In Praise of Make-Believe

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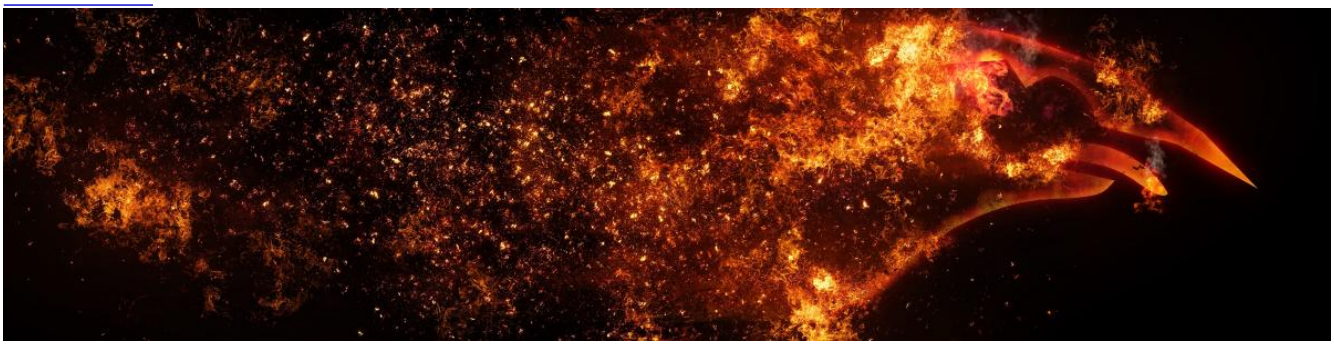

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[1]

Who am I, this worshipper? A person with, I'd like to suppose, a certain integrated unity. I have some understanding of the world, and I have certain desires, both for long-term goals and short-term pleasures, some purely selfish and some other-directed (concern for family, community, nation, humanity), some conscious, some less so. My unity consists of the fact that my actions are reasoned—that I can believe each action is instrumental to some goal in an integrated hierarchy of purposes, and according to some integrated understanding of the world. These purposes and this understanding are jointly at the core of my personal identity. But then what happens when, resolutely committed as I am to mitzvot, I thrice daily recite a petition to God to reinstate the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem (in the fourteenth blessing of *Shemoneh Esreh*)? This simply does not square with my real, reasoned, day-to-day understanding of what the world is like and what it should be like, the understanding that defines who I am. For all its wretched faults, I'm still in favor of sticking to Israeli electoral democracy; in any case, how would David's offspring be identifiable as such; and does anyone imagine David's leadership qualities transmit this far down through the DNA? Or when, on *Sukkot*, I wave a *lulav* and *etrog* in all directions, supposedly to signal my recognition of God's control of the universe and to petition God to curb pernicious storms,[1] do I *really* believe this action could persuade God of my recognition and to tamper with the rain cycle—that because of their symbolic meaning, my flapping them somehow impresses God more persuasively than if I just verbalized my statement? Honestly, I don't. Or when we cover the *challot* at the Shabbat table, putatively so that they won't be embarrassed or envious when we first make *Kiddush* over wine,[2] although I frankly have trouble believing *challot* have emotions? Performing these actions, deeply unconvinced by these putative reasons, yet in some way entertaining the notion that they soundly explain what I'm doing—is this really me, the person identified with this everyday hierarchy of beliefs and purposes? Or do I, when I worship God, just enter some make-believe consciousness, momentarily imagine the *challot* are

covered to save them from embarrassment, and for that moment pretend to be a person who believes it? If so, then it's not me worshipping but the make-believe; I'd be presenting to God a fake self.

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It might be said that my difficulty here is really a non-issue, as it's founded on the specific and disputable view, associated with Maimonides, that each mitzvah serves a purpose. We might assume instead, with Leibowitz (supposedly the polar opposite), that the sole reason for fulfilling any given mitzvah is to worship God, by unquestioningly doing as God has commanded us. If this is correct, and if my putative reason for (e.g.) waving my *lulav* and *etrog* is to petition God for a clement winter, then this is inessential to the real purpose; so that there's no problem if the putative reason is not at one with my real understanding of reality. I'll still be acting rationally by fulfilling the mitzvah just out of my wish to worship God.

But this by no means resolves the difficulty. It may well be true that what really makes us wave a *lulav* and *etrog*—the desire that actually, psychologically motivates us—is simply the fact that this is halakha. We typically first find out what halakha requires of us and do it, and only afterwards learn it's for this or that reason; hence this supposed reason could not really be our motivating reason. By deed, we're Leibowitzians. At the same time, however, upon learning that the reason for waving the *lulav* and *etrog* is to petition God to curb the storms (or, with some accounts, to petition for human fertility), we tell ourselves that this is our reason for doing so, and present ourselves to God as if this is why we're performing this action, though we may have no belief whatever that God is persuaded by our gesturing with these symbols.

I must note also that, contrary to what's often assumed, the Leibowitzian and Maimonidean understandings of mitzvot are perfectly consistent with each other, for they're speaking of different things. Leibowitz refers to *our proper reason for fulfilling a mitzvah*—what should properly motivate our action, or why it's right that we do so—in his view, that we thereby worship God; the Rambam's claim is about the reason it's a mitzvah in the first place, why God has commanded this particular mitzvah. Thus it could be that God has directed me to wave a *lulav* and *etrog* so that I thereby petition God for a better winter; while *my* proper reason for doing so, why it's right that I do, is just that God has (for *His* reason) directed me to do so and I wish to obey Him. The present problem, however, is that it's of the nature of our inquiring human minds to wonder what purpose could be served by our action—what the role is of this action in the large, teleological scheme of things. Even if one's actual motive for waving a *lulav* and *etrog* is one's wish to worship God, one cannot help wondering why God has given us this particular mitzvah, why it's *cosmically right*. One then learns that the putative reason is that we thereby petition God for a good winter, and one embraces this as one's own rationale—*one adopts it as the explanation of one's own action*—even if it doesn't authentically engage with one's real-world beliefs. One thus presents oneself to God in this false mental posture.[3]

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The integrity of the psyche can be especially challenged by prayer. Reciting the liturgy, I must surely be committed to the notion that all this text states is true and right. I might not be aware of what these true and right thoughts and wishes stated by the text specifically are; but insofar as I do know this or that thought or wish it states, I must surely agree with it. For I'd otherwise be presenting myself to God as a person who has this thought and is acting to communicate it, though I at the same time know I have no such thought. What am I to do, then, when I recite the second blessing of *Shemoneh Esreh*, aware it praises God for some day resurrecting the dead, while I have difficult doubts about how true and right this could be?

This awkwardness is exacerbated where, in many *siddurim*, special *kavanot* are provided—interpretations of expressions, annotated into the text, which it's recommended the user reflect upon while reciting them, sometimes literal interpretations but often going imaginatively beyond.[4] The popular Sephardic *siddur, Kavanat haLev*, for instance, is permeated not only with expression-related *kavanot*, but also includes many broader recommendations of *propositions* which one should, in some way, have in mind as one recites certain passages or sections. Just one example here: It recommends that, while reciting *HalleluYa'h halleli* (Psalm 146) in *Pesukey deZimrah*, one direct one's thoughts to the truth that one who trusts in God, Who supports one in all situations, will be happy.[5] To be clear, I certainly have no wish to question whether this is truth; my concern here is just with the question, *if* I somehow don't believe it's truth, must I recite the psalm while directing my thoughts to the idea and *pretending* I believe it? The Artscroll siddur, too, offers recommendations of this sort. An example: Its annotation at the beginning of the second paragraph of *Shema* asks us to "concentrate on accepting all the commandments and the concept of reward and punishment."[6] But I'll of course be unable to concentrate on any such acceptance if I have doubts about the precept of reward and punishment. I could perhaps concentrate on my *faking* of my acceptance of this precept—but I'd not thereby enter the elevated mindset that surely must be a precondition for connecting by prayer to God.

We have techniques for dealing with these difficulties. One familiar recourse is to *reinterpret* the problematic idea: to assume, for instance, that what we really mean when we say that God will raise the dead is that God will reawaken us from our spiritual slumber; or that our reference to the Davidic dynasty is our plea to restore the status of Jerusalem as a beacon of justice to the nations of the world. But there is some dishonesty in this. For the text has a fairly clear, literal meaning; it's that literal meaning we're stating if we're stating anything. (I can tell myself all I like that what I mean when I say "It's a sunny day" is that it's fortunate that it's raining, but if the perceivable context and assumptions of my audience don't make this clear, then that's not what I'll have communicated.) This is a meaning largely determined by its traditional understanding—the meaning rabbinically authorized and (more significantly) that this text has conveyed in its millennia of usage. We admittedly have some interpretative leeway, but our interpretative hypothesis will require justification. This may enable us to build on the received meaning, recognize some subtle distinctions hitherto tacitly assumed, but not to arbitrarily replace the meaning of this text with another, just because it better suits our temperament. To ignore the literal, traditional understanding of the resurrection of the dead is simply to sidestep the issue.

Then it may seem the difficulty is overcome insofar as one achieves the *kavanah*[7] one must aim for—the mental state ideally entered—when praying. It's our common understanding that this *kavanah* consists, in part at least, of *thinking about* the meaning of the text as one recites it. It seems to us even a truism that my reciting the second blessing could not be worth much if my consciousness is not, during those moments, in some way directed (in part) at the idea of the resurrection of the dead. This indeed seems to be the instruction of *Shulhan Arukh* when it writes that in praying one must "direct one's heart to the meaning of the words one issues from one's mouth…."[8] Now, if this means just that I must try *imagining* such a reality—just picturing or, in some way, *consciously representing the meaning* of the text—then it won't solve the problem of my seeming deceitfulness. For to picture in my consciousness the resurrection of the dead is not to *believe it will happen*. (I can conjure an image of pink elephants flying over the horizon without believing this will ever happen.) Something more is needed than just picturing the dead arising. Perhaps, then, I must try entering a mental state that is *subjectively identical to my having this belief*; something like imagining this event, but together with some sense of *affirming* that it will happen. It seems to me in fact that many practitioners of prayer suppose, albeit in some unclear way, that what they're attempting is something much like this. Accordingly, while reciting the blessing, I'd try inducing a state of consciousness which, from the inside, seems just like that of inhabiting a reality in which God will someday raise the dead. I'd need for those moments (among other things), to become oblivious to my ongoing, lucid conviction that if this event ever occurred it would be geopolitically and ecologically catastrophic, but also that the

prospect of it happening is (fortunately), unintelligible. In what bodies would the dead arise? Where on this earth would they all live? Would they remember who they were and their past biographies and, if not, then in what sense are they those same individuals? Ignoring the contrary thoughts I really have, I'd indulge in this blurred, *as if* conviction;[9] I'd become a momentary mimicry of a person who believes in the resurrection of the dead. For that half minute, I'd present to God not myself but, like a stage actor, this alien persona.

In that case, perhaps what I must do here is more than just adjust my consciousness so that it *internally seems* to me I have the belief. What's required, possibly, is that, by some special mental exertion, I induce an *actual state* of believing in (e.g.) the precept of reward and punishment. But this is all the more impossible. To believe that good deeds are rewarded and sinfulness is punished is to be configured with a certain *pervasive understanding*. This view of the world, of life, and of our relation with God, would need to be integrated with many more of my beliefs. It would need to penetrate into my thoughts about the unhappiness of good people and happiness of the wicked, of life after death and the possibility of a posthumous balancing out, of the Holocaust and the terror of innocents, and plenty more. It would need to govern the way I'd talk about and actively relate to these and many other matters. But there's just no way I could, in those moments of my reciting the second paragraph of *Shema*, transform my thoughts so radically that I could be said to actually, if only briefly, believe in this principle. It would, moreover, need to be the way I think about these things not just during those moments but fairly *enduringly*: it won't really have been my belief in those moments if, a few minutes later, having undergone no process of reassessing those associated truths, and without encountering any opinion-changing evidence, I rediscover myself as a person with no such belief.[10] While to induce a seeming-belief appears pointless, to induce an actual belief is impossible.

One further possibility: that my standing before God in prayer does not prerequire my accepting as truth all that's stated by the liturgy, but is my way of acquiring that acceptance. The purpose of prayer, accordingly, is self-development: my *kavanah* is my engaging in a continuing project—even a life-long endeavor—of *nurturing my real and lasting acceptance* of the vision and agenda espoused by the text.[11] Day by day, through prayer, I'd incrementally strengthen my commitment to the agenda listed in *Shemoneh Esreh* and to the vision of the liturgy as a whole, thus bringing my religious personality into shape. I'd do so specifically by, during each session, *rehearsing* my commitment—inducing a mental state *resembling* commitment—until I eventually become *genuinely* committed.

Surely, however, my best way of nurturing (with the Artscroll example) an acceptance of all the commandments is to meditate upon sound reasons for this acceptance; to so meditate in some protracted, penetrating manner that articulates with my broader understanding of the world and my life-goals—to thus sustain a process of integrating my whole personality into this acceptance of all the mitzvot and divesting myself of whatever obstructive attitudes I may have. This perhaps consisting of, in short, learning Torah—with particular focus on the propositions stated by the liturgy itself. Whereas it's hard to see what that brief pretense of accepting the meaning of the text, which I may muster in the course of prayer itself, will contribute to this project. Even more problematic: If the purpose of my reciting (e.g.) *Shemoneh Esreh* is self-improvement—as opposed to addressing God—then it's hard to see why this should count as prayer.

[4]

On the face of it, then, worship demands not make-believe but truthfulness. That the dead will arise must (we'd naturally assume), be the actual belief of this person I *really am and continue to be*, not merely something which, by fabricating a false state of consciousness, I can momentarily *imagine* I believe. Yet we seem to commonly proceed as if there's also a merit—a certain *religious piety*—in sustaining some such mental fabrication; as though, while it's ideal that we really believe in the resurrection of the dead and in reward and punishment and accept fully the yoke of mitzvot, there's failing that also value in fleetingly entering a mental state which *resembles* that of being enveloped and

animated by this vision. This seems so commonly and instinctively our method, that we should perhaps wonder if it could somehow really be inherent to the nature of worship.

Indeed, it's only insofar as we allow ourselves to indulge in some make-believe that so much of the color and substance of Jewish life is at all possible. Consider Shabbat candles. One often-cited reason for lighting them is that they ensure domestic well-being.[12] In earlier epochs, of course, it was realistic that the Shabbat lamp was conducive to well-being in the home, in preventing members of the family from bumping into things or each other, or from tripping over and sustaining personal injury. It probably also thereby created a calmer and more secure atmosphere and reduced irritability and domestic strife. Shabbat lights were thus materially functional in achieving these ends. But this doesn't apply when, in our day, the light added in the home by Shabbat candles is typically negligible. The meaning of candles has thus shifted, from being *directly instrumental* in enabling domestic well-being, to acting as a *remembrance* to a time when it did.

Then what goes on in our minds as we now light or observe Shabbat candles? Some of us, possibly associating them with their erstwhile functional meaning, doubtless perceive them as potently *symbolic* of peace and well-being. But the difference between symbolic and functional meaning is easily blurred. I suspect that many of us, learning of this connection to domestic peace, retain the notion that they somehow, in our day too, have a power to achieve it by operating through some instrumental mechanism—though clearly not by contributing physically to the illumination of the home, nor by any other mundane process. Hence we're open to unearthly ideas; on one well-received view, the twin candles induce domestic peace by representing the souls of husband and wife.[13] Now, I stress that I don't presume to have anything of interest to say about the plausibility of this or any of the many extant rationales for Shabbat candle-lighting.[14] I mean just to point to the ambivalence with which we're able to embrace our favored reason. For sure, not all Shabbat candle-lighters and observers subscribe, in particular, to the idea that Shabbat candles are imbued with a peace-inducing force—but some of us do. And possibly many of us do believe this literally and unequivocally. But many of us at least, though not *really* giving this idea clearheaded credence, do nonetheless apportion it mental space of some kind. We don't believe, really, that our presenting this symbol somehow persuades God more effectively to preserve peace in our home than our verbalized petition—nor that it achieves this peace by bringing together the two souls through some metaphysical harmonizing magnetism. Yet the idea that Shabbat candles induce domestic well-being could well be what we uncritically reply with if asked why we light them. Some such notion, it seems, can loom large for us and can act as an explanation to ourselves of why we're acting. This account and others like it are discontinuous with our regular, rational, workaday relation to the world—yet they insinuate themselves centrally into our experience of Shabbat candles.

Shabbat candles also impart their character to the experience of Shabbat in a quite enveloping way. Anyone who's experienced their Friday night glow knows the sense that it infuses the home with a nearly palpable and magical substance.[15] Shabbat candles are among those focal archetypes that spill their color over Shabbat and over Jewish life altogether, producing a kind of higher-order overlay. Possibly some symbolic meaning bleeds through this overlay and injects additional vigor, but there's also something irreducible—I'm tempted to say primal—about it; the overlay subsists independently of any symbolism. Looking at the two candles burning, we see not only these two physical objects in this confined physical space. We sense they are surrounded by an aura of meaning, an almost visible dimension that comes into being just when two otherwise plain sticks of combusting wax are, with the reciting of a blessing, exalted to the role of Shabbat candles. This sense derives, perhaps, from our knowing this ritual is ancestrally bequeathed, charged with some meaning possibly apprehended only by God, sanctified and delivered to us by millennia of practice. But the explanation doesn't lessen the fact that the secret, sacred dimension we thus glimpse can seem to us more real than the candlesticks and table they stand on.

But do I *really* believe in any such dimension? Unfortunately not—I'm too rational and too much a realist for that—at least not in the same *yom hol* way I believe in metallic candlesticks and wooden tables. Yet it is a real part of my world; I do not quite believe, in the fullest sense of *believing*, in its existence, but I do have a cognitive relation to it of *some* sort.

[5]

At least since Maimonides' formulation of his Thirteen Core Principles of Faith, it's been explicitly part of our religiosity that we—stating this broadly—have certain beliefs.[16] These are often beliefs which we don't receive passively, which are not forced on us by the evidence of our senses or as the logical implication of our everyday understanding, and which we therefore need to actively contrive to acquire. Alongside the praxis of mitzvot, the effort we make in inducing these cognitions is *part of our repertoire of worshipful acts*. Success is not straightforward; Maimonides' *Guide* was written on the premise that its reader was confounded by doubts that had to be seriously addressed, as well as that certain matters are necessarily beyond the comprehension of the human intellect.[17] Before Maimonides, Saadya Gaon had recognized that, as humans are created beings, human understanding is *necessarily* laden with doubts, for "the very fact of their being creatures necessitates their entertaining uncertainties and illusions."[18] Saadya saw doubt as a productive force, the engine of a dialectical, reasoned process ideally culminating in conviction; that ideal state, if ever achieved, would be permanent. But it meanwhile inevitably remains, in Saadya's view, our *normal* predicament to face God, en route to that ideal, with a faith that's stricken with doubt—and with a constant worshipful obligation to overcome that doubt.[19]

It's become immeasurably more difficult in our age to believe what we're obliged to believe. We expect our ordinary understanding of the world or even science to corroborate a thought before we accept it, and doubt fills the vacuum where it does not. It may comfort us that, in a certain respect, the collapse of certainty is our blessing: insofar as we're compelled into certainty by logical inference or clear evidence or simply an incapacity for doubt, our reaching to God is not a free act of worship; we're thus all the more able to manifest the love drawing us to God by overpassing our doubt with this freedom—the more difficult the doubt, the greater our worship.[20] As R. J. Sacks has said, "Faith is not certainty, but the courage to live with uncertainty."[21]

The question remains, however, whether we can deal with our doubt, not by dishonestly dismissing it with false argument or ignoring it, but by acknowledging it, incorporating it, and *defying* it. Nor by fabricating a state of consciousness in which we lose sight of our real selves and enter an alien identity, but rather—and this could be the key—by somehow *incorporating this state of consciousness into our own person*. Could we somehow rise toward God by adopting a strange mental posture which, though ungrounded in our understanding of the world, *leaves us nonetheless able to recognize ourselves* —even as we're then hovering, vertiginously distanced from firm ground, unfamiliarly contorted?

[6]

How drably unholy our religious lives would be without this capacity to mentally inhabit a dislocated reality. Much as if literature and theater were not able to likewise draw us into blissfully abandoning ourselves to impossible worlds; or if, at the cinema, we could not be seduced uncritically by even the most outrageously impossible premise into the ridiculous universe it implies (where, e.g., a 12-year-old boy suddenly turns into his adult self;[22] a woman formed from clay is endowed with superhuman strength, durability, flight, and more;[23] a man is eternally doomed to waking up every morning in the day that just ended[24]). The possibility of journeying into an impossible world—one held together by

a matrix of symbolism—gives meaning to the possible. Not that we become convinced that this is reality: we accommodate it or, we might say, compartmentalize it, alongside the world in which we parked the car, bought the tickets and squinted to our seats—and to which we'll presently reemerge, edified, enlarged, uplifted by our journey. The alluring aura of Shabbat candles, our reverie of the dead arising, or any make-believe rationale for this or that mitzvah, are likewise our openings to an odyssey through a transcendent, sacred reality; we go there, looking to carry back sanctity to our everyday. Equivocation of this sort is part of the richness of our religious lives.

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Peter Lipton, a leading figure in the Philosophy of Science, was until his sudden untimely death in 2007, intensely preoccupied by a concern to accommodate his own progressive Judaism in his broader world view, particularly with his scientific realism. There are clear inconsistencies, he acknowledged, between the claims of our religious texts and science. He argued,[25] however, that this does not force the scientist to reject outright (say) the biblical narrative. In fact, well-grounded scientific understanding can sometimes contradict even the most fundamental tenets of our common sense understanding of the world. The physicist Arthur Eddington pointed out that he simultaneously has two incompatible understandings of a table. It's incontrovertibly the solid, substantial, colored, permanent object holding up (in the case of this table before me) my computer and elbows; but it's at the same time the scientifically understood table, comprising sparsely scattered electric charges rushing about at great speed, holding things up by the impacts they jointly, probabilistically impart, totaling less than a billionth of the bulk of the table of our commonsense conception. Lipton invoked a theory about the nature of science and knowledge developed by Bas van Fraassen, known as *constructive empiricism*, the strength of which is its ability to sustain conflicting scientific theories (and hence dialogue between proponents of different theories before and after scientific revolutions). This account of science takes each theory's claims as *literal* descriptions, though not all of these will be believed as *true* descriptions, even by their proponents. A scientific claim, on this view, can meet with a cognitive attitude different from belief, an *acceptance*, which "is not just partial belief; it is also a kind of commitment to use the resources of the theory."[26] Thus a scientist may be committed to a subatomic understanding of the table, not fully *believing* in that understanding, but, in the suggestive term of this account, *immersed* in it. Lipton suggests a kind of equivalence between scientific and religious theories, in that where either contradicts our ineliminable everyday beliefs, it may elude belief, but is accessible to this different cognitive relation of immersion. "To immerse oneself in a theory is to enter into the world of that theory and to work from within it. This is not to believe that the theory is true, but it is to enter imaginatively into its 'world'."[27] A scientist might, for instance, take literally the Genesis account of Creation, possibly not believing it's true, but immersing herself in that world. The religious text can thus work for her as "a tool for thought, as a way of thinking about our world."[28] Tradition can in this way figure in our thinking, as a means for better understanding our lives and projects.

Lipton describes, in these terms of acceptance and immersion, what I've spoken of as our indulgence in *as if* belief. But what's most important here is that he also *validates* our doing so. He does so by showing it's of a kind with the attitude to scientific theory which a scientist is often forced to adopt. Despite evidence and firm theoretical grounds for believing in such-and-such a reality, that reality doesn't have, for the scientist, quite the solidity of our common-sense world. The story of the subatomic electrical space of the table is well-grounded; the scientist is fully justified in believing it; yet the sense of its reality can never be as cogent as that of the solid table of common sense. Our imaginary depictions of events in which the dead arise, or in which twin candles literally pressure together the souls of husband and wife, may likewise cognitively animate us as if they're real—though never with the same force as the realities of death and wax and flames. We sense even a *rightness* about these depictions, that a certain *piety* is conferred, by our inherited tradition, upon our upholding

them; although we know, looking out again at our objective world, that they have no basis here.[29]

It's the incorrigible nature of many of us to critically assess ideas put our way and so to relate skeptically even to certain foundational tenets. But we may have an equally incorrigible sense that it's our religious duty to accept whole the vision delivered by tradition—that we have no business questioning it and that, by sustaining our doubts, we're *betraying our pact with God*. This is the conflict inherent to *homo religiosus*, familiar from R. J. B. Soloveitchik's elaboration, between autonomy and submissiveness: between our creative, scientific, political activism and, pitched against this, our craving to overcome existential loneliness by quietly and uncritically attaching ourselves to God—specifically by sacrificing ourselves unprotestingly to the demands of halakha.[30] But the conflict, it's seen here, is not just practical—it extends also to our cognitive obligations. It's between, on the one hand, our psychic integrity and, on the other hand, our submissive self-immersion in a make-believe. We're *aware*, as we indulge in this make-believe, that it's a hiatus in the fabric of the real world; but also that, by our ambivalence, *we sanctify our whole world*.

[8]

There is some danger in this. Make-believe can lead us, through the pathway of tradition, back to God. But this must never permit us to lose sight of the divide between what belongs properly in our here and now, and what is not of this present reality. There are mitzvot that were early on rendered inoperative fiction by rabbinical interpretation in a world that had already vastly changed (such as *ben sorer u'moreh*, a parent's initiation of the public execution of his or her wayward, rebellious son[31]), but which continue to provide content to our religious imagination. The danger lies in the risk of upholding make-believe as a directive for some real-world action which, realistically, is inadmissible. The recent Israeli movie, *Yamim Nora'im*,[32] about the assassination in 1995 of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin, reminded those who experienced this dark, traumatic moment of Israeli history how a blurring of the difference between what is real and what is make-believe could authorize evil. The movie shows the assassin going from rabbi to rabbi in search of halakhic consent to murder. The justification he sought would come from the principle of *din mosser*, the debated meaning of which revolves around a right to murder a Jew in order to prevent him from life-threateningly informing on another Jew to non-Jewish authorities for what is not Jewishly an offense. In the movie at least, no rabbi *explicitly* granted him that right, but too many failed to unequivocally deny it. Arrogantly swaggering on the flimsy divide of ambivalence, they spoke of *din mosser* in a broad halakhic language, as so tightly constrained that it's all but obsolete, but at the same time, with artful obscurity, insidiously invited their inquirer to move to its realization—with abominable consequence.

Our religious consciousness may essentially involve, not an ability to find internal consistency between contradictory understandings, but the mental versatility to accommodate inconsistencies. We have warrant to sanctify our world with make-believe, but must always remain conscious of our rational and realistic scheme of things, carefully measuring that make-believe against a humane, responsible code of conduct.[33]

[1] BT *Sukkah*, 37b.

[2] *Tur, Orah Hayyim* 271:9.

[3] Admittedly, Leibowitz maintains not only that worship is our proper reason for fulfilling mitzvoth, but also that "Most of the mitzvoth are meaningless except as expressions of worship. They have no utility in terms of satisfaction of human needs." ("Religious praxis", in Y. Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State*, ed. E. Goldman. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, 3-29, p. 16.) But he does not deny that *some* mitzvoth have purposes. In any case, if it were true that *no* mitzvoth really serve purposes, then all the worse for our adopted pretense to God that we're acting for their

putative purposes. Cf. also Leibowitz's own discussion of this supposed conflict, in "The reading of the *Shema*," *op. cit*. 37–47, pp. 41–42.

[4] A rich tradition of *kavanot*, associated with the mysticism of R. Isaac Luria, and largely developed by the eighteenth-century Yemenite Kabbalist, the Rash"ash—Rabbi Shalom Shar'abi—assigns often-esoteric meanings to the expressions. This method is closely tied to a theory involving such things as the elevation of holy sparks trapped in our world since Creation, and correct speech acting as an energy that unites the physical with the spiritual dimensions.

[5] *HaSiddur HaMephurash Kavanat HaLev*. Petach Tikvah: Machon Shira Hadashah, 5774. p. 111.

[6] *Siddur Kol Ya'akov*. New York: Menorah, 1990, p. 92.

[7] Though "*kavanot*," as the term appears above, is literally the plural form of "*kavanah*," their meanings here are different though related. The *kavanah* of prayer also differs from the *kavanah*, or motivating intention, with which one ideally performs a mitzvah.

[8] *Orah Hayyim*, 98:1. With this, I believe we've gone drastically wrong in identifying *kavanah* as just in some way thinking about meaning. Contrastingly, by far the most thematic explication of *kavanah* in prayer in rabbinic literature is *awareness of the immediate presence of God*. Thus BT *Berakhot*, 28b: "When you pray, know before Whom you stand." *Orah Hayyim, loc. cit*.; Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Ahavah, Tefilah*, 4:16; R. J. B. Soloveitchik, *Lonely Man of Faith*, New York: Doubleday, 1965, pp. 53–54.: "Prayer is basically an awareness of man finding himself in the presence of and addressing himself to his Maker, and to pray has one connotation only: to stand before God."; also R. J. B. Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart* (New York: Toras HoRav/Ktav, 2003), p.100; and A. J. Heschel, *Man's Quest for God*, (Sante Fe: Aurora, 1998), p. 61.

[9] R. Prof. David Shatz wonders in this vein about what he calls the *Yizkor Jew*—someone who's distant from practice, presumably also from the underlying beliefs, but unfailingly attends synagogue for *Yizkor*: "It's not something the person believes literally. What is happening? Is it that at that moment the person believes the soul is in the next world? Is it that they've started living now in an imaginary thought world?…" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z91Qp_J7o0k, at 45:00.

[10] Thus R. J. B. Soloveitchik: "The Halakhah has never looked upon prayer as a separate magical gesture in which man may engage without integrating it into the total pattern of his life. God hearkens to prayer if it rises from a heart contrite over a muddled and faulty life and from a resolute mind ready to redeem this life. In short, only the committed person is qualified to pray and to meet God." *Lonely Man of Faith*, *op. cit*, p. 63. Cf. also Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart*, pp. 164–166.

[11] This is akin to a line of thought beginning at least with R. Yoseph Albo, *Sefer Ha'Ikarim*, treatise 4, chs. 16–18, that the purpose of prayer is not to persuade God to grant the petitions, but to bring it about, by one's reciting them, that one incrementally reshapes one's thinking in accordance with the vision of the world they define. This view seems in turn indebted to the Ramban's position on the purpose of at least some mitzvoth, that they cultivate a better moral character of the agent. Cf. his commentary on Deuteronomy 22: 6. Cf. also R. J. B. Soloveitchik, "Redemption, Prayer and Talmud Torah," *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought*, 17, vol. 2, 1978, pp. 55–72, p. 66; and A. J. Heschel, *op. cit*, pp. 32–33: "It is the liturgy that teaches us what to pray for. It is through the words of the liturgy that we discover what moves us unawares, what is urgent in our lives, what in us is related to the ultimate."

[12] Deriving from Rava's insistence, BT *Shabbat* 23b, that light on Friday night is more important than both Hannukah lights and even *Kiddush*, because it instills *shelom beyto*—well-being (or peace), in one's home. Cf. also the Rambam's variant on this, by which light enables us to fulfil the mitzvah of being joyful on Shabbat (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Shabbat*, Chap. 5), as well as, through our Shabbat joy, that of honoring Shabbat (ch. 30). This is distinct from the familiar reason for lighting specifically (at least) *two* candles, i.e., that they represent the two aspects of the mitzvah of Shabbat, *zakhor* and *shamor* (*Orah Hayyim*, 263:1).

[13] Cf. e.g., https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/484176/jewish/Why-Light-Two-or-More-Shabbat-Candles.htm. This builds imaginatively on the identification of flame with soul, suggested at BT *Taanit* 27b.

[14] A brief gloss of the Web reveals very numerous reasons on offer for lighting Shabbat candles, some more firmly rooted in mainstream sources than others. Chabad is especially productive in providing these.

[15] As beautifully stated by Ismar Schorsch: "And to this day, the lighting of two white Shabbat candles, one for *zahor* …and one for *shamor*…each with a single wick, is how we imbue the mundane space of our homes with a touch of eternity. The journey back to Judaism often begins with this transformative act. Its disarming simplicity and aesthetic power open the door to a wellspring of blessings for those with the resolve to proceed. To alter our inner state we need to modify our surroundings. That is the function of ritual." http://www.jtsa.edu/the-meaning-of-the-shabbat-candles.

[16] On the move from an impressionistic grasp of fundamental tenets in Torah, to the more discursive philosophical approach of Maimonides, see Howard Wettstein, *The Significance of Religious Experience* (New York: OUP, 2012), especially "Theological Impressionism," pp. 78-102 in that volume.

[17] *Guide to the Perplexed*, 1:31–32.

[18] *Book of Beliefs and Convictions*, Introduction 3.

[19] As R. N. Lamm states the point in his extensive discussion of the dynamic aspect of doubt, in "Faith and doubt," *Tradition* 9, 1967, pp. 14–51: "Cognitive doubt…is a violent struggle in the attainment of *emet*. I begin by believing despite doubt; I end by believing all the more firmly because of doubt" (27–28).

[20] Franz Rosenzweig quips that if not the Rhine ran through Frankfurt but the mythical Sambatyon River, which, according to Midrash, stopped flowing on Shabbat, then the entire Frankfurt Jewish community would be forced by this evidence to keep Shabbat; but that just the Rhine flows there shows that God does not appreciate observance founded on certainty instead of freedom. (*Star of Redemption*, p. 294 in the Hebrew edition, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 5753; cited in Gilad Beeri, "*Beyisurin*", https://www.etzion.org.il/he/???????) I thank Martin Lockshin for directing me to this reference.

[21] http://rabbisacks.org/the-courage-to-live-with-uncertainty/

[22] *Big*, with Tom Hanks.

[23] *Wonder Woman*, with Gal Gadot.

[24] *Groundhog Day*, with Bill Murray.

[25] P. Lipton, "Science and religion: the immersion solution," in J. Cornwell & M. McGhee (eds.), *Philosophers and God: At the Frontiers of Faith and Reason*. Continuum, 2009, pp. 31–46.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 44.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 41.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 44.

[29]An accommodation of a religious outlook into a broader, scientific understanding of the world, by some cognitive relation different from belief, may be what Samuel Belkin had in mind when, in his inaugural address as president of Yeshiva University, he explained his vision of *Torah u'madda*. "If we seek the blending of science and religion and the integration of secular knowledge with sacred wisdom, then it is not in the subject matter of these fields but rather within the personality of the individual that we hope to achieve the synthesis." ("The truly higher education," in S. Belkin, *Essays in Traditional Jewish Thought*, NY: Philosophical Library, 1956, 9-18. p. 17) The ideal of *Torah u'madda* seems to have become, in Belkin's watch, not necessarily an attempt to find logical consistency between secular and Torah understandings of the world, but the cultivation of an individual able to accommodate contrary ideas.

[30] As described in *Lonely Man of Faith*, *op. cit*., chs. I–II, founded in the conflict between Adam A of Genesis 1, commissioned to conquer the earth, and Adam B of Genesis 2, submissive to the Covenant.

[31] Deuteronomy 21: 18–21. According to BT *Sanhendrin* 71a, this was *never* applied.

[32] By Yaron Zilberman, translated as *Incitement*.

[33] I'm grateful to R. Prof. Martin Lockshin, and to R. Dr. Marc Angel, for commenting on earlier drafts of this article.