1. **Recovering the Questions**  
It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society. It would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion – its message become meaningless.  

Religion is an answer to man’s ultimate questions. The moment we become oblivious to ultimate questions, religion becomes irrelevant, and its crisis sets in. The primary task of philosophy of religion is to rediscover the questions to which religion is an answer. *(God in Search of Man)*

**God follows me everywhere (1929)**

God follows me everywhere—
Enmeshes me in glances,
Warms my sightless back like the sun.
   God follows me like a forest everywhere.
   My lips, filled with wonder, are fully numb, dumb
   Like a child who blunders upon an ancient holy place.

God follows me like a shiver everywhere.
I wish for tranquility and rest; the demand within me is: Rise up,
And see how prophetic visions lie neglected in the streets!
   I wander with my reveries as with a secret
   In a long corridor through the world—
   And sometimes I see, high above me, the faceless face of God.

God pursues me in the streetcars and cafes
Every shining apple is my crystal sphere to see
How mysteries are born and vision came to be.

**Intimate Hymn (1931)**

From word to word I roam, from dawn to dusk.
Dream in, dream out -- I pass myself and towns,
A human satellite.
   I wait, am hopeful, as one who waits at the rock
   For the spring to well forth and ever well on.
   I feel as bright as if I tented somewhere in the Milky Way.
   To urge the world to feel I walk through lonesome solitudes.

All around me lightning explodes sparks from my glance
To reveal all light, unveil faces everywhere.
Godward, onward to the final weighing
overcoming heavy weight with thirst.
Constantly, the longings of all born call out, "Is anyone around?"
I know each one is HE, but in my heart there writhes a tear;
When of men and rocks and trees I hear;
All plead "Feel us"
All beg "See us"
God! Lend me your eyes!
    I came to be, to sow the seed of sight in the world,
To unmask the God who disguised Himself as world--
And yes, I wait to be the first to announce "The Dawn."

2. **Depth Theology** Where is religion to be found? What sort of entity is it? What is its mode of being? He who is in search of art will find it in works of art as preserved, for example, in art collections. He who is in search of literature will find it in books as preserved in libraries. But where is the place of religion? Do visible symbols as preserved in temples, doctrines and dogmas as contained in books, contain the totality of religion?

Religion has been reduced to institution, symbol, theology. It does not affect the pretheological situation, the presymbolic depth of existence. To redirect the trend, we must lay bare what is involved in religious existence; we must recover the situations which both precede and correspond to the theological formulations; we must recall the questions which religious doctrines are trying to answer, *the antecedents of religious commitment*, the presuppositions of faith.

To some the truth of religion is in its ritual, to others the essence of religion is in its dogma. There is another component, however, which may be regarded as the vital ingredient, and yet because of its imponderable nature it often escapes the eye of the observer. It is that which goes on within the person: the innerness of religion. Vague and often indescribable, it is the heart of religious existence. Ritual and myth, dogma and deed remain externals unless there is a response from within the person, a moment of identification and penetration to make them internals.

We do not have a word for the understanding of these moments, for the events that make up the secret history of religion, or for the records in which these instants are captured. Theology is the doctrine of God, but these moments are neither doctrine nor exclusively divine. They are human as well as divine. The Psalms are not records of theology. The Psalms are the birthpangs of theology.

To convey these insights, man must use a language which is compatible with his sense of the ineffable, the terms of which do not pretend to describe, but to indicate; to point to, rather than to capture. These terms are not always imaginative; they are often paradoxical, radical or negative. The chief danger to philosophy of religion lies in the temptation to generalize what is essentially unique, to explicate what is intrinsically inexplicable, to adjust the uncommon to our common sense. (*"Depth Theology" The Insecurity of Freedom*)

3. **Wonder** Wonder, or radical amazement is the chief characteristic of the religious man's attitude toward history and nature. One attitude is alien to his spirit: taking things for granted, regarding events as a natural course of things. To find an approximate cause of a phenomenon is no answer to his ultimate wonder. He knows that there are laws that regulate the course of natural processes; he is aware of the regularity and pattern of things. However, such knowledge fails to mitigate his sense of perpetual surprise at the fact that there are facts at all. Looking at the world he would say, "This is the Lord's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes." (Psalms 118:23)

    As civilization advances, the sense of wonder declines. Such decline is an alarming symptom of our state of mind. Mankind will not perish for want of information; but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understand that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe but a will to wonder.

    Awareness of the divine begins with wonder. It is the result of what man does with his higher incomprehension. The greatest hindrance to such awareness is our adjustment to conventional notions, to mental cliches. Wonder or radical amazement, the state of maladjustment to words and notions, is therefore a prerequisite for an authentic awareness of that which is.

    *Radical amazement* has a wider scope than any other act of man...What fills us with radical amazement is not the relations in which everything is embedded but the fact that even the minimum of perception is a
maximum of enigma. The most incomprehensible fact is the fact that we comprehend at all. The way to faith leads through acts of wonder and radical amazement.

This is an insight we gain in acts of wonder: not to measure meaning in terms of our own mind, but to sense a meaning infinitely greater than ourselves.  

4. Mystery  

The deeper we search the nearer we arrive at knowing that we do not know. What do we truly know about life and death, about the soul or society, about history and nature? … The mystery is an ontological category. What it stands for is to most people given in the experience of extraordinary events. However, it is a dimension of all existence and may be experienced everywhere and at all times. In using the term mystery we do not mean any particular esoteric quality that may be revealed to the initiated, but the essential mystery of being as being, the nature of being as God’s creation out of nothing, and therefore, something which stands beyond the scope of human comprehension. We do not come upon it only at the climax of thinking or in observing strange, extraordinary facts but in the startling fact that there are facts at all: being, the universe, the unfolding of time. We may face it at every turn, in a grain of sand, in an atom, as well as in the stellar space. Everything holds a great secret. For it is the inescapable situation of all being to be involved in the infinite mystery.

… All worship and ritual are essentially attempts to remove our callousness to the mystery of our own existence and pursuits. … [Mystery] is not a symbol for the unknown but rather a name for a meaning which stands in relation to God.  

5. Awe  

The beginning of awe is wonder, and the beginning of wisdom is awe.

Awe is a way of being in rapport with the mystery of all reality. The awe that we sense or ought to sense when standing in the presence of a human being is a moment of intuition for the likeness of God which is concealed in his essence. Not only man; even inanimate things stand in relation to the Creator. The secret of every being is the divine care and concern that are invested in it. Something sacred is at stake in every event.

Awe is an intuition for the creaturely dignity of all things and their preciousness to God; a realization that things not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something absolute. Awe is a sense for the transcendence, for the reference everywhere to Him who is beyond all things. It is an insight better conveyed in attitudes than in words. The more eager we are to express it, the less remains of it. The meaning of awe is to realize that life takes place under wide horizons, horizons that range beyond.

6. The Question  

The sense of wonder, awe, and mystery does not give us a knowledge of God. It only leads to a place where the question of God becomes an inescapable concern, to a situation in which we discover that we can neither place our anxiety in a safe deposit of opinions nor delegate to others the urgent task of answering ultimate questions.

Religion begins with a consciousness that something is asked of us. It is in that tense, eternal asking in which the soul is caught and in which man's answer is elicited.

The ultimate question, bursting forth in our souls, is too startling, too heavily laden with unutterable wonder to be an academic question, to be equally suspended between yes and no. We can no longer ask: Is there a God? In humility and contrition we realize the presumption of such asking. The more we meditate, the more clearly we realize that the question we ask is a question we are being asked; that man’s question about God is God’s question about man.

All of human history as described by the Bible may be summarized in one phrase: God is in search of man. Faith in God is a response to God’s question.  

7. God’s Concern  

The Bible tells us nothing about God in Himself; all its sayings refer to His relations to man. His own life and essence are neither told nor disclosed. We hear of no reflexive concern, of no passions except a passion for justice. The only events in the life of God the Bible knows are acts done for the sake of man: acts of creation, acts of redemption, or acts of revelation.
Divine concern means His taking an interest in the fate of man; it means that the moral and spiritual state of man engages His attention. It is true that His concern is, to must of us, one of the most baffling mysteries, but it is just as true that to those whole life is open to God His care and love are a constant experience.

When we say [God] is present within all beings, we do not mean the He inheres in them as a component or ingredient of their physical structure. God in the universe is a spirit of concern for life. What is a thing to us is a concern to God; what is part of the physical world of being is also a part of a divine world of meaning. To be is to stand for, to stand for a divine concern.  

Man is Not Alone

8. Moments of Faith  The ultimate insight is the outcome of moments when we are stirred beyond words, of instants of wonder, awe, praise, fear, trembling and radical amazement; of awareness of grandeur, of perceptions we can grasp but are unable to convey, of discoveries of the unknown, of moments in which we abandon the pretense of being acquainted with the world, of knowledge by inacquaintance. It is at the climax of such moments that we attain the certainty that life has meaning, that time is more than evanescence, that beyond all being there is someone who cares.

The essence of Jewish religious thinking does not lie in entertaining a concept of God but in the ability to articulate a memory of moments of illumination by His presence. Israel is not a people of definers but of witnesses.

Faith is not the same as belief, not the same as the attitude of regarding something as true…Faith is an act of the whole person, of mind, will, and heart. Faith is sensitivity, understanding, engagement, and attachment; not something achieved once and for all, but an attitude one may gain and lose.

The power of religious truth is a moment of insight, and its content is oneness or love. Source and content may be conveyed in one word: transcendence. Transcendence is the test of religious truth. A genuine insight rends the enclosure of the heart and bestows on man the power to rise above himself.  

God in Search of Man

9. Religion  Man does not live by insight alone; he is in need of a creed, of dogma, of expression, of a way of living. Insights are not a secure possession; they are vague and sporadic. They are like divine sparks flashing up before us and becoming obscure again, and we fall back into darkness almost as black as that in which we were before. The problem is: How to communicate those rare moments of insight to all hours of our life? How to commit intuition to concepts, the ineffable to words, insight to rational understanding? How to convey our insights to others and to unite in a fellowship of faith?

What a sculptor does to a block of marble, the Bible does to our finest intuitions. It is like raising the mystery to expression. Private insights prepare us to accept what the prophets convey. They enable us to understand the question to which revelation is an answer. For our faith does not derive its full substance from private insights. Our faith is faith by virtue of being a part of the community of Israel, by virtue of our having a share in the faith of the prophets. From their words we derive the norms by which to test the veracity of our own insights. It is through the prophets that we may be able to encounter Him as a Being who is beyond the mystery.  

God in Search of Man

10. Revelation. The spirit of philosophy has often been characterized as the quest of values, as a search for that which is of greatest value. What is the spirit of the Bible? Its concern is not with the abstract concept of disembodied values, detached from concrete existence. Its concern is with man and his relation to the will of God. The Bible is the quest for the righteous man, for a righteous people.

The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of man
  to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God. '

They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt;
  there is none that does good, no, not one.  (Psalms 14:2-3)

The incidents recorded in the Bible to the discerning eye are episodes of one great drama: the quest of God for man; His search for man, and man's flight from Him. Judaism is a way of thinking, not only a way of living. And this is one of its cardinal premises: the source of truth is found not in "a process forever unfolded in the
heart of man" but in unique events that happened at particular moments in history. There are no substitutes for revelation, for prophetic events. Jewish thought is not guided by abstract ideas, by a generalized morality. At Sinai we have learned that spiritual values are not only aspirations in us but a response to a transcendent appeal addressed to us.

11. **The Prophets.** What have the prophets done for the human situation? Let us try to recall but a few out of many things. The Bible showed man his independence of nature, his superiority to conditions, and called on him to realize the tremendous implications of simple acts. Not only the stars but also the deeds of man travel a course that either reflects or perverts a thought of God. The degree of our appreciation of the Bible is, therefore, determined by the degree of our sensitivity to the divine dignity of human deeds. The insight into the divine implications of human life is the distinct message of the Bible. The Bible has shattered man’s illusion of being alone. Sinai broke the cosmic silence that thickens our blood with despair. God does not stand aloof from our cries; He is not only a pattern, but a power, and life is a response, not a soliloquy. The Bible shows the way of God with man and the way of man with God. It contains both the complaint of God against the wicked and the shriek of the smitten man, demanding justice of God. And there dwells also in its pages reminders of man's incredible callousness and obstinacy, of his immense capacity to bring about his doom as well as the assurance that beyond all evil is the compassion of God. He who seeks an answer to the most pressing question, what is living? will find an answer in the Bible: man’s destiny is to be a partner rather than a master. There is a task, a law, and a way: the task is redemption, the law, to do justice, to love mercy, and the way is the secret of being human and holy. When we are gasping with despair, when the wisdom of science and the splendor of the arts fail to save us from fear and the sense of futility, the Bible offers us the only hope: history is a circuitous way for the steps of the Messiah.

12. **Sacred Deeds** In our response to God’s will we perceive God’s presence in our deeds. God’s will is revealed in our doing. In carrying out a sacred deed we unseal the wells of faith. …

A Jew is asked to take a **leap of action** rather than a **leap of thought.** He is asked to surpass our needs, to do more than he understands, in order to understand more than he does. In carrying out the word of the Torah, he is ushered into the presence of spiritual meaning. Through the ecstasy of deeds he learn to be certain of the hereness of God. Right living is the way to right thinking. …

It is in **deeds** that man becomes aware of what his life really is, of his power to harm and to hurt, to wreck and to ruin; of his ability to derive joy and bestow it upon others; to relieve and to increase his own and other people’s tensions. It is in the employment of his will, not in reflection, that he meets his own self as it is; not as he should like it to be. In his deeds, man exposes his immanent as well as his suppressed desires. … The deed is a test, the trial, a risk. What we may perform may seem slight, but the aftermath is immense…. Mitsvot, then, are more than reflections of a man’s will or transcripts of his visions. In carrying out a sacred task we disclose a divine intention. With a sacred deed goes more than a stir of the heart. In a sacred deed, we echo God’s suppressed chant; in loving we intone God’s unfinished song. No image of the Supreme may be fashioned, save one: our own life as an image of His will. Man, formed in His likeness, was made to imitate His ways of mercy. He has delegated to man the power to act in His stead. We represent Him in relieving affliction, in granting joy. Striving for integrity, helping our fellow men; the urge to translate nature into spirit, volition into sacrifice, instinct into love; it is all an effort to represent Him.…

13. **More the Law** Observance must not be reduced to external compliance with the law. Agreement of the heart with the spirit, not only with the letter of the law, is itself a requirement of the law. The goal is to live beyond the dictates of the law; to fulfill the eternal suddenly; to create goodness out of nothing, as it were. The law, stiff with formality, is a cry for creativity; a call for nobility concealed in the form of commandments. It is not designed to be a yoke, a curb, a strait jacket for human action. Above all, the Torah asks for love: thou shalt love thy God; thou shalt love thy neighbor. All observance is training in the art of love. To forget that love is the purpose of all mitsvot is to vitiate their meaning. “Those who think that the performance is the main thing are
mistaken. The main thing is the heart; what we do and what we say has only one purpose: to evoke the devotion of the heart. This is the essence and purpose of all mitsvot: to love Him wholeheartedly."

Judaism asks for more than works. The goal is not that a ceremony be performed; the goal is that man be transformed; to worship the Holy in order to be holy. The purpose of mitsvot is to sanctify man. ... The goal is for man to be an incarnation of Torah; for the Torah to be in the man, in his soul and in his deeds.