

Spring, 1995

Aviv, 5755

הליכות

Halikhot
Paths

February
March
April
May

Adar I
Adar II
Nisan
Iyyar

The old will be made new and the new will be made holy.

הישן יתחדש והחדש יתקדש.

There is The Way and there the many "Ways." *Halakhah*, The Way, suggests the accepted code of laws that Orthodox Jews practice. *Halikhot*, paths to the One, however, are many. "Is not my word," says God, "like a hammer that smashes a rock into pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29) The Kabbalah suggests a commentary: three hundred pieces. So there are many approaches to the way to walk towards God.

Rabbi Kook said that the old way needs to be made new. The new way needs to be sacralized. Both of these processes take place simultaneously. As we learn the new and sacralize it, at the same time we are re-learning the old and making it new. Of course, it might be easier to just throw out the old way, but that is not our way. Throwing away the old would result in short term gains (less distraction to explore the new) and long term losses (the need to reconstruct accumulated wisdom of ages, mysteries known across centuries hidden within the old ways).

Each person must follow the way that leads his or her most directly to fullness, to the soul's mission, to God. Each person must ask "which is the way for me?"

Rabbi Baer of Radoshitz once said to his teacher the "Seer" of Lublin: "Show me one general way to the service of God." The zaddik replied: "It is impossible to tell people what way they should take. For one way to serve God is through learning, another through prayer, another through fasting, and still another through eating. Everyone should carefully observe what way his or her heart draws him or her to, and then choose this way with all of one's strength."

This story comes to us through Martin Buber who was an opponent of observance as a means of revitalizing Judaism. Buber felt that no external criteria should be permitted to interpose itself between the "I" and what the "Eternal Thou" might now be understood

continued



to command it. The usual situation of any given law from the past is that of an impersonal structure which only creates a barrier between the individual and the Eternal Thou.

Franz Rosenzweig, however, had a different view. Rosenzweig admitted that revelation was only personal, that we are required to do only what we know God wants of us. He argued that in the doing of a given law, that which previously might have seemed only a lifeless statute, becomes God's personal command to the doer. While Buber insisted that a personal revelation by God must precede a genuine religious act, Rosenzweig asserted that stated Jewish observance, carried out in a Jewish way, created its own sense of commandment, of purpose and encounter. *(Choices in Modern Jewish Thought by Borowitz)*

And so there are different ways within the Way. In Jewish mystical thinking two directions in which to walk on "the way" are described. One direction is to go *mil'mata l'ma'ala* – from below to above, to walk towards meeting God. This suggests pursuing the path which will bring you closer – whatever that means, however that unfolds, wherever that takes you, in

whatever situation you are called upon to be. It may bring you into a fast flowing river in a foreign country, into a long retreat of meditation, into your own world of dreams, into a volcano.

Having been with God, the path changes and takes you towards the world, *mil'ma'ala l'mata* – from above to below. Armed with your hard-won realization, you re-enter society with gentle compassion and firm assertiveness, to continue the work of integrating the Infinite Light into conscious interpersonal reality and personal economics.

The word *Halakhah* is thought of (In *Lekutei Torah* by R. Schneur Zalman, Bamidbar 30:2) as an acronym: for *Hari-u La-Yah Kol Ha-Aretz* "Vibrate (or sing) to God all the earth." Whatever way is our way, the end result and goal is that the earth, the planet in its physical worldliness, shall itself vibrate to Godly patterns of wholeness and balancing. So may we each discover the pattern and walk in the right way to set the planet singing.
Rabbi David Wolfe-Blank

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Halakhah or Shitah - Conclusions or Process?

As so often becomes the case, I think that people are using the word/concept of Halakhah in different ways (ah, how easy it is for differences to manifest). There is a definition of this word current in certain, but not all, Orthodox circles, that says that Halakhah is the record of universally accepted decisions – a set of conclusions which one either accepts and therefore becomes "Torah true," or rejects and therefore becomes post- or non- or anti-halakhic. Once we accept these parameters, we then fall prey to the argument that asserts this definition as the touchstone.

However, this is in fact only one possible understanding of what Halakhah is. Many rabbis have

been unhappy with "codes," precisely because they refocus attention from process to conclusion.

That process has more to do with figuring out what is right for this generation based on our understanding of the original divine imperative (Sinai), what those who came before us thought in similar situations, and what we know about our own situation. I believe strongly that this is closer to the "traditional" approach. Thus, the Conservative movement does not have its own Halakhah, it has a particular approach, a shitah, toward the questions of our time. And so do the rest of us as well.

R. Daniel Siegel