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## IDOLATRY: A PROHIBITION FOR OUR TIME

**I**dolatry is one of the most severe prohibitions in the Torah. According to our sages it is one of the three cardinal sins along with illicit relations and murder that may not be transgressed even under pain of death. Of the six hundred and thirteen commandments, no less than fifty are related to the prohibition of idolatry. Worship of foreign gods is likened unto infidelity, as well as harlotry, and is considered a breach of the covenant between God and Israel.

Technically speaking, *avodah zarah* includes two situations: One, the worship of a foreign deity.<sup>1</sup> The other, worshipping God through an idol, i.e., misrepresenting God Himself as a graven image and worshipping that image. It is to this phenomenon that the Torah refers in the book of Deuteronomy (4:15-18):

Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.

The fear here is not of the substitution of the God of Israel for an alien god but rather of the possible misconceptions of God which may arise as a consequence of God's own revelation at Sinai.

Nahmanides, in his commentary on the Torah, understands the sin of the golden calf in a similar vein: "They did not want the calf to serve as a

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deity; instead they wanted to have someone in the place of Moses to show them the way.”<sup>2</sup> Later on, he also writes,

Because Israel was in a wilderness, a desolate wasteland, and destruction and everlasting desolation come from the north, as it is written, “Out of the north the evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land” . . . [the intent of the verse is to state] that the attribute of justice comes to the world from the left, . . . and since in the account of the Divine Chariot it is said, “and the four of them had the face of an ox on the left side”—therefore Aaron thought that the destroyer [the ox, which was to the left, i.e. the north] points to the place of destruction where its great power is centered, and when worshipping God through there *the spirit will be poured from on high*. . . You [Moses] see them coming to Sinai and accepting my Torah, and I see them contemplating me and how I came forth in my “traveling coach” to give them the Torah. . . and they will unhitch one of my *tatromulin* of which it is written, “and the face of an ox on the left side,” and bring me to anger with it.<sup>3</sup>

The ultimate object of worship remains God. The problem is that only an aspect of His “personality” is being adored.

The revelation at Sinai is too powerful and overwhelming for the masses to comprehend. Consequently they become fixated upon fragments of that revelation, replacing the fragments for the harmonious whole.

Traveling through the east, one sees the worship of idols as alluded to in the Torah and our sages. Travelers to India will witness the burning of incense, the adoration of idols with flowers and the like. In the Western world, however, these phenomena are largely absent. What is the relevance, then, of the various prohibitions and multitude of admonitions against idolatry found in the Torah, prophets, and our sages to the non/post—idolatrous West? Are those laws to be related to as fossils, bearing testimony to now extinct phenomena? Are they the “appendix” of the Torah, part of the immune system that no longer serves any practical purpose?

We believe that the essence of idolatry is as vibrant as ever and persists in the modern world. In this article we wish to offer thoughts on the subject based primarily upon the teachings of R. Mordechai Yosef of Izbica as well as the surprising common ground he shares with the prominent Protestant theologian, Paul Tillich, as well as later Hinduism as understood by the famed German Indologist Heinrich Zimmer.

## I. R. MORDECHAI YOSEF AND THE THEOLOGY OF UNCERTAINTY

The open-ended and incomplete nature of our comprehension of the divine revelation is a cornerstone of the thought of R. Mordechai Yosef of Izbica.

“I (*anokhi*) am the Lord your God.” The verse does not state “*ani*,” for if it stated “*ani*” that would imply that the Holy One Blessed Be He revealed then the totality of His light to Israel, precluding the possibility of further delving into His words, for everything would already be revealed. The letter “*khaf*” [of *anokhi*], however, denotes that the revelation is not complete, but is rather an estimation and comparison to the light which God will reveal in the future.”<sup>4</sup>

The “*khaf*” of “*anokhi*” is the “*khaf hadimayon*”, the *khaf* of comparison. The correct translation of the verse would be “I am *as* the Lord. . .”! Even the revelation at Sinai, the paradigm of all subsequent revelations, must be comprehended as a partial and incomplete picture of the divine, as an “as if.”

R. Mordechai Yosef is rather emphatic on this point.

The reason that the Commandment of Thou shall not make for yourself a graven image [follows the commandment of *anokhi*]. . . is because a graven image is cut according to specific dimensions, perfect, lacking nothing. . . this is to teach us that nothing is revealed to man completely.<sup>5</sup>

Claiming perfect clarity and complete understanding of God’s revelation would be a transgression of the Second Commandment. This is not to say that certainty is not possible with even a partial, incomplete understanding.<sup>6</sup> A partial truth is a truth nonetheless. It is the insistence upon perfect and total understanding which R. Mordechai Yosef deems idolatrous.

There are two components to R. Mordechai Yosef’s position: the first is ontological and the second is phenomenological. Ontologically speaking, complete knowledge and understanding of the Divine is impossible given the nature of the human and the Divine respectively. How does this ontology impact upon our hearts and minds? This is the phenomenological question. Uncertainty is the experience which is engendered when the finite human comprehends something of the Infinite Divine. Since God is infinite and His creatures are finite, any revelation must contain an element of uncertainty. Uncertainty is what occupies the

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“space” between our finite selves and the infinite God. Denying the uncertainty is idolatrous.<sup>7</sup>

This is true not only for the common individual but for the prophet as well. Regarding the prophecy of Jeremiah, R. Mordechai Yosef writes,

. . . prophecy requires rigorous discerning introspection (“*berur*”) to determine whether it is truly from God. We find this principle with regard to Jeremiah when he was imprisoned. He received the prophecy instructing him to purchase the field from Hanamel ben Shalom, his uncle. It was only after Hanamel approached him offering to sell him the field that Jeremiah states, “and I knew that it was the Word of God” (Jeremiah 32). This implies that until then Jeremiah was uncertain as to whether his prophecy was indeed the word of God or whether perhaps he only perceived the content of the prophecy that way because of his personal desire to acquire the field and as a result of the desire he imagined that this too was the Will of God.<sup>8</sup>

Prophecy requires “*berur*,” a process of introspection and fleshing out of real motives, in order to be perceived with a measure of clarity.<sup>9</sup> Even the lord of the prophets can not escape the uncertainty inherent in revelation.

Behold when Moses saw that even after the Exodus from Egypt, Pharaoh persisted to accompany them, an uncertainty rose in his mind. Perhaps (he thought) the children of Israel have not yet completed their process of refinement (*berur*) and this was why Pharaoh could still have some relationship with them. Furthermore, from the observation that God did not guide the people toward the way of *Pelishtim* lest the people reconsider, He concluded that the people were not yet ready. . . At times God conceals His intentions and the meaning of His acts from people, and they will not understand the Divine Will in this issue. This was the situation in which Moshe found himself, for it was a source of amazement to him why God did not guide the children of Israel the way of the Land of the *Pelishtim*.<sup>10</sup>

The interpretation of the Divine will, according to R. Mordechai Yosef, is the true test of the *akeida*.

“And God tested Abraham”. . . In actuality, Abraham did not receive an explicit command to slaughter his son. That is why the Torah does not state “And the Lord (*YHVH*) tested” but rather, “And God (*Elohim*) tested.” This indicates that the revelation was seen through an unclear speculum (*aspaklaria de-lo nehira*). . . It was a test to Abraham precisely because the command was not explicit.<sup>11</sup>

According to R. Mordechai Yosef, the pivotal and orienting events of the Torah, such as the giving of the law, the exodus from Egypt and *akeidat Yitshak* are characterized by uncertainty as to what is the true will of God. We may conclude that R. Mordechai Yosef believes that in the attempt to grasp the Divine there is an inherent gap between what can be humanly comprehended and the Divine itself. This gap is occupied by uncertainty, *safek*.

What attitude are we to have toward the reality of *safek*? On the one hand how can we feel good about the chasm that exists between God and human beings? The “hiding of the Divine countenance” (commonly known as “*hester panim*”) is certainly perceived as a negative and, at times, tragic phenomena. Is there anything redeeming about *safek* and its attendant anxiety? Interestingly, R. Mordechai Yosef sees uncertainty as essential for religious development, allowing “space” to grow and expand. Again,

“I (*anokhi*) am the Lord your God.” The verse does not state “*ani*,” for if it stated “*ani*” that would imply that the Holy One Blessed Be He revealed then the totality of His Light to Israel, precluding the possibility of further delving into his words, for everything is already revealed.

For Abraham, the lack of clarity for the command of the *akeida* provides fertile ground for the perfection of Abraham’s attribute of loving-kindness. Referring to the passage, “Now I know that you are God fearing (*yirei Elohim*),” R. Modechai Yosef distinguishes between fear of God (*yir’at Elohim*) and fear of the Lord (*yir’at ha-Shem*). *Yir’at Elohim* is when one refrains from a prohibited activity due to an awareness that the prohibition is necessary for his own personal development. However, if one abstains not because of a personal flaw but rather for the sake of “the system,” he is considered to be a “*yirei ha-Shem*.”<sup>12</sup>

Abraham, R. Mordechai Yosef asserts, is in the position of *yirei Elohim* with regards to the *akeida*. That is to say that the *akeida* was necessary not only to provide a lesson for others of sacrifice for God as is commonly understood, but also to refine a flaw in Abraham himself. Abraham, by going through the excruciating process of deciphering the Divine Will, had refined and focused his love properly. The enthusiastic, unconditional love of Abraham for creation had become transformed, through the necessity of withholding his love from his most beloved son, into a more discerning and measured love, a love which is only for the sake of Heaven.<sup>13</sup>

From the example of the *akeida* we may conclude that the introduction of uncertainty into a situation may be necessary at times to facilitate growth. R. Mordechai Yosef goes further than this. The exacting demand of *berur* in understanding God’s revelation spills over into our own

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process of self-understanding and refinement. The uncertainty inherent in the process of *berur* as a consequence of the essential inability to fully know God, also applies to knowing ourselves and coming into our own. R. Mordechai Yosef's reading of Rachel provides an excellent example.

The Torah attributes to Rachel the characteristic of jealousy. When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (Genesis 30:1) According to *Mei Ha-Shiloah*, Rachel is unable to bear children until she refines this characteristic. She must weed out her jealousy *of* Leah, while retaining the zealotry *for* founding the Tribe of Jacob. The culmination of this process comes when Rachel sets her jealousy aside for the sake of the tribe and offers her handmaiden to Jacob: "Then she said, 'Here is my maid Bilhah; go to her, that she may bear upon my knees, and even I may have children through her.'" (Genesis 30:3)

It is precisely Rachel's engagement in the process of refinement that heals her. The possibility of process, precisely for the purpose of refinement, is embedded in reality by God. "Behold, it is God's way with people that in the good which God invested in our attribute he created a flaw!"<sup>14</sup> The flaw and the process of its repair are essential to facilitate authentic spiritual growth.<sup>15</sup>

## II. PAUL TILLICH AND THE BROKEN MYTH<sup>16</sup>

A similar notion to that of R. Mordechai Yosef's is proposed by Paul Tillich. Citing the passage, "and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might," Paul Tillich defines faith as "ultimate concern." "Ultimate concern" possesses, conditions, and animates the individual. Religious faith is being ultimately concerned with the Ultimate. Given the finite nature of human beings and the infinite nature of the Ultimate, we employ a special language when talking of our ultimate concern, the language of symbol and myth. We employ symbolic language when common language is inadequate in grasping the object to which we are referring. Symbols both resonate within us and point beyond themselves. A national flag, for example, stirs feelings of loyalty and belonging in the individual while pointing to the concept of "the nation."

Religious language does not stop with the use of symbols. The symbols are woven together by narratives, thus forming myths. In other words, religious stories, such as the story of creation, the Garden of Eden, and the standing at Sinai, being stories of the meeting of the human and the Divine, point beyond themselves to a transcendent reality, a reality which

is fundamentally beyond human comprehension. This point can not be overstressed according to Tillich. To assert otherwise, namely to insist upon the literal truth of these symbols and myths, would be idolatrous. It would be idolatrous to substitute the myth for the actual transcendent reality to which the myth is alluding. In Tillich's own words, "Literalism deprives God of his ultimacy and religiously speaking, his majesty. . . . Faith, if it takes its symbols literally, becomes idolatrous! It calls something ultimate which is less than ultimate. Faith, conscious of the symbolic character of its symbols, gives God the honor which is due him."<sup>17</sup>

According to Tillich, then, monotheism is not automatically free from idolatry. The point is not in how *many* gods one believes, but *how* one believes. How ultimate is the object of our ultimate concern. In order to preserve the ultimacy of our ultimate concern it becomes necessary to demythologize religious myths. To demythologize is to affirm the use of myth as the language of religion while acknowledging that the myth is not literally true. Myth so conceived, Tillich calls a "broken myth."<sup>18</sup>

As we have seen earlier, R. Mordechai Yosef treats the *khaf* in *anokhi* as a *khaf ha-dimayon*, indicating that the perception of God at Sinai is but an approximation of the divine reality. In Tillich's terms we would say that God's revelation at Sinai must be understood symbolically, asserting on the one hand that the symbol points to an ontological reality, while also acknowledging that the perception is not literally true. I believe that we may equate R. Mordechai Yosef's "*khaf ha-dimayon*" with Tillich's concept of the "broken myth."<sup>19</sup>

### III. HEINRICH ZIMMER AND THE PHENOMENON OF EXPANDING FORM

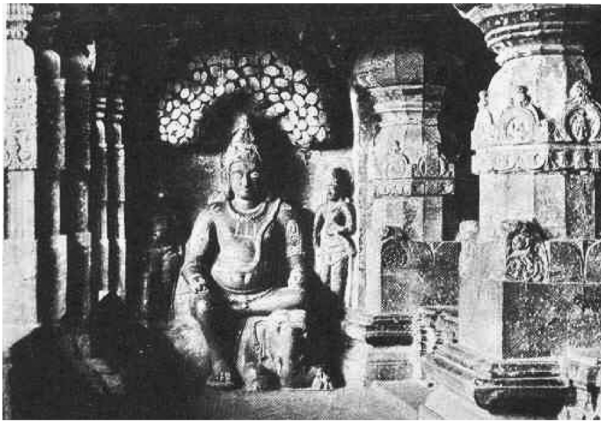
Both R. Mordechai Yosef and Paul Tillich call our attention to the human price of clinging to the unbroken symbol. By maintaining that our understanding is direct and complete we are both making God finite (in our own image) and limiting the potentiality of human growth and development. The graven image, being "cut and dried" and occupying distinct space in three dimensions, is the embodiment of this problem. Paradoxically, "clarity" is the enemy of religious development. And it is the clarity of direct comprehension of the Divine made completely manifest that idolatry promises and provides.

According to Heinrich Zimmer, the static nature of idols is a major concern in Hinduism. In his *Myth and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, Zimmer highlights what he calls the Phenomenon of Expanding

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Form, a unique Hindu device for conveying motion and unfolding development in idols. In the top picture we see a 9<sup>th</sup> century statue of the Hindu god, Indra, as portrayed by the Jaina sect. The style is massive and heavy with no hint of delicate workmanship or movement. “Jaina art,” Zimmer writes,

is characterized by a puppet-like stiffness, barrenness, and rigidity. . . . Like the doctrine and life experience that it renders and interprets, it is archaic fundamentalist, inflexible-unsophisticated by any alleviating insight. Nothing ever dissolves into undifferentiated, transcendent, subtle essence.<sup>20 21</sup>



This is a wonderful illustration of what R. Mordechai Yosef meant by a graven image. Furthermore, Zimmer’s interpretation of the *meaning* of this image is in complete agreement with R. Mordechai Yosef.



This image stands (or sits, as the case may be) in stark contrast to the three images beneath it. These images refer to Hindu creation myths. The sense that we get here is one of growth and erupting energy. Again, in Zimmer's words, "The solid, static mass of stone, by a subtle artifice of the craftsman, has been converted into a dynamomorphic, multiple event. In this respect, this piece of sculpture is more like a motion picture than a painting." This reflects the notion that "there is nothing static, nothing abiding, but only the flow of relentless process, with everything originating, growing, decaying, vanishing—this wholly dynamic view of life. . . is one of the fundamental conceptions of later Hinduism."<sup>22</sup>

This is Hinduism's breathtaking response to the critique of R. Mordechai Yosef. Zimmer's analysis of the "Expanding Form" exonerates Hinduism of a major pitfall of idolatry as understood by the *Mei Ha-Shiloah*.

#### IV. UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF AVODAH ZARAH

He [Rav Ashi] then questioned him [Menashe], "Since you are so wise, why did you worship idols?" He replied, "Had you been there, you would have raised up the skirt of your garment and run after me."<sup>23</sup>

For those of us who live in the post-idolatrous world, this *aggadah* is a true mystery. What is the source of Menashe's overwhelming desire to worship idols? Has human nature changed so radically that we now have no notion of what this *aggadah* is talking about? We must look to an analogous desire which we do in fact experience, one which the Western world is very well acquainted: the erotic.<sup>24</sup>

R. Mordechai Yosef understands eroticism as a corruption of divine revelation. He writes that the desire of Ahashverosh for the nakedness of Vashti is a sublimation of sorts of the desire to comprehend God directly, *without garments*.

In the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov it is said that "the time of nakedness is not yet come." . . . At that time the sages of the Great Assembly were victorious over the evil inclination of idolatry (*Yoma* 69b) and the evil inclination of illicit sexual relations was also in their hands and they wanted to destroy it, but at that time it was not yet the Divine will. . . So at that time it was close that God's light should be revealed explicitly without any [external] garments . . . And when God reveals a new light, that light spreads throughout and enlightens all the worlds and even the Nations have a vague sense

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of this. But they perceive this in their polluted state of physicality. Israel, however will receive the light purely as it emanates from God. Therefore, as the time was close to the revelation of the divine light without garments, the nations sensed this, only their sense of it was through pollution and physicality and that is why they desired nakedness without garments. . .<sup>25</sup>

Purim is seen as the time of the second giving of the Torah,<sup>26</sup> hence a time of divine revelation. In fact, revelation was “in the air.” Those with refined perceptions, properly prepared and tuned in to the divine reality, sense an impending revelation, a significant comprehension of the divine. The atmospheric fluctuations being perceived by the spiritual elite are not lost upon the less refined masses. The direct comprehension of the Other is substituted by an erotic desire for nakedness. Vashti pays the price.

To be sure, eroticism as a symbol of religious unity/harmony can be very powerful indeed and as such has a place within non-idolatrous religions. One need look no further than our very own *Shir Ha-Shirim*. The Zohar employs erotic symbolism in the instance of Moses entering the cloud as representative of the unifying of the male and female divine attributes.<sup>27</sup> In Hinduism as well, the union of Shiva and his Shakti (queen) is a powerful symbol of the primordial union of the static (male) aspect of the cosmos with the rhythmic (female) aspect.<sup>28</sup>

It is clear, nonetheless, that the Sages viewed eroticism and idolatry intricately connected. The Talmud states that “the children of Israel did not desire to worship foreign gods except than to permit illicit sexual relations in public.”<sup>29</sup> In another instance the Talmud relates that the Sages were successful in crippling of the evil inclinations towards idolatry and forbidden sexual relations at the same instance. The desire for idolatry is seen as a lion emerging from the Holy of Holies.<sup>30</sup>

There are two crucial points in this second *aggadah*: firstly, the correlation between idolatry and erotic desire, and secondly, the residence of the idolatrous desire in the Holy of Holies. This underscores that fact that desire for intense religious experience and devotion which is essentially positive in nature (residing in the Holy of Holies) is bound up with the idolatrous urge. This urge in turn is correlated with erotic desire. Here we have recognition that in “deflating” the evil inclination for idolatry we have dulled our own spiritual lives.

The language we employ colloquially is instructive as well. How often we have heard in popular songs and in general usage statements such as “my love is divine,” “goddess,” and “worship the ground he/she walks upon?” This phenomenon underscores the common bond between the religious and erotic desires.

The common denominator binding the erotic and the religious brings us to Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm. Freud writes of the fundamental religious experience (which he denied ever having actually experienced himself) as an “oceanic feeling” of oneness with the universe.<sup>31</sup> Fromm writes of the basic human need to experience belonging to a greater whole.<sup>32</sup> Man requires, above all, meaning in his life. He seeks to understand his place in the cosmos. The healthy satisfaction of this need provides a feeling of rootedness and belonging which is fundamental in the healthy development of personality. This, according to Fromm, is the source of the driving desire to identify and merge with the Other. This is the common ground of the religious and the erotic.

So, in my race to the bosom of the Other do I, in my desperation, stop short of the mark? Will I settle for an object unworthy of my adoration and ultimate concern? Eroticism will substitute the body for the soul and sex for love. Idolatry will confuse God with His manifestation (the idol).

The common denominator between the erotic and the idolatrous would be the substitution of the sublime spiritual for the physical manifestation. Cast in terms of Tillich, we would say that there is a substitution of the symbol for that which is being symbolized. The symbol remains unbroken. This substitution is a consequence of the inability to bear the anxiety inherent in the process of profoundly approaching the Other.

## V. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In our introduction we spoke of two different phenomena which may be characterized as idolatry: the first, replacing God with an object unworthy of our ultimate concern, and second, worshipping God Himself in an idolatrous manner by relating to symbols and myths in a fashion which renders them “unbroken.”

In fact, both of these phenomena exist in the modern world. In many quarters, God as ultimate concern has been replaced by desire for economic success, extreme nationalism, or eroticism. On the theological plane, God is often perceived and “sold” in a most simplistic and literalistic manner. This is because of the desire, burning at times, to transcend the self and find firm rooting in the direct unmediated comprehension of the Other. Since God is infinite, and ultimately beyond human comprehension, the temptation exists to substitute an imperfect and insufficient object for the ultimate.

Appearances, then, may be deceiving. Hinduism, with its plethora of idols and graven images, may not at the end of the day be idolatrous, while

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the extreme literalist elements of the monotheistic faiths may “err” in that direction.

We must all be on our guard against both blatant and less recognizable forms of idolatry. It is fairly obvious that we must aspire to nothing less than the “Most High,” rejecting all substitutions such as “self fulfillment,” financial security, etc., as unfitting objects of our ultimate concern. Those large and clunky idols will not make it past the gatekeepers of our sanctuary. It is most disturbing however, that smaller graven images, *terafim*, so to speak, have managed to infiltrate our Holy of Holies disguised as pious faith. We live besieged in a culture of fast food and immediate gratification. This has a profound effect upon how we relate to religious symbols and stories. Those who insist upon the literality of the symbols and stories perform a terrible injustice to the richness of our religious experience. Our relationship with God is in danger of becoming stagnant and ossified. We must be on our guard against approaches to the Torah which, while seeming to be more “religious,” in fact suffer from lack of depth and contribute to paucity of understanding and spiritual mediocrity.

As a matter of faith, we must assert that our religious symbols and stories are firmly rooted in Divine revelation and as such participate in a reality which is beyond human comprehension. Only then can we foster profound religious experience and an appreciation of the open-ended, unfolding nature of our relationship with God.

## NOTES

1. See Halbertal and Margalit, *Idolatry*, Harvard University Press, 1992, chapter 5, “The Wrong God.”
2. Nahmanides, *Ramban Commentary on the Torah*, New York, 1973, translation by Chavel, Charles; Exodus 32:1, page 550.
3. Ibid. p. 553, 554.
4. R. Mordechai Yosef of Izbitz, *Mei Ha-Shiloah*, Bnei Brak Israel, edition 1995, *Yitro* s.v. *anokhi*; all translations are my own.
5. Ibid.
6. R. Mordechai Yosef believes that alongside the existential uncertainty inherent in Divine revelation there exists, paradoxically, a certain unshakable confidence and rootedness in God. Throughout the trials and tribulations of my life I will experience much uncertainty in my relationship with God. On a deeper level, however, the core of my identity rests in God. R. Mordechai Yosef refers to this unshakable confidence as the *mirvah oz*. See *Mei Ha-Shiloah*, *Toladot* s.v. *va-ye’ehav*, *Behar* s.v. *ve-safarta*. On misplaced confidence see *Mei Ha-Shiloah*, *Korah* s.v. *va-yikah* (the first entry).
7. A theology predicated upon the uncertainty inherent in comprehending Divine revelation may be seen as undermining normative behavior as dictated

by Divine law. If I am uncertain of the content of Divine revelation, how can I be certain of the behavior God demands of me? Indeed, one does find striking antinomian expressions in the *Mei Ha-Shiloah* (see for example *Pinhas* s.v. *va-ya'ar*). A full exploration of this topic is well beyond the scope of this paper. I do believe, however, that *Mei Ha-Shiloah* is generally not properly understood on this issue. The antinomian expressions must be counterbalanced by the cautionary admonitions which we find in *Tetsaveh* s.v. *ve-asita* and *Korah* s.v. *va-yikah*. See also note 6 above.

Given the antinomian expressions we find in the *Mei Ha-Shiloah*, the following anecdote told in Hasidic circles is particularly relevant. One morning, the story goes, when R. Mordechai Yosef arose from his bed, he inadvertently tied his right shoe before his left (in violation of the ruling of the *Shulhan Arukh*). So shaken was R. Mordechai Yosef, that he fasted that day in penance.

8. *Mei Ha-Shiloah; Kedoshim* s.v. *ve-lohei*.
9. The requirement of *berur* on behalf of the prophet calls our attention to the human and interactive nature of prophecy. The comprehension of prophecy is dependent upon the labor and ultimately the character of the prophet. This may be along the lines of Maimonides' naturalistic understanding of the phenomenon. See *Mei Ha-Shiloah; Lekh Lekha* s.v. *va-yomer*, *Sefat Emet; Lekh Lekha* 5632 s.v. *Ramban*.
10. *Mei Ha-Shiloah; Be-shalah* s.v. *va-yehi*.
11. *Mei Ha-Shiloah; Va-yera* s.v. *ve-ha-elohim*.
12. *Ibid*.
13. See Jerome Gellman's breathtaking analysis of *Mei Ha-Shiloah* on the *akeida* in his "The Fear, the Trembling, and the Fire: Kierkegaard and Hasidic Masters on the Binding of Isaac", University of America Press, 1994. We certainly concur with Professor Gellman's understanding of *Mei Ha-Shiloah*, that the test of Abraham is existential in nature, placing Abraham's grappling with the ambiguity of God's command at the center of the *akeida* (chapter two). Professor Gellman further contends that the *akeida* establishes Abraham as a "lover of God" (p.43). In this paper we are asserting that the *purpose* of the *akeida* was actually to transform Abraham by refining his characteristic of boundless love for all creation, tempering it with the *fear* of God (see note 11 on page 44). *Berur*, we believe, has a dual function; firstly, clarifying what *is*, and secondly, transforming the individual engaged in the process.
14. *Mei Ha-Shiloah; Va-yeitsei* s.v. *va-tomer*.
15. For further references to *safek* and its spiritual value see also *Mei Ha-Shiloah; Toledot* s.v. *va-ye'ehav; Va-yeshv* s.v. *va-yeshv; Va-yeshv* s.v. *va-yehi er; Be-shalach* s.v. *va-yehi be-shalah; Tazria* s.v. *ishah; Be-bukotai* s.v. *im be-bukotai; Likutei Shas, Berakhot* 28b s.v. *ke-shehalakh; vol.2 Bereishit* s.v. *hen*.  
A concise summary of R. Mordechai Yosef's approach to *safek* can be found in Faierstein, Morris; *All Is in the Hands of Heaven: The Teachings of R. Mordecai Joseph Leiner of Izbica*, Ktav, 1989, pp. 51-52.
16. It is not my intention in this section to relate to the theology of Paul Tillich as a whole, but rather to present the parallel between Tillich's idea of the broken myth and the theology of the *Mei Ha-Shiloah*.
17. Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith*, New York, 1957, p.52.

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18. R. Joseph Gekatilia, in the introduction to his kabalistic work, *Sha'arey Orab*, relates to kabalistic symbols in the same manner. *Sha'arey Orab*, Introduction, page 49:

The true essence of The Creator is imperceptible to all but Himself. . . Therefore, the references in the Torah (to God's) hand and feet, eye and ear etc. . . all these usages, even though they point and bear testimony to His Greatness and Truth. . . And though we are created in (God's) form and image, do not think for a moment that an eye (of God) is in the form of an eye literally or hand the form of a hand literally. . . rather the essence of (the Divine) hand is not as the essence of (human) hand, nor is their structure equal. . . (These anthropomorphisms) are rather like symbols, obtuse and beyond human understanding. For example, when one writes the name Reuven ben Ya'akov, Behold, these letters are not the actual form of Reuven ben Ya'akov or his essence, but rather a remembrance that this Reuven ben Ya'akov which is written is a symbol parallel to that form and structure which is known and called Reuven ben Ya'akov.

What is true of Kabbalistic symbolism is true of religious symbolism in general. The crucial question with regards to symbolism, then, is: "What is the relationship between the symbol and that which is being symbolized?" Various nuanced responses may be offered. We dare not however, confuse the one for the other.

19. Halbertal and Margalit survey different readings of myth. See pp.83-107. The reading of myth we suggest here is what they refer to as the symbolic and typological readings. We especially agree with the distinction, brought on page 94, between *saying* and *showing*. "The symbol shows—but does not say—what cannot be said. . . The symbol therefore cannot state propositions about the deity, since this is the meaning of its being unable to say things, but it is capable of showing things."
20. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*; edited by Joseph Campbell, Princeton 1946, page 130.
21. For more on the Jaina sect, see Heinrich Zimmer; *Philosophies of India*; edited by Joseph Campbell, Princeton University Press, 1951. See Part III, chapter 1, and in particular, p. 248, "The Jaina Doctrine of Bondage."
22. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols*, page 130.
23. *Sanhedrin* 102b.
24. Halbertal and Margalit (pp.23-25) view the connection between idolatry and sexual immorality as an issue of idolatrous lifestyle. We propose a thematic connection as well.
25. *Mei Ha-Shiloah*, *Megillah* 12b.
26. *Shabbat* 88a.
27. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah New Perspectives*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1988, pg. 227.
28. See for example, Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols*, plate 34.
29. *Sanhedrin* 63b.
30. *Yoma* 69b.
31. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1961.
32. Erich Fromm, *Escape From Freedom*, New York, 1941.