Foreword

Constructing Judaism

The purpose of the present work is disarmingly simple: to describe Judaism, to make sense of it, to offer a framework through which it makes sense to both insider and outsider. Someone attempting to understand Judaism is confronted with so much data, instruction, legislation, and history that the sense of the whole too often proves elusive. For the system to "make sense", details must be appreciated as components of a larger system. Describing the system thus allows its meaning to surface. Yet, the ostensibly simple task of describing Judaism in its complexity turns out to be anything but simple.

The assumption that Judaism can be described must be queried. What aspect of Judaism is being described? In what period? From what perspective? What is being given attention, what is prioritized, and what is ignored? Decisions and presuppositions always underlay the act of description. And there is no correct or official way of making these decisions. When practitioners and philosophers of Judaism have radically different ways of practicing and understanding their faith, there cannot be one way of describing or presenting the rich and experientially complex reality we refer to as Judaism. What this means is that any effort at describing is already an attempt to construct. Every presentation is a construction and is dependent on presuppositions, on a worldview, and on a particular methodology.

Describing a religion and making sense of the ensemble of facts that make up its reality—objective, communal, personal, and experiential—is never a given, something self-evident, to be taken for granted. If the task were as simple as my opening sentence above suggested, all introductions to Judaism would look the same. The fact is that no two of them are alike. Once we realize that Judaism is constructed in the process of its description, the process becomes more transparent and can be appreciated in proper perspective. Every attempt to make sense, to present, to introduce is an interpretation of a larger whole through the interpretive lens of the thinker. The interpreter offers his best efforts at making sense, relying on his chosen methods and all too often also bringing his own worldview into play. The world view may be expressed through the choice of interpretive prism—historical, theological, sociological, et cetera—but more is involved in the act of describing and making sense of

Judaism than the choice of method. Any engaged description of faith, written from the perspective of faith, also reveals and relies upon the faith of the presenter. Judaism, thus, can never be described "correctly" or adequately. Every description, because it is an act of construction, provided it is based on solid knowledge, offers a valid perspective.

Author and Method

Because I am motivated by the religious life, and because for me meaning has to do with the ultimate, pointing to God, my approach is unabashedly theological. The Judaism I describe here is, accordingly, not the sum of historical realities known as Judaism, but an ideal Judaism, constructed from the sources I deem most representative in terms of their spiritual ideals. It is therefore a presentation that privileges the perspective commonly referred to as spirituality. I use the term as a way of referring to the internal and subjective orientation toward God and to awareness of processes associated with the religious life.[1]

This orientation also leads me to the domain of thought and experience often referred to as mysticism. Theology, spirituality, and mysticism have, for me, a close relationship, with one leading to the other and one informing the other. The Judaism I practice is heavily informed by mystical thought, in its many manifestations in kabbalah, hassidic thought, and the mystical writings of Rav Kook, chief rabbi of what was then Palestine, in the early twentieth century, and one of Judaism's greatest mystics and thinkers. I bring these to the task of understanding and describing Judaism as rich treasures that allow a deeper perspective on a tradition that is all too often described by a narrower and purely objective focus on texts, rituals, and community. These treasures inform my personal spiritual quest, and it is from there, supported by the academic and theological foundations I bring, that I speak.

I am an Orthodox rabbi. Orthodox rabbis' primary proficiency, and what frames their worldview, is halacha, the body of law and ritual that guides Judaism. In practice, Judaism is not only a set of beliefs, with subjective spiritual experiences as their correlates. It is based on commitment, practice, and law, and these provide a strong foundation for a description. This project strikes a particular balance between halacha's lived reality and the more theological and mystical dimensions of the tradition. The balance is different from what a manual of practice might be, and does not seek to provide instructions of "how to" engage in either Jewish practice or its spiritual application. As will become apparent, the balance of law and spirituality, of halacha and the quest

[1] See Sandra Schneiders, "A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality", in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark Burrows (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 51.

for God, is one of the major theses of the present work, as I explore dimensions of the meaning of "covenant" as a formative category that conditions the history of Jewish religious expression.

I am also an academic, trained in academic method, a method inculcated in me from my paternal home, under the tutelage of one of the eminent figures of Jewish studies in the second half of the twentieth century, the late Prof. Moshe Goshen-Gottstein. As an academic, I began my career as a scholar of rabbinic thought, of rabbinic theology, if you will. For the purposes of a description of Judaism, understanding its rabbinic roots is foundational. Much of what we live up to this day as Judaism has been shaped by the rabbis.

Over the course of my academic evolution, I have moved away from working in rabbinics and have been involved in broader issues relating to religion, comparative religion, and interfaith engagement. I have learned to see Jewish religion in a broader comparative context and this interest shapes how I see religion. Judaism provides a particular instance of broader religious categories, such as holiness, sacred time and space, holy person, scripture, and more. I move back and forth between the insider's perspective and a broader perspective that sees in the particular a case of the universal. I seek to read the one in dialogue with the other. Such dialogue may shed light on the particulars of Judaism through sensitivities and categories that apply to the study of religion, or, by contrast, may seek to revise those in light of the particularity of Judaism. Whatever the case, multiple perspectives inform how the particularity of Judaism relates to the generalities of the study of religion.

The academic perspective impacts my thinking in two major ways. The first is historical. Much of Jewish academic studies is shaped by a historical perspective, with history providing the lens for understanding and for structuring knowledge into periods, recognizing the evolution of institutions and ideas, and appreciating the overall development of Judaism. I cannot subscribe to a view of Judaism that lacks historical depth. Even if my thesis does not lie in historical periodization and change per se, these nonetheless condition my thinking and find expression in the fabric of the present work. However, history in the present work is not simply history for the sake of faithfulness to an academic discipline. It is integrated into a broader theological framework, where history is part of story, the story that this work seeks to tell, the story of Israel and its relationship with God. Story and history are central dimensions of my thinking. What distinguishes story from history is its sense of purpose, its meaning. It is "story" that allows me to present the history of ideas and institutions in theological terms, as expressions of Israel's relationship with God. If you will, it is theological history, captured as story.

There is another dimension of academic understanding that complements historical awareness, and that is phenomenology. Phenomenology describes real life experience, in practice and subjectivity, in its variety and internal nuance, as distinct from history and theology. Rather than describing ideas (theology) or events (history), phenomenology describes, contrasts, and classifies the varied forms of the religious life. Especially where it comes to practices, rituals, and how the sacred is lived and expressed, phenomenology offers a way of describing these from within. Such description relies in part on existing categories, in part on the insider's ability to describe faithfully with nuance. Accordingly, phenomenology describes the real-life experience, in practice and subjectivity, in its variety and internal nuance, as distinct from complementary approaches, such as history and theology.[2]

Yet, while phenomenology seeks to understand the workings of the religious life from within its application and experience, it cannot fully be separated from the theological or ideological, which provide it with meaning and interpretation. Thus, complementing theological, historical, halachic, and spiritual dimensions of the description is the phenomenological dimension, where key dimensions of the practices of the religion are presented.

Presentation as an Art: The Place of the Personal

Because description involves so many factors, there is no single, self-evident, necessary way of bringing together these different dimensions into a coherent description of Judaism. Another author, even one with a similar intellectual and spiritual profile, would combine the elements, establish their associations, and draw the composite picture in different ways. There is therefore something very personal in attempting a synthetic presentation of Judaism, seen as a whole. It is personal because it engages the different faculties of the author. But it is also personal because there is something fundamentally unscientific in the exercise, insofar as the scientific describes something predictable and repeatable. A presentation of a religion is more of an art than a science. Like art, it requires technique and mastery, and these include mastery of the fruits of scientific research. However, like art, it paints a picture, and any such painting is personal, and bears strong marks of the artist-author's style. It matters little, to follow the analogy, whether we consider a work as realistic, impressionist, or even photographic. Regardless, the creation will be unique, indebted to the intuition, creativity, insight, and vision of its author.

[2] The term is used in a way that is similar to how Moshe Idel uses it in his oeuvre. See Daniel Abrams, "Phenomenology of Jewish Mysticism: Moshe Idel's Methodology in Perspective", *Kabbalah* 20 (2009): 7–146. Abrams points to fluidity in the use of the term. Regardless, it does designate a particular dimension of the religious life.

The task at hand is to offer a composite picture of Judaism, drawing on its story/history, basic literature, theology, spirituality, and practiced religious life, in an attempt to make sense of it all. This is not proof of truth or authenticity, and can never be, because the statement is, as suggested, artistic, suggestive, and personal. It is personal in the deepest sense because the process by means of which a totality emerges from all the disparate facts that make up a religion and its history is itself personal. If I were asked to account for how all the diverse dimensions of this presentation came together, how I made the associations and connections, how I saw what I share with others, I am not sure I could provide an answer. As long as I rely on earlier authorities, it is easy to trace the pedigree of my thinking. But because what is presented in this book is original, there remains something intuitive, elusive and, once again, personal, in how these factors come together.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook—one of the figures who inspires me, and who is present throughout this work, both in quotations and in spirit—captures the challenge, dynamic, and mystery of how ideas come together and a whole emerges:

> The means of establishing connections, how the spirit connects its thoughts and images, one with the other, and each from the other, in its interiority, is a concealed matter. In every intellectual construction, even the most visible and rational, are such associations[3] that we consume without noticing, and we ourselves do not know how the matters have become associated one with the other. At times, critical thinking is awoken in relation to some cracks, and usually critical thinking and logical extension come to fill in the gaps between one thought and another in the ordering of the conceptual structure. But after all inquiries, we leap and pass over many stages of intellectual steps. Yet in truth we do not leave any vacant space, our spirit has already extended to the full scope, it has already composed its structures with all their parts.[4]

What I understand Rav Kook to be saying is that the process of constructing a conceptual, intellectual, or spiritual structure is one that we cannot fully account for. Things come together in our mind, in our spirit, in an interior way. We can refine and perfect what has come together through mental processes, but the actual work of combining ideas to create a whole is not entirely an intellectual exercise but rather a kind of spiritual revelation.

[3] Or permutations, combinations.

[4] *Shemonah Kevaẓim* 5:156. Rav Kook's works are extremely hard to translate. They are poetic, dense in meaning, and appeal to multiple associations. Translation often forces one meaning where the original is equivocal, stripping away the poetic qualities of the text. Of all the sources cited in the present work, his are the hardest to translate. I therefore ask the reader to make allowances in terms of precision and intention of the text, in case of doubt.

I imagine there are degrees to this understanding. Some conceptual edifices may be more indebted to intellectual activities; others may be more interior and concealed. I have shared this text as an expression of the difficulty in accounting for how ideas come together and how a conceptual whole is formed. If this is so, then every act of construction is deeply personal, precisely because it occurs in the depths of one person's spirit, beyond the machinations of the intellect. Critical thinking can balance out, fill in gaps, and attempt to systematize and equalize different parts of the presentation-building. But the actual act of bringing together ideas and seeing their interconnectedness, creating the whole, transcends purely intellectual accounting. It emerges from within, even as it is constructed externally.

What singles my work out, then, is in part the uniqueness of spirit, something that every author brings to his own work. This personal dimension applies not only to the whole, but also to its parts. How themes like prayer, sacred space, or holy times are developed is more than a summary of the objective data available to all scholars. It is an interaction between the objective presentation and my own personal perspective, grounded in experience. What prayer means to me is reflected in how the chapter on it is constructed. The same applies throughout the work, where my approach to the spiritual life conditions how I read and construct the sum total of existing knowledge into a new conceptual edifice. My authorial voice is personal and experiential.[5] There is little point in hiding it. It may be one of the strengths of the present work.

That a work of description is a work of construction, and that every construction is deeply personal, means that a project like the present one cannot be seen as purely academic. As Rav Kook suggests, constructing a conceptual edifice is a work of the spirit. As such, this book does not talk *about* religion; it is *part* of the religious process. This is, of course, true of all theological reflection. Given that my work is consciously theological, and recognizing how personal its deeper foundations are, leads me then to affirm that this work is as much a personal religious statement as it is a description. The religious vision pulls them together through guiding theses into a composite whole. The com-

[5] More than once I have struggled with the question of how to balance the subjective expression and its objective documentation. The work is a personal synthesis and expression of a knowledge-base that grows out of classical rabbinic training as well as scholarly erudition and perspectives. I have therefore sought to document and justify key ideas and statements by reference to existing literature, classical as well as scholarly. Whether everything needed to be justified by appeal to others, and how extensive such appeal need be, is a question I have wrestled with in the process of writing. While I have tried to strike an optimal balance, some readers, depending on their own personal disposition, might have preferred a different balance.

bining of distinct ideas and data into a larger whole are, in my understanding, not only a work of the mind, but also a work of the spirit; not only a science, but an art; not only talking about religion, but being part of religion.[6]

With some hesitation and due humility, I would consider this project in terms of genre akin to Heschel's *Torah min Hashamayim*, translated as *Heavenly Torah as Refracted through the Generations*.[7] Heschel's project is ostensibly a scientific one, presenting different schools of rabbinic thought, those of R. Akiva and R. Ishmael, on the matter of revelation, and more broadly as different approaches to Scripture and the religious life. In the course of such a presentation, Heschel walks the reader through textual analysis, research, references, and all the paraphernalia of academic study, executed perfectly or imperfectly, as his critics would have it. But beyond the scientific-descriptive process is a broader spiritual integrative view, that seeks to offer a composite vision, a perspective, a statement on the religious life. Susanna Heschel shares the fact that, even though this is one of Heschel's least popular works, he considered it his *sefer*, his work of true, authentic religious expression. As such it is a deeply personal statement, one that could be made by Heschel, and by Heschel only. It breathes his spirit, vision, and worldview into the myriad details that he draws together into a composite picture that bridges historical presen-tation and theological vision into a religious statement that is unique —a work of religion, not only of the study of religion. Because the work is dense and requires advanced learning to be fully appreciated, it has not (yet) attained the status its author had hoped for. Still, the vision of a work of erudition serving as a frame for a broader religious statement, a theologically informed history of ideas, serves me as an example for a certain way of making a contribution, of sharing and hopefully of inspiring others.

The Descriptive and the Constructive

The present work seeks to describe Judaism and is not a history of the religious life of the Jews. The latter would have been purely descriptive and would seek to be balanced in terms of a fair representation of all schools, positions, and approaches to the religious life. By contrast, my perspective is a mix of descriptive and constructive. It therefore refers to Judaism not only in the real, the

[6] I owe this insight to Jacob Neusner. In the early years of the millennium, I corresponded with him and shared the present project, in an earlier iteration, with him. He nicely reframed the project by saying it was not a book about religion, but a book of religion.

[7] English translation by Gordon Tucker with Leonard Levin (New York: Continuum, 2005). My analysis of Heschel's work and its import appears in "'Torah from Heaven' through the Prism of Rabbinic Thought", in *Get Thee: Studies in Abraham Joshua Heschel's Oeuvre*, ed. Benjamin Ish-Shalom and Dror Bondi (Tel Aviv: Idra, 2018), 311–47 (Hebrew).

historical domain, but also in the ideal—the theological and spiritual domain. A significant implication of the presentation of Judaism, over and against a history of the Jewish people's religious life, is that such a presentation of Judaism is not a value-free activity.

I originally approached the task of presenting Judaism as a purely descriptive task. As work proceeded, I discovered the work involved me in two types of activity—construction and apologetics—both of which implied a value judgment that went way beyond the (ideally) neutral task of description. That Judaism must be constructed rather than described means one must read it and offer one's interpretation. While engaged in interpretation, I became aware of the second type of activity, apologetics. I realized it was my task to give Judaism the most charitable reading. As suggested in Ronald Dworkin's *Law's Empire*,[8] the principle of charity would mean that, in reading a system, we strive to give it the best possible reading.

Apologetics, as I have come to understand, does not call for the invention of false explanation, but for the uncovering of deeper structures of meaning. Apologetics is validated and justified precisely in light of its opposite, the ability to pass judgment. If one presents a history of the Jewish people and their religious life, one need not pass judgment on the diverse forms that their life has taken. The facts are what they are, and the historian can expose them for what they are. A construction of the religion, on the other hand, necessitates taking a stand. As a reader of Judaism, I am willing to criticize alongside my own attempt to give the best possible reading. Offering the best reading does not equal condoning everything in the religion as it is. The formulation of the best possible reading may itself serve as the source of criticism of elements within the tradition. Good apologetics will sooner or later lead to making the distinction between positive and negative elements in the tradition, and the corresponding distinction between Judaism, viewed as a complete and ideal system, and the historical reality of the many Judaisms lived by Jews at different times. The imperfections will be acknowledged as historical realities of the many lowercased judaisms, removing the blemish from uppercased ideal Judaism.

Here emerges an important difference between the insider's presentation of his own religion and the outsider's presentation of a religion. The insider is uniquely qualified—both morally and in terms of the fullness of understanding—to question the tradition and draw attention to its imperfections. The insider's presentation requires adopting the theological voice, typically reserved

[8] See Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 52-3.

for the insider, which may lead to the type of self-examination and reflection that should be avoided by the outsider. For example, I will suggest later in the book that there is a crisis in relation to God. This sense of crisis is viewed in terms of both the theological and the experiential ideal. It is only the insider who can speak of the crisis of the religion and seek to address it in a constructive way.

The spiritual testimony of the insider as to his or her understanding of the meaning of their religious life is the ultimate apologetic move. The apologetics we prefer to dismiss seek to demonstrate something is right or true. A higher apologetics seeks to share the experience, significance, and meaning of the life of the believer. This is precisely why the appeal to mysticism and spirituality can be so powerful in the presentation of Judaism. It often provides a window on to the experience of the lived religious life, beyond the formalities of the law or the fixity of liturgy.

To speak of crisis in relation to God, or for that matter to offer any kind of criticism, requires a perspective and a vantage point other than that afforded by historical description. It requires a faith stance and a teleological vision. Ultimately, it presumes an attempt by the writer to insert herself into a God's-eye view of the religion, seeking to account for its purposes and its functioning from the perspective of a divine teleology. Needless to say, any such attempt is tainted by the human perspective from which such insertion is undertaken. Yet, it is the very task of theology to offer an account of reality from what a religious tradition considers to be such a God's-eye perspective. Recognizing the inherent limitations of such a stance, it is here undertaken as an expression of faith, fidelity to tradition, and theological practice.

Multivocality and Normativity

Balancing descriptive complexity with a constructive quest for uniformity leads to the question of which texts are representative and normative. To rely only on a canon that is common to all forms of Judaism would deprive a presentation of Judaism of the particularity of a position, of deeper identification, and ultimately of its spiritual benefit. While a self-conscious identification of the author with particular schools or approaches helps to justify such an approach, there are additional means by which normativity can be maintained.

One is the recognition of multivocality as fundamental to Jewish discourse, and therefore as essential to a fair presentation of the religion. Judaism cannot simply be presented as a single, facile, univocal belief. Indeed, what characterizes noncritical—what we might call "fundamentalist"—constructions of Judaism is precisely this lack of nuance, and the presentation of Judaism as a

univocal message. By contrast, historical description tends to privilege the multivocality of multiple historical Judaisms. Therefore, the constructive presentation of Judaism must be faithful to Judaism's fundamental multivocality. My attempt to present, balance, or choose between biblical-rabbinic, philosophical, and kabbalistic-mystical perspectives throughout the work owes to the recognition that multiple perspectives that constitute Judaism must be borne in mind, even as we adopt perspectives that are variously eclectic, synthetic, or prefer one position over others.

Seeking to uphold multivocality does not translate to systematic exploration of topics, seriatim, as understood by different periods and schools of thought. A theological approach is not an encyclopedic account of a topic. Multivocality requires awareness of multiple voices and maintaining a cognitive balance between different iterations of Judaism, historical as well as conceptual. Within this playing field, one must, however, make choices. A broad span of possibilities sets the stage for a wisely informed choice that is based on an interplay between a reading of tradition, in its complexity, and the personal orientation of the writer. Rather than offer a portrayal of Judaism that is consistent with any one perspective, this work often maintains broad awareness of the theoretical options while making informed choices among them. The choices are due to multiple factors. Personal spiritual orientation is an important factor, leading me to rely heavily on sources from the Jewish spiritual and mystical tradition. But it is not the only factor. For example, the attempt to construct this work around the notion of covenant, a notion that has largely fallen into disuse for the greater part of Jewish intellectual history, requires making choices among later iterations of Judaism in light of earlier ideals that have taken on new form or receded into the background.

The tradition's foundational stages or key ideals provide a principle of orientation that can inform selection among the competing options for how to construct Judaism. For example, the sources I rely on most heavily, those of the hassidic tradition, have, on the whole, lost the sense of Judaism's universality and therefore its very purpose, its teleology. Consequently, my final chapter, on the purpose of Israel's story, relies on sources closer to the philosophical tradition. My choices between traditional resources are more than a product of random eclecticism: they are founded on the very attempt at stating a higher vision, the God's-eye vision described above. Awareness of the tradition's many voices is the background against which purposeful choices and selections have been made, in service of this teleological perspective.

I have appealed to several fundamental works, bodies, or dimensions of religious life as providing normativity within the diversity of schools and interpre-

tations. One of these is the Bible,[9] the foundation of Judaism and its story. Its foundational status leads me to turn to it as the foundation of every discussion in the book. Each chapter begins with biblical evidence and then extends to the different stages of Israel's story and demonstrates how these later stages unfold from these foundations into later conceptual formulations. Two additional corpora that I consider fundamental to a presentation of Judaism are halacha and liturgy (the prayer book, the siddur). Halacha is here understood from the perspective of my own Orthodox formation: that is, from its foundational formulation in the Mishnah, down to its later articulation in the *Shulḥan Aruch* and its commentaries. If we seek to portray Judaism, we must take into account the way halacha in its different manifestations shapes Jewish life.

The other corpus, which for the purpose of the presentation is more convenient than the halacha, is the siddur. My Christian friends have taught me that *lex orandi* is *lex credendi,* the law of praying is the law of believing. The siddur is probably the most canonical of all Jewish texts outside of the Bible. It is significant because, unlike law codes read by scholars, the siddur is read by every single member of the Jewish community, without exception, by women as well as men. The siddur, along with other liturgical standards like the Passover Haggadah, articulates the community's aspirations as it faces God. It is thus possibly the single most important source for understanding the Jewish religion.

The ultimate test for the viability of any representation of Judaism is its ability to grow out of the liturgical heritage and to make sense of it. From the insider's perspective, a good presentation of Judaism should allow the member of the community to re-identify with greater vigor with the liturgical life. Liturgy thus not only provides the orienting framework for my entire constructive venture; it is also the arena where the spiritual usefulness of a given theological construct is tested and bears fruit.

The Study of Judaism and the Study of Religions

My work in comparative religion and interfaith relations involves me in sharing religions across boundaries. Sharing, explaining, and increasing understanding between religions is a significant component of my life's vocation. Viewing Judaism in the broader framework of world religions is relevant to the present project.

Spirituality is one of the important lenses through which I study Judaism, and religions at large. Throughout the writing process, I have wondered what of

[9] That is, the Hebrew Bible, which many Christian readers of this work would refer to as the Old Testament.

Judaism's spiritual treasures should be featured in this work and how much attention should be devoted specifically to the domain of spirituality as such. I have decided not to include much that would be of specific interest to the spiritual seeker who wishes to travel the path of Jewish spirituality. Issues of how to cultivate love and awe, paths to humility, how to attain *devekut* (attachment to God), and similar topics are all of interest to my view of Judaism and to a view of Judaism appreciated in a comparative perspective, and could have justified a separate chapter on Jewish spirituality.

However, I finally decided against including a dedicated discussion for two reasons. The first is that much of that material already appears in the book, in the context of its individual chapters: commandments, Torah study, prayer, et cetera. The second point is more principled. While there is certainly a Jewish particularity regarding how to practice love of God and similar questions, such topics suggest great common ground with parallel discussion in other faiths. Spirituality is a domain of the religious life that can be shared, to a significant extent, between religions. Rather than point to the common ground, I have decided to focus on those issues that distinguish the unique DNA of Judaism, so to speak: how it is constructed, what drives it, where it goes, and how it makes sense as a totality. I will therefore enter the domain of spirituality only in relation to those particular concerns, and not in relation to other more common aspects of the spiritual life that can be easily shared across traditions.

Throughout this work are assumptions about how a religion is to be studied and understood. This involves the relationship between the universal (religions in broader, often comparative context) and the particular (the study of one religion in its particularity). One way these dimensions come together is that the particular exemplifies the universal. Yet, with reference to the study of Judaism as a religion, we must also ask how the particularity of Judaism differs from the way other religions have been described or how the study of religion conceives of a topic. We seek to understand the particularity of Judaism from within its own story and hence through categories that are indigenous to it. A description of Judaism therefore requires identifying the theological phenomenology, by means of which its particular data can be best described. Once this is identified from within, we can consider how the study of Judaism enriches the study of religion more broadly. The categories, nuances, and complexities that are particular to Judaism may turn out to enrich how "Religion" as such is described.

It is precisely this insider's perspective that also accounts for the choice of categories, for what counts most for the faithful presentation of the religion. In my case, both my choice to frame the work with "covenant" and the fact that the book begins with analyses of mitzvah (commandment) and Torah reflect

the insider's view of what counts most in the tradition, and preserve its internal categories. The methodological discussion of how the category of Torah relates to broader notions such as "scripture" further highlights the particularity of the religion. Moving from the particular to the universal, from the insider's categories to ones shared more broadly, allows the individual discussions to function as windows into the religious life and spirituality of Jews and to examine ways in which categories that grow from Judaism can enhance the study of religion more broadly.

Other parts of the presentation are more indebted to categories that have broader currency in religious studies. The discussion of sacred time, sacred space, and holy person draw simultaneously on internal Jewish categorization, as well as broader conventions that apply to the field of religious studies.[10] This dialectical relationship between the universal and the particular in the study of religion will be borne in mind throughout the book.

Judaism and Israel

One significant instance of the tension between an insider's perspective in the study of Judaism and broader categories in the study of religion has to do with how our subject is designated. The subject of this work is Judaism, the religion of the People of Israel. My appeal to theological language and to the insider's perspective leads me to identify with classical perspectives that are much older than the term "Judaism", whose use to designate the religion is only about five hundred years old. One of the important internal categories to describe Judaism's self-understanding is covenant, and the covenant is made between God and the People of Israel. It is common in theological circles to refer to Israel as the carrier and subject of the religion of Judaism. Some readers may be more used to talking of "the Jewish People", yet typically the use of this latter term serves historical studies more than theological reflection. In accordance with what is common in theological discourse, I will refer to "Israel", rather than "the Jewish People". In certain contexts, "Israel" could even stand in for "Judaism".

The choice of term may not seem like a big deal until one considers the confusion that could be generated by the fact that, for the past seventy-five years, a modern nation-state closely associated with the Jewish People and its history also bears the name "Israel". It therefore deserves stating that my usage of "Israel" does not refer to the state, but to the people that have been partners to the covenant that, based on its own self-understanding, dates back

[10] From the perspective of internal Jewish categories, these three dimensions of holiness are considered as interrelated and expressive of the same dynamics. The roots of the trio—*olam, shana, and nefesh*—are found in *Sefer Yeẓirah* (chapter 6:1), and these become a commonplace in hassidic teachings.

thousands of years to Abraham. In those few cases where our discussion does lead us to the State of Israel, I will refer to the latter using the full expression, "State of Israel". Reference to the Land of Promise of the People of Israel will also be explicit, through appeal to "The Land of Israel".

I would also like to add a word concerning linguistic usage and gender awareness. Almost all the literature from which I draw was written by men, and the imagined readers of the greater part of this literature were also men. By contrast, I am committed to including women as readers and referents of my work, and my choice of language will capture that commitment, as appropriate. However, the language of the sources often speaks of men, rather than people broadly. The point is particularly acute when it comes to dealing with holy individuals. All the sources discussed in the chapter devoted to this subject envision men as the carriers of holiness, be it through Torah study, prayer, or personal piety. Rather than push these texts to a gender-inclusive form of expression, I prefer to let these texts and the broader discourse they reflect stand as they are, aware of the gap between the context and consciousness within which they were born and that of the present-day reader. As we learn from these texts, we are also called to consider their application in ways that are broader than the social circumstances within which they were authored.

"In God's Presence" and "A Theological Reintroduction"

We are now able to consider the book's title and subtitle. The title, *In God's Presence*, reflects a key thesis of this book: understanding Judaism from a God's-eye perspective. My work is informed by an imagined theocentric perspective. While much is said about Judaism's evolution historically and how it operates in its day-to-day spiritual life, the governing concern and perspective of this work is how all that is human, social, historical, and cultural ultimately serves God's purposes. My concern is to describe Judaism as it points to God, leads to him, and serves his purposes. I hope to offer a perspective that is all-too-often sidelined as Jews consider the meaning of their Judaism. Concerns such as peoplehood, Torah, and statehood readily take center-stage, while a God orientation remains an embarrassment, a sign of the crisis mentioned above. This work seeks to serve as a corrective to a Judaism that is mostly self-sufficient and not in need of God for its meaning, vitality, and purpose. Returning to the question of critique and the presentation of Judaism as an ideal, it is clear that this theocentric perspective is, in and of itself, a corrective, and hence a critique, to many alternative presentations of Judaism.

This God-centered orientation is echoed in the reference to this work as theological, in the subtitle. A lot of soul-searching, as well as compromise, has gone into the decision to describe this work as theological. "Theological" certainly seems like the apt descriptor for a work that seeks to describe religion in terms of what it means for God and for the path toward him. Nevertheless, other adjectives could also describe this work: "spiritual", "phenomenological", "mystical". Yet, at the end of the day, "theological" is still the preferable descriptor, if one is forced to choose only one. It points to the reality and the concerns of God that are so central to this work. It references the treatment of key theoretical issues that are typically considered the domain of theology. And it suggests an insider's perspective and attempt to offer an account of his faith so that others can understand.

The description of this work as a "Reintroduction" and its distinction from an "Introduction" is important. The sense of the whole and grasping its meaning and purpose are often left outside the scope of introductions, which present basic facts, mostly historical or ritualistic. A sense of the whole as it emerges from a detailed exposition of key topics might therefore be more aptly described as a "Reintroduction".

There is another way in which "Reintroduction" can be distinguished from "Introduction". Every presentation of a religion will answer three key questions—the "what", the "how" and the "why". The "what" refers to facts: individuals, observances, beliefs. The "how" describes how it functions, what it achieves, and what are the internal, systemic, spiritual dynamics that make a whole that is the purposeful, spiritual, and historical reality that is the religion. The "why" sets forth the purpose—what it is the religion seeks to achieve and how it understands its purposes. Every presentation of the religion will resort to some combination of these three dimensions and offer varying answers, leading to different presentations of Judaism. It is the proportional shift that distinguishes the "Introduction" from the "Reintroduction". The "Introduction" will be concerned mostly with the "what", describing the religion in its objective dimensions. Some aspects of the "why" must also be included but, for the most part, the understanding of the inner workings of the religion will not be featured in an "Introduction".

This is the task of the "Reintroduction", and this is how I see the particularity of the present volume. While describing much of the "what", my efforts focus on understanding the "how". How do operative spiritual dynamics find expression in key features of the religion and its ritual practices? How do processes of internal transformation and orientation find expression in the life of the devoted practitioner? How do different ideals and key ideas interact with

each other and how do they contribute to delivering the meaning of the whole? Taken as a whole, these add up to a story of the individual and of the collectivity of Israel. Within that story is found the "why", the meaning of the journey and the purpose of the system. Accordingly, I seek to present the "why" as it emerges from the "how". Typically, there is a gap between the "what" and the "why". The purpose of the story or the system is largely superimposed on the details and facts of the religion. I believe this gap is significantly narrowed when the "why" emerges from the "how". When Judaism is presented in terms of its internal dynamics these point the way toward its future and toward a likely reading of the meaning of the entire religious system.

There is also a quantitative dimension that sets this "Reintroduction" apart from the typical "Introduction". Rather than simple introductions that "tell the truth" or boil down an idea to its simplest elements, each of the topics is explored in depth, from multiple historical and theoretical perspectives. The result has been the creation of a series of chapters, each of which is a substantive introduction to a topic, a small book in and of itself. While there is an overall conceptual framework that ties this work together, the contributions relating to individual topics stand on their own. This means that the reader need not read the book in its entirety. I imagine that only a small portion of readers will read cover to cover. Most will use it as a reference work, a contemporary synthetic summary of historical, conceptual, and spiritual developments by means of which key topics of Judaism can be described. Each of the chapters of the book maintains the theological-spiritual concerns described above. Each seeks to offer for the subject matter of the individual chapter —Torah, prayer, holy men, et cetera—the same comprehensive, purposeful vision that the book as a whole seeks to impart. One might think of this work as a theological reference work, expressing a particular spiritual and theological orientation. It introduces students to a series of topics in a comprehensive, theologically oriented way. This allows me to express the hope that the reader who has approached this work as more of a reference work and who has found one chapter useful will be drawn to reading yet another, and to obtaining the sense of the whole, as it emerges from the totality of the present work.

From "Introduction" to "Reintroduction": The Evolution of *In God's Presence*

The distinction between "Introduction" and "Reintroduction" hides the tale of the formation of this book and its coming into being. This is a work that took a quarter of a century to crystallize and to find its final form. The work spanning this period, obviously not full-time work, involved more than just the intellec-

reality that cannot be reduced to morality, teaching, or social guidance. It is the touch of the divine, that which makes a religion more than the sum of all its human initiatives. To speak of Judaism as Israel's life in God's Presence is to see in Israel's story and practice how it relates to God, how it may be said to touch him and be touched by him, to channel a higher reality associated by tradition and by experience with the divine. To speak of "Presence", rather than simply of "God", is to recognize not only the theological dimension in telling Israel's story. It is also to recognize the spiritual, mystical, and experiential dimensions as they condition religious experience and as they inform reflection on Israel's relationship with God.

"Presence" functions not only as a means of pointing to what matters most. It also allows us to think of its several antitheses. If "presence" defines the initial focal point and goal of Judaism, approaching it in light of its antitheses will bring to awareness several key dialectics that are essential to an understanding of Judaism, both in its essence and as it relates to historical processes. The first of these dialectics is between presence and absence. If one speaks of presence, then one must also consider its loss. Presence is not a given. It is an ideal, a hope, a promise, and a gift. But it can also be taken away or revoked. Judaism's story can be told along the axis of presence and absence, with historical periods and religious ideals appreciated from one or the other pole. One might argue that a work built around the notion of "presence" is itself a response to an absence that informs the spiritual horizons of large parts of the Jewish world. The antithesis of presence and absence will appear as a constitutive feature of this work.

A second dialectic, growing out of the previous and addressing it, is that between Presence and memory. "Presence" suggests a fullness of divine manifestation, a charged quality of spiritual reality wherein God is recognized as real, living, en-livening the world and spiritual reality. Such fullness of Presence is associated with the classical institutions of Judaism, especially the Temple. There is also a recognition of Presence having been lost. Kabbalists refer to it as the exile of the Shekhinah, the Divine Presence. What fills the gap created by the departure of Divine Presence? As we will see time and again, memory fills the gap. Memory evokes a lost reality, keeping traces of it alive, fanning the embers of hope in anticipation of its full future return. To continue with the example of the Temple, following its destruction, one engages in memorial practices that keep its memory, and hope for rebuilding, alive. While memory captures some dimension of the lost reality, memory itself can never capture the fullness of lost Presence.

This in turn generates a third dialectic, between Presence and substitute.

Memory does not stop at cognition. If Presence is lost, efforts are made to compensate for its loss. Compensation creates substitutes or alternatives in which the Presence might find expression, even if in a reduced manner. Loss of Presence is the major challenge that runs throughout the historical presentation of Judaism and its religious and spiritual developments. Substitutes and secondary expressions of Presence are central to the historical evolution of Judaism. They are, therefore, also central to an understanding of much of what constitutes Judaism today, seen against the background of the ideal, and lost, Presence.

Judaism as Covenant

A principal framework within which God's Presence is grounded, and within which Judaism's story takes place, is "covenant". The idea of covenant takes us back to the biblical foundations of the story. It is the unique contribution of biblical faith to humanity's approach to the divine. While covenants were common in the ancient world between human parties, Israel alone envisioned its relationship with God as a covenant. Covenant is a category that structures God's relationship with Israel, offering God's Presence, his dwelling amidst Israel, and providing protection and blessing in exchange for covenantal faithfulness to the commandments. Covenant describes a relationship. It relates to the objective dimensions of that relationship: God's grant of a special relationship, his protection, care, and, in a word, his Presence, are all dependent upon Israel's commitment to follow God in the form of the mitzvot (commandments).

My presentation appeals to "covenant" for several reasons. In biblical times, Israel's story was understood in terms of its faithfulness (or lack thereof) to the covenant, and covenant is key to Israel's biblical story. Biblical foundations are indispensable for constructing a presentation of Judaism. Moreover, though post-biblical thinkers and sources often do not appeal to the category of "covenant", many important theologians have appealed to the idea as foundational to their theology of Judaism. The currency of "covenant" in the latter part of the twentieth century makes it recognizable to many contemporary Jews and thereby offers a meaningful point of contact between my presentation of Judaism and how the tradition is often perceived. What I offer, however, is a reclaiming of what covenant means in ways that are true to biblical foundations. All too often, "covenant" has been transported into a different conceptual framework and lost sight of its biblical dimensions. Furthermore, I suggest various ways in which Judaism remains phenomenologically covenantal, even while theologically it ceases to speak the language of covenant.

One of the features of the covenant is that wherever we find a covenant with God, we find both Divine Presence and a commandment or concern for the fulfillment of the law. God gives his Presence, through revelation, and affirmation of relationship while the human partner commits to faithfulness to God's law. This previously unnoted dimension of the covenant continues beyond historical biblical covenants and leads us to consider Judaism in relation to the aspiration for Presence. Two further dimensions of "covenant" may be suggested, and these have indeed figured in covenantal thinking of recent theologians. One is the sense of reciprocity that governs many aspects of Jewish religion. Human responsibility and initiative complement divine initiative and grace. When this complementarity is extended to its fullness, we come to the further dimension of covenant: synergy, co-creation, and a common space shared by God and Israel wherein the Torah in its fullness and the religious life of Judaism are born jointly between the two covenantal partners. It is thus a covenantal process that drives the evolution of Judaism from its consciously covenantal foundations to its latter-day religious expressions as human creativity, carried out in collaboration with God. We thus affirm the continuity of the covenant and its deepening from a distant view of obedience to a sense of collaboration and commingling.

Full relational mutuality leads to intimacy, sharing, and co-creation. But it is precisely such relational fullness that also leads to its opposite, an agonistic relationship that pits two covenantal partners against each other in an even deeper movement of covenantal collaboration, safe and secure enough to withstand the tension of confrontation. Covenant is the means by which two parties define an equilibrium for their relationship and position themselves in relation to each other.

What is it that drives the covenant between God and Israel? Love emerges as a major answer. Underlying the covenant and expressing it is love: God's love for Israel, the grounds for his entry into a covenantal relationship, as well as Israel's response in love, informing their covenantal engagement. As covenant is closely related to love, we find it interwoven with descriptions of the covenant in terms of love. The details of the relationship, and specifically the covenantal commitments, the mitzvot, are expressions of love. We will have multiple occasions for considering the covenant and Israel's relationship with God as a love story.

Three Grand Movements

Upon these covenantal foundations several movements occur. The interplay between the covenantal worldview and these movements accounts for

historical developments within Judaism, provides Judaism with complexity, and orients its spiritual processes. The first of these movements is what may be referred to as the expansion of the boundary of holiness. Covenant is based on particularity. God (initially in a world in which more than one was recognized) chooses a particular people to live a particular way of life. That way of life is characterized by holiness, which in turn is practiced through separation and demarcation, affirming the holiness of certain times, places, and individuals. Holiness, separation, and particularity are thus key expressions of Israel's covenant. A consideration of how holiness manifests in diverse arenas reveals an expansive drive for spreading the reach of the holy beyond its specified boundaries. A quest for sanctification and for bringing all of life—includingn all that has been separated—within the reach of the sacred is found in all domains of life. Applying the logic of expanding sanctity to the covenantal relationship raises the fundamental question of its purpose. Can covenant be understood only within itself and within the exclusivity of Israel's relationship with God, or does it point beyond itself toward a similar movement of expanding boundaries? If so, the ultimate meaning and purpose of the covenant, of Israel's election, lies beyond Israel.

A second movement is the shift in perspective from national to cosmic. The covenant is grounded in a story. Yet, over centuries, as the concept of covenant receded to the background, the story was not told in these terms. Other emphases came to the fore; other stories rose to prominence. The cosmic perspective is a complement to the historical orientation of the covenant. The rabbis affirmed the cosmic foundations of vital aspects of Judaism. Such a cosmic perspective became part of a structuring story in the hands of later kabbalists. These articulated another concept that has been popular in twentieth-century Jewish thought, complementing the importance of covenant: tikkun, meaning "healing", "reparation", "making whole". The notion of tikkun is based on another story, narrated by kabbalists, a story that involves both God and Israel. Its scope is broader than that of covenant. Its beginnings are prehistorical and its reach goes beyond the relationship of God and Israel. It is a tale that goes to the foundation of reality, to God and creation, and locates the fundamental cosmic and metaphysical flaw that Israel is charged with repairing. Thus, the meaning of religious behavior is expanded to cosmic and theurgic (impacting God) dimensions. Israel is understood as playing a major role in cosmic redemption and in repair of the divine itself, through its life, history, and religious observance.

The third movement of note is the move from collective to personal fulfillment. The covenant describes the relationship of Israel, as a collective, to God.

Its present-day failure led the prophets of Israel to imagine a future covenant written in the heart. While the vision remains collective, the move to interiority, seeing covenantal fulfillment in a transformation of heart, points us in the direction of interiority and subjectivity. The collective nature of biblical covenant gave way increasingly to attention to the individual and his or her spiritual transformation. This movement began in rabbinic literature and found its culmination in later movements, especially hassidism. Telling Israel's story as a movement from the collective to the individual captures one of the main trajectories of the evolution of Israel's religious life, namely a deepening of religious understanding and practice. It introduces intention, religious feeling, and interiority into a legal framework that can readily lead to privileging of the objective reality of measurable actions. Perhaps one can say that if the representative elements of the covenant are Presence and law, there is a tension between the performance of the law and the quest for Presence. The tension can only be resolved as law points to the heart opening to Presence. Telling the story is therefore also identifying those threads that move the story to the domain of the individual and of interiority.

Concern with interiority, subjectivity, and how religion is experienced is the concern of spirituality. It is in the mystical and spiritual tradition, and in its later expressions in hassidism, that one finds the move to this domain. Mystical literature moves religion from external institutions to the realm of heart and mind. This move is an important step toward fulfillment of the prophetic promise of the subjective and interior fulfillment of the covenant.

Overview of Chapters

Based on this review of the fundamental dynamics of Judaism, we can now review the chapters of this book, noting the ways core dynamics find expression in aspects of the religious life of Judaism.

Chapter 1 explores the definition of Judaism suggested above and offers a brief history of covenantal thought. Covenant was an organizing principle of Judaism in the biblical period, governing Israel's relationship with God. For a variety of historical reasons, it declined and is no longer a formative principle in rabbinic Judaism, nor in any form of Judaism up to the twentieth century. Judaism, however, remains structurally covenantal, even if not consciously and explicitly so, as suggested above. The elements of the covenant remain the principal elements of the Jewish religion, even if they are not brought together under the conceptual umbrella of the covenant. Detachment of these elements

from the covenant allows for their grounding in other frameworks, such as the cosmic framework, and for their valuation as self-standing values that are not subject to the covenant's vicissitudes. It also allows for new ideals and concepts to enter Judaism's horizons and to be absorbed into the covenantal framework, even if only implicitly. The historical evolution of Judaism sees the rise of ideals such as Messiah and of religious institutions such as prayer as major expressions of its religious life. The introduction of new ideals and religious realities is made possible when covenant as a concept recedes. Judaism's conceptual and spiritual development in cosmic and spiritual terms owes to covenant moving to the sidelines of religious awareness.

Two twentieth-century thinkers and their reference to covenant are featured. The contributions of these thinkers are profiled against the backdrop of two formative moments in Jewish history: the Shoah and Israel's return to the Land. Rabbi Kalonymus Shapiro offers us a personalized and spiritualized view of the covenant, in the framework of life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, in turn, offers an overview of Jewish history in covenantal terms. His grand narrative considers adhesion to God as the single driving principle of Jewish history and as the key to the various rich manifestations of Jewish life and spirituality. The end point of this historical-covenantal view is the light of Messiah.

The chapter continues with an exploration of Judaism's spiritual life by means of the notion of modalities. Because of how central Presence is to my definition of Judaism, and more specifically to my understanding of covenant, I will distinguish different forms of Judaism from one another in relation to their conceptions of Divine Presence, rather than, as is more common, in terms of different theological views of God. Accordingly, three modalities will be presented, each of which profiles Presence and its relationship to commandment, with a movement of evolution proposed between them.

The first modality is the relational modality. It describes the basic parameters of the relationship with God, for Israel and for the individual. Covenant is a principal means of describing this modality. The second modality is characteristic of the decline in the conceptual centrality of covenant and the rise of complementary approaches to the religious life. It is characterized by the emergence of a knowledge-base that provides teachings on God, the purpose of the commandments, and how they stand in relation to God. Two knowledge-bases are discussed here—that of the Jewish philosophers and that of the kabbalists. The third modality is the modality of intensification. This modality builds on the previous ones and is characterized by the intensity of spiritual experience that points to a deepening of the relationship and an interior recognition of the

teachings taught by the respective knowledge-bases. This modality represents a move from traditional religiosity to what is commonly referred to as mysticism.

The chapter concludes with an assessment of the present-day status of Presence in Judaism. Judaism is considered here in crisis. The crisis owes in part to broader crises of Western society. It is also affected by particularities of Jewish history, including the Shoah. However, at heart it is a systemic crisis. At its core, it is a crisis of Presence. The balance of presence and absence, constitutive of Judaism and its history, has shifted to the point that absence eclipses Presence. Internal balances between different components of the broader covenantal framework have been upset, and values other than God dominate the religious landscape. Concurrently, teaching on God is confused, making it hard to advance an educational program, let alone to engage in a journey of spiritual deepening. All these contribute to Judaism's present-day crisis.

Chapter 2 examines the notion of commandment and establishes different approaches to the commandments by means of the three modalities. The coupling of Presence and commandment has assumed different meanings throughout Jewish history, highlighting various understandings of God, commandment, and the covenantal relationship. The historical sweep is considered here not simply as a history of ideas, but through the prism of the three modalities that characterize the religious life, and that apply equally to different theological views of God.

As one moves from one modality to another, the meaning of mitzvah, "commandment", changes. The commanding Presence that characterizes the covenant gives way to softer understandings of God and his relationship to the commandments. These are seen as advice to attain spiritual perfection, as means of attaining communion with God and ultimately as expressions of divinity itself.

Different teleologies emerge to provide meaning for the commandments. The practice of the mitzvot will be different when carried out purely within a relational matrix as commandment, or when performed for the sake of attaining union with God or contributing to intra-divine processes. Different teleologies also affect the motivations accompanying the practice of the mitzvot. Commandments can be undertaken for self-serving reasons, such as reward and punishment, or for the sake of one's relationship with God, or for God himself. This remains a constitutive tension throughout the history of Judaism. Moving beyond self-serving motivation is aided by a proper understanding of the commandments and their relationship to God. This led to the rise of different literatures that account for the reasons for the commandments. For

philosophers, this literature suggests how society is ordered properly to facilitate the attainment of the goal of the knowledge of God. For kabbalists, this involves an understanding of how the commandments affect the inner life of God. For both approaches, a knowledge-base provides the orientation for the proper meaning of the commandments and for how they relate to God.

Recognition of purpose as an essential part of the performance of the commandments leads to an emphasis on proper intention. As teleology becomes more complex, especially in the mystical schools of Judaism, intention becomes even more important than the practice itself. If one seeks to impact the divine, or to attain some form of communion with God, intention must be specific and aid in the transformation of human consciousness toward a higher aim. As the commandments are increasingly understood as means of entering a divine reality, greater emphasis is placed on proper intentionality. A history of commandment and Presence in Israel's life is thus a movement from commandment to Presence. Grounded in conscious relational foundations, provided by the concept of covenant, religious practice and understanding of God evolve toward the realization of Presence as the driving force and the goal of religious practice.

Chapter 3 examines one mitzvah that has become so central in the practice of Judaism that it accounts for much of its particularity as a religion. It stands at the heart of Jewish practice, both in terms of the centrality afforded to it in theory, and its quantitative centrality in Jewish life. This mitzvah is Talmud Torah: the study of Torah.

Torah study can be understood and carried out in line with each of the three modalities discussed above. The relational modality provides the basic definition for Torah and its study. In the covenantal way of life, the Torah defines Israel's relationship with God. Its instructions are to be understood first and foremost as derived from the covenantal relationship. Its study is, accordingly, a means of realizing the covenant.

Because Torah study provides the information necessary for observance of all the commandments of the covenant, it is also a knowledge-base, thereby introducing us to the second modality. If other mitzvot are appreciated in line with a knowledge-base that provides them with meaning, Torah study in and of itself involves mastery of a knowledge-base. Yet, this knowledge-base is not a closed body of knowledge that must be mastered or handed down from generation to generation. It is, rather, a dynamic knowledge-base that is grown by the human effort to engage the Torah.

The third modality of intensification of Torah study points back to God and to a more explicit awareness of how God is related to Torah. If the first modal-

ity was founded on a relational perspective, the third modality sees presence, as a felt experience, as fundamentally related to Torah study. However, the particularity of Torah study is such that reference to "presence" may refer to more than divine presence. The realization of presence attendant upon Torah study applies to more than one dimension of presence. The third modality involves a transformative experience that makes Torah study more than an intellectual activity. A unitive process in relation to the Torah itself accompanies study and shifts awareness from the Torah as a body of knowledge that is either mastered or co-created to a super-mental energetic or conscious process in relation to the Torah.

The very status of Torah study as a mitzvah cannot be taken for granted. It represents historical and theological developments that extend from early Second Temple times to the foundations of rabbinical culture, and beyond. That this new cultural value is seen as a mitzvah is part of the phenomenon of the expansion of mitzvot and the capacity to generate new expressions of the religious life. Even more strongly, it is a function of how mitzvot emerge within the common relational matrix of God and Israel.

As it grew in prominence and became one of Judaism's most central, if not *the* most central religious value, Torah took on new significance. What Torah came to mean is much more than the idea of a word of God communicated in the framework of a commanding Presence of God to the community of Israel. Such an understanding would place the focus on obedience, and study would at most be a necessary requirement for the sake of proper living and performance of God's commandments. Rather, the Torah came to represent God and to constitute a space for encountering him. This shifted Torah from its original covenantal context as the body of covenantal laws to a more concentrated expression of encountering Divine Presence. Increasingly, Torah stood for God. The growth in prominence of Torah study stands in direct relationship to the decline in the centrality of the Temple and consequently of God's Presence being manifested through it.

Thus, we encounter a complex phenomenon that is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, Torah represents God, and is therefore closely associated with him. On the other, Torah occupies an autonomous position, as a self-standing spiritual reality, associated with God, but nevertheless having its own independent value. Potentially, Torah shifts attention away from God, competing with the direct experience of God. Along with this shift, we note the rise in Torah's cosmic significance, through the recognition of the status of Torah as instrument for creation. In its cosmic representation, Torah gains an autonomy that allows it to stand in for God, both mediating and concealing Divine

Presence. The Torah's centrality is thus related to both presence and absence, mediating Divine Presence, drawing from absence of the Temple, and standing in for God in a move that simultaneously represents presence and absence.

This new conceptual creation is key to the phenomenology of Torah study. Torah study and the understanding of Torah defy what might be commonly considered a typical approach to scripture and the reception of the word of God. Torah study is anything but the passive receipt of instruction or the transmission of a body of knowledge and wisdom. The primary experience of Torah study is one of creativity. The bulk of what is defined as Torah is not the divine component but that of human creativity. The governing experience of Torah study is the further advance in the development of Torah and its study, rather than the simple mastering of an existing body of knowledge.

There is a deep tension between the phenomenology of Torah study and its experience and the theories of Torah and revelation, even those that have been developed in traditional Jewish sources. It is hard to reconcile a passive-receptive model with the active, creative, and ever-expanding approach to Torah study and the body of knowledge it generates. Accordingly, I propose a new approach to understanding Torah study that grows out of its lived experience. I suggest Torah should be considered as that which is born in the common space of God and Israel. In this understanding, Torah remains deeply covenantal not because it communicates covenantal regulations, but because it is born of a collaboration and the shared space occupied by God and Israel. Torah is what is created in the relational matrix of the two covenantal parties —God and Israel.

The autonomous status of the Torah and the consequent role of man in co-creating the Torah provide wonderful spiritual opportunities, but also enormous challenges. The unique mixture of submission and self-expression gives Torah study much of its flavor. Yet it can be one of its great stumbling blocks. For if Torah is less than the incarnate presence residing in the scholar, it runs the risk of engaging the intellect, while shunning Divine Presence. Fundamental to the experience of Torah study is the question of the Torah's successful mediation of divine reality. To the degree that this representation becomes ideological lip service rather than a lived spiritual reality, the student runs the risk of engaging in intellectual activity that loses its spiritual moorings. If the beauty of the Torah ideal is its autonomous mediation of God and if the downfall of Torah study is its eclipsing of Divine Presence, the remedy to the spiritual ills of Torah students lies in the rediscovery of God. The history of Torah study for the past two millennia has seen repeated attempts at preserving the ideals of Torah study while establishing systemic balances to offset the potential

dangers of intellectualism and loss of spiritual perspective. Thus, Torah's tale is both a battle for cultural hegemony and a struggle for balancing divine representation with more immediate ways of accessing the divine.

While the significance of Torah study was never undermined, its centrality, its methods, and its position in the broader economy of Judaism's spirituality were reassessed by major figures throughout Judaism's history. Three examples are offered here of the tension between Torah study as it was developed within rabbinic culture and the spiritual quest characteristic of much post-rabbinic Judaism: Baḥya ibn Pakuda, Maimonides, and the Ba'al Shem Tov. Each of these figures offers a view of the religious life according to the third modality of intensification. From that perspective, each author considers Torah study and its relevance to that very attainment.

The chapter concludes with an analysis of the concept of Torah Lishmah, or "Torah for its own sake". A fundamental tension exists here between orienting study in relation to God or in relation to the Torah itself. Special attention is given to the uses of Torah Lishmah by Rabbi Kook. The choice of concentrating on Rav Kook is based on the recognition of how synthetic his thought is, how it integrates multiple reflective strands, and how deeply it grows out of his own personal spiritual experience. Even more significantly, it is to hear the voice of a figure of recent memory who demonstrates in his reflection, heavily influenced by experience, that the ideas we have been discussing are not simply theoretical constructs, but real, alive and vibrant, spiritual forces that shape one's interior life.

Chapter 4 examines what can be presented as the complement to Torah—prayer. There is much in common between the two phenomena. Both involve speech acts. And there is substantive overlap between the two, since various readings from the Torah, both written and oral, are included in the liturgy. To the outside observer, it may be difficult at times to discern whether the activity they are observing is prayer or Torah study, other than through various communal organizing principles and bodily postures.

However, while Torah study is established as a value and a mitzvah already during Second Temple times, prayer was not recognized as a commandment until later. Its evolution as a spiritual ideal was gradual and was impacted by several considerations. The first of these is the understanding of the nature of prayer. Is prayer concerned with fulfilling needs of the individual and the community, or is it a means of deepening the relationship with God and entering into his Presence? Maimonides, who considered prayer to be a mitzvah commanded by the Torah, did so because he saw prayer as related to the fullness

of approaching God. By contrast, Naḥmanides, who considered there is no biblical commandment to pray, viewed prayer through the lens of petition.

The emergence of prayer as a central Jewish ideal relied on three dynamics. First, prayer was established as a ritual that continued, compensated for, or paralleled Temple worship. Echoes of the Temple and its impact lend fixed prayer its significance. Second, prayer is deeply intertwined with Torah, both in choice of language, and in the incorporation of readings and biblical sources as part of public liturgy. But, most important of all was the third dimension: the affirmation of prayer as a means of turning to God. Legal sources, guidance in prayer, and the overall orientation of prayer point to God. This is the ultimate yardstick for prayer's centrality, as it points to God and leads to a deepening of relationship with him.

Jewish prayer as a formal, obligatory ritual emerged following the destruction of the Temple. The recitation of the Amidah, the core fixed Jewish prayer, is an obligation, to be performed thrice daily. An analysis of the text suggests that at its heart is the concern for the community's redemption. It is thus a communally oriented obligatory prayer. Its fixity upholds and inculcates communal values. But fixity also risks the loss of intention, sincerity, and depth. This creates a profound tension, often also a crisis, with reference to Jewish prayer.

Jewish thinkers have pursued various ways of establishing *kavanah* (proper intention) in the face of the erosive power of *keva* (routine). The term *kavanah* carries two senses. One relates to sincerity and an openness of heart that should accompany the recitation of set prayer. The other relates to how prayer serves as a vehicle for entering a deeper relationship with God. With this second sense in mind, we can review a variety of strategies and approaches that consider prayer with an eye to a relationship with God, and more specifically in relation to the Shekhinah. At its height, prayer ceases to be the prayer of the individual. It becomes a meeting point of human and divine speech. Prayer becomes the occasion not only of an encounter but of a transformation wherein the praying individual becomes an instrument for divine speech, for the Holy Spirit, for God guiding the prayer and working in and through the praying individual. Prayer is the point of coming together of human will and initiative and Divine Presence and purpose. The fullness of prayer emerges as similar in kind to the fullness of Torah. In both, human and divine speech come together. While in the case of Torah, it is divine speech that is expanded to the shared space with Israel, in the case of prayer it is human speech that rises to divine speech.

All this leads to an attempt to define what prayer is in Judaism. Contrary to a definition that is based on a view of prayer as speech that is directed to

God, we consider prayer as a process of entering God's Presence, and even more so of being *elevated* in God's Presence. This allows us to offer a broader definition of prayer, one that encompasses a broader range of phenomena under the rubric of prayer. Taken to its fullest manifestation, prayer has the potential of encompassing the entire religious life and all of life itself. While Judaism stops short of articulating a notion of constant prayer, due to the axiological primacy of Torah study, at its height prayer becomes the entire life, lived in God's Presence.

Chapter 5 studies manifestations of holiness in space. Two forms of holy places are biblically grounded and are also related to the covenant: the Temple and the Land of Israel. Sacred space in its fullness is the Temple, and preceding it was the traveling Tabernacle, the *mishkan.* These were both sanctified by God as his dwelling place. Divinely sanctified sacred space creates boundaries, limitations of access, and hierarchies of service. Contrast this with the sanctity of the Land of Israel, that is home of the People of Israel. Access is fully available to all and no hierarchy is involved. While the Land of Israel fulfills covenantal blessings, harkening back to the most foundational levels of the covenant, it does not function as sacred space in the same way that the Temple does, precisely because it is associated with the human pole in the covenantal relationship. The Land's sanctity is dynamic and expands following changes in the people's patterns of settlement. Thus, paralleling the sanctification of space by God is another kind of sanctification by Israel.

The destruction of the Temple is a moment of fundamental change in sacred space. A series of holy places emerges, none of them covenantal nor mediating Divine Presence in the same direct way the Temple did. Different elements of the covenant become sources of sanctification for these places: Torah, studied and practiced, the People of Israel, in their being and in their religious practice, the reality of prayer as spiritual activity and, of course, God as he is associated with these new forms of sacred space.

Several processes occur following the loss of the previous, biblically sanctioned holy places. One process is that of memorialization, expressed in the ubiquitous prayers for the restoration of the Temple, the Temple city, Jerusalem, and the Land of Israel. Memory provides a substitute for Presence lost, but also points in some way to such Presence. Memory informs the restorative drive that seeks a return to the lost or destroyed former holy places. Another process is the appreciation of the Temple, now destroyed, not only in terms of divine dwelling, fulfilling the covenantal blessings, but also in cosmic terms, thereby elevating it above the vicissitudes of history. Both processes attest to

the enduring centrality of the Temple in Jewish religious imagination. Another process is substitution, wherein the new forms of holy space compensate and substitute for the Temple. The synagogue and the house of study come into being, drawing on a combination of sanctifying elements. Processes of substitution and new sanctification allow us to appreciate the Jewish home as holy space, and account for why the tombs of saintly individuals are considered holy sites. What characterizes the places sanctified by Torah and by Israel is their open access and lack of hierarchy.

The interaction of memorialization and substitution yields further dynamics. Complementing the rise of alternative means of sanctification, we also recognize a move to making all these later expressions of sacred space similar to the Temple. Through memory, rituals and customs arise that seek to transplant Temple realities into later expressions of sacred space. This accounts for limitations on access even in later forms of holy places. The quest for making other forms of sacred space Temple-like also applies to the Land of Israel, that is understood not only as Israel's home, but increasingly in terms of manifesting Divine Presence.

The result of these movements of sanctifying space and seeking substitutes for the destroyed Temple is the expansion of sacred space, or the discovery of sanctity in spatial dimension. Thus, a core sanctity that was formerly associated with the spatially limited framework of the Temple is gradually increased to manifold expressions that are unlimited in principle. Presence and absence combine to generate the history of post-Temple holy spaces. Substitutes are governed by a sense of absence and create sacred spaces as substitutes for the direct sanctifying Presence of the divine. At the same time, they become associated with Divine Presence in other ways, either by evocation of memory or by alternative means of sanctification.

Mystical literature offers a parallel track of compensating for the destroyed Temple, not by establishing alternative expressions of sacred space, but by transcending space and establishing its equivalent in another order of celestial reality. Alternatively, the movement of individualization and interiorization leads to the location of sacred space within the person. An equivalence is created between the holy person and holy space. The individual is recognized as the dwelling place for God.

Sacred space is a prism through which Israel's story can be told. The centrality of this dimension of the religious life is witnessed not only by how central it is to the Bible but also by the multiple processes that it generates in the absence of the original sacred spaces—memorial, aspiration for restoration, substitutes, expansion, and interiorization. The interplay of these activities accounts for the

rich and complex history of institutions that are holy places and for the rich web of meanings and associations they carry. The different perspectives add up to a creative tension wherein the original sacred space, Temple, and Land, are never forgotten, while other expressions of sacred space arise in the vacuum created by their absence.

Chapter 6 studies holy times in Judaism. The study of holy times follows the study of sacred space and applies to it some of the same dynamics we have seen with reference to holy space. Rather than approaching sacred time as a unified whole, we should consider sacred time as textured and nuanced, drawing from multiple sources of sanctification, representing different degrees of sanctity and different historical periods, and conveying multiple messages particular to the memories of the different times celebrated. The chapter offers a map of sanctity, presence, and memory by means of which we can appreciate the complexity, the spiritual ground, and the ultimate drive of the various expressions of temporal sanctity in Judaism.

The equivalence between Temple and Sabbath holds the key to understanding the sanctity of the Sabbath and the workings of sacred time in Judaism. Making time hallowed is akin to constructing a Temple, a dwelling place for God, in time. Temple and Sabbath are correlative realities, like the space and time they bring to perfection. Sabbath may be viewed as a temple within time. Like the Temple, it is a place in which God is encountered. When the Temple is destroyed, the Sabbath takes on some of the Temple's significance, functioning as a means of accessing God's reality, no matter where one is or under what circumstances.

Sanctity in time operates much like sanctity in space. It too draws on a primary reality, that of the Sabbath. This sanctity is juxtaposed to the human pole on the axis of sanctification—the biblical Festivals. The totality of sacred time is a meeting point of divine and human initiative, as Sabbath and Festivals form a larger whole.

The consideration of holy times involves two dimensions. The first is an analysis of the nature of sacred time, the ways in which it is covenantal, and how it manifests Divine Presence. This consideration involves us in a discussion of the nature of sanctity and the different gradations of holy times, as these are understood halachically and conceptually. It also requires recognition of the different agents of sanctifying time—God and man.

The theoretical understanding of sanctity is complemented by a review of the memory content of sacred time. This second dimension relates to the story of sacred time. The evolution of sacred time in Judaism is the story of this

chapter, but it also tells a story. From one perspective, it is God's story, from another it is Israel's and ultimately humanity's or the world's. While presence and memory are two distinct dimensions of holy times, we note how in various ways memory is put to the service of a deeper drive for presence, thereby partially compensating for lost Presence.

There are fundamental differences between the Sabbath and all other holy days. This distinction parallels that of the Temple, as contrasted with other forms of sacred space. The sanctity of the Sabbath is extended to other holy days. The holiest and most archetypal form of holy time is understood as the source of the sanctity of other holy times. The Temple, too, as fundamental sanctifying principle, sanctifies not only other kinds of holy places but also different kinds of holy days. This is true for biblical Festivals as well as for post-biblical memorial days, that draw their significance from the memory of the destroyed Temple.

In the same way that sacred space reveals a movement of expansion, so too we recognize an expansion of the meaning of sacred time in Judaism. In the first instance, this takes place through the expansion of Sabbath to holidays. Further expansion occurs as we discover the ideal of extending the sanctity of Sabbath to the weekdays, to ordinary times. Diverse understandings portray such expansion as preparation, longing, blessing, and even the extension of the very sanctity of the Sabbath to the weekdays. Such expansion is coupled with another fundamental movement that we detect across different expressions of Judaism's spiritual life—interiorization. The Sabbath's sanctity (and to a much lesser degree that of other festivals) is lived in the interior, within the person. Interiorization might be, in the first instance, taking to heart the lessons and message of the holy time, thereby engraving holy time within the person. Such an understanding could potentially apply equally to Sabbath and festivals. There is, however, a stronger sense, where something in the essence of the holy time leads to identification with the holy person, and this applies especially to the Sabbath. The interiorization of the Sabbath leads to the consideration of the holy person himself as Sabbath. While this may be metaphorical, suggesting a relationship between the holy person and others that is analogous to that of Sabbath and other holy days, it can also be appreciated in a stronger sense. The holy person not only draws forth the reality of Sabbath into the week He himself is, to some extent, identified with the Sabbath, assuming its very nature into himself.

Chapter 7 flows from this recognition of how sacred time is interiorized within the human person. It is devoted to the holy person. Broader individual holiness has been encountered throughout, because of the covenant and as an outcome

of the practice of the mitzvot, performed as expressions of God's sanctification of Israel. Chapter 7 is devoted to outstanding individuals, holy men, agents of communicating the divine word and the Divine Presence. Their holiness, and in some cases their covenant, is to be appreciated as an expansion and as a deepening of Israel's collective holiness.

Covenant provides us with multiple perspectives by means of which we can appreciate the holy person in Judaism. Some holy individuals are recipients of divine covenants. Such is the case for priests and kings. Even where covenant does not appear as a concept, we identify covenantal structures with reference to the holy person. These include participation in divine reality, as well as self-standing in relation to God that allows holy individuals to confront, challenge and even oppose God and his decrees. Participatory and oppositional relations both express covenantal views of the holy person.

For kabbalists, and consequently for the hassidic movement, the term *brit*, covenant, describes the ẓaddik. The covenant is fulfilled in a person. It is in this person that Presence is made manifest, that the divine and the human come together in practical collaboration and in existential commingling, and where the goal of the entire covenantal system is realized. The holy person represents and integrates the two covenantal parties and their relationship within his person. As a consequence, we find two complementary modalities in the ẓaddik's relationship with God—participatory and oppositional. While the ẓaddik participates in divine reality, he is also presented in opposition to God, annulling divine decrees for the sake of the community.

There are several axes that are crucial to an understanding of the phenomenology and evolution of holy men in Judaism. The first concerns the distinction between Presence and Torah. While in the ideal, the two go hand in hand, we can distinguish different religious types according to the degree to which they represent one pole or the other. A second distinction is between Torah and prayer as means of approaching God and as primary activities of the religious life, generating different kinds of holy men. A third distinction is between the social framework for appreciating the holy man and the cosmic context within which he is appreciated. Different permutations of these elements form the story of the holy man as a central component of Israel's story in God's Presence.

The biblical period offers us the association of covenant and holy or chosen individual. Two of the important offices—the priest and the king—are both granted their hereditary office through a covenantal gift. These holy individuals are inter-mediaries, representing the community to God and God to the community. As such, they are mediators of Divine Presence, a fact we grasp readily when we consider the Temple, as well as consecrated royalty, as institutions

organized around Divine Presence. A third figure is the prophet. While the prophet comes into direct contact with Divine Presence, it is primarily through speech that he mediates this contact. His primary speech is divine speech addressed to Israel, or in some cases to the entire world, and thus a form of Torah. One of the functions of the prophet is also to pray for the community. Torah and prayer combine in the person of the prophet who has direct access to Divine Presence.

The rabbinic period is characterized by the loss of all three types, and along with them of the covenantal moorings of holy individuals and of the claim for direct Presence that they enjoyed. Absence, stemming from the Temple's destruction, leads to the rise of two types of holy individuals. Their characters are organized respectively around the spiritual realities of Torah and prayer. Torah functions as a substitute for Divine Presence and leads to the organization of religious leadership around excellence in Torah study. Whereas priesthood and kingship, mediating Presence and grounded in covenant, functioned through hereditary structures, Torah study is democratic, open to all and in theory lacking hereditary components. This is an expression of greater democratization, deepening individualization and the move away from a Presence-based understanding of the religious leader and outstanding individual. Complementing the figure of the Torah scholar is the figure of the ḥasid, a religious virtuoso whose excellence is primarily in the field of prayer.

A history of more than fifteen hundred years of religious leadership and of outstanding religious personalities is no more than a series of variations on these different possibilities. The content of knowledge that is privileged as the most important part of Torah changes between different schools—rabbinic, philosophical and kabbalistic—but the fundamental structure remains the same: knowledge as the primary feature of religious excellence, thereby demonstrating the primacy of Torah, balanced by the capacity to represent the community in prayer.

In this history, there is one noteworthy type of holy person that has emerged over the last centuries, especially in the framework of the hassidic movement—the ẓaddik. In rabbinic literature we come across the notion of a cosmically significant religious personality. The ẓaddik, the righteous, saintly personality is said to uphold the entire world in his merit. What was a literary possibility in rabbinic literature emerges as a social reality, identified with specific individuals in the hassidic movement. The importance attached to these individuals transcends the efficacy of their prayer and the extent of their knowledge. We encounter claims for and self-awareness of Divine Presence as a factor that defines these individuals. The most fundamental measure of this

is the view of the ẓaddik as dwelling-place for God. To the hassidic ẓaddik is attached cosmic significance, beyond the historical reach of his community. The ẓaddik is viewed as a continuing expression of the presence of Moses in the present day, thereby making the ideal religious personality, comprehensive and synthetic, grounded in Presence and full in knowledge, ever available. Hassidic literature and later mystical literature provide a glimpse into the subjective personal reality of the ẓaddik, beyond theoretical statements of his cosmic status and his ability to confront God in prayer. Hassidic literature has developed robust justification for the notion of the ẓaddik, including motives such as union with God, cosmic status, and even an incarnational view of the ẓaddik. Thanks to the publication of the personal diaries of Rav Kook, we are in a position to complement the theoretical study of the ẓaddik with the first-person testimony of an individual who understands himself in those terms.

The history of holy men in Judaism suggests there is a continuity between the ẓaddik and the figure of Messiah. Hassidic understandings that profile Torah or prayer, alternatively, as hallmarks of Messiah's work present Messiah as an extension of the image of the ẓaddik. Messiah, in this understanding is the perfection and extension of the notion of the ẓaddik, the ẓaddik of all ẓaddikim, if you will. What this also suggests is that there is a historical and metaphysical continuity between ẓaddikim and Messiah. Ẓaddikim lay the foundation for Messiah; in fact they make him present. He in turn fulfills their work, bringing it to completion. Israel's story, refracted through the history of holy individuals, takes on greater continuity and integration. Rather than a story of suffering that awaits a redeeming figure at the end of time, it is a story of evolving religious perfection, the integration of all forms of perfection, in a historical movement that builds from within, progressively and in an evolutionary manner, toward its fulfillment. The maturing of its long-term processes of covenantal realization is realized in one ideal future personality. This provides the perfect bridge for us to consider the future of Israel's story and the key to its meaning.

Chapter 8 concludes the book with a return to the question of Israel's story. It is now time to reflect upon the process and purpose of Israel's story, drawing on the insights of the entire book. A view of the unfolding and purpose of Israel's story draws on three sources. The first is the structure and key notions of the religious system as these have come to light in this work. The second are promises and visions of the future. Such promises and future visions can be understood as statements of the purpose of the story. They are found in the Bible and continue down to present times. For most of Jewish history they have been associated with the person of Messiah and a view of the messianic era. The

third source is an appreciation of the evolution of Judaism from its historical foundations to present times. Our working assumption is that changes and developments in the spiritual life of Judaism represent an essentially positive vector that leads to the fuller realization of Judaism's long-term aspirations. Such developments should be appreciated, then, as indications of the path of spiritual evolution that points to Judaism's eventual or messianic fulfillment. My presentation draws from past foundations, it builds upon what has become evident and operative in the present and considers the future in light of promises that incorporate and fulfill both past and present.

There are two basic drives that are associated with a vision of the future of Israel's story. The first is a movement of expansion. We have noted how holiness tends to expand. This finds expression with reference to Israel itself in the drive to expand both its teaching and its very being to others through teaching, inspiration, conversion, and more. Israel's own story cannot be appreciated independently of this movement for expansion. Some of this expansion has already been realized in history, including through the emergence of daughter religions that spread Judaism's message to the world. A fuller view of complete and universal expansion is envisioned as part of Judaism's messianic vision. This drive provides the key to understanding Israel's story and the purpose of its election. If we ask what the meaning and the purpose of Israel's story is, a large part of the answer is found in the drive for expansion.

The second drive is one of deepening. The move toward deepening is one of interiorization, fuller understanding, and deeper realization of the spiritual life of Judaism, and even more pointedly of the knowledge of God. Knowing God in a fullness of a lived spiritual experience, such that touches the core of the person and transforms his or her orientation in the Divine Presence, is a fundamental goal of the spiritual life. An important aspect of what we have referred to as "presence" is coming to live in the Divine Presence, shaping all of life around it and grounding one's life in the knowledge of and in a living relationship with God. This drive for deepening, for increased interiorization of the religious life, is one that is at work throughout the long history of Judaism. This drive defines the process leading up to the fulfillment of Israel's story. From the perspective of the faithful, from the subjective and experiential perspective, it provides the purpose of their journey. From God's perspective, while constituting an end in itself, it is also a means to the realization of the drive for expansion that eventuates in universal knowledge of God.

I approach a study of these movements through the lens of the history of interpretation of three key biblical passages, each of which is important to a view of the covenant, its definition, or its future. Each of these texts allows us

to understand the covenantal vision and its future projection. The texts and their history of interpretation give expression to these movements, as they are variously refracted through these biblical texts.

The bulk of the chapter consists of three studies in the history of interpretation. The first of these is a study of Exodus 19:6—the designation of Israel as a Kingdom of Priests. I focus on this text because it provides us with a covenantal point of departure. By means of this designation we can visit key dynamics of Israel's vocation and life. Israel's very being and its outreach in a vocation of teaching are presented through the history of interpretation. Israel's history is refracted using this designation, which is variously understood as an ongoing successful realization of the task of spiritual teachers or is postponed to a future time, when Israel's failure will be overcome.

The second text is Jeremiah 31:30–33, where we find the prophecy of a future new covenant. This text is one of the Bible's own answers to the problems associated with the covenant. The history of interpretation moves the vision of a new covenant from a future promise that is of no present relevance to an ongoing spiritual pursuit that touches the life of the individual and the community as it moves step by step toward the fulfillment of the new covenant and toward a deeper knowledge of and dedication to God.

The third text is Isaiah 56:1–8, the prophecy of the Temple becoming a house of prayer for all people. This passage in its entirety is one of the great universalistic visions of Judaism and the focus on the Temple and on prayer ties the text to one of the central concerns of the present work—Divine Presence. The oracle opens up the covenant for the outsider to join. Divine Presence is made available through prayer. Prayer and Presence are thus part of a covenantal vision.

The three textual studies make us realize there are, in fact, three movements at play in Israel's story—the movement of deepening, the movement of expansion, and the messianic movement. These come together at various points in the history of interpretation of these three texts. This leads us to a consideration of the relationship of Israel and Messiah as two possible ways of bringing Israel's story to fulfillment.

We do not have a full view of Israel's story from the outset. Its contours only emerge as the story unfolds. With thousands of years on history's stage, enough has been recognized to allow us to project a view of the future and of the meaning of the story based on what has come to light and the key aspirations that have been projected toward the future. One of the most important aspirations, crucial to the present chapter, is the ideal of Messiah. Like prayer, the idea of and the understanding of Messiah is something that emerges only in the

story's unfolding. The ideal of Messiah is different from other institutions that have emerged over the course of history. It is not a practice; it is an aspiration. Messiah is a way of telling Israel's story with a happy ending. There is need for a messianic figure only in the framework of a story and in the framework of a story that has gone awry. Were it not for sin and a derailing of Israel's story from its original divine intention, there might have not been a need for Messiah. A purposeful view of Judaism's evolution seeks to recognize the deepening of spiritual understanding even if ideas and institutions come into place through historical failure. Covenantal infidelity provides an opportunity for the discovery of spiritual realities that had not previously come to light. Even if the messianic ideal is born of failure, loss, and destruction, and the need to rehabilitate these, the historical circumstances nevertheless bring to awareness a major spiritual force in the life of Judaism and of mankind—Messiah.

The interplay of Messiah and Israel as vital components of a shared story forces the issue of how to evaluate Israel. Is Israel's story a story of success or of failure? Does Israel live up to God's expectation? How does this condition a view of Israel's contribution to the unfolding of historical processes and to the fulfillment of its own story? How does the introduction of the figure of Messiah impact a view of Israel? Does Israel, in its spiritual life, bring its story to completion or is history's happy ending a matter for Messiah, thereby eclipsing Israel's story and its purpose? Does Israel's failure lead to an alternative ending to its story, or can the story be told in a way that integrates Israel's longtime story and Messiah's long hoped-for work? Further reflection on this point will make us realize that it is not only the idea of Messiah that comes into clearer view with the historical evolution of Judaism. It is also an understanding of Israel itself, its grounding in the divine and the ultimate means by which it delivers its message and serves the world. As a higher view of Israel emerges so its association with Messiah is more closely integrated. As higher views of Israel come to light, the understanding of Messiah too deepens.

An initial understanding of Messiah sees in him a way of setting straight a story that has gone awry. Along with the deepening of reflection on Israel's being we also come to reflect on the being of Messiah. Is Messiah a means or an end? As a means, he aids in steering Israel back to its course, and in realizing its deep aspirations and the various biblical prophecies that are attached to it. As a means, he may have only come into the picture due to Israel's shortcomings. But if Messiah is recognized as a soul, an expression of Divine Presence, then we might consider reversing the relations. The value of Messiah is in the very manifestation of his soul. Beyond achieving the various corrective functions associated with the person of Messiah, this manifestation also delivers a

new teaching, a new revelation. More significantly, the ultimate revelation might be the revelation of that soul, rather than any of the actions or teachings associated with it. Revisiting the relations of Israel and Messiah leads to a reversal. Israel's story is instrumental to Messiah's revelation and reality.

To justify such a reversal, we must affirm the association of Messiah and Israel on more fundamental grounds. Messiah is not only someone who performs a set of "messianic" tasks. There is a unity of being, a shared existential ground, that unites Messiah and Israel. The fulfillment of Israel's task and the revelation of Messiah's being would, then, be different ways of describing the same historical, spiritual, and metaphysical process.

Unity is not only the key to understanding Messiah's relationship to Israel. It is also the key to understanding how the three drives—expansion, deepening, and the messianic—are related. All partake of an even more fundamental goal—unity. The understanding that emerges through the process of deepening points to unity. The move for expansion is driven by a vision of unity. It is in view of this unity that holiness expands. It is the ultimate unity of humanity that informs the drive for Israel expanding teaching and Presence to all of humanity. The recognition of a unity of being between Messiah and Israel is based on a vision of unity of souls. This applies first to the unity of the souls of Israel with that of Messiah. Beyond that, it relates to the souls of all of humanity, extending the Adamic body to Messiah.

Judaism's great message is one of unity. The one God is at the root of a united humanity. Reality itself is a union of souls who, united with the divine, radiate his Presence and carry out his design. Israel's story is one of seeking to realize this vision of unity.

1 Covenant, Divine Presence, and the Modalities of Judaism

Entering Judaism—Understanding Judaism

Judaism's story is closely tied to its particularity, even as it proclaims a universal God whose message applies to all and offers a comprehensive vision for all of humanity. In a world in which "world religions" are presented alongside one another, we run the risk of losing sight of the particularity of Judaism.[1] Understanding this particularity is the gateway to a working definition by means of which we can integrate the variety of information and insight that come to us from Judaism's almost four-thousand-year history.

If we seek to gain understanding of what Judaism is, one way of doing so is by looking at the process of entering Judaism—how one becomes a Jew. This will teach us something fundamental about Judaism itself. To this end, let us consider the instructions of the Talmud that continue to provide guidance for the convert nearly two thousand years after they were formulated.

> The rabbis taught: If at the present time a man desires to become a proselyte, he is to be addressed as follows: "What reason have you for desiring to become a proselyte; do you not know that Israel at present times is persecuted and oppressed, despised, harassed and overcome by afflictions?" If he replies, "I know and yet am unworthy", he is accepted forthwith, and is given instruction in some of the light and some of the severe commandments.[2]

The process by means of which one converts to Judaism highlights the entry into the people, not only into a set of religious beliefs or practices. The core of

[1] Viewing Judaism as a species in the genus "religion" may be appropriate to certain contexts but does not provide a good entry point into understanding Judaism. Part of the problem lies with difficulties related to the very definition of religion and the history of the emergence of the category. The problem of defining "religion" is a perennial problem. For relevant discussions, see: *What Is Religion? Origins, Definitions and Explanations*, ed. Thomas Idinopulos and Brian Wilson (Leiden: Brill, 1998); *The Pragmatics of Defining Religion*, ed. Jan Platvoet and Aried Molendijk (Leiden: Brill, 1999); *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), esp. 269–84; *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon and Willi Braun (London and New York: Cassell, 2000), esp. 21–34.

[2] BT *Yevamot* 47*a*.

the conversion ceremony is entry into the people and their particular relationship with God.[3] Classical Jewish conversion requires of the convert that he or she declare their desire to become one with the people of Israel, sharing in their historical suffering and fate, alongside taking on themselves the practice of the mitzvot of Judaism.[4]

This emphasis on joining the people reveals that Judaism is unlike any other religion today. Judaism is related to a people. It is the religion of the people of Israel. Its primary characteristic involves membership in this people. The national and religious dimensions point to aspects that are relevant to a working definition of Judaism. As we see in the conversion ritual, the potential convert is not only asked to join the people, but is asked whether he is willing to share in their historical fortunes. One joins Israel at a given point in their story—that is, Israel at the present time. Implicit in the present is a view of past and future. The perspective is therefore not simply one of a people, but of the story of a people. The convert joins the people and becomes part of its story. Entering into Judaism is sharing an identity-forming story.

Most Jews are simply born into the people and receive their identity through birth to a Jewish mother. They are fully Jewish, regardless of their level of observance. Even circumcision is not required to obtain Jewish identity. The convert, by contrast, must undergo a process of joining the people. Here we are led to a paradox that concerns peoplehood and membership in the religion. The convert must affirm not only his or her interest in joining the people, but also undertake a commitment to the commandments. Whereas a native-born Jew will not lose his status as a Jew due to failure to live up to the religious commandments, the prospective convert will not be admitted without acceptance of the commandments. There are then two defining dimensions: one national, involving membership in a particular nation or people, and the other religious, involving specific behaviors that are particular to the Jewish religion.

Religious obligations cannot be understood without the broader context of a relationship with God. The commandments assume one who commands. They cannot be properly understood without recognition of the God to whom they point and who grounds them. Let us consider the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. Delivered at a moment in which the nation was constituted,

[3] Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, is also considered the father of converts. Fundamentally, the status of the convert is no different than that of one who was born Jewish.

[4] It is noteworthy that none of the modern variants of Judaism have challenged this core understanding of what Judaism is, and hence of what is entailed in joining its ranks. Various reforming movements challenged the practices of Judaism, suggesting different yardsticks for contemporary behavior, but never an alternative understanding of the collective understanding of Judaism.

it is one of Judaism's most fundamental documents. The opening of the Decalogue (Exod 20:2), "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery", presents God as the God who took Israel out of Egypt. God does not introduce himself in philosophical terms, or even in terms of his relation to the entire world, as its creator. Rather, Israel's relationship with God is founded on the particularity of its story. This part of the story, important enough to serve as a divine calling card, begins in an act of rescue and liberation.

All this allows me to propose the following working definition, by means of which we can consider the entire scope of Judaism, its history, rituals, teachings, aspirations, spirituality, and self-identity. The proposed definition for Judaism, in this view, is—the enduring story of Israel's life in God's Presence. This means more than the obvious claim that the story takes place in God's Presence, or even that it is read or understood in God's Presence. It suggests that Israel lives its life, consciously and intentionally, in God's Presence. It is in relation to God's Presence that its life and process must be understood and evaluated. God's Presence is the goal, purpose, and meaning of its story.

This definition brings together the two relational partners, God and Israel, and relates them to what matters most: living in Divine Presence. It also acknowledges the complications and vicissitudes of this relationship and the *longue durée* of the process, that undergoes multiple changes, and during which Israel's relationship with God, understanding of him, and approach to him grows, develops, and undergoes many transformations. This story endures, goes on and awaits its final fulfillment. All this is captured in the combination of story and Presence, the two dimensions that give depth, nuance, and process to the fundamental relationship of God and Israel.

Understanding Judaism in terms of people, story, and Presence suggests that the ultimate meaning of Judaism eludes us. A definition allows us full grasp. By contrast, the meaning of the story of a relationship can be only fathomed as that relationship progresses. The perfection or the goal of the story is still a matter for future accomplishment. We cannot offer a complete accounting of the formation of this people, or of why it is that God chose them. We can only extrapolate from the point of the story that has come to light where it is headed, what is its fulfillment and how it serves God's purposes for humanity and for all of creation.

My formulation of what Judaism is also defines what Judaism is not. Judaism cannot be boiled down to an idea or a formula. Neither the declaration of the unity of God, monotheism, nor any of the moral values preached by Judaism define the essence of Judaism, as various thinkers have attempted to

do. In the twentieth century, a definition of Judaism as "ethical monotheism" focused on key ideas or teachings as the core of the religion. My own approach profiles process. As an ongoing and open story, Israel's life defies the kind of closed definition that presents Judaism as static, unmoving, and perfect. The entire scope of divine revelation and of human aspiration, the great ideals and teachings of prophets, philosophers, and mystics are best viewed as expressions of the people's life in God's Presence. God's Presence is the ultimate reference point, against which all expressions are measured and toward which they lead. What unites the diverse forms of Judaism, from biblical times down to the present, and what accounts for the transformation and growth within it, is the ultimate reference point and goal of the story of Israel's life—the Presence of God.

The Story of Israel's Covenant

There are different moments at which we can locate the beginning of Israel's story. Abraham, as father of the nation, might be understood as the beginning. Or we might consider the exodus, or the revelation at Sinai, as starting points. Locating the beginnings of Israel is conceptually complicated precisely because of the dual nature of the Jewish religion: nation and way of life. The father of the nation is not the same as the giver of the law.[5] However, these different options share in this quality of story, particularity, and relationship with God. As we shall presently see, they also share in a fundamental category: the covenant. If we consider the foundational covenant at Sinai, we recognize that when God reveals himself to Israel at Sinai, as well as at subsequent revelations and moments of covenant-making,[6] God not only obligates them with commandments. He forms a relationship with them. He gives them his Presence and is present to them. In this relationship of "I" the Lord and "thou" the people liberated, commanded, and entered into relationship, God's Presence is made known and given.

Covenant, far from being an abstract category, is a concrete relational category. It governed diverse forms of human relations in the ancient Near East—relations between kings, between kings and their vassals, subjects, and more.

[5] Another way of stating this complexity is through the question of who the founder of Israel's religion is. Both Abraham and Moses qualify in different ways for the title. As Jon Levenson has pointed out, Abraham practices a different form of religion than later Judaism. On the other hand, the root of all covenants is the covenant with Abraham. On this question, see Jon Levenson, "Abraham among Jews, Christians and Muslims: Monotheism, Exegesis and Religious Diversity", *ARC* 26 (1998): 5–29.

[6] Such as Deut 29. The text makes it clear that the covenant is made facing God, in his Presence, and hence as part of a relationship.

Covenant as such is not a theological category. However, Israel's unique religious genius is expressed in the application of the known legal category to its relationship with God. Covenant is the hallmark of biblical theology. It is the unique contribution of biblical faith to humanity's approach to the divine. While covenants were common in the ancient world between human parties, Israel alone envisioned its relationship with God as a covenant. Covenant also provides us with a lens through which Israel's story can be viewed. Israel's formation, the logic under which it comes into being, the unfolding of its story through sin, exile, and return, can all be viewed through the prism offered by "covenant", now functioning as a theological category. Covenant is a category that structures God's relationship with Israel, offering God's Presence, his dwelling amidst Israel, providing protection and blessing, in exchange for covenantal faithfulness to the commandments.

We must not see covenant simply as an agreement between two parties. It is here that Divine Presence is so crucial to understanding the covenant. What drives the covenant between God and Israel is love. Underlying the covenant and expressing it is love—God's love for Israel, the grounds for his entry into a covenantal relationship, as well as Israel's response in love, informing their covenantal engagement. As covenant is closely related to love, we find it interwoven with descriptions of the covenant. The details of the relationship, and specifically the covenantal commitments, the mitzvot, are expressions of love. We will have multiple occasions for considering the covenant and Israel's relationship with God as a love story.

Throughout this book, we will see how all of Judaism's great spiritual ideals and realities are related to the covenant. Moreover, the story of "covenant" is the story of the multiple dimensions and nuances that are discovered in the idea of the covenant, all of which give Judaism its spiritual wealth and depth. We turn, then, to the story of the covenant itself, a prism of Israel's relationship with God and its unfolding through time.

The Covenant with Abraham: Creating a People

God's covenant with Israel was not the first time he entered into relationship with his creation. God seeks to be known,[7] and to show his love and compassion.[8] The divine need for being known informs the story of creation. Indeed, Adam and later righteous individuals enjoyed relationships with God.[9] Yet

[7] *Zohar* II, 42a.

[8] R. Naḥman of Breslav, *Likutei Moharan* I, 64, a.

[9] It is noteworthy that until Noah we do not find positive expression of this relationship in terms of Presence. The biblical text speaks of both Adam and Cain as *not* being in God's Presence. See Gen 3:8 and 4:14. The assumption seems to be that ideally they should be walking in

while God engaged in relationships with individuals prior to Abraham, none of them was chosen for a covenant.[10] Something new begins here, the beginning of a particular relationship. The God who created all is also capable of choice or election. Herein we encounter the first element of a thick description of "Presence": God's engagement in relationship and his interest or desire to do so.

Why does this relationship, in its particularity, take place? Humanity's sins, as well as Abraham's personal virtue, may form part of the answer, but only a part.[11] The Bible itself does not provide an unequivocal answer for why Abraham is chosen by God and why a covenant is made particularly with him.[12] Is this an expression of God's free love, a love that cannot be contained by human reason? Or is there a purpose in this choice that can justify it beyond appeal to God's love?

Let us consider what covenant means and how it might be applied theologically as the story of covenant itself unfolds through successive covenants and through the vicissitudes of the covenant. We begin with an analysis of the structure of God's covenant with Abraham. This will provide us with a key to understanding Israel's covenant with God, God's relationship with the people of Israel, or, as later convention would have it, Judaism.

The covenantal reality is related to a command and to the Presence of God. When Abraham is ninety-nine years old, God addresses him:

God's Presence. However, only with Noah do we find a positive assessment of the relationship in terms of Presence. See Gen 6:9 and 7:1.

[10] This statement may sound surprising, in view of the frequent and common reference to a covenant with Noah. However, a careful look at Gen 9:9ff. indicates that the so-called covenant with Noah is not a personal covenant, structuring a particular relationship. In fact, it is not even a covenant with Noah. All references to a covenant are to a covenant God makes with Noah, his offspring, and all living creatures, who had been saved in the ark. It is thus a covenant made with creation, rather than with a person. It is a type of promissory covenant, in which God promises never again to bring a flood, rather than a relational covenant, like the one with Abraham. Covenant scholarship has classified covenants as one-sided, promissory covenants, or as bilateral covenants, where a mutual commitment is made. I believe an even more helpful distinction is relevant here, between a covenant that establishes a relationship and what I have called a covenant of no-harm. The distinction is developed in Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "Genesis 9, Noah's Covenants and Jewish Theology of Religions", *Studies in Christian–Jewish Relations* 18 (2023): 1–26.

[11] Why, for instance, did God not make with Noah the covenant that he made with Abraham? Obviously, the biblical narrative considers Noah the progenitor of humanity, rather than the father of a particular people. But this only brings into focus the question of why the exclusive covenantal relationship begins only with Abraham.

[12] See Israel Knohl, "The Election and Sanctity of Israel in the Hebrew Bible", in *Judaism's Challenge: Election, Divine Love and Human Enmity*, ed. Alon Goshen-Gottstein (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 2–7.

I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless. I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will make you exceedingly numerous. . . . As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be the father of a multitude of nations . . . . I make you the father of a multitude of nations, I will make you exceedingly fertile, and make nations of you; and kings shall come forth from you. I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come. I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God.[13]

These are the terms set forth for the covenantal relationship. Because this is the beginning, the terms are expressed as promises. Abraham binds himself to the promise when he undertakes to "walk before God and be blameless". Abraham is bound to walking his way, living his life before God, in his Presence; literally, "before God's face". Herein we encounter a further dimension of Presence, conscious living before God, as human awareness is oriented to the reality of a relationship that is real, personal, and palpable. This reality provides a frame of conscious reference to the believer, in this case Abraham, and defines and mandates specific actions.

God also binds himself to Abraham, defining his role in the relationship with Abraham and his offspring by promising to be a God to the people whose birth is here promised: "To be God to you and to your offspring to come—I will be their God". This relational commitment will be expressed time and again throughout the Bible in the covenant formula: God is our God and we are his people.[14] It allows us to identify covenantal thinking even where the term "covenant" does not appear. God is not approached in the abstract but through a particular relationship, to which he remains faithful and in which he is engaged. God is personally implicated in this relationship. The people are *his* and he is *theirs*.

The foundational covenant with Abraham already alludes to a definition of the covenant, which includes commitment, promise, and Presence. The

[13] Gen 17:2–8.

[14] On this formula, see Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998). Rendtorff defines the covenant formula either in reference to God as Israel's God, in reference to Israel as God's people, or the combination of both statements. In this he disagrees with the earlier work of R. Smend, *Die Bundesformel* (Zurich: E. V. Z. Verlag, 1963), who defines the covenantal formula proper as the combination of both elements, such as can be found in texts such as Deut 29:11–12 and Lev 26:12. This broader definition allows Rendtorff to discover the formula in a wider range of texts and contexts.

covenant God makes with Abraham is a covenant he makes already with the people to be fathered by him. "I will maintain My covenant between Me and you, and your offspring to come, as an everlasting covenant throughout the ages, to be God to you and to your offspring to come". Those promised generations are bound up in the covenant because they are present already in Abraham—God will be their God, present to them as well.

The covenant attaches itself to Abraham's flesh and to the offspring of his flesh. To that flesh, Abraham's offspring, God has a lasting claim. The fathering power of Abraham is the product of the covenant with God and belongs by right to him. Thus the covenant is identified with a mark in the fathering flesh of Abraham:

> God further said to Abraham, "As for you, you and your offspring to come throughout the ages shall keep My covenant. Such shall be the covenant between Me and you and your offspring to follow which you shall keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. And throughout the generations, every male among you shall be circumcised at the age of eight days. As for the homeborn slave and the one bought from an outsider who is not of your offspring, they must be circumcised, homeborn, and purchased alike. Thus shall My covenant be marked in your flesh as an everlasting pact."[15]

The centrality of circumcision as a defining feature of Jewish identity for all generations, down to present times, is rooted in the Abrahamic covenant. The mark of the covenant placed upon the flesh indicates the covenant, promises, and blessings conferred upon Abraham. The ritual benediction pronounced at the circumcision ceremony blesses God, "who commanded us to bring [the child] into the covenant of our father Abraham". It is followed by another in which God is designated as he who concludes the covenant.

Every act of circumcision, though enacted by the human partner in the relationship, is also a divine act of confirmation of the relationship and a moment in which God himself concludes the covenant. To say that God is active and present in human actions is to open human actions to a dimension that transcends the social categories that describe human activity. This is the aspect of Presence, by means of which it can be affirmed that God himself is implicated, engaged and continuously active in human religious behavior, no less than in the very relationship that he inaugurates.

Something else is said here at the beginning, another promise made by God in the covenant: the promise of land: "I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding".

[15] Gen 17:9–13.

The covenant God makes with Abraham is made with his flesh and the flesh of his offspring, who as a people, real in time and space, will need a land on which to dwell. The Land, as a hope in the beginning and a reality later on, is given by God as an integral element of the covenant. As later covenantal texts, such as Leviticus 26, teach us, how Israel keeps the covenant in time will be manifested visibly in Israel's relationship with the Land. The story of Israel will be intimately connected to the history of the Land.

The covenant with Abraham brings together for the first time two fundamental religious dimensions—law and Presence. These two dimensions define and ground the relationship being established through the covenant.[16] God commits his Presence, along with the specific blessings appropriate to the occasion. The human partner to the covenant expresses his attachment to the relationship through particular laws that give expression to the covenantal relationship, and whose meaning should be sought within that relationship.

The Sinai Covenant: Presence and Law

There have been multiple renewals of the covenant throughout Israel's history,[17] but the event we turn to now occupies a most privileged status: the covenant between God and Israel at Sinai. At Mount Sinai, God called Moses, who served as liaison between himself and Israel, and he went up the mountain. There, God spoke with him and proposed the establishment of a covenant:

[16] Long after this understanding was framed, I found Daniel Breslauer offered a close definition, significantly, framed in contradistinction to prevailing modern uses of "covenant". See S. Daniel Breslauer, *Covenant and Community in Modern Judaism* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 3.

[17] Rendtorff considers all covenants as an extension and a renewal of the primordial covenant, made with Abraham. See *The Covenant Formula*, 81–87. He finds in the reference to "my covenant" in Exod 19:5 allusion to the already existing covenant with Abraham. Accordingly, it is a renewal of an already existing covenant. I prefer to see the Sinai covenant as interrelated and interdependent with the covenant made with Abraham, but nevertheless as an independent moment in covenant history. Two elements are new here—the entry of the entire people into the covenant and the giving of the Torah (Rendtorff himself sees Exod 6:2–8 as a crucial text, because in it the people appear for the first time as part of the two-part covenant formula. See *The Covenant Formula*, 17). If "my covenant" in Exod 19:5 does refer to the Torah that is about to be given, we may still suggest an allusion whereby the Sinai covenant points to the covenant made with Abraham. It is possible to read the covenant narratives intertextually. Accordingly, we may locate a complementary appearance of the two-part covenant formula through the juxtaposition of Gen 17:7 and Exod 19:5. While each covenant may be understood independently, the Sinai covenant may also be considered as the fulfillment and ratification of the covenant made with Abraham. Other covenants are more explicit about the relationship with the patriarchal covenants. See Deut 29:12. Compare also below, p. 60 the discussion of Lev 26:42. On the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants, see Jon Levenson, *The Love of God: Divine Gift, Human Gratitude and Mutual Faithfulness in Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 114ff.

Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and declare to the children of Israel: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Me. Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.[18]

This is a foundational text, encapsulating the main themes of the covenant.[19] It begins by recounting Israel's history, by means of which the context of their relationship with God is established. God has already done good for Israel, the culmination of which is grounded in Presence, for God has "brought you to Me". In exchange for this Presence, Israel is asked to keep the covenant and is endowed with special status in relation to other nations.[20] This moment of particularity is set against a broader universal background—"all the earth is Mine".

Importantly, God does not force the covenant upon Israel. He invites Israel to partake in it. Rabbinic tradition highlights Israel's response to God ("all that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient") as the greatest expression of faith.[21] A midrashic parable highlights the degree of freedom involved in the making of the covenant.

A king who entered a province said to the people: "May I be your king?" But the people said to him: "Have you done anything good for us that you should rule over us?" What did he then do? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought their battles. Then when he said to them: "May I be your king?" they said to him: "Yes, yes". Likewise God. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down manna for them, brought up the well for them, brought the quails for them. He fought for them the battle with Amalek. Then he said to them: "May I be your king?" They said to him; "Yes, yes".[22]

Through this parable, the *Mekhilta* answers a question: why does the Torah not begin with the Ten Commandments? If law-giving is the essence of the revelation, why not begin with the essential? The Mekhilta's answer is that law can-

[18] Exod 19:3–6.

[19] Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*: *An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985), 23ff., uses this passage to draw out the meaning of Israel's covenant, against the background of the ancient Near East.

[20] The discussion in the final chapter of this work will develop further the dimension of status associated with the covenantal endowment, especially in relation to these verses.

[21] The literal rendering of the verse, "we will do and obey", allows the rabbis to find in the verse Israel's consent even to the unknown demands of God.

[22] *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Baḥodesh, chapter 5, trans. J. Z. Lauterbach (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1933), part 2, 229–30.

not be divorced from prior story because it takes place within a relationship. The laws are an expression of a relationship, and this in turn depends on the mutual knowledge of the partners entering the relationship. For God to be accepted by the people, they must come to know him as he is made known through the story. What is known of God is his goodness, and based on this goodness the people willingly enter into a relationship with him. The Mekhilta's parable captures in expanded form what is implicit in the above citation from Exodus 19.

The parable also calls our attention to an element of God's proposal which one might consider scandalous. The parable presents the image of a king who shows up among a people and, like a polite stranger says, "May I be your king?" God acts toward Israel not like a tyrant but like the best of kings, a king who respects the freedom of his subjects. The continuation of this same midrashic passage goes as far as to present Israel as turning down one of the covenant's stipulations—the most far-reaching proof of how free the reception of the Torah had to be. The covenant is based upon human freedom. Its future is subject to fickle human will.[23]

Following Israel's assent, God speaks and the content of his speech is commandments, or law. First come the Ten Commandments, followed by a larger number of commands having to do with servants, torts, property, social duties, and religious practices. The terms of the covenant are, in short, a collection of laws. The word "Torah" itself will come to be translated in the Greek of the Septuagint as *nomos* or law. While this translation certainly captures a fundamental aspect of what Torah is about, it also has unhappy consequences for how Judaism was understood, suggesting to later readers a contrast between law and covenantal love and freedom.[24] As the *Mekhilta* has already taught us, there is more to the Torah than law. Torah means "teaching" or "instruction", as we see in the fact that the Torah's laws are grounded in extended narrative. Law and story are two complementary aspects of one greater whole that is Torah. As the *Mekhilta* has also taught us, we need the story because only through it can the relational element of God's Presence be established. Story accompanies law. Just as the deeds of the king in our parable accompany his offer to be king, law always has about it this context of God's Presence. As with the covenant made with Abraham, the Sinai covenant too teaches

[23] Indeed, one solution to the constant violability of the covenant is the reestablishment of the covenant on grounds other than those of human free choice. This is the meaning of Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant (Jer 31:31–32), that will be discussed at length in the book's final chapter.

[24] For a recent treatment of how the two are related, not in oppositional manner, see Jon Levenson's *The Love of God*, chapter 1.

us that Presence and law are two complementary sides of the one covenantal reality.[25]

Covenant as both Presence and law can be understood in various ways. One interpretation highlights reciprocity. The model for Israel's covenant with God is not the treaty of parity, but the suzerainty treaty between unequals.[26] Yet, covenantal reciprocity exists despite the parties' differences in status and commitments. What makes the covenant reciprocal is the coming together of Divine Presence and Israel's commitment to the commandments. God gives his Presence and Israel, the recipient of covenantal promises, undertakes fidelity to the divine command.

Another possible understanding would be to recognize Presence as the goal of the covenantal relationship. To attain it, and to ensure its continuation, one must persevere in one's relationship with God. This is achieved with the help of the commandments. The covenant is more than a framework for the giving of the law, or of mutual commitment. Rather, the covenant made with God consists of a way of life, designed to bring the people of God into the Presence of God.

Yet a third possibility might be that law provides a means of memorializing Divine Presence. There are different degrees of intensity of the encounter with God and of the relationship with him. Dwelling in Divine Presence is the higher order. At times, when such Presence is lost or hidden, memory, typically associated with the Torah, serves as a substitute or means of holding on to lost Presence. Law provides the means for holding on to God's Presence even after it has receded from full awareness.

Returning to Presence and Sinai, we find in the narrative an indication of what the attainment of God's presence might consist of. A close reading of Exodus makes us aware what deep communion and participation is involved in covenantal entry into Divine Presence. We are told in Exodus 19 of God's descent onto the mountain and Moses's ascent to meet him. Here we share in the vision of God given to the elders of the people. We read of a meal taken by the elders of Israel, in the visible Presence of God. Like many ancient covenants, this covenant too is sealed by a sign of fellowship and communion.[27]

[25] E. P. Sanders, in his book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1977), aptly coins a term to describe this relationship to law—he calls it "covenantal nomism".

[26] Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 26. See, however, Levenson, *The Love of God*, 6, where the designation of Israel as a Kingdom of Priests establishes Israel as royalty. While this does not make Israel equal to God, it does create some foundational common ground that moves the covenant with God closer to a parity treaty.

[27] See Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1991), vol. 2, 153.

But even more striking than the meal is the covenantal sharing between God and Israel that is enacted in ritual. After the words of the covenant have been written by Moses in a book, an altar is set up and bulls are sacrificed. Half their blood is sprinkled on the altar. The book of the covenant is read to the people, who again declare that they will obey all that the Lord has said. Then Moses sprinkles the other half of the blood on the people. This is a sign that they now have a share in what belongs properly to God alone. We recall that blood is forbidden to humans, being the portion of the sacrifice exclusive to God (Lev 7 and 17). But here Israel shares in the divine portion, as the blood is sprinkled on them in a gesture of sharing and communion. Welcomed in this way into God's intimate Presence, the people become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

If covenant is celebrated as sharing, then it creates a common space shared by both covenanting parties. Within that space, the distinctions in status between the two parties give way to a common reality created by means of the covenant. Recognition of how covenant creates a space, so to speak, of commonality between God and Israel is an important recognition that will allow us to recognize how covenant operates in various dimensions of Israel's religious life—in time, in space, in the status allotted to special individuals, in achieving effective prayer and in the co-creation of the Torah. The later developments that will be described regarding these important expressions of Israel's religious life all rely on a fundamental covenantal understanding, even when they no longer appeal to the notion of "covenant" explicitly.[28]

God's Presence is not limited to the *making* of the covenant; it is the very *purpose* of the covenant. One of the most striking and direct expressions of God's Presence is God's dwelling amidst Israel. Several instances of the

[28] This sense of commonality and sharing underlies the even more radical description of covenant as partnership, found in a contemporary thinker such as Irving Greenberg. See Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004). While partnership does indeed convey the reality of how covenantal assumptions inform the workings of religion, in the collaboration between man (Israel) and God, I will not refer to covenant as partnership. The primary concern of theologians who speak of covenant as partnership is to affirm human autonomy in the relationship with God. As Tanya White points out to me, these thinkers are in some way managing the dissonance between divine authority and individual autonomy—between a religious ethical author external to the self, or one dictated by self-conscience. Covenant provides a means of negotiating this complexity. Covenant allows one to manage that dissonance by retaining the authoritative dimension of the divine but handing agency to humans to fulfill the divine will. My own presentation profiles other ways in which "covenant" can operate in religious thought, and seeks to collapse, in experiential and theoretical terms, some of the polarities that other authors seek to maintain by appeal to the covenant.

covenant formula stress God's literal Presence.[29] For example, in terse form, Exodus 29:45: "I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God". With greater elaboration, God's Presence is the consequence and goal of covenantal fidelity in Leviticus 26:11–12: "I will place my dwelling in your midst . . . ever present in your midst, I will be your God, and you will be my people". Divine presence as the fulfillment of the covenantal relationship is also part of Israel's eschatological hope. Thus, Ezekiel 37:27: "My presence shall rest over them; I will be their God and they shall be my people".[30]

Perhaps the greatest expression of how intimately the relationship with God is experienced is found in the metaphor of the covenant as a marriage. The metaphor is implied already in the reference in the Ten Commandments to God being a jealous God, drawing on the metaphor of the betrayed husband.[31] The prophets struggle to maintain Israel's covenantal faithfulness. The battle, or *riv*, that they mount against the people is designed to uphold the commandments of the Torah, the covenantal stipulations.[32] But alongside reproach and chastisement, we also find the prophets inculcating an image of an ideal relationship with God, casting it in terms of a loving spousal relationship:

> Assuredly, I will speak coaxingly to her and lead her through the wilderness and speak to her tenderly. . . . There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt. . . . And I will espouse you forever: I will espouse you with righteousness and justice, and with goodness and mercy. And I will espouse you with faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. And I will say . . . "You are my people", and . . . you will say "You are my God".[33]

What Hosea describes is the reestablishment of the covenant after repeated violation. For Hosea, the new covenantal moment will be an expression of mutual love, no longer the one-sided love of God alone. The metaphor of the husband betrothing his wife eternally in faithfulness captures the essence and depth of the covenantal relationship. Hosea, it has been suggested, provides the root metaphor for the expanded love poem found in the Song of Songs. One prevalent understanding of the Song of Songs is that it is an image of precisely this passionate covenantal love between God and Israel.[34]

[29] The following discussion relies on Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, 90.

[30] See further Zech 8:1–8. The same formula appears also in Jer 31:31–33, though without reference to God's dwelling. That text, which we shall study in depth in the book's final chapter, profiles God knowledge. It is possible that divine dwelling and divine knowledge are two complementary ways of capturing the one common quest for Divine Presence.

[31] See Exod 20:5.

[32] See the summary discussion of D. G. Spriggs, *Two Old Testament Theologies* (London: A. R. Allenson, 1974), 19–21.

[33] Hos 2:16–25.

[34] See Gerson D. Cohen, "The Song of Songs and the Jewish Religious Mentality", in *Studies*

Facing the Covenant's Violation

The story of the covenant also includes the story of Israel's infidelity. Even as Moses is communing on the mountain with God, the people who promised to do "all that the Lord has said", are enthusiastically violating God's commands by fashioning a golden calf and calling it their God. As God and Moses are preparing for the covenanted life of the priestly people and their future in the land, the people turn away in infidelity. The lover's anger blazes.

"I see that this is a stiffnecked people. Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation." . . . As soon as Moses came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, he became enraged; and he hurled the tablets from his hands.[35]

These are the tablets of the covenant. If the covenant has a beginning, can it have an end? If there is marriage, can there be divorce?

Repeatedly, the Bible provides strategies for upholding the covenant, never considering the possibility that the covenant may have been annulled due to Israel's infidelity. Indeed, throughout the entire history of the people of Israel, the assumption of a unique relationship with God is upheld, despite the vicissitudes of history. In fact, these vicissitudes are taken as indications of this special relationship, the flip side of covenantal intimacy. The biblical tale entertains no illusions regarding the people's goodness or reliability, as the present story indicates. Still, the covenant must endure, and if it is to endure, it must be founded on something other than Israel's fidelity alone.

In the present instance, it is Moses, liaison between God and the people, who provides the strategy for saving the people and upholding God's relationship with them. Moses points back to the covenant made with Abraham. That covenant was to be an everlasting covenant with his offspring.

"Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the

in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 3–17. See further Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's introduction to the Song of Songs, in his commentary on the siddur, *Olat Re'ayah* (Jerusalem, 1949), vol. 2, 3–4. Both writers suggest that the Song of Songs provides for the religious imagination and mentality a quality of expressing love that cannot be attained in any other way. According to Cohen, this is why the Song of Songs achieved canonical status. For him, the Song of Songs should be read as an expression of marital love, transferred to the relationship between God and Israel. See also Michael Fishbane, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Song of Songs* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2015), xix–xxv.

[35] Exod 32:9–19.

mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth. Turn from Your blazing anger, and renounce the plan to punish Your people. Remember Your servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, how You swore to them by Your Self and said to them: I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and I will give to your offspring this whole land of which I spoke, to possess forever." And the Lord renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon His people.[36]

Moses in effect persuades God to look beyond this dark moment in the story and to "remember". God saves the covenant by remembering Abraham, along with the other Patriarchs, and his covenantal promises to them.[37] He looks beyond the moment of infidelity and sees the covenant in the wholeness it had already in the flesh of Abraham. The patriarchal covenant is the foundation of the covenant with the people. It therefore stands in for the latter in times of crisis, protecting it from dissolution.

In another context, in the list of covenantal curses and blessings found in Leviticus 26, we again note how central the covenant with the forefathers is to the endurance of God's covenant with Israel. "Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land."[38] When Israel finds itself in exile, removed from God's Presence, and the covenant is virtually void, God remembers the covenant with the forefathers as a means of safeguarding his relationship with Israel.

[36] Exod 32:11–14.

[37] At various points in this work, memory is presented as a lower expression of the religious life, less than the fullness of Presence and often a human response to the religious life. This does not seem to be the case with reference to covenant. The memory of the covenant is not a lesser degree of the covenant. Rather, it seems to go to the core of the covenantal relationship and awaken or affirm it, when external circumstances do not correspond to promised covenantal circumstances. It is thus a return or an appeal to what lies at the core of the covenant. In this reading, the covenant with the Patriarchs constitutes this deeper reservoir of covenantal memory, to which God appeals when the covenant is broken outwardly. For instances of remembering the core covenant, see Gen 9:15; Exod 2:24; 6:5; Lev 26:42, and 44; Jer 14:21; Ezek 16:59. One notes that it is God, not the human partner, who remembers the covenant. It is likely there is a significant difference between how memory and covenant apply to God and to the human covenantal partner. With reference to God, memory goes to the heart of the covenantal relationship and imbues it with new life or drives it to action. With reference to the human partner, memory, on the whole, seems to be a substitute for the fullness of Presence, rather than a force that awakens Presence. It therefore seems that human memorialization of the covenant, in the Bible, is a very secondary phenomenon. The only reference to human memory in relation to the covenant is found in the parallel to Ps 105:8 in 1 Chr 16:15, where God's memory of the covenant is turned into a call to the listeners to remember it.

[38] Lev 26:42. For a discussion of this verse in the framework of a notion of covenant and holy individuals, see chapter 7, note 17.

The Covenant, Israel, and Divine Presence in Post-Biblical Thought

Throughout its history, Israel has continued to adhere to the understanding that it exists in a constitutive relationship with God, one which does not fade with time or with political changes. Even the experience of a prolonged exile, lasting millennia, has not led it to abandon this core belief. In this sense, the covenant is valid and enduring, ratified by the faith of the people suffering its curses, believing their fate is but an expression of their covenantal relationship with God. However, in coping with new realities, new ideas came to the fore, and certain concepts that had played a major role in biblical Israel's religious vocabulary moved from center stage to the sidelines. One of these was the concept of the covenant. New theological formulations replaced older biblical ones. These offered new theological understandings, suitable for the times and the circumstances of the Jewish people, as they moved through history and as their spiritual understanding evolved.

Following the biblical period, "covenant" never regained the currency it had enjoyed in biblical literature.[39] Later Jewish thought systems are either shaped by rabbinic language that does not allot a place of significance to "covenant" or formed by various external influences, which make no mention of covenant at all. In rabbinic usage, "covenant" remains a biblical term that is interpreted in the specific context, rather than the governing logic of the entire religious structure. Covenant loses its centrality as a key structuring concept in post-biblical Jewish thought. While the concept suffers decline, the different components of the biblical covenant continue to shape Judaism's religious life. The covenant remains *functionally* in place, even though

[39] Several scholars have pointed to the decline in covenant in rabbinic thinking. See W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); J. Bonsirven, *Le Judaïsme Palestinien* (Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1934). My own reading of the rabbinic corpus takes note of the fact that not only is there no covenant-making in rabbinic sources, but there is also no conscious appeal to the covenant as the framework of the religion or a central, let alone governing, notion. Frequent citations and comments on biblical verses that reference the covenant obscure the big picture, leading some scholars to present ad-hoc comments on biblical references as signs of the enduring appeal to "covenant" as a central theological notion in rabbinic thought. Such is the case with Lawrence Schiffman, "Rabbinic Understanding of Covenant", *Review and Expositor* 84, no. 2 (1987): 289–98. The problem of lack of explicit reference to covenant in rabbinic sources is confronted in Alan Segal, "Covenant in Rabbinic Writings", in *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 1987), chapter 6. His attempt to recover the covenant by appeal to liturgy is, to my mind, unsuccessful because of failure to distinguish between different types of biblical covenants and their relevance (and in my view irrelevance) to the conscious appeal to covenant as the broader structuring concept of Judaism.

conceptually it is no longer evoked as the overarching governing notion of the religious system.[40]

My presentation of Judaism in this book appeals to "covenant" in significant ways for several reasons. Needless to say, biblical foundations are a sound, I would claim indispensable, foundation for constructing a presentation of Judaism. Covenant also enjoys much currency in contemporary theological circles. Many important theologians have already appealed to "covenant" as foundational to their theology of Judaism.[41] The currency of "covenant" in the latter part of the twentieth century makes it recognizable to many contemporary Jews and thereby offers a meaningful point of contact between my particular presentation of Judaism and how it is often perceived. What I offer, however, is a revisiting of what covenant means in ways that are broader than typical contemporary uses.[42] Accordingly, I suggest various ways in which Judaism remains phenomenologically covenantal, even while theologically it ceases to speak the language of covenant. Recognizing the patterns that arise out of a phenomenological appreciation of the covenant justifies continued reference to it, even when covenantal language is no longer applied.

The first pattern is the key feature identified above. Wherever we find a covenant with God, we find two major components: Divine Presence and commandment or concern for the fulfillment of the law, the mitzvot. God gives his Presence, through revelation, promise, or affirmation of relationship, while the human partner commits to faithfulness to God's law. This previously unnoted dimension of the covenant—the juxtaposition of law and Presence—continues past historical biblical covenants and allows us to identify a fundamental covenantal pattern in all varieties of later Judaism.

[40] In this light, one should mention the work of Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Sanders describes the various forms of Second Temple Judaism in terms of "covenantal nomism". A close reading of his important work reveals that most of the sources that express this pattern of the religious life do so without explicit appeal to "covenant". This is certainly true of the rabbinic sources he analyzes in chapter 1. Sanders relates to the issue more fully in his "A Covenant to the People, a Light to the Nations: Universalism, Exceptionalism, and the Problem of Chosenness in Jewish Thought", *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 16 (2009): 23–55. One important distinction that must be made is between the Christian assertion that Judaism gave up its claim to being a covenant community, that is, to having a sense of relationship with God (Segal, "Covenant", 139–40) and my own emphasis upon the decline in the active use of the concept. This says nothing regarding the enduring relationship. As I demonstrate, decline in the conceptual centrality of "covenant" opens up to alternative means of affirming the relationship.

[41] One thinks of Eugene Borowitz, David Novak, David Hartman, Irving Greenberg, and Jonathan Sacks, to name a few. On covenant in the work of the latter two authors see Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *Covenant and World Religions: Jonathan Sacks, Irving Greenberg and the Quest for Orthodox Pluralism* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2023).

[42] See above note 28, with reference to Tanya White.

One important consequence of this juxtaposition of law and Presence is the growth of Judaism, over the long course of its evolution, in the direction of greater deepening, interiority, and quest for the knowledge of God, his love, and ultimately union with him. Resolving the possible tension between Presence and law is made possible as the heart opens up to Presence, in fulfillment of the covenant.

Some additional dimensions of "covenant" may be suggested, and these have indeed figured in the covenantal thinking of recent theologians. We recall how covenant is founded upon free will and human initiative and choice. Indeed, for some contemporary thinkers, the story of covenant in Judaism is the story of the move from divine initiative to human initiative.[43] Covenant is thus informed by a sense of reciprocity, which in turn governs many aspects of Jewish religion throughout the ages. Human responsibility and initiative complement divine initiative and grace. When this complementarity is extended to its fullness, we come to a further dimension of what constitutes covenant. Beyond reciprocity lies synergy, co-creation, power-sharing within a common space shared by God and Israel, a matrix wherein the spiritual life and reality itself are born jointly between the two covenantal partners.[44] This applies to the co-creation of the Torah as well as to views of the power of human ritual and spiritual excellence. The view of holy men is founded upon such intimate collaboration that leads to the inhabiting of a common space, much as the Temple's space allowed for the divine dwelling among humans. Covenant, from this perspective, is a way of creating a common "space" between God and the holy person, within which a sharing of power occurs.

This leads us to consider a further phenomenological pattern that is also understood as an outcome of the covenant. Full relational mutuality leads to intimacy, sharing, and co-creation. But it is precisely such relational fullness that also leads to the opposite of synergetic collaboration. One of the relational features that develops out of a covenantal phenomenology is the oppositional or agonistic relationship that pits two covenantal partners against each other in an even deeper movement of covenantal collaboration, safe and secure enough to withstand the tension of confrontation. Covenant is a means of regulating a relationship in which two parties define an equilibrium for their relationship and position themselves in relation to each other. The oppositional model assumes some parity between the two covenantal parties, God and Israel. When this is applied to the individual, or the group of special individuals, this

[43] See Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World* (London: Continuum, 2005), 152–55.

[44] On covenant, reciprocity, and power sharing, see Daniel J. Elazar, "The Political Theory of Covenant: Biblical Origins and Modern Developments", *Publius* 10, no. 4 (1980): 3–30.

leads to a possibility of empowered tension and sparring between the holy person and God. This is a startling outcome of a covenantal structure, and it applies especially in relation to the individual. The ability of rabbis to take control of the divine word and to proclaim its intention, even over and against God's explicit statement, is an expression of an autonomy that expresses covenantal dynamics. The pinnacle of such a view is articulated by the rabbis and eventually becomes a foundation for the theory of the ẓaddik in hassidism. It is the view that God decrees and a ẓaddik can annul the divine decree.

Even when later tradition does not consciously appeal to the covenant, it continues to uphold its constitutive elements. Thus, not only in terms of structure but also in terms of substance, Judaism continues to teach and follow in line with fundamental covenantal values and understandings. The key elements remain, even if they are not tied together conceptually via the concept of the covenant. The weakening of the covenantal conceptual framework makes possible conceptual and theological innovations that are absorbed into the fundamental covenantal framework. Thus, while being informed by the fundamental covenantal dynamics, Jewish faith grows, expands, and deepens in various ways that ultimately aid in the realization of the key covenantal aspirations. These are the movements that we shall trace in this work as we study key topics from their biblical foundations up through recent theological articulations.

A purposeful view of Judaism's evolution seeks to recognize the deepening of spiritual understanding, even as ideas and institutions come into place through historical failure. Lack of covenantal faithfulness, and ensuing shifts in the structure of Jewish religion, took away and destroyed some key institutions, especially the Temple. But they also gave rise to new forms of the religious life that advanced Judaism on its spiritual path, such as prayer. The loss of prophetic guidance is a fundamental loss, but it gave rise to alternative forms of spiritual development, associated with the cultivation and development of Torah knowledge. The relational exclusivity of the covenanting God gives way to a vision of the universal God, who reaches out to all of humanity.[45] In a similar light, covenantal infidelity also held opportunity for the discovery of spiritual realities that had not previously come to light. One of these is the messianic ideal. Even if the messianic ideal is born of failure, loss, destruction, and the need to rehabilitate these, the particular historical circumstances nevertheless bring to awareness a major spiritual force in the life of Judaism and of mankind—Messiah.

[45] While this can be conceived of also within a covenantal framework, the receding of the covenant to conceptual background allows a more universal face of the divine to come to the fore. The matter is discussed in this book's final chapter.

Several scholars have attempted to establish a continuity in covenantal thinking between biblical and rabbinic sources, despite the obvious decline in the centrality of covenantal thinking in rabbinic literature. Their suggestions illustrate how key concepts are retained, despite the decline in conscious covenantal reflection. The new ideas are considered as functionally equivalent, achieving the same basic theological and religious goals, even if these are not cast in explicitly covenantal language. Reuven Kimelman has suggested that the rabbinic notion of acceptance of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven is a rabbinic equivalent to the covenant.[46] This notion, which does not appear in biblical sources, describes the human initiative and expression of will to enter a relationship with God. Accepting the yoke of heaven means entry into a relationship, which also leads to undertaking specific commitments, in the form of mitzvot. The two notions of the yoke of the kingdom of heaven and the yoke of the commandments, which the rabbis consider in relation to one another, might be considered as expressions of the two dimensions of Presence and law, the former establishing the relationship and the second spelling out its practical obligations.[47] In a similar vein, Jon Levenson has suggested that the daily ritual of the recitation of the Shema achieves the same goals as a covenant renewal ceremony.[48] These suggestions illustrate how key ideas of the covenant extend beyond consciously covenantal theology and find new linguistic and ritual expressions.

These examples, however, also point to what is lacking in later adaptations that reconfigure elements of the biblical covenant. The Bible was characterized by relational reciprocity. God was an active actor. What he gave to the covenant was his Presence, a Presence grounded in a reciprocal relationship, articulated as mutual love and commitment. The suggestions by these scholars for how covenantal theological structures are carried over into the rabbinic period do not provide an expression of continuity to what is the most important dimension that makes the covenant a vibrant category spiritually. They describe human initiative as it is geared to God. However, what they describe is only the human side of what is essentially a one-sided engagement that gives expression to Israel's faith, but fails to convey the spiritual and experiential fullness of the biblical covenant. Turning the covenant into a primarily *human* religious expression and altering the reciprocal balances between the human and the

[46] Reuven Kimelman, "The *Shema'* Liturgy: From Covenant Ceremony to Coronation", in *Kenishta: Studies in Synagogue Life*, ed. Joseph Tabory (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2001), 9–105.

[47] See M *Berachot* 2:2; *Mekhilta*, Baḥodesh, chapter 5 and chapter 6, cited above p. 54.

[48] Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 80–86.

divine in the covenantal encounter is a feature of most twentieth-century theological applications of the covenant.[49] My own attempt at presenting Judaism in covenantal terms does not partake of this orientation.[50]

Various reasons can be suggested for the decline in the centrality of "covenant" in rabbinic, and later Jewish, theological vocabulary. These reasons would apply not only to rabbinic literature, but already to the literature of the Second Temple period, where the decline in the use of "covenant" first begins. In part, "covenant" was a political term in the ancient Near East, which fell out of theological use when it lost political currency, as political arrangements changed. In part, the move away from covenantal language may be due to the in-built vulnerability of the concept. Covenants can be violated, and Israel's present historical circumstances, perhaps already during Second Temple times, point to such violation. A different theological language was therefore sought. The theological moves made during this period had to uphold the foundations of the covenantal relationship, yet recast the components of the covenant into new theological structures, less vulnerable, more enduring—designed to see the people through their present historical condition.

Covenantal thought was no longer current. But the alternative was not disregard of Israel. On the contrary—what we find is the elevation of Israel beyond anything previous covenantal discourse had enabled. The means for doing so was by moving from history to metaphysics, from a covenantal view of Israel to a cosmically grounded view of its being, as well as that of all key spiritual ideals. One of the hallmarks of rabbinic thought, and consequently of much of later Jewish thought, is the move from the historical to the cosmic. When covenant, grounded as it is in history, receded to the background, Israel's story was told in other terms.

The cosmic perspective is one important complement to the historical orientation of the covenant. The rabbis affirm the cosmic foundations of vital aspects of Judaism. To appreciate the rabbinic cosmic grounding of Israel's

[49] See Arnold Eisen, "Covenant", in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, ed. Arthur Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1987), 107–12.

[50] Similarly, I remain reserved in relation to the suggestions by Kimelman and Levenson. They are, nevertheless, a useful illustration of how ideas are recast under a new theological framework. They are best understood, if they are to be understood covenantally, as moments of human remembering of the covenant, through the suggested rituals. Renewing the covenant on a regular basis (whether annually, as in Qumran, daily, as suggested by these scholars, or even more frequently, as we find in some later uses of "new covenant" that will be discussed in the final chapter) is not an act of *making* a covenant. It is more an act of *remembering* the covenant and rededicating oneself to it. The fullness of covenantal awareness requires a fuller sense of Divine Presence that cannot be supplied only by human memorialization and initiative.

status, we turn to the Midrash. In its treatment of the opening line of Genesis, *Genesis Rabbah* says:

Six things preceded the creation of the world. Some of them were actually created, while the creation of the others was already contemplated. The Torah and the Throne of God were actually created. . . . The creation of the patriarchs was contemplated. . . . Israel was contemplated. . . . Messiah was contemplated.[51]

Before the world was created, Israel was being contemplated—thought or looked upon—by God. And the Torah, by which Israel would come to be constituted in the Presence of God, was not only being contemplated but was already actually in existence. The basis for God's relation with Israel existed as God's plan for the world itself before it came to be. *Genesis Rabbah* continues:

R. Huna, reporting R. Jeremiah in the name of R. Samuel ben R. Isaac, said: "The intention to create Israel preceded everything else". This may be illustrated thus: A king was married to a certain lady, and had no son by her. On one occasion the king was found going through the market place and giving orders: "Take this ink, inkwell and pen for my son", at which the people remarked: "He has no son; what does he want with ink and pen? Strange indeed!" Subsequently they concluded: "The king is an astrologer and he has actually foreseen that he is destined to beget a son!" Thus, had not the Holy One, blessed be He, foreseen that after twenty-six generations Israel would receive the Torah, he would not have written therein (at Num 28:2), "Command the children of Israel".

This passage points to the Torah as preconceived by God for a son yet to be, Israel.[52] The parable shows the king ordering concrete things—ink, inkwell, pen—for a son yet to be. The choice of writing tools in the parable suggests the nature of this preexistent Torah. It is not a mere abstraction in the mind of God—it is not a "universal", or a Platonic idea. It is the very Torah that we possess, in its full textual reality, referring to all the concreteness and particularity of this world.[53] In looking upon it, God looks upon just this particular, concrete one, his son. What God sees and loves from the beginning in the light of Torah is Israel shining even before creation. Israel's being is understood as grounded in the order of creation itself, not only in the order of a

[51] *Genesis Rabbah* 1:4: *Midrash Rabbah*, vol. 1, *Genesis*, transl. H. Freedman (London: Soncino, 1939), 6.

[52] On the preexistence of the Torah, see discussion in chapter 3, section titled "Written Torah and Oral Torah".

[53] A similar reading may be suggested for the celebrated opening of *Genesis Rabbah* (1:1), where the parable refers to the Torah both as the mind of the architect and as the written manuals he consults. These latter should be understood as highlighting the concrete textual reality of the Torah.