



Man is Not Alone

What kind of God do we
encounter?

Opening Prayer

O heavenly Father, who hast filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Session 2 Intro

- This book is really Heschel's argument for the existence of God
- Last session concentrated on arguing that our wonder and sense of the ineffable lead us to reasonably conclude that God exists
- What kind of religion are we to embrace?
- Does God demand anything of us?
- How do we live?

The God of the Philosophers

- Observations of order in the universe lead us to conclude that there is an orderly mind behind it all
- This “watchmaker” kind of God does not demand anything of us
- *“For religion is more than a creed or an ideology and cannot be understood when detached from actual living. It comes to light in moments in which one’s soul is shaken with unmitigated concern about the meaning of all meaning, about one’s ultimate commitment which is part of his very existence; in moments, in which all foregone conclusions, all life-stifling trivialities are suspended; in which the soul is starved for an inkling of eternal reality; in moments of discerning the indestructibly sudden within the perishably constant.”*

The Ultimate Question

- *“Religion begins with the sense of the ineffable, with the awareness of a reality that discredits our wisdom, that shatters our concepts.”*
- Rational thought accepts certain foundational premises

The Ultimate Question

- A sense of the ineffable
 - Confronts us with a Presence that is other
 - Assures us that mystery underlies all existence
 - Teaches us that our existence is dependent on a “*spiritual presence*”
- *“To the religious man it is as if things stood with **their back to him, their faces turned to God**, as if the ineffable quality of things consisted in their being an object of divine thought. Just as in touching a tree we know that the tree is not the end of the world, that the tree stands in space, so we know that the ineffable—what is holy in justice, compassion and truthfulness—is not the end of spirit; that the ultimate values survive our misjudgments, deflations and repudiations; that meaning is meaningful not because of our minds; that beauty is beautiful not by the grace of man.”*

In the Presence of God

- Approaching God through the sense of the ineffable has consequences that the approach through rationality does not
- *“The root of religion is the question what to do with the feeling for the mystery of living, what to do with awe, wonder or fear. Religion, the end of isolation, begins with a consciousness that something is asked of us.”¹*
- *“Endless wonder unlocks an innate sense of indebtedness.... Within our awe we only know that all we own we owe.”²*
- This type of awareness forces us to pursue higher ends
- The confrontation with God’s question implies that we have the power to answer that question

In the Presence of God

- Praise is the proper response to this encounter with God
- *“It is God who sues for our devotion, constantly, persistently, who goes out to meet us as soon as we long to know Him.”³*
- *“Philosophy begins with man’s question; religion begins with God’s question and man’s answer.”⁴*
- At moments of confrontation with God: *“We are penetrated by His insight. We cannot think any more as if He were there and we here. He is both there and here. He is not a **being**, but **being in and beyond all beings.**”⁵*

Doubts

- Is beginning from the sense of the ineffable a reasonable place to begin?
- Individuals not in touch with this sense of the ineffable will not be persuaded by logical arguments for God's existence
- *“the certainty of the existence of God does not come about as a corollary of logical premises, as a leap from the realm of logic to the realm of ontology, from an assumption to a fact. It is, on the contrary, a transition from an immediate apprehension to a thought, from being overwhelmed by the presence of God to an awareness of His essence.”*
- Belief in God simply follows from this encounter

Faith

- Faith inheres in how we live our lives & takes a lifetime
- Faith opens us up to communion with God
- *“God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance, which means a deep certainty that it is better to be defeated with Him than be victorious without Him.”*

Faith

- Belief in miracles does not lead to faith
- *“God’s existence can never be tested by human thought. All proofs are mere demonstrations of our thirst for Him. Does the thirsty one need proof of his thirst?”¹*
- *“The mind surrenders to the mystery of spirit, not in resignation but in love. Exposing its destiny to the ultimate, it enters into an intimate relationship with God.”²*

What Do We Mean By the Divine?

- *“We have neither an image nor a definition of God. We have only His name. And the name is ineffable.”*
- It is possible to make idols of our creeds & dogmas
- It is possible to use miraculous means to make untruthful proclamations; the miracle does not make truth out of untruth
- Greek philosophy says that God is perfect; the Decalogue says that God is the One who liberates slaves
- Claiming that God is perfect places us in the position of God’s evaluator or judge

What Do We Mean By the Divine?

- Sciences & philosophies assume that the unity of the universe inheres in its adherence to universal laws
- *“The intuition of that all-pervading unity has often inspired man with a sense of living in cosmic brotherhood with all beings. Out of the awareness of the oneness of nature comes often an emotion of being one with nature.... We all have a mystery in common—the mystery of being.”*
- This fuzzy sense of brotherhood often evaporates when confronted with the concrete needs of individual people
- Despite this underlying unity, life constantly calls upon us to choose

What Do We Mean By the Divine?

- *“God is one, but one is not God. Some of us are inclined to deify the one supreme force or law that regulates all phenomena of nature, in the same manner in which primitive peoples once deified the stars.”¹*
- *“God is He who holds our fitful lives together, who reveals to us that what is empirically diverse in color, in interest, in creeds—races, classes, nations—is one in His eyes and one in essence.*

*God means: No one is ever alone; the essence of the temporal is the eternal; the moment is an image of eternity in an infinite mosaic. God means: **Togetherness of all beings in holy otherness.***

God means: What is behind our soul is beyond our spirit; what is at the source of our selves is at the goal of our ways. He is the heart of all, eager to receive and eager to give.”²

One God

- “Eternity is another word for unity. In it, past and future are not apart; here is everywhere, and now goes on forever. The opposite of eternity is diffusion not time. Eternity does not begin when time is at its end. Time is eternity broken in space, like a ray of light refracted in the water.”¹
- “Creature is detached from the Creator, and the universe is in a state of spiritual disorder. Yet God has not withdrawn entirely from this world. The spirit of this unity hovers over the face of all plurality, and the major trend of all our thinking and striving is its mighty intimation. The goal of all efforts is to bring about the restitution of the unity of God and world. The restoration of that unity is a constant process and its accomplishment will be the essence of Messianic redemption.”²

One God

- In paganism, nature is worshipped as god; in monotheism, nature becomes our fellow-creature
- The Hebrew word for one, *ehad*, also means unique
 - To speak of God as one is to speak of God's uniqueness
- *“Israel’s answer is: One God. One denotes inner unity: His law is mercy; His mercy is law.”*

One God

- *“His is only a single way: His power is His love, His justice is His mercy. What is divergent to us is one in Him.”¹*
- Education does not necessarily correspond with morality
- Evil is disunity and divergence
- *“No cell could exist alone, all bodies are interdependent, affect and serve one another. Figuratively speaking, even rocks bear fruit, are full of unappreciated kindness, when their strength holds up a wall.”²*

One God

- *“Rabbi Moshe of Kobrin said once to his disciples: ‘Do you want to know where God is?’ He took a piece of bread from the table, showed it to everybody and said: ‘Here is God.’”¹*
 - *Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord. Jer. 23:24*
- *“The natural and the supernatural are not two different spheres, detached from one another as heaven from earth. God is not beyond but right here; not only close to my thoughts but also to my body. This is why man is taught to be aware of His presence, not only by prayer, study and meditation but also in his physical demeanor, by how and what to eat and drink, by keeping the body free from whatever sullies and defiles.”²*

God is the Subject

- We are the objects to God, the Subject
- *“God is neither a thing nor an idea; He is within and beyond all things and all ideas. Thinking of God is not beyond but within Him. The thought of Him would not be in front of us, if God were not behind it.”¹*
- *“He remains beyond our reach as long as we do not know that our reach is with in Him; that He is the Knower and we are the known; that to be means to be thought of by Him.”²*

God the Subject

- *“To the philosopher God is an **object**, to men at prayer He is the **subject**. Their aim is not to possess Him as a concept of knowledge, to be informed about Him, as if He were a fact among facts. What they crave for is to be wholly possessed by Him, to be an object of His knowledge and to sense it. The task is not to know the unknown but to be penetrated with it; **not to know but to be known** to Him, to expose ourselves to Him rather than Him to us; not to judge and to assert but to listen and to be judged by Him.”*
- For Heschel, purpose of Bible is to tell us what God requires of us

God is the Subject

- Any goodness, morality, or justice in ourselves derives from the presence of God in our lives
- Prophets give voice to God's call to dwell in His justice, mercy and relationship

The Divine Concern

- Philosophers can only conclude that God exists
- To be alive means that we are concerned to perpetuate our existence
- *“Always in need of other beings to give himself to, man cannot even be in accord with his own self unless he serves something beyond himself.”*
- To be truly human, instead of being satisfied with an animal existence, means that we begin to actively meet the needs of others regardless of the cost to ourselves

The Divine Concern

- *“The self, the fellow-man and the dimension of the holy are the **three** dimensions of a mature human concern. True love of man is clandestine love of God.”*
 - *He that oppresses the poor reviles his Maker: He honors his Maker who is gracious to the needy.*
(Proverbs 14:31)
- Care for the self is not evil unless it leads to lack of care for others; it is part of *“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”*
- The way to unity with our fellow humans is unity with God

The Divine Concern

- *“For if creation is conceived as a voluntary activity of the Supreme Being, it implies a concern with that which is coming into being. Since God’s existence is continuous, His concern or care for His creatures must be abiding.”*
- Heschel says that humans have 2 foci like an ellipse, self & God
- Even when the Israelites rejected God’s law by making idols, God says of himself, *“God is compassionate and kind, slow to anger, abundant in love and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, but one who will never acquit the guilty, one who visits the iniquity of fathers on their children, and upon their children’s children, down to the third and fourth generation.”* (Ex. 34: 6)

The Divine Concern

- *“To know of God is not to whistle in the dark, as if exemplifying the world’s roaming in impenetrable fog....The impenetrable fog in which the world is clad is God’s disguise....God is within the world, present and concealed in the essence of things.”*

The Hiding God

- Post-Holocaust, Jews asked, “Where is God?”
- Man hid from God first after eating the forbidden fruit, leaving God to ask, “Where are you?”
- God hides when his people abandon Him
- *“The direct effect of His hiding is the hardening of the conscience: man hears but does not understand, sees but does not perceive—his heart fat, his ears heavy. Our task is to open our souls to Him, to let Him again enter our deeds.”*

Preview

- How do we live?
- The meaning of life
- Piety

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