

at the height of the oppression of the Roman Empire. Here, to the same effect, is another surprising text from Bereshith Rabbah 9: 13:

R. Simeon b. Lakish said [concerning Genesis 1: 31]: 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.' 'It was very good' alludes to the kingdom of heaven. But the 'behold' which precedes 'it was very good' signifies the Roman empire. Is then the Roman empire very good? How strange! Rome earns that title because it exacts justice for men.³

Rome is the great order which began governing in the Mediterranean, and became the West. It is the Rome whose noise, already heard from afar, troubled the great among the great, R. Akiba and his companions, in the fine apologue which closes the Tractate Makkoth 24a.

A political West about which no illusion, certainly, is permitted. But the coming of the son of David demands, perhaps, that the union is made beforehand, the Western union – not straight away according to the law inspired by the love of the other man, but already on a preparatory basis according to the law where evil will give itself the appearance of good. A world organized entirely around the Law, which politically will have a hold over it. The necessity of a planetary West for the coming of the Messiah.

5 The Pact (Tractate Sotah 37a–37b)

... They turned their faces towards Mount Gerizim and opened with the blessing etc. Our Rabbis taught [a *baraita*]: There was a benediction in general and a benediction in particular, likewise a curse in general and a curse in particular. (Scripture states): *to learn, to teach, to observe* [to keep] and *to do*; consequently there are four (duties associated with each commandment). Twice four are eight and twice eight are sixteen. It was similar at Sinai and the plains of Moab; as it was said, *These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses [to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which he had made with them at Horeb]* (Deuteronomy 29: 1), and it is written, *Keep therefore the words of this covenant* etc. (Deuteronomy 29: 9). Hence there were forty-eight covenants in connection with each commandment.

R. Simeon excludes (the occasion of) Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal and includes that of the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness. The difference of opinion here is the same as that of the teachers [the Tannaim] in the following [a *baraita*]: R. Ishmael says: General laws were proclaimed at Sinai and particular laws in the Tent of Meeting. R. Akiba says: Both general and particular laws were proclaimed at Sinai, repeated in the Tent of Meeting, and for the third time in the plains of Moab. Consequently there is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight covenants were not made. R. Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Acco said in the name of R. Simeon: There is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times 603,550 covenants were not made. Rabbi said: According to the reasoning of R. Simeon b. Judah of

Kefar Acco who said in the name of R. Simeon that there is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times 603,550 covenants were not made, it follows that for each Israelite there are 603,550 commandments (and forty-eight covenants were made in connection with each of them). What is the issue between them? R. Mesharsheya said: The point between them is that of personal responsibility and responsibility for others [responsibility of responsibility].

1 The Formal Law

The problem of the community that concerns us in this conference is certainly a topical one, owing to the unease felt by man today in a society which has become, in a certain sense, planetary, and in which – owing to modern means of communication and transport, owing to the worldwide scale of economy in industrial society – everyone has the impression of being simultaneously related to humanity as a whole, but also solitary and lost. With each radio broadcast and each day's newspapers, we admittedly feel implicated in the most distant of events and related to men everywhere; but we also notice that our personal destiny, freedom or happiness, depend on causes which strike with inhuman energy. We notice that technical progress itself – to repeat a commonplace – which relates everyone to everyone else, brings with it necessities which leave men in a state of anonymity. Impersonal forms of relation replace direct forms – 'short connections', as Ricœur calls them – in a world in which everything is programmed to excess.

The structure of the States and nations is admittedly less abstract than that of the planet, but it is still too broad, and the universal ties of the law guarantee that men come together side by side rather than face to face. Even within the family, human relationships are less alive and less direct because of the multiplicity of systems in which each person is caught. But the parental structure has perhaps never fully satisfied man's social vocation; hence the search for a more restricted society whose members would know one another. Some think that in order to achieve this, it is necessary to spend time together, to see one another regularly. Is this really the solution? A concrete yet marginal society, establishing itself only on the edges of a real society which, despite its impersonal structures, is based in the 'order of things'. Will our sociality find fulfilment in a society of Sundays and leisure activities, in the provisional society of the club?

If these structures of a more intimate social life are to make people aware of community life, one which is exalted in the recognition of one person by another, is it not necessary, in fact, for these structures to be non-artificial? Normal society is one in which is reflected and breathes a humanity which is in contact with the world. Today's professional life, with the points of concentration it determines, its towns, industry and crowds – but also its intercontinental dispersion – retains an understanding of the serious side of the things that count. It is not the result of lack of care or a mistake. It is the very essence of modernity. The solidarity of the modern world, a solidarity planned through Law and regulations, all these 'long connections' which it establishes, are what make reality function these days; even if these connections make us walk together rather than turning men's faces towards one another. Are we thus not back to the starting point of our problem?

2 Our Talmudic Extract

But also, perhaps (and this is what brings me to the Talmud), we have not measured all the implications of the Law which Western society welcomes too formally, and which have got lost within it.

This, perhaps, is one reason to question one of Israel's old texts. The Talmudic text we have chosen is a relatively simple one, though, as always, it is unusual. It concerns the problem we have just mentioned. It deals with a covenant, and interprets it in its fashion, which consists in apparently not touching on it. It interprets the covenant concluded between the Eternal of Israel and the children of Israel. It is through this covenant that the society of Israel is instituted by legislation and the Torah. I have entitled the proposed passage which has been translated for you 'The Pact', and it is an extract from the Tractate Sotah 37a–37b from the Babylonian Talmud. It is very short: just half a page.

I should situate the passage in its context. The sequence of the *Gemara* from which it is taken prolongs a *Mishnah* relating to a different theme altogether. This *Mishnah* deals with the question of whether Hebrew or profane languages are suitable for certain liturgical expressions such as 'benedictions', 'oaths', etc. The *Mishnah* is followed by several pages of *Gemara*. The small sequence which has been handed out to you is taken from these pages of the *Gemara*. This sequence is only a digression in relation to the themes of language, in which the problem of Greek always arises. The theme of language will appear at a certain moment in

our extract. This theme of language about which the *Mishnah* speaks is in no way without interest. In it is announced – or dissimulated – the problem of the relation between the particularism of Israel and the universality of men. We shall find an echo of it again in the commentary on our extract.

3 From the Bible to the Talmud

This text appears to be a commentary on Deuteronomy Chapter 27, but it also refers to Joshua Chapter 7. By recalling these texts, and also by returning to the text of the *Mishnah* which refers to them – in an even more complete way than the first sentence with which our extract begins – we shall first be able, by way of example, to measure the distance which can separate the written Law from the oral Law.

Deuteronomy Chapter 27, indeed, sets out the recommendations given by Moses to Israel for a ceremony which has to take place later, when – after his death, and at the end of their travels in the wilderness – the people will enter the Holy Land. Here are a few of the verses. The end of verse 2 and the beginning of verse 3: 'And on the day you pass over the Jordan . . . you shall set up large stones, and plaster them with plaster; and you shall write upon them all the words of this law.' It concerns all the words of the Torah. Verse 4: 'You shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you this day, on Mount Ebal.' The location where this ceremony has to take place is specified – there are two mounts: Mount Ebal and, next to it, Mount Gerizim. Having set up stones there, and written the Torah upon them, there is a second recommendation in verse 5: 'And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall lift up no iron tool upon them.' Let us appreciate the suggestive symbol: whole stones, unhewn ones, stones which will have been untouched by iron. Iron, probably the principle of all industry, is, in any case, the principle of all warfare. Burnt offerings will be offered on the altar, and peace offerings sacrificed. And verse 8 takes up the initial theme of the inscription of the Torah on the stones, but it specifies how it should be written. It is not the question of language which is raised but, for the moment, that of the graphic quality of the inscription: 'And you shall write upon the stones all the words of this law "very plainly" (*ba'er hateret*).' From verse 11 onwards, we have the recommendations of Moses relating to the dividing of the people on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, and to the 'ceremony of the Covenant' anticipated by Moses. Six tribes will

stand upon Mount Gerizim 'to bless the people', and six others 'shall stand upon Mount Ebal for the curse'. Thus, whether they are blessed or cursed, are not the people as a whole visible to all? During the whole of this anticipated ceremony, the members of the society can see one another. It is extremely important for the theme of our conference devoted to the problem of the community. From verse 14 onwards: 'And the Levites shall declare to all the men of Israel with a loud voice', verses of cursings sanction the transgression of certain interdicts, 'And all the people shall say, "Amen"'. From verse 15 to verse 26 the interdicts in question are listed – there are eleven of them – to which is added the general interdict of transgressing the 'words of this law' (verse 26). These interdicts certainly represent the essential principles of the pact, but they coincide with the Ten Commandments of Sinai on only a few points. There is the prohibition of idolatry, the interdict of treating one's father and mother with contempt, the interdict of moving the boundaries of a piece of land (not to encroach on one's neighbour's property), the order not to mislead a blind man, not to pervert the justice due to the sojourner [stranger], the widow and the orphan; the prohibition of various forms of incest, the interdict of 'slaying one's neighbour in secret' (this is principally how calumny is prohibited), and the interdict of taking a bribe so that an innocent person can be slain. No doubt these are the founding principles of society. Yet they do not cover the content of the Torah as a whole: hence the last verse of the chapter which specifies the whole of these principles. No doubt the evocation of curses and blessings in the first verses of Deuteronomy 27 signifies the blessing for him who respects the interdict, and the curse for him who does not. But in fact it is only the negative version, the curse, which is given in this passage. All the people, after every curse of the Levites, will reply 'Amen'. The words of the Levites are heard by all: all the people are present to all the people. Everyone will say 'Amen'. A veritable pact is thus concluded, and in the presence of the people as a whole, of a society – as I keep emphasizing – in which everyone looks at everyone else.

Let us recognize the fact that the text from Deuteronomy leaves vague many of the points concerning the staging of the ceremony of the pact to which the first sentence of the Talmudic text I am commenting upon seems to refer – or which, at least, it seems to imply.

In fact, this sentence: 'They turned their faces towards Mount Gerizim and opened with the blessing . . .' speaks of a 'blessing' which Deuteronomy does not formulate. The sentence refers to another

presentation of the scene played out between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, to the summary given of it in the Book of Joshua (Chapter 8, verses 30 to 35). I shall read it to you, specifying the difference between the two versions. This second account is more precise, and also shorter, and I am reproducing it in its entirety. It appears to be an account of the ceremony such as Joshua, faithful to the recommendation of Moses in Deuteronomy 27, would have carried out. It refers expressly to the recommendations of Moses:

Then Joshua built an altar in Mount Ebal to the Lord, the God of Israel, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the people of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, 'an altar of unhewn stones, upon which no man has lifted an iron tool'; and they offered on it burnt offerings to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings. And there, in the presence of the people of Israel, he wrote upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses, which he had written. And all Israel, sojourner as well as homeborn, with their elders and officers and their judges, stood on opposite sides of the ark before the Levitical priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half of them in front of Mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded at the first, that they should bless the people of Israel. And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessing and the curse, according to all that is written in the book of the law.

For every prescription of the book of the Law, there was the formula for the curse and the formula for the blessing! 'There was not a word of all that Moses commanded which Joshua did not read before all the assembly of Israel, and the women, and the little ones, and the sojourners who lived among them.'

You will notice that all twelve tribes are present, with women and children, in full, even with the strangers, the *gerim* who are among us. You will see that the meaning of this pact is expanded in relation to the first description we found in Deuteronomy. The picture is a little different – the disposition of the actors is specified, the 'staging' is not quite the same – but there are still the stones untouched by iron, stones which belong to the order of peace and not to that of warfare; and above all there is a remarkable insistence on the totality of the people present at the ceremony: women, children, strangers. There is also an insistence on the

totality of the Mosaic text which is read beyond the eleven verses mentioned in Deuteronomy 27. Finally, there is the insistence on the rigorous fidelity to the word of Moses, the servant of God: yet everything that differs here in relation to Deuteronomy 27 is from Moses. Even though Moses spoke differently!

Allow me now to give you the last version of this scene taken from the *Mishnah* itself (32a) to which the *Gemara*, from which our text is extracted, refers, and to which belongs the proposition which figures at the head of my translation with its 'et cetera'. This *Mishnah*, as I have already told you, deals with the authorized or forbidden languages in certain liturgical or ritual formulas, and where our description of the pact simply finds a distant pretext. Here it is:

Six tribes went up to the top of Mount Gerizim and six tribes went up to the top of Mount Ebal. And the *cohanim* (the priests) and the Levites and the Ark stood below in the midst [as in Joshua]; and the priests surrounded the Ark and the Levites surrounded the *cohanim*, and all Israel were on this side and on that, as it is written in Joshua [the *Mishnah* expressly says that this description conforms to the account found in Joshua], *And all Israel and their elders and officers and their judges stood on this side of the Ark and on that*. They turned their faces towards Mount Gerizim [the text of Joshua 8] and began with the blessing. Blessed be the man that maketh not a graven or molten image. And both these and these answered, 'Amen!' [quotation from Deuteronomy]. They turned their faces towards Mount Ebal and began with the curse, 'cursed be the man' who makes a graven or molten image. And both these and these answered, 'Amen!' – until they completed the blessings and the cursings. And afterward they brought the stones and built the altar and plastered it with plaster. And they wrote thereon all the words of the Law in seventy languages, as it is written 'very plainly' [*ba'er heter*].

What was a question of writing is now a question of language! This third version of the pact refers to the account of Joshua but takes up the formulas from Deuteronomy. Here the universality of the pact opens up, a pact which in Deuteronomy is concluded with all the tribes before an altar whose stones – already in the ancient texts of a civilization which aspires to have no wars – have not been touched by iron, and which in

Joshua is a pact encompassing women, children and strangers but whose law, according to the text of the *Mishnah*, is proclaimed in seventy languages. A message addressed to all humanity! Thought through to its conclusion, this particular ceremony of a people whose members can look upon one another, a concrete community capable of being taken in at a gaze, permits the whole of humanity to be included in the legislation in whose name this pact has been concluded.

This transition, then, from Hebrew to the universality which I call Greek is quite remarkable. It is the formula *ba'er heter*, 'very plainly', recommending the clarity and distinction of Scripture, which begins to signify complete translatability. The process of liberation and universalization must therefore be continued. We have not yet finished translating the Bible. The Septuagint is incomplete. Nor have we finished translating the Talmud. We have hardly begun. And as far as the Talmud is concerned, it must be said how delicate the task is! What up until now was a patrimony reserved for oral teaching passes, perhaps too quickly, into foreign languages without losing its unusual features in its new forms.

This universality is thus born, in some way, from a society which, moreover, is entirely visible to its members assembled on two mounts, visible as if on a stage. Right from the beginning, the society which aspires to intimacy between twelve tribes looking at one another, this society of a community, is already present to the whole of humanity, or opens on to the whole of humanity.

You have had here a specific example of the development of an idea passing from the written Law to the oral Law. The oral Law claims to speak about what the written Law says. But the oral Law knows more. It goes further than the plain meaning of the passage studied, but it does so in the spirit of the global meaning of Scripture.

4 The Various Dimensions of the Law

But let us return to our text. It is now going to show us various dimensions in this pact of the Torah, dimensions which ought to guarantee that a community whose members are practically face to face should keep its interpersonal relationships when its members look outwards towards humanity. The distinction between community and society testifies only to a social thought that is not yet mature. The adoption of the Law on which this society is based would entail, for those

men who adopt it correctly, the possibility of remaining face to face with one another.

Our Rabbis taught [a *baraita*]: There was a benediction in general and a benediction in particular, likewise a curse in general and a curse in particular. (Scripture states): *to learn, to teach, to observe* [to keep] and *to do*; consequently there are four (duties associated with each commandment). Twice four are eight and twice eight are sixteen.

The arithmetic is undeniable! But what is being spoken about here? In the text from Deuteronomy, the same laws are proclaimed and followed by curses for the person who transgresses them and blessings for the person who obeys them. For the person who undertakes to keep it, this cursing and blessing therefore constitute two independent ways of adhering to the same Law. In the covenant made on Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, there were thus two acts of will made to the same Law. 'Yes' was said twice over. If we look at the text of Deuteronomy 27, we will see that the interdicts are expressed in a particular form, but that according to the last verse they are included in the invocation of the 'words of this [whole] law'. The Torah is thus expressed in a general form and in a particular form. This makes two more acts of adherence. Two acts of adherence assenting to the curses, and two acts of adherence consenting to the blessings. So there are four acts of adherence. Four not as two plus two, but four as two times two.

But we know, moreover – if we refer to Deuteronomy 5: 1 and Deuteronomy 11: 19 – that the Torah entails four general obligations: the need to learn it (*lilmod*), to teach it (*lelamed*), to observe [to keep] it (*lishmor*), to do it (*la'asot*). Four covenants are included in the Covenant. Now we have just seen that every adherence to the Covenant entails four modes of adherence; there are thus sixteen covenants in the Covenant, sixteen pacts in the pact. The arithmetic may be surprising. I shall come back to it shortly. Let us say, generally, that in what we simply call adherence to the law, the rabbinical scholars distinguish sixteen dimensions.

Sixteen dimensions. But there are more! The Torah is said to have been taught three times, if we refer to the rabbinical calculations: according to Exodus, the first time at Sinai; the second time, according to Deuteronomy, in the plains of Moab; and for the third time – as we have

just seen – between Ebal and Gerizim. Each time, as we have said, there were sixteen adherences, which makes forty-eight adherences in all. Let us stay at forty-eight for the moment. You will see that there are even more.

I shall try to explain the signification of these distinctions and calculations. Some people must certainly have been surprised that in the adherence to a law which implies a blessing for the person who obeys it and a curse for the person who transgresses it, two different acts can be discerned, as if the blessing and the curse were not the two faces, the positive and the negative, of the sanction which all law entails. In concrete terms, the difference between these two faces is a real one. Already, in passing a law, forgiveness can be reckoned with in the case of transgression. We can tell ourselves that things will always sort themselves out! Thank God, forgiveness is not unknown in Israel. Only in Israel it is not taken into account at the moment the Law is adopted. If forgiveness is to have a meaning, it should not already be accepted at the moment of adherence to the Law. We know the distrust that Judaism has in relation to forgiveness granted in advance. We know where it can lead.

Can adherence to the Law as a whole, to the Law in its general terms, be distinguished from the 'yes' which accompanies the statements of each law in particular? Naturally, a general adherence is necessary. The general spirit of a legislation should be drawn out. The spirit of the law should be deepened. Philosophy is not forbidden, the intervention of reason is not unwelcome! If there is really to be an inner adherence, this process of generalization cannot be put aside. But why distinguish from it the access to the particular expressions of this general spirit? Because the meaning of a legislation in its general spirit remains unknown as long as the laws which it embraces have not been recognized. There are two processes here, and their distinction is justified from several points of view. We are all sensitive to Judaism being reduced to a few 'spiritual' principles. We are all seduced by what can be called the angelic essence of the Torah to which many verses and commandments are reduced in an immediate way. This 'interiorization' of the Law charms our liberal soul, and we are inclined to reject what seems to resist the 'rationality' or 'morality' of the Torah. Judaism has always been conscious – rabbinical literature testifies to this – of the presence within it – and this is necessary for great spiritual quality – of elements which cannot be interiorized straight away. Next to the *mishpatim*, the laws of justice in which all are recognized, there are the *duqim*, the unjustifiable laws which are Satan's

joy when he mocks the Torah. He claims that the ritual of the 'red heifer' in Numbers 19 is meaningless and tyrannical. And what about circumcision? Will a little psychoanalysis explain it away? It was certainly not foreseen, and it has to be wondered whether it even works! What about many other ceremonial or ritual preparations described in the Torah? Consequently, in the law of Israel there are points which demand, beyond assenting to the general or 'deep' spirit of the Torah, a special consent to the particularities which are all too easily regarded as transitory. There is constantly within us a struggle between our adherence to the spirit and adherence to what is called the letter. That the latter is as indispensable as the former is what is signified in seeing two distinct acts in the acceptance of the Torah. This is also Jacob's struggle with the Angel: to overcome in the existence of Israel the angelism of pure interiority. Note with what effort victory is given here! Yet is it in fact given? No one prevails! And it is Jacob's religion which remains a little lame when the Angel's grip is released. This struggle is never-over. But remember, the Angel is not the highest creature: as a purely spiritual being, it does not achieve the condition that life according to the Torah presupposes. It has neither to eat, to take, to give, to work, nor not to work on the Sabbath! A principle of generosity, but nothing but a principle. Admittedly, generosity entails an adherence. But adherence to the principle is not sufficient, and it entails a temptation: it calls for care and for our fight.

There is in the particular yet another reason for it to appear in the Law as an independent principle in relation to the universality reflected by all particular laws. It is precisely the concrete and particular aspect of the Law and the circumstances of its application which command Talmudic dialectics: the oral law is casuistic. It concerns itself with the transition from the general principle incarnated by the Law to its possible execution, its concretization. If this transition were purely deducible, the Law, as a particular law, would not have required a separate adherence. But it so happens – and this is the great wisdom the awareness of which animates the Talmud – that the general and generous principles can be inverted in their application. Every generous thought is threatened by its Stalinism. The great strength of the Talmud's casuistry is to be the special discipline which seeks in the particular the precise moment at which the general principle runs the danger of becoming its own contrary, and watches over the general in the light of the particular. This protects us from ideology. Ideology is the generosity and clarity of the principle which have not

taken into account the inversion which keeps a watch on this general principle when it is applied; or – to pick up on the image used a short while ago – the Talmud is the struggle with the Angel. This is why adherence to the particular law is an irreducible dimension in all allegiance, and you will see that R. Akiba thinks not only that it is as important as that of adherence to the Law in its general form, but also that the place dedicated to its study – ultimately, the *yeshiva* – is one of the three places where the pact is made, and that the dignity of this place equals that of Sinai, where the Torah is revealed, and that of the plains of Moab, where it is repeated by Moses.

In the apparently strange calculation of the forty-eight covenants which our text discerns at the heart of the pacts made around the Law, the number four has been brought in, representing the four promises that all adherence to the Law entails: the promise to learn it, to teach it, to observe it and to do it. Without the theoretical activity of study, without the obligation of listening and reading, without the *liilmod*, nothing can enter us. But it is also necessary to teach what has been learnt in order to transmit it. The transmission, the *lelamed*, is an obligation distinct from the pure receptivity of study. For humankind entails the risk of a fossilization of acquired knowledge, depositing itself in our consciousness like some inert matter and being handed down in this ossified form from one generation to another. This congealment of the spiritual is not the same as its true transmission, whose essence lies elsewhere: in vitality, inventiveness and renewal which occur precisely through being taken up by way of tradition, or of a lesson taught to the other and assumed by the other. Without this method of procedure, it is not possible for true revelation – that is, a thought authentically thought – to take place. Transmission thus involves a teaching which is already outlined in the very receptivity for learning it. Receptivity is prolonged: true learning consists in receiving the lesson so deeply that it becomes a necessity to give oneself to the other. The lesson of truth is not held in one man's consciousness. It explodes towards the other. To study well, to read well, to listen well, is already to speak: whether by asking questions and, in so doing, teaching the master who teaches you, or by teaching a third party.

In the last four books of the Pentateuch one verse constantly appears: 'And the Lord said to Moses: "Say to the people of Israel *lemor* ('in these terms')'. A prestigious master I had after the Liberation used to claim to be able to give one hundred and twenty different interpretations of this phrase whose plain meaning, however, is devoid of mystery. He revealed

only one to me. I have tried to guess a second. The one he revealed to me consisted in translating *lemor* by 'so as not to say'. Which amounted to signifying: 'Say to the people of Israel so as not to say'. The unspoken is necessary, so that listening remains a way of thinking; or it is necessary for the word to be also unspoken, so that truth (or the Word of God) does not consume those who listen; or the Word of God has to be able to lodge itself, without danger to mankind, in the tongue and language of men. In my own reading of this verse, *lemor* would signify 'in order to say': 'Say to the people of Israel in order for them to speak'; teach them sufficiently in depth for them to begin to speak, for them to hear at the point of speaking. The one hundred and eighteen other significations of the verse remain to be discovered. My master carried their secret to his tomb.

Let us move on to the third obligation: to observe [to keep]. *Lishmor*. There are two possibilities: *lishmor* would signify the observance of the negative commandments, the interdicts. Here, where the difference between negative or positive commandments is not made, this interpretation is impossible. *Lishmor*, then, would signify the new thing which is necessary once one has learnt: not to forget – that is, to repeat the lessons. Studying is never over in its very reception.

Finally, *la'asot*, 'to do'. This requires no explanations. The depth of our text consists in thinking of the four points as going together, as liable to isolation and not perversion. Each of these moments of study requires a special adherence and special care. There were, then, sixteen covenants in each pact. Now the pact was made in these three places – on Sinai, in the plains of Moab, and between Ebal and Gerizim – which makes forty-eight covenants around the Law. But on this point there was a disagreement. As you will see, R. Akiba does not agree to consider the ceremony between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim as counting as one of the three occasions. I personally am very happy that R. Akiba should have had a doubt here. I shall tell you why later.

5 The Three Occasions

That the pact of the Covenant was made three times is indicated at the heart of the Talmudic text we are commenting upon in the account of the ceremony near Mount Gerizim, and by the 'it was similar at Sinai and the plains of Moab'. Here is the text in full: 'It was similar at Sinai and the plains of Moab; as it was said, *These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab*'.

besides the pact he had made with them at Horeb. 'Keep therefore the words of this covenant.'

But here is someone who contests a point in this calculation: 'R. Simeon excludes (the occasion of) Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal and includes that of the Tent of Meeting in the wilderness.'

Admittedly, R. Simeon also thinks that the covenant was made three times, but for him the ceremony which took place between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal does not count. In order to arrive at the number three, R. Simeon considers the covenant to have been made in the meetings between Moses and the people, of which Exodus Chapter 33 verse 7 speaks: 'Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; and he called it the tent of meeting. And every one who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.' The number of forty-eight covenants is thus guaranteed. But R. Simeon prefers to confer the dignity of the covenant's conclusion not on the simple ceremony which, for him, the rite between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim really was, but on the discussion concerning the Lord's Law, on the study of the Law which is supposed to be done inside the 'tent of meeting in the wilderness', where Moses welcomes those who have questions or problems. The Covenant is not staged so that everyone can see everyone else; the Covenant is where the pupils, as individuals, question the master. It was in the tent of meeting, precisely, in the *yeshivah* of Moses, that the voice of God is heard, and it is there, after Sinai and before the plains of Moab, that the Covenant is made for the second time.

For R. Simeon, then, the ceremony is replaced by study. An important decision. We shall see straight away that this was also R. Akiba's opinion. What are R. Simeon's motives? Rashi obviously asks this question. R. Simeon would have told himself that the text of Deuteronomy 27, announcing the ceremony on Mount Gerizim, lists only a few of the laws of the Torah. The whole of the Torah as such does not appear. The ceremony cannot, therefore, count as a 'complete' covenant. I do not wish to dispute Rashi's word. But was not R. Simeon also shocked by the fact that the laws mentioned in Deuteronomy 27 are proclaimed only in a repressive manner? Only curses are indicated. Admittedly there were blessings, but their formulation is missing.

Be that as it may, R. Simeon's intervention disputing the validity of the covenant at Mount Gerizim raises an important question. It is closely akin to a discussion which had taken place between the giants of the

Talmud: the Tannaim, R. Ishmael and R. Akiba, R. Simeon's master. Here is the text:

The difference of opinion here is the same as that of the teachers [the Tannaim] in the following [a *baraita*]: R. Ishmael says: General laws were proclaimed at Sinai and particular laws in the Tent of Meeting. R. Akiba says: Both general and particular laws were proclaimed at Sinai, repeated in the Tent of Meeting, and for the third time in the plains of Moab. Consequently there is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight covenants were not made.

The difference of opinion expressed by R. Simeon thus dates back to an older discussion between Tannaim, between R. Ishmael and R. Akiba. R. Ishmael thought that the ceremony which took place between Mounts Ebal and Gerizim is included among the three ceremonies which should be counted as making the pact. What did he mean by this? Perhaps he thought that besides Sinai and the plains of Moab there was no other rite for the Covenant. For him only the particularities of the Law were taught in the tent of meeting, and the general laws at Sinai, such that Sinai and the tent of meeting count together as one single covenant. The plains of Moab are the second covenant, and Mounts Ebal and Gerizim the third. Moreover, perhaps R. Ishmael thought that something I will not discuss today – which is a possible problem – should be discussed: perhaps R. Ishmael was disputing this total equality between the study of the generalities and the particularities of the Law. Certainly he thought that the particular and the general are both important. If he had not, he would not be a master of the Talmud. But he considered that despite everything, the general laws are more important. Is he more liberal than R. Akiba? We should ask the Talmudists in the room who are more competent than me. Perhaps R. Ishmael considers that the ceremony in which everyone can see everyone else is an important ceremony. Perhaps he also had similar ideas to those formulated on the distinction between society and community, and consequently, for him, the experience of the community must have been an essential moment of revelation.

R. Akiba seems opposed to these ideas. He affirms the absolutely equal dignity of the general and the particular. He seems to exclude the ceremony in which everyone can see everyone else. Perhaps he thinks that the concrete presence of men is not what constitutes the true face-to-face.

We have come to count forty-eight covenants. We have tried to understand this calculation as the affirmation of the various dimensions of the Law, which go beyond the formal qualities of the anonymous law that would be at the origin of the crisis of modern society.

6 The Law and Interpersonal Relations

Forty-eight covenants? There are even more. 'R. Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Acco said in the name of R. Simeon' – in the name of the same R. Simeon who disputed the importance of the ceremony at Gerizim – 'There is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times 603,550 covenants were not made.'

The number of covenants made in these three ceremonies would thus be 603,550 multiplied by 48. Where does the figure 603,550 come from? It represents the number of Israelites standing at the foot of Sinai. But why multiply by this number? Because the Covenant made around the revealed Law, instead of appearing as an impersonal abstraction of a juridical act, is greeted as establishing living links with all those who adopt the Law: everyone finds himself responsible for everyone else; in every act of the Covenant more than six hundred thousand personal acts of responsibility are outlined. The forty-eight dimensions of the pact become $48 \times 603,550$. Obviously this may raise a smile. It is a lot. But it is still not an infinite number. The Israelites – or, more exactly, the men of mankind – are answerable for one another before a truly human law. In this making of the Covenant we have non-indifference concerning the other. Everyone looks at me! We do not need to meet on Mount Ebal or Gerizim and gaze at one another eye to eye to be in a position where we all look at one another. Everyone looks at me. Let us not forget the seventy languages in which the Torah is proclaimed. The Torah belongs to us all: everybody is responsible for everybody else. The phrase 'Love your neighbour as yourself' still presupposes self-love as the prototype of love. Here, the ethical signifies: 'Be responsible for the other as you are responsible for yourself'. We avoid the presupposition of self-love – self-esteem – which can be taken as the very definition of the personal. But we have not yet finished.

'Rabbi said ...' The Rabbi who is speaking now is Rabenu Hakadosh, who gave the *Mishnah* its written form and is the highest Talmudic authority after, or next to, R. Akiba. 'Rabbi said: According to the reasoning of R. Simeon b. Judah of Kefar Acco who said in the name of R. Simeon ...'

What a lot of references! Those of you who are perhaps attending a Talmudic lesson for the first time should not be surprised at this piling up. There is always a lot of care taken in the Talmud to specify who said what: a true lesson taught is that in which the universal nature of the proclaimed truth allows neither the name nor the person of him who said it to disappear. The scholars of the Talmud even think that the Messiah will come at the moment when everybody quotes what they learn in the name of the very person from whom they learnt it. Rabbi, then, says:

There is not a single precept written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times 603,550 covenants were not made, it follows that for each Israelite there are 603,550 commandments (and forty-eight covenants were made in connection with each of them).

Is he not repeating the truth we have just seen? The *Gemara* asks itself the question. 'What is the issue between them?' It is R. Mesharsheya who locates the issue. 'R. Mesharsheya said: The point between them is that of personal responsibility and responsibility for others [responsibility of responsibility].'

Not only are we responsible for everyone else, but we are also responsible for everyone else's responsibility. Forty-eight, then, has to be multiplied by 603,550, and the result multiplied again by 603,550. This is extremely important. We saw a short while ago something that resembles recognition of the other, love of the other. To such a degree that I am answerable for the other, for the other's adherence and faithfulness to the Law. His concern is my concern. But is not my concern his? Is he not responsible for me? Consequently, can I be answerable for his responsibility for me? *Kol Yisra'el 'arevim zeh lazeh*, 'Everyone in Israel is answerable for everyone else', signifies: all adherents to the divine Law, all men who are truly men, are responsible for one another.

This must also signify that my responsibility stretches to the responsibility that the other man can assume. I always have, myself, one responsibility more than the other, for I am still responsible for his responsibility. And, if he is responsible for my responsibility, I am still responsible for the responsibility that he has for my responsibility: *en ladavar soph*, 'it is never-ending'. Behind the responsibility attributed to

everyone for everyone, there arises, *ad infinitum*, the fact that in the society of the Torah I am still responsible for this responsibility! It is an ideal, but an ideal that implies the humanity of mankind. In the Covenant, when it is fully understood, in a society that deploys all the dimensions of the Law, society is also community.

6

On Religious Language and the Fear of God For Paul Ricœur

The Word of God, to speak to God, to speak of God and of the Word of God – Holy Scripture, prayer, theology: what the multiple expressions of religious language have in common is the claim to be inexhaustible in references to the world from which the signification of words, propositions and discourses is woven. How do we open to language the borders of the given reality in which we live? Paul Ricœur has shown us the resources of the imagination, which would not be a simply reproductive faculty, doubling the perception of objects to which it owes everything except its powers of illusion. On the contrary, it would be the deepest dimension of the human psyche, immediately functioning in the element of poetic language, the 'mysterious root' of all the forces of the mind which are similar to the sur-real: 'Poetic language alone restores us to a sense of belonging to an order of things, which precedes our ability to distinguish ourselves from these things as objects facing a subject'.¹ In the poetic imagination, the unheard can be heard, called out to and expressed; a text can be opened up to the hermeneutic process more widely than the precise intentions which had determined it; metaphor can lead beyond, the experiences which seem to have created it; and symbol would give cause for thought on a speculative level. When it is marked by the exceptional character of the messenger, the imperative or teaching which comes from outside would be able to vouch for itself in the mind of the listener: this ability to bear witness, linked to that of the poetic word, would be the very depth of the psyche. The transcendent would be able to seduce and open up the imagination rather than