YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RAV SOLOVEITCHIK

by Rav Ronnie Ziegler

LECTURE #16: "The Lonely Man of Faith" (Continuation)

Part 2 - Defining the Two Adams

Once Rav Soloveitchik finishes delineating the problem he wishes to address (see lecture #15), he sets up the framework from which to determine the answer. For the man of faith, he notes, self-knowledge means "to understand one's place and role within the scheme of events and things willed and approved by God" (p.8). Therefore, he turns to an examination of the Bible's account of the creation of Adam and Eve, which should reveal to us the essence and purpose of humanity.

BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The biblical narrative, as is well-known, contains two versions of the story of man's creation. Biblical criticism attributes this to the existence of two different documents which were subsequently interwoven in the biblical text. Chazal and the Rishonim were aware of these same discrepancies (see For Further Reference, #1), but offered different solutions based on their vastly differing assumptions. Rav Soloveitchik offers a strikingly original solution which flows naturally from his general philosophic approach.

Since Jewish thought often takes the form of exegesis of canonical texts (whether biblical or rabbinic), it is often the case, as Rav Jonathan Sacks notes (reference #2), that new forms of Jewish philosophy entail new ways of reading Jewish texts. In Rav Soloveitchik's case, this means extending the Brisker method of "chakira" from halakha to Tanakh and aggada. In keeping with this method, he highlights the differences between Bereishit chapter 1 and chapter 2, offering a unique interpretation of their significance.

"[T]he answer [to the discrepancies] lies not in an alleged dual tradition but in dual man, not in an imaginary contradiction between two versions but in a real contradiction in the nature of man. The two accounts deal with two Adams, two men, two fathers of mankind, two types, two representatives of humanity, and it is no wonder that they are not identical."

Prior to examining the two Adams, a word about the Rav's methodology is in order. (Permit me to quote here from lecture #3.) Much of Rav Soloveitchik's thought can be described as "philosophic anthropology" - the description of different ideal types of personalities. They are "ideal" in the sense of being pure abstract types, not in the sense of being the best types. In fact, the Rav repeatedly emphasizes that these pure types do not exist in reality (LMF, p.72; Halakhic Man, footnote 1). We can compare them to certain chemical elements or subatomic particles which can be isolated only under laboratory conditions, but cannot be seen by themselves in nature.

Thus, due to human complexity, any specific real person will contain within him a conglomeration of various types. However, the point of separating an individual into his component parts is to demonstrate the internal coherence of each position, and thereby to understand better the nature of the complex hybrid produced by the coexistence of the various types. For example, every person is expected to embody the positions of both Adam I and Adam II, but in order to negotiate this dialectic successfully, he must understand each component by itself.

TWO ACCOUNTS

With apologies to those who have read "The Lonely Man of Faith," I would now like to present selections from the two biblical accounts, and then the four major discrepancies which Rav Soloveitchik lists. [Note that there are details of the stories which he does not deal with here, but which he addresses elsewhere - see reference #3.]

I. Bereishit 1:27-28

"So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him, male and female created He them. And God blessed them and God said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the heaven, and over all the beasts which crawl on the earth."

II. Bereishit 2:7-8, 2:15

"And the eternal God formed the man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul. And the eternal God planted a garden eastward in Eden ... And the eternal God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to serve it and to keep it."

The discrepancies:

1. Regarding Adam I, the Torah states that he was created "in the image of God" but mentions nothing about the creation of his body, while regarding Adam II, the Torah says that he was fashioned from dust and then God breathed life into him.

2. Adam I is told to "Fill the earth and subdue it," while Adam II is charged to cultivate the garden.

3. In the first account, male and female are created concurrently, while in the second account, Adam is created alone and Eve appears later.

4. The first account refers to God only by the name "E-lokim," while the second account also uses the Tetragrammaton (the Shem Ha-meforash, the four-letter sacred name).

EXPLAINING THE DISCREPANCIES

The Rav's explanations of these discrepancies are spread throughout chapters 1-6 of "The Lonely Man of Faith." I will present them here briefly, and will then proceed to examine these chapters in more detail.

1. Chapters 1-2: Adam I's creation "in the image of God" refers to his capacity and desire to imitate God by becoming a creator, particularly in response to God's mandate to him to "subdue the earth." This is expressed by man's practical intellect, i.e. his scientific ability to comprehend the forces of nature and his technological ability to bend them to his will. Adam II, on the other hand, does not have such a grandiose self-image; he is humble, realizing that he was created from the dust of the earth. He allows himself to be overpowered and defeated by God. While Adam I maintains some distance from God, relating merely to the divine endowment of creativity, Adam II has a "genuine living experience" of God and is preoccupied with Him, as evidenced by the metaphor of God breathing life into his nostrils.

2. Chapters 3 and 4.A: Told to subdue the earth, Adam I adopts an active, dignified, and majestic posture. He is a conqueror in both intellectual and practical terms. Intellectually, he is able to take the bewildering array of natural phenomena and fashion scientific laws to explain their functioning. This is a conquest of the human mind over nature, or of order over chaos. Practically, he overcomes nature's threats to his existence by draining swamps and discovering vaccines; he harnesses the forces of nature to serve his own ends by splitting the atom and extracting fuel from the earth; and he fashions devices such as the automobile, airplane and spaceship to extend his hegemony. Adam II, on the other hand, is more passive and receptive. His goal is not to exercise mastery but to serve - God places him in the garden "to cultivate it and to keep it."

3. Chapters 3 and 4.B: Adam I is a social creature; male and female are created together. His quest for dignity can be realized only within a community, since dignity entails impressing others by means of one's accomplishments. Furthermore, the quest for dignity requires the cooperation of others, since one person alone cannot master a hostile environment. Adam II, however, is created in solitude; loneliness is inherent to his very being. In order to redeem himself from this situation which God deems to be "not good" - meaning to forge an existential community which will relieve him of his loneliness - he is required to sacrifice part of himself.

4. Chapter 6: "E-lokim" denotes God as the source of cosmic dynamics, while the Tetragrammaton indicates personal, intimate communion between God and man. Adam I is satisfied by an impersonal encounter with the former (the cosmic experience), while Adam II craves the latter (the covenantal experience).

ADAM I - THE QUEST FOR DIGNITY

Adam I and Adam II seem to start at the same point: both are motivated by their encounter with the cosmos, both search for God, and both try to realize their full human potential. But because of their different needs, attitudes and goals, they approach these tasks in very different manners, so that they end up in very different positions.

Adam I sees his main objective, the cultivation of his humanity, in the attainment of dignity. "[B]y setting himself up as a dignified majestic being capable of ruling his environment," he distinguishes himself from and raises himself above the rest of nature.

"Dignity is a social and behavioral category, expressing not an intrinsic existential quality, but a technique of living, a way of impressing society ... Hence, dignity is measured not by the inner worth of the in-depth-personality, but by the accomplishments of the surface-personality." (pp.25-26)

Why is the conquest of nature dignified? Why does majesty make one more fully "man?"

"The brute's existence is an undignified one because it is a helpless one... Man of old who could not fight disease and succumbed in multitudes to yellow fever or any other plague with degrading helplessness could not lay claim to dignity. Only the man who builds hospitals, discovers therapeutic techniques and saves lives is blessed with dignity." (pp.16-17)

Hence, Adam I is completely utilitarian in motivation, and boldly aggressive in approach. When he confronts the cosmos, he asks only "how," not "why" - he wants to know how the cosmos functions so that he can master it. "The most characteristic representative of Adam the first is the mathematical scientist" (p.18), who conceptualizes natural phenomena into an abstract system of his own making. [It is interesting to note that, in other works, the Rav presents the mathematical scientist as the model for Halakhic Man!] He is concerned not only with the functionality of his creation, but also with its order, balance, pleasantness and beauty. This extends to his structuring of society: "[H]e legislates for himself norms and laws because a dignified existence is an orderly existence" (pp. 18-19).

All this should sound familiar: it echoes the approach of majestic man in "Majesty and Humility." He espouses an ethic of victory, seeking to master nature and to legislate orderly norms. And, as in "Majesty and Humility," the Rav here emphasizes that,

"Even this longing for vastness, no matter how adventurous and fantastic, is legitimate. Man reaching for the distant stars is acting in harmony with his nature which was created, willed, and directed by his Maker." (pp.19-20)

However, as in the former essay, the Rav will also inform us here that this approach must be balanced by that of humble, covenantal man.

ADAM II - THE SEARCH FOR REDEMPTION

Adam II also seeks to fully realize his humanity, but he interprets this in terms of attaining redemption. The Rav draws a series of contrasts between dignity and redemption. While dignity is a social quality of the surface personality, redemption is an existential state of the inner personality. Redemption is attained by control over oneself, dignity by control over one's surroundings; redemption expresses itself in surrender to God, dignity in defiance of nature; redemption is characterized by retreat, dignity by advance. The contrast between advance and retreat should clue us in to the fact that the dialectical oscillation between these two modes of living is a cathartic process (see lectures #6, #7, etc.).

The redemptive surrender to God gives Adam II a sense of "axiological security:"

"The individual intuits his existence as something worthwhile, legitimate and adequate, anchored in something stable and unchangeable." (p.35)

Ultimately, this experience serves as a basis for him to enter into an intimate relationship with God.

When confronting the cosmos, Adam II does not wish to master it or mathematize it, but rather to encounter it directly in all of its pristine splendor. This is the difference between what the Rav refers to as the quantitative and qualitative approaches to reality (see reference #4).

"[Adam II] studies [the universe] with the naivete, awe and admiration of the child who seeks the unusual and wonderful in every ordinary thing and event... He looks for the image of God not in the mathematical formula or the natural relational law but in every beam of light, in every bud and blossom, in the morning breeze and the stillness of a starlit evening." (p.23)

The cosmic encounter propels Adam II to ask WHY the world exists (not HOW does it function), and to seek out God, whose presence he senses behind all of creation. On the one hand, the natural religious response to this awe-inspiring encounter is to recite a benediction, praising and acknowledging God as the source of cosmic dynamics (p.51, footnote 1). On the other hand, Adam II recognizes that encountering God in nature is insufficient to attain redemption. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, God is both hidden and revealed when one searches for Him in nature. Secondly, the message of the Heavens is impersonal.

"In short, the cosmic experience is antithetic and tantalizing. It exhausts itself in the awesome dichotomy of God's involvement in the drama of creation, and His exaltedness above and remoteness from this very drama. This dichotomy cancels the intimacy and immediacy from one's relationship with God and renders the personal approach to God complicated and difficult... Therefore, the man of faith, in order to redeem himself from his loneliness and misery, must meet God at a personal covenantal level, where he can be near Him and feel free in His presence." (pp.49-50)

It is the covenant, not the cosmic experience of God, which allows Adam II to attain redemption. (See Reference #5.)

The differences between Adam I and Adam II carry over to the type of community that each one forms. We will turn our attention to these two communities in the next lecture.

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE:

1. TWO ACCOUNTS: The Rav (p.10) lists several places where Chazal and the Rishonim take account of the discrepancies between Bereishit chapters 1 and 2 - Berakhot (61a), Ketubot (8a), Ramban (Bereishit 2:7), and Kuzari (IV).

2. JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AS EXEGESIS: Rav Jonathan Sacks, Tradition in an Untraditional Age (London, 1990), p.40. See also the sources cited in his footnote.

3. OTHER ESSAYS WHERE THE RAV EXAMINES THE CREATION STORY: "Confrontation," "The Community," "Adam and Eve" (in Shiurei Harav). There is also much material still in manuscript dealing with paradisical man. As I noted in lecture #3, the Rav's habit was to examine a text afresh each time he encountered it, learning something new from it each time. This is well-known regarding his Talmud scholarship, and is no less true of his study of Tanakh.

4. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE APPROACHES TO REALITY: This distinction appears in many of the Rav's writings, and is especially important in Halakhic Man and "Ma Dodekh Mi-dod." We discussed this distinction briefly in lecture #14, in connection with the catharsis of the intellect.

5.A. COSMIC EXPERIENCE OF GOD: This is a major theme in the opening chapters of "U-vikkashtem Mi-sham" (where it is referred to as the "Bereishit experience" or the "natural ontological consciousness"). See especially Chapter 3 of UVM, pp.134-141, which significantly expands the account in Chapter 6 of "The Lonely Man of Faith" of man's search for God in the cosmos and its ultimate failure.

5.B. EXPERIENCE VS. PROOF: In the fascinating and highly significant footnote at the end of chapter 6 of LMF (pp.51-52), the Rav takes pain to distinguish between APPREHENDING God IN nature (the cosmic experience) and COMPREHENDING God THROUGH nature (the cosmological proof). The former is an experience, while the latter is an intellectual performance (whose validity has been undermined by Hume and Kant). In a single stroke, the Rav does away with all medieval proofs for the existence of God, but then reinstates them when conceived as experiences and not as proofs. This has major ramifications, and is a good example of his translation of Maimonidean philosophy into more modern (generally existential) terms. In this manner, he saves many Maimonidean doctrines, which are dependent on a defunct philosophical framework, from irrelevance. He makes the same point in "U-vikkashtem Mi-sham" (pp. 127-132), where we will examine it at greater length.