



Lekh-Lekha

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This month's Lehrhaus Over Shabbat is dedicated in loving memory of Mrs. Livia Turkel, Chaya Sara bas Eliyahu, on the occasion of her sixth *yahrzeit*. A woman who cherished *tefillah* and Torah learning, she dedicated her life to Jewish education. Sponsored by Brenda and Elihu Turkel and family.

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The Exegetical Theology of Obadiah Seforno

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Introduction

Though theologians—and students of theology—often elevate careful study of the subject and its canon to the loftiest of ideals, there are yet many facets of the subject that go largely unnoticed. One of these is the style or form in which a theological work is written. Naturally, in some works of theology, you cannot fail to miss the author's unique flair. After all, who could mistake Aquinas' meticulously organized question/answer-style breakdown in his *Summa*

Theologiae for Augustine's almost poetic work, *The City of God*? And no one can deny that Moses Maimonides' extensive theological discourses in his *Guide for the Perplexed* differ not only in content but also in style from Moses Nahmanides' more brief treatments in his biblical commentary.

However, scholarship on the exegetical theology of the classic biblical commentators—especially the less prominent among them—is unfortunately sparse. The goal of this essay is to fill in just the smallest sliver of this gaping hole by exploring the style (and fragments of the content) of the theological writings of Obadiah Seforno (c. 1475–1549). Seforno belonged to a period in which Jewish philosophers were no longer content with the Aristotelian-Maimonidean notion of God as

Prime Mover who dwells outside of time and space and thus cannot be affected or interacted with in any meaningful way. In a movement that reemphasized the immanence of God so palpable in pre-medieval works, Jewish philosophers were beginning to postulate compromises between the personal, emotional, active—indeed, almost human—God of the Sages and the Bible and the more philosophically precise but indifferent and transcendent God of Aristotle and Maimonides. It was in this period that Joseph Albo (c. 1380–1444) wrote his *Book of Principles* pushing back on Maimonides’ thirteen principles of faith¹, and that Ḥasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410) penned *Light of the Lord*, a systematic, point-by-point evaluation of Maimonidean theology. Writing about a century after these great luminaries, Seforno benefited greatly from the availability of a whole spectrum of theological views, from the steadfastly Aristotelian Levi Gersonides (1288–1344), who doubled down on Maimonides’ more controversial philosophical beliefs in an effort to maintain what he believed was absolute metaphysical integrity; to the skeptics of philosophy, Moses Nahmanides (1194–1270) and Solomon ibn Aderet (c. 1235–1310); and, of course, the more moderate views presented above. It is difficult to prove which of these thinkers Seforno might have been familiar with; of them, he only ever quotes Nahmanides with any great frequency, yet he demonstrates a familiarity

with Jewish thought that suggests that his library was quite vast.

However, Seforno is not only the recipient of a great tradition of Jewish theological discourse, but a significant contributor to it. Not in the world of ideas, per se: very few of Seforno’s theological comments are novel and virtually none are properly unique. What Seforno does contribute is the first combination of two other novelties, one in format and the other in venue.

First, he arranged his philosophical inquiries in the form of biblical commentary; following in the footsteps of Rashi (1040–1105), his primary goal was exegetical, and, like Rashi, his exegesis is rigorously theological in places. Second, he adopted the model originally propagated by Rashi in his seminal biblical commentary², as well as by Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed*³, of arranging his theologically inclined notes in his scattered comments on the various names of God. By combining these two factors, he implicitly left a guide for the reader on how to read the Bible theologically: by looking at the presentation of God in any given story, especially at the name He is called by. However, though he borrows from all of these luminaries, his commentary differs sharply from each of their works. For example, whereas Maimonides’ *Guide* focuses mostly on the theoretical aspects of God—the nature of His existence, the difference in quality between His

¹ See Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), [Commentary to the Mishnah, Sanh. intro. to ch. 10](#).

² See, e.g., [Rashi to Exod. 3:14, s.v. “ehyeh asher ehyeh.”](#)

³ See, e.g., Maimonides, [Guide for the Perplexed 1:61](#).

different names, etc.—Seforno’s comments can be more accurately characterized as a description of the Divine. Seforno does not wrestle with God’s ineffability or attempt logical arguments for his proposed conclusions. He is, in that sense, less philosophical than Maimonides. On the other hand, he is not nearly as religiously inclined (for lack of a better term; Seforno was surely a very religious person) as Rashi. To illustrate this with an example: When God tells Moses that He is now revealing Himself by his name YHWH, the Tetragrammaton, for the first time, whereas to the Patriarchs, He employed the name “El Shaddai,” Rashi elaborates:

With El Shaddai: I made certain promises to them and in the case of all of these I said unto them, “I am El Shaddai.”⁴

For Rashi, the names of God reflect the experience of the humans with whom He is interacting. This is a profound religious message, but is hardly philosophical. After all, it makes no claim about God Himself, or even about the nature of a Creator-creature relationship, only about the *experience* of communing with God. Rashi’s

commentary links the names of God to types of man-God communion in an effort to show the variety of God’s self-expression in such instances. By contrast, Seforno writes the following:

With El Shaddai: by the attribute which demonstrates that I have created existence as such, as was explained in Genesis 17:1.⁵

We will later elaborate on the referenced comment, but, for now, it is sufficient to say that Seforno’s interests are notably more academic than Rashi’s are. However, to reiterate, they are also more ‘religious’ or experiential in character than Maimonides’, as is evident by his appeals to the Bible—rather than reason or Aristotle—as the primary source of theological knowledge and the starting place for all theological discourse. We will make the claim that theology was, for Seforno, a secondary goal, and that his commentary prioritizes the local context of the verse being interpreted over the grander theological concept under discussion. This is not to say that theology was unimportant to Seforno—on the contrary, it was of great importance to him⁶—but that he was comfortable presenting theology in parts, as

⁴ [Rashi to Exod. 6:3, s.v. “be-el Shaddai,”](#) trans. M. Rosenbaum and A.M. Silberman, London, 1929-1934, slight adaptations made.

⁵ [Seforno to Exod. 6:3, s.v. “be-el Shaddai.”](#) All quotations from Seforno use the translation of Eliyahu Munk, *Hachut Hameshulash* (Lambda Publishers, 2003), with varying degrees of adaptation.

⁶ See [Seforno to Deut. 4:39, s.v. “ve-yadata ha-yom,”](#) where he makes it absolutely clear that, in his view, obtaining a sophisticated philosophical understanding of God is a fulfillment of the commandment to “Know therefore this day, and consider it in thy heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is no other” ([Deut. 4:39](#)).

befitted the local context, instead of insisting on a treatise-like treatment of each concept as a whole.

With the novelties of Seforno's approach thus elucidated, we may finally proceed to an analysis of his commentary, with a focus on his notes on the divine names, which, as we noted, is the primary locus for his theological excursions. For brevity's sake, we will limit ourselves to the two most common names for God in the Bible: *Elohim* (and its variations; LXX: ὁ Θεός) and the Tetragrammaton (which I will simply render "YHWH" instead of attempting a translation; LXX: ὁ κύριος). By examining these comments, we hope to obtain a sampling of Seforno's theological methodology, the element of his theological writings that makes him truly unique among the many scholars of the Jewish tradition.

Elohim: Ontological Primacy

In one of his first comments on the book of Genesis, Seforno makes a puzzling remark. He tries to explain why the name *Elohim* is utilized in the Creation narrative of Genesis 1, but, in doing so, raises a curious issue about the meaning of that name. After stating that the divine name "*Elo'ah*" (the singular form of *Elohim*, meaning "power" or "authority") especially connotes God's eternity, he attempts to explain why the normative form of this name is plural:

The reason that the term "*Elo'ah*"
here appears in the plural

mode—i.e., "*Elohim*"—is to teach us that God is the origin of all the various visible and invisible manifestations in the universe. This is what the prophet ([Isaiah 6:3](#)) had in mind when he described God as "[the One Whose] glory fills the whole world." There is no other existence unless it has emanated from His existence.⁷

This is a strange juxtaposition: if the singular form of the name—*Elo'ah*—is supposed to imply God's temporal permanence or endurance, then why should the plural form of the same name—*Elohim*—mean something so radically different? There is no obvious relationship between permanence and emanation. To make matters worse, in a later comment Seforno provides an entirely different explanation for the name *Elohim*, namely that God is the best suited to maintain the world:

Our God [*Eloheinu*]: He is the choicest of all the abstract forces assigned to supervise the conduct of human beings, and even inert creatures. From Him we yearn for assistance in helping us to achieve our purpose on earth. We do not turn to any intermediary. He alone is fit to have prayers addressed to.⁸

⁷ [Seforno to Gen. 1:1, s.v. "Elohim."](#)

⁸ [Seforno to Deut. 6:4, s.v. "Eloheinu."](#)

According to this latter passage, the meaning of this name—in this instance, *Eloheinu*, “our *Elohim*”—is not related to God’s permanence or to His emanations, but to His status as the preferred address for prayer, what we might term ‘specific providence’. In a similar vein, he elsewhere writes about another variation, “*Elohei Yisra’el*, the *Elohim* of Israel”:

Elohei Yisra’el: Who arranges the affairs of Israel regarding their spiritual needs.⁹

However, he then continues, in a passage that may offer a solution to our dilemma and an insight into Seforno’s pedagogical style, with the following:

I.e., all matters beyond those that are subject to the laws of nature. A reference to the activities of God that are not even capable of being performed by abstract creatures known as *elohim*. Compare the line “if someone offers a sacrifice to [other] *elohim* he will be proscribed” ([Exodus 22:19](#)). Compare also [in Aramaic] “except the gods [*eluhin*] whose abode is not among man” ([Daniel 2:11](#)). This is why Moses calls the demons “the non-gods [*Elo’ah*]” ([Deuteronomy 32:17](#))... The Torah called the judges experts, also by the name *elohim* because they often judge

without their senses (i.e., objectively). Like Solomon’s wisdom in solving perplexing judicial problems, described him as possessing “wisdom of *Elohim*” ([1 Kings 3:28](#)).

Apparently, the unique quality of an *Elo’ah* is its abstractness¹⁰. *Elohim*, then, are spiritual beings (or beings who possess spiritual qualities) who are therefore beyond the scope of nature’s reach. Solomon’s wisdom was seen as supernatural due to its magnitude and thus termed “*hokhmat Elohim* (the wisdom of *Elohim*).” It would appear that this more conceptual understanding of the quality of *Elo’ah* solves our problems: God is the only abstract being worth praying to (source 2) for the same reason that He is seen as the ultimate *Elo’ah* (source 3): He is the source of all abstract power and knowledge. It is this that was intended in the first source we looked at: God is the source of all in that the abstract supernatural power that animates so much of the world can be traced back to Him alone (source 1b). What we have left to understand is how any of this relates to Seforno’s first interpretation of *Elo’ah*, namely that it is the term for that which is eternal (source 1a). We might propose that the eternality about which Seforno spoke was not temporal but metaphysical. In other words, he means not “eternal,” but “fundamentally immutable.” Said otherwise, when Seforno writes that the name *Elo’ah* is a reference to God’s attribute of *netzah* (eternity),

⁹ [Seforno to Exod. 34:23, s.v. “Elohei Yisra’el.”](#)

¹⁰ Seforno elsewhere writes that “every disembodied creature is known as *elohim*” ([Seforno to Deut. 21:23, s.v. “ki kilelat elohim taluy”](#)).

he does not mean to invoke the normative definition of the term (which is, indeed, temporal), but its ontological implication. That is to say, he meant that *Elo'ah* is an expression of God being the most basic and immutable thing—the Prime Mover in the Aristotelian language—and that He may be characterized with ontological primacy.

This position is also emphasized in another comment of Seforno's, his aforementioned note on Genesis 17:1:

I am *El Shaddai*¹¹: I am the One Who is sufficient unto Himself by My very existence to carry out My special function, the creation of the universe, all by Myself, without assistance by anyone else. The very opposite is true of all phenomena other than the Creator.¹²

Here, as well, Seforno interprets a variation of *Elo'ah* as a statement about God's ontology: God is the thing that is sufficient, of itself, to maintain the world. Translating "*El*" as "power" is thus not incorrect, but is somewhat imprecise. It might be more accurately translated "ontologically superior being."

Though Seforno's conclusion is ostensibly Maimonidean, his process is anything but. Rather than attempt a rigorous investigation of the term

Elo'ah in which every instance is treated in a systematic way, Seforno interprets each phrase locally, only truly defining the term in two of his many comments on the subject. His is not a disorganized or self-contradictory theology, far from it, but it is a localized one. Thus, when interpreting the name *Elohim* that appears in the *Shema* passage ([Deuteronomy 6:4ff](#)), he writes about the propriety of addressing prayer towards God, as this passage is central to the Jewish liturgy. He did not feel the need to veer into theology qua theology, but only to interpret the local verse or passage. It is only in the biblical portion that focuses on the holiday of Pentecost—a holiday in which the first fruits of the harvest are given to God as an offering—that he mentions God's ontological precedence. It appears that even here his goal was not to theologize, but to impress upon his readers the necessity for this ritual, as ritual sacrifices imprint God's supremacy upon the soul of the donor.

YHWH: Creator and Sustainer

As Maimonides warns, serious discussion about the Tetragrammaton is a highly dangerous activity, in that the slightest error can have unthinkable consequences. The Tetragrammaton is widely considered to be God's personal name rather than an attribute¹³; thus it is a most sensitive topic for theologians. Ostensibly, however, Seforno is not of

¹¹ For Seforno, *Shaddai* is not to be understood as a separate name—as it is for Maimonides—but as a variation of "*she-dai*, that which is enough." In other words, *El Shaddai* (or *El she-dai*) means "the God that is sufficient."

¹² [Seforno to Gen. 17:1, s.v. "ani El Shaddai."](#)

¹³ See, e.g., Maimonides, [Guide 1:61](#); Judah Ha-Levi (1079-1141), [Sefer Ha-Kuzari 2:2ff](#).

that view¹⁴. To him, the Tetragrammaton is a name like all others: a term God uses to teach us something about Himself.

Seforno identifies the attribute implicit in the Tetragrammaton as God's dual role as creator and sustainer of the world:

I, YHWH: the One Who maintains the entire universe all alone. I have not only called it into existence, but I also maintain it, and there is no other prime cause which exercises any independent influence on any part of My universe. As it says ([Nehemiah 9:6](#)), "and You alone keep all creatures alive." Unless I had given My consent, no creature could continue to exist.¹⁵

And again, more succinctly:

YHWH: The One Who is responsible for the existence of a physical universe.¹⁶

Here too, Seforno adds another comment that is something of a non-sequitur. Whereas, until now, his claim had been that the Tetragrammaton was the name God used to refer to His role as creator and sustainer of the world, here, he gives it an entirely different meaning:

And my name, YHWH, I never revealed to them: In [their visions of God], He never changed the laws of nature for them.¹⁷

These are, of course, not contradictory in any way. It is perfectly in line with the understanding of God as maintainer of the universe that He also has the ability to bend its laws; indeed, it is not unreasonable to claim that those are synonymous descriptors. However, this further demonstrates the idea that Seforno was willing to adjust the presentation of what he believed to be theological truths for the purposes of addressing the local biblical context more properly. Thus, though defining the Tetragrammaton as the capacity to manipulate the laws of nature is a roundabout and inefficient way of saying that it refers to God's dual role of creator and sustainer, Seforno preferred that presentation in this one location to preserve the context of the God-Patriarch relationship. Only in other comments, where he felt the local context did not need such edits, did he present this message with any amount of clarity.

Conclusion

We have thus completed a brief exploration of the theology of Obadiah Seforno and found it to be novel, not in its content, but in its methodology and venue. That, in the sense that Seforno often presents theological truths in multiple ways—all of

¹⁴ Despite the plurality of sources supporting Maimonides' position on this matter, the proponents of Seforno's side are not without precedent. See, e.g., [Exod. Rabb. 3:6](#).

¹⁵ [Seforno to Exod. 6:2](#), "ani YHWH."

¹⁶ [Seforno to Deut. 6:4](#), s.v. "YHWH."

¹⁷ [Seforno to Exod. 6:3](#), s.v. "u-shemi YHWH lo nodati la-hem."

them variations of the same idea, thus yielding no contradictions—so as to best preserve the local context of the verse he was commenting on. We have seen him walk this tightrope carefully, radically altering the formulation of the most important principles so as to satisfy the local context, while elsewhere explaining the principle with greater clarity and precision.

As we opened, so will we close: Seforno was not Maimonides, even though their theologies, if compiled, would look rather similar. Maimonides was a philosopher, a person whose primary interests were principles and ideas, the more fundamental the better. Seforno, by contrast, was an exegete. He was principally concerned with the internal harmony of the verse he was attempting to explain and only secondarily in formal theology. His theological methodology reflects exactly this; he was less interested in the way he formulated his ideas in any given instance than he was in making sense of the verse he was commenting on. Obviously, he had to formulate each idea properly at least once—how else will his readers know the proper formulation?—but, other than that, improper formulation was a permissible evil when the internal viability of the verse was at stake. Thus, as we saw, of Seforno’s five major explanations of the word *Elohim*, only two present his position clearly. The other three have varied—and yet consistently

ambiguous—formulations, designed to fit their local contexts, rather than precisely articulate the nature of *Elohim*.

By that same token, however, Seforno was not Rashi. His is a rigorous theology, a real system of divine truths, an attempt to describe the Almighty¹⁸. By contrast, Rashi’s exegetical method might be best described as experiential. He is not concerned with deep theological truths, nor is he bothered by contradictions that emerge from two different comments of his; rather, he is principally interested in conveying experiential, religious truths. Thus, he is readily willing to use metaphors of humans (most often, of human kings,) to describe God, and is unconcerned by the fact that he sometimes advocates for a divine form (i.e., God’s physicality)¹⁹, and in other contexts declares that verses that allude to God having a form are merely allegorical²⁰. Contrary to the very emphatic scholars who have taken the view that Rashi *really* believes that God is corporeal, or else that he *clearly* did not because such a view would be heretical²¹, I do not believe that either position can be inferred from his biblical commentary. Indeed, it is not obvious that Rashi set much stock in such questions at all, at least not in his biblical commentary. The biblical commentary, for Rashi—and later, Seforno—was meant to be mainstream, a work that could be read—and internalized—by all. Hence, theological

¹⁸ See, e.g., [Seforno to Gen. 22:1, s.v. “nisah et Avraham”](#); [Seforno to Exod. 3:14, s.v. “ehyeh asher ehyeh.”](#)

¹⁹ E.g., [Rashi to Exod. 7:4, s.v. “et yadi”](#); [Rashi to 14:31, s.v. “et ha-yad ha-gedolah.”](#)

²⁰ E.g., [Rashi to Exod. 20:11, s.v. “va-yanah ba-yom ha-shevi’i.”](#)

²¹ For both, see Natan Slifkin’s excellent article on the subject, “Was Rashi a Corporalist,” *Hakira* 7 (2009), 81-105.

compromise (in Rashi's case) and inconsistent formulation (in Seforno's) is permissible—nay, encouraged—when writing such a work.

Thus, Seforno's novelty might be recast in the following light: he took the best of both worlds and put them together when forming his own biblical commentary. On the one hand, he preserved the intense rigor of Maimonides, explaining deep theological truths in their purest forms without any watering-down or simplification. On the other hand, he also maintained Rashi's readability as well as his devotion to the local context, even at the expense of absolute precision. Too holistic a thinker to wholly follow Rashi's lead on this count, he merely reformulated ideas to fit the context, rather than properly contradicting himself as demanded by the moment. This, the combination of two of the greatest works by two of the greatest writers of Medieval Jewry, is Seforno's great and unique contribution to the world of Jewish theology.

Yiddengeist and Arguments for the Sake of Heaven

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Discourse is sacred. Every conversation can be taken to be an aspect of the Divine. Every

discussion is a part of a holy dialectic, in every time and every place. Torah — in the broadest sense — is a conversation. And every conversation, from the nested commentaries of the Talmud to the quotidian interactions we all have with each other in the course of a day, are all part of a sacred discourse, a holy dialectic.

Martin Buber says in *I and Thou* that, 'Spirit is not in the I, but between I and Thou.' It is that space between souls (*neshamot*) where spirit manifests.¹ Social media and related technologies have amplified this space, but not without distortion. And still, every comment and every post can be understood as a thought in the mind of God. Every interaction we have with each other, the stories we tell, all the love and all the anxiety, and all the ordinariness of everyday life that falls in between, are sacred. And as natural intelligence evolves with artificial intelligence into a new spiritual intelligence, a changing consciousness is emerging. Language is evolving. Language — our only practical medium between the isolated islands of the self and the other — is the meta-technology that makes all other technologies possible.

Innovations in language have always advanced the tradition (*masorah*). These evolving technologies are what make that long conversation — discourse itself — possible from generation to generation; from the first Proto-Sinaitic scribbles that came up from Egypt like the Israelites who would adopt

¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

them and make them holy, to the computer code that generates AI, language, in all its manifestations, is holy because it is an extension of the mind and spirit (*lashon ha-kodesh*). Every question is an opportunity to participate in and contribute to that conversation.

There is a well-known Jewish proverb: “Ask two Jews a question, and you’ll get three opinions.” With a touch of humor, this adage reflects the Jewish penchant for vigorous debate, not as a barrier to truth, but as a means of pursuing it. By making room for disagreement and multiple, conflicting, and contradicting interpretations, the conversation itself becomes a way of uncovering deeper meaning and offering greater possibilities. This is an exercise in both divergent and convergent thinking. It is precisely the tensions that emerge from the rub of perspectives against each other that give force and shape to the creative spirit. This proverb gives us permission to hold more than one opinion at the same time. Individual creative minds think divergently. A creative community aggregates these diverse ideas, and produces a synthesis that is greater than the sum of its parts. This can be seen and celebrated in the push and pull of perspectives that are found in traditional Jewish dialectical methods of study. The process by which Torah is understood, in the broadest possible sense, is a creative dialectic.

This is argued against *that*, producing divergent thought, and expressing the value of *machloket*, the Hebrew term for “dispute” or “argument.” This is a creative tension, “an argument for the sake of

heaven” (*mahloket le-sheim Shamayim*), because when people discuss ideas, new perspectives emerge, and those perspectives have the potential to widen everyone’s understanding. Agonistic, but not necessarily antagonistic, this process allows for insights to accrue. This creative dialectic is evidenced in the diversity of thought manifested throughout Jewish history. Creativity in general, and Jewish creativity in particular, is a process that can only move in two directions, either in opposition or synthesis.

For the sake of this conversation, we might call this creative spirit the “Yiddengeist,” taken to mean something like the creative spirit of the Jewish people as a whole and in the aggregate, manifesting itself in history as an aspect of a holy process. It is derived from the Yiddish word for “Jews” and the German word for “spirit,” as introduced and applied by Hegel, and drawing on his conception of the dialectical process that moves history forward. It draws on his concepts of the *Volksgeist*, or the “spirit of a people.” It also derives from Hegel’s notion of the *Weltgeist*, or “World Spirit,” which can be understood as the process of all discourse guiding history toward freedom and self-realization.

It is through engaging in dialogue with others, both within the Jewish community and, importantly, outside of it, that this spirit can emerge. In some sense, the boundary between interior and exterior is insignificant in so far as all dialogue, all discourse, and the entire dialectical process being described, emerges from the same divine source. There is nothing exclusively

“Jewish” about this project, although it is sacred to Jews. It is manifest anywhere where the technology of language transcends the gap between the alienated Self and the alienated Other. It is in dialogue with others that we encounter both ourselves (*Yehidah*) and the Divine spirit (*Shekhinah*).

This insight is an offering to both our enemies and our friends. We are offered, and we offer, an opportunity to discover an image of ourselves, and therefore the image of God (*be-tzelem Elohim*) in the reflection of the other. Both philosemites and antisemites alike participate in this dialectical process. Our sages tell us that baseless hatred (*sinat hinam*) was the cause of the destruction of the *Beit ha-Mikdash*, but baseless hatred was also a consequence of its destruction; baseless hatred projected onto generations of Jews during the centuries of antisemitism that followed. Let us remember this dialectic. Let the mirror be our shield. When they look into it, let it remind them of who they are. When we look into it, let it remind us of who we are. Let the mirror teach us all. Let it remind everyone that we are all part of that same Divine spirit and creative dialectic.

If we are all to heal from intergenerational traumas, both Jews and non-Jews, we must recognize the ways these anxieties are projected and reflected onto each other as they are amplified and distorted. It is only then that we might have any chance of finding a cure for the pathological, baseless hatred that seems to be increasingly prevalent in the world today. We are

all part of the same dialectical process that moves from brokenness and alienation towards repair and healing.

As we look into the mirror, we might consider another way to read the aforementioned proverb. “Two Jews, three opinions” can also be read as a description of the dialectical process herein described. In this interpretation, the first two opinions are those of the two Jews, as thesis and antithesis. However, the third “opinion” is elevated. It is a shared consensus, resolving the initial tension of opposition into a more harmonious synthesis and a new level of holiness. Perhaps it is in that unity of opposites that we might more fully encounter the Spirit of God (*Ru’ah ha-Kodesh*).

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