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INTRODUCTION

MY THEOLOGICAL JOURNEY

The process of selecting the material to be included in this book provided me with an opportunity to trace my theological journey from where I was some forty years ago to where I am today, and to anticipate the unfinished work that still lies ahead.

I entered The Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York as a rabbinical student in 1954, simultaneously enrolling as a doctoral student in philosophy at Columbia University. I had had a limited background in Hebrew and Judaica, but I was a philosophy and French literature major at McGill University in Montreal. I was introduced to Jewish philosophy when I attended a lecture by Will Herberg at McGill Hillel. That lecture changed my life. I was then a young twenty-year-old, and this was the first time I had heard anything about Judaism that I found intellectually engaging. Jewish learning became my first priority. Three Seminary graduate rabbis in Montreal and a conversation with the then dean of Jewish philosophers, Harvard's Harry Austryn Wolfson, guided me to the Seminary. As Wolfson reminded me, whatever I planned to do in Jewish philosophy, I needed a basic Jewish education which I had never had, and the Seminary would provide me with that.

My Seminary years were at once exhilarating and frustrating: exhilarating for the sheer intellectual energy of the place and the richness of the material that I was encountering for the first time, and frustrating because of the disdain with which the school treated theology and philosophy. I have spent the better part of five decades trying to change that pattern without significant success.

Upon my ordination in 1960, Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, the seminary's chancellor, offered me the first in a series of administrative positions in the rabbinical school. I interviewed applicants, counseled students, assumed increasing responsibility for the administration of the school, and began to teach part-time. The gratification that I derived from my Seminary responsibilities undoubtedly contributed to a certain ambivalence about my doctoral work at Columbia. Ultimately however, I did complete the doctorate, left the Seminary administration behind, and began writing and teaching full-time.

My choice of a dissertation topic was more significant than I thought at the time. I had always wanted to write on religious epistemology. Did theological statements constitute valid knowledge claims, or were they covertly a form of poetry, expressing purely subjective feelings? Were they in principle capable of being true or false? That issue would haunt my thinking for decades.

I decided to write on the French Catholic existentialist Gabriel Marcel. First, having been raised in French Canada, French was my native language; second, his thought had been relatively unexplored in America and in English; and third, his approach was surprisingly Heschelian, though much more systematic and rigorous. Apart from the epistemological issues, he also wrote at length on the theological valence of hope and on our relationship to our bodies—two issues that, again to my surprise, became central to my agenda years later when I began to study Jewish views on the afterlife.

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tinued to communicate with him while in rabbinical school. First, his style—blunt, passionate, engaged—was hardly indicative of a detached professor of philosophy. What I heard was a more popular version of Buberian existentialism than I had studied in my philosophy courses at McGill, but it reflected a Jewish dimension entirely new to me. I learned other things from that lecture: first, there was a discipline called Jewish philosophy; second, Jewish philosophy had always nursed from philosophical currents in the Western world at large; and third, in its contemporary mode, this material spoke to personal issues that were apparently lurking in my subconscious.

So I entered the Seminary with a bifurcated personal theology: theological existentialism together with a halakhic traditionalism common to newly engaged Jews. The traditionalism was challenged almost from the outset by my Seminary studies. It became clear to me that few of my teachers and fellow students believed that God had spoken at Sinai or that the Exodus and revelation at Sinai were historical events. Much of biblical religion, I learned, was borrowed—however transformed in the process—from the surrounding cultures. Biblical criticism, both “lower” (text criticism) and “higher” (source criticism), was the reigning methodology. I found the conclusions of this inquiry intellectually convincing, but what it did to my theology, preeminently to my sense of the authority behind my observance, was another matter.

That encounter had a lasting impact on my theological evolution. From that moment, I sensed that the core theological issue was revelation. Either Torah was the explicit word of God or it was not. If not, then the words of Torah were human words, whatever role God played in the revelatory encounter. The remaining alternatives seemed to be slippery. If Torah was substantively a human document, then, first, it was the human community from the outset that served as the authority on matters of belief and practice; second, it became clear why biblical religion, as well as all later iterations of Judaism, would be shaped by the prevailing foreign cultures; and third, Judaism had

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always been and would continue to be whatever Jews said it was. This set of conclusions was echoed by the rest of my Seminary educators. Most of my teachers were historians, and their overriding message was that Judaism had a history—that everything Jewish had changed all the time, and, we assumed, would continue to change.

Now, every time I teach Jewish theology, I begin with the issue of revelation. I remain convinced that how we deal with this determines how we handle the issue of authority in belief and practice. How we understand authority determines how we deal with the claims of the tradition on us; how we deal with those claims determines how we shape our own Judaism. That conclusion opens the gate to a reconsideration of all of Judaism’s theology, in particular how we understand God, for God is at the heart of Torah. With nontraditional understandings of revelation in place, where then did our ancestors learn of God? What is the standing of the varied and changing images of God that appear in our classical texts? What is the status of what theologians call “God-talk”?

Not all of these conclusions were obvious to me at the outset, and it took many years before they formed a coherent personal theology. But the germ was there. My theological journey can be understood as working through the implications of this original epiphany. If there has been a major focus to all of my teaching, it has been to affirm that a coherent theology is indispensable as the basis for a Jewish religious identity, and as part of that theology, to articulate a view of revelation that can support how one understands the authority of Jewish law.

My journey paralleled that of one of my teachers, Mordecai Kaplan. I studied with Kaplan for the first time in my second year without any prior sense of what he was going to teach me. Kaplan was then in his last years at the Seminary—he had joined the faculty in 1909 and was to retire in 1962—and his glory days as the icon of the faculty were behind him. The rising star in the faculty firmament was Abraham Joshua Heschel, whose neo-Hasidic traditionalism seemed much more responsive to my

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post-Holocaust sensibility. I was a newly crafted, newly observant religious existentialist. I came to the Seminary to study with Heschel; I was quite unprepared for Kaplan.

I studied with Kaplan for two academic years and fought him throughout. It took about a decade for me to realize that Kaplan was the only one of my teachers who could resolve all of the conflicts created by the Seminary approach to Jewish studies. Kaplan pulled together theology, ideology, and program. It was not until I began to teach and felt the need to formulate a coherent theology of my own that I rediscovered Kaplan. Kaplan may have taught me methodology, yet it was Heschel who taught me what it means to live the life of a religious Jew. I continue to have significant issues with the thinking of both of my teachers, but I also remain indebted to them.

The other thinker who shaped my thinking was Paul Tillich. Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith*, which I read for my work at Columbia, gave me the vocabulary for capturing the power of Jewish theological claims once I no longer could believe that they represented the explicit word of a supernatural God. The terms *symbol* and *myth* (in the academic sense of the latter) became omnipresent in my teaching and writing, however much criticism they inspired.

My identification with the thinking of Kaplan and Tillich represented my gradual shift toward religious naturalism. That shift represented my growing awareness that if religions are the creation of a human community, then to grasp why any religion emerged the way it did demanded an understanding of why people are the way they are. That inquiry was properly the domain of the social sciences. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz's seminal essay "Religion as a Cultural System" then pulled together all of the various strands of what had been a disjointed study. It helped me understand just how a religion, in all of its complexity, functions. I refer to it throughout my work. Geertz taught me that religion is much more than theology.

More recently, as an outgrowth of my work on religious epistemology, I have begun to read in neuroscience. Knowledge

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is the work of the brain, and it has become a source of radical amazement (to quote Heschel) to me how biological processes in my brain can lead to a concept of God. More than a decade ago, at the invitation of the late Dr. Mortimer Ostow, a prominent psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, I began meeting with a group of psychoanalysts and Seminary colleagues to explore the psychological effects of prayer. This workshop, which began with a close reading of psalms and the liturgy, has now focused on the psychodynamics of faith development. There is a growing literature in the new field of neurotheology that awaits me.

A few words about this book. Considerations of space compelled me to select less than half of the material that, under ideal circumstances, I would have wanted to include. I selected weightier material over slighter content, and more recent publications over earlier ones. I have also aimed to cover the broader range of theological issues covered in my teaching.

I have tried to preserve the individual versions of this material as originally published. In line with my current practice, however, I have edited them to avoid using masculine pronouns for God, or the assumption that every rabbi and every Jew was a "he." Occasionally, I altered a formulation that I now found to be unacceptably awkward. In the endnotes, I updated bibliographical data to reflect more recent editions of certain books.

I must express my profound indebtedness to my students who have helped me prepare this volume for publication. Daniel Ain, now Rabbi Daniel Ain, has been my primary research assistant for more than three years. He worked closely with me from the outset. I am thrilled that he will be moving on to a career in the rabbinate, and I wish him much fulfillment. More recent conversations with Noah Farkas, now Rabbi Noah Farkas, helped clarify my theological agenda. Amiel Hersh was responsible for obtaining permission to republish this material from copyright holders. Nava Kogen worked on converting the original, previously published articles into a tech-friendly format. Philip Weintraub reviewed the last revisions of the manuscript and

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I have never believed that scholarly research can be detached from classroom teaching. In one form or another, the substance of this book has been shared with my students in Seminary classrooms and in congregations around the country. More recently, Rabbi Leon Morris, executive director of the Skirball Center for Adult Jewish Learning at Congregation Emanu-El in New York City, has afforded me new opportunities to teach serious adult Jewish learners. All of my students in all of these settings have a share in this work and I thank them for that.

This is the fifth of my books to be published by Stuart M. Matlins and his staff at Jewish Lights Publishing. As before, I can only testify to both the graciousness and the sheer competence of everyone in Woodstock, Vermont. Emily Wichland, again, worked closely with me on every detail from the original proposal to the final product, often on a day-to-day basis. Would that every author might enjoy such cooperation!

My wife Sarah, my daughters Abby and Debby, my sons-in-law Michael and Danny, and my grandchildren Jacob, Ellen, Livia, and Judah are an unceasing source of joy and support in all I do.

The publication of this book anticipates my imminent retirement from the Seminary after more than five decades of association with the school, its administration, and my colleagues on the faculty—a community of men and women whose human qualities are fully the equal of their scholarly achievements. I will continue to teach in other settings, but I anticipate more time to read, reflect, study, and write.

I conclude by echoing the words of the morning liturgy, the very words that my teacher Mordecai Kaplan used to open every one of his classes: May God, who has enabled me to reach this day, grant me the discernment and the understanding to heed, study, teach, and fulfill all the words of God's Torah with love.

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CHAPTER 1

I BELIEVE

I believe, first, that the function of religion is to discern and describe the sense of an ultimate order that pervades the universe and human experience. With that sense of an ordered world intact, we human beings also have a place, we belong, we feel ultimately “at home”; without it, we are in exile, “homeless” and our lives are without meaning. The whole purpose of religion, its liturgies, rituals, and institutions, is to highlight, preserve, and concretize this sense of cosmos, and to recapture it in the face of the chaos that hovers perpetually around the fringes of our lives as we live them within history.

THE NATURE OF GOD

I believe that all human characterizations of God are metaphors borrowed from familiar human experience. Precisely because God transcends all human conceptualization, we can only think of God through metaphors. Our ancestors discovered God in their experience of nature and history. Those experiences, as understood, interpreted, and then recorded in Torah and the rest

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of our classical literature, serve as the spectacles through which we recapture the experience of God for ourselves. They teach us what to look for, how to see, and how to interpret what we see. We discover God, but we invent the metaphors that capture the variegated qualities of our experiences of God. They bring God into our lives and then in turn, help us discover God anew.

Our tradition provides us with a rich kaleidoscopic system of metaphors for God. We appropriate some of these, reject others, and add some of our own that reflect our personal experience of God. I accept most of those traditional metaphors—for example, that God is unique, personal, ultimate yet remarkably vulnerable to human claims, that God creates, reveals, and redeems, and that God is the ultimate source and principle of this ordered world—precisely as metaphors.

Knitted together, these metaphors form the complex Torah myth. This myth provides the structure of meaning that explains why things, including all of nature and history together with the realities of the human experience in all its complexity, are the way they are for us as Jews.

COVENANT

I believe that the covenant is the linchpin of the Jewish myth, the primary metaphor for Jewish self-understanding. But the covenant is itself the implication of a far more subtle characterization of God, what Heschel tried to capture in his use of the term "God's pathos." God entered into a covenant with the Jewish people because ultimately God cares desperately about creation, about people, and about our social structures. A caring God enters into relationships with communities. The fact that our ancestors used this metaphor for their relationship with God is further testimony to their concern with structure, for it is precisely their sense of covenantedness that led to their further understanding of law as the primary form of Jewish religious expression.

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AUTHORITY

I believe that the ultimate locus of authority for what we believe and how we practice as Jews is in ourselves. That is the irreversible gift of modernity. I also believe that we can and must voluntarily surrender some of that authority, primarily to our communities, for without community we would be totally bereft (without a *minyan*, I cannot genuinely worship as a Jew), and ultimately to God as we experience God in commanding relationship with us. But we reserve the right to determine how, and in what areas, and to what extent we surrender that authority. In the last analysis, we obligate ourselves.

DIASPORA

I believe that one of the necessary implications of the notion of the monotheistic God is that God is accessible to any human being, from any point on earth. The Bible presents various models about how sacred space is created, but one of those models, central to all of later Jewish history, is that it is the Jewish community that sanctifies space simply by determining that it is from this point on earth that we will address God. There is then no overriding *religious* (though there may be a political or social) objection to the claim that we can live fully religious lives as Jews wherever we find ourselves. This is not meant to undermine the claim that our historic *national* ties can *best* be fulfilled in a land that is ours. But it also recognizes that the diaspora community, from antiquity to our own day, has contributed richly to the resolution of manifold religious and spiritual issues for Jews throughout the world.

DEATH AND THE END OF DAYS

I believe that an inherent part of the way we structure time as Jews must include a vision of the end of days. Creation and

eschatology form the parentheses for the Jewish understanding of time. They characterize the beginning of time and its end, and without a beginning and end, there would be no middle. We would then not know where we stand in the canvas of time, just as a portrait without a frame would lack coherence and integrity. But Jewish eschatology must be understood as part of our mythic structure. As such, it says more about how we are to deal with our lives in the here and now than of what will happen at the end of days. It says that we must understand that the tensions and outbursts of chaos that we experience in the here and now are an inevitable part of our human experience within history, and that they will be banished in an age that will be the total embodiment of cosmos.

I believe that classical Jewish eschatology invariably structures its vision of the cosmos to come at the end as a recapitulation of the cosmos that was at the beginning. For that reason, the emergence of the doctrine of resurrection was an inevitable outcome of the view that death was not part of God's original plan for creation. If death is chaos, then the ultimate embodiment of cosmos will be marked by the death of death, which is the message of the "Had Gadya" hymn with which we conclude our Passover seder, the festive meal that celebrates our earlier redemption.

That at the end, God slaughters the angel of death is, as my teacher Professor Shalom Spiegel used to teach, the culminating victory of the monotheistic idea. If God is truly God, then my death can have no lasting victory over God's power, for God alone enjoys ultimacy. The belief that in time, God will resurrect the dead is also a remarkable testimony to the significance to God of the only lives we have or know, which is as beings incarnate through our bodies in space and time.

ON KNOWING GOD

My burning theological and philosophical issue is religious epistemology—that is, the nature and origins of our knowledge of God. For more than thirty years now, I have been struggling with how, in principle, human beings can gain an awareness or knowledge of God. I recall an extended discussion with one of my teachers at Columbia when the issue was posed in a crude but striking way: Are our theological claims knowledge claims—that is, capable of falsification and verification, of being true or false? Are they factual claims? Do they tell us about something that is "out there," beyond us, beyond our perceiving apparatus? Or are they poetry—that is, purely subjective expressions of personal feelings or wish projections? Or is there some alternative in between these two polar positions? I in no way demean the value of poetry, but I have stubbornly resisted the notion that theology is (only) poetry.

The issue became the subject of my doctoral dissertation on the thought of the early twentieth-century French Catholic existentialist Gabriel Marcel, and I have returned to it again and again in my writing and teaching.

I begin with the methodological assumption that no human being can have a totally objective and literally accurate fix

on God. We have no photographs of God. That is what makes God, God. To claim that human beings can comprehend God's essential nature is to slip into idolatry, the cardinal Jewish sin. Maimonides said that centuries ago. What kind of God could possibly be comprehended by the human mind and human language? Only some idol. One alternative to idolatry is worshipful silence, which would lead to sterile agnosticism. The other, preferable option is the claim that all statements about God are metaphorical or mythical, where a myth is understood as a set of metaphors systematized and extended into a coherent structure of meaning.

To the challenge: do we then invent God? I respond: no, we discover God and invent the metaphors and the myths. Which comes first is not clear. Sometimes, metaphors are revelatory; they enable us to see and identify what we might otherwise ignore. But our metaphors originate in experiences that I claim are veridical. The experiences and the metaphors feed into each other; experiences suggest metaphors that are then refined by later experiences; these refined metaphors, in turn, illuminate new experiences, and the process continues.

But how do I substantiate the claim that the experiences are veridical, that they reveal objective realities? What does it mean to experience God? It would seem that we do not see or experience God as we see or experience an apple (though apparently Moses and the elders in Exodus 24:9, and Isaiah, all did—though we don't really know what precisely they saw; of course, our ancestors frequently heard God's voice, but that raises a host of other questions that we will not address here). But is the difference between seeing God and seeing an apple an intrinsic difference? That is, do we require a dual epistemology, one for knowing natural objects and another for knowing God? Or is there one basic way for humans to experience anything, and hence to acquire knowledge of everything?

I claim that a single epistemology is sufficient. To substantiate that claim, I begin by suggesting three possible analogies for the epistemological process involved in knowing God: seeing

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a basketball team's passing game, seeing an ego, and seeing a quark.

In each of these instances, what we see is patterned activity. In the first, seeing a passing game is different from seeing a star basketball player. We clearly see the player as we see an apple; we know what he looks like or we identify him by the name and number on his shirt. But seeing the passing game involves seeing an in-between activity, a patterned relationship in which the ball is moved back and forth between five players. A passing game is never static, never immobile; it is intrinsically dynamic. This pattern exists over a limited spatial and temporal frame: the basketball court and forty-eight minutes. But it is perfectly clear that we do see a passing game and pass judgments on its quality: sharp, ragged, sloppy, and so on (all, it should be noted, metaphors). Further, though I know nothing about passing games, the coach does, and he can bring a wealth of experience to bear on what he sees and judge it. In other words, there is an interactional quality to this experience; both of us see the same objective game, but, in a way, we also see different games, or we see the one game differently, depending on what we bring to the experience out of ourselves. But there is a passing game out there; it is not an invention of basketball coaches and players.

Similarly, to see an ego is not to see an apple. An ego is not an entity that we can see if we dig deep enough into a human being. (Likewise, the question "where is the psyche?" is silly; the psyche is not in a place.) To see someone's ego is to see one specific, complex, pattern of human behavior, that dimension of the person's behavior which reveals stability and balance. Here too the frame is limited, to the individual human being and his or her life experience. Again, the experience is interactional: the psychologist and I see the same behavior, but the former brings a wealth of professional training and experience—doctoral studies in clinical psychology and years of observing human behavior—that enables him or her to see what I can't see.

To the question "Did Freud (or whoever first talked about egos) discover the ego or invent it?" the answer is clearly

“Both.” Freud discovered the pattern, at least partially because he was looking for it and knew what to look for. But then he identified it, gave it a name, and fitted it into his broader psychodynamic theory (or myth). Freud discovered the ego because it was out there to be discovered. The ego itself, in distinction to its name, is not a fiction, not a pure invention out of the blue.

Another way of saying this is that though the psychologist and I see the same behavior, the psychologist interprets what he or she sees in a way that I can't. “We see with our brains, not with our eyes,” my ophthalmologist claims. All seeing is interactional, and we invariably bring interpretive structures to our seeing. Of course, a psychologist whose interpretive structure (that is, his or her psychodynamic theory) does not include the myth of the ego will not see an ego. Again, we use metaphors to characterize the ego that we see: strong, weak, shaky, flimsy, solid, and so forth.

To elaborate: to see an ego is to see a pattern that is, in a sense, invisible. What we do objectively see is the way the child plays with blocks and interacts with teachers. But the psychologist “sees through” the overt behavior and then “sees” a solid or flimsy ego. Where is the ego? It is “in” the child, or “in” the behavior, or, more precisely, “in” the activity that the child performs.

Finally, let's talk about seeing a quark. Again, seeing a quark is not like seeing an apple.¹ But a trained nuclear physicist brings her interpretive structure (theory or myth) to look at the computer printout of the activity that took place in her supercollider and then claims to see a quark. I look at the same printout and see a chaotic mass of numbers; she sees a quark. Or, she interprets what she sees as a quark, or she “sees through” the printout to the “invisible” quark. Again, the experience is interactional: without the theoretical structure, the physicist would be like me, seeing nothing of significance. Again, the frame is rather limited—but the parallel holds. Does the physicist invent the quark or discover it? Again the answer is both: she discovers the pattern, but because her theory provides her with a name

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and a way to identify it when it is there, she can then see the quark. But the quark-pattern is out there to be discovered; it is not a fictitious creation of the physicist.

Seeing God is like seeing any of these, probably most like seeing an ego, in the sense that God is a pattern of activity that is “in” history and nature, as an ego is “in” the person. Here, the frame of reference is immense, the broadest possible canvas: all of nature, history, and human experience. Again the experience is interactional: the believer brings his interpretive structure (the Torah's religious myth) to his seeing, and sees the pattern that we call God. Do we discover God or do we invent God? Both. We discover the patterns and then identify them, name them, and the names are our inventions, just as we invent the names “ego” and “quark.” We can do this because the patterns are out there to be discovered.

What are these God-patterns? They constitute what I call the core of the classic, metaphorical system for God in Judaism: a sense of the integrity of all things (God is *ehad*, one); a sense of a transcendent reality that governs all of history and nature; a sense that this reality is personal—that is, relates in a personal way with all of reality; and finally, what Heschel, in his book, *The Prophets*, called “the divine pathos,” a sense that this transcendent reality cares about creation and about me.

An excellent biblical description of the process involved in becoming aware of God's presence is Exodus 14:30–31. Here, what the Israelites literally saw were dead Egyptians, but the interpretive structure of the text—the myth, or the perspective of the editor—leads the text to suggest that what they actually “saw” was God's mighty hand. This reading is the basis for the first clause of the passage, the claim that God redeemed the Israelites from Egypt. That claim is actually the conclusion of the passage, though it comes first in the text. Or, more precisely, it reflects the spectacles—the myth—that determined how the editor of the text read the experience at the sea. The same process applies to the canonical interpretations of the Maccabean victory (as recorded in the Chanukah liturgy), or to Joseph's

claim that God's hidden hand was directing the entire history of our ancestors' experience in Egypt (Gen. 50:20), or to the thinking that led the canonizers to include the Book of Esther in the biblical canon (B. Megilla 7a); it leads us to say that it was God who brought about the creation of the modern State of Israel. None of these is objective history; all of it is interpretive history or historiography.

The only way of denying that there is an "out there" or objective dimension to the experience of egos, quarks, and God is by not wanting to see those realities, by not having the ability to see them, by denying the interpretive structure that the beholder uses, or by selecting some other interpretive structure (such as the secular Israeli myth). But we cannot do without some structuring myth; without it, our experience is chaotic, literally meaningless. No one can claim that we invent egos and quarks, unless, again, we don't believe that such realities are there in the first place or that they are worth noting. What we do is identify certain patterns and then give them a name. Or we have the name, and then identify the patterns as, in fact, present in our experience.

Another way of characterizing the process is to use the analogy of the childhood game of connect the dots. We connect the dots by number and we see, say, a bunny rabbit. But what if the dots are without numbers, or if many different numbers are assigned to each dot? There are then multiple ways of connecting the dots. But the various patterns that we uncover in connecting the dots are not invented. They are out there to be discovered.

To use still another language, seeing is not believing. We see what we already believe we will see, or what we expect, or hope, or wish to see, or what we are trained to see.

How different is seeing an ego, quark, or God from seeing an apple? Not intrinsically different. We don't really see an apple; we see a colored patch, and our interpretive structure (our brain) identifies what we see as an apple. The apple may be more exposed to light than an ego, it may require a much less elabo-

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rate interpretive structure, much less education than psychology and physics, but the process is the same. If we were raised in a culture that didn't know of apples, we would see the patch but we would be incapable of identifying what we see. I realize this each time I see some strange tropical fruit in my grocery store. I see something, but I don't know how to identify what I see; the problem is not perceptual but interpretive or epistemological—not with my eyes but with my mind. If we can see an apple, then we can see egos and quarks and God. If we don't really see apples, then, again, we don't really see egos, quarks, and God. In other words, seeing is intrinsically complicated, and there is a subjective input to all seeing, even to seeing an apple.

Are these seeings falsifiable and verifiable? In principle, yes, by the process that John Wisdom, in his seminal paper, "Gods,"² called connecting and disconnecting; that is, by tracing the various patterns that different people see, emphasizing the connections we look for and dismissing the ones that don't cohere with our pattern, and then comparing and sharing them in a social experience. They can be falsifiable because it is, in principle, possible to submit evidence that would lead me to reject any one pattern and the claims it leads me to assert. That is what juries do in complex cases. They share the patterns traced by the prosecution and the defense, reach an agreement on which is the more convincing pattern, and then they acquit or convict. Sometimes, they are hung, unable to reach a verdict, and then the case is argued again. We find an example in the 1995 highly publicized criminal trial of former American football star O. J. Simpson, who was accused and acquitted of murdering his wife and her friend, and the following civil trial in 1997, when the jury found Simpson liable for wrongful death. The two O. J. Simpson juries disagreed on the burden of the evidentiary patterns they were exposed to, partly because the patterns in the two cases differed somewhat, but also because the two juries brought differing interpretive structures to their seeing of the various patterns.

In the case of God, the process of falsification and verification has taken place over centuries in the social context of

Israelite, and later, Jewish history; the patterns are infinitely complex because the canvas is immense, nothing less than all of history, nature, and human experience. There are also many differing patterns. The whole task of Jewish religious education is to train a new generation of Jews to trace and accept the interpretive structure that Jews have used to see the world. That is more complicated than even atomic physics and psychology. True, the process is not as tight as in elementary science, but it is thoroughly appropriate to the subtlety and elusiveness of the data.

Jewish thought is replete with instances of a kind of falsification where later generations repudiate the theological claims of their predecessors. The Book of Job, for example, subverts the classic Torah notion that suffering is inevitably God's punishment for sin; at the very end of the book (42:7-8), God does the subversion, informing Job that the consolers who told him that his suffering was punishment "have not spoken the truth about Me" (though the earlier notion has retained its hold in certain parts of the community, as witness some right-wing responses to the Holocaust). But Jonah 4:2 totally reverses the notion in Exodus 34:6-7 that God must inevitably mete out retribution for sin, because now repentance is in the picture. Here the new notion is canonized in our *Selihot* liturgy on Yom Kippur, and the original Exodus notion is universally recognized as archaic and no longer operative. In each of these cases, the author's personal experience confronted the received tradition, and the personal experience won out. The process as a whole is roughly similar to Thomas S. Kuhn's description of how scientific paradigms are overthrown in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.³

If seeing God is falsifiable and verifiable in the way I have described, then our theological claims are factual. They deal with an "out there." They are not merely poetry. They are also capable of being true or false, using what I call a "soft" correspondence theory of truth. The claims are true because they correspond in a rough kind of way with what generations of Jews have perceived in the world out there, all the time

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acknowledging the complexity of the data against which our claims are measured.

The tension, then, is between the subjectivism and objectivism of religious claims. My conviction is that we can never escape our humanness, the subjective interpretive structures that we bring to all of our experience. Without these structures, we would experience nothing of significance. True, we have no sense of what objective reality looks like, independent of our interpretive structures. But I am also convinced that this inherent subjectivism does not doom all of our theological claims to being pure human inventions, all fictions. What I have tried to indicate through the analogies suggested above is that we have familiar ways of gaining knowledge of realities that are elusive, beyond the range of normal human perception, but remain real, objectively the case, and hence factually valid.

CHAPTER 7

THE JEWISH PHILOSOPHER IN SEARCH OF A ROLE

Two issues dominate the agenda of Jewish philosophy today. They are, more accurately, metaphilosophical issues in the sense that they deal not so much with substantive questions, like the nature of God, but more with the Jewish philosophical enterprise itself in our contemporary setting. The two issues are closely interrelated; the second can be dealt with only in terms of our responses to the first. Neither is totally new, but each has gained added urgency because of the specific conditions of Jewish life today. Finally, both have been largely ignored by contemporary Jewish philosophers.

The first is the attempt to define the specific tasks and unique responsibilities that the contemporary setting poses to the Jewish philosopher, and raises the broader issue of the role of Jewish philosophy in the process of contemporary Jewish self-definition. The second is the attempt to define parameters of authenticity for a contemporary Jewish philosophical statement. What makes any such statement authentically Jewish? What would make it inauthentic? Which Jewish philosophers should be taught, preached, or discussed? Which should be ignored or dismissed? And who decides?

This issue raises the broader question of authority in Jewish philosophy.

For the purpose of these analyses, the term "Jewish philosophy" will be used to indicate the broad range of ideological issues raised in the search for a positive Jewish identity. For many of us, some of these issues will be more narrowly theological in the sense that they will assume that Jewish identity has to be understood in religious terms.

The most revealing fact about the place of philosophy in Judaism is that no compilation of the body of commandments that are incumbent on every Jew includes among its number a mitzvah that an authentic Jew should "do" philosophy. Maimonides begins his *Mishneh Torah* with the principle that there is a First Being and that to acknowledge this principle is a mitzvah.¹ Given what we know about Maimonides' philosophical predilections, his intention was undoubtedly to stipulate that the mitzvah is not simply to acknowledge God's existence but actively to prove it through the use of reason. The fact remains that Maimonides' approach is highly idiosyncratic. As we well know, it is entirely possible to acknowledge God's reality without having reflected on what we mean by God and how we know that God exists. In fact, most Jews whom we would call "religious" are so in this nonreflective way. What is striking about Judaism is precisely the extent to which it is possible to be a "religious" or, preferably, an "authentic" Jew without having anything resembling an explicit theology or without dealing with the philosophical issues that it implies. Until fairly recently in Jewish history, authenticity in Judaism was determined by adherence to mitzvot. The authentic Jew was the observant Jew. This makes Judaism the polar opposite of a religion such as Christianity. The central Christian act is an inner act of faith: that Jesus is the son of God (or alternatively, God Himself become flesh) who walked among men, was crucified, was resurrected on the third day, and will return at the end of days. The Christian is required to make this act of faith to be "justified" or to "become right" with God. If he or she does not believe in this way, he or she is simply not Chris-

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tian. Philosophical reflection, then, is intrinsic to Christianity simply because the content of this belief system, what the Christian believes, demands clarification and reformulation through reflection. That is why many forms of Christianity insist on articulating the substance of Christian belief as the Credo, which is an integral part of the Christian liturgy, or in the form of dogmas or precise formulations of doctrine that the Christian must explicitly accept as true in order to be an authentic member of the Church. It need not be said that Christianity also expects its adherents to live in a certain way, and, for its part, Judaism's emphasis on observance assumes a host of beliefs that also demand clarification and ongoing reformulation. But it is patently clear that the emphasis in the two traditions is reversed.

This phenomenon should go far toward explaining the relatively peripheral role that the formal philosophical enterprise has played in Judaism. The keynote is sounded by the eleventh-century French exegete, Rashi, in his commentary on the very first verse of Genesis. Rashi elects to quote an earlier rabbinic homily² to the effect that the Torah should have begun with the twelfth chapter of Exodus, which contains the first commandment addressed to Israel in its entirety (the Passover sacrifice). One has to pause at the state of mind that prompts such a suggestion in the first place. The very assumption that the nonlegal portions of the Torah (for example, the story of creation in Genesis 1) do not belong within revelation boggles the mind—at least the mind of the Jewish philosopher. But consider the following: How many genuinely influential philosophical works were written by Jews between the time of Philo in the first century BCE and Abraham Joshua Heschel or Mordecai Kaplan in our own day? We would be hard pressed to count beyond twelve to fifteen. And even if we add portions of the Bible such as the first chapter of Genesis, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, the homiletical material included in the Talmud or the anthologies of midrash, and the writings of Jewish mystics and the Hasidic masters, some of which deal with philosophical issues in their own characteristic vocabulary, it would still all add up to a

fraction of the energy expended by Jews over the same period of time in the exploration of the Jewish legal tradition.

Even more striking are four further characteristics of the later (that is post-ninth-century CE) philosophical literature. First, there is its remarkably transient quality. Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* is considered an authoritative codification of Jewish law to this day. Yet while his *Guide of the Perplexed* may be acknowledged as the pinnacle of medieval Jewish philosophy, it is hardly consulted by the perplexed of our day. In fact, it has even been argued that Mordecai Kaplan, whose thought was forged in the 1920s and 1930s, has little to say to a post-Holocaust generation of Jews. Second, it borrows extensively from the philosophical style of the non-Jewish world in which it was composed: Saadia from the Islamic Kalam, Ibn Gabirol and Abraham Ibn Ezra from medieval neo-Platonism, Maimonides from medieval Aristotelianism, Herman Cohen from nineteenth-century German idealism, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber from twentieth-century, continental existentialism, and Mordecai Kaplan from American naturalism. In fact, it seems that its main function in each generation is to provide a reading of Judaism in terms of the philosophical vocabulary of the period in which it was written. Third, it is a remarkably pluralistic enterprise. Take any issue, even one as central as the nature of God. Apart from the fact that God exists, there is little that one can find in common on it in the thought of Maimonides, Isaac Luria, Martin Buber, Mordecai Kaplan, and Abraham Heschel. Finally, and most significantly, the preeminent works in Jewish philosophy were written in a language other than Hebrew: Philo in Greek; Saadia, Yehudah Halevi, Ibn Gabirol, and Maimonides in Arabic; Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Buber in German; Kaplan and Heschel in English. Each of these thinkers was eminently capable of writing in masterful Hebrew; in fact, many of them composed other lasting works in Hebrew—for example, Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Halevi's liturgical and secular poetry, or Heschel's scholarly work on rabbinic theology. But they chose to write their philosophical works in the language of

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Even more striking are four further characteristics of the later (that is post-ninth-century CE) philosophical literature. First, there is its remarkably transient quality. Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* is considered an authoritative codification of Jewish law to this day. Yet while his *Guide of the Perplexed* may be acknowledged as the pinnacle of medieval Jewish philosophy, it is hardly consulted by the perplexed of our day. In fact, it has even been argued that Mordecai Kaplan, whose thought was forged in the 1920s and 1930s, has little to say to a post-Holocaust generation of Jews. Second, it borrows extensively from the philosophical style of the non-Jewish world in which it was composed: Saadia from the Islamic Kalam, Ibn Gabirol and Abraham Ibn Ezra from medieval neo-Platonism, Maimonides from medieval Aristotelianism, Herman Cohen from nineteenth-century German idealism, Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber from twentieth-century, continental existentialism, and Mordecai Kaplan from American naturalism. In fact, it seems that its main function in each generation is to provide a reading of Judaism in terms of the philosophical vocabulary of the period in which it was written. Third, it is a remarkably pluralistic enterprise. Take any issue, even one as central as the nature of God. Apart from the fact that God exists, there is little that one can find in common on it in the thought of Maimonides, Isaac Luria, Martin Buber, Mordecai Kaplan, and Abraham Heschel. Finally, and most significantly, the preeminent works in Jewish philosophy were written in a language other than Hebrew: Philo in Greek; Saadia, Yehudah Halevi, Ibn Gabirol, and Maimonides in Arabic; Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Buber in German; Kaplan and Heschel in English. Each of these thinkers was eminently capable of writing in masterful Hebrew; in fact, many of them composed other lasting works in Hebrew—for example, Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, Halevi's liturgical and secular poetry, or Heschel's scholarly work on rabbinic theology. But they chose to write their philosophical works in the language of

some other civilization in which they were obviously also at home.

This configuration literally begs for an explanation, and our first clue may well lie in this passage from Maimonides' own Introduction to his *Guide*. Why is he writing this book? He answers:

Its purpose is to give indications to a religious man for whom the validity of our Law has become established in his soul and has become actual in his belief—such a man being perfect in his religion and character, and having studied the sciences of the philosophers and come to know what they signify. The human intellect having drawn him on and led him to dwell within its province, he must have felt distressed by the externals of the Law and by the meanings of the above-mentioned equivocal, derivative, or amphibolous terms, as he continued to understand them by himself or was made to understand them by others. Hence he would remain in a state of perplexity and confusion as to whether he should follow his intellect, renounce what he knew concerning the terms in question, and consequently consider that he has renounced the foundations of the Law. Or he should hold fast to his understanding of these terms and not let himself be drawn on together with his intellect, rather turning his back on it and moving away from it, while at the same time perceiving that he had brought loss to himself and harm to his religion. He would be left with those imaginary beliefs to which he owed his fear and difficulty and would not cease to suffer from heartache and great perplexity.³

To whom, then, is this volume addressed? To the Jew for whom identification with Judaism and its teachings can no longer be taken for granted, to the Jew who is painfully aware of other ideological options, who is both Jewish and yet thoroughly at home

in the intellectual currents of the non-Jewish world at large and in a language other than Hebrew. In short, it is addressed to the intellectually "marginal" Jew. We use "marginal" here specifically to designate the Jew who stands on the margin that separates Judaism and some other civilization, and not in the contemporary sense of the Jew whose Jewish identity is remote and fragile. Maimonides was certainly not "marginal" in this latter sense; he was, however, in the former sense. If we may generalize from Maimonides, Jewish philosophy flowers when Judaism itself becomes problematic, when it can no longer compel allegiance through its own internal dynamics, when it is no longer self-validating. And, we may assume, the one who feels the marginality of his condition most acutely is the philosopher himself. That is precisely what impels him to write. He may permit his concerned contemporaries to look over his shoulder but he writes primarily for himself, to resolve his own personal perplexity about where he stands in the face of the challenges of his day. The legitimate task of Jewish philosophy, then, is "apologetics" in the best sense of the term: to provide a coherent, internally consistent and sophisticated defense of Judaism in terms of the conceptual scheme and vocabulary of the particular age—in short, to make the case for Judaism, precisely at a time when such a case has to be made. And since the nature of the challenge from the outside world is constantly changing, both the substance and the vocabulary in which Jewish philosophy is articulated must change concurrently. Hence the ephemeral nature of all such formulations. Hence, also, the decision to write in the lingua franca of the day instead of Hebrew. It could not be assumed that the intended audience would have mastered Hebrew—further evidence of its "marginality."

If this analysis has merit, we may be able to explain why Jewish philosophy flowered in those historical periods when Jews participated in an intellectually open society. The Islamic and Christian world between the tenth and fifteenth centuries provided the paradigmatic instance of such a setting. Jews got into philosophy in the Middle Ages because both the Christian

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and Islamic conditions of the age encouraged them to share this experience. The very presence of three competing religious traditions, each claiming exclusive truth, impelled believers of all traditions to step back and reflect on the phenomenon of religion itself. Not only had Judaism, Christianity, and Islam become problematic to each community of believers, religion itself had become problematic. It is not surprising, then, that the first in the line of great medieval Jewish philosophers, the tenth-century Saadia Gaon, does insist that contrary to our opening claim, in his age it is very much a mitzvah to do philosophy. Saadia's contemporaries, indeed, faced a bewildering number of alternative religious options. First, there were Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each of these was further split into a traditionalist camp that insisted on a literal understanding of scripture and a modernist camp that was prepared to modify its teachings to accommodate the new philosophical winds. In fact, Greek science and philosophy had been rediscovered and had produced a crop of skeptics who denied, in principle, the validity of all forms of revelation. Oriental cults abounded, and the Jewish community was also confronted by a vigorous and articulate sectarian group, the Karaites, who challenged the authority not only of the Talmud but, also, of its acknowledged interpreters who sat at the head of the Babylonian academies, the most prominent of whom was Saadia himself.

Is it any wonder, then, that Saadia and his contemporaries were impelled into philosophy? Judaism had, indeed, become problematic, and, Saadia insists, Jews must resort to philosophy for two reasons: first, in order that reason may establish and verify those religious claims that have been given by revelation alone; and second, in order to answer the attacks on Judaism on the part of competing ideologies.⁴ In short, Jews must do philosophy because they could no longer function intuitively as Jews.

It is clear that our situation in twentieth-century America is very much a replica of Saadia's age. We, too, live in a veritable supermarket of ideologies, each clamoring for adherents. American Jewry is intellectually sophisticated and upwardly mobile.

Jewish identity is entirely voluntary, and much of contemporary culture argues against any form of religious identification as anachronistic, and against the preservation of ethnic ties as destructive of a more broadly based "love of humanity." Assimilation and intermarriage are rife. America, too, then, is the paradigmatic open society and we are all paradigmatic marginal Jews. We are all painfully aware of other ideological options. In such a cultural context, it is again a mitzvah that reflective and articulate Jews once again step back and look afresh at what it means to be a Jew in terms of the conceptual scheme and vocabulary of our own day and, in the process, address the specific challenges to Jewish identity that are being posed by the competing ideologies of our generation.

There is one additional factor that should impel a flowering of Jewish philosophy in our day. Our generation has experienced two momentous historical events: the European Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. In the past, events of such magnitude have always sparked an outpouring of philosophical creativity as thinking Jews struggled to integrate their new historical experience into their thought patterns as Jews. Two notable examples come to mind: the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE and the expulsion of the Jewish community from Spain in 1492. Each of these events forced the participant and succeeding generations to rethink the ground rules of Jewish existence. Though it predates by a few years the destruction of the First Temple, Jeremiah 29 is a letter addressed to Jews already in exile, and it represents an attempt to formulate how they are to live, think, and worship as Jews in exile and without a Temple. This letter is an explicit contradiction of Deuteronomy 28:36-15, which warns that the exilic experience will be totally destructive of all attempts to live fruitfully and to worship as Jews. Jeremiah disagrees and orders the exilic community to do just that. In other words, the reality of the event, when it finally occurred, exposed the inadequacies of the earlier ideology and impelled the creation of a totally new one.

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Similarly, the expulsion from Spain forced the Jewish community to struggle anew with the twin themes of exile and redemption. A few generations later this struggle led to the mystically inspired theology of Isaac Luria, which sees exile not only as a historical event in the life of the Jewish people, but also as a metaphysical symbol denoting a fault in all of creation, affecting even God, who is portrayed as sharing in Israel's exile. The work of redemption is now assigned to the individual Jew whose every action becomes potentially redemptive—not only of Israel, but also of the world, and even of God. Momentous historical events, precisely because they are unprecedented, expose the inadequacies and anachronisms of our ideological consolidations and force us to struggle to reformulate them so that we may respond to our own historical experience as Jews.

The role of Jewish philosophy may also be set forth in traditional terms, by suggesting that it be understood as midrash. Midrash is commonly understood to designate a brief homily, usually of Talmudic origin and designed to teach some truth that a contemporary homiletician will then expound and elaborate into a sermon. But this is an excessively narrow sense of the term. In its broad sense, midrash denotes a process—the process of exegesis and interpretation by which the meaning of an ancient text is expounded beyond its original plain or literal sense (*p'shat* or "simple" meaning) to convey ever-new layers of meaning. Sometimes the text is a specific scriptural word or verse. A legal passage, through halakhic or legal midrash, may yield an entire body of laws; a narrative passage, through aggadic or homiletical midrash, may yield a homily bearing on some moral, theological, spiritual, or national issue facing the community.

It is not too much of an extrapolation, however, to expand this view by suggesting that a philosophy of Judaism in its entirety may be understood as a midrash where the "text" becomes the total body of prior traditional teaching. Thus, rabbinic Judaism as a whole may be understood as a midrash (or, more accurately, a series of overlapping midrashim) on Scripture,

as can Maimonides' *Guide*, the *Zohar*, Lurianic kabbalah, Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization*, or Heschel's *God in Search of Man*. In these latter instances, the "text" is Scripture plus rabbinic literature (which, because of its scope and centrality is awarded a role just about equal to that of Scripture) along with selected later formulations of Judaism. Heschel, for example, draws heavily from the Talmud, from medieval philosophy, from mysticism, and from Hasidism; all of these together form his "text." Jewish intellectual history, then, can be understood as an evolving and overlapping set of midrashim on an ever-expanding "text," itself a midrash.

A midrash is a temporary consolidation. It represents an ideological plateau, the outcome of an extended struggle to rethink and rewrite an ideology that has been recognized as out of date. Every midrash exists in a state of tension. On the one hand, it is rooted in the past, on a "text" understood either narrowly as Scripture or broadly as a previous midrash; on the other hand, every midrash is directed to a new historical situation, one that is by definition unprecedented—for otherwise why would we need a new midrash? An effective midrash, then, is inherently unsatisfactory; it tends to be offensive to the traditionalist (who doesn't feel the need for a new formulation in the first place) and inadequate to the liberal (who is prepared to distance himself more radically from the text). Furthermore, since the Jewish people is very much within history, all of these consolidations are inherently ephemeral and quickly outdated. They may well linger long after they have served their immediate purpose; it is always safer to hold on to the past, and the task of evolving a new consolidation is an enormously difficult and painful adventure—until we are shocked out of our complacency by the realization that our children consider us anachronistic.

What difference does it make if we refer to our philosophical consolidations as midrash? Preeminently, it enables us to recognize them as decisively influenced by the historical and cultural contexts in which they arise. They are all cultural documents, shot through with human appropriation, testimonies as

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much to the concerns and vocabulary of the specific age as to the eternal, ongoing "truths" of Judaism. We are thus liberated to do in a much more conscious and deliberate way what Jews have been doing all along. We can recognize not only the legitimacy but even the imperative to do midrash.

But then another, more significant question presses itself upon us. What are the theological implications of this understanding of midrash? Specifically, what are the implications for a theology of revelation? Our claim is that in each generation Jews felt free to reformulate the intellectual context of their tradition in terms of the conceptual scheme and idiom of their time. What gave them the authority to do this? And what authority did they accord to the original formulation of the content of Jewish belief in the Torah? If all formulations of Jewish thought are as much the product of human appropriations as they are of divine revelation, should we then not do away with the notion that there is an "ideal" (in the Platonic sense) Judaism—an original, pristine formulation of Torah that embodies the very words of God, floats above the historical experience of the Jewish people, out of which all further formulations emerge through the simple unfolding of the implications of the original, ultimate truth? The ultimate theological implication of this view is that even the original revelation itself must be seen as the product of divine and human interaction, as both God's *mattan Torah* and man's *kabbalat Torah*. Abraham Heschel captures this interaction when he insists: "As a report about revelation, the Bible itself is a midrash."⁵ All further formulations of Jewish thought, then, are midrashim on an original text that is itself midrash.

The issue of revelation is crucial because our understanding of revelation determines the authority of Torah on matters of belief and practice. And on the issue of revelation, there are only two possibilities: either Torah is the literal word of God (the dogma of verbal revelation) or it is not. If it is not, we then recognize a substantive human contribution to the formulation of Torah and thereby construe its authority in an entirely different light. Midrash, as we have described it, becomes a continuation

of a process that was present from the very outset. Torah itself, then, is properly midrash.

It is no accident that among contemporary Jewish theologians it was Heschel who hit on this formulation. He was a theological supernaturalist, but he also inherited from his Hasidic ancestors a conviction that God is beyond human conceptualization. After all, what kind of God would God be if *I* can understand God? Heschel was forced to confront the intrinsic inadequacy of all human characterizations of God. The naive literalist understanding of revelation was unacceptable not because it demeans human beings (as a Mordecai Kaplan might claim) but because it demeans God! Torah, then, could not be the literal word of God. It was a human appropriation of some more primitive content that, in its purity, is inaccessible to us. Heschel's monumental *Torah Min Hashamayim B'aspaklaryah Shel Hadorot*⁶ offers wide-ranging documentation that this view of revelation permeates the literature of Talmudic Judaism as well.

A more contemporary formulation of this claim would be that all theological statements, particularly those that refer to God qualities and manifold relationships with creation, have to be understood as myths.⁷ In a preliminary way, to say that all theological claims are myths is to say that they must not be taken as literal, precise renderings of the realities to which they refer. Popular usage to the contrary, however, neither are they to be understood as deliberate fictions. Myths use material from everyday experience, from the realm of time and space, to enable us to talk about that which is totally beyond direct human apprehension. They are partial, impressionistic constructs or accommodations and they are indispensable, for human conceptualization and language are totally incapable of capturing the reality that we call the essence of God. The issue is not myth or no myth, but, rather, which myth. If God is to figure in our scriptures, theologies, liturgies, and rituals, if God is to participate in the life of the community of believers, God's essence has to be concretized in the form of myth. The Torah itself, then, has to be understood as the original complex record of the Jewish reli-

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gious myth through which our ancestors interpreted their historical experience.

A myth, like a midrash, has a life span of its own. It lives and it dies; that is, it loses its power to do what great myths uniquely can do: create a community, establish identity, generate emotion, reveal unsuspected truths about the world and the human experience, and motivate to action. But rarely does a myth in its entirety die, for then the community will also die. More frequently, portions of the myth die for segments of the community. When this happens, a vital and healthy community will then set about to revise or rewrite its myth. That is precisely what happened when Job's personal experience led him to conclude that the received tradition, which stipulated human suffering as God's punishment, was simply inadequate. In effect, that portion of the biblical myth died for Job, and the voice out of the whirlwind should be understood as proclaiming a new—equally mythical—understanding of God's complex relationship with creation. Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* is a contemporary paradigm of the same process, as is the enterprise of Holocaust theology.⁸ In the latter instance, the process is still in a preliminary, fragmentary stage; witness the fact that we have neither a liturgy nor a set of rituals that are Holocaust specific. Great myths always have the power to generate liturgy and ritual; Passover is the primary example of that process.

It should be apparent from the above that much of what can be said about midrash applies equally well to religious myths. They are two ways of describing the same process. Most important for our purposes here, a myth—like a midrash—comes into being out of the encounter between a community and its distinctive historical experience. Both are the way in which that community reads its historical experience. That reading is then embodied in the community's scriptures, liturgies, and rituals, which, in turn, function to train future generations to read *their* historical experience through the prism of the community's distinctive myth. Scripture, then, is the first stage in a process of

myth writing and rewriting that extends throughout the historical experience of the community.

By definition, then, it is precisely the "marginal" member of the community, as we have defined the condition of "marginality," who first feels the incipient death throes of portions of the myth. However crudely or negatively expressed, his or her dissatisfaction with the received tradition jars the community out of its complacency and alerts it to the need to engage itself once again in the revision of the myth or midrash.

Three issues, then, define the Jewish philosopher's role in the process of Jewish self-definition in our day. Two of these are classic; one is unprecedented. An open intellectual setting renders every myth or midrash exposed and vulnerable because other options are glaringly accessible. And momentous historical events are uniquely capable of rendering even the most successful of them anachronistic. These dimensions are classical. What is unprecedented, however, is the uniquely modern collapse of the dogma of verbal revelation and, with it, the sense that the Torah can serve as an explicit standard of authority on all matters of belief and practice. Once this happens, we are forced to confront in a new light precisely what claim the received tradition has on our lives. To be precise, what is new here is not the process of midrash or remythologizing; our historical survey has shown that this process is familiar and well established. Rather, what transfigures the enterprise is the uniquely modern selfconsciousness, the awareness of the *fact* of history, that destroys fundamentalisms of every kind.

For if the Torah itself is a myth or a midrash, if there is no such thing as a pristine reading of Judaism that carries within itself its own warranty of ultimate truth, how do we determine which of the later consolidations are authentic? What standard or criterion can we use? And who decides? One who has a question in Jewish law knows how to find an authoritative answer. What is the ultimate seat of authority in matters of Jewish thought?

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they who personally and most acutely experience the state of "marginality" and the accompanying dissatisfaction with the received tradition. That is undoubtedly the reason why even the most creative among them has usually been viewed with suspicion by the established authorities of the day—and, in Judaism, the "established authorities" have always been the recognized masters of the halakhic tradition in every generation. This suspicion—and, on occasion, for example, with Maimonides in his day and Mordecai Kaplan and even, to a degree, Abraham Heschel, in our day, "suspicion" is a considerable understatement—can easily be understood.

Ultimately, the philosopher and the halakhist represent two different constituencies. The halakhist speaks for those Jews who are totally at home with their Judaism and its halakhah, who either tune out the challenges from the intellectual world outside, or simply do not feel challenged as Jews and, hence, have no need to defend or justify what they stand for. The philosopher, on the other hand, speaks to the Jew whose Judaism is in question, who is not totally at home in the Hebrew language, which we must understand as symptomatic of a much deeper sense of not feeling at home with his Judaism. The halakhist can only wonder what the fuss is all about and can only be shocked at the foreign cast that his Judaism acquires as a result of the transformations wrought by the work of the philosopher.

But these tensions notwithstanding, Jewish philosophy is an enormously powerful weapon, doubly powerful because of the flexibility and pluralism on which it thrives. It may well be an elitist enterprise, created by the few for the few; it may easily become dated; it may well strain the implicitly accepted boundaries of authentic Jewish teaching. But, overriding all of these considerations, it serves in every generation to enable countless Jews to remain Jews precisely at a time when the halakhists could not do so on their own.

Today, in our situation in America, it is once again an enterprise whose hour has come. It can no longer be considered

a luxury. The elitist few have now become the many. In fact, the problem is no longer to find Jews who feel the problems, but, rather, to persuade these Jews even to consider the answers that are being suggested by the philosophers of our day. That may be the greatest challenge of all.