



*See should you  
from for books*

Yeshiva University / Office of the President



April 29, 1992

Professor Jerome Eckstein  
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Dear Jerry:

I am grateful to you for sending me a copy of your new book, *Metaphysical Drift: Love and Judaism*. I read it through during the Pesach holiday, and was absorbed by it.

Since you solicit my reactions, let me tell you that I was gratified, angered, puzzled, piqued -- all these, but also enlightened and instructed by your book. Also, because of the unusual combination of philosophical thinking and intimate, uninhibited, autobiographical details, I feel that I know you personally more than I ever had before.

I did not at first quite understand your dichotomy between interestedness and intraestedness, but in the course of reading I think -- if you will excuse the pun as well as the adolescent lingo -- I catch your drift... Not only do I feel that I understand, but I also sympathize with you, and relish and cherish those precious moments, all too rare, when I experience intraestedness. My only question is whether it is significant enough to warrant a new nomenclature and all the philosophical attention you give it.

Frankly, I am somewhat taken aback at the passion of your protest against the rabbinic ideal of, "all your actions should be for the sake of Heaven." One does not have to be a psychologist -- and I most certainly am not one -- to observe that the emotion of your polemic is out of proportion to the point you wish to make, and that there must be a definite psychological explanation for this.

Forgive me if I essay such an explanation, but bear in mind two things: 1) The prominent aspect of your book, which is a kind of "true confessions of an intellectual," invites such a reaction, and 2) I remember a conversation we had many many decades ago (four? four and a half?) when we had a rather spirited argument. At that time, you maintained that psychology explains everything, and there can be no objective theory or idea, because everything stems from the psyche and its hidden emanations, and I disagreed with you. I remember even arguing

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that Einstein's Theory of Relativity is correct or incorrect, irrespective of whether or not one can locate any psychological explanation for it; you disagreed. I think I have come, in the course of the years, to a better appreciation of the role psychological forces play in life, and I suspect that although psychology plays a major (to my mind, too much of a major) role in your writing, you have backed off the radical stance you took as a very young man.

Whatever, while I can understand your arguing with Chazal about the principle of *kol maasekha yihyu le'shem shamayim*, the emotional vector of your polemic, which makes it seem so disproportionate, seems to be a continuing rebellion against your father's attempt to control you.

I did not experience the same rigid upbringing by my late father and grandfather, and therefore I do not universalize parental control as an attempt by "the Rabbis" to curb personal freedom by banning intraestedness.

Getting away from psychological doodling (and I confess that I still dislike it very much), I feel that to a certain extent you are tilting against windmills. First, the statement is not a *halakhah*, but an agadic ideal. For practical, everyday life, I doubt that the Sages would have faulted anyone for not living up to the word *kol* in their formula. Second, whereas the classical explanation of that dictum is the one offered by Rabbenu Bahya, namely, that all actions must somehow be related, even at several removes, to a *mitzvah*, there is an alternative explanation which I find much more palatable, and that is the Hasidic one. That is, that everything I do, right now, with full immediacy, must be consecrated to God. It is not that I eat in order to be able to study Torah later, but the very act of eating is in itself an act of great significance if I dedicate it *le'shem shamayim*. This does not by any means mean that I cannot enjoy it for its own sake, as an intraested person would do, because once or twice in your book (I do not remember the pages) you mention that one can experience the intraested in the framework of the interested. I can revel in your "Broadway experience" and feel the joy and pleasure of it as a God-given gift, and therefore a form of worship. (I expand on the Hasidic interpretation considerably in my recent book, *Torah U-madda*; if you do not have the book, I will gladly send it to you.)

Moreover, I do not see the principle, even according to the Bahyah interpretation, as stifling and freedom-curtailing. I see it, rather, as a thread that pulls together all of life's disparate experiences, all the broken fragments of one's quotidian encounters, all our social and moral thrusts and



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parries, into one cohesive whole. It gives direction and, ultimately, meaning to life and makes of it what the Zohar calls a foretaste of *alma di'yichuda* instead of our *alma di'peruda*. One can experience a sense of wholeness without feeling overly controlled, stifled, or set upon by autocratic superiors. There is place for intraestedness in such an interested framework. Perhaps such intraestedness is implied by the Biblical *nofesh* of Genesis. (Some years ago I wrote an article on leisure, and included it in my *Faith and Doubt*; if you do not have it, I shall be glad to send you a copy or, if I have run out of copies, I will be glad to send you a Xerox of this particular chapter.)

I observed other instances in your book where you impute to Judaism excessive control but where I can find no real sign of it. Thus, you inform your reader (on page 72) that there is an "ancient rabbinic ideal" that God is our only true love. I was startled by that statement, because of the obvious examples of "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" and *ve'ahavtem et ha-ger* (the latter mentioned no less than five times!). I believe, however, that you back away from this assertion a few pages later. That's good!

I can understand and sympathize with your annoyance that religious authorities have not really confronted the need to memorialize the Holocaust properly. However, I have tempered my own long-simmering impatience with a rather different understanding, which I can best explain by a halakhic analogy. When one loses a very close relative, such as a parent or spouse or child or sibling, two halakhic states follow upon each other: *aninut* and *avelut*. The former prevails until the time of burial, and functionally it means that one is exempt from the performance of any positive *mitzvot* because he must devote all his time to arranging for the burial of his relative. After that is done, a period of mourning begins with its expression of grief and its catharsis in practice. Now, the Ramban refers to the former state as principally psychological: *ein aninut ela be'lev*. It is a time of shock and disbelief, when one cannot be expected to gather his emotions sufficiently to express his grief and abreact his bereavement. Now, we as a people are, to my mind, still in the category of *onenim*, although we are nearing the end of that period. As long as a single Jew survives who lived during the Holocaust, and remembers hearing about it first-hand as a contemporary event, the Jewish people will be in a state of *aninut*. Only then will we go over to *avelut*, and only then can we legitimately be expected to express our grief in more "normal" forms. And incidentally, I hope and I pray that they will be far different from the "edifice complex" that has so profoundly affected and distorted our contemporary method of memorializing the martyrs.



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Finally, I thank you for your references to my *Torah Lishmah*. You make some trenchant comments on the subject of *lishmah*, especially as it relates to your central theme. Without appearing defensive, let me respond to your criticism on page 104 (and continuing to page 105). You ask a good "Kashe" -- but I am the wrong address. It is not I but Maimonides who defines *she'lo lishmah* as activity that issue from fear of God and, as I point out (*Torah lishmah*, pp. 212-213), it is he who chooses two different sets of interpretation: *lishmah* as the highest form of love, and *she'lo lishmah* as the lowest form of fear of God.

I remember your late father very well, and with much respect and nostalgia. I do hope your mother is well -- I haven't seen her for many a year. She was always a beautiful and gracious lady. I haven't seen your brother Joe for even longer. We shared some unhappy experiences in the fifth grade at YTV, and our paths have not crossed (except, perhaps, for one occasion many years ago) since we graduated from elementary school. Please give them all my very warmest regards.

I have written far more than I had expected to, and I do not know if what I say makes much sense to you, but I have done so out of respect for you and for your work which is filled with much penetrating thought, admirable integrity, and a great deal of pathos. I do not, in my heart, believe that you have reached the end of the road in your own thinking about Judaism. Please do not ascribe it any patronizing attitude or condescension, but only genuine personal and intellectual friendship, when I say that the faithlessness that you occasionally are inclined to flaunt in this book is an indication that you are not really happy with it, and that your spiritual journey will yet bring you back to your origins, but in a more mature and wiser form. If it does, and I pray that it will, I expect that you will share your tested and very singular wisdom with the rest of us, who will have so much to learn from you.

Cordially yours,

  
NORMAN LAMM  
President

NL/nv

P.S. A sign of the influence your book has already had on me: I wrote to my bank complaining that they had understated the amount of interest they owe me...