

THE LEGACY OF TWO ADAMS

DAN VOGEL

This article is published as a perpetual memorial for my grandson, Ittai Aharon Yogev ׀״U. Like Adam Natura, he loved God's earth and His great outdoors. Like Adam Humanus, he was intellectually perceptive and spiritually speculative. His memory will be a blessing to us all.

THE MAKING OF TWO ADAMS

Explaining why the Torah narrates two creations of Adam in the first two chapters of Genesis, J. B. Soloveitchik postulates two Adams.¹ Adam in Chapter 1, is Adam *Natura*, Natural Man, living out his days and nights as the chief creation of the animal world. But there is one characteristic that separates him from his companions in the garden of Eden: He had been endowed with *tzelem Elohim* (Gen. 1:27), or, as Soloveitchik puts it, *Imago Dei*, the Image of God. Thus Adam is gifted with the ability *to fill the earth and master it* (1:28). As the first scientist, his initial task is taxonomic; to name and classify the fauna of Eden. But this is not mastery of nature. The very idea gives Adam *Natura* "labor pains," in Soloveitchik's graphic analogy,

. . . about to give birth to himself as a *humanus*, to an I [a self] who secedes from his surrounding, meditates upon the things of his immediate [physical] environment, and sees the environment as something separate and foreign confronting him. (*FR*,8)¹

In Chapter 2, Adam ascends intellectually to become Adam *Humanus*. An additional set of commands is laid upon him by the Creator: *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat. But as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it . . .'* (2:16-17). The JPS translation of verse 16 leaves the impression that Adam had a choice to eat or not to eat of all the trees of the garden, but Soloveitchik takes the phrase *And the Lord commanded* as a command to Adam to eat of all the trees in the garden (*FR*, 5)² This is a stage of *Imago Dei*, in the form of an allegory, setting forth the **necessity** for Mankind to venture up out of his physical environment in the Garden of Eden, into the task of intellectual endeavor. Adam *Humanus* is "entitled to desire, to quest, to long for

Dan Vogel served as Professor of Literature at Yeshiva University 1949-73, and as Dean of Stern College 1957-67. He published The Three Masks of American Tragedy and Emma Lazarus. Upon aliyah in 1973, he became chairman of the English Department at Michlalah-Jerusalem College for Women. He retired in 1995, and serves as an associate editor of the Jewish Bible Quarterly.

and be fascinated by something great and wonderful – immortality and omniscience [in other words, *meta*-physical knowledge]." He feels the irreconcilable urge to break out, to "reject boundaries and long for vastness and boundlessness." (*FR*,10)

But verse 17 throws this command into the cauldron of paradox. Man's "two basic urges" (*FR*, 10) – the inner endowment of Mind and the assumption of God's command – impel him to search for Knowledge. However, Soloveitchik asserts, "He will have to pay a toll of the road along which he would travel" (*FR*,14). In fulfilling God's directive to develop his unique spiritual, intellectual potentiality of *Imago Dei*, Man will inevitably confront the paradox that he was denied permission to (allegorically) eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. That realm of knowledge is reserved for God alone. Soloveitchik explains: "The moral law challenges man in numerous cases . . . to refrain from advancing and to withdraw, to defy the very fantasy that made him man, [in other words] to give up." (*FR*,11). He will always desire to quest for Total Knowledge, but never entirely voluntary; forever commanded, yet never entirely ordained. Man is the victim, as it were, of inescapably attempting to conquer Ultimate Knowledge and the inscrutable foreknowledge that he will never be able to do so. He will continually learn that "A man's reach," as the poet Robert Browning intoned, "must exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

Adam/Man must "train the self to live in accord with [the] principle of limitation," asserts Soloveitchik (*FR*,15). He must expose himself to the Lord's command and paradox, to his own perplexity and resignation. Therefore, Adam must be expelled from Eden. John Milton best put it poetically:

Greatly instructed I [Adam] shall hence depart,
Greatly in peace of thought, and have my fill
Of knowledge, what this Vessel [Man] can contain;
Beyond which was my folly to aspire.
Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best. . . .

(*Paradise Lost*, Book XII:557-561)

Resigned to his limitation, Adam takes his wife Eve, and, the Bible relates, goes quietly eastward. No "please," no questions, no complaints.

This essay extrapolates Soloveitchik's thesis as a legacy of the two Adams to two other biblical heroes of Mind – Kohelet and Job – and then, to the cre-

dit of Soloveitchik's universality of insight, to an interpretation of a world-famous American novel, *Moby-Dick, or the Whale*, by Herman Melville (1851), the meaning of which has been constantly under scrutiny since its publication.

KOHELET AS ADAM I NATURA

Solomon the Wise understood the plight of Adam in the way Soloveitchik expounded it 29 centuries later. In his meditation called Kohelet [Ecclesiastes], Solomon summed it up in one verse: *I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun – an unhappy business, that, which God gave [to] men to be concerned with* (Eccl. 1:13).

The verse begins in first person singular to indicate that it was a voluntary decision on Kohelet's part: *I set my mind* [יָרַדְתִּי אֶת לְבָבִי] to go off on this quest for wisdom. In the middle, however, the verse switches to third person. It is God [יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ] Who gave Mankind [בְּחַדְשׁוֹ] the task to do so, and an unhappy task it is. So, which is it – voluntary or ordained? Both, says Kohelet. Desired, but not entirely voluntary; commanded, but not entirely ordained, precisely like Adam's situation.

Kohelet is the empirical Adam. First, like Adam I, he contemplates Nature, how the sun rises and sets *and glides back to where it rises*; how *all the streams flow into the sea, / yet the sea is never full . . .* (1:7-8). Nature is full of contradictions, and no answers. So Kohelet turns to the city of Jerusalem:

I said to myself: Here I have grown richer and wiser than any that ruled before me over Jerusalem, and my mind has zealously absorbed wisdom and knowledge [יָדַעְתִּי]. And so I set my mind to appraise wisdom and to appraise madness and folly . . . (1:16-17).

Everywhere he encounters irony and paradox. Observation leads him to conclude that *Wisdom is superior to folly / As light is superior to darkness*; and true, *A wise man has eyes in his head / Whereas a fool walks in darkness* (2:13-14). Intellect, on the other hand, forces him to ask, *But so what? I also realized that the same fate awaits them both* [the wise and the fool] (2:14). *God will doom both righteous and wicked . . .* (3:17). All, groans Kohelet, *has been predestined anyway* (9:1). Kohelet, as the representative Man, does have choices: either despair unto death, or righteous resignation to the inscrutability of the existential paradoxes. Like his forebear Adam, he chooses resigna-

tion: *The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments, for this applies to all mankind!* (12.13, NJPS slightly revised).

Kohelet, half-desirous, half-impelled, had ventured into the intellectual unknown, only to learn that he cannot grasp the knowledge of what is truly good and evil as the fruit of his investigations. Like his spiritual forefather Adam, Kohelet accepts his defeat with equanimity. He resigns himself to be a lonely man of faith.

JOB AS ADAM II *HUMANUS*

In the Prologue to this drama, it is God Himself Who introduces Job into the contest with the Satan (Job 1:8). Indeed, the author of the book has Him call Job *my servant* [עַבְדִּי], a special appellation, reserved heretofore for the likes of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Isaiah. It casts Job as one of God's heroes. In this indirect way, the author wants us to understand that Job, like Adam and Kohelet, is commanded to undergo the spiritual trial that is about to be imposed upon him.

The plot of the drama needs only a quick synopsis to focus the perspective: Job loses his children to murderers, his wealth to invaders and the elements, his wife to despair. He is left nearly naked, afflicted, suffering, alone, on a dunghill. Then three, finally four, friends come to sit with him.

The first of the friends to speak is Eliphaz the Temanite, and he touches off the contentious debate. '*See how happy is the man whom God reproves; / Do not reject the discipline of the Almighty*' (5:17). Job challenges Eliphaz that he can be guilty without sin: '*Relent! Let there not be injustice; / Relent! I am still in the right. / Is injustice on my tongue? / Can my palate not discern evil?*' (6:29-30). Knowing that he is a man who revered God in thought and action, Job turns to complain to God, significantly recalling the terminology of Genesis: '*If I have sinned, what have I done to You, watcher of men* [מִשְׁמַרְטֵי]? / *Why make of me Your target, / And a burden to myself?*' (7:20).

In his commentary to The Book of Job, Amos Chacham relates Job's reference to מִשְׁמַרְטֵי in the Genesis story:

And perhaps there is in this term a hint of the complaint as narrated in the Garden of Eden passage: *And He expelled the man . . . in order to protect the way to the tree of life*, the implication of these

words being that God, as it were, was misgiving about mankind [lit. the man] and placed guards against him, and this, precisely this, is the complaint of Job.³

From the pain of personal perplexity Job pushes his complaint up to universal theodicy: *Why do the wicked live on, / Prosper and grow wealthy?* (21:7) Asking why the righteous seemingly suffer and the wicked seemingly prosper is getting too close to the knowledge of true Good and Evil. "Job was in error, because he tried to grasp the nature of evil," wrote Soloveitchik (letter to the author, April 15, 1965).

The debate goes hotly back and forth, both sides persistent in their philosophical positions. This is too much, finally, for God. At the beginning of Chapter 38, the author of Job brings God down from heaven: *Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said: /Who is this that darkeneth counsel / By words without knowledge [וַיַּבֵּן לִי דְעָוָה?]* (38:2). Though the rhetorical question seems directed to Job, the reproof seems to be directed to his friends: *'I am incensed at you and your two friends,'* God declares to Eliphaz the Temanite, *for you have not spoken the truth about Me as did my servant Job'* (42:7).

But Job's dialogue had been almost entirely complaints and questions. Wherein lies his "truth"? It would seem that the "truth" lies actually in the courageous and persistent questioning of God's ways; an undertaking not voluntary, not entirely ordained, yet commanded. Such men are not rebels; they are God's heroes, as the Prologue implies.

Job had asked a question of Knowledge, but received an answer of Power. And so Job, Man *Humanus*, the hero of Persistent Mind, modestly says to God, '[You asked] *Who is this that obscures counsel without knowledge [וַיַּבֵּן לִי דְעָוָה?]* / *Indeed, I spoke without understanding / Of things beyond me'* (42:3). *'I clap my hand to my mouth. I have spoken once, and will not reply; / Twice and will do so no more'* (40:4-5). Like his heroic predecessors, Adam and Solomon, in the end Job contritely acquiesces.

MELVILLE AND HIS MAN *NATURA/HUMANUS*

Such journeys of the mind did not end with the Bible. We now must leap a couple of thousand years, leave the Bible itself, and consider the protagonist of the most Bible-inspired work of fiction in American literature, Herman

Melville's novel, *Moby-Dick, or the Whale* (1851). Melville (1819-1891) was himself an inheritor of the legacy of the two Adams, intoxicated with what Robert Alter called "the imaginative texture of the Bible," and in this great novel "Melville used a . . . strategy of building allusively on a dissenting biblical text, Job, in order to conduct his imaginative argument with dominant biblical theology."⁴ He created a hero of Mind named Captain Ahab, who straddled the challenges of Adam, Kohelet, and Job, all of whom Melville names and quotes in the novel. But Captain Ahab went too far beyond them and paid for it.

The story is told by a philosophically-minded narrator called Ishmael, a wanderer like his namesake, but a spiritual one. The plot is developed on two interlocked levels. On the realistic plane, it is an adventurous story of whaling, when it was at its height in 19th century America. On a metaphysical plane, it is the tale of the master of the whaler *Pequod*, who transforms an ordinary business venture into a confrontation between Man and God. The captain's name is Ahab, and one character testifies of him, "a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab" (Ch. 16).⁵ There is no Jezebel in this novel, no dogs licking blood, and the appearance of a character named Elijah is but momentary. Yet, one might read *Moby-Dick* almost as a *midrash* on I Kings 16:30: *Ahab the son of Omri did what was displeasing to the Lord, more than all who preceded him.* The question before us, then, is: What did Captain Ahab do that provoked the Lord more than his spiritual predecessors did?

In an early chapter, we learn that Captain Ahab had lost a leg on the previous voyage in an encounter with an gigantic albino whale named by the sailors Moby-Dick. Now, on the current voyage, the *Pequod* has been under way for several days to the whale-fishing grounds. All has been normal, until the captain suddenly orders all hands to gather on deck. In his first major speech in the novel, Captain Ahab charismatically persuades the crew that the primary object of the voyage will not be the killing of whales for the purpose of rendering the carcass into oil for sale back in Nantucket, but searching out the White Whale and killing it.

The only objection is voiced by the chief mate, Starbuck, a quiet, competent, right-thinking man of reason created by Melville as a dramatic foil to the grandiloquent captain. He accuses the captain of endangering the livelihood of everyone on board for the sake of personal revenge – on a dumb brute, no

less, that had acted instinctively. Captain Ahab does not deny it, but to justify himself to Starbuck, he insists that there's a "lower layer" of meaning to his obsession. He offers the following analogy:

"How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me that white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's nought beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. *That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate* [emphasis added]; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak my hate upon him." (Ch. 36)

Melville's passionate "prisoner" parallels Man in Soloveitchik's scheme, who decides "to reject boundaries and long for vastness and boundlessness." Like Adam, Kohelet, and Job, Captain Ahab feels "tasked" – that is, *commanded* – to undergo a mission of trying to break through "inscrutability" to grasp "Truth" (Ch. 76) – what is called Knowledge [לַמַּד] in the biblical narratives of previous attempts.

Aloneness and loneliness, as Soloveitchik observed, is the sad condition of the Man *Humanus*. And so, Melville has "Ahab sitting alone" (Ch. 37), privately scrutinizing sea charts (Ch. 44), shunning officers and crew (Ch. 106) who do not understand or appreciate his obsession, "soliloquiz[ing]" on his fate (Ch. 30, 127). Indeed, the entire Book of Kohelet is a soliloquy; and Ishmael, Melville's narrator, muses at one point: "The truest of all books is Solomon's, and Ecclesiastes [Kohelet] is the fine hammered steel of woe. 'All is vanity.' ALL. This willful world hath not got hold of unchristian Solomon's wisdom yet" (Ch. 96). This statement will be echoed in Melville's letter to his friend Nathaniel Hawthorne after he finished this novel: "I read Solomon more and more, and every time see deeper and deeper and unspeakable meanings in him."⁶

And Job: Melville mentions the Book of Job in the "Extracts" compendium that introduces the novel and refers to "Job's whale" in Chapter 41 of the novel, alluding to the Leviathan mentioned in the Lord's oration in Job 40-41. A pair of eminent scholars of the novel opine that Melville "was reviewing [Job] as he was forming his conception of *Moby-Dick*," that his "conception of *Moby-Dick* [was] a kind of nineteenth century Book of Job," and that the author of the novel himself was one such hero: "Melville sought, as Job had sought .

. . . an explanation for the existence of evil in the world."⁷ The Book of Job is the most underscored and annotated book in Melville's copy of the King James Bible, as preserved in the Harvard University Library (where I had the good fortune to examine it).

Captain Ahab, even more than Soloveitchik's "man-natura," had faced the rawest forces of nature – the primordial, chaotic, uncontrollable power of the sea, and its most primordial, powerful, gigantic, and fearsome inhabitant, the Leviathan. When a terrible storm buffets the *Pequod*, and electrical fire-balls called corposants play on the yard-arms of the ship, to the consternation of the superstitious sailors, Ahab challenges God Himself.

It is no accident that the oration Herman Melville now extracts from the lips of Captain Ahab resounds with the theme and very cadence of Job's speeches. Centuries earlier, Job, without rebellion, had cried, *Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him, / But I will maintain my own ways before Him!* (Job 13:15 in the King James version, a passage that Melville had underlined). There had been no rebellion in Job's addresses to God, only a fierce self-respect. Now, in the very rhythm of Job's verse, Captain Ahab cries to the fiery messengers of God:

"I own thy speechless, placeless power, said I not so? Nor was it wrung from me; nor do I now drop these links. Thou canst blind; but I can then grope. Thou canst consume; but I can then be ashes The lightning flashes through my skull; mine eye-balls ache and ache Yet blindfold, yet will I talk to thee." (Ch. 118)

There is no rebellion here, either; only a fierce self-respect. Ahab does not need the proclamations of God's Power in the last chapters of the Book of Job; he grants it. What he wants is answers to questions of life. What he does not accept is the lesson that Job learned, that in the face of the inscrutable, Man must accept silence.

Finally, the climactic chapters in *Moby-Dick* approach. Ahab is talking quietly to Starbuck about his long career of sailing and whaling, about his wife and child of his elder years waiting for him at home. Then he cries out:

"Why this strife of the chase? I feel deadly faint, bowed, and humped, as though I were Adam, staggering beneath the piled centuries since Paradise What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening, hidden lord and master, and

cruel remorseless emperor *commands* me [emphasis mine to remind my reader of Soloveitchik's use of the term]; that against all natural lovings and longings, I so keep pushing, and crowding, and jamming myself all the time; recklessly making me ready to do what in my own proper, natural heart I durst not so much as dare? . . . Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm?" (Ch. 132)

What impelled Adam II *Humanus* impels Captain Ahab. As Soloveitchik formulated it, he "sees the environment as something separate and foreign confronting him" (*FR*, 8). It is, as Kohelet said, *an unhappy business, that, which God gave [to] men to be concerned with* (Eccl. 1:13). Not entirely voluntary, yet desired; not entirely ordained, yet commanded.

And now comes the provocation that enrages God: Adam, Kohelet, Job all acquiesced in the ultimate realization that the search, though preordained and necessary, was nevertheless futile. Not Ahab.

Defiant to the end, Captain Ahab chases the White Whale for three days, though his chief mate cries to him, "See! Moby-Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!" (Ch. 135). Finally, God once more comes down out of heaven, it seems: He delegates the whale as His executioner of Ahab for provoking Him more than the spiritual "kings" before him. Ahab in his longboat catches up to the whale, hurls his harpoon into it, but the harpoon's cord in the boat is fouled. Stooping to clear it, Ahab is whisked out of the whaleboat. He is seen once more, as a drowned corpse tangled in his own harpoon line around the diving whale.

And as punishment to all, the White Whale sinks the *Pequod* with all hands, except Ishmael, the narrator. The headnote of his Epilogue reads, "And I only am escaped alone to tell" the tale, a quotation from Chapter 1 of the Book of Job. In *Moby-Dick*, it is the final echo of that book.

What Soloveitchik's analysis of Adam has brought us to see is that Adam, Kohelet, Job, and Captain Ahab, too, are all God's heroes of the paradoxical drama of searching for ΠΝΤ. But only Captain Ahab crossed the red line into rebellion. "I have written a wicked book," Melville had written to Hawthorne upon finishing *Moby-Dick*, "and feel spotless as the lamb."⁸

As for Melville, a spiritual seeker himself, Captain Ahab was a vicarious self: It would take him 40 years after writing *Moby-Dick* before he could

achieve a modicum of faith and resignation that the first three of the other heroes had reached eons before he created Captain Ahab. In 1891, the year of his death, Melville completed *Billy Budd*, a novella whose tragic hero is a common, uneducated sailor. In the denouement, Billy is hanged for killing a man under justifiable circumstances, and is sentenced with justice, but cruel justice. In sympathy, the sailors compose a "ballad" purporting to be Billy's last imaginings as he dangled from the noose. The first lines read: "Good of the Chaplain to enter Lone Bay, And down on his marrow-bones here and pray, For the likes just o' me, Billy Budd"

You do not have to be a king, or a biblical hero, or an insightful writer to be set off on a spiritual journey. Each one of mankind is a candidate. After imagining being wrapped in a sailsheet and slipped overboard to sink slowly to his last resting place, Billy concludes: "I am sleepy, and the oozy weeds about me twist."

Tired at last of confronting the great paradox, Melville resigned himself to the fact that the greater heroism, ultimately greater than the futile heroism and death of his hero, Captain Ahab, is, alas, acquiescence to the limitations God placed on Man at the beginning of time in Eden. In the year he died, Melville, like Job, figuratively placed his hands upon his mouth and accepted silence. Another Man *Humanus* had fulfilled his inevitable destiny.

NOTES

1. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships* ed. David Schatz and Joel B. Wolowelsky (New York: MeOtzar HaRav, Toras HaRav Foundation, 2000). References to this work will be made by parenthetical citations in the article to *FR*. I am grateful to Pinchas Kahn, Jerusalem, for reading my synopsis for faithfulness to the original. But I must emphasize that the paraphrases are all my responsibility. Actually, the theme of the two Adams is distilled in this chapter from a longer treatment in "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition*, VII (Summer 1965) pp. 5-67. For our purposes in this paper, it is sufficient to draw upon the essentials of Soloveitchik's exegesis as they appear in *Family Redeemed*.
2. The JPS translations of 1916 and 1986 translate the term בְּרִיָּא as "mankind" except when the context demands the First Man, and so shall I manipulate this term.
3. בְּרִיָּא רִשׁוֹן (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1984) p. 60, n. 78.
4. Robert Alter, *Canon and Creativity: Modern Writing and the Authority of Scripture* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2000) pp. 10, 132.
5. Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, eds. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York, Norton, 1967). Since there are many editions of this novel in print, and the chapters are short, citations will be made in the text of this article by chapter only.
6. Hayford and Parker, under "Letters," p. 566.

THE LEGACY OF TWO ADAMS

7. "Explanatory Notes," by Luther Mansfield and Howard P. Vincent in their edition of *Moby-Dick* (New York, Hendricks House, 1952) pp. 699, 631, 702.

8. In *Herman Melville: Representative Selections*, ed. Willard Thorp (New York, Appleton Century, 1952) p. 394.