

Keeping the Faith: Aspects of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's The Lonely Man of Faith in Bernard Malamud's "The Magic Barrel"

Some years ago in the pages of *Commentary*, Cheryl Miller and Julian Levinson debated Bernard Malamud's relevance. Miller offered a cultural explanation for why Malamud's fiction had faded from the literary scene, proposing that

He fell from literary grace because his entire sense of the world was powerfully antithetical to the cultural ethos of the times. . . . How could a writer whose work was dedicated . . . to themes which could only be described as 'adult'—self-sacrifice, obligation, moral decency—have remained a vital figure?

Levinson countered that

Malamud's enduring value consists [not in his moral exhortations, but] in forcing readers to imagine the encounter with the Other as an endlessly complex, potentially redeeming, though often frustrating trial.¹

While Miller ironically put her finger on precisely why Malamud is relevant today, Levinson identified the purpose of those adult themes: to present us with "a moral challenge to open ourselves authentically to one another" in order to achieve redemption.

1. Julian Levinson, "Moral of the Stories," *Commentary* 126 (October 2008): 6.

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In the intervening years, and as if to validate Levinson's understanding of Malamud and our need for redemption, Rabbi Soloveitchik's 1965 essay *The Lonely Man of Faith*, which had already been published twice in book form, appeared in a new edition from Koren Publishers and OU Press in 2012, while The Library of America has just released two collections of Malamud's novels and short stories, coinciding with his centennial.² In her *New York Times Book Review* essay on the Malamud volumes, Cynthia Ozick suggests that sometimes "a veil of forgetfulness falls over the work" of a long-deceased writer.³ I suggest that lifting that veil and reading Malamud through the lens of R. Soloveitchik's later essay reveals two men committed to finding paths to redemption through covenantal relationships with God or with other people. The Rav saw Man actively searching for the Divine; Malamud saw God seeking Man.⁴ Both approaches, however, have the same purpose—to redeem Man from his loneliness. The Rav develops this concept through exegesis of Genesis' dual accounts of Adam's creation; Malamud does so by creating characters whose suffering is alleviated by apparently Divine intervention.

In brief, *The Lonely Man of Faith* proposes that the Bible's two descriptions of Man's origin establish two typologies, termed Adam the first and Adam the second (henceforth Adam I and Adam II), which in truth represent two halves of the human personality. The first is self-oriented, focused on the majesty of conquering nature by virtue of his intelligence; the latter is "other-" or community-oriented, focused on the humility and redemption inherent in a covenantal relationship with God. Read in this context, many of Malamud's characters unwittingly embark on a journey from an extreme self-absorbed Adam I toward a redeemed Adam II existence. This occurs when they embrace relationships with what appear to be God's messengers or proxies.

The goal of this study is to offer a theologically-based interpretation of the Jewish elements in Malamud's earlier, 1954 short story, "The Magic Barrel," a biblically-grounded approach to his

2. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, with a foreword by Reuven Ziegler (New York and Jerusalem, 2012); Bernard Malamud, *Bernard Malamud: Novels & Stories of the 1940s & 50s*, ed. Philip Davis (New York, 2014); Bernard Malamud, *Novels and Stories of the 1960s*, ed. Philip Davis (New York, 2014).

3. Cynthia Ozick, "Judging the World," *New York Times Book Review* (March 16, 2014): 12.

4. Heschel describes both approaches in *Man's Quest for God*, (Santa Fe, 1954) and *God in Search of Man* (New York, 1955).

tropes of the suffering Jew and *schlemiel*, and an interpretation of Malamud's use of magic realism as a marker of his character's Adam the second-like desire for a covenantal relationship with God. *The Lonely Man of Faith* affords a new way to understand Leo Finkle, just as Freud, writing centuries after Shakespeare, offered another way to understand Hamlet. Of course, the Rav's universal typologies apply to many pieces of literature, by both Jewish and non-Jewish writers, precisely because the typologies are universal. However, this does not perforce diminish their value to exploring how they apply to and open up "The Magic Barrel." It seems to me that *The Lonely Man of Faith's* specific applicability to Malamud's work, as opposed to other texts in which characters suffer existential crises, rests with the deeply religious strains of Malamud's best fiction, "The Magic Barrel" in particular.

Malamud's Jewish characters are not merely nominally or culturally Jewish, but seem to be invested in or become invested in Jewish observance and law. Leo Finkle is an extreme version of the kind of man that the Rav describes in his text, except that Leo does not know that God wants a covenantal relationship with him. The man suffers not so much because he is a *schlemiel*, but because he is struggling with how to move from the values of Adam I to the divine love of Adam II. Understanding "The Magic Barrel" in these terms reassigns the cause of Leo's suffering to his following the divine dictates given to Adam I and the cause of his redemption to following the divine dictates of Adam II, if indirectly, by loving another in order to love God.

To my knowledge, this is a unique interpretation of Malamud's tale of Leo Finkle, a Rabbi-in-training, and Pinnye Salzman, a matchmaker hired to find Leo a wife in order to better his prospects for securing a pulpit. Leo finds each prospective bride wanting, but falls in love with a picture of a woman who turns out to be Stella, Salzman's daughter, apparently a prostitute. The story ends with Leo and Stella's meeting on a street corner, Salzman chanting *Kaddish* against a nearby wall.

In the sixty years since its initial 1954 appearance in *The Partisan Review* and its revised 1958 version in *The Magic Barrel*, critics have explored "The Magic Barrel"'s religious, literary, mythological, and artistic affinities, among other things. For example, Richard Reynolds applies to the tale the *Kaddish's* earlier Talmudic association with a prayer for resurrection of the dead when the messiah arrives, thus reading the story's concluding *Kaddish* as a plea for Stella's resurrection

through Leo's love.⁵ Bates Hoffer argues that the story is an allegory of the Torah's five-part structure, which exposes Leo as a law-breaker;⁶ Marcia Gealy suggests that the tale is Malamud's adaptation of the Hasidic literary tradition;⁷ and Stephen Bluestone contends that "The Magic Barrel" is a retelling of the Miltonic creation story, analogizing Leo to Adam *Kadmon*, Salzman to "Matchmaker-God of the Sixth Day," Lily Hirschorn to Lilith, and Stella to Eve.⁸ Alternatively, Evelyn Avery sees Stella as the biblical Dinah.⁹ Literary comparisons of Malamud's story include treatments of "The Magic Barrel" with Joyce's "The Dead";¹⁰ with Cheever's *The House-breaker of Shady Hill* and James Purdy's *Color of Darkness*;¹¹ and with Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*.¹² In addition, Michael Storey reads "The Magic Barrel" as a version of the Pan myth, the goat-god whose daughter, Lynx, is comparable to Stella,¹³ and Robert Solotaroff and others have noted similarities between Malamud's story and Chagall's paintings.¹⁴

With deference to Sanford Pinsker's description of Leo, the "*schlemiel* as moral bungler," whose Jewishness is a only "a literary illusion,"¹⁵ I believe that reconsidering Leo Finkle in terms of Adam I and Adam II offers a more forgiving, divine perspective on Leo's *schlemiel* status, his journey to redemption, and on the values he thought he was certain

5. Richard Reynolds, "'The Magic Barrel': Pinye Salzman's Kaddish," *Studies in Short Fiction* 1, 1 (Winter 1972): 101-102.

6. Bates Hoffer, "The Magic in Malamud's Barrel," *Linguistics in Literature* 2,3 (Fall 1977): 1-26.

7. Marcia B. Gealy, "Malamud's Short Stories: A Reshaping of Hasidic Tradition," *Judaism* 28,1 (Winter 1979): 51-61.

8. Stephen Bluestone, "God as Matchmaker: A Reading of Malamud's 'The Magic Barrel,'" *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 41, 1 (Summer 2000): 403-10.

9. Evelyn Avery, "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: Patriarchal Archetypes and Torah Values in Bernard Malamud's Fiction," *Modern Jewish Studies: A Special Issue, The Art of Bernard Malamud* 13 (2002): 18-29.

10. Mary Rose Sullivan, "Malamud in the Joycean Mode: A Retrospective on 'The Magic Barrel' and 'The Dead,'" *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 14 (1995): 4-13.

11. Martin Tucker, "A Pluralistic Place," *Venture* 3, 1-2 (1959): 69-73.

12. Theodore C. Miller, "The Minister and the Whore: An Examination of Bernard Malamud's 'The Magic Barrel,'" *Studies in the Humanities* 3,1 (October 1972): 43-44.

13. Michael L. Storey, "Pinye Salzman, Pan and 'The Magic Barrel,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 18, 2 (Spring 1981): 180-83.

14. Robert Solotaroff, *Bernard Malamud: A Study of the Short Fiction* (Boston, 1989).

15. Sanford Pinsker, *The Schlemiel as Metaphor* (Carbondale, 1991), 79. For thorough explanations of Malamud's heroes as schlemiels, see Pinsker, 77-110, and Ruth Wisse, *The Schlemiel as Modern Hero* (Chicago, 1971), 110-18.

of. This approach also adds a new dimension to Malamud's suffering Jew. As the Rav points out, God *intends* man to shift from one Adamic typology to the other.

Leo's redemption occurs, then, as he embraces aspects of Adam II and achieves, if not a covenantal faith relationship with God, then at least a meaningful awareness of Him. In this way, R. Soloveitchik's philosophy of the human personality sheds a different light on Malamud's approaches to suffering (remaining Adam I-like by focusing on the self), to humanity (commitment to becoming Adam II-like by focusing on others) and to redemption (the act of becoming Adam II, transcending the self and entering into a covenantal faith relationship with another). In turn, these readings offer new explanations for why and how the Malamudian hero, who begins as a pitiful failure, can end as a redeemed *mensch*.

In this view, Malamud's major characters suffer as long as they adhere to Adam I's egocentrism and live only for themselves.¹⁶ The moment they choose to move toward Adam II, to live for a person or entity external to themselves, they achieve their humanity. Redemption occurs only through the act of committing themselves to a covenantal relationship of faith with another, who, unbeknownst to the characters, plays the role of God in their lives. These frequently unsavory instruments of redemption turn the suffering, seemingly God-forsaken characters toward the Divine. Indeed, God haunts Malamud's characters vicariously, in the form of probationary angels, matchmakers, prostitutes, grocers, *Hasidim*, and assorted beggars. In the author's fiction, R. Soloveitchik's *homo religiosus* does not meet God; God meets him. Thus, Malamud's trope of the suffering Jew, whose anguish ends when he makes a leap of faith by committing himself to a typically non-rational idea, is an expression of the Rav's lonely man of faith. The problem is that these characters think first and embrace faith second.

For the Rav, this order is reversed. Precisely because "the terms 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' belong exclusively to the realm of the *logos* and are therefore inapplicable to the act of faith," the intellect enters only *a posteriori*.¹⁷ He argues further that emotion must precede

16. See, for example, the characters Frank Alpine in *The Assistant* (New York, 1957), Yakov Bok in *The Fixer* (New York, 1966), Seymour Levin in *A New Life* (New York, 1961), and Arthur Fidelity in *Pictures of Fidelity* (New York, 1969).

17. *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York, 2006), 101, n. 1. The text of this edition is conveniently available on the website of The Rabbinical Council of America, at <http://traditionarchive.org/news/article.cfm?id=105067>.

rationalism also because feeling is not the result of intellection. Still more important is the Rav's linkage of feeling-thought-act. He explains:

The faith gesture is not motivated by intellectual insights or convictions. . . . The Halakhic (legal) world of faith . . . [insists] that feeling become thought, and that experience be acted out and transformed into an objective event.¹⁸

Note that intellectualizing the faith gesture is critical to transforming it into an objective act.¹⁹ Malamud's hapless characters begin with the rational, then accept the emotional, and then re-rationalize their new-found faith, converting it into an observable act. While R. Soloveitchik and Malamud seem to agree that if one accepts the emotional, the intellectual will follow, for the Rav, the key to a redeemed existence is oscillating between emotion and reason. In contrast, once Malamud's Jews make the faith gesture, intellectualizing it enables them to implement their redemption, and their stories end. Yet their suffering often coincides with their putting thought before faith.

Characters grapple with or stumble upon their humanity and redemption in *The Assistant*, *The Fixer*, *A New Life*, *Pictures of Fidelman*, and in some of the author's finest short stories, dramatizing his vision of how God seeks Man. In these works, when one is transformed from Adam I's loneliness and misery to Adam II's fulfillment

18. Ibid.

19. The picture is actually more complex, as an anonymous reader for this journal pointed out. For, in another passage, the Rav states that "The [faith] commitment is rooted not in one dimension, such as the rational one, but in the whole personality of the man of faith. The whole of the human being, the rational as well as the non-rational aspects, is committed to God. . . . The act of faith is aboriginal, exploding with elemental force . . ." (*Lonely Man of Faith*, 94). Here, feeling does not precede thought but rather is part of a complex that includes thought and more. It is this entire volitional-affective-rational-passional complex that explodes with "elemental force" and takes up the entire human being. Afterwards, reason separates itself out, as it were, and reflects upon the faith gesture. But even if the Rav is not the precise opposite of Malamud, his notion of faith as a complex that includes emotion, and of thought succeeding feeling, in *some way* differentiates him from Malamud.

The anonymous reader noted, in addition, that although in the immediate context the Rav is speaking of halakhic thought rather than philosophical or scientific thought about faith, the fact is that, for the Rav, halakhic thought is an instance of (and the highest expression of), a *general* feature of philosophical thought, which is to transform subjective feeling into objective thought, as is made clear in *The Halakhic Mind* (Philadelphia, 1986), 65-80, 85. These pages mirror the note in *The Lonely Man of Faith*.

and redemption, the change is often accompanied in the text by magic realism to represent the mysterious force in play. According to Abrams's definition, magic realism appears as "a sharply etched realism representing ordinary events and descriptive details [interwoven] with fantastic and dreamlike elements, as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales."²⁰ All of these elements combine in "The Magic Barrel" to convert Leo Finkle from *schlemiel* to *mensch*.

To that end, the tale's first paragraph introduces Leo's affinities with Adam I:

Not long ago there lived in uptown New York, in a small, almost meager room, though crowded with books, Leo Finkle, a rabbinical student at the Yeshiva University. Finkle, after six years of study, was to be ordained in June and had been advised by an acquaintance that he might find it easier to win himself a congregation if he were married. Since he had no present prospects of marriage, after two tormented days of turning it over in his mind, he called in Pinye Salzman, a marriage broker whose two-line advertisement he had read in the *Forward*.²¹

The rabbinical student values and possesses a great deal of knowledge, but after six years of study, is alone. Intellectually, he knows that to find a congregation, a community, he needs a wife—not as a soulmate or confidante, but as a means to a job. Leo thinks about his problem for two anguished days. He obviously dreads the prospect of finding a wife and is not socially adept at making friends. Thus, a few paragraphs later, we are told that "but for his parents . . . he was alone in the world"²² Here, Finkle has all of the hallmarks of Adam I. He is alone, has conquered a particular kind of knowledge for six years, and views a wife, an Eve, if you will, as Adam I did—that is, as a means to filling and subduing the garden. As the Rav explains, Adam I was created "in the image of God, [and was directed toward] the functional and practical aspects of his intellect . . . to gain control of nature."²³ In this respect, Leo's narrow view of life (intense study and winning a pulpit) resonates with Adam I's focus on his mind.

However, even though Finkle's six years of intellectual rabbinical study alludes to the six days of creation, at the end of Leo's education,

20. M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th ed., Boston, 1999), 196-97.

21. Bernard Malamud, "The Magic Barrel," in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Robert Giroux. (New York, 1997), 134.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Lonely Man of Faith*, 12.

he has created nothing; Adam I, alone, has no value. The irony in Malamud's "creation story" is that his Adam must create himself by redeeming an other, a "thou." Like Adam I, the student searches for God in terms of "the accomplishments of the surface personality."²⁴ True to Adam I's personality, Malamud's character searches for dignity in a career, but it is as if his latent Adam II, who yearns for community and a love of God, has steered him toward the rabbinate and a congregation, a faith community. The Adam II in Leo Finkle, who confesses that he does not love God, dearly wants to do so. Enter Pinye, the angel-like matchmaker.

Pinye Salzman is as much a character of magic realism as he is a divine messenger. As the story unfolds, Pinye becomes increasingly ethereal, until he is "a skeleton with haunted eyes,"²⁵ his office "in the air."²⁶ We are told that Leo approves of the marriage-broker tradition "because it made practical the necessary without hindering joy."²⁷ This view of marriage is Adam I-like; there is no spiritual connection or love associated with it. Wedlock is merely a prerequisite for landing a job for Leo, and the joy here seems to refer to the purely physical. Yet for Pinye too, women are a commodity. After spreading out six cards, each filled with information on a potential mate, Pinye tells his client, "You wouldn't believe me how much cards I got in my office. . . . The drawers are already filled to the top, so I keep them now in a barrel."²⁸ Reducing women to "much handled cards" seems to echo the Rav's characterization of Eve the first, who is created with Adam I but with whom he has no existential, spiritual relationship. The Eve the first figure is simply a female helpmate who assists Adam in subduing the garden, or the prospective rabbi in obtaining a congregation.

Finkle finds the cards deficient, but, as the first Eve did for the first Adam, the cards serve a purpose for the first Leo. They teach him about what he does not want and about the importance of love. Understandably, Pinye's attitude toward his clients is also utilitarian. When Leo asks for photographs of the women, the matchmaker responds, "First comes family, amount of dowry, also what kind promises."²⁹ One does not fall in love with practical information about an

24. *Ibid.*, 24.

25. Malamud, 143.

26. *Ibid.*, 147.

27. *Ibid.*, 135.

28. *Ibid.*, 135.

29. *Ibid.*, 136.

individual, but Pinye insists on describing three prospects: Sophie P., Lily H., and Ruth K. As their names indicate, these women represent, respectively, wisdom, purity, and mercy. When Finkle reports to Pinye that none of the women interests him, Salzman responds:

In what else will you be interested . . . if you not interested in this fine girl [Lily H.] that she speaks four languages and has personally in the bank ten thousand dollars? Also her father guarantees further twelve thousand. Also she has a new car, wonderful clothes, talks on all subjects, and she will give you a first-class home and children. How near do we come in our life to paradise?³⁰

Notice the absence of love, spiritual connection, or any kind of existential union in Salzman's definition of paradise. For the marriage broker, the Eden of Adam-and-Eve the first is paradise. In R. Soloveitchik's terms, Lily's virtues are those of the "surface-personality." She speaks four languages, has money, a car, and good clothes. These are Adam I accomplishments that bespeak an interest in mastering knowledge, acquiring wealth, and attaining dignity in society.

The scene in which Leo meets Lily Hirschorn, however, cuts through these surface values to awaken his Adam II qualities: the desire to love another and, surprising to him, to love God. He realizes this when, to make conversation on their blind date, Lily asks Finkle, "How was it that you came to your calling? I mean, was it a sudden passionate inspiration?" Leo, after a time, slowly replied, "I was always interested in the Law."³¹ In this exchange, Lily wants to elicit a spiritual response. Naturally, she assumes that one's "calling" to serve God occurs as the Rav describes it:

[As Elijah transformed Elisha while the latter] was tilling the soil, he encountered God and felt the transforming touch of God's hand. The strangest metamorphosis occurred. . . . Majestic man was replaced by covenantal man. He was initiated into a new spiritual universe.³²

Finkle's response to Lily's weighty question is not spiritual, but intellectual. He has been interested only in the Law. Yet Lily persists: "You saw revealed in it the presence of the Highest?" The rabbinical student ignores her question, but Lily probes again: "When did you become enamored of God?" At last, realizing that Salzman had depicted him as

30. *Ibid.*, 140.

31. *Ibid.*, 142.

32. *Lonely Man of Faith*, 104.

“some mystical figure, perhaps even passionate prophet he [Pinye] had dreamed up for her,” Leo replies, “I think . . . that I came to God not because I loved Him but because I did not.” The narrator notes, “This confession he spoke harshly because its unexpectedness shook him.”³³ Apparently, Finkle’s dialogue with Lily is his first meaningful communication with another person, and it consists of confronting a devastating truth about himself. At this point, the student learns that a first step toward transcending one’s self is knowing one’s self.

Leo’s revelatory admission that he does not love God advances his transformation from lonely and self-absorbed Leo the first to redeemed Leo the second. It seems to me that Finkle’s confiding in Lily is an example of the Rav’s faith community writ small, as his explanation of the way in which communicating is a redemptive gesture applies to Leo’s situation: “[I]n crisis and distress there was planted the seed of a new type of community—the faith community which reached full fruition in the covenant between God and Abraham.”³⁴ The future rabbi is clearly in distress with Lily’s probing questions, but his ability to respond honestly to her is the planted seed, which will reach fruition for him not with God, but with Stella.

However, the immediate result of Leo’s epiphany is shattering. He realizes now a litany of failures: his inability to find a bride on his own, “the true nature of his relationship to God, and from that it had come upon him, with shocking force, that apart from his parents, he had never loved anyone. Or perhaps it went the other way, that he did not love God so well as he might, because he had not loved man. . . . [H]e saw himself for the first time as he truly was—unloved and loveless.”³⁵ This is Finkle’s existential crisis. He is now ripe for the redemption that R. Soloveitchik believes is found “in the depth of crisis and failure.”³⁶

The Lonely Man of Faith posits that Adam II sees his own “existential uniqueness not through dignity or majesty,” but in “the redemptive [mode of existence], which is not necessarily identified with the dignified.”³⁷ In fact, the Rav refers to this condition as “cathartic redemptiveness [which] is experienced in the privacy of one’s in-depth personality . . . and reaches into the very hidden strata of the isolated

33. Malamud, 142.

34. *Lonely Man of Faith*, 38.

35. Malamud, 143

36. *Lonely Man of Faith*, 35.

37. *Ibid.*, 24.

'I' who knows himself as a singular being."³⁸ Unwittingly, Leo is ready to enter this mode of existence. It is as if Malamud's imagination strips the Rav's basic theories of human nature down to their core. Leo does not possess the awareness and *telos* that govern Adams I and II, but he does share (albeit unknowingly) their fundamental failings and need for love and redemption. For example, when he insists on marrying the prostitute Stella, he is emphatically ignoring his own dignity, as a man and as a rabbi. Here too, though, Malamud's character demonstrates R. Soloveitchik's definition of a hero as one who acts irrationally in a crisis. As the Rav explains elsewhere: "There are situations in life with which clear-cut logical processes and utilitarian approaches fail to cope, while the sudden spontaneous leap into the absurd... may save man when he finds himself in utter distress."³⁹ For Malamud, too, Leo's passion for Stella is heroic because it is redemptive, and that which redeems, sanctifies.⁴⁰

Yet that redemption also requires an act of transcendence. This occurs after Pinye denies the young man's persistent requests to meet Stella. The narrative continues: "Put me in touch with her, Salzman," Leo said humbly. "Perhaps I can be of service." Before he even lays eyes on her, Stella has stirred humility in him. More important, he now wants to serve, rather than be served (i.e., be provided with a wife). In the Rav's terms, Leo is now disposed to "give instead of conquer."⁴¹ Thus, he is beginning to meet the criteria for the Rav's definition of redemption: a state of security in which one "intuits his existence as worthwhile, legitimate and adequate, anchored in something stable and unchangeable."⁴² Leo's leap into the absurd, his yearning to anchor himself to someone whom he intuitively invests his life with value, has engendered the transcendent leap that R. Soloveitchik associates with Adam II's covenantal existential relationship with Eve and with God. The Rav writes:

The change from a technical utilitarian relationship [procuring a wife only in order to get a job] to a covenantal one [wanting to redeem and

38. *Ibid.*, 34.

39. "Catharsis," *Tradition* 17,2 (Spring 1978): 40.

40. Unlike Adams I and II, Malamud's characters would be lonely also ostensibly because having faith in seemingly absurd forms of redemption would divide them from their communities. Obviously, we can only infer this, as their stories do not have epilogues.

41. *Lonely Man of Faith*, 96.

42. *Ibid.*, 34.

sanctify a prostitute] occurs in the following manner. When God joins the community of Man the miracle of revelation takes place in two dimensions: in the transcendental—*Deus absconditus* emerges suddenly as *Deus revelatus*—and in the human—*homo absconditus* sheds his mask and turns into *homo revelatus*.⁴³

The above passage describes Leo's transformation, but in Malamud's world, Salzman has mystical qualities, for Finkle is "afflicted by a tormenting suspicion that Salzman had planned it all to happen this way."⁴⁴ At the story's end, Pinye is "transparent to the point of vanishing,"⁴⁵ and "chant[s] prayers for the dead."⁴⁶ Here, Salzman seems to be an Elijah figure. The Midrash states that Pinḥas would take the form of Elijah, who did not lose his physical body at death so that he could revisit earth occasionally.⁴⁷ Malamud's Pinye is Elijah-cum-matchmaker, whose daughter, rather than mantle, transforms an Adam I-like lonely rabbinical student into a redeeming and redeemed Adam II. The new Leo, like the new Elisha, has transcended himself, and in redeeming an "other" has fulfilled his humanity and sanctified his life.

The dynamic of oscillating between advancement and retreat, conquering and submission, so crucial to R. Soloveitchik's philosophy, is also critical to Malamud's work.⁴⁸ For much of "The Magic Barrel," Leo's mind is in flux. Recall the two tormented days spent "turning over in his mind" the problem of procuring a wife. He also vacillates

43. *Ibid.*, 51.

44. Malamud, 149.

45. *Ibid.*, 148.

46. *Ibid.*, 149.

47. Midrash Ruth 4.

48. R. Soloveitchik locates the moment when Adam I becomes Adam II at God's prohibiting Man from eating from the tree of knowledge. As a result of the divine injunction, Adam moves from "a non-reflective life to meditative existential, ontological existence" (*Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*, ed. David Shatz and Joel B. Wolowelsky [New York, 2000], 12), because he now has moral awareness. The Rav contends that this awareness results in liberating man from his environment and from the belief that existence is comprised only of pleasure. In this sense, "the law of withdrawal is the first *mizvah*. Man must not overreach" (13). Yet Adam II is also commanded to work in Eden, to keep it, and to *name* all of creation; Adam I is commanded to fill the earth and *subdue* all of creation. For the Rav, a life of approach and withdrawal (keeping and subduing) is divinely engineered and is a function of Man's dual nature. For Malamud, the dynamic plays out repeatedly with characters that are at the mercy of chance. They vacillate between advancement and retreat, succeeding only because of some inexplicable force that moves them to believe something remarkable.

between retaining Salzman and “seeking out another matchmaker”;⁴⁹ he oscillates between contempt and desire for the marriage broker; and he sees in Stella’s photograph the face of someone who “had *lived*, or wanted to—more than just wanted, perhaps regretted how she had lived. . . . Her he desired, [but] he experienced fear of her.”⁵⁰ At last, Leo reaches an epiphany after he learns Stella’s identity:

Though he prayed to be rid of her, his prayers went unanswered. Through days of torment he endlessly struggled not to love her; fearing success, he escaped it. He then concluded to convert her to goodness, himself to God. The idea alternately nauseated and exalted him.⁵¹

Here, the tension between living in this world and the transcendent one, which the Rav describes, is played out intellectually and emotionally in Malamud’s text. Leo identifies the tension of opposites in Stella’s eyes: she had lived, or wanted to, or regretted living. He wants her but fears her, “aware that he had received an impression, somehow, of evil. He shuddered, saying softly, ‘It is thus with us all.’”⁵² In the Rav’s terms, Stella is almost Leo’s God-figure. She stirs in him love and terror, a desire for advance and recoil. When he prays to be rid of her, because that prayer is self-serving, it goes unheeded. “Fearing success, he escaped it.” Lost amidst these dizzying changes of mind, Leo is undergoing mentally something akin to what the Rav attributes to the result of taking action—that is, the experience of alternating between the earthly world and that of the covenant of faith. For the theologian, the man of faith who must repeatedly exchange one way of life for the other is doomed to “ontological loneliness” because he “does not feel at home in either of these communities.”⁵³ For Malamud, this sentence of loneliness is unacceptable, and Leo determines to convert Stella to goodness and himself to God, prospects that nauseate and exalt him by turns.

It seems that Leo is roughly the distillation of the Rav’s philosophy. As a nearly ordained rabbi, Finkle feels he must *convert* to God, as if God is a religion distinct from Judaism. While the notion of converting to God might be related to Adam II’s existential covenant of faith, it also seems to be where Malamud locates humanity—in committing oneself to an entity greater than and external to

49. Malamud, 138.

50. *Ibid.*, 145, 146.

51. *Ibid.*, 148.

52. *Ibid.*, 146.

53. *Lonely Man of Faith*, 82-83.

the self. R. Soloveitchik describes this covenant in a way that applies poignantly to Leo and Stella, in terms of a “new kind of fellowship, which one finds in the existential community. . . . There one lonely soul finds another soul tormented by loneliness and solitude yet unqualifiedly committed.”⁵⁴ Leo and Stella, who seem tailored to this description of an existential covenantal faith relationship, are ideally matched. Yet, like his other blundering heroes, Malamud’s Leo “perhaps did not know that he had come to a final decision [about Stella] until he encountered Salzman in a Broadway cafeteria.”⁵⁵ Leo is the last to realize his own choice, for redemption has found *him*. Indeed, when the future rabbi actually meets Stella, “He pictured in her his own redemption.”⁵⁶ Here, in the Rav’s sense of the word, Finkle “intuits his life as worthwhile.”⁵⁷ In fact, Leo’s entering into a covenantal marriage commitment is his final and most humanistic, redemptive act. It is the transformation of faith into an observable act.

Just as the Rav’s readings of Adam I and Adam II apply to Leo, his interpretations of Genesis’s two accounts of Eve similarly describe feminine typologies that apply to Stella. In his essay, “Marriage,” Soloveitchik writes:

While the first account (Gen. 1:27) deals exclusively with the physiological sexual differentiation of “male and female” and their joint capacity for procreation, the second account (Gen. 2:18) completely omitted this aspect of the male-female relationship . . . “Be fruitful and multiply” was imparted to an anonymous male and unknown female, but not to the two *personae* Adam and Eve. In contrast to the sexual polarity of male and female, *zakhar u-nekevah*, the Bible switches to *ish* and *ishah*, man and woman, and “a helpmate opposite him, *ezer ke-negdo*.”⁵⁸

By marrying not a teacher or wealthy widow, but possibly a prostitute, Leo transforms Stella from the Eve the first-like functionary sex partner of Genesis 1 to the “helpmate opposite him.” When he sees her, he does not see a mere female, but a woman who has lived, and so marriage will redeem both Adam I and Eve the first. Stella’s “profession” heightens the Rav’s point that at one level, “sexual activity is redeemed [by marriage]

54. *Ibid.*, 40.

55. Malamud, “The Magic Barrel,” 148.

56. *Ibid.*, 149.

57. *Ibid.*, 34.

58. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Marriage,” in *Family Redeemed*, 33.

by infusing it with . . . man's desire to give love,"⁵⁹ and that in wedlock, "The natural becomes personal; the vulgar refined; and the profane sacred—not by the intervention of God, but by that of man."⁶⁰ The Rav and Malamud would agree that Man does not require God for redemption and that sacrificing one's ego-centrism to sanctify and redeem another person is an act of fully achieved humanity. This is achieved in marriage, whose task "is to teach Man to find love in identity and continuity."⁶¹ R. Soloveitchik stresses that covenantal marriage is a series of commitments to alleviate "the spiritual incompleteness of lonely man and his need for ontological oneness with another individual."⁶² Leo Finkle unwittingly, perhaps unconsciously, recognizes his own incompleteness and loneliness in Stella.

Obviously, for the theologian, the archetypal covenantal community consists not only of Adam and Eve/husband and wife, but also of God. In "The Magic Barrel," however, the third party is not the Divine *per se*, but love—in this case, God's instrument. It is the magic that enables Leo the first to transcend and transform himself into Leo the second, who can then redeem even a prostitute.

After recognizing that he has neither loved nor been loved, Leo realizes that "the Five Books and all the commentaries" had not taught him the most critical knowledge—the truth about himself. He attributes his consequent "desolating loneliness" to the fact that "he was a Jew and that a Jew suffered."⁶³ The faithful Jew—learned, observant, but divided from himself, his community, and his God—has nowhere to turn, no one to turn to. As we are told, for Leo, "there was no *to whom*."⁶⁴ Here, Leo's loneliness parallels that of Adam I. As the Rav puts the latter's situation, naming and describing one's environment produces knowledge of it, but one remains alone without someone to confide in; to conquer loneliness, "Man must reveal himself" to another.⁶⁵ Perhaps intuiting this truth, with renewed determination in his bride quest, Finkle reasons that "perhaps with this new knowledge of himself he would be more successful than in the past. Perhaps love would now come to him and a bride to that love. And for this sanctified

59. *Ibid.*, 39.

60. *Ibid.*, 46.

61. *Ibid.*, 47.

62. *Ibid.*, 33.

63. Malamud, 143.

64. *Ibid.*

65. "Adam and Eve," *Family Redeemed*, 20.

seeking who needed a Salzman?”⁶⁶ Leo realizes that finding a bride, a wife, someone to love who loves him, is indeed a sanctified mission. With this recognition, Finkle experiences the transformative power of the Rav’s cathartic redemption. From the depths of a despairing existential crisis, Leo turns his personal truth into a means of redemption, and grows from Adam I’s self-centeredness to Adam II’s desire for a covenantal faith relationship with another person.

In these respects, Malamud prefigures basic elements of the Rav’s theology: Adam I and II typologies of the human personality, the tension produced by the opposing pulls of each type’s mode of existence and accompanying community, and an existential loneliness that can bring about redemption. Variations of these possibilities are explored in four other Malamud stories of magic realism: “Angel Levine,” “The Lady of the Lake,” “The Jewbird,” and “The Silver Crown.” In “Angel Levine,” a Job-like tailor named Manishevitz must believe that a black man is both a Jew and a probationary angel sent by God in response to the tailor’s prayers for his and his wife’s health.⁶⁷ When he chooses to believe, the couple’s health is restored and Alexander Levine ascends from the rooftop amidst “a whirring of wings,” a black feather drifting down, “turned white, but it was only snowing.”⁶⁸ Having once reasoned, “If you believed, you believed,”⁶⁹ the tailor ends the tale proclaiming, “Believe me, there are Jews everywhere.”⁷⁰ Manishevitz’s faith in the non-rational, however, is absent in the other three stories, whose characters pay a heavy price for their lack of faith. “The Lady of the Lake”’s Henry Levin will not believe that the beautiful Italian, Isabella (a secret Holocaust survivor), will love a Jew, and he loses her. “The Jewbird”’s Harry Cohen will not believe that the bird, Schwartz, is an old Jew, and essentially murders him. And “The Silver Crown”’s Albert Gans will not believe that paying a Rabbi Lifschitz to make an expensive silver crown will cure Gans’s dying father; sadly, just after the son refuses to pay Lifschitz, the elder Gans dies. In these tales, God’s search for men fails because the latter refuse to have faith, fail to transcend themselves, and remain unredeemed. Thus, beneath the veil of forgetfulness, Malamud’s vision of the human personality becomes visible. Like the

66. Malamud, 143.

67. For parallels between Elijah and Job in “Angel Levine,” see. David J. Zucker, “Malamud as Modern Midrash,” *Judaism* 43,2 (Spring 1994): 159-72.

68. Malamud, 166.

69. *Ibid.*, 165-166.

70. *Ibid.*, 166.

Rav's, it is to achieve humanity and experience redemption through transcendence.

In the end, the writer and the Rav toiled in different fields but cultivated the same garden. Interestingly, when asked what makes his characters Jewish other than their names and circumstance, Malamud answered, "Their Jewish qualities, the breadth of their vision, their kind of fate, their morality, their life, their awareness, responsibility, intellectuality, and ethicality. Their love of people and God."⁷¹ The fact that these qualities resound throughout *The Lonely Man of Faith* further testifies to the affinities between Malamud and the Rav. It may be that by creating his own worlds, Malamud was only fulfilling his Adam-I mandate to imitate God, but he also created Adam II-like characters, who discover their own humanity and redemption through transcendence and commitment. In the process, Malamud himself oscillates between Genesis' two Adams, perhaps preferring a covenantal faith relationship with humankind to one with God. As a writer, then, Bernard Malamud himself approximates R. Soloveitchik's lonely man of faith, alternating between creation and transcendence. Like Adam I, he dominates his environment (his texts); and like Adam II, he seeks redemption, not necessarily for himself through God, but for humanity through his art.

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71. Lawrence Lasher, *Conversations with Bernard Malamud* (Jackson, Mississippi, 1991), 50.