
***Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, Asher Kideshanu
BeMitzvotav VeTzivannu, La'asok BeDivrei Torah. Hafoch Bah!***

Text 1: **Nancy Ammerman**, *Conservative Jews within the Landscape of American Religion, from Jews in the Center* (ed. Wertheimer) p. 367 (quoted by Rabbi Hayim Herring in his essay “The Commanding Community and the Sovereign Self”, in *Re-Envisioning the Synagogue*, ed. Zachary Heller)

Neither an intolerant fundamentalism nor an accommodated and tolerant liberalism seems to promise a way forward. More promising are proposals that postmodernity will be inhabited by people who are (at least culturally) bilingual, speaking a native parochial language while also speaking a common language shared by people they do not know. [Parochial means] to have a community, to go beyond one’s presumed autonomy as an individual. The presumption of autonomy is neither so unquestioned today nor so welcomed as it once was. While choice and volunteerism are still celebrated as the hallmark of democracy and a key source of religious vitality, both constraints on choice and the commitments implied by choice are entering the vocabulary of social observers. The picture that is slowly emerging emphasizes the complexities of the relationship between individual and community over time, space, and function. We are neither as free and disconnected as the modernity paradigm would have had it nor as utterly embedded in ascribed communities as our traditionalist forbears. In the nexus of choice and community new understandings of person and commitment are emerging.

Text 2: **Barack Obama**, *The Audacity of Hope*, p. 55 (quoted by Rabbi Elliot Dorff in *For Love of God and People: A Philosophy of Jewish Law*, p. 6-7)

If we Americans are individualistic at heart, if we instinctively chafe against a past of tribal allegiances, traditions, customs, and cases, it would be a mistake to assume that this is all we are. Our individualism has always been bound by a set of communal values, the glue upon which every healthy society depends. We value the imperatives of family and the cross-generational obligations that family implies. ... We value a faith in something bigger than ourselves, whether that something expresses itself in formal religion or ethical precepts. And we value the constellation of behaviors that express our mutual regard for another. ... In every society (and in every individual), these twin strands – the individualists and the communal, autonomy and solidarity – are in tension, and it has been one of the blessings of America that the circumstances of our nation’s birth allowed us to negotiate these tensions better than most.

Text 3: **Rabbi Gerson Cohen**, Foreword to “*A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*” (by Rabbi Isaac Klein), pp. xix-xx

In the eyes of Torah there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as the purely private domain, for even in solitude – be it the privacy of the bath or the unconsciousness of sleep – one has the capacity and the duty to serve God. ... The temper of modernity itself has been extremely potent in promoting a hasty verdict of “anachronistic” or “irrelevant” on a body of law whose roots lie in antiquity. Many American Jews have, accordingly, become more concerned with the universal ethical values inherent in the Jewish tradition than with those particularistic laws which define the Jewish culture and way of life. But however prevalent, this tendency to divide the corpus of Jewish law into ethics versus ritual is foreign to the Jewish tradition, for the ethical precepts of the Torah are embodied and reflected in ritual. The two are inseparably intertwined into a system that bears the imprint of the covenant between God and Israel. This, the *Mishna* of Rabbi Judah the Prince was as clear in its instructions for proper separation of tithes as it was in its exhortations to be charitable toward the needy.

Text 4: **Robert Wuthnow**, *After the Baby Boomers* (2007), p. 127

“Seeking” often consists of casual shopping around, such as reading a magazine article about angels or chatting with a friend who happens to have been raised in a different religion. Seeking has its place. Especially in young adulthood, it is a way of exploring one’s options, of moving beyond the received wisdom of one’s religious upbringing and developing a deeper and more personal understanding of one’s own. However, people who have sought casually in various venues usually report feeling at some point that they need to become more serious about their spiritual life if they are to grow in it and mature. Spirituality is in this respect like learning to play the piano. It requires “Practice.”

Text 5: **Joseph Campbell**, *Thou Art That*, p. 92-95

A ritual allows us to participate in the enactment of a myth. One prepares internally to move with the image and the transcendent comes through. Often those who are interested in the arts in a discursive, historical, art-historical way, suddenly find that one of the words of art really grabs them and they are literally transformed. Think of what it is with music. At a certain age, a certain kind of music interests you and captures your imagination, your internal self, and you participate in it. Then that drops off and another order of music comes in. Art is talking to what is possible within you. ... It has been observed that rituals and rites seem to stress the homogeneous nature of experience. How, then, we might ask, does the individual fit into the ritual? Wherever you have a ritual, you have a group reference, with everybody participating in the ritual, thinking and finding themselves members of the same organism.

Text 6: **Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen**, *The Jew Within*, p. 96

The rabbinic ideal with regard to ritual performance was the unity of *kava* (fixed, routine observance) and *kavanah* (personal intention). ... According to one view of things, moderately affiliated American Jews are merely shifting the balance rather decisively from *kava* to *kavanah*, without actually abandoning either of the two. It is also true that any ritual, religious or not, must maintain a balance between the script which guides individual performance – the rules making the ritual what it is, recognizable both as ritual and as this particular ritual – and the creative originality that breathes life into the script and makes each performance unique, thereby keeping the ritual alive as one that people seek to perform. To survive a ritual must be open enough to allow for individual intentions, interpretations, or even innovations. ... However, ritual must also be closed enough to remain a communal form that is shared despite the differing intentions inevitably brought to it. ... The danger of excessive closure is abandonment of the ritual. But the opposite danger, excessive openness, is no less clear. ... Autonomy, subjectivity, personalism can go too far – precluding the experience of tradition and community that [can be for many a] primary motivation, meaning, and satisfaction.