


WORSHIP OF THE HEART

ESSAYS ON JEWISH PRAYER

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 ***“When I Speak
about the
Philosophy
of Prayer”***

Before we turn our thoughts to the analytical process of comprehension, I want to make the following reservation. John Henry Newman, at the beginning of chapter 10 of his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, says that in the provinces of religious inquiry, egotism is true modesty. One can express only his own feelings. He cannot and should not lay down universal postulates and general rules. He may hope that by formulating his own experiences in clear language, others may benefit from this self-revelation and enrich their own religious life. However the latter, being the most subjective and intimate of all modes of existence, is many a time inseparable from the individual personality—its character, temper, moods, and susceptibilities. Any attempt at standardization or generalization is based upon the assumption that what satisfies me is likely to please others as well. Yet, at times, my feelings and convictions are exclusively my own and I have no way to pass them on to others.

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Therefore, when I speak about the philosophy of prayer or *Shema*, I do not claim universal validity for my conclusions. I am not lecturing on philosophy of prayer as such, but on prayer as understood, experienced and enjoyed by an individual. I acquaint you with my own personal experience. Whether, taking into consideration the differences between minds and the peculiarities of the individual, my experience can be detached from my idiosyncrasies and transferred to others, I do not know.

The pride and audacity which usually mark the philosophical pronouncements in the field of Jewish religion by secular scholars who have never had the opportunity to live through great religious experiences must be done away with. I am lecturing on prayer as understood, experienced and enjoyed by an individual. Of course, I try to corroborate my own convictions and feelings by coordinating them with the great disciplines of Halakhah and Aggadah. However, to say that my feeling of certitude carries universal significance would be sheer ignorance. Hence, in all humility I warn you not to ascribe to my remarks more veracity than an individual may claim for his subjective experiences.