R. Jeffrey Saks jeffreysaks@gmail.com Monday 14:40

RABBI SOLOVEITCHIK'S LONELY MEN, HALAKHIC MEN (AND WOMEN)



Genesis 1

27. And God [Elokim] created man in His image; in the image of God [Elokim] He created him; male and female He created them. 28. And God [Elokim] blessed them, and God [Elokim] said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and rule over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the sky and over all the beasts that tread upon the earth.

בראשית פרק א

(כז) וַיִּבְרָא <u>אֱלֹקִים</u> אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצֵלְמוֹ <u>בְּצֶלֶם</u> <u>אֱלֹקִים</u> בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכַרַ וּיַּקַבָּ<u>ה בַּרָא אֹתָם</u>: (כח) וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹקִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם <u>אֱלֹקִים</u> פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְבַבָּשָׁהַ וּרְדוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמֵיִם וּבְכָל חַיָּה הָרמֶשֶׁת עַל הָאָרֵץ:

Genesis 2

7. And the Lord God [Ado·nai Elokim] formed man of dust from the ground, and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul. 8. And the Lord God [Ado·nai Elokim] planted a garden in Eden from the east, and He placed there the man whom He had formed... 15. Now the Lord God [Ado·nai Elokim] took the man, and He placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it ... 18. And the Lord God [Ado·nai Elokim] said, It is not good that man is alone; I shall make him a helpmate opposite him.

בראשית פרק ב

(ז) וַיִּיצֶר הִי אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם <u>עפָר מְן</u>
<u>הָאִדְמָה</u> וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם
לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה: (ח) וַיִּשַּע הי אֱלֹקִים גַּן בְּעֵדֶן מִקֶּדֶם
וַיְּשֶׁם שָׁם אֶת הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצֶר: ... (טו) וַיִּקְּח הי אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיַּנְּחֵחוּ בְּגַן עֵדֶן לְעָבְדָהִּ
וֹיִּלְשְׁמְרָהִּ: ... (יח) וַיִּאֹמֶר הִי אֱלֹקִים לֹאַ טוֹב הַיִּנִּתְת הַאָּדָם לְבַבּוֹ אָעֻשַּׁה לוֹ עַזִר בְּנַגְדֵּוֹ:

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, The Lonely Man of Faith (Maggid Books, 2012 [1965]), 58

The Halakhah believes that there is only one world – not divisible into secular and hallowed sectors – which can either plunge into ugliness and hatefulness, or be roused to meaningful, redeeming activity, gathering up all latent powers into a state of holiness. Accordingly, the task of covenantal man is to be engaged not in dialectical surging forward and retreating, but in uniting the two communities into one community where man is both the creative, free agent, and the obedient servant of God. Notwithstanding the huge disparity between these two communities, which expresses itself in the typological oppositions and conflicts described previously, the Halakhah sees in the ethico-moral norm a uniting force. The norm which originates in the covenantal community addresses itself almost exclusively to the majestic community where its realization takes place. To use a metaphor, I would say that the norm in the opinion of the Halakhah is the tentacle by which the covenant, like the ivy, attaches itself to and spreads over the world of majesty.

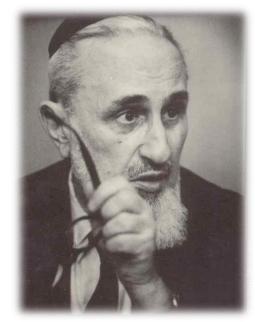
Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man (JPS, 1983 [1944]), 59-61

The Halakhah wishes to objectify religiosity not only through introducing the external act and the psychophysical deed into the world of religion but also through the structuring and ordering of the inner correlative in the realm of man's spirit. The Halakhah sets down statutes and erects markers that serve as a dam against the surging, subjective current coursing through the universal *homo religious*, which from time to time, in its raging turbulence sweeps away his entire being to obscure and inchoate realms. [...]

Once my father was standing on the synagogue platform on Rosh Ha-Shanah, ready and prepared to guide the order of the sounding of the *shofar*. The *shofar*-sounder, a god-fearing Habad Hasid who was very knowledgeable in the mystical doctrine of the "Alter Rebbe," R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady, began to weep. My father turned to him and said: "Do you weep when you take the *lulav*? Why then do you weep when you sound the *shofar*? Are not both commandments of God?" The mystic understands the symbolic significance of the sounding of the *shofar*—the concept of a plain note—whereby man attempts to pierce through lawful existence and reach the throne of glory of the *Atik Yomin*, the Ancient One, the *Deus Absconditus*. The sounding of the shofar, according to the outlook of R. Shneur Zalman, expresses the powerful aspiration of *homo religiosus* to extricate himself from the straits of contraction—the divine realm of strength—and enter into the wide spaces of expansion [. . .]. Man's weeping on Rosh Ha-Shanah, according to this doctrine, is the weeping of the soul that longs for its origin, for the rock from whence it was hewn, that yearns to cleave to its beloved not in hiding, but openly. The sounding of the shofar protests against reality and denies the universe itself. [. . .]

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Blessings and Thanksgiving (Maggid Books, 2019 [1957]), 61-63

The first step in man's great endeavor to redeem himself from brute existence and to raise himself to an intelligent, individualistic, personalistic existence, to not be one within nature, to not be included and swallowed by nature but to play the role of the outsider who observes and watches and understands nature, and who wants to gain control over nature, the first step in knowledge, in the cognitive process of man, the first beginning is classification, descriptive understanding. Man is not an object anymore; he is a subject who studies the world of objects. This drive is responsible for the great strides man has made in harnessing various forces in nature, in mastering his environment. This mastery over nature inspires him with self-confidence and gives him assurance that his status is unique in the universe. This rise above blind obedience and total integration into nature is corroborated by the technological achievement of man; this is the drive, the quest for truth. The quest of truth is out to redeem man from his bondage, from his unity with nature, and places him outside of the universe in the role of the knower, of the viewer, of the observer.



Rabbi Soloveitchik זצ"ל (1903-1993)

Now comes the great quest for *hesed*, for sharing his ontic experience with others, the powerful longing for love. This is due to the fear of loneliness which overcomes man as a direct result of man's triumph over the immediate, instinctive, brute existence and his rise to independence and personality. [...]

This longing for giving love, for uniting destinies, for sympathetic understanding, is the basis of all social institutions. Marriage is typical of that metaphysical will in man. "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Judaism has never considered the marriage institution as a mere result of the physiological-sexual drive but of man's desire to live a life of love, to be in a community, to address oneself to a thou. Only then is the individual redeemed from his loneliness and the I suddenly finds common interests with a strange thou of whose existence he was hardly aware a while ago. This is the metaphysical drive for *hesed*—to share one's existence with others.

However, this craving for love is not confined to human companionship. It reaches a much higher level of fellowship, namely, that of ideas-ideals and values. In order to save oneself from the curse of loneliness, the I who was dedicated to himself, to his selfish interests, must transcend his hemmed-in selfhood and experience something else which lies outside of his individual realm—and this mysterious something is to be found in the world of ideas which form values. [. . .]

While the world of theoretical ideas sprang from man who rebels against the absolute dominion of nature over him, the order of ideals flows from man's flight from himself to others, to an existence much broader than his own.

The intellectual engagement we term *limmud Torah*; the total involvement—*esek bedivrei Torah*. While the first act is representative of man's quest for knowledge and self-interpretation, the second is typical of his yearning for community existence which sees the other person or the ideal not from a pragmatic but from a metaphysical viewpoint. I regard the other not as useful to my egotistic petty utilitarian self but as something essential to my very existence.

Halakhically, both aspects constitute one whole which is called Talmud Torah.

For more on Rabbi Soloveitchik's life and thought see the live and interactive (or archived) courses at

