

Rabbi Schachter, B'nai B'rith Hillel Director at the University of Manitoba and chairman of that school's Department of Judaic Studies, here outlines two basic attitudes to Judaism which, to his mind, characterize the religious approaches of Hassidism and its opponents. This essay represents a response to Prof. Marvin Fox's analysis, in the last (Fall 1960) issue of *TRADITION*, of the thinking of Abraham Joshua Heschel. Rabbi Schachter is a graduate of the Lubavitcher Yeshivah in Brooklyn, and holds a Master's Degree from Boston University in the Psychology of Religion.

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Two hundred years have passed since the demise of the Baal Shem Tov. World Jewry celebrated this bicentennial in many ways. In Israel and in America many publications appeared dealing with Hassidism and its founder. In view of this it is quite significant to note Professor Fox's article, "Heschel, Intuition, and the Halakhah" in the Fall 1960 issue of *TRADITION*. When Hassidism first appeared, it soon found itself surrounded by opposition. Interestingly, this opposition by the *Mitnaggdim* (opponents) raised almost the same issues with Hassidism that Fox does with Heschel. In fact, a thorough reading of Fox's article makes it apparent that in addressing himself to Heschel, Fox addresses himself to Hassidism.

Fox's essay, as a footnote under the beginning of the article informs us, is based on Heschel's book, *God in Search of Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1956). Fox praises Heschel for his freshness, brilliance, vitality, yet feels that there are "some points in his philosophy of religion and of Judaism which require revision or, at least, a different emphasis." Fox objects to Heschel basing his thought on the intuitive approach, maintaining that the intuitive approach which is based upon

existentialist views is far weaker than (and this Fox does not fully spell out) the Maimonidean scholastic approach.* His second objection to Heschel is that he makes too many and too great demands on the contemporary Jew. Fox feels that Heschel demands an exalted state of mind, which is emotionally too expensive to maintain over any period of time, and that no claim based on intuition is able to convince the uncommitted. Finally, Fox maintains that Heschel's Judaism is not sufficiently anchored in Halakhah.

(Fox himself is aware that his disagreement with Heschel is not so much a substantive disagreement as one of emphasis, and that Heschel qualifies many of his statements in the direction of his objections. It would be quite interesting to follow through in this particular work of Heschel's, and in his other works, to see whether Fox's objections are well-founded or not. However, this is not the purpose of our essay, and so we must leave this to others.)

Opponents of Hassidism two hundred years ago also based their opposition on Hassidism's stress on intuition. They argued that on the one hand, Hassidism abandons the scholastic philosophy, that by reaching for the Zohar with its affective imagery,

*Fox himself is not a pure scholastic. He too presents us with an either/or existential choice. He says, "We then affirm, that in the beginning God created because we recognize that to deny God means to destroy ourselves." Fox shows how we must either opt destruction and meaninglessness, or, in order to exist meaningfully, affirm Creator and creation. If Fox were to follow Maimonides, he would persuade us to accept God as the necessarily Existent as our first axiom. He would then expand this axiom ontologically and build a theological system as the corollary of such an axiom. Or he may, like Bachya Ibn Pakuda, wish to persuade us by the argument from design. Yet Fox knows that the contemporary man in the street will not be persuaded by such an argument, and therefore challenges him in terms of non-being as the only alternative to Torah. Fox states, "that the Jew who is perplexed and searching is our special concern" and further that "he will never be persuaded to live as a Jew by religious intuitions which he does not have and cannot understand." Chances are that Heschel does not feel that he appeals to the totally uncommitted person. He appeals primarily to the person in whom he can strike a harmonious responsive chord. Such a person is already on the threshold of *becoming* a Jew, a process he would not have initiated had there not been an intuitive striving for God and Judaism.

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it abdicates the use of disciplined reason. On the other hand, its intuitionism suggests the accessibility of prophecy. The opponents quoted proof texts from the Talmud which in substance state that prophecy is no longer available to us. The opponents also argued that Hassidism makes demands upon its adherents which are far too great and lead to excesses. Thus, Hassidism requires even of the *Tzaddik*, the perfectly just man, that he do *teshuvah* (turning, repentance). There was another accusation advanced by the opponents of Hassidism — that Hassidism is not sufficiently rooted in the Halakhah and deprecates its study. It makes the *am ha-aretz* welcome in its ranks and showed far too much partiality to him.

But even on the level of Hassid and Mitnagged, the polemic was not new. It existed even before the fourteenth and fifteenth century of the common era, after the *Zohar* was published. Then the opposition expressed itself somewhat differently, and instead of speaking of Hassid versus Mitnagged, they spoke of *Mekubbal* versus *Pashtan*. If we were to trace these two opposing attitudes into talmudic times, we would discover that this discussion existed even then.

This polemic thus represents a perennial clash between opposing attitudes. At bottom the difference is not so much a logical or ideological one as a psychological personality factor. Two types of mentality in this perennial polemic clamor for recognition as the only true vision of Judaism.

There is an entire literature of *vikuchim* (polemics) exploring the very same question. These polemics were not limited to the printed page. They often took the form of public disputations, such as the one described in *Kuntres Bikkur Chicago* (*Otzar Chassidim*, [Brooklyn: Kehoth Publications, 1944] p. 22). There we are told of a dispute between Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Ladi, the founder of the Chabad movement in Hassidism, and the rabbis of Shklov, Brysk, Minsk, and Slutsk in the year 5543 (1782) in the city of Minsk. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Ladi addressed himself to two major issues in that polemic. One, why are the *amei ha-aretz*, the unlettered simple people, so greatly encouraged and so well accepted in Hassidic circles and and why is such a high level of prayer and devotional life advo-

cated for them. Second was the objection raised by the Mitnaggdim that Hassidism demands that even a perfect *Tzaddik* do *teshuvah*. This, the opponents of Hassidism argued, was a contradiction in terms. If one is a perfectly just man, then any movement away from him would lead to sin. Moreover, if we are to maintain that "the *Tzadik* is the foundation of the world," and still he stands in need of *teshuvah*, then the world is founded on a lie. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Ladi, in advocating the Hassidic point of view, quoted his teacher, the Maggid of Mezritch, who quoted the Baal Shem Tov as follows:

"And the angel of the Lord showed himself unto him in the flaming heart of the fire from the midst of the thornbush. And he saw, behold the thornbush is not consumed. And Moses said: 'Let me turn from here to see this great sight.' "

Onkelos translates "He showed Himself" as "He revealed Himself." The intent of "revelation" is that each one, according to his level, should attain to the revelation. The real meaning of *hitgallut* (revelation) is fulfilled only when even the lower levels are made aware of the revelation. For this reason Onkelos also translates "And *HVYH* descended upon Mount Sinai" as "*HVYH* revealed Himself on Mount Sinai." Thus *hitgallut* means the descent of revelation to the very lowest levels. Thus, at the giving of the Torah, not only Moses, on his exalted level, but even the lowliest of Israel received the Torah.

Of the *hitgallut* at the thornbush, Rashi states: *be'labbat esh* — "in the very heart of the fire." Wherein does the Lord's messenger become known? — "in the heart afire." "The heart afire" refers to the sincere and simple fervor (of the heart) which is "her conflagration is the flame of Yah."

Where is this "heart afire" to be found? "In the midst of the thornbush." Rashi further states: "Why the thornbush and no other tree? Because 'with him am I in straits.'" The straits are *this world*. This world is called *tzarah* (trouble, straits) because it is such a narrow spot. The supernal worlds, where His infinite Light, blessed be He, is condensed, in nature's ways, is a narrow place. That is why it is called *tzarah*. The supernal intention is that through the service and the study of Torah, the *tzarah* becomes transformed into *zohar* (a window) in order to illumine the worlds with the Light of Torah and *mitzvot*.

Now, it is written: "Man is the tree of the field." There are fruit trees, to which R. Yochanan (*Taanit* 7a) compared the Torah scholars, and there are thornbushes. But the heart afire is in the

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thornbush. The *Talmidei Chakhamim* (scholars) who are engaged in Torah-study are the fire, for Torah has been compared to fire. But for them, one cannot claim the "yet it is not consumed" because they can quench their thirst with the Torah insights they gain. However, the thornbushes, the simple folk, who are the very heart afire, in their simple, sincere prayer, their recital of the Psalms, despite their ignorance of the meaning of the words they recite, are the flame that is not quenched. Since their thirst can never be stilled, they possess an immense longing for God and Torah and *mitzvot*.

"And Moses said: "Let me turn aside . . ." Rashi comments: "Let me turn aside from here to approach there." Moses understood the supernal vision which revealed to him the greater value of the simple folk over the *Talmidei Chakhamim*, namely, that the heart afire is only in the "thornbush," and thus he attained to the rung of *teshuvah*. But since Moses was a perfect *Tzaddik*, his *teshuvah* was: "Let me turn aside from where I am, to come close to there." The intention is that one must never be satisfied with one's rung and status. Thus even a perfect *Tzaddik* like Moses needs the work of "Let me turn aside from here to come close to there," which is the movement of *teshuvah*.

We have quoted this excerpt in its entirety because it reveals not only the Hassidic answer to these questions, but also because it gives an insight into the manner in which the answer is offered. It is a homiletic way of dealing with the subject. It is round-about. It is most un-Greek, in that it does not provide us with an *essential* distinction, but rather describes to us the *functional* process in which the penitent *Tzaddik* is involved. And it is in this functional process that many logical paradoxes are contained side by side. This is the manner of Hassidic teaching as well as of rabbinic teaching. This is the manner in which a congregant is taught by his rabbi who addresses him from the pulpit and this is the manner in which the insight occurs to the preacher as he shapes the entire text into a new and dynamic configuration. Known data are regrouped to shape a more meaningful image which vibrates in consonance with one's own inner being, and thus involves the whole man in its harmonics. This is not necessarily pure intuition. It is "gestalt" thinking. Gestalt thinking usually has the power of placing man into a situation. Any situation creates heavy ethical demands on man and he is no longer involved in the *logical* process of manipulating concepts.

He is put into a situation of concern. This process was favored by Hassidic leaders in communicating to others their own insights.

Our particular excerpt concerns itself with the heart afire. In the dynamics of heart afire, the perfect *Tzaddik* is raised to *teshuvah*. Here he shares with the *amei ha-aretz* the dynamics of the *Baal Teshuvah*. And it is the *Baal Teshuvah* aspect about which our polemics revolve.

Many of us are already comfortably committed. Those of us who have arrived and become arrested at a particular level of Jewish observance and Jewish living will find themselves more comfortably at home with Fox and the opponents of Hassidism. The "heart afire" is quenched by feeling justified before God. Such a person does not see himself in need of an overwhelming and *general* desire for *teshuvah*. He may recognize that there are many *particulars* in which *teshuvah* is required of him, but generally he is at home with God. We may classify such a person as the *Chakham* type of mind (very much like the "Wise Son" of the "Four Questions"). His rightness is measured in terms of Torah behavior — *glatt kosher*, Jewish dairy products, the mutual approval of the pious. The *Chakham* approach in Jewish theological problems is detached, as if he is merely re-examining the already concluded philosophical business. He advocates the study of the *Guide for Perplexed*, if at all, in terms of studying the answers before the questions — and then only in order to know how to answer the heretic. The *Chakham* tends to be quantitative, form-following, seeking the obvious. He rationalizes his own behavior from a pious middle path. He is content to function with a dormant motivation which derives from a past decision. It is not that he is not unconcerned about God, but that he is too busy doing God's will. *Ver hot tzeit tzu trachten fun Gott? Fun Modeh Ani biz ha-Mappil bin ich k'seder farnumen*. The *Chakham* is basically democratic. He seeks the majority opinion according to the Torah dictum. He defines his thought in terms of quality and essence. The *Chakham* looks to the past for justification. He is more a student than a disciple. He wishes to walk through the world with a cool head rather than with a heart afire. He is content to align his conceptual thought with a

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great authority, and leave it at that.

The other type of mind is not "at home," is uncomfortable, and finds itself comfortable in the company of Hassidism and Heschel. If it is not yet the heart afire, it aspires to be the heart afire. It is more concerned in increasing its present holdings than in merely maintaining them. The *Baal Teshuvah* is intoxicated with his yearning and feels depressed unless he can maintain this intoxication. To live in the stress of the *Baal Teshuvah* psychology is emotionally expensive. Not many souls can bear this expense, and sooner or later they align themselves with one or another form of *being*, having arrested the process of *becoming*. From that moment on they are not in a *Baal Teshuvah* relationship with Judaism: they have become *Chakhamim* along with one group or another. The *Baal Teshuvah* must tap very deep resources in his own soul in order to be able to maintain himself in this emotionally expensive atmosphere. He truly is a heart afire in a thornbush that is never consumed.

The *Baal Teshuvah* lives in an atmosphere of crisis. He sees the world as unbalanced, and by his act of Torah observance, he wants to weigh the scales of the world into the merit side. His own sin is not just deviation from Torah-true behavior; it is a cosmic cataclysm. To merely square himself with halakhic criteria is not enough for the *Baal Teshuvah*. Like the "Seer" of Lublin, he is not satisfied with mere halakhic justification. He asks himself: will God take delight in my action? He places himself before the visage of God. This does not mean that the *Baal Teshuvah* has reached such high levels of contemplative vision that he is sure of God's qualities or attributes. He is sure only of his yearning for them. He has no criteria other than "not yet, not yet." The *Baal Teshuvah* is not concerned about rational proof of God's existence. God exists for him in his dissatisfaction with his present, somewhere at the end of his strivings. He seeks not so much to *know* God as to *find* Him, and he finds Him in his seeking. It is often difficult to communicate with the *Baal Teshuvah*. He is impenetrably esoteric, highly symbolic. The *Chakham* thus often accuses him of double-talk. He can, however, communicate his concern and his striving.

The *Baal Teshuvah* is not satisfied with dormant motivation.

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He strives always to bring it to full awareness. He lives in a state of tension. The consent of the majority is far less significant to him than the discipleship he seeks in one who has already trodden along his path. He is concerned not so much with the *what* of Judaism as in the *how* of becoming a good Jew. No goal in the present can satisfy the *Baal Teshuvah*: he always looks toward the future. He speaks from want of reconciliation, always considering himself in debt. He makes demands upon himself and upon others which seem unreasonable.

Halakhah is for the *Baal Teshuvah* not an end itself, but a means to God. It is for the *Baal Teshuvah*, in Professor Bergman's words, "the arsenal with which one can fight his way through God." The *Chakham* type of mind, will look to the halakhic scholar for guidance, while the *Baal Teshuvah* will look to the inspired guide to help him edify his own unsatisfying self.

The religious climate of the *Chakham* type of mind is temperate; that of the *Baal Teshuvah* is torrid. If he does not feel hot, as a heart afire, the *Baal Teshuvah* fears the creeping frost of Amalek.

The Rabbis declare that "On the place where the *Baal Teshuvah* stands, the *Tzaddik* cannot stand." The *Baal Teshuvah* is closer to God than the *Tzaddik*, for, as the Zohar has it, "he attracts Him with far greater force." There are mysteries concerning which the *Chakham* will not dare to speculate. These same mysteries are home ground for the *Baal Teshuvah*. "The people saw and they moved backwards and stood from afar. Moses came close and entered into the mist which was God." This the Bratzlaver interpreted in the following way: "The people became aware of the obstacles in their path to God and were satisfied to remain from afar, whereas Moses, realizing that God was to be found in the very obstacle itself, in the mist, proceeded further to find God right there."

It is the attitude of the heart afire which separates the *Baal Teshuvah* from the *Chakham*. When the *Chakham* argues that his approach is far more certain and yields greater consensual validation in terms of the historic tradition and in terms of coolly reasoned philosophy, the *Baal Teshuvah* answers that such an approach is far too abstract, that it merely demonstrates in

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devious conceptual ways what is easily apprehended by him in his striving. Thus he finds it unnecessary to engage in the *Chakham's* reasoning. The *Chakham* may argue that vision and prophecy do not exist today. The *Baal Teshuvah* will reply that he clearly heard the Heavenly Voice issuing from Mount Sinai calling upon him to return to God. The *Baal Teshuvah* is impatient with the *Chakham's* long and round-about conceptual way, when he is so constantly aroused by the situational prophetic call which he claims to hear. The *Chakham*, not involved in this striving, is not satisfied with the blurred outlines of the *Baal Teshuvah's* situational thought. The *Chakham* is scandalized when, a few moments later, the *Baal Teshuvah*, involved in a different crisis and in order to overcome that, has espoused an altogether opposing idea. The *Baal Teshuvah* does not wish to accept the *Chakham's* invitation to walk the middle path between both extremes. Like the Kotzker, he will retort that the middle path is trod only by animals. Thus the *Baal Teshuvah* will not commit himself to any system of thought, but will insist that the living word, speaking to him at the moment, enabling him to live through his present crisis, is the very best system. Because it helps him so much, he feels that this living word has come to him by Divine Providence and therefore partakes of the power of prophecy. The *Chakham* cannot help but see in the *Baal Teshuvah's* "living word" a mere homiletical exercise. But it is the function of homiletics to cater to the *Baal Teshuvah*. For this reason he often employs a Hassidic *vertel* because he can thus best communicate the dynamism of a multi-level interpretation. The form in which most Hassidic teaching comes to us is thus the short pointed homiletic flash. In order to best understand Hassidic literature, one must seek in it the answers for crises.

If we understand, then, that what divides the two streams as they proceed side by side through Jewish history is the problem of the "heart afire," we need by no means make a value judgement in favor of one or the other. Each functions in the light of its own approach to Torah. Both of them are profoundly Jewish. "The words of these and the words of the others are both the words of the living God." Yet out of this realization that both

represent Judaism, each group can learn from the other. The *Chakham* type would do well to take on some of the ongoing and forward-moving dynamics of the *Baal Teshuvah*. This is what our excerpt from the words of the Baal Shem Tov quoted before indicates. But Hassidism has also shown that the *Baal Teshuvah* would also do well to realize that, ultimately, he must somehow settle down in his commitments and serve God not only as an individual striving onward toward the realization of Him, but as a limb fulfilling His blessed will in *mitzvot*.

Hassidism in the time of the Baal Shem Tov at one time almost decided to be known as *Baalei Teshuvah*. For reasons of his own, the Baal Shem Tov did not consent to this. As Hassidism gained adherents, a certain balance was struck in its own camp in the course of the generations. The opponents of Hassidism and their successors felt too that they had to absorb some of the psychological dynamics of Hassidism, and this they did in terms of the later Mussar movement. The student of the Halakhah is bound to encounter the Aggadah, and a student of the Aggadah will suffer a total lack of understanding if he is not at home within the Halakhah. Upon introspection, a halakhic decisor will often find himself guided by intuition in arriving at a decision where there is no precedent available to him. For he too hears a Heavenly Voice issuing from Mount Sinai which says, "Woe unto creation due to the Torah's debasement."

In the light of the above it becomes apparent that the problem of *teshuvah* is a central one in the dialogue between Hassidim and their opponents, between the streams of *Chakhamim* and *Baalei Teshuvah*, and between Fox and Heschel today.

Whenever the climate is conducive to *teshuvah* the emphasis moves from the value judgment to the functional approach. The functional approach is always more psychological, the *Chakham's* approach is more philosophical. Yet both of these approaches within Judaism presuppose a general atmosphere of service to God. The calendar and the liturgy afford to both the expression of the point of view of the other. There is much study for the *Baal Teshuvah* in observances, halakhically formulated, which he shares, at least on the level of behavior, with Jews all over the world. And the halakhically motivated *Chakham* is

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bound to encounter *teshuvah* as it reaches him and transforms him into a *Baal Teshuvah* during the High Holy Days.

To the dismay of the adherents of both ways, the general atmosphere of divine service has become contaminated. Both groups must work to clear the air. The late Lubavitcher Rebbe remarked that in order to rid our atmosphere of defilement we must filter the air through constant recital of the words of Torah. Our present atmosphere is sensate, aims at success, loves the tangible, and conforms to the prevalent social niveau. In this atmosphere, vocations for life-long Torah study in a *Kolel*, or for a life of devout worship in Hassidic circles, are generally not produced. To our intense regret, the entire polemic between *Baal Teshuvah* and *Chakham*, Hassid and Mitnagged, Heschel and Fox*, are not relevant to the average uncommitted Jew today. For it takes place in an already sanctified atmosphere.

*Dr. Fox misreads the writings of Heschel when he says, "Must we in effect scorn the piety of a vast number of meticulously observant Jews because it is often routine and mechanical?" Surely Heschel does not scorn such Jews. He would no doubt be glad if, instead of reading his book, they would engage in intensive study of Torah in a Beth Hamidrash. Fox is unfair when he says, "Does not such a view of Judaism grant (without intending to do so) the old (and probably malicious) charge that a letter kills where the spirit gives life?" By leaving us with a choice of a lifeless letter and a living letter, we are bound to choose the living letter. But nowhere in Heschel's writing does he maintain that a letter of Torah is lifeless. All that Heschel says is that the letter needs reading. When Fox says, "a Jew who lives in accordance with Halakhah has done all that can be asked of him," he may find that not only Heschel and Hassidism will disagree with him, but Nachmanides will dispute him too. Nachmanides would say that such a person may well be "a reprobate with the consent of the Torah." Fox, who is an academic philosopher, should have been more careful in attacking his own deductions from Heschel's writings. Heschel does not attack the *Chakham* type of mind when he speaks disparagingly of "Pan-halakhic theology" calling it "a view which exalts the Torah only because it discloses the Law, not because it discloses a way of finding God and life." He is not speaking of Halakhah as envisioned by the Chafetz Chayyim or Chazon Ish or Rav Kook. Heschel attacks a religious behaviorism and pan-halakhism as it is construed by Professor Isaiah Leibovitz of Israel. A number of our contemporary Orthodox colleagues are more or less in agreement with Professor Leibovitz who pleads for behavior according to Halakhah and is not at all concerned with the duties of the heart and of the mind. Such words as soul and holiness are without relevancy in Professor Leibovitz's view.

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It will not do to create a straw man out of Heschel and to attack that straw man. It will not do to revive the polemics between Hassidim and Mitnaggdim. Our problem is not how we shall come to grips with one another, but how shall we purify the air, how shall we communicate with those who have neither already arrived nor are in the process of coming to Halakhah. Our problem is that this polemic between Hassid and Mitnagged, and Heschel and Fox, is not the daily dialogue between two average Jewish businessmen walking on their way to the subway.

We may not be able to win over the unconcerned Jew to Judaism in a direct way. We may attempt devious methods: attract him to adult education, work through his children who attend our day schools, wait for the moment in which his concern begins to rouse him. But from then on it is important that we do not contend for an exclusive way to Torah and God.

Hassidism itself did not remain pledged to only one way. Many Hassidic currents arose to care for those who were in need of their own particular way, and the problems that were peculiar to them. The opponents of Hassidism too were not satisfied with one solitary way. There were many different currents in Mussar. There were ways which, emphasizing study, allowed for many ways to study.

It is necessary to offer as many ways as possible, so that he who is searching may find one most suitable to his own need. Thus, when moved towards a more meaningful Judaism, he will not find his way barred. The word *way* is used advisedly. For it is a way, not the final goal. It is merely a path which will lead us all to the same glorious goal: the perfection of our service to God and our obedience to His will, as it is made manifest to us in Torah — both in Halakhah and Aggadah, in the lives of *Chakhamim* and *Baalei Teshuvah*, of *Tzaddikim* or giants of scholarship, whether of the past or the present.