

JOSHUA AMARU

Prayer and the Beauty of God: Rav Soloveitchik on Prayer and Aesthetics

RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK

Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer.

Edited by Shalom Carmy.

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What does it mean to pray? What is the point of petitioning an all-knowing God for the fulfillment of our needs and desires? The philosophy of prayer is the attempt to address these questions and others like them. Until now, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik's published works have not included a systematic treatment of his understanding of prayer. *Worship of the Heart* is a new publication (2003) in which the Rav's thought on prayer is presented extensively. This volume is another installment of the program of the Toras HoRav foundation to publish for a wide audience lectures and writings of the Rav that he himself did not bring to print.

As editor Shalom Carmy points out in his introduction, this work can be neatly divided into two halves. The first half is an attempt to outline a general philosophy of prayer, while the second half is largely made

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up of philosophical/theological interpretations of specific prayers, *shema* and its blessings and a long-awaited translation (ably accomplished by the editor) of the Rav's commentary on the *amidah*, "*Ra'ayonot Al ha-Tefillah*."¹ According to the editor, each half more or less corresponds to a different set of lectures given by the Rav at the Bernard Revel Graduate School in the late 1950's. This essay will focus on the first half of the book, which is less accessible to the average reader and contains, in this reviewer's opinion, significant philosophical and theological insights that have not, to my knowledge, appeared in print before.

This focus should not be taken as disparagement of the second half of the book, which I found both inspiring and enlightening. The Rav's interpretation of specific prayers and concepts (such as the acceptance of the "yoke of heaven") is brilliant and moving, as well as firmly rooted in the relevant halakhic and liturgical texts. I will not discuss these here, but I would recommend to the reader who finds the first section difficult or uninteresting to proceed to chapters 6-10, wherein he or she will find much that will edify and deepen their personal prayer experience. If there is additional unpublished material on prayer, I would suggest to the editors of this series to consider publishing a *siddur*, on the model of *Olat Re'ayah*, in which the Rav's interpretations would be published alongside the text of the liturgy.

This first section of *Worship of the Heart*, in addition to a theory of prayer, contains the most extensive discussion of aesthetics in the Rav's published oeuvre. This discussion is related to the theory of prayer, as we will see, but can also stand on its own, and perhaps should do so. I will outline the theory of prayer as it appears in *Worship of the Heart*, followed by some critical comments on that theory. Only then will I turn to the Rav's aesthetic theory.

Theories of Prayer

Any attempt to elaborate a philosophy of prayer must address the fundamental question: what (or for whom) is prayer for? There are two basic approaches to this question: an anthropocentric approach and a theurgical approach. According to the anthropocentric approach, prayer, though addressed to God, is fundamentally a human focused activity. The All-Knowing Master of the Universe already knows what is in our hearts and is not moved by praise or by petition. "*Ve-gam nezah Yisrael lo yeshakker ve-lo yinna'hem, ki lo adam hu le-hinna'hem*"—"The Eternal of Israel will not lie or change his mind, for He is not a man that changes his mind" (I Samuel 15:29). Divine judgment and justice are not subject to appeal or

revision, and human petition to God is necessarily futile. Though a simple understanding of the liturgy implies that we are attempting to influence the King of Kings, to glorify Him with our praise, to invoke His mercy with our petition, and to satisfy Him with our thanksgiving, we should interpret these as anthropomorphic metaphor. As opposed to a king of flesh and blood, the King of Kings, who is perfect and eternal, is not subject to influence and not affected by us.

If this is the case, and prayer does not “work” in the sense of impacting upon the Divine, what is prayer for? The answer is that prayer is for people; it is anthropocentric. The act of prayer does not affect the Divine so much as the pray-er. His or her soul is refined through relating his or her life to the Divine. Prayer is not answered in the conventional sense. Rather, the person who prays becomes more worthy or able to receive Divine grace than before the prayer.

As one would imagine, one who subscribes to the anthropocentric approach to prayer can be comfortable with the praise and thanksgiving components of prayer. In encountering the greatness of God and His Creation, he or she is inspired to sing His praises; likewise the human object of divine grace is morally obligated to express thanksgiving. Petition, however, remains a problem from this perspective: what human good is achieved by the detailing of our needs before an all-knowing God and the begging for His grace?²

The alternative to the anthropocentric perspective is the theurgical. This approach can embrace the simple meaning of the liturgy in understanding prayer as the attempt to influence and impact upon the Divine. Prayer, so to speak, can “work.” There is a two-way relationship between the human and the Divine, such that the scope of human action, of which prayer is part, extends to the divine realm. Prayer is a means of affecting God. Anthropomorphic metaphors of God referring to Him as Supreme Judge, Loving Father and so forth, are not to be dismissed as mere abbreviations for aspects of divine perfection, but are, in fact, the best way to understand different aspects or manifestations of the Divine.

The dialogue of the created with the Creator, as mediated through these metaphors, includes praise and thanksgiving, but also petition and request. Just as a plea for mercy or for assistance may affect a judge or inspire kindness in a father, so may they affect God. To be sure, it is no small theological challenge to understand how such influence is possible without giving up on principles such as the perfection and eternity of God. The most explicit and comprehensive expression of the theurgical approach in Judaism lies in the Kabbalistic tradition, in which such

notions as “raising the sparks,” and “*tikkun olamot elyonim*” (repairing of upper worlds) are expressions of such an approach and attempts to grapple with its theological implications.³

One should note that the two alternative approaches mirror one another’s basic strengths and weaknesses. The anthropocentric approach preserves the immaculateness of its conception of God at the expense of emptying the liturgy of much of its content. God is glorified at the expense of religion. The theurgical approach strikingly empowers the religious personage, granting him or her the ability to impact the Divine; religion becomes the tale of the empowerment of humanity *vis à vis* God. There is a certain irony about these opposing approaches to prayer: in order to glorify God, one approach tends to turn the focus of prayer away from God and towards a kind of self-focused meditation. The other approach, in understanding prayer as truly directed at God, threatens to conceive of God in a limited human image.⁴

At first glance, it would appear that any coherent theory of prayer, whatever its nuances, must fundamentally line itself up in one camp or the other, for the theological options are to a large extent mutually exclusive. In *Worship of the Heart*, however, the Rav outlines a dialectical approach to prayer that embraces elements of both opposing perspectives. He asserts categorically that prayer is a real dialogue with God and that one can encounter God through religious metaphors such as the Loving Father or Supreme Judge. In fact, these terms are not really metaphors according to the Rav; they are accurate descriptions of a human encounter with the Divine. At the same time, we do not find a significant theurgical element in the Rav’s thought. In no place does the Rav consider a theology that does not maintain divine perfection and immutability. The way the Rav negotiates this tension is by understanding prayer as a dialogue that is an end in itself rather than a means to change or affect the Divine. By focusing on the understanding of prayer as both a halakhic obligation and a human need, the Rav sidesteps the question of its impact on God. How, why, and whether prayer “works” is relatively incidental to its analysis:

The efficacy of prayer is not the central term of inquiry in our philosophy of *avodah she-ba-lev*. . . . The basic function of prayer is not its practical consequences but the metaphysical formation of a fellowship consisting of God and man (35).

As is apparent, the Rav is committed to a metaphysical understanding of prayer, as “a fellowship consisting of God and man,” while avoid-

ing the theurgical implications of such a position. Prayer is a real communion with God—not mere psychology. Yet the Rav’s account of prayer has an anthropological rather than a theological focus—it will be about human nature rather than the nature of God.

In order to understand how prayer can give rise to this “fellowship consisting of God and man,” the Rav situates prayer in the broader context of *avodat Hashem*, service of God, or, more generally, of religious experience. He catalogues the different modes in which contact between God and human beings takes place.

Media of Religious Experience

According to the Rav, religious experience is deserving of the name insofar as it is a way in which a person relates to God. The Rav asserts that religious experience is direct experience of God that is available, in principle, to all, and can be found in a broad range of human activities. Prayer is but one form or medium through which a person can relate to God. Perhaps less obviously, other central human experiences, when interpreted religiously, are to be understood as religious media, as modes of relating to the Divine.⁵

There are four media of religious experience. The first medium is the *intellectual*, which includes not only study of the Torah, but also the knowledge and understanding of creation and of metaphysics. The Rav draws on the Maimonidean emphasis on knowledge of God to elaborate this theme, but goes much further and understands the intellectual gesture to be a true meeting between God and the intellectual seeker. The intellectual, especially the intellectual whose focus is the Divine word, arrives through his knowledge and understanding at a kind of communion with the Divine.⁶

The second medium of religious experience is the *emotional*. Experience of God is to be found in the extremes of human emotion. Passionate love of God and the yearning for His presence can give rise to the actual experience of that presence. In elaborating this point, the Rav draws upon the description of revelation in R. Yehuda Halevi’s *Kuzari*. The direct experience of God that Halevi understands to lie at the center of the revelation at Sinai was not, according to the Rav, a one time event. It can be achieved by the ecstatic, whose passion makes it possible to break the bonds of the world and encounter God directly. This encounter is apprehended emotionally; depending on the situation, one may *feel* the presence and companionship of the Heavenly Father or the

glory and awesomeness of the Creator. One may also feel God out of a feeling of despair and anguish. The sufferer, who turns to God in his moment of crisis, may suddenly be filled with the joy of existence. This radical uplifting of his spirit is nothing but the emotional encounter with God, the Divine Comforter. As we will see, the emotional apprehension of God is deeply related to the experience of prayer.

The third medium of religious experience, and the main focus of religious experience in the Halakhah, is the *volitional*. One serves God through intentional action, that is, through the performance of *mizvot*. There is no significant difference between ritual and ethical *mizvot* in this respect:

One serves God and enters into an intimate relationship with Him by self-realization on the part of the moral will, by living a moral life, by walking humbly with people, by engaging in deeds of charity, by being just and merciful, generous and kind, by cultivating the truth, by helping others, by disciplining oneself, by taming one's animal desires and impulses and by introducing axiological worth into the realm of a bodily existence (9-10).

Finally, communication or contact between man and God can be *dialogical*, i.e., involving a speaker and a listener. The Rav points out that there are two manifestations of dialogue between human beings and God, prophecy and prayer. These are mirror images of one another. In prophecy, God is the speaker and the prophet is the listener. In prayer, the roles are reversed and the person standing in prayer becomes the speaker.

This is a striking juxtaposition—we do not usually think of prayer as related to prophecy. Yet in the context of the Rav's general view of religious experience, it is appropriate. For the Rav, religious experience in its various manifestations, the intellectual, the emotional, the volitional, as well as the dialogical, involves the *direct* experience of God. Communion with the Divine is not some lofty goal limited to the mystic or the prophet but is the real substance of all religious experience and is available to all. Within this framework, the association of prophecy and prayer should come as no surprise. True prayer is a means of coming into contact with God through speech, much the same as prophecy. The difference (and it is no small difference) lies in the direction of communication and the initiator of that contact.⁷

Centrality of Petitional Prayer

As mentioned above, for the Rav, prayer, like the other modes of religious experience, must be interpreted anthropologically. Human beings,

by their very nature, strive for contact with the Divine. Religion is the institutionalization and the formalization of this striving,⁸ and must be understood to be about the created rather than the Creator.⁹ At the same time, the Rav remains consistent with the tradition¹⁰ in its emphasis on petition.¹¹ However, petitionary prayer is difficult to explain without reference to theurgy. If we cannot affect God's will, what is the significance of the asking of God for one's needs? Moreover, how does the emphasis on petition fit with the Rav's commitment to understanding prayer as an instance of religious experience—as a means of communing with God? We pray for very concrete things: for understanding, for forgiveness, for health, for economic well-being. How are such prayers a religious experience in the sense of communion with the Divine? The Rav's answers to these questions can be found in the phenomenology of prayer laid out in the second chapter of *Worship of the Heart*.

Prayer as a *Mizvah* with a “*Kiyyum she-ba-Lev*”

In order to properly understand prayer, we must first address its status as a *mizvah*. The Rav quotes the positive commandment to serve God from Rambam's *Sefer ha-Mizvot*. According to Rambam, this commandment has two aspects; it is both a general principle, which the Rav takes to mean a subjective obligation with no physical action attached to it, and a specific performative norm — the obligation to pray daily.¹² According to the Rav, the *mizvah* of prayer belongs to a special class of *mizvot*. These *mizvot* have a specific physical action associated with their performance, a physical *ma'aseh ha-mizvah*, yet the fulfillment of these commandments is not achieved through the mere performance of the action. The action must be associated with a specific state of mind; it must be the expression of a particular inner experience. This is what the Rav refers to as a *kiyyum she-ba-lev*. The actual fulfillment of the *mizvah* involves the achievement of a certain type of consciousness.¹³ The fact that prayer is a *mizvah* with a *kiyyum she-ba-lev* explains the fact that prayer requires *kavvanah*, intention, even according to those who hold that *mizvot* do not generally require *kavvanah*. “For *kavvanah* with respect to *tefillah* forms the very core of the act; without it prayer would become a meaningless and stereotyped ceremonial” (21).

The Rav explains the content of this *kavvanah*, again drawing upon Rambam. While praying, says Rambam, “one must free one's heart from all other thoughts and regard himself as standing before the *Shekhinah*.”¹⁴ *Kavvanah* has two elements, the psychological—“free one's heart from

all other thoughts”—and the mystical—“regard himself as standing before the *Shekhinah*.” In explaining the psychological aspect of total focus, what he calls “mono-ideaism,” the Rav quotes from the famous passage in the *Guide to the Perplexed* (III:51) in which Rambam describes living in a continuous state of such focus as the highest form of human existence. *Kavvanah* in prayer is a microcosm of such a state.

However, prayer consciousness is not just a conscious focus on God; it has an experiential element of “standing before the *Shekhinah*.” According to the Rav, “standing before the *Shekhinah*” is not a metaphor that emphasizes the intensity of focus, but an exact description of the experience of prayer. As elaborated above, this element is central to the Rav’s notion of religious experience. Prayer is a mode in which human beings find themselves in direct contact with the Creator.

Prayer as the Expression of Existential Need

For the Rav, it is inconceivable that the Torah could command an act that is not accessible to everyone as a *mizvah*. The Halakhah is not esoteric; the *mizvah* of prayer must apply equally to all, whatever their spiritual abilities. Such a conception of *mizvot* does not easily accommodate an understanding of prayer as mystical communion with the Divine. Even if it is possible for a select few, how is it possible for ordinary people who are not spiritual giants to break the bounds of their finite existence to connect with the Infinite? Yet, according to the Rav, it is possible: such is the *mizvah* of prayer. Communion with God is made possible by the fact that the prerequisites for its achievement are part of the human condition. Prayer, even in its mystical sense, is not accessible only to the spiritual elite because it is a basic human need.

In this understanding of prayer as both a *mizvah* and a need one finds the Rav’s response to one of the difficulties with petitional prayer mentioned above. What is the significance of petitioning God for our needs? The Rav’s answer is that we pray because we must, both normatively and existentially. God’s response, if any, is not a function of the success or failure of the attempt at prayer, but is a separate question altogether. Prayer remains essentially a human activity and must be understood as such; yet it is a religious activity, and thus, a means of breaking through the limits of the world and accessing the transcendent.

How does this *mizvah* bring about the metaphysical transformation that is communion with the Divine? According to Ramban, the Torah commandment of prayer is only in times of *zarah*. Rambam disagrees

and claims that there is a commandment to pray every day. The Rav contends that Rambam does not disagree with Ramban about the principle that distress lies at the foundation of prayer. Their disagreement lies only in the source of the distress. Ramban focuses on external, physical *zarah*—famine, war, poverty and death. These are what the Rav calls “surface crises,” and since they generally strike communities rather than individuals, they inspire communal prayer, as in the laws of *ta’anit zibbur*. In contrast, Rambam’s notion of prayer as a daily obligation, while in no way obviating that of Ramban, is a response to a “depth crisis.” This is not the result of disastrous physical conditions but is a function of the human existential condition. Every person must realize that despite the greatness of the human personality, each individual is a “being born out of nothingness and running down to nothingness” (36). We are equipped with infinite imagination and desire but “must be satisfied with a restricted, bounded existence” (34). The *mizvah* of prayer includes the responsibility that a person realizes this fact and experience the distress attendant upon it. From the depths of crisis a person is drawn to call upon God out of the realization of his utter dependence every day. This call, when issued from the depths of the human personality, brings about the miraculous manifestation of the divine presence.

Though the Rav does not say so explicitly, it would appear that the normative element of prayer is not merely the required recitation of the liturgy but rather the demand for a kind of daily existential self-appraisal that imposes upon the individual a crisis-awareness. This crisis-awareness becomes prayer when it inspires a calling out to God “out of the depths.” Thus, in a fascinating way, there is a circular movement in the act of prayer: one recites the liturgy in order to remind oneself of one’s existential situation. One brings about a crisis-consciousness that in turn is the source for a calling out to God embodied in the liturgy one is reciting.

Absence of God as an Existential Crisis

As noted above, although prayer is a human activity, it carries within it the potential for transcendence, for communion with God. How does the crisis awareness, and the subsequent lifting up one’s eyes to God as a response to it, give rise to actual contact with God? One source of the existential distress that forms the depth crisis lies in the experience of the absence of God.¹⁵ This absence expresses itself in both the cosmic and historical realms. In modern times, with the great success of science and technology, the “cosmic” absence of God is particularly felt. “Not

always do the heavens proclaim the Glory of God” (75). God’s absence is also felt in the historical realm through our awareness of the “unreasonableness of historical occurrence” (76). One cannot make sense of history; it seems to lead nowhere and to serve no purpose. Both of these awarenesses inspire awe, fear, and, ultimately, despair; they present human life as tragic-comical and meaningless.

Man feels a grisly emptiness and chilling cruelty pervading the uncharted lanes of the universe. . . . Nature is cool, mechanical and devoid of meaning; man, searching for salvation, is a tragi-comical figure crying out to a mute insensible environment which does not share his troubles and suffering (75-76).

This feeling, claims the Rav, “is not to be confused with agnosticism or Greek mythological fatalism. It is the religious emotion at its best. It is the experience of God as *numen absens*” (77).

Communion with God Through Identification with His Will.

The numinous experience of divine absence gives rise to a profound existential loneliness, a feeling of desolation and alienation from the Creator. However, when interpreted religiously, this experience can be the foundation of prayer as a means of breaking through the silence and finding companionship. Through prayer a person can miraculously convert the distance into closeness, the numinous into the “kerygmatic,”¹⁶ loneliness into communion with God.

The possibility of this miracle, as well as the means of its achievement, can be learned, claims the Rav, from the Biblical account of the *avot*. The *avot* instituted a covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish People that holds the promise of redemption. This covenant promises suffering and travail (e.g. *Berit bein ha-Betarim*), but, because of His promise, God cannot forsake us forever. The individual stories of the *avot* furnish us with an account of individuals whose lives are full of alienation and regret, suffering and privation, but who made use of these experiences to deepen their relationship with God. The *avot* discovered the formula for transforming the numinous into the kerygmatic: “the acceptance of the numinous authority, truly wholeheartedly and with conviction, the result of which is the easing of the mind and dispelling of inner fear and anxiety” (81). When a person identifies the will of God with his own will, when he accepts both the cosmic and historical reality that he finds himself in, not through submission and defeat but actively and deliberately, he can convert distance into closeness.

They [the *avot*] considered the dreadful and mysterious encounter to be a summons to man, not to yield to something unknown, but to interpret the unknown in terms of a great experience, one that enriches and purifies man . . . one must not surrender to the numinous as a superior power that silences all opposition. Rather, one must make a supreme effort to assimilate it into one's total existential experience, to interpret it and to search for the message hidden in something paradoxical and alien No wonder that *tefillah* is the response of man to the numinous whenever he encounters it. The reason is that the function of tefila is to convert a strange and incomprehensible relationship into friendship and comradeship" (82).

The act of prayer, the calling out to God from the depths of despair, is the beginning of this process. In crying out, one begins the journey first traveled by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and it is no accident that the *Amidah* prayer begins with reference to them.¹⁷

We should note that in connecting the act of prayer to the covenant with God and the acceptance of His will, the Rav has returned us to the concept of prayer as a *mizvah* and drawn a connection between the volitional and the dialogical modes of divine service. Here too there is a circular movement: prayer is a *mizvah*, a normative requirement of every Jew, whose content involves the recognition of his existential situation and the response to it in prayer. This same prayer is part of the redemption from that distress for it is through internalization of the divine will, which includes the *mizvah* of prayer, that God's absence is overcome and His presence felt.

Praise and Thanksgiving—Aesthetic Experience of God

Though the Rav places great emphasis on petitionary prayer, he is well aware of the two other traditional categories of prayer, praise and thanksgiving. These are different from petitionary prayer in that they bear less existential weight: they are not a function of awareness of one's existential situation but responses to particular experiences. In particular, we are driven to praise or thank God when we encounter Him. Returning to the Rav's fourfold analysis of *avodat Hashem*, we can say that the connection between the volitional and the dialogical modes of divine service is rooted in the fact that prayer is a *mizvah*. In praise and thanksgiving, the dialogical medium becomes a function of the emotional.

Since, according to the Rav, religious experience is always a form of communion with God, the emotional experience of God cannot merely be the upwelling of religious feeling. It must be an intentional, directed sensi-

bility involving another. How is this possible? The Rav claims that one can experience God *aesthetically*. The term *aesthetic* here is used in the classical (and later Kantian) sense to refer to sensual perception in general rather than a particular focus on art or beauty. By using this notion, the Rav is certainly not denying the incorporeality of the Creator; he is rather asserting that one can undergo an experience of contact with divinity.

The feeling of God's presence is not mere imagination but is actually an authentic apprehension of the Divine, analogous to sense-perception.¹⁸ The medium of this perception is emotion. For example, compare the intense feeling of love of God with the feeling of being in the presence of a Loving Father. Both are religious feelings but there is a logical and chronological priority of the latter to the former. One cannot feel passionate emotion about an abstraction. Only direct contact with the object of one's emotions can inspire passion. God is "present" and manifest as the Loving Father when one feels Him to be.

One feels the touch of His hand and the warmth that His eyes radiate. "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:9) (58).

Ecstatic love of God, or authentic fear of Him, cannot be based on an understanding of God as either a cosmic First Cause or as a moral First Principle. These two descriptions of God, though of course valid, do not give rise to religious passion. Passion requires an object of its attention and is inspired by actual contact with that object and not mere contemplation of it in abstraction.

In terms of prayer, this sort of religious emotional contact with God is the foundation of hymns of praise and prayers of thanksgiving. The direct experience of God in different ways can inspire either praise or thanksgiving as a response. The direction of movement is the opposite of that found in petitional prayer. Petitional prayer arises from a profound sense of one's need and desire for God's help, inspired by one's sense of absolute dependence or one's pain at the feeling of God's absence. In contrast, prayers of praise and thanksgiving do not bring about contact with the Divine, but are the response to contact with Him.

To be sure, hymns of praise and prayers of thanksgiving are very different and reflect different experiences. One is inspired to praise at the experience of the glory and majesty of God manifesting His numinous power and might as the artist "whose creation abounds in grace and loveliness" (65).

The beauty of God is experienced as holiness, as the *mysterium magnum*, ineffable and unattainable, awesome and holy (*nora ve-kadosh*), as something that transcends everything comprehensible and speakable, which

makes one tremble and experience bliss. Beauty and paradox merge—He is both remote and so near; awesome and lovely, fascinating and daunting, majestic and tender, comforting and frightening, familiar and alien, the beyond of creation and its very essence. . . . (66)

It is this experience that gives rise to praise.

Thanksgiving prayer is the product of a very different sort of encounter:

God in the thanksgiving hymn is proclaimed primarily as good, as helping, giving and loving, as charitable and full of grace and mercy. We declare His will to be the abode of ethical and moral law, His deed a continuing process of realization of His infinite good (66).

It must be emphasized that in thanksgiving as well as in praise, one is not merely asserting God's goodness and *hesed* or majesty and holiness. Thanksgiving and praise are religious emotions inspired by the divine encounter. In both praise and thanksgiving, we transform moral descriptions into aesthetic attributes. One neither praises nor thanks God upon recognizing the greatness of God as a cosmic truth. Only the encounter with God's beauty, in its different manifestations, can inspire real praise and thanksgiving. These, claims the Rav, lie in the realm of religious-aesthetic experience, in the apprehension of the beauty of God.

The difference between these two modes lies in the aspect of the divine that one finds beautiful. Praise is the response to the beauty of numinous majesty, of divine greatness and exaltedness. Thanksgiving is the response to the beauty of closeness and concern, of divine grace and kindness. Thus all three modes of prayer, praise, thanksgiving and petition, share a common thread that is central to the Rav's thought. They are all concerned with direct experience of the Divine, in its different forms and manifestations. Religious experience is direct experience of God, according to the Rav, and his theory of prayer is an example of this.

To return to our point of departure, we can now see how the Rav negotiates his way between the two poles of understanding prayer, the anthropocentric and the theurgical. On the one hand, the entire focus of the Rav's discussion is on human nature and experience; prayer can only be understood in these terms and not in terms of metaphysical theology. On the other hand, prayer is to be understood literally as a dialogue with God in the different modes elaborated above. Prayer is not a function of our understanding of God but a mode of experiencing contact with Him. It is a pre-theological activity that stems not from the intellect but from the emotions.

One of the most original aspects of the Rav's thought on prayer is

this legitimization of religious emotion. Religious emotion is a good in itself, a form of *avodat Hashem*. In addition, and more unusually, religious emotion can serve as a valid epistemic medium. According to the Rav, one can directly experience God through one's emotions. This emotional apprehension of God is not, technically speaking, knowledge of God according to the Rav's Kantian epistemology, but it serves much the same role as knowledge of God does in the familiar Maimonidean theology. Through emotional experience, God can become the object of religious life. With the downfall of rational metaphysical theology, we were left with a gap between religious experience and our theological accounting of it. The Rav fills this gap by giving new prominence to emotional experience of God.¹⁹

Critical Comments on the Rav's Theory of Prayer

Before turning to the Rav's discussion of aesthetics, which occupies an important place in this volume, I want to offer some critical thoughts on the theory of prayer summarized above. The great strength of the Rav's understanding of prayer lies, to my mind, in his negotiation between faithfulness to the explicit content of the liturgy, on the one hand, and commitment to theological and philosophical rigor on the other. We would, of course, expect nothing less from the Rav. The faithfulness to the liturgy can be found in the Rav's insistence that a philosophy of Jewish prayer must be focused on petitional prayer and must appreciate what was obvious to *Hazal* and to everyone but theologians and philosophers—that people pray to God out of need. Implicit in this fact about prayer lies the danger of turning prayer into some kind of magical incantation, into a means of bending the divine will to our own. The Rav responds to the problem of how petition can be meaningful without it turning God into a crude anthropomorphism or implying some other kind of degradation of God's power and knowledge. The Rav turns the sociological observation that “there are no atheists in a foxhole” into a theological-anthropological principle—one experiences God in whatever foxhole one finds oneself, be it actual or existential. We cry out to God because we must, because it is a necessary response to the reality in which we find ourselves. The institutionalization of prayer by the Rabbis was an attempt to educate people in their own existential reality—sometimes it is only through prayer that we can come to the realization that we must pray.

This position has implications that should affect how we pray. For example, I recently was asked by a total stranger to pray for the health

of a particular sick person whom I did not know and had never even heard of. I will never know, and to be honest, I am not really interested to know, if the object of my prayer recovered from his illness. I have always felt uncomfortable in such situations; it is not difficult to say the words, but the very attempt to “collect prayers” seems to take prayer to be some kind of “divine nagging.” If enough people beseech the Holy One on a particular subject, He will, against His better judgment, so to speak, relent. Of course this is not how the person pursuing this course would describe what he is doing, and I mean no disrespect to the depth of his faith and commitment. But how else can we understand this sort of project?²⁰

The Rav’s theory of prayer offers an alternative. Meaningful prayer must be just that. It must reflect my own concerns and needs and my own sense of dependence on God. It is not a *means* of influencing God, but the expression of my desire to do so; I beseech God to address my concerns, to help me with my problems, to relieve my pain and distress.

Nonetheless, there are elements in the Rav’s philosophy of prayer that are difficult. The Rav insists upon the exotericism of prayer—that prayer, as a *mizvah*, must be an activity accessible to all and not only to the spiritual elite. This is an important point that seems hard to deny. There must be at least a minimal content to the *mizvah* of prayer that can be fulfilled by all. Yet the Rav at some points does not offer an understanding of prayer that is accessible to ordinary people. In his discussion of praise and thanksgiving in particular the Rav seems to turn away from the exoteric. He offers no account of institutionalized prayer and thanksgiving, as found in the texts of the liturgy. Prayer and thanksgiving are seen as responses to a profound religious experience of the perception of God, His beauty, power or grace. The Rav interprets several psalms from the point of view of the author of the psalm, who is clearly in a state of high religious emotion, but what of the reader of the psalm? The interpretation is both edifying and inspiring, but how does it connect back to the practice of the *mizvah* of prayer? Does the Rav think that the ecstatic experience of perception of the beauty of God is available to every person three times a day?

In “Reflections on the *Amidah*,” chapter ten of the volume, the Rav addresses this issue and interprets the praise and thanksgiving portions of the *Amidah* as the prelude and the conclusion, respectively, of the central petition (174-176). He admits that “the hymn, embroidered with aesthetic experience, is confined to the private domain of the elite. It is pleasing only to mystics. . . .” (174). It appears that the Rav must struggle to maintain the exotericism of prayer, limiting it to only the

petitional element, while the other elements are, in their authentic forms, limited to the spiritual elite.

Another place where it seems to me that the Rav fails his own test of exotericism lies in his existentialist interpretation of *zarah*. As related above, the Rav explains that according to Rambam, prayer is meant to reflect existential distress, a “depth crisis” rather than a “surface crisis.” Are existential angst, fear of the futility and emptiness of existence in the face of death, the loneliness of the human being in the deaf cosmos, exoteric emotions? To be fair, this volume opens with a qualification in which the Rav admits that he can only speak for himself:

Therefore, when I speak about the philosophy of prayer or *Shema*, I do not claim universal validity for my conclusions. I am not lecturing on philosophy of prayer as such, but on prayer as understood, experienced, and enjoyed by an individual (2).

I have no doubt that a deep sense of existential crisis was a major part of the Rav’s personal psychology. Perhaps the Rav believed that any healthy individual who is open to experience and not blinded by preconceptions will naturally arrive at such existential crisis. In any case, I think that the Rav hits much closer to the mark in terms of common human experience when he interprets prayer in light of the feeling of total dependence on God than when he describes the existential depth crisis. To my mind, the feeling of total dependence can appropriately be expected of anyone who has been educated to religious awareness. Existential crisis, on the other hand, reflects more than existential self-consciousness; it is, rather, a particular interpretation of it. The limitedness of human existence need not inspire despair and thus it seems to me that not everyone is subject, or should be subject, to existential angst. If I am correct, we cannot build an exoteric theory of prayer out of such a “depth crisis” since that crisis is not experienced by all.

Lastly, the Rav’s notion of the emotional apprehension of God that is so central to his understanding of prayer is deeply connected to his Kantianism, with the attendant difficulties for those of us who question some of the Kantian presuppositions. As this point is also relevant to the Rav’s discussion of aesthetics, I will return to it in that context.

The Aesthetic vs. the Ethical and the Cognitive Gestures

I would like to turn now to the Rav’s treatment of aesthetics. The discussion of aesthetics appears in the context of the Rav’s interpretation of modern culture’s problem of boredom, which he understands to be a

kind of depth crisis. Before elaborating the Rav's thought on this subject, we must note that he uses the term "aesthetics" in a slightly idiosyncratic way. We generally use the term to refer to a philosophical theory of art or of beauty. Classically, the term refers to all sense perception — "aesthetic" is a description of the manner in which one perceives, as in Kant who titles the analysis of sense perception in the *Critique of Pure Reason* the "Transcendental Aesthetic." The Rav's usage is an amalgam of the Kantian and contemporary understandings of the term.²¹

The Rav elaborates a kind of structural psychology in which human experience can be divided into three parts: the intellectual/cognitive gesture, the ethical gesture, and the aesthetic gesture. This division, though not explicit in Kant, is clearly Kantian in origin. The paradigm of the cognitive gesture is the pursuit of scientific knowledge, particularly physics. The ethical gesture involves the formulation of *a priori* norms that transcend experience and the implementation of those norms in life. The aesthetic gesture involves the encounter with the sensual world. This experience is understood through the analysis of the idea of beauty.²²

In the typological approach that he favors, the Rav describes an ideal aesthetic type. The aesthetic type, or "aesthetic man," is one whose world view is founded upon aesthetic experience, on the flow of sensory input, and thus whose values are defined in aesthetic terms. While the intellectual is concerned with the true as opposed to the false, and the ethical person is concerned with good versus evil, the aesthete finds his or her values expressed in terms of the beautiful and ugly. Thus, the aesthetic has the whole of sensory experience at its object, but its evaluation remains focused on the judgment of beauty.

The Rav contrasts the aesthetic gesture with the ethical and cognitive gestures, which he claims are of a fundamentally different nature. First, both the moral person and the scientist are in pursuit of something fixed and unchanging:

The cognitive and the ethical are Parmenidean types. The man engaged in the search for truth is always aware of the fixity of the natural law and of his intellectual capacity to conceive it. He employs methods that are basically unalterable and seeks to arrive at an eternal truth (40).

. . . The moral person believes in some deontic principles, in strict duties, which are not subject to change and transformation. The ethical law, unaltered, persists in her majestic dignity forever. It is binding at all times, without taking into account the peculiar mind of the individual or the temper of the community (41).

Both the cognitive type and the ethical type understand reality as being fixed and patterned; the task is to discover those patterns or to bring about their realization. Neither is interested in the flow of qualitative reality except insofar as it reflects either the truths or the norms to be pursued. In contrast, the object of the aesthetic type's interest is not some abstract theoretical realm, be it deontic or scientific. Rather, he or she is concerned with the qualitative experience of reality in its multifarious flux. Permanence holds no attraction to the aesthete. The object of the aesthete's attentions is his or her own self in the continual stimulation of his or her hedonic consciousness.²³

The aesthetic type differs from the ethico-cognitive in another way. The ethico-cognitive consciousness is by definition teleological, that is, purposive, while aesthetic consciousness is not. Both the scientist and the moralist are engaged in teleological activities—they have a purpose which guides and focuses their action. The scientist sets his sights on the understanding of reality. The ultimate understanding of reality is the *telos*, the end or purpose that pulls him forward and focuses his activity. This *telos* provides the standard by which he or she can be self-critical; all is judged in terms of its relation to the ultimate truth and on that criterion is accepted or rejected. So too, the moralist, in his or her critical self-reckoning, is always in search of an absolute morality that will guide him or her in the attempt to realize practical morality.

The Rav's insistence upon the teleological nature of ethics and cognition is of great significance. He claims that ethical and theoretical knowledge are possible only if they are understood to have a transcendental *telos*. They must reach beyond the mundane and accessible. Intellectual life, if it is to be significant and authentic, must be associated with "the metaphysical awareness of transcendental ultimate truth." Likewise, ethical experience must aspire to "absolute ideals of infinite mind and will" (52).²⁴ Understanding ethics and theoretical knowledge in terms of a transcendental purposiveness allows for self-transcendence and allows for us to make valid claims about the nature of the world and of the norms to be lived by. The ultimate good and the absolute truth that are the end of these activities are in principle unattainable, but only in their pursuit can we have confidence in our tentative conclusions. Only because we know that there are such ultimate truths can we both assert and critique our thinking and our morality.

To interpret the Rav's position theologically, we could say that purposiveness, teleological thinking, is not a psychological value but a prerequisite for a coherent epistemology or ethics. Our knowledge, of the

world or of the good, is legitimate only in so far as it “takes part” in the infinite Divine knowledge and will. Ultimate truth and ethics are outside the world, in the mind of God. The cognitive and the moral are both fundamentally God-seeking activities. Cognitive-ethical man is concerned with discovering the absolute—the absolute laws of nature and the absolute moral law. Since God, the source of these laws, is One, these must be understood to be ultimately identical. Though the mind of God is inaccessible to finite human beings, it is only through the setting of the transcendental as the standard and goal of either intellectual or ethical activity that these have validity. The legitimacy of objective knowledge and non-relativistic ethics does not so much need to be grounded as to be *focused*. Once the transcendental nature of one’s purpose has been posited, one has the ability to gaze at oneself critically and not merely skeptically.²⁵

The aesthete’s world view is entirely different. As mentioned above, aesthetic consciousness accepts a Heraclitean ontology—a view of the world as constantly in flux. Patterns, repetitions, and abstractions are of no significance. The pride of place granted to knowledge and understanding is replaced with the stimulation and satisfaction of fleeting desires. The aesthete is entirely self-centered, but despite (and because of) this he is neither self-aware nor self-critical. In contrast, the ethical and cognitive types are constantly examining themselves critically. Are they mistaken? Are they using the correct methodology? The aesthetic type does not perform the self-objectification necessary to examine himself, but

. . . intoxicates himself with self-admiration and adoration . . . since his self has been, in the expression coined by one theologian, expanded to a “world-self.” Nothing else exists; there is one world, which reflects himself (44).

This non-critical self-absorption is founded on the fact that aesthetic consciousness is non-teleological. Aesthetic experience is found in immediate, unmitigated contact with reality at the qualitative sensible level. It has no transcendental attachment—it is entirely this-worldly.

If there is no color, there is no perception of beauty for the eye; if the universe is purged of sound, how then can the ear catch the sweet glorious music of the spheres? For the aesthetic, there is no beauty in the abstract, in thought alone. (51-52)

The absence of a transcendental element in the aesthete’s existence means that it is not meaningful. It leads nowhere and realizes nothing.

He or she pursues no objective standard that would involve the recognition of something besides himself or herself.

It is for this reason that boredom is an aesthetic phenomenon. According to the Rav, neither the cognitive nor the ethical consciousness is afflicted by boredom, for the fixed repetitiveness of being that is the source of boredom is precisely their goal. Newness, adventure and excitement do not play a role in the ethico-cognitive consciousness.

When I come across a burning house where a helpless child has been trapped, I must hasten to rescue the victim, and it would be a criminal folly on my part to desist on the grounds that I have already saved five other children the same day and I am bored with the continued climbing and carrying of children overcome by fire (41).

The aesthete, however, has no interest in the repetitive and the constant. All value for him or her is in the moment, and if in the moment there is no stimulation to be found, the aesthete experiences boredom.

He desires a limitless multitude of experiences and is indiscriminate about how he attains them. He seeks changes of circumstance, panorama, friends and objects of enjoyment. What delighted him the day before is obsolete today, and what he indulges in now will lose its attraction with the rise of the morning star (39).²⁶

According to the Rav, the domination of the aesthetic consciousness over the ethico-cognitive is the source of sin. In an extended interpretation of Maimonides' account of the sin of Adam, the Rav argues that Adam's sin was precisely the preference for the aesthetic, with its attendant values of pleasure and delight, over the ethical-cognitive, which is concerned with truth and right.²⁷ When human beings lose sight of the relative significance of aesthetic values, and give priority to them over ethical and cognitive values, they sin.

The Redemption of the Aesthetic

Up until this point, one could use the Rav's analysis of the ethical, cognitive, and aesthetic gestures to support an argument for asceticism, for the suppression of the aesthetic gesture that is the source of sin. The Rav does not take that route. Despite its potential for sinfulness, the aesthetic gesture may be redeemed by introducing into it the teleological element that it is lacking.

Though the aesthetic, in itself, never ventures outside of immediacy and contiguity, it is more than that: it is an incessant search for the beyond,

for a finer, better, and purer existence which has been purged of the ugliness of ordinary, unredeemed existence (50).

It is possible to conceive of aesthetic experience in a new way, not merely as the satisfaction of transient desires and cravings, but as the reflection of the larger human desire to experience transcendence. The experience of beauty is fleeting, but that fleetingness is a function of human limitation. There in fact exists a permanent, eternal source of beauty of which earthly beauty is merely a reflection. When we relate to our experience of beauty in this way, we can redeem aesthetic experience and convert it from a source of sin into an experience of inherent value.

How is the redemption of aesthetics possible? According to the Rav, it is necessary to introduce a skeptical, critical element into aesthetic experience. The aesthete must develop the ability to make value judgments much like those made by the ethicist and the scientist in their realms. He or she will have to doubt and question his or her own experience, both in its particulars and as to its general value and worth.

What is required is the awakening of the skeptic, the rise of a critique of the aesthetic judgment and beauty–appreciation. Through the emergence of doubt—the thought that everything experienced as beauty is perhaps not beautiful at all—the catharsis of beauty is made possible. When the aesthete begins to wonder whether everything which is apprehended as beauty and pleasant expresses indeed genuine beauty, when he thinks that the aesthetic act can be critically examined and its worth objectively ascertained, in a manner similar to our critical attitude toward the cognitive and ethical gestures, then beauty is redeemed (56).

In order to redeem his or her experience, the aesthete must follow the same route as the ethicist and scientist. He or she must inquire into the source and nature of beauty and relate it to a transcendental standard, an absolute notion of beauty that can be envisioned but never experienced.

The Rav goes on to point out the relationship between this conception of the redemption of the aesthetic and religious emotion. Religious emotion stems, in part, from the perception of the exaltedness of the Divine, from the apprehension of the majesty and glory of God. This is an explicit instance of the attachment of a transcendent motif to an aesthetic experience. The experience of awe and wonder is related by the religious ecstatic to the transcendent glory of God. As discussed above, the Rav believes that this experience can be a genuine form of communion with the Divine, and is the foundation of the hymn of praise. The experience of beauty is redeemed by turning it into a religious experience. In the same manner in which we understand God to be the tran-

scendent source of truth and of good, so too He is the source of beauty. God addresses himself to us not only through our ability to cognize and understand, or to appreciate the moral good and act upon it, but also through our perception of aesthetics.

It must be emphasized that although redeemed aesthetics is deeply related to the religious emotion inspired by the experience of the beauty and glory of God, they are not identical. Aesthetic appreciation must be directed towards a transcendental motif; this need not be explicitly religious. In the same manner that scientific thought is made possible by being directed towards the absolute truth, and ethics by being directed to the ultimate good, whether or not these are conceived as divine manifestations, so too aesthetics must be focused on an idea of absolute beauty, regardless of whether such an idea is understood to be rooted in the Divine. Aesthetics, like science and ethics, stands independent of a particular religious interpretation. They are legitimate activities in and of themselves and do not need to be justified or validated through their serving some specific religious goal. This, of course, is not to say that the Rav did not interpret these activities religiously. On the contrary, for the Rav, the transcendental end of all three human gestures, the cognitive, the ethical and the aesthetic, is God in his differing manifestations. The human need to understand, act in, or appreciate the world is fundamentally rooted in each person's search for God. The Rav explores this theme at length in *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*, wherein it is connected to the larger theme of the relationship between God and the world. The discussion of aesthetics presented here should be understood in that context.²⁸

Validation of Aesthetics

In order to understand the aesthetic theory propounded here, it is important to appreciate the Rav's agenda. He is not interested in explicating the nature of aesthetic judgment, in the manner of Kant in the *Critique of Pure Judgment*. Rather, he provides us with a theory of the *validity* of aesthetic judgment. He explains how the apprehension of beauty can be something more than the stimulation of the senses in a pleasant manner. The Rav emphasizes the dangers of over-valuing the aesthetic, for down that path lies self-absorption and rebellion against God. He insists, however, that aesthetic experience can be inherently valuable and that this is accomplished by precisely the same means by which we make our need to understand and our ability to act valuable.

Through what he calls “the skeptical approach,” the human ability to relate critically to oneself, human activity is redeemed. Mythological explanation is converted into scientific explanation, primitive savagery is changed into ethical behavior, and potentially, sensible apprehension can become appreciation of true beauty. In the present stage of human history, claims the Rav, cognitive and ethical experience have come to be understood in this critical manner, and thus have largely been redeemed. Modern culture still fails to relate to aesthetic experience critically.

The Rav’s Idealism and its Difficulties

I cannot conclude a discussion of the Rav’s theory of the redemption of aesthetics without briefly addressing the Rav’s idealism (in the philosophical sense) and the difficulties that it creates for many a modern reader (or at least for me). By “idealism” I mean the philosophical tendency to give logical (and ontological) priority to the conceptual and theoretical over the experiential and empirical. It is a mode of thought that begins with concepts and proceeds from there to the interpretation of reality. In all of his categories of experience the Rav grants at least logical precedence to an ideal form—be it truth, good, or beauty—over the concrete reality. In the following I would like to raise some problems that I think result from this way of thinking. Though this is not the place for a critique of either idealism in general or the Rav’s particular version of it, it is important that we be aware that the Rav’s perspective involves philosophical commitments that are not so simple.

At the center of the Rav’s analysis lies his division of experience into the cognitive, the ethical and the aesthetic. For the Rav, this separation into categories is not merely a heuristic device; at the very least, the aesthetic is of a fundamentally different nature than the cognito-ethical. Yet one could question the validity of sharply dividing human experience in this way. Ever since Plato, the distinction between aesthetics and ethics has been problematic. The difference between beautiful and good is vital and important, but is it sharp? Can the good not play a role in what makes something beautiful and vice versa? In my opinion, although the Rav’s insistence on preserving this Kantian division of experience is useful (for example, for his analysis of Heraclitian versus Parmenidean consciousness), it runs the risk of obscuring parts of experience from our philosophical and theological view.

A related difficulty lies in the Rav’s particular understanding of each category. For the Rav, the paradigm of cognitive experience is that of the

theoretical physicist who creates mathematical models that map onto reality. Even if we grant that this is an accurate representation of the activity of a physicist, is our concept of knowledge limited to this model? Is all knowledge the more or less successful pursuit of abstract models? Are there not other ways and means of knowing that do not fit this paradigm at all? One would have trouble understanding how this notion of knowledge accommodates experiential knowledge that cannot be reduced to abstractions: the ability to ride a bike or learn a *sugya*. The Rav follows Kant (and perhaps the mainstream of the Western philosophical tradition) in perceiving thought and action as radically different. Thinking is understood in terms of abstract concepts of mind. Actions are physical manifestations of the body. The famous mind-body problem is an expression of this dichotomy. However, certainly since Wittgenstein, the radical gap between mind and body, thought and action, has been called into question. Perhaps thinking is merely a kind of acting, or maybe acting cannot be conceived of without an element of thinking.

I would beg of the reader not to misunderstand the previous paragraphs. Though antagonism to idealism is perhaps fashionable today, the problems with idealism are not new, and no doubt the Rav was aware of them and felt that they were not insurmountable. It would be both presumptuous and foolish of me to dismiss any of the Rav's conclusions or insights because of my difficulty with some of his philosophical presuppositions. The series of questions above serves a different purpose. It is clear that the Rav considered both the theological and philosophical issues (for the Rav the gap between the two was small) discussed in this essay to be of great significance. He dedicated both time and energy to his engagement with these subjects. For all of his enormous impact on modern Orthodox life, he does not seem to have many disciples in this engagement. Though perhaps there are no *talmidei hakhamim* today of the Rav's stature, Torah learning is, *barukh ha-Shem*, both a value and a significant part of the lives of thousands of his students and students' students (amongst whom I count myself). Our generation is not, in general, similarly engaged in the struggle to understand our place in the world and our relationship with the Creator. We do not necessarily need new theological approaches—theology is not a suit that one changes every so often—but we need engagement and concern. To take the Rav's advice, if this engagement is going to lead anywhere, it must be critical; it must be willing and able to question old assumptions and test them for validity. At stake are the depth and the seriousness of our religious lives.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to recommend *Worship of the Heart* to all. The second half of the book, which I have not discussed, is focused on interpretations of specific prayers. I have already made use of it in my own teaching and can recommend it to all who are interested in deepening their prayer experience. The theory of prayer laid out in the first half of the book and discussed at length above is of great import. The Rav offers us an understanding of the nature of prayer that bridges the gap between theology and religion. Besides this understanding of prayer, the Rav reflects in this volume on religious experience in general and grants particular legitimacy to religious emotion as a means of communion with God. Finally, we find here the most explicit expression of the Rav's understanding of aesthetic experience and its relationship to other spheres of human life. We can only thank the Toras HoRav Foundation and the editor of this volume, Shalom Carmy, for their efforts in issuing this work and hope to see more of the Rav's teachings, in *Halakhah*, *Aggadah* and *Ma'ashavah* published in the future.

Notes

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1. Published in *Hadarom* 47(1978):84-106 and in *Ish ha-Halakhah: Galuy ve-Nistar* (Jerusalem, 1979), 237-71.
2. The classic Jewish expression of this position is found in R. Yosef Albo, *Sefer ha-Ikkarim*, *Ma'amar* 4, chapters 16-18. It should be noted that according to Albo, prayer is not merely a meditative act without focus on practical human needs. Prayer "works," but it works by changing the pray-er, by making him a more fitting receptacle of divine grace, rather than by affecting the Divine.
3. See Shalom Rosenberg, "Prayer in Jewish Thought: Approaches and Problems (A Survey)," in *Prayer in Judaism*, ed. Gabriel H. Cohn and Harold Fisch (Northvale, New Jersey, 1996), 73-77 for a survey of the notion of theurgic prayer in Judaism as well as references. See pp. 77-80 of the same article in which Rosenberg describes another Kabbalistic tradition that he calls "mystical prayer," which contains both meditative and theurgical elements.
4. This rendition of the theological alternatives for a theory of prayer does not presume to be in any way comprehensive; it is meant, rather, to represent the scope of the possibilities.
5. This conception is possible only if one adopts a notion of the Divine that includes but goes beyond the personal God who appeared to the *avot*.

- Though we will not elaborate on this point here, the Rav's interpretation of religious experience is intimately related to his understanding of God's presence as embedded in the fabric of existence. This theme is elaborated upon by the Rav in many places. In the work under review, see in particular chapter 8, "Immanence and Transcendence: Comments on *Birkat Yozer Or*," and chapter 9, "Accepting the Yoke of Heaven."
6. This theme of intellectual worship of God is only mentioned briefly here, and is elaborated upon in the Rav's important essay "*U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*." See especially *Ish ha-Halakhah: Galuy ve-Nistar*, 122-42.
 7. One should not conclude based on this idea that the Rav believes that prophecy is available to everyone, or even to anyone, today. The difference in direction is crucial. Everyone can speak to God and must do so, but since the biblical era, God does not deign to speak to individuals; even then, that speech was usually limited to a few (see p. 7).
 8. This should not, God forbid, be taken to imply that the Rav questioned the principle of *Torah min ha-Shamayim*. Rather, the opposite is the case; the Torah is the divine manifestation of God's will, which functions as a "field" of human striving (primarily in the intellectual and volitional modes) for God.
 9. Even metaphysical theology of the medieval sort is understood by the Rav to reflect more about the human experience of God rather than the actual divine nature, which is transcendent, and thus inaccessible. See *u-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*, 138-156.
 10. See Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hil. Tefillah*, chapter 1.
 11. See *Talmud Bavli, Berakhot* 20b, in which the *mizvah* of prayer is described as *rahamei*, a petition for mercy.
 12. There is some confusion here. In the text, great emphasis is placed on how Rambam refers to this double norm as "*avodah she-ba-lev*," yet the quote is taken from *Sefer ha-Mizvot* in which Rambam quotes various verses that refer to "*avodah*" without specific reference to worship of the heart. In addition, it is difficult to accept the Rav's understanding of Rambam's category of "belonging to the class of general principles." The Rav takes this to mean that the *mizvah* has a purely subjective element. However, in *Shresh 4 of Sefer ha-Mizvot*, Rambam defines such *mizvot* as general exhortations to keep the Torah; they are therefore not counted in the list of *mizvot*. In any case, Rambam does use the term "*avodah she-ba-lev*" in *Mishneh Torah (Hil. Tefillah, 1:1)* in reference to prayer, and thus the main point the Rav is asserting, that prayer is a *mizvah* with a *kivvum she-ba-lev*, can draw on that proof-text.
 13. This analysis of *mizvot* that involve a subjective, experiential element was much beloved by the Rav and he applies it elsewhere. In the present volume, it is applied to prayer and to *Keriat Shema*.
 14. Rambam, *Hil. Tefillah* 4:16.
 15. I would like to point out to the reader that in my exposition here I have changed the order from that of *Worship of the Heart*. In the book, the discussion of the absence of God comes after the chapters on the redemption of the aesthetic that I will discuss later. My decision to discuss these topics in a different order is not merely for convenience's sake, allowing me to save the discussion of aesthetics for last. More significantly, it reflects a problem in the text; as I do not have access to the original manuscripts, I do not know whether to lay the problem at the door of the editor or the author. The description of the depth crisis as the source of *zarah* that gives

rise to prayer is found at the end of chapter 2, "Prayer, Petition and Crisis." The following two chapters are presented as an analysis of the depth crisis and of existential distress through an interpretation of the human condition, particularly of the aesthetic gesture in contrast to the cognitive and the ethical (see p. 37). However, those two chapters, in my opinion, do not relate to the existential depth crisis at all. Rather they are an interpretation of a different mode of religious experience, which is not *zarah*, but, on the contrary, the possibility of ecstatic religious experience, the source of praise and thanksgiving. Only in chapter five, "The Absence of God and the Community of Prayer," does the Rav return to the theme of existential distress and its relation to prayer. For this reason, I have addressed chapter five first and will return afterwards to the Rav's idea of the redemption of the aesthetic.

It is not entirely clear to me how to view the relation between the depth crisis described in chapter 2, in which petitional prayer is understood as a cry of existential distress, and the crisis of "the absence of God" in chapter 5. It would appear that "the absence of God" is a form of the depth crisis but is not the only form. Existential distress need not give rise to the feeling of God's absence; this feeling may instead be a direct source of the feeling of total dependence on God that prayer invokes, as elaborated in chapter two. If this is the case, then for the Rav, the communion with God "out of the depths" can circumvent the formula of identification with His will described in chapter 5. The pain and despair of *zarah*, interpreted as the feeling of total dependence, are in themselves to be understood as communion with God. It would appear that the crisis of "the absence of God" is an instance of this broader existential crisis and not something else altogether.

16. The term *kerygma* literally means "proclamation" in Greek. It is used by Protestant theologians to describe the response to a theological encounter that gives rise to the need to proclaim the "Word." The Rav's usage of the term is somewhat unusual. The kerygmatic, for the Rav, stands in opposition to the numinous or esoteric. It "stresses man's participation in the Divine mission" (75), rather than his alienation from it.
17. See "Reflections on the *Amidah*," 144-182 in this volume, in which the Rav elaborates on the theme of the *avot* in the liturgy.
18. Given the Rav's Kantianism, this position is far less radical than appears at first glance. The Rav is not arguing for a prophetic type ability to see the unseeable. According to Kant, all knowledge of the external world is a product of the spontaneous consciousness; our awareness of physical objects is in no way "direct" apprehension of anything. Rather, it is the *product* of the impingement of sensual stimuli on consciousness. One cannot directly "see" the outside world anymore than one can see God. The Rav takes this Kantian line of thinking and turns it on its head: since there is no such thing as unmitigated perception, there is no reason to limit perception to the physical senses. The experience of the presence of God is no less legitimate and belongs to the same order as the experience of a physical object. Both experiences are "real" in so far as they stem for an external stimulus and are a synthesis of that experience created by the mind.
19. This theme as well is discussed in *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*.
20. The unapologetically theurgical alternative remains open. If we are to

understand prayer, and *mizvot* in general, as means of affecting the ‘upper worlds’ that are part of some great metaphysical network, then perhaps even my mechanically asking for the health of Reuven the son of Leah will have some effect. I have difficulty accepting such a theology—I find it too mechanistic as well as presuming a metaphysics that I cannot take for granted.

21. The Rav’s usage is founded on Kant’s but not identical to it. In *The Critique of Judgment*, Kant analyzed aesthetic judgment, i.e. the capacity to make seemingly objective judgments about subjective matters of taste. In this light he examined the categories of the beautiful and the sublime as judgments of taste, that is, as judgments of aesthetic experience. These judgments are aesthetic for Kant not because they are about beauty or art, but because judgments about beauty or art are directly founded on sensory experience and are not dependent upon objective categorical concepts. In *Worship of the Heart*, the Rav’s usage of the term “aesthetic” is essentially the same as Kant’s in that it refers to the whole spectrum of sensory experience but seems influenced by the modern sense in that it is focused on a theory of beauty. One could argue that here too the Rav follows Kant, whose discussion of aesthetic judgment was limited to the explication of the notions of beauty and the sublime. The contemporary meaning of “aesthetics” may well be a result of this Kantian focus.
22. The reader will note that each gesture corresponds to one of Kant’s *Critiques*. The intellectual gesture is that understood and analyzed in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the ethical in *The Critique of Practical Reason*, and the aesthetic in *The Critique of Judgment*.
23. The Rav describes the type who views reality as fixed and patterned as a “Parmenidean” type, following the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides. The type for whom reality is perceived as flux and change is identified as a Heraclitean.
24. The Rav is well aware of the skeptical traditions in both epistemology and ethics that have denied a transcendental ground for these disciplines. He grants that the skeptical critique is correct; human beings cannot formulate a self-sufficient theory of knowledge or a rational ethics. This does not mean, however, that knowledge is impossible or that ethics are relative. The way to escape the skeptical trap does not involve the discovery of rational grounds for these activities but of *transcendental ends*.
25. This idea, that cognition and ethics must have a transcendental telos, is worth exploring in greater depth. It bears comparison to the epistemology laid out in *Halakhic Mind*. It would also be interesting to explore how this idea connects the Rav’s thinking to other attempts to respond to skepticism.
26. Rabbi Yitzchak Blau has pointed out to me that the Rav’s analysis of boredom is probably influenced by Kierkegaard’s account of boredom in *Either/Or*, particularly the essay “Crop Rotation.”
27. This is a somewhat unusual reading of *Guide of the Perplexed* I:2 in that it claims that ethics are part of the consciousness of Adam before the fall. See p. 46, where the Rav argues against the usual interpretation of this passage in the *Guide*.
28. In my opinion, the intrinsic value of human cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic experience is a subject of great importance in the Rav’s thought that has not been explored sufficiently. In addition to the exploration of aesthetics here,

the discussion must focus on *U-Vikkashtem mi-Sham*, as well as sections of *Halakhic Man* and *The Lonely Man of Faith*. The crucial point, to my mind, is that for the Rav, all of these activities draw their validity not from their instrumental use in keeping Torah and *mizvot*, but because they are in themselves manifestations of the human craving for contact with the Divine.