

FINNEGAN'S AWAKENING

by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

This essay is mentioned in the discussion of the humanistic kabbalist. It is to be read with a liquid mind.

... Once the figure ground principle is understood, we can see why the knowledge of God is not given to man in the usual manner of his cognition. Clearly, his knowledge is always of the figure and not of the ground. To focus and direct one's mind means to seek out the figure and to depress the ground. Tillich's phrase—God, the ground of all being—serves us well. Yet despite the fact that it implies a basic invisibility of the ground, we continue to look for God as if He were a figure, the image, the eidolon. McLuhan speaks of the environment as invisible factor. God as the environment in which the cosmos lives, remains invisible because He is the ground which visibilizes the figure. The transcendent transcends the figure and therefore is, as ground, invisible.

But the search for God in the figure is also doomed. God, as Watts put it, is always on the inside of the inside, while anything that becomes visible ipso facto only creates other outsides as it faces the eye and reflects light from the outside—the sur-face. The truly immanent is invisible because it is always deeper than the surface. Once even consciousness is seen as programming, that which inheres in the programming, the knower, cannot become known. In the figure-ground situation, another dichotomous construct is hidden: subject and object. As soon as awareness turns upon itself, it has contaminated the subject, the knower, with object aims and qualities. To want to know something turns that something into a thing, an object. The subject is the opposite of the object. By definition it knows and is not known. In the figure-ground dichotomy, the figure and the ground are objects and the subject hides itself in the search for knowledge. By being made self-conscious, it fibrillates for a very small moment between the hide and seek. This touches the life-death flip and creates great anxiety. “Now you see it, now you don't,” is to be conscious of everything else but not of itself. “There shall no man see ME and live. (Ex. 33:20). The experience of the man who experiences his own death, and in himself sees galaxies light up is close to the experience described in the Midrash about death. We shall quote the Midrash when we speak more of Death.

We recede from the fibrillation, as soon as we can manage. Being so programmed that we cannot linger in the fibrillation, we are shocked by our own adrenalin programming to let go of the subject's self-knowledge, the death revelation. With great effort, we can recall our self encounter, but not fully. Yet we can recall it enough for the extrapolation of some ideas on how the hide-and-seek works.

We have noticed that when we inspect the length of one dichotomous construct, we begin to note the other perpendicular constructs that are necessary for the maintenance of the first. In order to make the figure-ground construct mentally visible to us, we transpose the figure ground dichotomy from a zero position on the subject object continuum to a plus position on the object side. Even when we know this, we do not know it fully because by that time the game has

slipped to a conceptual structure. This is another way of maintaining the object separation from the knower so that knowledge of a thing becomes possible.

Heschel is right in invoking the conceptual-situational dichotomy. But what he seems to ignore is the fact that in doing this in the form of a book, he has only reinforced the conceptual mode. (The obverse of this is that it occurs in a book held in the reader's hand—a situation.) He is no more right, however, than Buber, who divides relationships between I-Thou and I-It. To know the I-Thou and to name it, is to "ittify" it. Like the fifth move in cat's cradle, the figure only undergoes a topological distortion, but does not essentially change. (Obversely, is not all topology a way of showing that essential changes are only topological rearrangements?)

What am I trying to say here? (I want to give a secret away and I know that I shall not succeed, and that I will succeed—but only by indirection.) The secret I focus on will not be told. Having become the figure, it is no longer the secret and what I really want to show is only visible from the corner of the mind's eye, and not in the center of the view which the figure occupies. I do not want to tell the manifest, I want to tell the secret, but only as it becomes the manifest can it be told.

This is what the esoteric game is all about. The hidden becomes the manifest, the esoteric becomes the exoteric so that the initiate becomes privy to the secret which is no longer a secret. And this is why even the so-called mystics, the Official Kabbalists, and the Hassidim, etc., cannot lay claim to the true arcana, because there is only one Arcanum and that is that "I am God." The Creator-creature dichotomy is all that was ever created. God is All, but much of the All is programmed to think of itself as creature. The creature is nothing but an aspect of the divine omnipotence programmed to experience itself as creature.

At the moment when the creature gets too close to the secret, a flip occurs and the Knower (the Creator) protects His anonymity (His essential need not to be named) by offering another bit of knowledge. The new dichotomy is a new red herring to keep from being unmasked. (We shall return to the question, "Why must the unmasking be delayed to infinity?") In this sense, no system can exist without assistance from other systems which are perpendicular to it. The new insight contained in a new dichotomous construct, takes on significance only in relation to other dichotomies already contained within the person. The hidden, in becoming manifest, keeps the merry-go-round going to Eyn Sof

Eyn Sof is both a condition of freedom and a condition of necessity. Adjusting to necessity and designing such games as hide the futility of infinite changeless existence, He embraces infinity by inventing changes— short, medium and long range games, all of which are designed to hide the infinity of necessary being. How much Maimonides wished to hide, and how much he gave away the Necessary Existent God. How terrible. I can, at least, commit suicide. In spite of all its tragic elements, death is still a relief, because I, Zalman Schachter, am not a necessary existent. I am a variable that thinks itself an independent one, but is itself a dependent variable. But, thank God, I am not a necessary existent. But I AM is.

All of change is created, moved and flipped in order to transfer the necessity of existence on to something else. Who is it now? The fashions change and it is now someone else. Atlas is forever, but in order to get some relief, He thinks that he is now someone else. Jesus is forever on the Cross, but to ease the burden, he thinks he is now this one, now that. He splits into six million and has six million awarenesses of crucifixion. The crucial fiction is individual consciousness. The play, the game, the program that makes for person, moves over the field of Atlas and Jesus. This is why some people make a difference between Jesus as a Christ, and THE CHRIST. This also is why there are so many Buddhas and Avatars, and in every generation there are the seven shepherds or the thirty-six zaddikim, the lammed-vovniks, or the righteous who each have sixty mighty men to accompany them through life. Mount Sinai is eternally poised and will crush whoever it is poised over unless he accepts the Torah. This is how He is programmed. The Torah is the program, and the experience of the poised mountain is the program.

Who did the programming? He who is the Necessary Existent! In accepting the necessity of his existence, He is It, and has to bear it all. But then comes the flip point, the extraneous thought, the t'murah, and in the quick turn, He is freed and has become only a he. No longer a necessary existent, he is expendable and variable, and has at this point forgotten that he is to enter the t'murah, the flip. (The seriousness with which we all obey our programming is so terribly evident as this is being written. The Arab-Israeli war is smoldering. Everyone is looking for a flipout to save face. And what is face? An imagined, programmed necessity.)

How does one save face? By flipping out from the necessity and choosing another set of better necessities which are not so difficult to bear. But what about meaning? A flip out is a death of the old face. What is better? To be mortified or to be dead? Once one is on the honor-shame continuum, shame is death. A flipout is a way of changing from one continuum to the other. You decide to play economics and life games, and you may flip out of the shame-death continuum.

Life is then a game in which the trumps is life, and all the continua are given to serve it. But, in order to bring the programmed ones to their sense, more death and power has to be invoked in order to push the one who is it to the corner where he must flip. "If you are pushed to the end of the sky—there is no more land left on which to stand— from there I shall gather you in and from there I shall take you." God, the Redeemer, is the one who is It so that the flip-out in the service of life may take place. The Messiah is always a suffering servant because he takes suffering to himself and gives another the flip-out possibility.

By taking an excursus, we have managed to look at the flip-out by not looking at it. If we now wish to focus again on what was said, we will find it vanishing from our sight. This is part of the cul-de-sac of logical positivism; in wishing to hold on to the medium of communication, it loses the message. The immanent flees the field of vision. Shy by necessity, it will not become figure. The ground shifts constantly, and this is why we do not see it unless we turn it into figure; "once the ground principle is understood, we can see. . ."