

Hermeneutics of the revealed and the concealed in R. Joseph Dov Soloveitchik's works

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In analyzing Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's talmudic interpretation, scholars have focused on methodologies of conceptualization, assuming that "Brisker" talmudic thinking is governed by the concept rather than the text. However, many instances of R. Soloveitchik's interpretations reveal close attention to textual detail, as well as return to the plain sense of the text by conceptual resolution of textual difficulties. A representative comparison of readings of a Maimonidean text by R. Soloveitchik and by an academic scholar reveals, alongside a shared commitment to close reading, a significant difference between the systematic linguistic analysis of scholarship and the more intuitive tools employed by R. Soloveitchik.

The difference in methods of interpretation is rooted in different ways of grappling with the "hermeneutic circle" which underlies all attempts to bridge the gap between reader and text. R. Soloveitchik posits an intuitive identification between reader and text, focusing attention upon significant textual features, namely those that facilitate conceptual constructions. R. Soloveitchik's employment of intuition and conceptual constructions in his talmudic lectures corresponds to ideas developed in his philosophical writings, which are rooted in his response to important currents in the philosophical, scientific, and religious thought of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.