

SACRED AND PROFANE:

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***Kodesh* and *Chol* in World Perspectives**

Delivered as a *yahrtzeit shi'ur* in memory of R. Soloveitchik's father, this little-known essay may well be the Rav's most important. In developkng the concepts of *kodesh* and *chol*, the Rav offers a philosophy of slavery and freedom through his understading of time-consciousness in Judaism.

TIME CONSCIOUSNESS

The other dimension of principle of *kedushah* is *zeman*, "time consciousness, "Bergson's¹³ tremendous influence upon modern philosophy is partly due to the fact that he formulated a new interpretation of time, the so-called pure "*durée*," duration. He contrasted this concept of time with that of the physicist, which is pure chronometry, time quantified and frozen in geometric space, time associated with space in motion and, in modern physics, with the time-space continuum.

Qualitative and Quantitative Time

Thus, Bergson speaks of fleeting time, living and immeasurable, beyond the scientist's mesh. No clock can be applied to this qualitative time, which is transient, intangible, and evanescent, and, on the other hand, creative, dynamic, and self-emerging. In this "time" there are no milestones separating past, present, and future. It is not unidimensional, as is physical time, but multidimensional, compenetrating and overlapping past, present, and future.

With this qualitative time, Bergson contrasts quantitative time. This is time measured by the clock, by the rotation of the Earth on its axis, and by its revolution about the sun. This "time" is uniform, empty and noncreative.

While Bergson limited himself to a philosophical and metaphysical analysis of time, we may proceed further and posit this dualistic time concept as the prime norm of human life that carries with it practical implications and ethical aspects. Man encounters the alternative of molding time in a quantitative or qualitative pattern.

There are some people who live in quantitative, dead time. They measure time by the clock and by the calendar. For them there is no merger of the past and the future. The present itself is a lost moment. A year is endless. How much more so centuries and tens of centuries! These people are deprived of an historical consciousness; for history is the living experience of time.

The man, however, who lives in qualitative time has a different criterion of the experience of time than the quantitative experience. He measures time not by *length-extensio* but by pure quality, creativity, and accomplishment. While for the man with a quantitative apprehension all fractions of time are equal because all represent physical "t's"; for the man of qualitative apprehension, there is no equality among temporal fractions of time. Moments are heterogeneous. One may live an entire life span quantitatively, not having lived even a moment qualitatively. And, contrariwise, one may have lived a moment quantitatively and have lived through an eternity qualitatively.¹⁴ The alternative is up to man himself. *The time norm is the highest criterion by which man, life, and actions should be judged.*

Oriental history has given us the best example of such an alternative. Oriental culture and technology is much older than that of Europe or America. Yet qualitatively America is — as regards technology certainly — older than China, for America has created more in one hundred fifty years than China in five thousand. History is concerned not with quantity but with accomplishment. History ultimately is not a composite of calendar time but a qualitative living entity. Wherein did the Orient fail until recently in keeping "time" with the Occident? There is one answer: in the differing time consciousness of these two civilizations. China apprehended time as a fact while America envisaged it as a norm.

Those historians who fell in love with the Orient for its Stoic calmness and indifference to the passage of time and who felt the breath of eternity there have misapprehended time and eternity. Eternity is to be conceived not in quantitative uniformity but in qualitative creativity and mutability.

What is true for entire cultures is equally true for individual personalities. There are some people who are always "time-thirsty." These are others, however, who are "time-saturated." One who fathoms the spirit of time becomes a *yotzer olamoth*, a creative personality. The problem of the creative personality today is one of time; it is too short. The finite character of time is one of the most crying tragedies of men's life. Yet, if a man lives by quantitative measurements, the problem of time is reversed; he is surfeited by it.

The individual who measures time in purely quantitative terms is an essentially passive personality. He is a recipient and not a giver, a creature rather than a creator. His prototype is the slave. The slave has no time consciousness of his own, for he has no time of his own. The awareness of ¹⁵הזמן גרמא, the full intuition of the qualitative moment, is alien to him. Absolved by homogenous, changeable time, he lacks affinity for a duty whose execution depends solely on time, on a "now" and "not later"; upon a "today" and "not tomorrow"; upon a night whose dawn cancels the opportunity, upon a day whose sunset eliminates the possibility. He does not understand the full impact of such dicta as "אם לא עכשיו אימת?" ("If not now, then when?") [Avoth 1:14] [and] "אם שיחקה לך השעה אל תחמיצנה" ("If the hour beckons, do not delay").¹⁶

From Slavery to Freedom

The basic criterion which distinguishes freeman from slave is the kind of relationship each has with time and its experience. Bondage is identical with passive intuition and reception of an empty, formal time stream.

When the Jews were delivered from the Egyptian oppression and Mosheh rose to undertake the almost impossible task of metamorphosing a tribe of slaves into a "nation of priests" [Shemoth 19:6], he was told by G-d that the path leading from the holiday of Pesach to Shavu'oth, from initial liberation to consummate freedom (*Gillui Shechinah*, Revelation), leads through the medium of time. The commandment of *sefirah*¹⁷ was entrusted the Jew; the wondrous test of counting forty-nine successive days was put to him. These forty-nine days must be whole. If one day be missed, the act of numeration is invalidated.

A slave who is capable of appreciating each day, of grasping its meaning and worth, of weaving every thread of time into a glorious fabric, quantitatively stretching over the period of seven weeks but qualitatively forming the warp and woof of centuries of change, is eligible for Torah. He has achieved freedom.

We may say then that qualitative-time consciousness is comprised of two elements: First, the appreciation of the enormous implications inherent in the fleeting moments of the present. No fraction of time, however infinite, should slip through the fingers, left unexploited; for eternity may depend upon the brief moment. Secondly, the vicarious experience, while in the present, of the past and future. No distance, however removed, should separate one's time consciousness from the dawn of one's group or from the eschatological destiny¹⁸ and infinite realization of one's cherished ideals.

NOTES

13. *Ed. Note:* To understand R. Soloveitchik's identification with French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and his dynamic view of time, a brief historical overview of time philosophy is in order:

The first serious analysis of time is found in Aristotle's *Physics*, in which he asks, "In what sense, if any, can time be said to exist?" For in his day, only compounds of form and matter were believed to exist in an unqualified sense. Aristotle therefore defines time as "the number of movements with respect to 'before' and 'after,' motion being a property of substance. He further deduces the continuity of time from that of motion, which is continuous because each indivisible moment links past and future by terminating the former and initiating the latter. According to Aristotle, then, the present has no duration; it is but a knife-edged transition between past and future. Indeed, as Augustine later noted, if the present were of finite duration, it would be subdivisible into earlier and later parts, whereas "earlier" and "later" cannot coexist in the present.

Owing to both Augustine's concept of a zero-duration present and the contemporary trend toward physics-based descriptions of the real or subjective world, philosophy approaches time as a psychological phenomenon. Since time is infinite, we can measure it only as a certain expanse of memory. Our perception of time therefore differs from reality.

Bergson rejects both Augustine's instantaneous present and — along with other twentieth-century metaphysicians — the premise that reality corresponds not to our intuitive grasp of it but to its scientific formulation. Bergson finds a springboard for his ideas in Zeno's Paradoxes of Motion. Though devised some 2,400 years ago, these four paradoxes remain influential in philosophy and science. The Arrow Paradox assumes that, every instant of its flight, an arrow occupies a space equal to itself. By reducing flight to a sequence of static positions, Zeno argues against the existence of motion, since motion cannot possibly consist of a series of immobilities. He then seeks to prove that motion would be equally impossible if time were indivisible (i.e., "continuous," as opposed to the "discrete time" posited by the Arrow Paradox). Thus, the Dichotomy Paradox dictates that before traversing any distance, one must travel half that distance. Similarly, before navigating that half, one must cover half of *it*, and so on ad infinitum. Consequently, to travel anywhere in finite time, one must complete an infinite number of movements, which is impossible. Finally, the Achilles Paradox states that even if motion exists, the fastest runner (Achilles) can never overtake the slowest (the tortoise). For Achilles must first reach the tortoise's starting point, but every time he takes a step, so does the tortoise. Since any distance contains an infinite number of subdistances — albeit finite ones — the distance itself must be infinite. Achilles therefore cannot traverse the distance between himself and the tortoise in a finite time.

Zeno's paradoxes were first challenged in the early nineteenth century, when it was shown that a distance is finite, not infinite. Bergson further exposed the absurdity of the Arrow Paradox, according to which an arrow is motionless even while it is clearly moving. He attributed this illusion of immobility to the fact that science fails to intuit the actual flight of the arrow, measuring only its trajectory once movement has begun. Its actual flight obviously consists of one simple, continuous stroke.

Thus, concludes Bergson, time is not static but dynamic, with past, present and future merging into one continuous flow. Given its elasticity, the Bergsonian model figures prominently in R. Soloveitchik's formulation of Halachic time consciousness.

14. *Ed. Note:* "There is one who acquires his world [to come] in one hour, and there is one who acquires his world over several years" (*Avodah Zarah* 10b [and 17a]).
15. *Ed. Note:* See *Kiddushin* 29a.
16. *Ed. Note:* Cf. *Pesachim* 112a.
17. *Ed. Note:* See *VaYikra* 23:15.
18. *Ed. Note:* Cf. "...anyone who teaches his son Torah, Scripture regards him as though he has taught him [his son], *his* son, and *his* grandson until the end of all the generations" (*Kiddushin* 30a) and "Anyone who teaches his grandson Torah, Scripture regards him as though he has received it from Mount Sinai" (*ibid.*).