

Rabbi Avi Finegold teaches Bible, Talmud and Jewish Philosophy at the Hebrew High School of New England in West Hartford, CT.

AN EXPLORATION OF RELATIONSHIPS IN *THE LONELY MAN OF FAITH*

Rabbi Avi Finegold

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's thought is noteworthy for grappling with the conflict between inner-lie and outer-expression. One of the works which epitomizes this mode of thinking is his essay entitled *The Lonely Man of Faith*. The work deals with the relationship between man in the modern world, how he relates to a faith that is eternal, and in some details seems to be fundamentally at odds with modern ideas. Parts of this essay can be fruitfully compared to the works of the neo-Freudian school of psychology, especially those referred to as the object relations school. I would like to examine *The Lonely Man of Faith* in light of these thinkers and demonstrate how they can offer new insight into this work.

Early in the essay, R. Soloveitchik writes that whatever he says has no bearing on Jewish law, and many readers might be very well served by disagreeing with what he writes. Nevertheless if some might gain insight, then his exercise is valuable, and even if not, he writes that he needs to say these things because speaking of them and getting the thoughts out in the open helps the soul. This immediately brings to mind the Freudian maxim that psychoanalysis is the Talking Cure, and that the very act of discussing one's issues serves as a mental balm. This sets the tone for an essay which is both profound and personal. It allows a reader the freedom to read much into R. Soloveitchik's words as if he were confiding in an intimate friend.

This essay begins by comparing the two creation stories of Adam in Genesis and describes how these each represent a different aspect of mankind. Adam I, instructed to inhabit and conquer the earth, is driven by creativity and the need to dominate. Adam II, with a primary need for companionship, is driven by the need to understand his surroundings and the things and people to which he relates. He then spends the rest of the essay demonstrating how these two should not be seen as contradictory and how an understanding of this reconciliation will assist one in navigating the modern world. R. Soloveitchik is describing a very Freudian drive model of the human psyche, only to come around and question that very model. Adam I, driven by domination, discovers new things

and propagates his species in a way that seems to show his consciousness of the fact that death is imminent and one must attempt to remain Godly and eternal in some way. Adam II sees his relationships with his God and his people as primary and that this need to understand everything is driven by a love for both one's God and one's intimates.

Freud spoke of religion as being a replacement for one's parental influences. Alternatively, one's faith can be a different primal influence and not simply a replacement; it is this type of relationship that seems to be described by R. Soloveitchik when defining Adam II. When he speaks of the *mysterium magnum*, and how Adam II seeks to create intimate bonds with the divine by looking at the why and who of the abovementioned mysteries of creation, R. Soloveitchik is essentially describing the relationship between parent and infant. In other words, as a child, one has a strong connection to a source of support, yet one has only the vaguest idea of what this object really is. As the infant grows older, there is a natural desire to learn about this object which has been sustaining him. Nevertheless, in both cases, there is a natural tension, which forms the basis for any kind of psychology. With parents, as with God, one feels an overarching love at times, yet one cannot help but feel alienated by the idea that he is completely incapable of gaining an understanding of the object. Perhaps this is the true meaning of the idea of man being created in God's image; much as one is incapable of discerning the divine object, one cannot begin to fathom the depths of the human psyche in its entirety. The human is as fundamentally unknowable as the divine when it comes to knowing inner thoughts. Only God is "the knower of the secrets of man"—the true Psychologist.

The two Adams need two different kinds of objects. Adam I needs someone simply to help him achieve his goal in life, someone to work alongside. Adam II needs someone who can speak to his soul, with whom he can enter into a relationship. Of course, both of these seem to speak overtly of objects that are fundamental to development later in life. There does not seem to be a correlation between this and early childhood, on which most psychologists focus. This could be for several reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, R. Soloveitchik would see the primal relationship as being with the divine. This might be a useful stance for philosophical inquiry, but would not sit well with the post-Freudian thinkers who see parental influence as fundamental.

However, it might be possible to reconsider R. Soloveitchik's ideas of Adam I and Adam II to include early life. Adam I, whose goal is to be creative and conquering, sees parents as a resource to be mined for anything useful, and then moves on to bigger and better things. This is an echo of the biblical exhortation that one ". . . shall leave his mother and father" (Genesis 2:24). This is not to diminish the value of parents; rather, the creative, scientific Adam sees parents as valuable only inasmuch as they can serve his life. Filial responsibility throughout their life is still essential, but only in a seemingly utilitarian gesture. R. Soloveitchik emphasizes that Adam I gains dignity by fulfilling God's word and

that domination over basic forces of nature through a greater understanding of them is the primary goal. Seen in this light, Adam I “using” his parents is only fulfilling God’s commandment to gain dominion over one’s environment. Adam II, on the other hand, creates lasting positive connections with his early role models because they will serve as catalysts for later relationships, but more importantly because he sees inherent value in them. He looks towards the second half of the above verse, which states that after man leaves his parents he shall “cleave to his wife, and they shall be as one flesh.” If one is driven by the need to know “who” and “why,” and these questions cannot even be conceived of accurately when thinking of the divine, then one must look to his fellow humans to establish these relationships. This does not mean that he ignores the divine. Rather, he models his behavior on how one might act with humans. R. Soloveitchik speaks of how Adam II sees the wondrousness of the cosmos with the wide-eyed naïveté and incredulity of a child. The same way in which one can only understand the universe in a child-like way according to Adam II, one can only define his relationship with the divine in a basic primal way, similar to the manner that Fairbairn, Winnicott, and Erikson see the relationship between the infant and mother.¹

As Fairbairn would see it, there is no structure without energy, and vice versa; man’s drive and psychic life can only exist with a framework in which they can operate. Adam I, who is more concerned with the “how” and “what” of life, is not divorced from divine life. He simply accepts it as the source of all knowledge and incorporates that into his worldview. Adam II, on the other hand, has “why” and “who” at the very forefront of his being. In this way, Adam II has God as the foundational idea upon which everything else in his life is based. In other words, Adam II by definition sees God as his primary object relation. By seeing the mutual, inter-defining nature of structure and energy in Fairbairn’s model, we can begin to see how Adam (both I and II) and God are mutually dependent on defining themselves in relation to the other. The question that inevitably arises out of such thinking is whether R. Soloveitchik could envision a God that is in any way dependent on humanity, almost like Heschel’s *God in Search of Man*. R. Soloveitchik would assume as a prerequisite that God exists completely independent of mankind. To bring this question back to Earth, so to speak, would be to ask whether a mother is fundamentally different after having a child than before. Just as a mother existed as an independent human being before she was a mother, so, too, God existed as an entity before mankind. Nevertheless, once there is a child (or a humanity) in the picture, there must be an understanding that each one is defined in relation to the other, whether the child vis-à-vis the mother, or the human vis-à-vis God. Without negating the self-sufficiency of the parent/God figure, one sees how they exist in relation to the other.

¹ For a discussion of these psychologists’ views, see *Psychoanalytic Theory, Therapy, and the Self: A Basic Guide to the Human Personality in Freud, Erikson, Klein, Sullivan, Fairbairn, Hartmann, Jacobson, and Winnicott*, by Harry Guntrip, (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

Winnicott seems to be straddling the two Adams, and bringing both of their points of view together without losing the intent of either one, much like R. Soloveitchik's ultimate conclusion. Winnicott's most developed stage of human life is "towards independence," and in a sense this encapsulates his thinking that one can neither leave one's mother's embrace and influence, nor should one even try to do so. This is not because one is incapable, but rather because doing so would be detrimental to one's development. By acknowledging the debt we owe to our primal relationships, we are giving a nod to the fact that our creative life is somehow rooted in past achievements. This can easily be seen as a reconciliation of Adam I and II, in that Adam I can never fully reach his creative potential without realizing the immense debt owed to both God, and human objects of relationship. Additionally, while Adam II is very much a fully developed, thinking being, he cannot help but retain an almost infantile (in a neutral sense of the word) relation to his primal object. Not because he chooses not to know, as one who remains in blissful ignorance of his parents' influence on his own life, but because at some point there is an unbridgeable gap in how one can perceive the primal object, something that seems to be implicit in the theories of Winnicott.

It would seem that for R. Soloveitchik, the major psychological difference between the two Adams is that one seeks out an object in a needy, "I"-centered way, while the other is more interested in creating a "faith-community" in which he is only a member of a larger unit. While both of these ideas are echoed in the psychoanalytic literature (the former when dealing with others as object for self-gratification and personal usefulness, such as with Freud and Melanie Klein, and the latter in the interpersonal and relational models brought forth by people such as Mitchell and Winnicott), ultimately R. Soloveitchik says that neither one exists in a vacuum, and that the ideal man oscillates between the two as required. The question that remains is whether the need for balance between the two is paramount, or does one need to manifest either one whenever an appropriate situation arises. Looking at theories of self might help clarify this issue. Many of the current theories seem to have as a basic foundation the fact that there is no single self, just a variety of selves that manifest themselves as needed. In this model, no single self battles for domination over the other. Rather, each one emerges when the situation warrants. I believe this is what R. Soloveitchik means, especially given his other works and how they argue for a peaceful balance between opposing forces and thought processes (see, for example, *Halakhic Man* and its construction of synthesis out of scientific man and *Homo Religiosus*). Indeed, there is a tension between opposing forces in one's mind. Regarding the ensuing psychology that can result, given how R. Soloveitchik gives equal value to both Adams, any tension that may exist between them is meant to be overcome.

As a final point, it is noteworthy that R. Soloveitchik overtly rejects the I-Thou model of human/divine relationship, something that is central to the psy-

chology/religious philosophy for many others. When he speaks of a faith-based community, he sees it as a tripartite existence between two individuals, presumably in an intimate relationship, along with a divine presence. This I-Thou-He is the basic building block of relationships. Therefore, one cannot possibly conceive of any object relations without the ever-present third party of the divine.

This is but a glimpse into R. Soloveitchik's ideas of religious feeling and psychology. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's thought resonates with the human condition and the relationship that this particular human has with his faith.