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YEARNING FOR SPIRITUALITY
IN
RELIGIOUS NATURALISM

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE

PINES SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

BY

ISRAEL DAVID OLER

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

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_____

PROFESSOR RICHARD SARASON, ADVISOR

MARCH 2024

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Upon these, my dear rabbis and teachers, may there be abundant peace, grace, kindness, compassion, long life, ample sustenance and deliverance.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents, Rabbi Abraham N. and Ann Oler, *zikhronam livrakha*, who raised me in a home devoted to *Torah, yir'at shamayim* and *ma'asim tovim.* I am so very grateful for their having modeled for me the values and commitments of a religious Jew and for encouraging my Jewish studies.

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Abstract

The history of the development of rational religion and religious naturalism is reviewed. Naturalistic perspectives that use God language and that offer alternative meanings for the term are seen as misappropriating it. The utilization of anthropopathism is rejected in favor of acknowledging that God is *ein sof*, beyond human comprehension.

What then is the purpose of Judaism? It is to foster holiness in behavior and purity of motivation, *kedushah* and *taharah*, and on a parallel basis *tikun olam* and *tikun atzmi*. Such personal transformation is to be accomplished through *torah, avodah* and *gemilut ḥasadim.*

In terms of Torah study. emphasis is placed here on *ta'amei hamitzvot*, regardless of level of commitment to observance, as teaching important spiritual and ethical lessons. The model of various righteous people in the Bible and beyond is discussed as another inspiring resource.

Avodah is now understood to mean liturgy. The focus here is on the preparation of liturgy, not addressed to a divine being, but offering encouragement and support toward spiritual self-transformation. This includes the use of resources from Jewish religious literature as a whole, from the Bible through the modern period, for study and performance as part of liturgy. An emphasis is placed on

the study of Musar, as an important resource for raising consciousness about ethical values and personal character. Meditation, as a method to seek insight about one's spiritual development, devoid of liturgy, is also addressed.

Gemilut ḥasadim, the provision of kindness to all others, is seen as central to Jewish identity. All *ma'asim tovim*, good deeds, are intended, as the vehicle to implement being a compassionate and righteous person and, thereby, aspiring toward spiritual self-actualization.

The appendix includes a model Shabbat evening service that seeks to implement the concepts and priorities of this dissertation.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction

Many non-affiliated and even affiliated Jews tend to say, “I am spiritual but not religious.” A portion of affiliates of Reform and other Progressive Jewish congregations want to identify with Judaism and use it as a vehicle for self-development but lack faith in the supernatural such that they find prayer and ritual observance to be non-efficacious and, therefore limit their participation. Some of these people are, nonetheless, motivated to grow emotionally and morally, and, thus, will be understood here to be spirituality seekers in that regard. They may utilize the resources of Judaism or look outside of Judaism to other resources for such spiritual development. Others who claim that they are spiritually oriented and who often have different motivations than emotional and moral growth, including performative and feel-good pursuits, are not the focus of what is being considered here to be spirituality. People who seek emotional and moral development, defined here as those who yearn for spirituality, are considered to be religious naturalists when they at the same time lack faith in supernaturalism. Such religious naturalists often function within supernaturally oriented contexts or are avoidant of institutional religion altogether. Some, even members of synagogues, lack awareness of the spiritual resources available to them from within Judaism.

According to a recent study performed by the Pew Research Center in 2020 and reported in 2021:

> Overall, about a quarter of U.S. Jewish adults (27%) do not identify with the Jewish religion: They consider themselves to be Jewish ethnically, culturally or by family background and have a Jewish parent or were raised Jewish, but they answer a question about their current religion by describing themselves as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular" rather than as Jewish. Among Jewish adults under 30, four-in-ten describe this way. Seven-in-ten or more U.S. Jews say that…leading a moral and ethical life (72%) (is) essential to their Jewish identity. Around a quarter of Jews (26%) say they believe in God "as described in the Bible," while 56% of all U.S. adults say this. 14% of Reform Jews say religion is very important in their lives and 18% of Reform Jews believe in God as described in the Bible.[1]

Thus, while a growing number of American Jews describe themselves as not identifying with religion or with faith in the biblical God, a significant number (72%) state that leading a moral and ethical life is essential to their Jewish identity. A number of these people have the potential to identify themselves as religious naturalists who draw inspiration for moral and ethical living in relationship to their Jewish identity.

In addition, many people are uninformed concerning alternative approaches to conceptualizing divinity and understand faith or lack thereof as binary. Learning an alternative conceptualization of religious naturalism and experiencing ritual and liturgy in keeping with it may serve to provide a more meaningful connection to Judaism for such people.

The following defines more specifically, for the present purposes, the intention of

the terminology used in the title, “Yearning for Spirituality in Religious Naturalism:”

Yearning is an internal process of an intense longing for something, as opposed to prayer which involves faith and seeking support from God for what is desired to be accomplished. The intention here is yearning for personal emotional and characterological change. Andrea Puma in his *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* interprets Cohen’s use of the word yearning as follows:

> …Cohen has recourse to the analogy of a feeling: yearning (Sehnsucht). The psalms, in particular, show man’s yearning for God…they do not sing of the object of this yearning, but only of man’s inclination.[2]

He goes on to offer a translation from Cohen’s *Religion der Vernunft* in this regard:

> Yearning penetrates body and soul, and its expressions know no limitations. But the psalm describes and sings only of anguished yearning and of the flight of the soul. God, however, remains outside of this description. Whereas lyrical poetry usually describes the beloved person, to whom one yearns and one is attracted, the psalm describes only the heart which feels the yearning, and appeals to God not so much in his beauty, but rather exclusively in his goodness, thus only as the archetype of moral action.[3]

Spirituality means various different things to different people or religious groups. For many it involves a connection with the divine. For our purposes the term is being used to denote the quest for personal transformation or self-actualization emotionally and ethically. Some people may think of this as *imitatio Dei* or *lalekhet bid’rakhav*, to walk in His ways, whether or not they

believe in a supernatural God, even if they understand God's attributes to be anthropopathic projections. Samuel Tobias Lachs in his *Humanism in Talmud and Midrash* quotes an especially meaningful and touching example:

> 'The midrash states that before God brought Eve to Adam, He braided her hair.' (Ber. 61a also Gen. R. 18.2) it contains a deeply moving and sensitive lesson on the importance of caring for the orphan girl…How could a human do less? It is an exquisite example of theological functionalism.[4]

Shmuly Yanklowitz in his *Pirkei Avot: A Social Justice Commentary* tells, with regard to helping the downtrodden, of how Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Mezeritch…

> …speaks powerfully of *yeish mei-ayin,* 'creation out of nothing.' He teaches that helping those who lurk in the shadows is akin to something coming into existence that previously did not exist, providing light to something that previously was unseen, comparing this to the creation of the universe itself.[5]

Judaism is replete with such uplifting examples of divine action seeking to inspire goodness in our behavior.

Others think of spirituality as self-actualization emotionally and ethically, utilizing the resources of Jewish tradition selected according to individual preference regardless of theistic faith. Both the term "spirituality," used originally in Christianity, and the term *ruḥaniyut*, stemming from Hasidic usage ("*ruḥniyus*"), may originate from Genesis 1:2 which refers to *ruaḥ elohim*, God's spirit. Another definition of spirituality would be "man's search for

meaning," to borrow a phrase from Viktor Frankl.[6] All people, whether in normal circumstances or the direst circumstances possible, need to cope with existential angst. People find meaning in being helpful to others and in other productive pursuits. Religion and spirituality encourage such meaningful efforts in life.

Religious naturalism is a desire to pursue spirituality utilizing the resources of religion while not believing in a supernatural God concept. As we shall see, God can be understood in the context of religious naturalism as an ideal or a process rather than a conscious being. Religious naturalism can also be about not having any God concept. In his *Religion Is Not About God,* Loyal Rue posits that:

> One becomes a religious naturalist in the same way one becomes a pious theist: the process of goal hierarchy transformation. Theists are known by their acceptance of the reality of God, but pious theists are known by whether their goal hierarchies conform to God's will.
>
> Likewise, naturalists universally accept that the real is natural and the natural is real, but *religious* naturalists will be known by their personal responses to Nature…by their reverence and awe before Nature…their sympathy for all living things…their sense of gratitude directed toward the matrix of life.[7]

Jewish liturgy, even within Reform Judaism, is predominantly theistic and functions within a context of expectation that a supernatural God hears people's prayers. In recent years in liberal Judaism there has been a proliferation of creative liturgy. The problem is that much of this liturgy remains theistic, regardless of varied philosophical intentions in the God- language

used, and, thus, often does not speak to these religious naturalists' concerns.

In addition, a significant portion of contemporary liturgy, even if non-theistic, does not necessarily focus on spiritual growth, i.e. on emotional or character development, just as a significant portion of traditional liturgy does not. This dissertation will include a review of such selections of contemporary creative liturgy to determine whether they have emotional and moral development as an expressed aspiration and will examine what other religious experience they may be expressing, such as, for example, a sense of wonder.

When spiritually aspirational material, as defined here, is identified, the selection will be noted as such. While primarily focused on Jewish liturgy, some relevant examples from non-Jewish sources will be also investigated. In addition, there will be suggestions for emendations of traditional prayers that remove theistic references. The fostering of the individual's capacity to develop personal expression of spiritual aspiration will also be explored. Selections written by adult education students at the New Reform Congregation Kadima in Deerfield, Illinois, who had the opportunity to write liturgy expressive of personal spiritual yearning, will be presented.

There will be a discussion of the transformative power of ritual observances, particularly when one is familiar with the literature of *ta'amei hamitzvot*, the rationales for the commandments.

There will be a discussion of the importance of providing educational opportunities that foster such spiritually aspirational growth in order to engage the involvement and commitment of religious naturalist spirituality seekers within Reform Judaism. The study of *musar* literature as a core resource for self-transformation will be considered, as will the study of inspiring biblical stories that teach us about spiritual aspiration.

This dissertation will review some of the sources developing rational religion and religious naturalist thought in general (e.g. Aristotle, Baruch Spinoza, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, Paul Tillich) and within Judaism in particular (e.g. Maimonides, Hermann Cohen, Mordecai Kaplan, Alvin Reines), as well as investigate the efforts toward spiritual growth that some proponents of particular expressions of a religious naturalist ideology have fostered.

Attention will be given to liturgy emanating from Reconstructionism with its Kaplanian Process Theology approach, from Reform Judaism's pluralistic approach, including Reines' Hylotheism or Pantheism, and Kantian/Cohenian understanding of the God Idea., and from Humanistic Judaism with Sherwin Wine's Atheistic approach.

Notes

1. “Jews in U.S. are Far Less Religious than Christians,” *Pew Research Center*, May 13, 2021.

2. Andrea Puma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 210.

3. Ibid. 210.

4. Samuel Tobias Lachs, *Humanism in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Associated University Presses, 1993), 83.

5. Shmuly Yanklowitz, P*irkei Avot - a Social Justice Commentary* (New York: Central of American Rabbis, 2018), 279.

6. Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959)

7. Loyal Rue, *Religion Is Not About God* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 366-367.

II. The Development of Rational Religion and Religious Naturalism

The antecedents of rational religion in western culture can be traced back to Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.), who functioned in a social context that emphasized mythological religion that anthropomorphized its deities. As an early philosopher, he attempted to describe divinity in more rational terms. He sought to go beyond the theology of his predecessors, including Plato with his notion of form and substance. Aristotle questioned the purpose of the notion of transcendent forms that were separated from inferior substance or matter and wherein the matter was understood to be the less perfect expression of the respective perfect forms.[1]

He introduces the concept of the "unmoved mover" in his *Metaphysics* XII.[2] All that exists was set into motion by a mover except for the original unmoved mover who, or that, can thus be understood to be God, the original source of movement, but such a God cannot be understood to have the attributes ascribed by differing religious outlooks.

The following summarizes Aristotle's understanding of God and God's behavior:

> God is the understanding that understands himself, because his understanding is like ours would be if we imagine it as being the intelligible equivalent of seeing light without seeing any other visible object. From the inside, then, from the point of view of the subject experiencing it, it is a state of consciousness of a sort familiar from the writings of the great

> religious mystics, in which both subject and object disappear from an awareness that yet remains fully and truly attentive, fully alive and joyous. Insofar as we have any experience-based evidence of what a beatific state is like, this one surely approximates to it.[3]

Thus, for Aristotle, God is engaged in a conscious process which is really an anthropomorphic conceptualization. He understands God to be the “unmoved mover” who got the world underway but is otherwise disengaged from humanity. So, while Aristotle conceptualizes an understanding of creation and a pre-existent force, he leaves no room for a personal God who is aware of human individuality, responsive to prayer or involved in human lives in any manner. Aristotle can thus be understood as an early proponent of religious naturalism. At the same time, he appears to offer a mystical spiritual approach of human beings aspiring to a self-transcendent state of consciousness. Aristotle was a significant influence on many subsequent thinkers in the Christian, Islamic, and Jewish communities up through, and in some cases even beyond, the Middle Ages.

Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) went further than Aristotle or his followers and came to be the outspoken monist, rejecting a supernatural realm and affirming that everything is God. Spinoza articulates a pantheistic position in his *Ethics.* In his *Metaphysics*, Spinoza posits that that there exists only one substance, which is absolutely infinite, self-caused, and eternal. This substance is “God," which for Spinoza is the same as “Nature.” He is listed here because, though Jewish, he has a most universalistic outlook and impact.

Barry Kogan suggests that:

> By common consensus Spinoza was one of the most rigorous and original thinkers in the entire history of Western philosophy. Not only did he lay the theoretical foundations for the scientific study of the Bible and the rise of the modern liberal state, he also developed a philosophic system so comprehensive and integrated in design that it has exercised the critical faculties and religious sensibilities of reflective people ever since.[4]

The occasion for Kogan's remarks was the tercentenary of Spinoza's death which was observed with a special symposium about Spinoza's contributions at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati. Kogan insightfully related Spinoza to the progressiveness of Reform Judaism by suggesting that:

> …as a seat of liberal Judaism in the modern world, the College also has a special relation to Spinoza and his enterprise. It is an heir to what we may call his positive vision. For wherever freedom of inquiry exists to encourage the critical study of the Bible and Israel's past in conjunction with reasoned reflection about God, man, and the natural world, Spinoza's legacy remains alive.[5]

Thus, Spinoza's important step toward religious naturalism was an essential conceptual building block that enabled the development of liberal religion including Reform Judaism.

S. E. Frost points out that for Spinoza,

> God is the sole independent substance of the universe. Outside of God there can be no substance. Mind and body, thought and extension, are attributes of God, and not independent of him. God is the cause of everything in the universe. He is both thinking and extended substance. God is a thought in the human mind and he is a tree in the forest. Thus,

> God is all, and all is God. There is nothing outside of or independent of God. God is a single, eternal, infinite, self-caused principle of nature and of all things. God and the world are one.[6]

Baruch Spinoza rejects the Platonic distinction between form and matter and actually suggests that everything is God. One might argue that this is a misuse of the term God, as it differs from what people usually mean about something distinct from themselves and from substance generally when they speak of God, most often as possessing consciousness. Spinoza might have equally stated that there is only monism and that everything is part of a total whole.

Kogan remarks on how at the Tercentenary David Savan,

> maintained, contrary to widely held views, that Spinoza neither conceived of God in the way we ordinarily conceive of Nature nor even thought of Him as equivalent to the abstract notion of Being itself. Rather, he conceived of God as the concrete activity of existence expressing itself in the infinite variety and uniqueness of natural things…tracing the implications of this conception for the way in which Spinoza thought we may know God in revelation, in the experience of love, and in intellectual intuition.[7]

People tend to describe Spinoza's monism as everything being God, but Savan explains it as being more about the activities of natural existence. The focus on these activities is perhaps similar to Whitehead's, Hartshorne's or Kaplan's processes that relate more to spirituality, or perhaps to Schulweis's predicate theology.

The German Romantic poet Friedrich Novalis first described Spinoza with the

now famous moniker “the God-intoxicated man,” in that he had a deep appreciation for spirituality and a sense of the sacredness of all of existence. Interestingly, Spinoza, like Aristotle, authored a treatise on ethics. Both had a concern with the individual’s spiritual development. Alfred Gottschalk pointed out that:

> Friedrich Schleiermacher, the great Protestant theologian and religious philosopher, stated that ”in sacred innocence, and deep humility, Spinoza was replete with religion and filled with the sacred spirit…“ Hegel who confessed that he knew of no greater philosophy than Spinoza’s said, ”there is no purer sublime morality than his.”[8]

Spinoza’s contributions to human life go far beyond his naturalistic ideology. His insights about humanity are deep in terms of the pursuit of a sublime spirituality. Steven Katz explains that, according to Spinoza:

> The highest form of knowledge would be to have complete understanding, to see everything as a logical system from the aspect of eternity…. We are driven toward self-preservation, constantly affected by emotions in the form of pleasure and pain. On this level we are in human bondage, moved by causes which we do not understand, since we only have confused ideas of our experiences. As we reach understanding of what is going on in our lives, we achieve human freedom. We are no longer determined by external factors but by our own comprehension.
> Freedom for Spinoza consists not in being uncaused, but in being determined by oneself alone…When we understand why things are happening, and know they cannot be otherwise, we are liberated from bondage to emotion and ignorance and are no longer driven aimlessly by feeling and events.[9]

This summary articulates a spiritual quest for emotional self-actualization through self- or ego-transcendence, which would enable a higher ethical aspiration. It also anticipates a psychoanalytic approach to achieving

understanding of our emotions and then being able to function in life with greater objectivity and less angst. Spinoza's focus on "human freedom" reifies the daily emphasis on the Exodus as an archetype in Jewish tradition.

Spinoza, the courageous spiritual pantheist, went beyond religious traditions to encourage a universalistic outlook of what a human could aspire to become. He was a most significant early modern philosopher in contradistinction to the philosophical and theological modes of thought in the Middle Ages. His thinking had a significant impact on subsequent Jewish and non-Jewish thinkers.

David Hume (1711-1776) went further and, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, taught that there is no way to prove God's existence and that humans likely developed the God-concept in order to assuage their anxiety about finitude (see Reines below who says the same regarding finitude). Hume (like Maimonides and Rabbi Kook below) felt that the human being does not have the capacity to construct an adequate conception of God. However, he felt that belief in God was important as a basis for hope and morality. Thus, even Hume, known for his skepticism about the existence of God, intimates a sense of spirituality in religious naturalism. Hume, whose approach is called pragmatism, was a precursor of Immanuel Kant and provided for a distinction between pure reason and practical reason.[10]

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), in his *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*,

understood God to be the highest idea of the Absolute Whole that included everything. Like Spinoza, Kant, too, is a monist pantheist. He understood God to be an idea rather than a being. He argues for the conceptualization of the God-idea, like Hume from practical reason rather than pure reason, through which he thought it cannot be accomplished. He theorized that humans make an entity of this whole and personify it into God for reason of human need. He taught that doing so is critical for the fostering of moral life and ethical principles. His approach is called Transcendental Idealism. Thus, Kant is a religious naturalist who fosters the God-idea in the interest of human spiritual transformation toward the lofty character traits associated with the God-idea.[11]

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) developed the philosophy of organism in which he understood the fundamental processes of the world to be the way in which humans relate to God. We experience the processes of nature and how they interact with each other on an ongoing basis and that is our experience of God.[12]

This seems to be an expansion of Spinoza's thinking regarding the natural world with an emphasis on the processes with which we interact. Thus, Whitehead appears to have a panentheistic outlook and his conceptualization is the basis of what came to be known as Process Theology, wherein God is understood to be a process that functions within us. Thus, this is a naturalistic perspective wherein our personal and interpersonal processes of enhancing

spirituality are our experience of God. We shall see later how Mordecai Kaplan emphasized how God is the process that makes for salvation.

Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000) expanded Whitehead's concept of process theology and emphasized panentheism, the concept that God is all of existence as well as beyond it. He emphasized the importance of nature as part of God and God's concern for nature. Hartshorne did not believe in the immortality of the soul but explained that all that happens in a person's life will exist as part of reality forever. Hartshorne writes:

> "Only man, among this earth's inhabitants, is a "religious animal."…Worship is the *integrating* of all one's thoughts and purposes, all valuations and meanings, all perceptions and conceptions…Conscious wholeness of the individual is correlative to an inclusive wholeness in the world of which the individual is aware, and this wholeness is deity…God is the wholeness of the world, correlative to the wholeness of every sound individual dealing with the world."[13]

Thus, Hartshorne emphasizes that each human being's integration of all important thoughts and feelings experienced in their lives is a spiritual experience that, when united with that of everyone else, is God. This clarifies the meaning of panentheism as God being all that exists plus separate. Hearthstone also appears to be emphasizing an integrative unity for all people with all of existence and with God.

Paul Tillich (1886-1965), in describing his concept that a person's ultimate concern is functionally their God, teaches that:

> …man has spiritual concerns… and each of them …as well as the vital concerns can claim ultimacy for a human life or the life of a social group. If it claims ultimacy it demands the total surrender of him who accepts this claim, and it promises total fulfillment even if all other claims have to be subjected to it or rejected in its name.[14]

Thus, one's ultimate concern or God can range from closeness to the deity to financial success. Regarding "the God of the universe" Tillich states:

> He is the ultimate concern of every pious Jew, and therefore in his name the great commandment is given: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might' (Deut. 6:5). This is what ultimate concern means and from these words the term 'ultimate concern' is derived.[15]

To further explain the range of a possible ultimate concern for a person, Tillich provides the following contrast:

> Another example–almost a counter example, yet nevertheless equally revealing–is the ultimate concern with 'success' and with social standing and economic power. It is the god of many people in the highly competitive Western culture and it does what every ultimate concern must do: it demands unconditional surrender to its laws even if the price is the sacrifice of genuine human relations, personal conviction, and creative *eros…* Its threat is social and economic defeat, and its promise - indefinite as all such promises - the fulfillment of one's being.[16]

He makes his religious naturalism very clear by stating that:

> God is the answer to the question implied in man's finitude; he is the name for that which concerns man ultimately. This does not mean that first there is a being called God and then the demand that man should be ultimately concerned about him. It means that whatever concerns a man ultimately becomes god for him.[17]

Tillich opens up the understanding of what religious or otherwise significant

striving can mean. The ultimate concern of a religious naturalist can be spirituality, i.e. self-transformation emotionally and ethically. For many, *tikkun atzmi* (the improvement/repair of oneself) and *tikkun olam* (the improvement/repair of the world) are their God.

Notes

1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, Ch.6, 987b; Ch. 9, 991a.

2. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII, 1072a, and *Physics* Book VII -VIII.

3. S. Marc Cohen, and C. D. C. Reeve, "Aristotle's Metaphysics", *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta ed. no. 14.

4. Barry S. Kogan, ed. *Spinoza: A Tercentenary Perspective.* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1978), ix.

5. Ibid., x.

6. S.E. Frost, Jr., *Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers* (New York: Doubleday, 1942), 116.

7. Barry S. Kogan, ed. *Spinoza*, xii.

8. Alfred Gottschalk in Ibid., 3.

9. Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 144-145.

10. S.E. Frost, Jr., *Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers* (New York: Doubleday, 1942), 118 -119.

11. Ibid., 120-121.

12. Ibid., 266-267.

13. Charles Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1967), 4-6.

14. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 1

15. Ibid., 2-3.

16. Ibid., 3.

17. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 211.

III. The Development of Rational Religion and Religious Naturalism Within Judaism

While there are no instances of religious naturalism in either the biblical or classical rabbinic literature, there are texts and traditions that reject the notion of divine providence, particularly as it applies to individuals. In the Bible, the book most likely to be at times questioning divine providence is the Book of Ecclesiastes. The text appears to have been significantly edited or to have been written by more than one person or to have been revised, for it expresses contradictory theological perspectives. Among the perspectives is a clear Epicurianism. For example, 3:21-22:

> Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upward and the spirit of the beast whether it goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I perceived that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion; for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

Elias Bickerman comments that

> Ecclesiastes could have been written only by a devout Jew who had discovered that there was no Providence, and that he was alone in a world foreign to him.[1]

Josephus, when characterizing the Jewish sects of the late Second Temple period (*Wars of the Jews* 2:164 [8.14], dated to the 90's of the first century C.E.), has this to say about the Sadducees:

> The Sadducees take away providence entirely and suppose that God is not concerned in our doing or not doing what is evil. They say that to do what is good or what is evil is at men's own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to everyone that they may act as they please. They

> also deny the immortality of the soul and the punishments and rewards in an afterlife.

Other than the claim of Josephus, it is difficult to be sure about the theological views of the Sadducees, but at the very least it is significant that we have here a first-century C.E. report that some were questioning divine providence.

In talmudic literature Elisha ben Avuya, a tannaitic rabbi, is depicted as a heretic rejected by his colleagues, who referred to him as *Aḥer*, "other." Numerous amoraic traditions attempt to account for what his heresy entailed. One late tradition in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Kiddushin 39b) suggests that it was related to the problem of theodicy, described as follows:

> And what happened with *Aḥer*? There are those who say he witnessed a case like this [in which a son climbed up to the roof on his father's command, sent away the mother bird, and then fell to his death]. Others say that he witnessed the tongue of Ḥuṣpit the Interpreter being dragged by a swine. [He said:] "The mouth that uttered pearls [of wisdom] licks the dust!?" Thereupon he went out and sinned.[2]

According to this tradition, Elisha's sense of the suffering of the righteous and the lack of apparent justice in the world, despite the Torah's promises of the reward of length of days for those who honor their parents (Exodus 20:12) and for those who send away the mother bird before taking the content of her nest (Deuteronomy 22:6-7), led him to doubt the existence of divine providence.

A separate talmudic tradition (y. Ḥagigah 2:1) depicts Elisha as nonetheless

still respected by his disciple Rabbi Meir and still concerned to prevent Meir from desecrating the Sabbath, notwithstanding Elisha's own heretical views and casting out from the rabbinic community. Such a seemingly contradictory depiction of a rabbinic figure deemed heretical shows a tension among rabbinic values (rejection of heretical opinions vs. loyalty to one's teacher and continuing concern for one's disciple): the heretic who rejects divine providence is still depicted as ethical in interpersonal relations.

The earliest instance of a rationalist position expressed by a Jew that approaches religious naturalism is that of Moses Maimonides (1138-1204 C.E.). Maimonides was deeply influenced by the philosophy of Aristotle as transmitted through the latter's Arabic Islamic interpreters, such as Averroes (ibn Rushd). Early in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides writes:

> When the chief of the philosophers (Aristotle) was about to inquire into some very profound subjects…he commenced his treatise with an apology and requested the reader to attribute the author's inquiries not to presumption, vanity, egotism or arrogance…but rather to his zeal and his desire to discover and establish true doctrines, as far as it lay in human power.[3]

He identifies Aristotle as the chief of the philosophers and recognizes that there are human limitations to understanding and establishing doctrines about God. He teaches that our intellect does not enable us to know anything about what is beyond us and identifies with a recognition that:

> arrives at the concept of God as an absolutely simple essence from which all positive definition is excluded…No positive statement about God can

thus go beyond the mere tautology that God is God.[4]

Maimonides has been viewed by many as a rationalistic Aristotelian who believed that the world was eternal, although he wrote equivocally about this. His *Guide for the Perplexed* is intended for Jews who questioned the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language of the Bible, which he taught conveyed a figurative, philosophical, rather than a literal meaning. Maimonides was very concerned that the attributes of God as described in the Torah not be taken literally, as explained by Julius Guttman:

> The critical portion of Maimonides' doctrine of attributes, his demonstration of the impossibility of predicating positive attributes of God, is essentially only an explication of the logical consequences implicit in his concept of God. In as much as the dualism of subject and object in every proposition involves a plurality of conceptual determinations, the absolute simplicity of God excludes any predicative propositions…The properties which we predicate of God cannot be essentially different than his essence; if they were, the unification of essence and properties would imply plurality in God.[5]

Maimonides wrote his *Guide for the Perplexed* in an enigmatic manner, providing for the needs of religiously observant Jews not familiar with philosophy and at the same time responding to the needs of the philosophically knowledgeable who questioned traditional supernatural teachings. For example, Maimonides writes that:

> God exists without possessing the attributes of existence. Similarly, He lives without possessing the attributes of life; knows without possessing the attributes of knowledge; is omnipotent without possessing the attributes of omnipotence; is wise without possessing the attributes of wisdom…He is one without possessing the attributes of unity.[6]

Steven Katz makes this clear:

> The enigmatic nature of the *Guide* imposed great difficulties on medieval and modern commentators, and two schools of interpretation arose. Some, while aware of Maimonides' method, consider him a philosopher who attempted to harmonize the teachings of religion with those of philosophy. Others, however, considered Maimonides a philosopher, whose views were in agreement with those of the rationalistic Aristotelians, and who expressed religious principles largely as a concession to the understanding of the masses. For example, Maimonides, according to the first interpretation, believed that the world was created, while according to the second, his true view was that the world is eternal.[7]

The latter group, that viewed Maimonides as a rationalist Aristotelian philosopher, was addressed by his suggestions about not taking those words of the Torah descriptive of God literally. His thinking seems to be suggestive of the notion of *ein sof*, that God is beyond our comprehension, as taught subsequently in Kabbalah, and it also intimates that God is not a supernatural being with attributes. This is a significant step toward religious naturalism.

Growing out of his philosophical outlook, Maimonides wrote the Mishneh Torah, the first systematic summary of the legal decisions of the Talmud regarding all aspects of Jewish life, including ritual practice. He, like Aristotle and Spinoza, also wrote a book of ethics, Shemoneh Peraqim*,* an introduction to Mishnah Avot*,* in which he identifies with Aristotle and questions the existence of personal souls. Thus, Maimonides emphasized the responsibility of the Jew to yearn for spirituality regardless of his seemingly having an Aristotelian ideology concerning God, the unmoved mover whose attributes described in the Torah are allegorical.

Moving forward several centuries, we note that modern Jewish philosophers were beholden in part to the tradition of medieval Aristotelian Jewish philosophers and certainly to Spinoza's clear rejection of dualism. Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) uses a rationalist approach to argue for the existence of God and for the immortality of the soul. He argues that:

> Man finds the idea of a Supreme Being in his consciousness. Since this idea could not have arisen out of man's limited and fragmented experiences…it is a priori and belongs to the category of concepts that precede all experiences and enable us to comprehend the universe, including space, time and causality. Although these concepts do not arise from experience, they are not subjective because they determine the character of universal experience.[8]

Mendelssohn's theory appears to anticipate Jung's idea of the collective unconscious, and Jung understood God to be an archetype in each human's collective unconscious. Influenced by Spinoza, Mendelssohn's views were nonetheless more in keeping with a religious outlook despite his rational philosophical approach, wherein he argued for theism based on reason rather than revelation.

He encourages Jews to remain loyal to Judaism and possibly anticipates the pluralism, and perhaps even the polydoxy, that was to emerge in Reform Judaism and writes particularly about the right to be different from the gentiles in his work *Jerusalem*:

> …let us not mismanage ourselves into uniformity when obviously diversity

> is the plan and ultimate goal of Providence. None of us thinks and feels exactly the same as the man next to him…adapt yourselves to the customs and the constitution of the land in which you live; yet, at the same time, adhere firmly to the religion of your ancestors.[9]

As a primary precursor of reform in Judaism, he encouraged a theistic approach that was of particular significance in shaping it, while his doubting attitude toward revelation opened up (though not intentionally) a new freedom of choice regarding Jewish law and observance. He sought to encourage righteous living within Judaism, while at the same time learning to function cooperatively in the larger society.

Like a number of other early Jewish religious reformers, Solomon Formstecher (1808-1889) taught an idealist philosophy influenced by Hegel. He had a special concern for ethics as expressed in his book *The Religion of the Spirit*, published in 1841. He distinguished religion of nature, which identifies nature with God, from religion of the spirit which considers God to be transcendent. He identifies the latter with Judaism, wherein the goal is to become more like God through moral actions. He felt that Judaism in the era of the Enlightenment could let go of its particularistic elements and its ritual laws. Thus, Formstecher, like Mendelssohn, had a more rational yet theistic orientation, and he also emphasized a freedom about matters of observance setting the tone for the establishment of Reform Judaism. He, too, put a major emphasis on spirituality in terms of ethics and morality.[10]

Samuel Holdheim (1806-1860) was a radical reformer who felt that ritual was of lesser importance and who argued that:

> The Talmud speaks with the ideology of its own time, and for that time it was right. I speak from the higher ideology of my time, and for this age I am right.[11]

He epitomized an assertiveness about the right to change Jewish observance that was definitive in the development of Reform Judaism. He felt that ritual law was no longer binding or necessary and went so far as to advocate the abolishment of ritual circumcision and moving the Sabbath to Sundays.

During the nineteenth century, a number of other thinkers conceptualized a more rational approach to religious belief but understood the importance of spiritual development. Samuel David Luzzatto (1800 -1865) believed, like Maimonides and others, that conceptualizing God is beyond human capability. Katz clarifies that Luzzatto:

> …agreed with Mendelssohn that Judaism possesses no dogmas, but unlike Mendelssohn he affirmed that moral action leading to righteousness is the purpose of all (even the ritual) commandments…he considers it the function of religious beliefs to induce moral actions.[12]

Luzzato understood the schism in nineteenth-century European Jewry as really being between adherents of rationalism as opposed to supernaturalism. He taught at the first modern rabbinical seminary, which was in Padua, and wrote to Isaac Samuel Reggio, who was rabbi in Gorizia, that:

> …in Judaism, which does not command belief in religious truths but rather

> the assumption of certain rules of life…anyone (as is actually the case with you and me) can still be a faithful Israelite, despite the admission that in his judgment he follows only the demands of his reason…I hold that the conflict that in our day divides the scholarly Israelites of Europe and particularly those of Germany, in regard to the enforcement of ceremonial law, is only a secondary quarrel which stems from the main argument between rationalism and supernaturalism.[13]

Luzzatto is incisive in clarifying the significant correlation between belief and ritual observance. He also understood that the purpose of the commandments including rituals is to teach righteousness. His thoughts are most relevant for our present effort to seek spirituality in Judaism particularly for rationalists or religious naturalists.

Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), writing about Luzzatto, comments:

> This speculative form of faith, however, has been most severely denounced by Samuel David Luzzatto as Atticism; that is the Hellenistic or philosophic tendency to consider religion as a purely intellectual system, instead of the great dynamic force for man's moral and spiritual elevation. He holds that Judaism, as the faith transmitted to us from Abraham, our ancestor, must be considered not as a mere speculative mode of reasoning, but as a moral life force, manifested in the practice of righteousness and brotherly love… modern Biblical research… shows that the essential truth of revelation is not to be found in a metaphysical but in an ethical monotheism.[14]

Moritz Lazarus (1824-1903) a Kantian, emphasized the centrality of ethics in Judaism, including ethics conveyed by ritual. He understood holiness to be about commitment to moral living. He authored *The Ethics of Judaism* (published in 1898 and in 1911) which emphasized the importance of personal autonomy in the pursuit of ethics as taught by Kant. Lazarus writes:

> The Bible does not expound, and the rabbis do not inculcate, metaphysical notions or dogmatic teachings concerning the divine nature, for the purpose of deducing the legislative authority of God. Man's duty of obedience is based neither upon God's omnipresence, nor his omnipotence, nor even his supreme wisdom. The ethical attributes are presented as attributes of God, and for the sake of their realization man is called upon to become like unto God.[15]

Lazarus understands the image of God to be the ideal and the attributes associated with the idea of God to be a model for our behavior. In other words, the entire purpose of the behavior prescribed in the Bible is *imitatio Dei*. He is even more explicit in his religious naturalism:

> Independently of every external force or alien influence, that is, with complete autonomy, the human mind lays down moral laws. Such action comports with its inmost nature, its essence. The moral law is autonomous, because it originates in the nature of the human mind alone. [16]

Lazarus connects his Kantian outlook with holiness as taught in Judaism:

> Kant, confining himself entirely within the bounds of legitimate ethical speculation, spoke of "holiness," and spoke of it, moreover, with the meaning and in the spirit of the Rabbis. He regards a will as "holy" that agrees with the moral law naturally… his will shall become constant, unwavering, in Kant's sense, holy. [17]

Lazarus thereby integrates Kantian ideology with Jewish spirituality.

Guttmann points out that according to Lazarus:

> Jewish ethics is an ethics both of the individual and the society…The idea of ethical community is not simply expressed in abstract formulations; Lazarus demonstrates how it is realized in the ethical life of the Jews, and how it has stamped their styles of life and institutions. [18]

Thus, Lazarus is addressing both *tikkun atzmi* and *tikkun olam*, and anticipates Mordecai Kaplan's emphasis on the pursuit of holiness in the community.

The most prolific and significant Jewish Kantian was Hermann Cohen (1842-1918). He established a Neo-Kantian approach at the University of Marburg emphasizing the centrality of how thought produces everything. He believed in the God Idea and was thus a religious naturalist. He felt that ethics provide humanity with an eternal ideal. A proponent of humanistic naturalism, he was very concerned with the morality of how workers were treated and believed in the unity of humanity.[19]

Cohen moved from the University of Marburg to the Hochschule fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin in 1912, when he was 70 years old, and in 1914 visited the Jewish communities of Warsaw and Vilna, all of which contributed to his deepening focus on Judaism and the opportunity it offers the Jew for repentance and salvation. He moved to a theocentric rather than an anthropocentric position. His final work, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*, published posthumously, concretized the transition in his thinking.

One of his most important contributions during this period was his emphasis on the concept of the responsibility of the Jew to correlate personal behavior with that taught by the Torah concerning the attributes of its image of God. This idea of correlation was very much in keeping with the notion of *imitatio Dei* or of

lalekhet bidrekhav. He saw it as rooted in *ruaḥ hakodesh*, an attribute in the relationship between God and humanity, as opposed to a distinct entity.[20]

Cohen states in his *Jüdische Schriften*:

> The great struggle to reveal this truth of monotheism is thus the supreme religious and philosophical task, for upon this eternal verity of verities depends not only the moral universe, but the ultimate realization of that spirit which God implanted in man and which in correlation is known as the Holy Spirit, the spirit by which man takes his task to become holy from the Holiness that is his God.[21]

He moved from an abstract idealism to a focus on the relationship of an individual with God in terms of such correlation. From a statistical perspective, of course, an absolute correlation must remain asymptotic, for otherwise man becomes God, which is not the intention. Man's purpose is to aspire toward holiness. It is interesting to note Cohen seems to define Holiness as man's God, perhaps anticipating Paul Tillich.

However, in his *Religion of Reason,* Cohen makes clear that:

> Because they are only ethical, and not at the same time logical attributes, they cannot be adequate to God's being. Truth is the only adequate attribute. [22]

This idea has a talmudic precedent in the dictum at b. Shabbat 55a: "Rabbi Hanina said: The seal of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is truth."[23]

Thus, Cohen retains much of his emphasis on Idealism and the rejection of

anthropomorphism.

Katz points out that:

> although Cohen held to a liberal interpretation of Judaism which emphasized its moral teachings, he vigorously affirmed the value of Jewish tradition and law.[24]

Cohen remained a religious naturalist but emphasized the importance of human aspiration toward correlation with the God idea and Jewish efforts to do so through the practice of the Jewish tradition.

William Kluback nicely summarized Cohen's contribution in his *Herman Cohen: The Challenge of a Religion of Reason*:

> The autonomous creativity of reason, the lyric of prayer, the ethical philosophy of Kant, and the prophecy of Ezekiel are apparent contradictory articulations of experience. Hermann Cohen gave his life to that vast endeavor of joining a Kantian ethic to a biblical faith. [25]

Cohen had a powerful impact on the thinking of many important Jewish thinkers including Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. Joseph Soloveichik (1903-1993) wrote his doctoral dissertation about Hermann Cohen. In a discussion of contradictions in the theological writings of Soloveitchik, Yoel Finkelman points out that:

> Yoram Hazony has recently suggested that *The Emergence of Ethical Man* – certainly the most important of the posthumously published works – embraces a sharp naturalism that leaves little room for the transcendent or supernatural in Soloveitchik's understanding of ethics, prophecy and human immortality.[26]

This naturalism might be at the core of Soloveitchik's description of Adam the first in his book *The Lonely Man of Faith* and the loneliness he describes concerning Adam the second may have come from being a major Orthodox figure, the scion of Brisk, who was influenced by Kantian Idealism and Hermann Cohen's rational approach to Judaism. His bifurcation of the Adams may have come from his inner struggle as a Kantian Rosh Yeshiva.

Soloveitchik was not the only prominent Orthodox figure to have had issues with the problems of anthropomorphism, anthropopathism and other aspects of supernaturalism.

Another example is that of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) who focused on inclusivity in dealing with atheist settlers in the Holy Land in the early part of the twentieth century:

> Atheism has a temporary legitimacy, for it is needed to purge away the aberrations which attached themselves to religious faith, because of a deficiency in perception and in the divine service… and in the ruins wrought by atheism will the higher knowledge of God erect her Temple.[27]

Kook also writes that:

> From the perspective of the higher divine truth there is no difference between conventional religion and atheism. Neither of them offers the truth…before the light of the Ein Sof (the Infinite) they are all alike. In atheism, too, is manifest a life-force in which is robed a higher illumination. It is for this reason that heroes of the spirit draw from it many good elements (sparks), and they transform its bitterness to sweetness…A great soul aspires to embrace all gradations of existence, to reach out to the very last stratum of being, in order to bring vitality to all, to draw all near to itself, to elevate all.[28]

Kook was very much influenced by Kabbalistic thought, which transcends the traditional literal understanding of the Torah and of God and is similar to Maimonides' teaching that "God is beyond human comprehension." The idea of God as *Ein Sof*, or infinite, was first used by Azriel of Gerona (1160-1238) who, "sharing the Neoplatonic belief that God can have no desire, thought, word, or action, emphasized by it the negation of any attribute."[29]

Michael Meyer describes how some of the early Reform rabbis in America questioned belief in a personal God and, recounting a rabbinical meeting in Cincinnati in 1871, he quotes Jacob Mayer of Cleveland as having said: "I believe not in a personal God, neither do I address my prayer to a personal God."[30]

Regarding Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati, the primary organizer of the institutions of Reform Judaism in America, Meyer reports that he:

> Thereupon…"proposed for debate" that the biblical God be understood – in Spinozist fashion – as "the substance unlimited, eternal and infinite." He had indeed come to the conclusion that the personal God was not Jewish, but "a philosophical fiction to explain the (Christian) incarnation." Moreover, at the conference Wise had expressed doubt as to whether God actively forgives the sinner on the Day of Atonement…[31]

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the so-called Classical period of Reform Judaism, there were a significant number of early Reform rabbis who were Kantian. The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 addresses itself to the

notion of the God Idea and begins as follows:

> We recognize in every religion an attempt to grasp the Infinite, and in every mode, source or book of revelation held sacred in any religious system the consciousness of the indwelling of God in man. We hold that Judaism presents the highest conception of the God-idea as taught in our Holy Scriptures and developed and spiritualized by the Jewish teachers, in accordance with the moral and philosophical progress of their respective ages. We maintain that Judaism preserved and defended amid continual struggles and trials and under enforced isolation, this God-idea as the central religious truth for the human race.[32]

Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926), who had occupied a number of important Reform pulpits in the United States, was the primary convener of the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference in 1885 and the author and prime mover of the platform. He went on to serve as the second president of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati beginning in 1903. He published *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered* in 1918, in which he wrote:

> Moses Mendelssohn at the beginning of the new era declare(d) that Judaism "contained only truths dictated by reason and no dogmatic beliefs at all." Moreover, as he was rather a deist than a theist, he stated boldly that "Judaism is not a revealed religion but a revealed law intended solely for the Jewish people as the vanguard of universal monotheism…" In the Mendelssohnian circle the impression prevailed, as we are told, that Judaism consists of a system of forms, but is substantially not religion at all… The religious genius of the Jew falls within the domain of ethnic psychology…which progressive Judaism is bound to recognize in its effects throughout the ages. It is from this standpoint, taken also by the sainted founder of the Hebrew Union College, Isaac M. Wise, that I have written this book.[33]

He also stated that, "Our modern historical view…rejects altogether the assumption of a supernatural origin of either the written or the oral Torah…"[34]

Kohler, like Wise, was involved in the publication of liturgical material for Reform Judaism. Both retained traditional God-language but attempted to be more rationally oriented and more universalistic in outlook and less nationalistic. Kohler also devoted a section of his book to Jewish ethics emphasizing its importance and central position in Jewish spirituality.

Michael Meyer tells us how:

> As early as 1874, Kohler had recognized that Darwinism was "the cornerstone and the capstone of the modern view of nature."[35]

But he also noted that biological evolution was only the first stage of human development: once the organism was externally complete, it could then develop its inward spiritual powers. In fact, spiritual evolution, in its subjective impact, was a moral imperative to overcome what remained of the animal… "Reform Judaism" according to Kohler was the necessary outcome of the age of evolution.[36]

Thus, Kohler emphasizes Darwinism rather than creationism and that the process of evolution is what enables spiritual evolution. This places spirituality directly in line with, and even a result of, natural development, just as many speak of social evolution.

Kohler's brother-in-law, Emil G. Hirsch (1851-1923), was more radical. He was the rabbi of Chicago's Sinai Congregation for more than forty years, where he

advocated the transfer of the observance of the Sabbath to Sunday and the removal of the Torah scrolls from the Ark. Hirsch stressed Judaism's ethical teachings almost to the exclusion of all ceremonialism. He was most responsible for infusing Reform Judaism with its prophetic passion for social justice.[37]

Hirsch argued that the Torah borrowed its ideas from neighboring tribes and that the Prophets represent an original religious contribution. Thus, the goal of religion is the holiness of humanity that would be based not on ceremonial rites but on human justice and mercy.[38]

Meyer clarifies how Hirsch:

> preferred to define prayer in purely human terms as "the attempt to bring home to man from the emotional side of his nature, and to sharpen within him, the sense of duty and responsibility" … Hirsch… was proud of the fact that at Temple Sinai prayer played a very secondary role to the sermon. Liturgical celebration, to his mind, was considerably less important than aiding the sick and motherless.[39]

Thus, Hirsch was much less concerned with God than he was with ethical development in terms of social action or *tikkun olam* in the practice of Judaism.

We have seen a varied representative group of religious naturalists both within and beyond the Jewish community. Most appear to be deists or rationalists but emphasize ethics and the practice of certain inspiring rituals and prayers in which people find meaning as a vehicle for spiritual growth.

The contemporary philosophical thinker Ken Wilber delineates well the difference between traditional faith and religious naturalism and their respective aims and practices. He differentiates between translational and transformational religion. Translational religion is about satisfying the expectations of God in order to be rewarded and not punished. Transformational religion is about rejecting the former and using religious resources to transform oneself to greater spiritual achievement. People often see religious naturalism as “religion light” or even Reform Judaism as “Judaism light,” their focus being on what is not believed or not ritually required. On the contrary, a serious focus on the potential for spiritual transformation is what can be so significant about religious naturalism and reformation. Wilber clarifies the distinction between translational and transformational religion:

> The function of religion does not usually or necessarily change the level of consciousness in a person; it does not deliver radical transformation… Rather it consoles the self, fortifies the self, defends the self, promotes the self. As long as the separate self believes the myths, performs the rituals, mouths the prayers, or embraces the dogma, then the self, it is fervently believed, will be ’saved’ - either now or in the glory of being God saved… or in an afterlife that insures eternal wonderment. But…religion has also served - in a usually very, very small minority - the function of radical transformation and liberation. The function of religion does not fortify the separate self but shatters it…not comfort but revolution - in short, not a conventional bolstering of consciousness but a radical transmutation and transformation at the deepest seat of consciousness itself.[40]

Another way of understanding the significant spiritual potential of a religious naturalist approach would be to suggest that it represents an opportunity for growth in autonomy rather than reinforcing dependency as traditional religion seems to do. The Freudian understanding that the God image is a projection or

transference of the image of parental authority supports this understanding, as does Emile Durkheim's similar theory about the image of government, and as does the Jungian understanding of the archetypal significance of personal individuation and redemption.

The various rationalist theorists discussed above appear to be calling for such spiritual transformation rather than merely negating dogmatic views about God. Perhaps the best expression of this is the explanation above of Spinoza's quest for the individual to achieve complete understanding, overcome bondage, become self-determining, and no longer be driven aimlessly by feelings and events. Thus, taken seriously, and not just as a way to be more minimalist, religious naturalism can be a vehicle for emotional self - transformation through self-transcendence enabling a higher ethical aspiration.

The concern here is to acknowledge and to reinforce that aspect of Reform Judaism which is an expression of transformational religion. The range of thinkers over time who have advocated some form of religious naturalism, or at least those who have questioned the attributes traditionally ascribed to a supernatural God, both non-Jewish and Jewish, is very broad, each individual bringing a unique depth.

Ensuing chapters will deal with the twentieth- century contributions of Mordecai Kaplan the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, and Alvin Reines, a pantheistic

professor at Hebrew Union College, significant proponents of religious naturalism influenced by some of these earlier thinkers. Following these there will be a chapter concerning the thoughts of other religious naturalists and then a chapter on Sherwin Wine, the founder of the Society for Humanistic Judaism.

Notes

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3. Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, I, 5.

4. Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 158-159.

5. Ibid. 159.

6. Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, I, 57.

7. Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 90.

8. Ibid. 148. Based on Moses Mendelssohn, *Morgenstunden* (1785).

9. Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem,* in Gesammelte Schriften, III (Leipzig, 1843), 358.

10. Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 162-164.

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13. Samuel David Luzzatto, in *Israelitische Annalen,* ed. J.M. Jost, vol. I (1839), 156.

14. Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology : A History and Study of Judaism; Jewish Beliefs, Prayers and Thought* (London: MacMillan Publishers, 1918), 20.

15. Moritz Lazarus, *The Ethics of Judaism*, translated by Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1900), 114-115.

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17. Ibid., 137-138.

18. Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 351-352.

19. Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 175.

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21. Hermann Cohen, *Juedische Schriften* (Berlin: 1934) III, 189, translated in William Kluback, *Hermann Cohen: The Challenge of a Religion of Reason* (Chico, California: Brown University, 1984), 76.

22. Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 414.

23. Translation from *Koren Talmud Bavli*, accessed on sefaria.com.

24. Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 178.

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26. Yoram Hazony, "The Rav's Bombshell." *Commentary* 133(4), 48-55, referred to in Yoel Finkelman, "Theology with Fissures in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik's Theological Writings." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 13:3 (Nov 2014): 3.

27. Abraham Isaac Kook, "The Pangs of Cleansing," *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review* (1975):101.

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30. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 259.

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32. W. Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 2015), 33.

33. Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology: A History and Study of Judaism, Jewish Beliefs, Prayers and Thought* (London: MacMillan Publishers, 1918), vii-viii.

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40. Ken Wilber, *The Essential Ken Wilber* (Boston: Shambhala Press, 1998), 140.

IV. Mordecai M. Kaplan

Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983) came to the United States from Swenziany, Lithuania at the age of eight in 1889. His father, Israel Kaplan, was an Orthodox rabbi and a follower of the Mussar movement of Rabbi Israel Salanter. Kaplan attended Yeshiva Etz Chaim and the City College of New York and was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 1902, examined and ordained by Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines, a founder of Mizrahi, in Lithuania in 1908. Kaplan received a Master's degree in philosophy and sociology at Columbia University, having submitted in 1902 a thesis entitled "The Ethical System of Henry Sidgwick," a nineteenth-century utilitarian philosopher.

His philosophy was influenced by sociology, particularly how that discipline explained dynamics of social and religious behavior. He was exposed to the ideas of Felix Adler, the founder of the Ethical Culture Society, who emphasized the idea that ethics is based on the individual's being part of the living organism of society, to which he is obligated; ethics is therefore indispensable to society. Adler, the son of Rabbi Samuel Adler of Temple Emanuel in New York City, and who had himself at one time studied for the rabbinate, had come to believe that religion had to be consistent with science.[1]

At first Kaplan served Kehilath Jeshurun, an Orthodox congregation in New York City. In 1909 Solomon Schechter invited Kaplan to become the principal (later

referred to as dean) of the newly established Teachers Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary, and in 1910 Kaplan began teaching in its Rabbinical School. By 1914 he made it clear that he accepted the assumptions of biblical criticism, but felt that such scientific study should not undermine the significance of the Torah in Jewish life:

> Traditional belief as to the origin of the Torah is not the sole support of its supremacy. If this is found to give way, the one derived from its having rendered Israel the instrument of divine revelation is no less effective in maintaining its pre-eminence.[2]

From 1915 until 1921 Kaplan served a new congregation, the Jewish Center, helping to establish the concept of the Jewish community center particularly in the context of a synagogue.

In 1920 Kaplan published an article entitled *A Program for the Reconstruction of Judaism* in which he wrote, “Nothing can be more repugnant to the thinking man of today than the fundamental doctrine of Orthodoxy, which is that tradition is infallible.”[3]

Mel Scult indicates that this article put forth the idea that:

> the only way to revitalize Judaism was to dispense with mythological ideas about God, to create a dynamic code that would guide Jewish behavior, and to establish a center for Jewish culture in the Land of Israel. The key to the whole program was a new way of thinking which Kaplan characterized as realistic rather than ideological, pragmatic rather than tradition-oriented.[4]

Thus, Kaplan breaks with Orthodoxy and distinguishes his approach from that of Reform of that period by calling for a code that would guide Jewish life and by asserting Jewish nationalism. He also at the same time distinguishes himself as being on the left within Conservative Judaism by rejecting outright mythological ideas about God and calling for a break with certain traditions.

Kaplan, supported by some of his congregants and others, established the Society for the Advancement of Judaism just a little east of the Jewish Center on W. 86th Street, near Central Park, in New York City, and he became its rabbi.

Stephen S. Wise urged Kaplan a number of times in the late 1920's to join the faculty of the recently established Jewish Institute of Religion, which, had he done so, might have enhanced the pluralism of Reform Judaism and thus added to its vitality. Under pressure from his students, he fatefully chose to remain at the Jewish Theological Seminary, becoming the leader of the Conservative Movement's liberal, Reconstructionist wing, despite the opposition he encountered from the Seminary's more traditional faculty.

Kaplan experimented with innovative changes in ritual practice at the congregation he served, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism. As an example, he introduced the Bat Mitzvah ceremony in 1922.

In 1934, Kaplan published *Judaism as a Civilization*, which set out not only his rational naturalistic ideology but his vision for the reorganization of the Jewish community as a distinct and evolving religious civilization. Here he integrated philosophy with sociology, as had Felix Adler, but emphasized a modern observance of Jewish traditions and the centrality of the Jewish community in fostering both its own and a more universal spirituality and ethics. In 1935 he founded and became the editor of a new biweekly publication, *The Reconstructionist*, through which he was able to promulgate his ideas further. In 1941, together with his disciples Rabbis Ira Eisenstein (Kaplan's son-in-law and assistant) and Eugene Kohn, he published a new Haggadah, leaving out reference to the ten plagues and removing reference to the chosenness of the Jewish People in the Kiddush, among other innovations. They also added reference to Moses, even though the traditional Haggadah had avoided doing so, apparently in a desire to emphasize God's role as the redeemer, (לא על ידי מלאך ולא על ידי שרף ולא על ידי שליח אלא הקדוש ברוך הוא בכבודו ובעצמו).

In 1954, the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot was established, and the founding of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College took place in 1968. Kaplan had been concerned not to be divisive within the Jewish community from an organizational perspective and sought to promulgate his ideas as broadly as possible, despite significant resistance from elements in the Conservative Movement and total rejection by Orthodoxy. He was interested in influencing all of Jewish life rather than in starting his own separate movement,

but the other movements, particularly with regard to their emphasis on theism, resisted his religious naturalism and some of its resultant innovations. A number of Conservative rabbis shared his theological perspective and were the core of the new Reconstructionist Movement. Kaplan was a significant influence on a number of individual Reform rabbis such as Levi Olan, Roland Gittelsohn, and Alvin Reines, among others, particularly regarding ideology. His innovative approach to ritual observance may have also influenced the Reform Movement more broadly in its return to a greater focus on ritual during the latter part of the twentieth century. Had Kaplan accepted the invitation of Stephen S. Wise to join him at the Jewish Institute of Religion in the late 1920's, Kaplan's influence on Reform Judaism would likely have been even more profound, and a distinct Reconstructionist Movement might not have emerged.

Emanuel Goldsmith, in commenting on the founding of Reconstructionism as a fourth movement in American Jewish life, indicated that:

> It is…primarily the all-embracing nature of Mordecai Kaplan's interpretation of Judaism that continues to make it a major force to be reckoned with in Jewish life despite changing theological, philosophical and sociological fashions. Mordecai Kaplan remains the only nineteenth or twentieth-century Jewish thinker to have painstakingly constructed a comprehensive analysis of Judaism in terms of community and peoplehood; organization and structure; philosophy and theology; and history, culture, ethics and ritual; and to have charted a course for the Jewish future in all these areas.[5]

There were other important leaders who did many of these specific things, but Goldsmith is describing the breadth of Kaplan's areas of contribution. Kaplan's

genius was the integration of the varied influences in his life. As we have seen, he was shaped by Felix Adler's emphasis on sociology, but also apparently by Hermann Cohen's neo-Kantianism and by Whitehead's process theology. Shaul Magid suggests that, "He is primarily influenced by the philosophical pragmatism of John Dewey, William James, and the nineteenth-century American transcendentalists."[6]

Magid argues for Kaplan's having been influenced by Spinoza as well:

> …the more we distance ourselves from Spinoza's highly critical engagement with Judaism and the more we look for the roots of Kaplan's constructive program, the more Spinoza's ideas can be seen to resonate in Kaplan's thinking… he begins his project by reconstructing modern interpretations of Judaism, embodied in twentieth-century Jewish denominations, in an attempt to exhibit how modern Judaism has thus far failed to meet the needs of modern Jewish civilization. As a Jewish "insider," Kaplan's goal is to reconstruct Judaism for twentieth-century America. His numerous attempts at reconstruction, however, almost always begin with a deconstructive prelude and utilize…Spinozistic premises as the foundation of his religious critique.[7]

Kaplan sought an alternative to the idealized God of liberal Judaism and the unquestionably transcendent God of Orthodoxy and proposed instead to utilize Spinoza's philosophic naturalism but, instead of rejecting Judaism and religion, sought to place the notion of holiness within the community instead of with God.

For our present purposes it is important to review the distinction that Kaplan makes between his own vision for Judaism and that of Reform Judaism in his 1934 volume, *Judaism as a Civilization*. After setting aside Neo-Orthodoxy as

supernaturally oriented and Secular-Culturalists as viewing religion to be superfluous, he compares the “Reformists” with what he envisions in the plan of his book, which at this point he refers to as the “Religious-Culturalists:”

The Reformists

1. In the past the Jewish differentia consisted of a distinctive national-cultural life and a unique religion.
2. The national-cultural life was bound up with Palestine and gave rise to a distinctive Jewish civilization.
3. In that civilization the element of religion as the sum of beliefs and practices which center about the relation of man to God developed into ethical monotheism.
4. Though the element of religion was until modern times closely associated with the national-cultural life of the Jews, it achieved sufficient content of its own to be worthy of being fostered in its own right.
5. Now that emancipation makes it necessary for the Jews to surrender their national-cultural life, they can dispense with the cultural elements of their heritage and retain only the element of religion.
6. The Jewish differentia is henceforth to take the form of the historically evolved religion of ethical monotheism.

The Religious-Culturists

The Religious-Culturists agree with the Reformists in the first three propositions, but add the following:

4. Religion and national-cultural life are so integrally related to each other as to be unable to function separately.
5. The emancipation and enlightenment have necessitated many changes in both concurrently.
6. The Jewish differentia is henceforth to take the form of a historically evolved civilization which is to reckon with the social and spiritual needs of the Jews as individuals and as a national entity.[8]

Thus, with regard to the understanding of the past, items 1-3, there is no distinction. However, there is a difference in interpretations of the impacts and meanings of historical events and movements and in visions of how the Jewish community should implement its future. According to Kaplan at the time, the “Reformists” approach Judaism as a religion of ethical monotheism and reject

Jewish nationalism and Judaism as a distinct culture, while the "Religious-Culturists" see religion and national-culture as inseparable for Judaism and as evolving.

Kaplan was writing ninety years ago. Since that time the Reform Movement has integrated much more "national-cultural," and specifically ritual, aspects into its functioning. As early as 1937, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted the Columbus Platform, known as the Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism, supporting Zionism and embracing aspects of traditional Judaism that the Reform movement had previously rejected. What generated this in large measure was the entry into the Reform movement of large numbers of eastern European Jews, immigrants and the children of immigrants, who wanted a "warmer," more tangibly recognizable form of Judaism----the same people from whom Kaplan sprung and whose unarticulated form of Jewish identity ("folk religion") he articulated.

The primary distinction between Reform Judaism and the Reconstructionist approach seems to have been that the former continued for the most part to emphasize ethical monotheism, while Kaplan continued to shape a religious naturalist orientation.

Kaplan writes:

> Man has come to understand that the act of contemplating reality in its wholeness does not place him outside reality. He now realizes that the

> inter-relatedness which is the source of his awareness of good operates within him, no less than outside him. *Thus, is eliminated the very need of making any dichotomy either between the universe of man and the universe of God, or between the natural and the supernatural…* God is not an identifiable being who stands outside the universe. *God is the life of the universe, immanent insofar as the whole acts upon each part.*[9]

He thus makes very clear his position as a monist and religious naturalist, a perspective that was integral to his development of Reconstructionist Judaism, as his "religious-culturalist" movement came to be known. He emphasizes what he refers to as "sancta" and as "mores," both from an anthropological perspective to encourage the affirmation of meaningful identification with "Judaism as a Civilization," while questioning the viability of a Judaism devoid of these and emphasizing ethical monotheism only.

As noted above, however, that Classical Reform approach soon evolved, and Reform Judaism affirmed the importance of the sancta as well of Jewish life. Thus, there is now a range of liberal ideological perspectives all yearning for spirituality.

Despite all this, Kaplan's liturgical publications tended to keep traditional God language and his emendations were primarily about social-political issues like omitting reference to the chosenness of the Jews, similar to the liturgical emendations within the Reform movement of his day.

Goldsmith describes a different profound influence on Kaplan, one which he took specifically from Jewish sources and perhaps what he considered to be most important from within Judaism, namely:

> …the… mussar (ethics) movement, founded by Rabbi Israel Salanter of Lithuania in the nineteenth century, emphasized introspection, self-analysis, and the study of Hebrew ethical literature in a contrite and penitent mood. Its major themes were responsibility, conscience, and soul-searching. Mordecai Kaplan's father, Rabbi Israel Kaplan, was a follower of Rabbi Salanter…Mordecai Kaplan always admitted that his father's influence on him had been great.[10]

In fact, Mordecai Kaplan translated Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's important *musar* text, *Mesillat Yesharim*, into English. In his introduction, Kaplan writes about *musar* generally:

> The function of this literature, as a cursory examination of it must show, is to cultivate the inwardness of the laws and duties to which the Jew has to live up. The title Duties of the Hearts, which one of these ethical works bears, might well be applied to the entire mass of Jewish ethics; for, side by side with the emphasis upon outward observance or "duties of the limbs," Judaism has stressed the importance of cultivating the proper spirit and frame of mind.[11]

Kaplan, thus, understood *musar* to be about both *tikkun atzmi* and *tikkun olam*. He also saw it as an important way through which to affirm the value of Judaism. Thus, Kaplan was concerned about encouraging the Jewish community to pursue spirituality through familiarity with the teachings of *musar*, even though in the past such study and its application had been about living up to God's expectations. He writes:

> There was a time–and that not so long ago–when the pious Jew would turn to Mesillat Yesharim to derive from it fresh incentive to moral and spiritual effort. The universe of discourse in which the reader then moved was almost the same as that in which the author, R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto conceived his ideal of a holy life lived in accordance with the will of God. That kind of reader is a rarity nowadays. Very few can be counted on to look to this and similar ethical works for edification in that unsophisticated fashion which was possible until a generation ago. The reason is obvious. Very few readers find themselves thinking in terms of the spiritual aims formulated in the Mesillat Yesharim…[12]

Kaplan appears to be suggesting that, while prior generations pursued "a holy life lived in accordance with the will of God," people today who do not have that motivation would still benefit from pursuing the "spiritual aims formulated in the Mesillat Yesharim" or potentially other similar material. That is likely what motivated him to translate the work.

But he writes in *Judaism as a Civilization:*

> The very notion of finished and rounded-out systems of ethics is wrong…a vital ethics must be a process of individual or group reflection and study carried on throughout life. It is in this way that we look to the renaissance of the inherently ethical character of the Jewish civilization…Torah study…has in it the potency of centuries of accumulated energy and devotion. If made to function again, it would revive the ethical genius of the Jewish people.[13]

Thus, Kaplan is encouraging spirituality for the religious naturalists of his envisioned civilization, utilizing Jewish resources, and understanding ethics to be an evolving living communal process.

> Kaplan continues and emphasizes, "*Torah as study never meant detached contemplation of truth, but group discussion with a view to arriving at a knowledge of the right in specific problems of human conduct."*[14]

In other contexts, we might call this *halakhah lema'aseh*, "theory in practice." Kaplan was concerned to encourage the study of Torah in order to stimulate contemplation of the right ethical decision for practical immediate circumstances. In other words, he envisioned such an approach for the sanctification of life through the resources of Judaism.

Nancy Fuchs Kramer asks a profound question regarding Kaplan's effort to reconstruct Judaism:

> Kaplan's project was to take the ideas of Torah, Israel, and God, deprive them of the power and prestige of divine revelation, and (here was the tricky part) enhance religious practice, commitment to the Jewish people, and spirituality. He wanted to demystify the key elements of Judaism, to see them as human constructions understood through social science, and then to have people find them more compelling than before. He had faith that a high level of transparency could coexist with depth of obligation and commitment. Those of us who do our work under the banner of Reconstructionism share that faith—at least enough to test it in action… by asking, though not answering, the important Kaplanian question: Is it possible to create a version of Jewish life that, while demoting Torah, Israel, and God from their supernatural status, results in increased willingness to submit to norms, a "maximum" identification by Jews with Jewish life, and deeper connections with the holy?[15]

The answer to this question, regardless of any quantitative response, is that of course it is possible for Jews who have a rational approach to religion and who value spiritual growth to accomplish a strengthened Jewish life and deeper connection with the holy. Kaplan's project must be measured in qualitative terms and in its potential to attract and to inspire people from throughout the progressive Jewish world, Reform as well as Reconstructionist, as well as those

still in the process of figuring out how they want to live as Jews. Many more than those affiliated with Reconstructionist congregations, particularly Reform-affiliated Jews, have been influenced by the contributions of Mordecai Menachem Kaplan.

Writing fifty years ago (and drawing on research published in 1966 and 1967 before the founding of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College), the sociologist Charles Liebman observed that:

> Under the influence of Durkheim and Dewey, Kaplan sought to explicate or make manifest in religion what others had seen as its latent function: social solidarity and the strengthening of peoplehood. Kaplan sought to retain the form of many traditional observances by reinvesting them with contemporary humanist meaning or national-historical significance… Kaplan was not saying anything very new. He articulated in a provocative and intellectual manner the folk religion of American Jews...[16]

Liebman reports that Reconstructionism did not attract many adherents at first. Its theological approach did not seem to appeal to the masses but primarily to more intellectual Jews. Many of the former, though personally not observant, still wanted to see “their religion” as having faith in God. He does acknowledge that:

> As Reform found an East European Jewish identity, Kaplan's notions of peoplehood and his justification of many ritual practices as folkways had special resonance for some.[17]

Kaplan may, thus, have been an influence on the Reform Movement’s transition from its classical period toward an embracing of more traditional ritual practices and toward a sense of peoplehood and Zionism. Observing the American Jewish community in the late 1960’s-early 70’s, Liebman indicates that:

> Reconstructionism has enjoyed some increase in popularity…among Reform Jews, though not among its theological spokesmen. Reform theologians either are far more committed to religious existentialism and belief in a personal God or, at the other extreme, far more radical than Kaplan. The radical Reform Jews deny the utility of the God concept or the existence of a meaningful Jewish tradition.[18]

The next chapter will be about Professor Alvin Reines of Hebrew Union College who expressed a similar theology/ideology to Kaplan's, but functioned from within a context of Reform Judaism, with a freer approach about whether or not to keep the mores of the Jewish religious civilization.

Notes

1. Emanuel S. Goldsmith and Mel Scult, *Dynamic Judaism: The Essential Writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985) 5-7.

2. Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Supremacy of the Torah," in *Students Annual of the Jewish Theological Seminary* (New York:1914) 186.

3. Kaplan, "A Program for the Reconstruction of Judaism," in *The Menorah Journal* 6:4 (August 1920).

4. Goldsmith and Scult, *Dynamic Judaism*, 9.

5. Ibid., 16.

6. Shaul Magid, "The Spinozistic Spirit in Mordecai Kaplan's Revaluation of Judaism" in *Modern Judaism*, 20:2 (May 2000):159.

7. Ibid., 159.

8. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), 312.

9. Ibid., 316.

10. Goldsmith and Scult, *Dynamic Judaism*, 16.

11. Moses Hayyim, Luzzatto, *Mesillat Yesharim: The Path of the Upright.* Translated with an introduction by Mordecai M. Kaplan. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1936.

12. Ibid.

13. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*, 464-465.

14. Ibid., 465.

15. Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, "Seventy Years after Judaism as a Civilization: Mordecai Kaplan's Theology and the Reconstructionist Movement" *Jewish Social Studies, History, Culture, Society,* Indiana University Press. Volume 12, Number 2, Winter 2006 (New Series):128.

16. Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973) 73-74, drawing on his previously published articles, "Changing Social Characteristics of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews," *Sociological Analysis* 27 (Winter 1966): 210-22, and

“Religion, Class, and Culture in American Jewish History,” *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 9, no. 2 (December 1967) 227-41.

17. Ibid. 77.

18. Ibid. 76.

V. Alvin J. Reines

Following many years during which even Reform leaders who described themselves and their programs as Kantian and yet were not really religious naturalists in their formulations or in liturgical efforts, Alvin Reines courageously broke the mold. He articulated a pluralism within Reform that allowed for a full variety of theological/ideological perspectives.

His major contribution was his notion of polydoxy, which provides for a full range of theological options within Reform, making it clear that the pluralism of Reform Judaism included an openness to differing beliefs about the existence of God.

In addressing himself to the rejection of fundamentalist orthodoxies within Judaism and beyond he calls for clarity and choice in liberal religious thought. He defines polydoxy as:

> a religious ideology that affirms the ultimate right of an individual to religious self-authority or autonomy; and a religious community that adheres to a polydoxy affirms the ultimate right to religious autonomy of each of its members.[1]

He was disturbed by a lack of clarity in the religious ideology of Reform Judaism and sought to affirm that the existence of various differences in outlook within a liberal perspective should in and of itself be affirmed as definitional of Reform Judaism. Hence the emphasis on polydoxy. Reines suggests that Reform Judaism rejects the verbal revelation of the Pentateuch stating that:

> …repudiation of the Pentateuch as verbal revelations is precisely what the Central Conference of American Rabbis has explicitly set forth in a declaration of principles on the nature of Reform Judaism…[2]

He was referring to the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. He further states that "Reform Jews uniformly reject in whole or in part the practices mandated by the Pentateuch."[3]

This suggests a natural and thus fallible revelation for Reines, who then concludes that no one can, therefore, justifiably claim to have authority in relation to others, leaving them to be free to make their own decisions about Jewish observance. He proposes the Freedom Covenant for Polydox communities wherein "every member of the religious community possesses an ultimate right to religious self-authority."[4]

It would seem that Reines is addressing himself to the institutions of Reform Judaism and trying to foster a principle that Reform Jews can unite on regardless of their various differences in theological perspective and in ritual observance. However, one might argue that, even though Orthodox Jewry is not tolerant of liberal perspectives and thus not reciprocally engaged in a Freedom Covenant with liberal Jews, from a philosophical perspective Reform Jews respect the freedom of even fundamentalist, supernaturally oriented Orthodox Jews and members of other religions to autonomously believe and practice religion however they choose. In this way our respect for pluralism of belief is unlimited.

Reines affirms that religion is broader than belief in theistic absolutism and, thereby, makes the case for including religious naturalism within polydoxy. He states:

> Once the word religion is so defined as to include meanings other than 'belief in theistic absolutism,' then the theistic absolutistic religions can no longer claim a monopoly either on the word religion or its practice.[5]

Reines understands religion to be the human response to the conflict of finitude and suggests that:

> The ideal purpose of a religion is to provide a response to the conflict of finitude that enables a person to resolve the conflict and thereby attain a state of ultimate meaningful existence that the conflict's negative moods would otherwise destroy.[6]

Thus, it seems that Reines is suggesting that religion is essentially about the effort to transcend the concern of human beings regarding personal mortality. One might conclude that he views personal transcendence of one's existential circumstance as the ultimate spiritual quest. This understanding of religion and of spiritual quest is present for religious naturalists as for those who believe in theistic absolutism.

He introduces the term "soteria" to refer to this state of meaningful existence and concludes that "the function of religion is to produce soteria."[7] Reines criticizes others for misusing religious terminology by using established words to indicate new meanings, writing that:

> It is the fashion in some theological circles to disguise … creative activity and pretend that the new meaning is that which the term has always signified…The practice of deception, conscious or unconscious, is as debasing to theology as is it is destructive of scientific scholarship.[8]

An example of what he may be referring to might be Spinoza's use of the word "God" to refer to the monistic natural world. Yet Reines himself suggests new uses for existing terms. He argues that doing so in the context of polydoxy makes sense because of the non-dogmatic nature of polydoxy. This appears to be inconsistent at best. Why not use different terms? Spinoza could have used "ultimate substance" or "ultimate reality" instead of "God" to refer to the natural realm. Similarly, when describing hylotheism, Reines refers to "the definition of God as the enduring possibility of being…"[9], and thus introduces a concept and a meaning for God significantly different from its generally accepted understanding.

He affirms that "there exists no authoritative revelation so far as the polydox community as a whole is concerned,"[10] yet is more equivocal and nuanced in defining God in his conceptualization of hylotheism as "the enduring possibility of being." A possibility is not the same as a reality. Why not just say that within a polydox community or a Reform congregation our polydoxian approach, or our pluralism, is such that we accept and respect religious naturalists as well as supernaturalists. He progresses beyond most of his predecessors by introducing the term "possibility" in contradistinction to "reality." He moves even more clearly into the naturalist camp by suggesting that without human beings there is no possibility of being for God. In elucidating hylotheism he suggests that:

> The status of God's existence as the enduring possibility of being leads to a further consequence: God cannot exist without the world. God has no meaning without being; being has no endurance without God. God's existence is not absolute; the enduring possibility of being exists as a correlative of being.[11]

This would suggest that he understands God to be a human projection. Reines in fact suggests that:

> One of the conclusions of Sigmund Freud's investigations was that the experience of 'presence' which some take as meeting with the deity is properly understood as an experience of self objectified and projected outward. How, in this Freudian and scientific age, can it be considered 'rational' to accept the mere fact of experiencing a 'presence" as consciousness of 'God Himself'? Rather, it would appear that one of the prime methodological considerations in a theology competent for our time is the recognition that 'presences' per say can well be projections of the unconscious.[12]

Similarly, Carl Jung conceptualizes God to be a human archetype. This way of thinking does not necessarily minimize the role of the image of God as an influence toward spirituality and, thus, as central to religious naturalism. This is in keeping with Immanuel Kant's "God Idea" and central to Hermann Cohen's emphasis on the effort to correlate one's character traits (*middot*) with those of the God Idea as the essence of the religious quest. Reines makes clear: "Genuine religion is to have one's view of the word God shape one's emotions and desires, and not the contrary."[13]

He also states courageously and clearly that:

> …the Jewish religious complex must make widely available deanthropomorphized and demythologized options of belief and

> observance. The present manifest is by and large impotent, and is a major reason for the present widespread alienation and estrangement of Jews from the Jewish religious complex.[14]

Reines introduces the concept of the Jewish Religious Complex which bears some resemblance to Kaplan's Judaism as a Religious Civilization, wherein the latter is broader and the former more focused on religion and theology. Reines, like Kaplan, also emanating originally from an Orthodox background, emerges as a religious naturalist process theologian. At the same time, Reines emphasizes his pluralistic respect for other viewpoints through his polydoxian approach.

Subsequently, Reines describes hylotheism in the context of process theology in a chapter entitled "Hylotheism: A Theology of Pure Process"in Lubarsky and Griffin's volume, *Jewish Theology and Process Thought*. Here he emphasizes more fully that he is a pantheistic process theologian. He asks:

> Why do theologians personify, overstate the perfection of, and overvalue the power of the godhead to overcome nothingness? The answer is evident: confronted by the angst of finity, many humans find it unbearable to be alone in the universe without a personal, omniperfect deity who has absolute mastery over nothingness. The question then arises: If no objective evidence exists for the omniperfection and overvaluing of deity, whence do such attributes arise? Their source, I believe, is the unconscious projection of parental images onto extramental reality. Those whose theologies personify and overvalue the godhead's power to prevail over nothingness project the parental imagoes in thinly-disguised fashion; those who eliminate personhood, but retain the deity's absolute mastery over nothingness, project parental imagoes in a more subtle way.[15]

Thus, Reines appears to feel supported by Freud's explanation of the origin of religion in human civilization. Freud writes:

> …the child's attitude to its father is coloured by a peculiar ambivalence. The father himself constitutes a danger to the child…Thus it fears him no less than it longs for him and admires him. The indications of this ambivalence … are deeply imprinted in every religion. When the growing individual finds that he is destined to remain a child forever, that he can never do without protection against strange superior powers, he lends those powers the features belonging to the figure of his father; he creates for himself the gods whom he dreads, whom he seeks to propitiate, and whom he nevertheless entrusts with his own protection. Thus his longing for his father is a motive identical with his need for protection against the consequences of his human weakness. This defense against childish helplessness is what lends its characteristic features to the adult's reaction to the helplessness which he has to acknowledge - a reaction which is precisely the formation of religion.[16]

This appears to undergird Reines' theory that human finitude is at the core of religion. It is also related to what may underlie the issue of love and fear in the service of God (אהבה ויראה בעבודת ד׳).

This proposition has experimental research support in the present author's Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Attachment Styles, Parental Caregiving and the Perceived Image of God," (Oler, 1999) which demonstrated that people's perception of God's attitude toward them varies in accordance with parental manner of caregiving in early childhood. In particular, people who experienced a parent as cold perceived God to be judgmental (*middat hadin*) relative to those who experienced a parent as warm and perceived God to be compassionate (*middat harahamim*). While Freud's conceptualization mentioned by Reines is causative, the results of this research are correlational, after the fact, and may result from a common antecedent such as disposition impacting both perceptions.

Reines's emphasis on anxiety concerning finitude as the motivator of individual religious impulse might suggest that Kaplan's communitarian approach could in a similar fashion be based on individual existential loneliness. Either way, human anxiety and the hunger for parental or at least external reassurance is understood to be the basis for the ubiquitous search for a higher power. Particularly with Reines's theory about finitude, were humans to be immortal not only would they have no need for a god but they would have personally attained one of the primary characteristics of divinity.

Reines continues to differentiate hylotheism from other process theologies which he sees as panentheistic, referring to them as:

> …hybrids rather than pure process theologies. The reason is that they characterize deity as static or immutable in part and dynamic and mutable in part. This view contrasts with hylotheism, which is pure process theology inasmuch as deity is conceived of as entirely and always becoming.[17]

Reines, clearly in contradistinction, sees hylotheism, "the enduring possibility of being," as pantheistic process theology (or ideology) rather than panentheistic. The emphasis on "possibility" undermines any suggestion of the definitive reality envisaged by believers, including panentheists who postulate a divinity distinct from Spinoza's divinity of monistic reality.

Lubarsky makes it very clear that:

> Although the process view is sympathetic to the naturalism of Mordecai Kaplan and others, it is nevertheless a different form of religious naturalism. Kaplan's naturalism makes religion compatible with the modern scientific worldview by equating God with the process of life. Process theology rejects the mechanism, determinism, and materialism of that worldview in favor of an organic worldview that allows God as a personal being to be active in the process of life, Because God is not the process itself, this form of religious naturalism, unlike Kaplan's, can account for moral value.[18]

In further defining hylotheism Reines makes his intention very clear. He states:

> The term hylotheism in rare and obsolete usage has been employed to refer to the doctrine that God and the material universe are one…The primary meaning of hyle in Aristotle is…"possibility of being." It is by reason of this meaning that I have given the name "hylotheism" to the concept of God as the "enduring possibility of being."[19]

Reines concludes his essay on hylotheism with a critique of Christian process theology as being of necessity panentheistic. He quotes David Griffin, a co-editor of the volume in which it appears, as follows:

> All (Christian theological) reflection must be rooted in a distinctively Christian perspective.…every conceptualized understanding of reality is based upon some non-rational starting point. This starting point can be termed "a vision of reality." Accordingly,…the Christian revelatory content is understood as the Christian vision of reality… The theologian, in beginning with revelation, is not subjecting his thought to some heteronomous authority, but is simply reflecting upon reality in terms of the way he sees reality.[20]

He continues to quote David Griffin:

> "…the Christian belief that Jesus is God's decisive revelation can be understood to be a real possibility…"[21]

Reines proceeds to describe, in addition to Griffin, earlier major process theologians, Whitehead as well as Hartshorne, as also having a Christian panentheistic process-theology orientation. This is surprising as there are process theologians who are pantheists and panentheists in Judaism as well. In Reform Judaism in particular there have been, for example, pantheists such as Roland Gittelsohn and panentheists such as Levi Olan. Reines makes room for all within polydoxy but his perspective of hylotheism appears to imply a more naturalistic perspective of pantheism while equivocating linguistically with his definition of "the enduring possibility of being."

Gittelsohn writes that God "is not supernatural" and explains his conclusion in a striking way:

> …the important thing here is to think of God as operating within and through nature, permeating it from beginning to end, rather than activating it from without. The difference is crucial. Fire, baking a loaf of bread, is an external force applied from outside. Yeast, mixed with the dough itself, is an inner force, causing the loaf to rise. I mean no irreverent heresy, in suggesting that God is the yeast of the universe.[22]

It seems that Christians by definition cannot be pantheists, or then they no longer are considered really Christian. Jews who are pantheists are similarly also regarded as heretical by believers. Perhaps because one can be a Jew ethnically regardless of holding to a pure pantheist or pure process theology perspective, the distinction of remaining identified as a Jew is not as hard and fast as for Christian identity which is based exclusively on faith.

Griffin argues back in response to Reines that:

> …Reines has developed a worldview that is substantially indistinguishable from scientific secularism. He continues to use the word "God," to be sure, but the meaning of the word has virtually nothing in common with widely accepted meanings. His deity…is not even actual.[23]

Griffin clarifies that Reines goes further than Whitehead in being a naturalist pantheist and that the latter makes much more room for a theism in which "previous actual occasions and God are incarnate in each present occasion of experience."[24]

Griffin suggests that Reines thereby rejects process theology. Thus Reines and Kaplan are not really process theologians from the perspective of Whitehead, even though Kaplan defines God as the process that makes for salvation. Reines has similar non-supernaturalist views, but appears to be less concerned with maintaining the mores of Jewish civilization.

Having established clearly that Reines is a naturalist, the question remains as to whether he was a religious naturalist concerned with spiritual growth in terms of personality integration and individual character development. In order to answer these questions we shall examine his ritual and liturgical contributions.

In earlier writings, Reines discusses a common symbolism for Reform Judaism, where he suggests that Reform has adopted the common symbolism of Orthodoxy in terms of the core of its liturgy and its calendar of observances.

Reines argues that this symbolism “is neither the sole nor original symbolism of the Jews.”[25] He reviews the development of Jewish observance over the course of history and argues for a new creativity within Reform Judaism. He rejects halachic authority and argues for individual freedom, calling it “the principle of free symbolism.” He takes note however that within Reform there are advocates both for halachic symbolism and for open symbolism and emphasizes the lack of observance among Reform Jews. He focuses on the Sabbath as not being observed by most Reform Jews and advocates for an approach that rejects traditional halachic influence.

This advocacy is a significant example of the pursuit of spirituality in a Jewish context while questioning supernaturalism and the authority of Jewish law. Reines suggests that people can still learn the central concept of the essence of the Sabbath and observe it at any time to whatever extent they choose under their personal authority any day of the week. This is a much more profound insight than the efforts of some early reformers to highlight Sunday rather than Saturday observance and worship for economic and socio-political purposes.

For Reines, what is important are not the commandments in the Torah to observe and remember the Sabbath nor its elucidation and legalistic development in the Talmud, but the profound rationale and essential inspirational and transformational capacity of the Sabbath. He proposes the Sabbath as a “state of being.” It is a symbol and what he calls a “vehicle symbolism” to elucidate its

essence as a state of being. Reines describes the Sabbath as a state of being as follows:

> …that may be characterized as a state of intrinsically meaningful person being. Phenomenologically this state is experienced as 'full' being…It is important to understand that it is not the essence of sabbath which has lost its value, but a particular vehicle that has for many become an impotent symbol for realizing this essence. It is not Reform Judaism that is rejected when temples are empty on a Friday night, nor the sabbath as a state of being, but a particular vehicle symbolism. Conversation theism rituals, 'seventh-days' that do not fit real-life calendars, and other traditional vehicle symbols, no longer serve many to realize the state of Shabbat being.[26]

In his focus on the Sabbath in this way, Reines is extracting and highlighting what he deems to be its essence while not feeling bound by its halachic details. In Exodus 31:17, which is recited prior to the Amidah on Friday evenings and in the *kiddush* for Saturday we find the projection onto the God image of becoming ensouled (*vayinafash*), which supports Reines' aspiration for the individual's experiencing "a state of intrinsically meaningful person being."

In a discussion with Mrs. Hera Reines on June 21, 2023 arranged by Professor Sarason, when the notion of spiritual quest toward personal transformation as achieving "the state of intrinsically meaningful person being" as her husband had defined the Sabbath, was presented to her, Mrs. Reines demurred. Her understanding of her husband's intention about this state of being was rather that of an experience in its own right. Perhaps this approach fits in with Reines' concept of soteria.[27]

On the other hand, one often speaks of preparing for the Sabbath during the week. While this is generally understood as physical preparation, it can also be understood as a metaphor regarding spiritual, that is emotional and moral, preparation for Shabbat. Praying for the eschatological יום שכלו שבת ומנוחה לחיי עולמים, "day that is entirely Shabbat rest in the world to come," in the Shabbat additions to *birkat hamazon*, the blessing after meals, relates to Reines's ideas of soteria and concern with finitude as central to religious quest. He argues for the importance of the Sabbath in non-halachic terms within a Reform Movement that is truly committed to a pluralistic approach. The conceptualization he provides can be applied to any ritual and to liturgy, and gets to the essence of what reform is really about. His approach to the Sabbath suggests the critical importance for Reform Judaism to teach the spiritual lessons of the tradition, the rationale for the commandments (*ta'amei hamitzvot*), while rejecting the binding conception of *mitzvah*, and with the participants not feeling bound by the forms taught within the legalistic tradition.

It is also important to note that Reines puts this effort into a spiritual context, removing the traditional requirements of *halakhah* but focusing on the aspiration to "a state of intrinsically meaningful person being." Such intent and focus surpasses rote observance of the tradition without sufficient attention to personal transformation. A revitalization of Judaism within Reform requires such a focus as a priority.

While many reject Reines' ideological perspective and his innovative terminology, his emphasis on the spiritual rationale of the Sabbath rather than on its outward form shows him to be a religious naturalist rather than a secular humanist. His emphasis on the intrinsic meaning rather than the external details is defining of the essence of the process of Reform.

Mrs. Reines agreed when she was asked whether her husband had this broader application to mitzvot generally, beyond the Sabbath, in mind. This important insight that Reines suggests regarding extracting the essence of the Sabbath while not feeling obligated to its traditional observance, can be expanded to other areas of Jewish tradition.

It is important to note here that in rejecting *halakhah* and many of its ritual observances, Reform Judaism has lost many opportunities for its adherents to learn and to reinforce the rationale of the commandments (*ta'amei hamitzvot*), the underlying spiritual messages of Judaism for themselves, particularly those that nurture and reinforce spirituality, defined here as personality integration and character development (*tikkun atzmi*). This will be discussed in greater detail below.

Reines questions the effectiveness of Reform liturgy as expressed in the primary liturgical source in use throughout most of its congregations for over seventy years at the time of his writing in 1967, the *Union Prayer Book*. He argues that it

did not speak to many of the people holding a more progressive ideology within the movement. He refers to it as "at the least incoherent and possibly inconsistent with Reform Judaism." He explains that:

> The outstanding and essential characteristic of Reform Judaism is that it is a polydoxy, an open or liberal religion allowing for theological pluralism. Reform Jews can and do subscribe to different meanings of the term God as well as to diverse concepts of the essential religious act or act of salvation that the different meanings of God entail…The Reform service clearly should strive to serve the religious needs and interests of all who are Reform Jews. The Union Prayer Book does not serve the common need. Its concepts and language literally and unequivocally represent only one of the possible Reform Jewish theological positions…it is inconsistent with the free essence of Reform Judaism…A great burden, therefore, is placed upon those Reform Jews who do not agree with its literal significance, and many are estranged and alienated from the divine service.[28]

Reines goes into further detail to support this argument. He suggests that the theological position of the *Union Prayer Book* is inconsistent with that of Amos, Maimonides and Buber, "people respected by Reform Judaism" from three distinct periods of Jewish history.

Regarding Amos' view he says: "…it is clear that social justice is the sine qua non of salvation," and quotes the prophet: "I hate, I spurn your feasts, I take no pleasure in your festal gatherings…Take away from me the noise of your songs, and to the melody of your lyres I will not listen, but let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a perennial stream…"[29]

Reines continues:

> Maimonides' theology, as presented in Moreh Nebukhim, is not a theistic absolutism if by theistic absolutism is meant a God who does all that is ascribed to him in conversational theism…nothing is known of God except what He is not…God is absolutely transcendent…there is no supernatural providence exercised. Neither is there individual providence for the world, mankind, or the Jews…There is no relation possible between God and man; salvation comes only through personal realization…Since there is no God-man relation, conversation-prayer is impossible and exists only as phantasy. As Friedlander remarks, "According to Maimonides it is not by sacrifices or prayers that we truly approach God." (M. Friedlander, trans., *Guide of the Perplexed*, III,294, n. 1). Conversation theism is not only untrue for Maimonides, it can be akin to idolatry. Maimonides' opposition to prayer and conversation are explicitly expressed.[30]

He goes on to quote Maimonides from Moreh Nebukhim:

> We cannot approve of what those foolish persons do who are extravagant in praise, fluent and prolix in the prayers they compose, and in the hymns they make in the desire to approach the Creator… Treating the Creator as a familiar object, they describe Him and speak of Him in any expressions they think proper; they eloquently continue to praise Him in that manner, and believe that they can thereby influence Him and produce an effect on Him.[31]

Concerning Martin Buber, Reines writes:

> While it would appear upon superficial acquaintance with the language of Martin Buber's theology that he is a conversation theist, this is not the case. Indeed, he is not a theist at all, but a panentheist whose God contains as well as transcends the universe. Buber is in close agreement with Maimonides that God is not an object of knowledge. He does not, in fact, exist for us as an object at all…God does not exercise providence over man in any theistic sense of the term. He does not interrupt the natural order, and consequently, man is dependent upon the natural causation of the world of I-It and his own resources. There is no immortality. Neither does God reveal himself explicitly to man: the supposed literal revelations are the words of men who are reacting and expressing an I-Thou happening. The quality of person as an attribute of God is the reason man can enter into an I-Thou relation, and through this

> relation or meeting realize authentic existence…Prayer, then, as theistically understood, is meaningless for Buber.[32]

He states very clearly that, in contradistinction to these important figures,

> The theology underlying the Union Prayer Book may be characterized as a form of theistic absolutism which may be termed conversation theism. (This qualification is important since not every theism, not even every theistic absolutism, is a conversation theism.) Anthropomorphism and anthropopathism give competent knowledge of the Godhead; positive attributes are unqualifiedly and properly affirmed of God. Accordingly, we know that God is a person, the absolute creator of the universe, omnipotent, omniscient (conscious of the world as well as of Himself), and all-merciful. We know, too, that He relates directly to the individual, that He exercises complete providence over every person and thing, and that He reveals His will with certainty and clarity in a perfect clarity in a perfect revelation in the Torah. God arbitrarily has elected the Jews to be His chosen people, and he has charged them with the clarity in a perfect mission of informing all men that theistic absolutism as depicted in the Union Prayer Book is the only true concept of God.[33]

Reines supports these statements with selections from the Union Prayer Book such as: “With a father’s tender care Thou rememberest me every day and every hour” (U.P.B., p. 35); “Infinite as is Thy power, even so is Thy love” (U.P.B., p. 12); “The law (Torah) of the Lord is perfect” (U.P.B., p.149); “All goodness and truth are Thine” (U.P.B., p.29); and “…lean not upon thine own understanding” (U.P.B., p. 53).[34]

With the publication of *Gates of Prayer* in 1975, Reines’s desire for a Reform liturgical text that would enable a polydox congregation to have choices and enable the participants to respect each other’s freedom of expression was realized. The service associated with a religious naturalist perspective advocated

by Reines as a necessary option is the Friday night service number 6, referred to as the Equivocal Service. Most of the selections were prepared by Rabbi Chaim Stern.

In this equivocal service, traditional theistic language is retained in the Hebrew, but the English translation for the name of God is “eternal power,” or “the power that unites all the universe” and similar expressions. Some translations just omit any reference to a deity in any way as do a number of other inspiring selections. In explaining what is meant by equivocal, Stern clarifies that:

> theological language is either omitted completely from the English, or is phrased so as to allow for the possibility of a multiplicity of subjective interpretations by individual worshippers…all references to Deity use wording that may be understood in a variety of ways.[35]

It was important to Reines

> that the service… be written equivocally so that private meaning can be poured into its words and language. For some the service will constitute a relation with the infinite; for others, an occasion for ethical commitment; still others will engage in acts of self realization; and others will find in it ultimate existential relation. All will find the beginning of realization of plenary being in the concrete, public, and mutual affirmation of their integrity and existence.[36]

Gates of Prayer with its equivocal service brought to fruition Reines’ vision of polydoxy as the essential definition of Reform Judaism. The concept of equivocal language is reminiscent of Maimonides’ understanding of terms in multiple ways such as the *malakhim* in the story of Jacob’s ladder being understood as

messengers rather than angels. (The order of their journey being up and down rather than down and up supports this interpretation). In the above-cited statement, Reines expresses a yearning for people to pursue spiritual growth in a depth rarely expressed by others.

Reines founded the Institute of Creative Judaism in 1971 as a research and development organization "to produce and distribute educational, ritual and liturgical materials for a free or Polydox community." The Institute functioned until 1985.

The following liturgical selections are from "The Community Service Book" published by the Institute in 1981:

> This is a Sabbath moment, a moment of divine quest. Together we have created a sanctuary of Israel. We are invested with the sounds of the spirit. We are gathered in mutual affirmation to seek the Sabbath of the soul.[37]

While the word "divine" is used here, what is intended is not worship of a deity. It likely refers to a spiritual or holy quest. The quest, as the ending suggests, is to seek the Sabbath of the soul. By "together we have created a sanctuary of Israel," he seems to affirm a polydoxian approach as having the potential to create a sanctuary of Israel. This piece expresses a spiritual quest that could work for a religious naturalist participant as well as for someone comfortable with a supernatural perspective, using words like: divine; sanctuary; spirit; and soul.

Commenting on the liturgical recitation of Gen 2:1-3, the Service Book notes: “In an ancient vision, a Biblical author revealed the essence of the Sabbath. When creation rests and existence is sure, when the void is full and being is secure, the Sabbath then is born.”[38] This asserts that the Torah is of human origin and likely is referring to the experience of soteria.

Barechu, the traditional convening of the congregation to pray, is replaced with: “Bless the community of Israel that serves as a blessing. / Blessed is the community that serves as a blessing forever and ever.”[39] The Hebrew is similarly changed, omitting traditional theistic language, and instead affirming the people. The notion that the community “serves as a blessing” seems to imply a commitment to ethically responsible behavior.

For lighting the Shabbat candles, instead of conversational theism we find: “The Sabbath candles celebrate the power that makes for light and life.”[40] This is consistent with a monistic, naturalistic approach.

As Shabbat celebrates creation, Reines provides the following reading:

> “The genius of creation enthralls the mind and delights the imagination. Existence triumphant over nothingness, cosmos victorious over chaos, silence the understanding and still the emotions. The richness of the universe heightens our awe of creation and deepens its mystery. Difference, not sameness, diversity, not uniformity, stamp all that is. Individuals are the mark of reality, uniqueness the mark of individuals.”[41]

Reines marvels at the genius of creation, which might have theistic implications, but does not ascribe it to a deity, consistent with the equivocal approach of Maimonides. His approach here is a Heschelean sense of awe and wonder.

He provides a number of readings affirming the equality of women, including: “The freedom of a community is indivisible. All its members are persons and free or none are; men cannot be persons and free if women are not; women cannot be free if men are not.”[42] This is a bold and profound affirmation of egalitarianism. Similarly, “Denied the fullness of their being, yet did the women of Israel, in the generosity of their souls, give beyond measure. In myth and legend, in history and fact, their exploits are celebrated in song and story.”[43] Reines is affirming the spiritual values of equality and generosity as expressed in mythology and in reality.

In place of the traditional Shema, Reines affirms humanity rather than God, in Hebrew and in English, stating: “Hear O Israel, male and female were they created and the name given them was Person.”[44] He uses a phrase from Genesis 1 to support this affirmation, which is essentially a quintessential humanistic statement. This demonstrates that there is no doubt that he was a pantheist and a religious naturalist, sensitive to the equality of the genders as expressed in Genesis 1, despite his emphasis on his equivocal concept of hylotheism.

It is fitting that we conclude with reference to Reines' version of Kaddish which begins as follows: "Magnified and hallowed be the compassionate spirit. Let us fashion creation in our world according to its will."[45] Here in the opening words of Kaddish, as in many other instances, there is a yearning for spirituality, in terms of emphasizing the values of compassion and modesty, in a context of religious naturalism.

On the other hand, one needs to wonder whether the use of terms like the "compassionate spirit, divine quest, Sabbath of the soul" and the like were uncomfortable for people drawn to Reines' naturalistic hylotheism. At the same time perhaps people in the polydoxian environment who preferred more theistic-sounding liturgy such as "divine quest" might have not been comfortable with the extent of the religious naturalism prevailing in liturgical pieces like "Hear O Israel, male and female were they created and the name given them was Person." It may have been very difficult to fulfill the polydoxian mission with what appear to be liturgical extremes on both sides. The issue may be stylistic and there may be less stark ways to draw a range of ideologically disparate participants.

Rabbi Alvin Reines stood for the personal religious authority of each individual; true freedom of religion as described in his formulation of polydoxy; "the enduring possibility of being" as a way of defining the potential reality of God expressed in his hylotheism; and aspiring to be a true religious naturalist, rather than a secularist, in terms of his emphasis on spirituality. His theology/ideology was

similar to that of Mordecai Kaplan, but while Kaplan maintained a commitment to observance, Reines, as a Reform Jew, emphasized a greater freedom of choice regarding *halakhah* and ritual practice. He courageously articulated a formulation seeking the essence of Jewish spirituality in a pluralistic Reform Movement.

Notes

1. Alvin J. Reines, *Polydoxy:Exporations in a Philosophy of Liberal Religion* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987), 12.

2. Ibid., 21

3. Ibid., 22

4. Ibid., 25

5. Ibid., 57-58

6. Ibid., 63

7. Ibid., 63

8. Ibid., 156

9. Ibid., 176

10. Ibid., 161

11. Ibid., 177.

12. Ibid., 172-173.

13. Ibid., 174.

14. Ibid., 191.

15. Reines, “Hylotheism: A Theology of Pure Process,” in *Jewish Theology and Process Thought,* ed. Sandra B. Lubarsky and David Ray Griffin (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 258-259.

16. Sigmund Freud, *The Future an Illusion* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961), 24.

17. Reines, *Jewish Theology and Process Thought,* 264.

18. Sandra Lubarsky, “Introduction,” in *Jewish Theology and Process Thought,* 10.

19. Reines, *Jewish Theology and Process Thought,* 284.

20. Ibid., 281.

22. Roland b. Gittelsohn, *Man's Best Hope* (New York: Random House, 1961) 112-113.

23. David Jay Griffin, "Modern and Postmodern Liberal Theology: A Response to Alvin Reines," in *Jewish Theology and Process Thought*, 291

24. Ibid., 297

25. Reines, "A Common Symbolism for Reform Judaism," *Dimensions* (Spring 1970): 21

26.. Reines, "Shabbat as a State of Being," *CCAR Journal* (January1967):14-15.

27. Telephone interview with Hera Reines, June 21, 2023, Cincinnati

28. Reines, "Shabbat as a State of Being," 1-2.

29. Ibid., 5.

30. Ibid 6-7.

31. M. Friedlander, *Guide of the Perplexed,* I, 218

32. Reines, "Shabbat as a State of Being," 8

33. Ibid., 2-3

34. Ibid., 16

35. Chaim Stern, "Guide to the Services and Their Themes," in *Gates of Understanding,* ed Lawrence A. Hoffman (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis and Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977) 173-174.

36. Reines "Polydoxy and the Equivocal Service" in *Gates of Understanding,* ed.Lawrence A. Hoffman (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis and Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1977) 100.

37. *The Community Service Book* (St.Louis: The Institute of Creative Judaism, 1981)1-B-1

38. Ibid., 1-B-1

39. Ibid., 1-B-2

40. Ibid., 1-A-2

41. Ibid., 1-B-7

42. Ibid., 1-B-10

43. Ibid., 1-B-11

44. Ibid., 1-B-13

45. Ibid., I-E-2

VI. Some Other More Recent Religious Naturalists

In recent times there have been quite a number of varied Jewish religious naturalists who are proponents of the pursuit of spirituality. A sampling among them are: Arthur Green, Richard Rubenstein, Levi Olan, Roland Gittelsohn, Arnold Jacob Wolf, and Harold Schulweis, each with his own unique perspective.

Arthur Green, who trained as a Conservative rabbi, became a scholar of Hasidic thought and later served as the dean of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and the founder of the Hebrew College Rabbinical School in the Boston area, questions the vertical relationship with God:

> Let us think of the journey to God as a journey inward, where the goal is an ultimately deep level within the self rather than the top of a mountain or a ride in the clouds…This journey inward would be one that peels off layer after layer of externals, striving ever for the inward truth, rather than one that consists of climbing rung after rung, reaching ever higher and higher. Spiritual growth, in this metaphor, is a matter of uncovering new depths rather than attaining new heights. Perhaps we could even try to think of the Torah itself having been given at the deepest level of inner encounter, rather than from the top of the mountain, , the mountain serving as a *vertical metaphor for an inward event…*The locus of activity in human reaching for God is primarily inward, a turning of heart and mind that is attested by, but never fully subsumed within, outward deeds.[1]

Green is using metaphor in advocating here for religious naturalism and a commitment to aspire to inner spiritual development that will be revealed by the accomplishment of outward good deeds, or ethical behavior. Thus, he is advocating for *tikkun atzmi* and *tikkun olam* as the way to experience holiness on a naturalistic horizontal, rather than a vertical, basis.

Green has written regarding God as a human projection that:

> our images and ideas of God are the creations of the human mind. The person on the throne, to paraphrase one surprisingly radical Hasidic statement, is there because we put Him there. No such God-figure would exist had we not created or projected it.[2]

In her recent book, *Thinking about God,* Kari Tuling, suggests that Green is a "humanistic mystic," and that "Green's identification of a (divine) life force within all things might be characterized as pantheism."[3]

The following is an example of liturgy prepared by Green expressive of his pantheism infused with mysticism:

> Lord of the Universe! I do not believe in You! You, our all-good Maker and Master, You who watch and listen (do you taste, sniff, and touch us as well?), know everything and act for goodness always, You who "support the fallen, heal the sick, release the bound, and keep faith with those who lie in the dust." I do not believe in You, I have seen and tasted too much dust. I read the daily headlines: war, destruction, typhoon, tzunami, earthquake. I have dared to love and watched my loved ones die. Those fool enough to love me will soon watch me die as well. Why? What should I believe? Koheleth said it all. In a world filled with both human evil and nature's indifference to us, how am I supposed to believe in You?
>
> But to whom can I bring the pain of my disbelief if not to You? To whom can I cry out to if not to You, the All, Foundation on whom my house is built, Rock upon whom I stand, Sea into whose oblivion I will fall when oblivion becomes my fate? Am I too weak to live without You, without a Someone into whose ear to scream, so that I have to invent You, O terrible plaything of my imagination? There are days when it feels like that. Or am I indeed, as I think on better days, wise enough to see the Truth of truths, the far shores of the chasm of great emptiness, to recover a truth beyond reality, beyond words. That Truth knows of something I can barely address

> as “You,” but surely cannot call “It.” Then I dare to open myself and turn to You, the hope and dream of that place, across the chasm that is none other than the hole in my broken heart… that gives me life, that allows me to go forward, day after day.[4]

He is struggling with the anguish of living without believing yet yearning for connection with the essence of existence.

Green was influenced by Zalman Schachter and integrated a mystical approach to liturgy and observance such as:

> Y-H-W-H as Sh’ma Yisra’el is stasis, the great Transcendent Oneness; Y-H-W-H as Baruckh Shem is process, the One within the the everchanging many.[5]

Tuling clarifies Green’s intention:

> God’s oneness is envisioned as a tension between stasis (the aspect of God that is eternal and unchanging) and process (the endlessly creative aspect of God). As you breathe in, say ‘Shema.’ As you breathe out, ‘Barukh Shem Kavod.’ Each breath becomes an affirmation of the theological concept that God is both transcendent — beyond us yet also immanent — within us.[6]

Richard Rubenstein was a Conservative rabbi and a professor at Florida State University and later president of the University of Bridgeport. He wrote *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*, in which he discusses the notion of the death of God but identifies God in accordance with Paul Tillich as the primal ground of being. Rubenstein writes:

> I believe such a God is inescapable in the time of the death of God. The God who is the ground of being is not the transcendent, theistic God of

> Jewish patriarchal monotheism. Though many still believe in that God, they do so ignoring questions of God and human freedom and God and human evil. For those who face these issues the Father-God is a dead God. Even the existentialist leap of faith cannot resurrect this God after Auschwitz…I should like to suggest that God can be understood meaningfully not only as ground of being but as the *focus of ultimate concern.* As such He is not the old theistic Father-God. Nor is He Reconstructionism's 'power that makes for salvation of the world.' He is the infinite measure against which we can see our own limited lives in proper perspective…Our prayers can no longer be attempts to dialogue with a personal God.[7]

As the focus of ultimate concern, Rubenstein's image of God appears to be a theoretical ideal toward whose characteristics a person should strive. Thus, while believing that God is dead, or non-existent, the God Idea can remain an ideal and correlation therewith, one's ultimate concern. Rubenstein continued to advocate prayer and certain ritual observances, and he attended Shabbat services regularly and remained an affiliated Conservative rabbi. He was a religious naturalist who utilized traditional resources in his search for spirituality.

Levi Olan, who served congregations in Worcester, MA, and Dallas, was president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1967 to 1969 and a well-known panentheist. He comments on the development of rational religion in the context of scientific development, in keeping with his outlook, as follows:

> The Jewish tradition, never hospitable to the either/or formula, recognized the significance of the roles of both God and man in bringing near the messianic era. The resources available to man in the disclosures of the new scientific revolution strengthen his capacities and give him courage in his spiritual purpose. His God-faith, which gives meaning to his striving and his suffering, is inspirited by the revelation that the universe can respond to his moral effort. The secular humanist robs his hopeful vision of

> a large part of reality by rejecting the guiding hand of the creative spirit of the universe.[8]

As a panentheist, Olan is emphasizing the significance of the spirituality inherent in the universe and in humanity, in addition to a rational faith in God. Olan also affirms a strong commitment to pluralism within Judaism:

> Judaism cannot be equated with any philosophic system, past or present, nor is it subsumed under any one descriptive term. It cannot be claimed exclusively by rationalists or mystics, by liberals or existentialists. The Jewish historic experience is unique, and its outlook is eclectic, reflecting the diversity of human needs and talents. The mystic and the priest are as much at home in it as are the rationalist and prophet…It is in this broad historic framework that the major characteristics of the modern liberal outlook find a significant and natural place.[9]

He is suggesting that the pluralism of the Jewish civilization includes a place for the rationalism of a liberal religious outlook. Yet he continues to use God-language and to function with the theistic liturgy of Reform Judaism. At the same time, Olan continues to affirm the potential inherent in humanity to seek holiness and self-actualization.

Roland Gittelsohn was the rabbi of Temple Israel in Boston, past president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, a Navy chaplain during the Second World War, and a well-known liberal thinker in the Reform Movement. As a pantheist, he wrote:

> To believe in God means to recognize the existence of spiritual or moral laws of nature…These… are discovered by man, not invented or created by him. And the only way to live in security and to attain happiness is to conform to them…Mature religion recognizes that not even God can change these laws.[10]

Gittelsohn appears to be suggesting that moral laws exist, just as physical laws do, within the world prior to their discovery by humanity. This is one expression of divinity within nature. He asserts that God does not have the power to change these laws.

Arnold Jacob Wolf, who served as a chaplain at Yale and as a rabbi in Chicago questioned the dogmatism of many liberal Jewish theologians. Wolf recognized that a definitive conceptualization of God is beyond human comprehension, as Maimonides had thought. Wolf also thought that many avoided dealing with the issue of theology entirely. He writes:

> It is curious, too, how little the classical Reformers say about God…they… had not much interest in theology as such….Kohler by far the most theology-minded of the Reformers, is somewhat more ambitious…What in fact Kohler did, as his successors at the Hebrew Union College were also to do, was to substitute, systematically, historical theology for systematic theology. This is to admit that we cannot form clear and distinct notions of God and that our function is to trace the history of the idea of God in Jewish tradition. Since we cannot know God, we must strive to know Judaism.[11]

Thus, Wolf laments the Reform Movement's founders not taking a more definitive position about where a rational approach to religion truly leads and also how difficult it is to define God, yet he affirms the importance of knowing Judaism to find spirituality.

Wolf quotes Martin Buber: “if we help the holy spiritual substance to accomplish itself in that section of the Creation in which we are living, then we are establishing, in our place, a dwelling place for the Divine Presence.”[12] Perhaps this is what is meant by ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתכם, “and let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in thier midst.” Wolf suggests that this pursuit of holiness and spirituality is much more critical than any ideologies.

Harold Schulweis served Valley Beth Shalom Synagogue in Encino, California. He was a Conservative rabbi and a religious naturalist very much influenced by Kaplanian Reconstructionism. He was a proponent of predicate theology and teaches that:

> Better to understand the God-idea and more effectively overcome the obstacles to the acceptance of God in our lives, we must view theology with a new perception. Elohut, Godliness, the divine predicates do not exist for the sake of Elohim, God, the Subject, but vice versa. It is not the attributes of a divine Ego, but the divinity of the attributes which demands our allegiance. What I propose for consideration is adoption of a ‘Predicate Theology’ as a viable alternative for those who are not persuaded by the arguments and claims of traditional ‘Subject Theology.’ I am convinced that for many who intellectually and temperamentally are blocked from expressing their religious sensibilities because of the formulations and presuppositions of Subject theology, Predicate theology offers a way to relate positively to divinity, and its celebration in prayer and ritual.[13]

This significant conceptualization is akin to the traditional notion of *lalekhet biderakhav*, “to walk in His ways.” We are called upon to imitate the positive values that we consider to be godly or holy, or as Hermann Cohen taught, to correlate our behavior with what is considered divine behavior. Thus, divinity is

experienced through ethical and sensitive interaction among people. Such predicate theology solves the problem of all the replacement nouns that philosophers have suggested for God, such as process, idea, all that is, or all there is plus a separate spirit.

The following is a poem, certainly a profound liturgical piece, written by Schulweis entitled *Between*, which articulates this predicate theology:

> *God. Elusive*
> Where then, when then
> God not me or mine
> nor you or yours
> But ours.
>
> God known
> not alone
> but in relationship.
>
> Not revealed through lonely power
> but through kinship, friendship
> healing, binding
> raising up of each other.
>
> To know God is to know others
> To love God is to love others
> To hear God is to hear others.
>
> More than meditations within
> Insights within
> Feeling within
> Between us are
> Claims, obligations, commandments
> the behavior of belief.
>
> God
> not as super-person alone
> He or She
> Not as process, power, being, thing

a Subject acting on me or I on it.

God in connection
God in the nexus of community
God the betweenness
That binds and holds together.

Alone, in meditation, in private thought
I turn to the memory of betweenness
to the promise of our betweenness.

God not in me or in you or in Himself
but in betweenness the evidence of
God's reality and our own.[14]

Schulweis also suggests the use of the term *elohut* rather than *elohim* in liturgy, praising godly behavior between people rather praising God. Thus, Schulweis shows us how we can address the problem of lack of faith in a supernatural God while fostering a deep commitment to religious behavior, a spirituality of holy action. Instead of *bein adam lamakom* (between man and God), it is experiencing *hamakom*, "God," within *mitzvot shebein adam lahavero* (obligations between a man and his fellow).

Notes

1. Arthur Green, *Seek My Face, Speak My Name: A Contemporary Jewish Theology* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aaronson, 1992), 12-13.

2. Arthur Green, Judaism for the World - Reflections on God, Life and Love (New Haven:Yale University Press, 2020)

3. Kari H. Tuling, *Thinking about God* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2020), 21-22.

4. Arthur Green, *Seek My Face, Speak My Name: A Contemporary Jewish Theology* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aaronson, 1992), 61.

5. Ibid. 17.

6. Kari H. Tuling, *Thinking about God* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2020), 166.

7. Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1966), 237-241.

8. Levi Olan, in *Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought,* (Chicago: Central Conference of American Rabbis and Quadrangle Books, ed. Bernard Martin, 1968), 37.

9. Ibid., 23.

10. Roland B. Gittelsohn, *A Jewish View of God* (Washington: B'nai Brith Youth Organization, 1965), 19.

11. Arnold Jacob Wolf, in *Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought,* (Chicago: Central Conference of American Rabbis and Quadrangle Books, ed. Bernard Martin, 1968), 43.

12. Martin Buber, *To Hallow this Life* (New York: Harper, ed. Jacob Trapp, 1958),
3

13. Harold M. Schulweis, "From God to Godliness: Proposal for a Predicate Theology," *The Reconstructionist* (February 1975): 1

14. Harold M. Schulweis, Judaism- *A Collected Selection of Poetry* (The Harold M. Schulweis Institute), 79.

VII. Sherwin T. Wine

Essentially contemporaneous with Professor Alvin Reines and having many similar ideas, Sherwin Wine, a Hebrew Union College-trained rabbi, went further in rejecting any notion of God and developed Secular Humanistic Judaism. He was a naturalist, and his commitment to Judaism was ethnic and cultural, rather than religious. He describes his movement as “a bold new secular reinterpretation of the Jewish religion.” While taking a totally secular approach, he asserted his movement as synagogue-based.

Concerning theology Wine writes:

> The crisis of religion today is a crisis of belief. In a scientific age when the empirical method dominates the pursuit of truth, the belief frameworks that sustained conventional religious activity have collapsed…The decline of prayer and worship…is a direct consequence of altered belief. No man can be motivated to pray when he has lost the possibility of a personal God.[1]

He also declares that:

> The age of reason is the age without God. While nostalgia preserves him in the vocabulary of the powerful, he has lost his substance. The terrifying heavenly super-father has been replaced by a dispensable philosophic abstraction. He has lost his ability to intimidate and to attract…Liberal religion has produced a God too vacuous to be taken seriously…No redefining the word God will change the reality we now perceive.[2]

He is clearly unequivocally atheistic. He is honest and direct about it rather than developing new meanings for the term God.

Wine continues:

> "A viable modern religion must enable man to understand and use the significant forces within and without him that make life meaningful. The decline of traditional religion is due to the ever-increasing belief that the old religion is unrelated to the social and physical forces that count… theology as a source of information about available powers is an anachronism…The 'death' of theology is not something to be deplored.[3]

Wine argues that theology should be replaced with anthropology. Despite this, he discusses his intention to continue to use the term "religion" regarding his movement. He suggests that Confucianism and Buddhism, though non-theistic religions, are as spiritually significant as the Western theistic religions. However, these Asian religions as well as the Western religions, and certainly including Judaism, all provide significant opportunities for spiritual development, regardless of various theologies, which Wine does not seek to do. He even states, "Reason and the old spirituality are incompatible."[4] And: "If there is a Jewish ethic it does not derive from quotations from the Torah."[5]

Even though he argues for a new secular paradigm he wants his humanistic movement to be part of Judaism. One might suggest that Secular Humanistic Judaism is part of the Jewish religion in the same way that a Jewish community center, Yiddishist group, or other secular Jewish organizations are. Yet Wine sought to develop a synagogal movement.

From the point of view of Reines's polydoxy which included his own hylotheism, a naturalistic pantheistic approach, Humanistic Judaism might have been

compatible with Reform. Yet Reines himself and other Reform leaders felt that Wine just went too far. Reines and Wine were rivalrous with each other even though they had very much in common, but just articulated views with different styles and emphases. The primary difference, however, was that Reines was open to and even advocated polydoxy, while Wine was adamant in his atheism and the negating of all religious perspectives. He introduced and often used the term “ignostic,” by which he meant that the issue of the existence of God is meaningless because the word “God” has no coherent and unambiguous definition.

Wine argues that:

> The historic founders of classical Reform vehemently denied that, by dispensing with the vast majority of traditional ritual practice, their followers were less Jewish than the most ardent Orthodox…They asserted that they were simply reviving the old message of the prophets, the *true* Judaism which had long been obscured by ceremonial trivia.[6]

Thus, it appears that Wine was expressing a commitment to ethics and a rejection of theism and most ritual observance, i.e. keeping the ethical but not the monotheism of ethical monotheism as a next step in the evolution of the Jewish religion. Yet he writes:

> In the realm of ethical values, one repeatedly hears educators and rabbis singing the praises of Jewish values. But, again, if one excludes the attachment to certain ceremonial forms, there are no significant moral commitments that are uniquely Jewish, either in belief, practice, or origin…The ‘painful truth’ is that our Jewish distinctiveness lies in no real separation of belief and moral ideal: it finds its definition in the ‘trivia’ of ceremony and language… and in order for Judaism to survive it must

> direct its energies to what is not uniquely Jewish, but to what is common and universal.[7]

Thus Wine, who is clearly a naturalist, rejects the pursuit of spirituality in a Jewish context and seeks to pursue any ethical commitments in the context of humanism and universalism. Despite Wine's organization having a synagogal structure, his articulations appear to be more of a rejection of Judaism. In fact, at his Birmingham Temple the ark and Torah scroll were replaced with a piece of sculpture, or statue, if you will, depicting the word "Adam." Some might suggest that it symbolized an environment of self- idolization for the participants.

Wine, rightfully referred to his movement as secular. It was, thus, not religious or even religious naturalist or in pursuit of Jewish spirituality.

The following selections, which really clarify his distinct position, were written by Wine for Shabbat services and have been in use at his Birmingham Temple and in other congregations affiliated with the Society for Humanistic Judaism:

> <u>Dignity</u>
>
> Secular Humanistic Jews affirm the power of people. They affirm the power of common sense and human reason. But, above all, they strive for human dignity.
>
> Pious people see themselves as weak and dependent. They see the world as a mystery too deep to fathom. They abhor change and search for everlasting guarantees. Divine power and divine guidance give them a sense of safety. For them, obedience is a small price to pay for eternal security.

People of dignity believe that they have the right to be strong and independent. They see the world as an orderly place to investigate. They welcome necessary change and are good-humored enough to know that nothing is permanent. Human power and human guidance give them a sense of safety. But they are willing — even desire — to live with risk. They avoid childlike obedience. They cultivate respectful equality.

Human dignity is Jewish dignity. Jewish dignity is our dignity.

Song

Ayfo Ori?

Where is my light? My light is in me.

Two Traditions

There are two Jewish traditions.

The first is the religious one. It finds supernatural power, prayer, and worship important. It believes in divine revelation, eternal laws, and sacred rituals. It sees nature as less interesting than the world beyond. In Jewish history, it found political power and became the establishment.

The second is a secular and humanistic tradition. It affirms people, human intelligence, and human dignity. It affirms reason, science, and human community. It finds no need to look beyond the wonders of nature. In Jewish history, it never found political power. It survived in the underground of ordinary Jewish life.

The second tradition is as important as the first one. The second tradition is our tradition. We are Secular and Humanistic Jews.

Song

Sahaki

I believe in man.[8]

These selections, which are typical of the services in the Society for Humanistic Judaism, focus primarily on the rejection of religious Judaism and on the affirmation of the personal authority of each individual. This appears to serve the needs of people who want to reject Judaism and Jewish values but feel the need to be affirmed in doing so within community.

Wine was able to develop a small group of congregations that mostly use such liturgy. The Society for Humanistic Judaism is opposed to the use of any God-language and, while observing some Jewish rituals, frames these observances most often in a blatantly anti-religious context. The liturgy appears to be devoid of any quest for spirituality, certainly in any Jewish context.

Following his traditional Jewish upbringing and studies for the rabbinate at Hebrew Union College, Wine broadened his perspective by identifying with humanism, with a diminished focus on a specific Jewish spirituality. While he took these issues very seriously, less Jewishly educated and/or committed people

were attracted to Humanistic Judaism as a less demanding opportunity in which to maintain Jewish affiliation. In addition, officiation at intermarriages, at a time when Reform rabbis were generally not doing so, provided an environment in which intermarried families could feel more comfortable in affiliating.

Wine argues that his approach represents the perspective of many unaffiliated Jews. While that may be true, it is important to be concerned with how to attract some of these Jews and also better serve those already affiliated with Progressive (Reform and Reconstructionist) congregations. Rather than give in to the disinterest or rebellion of a large plurality, it is our responsibility to reach out to Jews who are naturalists by offering them a strong program of spiritually uplifting ideas and actions from Jewish sources. Wine makes a provocative statement that would be of interest to certain religious naturalists in progressive congregations when he declares in 1978 that, “The recent Reform revision of the Union Prayer Book seems a bit anachronistic. Why bother to improve prayers for people who don’t want to pray? Perhaps more drastic alternatives are needed.”[9]

However, if we think of prayer as personal reflection rather than supplication to a supernatural being, then it remains essential in the quest for spirituality even for religious naturalists. We must bother to improve prayers and not just say that the whole process is anachronistic. Perhaps we want to reconsider to whom prayer is addressed.

Kaplan did not believe in a traditional God, nor did Reines, but they sought to build commitment to the pursuit of holiness in a Jewish context. The title of Hermann Cohen's book, *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism* says it all in terms of a rational approach to religion that focuses on the sources of Jewish tradition. Kaplan and Reines, in Reconstructionist and Reform Judaism respectively, emphasized, as we have seen, using the sources of Judaism in pursuit of spirituality and holiness. Cohen emphasized the importance of correlation with the God idea, a rational approach to religion and to the pursuit of spirituality. Wine's approach of secular humanism rejects the pursuit of Jewish spirituality, and, therefore, cannot be considered as Jewish religious naturalism.

This, however, helps us to better define our terms. Religious naturalism is the pursuit of spirituality and holiness in the context of non-belief in a supernatural being. Religious naturalism in Judaism involves such a pursuit of spirituality out of the sources of Judaism.

Psychoanalyst Erich Fromm expresses a similar and even broader reaction in *You Shall Be as Gods*:

> If the spirit and hopes of the Prophets are to prevail, it will depend on the strength and vitality of this new humanism. For the non-theistic humanists a further question arises: What could take the place of religion in a world in which the concept of God may be dead but in which the experiential reality behind it must live?[10]

Thus, Fromm is calling for a religious humanism rather than a secular humanism and for, where appropriate, the use of the sources of Judaism for the development of spirituality and ethics even in a naturalistic context.

As noted above, Levi Olan stated that, “The secular humanist robs his hopeful vision of a large part of reality by rejecting the guiding hand of the creative spirit of the universe.”[11] He argues for a religious naturalism seeking spirituality from within nature and within humanity in particular.

Notes

1. Sherwin T. Wine, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), 21.

2. Ibid., 32-33.

3. Ibid., 23-24.

4. Wine, *Judaism Beyond God* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1995), 222.

5. Ibid., 224.

6. Wine, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), 44.

7. Ibid., 45-48.

8. Wine, "Secular Humanistic Shabbat Service," *Humanistic Judaism,* 22.2 (Spring 1994): 32-35.

9. Wine, *Humanistic Judaism*, 9.

10. Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 229.

11. Levi Olan, in *Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought,* edited by Bernard Martin (Chicago: Central Conference of American Rabbis and Quadrangle Books, 1968), 37.

VIII. A Forward-Looking Vision

In reflecting on the above review of selected thinkers who have contributed to the process of liberalizing Judaism away from faith in a supernatural being, there are many foundational ideas that are clearly articulated and that have had profound influence on the Jewish community's understanding of reality. In this chapter, the intention is to react to the continuing relevance of these ideas, to question the viability or accuracy of some of these ideas going forward and to make some integrative and clarifying suggestions for the future of the religious naturalist segment of the Reform Movement. This is an opportunity to synthesize beliefs, values and priorities, and to reflect on the contributions of these teachers.

It appears that many of these thinkers go to great lengths to redefine the term "God" and, thus, misappropriate it in usage vastly different from its generally understood meaning as a conscious, supernatural being who is omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent and responsive to prayer (עונה לעמו בעת שועם אליו, "Who answers his people at the time when they call out to Him"). The typical congregant is not familiar with, or does not relate to, these efforts. Whether pantheist or even panentheist, to refer to nature as God is at best misleading, not engaging of religious commitment, and perhaps even idolatrous. To refer to God as an idea or a process, while of interest to theologians, has done little to engage the religious commitment of people who either lack interest in what they consider abstractions or lack faith, or whose faith is in a supernatural God.

If we accept that many non-Orthodox Jews have issues with supernaturalism, perhaps we need to have. for those people. more resources that do not use the term “God,” regardless of how it may be redefined. It would be redundant to clarify that we do not really mean a supernatural responder to prayer every time a *berakhah* or other liturgy is recited mentioning God. We may intend rational religion, with new formulations of God, but some people perceive God-language to be irrational and, therefore, stay away from prayer.

What is most important is the search for *kedushah* (holiness) and *taharah* (purity) in our lives. These are matters that are real and potentially achievable for a religious naturalist. *Kedushah* can be conceptualized as being achieved through *mitzvot shebein adam leḥavero* (“obligations between a person and their fellow human beings”), or *tikkun olam* (“repair of the world”), and *taharah* as being achieved through *mitzvot shebein adam lamakom* (“obligations between a person and God, literally ‘the Place.’” *Hamakom* in classical rabbinic literature is a euphemistic epithet for God, a metonym for “the God who dwells in this place,” namely the Temple in Jerusalem), here understood as the “place” or state one is in emotionally or in the introspective contemplative processes to achieve *tikkun atzmi* (“repair, improvement of oneself”). An example of the former would be *tsedakah* (charity/generosity) or *bikkur ḥolim* (visiting the sick) and of the latter *lo taḥmod* (“Do not lust”) or *v’ahavtah* (“You shall love Adonai”). Thus, liturgically,

Nekadeish et shimkha (“We will sanctify your name”) might be replaced with *Nekadeish et ḥayyeinu* (“We will sanctify our lives”).

Among the theorists reviewed above, several stand out for their clarity, courage and lasting contributions to rational religion. Baruch Spinoza was courageous to state outright that there is not a supernatural realm.[1] Yet, 350 years later we still struggle to be honest and direct in differentiating the natural realm from the term “God.” Many agree with Spinoza that it is a monistic world and that, within it, we humans have the potential to strive toward holiness and purity. Perhaps, the potential for such a spiritual quest is what Spinoza really found intoxicating.

Hermann Cohen’s advocacy of the human task being “correlation” with the *middot* (ethical attributes) of the God Idea, understood as Maimonidean metaphor, is an important clarification of, and emphasis on, the spiritual task of imitatio Dei.[2] The midrashic comment on Deuteronomy 11:22, ללכת בכל דרכיו, in Sifre Deuteronomy 49 is: מה המקום נקרא רחום וחנון אף אתה הוי רחום וחנון (“Just as God is called compassionate and gracious, so should you be compassionate and gracious”). The rabbinic tradition (Gen. R. 18.2 and b. Ber. 61a) that describes God braiding Eve’s hair before bringing her to Adam is a tender example that we can emulate by helping those who are lonely and in need. But many of the *middot* that can be vehicles for *kedushah* and *taharah* were never articulated in terms of an example modeled by the deity and, where they are, such anthropopathism and anthropomorphism must be understood as metaphor and

human projection. Perhaps, rabbinic Judaism's emphasis on highlighting God's *middot* has been counterproductive as a model. Other religious traditions have emphasized the righteous character traits of humans, e.g. Buddha and Jesus, in their liturgies. Perhaps people in those traditions find such examples more accessible as models for their own behavior. We need to have liturgy that speaks of the holiness of people in our tradition who can serve as models for us. Our tradition is replete with references to human examples of attributes often associated with God, such as: כרחם אב על בנים (Psalm 103:13); טוב ארך אפים מגבור (Proverbs 16:32); the lovingkindness of Abraham[3], חסד של אברהם (of course the Amidah refers to זוכר חסדי אבות but does so in praise of God); אנשי אמת (Exodus 18:21); the forgiveness by Joseph of his brothers modeled for us in Genesis 50:21. These constitute the five underlying themes in the rabbinic depiction of the thirteen attributes of mercy descriptive of God in Exodus 34:6-7, the primary source for the divine attributes. The courage of Esther would be another model to be used more frequently. Mordecai Kaplan's inclusion of reference to Moses in the Haggadah may have been the result of similar concerns.

If one truly believes that the attributes with which the Torah describes God are anthropopathic projections and that the Torah is written by humans and not the revealed words of a supernatural being, then one must be truthful (one of the core attributes) and present the attributes as human and as idealized by the authors of the Torah through anthropopathic projection.

Mordecai Kaplan, though a naturalist, held that God is the process that makes for salvation,[4] and he intended by this, intrinsic salvation. Let us teach instead that the pursuit of *kedushah* and *taharah* is the process that makes for intrinsic salvation. Kaplan emphasized stronger commitment to ritual observance than Reform Jews might prefer and understood Judaism to be a religious civilization with a broad range of mores. Most Reform Jews tend to think of Judaism as their religious identity. It is incumbent to educate people about the opportunity that Judaism can provide for religious life understood in terms of personal transformation. There are many examples of Jewish modeling of human holiness and purity in the history of Jewish civilization within and beyond the Bible. Highlighting these in our observances and liturgy would serve to broaden peoples' appreciation for the most important aspects of our Jewish civilization.

The early Reformers emphasized pluralism regarding ritual observance. We should encourage the selection by people of rituals and liturgy that speak to their own particular spiritual development. Support for people's growth should be the standard criterion for ritual and liturgical use. Alvin Reines' contribution regarding polydoxy[5] resonates in terms of the *kedushah* inherent in respecting the thoughts, feelings and needs of others, which may be different from our own.

Sherwin Wine's emphasis on honesty about rejection of supernaturalism and not using its language in a way that misleads people is important.[6] But to be clear,

the present vision does not intend a Secular Humanistic approach, nor that of its antecedent in the Ethical Culture movement developed by Felix Adler, but rather a serious commitment to *kedushah* and *taharah* as taught within Jewish tradition. In fact, such emphasis should be our "ultimate concern." While the ethics of secular humanism provide for justice, Judaism challenges us to function *lifnim mishurat hadin*, beyond what the law requires. The concept of *ḥesed* as developed from the biblical literature down through that of the musar movement is but an example.

Regarding the ethical monotheism emphasized by the classical Reformers, we need to provide ethical teachings for those who are not theists, but religious naturalists. They are not religious in terms of faith, which would contradict their naturalism, but because of a commitment to spirituality. We need to be intentionally responsive with religious resources to those who identify with ethical non-theism as opposed to only those who identify with ethical monotheism.

The theorist who resonates the most with this approach is Harold Schulweis with his predicate theology.[7] Judaism is a religion of actions. Schulweis addresses himself primarily to how we treat one another, and sees positive, ethical behavior between people as the experience of divinity or *elohut*.

But why call it that? Such sensitive relating with others fosters *tikkun olam* and ultimately *kedushah*. Predicate theology must also be understood to be about

how we think, *tikkun atzmi* leading to *taharah*. The language of the midrashic tradition previously cited, אף אתה הוי רחום וחנון , "so, too, should you be compassionate and gracious," teaches us to pursue an altruistic attitude of compassion as an important predicate of whom we aim to become in our spiritual development.

Setting aside faith in God as a subject and resisting describing God as a predicate in the context of human behavior, allows for focusing on *kedushah* and *taharah* as the ultimate concern for religious naturalists within Judaism. Holy interpersonal behavior and emotional development toward purity of motive are not predicate theology, but predicate anthropology.

Arnold Jacob Wolf wrote an article entitled "Against Spirituality,"[8] in which he makes the point that spirituality in Judaism must be ethically oriented rather than self-gratifying. The *tikkun olam* and *tikkun atzmi*, based on the *kedushah* and *taharah* described here, is likely what he had in mind in contradistinction to the self-gratifying behaviors which he deplored as being considered "spirituality."

It is important to make clear that a rejection of the misappropriation of the term "God" and the affirmation of the pursuit of holiness and purity as our ultimate concern, both discussed above, are not intended as an endorsement of atheism. The understanding of God as *ein sof* and beyond human comprehension, as advocated by many, including Azriel of Gerona[9], Maimonides[10], and Abraham

Isaac Kook[11], is compatible with a religious naturalist understanding. Such a perspective is consistent with the teaching of the Talmud in b. Berachot 4a: למוד לשונך לאמר איני יודע ("Teach your tongue to say 'I do not know'"), oft quoted by Maimonides and Rashi. We can feel a sense of Heschelian wonder and awe about existence without presuming to be definitive about particular notions of theology.[12] Greater modesty concerning the enigma of our existence in the presence of ultimate reality and emphasis instead on human holiness of action and purity of thought is what is intended by our use of the term religious naturalism.

We need to think of the biblical stories referencing God as early Hebrew mythology. Just like Greek, Roman, Mesopotamian and other mythologies tell stories of gods that have human qualities but supernatural powers, so does Hebrew mythology, except that our deity is invisible. There are profound spiritual lessons that have been conveyed to us through these stories by our ancient forebears. Our rabbis have added a great richness to these archetypal themes that can facilitate spiritual individuation or self-actualization. An example is the archetype of self-emancipation that is expressed in the story of the Exodus which is referenced in our liturgy morning and evening, every day of the year. This motif inspires our personal spiritual and emotional journeys. This enables our assertion of autonomy as well as our sense of responsibility to work for redemptive progress in society. Our religion affords us a rich trove of material to facilitate our spiritual growth, regardless of whether we believe in the supernatural or are

naturalists. The centrality of the Exodus in our tradition is a salient daily reminder of the significance of our personal freedom and autonomy to choose to function as seriously committed religious naturalists, as defined here, if that is what gives us ultimate meaning.

The discussion earlier of Baruch Spinoza's encouraging our search for objectivity regardless of life experiences predates and foretells Freudian psychoanalysis, and other resultant psychotherapies.[13] He sets out the pathway for true emotional and spiritual *taharah* through ego transcendence that enables character development, *tikkun atzmi*. The fostering of such objectivity is a process involving many predicates, as is all spiritual contemplation. Let us move on from the illusory projections of supernaturalism, as in parental and monarchical images of *avinu malkeinu*, accept the concept of *ein sof*, and affirm a commitment to religious life that aims, not to gain external affirmation from a deity, but to transform ourselves and actualize our potential for a holy and a pure life.

Therefore, we need to assess existing resources, and develop new ones where necessary, as we attempt to accomplish the goals of this vision. The next chapter will consider liturgical, ritual and other materials and strategies for fostering spiritual thought and behavior in the context of religious naturalism.

The names of the Progressive movements in Judaism both begin with the prefix "re," both implying a rebuilding of Judaism. Based on the extensive progress of

Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism in facilitating freedom of thought, this vision calls for “Affirmation” of what has always been essential at the core of Judaism, using verbs, as the traditional morning liturgy states: ”וכולם פותחים את פיהם בקדשה ובטהרה“ and as we read in Leviticus 11:44 ”והתקדשתם והייתם קדשים“, and Leviticus 19:2 ”קדשים תהיו“ and as we pray on the Sabbath and on holy days: ”וטהר לבנו לעבדך באמת“, which Orchot Tzadikim 23:5 interprets to mean ”שנעשה כל עבודתנו באמיתות“

A motto for this orientation might be from Psalm 97:11, אור זרוע לצדיק ולישרי לב שמחה. (“Light is sown for the righteous and joy for the upright in heart”). Being a *tzaddik*, righteous, is related to *kedushah* in interpersonal relationships, and being among the y*ishrei lev*, upright in heart, is related to *taharah* in one’s inner life. In terms of verbs, we need to provide resources for religious naturalists in Reform Judaism who will be *rodfei tzedek*, pursuers of righteousness.

An advanced candidate for conversion was once asked to define Judaism and why it was attractive and responded that Judaism is “normative mysticism.” By this she meant that regardless of whether a person is a believer in a supernatural God or not, Judaism offers a day-to-day program, wherein a person can pursue the kinds of spiritual activities that are typically reserved for mystics in an effort to become holy in behavior and pure in motive.

Reform Judaism can inspire a rejuvenation of our people's spiritual life by making normative our people's daily pursuit of holiness and purity, regardless of their particular theological outlook. Existing and new liturgy that focuses on this challenge, the study of *musar*, and examples of righteous people in our tradition and focus on *ta'amei hamitzvot* are among the ways for accomplishing this goal that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Lastly, before moving to a discussion of such resources, one such, which belongs here as a summary of the envisioned ideology, is as follows:

שלושה עשר עיקרים

The Thirteen Principles of Affirmation of Religious Naturalist Reform Jews

1. I affirm that God is beyond human comprehension.
2. I affirm that God is beyond interaction with humanity, but has been envisioned in Judaism as a model of holy behavior.
3. I affirm that it is important to aspire to modesty in general and in particular regarding conceptualizing God who has no body or personality.
4. I affirm that it is my ultimate concern to aspire to holiness and purity of motive in my interactions with all people.
5. I affirm that it is my responsibility to pursue repair of my character.
6. I affirm that it is my responsibility to pursue repair of the world.

7. I affirm that it is important to respect the righteous people of all religions and all nations.
8. I affirm that it is my responsibility to protect the Earth and all that live upon it.
9. I affirm that it is my responsibility to love my neighbor.
10. I affirm that it is my responsibility to love the stranger.
11. I affirm that the teachings of Judaism from the Bible until the present, including the modeling of the righteous, inform and inspire us toward lives of holiness and purity.
12. I affirm that it is my responsibility to be forgiving of others and to reflect on my past behavior, forgive myself for what I have done wrong, and resolve to live more righteously in the future.
13. I affirm that it is my responsibility to continually strive for intrinsic salvation in this finite life.

For intrinsic salvation I do long. I do long for such salvation!

Notes

1. S.E. Frost, Jr., *Basic Teachings of the Great Philosophers* (New York: Doubleday, 1942), 116.

2. Hermann Cohen, *Juedische Schriften* (Berlin: 1934) III, 189, translated in William Kluback, *Hermann Cohen:The Challenge of a Religion of Reason.* Brown Judaic Studies. (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), 76.

3. Re: Chesed Shel Avraham see Nosson Tzvi Finkel, *Ohr Hatzafun: Bereshit* XVII-4 *Midat Hachesed (*Sefaria)

4. Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934)

5. Alvin Reines, *Polydoxy: Explorations in a Philosophy of Liberal Religion* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1987), 12.

6. Sherwin T. Wine, *Humanistic Judaism* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), 32-33.

7. Harold Schulweis, “From God to Godliness: Proposal for a Predicate Theology,” *The Reconstructionist* (February 1975): 1.

8. Arnold Jacob Wolf, “Against Spirituality,” *Judaism* 50.3 (2001) 363-364.

9. Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974), 88.

10. Julius Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1964), 158-159.

11. Abraham Isaac Kook, Arpele Tohar 32-33, in *The Essential Writings of Abraham Kook*, edited by Ben Zion Bokser (Teaneck: Ben Yehuda Press, 1988), 207-208.

12. Abraham J. Heschel, *Between God and Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 40-44.

13. Steven T. Katz, *Jewish Philosophers* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 144-145.

IX. Resources for the Pursuit of Spirituality in Religious Naturalism

The previous chapters have discussed a number of theologians and philosophers who have contributed to the development of religious naturalism. Their ideas have helped to clarify the importance of an unequivocal perspective of religious naturalism, without any misappropriation of the word “God.” This then provides for a synthesis which includes thinking of God as *ein sof*, beyond human comprehension, and the fostering of an “ultimate concern” for holiness in behavior and purity in motive.

In terms of God being impossible to define with any specificity, Jung writes: “an unknowable essence that we cannot grasp as such since by definition it transcends our powers of comprehension.”[1] Religion then is about human spiritual self-actualization.

As we proceed to consider methodologies and resources, liturgical and otherwise, in the service of this synthesis, and make it available to those for whom it might resonate, one important caveat is that while this understanding is about prioritizing ideology and character development, the intention is that it be implemented with an internal sense of *hitlahavut* and *hitragshut*, profound enthusiasm and feeling. This is part of the yearning for *ruhaniut*, the spirituality intended here.

Liturgy and ritual, as spiritually uplifting experiences, depend on the value we invest in them. Jung writes:

> A *value* is a possibility for the display of energy…Energy in itself is neither good nor bad, neither useful nor harmful, but neutral, since everything depends on the form into which energy passes. Form gives energy its quality. On the other hand, form, mere form without energy, is equally neutral. For the creation of a real value, therefore, both energy and valuable form are needed. [2]

Thus, for our synthesis, the form must be consistent with an ideology people truly accept and that elicits an energy of motivation and expression that results in the creation of a real value. In this instance, a real value is a sense of meaning that inspires personal spiritual transformation.

The Chapter of Primary Principles, Pirkei Avot 1:2, quotes Rabbi Shimon the Righteous as having said that: “The world depends on three things: Torah, [the Temple-] service, and the provision of deeds of kindness.”

Spirituality can be understood as a process for self-edification and personal transformation involving these three categories: 1. *ahavat torah,* prioritizing Torah learning, which includes all spiritually-related Jewish learning; 2. using liturgy and self reflection; and 3. the implementation of kindness and other righteous behavior. We shall proceed to discuss elements of a program for the pursuit of spirituality in a religious naturalist context in terms of these three categories.

Torah

While Reform Judaism does not feel bound by the particular forms taught within the legalistic tradition of *halakhah*, nor by the concept that *mitzvah* is required commandment mandated through revelation, either *mid'oraita* (from Scripture) or *miderabbanan* (from the Rabbis), we are clearly obligated by the ethical teachings of Judaism. We focus in the Reform Movement on the essence of these ethical teachings. Regarding ritual observance we take a pluralistic approach, with every congregation and every individual choosing to do as they see fit. While various motives have guided personal choices, our focus should be on the rationale for the commandments (*ta'amei hamtizvot*), as a way to use our observance, or at least our understanding of the *mitzvot*, for the purpose of spiritual growth. While the spiritual messages of ethical teachings are more obvious, many rituals convey important underlying ethical messages. Rituals are an important part of what Kaplan identified as the mores of Jewish civilization. We should select to study, if not observe, those which convey spiritual messages.

Certain ritual *mitzvot*, designated as *ḥukkim*, are understood in rabbinic tradition as statutes without rationale, other than a willingness to fulfill God's expectations as a demonstration of devotion to God. An example would be the prohibition of wearing garments made of a mixture of wool and linen (*sha'atnez*) as seen in Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11. Such *mitzvot* are rarely viewed as relevant for consideration by Reform Jews, particularly religious naturalist ones.

However, if we are to take our search for spirituality seriously, it is important that we consider the potential for learning from rituals that are more likely to have a meaningful inspirational purpose, particularly those understood by the Rabbis as *mishpatim*, many of which may be unfamiliar to Reform Jews at this point.

Not everyone agrees with the emphasis on *ta'amei hamitzvot*. Isaak Heinemann, in his *The Reasons for the Commandments in Jewish Thought,* clarifies that over the ages many authorities emphasized fulfilling the *mitzvot* because they viewed them as commanded by God, their specific rationales being less relevant. He states that:

> There are two basic motivations in us for performing the commandments: (1) the belief in the *authority* of the legislator and (2) the belief in the *value* of the commandments…Indeed we must not ignore the profound difference between these two modes of inquiry… Because recognizing the value of the mitzvot would be likely to strengthen practical and theoretical commitment to religious life, one might have assumed that those who valued the mitzvot would give their blessing to such inquiries. But this was not the case. There were to be found in our people—and not only there—thinkers who were opposed in principle to any inquiry into the reasons for laws…The educational value of the mitzvot will be diminished if we fulfill them only to discharge our obligation and earn our future reward; it will be enhanced to the extent that the intentions of the Torah, both explicit and hidden, will find an echo in our souls.[3]

Heinemann clearly supports seeking the rationale for the commandments, believing that will deepen understanding and commitment. However, he shares his analysis of the motivation for observance by varying theorists and schools of

thought over the course of Jewish history. Generally, he draws the comparative conclusion that:

> …halakhic scholars did not take an interest in finding reasons for the commandments. The approach of the philosophers was altogether different. It is our obligation to use reason…in order to establish a world-view appropriate to Torah. This obligation was regarded by the Jewish philosophers as not just theoretical, but also religious…It is the way of science to investigate the reasons for things.[4]

This questioning of the applicability of a *ta'amei hamitzvot*-approach, even in modern times, is brought to light by Yoel Finkelman, who in emphasizing contradictions in the writing of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, describes:

> …the revolution that Soloveitchik tried to implement in the closing chapter of *Halachic Mind,* in which he rejects the medieval suggestion that the search for *ta'amei hamitzvot* is a search for the function, purpose, or teleology of observance. Instead, Soloveitchik insists that we work backwards and attempt to determine what in the internal recesses of the religious personality is expressed by mitzvah observance.[5]

Soloveitchik is considering "the religious personality," likely someone, in his view, with an Orthodox belief in a supernatural God, whom the individual seeks to obey. However, Finkelman is probing contradictions in the writings of Soloveitchik, who was both a halachic authority and a philosopher.

The orientation of the religious naturalist, whose spiritual development we are seeking to address, is clearly more akin to that of the philosophers than that of fundamentalists. As we saw earlier, Reines likely supports the importance of

teaching the underlying spiritual lessons of the observances of Judaism, which we can deduce from his approach to the Sabbath. The approach Reines suggests regarding extracting the essence of the Sabbath while not feeling obligated to its traditional observance, can be expanded as an approach to other *mitzvot*.

In rejecting *halakhah* and many of its ritual observances, Reform Judaism has lost many opportunities for our adherents to learn and to be inspired by the rationales for the commandments (*ta'amei hamitzvot*), the underlying spiritual messages of Judaism. Clearly, for the religious naturalist, the rationale underlying an observance is its most important aspect and the essence of its transformational potency, as is traditionally said before the observance of various *mitzvot*: *asher kidshanu bemitzvotav*, "Who has made us holy through His commandments."

There are many ritual commandments that may or may not be observed by Reform Jews, whose established or personally meaningful rationale can nonetheless be a source of spiritual inspiration. Let us focus here on some examples: 1. the mitzvah of *kisui dam*, covering the blood of a slaughtered animal (Lev 17:13), teaches reverence for life; 2. *sheḥitah*, the particular Jewish form of animal slaughter, teaches sensitivity to avoid undue pain even to an animal (see the first two chapters of Tractate Chullin and first twenty-seven chapters of Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah); 3. that some animals are *kasher* and

permitted and others not (Lev 11:3-8 and Deut 14:4-8) teaches more generally, metaphorically, about matters that are permissible and non- permissible to us, perhaps including human sexual relationships. (While in the past there was a cultural revulsion against certain kinds of animals on the basis of some of their characteristics, many no longer feel this way, and other, more metaphoric, lessons may be of value in character development regardless of actual *kashrut* observance. It has been suggested in a recent preface to Heinemann's *The Reasons for the Commandments in Jewish Thought* that "every thinker and every generation comes up with different reasons and has its own preferred taste for liking certain explanations and rejecting other;"6) 4. the *sukkah* (the only place in the Torah that instructs the "native born," *ezraḥ*, but does not then add "the stranger who dwells among you," *hager hagar betokhekhem*–Lev 23:42) teaches about sensitivity to the suffering of the homeless and the stranger, which only the native citizen in his or her complacency needs to learn through the Sukkah observance, since the stranger already knows. This interpretation is more relevant to the religious naturalist than that given in Lev 23:43 "that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." 5. *taharat hamishpaḥah* (Lev 15:19 and 24, 18:19, and 20:18) can be understood to be about the control of physical passions and to emphasize the spiritual rather than the physical in the marital relationship.

While Reform Jews see the *halakhah* as not binding and ritual observances as

optional, it is critical for our people's spiritual development that they learn essential teachings of Judaism from the ritual commandments. There is value in considering some way to extract the essence of the spiritual learning wherever possible, even while questioning or even rejecting what Reines refers to as "vehicle symbolism," the specifics of halachic observance. The important insight that Reines suggests regarding extracting the essence of the Sabbath while not feeling obligated to its traditional observance can be expanded to other areas of Jewish tradition. These essential teachings of the values and the spirituality of Judaism should be taught at all levels of education in our movement, regardless of freedom not to observe the specific practice. In addition to extracting the essential spiritual lesson of a particular ritual commandment, people might then want to consider what practices would be relevant for them to observe and thereby enrich their Jewish identity and personal growth. In fact Heinemann states: "Ethical-religious influence proceeds from the mitzvot, according to the rabbis, whether it is in their observance or in the mere act of expounding them."[7]

One example, broadly practiced, of retaining the essence of an observance, while not adhering to it from a halachic perspective would be *berit habat*. While there is clearly no circumcision and not even any *dam berit* involved, the essential affirmation of covenant has been adapted for girls with inspiring liturgies that evoke parental commitment. Another example would be congregations that have classes on Shabbat mornings instead of the regular service. This

celebrates Shabbat in a meaningful way that fosters what Reines would call soteria, though not in the usual ritualistic fashion.

The above representative mitzvot do relate in their rationales to *tikkun olam*, and to *tikkun atzmi*. From early on the Reform Movement has emphasized prophetic Judaism and *tikkun olam*. While critically important, and while reinforced through Judaism, social justice work can often be accomplished outside religious life. Greater emphasis on how the tradition reinforces *tikkun olam* as well as *tikkun atzmi*, which in some instances undergirds the altruistic motivation of *tikkun olam*, may serve to enable people to find more advantage in Jewish identity. Of course, as Reform Jews, this could happen even without halachic requirements and mandated observances, but through an emphasis on familiarity with the rationale for the traditional teachings, regardless.

We need curricula at all levels of Jewish education, a new Shulchan Aruch emphasizing *ta'amei hamitzvot* for Reform Jews (building on *Sefer Hachinuch* and *Ta'amei hamitzvot umekorei hadinim* for a Reform context), and liturgical texts for recitation or meditative contemplation (in the genre of a modernized *Hineni mukhan umezuman*) that could result in such personal transformation, particularly for religious naturalists. This emphasis might help reinvigorate Reform Jewish life in the context of our polydoxy and pluralism. Such an emphasis on spirituality, understood as moral self-development, would bring

religion, in terms of personal and communal transformation, into religious naturalism and potentially attract secularists as well as supernaturalists.

So far we have addressed ritual law under the category of Torah. But the Torah contains lore as well as law. Discussed above was the proposition that i*mitatio Dei* could be fittingly replaced by human models to be imitated in our aspiration for holy living, particularly for naturalists, and perhaps for a broader range of Reform Jews. Such human models were discussed earlier as perhaps more accessible than anthropopathic depictions of God for spirituality seekers.

Many Christians view Adam's eating from the forbidden tree as the original sin. Certain Jewish writers see it as Adam's assertion of his autonomy and, thus, potentially a positive model. Nahum Sarna writes:

> …God Himself testifies that 'man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil' (Genesis 3:22). In other words, man does possess the possibility of defying the divine word, and therein lies the secret of his freedom. The Garden of Eden incident is thus a landmark in the development of the understanding of the nature of man, his predicament and destiny. Man is a free moral agent and this freedom magnifies immeasurably his responsibility for his actions…But man is free to disregard the moral law, should he wish to, though he must be prepared to suffer the consequences…Human freedom can be at one and the same time an omen of disaster and a challenge and opportunity.[8]

Sarna sees in the story of Adam the human being's autonomy to choose, as the basis of human freedom, but also of our responsibility for our actions. Such freedom to make choices is a core distinction of the human being which is established immediately in the second chapter of Genesis.

Abraham models for us many acts of *hesed*; patriotically fighting for his local kings, pleading for the deliverance of the people of Sodom, and showing generosity to his nephew Lot are but a few examples. Rebecca offers to provide water to Eliezer's camels, not just for him, which Rashi explains regarding Genesis 24:14, ראויה היא לו שתהא גומלת חסדים וכדאי ליכנס בביתו של אברהם. Joseph models ego self-transcendence in a dramatic way, culminating, at the end of Genesis, in his forgiveness of his brothers who had gravely wronged him. This is just a cursory review of the first book of the Torah. Our tradition has very many examples of righteous individuals, from throughout Jewish history, concerning whom we could aspire to "walk in his or her paths," as part of our spiritual development.

Torah study must include emphasis on Mussar as it focuses on *tikkun hamiddot*, the improvement and perfecting of our moral qualities. Recent years have seen effort toward such study in our congregations. Our goal being spiritual development, the emphasis on Mussar needs to be further enhanced. Mussar study will be discussed further in the section on Gemilut Chasadim.

Avodah

Many people we relate to within or about our congregations often say they are not religious. Perhaps they lack “emunah” and do not wish to respond by attesting to blessings they hear by saying “amen” just to be polite, and then not return to our worship services. They do not relate to our complex theologies using God-language different from that which is generally understood by the term, namely a supernatural God. We may intend the God idea, or God as a process, God as a verb or Hylotheism, but they assume we intend supernaturalism and feel alienated, when our words and meaning seem unaligned. They need liturgy that speaks to them, wherein there is no God language, or where it is clearly and frequently explained as naturalistic, and they need other ritual activities that inspire them with spiritually uplifting messages from Jewish tradition. We shall examine liturgy presently available from both an ideological perspective and in terms of whether it encourages *tikkun* toward *kedushah* and *tahara*. In addition, it is worthwhile to note whether reference is made to anything distinctively Jewish, so that people identify with Judaism as a resource for spiritual development.

Michael Meyer discusses the formation of the *Union Prayer Book*, which was published in the 1890’s by the Central Conference of American Rabbis based on earlier volumes prepared by individual rabbis, and how, with minor revisions, it served the Reform Movement for over eighty years. While it differed stylistically from the more traditional texts of other movements and provided for various

changes, including significant abridgment, it remained true to ethical monotheism and, to a significant degree, consistent in many aspects of structure and content with more traditional texts. The *Union Hymnal* published in 1897 "consisted mostly of English hymns on universal themes."[9]

Gates of Prayer (The New Union Prayer Book), published in 1975, was the first Movement-wide break in North America from the former long- established *Union Prayer Book*. Under the editorship of Chaim Stern, it introduced various changes including more modern English, gender neutrality regarding people (with respect to God, gender neutrality was Introduced in the 1990's), supplementary readings and ideological choice, through the option for the selection of distinct services. Especially of note is service six for Shabbat evenings, prepared by Stern in keeping with the pantheistic perspective of Alvin Reines, as discussed above in the chapter dealing with Reines' work. This approach enabled congregations to offer a complete specific type of service where that was preferred.

Subsequently, the Movement progressed to the *Mishkan* series which provides for the polydoxian approach of Reines in an integrated fashion, as Sonja Pilz writes:

> Each double-page spread of *Mishkan T'filah*…turned into a dialogue of different styles, voices, and also theologies. In *Mishkan T'filah,* atheism and pantheism are to be found right next to orthodox monotheism, voices of doubt speak up right next to voices of trust and hope.[10]

Elaine Zecher quotes Elyse Frishman, the editor of *Mishkan T'filah*, who also wrote about its multivocality, but with a more integrative perspective:

> Theologically, the liturgy needed to include many perceptions of God: The transcendent, the naturalist, the mysterious, the partner, the evolving God…We should sense all these ways. This is the distinction of an integrated theology: Not that one looks to each page to find one's particular voice, but that over the course of praying, many voices be heard, and ultimately come together as one.[11]

This integrative approach is particularly inspiring toward a constructive atmosphere of openness to learning and growing and of respect for people holding other views. Unfortunately, not everyone values the unity intended. Some might prefer a congregation or group within a congregation offering a particular naturalistic or a specifically theistic service.

The following are some selections of creative readings drawn for illustrative purposes from *Mishkan Hanefesh,* the most recent Machzor for Yom Kippur published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 2015:

> LETTER TO A HUMANIST
>
> Men and women are the messengers of God;
> There are neither angels nor emanations;
> Only people like you, in whom God has planted
> A striving for justice and freedom and peace.
>
> Inspiration and dedication and every inward joy
> Are the gifts of God, who makes us equal with equal love

And appoints us, every one, God's messengers and workers
To bring another springtime to the world.

Listen to your own inner conversation:
You will learn that
When you work for justice,
You are bringing redemption;
When you work for freedom and peace,
You are praying for salvation;
When you accept and love another person,
The Messiah draws near.[12]

This selection from the well-known liturgical poet Ruth Brin is addressed enigmatically to humanists yet speaks of God as proactive and also makes reference to the coming of the Messiah. Yet, it speaks of the holy behavior of "striving for justice and freedom and peace," and of the purity of thought expressed by "Inspiration and dedication and every inward joy."

INVISIBLE TO ALL

THE RIGHTEOUS, they say, are invisible to all.
Hidden and unknown, they live in quiet decency,
hurting no one but suffering the pain of the world.
Were it not for these thirty-six, the Sages say,
the universe could not exist.

If you think you might be one of the thirty-six,
chances are you're wrong.
They labor in obscurity,
bombarded every minute of every day
by unbearable sounds from everywhere:
the weeping of sick and hungry children,

abused women; sad and wounded men,
tormented souls who feel they're all alone.

The thirty-six shudder; they cover their ears.
They can't bear the anguish, the assault of tears—
and their hearts break, over and over
and over again, and the bleeding never stops.
But they are the righteous;
they have to endure it
every minute of every day
so that the world can go on,
and the rest of us can live
in peace.[13]

This selection using the model of the *Lamed Vovnikim* (b. Sanhedrin 96b and b. Sukkah 45b) is, of course, distinctively Jewish. It carries a strong message of purity of motivation particularly by stating: "If you think you are one of the thirty-six, chances are you're wrong." This relates to the high ideal of ego-transcendence and purity of motive in *tikkun atzm*i. There is surprisingly limited reference to interpersonal righteous behavior and no reference to God. This piece fits a number of the criteria for yearning for spirituality for religious naturalists in a Jewish context.

Rabbi Jeff Goldwasser addresses the *Quality of G'vurah* culminating in *For Reflection* as follows:

> The QUALITY of *g'vurah* may be understood as strength, justice, severity, discipline, and will. Reflecting on *g'vurah* offers us an opportunity to contemplate the way in which we set limits for ourselves and the way we

judge ourselves and others. Like many people, I tend to be quite hard on myself. Love and strength, *chesed* and *g'vurah*, are partners when I keep them in balance with each other, allowing me to be both critical and kind to myself and others.

FOR REFLECTION

Is my self-criticism and severity helpful or harmful?

Do I reflect on my own behavior in a way that is both strict and loving? Is my judgment of other people harsh and without compassion?

How do I use my strength and self-discipline to reach the highest within me?[14]

This selection is personally focused with no reference to God and attends to one's inner qualities. It calls for a sense of balance between kindness and courage in thinking about one's own manner of being. This piece is particularly focused on *tikkun atzmi*. It emphasizes the important human *middot* of *hesed* and *gevurah* from Jewish tradition. It is a suitable selection for our purposes.

Accompanying the Amidah for Mincha in this Machzor is a selection of creative liturgy entitled, "The Heart of Yom Kippur: *Tikkun Midot Hanefesh*." Its intention is to amplify to an even greater depth the inherent meaning of the original seven blessings that constitute the Amidah here (six of which are present in every Amidah). The themes of these seven blessings are emphasized in an effort to accomplish "repair of the traits of one's soul." These particular *middot* involve interpersonal behavior, and thus relate to k*edushah* and *tikkun olam*, as well self-reflection and motivational attitude, which relate to *taharah* and *tikkun atzmi*,

as discussed above. T*ikkun middot* is a more general term that encompasses both *tikkun olam* and *tikkun atzmi*.

In defining *hesed*, the following appears on page 358:

> The word chesed, as used in the Bible, does not refer to a single, one-way expression of kindness or mercy. The essence of chesed is mutual loyalty and allegiance — between human beings, or between human beings and God. It is best understood within the context of reciprocal rights, responsibilities, and duties.[15]

Nelson Glueck and others have demonstrated that while this may be true of earlier depictions of *hesed* in the Bible, such as in the Book of Genesis, elsewhere in the Bible, such as at Micah 6:8, *hesed* refers to freely willed acts of non-reciprocal kindness.[16] Mussar literature repeatedly and consistently raises up *hesed* as an altruistic middah to be extended to everyone, *lekhol adam*.

The selection from Bernard Bamberger dealing with the holiness code of Leviticus makes reference to God and the idea of God as the model for holiness, yet not as a conscious being. He lists a number of behaviors that Lev 19 defines as part of the pursuit of holiness and clarifies how the human pursuit of holiness is asymptotic. Bamberger makes note of both behavior and motive and of the combining of moral and ceremonial commandments. The excerpt reads as follows:

> CHAPTERS 18-20 OF LEVITICUS (known as the Holiness Code) give a clear account of holiness in life. The prime emphasis is ethical. And the moral laws of these chapters are not mere injunctions of conformity. They call for just, humane, and sensitive treatment of others. The aged, the handicapped, and the poor are to receive consideration and courtesy. The laborer is to be promptly paid. The stranger is to be accorded the same love we give our fellow citizens. The law is concerned not only with overt behavior, but also with motive; vengefulness and the bearing of grudges are condemned…. In holy living, the ethical factor is primary, but it is not the only one. In combining moral and ceremonial commandments, the authors of the Holiness Code displayed sound understanding. Such are the components of the way of life called *kadosh (holy).*
>
> Leviticus 19 begins with the startling declaration that by these means we can and should try to be holy like God. The same Torah that stresses the distance between God's sublime perfection and our earthly limitations urges us to strive to reduce that distance….The Law of Holiness is not addressed to selected individuals. It is addressed to the entire community of Israel….[17]

In a selection entitled "It is Good to Give Thanks," based on Psalm 92:2, Joshua Haberman addresses projection onto the God-image and the futility of attempting to intercede with God. He emphasizes the importance of feeling thankful and of focusing on the present. This piece, thus, encourages *tikkun atzmi* in terms of fostering a sense of gratitude.

"IT IS GOOD TO GIVE THANKS"

The Psalmist exclaims, *It is good to give thanks to God* (92:2)—good for whom? Do we know what God gains from our thanksgiving? We can only guess that God is pleased to have our thanksgiving, as we are pleased to receive thanks from anyone to whom we showed favor. But this is projecting our mentality upon God.

Considering that each of us is less than a speck of dust in the universe, it is difficult to imagine that God gains anything from our words of thanksgiving. What good there is in thanksgiving to God goes entirely to the person who gives thanks.

Gratitude opens the door to contentment, and contentment induces happiness. The American poet John Greenleaf Whittier made the keen observation that gratitude focuses on the good we enjoy in the present:

> No longer forward nor behind
> I look in hope or fear,
> But grateful, take the good I find,
> The best of now and here.
>
> To put yourself in a better mood, all you need to do is count the things you appreciate. Gratitude is the twin of appreciation. Whether you give thanks to God or to human beings, you will be the first to benefit from thanksgiving.[18]

In 1996 Marcia Falk provided a breakthrough of poetic creative liturgy, significant particularly in its sensitivity to egalitarianism. Her work initiates novel alternatives for God-language. Others generally adhered to traditional theistic liturgical language other than those omitting reference to God altogether, such as Chaim Stern's inclusion of an innovative non-theistic option into *Gates of Prayer*.

Falk writes:

> To me, *adonay eloheynu, melekh ha'olam* is an example of dead

> metaphor, that is, I see it as a greatly overused image that no longer functions to awaken awareness of the greater whole. Moreover, because this image has had absolute and exclusive authority in Jewish prayer, it has reinforced forms of patriarchal power and male privilege in the world. But I have never believed that the alternative to this icon is a substitute image for the divine, since any single name or image would necessarily be partial and would, potentially, be the basis for further exclusivity and distortion. Rather, from the beginning I maintained that we should set in motion *a process of ongoing naming* that would point toward the diversity of our experiences and reach toward a greater inclusivity within the encompassing monotheistic whole. As an example of what I was calling for, I offered several new images of my own — among them, *eyn hahayim*.[19]

Thus, while Falk is urging an effort to find preferred appellations for God that would inclusively be expressive of a variety of individual experiences of a monotheistic God, she also at times leaves out any reference to divinity and focuses on nature such as in her *Aleynu*, in which she suggests:

> "It is ours to praise the beauty of the world – "עלינו לשבח ליפעת תבל" [20]

She is thus also offering a polydoxy, including a naturalist perspective.

Particularly important to note is that Falk was offering emendations not just to English but to the original Hebrew liturgy, including biblical quotations. The following is her alternative for the *Sh'ma:*

> שמע ישראל – לאלהות אלפי פנים, מלא עולם שכינתה, רבוי פניה אחד [21]

She challenges the original masculine language, and, like Schulweis,

changes here the concept of *elohim* to *elohut*, but affirms omnipresence, and introduces the many faces of divinity, which is suggesting that human beings experience God each in their own way. There is a similarity to the intention of the *Mishkan* series, which seeks to foster an integrative theology, as Elyse Frishman explained. However, the approach is different in that Falk actually offers a variety of new appellations for God, in the Hebrew and in English, rather than a variety of human experiences of divinity.

In addition to the publications of the Reconstructionist Movement, a number of their rabbis, including Sheryl Lewart, have written meaningful human development-oriented pieces:

Lewart has written:

> Struggle
> May you struggle with your false self
> and confront the mystery
> at the core of your being.
> May you be held in the grip of truth
> until all your self-deceptions melt away,
> your delusions fade
> and your defenses fall.
> May the dawn break as it did for Jacob
> revealing the hidden radiance
> that shines through
> all the veils and masks
> so that you know who you really are.
> May your soul call to you
> and send you a new name. Amen [22]

This reflection is based on Gen 32:25 and calls on everyone to seek personal transformation by struggling to overcome personas they put forward and to look honestly at their real self, thus revealing their true essence. This is a particularly insightful and creative selection that calls everyone to purity of motive and wholeness, using the model of Jacob's struggle that enables him to become Israel (כי שרית). It is a wonderful example of yearning for spirituality in religious naturalism (and of course for all religiously sensitive people) out of the sources of Judaism, particularly in its focus on overcoming self-delusion and recognizing one's true self. The use of the term "soul" can be understood as one's true self.

Michael Marmur and David Ellenson take note of a work that highlights unity, redemption, and hope as expressions of divinity in a selection by Judy Chicago:

MERGER POEM

And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both men and women will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And the greed of some will give way to the needs of the many
And then all will share equally in the earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures

> And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth
> And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.[23]

While this piece relates to specific Jewish tradition only in its reference to Eden, it is about essential issues in Judaism. It is about *ahdut,* unity, being accomplished within reality, and values such as *rahmanut*, compassion, and *ahavat haberi'ot,* love for humanity, *philanthropia*. It is also about unity as it addresses the integration of the usual understanding of male and female qualities, or the individuation process that includes the integration of animus and anima, within each person, from a Jungian perspective. Such integration can be understood as part of the human spiritual quest.

Gordon Tucker describes Lawrence Hoffman's understanding of, and responsiveness to, the apparent diminution of faith within our contemporary society and shares that:

> Hoffman asserts that this stems from an inadequacy of language. In his illustration, the words "creation," "revelation,"and "redemption" classically pointed to what were the three long-standing fundamentals of monotheistic faith: that God created the universe as an act of will, made the divine will known to us through commands, and promised an ultimate salvation from suffering and death to those who prove themselves worthy. Yet these words no longer carry the same meanings for today's Jews, Hoffman writes.[24]

Tucker goes on to explain what has caused this loss of faith and quotes Max Weber's insight that "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he

himself has spun."[25] Tucker suggests that "Hoffman is teaching us…that we have the capacity to reformulate our stories so as to reflect our experiences with honesty, and thereby transform both faith and ourselves."[26]

As has been the case throughout Jewish history, we today are challenged to revitalize the sources of Judaism in the context of our honest ideological perspective for the purpose of serious spiritual development. It is imperative that those who yearn for spirituality in religious naturalism have the content and liturgical resources that can enable them to grow.

In addition to some of the representative pieces above, the following are liturgical selections, written by the present author, that are related to Jewish sources, and that are intended to foster the furtherance of spiritual development, often focused on tikkun *olam* and tikkun *atzm*i, in the context of a religious naturalist-oriented ideology:

Shema Yisrael

Hear Israel — aspiring toward holiness is our singular purpose.

I will love kindness and compassion with all my heart,
and with all my soul, and with all my might.
And all these words shall be in my heart,
and I will teach them with diligence to everyone
and speak of them at home and away at all times of night or day.
And I shall make signs and symbols to constantly remind myself
to be holy and love kindness and compassion.

Clearly naturalistic, this piece makes the human aspiration toward holiness the ultimate concern, using the term “singular” to echo the original *achdut*. Much of the other language is intended as a similar echo. The commanding language of “Thou shalt” is changed to the committing language of “I will.” The intention is to indicate that teaching of the aspiration toward holiness, kindness and compassion is not just for one who has children, but for everyone. While *tzitzit* serve specifically as a mnemonic aid, the assumption is that the rituals of *tefillin* and *mezuzah* do as well but are replaced here with whatever signs and symbols the individual might choose to be a reminder of this commitment toward holiness, kindness and compassion.

Our Collective Ultimate Concern

> The Torah teaches that Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, meaning that he had wrestled with God (Genesis 32:29). The Sh’ma Deuteronomy 6:4) calls on each of us, as the Children of Israel, to engage with and search for the meaning of divinity in our lives. It has been taught that one’s ultimate concern is effectively one’s God. For the Jewish people our collective ultimate concern is to attain the attribute of compassion, associated with divinity in our tradition. This is what we intend to convey by the words of the Sh’ma.

This piece is used to introduce the recitation of the traditional Shema, as well as to broaden its appeal for those who question its literal meaning. Reference is made to the origin of the name Israel in Genesis, because the Shema calls to the People of Israel, and because each of us struggles to clarify our ultimate concern. Paul Tillich introduced this latter term, as discussed above, as a

definition of the meaning of God for a person. “To attain the attribute of compassion” is offered as our ultimate concern, based also on the concept of *lalekhet biderakhav*. The Tetragrammaton, central to the Shema, is associated in our tradition with compassion, *middat harahamim*.

A New Kaddish

Kaddish means sanctification.

We must each find ways to sanctify our lives
and remember how others inspired us
by sanctifying theirs.

To sanctify means to set aside significant time to consider how we can grow in our empathy for others.
We need to learn to transcend our own pain and losses and bring a new openness each day to how we engage with everyone else.

Soon and without procrastination we must act with compassion, patience, lovingkindness, honesty and forgiveness, as the Torah teaches in modeling the ultimate ideal of holiness.

We must rise above ourselves and actualize
our inherent spiritual potential
and be instruments of peace while we are yet alive.

Let us affirm our goal of intrinsic salvation
while we are yet alive, while we yet have breath
and speak sincere affirmation and commitment by saying:

Amen - I truly believe and commit to what I have just spoken.

This piece is intended to maintain the concept of sanctification, only the object changes from God to ourselves. Those deceased, who are not mentioned in the traditional Kaddish, are introduced here as people to remember, particularly for their having provided positive role modeling. A reference to sanctification as relating to “setting aside” for a holy purpose is included. Other language of the original Kaddish is maintained with new meaning, such as “we must rise above ourselves” in place of *yitgadal* and *veyit’aleh*. “Soon and without procrastination” echoes *ba’agalah uvizeman kariv.* The piece encourages aspiration to holiness and purity of motive and uses the core five *middot* from Exodus 34:6-7. It makes direct reference to intrinsic salvation and intimates finitude, all in keeping with a religious naturalist ideology.

May Our Bereavement

> May our bereavement for our loved ones who are no longer with us lead to an expansion of our compassion for all of life and of our passion for holiness in our relationships. May we pursue peace among the living. May we find inner peace, Shalom, in the acceptance of our loss, cherishing the memories of companionship which shall endure in us.
>
> Congregation responds:
>
> May our community be a source of sustenance and support for those who mourn.

This piece can serve as a reading for mourners with a congregational response echoing *Hamakom yinahem etkhem*. It guides the mourner to utilize the pain of loss constructively — the expansion of compassion and passion for holiness in

their relationships. The yearning for Shalom echoes the traditional prayer for peace in the Kaddish.

Life Before Death

> For those of us who do not believe in life after death the prospect of our demise can become more frightening. Traditional religion often offers comfort about mortality for those who believe. Yet the Torah makes no reference to heaven or to resurrection. Death is referred to in the Book of Genesis as “lying down with my ancestors,” or “gathered unto his people.” What can the words of Psalm 23: “And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” mean for the religious naturalist? We can live in such a way, aspiring toward holiness and purity, that our self-actualization remains a fact through eternity. No one promised us a rose garden. We are awed by the joy of life, though it is temporary. We need to remember each day that our lives are finite, and we need to do the best we can to live each day to the fullest, to find meaning in being productive and altruistic. We should prepare to die with a sense of joy and satisfaction about what we have accomplished and contributed as the Torah teaches, “And Abraham died at a good old age, old and full, and was gathered to his people.”

Reines emphasized that it is anxiety regarding human finitude that draws many to religion.The concern here is to provide comfort regarding mortality for non-believers, by suggesting that religious living in terms of pursuing holiness and purity, good values, such as productivity and altruism, can lead to spiritual self-actualization and thus to freedom from the fear of mortality. The Torah’s description of the death of *Avraham Avinu* in Genesis 25:8 serves as a model for what is being suggested.

May I Guard My Tongue From Evil

May I guard my tongue from evil and
my lips from speaking falsehood.
May I be quietly and patiently non-reactive
to those who speak offensively of me or to me,
being humble as dust to all.
May I open my heart to the Torah
and let my soul pursue its teachings.

In all of traditional daily liturgy, *Elohai netzor* at the conclusion of every silent Amidah, is the only individual prayer and the most focused on personal spiritual development. This piece retains the original subject matter but makes the self-transformation a personal aspiration instead of the subject of a prayer for God's intervention in that regard.

Shabbat and Wholeness

As human beings we aspire toward wholeness, to transform ourselves into compassionate and sensitive people who can transcend our mundane self-serving drives.

Judaism teaches about the inner struggle in each person between the inclination toward goodness and the inclination toward evil, and encourages us to enable our better selves to prevail.

Religion involves the search for such personal transformation utilizing the resources of spiritual traditions: ethical teachings and observances that reinforce them.

We celebrate Shabbat to learn about holy living. We sanctify or set aside time, which we invest with qualities and an atmosphere distinct from the remainder of the week.

Shabbat serves as a metaphor teaching us to distinguish ourselves with qualities that uplift us to transcend who we might otherwise remain.

Keddushat Shabbat, the holiness of the Sabbath, teaches us to regard with awe the reality of existence within time and to appreciate the opportunity for freedom.

This selection uses the metaphor of the distinction between *shabbat* and *hol* as representing *milhemet hayetzer.* It clarifies that the resources of spiritual tradition include both ethical teachings and observances like *shabbat* to reinforce them. *Shabbat* is an opportunity to respond with a sense of awe about existence and to learn how to free ourselves from our more mundane predilections.

שלוש עשרה מידות הרחמים

הוי הוי רחום וחנון
ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת
נצר חסד לאלפים
נשא עון ופשע וחטאה ונקה

Be merciful and compassionate,
slow to anger,
abounding in lovingkindness,
Strive for truth
Be kind and forgiving to all.

This meditation, which can be sung with a traditional melody, provides for a

recitation of the essential core attributes of Exod 34:6-7. It replaces reference to God, El, as well as the two references to YHVH, with the term *heveh* taken from the Midrash Sifre Deut Ekev 11:22, which uses the term *heveh* in encouraging humankind to strive to emulate these ways of God. The term *heveh* in this Midrash appears to be a play on words using the same root (to be) that appears to be the source of the name of God, the Tetragrammaton, which is being replaced with the directive to humanity to aspire toward these same character traits. Naturalist congregations can use this version, which focuses on personal transformation instead of praising God.

ARBA'AH MINIM

> The Torah teaches us to gather together these four species as an expression of thanksgiving for the harvest at Sukkot. Some call these the etrog set, because the citron is the most elite and beautiful of the four. Others, including the traditional blessing, refer to the set of four as the lulav, likely because it is the tallest. Let us see beyond appearances and worldly valuations of our worth. This ritual teaches inclusivity of everyone, for if one of the four species, even the valueless willow sprigs, which have neither aroma nor taste, is missing, the ritual cannot be observed. Let us, therefore, refer to this as the observance of the Arba'ah Minim, the four species, teaching us to be inclusive of everyone in our midst. Let us celebrate together!

This piece is intended as a meditation prior to the ritual of the *arba'ah minim*. It is not theistically oriented but rather teaches through its details important lessons about sensitivity and inclusivity.

Circle of Concern

In the spirit of community, in which we share and find common purpose, we turn our minds and hearts toward one another, seeking to bring into our circle of concern all who need our love and support: those who are ill, those who are in pain, either in body or in spirit, those who are lonely, those who have been wronged.

(Here people may say the names of those who concern them)

We are part of a web of life that makes us one with all humanity, one with all the universe. We are grateful for the consciousness that we share, the consciousness that gives us the power to remember, to love, to care.

This piece written by Frederick E. Gillis, and adapted by the current author, is originally from the Unitarian Universalist Hymnal. It provides for an expression of concern about those who are ill, rather than the customary prayer to God to intervene to heal the sick, the *Mi sheberakh*.

לקדש ולטהר

הנני מוכן ומזומן לשאף לקדש את חיי ולטהר את לבי בדרכי התורה ומנהגי עם ישראל

I am ready and prepared to aspire to sanctify my life and purify my heart through the ways of the Torah and the customs of the People of Israel

The intent here is to provide a new *matbe'ah shel berakhah* utilizing a traditional

introduction but omitting reference to the performance of a required *mitzvah*, while focusing instead on the personal yearning for holiness and purity. It is written to stand on its own but can also be used as the introduction to the performance of any ritual by adding reference to it such as ולהדליק נר של שבת. Of course the language can be feminized and/or pluralized.

An alternative version might also be:

יהי רצון שאקדש את חיי ואטהר את לבי בדרכי התורה ומנהגי ישראל

An additional specification for a particular ritual here might then conclude for example with ובהדלקת נר של חנוכה.

This selection is an effort to concretize the intention of this entire project, to provide for religious feeling and expression for naturalists in terms of the pursuit of *kedushah* and *taharah* in their lives out of the sources of Judaism.

It is important to provide opportunity and encouragement for people in the congregation to articulate their own expressions of their spiritual yearnings, reflective of their own emotional and moral journeys. Students in an adult education class at the New Reform Congregation Kadima in Deerfield, Illinois were recently invited to write their own liturgical selections or reflections. The following are representative pieces:

Veracious and Sure

Genuinely established, enduring and upright, loved and cherished as faithful by our parents.
Excellent and beautiful, a complex image from us and our ancestors forever.
You have been beloved as a king, Rock of Ya'akov, Shield of deliverance!

Our understanding endures from generation to generation, our ideals ascribed to HaShem endure, like a throne firmly established, sovereign in our ideals, enduring as part of us forever.

The words ascribed to you are alive and enduring in our hearts, desirable and correct.

For our parents, us, our children, and our generations to come from the house of Israel.

You are our evolving understanding, the ideal of our ancestors, the paramount thoughts of our forefathers, our highest ideal like a king to our ancestors.

Understood as a redeemer of our parents, our rock of deliverance, our liberator when we survive the mightier -- when we find impossible rescue, from the beginning of our time, we think of your name as the embodiment that maintaining hope is always justified.

We have no God other than the image we set aside of you in perpetuity and heartfelt fidelity to the hope beyond hope we find in the universe that you always represent.

Marc Dubey

It is worthy to note that Marc Dubey chose independently to focus on this text from the liturgy and that Kaufmann Kohler wrote that "'True and firm is this belief for us' (Emeth we Yatzib) is, in fact, the earliest form of the confession of faith."[27] The author here, like Kohler, recognizes the importance of this text, but clarifies his own view that for himself in the present what is important is not the reality of actual faith but appreciation for the image of God and what it represents in terms of "our ideals."

Modeh Ani (I am Thankful)

> I am thankful to wake,
> continuing in our enduring universe.
> In awe of existence and its mysterious source.
>
> Marc Dubey

Marc Dubey is expressing the religious response of a sense of wonder without addressing himself to God.

Overcoming Hate

> The preponderance of hate in the United States and throughout the world is very disheartening. People hate others just because of who they are. In particular, I am very concerned that anti-Semitism is rampant in this country especially since the Israeli-Hamas war.
>
> How can I as a Jew not hate those who hate me, some with perceived cause such as the Palestinians and others who just hate Jews because they are Jews? How can a Jew not hate the Nazis and most Germans because of what they did to us during the Holocaust? Thankfully, they were defeated in World War II but at immense cost to the world, especially their annihilation of 6 million Jews.

Pirkei Avot 4:24 teaches us “When an enemy falls, be not glad; and when one stumbles, let your heart not be joyous.” The commentary mentions that “even though it is difficult, we should learn to hold love for the enemy when it seems humanly impossible.“ I do not think that this is possible for any Jew to love the Nazis because of what they did to us. I personally will never purchase a German automobile. I think that my hate is justified.

My point is, how can we be tolerant of people who hate us just for being Jewish? I suspect that most of the anti-Semites have never met a Jew. Should I hate these people whom I never met or possibly did meet but was unaware of their prejudices? How can we personally overcome hate for those who hate us “even when it seems humanly impossible”?

Jay Paul. 11/9/23

Jay Paul expresses his personal anguish concerning the rise in antisemitism following the attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 and struggles with how to aspire to transcend hatred of those who hate and hurt our people. This is a timely and significant concern.

What Do We Ask of God –

Who are we to ask things of one so grand as God when we are but dust and ashes?

We are the children of Israel, struggling to do holy work while living in an imperfect world.

Why do we ask things of God when our problems are so small and the world is so large?

Whether for fear, humility, or anxiety, there is a part of us that does not believe the world will be better without the hand of the divine.

What purpose can prayer hold when we know we cannot rely on miracles?

Prayer helps us believe in a world that can be better, a world where we have the power to act and affect change.

How are we, as Jews, meant to respond to prayer, whether our own or another's?

Our tradition teaches that we are God's chosen people, that we bring holiness into the world on His behalf and light the way for others to do the same.

When we pray and hear prayer, we are called to think not of what is wrong in the world, but what could be made right in it. Not of how great God's miracles must be to be able to change everything, but how small of a push we need to be able to change something.

John Canter

John Canter has focused on a sense of modesty and, at the same time, on the importance of finding the inspiration to take responsibility to improve the world because *ein somchin al hanes*, we do not rely on miracles. After asking: "What purpose can prayer hold?," he responds that its purpose is to teach us that the "world can be better," and that "we have the power to act and affect change," and "that we bring holiness into the world." This is an expression of religious naturalism deemphasizing reliance on God and focusing on the spiritual values we can learn from Judaism to inspire us to act with holiness, just as Marc Dubey does above in his "Veracious and Sure*"* above regarding "our ideals."

Kavanat Koleinu

Let our voices make clear our shared, common need to provide and to receive compassion, our eternal resource. *May we always remind each other of our deep tradition and the universal truths bonding us now and across generations.* Like our ancestors, shall we link our holiest concerns with ongoing persecution and suffering, learning from the past to better the future. *As the span of our days and vigor decline may our vision of*

expanded wisdom, memories of friendship, and the search for shared human experience, not falter from pain or abandonment.

Jack Henkin

The class was asked to consider writing a naturalist version of *Shema Koleinu*. Jack Henkin did so replacing its petitionary rhetoric with a calling for mutual concern among members of the community.

In concluding this section on Avodah, it is important to mention that not all effort to foster spiritual growth needs to be or should be verbalized. There is a long tradition of silent meditation in Judaism, going back to Gen 24:63, ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה, "Isaac went out to meditate in the field."

Meditation is usually free of ideological verbalization, but enables the practitioner to experience realizations of existential import. Aryeh Kaplan distinguishes three kinds of Jewish meditation: *kavanah*, *hitbonenut*, and *hitbodedut*, and discusses how they came about and were used over the centuries. Most relevant for our present purpose would be *hitbonenut*, which Kaplan understands to be "self-understanding."[28] Thus, synagogue meditation groups or individual meditation have the potential to enable the practitioner to achieve self-understanding which is at the core of spiritual growth. Ira Progoff, a disciple of Carl Jung's, explains how meditation puts people in contact with matters that were previously unconscious and how, in journaling this material, one can

achieve a higher plateau of spiritual self-actualization.[29] He explains that meditation journaling:

> . . .on the one hand, generates a movement within the person; on the other hand, it deepens the level on which all the contents of the psyche are experienced…It generates a momentum of inner experiences within the individual, first on the personal, subjective level of the psyche, and increasingly on the deeper-than-personal, the generically human level of the psyche."[30]

The yearning for spirituality, thus, can expand to connecting our personal life experiences with transpersonal or archetypal depth. He also writes that:

> . . .each of the Bibles of mankind is a spiritual sourcebook for the civilization it serves. As the scripture for its society, a Bible is not a book that comes into existence by means of a single individual. It is the product of many experiences and numerous lives. It reflects the experiences of many persons as they reach toward a contact with divinity in the midst of the harsh social and economic struggles that formed the life of its civilization through the centuries. The Bibles of the world provide a tradition and a wisdom from which those who are attuned to them can draw sustenance for their lives. [31]

In Jewish civilization we have an entire body of inspirational teachings beyond the Bible, including all of rabbinic literature and all that has been developed since. Certainly in verbalized *avodah,* we are inspired to higher values not only by what we express from within ourselves, but even more so by what we hear or recite for ourselves to hear most often from the values of our tradition, from the Bible and beyond. Particularly as religious naturalists, who have no expectation of our prayers being heard on high, it is critical to recognize that our spiritual

growth can be inspired and supported by the ideas that we recite or hear others recite. In Judaism, study is a core part of our prayers or *avodah*. We are working to be imbued with the values that constitute part of our liturgy. The traditional liturgy includes the early recitation of *birkhot hatorah* every morning and regular study of such texts, including Mishnah Peah 1:1 dealing with charity, acts of kindness and Torah study; Bavli Shabbat 127a, which delineates interpersonal good deeds and emphasizes the study of Torah; and many other selections from the Bible in particular. The reading of the Torah and the study of the mishnaic tractate Pirkei Avot are also scheduled parts of the liturgy.

Richard Sarason clarifies how through the study of Torah the Jew learns how Judaism understands the will of God and that: “For the rabbis, as scholastics, Torah study constitutes the salvific activity par excellence.”[32]

Sarason makes clear that:

> The central ontological and epistemological role assigned to Torah as the primary intermediary between man and God — as the vehicle through which each approaches the other — suggests that Torah study will be a major mode of divine worship in Judaism. [33]

Lawrence Hoffman suggests more generally that:

> Worship . . . provides religious identification, declares what is right and what is wrong, and explains why being . . . a Jew is ultimately valuable. Worship defines a world of values that group members share; it both mirrors and directs the social order in which the group lives.[34]

He also addresses the ultimate purpose of worship:

> Liturgies that work…make moral demands on us that transcend the similar claim of dramas in general. We are expected to take the liturgical message home with us, internalized in our psyche. The liturgical drama doesn't end with the final song or benediction. Our day to day lives testify to liturgical success when we act out the message of our prayers in moral behavior.[35]

Traditionally the liturgy in quoting our holy texts serves to inspire us toward holiness and purity. This once again ties together Torah, Avodah and Gemilut Ḥasadim. It is critical, therefore, that current liturgical development do likewise. It should draw on sources from our tradition or express values that have developed in Jewish thought more recently, with the purpose of inspiring spiritual development, particularly in terms of fostering *ma'asim tovim.*

The selection above (p.151) entitled Arba'ah Minim, for example, is an effort to use details of halachic tradition to teach sensitivity and inclusivity.

It is important that liturgy speak to the heart of people. Catherine Madsen writes:

> ...liturgy has always been an attempt to transform the literal: to bring into our experience something from beyond our experience, to compel consciousness to burst its bounds. If liturgists cannot imagine how to do this in the modern world they must keep trying until they can. "Language in a condition of total significance": religion, when it means anything worth having, is *the world* in a condition of total significance.
> Poetic language replicates and summons this state, the associative overload of mystical experience, in order to make all things new in our perception and in our actions. When modern liturgy takes seriously the

> prophetic sensibility — not simply its demand for justice, but the demand for justice made in language that cannot be refused, language from which we cannot hide — then it will have the means, and (so far as possible in an imperfect world) the right, to command us. Then metaphor will have left the realm of moral exhortation and found its right use in moral coherence; the superego will lie down with the id, with none to make them afraid. [36]

The work of *avodah* must be to challenge and support people in their efforts to find spirituality in their lives. Utilizing the rich moral content of Judaism, new liturgy must reach the consciousness of the individual and the community to bring about significant emotional and ethical transformation.

The selection above (p. 144), “Hear Israel — aspiring toward holiness is our singular purpose,” is intended to catch people's attention in a challenging and inspiring way. The selection above, “Life Before Death” (148), is intended to provide for a “stillness maintained in turbulence,” as Madsen puts it, for people who are worried about mortality.

Appendix 1 below is a new Shabbat Evening Service text to be used at the New Reform Congregation Kadima in Deerfield, Illinois. It takes a polydoxian approach but emphasizes religious naturalism. The intention is to integrate and emphasize the conclusions of this dissertation, namely, the centrality in liturgy of the study and performance of inspirational Jewish texts that encourage spiritual transformation through the pursuit of *kedushah* and *taharah*.

Gemilut Ḥasadim

While Torah teaches about law and lore and Avodah is also largely a verbal/mental process inspiring us, it is actually the implementation of the values taught through the *mitzvot* that is the expression of spirituality in Judaism. The tradition attributed in Avot 1:2 to Shimon Hatzadik, as we have seen, while using the broadest terms for these first two pillars of the world, chooses to highlight the provision of kindness to others as the third pillar. It would have been more parallel to teach: תורה עבודה ומעשים טובים

It is the implementation of the good deeds encouraged and fostered by Torah and Avodah that is central to being a spiritual person from a practical perspective. Yet this saying lifts up the provision of *ḥesed* as primary. It does not just focus on *ḥesed* theoretically, but on its provision, *gemilut ḥasadim*. This implies that functioning with kindness is central to spirituality in Judaism.

Kindness is action and is thus in keeping with *tikkun olam*. It is also a mentality, and thus is in keeping with *tikkun atzmi*. Felix Asensio suggests that the fundamental meaning of *ḥesed* is: “spontaneous and free favor, mercy — work which always presupposes and at times includes mercy — sentiment and affection.”[37] Similarly, Gordon Clark concludes that: “Hesed is not merely an attitude or an emotion: it is an emotion that leads to an activity beneficial to the recipient.”[38]

The sincerity of the righteous in functioning with *ḥesed* is well articulated in the

Talmud: “This is the way of the provider of *ḥesed*— to run after the poor. (b. Shabbat 104a) This is a beautiful articulation of *zerizut* (zealousness) in fulfilling a *mitzvah*.

Maimonides teaches the centrality of *ḥesed*: “The purpose of the laws of the Torah is to bring mercy, lovingkindness, and peace upon the world” (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Shabbat 2:3). He goes into greater detail in the *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:53 and states:

> …we have explained the expression ḥesed as denoting an excess in some moral quality. It is especially used of extraordinary kindness. Loving-kindness is practiced in two ways: first, we show kindness to those who have no claim whatever upon us; secondly, we are kind to those to whom it is due, in a greater measure than is due to them. In the inspired writings the term ḥesed occurs mostly in the sense of showing kindness to those who have no claim on it whatsoever.

Maimonides is suggesting that *ḥesed* is not reserved for reciprocal relationships, but is an act of extraordinary kindness offered on an altruistic free-will basis.

In reflecting on the teaching of Maimonides in this regard, Eugene Korn concludes:

> …the defining and most crucial personality trait of a Torah Jew is raḥamim - empathic compassion. If there is one essential characteristic of the faithful Jew it is to be motivated by raḥamim that expresses itself in acts of ḥesed toward all people… The God intoxicated Jew is a raḥamim personality who acts with unbounded ḥesed toward all God’s creatures.[39]

Mussar texts emphasize consistently that *ḥesed* is to be provided *lekhol adam,* to everyone. Mussar literature in particular provides clarification and directives for the application of the spiritual values of Judaism. The Union for Reform Judaism has in recent years encouraged a focus on the study of Mussar. Serious study of Mussar has significant potential for encouraging and shaping the spiritual aspirations of all, including the religious naturalist Jew. It is the yearning for spirituality that distinguishes the religious naturalist from the secular Jew and Mussar is a primary repository for the focus on a life of *kedushah* and *taharah*.

It would be ideal if all Reform congregations were to make the study and practice of Mussar central to their raison d'etre, with a *ḥevrah* that would study together, interact with one another using the values learned, and function in the community on the basis of its holy teachings. Orthodox communities often have a *ḥevrah sha"s* (Talmud study group) as well as a *ḥevrah* for many of a whole range of specific *mitzvot*.

Many of our congregations occasionally schedule a "mitzvah day" or maintain a social action program that is sometimes disengaged from any serious spiritual reflection. Perhaps, instead, what would engage people and help them grow spiritually would be an integrated module program that would involve study of *ta'amei hamitzvot* and *mussar*, together with observing related rituals, with attendant liturgy, integrated with *ma'asim tovim*, acts of *ḥesed*. An example might be to learn about interpretations of the *mitzvot* of the sukkah and the *arba'a minnim*

as discussed above, fulfilling these rituals with related reflective liturgy, reinforcing the inherent values, and then proceeding to volunteer at a homeless shelter or in a program for immigrants.

Such groups in congregations would not just study established major texts but would in addition dialogue about their personal journeys in small-group discussions not dissimilar from the “Mussar Schmooze” conducted in certain yeshivot. Perhaps such congregational groups could write their own ethical texts to enhance the seriousness of people’s commitment to spiritual growth. For the religious naturalist, this ardency would express the religious zeal that otherwise would have been devoted to divine worship and other theistic pursuits.

This may seem ambitious and may at first attract only a small cadre of people. However, the problem is that in many ways what we offer is not serious enough. Many see our movement as Judaism Lite. If we are really committed to spiritual self-actualization, we need to become the movement that is really serious about helping people to achieve it. Our enlightenment about ideology and reformation about halachic requirements should not mean that we do not take seriously the pursuit of *kedushah*.

In an article in *The New York Times* on November 22, 2023, Thomas L. Friedman urges having a broad perspective that considers and integrates constructively all points of view. He suggests a kaleidoscope metaphor that

illustrates how we can integrate information differently depending on context and how prior pieces of information can shift when new information is integrated, providing for a dynamic rather than a static perspective.

While Polydoxy allows for pluralism of religious ideology, we have seen here how it is possible to have a kaleidoscopic approach to Judaism, integrating a religious naturalist ideology with spirituality that makes use of adapted traditional material and new material, integrated with the rest of Judaism. Such a dynamic approach would provide for the spiritual needs of a broader range of our people.

We have reviewed the development of religious naturalism and envisioned its articulation in a respectful manner that does not misappropriate the word “God,” but affirms the notion of *ein sof*, beyond our comprehension or description. We have envisioned a program for the serious pursuit of spirituality in such a context with specific details.

The intention is not to be divisive, but on the contrary, to bring people closer to the essence of what is most important in being religious, the holiness and purity of our *middot*, our own characteristic attributes of personality. The concern is to be respectful of others ideologically, to not misappropriate the concept of God, to not use anthropopathism, but to recognize that divinity is *ein sof*, beyond our comprehension. The hope is to become closer to other religious people within and beyond the Reform Movement and to work together for our respective

understandings of salvation, for ביום ההוא.

As I conclude, the words של נעליך מעל רגליך , “Remove your sandals from your feet for the place on which you stand is holy ground” (Exod 3:5), keep reverberating in my mind, as these proposals may tamper with what many of our people have considered to be holy. I also keep hearing the words that were repeated frequently at school and at home from my earliest recollections דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה, “Human decency takes precedence over Torah-learning,” so in sincerest humility, I should like to conclude with this reflection from Ben Zion Meir Hai Uziel in his *Hegyonei Uziel*:

> This love, whose beginning stems from our love of the Eternal, the singular One of the universe, accompanies us on all our paths and all our steps and says: Love the truth and peace. “And the truth and peace you shall love” (Zechariah 8:18). Love justice and righteousness, love the Torah, love the land, love yourself and your people, love humanity and the creatures, all of them, “love work” (Avot 1:10) in all its myriad branches and diverse sections, and despise leadership that separates brothers and causes idleness and boredom. And “everything you do, do it not but from love” (Sifre Ekev 41). And this love, which unites us with everything and intensifies our personal becoming, purifies the heart, uplifts the soul, settles the mind, and makes life pleasant. “How fair you are, how beautiful! Love with all its rapture!” (Song of Songs 7:7). And it sweetens and makes beloved also the sufferings that are part of life, so that by their loving everything, they are beloved by all; they function from love and rejoice in sufferings and accept them in love. And concerning them it is said: “but let them that love Him be as the sun when it comes out in its might” (Judges 5:31).”[40]

Notes

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13. Ibid., 227.

14. Ibid., 362.

15. Ibid., 358.

16. Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible.* Translated by Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967).

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29. Ira Progoff, *At a Journal Workshop* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1992)

30. Ibid. 268-269.

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Appendix:
Erev Shabbat Service for The New Reform Congregation Kadima in Deerfield, Illinois, with Commentary

The Service

Introduction

Shalom Aleichem! Welcome to the New Reform Congregation Kadima. Affiliated with the Union for Reform Judaism, we emphasize ideological and ritual pluralism. We respect everyone's right to believe and practice Judaism in their own way.

Our liturgy is committed to multi-vocalism, which is emphasized in Reform Judaism, enabling our people to have differing views about God in the use of any theistic language, which is supported by Maimonides' approach to the interpretation of terms in the biblical text.

However, our Congregation and our liturgy are focused primarily on religious naturalism, which questions envisioning God as having a personality and as responsive to prayer and rather understands God to be beyond human comprehension. However, we seek to be religious in terms of our learning from Jewish sources how to pursue holiness in our behavior and purity in our motivation, and our liturgy seeks to foster these goals.

In our progressive approach at the New Reform Congregation Kadima, our Shabbat morning observance involves the study of Mussar, Jewish ethics, with an emphasis on character development and personal transformation. This focus on self-transcendence and altruism reinforces the Congregation's commitment to social justice work, which is so core to our identity as Jews and as part of Reform Judaism's emphasis on Prophetic Judaism.

We have a deep love for Judaism and its inspirational and transformational power and hope you share in our priorities and feel welcome here with us.

Rabbi David Oler

הִנְנִי מוּכָן וּמְזוּמָן

הִנְנִי מוּכָן וּמְזוּמָן לְשַׁאֵף לְקַדֵּשׁ אֶת חַיַּי וּלְטַהֵר אֶת לִבִּי

בְּדַרְכֵי הַתּוֹרָה וּמִנְהָגֵי עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל

Hineni mukhan umezuman lesha'ef lekadesh et ḥayiy u'letaher et libi

bedarkhai haTorah u'minhagai am Yisrael

I am ready and prepared to aspire to sanctify my life and purify my heart through the ways of the Torah and the customs of the People of Israel

מַה טֹּבוּ

מַה טֹּבוּ אֹהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל

Ma tovu ohalekha Ya'akov mishkenotecha Yisrael

How good your tents, Jacob, your dwelling places, Israel (Numbers 24:5)

In This Quiet Hour

In this quiet hour we reflect upon the meaning of our lives. We harbor within — we all do — a vision of our highest self, a dream of what we could and should become.

May we pursue this vision, labor to make real our dream. Thus will we give meaning to our lives.

An artist in the course of painting will pause, lay aside the brush, step back from the canvas, and consider what needs to be done, what direction is to be taken.

So does each of us on this Sabbath eve pause to reflect.

As we hope to make our life a work of art, so may this encounter help us to turn

back to the canvas of life to paint the portrait of our highest self.

May our efforts to grow in moral stature bring us the joy of achievement.

And may we always hold before our eyes the vision of our highest potential and grow toward it day by day.

יִשְׂמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְתָגֵל הָאָרֶץ יִרְעַם הַיָּם וּמְלֹאוֹ

Yismeḥu hashomayim v'tagel ha'aretz yiram hayam u'melo'o

The heavens will be glad

and the earth will rejoice (Psalm 96:11)

אוֹר זָרֻעַ לַצַּדִּיק וּלְיִשְׁרֵי לֵב שִׂמְחָה

Ohr zarua latzadik u'leyishre lev simḥa

Light is sown for the righteous

Gladness for the straight of heart (Psalm 97:11)

L'cha Dodi לְכָה דוֹדִי

לְכָה דוֹדִי לִקְרַאת כַּלָּה פְּנֵי שַׁבָּת נְקַבְּלָה

L'kha dodi likrat kallah p'nai Shabbat n'kab'lah

Let us go, my friend, to welcome the Sabbath together

בּוֹאִי בְשָׁלוֹם עֲטֶרֶת בַּעֲלָה גַּם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְצָהֳלָה

תּוֹךְ אֱמוּנֵי עַם סְגוּלָה בּוֹאִי כַלָּה בּוֹאִי כַלָּה

bo'ee v'shalom ateret ba'ala gam b'simḥa uvetzahala

tokh emunei am segulah bo'ee khala bo'ee khala

Arrive in peace and joy Sabbath bride

Shabbat Candle Lighting הַדְלָקַת נֵרוֹת שֶׁל שַׁבָּת

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלוֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת

Barukh attah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam asher kidshanu

b’mitzvotav v’tzivanu l’hadlik ner shel Shabbat

We seek an atmosphere of holiness as we light the Sabbath lights

שָׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם

שָׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת מַלְאֲכֵי עֶלְיוֹן
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא

בּוֹאֲכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם מַלְאֲכֵי עֶלְיוֹן
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא

בָּרְכוּנִי לְשָׁלוֹם מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם מַלְאֲכֵי עֶלְיוֹן
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא

צֵאתְכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם מַלְאֲכֵי הַשָּׁלוֹם מַלְאֲכֵי עֶלְיוֹן
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא

Shalom aleikhem malakhei hasharet malakhei elyon
mimelekh malkhei hamelakhim hakadosh barukh hu

Bo’akhem leshalom malakhei hashalom malakhei elyon
mimelekh malkhei hamelakhim hakadosh barukh hu

Borkhuni leshalom malakhei hashalom malakhei elyon
mimelekh malkhei hamelakhim hakadosh barukh hu

Tzaytkhem leshalom malakkhei hashalom malakhei elyon
mimelekh malkhei hamelachim hackadosh barukh hu

We greet you with peace. May you, messengers of peace,
arrive with the blessing of peace and depart in peace.

On Shabbat

On Shabbat we reclaim our spiritual birthright.

Each of us deserves to rest from work,

To lift our hearts and minds above mundane concerns,

To gain perspective by stepping back from frantic activity to contemplate what is of enduring value.

Each of us deserves to find sustenance in the experience of nature,

To embrace family and friends with an abundance of time to share,

To know that we are cherished, not for our achievements, but for the totality of our personality,

To take joy in simple things.

מַה יָּפֶה הַיּוֹם שַׁבָּת שָׁלוֹם

Ma yafeh hayom Shabbat Shalom

How Beautiful is this Day!

What Do We Ask of God

Who are we to ask things of one so grand as God when we are but dust and ashes?

We are the children of Israel, struggling to do holy work while living in an imperfect world.

Why do we ask things of God when our problems are so small and the world is so large?

Whether for fear, humility, or anxiety, there is a part of us that does not believe the world will be better without the hand of the divine.

What purpose can prayer hold when we know we cannot rely on miracles?

Prayer helps us believe in a world that can be better, a world where we have the power to act and affect change.

How are we, as Jews, meant to respond to prayer, whether our own or another's?

Our tradition teaches that we are God's chosen people, that we bring holiness into the world on His behalf and light the way for others to do the same. When we pray and hear prayer, we are called to think not of what is wrong in the world, but what could be made right in it. Not of how great God's miracles must be to be able to change everything, but how small of a push we need to be able to change something.

The Tremendous Mystery

We feel an awesome sense of wonder when we contemplate the tremendous mystery of existence.

The grandeur of this world amazes us. We respond with awe to our surroundings. Jacob awoke from his dream of a ladder and said, "how awesome is this place!"

How did we get here? When did it all begin? What was there before? What existed before time?

These are matters beyond our comprehension, so they remain in the realm of the tremendous mystery of existence. Our ancestors, similarly awed in the presence of such mystery, looked to religion to explain what they could not understand.

They vested God with infinite powers, especially those of consciousness, intention and creation.

Yet the human is very young in the face of the eternal.

All the more reason to respond to the tremendous mystery of existence with humility and awe.

Rather than seek to master the mystery through description, let us continue, in the spirit of Israel, to wrestle with ourselves,

So that we can live most fully in the presence of the tremendous mystery of existence.

Being Holy

Where is God?

God, the Eternal, is within us as we allow God in.

God is an idea taught in our tradition, an idea about a holy way of being.

Our task, as developing human beings, is to emulate and integrate the qualities, the ways of God, into our way of being in the world.

The more compassionate, patient, kind, truthful and forgiving we become the more we facilitate the process of Godliness within ourselves.

I yearn to be a human being who constantly aspires to integrate these ways of divine being into my life. That's what intrinsic salvation is all about.

Shabbat and Wholeness

As human beings we aspire toward wholeness, to transform ourselves into compassionate and sensitive people who can transcend our mundane self-serving drives.

Judaism teaches about the inner struggle in each person between the inclination toward goodness and the inclination toward evil, and encourages us to enable our better selves to prevail.

Religion involves the search for such personal transformation utilizing the resources of spiritual traditions: ethical teachings and observances that reinforce them.

We celebrate Shabbat to learn about holy living. We sanctify or set aside time, which we invest with qualities and an atmosphere distinct from the remainder of the week.

Shabbat serves as a metaphor teaching us to distinguish ourselves with qualities that uplift us to transcend who we might otherwise remain.

Kedushat Shabbat, the holiness of the Sabbath, teaches us to regard with awe the reality of existence within time and to appreciate the opportunity for freedom.

Redemptiveness

Cathartic redemptiveness, in contrast to dignity, cannot be attained through man's acquisition of control of his environment, but through man's exercise of control over himself.

Our Collective Ultimate Concern

The Torah teaches that Jacob's name was changed to Israel, meaning that he had wrestled with God (Genesis 32:29). The Sh'ma Deuteronomy 6:4) calls on each of us, as the Children of Israel, to engage with and search for the meaning of divinity in our lives. It has been taught that one's ultimate concern is effectively one's God. For the Jewish people our collective ultimate concern is to attain the attribute of compassion, associated with divinity in our tradition. This is what we intend to convey by the words of the Sh'ma.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יהוה אֶחָד

Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Eḥad

Hear Israel — aspiring toward holiness is our singular purpose.

I will love kindness and compassion with all my heart,
and with all my soul, and with all my might.
And all these words shall be in my heart,
and I will teach them with diligence to everyone
and speak of them at home and away at all times of night or day.
And I shall make signs and symbols to constantly remind myself
to be holy and love kindness and compassion.

Veracious and Sure

Genuinely established, enduring and upright, loved and cherished as faithful by our parents.

Excellent and beautiful, a complex image from us and our ancestors forever.

You have been beloved as a king, Rock of Ya'akov, Shield of deliverance!

Our understanding endures from generation to generation, our ideals ascribed to HaShem endure, like a throne firmly established, sovereign in our ideals, enduring as part of us forever.

The words ascribed to you are alive and enduring in our hearts, desirable and correct.

For our parents, us, our children, and our generations to come from the house of Israel.

You are our evolving understanding, the ideal of our ancestors, the paramount thoughts of our forefathers, our highest ideal like a king to our ancestors.

Understood as a redeemer of our parents, our rock of deliverance, our liberator when we survive the mightier -- when we find impossible rescue, from the beginning of our time, we think of your name as the embodiment that maintaining hope is always justified.

We have no God other than the image we set aside of you in perpetuity and heartfelt fidelity to the hope beyond hope we find in the universe that you always represent.

וְשָׁמְרוּ

וְשָׁמְרוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת לְדֹרֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם

V’shamru venay Yisra’el et hashabat la’asot et hashabbat l’dorotam brit olam

The Children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath and observe it throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant.
(Exodus 31:16)

Torah תּוֹרָה

וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נָטַע בְּתוֹכֵנוּ

V’ḥaye olam nata b’to’kheynu

May the study of Torah inspire us to grow in spirit, to pursue holiness in word and in deed and to find its eternally living values implanted in us.

Raḥum

A Mother’s Devotion and Mercy

My mother used to glow in her love for me. I imagine she felt a deep connection with me even before I was born, while I was still in her womb. I reveled in that attention as I grew up. All I had to do was to be myself. I hope I can provide a semblance of such self-sacrificing devotion and merciful responsiveness to those who look to me for affirmation. I want to offer such altruistic love and noncontingent empathy in the world.

Ḥanun

A Father's Acts of Compassion

My father functioned in a self-sufficient manner, generally expecting the same from me. He was busy with the needs of the community, and was often unavailable to me. Yet, if I really needed his attention, he would give it to me. If I needed help with an academic project or in some other way, he was there to be supportive.

This shaped my worldview: Others were generally busy and unavailable unless I expressed a particular need and then they might come to my aid. There are people whose worldview I contribute to shaping. May I always be cognizant of the impact of my aloofness versus my compassionate engagement on the lives of others. May I always consider the possible long-term effects of my stance toward other people and their needs.

Rav Ḥesed

Abundant in Kindness

Love is not just a feeling but must be fulfilled by action and become Chesed, an act of lovingkindness. So often what we call love is more about our own gratification regarding an exhilarating feeling and not about what we can do for the beloved. May I always strive to function with abundant lovingkindness in all my interactions so that everyone I meet will feel that they were nurtured and cared for. From out of my depths, where there resides a measure of egotism and selfishness, I call upon my higher self to

treat all others with lovingkindness. I want to be a person who functions with Ahavat Ḥesed, the love of kindness.

From the Talmud

"This is the way of the provider of ḥesed - to run after the poor."

Mesilat Yesharim

…one must endeavor to assist all people as much as possible and to ease their plight. This is what we have been taught (Pirkei Avot 6:6) "And to share the burden of his fellow."

The Essence of Judaism

Our Talmudic sages searched for a biblical passage that would express the essence of Judaism.

Some suggested the teaching of Micah: "Act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with thy God." -Micah 6:8

In the spirit of Micah's words, let us endeavor to be fair in all our interactions. Let us be gentle and compassionate. Let us be modest and unassuming, respecting the most vulnerable among us, as if in the presence of our ultimate concern.

Rabbi Akiba concluded that the essence of Judaism is expressed in these words of the Torah: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." -Leviticus 19:18

In the spirit of these words, let us respect ourselves so that the love we offer has value.

Let us regard all living beings as our neighbors.
Let us passionately pursue kindness in thought and in deed.

Let us feed our animals before we eat and water the flowers in our care,
and not merely speak of how much we love flowers.

Orḥot Tzadikim

And a person must conduct themself in their dealings with people and in money matters with even greater care for their interests than the law demands (beyond the letter of the law), and all their transactions with people should be with humility and gentleness. And the essence of modesty is that they should be humble before those who are in a lower position than they. For example, to their help and their household, and to those poor who obtain their sustenance or benefit from them—to those from whom they never need or expect any favors, and whom they do not fear.

Ahavat Ḥesed

Now if a person were to scrutinize the days of his life that have already passed, in this light, he would find most of them devoid of this holy trait…He should therefore strive to sanctify the remaining days of his life, not to allow another day to pass without Torah study and ḥesed.

With Joy

וְהִשְׁתַּדֵּל שֶׁגַּם הַנְּתִינָה תִּהְיֶה בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוּב לֵב

Try to give with joy and a good heart

Tender Hearted

As for the human being…his heart has been created so tender that it feels with the whole organic world…so that if nothing else, the very nature of his heart must teach him that he is required above everything else to feel himself the kin of all beings, and to recognize the claim of all beings to his love and beneficence.

A Special Path

> “Each person must know that he is called upon to serve on the basis of his own distinctive conception and feeling, according to the prompting of his own soul…He must concentrate on his own inner worlds which are for him full of everything and embrace everything. A person must say, ‘For my sake was the world created.” (M. Sanhedrin 4:5)… By stepping in this sure way of life, in the path of the righteous especially meant for him, he will fill himself with the strength of life and spiritual joy. And the light of God will reveal itself on him. From the meaning in the Torah that speaks especially to him, will go forth for him his strength and his light.”

Ohr Hatzafun - The Hidden Light

וְיֵשׁ מְפָרְשִׁים: מַה הָעָפָר הַכָּל דוֹרְסִים עָלֶיהָ

וְהִיא סוֹבֶלֶת אוֹתָם וּמְצַמֶּחֶת וְנוֹתֶנֶת חַיִים

לְעוֹלָם כַּךְ עַל הָאָדָם לִלְמוֹד מִמֶּנָה לִסְבוֹל

אֶת הַכָּל וְלִגְמוֹל חֶסֶד עִם הַכָּל בְּאֵין יוֹצֵא

Just as the earth is walked on by everyone and yet endures them and blossoms and provides sustenance for all, thus every person should learn to suffer everything and to provide ḥḥesed to all, without exception

Torat Chayim תּוֹרַת חַיִים

תּוֹרַת חַיִים וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וּצְדָקָה וּבְרָכָה וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִים וְשָׁלוֹם

Torat ḥayim v’ahavat ḥesed u’tzedaka u'vraḥa veraḥmim veḥayim veshalom

Torah of life, and the love of kindness, and righteousness, and blessing, and compassion, and life and peace.

May I Guard My Tongue From Evil

May I guard my tongue from evil and
my lips from speaking falsehood.
May I be quietly and patiently non-reactive
to those who speak offensively of me or to me,

being humble as dust to all.

May I open my heart to the Torah

and let my soul pursue its teachings.

קִדּוּשׁ Kiddush

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְרָצָה בָנוּ וְשַׁבַּת קָדְשׁוֹ

בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחִילָנוּ זִכָּרוֹן לְמַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית כִּי הוּא יוֹם תְּחִלָּה לְמִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ

זֵכֶר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם כִּי בָנוּ בָחַרְתָּ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדַּשְׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְשַׁבַּת קָדְשְׁךָ בְּאַהֲבָה

וּבְרָצוֹן הִנְחַלְתָּנוּ

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה מְקַדֵּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam borei peri hagafen

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha’olam asher kidshanu b’mitzvotav v’ratza vanu v’shabbat kadsho b’ahava u’veratzon hinḥilanu zikaron l’ma’aseh v’reisheet ki hu yom teḥila l’mikraei kodesh zekher l’yeztiat mitzrayim ki vanu vaḥarta v’otanu kidashta mikol ha’amim

v’shabbat kadshecha b’ahava u’v’ratzon hinḥaltanu

Barukh ata Adonai m’kadesh hashabbat

We sanctify the Sabbath to recognize the grandeur of creation and to remember the inspiration of the Exodus.

Hamotzi הַמוֹצִיא

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהוה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

Barukh attah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam hamotzi leḥem min Haaretz.

We appreciate that we can bake bread from the grain that grows from the earth.

In Appreciation for Our Food

הִנֵּה מַה טּוֹב וּמַה נָּעִים שֶׁבֶת אַחִים גַּם יָחַד

מַה שֶּׁאָכַלְנוּ יִהְיֶה לְשֹׂבַע וּמַה שֶּׁשָּׁתִינוּ יִהְיֶה לִרְפוּאָה

Hiney ma tov uma na'im shevet aḥim gam yachad

Mah she'a'khalnu yi'he'yeh l'sova,

uma she'shatinu yi'he'yeh lirfua

Behold, how good and pleasant it is to live together in unity.

May we be satisfied with what we ate and drank,

and may this meal be a source of nourishment and healing for us.

Circle of Concern

In the spirit of community, in which we share and find common purpose, we turn our minds and hearts toward one another, seeking to bring into our circle of concern all who need our love and support: those who are ill, those who are in pain, either in body or in spirit, those who are lonely, those who have been wronged.

(Here people may say the names of those who concern them)

We are part of a web of life that makes us one with all humanity, one with all the universe. We are grateful for the consciousness that we share, the consciousness that gives us the power to remember, to love, to care.

Human Solidarity

The foundation of efficacious and noble prayer is human solidarity and sympathy, or the covenantal awareness of existential togetherness, of sharing and experiencing the travail and suffering.

קַדִּישׁ יָתוֹם Mourners Kaddish

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵה רַבָּה בְּעָלְמָא דִי בְרָא כִרְעוּתֵה וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵא

בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב וְאִמְרוּ

אָמֵן יְהֵא שְׁמֵה רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלַם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאַר וְיִתְרוֹמַם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדַּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל

שְׁמֵה דְקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא לְעֵלָּא מִן כָּל בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא תֻּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנֶחֱמָתָא

דַאֲמִירָן בְּעָלְמָא וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן עוֹשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם בִּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ

וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן

Yitgadal v'yitkadash shmai raba b'olma divra khirutei v'yamlich malkhutei b'ḥayakhon u'v'yamaikhon u'v'ḥayai d'khol beit yisrael ba'agala u'vizman kariv v'imru

amen *yehai sh'mai raba m'vorakh l'olam u'l'olmai olmaya*

yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpo'ar v'yitromam v'yitnasei v'yithadar v'yita'le v'yithalal shemai d'kudsha brich hu l'aila mikol birkhata v'shirata tushb'ḥata v'neḥemata d'amiran b'olma v'imru amen y'hai shlama raba min shemaya v'ḥayim alainu v'al kol yisrael v'imru amen oseh shalom bimromav hu ya'ase shalom alainu v'al kol yisrael v'imru amen

A New Kaddish

Kaddish means sanctification.

We must each find ways to sanctify our lives

and remember how others inspired us

by sanctifying theirs.

To sanctify means to set aside significant time to consider how we

can grow in our empathy for others.

We need to learn to transcend our own pain and losses and bring a new

openness each day to how we engage with everyone else.

Soon and without procrastination we must act with compassion, patience,

lovingkindness, honesty and forgiveness, as the Torah teaches in

modeling the ultimate ideal of holiness

We must rise above ourselves and actualize

our inherent spiritual potential

and be instruments of peace while we are yet alive.

Let us affirm our goal of intrinsic salvation

while we are yet alive, while we yet have breath

and speak sincere affirmation and commitment by saying:

Amen - I truly believe and commit to what I have just spoken.

May Our Bereavement

May our bereavement for our loved ones who are no longer with us lead to an expansion of our compassion for all of life and of our passion for holiness in our relationships. May we pursue peace among the living. May we find inner peace, Shalom, in the acceptance of our loss, cherishing the memories of companionship, which shall endure in us.

שַׁבָּת שָׁלוֹם

Shabbat Shalom

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The Essence of Judaism	David Oler
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Commentary on the Sabbath Service

The introduction affirms the commitment of the congregation to pluralism with an emphasis on religious naturalism. While in a context of conceptualizing God as being beyond human comprehension, this service uses a multi-vocalism approach. This provides for the use of God language in the original Hebrew or Aramaic, particularly for primary parts of the service such as the candle lighting, *Kiddush, Shema and Kaddish*. These are especially important to many congregants for various reasons including a sense of identification with the Jewish People, respect for Jewish tradition, as well as the pluralistic understanding of God within the congregation.

The service begins with הִנֵּנִי מוּכָן וּמְזוּמָן (which will be chanted repetitively), providing for a new liturgical emphasis in stating directly the aspiration toward holiness for ourselves rather than blessings of praise for God.

We then proceed to a *matbea shel tefilah* that seeks to reflect the general outline of the traditional service, beginning with the first line of *Ma Tovu,* which is human-focused. This includes several selections about the meaning of Shabbat in our lives, such as: “In this Quiet Hour” and “On Shabbat,” both of which relate to human development. This section includes a couple of verses from the psalms in the Kabbalat Shabbat service: 96:11 refers to the natural world and its celebration of the spiritual and 97:11 is focused on the primary theme of seeking to be righteous and just. This small piece of Kabbalat Shabbat concludes with

L'cha Dodi. The Shabbat candle lighting uses the traditional *berakhah.* This is the first of several such uses of the traditional *nusaḥ* with reference to God as some of the members are familiar with these *tefilot* and people can think of what they consider God-references to mean. The accompanying English is not a translation but a reference to our search for holiness rather than to our achieving holiness through God's commandments. Without feeling *metzuveh* we can still use the ritual to seek *kedushah*. We then sing *Shalom Aleikhem*, with the English summary referring to messengers rather than angels, which is supported by Maimonides regarding the reference to *malakhim* in the story of Jacob's ladder. Some congregants may also hear this as their being welcomed as messengers of peace.

The next section grapples with our ideological search, with pieces such as "What Do We Ask of God" (written by a congregant), "The Tremendous Mystery" (which culminates in our responsibility to live most fully), and "Being Holy" (which begins with the Kotzker Rebbe's dramatic question "Where is God?" and then proceeds to discuss *lalekhet bid'rakhav*, walking in God's ways, with a focus on the primary themes of Exodus 34:6-7.

The selection "Shabbat and Wholeness" emphasizes the aspiration toward *sheleimut* with Shabbat serving as a model for such growth relative to *ḥol*. The intention is to point out the potential for inspiration from the teachings and practices of Jewish tradition.

In keeping with the theme of spiritual transformation, Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik's few words contrasting man's control of the environment with control over himself, seems apropos regarding Shabbat's lesson that self- control is how dignity is achieved, not through control of the environment, which Shabbat seeks to have us let go.

"Our Collective Ultimate Concern," based on the concept from Paul Tillich, suggests here that for our People *midat haraḥamim*, compassion, is the ultimate concern. The intention is to provide this alternative meaning for the use of the Tetragrammaton in the ensuing Hebrew declaration of the *Shema*.

The new English reformulative "translation" of the *Shema* again uses Tillich's notion of Ultimate Concern, expressing it as aspiring toward holiness, which is the purpose of this liturgy and the approach to Jewish religious life it represents. *V'ahavta et Adonai* is replaced with "I will love kindness," and utilizes the themes and ideas of the original in a broadened fashion to implement holiness from the new *Shema* and the love of kindness from the new *V'ahavta.*

"Veracious and Sure" (written by a congregant) appears immediately following the "reading of th *Shema*," just as does *Emet v'emunah* following the traditional *Shema* in the *shaḥarit* service. As noted above, Kaufmann Kohler understood this to be "the earliest form of the confession of faith." The author here, like

Kohler, recognizes the importance of this text, but clarifies his own view that for himself in the present what is important is not the reality of actual faith but appreciation for the image of God and what it represents in terms of “our ideals.”

The opening verse of *V’shamru* from Exodus 31:16, before the text becomes theistic, is sung here as it is sung traditionally after the *Keriat Shema* and its blessings and before the *Amidah.*

In place of the *Amidah,* with its expressions of praise, thanksgiving and requests expressed to God, there is a section of resources for study. In the spirit of *talmud torah keneged kulam,* this section includes various writings, primarily from *Mussar*, but from elsewhere as well, that teach values and *ḥesed* in particular. As discussed above, study is an important established part of Jewish liturgy. The goal is to encourage people to enact in their daily lives the values presented. Different pieces of this section can be chosen to be used on varying occasions.

This study section of the service is demarcated at the outset by *v’ḥayai olam natah b’tokheinu,* which is here translated interpretively as “eternally living values implanted in us,” as opposed to God being the subject. It is taken from *birkhot hatorah* and from *U’va l’tzion*. The study section concludes with *Torat ḥayim v’ahavat ḥesed,* which is taken from the prayer for peace at the conclusion of the *Amidah* in the morning and expresses appreciation for the values that are the focus of the learning segment and of the service in general.

At the conclusion of each *Amidah*, following the prayer for peace, there is a supplementary paragraph of individual prayer. It appears next here, amended from a theistic prayer to a personal meditation, “May I Guard My Tongue From Evil.”

As is customary, the *Kiddush* is then recited, summarized and emended in English as our sanctifying the Sabbath.

Hamotzi is next, as a *Shabbat* meal most usually ensues, and the “translation” expresses appreciation that we can bake bread.

“Appreciation for Our Food” expresses thankfulness for community and for food and the hope that it be nourishing.

In place of the *Mishebarakh* requesting divine intercession to heal the sick is “Circle of Concern,” which brings to mind those who are suffering in various ways about whom those present are concerned.

The quote from *The Lonely Man of Faith* emphasizing that “efficacious and noble prayer is human solidarity and sympathy” fits in well between “Circle of Concern” and *Kaddish Yatom,* as it is relevant to both.

Following the traditional *Kaddish Yatom* is “A New Kaddish,” which, rather than praising God, as the traditional *Kaddish* does extensively, focuses on our sanctifying our lives by working toward self-transcendence and empathy for others. It draws on aspiring to the primary attributes in Exodus 34:6-7. It refers to intrinsic salvation as our goal. “May Our Bereavement” encourages us to find empathy for others from experiencing the pain of our loss of loved ones and encourages us to seek holiness and peace, echoing the *Kaddish* in a religious naturalist manner. Reference is made to our deceased loved ones and our memories of them, which does not appear in the traditional Kaddish.

We conclude with singing *Shabbat Shalom*, a thoughtful wish to others rather than with praise for God such as *Adon Olam*.

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