

Encounter with Another Religion

“I read an announcement about a new course in spiritual disciplines and resources which would include labs for spiritual exercises, to be taught by the Dean of the Chapel. The course intrigued me, but I was apprehensive about taking it. The Dean of the Chapel was also a minister and I worried that he might feel obliged to try to convert me.



Reverend Howard Thurman, Dean of the Chapel at Boston University." Photo by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi.

‘Dean Thurman,’ I said, ‘I would like to take your course, but I don’t know if my anchor chains are long enough.’ He put his coffee mug on his desk and began to look at his hands. He turned them palms up, then palms down. The back of his hands was very dark and his palms were very light. He turned them back and forth, looking at them, as if considering the light and dark sides of an argument. . . . Suddenly he spoke. ‘Don’t you trust the *Ruach Hakodesh*?’

I was stunned. He’d used the Hebrew words for the Spirit of Holiness . . . I began to tremble and walked out of his office without answering him. For the next three weeks I went through torment struggling with the question. Did I indeed trust the *Ruach Hakodesh*, trust It enough to have faith in my self-identity as a Jew? Or was I holding back, fearful of testing my belief in an encounter with another religion . . . Finally, I realized that his question could have only one answer . . . ‘Yes, I do,’ and I signed up for his course. [...]



In the exchanges with Dean Thurman and other members of the class, I learned an important lesson, which is still at the center of my thinking: Judaism and all other Western religions are suffering from having become oververbalized and underexperienced.”