

REVEALMENT AND CONCEALMENT IN LANGUAGE

EVERY DAY, consciously and unconsciously, human beings scatter heaps of words to the wind, with all their various associations; few men indeed know or reflect on what these words were like in the days when they were at the height of their power. Many of these words came into the world only after difficult and prolonged birth pangs endured by many generations. Others flashed like sudden lightning to illuminate, with one leap, a complete world. Many were paths through which living hosts passed, each leaving behind its shadow and aroma. These were words which served as receptacles for delicate and profound thoughts and exalted emotions. Some words were like the high mountains of the Lord, others were a great abyss. Sometimes all the vital essence of a profound philosophic system, its complete immortality, were hidden in one small word. There were words that laid

low nations and lands in their time, deposed kings from their thrones, shook the foundations of heaven and earth. But there came a day when these same words, having fallen from their height, were thrown aside, and now people wallow in them as they chat, as casually as one wallows in grass.

Is this cause for wonder? The laws of nature are not to be questioned. That is the way of the world: words rise to greatness, and, falling, turn profane. What is essential is that language contains no word so slight that the hour of its birth was not one of powerful and awesome self-revelment, a lofty victory of the spirit. So, for example, it was with the first man, when, taken aback by the sound of thunder ("The voice [sound] of the Lord is in the power, the voice of the Lord is in the glory"), overcome by amazement and terror stricken, he fell on his face before the divinity. Then a kind of savage sound burst spontaneously from his lips—let us assume, in imitation of nature—resembling a beast's roar, a sound close to the *r...r* to be found in the words for thunder in many languages. Did not this wild cry vastly free his

confounded soul? Was a smaller measure of the power, the fearfulness, and the exultation of creative victory revealed in this echo of a spirit shaken to its depths than are revealed in the happy phrases on exalted subjects expressed by any of the great seers in their moments of spiritual elevation? Did not this meager syllable, this seed of the future word, embrace a complete volume of primordial emotions, powerful in their novelty and vigorous in their savagery, resembling terror, fear, amazement, submission, astonishment, preparedness for self-defense? And if this was true, was not the first man himself at that moment an artist and lofty seer, an intuitive creator of an expression—and a very faithful expression, for himself, at any rate—pointing to a deep and complicated inner disturbance? As one thinker commented, how much of profound philosophy, of Divine revealment was there in that small word *I* that the first man uttered!

Nevertheless, at this very moment these same words, and a great many others like them, are being lost in language—and it does not matter. We are inwardly almost untouched. Their core is consumed and their

spiritual strength fades or is hidden, and only their husks, cast out from the private domain to the public, still persist in language, doing slack service within the limited boundaries of logic and social intercourse, as external signs and abstractions for objects and images. It has come to the point where the human language has become two languages, built upon one another's destruction: one, an internal language, that of solitude and the soul, in which what is essential is "how?" as in music—the domain of poetry; the other, the external language, that of abstraction and generalization, in which the essential is "what?" as in mathematics—the domain of logic.

Who knows whether it is not for the best that man should inherit the husk of a word without its core—for thus he can fill the husk, or supply it constantly from his own substance, and pour his own inner light into it. "Every man prefers his own measure." If the spoken word were to remain throughout history at the height of its glowing power, if the same complex of emotion and thought which became attached to it in its prime were to accompany it always, perhaps no speaking

creature would ever attain to its self-revelment and particular illumination. In the final analysis, an empty vessel can hold matter, while a full vessel cannot; if the empty word enslaves, how much more is this true of the full word?

What is there to wonder at? This: the feeling of security and the satisfaction that accrue to human beings when they speak, as though they are really leading their thoughts or feelings beside the still waters and across the iron bridge of the Messiah, without their having any conception of how shaky is their bridge of mere words, how deep and dark the void is that opens at their feet, and how much every step taken safely partakes of the miraculous.

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For it is clear that language with all its associations does not introduce us at all into the inner area, the essence of things, but that, on the contrary, language itself stands as a barrier before them. On the other side of the barrier of language, behind its curtain, stripped of

its husk of speech, the spirit of man wanders ceaselessly. "There is no speech and there are no words," but only a perpetual search, an eternal "what?" frozen on man's lips. In truth, there is no place even for this "what?", implying as it does the hope of a reply. Rather there is—"nothingness"; man's lips are closed. [If, nevertheless, man does achieve speech and with it contentment, it is only because of the extent of his fear at remaining alone for one moment with that dark void, face-to-face with the nothingness, with no barrier between them. "For man shall not look on me and live," says the void, and every speech, every pulsation of speech, partakes of the nature of a concealment of nothingness, a husk enclosing within itself a dark seed of the eternal enigma.] *No word contains the complete dissolution of any question. What does it contain? The question's concealment.* It makes no difference what the particular word is—you can exchange it for another—just as long as it contains the power momentarily to serve as concealment and barrier. Dumb music and symbolic mathematics—two hostile kin at two parallel extremes—attest unanimously that the word is not

necessarily what it seems, that it is nothing but a manifestation of the void. Or rather, just as physical bodies become sensible to the eye and determinate because they serve as barriers before light in space, so the word's existence takes place by virtue of the process by which it closes up the small aperture of the void—constructing a barrier to prevent the void's darkness from welling up and overflowing its bounds.

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He who sits alone in the depths of darkness trembling, speaks to himself: he confesses his sins, or whispers a word. *Why? Because the word is a talisman which serves to divert him and to dissipate his fear.* It is the same with the spoken word—or with complete systems of words. The word's power does not consist in its explicit content—if, generally speaking, there is such a thing—but in the diversion that is involved in it. Averting one's eyes is, in the final resort, the easiest and most pleasant means, although an illusory one, of escape from danger; in situations where keeping one's eyes open constitutes the

danger there is really no securer refuge, and "Moses did well to conceal his face."

Who knows? Perhaps the truth is that from the time of Creation, speech has not been cast as a social vessel to pass between two men; it has not been speech for its own sake. It may have always had its source in men sitting alone, speaking to themselves, as a spiritual need, i.e., "speech for its own sake" falling in the class of "When my spirit within me is dumb, I shall speak unto my heart...." The first man was not content until he had spoken *himself* aloud for himself to hear. For the sound that at the time of creation drew man's self-recognition up from the depths of the void—that very sound suddenly stood as a dividing wall between man and that which is on the other side, as though to say: "Henceforth, O man, thou shalt direct thy face toward that which is 'on this side.' Thou shalt not look *behind* thee, and if thou shouldst—it shall not avail thee, for man shall not see the 'void' face-to-face and live. The dream that is forgotten shall not be recalled. Thy desire shall be to the 'void' and speech shall rule over thee."

And, in truth, "knowledge and speech" rule only

over that which is on this side, within the four cubits of space and time. "Man walketh in the shadow merely"; the nearer he approaches the illusory light *that is before him*, the larger grows the shadow *behind him*, and the surrounding darkness is never lessened. Perhaps, on this side, everything can be explained—strictly or liberally—but explained. What is essential is that man's atmosphere of knowledge must never for a single moment be rid of words, crowded and consecutive like the links in a suit of armor, without so much as a hair's breadth between them. The light of knowledge and speech—the glowing coal and the flame—is an eternal light that must not be extinguished. Indeed, the very area on this side that lies within the bounds of the illusory light—in the final analysis, of what importance is it compared with the endless sea of universal darkness that still remains, and will always remain, *outside?*

And again, in the final analysis, it is that very eternal darkness that is so fearsome—that darkness that from the time of Creation has always secretly drawn man's heart to it, arousing his hidden yearning to gaze

on it for a brief moment. Every man is afraid of it, and every man is drawn to it. With our very lips we construct barriers, words upon words and systems upon systems, and place them in front of the darkness to conceal it; but then our nails immediately begin to dig at those barriers, in an attempt to open the smallest of windows, the tiniest of cracks, through which we may gaze for a single moment at that which is on the other side. But alas, vain is the labor of man! At the very moment when the crack is apparently opened—another barrier, in the shape of a new word or system, suddenly stands in the place of the old, shutting off the view again.

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Thus, there is never an end. A word cometh and a word goeth, a system riseth and a system falleth—and the old eternal enigma remains as powerful as ever, unalterable and irreducible. Signing a note, or listing a debt in a ledger, is far from being the debt's liquidation; it merely momentarily removes the note's burden from

one's memory—and no more. The same is the case with definitive speech: the assignment of names and the putting up of orderly fences around images and their associations. No reply to the question of essence is ever possible in the process of speech. Even the express reply to a question is really no more than another version of the question itself—"this is amazing" we understand as meaning "pause and think" (a form of concealment instead of revealment). If we were to strip all the words and systems completely bare to their innermost core, in the end, *after the last reduction*, we should be left with nothing in our hands but one all-inclusive word. Which? Again, the same terrible "what?" behind which stands the same X, even more terrible—the nothingness. Man chooses to tear the debt into small pieces under the false illusion that he is thus easing the final payment. When this illusion fails him, he exchanges the present word for another—he writes a new note to take the place of the old, and delays or gives himself more time for the final payment. In either event the debt is never paid in full.

So, a word or system declines and yields to another, not because it has lost the power to reveal, to

enlighten, to invalidate the enigma either totally or in part, but for the very opposite reason—because the word or system has been worn out by being manipulated and used, is no longer able to conceal and hide adequately, and can, of course, no longer divert mankind momentarily. Man, gazing for a moment through the open crack, finding to his terror that awesome void before him again, hurries to close the crack for a time—with a new word. He seizes the new talisman, like its predecessor; a proven momentary diversion—and is saved from the terror.

Do not wonder at this! The talisman is effective for those who believe in it, for faith itself is no more than a diversion. Do not the speaking creatures themselves provide an analogy? So long as man moves and breathes—he occupies space and everything is apparently comprehensible; “everything is alright.” All the flow of life, all its content, is nothing but a continuous effort, an unremitting toil to be diverted. Every moment spent in “pursuit of” is at the same time a “flight from,” and flight, and flight alone, is its wages. The wages of pursuit is flight. At every moment the pursuer finds his

momentary happiness not in that which he attains to, but in that which he escapes from, a fact which gives him a momentary shadow of security. “For to him that is joined to all the living there is security.”

But man dies—and his space becomes unoccupied. There is nothing to serve as a diversion—and the barrier is down. Everything suddenly becomes incomprehensible. The hidden X descends upon us in all its fearful shape—and we sit mourning on the earth before it for a moment in darkness and dumb as a stone. But for a moment only. For the Master of all life anticipates the opening with a closing. He immediately furnishes us with a new talisman with which to divert ourselves and dissipate the fear. Before the covering stone is sealed over the dead, the space that was emptied is again occupied with a word, whether it be one of eulogy, or solace, or philosophy, or belief in the soul’s immortality. The most dangerous moment—both in speech and in life—is that between concealments, when the void looms. But such moments are rare both in speech and in life, and for the most part men skip over them unaware. “The Lord preserveth the simple.”

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From all that has been said, it would appear that there is a vast difference between the language of the masters of prose and that of the masters of poetry. The former, the masters of exposition, find their sanction in the principle of analogy, and in the elements common to images and words, in that which is established and constant in language, in the accepted version of things—consequently, they walk confidently through language. To what may they be compared? To one who crosses a river walking on hard ice frozen into a solid block. Such a man may and can divert his attention completely from the covered depths flowing underneath his feet. But their opposites, the masters of allegory, of interpretation and mystery, spend all their days in pursuit of the unifying principle in things, of the solitary something, of the point that makes one body of all the images, of the fleeting moment that is never repeated. They pursue their solitary inwardness and the personal quality of things. Therefore, the latter, the masters of poetry, are forced to flee all that is

fixed and inert in language, all that is opposed to their goal of the vital and mobile in language. On the contrary, using their unique keys, they are obliged themselves to introduce into language at every opportunity—never-ending motion, new combinations and associations. The words writhe in their hands; they are extinguished and lit again, flash on and off like the engravings of the signet in the stones of the High Priest's breastplate, grow empty and become full, put off a soul and put on a soul. By this process there takes place, in the material of language, exchanges of posts and locations: one mark, a change in the point of one iota, and the old word shines with a new light.

The profane turns sacred, the sacred profane. Long established words are constantly being pulled out of their settings, as it were, and exchanging places with one another. Meanwhile, between concealments the void looms. And that is the secret of the great influence of the language of poetry. And to what may those writers be compared? To one who crosses a river when it is breaking up, by stepping across floating, moving blocks of ice. He dare not set his foot on any

one block for longer than a moment, longer than it takes him to leap from one block to the next, and so on. Between the breaches the void looms, the foot slips, danger is close....

Nevertheless, some of this group, too, "enter in peace and leave in peace," crossing in safety from one shore to the other, "for the Lord preserveth not merely the simple."

So much for the language of words. But, in addition, "there are yet to the Lord" languages without words: songs, tears, and laughter. And the speaking creature has been found worthy of them all. These languages begin where words leave off, and their purpose is not to close but to open. They rise from the void. They *are* the rising up of the void. Therefore, at times they overflow and sweep us off in the irresistible multitude of their waves; therefore, at times they cost a man his wits, or even his life. Every creation of the spirit which lacks an echo of one of these three languages is not really alive, and it were best that it had never come into the world.

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JEWISH DUALISM

MANY STUDENTS of our national *Gestalt* have dealt with the phenomenon of dualism in our psyche as a fundamental characteristic of the Jewish people. By dualism we mean the rule of two traits in the nation's soul, one contradicting the other. In this dualism, we can discern the source of our misfortunes and greatest afflictions but it is the source of our strength and happiness as well.

This dualism turns the soul of the nation into a battlefield where an incessant war rages. It is an impoverishing war. The two forces maul each other, thereby weakening the nation; but, on the other hand, they enrich our national content by not permitting us to drop off to sleep. Paradoxically enough, these opposing forces couple and are fruitful, so that the nation becomes many-sided and diversified.

In what is this Hebrew dualism revealed? One