

Martin Buber, “A Conversion” In my earlier years the “religious” was for me the exception. There were hours that were taken out of the course of things. From somewhere or other the firm crust of everyday was pierced. Then the reliable permanence of appearances broke down; the attack which took place burst its law asunder. “Religious experience” was the experience of an otherness which did not fit into the context of life. ... The “religious” lifted you out. Over there now lay the accustomed existence with its affairs, but here illumination and ecstasy and rapture held, without time or sequence. The illegitimacy of such a division of the temporal life, ..., was brought home to me by an everyday event, an event of judgment...What happened was no more than that one forenoon, after a morning of “religious” enthusiasm, I had a visit from an unknown young man, without being there in spirit. I certainly did not fail to let the meeting be friendly, I did not treat him any more remissly than all his contemporaries who were in the habit of seeking me out about this time of day as an oracle that is ready to listen to reason. I conversed attentively and openly with him—only I omitted to guess the questions which he did not put. Later, not long after, I learned from one of his friends—he himself was no longer alive—the essential content of these questions; I learned that he had come to me not casually, but borne by destiny, not for a chat but for a decision. He had come to me, he had come in this hour. What do we expect when we are in despair and yet go to a man? Surely a presence by means of which we are told that nevertheless there is meaning. Since then I have given up the “religious” which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken. The mystery is no longer disclosed, it has escaped or it has made its dwelling here fullness but each mortal hour’s fullness of claim and responsibility. Though far from being equal to it, yet I know that in the claim I am claimed and may respond in responsibility, and know who speaks and demands a response. I do not know much more. If that is religion then it is just everything, simply all that is lived in its possibility of dialogue.

Relating to God In every sphere in its own way, through each process of becoming that is present to us, we look out toward the fringe of the Eternal You; in each we are aware of a breath from the Eternal You; in each You we address the Eternal You...The You meets me through grace -- it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being, is indeed *the* act of my being....

...Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal You...Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You. The mediatorship of the You of all beings accounts for the fullness of our relationships to them--and for the lack of fulfillment. The innate You is actualized each time without ever being perfected. It attains perfection solely in the immediate relationship to the You that in accordance with its nature cannot become an It.

Men have addressed their eternal You by many names. When they sang of what they had thus named, they still meant You: the first myths were hymns of praise. Then the names entered into the It-language; men felt impelled more and more to think of and to talk about their eternal You as an It. But all names of God remain hallowed because they have been used not only to speak *of* God but also to speak *to* him...

“Herut, On Youth and Religion” We are not concerned, then, with imposing religion upon youth, or with forcing it into a system of the knowable and doable, but with awakening youth’s own latent religion; that means: its willingness to confront, unwaveringly, the impact of the unconditional. We must not preach to youth that God’s revelation becomes manifest in only one, and in no other, way; rather, we must show it that nothing is incapable of becoming a receptacle of revelation. We must not proclaim to youth that God can be served by only one, and by no other, act, but we must make it clear that every deed is hallowed if it radiates the spirit of unity. We must not ask young people to avow as exclusively binding in their lives only that which emanated at some hour of the past, but we must affirm for them that “every man has his hour” when the gate opens for him and the word becomes audible to him. We who stand in awe of that which is unknowable do not want to transmit to youth a knowledge of God’s nature and work. We who consider life as more divine than laws and rules do not want to regulate the life of youth by laws and rules attributed to God. We want to help youth not to bypass its destiny, not to miss its metaphysical self-discovery by being asleep, and to respond when it senses within itself the power of the unconditional. By so doing, we do not diminish the openness of youth but promote and affirm it; do not curtain any of its windows, but let it absorb the all-encompassing view; do not shut off any

road, but make it easier for youth to see that all roads, if walked in truth and consecration, lead to the threshold of the Divine.

Franz Rosensweig “**The Builders, Concerning the Law**” *Law* must again become *commandment* which seeks to be transformed into deed at the very moment it is heard. It must regain that *living reality* in which all great Jewish periods have sensed the guarantee for its eternity. Like teaching, it must consciously start where its content stops being content and becomes *inner power*, our own inner power. Inner power which in turn is added to the substance of the law. ... what counts here, too, is not our will but our ability to act. Here too the decisive thing is the selection which our ability - without regard to our will makes out of the wealth of the possible deeds. Since this selection does not depend on the will but on our ability, it is a very personal one; for while a general law can address itself with its demands to the will, ability carries 'in itself' its own law; there is only my, your, his ability and, built on them, ours; not everybody's. Therefore, whether much is done, or little, or maybe nothing at all, is immaterial in the face of the one and unavoidable demand; that whatever is being done, shall come from that inner power. As the knowledge of everything knowable is not yet wisdom, so the doing of everything do-able is not yet deed. The deed is created at the boundary of the merely do-able, where the voice of the commandment causes the spark to leap from "I must" to "I can." The Law is built on such commandments, and only on them.

The growth of the Law is thus entrusted once again to our loving care. Nobody should be allowed to tell us what belongs to its spheres, as nobody was allowed to tell us what belonged to the sphere of teaching. ... This is what the appeal to ability means. As our whole being is at every moment placed before the task of returning home, not only certain layers and domains of being... A decision based on ability cannot err, since it is not choosing, but listening and therefore only accepting. For this reason no one can take another person to task, though he can and should teach him; because only I know what I can do; only my own ear can hear the voice of my own being which I have to reckon with.

Abraham Joshua Heschel Israel's religion originated in the initiative of God rather than in the efforts of man. It was not an invention of man but a creation of God; not a product of civilization, but a realm of its own. Man would not have known Him if He had not approached man. God's relation to man precedes man's relation to Him. The mystic experience is man's turning toward God; the prophetic act is God's turning toward man. The former is first of all an event in the life of man, contingent on the aspiration and initiative of man; the latter is first of all an event in the life of God, contingent on the pathos and initiative of God. From the mystic experience we may gain an insight of man into the life of God; from the prophetic act we learn of an insight of God into the life of man. Therefore, to characterize revelation as a prophetic insight or experience is to reduce a reality to a perception. Seen from man's aspect, to receive a revelation is to witness how God is turning toward man. It is not an act of gazing at the divine reality, a static and eternal mystery. The prophet is in the midst of a divine event, of an event in the life of God, for in addressing the prophet, God comes out of His imperceptibility to become audible to man. The full intensity of the event is not in the fact that "man hears" but in the "fact" that "God speaks" to man. The mystic experience is an ecstasy of man; revelation is an ecstasy of God. As described by the prophets in terms of time and space, the act of revelation represents the image of a transcendent event as reflected in the restricted terms of human experience. Its indigenous quality is to be found in the creative fact of how the divine was carried into the concrete experience of man. Imbued with a sense of the crushing marvel of God's reality, compared with which mankind appeared to be less than nothingness, the prophets must have been more astounded about their experience than any one of us to whom the transcendence of God is only a vague concept, of which we occasionally become aware in calm speculation. To sum up, revelation is a moment in which God succeeded in reaching man; an event to God and an event to man. To receive a revelation is to witness how God is turning toward man.

The degree of our appreciation of the Bible is determined by the degree of our sensitivity to the divine dignity of human deeds. The insight into the divine implications of human life is the distinct message of the Bible. The Bible has shattered man's illusion of being alone. Sinai broke the cosmic silence that thickens our blood with

despair. God does not stand aloof from our cries; He is not only a pattern, but a power, and life is a response, not a soliloquy. The Bible shows the way of God with man and the way of man with God. It contains both the complaint of God against the wicked and the shriek of the smitten man, demanding justice of God. And there dwells also in its pages reminders of man's incredible callousness and obstinacy, of his immense capacity to bring about his doom as well as the assurance that beyond all evil is the compassion of God. He who seeks an answer to the most pressing question, what is living? will find an answer in the Bible: man's destiny is to be a partner rather than a master. There is a task, a law, and a way: the task is redemption, the law, to do justice, to love mercy, and the way is the secret of being human and holy. When we are gasping with despair, when the wisdom of science and the splendor of the arts fail to save us from fear and the sense of futility, the Bible offers us the only hope: history is a circuitous way for the steps of the Messiah.

Mordecai Kaplan [I] assume that man, once his physiological needs are satisfied, begins to experience the need to overcome such traits as self-indulgence, arrogance, envy, exploitation and hatred, or to bring under control the aggressive forces of his nature. That constitutes man's true destiny. Therein lies his salvation. From that point, it is natural to arrive at the next step, which requires no blind leap into the dark. The next step is to conclude that the cosmos is so constituted as to enable man to fulfill this highest human need.

A magnetic needle, hung on a thread or placed on a pivot, assumes of its own accord a position in which one end of the needle points north and the other south. So long as it is free to move about, all attempts to deflect it will not get it to remain away from its normal direction. Likewise, man normally veers in the direction of that which makes for the fulfillment of his destiny as a human being. That fact indicates the functioning of a cosmic Power which influences his behavior. What magnetism is to the magnetic needle, Godhood or God is to man.

To carry the analogy one step further, just as the magnetic needle is the source of our knowledge of the earth's magnetism, so is man's salvational behavior the source of our knowledge of God. And just as we learn from the action of the magnetic needle the laws of magnetism so do we learn from man's salvational behavior, which we come progressively really to understand, the law or will of God... *The fact that the cosmos possesses the resources and man the abilities -- which are themselves part of those resources -- to enable him to fulfill his destiny as a human being, or to achieve salvation -- is the Godhood of the cosmos.*

Harold Schulweis The Torah is the selective record of Israel's extraordinary religious interpretation of its collective experience during the formative period of its career. The origin of Torah lies not in an extramundane source which has cast down absolute truths upon a receiving people, nor is it the arbitrary projection of human inventiveness flung upward. Torah is rooted in the matrix of a living organism, in a people which discovers out of its existence with failure and fortune the powers of godliness residing within it and its total environment. Torah as revelation is the product of Israel's creative transaction with history....

Conscience is the inner witness to the covenant that carries the divine and human signatures.The status and role of conscience in religion cast a different complexion on revelation. Revelation is not a one-way directive from above or a human projection from below. Revelation is the dialogue of reciprocal covenant, an ongoing process of listening and interpreting, of receiving and giving. Awareness of having entered the covenant makes it impossible to separate the divine and human element in the encounter of revelation. Conscience is the hyphen of the human-divine covenant that runs both ways. Conscience and commandment are not rivals but co-respondents of a moral covenant.

Yehuda Amichai

My father was God and did not know it.

He gave me the ten commandments neither in thunder nor in fury, neither in fire nor in cloud

But rather with gentleness and love. And he added caresses and kind words.

He added "I beg you" and "please. And he sang "keep" and "remember"

In a single melody and he pleaded and cried quietly between one utterance and the next,

Do not take the name of God in vain, do not take it, not in vain, I beg you, do not bear false witness against

your neighbor. And he hugged me tightly and whispered in my ear “Do not steal. Do not commit adultery. Do not murder.” And he put the palms of his open hands on my head with the Yom Kippur blessing. Honor, love, in order that your days might be long on the earth. And my father’s voice was white like the hair on his head. Later on he turned his face to me one last time like on the day when he died in my arms and said, I want to add Two to the ten commandments: The eleventh commandment, “Thou shalt not change.” And the twelfth commandment, “Thou must surely change.” So said my father and then he turned from me and walked off disappearing into his strange distances.