

rated, and frightened by the knowledge. There are times when we want to shout it in the streets, to turn men on to the awareness that all of them are God. There are also times when we want to come back, to live in the world where man is man. In order to do this, we are even willing to pretend that man is man and God is God. But we know that this is a game; we cannot retract. Because we have the *hubris* to admit to ourselves that we have been there, we are doomed to live here with a boundless liberating joy that we fear to express, lest we be seen as madmen.

But even then we have a role to play. Our society suffers greatly from a lack of madmen.

Nikos Kazantzakis speaks of man's search for God as an ascent up a seemingly unassailable mountain. Men have been climbing for countless generations; occasionally one of them comes to face the summit. There are ledges and cliffs. The higher one goes, the greater the danger of falling. Our forefathers were experts at climbing the mountain. Kabbalists generally climbed slowly, deliberately, step after sure-footed step. They were equipped with road maps that had been tested and found good for centuries. Nearly every inch of the mountain was charted. If there occasionally was a slip-up, it was usually by one of those who tried to chart a bit of a new path for himself. The task was formidable: many tried, some fell, but a good number came near to their particular summits.

Today we no longer know how to read the road maps. In any case, they would do us little good. They were charted for hikers. We are driving up the mountain in a fast car, equipped with brightly flashing multicolored headlights. We will get there faster and more easily—if we get there at all.

Perhaps you will pray for us back in our village in the valley. Strange: up there, high on the slopes of the mountain, we seem to forget how to pray. . . .

After Itzik: Toward a Theology of Jewish Spirituality

by ARTHUR GREEN

[for H.L. & S.Z.]

Introduction I

Denizens of two worlds have never been happy creatures. Climbing half out of their own skins in an attempt to wholly enter one world or the other has always seemed to them artificial; the attempt at a personal wholeness based on an acceptance, on the other hand, of their dual status, or even a glorification of it, often strikes them as insufficiently real. So it is with the demons of Isaac Bashevis Singer: human in the nether world and demonic in the human world, at home in neither and nowhere at rest.

Such a creature, insofar as he seeks out the life of the spirit, is man. "Half from the upper realms, half from the lower . . ." not quite at home, we might add, in heaven or earth. The spiritual history of man can be read as nothing but a series of attempts at resolution of the internalized conflicts between worlds and life-styles above and below. Reconciliation of heaven and earth: the point where mys-

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tical union is personal integration. Yet instead, we try to opt for one or the other. Alas. Man's attempts both to become angel and to deny the angelic in himself may have occasioned great bales of cosmic laughter and an infinite flow of heavenly tears, but they have left us no less fragmented than before.

Once there was a moment of conversion, of knowing, of *da'at* in that most intimate sense that "above" and "below" were silly attempts at distinction, that God flows into man and man into God so fully that to try to pull them apart could only do violence to both. No, not a "moment of conversion"—many such moments, perhaps, and none of them quite conversionary. That indeed is our problem and the question with which we begin: Is conversion any longer possible for those who have so nearly been converted so often, and in whom there thus remains so little innocence?

Introduction II

"Open for me the gates of righteousness . . ." says the psalmist. "I come through them and praise the Lord." Standing at the gate, looking through to the other side. Peering into Wonderland. Waiting. Joseph K. before the Law. Open them *for* me.

Open them for yourself, damn you! Push! "What are you hollering at Me for?" God says to Moses. You think I open the gates for anyone? "Tell the children of Israel to get moving!"

. . . and sometimes it happens that a man's turning begins not on his own account. Rather he is awakened to the turning by an awesome Presence which God in His bounty brings to him . . . Now this Awe comes from Above, and therefore it cannot last forever. If it were indeed to last, that man's service would be only of that which comes

from God Himself. Thus he takes away that Awe which he had granted him, so that man will go build up his own love of God. Then his service will truly be of his own . . . This doesn't come to man easily; it's a matter of great strength and concentration over long periods of time. When a man seeks love in this way and doesn't find it, he may cry out to God to help him as he had before. Such a prayer is not answered. A man just has to work on it on his own . . ."

Thus far a voice from the eighteenth century.¹ That which you don't work out on your own, in a struggle that has to begin way down here in the world of ordinary weekday consciousness, somehow just isn't going to last. That doesn't mean the first moment (drug-induced or not) was any less real, but it does let you know that it can't become the replacement for down here religious struggle.

Struggle. Storm the gates. No, you don't have to: a gentle push will do. Now why don't we open them ourselves? If the gates are there before us, and we're standing so close we can even see how they open—and we've even looked through them—

Try to run . . . try to hide
Break on through to the other side!

We stand dumbstruck both before the gates and before the question. We remain afraid. At Sinai we said to Moses: "You go talk to that thing, man. You tell us what it says. We're not gettin' any closer . . ."

When I ask myself these days who we, Israel, are, I hear myself answering: "We are those who fled from Sinai."

Now that is really a bit of shorthand, a one part reduction of a two part statement: "We are those who were there at Sinai and who fled." (One who has not been there of course has no need to flee. He may be involved in some other flight and flatter himself by thinking that it is Sinai he flees, but his confusion can be seen and his error felt. Still, the myth of the faith-community retains its meaning: On some other plane *all* of us Israelites have been to Sinai and fled.) I would want to reintegrate the flight from Sinai into our spiritual history, from which it has been largely expunged. We generally choose to see ourselves as those to whom God spokè, as those who listened, those who agreed (perhaps the word is "acquiesced"). But that should not be all . . . we are also those who fled. This does not make us the accursed of God in any very particularistic sense; it simply makes us human. Restating firmly that at Sinai we were mere terrified mortals might give us a more complete and realistic spiritual self-image, one of less angelic perfection but one with which we might more readily identify: "We are those who stood at Sinai, who saw and heard, were scared out of our little minds (*mohin de qatnut*), and fled!"

This, you see, is why we are eternally Israel, those who wrestle with the Divine. Our faith is not one that hopes to reside in bliss, but rather one committed to movement and struggle. Committed and destined; I'd want to say both. Committed to struggle, because the ascent to the Endless is itself Endless² and we are constantly to see ourselves as climbing up Jacob's ladder, not satisfied to stand on *any* rung.³ And destined to struggle? Because we're always falling off and starting the ascent all over again. Falling off the ladder because we refuse to ascend (each rung is only strong enough to hold you for an instant) and because of our constant silly habit of looking down and contemplating flight.

We are Israel in that life in the Presence will always be

a struggle for us. The discovery of God comes to us as a constant surprise, almost a shock. For countless generations we chant: "the whole earth is full of his glory," yet each time we turn around and see the glory of God in a new place we shudder with a mixture of delight, fear, and astonishment. Our sense of wonder is always getting lost. The shallow rationalist bias creeps back in, sits tight and waits to be blasted sky-high again before he'll budge an inch. Something in us is constantly repeating the primal conflict of the Israelite Moses: "C'mon, stop wasting your time" the over-educated Jewish boy in him must have been saying. "A plain ordinary thornbush and a little desert heat. Optical illusion." But Moses is, after all, Moses, and there has to be a story. He turned aside to look. He stopped, and there was God. He looked for a minute, saw and heard, and then, like one who still half thought he wouldn't be able to stand it (or perhaps feared that he *would* be able to stand it?), he hid his face.

"You want to know what a *zaddik* is?" asks Reb Hayyim Haikl of Amdur. "We ordinary men need the hiding, we need to have God hide His light from us. The *zaddik* says "No!" to hiding and stares right into the sun!"⁴ Moses, *even Moses*, hid his face and said: "How about sending someone else?"

Brinkmanship, unspeakable risk, borderline madness of intensity and blindness of immersion—those are the things it takes to be a *zaddik*. Most of us Jews prefer to be *beynonim*, plain humans, ever living in the stream of our particular dialectical movement, confronting and hiding, moments of Presence followed in rapid succession by moments of dryness and despair. In other generations the cyclical motion was interpreted differently, but our particular version of it seems to run something like this: disbelief, seduction, wonder, living-in-the-Presence, terror, flight, disbelief, and so on and so forth. Each moment in the cycle is tyrannical and dogmatic: disbelief has no faith

in the rebirth of wonder, and in our moments of living in the Presence we are revolted by the cynicism and self-conscious secularism of our unbelieving periods. The twentieth-century *beynoni* lives as though bound to the cycle of wonder and doubt.

We do not seek liberation by means of breaking out of the cycle. Opting for either world, as we have said, can only lead to prolonging of fragmentation. We see spiritual ebb and flow, moments of absence and moments of Presence, as central to the human religious situation. Our desire is neither to deny nor to escape it, but rather to learn to live as religious human beings in our moments of spiritual ebb. What else can be done with the moment of disbelief in our cycle? If we are not to deny the cycle altogether, must we allow ourselves to ever be torn apart by shallow cynicisms that we should like to have transcended long ago? Can there be spiritual growth if there has to be constant return to such a coarse moment of ebb? Most basically: in viewing the ebb and flow of the Spirit's presence within us, can we step beyond conflict and see the thing as rhythm, as a rhythmic movement that brings some *excitement* to the spiritual life and inspiration to the "downs" as well as the "ups"?

Hasidic theological texts, which comprise the literature we have that is most attuned to the problems of spiritual quest, knew this problem well. *Razo wa-shov*, they called it. "Running back and forth." Man runs back and forth, in and out of the divine-Presence, and the Presence itself (*hiyyuth*) seems to be running back and forth, in and out of the human soul. In Hasidic terms, it seems to be largely the movement of the Spirit itself that creates the spiritual cycle. Ultimate conversion is not to be made easy for us. At the same time, the spiritual masters of the Hasidic tradition, perhaps partly through the very term *razo wa-shov*, which allowed them a theologization of the spiritual reality, were able to live with the cyclical movement

and continue to build. This, then, is what we seek to articulate: a contemporary theology of *razo wa-shov*.

There was a time when the appropriate geographical metaphor for our spiritual lives seemed to be one of isolated, widely separated peaks set in the midst of broad extended flatlands. The task we then set for ourselves was that of ascending the mountain with some measure of safety to bring down its secret, hoping thereby to give some light to the vast and empty world of the everyday. Then we were rather sure that we wanted to begin with the highs, that they were the paradigm of religious awareness after which the everyday was to be remodeled. If one will permit a rather simplistic reading of the tradition, a kind of *Shabbat* and weekday model, where one clearly knows which are the peaks and which are the valleys. The goal: "the world that is wholly *Shabbos*." But the humdrum world persists; the weekday simply doesn't want to become *Shabbos*! To make *Shabbos* the model for a spiritualized weekday is eschatological. In our schema it would mean a breaking out of the cycle, a radical spiritualism that would deny legitimacy to moments of *qatnut*, of spiritual ebb.

We do not always live in the glow of spiritual *Shabbos*. When we don't, we have to begin from below.⁵ There is no upper light flowing into us; we have only the world. The discovery of the Presence in the world below, in the very earthiness of the weekday, then becomes our task. This is the time of struggle, the time of *avodah* as active work in seeking out one's religious way *in the world*. We do not mean by this an indiscriminating embrace of the secular, which has come to characterize the religious stance of a good many contemporary Christians. They (like the kibbutzniks, as Rav Kuk would say) have good reason to be in rebellion against an anti-worldly spiritual-

ism. We mean rather a more profound fusion of the religious and the secular, one which can turn inward to a real spiritual life partly in order to nurture the outer life and one which labors with love in the secular world without granting it *ultimate* seriousness.

Religious work in the weekday world, as we would see it today, must proceed from that element within the Hasidic tradition which sought to deny the separability of matter and spirit.⁶ We are not interested in redeeming the spark from any earthly prison; we need rather to discover that all is spark. Nor do we seek to rejoice in the transparency or "illusion" of material reality.⁷ We do not experience ourselves or one another as body and soul, but as bodysoul; so too with matter and spirit. We seek our exultation in the spirit that can be known in the very flesh of the material world. "The breath of all life . . . and the spirit of all flesh."

This is the quality of *razo wa-shov* that we are after, that which is most faithful both to our own perceptions and to the ongoing specific mission of Israel in the history of Western spirituality. We are Israel in that we know and insist upon the oneness of matter and spirit.⁸ Sometimes we are convinced of the utter folly of such a position with its inherent optimism, yet we will not let go. Sometimes all of Jewish history seems to us one vast plot by which the nations of the world hope to convert us to their otherworldliness, making it more than painfully obvious that salvation is not to be found in this life, that the true realm of the spirit must be elsewhere. No avail; we dig in and hold on to earth. Our *razo wa-shov* is not to be seen only as a ladder; in moments of stress the picture is turned on its side and the Jew is seen scurrying back and forth across a tightrope stretched out between matter and spirit, desperately patching things up at one end or the other. Even when the link appears to be so terribly tenuous, we dare not pronounce it broken.

The transformation of the ebb into a moment of reli-

gious legitimacy may take countless forms. The *via activa* as one side of the spiritual life, recognizing itself as not more and no less than that, may then rightly seek its fulfillment through social concern and political involvement. The kinds of political stances that would emerge as expressions of the spiritual as we see it can of course not be specifically pre-determined, but would have a good deal to do both with the maximizing of human freedom and the pursuit of peace. For others the active life could involve teaching, involvement in the personal and religious growth of others: the special concern we develop for student-comrades. Still others might find their fulfillment in the redemptive robustness of physical labor, particularly such as would involve them with the realms of animal and plant.

Through all of this, the maintaining of religious perspective will be essential, and will be an uphill struggle. If the Presence is to be rediscovered in the weekday world, demands will be made upon us that will radically re-orient the direction of our lives—demands of discipline of lifestyle, of ritual patterns and interpersonal openness which hardly thrive in the context of the mechanized, isolated, and frightened lives of the American middle class. The work of redemption, no matter what form it takes, will require new and intimate communities of support, which live outside current standards of achievement and success. We would do well to look at the vows of poverty found in monastic life, though seeking to read them somewhat more broadly than has been done in the past.

Such a religious path, if not watered down to absurdity, will speak only to very few. That is for the good. Ours is not an age in which popular spiritual movements could escape terrible perversion. Just as there are moments of ebb and flow in the individual's spiritual life, there at times appear to be historical periods of ebb and flow in mankind's general awareness of the Spirit. If we are to survive this great age of spiritual ebb, it will only be by the crea-

tion of small but terribly significant religious elites who can plant the seed for what may be some more fruitful future generation.

Even for the few, the task remains formidable. Our membership cards in the Western intellectual community are parted with only with the greatest difficulty. We cannot proclaim ourselves to be traditional believers; it is hoped that we are too honest even to try to talk ourselves into that position. The fragmentation of truth is part of our legacy as twentieth-century men. Yet maintaining our roots in the current intellectual milieu while trying to overcome cynicism and detachment is easier said than done. We are calling for nothing less than the re-mythologization of our lives. While not abandoning our outsiders' knowledge of the role of myth and the way it functions, we must be able to take the leap of re-entering the world of myth, in which the constant confrontation with sacred Presence is of the very fabric of daily existence. Our *razo wa-shov* can become a rhythmic rather than a fragmenting process only as we begin to take ourselves seriously as human beings of great spiritual strength. Our weakness of soul is less real than we would sometimes like to believe. Such seriousness and renewed confrontation with our inner strength will come to us as we rediscover who we are, as we claim our place as members (albeit in our own ways) of the eternal faith-community of Israel.

We have always fled because the task is too great, the burden too much to bear. When we heard the Voice say "a kingdom of priests" even before the theophany itself, we knew it was time to run away. Again, in the symbolic person of Jonah, when we saw that it meant transforming *the world*, we turned and fled. Who, us? *The world*? Madness. And so the ghetto, or at least our half of that nefarious bargain. And who is to say that transforming the self is any less a challenge than transforming the world?

Sinai is eternal, its demand infinite, and we want to reject both madness and flight. In learning to live with the rhythm of our inner tides there may be a path that brings some peace. Not the stillness-peace of a lake or a pond: those we strugglers can never attain (and thus we reject them)! Rather the peace of the waters of Ocean, ever churning, smashing, rising, and falling—finding their peace in the regular breathing of tides, seeing themselves and their beauty both in ebb and in flow.

An end to flight?

Who is the man who can stand to live with his own holiness? Perhaps Messiah. Maybe that's what he's all about . . .

NOTES

NOTE: The student of Hasidism will note that much of this article can be taken as a re-reading of Hasidic sources through twentieth-century eyes. The following are some *suggested* points of departure.

1. Benjamin of Zalozhitz, *Ahavat dodim*, Lemberg: 1797, p. 61a. Cf. Rivka Schatz, *Ha-hasidut ke-mistiqa*, p. 117.
2. *Liqute yeqarim*, New York: 1963, p. 6a.
3. *Degel mahaneh Efraim (wa-yeze)*, Jerusalem: 1963, p. 40.
4. *Hayyim wa-hesed*, Warsaw: 1891, p. 7a.
5. The appropriate Kabbalistic term here is *ha'alat mayyin nuqvin*, the raising up of the "feminine waters," the waters from below which man raises up (as the new manna, one source would have it) to sustain the heavens. On the complicated relationship between *Shabbat* and week-day religious consciousness, cf. *Sefat emet (ki tisa*, 1871), v. 2, p. 99a.
6. Seemingly more to be found in such later Polish traditions as those of Izhbitz and Ger.
7. This dominates in early "classical" Hasidism, particularly in the school of Mezritch. Cf. Schatz, *op. cit.* chapter 3 and Hillel Zeitlin, *Be-pardes ha-hasidut weha-qabalah*, chapter 1.
8. Desideratum: A Judaism that allows, even accentuates, its mystical self-understanding, while at the same time radically denying the Hellenistic/Gnostic body-soul and matter-spirit dualisms which have so deeply infected us. Handle carefully and avoid Frankism.

New Metaphors: Jewish Prayer and Our Situation*

by ALAN L. MINTZ

* *The question of prayer has in the past elicited two equally unsatisfying approaches in Jewish thought: either dry, scientific study of the historical development of the text of the prayer-book, or the unwitting mystification of the experience of prayer in romantic effusions of theologians. The work of a happy deviant, Rav Kook, has yet to be made intelligible to Western readers.*

Alan Mintz, in the following article, attempts to establish a middle ground by asking what the experience of Jewish prayer should yield, and how the language of the siddur (prayer-book) might ideally function in this way. The emphasis is placed not upon radical surgery performed on the text, nor upon the wholesale inclusion of outside materials into the service; hope is placed rather in the possibility of investing the words of the liturgy with personal and empirical meaning, as well as the ability to think in ways which are symbolic and metaphorical rather than confined and literal.

It is a very tenuous assumption that anyone still wants to talk about prayer. Is it on anyone's list of concerns? Does anyone really care? In reality, unless we have to defend prayer to students or non-Jews, we let the subject drop and be swept under the carpet. It has ceased being even problematical. In opposition to this trend, this article makes the claim that although the subject is enormously difficult and the solving of its problems remote, prayer is still worth considering even if our efforts are only "experiments in thought." To initiate critical exploration of prayer by complaining and lambasting would be self-indulgent in addition to echoing what we already know. Discussing prayer has to be a *tabula rasa* affair; we have to disregard

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