

A Halakhic Approach to Suffering

Whatever I am going to say today is the result of my own thinking and my religious experience of Jewish values. I do not lay claim to objectivity and philosophic validity. I do not claim that my interpretations or analyses are true. It is hard to pinpoint and define a Jewish philosophy, particularly a Jewish philosophy of man. Whatever I am going to say should be taken as a soliloquy, as a monologue. I am thinking out loud and trying to spell out my own experiences and understand the great transcendental adventure of the Jewish people. If someone will find my experiences and my interpretations commensurate with his own, I shall be amply rewarded. However, if one should not concur with me and should feel that my experiences do not correspond with his own attitudes, I shall not feel hurt.

Before taking up the subject of suffering and mental health, I would like to offer a brief general description of Halakhah, because it will be very important for our analysis. The gesture of halakhic creativity unfolds at two levels. First, at the level of positivistic thinking, the halakhic logos and ethos (the halakhic mind and the halakhic will) posit unique categorical forms, postulate a set of rules, and develop well-defined topics revolving around man and his formal relationship to the ontological orders surrounding him. Basically, the Halakhah is concerned with one problem—that of the relationship of man to the existential orders confronting him. At this level were born the great halakhic conceptual system as well as normative disciplines—what we call in the vernacular, the codes—which lay claim to the human mind and will.

The motto of the halakhic logos and ethos was expressed in the answer that the Jews of old gave Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai: “All that God hath spoken, na‘aseh ve-nishma” (Ex. 24:7). The Latin Vulgate translated “na‘aseh ve-nishma” in the sense of obeying: “faciemus et erimus obedientes, we will do and we will be obedient.” However, the Talmud interprets the word “ve-nishma” theologically and semantically. In Hebrew, “ve-nishma” has the connotation of understanding instead of obeying. According to the talmudic interpretation, “na‘aseh” means “We shall be obedient, we shall obey the laws,” and “ve-nishma” means “We shall try to understand the laws” (Shabbat 88a-89b). This is quite characteristic of our talmudic approach, which is commensurate with the philosophy of Halakhah. It is not enough to do; it is

also important and essential to understand, to know. Basically, the positive Halakhah lays claim to the mind of man and to his will-will translated into action; not just the abstract decision in the Kantian fashion, but the decision which is later translated and transformed into deed.

At the second level at which the halakhic gesture unfolds, axiological experiences (that is, experiences of values) emerge. Halakhah disposes with the services of the logos-ethos and leaps over the barriers of cognitive formalism into the realm of living structural value themes. At this level, “beholding” after a prophetic fashion, rather than “discerning” in the philosophical tradition, is the key word. Meaningful themes, in contrast to conceptual topics-I use the terms topical and thematic in the original Greek sense of surface (topos) and root (theme) respectively-address themselves not to the discriminating mind, the public homo theoreticus, man who has the capacity for understanding something in a scientific or intellectual cognitive gesture. Nor does the axiological Halakhah address itself to the tenacious will, to public homo magnus, man capable of acting in accordance with something. Instead, it speaks to the clandestine man, to homo absconditus, whether he is a soul or spiritual personality. He does not engage in understanding something, nor does he engage in acting out something, but is always concerned with relating to and sharing in something.

The dominant matter of this second gesture on the part of Halakhah-not the positive conceptual gesture but the axiological gesture-is not “ve-nishma’,” but “ta‘amu u-re’u ki tov Hashem, taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalms 34:9). It is very strange that “ta‘amu” is translated as “consider” in many English translations. This simply destroys the very meaning of the verb. I would accept here the translation of the Vulgate, “gustate et videte, taste and see.” It means that God can be be tasted, beheld intuitively, confronted and related to. Man can share in God. The themes, values, and axiological motifs of the thematic Halakhah cannot be interpreted, nor can they be understood and analyzed. Rather, they are felt intuitively and beheld. The Halakhah never attempted to evolve cognitive instruments by virtue of which the themes could be interpreted and portrayed. It apparently considered such an undertaking futile since the themes are intrinsically not subject to articulate determination and verbalization. The themes inhabit a nonloquacious, mute halakhic periphery; they are more or less boundary concepts and ideas for which halakhic man, in his questing for absolute security and rootedness, reaches out. However, they always remain outside of his reach. The more rapidly the Halakhah or halakhic man moves toward those glowing horizons, the more the themata recede into an endless distance.

In a word, the emergent halakhic gesture manifests its dialectical character or nature. On the one hand, it sets up a reasoned, clearly defined, precise system of thought, finding its application in detached deeds which reach the point of being mechanical actions. The disciplines require only acting in accordance with the understanding, but the acting is normative. It means, we might say, being pressed to act not by some physical outside force, but by the inner norm. On the other hand, it insists upon all-out involvement with a singular, unreasoned order of experiential themes, communicated to us through the medium of notched, indented, and lens-shaped metaphors. Basically, the themes, the values, the axiological motives, cannot be interpreted, nor can they be understood and analyzed. They are felt intuitively and beheld.

Permit me to introduce an example which will elucidate the above analysis. If we should examine all the laws pertaining to the Sabbath, we will discover that within their topical normative context, within the halakhic logos, we deal exclusively with formal concepts such as melakhah (work) and melekhet mah.ashevet (intentional performance) and so forth, without relating them to any axiological theme. There is no single axiological theme-or call it variant-to which the positivist halakhist relates his concepts. There is no need to place these concepts within a meaningful coordinate system. All the topical Halakhah is interested in is the cognitive substance, not axiological validity; in formal constructs, like those of physicists or mathematicians, and their logical interrelatedness within the system.

The topical halakhist is not concerned with axiological motifs. At the level of topical Halakhah, Shabbat is just a twenty-four hour stretch or period during which one must abstain from work and discontinue his daily routine; that's all. There is nothing else involved in the topical approach to the Sabbath idea. However, when we shift our attention from halakhic thinking to halakhic feeling, from halakhic topics to axiological themata, we suddenly find ourselves in a new dimension, namely that of kedushah, holiness. Suddenly the Sabbath is transmuted or transformed from an abstract norm, from a formal concept, into a "reality," a living essence, a living entity; from a discipline in accordance with which one acts compulsorily into a great experience which one acts out spontaneously.

Of course, we have many passages in the Bible dealing with the Sabbath, but the basic biblical text containing the Sabbath idea within the topical frame of formal-systematic reference is the passage in the Decalogue dealing with the normative aspect of the Sabbath: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, le-kaddesho. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work but the seventh day

is a Sabbath unto the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any manner of work, thou, nor thy son. . . .” (Ex. 20:8-10).

The verb *le-kaddesho*, to keep it holy, if analyzed in the light of positive topical Halakhah, means only abstention from the daily routine or separation from work. In the topical context, the term *le-kaddesho* does not refer to or imply a charismatic quality inherent in the seventh day. It is just set aside as a day in the week on which one must abstain from work; that is all. This is a formal approach to the Sabbath idea.

In contrast to the topical Halakhah, the text which forms the main motto of the thematic Halakhah with regard to Shabbat would be, I believe, the mysterious passage in Genesis which concludes the story of creation: “And God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, *va-yikaddesh oto*” (Gen. 2:3). A twenty-four-hour period was sanctified and hallowed. It has suddenly become a metaphysical entity upon which the Almighty had bestowed a unique endowment, a very strange endowment, namely, that of blessedness and sanctity.

Let us now turn to the problem of mental health within the frame of reference of the Halakhah. When we attempt to explore the therapeutic and redemptive qualities of the religious act-and this is exactly what modern religion, cooperating with mental health institutions, is trying to do-it is necessary to examine first the philosophy of suffering which that particular religion has formulated. We cannot come to grips with the remedial or redemptive functionality implied in the religious experience unless we know how this religion managed to accommodate or at least attempted to accommodate the human passional experience, the pathos and suffering. Without accommodating somehow the human passional experience, it is impossible to develop a religious technology of mental health. Without a precise investigation of this problem, we shall in vain claim a therapeutic role for the religious performance. We will engage, I would say, either in arbitrary statements or in cliches or platitudes.

If this is universally true of all religion in general, it is also true with regard to Judaism, to Halakhah. Therefore, prior to exploring the remedial redemptive potential of our Judaic religious act, we must spell out in articulate, precise terms the Judaic doctrine of suffering and define clearly our attitude vis-à-vis an unfriendly world replete with disorder and disharmony. When a rabbi comes to guide a person in distress, or when he wants to counsel him and advise him particularly with regard to health, he must know exactly what our resources

are-resources not in homiletical terms but in philosophical-metaphysical terms. Otherwise, his work will be in vain.

The practical and functional motifs are undergirded by theoretical ones. The metaphysical philosophical doctrine leads in religion. The functional methods do but follow, they do not lead. This is one of the cardinal mistakes which people make about religion in general and Judaism in particular. Religion is basically not a technology. Its essence is hard to define, but it is not a technology. Of course, religion is also concerned about the welfare of man, his happiness, his peace of mind, his tranquility. But those functional aspects must be inferred from theoretical premises.

Hence, our immediate attention must be focused upon halakhic theodicy. (I am using a term which Leibniz coined. "Theodicy" means "justification of God," if taken literally.) As an equivalent for theodicy, we must focus on the halakhic metaphysic of evil or suffering, or the halakhic metaphysic of the pathos, the pathetic or passional experience of man.

How does the Halakhah handle the problem of human despair? It is a very elementary question, but the question has somehow never been raised, inasmuch as despair is inherent in our very existence. It is not just incidental, not just contingent, not just temporary and transient. It is inculcated in the very core of our existence. The Halakhah certainly did grapple with the absurd phenomenon of evil and had to fit it into a frame of sensible reference. No religion can afford the luxury of ignoring the most disturbing of all problems, the problem of suffering. The Jewish religion, as a realistic one, could not simply ignore it. No religion could.

Since the halakhic gesture operates with two frames of reference, the topical and the thematic, our problem applies to both. Thus our question should be rephrased: what position do the topical as well as the thematic Halakhah assign to the passional experience of suffering within their respective frames of reference? Let us bear in mind that the topical reference exhausts itself in arrangement and classification of formal halakhic constructs within a conceptual continuum, while the thematic reference signifies the relatedness of the same formal constructs and norms to an intuited order which lies outside of a conceptual system. Thematic referring implies transcending the conceptual continuum; only such a leap may fill the formal halakhic schemata with meaningful content within the universe of values.

Translating this characterization of the topical and thematic act of referring into more familiar terms, we would say that the topical frame of reference of

the positive Halakhah is confined to the world of whose existence we are assured by our sense experience and which is bounded by time and space. The topical frame of reference is this physical universe, the universe of color and sound, of taste and touch, the universe of becoming and disappearing, of life and death. By contrast, the frame of reference of the thematic Halakhah, of halakhic axiology, of the halakhic universe of values, is not limited merely to this world, but envelops Being in its majestic totality as a whole, beginning with the here and now, the finite existing experience, and concluding with our awareness of eternity. The frame of reference of the thematic Halakhah is not only a this-worldly one, but is transcendental as well.

The topical Halakhah or halakhic gesture thus fashions its interpretive axiological methods in the mold of finiteness and sensibility. It displays extreme modesty and sobriety in its approach to Being. The thematic gesture, however, is by far more bold and possessed by the spirit of adventure. It exceeds the boundaries of our own ontological awareness, which is imprisoned within a scientifically explainable universe, and attempts to relate itself to parts unknown, to link up the orders of things and events with the transcendental order of the ultimate. The thematic Halakhah opened up the closed frame of topical reference and accommodated infinity itself.

Judaism, then, operates with two frames of reference because Judaism is engaged in the dialectical method, in an antithetical approach to reality. One frame of reference is one sector of being, the this-worldly sector, and a second frame of reference is Being in its majestic totality.

As regards the topical, positivistic Halakhah, I may go even a step further and state that the Halakhah is not even interested in the physical universe as a whole. Its attention is focused upon just a single sector of reality, namely, the one into which, if I may use an existential term, man is cast and in which his destiny is either fulfilled or he fails miserably.

The Halakhah, of course, is theocentric, or God-centered, because it is of a religious nature. However, it is still oriented around man. The Halakhah, in spite of its theocentric character, is anthropo-oriented. Its concern envelops certain segments of reality insofar as they are relevant to man and his interests. The Halakhah does not venture outside of the human world, and the human world is a very small world. Whatever is relevant to man, to his interests, to his self-fulfillment and his self-realization is relevant and pertinent to the Halakhah. Whatever is irrelevant to man is irrelevant to the topical Halakhah.

Whatever philosophy of man's nature and his destiny the Halakhah may have formulated, it invariably ends up by referring the whole of Being to man. The story of creation of the physical cosmos, of the physical universe, is but a prelude, if we read the story of Genesis carefully, to the wondrous emergence of man that took place on that mysterious Friday, the sixth day of creation.

Moreover, the Halakhah's concern with man is mainly centered on the individual. Man is neither an idea, like humanity, whose praise Plato and the Greek philosophers sang, nor a supra-individual unity, like society or community, which many philosophical systems, including that of Marxism, have idealized and idolized. They sang the praise of society, which is a supra-individual unity. The Halakhah insists that nothing, not the idea nor the collective, should supplant the single transient and frail individual "who is here today and tomorrow is in the grave" (Berakhot 28b), who today is here on the platform and the next day, who knows where he will end up. He occupies a dominant position in the Halakhah, and his role is central and indispensable. Of course the Halakhah has not overlooked the community, particularly the community of the committed and the elected, as the bearer of the Divine eternal message. Yet, the individual constitutes a reality whose ontic legitimacy must not be questioned and whose interests the Halakhah, like a devoted mother, had at heart.

Returning to our problem, namely, the accommodation of the passionate experience by the Halakhah, we must admit that the topical Halakhah would treat this experience in a different manner than the thematic Halakhah.

It is very certain that the thematic Halakhah-the Halakhah related to the outside, to what the Greeks called *hyperteles*, something beyond-even though it was embarrassed to the point of perplexity by the existence of evil, managed somehow to accommodate it within its frame of reference. The best proof that the thematic Halakhah-thematic Judaism, axiological Judaism-was embarrassed and even tormented, was confused and bewildered by evil or by Satan, is the Book of Job. I don't have to refer you to any clandestine passages in our literature. But, somehow, the thematic Halakhah emerged from this and countered evil victoriously, depending on the interpretation of victory, of course.

Because the frame of reference of the thematic Halakhah extends into infinity and eternity, it is possible somehow to accommodate evil and assign to it a very prominent role and position. Within the thematic Halakhah, we find a theodicy or, to be more precise, a metaphysic of suffering. Judaism, at the level of

axiology or at the level of transcendental reference, did develop a metaphysic of evil, or, I would rather say, of suffering, of the passional experience.

Let us briefly see how the thematic Halakhah managed somehow to accommodate evil. I would not say that evil was a very pleasant guest, but, somehow, the thematic Halakhah had to put up with it. One sometimes puts up with a guest who is not welcome, but is simply foisted and imposed upon you.

The dominant idea which underlies this metaphysic of evil developed by the thematic Halakhah is basically that suffering as a subjective experience—an emotion, an affect, a feeling—and evil as a reality are not identical. The fact that people in distress, the distraught individuals who find themselves in a crisis, ascribe their misery to some outside agency called “evil” or “Satan”—the name is irrelevant—and identify their subjective experiences with a destructive fiend or enemy of man, does not prove that evil actually exists and that it reveals itself through the pathetic mood to the passional mood. On the contrary, the thematic Halakhah’s metaphysic maintained that the passional experience represents the highest good.

This sharp distinction between evil and pathos opened up to the thematic Halakhah new vistas which explained suffering. It did so by denying the reality of evil in a twofold way, by introducing transcendentalism and universalism.

Let us take a look at these motifs which the thematic Halakhah utilized in its attempt to prove the incommensurability of suffering and evil. It is self-evident that evil as an entity per se vanishes as soon as the threshold of man’s ontological consciousness is raised from the order of the sensible, phenomenal and transient to a higher order of the absolute and eternal. Any system of ideas, even one of a purely rational-philosophical strain, such as Platonic philosophy, finds no difficulty in separating the pathos as a subjective experience from evil as an objective entity, and in disposing quickly of the latter.

A passage in the Talmud is indicative of the kind of metaphysic of suffering that the thematic Halakhah formulated: “To what are the righteous compared in this world? To a tree standing wholly in a place of cleanness, but whose bough overhangs to a place of uncleanness. When the bough is lopped off, it stands entirely in a place of cleanness. Thus the Holy One brings suffering upon the righteous in this world in order that they may inherit the future world. . . .” (Kiddushin 40b).

I believe that this is a very clearcut, unequivocal example of how the thematic Halakhah has handled evil. It is a radical approach, of course, simply disposing

of it. Sometimes, if a problem is too embarrassing and too tormenting, one simply puts it in the waste basket and ignores it. This passage is indicative of the kind of metaphysics of suffering that the thematic Halakhah formulated.

The same is illustrated by the dictum regarding the biblical passage, "That it may be well with thee and that thou mayest prolong thy days" (Deut. 5:16, 22:7). R. Jacob says that this refers to an existence in the world of eternal bliss: "le'olam shekulo arokh . . . le'olam shekulo tov" (Kiddushin 39b, H.ullin 142a). Many other aphorisms and sayings with which our talmudic and midrashic literature is replete would fit perfectly into this transcendentalistic framework. In death and in suffering one is born to a new true life. The pathos, the fear of death, is the mysterious link between a shadowy existence and true being.

A quotation from Maimonides' Guide would suffice to illustrate the transcendentalists' approach to the most dreadful of all evils, death. Death is identified by Maimonides with deliverance. To die means to gain freedom from captivity, to join the beloved friend for whom the soul has been yearning all along. (Interesting is the parallelism between the Maimonidean philosophy and the Platonic dialogue Phaedo.)

The more the forces of his body are weakened and the force of passion quenched, in the same measure does man's intellect increase in strength and in light; his knowledge becomes pure and he is happy with his knowledge. When this perfect man is stricken in age and is near death, his knowledge mightily increases. His joy in that knowledge grows greater, and his love for the object of his knowledge more intense, and it is in this great delight that the soul separates from the body. To this state our Sages referred when, in reference to the death of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, they said that death was in these three cases but a kiss (Guide 3:51).

I would add: a kiss by eternity impressed upon temporality.

The motif of universalism is employed by the thematic Halakhah in a similar fashion. Again, the thematic Halakhah maintains the universal doctrine of suffering that evil as a universal entity does not exist, that it is nothing but a chimera, just a figment of our fantasy. Suffering and misery are due to the accidental and contingent character of our existence, which is confined to a narrow segment of being. Yet, within the scheme of Being as a unitary whole in its boundlessness and majesty, the pathos is an unknown datum. Moreover, the thematic Halakhah maintains that sufferings of the individual are ministerial to a higher good within the universal order, basing this doctrine upon the passage

in Genesis, “And God saw all things that He had made and behold it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). Evil is not an essential part of being if the latter is placed in the perspective of totality.

Rabbi Meir was a man who knew suffering in his private life. He lost two children, he lost his wife, he lost his father-in-law, and he died a martyr’s death. His marginal remark that at twilight of the mysterious Friday, when creation was concluded, God cast a glance and found even death to be good (Bereshit Rabbah 9:5) attests to the universalistic view of our Sages.

In consonance with this universalistic doctrine, our scholars modified a verse in Isaiah before incorporating it into our liturgy. In Isaiah (45: 7) we read, “I formest light and createst darkness; I makest peace and createst evil, ra’.” In our morning service we recite, “Blessed are Thou who forms light and creates darkness, who makes peace and creates all things, ha-kol.” The word “ra’, evil” was supplanted with “ha-kol, all things.” Apparently, in the perspective of totality, evil vanishes. (This metaphysic of evil is not confined to Judaism. A similar approach is to be found in Plato’s *Phaedo*, where Plato quotes the oration delivered by Socrates on the day of his execution. Death is nothing but deliverance of man from the cave, from the Valley of Shadows. Death is an ascent to the heights from which man may behold the ideas, the true Being, the ontos on, the real, true, genuine being.)

Can such a metaphysic bring solace and comfort to modern man who finds himself in crisis, facing the monstrosity of evil, and to whom existence and absurdity appear to be bound up inextricably together? Is there in the transcendental and universal message a potential of remedial energy to be utilized by the rabbi who comes, like Zofar, Bildad and Eliphaz, the three friends of Job, to share the burden and to comfort his congregant in distress? We know that the friends of Job were not that successful in convincing Job about the nonexistence of evil. Can a rabbi be more successful? Can he succeed where the biblical friends of Job failed miserably? I will be frank with you; I do not know.

The question is not an easy one. On the one hand, we know that this metaphysic has worked miracles with our people, whose history is a continuous tale of martyrdom and suffering. The Jewish community found, in this metaphysic of evil, relief, hope and courage. Yet what seemed apodictic and simple to our ancestors, inspired by indomitable faith and a passionate transcendental experience, might prove to be an extremely complicated matter for contemporary egotistic man, who is spiritually uprooted, homeless, and perplexed. I can state with all candor that I personally have not been too

successful in my attempts to spell out this metaphysic in terms meaningful to the distraught individual who floats aimlessly in all-encompassing blackness, like a withered leaf on a dark autumnal night tossed by wind and rain. I tried but failed, I think, miserably, like the friends of Job.

The topical Halakhah could not accept the thematic metaphysic which tends to gloss over the absurdity of evil, and it did not engage in the building of a magnificent philosophical facade to shut out the ugly sights of an inadequate existence. Realism and individualism, ineradicably ingrained in the very essence of the topical Halakhah, prevented it from casting off the burden of the awareness of evil.

The topical Halakhah, which is particularly interested in real man, in his body and soul, in his day-to-day activities, in his transient, carnal perceptions and experiences within his small, narrow world, could not be content with a fine metaphysical distinction between evil and the pathos of being, between Satan and suffering. The topical Halakhah lacked neither candor nor courage to admit publicly that evil does exist, and it pleaded ignorance as to its justification and necessity. The topical Halakhah is an open-eyed, tough observer of things and events and, instead of indulging in a speculative metaphysic, acknowledged boldly both the reality of evil and its irrationality, its absurdity.

As a case in point let us examine the topical Halakhah's attitude toward death, which was idealized by the thematic metaphysic.

It is enough to glance at the laws of mourning in order to convince ourselves that the topical Halakhah saw death as a dreadful fiend with whom no pact may be reached, no reconciliation is possible. In the act of mourning for a deceased member of the household, the whole traumatic horror in the face of an insensate and absurd experience asserts itself. Death appears in all its monstrosity and absurdity, and an encounter with it knocks out the bottom of human existence.

If the topical Halakhah concurred with the thematic in its interpretation of death as deliverance, as a victory over nihilism, then why mourn and grieve for the departed? Why rend our garments, sit on the floor, and say "Barukh dayyan emet"? As a matter of fact, the topical Halakhah reflects the despair and horror and bewilderment of biblical man when he was confronted by death. From Moses, who sought passionately and entreated God to save him from death in the desert (Deut. 3:23-25), to King Hezekiah, who in despair and agony petitioned God with extreme urgency to protect him from she'ol (Isaiah 38), the grisly fear of death and man's stubborn refusal to surrender to its power winds itself through the Bible like a red thread. The mood of biblical man is

permeated with melancholy. In the back of everything, he sees the skull grinning at him, and while feasting he sees the hand of death writing on the wall.

Such an attitude is in sharp conflict with the thematic metaphysic of suffering. In short, the practical topical Halakhah did not and could not evolve a metaphysic of suffering. It simply refused. It was not eager to find the rationale of evil and to convert the negation into an affirmation. It neither justified evil nor denied and hid it. The topical Halakhah always held the view that evil exists and that man must face it in perplexity and embarrassment.

Of course, it could not accommodate evil, but there is a difference between accommodating evil and handling evil. Some guests I am eager to accommodate; some guests I do not want to accommodate. But if somebody knocks at my door, I must answer, responding and handling him, even by taking his lapel and throwing him out. So the question is, "How did the topical Halakhah handle evil?" not "How did it accommodate it?" There was no accommodation for evil within the framework of topical Halakhah. Simply, the framework is a realistic one, and a realistic framework cannot have a place or position within its coordinate system for evil and suffering. Yet, whether or not we are ready to accommodate evil, we must deal with it; and the topical Halakhah could not shirk such an elementary responsibility.

Yes, the topical Halakhah has evolved an ethic of suffering instead of a metaphysic of suffering. While the metaphysic is out to discover the ontological objective reason of suffering from within, the ethic posits meanings from within and without. It is concerned not so much with pathos as such but with the pathetic mood of the person in distress, with the assimilation of pain into the total I-awareness, with man's response to adversity and disaster. This is the difference between a metaphysic and an ethic of evil. The metaphysic seeks to justify evil or deny its reality. The ethic of suffering seeks the transformation of an alien factum which one encounters into an actus in which one engages, the succumbing to an overwhelming force into an experience impregnated with directedness and sense.

To sum up, I would say that the halakhic ethic of suffering rests upon three propositions. First, evil does exist, and evil is bad. The world in which we live is not free from deformities and inadequacies which result in the perennial discord between the interests of man and the unalterable laws of nature. In other words, the reality of evil is indisputable.

Second, one must never acquiesce in evil, make peace with it, or condone its existence. Defiance of and active opposition to evil, employing all means that God put at man's disposal, is the dominant norm in Halakhah. Scientific intervention on behalf of man in his desperate struggle for control of his environment is fully endorsed and justified. At all levels-physical, moral, etc.-in all situations, man must rise against his archfoe-evil-and reject its sovereignty. As an example, consider the problem of medical cures. Whether one may intervene with illness, with disease, was very disturbing to religion in general. We have denominations within Christianity which have not reached, so to say, a pact, a treaty of peace, with medicine. To the Halakhah, it was obvious, apodictic, simple. "Ve-rappo yerappe, he shall surely be healed," says the Torah (Ex. 21:19). From here we learn that the physician should cure and heal (Berakhot 60a). Man should actively interfere with evil. Man is summoned by God to combat evil, to fight evil, and to try to eliminate it as much as possible.

That is why, perhaps, God put at our disposal such powerful means as our intellect, our capacity for controlling nature. Not only can man interfere, but man should interfere and subdue the environment to his interests and needs. Of course, the Halakhah idealized scientific intervention on behalf of man in his desperate struggle for control of his environment, at all levels.

Halakhah always preached active opposition to evil. That is why the Halakhah could not understand-and not only Halakhah but we Jews cannot understand-a philosophy of passive resistance to evil. It simply couldn't assimilate this philosophy preached by Gandhi and then by Nehru, not to combat evil actively, not to fight evil the way Jacob engaged in combat with the mysterious antagonist on a dark night, but simply resist evil passively.

The third proposition is faith. If man loses a battle in a war, the topical Halakhah has always believed, based on an eschatological vision, that at some future date, some distant date, evil will be overcome, evil will disappear; "Bila ha-mavet lanez.ah. u-mah.ah Hashem dim'ah me'al kol panim," "He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe off the tears from all faces" (Isa. 25:8). Yes, it is a long war; it is a long struggle. In war, one loses battles. If man loses a battle from time to time and evil triumphs over him, he must bear defeat with dignity and humility, accepting the divine verdict.

One might say that this halakhic ethic of suffering differs little from the attitude usually adopted by modern man toward evil. Modern man, scientifically oriented, technologically minded, bold and courageous, is sensitive to the disorder and disharmony with which the universe is packed, and he is far from

indulging in a happy-go-lucky contentment. Scientifically minded, he tries to combat evil and is convinced that it can be overcome. Otherwise, he would not work so hard in order to find cures for some incurable diseases. He even questions the inevitability of death.

Yet, modern man loses a few battles in his struggle with evil. He is not always triumphant. If you want to see modern man, if you want to convince yourself that modern man is not always triumphant, just go into a hospital for incurable diseases and see how many patients inflicted with cancer, multiple sclerosis, and so forth, are suffering and gradually dying. Man loses many battles in his engagement with the archfoe or fiend of humanity. But, still, modern man says—and this is basically what mental health work is out to achieve—that when one is confronted by evil, one must face adversity courageously; one must not succumb to hysteria when evil strikes viciously at him.

So modern man has developed a stoic approach to stress and suffering. However, no matter how close the resemblance is between the modern approach to evil and that of the topical Halakhah, there is still an unbridgeable chasm separating them. While modern man resigns himself to an unalterable cosmic occurrence and bears distress with equanimity, yet without discovering any meaningfulness, the halakhic man accepts suffering and turns it into a great existential experience, one in which he may find self-fulfillment. He bears distress and accepts suffering with dignity.

The difference between the halakhic ethic of suffering and modern mental health technique is as vast as the one which lies between equanimity and dignity. While equanimity implies only the absence of any hysterical disturbances and suggests a habit of mind that disowns unpleasant emotions in the Stoic tradition, dignity denotes man's divine personality, a new dimension of greatness in man in which his human distinctness as a spiritual being manifests itself. Equanimity is a state of mind, dignity a form of existence. The former is a psychological descriptive term; the latter an ontological attribute.

A dignified existence means a unique existence. Dignity is an existentialist dimension, not just a psychological idea or a descriptive attribute pertaining to man's behavior. It is more than that. It somehow reflects man's inner personality, the core of his existential experience. In Hebrew, the equivalent for dignity is kavod, and the correlate phrase of dignity of man is kevod ha-beriyyot. Man's creation "in the image of God" means that man's existence, in contradistinction to natural existence in the animal kingdom, is a dignified existence. As the psalmist says of man, "Thou hast crowned him with dignity and honor" (Psalms 8:6).

What is man's uniqueness, his individuality? How is he distinct from the natural kingdom of existence? There is only one difference: man's existence is dignified. Whatever a table is, there is nothing dignified in the table's existence. There is no dignified existence to the animal in the jungle. There is no dignified existence to a machine. Man possesses this attribute of dignity, which is basically a divine attribute. That is why the Bible tells us that man was created in the image of God. He is dignified, of course, being, naturally, in the image of God.

Let us analyze what Judaism understands by dignity. The constitutive essence of dignity comes to expression par excellence in man's aptitude to commune with God. The capability of man to relate himself to God, to search and quest for Him and to experience Him in the deep recesses of his own existential awareness, is a unique gift that God bestowed upon man, and in this experience the image-the dignity of man-reveals itself.

Whatever frame of reference we might select-the topical or the thematic-we will unavoidably find that the God-man communion-the God-man relationship which lies at the very root of Judaism, which is itself the root of every civilized religion and faith-is a dialectical performance. Communing with God is antithetic insofar as it consists of two contradictory movements, two movements in opposite directions.

Questing for God is synonymous with surging forward and reaching out eagerly for anchorage and security. The human being who is driven and pressed for creative heroic action-who aims at the enlargement of the self by conquering and subduing whatever sectors of being lie outside of his small world-moves towards God. In Him he finds freedom from insecurity and fear, which is a *conditio sine qua non* for man to conquer the world, to develop his ability, to realize and fulfill himself. He finds self-assertion, boundless self-expansion, and serenity.

What is our scientific adventure if not a human desire for conquest, to conquer the impossible, to invade the distant, to discover the unknown? In other words, finding God, not scientific conquest, is the crowning victory attained by man-conqueror. Man triumphs when he meets his Creator. It suffices to read the Psalms in order to realize that the forward movement of the conquering hero, the perennial pursuit of something, is perhaps the cardinal characteristic of the transcendental adventure, and that by confronting God one gains not only security and serenity but power and self-greatness as well. "I will be glad and rejoice in Thee" (Psalms 9:3-4). "I will sing praise to Thy name, O Thou most high, when mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at Thy

presence” (Psalms. 18:33). “It is God that girdeth me with strength and maketh my way perfect. He teaches my hands to work so that a bow of steel is broken by my arms” (Psalms 18:35).

Man finding God, associating with God, is a warrior; man-conqueror, an aggressive, bold, courageous adventurer, yearning and longing for self-vastness, for self-explanation, for the infinite-and man conquers the infinite if he finds God. This is a progressive movement in one direction, a forward direction. This is the forward course of man.

We may formulate the following equation: to be created in the image of God = to be endowed with dignity = to be capable of finding God and communing with Him-and to commune with God is the greatest victory on the part of man. In conclusion: the dignity of man and his divine character assert themselves in triumph and conquest.

On the other hand, being confronted by God results in a movement of recoil and in withdrawal. Somehow man, in his quest for opportunities for domination and power in a world that lies endlessly before him, extending boundlessly into the unknown, in his incessant drive for self-enlargement when everything in him stirs his fantasy to reach the endless fringes of reality, suddenly comes to a halt, turns around and begins to fall back and to retreat. When he meets God, he begins to retrace his steps. Hard won positions are evacuated, points of vantage are deserted, and man who has traveled long distances, piling up on his journey victory upon victory, conquest upon conquest, swings back to the point of departure and is defeated-defeated by nobody but himself. To encounter God means both victory and defeat, self-affirmation and self-negation.

In God, man finds both affirmation of himself as a great being, and a ruthless, inconsiderate negation of himself as nothing. This is the main, the dominant theme of Judaism, of both thematic and topical Halakhah. In the moment of exultation, the great purge occurs, a purge by virtue of which man loses everything. Victory, conquest, abundance, success and security are instantaneously extinguished and lost by man when confronted by God, and man finds himself in retreat. And man, when he finds himself in retreat, finds also greatness. Finding God is, on the one hand, the greatest victory which man may obtain and, on the other hand, the most humiliating, tormenting defeat which the human being experiences.

Let me quote the psalmist, the same psalmist who spoke in such glowing terms of his association with God, the same psalmist who said that God rejoices in man, that God teaches him how to engage in combat, that He trains his hand to

walk, to break steel weapons. That same psalmist says, “Whither shall I go from Thy spirit, O God? Or, whither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Psalms 139:7). Why flee? It is hard to escape from him: “I ascend up into heaven and Thou art there. If I make my bed in the depth below, behold, Thou art there” (Psalms 139:8). “Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thy hand upon me” (Psalms 139:5). The hand of God, when it is laid upon man, weighs heavily on his frail shoulders. It is a great burden, and man must manage to carry this burden. This is his task in this world.

Maimonides, describing the essence of the love of God, writes:

And what is the way that will lead to the love of Him and the fear of Him? When a person contemplates His great and wondrous works and creatures and through them obtains a glimpse of His wisdom which is incomparable and infinite, he will straightway love Him, praise Him, glorify Him and long with an exceeding longing to know His great name; and when he ponders these matters, he will recoil affrighted and realize that he is a small creature lowly and obscure, endowed with slight and slender intelligence standing in the presence of Him who is perfect in knowledge (Mishneh Torah, Hil. Yesodei ha-Torah 2:2).

And so David said, on the one hand, “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, what is man that Thou art mindful of him?” and then continues, “Man is a little less than God; Thou hast surrounded him with glory and honor” (Psalms 8: 4-6). There is both glorification and complete negation in man. Man is victorious in his communion with God, but he is horribly defeated.

The basic relationship to God expresses itself in two opposite motions: forward and backward. The formulations which we developed above would have to be modified: to be created in the image of God = to be endowed with dignity = to be capable of finding God and communing with Him-and in communion with God, man defeats himself. In conclusion, the dignity of man and his divine character assert themselves in defeat and failure.

The dialectical content of the religious experience stands out as an archetype after which the Halakhah has fashioned its philosophy of man-and not only its philosophy of man but its codes, its norms, and its disciplines. If we should introduce the old prophet Micah’s challenge: “It has been told thee, O man, what is good and what the Lord does require of thee” (Mic. 6:8), the Halakhah would meet this challenge by stating in paraphrase, “Only to move forward

boldly, to triumph over opposition and to conquer nature and to retreat humbly and take defeat at your own hands when confronted by thy God.” In a word, the dialectical movement of surging forward and falling back is the way of life ordained by God for the Jew.

At every level of our existential experiences-aesthetic, hedonic (which means the carnal experiences of man in which the element of pleasure is involved or implied), intellectual (which includes man as scientist, metaphysician, theologian and historian), and emotional-one must engage in the dialectical movement of surging forward boldly and swinging back humbly, of making a series of steps outside of the self and immediately reversing the motion and retracing the steps into the self. The onward course, the journeying forward, is the prime task with which man was charged. Both the topical and the thematic Halakhah were aware of the program that God set up for man: “Replenish the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). He was called upon to defy opposition and march to victory. Biblical man is a conqueror. The desire for vastness and greatness is a legitimate one and was endorsed by the Halakhah in all areas of human endeavor. Halakhic disciplines cover the full gamut of human activity through which man exercises his power over nature. Commerce, agriculture, political community, science, and even the aesthetic-hedonic aspects of our lives constitute the topics of halakhic thinking and legislating. This is indicative of the latter’s endorsing man’s involvement in this multiple endeavor which leads him to success and conquest, for one does not work in vain. Yet, when conquest is within our reach and the road to fulfillment has been cleared of all hindrances, man begins to retreat and invites defeat-not expects defeat to be falling on him or to assault him, but invites defeat-and surrenders what he has been questing for so long.

It is obvious that after man has taken defeat at his own hands, after he has fallen back and withdrawn from a position for which he had fought tenaciously, after he has given up triumph and conquest, the pendulum begins to swing in the opposite direction, to the pole of greatness, of vastness, conquest, victory and triumph. Man defeated surges forth and the questing is resumed; the pursuing and longing for self-expansion and self-assertion sets in once more. Again man seeks greatness, vastness, experiments daringly with his liberties, searches feverishly for dominion and mastery and of course, again, when he finds himself near his destination he retreats. In a word, the Halakhah teaches man how to conquer, to seize initiative and succeed, and also to give up and disengage and invite defeat.

This dialectical principle manifests itself in all halakhic norms pertaining to man as a natural and transcendental being. But nowhere does the doctrine of

dialectical movement appear in its full glory and splendor as at the aesthetic-hedonic level. Judaism again operates with an antithetic principle. On the one hand, it considered the carnal drives in man, his biological pressures, as legitimate and worthwhile. On the other hand, it demanded that man redeem reality and himself. The act of redeeming one's natural desires consists in the dialectical movement of withdrawal, of disengagement at the moment when the passion reaches its peak. The stronger the grip and impact of natural desire is felt by man, the more intoxicating and bewitching the vision of hedonic conquest is, the greater is the redemptive capacity of the dialectical movement when man, spellbound by his passion, coming close to victory, suddenly steps backward and accepts defeat.

I will read for you a Midrash (Midrash Rabbah to Shir ha-Shirim 7: 3, "Thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies"), and I believe it speaks for itself. The Midrash explains Jewish ritual law pertaining to sexuality. Judaism developed a very strange attitude towards sexual life. On the one hand, it endorsed it, completely rejecting the Aristotelian negative approach which Maimonides had somehow accepted. Sex can be a sacred performance if treated properly, if placed in a worthwhile, dignified perspective. In one's sexual life, the dignity of man is the most important factor. It determines the whole character of the sexual life, whether it is low, primitive, hypnotic, orgiastic, or dignified and sacred.

The Halakhah developed a very strange, paradoxical law pertaining to the periods of withdrawal and association. But the strangest of all laws in the code pertaining to sex is one norm which borders almost on the inconsiderate. A young man meets a young woman and falls in love, marries her, and consummates the marriage-the norm is that it is then that a period of withdrawal of almost twelve days begins.

"It often happens that a man takes a wife when he is thirty or forty years old and after going to great expense"-expense is not meant in terms of money, but it means he proposed a few times and she rejected him. He was in love and kept on insisting, and finally he won out. "After going to great expense, he wants to associate with her." His heart is overflowing with love and passion. "Yet, if she says to him, 'I have seen a rose red speck,' he immediately recoils. What made him retreat and keep away from her? Was there a wall of iron between them? Did a serpent bite him? Did a scorpion sting him? . . . It was the words of Torah which are soft as a lily."

The Midrash gives another example. "A dish of meat is laid before a man and he is told that some forbidden fat has fallen into it, he leaves it alone and will

not take it.” Hungry as he is, however strong his desire for food, he will not taste it. “Who stops him from tasting it? Did a serpent bite him? . . . Did a scorpion sting him? . . . It was the words of the Torah which are soft as a lily. . . .” Bride and bridegroom are young, physically strong and passionately in love with each other; both have patiently awaited this rendezvous and they met and the bridegroom stepped backward. Like a knight, he gallantly exhibited superhuman heroism, not in a spectacular but in a quite humble fashion, in the privacy of their home, in the stillness of the night. And what happened? He defeated himself at the height of his triumphant conquest, when all he had to do was to reach out and take possession. The young man overcame himself, the conqueror in his orgiastic hypnotic mood retreated, performed a movement of recoil. He displayed heroism by accepting defeat. And in this act of self-defeat one finds the real dignity of man.

If man knows how to take defeat at his own hands in a variety of ways as the Halakhah tries to teach us, then he may preserve his dignity even when defeat was not summoned by him, when he faces adversity and disaster and is dislodged from his castles and fortresses.

What is the leitmotif of the strange drama that was enacted by Abraham on the top of a mountain when, responding to a paradoxical divine summons to take his son, his only son, whom he loved, and offer him in a distant land called Moriah, he surrendered his son to God (Gen. 22)? It was more than a test of loyalty that Abraham had to pass. God, the Omniscient, knew Abraham’s heart. It was rather an exercise in the performing of the dialectical movement, in the art of reversing one’s course and withdrawing from something which gave meaning and worth to Abraham’s life and work, something which Abraham yearned and prayed for on the lonely days and dreary nights while he kept vigil and waited for the paradoxical, impossible to happen. And when the miraculous event occurred and Abraham emerged as a conqueror, triumphed over nature itself, the command came through: Surrender Isaac to Me, give him up, withdraw from your new position of victory and strength to your old humble tent, all enveloped in despair and anxiety, loneliness and gloom. Abraham, take defeat at your own hands, give up heroically what you acquired heroically; be a hero in defeat as you were in victory.

Abraham obeyed. He realized that through this dialectical movement a man attains redemption and self-elevation. And the improbable happened; as soon as he recoiled, as soon as he gave Isaac up, the forward movement, the march to victory was resumed again. He received Isaac from the angel and the pendulum began to swing to the pole of conquest.

This drama is reenacted continually by the man of Halakhah who is dignified in victory and defeat. The Halakhah taught man not contemptus saeculi, but catharsis saeculi.

Halakhah wants man to be conqueror and also to be defeated-not defeated by somebody else, not defeated by a friend, not defeated by an outside power, for there is no heroism involved in such a defeat; such a defeat, on the contrary, demonstrates cowardice and weakness. Halakhah wants man to be defeated by himself, to take defeat at his own hands and then reverse the course and start surging forward again and again. This directional movement, like a perennial pendulum, swinging back and forth, gives exhaustive expression to man's life and to Halakhah.

Is this important for mental health? I believe so. Of course, I cannot spell out here how this doctrine could be developed into a technology of mental health, but I believe this doctrine contains the potential out of which a great discipline of the Judaic philosophy of suffering, an ethic of suffering, and a technology of mental health might emerge.

What I have developed is more a philosophy of the Halakhah. How this philosophy could be interpreted in terms of mental health is a separate problem, one that is quite complicated. But I believe that the trouble with modern man and his problems is what the existentialists keep on emphasizing: anxiety, angst. Man is attuned to success. Modern man is a conqueror, but he does not want to see himself defeated. This is the main trouble. Of course, when he encounters evil and the latter triumphs over him and he is defeated, he cannot "take it"; he does not understand it.

However, if man is trained gradually, day by day, to take defeat at his own hands in small matters, in his daily routine, in his habits of eating, in his sex life, in his public life-as a matter of fact, I have developed how this directional movement is applicable to all levels-then, I believe, when faced with evil and adversity and when he finds himself in crisis, he will manage to bear his problem with dignity.

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