa*, III, 149; Shem Tov, *Commentary on The Guide of the Perplexed*, II, 29; Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi, *Tanya*, ch. 21.

²³ Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Ostrog, *Rav Yeivi* on Psalms 18. The idea is discussed by Rabbi Moshe Alshech, *Commentary* on Leviticus 9:2. According to the Rabbis, all prophets beheld a vision of God through a dim speculum, while Moses beheld a vision through a lucid speculum. The difference, according to Rashi, was that the prophets believed that they had seen God but did not, whereas Moses, who looked through a lucid speculum, knew that he did not see Him! *Yebamot*, 45b. See Joseph Albo, *Ikkarim*, part 3, 9.

- ²⁴ *Zohar*, vol. III, p. 52a.
²⁵ *Midrash Tehillim*, 119, 9, ed. Buber, p. 493.
²⁶ *Zohar*, vol. III, p. 152a.
²⁷ *Shabbat* 97a; *Song of Songs Rabba* 1,39. Compare *Shabbat* 89b; *Yebamot* 49b; *Baba Kamma* 38a; *Sanhedrin* 111b; *Midrash Tehillim* 7,1.3.
²⁸ *Tosefta Berachot* 3, 7.
²⁹ *Seder Eliahu Rabba*, ch. 4, ed. M. Friedmann, Vienna, 1902, p. 17.
³⁰ *Ecclesiastes Rabba*, 5,4.
³¹ *Leshem Shevo Veahlemah*, vol. II, p. 305b. See above, note 15.
³² Rabbi Mendel of Kotsk.
³³ *Midrash Tehillim* 3,1.
³⁴ *Midrash Tehillim* on 119:19.
³⁵ See I. Reicher, *Torat Harishonim*, Warsaw, 1926; S. Gandz, *The Dawn of Literature*, Osiris, vol. VII, 1939, p. 438f.
³⁶ *Seder Eliahu Zuta*, ch. 2, ed. Friedmann, p. 172.
³⁷ *Temurah*, 14b.
³⁸ *Jerushalmi Shabbat*, XVI, 1.
³⁹ *Temurah*, 14b; *Gittin*, 60a.

3. RESPONSE