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KOL HAMEVASER

THE JEWISH THOUGHT MAGAZINE OF THE YESHIVA UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY

Defining the
Yeshiva-Space

Seforno on the
Tabernacle

Non-Spaces in
Halakhah

Cultures of the
Beit Midrash

A Halakhic Overview
of *Mehitsot*

The Limits of the Book
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Exploring the
Architecture of the
Wilf Campus

Revisiting Old Jewish
Brownsville

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SPACE





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ABOUT KOL HAMEVASER

Kol Hamevaser, the Jewish Thought magazine of the Yeshiva University student body, is dedicated to sparking discussion of Jewish issues on the Yeshiva University campus and beyond. The magazine hopes to facilitate the religious and intellectual growth of its readership and serves as a forum for students to express their views on a variety of issues that face the Jewish community. It also provides opportunities for young thinkers to engage Judaism intellectually and creatively, and to mature into confident leaders.

Kol Hamevaser's primary contributors are undergraduates, although it includes input from RIETS Roshei Yeshiva, YU professors, and outside figures. In addition to its print magazine, *Kol Hamevaser* also sponsors special events, speakers, discussion groups, conferences, and shabbatonim.

We encourage anyone interested in writing about or discussing Jewish issues to get involved in our community, and to participate in the magazine, the conversation, and our club's events. Find us online at kolhamevaser.com, or on Facebook.

Editor's Thoughts: Defining the Yeshiva-Space

BY: REUVEN HERZOG

The Jewish psyche seems to always center on *zemanim* – the day is regulated by times of prayer; the week is regulated by shabbat; the year by *Rosh Hodesh* and the holidays. However, less explicit attention is given to the other three dimensions of our experiences. Space surrounds us; it defines our experiences with other things both tangible and not. In this issue, we wish to turn attention to the spatial considerations of the Jewish world.

What does it mean for an entire city to have holiness, who gives it that quality and who is affected by it? On the flipside, what does it mean for a tent to be enveloped with impurity; or for one to be the focus of God's presence? How does the design of a study space affect the character of our *tefilah* and *talmud*? How is spatial design an element of affirming a Jewish identity? Is there such a thing as real spaces, fake spaces, and non-spaces? And how much of a Jewish space, exactly, is the domain of the Jewish book? In the following pages we bring many of these and other inquiries into discussion with each other, showing how the questions of space in Jewish Thought are complementary and unified.

In this context I want to introduce a model of spatial inquiry and apply it to our own Yeshiva University. One of the most critical questions to address about a given space is its boundaries. Where does one thing end and the next begin, and what is the sort of relationship between the interior and exterior of a space? The university encompasses three undergraduate colleges, multiple graduate schools, a law school, two high schools, a community synagogue, a museum, until recently a medical school, a rabbinic ordination program, an advanced Talmud program for women, multiple *kollelim*,

undergraduate Torah studies, not to mention the Center for the Jewish Future and the S. Daniel Abraham Israel Program. Its buildings stand in four neighborhoods in New York City, as well as in Jerusalem. Precisely where among this multitude can we find “the yeshiva?”

For this approach I am assuming that a model of a “yeshiva” exists, and that our yeshiva is based on it. Furthermore, I am not arguing what the yeshiva *should* be, or making hard prescriptive claims of definition. I instead want to make observations on some aspects of the yeshiva's self-described internal coherence as well as relationships to the base model.

It's reasonable to acknowledge the consensus that the Glueck *Beit Midrash* is the heart of the yeshiva. Looking to the previous models of *yeshivot*, Glueck's usage is similarly only *tefilah ve-talmud*. With regards to how the yeshiva perceives of its coherence, it is where the opening *kinus* occurs and the weekly *sichot mussar* are delivered; additionally, its *minyanim* are referred to as “the yeshiva minyan.”¹

Just as the inclusion of these *batei midrash* within the bounds of “the yeshiva” is without question, so too is the exclusion of the law school, the medical school, and the museum. Their uses are hardly yeshiva-like activities, and the people who occupy those spaces do not claim to be yeshiva students – many have no connection to the Jewish tradition.²

But what of the spaces in between these poles of consensus? The Beren Campus and the women who attend school there have an argument that they should be included within bounds of the yeshiva. After all, the women's undergraduate programs were established to be counterpart to the men's dual-curriculum. However, these are often not treated as part of the yeshiva, to

many of these women's chagrin. Two years ago a group *siyum* was held in honor of Rav Schachter; this initiative included male undergraduate, *semikhah*, and high school students. No women were included in this effort, not even the full-time Torah students in GPATS. Though the scheduling of a co-ed *shabbaton* in Washington Heights was deemed by some to be inconsistent with yeshiva-space, none of the objectors seemed concerned that such events regularly occur on the Beren campus. In what is the most frustrating example of this exclusion to many, the *beit midrash* in 245 Lexington Ave. is often repurposed as a study space and work space for non-Torah subjects.

As we continue to develop our spatial model of “the yeshiva of YU,” what other structures do we include? Do we include all buildings on the Wilf Campus, even Belfer Hall, which hosts no Torah programming, or the Gottesman Library? What about the classrooms in Furst Hall; what of the offices there? Do the dormitories count; the cafeteria; the pool?

We can also inquire as to *who* is included in “yeshiva-space?” *Semikhah* students, MYP students, BMP students, Roshei Yeshiva all fit the roles of a classic yeshiva. As for IBC and JSS students, are they included? The college class-style learning, the focus on non-Gemara material, and the ability to include afternoon classes in an IBC schedule are certainly not consistent with the classic yeshiva style of *seder* and *shiur*. And while nearly all MYP teachers are given the title “Rosh Yeshiva,” this does not seem to apply to the other programs' faculty.

When are the boundaries of yeshiva-space? Let's assume for a moment that all YU male undergraduates occupy this space. But when are they in it, and when are they out of it? Are they considered

in the yeshiva only when they are learning in the *beit midrash*, and they are exclusively college students from 3 PM onwards? Or are they *benei yeshiva* all day long, just like the *kollel* fellows?

To examine two ramifications of these theoretical questions, first let us take the case of night *seder*. A yeshiva typically includes three *sedarim*: morning, afternoon, and night, and the expectation is that the student is devoting nearly all of his time to immersive Torah study. If one is inhabiting yeshiva-space all day, then attending night *seder* is a reasonable expectation. However, if after 3:00 the undergraduate men leave yeshiva-space, then their calculus changes. A college student has both “vocational” responsibilities – class attendance and homework – but also is expected to use this time to cautiously enter the adult world: run errands and live self-sufficiently, develop hobbies, cultivate friendships, enjoy outside leisure. *Talmud Torah* here fits in as an avocational responsibility, juggled with everything else; and the college student has already devoted five hours in the day to such study; more may be admirable but certainly not expected.

Second, we will consider recent debates on campus which have centered around appropriate levels of women’s inclusion in the yeshiva; last year the discussion surrounded the Klein@9 *minyán*; this year it was over an uptown co-ed *shabbaton*. Others have thoughtfully articulated arguments about appropriate conduct inside a yeshiva;³ I do not wish to enter directly into this conversation, but instead to raise a question on one of its assumptions, that these events took place inside the yeshiva. Some leaders of Klein@9 tried to argue that they were a “community *minyán*” not within the bounds of the

yeshiva, and thus RIETS’s concerns should be irrelevant. Similarly, the recent *shabbaton* was held primarily in the Schottenstein Center – a building whose primary tenant is

From both a descriptive and prescriptive angle, spaces have inherent qualities and expectations, and before engaging in questions of what is or what ought to be with our yeshiva and our university – questions of tradition and innovation, insularity and engagement, top-down and bottom-up authority, the Academy and the Mesorah – we must agree on a definition of those two terms.

the officially designated “YU Community Shul,” whose attendees include minimal yeshiva students, and where co-ed interaction is regular and unquestioned. We should ask, therefore, was this *shabbaton* in the yeshiva; or was it in the adjacent neighborhood?

To respond to these questions, perhaps we can offer a spatial model anchored not on physical structures but on people. In this model, the yeshiva is not defined by *batei midrash* but by its students, wherever and whenever they travel. A student in the yeshiva should conduct himself as one at all times, from the start of the *zeman* in August to the end in June, *shabbatot* included. If it is not appropriate for a yeshiva student to partake in co-ed events, then a co-ed event designed for yeshiva students inherently runs contrary to institutional norms, violating the student-defined yeshiva-space.⁴

The importance of delineating spaces cannot be understated. From both a descriptive and prescriptive angle, spaces have inherent qualities and expectations, and before engaging in questions of what is or

what ought to be with our yeshiva and our university – questions of tradition and innovation, insularity and engagement, top-down and bottom-up authority, the Academy and the Mesorah – we must agree on a definition of those two terms. My attempt to define a model of YU’s “yeshiva” is meant only as a first step in this conversation.

Though questions of our campus community are important for consideration and discussion, just as deserving of attention is the broader Jewish world, which is what we aim to shed light on in this issue of *Kol Hamevaser*. Enjoy perusing the rest of our issue on space, and we hope the explorations within will reframe the way you see those spaces around you.

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Notes

1 The Fischel *Beit Midrash* matches many of these descriptive qualities. A further connection between the two: Rav Hershel Schachter is explicitly considered the *posek* of the Glueck and Fischel *batei midrash* and the *minyanim* held there, unlike any other part of the institution.

2 Other questionable occupants of yeshiva-space are the Revel, Azrieli, and Wurzweiler graduate schools. *Semikhah* students often attend these schools as part of their rabbinic training program, and Revel’s Academic Jewish Studies curriculum can arguably be defined as *Talmud torah* just like a classic yeshiva’s.

3 See articles by Sam Gelman, available at: <https://yucommentator.org/2019/02/more-than-an-announcement/>, and by Kira Paley, available at: <https://yuobserver.org/2018/02/stern-students-shouldnt-access-uptown-pool/>.

4 Further, we can distinguish between situations were *benei yeshiva* are occupying their home yeshiva-space (generally as a group) and where they are guests in other spaces, such as other college campuses or their hometown communities.

From *be-Khol Makom To ve-Asu Li Mikdash*: Seforno on the Tabernacle

BY: ROCHEL HIRSCH

And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them. (Exodus 25:8)

In this famous and dramatic verse, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to build the *mishkan*. The construction of the *mishkan* is usually considered a positive development in the turbulent tale of Bnei Yisrael in the wilderness. To Nahmanides, for example, the *mishkan* represents the pinnacle of Sefer Shemot, the consummation of the exodus from Egypt, and Bnei Yisrael's return to the spiritual level of the *avot*.¹ According to several *midrashim*, the command to build the *mishkan* reflects Bnei Yisrael's total atonement for *chet ha-egel*.² The *mishkan* is an overwhelmingly positive symbol in traditional Biblical exegesis and Jewish thought.

Yet according to Italian exegete R. Ovadiah Seforno (1475-1550), "*ve-asu li mikdash*" is, in the words of R. Yehuda Copperman,³ "not entirely good news."⁴ In his *Kavanot ha-Torah* and throughout his Biblical commentary, Seforno breaks with the tradition of exegesis that idealizes the *mishkan* and Hashem's residence there. According to Seforno, the construction of the *mishkan* and the confinement of the *Shekhinah* was a *bedi'avad*, a demotion from the ideal form of worship as a consequence of *chet ha-egel*.

Seforno asserts that before sin of the golden calf there was no need for the *mishkan*, its vessels, mandatory sacrifices, or Levite priests. Ideal, pre-sin *avodah* is described by the following verse:

Make for Me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of

well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you. (Exodus 20:21)⁵

This verse, writes Seforno, describes an ideal form of worship that required no gold or silver or precious stones. Before *chet ha-egel*, in order to approach Hashem a simple earthen altar would suffice.⁶ Furthermore, this understated altar would only service voluntary offerings; mandatory sacrifices, according to Seforno, were instituted only after *chet ha-egel*.⁷ The priests to perform the original, ideal *avodah* would be drawn from firstborn Israelites of any tribe.⁸ As for location, there was no need for one designated tabernacle or temple. One could find Hashem "in every place" worthy of His presence, i.e. in any *beit midrash*.⁹ Wherever the righteous people in the generation resided, there the Divine Presence dwelled.¹⁰

The sin of the golden calf, in Seforno's view, stripped Bnei Yisrael

The notion that the Shekhinah would ideally have been accessible "in every place" where righteous people dwelled reinforces a major tenet of Jewish thought about temple service: the physical structure is meaningless without the internal righteousness of the Jewish people.

of their "spiritual ornaments," the spiritual level that granted them access to Hashem "in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned."¹¹ To advance this theory, Seforno is compelled to reorder the events in the second half of Sefer Shemot. The command to build the *mishkan* appears in chapter 25, well before *chet ha-egel* in chapter

32, which seemingly undermines Seforno's claim that the *mishkan* was a result of that sin. Yet Seforno, like Rashi, here invokes the exegetical tool *ein mukdam u-me'uchar ba-Torah*, the principle which states that the Torah is not necessarily ordered chronologically. While the Biblical narrative places the command to build the *mishkan* before *chet ha-egel*, Seforno sides with the Midrash Tanhuma,¹² which tells us that historically, *chet ha-egel* came first.

That the command to build the *mishkan* followed *chet ha-egel* chronologically allows Seforno to posit that it followed causally as well. Although Moshe, through his prayers and supplications after *chet ha-egel*, won Hashem's forgiveness for Bnei Yisrael, he managed only a "certain rectification" when it came to the *Shekhinah*'s return to their camp.¹³ Post-*egel*, Bnei Yisrael lost the privilege of unfettered access to Hashem, at least until Messianic times.¹⁴ They were now required to build a physical space, furnished with many gold and silver vessels, in which the *Shekhinah* would be confined. They were also commanded to offer a host of mandatory sacrifices, both individual and communal, with supplemental meal offerings and libations.¹⁵ Only "in this manner and in this place alone," writes Seforno, would Hashem dwell among the people after the sin of the Golden Calf.¹⁶

Seforno does not explore the thematic connection between *chet ha-egel* and the resulting commandment to build the *mishkan*. He simply refers to a drop in the nation's spiritual level, post-sin, that demanded a different form of worship. But what about this particular sin led to these particular consequences? Is there a deeper connection between the sin

of the golden calf and the resulting construction of the *mishkan*?

A close reading of Seforno's commentary on *chet ha-egel* begins to uncover the connection. Although many commentators eschew the idea that *chet ha-egel* constituted idolatry proper,¹⁷ Seforno follows Rashi's lead and asserts that *chet ha-egel* was actual *avodah zarah*. In one brief comment on Shemot 32:4, Seforno interprets the nation's cry about the calf, "*eleh elokecha yisrael*," as "gods to whom you shall pray for all your needs, and you will serve them to attain your desires."¹⁸ This most straightforward interpretation of *chet ha-egel* is also corroborated by the Talmud in *Avodah Zarah* 53b. Whether Bnei Yisrael sought to replace Hashem with the calf or to serve both together,¹⁹ according to Seforno, *chet ha-egel* was idolatry.

However, in his commentary on the sin, Seforno emphasizes a seemingly peripheral aspect of *chet ha-egel*. Worse than forging and serving the calf, writes Seforno, was the fact that Bnei Yisrael danced around it.²⁰ It was the enthusiastic dancing that Moshe witnessed upon his descent from Mount Sinai that caused him to despair of the people's easy repentance. Bnei Yisrael's glee in their worship of the idol, displayed in dance, compelled Moshe to smash the first *luhot*.²¹

Seforno's focus on the gleeful dancing around the calf points to his overall characterization of *chet ha-egel* as an exercise in anarchy. Indeed, Hashem calls Bnei Yisrael a "stiff-necked people" in response

to their sin; this means, according to Seforno, that Bnei Yisrael "will not turn to listen to the words of any righteous teacher."²² The nation ganged up against Aharon and forced him to comply with their will to build an idol, breaking the covenant with Hashem still in its infancy. The sin of the golden calf constituted a rejection of authority—both human and Divine—and a reversion to the freewheeling idolatry to which Bnei Yisrael had been accustomed in Egypt.²³

Given Seforno's understanding of *chet ha-egel* as anarchy, the thematic connection between the sin and its consequence—the command to build a *mishkan*—becomes clear. The pre-*egel avodah* was much less structured and regulated than its post-*egel* alternative. In the ideal state of affairs, Bnei Yisrael were afforded the freedom to choose when and where to offer sacrifices, since all *korbanot* were voluntary and the *Shekhinah* dwelled "in every place."²⁴ The sin of the golden calf, however, constituted an appalling abuse of autonomy. Rejecting the covenant they had so recently made, Bnei Yisrael devolved into idolatrous, hysterical anarchy. Bnei Yisrael were granted a second chance, thanks to Moshe's intervention. Yet no longer could the nation be privileged with unfettered access to Hashem via voluntary sacrifices and simple, universal earthen altars. No longer could Bnei Yisrael be trusted with unstructured *avodah* and limited restrictions on worship. The debacle of the golden calf demonstrated that

this stubborn-necked people needed rules, regulations, and structure in order to serve Hashem, at least for now, at least until the Messianic age.²⁵ And so after *chet ha-egel*, Bnei Yisrael were saddled with mandatory sacrifices and a highly regimented *avodah* that relied on particular vessels and a special caste of Levite priests. The *Shekhinah* withdrew to one limited space, the *mishkan*, in contrast to the pervasiveness and accessibility of the *Shekhinah* "in every place" prior to the sin.

R. Ovadiah Seforno's view of the *mishkan* as a *bedieved* result of *chet ha-egel* sharply diverges from the idealization of the *mishkan* by other commentators. Yet Seforno's reading should not be misunderstood as a "downer." The notion that the *Shekhinah* would ideally have been accessible "in every place" where righteous people dwelled reinforces a major tenet of Jewish thought about temple service: the physical structure is meaningless without the internal righteousness of the Jewish people. Downplaying the idealization of the physical *mishkan* emphasizes that "*heichal Hashem hemah*"²⁶ – ultimately, it is righteous conduct that draws the *Shekhinah* down to earth, even if it must then be confined to one physical space.

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Notes

- 1 Ramban, Introduction to Sefer Shemot.
- 2 See Shemot Rabbah 33:3 and Midrash Tanchuma, Terumah 8.
- 3 R. Yehuda Copperman zt"l (1929-2016) wrote extensive footnotes on Seforno's Biblical commentary, published as a two-volume set. I have relied on R. Copperman's elucidation throughout my analysis of Seforno's comments.
- 4 Footnote 52 on Seforno's comment on Vayikra 26:12.
- 5 JPS, 1985.
- 6 Seforno on Exodus 20:21.
- 7 *Kavanot HaTorah* chapter 6 and end of chapter 9.
- 8 Seforno on Bamidbar 8:19.
- 9 *Kavanot HaTorah* chapter 6.
- 10 Seforno on Vayikra 26:12. Seforno here is describing the state of *avodah* in Messianic times, which he equates to the pre-*chet ha-egel* *avodah* in his commentary on Vayikra 11:2.
- 11 Seforno on Vayikra 11:2.
- 12 Midrash Tanchuma *Ki Tisa* 31.
- 13 *Kavanot HaTorah*, chapter 6. See R. Copperman's footnote 16, which spells out Seforno's distinction between atonement for the sin and *hashraat ha-Shechinah*.
- 14 Seforno on Vayikra 11:2.
- 15 *Kavanot HaTorah*, end of chapter 9.
- 16 Seforno on Vayikra 21:12.
- 17 See, for example, Nahmanides on Exodus 32:1 and *Sefer HaKuzari* I, 97.
- 18 R. Raphael Pelcovitz's English translation of Seforno on Shemot 32:4.
- 19 See R. Copperman footnote 2, Seforno on Shemot 32:4.
- 20 Seforno on Shemot 32:21.
- 21 Seforno on Shemot 32:19.
- 22 Seforno on Shemot 32:9.
- 23 Seforno on Shemot 32:22. See also R. Copperman's footnote 24 on this comment, in which he quotes the *Mechilta* on *Beshalach*: "these [Egyptians] are idol worshippers, and these [Israelites] are idol worshippers."
- 24 Exodus 20:21.
- 25 Of course, the construction of a Third Temple in Messianic times is ubiquitous in Jewish thought. See *Shem MiShmuel* on *Ki Tisa* and *Malbim* on Ezekiel 37:26-27, both of whom assert that the Third Temple will provide access to the *Shechinah* for other nations of the world. Bnei Yisrael, however, will not rely on the physical temple, since Hashem will dwell directly among them.
- 26 Yirmiyahu 7:4.

Non-Space in Halakhah and Jewish Thought

BY: NOAH MARLOWE

Kedushat ha-zeman, holiness of time, and *kedushat ha-makom*, holiness of space, receive a fair deal of discussion in *Halakhah* and Jewish thought.¹ Holiness in space most prominently manifests itself in the Land of Israel², the *beit mikdash*,³ the *beit kenesset*,⁴ and the *mishkan*. However, I would like to explore an area Jewish Thought that, I believe, remains untouched: non-spaces.

The twentieth-century English theologian and founder of the British Masorti movement, Louis Jacobs, while exploring different approaches of the Hasidic masters to physicality (*avodah be-gashmiyut*), describes

the notion of 'non-behaviors.'⁵ Man, according to the Hasidic and Kabbalistic doctrine, releases divine sparks (*nitzozot*) when performing affirmative behaviors. Conversely, man, too, releases divine sparks by abstaining from certain behaviors.⁶ When a person, for example, eats kosher, he engages in the sanctifying *non-behavior* of *kashrut*. Or, if one withstands sexual temptation, he engages in a holy non-behavior⁷. This Hasidic doctrine envisions a far-reaching and deeply penetrating view of the human condition; while modern psychology claims the domains of affection, cognition, and behavior, *Hasidut* goes above and beyond – stating that patterns of non-behaviors enter the realm of divine concern. Human (non-)behavior, thus, shapes the cosmos and, according to mystical doctrine, facilitates *tikkun*,⁸ mystical metaphysical repair.

In general, the notion of 'non-behaviors' aligns (almost seamlessly) with the classification of *mitzvot lo ta'aseh*, negative commandments. For example, the laws of *shevitat melakhah*, cessation of creative work on Shabbat and *yom tov*, attempt to engender an atmosphere of psychological reflection and interpersonal connection.⁹ Similarly, I contend, non-spaces exist in *Halakhah* and Jewish thought. Non-spaces are the metaphysical opposite or contrast to the spaces we physically create. *Halakhah* requires and acknowledges creating, constructing, and manipulating – and, of course, refraining from generating – certain spaces: *eiruvim*, *mikva'ot*, *sukkot*, *ohalot*, *kela'ei ha-kerem*, *tehum shabbat*, *minhag ha-makom*, *arei miklat*, *hatzer ha-shutafim*, and many others. Therefore, one must consider

what goes into crafting these spaces, and, more specifically, what is absent in the creation of these spaces. Space, in this view, is an earth-shattering medium in which holiness permeates the membrane of metaphysical and *halakhic* reality. While, I admit, this idea is an expansion of the Hasidic and Kabbalistic doctrine, and *not* explicitly what the Hasidic masters taught and wrote, I believe it serves as a launching pad for further thought and consideration. In my analysis, I will explore three areas – of significant categorical difference – with the intent to introduce the idea of non-space, and not to offer an all-encompassing theory.

Yihud, in turn, represents the paradigmatic form of environmental manipulation to prevent (sexual) sin. And those who keep the laws of yihud, I argue, develop and cultivate a non-yihud space. The space in which they dwell transforms into one of supreme holiness.

Yihud

The Mishnah in Kiddushin (4:12) teaches the prohibition of an individual man secluding himself with two women;¹⁰ the Gemara (80b) further expounds on the biblical proscription, ruling that seclusion between a man and a woman of which a sexual relationship is forbidden constitutes a biblical prohibition.¹¹ The prohibition of *yihud* functions as a blanket prohibition meant to prevent *any* illicit sexual behavior that might take place in private. Judaism, of course, recognizes, sexual passion and libido is alive and well; *Halakhah*, however, demands not only herculean self-control but goes as far as manipulating our environment to gain a desirable (religious) outcome.¹² *Yihud*, in turn, represents the paradigmatic form of environmental manipulation to prevent (sexual) sin. And those who keep the laws of *yihud*, I argue, develop and cultivate a non-*yihud* space. The space in which they dwell transforms into one of supreme holiness.

Midat Sedom¹³

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (5:10) describes an unbecoming character trait: *midat Sedom*, the Sodomite virtue. According to the “*yesh omrim*” attribution in the mishnah, one who declares that his property is strictly his and that his neighbor’s property is strictly hers actualizes the Sodomite virtue. The people of Sodom (during the days of antiquity) failed to exercise proper hospitality and sensitivity to the vulnerable. Moreover, their egregious behavior and heinous mistreatment of others gave rise to the name of a negative moral virtue. One who invokes the trait of legal selfishness turns his household into an extension of the notorious city; once again, I argue, that one who acts against his or her evolutionary proclivity for selfishness, and embraces the opposite of *midat*

sedom, fashions his household into a *midat-sedom* non-space.

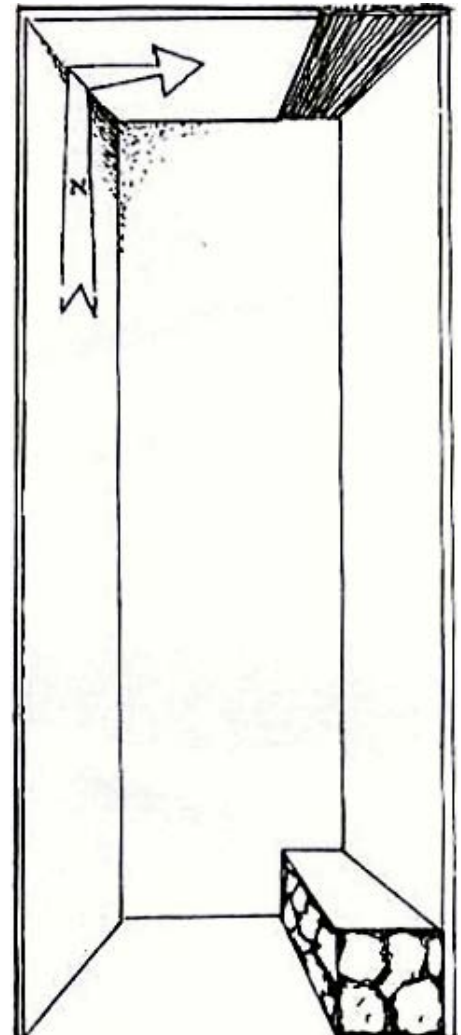
Dofen Akumah

The Gemara (Sukkah 4a) teaches a strange *din*: If one has a *sukkah* that is taller than 20 *ammot*, the maximum height of a *sukkah*¹⁴, and desires to circumvent the *pesul* of 20 *amot* by building an *itztabba*, a platform, across the middle of the *sukkah*, while maintaining (within the platform part of the *sukkah*) the minimum standards of a *sukkah*, *hekhser sukkah*, the *sukkah* is rendered *kasher*. How does it work? The *sakhakh* that is above 20 *amot* is viewed *halakhically* as a bent wall, a “*dofen akumah*.” Instead of seeing the above-20-*amot sakhakh* as *sakhakh*,¹⁵ it is now viewed as a bent wall, which is the awkward continuation of the *sukkah* walls. While the Gemara concludes that a *dofen akumah sukkah* is, in fact, *kasher*, the question of whether or not one could sit under the part of the *sukkah* which is considered directly under the *dofen akumah* space is subject to dispute. The *mahloket* depends upon how one understands *dofen akumah*: Does the *sakhakh* connect to the platform and therefore anything under that area is considered part of the *sukkah*, or do we view the above-20-*amot sakhakh* as part of the wall and therefore one cannot eat/drink/sleep under it?¹⁶ The view that interests me is the one that posits that the *sakhakh* and the wall are viewed as connected; it suggests a type of annihilation of space. Different than the other two examples, this view of non-space is an explicit product of a *halakhic* construct. What is this (non-)space? Why is it significant? These are questions that require further examination, or to borrow the phrase of the *aharonim*: *tzarich iyyun gadol!*

In sum: *Halakhah* and Jewish thought wink gently at the areas of non-space. An early

Hasidic approach leads to a novel perspective of non-spaces. While the ideas remain in their infancy, further discussion is in order. Space facilitates cosmic human initiative and consecration; *yehi ratzon* that we may, soon, discover how to sanctify that which transcends space and defies cognitive ideation.

Noah Marlowe is a senior at Yeshiva College studying Psychology and Jewish Thought. He is the former Vice President of SOY (2017-2018) and current President of the Klein@9 community minyan.

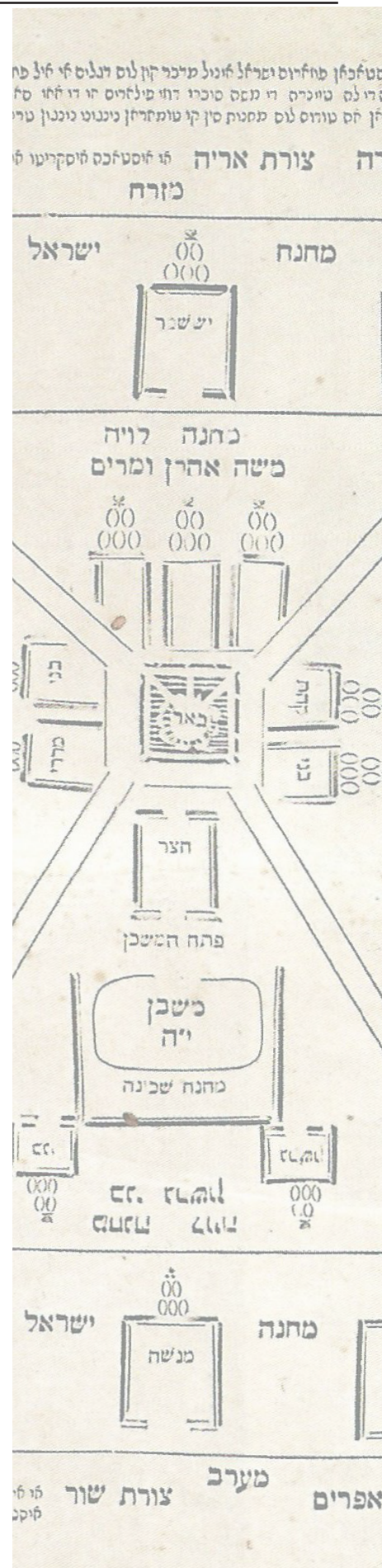


A dofen akumah bending into the raised part of the sukkah

Notes

- 1 See, most recently, the posthumous volume entitled *Kedushat Aviv* by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein *zt"l*; for a classic excursus on the temporal holiness of Shabbat, see *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel
- 2 Rav Kook, in specific, believes in metaphysical holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*; see *Orot Eretz Yisrael*, Chapter 1, and *Orot ha-Tehiyah*, Chapter 28. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (in *Kol Dodi Dofek*), in contrast, viewed *Medinat Yisrael* as pragmatically significant
- 3 In fact, in *Kedushat Aviv* more than six chapters (further) analyze the sub-divisions of *kedushat ha-makom* of the *beit mikdash*
- 4 See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's lecture at Congregation Kehilath Jeshrun about sanctity of the synagogue entitled "The Synagogue as an Institution and as an Idea," reproduced in Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume; see Steven Fine's book *Sacred Realm* about ancient conceptions of the synagogue
- 5 A term of my own creation, not of Jacobs'
- 6 Jacobs (pg. 160-161) attributes this theory to the *Me'or Einayim*, Rabbi Nahum of Tchernobil, and the *Kedushat Levi*, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev
- 7 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik describes a similar phenomenon in his essay "Catharsis," while attributing its epistemological roots to *Halakhah*, as opposed to the Hasidic or Kabbalistic doctrines
- 8 See Louis Jacobs' essay entitled "The Uplifting of Sparks in Later Jewish Mysticism" for more on Lurianic Kabbalah and divine sparks
- 9 Rabbi Norman Lamm beautifully expresses this idea in chapter 7 of his book *Faith and Doubt*, entitled "A Jewish Ethic of Leisure"; see also Rabbi Michael Rosensweig's *shiur* entitled "Chiyuv Tzom and Issur Achila on Yom Kippur" (<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/907378/rabbi-michael-rosensweig/chiyuv-tzom-and-issur-achila-on-yom-kippur/>) where he discusses cessation, both in the context of *Shabbat* and *Yom Kippur*, as an atmosphere-shaping phenomenon
- 10 *Tosefot Ri ha-Zaken* (Kiddushin 80b s.v. "lo yetyahed adam em shte'i nashim") extends the *issur yihud* to seclusion of one man and one woman
- 11 Rambam rules this way (*Hilkhot Issurei Bi'ah* 22:1), as does Rabbi Yosef Karo

- (*Shulhan Arukh, Even ha-Ezer* 22:1)
- 12 Rambam (*Hilkhot Geirushin* 2:20) rules that *beit din* can physically assault a recalcitrant husband until he gives his wife a *get*, as the man's inner desire is to follow the *retzon ha-torah* and to be part of the Jewish people. Rambam, according to Rabbi J. David Bleich in *Contemporary Halakhic Problems Volume 6* (pg. 76), "[asserts] that the human psyche is multi-layered," a psyche that has conflicting and overlapping desires. Here, too, *Halakhah* recognizes that man's inner will does not always reflect his behavior; consequently, *Halakhah* demands manipulating our environment to attain our true inner desire. Behavioral psychology has brought the issue of environmental controls or, as Nobel Prize-winning economist Richard Thaler calls it, "choice architecture," manipulating our environments to achieve our desired outcomes, to the forefront. For more a more practical perspective see Chapter 8 of Chip and Dan Heath's book *Switch*, entitled "Tweak the Environment." For more theoretical models, see Richard Thaler's *Nudge*
- 13 For a more detailed exposition of *midat Sedom* and the sin of the people of Sodom, see *mori ve-rabi* Rabbi Jeremy Wieder's *sichat mussar* entitled "Sodom(y) and The Curse of Materialism" - <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/887661/rabbi-jeremy-wieder/sodom-y-and-the-curse-of-materialism/>
- 14 BT *Sukkah* 2a
- 15 Rabbeinu Tam (*Rosh, Sukkah, Siman* 3) maintains that *sakhakh* above 20 *amot* is not *itself* considered *sakhakh pasul*, but rather the *sukkah* extends beyond the 20 *amot* maximum
- 16 In the *Reshimot Shiurim* (pg. 17-19) of the Rav, he identifies this *mahloket* between Rashi and Tosafot; this very same *mahloket* can also be attributed to an understanding of the *setirah* in Rambam's *Hilkhot Sukkah* 4:15 and 5:15



REHAV RUBIN

The *Beit Midrash*: An Ever-Changing Creature

BY: SHAYNA HERSZAGE

The campuses of Yeshiva University have multiple rooms that, at the skeleton of their being, look similar to each other - rooms filled with rows of bookshelves, hundreds of books, tables intended for people to read and learn. However, while some rooms go by the name “libraries,” others are considered “*batei midrash*,” and the names distinguish two completely different species. While libraries are places of quiet reading and solitude, *batei midrash* are places in which learning is best done with others as *khavrutas* (learning in pairs), arguing and shouting and proving and disproving. In addition, libraries have remained essentially the same since they were first created, whereas *batei midrash* have been changing and evolving constantly since their beginning, shaping to meet the needs of the society. *Batei midrash* are spaces not made for an individual experience, but for people to come together to contribute to a millennia-long search for information and answers to age-old questions, all the while participating in the story of an ever-changing form of institution.

Since their establishment in Mishnaic times, *batei midrash* have been spaces not only for Torah-fueled arguments, but also for Torah-fueled interpersonal relationships, friendships that are rooted in spiritual and intellectual growth. The tractate Bava Metzia (84a) relates the story of a strong friendship that was born through a *beit midrash* environment: One day, Rabbi Yochanan went to bathe in the river, and a robber named Reish Lakish thought he was a beautiful woman and approached him. Soon after, Rabbi Yochanan convinced Reish Lakish to learn Torah with him, and the unlikely pair became an inseparable one. Through their partnership, Reish Lakish changed from a robber to a

holy and learned person, and Rabbi Yochanan’s learning experience was heightened by having a *chavruta* with whom he could argue and be challenged. Every conflict in opinion with Reish Lakish helped him to grow.

Unfortunately, in a discussion about a law regarding manufacturing weapons, Rabbi Yochanan referenced Reish Lakish’s former bandit lifestyle, and insulted him. The hurt feelings escalated, and the two no longer spoke to each other. Distraught, Reish Lakish fell ill, and he passed away. The death of his friend threw Rabbi Yochanan into a deep depression. Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat visited him, hoping to help him by learning with him. For every point Rabbi Yochanan made, Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat could think of sources to support him. Rabbi Yochanan was dissatisfied with the dynamic, and said, “Are you comparable to Reish Lakish? In our discussions, when I would raise an argument, he would raise twenty-four counter-arguments, and I would argue against the counter-arguments, and the law would have been clarified by our arguments.” Rabbi Yochanan was looking for a *chavruta* to oppose him, rather than supporting him in everything he said. Rabbi Yochanan *knew* he was correct - otherwise, he would not have stated his opinion. With Reish Lakish, he was shown the flaws in his statements, and he could refine his own ideas.

While Reish Lakish and Rabbi Yochanan developed a powerful connection in which they were able to make progress in their *halakhah* study as a pair, it is important to note the nuances that turn *chavruta* learning pairs into productive arguments, rather than turning a *beit midrash* into a verbal fight club - which would decrease productivity. The ideal dynamic is highlighted

well through the most famous *halakhic* opponents in history: Hillel and Shammai. The followers of both sides constantly disagreed on topics throughout Jewish law, and yet they maintained a level of respect for each other. In the tractate *Eiruvin* (13b), it is said that Hillel’s opinions were given stronger preferences because he showed more respect and tolerance toward Shammai. A *beit midrash* is a place of disagreement, but also simultaneously acknowledging and respecting each others’ differences and using them to strengthen the work that is done.

As *batei midrash* have grown in size and number, it has become clear that not all Torah scholars are created the same way, and different people need different denominational, cultural, or structural details in order to thrive. The most common forms of *batei midrash* today are seminaries and *yeshivot* intended for post-high school gap-year programs. The first semester of twelfth grade for many Jewish high school students is a time of stress as they struggle to decipher the information they receive about *yeshivot* and seminaries. A student may be considering two *batei midrash*, but is torn due to seemingly minute differences, such as frequency of organized trips, or whether or not night classes are mandatory. However, these small differences, in a society filled with diverse institutions made to suit the equally diverse selection of students, contribute to the essence of the institution. The nuances that make the individual *beit midrash* also make what is the ideal learning environment for some, and less so for others. For example, an institution that requires night classes may be stressful for one student, but their classmate may want mandatory night classes in order to prevent them from “slacking off.” Different people require different environments in

order to achieve their goal of learning Torah, but the growing range of *batei midrash* is working to accommodate the diversity of Torah scholars.

In the tractate *Berakhot* (48a), a comparison of two different Torah scholars is derived from an anecdote. Abaye and Rava, two people who grew up to be well-known *amoraim*, sat before Raba as children. He asked them, “To whom do we recite blessings?” The two replied that they pray to God, to which Raba asked, “And where does God reside?” Here, Abaye and Rava replied with slightly different answers. Rava pointed up to the rafters on the ceiling, but Abaye ran outside, and he pointed to the heavens without a building to act as a barrier. Raba then said, “You will both grow up to be great scholars.” Which, as is evident throughout the

Talmud, was a true statement.

While Rava opted to demonstrate information by staying seated in the *beit midrash* and simply pointing upward, Abaye saw value in moving, in even leaving the *beit midrash* for a moment, for the purpose of enhancing his learning experience. This momentary glimpse into a *beit midrash* shows two equally valid approaches to learning and understanding, and, by extension, two equally valid students. The growing range of *batei midrash* and *yeshivot* help people who harbor different beliefs or take varying approaches, such as half-learning, half-volunteering programs, to be able to access learning in a format that is not one-size-fits-all.

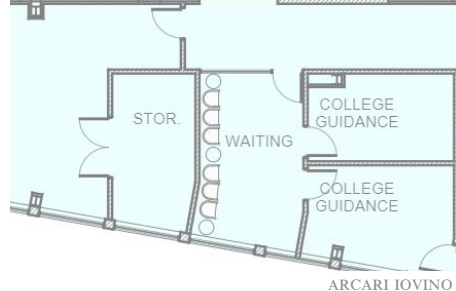
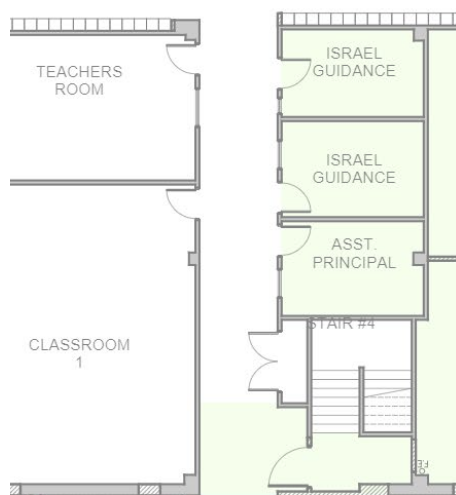
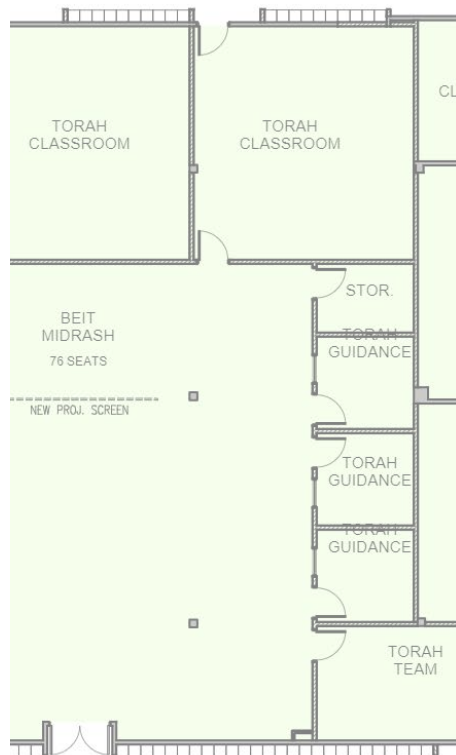
In addition to different methods and demographics, *batei*

midrash are evolving to include a group of people who previously were allowed very little involvement with the *beit midrash* experience - women. *Batei midrash* that are women-only or women-inclusive are on the rise in multiple denominations. While high school boys flip through men’s *yeshiva* pamphlets, their female classmates look at the websites of women’s seminaries, which also are growing to accommodate students’ needs and preferences. For example, while some seminaries put focus on a rigorous Talmud curriculum, others make Talmud optional, and some do not offer Talmud classes at all, preferring to put more emphasis on Tanakh or philosophy courses. Additionally, co-ed *batei midrash*, such as the Drisha Kollel Program, are growing in popularity among



The *beit midrash* in Migdal Oz, Israel

JENNIFER VAN AMERONGEN



ARCARI IOVINO

Modern Orthodox communities, granting men and women the opportunity to listen to each other's opinions, thoughts, and ideas in an organized beit midrash setting.

The inclusion of women in *batei midrash*, whether in mixed company or in single-gender environments, deeply alters the beit midrash experience. The addition of women's voices to the beit midrash allows a myriad of new perspectives and ideas. Additionally, having the opportunity to argue and learn the way they used to watch their fathers and brothers do is an empowering experience for women. After generations of women being confined to the home, the *beit midrash* is finally giving women a chance to argue, to shout and point at the footnotes of books, to prove and disprove and learn together like women before them seldom could.

Yeshiva University's Graduate Program for Advanced Talmudic Studies, as well as other post-undergraduate women's beit midrash initiatives, has affected the tone of Stern College for Women. Women are now able to see a future for themselves in the Talmud and Torah world that is different from that of the women they saw growing up. Before the current rise of women in the Torah world, women primarily only were seen as authority figures because they married men with authority, thus granting the women the term "rebbetzin." Now, it has become common for women to be seen as great in the Torah world on their own. In turn, the ability for women to have futures in the beit midrash increases their drive to be

in *batei midrash* at younger ages. Through increasing opportunities for post-undergraduate women's beit midrash learning, women's *batei midrash* across all ages and levels are strengthened and improved.

Since their establishment in Mishnaic times, batei midrash have been spaces not only for Torah-fueled arguments, but also for Torah-fueled interpersonal relationships, friendships that are rooted in spiritual and intellectual growth.

The *beit midrash* is an integral part of Jewish life, culture, and development as a society. It is a place of interactive learning that not only advances the learning and the discovery of information, but also strengthens the connections between people by interacting together on a high spiritual and intellectual level. Through *batei midrash*, people find new understandings of the world around them by working together and contributing ideas to their quests for knowledge. *Batei midrash* are ever-changing creatures, evolving with the times to create a space to welcome people across multiple spectrums of being into the world of Jewish learning. What once was a uniform, men's-only environment is now a diverse place for people to grow in their spiritual experience and their connection to Jewish law.

Shayna Herszage is a sophomore at Stern College studying Psychology.

Why is There a Need to Create a Divide?

BY: ZAHAVA FERTIG

Every *shul* has a different type of *mehitsah*: some shorter, some taller, some prettier, some plainer, some with one sided mirrors, some with slats some all the way up to the ceiling, some up to a man's shoulder and some up to a child's shoulder. Regardless of what it looks like, the *mehitsah* serves a function. A *mehitsah* is a physical boundary that creates two separate sections, one for men and one for women. But, as one of the clearest indicators of an Orthodox shul, there is a glaringly noticeable lack of information provided in the Gemara and earlier sources regarding *mehitsot*.

The only source regarding *mehitsot* is, interestingly enough, brought in the context of the *Simhat Beit ha-Sho'evah*. Every Sukkot when the *beit ha-mikdash* was standing, there was a festive water drawing ceremony in the courtyard. Everyone would come to watch the ceremony, and the men would dance all night. The Gemara (BT *Sukkah* 53a) discusses how the nation would celebrate at this event: The *Leviyim* played their instruments and lit torches. Some would engage in a juggling performance, including Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel. Earlier in the discussion (51a), the Mishnah notes that after the first *Simhat Beit ha-Sho'evah*, the *Leviyim* enacted "a significant repair." The Gemara elaborates further, explaining that the women's courtyard, the location of the water-drawing ceremony, was originally set up as follows: The women sat in the inner circles surrounding the *mizbe'ah*, and the men sat in the outer circles surrounding the women. But at a time of such a celebratory and exciting event, the atmosphere and environment became too lax and led to "*kalut rosh*," commonly defined as frivolity, among the men and

women. The Gemara explains that the "significant repair" referred to in the Mishnah was the building of a balcony for the women to stand on that overlooked the courtyard. Originally, they tried to flip the men's and women's locations with each other; in that formation, too, there was mingling within the crowd. By building a balcony, the intention was to separate the men and women from each other and to prevent them from mixing together in the courtyard.

While the main source for *mehitsot* is in tractate *Sukkah* and not in *Berakhot* – which does have a section discussing prayer before women¹ – the *mehitsah* plays a tremendous role in an Orthodox *shul*. Yet, the *mehitsah's* actual function is up for debate. With regards to a *mehitsah* in a *shul*, there are varying opinions on what a separation should look like. The root of this debate revolves around the goal of the *mehitsah*. The first opinion is that men should not see women while they are praying. Following this ruling, a *mehitsah* would need to be as tall as the tallest women. Additionally, the *mehitsah* would need to be made from a material that cannot be seen through, or at least not be seen through from the men's section of the *shul*.

While this opinion is followed by many communities, there is another understanding of the reason for a *mehitsah*, one that would change the requirements for the structure of the partition wall. The second opinion is not about a man seeing a woman while he is davening. Rather, the main problem that the *mehitsah* is trying to prevent is the development of a frivolous environment within the *shul* during *tefilah*, something that can occur as a result of men and women congregating together.

Rav Eliezer Waldenberg of Jerusalem, well-known for his halakhic works titled the *Tsits Eliezer*,

was of the opinion that the main issue with mixed seating is for a man to see a woman during *tefilah*. Therefore, he determined that the *mehitsah* must be high enough that a man could not look over it and see into the women's section (*Tsits Eliezer* 7:8).

Rav Moshe Feinstein discussed in his responsa (*Iggerot Moshe* 1:39) that the ideal form of a *mehitsah* is a balcony. There are two logical reasons why a balcony is ideal and why many shuls follow this architectural design. Firstly, the original *mehitsah* – in the *beit ha-mikdash* – was indeed a balcony (refer back to BT *Sukkah* 51a). Secondly, a balcony separates men and women further, and it avoids any dispute about the appropriate height, material, and design of the *mehitsah* itself. If installing a balcony is not reasonable in a given shul's layout, the second best *mehitsah* setup according to Rav Moshe is a partition that reaches up to a woman's shoulders. The reason for this position that while separate seating might prevent frivolity within the shul, there is still a concern should a woman come to shul dressed immodestly: if the *mehitsah* was not tall enough to cover the woman's body there would now be an additional *issur* of men saying the Shema in front of *ervah* (BT *Berakhot* 24a).

Additionally, there is a debate whether or not the requirement of a *mehitsah* is a from the Torah or rabbinic in origin. Rav Feinstein held that the requirement for a *mehitsah* – and the parameters of the *mehitsah* itself – was a mitzvah from the Torah that was passed down through the oral tradition. This perhaps could explain why there is extremely limited information in the *halakhot* of *mehitsot*: there was no need to elaborate on halakhot that were orally and generationally transmitted. Contrarily, Rav Yosef Dov Soleveitchik held that while

the requirement for a *mehitsah* was a Torah law, the laws regarding what the *mehitsah* looked like are only a rabbinic requirement.

While these disputes over the technical aspects of the *mehitsah* requirement are still debated, in essence the goal is the same. When it comes to *tefilah*, one's concentration is necessary; the goal of the *mehitsah* is to make it easier for both men and women to concentrate on their prayers. Regardless of the reasons why a *mehitsah* is necessary, today, there is a *mehitsah* in every Orthodox shul; it is an accepted part of the Tradition that men and women sit separately during prayer. Having a *mehitsah* in their synagogues defines the *halakhic* observance of the Orthodox community and differentiates it from Reform and Conservative synagogues.

To conclude with a personal note, as an Orthodox Jewish woman living in 2018, I admit there are times when I am in shul and the *mehitsah* bothers me. When the *hazzan* is *davening*, I don't want to struggle to guess the words that I can barely hear through a thick curtain or solid wall. When the Rabbi is speaking, I like to be able to hear what he has to say. When the Torah is raised for *hagbahah*, I want to be able to say, "*ve-Zot ha-Torah asher sam Moshe...*" after actually seeing the text in the *sefer Torah*.² Alternatively, I've also been in a *shul* where the women's

section is parallel to the men's section and while there was a full *mehitsah* dividing the men's and the women's section, when it came time for the Rabbi to give his *derashah*, the curtains on the top part of the *mehitsah* were opened so that the entire congregation could not only hear, but also see who was addressing the entire community.

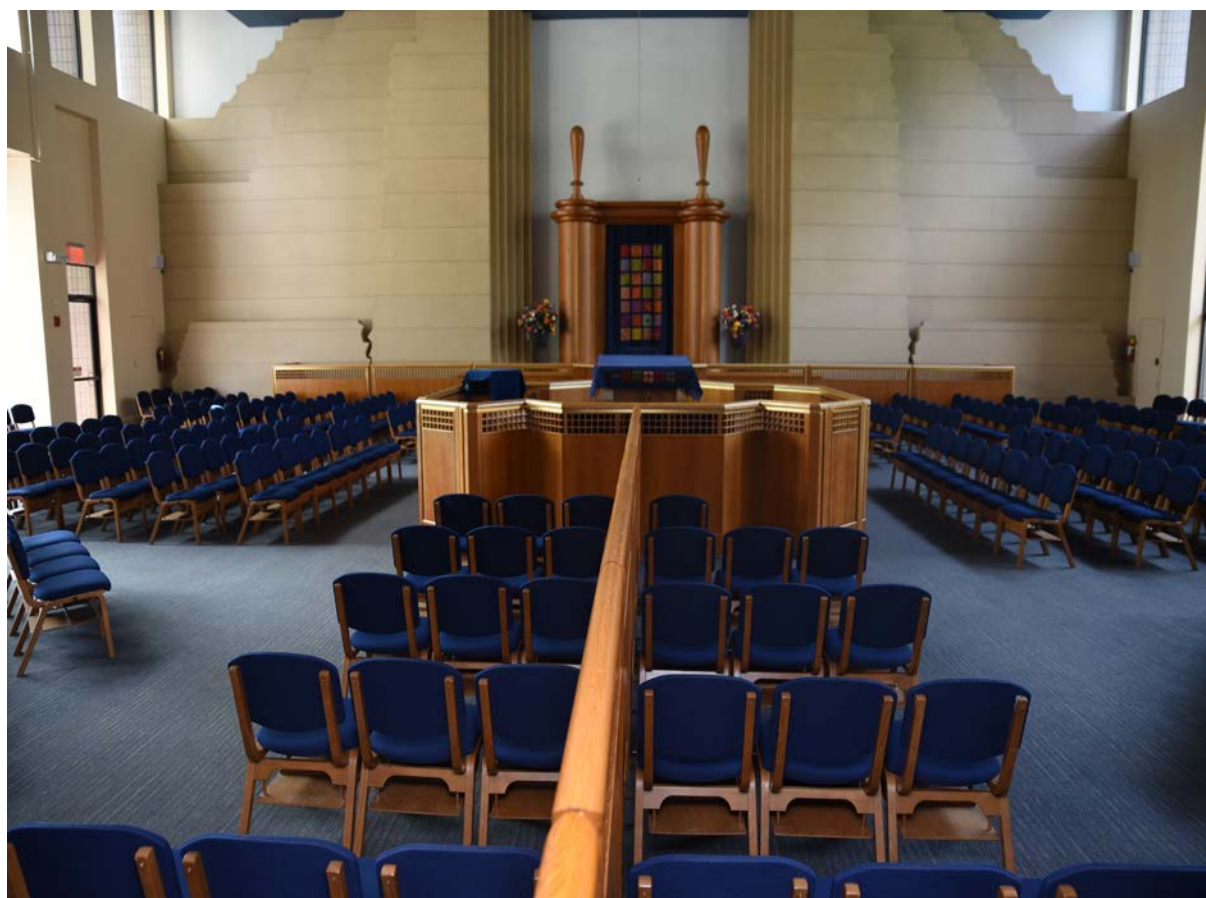
While there is no perfect solution for the relatable phenomenon in which women feel as though they are outsiders during a communal prayer, there is hope for an adjusted future. As new shuls are formed or built, the women's section location should be placed intentionally and thoughtfully in order to maximize the ability to see the *aron kodesh* and the *bimah*, and to hear the *tefilah*, all while maintaining the proper decorum of seriousness and intent required during times of communal prayer.

Zahava (Samantha) Fertig is an upper sophomore at Stern College for Women. She is likely to major in Philosophy with Biology and Education minors. Zahava is currently involved in YUNMUN, Beit Midrash Committee, and START Science.

Notes

1 BT *Berakhot* 24a says that a *tefah* of hair showing on a married woman is considered *ervah*, which can be literally translated as 'nakedness'. When the *Sugya* discusses the prayer of *Shema*, it explains that a man may not recite the *Shema* while in front of a woman who is exposing her *ervah*.

2 *Shulchan Arukh* O.C. 134 states that the *sefer Torah* is shown to everyone while the congregation stands. When the men and women see the actual text of the *sefer Torah*, they recite the following pasuk, "*ve-Zot ha-Torah asher sam Moshe...*" (Deuteronomy 4:44).



The sanctuary at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, featuring symmetric men's and women's sections, and a *mehitsah* down the middle of the room.

SHULI BOXER RIESER

Printing, Christian Hebraism, and the Changing Nature of the Hebrew Book

BY: DAVID SELIS

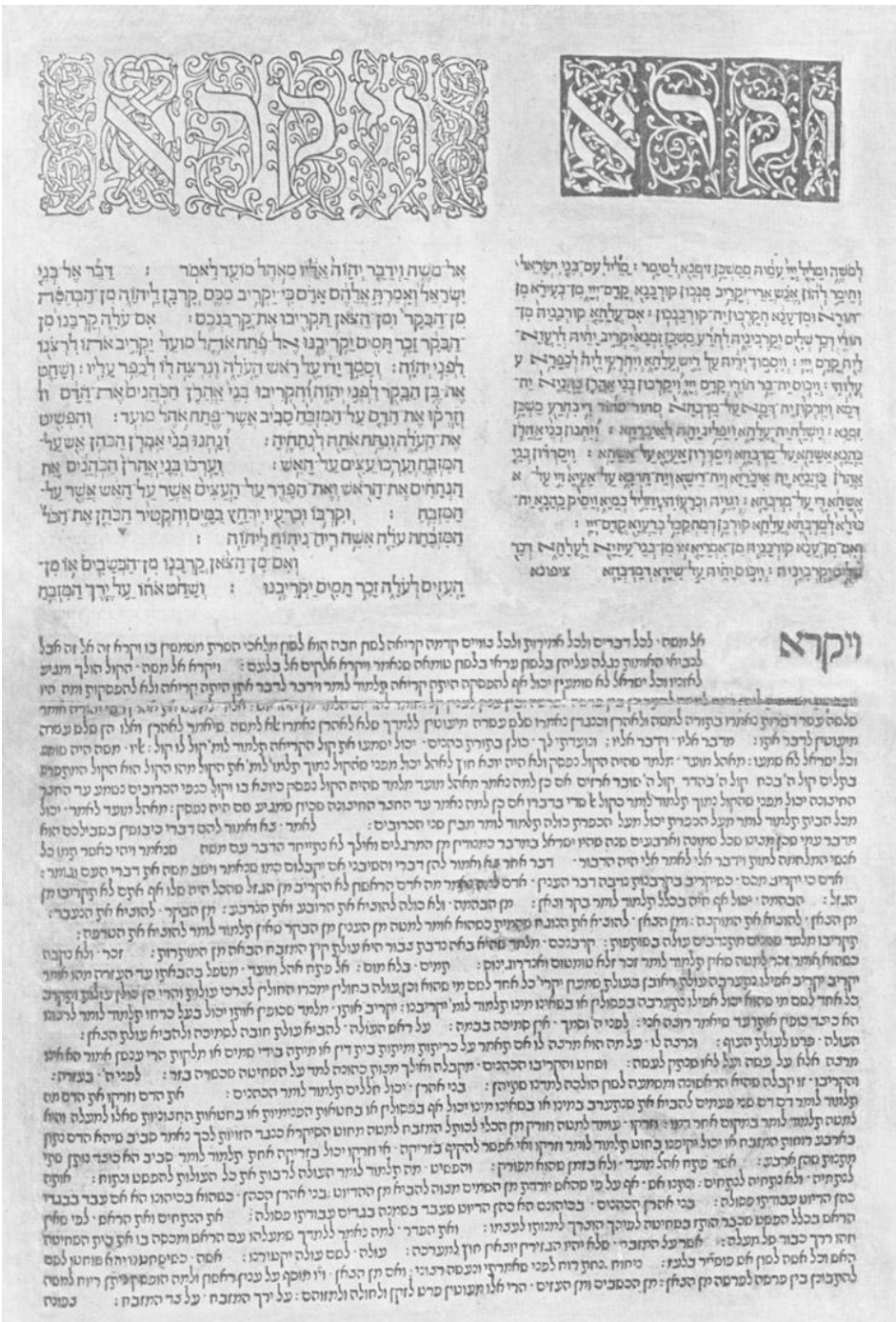
What could be a more Jewish textual space than the *Mikraot Gedolot*, the Rabbinic Bible which includes the biblical text, the *masorah*, Targum Yonatan and Targum Onqelos, the commentaries of Rashi, David Kimhi, Ibn Ezra and Gersonides? The 1526 edition, known as the Second Rabbinic Bible

and printed by Daniel Bomberg in Venice, serves as the basis for all Mikraot Gedolot today and is one of the most iconic Hebrew books printed in the 16th century. However, a closer analysis reveals several factors which complicate the nature of its Jewishness and are indicative of the way that printing and Christian

Hebraist interest in Jewish texts led to fundamental changes in the typographical design, content and paratextual features of the printed Hebrew Bible and Talmud which are taken for granted by most contemporary Jews.¹

An examination of aspects of the print history of Bomberg's Rabbinic Bible and Talmud as well as an awareness of the complex history of the ownership and readership of Hebrew books complicates the popular assumption that Hebrew books were printed for Jews alone and were only studied in exclusively Jewish spaces. It must also be noted that much of the literature concerning the subject of Jewish space has thus far focused on either physical spaces or conceptual understandings of Jewish space, while the book as space has received little attention. In discussing the Hebrew book as Jewish space, I am viewing it as a textually Jewish space created by Jews (be they scribes or printers) for Jewish readers. Additionally, with some limited exceptions like controversies over anti-Christian content in Jewish books, prior to the late 15th century few Christians had much interest in the contents of Hebrew books and even less had the knowledge of Hebrew required to study them in their original language. Properly understood in historical context and informed by recent work in book history and interdisciplinary intellectual history, the Jewish book emerges as a crossroads of diverse audiences which forces us to drastically reevaluate the extent to which the Hebrew book is an exclusively Jewish space.²

When considering the Hebrew book as a Jewish space, meaning a textual space created by Jews (be they scribes or printers) for Jews, the way printing affected the "Jewishness" of the Hebrew book cannot be



A page from the first Bomberg Rabbinic Bible JEWISHENCYCLOPEDIA.COM

understated. As David Stern notes in his discussion of the context of Bomberg's Rabbinic Bible, "before the 16th century – whether in the age of manuscripts or in the fifty-year incunabular period of early Jewish printing – the Jewish book was essentially a text by a Jewish author written in Hebrew script (whether the language was Hebrew or one of the Jewish languages like Judeo-Arabic or Yiddish) and produced by a Jewish scribe or printer for a Jewish reader."³ However, with the rise of Hebrew printing in Italy, none of these assumptions could be taken for granted: Many printers of Hebrew books, most famously Daniel Bomberg, were Christians, and the rise of Christian Hebraism created a strong non-Jewish market for Hebrew texts. Prominent Hebraists such as Johannes Reuchlin wrote learned works which incorporated substantial citations of Jewish texts in their original language, with some Christian Hebraists even composing letters and entire works in Hebrew.⁴ Moreover, there is ample evidence both from 16th century correspondence and current provenance research that Bomberg's Hebrew Bibles were highly desired by Christian Hebraists.⁵ Bomberg's Rabbinic Bible was also highly desired by Jews as it combined the features of the Masoretic Bible, liturgical bible (*humash*), and the study bible which, prior to Bomberg, had been distinct works both in print and manuscript.⁶ Finally, the rise of Christian Hebraism and concomitant increase in Christian Hebrew literacy meant that the Rabbinic Bible had two markets; Christian Hebraists and Jews. These factors meant that the clear-cut distinction between Christian and Jewish books had become blurred.

Daniel Bomberg and the Complex Jewishness of the Hebrew Book

The rise of Christian Hebraism and subsequent Christian

interest in newly printed editions of the Bible and Talmud complicates the Jewishness of these ostensibly 'Hebrew' books. In addition to the influence of Christian Hebraism, which created two markets for Hebrew books, it must be stressed that Bomberg was a Christian Hebraist and had both economic and

What does it mean for the Jewishness of the Hebrew book that one can find translations of the Babylonian Talmud and many other rabbinic texts which do not include the Hebrew and Aramaic original and are thus both inaccessible and useless to the classically educated yeshiva student?

theological motivations for printing Hebrew books.⁷ Additionally, the editor of the first edition (1517) of the Rabbinic Bible, Felix Pratensis, was a Jewish apostate who became an Augustinian monk, and many of the individuals employed by Bomberg later converted to Christianity. Finally, it is noteworthy that the 1517 edition was published in two separate editions: one intended for Christian markets contained a Latin dedication to Pope Leo X, while the edition intended for Jewish markets omitted this dedication.

Up until now, we have discussed the print history and reception history of Bomberg's 1517 and 1525/6 Rabbinic Bibles as a means of understanding the complexity of their Jewishness. Owing to the multiplicity of readers and owners of the Rabbinic Bibles, and their desirability among Christian Hebraists, their status as a Jewish space is complex. Library catalogs, references in the writings of Christian Hebraists, and recent provenance research makes clear that

among Hebraists, the Rabbinic Bible was viewed as an especially valuable resource which could help Christians better understand the plain meaning of scripture. The Rabbinic Bible forces us to reassess the assumption that except for a few academic scholars in Bible, Ancient Judaism, and Talmud, Hebrew texts are strictly the domain of Jews. As Stephen G. Burnett and Bruce Nielsen have conclusively demonstrated, major Hebraists such as Johannes Reuchlin, Johannes Buxtorf, Edward Pockocke, and others made extensive use of the Rabbinic Bible well into the seventeenth century, with several guides to rabbinic abbreviations and student editions published by printers such as Paulus Fagius and Robert Estienne.

Bomberg introduced a number of features into his Rabbinic Bible and Talmud editions which made them much easier to use and had the incidental impact of making them more accessible to Christian readers. Two examples are the introduction of chapter and verse division corresponding to those of the Vulgate in the First Rabbinic Bible, and the division of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles into two books were introduced. These features quickly became standard in all later Jewish bibles.⁸ In printing the Talmud, Bomberg added foliation (*daf* and *amud* numbers, e.g. 2a, 2b) which made locating a citation much easier, as earlier printings only included chapter and tractate but not folio numbers. This also served to make the Talmudic text much more accessible, especially to Christians, as a passage could be cited by giving the tractate, folio and opening words of the passage. With the publication of translations of the Talmud, first into Latin for Hebraists, later into German, and more recently into English translations, the Talmud has become far more accessible to both Jews without the ability to parse the dense Aramaic text and, secondarily,

to academic scholars.⁹

As I have demonstrated, the convergence of printing and Christian Hebraism led to major changes in the very nature of the Hebrew book, especially the Rabbinic Bible, yet the passage of centuries has obscured the radical nature of these changes and the factors that precipitated them. While Bomberg's innovations in his two editions of the Rabbinic Bible are well known to scholars of Hebrew bibliography, they are taken for granted by most textually literate members of the Jewish community. The effect of Christian Hebraism and printing in complicating the Jewishness of the Hebrew book in the 16th and 17th centuries is today occurring due to the internet as a vehicle of textual democratization, vernacular translations of rabbinic texts, and the fruits of academic study of Jewish texts. What does it mean for the Jewishness of the Hebrew book that one can find translations of the Babylonian Talmud and many other rabbinic texts which do not include the Hebrew and Aramaic original and are thus both inaccessible and useless to the classically educated yeshiva student? Is this situation any different from the existence of editions of Maimonides' Judeo-Arabic works with a Latin translation aimed at Christian Hebraists which would be impenetrable to most Jews? How do academic Jewish studies and the historical legacy of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement complicate the nature of Jewish texts, both biblical and rabbinic as exclusively Jewish space? Is the Hebrew book today a shared space or - except for a small number of academic scholars - functionally an exclusively Jewish space? If the Hebrew book, especially the bible, is a shared space, what then is a Jewish space? My purpose in this article has been to use the print history of the Bomberg Rabbinic Bible and the Bomberg Talmud printing to provide a historical contextualization

to these questions which have at present not been extensively addressed by scholars of the Hebrew book and its history. In view of the changing nature of modern Judaism, the internet as a force of textual democratization and the increased interplay between academic Jewish studies and the traditional Jewish community, the Jewishness of the Hebrew book and Jewish texts is once again undergoing a radical transformation which deserves a fuller scholarly treatment.

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Notes

1 See David Stern, "The Rabbinic Bible in its Sixteenth-Century Context" in *The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy*, eds. Joseph Hacker and Adam Shear, especially pp. 94-100. See also Bruce Nielsen, "Daniel van Bombergen: A Bookman of Two worlds" in Shear and Hacker, *The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy*, 66-75. For an overview of Christian Hebraism, see Theodor Dunkelgrun, "The Christian Study of Judaism In Early Modern Europe" in *The Cambridge History of Judaism Volume VII*, pp. 316-348.

2 See for example, *Jewish Books and their Readers: Aspects of the Intellectual Life of Christians and Jews in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Scott Mandelbrote, Joanna Weinberg.

3 Stern, "Rabbinic bible", 77.

4 Ibid. Regarding Christian use of the Rabbinic Bible, see Burnett, Stephen G., "The Strange Career of the Biblia Rabbinica among Christian Hebraists, 1517-1620." In *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation; Books, Scholars, and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, (2012) 63-84. Eds. Bruce Gordon, Matthew McLean.

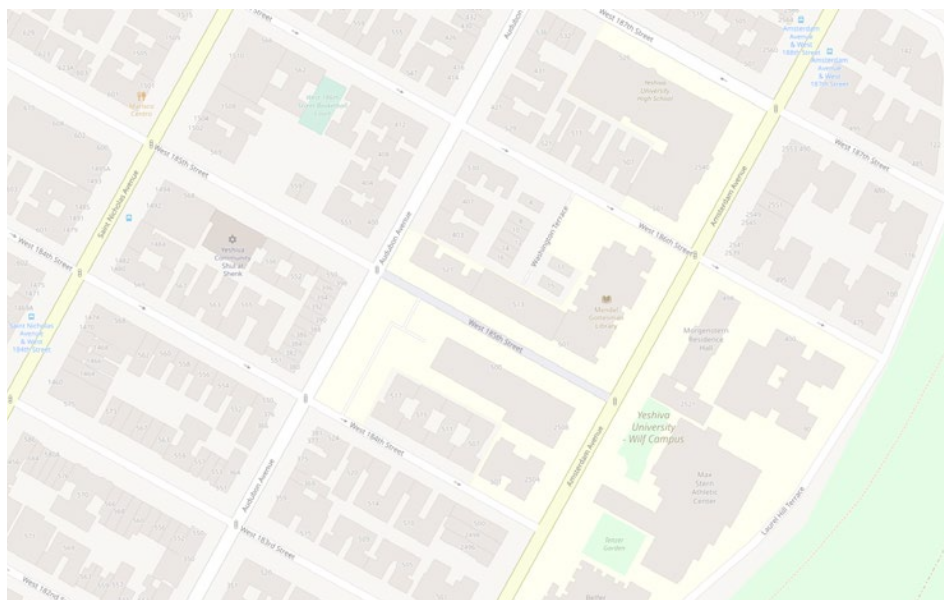
5 See for example Burnett, Stephen G., "The Strange Career of the Biblia Rabbinica among Christian Hebraists, 1517-1620". See also the statements by Hebraists cited by Nielsen in "Daniel Van Bombergen". The Footprints project's provenance data reveals numerous cases of Christian ownership of Bomberg's Rabbinic Bibles and Biblia Hebraica. See for example <https://footprints.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/footprint/2764/>

6 See Stern, *The Jewish Bible: A Material History*, pp.88-90.

7 See Bruce Nielsen, "Daniel van Bombergen, a Bookman of Two Worlds" in *The Hebrew Book in Early Modern Italy*, eds. Adam Shear and Joseph Hacker.

8 See Stern, *The Jewish Bible*, citing Penkower, 145.

9 Regarding Jewish Talmud translations, see Adam Mintz's essay "The Talmud in translation" in *Printing the Talmud from Bomberg to Schottenstein*, pp. 211-141. See catalog numbers 68-76, pp. 302-316 for examples of Talmud translations and brief discussions of some editions.



OpenStreetMap Contributors

Is Tzfat Part of Our Mesorah? An Analysis of One of the Most Popular Cities in Israel

BY: SARA SCHATZ

Introduction: What Makes Tzfat So Different?

Since our nation's inception, we've maintained a long and enduring connection to our homeland, Israel. In modern-day Israel, it's still rather confusing how certain cities have become a haven for some Jews, despite their vague descriptions in the Torah. This is particularly the case in one of the most mysterious cities in Israel: Tzfat. There are few mentions of specific Israeli cities in the *Humash*, Hevron aside. Of course, once the Jews arrive in and settle Israel, city names abound. Some no longer exist, but some have become touchstones and symbols of Jewish life and Torah. But the word "Tzfat" (or "Tzfata") is only mentioned twice in the Tanakh¹ as a city within Naftali's colony. Since then, it has been proven that the Tzfat we know today is not the same as the one mentioned in Tanakh.² In the *Torah she-be'al peh*, the only time Tzfat is mentioned is in the Talmud Yerushalmi³ with reference to the hilltops where the *hakhamim* lit fires to signify Rosh Hodesh. How has Tzfat gained such an outsized reputation of holiness despite having

minimal mentions in the Tanach and Talmud?

Other than that, there are a few mentions of Tzfat here and there from Rabbi Elazar ha-Kalir, in two of his Tish'ah be-Av *kinot*⁴, which hints to some resettlement of the Levi'im who lived there following the destruction of the first *beit ha-mikdash*, as well as some recordings from the famed non-religious Jewish historian, Josephus.⁵

Tzfat became populated with figures who endowed it with mysticism around the time of the Crusades. *Mekubalim* (kabbalists) moved there due to its adjacency to Har Meron, home of the gravesite of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, author of the Zohar, the key kabbalistic text. Though we know of Tzfat as one of the "Four Holy Cities", this is a relatively recent application, only coined in 1640 as part of a *tzedaka* movement.⁶

Despite plague, earthquakes⁷, and frightening battles with their British and Arab enemies during the War of Independence⁸, the Tzfat population has remained steadfast in their unwavering faith towards their city. Since its Golden Age in the Middle Ages, Tzfat has become

a leading municipality of tourism, artistry, and a plethora of mostly Hassidic Jews and Baalei Teshuva, all with dreams to ignite a renewed, raw link with God.⁹

Even atheists and people from other faiths trek far and wide to visit this obscure settlement. In 2015, journalist Eric Weiner was astonished to note in a BBC News article¹⁰ that "Tzfat is one of those places people visit for a few days, on a lark, and, next thing they know a lifetime has passed." And prominently, renowned American pop artist Madonna put Tzfat in the papers when she visited the city in 2009¹¹ to find oneness with God.

Why this city? Why is this mysterious apex in the middle of Northern Israel such an important landmark in our history; one that many treat at a holier level than Jerusalem, the place that held our former Temple? What is it about this mystical land that brings so many such revitalization?

A Substitute for Jerusalem

Northern Galilee, 1538: Rav Yaakov Beirav, already wise in both years and experience, steps down from his rabbinical position in Cairo in search for a community where he could feel belonging. Throughout his entire life, since being expelled from his home in Spain as a teenager, Rav Beirav had lived in constant flux. After stints in Fez, Damascus, and Jerusalem, he courageously left his comfort zone and made *aliyah* to a small and underpopulated mountaintop known as Tzfat. It was there where he made his mark in history; soon after his arrival, he reestablished the concept of *semikhah* in the Land of Israel.

Rav Beirav jump-started an era in Tzfat known as the "Golden Age". His disciple, Rav Yosef Karo, gained inspiration to compose his



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famed Shulchan Aruch in Tzfat. Around that time, a man known by Rav Isaac Luria (also known as the Arizal) arrived to join the school of Rav Moshe Cordevero, popularizing the Zohar and replacing previous Maimonian rationalist ideals with a more mystical, kabbalistic approach in Judaism. These risky readjustments in both *halakhah* and *hashkafah* marked intense transformations in the Jewish tradition.¹²

For a generation that had very recently suffered the Spanish Expulsion, most of the Jewish community wanted a blissful life. Though Jerusalem was the go-to

Its old city abounds with Breslov hassidim dancing to the tune of "Rabi Nahman me-Uman," while local citizens from vast ends of the earth are found a block away selling their expressions of Judaism through art and other commodities, both with the common goal to connect to their creator.

destination theologically, it faced difficult measures during this time; Jews there lived quite impoverished lifestyles in addition to persecution from their Muslim neighbors. Though Tzfat wasn't much better economically, the religious zealotry and strength was a strong appeal to numerous Jews.¹³

Since the days of the Sephardim in 1492, Ashkenazic Hassidim set up camp to flee persecution from their Eastern European host countries beginning with the voyage of early *hassidic* leaders, Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk and Avraham of Kalisk, and their three-hundred followers, in 1777. They too entered this land with similar hopes and aspirations.¹⁴

But Is Tzfat Holy?

As stated in this introduction, Tzfat doesn't have the most religious

significance masoretically. However, people still often treat it on par with Jerusalem, which has been traditionally the holiest place in Israel.

Oftentimes, the people of Tzfat's hippie-esque and out-of-the-box ways of connecting to God may often cause many sects of Judaism to feel uncomfortable. But there is something universal to say about the citizens of Tzfat that most can't say about a community of Jews.

Tzfat's history is uniquely amassed with legends that bring them pride and joy.¹⁵ Its old city abounds with Breslov *hassidim* dancing to the tune of "Rabi Nahman me-Uman," while local citizens from vast ends of the earth are found a block away selling their expressions of Judaism through art and other commodities, both with the common goal to connect to their Creator.¹⁶ Tzfat's current mayor, Ilan Shohat, refuses to accept a political position elsewhere, describing Tzfat as "a very special city in Israel, where everyone gets along and respects each other."¹⁷ As any city, it has its flaws; yet the rich passion and dedication embedded within it is something incomparable.

And in that sense, Tzfat *is* in fact one of the holiest places in Israel. Though conventionally the *shekhinah* might not have been dwelling on it from the times of our forefathers, it doesn't matter. God created a home for *us* to sanctify; and it seems that specifically in Tzfat, they observe this to a tee. One can only imagine how much easier it is to have *kavanah* in *tefillah* and keep daily *halakhah* in sheer joy when there are others surrounding you doing the same thing.

19th-century German writer Johann Wolfgang Goethe was attributed¹⁸ to saying, "Energy is the basis of everything. Every Jew, no matter how insignificant, is engaged

in some decisive and immediate pursuit of a goal... It is the most perpetual people of the earth..." Let us utilize the lesson of Tzfat to bring those passionate energies to our own communities. As we've seen from some tragic times in our history, it's the refuge that truly seems to renew our nation's continuity to (both physical and spiritual) greater heights.

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Notes

1 Shoftim 1:17 and Divrei HaYamim II 14:9
2 *Early Safed History*. (Zissil: Encyclopedia of Tzfat: 2015)

3 Rosh ha-Shanah 11a

4 "Eikkah Yashevah" and "Zekhor Eikkah"
5 Wars, 2:573

6 Only Jerusalem is mentioned in Tanakh as "holy". Tiberias didn't join the group as the fourth city until 100 years later.

7 Tzfat is one of the highest ancient cities in the world, which, according to the Geological Survey of Israel (GSI), is subject to numerous earthquakes. This has been a particular threat to Tzfat for years, specifically in 1769 when an earthquake and plague (which unfortunately was also a frequent occurrence) left only seven surviving families, and in 1837, when 4,000 people were brutally destroyed.

8 Tzfat is famed for being the site where Jewish soldiers used an ineffective artillery piece known as the *Davidka*, whose unique and booming noise scared away Arab civilians. For more information on Tzfat's rich and miraculous history, visit safed.co.il.
9 *Safed*. (Safed.co.il: 2018)

10 Weiner, "A City That Will Teach You to Be At Peace" (BBC: October 2015)

11 Ashkenazi, "Mystical Madonna Visits Safed Tomb of Kabbalistic Great" (Haaretz: September 2009)

12 Mindel, Nissan. *Rabbi Jacob Berab*. (chabad.org: 2018)

13 *Rabbi Beirav and His Legacy*. (Safed.co.il: 2018)

14 *Ottoman Rule of Safed: 1760-1918*. (Zissil: Encyclopedia of Tzfat: 2015)

15 *Legends of Tzfat*. (Safed.co.il: 2018)

16 *Hassidic Messianic Beliefs*. (Safed.co.il: 2018)

17 *Ilan Shohat: The Mayor*. (Safed.co.il: 2018)

18 Though he is credited for saying this, it is unclear whether he actually stated it or not. However, we do know from his numerous poems and plays involving Israel that he was a major fan of Jewish culture.

The Architecture of Yeshiva University's Wilf Campus

BY: DR. JESS OLSON



THE COMMENTATOR



From top to bottom, Zysman Hall, Furst Hall, and the Glueck Center

Every day that I am at YU's Wilf Campus in Washington Heights, I follow the same ritual. For the eleven years, when the time comes for me to go and teach, I walk from my office to wait for the elevator on the 15th floor of Belfer Hall, and gaze out the floor-to-ceiling window facing north. While I always begin scanning the horizon to pick out the distant Westchester high-rises of New Rochelle and my hometown of White Plains, my gaze inevitably settles much nearer, on the jewel of our own neighborhood, Zysman Hall. I walk across Amsterdam on my way to teach, and usually stop off in the lobby of the Glueck Center (well, technically the library, but it seems like a shared space) to buy a cup of coffee at Nagel's. Then I cross the 185th street plaza to Furst Hall, coffee in hand, and walk up the stairs to my classroom on the third floor. For over a decade I have followed a nearly identical path with only tiny variations – primarily that before Glueck was completed and Nagel's existed, I had to make my own coffee.¹

I have come to realize that over my years at Yeshiva these structures have become my home. These are the places where my work life takes place, where I encounter and share ideas with students and colleagues, where I think, where I plan, where I write. While I am certain that our other campuses downtown and spread over the five boroughs have their own architectural gems, I have taught entirely at the Wilf campus and know these buildings best. As my students know, I am an avid amateur architecture enthusiast. As a professional historian I am engaged with the buildings as living artifacts of a history very close and important to me and all of us at YU;

as a clinical psychotherapist I am fascinated by the idea of these spaces and how they affect our moods and social interactions. But what I am most interested in is the intersection, unique to buildings, perhaps unique to American buildings – perhaps unique to American *Jewish* buildings – of past and present, memory and representation, beauty and function. In our buildings on the Wilf campus, I don't see piles of brick and mortar arbitrarily arranged (a tempting interpretation, given our campus' eclecticism), but rather an idea of a place, evolving over time, telling us both who we are, where we have come from, and where we wish to go. These three buildings – Zysman, Furst and Glueck – are more than the setting of my routine to me, rather they outline my understanding of this remarkable place. After innumerable iterations of the same short journey over the years, I have realized that these buildings represent an essential part of the *kedushah* of Yeshiva University, inscribed in its whole history as an institution: It is a place in the present that is rooted in the old, strives for the new, in both the mundane and the sublime – a place where ideas (and ideals) matter in a way I have experienced in no other university, even in the very bricks, mortar, steel and glass of these structures themselves.

Zysman, the oldest of the three, the landmark structure of our university for almost a century, is the most recognizable symbol of our institution. It is an exquisite late example of a long-passed epochal fascination prominent in Jewish buildings, historicism, in which modern buildings are constructed imitating historical styles to evoke specific sentiments or ideas in the present. Although historicism

was the dominant mode of 19th century monumental architecture in Europe and America generally, Jews developed their own, unique take that evolved from the 1840s into a characteristic style, most often called “neo-Moorish” for its fanciful evocation of the architectural designs and ornaments of Islamic Spain. From the earliest experiment in this style, first imagined by legendary German architect Gottfried Semper, the style was embraced by Jewish communities and institutions and culminated in monumental buildings that dominated urban blocks throughout Central Europe and North America.² It lasted until the collapse of the world economic system in 1929 made such projects financial unfeasible and the triumph of modernism made them decidedly unfashionable. Though all of these buildings were remarkable in their own way, Zysman Hall is singular in its purpose and execution. Like its sister structures in Europe, Charles Meyers’ building is a continuation of an old world architectural homage to a millennia of Jewish life in Europe, transplanted to the new world.³ It displays an imagined past of Jewish nobility and grandeur. Its minarets and horseshoe arches are an homage to an idea of Jewish sophistication and culture associated with medieval Spain, while its historicism connects it with its siblings in nearly every town and city with a sizable Jewish population in Central Europe. But in a unique Yeshiva University fashion, Zysman goes further. Erected in 1928 at a time of great optimism for the future of the Jewish people in a new home – the United States – the building echoes the can-do grandeur of other Jewish structures of its period, such as the magnificent Emanu-El synagogue on Fifth Avenue. Simultaneously, it evokes a new idea of possibility in a different “old-new land.” Unlike other

buildings of its type, Zysman not does not simply refer to a historical past in the Diaspora, it aesthetically unifies the Diaspora experience with an even older past and a tangible, hoped-for future of the Jewish people in its homeland in Eretz Yisrael. In addition to typical “Moorish” details once found in nineteenth-century synagogues across Europe and North America, Zysman has its own, unique additions which were a deliberate reference to the New Yishuv. Like other designs, such as the voluminous production of artistic

As I reiterate to my students each semester as we sit in our Furst classroom and contemplate the vicissitudes of Jewish modernity, it is, in its own unassuming way, another jewel of our campus.

Judaica from the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem which were then becoming popular adornments to china cabinets and Shabbat tables in Jewish homes in Europe and America, Zysman adds to its design specific images that reference the past and present of the nascent Jewish state. Accenting its more common historicist towers, arches and other details are unique ornaments such as art deco Assyrian-inspired friezes, stylized six and seven-pointed stars and, most delightfully, a zodiac, a reference to the then-recently-uncovered floor of the Beit Alfa synagogue near Tiberias, greeting every visitor in the foyer. Like this archeological discovery, they were designed to represent an amalgam of the Jewish past and future as imagined in the interwar period.

Furst Hall, around the corner

and across 185th street, would seem to be a stark contrast; the differences in design of the two buildings could not be more obvious.⁴ But together they form a harmony of continuity of the Jewish experience on three continents across the most wrenching and simultaneously redemptive events of modern Jewish history. As I reiterate to my students each semester as we sit in our Furst classroom and contemplate the vicissitudes of Jewish modernity, it is, in its own unassuming way, another jewel of our campus. Designed by New York architect H. I. Feldman and opened in time for the fall semester of 1962, it is a near-pure example of high modernism: It is functional; its sturdy austerity, obsessional simplicity and angularity carry with them the lightness and weight of a modernist ethos of truth and honesty in simple, unornamented design. Primarily a designer of apartment complexes in Manhattan and the outer boroughs, Feldman tended in other buildings towards a staid, postwar New York brick apartment building style – heavy on the bricks, light on the windows – with two notable exceptions: a signature International Style building at 1025 Fifth Avenue, replete with a grand cantilevered slab awning (now obscured by a glass addition) and our Furst Hall. Furst is a reference to the bold architects and designers who first pioneered the style of cool, constrained simplicity – in particular the Bauhaus style of Walter Gropius, immortalized in the Weimar-era institute’s home in Dessau. Emerging out of the destruction of World War I, centers of modernism like the Bauhaus represented a revolution in architecture and design, emphasizing simplicity, functionality, and a near-moral commitment to minimal ornamentation – a stark contrast to the historicism that it overtook. Like the modern style itself, Feldman was a Central European who was

transplanted to the fertile new soil of the United States, a Galicianer, child of immigrants who completed his training as an architect at Yale University. Like Furst Hall, Feldman's aesthetic sense was forged in a Central European cultural context that flowered in the new world. Yet whether or not he was conscious of it, I would suggest that Feldman's building makes another connection that is part of Yeshiva's DNA: the explosion of modernist architecture in the then-still-new State of Israel. Evidenced in the magnificent Bauhaus structures from Tel Aviv's Rehov Rothschild to the Jerusalem neighborhood of Katamon, its white stoned cantilevered balconies and clear brick inlays made Central European modernism a statement of ownership and rescue of the best of a culture that had so viciously turned upon the Jewish people. In the context of our own little campus, modernism becomes more than a straightforward way to build a functional structure. It becomes a statement of hope and faith that elements of that very material culture could be at the same time tools of construction and redemption – no less than a reclamation of hope in human progress, this time as a continuity of the ancient story of the Jewish people in its own land.

Which brings me to Glueck, the newest addition to our little uptown campus.⁵ This showpiece building, completed and opened in 2009, Glueck continues once more the dynamic sweep of its sister structures. In the description provided by the architectural firm, HOK New York's Kenneth Drucker, the building was consciously designed as a "contemporary yet contextual design" that "used channel glass, recessed sidelights and Vetter Stone (very similar to Jerusalem stone) in the composition of the façade while simultaneously blending a very efficient building into the fabric of

the campus." My interpretation of this, and of my experience in Glueck, is that the designers had in mind the same goal of capturing and entering the temporal dynamic of a Jewish past, present and future as imagined at Yeshiva University. Glueck is the home of our central *beit midrash*, a magnificent room whose lightness of space and visual light and its state-of-the-art electronic (if invisible) infrastructure are grounded in the hoary brown and gold covers of sacred *sefarim* that are the basic tools of our *limud ha-Torah*. It is at once uncompromising in its commitment to the foundation of our Jewish tradition and joyfully contemporary in its use of angles, shapes and, especially, light and glass. While it might seem counterintuitive given the postmodern aesthetic that is the building's inspiration, in its way Glueck is the perfect counterpart to Zysman, its sister around the corner. More specifically, its design is an inversion of Zysman's past-present-future historical dynamic that tells the same story in a way relevant to the 21st century. Rather than place its homage to our history demonstrably on the exterior as historicist ornament, Glueck locates it in its heart in the form of its *beit midrash*; rather than encase its treasure in brick and stone, it displays it in glass and light – but the essential meaning is preserved: Here we take our history seriously, we embody a present that seeks to construct our best selves for a better world, and look forward to our future of possibilities both in the United States and in the State of Israel.

Daniel Liebeskind, designer of the monumental Jewish Museum in Berlin, observed that "to provide meaningful architecture is not to parody history, but to articulate it." Applying this standard, there is no doubt that our campus is a site of meaningful architecture. Yet I would suggest that the shortcoming

of Liebeskind's observation is highlighted by our campus as well. Not only does it articulate history, our history, an important part of the history of American Jews, but it, like truly meaningful history, also tells us the story of who we are, and who we wish to become.

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Notes

1 I am grateful to Shulamith Berger, Paul Glassman and Deena Schwimmer for their generous assistance in helping me assembling the historical details contained in this piece.

2 For a detailed discussion of historicism in Jewish architecture, see Jess Olson, "Emancipating Jewish Sacred Architecture: Reimagining the Synagogue in the 19th and 20th centuries," unpublished, forthcoming in *History of Jewish Architecture*, Brill Academic Press.

3 The details regarding Zysman Hall in this section are drawn from the essay by Eitan Kastner, "Yeshiva College and the Pursuit of Jewish Architecture," *American Jewish History*, 96, 1 (June 2010), 141-161.

4 Details on Furst Hall are drawn from Kastner, "Yeshiva College and the Search for Jewish Architecture," an unattributed pamphlet, "Blueprint for the Sixties," and finally an article, "Yeshiva Marks 75 Years," *New York Mirror* (9/24/1961). The latter were provided by Shuli Berger and Deena Schwimmer of the YU archives.

5 Details about Glueck Hall are from Adrian Welch, (2016, December 14), Glueck Center for Jewish Study New York: Wilf Campus, retrieved from: <https://www.e-architect.co.uk/new-york/glueck-center-jewish-study>

Walking the Lost Jewish Streets of Alfred Kazin's Brownsville

BY: REUVEN HERZOG

Reviewed Book: Alfred Kazin, *A Walker in the City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951)

More than the urban jungle it is often labeled, New York City is an urban tapestry. Its distinct neighborhoods have unique colors, histories, internal mazes and designs, and boundaries that often starkly contrast with their neighbors. Each neighborhood of the city has a story to tell; in *A Walker in the City* Alfred Kazin tells Brownsville's. The Jewish enclave at the end of the IRT's New Lots Line on the border of Brooklyn and Queens, Brownsville was the first of the second-generation Jewish neighborhoods and the bridge for many between the Lower East Side and the rest of America. Kazin's memoir brings the author back to this neighborhood of his youth in the 1920s and '30s, as he roams the streets of his neighborhood and his memories.

Kazin emphasizes how one of the most defining elements of a New York City story is its geography. The first chapter of his book structures his memories around the trip from Manhattan to his old home on Chester Street. It begins with the long subway ride that makes the Jewish world of *Brunsvil* seem so far away from the true 'New York.' "The end of the world," Kazin thought of his home, well beyond "the many stations of Gentiles," and the *alrightniks* on Franklin Avenue. Kazin identifies every stop along the subway ride by name and by identity before getting to Brownsville. He needs to define his own area by everything that comes before it: it is not "the city," it is not the middle-class lands, it is not

gentile – it is Jewish, poor, ethnic, run-down, sad, and home (Kazin 8-10).

Throughout the chapters Kazin creates this motif of contrast between his neighborhood and the rest of the world. He describes a wanderlust that I myself very much relate to – feeling constricted by his surroundings, he loves to leave and explore. One of my favorite passages in the book is from the aptly titled *The Block and Beyond* and concerns Kazin's formative journey across the Brooklyn Bridge returning from a



ALAN FISHER

The Belmont Avenue pushcart market, in 1939.

class trip to City Hall. His description of the experience takes on religious and almost transcendental symbolism – he absorbs himself entirely in his surroundings, "lost and happy" in the vividness that lay beyond the brick walls of Brownsville (105-107). "Beyond! Beyond!" Kazin cries in a yearning that I have always experienced, trying to escape the mundane existence to the colors that lie out there. (It's funny, then, that my own wanderlust ultimately carried me to Brownsville.)

It's interesting that Kazin viewed Brownsville as the contrast between his home and "the beyond." He always saw everything outside

Brownsville as the "real America" – full of Italians, blacks, *alrightniks*, Polish, rich, and everyone else. In the development of Jewish life in New York City, though, Brownsville was already a step out. If the Lower East Side was the Gilgal of America, Brownsville was its Shiloh. It was settled as Jews began to trickle outside the false walls of the ghetto and move to new, better dwellings. Some moved up to brownstones on the broad, green streets of Harlem; some moved to brownstones on the streets of Crown Heights; some moved up to the Grand Concourse in the Bronx; hordes moved to the tenements out in Brownsville. It was far enough away that it was still being developed, and even in Kazin's time there was open space, but still within reach of the subway. It didn't have the prestigious convenience of Harlem, though; it's a 35-minute subway ride to Wall Street, and 55 minutes to Times Square. It was much more lower-class than the other escapes from the Lower East Side.

But still Brownsville was a step outside the ghetto. The story of Brownsville is the story of second-generation immigrants who are beyond Europe, becoming more American the longer they live in the country. The history of Jews in New York followed a general trend: as their time in the country extended, the Jews moved geographically away from the Lower East Side and religiously and culturally away from European Jewishness. This trend reached its apex in the 1950s flight to suburbia, when everyone on the block became friends with each other, and "American-ness" took precedence over any other ethnic identity. Kazin paints a different picture: in his eyes

he is still buried in the ethnic enclave. He weaves tension of wanting to get out, to explore, to be somewhere else and some time else, trying to connect with the mythological New York City of the aughts and the days of Teddy Roosevelt – but he also comes back to his people and his faith by choice, and he still calls Brownsville home.

Kazin feels pulled between “Americanization” and his tradition. It’s an experience similar to most other immigrant groups; as a Jew his carries with it a religious component as well. As a second-generation immigrant, his parents fresh off the boat, Kazin feels the tension more acutely than his more-established counterparts. He articulates the feeling:

It was not for myself alone that I was expected to shine, but for them – to redeem the constant anxiety of their existence. I was the first American child, their offering to the strange new God; I was to be the monument of their liberation from the shame of being – what they were (22).

At the same time that Kazin felt the pressure from his parents to Americanize, they gave off a strong sense of ethnic connection. In another passage he highlights his family’s – and his people’s – need for each other:

So it was: we had always to be together; believers and non-believers, we were a people; I was of that people. Unthinkable to one’s own way, to doubt or escape the fact that I was a Jew. I had heard of Jews who pretended they were not, but could not understand them. We had all of us lived together so long that we would not have known how to separate even if

we had wanted to (60).

Brownsville being a Jewish enclave but touching other communities played a part in Kazin’s childhood. He tells an almost comedic anecdote about a girl from the neighborhood with a “widowed mother...with a clubfoot” (80). The girl fell in love with an Italian boy from the next neighborhood over, and the mother would not hear of their engagement. In his desperation the boy offered to convert, but waited to circumcise until just before the wedding, and he collapsed walking to the *huppah*.

Kazin viewed Brownsville as the contrast between his home and “the beyond.” He always saw everything outside Brownsville as the “real America” – full of Italians, blacks, alrightniks, Polish, rich, and everyone else. In the development of Jewish life in New York City, though, Brownsville was already a step out. If the Lower East Side was the Gilgal of America, Brownsville was its Shiloh.

The “Jewish street” of lore was very much present in Brownsville. As the memoir reflects Kazin’s childhood, it’s natural that much of it takes place on the street – playing variations of handball, wandering by the storefronts, walking different places – and nearly all his interactions are with fellow Jews. The commercial district was on Belmont Avenue, full of merchants with their pushcarts and lots of women yelling – very reminiscent of the classic Lower East Side scene immortalized in photographs, though maybe scaled down a little bit. Jews fraternized almost exclusively with other Jews. Not all of them were religious, but Jews were whom they lived with, whom they worked with, whom they spoke and argued with. Among the organizations and movements was the Zionists, supporting their “brothers in Palestine.” Other organizations included the Socialists and Communists – they didn’t get

along with each other so well. They would meet on the street corner in front of the Municipal bank to yell at whomever would listen – supporters or detractors. Kazin was fond of the Socialists (his father was one), and, as was his wont, he read much of the literature. The role of radicalism isn’t played up in the memoir, however; it was merely there in the background, another brush stroke in Kazin’s memory.

In fact, much of the book doesn’t involve rich characters or plotlines. There are a plethora of people mentioned in the book, nearly all of them Jewish. But their stories are short, ranging from two paragraphs to (at longest) five pages. They are all background characters in Kazin’s memory, some a bit more colored. For some, their Jewishness

is important. For other stories, it’s irrelevant; they just happen to be Jewish. This, though, is what really defined the Jewish street of 1900s New York City: It was dense and vibrant, full of characters who all happened to be Jewish. The neighborhood was a diverse place, religious and secular and secularizing; socialists, communists, and people who could care less; shopkeepers and laborers; those who worship to the God of Israel and those who worship to the God of America. Real life rarely has a grand narrative, and the Jewish neighborhoods of New York are no different; the picture Kazin paints is closer to a Jackson Pollock than a Georges Seurat.

The journey from Europe to America often was accompanied by a religious journey. Many Jewish immigrants threw off their religious yokes on the boat ride to America; many came without any such burden to begin with. But America was

the “land of opportunity;” the place where people came to start a new life, to seek a safe and comfortable living. It was the new world, where religious expectations weren’t so heavy, where communal religious structures weren’t so strong. It was also the great melting pot, where the biggest pressure was to “Americanize.” This environment created a great religious diversity, where each person found his own place balancing between tradition and secularism.

The synagogue became as much a communal institution as a religious one; people would come to the shul to exchange greetings as much as prayers. The *lantsmanschaft* was a place where emigrants from villages would stay connected to each other; Kazin’s was for the Dugschitzers. He describes how the synagogue was not nearly as glamorous as the one down the block: it was small, dark, dank, and smelling like snuff. But, as he asserts, “the little wooden synagogue was ‘our’ place” (43). The synagogal community was homely and familiar: people would refer to each other by first names and distinguishing characteristics. Kazin continues for the next few paragraphs describing

his relationship with the synagogue: He felt “a loveless intimacy with the place” (44); he belonged to it because he was born that way. In that section Kazin vacillates between owning the synagogue and reluctant to accept his place in it.

The Americanizing pressure families proportionally to their length of stay in America: second- and third-generation immigrants were often significantly less traditional than their parents; they grew up not in the shtetl but on the streets of New York, where there was so much more to occupy their time with than tradition. Traditional religion is therefore often seen as in the domain of the older generation. Kazin felt somewhat alienated from religious practice. But God was in his life (whether he wanted it so or not). Kazin writes a particularly revealing and deep passage about his relationship with God: Growing up he thought of God as the invisible judge watching everything, concerned with everything Kazin would do. But he couldn’t share this; “He was my private burden, my peculiar misfortune” (47). But, Kazin continues:

I never really wanted to give him up. In some ways it would have been hopeless to justify to myself – I had feared Him so long – He fascinated me, He seemed to hold the solitary place I most often went back to. There was a particular sensation connected with this – not of peace, not of certainty, not of goodness – but of depth; as if it were there I felt right to myself at last (ibid.).

Religion finally comes alive to Kazin the summer of his Bar Mitzvah, when he reads the English of the siddur. Appreciating the rich meaning in the liturgy for the first time, Kazin feels connected to his tradition, his people and God with a sense of pride. It comes to life for him; the *viduy* on Yom Kippur the most intense moment of his spiritual life. But then he crashes down to Earth realizing his community has no members who share this vibrancy and embrace of God; it is all monotonous repetition; tradition only for tradition’s sake. He sees the same gloom and despair in his neighborhood’s practice of religion as in their practice of everything else, and wanders away, hoping to find the



Belmont Avenue, former site of the pushcart market, in 2017.

REUVEN HERZOG

joyful Chassid of his imagination (99-104). If only Kazin knew of the Hasidic communities burgeoning in Brooklyn today, with the passion they live their lives; if he could see the *simhat beit ha-sho'evah* or *tisch!*

Religious life in America was not simple, and it still isn't. The plague of "dead religion" besets even our communities today.

Kazin grew up in Brownsville in the 1920s and '30s, when the Jewish community was at its peak density. He returned to write his memoir in the late 1940s; the book was published in 1951. By this time the neighborhood was already changing. The neighborhood was never wealthy – its median income was around twice that of the Lower East Side, though less than in other neighborhoods¹ – but forces then conspired to move the Jews out. When Kazin was walking around, the neighborhood was still largely Jewish, but on the downswing. As he relates:

The old drugstore on our corner has been replaced by a second-hand furniture store; the old candy store has been replaced by a second-hand furniture store; the old bakery, the old hardware shop, the old "coffee pot" that was once reached over a dirt road.

What drove Jews to Brownsville – cheap land, cheap housing, getting away from the density on the Lower East Side – was eventually driving them away. Robert Moses, the legendary urban planner of New York City, began to build public housing projects in dilapidated areas of the neighborhood. The neighborhood turned even more poor and more African-American. As the African Americans moved in, the Jews, even if they couldn't move up, moved out. Some went to suburbia, others to other neighborhoods in the city. By 1960, nearly all the Jews of Brownsville were gone.

Kazin returned to Brownsville to walk the streets again and reclaim his memories. He went there to see what the neighborhood had become and to remember what it was. I followed in his footsteps for this project, to continue this process of active memory: I had read about what was; now I wanted to see what is.

I boarded the 1 train in dense, immigrant Washington Heights after leaving my apartment that, like Kazin's street, smells like something awful (though it's marijuana, not sewage). I switched at 96th street to the 3 train; I too rode past all the gentile stops in Manhattan (after the Jewish stops on the Upper West Side), through the long tunnel under the East River, past Borough Hall, Hoyt, and the Grand Army Plaza; no one did get on at Bergen Street. I rode the long way past the *Chabadniks* at Franklin Avenue, out of the tunnel at Sutter Avenue and disembarked at Rockaway.

The neighborhood is starkly different from what Kazin describes. The first thing I see when I get off the train is a massive public apartment complex, ten times the height of Kazin's tenement homes. Most of the neighborhood is public housing; many in smaller, low-rise buildings. There are some streets in the western part of the neighborhood with semi-detached homes, but still not the "private homes" Kazin mentions; these were clearly built later. I could tell it was the better part of town from the luxury cars in the driveways.

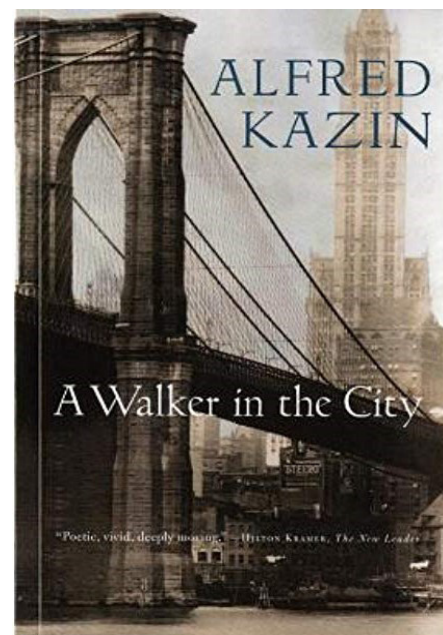
I walked up Rockaway Avenue to Belmont. Churches abound; presumably some of these used to be synagogues. I reached the commercial district a few blocks up, and then turned onto Belmont Avenue. The pushcart market of yore was not there, but you could tell from the street what used to be there. It's narrow; one way, and loaded with storefronts. Most of these, though, are hair salons or furniture stores; Kazin's streetscape in 1950 hasn't all

changed. Many of these storefronts were closed; at 4 pm on a Thursday, I imagine that means they are out of business.

I cycled back around onto Pitkin; it's still a commercial drag, but not the legendary street of Jewish yore. There are fast food places, salons, cheap clothing stores, tax and law offices – standard fare for a working-class city neighborhood. It's clearly a very ethnically African-American place. As much as one can imagine the Jewish street of Brownsville in the 1920s, that's what Brownsville is today. The people hang out on the streets; the stores, the religious institutions all reflect who is living in the area.

Not many hints of the old character of the neighborhood remain. I tried to find the Municipal Bank building where the socialists would stand on their soap box, but there was no marker. The block where Kazin grew up – Chester Street, between Sutter and Blake – is now a public school. It took me until the final block of my walk to find the tenement buildings with fire escapes that Kazin references so many times; most have been torn down and replaced with either public housing or row houses.

The neighborhood is so different from the one in my



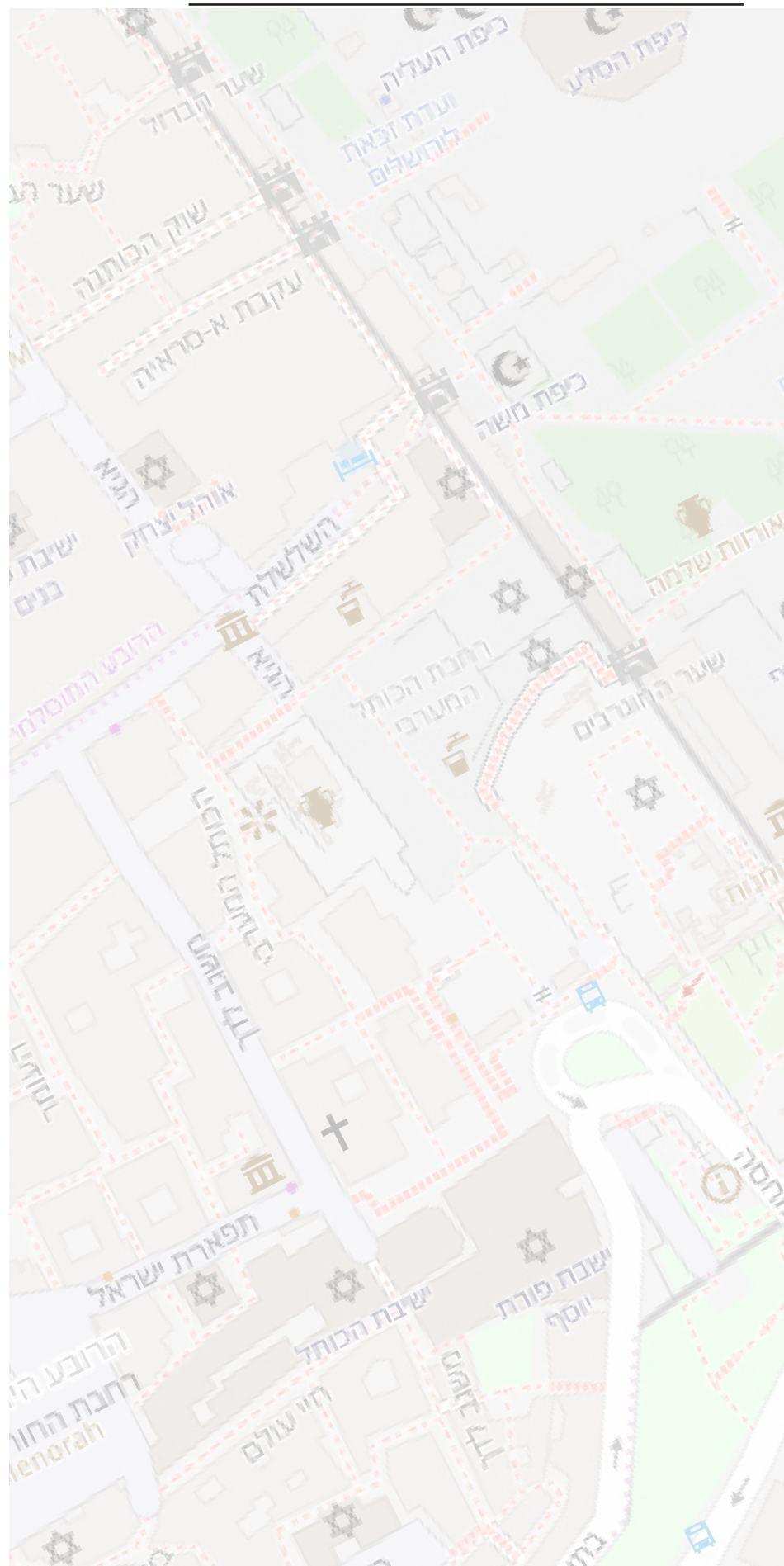
imagination, from my reading. But on my journey I found a fascinating link to the past: While walking down Belmont Avenue I spotted a man working on a storefront, wearing a white shirt, black pants, and tzitzit. He was also wearing a kippah, I spotted as I got closer. I approached him with a “*shalom aleichem*,” identifying myself as a fellow Jew. We began schmoozing, I revealed that I was a student at Yeshiva University working on this project, and he informed me he had owned that storefront since 1977. No Jews were living there even then, he said in his Israeli accent, but lots came back “for *bizniss*.” I then carried on a conversation with one of his workers, who himself moved to Brooklyn in the 1970s, but his father-in-law grew up in Brownsville. I feel embarrassed I already forgot these gentlemen’s names and I didn’t even take a picture of them; I think I found the last Jewish remnants of “Little Jerusalem.”

New York City is a tapestry of stories. Each neighborhood has a story, and the people living there do too. The little anecdotes reveal to us larger pictures, but sometimes just getting to know one person well is more than enough. Alfred Kazin’s memories are a vivid, messy, complicated mess of a tale, and so is Brownsville. I don’t dare to say I know all of its story from having read this one book. But I do feel like I know a part of it that I had never discovered before.

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Notes

1 Thomas, J.A.; Pritchett, Wendell E.; Moss, C.F.; Vater, M.. [Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto](#). Historical Studies of Urban America. University of Chicago Press, 2002.



OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS



"Ve-Asu Li Mikdash ve-Shakhanti be-Tocham" (Ex. 25:8)

BY: MICHAL YACKER