

tradicts what the two of you have come to mean to one another. Even then we may experience the extraordinary resilience of relationships, for they often survive such blows. All that can be true of our relationship with God and help us live with the evils that come our way. Thus, as some feminist theologians have pointed out, there were many small acts of human kindness in the Holocaust death camps and they testified to the presence of God in that black human hell. So today, in less extreme times, cultivating the nearness of God is once again as much an “answer” to the problem of evil as people are ever likely to find.

Yet this Job-ian turn to relationship has its own limitations: it calls for great faithfulness precisely when our relationship appears shattered. And because it often is, Judaism countenances divorce—though not from God. It is also true that waiting for signs that our old intimacy with God is reviving may make us passive just when there may be much that human initiative could usefully accomplish.

Facing all these suggestions, each with its piece of the truth, many a Jew has built an eclectic mix of all or parts of them, relying on whichever one or combination of these traditions enables them to survive their present trauma in Jewish faithfulness. Despite their wounded piety they find a way to live by the truth of Rabbi Yannai’s dictum, “It is not in our power to explain...”

A Neo-Hasidic Life: Credo and Reflections

Arthur Green

Personal Introduction

When I turned seventy years old earlier this year, I did not realize how fully the occasion would turn into a time of reflection. While I have every hope that my productive years are far from over, there is no question that reaching this big number tells one that the final phase of life has begun. There is no more saying “late middle age” or “sixty is the new forty.” The Psalmist’s words, however tempered by medical advances, still resound loudly in the ears of the septuagenarian. *Yemey shenoteno shiv'im shanah*. Anything more is surely *hesed hinam*, a pure divine gift.

Although my years have been marked by a number of shifts of direction in both my writing and my professional roles, in the perspective of hindsight I now realize they constitute a single project, one that has taken a number of forms but nevertheless bears a consistent message. Since Neil Gillman has known me almost since the beginning of this half-century journey, and since we share a commitment to the personal nature of the theological enterprise, I thought I would offer my comments here in a more personal tone than is usual in *Festschriften*.

I was twenty years old, a senior in college, when I read Hillel Zeitlin’s essay *Yesodot ha-Hasidut*, “The Fundamentals of Hasidism.”¹ I no longer remember whether it was Zalman Schachter or Alexander Altmann who put it in my hands, but they are the most likely candidates. To say that I fell in love is something of an understatement. I realized then and there that his words were giving expression to a deep truth that my heart already knew, and that this would be my religious language throughout my life. I promised myself (and Zeitlin) that I would trans-

¹ Originally published Warsaw, 1910, and included in the posthumous volume *Be-Fardes ha-Hasidut ve-ha-Kabbalah* (Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1960).

late this essay into English, a promise I fulfilled only half a century later.²

Although I did not yet have the term in my vocabulary, I have ever since then been a committed Neo-Hasidic Jew. Zeitlin joined with Buber, Heschel, and Schachter, whose writings and teachings saved Judaism for me, much as the Hasidic Rabbi Pinhas of Korzec once said that the Zohar had “kept him a Jew.” Collectively, they moved me toward a rather defined faith-stance (I intentionally choose this term over “theology”), from which I have wavered rather little. Zeitlin was the most important, and thus remains my *rebbe*, because he showed me the abstract truth that lay behind the mask of personalist God-language, which was already problematic for me. He led me to a search within the primary texts of Hasidism, one that has never ceased. My purpose here is to articulate the nature of that quest and to flesh out in specifics my lifelong project of bringing to birth a Neo-Hasidic Judaism that would have broad appeal to contemporary seekers. These seekers include many present and future rabbis, with whom I have tried to share my love of the original Hasidic sources, and who I hope will open this path to others. But I write also for the many spiritually serious Jews (and others) of my and more recent generations who have turned away from Judaism and toward Eastern spiritual paths in despair of finding anything useable in our own spiritual patrimony. My heart goes out especially to this latter group, and I constantly have them in mind as I write. It is for them (though I daresay for myself as well, since I am spiritually so close to them!) that I have sought to use Hasidism in creating what I sometimes call a “seeker-friendly” Judaism.

Elsewhere, most recently in *Radical Judaism*,³ I have outlined a theological position that takes as its departure-point an evolutionary approach, both to human origins and to the origins and development of religion. I take for granted that as the twentieth century ran its course, the two great century-long battles fought by traditional religious forces, one against Darwin and the other against Biblical criticism, have both been decided, neither coming out the way those forces might have

² It will appear in my volume of Zeitlin’s writings called *Hasidic Spirituality for a New Era*, to be published by Paulist Press in the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series in 2012.

³ *Radical Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

hoped. In articulating a religious language that will speak to twenty-first-century people, we have to leave both of those struggles behind us, accept their conclusions on the scientific/scholarly plane, but then seek out a way of expressing our sacred truth that reaches beyond them. In the course of doing this, I make frequent recourse to the Kabbalistic and Hasidic traditions, since I believe they provide tools that make such a transition possible. Here I would like to work in the opposite direction. Rather than beginning situationally with the present, I want to lay out what I consider to be the key principles of Neo-Hasidism. I offer both original text and commentary, following a format occasionally found in the Kabbalistic corpus. The comments will be historical, theological, and personal, but always with the intent of drawing forth their implications for our contemporary religious situation.

Zeitlin’s introduction to Hasidic thought was published just over a century ago. A bit later he published an “interview” with himself in which he described the new Hasidism he sought to create in interwar Poland, emphasizing its continuities with and differences from the old.⁴ He also wrote fourteen admonitions for members of his intended community, Yavneh, a sort of Neo-Hasidic *hanhagot*. Although there is no text called a “credo,” one can certainly surmise one from a reading of these in tandem. (All are included in the volume of Zeitlin’s writings I have just edited.) Schachter wrote something called “A Modern Hasid’s Credo” back in the 1950s, which formed the basis for many of his later writings.⁵ Here is mine, in the shortest form to which I am able to reduce it, followed by my commentary. It is very much a personal statement, but one that I hope will be useful to others as well.

A Neo-Hasidic Credo

1. There is only One. All exists within what we humans call the mind of God, where Being is a simple, undifferentiated whole. Because God is beyond time, that reality has never changed. Our evolving, ever-changing cosmos and the absolute stasis of Being are two faces of the same One. Our seeming existence as individuals, like all of physical reality, is the

⁴ “*Hasidut shele-’atid la-vo*,” in *Sifran shel Yehidim* (Warsaw: 1928).

⁵ Published in *Varieties of Jewish Belief*, ed. Ira Eisenstein (New York: Reconstructionist Press, 1966).

result of *tsimtsum*, a contraction or de-intensification of divine presence so that our minds can encounter it and yet continue to see ourselves as separate beings, in order to fulfill our worldly task. In ultimate reality, however, that separate existence is mostly illusion. "God is one" means that we are all one.

2. God's presence (*shekhinah*) underlies, surrounds, and fills all of existence. The encounter with this presence is intoxicating and transformative, the true stuff of religious experience. "Serving God," or worship in its fullest sense, means living in response to that presence. In our daily consciousness, however, divinity is fragmented; we perceive *shekhinah* in an "exilic" or unwhole state. Sparks of divine light are scattered and hidden everywhere. Our task is to seek out and discover those sparks, even in the most unlikely places, in order to raise them up and re-join them to their Source. This work of redemption brings joy to *shekhinah* and to us as we re-affirm the divine and cosmic unity.

3. That joyous service of God is the purpose of human existence. God delights in each creature, in every single distinctive form taken by existence. But we human beings occupy a unique role in the hierarchy of being, having the capacity for awareness of the larger picture and an inbuilt striving for meaning-making. We are called upon to develop that awareness to our fullest ability and to live our lives in response to that awareness, each of us thus becoming a unique image of God.

4. "God needs to be served in every way."⁶ All of life is an opportunity for discovering and responding to the divine presence. The way we relate to every creature is a mirror of our devotion to our single Creator. Openheartedness, generosity, fairness, and humility are key virtues of the religious life. Moral courage, honesty, and integrity are also values never to be ignored.

5. The essence of our religious life lies in the deep inward glance, a commitment to a vision of spiritual intensity and attachment to the One. Outer deeds are important; ritual commandments are there to be fulfilled. They are the tools our tradition gives us to achieve and maintain awareness. But they are to be seen as means rather than as ends,

⁶ *Tsava'at RYVaSH* (Brooklyn: *Otsar ha-Hasidut*, 1975), #3.

as vessels to contain the divine light that floods the soul or as concrete embodiments of the heart's inward quest.

6. Our human task begins with the uplifting and transforming of our physical and emotional selves to become ever more perfect vehicles for God's service. This process begins with the key devotional pair of love and awe, which together lead us to our sense of the holy. Care for the body, our own and others', as God's handiwork is also a vital part of our worldly task.

7. The deeper look at reality should put us at odds with the superficial values of the consumerist and overly individualist society amid which we live. Being, unlike our Hasidic ancestors, citizens of a free society, we can and must take a critical stance toward all that we regard as unjust or degrading in our general culture. Caring for others, our fellow-limbs on the single Adamic body or Tree of Life, is the first way we express our love of God. It is in this that we are tested, both as individuals and societies. Without seeking to impose our views on others, we envision a Jewish community that speaks out with a strong moral voice.

8. The above principles all flow directly from an expansive Hasidic reading of Torah, classical Jewish teachings. We live in an abiding and covenanted love relationship to Torah. That means the text, "written Torah," and the whole of the oral tradition, including our own interpretive voices. We are not literalists about Torah as revelation, but we know that our people have mined endless veins of wisdom and holiness from within that text, and we continue on that path, adding new methods to the old. The whole process is sacred to us.

9. We are Jews. We love our people, past, present, and future. We care that our people, bearers of a great spiritual legacy and also a great burden of suffering and persecution, survive and carry our traditions forward. We want this to happen in a creative and openhearted way, and we devote ourselves to that effort. As Jewish seekers, we have a special connection to Abraham our Father, who followed the voice and set off on a journey that we still consider unfinished.

10. Our world suffers from a great imbalance of energy between the typically "male" and "female" energies. Neo-Hasidism needs to be shaped

by the voices of women alongside men, as full participants in every aspect of its emergence. We welcome devotion to the one God through the channels of *shekhinah* and *binah*, God as saving and protecting Mother.

11. Hasidism at its best and worst is built around the figure of the *tsaddik*, a charismatic holy man blessed by God and capable of transmitting divine blessing. We too recognize that there are gifted spiritual teachers in our world and we thank God for their presence and our ability to learn from them. But we live in an age that is rightly suspicious of such figures, having seen charisma used in sometimes horrific ways. We therefore underscore the Hasidic teaching that each person has his/her own path to walk and truth to discover. We encourage spiritual independence and responsibility.

12. Hasidism, like Judaism itself, believes in community. The sense of *hevrayyah* or fellowship among followers of a particular path is one of the greatest tools it offers for spiritual growth. Cultivating spiritual friendships that allow you to talk through your own struggles and the obstacles you find in your path, as well as developing an ear to listen well to the struggles of others, is one of the great gifts to be learned from the Hasidic tradition.

13. We recognize that Torah is our people's unique language for expressing an ancient and universal truth, one that reaches beyond all boundaries of religious tradition, ethnic community, or symbolic language. As heirs to a precious and much-maligned legacy, we are committed to preserving our ancient way of life in full richness of expression, within the bounds of our contemporary ethical beliefs. But we do not pose it as exclusive truth. The old Hasidism limited all of its teachings to Jews, believing that we alone had the capacity to truly serve God, and that Judaism was the only revealed path toward such service. Thankfully we live in a different era of the relationship of faiths to one another. We happily join with all others who seek, each in our own way, to realize these sacred truths, while admitting in collective humility that none of our languages embodies truth in its fullness.⁷

⁷ The number thirteen was not intentional. In fact I tried to avoid it, but failed. I take it as parallel to the thirteen *middot ha-rah'amim*, qualities of compassion, and thus ask the reader to judge its author with mercy.

Commentary

1. *There is only One. All exists within what we humans call the mind of God, where Being is a simple, undifferentiated whole. Because God is beyond time, that reality has never changed.*

The essential faith-claim is that being is one. This is the way I understand the daily proclamation of *shema' yisra'el*, the core of my Jewish liturgical practice. Note that I do not say that all being "originates" within God, as though I were offering an account of creation: it was first there, then it emerged from there. I do not believe that change has ever happened. "You are He until the world was created; You are He since the world was created,"⁸ i.e. unchanged. The language we speak in explaining "creation" may sound temporal, but that is only because we are telling a story. Our existence as one, within God, is a permanent condition, an underlying truth. We still exist "in the mind of God."

It is that simple wholeness of being that we call Y-H-W-H or Being. The capitalization (possible only in English, not in Hebrew, of course) indicates that we revere it, that we accept Being as an object of worship. We fall before its majesty, its mystery, including both its life-giving and its destructive power, as did Job. *In doing so, we give to it the highest gift we humans can offer: we personify it; we give to Being of our most precious humanity, enabling ourselves to address it as atah, "Thou," to render it not only object of veneration, but subject of prayer.*

I recognize that a phrase like "the mind of God" is the beginning of anthropomorphism; hence the qualification. What lies behind it is the Kabbalistic *hokhmah*, the font of existence in which all being is fully present in a not yet differentiated state. *Hokhmah* is, for the Hasidic sources, the first of the ten *sefirot*, the stages of divine self-manifestation. It is also described as *ayin* or "nothingness," meaning that no specified identity is yet present in it.⁹ Like all of the ten *sefirot* of the Kabbalists, *hokhmah* is transcendent to both space and time, though it may be depicted in metaphors that derive from both.

⁸ From the daily morning service.

⁹ This identification of *hokhmah* and *ayin* is a specifically Hasidic feature, diverging from most earlier Kabbalistic sources that identified *ayin* with *keter* and saw *hokhmah* as deriving from it.

“*God is one*” means that we are one.

This is *sod kerī’at shema’*. The rest is commentary. I have elsewhere¹⁰ quoted the comment of the *Sefat Emet* on this, a completely unequivocal statement of *unio mystica* at the heart of Hasidism. This is where I depart most clearly from Heschel, who was strongly committed to theological personalism. You might say that we choose to read different parts of the *Maggid* of Mezritch. I (like Zeitlin) am mostly attracted to the abstract theology of early Hasidism; Heschel preferred the affectionate God-as-Father language that fills the *Maggid*’s parables.¹¹

Our existence as individuals, like all of physical reality, is the result of tsimtsum, a contraction or de-intensification of divine presence so that our minds can encounter it and yet continue to see ourselves as separate beings, in order to fulfill our worldly task. In ultimate reality, however, that separate existence is mostly illusion.

This non-literalist reading of *tsimtsum* has its origins in the seventeenth and eighteenth century debates about how to understand the Lurianic myth. It was adopted by the early Hasidic masters as a key part of their mystical self-understanding.¹² It may be seen as a mystical parallel to Kant’s *Prolegomenon*: the mind by definition cannot know or make claims about that which lies beyond its scope. We live in a mental universe shaped by individual consciousness and self-awareness. That is the way the human mind is fashioned. (The old Hasidic language would say, of course, “that is in the way God in His wisdom created us.” I am not averse to such language, but want to avoid it here in order to lessen confusion.)

But how then do I dare to make the prior statement that all existence is one in the mind of God? Does not *tsimtsum* make it impossible for me to know or assert such a thing? Here again I need recourse to Kabbalistic language. *Da’at*, best translated as “mind” or “awareness,” indeed resides within the realm of *tsimtsum*, the reduced consciousness of our ordinary mental self. But human beings are capable of insight that comes from

¹⁰ See *The Language of Truth* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1998), or *These Are the Words* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 1999; new edition 2012).

¹¹ I am grateful to Shai Held for helping me to formulate this distinction.

¹² A very readable treatment of this debate is offered by Louis Jacobs in *Seeker of Unity* (New York: Basic Books, 1966), 49ff.

a more profound realm of existence (or a deeper, pre-conscious level of mental activity). It is called *binah*, as in the phrase *ha-lev mevin*, “understanding of the heart.”¹³ Such insight, often coming in brief flashes and resistant to expression in the prose of *da’at*’s language, is the transcendent core of religious experience, leading us to an awareness that goes beyond the constricted consciousness within which we mortals are both blessed and cursed to live our daily lives. Religious teaching, often best encapsulated in the multivocality of myth, originates in that deeper level of the mind. Religious experiences, including but not limited to such flashes of deep intuition, are the primary data around which theology is to be shaped.

2. God’s presence (shekhinah) underlies, surrounds, and embraces all of existence. The encounter with this presence is intoxicating and transformative, the true stuff of religious experience.

This is the other, and larger, part of religious experience. It is the sense of divine immanence, an awareness that all of being shimmers with an inner glow that marks it as fraught with sacred character. It was well known to the Psalmist and is present in the works of all great religious poets (Rumi, Whitman, and Tagore come to mind, along with a host of others).

Calling this aura of holiness *shekhinah* requires a bit of historical footnoting. The term is first used in early rabbinic Hebrew much as *ka-vod* (“glory”) is used in the Hebrew Bible, a euphemistic way of referring to God as present in the world, where use of the term Y-H-W-H or even *elohim* (the generic Hebrew word for “God”) would somehow diminish divine transcendence. In Kabbalistic parlance, *shekhinah* took on a specifically feminine characteristic, serving as the mate to the blessed Holy One in the *zivvuga qaddisha* or sacred coupling that constituted divine wholeness. As this took place, *shekhinah* came to be seen as a cosmic entity or hypostasis, somehow separate from God but separate from the world as well. Indeed, the Kabbalistic *shekhinah*, as I have sought to

¹³ I have in mind the passage from *Patah Eliyahu*, the passage from *Tikkuney Zohar* printed in Sephardic prayerbooks as a daily credo, and recited by *hasidim* prior to *Kabbalat Shabbat*. Zeitlin commented on this text; reprinted in *Be-Fardes*, 147ff. This too was among my earliest readings in Kabbalah.

show elsewhere,¹⁴ is precisely an intermediary between the upper and lower worlds.

Not so in Hasidism. The Maggid and his disciples go back to the insistence that *shekhinah ba-tahtonim mamash*, that the divine presence truly infuses the lower, corporeal world. This means that the classic western division between matter and spirit, reaching back to Plato, is misguided; the physical world itself is filled with spiritual energy, which alone animates it. Martin Buber wrote that he loved Hasidism because it was the only western mysticism untinged by the Gnostic spirit. Of course, as Scholem has insisted, one has to read the Hasidic sources quite selectively to maintain this view, but it is fair to say that there are some texts that proclaim it clearly. They love the old rabbinic formula “He is the place of the world, but the world is not His place,”¹⁵ which they take as implying that this world is totally contained within *shekhinah*, but that God also exists beyond, in unknown ways. That means that *yihud kudsha brikh hu u-shekhintey*, the unification of primal “male” and “female” within God, is in effect the union of upper and lower worlds, the utter infusion of matter with spirit. No wonder it is intoxicating and transformative! (“Intoxicating,” by the way, is a translation of the *Zohar*’s *itbassim*, from the *bosem* of the perfumes of Eden, wafting through the verses of the Song of Songs, not the coarse intoxication of Purim and the vodka bottle.)

“*Serving God,*” or worship in its fullest sense, means living in response to that presence.

The notion of service, so essential to the devotional life in any tradition, is hard for us modern westerners to swallow. We are too afraid of the loss of both ego and freedom to see ourselves as servants. This is part of the struggle to be a religious person in our era. “Responsiveness” may help in that acceptance process. We stand in love and awe before the greatness of God (I will not argue if you call it “the magnificence of existence”), and feel ourselves called upon to respond by living a life of service. This is how we can mean *ana ‘avda de-kudsha brikh hu*, “I am the servant of the blessed holy ONE.”

¹⁴ “Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs” in *AJS Review* 26:1 (2002): 1-52.

¹⁵ Bereshit Rabbah 68:10.

In our daily consciousness, however, divinity is fragmented; we perceive shekhinah in an “exilic” or unwhole state. Sparks of divine light are scattered and hidden everywhere.

This is our human, all-too-human, situation. We live most of our lives with ordinary, unexpanded consciousness, *mohin de-katnut*. We may have glimpses into the divine fullness in rare flashes of insight: beauties of nature, great love, great loss, and other transcendent moments in our lives briefly open the *haloney raki’a*, windows of heaven, and we see how much we are usually missing. But how do we build a life around these moments? Can we fashion a sustained and sustaining vision out of such brief and occasional glimpses?

“Both the whole and the broken tablets were placed in the ark,”¹⁶ the Talmud tells us. I like to think that the broken tablets were placed there for our generation, a time when whole tablets have ceased to function. That applies to any set of whole tablets. Orthodox Freudianism or Marxism are just as alien to our age as is Orthodox Judaism; there is no grand system of truth that works for us, whether you are to look up the “right” answers in the *Little Red Book* or the *Kitsur Shulhan ‘Arukh*. We rather rejoice in discovering the fragments and fitting them together—each of us in a unique way—to fashion “our” truth. This does not have to lead to solipsism or chaos, as some fear. As in all ages, the sacred process requires trust in God.

Awareness of exile as the human condition is one of the great contributions of Judaism to civilization. There is nothing more eerily prescient about our tradition than the fact that we bore a notion of exile from Eden as the essential human situation centuries long before historical exile was to become the dominant and formative experience of Jewish life. The Hasidic masters, building on earlier developments, understood this chiefly as an exile of the mind.¹⁷ We are too deeply alienated from God and our own souls to be regularly aware of the ever-presence of the One in and around us. Egyptian bondage was “awareness in exile;” redemption from *mitsrayim* was release from the *metsar yam*, the “narrow

¹⁶ B. Berakhot 8b. Of course Neil Gillman’s own book, *Sacred Fragments*, is named after this legend.

¹⁷ Among many other sources, see the classic formulation in Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl’s *Me’or Eynayim, shemot*.

straits” in which we did not have the breadth-perception to get beyond our inner *katnut* or exilic mind.

This notion of the mind-in-exile appears again in twentieth century literature, most often associated with figures like Kafka, Agnon, and Borges. We moderns also feel ourselves cut off from the deeper well-springs of an inner reality that we somehow know to exist.¹⁸ Perhaps that is why the longing to reclaim ancient sources of inner wisdom has attracted so many of the best minds of the past century, stretching from the generation of Zeitlin and Buber (as well as Tolstoy and Hesse) down to seekers of our own day.

Our task is to seek out and discover those sparks, even in the most unlikely places, in order to raise them up and re-join them to their Source.

Surely this is a significant part of what has made Hasidism so attractive, both in its eighteenth-century form and in this Neo-Hasidic garb. There is a sense of spiritual adventure, in which one is ever seeking out the sparks, ever involved in that work of uplifting and transformation. In this sense I find Hasidism to be a remarkably modern, romantic religious movement, and that has much to do with my original attraction to it. Life is depicted as a lifelong quest, filled with struggles to find, uplift, and redeem fallen bits of the single divine Self. When you add the phrase *even in the most unlikely places*, the drama is pitched to a high point, the journey becomes fraught with danger. Indeed it is. I know from my own failures.

For us, living as we do in such a “secular” culture, the task is greater than ever. We have to raise up sparks not only from amid the conversation with the peasant in the marketplace, as the Ba'al Shem Tov taught, but from off the computer and television screens, filled with everything from blatant pornography to the less openly pornographic, but equally distressing, worldviews created by both Hollywood and Wall Street.

¹⁸ Erich Heller's *The Disinherited Mind* was “on the reading list” during my undergraduate years at Brandeis, where all my key teachers were themselves exiles. Especially formative in my own thinking was Nahum Glatzer's essay “Franz Kafka and the Tree of Knowledge,” in *Between East and West*, edited by A. Altman (London: East and West Library, 1958).

3. *This work of redemption brings joy to shekhinah and to us as we reaffirm the divine and cosmic unity ... That joyous service of God is the purpose of human existence. God delights in each creature, in every single distinctive form taken by existence.*

This is probably my most audacious claim, one that I take directly from the early Hasidic sources. How do we dare make it? I can know what gives me pleasure, or what pleases those around me. But “the *shekhinah* takes pleasure?” “God delights?” What do I mean?

Of course, such language exists in the realm of *poesis* rather than that of scientific discourse. This is the point where Gillman dismissed Heschel as poet rather than philosopher, or became annoyed by Heschel's insistence that such poetic assertion indeed has truth-value, or is philosophy. Here I take up the cudgels for my teacher, agreeing that the traditions of *philosophia* have indeed been read too narrowly in recent generations, and that the “love of wisdom” needs to be restored and made whole again by the admission of categories of human experience that come from levels of mind other than that of logic and provability. Our western encounter with the philosophies of the east is all about this, and I believe that is the most important frontier to be crossed in the development of our self-understanding and humanity, one we indeed need most urgently to approach. The future of theology will have much to do both with this encounter and with growing awareness of the complexity of consciousness. This will be helped by progress in the realm of brain science, but should not be reduced to it.

The western intellectual tradition fought a necessary but terrible battle to free itself from ecclesiastical domination. The scientific advance of the past several centuries would not have been possible without that liberation. The way it succeeded in that fight was through establishing a new high altar of objectivity, one that (in unacknowledged paradox) could only be approached by maintaining critical distance. This has led to a bifurcation between poetic insight and philosophic truth, separating the acquisition of knowledge and the quest for wisdom. This is part of why philosophies originating in the East, where that battle did not take place in the same way, have been so attractive.

Having said that, the assertion of divine delight is a return to the Psalmist's insight. A glimpse of beatific vision is part of the religious

mindset, including a sense that the fullness and radiance of such vision is not the mind's alone. The vision may present itself as representing an Edenic past or a glorious, not yet disclosed, future. It may be what the Zohar identifies as *'olam ha-ba'*, a world that is always "coming," but ever remains just a step beyond our current grasp. This window into divine joy is humbling; the greatest exultation I can feel is but its palest shadow.

So the insight that comes from expanded mind (*mohin de-gadlut*) is at once intellectual and emotional, transformative in both of those realms, though its Source lies beyond them. The truth of which it speaks is that of a universal Self that radiates its light throughout the world. That light can penetrate every human mind that is able to free itself from its *kelipot*, its self-generated defensive blinders. The light that shines through those cracks in the wall speaks of *delight* and comes to *enlighten*.

But we human beings occupy a unique role in the hierarchy of being, having the capacity for awareness of the larger picture and an inbuilt striving for meaning-making. We are called upon to develop that awareness to our fullest ability and to live our lives in response to that awareness and its call.

The shining light, the calling voice—they are one and the same. The sense of religious call does not stand or fall with the personified Caller. The voice sings out to us from within the folds of the earth—*mi-kenaf ha-arets zemirot sham'anu*¹⁹—as much as it does from the highest heavens. It may indeed manifest itself in song or in verse or in the thundering cry of the Biblical prophets. The important thing is that it makes a claim on us and our lives. Awareness of the larger picture takes us back to Job's hearing "Where were you when I laid the foundations of earth?"

We become human when we begin to see beyond the moment, beyond the fulfillment of our immediate creaturely needs. Even though an old prayer tells us that "man is no better than the beasts" (the Sephardic version can't stand it and rushes in to insert "except for the pure soul!"), we detect "humanity" among our primate ancestors when we see them

¹⁹ Isaiah 24:16. The reading belongs to R. Nahman of Bratslav, *Likkutey MoHaRaN* 2:63. See my *Tormented Master* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1969), 139.

sublimating *eros* enough to begin to create art, to decorate beads or to paint pictures on the walls of caves. The "uplifting" that is such a key part of Hasidic teaching is surely in part another way of saying "sublimation." Being human means being able to uplift and transform.

Among the great wonders of evolution is the fact that the first creature powerful enough to dominate and determine the fate of all species on earth, the first to have the power to destroy our earthly biosphere, is also the first creature to have enough of conscience and self-awareness to hold back from doing so. Is this a coincidence?

The call has been uttered. It waits to be heard. This is the essential *mitzvah*: *da'at elohim*, knowing God. Acting on this *mitzvah* calls upon us to transform our lives, to work to redeem the world. Will we respond in time?

4. *"God needs to be served in every way." All of life is an opportunity for discovering and responding to the divine presence. The way we relate to every creature is a mirror of our devotion to our single Creator. Openheartedness, generosity, fairness, and humility are key virtues of the religious life.*

It is not only through the specific practices of our tradition that we serve God, but through the entire way we live in God's world. Transform and uplift every act you do, including the fulfillment of your bodily needs, to make every deed an act of worship.

This is the way of living taught by Hasidism, both the old and the new. The word *hasid* in this context is seen as derived from *hesed*, the realm of unbounded and unearned giving and love. As the world began with an act of *hesed*, so does all our world-redeeming work have to begin with *hesed*, compassion. To be a *hasid* is thus to be a giver, a bestower of love. Our love of God is best witnessed, of course, by our acts of love toward God's creatures. Beware of anything that may distract you from this effort, especially excessive religious guilt or deprecation of your sacred potential for giving. These will only lead you astray from your task of serving God in joy.

The Ba'al Shem Tov understood that oppressive religion can bury the spirit. Our memory of liberation from Egyptian bondage is essential to our identity as Israel. Sometimes that bondage can be brought about by religion itself; we need to be vigilant about that danger, especially among the young. "The handmaiden at the Sea saw more than Isaiah or

Ezekiel.”²⁰ Liberation from bondage is a sacred moment, one in which God is revealed, even if that liberation is from too much stifling piety.

5. *The essence of our religious life lies in the deep inward glance.*

Look more deeply; that’s our message. We apply it to the three realms of person, world, and text. Look more deeply both into yourself and into those around you. Do not be satisfied either with the well-defended ego that first appears, or the needy, craving self that you may see next. Go deeply enough to seek out the soul, the vulnerable innermost self that is the seat of true love and wonder. Cultivate those close love relationships with which you are blessed as paradigms for the way you should learn to see all human beings, each a unique expression of the divine image.

World. See the natural world around you in all its magnificence, contained within the small and seemingly “ordinary” as well as within the great. Develop an eye for wonder, both in yourself and especially in those you teach. Devote time and attention to cultivating that awareness; do not take it for granted. Be inspired to do more to save and to protect our world.

Text. As above. Our view of Torah should be enriched rather than diminished by critical, especially literary, insights. The presence of a level on which we see the texts in historical perspective should not keep us from engaging with the many other levels of reading, including the playful. Insight comes in all sorts of packages.

Ritual commandments are there to be fulfilled, but they are to be seen as means rather than as ends, as vessels to contain the divine light that floods the soul or as concrete embodiments of the heart’s inward quest.

“Are there to be fulfilled” is intentionally ambiguous. Neo-Hasidism can embrace a wide range of relationships to halakhah, varying in accord mostly with the psychological and devotional needs of the individual. There is no absolute “right” or “wrong” in this realm, not even a “better” or “worse.” The values of Neo-Hasidism as outlined here are

²⁰ Mekhilta be-shalah 3.

lines that barely intersect with those that define American Jewish “denominations.”

The Hasidic sources often quote an older play on the word *mitzvah*, deriving it from the Aramaic *tsavta* or “togetherness.” A *mitzvah* is an act in which God and the person are drawn together, an opportunity to find one another in the midst of our eternal game of hide-and-seek. I rather like this reading, but I hear the traditionalist immediately rise to object. “But where is *obligation* in all this?” he (probably a “he”) will ask. Go back to the credo. Read it again. There is plenty of obligation: to openheartedness, to compassion, to decency, to Torah, to the Jewish people, to healing the world, and lots more. Traditional observance is not the only way for Jews to have a culture of obligation. Classical Reform’s prophetic call and Zionism’s *yishuv ha-arets* are also forms of deep Jewish commitment; they are *religious*, even though some may not call them that. I say these things as a Jew who happens to care, for my own personal reasons, that the Shabbat candles be lit before dark, who is careful to hear a hundred *kolot* of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, every word of the *megillah* on Purim, and lots more. But I know that I am selective about these things, and the governing principle is personal/spiritual, certainly not legal, with no need to pretend otherwise.

“Keep your eyes on the prize” is my essential message here, on the end of *devekut* or spiritual openness, rather than on the means. Do not get overly caught up in the game.

6. *This process begins with the key devotional pair of love and fear, which together lead us to our sense of the holy.*

We need to purify these aspects of our lives, coming to realize that all true love bears within it the love of God and that the only worthy fear is our awe at standing in God’s presence. True love and fear, along with other emotions that flow from them, open channels through which God’s blessing can flow into us. Inner discipline and purification of heart and mind are our constant spiritual work.

Care for the body, our own and others’, as God’s handiwork is also a vital part of our worldly task.

The physical self is deserving of respect. The Hasidic sources go a long way toward understanding this, finding God’s service in ordinary

physical activities as well as in study and prayer. But they are still afflicted by the deep western/Platonic bias against the body, talking about transcending the corporeal self, "stripping off" the physical, and so forth. Neo-Hasidism's completion of this move is in harmony with the most ancient Jewish insights into *tselem elohim*, the notion that each human self, body and soul as one, is a unique embodiment of the divine image and thus needs to be protected and kept whole. A healthy Judaism needs to retain our essential values while shedding their medieval shell.

7. The deeper look at reality should put us at odds with the superficial values of the consumerist and overly individualist society amid which we live.

A Hasidism to be lived within contemporary society, without reconstructing the ghetto walls, will have to deal in complex ways with the secularization of consciousness and its views of self, world or society, and text. On the one hand, we remain a defiant religious minority who need to stand up as a critical voice to modern capitalist society's superficial and trivialized view of human existence, bringing with it a culture of coarse materialism and the many human degradations of our consumer society. But we must also recognize the blessings of that secularization, our liberation from a society of compelled religious belief and behavior, and be wary of those forces that seek to reverse them. Hasidism's first battle was fought against socially compelled and routinized religious behavior, just as deadening to true spiritual awareness as is secular superficiality. We have no desire to recreate pre-modern Jewish life or the *shtetl*, and we should avoid excessive romanticizing of it.

Historical Hasidism underwent two great struggles: first against the dominant rabbinic culture, then against *haskalah*. You might say that our situation more reflects the latter; the secularization of consciousness surely began with the enlightenment, and we continue to live in its midst. Yes, but we need to go about that ongoing struggle in a manner completely different from nineteenth century Hasidism. What they did then is parallel to the current fundamentalist (in all three western faiths) rear-guard rebellion against modernity, against Darwinism, against biblical criticism, etc. We need to understand that those battles are over, decisively lost. Our religious consciousness has to awaken from the daze of that loss and seek old/new paths for expression.

Yes, there has been a cost as those battles were lost. A certain naïvete about willful divine control of things in such a way that our prayers might make them go our way no longer works for us. Yet we do not stop praying! The sense of the miraculous, *'al nisekha shebe-khol yom imanu*, is not at all diminished by evolution. This wonder remains the object of our prayers. Nor is the transcendent beauty of insight into text, our special Jewish way of reading, lessened by our knowledge of the text's human authorship. We need to allow ourselves the spiritual *freedom* to feel those things, liberating ourselves from the tyranny of our own skeptical selves (yes, tyranny exists on that side as well) that holds us back. And that freedom itself, we should recall with no small sense of irony, is a gift of modernity.

Caring for others, our fellow-limbs on the single Adamic body or Tree of Life, is the first way we express our love of God. It is in this that we are tested, both as individuals and societies. Without seeking to impose our views on others, we envision a Jewish community that speaks out with a strong moral voice.

The oneness of being does not mean any less of care for fellow-humans or celebration of the differences between us. On the contrary, it means that we are all joined together in a bond that needs only to be discovered, not forged artificially. In caring for the other, we reassert the One.

8. We live in an abiding and covenanted love relationship to Torah.

As readers of *Radical Judaism* will know, I do not affirm a God who establishes a covenant with the people of Israel. There is too much of both anthropomorphism and religious exclusivism linked to the notion of a God-initiated covenant for me to accept it. Yet I still have a sense that we exist as a covenantal community, a covenant *we* have made with our memory of transformative events recorded in our people's historic saga. Remembering both that we were slaves in Egypt and that we stood at the foot of Sinai is what makes us a people, one marked by a sacred legacy and called to a sacred task. Never mind that neither of these can be affirmed by historians; they are events that transcend history. We relive them constantly and they become the language, the echo chambers, through which we speak about many other things that

happen in our individual and communal lives. Our sense of covenant with them is abiding and unbreakable. The people of Israel are indeed *mushba'im ve-'omdim me-har Sinai*, under oath to remain faithful to them.

The whole process is sacred to us.

The early Hasidic masters had a bold approach to the ongoing process of reading and re-interpreting Torah. Each generation, they taught, has its own soul-root, and needs to discover the meaning of Torah for its own time. Teachers emerge to do that, adding to and enriching the store of tradition as it is passed on to future generations. Anyone who denies this, some of them add, denies the power of Torah itself as a living embodiment of truth.²¹ Amen.

9. We want this to happen in a creative and openhearted way, and we devote ourselves to that effort.

This commitment to the survival of Judaism as a creative force sets us apart from the ongoing traditional Hasidic community, mostly dedicated to preservation of the old way. We believe firmly that Judaism's most creative centuries may yet lie ahead of us. We encourage ongoing creativity in realms that were familiar to the old Hasidism—Torah interpretation, music, dance—but in many new media as well. This is a vital part of “serving God in all ways.”

As Jewish seekers, we have a special connection to Abraham our Father, who followed the voice and set off on a journey that we still consider unfinished.

The unfinished journey is at the same time a spiritual, familial, and political one. Abraham is the classical Jewish seeker, smashing idols and trying on forms of truth until his path became revealed to him. But he is also *avinu*, the progenitor of our tribe, which must continue to live in faith with his spirit. And since his journey was one that took him to

²¹ I have documented and discussed this in my essay “Hasidism and Its Changing History,” appearing in a special 2012 issue of the journal *Jewish History*, entitled “Toward a New History of Hasidism,” co-edited by Ada Rapoport-Albert, Moshe Rosman and Marcin Wodzinski.

the Holy Land, the body politic that we Jews have created there in our beloved State of Israel must also be one that shares the open-tent values of the one who set us out on our way. The true *Israel* is not only about Herzl's vision, but one much older and wiser. Remember that Abraham was ready to risk everything, even his relationship with God, for the sake of wicked “Palestinians” in Sodom.

We are also Jews who live in the shadow of the greatest catastrophe of Jewish history, one of the darkest episodes in human history as well. This leaves us sharply aware of the depths of human evil as well as the responsibility borne by indifferent bystanders. We recognize that the Jewish people may have real enemies and promise not to be naïve about that reality; the price is one we cannot afford to pay again. At the same time, our post-Holocaust “Never again!” applies both to ourselves and to all of humanity and commits us to active involvement in standing against the forces of evil in our world, wherever they may be.

10. Our world suffers from a great imbalance of energy between the typically “male” and “female” energies.

The over-valuing of the “male” (present, to be sure in biological women as well as men) is manifest in excessive aggression, war, and rampant capitalism. All these and more are in need of healing. The old Hasidism, born of a deeply misogynist Kabbalah,²² saw that imbalance, but was still part of it. Neo-Hasidism openly seeks to right that wrong, by welcoming both women and female energies into its ongoing creative re-reading of tradition.

The sages of the Talmud²³ may have already been aware of the dangers caused by this imbalance when they depicted God asking us to bring an atonement sacrifice for Him each Rosh Hodesh because He diminished the moon, giving it monthly cycles that make it less than the ever-shining sun. The ignoring of women's potential contributions to our society has indeed weakened us, and not only because they represent half of humanity. It is our male-dominated society that has brought us to the brink of self-destruction.

²² See the recent very thorough presentation in Sharon Koren's *Forsaken: The Menstruant in Jewish Mysticism* (Waltham: New England University Press, 2011).

²³ B. Hullin 60a.

11. *We too recognize that there are gifted spiritual teachers in our world and we thank God for their presence and our ability to learn from them. But we live in an age that is rightly suspicious of such figures, having seen charisma used in sometimes horrific ways. We therefore underscore the Hasidic teaching that each person has his/her own path to walk and truth to discover. We encourage spiritual independence and responsibility.*

The greatest error of Hasidism was its turn to dynastic succession. Spiritual charisma, as attractive and dangerous as it is, does not pass through the genes. Hasidism became committed to ultra-traditionalism, and hence became frozen as a creative force, partly because leaders whose only legitimacy was based on dynastic succession could offer nothing more than nostalgic preservation of the past. We do not need to repeat that error. The best examples here are those of early nineteenth century Polish Hasidism, where disciple succeeded master, each proclaiming openly the need to strike out on a new and unique path. A variety of diverse paths and teachers seems appropriate to a Neo-Hasidism for our age.

12. *Hasidism believes in community. The sense of *hevrayyah* or fellowship among followers of a particular path is one of the greatest tools it offers for spiritual growth.*

Judaism is a non-monastic tradition. Our religion is one designed for householders, people committed to raising families, who nevertheless seek an intense spiritual presence in their lives. In this sense Judaism is closest to Islam, as distinct from classical Christianity and Buddhism. The Hasidic community, like the Sufi brotherhood, is meant to create the sort of bond among householders that supports this vision. It is an essential part of the Neo-Hasidic enterprise, where communal energies to some degree supplant the authority of the onetime *tsaddik* and serve as a check against potential abuses.

13. *We are committed to preserving our ancient way of life in full richness of expression, within the bounds of our contemporary ethical beliefs.*

Yes, there are ethical limits to our traditionalism. We are not ashamed to say that we have learned much that is positive from living in an open society that strives toward democracy and equality. These values should

become part of our Judaism. Ultimately they are rooted in the most essential Jewish teaching that each person is a unique *tselem elohim*, divine image. Traditions that inhibit the growth and self-acceptance inherent in that teaching must be subject to careful examination and the possibility of being set aside. New ways of thinking that enhance our ability to discover the divine image in more ways, or in people we once rejected, need to be taken seriously as part of Torah.

Mordecai Kaplan was certainly right in calling Judaism an “evolving religious civilization.” Our ethical norms grew as civilization progressed. We went from a literal “an eye for an eye” to the payment of damages. Setting aside the biblical text, we stopped stoning suspected adulteresses or rebellious children to death. But in the course of our long struggle for self-preservation, halakhic innovation lost its nerve. We need to reassert the early rabbis’ claim to a right to move boldly when faced with moral and ethical norms that we know to be behind the times.²⁴

We happily join with all others who seek, each in our own way, to realize these sacred truths, while admitting in collective humility that none of our languages embodies truth in its fullness.

We especially welcome shared efforts in the realm of action. We seek to join with other people of faith and goodwill to reshape our society into one less based on greed and competition and more on human goodness, and to engage in the most urgent task of our generation, that of protecting life on our beloved and much-threatened planet.²⁵

²⁴ The Conservative rabbis’ Committee on Law and Standards’ rejection of Rabbi Gordon Tucker’s *teshuvah* regarding homosexuality, even as one of several legitimate alternatives, is an example of this failure of moral courage in the adjudication of halakhah. To cite another example, our inability to insist on the stunning of animals before Jewish religious slaughter is a blight on our moral courage.

²⁵ I am grateful to my students Ebn Leader, Ariel Mayse, and Or Rose for important contributions to this essay. I shared the credo with participants in a conference on Jewish theology at Hebrew College in the fall of 2011. I am grateful for their input as well.

New Perspectives in Post-Rabbinic Judaism
Series Editor — Shaul Magid (Indiana University)

PERSONAL THEOLOGY

Essays in Honor of
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Edited by WILLIAM PLEVAN



BOSTON
2013