

Me, Myself, and You: Rosenzweig and Buber

Drisha Winter Week of Learning 2013

Leora Batnitzky

1. What is the *nature* of relationships, either between humans or between the human being and God? Is there a role for judgments of others in relationships?
2. The mutuality of relationship, according to Martin Buber:

*I and Thou* (1923)

“The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relation to it. Thus the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once... The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one’s whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; become I, I say You. All actual life is encounter.”

“The word of revelation is: I am there as whoever I am there. That which reveals is that which reveals. That which has being is there, nothing more. The eternal sources of strength flows, the eternal touch is waiting, the eternal voice sounds, nothing more.”

3. Dialogue as judgment, not mutual affirmation. An introduction to Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929)
4. What’s love got to do with it?  
*Star of Redemption*, selections  
Song of Songs, chapters 6-8  
Compare Song of Songs 8: 6 with Genesis 47:9 and Isaiah 19:4
5. Theological and Political Implications of Rosenzweig’s claims about dialogue
6. What’s gender got to do with it?

7. Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995)

8. Ethics as an asymmetrical relation:

“We are all responsible for everything and guilty in front of everyone, but I am that more than all others.”

“The other’s material needs are my spiritual needs.”

9. What’s gender got to do with it?

Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Existence*:

“Is not the restlessness of someone persecuted but a modification of maternity, the groaning of the wounded entrails by those it will bear or has borne? In maternity what signifies is a responsibility for others, to the point of substitution for others and suffering both from the effect of persecution and from the persecuting itself in which the persecutor sinks. Maternity, which is bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor.”

Levinas, “No Identity” in *Collected Philosophical Papers*:

“To suffer from another is to have charge of him, to support him, to be in his place, to be consumed by him. Every love or every hatred of a neighbor as reflected attitude presupposes this prior vulnerability, this mercy [rachamim], this ‘groaning of the entrails.’ ”

Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*:

"This alteration and identification in fecundity--beyond the possible and the face—constitutes paternity. In paternity desire maintained as insatiate desire, that is, as goodness, is accomplished."

10. Levinas, “The Pact (Tractate Sotah 37a-37b)”

11. Theological and Political Implications of Levinas’ analysis

# THE STAR OF REDEMPTION

BY

Franz Rosenzweig

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*Translated from the Second Edition of 1930 by*

WILLIAM W. HALLO

*"Ride forth victoriously for  
the cause of truth!"*

Ps. 45:14 (RSV)

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# BOOK TWO

## Revelation

or

## The Ever-Renewed Birth of the Soul

Love is strong as death.<sup>1</sup> Strong in the same way as death? But against whom does death display its strength? Against him whom it seizes. And love, of course, seizes both, the lover as well as the beloved, but the beloved otherwise than the lover. It originates in the lover. The beloved is seized, her love is already a response to being seized: Anteros is the younger brother of Eros. Initially it is for the beloved that love is strong as death, even as nature has decreed that woman alone, not man, may die of love. What has been said of the twofold encounter of man and his self applies strictly and universally only to the male. As for woman, and precisely the most feminine woman above all, even Thanatos can approach her in the sweet guise of Eros. Her life is simpler than that of man by reason of this missing contradiction. Already in the tremors of love her heart has become firm. It no longer needs the tremor of death. A young woman can be as ready for eternity as a man only becomes when his threshold is crossed by Thanatos. No man would die the death of an Alcestis. Once touched by Eros, a woman is what man only becomes at the Faustian age of a hundred: ready for the final encounter—strong as death.

Like all earthly love, this is only an analogy. Death as the capstone of creation first stamps every created thing with the ineradicable stamp of creatureliness, the word "has been." Love which knows solely the present, which lives on the present, pines for the present—it challenges

<sup>1</sup> Song of Songs 8:6.

Revelation or The Ever-Renewed Birth of the Soul  
death. The keystone of the somber arch of creation becomes the cornerstone of the bright house of revelation. For the soul, revelation means the experience of a present which, while it rests on the presence of a past, nevertheless does not make its home in it but walks in the light of the divine countenance.

### The Revealer

#### THE CONCEALED ONE

The living God to whom the heathen cry, insofar as he is not just "asleep or on a journey," had disclosed himself, in the mighty wisdom of his creative activity, as the God of life. With that there reappeared that limitless power which once had merged with God's mythical vitality. But from a caprice which was chained to the fleeting moment, it has turned into a wisdom enduring in its essence. That which had struggled to the surface out of God's "Nought" as self-negation of this Nought, re-emerged from its immersion into God's living "Aught," not any longer as self-negation, but rather as world-affirmation. God's vitality thus became to a certain extent again a Nought, a Nought on a higher level, Nought only with reference to that which emerged from it, but in its own right a Nought full of character, in short no Nought but an Aught. It was Nought only in this respect that, in disclosing itself, it at once broke up into new configurations one of which, essential power, we have already learned to recognize. For these new configurations have nothing designable behind them out of which they might have emerged. If one wanted to regard God's vitality as such a background, say, of the manifest creative power, it would justifiably have to be countered that this emergence could not have taken place out of the mythical vitality of the concealed God, but only out of its conversion into the revealed. This conversion, however, lacks a name; it is no more than, as it were, the geometric point out of which the emergence takes place.

True, even "before" the conversion, God's vitality was but a geometric point of this sort, the convergence of the two segments of the divine Nought, the arch-yea and the arch-nay; and the conversion can only be comprehended as the reversal of the directions which, then, converged in the one case and diverged in the other. But the result of the conversion of two lines, albeit but a point, is yet as generated point something designable, defined, an Aught, like the point  $(x, y)$  within a system of co-ordinates. A point, on the other hand, which is

## DIALOGUE

The "not otherwise" is at once confronted by the question: "not otherwise than what, pray?" It has to answer: "not otherwise than everything." For when we designate something as "thus and not otherwise," we mean to delimit it as against "everything" pure and simple. And it is, in fact, "none other" than everything. It is already posited as otherwise than everything by the "thus"—the "not otherwise" coupled with the "thus" means precisely that, though otherwise, it is nevertheless not at the same time otherwise than everything, that is, capable of being related to everything. What then is it that is "not otherwise" in this sense, that is to say "otherwise" and at the same time "not otherwise" than everything? For "everything" implies "the All." It can only be that which is identical with the "Being" of the All and of each individual object, with the "thinking," that is, which is at once identical with Being and its opposite—in short, the I. In the previous Part we discovered the "good" to be the Thus become audible. Similarly we have here discovered the "I" as Nay become audible, not as a word within its species of words, however, but rather as individual response to individual question in the quiz-game of reasoning. And so too we will henceforth proceed from real word to real word, not from one species of word to another as we did in describing creation. This accords with the wholly real employment of language, the center-piece as it were of this entire book, at which we have here arrived. Only in retrospect can we recognize the actual word as a representative of its verbal species as well—and indeed we must do so. But we do not find it as such a representative of a species. Rather we find it directly as word and response.<sup>1</sup>

## MONOLOGUE

To the I there responds in God's interior a Thou. It is the dual sound of I and Thou in the monologue of God at the creation of man. But the Thou is no authentic Thou, for it still remains in God's interior. And the I is just as far from already being an authentic I, for no Thou has yet confronted it. Only when the I acknowledges the Thou as something external to itself, that is, only when it makes the transition from monologue to authentic dialogue, only then does it become that I which we have just claimed for the primeval Nay become audible. The I of the monologue is not yet an "I, however." It is an unemphatic I, an I that is also self-understood precisely because

<sup>1</sup> German "Ant-wort," etymologically "counter-word." (Tr.)

Revelation or The Ever-Renewed Birth of the Soul  
it is only self-addressed. It is thus an I still concealed in the secret of the third person and not as yet a manifest I, as we already recognized in the "let us" of the narrative of creation. Only in the discovery of a Thou is it possible to hear an actual I, an I that is not self-evident but emphatic and underlined. But where is the Thou, independent but freely confronting the concealed God, in which he could discover himself as I? There is a material world, there is the self-contained self, but where is there a Thou? Yes—where is the Thou? So God asks too.

## THE QUESTION

"Where art Thou?" This is none other than the quest for the Thou, and for the present only for the Where of it, not for its nature, for this is at this moment still far out of sight. Where is there a Thou altogether? This inquiry for the Thou is the only thing that is already known about it. But the question already suffices for the I to discover itself. By the very act of asking for the Thou, by the Where of this question, which testifies to its belief in the existence of the Thou even without the Thou's coming into its purview, the I addresses and expresses itself as I. The I discovers itself at the moment when it asserts the existence of the Thou by inquiring into its Where.

## THE ADDRESS

The I discovers itself—not perchance the Thou. The quest for the Thou remains a mere quest. Man hides, he does not respond, he remains speechless, he remains the Self as we know it. The responses which God finally elicits from him are not responses. The divine quest for the Thou receives no "I" for an answer, no "I am," "I have done it." Instead of an I the responding mouth brings forth a He-She-It. The human being materializes as "man": it is the woman who did it, and specifically the woman wholly materialized as she was given to man. And she transfers the blame to the ultimate It: it was the serpent. The self demands to be conjured by a more powerful spell than the mere inquiry after the Thou before it will utter the I. The indefinite Thou was merely deictic, and so it was answered by man with a mere deictic: the woman, the serpent. Its place is taken by the vocative, the direct address, and man is cut off from every retreat into hypostatization. The general-concept of man can take refuge behind the woman or the serpent. Instead of this the call goes out to what cannot flee, to the utterly particular, to the nonconceptual, to something that transcends the sphere of influence of both the definite and the indef-

nite articles—a sphere which embraces all things if only as objects of a universal, nondistinctive providence—to the proper name, the proper name which yet is not properly *his* name, not a name which the man gave himself arbitrarily, but the name which God himself created for the man and which is properly the man's only because it is the creation of the Creator. To God's "Where art Thou?" the man had still kept silence as defiant and blocked Self. Now, called by his name, twice, in a supreme definiteness that could not but be heard, now he answers, all unlocked, all spread apart, all ready, all-soul: "Here I am."

#### HEARING

Here is the I, the individual human I, as yet wholly receptive, as yet only unlocked, only empty, without content, without nature, pure readiness, pure obedience, all ears. The commandment is the first content to drop into this attentive hearing. The summons to hear, the address by the given name, the seal of the discoursing divine mouth—all these are but preface to every commandment. In fully explicit form, they preface only that one commandment which is not the highest, which is in truth the only commandment, the sum and substance of all commandments ever to leave God's mouth. What is this commandment of all commandments?

#### THE COMMANDMENT

The answer to this question is universally familiar. Millions of tongues testify to it evening and morning: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might." Thou shalt love—what a paradox this embraces! Can love then be commanded? Is love not rather a matter of fate and of seizure and of a bestowal which, if it is indeed free, it is withal only free? And now it is commanded? Yes of course, love cannot be commanded. No third party can command it or extort it. No third party can, but the One can. The commandment to love can only proceed from the mouth of the lover. Only the lover can and does say: love me!—and he really does so. In his mouth the commandment to love is not a strange commandment; it is none other than the voice of love itself. The love of the lover has, in fact, no word to express itself other than the commandment. Everything else is no longer direct expression but already declaration—declaration of love. A declaration of love is a very poor thing, like every declaration it always comes behindhand and thus,

since the love of the lover is present time, the declaration of love is in reality always too late. It would drop wholly into the void but for the fact that, in the eternal trust of her love, the beloved opens her arms wide to receive it. But the "Love me!" of the lover—that is wholly perfect expression, wholly pure language of love. It is the imperative commandment, immediate, born of the moment and, what is more, becoming audible at the instant of its birth, for emerging and finding voice are one and the same thing in the case of the imperative. The indicative has behind it the whole cumbersome rationalization of materiality, and at its purest therefore appears in the past tense. But the "Love me!" is wholly pure and unprepared-for present tense, and not unprepared-for alone, but also unpremeditated. The imperative of the commandment makes no provision for the future; it can only conceive the immediacy of obedience. If it were to think of a future or an Ever, it would be, not commandment nor order, but law. Law reckons with times, with a future, with duration. The commandment knows only the moment; it awaits the result in the very instant of its promulgation. And if it possesses the magic of the true voice of command, it will truly never be disappointed in this expectation.

#### THE PRESENT

Thus the commandment is purely the present. But while every other commandment could equally well have been law if one but viewed it from without and, so to speak, retroactively, the sole commandment of love is simply incapable of being law; it can only be commandment. All other commandments can pour their content into the mold of the law as well. This one alone resists such recasting; its content tolerates only the one form of the commandment, of the immediate presentness and unity of consciousness, expression, and expectation of fulfillment. For this reason, as the only pure commandment, it is the highest of all commandments, and where it takes the first place as such, there everything else too becomes commandment though otherwise, and viewed from without, it could as well be law. God's first word to the soul that unlocks itself to him is "Love me!" And everything which he may yet reveal to the soul in the form of law therefore without more ado turns into words which he commands it "today." It turns into execution of the one initial commandment to love him. All of revelation is subsumed under the great today. God commands "today," and "today" it is incumbent to obey his voice. It is in the today that the love of the lover lives, in this imperative today of the commandment.

## REVELATION

This imperative can only proceed from out the mouth of the lover, and no imperative but this from out this mouth. So too the I of the speaker, the root-word of the entire dialogue of revelation, is the seal which, strapped upon each word, marks the individual commandment as a command to love. Revelation commences with "I the Lord" as the great Nay of the concealed God which negates his own concealment. This "I" accompanies revelation through all the individual commandments. In the prophet, this "I the Lord" creates a tool of its own and a style of its own for revelation. The prophet does not mediate between God and man, he does not receive revelation in order to pass it on; rather, the voice of God sounds forth directly from within him, God speaks as "I" directly from within him. The master of the great plagiarism of revelation lets God speak and passes the revelation which occurred to him in secret on to the dazed assemblage. Not so the true prophet. He does not let God speak at all. Rather, he no sooner opens his mouth than God already speaks. Hardly has he uttered his "Thus saith the Lord," or the even briefer, even more hurried "Oracle of the Lord"—which even dispenses with the verbal form—before God has already taken possession of his lips. God's "I" remains the keyword, traversing revelation like a single sustained organ note; it resists any translation into "he"; it is an "I" and an "I" it must remain. Only an "I," not a "he," can pronounce the imperative of love, which may never be anything other than "love me!"

## RECEIVING

But what, then, of the soul, the ready, the opened, the all-speechlessly hearkening soul? What can it reply to the commandment of love? For there must be a reply. The obedience to the commandment cannot remain mute. It too must become audible, it too become word. For in the world of revelation everything becomes word, and what cannot become word is either prior or posterior to this world. What then does the soul respond to the demand to love?

## SHAME

The beloved's admission of love responds to the lover's demand of love. The lover does not admit his love. How should he? He has no time at all to do so. His love would have vanished before he had admitted it; it would no longer be present. If he nevertheless makes the attempt, then the lie inherent in acknowledging the present is its own

# BOOK ONE

## The Fire OR The Eternal Life

### *The Promise of Eternity*

"Blessed art Thou . . . who hast planted eternal life in our midst." The fire burns at the core of the star. The rays go forth only from this fire; and flow unresisted to the outside. The fire of the core must burn incessantly. Its flame must eternally feed upon itself. It requires no fuel from without. Time has no power over it and must roll past. It must produce its own time and reproduce itself forever. It must make its life everlasting in the succession of generations, each producing the generation to come, and bearing witness to those gone by. Bearing witness takes place in hearing—two meanings but one act, in which eternal life is realized. Elsewhere, past and future are divorced, the one sinking back, the other coming on; here they grow into one. The bearing of the future is a direct bearing witness to the past. The son is born so that he may bear witness to his father's father. The grandson renews the name of the forebear. The patriarchs of old call upon their last descendant by his name—which is theirs. Above the darkness of the future burns the star-strewn heaven of the promise: "So shall thy seed be."

### *The Eternal People: Jewish Fate*

#### BLOOD AND SPIRIT

There is only one community in which such a linked sequence of everlasting life goes from grandfather to grandson, only one which cannot utter the "we" of its unity without hearing deep within a voice

that adds: "are eternal." It must be a blood-community, because only blood gives present warrant to the hope for a future. If some other community, one that does not propagate itself from its own blood, desires to claim eternity for its "we," the only way open to it is to secure a place in the future. All eternity not based on blood must be based on the will and on hope. Only a community based on common blood feels the warrant of eternity warm in its veins even now. For such a community only, time is not a foe that must be tamed, a foe it may or may not defeat—though it hopes it may!—but its child and the child of its child. It alone regards as the present what, for other communities, is the future, or, at any rate, something outside the present. For it alone the future is not something alien but something of its own, something it carries in its womb and which might be born any day. While every other community that lays claim to eternity must take measures to pass the torch of the present on to the future, the blood-community does not have to resort to such measures. It does not have to hire the services of the spirit; the natural propagation of the body guarantees it eternity.

#### THE PEOPLES AND THEIR NATIVE SOIL

What holds generally for peoples as groups united through blood relationship over against communities of the spirit, holds for our people in particular. Among the peoples of the earth, the Jewish people is "the one people," as it calls itself on the high rung of its life, which it ascends Sabbath after Sabbath. The peoples of the world are not content with the bonds of blood. They sink their roots into the night of earth, lifeless in itself but the spender of life, and from the lastingness of earth they conclude that they themselves will last. Their will to eternity clings to the soil and to the reign over the soil, to the land. The earth of their homeland is watered by the blood of their sons, for they do not trust in the life of a community of blood, in a community that can dispense with anchorage in solid earth. We were the only ones who trusted in blood and abandoned the land; and so we preserved the priceless sap of life which pledged us that it would be eternal. Among the peoples of the world, we were the only ones who separated what lived within us from all community with what is dead. For while the earth nourishes, it also binds. Whenever a people loves the soil of its native land more than its own life, it is in danger—as all the peoples of the world are—that, though nine times out of ten this love will save the native soil from the foe and, along with it, the life of the people, in the end the soil will persist as that which was loved more strongly, and the people will leave their lifeblood upon it. In

is the exception that proves this rule. What is Christian by nature has its being outside him, in secular and ecclesiastical institutions; he does not carry it around with him on the outside. The mystery of birth, which occurs in the Jew precisely to the individual, here precedes every individual in the miracle of Bethlehem. There, in the origin of revelation which is common to all, the first birth common to all occurred. The undeniable, the given, the original and enduring being of their Christianity they find, not in themselves, but in Christ. They themselves had, each of them, to become Christian. They are relieved of being-Christian before birth by the birth of Christ, just as, contrariwise, the Jew is relieved of becoming-Jew in the protohistory of his people's revelation, while he possesses his being Jew in himself from birth on and carries it with him.

#### LAW OF HUMANITY: BIRTH AND REBIRTH

This contradictory relationship of Here and Now, of birth and rebirth, also determines each and every further contrast in effect between Jewish and Christian life. Christian life begins with rebirth. Birth lies outside it in the first instance. Thus it must seek to lay a foundation for its birth and its rebirth. It must remove the birth from the manger in Bethlehem into its own heart. "Were Christ born a thousand times in Bethlehem, but not also in you, you would still be lost."<sup>1</sup> This whole Here that is still without, this whole world of naturalness must be drawn into the series of becoming-Christian's which begins with the great Now of the rebirth. Christian life leads the Christian into the outside. The rays radiate evermore, till all the outside shall be irradiated. Jewish life is just the opposite. Birth, the whole natural Here, the natural individuality, the impartible participation in the world—already exists here, and this broad and full existence must be conducted into the narrow instant of the rebirth. This conducting becomes a re-duction, for rebirth precedes the personal and individual birth by time out of mind. The reliving of the quondam common rebirth here takes the place of the transfer of the quondam common birth into the personal reborn heart. Thus instead of the past being made present, the present is conducted back into the past. Everyone is to know that the Eternal brought him personally out of Egypt. The present Here dissolves in the great Now of the remembered experience. The Christian way becomes expression and expropriation and irradiation of the outermost, while Jewish life becomes memory and internalization and inspiration of the innermost.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 339. (T.F.)

# Beyond the Verse

*Talmudic Readings and Lectures*

EMMANUEL LEVINAS

*Translated by Gary D. Mole*

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To the memory of Léon Algazi, composer of music,  
interpreter of verses and simple believer

Mesharsheya said: The point between them is that of personal responsibility and responsibility for others [responsibility of responsibility].

#### 1 THE FORMAL LAW

The problem of the community that concerns us in this conference is certainly a topical one, owing to the unease felt by man today in a society which has become, in a certain sense, planetary, and in which — owing to modern means of communication and transport, owing to the worldwide scale of economy in industrial society — everyone has the impression of being simultaneously related to humanity as a whole, but also solitary and lost. With each radio broadcast and each day's newspapers, we admittedly feel implicated in the most distant of events and related to men everywhere; but we also notice that our personal destiny, freedom or happiness, depend on causes which strike with inhuman energy. We notice that technical progress itself — to repeat a commonplace — which relates everyone to everyone else, brings with it necessities which leave men in a state of anonymity. Impersonal forms of relation replace direct forms — 'short connections', as Ricoeur calls them — in a world in which everything is programmed to excess.

The structure of the States and nations is admittedly less abstract than that of the planet, but it is still too broad, and the universal ties of the law guarantee that men come together side by side rather than face to face. Even within the family, human relationships are less alive and less direct because of the multiplicity of systems in which each person is caught. But the parental structure has perhaps never fully satisfied man's social vocation; hence the search for a more restricted society whose members would know one another. Some think that in order to achieve this, it is necessary to spend time together, to see one another regularly. Is this really the solution? A concrete yet marginal society, establishing itself only on the edges of a real society which, despite its impersonal structures, is based in the 'order of things'. Will our sociality find fulfilment in a society of Sundays and leisure activities, in the provisional society of the club?

If these structures of a more intimate social life are to make people aware of community life, one which is exalted in the recognition of one person by another, is it not necessary, in fact, for these structures to be non-artificial? Normal society is one in

## 5 THE PACT (Tractate Sotah 37a-37b)

... They turned their faces towards Mount Gerizim and opened with the blessing etc. Our Rabbis taught [a *baraita*]: There was a benediction in general and a benediction in particular, likewise a curse in general and a curse in particular. (Scripture states): *to learn, to teach, to observe* [to keep] and *to do*; consequently there are four (duties associated with each commandment). Twice four are eight and twice eight are sixteen. It was similar at Sinai and the plains of Moab; as it was said, *These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses [to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which he had made with them at Horeb]* (Deuteronomy 29: 1), and it is written, *Keep therefore the words of this covenant* etc. (Deuteronomy 29: 9). Hence there were forty-eight covenants in connection with each commandment.

R. Simeon excludes (the occasion of) Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal and includes that of the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness. The difference of opinion here is the same as that of the teachers [the Tannaim] in the following [a *baraita*]: R. Ishmael says: General laws were proclaimed at Sinai and particular laws in the Tent of Meeting. R. Akiba says: Both general and particular laws were proclaimed at Sinai, repeated in the Tent of Meeting, and for the third time in the plains of Moab. Consequently there is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight covenants were not made. R. Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Acco said in the name of R. Simeon: There is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times 603,550 covenants were not made. Rabbi said: According to the reasoning of R. Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Acco who said in the name of R. Simeon that there is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times 603,550 covenants were not made, it follows that for each Israelite there are 603,550 commandments (and forty-eight covenants were made in connection with each of them). What is the issue between them? R.

which is reflected and breathes a humanity which is in contact with the world. Today's professional life, with the points of concentration it determines, its towns, industry and crowds – but also its intercontinental dispersion – retains an understanding of the serious side of the things that count. It is not the result of lack of care or a mistake. It is the very essence of modernity. The solidarity of the modern world, a solidarity planned through Law and regulations, all these 'long connections' which it establishes, are what make reality function these days; even if these connections make us walk together rather than turning men's faces towards one another. Are we thus not back to the starting point of our problem?

### 2 OUR TALMUDIC EXTRACT

But also, perhaps (and this is what brings me to the Talmud), we have not measured all the implications of the Law which Western society welcomes too formally, and which have got lost within it.

This, perhaps, is one reason to question one of Israel's old texts. The Talmudic text we have chosen is a relatively simple one, though, as always, it is unusual. It concerns the problem we have just mentioned. It deals with a covenant, and interprets it in its fashion, which consists in apparently not touching on it. It interprets the covenant concluded between the Eternal of Israel and the children of Israel. It is through this covenant that the society of Israel is instituted by legislation and the Torah. I have entitled the proposed passage which has been translated for you 'The Pact', and it is an extract from the Tractate Sotah 37a–37b from the Babylonian Talmud. It is very short: just half a page.

I should situate the passage in its context. The sequence of the *Gemara* from which it is taken prolongs a *Mishnah* relating to a different theme altogether. This *Mishnah* deals with the question of whether Hebrew or profane languages are suitable for certain liturgical expressions such as 'benedictions', 'oaths', etc. The *Mishnah* is followed by several pages of *Gemara*. The small sequence which has been handed out to you is taken from these pages of the *Gemara*. This sequence is only a digression in relation to the thematics of language, in which the problem of Greek always arises. The theme of language will appear at a certain moment in our extract. This theme of language about which the

*Mishnah* speaks is in no way without interest. In it is announced – or dissimulated – the problem of the relation between the particularism of Israel and the universality of men. We shall find an echo of it again in the commentary on our extract.

### 3 FROM THE BIBLE TO THE TALMUD

This text appears to be a commentary on Deuteronomy Chapter 27, but it also refers to Joshua Chapter 7. By recalling these texts, and also by returning to the text of the *Mishnah* which refers to them – in an even more complete way than the first sentence with which our extract begins – we shall first be able, by way of example, to measure the distance which can separate the written Law from the oral Law.

Deuteronomy Chapter 27, indeed, sets out the recommendations given by Moses to Israel for a ceremony which has to take place later, when – after his death, and at the end of their travels in the wilderness – the people will enter the Holy Land. Here are a few of the verses. The end of verse 2 and the beginning of verse 3: 'And on the day you pass over the Jordan ... you shall set up large stones, and plaster them with plaster; and you shall write upon them all the words of this law.' It concerns all the words of the Torah. Verse 4: 'You shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you this day, on Mount Ebal.' The location where this ceremony has to take place is specified – there are two mountains: Mount Ebal and, next to it, Mount Gerizim. Having set up stones there, and written the Torah upon them, there is a second recommendation in verse 5: 'And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall lift up no iron tool upon them.' Let us appreciate the suggestive symbol: whole stones, unhewn ones, stones which will have been untouched by iron. Iron, probably the principle of all industry, is, in any case, the principle of all warfare. Burnt offerings will be offered on the altar, and peace offerings sacrificed. And verse 8 takes up the initial theme of the inscription of the Torah on the stones, but it specifies how it should be written. It is not the question of language which is raised but, for the moment, that of the graphic quality of the inscription: 'And you shall write upon the stones all the words of this law "very plainly" (*ba'er heter*).' From verse 11 onwards, we have the recommendations of Moses relating to the dividing of the people on Mounts Ebal

and Gerizim, and to the 'ceremony of the Covenant' anticipated by Moses. Six tribes will stand upon Mount Gerizim 'to bless the people', and six others 'shall stand upon Mount Ebal for the curse'. Thus, whether they are blessed or cursed, are not the people as a whole visible to all? During the whole of this anticipated ceremony, the members of the society can see one another. It is extremely important for the theme of our conference devoted to the problem of the community. From verse 14 onwards: 'And the Levites shall declare to all the men of Israel with a loud voice', 'And all the people shall say, "Amen"'. From verse 15 to verse 26 the interdicts in question are listed - there are eleven of them - to which is added the general interdict of transgressing the 'words of this law' (verse 26). These interdicts certainly represent the essential principles of the pact, but they coincide with the Ten Commandments of Sinai on only a few points. There is the prohibition of idolatry, the interdict of treating one's father and mother with contempt, the interdict of moving the boundaries of a piece of land (not to encroach on one's neighbour's property), the order not to mislead a blind man, not to pervert the justice due to the sojourner [stranger], the widow, and the orphan; the prohibition of various forms of incest, the interdict of 'slaying one's neighbour in secret' (this is principally how calumny is prohibited), and the interdict of taking a bribe so that an innocent person can be slain. No doubt these are the founding principles of society. Yet they do not cover the content of the Torah as a whole: hence the last verse of the chapter which specifies the whole of these principles. No doubt the evocation of curses and blessings in the first verses of Deuteronomy 27 signifies the blessing for him who respects the interdict, and the curse for him who does not. But in fact it is only the negative version, the curse, which is given in this passage. All the people, after every curse of the Levites, will reply 'Amen'. The words of the Levites are heard by all: all the people are present to all the people. Everyone will say 'Amen'. A veritable pact is thus concluded, and in the presence of the people as a whole, of a society - as I keep emphasizing - in which everyone looks at everyone else.

Let us recognize the fact that the text from Deuteronomy leaves vague many of the points concerning the staging of the ceremony of the pact to which the first sentence of the Talmudic

text I am commenting upon seems to refer - or which, at least, it seems to imply.

In fact, this sentence: 'They turned their faces towards Mount Gerizim and opened with the blessing ...' speaks of a 'blessing' which Deuteronomy does not formulate. The sentence refers to another presentation of the scene played out between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, to the summary given of it in the Book of Joshua (Chapter 8, verses 30 to 35). I shall read it to you, specifying the difference between the two versions. This second account is more precise, and also shorter, and I am reproducing it in its entirety. It appears to be an account of the ceremony such as Joshua, faithful to the recommendation of Moses in Deuteronomy 27, would have carried it out. It refers expressly to the recommendations of Moses:

Then Joshua built an altar in Mount Ebal to the Lord, the God of Israel, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, 'an altar of unhewn stones, upon which no man has lifted an iron tool'; and they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. And all Israel, sojourner as well as homeborn, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

For every prescription of the book of the Law, there was the formula for the curse and the formula for the blessing! 'There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.'

You will notice that all twelve tribes are present, with women and children, in full, even with the strangers, the *gerim* who are among us. You will see that the meaning of this pact is expanded in relation to the first description we found in Deuteronomy. The picture is a little different - the disposition of the actors is specified, the 'staging' is not quite the same - but there are still the

stones untouched by iron, stones which belong to the order of peace and not to that of warfare; and above all there is a remarkable insistence on the totality of the people present at the ceremony: women, children, strangers. There is also an insistence on the totality of the Mosaic text which is read beyond the eleven verses mentioned in Deuteronomy 27. Finally, there is the insistence on the rigorous fidelity to the word of Moses, the servant of God: yet everything that differs here in relation to Deuteronomy 27 is from Moses. Even though Moses spoke differently!

Allow me now to give you the last version of this scene taken from the *Mishnah* itself (32a) to which the *Gemara*, from which our text is extracted, refers, and to which belongs the proposition which figures at the head of my translation with its 'et cetera'. This *Mishnah*, as I have already told you, deals with the authorized or forbidden languages in certain liturgical or ritual formulas, and where our description of the pact simply finds a distant pretext. Here it is:

Six tribes went up to the top of Mount Gerizim and six tribes went up to the top of Mount Ebal. And the *kohanim* (the priests) and the Levites and the Ark stood below in the midst [as in Joshua]; and the priests surrounded the Ark and the Levites surrounded the *kohanim*, and all Israel were on this side and on that, as it is written in Joshua [the *Mishnah* expressly says that this description conforms to the account found in Joshua]. And all Israel and their elders and officers and their judges stood on this side of the Ark and on that. They turned their faces towards Mount Gerizim [the text of Joshua 8] and began with the blessing, Blessed be the man that maketh not a graven or molten image. And both these and these answered, 'Amen!' [quotation from Deuteronomy]. They turned their faces towards Mount Ebal and began with the curse, 'cursed be the man' who makes a graven or molten image. And both these and these answered, 'Amen!' - until they completed the blessings and the cursings. And afterward they brought the stones and built the altar and plastered it with plaster. And they wrote thereon all the words of the Law in seventy languages, as it is written 'very plainly' [*ba'er heter* ]<sup>1</sup>.

What was a question of writing is now a question of language! This third version of the pact refers to the account of Joshua but takes up the formulas from Deuteronomy. Here the universality of the pact opens up, a pact which in Deuteronomy is concluded with all the tribes before an altar whose stones - already in the

ancient texts of a civilization which aspires to have no wars - have not been touched by iron, and which in Joshua is a pact encompassing women, children and strangers but whose law, according to the text of the *Mishnah*, is proclaimed in seventy languages. A message addressed to all humanity! Thought through to its conclusion, this particular ceremony of a people whose members can look upon one another, a concrete community capable of being taken in at a gaze, permits the whole of humanity to be included in the legislation in whose name this pact has been concluded.

This transition, then, from Hebrew to the universality which I call Greek is quite remarkable. It is the formula *ba'er heter*, 'very plainly', recommending the clarity and distinction of Scripture, which begins to signify complete translatability. The process of liberation and universalization must therefore be continued. We have not yet finished translating the Bible. The Septuagint is incomplete. Nor have we finished translating the Talmud. We have hardly begun. And as far as the Talmud is concerned, it must be said how delicate the task is! What up until now was a patrimony reserved for oral teaching passes, perhaps too quickly, into foreign languages without losing its unusual features in its new forms.

This universality is thus born, in some way, from a society which, moreover, is entirely visible to its members assembled on two mounts, visible as if on a stage. Right from the beginning, the society which aspires to intimacy between twelve tribes looking at one another, this society of a community, is already present to the whole of humanity, or opens on to the whole of humanity.

You have had here a specific example of the development of an idea passing from the written Law to the oral Law. The oral Law claims to speak about what the written Law says. But the oral Law knows more. It goes further than the plain meaning of the passage studied, but it does so in the spirit of the global meaning of Scripture.

#### 4 THE VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF THE LAW

But let us return to our text. It is now going to show us various dimensions in this pact of the Torah, dimensions which ought to guarantee that a community whose members are practically face

to face should keep its interpersonal relationships when its members look outwards towards humanity. The distinction between community and society testifies only to a social thought that is not yet mature. The adoption of the Law on which this society is based would entail, for those men who adopt it correctly, the possibility of remaining face to face with one another.

Our Rabbis taught [a *baraita*]: There was a benediction in general and a benediction in particular, likewise a curse in general and a curse in particular. (Scripture states): *to learn, to teach, to observe* [to keep] and to *do*; consequently there are four (duties associated with each commandment). Twice four are eight and twice eight are sixteen.

The arithmetic is undeniable! But what is being spoken about here? In the text from Deuteronomy, the same laws are proclaimed and followed by curses for the person who transgresses them and blessings for the person who obeys them. For the person who undertakes to keep it, this cursing and blessing therefore constitute two independent ways of adhering to the same Law. In the covenant made on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, there were thus two acts of will made to the same Law. 'Yes' was said twice over. If we look at the text of Deuteronomy 27, we will see that the interdicts are expressed in a particular form, but that according to the last verse they are included in the invocation of the 'words of this [whole] law'. The Torah is thus expressed in a general form and in a particular form. This makes two more acts of adherence. Two acts of adherence assenting to the curses, and two acts of adherence consenting to the blessings. So there are four acts of adherence. Four not as two plus two, but four as two times two.

But we know, moreover – if we refer to Deuteronomy 5: 1 and Deuteronomy 11: 19 – that the Torah entails four general obligations: the need to learn it (*lifmod*), to teach it (*lelamad*), to observe [to keep] it (*lishmor*), to do it (*la'asot*). Four covenants are included in the Covenant. Now we have just seen that every adherence to the Covenant entails four modes of adherence; there are thus sixteen covenants in the Covenant, sixteen pacts in the pact. The arithmetic may be surprising. I shall come back to it shortly. Let us say, generally, that in what we simply call adherence to the law, the rabbinical scholars distinguish sixteen dimensions.

Sixteen dimensions. But there are more! The Torah is said to have been taught three times, if we refer to the rabbinical

calculations: according to Exodus, the first time at Sinai; the second time, according to Deuteronomy, in the plains of Moab; and for the third time – as we have just seen – between Ebal and Gerizim. Each time, as we have said, there were sixteen adherences, which makes forty-eight adherences in all. Let us stay at forty-eight for the moment. You will see that there are even more.

I shall try to explain the signification of these distinctions and calculations. Some people must certainly have been surprised that in the adherence to a law which implies a blessing for the person who obeys it and a curse for the person who transgresses it, two different acts can be discerned, as if the blessing and the curse were not the two faces, the positive and the negative, of the sanction which all law entails. In concrete terms, the difference between these two faces is a real one. Already, in passing a law, forgiveness can be reckoned with in the case of transgression. We can tell ourselves that things will always sort themselves out! Thank God, forgiveness is not unknown in Israel. Only in Israel it is not taken into account at the moment the Law is adopted. If forgiveness is to have a meaning, it should not already be accepted at the moment of adherence to the Law. We know the distrust that Judaism has in relation to forgiveness granted in advance. We know where it can lead.

Can adherence to the Law as a whole, to the Law in its general terms, be distinguished from the 'yes' which accompanies the statements of each law in particular? Naturally, a general adherence is necessary. The general spirit of a legislation should be drawn out. The spirit of the law should be deepened. Philosophy is not forbidden, the intervention of reason is not unwelcome! If there is really to be an inner adherence, this process of generalization cannot be put aside. But why distinguish from it the access to the particular expressions of this general spirit? Because the meaning of a legislation in its general spirit remains unknown as long as the laws which it embraces have not been recognized. There are two processes here, and their distinction is justified from several points of view. We are all sensitive to Judaism being reduced to a few 'spiritual' principles. We are all seduced by what can be called the angelic essence of the Torah to which many verses and commandments are reduced in an immediate way. This 'interiorization' of the Law charms our liberal soul, and we are inclined to reject what seems to resist the 'rationality'

or 'morality' of the Torah. Judaism has always been conscious – rabbinical literature testifies to this – of the presence within it – and this is necessary for great spiritual quality – of elements which cannot be interiorized straight away. Next to the *mishpatim*, the laws of justice in which all are recognized, there are the *chukim*, the unjustifiable laws which are Satan's joy when he mocks the Torah. He claims that the ritual of the 'red heifer' in Numbers 19 is meaningless and tyrannical. And what about circumcision? Will a little psychoanalysis explain it away? It was certainly not foreseen, and it has to be wondered whether it even works! What about many other ceremonial or ritual preparations described in the Torah? Consequently, in the law of Israel there are points which demand, beyond assenting to the general or 'deep' spirit of the Torah, a special consent to the particularities which are all too easily regarded as transitory. There is constantly within us a struggle between our adherence to the spirit and adherence to what is called the letter. That the latter is as indispensable as the former is what is signified in seeing two distinct acts in the acceptance of the Torah. This is also Jacob's struggle with the Angel: to overcome in the existence of Israel the angelism of pure interiority. Note with what effort victory is given here! Yet is it in fact given? No one prevails! And it is Jacob's religion which remains a little lame when the Angel's grip is released. This struggle is never over. But remember, the Angel is not the highest creature: as a purely spiritual being, it does not achieve the condition that life according to the Torah presupposes. It has neither to eat, to take, to give, to work, nor not to work on the Sabbath! A principle of generosity, but nothing but a principle. Admittedly, generosity entails an adherence. But adherence to the principle is not sufficient, and it entails a temptation; it calls for care and for our fight.

There is in the particular yet another reason for it to appear in the Law as an independent principle in relation to the universality reflected by all particular laws. It is precisely the concrete and particular aspect of the Law and the circumstances of its application which command Talmudic dialectics: the oral law is casuistic. It concerns itself with the transition from the general principle incarnated by the Law to its possible execution, its concretization. If this transition were purely deducible, the Law, as a particular law, would not have required a separate adherence.

But it so happens – and this is the great wisdom the awareness of which animates the Talmud – that the general and generous principles can be inverted in their application. Every generous thought is threatened by its Stalinism. The great strength of the Talmud's casuistry is to be the special discipline which seeks in the particular the precise moment at which the general principle runs the danger of becoming its own contrary, and watches over the general in the light of the particular. This protects us from ideology. Ideology is the generosity and clarity of the principle which have not taken into account the inversion which keeps a watch on this general principle when it is applied; or – to pick up on the image used a short while ago – the Talmud is the struggle with the Angel. This is why adherence to the particular law is an irreducible dimension in all allegiance, and you will see that R. Akiba thinks not only that it is as important as that of adherence to the Law in its general form, but also that the place dedicated to its study – ultimately, the *yeshivot* – is one of the three places where the pact is made, and that the dignity of this place equals that of Sinai, where the Torah is revealed, and that of the plains of Moab, where it is repeated by Moses.

In the apparently strange calculation of the forty-eight covenants which our text discerns at the heart of the pacts made around the Law, the number four has been brought in, representing the four promises that all adherence to the Law entails: the promise to learn it, to teach it, to observe it and to do it. Without the theoretical activity of study, without the obligation of listening and reading, without the *illmod*, nothing can enter us. But it is also necessary to teach what has been learnt in order to transmit it. The transmission, the *lelamed*, is an obligation distinct from the pure receptivity of study. For humankind entails the risk of a fossilization of acquired knowledge, depositing itself in our consciousness like some inert matter and being handed down in this ossified form from one generation to another. This congelment of the spiritual is not the same as its true transmission, whose essence lies elsewhere: in vitality, inventiveness and renewal which occur precisely through being taken up by way of tradition, or of a lesson taught to the other and assumed by the other. Without this method of procedure, it is not possible for true revelation – that is, a thought authentically thought – to take place. Transmission thus involves a teaching which is already

outlined in the very receptivity for learning it. Receptivity is prolonged: true learning consists in receiving the lesson so deeply that it becomes a necessity to give oneself to the other. The lesson of truth is not held in one man's consciousness. It explodes towards the other. To study well, to read well, to listen well, is already to speak: whether by asking questions and, in so doing, teaching the master who teaches you, or by teaching a third party.

In the last four books of the Pentateuch one verse constantly appears: 'And the Lord said to Moses: "Say to the people of Israel *lemor* ("in these terms")". A prestigious master I had after the Liberation used to claim to be able to give one hundred and twenty different interpretations of this phrase whose plain meaning, however, is devoid of mystery. He revealed only one to me. I have tried to guess a second. The one he revealed to me consisted in translating *lemor* by 'so as not to say'. Which amounted to signifying: 'Say to the people of Israel so as not to say'. The unspoken is necessary, so that listening remains a way of thinking; or it is necessary for the word to be also unspoken, so that truth (or the Word of God) does not consume those who listen, or the Word of God has to be able to lodge itself, without danger to mankind, in the tongue and language of men. In my own reading of this verse, *lemor* would signify 'in order to say': 'Say to the people of Israel in order for them to speak'; teach them sufficiently in depth for them to begin to speak, for them to hear at the point of speaking. The one hundred and eighteen other significations of the verse remain to be discovered. My master carried their secret to his tomb.

Let us move on to the third obligation: to observe [to keep]. *Lishmor*. There are two possibilities: *lishmor* would signify the observance of the negative commandments, the interdicts. Here, where the difference between negative or positive commandments is not made, this interpretation is impossible. *Lishmor*, then, would signify the new thing which is necessary once one has learnt: not to forget – that is, to repeat the lessons. Studying is never over in its very reception.

Finally, *la'asot*, 'to do'. This requires no explanations. The depth of our text consists in thinking of the four points as going together, as liable to isolation and not perversion. Each of these moments of study requires a special adherence and special care.

There were, then, sixteen covenants in each pact. Now the pact was made in these three places – on Sinai, in the plains of Moab, and between Ebal and Gerizim – which makes forty-eight covenants around the Law. But on this point there was a disagreement. As you will see, R. Akiba does not agree to consider the ceremony between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim as counting as one of the three occasions. I personally am very happy that R. Akiba should have had a doubt here. I shall tell you why later.

5 THE THREE OCCASIONS

That the pact of the Covenant was made three times is indicated at the heart of the Talmudic text we are commenting upon in the account of the ceremony near Mount Gerizim, and by the 'it was similar at Sinai and the plains of Moab'. Here is the text in full: 'It was similar at Sinai and the plains of Moab; as it was said, *These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab*', besides the pact he had made with them at Horeb. 'Keep therefore the words of this covenant.'

But here is someone who contests a point in this calculation: 'R. Simeon excludes (the occasion of) Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal and includes that of the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness.'

Admittedly, R. Simeon also thinks that the covenant was made three times, but for him the ceremony which took place between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal does not count. In order to arrive at the number three, R. Simeon considers the covenant to have been made in the meetings between Moses and the people, of which Exodus Chapter 33 verse 7 speaks: 'Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; and he called it the tent of meeting. And every one who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.' The number of forty-eight covenants is thus guaranteed. But R. Simeon prefers to confer the dignity of the covenant's conclusion not on the simple ceremony which, for him, the rite between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim really was, but on the discussion concerning the Lord's Law, on the study of the Law which is supposed to be done inside the 'tent of meeting in the wilderness', where Moses welcomes those who have questions or problems. The Covenant is not staged so that everyone can

see everyone else; the Covenant is where the pupils, as individuals, question the master. It was in the tent of meeting, precisely, in the *yes'ivah* of Moses, that the voice of God is heard, and it is there, after Sinai and before the plains of Moab, that the Covenant is made for the second time.

For R. Simeon, then, the ceremony is replaced by study. An important decision. We shall see straight away that this was also R. Akiba's opinion. What are R. Simeon's motives? Rashi obviously asks this question. R. Simeon would have told himself that the text of Deuteronomy 27, announcing the ceremony on Mount Gerizim, lists only a few of the laws of the Torah. The whole of the Torah as such does not appear. The ceremony cannot, therefore, count as a 'complete' covenant. I do not wish to dispute Rashi's word. But was not R. Simeon also shocked by the fact that the laws mentioned in Deuteronomy 27 are proclaimed only in a repressive manner? Only curses are indicated. Admittedly there were blessings, but their formulation is missing.

Be that as it may, R. Simeon's intervention disputing the validity of the covenant at Mount Gerizim raises an important question. It is closely akin to a discussion which had taken place between the giants of the Talmud: the Tannaim, R. Ishmael and R. Akiba, R. Simeon's master. Here is the text:

The difference of opinion here is the same as that of the teachers [the Tannaim] in the following [*a baraita*]: R. Ishmael says: General laws were proclaimed at Sinai and particular laws in the Tent of Meeting. R. Akiba says: Both general and particular laws were proclaimed at Sinai, repeated in the Tent of Meeting, and for the third time in the plains of Moab. Consequently there is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight covenants were not made.

The difference of opinion expressed by R. Simeon thus dates back to an older discussion between Tannaim, between R. Ishmael and R. Akiba. R. Ishmael thought that the ceremony which took place between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim is included among the three ceremonies which should be counted as making the pact. What did he mean by this? Perhaps he thought that besides Sinai and the plains of Moab there was no other rite for the Covenant. For him only the particularities of the Law were taught in the tent of meeting, and the general laws at Sinai, such that Sinai and the

tent of meeting count together as one single covenant. The plains of Moab are the second covenant, and Mounts Ebal and Gerizim the third. Moreover, perhaps R. Ishmael thought that something I will not discuss today – which is a possible problem – should be discussed: perhaps R. Ishmael was disputing this total equality between the study of the generalities and the particularities of the Law. Certainly he thought that the particular and the general are both important. If he had not, he would not be a master of the Talmud. But he considered that despite everything, the general laws are more important. Is he more liberal than R. Akiba? We should ask the Talmudists in the room who are more competent than me. Perhaps R. Ishmael considers that the ceremony in which everyone can see everyone else is an important ceremony. Perhaps he also had similar ideas to those formulated on the distinction between society and community, and consequently, for him, the experience of the community must have been an essential moment of revelation.

R. Akiba seems opposed to these ideas. He affirms the absolutely equal dignity of the general and the particular. He seems to exclude the ceremony in which everyone can see everyone else. Perhaps he thinks that the concrete presence of men is not what constitutes the true face-to-face.

We have come to count forty-eight covenants. We have tried to understand this calculation as the affirmation of the various dimensions of the Law, which go beyond the formal qualities of the anonymous law that would be at the origin of the crisis of modern society.

<sup>6</sup> THE LAW AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS  
 Forty-eight covenants? There are even more. R. Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Acco said in the name of R. Simeon' – in the name of the same R. Simeon who disputed the importance of the ceremony at Gerizim – 'There is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times 603,550 covenants were not made.'

The number of covenants made in these three ceremonies would thus be 603,550 multiplied by 48. Where does the figure 603,550 come from? It represents the number of Israelites standing at the foot of Sinai. But why multiply by this number? Because the Covenant made around the revealed Law, instead of

appearing as an impersonal abstraction of a juridical act, is greeted as establishing living links with all those who adopt the Law: everyone finds himself responsible for everyone else; in every act of the Covenant more than six hundred thousand personal acts of responsibility are outlined. The forty-eight dimensions of the pact become  $48 \times 603,550$ . Obviously this may raise a smile. It is a lot. But it is still not an infinite number. The Israelites – or, more exactly, the men of mankind – are answerable for one another before a truly human law. In this making of the Covenant we have non-indifference concerning the other. Everyone looks at me! We do not need to meet on Mount Ebal or Genizim and gaze at one another eye to eye to be in a position where we all look at one another. Everyone looks at me. Let us not forget the seventy languages in which the Torah is proclaimed. The Torah belongs to us all: everybody is responsible for everybody else. The phrase 'Love your neighbour as yourself' still presupposes self-love as the prototype of love. Here, the ethical signifies: 'Be responsible for the other as you are responsible for yourself'. We avoid the presupposition of self-love – self-esteem – which can be taken as the very definition of the personal. But we have not yet finished.

'Rabbi said ...' The Rabbi who is speaking now is Rabenu Hakadosh, who gave the *Mishnah* its written form and is the highest Talmudic authority after, or next to, R. Akiba. Rabbi said: According to the reasoning of R. Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Acco who said in the name of R. Simeon ...

What a lot of references! Those of you who are perhaps attending a Talmudic lesson for the first time should not be surprised at this piling up. There is always a lot of care taken in the Talmud to specify who said what: a true lesson taught is that in which the universal nature of the proclaimed truth allows neither the name nor the person of him who said it to disappear. The scholars of the Talmud even think that the Messiah will come at the moment when everybody quotes what they learn in the name of the very person from whom they learnt it. Rabbi, then, says:

There is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times 603,550 covenants were not made, it follows that for each Israelite there are 603,550 commandments (and forty-eight covenants were made in connection with each of them).

Is he not repeating the truth we have just seen? The *Gemara* asks itself the question. 'What is the issue between them?' It is R. Mesharsheya who locates the issue. 'R. Mesharsheya said: The point between them is that of personal responsibility and responsibility for others [responsibility of responsibility].'

Not only are we responsible for everyone else, but we are also responsible for everyone else's responsibility. Forty-eight, then, has to be multiplied by 603,550, and the result multiplied again by 603,550. This is extremely important. We saw a short while ago something that resembles recognition of the other, love of the other. To such a degree that I am answerable for the other, for the other's adherence and faithfulness to the Law. His concern is my concern. But is not my concern his? Is he not responsible for me? Consequently, can I be answerable for his responsibility for me? *Kol Yisra'el 'arevim zeh lazeh*, 'Everyone in Israel is answerable for everyone else', signifies: all adherents to the divine Law, all men who are truly men, are responsible for one another.

This must also signify that my responsibility stretches to the responsibility that the other man can assume. I always have, myself, one responsibility more than the other, for I am still responsible for his responsibility. And, if he is responsible for my responsibility, I am still responsible for the responsibility that he has for my responsibility: *en ladavar soph*, 'it is never-ending'. Behind the responsibility attributed to everyone for everyone, there arises, *ad infinitum*, the fact that in the society of the Torah I am still responsible for this responsibility! It is an ideal, but an ideal that implies the humanity of mankind. In the Covenant, when it is fully understood, in a society that deploys all the dimensions of the Law, society is also community.