The Lonely Man of Faith as Halakhic Philosophy

I. Is The Lonely Man of Faith Halakhic Philosophy?

Near the beginning of The Lonely Man of Faith, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s celebrated essay that grapples with the tension between the spiritual outlook of the religious person and the technological, pragmatic orientation of modern man, the Rav offers a kind of disclaimer. “My interpretive gesture is completely subjective and lays no claim to representing a definitive Halakhic philosophy” (9).1 Apparently, for the Rav, there is something called a halakhic philosophy. Yet, The Lonely Man of Faith, he says, should not be read as a definitive halakhic philosophy. The ambiguity here leaves us with the question, does the Rav mean to say that The Lonely Man of Faith does not present a halakhic philosophy, or, quite the opposite, that it does present a halakhic philosophy, just not a definitive one, that is to say, not the only possible version?

The question stands regardless of this particular sentence. Is The Lonely Man of Faith a halakhic philosophy? We must first determine, what is a halakhic philosophy? The term does not appear again in The Lonely Man of Faith, but if we explore the Rav’s various writings for clues as to its meaning, the best place to look is arguably The Halakhic Mind. There he outlines a program and method to develop a religious philosophy from halakha, famously concluding that essay with the announcement that “[o]ut of the sources of Halakhah, a new world view awaits formulation.”2 A halakhic philosophy, or halakhic world view, is thus a philosophy derived from halakhic sources.

If so, we can be easily convinced that The Lonely Man of Faith is not a halakhic philosophy. The Rav grounds the essay on his analysis of the first two chapters of the creation story in Genesis. From the contradictions between those two chapters he paints a portrait of two types of person, the pragmatic, technologically oriented individual whom he calls majestic

man, and the lonely, deeply and metaphysically contemplative person who seeks companionship to alleviate the existential crisis of knowing there is no one else like him or her, whom he calls covenantal man. The tension between these two types drives the drama of the rest of the essay, and very little halakha is invoked in developing their different outlooks. True, the essay does make passing use of halakhic sources here and there, but mostly in the footnotes and mainly nearer the end of the essay. The overall impression is that the accounts of creation in Genesis 1–2 serve as the nearly exclusive sources of his interpretation, while the halakhic material comes as an afterthought, as a kind of supplement or enhancement for those interested in additional sources.

If indeed The Lonely Man of Faith is not a halakhic philosophy, then the essay marks a rejection of a philosophical position the Rav adopts in his earlier work, Halakhic Mind.³ There he insists that a halakhic philosophy is the only kind of philosophy that can conceivably be called Jewish, stating that, “there is only a single source from which a Jewish philosophical Weltanschauung could emerge; the objective order – the Halakhah.”⁴ The term Weltanschauung, generally speaking, means a world view. If The Lonely Man of Faith fails to meet the demand that all Jewish philosophy be developed exclusively from halakhic sources that might indicate that the Rav abandoned the project he developed in Halakhic Mind.

From this perspective, The Lonely Man of Faith contributes to a non-unified view of the Rav’s thought. In one version of this view, the Rav’s body of work can be divided by stages of development, according to which his early work belongs to his neo-Kantian stage and his later work belongs to his existentialist stage. Halakhic Mind fits in with early works such as Halakhic Man and And From There You Shall Seek, works that tend to compare halakha to science. As such they appear to be influenced by the neo-Kantian view of scientific reasoning as the archetypical model for all knowledge. References in these works to prominent neo-Kantians of the Marburg school like Hermann Cohen, Paul Natorp, and Ernst Cassirer support this categorization, not to mention the fact that the Rav’s doctoral dissertation was on Herman Cohen’s philosophy. For the existentialist view, by contrast, scientifically reasoned systems are replaced by deep reflection on the meaning of life and on the personal and emotional qualities of lived experience as the most reliable sources of knowledge. The contrast between Halakhic Mind, designating halakha as the science-like “objective order” from which a Jewish philosophy

³ Although only published in 1986, an “Author’s Note” at the beginning of Halakhic Mind indicates that it was written in 1944.

⁴ Halakhic Mind, 101. We will explain below why the Rav calls halakha the “objective order.”
must be developed, and *The Lonely Man of Faith*, referring to its ideas as “completely subjective” and looking to non-halakhic, biblical narrative sources for its foundation, reflects, according to this view, the Rav’s shift from neo-Kantianism to existentialism, as well as a general rejection of the project set out in *Halakhic Mind* to generate a new world view out of the sources of halakha.

A different version of the non-unified view of the Rav’s thought looks skeptically at the claim that the Rav ever had any stages of philosophical development at all. According to this view, the Rav was never locked into any of his professed philosophical positions. The Rav was an Orthodox rabbi whose main concern was to increase the religious and halakhic commitment of his audience. His obedience was to Torah only, not to this or that philosophical view. He used philosophical categories only as a kind of rhetorical device for his modern, sophisticated audience, convinced that this would elevate the Torah’s dignity in their eyes. Neo-Kantianism and existentialism represent not stages of his own philosophical thought but various and changing trends in society that he adopted in his lectures and writings as a method to more effectively communicate his message. *Halakhic Mind*’s demand that Jewish philosophy be derived from halakha, one might argue according to this view, arises not from a theoretical, rigorously thought-through philosophical system but from a practical rabbinic effort to push halakhic commitment, to make halakha more central in the religious outlook of the reader. That *The Lonely Man of Faith* abandons this demand signifies not so much that the Rav entered a new stage in his thought but rather that he never took that demand very seriously in the first place, easily discarding it when a new situation called for a new approach.5

Despite *The Lonely Man of Faith*’s central reliance on biblical narrative, I propose a more unified view of R. Soloveitchik’s philosophical writings by arguing that the Rav actually saw that essay as an example of halakhic philosophy and as a fulfillment and implementation, not a rejection, of the demand in *Halakhic Mind* that Jewish philosophy come from halakhic sources. To make this argument we will need to reassess the meaning

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5 For an overview of these and other approaches to explain shifts and contradictions among the Rav’s writings, see Yoel Finkelman, “Theology with Fissures: Contradictions in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s Theological Writings,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 13:3 (2014), 399–421. Regarding the specific question of viewing the Rav’s subsequent work as an implementation or rejection of *Halakhic Mind*, a number of writers on *Halakhic Mind* have touched on this question, but a discussion specifically dedicated to this issue can be found in Mayer Twersky, “Towards a Philosophy of Halachah,” *Jewish Action* (Fall 2003), and in the response by Shubert Spero, “On the Rav’s Philosophy of Halachah,” *Jewish Action* (Summer 2004), 66–67. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for pointing me to these materials in *Jewish Action*. 
of the Rav’s insistence in *Halakhic Mind* that Jewish philosophy must be derived from halakha. To that end we will use the Rav’s posthumously published manuscripts where he elaborates this principle in a manner that makes it more nuanced and less exclusionary than we had originally assumed. Furthermore, we will examine and analyze some of the footnotes of *The Lonely Man of Faith* in order to show that they point to halakhic sources that offer a robust and parallel version of the main ideas of the essay. Finally, we will make use of an audio recording of a lecture series delivered by the Rav that presents an early version of some of the main ideas of *The Lonely Man of Faith*. This series demonstrates that one of the most central and important aspects of *The Lonely Man of Faith*, one that appears to arise from biblical sources and existential reflection, was, in fact, first presented as stemming from halakhic sources. This essay aims not only to contribute to a more unified approach to R. Soloveitchik’s philosophy, thereby promoting a view of the Rav as a more consistent and more committed philosopher than some would acknowledge, but also to offer an example of a novel and important approach to the philosophy of halakha and of Judaism in general.

**II. Halakha as the Authoritative Source of Jewish Philosophy**

When the Rav says in *Halakhic Mind* that halakha is the only, single source “from which a Jewish philosophical Weltanschauung could emerge,” he certainly does not mean to say that other Jewish sources have nothing to contribute to a Jewish world view. A number of passages in *Halakhic Mind* indicate that many sources should be consulted, such as the Bible, the Aggada, the liturgy, and Jewish medieval philosophical works. How, then, are we to understand the exclusivity of the halakha? We get a clue from his *Worship of the Heart*, a work published posthumously from the Rav’s notebooks. In the chapter entitled “Intention (Kavvanah) in Reading Shema and in Prayer,” where he outlines his method for exploring the “experience associated with the reading of Shema,” he says, “I have always maintained that the halakhic elements constitute the most appropriate and reliable material out of which a philosophical understanding might emerge.” Note that halakhic elements are the “most” appropriate and not the “only” appropriate source. He continues to assess the use of aggadic material as well, about which he urges “great caution,” because the way aggadic texts stimulate the imagination could cause the reader to interpret the text with “alien ideas.” While acknowledging the usefulness of aggadic material for developing Jewish philosophy, he suggests that we “check

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6 See for example *Halakhic Mind*, 81, 90-91. Also note that on p. 101, right after he isolates halakha as the single source for Jewish philosophy, he suggests looking at “the Halakhah and other objective constructs” to reconstruct a Jewish world view.
aggadic interpretations against halakhic ideas in order to ascertain the adequacy of our approach.” This passage indicates a hierarchy, according to which lower level aggadic sources may be employed to suggest philosophical ideas, but the final word must be given to the higher level halakha in order to ensure that those philosophical ideas are truly Jewish. Thus when the Rav says that halakha is the only source from which a Jewish world view may emerge, he means that halakha is the only authoritative source, the only source that is reliable on its own.

Such a hierarchy seems counterintuitive, as we might expect the homiletic stories and lore of the Aggada to be a richer source for Jewish philosophy than halakha. Nevertheless, this counterintuitive hierarchy is precisely R. Soloveitchik’s innovation about Jewish philosophy. There are at least three reasons the Rav might consider halakha the only authoritative source for Jewish philosophy. One is, as indicated in the above citations, that halakhic sources and interpretation are less prone to admitting “alien ideas.” Since the halakhic process is a highly regimented and specialized, rule-based enterprise, it is unlikely to fall under the influence of foreign elements. A second reason has to do with Judaism’s focus on practice over ideas. Students of the beit midrash are generally suspicious of discussions of ideas that have no practical ramifications, a hakira with no nafka mina, in the parlance of lomdus. A philosophical idea with no support in normative practice has limited currency in Judaism.

There is another reason to give priority to halakha whose explanation requires us to examine the Rav’s conception of philosophy. As noted above, the goal of his Jewish philosophy is to develop a Weltanschauung, or world view, which is generally understood in contrast to scientific thinking. It aims to grasp the subjective side of life that is ignored by the abstract concepts of science. In a different article, the Rav describes Weltanschauung as aiming to reveal and describe the emotional, passionate side of life, to include an appreciation and valuation of life,

7 Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Worship of the Heart (Ktav, 2003), 103–104. The Rav indicates that rabbis “prone to the homiletical approach” often utilize the Aggada as a way to dress up ideas originating from their own imagination but not necessarily representing an authentically Jewish view. This admonition parallels his critique of medieval rationalist Jewish philosophy at the end of Halakhic Mind, where he notes that “the most central concepts of medieval Jewish philosophy are rooted in ancient Greek and medieval Arabic thought and are not of Jewish origin at all” (100). See fn. 36 below for his specific critique of Maimonides in this regard. It is apparent that the Rav saw a connection between this critique and the fact that Maimonides and his followers tend to attach their philosophies to aggadic and biblical sources while denying philosophical value to halakhic details; cf. Guide III:26, and also Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (Schocken, 1995), 28–29, about how medieval rational Jewish philosophers neglected halakha as a source for philosophy.

8 We will see below that the Rav presents this approach in his lectures ”Religious Definitions of Man and His Social Institutions.”
to give a philosophy of life from the perspective of “intimate personal experience.” In a similar vein, some have described the Rav’s philosophical method as phenomenological, which asks the question, “what is it like” to experience this or that? A story tells that the French philosopher Sartre decided to study phenomenology after he heard a friend’s phenomenological description of the experience of enjoying an apricot cocktail.

However, while traditional schools of phenomenology and Weltanschauung theory aim to describe or analyze the subjective side of life on its own, the Rav subscribed to a unique, neo-Kantian version of phenomenology, one that demands that the analysis of the subjective experience take into account the objective laws and rules that govern the situation under investigation. The Rav calls this kind of phenomenology “reconstruction,” because its method reconstructs the subjective experience out of the objective rules and laws. A Weltanschauung or world view is, after all, a view of the world, meaning, a subjective, human view of the objective, real world. As such it must be rooted in objective reality, as defined by the rules and laws that govern that reality.

We can illustrate why the method of reconstruction insists that we take into account the objective laws governing the situation when describing the subjective experience of the situation. Compare two science-minded people experiencing a sunset. The first person lives in

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10 David Shatz, “A Framework for Ish Ha-halakhah,” in Turim: Studies in Jewish History and Literature Presented to Dr. Bernard Lander, ed. by Michael A. Shmidman, vol. 2 (Touro College Press, 2008), 175–176; Dov Schwartz, From Phenomenology to Existentialism: The Philosophy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, vol. 2 (Brill, 2013), xii. The historical relationship between Weltanschauung philosophy and phenomenology is a complex one, but they do overlap in their concern with explicating subjective experience. This shared concern was to a large degree a response to the dominance of scientific accomplishment at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, which threatened to dismiss subjective experience as irrelevant to philosophical knowledge. See Edmund Husserl, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” in The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy 2 (2002), 249–295.


12 Halakhic Mind, 62–102. The Rav attributes the method of reconstruction to the Marburg neo-Kantian Paul Natorp, ibid., 62, 126 n. 75, and indicates that he defines objectivity by fixed rules and laws when he identifies halakha as the highest level of religious objectification because it converts “fleeting individual experience into fixed principles and universal norms” (Halakhic Mind, 86). This definition is also consistent with that of Natorp, the originator of the reconstruction method, which says that “an objective representation is one which has been raised to law.” Paul Natorp, “On the Objective and Subjective Grounding of Knowledge,” in The Neo-Kantian Reader, ed. Sebastian Luft (Routledge, 2015), 172.
the pre-modern world where the laws of nature of the era put the earth in the center of the universe. This person interprets the sunset as the sun actually sinking. Reflecting on this understanding of reality, the person experiences the sunset in a mood of triumph and self-importance, as earth remains stable while everything else moves around it. The second person lives in the modern era where the laws of nature put the sun as stationary. This person contemplates the sunset from the perspective of the earth’s rotation and feels humbled. The sunset for this person evokes feelings of being unanchored, unstable, as one living on a spinning rock hurtling through the vacuum of space. One cannot accurately describe subjective experience unless one has a grasp of the laws that are understood to govern the objective reality of that experience. The same is true in religion. How one experiences holiness will change depending on if the rules that determine what is holy and what is not holy come from a Christian framework or a Jewish one.

For the Jewish religion, in R. Soloveitchik’s view, the fixed rules and laws that govern the objective reality of our religious experience are the halakha. The Rav invokes this relationship between halakha and reality when he explains why halakha is superior to classical works of Jewish thought as a source for Jewish philosophy. “When we speak of philosophy of religion, we must have in mind foremost the philosophy of religious realities experienced by the entire community, and not some abstract metaphysics cultivated by an esoteric group of philosophers.” 13 For the halakhically committed Jewish community, the laws of halakha represent religious reality more than any other source. We experience Shabbat, for example, as an objective reality not because of its ideas but because of its laws. Even for laymen unschooled in the halakhic method, as long as they belong to a halakhic community and live halakhically committed lives, their subjective, religious experience of Shabbat is shaped by the details of the objective laws that determine what Shabbat is and how it is kept. 14 Any attempt to accurately describe the subjective experience of Shabbat for the community of halakhically observant Jews, therefore, must be rooted in an analysis of the laws of Shabbat. This is what the Rav means when he says, “there is only a single source from which a Jewish philosophical Weltanschauung could emerge; the objective order—the Halakhah.”

13 Halakhic Mind, 100.
14 The Rav speaks of “devout Jews who, though formally unlearned, may absorb from the Torah atmosphere in which they live profound and valid perceptions of the basics of Judaism.” Abraham Besdin, “The Profundity of Jewish Folk Wisdom,” in Reflections of the Rav: Lessons in Jewish Thought Adapted from the Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Ktav, 1981), 59.
The third reason, then, for the priority of halakha as a source for Jewish philosophy is that it functions as the fixed order of rules and laws that determine objective religious reality for the observant Jew. Aggadic, narrative-biblical, and Jewish philosophical sources also serve to a degree as a fixed anchor that determines religious reality, and as such they should be mined for philosophical insight into the emotional, subjective experience of Jewish religious life as well. Nevertheless, because their meaning and significance are open to a wide variety of interpretations, because they lack an exact and precise method of analysis universally accepted by the religious community, their impact on religious consciousness generally does not reach the level of hard, fixed reality the way that halakhic principles do. That is why philosophical ideas derived from the Bible or the Aggada should be checked against halakhic sources in order to assure their accuracy in depicting Jewish religious experience.

Our claim that *The Lonely Man of Faith* constitutes halakhic philosophy asserts that it follows the method of reconstruction and its principles outlined above. That means that the essay presents a *Weltanschauung*, a subjective account of religious experience, an answer to the question, what is it like to live as a religious person in the modern world? To gain access to this subjective realm, however, the Rav needed to examine the objective order, the system of rules that determine religious reality, which, for religious Jews, is the laws of the halakha. Our basis for presenting reconstruction as a method that seeks to describe "what it is like" to experience aspects of life comes primarily from the general impression *Halakhic Mind* gives that the Rav shares the goals of the schools of phenomenology and *Weltanschauung* philosophy, even as he strongly disputes their methods. See *Halakhic Mind*, 50–62. It also comes from the formulation of reconstruction as purporting to answer the questions, "What is the religious act? What is its structure, context, and meaning" (ibid., 86)? Further supporting this interpretation of reconstruction is the Rav’s use of the method to discover an array of conflicting religious emotions in the God-man relationship (ibid., 68), as well as his application of reconstruction to describing the subjective experience of various mitzvot (ibid., 91–99). Natorp establishes his method of reconstruction as sharing the same goals as *Weltanschauung* philosophy in *Philosophie: Ihr Problem und Ihre Probleme*, ed. Karl-Heinz Lembeck (Edition Ruprecht, 2008), 1, 127–156.

My argument does not intend to limit *The Lonely Man of Faith* to a particularistically Jewish message. Since the Rav views the halakha, at least in part, as a particular way of accessing and experiencing certain universal truths and realities, the essay can still be read as a universal religious philosophy.
aim to show that the Rav took care to check these ideas against halakhic sources, as evidenced either by the footnotes or by an earlier presentation of the same ideas.

III. The Rav’s Sources for the Ideas of The Lonely Man of Faith

Let us summarize the main argument of The Lonely Man of Faith in order to assess the degree to which the Rav saw its foundation in halakhic sources. The essay describes two different kinds of loneliness experienced by the man of faith, the first inherent in the faith commitment and the second a result of conflict between this faith commitment and a particular attitude prevalent in modern culture. Both types of loneliness involve a split between two conflicting human drives or attitudes, or two contradictory worldviews, presented as two types of person that live to one degree or another in each of us.

Adam I, or majestic man, sees the challenges of life as pragmatic, focusing attention on technological solutions to improve wellbeing (12–19). He measures the worth of people by their surface accomplishments, by their success within the work community (24–26). In this view people need one another only for pragmatic purposes, to maintain their dignity, defined by the Rav as control over one’s environment (14–16, 24–26). In the work community only surface-personalities come together (24, 32, 66). No deep void in the human personality needs to be filled by another, and therefore Adam I does not experience any kind of deep, existential loneliness (27–32). The main source from which the Rav develops his description of Adam I is the first chapter of Genesis, where Adam is blessed with the ability to conquer his environment and where his relationships with Eve and God are presented in impersonal, functional terms (19, 22, 32, 48).

The second type of person, named Adam II, or covenantal man, recognizes that he or she is an utterly unique individual with an in-depth experience that is incommunicable, that he or she possesses an essence incompatible with anyone else (33–40). Awareness of this singularity, of being unlike any other being, brings a deep, existential sense of loneliness, an agonizing solitude (36–40, 66). This is the first of the two kinds of loneliness that Adam II experiences, and it pushes Adam II to seek not dignity, not control over the environment, but redemption (24, 33–35). The only path to redemption from this existential loneliness is through a personal connection with God, the ultimate Lonely One, the root of a person’s existence, and the Being before Whom the hidden personality is revealed, or, in the Rav’s language, before Whom the homo absconditus becomes a homo revelatus (4, 41, 51, 106). Adam II therefore seeks a community of people committed to God and finds it in the covenant. The personal relationships formed in this covenantal community alleviate not pragmatic
challenges but an existential crisis, as the community joins hands in fellowship and devotes its energy not to conquering the environment but to mutually submitting to God and accepting the yoke of His Will (37–44, 51–71). The sources out of which the Rav develops the portrait of Adam II come primarily from the second chapter of Genesis where Adam is commanded to protect the garden and where he interacts with God and Eve in personal, emotional, and devotional terms (22, 35, 41–42, 48–49).

The redemption offered by belonging to the covenantal community would be a complete solution to the first kind of loneliness of Adam II, to the existential sense of utter uniqueness and incommensurability with anything else, but, since man was created paradoxically as both types, God wills man to belong to both communities, the pragmatic work community and the covenantal faith community. The demand that man move dialectically back and forth between the two world views denies us full relief in the covenantal community from the crisis of solitude, since we find ourselves called back toward the work community where we are valued only for our utilitarian, surface accomplishments. Thus, the first kind of loneliness always remains (75–85). However, because this perennial loneliness and crisis grows out of awareness of one’s uniqueness, it is not a destructive emotion but belongs to man’s destiny and can be a “wholesome and integrating” experience (86).

The second kind of loneliness also belongs to Adam II. However, it is an “unwholesome and frustrating experience” (86), and, unlike the first kind, pertains only to the historical situation of our times. It arises from the rejection by modern man of Adam II. Modern man has subscribed wholly to the world view of Adam I, caring only about superficial success and happiness, ignorant of the depth crisis that entails submission to God. There are even religious versions of Adam I who view religion as part of their program for triumph and success, never sacrificing themselves, never fully devoting the core of their being to God and the faith community. In addition to his perpetual loneliness due to his uniqueness, Adam II of the modern era experiences a second kind of loneliness from being sidelined, due to his failure to impress his importance upon the modern Adam I. The essay concludes with the challenge to the religious person to try to teach the modern work community that it is incomplete without the faith community (86–101).

As noted, the essay locates the primary source of its main ideas in a careful reading of the first two chapters of Genesis. This biblical analysis remains front and center in the reader’s attention, not only because it drives the ideas of the essay, but also because the Rav’s dialectical approach to the two creation stories presents the Orthodox reader with a unique and appealing response to the challenges of modern biblical
scholarship, specifically to the theory of documentary hypothesis that views the Bible as a conglomerate of various documents of multiple authorship. The Rav’s reading has the two contradictory creation stories reflect not two authors but one, divine account of two contradictory aspects of man: “the answer lies not in an alleged dual tradition but in dual man, not in an imaginary contradiction between two versions but to a real contradiction in the nature of man” (9–10).

Throughout the development of the essay various footnotes cite halakhic sources. These include halakhic sources that help to define the concept of human dignity, as embraced by the work community of Adam I (14, 33–34), as well as halakhic sources that display an attitude towards God as a fellow member of the religious community, as experienced by the covenantal community of Adam II (42–44). The most extensive halakhic discourse appears in footnotes of the chapter about prayer (51–74) in order to support the Rav’s comparison of prayer to prophecy. The halakhic discussions here get quite involved, including reference to the Rav’s grandfather R. Hayyim Brisker’s conceptual analysis of the laws of prayer (71–72 n. 1). Nevertheless, at first glance, none of these halakhic sources will form the heart of the argument that The Lonely Man of Faith is a halakhic philosophy, for they seem peripheral, not serving to form the core ideas of the essay.

The essay also makes use of non-Jewish sources, referring throughout the text and footnotes to theories of Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Kierkegaard, and numerous others (for examples see 4, 27–29, 39, 49 n., 67 n., 92). Furthermore, some studies indicate that R. Soloveitchik’s dialectical reading of the first two chapters of Genesis draws on his familiarity with modern Christian theologians. Sometimes the Rav’s appeal to non-Jewish sources aims to contrast and thereby clarify the Jewish halakhic and biblical view, while other times such sources support the Jewish view. Support from such sources does not undermine our claim that the Rav bases the ideas of the essay on halakha, since this claim sees halakha only as the final word, as the ultimate authority that determines which theories from the marketplace of ideas can be translated, adapted, or adopted into a Jewish religious outlook. As the Rav says in Halakhic Mind, halakha remains the "compass" that guides our interpretation of outside sources.


19 Halakhic Mind, 101–102. Some have questioned the legitimacy of the Rav’s use of Natorp’s neo-Kantian phenomenology as the source for his view that it is the task of Jewish philosophy to reconstruct subjective experience out of halakha, since that view itself comes only from outside sources. Spero, for example, argues that
To make the argument that *The Lonely Man of Faith* constitutes a halakhic philosophy, we need to show that the Rav derives the core ideas of the essay from halakhic sources. Let us distill the argument of the essay into three core ideas.

1. **The man of faith is lonely due to the existential uniqueness of each individual person.**
2. **In accordance with the dual nature of man, God demands dialectical commitment to both the covenantal faith community and the majestic work community, thereby perennially disrupting the man of faith’s relief from loneliness offered by the faith community.**
3. **Modern man denies the significance of the faith community, resulting in a second type of loneliness, one of rejection, which presents a unique challenge for the modern person of faith.**

Of these three ideas, we will look mainly for only the first two in halakhic sources since they are perennial, whereas the third is a circumstantial quirk of the modern scene. We intend to show that the Rav gives us the halakhic sources for the second idea in the footnotes of the essay, while the halakhic sources of the first idea appear in a different, earlier lecture by the Rav that parallels *The Lonely Man of Faith*. We therefore begin with the second idea, saving our venture out into a parallel lecture to the end of this investigation. This second idea is of central importance to the essay and it exerts significant power on the essay’s audience. To a certain degree it can be considered the credo of the Modern Orthodox

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the Rav grants religious significance to subjective religious consciousness based on the presuppositions of the phenomenologist and existentialist schools without indicating any halakhic source for such presuppositions. See Shubert Spero, “Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik and the Philosophy of Halakhah,” *Tradition* 30:2 (1996), 44–45. However, it seems likely that the Rav’s well known interpretation of certain *halakhot* that are performed with an outer action but only fulfilled through a corresponding, inner experience—*halakhot* like joy on the festivals or mourning for deceased relatives—served as his “compass” in assessing those presuppositions. As for the apparent lack of halakhic sources for the specific method of reconstruction, we should also keep in mind the distinction between method and content. While the content of a Jewish philosophy must comply with particularly Jewish sources in order to be considered Jewish, the general method by which one develops a philosophy of Judaism must adhere to a universal template. To have a philosophy of Judaism that we can share with others outside the faith, that we can compare to or contrast with a philosophy of Christianity or a philosophy of science, ethics, or aesthetics, we must also have a universally agreed upon sense of what “philosophy” means. The Rav’s critique of the medieval Jewish philosophers for allowing too much Greek philosophy into the content of Judaism therefore does not clash with his own use of a neo-Kantian method to extract Jewish philosophical content out of Halakhah.
Jew, for it provides a mandate to combine living in the modern world with living as a person of faith.

Although the various elements that constitute the loneliness of the person of faith and the pragmatism of majestic man present themselves as mainly Bible-based, when we read chapter eight\(^{20}\) we encounter a surprise. This is the chapter that introduces and explains the mandate to oscillate between the covenantal community and the work community. While the Rav begins by rooting this demand in the words of the biblical story, he suddenly changes the language from biblical to halakhic.

If one would inquire of me about the teleology of the Halakhah, I would tell him that it manifests itself exactly in the paradoxical yet magnificent dialectic which underlies the Halakhic gesture. When man gives himself to the covenantal community the Halakhah reminds him that he is also wanted and needed in another community, the cosmic-majestic, and when it comes across man while he is involved in the creative enterprise of the majestic community, it does not let him forget that he is a covenantal being who will never find self-fulfillment outside of the covenant and that God awaits his return to the covenantal community (78–79).

This shift is unexpected, and the main text does not seek to support with significant examples the idea that halakha demands this dialectical movement (in the same way it earlier supports its argument from the biblical narrative). The main source cited for the requirement to join the work community, that in Genesis God commands man to “conquer” or “dominate” his environment (\textit{ve-khivshuha}, Gen. 1:28), is not codified as one of the 613 commandments and does not appear in halakhic sources as a legal category. There is no section of the code of Maimonides or \textit{Shulhan Arukh} that refers to “laws of dominating one’s environment.” It seems as if the Rav invented a halakha out of the biblical narrative, which any student of halakha recognizes as an irregular move.\(^{21}\) One is therefore inclined to think that the Rav here uses the word “Halakhah” in an idiosyncratic fashion, referring not to halakha proper, the normative, legal code of Judaism, but to Judaism in general as represented by biblical stories. This is a case, apparently, of poetic license.

A long footnote here (83–85), however, reveals this proposed reading of what he is doing to be in error. The Rav actually refers here to halakha

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\(^{20}\) In the original edition in \textit{Tradition} (1965), this section appears as chapter nine.

\(^{21}\) Even if one wants to argue that at times biblical stories have impact on halakhic decisions, we are dealing here with something of a completely different magnitude, an entirely new mitzva that claims to govern half of one’s life.
proper. As evidence that halakha recognizes the “world of majesty,” he notes that “in order to render precise Halakhic decisions in many fields of human endeavor, one must possess, besides excellent Halakhic training, a good working knowledge in those secular fields in which the problem occurs” (84 n). Clearly the term “halakha” here refers to the legal norms—the types arrived at through legalistic “precise Halakhic decisions” (piskei halakha).

Other than the requirement to know the background of a secular field in order to know how to render halakhic decisions in those fields, where does the halakha demand that we actually engage in those fields, that we shift from an Adam II existence to an Adam I approach? The Rav cites halakhot from two specific areas: agricultural productivity and medical intervention. However, the sources he cites for each involve complexities that require analysis.

IV. The Halakhic Dialectic of Economic Productivity vs. Torah Study

Let us begin with the halakhot about agricultural productivity. The long footnote (83–85 n.) begins by citing two Talmudic passages, although the Rav does not summarize their content. In the first passage (Berakhot 35b) we find the following statement: “Rava said to the Sages: I implore you; during the months of Nisan and Tishrei, do not appear before me, so that you will not be preoccupied with your sustenance all year.” Rava’s attitude appears as an example of the position of R. Yishmael cited earlier on the Talmudic page, that one should balance Torah study with agricultural work, based on the verse, “And you shall gather your grain, your wine and your oil” (Deuteronomy 11:14). According to Ein Mishpat, ad loc., this position becomes codified in Shulhan Arukh (O.H. 156:1; Y.D. 246:21) as a mandate to work. In R. Soloveitchik’s terms, this halakhic source presents us with the demand to oscillate between the covenantal world of the beit midrash and the majestic world of economic productivity.

If that were all the Talmudic passage had to say, though, we might consider the transition between learning and farming as smooth and easy. You simply learn when it’s time to learn and farm when it’s time to farm, with no dialectical tension, no paradox, no dualistic existence, and no clash of the incompatible world views of Adam I and Adam II. Closer
examination of the source of this halakha, however, reveals a more complicated picture. R. Yishmael reaches his position only after adjusting the meaning of the verse, “This Torah shall not depart from your mouths, and you shall contemplate in it day and night” (Joshua 1:8). Initially, this decree to learn Torah day and night clashes with the mandate to work the fields, since it makes a total and uncompromising demand on one’s time. Even after R. Yishmael tempers this verse’s reach, limiting its actualization to one’s discretionary time, other halakhic sources indicate that the all-encompassing power of this demand to learn full time remains in place in certain ways.23

In fact, a second Sage, R. Shimon bar Yohai, rejects R. Yishmael’s compromise, asserting that, if one is meritorious enough, one should engage in Torah study day and night, relying on God to support him through the work of others. The demands of Torah study and the demands of economic productivity are incompatible. “Rabbi Shimon ben Yohai says: Is it possible that a person plows in the plowing season, sows in the sowing season, harvests in the harvest season, threshes in the threshing season, and winnows in the windy season? What, then, will become of the Torah?” Each pursuit claims the whole of the person, and one must choose a camp, either the economic productivity camp of majestic man or the Torah camp of covenantal man.

The second Talmudic passage cited in the footnote further increases the sense of struggle and tension between the pursuit of Torah study and engagement in economic productivity. There we have the story of R. Shimon bar Yohai hiding in a cave for thirteen years (Shabbat 33b). While not exactly halakha, the story reflects and illustrates with a concrete example the debate in Berakhot between R. Shimon bar Yohai and R. Yishmael. The story begins with R. Yehuda praising the Romans for enhancing life in Jerusalem by building bridges, marketplaces, and bathhouses. Ever suspicious of the majestic pursuits of Adam I, R. Shimon bar Yohai disagrees, dismissing these achievements as self-serving, as a means for the Romans to pamper themselves and collect more taxes. His words reach the ears of the Roman leaders, forcing him to flee for his life and hide in a cave, where he and his son do nothing but learn Torah and pray for twelve years, sustaining themselves from a nearby carob tree and brook. R. Shimon bar Yohai thus lives out the program he outlined in Berakhot.

Thus, Tosafot (Berakhot 11b, s.v. she-kvar) uses this verse to explain the halakha that one blessing over Torah study suffices to cover the whole day, since this verse makes it “as if one sits all day [and learns] without interruption.” The Rav interprets Tosafot to mean that the “injunction against discontinuity” presented by this verse indicates that we maintain a “latent awareness, and this awareness is still present even though one is engaged in other matters.” See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “On the Love of Torah: Impromptu Remarks at a Siyum,” in Epstein, Shiurei HaRav, 183–185.
Upon hearing of the death of the emperor and the lifting of the decree against him, R. Shimon bar Yohai ventures out of the cave, only to register shock and frustration upon witnessing Jews engaging in agricultural work. “They forsake eternal life and pursue temporal life!” he calls, turning a destructive gaze upon the fields, until he must retreat to the cave for one more year. R. Shimon bar Yohai fails to reconcile the “temporal life” of Adam I and the “eternal life” of Adam II, until one year later he emerges from the cave and meets an old man carrying agricultural products, only this time R. Shimon bar Yohai exhibits more patience and interviews the man, to discover that the man has gathered two myrtle branches in honor of the dual demands to “remember” and “observe” the Sabbath. Thereupon R. Shimon bar Yohai’s mind is set at ease, and he declares, “See how beloved the mitzvot are to Israel!”

R. Shimon bar Yohai’s slow and difficult acceptance of the blending of a covenantal existence of Torah study with membership in the work community of majestic man illustrates the paradoxical and dialectical tension in the halakhic demand to both study and work. His halakhic dispute with R. Yishmael and his similar dispute with R. Yehuda present the efforts to be both majestic man and covenantal man as a kind of tug-of-war between two world views, in a manner similar to the conflicting accounts of the first two chapters of Genesis. One feels this conflict even in the mainstream halakhic sources that seem to follow R. Yishmael’s view. Thus, for example, when Shulhan Arukh (Y.D. 246:21) cites the law that one must give one’s whole self over to Torah study, curtailing luxury, sleep, and food, Rema draws out an extensive comment that teeters back and forth between two ideals that seem never to make peace with one another, the ideal to spend all of one’s time learning and the ideal to support oneself through work. While early in the comment Rema trumpets the ideal of work, insisting that one who exclusively learns and relies on communal charity to support himself “desecrates God’s name and degrades the Torah,” by the end of his comment he acknowledges that not all people are capable of balancing the two, referring to those who manage to do so as upholding a “pious trait,” and he capitulates to those who permit students of Torah to neglect the work ideal in order to study effectively.

The halakhic drama of balancing work and learning, then, as it emerges from the sources cited in this footnote and the interpretations by the codifiers of these sources, exemplifies the complexities of “Man’s dialectical see-sawing between the cosmic and the covenantal experience of God” (76 n.). Rather than simply and easily assigning learning at certain times and working at other times, the halakha can give a person the sense that he or she is two people, charged with the task of figuring
out how to merge seemingly incompatible paths of life.24 “In every one of us abide two personae – the creative, majestic Adam the first, and the submissive, humble Adam the second” (81).

As we now turn to the second area of majestic life cited in the footnote as sanctioned by the halakha, medical intervention, we see that here too the total picture brings with it dialectical tension and complexity.

V. The Halakhic Dialectic of Medical Intervention vs. Prayer

To be more specific about halakha’s involvement in “every sector of the human majestic endeavor,” the Rav points to the example of halakha’s relationship to the field of scientific medicine. Halakha considers medicine “a great and noble occupation” (84 n.). While some religions might preach a quietist attitude towards disease and see medicine as interfering with God’s will, halakha demands an activist stance against illness.

Unlike other faith communities, the Halakhic community has never been troubled by the problem of human interference, on the part of the physician and patient, with God’s will. On the contrary, argues the Halakhah, God wants man to fight evil bravely and to mobilize all his intellectual and technological ingenuity in order to defeat it (84 n.).

The Rav wants to prove this point beyond question, so he cites at least four normative halakhic laws or principles that demand or encourage the pursuit of scientific medicine. There is the biblical verse demanding that one who wounds a fellow must pay the medical bills—“he shall cause him to be thoroughly healed” (Exodus 21:18)—with the Talmudic commentary that from this verse, “permission is granted to a doctor to heal” (Bava Kamma 85a). Then there is the principle that pikuah nefesh, the saving of a life, suspends almost all other norms. He further cites the statement in the codes of law of Tur and Shulhan Arukh that a doctor who refuses to administer medicine is considered as one who murders (Y.D. 336:1). He also includes the Talmudic discussion that grants medical doctors the authority to determine when someone is sick enough to eat on Yom Kippur (Yoma 82a–83a).

Here the footnote summarizes the halakhot taught by most of these sources rather than just pointing to them as it does with the mandate to engage in agricultural work. He thus makes it even clearer that when he

24 The Rav confesses that at times he sees the halakhic demand to move back and forth between the two communities as “dialectical” and dualistic, and at other times he sees it as “complementary” and monistic. Even the monistic approach, however, requires an act of uniting the two communities due to the “huge disparity” between them (79–80).
says in the main text that he feels the halakha pushing him into the majestic community, he is talking about normative halakha, and not using the word “halakha” idiosyncratically.

And yet, this footnote seems imbalanced, for apparently all of the halakhic source material supports only one side of the dialectic, the majestic side. The central point of the chapter is that halakha, recognizing the paradox in man, pushes us from community to community, from one worldview to the other, and demands that we live in two worlds. If the Rav wants to support his argument from halakhic sources, as the footnote indicates he does, he should show us contradictions in the halakha that parallel the contradictions in the two biblical stories of creation, in order to demonstrate the paradoxical nature of man that generates the dialectical, back and forth movement. Yes, the halakha supports scientific medicine, but are there also countervailing halakhic norms that paradoxically push us to withdraw from the pursuit of success in the medical field and return to the covenantal community? If so, then why does the Rav here offer us halakhic sources that present only half the story?

In fact, there are such halakhic sources, and the Rav does cite them in the very same footnote, although he does not call attention to the paradox. Let’s examine, for example, *Kiddushin* 82a and Rashi thereupon, cited in that footnote (84). We find the following line in the Mishna there: “The best of doctors goes to hell.” Now, such an arresting statement certainly gives pause to anyone claiming that the halakha glorifies the medical profession. Nevertheless, while on its own this one line would seem to contradict the Rav’s argument that halakha wants man to live not only in the covenantal community but also in the majestic one, various commentators limit its scope and context. Rashi, also cited by the Rav, comments as follows:

“The best of doctors goes to hell”: He does not fear disease. He eats the food of the healthy, and he does not break his heart before God. Sometimes he kills, and sometimes he is able to heal a poor person but does not do so.

The Mishna intends to warn doctors of the potential arrogance that could develop from having the power to heal. This arrogance, if allowed to fester, leads to two catastrophes, one personal and the other interpersonal. On the personal level it extinguishes the religious mood appropriate for one who stands before God, as when praying. The doctor may feel: Why do I need to bow my heart to God, to plead with Him for life, when the power of life lies in my own hands? He “does not break his heart before God.” On the interpersonal level, it may lead to poor judgment in
sharing this power, thereby causing death. “Sometimes he kills,” through negligence or through discrimination against the poor.

According to the second half of Rashi, rather than disparaging medicine, the Mishna intends to do the contrary, to raise medical skill up to such a high value that one is punished severely for withholding it from the poor. We understand, then, why the Rav cites this comment of Rashi to support the activist view of medicine.

Yet, at the same time, it could not have escaped the Rav’s attention that the first half of Rashi, the part that sees expertise in medicine as potentially conflicting with the prayerful mood, as an expression of the very conflict between Adam I and Adam II reflected in the two stories of creation. This Rashi highlights a dialectical tension between the push towards conquering the environment with the majestic community and the opposing push towards the prayerful humility of the covenantal community.

We find a similar source in Pesahim 56a, where we read that King Hezekiah did six things, three of which the Sages approved, and three of which they disapproved. Among the list we find the following: “He suppressed [ganaz] a book of medical remedies, and they conceded approvingly to him.” Once again we have a Talmudic statement that conflicts with the halakhic sources that support medical intervention. The Rav however suggests we look at the comments of Rashi and Maimonides on this Mishna (84). Maimonides (Commentary to the Mishna, Pesahim 4:10), himself a physician, easily dispenses with the negative implications towards medicine in this statement with his interpretation that the book suppressed by King Hezekiah was a fraud, a work of idolatrous falsehoods.

Rashi, however, disagrees. He says, “He hid the Book of Remedies because their hearts were not subdued due to their illness, for instead they would be healed instantly.” Rashi here is consistent with the first half of his commentary in Kiddushin that reliance on medical intervention has the potential to interfere with one’s sense of submission to God. Living in the world of Adam I conflicts with living in the world of Adam II.

This interpretation of the Mishna about the Book of Remedies aggravated Maimonides. He calls this line of reasoning foolish and unfit to be held even by the dregs of society. If someone is hungry and reaches for bread to “heal” his hunger, he asks, does that demonstrate a lack of trust in God? We could, in recognition of the cogency of Maimonides’ argument, try to interpret Rashi in a manner along the lines of saying that Hezekiah hid the book from the public so they would not know about it, but still allowed doctors to use it. Even if we do, Rashi still leaves us with significant tension between the Sages’ approval of King Hezekiah’s suppression of the medical book and the halakhic sources cited by the Rav.
that approve the pursuit of medical intervention. This conflict reflects the tension between Adam I and Adam II, whether to plant oneself in the majestic world of medical triumph or in the covenantal world of submission before God.

From one perspective, these two sources about the harsh fate of the best doctors and the suppression of medical knowledge, and Rashi’s interpretations of them, might not technically constitute halakhic sources. They might be classified as Aggada. However, from another perspective, they are halakhic, because they, or at least sources just like them, enter into the halakhic analysis for decisors looking to know how to codify the counter sources that permit and encourage scientific medical intervention. This perspective is taken up by R. Yoel Sirkis in his commentary, Bayit Hadash (Bach) on Tur (Y.D. 336). Significantly, the Rav cites this Bach in the same footnote (84). The Bach first cites Tur’s ruling that it is permitted and also an obligation to provide medical treatment, then backs up this ruling with Tosafot (Bava Kamma 85a, s.v. she-nitna)—also cited in the Rav’s footnote (84)—who says that halakha rejects the position that giving medical treatment contradicts God’s divine decree. So far Bach’s comments line up with the Adam I position that halakha wants us to master the natural world to man’s benefit.

But Bach continues,

And regarding what Scripture says in Chronicles (II 16:12) about [King] Asa, “but ill as he was, he still did not turn to the Lord, but to physicians,” which sounds like it is prohibited to seek healing from doctors for an affliction originating from God [i.e., a natural illness] – one can say that he was punished because he did not turn to God at all, but only to physicians. Conversely, if [one] put trust in God that He will send him healing through the physician, it is permitted to turn to physicians, even for an affliction originating from God, and that has been the custom for Jews in all lands.

The verse in question that chides King Asa for going to doctors instead of turning to God belongs in the same camp as the Talmudic passages condemning the best doctors and medical books, all of which stand in tension with the halakha’s support of medical activism. The Rav dismisses the verse as referring not to true doctors but to idolatrous charlatans, indicating that had King Asa gone to proper doctors then the Bible would not have criticized him (85). Nevertheless, the Rav also cites this Bach, who paints a more complex picture. Notice that Bach speaks in the halakhic language of “prohibited” and “permitted” and “custom.” The verse about King Asa carries halakhic weight, seemingly prohibiting
medical treatment. *Bach* sees this verse as potentially standing in halakhic contradiction with the Talmudic permission to seek medical treatment. Rather than dismissing the verse as referring to idolatry, or as otherwise irrelevant to halakha, *Bach* understands this verse as putting a halakhic condition and limitation on the permit to seek medical assistance, allowing such activity only if the ill person adopts the attitude of submission to God. At times halakha prescribes not only discrete actions but also attitudes, a point developed in great detail by Rabbenu Bahya in his classic work *Duties of the Heart*. This comment by *Bach* intimates that one whose visit to the doctor uproots his sense of submission to God loses the permission granted by the Talmud to seek medical help. The Talmudic hava amina, the initial musing that perhaps it should be prohibited to seek medical attention, although dismissed, survived that dismissal in moderated form.25

What we have in this comment of *Bach*, then, is a working through the apparent contradiction in halakha between sources that support the Adam I worldview with sources that support the Adam II worldview. *Bach* harmonizes the two trends halakhically by requiring adoption of both attitudes, both submission to God and pursuit of medical activism. That is not to say that *Bach* actually intended to present us with the dialectical approach that the Rav develops in *The Lonely Man of Faith*. Rather, what interests us is the footnote’s use of *Bach* in the context of the discussion of the dialectical relationship between Adam I and Adam II. By calling our attention to *Bach*, as well as to the two comments of Rashi discussed above, the Rav prods us to read this footnote on two levels. On the surface, the list of sources in the footnote supports only the Adam I side of the equation, that the halakha promotes the activist view of medical intervention. Upon investigation of these sources, we discover a deeper level, where the sources provide a more complete account of the dialectical drama of the halakhic demand to oscillate between the opposing worlds of Adam I and Adam II, in the halakhic requirements to both pursue medical achievement and withdraw emotionally from the sense of personal triumph that would have followed that achievement.26

The significance of this *Bach* goes even deeper, however. We suggested above that of the three core ideas by which we summarized *The Lonely Man of Faith*, we should not expect to find halakhic sources for the

25 Also relevant in this context is the halakhic work *Arukh ha-Shulhan* (Y.D. 335:1) that cites the verse about King Asa to support the halakha that one who is sick should not rely on doctors alone but should also seek favor from God through good deeds and acts of prayer, repentance, and charity.

26 The Rav explicitly discusses the religious demand that the scientist withdraw from the full emotional triumph in an act he calls “cognitive catharsis” in “Catharsis,” *Tradition* 17:2 (1978), 50–52.
third idea, that a second type of loneliness arises due to modern man’s rejection of Adam II. The reason is that this second type of loneliness is particular to modern historical circumstance. However, this suggestion may have been overstated. In this *Bach*, King Asa stands as an illustration of modern man who lives only as Adam I and rejects the need to also live as Adam II. Like modern man, King Asa asked himself, why should I submit myself before God when I can find all the answers to my questions and all the solutions to my problems in “modern” science and culture? Like the Rav, *Bach*’s response to Asa’s attitude is not to reject Adam I, not to take an “Adam II only” attitude and withdraw from the majestic community, but to argue for a way of life that combines both attitudes and both communities. We go to doctors and identify with the scientific community while at the same time belonging to the prayer community and recognizing that the doctor’s power ultimately comes from God. This combination resembles the Rav’s dream that if only the man of faith could convince the man of culture of the need to embrace the depth experience and seek redemption through surrender to God, then “a perfect harmonious relationship would prevail between both Adams” (93). Modern man, however, does not want to hear the lonely man’s side and rejects his message, leaving him with his frustrating loneliness. One can imagine that in his reading of *Bach*’s halakhic correction to King Asa’s attitude, the Rav saw a blueprint for the effort of the man of faith to convince modern man to adopt his model for balancing faith and culture.

Taken as a group, these three sources that raise concerns with medical intervention (the two comments of Rashi and that of *Bach*) all share a common, suggestive feature. They all point to a contrast between medical intervention and prayer. The Rav is correct that the halakha does not see the administering of medicine as interfering with God’s will, but, at the same time, halakha does see medicine as potentially interfering with the human endeavor of prayer. Both comments of Rashi see the potential arrogance of medical triumph as a threat to standing before God with a broken or a subdued heart. Although Rashi does not explicitly mention prayer, these terms naturally call prayer to mind, which in biblical and halakhic language is referred to as “service of the heart.” The third source, the verse in Chronicles cited by *Bach*, criticizes King Asa for seeking doctors instead of God, using the word “to seek after,” “li-drosh,” which also implies turning to God with prayer. By setting up the two activities of prayer and medical intervention as in potential philosophical conflict, these sources invite us to reassess the significance of the chapter in
The Lonely Man of Faith in which the Rav analyzes prayer, along with the halakhic analysis about prayer in the text and footnotes.

The reader might have the sense that the essay could have done without most of chapter seven (51–74). It is mainly a comparison between prayer and prophecy that, at first glance, does not seem to contribute much to our understanding of the dichotomy between Adam I and Adam II. It contains copious halakhic analysis of prayer that seems to be more at home in a Talmud lecture than in an existential, philosophical analysis of the man of faith.

Nevertheless, we cannot forget that the Rav introduces the chapter as the key to how Adam is to “change from a technical utilitarian relationship” with Eve “to a covenantal existential one” (51), that is, to transform from Adam I to Adam II. As such, the three aspects of prayer that the Rav develops here are meant not only to serve as a basis of comparison with prophecy, but also as a basis of contrast between the spiritual world of Adam II and the professional world of Adam I. Let us follow the lead of the sources we cited above and use the medical profession as an example to contrast with the prayer experience according to each of these three aspects, although the contrast can be extended to most professions that belong to the majestic community.

The three aspects of prayer treated here are the face to face meeting with God, the sense of solidarity and fellowship with the community, and the commitment to divine norms. If we want to measure the degree of success of an act of prayer, these are the three benchmarks to use. All the halakhic sources cited by the Rav in this context involve concretizing these three ideals into specific acts and norms.

Let us start with the first aspect. The face to face meeting with God depends on the halakhic concept of kavvana (intention). In a footnote, the Rav cites a series of Talmudic sources, as well as the novella of his grandfather, R. Hayyim, to support the thesis that the kavvana demanded for prayer is deeper and more intense than that required for other commandments (71–72 n. 1). Whereas standard kavvana requires simple awareness that one is doing a mitzva, these halakhic sources indicate that “in prayer,” halakha requires kavvana such that “one must direct his whole self toward God” by maintaining “an all embracing awareness of standing before the Almighty” (71 n. 1). For an act of prayer to succeed, it must involve this unique kind of kavvana. In contrast, such a demand is completely alien to the professional world. For a medical procedure to be considered successful, no demands are made on the doctor’s intentions, nor is there a requirement that the doctor have an existential
awareness of who he is in relation to God or to anyone else in the room. The bottom line is measured not by the intention but by the result, not by the state of mind but by the work of the hand. The doctor’s task is not to offer himself or herself, but his or her skill.\(^{29}\) Descriptive terms that refer to Adam I’s relationship to the world as “functional and practical” (12) and “utilitarian” (13), and especially the Rav’s description of Adam I’s dignity as “measured not by the inner worth of the in-depth personality, but by the accomplishments of the surface personality” (24), all contrast sharply with the inner depth-experience of prayer demanded by the halakha of kavvana, an experience in which Adam II sweeps past practical, surface accomplishments and dives into a “living experience of God,” a “communing with the Great Self” (22).

The second aspect of prayer, the sense of solidarity and fellowship with the community, is concretized by the halakha that our prayers are formulated in the plural. “The plural form of prayer is of central Halakhic significance” (57). The supporting footnote here cites three Talmudic passages, only one of which unequivocally qualifies as halakhic. That one states that when we pray for the ill, we must include them “among the rest of the ill in Israel” (Shabbat 12b). The other two Talmudic passages teach that one who neglects to pray for a friend when able to do so is called a sinner, and that one who prays for a friend suffering from the same misfortune as himself or herself is answered first.\(^{30}\) We might call these passages “quasi-halakhic,” in that they are not codified as formal requirements, yet at the same time their intention is to impact halakhic practice. The Rav understands these passages as motivating the formal halakhic practice of formulating prayer in the plural. He also mentions in this context the halakhic emphasis on praying together in a group, tefillat ha-tzibbur (58 n.).

These halakhic sources all mean that for prayer to succeed, the prayerful individual must engender an attitude of “solidarity and sympathy,” of “existential togetherness,” of “sharing and experiencing the travail and suffering” of one’s fellow (57). In the professional world these qualities, while they may be valued or practiced, do not constitute the benchmarks of success. The doctor who, during a session of intensive surgery, finds himself or herself caught up in and distraught by the emotional drama of the suffering of the patient and the patient’s family members may have less success than the professional who is able to disengage from all of

\(^{29}\) While this is the case with most professions, arguably the performing arts may stand out as an exception, where the success of the performers often hinges on the degree to which they succeed in revealing something of their inner selves. On the other hand, we shouldn’t forget that it’s all just an act.

\(^{30}\) Berakhot 12b and Bava Kamma 92a, respectively.
that to focus on the task at hand. That is not a criticism of doctors. To the contrary, we want our doctors to stay focused and not be distracted, for at times disengagement from others’ pain allows us to do the greatest kindness for them. At times we need a good doctor more than a good friend. The point here is that the manner in which we view others oscillates as we shift from the prayerful attitude of the covenantal community to the professional attitude of the majestic work community. Both views are needed, and both are demanded by the halakha.

The third aspect of prayer, that it demands a commitment to divine, moral norms, finds support in two halakhic principles. The first is the requirement of semikhat ge’ula li-tefilla, that the amida prayer must follow recitation of the Shema. According to the Rav’s interpretation, the aspect of the Shema that prayer depends upon is the “accepting of the Kingdom of Heaven.” “One has no right to appear before the Almighty without accepting previously all the covenantal commitments implied in the three sections of the Shema” (72 n. 2).31 The second halakhic principle is the disqualification, under certain circumstances, of a prayer offered by a morally corrupt individual. While the Rav cites a midrashic source indicating that “prayer of a sinful person is imperfect,” the halakha limits formal disqualification to the priestly blessing offered by one guilty of the sin of murder (72-74 n. 3). He seems to feel that the midrashic degrading of the prayer of the sinful and the halakhic disqualification of the priestly blessing of the murderer belong on the same spectrum, one that connects the efficacy of prayer with one’s character.

Who is qualified to engage God in the prayer colloquy? Clearly, the person who is ready to cleanse himself of the imperfection of evil. Any kind of injustice, corruption, cruelty, or the like desecrates the very essence of the prayer adventure (62–63).

In the professional world of the work community, good character may be valued, but it is generally not considered a prerequisite to success. Someone in need of life-saving surgery will usually not disqualify the top surgeon for cheating on his or her spouse. The list of the most righteous of the generation and the Fortune 500 have very different criteria for qualification.

All of these halakhic principles regarding prayer—kavvana, communal prayer, accepting of the Kingdom of Heaven, the disqualification of certain sinners—present a portrait of Adam II that in some ways appears

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31 This interpretation seems to deviate from the more conventional one which identifies the redemption from Egyptian slavery that appears in the third paragraph of the Shema and in the following blessing as the element that needs to be connected to prayer.
more rich and detailed than that which arises from chapter two of Genesis. That the halakha demands that I be both the kind of person who prays and the kind of person who conquers disease means I must function in a paradoxical way. I must be both an “in-depth-personality” and a “surface personality” (24). I am expected to relate to people both as “surface-personalities engaged in work, dedicated to success, and speaking in clichés and stereotypes,” and as “souls bound together in an indissoluble relation, each one speaking in unique logoi” (32). My fellowship with others is both ontological—rooted in my very being—and utilitarian (39, 66). I must belong both to the majestic community and the covenantal community. Once again, as with the conflict between the mandate to learn Torah all day and the mandate to work, I feel like the halakha addresses me as two people. It is not, however, just a matter of incommensurate principles of scheduling and time management, but of incompatible ways of looking at my own being and function, my commitments, and at my relationships with others.\(^{32}\)

The sources about agriculture and medicine appear in the footnotes only as a sampling of the halakha’s attitude towards the majestic community, not as an exhaustive list. No doubt the Rav also had in mind halakhic sources that address many other areas of the majestic community, like politics, ethics, art, ecology, and more. Were we to investigate relevant halakhic sources, we would likely find areas of tension between the majestic and covenantal worldviews as we did with agriculture and medicine. For a political example, the details of the laws requiring the Israelite king to write his own Torah and curtail his acquisitions might be shown to involve the kind of dichotomy that feeds the dialectical tension between Adam I and Adam II.

Thus, when the Rav says that the “teleology of the Halakhah” can be found in “the paradoxical yet magnificent dialectic” of Adam I and Adam II (78), he is describing not only his reading of Genesis but his living experience of the formally codified halakha. The main difference between the biblical dialectic and the halakhic dialectic is that one can read the Bible from a neutral position where Adam I and Adam II have equal footing. One committed to halakhic norms, on the other hand, has, in accepting that commitment, already from the start positioned himself or herself as Adam II, and from that vantage point discovers that the halakha also wants him or her to be Adam I. This sequential ordering of the two Adams in the halakhic version of the dialectic explains the Rav’s metaphor that “the

\(^{32}\) I believe one can find similar conflicting motifs in the halakhic footnotes about dignity, if one examines the references to sources that pit the halakhic norm of human dignity against the halakhic norms of the Sabbath and shatnez (14 n., 33–34 n.).
norm in the opinion of the Halakhah is the tentacle by which the covenant, like the ivy, attaches itself to and spreads over the world of majesty” (80).

We see from our analysis that the Rav used the method of reconstruction from Halakhic Mind when he wrote The Lonely Man of Faith. However, he does not lead the reader completely through the process. Rather, he leaves the reader enough information in the footnotes to figure out how he reconstructed the subjective experience of the man of faith from the objective sources of the halakha. If we want to see the Rav more explicitly employ the method of reconstruction to develop the ideas in Lonely Man of Faith, we need to turn to an alternate, earlier formulation of the ideas that go into the essay, one that puts reconstruction more out in the open.

VI. The Lonely Man of “Religious Definitions of Man and His Social Institutions”

At this point, one of the three main ideas of the essay still seems to arise only from the biblical and not the halakhic sources, the idea of the existential loneliness of the man of faith. According to the essay, that loneliness manifests itself in the biblical narrative of chapter two of Genesis. Man, initially created alone, confronts his singularity and strangeness until he finds consolation when God introduces him to Eve. Regarding the verse in that chapter, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:17), the Rav says, “‘To be’ means to be the only one, singular and different, and consequently lonely. For what causes man to feel lonely and insecure if not the awareness of his uniqueness and exclusiveness?” (39). Chapter two of Genesis thus emphasizes the human individual’s “ontological incompatibility with any other being” (36).

The experience of this existential loneliness drives the drama of the essay. It thrusts the man of faith into the arms of the covenantal community where he would find redemption from this loneliness, were it not for the demand to dialectically oscillate between the majestic and covenantal communities, as discussed above.

The omission in The Lonely Man of Faith of any halakhic sources that illustrate the loneliness resulting from the uniqueness of man does not necessarily mean the Rav had no such sources. He may have simply decided to omit them from the essay in order to facilitate its flow and rhythm. If we had some window into the Rav’s mind, perhaps his notes from which he built the essay, we might be able to determine if he made sure to check his analysis of the loneliness he develops from chapter two of Genesis against halakhic sources. Do we have anything like that?

Actually, we do. The Rav’s background thinking to The Lonely Man of Faith comes to us in the form of a series of seven audio files digitized from tapes of lectures delivered by the Rav in 1958–1959, around six years
before the publishing of *The Lonely Man of Faith*. The content of these tapes is available on the Internet under the title “Religious Definitions of Man and His Social Institutions,” parts 1–7.33 To a large degree the lectures present an earlier version of *The Lonely Man of Faith*. Alan Brill has suggested that “[f]or any future articles on Rav Soloveitchik and *Lonely Man of Faith*, these seven lectures are essential tools to show what motivated his thinking: they elaborate his thought, they explicate his sources, and by contrast they show what his final resolution in [1965] rejected.”34 The topic of the lectures is the Jewish theory of man, in contrast with secular theories of man.

In the second audio file the Rav presents the central idea of the lectures. Answering the question, what distinguishes man from the animals and the rest of creation, or “what is the distinctive element in man” (P2, 00:11),35 the Rav answers, “Man is a lonely being, and in this feeling of loneliness the distinctness of man manifests itself” (P2, 00:16). And why is man lonely? Because, the Rav continues, each person is a “singular being,” that is, each person is unique.

The Rav explicitly addresses the question of sources for this idea of loneliness, and this is where the method of reconstruction comes in to play. What sources give us “genuine Judaism” that is “unadulterated by any philosophical jargon or any extraneous influences” (P2, 00:12)? He passes over the works of medieval Jewish philosophy due to the influence upon them by Aristotle and other philosophers in the Greek tradition.36

33 The lectures can be accessed at www.yutorah.org (direct link: https://tinyurl.com/ReligiousDefinitions). My research with materials provided by the Toras Horav Archives has led me to conclude that these seven parts are an incomplete recording of a series of twelve lectures that the Rav delivered to Jewish social workers for a program of the Jewish Education Committee of New York titled “Jewish Orientation and Training Seminar,” between November 6, 1958 and May 21, 1959. The “Religious Definitions” audio files have only half of the first lecture, are missing lectures two and three, and then continue with lectures four through eight. The files labeled as “Part 3” and “Part 4” are in reverse order, so that part 4 should be listened to before part 3. The Toras Horav Archives have alternate recordings that fill in the gap between lectures one and four, but recordings of the last four of the twelve-lecture series have not yet been found.


35 All references to this audio lecture series that appear in parentheses refer to Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Religious Definitions of Man and His Social Institutions” Parts 1–7 (1959). The references in parentheses refer to the part (P1–7) and the timestamp (HH:MM). A rough transcript provided by the Toras Horav Archives was helpful for citations, but the final wording of all citations is based on my own listening.

36 The Rav singles out Maimonides, saying, “you never know where Maimonides is the Jewish scholar or [where he is] the disciple of Aristotle and Plotinus. It’s hard to
“Basically there is only one source which is very reliable, and this is the halakha. The halakha is an unadulterated source” (P2, 00:13). Although in some writings the Rav might sound like he uses the term “halakha” in a broad way that includes canonized Jewish sources of a non-legal nature, here he explicitly says that he is talking about the legal body of halakha when he continues, “the halakha speaks in terms of laws, in terms of legal concepts” (P2, 00:14). He further highlights his method of turning to technical, legal sources in order to develop a theory of man when he mentions the difficulties of the method.

The passage from technical rule of behavior to a great religious experience, to the passionate religious personality, to the homo religiosus, is a very tortuous one. But we will try our best to try to develop out of halakhic sources the theory of man (ibid.).

Any doubts that he is describing the same method of reconstruction developed in Halakhic Mind are allayed when the Rav mentions reconstruction by name. He says, “to find the philosophical background, you get involved in a job of reconstructing out of objective data the great religious experience” (ibid.).

How does the Rav implement this method in the “Religious Definitions” lectures regarding man’s existential uniqueness and loneliness, as he promises he will? He does eventually delve into halakhic sources, but not until after he spends some time describing the loneliness of man. He says, “I have many laws to corroborate what I say,” but then says that he will have to “bore” the audience first in order to describe man’s loneliness in a philosophical context. We will summarize this philosophical description before we discuss the halakhic sources in order to confirm that we are indeed talking about the same loneliness that drives the discussion in The Lonely Man of Faith.

The Rav asks, “What is loneliness” (P2, 01:10)? He answers that human loneliness is intertwined with the fact that everything that exists has a surface-existence, but humans also have a depth-existence. For an existence that is only a surface-existence, “its whole existence is exhausted by its relatedness to others” (P2, 01:14). A stone, for example, has no inner life. Its existence can be summed up completely by universal terms like mass and energy, which are functions of how the stone can effect change in or be affected by other things, how it behaves in the chain of cause and effect. We understand the stone by understanding its behavior. The same know. Sometimes you deal with Maimonides the Jewish scholar, and in a second he vanishes, and he is replaced by an Aristotelian. It’s hard to know sometimes. That’s why the [medieval Jewish philosophical] sources are not too reliable” (P2, 00:13).
is true with animals. While the human also has a surface-existence, and we can understand a person to a degree by his behavior, by his interaction with others, at the same time the human’s depth-existence defies measure, escapes definition, and transcends the cause-effect chain. “There is always more to the personality than his active participation in the order of things or his active contribution to society,” and “there is more to man than his work” (P2, 01:18). The Rav labels the surface-existence “kerygmatic,” based on the Greek word _kerygma_, which refers to a message one conveys to others, since this mode of existence can be summed up by the contributions of man to the rest of society. The depth-existence, conversely, he labels “numinous,” adapting a term from Rudolph Otto that refers to an undefinable, ungraspable, and inexpressible kind of existence (P4, 00:11).

Man’s loneliness comes from his numinous existence. Numinous man cannot communicate with others. It is the side of the personality that always remains hidden.

How much can I express to you? Just an infinitesimal part of my experience. First of all, my vocabulary is perhaps limited. Secondly, there are certain experiences which don’t lend themselves to externalization, objectification, because, always, when you take an experience and you try to relate it to others, to tell others about the experience, the experience right away becomes depersonalized. [. . .] If you explain to others how you feel you have to employ categories and metaphors, symbols of language which take your very passionate, intimate experience which is part and parcel of your inner core, and you try to objectify it, depersonalize it, universalize it, generalize it (P4, 00:44).37

This inability to express one’s inner experience does not need to bring negative and frustrating emotions because this loneliness is found “in the depth of human greatness and human dignity and glory. Man is great and glorious because he is lonely” (P2, 00:35). The Rav prefers to call this positive kind of loneliness that comes from awareness of one’s uniqueness “aloneness.” Aloneness refers to the singular experience of numinous man, whereas the term “loneliness” refers to the feeling of rejection by society experienced by kerygmatic man when he fails to convey his message (P5, 00:22). This aloneness is not a nuisance but “an ennobling experience” (P2, 00:55), as well as “a creative experience” (P5, 00:32). In fact, this aloneness parallels God’s uniqueness and aloneness (P2, 00:29), and as such it draws one to God. The worth of a person, therefore, comes not from his accomplishments, but from the very fact of his existence.

37 Note the parallel description in _The Lonely Man of Faith_ (64–65).
“The great scholar, scientist, and the little person have the same worth” (P3, 00:33). The Rav calls this outlook on man “axiological democracy,” meaning equality of value for all people.

This characteristic that the Rav calls aloneness is indeed the same as the first loneliness presented in The Lonely Man of Faith. There as well, the loneliness comes from man’s “awareness of his uniqueness and exclusiveness” (40). There too, this loneliness is a “wholesome and integrating experience” (86), contrasted with the more frustrating version of loneliness resulting from the clash with a disinterested society. As in “Religious Definitions,” in The Lonely Man of Faith awareness of this loneliness drives man to seek a personal relationship with God, the ultimate Lonely Being (4, 20–22, 48, 106). The Lonely Man of Faith also sees this “ontological loneliness” as intertwined with a duality in man, stemming from the “existential in-depth experience” of Adam II but not from the “practical surface experience” of Adam I (30), whom the essay also calls kerygmatic man (25). The essay also characterizes the loneliness of the depth-existence as based on the inexpressibility and incommunicability of Adam I, who is called “homo absconditus” rather than numinous man (64–65). Although The Lonely Man of Faith does not use the term “axiological democracy,” it does present the same idea when it contrasts the way Adam I and Adam II measure their worth, noting that the dignity of Adam I “is measured not by the inner worth of the in-depth personality, but by the accomplishments of the surface personality” (24).

Significantly, just as he does in The Lonely Man of Faith, the Rav in “Religious Definitions” shows that this duality in man can be developed from the contradictions in the two creation stories of chapters one and two of Genesis. Just as he does in Lonely Man of Faith, he offers his dialectic interpretation of the contradictions between those chapters as an alternative to the theories of the Bible critics who see the two stories as reflecting two different traditions (P4, 00:07). This parallel is important for our claim that The Lonely Man of Faith is a halakhic philosophy. It shows that even if it derives its ideas from biblical narratives, that does not preclude the proposition that the Rav sees the halakha as the more authoritative source. After all, in “Religious Definitions” he presents the biblical interpretation after he has already announced that the only authentic source for Jewish philosophy is the halakha. The biblical source helps to describe the theory, but the halakhic sources demonstrate the theory to be authentically Jewish.

38 Note that in at least one place The Lonely Man of Faith reverses the meanings of the terms “aloneness” and “loneliness” from their meanings in “Religious Definitions” (30), but these shifting names of the concepts do not significantly alter their content and function.
There are also significant differences between *The Lonely Man of Faith* and “Religious Definitions.” Perhaps most surprisingly, especially for anyone who finds the Rav’s biblical interpretation compelling, in some ways the two presentations reverse the analysis of the differences between chapters one and two of Genesis. In *The Lonely Man of Faith*, because chapter one presents Adam and Eve as created together, the Rav reads this chapter as representing kerygmatic man, the social being. In “Religious Definitions,” on the other hand, the Rav notes that in chapter one Adam and Eve do not communicate with one another, whereas in chapter two they interact. Therefore, he associates kerygmatic man with chapter two, reading chapter one as referring to the lonely, numinous man (P4, 00:010). Such differences, however, do not undermine the fact that both presentations center around the identical theory of loneliness of the man of faith.

What are the Rav’s halakhic sources for this loneliness? Even in the descriptive section of “Religious Definitions,” before he shifts the focus to presenting a series of supporting laws, he notes a few supporting halakhot. To show that the religious experience is “the flight of the lonely to the Lonely One” (P2, 00:38), he notes two laws regarding prayer meant to emphasize one’s solitude. One is the law of the mehitza, whose primary function appears in this presentation not so much as to separate men and women but to separate husbands and wives. “That’s why we fight against the family pew, because we want to isolate the individual from the family, at least for an hour or two, and to come to God, or before God, as a lone individual who has no family—no wife, no children, no parents” (P2, 00:53). He further cites in the same vein the halakha of Rema that prohibits parents from kissing their small children in the synagogue.

39 This reversal results in different interpretations of the image of God, which appears in chapter one of Genesis. In *The Lonely Man of Faith* where chapter one presents kerygmatic man, the Rav reads the image of God as referring to Man’s creativity, specifically his ability to master nature (12). In “Religious Definitions,” conversely, chapter one presents numinous man. There the Rav interprets the image of God as referring to the singularity of numinous man. Just as God is unique and solitary, “the image of God expresses itself in the fact that man is lonely or solitary, in his aloneness and otherness, in his estrangement and separateness from creation in general and from the ‘thou’ in particular” (P2, 00:21). He also says, “kerygmatic man was not created in the image of God, but [only] numinous Adam [was]” (P4, 1:08).

40 He identifies Plotinus as the originator of this phrase both here and in *The Lonely Man of Faith* (4, 106).

41 Oddly, the Rav initially presents this halakha as a prohibition for a father and son to sit next to each other in synagogue (P2, 00:53). Later, during a question and answer period, when someone presses him about this, he mentions Rema, claiming Rema says that “one should not embrace the child, or even pat his child, or even look at his child, I mean to caress the child with a glance during prayer” (P2, 01:05).
In order to illustrate the idea that there is a side of man that cannot be communicated to anyone but God, the Rav cites the halakha that no contract drawn up between two people can be eternally binding. Specifically, halakha does not share Catholicism’s treatment of marriage as sacrosanct, in the sense that one may never back out of it. “Any contractual arrangement cannot be sacramental, cannot be an eternal arrangement, can be broken up, or the contract can be forfeited and annulled. That’s why divorce was introduced in Judaism as a basic institution” (P4, 00:40). The reason is that only the kerygmatic side of Adam can commit to Eve, not the numinous side. A contract is an exchange of words, and words cannot capture nor bind man’s numinous side. All social contracts are therefore only relative, not absolute. The only commitment which is absolute, in which numinous man participates as well, is the commitment to God (P4, 00:42).

The main halakhic section of the lectures cites a number of “peculiar” laws meant to demonstrate “the concern of Judaism not with the crowd but with the lonely person” (P4, 01:16). These laws reflect Judaism’s “idealization of anonymity” and endorse the claim that Judaism “sang praise to the pauper and the vagabond.” This is the “axiological democracy” referenced earlier, the position that, because each human being has a unique depth-existence independent of any interaction or communication with others, all people are valued at the same worth, no matter how high or low their station in society. Before presenting the laws that demonstrate this axiological democracy, the Rav signals that he is fulfilling his promise from the outset of the lectures to reconstruct his theory of man from halakhic laws, by announcing, “now let me quote a law” (P4, 01:17).

The first law he cites in this section comes from the Mishna (Terumot 8:12) and is codified by Maimonides (Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Torah 5:5). If enemies demand that a group of Jewish women surrender one of its members so that the enemies may defile her, or else they will defile everyone in the

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The actual words of Rema are: “It is prohibited to kiss one’s small children in the synagogue, in order to establish in one’s heart that there is no love like the love of the Lord” (Shulhan Arukh, O.H. 98:1). Although the details of the law differ from the Rav’s presentation, his explanation of the function and meaning of the law as symbolizing man’s isolation from all but God still fits appropriately.

42 As the Rav knew, in some tragic circumstances a woman might find herself trapped in a dead marriage with a recalcitrant husband, due to the halakhic requirement that the husband agree to the divorce. The parallel requirement that the woman agree to the divorce occupies a lower halakhic status and can be overridden by a loophole known as heter me’a rabbanim. Nevertheless, the halakhic ideal is to allow divorce, and rabbinic authorities throughout the ages have sought various ways to fight cynical attempts of a husband to defy this halakhic ideal and refuse divorce. Incidentally, it is reported that the Rav refused to participate in a heter me’a rabbanim because he felt it was unfair that this loophole was available only to men and not to women. See Walter S. Wurzburger, “Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik as a Posek of Postmodern Orthodoxy,” in Covenantal Imperatives (Urim, 2008), 148.
group, the halakha prohibits surrendering the one person. The halakha prefers that the whole group be defiled rather than actively hand over one person to the enemy (P4, 01:17). The Rav also cites the parallel version of this law as it appears in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Terumot 8:4/64b), also codified by Maimonides, where the enemy demands that the group deliver one person to be killed, or else they will kill the entire group. The law again prohibits delivering the one person in order to save the group. The Rav notes that there is even an opinion in the Yerushalmi that was “almost accepted universally” that says that this prohibition holds “even though the woman they specified is of lax morals and practices prostitution, or the man they want is a criminal deserving the death penalty anyway” (P4, 01:19).

The Rav suggests that this is a “strange law” (P4, 01:20), presumably because one expects that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few, and more so when the few are the riffraff of society. Nevertheless, Judaism asserts that “the community must not take precedence over the most sordid life which is, in the opinion of kerygmatic man, worthless.” Because man is not only a kerygmatic but also a numinous being, Judaism does not measure his or her worth by “accomplishments, kerygmas, life stories, [or] contributions to society,” but by his or her mere existence as a person.

Another law he cites here is that known as met mitzva, that if one encounters a corpse on the side of the road, with no one else attending to its burial, then the obligation of burial falls upon the one who finds the body, even if the finder is the high priest who is otherwise forbidden to defile himself through contact with the dead (P3, 00:02). The Rav asks: Who is this abandoned body most likely to be? Certainly it would not be the king, nor anyone important for society who would have an assembly of subordinates or loved ones to take care of the body. Rather, an abandoned body is more likely to be “some anonymous being, perhaps a vagabond or a leper—a leper you would usually leave in the woods; he was not admitted to the community—or a sinner who was expelled or excommunicated from his home” (P3, 00:10). Yet, the high priest, even on Yom Kippur

43 It is not obvious which opinion the Rav means, since both Resh Lakish and R. Yohanan hold that if the enemies designate a specific person who is also guilty of a capital crime, that person may be extradited. The Rav may be referring here to the ensuing story of R. Yehoshua ben Levi in which the prophet Elijah suggests that the pious person, the hasid, would not extradite even a designated criminal. For an overview of the topic see J. David Bleich, “On Extraditing an Individual from within a Group” [Hebrew], Tehumin 3 (1982), 275–286.

44 See Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Aveilut 3:8. As mentioned, parts 3 and 4 of the "Religious Definitions" lectures are mislabeled and should be listened to in reverse order, so that this discussion also belongs to the section of the lectures where the Rav supports his thesis of loneliness with laws.
day, when the entire community casts its eyes upon him and relies on him to bring them atonement, must defile himself and disqualify himself from the sacrificial service, disappointing the whole community, disregarding “the hopes and expectations of millions of people,” for the sake of this one, lonely, anonymous person (P3, 00:11). The Rav asserts that the principle in this law stands at the foundation of Jewish ethics.

The greatness of the individual is the supreme principle in Judaism. It reigns supreme. The inner worth of the person, which is dependent not upon accomplishment and success, but upon his uniqueness and loneliness, is the foundation of Judaic ethics.

The Rav moves the lecture from this point in a variety of directions, but along the way he enters a few more halakhot into evidence, such as the principle “how do you know that your blood is redder; maybe the other person’s blood is redder” (Sanhedrin 74a), prohibiting saving my own life by taking another’s. In the context of this law the Rav asks, “who knows who has a deeper existential experience and who has a warmer heart, who has a more tender soul, the great philosopher Kant or a pauper or a beggar” (P3, 00:48)? By the standards of kerygma we are able to evaluate one life as greater than another, but not by the standards of numinous existence. “Measured by contributions, there are objective criteria by which we can judge the greatness of a person. Measured by the inner experience, there are no criteria. Only God can measure, not human beings.”

The Rav also notes the injunctions in the Torah against causing distress to the deaf, the blind, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, which suggest that “the less relevant” one’s kerygma, one’s message and contribution to society, “the more concerned society must be with his inner pride and dignity” (P3, 01:10).

The Rav’s halakhic analysis in these lectures is certainly not complete. For instance, he does not grapple with counter examples, such as the Mishna (Horayot 3:7–8) that presents rules of triage, rules of who should be saved first when not all can be saved, that do seem to take into account kerygmatic factors of societal worth.45

Nevertheless, he does live up to his promise to develop a uniquely Jewish view of man based on the objective halakhic sources, and he presents this view from the subjective standpoint, in terms of feelings and personal experience, in terms of what it is like for and what it means to a person to live this view. In doing so, he provides us with a clear example

of the method of reconstruction of subjectivity out of objectivity that he describes in *Halakhic Mind*. He also shows us that although his theory of ontological uniqueness and the resultant loneliness in the *The Lonely Man of Faith* appears to be rooted only in biblical sources, years earlier he had already worked through and presented the halakhic sources that make that theory authentically Jewish and rooted in the norms and rules that constitute the lived-through reality of the halakhically committed Jewish community. The “Religious Definitions” lectures, as an early version of *The Lonely Man of Faith*, strongly support our argument that views *The Lonely Man of Faith* as an effort to fulfill the promise at the end of *Halakhic Mind*, “[o]ut of the sources of Halakhah a new world view awaits formulation.”

What changed between the 1959 lectures and the 1965 essay is that the Rav stopped calling attention to the method of reconstruction from the halakha, even as he was doing it behind the scenes. We can conjecture as to the cause of this change, whether it has to do with the differences between the flexibility of an oral lecture series and the more succinct format of a journal essay, or if it perhaps reflects a shift in the Rav’s pedagogical priorities. It could also be that the Rav wanted the written version to appeal to a more universal audience familiar with the Bible but unfamiliar with halakha. The report that the Rav presented a version of *The Lonely Man of Faith* as a lecture series before a Catholic seminary might support this latter suggestion.

Whatever the case may be, our analysis has better positioned us to understand what the Rav means when he opens *The Lonely Man of Faith* with the confession that his interpretation is “completely subjective and lays no claim to representing a definitive Halakhic philosophy.” It certainly is a halakhic philosophy, albeit not “definitive.” It is also subjective, and in two ways. First, it is subjective in the sense that the method of reconstruction aims to reconstruct and describe subjective religious experience out of the objective halakhic sources. It seeks to communicate the “feel” of religious Jewish experience through an analysis of the reality of Jewish

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46 Our claim that *The Lonely Man of Faith* implements the program outlined in *Halakhic Mind* does not mean that it completes that program. We understand that program as open ended and not confined to defining a specific, narrow set of fundamental, philosophical concepts. See the sources cited above in fn. 16 that support this characterization. The few places where *Halakhic Mind* does list such sets of concepts are to be understood as presenting examples of what can be accomplished through reconstruction, not as delineating its exclusive goal. See *Halakhic Mind*, 50, 99, 101. We do not need to concern ourselves with locating the core concepts of *The Lonely Man of Faith* and “Religious Definitions” among those lists. Having said that, the interested reader should note that one of the concepts on those lists, time, is treated in *The Lonely Man of Faith* (66–71).

47 See Walter S. Wurzburger, “Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik as a Posek of Postmodern Orthodoxy,” in *Covenantal Imperatives* (Urim, 2008), 146.
life as regulated by the norms and laws of halakha. Second, it is subjective in the sense that there is more than one way to interpret the Jewish religious experience through halakha. Another learned halakhic scholar might look at the same sources and offer a competing interpretation. For example, awareness of the axiological democracy indicated by laws like the one prohibiting saving the life of one by killing another does not necessarily have to lead to a feeling of loneliness. That part might reflect the Rav’s own, personal, emotional experience, and is not “definitive.” But it is still halakhic philosophy because it presents itself as nourished by halakhic reality and is not merely a raw, personal disposition, idiosyncrasy, or mood. Anyone for whom the “actual situations and experiences” (1) of their religious reality are shaped by halakha can, through reflection on the sources of their halakhically nurtured experience, get in touch with the same loneliness the Rav describes.

This dependence of the subjective world view described in The Lonely Man of Faith on the objective, halakhic sources should cause us to rethink the relationship between the Rav’s works that are considered neo-Kantian and those considered existentialist. The method of reconstruction and The Halakhic Mind, where the method is explained using a scientific model, are neo-Kantian. The method’s originator, Paul Natorp, a central figure of Marburg neo-Kantianism, certainly saw scientific knowledge as the paradigm for all modes of knowledge. At the same time, Natorp avoided getting trapped in a world defined by cold, abstract concepts when he developed his method of reconstruction of subjectivity out of objectivity in order to give voice to the warm, living subjective experience as expressed through a Weltanschauung. The Rav took the same path to give us a special, religious Weltanschauung out of halakha. By showing us the connection between the neo-Kantian method of reconstruction in Halakhic Mind and the existentialist exposition of loneliness in The Lonely Man of Faith, the “Religious Definitions” lectures serve as a bridge not only between those two works, but between two genres that we had thought were much further apart.

We conclude with one final insight that “Religious Definitions” provides about the ontological loneliness of The Lonely Man of Faith. In these lectures the Rav emphasizes that this theory of axiological democracy constitutes a special contribution of Judaism to societal ethics. Even as he expresses skepticism regarding claims people like to make about Jewish contributions to culture, he views this particular contribution as being genuine. We should take pride in this theory as “one of the ideas that Judaism gave to the world” (P2, 00:16). The individualism promoted

48 See above, fn. 12.
49 See above, the end of fn. 16.
by the Enlightenment glorified the individual as autonomous, as distinct from and having priority over the collective, but it did not emphasize the uniqueness and singularity of each individual. While it trumpeted individual rights, it considered individuals to be replaceable and dispensable. “Judaism’s greatness,” he concludes, is expressed in its position that “the individual is not only a single being, [but] a singular being” (P2, 00:20). Thus, the theory of the uniqueness of the individual is not just a world view, but a new world view, introduced to the world by Judaism. In that way as well, The Lonely Man of Faith can be viewed as a significant contribution to the program proclaimed at the end of Halakhic Mind: “Out of the sources of Halakhah, a new world view awaits formulation.”