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## PLURALISM AND THE HALAKHAH

Of late it has become fashionable to view atomic fission as the symbol of a disintegrating civilization. Our atomic misery makes for strange bedfellows. Spokesmen for science and religion vie with each other in decrying the ills of atomization and fragmentation — the villains blamed for the weird array of psychological, social, and political ailments that plague modern man.

Amidst such a climate of opinion, we are prone to ignore the intellectual and psychological hazards that can result from preoccupation with the other extreme — the craving for absolute unity — that is so often regarded as the hallmark of religious orientation.\* We tend to forget that without division, separation, and specialization, all significant human thought must come to a standstill. Moreover, it must be borne in mind that the Platonic emphasis upon the *essential* unity that underlies all *existential* diversity has given rise to various political systems that swallow up the individual in the ocean of collectivity. Similarly, the grandiose attempt of Hegel to reduce Reality to the One Absolute unfolding itself in a logic of history has led (via its Marxian adaptation) to the emergence of modern communism with its utter contempt for the rights of the individual. By the same token, Higher Criticism — the fantastic attempt to undermine the authority of the Bible, especially of

\* It is, of course, true that the religious personality gravitates towards the ultimate Unity that lies beyond all empirical diversity. Abraham, the Jewish "knight of faith," is described in the Midrash as the religious genius who through his discovery of God restored the original unity of the world "in the same manner as a tailor sews together a garment that has been ripped apart" (*Bereshit Rabbah*, 39:3).

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the Pentateuch, by stigmatizing the canonical writings as clumsy hodgepodes of assorted passages from numerous authors — does not at all reflect the influence of atomization or fragmentation. On the contrary, the methods of Higher Criticism, as Professor Kaufmann<sup>1</sup> has shown, were inspired either by Hegelian notions concerning the unfolding of the Absolute in history or by the totally unwarranted extension to the domain of religious thought of Darwinian notions concerning the evolution of the species. In either case, the fragmentation of the Pentateuch can be traced back to the overzealous search for unity — manifesting itself in the obsession to find a single master formula for the understanding of all of reality.

It may be contended that these arguments discredit only certain brands of monistic philosophies but do not affect the validity of the so called “unity theme.”\*\* It will therefore be the purpose of this paper to show that for cogent reasons Judaism held in check its monistic trends and assigned priority to the pluralism inherent in the halakhic approach.

### I

Kabbalistic thinking, though composed of a variety of strands, is marked by a strong bent towards a radical monism. Drawing upon this conceptual framework, Rabbi Lamm portrayed a masterful picture of a world view that regards all forms of separation as a cosmic tragedy — relieved only by the comforting realization that with the fulfillment of our eschatological hopes all divisiveness was destined to be overcome.

This standpoint is akin to the orientation of the mystic to whom any form of separation from the ultimate One is intolerable. Hence, escape from the illusory world of appearance and union with the ultimately Real become the only worthwhile goals of life.

Significantly, many of the foremost halakhic thinkers displayed a proclivity for this mystic approach. Even such a

\*\* Norman Lamm, “The Unity Theme and Its Implications for Moderns,” *TRADITION*, Fall 1961, pp. 44-64.

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staunch advocate of a rigorous Halakhah-centered orientation as Rabbi Chayyim of Volozin could not completely suppress his monistic longings. They come to the fore in a passage in which the illusory character of all existential diversity is unabashedly admitted. Developing the kabbalistic notion of the "Higher Unity" to its logical conclusion, Rabbi Chayyim acknowledges that, metaphysically speaking, Absolute Reality is constituted of undifferentiated oneness. "In truth, from His side, all of existence is filled with His being, without any separations, distinctions, or divisions, as if creation had not taken place at all."<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Chayyim is, of course, quick to recognize that such an attitude is completely incompatible with any form of normative Judaism. This is why he immediately proceeds with the important proviso: "We are neither capable nor permitted to contemplate this fact at all, but must seek to perform His *mitzvot* in the world that is revealed to our understanding."<sup>3</sup>

Obviously, the very foundation of the Halakhah would collapse if all distinctions were merely of an illusory character. Large segments of Jewish law presuppose the reality of spatial and temporal distinctions. Even more disastrous would be another corollary of viewing the world from the perspective of the "Higher Unity." If God's presence permeates equally all reality, then the very difference between the sacred and the profane, the pure and the impure, between good and evil itself, would be completely obliterated. The implications of the position would lead to such a radical anti-nomianism that even the excesses of the Sabbatian heresy would by comparison pale into insignificance.

Rabbi Chayyim could not brook any world view that would assign only relative importance to halakhic norms. In a manner so characteristic of the essentially pluralistic approach of halakhic Judaism, he does not even attempt to resolve the tension between his mystic, monistic leanings and his halakhic, pluralistic orientation. Instead, he pragmatically postulates the existence of finite, individual entities as indispensable to the functioning of the halakhic process.<sup>4</sup>

In marked contrast to this position, Rabbi Lamm, in his quest for unification, invades the very stronghold of pluralism

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— the Halakhah. While he concedes the essentially pluralistic outlook of the Halakhah as a whole, he nonetheless contends that Judaism's penchant for absolute unity comes to the fore in one of the most pivotal areas of the Halakhah — the laws of the Sabbath.

From Rabbi Lamm's brilliant presentation, the various halakhic injunctions and regulations concerning the Sabbath emerge as an eloquent protest against man's involvement in the world of nature. Since all creativity in the world of nature depends upon processes utilizing atomization and fragmentation, the abstention from creative work on the Sabbath is designed to remove man from the "World of Disunity" and lead him towards a higher plane of existence where all separation and division are surmounted.

This poetic description of the higher symbolic function of the Sabbath — as a manifestation of the "Higher Unity" towards which Judasim aspires — has a deeply moving quality. But it cannot be adduced as evidence for the unity thesis. For nowhere can it be shown that this interpretation reflects halakhic categories of thought. In point of fact, the argument has employed purely Kabbalistic notions to provide a rationale for Sabbath observance. As a matter of fact, it could easily be shown that this essentially mystic explanation clashes with numerous other halakhic norms which look upon creativity in the world of nature not as a necessary evil but as the realization of the religious duty to become a partner with the Holy One, Blessed be He, in the process of creation."<sup>5</sup> Those who are not privileged enough to share the same proclivity for mystic thinking are free to adopt an entirely different rationale for Sabbath observance. Admirers of Samson Raphael Hirsch, for example, would find in the Sabbath not a protest against man's involvement with the mundane but rather an enthusiastic endorsement of human creativity. Accordingly, we link ourselves with the divine scheme of creation when, in conscious imitation of the Creator, we, too, interrupt our own creative efforts on the Sabbath.

Halakhic thinking, as a general rule, is marked by a far more affirmative attitude towards uniqueness and individuality

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than is suggested by the broad espousal of monism. Judaism does not strive for Nirvana — the dissolution of all individuality and particularity in the ocean of undifferentiated oneness. The verdict “it was good” was pronounced by God, so the Book of Genesis (1:31) informs us, not before, but after the process of separation had been initiated and distinctions had made their appearance in the world of creation. The Psalmist certainly was not embarrassed by the manifold. He made no attempt to discover any underlying unity. On the contrary, he exclaimed: “How manifold are thy works, O God!” (Psalms 104:24). The absolute Unity of the Creator does not at all imply the oneness of the creation. Moreover, it is precisely in the lower world of creation, not in the higher regions of Being, that, according to a well known Midrash, the Divine Presence has its abode.\*

Judaism has, of course, its share of mystic thinkers who yearn passionately for redemption from the world of disunity and disintegration. Thus Maimonides extolls *mitat neshikah* (death as a kiss) which enables the soul to become reunited with God. A contemporary mystic, Professor Heschel, sums up his philosophy of life with the statement, “For the pious man it is a privilege to die.”<sup>7</sup>

But it must be borne in mind that such attitudes do not arise out of the matrix of halakhic thinking. Instead, they reflect points of view that relegate the Halakhah to a peripheral position. In the case of Maimonides, we should note that his glorification of *mitat neshikah* as the liberation of the soul from the prison of finite limitation goes hand in hand with other non-halakhic trends such as the downgrading of the role of the *mitzvah*,\*\* a stringent asceticism, and the advocacy of philo-

\* The fundamental differences between the halakhic and the Kabbalistic attitudes are clearly formulated in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's classic study, “Ish ha-Halakhah” (*Talpiot*, 1944, pp. 651-735). This pioneering work is indispensable to an understanding of the philosophy of Halakhah.

\*\* See *Guide for the Perplexed*, Part 3, Chapter 51, where the religiously observant, but philosophically naive individual is compared by Maimonides to a person who, while anxious to enter the palace of a king, has not even seen it. In all fairness to Maimonides we should, however, remember that the con-

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sophical reflection as a means to mystical union with God. Obviously, these views do not express halakhic categories of thought, but attest to the powerful influence which Neo-Platonism exerted on Maimonides. Insofar as Professor Heschel's position is concerned, it is hardly necessary to point out that he represents a school of thought in which the Halakhah plays only a very subordinate role.

As opposed to these flights from earthly realities, the halakhist's attachment to the world of existential diversity is typified by Rabbi Hayyim's trenchant observations concerning the proper motivation for Torah study. In the Hassidic scheme, the study of Torah was looked upon as a means to communion with God. This view is rejected by Rabbi Chayyim who insisted that *Torah Lishmah* was to be taken literally as the study of the Torah for its own sake.<sup>8</sup> Superficially, the argument rests on solid, practical ground. It is, of course, impossible to concentrate upon involved and intricate talmudic problems if concern for mystical union with God diverts one's attention from the legal question at hand.

In reality, however, the issue goes far deeper than the requirements of the psychology of learning which call for a maximum of undivided attention for the attainment of optimum results. The very ideal of losing oneself in the all-embracing One clashes with the spirit of the Halakhah which emphasizes serving the One in and through a pluralistic world. Hence, we should study Torah to comprehend the divine will as it relates to man's task on earth, not to reach the mystic goal of *bittul ha-yesh* (the obliteration of individuality in the union with God).\*

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cluding chapter of the *Guide* implies a far more positive attitude towards religious practice.

\* For similar reasons, Rabbi Chayyim objected to excessive emphasis upon Mussar (pietistic literature) at the expense of halakhic literature. Our main objective in life is not simply to seek communion with God, but to understand His will as it relates to our specific tasks in all sorts of situations (see *Nefesh Chayyim*, Part IV).

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### II

Because halakhic thinking veers away from the ultimate implications of any system that revolves around the absolute Unity of Reality as a whole, it represents the very antithesis of what has been described by William James as the typical religious attitude. To quote a particularly revealing passage in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, "the abandonment of self-responsibility seems to be the fundamental act in specifically religious, as distinguished from moral, practice."<sup>9</sup> That religion lends itself to this kind of interpretation was demonstrated by Dr. Servatius in a specially shocking manner during the Eichmann trial. In a ridiculous attempt to shift the onus of guilt from his client to Divine Providence, Eichmann's lawyer implied that the extermination of six million Jews formed an integral part of a divine design for human history. The absurdity of such an obnoxious defense maneuver should not blind us to the fact that the so-called religious attitude, unless counterbalanced by halakhic components, may in fact lead to an evasion of moral responsibility. If evil and suffering are parts of a cosmic scheme that "as a whole" is good, why not resign oneself to the prevalence of tragedy in the comforting faith that the calamities of our fellow man contribute to the ultimate goodness of the universe? \*\* Why struggle against moral lapses if seemingly discordant notes constitute part of the higher harmony of an orchestra directed by a Divine Conductor?

Such attitudes of resignation and passivity are completely foreign to halakhic Judaism. In its scheme, man is not merely a creature, but also co-creator, "God's partner in the creative process."<sup>10</sup> Jewish tradition pins upon every individual the responsibility for the very survival of the cosmos. We must so act as if our action were to decide the very existence of the universe.<sup>11</sup> Thus religion leads, not to the evasion, but the accentuation of personal responsibility.

\*\* Cf. the grotesque distortion of the religious attitude contained in Daniel Bell's "Reflections on Jewish Identity," (*Commentary*, June 1961, p. 472): "Orthodoxy leads to quietism, suffering is the badge, one accepts it as the mark of fate."

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Unlike the Stoic philosopher, the religious Jew cannot be indifferent to the suffering of his fellow man. Judaism advocates a philosophy of involvement — not detachment. It may be granted that from the standpoint of “Reality-as-a-whole” or, as Spinoza put it, “under the aspect of eternity,” the suffering of the individual may vanish in the total good. The Midrash<sup>12</sup> goes so far as to credit death and suffering with winning for the universe the stamp of divine approval contained in the phrase, “God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Yet, this does not entitle any individual to adopt a “philosophical” attitude towards *preventable* suffering, especially that of his fellow man.

As human beings, we must come to grips with individual situations and specific problems. We cannot act with reference to “Reality-as-a-whole.” All significant human action would come to standstill if we were to proceed upon the assumption that all our distinctions are meaningless because they are transcended in the infinite. Our ethical behavior and social action must be predicated upon the admittedly limited perspective of finite, mortal creatures who catch only a partial (and probably even distorted) glimpse of the truth. But any attempt to rise above such a limited standpoint will only end up with a vicious relativism (even moral solipsism) where all distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, become completely blurred.

With this proviso, we can wholeheartedly accept many spiritual benefits that spring from the “religious” attitude. When personal tragedies are accepted as necessary to the good of the whole, the burden of sorrow can be borne with a measure of equanimity. By stepping beyond our self-enclosed frame of reference, we can remove the sting of bitterness from much of our pain. A Hassidic sage expressed this in a striking comment on the Biblical verse, “God blessed Abraham with all” (Gen. 24:1). It was Abraham’s ability to regard each isolated event as part of an over-all scheme that made his life the blessing it was.<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, the same Hassidic leader read a profound insight into the Talmudic dictum, “all that God does is for the good” (*Berakhot* 60b). If we look upon events not

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as isolated units but as parts of an all-embracing Whole, we shall discern that, all appearances to the contrary, they are really for the good.<sup>14</sup> It was this kind of faith that came to the fore in the moving statement of R. Israel Baal Shem Tov: "Because I am conscious of God, all things are of equal value to me."<sup>15</sup>

As one among the many strands that form the fabric of a pious life, such an attitude is highly commendable. But the situation is altogether different when absorption in the Whole becomes the dominant, let alone exclusive, feature of religiosity. Judaism is far too concerned with the fate of the individual to invite cavalier solutions to the problem of evil. The suffering of the individual remains a problem (witness the Book of Job!) in spite of the most idealistic systems human fancy can construct. The goodness of the system as such does not answer the needs of the individual in the throes of anguish and sorrow. Religion should deepen our sense of compassion, not provide a glib metaphysical pseudo-solution that explains away the very problem of evil.

Characteristically, the Halakhah is too realistic to recommend the adoption of an ultimate metaphysical perspective as a solution of the problem. True, we are required to bless God both for good and evil.<sup>16</sup> But the content of the respective blessings is altogether different in both cases. Good news we receive by hailing God as the dispenser of goodness; sad news prompts us to acknowledge Him as the "True Judge." Significantly, even when there is reason to expect that in the long run the present calamity may turn out to be a blessing in disguise, we still are not permitted to gloss over the immediate tragedy. Even momentary anguish cannot be dismissed lightly as something utterly inconsequential. This is why the Halakhah stipulates that no matter what the ultimate consequences of a given event may be, we must judge it in terms of the present and pronounce whatever benediction is warranted in the light of immediate circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

Refusal to draw a sharp line of demarcation between metaphysical good and evil (viewing the latter as something apparent rather than real) can easily result in confusion in the

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moral sphere as well. In all fairness, it must be pointed out that this is not a necessary corollary of metaphysical monism. It is quite possible to uphold the distinction in the moral sphere, while rejecting it in the realm of metaphysics. But there can be no doubt that metaphysical monism tends to spill over into the ethical domain. This need not take such extreme formulations as the Sabbatian and Frankian heresies. There are many Hassidic doctrines that tend to blur the absolute distinction between right and wrong. The justification of *averah lishmah* (the sin which is committed with the express purpose of serving God), especially on the part of the *Tzaddik*, represents a specially telling example. The views of the late Rabbi Kook at times also gravitate in this direction. As Pinchas Rosenbluth pointed out in a recent essay, if the lights of holiness shine forth from the most secular and even atheistic manifestations of culture, if all of reality is "holy and divine," and all evil purely illusory, then we are deprived of all significant criteria for moral evaluation.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, an element of goodness (a spark of holiness) may possibly be found in even an immoral act even as the most moral human act may be tainted with some evil (due to the intrinsic limitations imposed upon everything finite). But unwillingness to make any distinction at all will undermine the very structure of all morality. No crime can be justified on the ground that in the long run it has proved a boon to mankind. Pharaoh's brutalities against the Jewish people cannot be defended on the ground that they were necessary as background for the exodus from Egypt which forms such a keystone of Judaism. To revert to the criticisms levelled by Pinchas Rosenbluth,<sup>19</sup> Rabbi Kook's thought, at times, seems to confuse the ideal with the real, the ultimate Messianic perspective with the requirements of the harsh present-day realities in all their ugliness and baseness.

The same kind of confusion comes to the fore in Rabbi Lamm's powerful plea for the re-evaluation of our attitude towards secular studies. His view aspires to a synthesis that knows no essential gulf between the sacred and the secular, because "all knowledge is . . . ultimately integrated in the great *yichud* of the Holy One and His Shekhinah."<sup>20</sup>

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Here again we must fall back upon the vital distinction between the temporal and eternal, the immediate and the ultimate. The categories of normative Judaism are geared to the requirements, not of a Messianic area in which all differences are transcended, but of our present world that abounds in existential diversity. The fact that secular knowledge can also serve a religious purpose by no means detracts from the singular and unique importance of Torah in the narrower sense of the term.

At this point it will be of special importance to remember that Judaism attaches a great deal of weight to distinctions even within the domain of the sacred itself. Considerable attention is paid to different forms and degrees of holiness. Within halakhic thought, particular emphasis is placed upon the lines of demarcation between the various branches and aspects of Torah. Legal principles governing ritual questions need not necessarily apply to civil law, and, conversely, the standards of civil law cannot be automatically extended to the ritual law.<sup>21</sup>

Far more fundamental in the distinction between Halakhah and Aggadah. Methods and processes appropriate to the one are completely irrelevant to the other. To fuse the two, in accordance with Bialik's recommendation,<sup>22</sup> would only result in a confusion of languages. We would end up in a Babel of confusion, similar to the one that would arise out of the mixing of the language of poetry with that of science.

In keeping with this emphasis upon the autonomy of the various areas of religious thought, the Halakhah is hermetically sealed off against intrusion of all elements that interfere with the canons and procedures of strictly halakhic reasoning. According to a well known talmudic episode, the rabbis, in the midst of a very heated debate, not only refused to be swayed by the "evidence" of miracles, but categorically objected to heeding a heavenly voice that seemed to substantiate a minority opinion. Rabbi Eliezer was overruled — in spite of the supernatural support he was able to marshal for his point of view, for "Torah was no longer in Heaven."<sup>23</sup> Rabbi Joseph Karo did not fare any better when he sought acceptance for some of his rulings on the ground that they were vouchsafed to him

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by his heavenly mentor (the *Maggid*). For that matter, only the Pentateuch — no other part of the Bible — can serve as the basis for the derivation of laws.<sup>24</sup> When it comes to questions of laws, “the scholar is superior to the prophet.”<sup>25</sup> The notion of “progressive revelation,” which plays such a dominant role in Conservative and Reform theology, is completely strange to traditional Judaism. For interpretations of the law we rely exclusively on the following two sources: 1) The content of the Sinaitic revelation as recorded in the Pentateuch and 2) the principles of interpretation of the Oral Torah. It must be borne in mind that subsequent prophetic revelations are completely devoid of authority in matters affecting the proper elucidation of the intent of the Law.\*

### III

Respect for the autonomy of the diverse fields of religious knowledge represents not merely an indispensable methodological principle, violation of which would result in intellectual chaos or disastrous confusion of languages. Within the *Halakhah* itself, there is noticeable a marked accent upon diversity and a deeply ingrained aversion to all types of *reductionism*. In sharp contrast to many other religious systems, there is no single mood, emotion, or attitude, be it love, faith, or self-surrender, that can claim a monopoly in the Jewish religious economy. Variety is the order of the day. According to the Talmud, the biblical verse “in *all* thy ways thou shalt acknowledge Him” (Proverbs 3:6 [*italics my own*]), best sums up the sweeping range over which Jewish piety holds sway.<sup>26</sup> There are innumerable avenues of service to God; every psychological drive can be harnessed in the process.

We are, of course, bidden to love God. But for that matter, we are also supposed to fear Him. We are neither in love with love, nor in fear of fear. Both sentiments represent solid pil-

\* We refer here only to authoritative interpretations of the Law, not to temporary suspensions or other measures dictated by *Horaat Shaah* (emergency regulations necessitated by the exigencies of the moment were within the scope of prophetic competence).

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lars supporting the arch of Jewish piety. The daily liturgy reflects this all-embracing attitude in the prayer, "unify our hearts to love and fear Thy name."<sup>27</sup> Notwithstanding all the scathing theological attacks directed against us on this score, during the "Days of Awe" we unabashedly continue to turn to God with the request, "and thus place Thy *fear* upon us."<sup>28</sup> We seek, not the conquest of fear, but its proper use.

It has become fashionable to ridicule what Walter Lippmann has branded "lower forms of religion" in which appeals to self-interest are sanctioned.<sup>29</sup> But Judaism maintains that every attitude can be hallowed (not merely sublimated) in the service of God. In this scheme, there is room for self-regarding as well as altruistic motives, for the Freudian *libido* as well as the "death-instinct," for self-realization as well as self-surrender. All the components of our complex psychological make up can be channeled into the service of God.

To cite a typical example, the Talmud approves of charity, even if it is inspired by such a strictly prudential mentality as expressed in the proverb "charity is the salt (the preservative) of money."<sup>30</sup> Now it may be argued that the talmudic sages were so preoccupied with the communal benefits accruing from the practice of charity that they were completely uninterested in the motive of the giver. But it would hardly be proper to impute to the sages of old the kind of mentality associated with a certain type of professional fundraiser, to whom nothing matters but the success of a campaign. There is clear-cut evidence that the rabbis were most definitely concerned with the propriety of the motive. They went so far as to negate altogether the value of any donation that was motivated by any form of haughtiness.<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche was by no means original in his discovery that, at times, charity springs from resentment rather than love.<sup>32</sup> The talmudic sages were astute enough depth-psychologists to recognize how frequently base emotions are concealed behind the veneer of charity. They might even concur with many of Nietzsche's biting denunciations of certain types of charity. Yet — and here an unbridgeable chasm separates the two points of view — insofar as the rabbinic position is concerned, only what transpires at the conscious level

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need be taken into consideration in the evaluation of the worthwhileness of a philanthropic act. Charitable giving is condemned only when it serves as a vehicle for the expression of haughtiness or similar attitudes — e.g., when a “philanthropist” relishes the feelings of superiority over his “inferior” fellow man who must depend upon him for sustenance. In cases like these, when philanthropy represents a deliberate act of self-aggrandizement rather than an expression of loving-kindness, it must be regarded as a spiritual liability. But the rabbis could not go along with Nietzsche in cases where charity arises out of a *sublimated* sense of resentment. What takes place on the subconscious level cannot detract from the spiritual merits of an act. On the contrary, the transformation of an undesirable psychological trait into a wholesome quality would be regarded as a spiritual triumph of the highest order. Man fulfills his task to the extent that he succeeds in the sublimation of immoral drives by harnessing them into the service of his Creator.\*

Owing to the intrinsic limitations besetting human nature, this ideal can never be fully realized. The rabbis, therefore, encouraged the performance of good deeds, even if prompted by ulterior motives. This realistic approach was justified on the ground that, eventually, the habit of performing good deeds

\* This point of view differs sharply from that expressed by Max Scheler in his celebrated “Das Ressentiment im Aufbau der Moralen” (*Vom Umsturz der Werte*, [Bern: A. Francke, 1945], pp. 33-131). Approaching the subject from a Christian perspective, Scheler discounts the value of any form of charity that is grounded on any other emotion but love. In Scheler’s scheme, charity, as opposed to mere philanthropy cannot have its ultimate root in any undesirable psychological trait. The Jewish standpoint is altogether different. However pre-eminent a position we assign to altruistic love in our scale of values, we must reckon with other psychological factors. Given sufficient self-discipline and self-control, other psychological drives and urges can be sublimated and eventually channeled into religiously approved outlets. To illustrate our point concretely, Scheler disparages the moral worth inherent in the selfless actions of a nurse who chose her profession out of a subconscious delight in watching suffering at close range. Judaism, instead of harboring disdain for this nurse, would credit her with a colossal spiritual victory. To have sublimated an ugly urge to the extent that it becomes the driving force behind a life of selfless service is deserving, not of sneering derision, but of whole-hearted admiration.

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may gradually transform our mentality and ennoble our character to such an extent that we may reach a level of religiosity where the good deed is inspired only by the sublime desire to serve God. Although many scholars maintain that such completely disinterested service is within the reach of man, Rabbi Chayyim of Volozin, in espousing a rigorous halakhic approach, considerably tones down what he considers to be extravagant claims for the efficacy of this approach. What emerges is a far less idyllic picture of man's capacity for selfless service. Rabbi Chayyim anticipates no miracle cure from selfishness and ego-centeredness. All he expects is that, as the result of the repeated performance of good deeds, our character may become sufficiently refined so that at least *some* of the motives prompting our good deeds will stem from the desire to serve God.<sup>33</sup> But this ideal motive can, in point of fact, co-exist with numerous other purely selfish and even base drives and urges. Reinhold Niebuhr and other neo-orthodox Christian theologians may be completely right in their analysis of the selfishness that mars so much of what parades as selfless love. But Judaism suffers from no perfectionist pretensions. Granted that even our noblest sentiments and finest actions are tainted by residual traces of selfishness, resentment, and even outright hostility, we still are not justified in repudiating altogether the worthwhileness of moral effort. In the Jewish scheme, the recognition of our imperfections leads, not to a Pauline obsession with "original sin," but to a design for the "ultimate sanctification" of all the elements comprising our psychological and biological make-up. We end up — not with a vicious perfectionism where the damned and doomed individual will depend for his redemption upon a gratuitous act of "grace" to be bestowed upon those who possess "faith" — but with a wholesome stress upon moral responsibility, manifesting itself in a never-ending quest towards self-perfection.

## IV

The ultimate objective of such incessant striving obviously will mirror the peculiar structure of Jewish piety with its accent

