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Judaism for the Post-Modern Era

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Samuel H. Goldenson (1878–1962) was ordained at the Hebrew Union College in 1904 and subsequently led congregations in Lexington, Kentucky and in Albany, New York. He served as senior rabbi of the Rodef Shalom congregation in Pittsburgh from 1918 to 1934 and of the Temple Emanu-El of New York City from 1934 to 1947. Rabbi Goldenson, who was president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1933 to 1935, was a lifelong advocate of social justice and emphasized the universal message of the Prophets in his preaching. The HUC-JIR lectureship bearing his name was established in 1955 by Temple Emanu-El to commemorate his fiftieth year in the rabbinate.

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The coming of the year 2000 on what is essentially the Christian calendar is seemingly not an event that should be of great significance to the Jewish people. No one has yet informed me of an impressive *gematria* for the number 5760 or a hidden abbreviation in the letters תש"ס that would render this date significant in our traditional numerological or word-play traditions. Nevertheless, because we Jews for some time now have been reckoning our history, if not our liturgical lives, by this calendar—since the beginning of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* we have spoken of Jewry in thirteenth-century Spain, in sixteenth-century Turkey, and so forth—many a history-conscious Jew will breathe a great sigh of relief when this twentieth century is over. Surely it is deserving of a ברוך השם or perhaps even a ברוך שהחינו that we will have reached an end to that century of upheaval, tragedy, and transformation unparalleled by any since that with which this Christian era began, and that we find that there still is a Jewish people—vital, unoppressed, and committed to its future—here to thank God for having survived this century.

What shall we say of the Jewish people as it enters this third millennium of what we shall generously call the *Common Era* (generously so as not to remind our Christian neighbors that the legacy of Christian imperialism extends even to our reckoning of time itself)? We can begin by saying how divided Jewry is: between Orthodox and heterodox, between Israeli and diaspora, and along various lesser fault-lines as well. We can begin in good Jewish fashion by bemoaning our fate, by saying how the Jewish people, though indeed alive, is very nearly dying yet again, this time from assimilatory pressures rather than from persecution. Let us all rise and recite the intermar-

riage statistics, which we as rabbis know by heart the way our rabbinic forebears knew משניות.

But let us begin with a different sort of truth, leaving aside for a moment these all-too-familiar litanies. We begin the twenty-first century in a post-revolutionary situation. The period behind us was that of the modernization of the Jewish people. Over the course of some two hundred years, beginning in Germany in the mid-eighteenth century and extending to 1950 for Yemenites and 1990 for Ethiopians, the Jewish people was transformed by its encounter with modernity. Most of us descendants of Jews who emigrated from Eastern Europe have now had about a century of living with modernity. We were very late entrants into the modern world, having come from Russian or Polish Jewish townlets where such modernity-bearing intellectual currents as the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment had created barely a ripple. Essentially we lived in what may be called a post-medieval era that lasted, at least for some of our grandparents and great-grandparents, down to the eve of emigration itself. Both socially and intellectually this era may be defined as one in which rabbinic authority still held sway over the way Jews lived and thought. Life essentially followed the pattern described in the שולחן ערוך, and when a question came up you went to the rav. Similarly, truth was determined by the authority of Scripture, by the aggadah of Talmud and Midrash, by the available popularizations of medieval Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah and, in some districts, by the teachings of the local Hasidic rebbe. Though it happens that my bobbe's town was no more than a hundred miles or so from Königsberg, Immanuel Kant might as well have taught philosophy on the moon for all the influence he had on Jews in Lomza.

Our migration, then, whether to America or to the urbanity of Vienna, Lodz, or Moscow, was a migration of the mind as well as the body. The old faith quickly crumbled as we made our adjustments to the material and intellectual demands of that ongoing stream of modernity into whose cold waters we had been immersed so suddenly. Secular education became the great dream of the

Jew who sought a true grasp of reality first through mastering the physical and then the social sciences. As we joined a Western post-Christian intellectual tradition that had fought long and hard to free itself from ecclesiastical control, the Jew's presence itself bore witness to the liberation of the university's mind and spirit from the last vestiges of Christian domination. The price for our acceptance into that new-found freedom—one that most Jews were entirely willing, even eager, to pay—was that we too cast off the remains of our “superstitious” shackles and join in the creation of not a Judeo-Christian but in fact a post-Jewish and post-Christian self-consciously secular, science-based world view. That demand was as clear at the City College of my father's generation as it was for those Jews who left the shtetl not for New York but for Moscow, and whose sadly de-Judaized grandchildren we meet today.

That generation of Jews in New York of the 1920s and 30s was of course the group Mordecai Kaplan addressed and understood so well. His was a grand attempt to rescue Jewish religion for a generation of Jews who knew quite clearly what it was they had rejected—God as person, providence, halakhic authority, the chosen people, the afterlife. Kaplan tried to provide for them a Judaism that could survive that long list of *nays*. When I became involved with the Reconstructionist movement some fifty years later, meeting exactly the same sort of Jews you meet in the Reform context, I found that the list of *nays* was of a somewhat different and less harsh order. But we will come to that presently.

Jewry of 2000 lives in a post-revolutionary situation. Some eighty-five percent of the Jewish people has voted with its feet, stepping outside the realm of committed halakhic practice and the traditional categories of Jewish religious faith. It is with the Judaism of these Jews that we are here concerned. We presume that a traditionalist minority will survive, even if deeply divided within itself. Our relations with that group are an ongoing concern, but not our topic on this occasion. We want to know what sort of Judaism will and should exist for liberal or heterodox—I intentionally refuse to employ the

denominational terms—Jews in the coming century. What kind or kinds of Jewish expression will be important to them, almost all fourth-plus generation Americans, enjoying a comfortable material existence in a land of plenty, living with bits of residual alienation but no overt persecution or memory of discrimination, living in families with ties to Christian as well as Jewish Americans. What Judaism will such Jews want, need, and create for this new epoch of our collective history?

I take as my specific focus for this discussion a young woman who made her first public appearance as a subject of Jewish theological discussion in the personals column of New York's *Jewish Week* about a year ago. (I have a friend in New York—an otherwise happily married rabbi, insofar as I know—who follows those columns assiduously. "This one you've got to see," he told me.) She described herself as: *DJF*, 34. *Spiritual, not religious. Seeking like-minded JM*, etc.

This young woman should indeed be of interest to us. Allow me to treat her, if you will, as an icon of our age. I think she has a pretty clear idea of what she means by "spiritual, not religious." You could meet her, along with a great many other Jews, at a Kripalu Yoga Ashram retreat, where she goes for a weekend of Yoga, massage, a lecture on spiritual teachings, healthy vegetarian food, and conversations with like-minded people. You will not meet her at your synagogue, from which she continues to feel alienated. But she fasts and meditates on Yom Kippur, a day that has some "special meaning" for her. She reads both Sufi and Hasidic stories. She used to go to Shlomo Carlebach concerts and occasionally lapses into one of his tunes. Passover with her family is still an obnoxious and boisterous, "totally unspiritual," as she would say, affair. But one year her folks were away on a cruise, and she got to go to a women's seder. It was a little too verbal and too strident for her tastes, but she'd like to try more of that sort of thing, if it were conveniently available. She read part of *I and Thou* years ago and liked it, but most of her inspiring reading has been by Eastern authors or by Americans who have chosen an Eastern path. The fact is that she really doesn't read very much

at all. Being of the video generation, she'd much rather watch tapes of lectures by the Dalai Lama, which she owns, than read his book.

By "spiritual, not religious" she doesn't only mean East versus West. She thinks of herself as a seeker more than a joiner. She has no interest in cults and thinks that her cousin Shimon, formerly Scott, who became ultra-Orthodox and lives in Jerusalem, has fallen into one. She picks things up here and there, believes that all religions are one, and is happy to live with bits of turned-on teachings from Jewish, Sufi, Hindu, and Buddhist sources all joined without any need for theological consistency. She is willing to accept spiritual disciplines when meaningful. She's been a vegetarian for years, after all, and she once went on a thirty-day silent vigil at a Buddhist retreat center. (She cheated a couple of times and was interested to note that the other people having trouble maintaining thirty days of silence were also Jewish, one of them even a rabbi!) But she also uses the phrase *spiritual, not religious* as a way of saying she's not interested in an Orthodox guy or the traditional Jewish lifestyle that a relationship with him would demand.

Why is she turned off to the liberal synagogue where she grew up and was a *בת מצוה*? Some of it, she knows, is still post-adolescent rebellion. Her parents and their friends seemed like such hypocrites the only times they went, on the high holidays and for family occasions, mouthing words that had nothing to do with their entirely secular and success-oriented lifestyles. Part of it was that the temple represented acceptance of everything she had disliked about suburbia: the big cars, the expensive clothes, the rigid conventionalism of it all. She knew they did some good things at the temple—the committee for the homeless, for example, where she'd helped out a few times. But there was nothing *spiritual* about that to her; it was just doing the right thing. She began discovering her own spiritual self after college, much of it in the course of the painful break-up of her first marriage. A guy she was seeing took her on her first Yoga retreat. By then the synagogue had been left far behind.

But there is more to it than that. *Spiritual, not religious*. She doesn't

know whether she believes in God. Certainly the God-centered religion she encountered in the synagogue never spoke much to her. Some of it was the male language and the regal metaphors; worshipping “the King of the universe” is not something she is motivated to do. How can she walk into the synagogue or open the prayer-book if she thinks she “doesn’t believe in God”? And yet this world does not seem like it is ruled by anyone, or else how could there be a Bosnia? “Or a Holocaust,” she hastens to add. And how could we be destroying life on our planet by all this excess consumption and pollution, if we were the subjects of some universal King? The language seems at best hypocritical, but even more, just false to her experience of life in the world.

But this agnosticism is of a new sort. It emphatically is not about a denial of spirituality. That’s something she once tried to explain both to her parents and her former (Jewish) husband, but they completely failed to understand. For her, spirituality is something that begins from within, has to do with a perception of the universe, with a perspective on existence itself. It begins with experience, not with a declaration of belief. It is a sense that all of being is One, that each of us is an expression of an inner core of Oneness, that the same One manifest in you is also present in me, and that our task is to find and be in touch with that One within ourselves and within one another. If there is something she could call *God* it is that inner Oneness. But she’d just as soon call it *universal soul* or *breath* as some of the Yoga teachers do. Even if this is a *God*, it is one she seeks to discover and experience, to make real in her life. She wants to realize that we all breathe that same breath and therefore should do no harm to any creature, as they say at the Ashram. But all this does not mean that there is someone she wants to *worship*.

What do we representatives of Judaism have to offer this young woman? I have spent this time introducing you to her because I believe that she bespeaks our post-modern situation. In associating her with post-modernity I mean to say three things:

1. The long, drawn-out struggle of the Western religious traditions

against the process of secularization is gone and forgotten. The process has reached its completion; secularity is the beginning point. She and everyone she knows have always seen their lives as the result of combined biological, social, and economic forces. Even her “inner life,” when it first began to impose itself on her, was something she saw as a probable result of biochemical imbalance, and her first instinct was to treat it pharmacologically. Her soul does not natively speak any spiritual language. There is no memory of a pre-modern past, no link to the “old country,” no reservoir of Jewish memory, no sentimental return to the melodies of childhood. Our seeker finds herself adrift in secular, brash, competitive New York. The reasons for her spiritual search are themselves the realities of post-modern living: the anomie and rootlessness of modernity now aggravated by the tremendous increase in the pace at which humans are expected to live and the brain is expected to function. This has everything to do with living in the computer/FAX/e-mail age, a time when your boss no longer is thought unreasonable for wanting everything done “immediately if not sooner.” You keep up the frantic pace only because you know that the pressure on the boss is even greater than that which he or she is placing upon you.

2. She is a child of the global village. True, there was some bit of Jewish education in her childhood, but she was also writing Haiku already in the fourth grade. Her school was “twinned” with a school on a Navajo reservation in Arizona, and she learned some of their chants at a meeting of the two groups, to which the suburban New York kids brought gifts (“donations”) for the reservation from their material civilization. She has a close friend who is an Indonesian Muslim, who lived with her as an exchange student when they were both in high school. Her school class contained as many students who themselves came from China and Korea as there were Jews and half- or quarter-Jews of long forgotten immigrant background. In fact she was identified mostly as Caucasian and native-born American at school, rather than as anything more particular. She doesn’t have much money for travel these days, but Asia will be her first destination when she does.

3. She knows as well as she knows herself that modernity has failed. Liberated from once-normative behavioral constraints, from traditional women's roles, from any subjugation to authority other than that of the minimalist state, she finds herself seeking out wisdom and truth from such figures and sources who might serve to reconstitute some center of authority in her life. As a health-conscious New Yorker of her generation, she feels herself confronted daily with the ever more compounded errors of thoughtless overconsumption, disregard for the environment even to the point of its bare livability, and the constant pressures that an endlessly soaring human population place upon our world. She can feel the growing crowdedness of the planet in the subway car around her. Her own quest has developed in the shadow of all these awarenesses, and is in part her way of responding to them.

In the face of what she experiences as a massive failure of modernity to provide meaning structures to guide her through the maze of interpersonal complexities in her adult single state, to inspire us collectively to do something to keep the physical world alive and nourishing of life, or that will lead her to an encounter with Truth on a deeper level, she has come to reject modernity as a source of values. She is therefore not much interested in hearing from rabbis, clerics, or other wisefolks who themselves seem corrupted by their compromise with modernity. Instead she finds herself seeking out the wisdom of the ancients, the true knowledge, in our language the תורת חיים, the Torah of עץ החיים rather than עץ הדעת, that was there before modernity banished it. She is willing to hear this ancient teaching from yogis, lamas, female teachers who present it as wicca, or anyone else who seems to represent an authentic voice of pre-modern worldly wisdom. She would be quite happy to encounter this wisdom in Jewish form if she could find a rabbi/teacher who was neither liberal, and therefore compromised by modernity, nor Orthodox and therefore likely to "lay a trip on her" about observance and exclude her as a woman.

Let us make it clear that our spiritual seeker is no rejecter of the

modern world as a source of creature comforts, nor does she want to enter into a personal lifestyle (especially not as a woman) that belongs to a previous century. While some observers might say that she displays the same dangerous tendency that produces the new fundamentalisms, the flight from modernity that is a step backward rather than forward, she does not understand herself that way at all. She lives quite a contemporary lifestyle, and does not seek to change that. In being more sensitive than her parents were, both to spiritual awareness and to health and ecological concerns (these are all related for her), she sees herself as forward looking and open. She is not a *New Age* person in the frivolous sense of that term; she is not attracted to crystals, horoscopes, or psychics as a way to deal with her spiritual questions. But she is already a child of the new century. Her post-modernism means that from an intellectual and spiritual standpoint, she is ready to bracket the modern experience almost entirely. If you were to tell her, for example, that the wisdom literatures she is studying all depend upon a metaphysical structure that has been discredited philosophically since Newton, Descartes, and Kant, she would be quite totally disinterested. She would probably first argue (if you could engage her at all in such a debate) that Newton is responsible for modern science—"and look where that got us"—while Kant, who taught moral absolutes in Germany, also did not have much of success to show for himself. Once you press beyond, as you should, that round of resistance, she would admit that it is not metaphysical truth she is seeking from the teachings of the masters, but rather personal insight, psychological truth, and that is not necessarily subject to the same philosophical strictures. The paradigms presented by such teachers may indeed not be what they once claimed to be, accurate maps of the universe, but as interesting and insightful maps of human consciousness they are of interest nonetheless. This is the nature of post-modern seeking at its most intelligent and moderate.

The person I have described in the preceding paragraphs is neither the most profound nor the most casual among today's Jewish

seekers who turn to Eastern traditions. These include some highly trained and knowledgeable people, themselves now masters and teachers within specific schools of tradition, generally the more intellectual, including both Zen and Tibetan Buddhism as well as Vedanta and other forms of contemplative Hindu practice. They also include a great many dabblers, “groupies,” and followers who seek for a wide variety of spiritual and psychological reasons, not all of which our Western psychiatric tradition would deem “healthy.” If it is true, as is widely rumored, that a majority of non-Asian Buddhists in the U.S. are Jews, we indeed have a wide range of examples from whom to choose. In depicting someone of “middlebrow” seriousness, I intend neither to glorify nor to demean her quest. What is most important is to ask how we will address such people, and to realize that such seeking can hardly be dismissed as a “cult” phenomenon or as a passing fad.

In considering what we have to offer our yiddishe Jane Doe, I challenge us to ask ourselves deep questions about where our own commitments lie. Many of us chose Jewish heterodoxy because our values were like hers, but in an earlier version. We liked Martin Buber’s distinction between *religiosity* and *religion*, and shared his feeling that too much had been frozen in the old forms of Jewish observance. But as leaders of liberal Jewish institutions we too became defenders of another version of institutionalized religion, and perhaps lost some of our attunement to that religiosity. For us Jane’s ad should be first a call to תשובה, to return to the inner search that brought us here in the first place. This may mean a washing out of our mouths for some of the “answers” we have provided for the Jews we serve, when we should have just told them that we too are seekers. We too were attracted to the life of faith without being literal believers in the revealed authority of Judaism and its practices. We too may yearn more for a spiritual attitude toward life than we believe in the God-images we offer to Jews through the pages of the prayerbook we place before them. For a variety of reasons, including our greater closeness to immigrant memories, to the Holocaust, to

the birth of Israel, to the influence of teachers and friends, we were able to find a place within Judaism, though not with complete theological comfort. Some of us have buried the questions for decades; others of us struggle with them every day of our lives as rabbis and teachers. The time has come for us to share our quest, including our unanswered questions, with some of the many thousands of young Jews who do not know that questing is possible within the Jewish tradition, and have come to see us as mere representatives of a closed and over-determined religious establishment.

In the course of this new openness, we may need to reconsider just how committed we are to what I call the *vertical metaphor* that lies at the heart of Jewish religious language. The particular ancient Near Eastern culture out of which the Jewish people and its religion emerged was one that worshiped sky-gods. Especially after the Prophets eliminated polytheism with its pantheon and concentrated all the deities and their powers into one, the primary residence of God in the heavens was firmly established. From its very earliest origins, Jewish (and hence general Western) conceptions of God have been tied to this vertical metaphor for the God-world relationship. As much as we outgrow any literal understanding of this metaphor in our quest for mature religion, the image of “God above” never quite leaves us, ingrained as it is within the Western religious consciousness. It is reinforced every time we read a Psalm about God who “dwells in heaven,” every time we tell the story of Moses going “up to heaven” to receive Torah, every time we encounter a text that speaks of spiritual growth as a series of “steps up a ladder” of perfection. Even our mystical thinking is much influenced by this deep-seated way of thinking: the visionary “ascends” through the seven heavens before seeing the throne of God’s glory; the Kabbalist binds “rung to rung” in an attempt to reach ever greater heights of knowledge and closeness to God.

But suppose we allowed ourselves to be freed from this upper world/lower world way of thinking. Dare we imagine a Jewish faith less than fully wedded to this single root-metaphor? Some of our

greatest philosophers and mystics in prior ages went quite far in trying to understand reality in terms of *inner* and *outer* rather than *higher* and *lower*. They would have us think of the quest for God as a journey inward, where the goal is an ultimately deep level within the self rather than the top of the mountain or the throne in heaven. The Torah tells us that our earliest ancestors were diggers of wells. Suppose we try, in seeking that Torah, to reach for the water that flows freely from the depths of Abraham's well rather than the Torah that came down carved in stone from the mountaintop that reached into heaven. The journey to Torah would then go inward, peeling off layer after layer of externals, rather than climbing higher and higher.

Sinai itself, of course, seems like the ultimate vertical metaphor. But perhaps we can think of it as a vertical metaphor that describes an inward event. In asking us to consider a Torah from *within* rather than *above*, I am also asking for a Torah that is not given by a God who is "wholly other," to use Rudolph Otto's now-classic phrase. A deity manifest from within nature as well as from within the self is one from whom we can never be entirely separate. Ultimately the deepest self will be identified with that God. Such a God may do us the favor of allowing us to pretend that God does not pervade all, so that we may carry on with the necessary tasks of our essentially illusory lives (this is precisely the position of the classics of HaBaD thought, perhaps the most profound of Jewish mystical theologies), but the ultimate truth of realizing our oneness with that all-embracing Being can only be postponed, not denied.

In turning to the well or spring rather than the mountain as our key metaphoric embodiment of the source of Torah, I am suggesting much more than a change of direction. I propose that we need to reconstitute Judaism as a religion friendly to the notion of quest, to a vision of life as an unending voyage in search of truth or God or Oneness, but one in which some measure of that goal is attained incidentally, בְּהִסְחָ הַדַּעַת, along the way. The Judaism of the foot of the mountain has not much room for seekers. Torah has already been given; we live in the afterglow of revelation. For purposes of praxis,

there is a Set Table where we can look up how it is we are to live, what to do in any given situation. Our questing—which does go on in classical Judaism, to be sure—takes the form of commentary, but commentary to a text that is already given, already fixed in its primary meaning. And the event of revelation, the moment of encounter between the divine mind and the human, is to be seen through the distant veil of generations, דּוֹר וְסוֹפְרָיו דּוֹר וְסוֹפְרָיו, each writer and book adding another layer of distance.

But Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin, among the fathers of the post-modern mind, are here to remind us that on one level we have no such fixed text at all. The revelation is silent, beyond speech, beyond the confines of both mind and language. It is we (in our terms, in the person of Moshe Rabbenu) who put it into words, who create the תּוֹרָה שְׁבִכְתָּב that is really the first layer of commentary on the silent *Urtext* that we can only call תּוֹרַת ה'. We were transformed, dazzled, shaped into a revolutionary new nation by an encounter with that silent Presence, with that level of Being, with that rung of Mind. The Torah-text emerged, over a period of generations, from our attempt to live in the light of that transforming encounter. While I am not suggesting for a moment that we as Jews can or should leave that sacred written text behind, I am saying that we have to learn to recover what lies behind and within it. Standing at the mouth of the well, a source or מְקוֹר that never runs dry, whence revelation pours forth like a never-ending stream, will do us better than being at the foot of a mountain which, the rabbis tell us, loses all sense of holiness once the single event of revelation is over.

If Western religion is going to speak to post-moderns, it will have to learn to do so in a new key. The transformations required will be deep-seated, and it is not entirely clear that they will work. I believe that the best guides we have in this search for a new and yet tradition-rooted religious language are the mystics of the West, if read selectively. I believe they are important partly because of the profundity of their symbolic language and imagination, but also because of the example they provide of a radical transformation of meaning within

the history of a religious tradition, while maintaining and even deepening the symbols and sancta of that tradition. I believe that the Kabbalistic re-shaping of Judaism is the most profound change in the history of that tradition after the Prophets' revolutionary reshaping of the sacred as they encountered it in the religions of pre-Israelite antiquity. Indeed, it is probably to that first re-shaping that we should now first turn our attention.

The Prophets, shapers of Israelite monotheism as it has come down to us, insisted that their God was the author of both nature and history, the two realms in which He was manifest. It was God who fashioned the world, who reigned in heaven as He subjugated the forces of chaos before all was made, who will see the world through its course of history and will reign again, having defeated His foes once more, at the end of time. Nature is God's handiwork and bears witness to God-as-Creator, but is not of the same *stuff* as God and is not in itself sacred. In fact, it is Israel's subjugation of nature to divinity, the regulation of nature in accord with the divine imperative, that makes for holiness. While still holding the Prophets' words to be sacred, the Kabbalist effected the reversal of this banishment of nature from the sacred precincts by the power of transforming the natural realm itself into a *corpus symbolicum*, to adapt a usage of Scholem's, inhabited by the God who could only be expressed by such symbols. If *tree, river, sea, sun, moon, spring, land, and sky* are all symbol-terms for elements within the divine self, nature itself becomes a garment worn by the elusive One. God is present in the tree because the tree itself—not just *tree* as a word, but the organism itself (this point is often missed!)—is a symbolic representation of divinity. If the medieval Kabbalists could not complete this revolution in consciousness, due to the Platonic denigration of matter that was the common legacy of the entire medieval West, the full, indeed no longer symbolic, reintegration of the divine and natural realms takes place in the early and most daring generations of Hasidism. There Isaiah's "the whole earth is filled with His glory" was taken as a mystical watchword for the real presence of divinity as the substratum

and essence of the entire natural order. God is to be shown, seen, discovered everywhere as the innermost Self of the universe in which we live. Nature is the garb of God, the coat of many colors in which the One is ever both hidden and revealed.

This is *not* to say that Hasidism is neo-paganism, or that a contemporary appropriation of Kabbalistic/Hasidic ways of thinking on this question winds up back in the moral world view of competing natural forces that the Prophets fought so hard to subject to the moral will of God. The monotheism of the Prophets remains a crucial stage in the development of our religious consciousness; its moral achievement is not lost as we go the next step, from monotheism to monism. Its insistence that all the forces of nature attest to the same singular Being remains unchallenged. It is this Oneness, the unity of all being in God, that becomes the basis for the moral imperative. All that exists is your brother, your flesh, your own self. You, conversely, are flesh of all flesh; you belong to the Self of all Being. Your existence is an instant borrowed from eternity. You live to increase the good of all creatures. Only in that way can you bear witness to the One who dwells in all, and that witness is your entire purpose in living. The subjugation of self and individual will to the One is all the more clear when that One is none other than the single soul of all: נשמת כל חי.

Crucially, the ultimate transcendence of that Being is also affirmed by the Hasidic masters. Their God remains transcendent in that the mysteries of God's Oneness may never be fathomed; the depth of the mind that encompasses and unifies all mind must remain infinitely beyond our comprehension. It is only an act of divine contraction, צמצום, compared to the father who speaks to his child in child's language, that enables us to grasp some bit of the mystery. But now that mystery is seen as world-embracing and world-filling as well as world-transcending. Indeed, it is from within immanence itself that we rediscover transcendence: God is so profoundly and ineffably present in each moment, in every place, and in a special way in each human soul that the encounter with that pres-

ence leads us right back to an awareness of transcendent mystery. In a sense all we are saying here is *אין סוף אין לו סוף*. The endless cannot be fenced in, kept out, or put aside *over there* as eternal other in order that we may be *over here*, convinced of our separate existence. Dualism, all dualism, even that of God and person, self and other, is false consciousness. It is the way the world thinks, the lie on which this *עלמא דשקרא* is founded. That is why the tale of Creation begins with the letter *bet*; here begin the twos, and so the whole creation tale is told in terms of pairs: day and night, heaven and earth, sea and land, sun and moon. But behind that *bet* lies the patiently waiting silent *aleph*, ready to be revealed as *אנכי* at Sinai and thus to give the lie to the world of self and other.

It is this sort of radical theology that I believe we will need for the post-modern age. It will mean going back to the silent *aleph*, to the pre-verbal *Urtext* of divine speech and asking how God is to be spoken to and spoken about in this very new and different age in human history. We will have to go there in our own reverent silence, ready both to wait and to prepare ourselves for that new speech to emerge in us. My sense of that new speech is that it will center in the internal metaphor, in the language of unity, in the bringing together of all creatures in their single Source. It may be, I hasten to emphasize, a deeply Jewish language if we are educationally prepared to make it that. A new age in history calls for a new selective combining of our sources. My guess is that for this age we should speak of God with the *merkavah* mystics as *חי העולמים* or with Ibn Gabirol as *אחד האחדים* rather than as *שבשמים* or as *מלך העולם*. I recognize this is only one side of Hasidism, and that the hasidim also loved to address God intimately even as *הימל אין הימל*. But in an age when even HaBaD is transcending its East European roots and opting for American corporate leadership instead of the old Russian dynastic model, the time has come for us too to see that change is in the air.

There will continue to be synagogues, well into the post-modern age, where old-fashioned davening will go on. There will also be egalitarian settings in which such prior-age prayer will continue. You

will often find me in one of those places on Shabbat, for which I make no apology. But I hardly think this is what most of our Jews need these days. I would also like to see there be a silent Kabbalat Shabbat service in our cities, where the beginning of the holy day is marked with candle lighting, a period of wordless chanting, a long time of silent awareness of the change of light in that mysterious hour (there should be a natural light-source or view of the outdoors, and no artificial lighting except Shabbat candles), and ended with a shared kiddush. This can be a deep and moving Jewish spiritual experience, one that requires no Hebrew, demands no prior belief-structure, but also has none of the passivity and sterility of what usually passes for prayer in liberal Jewish settings. We should even have a minyan of Jews somewhere out there in post-sixties land who come together every day *דווקא* at sunrise and sunset to give their *שחרית* and *מנחה* offerings in silent awareness, perhaps ending a silent period with a called out *שמע ישראל*. There are a great many Jews who need such a service, and who by their presence could lend to it great depth and emotional resonance. We should be helping to provide it for them, as well as for ourselves.

A Jewish religion of immanence and inner oneness will also lead to a greater spiritual celebration of this world, the natural and physical universe in which we live and in which we seek and find God. In calling for this sort of religion we recognize that a key element in the making of post-modernity is the still-unfolding ecological crisis. This is so not merely as the fad of the decade, but because it shows how modernity bears within it the seeds of destruction, not only of modern humanity, but of our biosphere itself. I believe that in the twenty-first century all religions will have to be drawn upon to create a somewhat shared religious language that will make for the great transformation of human consciousness needed for the very survival of our world. For us that will mean a return to the theology of creation, an area much neglected in Jewish theology throughout the modern era. Creation, perhaps the key issue for various Jewish theologies in the Middle Ages, was abandoned in modernity for two

primary reasons. It was too difficult to defend the biblical accounts of creation in the face of the ongoing progress of scientific knowledge, a second religion in which most of us were at least passive believers. Especially after Darwin was accepted, talk of faith in creation among Jews religiously to the left of the Lubavitcher rebbe became quite rare. But creation was also seen as an insufficiently particularist issue to rouse our excitement in modern times, when the central apologetic question that drove so much of our theology became *How is Judaism different?* Our faith in creation was not essentially different from that of other Western religions, and therefore was hardly worth the great effort in defending.

But the issue of creation will not disappear so quickly. The search for meaning and the question of origins do not readily separate from one another. When we ask ourselves what life is all about, why we live and why we die, we cannot help but turn to the question of how we got here in the first place. When we try to understand our place in the universe, especially the relationship of humanity as a whole to the rest of the natural order, we find ourselves returning to the question of creation. As we seek to extend a notion of community-of-all-the-living to include all creatures, seeking out the One within the infinite varieties of the many, we discover that we are still speaking the language of creation.

We have no essential argument with a scientific and evolutionary approach to the tale of life's origins. But as religious people we need there to be a teleology to this tale. Evolution will have to reveal itself to us as the greatest of all religious dramas. The history of our universe is an ongoing and incomplete account of how the One, source of all existence, entered into life on this planet, became manifest in earth's infinite variety of species, and finally became articulate through the consciousness and many languages of humanity. We see this as no blind process, but as the great striving of the One to be manifest in the garb of the many, each testifying to that Oneness.

More than one voice within contemporary science seems open to describing the origin and evolution of species in some sense as the

self-expression of a singular universal force. While this force could theoretically be conceived as an external Creator, it is more generally seen as a drive within existence that strives relentlessly, though by no means perfectly or all-powerfully, toward greater complexity and consciousness. The evolutionary process would then be understood in a unitive way as the halting, struggling self-assertion of such a singular force or presence, rather than as the endless war of creatures against one another. Such a vision would explain the ongoing emergence of "higher" and more conscious life-forms as evidence of this struggle's emerging success rather than as "the survival of the fittest."

A new creation story is emerging in our day, one that begins with the Black Hole, the first infinitesimal particles of matter, the origins of time, the first stirrings of life, and carries on through the evolution of life-forms as we know them. This tale is still unfolding, to be sure, and we humans are both a recent development and a link to further growth in the evolutionary process, if our world survives. Even scientists grasp this narrative only in a fragmentary way. But we Jews, as bearers of the old creation-tale that so long nourished and sustained the West's sense of origins and self-understanding, have a special interest in the emerging new story. I am suggesting here that a voice will be needed to accomplish once again what the inspired genius did who composed the opening chapter of *בראשית*. He surely knew the tales of mythic battle, of chaos, of creation's emergence as the result of endless violent conflict among the gods and forces of nature. But he intentionally quieted all that, understanding and presenting creation as the willed speech of a single God, allowing for a peaceful and harmonistic view of existence that inspired the entire West for perhaps two and a half millenia. The same will have to emerge in our day, a vision that is scientific and religious at once. The age in which we live cries out for a religious language that speaks of the underlying unity of all existence, a unity that is manifest throughout life's diversity, rather than of the struggle of species against species. For us that will be a renewal of creation speech, teaching again that all beings emerge from a single source.

Of course what I am suggesting is hardly what is currently known as *Creationism*, a forced return to biblical literalism in this realm. We should return to the Bible, especially to the Prophets and the Psalms, where the beauty and variety of creation are seen as a unified chorus of praise to God. We should also make use of the seven-day creation tale. How can we not do so, when Shabbat remains, and should indeed remain, the central religious institution of Judaism and perhaps the most important gift that we still have to offer to the world? But we need to make it clear that we are far from literalism in our use of Scripture: we should use the old tale of seven-day creation interwoven with bits of the emerging new tale, trying to let the spirit of the one affect the other. We should say openly that we tell the old tale as our beloved Jewish myth, but one that teaches a key lesson. This is the real lesson of *creation* as post-moderns will understand it: behind the many lies the One, and that One ever wills the many into being. Each creature bears witness to the Self of the universe, of which it is a unique manifestation, a crystallization of divine energy that exists nowhere else. A God who enters into the world of multiplicity, who puts on the coat of creation in its infinite colors, is also a God who loves diversity, who cares that each of us, varied as we are, live and turn inward to rediscover and reattest to that One.

There is a final aspect of the prophetic revolution that will also have to be reconsidered as we look at both Judaism and religion in the post-modern era. I refer to the exclusiveness of our Jewish claim on God, significant vestiges of which are still with us. It was in their iconoclastic zeal that the Prophets, seeking to set their teachings off from all that the world yet knew of religion, mocked the religions of the ancient world as the worship of mere sticks and stones. “Eyes have they, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not” and all the rest. The exclusiveness of that claim of course lived to haunt us, since Christianity inherited it as part of its legacy from Judaism, turning it against us as well as against the unconverted of all regions and ages. While we Jews were seldom given the opportunity by history to taunt other religions, we also never developed an adequate theology

of the spiritual legitimacy of other faiths. This is not the same as the notion of *חסידי אומות העולם*, which states that there can be righteous individuals outside of Jewry, but leaves aside the question of whether their religions had anything to do with that righteousness. Franz Rosenzweig worked hard to create a Jewish theology of Christianity, certainly a need both for him personally, living so close to the border of those two faiths, and for his age. Post-moderns will need us to do this for other religions in general, including those Eastern traditions hardest for us since they seem to contain elements of both polytheism and the veneration of what our language can only call *idols*—truly an *עבודה* that is *זרה* to our spirit and experience.

In contrast to the apologetic needs of Jewish modernity, post-modern Jews will no longer need to show how our religion is different from others in order to justify Jewish survival. The underlying unity of religions is already taken for granted by most students of the subject. Phenomenological tools of research developed over the last half century have shown that the varying traditions, with all their very real differences of language, symbols, and history nevertheless reveal deeply parallel underlying structures. All are embodiments of the human search for meaning, the need for communities of expression, and the striving to name and embody transcendence. Judaism has a venerable place in this community of world religions, an importance all out of proportion to our numbers within the human population.

Secure in that place, we will need to open ourselves to a new cycle of learning and teaching, an open meeting with the philosophical and meditational traditions of the East. This is an encounter of religions that has not yet taken place in our long history and one that bears no legacy of former oppression or persecutions. There is great wisdom to be learned from aspects of these traditions, some of which are developed much more fully than Judaism in their subtle understandings of inward states and religious consciousness. Judaism has much to offer the East in this encounter, including both our prophetic tradition of social justice and our long experience of sur-

vival in an alien and often hostile cultural setting. As some of the many Jewish students and devotees of Eastern traditions come home to their own ancestral roots, as we hope and pray they will, we should also hope that they bring with them some of the techniques of meditation and understandings of the human mind that Judaism could well absorb in this new era, much as in prior ages we made room for Plato and Aristotle or Kant and Hegel. We will be open to such learning only insofar as we find a way to overcome our narrow and overly judgmental views of the ways other human societies have found to worship and know the same One whom we call only by the nameless name **אשם**, hiding the unpronounceable verb-noun **ה-ו-ה-י**.

Perhaps we will find a key to this opening in the strange way the Hebrew language preserved the old plural form of its term for divinity—**אלהים**—forcing us to violate the rules of grammar every time we use it with a singular verb, as though to tell us that all the prior gods of the nations are henceforth included within this single One. If we could find a way of teaching that each time we say **אלהינו** in a blessing, the *yod* attests to that plural, indicating that we worship the One manifest in all the many traditions of humanity, respecting and loving them for their diversity and richness, we would be taking a major step. Of course the *nun vav* in that same word would continue to declare that we articulate that worship in a way that is distinctly our own—not superior, not exclusive, but loved simply for being ours, the unique product of our people’s quest up the mountain and down into the well over all these centuries. When we can clearly express both of these, with no need for defense or apology, we will be well on the road toward teaching the Judaism that will be needed and well-heard in the coming post-modern era.

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