



CONGREGATION  
SHOMREI EMUNAH

**JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS:**  
SHARED VALUES AND THE  
LIMITS OF COOPERATION

PART I

*MOTZEI SHABBOS PARSHAS VAYESHEV*  
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1.

The Biblical account of the creation of man portrays him at three progressive levels.

At the first level, he appears as a simple natural being. He is neither cognizant of his unique station in the cosmos nor burdened by the awareness of his paradoxical capability of being concur-

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him and the norm. Natural man, unaware of the element of tension prevailing between the human being and the environment of which he is an integral part, has no need to live a normative life and to find redemption in surrender to a higher moral will. His existence is unbounded, merging harmoniously with the general order of things and events. He is united with nature, moving straightfor-

Man who was created out of the dust of the ground, enveloped in a mist rising from the jungle, determined by biological immediacy and mechanical necessity, knows of no responsibility, no opposition, no fear, and no dichotomy, and hence he is free from carrying the load of humanity.

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When I refer to man at the level of naturalness, I have in mind not the *Urmensch* of bygone times but modern man. I am speaking not in anthropological but typological categories. For non-confronted man is to be found not only in the cave or the jungle but also in the seats of learning and the halls of philosophers and artists. Non-confrontation is not necessarily restricted to a primitive existence but applies to human existence at all times, no matter how cultured and sophisticated. The *hedoné*-oriented, egocentric person, the beauty-worshipper, committed to the goods of sense and craving exclusively for boundless aesthetic experience, the voluptuary, inventing needs in order to give himself the opportunity of continual gratification, the sybarite, constantly discovering new areas where pleasure is pursued and happiness found and lost, leads a non-confronted existence. At this stage, the intellec-

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At the second level, natural man, moving straightforwards, comes suddenly to a stop, turns around, and casts, as an outsider, a contemplative gaze upon his environment. Even the most abandoned voluptuary becomes disillusioned like the king of Ecclesiastes and finds himself encountering something wholly other than his own self, an outside that defies and challenges him. At this very moment, the separation of man from cosmic immediacy, from the uniformity and simplicity which he had shared with nature, takes place. He discovers an awesome and mysterious domain of things and events which is independent of and disobedient to him, an objective order limiting the exercise of his power and offering opposition to him. In the wake of this discovery, he discovers himself. Once self-discovery is accomplished, and a new I-awareness of an existence which is limited and opposed by a non-I outside emerges, something new is born — namely, the divine norm. "ויצו ה' א' על האדם" — "And the Lord God commanded the man." With the birth of the norm, man becomes aware of his singularly human existence which expresses itself in the dichotomous experience of being unfree, restricted, imperfect and unredeemed, and, at the same time, being potentially powerful, great, and exalted, uniquely endowed, capable of rising far above his environment in response to the divine moral challenge. Man attains his unique identity when, after having

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Confronted man is called upon to choose either of two alternatives:

1) To play an active role as a subject-knower, utilizing his great endowment, the intellect, and trying to gain supremacy over the objective order. However, this performance is fraught with difficulty because knowledge is gained only through conflict and the

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2) Man may despair, succumb to the overpowering pressure of the objective outside and end in mute resignation, failing to discharge his duty as an intellectual being, and thus dissolving an intelligent existence into an absurd nightmare.

Of course, the Torah commanded man to choose the first alternative, to exercise his authority as an intelligent being whose task consists in engaging the objective order in a cognitive contest. We have always rejected the nirvana of inaction because the

בראשית (2:7)

וַיִּשְׂמֹת ה' אֱלֹהִים לְנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם וַיִּטֵּן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים  
רִדְפוֹתָן מִקֶּדֶם וַיִּשֶׂם שֵׁם אֶתְהָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יִצְרָה וַיִּצְמָח

בראשית (16:7)

פָּרַת: וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶתְהָאָדָם וַיִּנְתְּהוּ בְּיַד עֵדֶן  
לְעִבְדָהּ וּלְשִׁמְרָהּ: וַיִּצַּו יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַלְהָאָדָם לֵאמֹר

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order of facticity ending in tension and conflict. The verb *ויקח* signifies that God removed man from one dimension and thrust him into another — that of confronted existence. At this phase, man, estranged from nature, fully aware of his grand and tragic destiny, became the recipient of the first norm — "ויצו ה' א'" "And the Lord God commanded the man." The divine imperative burst forth out of infinity and overpowered finite man.

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There is, however, a third level which man, if he is longing for self-fulfillment, must ascend. At this level, man finds himself confronted again. Only this time it is not the confrontation of a subject who gazes, with a sense of superiority, at the object beneath him, but of two equal subjects, both lonely in their otherness and uniqueness, both opposed and rejected by an objective order, both craving for companionship. This confrontation is reciprocal, not unilateral. This time the two confronters stand alongside each other, each admitting the existence of the other. An aloof existence is transformed into a together-existence.

ויאמר ה' א' לא טוב היות האדם לבדו אעשה לו עזר כנגדו . . . ויבן ה' א' את הצלע אשר לקח מן האדם לאשה ויבאה אל האדם.

"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make a helpmeet opposite him . . . And the Lord God made the rib which he had taken from the man into a woman and brought her unto man." (Genesis 2:18, 22) God created Eve, another human being. Two individuals, lonely and helpless in their solitude, meet, and the first community is formed.

The community can only be born, however, through an act of communication. After gazing at each other in silence and defiance.

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When Adam addressed himself to Eve, employing the word as the means of communication, he certainly told her not only what united them but also what separated them. Eve was both enlighten-

of mechanistic behaviorism. In fact, the closer two individuals get to know each other, the more aware they become of the metaphysical distance separating them. Each one exists in a singular manner,

It is paradoxical yet nonetheless true that each human being lives both in an existential community, surrounded by friends, and in a state of existential loneliness and tension, confronted by strangers. In each to whom I relate as a human being, I find a

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tions are not the same. We are, in the words of the Torah, an עֵרָךְ — a helpmeet to each other, yet at the same time, we experience the state of כִּנְיָוָה — we remain different and opposed to each other.<sup>7</sup> We think, feel and respond to events not in unison

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We Jews have been burdened with a twofold task; we have to cope with the problem of a double confrontation. We think of ourselves as human beings, sharing the destiny of Adam in his general encounter with nature, and as members of a covenantal community which has preserved its identity under most unfavorable conditions, confronted by another faith community. We believe we are the bearers of a double charismatic load, that of the dignity of man, and that of the sanctity of the covenantal community. In this difficult role, we are summoned by God, who revealed himself at both the level of universal creation and that of the private covenant, to undertake a double mission — the universal human and the exclusive covenantal confrontation.

Like his forefather, Jacob — whose bitter nocturnal struggle with a mysterious antagonist is so dramatically portrayed in the Bible — the Jew of old was a doubly confronted being. The emancipated modern Jew, however, has been trying, for a long time, to do away with this twofold responsibility which weighs heavily upon him. The Westernized Jew maintains that it is impossible to engage in both confrontations, the universal and the covenantal, which, in his opinion, are mutually exclusive. It is, he argues, absurd to stand shoulder to shoulder with mankind preoccupied with the cognitive-technological gesture for the welfare of all, implementing the mandate granted to us by the Creator, and to make an about-face the next instant in order to confront our comrades as a distinct and separate community. Hence, the Western Jew concludes, we have to choose between these two encounters. We

are either confronted human beings or confronted Jews. A double confrontation contains an inner contradiction.

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The proponents of the single-confrontation philosophy (with the exception of some fringe groups) do not preach complete de-Judaization and unqualified assimilation. They also speak of Jewish identity (at least in a religious sense), of Jewish selfhood and the natural will for preservation of the Jewish community as a separate identity. As a matter of fact, quite often they speak with great zeal and warmth about the past and future role of Judaism in the advancement of mankind and its institutions. However, they completely fail to grasp the real nature and the full implications of a meaningful Jewish identity.

This failure rests upon two misconceptions of the nature of the faith community. First, the single-confrontation philosophy continues to speak of Jewish identity without realizing that this term can only be understood under the aspect of singularity and otherness. There is no identity without uniqueness. As there can-

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There is no contradiction between coordinating our cultural activity with all men and at the same time confronting them as members of another faith community. As a matter of fact even within the

The second misconception of the single-confrontation philosophy consists in not realizing the compatibility of the two roles. If

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cruel relationship which the world displayed toward us. We have always considered ourselves an inseparable part of humanity and we were ever ready to accept the divine challenge, מלא את הארץ וכושחה "Fill the earth and subdue it," and the responsibility implicit in human existence. We have never proclaimed the philosophy of contemptus or odium seculi. We have steadily maintained that involvement in the creative scheme of things is mandatory.

the cosmos. We stand with civilized society shoulder to shoulder over against an order which defies us all. Second, as a charismatic faith community, we have to meet the challenge of confronting the general non-Jewish faith community. We are called upon to tell

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It is self-evident that a confrontation of two faith communities is possible only if it is accompanied by a clear assurance that both parties will enjoy equal rights and full religious freedom. We shall resent any attempt on the part of the community of the many to engage us in a peculiar encounter in which our confronter will command us to take a position beneath him while placing himself not alongside of but above us. A democratic confrontation certainly does not demand that we submit to an attitude of self-righteousness taken by the community of the many which, while debating whether or not to "absolve" the community of the few of some mythical guilt, completely ignores its own historical responsibility for the suffering and martyrdom so frequently recorded in the annals of the history of the few, the weak, and the persecuted.

In light of this analysis, it would be reasonable to state that in any confrontation we must insist upon four basic conditions in order to safeguard our individuality and freedom of action.

First, we must state, in unequivocal terms, the following. We are a totally independent faith community. We do not revolve as a satellite in any orbit. Nor are we related to any other faith community as "brethren" even though "separated." People confuse two

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Second, the logos, the word, in which the multifarious religious experience is expressed does not lend itself to standardization or universalization. The word of faith reflects the intimate, the private, the paradoxically inexpressible cravings of the individual for and his linking up with his Maker. It reflects the numinous character and the strangeness of the act of faith of a particular community which is totally incomprehensible to the man of a different

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are as unique as their apocalyptic experiences. The confrontation should occur not at a theological, but at a mundane human level. There, all of us speak the universal language of modern man. As a matter of fact, our common interests lie not in the realm of faith, but in that of the secular orders." There, we all face a powerful

8. The term "secular orders" is used here in accordance with its popular semantics. For the man of faith, this term is a misnomer. God claims the whole, not a part of man, and whatever He established as an order within the scheme of creation is sacred.

formulated. In these matters, religious communities may together recommend action to be developed and may seize the initiative to be implemented later by general society. However, our joint engagement in this kind of enterprise must not dull our sense of identity as a faith community. We must always remember that our singular commitment to God and our hope and indomitable will for survival are non-negotiable and non-rationalizable and are not subject to debate and argumentation. The great encounter between God and man is a wholly personal private affair incomprehensible to the outsider — even to a brother of the same faith community. The divine message is incommunicable since it defies all standardized media of information and all objective categories. If the

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changes in its ritual or emendations of its texts. If the genuinely liberal dignitaries of the faith community of the many deem some changes advisable, they will act in accordance with their convictions without any prompting on our part. It is not within our purview to advise or solicit. For it would be both impertinent and unwise for an outsider to intrude upon the most private sector of the human existential experience, namely, the way in which a faith community expresses its relationship to God. Non-interference with and non-involvement in something which is totally alien to us is a *conditio sine qua non* for the furtherance of good-will and mutual respect.

Fourth, we certainly have not been authorized by our history, sanctified by the martyrdom of millions, to even hint to another faith community that we are mentally ready to revise historical attitudes, to trade favors pertaining to fundamental matters of faith, and to reconcile "some" differences. Such a suggestion would

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in a movement of recoil and retrace our steps. In a word, we belong to the human society and, at the same time, we feel as strangers and outsiders. We are rooted in the here and now reality, as inhabitants of our globe, and yet we experience a sense of homelessness and loneliness as if we belonged somewhere else. We are both realists and dreamers, prudent and practical on the one hand, and visionaries and idealists on the other. We are indeed involved in the cultural endeavor and yet we are committed to another dimension of experience. Our first patriarch, Abraham, already introduced himself in the following words: "I am a stranger and sojourner with you" — "גר ותושב אנכי עמכם" Is it possible to be both — גר ותושב — at the same time? Is not

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mutually exclusive terms? And yet, the Jew of old defied this time-honored principle and did think of himself in contradictory terms. He knew well in what areas he could extend his full cooperation to his neighbors and act as a תושב, a resident, a sojourner, and at what point this gesture of cooperation and goodwill should terminate, and he must disengage as if he were a גר, a stranger.

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The boundary line between a finite idea and a principle nurtured by infinity, transient possessions and eternal treasures, was clear and precise. Jacob, in his instructions to his agents, laid down the rule:

כי יפגשך עשו אחי ושאלך לאמר למי אתה תלך ולמי אלה לפניך?  
"When Esau my brother meeteth thee and asketh thee, saying: whose art thou, and whither goest thou and whose are these before thee?" My brother Esau, Jacob told his agents, will address to you three questions. "Whose art thou?" To whom do you as a metaphysical being, as a soul, as a spiritual personality belong? "And whither goest thou?" To whom is your historical destiny committed? To whom have you consecrated your future? What is your ultimate goal, your final objective? Who is your God and what is your way of life? These two inquiries are related to your identity as members of a covenantal community. However, Jacob continued, my brother Esau will also ask a third question: "And whose are these before thee?" Are you ready to contribute your talents, capabilities and efforts toward the material and cultural welfare of general society? Are you ready to present me with gifts, oxen, goats, camels and bulls? Are you willing to pay taxes, to develop and industrialize the country? This third inquiry is focused on temporal aspects of life. As regards the third question, Jacob told his agents to answer in the positive. "It is a present unto my lord, even unto Esau." Yes, we are determined to participate in every civic, scientific, and political enterprise. We feel obligated to enrich society with our creative talents and to be constructive and useful citizens.

Yet, pertaining to the first two questions — whose art thou and whither goest thou — Jacob commanded his representatives to reply in the negative, clearly and precisely, boldly and courageously. He commanded them to tell Esau that their soul, their personality, their metaphysical destiny, their spiritual future and sacred commitments, belong exclusively to God and His servant Jacob. "They are thy servant Jacob's," and no human power can succeed in severing the eternal bond between them and God.

This testament handed down to us by Jacob has become very relevant now in the year 1964. We find ourselves confronted again like Jacob of old, and our confronters are ready to address to us the identical three questions: "Whose art thou? Whither goest thou? Whose are these before thee?" A milenia-old history demands from us that we meet the challenge courageously and give the same answers with which Jacob entrusted his messengers several thousand years ago.

STATEMENT ADOPTED BY THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL  
OF AMERICA AT THE MID-WINTER CONFERENCE,  
FEBRUARY 3-5, 1964

We are pleased to note that in recent years there has evolved in our country as well as throughout the world a desire to seek better understanding and a mutual respect among the world's major faiths. The current threat of secularism and materialism and the modern atheistic negation of religion and religious values makes even more imperative a harmonious relationship among the faiths. This relationship, however, can only be of value if it will not be in conflict with the uniqueness of each religious community, since each religious community is an individual entity which cannot be merged or equated with a community which is committed to a different faith. Each religious community is endowed with intrinsic dignity and metaphysical worth. Its historical experience, its present dynamics, its hopes and aspirations for the future can only be interpreted in terms of full spiritual independence of and freedom from any relatedness to another faith community. Any suggestion that the historical and meta-historical worth of a faith community be viewed against the backdrop of another faith, and the mere hint that a revision of basic historic attitudes is anticipated, are incongruous with the fundamentals of religious liberty and freedom of conscience and can only breed discord and suspicion. Such an approach is unacceptable to any self-respecting faith community that is proud of its past, vibrant and active in the present and determined to live on in the future and to continue serving God in its own individual way. Only full appreciation on the part of all of the singular role, inherent worth and basic prerogatives of each religious community will help promote the spirit of cooperation among faiths.

It is the prayerful hope of the Rabbinical Council of America that all inter-religious discussion and activity will be confined to these dimensions and will be guided by the prophet, Micah (4:5) "Let all the people walk, each one in the name of his god, and we shall walk in the name of our Lord, our God, forever and ever."

A Treasury of Tradition, ed.  
Rabbi N. Lamm and Rabbi W. Wurzburger  
(1967) pp. 78-80

ADDENDUM

[The following statement formulated by Rabbi Soloveitchik appeared in the Rabbinical Council Record for February, 1966.]

ON INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS

The Jewish religious tradition expresses itself in a fusion of universalism and singularism. On the one hand, Jews are vitally concerned with the problems affecting the common destiny of man. We consider ourselves members of the universal community charged with the responsibility of promoting progress in all fields, economic, social, scientific, and ethical. As such, we are opposed to a philosophy of isolationism or esoterism which would see the Jews living in a culturally closed society.

On the other hand, we are a distinctive faith community with a unique commitment, singular relationship to God and a specific way of life. We must never confuse our role as the bearers of a particular commitment and destiny with our role as members of the family of man.

In the areas of universal concern, we welcome an exchange of ideas and impressions. Communication among the various communities will greatly contribute towards mutual understanding and will enhance and deepen our knowledge of those universal aspects of man which are relevant to all of us.

In the area of faith, religious law, doctrine, and ritual, Jews have throughout the ages been a community guided exclusively by distinctive concerns, ideals, and commitments. Our love of and dedication to God are personal and bespeak an intimate relationship which must not be debated with others whose relationship to God has been moulded by different historical events and in different terms. Discussion will in no way enhance or hallow these emotions.

We are, therefore, opposed to any public debate, dialogue or symposium concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of our faith vis a vis "similar" aspects of another faith community.

We would deem it improper to enter into dialogues on such topics as:

Judaic monotheism and the Christian idea of Trinity; The Messianic idea in Judaism and Christianity; The Jewish attitude on Jesus; The concept of the Covenant in Judaism and Christianity; The Eucharist mass and Jewish prayer service; The Holy Ghost and prophetic inspiration; Isaiah and Christianity; The Priest and the Rabbi; Sacrifice and the Eucharist; The Church and the Synagogue—their sanctity and metaphysical nature, etc.

There cannot be mutual understanding concerning these topics, for Jew and Christian will employ different categories and move within incommensurate frames of reference and evaluation.

When, however, we move from the private world of faith to the public world of humanitarian and cultural endeavors, communication among the various faith communities is desirable and even essential. We are ready to enter into dialogue on such topics as War and Peace, Poverty, Freedom, Man's Moral Values, The Threat of Secularism, Technology and Human Values, Civil Rights, etc., which revolve about religious spiritual aspects of our civilization. Discussion within these areas will, of course, be within the framework of our religious outlooks and terminology.

Jewish rabbis and Christian clergymen cannot discuss socio-cultural and moral problems as sociologists, historians or cultural ethicists in agnostic or secularist categories. As men of God, our thoughts, feelings, perceptions and terminology bear the imprint of a religious world outlook. We define ideas in religious categories and we express our feelings in a peculiar language which quite often is incomprehensible to the secularist. In discussions we apply

the religious yardstick and the religious idiom. We evaluate man as the bearer of God's Likeness. We define morality as an act of *Imitatio Dei*, etc. In a word, even our dialogue at a socio-humanitarian level must inevitably be grounded in universal religious categories and values. However, these categories and values, even though religious in nature and biblical in origin, represent the universal and public—not the individual and private—in religion.

To repeat, we are ready to discuss universal religious problems. We will resist any attempt to debate our private individual commitment.