

The God Worshipper as Trained Monkey: Rethinking Halakhic Performance with Schechner and *Kol Sachal*

Richard Schechner's performance theory has had an immense influence on the study of religious and traditional ritual – and Jewish ritual is no exception. Several studies have explored in terms of performance rituals such as the Pesach Seder, Purim celebrations and rituals surrounding the Torah Scroll. An attempt to apply Schechner's theory to the broader field of Jewish Halakhah, however, might give rise to several questions. To be sure, Halakhic praxis fits neatly into Schechner's formulation of "restored behavior". And yet, since the Halakhic system is not composed of rituals alone – indeed, it aims to shape and govern everyday activities, from sex to lacing one's shoes – the concept of ritual as a performance set in its own space and time, and thus allowing for a "self" which is different from that of everyday life, needs to be rethought of to some degree. This paper will attempt at offering one possible model for such rethinking, by reading one of the earliest explicit theorizing of Halakhah in terms of performance – the treatise *Kol Sachal*, a critique of Rabbinic culture attributed to Venetian Rabbi, Leon Modena (1571-1648). In this text, the worship of God is presented as an act of performance similar to that of a trained animal in front of the monarch. By tracing the ways in which *Kol Sachal* radically relocates Halakhic praxis in the context of courtly performance culture, I will suggest that the image of the "trained animal" allows *Kol Sachal* to articulate the other "self" of the Halakhic performer not in a ritual set aside in space and time, but as an everyday otherness which is located within the performing body itself.

About the Author

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