

In the stories “The Jewbird” and “An Apology,” Bernard Malamud confronts the idea that one of the most substantial forces in human life is the desire for control; conversely, if control is lost, people often turn to hostility to carry out their wishes. Throughout Malamud’s stories, the notion of control is defined as the ability to dictate the outcome of any given situation according to personal desire; often, this ideal is taken too far and integrated as a dogmatic way of enforcing personal beliefs upon others. In “The Jewbird,” Harry Cohen is the model of this behavior, as the arrival of Schwartz, a talking Jewbird, causes him to lose control over his family and over his temper. Similarly, Bloostein’s failure to comply with police officer Lou’s demands in “An Apology” causes Lou, a person accustomed to always being in control of the situation, to become hostile and bitter towards the peddler. Both stories argue that this resultant hostility is a demonstration of inner weakness and discomfort, but they vary in how this is expressed. “The Jewbird” insinuates that lack of control leads to a type of primal desperation, hinting that it is the nature of mankind to commit desperate acts in the quest for control. On the other hand, “An Apology” presents two opposing viewpoints on the subject of control, suggesting that while many people live to control others, there are also people who strive for simple decency instead of power. Overall, Malamud concludes that the pursuit of control is futile and unproductive, yielding nothing but a fading sense of self satisfaction and arrogance that disappears as quickly as it was attained.

According to Bernard Malamud, faith does not bring people together simply because they belong to the same religion. Rather, he argues that faith is the only basis for true connection with others. Thus, Malamud’s stories are not about Judaism itself. Instead, he uses Jewish culture and religion in his stories as symbols of unity, connection, and universal faith. He implies that all humans are unified in the struggle of life and that we all have faith in the things we love. Malamud also uses magic as an important element in his stories to test the characters’ faith in things that are seemingly unreal. Once one surrenders rational thought, one is left with out a defense except for one’s faith in others. Therefore, because people need each other most when they are weak, they must unite on a basis of faith. If one insists on distrust and suspicion, one will live isolated from the company of others and deny themselves inner peace. Malamud effectively conveys this message in his stories “The Jewbird” and “The Silver Crown.” In “The Jewbird,” the reader sympathizes with the bird who is a symbol of faith and momentarily draws an average family closer together. By contrast, the main character in “The Silver Crown,” Albert Gans, does not gain the reader’s sympathy because of his lack of trust which eventually leads to the death of his father. Malamud’s stories encourage a faith in hope for existence rather than faith simply in a specific religious group. The stories are a powerful reminder of the importance of such faith, and the inevitable loneliness that comes as a consequence of suspicion and being unable to accept others.

The spirit within us controls the course of our lives, despite the fact that humans often blame mishaps and misfortunes on God. According to Malamud, God is not out to get us but rather to save humans from the pain that we impose on ourselves. Malamud demonstrates in his stories “Angel Levine” and “The Silver Crown,” that the spirit inside of a man or an object is all that matters. Since the spirit is all that matters, each

individuals' spirit is the center of the universe, so to speak. As a result, the spirit inside of man controls his universe and every event within it is a manifestation of man's spirit. The universe would be perfect if it were not for one element that is present within all of us: fear. Manishevitz and Gans, from "Angel Levine" and "The Silver Crown" respectively exemplify how people lose control of their lives due to fear. However, according to Malamud, fortunately God gives us opportunities of overcome our fears in the name of faith. In Malamud's stories, presents his characters with a test or "leap of faith." Those who take the leap eliminate their fear and restore their lives to an ideal state. Those who fail are consumed by their fear and destroy their lives. The results of the tests that God presents Manishevitz and Gans are where the two stories diverge: while Manishevitz passes the test, Gans fails. This raises the question of what enables some men to overcome fear while others cannot. Malamud's answer is simple and clear. Man cannot let go of fear unless he has love in his heart. Without love faith is impossible.

Since we think of ourselves as living in an "enlightened society, we would like to believe that we have overcome racial boundaries and prejudices. However, by taking a closer look at history and the modern world, one can see that we have never been able to overcome racism as a society. Bernard Malamud expresses both the tragedy and irony of this failure in his stories "Black is My Favorite Color" and "Angel Levine." In both stories, Malamud illustrates how it is the superficial that divides us, but it is the soul that unites us. Humans make judgments based on the superficial, and from these judgments we develop stereotypes that define the course of human interaction and set up antagonism between the races. It is this inherent part of the human character that makes racial boundaries seem hopelessly impermeable, and for Malamud the almost are. However, he does say that it is possible to overcome prejudice, but if one is to do so, one must open oneself up to the world, exposing the soul in all its glory and imperfection. This, however, scares most people. No one wants to be vulnerable; we are a society built on self-sufficiency and independence. Therefore, in the modern world, prejudice is a sort of self defense mechanism to avoid personal connections. In "Black is My Favorite Color" and "Angel Levine," Malamud ventures to say that all human beings are equal, but prejudice will continue to exist as long as we are afraid of intimacy.