

The Lonely Man of Faith

by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik
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5 In the covenantal community, man of faith finds deliverance from his isolation in the “now,” for the latter contains both the “before” and the “after.” Every covenantal time experience is both retrospective, reconstructing and reliving the bygone, as well as prospective, anticipating the “about to be.” In retrospect, covenantal man re-experiences the rendezvous with God in which the covenant, as a promise, hope, and vision, originated. In prospect, he beholds the full eschatological realization of this covenant, its promise, hope, and vision...Within the covenantal
10 community not only contemporary individuals but generations are engaged in a colloquy, and each single experience of time is three dimensional, manifesting itself in memory, actuality, and anticipatory tension....

15 Thus, the individual member of the covenantal faith community feels rooted in the past and related to the future. The “before” and the “after” are interwoven in his time experience. He is not a hitchhiker suddenly invited to get into a swiftly traveling vehicle which emerged from nowhere and from which he will be dropped into the abyss of timelessness while the vehicle will rush on into parts unknown, continually taking on new passengers and dropping the old ones. Covenantal man begins to find
20 redemption from insecurity and to feel at home in the continuum of time and responsibility which is experienced by him in its endless totality—from everlasting even to everlasting. He is no longer an evanescent being. He is rooted in everlasting time, in eternity itself. And so covenantal man confronts not only a transient contemporary “thou” but countless “thou”
25 generations which advance toward him from all sides and engage him in the great colloquy in which God Himself participates with love and joy.

30 This act of revelation does not avail itself of universal speech, objective logical symbols, or metaphors. The message communicated from Adam to Eve certainly consists of words. However, words do not always have to be identified with sound. It is rather a soundless revelation accomplished in muteness and in the stillness of the covenantal community when God responds to the prayerful outcry of lonely man and agrees to meet him as brother and friend, while man, in turn, assumes the great burden which is the price he pays for his encounter with God.