TRADITION
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HIGH HOLIDAY READER

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' Bookshelves Project

EDITED BY CHAIM STRAUCHLER

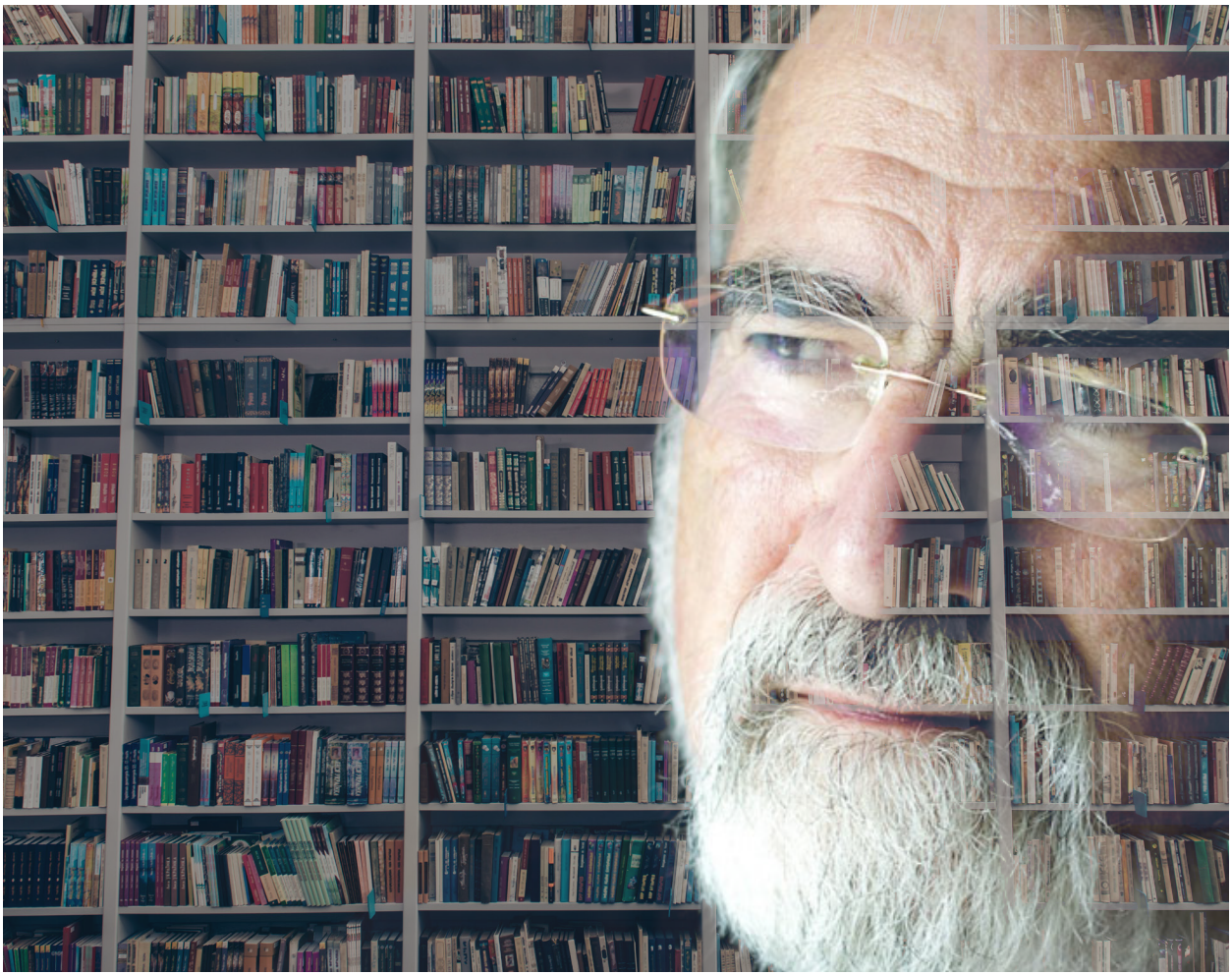

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Welcome to the 5782 High Holiday Reader.

Thank you for joining us in prayer, thought and conversation.

The High Holiday Reader brings together articles and essays to help us reconnect to what really matters in life. It asks us to think more deeply about those things. In the past, I have written short introductions to explain what I find meaningful in the piece. In some respect, the Reader this year is composed almost exclusively of such introductions, written on classics of Western thought.

TRADITION has been engaged in a years long project called "The BEST." In Culture and Anarchy (1869), Matthew Arnold argues for the role of reading "the best that has been thought and said" as an antidote to the anarchy of materialism, industrialism and individualistic self-interest. Arnold's idea influenced much of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein's understanding of Western Culture and its usefulness to bnei Torah.

"The BEST" attempts to highlight what things "out there" make us think and feel. What elements in our culture still inspire us to live better? We seek to share what we find that might still be described as "the best that has been thought and said." Our writers have prepared short introductions to those works to explain something of their value.

On 20 Heshvan – October 26 2021, the world will commemorate the first yahrzeit of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. Rabbi Sacks masterfully integrated the "Best" of Western thought with the timeless message of Torah to create a hopeful message for the Jewish people and for all humanity. We have dedicated a portion of the Best project to Rabbi Sacks' bookshelves. Rosh Hashanah is a time to think broadly of Hashem's world and our place within it. Rabbi Sacks' model is a most worthwhile framework for such thinking.

The Rabbi Sacks' Bookshelves owes a great debt of gratitude to Rabbi Jeffrey Saks – editor of TRADITION – who has championed this initiative and offered important guidance throughout. Thanks also to Isaac Selter, TRADITION's editorial assistant, for his valuable help and advice.

In addition to reviewing the Reader in shul, please bring it home and use it to spark discussion around your table. I would love to hear about the conversations that ensue. I send out a weekly e-mail with words of Torah and articles of interest (much like those included in this Reader) every Friday. If you would like to receive this weekly e-mail, please forward me your e-mail address after Yom Tov. My e-mail address is rabbistrauchler@rinat.org.

With wishes for a happy and health sweet new year – *shana tova*

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Rabbi Jonathan Sacks published this essay when he was a 25-year-old faculty member of Jews' College in London, England. The essay is a testament to his intellectual and Torah courage. Rabbi Sacks challenges the phenomenology of Lonely Man of Faith, arguing that loneliness is not the normative state of the religious person—but rather is indicative of a state of sin. He goes so far as to attribute the sin of the spies to this loneliness. Much of Rabbi Sacks' characteristic religious optimism—that would characterize so much of his later teachings—can be found in this, his first essay, in the pages of TRADITION.

FROM THE TRADITION ARCHIVES:

ALIENATION AND FAITH

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the phenomena, spiritual and social, that characterize contemporary existence, centrality of significance belongs to alienation. The distance at which the individual stands. from an easy immediate and innocent identification with nation, society, his physical environment, and other people is a distinguishing mark of the age; and one which has its obvious spiritual reflection. For the relationship between man and God is not independent of that between man and the world. When man is prised off the surface of the world by his technical mastery of natural forces; when this succeeds to self-consciousness and reflection; and this gives way in turn to loneliness and despair of innocence regained, then, in parallel, we can trace a widening gap between man and God, from the Thou of revelation, to the He of the Halakhah, to the It of the philosophers, and to the hidden and unreachable God of the crisis theologians, who begin, in His absence, to turn to other consolations.

We must distinguish the ontological condition of loneliness, from the occasional mood of estrangement that comes on men even in the heart of a period of direct relationship. For ours is not the loneliness of the Psalmist: "I am become a stranger to my brothers and alien to my mother's children" (69:8), for he can still speak the Thou and expect an answer: "For the Lord hearkens to the needy." Nor do we face the God of Isaiah: "In truth you are the God who hides Himself" (45:15) Intentional concealment is concealment for a purpose, part of the dialectic of revelation, a gesture understood by the lover of God. The Zohar speaks of this in the famous allegory of the maiden in the castle:

> The Torah lets out a word and emerges for a little from its concealment, and then hides herself again. But this she does only for those who understand and obey her.

Our isolation, in contrast, belongs to our times, a time when, it would seem, even the hiddenness is hidden. A story about the Baal Shem Tov explains the nature of double concealment. It is said that one day on the way he met a child who was crying, and when he asked him why, the child said: I was playing with my friends, and I was to

hide. But I have hidden myself so well that they cannot find me. This, it is said in the name of the Baal Shem Tov, is God's situation. To hide one's face is to seek to be found; but when one is so hidden that even the fact that one exists in hiding, is hidden, then the separation is of a tragic order.

Together with a separation of man from God and the world goes an estrangement of man from himself. If, as Buber says, "All real living is meeting," then the absence of real meeting means the absence of life, in its wholeness and integrity. Identity is given in relation; a man whose meetings are distant encounters does not even possess himself.

This, of course, is a universal phenomenon and a central datum of our political and social philosophy, psychology and theology. The question I want to pose in this essay is: what place does it have in the inner history of Judaism? Must we as Jews participate in this movement of the soul? Is the attempt to stand aside from it an act of bad faith; a misinterpretation of our proper stance towards our location in time; or simply one which, however intentioned, is bound to fail? Do we have a refuge from alienation, or must a *Baal Teshuva* expect to inhabit the same locus of existential doubt as he did before his return?

I.

Obviously our answer to these questions will help to define Judaism's relevance to one of the secular crises of the day. But there is a preliminary point to be made about this constant demand made of Judaism that it be relevant. And that is that there are two modes of relevance: one might label them the empathetic or concessive, and the redemptive. One can relate to someone else's problems by entering into his situation, seeing it with his eyes; or by addressing his problems from one's own unchanged perspective. By the first method one wins the advantage of fully understanding his problem, at the risk of losing all that might have enabled one to solve it, even at the risk of being infected with the same problem oneself. Because one's situation is now the same as his, it now afflicts both. The second preserves a way of escape, the possibility of new and unforeseen perspectives, but at the cost of an unmediated distance between the one who asks and the one who answers. Both forms of relevance embody a paradox. But what must be remembered is that neither has an intrinsic priority over the other. And that the possibility that Judaism might stand diametrically opposed to a contemporary movement of consciousness does not, eo ipso, entail its irrelevance to, or its independence from, its context in secular time.

II.

Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, in his justly famous article, "The Lonely Man of Faith," belongs in effect if not in intention to the stance of empathetic relevance. For the Jew, as he conceives him, is (in the paradox of sacrifice) doomed to and at the same time blessed by an existence which is divided, alienated and lonely. This is not to say that for him, Jewish experience is a paradigm of the modern consciousness in its mood of existential despair. In at least three ways the experience he depicts differs from the secular condition:

(i) The alienation of the man of faith is not a consequence of a sense of meaninglessness, but rather the opposition of two sharply sensed and incompatible meanings. His

self is not so much distanced from the world as divided within itself. A sense of two realities prevents each aspect of the Jew from making its home in anyone of them.

(ii) Whereas the secular man's alienation is born of a sense of being left alone without a God, the alienation of the Jew is God-given, for it arises out of the tension between two fundamental Divine commands. Indeed to feel alienated is to have *succeeded* rather than to be forlorn; it is to have demonstrated the fidelity of one's response.

(iii) Lastly this religious alienation is not a phenomenon conditioned by time. Rabbi Soloveitchik finds its source in the two aspects of Adam; and it was a tension felt by the prophets. Modern secularism may make it more acute, but it is part of the permanent condition of the Jew.

Rabbi Soloveitchik is not writing for the unbeliever, to provide him with a mode of re-entry into commitment; nor does he write detachedly, making comparisons. He speaks subjectively, seeking response. But here is a point in time where a defining mood of Judaism finds an echo in the prevalent mood of the secular world, a time when the two might share a vocabulary of the emotions.

I want, in contrast rather than disagreement, to describe an alternative phenomenology of the Jewish self, one which arises equally naturally from the traditional sources, and one in which the divided self occupies a different and impermanent place. There is a sense, strongly present in the account of Adam's creation, persisting through the Torah, explicit in the Psalms, and analyzed often enough in Kabbalistic and Hassidic sources, that alienation and loneliness are defective states, the consequence of sin, and that the religious man of any age transcends divisions, subsumes contrasts into harmonious emotion, and exists in unmediated closeness to God, the world and other Jews. In short, I want to argue that Judaism stands to contemporary alienation in a redemptive rather than an empathetic relation.

III.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's analysis is too well known to require more than a brief 'recapitulation here.' It is that the two kinds of command given to Adam in the two versions of his creation (Genesis I and II) define two typological responses. There is Majestic man, formed "in the image of God" and commanded to "subdue" the world; and Redemptive or Covenantal man, made "from the dust of the earth" and charged to "guard and keep" the creation. Majestic man is creative, technological, functional, dignified in his mastery over nature and existing in the realm of victorious activity. Redemptive man, on the other hand, is non-functional, receptive, loyal, submissive, separated from nature not by his de facto dominion but by the covenant by which he is entrusted to redeem the world by bringing his actions under the will of God. Majestic man lives in the assertion of the will; redemptive man in its extinction. But both live in uneasy coexistence within each Jew, for he has been given both commands. On the one hand he has to master the world, and on the other, he has to offer it in humble dedication to God.

Not only is the Jew an intrinsically divided self, but also ineluctably, a lonely one. For each uniquescent element of his being defeats the attempted consummation of the other. Majestic man, that figure of will and conquest, is vulnerable not to loneliness but to being alone. For "dignity" — his mode of being — is a social category,

presupposing recognition by others; and practical power — his objective — requires the cooperation of others. In "natural communities" (functional combinations rather than empathetic unions) he finds his completion. Redemptive man, however, is open to loneliness, for his existence lies neither in the co-operation nor the recognition of others but in his relation, qua solitary being, with God. He can transcend this only in the "covenantal community," one forged not by identity of interests but by identity of relationship towards God — a triadic encounter, whose paradigms are prayer and prophecy. Each might find community but for the insistent claims of the other. Majestic man is wrenched from his functional involvement by a sudden awareness of personal encounter with a God who transcends nature; and the Redemptive man is forced at times to relinquish his community of faith by the exigencies of practical labour, and the cognitive categories in which this must be conducted. Neither can be reduced to the other, and thus neutralized. Majesty requires the redemptive vision to give its creative enterprises ultimate validation; and the content of this vision cannot be completely translated into functional concepts. This internal rift is given added poignancy in our time which is an age primarily of technological achievement. Faced with a community of Majestic men the man of faith is bound either to betray himself or be misunderstood; and all that faces him is a retreat into solitude.

This typology, reminiscent in many ways of Hegel's Master/ Slave dichotomy, defines a tension which many Jews undoubtedly experience in their oscillation between secular and Jewish involvements, and throws a critical light on the easy assumptions of synthesis and compatibility made, for example, by S. R. Hirsch. But it is clearly of great importance to know whether this is a contingent or a necessary phenomenon — whether Judaism contains within itself the means of transcending this dichotomy without on the one hand retreating from the creative endeavours of majestic man; and on the other, of excluding all but the atypically righteous (the Patriarchs and Moses according to R. Soloveitchik's concession) from this transcendence.

What makes one suppose that there is such a transcendence, accessible as the natural consequence of a righteous life, is the constant reiteration of just this claim, particularly in the Psalms. If we take as an example Psalm 1, it is immediately striking that R. Soloveitchik's picture of the restless, wandering, unquiet soul is exactly that of the *unrighteous* man of the Psalm, who is "like the chaff which is blown by the wind" — one is tempted to continue in T. S. Eliot's extension of the metaphor: "driven this way and that, and finding no place of lodgement and germination." The righteous, in contrast, flourish in two dimensions. They are *rooted*, "like a tree planted by streams of water"; and they are possessed of *progress*, for "the Lord regards the way of the righteous" while the movement of the wicked is stultified (graphically conveyed by the order of verbs in v.1. from "walking" to "standing" to "sitting"). Rootedness and progress stand as opposites to alienation on the one hand and nihilsm and anomie on the other. These dimensions can be correlated with R. Soloveitchik's typology, for the tree is the image of covenantal man, flourishing in passive receptivity to the source of its life, the "streams of water" being a familiar image for Torah; while progress, "the way", is the symbol of independent and mobile activity.

The significant word in this context is *Ashrei* – the state of the righteous man. Though this is normally translated as happiness, it is neither *eudaemonia* nor *hedone*; it embodies precisely those two aspects mentioned in the development of the Psalm. For its linguistic affinities are with:

(i) the verb *Ashar*, meaning to go straight or to advance (as in Prov. 9:6: *Ve-ishru be-derech binah*, "and go straight on in the way of understanding");

and (ii) the *Asherah* (mentioned in Deut. 16:21), the "sacred grove" of Canaanitic worship, a tree which flourished under the benign influence of a deity and which was therefore an object of pagan rites. Asher, the son of Jacob and Zilpah (Gen. 30: 13) is clearly so-called because of the connotation of fertility implicit in the word.

So that, in the dense poetic logic of the Psalm, the first word contains in association, the two themes which it proceeds to develop — the image of the tree and of the way. And, significantly, these majestic and covenantal aspects are fused in a single unified felicific state.

If we doubted this, we need only remember the connection between *Ashrei* and that other predicate of the righteous, *Temimut*; as in Psalm 119: 1 — *Ashrei temImei derech*. The cluster of meanings gathered round *Tamim* stand in polar opposition to the divided seIf: complete/finished/entire/ innocent/simpIe/ possessing integrity. The concept is clearly related to the subsequent verse (119:10) "With *my whole heart* (*bekol libi*) I have sought thee."

In Psalm 8 the paradox of the two aspects is stated explicitly: "What is man that you are mindful of him?" yet, "You have made him little lower than the angels" — this is clearly the "dust of the earth" become "image of God." But the tone is one of thanksgiving rather than tension, and this is the normal expression of the paradox in Judaism: wonder that a transcendent God should seek a *Dirah be-tachtonim*, a dwelling in the lowest sphere of existence, and should entrust a physical being with His redemptive work. Of particular interest is the verb used to denote this charge, *Tamshilehu* (v. 7). This is neither the "subdual" commanded to Majestic man, nor the "serving and guarding" of Redemptive man, but a clear synthesis of the two. *Mashal* — to have dominion over — is something which is both entrusted to one (its first occurrence in Genesis is in 1:16 where the sun and moon are entrusted with dominion over the heavens) and a position which involves dominance and supremacy. The sense that dominion is something held in trust, or by covenant, is enforced by the linguistic association of the verb *Mashal*, a word which also means, "to represent, or be like" as in an apposite verse from Job (41:25): *Eyn al-afar mashlo*, "There is none on the dust of the earth like him"; and so by extension *Mashal* comes to mean a parable or example, something which reproduces the form of that which initiated it. Significantly, the word "represent" embodies the same ambiguity: to be entrusted as a delegate; and to picture or resemble.

In the light of this, when we turn to the accounts of Adam's creation in Genesis I and II, the natural reading (and that taken by Rashi, for example) is to regard the second as a qualification or explication of the first, rather than to see them as essentially opposed. Cassutto explains it in this way: "As for the repetition of the story of man's creation, it should be noted that such repetitions are not at all

incongruous to the Semitic way of thinking. When the Torah described man's creation (twice) the one in brief general outline as an account of the making of one of the *creatures* of the material world and the second at length and in detail, as the story of the creation of the *central being* of the moral world, it had no reason to refrain from duplicating the theme, since such a repetition was consonant with the stylistic principle of presenting first a general statement and thereafter the detailed elaboration..." This is itself an echo of Rashi's explanation: "Should you say that the Torah has already stated (In Genesis 1:27) 'And He created the man...' etc. then (I say that) I have seen the. *Beraita* of Rabbi Eliezer... dealing with the thirty-two interpretative rules by which the Torah can be interpreted, and the following is one of them: when a general statement (of an action) is followed by a detailed account (of it) the latter is a particularization of the former . . . He who hears (the second account) might think that it is a different account entirely, whereas it is nothing but the details of the former general statement."

This account still leaves unanswered the question, how are we to resolve the apparent contradiction (or at least contrast of emphasis) between man as "dust of the earth" and as "image of God"; between "serving and guarding" and "subduing," and between a narrative which invokes the Tetragrammaton and one which does not?

The contrast between the Tetragrammaton and E-Iohim as names of God is usually seen in the context of metaphysical categories — transcendence as against immanence, mercy as against justice — but even at the level of grammar we can see, as Cassutto points out, an immediate difference. The Tetragrammaton is a proper name; denoting an individual — the God of Israel; while E-Iohim, as its plural form suggests, is the name of a class, the totality of all gods. As a consequence it is used to refer even to heathen deities ("You shall have no other E-lohim besides me" [Ex. 20:3]), and can be extended to mean "judges" or "angels." The appearance of synonymy between the two is explicable in terms of the fact that in Jewish belief the class of gods has only one member, so that E-lohim often appears to be a proper name. Cassutto's conclusion is that wherever E-Iohim is used, the context is one where what is spoken of is in some sense *universal* (for example, the Wisdom literature), whereas the use of the Tetragrammaton indicates that a *particular* relation between God and Israel is being presupposed (as in the halakhic passages).

Having made this distinction, we can use it to understand the different perspectives from which Adam's creation is seen in the two accounts. The first, using the name E-Iohim alone, is a universal description not only in the sense of being less detailed, more general than the second, but in the important sense of being intelligible (and addressed) to all men irrespective of the value-systems in which they stand (This could in any case be inferred from Rashi's comment on Gen. 1:1, that the Torah begins with an account of the creation of the world so that Israel should be able to justify their inhabiting the land of Canaan to the "nations of the world" when the latter complained that they had no territorial right to it. This clearly supposes that Genesis 1 was addressed to "the nations of the world" and not to Israel alone). But the second, invoking the four-lettered name of the God of Israel, describes the special relationship between man and God, the relationship that can only exist between man and the *unique* God. In other

words, the first articulates the nature of *homo sapiens*; the second, of *homo religiosus*.

The first version tells us that man was created "in the image of God," and Rashi interprets this to mean, "in understanding and intellectual power." This is *homo sapiens*, man *qua* rational being. And this is his distinguishing feature as a *biological* phenomenon, that which divides man "sharply and importantly from all other known species. " But in the second passage we are told that man was formed "of the dust of the earth" and that there was "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul," on which Rashi comments, "He made him of both lower (material) and higher (spiritual) elements, a body from the lower and a soul from the higher." Man as an embodied soul is specifically a religious conception, one which cannot be explicated in naturalistic terms. And so this perspective could not be admitted into the earlier account, speaking, as it does, to all "the nations of the world." "In the image of God" – this is a *state*; "He breathed into his nostrils" – this is a relation. The state is independent of the religious life; the relation is its very essence.

A parallel distinction is apparent in the different commands reported in the first and second narrations. In the first, the commands to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" are addressed to man as part of the natural order, mirroring verbatim the blessing given to all other creatures (p. 22). The only difference is that to man it is given as both blessing and *command*, in recognition of man's capacity as rational being to receive and act on imperatives. The two other commands, "And subdue it (the world) and have supremacy" over the other creatures, belong to the realm of description rather than Mitzvah – a word which can only be imperfectly translated as "the command which brings relation." *Va-yetzav* ("and He instructed as a Mitzvah") occurs only in the second version (2:16); the first restricts itself to *Va-yomer* ("and He said"). "Subdue" and "have supremacy" are stated as activities in which the *telos* – the purpose in the context of Divine-human relation – is unstated. *Kavash*, to subdue, has in Hebrew the connotation of suppressing or treading down, and has a Biblical extension in the word *Kivshan*, which means a furnace, in which the form of that which is placed in it is beaten down and made pliable. *U-redu*, and have supremacy, similarly means to subject, with the connotation of autocratic disregard for the object over which it is exercised. Rashi notes its affinities with the verb *Rud*, to bring low; its meaning is that the rest of creation is brought low with respect to man. Neither verb has the dimension that we noticed in the word used in the Psalms to mean "dominion" – *Mashal* – that of being given in trust as part of a covenant. So that the Genesis I account is a neutral description of man's biological relation with the animal kingdom. The religious dimension appears only in the next chapter, supplying the previously missing telos, rather than (as it would appear from R. Soloveitchik's account) propounding an opposing one.

The verbs used in Genesis 2 reverberate in associations with the Divine teleology. *Le-ovdah* – "to serve" the creation: this is the paradigmatic act of the Jew in relation to God. Moses is called the *Eved* of the Lord as the highest term of praise (Numbers 12:7). And Kimchi explains the concept in the following terms (commentary to Joshua 1:1): "Anyone who directs all his powers, intentions and concentration to the Lord (i.e., to that aspect denoted by

the Tetragrammaton) *so that even his involvement with the secular world* (literally, 'affairs of the world') is directed to the service of God, is called an *Eved* of the Lord." In other words, the Eved is precisely the man for whom the conflict between Majesty and Covenant is not transcended but rather *not perceived* at all (*all* his concentration belongs to the Master). We cannot speak in this context of a *dichotomy* of involvements, nor even of a *synthesis* of two separate elements, but only of a *single task* which involves two relationships: man as servant of God, aligning all his actions to the Divine will and as servant towards the world as well, meaning that he redeems it in a way that it could not redeem itself. This is not incompatible with "subduing" it: it is merely subduing it with a purpose, or re-directing it. It will be said that only a few attain the rank of *Eved* (Kimchi mentions Abraham, Moses, David and the prophets); and while this is true it does not follow that all other Jews are condemned to spiritual tension. For the children of Israel as a whole are called "My servants" by God. The contradiction is resolved by distinguishing between a role and a state; or a task and its achievement. Even though not all have achieved a transcendence it is still their role and their entitlement. To be a man of divided attentions is not an ontological destiny but an imperfection. The actions of a man of faith are comprehended under the concept of *Avodah* – a word in which man's dual aspect as part of nature and as a soul is fused in the idea of an act which sanctifies nature by bringing it under the scheme of Divine will. The Jew in the process of *Avodah* is a unity; outside of it, he is a divided being.

Adam's other command was *le-shamrah*: to "guard" the creation. This is a specifically covenantal mode, and one cannot miss the verbal allusion in: "And the children of Israel shall guard the Shabbat . . . as an everlasting covenant" (Exodus 31:16-17). *Shamor* is an act of withdrawal from majesty and creation; not as an act of separation but as a rededication. The word *Shamor* occurs in relation to Shabbat only in the second version of the Decalogue, where it is linked with the remembrance that "You were a servant (*Eved*) in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 5:15) a memory unmentioned in the first account. So that it is clear that *Shamor* is contrasted with a service undertaken in secular terms, under purely human aegis: "You are *my* servants, not the servants of other servants" (Rashi to Exodus 20:6). Guarding is a qualification of serving, not an alternative to it. It is a part of that inner and harmonious dialectic by which the man of faith gathers the inward strength to dedicate his outward works to the task of redemption. The *Shabbat* command begins: "Six days shall you labor," stating at the outset that the *Shabbat* is not a separate realm but part of a continuum which includes creation and withdrawal, in which man is not simply creative but is "a *partner* in creation." And as the Adam narration reminds us, the act of withdrawal, though it has its own special sanctuary in time, is in fact an ongoing process simultaneous with the act of creation.

To conclude: there is a natural reading of Genesis 1 and 2, enforced by the more explicit testimony of the Psalms, and supported by the traditional commentators, according to which the two accounts of creation do not give rise to a dualistic typology of the man of faith. Instead they describe a state in which an apparent tension is brought within a single harmonious mode of activity whose consequence is at the polar opposite from alienation and internal discord. Admittedly, this belongs to the second narration, but the first is not a contrast but a neutral

description, addressed in a wider context, to those who are not themselves men of faith.

IV.

There are two difficulties in assessing a typological metaphysic such as R. Soloveitchik proposes. One is in the significance of the qualification that such a schema is "subjective." The other is that its evolution from its textual sources seems to be of a Midrashic order. "Subjectivity" as a predicate of philosophy done in the Kierkegaardian manner can denote either "inwardness" or "non-provability." It can, as it were, either speak to the individual in his inner being, or be spoken by an individual as the untestable record of his private impressions. Although these may go together (as in poetry), neither entails the other. As long as the distinction between the two is inexplicit, the border between autobiography and philosophy remains blurred, and this is what makes much existential analysis of religious experience so problematic. As far as establishing a criterion for the deducing of a metaphysic from a Biblical text is concerned, this is too large a subject to be mentioned here: all I have tried to do is to show that an alternative reading can be derived from the same textual details, relying on only grammatical and semantic considerations.

Not knowing how much counterargument is rendered otiose by the qualification of "subjectivity," it is worth considering briefly whether the two aspects of the *involvement* of the man of faith in the world, necessarily generate a bifurcation in his *character*. If not, then the way is clear for an alternative phenomenology of Jewish consciousness; for we would have severed the typology of character from its roots in the Divine command.

When we speak of a pull between a Jew's secular and religious involvements, we are apt to become confused, because there is not one but many things that might be denoted by that contrast. There are at least the following:

(i) the realm of the secular and the realm of the holy;

(ii) a universal *concern* for human welfare and a particularistic concern for Jewish interests;

(iii) *identity* qua man as such, and identity as a Jew;

(iv) a secular *attitude* towards the world and a sanctifying attitude. These may be related, but they occupy different dimensions. Identity, concern and attitude belong to distinguishable psychological strata. Each contrast deserves extensive treatment, but in this context we are only interested to know (a) does each of these have to be internalized by a Jew, are they contingent, or integral, to his destiny? and (b) is each a *genuine* conflict?

(i) is certainly a pseudo-conflict: the secular and the holy are not objectively distinct realms. There is nothing (in the domain of the halakhically permitted) that cannot be redeemed or made holy by a sanctifying use. This is a familiar theme. Less familiar is the *ex post facto* sanctification of the forbidden when in an act of "repentance from great love" the intentional sins of the penitent are added to his merit. Even if we discount this, for it cannot be directly intended (which would amount to the Sabbatian heresy of redemption through sin), the realm of the forbidden is not the proper territory of the Jew and so does not constitute a distinct area of his involvement.

(ii) is not a conflict at all. Concern for human welfare *as such* is part of Jewish law, if not an entirely unproblematic one. The welfare of fellow Jews, in order of the proximity of their claims ("The poor who are neighbors before all others; the poor of one's family before the poor of one's city; the poor of one's city before the poor of another city"), is simply part of this general concern; prior but not separate.

(iii) is a spurious opposition. What is to be a man *as such*? A man's identity is given in relation and in the context of some community. Each community has its own culture and vocabulary which give it its distinctive way of allowing its members to see themselves as men. The idea of universal moral truths, not in the sense of those believed by an individual to *apply* to all men, but in the sense of truths believed *by* all men, is a fiction. There are no cross-cultural moral constants, and the search for them has been criticized in much contemporary work in anthropology and philosophy (Chomsky and Levi-Strauss notwithstanding). The man of faith qua Jew is a moral man as such, and no more could intelligibly be demanded of him without this being a tacit insistence on his cultural assimilation. Indeed the *cultural* tensions of the American- or Anglo-Jew are contingencies not merely of their spatio-temporal location but of the particular socio-political attitude prevailing within the non-Jewish society as to the proper cultural stance of its minorities. As a tension, it may be real, but it is not part of the essential God-given directive to the Jew. This is not to argue for separatism, for there are ways of entering into a secular society's common concerns without compromising one's religious integrity, and these have been outlined by R. Soloveitchik in his statement on Interfaith Relationships.[1]

iv) Only here do we approach something in the nature of a real conflict. The Jew has his part to play in the building of a technology designed to ameliorate the human situation, and this necessitates the adoption of "cognitive-technological" concepts and frames of reference. The causal-deterministic framework, the detached subject-object mode of cognition, the mind ever open to the refutation of its hypotheses, are all necessary to a science whose aim is prediction and manipulation. It is not merely that these have their linear contrasts in the religious mind: a non-deterministic schema with place for responsibility and choice, empathetic I-Thou relation with the objects of experience, and a mind unshakably convinced of its moral truths; for these are contrasts between the scientific and the *moral*, and can be reconciled in purely secular terms. What is irreducible in the *religious* vision is the defining sense of relation with the Transcendent; and this seems to rule out all reconciliation.

We must remember here that what is at stake is not a clash of *empirical claims* between science and religion. How we are to resolve these is a matter of some choice (between qualifying the *Peshat* of the Torah and limiting the epistemological status of scientific extrapolation, for example), and anyway calls for case-by-case analysis. But we are in a position now, in the aftermath of the Victorian chauvinism of science, to regard the clash as essentially resolvable. Instead, what is supposed to remain intractable is the *opposition of attitudes* of the Jew as scientist and as sanctifier of the world. How can a person moving in the nexus of a world-view restricted to

1. [Editor's note: Now reprinted in Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Community, Covenant and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot, (Ktav, 2005), 263–265

the discovery of empirical causes fail at times to lose sight of the God who transcends the observable, the God whom he addresses when he removes himself to prayer, by His four-lettered name?

This, I think, rests on a confusion. Karl Popper (see "Conjectures and Refutations") has distinguished between what he calls the *essentialist* and the *instrumentalist* views of scientific truth. For the essentialist, scientific laws state simple truths about the world, so that in his view Einstein and Newton are strictly incompatible. Whereas the instrumentalist sees them not as truths at all, in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather as tools *for prediction*; so that Einstein's invention of an instrument which has more extensive predictive application does not *falsify* but instead *restricts the relative usefulness* of Newton's laws. Popper gives a number of reasons for preferring to work under the instrumentalist conception. And if we as Jews adopt it, it becomes clear that the use of scientific hypotheses does not represent the adoption of any alternative world view, any more than does the use of any other instrument, say, the picking up of a hammer to fix a mezuzah. Majestic man is simply covenantal man at work, in perfecting the tools by which he is to gain control over the natural world for the sake of enlarging the range of his halakhic activities, supporting a growing population, removing poverty and disease, and preserving the environment. Only under an essentialist construction of the scientist's search for the truth could we maintain the semblance of an incompatibility between the task of creation and the work of redemption.

V.

What, then, is the place of alienation and loneliness in the Jewish analysis of the emotions? Of course, there is no single analysis, but we can detect two recurring tendencies of thought, the one in line with R. Soloveitchik, the other which I wish to present here. A classic source for the alternative phenomenology is the famous chapter 32 of the Tanya of Rabbi Schneor Zalman of Ladi:

> Through the fulfillment of (the previously mentioned act of repentance in which the transgressions of the body are distinguished in one's mind from the soul which remains ever in its undisturbed relation with God)... by which one's (errant) body is viewed with scorn and contempt, and one's joy is in the soul alone, through this one finds a direct and simple way to fulfill the commandment "And you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (a love which is to be shown) to every Jewish soul, great or small.
>
> For although one's body is despised and loathed, who can know the greatness and depth of the soul and the spirit in their source and origin in the living God? And since all (of the souls of Israel) are related, and all emanate from one Father, all Israel are literally called "brothers": in that the source of their souls is in the One God, and they are divided only by virtue of their bodies. Therefore those who give priority to their body over their soul, find it impossible to share true love and brotherhood except that which is conditional on some benefit (and hence ephemeral).
>
> This is what Hillel the Elder meant when he said about this commandment (the love of Israel: "This is the whole Torah; and the rest is commentary." For

> the foundation and source of all Torah is to elevate and give ascendancy to the soul over the body...

Although this passage is written in the context of the practical question of how to achieve the love of one's fellow man, and the theosophical repercussions that an achieved unity has in terms of Divine blessing, it contains a clear statement of the phenomenology of a community of faith.

(1) *Ahavat Yisroel* – the mutual relation of the faith community – is a specifically religious emotion, a distinguishing feature of the men of faith. For it presupposes a metaphysic (man as an embodied soul; the unity of all souls at their source) which is implicit only in the second account of Adam's creation.

How does it differ from other forms of human collectivity? It is not the community of experience adumbrated by Hobbes, a contract founded on mutual self-interest; nor is it the functional community, joined in collective enterprise, to which man belongs in his role as creative or technological being. It is not even the I-Thou encounter with another in which he is known in his full strangeness and otherwise. It belongs to the perception of a real unity, a breaking down of the walls between self and otherness. It is unconditional and untempered by time. It does not lie at the surface of the soul's awareness, but hidden in its deepest reaches. It is gained only by the strictest spiritual self-discipline. If we have a model of it in ordinary life, it is in the mutual bond between parent and child. A metaphorical similarity can be found in Jung's concept of the collective unconscious.

What do we mean by saying that it cannot exist at the level of bodily existence, but only "when the body is despised?" Clearly the Tanya is not advocating asceticism and body-denial. The contrast which is being indicated here is between *two modes of identity*. How are we aware of our individuality? Man as part of nature individuates himself from his environment by the perception that he is *bodily distinct* from others. He feels pain when his body is injured, but not when it happens to another body. This is the genesis of his opposition self/not-self. And this too is the origin of his sense of existential loneliness; he cannot enter into another mind since it is inseparably linked to another body. Natural man is prey to the anguish of solipsism – in which Descartes, for example, is imprisoned until he brings God into his class of certain knowledge. His experiences are bounded by the concepts of opposition/identity/selfhood/ loneliness.

The man who is defined by his relation with God is only dialectically aware of himself as a distinct entity. He was made by God, indeed he can reach God by an inward journey to the depths of his soul. He is joined with God in love and separated from Him in awe. But even the separation is full of the consciousness of God. So his embodiment in the physical world is not his only or his primary reality: he views it teleologically. He is placed here for a purpose, and he can discover this by analyzing his capacities and his environment – this I can effect, this I cannot. His identity is given by his distinctive role in relation to the world, his covenantal mission. But in being himself – in performing his role – he is placing himself in harmonious fusion with the rest of the world, for his role has meaning only in the light of all others. It is said: there are 600,000 letters in the Torah and 600,000 Jewish souls. Each soul is like a letter of the Torah. Each is distinct but meaningful only in the context of the whole.

And though they have no independent reality; each is supremely important for if a single letter is missing or malformed, the whole *Sefer Torah* is unfit for use. So for the man of faith individuality belongs to the not-self and to a redemptive function which is of transcendental origin and which embraces the world. Its *reality* is in community, so that the faith community is different in kind from all others: it is not a coming together of initially separate existences, for it is the only air its members can breath.

This is the typology which relates the "life of the body" to loneliness and the "life of the soul"' to communion. It is not as if the man of faith, being an embodied soul, must oscillate between them. For his identity is at the level of soul; body is mere

(2) How, on this account, does loneliness enter the life of the Jew? It belongs to the triadic process: sin, separation from God, and loneliness amongst men. And it comes about in this way: he who sins opposes his will to the will of God. And the person in whom this self-assertion is the motivating force, cannot tolerate other selves, for they are potential obstacles to his self-realization. So his only mode of relation is conditional and self-interested, and this is not fully to concede the separate reality of others. He is caught in the prison of the self.

In this way we can understand that strange verse: "And the Lord God said, it is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a help-meet opposite him (*ezer ke-negdo*)" (Gen. 2:18) Rabbi Soloveitchik (see “Confrontation”) sees in this the permanent paradoxical condition of human relationship; friendship (*ezer*) and otherness (*ke-negdo*) are inseparable. But Rashi has another reading. "If he is worthy, she shall be a help (*ezer*) to him; if he is unworthy, she shall be opposed to him (*ke-negdo*) to fight him." The man who lives his life in the Torah finds union; he who separates himself from it, separates himself from other men, even those closest to him. Loneliness is the condition of sin.

Indeed, this is demonstrated in the very next chapter, in the narration of the first sin. "And the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7). The consequence of sin was self-consciousness, which is, the progenitor of loneliness. And what they noticed, significantly, was their bodily state; what they perceived was its tragic significance for those who make it their reality. Immediately their thinking became embedded in physical space; "And the man and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, amidst the trees of the garden" (ibid., 3:8), as if relation and hiddenness were spatial categories.

If we needed further proof of the relation between hubris and alienation we could not find a more graphic illustration than in the episode of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11). "And the whole earth was of one language and few words." Language is the medium of communication, yet paradoxically those closest to each other are least in need of words, "One language" – the world was a single community; "of few words" – their community was an empathetic union. But the bond was a false one, belonging to the level of material expediency. "And they said to one another, Come, let us make bricks... and build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves." They wanted, true to Aristotle's analysis of the creative urge, to make themselves permanent by externalizing themselves in a

physical object. Their reality belonged to the material world. In it they saw permanence and in it they thought they could embody themselves in the work of creation. The result was fitting and inevitable; "And the Lord said... come let us go down and confuse their language so that they may not understand one another's speech." This is real ontological loneliness, the severing of the lines of communication.

Alienation, then, has its place in the inner life of the Jew: as the corollary of sin. The Jew who returns, the *Baal Teshuvah*, finds refuge and relation restored to him.

(3) Might we nonetheless be mistaken in thinking that *Ahavat Yisroel* and its corresponding community of faith, constituted the central relational mode of the Jew? If we are, then how are we to account for Hillel's dictum, "This is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary." The answer lies deeper than in the idea that the love of the faith community is triadic, that Jew is bound to Jew in the identity of their relation to God, so that only in the context of a whole life of Torah and *mitzvot* does *Ahavat Yisroel* appear. It belongs instead to the explication of the opaque remark of the Zohar: "Israel, the Torah and God are all one" (*Zohar Chadash* I 24a; II 60a; III 93a). This is not an ethical but an ontological statement, meaning that our very concept of separate existences lies at the level of religious estrangement; and that through a life not merely lived but seen through Torah, God's immanent presence, His will (as embodied in the Torah) and the collectivity of Jewish souls are a real (in the Platonic sense) unity. The very idea of relation implies that there are two or more distinct things related. What the Zohar is suggesting is that the way of experience in Judaism demands a profound revision in our ontological categories; a move similar in kind though opposite in intention to Spinoza's radicalism about "substance." To put it more mildly, as we have shown, Ahaval Yisroel contains its own specific notion of personal identity; this can be acquired only in the life of Torah; so that the life of Torah and the precondition of the faith community are identical. Hilel's dictum is therefore precisely correct; and his existence in the community of faith is the *whole* life of the Jew.

VI

The distance between the phenomenology of the Jew and that of secular man is what allows Judaism to hold out what I earlier called redemptive relevance to the crises with which the Jew is faced when he is alienated from his faith. We can make this clearer by a brief account of the relation between love and the self as they are related within and outside of Judaism.

1. "A love which is conditional, ceases when the condition is unfulfilled" (Avot 5:19). There are many loves whose nature is tacitly conditional on the satisfaction of the desires of the one who loves. The child loves his teacher because he is dependent on him. The disciple loves his master because he exemplifies the virtues. Because there is an intentional object of desire, when the loved one ceases to satisfy the implicit requirements of that object it ceases to arouse that love. This is a love which is not blind to faults; and also one in which there is a *Yesh mi sh-ohev*, "a self that loves." The Jew who loves God as the creator of the material world and its pleasures, is not yet God-intoxicated; nor is he if his love is one which is in love with itself – which lives on satisfactions of prayer, learning or *mitzvot*. For his desires (and so his self) are still intact. His love lives in the tension between self and otherness.

2. "The love which is unconditional will not pass away for ever" (*ibid.*). Here, he who loves is conscious only of that which is loved. Being oblivious of self, it is unconditional: it is the emotional corollary of the ontological condition of the not-self. This is the love of "Nullify your will to His will" (Avot 2:4) and is the distinctive quality of the man of faith. But we must distinguish between the unconditional love which requires a stimulus and that which does not. The Jewish moralists have all been aware that this love is not a passion but a mode of recognition (that all human existence is continually dependent on God). Meditation and prayer are the necessary preliminaries. But not for all. There are those rare spirits for whom this recognition is an immediate and dominating awareness. So that we should not be led into the mistake of thinking that the difference between the exceptional and the normal Jew is one between unconditional and conditional love, which would be to concede that the normal condition is one of paradox and tension. Rather it lies between immediacy and active arousal, or the achievement and the task both within the single dimension of the unconditional.

This is the emotional geography of the secular and the religious mind. It is not a paradox to say that the Jew abandons selfhood. Conditional love is potentially promiscuous, it can take many objects. It could not be the love of which a monotheistic religion speaks when it talks of the love of God. And this transcendence of *Yeshut, "etre pour-soi"* is what removes divisions and ends the loneliness of the man of faith.

VII.

I spoke earlier about two tendencies in Jewish thought, the one outlined above and the other in which R. Soloveitchik's analysis is foreshadowed. We can trace this back to a disagreement between Nachmanides and Ibn Ezra on the interpretation of the verse (Deut. 11:22), "And you shall love the Lord, to walk in all His ways and to cleave (*le-davka*) to Him." Is it possible that man should be in intimate relation with God at all times? Or must Majesty sometimes interfere with Covenant?

Ibn Ezra comments, "To cleave to Him: at the end, for it is a great mystery," implying perhaps that it is a communion reached only at death. Whereas the Ramban says: "It is, in fact, the meaning of 'cleaving' that one should remember God and His love at all times, and not be separated in thought from Him 'when you go on your way and when you lie down and rise up'." At such a stage, one may be talking with other people but one's heart is not with (i.e., confined to) them, since one is in the presence of God." The suffusion of man's social existence with his covenantal intimacy with God is for Nachmanides a this-worldly possibility.

But for whom is it possible? Here again the ways divide. One path is taken by Maimonides (*Guide to the Perplexed* III, ch. 51.). By philosophy and meditation a man may reach the rank of prophecy, and this is the highest natural perfection. But it is still the realm of the divided self. "When you have succeeded in properly performing these acts of Divine service, and you have your thought during their performance entirely abstracted from worldly affairs, then take care that your thoughts be not disturbed by thinking of your wants or of superfluous things. In short, think of worldly matters when you eat, drink, bathe, talk with your wife, and little children, or when you converse with other people." *Devekut*, cleaving, is an act of seclusion

and prayer is its sanctuary. Emerging into the mundane, one relinquishes that union. Only at the highest level of prophecy, where Moses and the Patriarchs stand, does this partition dissolve. "When we therefore find them (these few exalted men) also engaged in ruling others, in increasing their property, and endeavoring to obtain possession of wealth and honor, we see in this fact a proof that when they were occupied in these things, only their bodily limbs were at work, whilst their heart and mind never moved away from the name of God." This is a level not to be attained through training. It is a specific act of grace. It cannot be the aim of any spiritual journey: it must always be unexpected.

Strangely enough, we find Maimonides' ideas mirrored in the Kabbalistic tradition. Accepting that *Devekut* was for the ordinary man the product of seclusion, the Kabbalah pursued this to its logical conclusion. He who makes *Devekut* his aim must sever his contacts with the world and practice a meditative retreat.

It is only in Hassidism that we find, as it were, a democratization of Maimonides. Cleaving to God in all His ways is removed from Ibn Ezra's category of "mystery" where it had lain even in the Kabbalah. Once the implication of the unity of God is perceived – that nothing exists except in him – then one can preserve the state of communion and the not-self even when immersed in the world, for by carrying out the Divine imperative one not only realizes but also enters into the reality of God's will. To be sure, there is a distinction to be preserved between normality and grace (Maimonides' lower and higher prophecy), but this is to be conceived, as we have already explained, in terms of the Devekut which needs arousal and that which is immediate and ever-present. The normal man of faith still preserves the distinction between *le-ovdah* (practical action) and *le-shamrah* (rededicative withdrawal and arousal) but this is not the opposition of Majesty and Redemptiveness; but the realized and preparatory stages of Redemptiveness itself.

VIII.

In summary, not one but two readings of the inner possibilities of the Jew are implicit in tradition; and with them go two interpretations of man's creation, of his stance towards the world and God, and of the nature of his relation to other men. And at a time when loneliness is the condition of the estranged Jew, one reading offers empathy, the other, healing. To state this contrast is not to formulate an opposition; simply to open another gate.

When Moses sent men to spy out the land of Canaan, after their years in the wilderness, they returned with divided reports (Num. 13). Ten said, "We came to the land where you sent us, and truly it flows with milk and honey. . . (but) it is a land which consumes its inhabitants." But Caleb said, "We should surely go up and possess it, for we are well able to do so." What is at first sight unintelligible is how the ten could have uttered a counsel of despair. They were not ordinary men, but were chosen on God's command from the princes of the tribes. They had already been promised (Ex. 3: 17) that God would bring them "up out of the affliction of Egypt . . . to a land flowing with milk and honey." They had seen God revealed on Mt. Sinai. They had been delivered victorious in the battle with Amalek.

There is a Hassidic explanation. In the wilderness, the Israelites had no creative or constructive work to do. Their

food and water were provided by God; He guided them; His presence dwelt amongst them in the Tabernacle. They were at the height of covenantal withdrawal, the Divine hand surrounded them like a protective wall. Canaan meant emergence, practical responsibility, the work of building up a nation; and the ten feared immersion in the secular and the hiding of the face of God from sight. "It is a land which consumes its inhabitants." They saw Covenant and Majesty, distinct and opposed, and they trembled and held back. Caleb did not see it. He knew that sanctuary is mere preparation and that redemption was its fulfillment, a work which saw no realty in the secular except as the yet-unredeemed. The ten spoke and the people were unsettled: a divided vision confronted them. Caleb spoke and the people were stilled. All the spies were men of faith (they had seen God with their own eyes); not all of them were lonely men.

THE THOUGHT WORLDS OF RABBI SACKS

David Shatz

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks' contributions to Jewish thought are massive and breathtaking. They span works of philosophy, *parshanut*, history, and homiletics, along with commentaries on the Siddur, Mahzor, and Haggadah. Countless Jews know his name; many of them, particularly among the Orthodox, have read his works, heard him speak, perused his *parasha* sheets, regularly used his siddur, and viewed or heard his online conversations. He addressed robustly issues of paramount concern for Jews: anti-Semitism, Jewish identity, the Shoah, Israel, the family, unity, community, and continuity. Here was a man who had little formal Jewish learning until his 20s and yet—by harnessing brilliance, vision, commitment, and stunning eloquence—sensitized hearts, expanded minds, and animated Jewish life. His readers and audiences always emerged edified and inspired. Those who met him were greeted warmly and witnessed his capacity to engage. All are saddened by his passing, which sprang upon us so quickly.

Yet one of the most striking things about Rabbi Sacks' body of work is how often he spoke not of Judaism but of religion, not of Jewish society but of politics, not of halakha but of morality. This reveals much of who he was—a Jew with a fierce, proud commitment to a particular religion, but whose mind and soul were broad. I do not mean only that he published (particularly in his later years) books on science and religion, politics, economics, and morality aimed at a global audience; nor just that his work is studded by astonishingly erudite insights from literature, world history, psychology, science, and linguistics; nor merely that he engaged extensively with relativism, postmodernism, pluralism, and scientism. I mean also that on the ethical level he preached tolerance, the "dignity of difference," and love of the stranger, to a degree that is especially striking for an Orthodox writer.

Yet obviously the outlook of this great rabbinic leader was not a commonplace cosmopolitanism or globalism. He understood, first of all, that we Jews are part of humanity, and that the challenges that confront our religion, such as fanaticism, confront religions generally. The more we situate ourselves in a larger human context, the better we comprehend our own problems and predicaments. Hence, his universalist discourse can inform our Jewish self-understanding.

Moreover, he believed that the universalism that prevailed in the West since the Enlightenment was in some ways a menace. It threatened to obliterate traditions. The more the world would appreciate traditions and seek to sustain them, the more it would appreciate what is truly distinctive and valuable about Judaism's teachings. In fact, a leitmotif of his work is the uniqueness, novelty, and greatness of Judaism's contributions to world history. Ultimately his message in numerous places is that the values of Judaism can speak to modern societies and ideologies and can improve the world. His extensive use of the Bible adds to the wide appeal of his reasoning.

Rabbi Sacks' broad vision and his prominence as a public intellectual in the UK earned him accolades—now, alas, in the form of eulogies—from the spheres of politics, royalty, religion, and academia. His projects culminated in his being awarded the $1.5 million Templeton Prize in 2016 for his work in countering religious extremism and religious violence. A look at his awards, honorary degrees, and appointments boggles the mind. To name but one tiny instance of his standing in the larger intellectual universe, Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, two of the most important philosophers of recent decades, joined twelve Jewish contributors to a festschrift in Rabbi Sacks' honor, with MacIntyre authoring the lead essay.

R. Sacks' attainment of both Jewish and global renown reflects a central theme of his thought (better, *the* central theme): the meeting of the universal and the particular. His worlds were not segregated but rather integrated. I recall vividly the 1997 commencement at Yeshiva University, when Rabbi Sacks received an honorary degree. With his wonderful blend of creativity, eloquence, oratorical power, and humor, he made a pointed argument on behalf of the ideal of *Torah ve-Hokhma*, one that merges the universal and the particular in a manner somewhat reminiscent of Rabbi Soloveitchik: "*Hokhma* reminds us that we are humans, we are citizens of the universal enterprise of mankind, and Torah reminds us that we are Jews, heirs of the greatest heritage ever conferred on a people."

We Jews must not simply receive from the world; we must also give. As he wrote elsewhere, "To be a Jew is to be true to our faith while being a blessing to others regardless of their faith." Jews must help "heal a fractured world" and live up to the "ethics of responsibility." With his face to the future, he taught that different groups, Jews included, must "build a home together," a society for the common good, even while keeping their distinctive characters.

* * *

There is much else to say about R. Sacks' talents. Apart from works that developed his central themes for a broad audience, he wrote lucid philosophical essays about abstruse technical concepts, as in his review of the Rav's most challenging work, The Halakhic Mind (which appeared in *TRADITION*, Spring 1988), and in several books he offered incisive analyses of individual thinkers. His prose was remarkable. With elegant sentences, often short and pithy, replete with wonderful turns of phrase and bon mots, he made readers as riveted by his writing as by his oratory.

Readers did not always agree with R. Sacks' views and arguments. He at times endured strident criticism, whether from the left or from the right. But this is exactly what his philosophy urges us to welcome: conver-

sation, disagreement and difference, albeit, decidedly, without the stridency. About one point there should be no disagreement: the world was privileged to receive the riches that R. Sacks offered. He was among the most compelling and inspiring authors, orators, and leaders to have graced the Jewish world in modern times. *Yehi zikhro barukh.*

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RABBI SACKS' BOOKSHELVES PROJECT:

TRADITIONOnline's The BEST invites our readers and writers to consider what things "out there" in worldly culture make them think and feel. What aspects of western thought and literature inspire us to pursue lives as more fully engaged thinking religious beings? In tribute to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' impact on the spiritual and intellectual life of our community, TRADITIONOnline's The BEST developed a series of columns dedicated to aspects of his thought and teaching.

Reading R. Sacks' many books and listening to his lectures, one is not just impressed by his original insights and striking formulations, but also awed by his ability to integrate so many disparate sources. To read his work is to experience a well-guided tour of Matthew Arnold's ideal of "the best that has been thought and said." Throughout his writing, Rabbi Sacks quotes broadly from Torah sources. Yet, he also reaches deeply into classical and contemporary writers on philosophy, politics, and society, including popular research in psychology, ethics, economics, and sociology.

In looking to add to The BEST project, we have "raided" Rabbi Sacks' "bookshelves." Reviewing the endnotes, bibliographies, and indexes of his books, we collected a list of titles and writers that he called upon to develop and argue his ideas. Challenging our writers to not simply profile these works, we asked them what Rabbi Sacks was doing in "importing" these thinkers and writers into his "Thought Beit Midrash." His readers can observe how each work uniquely enriched his own thinking and the beautiful tapestry of meaning that he was able to weave. Over the coming weeks our writers will explain not only why these works are "The BEST," and worthy of our attention in and of themselves – but what Rabbi Sacks was driving at in drawing from their wisdom and presenting their ideas to his readers and students worldwide.

A. J. Ayer:
LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND LOGIC

Reviewed by Daniel Rynhold

SUMMARY: *Language, Truth and Logic*, written in 1935 when the British philosopher Alfred Jules Ayer was a mere twenty-four years old, instantly propelled its author into the philosophical firmament, and became the "manifesto" of logical positivism (during its short-lived heyday). It was an iconoclastic work that razed traditional metaphysics to the ground through its introduction of the verification principle of meaning. The key idea, built on the foundations of classical empiricism, was that there are only two types of meaningful proposition. On the one hand, we have the a *priori* propositions of logic and pure mathematics, stating relations between concepts which are true by definition; on the other, we have propositions purporting to state empirical matters of fact. Our beliefs about the latter, Ayer tells us, are empirical hypotheses that are meaningful only if there is some possible sense experience relevant to determining whether they are true or false (or "verifying" them, hence the so-called verification principle). So, for example, "the moon is made of cheese" is meaningful (albeit false) since we know of a sense experience relevant to its truth or falsity (going to the moon and trying to take a bite). The upshot of this, however, is that since there is no sense experience that could be relevant to determining the truth or otherwise of traditional metaphysical disputes, and more importantly of any statements in ethics or theology, all such discourses become meaningless; not false, even, but expressions without literal signification that could be assessed for truth at all, like a sigh. Ayer did give us the theory that became known as "emotivism" whereby ethical statements can be construed as expressions of emotion, like "hurray" and "boo." No quarter was given, however, on the theological front.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: *Language, Truth and Logic*, was most certainly not identified by R. Jonathan Sacks as "The BEST"; in fact much of it was later repudiated by its own author! It is of some consequence that in 1976, responding to Bryan Magee's question: "What do you now, in retrospect, think were the main shortcomings of the movement," Ayer, who clearly had a wicked sense of humor, responds (to ensuing hilarity), "Well I suppose the main defect is that nearly of all it was false." It remains, however, a beautifully written work – would that all works of philosophy were written so lucidly, not to mention with such brevity.

Assuming that nothing much had changed in the intervening decades in Cambridge philosophy, R. Sacks, much like I had, would have read (and written essays about) *Language, Truth and Logic* as an undergraduate. While Ayer's own concessions regarding the verification principle offered believers a path out of his theological *cul de sac*, in the aforementioned interview Ayer maintains that his approach to ethics was "still on the right lines." For R. Sacks, this is the point that would have called out most urgently for a response, that is, "Ayer's dismissal in a mere twenty pages… of the whole of ethics, aesthetics and religious belief as 'meaningless'" (T*he Politics of Hope*, 180). The philosophical challenge thus laid down, R. Sacks went to work on combatting the destructive consequences of logical positivism for ethical and religious discourse by devoting much of his writing to combatting its ills and – whether with knowledge of the above concessions or not – those of emotivism in particular.

Of the many problems with emotivism – which understands, say, "killing the innocent is wrong," as "killing the innocent; Boo!" – the gap it opens up between moral assertions on the one hand and reasoned argument on the other was the most egregious. As R. Sacks writes in *The Politics of Hope*, "if moral arguments are no more than the clash of rival emotions, then the loudest, most intensely felt and forcibly expressed voice wins – not by convincing its opponents, since that is by definition ruled out, but merely by silencing them" (31). This is a quotation that is startling in its relevance as I write it today on January 7, 2021. While space does not permit a full presentation of R. Sacks' response, you will find an excellent summary in the contribution to this series on Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* by my friend and colleague Michael Harris. But in brief, for R. Sacks it is only by locating ourselves within collective structures such as religious traditions, indeed especially religious traditions, that we find the social meanings which give us reasons to pursue one project over another, thus restoring the link between ethics and reason that Ayer's legacy had put asunder. And it is no small part of Rabbi Sacks' legacy that he cared to read and respond to challenges such as Ayer's rather than ignore them.

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Nikolai Berdyaev:
THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Reviewed by Joe Kanofsky

SUMMARY: In *The Meaning of History*, Russian political philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874– 1948) attempts to revive the philosophy that history laid the foundations for Russian national consciousness. Its categories are centered on distinctions between Slavophiles and Westerners, East and West. In order to grasp and oppose the complex phenomenon of social and cultural disintegration, Berdyaev shows that human beings must rely upon some internal dialectic. After the debacle of World War I, the moment arrived to integrate Russian historical experiences into those of a Europe, which, although torn by schism, still claimed to be the ultimate descendant of Christendom. Along the way, Berdyaev touches on Judaism:

> I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint.... Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny.

Something more profound than a non-Jew affirming Judaism—like Twain of Priestly—is at stake here. The tools of history are not as far-reaching and all-powerful to explain the vicissitudes of their subject as we believe them to be at first sight.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: The triumphalism of history, particularly with regard to explaining the Jewish condition of being, reached its apogee in the 19th century with Geiger's *Hochshule fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Yet, the historical-critical model, which places a text's origin above its meaning, still holds sway not so much in the academy as in the pervasive notion that one interpretive lens, be it Marxist or feminist or deconstructionist, can reach so far as to explain comprehensively any phenomenon under investigation.

Berdyaev goes against this grain. He writes that history is a noumenon, not entirely knowable by mere sensory perception. In the early chapters of The Meaning of History (first published in Russian in 1923 and in English in 1936) he speaks repeatedly of the "mystery of the historical," of history as "a sort of revelation," and of history as "a myth." In other words, he lays to rest the misperception at the outset of his discourse by stating that "a purely objective history would be incomprehensible."

A middle chapter of *The Meaning of History* is somewhat less roundly praising of the Jewish people. Berdyaev at once appreciates the absolute monism of the Jewish apprehension of the divine while almost on the same page decrying the dualism that prevents Jews from apprehending the "savior" who purportedly arose from our midst. He transfers the enduring messianic teleology via Marx's class structure to the liberation of the proletariat; which sounds as much like a dialectical materialist trying to square the circle of his own Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The deliberate misreading that must necessarily attend a supercessionist reading of the Hebrew Bible is only somewhat dimmed by Berdyaev's recognition that Judaism defies any attempt to wrestle it into the confines of deterministic historical models (i.e., that all events are determined completely by previously existing causes). In fact, in this chapter as well as throughout the book, Berdyaev leans on the influence of Jakob Böhme, the early 17th century German philosopher. A Lutheran, Böhme seemed quite aware of the mystical trends in Jewish thought and described a numinous, esoteric strain in Jewish history which obviously resonated with Berdyaev.

Berdyaev is firm evidence both by design and by his example that efforts to constrain the sweep of the Jewish people to one historical, philosophical, or theological view will result in considerable distortion of the subject at hand and ultimately of the enquirer as well.

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Peter L. Berger:
RUMOR OF ANGELS

Reviewed by Mijal Bitton

SUMMARY: In his slim 1969 work, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, sociologist of religion Peter L. Berger offers a glimpse into his personal approach to faith and theology. Born to a Viennese Jewish family that converted to Christianity when he was a child, Berger was a prominent sociologist whose early books explored religion in light of secularization. In *A Rumor of Angels*, Berger explores the ways secular modern western society is increasingly skeptical regarding the supernatural, resulting not only in the demise of religious commitment but also how it poses a challenge to the remaining faithful few who are now a cognitive minority. Since human belief systems are usually reinforced by social structures, Berger argues that secular societies impose immense pressures on religious individuals, and in response offers an insight often quoted by faith leaders: that the person seeking to maintain their faith in a secular society "must huddle together with like-minded fellow deviants—and huddle very closely indeed." Only by creating communities of fellow believers, what he calls social plausibility structures, can individuals strengthen their ability to believe in God.

In his analysis, Berger also provides tools for believers to push back against intellectual secular pressures. One approach is that of "relativizing the relativizers." Secular thinkers, according to Berger, approach faith with a double standard in which they use sociological knowledge to relativize and deconstruct past religious traditions but do not subject their own beliefs to the same scrutiny. One tool in the arsenal of believers is to engage in the same exercise of relativization applied to modern critiques of religion.

Beyond taking on critics of religious belief, Berger also describes his own approach. His is not the traditional embrace of the explicitly supernatural but resembles instead the modern enterprise of seeking God by rational means. He offers an inductive orientation that looks at the world and finds traces of transcendence (hence the book's title). Unlike Maimonides, who sought God's imprint in the laws of the natural universe, Berger follows his sociological impulses and seeks transcendence in human behavior. He describes five major human signals of transcendence: the human belief that the world is ordered, the ability to play, the capacity to hope, the belief that some things are worthy of condemnation, and the capacity to laugh.

Berger argues these aspects of human experience cannot be rationally explained and point instead to "signals of transcendence."

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Berger's *A Rumor of Angels* has several key implications for Jews in the modern world. First, Berger provides sociological language to explain the dangers of being a cognitive minority in an open society. His advice to "huddle together" with fellow believers is essentially the sociological model that's been adopted by Orthodox Jews and other traditional communities that realized this was the most potent way to ensure group continuity in America. It is less a theological justification for "*am le-vadad yishkon*" ("A people which dwells apart"; Numbers 23:9) and more a sociological explanation for the necessity of building independent and socially insulated communities that can allow religious individuals to overcome the assimilatory pressures of secular society.

In this work Berger also models a different path of how to be a believer immersed in secular society—a somewhat lonely but still confident intellectual that insists on the possibility of transcendence. Tellingly, Berger is not huddled together with fellow believers; rather, his colleagues are academics and secular students. This route is hard and might not be the best for communal retention of religious commitment, but it does offer a way academics can retain their religious beliefs while immersing themselves in a secular, intellectual world.

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Stephen L. Carter: **CIVILITY**

Reviewed by Jonny Lipczer

SUMMARY: Stephen L. Carter argues that civility is disintegrating because we have forgotten the obligations we owe to one other. He proposes to rebuild our public and private lives around the fundamental rule that we must love our neighbors, a tenet of all the world's great religions. Drawing on such diverse disciplines as law, theology, and psychology, he investigates many of the fundamental institutions of society and illustrates how each one must do more to promote the virtue of civility.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: *In Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (Harper, 1999), Stephen L. Carter describes a moment that changed his life. As a young child, in the 1960s, his family moved to Cleveland Park, a neighborhood in the middle of northwest Washington, DC. They were the first black family living in this all-white neighborhood.

Carter and his two brothers and two sisters sat on the steps of their house in this new area, and everyone passed by without giving them a look, without saying a word to them. "I knew we were not welcome here. I knew we would not be liked here. I knew we would have no friends here. I knew we should not have moved here," he writes.

As he was thinking those thoughts, a white woman coming home from work passed by on the other side of the street. She turned to the children and with a broad smile said, "Welcome!" Disappearing into the house, she emerged minutes later with a large tray of drinks and sandwiches, making them feel at home. That was the moment that changed his life.

This story was retold by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in T*o Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (2005), a book exploring the traditional Jewish values that teach us the responsibility we have for our fellow human beings. In this volume, R. Sacks raised awareness about these values and encouraged more acts of charity and kindness.

To Heal a Fractured World made a deep impact on me personally, and *Civility* became the first book (of many) that I added to my own library having seen it referenced by R. Sacks.

Stephen Carter eventually became a law professor at Yale. He identifies the woman in his story as Sara Kestenbaum

and adds that it was no coincidence that she was a religious Jew. "Civility creates not merely a negative duty not to do harm, but an affirmative duty to do good. In the Jewish tradition, this duty is captured in the requirement of *chesed* – the doing of acts of kindness – which is in turn derived from the understanding that human beings are made in the image of God.... Civility itself may be seen as part of *chesed*: it does indeed require kindnesses toward our fellow citizens, including the ones who are strangers, and even when it is hard."

R. Sacks wrote: "What is *chesed*? It is usually translated as 'kindness' but is also means 'love' – not love as emotion or passion, but love expressed as deed."

One such deed changed Stephen Carter's life and started the journey that led him to recognize the importance of civility. No book can change the world – but the people who read it can.

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G. K. Chesterton: **ORTHODOXY**

Reviewed by Ben Crowne

SUMMARY: Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874 – 1936) was a leading member of the 1920s Anglo-Catholic literary revival, alongside writers and poets such as Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, and T.S. Eliot, all of whom identified with Anglo-Catholicism. Chesterton produced more than eighty books, hundreds of poems and short stories, and around 4,000 essays and newspaper articles, and is widely regarded as a great communicator of religious ideas for which he earned a huge audience beyond his own minority faith.

Orthodoxy is a series of essays in the tradition of Montaigne—attempts (the French "*essai*") to explore propositions in a conversational and often controversial way. Read around the world, his admirers included Gandhi, the Irish Republican Michael Collins, the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, Jorge Luis Borges, and the heavy metal band Iron Maiden. In *Orthodoxy* Chesterton turns inward to write of his own faith, and in particular his path towards religious belief in adulthood. He sets aside the veil of fiction and writes conversationally, with immensely readable diversions.

Chesterton narrates his exploration of doubt and religious identity, his yearning for an authentic and intellectually-rigorous faith, and his astonishment when his individual quest led him ultimately to the same path he had discarded in adolescence: "I tried to be some ten minutes in advance of the truth. And I found that I was eighteen hundred years behind it." Early on, he likens the process of finding faith through a thought experiment from a discarded novel—an explorer who becomes lost and arrives in England thinking that it is an unknown Pacific island: "What could be more delightful than to have in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home? How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it?"

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Chesterton remains one of the great writers and communicators of modern religion, combining a journalist's flair, the literary credentials of a first-rate author, and a theology, which although un-academic, was deeply considered and has been taken seriously by generations of readers.

Chesterton's widely-read fiction is notable above all for its emphasis on paradox, reversal, and duality. Probably his greatest work, the novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*, is also the least overtly Christian, exploring the different ways the ordinary can become bizarre, or the mundane fantastical, through the infiltration of a nested set of anarchist conspiracies. Father Brown, the protagonist of his detective stories, is a quiet and nondescript parish priest, who finds straightforward explanations for occurrences which seem to everyone else to be bizarre and supernatural. Chesterton was inspired by paradox—this time of an unworldly and unobtrusive priest who could solve the most flamboyant and grotesque of crimes through common sense and a clear understanding of human nature.

This sense of duality pervades Chesterton's fiction, and in *Orthodoxy* he spells out its theological significance: In order for religion to be universal, it must encompass within it all the multitudinous complexity of human nature, and nevertheless speak with a clear and unambiguous voice. But how can this be possible for all people, and across all times, when "all the colours mixed together in purity ought to make a perfect white. Mixed together on any human paint-box, they make a thing like mud?" Only through an embrace of paradox, a willingness to not just live with inconsistency and contradiction but to embrace it, to celebrate "the hidden eccentricities of life."

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks quoted Chesterton across a range of his works—in particular using his descriptions of America as "the only nation in the world founded on a creed" (*Radical Then, Radical Now*, 246) and "a nation with the soul of a church" as a shorthand for his own ideas of covenantal and community-focused politics. Depending on the audience, he might also refer to Chesterton's own antisemitism (the index of a recent sympathetic biography lists twelve separate entries under the heading "antisemitism of, alleged"), and discuss how our prejudices can blind us to the full comprehension of our own insights.

Although a far more serious and rigorous thinker than Chesterton, Rabbi Sacks enjoyed a similar position as a representative of a minority religion who could speak about faith and religious identity to a nationwide audience. His profile in the UK was cemented in 1990, a year before he became Chief Rabbi, when he delivered the BBC's Reith Lecture series, observing that "Toleration is not, as G.K. Chesterton said, 'the virtue of people who do not believe anything'" (Lecture 5), and throughout the following decades he would combine widely-read books with regular newspaper columns and radio appearances.

In the final essay in his collection *Celebrating Life*, Rabbi Sacks revisited Chesterton's metaphor of the lost explorer rediscovering the familiar, and turned it from a personal message to a civilizational one: "This is the fate of religion in our time. It is become so old that it is something new. It has been so neglected that we can see it for the first time" (190).

At Chesterton's funeral—held in a packed Westminster Cathedral—he was eulogized by the priest and writer Ronald Knox (another Catholic convert from Anglicanism) who hailed the ubiquity of his influence across colleagues and students: "We do not even know when we are thinking Chesterton." For generations of his colleagues, students, and readers, the same is true of Rabbi Sacks.

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RESPONSE TO "CHESTERTON'S ORTHODOXY"

Yitzchak Blau

I have very much enjoyed the Rabbi Sacks Bookshelves Project, part of "The BEST" series, and I was pleased to see G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* included. Ben Crowne has performed an important service in drawing *TRADITION*'s readers' attention to that insightful essayist. However, the specific focus on a writer's influence on Rabbi Sacks may obscure other important aspects of his work, and I hope my response here will help more fully flesh out the significance of Chesterton's thought to our lives as religious people. I should note that I disagree with the assertion that R. Sacks was a "far more serious and rigorous thinker than Chesterton," and, unlike Crowne, I contend that *Orthodoxy* and *Heretics* are more important works than *The Man from Thursday*.

To offer a sense of the power of Chesterton's prose and the keenness of his insight, I offer one quote from each essay in *Orthodoxy*. (My formulation of each selection's topic appears in parenthesis.) A public-domain copy of the essays in *Orthodoxy* is available at Project Gutenberg. As Ben Crowne and I agree, Chesterton's writings are "The BEST," and engaging with them is a worthy use of time.

"The Maniac" (on the rationality of the madman): The madman's explanation of a thing is always complete, and often in a purely rational sense satisfactory. Or, to speak more strictly, the insane explanation, if not conclusive, is at least unanswerable; this may be observed specially in the two or three commonest kinds of madness. If a man says (for instance) that men have a conspiracy against him, you cannot dispute it except by saying that all the men deny that they are conspirators; which is exactly what conspirators would do. His explanation covers the facts as much as yours. Or if a man says that he is the rightful King of England, it is no complete answer to say that the existing authorities call him mad; for if he were King of England that might be the wisest thing for the existing authorities to do. Or if a man says that he is Jesus Christ, it is no answer to tell him that the world denies his divinity; for the world denied Christ's. Nevertheless he is wrong. But if we attempt to trace his error in exact terms, we shall not find it quite so easy as we had supposed. Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not

so large. In the same way the insane explanation is quite as complete as the sane one, but it is not so large. A bullet is quite as round as the world, but it is not the world. There is such a thing as a narrow universality; there is such a thing as a small and cramped eternity; you may see it in many modern religions. Now, speaking quite externally and empirically, we may say that the strongest and most unmistakable MARK of madness is this combination between a logical completeness and a spiritual contraction. The lunatic's theory explains a large number of things, but it does not explain them in a large way.

"The Suicide of Thought" (on the pragmatic need for absolute truth): I agree with the pragmatists that apparent objective truth is not the whole matter; that there is an authoritative need to believe the things that are necessary to the human mind. But I say that one of those necessities precisely is a belief in objective truth. The pragmatist tells a man to think what he must think and never mind the Absolute. But precisely one of the things that he must think is the Absolute.

"The Ethics of Elfland" (on tradition as a form of democracy): But there is one thing that I have never from my youth up been able to understand. I have never been able to understand where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time. It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record.... Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death.

"The Flag of the World" (on love of the world as a kind of patriotism): But this is a deep mistake in this alternative of the optimist and the pessimist. The assumption of it is that a man criticises this world as if he were house-hunting, as if he were being shown over a new suite of apartments. If a man came to this world from some other world in full possession of his powers he might discuss whether the advantage of midsummer woods made up for the disadvantage of mad dogs, just as a man looking for lodgings might balance the presence of a telephone against the absence of a sea view. But no man is in that position. A man belongs to this world before he begins to ask if it is nice to belong to it. He has fought for the flag, and often won heroic victories for the flag long before he has ever enlisted. To put shortly what seems the essential matter, he has a loyalty long before he has any admiration.... My acceptance of the universe is not optimism, it is more like patriotism. It is a matter of primary loyalty.

"The Paradoxes of Christianity" (on the golden mean not as meek balance but as holding two powerful truths together): It separated the two ideas and then exaggerated them both. In one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been. In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am a man I am the chief of sinners. All humility that had meant pessimism, that had meant man taking a vague or mean

view of his whole destiny—all that was to go. We were to hear no more the wail of Ecclesiastes that humanity had no pre-eminence over the brute, or the awful cry of Homer that man was only the saddest of all the beasts of the field. Man was a statue of God walking about the garden. Man had pre-eminence over all the brutes; man was only sad because he was not a beast, but a broken god. The Greek had spoken of men creeping on the earth, as if clinging to it. Now Man was to tread on the earth as if to subdue it. Christianity thus held a thought of the dignity of man that could only be expressed in crowns rayed like the sun and fans of peacock plumage. Yet at the same time it could hold a thought about the abject smallness of man that could only be expressed in fasting and fantastic submission, in the gray ashes of St. Dominic and the white snows of St. Bernard.... Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious. The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one's self. One can hardly think too much of one's soul.

"The Eternal Revolution" (revolution depends on an ideal of permanent truth): Thus we may say that a permanent ideal is as necessary to the innovator as to the conservative.... There must at any given moment be an abstract right and wrong if any blow is to be struck; there must be something eternal if there is to be anything sudden. Therefore for all intelligible human purposes, for altering things or for keeping things as they are, for founding a system for ever, as in China, or for altering it every month as in the early French Revolution, it is equally necessary that the vision should be a fixed vision. This is our first requirement.... My vision of perfection assuredly cannot be altered; for it is called Eden. You may alter the place to which you are going; but you cannot alter the place from which you have come. To the orthodox there must always be a case for revolution; for in the hearts of men God has been put under the feet of Satan. In the upper world hell once rebelled against heaven. But in this world heaven is rebelling against hell. For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration. At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam.

"The Romance of Orthodoxy" (a critique of pantheism and the idea all religions are the same at the core): A short time ago Mrs. Besant, in an interesting essay, announced that there was only one religion in the world, that all faiths were only versions or perversions of it, and that she was quite prepared to say what it was. According to Mrs. Besant this universal Church is simply the universal self. It is the doctrine that we are really all one person; that there are no real walls of individuality between man and man. If I may put it so, she does not tell us to love our neighbours; she tells us to be our neighbours. That is Mrs. Besant's thoughtful and suggestive description of the religion in which all men must find themselves in agreement. And I never heard of any suggestion in my life with which I more violently disagree. I want to love my neighbour not because he is I, but precisely because he is not I. I want to adore the world, not as one likes a looking-glass, because it is one's self, but as one loves a woman, because she is entirely different. If souls are separate love is possible. If souls are united love is obviously impossible. A man may be said loosely to love himself, but he can hardly fall in love with himself, or, if he does, it must be a monotonous courtship. If the world is full of real selves, they can be really unselfish selves. But upon Mrs. Besant's principle

the whole cosmos is only one enormously selfish person. It is just here that Buddhism is on the side of modern pantheism and immanence. And it is just here that Christianity is on the side of humanity and liberty and love. Love desires personality; therefore love desires division.

"The Authority of the Adventurer" (religious restrictions as enhancers of joy): And if we took the third chance instance, it would be the same; the view that priests darken and embitter the world. I look at the world and simply discover that they don't. Those countries in Europe which are still influenced by priests, are exactly the countries where there is still singing and dancing and coloured dresses and art in the open-air. Catholic doctrine and discipline may be walls; but they are the walls of a playground. Christianity is the only frame which has preserved the pleasure of Paganism. We might fancy some children playing on the flat grassy top of some tall island in the sea. So long as there was a wall round the cliff's edge they could fling themselves into every frantic game and make the place the noisiest of nurseries. But the walls were knocked down, leaving the naked peril of the precipice. They did not fall over; but when their friends returned to them they were all huddled in terror in the centre of the island; and their song had ceased.

–Yitzchak Blau

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Leonard Cohen:
YOU WANT IT DARKER

Reviewed by Daniel Rose

SUMMARY: Leonard Cohen, the award-winning Canadian Jewish singer-songwriter, poet, and novelist, died at the age of 82 on November 7, 2016. In his illustrious and celebrated career spanning five decades, he released 14 studio albums, published 17 collections of poems and two novels, and received more than 40 awards, including the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010. Described as "without question, one of the most important and influential songwriters of our time" at his 2008 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and in the Rolling Stone magazine obituary as "the dark eminence among a small pantheon of extremely influential singer-songwriters to emerge in the Sixties and early Seventies. Only Bob Dylan exerted a more profound influence upon his generation."

Listening to his haunting bass voice crooning his deeply evocative lyrics, he was a poet-philosopher as much as a singer-songwriter. He liked to describe his songs as "investigations" into the hidden mechanics of love, sex, war, religion and death—the beautiful and terrifying truths of existence. Folk singer Judy Collins once summarized his work as "songs for the spirit when our spirits were strained to the breaking point," surely an argument for why Cohen's work remains valid and relevant to this day.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks had a deep appreciation for music of all kinds, and was equally comfortable extolling the virtues of Beethoven and Brahms, *hazzanut* and a Hassidic *nigun*, and the Beatles and Eminem. This became clear from his early appearance on the BBC's Desert Island Discs in 1991 and the recent interview promoting his book *Morality*, in *The Financial Times* from April 2020, where music was a recurring theme. In this interview, one of the last he gave before his untimely death just a few months later, he describes his passion for music, how music was his connection with his father, and how critical music is for Judaism. But for R. Sacks, music was first and foremost a source for spirituality, "the language of the soul."

On November 18, 2016, days after the death of Leonard Cohen, sitting in his New York hotel room, no doubt preparing a sermon on the coming week's portion, Vayera, R. Sacks experienced a moment of inspiration that he couldn't help but share in an unscripted and

unplanned video. In it, he linked the beauty and power of Cohen's last song *You Want It Darker*, the weekly *sedra*, and the fractured world of the post-2016 U.S. election and the Brexit vote.

A self-professed fan, R. Sacks has quoted Leonard Cohen songs often. But in this 11-minute video, he delves into an unprecedented depth of analysis of both this particular song (its personal message and the broader message to our generation), and of Cohen as a deeply Jewish artist. It is a magnificent example of R. Sacks finding religious meaning and inspiration everywhere he looked, and his openness to appreciating and respecting Jews and people of all backgrounds, finding religious truth and beauty in their work and in their lives.

The song contains an English translation of parts of *Kaddish* (R. Sacks suggests Cohen knew he was nearing the end of his life and was reciting *Kaddish* for himself). The Hebrew word *hineni* ("here I am") appears three times in the song, followed by the English words "I am ready my Lord," an obvious reference to the biblical phrase used to denote a willingness for sacrifice. This phrase features three times in the *Akeda* narrative in *Vayera* (see Genesis 22). R. Sacks saw significant connections between the song, the *Akeda*, and the existence of violence in the name of God. He notes the angst and anger in the lyrics, summarizing his analysis with this paraphrasing: "God, I love You, but I don't love the world You created or the human beings You have made in Your image."

Despite Leonard Cohen's obvious struggles with his faith, and his experimentation with other religious experiences, he was always deeply and proudly Jewish, and R. Sacks celebrated him for this. Cohen famously came to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War to entertain IDF troops, and his many performances in Israel would be peppered with Hebrew and references to Jewish liturgy. For example, he concluded a 2009 concert in Ramat Gan with *Birkat Kohanim* (he was proud of his priestly heritage). References to Jewish ideas are found in many of his songs, such as *Unetana Tokef* in Who By Fire, and according to R. Sacks his most famous lyric, "There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in," is a reference to the Kabbalistic doctrine of *Shevirat ha-Kelim*. But in his most "Sacksian" lyric, perhaps underpinning a deeply Jewish theme running throughout his art, Cohen sings in *Hallelujah*:

> And even though it all went wrong
> I'll stand before the lord of song
> With nothing on my tongue but hallelujah

For R. Sacks, these words capture the essence of the existential paradox of Jewish faith: "That is what it is to be a Jew, a person of faith. Even in the midst of darkness there is light. Even in the midst of death there is life. Even in the midst of hate, there is love. And even with our dying breath, we can still say hallelujah. That is the power of love, to redeem the brokenness of the world."

Almost exactly four years after he recorded this video, R. Sacks passed away on Shabbat *Parashat Vayera*, leaving us the challenge—to find light in the midst of darkness, life in the midst of death, with words of praise of God on our lips.

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Alexis de Tocqueville:
DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

Reviewed by Stuart Halpern

SUMMARY: Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* was the French nobleman's attempt to help his countrymen understand the democratic experiment flowering on United States soil. Appearing in two volumes (one in 1835, the other in 1840), it reflected upon his nine-month sojourn in the new American republic. Almost two centuries later it remains a classic – cherished by Americans on both sides of the political aisle, and cited often by liberals and conservatives alike. It is also beloved by those who admire the American project from afar, as did Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: "Turn it, turn it, for everything is in it," Ben Bag-Bag says of the Torah in the well-known Mishna in *Avot*. When it came to understanding the modern world, R. Sacks felt the same of Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America.

R. Sacks often said that he tried to read Tocqueville's *magnum opus* every year. The book inspired him throughout his career, from his writing on the *parasha* to speeches in Parliament. It served as a wellspring of guidance in his thinking about politics, community, and the family.

In his 2009 maiden speech in the House of Lords, R. Sacks said:

> Democratic freedom is not just a matter of political arrangements, of constitutions and laws, elections and majorities. It depends, too, on what Alexis de Tocqueville called "habits of the heart": on civility, the willingness to hear the other side, respect for those with whom you disagree, and friendships that transcend the boundaries between different parties and different faiths. And those things must be taught again and again in every generation.

In addition to emphasizing the role of respectful dialogue in the public square, Tocqueville also stressed the role of the family and of faith as bulwarks against tyranny. That the Passover Seder is performed not communally but in the privacy of one's home, reminds us, wrote R. Sacks:

> that, in Alexis de Tocqueville's words, "As long as family feeling is kept alive, the opponent of oppression is never alone." ... Freedom begins with what we teach our children. That is why Jews

> became a people whose passion is education, whose heroes are teachers and whose citadels are schools. Nowhere is this more evident than on Passover, when the entire ritual of handing on our story to the next generation is set in motion by the questions asked by a child. In every generation we need to cultivate afresh the habits of the heart that Tocqueville called "the apprenticeship of liberty."

Tocqueville's thought played foundational roles in many of R. Sacks' books, including *The Home We Build Together* and, most recently, Morality. After all, it was the Frenchman who taught us that "Liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith." And

the emphasis on "we" as opposed to "I," of individuals to come together in what Tocqueville called "voluntary associations" that would enhance the flourishing of society is central to both works. As R. Sacks put it, "democracies are at risk of a completely new form of oppression for which there is no precedent in the past. It will happen, he [Tocqueville] says, when people exist solely in and for themselves, leaving the pursuit of the common good to the government. As my colleague and friend R. Meir Soloveichik has written in Mosaic, R. Sacks, in offering Americans and so many others a means of navigating liberal democracy, the market economy, and ever-advancing science and technology, was a 21st century Alexis de Tocqueville. His own insights into the challenges of the modern age, the roles of faith and family, and the power of community will be turned and turned, like Tocqueville's, over the generations.

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John Donne:
"MEDITATION XVII," DEVOTIONS UPON EMERGENT OCCASIONS

Reviewed by Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz

SUMMARY: In 1623, John Donne—Catholic recusant, poet, rake, soldier, prisoner, Member of Parliament, and ultimately Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral—fell seriously ill and almost died. As he slowly returned to health, he composed his Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, a remarkable spiritual journey through sickness and recovery that explores the meaning of mortality and suffering as tools to guide individuals towards God, their creator and ultimate home. Each of the 32 "Meditations" of which it is composed links a stage of his illness—"The Phisician comes," "I sleepe not day or night," "They warn me of the fearfull danger of relapsing"—to a consideration of the associated spiritual lessons and experience that would help him approach the moment of reunion with the divine. Death was no stranger to Donne, who had lost a brother to the plague, saw six of his twelve children die, and lost his beloved wife as she gave birth to their last child, and even the superb love poetry he wrote in his youth is shot through with intimations of mortality. "Meditation XVII," perhaps the best-known of all his works, starts from the experience of hearing church bells toll for others as he lies on his sickbed, and develops into a moving reflection on the way in which this teaches him that "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine. . . any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde."

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: I literally learned this at my mother's knee, and was encouraged to ground my life on this principle of the mutual involvement and responsibility of all humans. It is no surprise to find that R. Jonathan Sacks returned to it on several occasions, among them in his The *Dignity of Difference* and *The Home We Build Together*, where he quotes it in a discussion of the covenantal foundation of a healthy society. Donne, whose tempestuous life could scarcely have been more different from that of R. Sacks, shares the same passion for a life of connection in the presence of God, the same recognition of the everyday groundedness of a true and lasting spirituality. "Meditation XVII" and the larger work from which it comes present a vision of sickness and death, not as enemies to be resisted, but as unique opportunities to make progress on the journey to God. Perhaps the other soaring metaphor that Donne applies here can be appropriately repurposed as an elegy for Rabbi Sacks, that great lover of books:

All *mankinde* is of one *Author*, and is one volume; when one Man dies, one Chapter is not *torne* out of the *booke*, but translated into a better language; and every Chapter must be so translated; *God* emploies several *translators*; some peeces are translated by *age*, some by *sicknesse*, some by *warre*, some by *justice*; but *Gods* hand is in every *translation*; and his hand shall binde up all our scattered leaves againe, for that *Librarie* where every *booke* shall lie open to one another.

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B.J. Fogg:
TINY HABITS

Reviewed by Tamra Wright

SUMMARY: B.J. Fogg is an American behavioral psychologist. He is the founder and director of the Stanford Behavior Design Lab.

Although his book *Tiny Habits: The Small Changes That Change Everything* was published in 2019, Fogg has taught the ideas behind it for many years. Graduates of his courses have created successful products and digital services, most notably Instagram, which Fogg uses to illustrate his maxims:

Maxim 1: "Help people do what they already want to do." (Instagram example: share photos)

Maxim 2: "Help people feel successful." (Instagram made it easy both to share the photos and to make the photos look good, thus making the user feel successful.)

According to the Fogg Behavior Model (represented as B = MAP), Behavior happens when Motivation, Ability, and Prompt converge at the same moment. Prompts are needed to remind us to do the behavior. When motivation and ability are both high, the desired action will follow. But motivation and ability can also compensate for each other. With high motivation we can do things that are difficult despite low ability; when ability is high relative to the task, little motivation is required.

To create or troubleshoot a habit, Fogg argues that we should begin not with motivation, but with prompt and then ability. He gives the mundane example of his own struggle to floss regularly. He set the bar very low by giving himself the objective of flossing just one tooth. He could do more if he felt like it, but one well-flossed tooth on any given day was enough for him to congratulate himself on successful flossing. Crucially, according to Fogg, a quick moment of "celebration" on successful completion of the tiny habit means that the "feel good" hormone dopamine is released and learning is reinforced. Over time Fogg developed the habit of flossing all his teeth by building on these small successes.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: The same psychological insights that enabled Fogg to solve his flossing problem have had a huge impact on society through the work of his students. Graduates went on to leading roles at Facebook, Google, and other technology companies.

Although Fogg himself is committed to using behavior design and technology in ethical ways, there is a growing wave of concern that companies are using his insights to manipulate users into spending more time on their apps, even when this is detrimental to the users' own interests.

Fogg's work intersects with Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' interests in two ways. Firstly, although he highlighted concerns about the impact of technology, social media, and "narrowcasting," Rabbi Sacks shared Fogg's view that new technologies are not inherently good or evil, but that as individuals and societies we need to make conscious decisions about when and how to use them. Rabbi Sacks emphasized the Sabbath as one way in which Judaism can help us tame technology's addictive qualities. Fogg reminds us that we have control over the "prompt" aspects of our phones that make them so compelling: we can disable notifications, use the airplane setting, and leave our phones in another room when we go to bed.

Secondly, Fogg's approach is ultimately optimistic: with the right techniques, people can not only change their behavior, one habit at a time, but also learn to feel better about themselves and more hopeful about the future. In this respect, behavior design is an important complement to positive psychology, an approach to human flourishing that Rabbi Sacks saw as a contemporary manifestation of Jewish wisdom. He frequently cited Martin Seligman, the movement's founder, and suggested that Seligman's approach could form the basis for a "new musar." (See my "Afterword: A New Musar" in *Radical Responsibility: Celebrating the Thought of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks*.) Rabbi Sacks pointed out that positive psychology, like cognitive behavior therapy and logotherapy (all founded by Jewish psychologists), rejects purely deterministic understandings of human feelings and behavior, and emphasizes human freedom. One of the most basic freedoms is our ability to choose how we interpret and respond to events. Awareness of this freedom is one of the keys to avoiding pessimism and despair. Rabbi Sacks describes Joseph as the "first psychotherapist." Reconciling with his brothers, Joseph was able to re-frame their mistreatment of him and his subsequent trials as part of a divine plan.

What might a new musar, drawing on Jewish tradition as well as positive psychology and behavior design, look like in practice? Here is one example. Gratitude is one of the most extensively studied emotions in positive psychology research, and it is also, according to Rabbi Sacks, a central component not only of Jewish liturgy and ethics, but even of Jewish identity – "Jewishness," he writes, "is thankfulness." Research shows that feeling and expressing gratitude has multiple benefits for mental and physical health and enhances relationships. Several positive psychology exercises have been designed to enhance feelings of gratitude. Similarly, Jewish practice encourages the expression of gratitude from the moment one wakes up in the morning (*modeh ani*) and throughout the day (reciting *berakhot* and *tefillot*). Yet many people struggle with maintaining *kavvana* during prayer or praying regularly. A "musar" teacher trained in positive psychology and behavior design could help with these challenges on an individual basis. One person might benefit more from the positive psychology exercise of keeping a gratitude journal, striving to enhance their overall feelings of gratitude so that they can evoke this feeling during prayer. Another may need help to start

a daily prayer habit, and a third might use the behavior design method to help them improve their *kavvana* when reciting *berakhot*.

Change can be hard. Research suggests that 80 percent of New Year's resolutions fail. Similarly, how often have we noticed during *Elul* or the *Yamim Noraim* that the improvements we resolve to make this year are the same ones we were thinking about last year and the year before?

Tiny Habits provides practical guidance for looking at our values and translating them into an increasing number of small, achievable habits that can collectively become transformative.

Rabbi Sacks observed: "Most of us believe in high ideals, but we act on them only sporadically. The best thing to do is to establish habits that get us to enact those ideals daily." Fogg's research, insights and explanations can help us learn to do just that – and floss our teeth as well.

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Viktor Frankl:
MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

Reviewed by Chaim Strauchler

SUMMARY: Viktor Frankl, famed psychotherapist and Holocaust survivor, published *Man's Search for Meaning* in 1946. The book recounts his experiences as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps to frame his psychotherapeutic method. His approach seeks to help patients (and readers) identify a purpose in life to feel positive about, and to imagine that outcome. According to Frankl, the way prisoners thought of the future affected their survival in the camps.

> Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.
>
> When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.
>
> Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: This year, as we enter Sukkot—the holiday of joy and gratitude—we do so with a deeper appreciation for human limitation and our individual mortality. Pandemics do that. We will experience joy, but differently. Frankl argues that we cannot avoid suffering but we can decide how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward with renewed purpose. At the heart of his theory, known as logotherapy, is a conviction that the primary human drive is not pleasure but the pursuit of what we find meaningful.

Frankl's book is a study in human power to endure suffering, but its message applies equally to our control over how we experience happiness. John Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost*, "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." In Sukka 53a, Hillel said of the celebration of *Sukkot's simhat beit ha-shoeva*, "If I am here, everyone is here; and if I am not here, who is here?" While Rashi famously explains that Hillel spoke these words in God's name, Tosafot and Akedat Yitzhak note that they may also be interpreted regarding the human experience.

While acknowledging the limited control that people have over so much of their lives, Frankl argues for the

ultimate power that we each have over our minds in how we respond to our circumstances. For Frankl, this isn't an excuse for injustice, but a claim for ultimate human meaning and purpose.

Cautionary Instructions: Frankl's argument that prisoners who survived the camps did so because they retained hope for the future implies that those who did not survive did so because they did not possess this sense of meaning. While not explicitly stated, such a conclusion is obviously problematic.

Chaim Strauchler is the Rabbi of Rinat Yisrael in Teaneck and an associate editor of TRADITION.

Sigmund Freud:
MOSES AND MONOTHEISM

Reviewed by Harvey Belovski

SUMMARY: Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, completed *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) while dying of cancer in exile in London. Started before Freud escaped Nazi-occupied Vienna, Moses and Monotheism is a radical re-reading of the life, origins, and religious leadership of Moses. Freud recasts Moses not as a born Hebrew raised in the pharaoh's palace (as per the Book of Exodus), but as an Egyptian. He asserts that following the death of the pharaoh, Moses led a small band of followers out of Egypt. In Freud's narrative, Moses was a dictatorial and overbearing figure who was eventually assassinated in a revolt against his leadership. Later, while wandering in the desert, this band encountered another tribe, with whom they combined, adopting their monotheistic beliefs, which later evolved into what we know as Judaism.

For Freud, the murder of Moses and its subsequent repression by the entire people, are defining features of Jewish monotheism. Awareness of the murder itself may be lost from conscious national awareness, but survives in subconscious guilt, which is manifest in various religious obligations and endeavors. One important example is the notion of a "messiah," which Freud saw as the Israelites' attempt to reconnect to their sublimated need for a father-leader. This guilt even resurfaces in Judaism's "daughter religion" Christianity, which attempts to permanently remedy it through the sacrifice of a substitute—Jesus.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Despite its almost total incompatibility with normative Jewish beliefs and its highly mythologized narrative, *Moses and Monotheism* remains a fascinating and seminal work for the Jewish reader. It provides an important glimpse into the Jewish identity and self-understanding of a resolute self-proclaimed non-believer, a man whose ideas shaped modernity, at the moment he was grappling with his own imminent demise. In fundamentally recasting the foundational narrative of his faith of origin, Freud reveals his profound interest in Jewish ideas and has provided later writers a wealth of material through which to interpret the great man's Jewish identity. This is especially true for Yosef H. Yerushalmi, whose important book *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (Yale, 1993) transformed our understanding of Freud's relationship to Judaism. Yerushalmi considers whether reimagining Moses as an Egyptian might enhance or degrade Freud's

Jewishness. Most interesting is Yerushalmi's detailed analysis of just how Jewish in thought and allegiance Freud actually was and the extent to which Jewish history and aspirations colored his work, especially towards the end of his life. Indeed, Yerushalmi asserts that *Moses and Monotheism* might not have been written at all if not for the events of the Hitler years.

Despite his staunch atheism, Freud is genuinely excited by an important concept that Judaism has gifted to humanity – the choice to worship an invisible God. In the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, "They opted for the intellectual, not the physical… Jews sought the unknown beyond the horizon… that, wrote, Sigmund Freud… was Judaism's greatest contribution." (*Covenant and Conversation:* "The Genius of Jewish Genius"; "The Faith of God"). Rabbi Sacks demonstrates that Freud's rather restrained recognition of the "invisible" God barely scratches the surface of the Jewish concept of the divine. He indicates that Freud missed the importance of invisibility – the fact that we cannot conceptualize, understand, or predict God, who through His utter freedom from any external constraints endows human beings with the freedom to choose what they will be. This is a fascinating and innovative inversion of Freud's understanding of human nature.

It is fascinating that Freud comes perilously close to undermining the credibility of his own thesis. He admits that "[when I use biblical tradition in] an autocratic and arbitrary way, draw on it for confirmation whenever it is convenient and dismiss its evidence without scruple when it contradicts my conclusion, I know full well that I am exposing myself to severe criticism concerning my method and that I weaken the force of my proofs." Yet, this is part of the charm of *Moses and Monotheism*—Freud himself uncovers the mass of internal paradoxes that drove him to write the work. This startling self-admission should make *Moses and Monotheism* more accessible to the contemporary reader. While one should feel no compunction in jettisoning Freud's chimerical, self-serving narrative, like Rabbi Sacks, one may embrace Freud's enthusiasm for the invisible God as platform for a mature and source-based investigation of the extraordinary notion of the living God of the Jewish people.

> Among the precepts of Mosaic religion is one that has more significance than is at first obvious. It is the prohibition against making an image of God, which means the compulsion to worship an invisible God.… If this prohibition was accepted, however, it was bound to exercise a profound influence. For it signified subordinating sense perception to an abstract idea; it was a triumph of spirituality over the senses; more precisely an instinctual renunciation accompanied by its psychologically necessary consequences.
>
> The progress in spirituality consists in deciding against the direct sense perception in favor of the so-called higher intellectual processes, that is to say, in favor of memories, reflection and deduction. An example… would be: our God is the greatest and mightiest, although He is invisible like the storm and the soul.

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René Girard:
VIOLENCE AND THE SACRED

Reviewed by Zissy Turner

SUMMARY: In *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), René Girard offers a universal theory of religion and culture through the lens of violence. Girard sees sacrifice as functional. Ritual appeases and channels humanity's innate desire for violence. This "mimetic" desire develops from jealousy for what others have. Left unchecked, this violence seeps into an amorphous being and will eventually find a victim. That victim will then seek more violence, leading to a destructive circle of vengeance that can lead to society's destruction. Sacrifice offers a solution to this problem through channeling violence into a sacred moment. A surrogate victim is chosen; a third party to the conflict. The communal need for violence is pinned on this sacrifice in an act of deep catharsis.

Girard reads the Cain and Abel story as an example of this sacrifice and violence. Many interpreters try to deal with the question of why God accepted Abel's sacrifice but not that of Cain. Girard reads the murder at the story's climax as an explanation for its beginning. When Cain brought a grain offering to worship God, instead of an animal sacrifices, the exigency for violence was not properly appeased. The need for blood hung in the air, and therefore, God indicated Cain would ultimately sin. God did not accept Cain's sacrifice, leading Cain to act out the violence against his brother.

If sacrifice as a means of channeling violence is so essential to human survival, why aren't humans at each other's throats nowadays when we no longer have sacrifice? Girard argues that we have something that the ancient world did not: A justice system. A justice system can be viewed as an impartial third party to conflicts. It can resolve conflicts without sacrifice.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Connecting scapegoating and violence is one way to understand the current rise of antisemitism. When two parties are in a vicious cycle of vengeance, the only way to break that is to find an innocent third party, a minority, to pin the blame on. Historically, this has taken the form of physical violence towards Jews.

As a teacher in a Jewish Day School, my students experience a different form of antisemitism, not one of bodily harm, but one of social media and infographics.

They are bombarded with brightly colored posts delegitimizing core tenets of Jewish peoplehood. This violence of the psyche slowly strips away elements of their selves. Frustratingly, Girard's solution (an impartial justice system) doesn't exist for my students. A review board can or cannot take down a post, but another easily takes its place to breed hate on social media.

Girard provides a fascinating framework for understanding this incessant hate, if not a means to stop it. Nevertheless, I'm inspired by Girard to break the cycle of this violence in a different way, by teaching my students that "hate breeds hate" and by turning to their community for support in defending their sense of self.

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Ibn Khaldun: **THE MUQADDIMAH**

Reviewed by Ari M. Gordon

SUMMARY: In fourteenth century North Africa an Arab Muslim jurist and polymath set out to write a comprehensive history of the world and penned an introductory volume, the *Muqaddimah*, which laid out a remarkably innovative theory of human civilization.

Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406) lived in an era when unified Islamic empires fragmented into small, local, and often short-lived dynasties. He saw the tragic impact of the Black Death, and he described the ruins of once-great cities, laid waste by human absence, economic decline, and warfare. Islamic societies continued to flourish, but Ibn Khaldun took it upon himself to explain a world beset with political uncertainty and social turmoil. He sought to answer a question that troubles all great civilizations reflecting on a gloried past and wary of a sclerotic present. How did we get here?

The work is rich and varied, but at its heart lies a theory of cyclical social change based on the concept of "*asabiya*." The term *asabiya*—appearing several hundred times in the *Muqaddimah*—connotes social cohesion, a group feeling that constitutes the lifeforce of human civilization. Ibn Khaldun highlights a dynamic tension between sedentary and nomadic cultures. Nomadic groups experience a potent form of *asabiya*, as the unforgiving environment of the desert demands mutual responsibility and community-based social structures. Asabiya drives these groups towards power, leading them to establish royal authority and statehood in urban settings. States require taxation to fill growing material needs and support political institutions. After some generations, the society becomes enamored with the coddling of sedentary life and descends into decadence. As the pursuit of luxuries and personal glory increases, people become alienated from the rulers and from one another. The loss of cohesion in those societies makes way for a new group with greater *asabiya*, and the cycle begins again.

The *Muqaddimah* serves as a kind of Aristotelian first principles for Ibn Khaldun's multi-volume work of history, *Kitab al-'ibar (The Book of Lessons and Archives)*. With the precision of a jurist, he breaks down society into component parts and analyzes their function: the forces that drive human civilization; the ways geography and environment shape culture; nomadic and sedentary societies; political authority; economies and livelihood; and various fields of scientific knowledge. Ibn Khaldun is both a product of his intellectual context as well as a pioneer within it.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Most works of medieval Arab history remain the stuff of esoterica, the provenance of historians of the Muslim world. While Ibn Khaldun wrote from within his medieval Islamicate context, the Muqaddimah was a forerunner of several fields of modern social science—including historiography, sociology and social psychology—to which it offered a useful vocabulary of concepts. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks also demonstrated the Muqaddimah's cross-cultural utility in his critique of modern western culture. He deploys the concept of asabiya to highlight the social decline that unfolds within wealth-driven and narcissistic societies (Not in God's Name, 257). It is no wonder that Ibn Khaldun's ideas resonated with Rabbi Sacks who argued that religion, in general, serves as "a countervoice to the siren song of a culture that sometimes seems to value self over others, rights over responsibilities, getting more than giving, consumption more than contribution, and success more than service to others" (speech in the House of Lords, November 22, 2012).

Our Jewish communities today stand to benefit from engagement with Ibn Khaldun's civilizational theory, as well. American Jews have become an empowered social and political force. We have built first-class educational institutions, erected great houses of worship, and fostered every form of Jewish artistic and cultural expression. Israel as a Jewish State is a democracy with a thriving economy and public sector. However, along with political empowerment, social acceptance, and economic success, materialism and individualism in our communities are challenging the Jewish value of sacrifice for God, community, and the greater good.

Our soaring synagogues, elegant weddings, and cabinets filled with luxury Judaica can be expressions of hiddur mitzva, sacred beautification. As a means to channel our collective intentions and elevate the holy in our lives, material adornments of our religious rituals can strengthen the ties of community. However, when they become status symbols, testimonies to individual prosperity, they erode our social cohesion. Ibn Khaldun's schema demonstrates that without intentional intervention, the descent from purpose-driven asabiya to social decay occurs subtly, naturally, and inevitably. The generation that "built the edifice through application and group effort," according to the Muqaddimah, appreciates its mission to serve collective needs. Those born into a life of comfort and existing institutions, however, "think that it was something owed his people from the start, by mere virtue of their descent."

The Muqaddimah suggests that blood-ties of family and tribe lie at the center of asabiya, but organizing around God and religion may play a similar role. Pride and jealousy are powerful drivers of human action, writes Ibn Khaldun, but the proper group cohesion around religion causes "the qualities of haughtiness and jealousy to leave them" and "exercises a restraining influence on mutual envy." Common cause and shared purpose emerge from seeing ourselves as representatives of the Divine on earth, with requisite responsibilities to one another.

Jewish scholars often engage with Islamic works in search of what they may reveal about the thought of our own great luminaries such as Rambam, Sa'adya Gaon, and Ibn Ezra. Rabbi Sacks' reading of the Muqaddimah is remarkable in that it does not excavate the work for what it says about us, but he channels the wisdom it offers to us.

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Horace M. Kallen:
DEMOCRACY VERSUS THE MELTING POT

Reviewed by Helena Miller

SUMMARY: Horace M. Kallen's essay "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot" was first published in *The Nation*, on February, 25 1915. Kallen (1882–1974) was a German-born American philosopher, son of an Orthodox rabbi, who supported the concept of cultural pluralism. He begins this article with an overview of the immigrant populations entering the United States, focusing specifically on the Jews. He discusses what it means to be "Americanized" and suggests that a democratic society that realizes the assumptions of the Declaration of Independence would lead to a leveling of society, such that all people become alike. This leveling is a melting pot. (Kallen distinguishes the Jewish immigrants from other immigrant groups by the fact that they do not come from truly native lands, but from countries where they have been treated as foreigners for sometimes centuries.)

Kallen argues that although immigrant groups must be loyal to certain democratic principles, within those constraints, there is no reason that immigrant peoples should not be able to maintain their identities, cultural expressions, religious beliefs, and even languages. Kallen suggests that through union, not uniformity, a mutual respect and mutual co-operation based on mutual understanding can be achieved. He defines this as cultural pluralism: when smaller groups within society keep their unique cultural identities, their values, and practices and are nevertheless accepted by the dominant culture, providing they are consistent with the laws and values of the dominant culture.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Readers might wonder to what extent an article exploring cultural pluralism from more than a century ago would resonate in contemporary times. Surely the world has moved on in its understanding of how groups within society can live together. But Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, exploring identity in his The Home We Build Together (2007), cites both Kallen and philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859–1952) as crucial voices in this process (31). He shows us how today's multi-culturalism developed from Kallen's definition of cultural pluralism. Sacks distinguishes the approach of Kallen and Dewey through a metaphor. He imagines that Kallen provides us with a fruit bowl, while Dewey serves us a fruit salad. In other words, Kallen wants us to preserve our distinct identities. He calls for us to integrate, not

assimilate. The fruits in the bowl sit together, their colors and shapes contributing to the picture of the whole – but each fruit retains its distinctive and separate look and taste. Dewey viewed our identities as American or British, on the one hand, and Jewish on the other, as interconnected, leading to a shared identity, which may be seen as assimilation, rather than integration. Hence R. Sacks' picture of Dewey's fruit salad—a taste of all the fruits in a single mouthful.

R. Sacks uses this metaphor as the springboard for a new approach to national identity. We should see society as bringing the distinctive gifts of different groups to the common good. He compares multiculturalism to a hotel, in which nobody is at home – we each have our own room and so long as we do not disturb others, we can do what we like. He replaces this with his idea of a home, which we all build together. In doing so he emphasizes our responsibilities and asks us to value our differences, which are not used to keep us apart. Rather, we each have something different and special to give to the common good. He calls this "integrated diversity" and ultimately prefers this metaphor to either the fruit or hotel metaphors. Cultural pluralism is vital to sustain and build a society in which all religious identities can flourish, but on its own, as Sacks recognizes, it is not the only platform needed from which to build a strong Jewish identity, connected to Jewish tradition and Jewish life.

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Martin Luther King Jr.: **I HAVE A DREAM**

Reviewed by Zev Eleff

SUMMARY: On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr., delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech before a quarter-million supporters in Washington, DC. King stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, determined to strike the right chord on behalf of civil and economic rights. His sermon called for fairness and the collapse of racial barriers. King argued forcefully and sensibly for racial equality, not unlike his and others' statements throughout the Civil Rights Era.

King's "Dream" sermon stands out for its rhetorical genius. The Civil Rights Era's most important champion connected his remarks to foundational American texts. First, he invoked Abraham Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" and linked his social justice efforts with the Emancipation Proclamation. After that, King reached farther back in American history to Thomas Jefferson and the self-evident truths of the Declaration of Independence. In the climax, King borrowed from Samuel Francis Smith's "America," calling for "freedom to ring" while pointing upward to the mountains of the bigoted South.

King's speech represented African Americans' tortured struggle to find themselves within the so-called American Dream. He had invoked "dreams" in earlier sermons, an image probably conjured up by King's admiration for and friendship with Langston Hughes. Hughes was the Harlem Renaissance's most prominent poet, who asked in 1951 "What happens to a dream deferred?"

King pleaded for America to no longer defer his dream, even as he recognized that desegregation and civil rights would not be solved in his lifetime. "I have a dream," he preached, "that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." By connecting racial justice to the tenets of America's foundational texts, King widened the dream question to all citizens: "black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics.".

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: King's "I Have a Dream" routinely rates among the very best speeches in American history. In December 1999, a pair of communications professors from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Texas A&M University polled a panel of 137 experts on the best American speeches delivered in the twentieth

century. King's "I Have a Dream" topped the list. Time and again, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote about King's dream. Like others, R. Sacks was taken by the democratic idea of a dream: that it was conjured up by one person's consciousness but could be shared and interpreted by many others. The concept resonates with Jewish tradition. It fits into the biblical story of Pharoah and Joseph. It relates to the sympathies of Zionism and the hopes of Theodor Herzl.

All this explains how Martin Luther King elevated his commitment to reworking the American dream into a shared, quasi-religious cause. "With this faith," offered King, "we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood." King beseeched his listeners to "pray together" and "struggle together." The Jewish experience in the United States has been far more positive than that of African Americans. Yet, especially amid recent anti-Semitism, Jews ought to consider their own stakeholdership in the American Dream. We too might dream within culturally canonical texts and engage in discourse over equity and fairness.

This question resided at the core of King's message, "What do the texts and values of the American story ask of you?" For tradition-bound Jews, King's speech and its reception provide another element to consider. The "I Have a Dream" sermon looms large in American culture, for its rhetorical brilliance as well as its central place in the canon of Civil Rights literature. Since the Colonial Period, Jews—not at all unlike other ethnic and religious groups, on their own terms—have fused American and Jewish traditions to gain a stronger foothold in the New World. My teacher, Jonathan Sarna, described this as the "Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture."

Today, some Orthodox commentators take great pains to argue for the Jewish spark within Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. This impulse reduces the force and meaning of both Jewish and American sources. Instead, we ought to take important texts and materials at fuller depth, appreciating them on their own terms. Like King's "I Have a Dream," our traditions—certainly the Jewish ones, but the best of the American canon, too—ought to stand on their own without the support of cultural and political alchemy.

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Abraham Lincoln: SECOND INAUGURAL

Reviewed by Menachem Genack

SUMMARY: March 4, 1865, began with torrents of rain and gale winds. Photos from that day show crowds in Washington, D.C., gathered in lake-sized puddles. As Abraham Lincoln began delivering his Second Inaugural Address, the rain stopped and the clouds dispersed. With the Union's impending victory in the Civil War only weeks away, Lincoln was expected to deliver a triumphalist speech. But Lincoln did not congratulate himself, nor did he celebrate in any way. He did not speak about himself, at all.

Instead, the speech, which Fredrick Douglas praised as a "sacred effort," is a deep meditation on the cause of the Civil War from a theological perspective. Lincoln saw the war as divine retribution for the sin of slavery. But he did not place the blame exclusively on the South; on the contrary, he attributed blame to the North as well, "that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offence came."

While the second shortest inaugural address in American history, Lincoln's Second Inaugural is the most profound, revealing him as a religious thinker of the first caliber. His resigned theology sought to brace the American people to the task of rebuilding a united nation by enshrining a policy of pragmatic accommodation in place of doctrinaire vengeance.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: The Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural flank Lincoln's sculpture in the Lincoln Memorial. Shortly after delivering it, Lincoln wrote to Thurlow Weed, a New York newspaperman and Republican party official, that he expected the speech to "wear as well as—perhaps better than—any thing I have produced."

Historian Ronald C. White in his *Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural* calls attention to Lincoln's use of inclusionary language (61):

> Lincoln's central, overarching strategy was to emphasize common actions and emotions. In this [second] paragraph, he used "all" and "both" to be inclusive of North and South. Lincoln was here laying the groundwork for a theme that he would develop more dynamically in paragraphs three and four of his address. Notice the subjects and adjectives in three of the five sentences in the second paragraph:

> Sentence one: "All thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war."
> Sentence two: "All dreaded it – all sought to avert it."
> Sentence four: "Both parties deprecated war."

These rhetorical devices allowed Lincoln to ask "his audience to think with him about the cause and meaning of the war," not as warring partisans but as weary participants (59).

Earlier in life, Lincoln had been a religious scoffer, but he had now grown into a more mature and reflective religious thinker. Lincoln communicates knowledge of the Bible and humility, "It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged." In fact, the speech reflects an existential humility. Lincoln maintained that the divine will is unknowable, "The Almighty has his own purposes." These themes are apparent, as well, in Lincoln's posthumously discovered note known as the "Meditation on the Divine Will:"

> In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time.

However, submission to inscrutable providence is more fully developed in the Second Inaugural.

Lincoln concludes with a vision of Reconstruction which is infused with his generosity of spirit, "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations." In contrast to the Radical Republicans, Lincoln took a more liberal approach attitude toward readmitting Southern States into the Union. Tragically, he was never able to implement this vision. One photo from that rainy day shows John Wilkes Booth standing in the galleries behind Lincoln. Only five weeks later, Booth shot and killed the President. In doing so he deprived the nation of its greatest statesman, its greatest orator, and its greatest moral paragon.

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Alasdair MacIntyre:
AFTER VIRTUE: A STUDY IN MORAL THEORY

Reviewed by Michael J. Harris

SUMMARY: *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre's best-known and most influential book, is an extraordinarily rich and complex work of moral philosophy. The broadest of outlines: MacIntyre argues that in our culture, important moral disagreements seem irresolvable. This is because the parties deploy incommensurable moral assertions, which, removed from their original theoretical contexts, amount to little more than the expression of personal attitudes. This situation has come about largely because of the failure of Enlightenment philosophers to achieve their goal of establishing a secular morality to which any rational person would need to assent. To restore rationality to our moral commitments, MacIntyre recommends a return to the Aristotelean tradition of ethics and politics in which the concept of virtue is central, rather than the notion of rules so important to modern conceptions of morality.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Unlike much of the moral philosophy being written when MacIntyre published the first edition of *After Virtue* in 1981, his magnum opus is not exclusively focused on the conventional philosophical canon and its contemporary successors but displays great erudition across a range of disciplines in the humanities. There is a broad similarity here to the writings of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks which manifest unusually wide familiarity with secular literature.

But Rabbi Sacks is also drawn to the substance of MacIntyre's philosophy and illuminates its deep affinities with some fundamental elements of a traditional Jewish worldview. Rabbi Sacks is especially enthusiastic about communitarianism – the idea, associated with MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer, and in opposition to liberal individualism, that our identities and moral obligations are primarily rooted in our communities and their histories. Our moral obligations are not, as many contemporary philosophers argue, simply a matter of individual choice. On the contrary, in the spirit of R. Elazar HaKappar in *Avot* 4:29, as translated by Rabbi Sacks in his Siddur, "without your consent you were born, without your consent you live… and without your consent you will… have to give an account and reckoning."

Already in one of his earliest books, *Tradition in an Untraditional Age* (1990), Rabbi Sacks, acknowledging

After Virtue, champions the idea that "ethics belongs firmly within traditions and communities, and... we make our ethical choices as individuals within a specific historical tradition, and within the context of a community in which that tradition is given living substance." He goes on to endorse "the case presented with overwhelming force by MacIntyre and others" that morality cannot flourish at the level of the state or the individual but in the midway setting of the community. Rabbi Sacks returns to these themes in another early work, *The Persistence of Faith* (1991), where he extends MacIntyre's argument by urging that religions are particularly adept at creating communities based on shared moral values. The influence of *After Virtue* on Rabbi Sacks's moral thought remains constant right up to his very recent book *Morality* [read preface and introduction here], in which he once again emphasizes the indispensability of community to morality and, in turn, the special potency of religion in generating communities.

Finally, it should be noted that not only did MacIntyre's thought influence Rabbi Sacks, but Rabbi Sacks' oeuvre impacted reciprocally on MacIntyre. In the opening chapter of *Radical Responsibility* (2012), a volume of essays by leading thinkers presented to Rabbi Sacks on his retirement as Chief Rabbi, MacIntyre includes many references to Rabbi Sacks' works, praises his "original and insightful" application of *After Virtue* to a Jewish context, and writes that he has learned from Rabbi Sacks even on issues where they disagree.

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Nelson Mandela:
LONG WALK TO FREEDOM

Reviewed by Daniel Rose

SUMMARY: *Long Walk to Freedom* is Nelson Mandela's 1994 autobiography. In this popular and widely read book, Mandela narrates his journey from an anti-apartheid activist, through his incarceration on Robben Island, to gaining his freedom and later becoming the leader of the ANC, ultimately president of a reborn South Africa, winning the Nobel Peace Prize along the way. His heroic life and struggle for the freedom of his people is deeply inspiring and morally impactful, as he dedicated his life to the values of human rights and racial equality for all.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: The story of Nelson Mandela will inspire future generations because it is the most human of narratives. It revolves around the power of an individual to change the world, the underdog overcoming the tyranny of the mighty, and the fight for freedom, dignity, and equality for all. These of course were all recurring themes in the thought and writings of **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**.

When R. Sacks heard of the passing of Mandela in December 2013, he issued this statement:

> Today we mourn the loss of one of the world's great leaders, the man who was our generation's mentor in *forgiveness and reconciliation*. Nelson Mandela lived and breathed the politics of hope. It takes courage to hope, and even greater courage to lead a people on the *long walk to freedom*. Because of him not only South Africa but the world is a better place.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are themes discussed by R. Sacks when he distinguished between shame and guilt cultures. Judaism is an example of a *guilt-and-repentance culture* rather than the *shame-and-honor culture* of the ancient Greeks. In a shame culture evil attaches to the person and can never be fully forgiven. He is a pariah and the best he can hope for is to die in a noble cause. In a guilt culture like that of Judaism, evil is an attribute of the act, not the agent, leaving room for repentance, rehabilitation and reconciliation. (See his Introduction to the *Koren Yom Kippur Mahzor*, lxxi.)

R. Sacks has called the Jewish people the "voice of hope in the conversation of mankind" because to be a Jew is to be "an agent of hope." "Every ritual, every command,

every syllable of the Jewish story is a protest against escapism, resignation and the blind acceptance of fate" (*Future Tense*, 249–252). He contrasted mere optimism with the courage to hope that he saw in Nelson Mandela. "Optimism and hope are not the same. Optimism is the belief that the world is changing for the better; hope is the belief that, together, we can make the world better. Optimism is a passive virtue, hope an active one. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it takes a great deal of courage to hope. The Hebrew Bible is not an optimistic book. It is, however, one of the great literatures of hope" (*To Heal a Fractured World*, 166).

But perhaps the most significant connection between the story of Mandela's life and the thought of R. Sacks is in the title of Mandela's autobiography itself – a phrase R. Sacks used many times to describe the biblical journey of the Jews from slavery to freedom. For R. Sacks the Exodus narrative, despite its particularistic nature, represented a universal human story, providing inspiration for many peoples in many different ages.

When black Americans sang, "Let my people go," when South American liberation theologians in the 1960s based their work on the Book of Exodus, when Nelson Mandela entitled his autobiography *The Long Walk to Freedom*, each was adopting Israel's story and making it their own (*The Jonathan Sacks Haggada*, 76).

In fact, rather than suggesting Mandela was coopting the Exodus narrative for his own journey, on numerous occasions R. Sacks used the title of the book to capture the essence of the Exodus narrative.

As much as the biblical telling of the Israelites' "long walk to freedom" may have inspired Nelson Mandela, his life and accomplishments inspired R. Sacks. R. Sacks concluded his statement after Mandela's death with the following words: "The greatest tribute we can pay him is to be inspired by his memory and lifted by his ideals. We offer our sincere condolences to his family. May they find comfort in the knowledge that his spirit will live on. He permanently enlarged the horizon of human hope." These words are now just as appropriately said about R. Sacks himself.

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John Stuart Mill:
ON LIBERTY

Reviewed by Samuel Lebens

SUMMARY: Classical utilitarianism claims good action maximizes net human pleasure and minimizes net human pain. John Stuart Mill famously refined this position. He distinguished between higher and lower pleasures. The scant pleasures experienced even by a dissatisfied Socrates are, Mill argues, of such a refined variety that they outweigh whatever earthly pleasure might be had, even by the most satiated pig. This argument appears in Mill's *Utilitarianism* but is present in the background of his earlier work, *On Liberty*.

Individuality is one of the necessary prerequisites for the experience of "higher" pleasures. Accordingly, Mill wanted to advance a political theory that would allow for the emergence of citizens with a keen sense of their own individuality. Moreover, his *On Liberty* articulated a political theory that could act as a bulwark against one of the greatest threats to utilitarian ethics: the tyranny of the majority.

If we kidnap a single illiterate person and harvest his organs, we could save the lives of many scholars. The ongoing and refined pleasures of these modern-day Socrates types would outweigh the pain caused to our victim. *On Liberty* counters this argument. Mill claims, "The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant." This is known as the harm-principle.

On Liberty also contains a defense of three key liberties: (1) the freedom of speech; (2) the freedom to structure one's life according to one's own taste (providing no harm is done to others), even if doing so may be deemed immoral by others; and (3) the freedom to associate with others (providing no harm is thereby rendered to those outside the association). These liberties are central to the cultivation and preservation of individuality.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Belief in God, and in revelation, comes along with the danger that one will become rigidly dogmatic. The Sages sought to fend this danger off, exhorting us to learn from all people. The risk is nevertheless real. John Stuart Mill's moving and thorough defense of the freedom of speech, in which he describes the good that comes even from listening to false

beliefs, can function as an important corrective to the peril of dogmatism. Moreover, to be an Orthodox Jew is to carry a thick conception of the good, which automatically gives rise to questions as to whether and when it may be appropriate to impose that conception upon others. *On Liberty* is a foundational contribution to that discussion.

However, *On Liberty* is host to some serious shortcomings. The harm-principle applies only to "a civilized community," since the highest forms of human pleasure are experienced there. Less civilized societies might fare better, according to Mill, if they are, at first, forcibly refined by the strong hand of a benevolent authoritarian. Indeed, Mill was in favor of British imperialism. Thus, *On Liberty* will not strike a modern-day liberal as all that liberal. Another concern: Mill would legalize gambling and prostitution, but only in private, and only between consenting adults. Accordingly, he allows the state to interfere in order to prevent "public indecency." But how is this consistent with Mill's argument that we should be free to offend people? How, exactly, am I harmed merely by seeing acts of indecency? How is this harm to be differentiated from my merely taking offence? There are also worries about the degree to which Mill's *On Liberty* is truly consistent with his *Utilitarianism*.

In *Not in God's Name*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes that the harm principle was "the beginning of the end of traditional codes of ethics, to be replaced by the unfettered sanctity of the individual, autonomy, rights and choice." R. Sacks was adamantly opposed to unfettered individualism. He thought that people are born into communal networks of responsibility and obligation. Indeed, halakhic Judaism views each Jew as standing under a specific set of commands. The classical liberalism of Mill, by contrast, sees each person as a self-defined locus of meaning. Mill's liberalism is, in some respects, a clear articulation of what Modern Orthodoxy must define itself against. And yet, R. Sacks was equally adamant, in political writings—such as *The Politics of Hope* and *The Home We Build Together*—that the state and the market could both be forces for the good. This is an essential ingredient of the Modern Orthodox embrace of modernity. But, crucially, the state and the market must both be regulated. *On Liberty*, as a *locus classicus* for the discussion of the appropriate limits of state power therefore contains, despite the elements we're bound to reject, an important ingredient of a broadly Modern Orthodox outlook.

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Eric Nelson: THE HEBREW REPUBLIC

Reviewed by Raphael Zarum

SUMMARY: In *The Hebrew Republic: Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (2010), Eric Nelson, Harvard Professor of Government, argues against the standard view that Western political thought was founded on secular foundations. Rather, the Christian encounter with traditional Hebrew texts caused the radical transformation of that field in the 16th and 17th centuries. Armed with newly available rabbinic writings, from the Talmud to Maimonides, European Christian scholars "began to regard the Hebrew Bible as a political constitution, designed by God himself for the children of Israel" (3).

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: I remember how excited Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was when this book first appeared in 2010. Over a decade before, in his The *Politics of Hope*, R. Sacks was already contrasting the early Western political perspective of self-interest with the Jewish covenantal community, so to read new research that extensively showed the influence of Jewish texts on the political ideas of the likes of Hobbes, Milton, and Locke was both a vindication of his own analysis and an opportunity for further exploration.

R. Sacks first employed Nelson's ideas in *The Great Partnership*, his 2011 book about the relationship between religion and science. "Science," he wrote, "must be accompanied by another voice. Not in opposition to science, but as the humanizing voice of what once we called the soul" (127). This humanizing voice can be seen in the Bible's treatment of political power and was understood and promulgated by early European political thinkers "who argued for constitutional (i.e., limited) monarchy, the principle of toleration and their uniquely modern freedom, the liberty of conscience" (131). R. Sacks then relates this to his understanding of the traditional Jewish perspective which he calls "the politics of freedom." This is "politics with a human face, the politics that knows the limits of power, as well as the transformative effect of free persons freely joining together to make social institutions worthy of being a home for the divine presence" (143).

In one Torah study, before exploring the revolutionary approach to society and slavery in the *sedra* of Behar, R. Sacks once again draws on Nelson's work to explain the biblical basis of two of the revolutions that shaped the modern world:

> The English and American revolutions were inspired by the Hebrew Bible as read and interpreted by the Puritans. This happened because of the convergence of a number of factors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Reformation, the invention of printing, the rise of literacy and the spread of books, and the availability of the Hebrew Bible in vernacular translations. For the first time, people could read the Bible for themselves, and what they discovered when they read the prophets and stories of civil disobedience like that of Shifrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives, was that it is permitted, even sometimes necessary, to resist tyrants in the name of God. The political philosophy of the English revolutionaries and the Puritans who set sail for America in the 1620s and 1630s was dominated by the work of the Christian Hebraists who based their thought on the history of ancient Israel (*Covenant & Conversation: Leviticus*, 368).

In another Torah study, this time on Va'ethanan, he focuses on the verses, "This is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'" (Deuteronomy 4:5–6). For R. Sacks an essential element of this wisdom was the Torah's conception of nationhood. It was this that would inspire other nations. He bases his justification for this on Nelson's book which he calls "a fine recent study." He then gives his summary of the key ideas of The Hebrew Republic from his particularly Jewish perspective:

> Nelson argues that the Hebrew Bible influenced European and American politics in three ways. First, the Christian Hebraists tended to be republican rather than royalist. They took the view – held in Judaism by Abarbanel – that the appointment of a king in Israel in the days of Samuel was a (tolerated) sin rather than the fulfilment of a mitzvah. Second, they placed at the heart of their politics the idea that one of the tasks of government is to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor, an idea alien to Roman law. Third, they used the Hebrew Bible – especially the separation of powers between the king and the High Priest – to argue for the principle of religious toleration (*Covenant & Conversation: Deuteronomy*, 61–62).

The Hebrew Republic, which R. Sacks waved at me with delight in his office immediately after it was published, enabled him to further develop his political readings of the Torah and show how rabbinic interpretations, in Nelson's words, "radically transformed European political thought and pushed it forcefully towards what we call modernity" (22).

The upshot of all this for us is monumental. We Jews living today in Western states are mistaken in thinking that the political structures of our governments were born out of the Enlightenment's secularism. Nelson reveals the unintuitive irony that the drive to separate Church and State came from these early modern readings of the Bible. The problems of monarchy, played out so dramatically in the biblical books of Samuel and Kings, and so fervently debated by our rabbinic sages, became the model that

convinced these European thinkers of the need for a politics built on liberty. Some of them might have been atheists, but their political aspirations—what R. Sacks called "covenant politics"—came from the pages of our *Tanakh*.

How parochial it is then for us to only take an interest in national politics when it directly concerns our own constituency or national homeland. Knowing that modern ideas of government were constructed from our sacred text should inspire us to be impassioned about its vision for society as a whole. And the dangers associated with covenantal politics that R. Sacks highlighted – overconfidence, moral self-righteousness, ultranationalism, loss of principles leading to corruption and injustice—should be front and center in our minds when we are making important decisions about how we engage in the countries in which we live.

Our tradition has had much to say about how humans should live together in harmony. If we confine our faith to the halls of study and prayer and ignore the halls of power, we betray God's revelation to our ancestors which forged the Jewish philosophy of nationhood.

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H. Richard Niebuhr:
THE IDEA OF COVENANT IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Reviewed by Daniel Friedman

SUMMARY: In 1953, Yale theologian H. Richard Niebuhr was asked, "To what extent did religious and specifically Christian convictions influence the development of American democracy; and, to what extent can that democracy be maintained here, or be reproduced elsewhere, without the aid of such convictions?" In response, Niebuhr proffered the theory of America as a covenantal community. In contrast with a contractual society, which is based on transactions of mutual convenience, the covenantal model is built on trust and the unspoken voluntary promise on the part of each member of the covenant that every decision one makes will be in the interests of enhancing the greater good.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: In 2007, whilst on the presidential campaign trail, Barack Obama told David Brooks that his favorite theologian was Reinhold Niebuhr, Richard's more famous older brother. Reinhold's doctrine of Christian Realism greatly impacted 20th century American foreign policy ideology. While R. Jonathan Sacks does make fleeting reference to Reinhold, he was clearly more influenced by the teachings of Richard Niebuhr. Apart from his essay "The Idea of Covenant in American Democracy," which R. Sacks quotes extensively in *The Home We Build Together*, R. Sacks appears to have based his initial framework in *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* on Richard Niebuhr's *The Responsible Self*. (Unfortunately, the index editors confuse the two brothers, misattributing Sacks' source to Reinhold.)

While Christianity's sources on how to lead a responsible, moral life are less apparent (see Niebuhr's *The Responsible Self*), Sacks is able to rework Niebuhr's ideas through the lens of Judaism, utilizing its abundance of scriptural and midrashic material. Popularized later in *Covenant & Conversation*, R. Sacks was always an outstanding *darshan* and would, very convincingly, anchor his ground-breaking ideas in a deft reinterpretation of classical sources.

Acquaintance with the ideology of Richard Niebuhr is essential for an understanding of contemporary anti-Israel advocacy in the mainline Churches. Judaism's distinction between particularistic and universalistic relationships allowed R. Sacks to reconfigure Niebuhr's thoughts on responsibility, distinguishing between national and global societal duties of care. The

universalism of Christianity, however, makes no such distinction. Consequently, Niebuhr's doctrine of "Radical Monotheism" dictates that allegiance to country over individual is idolatrous. Every response in life (the root word of responsibility) must satisfy faithfulness to God above all other considerations – and God always cares for the oppressed.

As a result of this complexity, Niebuhr concludes his "Idea of Covenant" essay uncertain as to whether the principles undergirding the American democratic model could be expanded universally. R. Sacks believes that the model could be reproduced and argues for such a society in Britain. One of the impediments that Sacks does not address is that in the American model, "Government must be of the people by the people for the people but always under God." Niebuhr attributes America's covenantal model to the effect of "continual domestic study of the Bible upon the national character and imagination of the American people." While R. Sacks proposes a covenantal framework for British society, noticeably absent are Niebuhr's prerequisites of Bible-study and pervasive loyalty to God.

Nevertheless, Sacks' acknowledges that the covenant proposition has applications beyond national society and may be more implementable on a micro-level. Quoting Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, which laments the decline of civic groups, R. Sacks calls for a reinvigoration of such indispensable societal structures, as they occupy an important space between the two modalities of the state and the individual. In fact, the "idea of covenant" may have been R. Sacks' parting message to the world. He concludes his final philosophical work, *Morality*:

> My firm belief is that the concept of covenant has the power to transform the world… we can change. Societies have moved from "I" to "We" in the past. They did so in the nineteenth century. They did so in the twentieth century. They can do so in the future. And it begins with us.

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George Orwell:
THE LION AND THE UNICORN

Reviewed by Nessa Liben

SUMMARY: Famous for his social satires and dystopian novels, George Orwell's insightful writing made him one of the leading social commentators of his time. In "*The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*," first published in 1941, Orwell analyzes British identity and culture during the Second World War. Terrified by the idea of totalitarianism, he said that in order to win the war and defeat the Nazis, a socialist revolution was necessary. He derided the class system in England, referring to the nation as "the most class-ridden country under the sun." Orwell differentiates between fascism and socialism, describing fascism as focused on human inequity, and socialism as believing in human equality.

Despite his deep concerns about the state of England's identity, Orwell concludes on a hopeful note by saying, "By revolution we become more ourselves, not less.... Nothing ever stands still. We must add to our heritage or lose it, we must grow greater or grow less, we must go forward or backward. I believe in England, and I believe that we shall go forward."

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Opining on nationalism, Orwell describes its purpose as securing power and prestige for one's country. In contrast, patriotism is "the devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people" ("*Notes on Nationalism*"). This distinction should be particularly interesting for religious readers who are considering what it means to build civil societies and moral communities. Patriotism is integral to a civil society, and democracy flourishes only when such a society is strong; in contrast, free society dies when people seek power through nativist populism.

Orwell's explanation that liberty means "the right to tell people what they do not want to hear" reflected his belief that disagreements allow room for truth to arise, and that people learn new ideas from listening to other perspectives. Exposure to alternative viewpoints does not make us less patriotic; it makes us more so. It reminds us to improve ourselves and our national collective identity, our patriotism.

In the opening of "The Lion and The Unicorn," Orwell says about England: "And above all, it is *your* civilization, it is

you... Good or evil, it is yours, you belong to it, and this side of the grave you will never get away from the marks that it has given you." Orwell reflects on his national identity, and he spurs us to pause and reflect on our own, considering who has power, what role we play in building our collective identity, how our culture imprints upon us, and how we impact it.

Orwell challenges the British to consider what they have in common, and we, no matter where we live, must ask ourselves the same question: What binds us together as a nation? Are we a collection of individuals randomly living in the same place, or is there a common thread that connects us? These questions become even more acute in our hyper-polarized society today.

Our shared history, mission, and destiny binds us together. This has always been true for us as members of the Jewish people. We are so fortunate that this is true for us as Jews living in Western societies. We appreciate the principles of freedom, liberty, and tolerance upon which our countries formed. As new immigrants arrive upon our shores, we remember that many of our grandparents were themselves immigrants who embraced this common identity.

Our challenge today is to continue building bridges between different segments of society who feel more and more distant from one another in order to connect to our shared history and come together around our shared destiny. This presents a unique challenge and opportunity for Jews in Western society today. (In Israel these challenges exist as well, albeit in far more complex ways.) We need to maintain our special bonds to our own Jewish communities, while also understanding that in so many ways, our destinies with all members of society are intertwined.

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Robert F. Putnam: **BOWLING ALONE**

Reviewed by Johnny Solomon

SUMMARY: "Bowling Alone" is a metaphor for, and title of, Harvard social scientist Robert F. Putnam's article (1995) and book (2000) which both analyzes and describes the increase in social disconnect, the diminishment of civic engagement and social capital, and the shift from "we" to "I" in the modern age. Its subtitle, "The Collapse and Revival of American Community" strikes a pessimistic note in its assessment of the public square, while leaving open the possibility for repair.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Even before surveying how the ideas found in Bowling Alone have informed and influenced the thinking of R. Jonathan Sacks, it is worthwhile noting that it is, quantitatively speaking, among the most regularly quoted books in his collected writings, with R. Sacks making direct reference to *Bowling Alone in Celebrating Life* (2000), *The Dignity of Difference* (2002), *The Home We Build Together* (2006), *The Great Partnership* (2011), and *Not in God's Name* (2015). Moreover, not only does R. Sacks begin *Morality* (2020) by referring directly to Bowling Alone and its author, but Putnam actually wrote an approbation to this book. Given all this, the question I consider here is what was R. Sacks "doing" by familiarizing his readers with the research, ideas, and conclusions found in Bowling Alone?

To answer this question, I'd like to go back a full decade before the publication of *Bowling Alone* when R. Sacks, just prior to his being appointed as Chief Rabbi, delivered the 1990 Reith Lectures which were subsequently published in *The Persistence of Faith* (1991). Both in those lectures and even more pointedly in his *Faith in the Future* (1995), R. Sacks explored the relationship between family, community, and faith. As he wrote:

> Faith, family and community are, I suspect, mutually linked. When one breaks down, the others are weakened. When families disintegrate, so too does the sense of neighbourhood and the continuity of our great religious traditions. When localities become anonymous, families lose the support of neighbours, and congregations are no longer centres of community. When religious belief begins to wane, the moral bonds of marriage and neighbourly duty lose their transcendental base and begin to shift and crumble in the high

> winds of change. That is precisely what has happened in our time and the loss, though subtle, is immense (*Faith in the Future*, 6).

As R. Sacks explained there, and as he repeated many times since, his intention as Chief Rabbi was to be a voice that helped restore "to our culture a sense of family, community and religious faith" (ibid., 7).

In the following years, the interconnectivity between faith, family, and community continued to be a central theme in his thinking, which was given further expression in *The Politics of Hope* (1997) where R. Sacks wrote that:

> [T]o be good, we have… to recognize that my well-being, my ability to pursue even the most private of projects, my very sense of individuality and identity, depend on a network of social relationships which I have a duty to sustain, in whose maintenance I carry a participative responsibility. That is why families and communities are the matrix of the moral sense, for it is there that we learn the give-and-take of reciprocity, the demanding and offering of love and recognition, the 'I' and 'Thou' that frame the 'We' (241).

Then, in 2000, Putnam published *Bowling Alone* containing significantly more research than his original 1995 article, and rather than "suspecting"—as R. Sacks had previously written—that faith, family, and community are linked, *Bowling Alone* provided R. Sacks with the critical data and the sharper language (e.g., social network, social capital, and "we're all in this together") to explore the phenomena that had already been on his mind and agenda for the previous decade. This is why R. Sacks opens *Morality* by writing that: "Robert Putnam… has done more than anyone in our time to document the loss, in contemporary America, of social capital" (25).

When, in 2018, R. Sacks interviewed Professor Putnam, he referred to his work as "prophetic." However, having noted how so much of what Putnam went on to prove in *Bowling Alone* had already been, for some time, so central to R. Sacks' concerns and writing, it is demonstrative that R. Sacks, too, was prophetic, and this explains why *Bowling Alone* is such an important tool in understanding the thought of Rabbi Sacks.

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Jean Jacques Rousseau:
ON THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

Reviewed by Isaac Fried

SUMMARY: Assimilating the insights of many of the early-modern natural law and social contract theorists, Jean Jacques Rousseau's *On the Social Contract* is a landmark in political theory. Its account of the purpose and powers of government is both rigorous and impressively concise. Although at times technical and abstract, *OTSC* is marked by a wonder at the human condition, especially at humanity's evolutionary transformation from prehistoric, asocial animals, to civilized beings. In *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau noted that humans hunger for socialization, and that this hunger manifests in the opposing poles of competition and collaboration. *OTSC* picks up where the *Discourse* left off, with the question of how to balance our individual competitiveness with the dignity of a common life. Indeed, the social contract is precisely the answer to this question, or what Rabbi Sacks calls the proper relation between the "I" and the "We" (Morality, 20).

The origin of peoplehood, Rousseau argues, lies in the social contract: "Before examining the act by which a people chooses a king, it would be well to examine the act whereby a people is a people" (I:5). Contra Hobbes, Rousseau argues that a people does not form to avoid violence, for two main reasons. First, it is only the state of society that generates the motive for violence (I:4). If not for the competitiveness to which society drives us, humans would never come to blows, amid nature's bounty (*Discourse*, 69). Second, even the purported fear of violence is not sufficient to moot humanity's existential need for liberty, which Rousseau takes as essential to human dignity: "Free peoples regularly sacrifice… life itself to maintain their liberty…" (*Discourse* 82–83).

As Rousseau has it, the social contract does not alienate the individual's power of self-government, but preserves it in elevated form. Society forms not to avoid violence, but so that individuals can better meet the challenges of living through collaboration, innovation, and shared knowledge. It is this, almost libidinal, connection that joins individuals into a people, itself a sort of "invention", establishing them as a "single moving power, made to act in concert" for the common good (I:6). The common good, or the "general will," is then the foundation for all legitimate lawmaking. Importantly, the community's general will is not simply an expression of the will of the majority (I:3). It is, rather,

what a disinterested person would recognize as the policy all community members should agree upon as being in their mutual interest.

The remainder of *OTSC* examines the nature of government institutions. The power to implement laws, or the *legislative power*, is the essence of what Rousseau calls sovereignty. Rousseau takes this up in Book II: every law flows from, and is validated by, the sovereign social contract, and is a further "agreement of the [political] body with each of its members" (II:4). However, the implementation of particular laws and institutions relies on *executive power*, which is not identical with the general will. In this function, the people must be represented, so that while "the people cannot be represented in the legislative power... it can and should be represented in the executive power, which is merely force applied to the law" (III:15).

The split between executive and legislative powers opens a conundrum: how will we ensure representatives remain loyal to the general will? For this, Rousseau highlights the *judicial power*: regular assemblies put the government "on trial", as citizens vote on the continuance or discontinuance of the current government institutions and representatives (III:18; IV:2). Special judicial agencies also help keep the government within its legitimate powers and beholden to the general will.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: *On the Social Contract* is one of a few texts with a lasting impact on democracy, influencing the leaders of the French and American Revolutions, as well as the nineteenth and twentieth century independence movements in Europe and the Third World. It remains strikingly on point for our times. To take one example, recent protests involving property destruction raise the question of the ultimate role of the state. Is it to abolish violence and protect property, *à la* Hobbes, or is there something that precedes government institutions, including property, in the foundation of the political order? Rousseau's provocative suggestion is that the common good can, at times, entail violating legal institutions, *if* the social contract itself is at stake.

As Rabbi Sacks has written, in our fractured world the very fabric of the social contract seems to be coming apart. Competitiveness rules the day, even as COVID-19 has revealed just how interdependent we all are. In these trying times, Rousseau's *On the Social Contract* is a breath of fresh air, a reminder that if we lose our sense of "We," our individual liberty, prosperity, and even our health, will soon follow.

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Michael Sandel:
LIBERALISM AND THE LIMITS OF JUSTICE

Reviewed by Samuel Lebens

SUMMARY: In the 1970s, two Harvard philosophers published hugely influential books in defense of two forms of liberalism. John Rawls' *Theory of Justice* was a defense of a center-left, social-democratic conception of justice. Robert Nozick's *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* was a defense of a right-wing, small-state libertarianism. What both books had in common, drawing from the tradition of political liberalism, was the centrality of individual and personal autonomy. With these two books, that tradition had reached something of a zenith. In 1982, another Harvard philosopher, Michael Sandel, published *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. This book raised a powerful objection against the entire tradition of political liberalism.

According to Sandel, liberalism goes wrong when it thinks of the individual in abstraction from his or her social context. Rawls had gone so far as to suggest that we arrive at the core principles of justice by imagining what rules we would accept to govern a society if we were to stand behind a veil of ignorance. Behind this veil, we don't know what our gender, religion, or socio-economic background is; we are ignorant of our own racial identity or physical condition. According to Rawls, the principles that we might agree to behind such a veil can be considered to be the foundational principles of justice. Sandel, by contrast, argues that a person behind a veil of ignorance is a contradiction in terms. Not to know these things about oneself is to no longer be a person at all.

Sandel's criticism of classical liberalism came hand in hand with other similar critiques in the 1980s from thinkers such as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre, in a movement that came to be known as communitarianism. Communitarianism wasn't intended to be anti-liberal. But it strove to correct something that had gone wrong at the heart of the project. By thinking of the human being as a completely discrete and autonomous "I," liberalism quickly descends into the view that there is no such thing as right or wrong beyond respecting the decisions of fully informed and consenting adults (whatever those decisions might be). The notion that a person could be born into a network of obligations and responsibilities had been utterly overlooked. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was to summarize the key insight of Sandel and his peers:

> We are not mere individuals. We are social animals, embedded in a network of relationships—families, friends, colleagues, neighbors, co-workers, and co-worshippers—and some of these are constitutive of our sense of self. The "I," in and of itself, has no identity. We are who we are because of the groups to which we belong. To be sure, liberalism allows us to enter or leave such groups as we choose: that is what makes it liberal. It turns potentially coercive groups into voluntary associations. But community is essential to identity, so these thinkers argued, and they became known collectively as "communitarians"(*Morality*, chapter 9).

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: R. Sacks realized more vividly than others that the communitarian critique of liberalism resonates deeply with Rabbinic sources. Judaism is a religion rooted in our tribal or national identity. A person doesn't cease to be a Jew upon renouncing her Jewish beliefs. This is because a person is born into a network of obligations that history places on her shoulders whether she likes it or not. Modern Orthodoxy, for good reason, promotes individual autonomy. In contrast to the sometimes herd mentality of those who delegate almost every decision to the authorities of daat Torah, Modern Orthodoxy aspires for each individual to be sufficiently well-versed in the values and texts of the tradition to be able to make many decisions for themselves. On the other hand, the unfettered individualism of contemporary society, which quickly collapses into a form of consumeristic hedonism, becomes a hostile environment to religiosity and especially to the identity-based faith of Judaism. In part, this was what led to the notes of despair in Rabbi Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith*: we live in a world that is increasingly inhospitable to the life of faith within the context of a covenantal community. What's so exciting about *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* is that it offers a criticism of this unfettered individualism, and it does so in the language of liberalism itself. For that reason, it can become an essential resource for a Modern Orthodox Jew trying to balance the importance of autonomy with the value of community.

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Benedict de Spinoza:
TRACTATUS THEOLOGICO-POLITICUS

Reviewed by Daniel Rynhold

SUMMARY: Published anonymously in 1670, and banned a few years later, Spinoza wrote a letter describing the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (*TTP*) as presenting "my views regarding Scripture," but the book does far more than that. Its writing was occasioned by what was, in Spinoza's eyes, an urgent need to address religiously motivated political strife in the Dutch Republic. Thus, he goes on to specify, it aims to "expose the prejudices of the theologians," to combat accusations of atheism (a charge he always vigorously denied), and most centrally to argue for the "freedom to philosophize." It begins with theology, dealing with how he understands the *Tanakh*'s presentation of topics such as prophecy, miracles, and divine law, lambasting in the process medieval Jewish rationalist—Maimonides in particular—for forcing *Tanakh* into an ill-fitting Aristotelian straitjacket. He then continues with an influential early presentation of Biblical criticism. But the biblical content, substantial though it is, is ultimately just setting the scene for the book's political goals. For on the basis of his conviction that the Bible presents only the barest of theologies—that there is one omnipresent God the worship of whom "consists solely in justice and charity" (TTP, chapter 13)—Spinoza can argue that since the Bible itself barely cares to police our theologies, the state should similarly only regulate the behavior of its citizens, not their theologies or philosophies. The path is thereby cleared for Spinoza to present his version of a social contract argument that limits political power to justify freedom of thought, a limit that at the same time best serves political stability, since "peace and piety are endangered by the suppression of this liberty" (*TTP*, Preface). While the resulting Spinozan state is someway from granting the broad freedoms of religion we today enjoy, the *Tractatus* is seen as an important early step along the path to liberal democracy.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: It would clearly be a gross understatement to say that R. Jonathan Sacks has no stock with Spinoza's rejection of the divine authorship of the Torah and denial of the continuing validity of *mitzvot* (or the "ceremonial law" as Spinoza puts it). Yet, R. Sacks acknowledges that Spinoza was both one of the "makers of the modern mind" (*Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren*, 11) and "one of the first great theorists of liberalism" (*To Heal a Fractured World*, 89).

Spinoza's defense of liberty and toleration—which R. Sacks notes, in still granting the state "draconian powers" (*The Politics of Hope*, 71) did not go far enough—would lead to the classical liberalism that R. Sacks calls "one of the great achievements of human civilization" (ibid., 75). However, without a shared morality, the negative liberty for which he takes Spinoza to be arguing will not alone hold civil society together, and it is over how to provide that shared moral underpinning that Spinoza and R. Sacks differ fundamentally.

It is of great significance to R. Sacks, and an idea that he was often at pains to repeat, that Spinoza presents us with a characteristically penetrating insight into the nature of Judaism. For while Spinoza dismisses *mitzvot* as merely being the political law of the ancient Jewish state that lost their binding force once the state fell, the flipside is his recognition that this "discipline of difference… had been a key to Jewish survival" (*One People*, 28). Spinoza recognized that abandoning the commandments "meant abandoning membership of the Jewish people" (ibid., 35).

The centrality of *mitzvot* for Judaism is clearly a contention with which R. Sacks wholeheartedly agrees. Where he comes apart from Spinoza decisively is in his evaluation of this truth. Spinoza's enlightenment universalism meant Jewish particularism was an obstacle to peace and thus to be eliminated. Spinoza dismisses tradition in favor of universal rationality, whether in his opposition to *mitzvot* or to the divinity of the Torah. As R. Sacks tells us, Spinoza "rejected the authority of tradition in understanding sacred texts" (*Crisis and Covenant*, 182). Other than the obvious religious objections that he would have to this, for R. Sacks it is only through our membership of traditions, via religions and particular communities, that we can acquire the very universal values that will lead to the peaceful, just society that both he and Spinoza desire. Spinoza had correctly identified the centrality of Jewish law for the survival of Judaism. Where he went wrong was in thinking that eliminating it is the path to a moral society. R. Sacks showed us that maintaining *mitzvot* and retaining particularity rather than flattening it is the way to secure a just society—for Jews and for humanity in general.

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Charles Taylor:
A SECULAR AGE

Reviewed by Chaim Strauchler

SUMMARY: In *A Secular Age*, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues that secularism is not simply the absence of religion, but rather an intellectual category that is itself a historical construct. Taylor examines the change in Western society from a condition in which it was almost impossible not to believe in God, to one in which belief is a choice among options. He connects this to changes in how people experience their surroundings—a move between what he calls "the porous self," which was vulnerable to external forces like spirits and demons, to "the buffered self," a disciplined and independent agent living in a progressively disenchanted world.

He argues against the view that secularity in society is caused by the rise of science and reason (what he calls a subtraction narrative). Rather, the successes of religious reform efforts in the late Middle Ages encouraged an anthropocentrism that opened the gates for a godless humanism (130). Up until a few hundred years ago, people could not even consider a viewpoint absent of God. Culture has now changed so that multiple viewpoints are conceivable to most people. Taylor refers to this new way of thinking as the modern social imaginary.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: In his book *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, R. Jonathan Sacks writes, "We live, in the deep sense given by Charles Taylor in his masterwork of that title, in 'a secular age'" (193). Taylor's work vividly portrays the spiritual and intellectual environment in which we moderns reside. Taylor explains how our presumed "enlightened" existence in fact impoverishes society.

Taylor's insights provide a framework through which a person of faith can challenge the immanent assumptions of this secular age. He takes us out of this frame, allowing us to look back at it critically and identify its weaknesses. We come to grasp how secularism leads us to believe that everything important is this-worldly, explicable on its own terms. Everything fits within the time-space-energy-matter dimensions. Social and political orders are constructed by humans for mutual benefit. Society is made up of individuals, each charged with finding her or his own way of being human.

Taylor lists several Closed World Structures (i.e., closed to transcendence) that assume the prevalent worldview.

One is the idea of the rational agent of modern epistemology. Another is the idea that religion is childish, so "An unbeliever has the courage to take up an adult stance and face reality" (562). Taylor argues that such Closed World Structures do not really argue their worldviews, they "function as unchallenged axioms" (590) rendering belief in the transcendent not just implausible but inexplicable.

Separated if only for an instant from the immanent frame, we come to realize that this perspective is neither ethically neutral nor strictly objective. It includes some things (values such as secular time) and excludes others—it renders "vertical" or "transcendent" worlds as inaccessible or unthinkable. R. Sacks touched on these themes in a 2007 essay: "What we disagree with is not science but scientism, the belief that what we can see and measure is all there is."

Yet, even upon appreciating our secular age's buffered selves and its immanent frame, we cannot restore a porous existence. To be aware of the choice that is faith does not remove the fact that we must choose.

Taylor does not see the secular status quo as stable. He writes toward the end of the book, "Our age is very far from settling into a comfortable unbelief.... The secular age is schizophrenic, or better, deeply cross-pressured" (727). R. Sacks touched on these cross-pressures when he and Taylor shared a stage in Toronto in November 2011, discussing "The Future of Religion in a Secular Age." Rabbi Sacks said in response to a question regarding religion's ongoing viability and vitality, "Human beings are meaning-seeking animals, and the search for meaning is constitutive of our humanity, and religion is the greatest heritage of our meanings."

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Leo Tolstoy:
A CONFESSION

Reviewed by Yakov Danishefsky

SUMMARY: With excruciating detail, Tolstoy's *A Confession* depicts the agony of meaninglessness. Tolstoy's pain was not the pain of having suffered abuse or tragedy. His life, as he writes, was blessed and fortunate. He had career success, financial comfort, family, and friends. He experienced the luxuries and pleasures the world had to offer. Yet, he was depressed to the point of nearly taking his life.

Tolstoy describes his fame and success, "This faith in the meaning of poetry and in the development of life was a religion, and I was one of its priests." Disenchantment from this "religion" led to the realization that its "highs," its "priests," and its societal "progress" and "dogmas" were filled with nothing but the search for pride and praise.

Eventually, his critical eye and reflective mind returned to ask, "Why am I doing what I'm doing? What is this for?" He found himself empty and unrooted. Alive but without life. In his misery, from within his hurt, he discovered light in the most unexpected places. He found his answer in the masses of "unlearned, poor people." People who simply believed in God. People who were not necessarily part of the central religious institutions but just lived with faith.

Tolstoy's upper-class education taught him and his peers to use a rational scientific apparatus. But science and philosophy were the wrong tools for discovering meaning. The unlearned people succeeded through faith. This simple faith in an infinite Being was all Tolstoy needed for his finite life to be fundamentally altered.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Tolstoy's challenge has gone viral. Material prosperity and save-the-world politics has made "social progress" priests of every college graduate and pop star. Tolstoy's work is the best because it exposes the underbelly of high-class culture: status, self-righteousness, and dogmatism.

But *A Confession* is The BEST because of more than that. Tolstoy did something most of us are too afraid to do: He ripped off all the Band-Aids of life. He put away his fame, material success, professional success, social popularity, institutionalized religion, intellectual prowess, and even familial relationships. And he let himself discover the

unadulterated rawness of experience. And in doing so he found that the only viable response to the problem of finite being is in the Infinite Being.

Modern addiction crises result from existential and spiritual emptiness. The alcoholic does not enjoy alcohol more than the non-alcoholic; he tolerates sobriety less. The highs that come with each hit serve as a stand-in for the High that is truly lacking. It is this High that Tolstoy presents in *A Confession*.

To many, the skeptic is intellectually honest, while the believer is an unenlightened follower. Tolstoy demonstrates no shame, immaturity, or shallowness in choosing to believe in the purpose and meaning of a world created by God. Belief is courageous, noble, and ever-important.

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Lionel Trilling: **BEYOND CULTURE**

Reviewed by Joe Kanofsky

SUMMARY: *Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning* (1965) is a collection of Lionel Trilling's essays on a variety of subjects. Trilling presents a consistent argument throughout the collection's eight chapters: "The examination of life by aesthetic categories yields judgments of a subtle and profound kind, of compelling force" which liberates great authors and their readers, because they had the "clear purpose of detaching the reader from the habits of thought and feeling that the larger culture imposes, of giving him a ground and vantage point from which to judge and condemn, and perhaps revise, the culture which produced him." Cautioned by the left's flirtation with, or outright seduction by, communism in the first part of the century, Trilling's wiser-for-the-experience liberalism as presented in *Beyond Culture* provides marvellously capable tools in reorienting identification with a strong and stable liberal tradition.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: Though the social and political pendulum swings of mid-20th century America, Lionel Trilling seemed to believe the liberalism he modeled and taught in perpetual ascendancy. New Deal political liberalism and academic liberal social criticism peaked during his lifetime; America's flirtation, and even that of traditional Judaism, with conservatism, which became a full-blown affair by the turn of the century, still lurked deep in the shadows at the time of Trilling's death in 1975. His influence on major thinkers and writers of the American Jewish intellectual scene, from Cynthia Ozick to Carolyn Heilbrun to Louis Menand, weighted heavily toward the center, as equidistant from the radical left of the 1930s as from the neo-conservatism of the Reagan years.

Beyond Culture picked up threads of liberal culture and literary criticism begun in a still earlier volume, *The Liberal Imagination* (1950). Freud and Isaac Babel are essay topics, as are classics such as Jane Austen's Emma and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Trilling cites Henry Sidgwick in the last essay, advocating for supplanting the Greek and Latin classics with "really" teaching students English so that "as far as possible, they may learn to enjoy intelligently poetry and eloquence; that their interest in history may be awakened, stimulated, and guided; that their views and sympathies may be enlarged and expanded by apprehending noble, subtle, and profound thoughts, refined and lofty feelings: that some comprehension of the various development of

human nature may ever abide with them, the source and essence of a truly humanizing culture."

R. Jonathan Sacks' humanism built on Trilling's vision in what seems a profoundly authentic Jewish way: not to supplant the classics of the Jewish canon but to refract their teachings and values through a humanizing lens. It is no wonder that with this perspective guiding his public voice, Sacks' Torah lands as influentially with Jews of many views and alliances as with non-Jews. Trilling's lectures undergird some of Sacks' most captivating themes throughout his writing. Sacks' call to move from "I" to "we" suggests shifting a balance in the tension that the enlightenment wrought, to free the individual from corporate (then ecclesiastical, now national) identity toward greater autonomy. That struggle's expression in Trilling's essay "Society and Authenticity" is the "honest soul" that relates to society in both "obedient service" and "inner reverence." Trilling's sustained argument for the reflective, literate, thoughtful, and above all authentic self is the humanist compliment of Sacks' moral ideal.

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Max Weber:
THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

Reviewed by Andrew Rosenblatt

SUMMARY: One of sociology's early classics, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* by Max Weber ambitiously sets out to explain the prosperity of Protestant countries. However, Weber's *magnum* opus is significant for the religiously curious specifically because it demonstrates how religious doctrine can have profound impact on both culture and economics.

The central thesis that Weber attempts to prove is that the Calvanists, Methodists, Baptists, Quakers, and Pietists developed a work ethic independent of consumption. The sects were simultaneously ascetic and industrious. The cultures produced by the Protestant reformation valued work and productivity for its own sake; consumption and hedonism were frowned upon. The religious development of the Protestant Work Ethic originates in the Calvinist concept of predestination. Calvin preached that God already knew who was among the elect, or saved, and they were predestined to enter heaven *already*. The pious could not change their position. However, Church luminaries implored them to develop confidence in their position among the elect. The best way to develop this religiously mandated confidence was to contribute to the recognizable economic success of God's community. Thus, hard work, frugality, and the amassing of wealth became the *religious* life aim of these Protestants.

Weber presents the words of Benjamin Franklin in "*Advice to a Young Tradesman*" as a prime example of this Protestant philosophy, "Time is money... he that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor... and sits idle half of that day... has really thrown away five shillings." Furthermore, "Credit is money," and "money has a proliferation power." Franklin goes on to explain that wasting a coin is like slaughtering a cow—neither can produce future offspring. The uniqueness of this wisdom is that it speaks of economic achievement on its own terms, while at the same time demurring consumption.

WHY THIS IS THE BEST: While the Torah world may have little use for the theology of the Protestant sects, the idea that religion is a primary driver of culture and that culture is a primary factor in the economy should concern any community leader who considers how religious doctrines impact the culture which we all inhabit. We would be naive to think that our own halakhic and hashkafic discussion

on *Torah im Derekh Eretz* versus full-time Torah study as a universal ideal will have no impact on culture or economy. The idealization of exclusive Torah study and the tandem disapproval of those who work will certainly create its own economic outcomes and pressures. Just as Protestants became industrious in response to the preaching of their leaders, so too economic hardships would logically follow from the prejudice against secular employment. Such economic hardships may in turn lead to the negative social outcomes of poverty, such as crime, anxiety, divorce, and depression.

One additional insight of Weber's deserves mention. He attempted to determine the difference between *Church* and *Sect*. The former being an institution that speaks with authority and which must serve all the people. The *Sect*, on the other hand, is the community of the chosen, whose members are admitted by virtue of a voluntary mutual decision by community and individual. Freedom of conscience characterizes the self-selection of sects. For example, Quakers must respond to the voice of their own conscience above the authority of the Quaker movement or sect. This fealty to personal conscience was an important factor in the anti-authoritarian nature of American democracy. In short, the Unites States Constitution is a direct outgrowth of Protestant sectarianism. The particulars of faith may be less interesting to the Jewish Community than the methodology of tracing the origin of religious ideas into the formation of national governance.

Weber established the methodology that traces the path from sermon to everyday culture, as evidenced by his demonstrating how the pithy common sense of Benjamin Franklin emerged from Quaker sermons. Certainly the religious virtues of envisioning future outcomes (see Ecclesiastes 2:14 and *Avot* 2:9) and being vigilant for the consequences of actions recommend that we study Weber's methodology.

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RABBI SACKS BOOKSHELVES PROJECT – A CLOSING CHAPTER

Reviewed by Chaim Strauchler

> "What shall I do with all my books?" was the question; and the answer, "Read them," sobered the questioner. But, if you cannot read them, at any rate handle and, as it were, fondle them. Peer into them. Let them fall open where they will. Read on from the first sentence that arrests the eye. Then turn to another. Make a voyage of discovery, taking soundings of uncharted seas. Set them back on their shelves with your own hands. Arrange them on your own plan, so that if you do not know what is in them, you at least know where they are. If they cannot be your friends, let them at any rate be your acquaintances. If they cannot enter the circle of your life, do not deny them at least a nod of recognition (Winston Churchill, *Thoughts and Adventures*).

The decluttering minimalism of this moment has made books into a problem: "What shall we do with all our books?" They take up precious space. Their preservation requires justification. Technology has made possessing physical tomes almost discretionary. They, after all, can be exorcised upon digital readers and audio recordings. When demanded, they can be printed off digital scans. Yet, it is not just the physical book—but the role of books and the type of knowledge they possess that are under question. Attention merchants have employed an array of distraction to replace deep absorption with the shallows of tweets, click bate, and the targeted ad. Forget space, who has time for a book?

Elli Fischer and David Bashevkin have recently written on the "shelfie," a photo taken to show off what is on someone's shelf:

> The advent of digital culture has lessened the utility of printed books as storehouses of information and thus, somewhat ironically, increased their value as means of self-fashioning and self-curation. This process took another leap forward during the COVID-19 epidemic, when otherwise private or semi-private spaces became public on ZOOM, Facebook Live, and related applications. The more the naïveté of book-placement diminishes, the more we can expect to find significance in the books that are held, placed on a desk, or arranged on a shelf.

That books would be used as a means of preening and posturing depends on the assumption that a book's position upon a shelf says something about the person who sits before it. Yet more might be said about a book's interior design potential. Books brandish a more precious interior—that of the mind and soul. We are not just what we eat—but also what we think and quote. Within a modern society where our identity is always up for grabs, we are formed by the ideas that we arrange upon the "shelves" of our minds. True, some ideas flitter through and are gone, but some sit and dwell. They take a position within the inner stacks of our cognitive reference libraries. They become part of the furniture of our minds. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks *z"l* had elaborate bookshelves of this type.

TRADITIONOnline's Rabbi Sacks' Bookshelves Project has sought to both mourn and celebrate R. Sacks by describing these bookshelves. We did not sneak into his Golders Green study. We did not perform a "shelfie" analysis of the furniture that stood behind him during the Zoom presentations of his last year of life. Rather, we looked at our own bookshelves upon which so many of his books sit. We opened those books and combed his bibliographies for the works that he quoted most.

It cannot be emphasized enough that R. Sacks' bookshelves were occupied first and foremost by the classics of Jewish traditional scholarship. To that canon, he contributed new volumes which will be remembered long after other books are forgotten. While he wrote beautiful commentaries on the *Siddur* and the *Humash*—his legacy as a teacher reached far more deeply into the sea of Torah learning and surfaced many pearls with which both Jews and non-Jews might adorn examined lives.

R. Sacks' bookshelves contained classical and contemporary writers on philosophy, politics, and society, including popular research in psychology, ethics, economics, and sociology. In perusing his shelves, our writers sought to capture the unique wisdom and beauty within each text. Yet, they also found commonalities.

Our writers found echoes of their subjects' life stories in R. Sacks himself: Whether in the ubiquity of Chesterton's influence upon his colleagues and students; the insight of de Tocqueville into the challenges of the modern age, the roles of faith and family, and the power of community; Mandela's enlarging the horizon of human hope; or the poetic and deeply spiritual paradoxes of Leonard Cohen. In thinking about the ways in which R. Sacks used these texts, our writers found a courageous fighter willing to engage the best that has been thought and said—even when, and especially when, those things threatened the religious personality—be it at the hands of Ayer, Freud, or the new atheists. Through it all, our writers found in R. Sacks' shelves something hopeful and optimistic about the human intellect and its ongoing quest to create a better world.

R. Sacks' curiosity and excitement drove him to explore not just knowledge but also the people who generate knowledge. This was true not just in how he developed relationships with writers included in the project, among them MacIntyre, Putnam, and Taylor (not to mention our project's writers themselves). It was also true of how he read. While a voracious reader of practically everything, his attention to fields like politics, psychology, ethics, economics, and sociology reflects a deep humanism—a love for people in all their curious convolutions. In the epilogue to his recent book *Morality*, R. Sacks describes

his hopes for a post-COVID reality with the force of John Donne's famous words, "Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind."

In the twelfth century, Yehuda Ibn-Tibbon famously wrote in a letter to his son: "*Sim sefarekha haverekha* – Make your books your friends; let your cases and shelves be your pleasure grounds and gardens."

As we close the Rabbi Sacks Bookshelves Project, it is well for us to remember how he began each of his public lectures. He would address his audience with the word, "Friends." As we turn our gaze from R. Sacks' bookshelves, we carry his friendship with us upon our own bookshelves, where he remains, as ever, among our very best companions. As we gaze upon the bookshelves and gardens that will bear our own names, may we continue to fill them with the best of teachers and friends. *Hadran alakh ve-hadrakh alan...*

AND AN UNWRITTEN CHAPTER

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

A critique can and should be raised against this project. While we pretend that Rabbi Sacks' example creates a community engaged with minds like Taylor and Mill, the reality is quite different. Often pointing to their works resting on a bookshelf somewhere serves to excuse the screens that have captured our children (and ourselves) within the secular ethos of our age. In the essay excerpted here from the preface to the 20th anniversary edition of Rabbi Norman Lamm's Torah Umadda, Rabbi Sacks argues, "Not all cultures are congenial to the values of the Torah, and ours is less than most." Rabbi Sacks makes use of MacIntyre, Sandel, Bellah and Kuhn (among others) to argue for something more critical toward Enlightenment ideals. The Torah offers us something better. As Rabbi Sacks did, we must not just gaze upon lofty shelves, but use the ideas of the Torah – in our mouths and hearts - to confront the world's brokenness – a brokenness that has only become more obvious in the year since his passing.

From TORAH UMADDA: THE UNWRITTEN CHAPTER by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition* (Jason Aronson, 1990; 20th anniversary expanded edition, Maggid Books, 2010)

[W]hen we seek to combine Torah with something else—whether we call it *derekh eretz* or *madda* or *hokhma*—we must know what that something else is. It is not a constant. In Mishnaic times it was a worldly occupation. In medieval times it was neo-Aristotelian physics and metaphysics. In the nineteenth century it was, roughly speaking, the philosophy of Kant and Hegel and the poetry of Goethe and Schiller. Torah does not change. But the environment in which Jews seek to understand Torah does change. The reference of the word *madda* represents the culture of modernity.

What are the salient elements of this culture? R. Lamm defines them as follows:

> The substitution of experience for tradition as the touchstone of its worldview; a rejection of authority—at the very least a skepticism toward it, at worst a revolution against it; a radical individualism... and thus a preoccupation with the self; a repudiation of the past and an orientation to the future...; secularism, not as a denial of religion as

> much as an insistence upon its privatization…; and a rejection of particularisms of all sorts and an affirmation of universalism, the dream of the Enlightenment (10). This is a fine summary of the intellectual world we inhabit, a world shaped by Kant, Hume, John Stuart Mill, and Nietzsche, and by the transformation of society of which their thought is at once symptom and cause.

But this synopsis plays no further part in the argument. Lamm himself says that "the social, communal, and general cultural challenge of modernity is not our central concern here" (11). But if not here, then somewhere else, a concern it must be. For a single paragraph, we have before us the most compelling possible reason for concluding that whatever might have been the relation between Torah and *madda* in the past, and whatever it might be again in the future, in the present the two are radically opposed.

Consider the aspects of modernity one by one and their implications for Judaism. The substitution of experience for tradition undermines the *mesora*, Judaism as tradition. The rejection of authority compromises the relationships on which the transmission of values rest: between parents and children, teachers and disciples. Radical individualism is destructive of community, in particular of the community of action which is the essence of the *halakha*. Repudiation of the past subverts the self-understanding of the Jew as a person bound by birth to the covenant of Sinai. The privatization of religion weakens the idea of *Knesset Yisrae*l, that the primary partner of the covenant is the Jewish people as a whole, not as a series of sects and denominations each seeking relationships with God but not with one another. The rejection of particularism is a fundamental assault on Jewish singularity and the religious life in which it is expressed.

These are no abstract considerations. They are at the heart of the dilemma of Judaism in modernity. They are enacted daily. They result in a calamitous intermarriage rate; in a rising incidence of non-marriage and divorce; and in a Jewish world in which the overwhelming majority of identifying Jews no longer see themselves as bound by *halakha*. These consequences are not surprising. They are precisely what one would expect to happen in a culture that bears the characteristics that Lamm has described. As every sociologist of religion has noted, modern consciousness is radically subversive of religious faith and traditional practice. Jews, having embraced modernity with unusual fervor, have experienced to the full its disintegrative effects. We are no longer, collectively and empirically, the people of the Torah…

The Torah's eclipse in recent centuries is the single most striking feature of modern Jewish history. The contribution of the very greatest minds of Jewish provenance—Spinoza, Marx, and Freud—has been an assault on Judaism, rather than an expression of its essence. Jewish novelists have shaped the literary sensibility of twentieth-century America. Yet, as Ruth R. Wisse wrote, "If asked to reconstruct the 'Jewish' moral imagination on the basis of American fiction… I would go to the Protestant John Updike sooner than to the Jewish E.L. Doctorow; not only is Updike closer in his view of life to Jewish tradition, he has more interesting things to say about the Jews." No less fatefully, liberal Judaisms have tended simply to accept as normative the secular ethos of the age.

In all these cases the critical dialogue has broken down.

So long as our values are shaped by Torah, we have the necessary distance to be able to engage in moral critique. We are no longer prisoners of our time. It is Torah that continually sets before us the dissonance between what is and what could and should be, the distance we call *galut* and which lies at the very heart of the prophetic-halakhic imagination. If we were asked, however, to define the mood that is the leitmotif of modern Jewish history, it would be a profound weariness with the tensions of *galut* and a massive desire to make the here-and-now home.

When this happens, Torah is inevitably the casualty. Either it is abandoned altogether, or it is domesticated to fit the latest fashion in ethics. Small wonder that most Jews no longer have any clear idea what Judaism is or stands for.

The failure of *Torah Umadda*, then, is not something that should be seen within the ambit of Orthodoxy alone. It is, in essence, the Jewish failure to construct a viable cultural continuity in the modern world: a problem that affects Israel no less than the Diaspora. The key to this failure has been the loss of Torah: as text, as tradition, as command, and as summons to build a society that is not yet but might be.

And here is the crux. In this book, R. Lamm argued the case for *madda*, a Jewish acquaintance with the best available secular knowledge and culture. Yet that is precisely what the vast majority of Jews have in superabundance, both when the book was first published and even more so today. What they lack is Torah, or even any clear sense of why, without Torah, the Jewish destiny loses all coherence.

Torah and *madda* are not equal partners. To paraphrase Maimonides, Torah leads to *madda* but *madda* does not lead to Torah. If we understand Judaism, we are led to explore the world we are called on to change. But if we understand the world, we are not led by that fact alone to explore Torah. The defense of Torah is intrinsically more difficult than the defense of *madda*. And more necessary. If we are to revive the failing pulse of Jewish existence in time—the dialogue between covenant and circumstance, the word of God and the existential situation of the Jewish people—it is Torah more than *madda* which needs persuasive advocacy...

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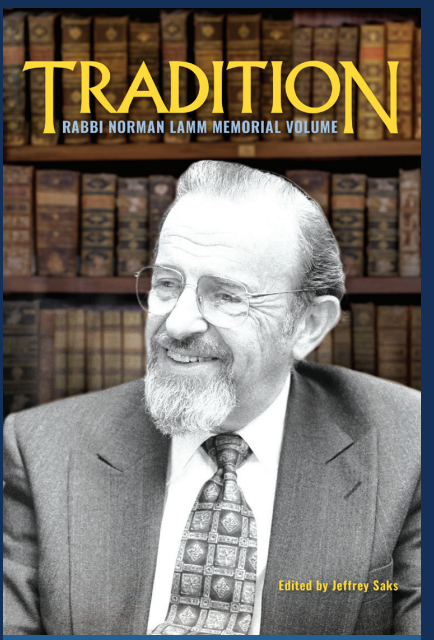

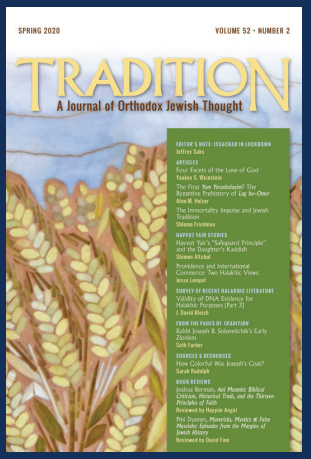

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