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My Own Spiritual Crisis

Julian Ungar-Sargon*

Borra College of Health Sciences, Dominican University Illinois, USA.

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It has become clearer over the years that until I understand my own inner spiritual crisis I cannot begin to entertain a therapeutic space with my patients that allows for a spiritual healing beyond the physical symptoms and psychological barriers to health. Born 5 years after the Shoah to a survivor from Vienna, my childhood was spent obsessing about the subject and the impossibility to make sense of theology in a rational way.

Sabbath afternoons were spent with like mind colleagues struggling with the same issue – theodicy_ (including Lord Jonathan Sacks) and for years I combed the post war theological writings in the magazines like Tradition, Judaism and Commentary to find a voice that “understood” my dilemma.



I remember reading Lonely man of Faith by Rabbi Josphe B Soloveitchik [1] at age 18 and finally found an expression for the loneliness and tragic nature of modern man fully engaged as an orthodox person. It was not until I lived in Boston 20 years later did I realize that he never resolved the paradox of the master of

Adam I with the servant of Adam II.

Rabbi Soloveitchik tackles a number of major issues, the central ones being mankind’s dual role in the world, and the possibility of religious existence in modern, largely secular, society.

He proposes that the two accounts of the creation of man (in chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis) portray two types of man, two human ideals. One type, termed Adam the first (or Adam I), is guided by the quest for dignity, which is an external social quality attained by control over one’s environment. He is a creative and majestic personality who espouses a practical-utitarian approach to the world. Adam ii, on the other hand, is guided by the quest for redemption, which is a quality of the inner personality that one attains by control over oneself. He is humble and submissive and yearns for an intimate relationship with God and with his fellow man in order to overcome his sense of incompleteness and inadequacy. These differences carry over to the type of community each one creates: the “natural work community” (Adam I) and the “covenantal faith community” (Adam ii).

God not only desires the existence of each of these personality types and each of these communities, but actually bids each and every person to attempt to embody both of these seemingly irreconcilable types. One must attempt to pursue both dignity and redemption. This analysis of the two basic tasks of man leads to two important conclusions.

First, Adam I’s existence is willed by God and therefore his majestic and creative actions have religious value. Rabbi Soloveitchik, accordingly, has a positive attitude towards the extension of human dominion through general scientific and technological progress, the spreading of culture and the development of civilization. However, one must also give Adam ii his due, which leads to the second conclusion: Adam ii and his quest for redemption have independent value, regardless of whether they said Adam I’s quest for majesty. Faith (the realm of Adam ii) is not subservient to culture (the creation of Adam I); it is a primordial force that has no need to legitimize itself in other terms.

Contact: Julian Ungar-Sargon, Borra College of Health Sciences, Dominican University Illinois, USA.

The demand to be both Adam I and Adam ii leads to a built-in tension in the life of each person responsive to this dual call; and because one lives with a constant dialectic, a continual oscillation between two modes of existence, one can never realize fully the goals of either Adam I or Adam ii. Unable to feel totally at home in either community, man is burdened by loneliness. Since this type of loneliness is inherent in one's very being as a religious individual, Rabbi Soloveitchik terms it "ontological loneliness" ("ontological" relating to being or existence). In a sense, this kind of loneliness is tragic; but since it is willed by God, it helps man realize his destiny and therefore is ultimately a positive and constructive experience.

What excited me was his description of a particular kind of loneliness, one which is not a built-in aspect of human existence but rather the product of specific historical circumstances; this "historical loneliness" is a purely negative phenomenon. Modern man, pursuant to his great success in the realm of majesty-dignity, recognizes only the Adam I side of existence, and refuses to acknowledge the inherent duality of his being. Contemporary society speaks the language of Adam I, of cultural achievement, and is unable or unwilling to understand the language of Adam ii, of the uniqueness and autonomy of faith. Worse, contemporary Adam I has infiltrated and appropriated the realm of Adam ii, the world of religion; he presents himself as Adam ii, while actually distorting covenantal man's entire message.

Instead of talking theology, in the didactic sense, eloquently and in balanced sentences, I would like, hesitantly and haltingly, to confide in you, and to share with you some concerns which weigh heavily on my mind, and which frequently assume the proportions of an awareness of crisis.

This description provided me deep spiritual support as a first articulation of my own split soul. Only later in reading McGilchrist's work did I realize just how seamlessly this theology fit with neuroscience.



Theism and Death of God

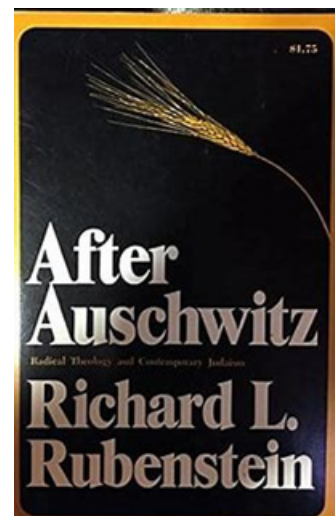
How can I avoid living in this postmodern post holocaust world
 And live as if it never happened
 As if I could return to a naive prewar belief
 That the ovens never happened
 That *der eybisher* was present in human history and galut/
 exile
 Always watching us with love and care
 How could I have not been swayed by Kafka and Fackenheim
 and refuse the puerile orthodox responses that could not let go

of control of the ideology the old, tired theologies.

Fackenheim asserted that tradition could not anticipate the Holocaust, so one more law, a 614th Commandment, became necessary. "Thou shalt not hand Hitler posthumous victories. To despair of the God of Israel is to continue Hitler's work for him."

This proposes that people of Jewish heritage have a moral obligation to observe their faith and thus frustrate Hitler's goal of eliminating Judaism from the earth. Yet this seemed good for theology it failed my need for a living relationship with the divine not dependent upon a moral imperative.

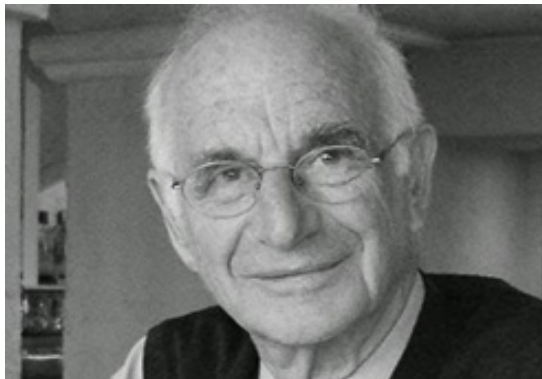
I was more impressed by the work of Richard Rubenstein [2] who emerged in the 1960s as a significant writer on the meaning and impact of the Holocaust for Judaism. His first book, *After Auschwitz*, explored radical theological frontiers in Jewish thought. Rubenstein argued that the experience of the Holocaust shattered the traditional Judaic concept of God, especially as the God of the covenant with Abraham, in which the God of Israel is the God of history. Rubenstein argued that Jews could no longer advocate the notion of an omnipotent God at work in history or espouse the election of Israel as the chosen people. In the wake of the Holocaust, he believed that Jews have lost hope and there is no ultimate meaning to life.



In *After Auschwitz*, Rubenstein argued that the covenant had died. He did not mean he was now an atheist, nor that religion had to be discarded as irrelevant. However, he believed not in a transcendent God, but in God as the ground of being:

Terms like "ground" and "source" stand in contrast to the terms used for the transcendent biblical God of history who is known as a supreme king, a father, a creator, a judge, a maker. When he creates the world, he does so as do males, producing something external to himself. He remains essentially outside of and judges the creative processes he has initiated. As ground and source, God creates as does a mother, in and through her own very substance. As ground of being, God participates in all the joys and sorrows of the

drama of creation which is, at the same time, the deepest expression of the divine life. God's unchanging unitary life and that of the cosmos' ever-changing, dynamic multiplicity ultimately reflect a single unitary reality.



Jung and Hillman opened me to the psychic value of paradox and the soul/ego dynamic demanding individuation, and that I enter this dark world of the subconscious that subtends both hemispheres, the center of the darker desires where His vitality resides as everywhere.

My ventures into the Zohar and Kabbalah allowed for the reality and presence of the demonic in which man is critical in rescuing the divine (Schechina) through his spiritual work [3].

Yet in some writings I found comfort, in the Izhbitzer, Rav Kook's personal confessions, the Eish kodesh, Reb Shlomo, Reb Hershy, and of course Rebbe Nachman and Rav Shagar. In the anarchic counter narratives that allow only for His Absence and the yearning despite His absence, I found shelter in a presence despite feeling alone in a world filled with people I prayed with and learned with yet an intellectually nihilistic climate I bathed in.

My "theology" must include a sense of the sublime the "memale kol almin" even Einstein's Spinozian theism, I cannot abandon my higher power, I feel Him in my flesh in the wind, the sunset, the dying of the leaves, and the absolute terrifying beauty of nature and the starry skies. So how to reconcile irreconcilable conflicting demands on my soul?

I was relieved to find in the recent neurobiological models that saw two very different functions of the brain: The left hemisphere tends to control and manipulate the world but lacks understanding. The right hemisphere is more intelligent and better suited for understanding the world.

This part of the brain attends vigilantly and empathetically to the whole, providing a broader context for experiences. This holistic perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of complex life situations that may contribute to a soul crisis. It allowed me to not rely on the logical intellectually consistent functioning of the left hemisphere alone which deals in mastering the world through analytic means logical inferences, manipulating the world but lacking understanding and most of all paradox.



Post Theistic Theism

Christianity according to Zizek was quite subversive claiming not that Christ would return but that incarnation is in every one of his disciples, that the transcendent old testament deity had in fact died on the cross. This notion of the Death of god as the transcendent divine out there but now animating everything within, the reality we are bathed in, the ongoing unfolding of the cosmos and biological life is the very kingdom, without and within.

The messianic era, *Olam haba*...is an ever-present unfolding, the 1000 joys and sorrows all together make up this tapestry, both the horrors and the sublime are sides of one coin, the unity. In my aging, I have learned that the spiritual path is one of surrender to this Presence, and acceptance of everything is the key to the door of this kingdom. Its currency is love and tolerance, and the refusal to bend to overarching global narratives whatsoever.

Now I look upon the last few hundred years of dogmatic fights between orthodoxies and mystics -whether Christian, Muslim or Jewish- more as an ivory tower debate in the halls of the Oxford Union without any relevance whatsoever to the real winds of the spirit on the ground. In many ways there merely reflected the sideshow of a colonial European culture where the unspoken agreement was that if you were disempowered poor or racially diverse (*sephardi*) you were not even on the radar screen of the gentlemanly theological debate (like for instance the *Tzimztum*) [4].

Recently I do see hints of this sensibility in the first-generation Hassidic masters, where the fellowship, the chevraya kadisha, were in fact a possible substitute or at the least as important as the transcendent higher power...deconstructing the vertical for whom only the zaddik has access.

ואל ימעט בעיניו שום מצוה ודבור הגון כשהוא עם החיות כי
הבעש"ט ע"ה נשמתו בגנוי מרומים אמר שכר מצוה בהאי עלמא
ליכא כי אין כל העולם יכול לקבל אור השכר של מצוה ודבור הגון
כי הוא מאין סוף ברוך הוא כאמור וניצוץ כלול מכולו והעולם יש
לו סוף אף על פי שאינו רואה שום דבר ואינו יודע לכווין כוונה
מכל מקום כשמישים כל החיות בהדבור או בדבור שעושה נעשו
יחודים למעלה כיון שעושה כפי שאפשר לו ויכלתו והכל יעשה
באחדות עם כל ישראל ועם כל הצדיקים שיקשר מחשבתו ויכלול
עצמו עמהם לכן אומרים קודם מצוה לשם יחוד קודשא בריך הוא
ושכינתיה בשם כל ישראל ולפעמים נתעורר באדם השק לעבוד
עבודה תמה ולהתפלל הוא מחמת הצדיק שהוא מתפלל ומעלה
דורו ובלבד שלא ינתק עצמו מהם במחשבתו והבן;

Me'or Einayim, Beshalach 20

"..for the Baal Shem Tov commenting on the aphorism- the reward for a mitzvah is not in this world- [5] since this world is incapable of containing the rewards of the mitzvah nor an appropriate speech for it comes from the infinite blessed be He...

nevertheless, if one places all one's vitality in the speech or whatever he is doing this produces unifications in the upper worlds, as long as he does it to the best of his ability and in unity with all Israel and the Zaddikim, by including himself and binding his thoughts to them.

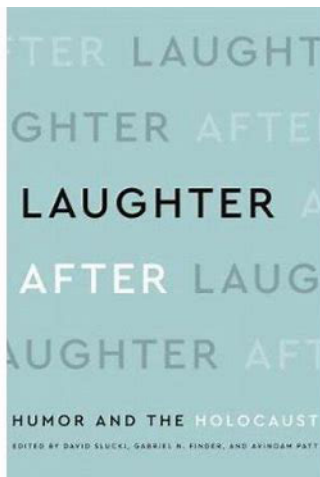
that is why we say prior to performing a mitzvah "for the sake of the unification of the Holy One Blessed Be He and the Schechina IN THE NAME OF ALL OF ISRAEL

The Meor Eynayim privileges access to the infinite only by way of the zaddik who binds all Israel into a holy mystical congregation (Schechina) and this binding laterally with others in the holy fellowship is the prerequisite for the unifications and rectifications of the upper worlds.

Similar sensations are found in the fellowship of AA and the like where a development of a relationship with Higher Power only develops in step 11 whereas sobriety is found initially in steps 1 2 and 3 by making the fellowship one's "Higher Power" by going to meetings and confessing to the brotherhood first and foremost. The divine beyond this world, the *sovev kol almin* is beyond human grasp, the imminent is the only appreciation, but fully within nature, and fully participates in the vitality of good as well as evil. After 15 years reading the Alter Rebbe of Habad, it seems to me that his struggle was to be able to articulate (in a rational left hemisphere approach) that which can only be hinted at, implied and pointed towards... the paradox of hiddenness and the impossibility of language to convey the human apprehension of the divine.

"Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"

Hume [6]



Holocaust Humor and Theodicy

For the paradox in the joke and a tragedy to take place there must still be limits... the victim must retain his dignity...if too much then horror comedy enters.

2 Jews murdered in Auschwitz enter the next world...

One says to the other Moische!

Do you realize that before they could gas you, you slipped and hit your head suffering a concussion and dying before you reached the gas chamber?

The other one responds yes that was so ironic...

God passes by and says sorry guys "I don't understand the joke"

Don't worry God

You couldn't understand because you weren't there

Nimshal

(God was absent in Auschwitz) [7]

He understands theodicy. He understands the whole of Auschwitz horror.

He understands that jew is born to sacrifice himself if need be in the multiple pogroms in the vale of tears that is Jewish history...

But he cannot understand the humor of it, he cannot understand two Jews revealing the irony of their deaths. As if they are exposing His flaw...his absence despite the covenant to protect them. So they make an excuse even for Him.

This need for humor even in the face of tragedy

The role of humor as catharsis

The function of humor in deconstructing old belief systems that do not serve.

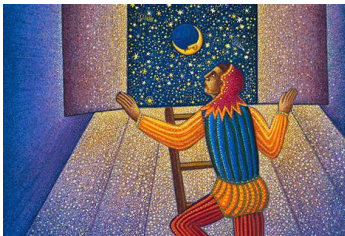
Holocaust humor "reflects humor's important role as a defense mechanism against the acting-out of the trauma, a tool to vent frustration and fight various aspects of Holocaust commemoration, and an attempt to tone down the constant anxiety that the canonical memory agents create by deconstructing the fear factor," wrote Steir-Livny [8] and Jews depended on humor to endure the period after liberation, both as a psychological weapon to grapple with what they had endured under the Nazi threat and as a source of coping with the displacement of the postwar period. After the war, humor was a poignant affirmation of *mir zaynen do* we are (still) here a declaration that the Jewish people had not disappeared and indeed could at times have the last laugh [9].

Explaining a joke is like dissecting a frog. You understand it better, but the frog dies in the process. ~

E.B. White

Another time, he said that it seems impossible to achieve happiness without some measure of foolishness. One must resort to all sorts of joking and foolish things if this is the only way to attain happiness.

Sichot HaRan 20:3



Rebbe Nachman's Holy Silliness

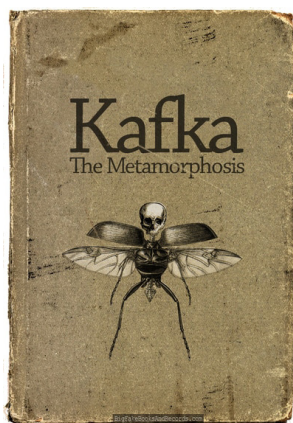
Rebbe Nachman emphasized the subjective spiritual journey of each individual. Having experienced inner torment and suffering himself, he had great empathy for the cycle of progress and failure that each person experiences. At the same time, he spoke of the power of the true *tzaddik* (spiritual master) to intercede with God, to heal, and to serve as a catalyst for growth.

We find humor in our texts Rebbe Nachman of Breslov believed that engaging in humor and foolishness is essential for achieving true happiness. In his collection of teachings, Sichot HaRan, Rebbe Nachman emphasizes the importance of joy and simplicity in serving God.

He emphasized the importance of joy and laughter in spiritual practice. He famously taught that "It is a great mitzvah to be in a state of constant joy" and believed that true happiness could only be achieved through silliness

This approach recognizes the inherent contradictions in human existence and uses humor as a tool for spiritual growth. Breslov thought employs paradoxical and absurdist elements to convey deep spiritual truths:

1. The use of seemingly nonsensical stories, like "The Rooster Prince," to impart wisdom
2. The recognition of divine absurdity in Jewish history, such as the miraculous birth of Isaac
3. The embrace of silliness as a way to overcome ego and connect to simple joys



Kafka's Absurdist Comedy [10]

While often perceived as a writer of dark, nightmarish tales, Franz Kafka's work is imbued with a sharp and often overlooked sense of humor. His friend Max Brod recounted that Kafka would laugh uproariously when reading his own works aloud, sometimes unable to continue due to his mirth.

His humor is characterized by:

1. Irony and satire
2. Grotesque and absurd situations
3. Slapstick-like physical comedy
4. Wordplay and linguistic games

His stories often present characters trapped in absurd situations by incomprehensible forces, mirroring the human condition in a way that is both tragic and darkly comic.

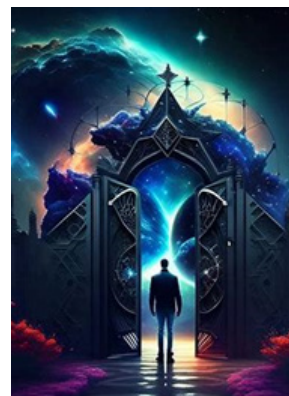


The Comedy of the Absurd

The absurdist philosophy, which both Breslov and Kafka's works touch upon, recognizes the fundamental disconnect between human desire for meaning and the apparent meaninglessness of the universe. This paradox becomes a source of both anguish and humor:

1. The absurd highlights the futility of human attempts to find inherent meaning in life
2. It emphasizes the ridiculous nature of everyday situations when viewed from a cosmic perspective
3. Humor becomes a coping mechanism for dealing with life's inherent absurdity

The intersection of Breslov Hasidism, Kafka's writings, and the comedy of the absurd offers a unique perspective on the human condition. By embracing paradox, humor, and the absurd, these traditions provide a means to confront life's mysteries and contradictions. They suggest that laughter and joy, even in the face of apparent meaninglessness, can be powerful tools for spiritual growth and psychological resilience. In doing so, they offer a profound and surprisingly optimistic response to the challenges of modern existence.



Paradoxical Approach to Divine Understanding

While not atheistic, Nachman's approach to understanding God had elements that might resonate with some atheistic or agnostic perspectives:

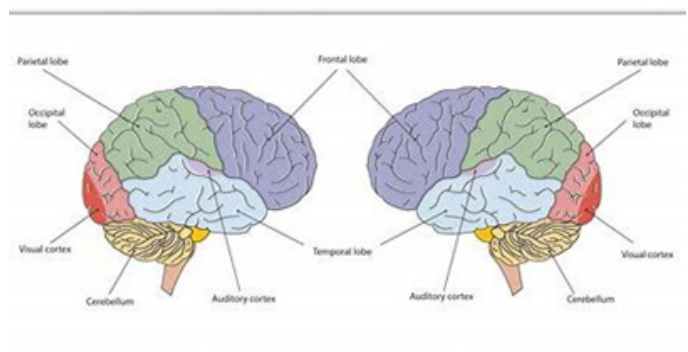
He taught that there is a place where God does not exist, as God had to withdraw His light to make room for creation (*chalal hpanui*)[11]. He emphasized that God is beyond human comprehension, stating that the inability to fully understand God actually enhances His greatness.

There is a famous story told in Hasidic literature that addresses this very question. The Master teaches the student that God created everything in the world to be appreciated, since everything is here to teach us a lesson. One clever student asks "What lesson can we learn from atheists? Why did God create them?"

The Master responds "God created atheists to teach us the most important lesson of them all — the lesson of true compassion. You see, when an atheist performs an act of charity, visits someone who is sick, helps someone in need, and cares for the world, he is not doing so because of some religious teaching. He does not believe that God commanded him to perform this act. In fact, he does not believe in God at all, so his acts are based on an inner sense of morality. And look at the kindness he can bestow upon others simply because he feels it to be right."

"This means," the Master continued "that when someone reaches out to you for help, you should never say 'I pray that God will help you.' Instead for the moment, **you should become an atheist, imagine that there is no God who can help, and say 'I will help you.'**"

If there is redemption in religion, I believe it is when people come to understand this story.



Where I to rely merely on my left hemisphere rational mind I would have long ago come to the concept of The concept of "holy atheism" may seem paradoxical at first glance, as atheism is typically defined as the rejection of belief in deities or spiritual beings.

However, some philosophers and thinkers have explored ways in which atheism can incorporate elements traditionally associated with religious concepts of holiness or the sacred. Here are some key perspectives on this idea:

Secular Sacredness

Some atheists argue that it's possible to have a sense of the sacred or holy without belief in supernatural entities out there. Is it possible to interclude all theologies in my all-inclusive paradoxical theatre of the absurd? All are welcome at the table with the only criteria being humility and radical openness.

1. **Reverence for nature:** Many atheists find profound awe and wonder in the natural world, viewing it as worthy of reverence and protection.
2. **Ethical imperatives:** Certain moral principles or human rights might be considered "sacred" in a secular sense, as inviolable and of utmost importance.
3. **Transcendent experiences:** Atheists may have powerful emotional or aesthetic experiences that feel "holy" without attributing them to a deity.

Postmodern theology emphasizes that God, or the idea of God, is subject to human interpretation. It is influenced by deconstructionists such as Jacques Derrida, the German idealist Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Christian existentialists including Soren Kierkegaard and Paul Tillich, and philosopher Martin Heidegger.



Philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek says, "The only way to be an atheist is through Christianity." He claims traditional atheism does not go far enough:

Christianity is much more atheist than the usual atheism, which can claim there is no God and so on, but nonetheless retains a certain trust into the Big Other. This Big Other can be called natural necessity, evolution, or whatever. We humans are nonetheless reduced to a position within the harmonious whole of evolution, whatever, but the difficult thing to accept is again that there is no Big Other, no point of reference which guarantees meaning.

According to Žižek, the idea of Jesus' death on the cross addresses this tension by serving as an act of love and a "resolution of radical anxiety." Indeed, Žižek says that Jesus himself became an atheist on the cross when crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) [12].



The Failure of Classical Monotheism

Rav Hillel Rachmani writes [13]:

The theological system represented by this allegory is known as transcendental monotheism. In this classical view of God, an I-Thou relationship exists between creature and Creator, where God is other to the Human self: a bonfire surrounded by candles. When presented with an omnipotent Being, Man cannot but annul his ego in the face of divine infinity. In a world filled by God's greatness, there is no room for personal growth. This is so threatening that it leads to a rejection of God, and atheism.

When faced with a Supernatural Force, Man naturally begins to struggle. It is in Man's essence to wish himself free of the constraint of this external power, which squashes his self. Nietzsche sums up this tension: If there is a God, how can he be other than me? Rav Kook names this phenomenon "Divine Envy" - the inability of Man to accept that there is an extra-corporeal entity next to which he is seemingly irrelevant. This unwillingness leads to an instinctive disbelief in God. (See Orot HaKodesh, volume 2, page 397.)

Pantheism

In a volume of eulogies -"Eder Ha-Yakar" - written for his father-in-law, Rav Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim (Aderet), Rav Kook has a pamphlet - "Ikvei HaTzon." In this collection of articles there is an article entitled "Da'at Elokim." Here Rav Kook discusses a metaphysical paradigm diametrically opposed to that of Transcendental Monotheism: Pantheism - an approach associated with Baruch Spinoza in the seventeenth century. Pantheism has as its central dogma "Deus sive natura" - God is nature.

Against this, Rav Kook claims that if God is identified with existence, reality itself becomes divine. Superficially, this does not appear problematic; indeed Spinoza seems to be very religious - he has succeeded in sanctifying all of the profane! In reality, though, he has desecrated the holy and the idea becomes a farce. As soon as one enters this mindset, the God idea loses all its significance. If everything is holy, nothing is. When God is not to an extent removed from mundane reality, where there is no ontological ladder for Man to climb, there is no spiritual challenge and there can be no spiritual growth. If the spiritual hierarchy is deleted, religion is null and the God idea worthless. Judaism cannot accept such a concept of God.

Panentheism

Having rejected Transcendence and Pantheism as problematic theological models, Rav Kook favors a third alternative, panentheism, meaning the world is in God. (Pantheism = all is God; Panentheism = all is in God.)

Taking transcendence as our starting point, we have already seen how it suggests a threatening view of God. Rav Kook points out that God is only threatening if we consider him to be foreign. If, however, we cease to relate to God as other and create a genuine contact between the divine Spirit and the Human soul, this problem vanishes. Panentheism is a middle ground between Transcendence and Pantheism: everything that is, is in God; however, God is not everything that is. Man, therefore, is a revelation of God and in order to spiritually develop, to become more existentially significant, Man must connect with God. Man ought to view himself as a divine revelation, not an independent entity cowering in the face of divinity. To grow, we must boost the extent to which we are a divine revelation.

Panentheism is fundamentally different from Pantheism in that here, nature is merely a limb of a far greater divine Being, and not an equivalence. There is, explains Rav Kook, a higher divine Source. There remains a spiritual ladder which we must try to climb, a metaphysical hierarchy in which Man is towards the bottom. Only by moving up this spiritual ladder and connecting with God can we enrich our egos [14].



In the writings of Rav Shagar such as *Faith Shattered and Restored* [15], one finds a teacher who understands this dilemma on a deeply personal and existential level, yet remains committed to authentically living in both worlds. His teachings represent a powerful model of engaging the broader intellectual currents within which one lives while maintaining an unyielding commitment to Torah.

The term postmodernism is one of the most debated and confusing to emerge in recent decades. Associated with French thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard, it is accused of everything from obscurantism to nihilistic relativism.

The definition offered by Rav Shagar "postmodernism is, at bottom, not so much a philosophical theory as a mode of life and a state of consciousness a cultural situation some would even say. At its root is a loss of faith in grand narrative, in metaphysical goals, and in comprehensive theories" [16].

Postmodernism, however, did not limit its critique only to political and economic ideologies, but in fact sought to prove

that the construction of all knowledge was subject to unseen biases and prejudices that rendered the idea of objective truth a fallacy. In Rav Shagar's words, postmodernism rejects the absolute certainty of modernity and brings about the sense that, "There is no truth, certainly not with a capital T. In such a word, truth is a cultural product or artifact. Every truth hinges on specific cultural contexts and is perceived as something that benefits specific interests".

Rav Shagar argues that it is postmodernism's denial of objective truth that allows for new religious opportunities. Instead of leading to meaninglessness, the loss of absolute certainty can open one up to a mystical perspective. Rav Shagar explains that "In kabbalistic and hasidic terms, postmodernism reveals the ayin, or nothingness: Truth has no metaphysical mooring in heaven above, no bedrock to bear it upon the earth below".

In Kabbalah, the concept of ayin is used to describe God's infinite nature, which transcends human comprehension and functions as the very beginning of the *sefirot*. In the words of Daniel Matt, "Everything emerges from the depths of ayin and everything eventually returns there... Since God's being is incomprehensible and ineffable, the least offensive and most accurate description one can offer is, paradoxically speaking, nothing." Postmodernism enables us to grasp this mystical concept in ways unappreciated before. "Stacked up against the divine infinitude, everything is absolutely equal—not equally valuable, but equally paltry. The innovation of postmodernism lies in turning the godly perspective into a human one"

Rav Shagar finds insights from the writings of Franz Rosenzweig and Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek to help elucidate how Jewish nationalism and universalism can coexist. Rosenzweig speaks about the Jewish people as "she'erit ya'akov," the remainder of Jacob. Jews inevitably are both rooted and transient in ways unlike other peoples. Rosenzweig writes that the individual Jew "is always somehow one who remains, an inside whose outside was seized by the river of the world and driven off, whilst he himself, that which remains of him, remains standing on the shore". To be a remainder is to be "the extra piece of the puzzle.

Mathematically speaking, it is the remainder left without a "place" after division". In the words of Zizek, it is to be "a foreign body within the social texture, in all dimensions". This position of Other is quintessentially Jewish and is a necessary consequence of a Jewish nationalism oriented towards transcendence. Rav Shagar explains that "In cleaving to the Torah, the Jew alienated himself from a world that relies on the natural order, and from the spaces of all nations, thus, by dint of his alienation, becoming Other"



The "remainder" therefore acts as a constant reminder of the uniqueness of every individual and stands as a rejection of uniformity.

Rav Kook on Christianity and Hegel

Aryeh Sklar writes [17]:

His complex and perhaps contradictory picture on Christianity has been systematically and intentionally obscured by the followers of Rav Kook's son, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook.

This censorship occurring through the publishing house Makhon Rav Tzvi Yehudah is more common than previously thought, extensively discussed by Professor Marc Shapiro on Seforim Blog [18]. He cites several examples where comparing the original manuscripts with the printed version indicates heavy censorship of Rav Kook's more radical ideas. We especially see this in a "leaked" online version of an unedited notebook from Rav Kook's time in Boisk (1896-1904). Because of the "leak" (the motivations of which I have been unable to ascertain), we have gotten a glimpse of the censorship that occurs when Rav Kook's writings are published [19].

This relatively new notebook is interesting in its own right. Rav Kook's closest student, Rabbi David Cohen (known as the Nazir of Jerusalem) named the notebook in his commentary to Rabbi Judah HaLevi's *Kuzari* as "*Moreh Nevukhim HaHadash*" - "The New Guide for the Perplexed." As one can imagine, it contains extended essays on major points in Rav Kook's worldview that attempt to resolve some of the most vexing problems in Judaism of the time. Soon after the leak, the Mekhon Rav Tzvi Yehudah published the "official" version of this book, in *Pinkesei ha-Re'iyah*, vol. 2. Since both the censored and uncensored versions are available, one can clearly see that, again, the censorship is heavy-handed. Sometimes, one can understand the caution, but sometimes it is quite difficult. As Rav Pesach Wolicki of Yeshivat Yesodei HaTorah pointed out to me, it is true that Rav Kook did not necessarily write many of his notebooks for straight publication, and their haphazard style and random content indicate that they were surely not meant to be published without some editorial process; thus, the censorship could be justified.

Naor himself points out that the controversy surrounding Rav Kook's writings had such an effect on him that in 1924, prior to the publishing of Rav Kook's *Orot HaTeshuvah*, Rav Kook sent a letter to his son R. Tzvi Yehudah Kook begging him to be more careful in publishing Rav Kook's writings. "For God's sake," he writes, "be exacting that nothing is issued which is not thoroughly explained."

However, some edits are unclear in their intent, occasionally taking out from one notebook something that already appeared without fanfare elsewhere. As Professor Shapiro notes, there have been many of these "edits" with regard to Rav Kook's view of the ceasing of animal sacrifices, even though we know his views from elsewhere. Indeed, sometimes the censorship is not just protecting Rav Kook, but also even changing the thrust of his thought, or even his view entirely, which is surely a larger offense. Let us return, then, to the issue of Rav Kook's supposed Christophobia. The subject of Christianity and other

religions in general is much discussed in *Li-Nevukhei ha-Dor* and was heavily censored as well.

This should not come as such a surprise - with the background we saw above and Rav Tzvi Yehudah's reaction to controversies over his father. In this notebook, Rav Kook argues extensively for a Hegelian-like view of knowledge and truth. That is, all of history is guided by some divine Spirit that causes all historical movements to move toward a unified truth [20].

With this, Rav Kook allows for truth within Christianity and Islam, a truth that Jews should not seek to tamper with. Indeed, there is tremendous value in encouraging Christians and Muslims to stay true to their beliefs, because they will be lost without this guiding movement they have become used to. The censorship of these passages robs modern Judaism of a beautiful framework in which to view other religions. Indeed, finding purpose to other religions started before Rav Kook. Maimonides himself had a controversial view of Christianity and Islam in his Laws of Kings (11:4), which was also censored. Maimonides famously writes that there is a divine purpose for Christianity and Islam. Though "there is no greater stumbling block than Christianity," and the relentless Christian persecution of Jews has scattered us and nearly destroyed us, still, the world is now a step closer to a messianic movement that allows for a messianic age to occur. God's plans are inscrutable, he writes, but it seems that through the widespread adoption of Christianity and Islam, the end-of-days state predicted by the prophets such as Zephaniah is that much easier to achieve.

This concept, that God's providence can use human religious activity and turn it into a tool for perfection of the world, for Rav Kook, allows for even greater acceptance and possibility of truth in other religions. In the censored Chapter 8 of *Li-Nevukhei ha-Dor*, Rav Kook argues that all religions that allow for the development of higher moral values are hitting on a divine truth that is important and valuable. With this belief in divine providence, he grants the possibility that the leaders who founded those religions could have truly had a low form of prophecy ("divine ideas"), and even actually performed miracles ("perceptible wonders"). Since this may be surprising, I have provided my own translation of this section below.

It is possible that the founders [of those religions] had a divine idea for them to strive to improve the impressionable part of humanity however much they could. For this purpose, it is possible that some perceptible wonders were prepared for them, if they needed to strengthen [their messages], since this is relevant to humanity's improvement, for the hand of God stretches from the beginning of existence to the end. However, the mistaken aspects that got mixed into [those religions] is only that which [makes] it impossible for their formula to be the true formula for guidance to perfection's end, for it is fitting that there be [just] one spiritual center in the world.

For Rav Kook, Judaism is certainly a correct system since it believes in monotheism along with the belief that there can only be one spiritual authoritative center to guide the world, which for him will create ultimate unity of humanity. As he states in Chapter 7:

Just as it is impossible for the system of an individual, state to develop except through a central body that is situated in one place, a king, or a legislature, so too the world cannot reach the perfection of this system unless there was some set center in one place...

It makes sense that in apportioning to every nation the field of endeavor that is unique to it,^[xv] the field of perfected spirituality of life would fall into the domain of Israel, for they are suited to this through the Torah of God that they have, and because of the fitness of their elevated spirit for things that are very lofty, and from the standpoint of their share in general history, which is their longstanding mission to enlighten the world with knowledge of God even in the darkest and most hateful times, and how much more so in times of light and love.

Absent this belief that all nations must work together in their unique talents, with Judaism in Israel focusing on spiritual growth, other religions have made a mistake. Besides for this error, humanity nevertheless improves through religion; the divine progression of religious communities goes so far as to allow even the possibility that their founders performed miracles.

Rav Kook admits that granting truth to other religions is not a common one in Judaism. He states in the censored Chapter 14a:

There are other people who think that a person can only properly have perfect faith in the Moses' true Torah so long as one also believes that other faiths are all "false and foolish", and that there is nothing positive in holding fast to them. However, it is not true. However, there are ideas that the Jewish nation is accustomed to which cause much of the masses to think this. This view is indeed useful in that it sometimes strengthens Jewish faith in the hearts of fools, for they cannot understand the lofty value and the holiness of our holy Torah without also thinking of other faiths as mistaken and useless. However, there is also much evil that comes from this view if it is not corrected. For, the contempt that is imprinted deep in the heart of the masses for other faiths, also causes people to be secular, wicked people who also consider pure Jewish faith the same in this regard, and they say, "Both ways are equal, this is a faith and that is a faith."

Thus, not only is it a false notion, but it damages the Jewish religion to believe that other religions have nothing redeeming about them or are not on the path of truth. Rav Kook was evidently concerned with the implications that such a belief holds when one of our own leaves our path.

When such a person is taught that all other religions are false, and then later comes to the belief that his own religion is false, Judaism lose him to atheism and pure secularism, instead of perhaps a lower level of religious Judaism, or some other religious outlook.

The influence of Hegel [21]

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is probably the most important and influential philosopher of the last 200 years. It is Hegel who

articulated concepts that we have all inherited in the present: “death of God,” the dialectic as unfolding history which leads to the “end of history,” the idea of Absolute Spirit or the Absolute Idea that unites us all in common cause, and he is, in other ways, a spiritual godfather to Marxism, Romanticism, liberalism, cultural relativism and particularism, fascism, national conservatism, and American Transcendentalism.



Hegel rejects the traditional Christian understanding of not only anthropology, the nature of the Trinity, and the purpose of the incarnation. For Hegel, the Trinity is not a unity of three eternally together (pluralism) in a relationship of love, the incarnation does not lead to restoration and re-harmonization of the tug of war between concupiscence and wisdom seeking to work together, and the god-man is not that which naturally draws us to him since he is not Logos incarnate. Instead, Hegel’s dialectical theology embodies his own idealistic monism and tripartite dialectic.

The absolute idea in theology, in some sense, is God the Father, but it also not God the Father.

The absolute idea in theology, in some sense, is Jesus the incarnate god-man, but it is also not the incarnate Christ. For Hegel, the true absolute idea in theology is the Holy Spirit. Many Charismatic, Pentecostal, and low-church evangelical traditions that place their emphasis on the “power of the Holy Spirit,” and other language about the primacy of the Holy Spirit, are unknowingly following Hegel’s theology of the “cult of the Holy Spirit.” For Hegel, just as with his view of History, theology is about the absolute idea becoming concrete in history. We can call Hegel’s theology a form of *concrete theology*.

God starts off as Father but becomes sublated through the incarnation. God the Father ceases as God the Father as he becomes God the Son, who is also sublated at the moment of Crucifixion and becomes the Holy Spirit (the universal community, or the universal church of believers). The Holy Spirit, as the Absolute Idea of God in theology, is the movement of God to humanity and condescending to humanity. God the Father, that Transcendent and never to be reached God as presented in classical theism, slowly permeates himself into the world “to become one with us.”

Hegel’s reading of Scripture, in conjuncture with his Lutheranism, confirms the dialectic Trinity of self-exhaustion into pure Spirit. The Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) is the tale of God the Father.

The Gospels, which tell us about the god-man Christ, are the tale of the incarnate God made man. The ending Epistles and other New Testament writings tell us about the post-Crucifixion God, who poured himself out to humanity and “his church” at Pentecost as Luke informs his readers in the Book of Acts. The ending of the Bible is not God the Father of God the Son, but God the community – Paul’s Epistles, in particular, tell us the story not of God or Christ, but of his church, which is to say, *of his community or Spirit*.

For Hegel, Scripture unfolds in three motions: the search for God (the Old Testament), God coming to meet us in our search (the Gospels), and us knowing God through community (the Epistles); God is now made concrete in history. In Hegel’s historicist theology, God becomes what humanity desires.

As Hegel himself says, community is principally built on conflict and suffering, and God himself takes this form so we may know him and know true community, the suffering of God “*is a moment in the nature of God himself; it has taken place in God himself.*”

God as suffering reveals the true nature of God in suffering because human life is about suffering, suffering and struggle is what his church should become and don in homage to the God that suffered and taught how to suffer. God’s church struggles to overcome the suffering of the world, the conflict in the world, and the push by “Satanic” forces that attempt to denigrate and destroy community (since community is the ultimate embodiment of God’s Spirit).

We can already hear the overtures of liberal Protestants echoing Hegel without even knowing it. In Hegel’s view, God is dead because God has poured himself out to humanity in his action of divine love.

How these words echo for me as the suffering Schechina the lost princess of rebbe Nachman as I have described earlier [22].

I continue to struggle between my right hemispheric brain’s intuitive sense of the sublime and a higher power who my father called his 3 angels who saved him during the war from impending death, and through my own spiritual practice submit to a cosmic sense of the divine immanent in my life paradoxically. And my left hemispheric analytic mind that cannot reconcile the Spinozian concept of a non-personal spirit and all the theodicy issues of our generation and the sneaking suspicion that Hegel’s fellowship (for him “In Christ” for us the “Chevraya Kadisha) might be all we have.

May the struggle continue!

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