

בְּרֵאשִׁית בֵּיא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ. וְהָאָרֶץ הִיחָה תוֹהוּ וְבוֹהוּ וְהוֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וּרוּחַ אֱלֹקִים מְרֻחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר. וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאֹרֶךְ כִּי טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹקִים בֵּין הַיָּם וּבֵין הָאֶרֶץ. וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹקִים לַחוֹשֶׁךְ קִרָּא לַיְלָה וְהָאֹרֶךְ יוֹם. בָּקָר יוֹם אוֹדֵר הַמַּיִם וַיְהִי מִן הַיָּם מַיִם לַמַּיִם וַיֵּעָרֶךְ הַיָּם אֶשְׁרֵי מַתּוֹת לִרְקִיעַ וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֶת הַמַּיִם אֶשְׁרֵי מַתּוֹת לִרְקִיעַ. וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בָקָר יוֹם שֵׁנִי. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים יִקּוּ הַמַּיִם מַתּוֹת וְהַמַּיִם אֶל מְקוֹם אוֹדֵר וְתִרְאֶה הַיִּבְשֶׁת וַיְהִי כֵן. וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹקִים לַיִּבְשֶׁת אֶרֶץ וּלַמַּקְוֹת הַמַּיִם קִרָּא יָמִים וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים כִּי טוֹב.



About the cover

The cover artwork was designed to express the approach of this series of essays which interprets popular media, primarily film and music, through the looking glass of Jewish philosophy. The intent of the essays is not to explain a particular pop-media piece *per se*, but rather to utilize its power to explain Jewish Philosophy. In this sense the media serves as an *articulation* of Jewish Philosophy whereby recondite ideas are brought to life in the "language" of modern man. Jewish philosophy seeks to understand man's world within the context of the Creator; as such the cover art rests on a backdrop of deep sky blue, *tekhelet*, the color of God's throne, upon which the entire creation rests. The blue is rendered chaotic through graphic noise, thus giving expression to the unfinished and imperfect nature of creation. Upon this amorphous substrate is the text of the creation narrative, written in the typeface of a traditional Torah scroll, indicating that it is with reference to the ancient lore that we seek to derive meaning. Scattered around the page are ten circles modifying the base color, representing the ten *sefirot*. The *sefirot* are mystical lenses through which divine emanations reach the world and through which man perceives divinity. There is another circle, in a very light *tekhelet*, around the word "*bereishit*" (beginning), symbolizing the *sefirah* of "*keter*" – God's crown itself. Overlaying these religious symbols are the more familiar symbols of film and music: the director's clapperboard, treble and bass symbols, and a guitar. The guitar is replicated three times; three representing permanence in Jewish thought. The guitar is no ordinary guitar but the 1950's Fender Telecaster used to record Led Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven, a permanent classic in the music world and the subject of one of the essays in this series.

Is This Your Copy?

Please consider the tremendous effort invested in producing this work and purchase your own copy by visiting:

www.divreinavon.com/matrix.htm

Copyright © 2009 by Mois Navon

All rights reserved. No part of this material shall be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the express written permission from Mois Navon, except for quoting brief passages for educational or promotional purposes.

The Matrix – A Mystical Modern Midrash

There is nothing more powerful than *experience* to bring home the veracity of abstract ideas. The next best thing to actual experience is the vicarious experience of watching a movie or hearing a story. It is the contention of this essay that the movie *The Matrix* offers not just some unspecific experience but one that might rightly be called “a spiritual experience.” It does so by providing a vehicle to understanding the Creator and His creation in a palpable way that only a powerful Midrash can.

Midrash as a Vehicle

Midrash is a creative device used to impart deep philosophical concepts through a medium that wins immediate attention by its apparent simplicity and entertaining quality. Midrashim are usually creative embellishments to stories or situations that are very familiar. The familiarity of the basic story outline provides a level of relative comfort conducive for the audience to “hear” the deeper message. In this way, the message is transmitted subtly but palpably. The objective is to convey an idea that might otherwise be difficult to understand or perhaps, uncomfortable to accept. Sometimes, it may convey ideas which are already familiar, but brings the point home in a way that simply relearning the hard facts would never accomplish.

Midrashim work, as stated, because man is an “experiential” being – he learns best from experience. And though one can read a book of philosophy or hear a lecture on intellectual concepts, it is ultimately through experience that one internalizes the teachings.¹ Midrashim impart the most sublime of teachings that can really only be conveyed in their “experiential” form. The Rambam was so awed by their depth that he set for himself the task of explaining every Midrash. However, it wasn’t long into his project that he realized that often the only way to explain a Midrash is to tell another Midrash.

Movies as the Modern Medium for Midrash

For millennia man has been conveying messages through the telling of stories – sometimes the telling was verbal, sometimes it was written, and sometimes it was acted on stage. Today probably the most ubiquitous media for telling stories is electronic – whether it be TV, PC or the movie theater.

Great story tellers, directors, and producers are great not only for the theatrical or cinematic technique they employ but for the depth of meaning that they successfully convey. Indeed, all great stories have some message lying beneath their surface, waiting to be revealed, begging to be discovered. One media critic

explained that the power of *The Matrix* inheres in the fact that its creators² have struck on precisely the right formula to convey their message:

The Wachowskis seem to have asked themselves this question: How do you speak seriously to a culture reduced to the format of comic books and video games? Answer: You tell them a story from the only oracle they'll listen to, a movie, and you tell them the story in the comic-book and video-game format that the culture has become so addicted to.³

Religious Themes in The Matrix

*The Matrix*⁴ has taken on a cult-like following because, I believe, of the profundity that it expresses in a most novel and captivating way. It does not necessarily teach us anything that we didn't know before; however, it tells us what we are so unwilling to face, in a way that we simply can't ignore. And it does so in such a subtle yet powerful way that we can't help but be moved.

The movie's facets and depths have captured the imagination of philosophers and theologians from a myriad of religions which has translated into numerous articles written by Christians, Gnostics, Buddhists, and Jews. Of course, no one can claim that *The Matrix* is teaching their religion, for there are clearly many different religious themes woven into the fabric of the film. Indeed the authors themselves admit to having employed various philosophies. When asked if "all the religious symbolism and doctrine throughout this movie [is] intentional or not?" They answered, "Most of it is intentional."⁵

Jewish Themes in The Matrix

As Jews, however, we can garner great insights by exploring the Jewish themes that exist in *The Matrix*. This is not to imply that the Wachowskis intended any of these themes, nor is their intent really of interest. My objective is not to decode the messages of the authors, but rather to use their work as a powerful tool to understand essential teachings of Judaism. In this sense I am "reading in to the story" rather than "reading out of the story".

That being said, I do believe that it is wholly possible to legitimately and convincingly explain *The Matrix* from within the ambit of Jewish philosophy. In this vein, when the Wachowskis were asked: "Do you appreciate people dissecting your movie? ... does it annoy you a little, especially when the person may have it all wrong?" – they responded, "There's not necessarily ever an 'all wrong'. Because it's about what a person gets out of the movie, what an individual gets out of the movie."⁶

Before we begin to delve into the various themes and symbols through which *The Matrix* speaks, it is important to stress a word of caution relevant to all such

To read the rest of the text please visit the following link:
<http://www.divreinavon.com/matrix.htm>

- ¹ One simple example is the method employed for vocabulary improvement – after providing a definition of a word, it is then used in a story to bring it to life
- ² The Wachowski brothers (Larry and Andy) wrote and directed *The Matrix* (1999).
- ³ Quoted in R. M. Schuchardt, "What is the Matrix?", Taking the Red Pill, p.13.
- ⁴ The intention of this paper is to discuss the original movie and not the sequels, for it is my contention that the original movie provides a philosophically whole story.
- ⁵ <http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com/cmp/larryandychat.html>
- ⁶ Ibid.

If you enjoyed this essay,
feel free to forward the following link to your friends:
www.divreinavon.com/matrix.htm

~ Other titles in this series ~



- **DoubleEdgeFilms' "SPIN"**
- On Fallen Angels, Free Will,
and Fixing the World



- **Led Zeppelin's "Stairway To Heaven"**
- In a Revealed Light



- **Jethro Tull's "Bungle In The Jungle"**
- A Song On Life



- **Bill Murray's "Groundhog Day"**
- Ecclesiastes Revisited

~ Visit our site for other inspiring essays ~

~ Join our mailing list and get updated on new releases ~

www.divreinavon.com

"What is the Matrix?"

The Matrix is a movie which, by design, is laden with religious symbolism. For this reason it has drawn the attention of philosophers and religionists from all quarters who use it to describe otherwise difficult and esoteric ideas. The movie touches upon fundamental issues such as faith, miracles, multiple worlds, desire, redemption, truth and falsehood. It is a movie which deals with the ultimate questions of man's existence: "What is this world?"; and more importantly: "What are we doing here?" In the words of the movie's heroine: "It's the question that drives us." It is the question that we seek to explore herein.

"Thanks for the marvelous essays -- such a depth of vision, a wide range of sources, inspiring Torah. You have much to teach!"

Vera Schwarcz
Freeman Professor, East Asian Studies, Wesleyan University

About the author

Mois Navon has successfully bridged the secular and the religious, the modern and the traditional, into a cohesive and complementary whole. Growing up on the beaches of California as an avid surfer, it wasn't until his years studying for a degree in Computer Engineering at UCLA that he honed his logical reasoning and analytical thinking. During this time he was also introduced to the Arts which inspired a personal journey to spirituality. While obtaining a minor in Art History, he learned that man speaks profoundly in the language of symbol. Raised in a traditional home, it didn't take long before he began to find philosophical depth in the symbols of the Torah and build logical constructs in essay form. From that time on he dedicated himself to delving into Jewish Thought, writing prolifically and teaching passionately on the subject. His journey brought him to Israel where he obtained rabbinic ordination, and where he continues to write and teach – all while maintaining a notable career as a Computer Engineer.

