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Introduction

Any discussion of the relationship between prayer and philosophical, theological, and Kabbalistic thought must go beyond the philological, historical, and halakhic study of prayer. Prayer is an inherent component of the world of the religious individual, and in consequence has always occupied center stage in the intensive research of the history of religions and comparative religion. Prayer is perceived as a defining experience in the relationship between man and the divine, and between man and himself. This experience places man and his initiatives at its center. Man praises, requests, and sings to his God. At times God is seen as a partner to the conversation, and at other times, as a passive listener. On occasion the prayer experience overwhelms the being of the worshiper to the extent that he has no need of any tangible response; it suffices for God to be aware of his prayer. There are times when the worshiper expects that prayer will cause God to actively intervene in his life. Sometimes prayer expresses man's self, and makes him aware of his personality and the deep strata of his soul. The act of prayer and its formulation enable the worshiper to understand his authentic needs, and there are instances in which the worshiper gains insights into the divine by means of his addressing Him. In any event, prayer is humanly-initiated action. It expresses the wealth of a person's expression, progressing from the word and the sound to language and dialogue. Formal dialogue is conducted between man and God, while accompanied by a dialogue between man and himself. The liturgical text became the basis of the experience, and as such, the prayer experience blazed a trail over the course of time to the very heart of religiosity.

These features of the prayer experience are manifest in the Jewish world, as well.[1] It is not surprising that prayer has captivated modern Jewish thought. It is perceived as a subjective act par excellence, which represents

1 A detailed list of studies on Jewish prayer was prepared by Joseph Tabory, the indefatigable bibliographer of prayer. See Joseph Tabory, *Jewish Prayer and the Yearly Cycle: A List of Articles*, supplement to *Kiryat Sefer* 64 [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 1992-1993).

the religious experience of the worshiper. On a parallel track, philosophers such as Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig highlighted prayer as an expression of the individual, and probed the meaning of the movement from personal to communal, public prayer. Of especial scholarly interest is prayer's median position: on the one hand, it is a product of intimate mental processes, while on the other, it embodies the imperative. Prayer oscillates between the autonomous and the authoritative.

The current book analyzes R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik's writings on prayer. R. Soloveitchik created extensive discussions to this topic, which occupies a prominent place in his legacy. In the current book I will analyze the place of prayer in his writings and the insights regarding prayer that emerge from his writings and thought.

The Study of the Religious Consciousness

R. Soloveitchik did not act in a vacuum. Prayer is an important component of Jewish religiosity in the United States, where R. Soloveitchik was active (as it is in other Diaspora communities), from both the existential-experiential viewpoint and the communal perspective, and its significance will be discussed in the chapters of this book.[2] The centrality of prayer for American Jewry also finds philosophical expression.[3]

The philosophical and theological orientation concerned with the phenomenology of religion occupies an important place in terms of the sources and scholarly methodologies of R. Soloveitchik's thought, as we shall see below. Both the context of the discussion of prayer in R. Soloveitchik's writings and the terminology of this discussion are based on the literature of the phenomenology of religion. I intend to argue that the main goal of R. Soloveitchik's thought on prayer is to offer a phenomenological description of the consciousness of prayer. To this end, we should more sharply define the boundaries of this consciousness.

Phenomenologists of religion generally accepted the principles formulated by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), viewing religion as a given. Rather than judging the religious phenomenon, the phenomenologist of religion seeks to decipher it and understand its nature. The phenomenologist is occupied with description, and therefore examines the structure of the consciousness, that is, the manner in which objects are perceived by the

2 See below, Chapter Twelve.

3 See, for example, Shalom Ratshabi, *Between Destiny and Faith: The Jewish Theological Discourse in the United States* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2003), 241-242.

consciousness. According to Husserl, consciousness is intentional and relates to objects. For the phenomenologists of religion, the religious individual possesses a distinct consciousness that includes a series of epistemological acts that relate to objects such as God. These phenomenologists examine the various—at times contradictory—appearances of religion in order to isolate the essential elements of the religious consciousness: in this case, the consciousness of prayer. Philosophers and scholars have discussed the nature and definitions of the phenomenology of religion. Eric Sharpe formulated the task of the phenomenology of religion in five stages:

(1) to assign names to groups of phenomena—such as sacrifice, prayer, saviour, myth, etc.;
(2) to interpolate the experiences within one's own life and experience them systematically—a point which seems at the first sight hard to reconcile with the claim that the aim of phenomenology is "pure objectivity";
(3) to exercise *epoche*, that is, to withdraw to one side and observe;
(4) to clarify and comprehend.
(5) to confront chaotic reality and testify to what has been understood.[4]

Sharpe based the work of the phenomenologist on the writings of Gerardus van der Leeuw (1890-1950), Jan Hermelink (1924-1961), and others. Joseph D. Bettis noted that the phenomenology of religion differs from the philosophy of religion in that, inter alia, it is not concerned solely with ideas and doctrines but also studies the diverse forms of religious expression, such as ritual, symbolism, and the like.[5] In other words, phenomenology is also concerned with the epistemological meaning of "objective" acts, and not only with the subjective experience. This distinction is a formative element in the thought of R. Soloveitchik. This forms the background for the phenomenological inquiry into prayer.

The Consciousness of Prayer

The phenomenological discussion of prayer in the scholarly literature of the history of religion in general, and particularly that of the Jewish world, was conducted in at least two planes.

4 Eric Sharpe, *Comparative Religion* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 234.
5 Joseph D. Bettis (ed.), *Phenomenology of Religion: Eight Modern Descriptions of the Essence of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 3. See Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 248-249.

(1) Prayer by itself. The discussion encompassed various aspects of the virtues, properties, and consequences of prayer. In many instances, the nature of prayer was determined in accordance with its effect and purpose. The aims of prayer are defined as follows:
   (a) influence on divine and cosmic providence;
   (b) influence on the worshiper's moral and religious degree (= education);
   (c) influence on the social fabric (community, public prayer).

(2) Prayer in the context of the worshiper. Prayer is not perceived as an autonomous religious act. Rather, it reflects the worshiper's consciousness and his general relationship to God and the world. In this plane, prayer is not weighed in accordance with its purpose, but by the contribution it makes in the fashioning of the worshiper's religious state and the expressions of this situation. This approach was expressed in three perceptions of prayer:
   (a) as a mirror and symptom of the worshiper's way of life and religious consciousness;[6]
   (b) as standing before God,[7] and as an expression of the relationship with the transcendental dimension of life;
   (c) as an expression of community (public prayer).[8]

The first plane, that of prayer by itself, corresponds to the perception of prayer as an expression of "sacred words," in the terminology of the phenomenologist of religion Edvard Lehmann (1862-1930). According to Lehmann, prayers play a central role in the second of religion's three components ("sacred actions," such as ritual and magic; "sacred words," such as sacred music and ceremonies; and "sacred places," in the sense of

6 *Maharal* (R. Judah Loew ben Bezalel) argued that prayer is a component in the definition of the perfect man. According to him, man was created deficient, and he completes himself by means of prayer. *Maharal* used the Aristotelian terminology that refers to man as *medabber* ("rational one"; literally, "the one who speaks"), but while Aristotle referred to inner speech, that is, verbal thought, *Maharal* meant audible speech. Prayer completes speech, and man is a whole "speaking entity" (Judah Loew ben Bezalel, *Netivot Olam*, *Netiv ha-Avodah* 2 [Jerusalem, 1972], 81a). On speech, see also Karl Erich Grözinger, "Sprache und Identität—Das Hebräische und die Juden," in *Sprache und Identität im Judentum*, ed. K. E. Grözinger (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 75-90.

7 Schechter stated that prayer attests to affinity between man and his God. He sharply opposed the view that ascribes a transcendentalist position to the rabbinic literature. See Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, 1961 [1901]), 22-23.

8 See, for example, Perry D. LeFevre, *Understandings of Prayer* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981).

expanse and place in the expanse).[9] Alston listed prayer and "other forms of communication with gods" as one of the "religion-making characteristics."[10]

The second plane, that of prayer as a dynamic reflection of the life of the worshiper, is suitable for the discussion of prayer in the mystic and the phenomenological literatures. Christian spirituality is based in part on the book of Psalms and on the prayers constructed from it. The monastic agenda relies on such prayers as is reflected, for instance, in the writings of Augustine. In the mystical literature, prayer is at times an expression of the aspiration for communion and union with God. For example, Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) called the first stage of such union the "prayer of quiet." Unlike verbal prayer, this is the meditative stage of a sacred ceremony or event from the life of the saints. This results in an experience of proximity to God. She termed the second stage the "prayer of full union," which is marked by the manifestation of the divine presence within the soul. This results in the union of God and the soul in a mutual embrace. The third stage is the ecstatic.[11] According to this depiction, prayer is merely a reflection of the different levels of the mystical experience. An expansive approach of the epistemology of prayer is also to be found among thinkers who are not identified as mystics. For example, Emil Brunner (1889-1966) writes that prayer is a mirror of the worshiper's soul and his relationship to the divine. He argues that prayer proceeds from "profound reflection upon our own lives, as well as from the study of God's Word."[12] R. Judah Halevi's thought, for example, is not mystical—but, nevertheless, views prayer as an expression of the flow of religious life in its entirety.[13]

The Phenomenological Study of Prayer

The academic interest in prayer first arose at the end of the nineteenth century. Scholars who viewed prayer as a central expression of religion

9 See Sharpe, *Comparative Religion*, 227.

10 William P. Alston, "Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vols. 7-8, 141-142.

11 See Nelson Pike, *Mystic Union: An Essay in the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 1-11.

12 Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative: A Study in Christian Ethics*, trans. Olive Wyon (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2002]), 314. R. Soloveitchik cited Brunner in *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition*, ed. David Schatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, and Reuven Ziegler (Hoboken, NJ: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2003), 151, 154-155.

13 See below, Chapter Eleven.

began to use critical historical, psychological, and comparative scientific approaches. Many of those who composed studies devoted to prayer were German, such as Eduard von der Goltz (1870-1939), Otto Dibelius (1880-1967), and Paul Drews (1858-1912). Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) from France and Friedrich Heiler (1892-1967) argued that prayer is a universal component of religion and, as such, constitutes man's communion with his God.[14]

The religious phenomenology perceived prayer primarily as a "religious act" or "spiritual act,"[15] which becomes fully significant only in a religious environment. R. Soloveitchik frequently used these expressions, most of which were developed, with thorough argumentation, in the writings of Max Scheler (1874-1928). For Scheler, prayer, as any religious act, could not be fully comprehended unless, as he writes regarding repentance, "one places it within a deeper overall conception of the nature of our temporal life-stream in relation to our permanent personal Self [*feststehender Person hineinzustellen*]."[16] Scheler further argued that the religious act is autonomous, that is, it acquires its meaning only in the context of the religious consciousness. Its psychological, philosophical, and social aspects may be useful in coming to know the standing of prayer, but its full understanding is possible only within the experience of the religious consciousness, the experience of meeting with God.[17] In this respect, Scheler may have been influenced by Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), who stated in his book *The Idea of the Holy* that religiosity cannot be fully translated into other realms (psychology, sociology, philosophy, and the like).[18] The experience of God, or the numinous, is characteristic solely of religion. According to Otto and Scheler's approaches, prayer is considered not as an isolated act, but within the special context of religious life. In any event, prayer is, first and foremost, an act of specific religious consciousness. In many respects, Scheler added depth to Otto's approach.

In R. Soloveitchik's writings, we see direct traces of Scheler and Otto's influence. However, there were also other phenomenologists of religion, who specifically examined the consciousness of prayer (see below), and

14 See W. S. F. Pickering, "Introduction" to Marcel Mauss, *On Prayer*, trans. S. Leslie (New York: Durkheim, 2003), 9.

15 Terms "religious act" and "religious action" are both used to denote the act.

16 Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man*, trans. B. Noble (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1972), 39.

17 The nature of the religious act will be discussed below, in Chapter Six.

18 R. Soloveitchik was occupied to a great extent in *The Lonely Man of Faith* with the impossibility of translating the religious experience. See Dov Schwartz, *From Phenomenology to Existentialism*, trans. Batya Stein (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 335-339.

we can hardly assume that they had no effect on R. Soloveitchik's discussions. R. Soloveitchik was in Berlin during the time when philosophy written in German was stimulated by these approaches, and he was in close contact with the academic faculty that discussed them and was challenged by them. Indeed, his terminology and the nature of his discussions were fashioned, both directly and collaterally, by the phenomenological approaches, as we shall see below.

Friedrich Heiler's book on prayer, *Das Gebet* (*Prayer*), greatly influenced the early twentieth-century perception of prayer, and in a large degree, also the thought of R. Soloveitchik. His book, in turn, was directly influenced by the conception of Nathan Söderblom (1866-1931) who, alongside Scheler and Otto, argued that the religious act must be understood from within itself, and not in the context of other realms, such as psychology or magic. We will now concisely set forth the phenomenological ideas that appeared in Heiler's work.

Heiler maintained that prayer is a direct expression of the inner religious experience, in contrast to all other ceremonial acts, which are merely indirect expressions.[19] He begins his book with the declaration that religious people, scholars, and theologians all view prayer as "the central phenomenon of religion."[20] He asserts that "prayer is the heart and center of all religion."[21]

Heiler sought to describe the essential nature of prayer and devoted the last chapter of his book specifically to this question. There, he raised a series of arguments concerning the consciousness of prayer. Heiler states that prayer appears in many forms, from spontaneous experience to institutionalized formats. Prayer is the most personal experience, while at the same time it is clearly communal. It ranges from being a product of ecstasy to the fulfillment of institutionalized religious law.[22] The most fundamental psychological motive of prayer is man's primal desire for a higher-quality, powerful, and richer life.[23] Consequently, prayer relates to all aspects of human life, from man's very existence to the loftiest spiritual planes.

19 See Ron Margolin, *Inner Religion: The Phenomenology of Inner Religious Life and Its Manifestation in Jewish Sources (from the Bible to Hasidic Texts)* [Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), 23.

20 Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion,* trans. S. McComb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), xiii.

21 Ibid., xv.

22 Ibid., 353.

23 Ibid., 355.

This motivating factor, however, is not all there is to the consciousness of prayer. Heiler argues that the deep inner structure of the consciousness of prayer is based on three foundations:

(1) the belief in a personal God;
(2) the belief in God's real and immediate presence;
(3) a realistic[24] fellowship between man and God, in which God is conceived as present.

Heiler further maintains that prayer is a personal address by the man's "I" to God's "Thou," and the opening of man's heart before God. In short, prayer is a dialogue with God and the creation of a community with Him. Heiler explains that prayer cannot be summed up as the belief in a personal God and in His presence, but rather described as a process of communication that establishes an inner bond between man and his God. We would not be wrong to state that prayer is communion with God.[25]

Heiler's pioneering discussion was followed by the phenomenologists of religion who analyzed the consciousness of prayer within their studies of religion. William Brede Kristensen (1867-1953), for example, argued that the phenomenology of religion searches for the identical elements in different religions, in order to reveal the nature of man's religious consciousness. Kristensen added that religions do not provide accurate and detailed reports on the nature of the religious need that inspires prayer. He analyzed the conscious expression of prayer and split it in the following two categories:

(1) "magic prayer," which emphasizes prayer's capabilities and influences.
(2) "spiritual prayer," representing submission to God's will, and the spiritual power that ensues from this surrender.[26]

In Kristensen's analysis, these two categories appear from a single conscious element, namely, the act of prayer. His analysis is just one example of the internalization of the categories developed in the late nineteenth and

24 Ibid., 356. In the German original: *dramatische* (Friedrich Heiler, *Das Gebet: Eine religionsgeschichtlische und religionspsychologische Untersuchung* [Munich: Verlag von Ernst Reinhardt, 1921], 489).

25 Heiler, *Prayer*, 357.

26 W. Brede Kristensen, "The Phenomenology of Religion," in Bettis, *Phenomenology of Religion*, 36-51, at 39.

early twentieth centuries by the researchers who analyzed the consciousness of prayer.

The Consciousness of Prayer in Judaism

The phenomenological perception of prayer is also to be found in the study of Jewish liturgy and its standing in Jewish law and thought. It was mainly employed by the scholars who went beyond the philological and historical dimension of prayer. The following passage by Uri Ehrlich exemplifies this perception:

> To my mind what is called for is not the restriction of the study of prayer to the prayer-text, but a multifaceted examination of the *act* of prayer. Although undeniably a fundamental component, the text in and of itself gives only partial expression to the full import of the prayer-act. Viewed from this broader perspective, liturgical formulas are not just literary compositions but rather texts placed in the mouths of worshipers standing before their Creator in prayer, aimed at establishing a living dialogue between individuals and their God. Additional factors shape the holistic nature of the prayer-act in conjunction with prayer-formulas: the venue of worship, the number of prayers recited and the time of day, the worshiper's emotional mood, attire, voice, and gestures, and the like.[27]

In a certain sense, the canonical version of the prayers supports the conscious orientation. Prayer arises from a multifaceted reality, but those establishing the prayer texts sought to inculcate a uniform consciousness among the worshipers.[28] In many instances, the prayer text aims to support a universal consciousness, or alternately, a pan-Jewish one.

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27 Uri Ehrlich, *The Nonverbal Language of Prayer: A New Approach to Jewish Liturgy*, trans. Dena Ordan (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 3. The use of the term "act of prayer" indirectly reflects phenomenological terminology.

28 An example of this is the prayer for rain, which is adapted to a specific locale (Babylonia or the Land of Israel). On the contrary, those who established the canonical text of prayer sought to compose a formulation suitable for every location. See Arnold A. Lasker and Daniel J. Lasker, "The Jewish Prayer for Rain in Babylonia," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 15 (1984): 124-44; idem, "The Jewish Prayer for Rain in the Post-Talmudic Diaspora," *AJS Review* 9 (1984), 141-174. On the question of the establishment of the canonical text of the prayers, especially the *Amidah*, see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 24-37.

The extensive pioneering phenomenological essay on prayer in Jewish thought was written by the scholar of Jewish thought Shalom Rosenberg. In his essay, Rosenberg listed three strata in the study of prayer:

(1) the philological and historical ("formal") analysis of prayer;
(2) revealing the ideas and conceptions in prayer (the "semantic system");[29]
(3) exploring the standing of prayer in religious life and thought (pragmatics").

Rosenberg then offered a number of approaches to prayer.

(1) Simple prayer: the Biblical and midrashic approach to prayer, that is not reflective.
(2) Theurgic prayer: the act of prayer is presented as mending (*tikkun*) of the world and God. This approach finds systematic expression in Kabbalah. Rosenberg includes the discussion of magic prayer in this category.
(3) Mystical prayer: the Kabbalistic approach that presents prayer as communion with God and spiritual elevation.
(4) Didactic prayer: the moral approach that views prayer as educational.
(5) Existential prayer: the communal approach, which holds that prayer expresses communal existence (such as public prayer).[30]

Other approaches could be added to this list, as Rosenberg presents prayer as a system of conscious acts that fully comprises the Jewish religious consciousness. His insights reflect the adaptation of the extensive discussions of prayer in the general literature of religious phenomenology to the analysis of prayer in Jewish tradition. Since then, additional works have been written on Jewish prayer. Lawrence Hoffman, for instance, based on an analysis of specific prayers, viewed the liturgical text as "a source of insight into the way religious consciousness is formed, nurtured,

29 On the value of the discussion of meanings in prayer, see, for example, Eliezer Berkovits, "Expectations from Prayer," in *Sefer Aviad: Collection of Articles in Memory of Dr. Isaiah Wolfsberg-Aviad* [Hebrew], ed. Yitzhak Raphael (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986), 179-184.

30 Shalom Rosenberg, "Prayer and Jewish Thought: Approaches and Problems (A Survey)" in *Prayer in Judaism: Continuity and Change* ed. G. Cohn and H. Fisch (Northvail, NJ: Jason Arondon 1996), 69-107, 89-107.

and lived."[31] It seems that the works by Reuven Kimelman and the book by Stefan Reif contain phenomenological analyses, despite their intent to provide a historical and critical description.[32] Tzvi Zahavy classified prayer by six types of worshipers: performer, mystic, scribe, priest, meditator, and celebrity. I do not intend to discuss the definition of these types or the degree to which they are reflective of all the possible variants. It should be noted, however, that Zahavy assigned the archetype of the performer to R. Soloveitchik.[33] Published works in the religious-Zionist rabbinic world seek mainly to understand the consciousness of prayer.[34] Although the authors from the latter sector almost certainly are not thoroughly familiar with the phenomenological literature, and their approach is not critical, their work, nevertheless, attest to a conceptual climate that finds it important to understand the religious consciousness created and promoted by the act of prayer.

Prayer and Jewish Thought

Jewish thought in the medieval and early modern periods began with the perception of prayer as obligatory and as the fulfillment of the demands of religious law. Jewish thought treats prayer as providing reasons for the commandments and as part of the discussion of man's relationship with his Maker. Taking this as given, Jewish philosophers analyzed a series of theological questions raised by prayer. The place of prayer in Jewish thought is derived from two approaches.

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31 Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

32 Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayers: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Reuven Kimelman, "The *Shema*' Liturgy: From Covenant Ceremony to Coronation" [Hebrew], *Kenishta* 1 (2001): 5-109; idem, *Mystical Meaning of Lekha Dodi and Kabbalat Shabbat* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003). Margolin, *Inner Religion*, presents a few phenomenological aspects of prayer.

33 See Tzvi Zahavy, *God's Favorite Prayers* (Teaneck, NJ: Talmudic Books, 2011), 37. R. Aharon Lichtenstein was assigned the archetype of the scribe.

34 A fascinating work in this field was written by Eli Taragin and Michael Rubinstein, *Prayer as Encounter: The Laws of Prayer—A Journey from the Halakhah to the Soul* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Merkaz Halakhah and Sifriyat Bet-El, 2011). Also noteworthy is the book by Rabbi Eli Adler, *Tefilat Yesharim* [Hebrew] (Atzmonah: n.p., 2003). The ultra-Orthodox world mainly publishes collections of the laws of prayer and books of ethical teaching of prayer.

(1) Prayer as the observance of a religious commandment or obligation. This sense focuses on prayer itself as everyday obligation and as an ideal. The obligation can be fulfilled in two ways:
   (a) recitation of diverse liturgical texts;
   (b) intent, that is concerned with mental focus and with comprehension of the liturgical texts.
(2) Prayer as the realization or symbol of other religious ideals, besides the fulfilling of the religious obligation. Examples of such ideals are:
   (a) prayer as contemplation.
   (b) prayer as communion with God and as an ecstatic state;
   (c) prayer as influencing heavenly events.

Jewish religious thought in different periods was occupied with the relationship between prayer and theology. This relationship consists of three main parts.

The first important issue is the relationship between prayer and prophecy. Prayer in itself is perceived as speech. The state of prayer refers to a person who verbally addresses his God, with a clear connection to prophecy. In the prophetic state, God and the prophet engage in discourse (with the question of who initiates this discourse). Man and God speak with each other from time to time. Prayer is an event reminiscent of the prophetic dialogue, even though only man speaks, while God is the object of his address. Moreover, institutionalized prayer came after the cessation of documented prophecy. Prayer, accordingly, is discussed in reference to prophecy.[35]

Secondly, prayer is addressed within the context of negative theology. Already in the medieval period, negation of the attributes of God was established as an accepted and semiofficial doctrine. This trend presented God as undescribable in human language, and as absolutely distinct from man. It created an image of immutable God, on whom man's address Him makes no impression. Divine knowledge relates to the rational world that is concerned with universal phenomena, but does not apply to the individual as such and to the stormy events that he experiences. Maimonides systematized this idea, but it was already accepted before his time. Few dared to differ with it, and most did not reject the notion of God's immutability. In light of this theological conception, prayer became sterile. Not only did

35 On prophecy and prayer, see *Lonely Man of Faith* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997 [1965]), 53-66.

prayer alter nothing, but moreover, it was doubtful whether prayer could receive God's attention, coming from a low level in the cosmic structure and the hierarchy of God and His creatures.

Thirdly, the discussion of prayer was linked to understanding of divine perfection. This question stems from that of negative theology. While the preceding section related to the knowledge and attributes of God, here we are concerned with divine providence. If it is observed that prayer alters divine decisions (the healing of the sick, the lifting of harsh laws, and the like), we are left with a contradiction: on the one hand, God is perfect and He and His decisions are immutable, while on the other, prayer has the ability to change the divine decree. However, if, prayer cannot alter the divine decree, then the very benefit of its recitation is called into question. The worshipers feel powerless in the face of the unchanging divine perfection and, as a reaction, they wish to demonstrate the utility of prayer to their society and to themselves.[36]

Jewish thought in the modern world relates to various aspects of prayer, and R. Soloveitchik was one of the leading voices in this discourse.[37] However, the main centers of interest in the contemporary philosophical discussions of prayer are removed from the realm of the theological. Modern Jewish thought is more concerned with the condition of prayer (that is, standing before God) and with the consciousness of prayer than with theological inconsistencies. Unlike medieval thought, in which prayer was anchored in the routine ritual, and, with its symbolism and importance, was one of the spheres requiring reason and clarification, in modern thought prayer has taken on a new and different dimension. It now reflects man's moral existence and his values, consciousness, experiences, and personality: "prayer is not in time but time in prayer."[38] R. Soloveitchik, too, concentrated on the human state of consciousness, which prayer expresses and documents. For modern man, prayer is linked to the phenomenological and the existential dimensions of religious life. R. Soloveitchik undertook a mission that is by no means straightforward. He promoted the approach that prefers the description of the prayer experience to explaining the detailed ritual behavior required by the Torah in the heart of Orthodox thought.

36 R. Soloveitchik was not concerned by this theological issue, since his viewpoint was that of the consciousness of prayer, that is, the subject who prays and the human perspective of prayer.

37 Rosenberg, "Prayer and Jewish Thought."

38 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, 2000), 24.

Prayer in the World of R. Soloveitchik

Echoes of philosophical, Kabbalistic, and Hasidic sources clearly resound in R. Soloveitchik's discussions on prayer. Kabbalistic patterns of thought, for example, are obviously present in his writings, even though he generally kept his distance from mysticism. Additionally, his essays contain traces of thought developed by *Maharal* (R. Judah Loew ben Bezalel) in *Netivot Olam* and of other traditional and modern interpretations of the prayer book. But all these sources bubble beneath the surface. R. Soloveitchik's constant "conversants" remain the same: prayer and its texts in themselves, Maimonides (and at times thinkers such as R. Judah Halevi and Nahmanides). The contents of these sources infused his methods of writing and discussion that originated in early twentieth-century philosophy, as we shall see immediately.

R. Soloveitchik was profoundly influenced by the phenomenology of religion, as can be seen in his major works that were composed in the mid-1940s. In these writings, prayer is primarily a "religious act" of the consciousness. In the 1950s R. Soloveitchik began to write existential essays. Religious existentialists argued that prayer is an expression of human existence. Prayer emerges, first and foremost, out of distress and suffering. Accordingly, it addresses the existential rift, and reflects the religious approach to this rift. It is also an expression of discourse and the possibility of elocution. The worshiper has discovered the possibility of intersubjective discourse. At times, therefore, prayer affords existential dignity to the one uttering it.

This said and done, the question of R. Soloveitchik's sources is a complex one. He was unquestionably influenced by the intellectual and theological climate.[39] Moreover, his mastery of various languages is unquestioned: he wrote his doctoral dissertation in German. Nonetheless, the references in his essays usually are to summations in Hebrew, such as articles by Samuel Hugo Bergmann, and works that were translated into English, such as the books of Max Scheler. We may assume that he did not always think it necessary to read these sources in the original and internalized their message from second- and third-hand sources as well. His revitalization of Orthodox Jewish thought

39 Relevant in this context are R. Soloveitchik's lectures "On the Religious Definition of Man" delivered in 1957. Recordings of the lectures are available at: (1) https://app.box.com/s/7pxhzhg2ekrid9e5fb4/129360005, (2) torahdownloads.com/shiur_16138.html, (3) on the YUTorah Online site. The printed text appears only in Hebrew: *Ha-Adam ve-Olamo* (Man and His World) [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Eliner Library, 1998), 9-72.

was based on his internalization of contents and ways of thinking from phenomenological and existential thought, even if he did not spend the effort to delve into the writings of those thinkers.

The shifts in R. Soloveitchik's thought and life are intertwined with the standing of prayer. It has also been suggested that the parameters of a comprehensive educational program are to be sought in R. Soloveitchik's thought on prayer.[40] Notwithstanding the great pains he took to emphasize that there are no degrees in Jewish ritual, prayer occupied him more than many other questions. Needless to say, as an outstanding Torah scholar who was immersed in the world of Torah study and in its teaching, R. Soloveitchik was interested in the formal and halakhic aspects of prayer. This was matched by the considerable extent to which his interest in prayer entered his philosophical writings. As a philosopher, R. Soloveitchik was unquestionably concerned mainly with prayer as reflective of the standing and consciousness of the worshiper, and with prayer as expressing manifold religious ideals. Three different philosophical schools influenced R. Soloveitchik's conception of prayer.

The first school is epistemological idealism: R. Soloveitchik was interested in prayer as a halakhic object, whose foundations are to be uncovered and which is to be constructed as an intellectual product. To this end, he analyzed the components of the halakhic states of prayer. In *Halakhic Man* he grounded this process in post-Kantian epistemological idealism, and mainly in the thought of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. I will discuss this approach mainly in Chapter Ten (below), which examines the conceptions of prayer in Torah scholarship (*lamdanut*).

Secondly, R. Soloveitchik experienced the influence of phenomenology: he examined prayer as an expression of the religious consciousness. Reflected in the act of prayer are the tempestuous processes that characterize the subjective religious consciousness. From this respect, prayer is an objective and practical manifestation of the depths of the dynamic religious consciousness. R. Soloveitchik was influenced mainly by the phenomenological thought of Max Scheler and phenomenological psychotherapy. In practice, revealing the typical structure and processes of the religious consciousness was the primary aim of his works *Worship of the Heart* and *Raʿayonot al Tefillah* [Thoughts on Prayer]. An analysis of these

40 See Moshe Sokolow, *Tefilat Rav: Educating for Prayer, Utilizing the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (the Rav); Curricular and Instructional Guidelines. The Azrieli Papers* (New York: Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education & Administration, Yeshiva University, 2006).

works (see the following chapters) seems to indicate that R. Soloveitchik took a greater interest in the structure of the religious consciousness than in the specific act of prayer. On occasion prayer is evidently an excuse to engage in the religious consciousness. Furthermore, other schools of thought, namely, epistemological idealism and existentialism, are casual and episodic in comparison to the intense phenomenological research that R. Soloveitchik presents. His philosophical preferences are beyond doubt: his intellectual curiosity is substantive, and is almost entirely directed to examining the consciousness of (the act of) prayer, specifically, and the religious consciousness in general.

Thirdly, a major trend that influenced R. Soloveitchik's thought is existentialism. R. Soloveitchik focused on prayer as an expression of man's concrete existential conditions. Prayer represents an authentic, unique, and intransitive existence, relates to man's solitude, creates community, and so forth. The central sources of influence were the thought of Kirkegaard and religious existentialist thought (Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, and others).[41] R. Soloveitchik was also indirectly moved by the writings of classical existentialist thinkers such as Heidegger, but it should be stressed, once again: it is doubtful whether he troubled himself to read these philosophers in the original, and it is more likely that he read summations.[42] Existentialist psychology, which flourished in the United States in the 1950s and the 1960s, also left its mark on R. Soloveitchik's ideas.

The schools mentioned above molded R. Soloveitchik's thought, and patterns associated with them recur when we analyze his discussions. I extensively clarified the place of these philosophical sources in my previous two volumes on R. Soloveitchik's thought.[43] As I mentioned above, R. Soloveitchik's major works from the 1940s were influenced primarily by

41 The circle of Protestant thinkers known as the "theologians of crisis," and especially Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, also significantly influenced R. Soloveitchik's thought. Their thought was close, in some respects, to existentialism. R. Soloveitchik apparently thought highly of them because they provided a basis for Orthodox thought by placing revelation at the center of their theology.

42 At times this presumed reading style adds points of interest and originality, as can be seen in the thought of R. Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, who also relied on abstracts and summations. The acquisition of general knowledge that comes from secondary sources might characterize the thought that emerges from the heart of Orthodoxy, for whom historical revelation is the supreme source of knowledge and direction.

43 See Dov Schwartz, *Religion or Halakha*, trans. Batya Stein (Leiden: Brill, 2007); idem, *From Phenomenology to Existentialism* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

the phenomenology of religion.[44] In any event, R. Soloveitchik did not seek consistency, and at times his thought brought together these three types of sources, often with many additional influences. Still, he did not always mix different types of writing. The topic of prayer is exceptional in this respect, as we shall see in the following chapters of the current work. An examination of the philosophical methods and sources of R. Soloveitchik's discussions of prayer reveals his interest in its anthropological dimension, that is, its contribution to the personality of the worshiper and the environment and community in which he chooses to live his life. For him, the consciousness of prayer is stormy, changes from one person to another, and embodies pure subjectivity and dialectics.[45] Prayer is one of the supreme expressions of religious individualism. Consequently, R. Soloveitchik presented the halakhah as regulating and balancing the subjective consciousness and existence.

R. Soloveitchik's conception of prayer emerged and coalesced from within a wealth of diverse halakhic statements.[46] Stylistically, he incorporated prayer in his oral discourses, in his articles and monographs. In terms of topic, R. Soloveitchik did not limit himself to the *Amidah* prayer. He also analyzed the blessings on pleasures (*birkhot ha-nehanin*), the *Shema*, the chapters of Psalms incorporated in the prayer book, the Yom Kippur prayer of the High Priest, the Torah readings, the penitential *Selichot* prayers, and many additional liturgical texts, which, to his mind, reflected the idea of prayer. He perceived prayer, on the one hand, as a conscious religious act deserving of independent discussion, and on the other, as object-dependent, that is, linked to a specific event (the morning blessings, the blessings of the Torah, the blessing of the new moon, etc.). R. Soloveitchik wrote on prayer in separate articles and monographs, but taken together, his seemingly

44 In the meantime, an examination in a Jewish philosophy course taught by R. Soloveitchik in 1936 has been published by Nathaniel Helfgot, on *Tradition*'s site, *Text and Texture*. Its questions directly relate to the phenomenological conception of religion and its consequences for the Jewish consciousness. All the questions concern the religious consciousness, the religious act, object and subject in the religious consciousness, and the like. See http://text.rcarabbis.org/final-exam-in-jewish-philosophy-of-dr-joseph-soloveitchik-1936.

45 See, for example, Evelyn Underhill, *Worship* (New York: Harper, 1957), 171. R. Soloveitchik created complex structures of conscious tensions, which will be analyzed in depth in the current book. The dialectical structure of prayer was already examined by those writing on R. Soloveitchik's thought. See, for example,Yuval Cherlow, *Joined Together in Your Hand: From Dialectics to Harmony in the Thought of Rabbi Joseph Dov Halevi Soloveitchik* [Hebrew] (Alon Shvut: Tevunot, 1999), 99-107.

46 R. Soloveitchik related to "halakhah" in its broad sense; for him, halakhah includes both practice and idea.