

'for the sake of the (Divine) Name' primarily refers to [studying] for the sake of the love of the Torah—i.e., that one should exert oneself to determine the root principle [of the law]. But a person may think that *lishmah* means [for the sake of] cleaving [to God], and, therefore, according to this opinion it would be preferable for one to occupy oneself with songs and hymns and in particular with the Psalms of [David,] the sweet singer of Israel, that arouse in one love for God and a sense of His closeness, and this is sufficient for him and in this manner he will attain a pleasant life. But such is not the case. For the Midrash [on Psalms 1:8] states that King David requested that God should account one who would recite the Psalms as being on the same level as one who studies the laws of leprosy and tents. This clearly implies that the study of these laws is of more value than the recitation of Psalms. And there is no indication [in the Midrash] that God granted him his request. This is so because the primary purpose of study is not to study simply for the sake of cleaving to God, but to comprehend, through the Torah, the commandments and laws, and to know each and every matter clearly, both its general principles and its particulars. . . . Thus one should study these matters—i.e., these laws—for the sake of the matters themselves . . .—so that one will comprehend these matters and deepen one's understanding and analytic skill and not study simply for the sake of cleaving [to God], as many have erroneously thought. Rather, one must delve profoundly and inquire into the very concrete materiality of these laws. For example, when one studies civil law, one must at times closely analyze the issue of *miggo* [i.e., the principle that a party's plea is to be credited if a more convenient or a more advantageous plea is available to him]. Now *miggo* raises the question of [the psychology of] liars—i.e., we ask ourselves if a particular party were a liar, what type of plea might he put forward. . . . Thus even though at the time of study a person does not have the fear of God in mind, nevertheless the study itself is for the sake

of the unification of the Holy One, blessed be He. Therefore, when a person exerts himself to understand a halakhic matter clearly, then it is certain that the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence, rests upon him at the very moment he is studying. As the sages have stated: 'God only has in His world the four cubits of the Halakhah.'<sup>100</sup>

The above is the declaration of R. Hayyim Volozhin, the outstanding student of the Gaon of Vilna and the founder of the Yeshivah of Volozhin; and it would appear to me that it needs no comment.

## XV

**H**ALAKHIC man does not quiver before any man; he does not seek out compliments, nor does he require public approval. If he sees that there are fewer and fewer men of distinguished spiritual rank about, then he wraps himself in his mantle and hies away to the four cubits of Halakhah. He knows that the truth is a lamp unto his feet and the Halakhah a light unto his path. His whole being loathes idlers, wastrels, and loafers. Piety that is not based upon knowledge of the Torah is of no consequence in his view. There can be no fear of God without knowledge and no service of God without the cognition of halakhic truth. "A crude man fears not sin, nor is a man ignorant of Torah pious" [Avot 2:5]. The old saying of Socrates, that virtue is knowledge, is strikingly similar to the stance of halakhic man.

And this halakhic truth is one complete and ultimate truth, which halakhic man is not ready to sacrifice even for the sake of some exalted goal. He does not understand the ins and outs of politics, nor is he cunning (I am not speaking of wisdom) in worldly matters. He will not overlook a single jot or tittle of the Halakhah, even to realize some lofty desire. We have here manifested not the religious zeal of the universal *homo religiosus*

but a type of zeal specific to the halakhist—the zeal for the truth, granted him by the Almighty. Thus, halakhic man will not be overly lenient; but, at the same time, he will not be overly strict. The truth will call to account those who dishonor it, be they extreme rigorists or extreme permissivists.

Once R. Hayyim of Brisk was attending a conference of outstanding Torah scholars in St. Petersburg. The item on the agenda was the question of uncircumcised infants—should their names be entered in the official register of the Jewish community. All of the rabbis declared: "It is certainly forbidden to register them, for they are not circumcised." (Through this tactic they hoped to compel the assimilationists to circumcise their sons.) R. Hayyim arose and said: "My masters, please show me the halakhah which states that one who is not circumcised is not a member of the Jewish people. I am aware that a person who is not circumcised may not partake of the sacrifices or the heave offering, but I am unaware that he is devoid of the holiness belonging to the Jewish people. To be sure, if he comes of age and does not circumcise himself he is liable to excision.<sup>101</sup> However, he who eats blood and he who violates the Sabbath are also liable to excision. Why then do you treat the uncircumcised infant so stringently and the Sabbath violator so leniently? On the contrary, this infant has not as yet sinned at all, except that his father has not fulfilled his obligation." From a political and practical perspective, and as an emergency measure, no doubt the majority was correct. However, on the basis of the pure Halakhah, R. Hayyim was correct. And he would not sacrifice this halakhic truth even for the sake of realizing the noblest of ideas.

Halakhic man implements the Torah without any compromises or concessions, for precisely such implementation, such actualization is his ultimate desire, his fondest dream. When a person actualizes the ideal Halakhah in the very midst of the real world, he approaches the level of that godly man, the prophet—the creator of worlds. Therefore, the ideals of

righteousness, which the Torah first introduced into the world, are implemented, are actualized and concretized, by halakchists in all their purity and resplendent brilliance. Halakhic man cannot be cowed by anyone. He knows no fear of flesh and blood. For is he not a creator of worlds, a partner of the Almighty in the act of creation? And precisely because he is free from fear of flesh and blood, he neither betrays his own mission nor profanes his holy task. He takes up his stand in the midst of the concrete world, his feet planted firmly on the ground of reality, and he looks about and sees, listens and hears, and publicly protests against the oppression of the helpless, the defrauding of the poor, the plight of the orphan. The rich are deemed as naught in his view. He is the father of orphans, the judge of widows. My uncle, R. Meir Berlin [Bar-Ilan], told me that once R. Hayyim of Brisk was asked what the function of a rabbi is. R. Hayyim replied: "To redress the grievances of those who are abandoned and alone, to protect the dignity of the poor, and to save the oppressed from the hands of his oppressor." Neither ritual decisions nor political leadership constitutes the main task of halakhic man. Far from it. The actualization of the ideals of justice and righteousness is the pillar of fire which halakhic man follows, when he, as a rabbi and teacher in Israel, serves his community. More, through the implementation of the principles of righteousness, man fulfills the task of creation imposed upon him: the perfection of the world under the dominion of Halakhah and the renewal of the face of creation. No religious cult is of any worth if the laws and principles of righteousness are violated and trampled upon by the foot of pride. "A precept that is fulfilled through a transgression," attaining religious ends through unjust means, is of absolutely no value. "For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery with a burnt offering" (Isa. 61:8). Iniquity prevents man's prayer from being accepted on high. The anguish of the poor, the despair of the helpless and humiliated outweigh many many commandments. "He who shames his fellow man in

public has no share in the world to come" [Avot 3:15; Bava Metzia 59a]. If a person sinned against his fellow man, repentance and the Day of Atonement cannot grant him atonement until he has appeased his fellow [Yoma 8:5; Maimonides, *Laws of Repentance* 7:9].

That dualism, so prevalent in other religions, which distinguishes between the man who stands before the Lord in an atmosphere suffused with heavenly solemnity and the man driving a hard bargain with his fellow in the marketplace, is totally foreign to the Halakhah. We have already emphasized earlier that Judaism does not direct its glance upward but downward. The Halakhah does not aspire to a heavenly transcendence, nor does it seek to soar upon the wings of some abstract, mysterious spirituality. It fixes its gaze upon concrete, empirical reality and does not allow its attention to be diverted from it. Halakhic man does not compartmentalize reality—this is the domain of eternal life and this the domain of temporal life. On the contrary, he brings down eternity into the midst of time. He does not enter into a hidden, pure, transcendent realm even in his intimate prayer-colloquy with his Creator. Even when halakhic man enters the synagogue or study house, he does not leave his this-worldly life behind. His prayer is replete with requests regarding bodily needs: healing, prosperity, political freedom, a good and peaceful life, and such. The strange, disturbing dualism that blossoms forth in other religions is grounded in the fragmentation of life into many different sectors. The universal *homo religiosus* not infrequently sets up markers and draws sweeping demarcation lines—till here is the divine-heavenly-transcendental realm and from this point on the realm of earthly, bodily life. *Homo religiosus*, praying in his house of worship, prostrated on the cold stone floor, repeating over and over the old litany *non mea voluntas sed tua fiat*—not my will be done, only Thine—is not at that moment a this-worldly man, possessor of riches and chattels, estates and factories, who drives his impoverished workers

ruthlessly, and whose hands are often stained with the blood of the outcast and the ill-gotten gain wrung from the hands of the unfortunate. For him the world of prayer and the world of reality have nothing to do with each other. He enters his sanctuary humble and contrite, in a mood of submission and humility. In this religious atmosphere filled with the thick clouds of incense and the echoes of the hymns of angels and seraphim, he divests himself of his arrogance, of his rigid, unbending character, and becomes the very model of meekness, self-effacing and bowed down. And he leaves the same way he entered, humble and submissive [cf. Sanhedrin 88b]. However, no sooner does he step outside into the noisy, clamorous street than he reverts back to his original persona, to his previous haughty and concealed self-centeredness. The heavenly kingdom does not come into the slightest contact with the earthly kingdom. This mode of behavior cannot even be considered a form of flattery or religious obsequiousness. It is rather a manifestation of a strange, obscure, psychic dualism whose nature cannot be determined. The man in the sanctuary and the man in the marketplace are two separate and distinct personalities who have absolutely nothing in common with one another. How many noblemen bowed down before the cross in a spirit of abject submission and self-denial, confessed their sins with scalding tears and bitter cries and in the very same breath, as soon as they left the dim precincts of the cathedral, ordered that innocent people be cruelly slain. We have here a manifestation of a deep fissure in one's psychic identity. The Halakhah, however, rejects such a personality split, such a spiritual schizophrenia. It does not differentiate between the man who stands in his house of worship, engaged in ritual activities, and the mortal who must wage the arduous battle of life. The Halakhah declares that man stands before God not only in the synagogue but also in the public domain, in his house, while on a journey, while lying down and rising up. "And thou shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house,

and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:7).

The primary difference between halakhic man and *homo religiosus* is that while the latter prefers the spirit to the body, the soul to its mortal frame, as the main actor in the religious drama, the former, as has been stated above, wishes to sanctify the physical-biological concrete man as the hero and protagonist of religious life. Therefore, the whole notion of ritual assumes a special form in Judaism. The standard notion of ritual prevalent among religious men—i.e., ritual as a nonrational religious act whose whole purpose is to lift man up from concrete reality to celestial realms—is totally foreign to Judaism. According to the outlook of Halakhah, the service of God (with the exception of the study of the Torah) can be carried out only through the implementation, the actualization of its principles in the real world. The ideal of righteousness is the guiding light of this world-view. Halakhic man's most fervent desire is the perfection of the world under the dominion of righteousness and loving-kindness—the realization of the a priori, ideal creation, whose name is Torah (or Halakhah), in the realm of concrete life. The Halakhah is not hermetically enclosed within the confines of cult sanctuaries but penetrates into every nook and cranny of life. The marketplace, the street, the factory, the house, the meeting place, the banquet hall, all constitute the backdrop for the religious life. The synagogue does not occupy a central place in Judaism.

When liberal Judaism expelled the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence, from the broad arena of Jewish life, it set aside a special place for it in the temple. As a result, according to the liberal Jewish outlook, the temple stands at the heart of religion. The Halakhah, the Judaism that is faithful to itself, however, which brings the Divine Presence into the midst of empirical reality, does not center about the synagogue or study house. These are minor sanctuaries. The true sanctuary is the sphere of our daily, mundane activities, for it is there that the

realization of the Halakhah takes place. The great Torah giants, the halakhic men, par excellence, were indeed champions of truth and justice. They glowed with a resplendent ethical beauty. Space does not permit me even to begin to speak, for example, about R. Hayyim's unrelenting efforts to realize the ideals of righteousness and equity. Let me merely cite one incident wherewith to conclude this section. Once two Jews died in Brisk on the same day. In the morning a poor shoemaker who had lived out his life in obscurity died, while about noontime a wealthy, prominent member of the community passed away. According to the Halakhah, in such a case the one who dies first must be buried first. However the members of the burial society, who had received a handsome sum from the heirs of the rich man, decided to attend to him first, despite the fact that he had died later, for who was there to plead the cause of the poor man? When R. Hayyim was informed about the incident, he sent a messenger of the court to warn the members of the burial society to desist from their disgraceful behavior. The members of the burial society, however, refused to heed the directive of R. Hayyim and began to make the arrangements for the burial of the rich man. R. Hayyim then arose, took his walking stick, trudged over to the house of the deceased, and chased all the attendants outside. R. Hayyim prevailed—the poor man was buried before the rich man. R. Hayyim's enemies multiplied and increased.

Thus have true halakhic men always acted, for their study and their deeds have blended together beautifully, truly beautifully.