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Public Religion in Samson Raphael Hirsch and Samuel Hirsch's Interpretation of Religious Symbolism

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Scholars of Jewish thought have emphasized how modern Jewish thinkers reread, indeed reinvent, the public character of Jewish religious activity in the modern world. This essay will explore how such rereading is a political activity, one that challenges prevailing models of community, political status, and public religion. To gain admittance into European culture, education, and society, many nineteenth-century German-Jews adopted a religious rather than national inheritance. They recognized themselves within a narrative of religious history divorced from national ties. But the stark contrast between religion and nationality should not obscure the political nature of Jewish religious identity.¹ Nationalism was but one form of political commitment. For two nineteenth century German-Jewish thinkers, the romantic turn to symbol offered an interpretive guide to reconceptualize Jewish religious politics. The influence of the romantic concept of language and religion on the Orthodox rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808–1888) is

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¹ For a recent discussion of how religious arguments justify political commitments, see Ronald Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996).

well known.² Less so the romantic impact on the Reform rabbi Samuel Hirsch (1815–1889), due in part to the scholarly neglect of his Luxembourg writings.³ For both, however, reinterpreting commandment and religion symbolically helped them to reevaluate the interplay between politics and religion.

Though unrelated in name, and far apart in their understanding of Jewish tradition, both Hirschs offered compelling accounts of a Jewish public religion. Their symbolic readings of commandment (S.R. Hirsch) and religion (Samuel Hirsch) emphasized the public character of religious practice, and placed their religious interpretations firmly within the political debates then raging in nineteenth-century Germany. This paper will focus on two works – S.R. Hirsch's *Guidelines to a Jewish Symbolism* (1857), and Samuel Hirsch's *Humanitarianism as Religion* (1854) – that construe in various ways the nature of symbolism and its significance for Jewish religious thought and practice.⁴ Both works are critical

² See Isaac Heinemann, "The Relationship between S.R. Hirsch and his Teacher Isaac Bernays (Hebrew)," *Zion* 16 (1951), pp. 62–69; David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 165–168, where Sorkin points out the influence of Schleiermacher and Friedrich Creuzer on S. R. Hirsch's understanding of symbol and language.

³ See Jacob Katz, "Samuel Hirsch – Rabbi, Philosopher and Freemason," *Revue des études juives* 125 (1966), pp. 113–126. Scholars have been most interested in Hirsch's *Religionsphilosophie* (1842), a 884 page response to Hegel's philosophical interpretation of Judaism that was never completed. See Emil Fackenheim, "Samuel Hirsch and Hegel," in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 171–201; Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 72–74; Nathan Rotenstreich, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), pp. 120–136; Hans Joachim Schoeps, *Geschichte der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie in der Neuzeit* (Berlin: Vortrupp, 1935), pp. 93–132; Eliezer Schweid, *A History of Jewish Thought in Modern Times (Hebrew)* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1977), pp. 234–263; and Max Wiener, *Jüdische Religion im Zeitalter der Emanzipation* (Berlin: Philo Verlag, 1933), pp. 131–147.

⁴ Samson Raphael Hirsch's essays on symbolic interpretation were published over the course of a number of years in the 1850s. The ground-breaking methodological essays were published in 1857. See Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Grundlinien einer jüdischen Symbolik," *Jeschurun* 3 (1856/57), pp. 615–630, and *Jeschurun* 4 (1857/58), pp. 19–32. For an English translation, see Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings: Jewish Symbolism*, vol. III (New York: Philipp Feldheim, Inc., 1984). For a review of S.R. Hirsch's well known life

texts for understanding the relationship between religious claims and the socio-political context each author wishes to address, or more accurately, to change. Rather than judging their symbolic reading of text and tradition according to the romantic distinction between symbol and allegory,⁵ or a normative account of modern Jewish philosophy,⁶ I want to underscore S.R. Hirsch and Samuel

and literary works, see Noah Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform: The Religious Philosophy of Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1976), pp. 3–120, and Robert Liberles's more perceptive study, *Religious Conflict in Social Context: The Resurgence of Orthodox Judaism in Frankfurt am Main, 1838–1877* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985). Also note Isaac Heinemann's fine articles on Hirsch's conception of "Torah im Derekh Eretz", Jewish education and community, and the meaning of the commandments. See Isaac Heinemann, "Studies on R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (Hebrew)," *Sinai* 24 (1949), pp. 249–271, and Isaac Heinemann, *Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot in Jewish Literature (Hebrew)*, vol. II (Jerusalem: Horev, 1993), pp. 91–161. Samuel Hirsch's lectures to the Masonic lodge in Luxembourg were collected and published as, *Die Humanität als Religion* (Trier: C. Troschel, 1854). For a review of *Humanität* and its place within Hirsch's interpretation of Judaism, see Katz, "Samuel Hirsch – Rabbi, Philosoph and Freemason," pp. 113–126; and Gershon Greenberg, "The Historical Origins of God and Man: Samuel Hirsch's Luxembourg Writings," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 20 (1975), pp. 129–148. Also see Gershon Greenberg, "Samuel Hirsch: Jewish Hegelian," *Revue des études juives* 129 (1970), pp. 205–215, for a quick biographical sketch.

⁵ See Heinemann's apologetic defense (*Ta'amei ha-Mitzvot*, vol. II, p. 111, and especially fn. #114, p. 269) of Hirsch's symbolic interpretation of commandments, in which he blames nineteenth-century reform thinkers, themselves critical of S.R. Hirsch's symbolic reading, for not attending to the romantic distinction between symbol and allegory. Heinemann claims that Hirsch's critics "did not see the difference between symbolic and allegorical interpretation. Certainly the allegorical interpretation cancels the existence of the commandments, and one need not say how far Hirsch's theory is from this" (p. 269). This dubious distinction has come under sharp criticism by recent scholars, in part due to Paul de Man's influential essay, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 187–228. See David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 11–17, and Frank Talmage, "Apples of Gold: The Inner Meaning of Sacred Texts in Medieval Judaism," in *Jewish Spirituality*, vol. I, ed. Arthur Green (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 314–355.

⁶ Note Fackenheim's conclusion that in his *Religionsphilosophie*, "Hirsch's Jewish confrontation of Hegel ends in failure." This is so, Fackenheim tells us, because Hirsch never asserts that "philosophy too must accept the otherness of God, for the simple reason that God *is* other than the man with whom He yet

Hirsch's hermeneutical strategy to create public space for Jewish religious practice. Their symbolic readings are, despite their differences, rhetorical maneuvers that justify continued Jewish identity and practice in the hostile socio-political environment of nineteenth century German culture. Religious discourse, for both Hirschs, was a public activity, and one that actively challenged the politics of emancipation, and the enlightenment ideals of equality, toleration, and private religion.

Samson Raphael Hirsch: Commandment, Symbol, and the Politics of Continuity

In his "Grundlinien einer jüdischen Symbolik" (1857),⁷ Hirsch "draws up guidelines for a science [Wissenschaft]" of Jewish symbolic interpretation of the commandments. Central to this project is the establishment of the appropriate hermeneutical rules that promise to solve "the most difficult problem in Jewish knowledge" – the meaning of the commandments. The mitzvot, Hirsch tells us, present the most difficult challenge for interpretive strategies because their sophisticated meanings still remain obscure. But his essay on Jewish symbolism belies a more general concern with symbolic interpretation itself. Hirsch's theory of symbolic meaning is both a general theory of symbolic composition and interpretation, and a particular theory of Jewish symbolism. His essay moves from a comprehensive account of symbolism to a more particular reading of Jewish symbolic discourse. This "wissenschaftliche" approach, one that begins with methodological concerns and only then tackles exegetical questions, attempts to reveal the hidden significance of Jewish religious observance. Hirsch's *Guidelines* is

enters into relationship..." Contemporary religious thinkers must explore the "possibility which Hirsch dismissed". See Fackenheim, "Samuel Hirsch and Hegel," p. 201.

⁷ All translations are my own, and while following closely (at times) the standard English translation in *The Collected Writings*, there are a few significant passages that cannot be found in the English edition. Citations will be noted in the text with reference to volume and page number.

a hermeneutics of disclosure, one that reveals the continuity of meaning in Jewish public acts of religious observance.

For Hirsch, the academic study of Judaism (*Wissenschaft*) underscores the timeless and uniform meaning of Jewish ritual observance. An appropriate academic approach to Jewish commandments discloses God's intended meanings in symbolic ritual practice. But Hirsch recognizes two potential hazards that correspond to his two-fold division between methodology (general theory of symbol) and exegesis (Jewish symbolism): (1) the danger of symbolic interpretation itself, and (2) the failure to interpret Jewish commandments symbolically according to the demands of *Wissenschaft*. The common symbolic understanding of commandment can lead, Hirsch warns, "to the most serious danger for Jewish knowledge." Here, *Wissenschaft* turns into "a simple game of wit [Witze] and cleverness" in which any dimwit [Flachkopf], who lacks the proper conceptual apparatus, can "only make a beginning," but never provide foundational guidelines. Without the fitting methodological approach, the inner meaning of Jewish symbolism is forever obscured. Hirsch's scientific analysis, to the contrary, yields "the right method for the solution of our problem" (III, 615). Only Hirsch's hermeneutical guidelines can remove common misunderstandings, while securing the true, unchangeable meaning of commandment in the new authoritative discipline of *Wissenschaft*. Rather than an opponent to the scientific study of religion,⁸ Hirsch intends to become its leading and most sophisticated practitioner.

Hirsch claims that his methodological section has two aims: (1) uncover the rules of symbolic discourse in order to recognize the appropriate material signs that correspond to true spiritual ideas [Ideen], and (2) discover the ideas to which symbols refer. The former study trains the student in the art of symbolization, the latter in the recognition of meaning in the already created

⁸ For this view, common to many general studies of Hirsch's defense of traditional Judaism and his critique of Reform, see Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 78–79, where Meyer claims that Hirsch could "spiritualize the law with the hermeneutics of symbolic meaning. However, in the shape of historical criticism, modern culture could too easily breach the fortress walls. It was therefore of the utmost importance for Hirsch to launch a counterattack on *Wissenschaft des Judentums*."

symbol (III, 616). The first is to act like God and create symbolic meaning; the second is to interpret the meaning of God's symbolic world. Hirsch claims that he follows the second approach, providing guidelines for the discovery of meaning in the symbolic world of commandment. *Wissenschaft*, in Hirsch's theory, is not a creative discipline, but a process of discovery; its practitioners do not produce new meanings, but rather discern the hidden symbolic meaning of Jewish religious observance. The scientific study of Judaism is itself a religious activity of disclosure.

But Hirsch's methodological section is instead an extended discussion of the art of symbolization itself. Here, Hirsch is more concerned with symbolic composition than symbolic interpretation. *Wissenschaft*, as understood in this first section, is the recovery of God's intentions. Exegesis of Jewish scripture, in contrast, is the discovery of the ideas to which symbols refer. A Jewish scholar, therefore, must understand the way in which God creates symbolic meaning before beginning exegetical commentary. For Hirsch, knowing God's intentions is a necessary precondition for good exegesis. *Wissenschaft* recreates the thoughts of God.

Hirsch's interpretation of *Wissenschaft* was at odds with the then dominant view of Reform and historical school thinkers. Ismar Schorsch has argued that *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in nineteenth century Germany shattered the "dogmatic type of historical thinking" that was pervasive in Jewish historical research. This new academic study was structured around five controlling principles: historical change and flux, the right of free inquiry, expanding the sources used in historical analysis, research as a synthetic, problem-solving activity (rather than merely exegetical), and the desire to wrest Jewish history from Christian theological critique.⁹ Hirsch directly attacked this type of new, scholarly research. As a process of recovery and exposure, Hirsch's *Wissenschaft* uncovered the "true spiritual ideas" that resisted incessant change and progress. Free inquiry would be limited to those rabbinic scholars who acquired both the academic and Jewish textual

⁹ Ismar Schorsch, "The Emergence of Historical Consciousness in Modern Judaism," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 28 (1983), pp. 415–419.

training necessary for “the right method”. The rabbinic tradition – the only tradition, Hirsch claims later, that accurately perceived God’s intentions – remained the authentic and authoritative source for historical inquiry. Hirsch’s essays were indeed driven by methodological concerns and problem-solving analysis. Yet his methodology provided the guidelines for the heart of his program: exegetical commentary of the Jewish commandments. Indeed, Hirsch attacked the prevailing model of Jewish *Wissenschaft* because it led to faulty exegesis of Jewish scripture.

But the definition of *Wissenschaft* was not only an internal religious debate among Jewish interpreters of Torah. When in 1854 Hirsch published his *Guidelines* and defended an alternative approach to the study of Judaism, he self-consciously entered an explosive political debate concerning Jewish emancipation in Germany. The rise of *Wissenschaft* coincided with the social movement for Jewish emancipation. Historical studies were political statements, and were recognized as such. They often facilitated or complicated Jewish social and political acceptance in Germany. Leopold Zunz, in his groundbreaking historical study of Jewish sermons, argued that emancipation and *Wissenschaft* were together “the sources of the ethical life”. The success of Jewish emancipation, Zunz thought, rested in part on the scholarly study of Judaism. Equal political and social status for Jews and Judaism, Zunz believed, would be accomplished through *Wissenschaft*.¹⁰ In this light, Hirsch’s study of the commandments can be understood as a political and social challenge to reformist tendencies to debunk rabbinic tradition and authority in order to secure social and political equality. If Jewish history was indeed as open, expansive, and fluid as Zunz, Jost, and Frankel had suggested, then Hirsch’s interpretive art of discovery was an attempt to reign in and secure a meaningful, foundational religious order that would thwart progressive politics and modern social commitments. After all, God’s intentions do not bend to historical contingencies. Hirsch’s *Wissenschaft* would be a politics of reliability, harmony, and

¹⁰ Leopold Zunz, “Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge, Vorrede (1832),” vol. I in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Louis Gerschel, 1875), pp. 32–40.

authority, and one that would create the much needed public sacred space for Orthodox religious observance.

Hirsch's image of the handshake as a natural symbolic gesture reinforces this public, covenantal, and enduring feature of religious observance. Symbolic expression is "natural", Hirsch claims, and an eternal, necessary expression of human communication. Bodily gestures are what Hirsch calls "natural symbolism": an expression of thought through a material sign that is a "natural, inborn ability, and a natural, inborn need" (III, 616). Unlike the oratory farewell that is soon forgotten, Hirsch recalls "the moment" of a silent handshake with a close friend, in which "I am united with him, a moment which I would gladly retain forever, and this moment, in which I understand the full sadness that my parting brings to him, I will never forget" (III, 616). Bodily symbolic signs have the advantage over spoken words in their capacity to make lasting impressions. Words are fleeting and are quickly discarded: the "Augenblick" of the bodily gesture becomes a "kurze Augenblicke" in linguistic discourse (III, 617). If one were to express a thought or feeling in a "permanent sign that endures", the spoken word would be of little help. The symbolic act arises due to the lasting importance of a thought or emotion, and the "intention to grant a thought or emotion a permanent sign" (III, 617–618). So God's symbolic commandments are not foreign to human nature, but like bodily gestures, are the means by which God communicates thoughts intended to make lasting impressions.

Recall that in his methodological section, Hirsch does not begin with the second (and stated intention) to offer guidelines for symbolic meaning. Hirsch explores, instead, the nature of God's symbolic discourse itself. At issue is God's use of symbols to communicate information. A truly "wissenschaftliche" approach to religious symbolism has to explain why God would choose to reveal thoughts and emotions through symbolic signs and not the spoken word. What of the revelation at Sinai, or Moses's prophecy? As we shall see, Hirsch is not unaware of such difficulties, and will attempt to explain the special cases in which God speaks not through symbol but directly through the spoken word. But he still must provide a rationale for symbolic discourse itself as a fitting

medium for divine revelation. Symbolic acts retain an element of permanence and stability lacking in the spoken word. Language is fleeting and imprecise, but symbolic activity is repetitive, recalled quickly and directly by memory. God's intentions are closely related to human symbolic activity: just as God employs symbols that impress thoughts and emotions permanently in the human mind, so too human beings engage in symbolic activity in order to "retain forever" the inner meaning of thoughts and emotions. God's intentions are very human.

The handshake between two close friends is not a trivial model for symbolic activity. It highlights the meaning and intention of symbolic gesture, itself a symbol for the divine-human relationship. Hirsch's description of the handshake is a covenantal model for religious devotion. It represents an intimate friendship that unites the divine and human. But more than this, it is also a methodological claim that concerns the academic study of Judaism. The handshake links the scholar of Jewish symbolism to God's intentions. Imagining God as a close friend, and recognizing God's "full sadness" when these two friends part, enables the scholar to understand God's intentions and accurately recover the meaning of God's symbolic world. The handshake is a symbolic bodily gesture that signifies the rabbinic scholar's capacity to access God's intentions. It is as much a claim for an eternal Jewish covenant as it is an appeal to hermeneutical authority.

The public character of the Jewish covenant, symbolized in the handshake between two friends, is maintained by the fitting rabbinic interpretation of Jewish symbolism. Symbolic meaning is not discovered, but like the handshake, enacted. The art of symbolization is an activity, a composition, an imitation of God's symbolic creativity. This kind of religious devotion requires public space for shared communal activity. Hirsch, who defends the commandments by interpreting their symbolic meaning, recognizes the need for public religious worship. The performance of each commandment is a public handshake between Jews and their God.

The handshake is not a religious act, but a symbol for what commandments do. Hirsch argues that the handshake, like all bodily gestures, is not sufficiently precise for divine symbolic communication. God requires unambiguous signs to communicate

“objective concepts”. Bodily gestures express thoughts or emotions only in a “subjective” manner. The meaning of handshakes, tears and laughter, varies from “Volk zu Volk”. Thus, while making more lasting impressions than the spoken word, these “natural” symbols still lack the coherence and uniformity required for “objective concepts”. Hirsch defines symbolic acts as, “sequences of physically perceptible signs, all of which should bring to expression one and the same thought, one and the same emotion” (III, 618). Bodily symbolic acts cannot do this. The handshake, still a provocative model for the divine-human encounter, signifies a multiplicity of possible meanings. It therefore fails Hirsch’s test to provide one and the same thought and emotion. Where the natural symbol is “subjective” and imprecise, the religious symbol is “objective” and universal, revealing “ideas, truths, teachings, and principles” to a unified society (III, 618):

Signs and symbolic activity are introduced as means of expression whenever a fact or doctrine, a truth or principle of obvious importance must be refreshed and made permanent, through repetition, in knowledge and recognition. This is true especially where the knowledge and recognition are to be realized by a mass of people, a collectivity, or a nation (III, 620).

It is not sufficient to merely “record” the fact, or pronounce the teaching, truth, or principle. Instead, one “grasps the knowledge of these teachings in a specific, suitable symbolic activity, which the collectivity, the people, are called to perform at specific recurring periods.” Natural symbolic gestures are still too fleeting, temporary, and personal for the education of a nation. While the bodily gesture still involves “one’s whole body, one’s whole being”, it lacks the power of “permanent signs, the continuance of which is secured in memory.” For objective, universal statements of truth, human beings require religious symbolism. The recognition of God’s symbolic world is a political and communal act of religious education.

The language of continuity, permanence, and coherency run throughout Hirsch’s interpretation of religious symbol. They are significant goods for an Orthodox religious Jew who recognizes that the progressive politics of emancipation are eroding public space for Jewish religious observance. Symbolic activity is a collective, public practice, and one that maintains a secure continuity

with the past in the face of an uncertain future. Hirsch understands that religious reform begins with recognizing discontinuities in religious traditions. He therefore turns away from historical studies in order to provide a more stable base for religious practice. Hirsch's critics were quick to challenge his drift away from historical inquiry as an evident disregard for the standards of rational critique.¹¹ But to Hirsch, the coherence and uniformity of symbolic activity cannot be anchored in historical studies. Instead, the religious scholar must look to "the intention [Absicht] of the one who commanded the symbol":

The first condition to find our way to an understanding of a symbol is to ascertain the intention [Absicht], that is, whether the author intends an object or phenomena to be a symbol in order to express an idea (III, 622).

Without the knowledge of the author's intention, interpretation is nothing but a "subjective, trifling joke" without value and objective reality. This, as Hirsch explained earlier, is the "unwissenschaftliche" interpretation of common dimwits. The scholar should determine whether, to begin, a symbolic reading is necessary, then which objects or activities should be interpreted figuratively, and finally whether the symbol carries religious meaning. One can understand an anchor at the waterfront according to its "primitive meaning", and argue that it is merely a tool to secure a boat in the harbor. But one can also interpret it according to its "symbolic meaning" if the anchor is so small that it would be ill-suited to moor the vessel. The "primitive meaning" is ruled out according to functional criteria (the anchor is simply too small to secure the vessel). For the anchor to have symbolic significance, it is due, Hirsch claims, "to the choice and intention conferred upon it" (III, 624). But the anchor's significance is open to "the most varied interpretations", only one of which is the true one. How does the scholar distinguish the one correct interpretation from the various possibilities? The scholar discovers, "the one intended by

¹¹ See, for example, Abraham Geiger, "Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum, von Ben Uziel: eine Recension," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* 2 (1836), pp. 351–359, 518–548.

the author who chooses this particular object or activity as an expression of a particular idea" (III, 624). Only knowledge of God's intentions will secure the precise meaning for religious symbols.¹²

Hirsch clearly does not want to abandon historical inquiry altogether. While emphasizing authorial intent, the local and historical background to symbolic composition still plays a formative role in the interpretive process (III, 625). A sentence torn from its historical context (what Hirsch calls a "herausgerissenen Satz") can lead to competing and conflicting interpretations. Indeed, symbolic interpretation practiced by the "unsystematic" thinkers leads to both wrong and multiple interpretations. The story of the serpent in Genesis 3:14 could have both a natural or figurative meaning. If symbolic, Hirsch asks, how does one determine whether the serpent symbolizes the earth, temptation, truth, or cleverness? Only when the symbol or symbolic activity is studied within its historical and local context will it lose much of its ambiguity. Determining the fitting context delivers uniformity and precision. Ten commentators, Hirsch admits, can offer ten competing interpretations of the same text, but Hirsch will accept only the one that accords with his contextual approach (III, 626–628). But Hirsch's contextual reading is, in the end, historical dressing for authorial intent. Only the knowledge of the author's intention will avoid the dangers of pluralism, and secure the one true symbolic meaning. The intentions of God are the foundations upon which the religious scholar justifies a coherent and uniform interpretation of symbolic activity.

Hirsch's desire to protect a single and uniform meaning is most apparent in his argument that symbols cannot impart new information or truth to the one who receives it. A symbol, instead, must be recognizable within a limited social, cultural, and religious framework:

The meaning of the symbol can move only within a circle of thought in which general acquaintance between the one who imparts the symbol and the one who

¹² For a modern literary discussion of authorial intent and its significance for interpretation, see E.D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967).

receives it is already established. A symbol cannot be communicated to a recipient in which the symbol expresses a truth that is completely new to him (III, 629).

A known concept is brought together, in a new relationship, with a known object, through symbol. This “is the highest degree of newness that can be imparted by a symbol... To reveal a completely unknown mystery is impossible by means of symbol” (III, 629–630). To recognize a symbol as a symbol, one must already be within a framework of meaning in which it makes sense to relate a particular object to an already comprehensible idea or ideal. There must be a background of meaning and relationship that underlies symbolic recognition. Furthermore, the context of meaning makes clear the possible candidates signified by the object. The scholar of religious symbolism narrows the possible meanings to the one intended by the author.

Hirsch’s *Wissenschaft* is the religious re-discovery of God’s intentions. This hermeneutical theory, I am arguing, is an apologetic for his political and religious commitments. Just as the *Wissenschaft* scholar discovers, rather than creates meaning, so too God discloses hidden rather than new truths. For both God and the religious scholar, symbols confer new relationships, but not new ideas. The scholar does not create meaning out of chaos, but discovers it in an already ordered and meaningful world. Apparently God, too, is a good *Wissenschaft* scholar: God does not create meaning so much as reveal the meanings already inherent in a particular cultural, political, and intellectual climate. When these meanings are particularly important to remember through repetition, symbolic activity is most efficacious. God instructs “a mass of people, a collectivity, or a nation” in order to create a political community that recognizes the now disclosed truths through repetitive symbolic gesture. Religious symbolism has become political activity, one that unites a community with God in a public handshake. The scientific investigation of God’s symbolic world is the imitation of divine symbolism and divine politics. Religious study, like politics, is the art of retrieving the hidden order of God’s symbolic world. *Wissenschaft* is the method through which the religious scholar enters political debate.

It is a politics that mirrors the order and security of God's symbolic universe, and a politics that defends the needs of a religious community struggling against Jewish pluralism.

For his hermeneutical theory to be effective at all, Hirsch must argue that symbols only disclose known truths. *Wissenschaft* demands that local, historical context generates possible candidates for symbolic meaning. If God's symbolic communication were to reveal new meanings, then Hirsch's contextual approach may prove unreliable. Perhaps nothing in the "personal, local, and historical" field could help explain a radically new meaning. Even more dangerous, God's intentions might well be beyond human understanding. If authorial intent is necessary to understand symbolic meaning, then God must conform to human modes of activity and thought. It is not coincidental that in the description of the "general acquaintance" between author and receiver of symbol, the model of the friendly handshake returns. God's intentions are not mysterious to the scholar of religious symbolism, for he is the true defender of Jewish religious observance and the stable political order that makes such observance possible.

With his methodological section as a guide, Hirsch turns to the particular problem of Jewish symbolism. Hirsch has carefully prepared his readers for this transition, for he has argued that symbolic meaning is limited to political communities. Only within these polities will religious symbolism make sense. This both justifies a Jewish religious symbolism, and protects it from alternative readings. Hirsch's real concern lies with the "modernists", who attack symbolic interpretation because the Jewish law is to them a "burden". Though the lawgiver surely intended these laws for Jews of the past, the "modernists" claim that they have now lost their meaning. When one discovers religious meaning, wherever it may be found, the symbolic "shells" are easily discarded. Hirsch responds, to the contrary, that even what appears superficial or external to the meaning of commandment instead "raises high above all the changes in time and place through the eternity of the idea that is inherent in them" (IV, 21). One cannot distinguish the symbolic meaning from the symbolic act. The true ideas to which the symbol refers "dwell" or are

“inherent” [innewohnenden] in symbolic activity itself. These ideas, as we have seen, are discovered through a sympathetic interpretation of authorial intent. The “modernists”, unconcerned with authorial intent, misunderstand symbolic discourse. There is certainly historical progress and transformation, Hirsch is arguing, but the symbolic context of meaning is secure, anchored, as it were, in God’s original intent.

In the methodological section of Hirsch’s essay, symbols express [ausdrücken] a truth or principle. Here, in his account of Jewish symbolism, they are now the carriers of “Inhalt”. The German word “Inhalt” can mean both “meaning” and “content”. Significantly, symbols and symbolic activity no longer point to ideas, but are the carriers of the ideas themselves. Access to true principles is available only through the symbol. Symbolic activity is not, as many “modernists” believe, a burden and “meaningless shell”, but an integral, indeed essential performance of religious truths. Now understood as the carrier of eternal truth, symbolic activity is itself, like the truth contained within it, eternal and “raised above” the ravages of historical change. The progressive politics of the “modernists” cannot harm nor undermine divine symbolism.

To further protect religious truth from historical contingency, Hirsch appeals to God’s divine revelation to Moses at Sinai. God communicates “Wahrheit” (truth) to humanity by means of religious symbols (IV, 29). Yet God speaks to Moses “mouth to mouth”. Only at Sinai is “Wahrheit” communicated directly and immediately in words without symbolic gloss:

His [Moses’s] mission required – and therein lay his greatness – that God did not speak with him through symbols, but rather Moses had to bring the immediate, unmediated word of God, his law, to the people (IV, 184).

With other prophets, God informs through “Vermittlung symbolischer Erscheinungen” (the mediation of symbolic appearances), such that each prophet “must clothe them [the true principles] in his own words” (IV, 184–185). But at Sinai, words express immediately and perfectly what symbols would only disclose vaguely and imprecisely. In addition, God’s revelation is radically

new. According to Hirsch's definition, God could not reveal new information through symbol, for symbols produce new relationships, but not new meanings. God's law is not "entrusted" in symbols because symbols do not adequately manifest the pristine uniqueness and immediacy of God's word. By placing the "unmediated word of God" beyond symbolic meaning and historical context, Hirsch minimizes interpretive strategies that could undermine the uniqueness of Moses's prophecy and the revelation at Sinai. Progressive politics, and the religious critique essential to it, is thwarted by Hirsch's appeal to immediacy and uniqueness. By speaking to Moses "face to face", God recognizes the limits of *Wissenschaft*. It is a handshake between friends that, in this moment of divine and human encounter, transcends historical contingency.

Sinai is, however, but one moment in divine revelation. The whole Torah (the five books of Moses) reunites the Jewish people with God's original purposes. In a long footnote to the eighteenth letter in *The Nineteen Letters* (1836), Hirsch compares the study of nature with the study of Torah:

One word here concerning the proper method of Torah investigation. Two revelations are open before us; that is, nature and the Torah. [For both there is only one method of research.] In nature all phenomena stand before us as indisputable facts, and we can only endeavor *a posteriori* to ascertain the law of each and the connection of all . . . The same principles must be applied to the investigation of the Torah. [Fact is Torah to us like heaven and earth; as fact the Torah's ordinances lie before us.] In the Torah, even as in nature, God is the ultimate cause. In the Torah, even as in nature, no fact may be denied, even though the reason and the connection may not be understood. What is true in nature is true also in the Torah; the traces of divine wisdom must ever be sought for. Its ordinances must be accepted in their entirety as undeniable phenomena . . . So, too, the ordinances of the Torah must be law for us, even if we do not comprehend the reason and the purpose of a single one. Our fulfillment of the commandments must not depend upon our investigations. Only the commandments belonging to the category of *Edoth*, which are designed to impress emotional and intellectual life, are incomplete without such research.¹³

¹³ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters*, ed. Jacob Breuer (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim Publishers, 1969), fn. #6 to eighteenth letter, pp. 143–144; Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Igerot Tzafon: Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum* (Altona: J.F. Hammerische, 1836), p. 96. Sentences in brackets [] appear in the original German but not in the English translation.

Torah, like nature, consists of undeniable facts.¹⁴ But the “Edoth” (the Hebrew word for “testimonies” but what Hirsch calls “symbolic activity”) need “Forschung” (research) for their own clarity and intelligibility. If the “Edoth” are incomplete without interpretive gloss, it appears that much of the written text requires exegesis. This is clear in Hirsch’s account of oral and written Torah:

Thus the Written Law seeks to be celebrated only in a company of men who are permeated by the living breath of the Oral Law, which is divine like the written word; and in this way the Written Law itself makes it clear that its very being depends on the existence of the Oral Law.¹⁵

Hirsch implies that the written Torah is not an integral, self-contained text, but rather that its source of authority (“its very being”) lies in the divinity of the oral tradition, and those “permeated by the living breath of the Oral Law”. Symbolic reading of the commandments completes what is “incomplete” in the written text. Hirsch’s own detailed, symbolic commentary has become oral Torah. His symbolic reading reproduces the thought of God.

Hirsch’s discussion of tefillin offers a helpful illustration of his symbolic method at work.¹⁶ Tefillin is an example of “Edoth”. In *Horeb* (1837), a compendium of Jewish law and its meaning, Hirsch argues that wearing tefillin expresses four (and only four) essential Jewish beliefs: (1) God delivered the Jews from Egypt (the basis [Grundlung] of Judaism), (2) service to God maintains

¹⁴ For a similar description of Torah as factual data that is unchangeable and permanent, see Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb* (New York: The Soncino Press, 1962), p. 20, paragraph #34; Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb: Versuche über Jisroels Pflichten in der Zerstreung* (Frankfurt am Main: J. Kauffmann, 1921), p. 17, paragraph #34.

¹⁵ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Collected Writings*, vol. I (New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1984), pp. 195–196. Jay Harris understands Hirsch’s interpretation of oral Torah as a response to the burgeoning historical school and the partial relativization of midrash halakhah by Frankel, Graetz and Geiger. See Jay Harris, *How do we know this?: Midrash and the Fragmentation of Modern Judaism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 157–210, 223–228, especially pp. 225–227 on Hirsch’s understanding of oral Torah.

¹⁶ Hirsch, *The Collected Writings: Jewish Symbolism*, pp. 140–161.

human life (the implementation [Verwirklichung] of Judaism), (3) Jews must take to heart [Verherzigung] the fulfillment of Israel's mission, and (4) tefillin serves as a memorial [Denkmal] for Jews and non-Jews throughout history.¹⁷ Both in *Horeb* and in Hirsch's biblical commentary, one finds intricate and detailed interpretations of the precise meaning of tefillin, even its very shape and material.¹⁸ For example, the shape of the "bayit" (the "house" which is worn on the forehead) is square, and not round, because,

of all the creative organic forces it is only the energy of man, who thinks and acts freely, that constructs linear or angular forms. We therefore maintain that the circle characterizes the structures produced by organic forces not endowed with a free will, while angles and squares are hallmarks of man.

The "bayit" must be square, for human beings are endowed with freedom, and "the square is the mark of human freedom which masters the material world". God wishes to remind human beings of their freedom, and their responsibility (to God) to exercise it.¹⁹ In Hirsch's symbolic theory, human beings rediscover God's intentions and the truths conveyed through symbolic activity.

Hirsch's forced symbolic readings did not escape his contemporaries. Two reform rabbis, Abraham Geiger and Gotthold Salomon, reviewed Hirsch's *The Nineteen Letters* in Geiger's journal.²⁰ Geiger claimed that Hirsch imported "phantastisches Bildern" (fantastic representations) and "fremdartigsten Anschauungen" (the most foreign conceptualizations) into the category of "Edoth". He questioned whether the Orthodox will truly believe in the divine source of the commandments if they depended upon Hirsch's reading of even "the smallest, most petty part of the ceremonies". The commandments lose their plausibility the more "tortuous" and

¹⁷ Hirsch, *Horeb*, p. 176, paragraph #271; Hirsch, *Horeb: Versuche über Jisroels Pflichten in der Zerstreung*, p. 153, paragraph #271.

¹⁸ Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Pentateuch*, vols. I and V (Gateshead: Judaica Press, 1989), pp. 160–174 in first volume, and pp. 88–114, 182–192 in fifth volume.

¹⁹ Hirsch, *The Collected Writings: Jewish Symbolism*, p. 152.

²⁰ Geiger, "Neunzehn Briefe über Judentum," pp. 351–359, 518–548; Gotthold Salomon, "Vertrautes Schreiben an einen Rabbi," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für jüdische Theologie* 2 (1836), pp. 417–435.

convoluted Hirsch's "play with symbols" becomes.²¹ Furthermore, if one is so engrossed in the symbolic activity, how can a "free, grand thought or principle" arise at such a time? Here, Geiger's pen is unsparing:

What good does all the clever and spiritual instruction do me, if every moment of life hurls me into a dead mechanism [todten Mechanismus].²²

The complete focus on the symbolic act impedes religious instruction, let alone Hirsch's questionable interpretations. Geiger calls this "spiritual enslavement" [Geistesknechtshaft]: not "Wissenschaft", but the game of wits and cleverness that Hirsch promises to overcome. We require truth and knowledge, Geiger concludes, not "unbegründeter Glaube".²³

Like Geiger, Gotthold Salomon also believes Hirsch's symbolic interpretation leads to a "mechanischen Spiel". But Salomon is more concerned with the appropriateness of symbolic interpretation itself.²⁴ He is, as Hirsch suspects, one of those "modernists" who argues that "Judaism has nothing to do with symbols". Salomon fears that symbolic interpretation opens the door to "fantastical pictures":

If we are permitted a symbolic explanation, if we see in the serpent of Satan, or in the tree of knowledge, something that cannot be perceived, then with what right can we reject the many and ridiculous absurdities with which one or

²¹ Geiger, "Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum, von Ben Uziel: eine Recension," *WZJT* 3 (1837), pp. 83–87. One modern scholar echoes Geiger's critique: "The more volatile a rite and the weaker its observance, the more strongly Hirsch defended it; the more precarious a ritual detail and the more endangered its continuity by abuse or disuse, the more complex was Hirsch's rationale urging its performance... The more abstruse the rite and the more unintelligible its observance, the more complex and weighty is Hirsch's explanation." See Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, p. 203. Also note Nathan Rotenstreich's critique that Hirsch formulated rational meanings in the form of symbolic interpretation for what had come to be seen as "irrational religious activity". See Nathan Rotenstreich, *Ha-mahashavah ha-yehudit be-et ha-badashah*, vol. I (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1966), p. 120. Also see Arnold Eisen, "Divine Legislation as 'Ceremonial Script': Mendelssohn on the Commandments," *AJS Review* 15.2, Fall (1990), p. 264, for a critique similar to Rosenbloom.

²² Geiger, "Neunzehn Briefe über Judenthum," *WZJT* 3, p. 87.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁴ Salomon, "Vertrautes Schreiben an einen Rabbi," p. 431.

another church, with this or ten other interpretations, has put forth, or even further (because the realm of the irrational is borderless) will put forth.²⁵

Once symbolic interpretation is allowed, then Christian theologians could adopt similar hermeneutical strategies with very different ideological agendas. Symbolic interpretation, to Salomon, is imprecise, indeterminate, irrational, and dangerously ecumenical. Echoing Geiger, Hirsch's symbolic reading is condemned as "unwissenschaftliche".

It is possible that Hirsch's *Guidelines*, written some twenty years after *The Nineteen Letters*, attempted to respond to both Salomon and Geiger's critique. We have noticed Hirsch's awareness of "modernists" like Salomon who denied Jewish symbolism altogether, in part because of its unwelcome implications. Indeed, Hirsch's *Guidelines* promised to overcome this kind of fear and denial. And, given the history of Hirsch's friendship with Geiger, one can assume that Hirsch was not unaware of Geiger's critical review.²⁶ Yet Hirsch's *Guidelines* has done little to calm Salomon and Geiger's skepticism. Even as he pursued a "wissenschaftliche" approach to symbol, Hirsch secured the revelation at Sinai beyond interpretive suspicion. His analysis of tefillin relied on questionable generalizations concerning human "energy" and the philosophical meaning of squared objects. At a time when his contemporaries Frankel and Graetz discovered new rabbinic interpretive sources,²⁷ Hirsch claimed to possess, in the "prophetic voice" so distasteful to Salomon,²⁸ the sole hermeneutical strategy for unlocking the secrets of Torah.

We have seen that Hirsch's interpretive strategy was an attempt to reduce error and ambiguity in symbolic interpretation. Through an understanding of the author's intention, each religious symbol revealed only one idea, truth, teaching, or principle. Multiplicity of meaning was the mark of the "Flachkopf" who lacked the appropriate scholarly skills and conceptual apparatus. Ambiguity

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

²⁶ See Liberles, *Religious Conflict in Social Context*, pp. 116–124.

²⁷ See Ismar Schorsch, "The Ethos of Modern Jewish Scholarship," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 35 (1990), pp. 55–71; and Schorsch, "The Emergence of Historical Consciousness in Modern Judaism," pp. 413–437.

²⁸ Salomon, "Vertrautes Schreiben an einen Rabbi," p. 417.

and difference were to be avoided; objectivity, coherence, and unity were to be procured. To know the intention of the author who introduced the symbol was to secure the one appropriate and correct meaning. David Sorkin and Isaac Heinemann have argued that Hirsch's theory of symbol was influenced by the eighteenth and nineteenth century expressivist traditions. The neo-humanist romantics believed that through a close study of the Greek classics, one could encounter the "spirit" (Geist) of the Greeks themselves.²⁹ Schleiermacher, at least in his "technical/psychological" theory, claimed that understanding the other is knowing that other better than it knows itself.³⁰ Surely, Hirsch's insistence upon authorial intent was inspired by this romantic hermeneutical tradition, even if it was somewhat distant from Schleiermacher's discussion of intention and the hermeneutical circle.³¹

²⁹ See Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry*, pp. 156–167, and Heinemann, "The Relationship between S.R. Hirsch and his Teacher Isaac Bernays (Hebrew)," pp. 60–69. For a discussion of the Romantic conception of symbol in eighteenth and nineteenth century Germany, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 147–173. For an important critique of Romantic conceptions of symbol as "an act of ontological bad faith", see de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," pp. 187–228, and David Dawson's insightful critique of de Man's interpretation of Coleridge in his, "Against the Divine Ventriloquist: Coleridge and De Man on Symbol, Allegory and Scripture," *Literature and Theology* 4.3 (1990), pp. 293–310. For background to the nineteenth century debate over symbol and allegory, see Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria*, pp. 11–17; and Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 198–221.

³⁰ F.D.E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, ed. Heinz Kimmerle (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977). On Schleiermacher's hermeneutical theory, see Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 290–300; Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 48–54, especially p. 52 for his critique of Frei's account; and Azade Seyhan's provocative reading that Schleiermacher's "hermeneutical circle excludes the possibility of direct and total representation". See Azade Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 96–104.

³¹ It is difficult to ascertain whether knowing the authors better than the authors know themselves means for Schleiermacher that the interpreter must understand authorial intent. On this point, see Frei's discussion in *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 295–300, and Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents*, pp. 101–103, where she argues that the concept of understanding authors must be interpreted from within the more limited claims and possibilities of Schleiermacher's hermeneutical theory.

Hirsch's theory of symbol is also, to my mind, a claim to hermeneutical and political authority, and a defense of Hirsch's rabbinic and university education. Unlike the "modernists", Hirsch provides systematic guidelines for understanding God's intentions, the time and place of the symbol's origin, and the local and historical background. This is the context within which the appropriate meaning of symbol is to be found, even if Hirsch's reading of symbol is not always true to his theory. Only a rabbinical scholar, trained in Jewish literature and the secular studies of philology, history, linguistics, and philosophy, could offer a sympathetic account of Jewish symbolism. If Hirsch's *Guidelines* attempts to secure the one, true meaning of religious symbol, then it is also a rhetorical strategy to protect his rabbinic authority to discern God's intentions. Hirsch affirms and defends both his education and the modern rabbinic institution in his theory of symbolic interpretation.³²

The significance of Hirsch's hermeneutical theory is strongly tied to the sociological and political landscape. Unconcerned with Christian exegesis, Hirsch does not fear, like Salomon, that the Hebrew bible is open to Christian subversion. In Hirsch's world, Jewish symbolism is for Jews alone. Only within the context of Jewish tradition and community can the meaning of commandment be understood: since symbols cannot impart new meanings, Hirsch's symbolic readings are only for the initiated. Geiger, believing in an underlying religious spirit that pervades all religious practice, rejects Hirsch's defense of Israel's particularity.³³ But if Geiger and Salomon are attuned to Christian exegesis and the ethical implications of being chosen, Hirsch's concerns lie elsewhere. With the increasing openness of German society to Jewish civil and political involvement, even within his own community in Frankfurt am Main, Hirsch's symbolic reading

³² On the emergence of the modern rabbinate, and Hirsch's place within it, see Ismar Schorsch, "Emancipation and the Crisis of Religious Authority: The Emergence of the Modern Rabbinate," in *Revolution and Evolution: 1848 in German-Jewish History*, ed. Werner Mosse, Arnold Paucker and Reinhard Rurup (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1981), pp. 205–247.

³³ Geiger, "Neunzehn Briefe über Judentum," *WZJT* 2, p. 541.

secures a realm where Jewish commandment still retains force for Jews wishing to retain attachments to ritual observance. In 1854, only three years before his methodological essay on symbolic interpretation, Hirsch attacks those reformers who too easily trade in their Jewish rituals in order to purchase the goods of political and civil equality:

At the marketplace of politics, where emancipation was to be purchased, the sons of Judah could be seen everywhere, trading old-style Judaism for "progress".³⁴

Hirsch argues that true "Torah im derekh erez" does not abandon either traditional Jewish observance nor modern secular commitments.³⁵ I have suggested that this is not entirely true, for Hirsch consistently undermines historical criticism by appealing to authorial intent. Even Hirsch is painfully aware that sacrifices are inevitable in a world hostile to orthodox practice:

And, indeed, if most of our brethren would live as true Jews, then most of the conditions that now bar the Jew from so many careers could be eliminated. If only all Jews who travel or who are active in business life were to insist on observing their duties as Jews, this insistence would bring about the possibility of fulfilling all religious requirements. Wherever he would go, the Jew would then find meals prepared in conformity with his religious standards. Then it would be virtually no sacrifice for him to refrain from doing business on the Sabbath... Only due to the faithlessness of the majority does the loyalty of the minority at present demand so many sacrifices.³⁶

Hirsch's Judaism can flourish only in a world where his vision is normative. Yet even in his own community in Frankfurt this is not the case.³⁷ The reinterpretation of commandment as the symbolic

³⁴ Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Religion Allied with Progress," *The Collected Writings*, vol. VI (New York: Philipp Feldheim, Inc., 1990), p. 108.

³⁵ For an account of Hirsch's understanding of "Torah im Derekh Eretz" and its relation to Orthodoxy in Frankfurt am Main, see Heinemann, "Studies on R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (Hebrew)," pp. 249–271.

³⁶ Hirsch, "Religion Allied with Progress," pp. 123–124.

³⁷ See Rosenbloom, *Tradition in an Age of Reform*, pp. 94–120, where he states that even in Frankfurt am Main, "this centuries-old, tradition-bound community became one of the strongholds of the Reform movement in the nineteenth century and served as the terrain for one of the fiercest clashes fought

carrier of meaning is one attempt to turn sacrifice into public acceptance, to move from minority status to normative political practice. Hirsch's symbolic reading is one hermeneutical strategy to provide more public space for Orthodox religious observance. To do this, religious discourse must redefine the political and social landscape. This is but one way of saying that Hirsch's religious commentary is a political and public act.

Samuel Hirsch: Religion, Symbol and the Politics of Toleration

Samuel Hirsch's *Die Humanität als Religion* (1854), published three years before S.R. Hirsch's *Guidelines*, is a collection of lectures given to his fellow Freemasons at the Luxembourg Masonic lodge. The impetus for the lectures, as Hirsch explains in the preface, is the reactionary policy of Prussian Masonic lodges to exclude Jewish membership.³⁸ The Luxembourg lodge, which Hirsch joined after being appointed Communal Rabbi of Luxembourg (1843), is in his view the model religious and political community for toleration, openness, and progress. From the very outset, Hirsch recognizes the social and political implications of religious discourse. He self-consciously sees himself as a religious and political leader. Indeed, Jacob Katz describes *Die Humanität* as "an attempt to overcome the differences between the opposing religions on the

between the traditionalists and Reformers" (p. 95). And note Liberles's claim that "Hirsch's decision to move to Frankfurt derived from his own self-image as the champion of Judaism in the midst of the crisis of his day". See Liberles, *Religious Conflict in Social Context*, p. 134.

³⁸ See Jacob Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723–1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 96–114. For a history of Jewish participation in Masonic Lodges, see Jacob Katz, "Freemasons and Jews," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 9 (1967), pp. 137–148. Prussian lodges were the most reactionary, denying Jewish membership from the very beginning. This is significant, because by 1840 there were 164 Prussian lodges with a membership of 13,000, accounting for roughly two thirds of the entire membership in Germany. For Hirsch's relationship to the Freemasons, see Katz, "Samuel Hirsch—Rabbi, Philosopher and Freemason," pp. 113–126.

basis of Masonic ideology".³⁹ That ideology, Hirsch insists, is a progressive politics of religious toleration. The generous quotations from both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament attest to Hirsch's ideological commitments: Freemasonry, symbolizing the "religion of love and tolerance," absorbs the spirit and principles of both Judaism and Christianity to become "the religion of the future".⁴⁰ A humanitarian religion is a politics of toleration and unification.

A contemporary, Moses Hess, criticized Hirsch for dissolving Jewish particularity in a new "fusion of cults"; Jewish rabbis, Hess concluded, "have now nothing better to do than to close their Reform temples and lead their Jewish parishioners into the temple of Freemasonry".⁴¹ In response to Hess's attack, Samuel Hirsch defended his view of religion in *Die Humanität*:

I have already demonstrated in lectures held in the Lodge that Masonry amounts to nothing if it does not appropriate the basic principles of Judaism. Even the Freemasons require Jewish principles. No! I am supposed to have demanded that the Jews become Masons.⁴²

Hirsch insisted that Jews need not become Freemasons, as Hess unjustly inferred, but rather Freemasons must be more Jewish! The principles of Judaism formed the basis of Masonic ideology. So Freemasonry was only an external cover for the true religion of the future: Judaism as the "religion of love and tolerance". True politics would be Jewish politics, though not in name. We have already seen that Samson Raphael Hirsch desired public acceptance for Jewish religious observance despite the "marketplace of politics". Samuel Hirsch, however, argued that Jewish principles inform that "marketplace". Where S.R. Hirsch spoke only to the initiated, Samuel Hirsch imagined a much

³⁹ Katz, "Samuel Hirsch – Rabbi, Philosopher and Freemason," p. 113.

⁴⁰ Samuel Hirsch, *Die Humanität als Religion*, (Trier: C. Troschel, 1854), p. 248. All further quotations will be cited in text.

⁴¹ Moses Hess, "Rom und Jerusalem, die letzte Nationalitätsfrage," in *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Horst Lademacher (Köln: Joseph Melzer, 1962), p. 262.

⁴² Quote taken from Gershon Greenberg, "The Reformers' First Attack upon Hess' Rome and Jerusalem: An Unpublished Manuscript of Samuel Hirsch," *Jewish Social Studies* 35.3 (1973), p. 195.

broader audience – an audience that would certainly be far more hostile to his claim that Judaism was the most tolerant and universal of religions. So Jewish politics required subversive discourse, in which Freemasonry would undermine public hostility to Jewish emancipation without overtly appealing to Jewish principles. The means to effect this political shift would be a renewed investigation into religious symbolism.

Hirsch claims, initially, that symbols are the perfect and complete embodiment of the truths they represent. They communicate “immediately” eternal truths. But as he works through the distinctions among natural, artistic, and religious symbols, his explanation of symbolic meaning changes substantially. By the time Hirsch explains the meaning of religious cultic activity, symbols no longer perfectly correspond to the eternal truths. Instead, true ideas – God’s unity and oneness, the ultimate triumph of good over evil – are not restricted to a finite set of symbolic forms. Multiple symbols, each tied to particular social and historical periods, mediate these truths to local communities. In the initial explanation, symbols perfectly translate the ideas as they are in themselves. But later, symbols refer to the ideas as they appear to finite human beings, limited to cultural, historical, and social understanding. Hirsch, in the end, calls the former theory pagan worship. The latter interpretation – where symbols are inescapably bound to particular historical periods – develops into a politics of religious toleration. This transition, based on the Kantian distinction between things-in-themselves and things-as-they-are-for-us, underscores the political character of Hirsch’s symbolic interpretation of religion. A Jewish politics of emancipation relies upon the power of particular religious symbols to disclose universal truths.

If for S.R. Hirsch human beings naturally express their desires and thoughts through symbolic activity, then for Samuel Hirsch, those desires and thoughts are revealed through religious activity. Hirsch begins his lectures with a paraphrase of Feuerbach’s interpretation of religion:

Religion is anthropology, it is teaching [Lehre] from the innermost being of man and humanity. This expression of Feuerbach is a true expression, but only if understood correctly – falsely understood, it is an empty phrase (Vorwort, i).

Hirsch appeals to a basic human nature shared by all. Difference does not go all the way down. Properly conceived, religion is “essential, necessary, and intrinsic” to the concept of personhood, and will only cease with the destruction of humanity itself. Not something made nor found, religious life is a necessary human activity and experience. To be human is to be a religious being. At the core of all activity is a shared religious sensitivity.

Hirsch specifies this universal religious nature as *Arbeit* – the essence of religion and “the concept of humanity”. Not every human activity counts as *Arbeit*. It is a special kind of spiritual activity, “in which a definite goal is known and the correct means are applied to achieve that goal”. Through directed activity, human beings, in the image of God, “control the earth” and “stamp the earth with the seal of our spirit”: “Creation, through our activity, will be perfected” (37–38, 42). Through *Arbeit*, we view each other as “fellowbeings” [Mitmenschen] who express human freedom in the capacity to rule the earth; *Arbeit*, as the essence of religion, is also the essence of political and communal engagement. Public religion builds unifying relationships of love, represented in the universal brotherhood of Freemasonry:

In the Masonic lodge true freedom prevails. We want only free beings, that is, beings who understand that freedom is gained in and through their activity [Arbeit]... In the end, the Masonic lodge is an image [Bild] of honorable brotherly love... We accomplish in life what the Masonic Lodge symbolically [sinbildlich] teaches us (54).

Human freedom is enacted through the outward expression of the religious self. To be human, in Hirsch’s interpretation of *Arbeit*, is now to be a religious and political animal. The “religion of the future”, in which toleration and love transform human interaction, begins with *Arbeit*, and ends in the Freemason community. Religion has become political praxis, and an integrative one at that.

Hirsch’s public religion is a world of fellow beings in a universal community of love and mutual respect. Religion builds personal relations between “Mitmenschen”, now viewed as compatriots in perfecting God’s creation. *Arbeit*, as the “concept of humanity”, represents the human responsibility to fulfill its obligations to God. Recall that S.R. Hirsch imagines the covenant as a handshake

between human beings and God. For Samuel Hirsch, unifying relations among fellow beings enacts the covenant. Indeed, the title of his lectures, "Humanitarianism as Religion", indicates that divine worship translates into public policy. The contrast between S.R. Hirsch's handshake, and Samuel Hirsch's "Arbeit", is a contrast that ideologically divides the Orthodox from the Reform. For the Orthodox Hirsch, religious worship is public service that builds personal relations between Jews and their God. For the Reform Hirsch, religious worship is social and political activity that fortifies tolerant relations among others.

Samuel Hirsch's theory of religious symbol develops out of his discussion of *Arbeit* as religious and political activity. The transition is effected through a discussion of art that draws heavily from the Platonic, or more accurately the Plotinus tradition of ideal forms.⁴³ Hirsch describes a carpenter who, before constructing a chair, must have in mind the "idea of the whole". The builder imagines the perfect form (chairness) to which the physical chair corresponds. But the activity [*Arbeit*] of construction often deviates from the original and pure theoretical idea. In cases where the translation from theory to practice becomes difficult or confusing, the carpenter "no longer depends upon the idea in his head, but rather wants to see this idea of activity before him" (127). Hirsch's carpenter requires a perfect material translation of the idea of chairness in order to better construct the most suitable chair. The sign that transports the non-material idea into a recognizable material reality is the symbol. In "Kunst" (art), the carpenter discovers a reality that fully corresponds to the ideal forms:

Here [in art] the symbol of the idea is not merely a means for the materialization of the idea, but rather serves to immediately present the idea (127).

The symbol is not a translation of the formal, true idea, but rather its perfect incarnation. It does not mediate, but reveal. The artist communicates the perfect idea in a form (symbol) that "immediately" corresponds to its content.

⁴³ I thank David Dawson for pointing out the correlation between Hirsch's theory of art and Plotinus's reinterpretation of Plato's account of ideal forms.

The carpenter's problem, Hirsch emphasizes, is that the individual chair of his creation cannot "immediately" present the idea in full. Each tree or fruit, for example, is one "realization of the eternal idea, the idea of fruit or tree". But since the idea is "eternal and omnipresent", each individual fruit or tree cannot fully encapsulate or correspond to the idea. The artist, however, envisions the form, and not the particular instance of the idea. In each apple, the painter recognizes the "Urbilde" (the archetype), portrays it, and creates the "true apple", "not a mere copy or imitation of the natural thing, but rather the real [wirklich] that is found in the idea itself":

The mystery, a need of Spirit, the need to see the idea in a thing, is solved in reality for all through art.

The painter of everyday life, the historical painter, the sculptor, even the portrait painter understands with his ingenious eye this idea, and brings the idea completely in any one situation to presentation, and everyone is moved to feel it (128).

In Hirsch's symbolic theory, the artist⁴⁴ perfects nature. She observes the material embodiment of the idea that is only vaguely disclosed to the carpenter, and unveils it "immediately" before him. Her symbolic painting is therefore not a "mere copy or imitation", but a more perfect rendering of eternal ideas. Here we witness at least one strain of the romantic influence upon Hirsch's theory of symbol, in which the artistic symbol is not the mere carrier of revelation, but is itself a revelatory event.⁴⁵ For S.R. Hirsch, symbols uncover latent, obscure meanings in nature and thing. So too for Samuel Hirsch's account of artistic symbol as an act of disclosure. But the artist does more than merely disclose meaning, she also perfects nature. A power that

⁴⁴ Notice Hirsch's expansion of artistic expression from painter (Maler) to encompass a broader spectrum of art which, as we shall see, includes the poet as well.

⁴⁵ For the romantic conception of how art reveals eternal harmony and unity, rather than merely imitates or copies nature, see Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, pp. 147–189. In *Representation and Its Discontents*, Seyhan argues against this reading, focusing instead on the early romantics's obsession with the crisis of representing the absolute. Romantic texts "suggest that since no scientific principle or method can reveal the absolute or absolute time, the latter can only be indirectly understood through artistic representation". "The investigation and appropriation or appropriative representation of otherness," Seyhan adds later, "constitutes the essential gesture of Romantic hermeneutics" (pp. 12, 23).

S.R. Hirsch respectfully leaves to God, Samuel Hirsch now transfers to the artist. S.R. Hirsch's heavenly politics -- the handshake between human beings and God -- has become thoroughly human.

This should not surprise us, for *Arbeit* is a distinctly human activity that unifies diverse human achievements. The artist merely captures the universal idea underlying all human response. Nature only vaguely signifies eternal ideas, where art reveals them in full. Even in specific symbolic human activity, "the idea never appears entirely". The artist discloses the idea "better and truer, that is, more accurately" than "the reality of life" (128). This is most evident in poetry, Hirsch claims, for we feel after reading a poem that the poem itself contains "the entire idea". But even this artistic perfection is not enough to satisfy our need to discover eternal ideas in reality:

We have the need to see the whole idea as such, completely and in its purity. Not merely to understand it as an inner reality in thought, but rather to grasp it as an outer reality before our spiritual but corporeal eyes (128).

This visionary need can only be satisfied in religious activity [der Cultus]. The religious cult is "the art of religion" and "the art of life". Like art, music and poetry, religious activity discloses the idea "completely and in its purity". If art perfects nature, then religious symbolic activity completes what still remains incomplete in art:

Just as life finds its center in the religious idea, and just as human life needs the arts in order to become truly human, so too all the arts find their rightful center in the true religious activity [Cultus] that corresponds to the idea (129).

Art reveals to us true ideas, but in religious activity we experience these truths fully and completely through our material, worldly, though no less spiritual vision. For symbol to be fully efficacious, it must become public activity.

The eternal truths experienced in religious activity correspond, in Hirsch's analogy, to "the Platonic sun". Without the *Cultus*, we remain in the darkness of the cave, lost and disillusioned. But in religious activity, human beings flourish, warmed and illumined by eternal truths (129):

Since religious activity [Cultus] is the symbolic expression of the idea of life, so too must it comprise all of life, to symbolically represent the entire idea

[die ganze Idee sinnbildlich darstellen]. Religious activity comprises the entire human being, as much as in his entire secular life as in his entire inner being (130).

Public religious activity [öffentlicher Cultus] extols us. It brings us to the consciousness that humanity is one and that every human being can and should be a valued part in this whole (138).

The terminological shift from “Cultus” to the “öffentlicher Cultus” is not accidental. It is part of Hirsch’s extended claim that religion can be the unifying force in public policy. Even more, it underlies his defense of Freemasonry: “To the Freemasons we need not say much about what the common *Cultus* is and how it fulfills human needs. Our symbolic assemblies are nothing other than a common *Cultus* [gemeinsamer Cultus]” (138). The transition from “Cultus” to “öffentlicher Cultus”, and finally to “gemeinsamer Cultus”, signifies a significant move from the private to the political, from the particular to a shared public religious activity. Freemasonry represents universal, religious and political activity that, like Plato’s sun, enlightens and enlivens human experience. No one community or religious tradition can claim ownership to the sun’s spiritual power. Only the Masonic lodge, common and open to all, illumines “all of life” in its “secular” (political) and “inner” (religious) being.

But what of those other communities, the symbolic activities of other religious traditions that lack the openness of Freemasonry? If one recognizes all religious activity as symbolic, then even the animal sacrifices in ancient Judaism are “understandable from this historical perspective”. Because all require cultic activity to experience eternal ideas in physical, public reality, every act of religious worship represents “the activity of ideal humanity” in symbolic form. While no longer comprehending the meaning of the sacrificial alter, one can still recognize its representational power, even if such activity is “unsuitable” for moderns (140). A symbolic reading of religious activity promotes toleration and respect for difference.

Hirsch’s interpretation of symbolic activity has undergone a significant change. Originally, religious symbolic activity perfected the still abstract representation of true ideas in art. In the religious *Cultus*, human beings discovered these eternal truths in human activity (*Arbeit*) “immediately” and “entirely”. But in his defense

of religious toleration, Hirsch modifies his approach to symbolic activity. Cultic performance represents the truth, but is itself not a complete revelatory event. Symbol is no longer compared to "Plato's sun", nor is it a translucent signifier of eternal ideas. Instead, symbolic activity is one particular form that mediates the content of eternal truths. Though universal ideas are always represented in symbolic activity, this symbolic form changes through history:

He [the free human being] will not be indifferent to religious activity; he will strive to make his religion [Cultus], the religion to which he belongs, a true expression of his spiritual life. But this striving will be endured with tolerance and respect for every other form of religion, for these other symbolic activities represent the inner life of his fellow creatures [Mitmenschen]. All the religions [Culte] in the end will be united, but the means must be as different as there are various degrees of culture and human development (142).

We work under different forms yet we all recognize only one goal and know that the variety of forms will not injure the unity and uniformity of the ideal (142).

Religious activity "is only the symbol, only the representation of life, and not life itself" (142). If the symbol once disclosed the idea "completely and in its purity", now it becomes one of many pointers to truth. Unlike the "eternal idea", symbolic expression is relative to cultural and historical conditions and sensibilities.⁴⁶ Tolerance demands it.

Intolerance results when symbolic activity is thought to capture "in its purity" the eternal ideas. Paganism, in Hirsch's taxonomy, confuses appearance with ultimate reality:

Human activity as religious activity is considered by paganism not only as a symbol, as a representation of life and the activity in life, but also as a real, true service to God. God really drinks, according to the pagan conception, the blood of the sacrifice and really consumes its fat (141).

⁴⁶ Note Hirsch's interpretation of Hebrew scripture: "To us, it does not matter how the truth is expressed, but only what has been proclaimed as the truth... For us, only the thoughts are important that were put in the mouth of Abraham and Moses. These thoughts exist [sind vorhanden]. If Abraham and Moses had not spoken them, then some person living at a later time had put these words in Abraham and Moses's mouth. This later person [and not Moses and Abraham] had these thoughts, but these thoughts remain no less grand or true in his mouth, than in the mouth of a Abraham." See Hirsch, *Humanität als Religion*, pp. 213–214.

Cultic activity is symbolic, pointing or referring to eternal truths. But pagans mistakenly believe that their religious activity captures the truth wholly without remainder. They mistake the things-in-themselves for things-as-they-appear-to-us. Hirsch's earlier discussion of artistic symbolic activity as immediate revelation, where eternal truths were captured in art, must now be considered pagan worship. Symbols mediate truths, rather than immediately present them. The "Urbilde" or the "real that is found in the idea itself" can no longer be wholly discovered in religious activity. Samuel Hirsch is forced to modify his initial account of symbol in order to challenge misguided, "intolerant" conceptions of religious activity.

What accounts for Samuel Hirsch's retreat from his original interpretation of symbol? We can see in the displacement of symbol as transparent revealer to relative signifier Hirsch's hermeneutical strategy to defend Jewish religious practice in the wake of social and political intolerance. While Hirsch himself finds many of these ancient Jewish practices objectionable (247), his symbolic reading is not so much a critique of Judaism as it is a political challenge to Christian conceptions of Jewish religious practice and belief. Recall that Hirsch's lectures at the Masonic lodge in Luxembourg were written to challenge Prussian lodges that denied Jewish membership. As Jacob Katz argues, Freemasonry in Germany reflected the broader social and political landscape. The Prussian lodges merely exposed the dominant socio-political demand: Jews must abandon ritual observance to purchase an entry ticket into European culture.⁴⁷

Hirsch's is a rhetorical strategy designed, in part, to challenge this political and social policy.⁴⁸ Even if Jewish religious practice is often

⁴⁷ See Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723–1939*, pp. 1–5; and Katz, "Freemasons and Jews," pp. 137–148.

⁴⁸ Thiemann's discussion concerning the critical power of religious traditions to challenge democratic polities fits well with Hirsch's agenda: "From time to time these societies need to be called to account by reference to a higher standard of justice than that to which they ordinarily give allegiance. Religious traditions are often the source for those standards, and religious discourse will often be the vehicle for both critique and renewal. And when religious traditions are employed in that fashion, they become part of the proper public discourse of democratic societies." See Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life*, p. 88.

“unsuitable”, it is nonetheless “understandable” from a tolerant historical perspective. Contemporaries like Hess and later social historians like Katz misunderstand Hirsch’s critique: not Judaism, but European society must be transformed, a reformation that begins with the advancement of Jewish membership in Prussian Masonic lodges. Hirsch’s interpretation of *Arbeit* as religious and political activity offers the conceptual tools to help effect political change.

This becomes clear in Hirsch’s correlation of Passover with Christmas. Like Passover, the birth of Christ represents the “idea of humanity” in a single event. Both holidays symbolize eternal principles: the victory and eternity of truth over error, virtue over vice, the good life and justice over misery and evil. Through “the truth of Christ”, the holy spirit enters the world, and in “the ten words of Sinai”, the instruction of Israel becomes the property of the world. These holidays are not merely “festivals to remember historical facts”, but represent the same basic principles:

So in Christianity as in Judaism is acknowledged always the one idea, the eternal idea of humanity, there in the person of Christ, here in the people of God (145).

The Christian Sunday and the Jewish Sabbath both represent human mastery over nature. Christianity is therefore only an alternative symbolic expression of truths originally found in Judaism. But Jewish originality confers authority and authenticity:

Judaism discovered and expressed the true principle long before Christianity (223). To the Jews Jesus could bring no new teachings – for their old writings contained the same teachings, the same axioms, the same principles as Jesus had taught and proclaimed (226).

To merely call oneself Christian, to merely confess to the truth of Christianity as was taught by Jesus: this the Jews who lived at the time of Jesus did as well and as passionately as Christians today (227).

Christianity is but Judaism in another name: the content is the same, only the form has changed. This is not a call for Jews to join Masonic lodges, as Moses Hess would have it. Instead, these lodges, and Christianity itself, must become more Jewish. The “religion of the future” may be Judaism in the form of Freemasonry, but it is Jewish nonetheless. Religious symbolism, if properly understood, promotes the religious and political toleration

required for Jewish access to the goods of European society. And this is possible because that society, in Hirsch's symbolic reading, is Jewish to the core.

Conclusion

Samuel Hirsch is less than tolerant to non-Western religions. Buddhism is condemned for its "atheistic" tendencies and its renunciation of worldly engagement. Egyptian religions and Hinduism fare no better: they all result from a "false hypothesis" (211). This should not surprise us if we understand Hirsch's lectures at the Luxembourg lodge as strategic attempts to open Christian doors for Jewish entry. Hirsch's concerns are parochial, and thus his tolerance limited.⁴⁹ We find a different, though no less restrictive agenda in Samson Raphael Hirsch's symbolic reading of the commandments. Unconcerned with Christian symbolic reading, S.R. Hirsch need not defend what most concerns Samuel Hirsch. Instead, S.R. Hirsch offers a "wissenschaftliche" rereading of the commandments that provides coherence and uniformity only for those already within the ever shrinking borders of German Orthodoxy. Yet S.R. Hirsch's Orthodoxy, as much as Samuel Hirsch's Reform, requires public space and acceptance for continued Jewish observance. Their religious readings are also political statements.

But their politics are different, and this is revealed in their divergent symbolic readings of religion and commandment. Samuel Hirsch defends a policy of contained pluralism, one that opens social and political goods to all those who ascribe to the universal principles of love and toleration. His symbolic interpretation

⁴⁹ Note Jacob Katz's appraisal: "What Hirsch's theory amounted to was the identification of freemasonry with the Judeo-Christian teachings. Theoretically this would have entailed the exclusion of the adherents of other religions from the Masonic order. The tolerance achieved by his theory was not, then, absolute, but limited to Jews and Christians only." See Katz, "Samuel Hirsch – Rabbi, Philosopher and Freemason," p. 125. Also note Katz's remark in *Jews and Freemasons in Europe, 1723–1939*, that "Hirsch contended that humanism could only be attained through Judaism or Christianity" (p. 127).

integrates diverse human activity, for underlying that activity is a shared religious sensibility (*Arbeit*) that points to universal truths. Despite multiple symbolic forms, Hirsch carefully protects “the unity and uniformity of the ideal”. Conflicting religious interpretations should not blind us to the universal principles and truths underlying them. One need not fear pluralism, for all difference is ultimately rooted in common religious ideals. But tolerance does not extend to those who do not accept these universal truths. Only Freemasonry, Christianity, and Judaism pass the test. Religions founded upon a “false hypothesis” are pushed to the margins of political discourse. But Judaism is not one of those religions. It should therefore be fully integrated within the social and political life of nineteenth-century German culture. Jewish ritual practice refers to the same universal truths as many other religions, and certainly does so “long before” Christianity.

S.R. Hirsch does not emphasize common religious *ideals*, but instead focuses upon the uniform *interpretation* of religious texts. To be sure, Hirsch’s reading of tefillin appeals to the universal truths of human freedom and free will. Yet “the unity and uniformity of the ideal” is not his concern. Instead, he fears multiple religious interpretations of the commandments. If Samuel Hirsch requires uniformity in religious truths, then S.R. Hirsch demands uniformity in symbolic readings of the commandments. Samuel Hirsch would certainly find S.R. Hirsch’s program a troubling one, for it undermines the commitment to a pluralistic society so necessary for Jewish emancipation. There is no common truth among religions so much as competing claims to hermeneutical authority. But the “marketplace of politics” is not S.R. Hirsch’s arena. All he requires is a public, enclosed space for Jewish religious practice, and a political policy that will protect that space. For his symbolic reading of the commandments to be normative, S.R. Hirsch must encourage a politics of religious protection and exclusion, one that protects his reading of texts and excludes revisionary pressures. His politics seeks to integrate one community by marginalizing others.

Samuel and S.R. Hirsch’s political differences are rooted in how they understand that one community. The liberal politics of Samuel Hirsch requires a uniformity in principle, such that the one community includes only those who ascribe to that principle.

S.R. Hirsch's more conservative program seeks conformity in practice. His one community is exclusive, open only to those Orthodox Jews who comply with his symbolic reading of the commandments. Another way of saying this would be that S.R. Hirsch's handshake unites a particular Jewish community with God, while Samuel Hirsch's covenant binds Jews with tolerant others.

‘The Intellect is the Bond Between Us and Him’: Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Divine Names and Communion with God through the Intellect

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*The purpose of philosophy is to know the Creator,
for He is the real God (...)
but the fruit of philosophy and the result of it is
to imitate His acts according to one's ability.¹*

The present essay is an analysis of some of the main features in the thought of Joseph B. Soloveitchik as articulated in “U-viqqashtem mi-sham”.² The essay will bring into focus, first of all, Soloveitchik’s interpretation of the divine names ‘I am that I am’ and the tetragrammaton. Secondly, the essay will examine Soloveitchik’s statement that communion with God is achieved through the intellect.

¹ Joseph ibn Tsaddiq, *Sefer ha-‘alam ha-qatan* (ed. Horovitz. Breslau, 1903) 68, cf. *ibidem*, xiii, note 55. See also: I. Heinemann, *Die Lehre von der Zweckbestimmung des Menschen im griechisch-römischen Altertum und im jüdischen Mittelalter* (Breslau, 1926) 58.

² Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “U-viqqashtem mi-sham”, in: *idem, Ish ba-balakha. Galuy we-nistar* (Jerusalem, 1979) 115–235. The title of the essay is a quotation from Deut. 4, 29: “And from there Thou shalt seek”. All translations of “U-viqqashtem mi-sham” are my own.

I

Soloveitchik's discussion of the divine names 'I am that I am' and the tetragrammaton is articulated in the context of his exposition of the doubly dual nature of the relationship between God and man. According to this exposition, man, on the one hand, is in search of God and, on the other, hides from Him at the moment the divine reveals Himself. And God, for His part, both reveals Himself to man and conceals Himself from him; He is in search of man, the apple of His eye, and yet there are times in which He "wraps Himself in a cloud and withdraws in the hidden places of eternity."³

The duality in man's relationship with the divine is related to what Soloveitchik calls two types of consciousness, "natural" and "revelational".⁴ Man's "natural consciousness" is described by Soloveitchik in various ways which do not seem entirely coherent. Man's natural consciousness is characterized, first of all, by the endeavour to direct the multiplicity of reality and its contingent nature to a first being that is unconditioned and exists of necessity. To illustrate this endeavour, Soloveitchik refers to the first rule in Maimonides' *Mishne Torah*, Hilchot Yesode ha-Tora I, 1. There it is stated that the first principle of wisdom is the acknowledgement of a first being whose existence is the precondition for the existence of all that exists. A second way in which Soloveitchik describes this type of consciousness is by the endeavour of man to find "the concealed reason" that will enlighten the core of reality. Both endeavours are considered by Soloveitchik to be attempts to know the divine through knowing reality. And thirdly and finally, there is the awareness in man's natural consciousness of the enigmatic nature of reality, as the core of reality transcends the abilities of cognition.⁵ The epistemological transcendence of reality is interpreted by Soloveitchik as a hint

³ "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 137, 145–146 *et passim*. Cf. Franz Rosenzweig, "Das neue Denken", *Gesammelte Schriften* III, hrsg. von R. und A. Mayer (Dordrecht, 1984) 139–161, esp. 150. See also page 7, below, on God's singularity.

⁴ "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 148.

⁵ "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 132–133, note 7; 140. Cf. Soloveitchik's doctoral thesis (published under the name Josef Solowiejczyk), *Das reine Denken und die SeinKonstitution bei Hermann Cohen* (Berlin, 1932) 87 *et passim*.

of the transcendence of the Eternal One,⁶ who is named in Rabbinic literature as 'He who dwells in the hidden places of the world.'⁷

The second type of consciousness, which is called "relational consciousness", is based on the awareness that man is dependent on the act of self-revelation of the Eternal One in order to reach the absolute and eternal in reality.⁸ If reality in essence transcends cognition, the endeavour to discover the divine by investigating reality ends in failure.⁹ To Soloveitchik, it is because of man's sin that God hides from him and "departed from the world below to the hiding place of eternity and infinity".¹⁰ However, if the core of reality remains an enigma, man is unable to discover the One who withdraws to the hidden places of the world; he is unable to discover the divine through creation. Instead, he is dependent on the act of self-revelation of the (T)ranscendent in order to achieve his goal of knowing what is concealed.¹¹ In this context, Soloveitchik writes elsewhere: "When God is apprehended *in* reality it is an experience; when God is comprehended *through* reality it is just an intellectual performance."¹² Hence, on account of the experience of the divine *in* reality – i.e. the encounter with the God of Sinai, the God of the revealed divine will as articulated in the halakha¹³ – the transcendence in reality is conceived as a hint of the Transcendent or the concealed reason, i.e. of the God of creation.

It is also on account of the experience of revelation that Soloveitchik formulates the proposition that God is the source

⁶ "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 148. Cf. Deut. 29, 28: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but those which are revealed belong to us and to our children..."

⁷ Wayr 23, 12 (ed. Margolies, 545): "Yoshev ba-sitro shel 'olam". Cf. *Peirika Rabbai* ch. 24 (ed. Friedmann, 124b). See also: bShev 15b for a different reading, and A. Marmorstein, *The old Rabbinic Doctrine of God* (2 Vols. London, 1927) I, 88.

⁸ "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 148.

⁹ Cf. "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 139–140, as opposed to, e.g., Hermann Cohen, *Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Leipzig, 1919) 82.

¹⁰ "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 140–141.

¹¹ Cf. "Ish ha-halakhā", in: Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Ish ha-halakhā. Galuy ve-nistar* (Jerusalem, 1979) 46 *et passim* (*Halakhic Man*, Translated from the Hebrew by Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia, 1983) 45 *et passim*), and "The Lonely Man of Faith", *Tradition* 7 (1965) 5–67, esp. 34.

¹² "The Lonely Man of Faith" 30–33, quote: 32, note*.

¹³ "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 146.

and relas of reality and that there is no reality aside from Him.¹⁴ Heaven and earth bear testimony to the dignity and wisdom of Him “who spoke and the world came into being.”¹⁵ Moreover, if He is the Creator of the world it turns out that “there is no God-less existence, no reality without reference to God.”¹⁶ He is *ba-magom*, “the Place”, to be understood as *megomo shel olam*, “the Place of the world”.¹⁷ ‘Being’ is therefore “nothing but a metaphor for the infinite reality,” which is God.¹⁸ According to Soloveitchik, this proposition is based on the apprehension of reality as divine reality, an apprehension that was revealed to Moses in the logion *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, “I am that I am”.¹⁹ The logion indicates, to Soloveitchik, that the contingent reality of the “Let there be” of creation is dependent on the necessary being of the “I am”.²⁰ In addition to this interpretation in “U-viqqashren mi-sham”, the logion is interpreted in the essay “Confrontation” as indicating, first of all, that God is the existent par excellence (referring to *Guide* I, 63), and, secondly, that there is a fundamental difference between God and man. This fundamental difference is an illustration of human ‘distinctiveness and grandeur’: “God is free from the contradiction between potentiality and actuality, ideal and reality. He is pure actuality, existence par excellence. Man, however, is unable to stare of himself *ehyeh asher ehyeh* since his real existence always falls short of the ideal which his Maker sets up for him as the great objective. This tragic schism reflects, in a paradoxical fashion, human distinctiveness and grandeur.”²¹

¹⁴ “U-viqqashren mi-sham” 128, 167–168.

¹⁵ On this Tannaic term for God, see, e.g.: bSanh 19a.

¹⁶ “U-viqqashren mi-sham” 168.

¹⁷ Cf. “U-viqqashren mi-sham” 201. “Sacred and Profane”, *Gabber* 3 (1965) 5–29, esp. 9. See also: Berk 68, 11 (ed. Theodor/Albeck 777–778) and parallels mentioned by the editors *ad loc.*

¹⁸ “U-viqqashren mi-sham” 129, note 4.

¹⁹ Exod. 3, 14. For a brief outline of the various interpretations of the logion *ehyeh asher ehyeh* that have been proposed in the course of time, see: Max Reisel, *Observations on the Tetragrammaton* (Assen, 1957) 5–31, esp. 12–20. *Dieu et Père. Exégèse d'Exode 3, 14 et de Coran 20, 11–24* (Paris, 1978) 47–55, 67–84. *Celui qui est. Interprétations juives et chrétiennes d'Exode 3, 14*, édité par Alain de Libera et Emilie Zuum Brunn (Paris, 1986) 15–24 et *passim*.

²⁰ “U-viqqashren mi-sham” 167–168. Cf. *ibidem*, 129, note 4.

²¹ “Confrontation”, *Tradition* 6 (1964) 5–28, esp. 10. On God as pure actuality and man as a composite of potentiality and actuality, see page 16,

Soloveitchik derived this theistic proposition and his understanding of the divine name *ehyeh asher ehyeh* from Maimonides – although his rendering is given in a different fashion from Maimonides. It is well known that Maimonides plays a most significant role in Soloveitchik's thought; 'the Great Eagle' is an authoritative source of inspiration in the latter's thinking. This role of Maimonides is articulated in a rather personal way at the end of "U-viqqashtem mi-sham". There Soloveitchik writes in an impassioned style that while feeling fear for and alienation from the world because of its heartlessness, "I only had one friend and he is, don't make a mockery of me, Maimonides."²²

Soloveitchik's indebtedness to Maimonides on the point under discussion can be illustrated by the first rules of The Book of Knowledge in *Mishne Torá*. There Maimonides states, first of all, as referred to above, that the first principle of wisdom is the acknowledgement of a first being whose existence is the precondition for the existence of all that exists. This first being is specified (I, 4) as *Adonai*, the God of the Fathers. Maimonides calls the acknowledgement of this principle an affirmative precept (I, 6).²³

In *Guide I*, 63 Maimonides likewise argues that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the necessary existent, on account of His self-revelation as "I am that I am". The divine name "I am that I am" indicates, according to this passage, that God is "the existent that is the existent." God is the existent that is not non-existent, i.e. the first being that brought all existing things into existence. In other words, God is the *ens necessarium*.²⁴

below. In "Majesty and Humility", *Tradition* 17 (1978) 25–37, as well as in "The Lonely Man of Faith" and "Confrontation", the composite, dialectical nature of man is interpreted by Soloveitchik as an exemplification of both man's tragic situation, i.e. his failure to realize the ideal, and his grandeur, i.e. the great challenge of being able to pursue the ideal.

²² "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 230.

²³ *Mishne Torá*, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torá I, 1–6. See also: *Sefar ha-mitsvot* (Book of the Commandments), 'ave 2, where the belief in the unity of God is interpreted as indicating that the Creator of all things in existence and their First Cause are One, as is articulated in the *shema'* (Deut. 6, 4).

²⁴ Cf. *Guide I*, 63: 154–155.

Although Soloveitchik does not make any reference to the interpretation of the logion by his contemporaries, it is interesting to note that his explanation of *ehyeh asher ehyeh* corresponds with Hermann Cohen's and is in opposition to the one offered by Franz Rosenzweig. Cohen interprets the phrasing of the divine name as indicating that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob manifests Himself as the God of being, and that there is no difference between the two. To Cohen, the explication of this manifestation is what (a philosophy of) religion is about.²⁵ Rosenzweig, on the other hand, vehemently dismisses such an interpretation, calling it "the abomination of the Sepruagint."²⁶ Instead, he offers an interpretation of the text – corresponding with ShemR 3, 6 and bBer 9b – in which the logion is phrased as "Ich werde dasein, als der ich dasein werde."²⁷

The parallel between Soloveitchik and both Maimonides and Hermann Cohen can even be drawn a little further, viz. with regard to the implications of the manifestation of God as being. According to Maimonides, the conviction that God is one is to be understood as indicating both His unity, *achdut* – denoting that there is no composition in Him²⁸ – and His uniqueness or singularity, *yehidut* – which indicates that He has no

²⁵ Cf. *Religion der Vernunft* 41–57, esp. 47–52. *Der Begriff der Religion* 20. *Jüdische Schriften* I, 89–92. See also: Nathan Korenstretch, *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig* (New York, etc., 1968) 78–102, and the present author's "God Reveals Himself in Reason. On Hermann Cohen's Analogy between Logic and Religion", *Archivio di Filosofia* 61 (1993) 269–287, esp. 278–287.

²⁶ Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften* IV, 2 (Dordrecht, 1984) 93. See also: Rosenzweig's letter to Martin Goldner dated 23.6.1927, *Gesammelte Schriften* I, 2, 1158–1162, esp. 1161, and the essay "Der Ewige", *Gesammelte Schriften* III, 801–815, esp. 804–807.

²⁷ *Ibidem*. On account of the equivocal meaning of the verb *hayah*, 'to be' in Exod. 3, 14 (cf. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, hrsg. von G. Johannes Botterweck und Helmer Ringgren (Stuttgart, 1977) II, 406–408, as well as the literature mentioned in note 19, above) it is legitimate to conclude, against the position taken by, e.g., Rosenzweig, that the introduction of classical metaphysics in Exod. 3, 14 cannot be dismissed by referring to the meaning of the verb *hayah*.

²⁸ *Guide* I, 50: 111. On this notion of *simplicitas*, see also *Mishne Tora*, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Tora I, 7: "He is not two, nor more than two, but one".

equal.²⁹ In addition, Maimonides can be quoted as saying: "He alone is real and nothing else is as real as His reality".³⁰ Thus the world is to Maimonides a non-reality vis à vis the reality of the divine.

Cohen likewise states that the oneness of God indicates that He is uncomposed, *Ein*, and singular, *Einzig*. In line with this statement, the proposition that God is being is interpreted by Cohen as indicating that His being is the singular being, *das einzige Sein*, or *der einzige Seiende*. This singular nature of God's being is interpreted as the incommensurability of God with everything that is not-God. Only God is called being, and He is called the only being. That which is besides or outside of God is hence called nothingness or non-being.³¹

Soloveitchik, finally, can be quoted at this point as saying, "God is the pure reality that provides and comprises all (...). There is no existence without God, nor a reality that does not refer to Him."³² Existence can be attributed to God only, and there is no existence apart from Him. Independent existence is to be denied of the world. "Only God exists, nothing else exists apart from God. Even the modifier 'apart from' is an absurd term. There is no 'apart from' with regard to Infinity."^{33, 34} This status of God is

²⁹ *Guide* I, 57: 133. Cf. *Mishne Torah*, Hiltchot Yesodei ha-Tora I, 7. For a similar interpretation of *abad* – as indicating *abadut* and *yeshivat* – in Rabbinic literature, see, e.g.: BerR 21, 5 (ed. Theodor/Albeck, 200–201); *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, piska 4 (ed. Mandelbaum, I, 54) and *Midrash Tanchuma*, seder be-midbar, parashat chugqat, masechet 4 (ed. Buber, 103). See also: Harry Austryn Wolfson, "Maimonides on the Unity and Incorporality of God", in: *idem, Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion II* (Cambridge, MA, 1977) 433–457.

³⁰ *Mishne Torah*, Hiltchot Yesodei ha-Tora I, 4.

³¹ *Religion der Vernunft* 48. Cf. *Urdem* 51. *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Berlin, 1907². Reprint: Werke, Bd. 7. Hildesheim, 1981) 403. *Der Begriff der Religion* 27. *Jüdische Schriften I*, 91.

³² "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 167–168.

³³ "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 183, note 15. The Hebrew *chut min*, which is translated here as 'apart from', can also be translated as 'except', a translation that would put Soloveitchik's statement on a par with Cohen's as referred to in note 31, above.

³⁴ The present essay does not deal with the supposed influence of Hermann Cohen's ethics on Soloveitchik, as articulated by Lawrence Kaplan, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Philosophy of Halakha", *The Jewish Law Annual* 7 (1987) 139–197; Aviezer Ravitzky, "Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik on Human Knowledge: Between Maimonidean and Neo-Kantian Philosophy",

articulated, according to Soloveitchik, by the ineffable name of God, *shem ba-mephorash*. The ineffable name is an indication of the absolute singularity of God and of His complete separation from man and the world. Soloveitchik considers his interpretation of the ineffable name to be underlined by the linguistic form of the tetragrammaton in *Tanach*. According to this type of *Sprachdenken*:

The ineffable name, which signifies infinite, uncomposed being, cannot be grasped in any linguistic form that would signify a relation to an other. The other possesses no existence vis à vis divine infinity or in relation to it. No (possessive) pronoun can be imposed on the tetragrammaton, no definite article can be attached to it, and no construct chain (*semikhah*) can be connected with it.³⁵ In every construct chain, the nominative is dominated by the genitive. Therefore, the tetragrammaton cannot stand in a nominative position in a construct chain, whereas we find the tetragrammaton in the genitive position in many places in Scripture.^{36, 37} In the light of this assumption we understand the words of the Sages in *bShevu'ot* 35b: *Tsevaot* is a name by itself.³⁸ At first

Modern Judaism 6 (1986) 157–188; and Steven S. Schwarzchild, “The Title of Hermann Cohen’s ‘Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism’”, in: *The Life of Cohen*, *The Challenge of Contemporary Judaism*, ed. Joseph A. Edelheit (Chicago, 1986) 207–220. For an analysis of Soloveitchik’s critique of Cohen’s logic and epistemology, see the present author’s *THE RATIONALE OF HALAKHIC MAN*, Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s *Conception of Jewish Thought* (Amsterdam, 1996) 14–51.

³⁵ This statement of Soloveitchik is confirmed by Koehler/Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden, 1958) 368. According to Avraham Even Shoshan, *Qongorlantia bhalasha le-Tora, Neivim u-Ketuvim* (Jerusalem, 1988, 1992⁵) 440, the name *Adonai* does not appear indeed as a nominative in a construct chain, with the exception of: *Adonai Adonai, Adonai Elohim* (or conjugations of Elohim) and *Adonai Tsevaot*. On the basis of *bShev* 35a–b (see below) it can be argued that these three constructions are not construct chains but instead combinations of two names.

³⁶ An example of the nominative position of the divine name in a construct chain is: *Elohei Avraham*; an example of a genitive position is: *yad ba-Elohim*, or *yad Adonai*.

³⁷ In *Guide* I, 68: 163 as well as at the end of Chapter 8 of the *Eight Chapters* (Gorfinkle, 100–101, Weis-Burterworth, 94), Maimonides argues that on account of the principle that God is the Knower, the known and the knowledge, it does not make sense to use the construct chain *the Adonai*, ‘(by) the life of the Eternal’ in an oath formula, for (a) His life is not something other than His essence, and (b) a noun cannot be put in a construct chain with itself. Therefore it is read *aby Adonai*, the Eternal lives (cf. I Sam. 20, 3 and more often). See also: *Mishne Tora*, Hilchot Yesodey ha-Tora II, 10.

³⁸ Hence, *Adonai Tsevaot* is not a genitive construction. On *Tsevaot* as ‘a name by itself’, see also: *ShemR* 3, 6 (ed. Mirqin V, 72).

sight, this is a very problematic phrase. Doesn't Scripture speak of '*Adonai Tsevaot*'? The former has the form of a nominative, and *Tsevaot* is a genitive. This idea is the basis of the opinion of R. Yose, who opposed the Sages, stating that *Tsevaot* can be erased [because it is not a holy name of God], for *Tsevaot* is nothing but a name for Israel,³⁹ and the words of the *qedusha*-prayer '*Adonai Tsevaot*' appear in a construct chain. The Sages opposed R. Yose [and said] that the tetragrammaton does not appear in a construct chain in which it takes the position of the nominative; for that reason they interpreted the words '*Adonai Tsevaot*' as two names, '*Adonai* who is *Tsevaot*'.

The tetragrammaton indicates complete separation, absolute singularity, and an awesome and fearful seclusion from its entire environment. The tetragrammaton is an indication of the privation of relatedness and the renunciation of freedom.⁴⁰ When a Jew attests in the morning and evening prayers to the uniqueness of His divine name, he bears testimony to the irreality of the world, and of the unique quality of God, who is actually the only reality in existence. Again, the divine unity means the uniqueness of God by which any claim to independent being of creation is suspended.⁴¹

Soloveitchik's characterization of the tetragrammaton as the expression of absolute singularity and of privation of relatedness of the divine has, again, a parallel in Maimonides' reflection on the ineffable name. According to the latter, the articulated name "is indicative of a notion with reference to which there is no association between God, may He be exalted, and what is other than He."⁴²

By way of summarizing this part of our analysis, we conclude that according to Soloveitchik the proposition that God is the source and the relos of reality is contained in the logion with which God made Himself known to Moses, *ehyeh asher ehyeh*, I am that I am. The logion is interpreted as demonstrating, first of all, that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the *ens necessarium*. The logion is interpreted, secondly, as indicating that the world cannot be attributed with independent existence, for all that exists is dependent on the reality of His existence. Thirdly and finally, the logion is interpreted as a demonstration of the singularity of God

³⁹ In bShv 35b, R. Yose refers to Exod. 7, 4.

⁴⁰ This statement of Soloveitchik can be interpreted as indicating that the ineffable name has renounced the possibility of relating to something that is outside of Him. According to this interpretation, the notion of freedom would have the connotation of being able to relate to an other.

⁴¹ "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 183, note 15. Cf. "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 197. See also: "Ish ha-hakha" 50 (*Halakhot Man* 50) on *Elohei ha-vlam*.

⁴² "Guide I, 61: 148. Cf. *Mishne Torah*, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Tora II, 9.

and of the difference between Him and all other existents, as there is no other existent of which it can be said that it exists of necessity and that it comprises and maintains all. God comprises all, for there is no reality apart from Him, and He is distinct from all, for there is no other like Him. This status of absolute singularity and complete separation of the divine is articulated by the ineffable name of God.

II

If the status of the ineffable name is one of absolute singularity and complete separation from what is different from Him, there is the problem of how to relate to the divine, the God of the covenant with man at Sinai, and how to commune with Him? Soloveitchik's answer to this problem is that communion with God is achieved through the intellect. This statement is articulated in the context of his exposition of the notions of *hidammut l'Elohim*, or *imitatio Dei*, and *hidabbegut l'Elohim*, or *coningatio Dei*. The revelation of God as the One who comprises all and is distinct from all evokes, Soloveitchik maintains, a sense of love and fear or reverence in man.⁴³ The contrast between revelation and concealment, or between love and fear, finds a solution in the imperative to emulate His ways, *bidammut l-Elohim*.⁴⁴ Soloveitchik takes the injunction to emulate His ways as an exemplification, on the one hand, of man's failure to reach God by his 'natural' abilities and his submission to the revealed divine will. On the other hand, the injunction is an exemplification of man's freedom. It is the affirmation of the abilities of spontaneity and creativity of thought

⁴³ "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 176–179.

⁴⁴ "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 180–186. Cf. Deut. 28, 9: *we-balakhta bi-dvabav*, 'and you shall walk in His ways'. Deut. 10, 12: *la-leket be-ebol dervabav*, *Sifre Devarim*, piska 49 (ed. Finkelstein, 114), *Mekhilta*, massekhta de-shira, parasha 3 (ed. Horowitz, Rabin, 127), the words of Abba Shaul: "Be like Him." See also: Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Hilchot De'ot I, 6, and *Sifse ha-mitsvot* (Book of the Commandments), 'ave 8. Furthermore, see: Lev. 19, 2. *Sifra*, Qedoshim I, Introductory passage (ed. Wei. Wien, 1862) 86b. "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 218, and "Ish ha-halaha" 90–91 (*Halakhot Mar* 108–109).

and will when they are exerted within the context of Torah and mitzvot.⁴⁵ It is hence through the injunction of *imitatio Dei* that the tragic is overcome which, as mentioned above, is inherent in the agony of the spirit to grasp the foundation of being.⁴⁶ And to the degree that man emulates His ways, he attains the state of cleaving to God or communion with Him, *hitdabbequt l-Elohim*.⁴⁷ The unfolding of the abilities of man's spirit within the framework of Torah and mitzvot opens the possibility of communion with God. *Imitatio Dei* leads to *coniunctio Dei*. This statement raises the question of how it is possible to commune with a transcendent being.⁴⁸ To this question the Rabbis answered that the injunction to cleave to God is to be understood as meaning, to adhere to scholars and their students who know His name; what we might call *imitatio sapientium*.⁴⁹ In line with the Rabbis, Soloveitchik maintains that communion with God is dependent on the knowledge one attains of Him. This conclusion of Soloveitchik's is phrased as follows:

Let us consider the formula of the halakha regarding the command of *davequt* – 'to cleave to Him'. As is emphasized in the foregoing, the halakha tells us to cling to those who know Him. In other words, those who know Him commune with Him, and through joining those who know Him man attains the situation of cleaving to God. However, the question remains: how do those who know Him commune with God? The obvious answer is – through their knowledge. It is understood that the halakha does not aim at abstract knowledge that is without any relevance. Learning is a great thing for it leads to practice. A pure life in *abstracto*, without any relevance for the realm of acts is

⁴⁵ Cf. "U-viqqashrem mi-sham" 223. See also: "Ish ha-halakha" Part II.

⁴⁶ "U-viqqashrem mi-sham" 186.

⁴⁷ "U-viqqashrem mi-sham" 187; 193–204. On *davequt*, see also: Gershon Scholem, "Devotio, or Communion with God", in: *idem*, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1971) 203–227.

Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah. New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988) 35–58.

⁴⁸ "U-viqqashrem mi-sham" 190.

⁴⁹ "U-viqqashrem mi-sham" 192. Cf. *Sifre Devarim*, piska 49 on Deut. 11, 22 (ed. Finkelstein, 114–115). bYoma 21b. bKet 111b. bPes 49a. See also: Maimonides, *Mishne Torah*, Hilkhot De'ot VI, 2 and *Syfer ba-mitsvot* (Book of the Commandments) 'ase 6. On the term *imitatio sapientium*, see: A. van der Heide, "Maimonides' Regels van het Gedrag en de verhouding tussen rede en traditie", *Joude filosofie tussen rede en traditie. Feestbundel ter ere van Prof.dr H.J. Heering* (Kampen, 1993) 48–64, esp. 53.

not the ideal of halakhic man or of *homo religiosus*. When thought is converted into volition, and volition into concrete deeds which take the form of faithful love, justice, and righteousness, the person who thinks, intends and acts achieves the status of cleaving to God: "Let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises faithful love, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says the Lord."⁵⁰ The aim of knowledge is the moral act, and therefore the term those who know Him' includes more than we grasped at first sight. "Those who know Him' are men of God, endowed with insight and yearning, in which reflection and action, the faculties of cognition and volition are merged into a homogeneous spiritual unity.

In fact, this juxtaposition of cognition, volition and action is one of the characteristics of *imitatio Dei*. In Him, blessed be He, the absolute identification of reason, will, and act is revealed. The injunction of God comprises His thought, His will, and His deeds. Through the emulation of this superior identity man imitates God and cleaves to Him. Again: approaching God starts with emulating and ends with communion – "to walk in His ways and to cleave to Him"^{51, 52}

It is thus argued by Soloveitchik, first of all, that the interpretation of the injunction to cleave to Him as meaning to cling to 'those who know Him' indicates that 'those who know Him' commune with Him on account of their knowledge of Him. Secondly, in the context of the halakha the act of achieving knowledge serves the purpose of performing the commandments, as the aim of knowledge is the moral, i.e., halakhic, act. Therefore, thirdly, 'those who know Him' are the scholars and their students who have achieved the unity of cognition, volition and action.⁵³

A central question that remains to be answered is one regarding the nature of knowledge that leads to communion with the divine. This question is dealt with in the exposition of the subject-object relation in "U-viqqashrem mi-sham". Human knowledge of the realm of both the 'I' and the 'non-I' is characterized by Soloveitchik as a subject-object relation.⁵⁴ Soloveitchik's exposition

⁵⁰ Jerem. 9, 23.

⁵¹ "Deut. 11, 22.

⁵² "U-viqqashrem mi-sham" 194–195.

⁵³ The model for the injunction of *imitatio sapientium* is the ideal type of the prophet. See: "Ish ha-halakha" 105 (*Halakhic Man* 128). "The Lonely Man of Faith" 34, 39. "U-viqqashrem mi-sham" 217–220, esp. note 21, and 225–227.

⁵⁴ "U-viqqashrem mi-sham" 196–200.

of the subject-object relation, however, is problematic. It is made up of three expositions, and the coherence or compatibility of these three is not clear. According to the first, the object that is known in science is not a 'duplicate' of the given, but instead a product of reason, constructed according to its needs. The exposition of this interpretation of the relation between subject and object more or less conforms to the Kantian scheme.⁵⁵ According to the second exposition of the subject-object relation – which he may have adopted from Wilhelm Dilthey or Max Scheler⁵⁶ – the process of acquiring knowledge is a confrontation or a conquest between subject and object in which the object offers "resistance" to its being defeated by the knowing subject, and the knowing subject at times overpowers the object and penetrates into its essence. "The object resists the subject. At times the object does not cooperate with the knowing subject. On the contrary, it prevents the subject from achieving knowledge. And the object succeeds in its resistance. At other times the subject overpowers the object and penetrates into its essence."⁵⁷ In the essay "Confrontation" Soloveitchik, referring to Latin *obivere*, German *Gegenstand*, and Hebrew *cheveti*, similarly writes that "knowledge is gained only through conflict and the intellectual performance is an act of conquest. (...) The subject-knower must contest a knowable object, subdue it and make it yield its cognitive content."⁵⁸ Yet, if the subject is able to penetrate into the essence of the object, it is possible to know this essence.⁵⁹ And, finally, elsewhere in

⁵⁵ Cf. "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 130: "The theory of Kant, in spite of all its difficulties, has not lost its validity regarding the point under discussion. Reason does not picture the 'given' but adapts it to its needs." See also: "Ma dodekch mi-dodch", in: Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Divrei hagut we-h'arabha* (Jerusalem, 1982) 57–97, esp. 76.

⁵⁶ See: Max Scheler, "Erkenntnis und Arbeit", *Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft* (Leipzig, 1926) 231–486, esp. 352, 461–482. "Idealismus und Realismus", *Philosophischer Anzeiger* 2 (1927–1928) 255–324, esp. 284–293. In both essays Scheler discusses Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of resistance. On the influence of Scheler on Soloveitchik's thought, see the present author's *THE RATIONALE OF HALAKHIC MAN*, 4 *et passim*.

⁵⁷ "U-viqqashem mi-sham" 196.

⁵⁸ "Confrontation" 10–11, and notes 4 and 5.

⁵⁹ According to "Confrontation" 11, note 5, the human "cognitive gesture" will succeed only in certain sectors of reality.

“U-viqqashtern mi-sham” the act of acquiring knowledge is described as the act of penetrating into the object, subjecting its otherness and, finally, becoming united with it. The distinction between subject and object has consequently vanished.⁶⁰ The second exposition is related to the third, which will be discussed below.

These two expositions of the subject-object relation can be taken as an exemplification of the eclectic character of Soloveitchik’s thought. Yet, regarding the problem of the (un)knowability of the essence of reality, it is remarkable to see a similar conflict in Maimonides’ thought, viz., the incompatibility of his theory of divine attributes with his exposition of the intellect in actu.⁶¹ According to the theory of divine attributes, the essence of God is unknowable, an *an sich*, as it were, whereas on account of the exposition of the divine intellect – as will be exposed below – God’s essence is known as His acting, and God and man commune with one another in the intellect in actu. It can consequently be argued that even at this point the central role of Maimonides is mirrored in “U-viqqashtern mi-sham.”

Soloveitchik’s third exposition of the subject-object relation, and the most relevant one for the statement under discussion, is of a Maimonidean nature. It is part of Soloveitchik’s articulation of the notion of *devequt*. The exposition starts with the statement that the division of subject and object, which is characteristic of human knowledge, is to be rejected with regard to our knowledge of God’s Self, so to speak.⁶² As is explained in the foregoing, the proposition that God is One is interpreted by both Maimonides and Soloveitchik as an indication of His unity, *achdut*, and of His singularity, *yechidut*. On account of His unity, it is maintained, there is no division between subject and object as regards His self-knowledge, whereas on account of His singularity there is no subject-object division in His knowledge of what is ‘outside’ of or ‘apart from’ Him. Moreover, there is no division between His

⁶⁰ “U-viqqashtern mi-sham” 198. See further: “ish ha-halakha” 67, esp. note 87.

⁶¹ Cf. Pines’s remarks in his “Translator’s Introduction” to the *Guide*, xcvi–xcviii.

⁶² “U-viqqashtern mi-sham” 195–196.

self-knowledge and His knowledge of the world; God knows the world because He knows Himself.⁶³

In *Guide* I, 68, where the subject is discussed again, Maimonides' line of argumentation is as follows.⁶⁴ In the precognitive state intellectus, intelligens, and intellectum⁶⁵ are each of them entities in potentia. In the cognitive state, in which knowledge is acquired, the three potential entities are turned into entities in actu. Yet, as the essence of the intellect in actu is its acting, or apprehension, the intellect is said to be an intellectually cognizing subject (I). Furthermore, on account of the essence of the intellect in actu it is maintained that the intellect in actu is "nothing but the thing that is intellectually cognized",⁶⁶ which is the abstract form of the thing that is apprehended. Form and intellect in actu are hence one and the same thing (II). Pursuant to I and II, Maimonides writes that "the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object are always one and the same thing in the case of everything that is cognized in actu."⁶⁷ This unity of intellectus, intelligens, and intellectum holds with reference to every intellect in actu, be it God's or man's. Maimonides may have borrowed this formula of the trinity from Al-Farabi,⁶⁸ but it can even stem from Neo-Platonic sources.⁶⁹

⁶³ Cf. *Mishne Torah*, Hilchot Yesodei ha-Torah II, 9–10. See also "Uviggashstem mi-sham" 197.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Guide* I, 68: 163–166. See also: *Eight Chapters*, Chapter 8 (Gorfinkle 101–102; Weiss-Buterworth 94).

⁶⁵ The terms under discussion are in Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin respectively: al-'aql, al-'aql, al-na'iqal; sekhel, maskil, muskal; nous, nooon, noeton; intellectus, intelligens, intellectum.

⁶⁶ *Guide* I, 68: 164.

⁶⁷ *Guide* I, 68: 164–165.

⁶⁸ *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*. A Revised Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by Richard Walzer (Oxford, 1985) 70–71. Cf. Alexander Altmann, "Maimonides on the Intellect and the Scope of Metaphysics", in: idem, *Von der mittelalterlichen zur modernen Aufklärung. Studien zur jüdischen Geistesgeschichte* (Tübingen, 1987) 60–129, esp. 74. Altmann is opposed to Salomon Munk and Shlomo Pines, according to whom this trinity is derived from Aristotle's *De Anima* and *Metaphysica*. See Munk's comments in *Guide des géarés* (Paris, 1856) I, 301–302, and Pines's remarks in *Guide*, xcvi, and I, 68: 165, note 8.

⁶⁹ Cf. David R. Lacherman, "Mathematical Construction, Symbolic Cognition and the Infinite Intellect. Reflections on Maimon and Maimonides",

Of God, Maimonides continues, it is demonstrated that He “is an intellect in actu and that there is absolutely no potentiality in Him.”⁷⁰ He is constantly an intellect in actu and therefore constantly intellectus, intelligens, and intellectum, three in one.⁷¹ The intellect of man, however, in contradistinction to God’s intellect, is characterized by a duality of potentiality and actuality. The moment man’s intellect is in potentia there is a distinction between intellect, subject and object. Yet when man’s intellect is in actu the distinction between intellect, subject and object is merged into the unity of intellect, intellectually cognizing subject, and intellectually cognized object.

The conclusion which Soloveitchik draws from Maimonides’ line of reasoning is that the principle of the unity of intellectus, intelligens, and intellectum is applicable to both the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man.⁷² God and man commune with one another in the acting intellect, which is equivalent to saying, in the act of achieving knowledge of an object.⁷³ And as it is reality in its form of both nature and of spirit that is the domain of God’s and man’s knowledge, it is by knowing the realm of nature and of the spirit that man knows his Creator and cleaves to Him.⁷⁴

This conclusion, however, does not imply that the nature of the knowledge of an object is the same for God and man. Maimonides

Journal of the History of Philosophy 30 (1992) 497–522, esp. 511–512. However, in *Enneas* V, 3: 5, 28–48, *Plotini Opera* II (ed. Hebrý/Schwyzler, Oxford, 1977) 212–213, to which Lachterman refers, we read *noeisis* instead of *nooön*.

⁷⁰ *Guide* I, 68: 165.

⁷¹ Yet if God is an intellect in actu we consequently know His essence, which is His acting, or His being intellectus, intelligens, and intellectum. This conclusion, as Pines has pointed out (see note 61, above), is in contradiction to Maimonides’ theory of divine attributes, notwithstanding the fact that what is known as His essence – His acting – corresponds to what is known on account of His attributes.

⁷² “U-viqqashrem mi-sham” 198. Cf. “Ish ha-halakha” 107 (*Halakhot Man* 131).

⁷³ Cf. *Guide* I, 1: 23, where Maimonides argues that it is said of man that he is “in the image of God and in His likeness” because of the divine intellect conjoined with man.

⁷⁴ Cf. “U-viqqashrem mi-sham” 201–202, 207.

rejects such an implication, stating instead that our knowledge of things is dependent on the thing which we perceive, whereas God's knowledge of things is not dependent on His perception of the things themselves, but conversely, things are dependent on His knowledge, as He is the artificer of reality.⁷⁵ Soloveitchik likewise states that man's knowledge is limited and discontinuous, whereas God's is unlimited and never ending.⁷⁶ There is consequently a difference regarding the nature of the knowledge of God and man, whereas the domain of their knowledge is the same. It is by knowing the contingent character of reality as the *yehi*, the 'Let there be' of creation, that man cleaves to God who made Himself known as *ehyeh*, the necessary existent 'I am', who also provides and comprises all.

However, if God and man commune in the intellect it can be argued – in opposition to what Soloveitchik argued above regarding the encounter with God *in* or *through* reality – that the encounter with the Transcendent *through* reality is not “just an intellectual performance”. Instead, it is an act of the intellect that leads to communion with the divine. Moreover, this communion in the intellect seems to make divine revelation redundant, and certainly the injunction to emulate His ways. Soloveitchik does not address this problem explicitly but, instead, draws our attention to the context of his exposition of the intellect. That context is a discussion of the injunctions of *hid'ammot P'Elohim* and *hid'abbegut P'Elohim*. On account of the correlation of both injunctions Soloveitchik maintains that the concept of knowledge he refers to is of a moral–religious nature; it includes the realm of volition and action. Soloveitchik can thus be quoted as saying: “knowing God is not a contemplative-passive act. (...) Knowing the world as the reality of God also indicates knowing His acting will. God, who knows, wants, and acts, commands man to turn into a creature that knows, wants, and acts, that imitates Him and cleaves to Him through a fusion of thinking, willing, and acting.”⁷⁷ “The aim of all acts of cognition is the realization of the holiness of body and

⁷⁵ *Guide* III, 21: 484–485.

⁷⁶ “U-viqqashtem mi-sham” 201. See also: “Confrontation” 11, note 5.

⁷⁷ “U-viqqashtem mi-sham” 202.

soul.”⁷⁸ And furthermore: “As a matter of fact, if the observation of creation lacks submission to the halakha, it does not lead to love or communion with God, nor to the unity of intelligens and intellectum.”⁷⁹ In other words, the principle of identification of intellectus, intelligens and intellectum applies, first of all, to both knowledge of reality, i.e. the realm of reason, and knowledge of the revealed imperatives, the halakha, i.e. the realm of the will and of acts.⁸⁰ It applies to a concept of knowledge the aim of which is of a moral–religious nature, viz., the sanctification of reality.⁸¹ It is with reference to this aim of intellectual activity that Maimonides can be quoted as saying that it is on account of the intellect that man was addressed by God and given commandments.⁸²

Secondly, and what is more, the principle can be applied to these realms of knowledge on the express condition that the knowledge aimed at is achieved from the perspective of the halakha. It is within the context of the halakha, and within that context only, that the unity of the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object is achieved. Hence, the transcendent can indeed be met through reality in so far as reality is perceived *in lumine Dei*. Seen from this perspective, the aforementioned juxtaposition of meeting the divine *through* or *in* reality is actually overcome, for the cognition of reality is itself already cognition perceived *in lumine Dei*. In Part I, above, I made the observation that it is on account of the revelation at Sinai that the transcendent in reality can be conceived of as a hint of the Transcendent. In the present context, a similar observation can be made, viz., that Soloveitchik’s conception of cognition is determined by the decision of the will to accept the yoke of Torah and miswor. Volition here precedes cognition.

⁷⁸ “U-viqqashem mi-sham” 212.

⁷⁹ “U-viqqashem mi-sham” 204.

⁸⁰ Regarding the second element, see “U-viqqashem mi-sham” 204–222, for a halakhic discussion of (1) the authority of reason, (2) the elevation of the body, and (3) the continuation of the divine word, or prophecy.

⁸¹ Cf. “U-viqqashem mi-sham” 207–217. See also: Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Sacred and Profane”, *Ha-Tzedeq* (May–June 1945) 4–20. Reprint: *Gabbar* 3 (1965) 5–29.

⁸² *Guide* I, 2: 24.

And on account of this decision of the will, it can be argued, thirdly and finally, that the exertion of man's faculty of cognition in *lumine Dei* is itself already a way of performing the injunction to walk in His ways.⁸³ From a halakhic perspective, the act of knowing reality is an act of emulating Him whose knowledge is the source of reality and whose intellect is always in a state of actuality. It is on account of this central role of the intellect in the process of achieving communion with God that Soloveitchik can be quoted as saying: "The kingdom of God is the kingdom of real cognition (*hakkanah*), when the light of knowledge (*da'at*) arises over the earth and its fullness."⁸⁴

III

In conclusion, the result of our analysis is that both in his exposition of the divine names and in his discussion of the intellect as the bond between God and man, Soloveitchik offers an interpretation and development of Maimonides' thought *ad rem*. The topics under discussion are an exemplification of the role of Maimonides in Soloveitchik's thought. First of all, the discussion of *elyeh asher elyeh* leads to the conclusion that the God of the Patriarchs, who is the source and telos of reality, is the necessary being and the only one who can rightly be called being. Hence the world cannot be said to have independent existence but, instead, is a non-reality vis à vis His reality. This absolute singularity of God and His complete separation from all other existents is articulated by the ineffable name of God. Secondly, the statement that communion with God is achieved through the intellect is

⁸³ Cf. "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 202: 223–224. This line of thought of Soloveitchik is in agreement with Leo Baeck, "Geheimnis und Gebot" (1922), in: *idem, Wege im Judentum* (Berlin, 1933) 33–48. *Idem, Das Wesen des Judentums* (Frankfurt a.M., 1926⁴) 95, 130–132.

⁸⁴ "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 203. Cf. "U-viqqashtem mi-sham" 224: "In the conception of the halakha, there is no difference between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth, for 'The kingdom of heaven is like the kingdom of earth' (bBer 58a), the kingdom of heaven and earth. 'Thus says the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool' (Isaiah 66, 1)."

based on the principle of the unity of the intellect, the intellectually cognizing subject, and the intellectually cognized object, a principle which Maimonides adopted from Al-Farabi or from Neo-Platonic sources. The principle is taken to apply to the realm of cognition, i.e. to knowledge of reality in its form of both nature and spirit, as well as to the realm of volition and action. The aim of knowledge, it is argued, is the moral-religious act as articulated in the halakha. Moreover, it is only within the context of the halakha that the unity under discussion is achieved. At this point, the observation was made that volition here precedes cognition; the conception of cognition as articulated by Soloveitchik is determined by the decision of the will to accept the yoke of Torah and mitzwo. Finally, it is argued that the exertion of man's faculty of cognition *in lumine Dei* is itself already a way of performing the injunction to walk in His ways.