

KOL HAMEVASER



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THE "OTHER" IN JUDAISM

REMEMBERING RABBI OZER GLICKMAN Z"L
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BY AVRAHAM WEIN

Trust the Person, Doubt the Ideas

Rabbi Shalom Carmy, in a sermon I once heard from him on Parshat Korach, discussed how we read the Korach narrative through Moshe's eyes but not his mind. What this meant was, that we are not privy to know what Moshe is really thinking about Korach's actions and words, but rather, we are simply presented with the words and actions as they occurred. R. Carmy argued that a valuable message is found in this narrative detail; it is important to take people's actions and words at face value, and not assume there are conspiracy theories backing and motivating that person's thoughts. Assuming negative intentions from opponents is an inappropriate and dangerous methodology.¹

Later, I saw a striking quote by Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein, who also argued that we must not suspect others of acting with malevolent intentions. The context for this statement was a 1998 discussion of the Ne'eman Committee's proposals (regarding conversion), which R. Lichtenstein was accused of being in full support of. In a letter to *The Jewish Press* (3/27/1998), he wrote:

I deeply regret the substance and tone of much of the charged rhetoric being leveled at its members in some quarters — or, for that matter, some of the almost vitriolic condemnations of Conservative and Reform Jewry occasionally heard in the heat of controversy. Vehemently as I disagree with the positions of these movements, I prefer to attribute to error what some appear bent on ascribing to malevolence; and I fail to see what the Orthodox world has to gain by putting the worst possible face upon the motives and actions of our rivals. Such a course is both morally and Halakhically problematic and, from a pragmatic perspective, probably, ultimately, counterproductive.

Similar to R. Carmy, R. Lichtenstein's argument is that assuming others have insincere intentions is problematic morally, halakhically, and pragmatically.

This approach, of not casting aspersions on the motives of others, deeply resonated with me at the time, but even more so now, as I was unaware of how relevant this issue is to our community. Assigning ulterior motives to others is a dangerous methodology, and we are surely better suited by instead engaging in substantive debates about ideas and values.

In this vein, we chose the topic of "The Other in Judaism," with the hope of shedding light on how Jews engage with communities, individuals, and ideas that are different than their own. During our preparation for this issue, Yeshiva University suffered a major loss, namely Rabbi Ozer Glickman z"l. Along with being close with many current and former writers and editors of *Kol Hamevaser*, Rabbi Glickman was a major supporter of *Kol Hamevaser*, and very much believed in its importance. Therefore, we have dedicated a tribute section to R. Glickman in this issue, which includes touching and insightful eulogies from both his colleagues Rabbi Yosef Blau and Dr. Steven Fine, as well as his students Gabi Weinberg and Ari Friedman.

While this tribute section to R. Glickman in this issue was certainly unanticipated, R. Glickman's life actually beautifully dovetails with this issue's theme. As you will read in the various tributes, R. Glickman was a man that was very open-minded and remarkably respectful and open to the ideas and approaches of others. Indeed, R. Glickman's life is an inspiring model for how to engage with others, even those with whom he strongly disagreed, in a substantive and respectful manner. Although he is no longer physically with us, R. Glickman will have a lasting legacy as a role model for meaningful and thoughtful dialogue.

In addition to the tribute section, Daniel Gottesman and Isaac Bernstein wrote articles relating to this issue's theme, and touch upon important ideas regarding conversion and non-Jewish souls. In honor of Yom Yerushalayim, our symposium focuses on balancing responsibilities towards *Medinat Yisrael*. In the "Revisiting Classical Essays" section, I discuss the impact of Dr. Haym Soloveitchik's famed article "Rupture and Reconstruction." Finally, the issue closes with three book reviews by Matt Lubin, Tzvi Benoff, and David Selis. We thank the Center for Israel Studies for sponsoring this issue in memory of R. Ozer Glickman Z"L. We hope you enjoy reading this issue and look forward to hearing your feedback.

Avraham Wein is a senior at Yeshiva college and is majoring in Jewish Studies, Psychology, and Tractate Shevuot.

¹ I confirmed with Rabbi Carmy that my recollection of his sermon was indeed accurate. For a more extensive analysis of the korach narratives see Shalom Carmy, *The Sons of Korach Who Did Not Die*, Tradition 49:1 (2016), 1-7.

Rabbi Ozer Glickman Z"L: An Unusual and Remarkable Rosh Yeshiva

BY RABBI YOSEF BLAU

The untimely and sudden death of Rabbi Ozer Glickman shocked his family, friends, and admirers. A man of multiple interests and talents, his loss will be felt most acutely by his beloved family, but also by many others. While there is much to say about Rabbi Glickman being a true renaissance man in a world of specialization, I would like to focus on his role at Yeshiva, where he served as a Rosh Yeshiva and faculty member in IBC, Sy Syms, and Cardozo.

In many ways, Rabbi Glickman's background and life experiences were radically different from his fellow Roshei Yeshiva. He was not a product of the standard yeshiva system. His acquisition of Torah knowledge came from a range of sources rarely mentioned in the same context. He studied in Israel at Merkaz Ha-Rav and learned at the Philadelphia Yeshiva without formally being a student. He was a disciple of the most prominent proponents of academic Talmud study and learned with a major Hassidic scholar. During his highly successful career as an investment banker, Rabbi Glickman became enthralled with the Brisker Torah of the Rav. He, in his inimitable fashion, was able to integrate all these

strands into one cohesive approach to Torah. R. Glickman was never satisfied by his accomplishments: to his last day, he sought to grow in Torah knowledge.

The great challenge that faced Yeshiva during my days as a student was who would be able to replace the Roshei Yeshiva. They were giants of European Talmudical erudition who studied in the Torah centers of Eastern Europe which were destroyed in the Holocaust. Remarkably, Yeshiva has successfully produced two generations of its own Torah scholars and leaders. Like virtually all accomplishments however, there is a down side. With all of the rabbinic faculty having essentially the same background and life experiences, a substantial number of students were not able to find an appropriate mentor.

Rabbi Glickman was the exception. The combination of his broad and varied experiences with his human warmth made him a magnet for these students. He had an unofficial office at a table near Nagel Bagel where any student, enrolled in one of his classes or not, could come and discuss Talmud, Jewish philosophy, or life in general. Moreover, his vast erudition enabled him to be at home in a multiplicity of

disciplines. His course in business ethics was particularly unique because he embodied the very values that he taught.

Though not a product of Yeshiva, Rabbi Glickman was a fierce advocate for Yeshiva's values and defended other Roshei Yeshiva even when his views differed from theirs. By utilizing social media to express his approach to religious life, followers and admirers whom he had never met were able to benefit from his wisdom. He applied Torah U-Madda to the complexities of the modern world and was able to bring a mature commitment to sensitive issues after having been exposed to many approaches.

Rabbi Glickman made a positive impact on many lives, but was taken from us with great potential ahead of him. It is difficult to imagine even a partial replacement for his unique combination of erudition and humanity. Let his memory be a source of blessings.

Rabbi Yosef Blau serves as the Mashgiach Ruchani at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary.

Kad Demakh ha-Rav Ozer... Remembering my Friend, Rabbi Glickman

BY STEVEN FINE

For Rabbi Yohanan said:
No one is appointed to
the Sanhedrin who is not
of the masters of wisdom,
the masters of vision, the
masters of uprightness,
the masters of eldership,
the masters of magic,
and who doesn't know
seventy languages— so
that the Sanhedrin is not
be reliant upon a translator.

— Sanhedrin 17a,

Menahot 65a

So said, Rabbi Yohanan son of Napha, the greatest of all the Amoraim of *Erets Israel*, and the teacher of generations of students from his *beit midrash* in Tiberias. Looking back to the time when the Temple still stood, Rabbi Yohanan, who flourished during the first half of the 3rd century, projected his highest ideals onto the sages of the Sanhedrin. He demanded the highest standards of performance of himself, of his peers, and of the “students of

the sages”— the *talmedei hakhamim* who assembled in the great house of council (*beit ha-vaad*) in *Teveria*.

Few of us come close to the worldly piety, the sophisticated wisdom, the absolute uprightness, the lightly worn eldership, vision, or linguistic capacities of the man who insisted that I call him Tony, and sometimes Ozer, and never, ever “Rabbi Glickman.”

Writing, as I am, from *hutsot Yerushalayim*, from Jerusalem, I am

anguished by the loss of my friend and teacher Rabbi Ozer Glickman *zikhrono le-verakhah*. Our many hours discussing Hazal, philology, novels, writing, Hebrew literature, philosophy, and of course, the present and future of our beloved Yeshiva University are over. We spoke together in shorthand—referencing obscure and well-known texts, people, places, genre, books, and events—sometimes with a single word or phrase. I cherish the moments when the flames seemed to encircle as we danced the dance of Torah. I remember fondly the day my phone rang in the basement of the Strand Bookstore—Rabbi Glickman calling to discuss a student in trouble; or the day we accidentally found each other at Barnes and Nobles—separating more than an hour later, when we each realized that we had to “get back to work.” While no *ba'al kishuf*, “master of magic,” our time together was magical, and I know that Ozer thought so as well.

Rabbi Yohanan’s list of the attributes of a member of the Sanhedrin is not, I think, meant to be complete. The length of the list suggests that even Rabbi Yohanan had a hard time being concise in his job description for the ideal Sanhedrin member. Our talmudic tradition is a list of necessary public

skills. What about the private ones? First among these, I would suggest was the necessity to be a *ba'al anavah*, a “master of modesty.” Rabbi Glickman wore his rabbinic robe very lightly. He greeted each of his many students and friends—from the janitor to the guard to the business person, rabbi and professor, the *talmedei hakhamim* and the *talmedot hakhamim*—with a smile, with *sever panim yafot*. He was Tony with the baseball hat. His “rabbinic costume” was a polyester jacket—not intended to impress, but not frayed or dirty—which would not befit a *talmid hakhamim*. Ozer knew what he knew, and sought out experts to teach him what he did not. He was ready to “learn from every person” yet truly “never lost a drop.” He was a builder of communities, and a conscience of our own.

Even Rabbi Yohanan died, and so too our dear Rabbi Glickman. The Jerusalem Talmud, *Avodah Zarah* chapter 3, remembers that:

When Rabbi Yohanan died (*kad demakh*), the statues (in Tiberias) bowed low. They say that

when he would go up to carry out the intercalation of the months, the sea would split before him.

Tiberias is located on the shores of the Kinneret, deep within one of the most active earthquake zones in the world. This *agadata* reflects that reality—of massive stone statues bowed low, of a broad and beautiful sea splitting at Rabbi Yohanan’s feet, of time itself at his command. Ozer Glickman was one of Rabbi Yohanan’s most conscientious students. He was a “teacher in Israel,” but not a miracle worker—at least not in the traditional sense of the term. He was a lover of Torah, of *Erets Yisrael*, of our Yeshiva, of his *talmidim*, his friends, and most of all, his family. I heard of his death early on a Jerusalem morning. A comment from one of our many Facebook Messenger conversations overtook me: “come back soon, *haver*, we need you here.” To which I respond as he did each time we parted, *Shalom, haver*.

Dr. Steven Fine is the Dean Pinkhos Churgin Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University, and is the Director of the YU Center for Israel Studies.

Reflections from Members of the Chabura

BY GABI WEINBERG AND ARI FRIEDMAN

Gabi Weinberg and Ari Friedman were two talmidim in Rabbi Glickman’s Yoreh De’ah Chabura in 5775. Below they share their experience:

By Gabi Weinberg (RIETS ‘17, Revel ‘16, YC ‘14)

To me, Rabbi Ozer Glickman was a seeker and a connector. Being out of Yeshiva University for a bit now, my connection to Yeshiva was due to his digital presence. His interest in existential Jewish communal questions, to some might appear as *hock*, but were truly essential questions to him and they made me think and question my preconceived notions.

I remember when my Yoreh De’ah chavruta, Ari Friedman,

introduced us. We were following a different Yoreh De’ah *chabura*, but wanted some extra insight and methodological approaches, and Ari knew exactly who to go to: R. Glickman. Whenever Ari would describe him, I couldn’t wrap my head around this man who seemed to be full of contradictions. A banker, a scholar, a *talmid hakham*, a music aficionado, a sports fan, and many other things.

At the levaya, Rabbi Blau described R. Glickman’s office: it was a table at Nagel Bagel. That “office” was where we learned. On top of the metallic table he’d have his things. He always had his over-the-shoulder bag, a tablet or two (with an Android OS), a bottle of coke, and more often than not, a sabra pretzel-hummus container. Ari and I would show up for our *chabura* with someone who

simultaneously appeared to be “just like us” but was actually very different.

I wasn’t a chassid of Rabbi Glickman, and there are many of them that inhabit Yeshiva and the wider world. Regardless, whenever I would send R. Glickman a Facebook message, following up on an idea he posted about or searching for guidance for a shiur I was preparing, he would respond faster than nearly any of my friends. My interests in startups and Jewish thought were something he could understand, and the care with which he guided me to new sources made me feel like I was his number one priority.

Professionally, I had the privilege of having two of Rabbi Glickman’s teenaged relatives in my program. His excitement about their intellectual pursuits was palpable

and his care for their emotional and spiritual well-being was clear. He knew they were plenty smart, and he wanted to make sure they got the nourishment they needed.

As an educator, nothing was too ethereal or mundane for him. He was always proud of his oversubscribed business-ethics

courses in Syms, and in his *chabura* we always felt his concern for our growth, both spiritual and intellectual.

They say when you hear the same thing from multiple maspidim you know that it's true, so if you hear anything which you also heard from other sources, it should serve as a validation for the esteem in which we all

held Rabbi Glickman. There were not different personalities in the *chabura*, on Facebook, or in a Rosh Yeshiva meeting (we think). He embodied the principle of *tokho ke-boro*. I am so lucky to have sat at his feet, learned his Torah, and with the help of his many *talmidim* I hope to perpetuate his legacy.

By Ari Friedman (YC '14)

Rabbi Glickman was special to many people in many ways. Above all was his family, to whom he was a father, husband, grandfather, uncle, and more. To some he was an analyst, a Chazzan, a law professor, a bandmate, a Bais Din advocate, the Vice President of Risk Management services, or a senior consultant.

To me, he was my Rebbe.

When I first met Rabbi Glickman I was an anonymous face in the crowd at a Friday night tisch in YU and only spoke with him briefly afterwards. As with many of his Talmidim, not initially knowing them never stopped Rabbi Glickman from generously taking time from his already overbooked schedule to meet with them. When I reached out to Rabbi Glickman, even though it was the week of Rosh Ha-Shana, he still invited me, an unknown student, to his home for a conversation which lasted hours. I was fortunate that my relationship with him continued in a way that may be familiar to his other students: chats in Chop Chop, midtown meetings for coffee, email exchanges, and talks in his "office" in the back of Nagel's.

Asking Rabbi Glickman to give his Yoreh De'ah *chabura*, even though it wasn't a listed course for the semester, was a lesson in his approach to being a Rebbe. That was how I learned about one of his requirements

to give a *chabura*: the *chabura* needed to be small enough that he could make eye contact with each individual in the room. Rabbi Glickman needed to be able to know his talmidim as individuals, not just give a lecture to a room full of impersonal students (although he seemed to enjoy meeting at Simchas his online followers from Lakewood whom he had never met in person). The final bechina for the shiur, which I sadly never got to experience, was another expression of his generous spirit and love for his talmidim. After all the written bechinas were submitted, there was the final oral bechina, administered at a restaurant where he took the student out for dinner (and, as he always did, footed the bill).

The suddenness of Rabbi Glickman's passing surprised us all. When I saw a picture of the sign hung on the door to Glueck, Rabbi Glickman's last reply to me was still in my inbox. That email captured much of who Rabbi Glickman was to me as a Rebbe, and I think to others as well. It was a response to an email I wrote to him while in a hospital clinic on Purim afternoon, far away from any Seuda or Simchas Purim. On days when the work environment seemed to clash with the rhythm of Jewish life, Rabbi Glickman was a unique Rosh Yeshiva to turn to. He had invaluable advice on the challenge of being a dedicated Jew on those days because he spent his life bridging the two worlds so that there didn't have to be a divide.

This is an excerpt from that final email:

"Lo yamush sefer ha-tora ha-ze mi-pikha ve-hageta bo yomam va-laila leman tishmor la'asot ke-khol ha-katuv bo ki az tatsliah et derakhekho ve-az taskil." Note that this was not directed to Moshe Rabbeinu or R' Yehuda ha-Nasi but to Yehoshua who would excel not only as a spiritual leader but as a military and political one as well. Although some have interpreted this verse as an exhortation to constant Torah learning....I prefer the Gra Ha-Kadosh in the Shenot Eliyahu [that] we fulfill this exhortation the entire day when we not only open and close it with keriat shema but keep the demands of Torah in our conscious minds. This idea is very precious to me. It reminds me that my entire life is potentially a Torah experience and that the greatest opportunities for Torah im Derech Eretz are when I don't do them sequentially but when they coalesce in the course of my day.

Why Did Ruth Convert?

BY DANIEL GOTTESMAN

On the holiday of Shavuot, the holiday of receiving the Torah, Jews across the world will sit down to hear

the reading of *Megillat Rut*. Although short in length, *Rut* is packed with tragedy, happy endings, family values,

and a glimpse into the messianic dynasty. The heroine throughout the story is the famous titular convert,

Ruth. A Moabite, Ruth converts to Judaism and cares for her mother-in-law Naomi – even after both women's husbands pass away. Ruth's character and genuine actions jump out of the text as she journeys from being a Moabite woman, to a poor daughter -in-law, to moving to Judah and becoming the wife of Boaz, a leading figure of the time. While Ruth's character is compelling, the reader wonders why it is her particular story that we read on the holiday of receiving the Torah. Through exploring Ruth's conversion to Judaism, and her choice to become a part of the Jewish people and Jewish faith, the connection between her story and the holiday of Shavuot can be better understood. Interestingly, the text of *Megillat Rut* never imparts the details of Ruth's conversion. Thus, we must explore the question of when exactly Ruth converted, making the leap from Moabite to Israelite. And further, what can her conversion itself tell us about Ruth's character; and what can it teach us about receiving the Torah?

Throughout the ages Biblical commentators have debated about when exactly Ruth converted. The basic storyline of the first chapter of Ruth is that a family from Judah, comprising of Elimelekh, Naomi, Mahlon, and Kilyon, goes to live in the fields of Moab, where the two sons marry two Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Tragically, all three men pass away, and Ruth and Orpah remain with their mother-in law. Eventually Naomi decides that she is going back to the Land of Judah and tells her daughters-in-law to return to their homelands. Orpah accedes and returns home with an emotional goodbye; Ruth however hangs along with Naomi for the journey. Throughout the classic commentaries, two main approaches to the timeline of Ruth's conversion arise: either she converts before marriage, prior to the events of *Rut* 1:4, or when she insists on staying with Naomi and states, "*Ameikh ami ve-e-lohayich e-lohai* – your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (1:16).² We will explore these two classic options and then two others.

The first opinion contends that both Ruth and Orpah convert at some point before they marry Mahlon and Kilyon. This could explain why Ruth does not take on a Jewish name at a later point – because Ruth in fact is her

Jewish name, not her Moabite name.³ Ibn Ezra, in defending Elimelekh's sons marrying Moabite women, perpetuates this idea with strong language: "And it is inconceivable that Mahlon and Kilyon would take these women before they converted, and '[Your sister-in-law Orpah returned] to her nation and god' (*Rut* 1:15) proves this." Ibn Ezra seems to think it impossible that Mahlon and Kilyon would marry outside the faith. Following this opinion, the two sons could have married these women only after they had converted. Ralbag also insists that the women converted before marriage, and this is why we don't see Ruth convert at any other point in the *Megillah*, even when she marries Boaz. Ralbag writes, "And thus it appears that they converted when Mahlon and Kilyon married them; for this reason we don't find that Ruth needs to convert when Boaz marries her." Like Ibn Ezra, Ralbag assumes Ruth converted to Judaism at some point before her first marriage, and throughout the *Megillah* she is assumed to have already converted.

The second opinion is that after the tragic events of the first half of the chapter, Naomi journeys to return to Bethlehem; Orpah parts with her; and at that moment, Ruth converts. Rashi explains: "They had not converted; and now they are coming to convert, as it is written, 'For we will return with you' (*Rut* 1:10): From now we will be one nation" (Rashi on *Rut* 1:12). During this potential moment of separation between Ruth and Naomi, Ruth converts and joins the Jewish people. Ruth's famous words, "Your nation is my nation and your God is my God" (*Rut* 1:15) are meant literally, as this is her conversion to Judaism. The Targum's interpretation of the text includes the words, "I will convert," in Ruth's proclamation of beliefs. Hazal even derive certain laws of conversion from Ruth's proclamation in 1:15.⁴ This interpretive position maintains that Naomi wants to send Ruth back to the Moabite people, and Ruth converts, making Israel her people.

With both approaches come many textual and conceptual difficulties. In understanding that Ruth and Orpah converted before marrying Mahlon and Kilyon, the Akeidat Yitzhak⁵ raises an issue with Ibn Ezra's position: If Ruth and Orpah had indeed converted,

and the Jewish people were now their people, how could Naomi push Ruth and Orpah to go back to Moab? How could Naomi allow Orpah to return to her former idolatrous people once she had converted to Judaism; surely Naomi here would be a *mesit u-medi'ach*?⁶

On the other hand, maintaining that Ruth's conversion occurs at 1:15 raises a number of both technical and character questions. One of the main advantages of Ibn Ezra's approach is its avoidance of the problem of Mahlon and Kilyon marrying Moabite women. The magnitude of this problem is heightened in light of the Talmudic statement of R. Shimon ben Yochai that "Elimelekh, Mahlon, and Kilyon were the leaders of the generation." It would be astonishing if the greatest men of the generation married outside the Jewish people. Additionally, while powerful and inspirational, Ruth's proclamation could not have been a full-fledged conversion; there was no *Beit Din* in the desert, only her and her mother-in-law.

There exist many ways to solve these issues. Avi Harel proposes that Ruth only converted upon marrying Boaz. Prior to the marriage, recorded in *Rut* 4:14, Ruth is referred to as Ruth the Moabite. However, once she is married, she is simply called Ruth. Another approach is Israel Drazin's, that Ruth did not formally convert at all. In his explanation, legal conversion was not needed, since Judaism was simply a nationality, and not a religion. When Ruth entered the land, she "converted" by *de facto* joining the Jewish nation.

Another approach is one that blends the two classical positions of Rashi and the Ibn Ezra. In his *Tzitz Eliezer* responsa (17:42:5), R. Eliezer Waldenberg offers a compromise approach. He explains that Ibn Ezra is correct in judging Mahlon and Kilyon favorably for not marrying non-Jews; on the other hand, Rashi is also correct in understanding Ruth's statements in 1:16 as her conversion. R. Waldenberg compares Ruth and Orpah's conversions to the way Rambam assesses the conversions of the wives of Samson and Solomon:⁷ their conversions were technically valid, but since they were exclusively for marriage and without any pretense of genuinely joining the Jewish people, the Tanakh views these women as if they were still non-Jews.

However, Ruth then becomes a “full” convert when she remains with Naomi. After the husbands’ tragic deaths and the three women’s journey, Naomi turns to her daughters-in-law and tells them to return to their nations. Orpah listens to this request and leaves the religion and people which she never properly converted into to begin with. Ruth, however, in her claim to willingly stick to Judaism, affirms her original conversion. By claiming “your nation is my nation,” Ruth accepts Judaism in a quasi-conversion to complement and complete her earlier conversion.

R. Waldenberg thus gives great insight into the essence of Ruth’s character, and her personal connection to the Jewish people. Ruth and Orpah both marry into a family; after horrific events they both heroically stay by the side of their widowed mother-in-

law. When Naomi returns to Israel she is extremely embarrassed of herself: she opts to be known as Marah, in reference to her bitterness. Indeed, she left Israel with a husband and two sons who were the *gedolei* and *parnesei ha-dor*, and would return with two widowed Moabite women. Naomi offers to spare her daughters-in-law her embarrassment and gives them an out. Orpah, after remaining by the side of her mother-in-law through tragedy, takes her up on the option. Ruth, however, “*davekah vah* – stuck to her” (*Rut* 1:14). This “*vah*” can refer not only to Naomi, but also to the Torah. Through her marriage, Ruth joined a Jewish family. However in remaining with Naomi in Judah, Ruth declares that she is not only part of the Naomi’s family; she also chooses to embrace her faith, as Naomi’s God is also her God. Ruth clings to the Torah, sticking by its

side, as well as Naomi’s, joining not only the Jewish people but also its faith.

Reading this story on Shavuot, the Jewish people relate Ruth’s story to its own. When the Jewish people left Egypt they were a nation, they were a family. Like Ruth and Naomi, the Jewish people witnessed tragedy and faced adversity. Yet, when they got to Mount Sinai they exclaimed, “*na’aseh ve-nishma* – we will do and we will listen” (*Shemot* 24:7), parallel to Ruth’s “*amekh ami ve-e-lohayikh e-lohai*.” Both exhibit true embracement of God and the Torah. Ruth sends a message that she is in fact part of our people, and so, on the holiday when the Jews celebrate accepting the Torah, we look to this convert heroine who stuck to the Torah.

*Endnotes for this issue appear on pages 26-27

The Non-Jewish Soul

BY ISSAC BERNSTEIN

Traditional Jewish doctrine teaches that there are substantial differences between the Jewish people and the other nations of the world. There is no doubt that God created both the Jew and the non-Jew in His image. However, the question arises when examining the spiritual makeup of human beings: is the soul of a Jew different than that of a non-Jew? To be more specific, do Jews and non-Jews have the same ability to reach the “World to Come?” The answers to these questions have been subject to debate amongst rabbinic scholars dating back to the time of the Tannaim. Answering each of these questions with either a “yes” or “no” represents either of the two extreme approaches to this topic. These two very different positions are commonly found in the texts of the Kabbalah and in the works of rationalists, respectively. The overarching question is much more complex than “are Jews better than non-Jews?” Rather, the question is searching for what the souls of both Jews and non-Jews “look like.” While Kabbalistic teachings show that the soul of a Jew is on a higher level than the non-Jew, the rationalist opinion may say that there is a level playing field

between Jews and non-Jews. Through analysis of different sources on the matter, we will find that Maimonides disagrees with the Kabbalistic approach and creates a new way of thinking about the soul of the non-Jew.

The Talmudic source for this discussion is found in *Bava Batra*.⁸ The Gemara begins with Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai asking his students to explain the verse in *Mishlei* 14:34, “Charity will elevate a nation, but the kindness of the kingdoms is sin.” This verse is troubling: why would the kindness of the kingdoms be considered “sin?” One would think the opposite, that their kindness is praiseworthy!

R. Yochanan ben Zakkai’s students explain that the “nation” in the beginning of the verse refers to the Jewish people. According to this interpretation, charity elevates specifically the Jewish people. The cause of debate amongst the students is the end of the verse: “The kindness of the kingdoms is sin.” Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus explains this part of the verse as meaning that all the acts of charity and kindness that the nations of the world perform is counted as sins for them, since they perform these

deeds only to elevate themselves. Rabbi Eliezer cites a verse that shows that when the nations of the world bring sacrifices, they only do so for their king and for their own benefit. Rabban Gamliel similarly explains that the nations of the world will act with kindness only in order to act haughtily through their deeds. Finally, the Talmudic passage concludes with Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakkana explaining that both “charity” and “kindness” refer to the Jewish people, while “sin” refers to other nations.

The Gemara then asks a question regarding ulterior motives with regards to giving charity. There is a *beraita* that states that if a Jew gives charity so that his son will be healthy, or so that he himself will merit a spot in the World to Come, then he is considered a “fully righteous person.” So, one wonders, why are ulterior motives acceptable for a Jew, yet unacceptable for a non-Jew? Rashi⁹ answers that a Jew’s mindset is focused on Hashem; whether or not his request is fulfilled, the Jew will still be focused on Hashem. However, Rashi says that with a non-Jew, if his request is not fulfilled, he will regret having given charity in the first place.

Whichever way one learns the Gemara cited above, the outcome is the same: non-Jews do not perform acts of kindness for the "right," or altruistic reasons. It seems clear from the Gemara that when it comes to charity and kindness, Jews and non-Jews are different. Yet, the Gemara does not make any distinction between the souls or the spiritual makeup between the Jew and non-Jew. Those who learn towards the Kabbalistic approach interpret this Gemara to mean that there is an inherent difference between a Jew and non-Jew, beyond charity and kindness.

Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri, in his commentary on *Mishlei*, gives another reason for the ending of this verse. The Meiri states that this verse comes to warn the Jews against stealing money.¹⁰ The Meiri goes on to state that the non-Jewish way is "to take from him, and give to another." He says that the reason why the charity and kindness done by non-Jews is considered sin is because they are using stolen money. The Meiri calls their charity "a *mitzvah* that only comes about because of a sin."

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzatto (Ramchal), in his work *Derekh Hashem*, writes, "While a Jew and a non-Jew appear exactly alike in terms of their human characteristics, from the Torah's perspective, they are so greatly different as to be considered a completely different species."¹¹ The Ramchal also comments regarding the World to Come that "only Israel will be found there, while the righteous of the nations will be given their reality only by virtue of their attachment to them. They will be subordinate to Israel as clothes are subordinate to the body."¹² Notably, the approach of the Ramchal seems to go against the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* which states that "the righteous of all nations have a place in the World to Come."¹³

The above sources deal with mainstream rabbinic sources addressing the topic of non-Jews. For a deeper understanding, one must look to Kabbalistic teachings where the non-Jewish soul is addressed. Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi, known as the Baal HaTanya, addresses the topic of the non-Jewish soul by quoting the famed student of Rabbi Isaac Luria, Rabbi Chaim Vital. In Vital's work, *Etz Chaim*,¹⁴ he writes that every Jew

has two souls. "There is one soul which originates in the *kelipah* and *sitra achra* and which is clothed in the blood of a human being, giving life to the body...From this soul stem also the good characteristics which are to be the innate nature of all of Israel... The souls of the nations of the world, however, emanate from the other, unclean *kelipot* which contain no good whatsoever...all good that the nations do is done from selfish motives." The Baal HaTanya then quotes the opinion of Rabban Gamaliel, found in the above Gemara in *Bava Batra*, who says that the phrase "the kindness of the kingdoms is sin" means that all charity and kindness done by the nations is only for their own self-glorification.

Rabbi Chaim Vital, later in the *Etz Chaim* passage quoted,¹⁵ explains that the *shevirat ha-keilim* of the Arizal pertains to this subject, for when the *shevirat ha-keilim* took place, there were parts of the vessel that were imbued with *kedusha* and those that were not. Vital writes that Jews are made from the parts that have *kedusha*, while non-Jews are from the excess parts of the vessel which do not contain *kedusha*.

The Kabbalists read the Gemara in *Bava Batra* to say that the difference between the Jew and non-Jew is not simply how they perform acts of kindness and charity: the Jew is a different type of being. This is akin to the Meiri above who said, "They (Jew and non-Jew) are so greatly different as to be considered a completely different species."¹⁶

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, a twentieth century Torah scholar and student of Kabbalah, writes in his book, *Orot*, regarding the distinction between the Jew and non-Jew: "The difference between the Jewish soul...and that of all the nations, at all their levels, is greater and deeper than the difference between the human soul and the soul of an animal." This is the most blatant and extreme expression of distinction thus far expressed between the Jewish and non-Jewish soul.

As demonstrated by the numerous aforementioned sources, the approach of most rabbinic scholars to this topic is similar to the Kabbalistic view: Jews are different from non-Jews. However, the Kabbalistic

approach brings this distinction to a more extreme level, claiming that the non-Jew is born and created with a different soul than a Jew. Rabbi Kook emphasizes that not only are Jews different in their actions, but rather they are inherently different in their souls.

The approach of the Kabbalists is difficult for many reasons. First, the source in *Bava Batra* which they draw from seems to judge the actions and moral culture of non-Jews, rather than their spiritual make-up. Furthermore, even if the reading and assumption of the Kabbalists is correct, does this apply to all non-Jews? Are there no truly good-hearted non-Jews, as Rabbi Chaim Vital writes? Does everyone agree with this morally troubling approach? The answer to this last question is that almost everyone, except for Rambam and the tradition that followed him, seem to accept the notion that non-Jews have a different spiritual makeup than Jews.

Rambam holds an alternative view and, by contrasting Rambam's view to the views of those mentioned above, it will be shown that Rambam's view was indeed unique with regards to the non-Jewish soul. Rambam emphasizes many times in his writings that all human beings can come close to Hashem. Rambam says that, essentially, there is no difference between the Jewish soul and the non-Jewish soul.

In Rambam's famous "palace parable," he describes the different levels at which a person can stand in relation to Hashem. He writes:

"A king is in his palace, and **all his subjects** are partly in the country, and partly abroad. Of the former, some have their backs turned towards the king's palace, and their faces in another direction; and some are desirous and zealous to go to the palace, seeking "to inquire in his temple," and to minister before him, but have not yet seen even the face of the wall of the house. Of those that desire to go to the palace, some reach it, and go round about in search of the entrance gate;

others have passed through the gate, and walk about in the ante-chamber; and others have succeeded in entering into the inner part of the palace, and being in the same room with the king in the royal palace. But even the latter do not immediately on entering the palace see the king, or speak to him; for, after having entered the inner part of the palace, another effort is required before they can stand before the king--at a distance, or close by--hear his words, or speak to him.”¹⁷

Throughout the parable and his subsequent explanation, Rambam speaks in general terms regarding “all of his subjects.” He makes no distinction between Jews and non-Jews in terms of their ability to come close to the King. Rambam specifically mentions that the people who are far away from the king “are all those that have no religion,” and the ones “who are in the country, but have their backs turned towards the king’s palace, are those who possess religion, belief, and thought, but happen to hold false doctrines.”¹⁸ The only distinction that Rambam makes is between those who have the intelligence to speak with the king and those who do not. It seems that Rambam is saying that if one possesses the intellect to speak with the king, the religion or background of that person is irrelevant. This parable of Rambam’s seems to be in-line with a well-known Mishna in *Pirkei Avot*. In this Mishna, Rabbi Akiva praises man for being created in God’s image. He then praises Israel for being called “sons” to God. Finally, he praises Israel because God gave them the Torah. At first glance, the Mishnah makes a very obvious distinction between Jews and non-Jews, for Rabbi Akiva begins by praising “Man,” and then in the next two praises he specifies “Israel.”

The Tosfot Yom Tov clarifies this. He states that the beginning of this Mishnah, where man is praised for being created in God’s image, refers to all of mankind. He explains that Rabbi Akiva wanted to praise not only Jews, as other commentaries suggest, but rather both Jews and non-Jews for this

specific trait. The Tosfot Yom Tov is perplexed by the other commentaries who say that even the first part of the Mishnah is only referring to Jews. His confusion is valid, for the Mishnah is clear in differentiating its language between the different praises, making it obvious that the initial praise is speaking about all of mankind.

Contrary to the opinion of the Kabbalists, Rambam, in *Hilkhot Melakhim* quotes a similar idea regarding the ability of non-Jews to reach great spiritual heights. There, Rambam speaks about a category called “the righteous amongst the nations.” This category appears impossible according to the view expressed in the writings of Kabbalah. The Kabbalists and the rabbinic figures who agreed with them in previous sources express the view that, inherently, a non-Jew does not possess the trait of pure, or altruistic goodness. The Gemara in *Bava Batra* explicitly states that the non-Jew who expresses kindness is doing so either for his own self-elevation or so that he can then act prideful. The thought that there could be a non-Jew who falls into the category of “righteous among the nations” is completely different from the words of Rabbi Chaim Vital. How could there be a non-Jew in the category of “righteous among the nations” if the non-Jew has “no good within him,” a la Rabbi Vital?

Rambam, in *Hilkhot Teshuva* describes the ability of every man to decide his own fate. He insists that free will is given to every person, giving every individual the ability to decide between leading a virtuous life or a sinful one. In this celebrated passage, Rambam does not differentiate between Jews and non-Jews. Strikingly, he says twice that every person has the ability to make him or herself as virtuous as the biblical Moses.

This view of Rambam is impossible to reconcile within the teachings of Kabbalah. How could a non-Jew, who is incapable of having pure motives and who possesses no good at all--¹⁹according to the Kabbalistic sources, that is--be able to reach the lofty spiritual level which Rambam deems a possibility for non-Jews? The Kabbalists believed that the souls of the non-Jews are inferior to the souls of the Jews. This assumption would

never allow non-Jews to reach the high spiritual levels that Rambam describes.

The last and most noteworthy quote of Rambam that is worth examining appears in *Hilkhot Shemitah ve-Yovel*. In this passage, Rambam expresses the equality of the souls of Jews and non-Jews. Rambam insists that “every single person, from all of inhabitants of the world” who wants to come close to God and is willing to separate him or herself from the bad ways of the world can be sanctified at the highest levels of holiness. Regarding this person, Rambam says, “God will be his portion and inheritance forever and ever.” Clearly, the Baal HaTanya and Rabbi Chaim Vital would categorically reject this view. Rambam is saying that even a non-Jew can possess a *portion* of God, as it were, within himself. This explanation differs from that of the Baal HaTanya, which claimed that the soul of a Jew is literally a part of God and the Divine essence, whereas the soul of a non-Jew is purely animal.²⁰

Rambam here uses the words “holy of holies” to describe this person. The “holy of holies” was the innermost, hidden part of the Temple. Only the High Priest, on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, was allowed to enter it. Thus, Rambam, in this dramatic line, expresses that as long as someone dedicates himself to the service of God and continuously improves his intellect to search for the truth about God, he may reach the highest levels of holiness attainable.

As seen through the various sources cited above, the Kabbalists believe that the soul of a non-Jew is inherently different and inferior to that of a Jew, while Rambam opposes this distinction. Kabbalistic teachings use the Gemara in *Bava Batra* to support their claim that there can be no true good found in a non-Jew. Rambam most likely reads this Gemara to only apply to the non-Jews who are far away from the truth. Rambam believes that as long as one searches for a path of truth and righteousness in the service of Hashem, he may reach the “holy of holies” of spirituality, regardless of whether or not he is a Jew.

*Endnotes for this issue appear on pages 26-27

Symposium

Balancing Responsibilities Towards *Medinat Yisrael*

Contributors to this symposium were asked to respond to the following prompt:

For many Modern Orthodox Jews who live in the Diaspora, there is a perpetual tension between dedication and focus to the State of Israel on the one hand, and to one's own surroundings and community on the other. This tension manifests itself in a variety of ways, including decisions regarding voting, charitable donations, and budgeting time for supporting meaningful causes. Additionally, many Diaspora Jews understandably feel the pressure to make aliyah but struggle to balance that with other considerations regarding where to live. We asked guest contributors to respond to the following prompt relating to these issues:

1. How should a Jew living in the Diaspora balance responsibilities to one's own community with responsibilities towards Israel as a religious Zionist?
2. What factors, priorities, and values should one weigh when deciding whether or not to make aliyah?

The Challenges of Long-Distance Zionism

BY RABBI DANIEL FELDMAN

1. The need for balance regarding communal responsibilities in the Diaspora with meaningful expressions of religious Zionism is evident in many areas, prominently including decisions about voting and charitable donations. Regarding voting, the American voter who places Israel-related concerns at the forefront of his decisions is often accused of being a "one-issue voter," of having "dual loyalties," or of narrow-minded tribalism.

It's true that support of any political candidate is a complex decision, necessarily affected by multiple considerations, all demanding harmonization into one zero sum conclusion, one that more often than not represents the lesser of two evils. That being said, there is much about the support of Israel that justifies an outsized influence upon electoral preferences, and it is far more than tribalism that is involved. On a basic practical level, the challenges Israel faces are existential, life and death threats on a national scale, and Israel is unfairly targeted for exclusion and derision on the international stage. These aspects

alone justify prioritized attention.

More fundamentally, though, when properly understood, Israel's cause is America's cause. The support of a lone democracy committed to human rights surrounded by autocratic regimes bent on its destruction is the essence of American values. Further, Israel's struggle against terrorism is one in which it fights on behalf of the entire free world, whether they realize it or not. Is the targeting of innocents for slaughter in the name of a political end acceptable, or is it not? If it is acceptable in Israel, then it is also in France, England, Spain, and America.

Regarding financial support, the question has additional complexities. Prioritization among charitable causes is a multifaceted, subtle analysis, but the issues can be organized around two axes: a) that which most urgently begs for our financial assistance, and b) those causes which through our support give voice to our own most cherished values and ideals. From both perspectives, institutions and programs in Israel deserve prominent ranking.

However, as American Jews, the two axes are processed differently. Causes in Israel are in need of support, but so are those in the Diaspora communities. The apparent affluence of American Jewry masks a profound crisis in the sustainability of its institutions and frameworks, most sharply in the area of education. This predicament is the result of many factors, some of them organizational and attitudinal, but it is undoubtable that among them is need for greatly enhanced philanthropic attention. While the support of Israel is given great emphasis in the codified laws of *zedakah*, most authorities rule that the standard of "the needs of your locality take precedence" continue to apply (see *Bach*, Y.D. 251, s.v. *aniyyei*, who considers this point "obvious," and *Shakh*, 251:6; see also *Birkei Yosef*, 251:1; *Chiddushei Sefat Emet* to Y.D., and *Resp. Shevet Ha-Levi* V, 135:5). As these local needs indeed loom large, they do demand attention.

The second axis, the expression of personal values through communal support, does speak loudly to the

American Jew: as he has not taken the step of personally settling the land, and of contributing physically and demographically to its development, financial backing seems the main avenue to avoid being a Zionist in name only. This instinct is compelling, and particularly appropriate toward Israeli institutions with which one has personal connections or benefits. Nonetheless, the magnitude of such philanthropy must be assessed carefully against its impact on the very real needs of Diaspora communities.

2. The dream of ascending to the land of Israel, and of realizing the manifestation of God's mission in its most tangible sense, should be ever present in the Jewish soul and mind, at minimum as an ideal. This is true both as a personal spiritual goal post, as well as the appropriate desire to play a role in the fulfillment of the national aspiration.

Nonetheless, this does not eliminate the need to factor in other considerations, which impact on both aspects. These considerations are highly personal and complex, but go to the questions of how one's actual personal needs, be they spiritual or otherwise,

will be affected, as well as to the second question of how effective will one be in contributing to the mission of *am Yisrael*, including the opportunity costs of pursuing one option over the other.

My great great grandfather, R. Zevulun Leib Baritz "l, was a passionate rabbinic advocate of religious Zionism and wrote eloquently about it, in letters to R. Zvi Hirsch Kalischer and others. In one such letter (printed in *Shivat Tziyon*, vol. I, 43-52), he details the various benefits to inhabiting the Land, including the inherent *mitzvah* fulfillment; the enhancement of religious accomplishment in all areas, especially Torah study; a diminished focus on materialism; and the creation of a unifying center to bring together the entire Jewish people. Regardless of one's personal decision of where to live, it is incumbent on every Jew to recognize the role *Yishuv Eretz Yisrael* plays in all of these values, and to strive to maximize them in all decisions, both in terms of personal development and in terms of contributions to the *klal*, whether from within its spiritual homeland or from afar.

R. Barit prefaces his letter with

a citation from *Yalkut Shir Ha-Shirim* (4), which he explains at its close. The winds fought with each other, the Northern wind saying I will bring in the exiles, and the Southern wind saying the same. God made peace between them, and brought them all through the same entrance. In his explanation, the north and south are references to placement in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, respectively the *shulhan*, representing material sustenance, and the *menorah*, representing the Torah and its scholars. Each wants to play the primary role in bringing the redemption. However, ultimately it will be the harmony of all playing their unique roles and working together towards the broader picture, harnessing their instincts, talents, abilities, and resources towards the realization of God's vision for the Jews and humanity. May it soon be His will.

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Aliyah: Personal, Complex... and Wonderful

BY SHAYNA GOLDBERG

My desire to make aliyah evolved over time. I always wanted to want to make aliyah, I just didn't actually want to. In addition, other values like love of Torah, commitment to halakha, passion for Judaism, and service to the community, which were the bread and butter of my childhood home, had higher priority for me.

It is not that I didn't feel deeply connected to Israel; I loved Israel with all my heart. But love is not the same as marriage, and I was not ready to commit. The love that I felt did not translate into a desire to live there.

Maybe I had a vague aspiration of ultimately getting there, but aliyah remained, in an unspoken way, an impossibly difficult journey that I was not quite sure I wanted to undertake. I felt that there was too much I wanted to give back to the community I had grown up in as a teacher in my native

language and in the environment and culture that I knew well and understood from the inside. Finding meaning and fulfillment in your job is very important for general happiness, and I could not identify with those who professed that they were ready to sacrifice professional satisfaction in order to actualize their dream of living in Israel. When I met my husband, we shared many of the same feelings, and I was relieved to be with someone who identified with my ambivalent state.

And then something changed. Shortly before we got married, we visited my sister-in-law and her family, who had moved to Israel only months before. Seeing their lives was like looking at ourselves in the mirror. We recognized that people just like us were happy, comfortable, and finding meaning. Their life was not very different from the one we were used to; they just lived it in Israel. They

were contributing to their community in the ways that they could and were overall satisfied with their lot.

Almost instantaneously, in a way that felt strangely revelatory and yet completely natural, we wanted to be a part of that. As if a image had suddenly and unexpectedly come into focus, the landscape immediately looked different. Things that had seemed so important to us were now blurry, while things we had barely thought about moved front and center.

We had a newfound clarity about our direction, and yet, even so, it still took time for our intentions to fully crystalize. First, we came to acknowledge that the dream of aliyah was attainable for even "regular" people like us. We could go to work, send kids to school, order pizza, and live like typical families everywhere — but live it in the land that God had

promised us. Then, as we started to have children, our personal aspirations began to take a back seat to our familial ones. We thought a lot about the meaning of raising children in a place where our traditions and our holidays are the national ones and where the stories of Tanakh played out around the corner. We wanted them to understand intuitively the words of the tefilot they daven and of the books they study. We wanted the history they learn to be their own.

We wanted our children to feel comfortable and rooted in Israel and not to have to experience the tension that so many Jews in the Diaspora face. More, we wanted to spare our children the agony of the very dilemma that was gripping us. True, we would likely never be fully fluent in Hebrew or as accomplished professionally as we otherwise might have been, but somehow those tradeoffs seemed to matter less when we considered the meaning we would find in the ins and outs of day-to-day life, as well as the fact that personal fulfillment is not an all-or-nothing proposition.

Ultimately, we made aliyah because we felt that Jewish destiny is going to play out in the Land of Israel and that we could choose to either remain on the sidelines or jump into the center of that process. We asked ourselves why other people's children should protect the Land and not ours? Why should other families live there and not us?

Slowly, we embraced our newfound perspectives more and more. At the time of our eventual aliyah, almost 9 years after our wedding, we were then challenged to really own our lofty musings explicitly.

We were confronted by others

about how we could move our four sons to a place where they would be drafted into the army. Some wondered how I could leave the communal roles I played to go teach in Israel — a job that was clearly, in their eyes, less meaningful and significant to them in comparison to what I was contributing at the time. And then there was the visiting educator from Israel who caught me completely off guard with this zinger: "I heard you are making aliyah, throwing American students to the dogs and moving to Israel to steal other people's jobs."

No one likes to be judged. Not for making aliyah. Not for not making aliyah.

We were aware then, and still are, of the factors that enabled us to make a smooth, successful aliyah. Our children were relatively young, our parents are, thank God, healthy, and we were not leaving elderly grandparents behind. We had decent job prospects waiting for us, siblings who had already made the move, and a community that we were thrilled to be joining. And yet we tried to be very honest about all that we knew we were walking away from, which is why I still think that the decision to come here is not a simple one.

No one can ever know where he or she will make the biggest difference, or what is "really, really right" in some Divine sense. All we can do as human beings is to try to make the best decisions that we can. And for us, that meant moving our young family to Israel.

I do not think that there is one right answer out there on the question of aliyah, and I don't see great value in debating whether the Israeli soldier or the American pulpit rabbi is more worthy. Instead, what is important to me is embracing aliyah as a complicated,

multifaceted decision that has no easy answers. We should encourage people to learn to live with the tensions of that decision and to be able to admit to others what they have chosen to sacrifice in the process. I am sometimes left with the feeling that cognitive dissonance profoundly warps discussion of aliyah, in both directions: I have heard olim whitewash the hardships they encounter, as well as those who choose to remain in America work to convince themselves and others that there never really was a viable alternative.

The decision of where to live should be made from a place of honesty and trust and, in turn, breed happiness and fulfillment. It is hard to succeed and contribute anywhere if you don't really want to be there, on the one hand, or are overcome by guilt over the path not taken, on the other. To make aliyah or not is a critical question that I don't think can be easily dismissed or minimized. Still, I think we want to ensure that its sheer weight doesn't suppress other positive and meaningful expressions of love for and attachment to our land, with pride and without burdening self-consciousness, by all Jews, wherever they may be.

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Libi Ba-Mizrach and the Delicate Dance of Our Lived Reality

BY RABBI NATHANIEL HELFGOT

On one level, the question of balancing responsibilities to one's own community versus those to the State of Israel is part of a larger canvas of how one balances conflicting responsibilities. The question of how one allocates time to career versus family, Torah study versus *hesed* activities, general civic involvement versus local shul concerns,

engagement with national Jewish organizations versus engagement with one's day school, and a myriad of other valuable and significant human endeavors is one which is a perpetual challenge. There are, of course, no easy answers or algorithms that can plot the proper choices to be made in each circumstance. Additionally,

these conflicts are ones that may have different answers at different stages of one's life. Moreover, they may have different answers for different people whose talents and time can best be used in one area rather than another. Would the Jewish people have been better served if R. Aryeh Levin *zt"l* would have devoted a few more hours each

day to learning another section of the Ketzos or Nesivos as an adult rather than engaging in his myriad *hesed* and *tzedakah* works which were his unique focus during the blossoming *Yishuv* and the then fledgling State of Israel?

Furthermore, these questions are often connected to the severity of one need versus the other. Surely, different calculuses are necessary to weigh competing needs in relatively calm times versus when one need is dire. To make an analogy from the world of *tzedakah*, we are all familiar with the concept of “*aniyei irkha kodem*” in the allocation of funds. However, as the Hatam Sofer and others point out, this is only in the case of equivalent needs. However, if people are starving in another city and in your hometown the *tzedakah* needs are not as urgent, one does not simply apply the hometown advantage criteria. Or, to bring the issue home to our direct topic, there would and should be one type of balance in relatively peaceful times, while a different balance would have been used when Israel was in the midst of a war for survival, or experiencing an extreme situation such as the need to quickly resettle thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union or Ethiopia.

However, as committed religious Zionists who see the continued flourishing and growth, both materially and spiritually, of the State of Israel as a central part of our essential core values, religious commitment, and community ethos, the issue has heightened force. A major driving framework for us who live in the Diaspora should be the famous gemara (*Rosh Ha-Shana* 30a) commenting on the verse in Yirmiyahu—“*Tziyon he doreish ein lah-, mikhlal de-ba’ee derisha,*” even if we cannot physically be a “*yosheiv be-tziyon,*” we should be animated by our sense of being a “*doreish tziyon,*” and seeking out its welfare in every way we can. Our concern for the welfare of the State of Israel is a primary value, even if not an exclusive one, and thus our devotion to enhancing and strengthening it, should be high up on the list of our priorities, even if it does not come at the exclusion of other values and concerns.

Finally, in the context of that support and desire to help the State of Israel, we recognize that we still need to advocate for robust and strong military and political support from

our government and our country, the *medinah shel hesed*, that is the United States. But as the years pass, we also know that Israel is no longer the economically weak state of the 1950’s and 1960’s, but a powerhouse nation and high tech country that does not need our charity simply to function. It has a high standard of living and a thriving society. However, it also faces the challenges of many first world nations. These include growing economic divides between the have and the have nots, educational gaps among various segments of the population, and communal challenges such as corruption and internal schisms. It is in this context that our personal and communal support to Israel and her citizens should be thoughtful and targeted. The goal should be to help Israel become an even better society in the spirit of the words of the Prophets who constantly pointed to the level of ethics, social justice, integrity, probity, and humility before God and man as central to ensuring both continued possession of the land of Israel and the stability of the country and its national institutions.

Regarding the second question, aliyah is, and should be, a central value of the committed Diaspora Jew. It is an option that should be considered seriously by any committed Jew in the Diaspora. For the health of our own community and its religious Zionist vision, it must remain, to use William James’ language, a “live option” for the individual. Moreover, it needs to be part of the communal ethos that we educate towards and project, even if we are not able to practically fulfill it in our own lives. Encouraging ourselves, our children, and their progeny to envision a future for themselves in the State of Israel, is a religious and communal desideratum.

At the same time, the language of the second question of this symposium prompt makes the assumption, which I believe to be correct, that the obligation to make aliyah is not an absolute one like eating matzah on the first night of Pesah. An obligation such as *akhilat matzah* can only be pushed aside for serious concerns of health or if one is under literal duress. When speaking of aliyah, we are speaking instead, in the language of Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt”l* and others, of a mitzvah *kiyomit*. Given that this mitzvah is of a different

character, it is proper to consider within that framework what factors should go into making aliyah. As such, the momentous decision to uproot one’s family and life and become part of the grand drama of modern Jewish history that is the State of Israel, involves many gray areas that cannot simply be formulated in terms of pure obligation. Here too, it is impossible to outline in a few sentences what weight one should give to various considerations of personal and spiritual fulfillment, career opportunities, family dynamics, educational options for children, tolerance of risk, and so many other factors in evaluating the choice to live and make one’s home *hakha* or *hatam*. But the truth is, that it is not necessary for me to try to articulate the issues at hand as my esteemed teacher and revered mentor, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein *zt”l* has, in his customary nuanced, balanced, sensitive, and profound way already outlined the halakhic and *hashkafic* factors, the sociological issues, and the personal considerations that should—and in practice most often do—affect the thinking of the committed Diaspora Religious Zionist in a seminal essay, first presented at the Orthodox Forum in 2007, entitled “Diaspora Religious Zionism: Some Current Reflections” and reprinted in his “Varieties of Jewish Experience” (2011). I commend the reader to examine that piece, *ve-idakh zil gemor*.

Second, the question points to another assumption, which I also hold to be correct, though this requires a full paper to tease out. The Jewish nation is a larger entity than the Jewish state, and one that includes both Israel and the Diaspora. We reject the perspective of *shelilat ha-Golah* in our contemporary circumstances, whether of the secular mode ala A.B. Yehoshua or the religious mold ala R. Zvi Yehuda Kook *zt”l* and his disciples. Each community has a role to play in the current narrative of the Jewish people which leaves both personal calculation and communal needs as meaningful factors in the decisions of Aliyah.

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Revisiting Classical Essays

Rupture, Reconstruction, and Revolution: Dr. Haym Soloveitchik's Landmark Essay on the Contemporary State of Orthodoxy

BY AVRAHAM WEIN

During my years of study at Yeshivat Har Etzion, I once had the pleasure of sitting with Rabbi Dr. Aharon Lichtenstein *zt"l* and Dr. Tovah Lichtenstein for a Friday night dinner. While much of the meal I spent doing my best to catch what each of the Lichtensteins were saying, I had the opportunity to discuss with them the differences between Jewish American Orthodoxy in the 40's and 50's versus the current day. The primary distinction they proposed was the polarization between different Jewish Orthodox groups. I asked R. Lichtenstein how this difference manifests itself. He responded that when he was growing up, you went to the supermarket and picked up kosher meat. Everyone bought the same kosher meat, regardless of what group of Orthodoxy they came from.²¹ Today, he said, you go to the store and find that there are endless *hashgachot* for each branch of Orthodoxy! While this specific example is perhaps of a more trivial nature, it does reflect a broader and more significant shift in Jewish American Orthodoxy.

Though studying the makeup of different groups along the spectrum of Jewish observance continues to be a major topic in contemporary academia,²² the most important foray into this area in the last fifty years was made by Dr. Haym Soloveitchik in his article "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy." Dr. Soloveitchik's article, published in the journal *Tradition*, has been described as the "most widely discussed article in the last 30 years of *Tradition*" by R. Yitzchak Blau.²³ Moreover, Mark Steiner wrote that "seldom does an article evoke such discussion as Professor Haym Soloveitchik's 'Rupture and Reconstruction.'"²⁴ Soloveitchik's essay was landmark in the field of studying contemporary Orthodoxy, and its significance is attested to by the fact

that any discussion in this field published subsequent to Soloveitchik's essay has needed to include a discussion of Soloveitchik's groundbreaking article.

Dr. Soloveitchik's central claim in his article is that there has been a major shift from the Orthodoxy he experienced in his early years (which existed in Orthodox Jewish Society for many centuries beforehand as well) to the one that now exists in the post World War II era. Ultimately, this leads him to make certain controversial observations about the modern Jew's sense of the Divine presence. In order to evaluate the legitimacy of Soloveitchik's claims and their relevance to the modern day, the following questions should be raised:

- How accurate are Dr. Soloveitchik's descriptions of what Orthodox Judaism was like in the past?
- How accurate are Dr. Soloveitchik's descriptions of what Orthodox Judaism is like in the present?
- How compelling are Dr. Soloveitchik's claims for why this shift occurred?
- Are Dr. Soloveitchik's claims still relevant 20 years later for the sociological realities of Orthodoxy today?

As alluded to earlier, there were a wide variety of critiques levied at the article, including some by significant scholars like Isaac Chavel, Mark Steiner, and Hillel Goldberg. Each of these critiques related to one of these questions, and created an important discussion of this significant article. Dr. Soloveitchik also addresses a number of other fascinating topics by way of presenting his central thesis, which are also worthy of

evaluation. A careful exploration of Soloveitchik's article, as well as a brief survey of main critiques levied at the piece will provide deep insight into the nature of Orthodoxy post World War II.

Dr. Soloveitchik's Central Thesis

Prior to addressing our earlier questions, let us outline the central thesis of Dr. Soloveitchik's article. At the very outset of his article, Soloveitchik makes a startling statement: "The orthodoxy in which I, and other people my age, were raised scarcely exists anymore."²⁵ Later, when explaining his decision to study this topic Soloveitchik wrote:

It seemed to me to that what had changed radically was the very texture of religious life and the entire religious atmosphere. Put differently, the *nature* of contemporary spirituality has undergone a transformation; the ground of religiosity had altered far more than the ideological positions adopted thereon. (65)

Therefore, Soloveitchik set out to understand this transformation and studied the haredi community in order to do so. Hence, his article is a sociological analysis of Orthodoxy in the postwar world.

Dr. Soloveitchik argues that the social changes of the twentieth century, primarily as a result of the Holocaust, led to a dramatic shift in traditional Jewish practice. Simply put, Soloveitchik puts forth two different types of traditions: mimetic and text-based. A mimetic tradition is one in which people learn how to act by imitating others. The alternative, a

textual tradition, is when information is passed down through the written word. Soloveitchik argues that pre-war Orthodox Judaism strongly adhered to a mimetic tradition. He describes:

Halakhah... constitutes a way of life. And a way of life is not learned but rather absorbed. Its transmission is mimetic, imbibed from parents and friends, and patterned on conduct regularly observed in home and street, synagogue and school. (66)

In contrast, Judaism in the postwar era largely follows a textual tradition and is disconnected from the mimetic tradition. Soloveitchik describes this change as the “new and controlling role that texts now play in contemporary religious life.” The last remnants of the mimetic tradition were lost in the absence of the shtetl lifestyle, a result of the Holocaust.

Soloveitchik demonstrates this change by contrasting two of the most significant halakhic works of the last few centuries: the *Arukh Ha-Shulhan* and the *Mishna Berura*. In the *Arukh Ha-Shulhan*, common practice had its own value and legitimacy, whereas in the *Mishna Berura*, common practice needed to be squared with halakhic literature. Thus, the *Mishna Berura*, when evaluating a practice, often times will explore earlier halakhic literature and then provide a *post facto* justification for a common practice. This shift in orientation indicates a transition from viewing received practice as being inherently valid to it no longer standing on its own. Soloveitchik dramatically hammers this point home by arguing that:

It is no exaggeration to say that the Ashkenazic community saw the law as manifesting itself in two forms: in the canonized written corpus (the Talmud and codes), and in the regnant practices of the people. Custom was a correlative datum of the halakhic system. (67)

Within this framework, Soloveitchik explains the “slide to

the right” in the Jewish American Orthodox community. What is meant by this slide, is that there has been a heavy emphasis on *chumrot* in halakhic observance. As Rav Yehuda Amital once observed, when he was a student in yeshiva, when *talmidim* read sections in the *Mishna Berura* that were directed to a God-fearing person, they all would think of one special student in the beit midrash, and not themselves. Nowadays, when the *Mishna Berura* writes about a *chumra* relevant to a God-fearing person, everyone thinks it is referring to them!

Soloveitchik argues that “much of the traditional religious practice has been undergoing massive reevaluation” and that there has been a concentration on *chumrot* through the medium of the printed word. Soloveitchik sums up this transition as:

Fundamentally, all the above—stringency, “maximum position compliance,” and the proliferation of complications and demands—simply reflect the essential change in the nature of religious performance that occurs in a text culture. (72)

The most prominent example that Soloveitchik references is *shiurim*. Despite Jews having used the same type of *shiurim* for hundreds of years beforehand, the *Hazon Ish* totally upended this practice, by contending that the *shiur* size needed to be increased. This new *chumra* was adopted by many in the haredi world.

There are two primary reasons proposed for this change. First, we no longer have the strong mimetic tradition as a result of the rupture of the twentieth century, so we have lost our confidence in the mimetic tradition of our fathers and forefathers and have resorted to books as our guide instead of our parents. In other words, if we haven’t seen it in writing, we don’t trust it. Second, due to the secular culture Jews now find themselves in, they now strive to maintain their fidelity to authentic Judaism by taking upon themselves more *chumrot*.

Finally, we would be remiss if

we were to not mention Soloveitchik’s bombshell found in the final section of the article. He proposes that the transition from the mimetic tradition to an entirely text-based tradition has had a dramatic impact on a critical area of Jewish life: sensing the Divine presence within our daily life. Soloveitchik illustrates his argument with an example of *tefillot* on Yom Kippur. He writes about his experience at a yeshiva in Bnei Brak:

I spent the entire High Holiday period—from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur—at a famous yeshiva in Bnei Brak. The prayer there was long, intense, and uplifting, certainly far more powerful than anything I had previously experienced. And yet, there was something missing, something that I had experienced before, something, perhaps, I had taken for granted. Upon reflection, I realized that there was introspection, self-ascent, even moments of self-transcendence, but there was no fear in the thronged student body. (98)

Whereas, in his congregation in Boston, constituted of largely irreligious immigrants from Eastern Europe, the atmosphere was entirely different. He describes that during *Ne’ilah* “the synagogue filled and a hush set in upon the crowd. The tension was palpable and tears were shed.” He continues:

“What had been instilled in these people in their earliest childhood was that every person was judged on Yom Kippur, and as the sun was setting, the final decision was being rendered...these people cried...not from religiosity but from self interest, an instinctive fear for their lives...what was absent among those thronged students in Bnei Brak was that primal fear of Divine judgement, simple and direct.” (99)

Soloveitchik argues that Orthodox Judaism has undergone a change in the sensed intimacy with God and the felt immediacy of His presence. He attributes this to the way people understand daily events. While in modern times, a curious child may be told that diseases come from viruses, in the past he would have been told it is the direct hand of God. Soloveitchik argues that "God's palpable presence and direct, natural involvement in daily life—and I emphasize both "direct" and "daily"—, His immediate responsibility for everyday events, *was* a fact of life in the East European shtetl, so late as several generations ago." (101) This change is also attributed to the influence of natural science.

Ultimately, Soloveitchik powerfully concludes:

"I think it safe to say that the perception of G-d as a daily, natural force is no longer present to a significant degree in any sector of modern Jewry, even the most religious. ...individual Divine Providence, though passionately believed as a theological principle... is no longer experienced as a simple reality." (102)

Critical Responses

As is to be expected with an essay that touches on so many important aspects of Jewish life, Soloveitchik's thesis was subject to a wide variety of discussion and criticism. These criticisms fall into three categories: his assessment of the past, his assessment of the present, and the reasons he suggests for the transition from one tradition to the next. While limited by the scope of this essay, we will briefly explore the critiques found in these three as well as raise some of our own suggestions for why this transition occurred.

Critique of His Description of the Past

Two important critiques were directed at Soloveitchik

regarding his description of the past as a primarily mimetic tradition. Hillel Goldberg wrote that:

That which he takes to be "new and controlling" is, in fact, part of a time-honored pattern in Jewish history. Without insisting on too strict a parallel and without ignoring contemporary nuances, the increased reliance on text at the expense of mimesis describes conditions that obtained in successive epochs when, for example, the Mishna was formulated, the Talmud was formulated, and the decisions of the Rishonim were codified in the *Shulhan Arukh*. In all these cases, where previously there was reliance on mimesis and a measure of halakhic diversity, now there emerged reliance on "texts" and a reduced measure of halakhic diversity. Where previously there was a living teacher, now there was also a written one. Where previously certain matters of halakhic discussion had practical import, now, with fixed decisions, they had mostly theoretical import. In short, while making due allowance for periodic coloration and local conditions, that which R. Soloveitchik takes to be "rupture" is, in fact, part of a familiar pattern.²⁶

Micha Berger, also took issue with Soloveitchik's description of the past as a primarily mimetic tradition, but from a different angle than Goldberg:

I find this characterization ironic, given the identity of the author. His great grandfather and namesake, R' Chaim Brisker, was famously textualist in his approach to halakhah despite living pre-war.²⁷ Nor was Brisk the first: the Vilna Gaon often

ruled based on theoretical argument in contradiction to mimetic tradition. Chassidus could not have emerged if people weren't looking at the traditions and looking for a new justification for them.²⁸

Berger instead proposes that instead of just one rupture, there were in fact really two: the Haskalah and the Holocaust. He believes that the Haskalah movement led to the fall of mimeticism.

Critique of His Description of the Present

In this section, we will briefly relate to two important critiques of Soloveitchik's depiction of contemporary Orthodoxy. The first was raised by Isaac Chavel, who took issue with Soloveitchik's grouping of the Modern Orthodox community with the haredi community. Instead, he writes that the Modern Orthodox community has had a very different timeline than the haredim for important reasons.

The second, and perhaps far more crucial critique, was made by Hillel Goldberg. Goldberg found Soloveitchik's claim regarding the lack of *Yirat Shamayim* to be inaccurate. He wrote:

R. Soloveitchik has confused lack of yirat shamayim with lack of open, public proclamation of yirat shamayim. That's not the style today. We live in cynical times. For people publicly to proclaim that they perceive God as a daily, natural force is to identify themselves as relatively unsophisticated.

Critique of Soloveitchik's Reasons

In the article, Soloveitchik argues that the proliferation of halakhic books on *Orah Hayyim* topics is due to the transition to a text-based tradition. Hillel Goldberg disagreed with him on this point, and understood this phenomenon very differently. First, he contends that it should be seen as part of

a broader trend towards specialization in all advanced systems of knowledge. Second the “process of producing a book is easier, cheaper, and more decentralized than ever before.” Third, and most importantly, Goldberg writes:

For most, the present textual explosion fills in for Orthodox parents, teachers, mentors, or rabbis who have been missing since long before “contemporary Orthodoxy.” It is in this context that there is a textual process of reconstruction—an attempt to reestablish a link to the living past, not to replace it. R. Soloveitchik confuses cause and effect. The preponderance of new texts has not caused the diminishment of mimesis, but has creatively responded to the diminishment.

In a different vein, Mark Steiner argued for an alternative explanation for the lack of *Yirat Shamayim* in the haredi community. He wrote, “I would argue that haredi Jews today are in general less fearful and more aggressive than a generation ago, primarily because of improved material standards—and, in particular, they are also less fearful of God.”²⁹

Finally, Steiner disagrees with Soloveitchik’s claim that the loss of the shtetl led to the shift in traditions. Instead, he proposes:

“[There] has been a change: a change in the locus of authority. The traditional kehilla was no more, its potential leaders perceived as having sold out to the New World or to Zionism. What was left, a tradition without any religious legitimizing authority, was fragile and inherently unstable, susceptible to massive defections to the left and to the right. Most, of course, left the fold. Those truly interested in fulfilling God’s Will had no choice but to turn to

what they considered to be the uncorrupted saving remnant, those talmidei hakhamim they began to call “gedolim.” In a world of technological change, universal literacy (in Orthodox circles, of course), and new options, halakhic handbooks began to be written to inform the “b’nei Torah” what these gedolim say about the new issues, and also to combat foreign sources of corruption.”

Additional Considerations

Prior to concluding the essay, I believe two other considerations are worthy of mention. First, R. Yehuda Amital argued that there was a need for in-depth Torah study because:

In a generation that attaches so much importance to the intellect, it is important that the intellect, too, be employed in the service of God. In a period when people invest such great efforts in various fields of study, should the service of God not demand strenuous application of the intellect? Precisely at such a time, it is especially important that Torah study should be serious and in no way inferior in intellectual profundity to other realms of study. The service of God will not survive in our day if its bearers are void of Torah scholarship. It is impossible to live a serious religious life without deep Torah learning.

Lastly, the academic culture surrounding study of any discipline demands textual analysis. Many would fall prey to believing that halakhic observance does not have legitimacy historically if there were not texts to base observance on. In modern culture, in order for something to be legitimate, “it needs to be seen in writing.”

Conclusion

It is worthwhile to note that in the twenty years since the publication of Soloveitchik’s essay, significant changes have occurred in the Orthodox community. The spread of neo-hassidut, postmodernism, and individualism have all affected the nature of religious observance in the Orthodox community. It would be worthwhile for Soloveitchik to reinvestigate if his description of the Orthodox community should be changed as a result of these new trends. In conclusion, despite the various critiques discussed in this paper, it is clear that Soloveitchik’s article is a landmark and an incredibly important piece both because of the valuable content and ideas contained therein, as well as the discussion it opened. Without a doubt, it should go down as one of the most important articles of the last half-century.

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Dr. Haym Soloveitchik’s article can be found at <http://traditionarchive.org/news/converted/Volume%2028/No.%204/Repture%20And.pdf>.

*Endnotes for this issue appear on pages 26-27

Book Reviews

Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration? Edited by Rabbi J.J. Schacter

BY MATT LUBIN

Ask just about any student of Yeshiva University, or more generally, anyone who considers themselves to belong to "Modern Orthodoxy," what distinguishes it from other strands of Judaism, and you are likely to be told that Modern Orthodoxy is particular in its double commitment to Torah and the general surrounding culture. No question could be more central, then, to the ideology of Modern Orthodoxy than the subject of the recently reprinted volume which centers on that very issue, *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration?*, (Maggid Books, 2017), edited by Rabbi J.J. Schacter. Since its first appearance in 1997, this volume (and particularly its final essay chapter) has become somewhat of the defining ideological statement of the "Torah U-Madda" *hashkafah*, even more so than the essay of Rabbi Norman Lamm of that name. Comprised of four essay-chapters, the collection takes a form which is as crucial as it is ambitious, by first providing a highly detailed picture of how this question was approached throughout Jewish history (starting from the Mishnah), culminating in a highly practical assessment by Rav Ahron Lichtenstein, who is for many the greatest *talmid hakham* to be firmly entrenched in the world of Modern Orthodoxy since Rabbis Joseph Ber and Aaron Soloveitchik. The book's medium is very much its message: the collection is structured as a presentation of four historical studies, indicating the importance of such studies for contextualizing this pressing halakhic-*hashkafic* issue.

For determining the Orthodox Jewish perspective towards (what is referred to by the title as) "culture," the choice of authors is essentially unsurpassable. Professor Blidstein and Rav Lichtenstein, the two Israeli writers, have both received the Israel

Prize, the country's highest award for academic or Torah scholarship, and the American authors and editor are the titans of Yeshiva University's Judaic studies department—Professor David Berger is the dean of Bernard Revel graduate school, and Professor Shnayer Leiman is known in Yeshiva University circles as its resident historical polymath. All of these authors are also firmly entrenched in the Orthodox Jewish community, their children (and grandchildren) having attended Torah day schools, and so they can reliably speak to an audience who themselves are looking to inform a Torah-based perspective on where general studies and a commitment to Judaism meet. Tackling each of their respective fields of expertise, the three historians provide a rich and detailed picture of how rabbinic Judaism approached their intellectual cultural environments throughout the ages.

The first essay, written by Professor Gerald Blidstein, is entitled, "Rabbinic Judaism and General Culture: Normative Discussion and Attitudes." As the byline suggests, Blidstein is interested in exploring explicit discussions of "general culture" as a subject of rabbinic normative statements, i.e. what the rabbis themselves had to say about the integration of general culture. The author admits at the outset that this might appear to stray far from the intended mark: if we want to know to what extent the ancient rabbis were influenced by their surrounding culture, would it not make more sense to conduct a historical study "observing the data of this interaction themselves,"³⁰ instead of looking to the sparse explicit remarks by the sages on the subject? The implicit answer provided by the author (and the editors of the volume, who could have included a very different kind of

essay) is that while such a historical discussion may indeed be useful if the intended "mark" is a question of factual determination, the question that faces "the traditionalist," as Blidstein calls him, is a normative one: how should the allegiant of rabbinic Judaism look to rabbinic literature to determine the acceptability of outside cultures? On the other hand, "The historian's agenda may yet be relevant even from a normative point of view,"³¹ as historical behaviors of the Sages themselves indicate, by implication, the types of conduct that they deemed acceptable. Despite his opening reservations, therefore, Blidstein quotes liberally from historians of rabbinic literature in assessing their reliance on Hellenic and Roman culture.

All in all, Blidstein concludes that the Sages condemned gentile culture when it smacked of idolatry or immorality, but otherwise assimilated (or were largely disinterested in) those elements which they considered benign. After reading through the chapter, however, it is clear that this conclusion is at least as dependent upon studies of the Sages' historical milieu as it is on the reading of specific rabbinic passages, most of which have a decidedly more repudiatory flavor. This study then presents a significant potential problem: if we want to use the Sages' behavior to serve as a normative example, it may be important to determine whether these cases of clear outside influence are merely a feature of osmotic, unconscious diffusion, or if the Sages were decisively comfortable with integrating aspects of the general culture into their world. If their accepting of outside influences was not meant as an explicit seal of approval, but merely "a recognition that the rabbis are part of a sphere of culture whose materials pass with considerable freedom between all its

members,”³² then their example can provide little instruction for those of us who may be interested in intentionally engaging in the outside culture beyond what we may already have inculcated unthinkingly or unavoidably.

As Blidstein purported to limit himself to explicit rabbinic statements, David Berger, author of the second essay in this collection, also limits his purview of cultural influence upon Medieval Jewry, writing that he will “concentrate [only] on high culture, on disciplines which many medieval and early modern Jews regarded as central to their intellectual profile and which they often saw as crucial or problematic (and sometimes both) for the understanding of Judaism itself.”³³ The bulk of his essay is thus concerned with the study of philosophy and its reception among the rabbis, including the important Maimonidean controversies, spanning from rabbis of the Geonic era to R. Jacob Emden. Berger’s sweeping discussion leaves almost no stone unturned, and although referring to dozens of rabbinic figures and their works (some well-known and some much less well-known)³⁴ necessitates that each individual account be brief, his examples nonetheless includes some fascinating insights. In considering Judah Halevi, for example, Berger sees a deep connection between his disdain for philosophy and the uniqueness of the Jewish people as a race-nation; “Judaism rests on a unique revelation, not a common philosophic consensus; Jews are set apart and above, their status ingrained and unapproachable even through conversion.”³⁵ At the same time however, “Halevi could no more rid himself of the [concept of the] active intellect than a contemporary religious critic of evolution could deny the existence of atoms or DNA.”³⁶

Exploring so much of the relevant literature can easily cause one to lose the forest in so many trees, but here it might be more accurate to say that there is no coherent forest at all; this study clearly shows that there was no singular attitude towards philosophical inquiry and cultural wisdom which all the medieval rabbis shared. Throughout the essay though, Berger helps the reader make sense of these sources by discussing historical-geographical trends and pointing out each one’s salient features. Drawing

upon much of his own scholarship, Berger carefully considers the controversies surrounding Maimonides and the reception of his philosophical works as a lens through which one can understand how the communities of Spain and Provence viewed general studies. Besides for the views of the rabbinic leadership, Berger also notes that the desire of many communities to hear sermons incorporating philosophical ideas proved that “there is strong reason to believe that a majority of the Jews in Montpellier sided with the rationalists.”³⁷ The rabbis of Ashkenaz were generally more reticent to engage in philosophical study, although their interactions with Christian and scholastic culture likely had effects on biblical studies and perhaps even the dialectical methods of the Tosafists. Additionally, “It is overwhelmingly likely that the influence of the Christian environment was decisive” in the Ashkenazi pietistic movement, as “Ashkenazi pietists set out to demonstrate that they would not be put to shame by Christian zeal in the service of God.”³⁸ Regarding Italy, “The evidence for Renaissance Jewry’s immersion in the surrounding culture becomes overwhelming,”³⁹ but debates continued regarding the acceptability of philosophical (and later, in the example of R. Azariah de Rossi, of historical) speculation. Even when philosophical literature was studied, this was more often “for religious reasons, as part of a spiritual quest, totally separate from external contacts and influences,”⁴⁰ as Isadore Twersky wrote of R. Yair Bachrach, and is not indicative of a positive reception of general culture.

Moving on to the era of modernity, Prof. Shnayer Leiman takes a different approach. Instead of attempting the impossible task of surveying all of the Jewish literature of the period, Leiman discusses in detail the development of the concept, “*Torah im Derekh Erets*,” which he does by tracing its history from R. David Friesenhausen and showing how such an ideology was viewed and practiced by four of its greatest rabbis: Isaac Bernays, Jacob Ettlinger, Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Azriel Hildesheimer. Leiman’s presentation of German Orthodoxy is rich in detail, including such fascinating points as the fact that almost none of R. Isaac

Bernay’s lay audience understood or were even interested in hearing his weekly Shabbat sermons (despite his preaching in the vernacular German) and the remarks made by one of R. Hirsch’s contemporaries that “he did not freely make friends and even his friends he kept at a distance... His intercourse with other scholars was scanty. He did not need them.”⁴¹ While including copious references to Mordechai Brauer and similar historians of the period, Leiman’s chapter also includes many excerpts from the writings of these Sages (some translated into English for the first time) so that these leaders can “speak for themselves.” Lieman also makes note of the rabbinic controversies that often surrounded these figures and their institutions, though some readers may find that in doing so he assumes that his audience has more background knowledge that they might actually have.⁴² Because of the great depth involved in painting these intellectual portraits, there is unfortunately no room in the chapter to compare and contrast the different approaches taken by these great Orthodox leaders, but a helpful citation is provided where available for the reader interested in such studies.

The volume’s crowning jewel, its final chapter, is Rav Ahron Lichtenstein’s impassioned but equally nuanced defense of the value of a modern liberal arts education for today’s *beni Torah*. Many reviewers have looked to this essay as Rav Lichtenstein’s definitive formulation of his version of the “Torah U-Madda,” or “Centrist Orthodox” (as Rav Lichtenstein and Rabbi Lamm often preferred) *hashkafa*.⁴³ The extensiveness of Rav Lichtenstein’s own educational background, evident by his drawing upon dozens of literary authors, is matched by the depth of the essay’s spiritual sensitivity. Rav Lichtenstein insists upon the importance of the study of the sciences, including economics and sociology, writing that, for example, “One cannot translate ordinances concerning neighborly relations into contemporary terms without some knowledge of both the classical and modern socio-economic scene.” If, as Maimonides famously touted, one comes to appreciate God by studying His handiwork, this is all the more true through the study of the

humanities, which, as its name suggests, is the study of the human experience, "His wondrous creation at its apex."⁴⁴ Despite being fully forthcoming about the religious risks and potential halakhic problems inherent in such studies, Rav Lichtenstein argues that general knowledge is essential for a full spiritually enriching education, as even if it may be true that "everything is in it [the Torah],"⁴⁵ we should not be so haughty as to believe that we can derive "all we need within our own tradition."

There is almost no argument one can make against Rav Lichtenstein's position that he has not already anticipated in this remarkable essay, and while this helps give his positions the crucial authority of considered balance, such a presentation is likely not going to convince any reader already inclined to disagree with his stance on the value of general studies. Although this is of course always true to a large extent,⁴⁶ here Rav Lichtenstein accedes to the severe spiritual dangers posited by serious study of the humanities, yet insists that "the advocacy of *Torah u-Madda* can very well still be sustained, depending, of course, on the overall balance of benefit and loss."⁴⁷ Presented with all of Rav Lichtenstein's evidence, however, a reader can just as easily come to the opposite conclusion, even if he recognizes that "we also ignore *hokhmah* at some cost," for who is to say which path is filled with more spiritual dangers? In an exchange published in the Orthodox Union's *Jewish Action* magazine,⁴⁸ Dr. William Kolbrener wrote that he believes the modern university would invariably fail a student attempting to put Rav Lichtenstein's ideal into action, and his proposed path has, in his experience, sometimes led to tragic spiritual consequences. On the next page, Rav Lichtenstein concedes that perhaps there may be more significant dangers inherent in his program, especially in a university, but his essential argument remains unchanged: he believes that the benefits of such an education outweigh their costs.

Although each of the volume's historical essays are very thorough, it is unfortunate that the new republishing has not inspired any updating, as certain lacunas may appear to today's readers who are exposed to the scholarship of the past two decades. Starting with

the first essay, for example, the vast majority of Blidstein's attention is paid to pre-Talmudic rabbinic literature and Roman influence, which was indeed the focus of academic studies of rabbinics for most of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but he makes no mention of more recent scholarship on the Babylonian Talmud and its significant borrowing of literary structures, themes, and concepts from Persian culture.⁴⁹ In discussing some obvious legal loan-words that made it into the halakha, Blidstein mentions the *prozbul* and *dyothiki*, but not the foreign word that would be more familiar to any practicing Jew, "*afikoman*," which would have been a good segue to mention the Passover Seder's relationship to the Greek Symposium (more recently the subject of an excellent study by David Henshke).⁵⁰ In the penultimate section of the essay, Blidstein suggests that the "distinction between facts and values (wooly as it may be) is perhaps at the heart of the rabbinic assertion that the nations of the world do not possess Torah, but they do possess wisdom,"⁵¹ believing that the Sages were willing to unquestioningly adopt scientific knowledge as superior to their own if it can be shown to be correct. In actuality, this assertion is not as simple as Blidstein would like it to be, as he himself notes that the Sages will almost never accept a logical-scientific argument without being able to provide a scriptural source for the same conclusion. As readers are probably aware, the question of where the rabbis' scientific assumptions are sourced is (and to a large extent, has been for centuries) the subject of significant controversy among rabbinic thinkers.⁵²

Despite the very detailed account of medieval Jewry provided by Berger, it too could potentially have been updated thanks to some more recent studies, particularly with regard to his treatment of Ashkenazic attitudes towards general learning. Referring to the *peshat* focus of Rashbam's commentary to the Torah, for example, Berger writes that "it surely cannot be ruled out—indeed, it seems overwhelmingly likely—that some taste of the exciting new approaches was transmitted," from Christian exegetes to Jewish commentators. Thanks to the work of Eliezer Touitou,⁵³ this can now be stated with much greater confidence. In his belief that

the sages of medieval Ashkenaz likely had an "intense curiosity about the natural and mechanical phenomena that surrounded them," which likely extended to at least moderate study of natural philosophy, Berger can only cite in his footnote "a conversation with Ta-Shema," but today the reader could be directed to a full monograph on the subject by David I. Shyovitz.⁵⁴ The Jewish reception and involvement in the Copernican Revolution and the new science of experimentation, for which Berger provides a quick overview, is also now the subject of an entire book.⁵⁵ Recent publications could even be cited to supplement Prof. Leiman's extraordinarily well-sourced essay, such as Adam Ferziger's study of German Orthodoxy's relationship with the non-Orthodox community,⁵⁶—but this would scarcely have changed the content of Leiman's essay substantially, if at all.

Updating aside, a more significant limitation of this collection is that although its title concerns the "encounter" of Judaism and "other cultures," all of these essays are almost exclusively interested in what is sometimes called "high culture," the intellectual products of non-Jewish nations—there is almost no talk of everything else we would today associate with culture: food, dress, language, entertainment, and on and on and on.⁵⁷ In one sense this complaint is nothing more than a pedantic quibble about a word in the title,⁵⁸ but there is another sense in which this indicates a major shortcoming regarding the audience of this collection. While it may be true that any Yeshiva University student will likely say that Modern Orthodoxy is distinguished by its approach to general culture, he or she will understand the word "culture" to refer to something very different than the subject of this book. Beyond Blidstein's overview of the prohibition to imitate the gentiles, there is little that speaks to the aspects of general culture that are much more pressing for the vast majority of the Modern Orthodox readership. As Kolbrener quoted from a student, "It's not so much that we are interested in *Torah Umadda*, what we are really interested in is Torah and entertainment."⁵⁹

Those who consider themselves to be Modern Orthodox in this sense would

likely consider how the medieval rabbis understood the prohibition of imitating gentile dress and similar cultural practices⁶⁰ to be more relevant than their embrace of Aristotelianism, and would be more interested in the fact that R. Azriel Hildesheimer loved

to sing German *lieder* to his daughters⁶¹ than in his mastery of Greek. That being said, no community can be expected to live up to its ideals perfectly, and one only hopes that the shining example and educational program formulated here by Rav Lichtenstein can be an

inspiration to future students looking to have their approach to culture be shaped by the Torah and its values.

*Endnotes for this issue appear on pages 26-27

Flames of Faith: A Review of an Introduction to Chasidic Thought for the American Jew

By TZVI ARYEH BENOFF

I - Introduction

There is a *Hassidic* story in which the founder of the *Hassidic* movement,⁶² Rabbi Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov, met the Messiah and asked when he would come. The Messiah responded, "When your wellsprings (the teachings of *Hassidut*) spread outward [to educate and inspire the rest of the world]." This charge to spread the teachings of *Hassidic* thought has been accepted by many, especially Lubavitch *Hassidim*, as a directive to inspire Jews throughout the world. However, a wellspring is merely a source of sustenance. What grows will depend upon what is planted. This analogy holds true for how *Hassidic* teachings are used and presented to teach others. Aspects that are stressed or resonate in certain ages and locations may not in others.

This is the phenomenon that yielded Rabbi Zev Reichman's *Flames of Faith: An Introduction to Chasidic Thought*. Published in 2014 by Kodesh Press, the book is based on a lecture series by Rabbi Moshe Wolfson and serves, in its own words, as "an introduction to the basic terms and ideas of Chasidic texts...for the interested lay reader who may be new...to the world of Chasidus."⁶³ At first glance, this is a succinct self-description of the work's content and purpose, but it does not do justice to the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual dynamics that *Flames of Faith* derived from and promotes.

II – A Variety of Influences

In a way, the book, author,

and lecturer whose classes it is based upon are what some may consider to be chimerical entities, syntheses of varied backgrounds that were once considered inherently distinct and irreconcilable. According to his biography, Rabbi Zev Reichman is the director of the Mechina Program at Yeshiva University, considered by many to be the educational flagship of American Modern Orthodox Judaism, as well as the rabbi of the East Hill synagogue in Englewood, New Jersey. Before being ordained by RIETS (Yeshiva University's affiliate yeshiva and rabbinical school, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary), he studied in Yeshivas Chevron, an elite Ultra-Orthodox yeshiva in Israel.⁶⁴ While it is not unheard of for the educational background of a rabbi in Yeshiva University to straddle the Modern Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox worlds, Rabbi Reichman also developed a relationship with Rabbi Moshe Wolfson of Boro Park in Brooklyn.

Rabbi Moshe Wolfson himself also has a varied, albeit different, background. Serving as the *Mashgiach* (spiritual guidance counselor) of Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, he is a paradigm of the yeshiva itself. Brought to prominence by the famed Jewish education pioneer Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz in 1921, Torah Vodaath evolved throughout the decades, but was designed to educate the American Jew by creating an environment that was conducive for the contemporary school child to grow in educational and emotional connection to Judaism. As such, Rabbi Mendlowitz sought to combine the Lithuanian Torah study with the warmth of Polish *Hassidut* to

create an American Jew.⁶⁵ In that vein, Rabbi Moshe Wolfson was a follower of the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneerson) and therefore received a significant education in Lubavitch *Hassidic* philosophy. However, his role in the yeshiva morphed into one of a general *Hassidic* background. As students grew older and continued to seek his guidance and inspiration, a synagogue was founded, known as Emunas Yisrael, at which he became the de-facto rabbi. Teaching *Hassidut*, leading a shul, and offering guidance and support, Rabbi Wolfson evolved into a *Hassidic rebbe* in his own right (though he modestly insists on only being referred to by his institutional title, *mashgiach*). Thus, he is a microcosm of Torah Vodaath, the melding of different backgrounds to create a new path, forged from the untainted traditions of old, to practically inspire and guide a new generation of American Jews. As such, much of the *Hassidic* philosophy that he shares is often sourced in Lubavitch teachings but is supplemented or presented through the lens of general *Hassidic* thought and homiletics.

III – Structure and Content

The same can be said for Rabbi Reichman's book. The title, *Flames of Faith: An Introduction to Chasidic Thought*, connotes a pathos-based work delineating the fundamentals of general *Hassidic* thought. However, the book as a whole is organized around the opening chapters of the famous Lubavitch work written by the founder of Lubavitch *Hassidut*, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of

Liadi, *Sefer Likkutei Amarim*, known colloquially as *Tanya*. Indeed, in his approbation, Rabbi Wolfson notes that explicitly.⁶⁶ Yet, much like Rabbi Wolfson himself, the lectures adapted into the book explicitly and implicitly evince both philosophical and content-based influences from other *Hassidic* and non-*Hassidic* groups.

For example, the first chapter is titled "The Commitment at Birth" and examines the Talmudic passage that the *Tanya* opens with. The Talmud states that when a soul is about to leave its mother's womb, the angel which taught the soul Torah makes it swear an oath: "I will be a *tzaddik* (righteous man). I will never take pride for virtue even if the whole world calls me a saint. In my eyes I will remain like a wicked man."⁶⁷ In *Tanya*, the Alter Rebbe asks that this passage appears to contradict other Talmudic statements and dictums.⁶⁸ Rabbi Reichman, however, proceeds to first analyze the concept of a vow and its applicability and efficacy vis-a-vis an unborn, pure soul. He explains that an oath is both compulsion and empowerment, imbuing the oath-taker with the capability and fortitude to fulfill the oath. While this is an idea that is explained by the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Lubavitcher Rebbe,⁶⁹ Rabbi Reichman instead quotes the book *Ohr Gedaliahu*, the seminal work of Torah Vodaath Rosh HaYeshiva Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr, and the Sefat Emet.⁷⁰

Although in this instance there is little discrepancy between the purely Lubavitch commentary and others, Rabbi Reichman then digresses to Chapter 2 which discusses the sanctity of *Shabbat*. The connection between the two chapters is the number seven, symbolizing the totality of creation. *Shabbat* is the seventh day of the week. Similarly, the Hebrew word for "week," *shavuah*, and by extension, the Hebrew word for "seven," *sheva*, are related to the word *shevuah*, oath. Both entail the utilization of the totality of their respective natural existences.⁷¹ While the topic of Shabbos is certainly significant in *Hassidic* thought, its connection to the opening chapters of *Tanya* is tenuous at best. It is however, extremely important in the thought of Rabbi Moshe Wolfson.⁷² Such digressions recur in varying size and magnitude throughout the book.

There are also other content related differences. For example, the variety of *Hassidic* tales that span the gamut of time and sect. Another difference is the usage of *gematriot*⁷³ (teaching based on the numerical value of the letters of words in Biblical texts) and word plays.⁷⁴ Both of these facets are less used in Chabad thought. Additionally, Rabbi Reichman will sometimes incorporate teachings of the Vilna Gaon, an early opponent of the *Hassidic* movement, to buttress points.

IV - Summary

It is these very stylistic differences, however, that make the work an introduction to general *Hassidic* thought. Divided into small, conquerable chapters, Rabbi Reichman distills Rabbi Wolfson's lectures on *Hassidut* into English prose that transmit both the content and heart of *Hassidic* teachings. Using the opening chapters of *Tanya* as a scaffold, the book elaborates on various themes of *Hassidut* by explaining and applying kabalistic thought about the nature of God, the soul, creation, and evil to aspects of divine service such as prayer, Torah study, and fulfilling commandments.

The first half of the book (Chapters 1-13) discusses the nature of the soul and its relationship with the physical body, during which he uses these concepts as a springboard to explain the nature and role of the *tzaddik*,⁷⁵ the significance of *Shabbat*,⁷⁶ creation and the 'cosmic pipeline' through which God interfaces with creation (*tzimtzum*), and the love of fellow Jews.⁷⁷ More significantly, Rabbi Reichman explains how this knowledge of the soul can be applied to serving God.⁷⁸ Because Jews have a *nefesh elokit*, a soul that is a 'piece of God,' as it were, they are instilled with an inherent latent love of God that, when harnessed, can inspire them to overcome any challenge or trial they may face. Thus, to achieve a degree of what Rabbi Reichman calls "*tzaddikhood*,"⁷⁹ transforming the physical into the spiritual (see next paragraph), one must stoke the flames of that hidden love for God to manifest itself in one's daily life, actions, and performance of *mitzvot*.

The next chapters explain the nature of evil. Based on verses from the Bible and teachings of Rabbi Isaac Luria, Rabbi Reichman presents that evil is not an existence onto itself for there is nothing but God. Rather, evil is the concealment of Godliness and connection to God. Thus, it is termed *klippah*, husk, which conceals the inherent good and Godliness in everything. He continues that there are two general categories of *klippot*: One type is comprised of *klippot* that are so strong that the Godliness inside cannot be extracted in the current reality in which the world as a whole does yet recognize God as the true and only ruler. Such *klippot* manifest themselves as sins that Jews are charged to avoid. The second group, called *klippat nogah*, is translated as a translucent husk which can allow light to penetrate. This group manifests itself as items and actions that are not inherently prohibited which can be elevated by allowing the Godliness to shine through. This is accomplished by utilizing these *klippot* for holy purposes (such as actual commandments or for the sake of heaven). The task that Jews are charged with is to elevate the physical world (including themselves) by uncovering and expressing its Godliness thereby making it a dwelling place, as it were for God, by the performance of commandments and doing things for the sake of heaven.

The final chapters elaborate upon a person's personal development in the struggle to reveal that light within themselves. To achieve a degree of "*tzaddikhood*." To that end, he explains how man, created in the image of God, possesses intellectual (*mochin*) and emotional (*middot*) faculties that are analogs to the process in which God interfaces with creation and how they can be implemented in one's daily life. By fulfilling the commandment of following in the path of God by following His traits, Jews are able to fulfill commandment and overcome the struggles in life to grow.

V - Conclusion

While many of the broader themes and particular teachings of Rabbi Reichman's work are certainly timeless, the synthesis of different

sources, as well as the tone and focus of applying the teachings, highlights how *Flames of Faith* represents a unique genre, speaking to a new and distinct audience. Indeed, this can be observed from Rabbi Reichman's own description of the book on its back cover:

"The secrets from the inner meaning of Torah form the soul of the Chassidic movement's thought. They inspire revive and inflame Jewish souls with a passion to constantly increase observance and devotion. For more than two centuries it has inoculated millions against the ravages of secularism and preserved the spiritual life of the Jewish nation. Chassidus emerged as a protection from the storm winds of modernity. Today's Jewish community might benefit from a new look at the Chasidic movement's beginnings and reflections. Even those Jews who

fulfill their religious obligations frequently perform rituals in a lifeless and superficial way. Were we to discover the depth and soulful vitality that fill Chasidic literature, a renewed passion might flame our faltering Jewish experience with the warmth of Torah."⁸⁰

This excerpt has the tone of an outsider hoping to glean wisdom to bring back to one's distinctly different home. As an outsider searching for meaning and inspiration, one has the luxury of drawing from different sources, as well as focusing on particular elements that suit one's particular needs and interests. In other words, *Flames of Faith* is a marvelous adaptation and application of the teachings of *Hassidut* to a distinctly Americanized audience, which the author believes is suffering, like its European ancestors, from a spiritual vacuum wrought by the tumultuous and deleterious waves of modernity. In such a dire state, one must draw from and present whatever that demographic

group needs as a panacea for spiritual apathy. Thus, it is the voice of Rabbi Moshe Wolfson echoing from the halls of Emunas Yisroel and Torah Vodaath, syntheses themselves of a variety of influences and sources to instill a passion and commitment to Judaism in the hearts and minds of a different distinctly American-Jewish audience.

Rabbi Reichman's book is not merely an "Introduction to Chasidic Thought." It is an introduction to *Hassidic* thought for the modern American Jew. It is the product of multiple generations of American-bred leaders and thinkers synthesizing and applying the teachings of *Hassidic* and kabalistic thought to breathe new life into a Jewish community searching for spiritual meaning.

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*Endnotes for this issue appear on pages 26-27

Signs and Wonders: 100 Haggada Masterpieces by Adam S. Cohen

BY DAVID SELIS

No Jewish text besides the Bible has been illuminated and illustrated as much as the Haggadah. Yet, with few exceptions, there have not been popular treatments of the artistic aspects of Haggadah illumination. Professor Adam S. Cohen's recent book *Signs and Wonders: 100 Haggada Masterpieces* fills a much-needed lacuna in the popular literature on Hebrew illuminated and illustrated Haggadot. An illuminated manuscript refers to a scribed text which includes decorative elements such as rubricated (hand colored, decorative) opening words (known as capitals or initials), ornamental borders, designs and miniature illustrations. Throughout this review, I use the phrase "illuminated manuscript" in reference to handwritten, decorative Haggadot

which often feature a wide variety of artistic and decorative elements. While most commonly associated with the Medieval period, a hand written text with decorative features written during any period including the present would be considered an illuminated manuscript so long as the text in question was fully produced by a scribal hand and not merely a reproduction (facsimile) of a manuscript original. I use the term "illustrated Haggadah" to refer to printed Haggadot which include decorative elements such as woodcuts, decorative initial words and other artistic elements found in printed books. I am also using this term in reference to contemporary Haggadot for which hand drawn illustrations were commissioned and reproduced.

Cohen, an art historian and professor at University of Toronto, masterfully utilizes his scholarly training to highlight a hundred illuminated and illustrated Haggadot that were produced over the last thousand years across Europe, Israel and America. Over the past few decades in the wake of the Holocaust, Hebrew illuminated and illustrated manuscripts and fine printings have become a subject of popular interest, with dozens of manuscripts and hundreds of printed editions being reproduced in facsimile editions, often with accompanying scholarly essays. Some of them such as the Washington, Sarjevo, Ashkenazi, and Rylands Haggadot and more recently, the Moss Haggadah may be familiar to readers with an interest in Jewish

art. Each facsimile edition enumerated above includes a high quality and full color reproduction of an illuminated manuscript, with a translation of the text and accompanying scholarly essays.

Unlike these editions, Cohen's present work reproduces selected pages from a diverse array of illuminated and illustrated Haggadot. Taking his cue from Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's masterful work on printed Haggadot, *Haggadah and History*, Cohen provides short commentary on each image he reproduces and notes interesting artistic and historical dimensions of each Haggadah. Yerushalmi's work focuses on the printed Haggadah until the 1970's with particular attention to the evolution of the printed Haggadah, and the Haggadah as a witness to the vicissitudes of Jewish history. While Yerushalmi focuses almost exclusively only on printed Haggadot, Cohen includes both a wide selection of manuscript and printed Haggadot, with selections covering the 14th century to the present, and spanning Central and Western Europe, Spain, Italy, America, and Israel.

Cohen opens with a short introduction providing a basic overview of the history and function of the Haggadah, as well as an introduction to the development of the Haggadah and its manuscript and print tradition. Unlike Yerushalmi's volume, which includes multiple scholarly essays, Cohen opens with a very short introduction to the Haggadah, its text, manuscript, and print tradition. While I personally find the lengthy essays in Yerushalmi's introduction of great use and interest, I submit that such an approach is not the norm for popular books on Jewish art. That said, Yerushalmi's scholarly introduction to the facsimiles he presents in *Haggadah and History* have ensured that his book remains a classic work in the field of Haggadah printing. In view of the wealth of recent scholarship on illuminated and illustrated Haggadot, I believe that Cohen missed a golden opportunity to create a work which could become a classic reference and overview of the present state of scholarship on the illuminated Haggadah, while at the same time capturing the beauty of his subject. In this vein, I find it unfortunate that Cohen did not include any selected bibliography or works

for further reading as was done by Yerushalmi. Finally, I think Cohen's book would have greatly benefited from being organized like an exhibition catalogue, with introductory scholarly essays followed by the one hundred Haggadot he chose; each Haggadah would have been represented by several images and accompanied by his commentary and a short bibliography.

It must be noted that while Yerushalmi's work occupies the grey zone between an academic and popular work, Cohen chose to produce a work targeted at a popular audience. In view of the many scholarly works on Hebrew illuminated and printed manuscripts, Cohen's decision to not include extensive scholarly commentary is eminently justifiable as he seeks to expose the reader to the beauty of the illuminated and illustrated Haggadah.

In discussing the Haggadot he included, Cohen focuses on them as both artistic and ritual objects, whose illuminations reflect the impact of evolving artistic trends. For example, when discussing the Ashkenazi Haggadah illuminated by the German scribe Yoel Ben Simon in the second half of the fifteenth century, Cohen focuses on the YaKNHaZ or hare hunt scene. On the surface, this scene is simply a visual flourish. However, this scene is always found in Ashkenazic haggadot as the illumination for the *brakhot* of *Kiddush*, and is in fact an acronym for the order of the Festival *Kiddush*. The opening letters of the relevant Hebrew words sounds like the German phrase for hare hunt, thus leading to this illustration.

Perhaps the most important element of *Signs and Wonders* is the inclusion of early modern and contemporary illuminated Haggadot. While medieval illuminated Haggadot produced between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries comprise some of the most opulent Haggadah manuscripts, it must be remembered that the tradition of Haggadah illumination continued well into the age of print and has experienced a renaissance in the last few decades. Of the pre-1900 illuminated Haggadot Cohen discusses, my personal favorites are the Charlotte von Rothschild Haggadah (#47) and the Bouton Haggadah (#48), both of which are unique with the Rothschild

Haggadah being the only extant Haggadah illuminated by a woman, while the Bouton Haggadah is unique in that it is molded on Arabic illuminated manuscripts produced in Shiraz.

Cohen also includes over 50 Haggadot illustrated and illuminated between 1900 and the present, many of which are not included in Yerushalmi's *Haggadah and History*. Of these contemporary illuminated Haggadot, mention ought to be made of the Moss Haggadah (#83) and the Rose Haggadah (plate #100) which are among the most exquisite modern illuminated haggadot.

I submit that many of my critiques are likely not shared by the lay reader who is looking for an elegant and informative work rather than something which is both a coffee table book and scholarly source. While of little interest to the lay reader, as someone with a keen interest in the history of the Hebrew book, I was pleased that Cohen included the location, call number and page numbers (in technical, bibliographic terminology, the folio number) for each Haggadah and image included. I also appreciated that Cohen included both a subject index and an index of scribes and illuminators. While as someone who is studying the history of the Hebrew book and Hebrew manuscripts I have some critiques of *Signs and Wonders*, on the whole it is an excellent work which will greatly enrich the owner's appreciation of the Haggadah as a work of art.

*Endnotes for this issue appear on pages 26-27

Endnotes

2 NJPS translation.

3 *Zohar Hadash Rut* 32.

4 TB *Yevamot* 47b, Rambam, *Hilkhot Issurei Bi'ah* 13:14; *Shulchan Arukh* 268:2; and *Levush* ad loc.

5 Akeidat Yitshak *Hamesh Megillot* Ruth 1:16.

6 Deut. 13:7. This refers to a person who convinces one to commit idolatry, and leave the path of the Torah.

7 Rambam *Hilkhot Issurei Bi'ah* 13:14

8 *Bava Batra* 10b.

9 Rashi, *Bava Batra* 10b.

10 Meiri Commentary on Proverbs, Mossad Harav Kook, 1969, 146.

11 *Derekh Hashem* 4:1.

12 *Derekh Hashem* 4:7.

13 *Sanhedrin* 105a.

14 *Etz Chaim*, Portal 50, chapter 2.

15 Ibid.

16 *Derekh Hashem* 4:1.

17 Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, (Friedländer tr., 1904), Part III, Chapter 51, 384.

Found on sacred-texts.com

18 Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, (Friedländer tr. 1904), Part 3, Chapter 51, 384.

19 Referring to Rav Chaim Vital in the *Etz Chaim*.

20 Likutei Amrim-Tanya, Rav Shneur Zalman Liadi, "Kehot," (Publication Society, Brooklyn, NY 1984), 4.

21 It is somewhat ironic that R. Lichtenstein used this as an example, since his father-in-law, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, was famously involved in a major controversy regarding hashgachot of meat in Boston.

22 For example, see Menachem Keren Kranz's article in *Tradition* (49:4) titled "The Contemporary Study of Orthodoxy: Challenging the One-Dimensional Paradigm."

23 Yitzchak Blau, "From the Archives of Tradition," *Torah Musings*, available at <http://www.torah-musings.com/2015/01/archives-tradition-8/>.

24 Mark Steiner, "The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy: Another View," *Tradition* 31:2 (1997), 41.

25 Haym Soloveitchik, *Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy*, *Tradition* 28:4 (1994), 64.

26 Hillel Goldberg, "Responding to 'Rupture and Reconstruction,'" *Tradition* 31:2 (1997), 40.

27 Also see Mark Steiner's discussion of Brisker chumrot.

28 Micha Berger, "The Fall of Mimeticism and Forks in the Hashkafic Road," *Aspaqlaria*, available at aishdas.org

29 Mark Steiner, "The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy: Another View," *Tradition* 31:2 (1997), 41-42.

30 Gerald Blidstein, "Rabbinic Judaism and General Culture: Normative Discussions and Attitudes," in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures*, ed. by J.J. Schacter (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2017), 2.

31 Ibid, 7.

32 Ibid, 49.

33 David Berger, "Judaism and General Culture in Medieval and Early Modern Times," in *Judaism's*

Encounter with Other Cultures, 72.

34 Although Berger deserves credit for discussing many of Jewish philosophical scholars or writers who are likely to be unknown to readers with only a Yeshiva or day school education, he sometimes neglects to mention figures who may be more familiar (and whose opinions are therefore of greater interest) to residents of the traditional *beit midrash*, so to speak, such as R. Nissim of Gerona or R. Simon b. Zemah Duran (author of "*Tashbetz*").

35 *Judaism's Encounter with other Cultures*, 95.

36 Ibid, 93.

37 Ibid, 133; Although Dr. Berger does mention some members of the more radical rationalist movement, including Samuel ibn Tibbon, Moses Narboni, Joseph ibn Kaspi, Gersonides and Isaac Albalag, I believe that he intentionally left out any mention of those thinkers who he thinks moved beyond the limits of what was acceptable in their Jewish communities, such as Levi ben Abraham or Nissim of Mersailles, (but it is hard to know how this cut off was made).

38 Ibid, 151.

39 Ibid, 158.

40 Ibid, 172.

41 Shnayer Leiman, "Rabbinic Openness to General Culture in the Early Modern Period in Western and Central Europe," in *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures*, 224.

42 For example, see *ibid.*, 228-229, 257.

43 Alan Jotkowitz, "Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein: Torah Umadda Man," *Modern Judaism* 35:3 (2015); Shalom Carmy, "Music of the Left Hand," *Tradition* 47:4 (2015), 226.

44 Aharon Lichtenstein, "Torah and General Culture: Confluence and Conflict," in *Judaism's Encounter*, 310.

- 45 Avot 5:22.
- 46 See the influential study by C. G. Lord, Ross, and Lepper, "Biased assimilation and attitude polarization: The effects of prior theories on subsequently considered evidence," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37:11 (1979). These findings have been largely upheld in the past few decades; see the updated and refined article by C.S. Taber and M. Lodge, "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs," *American Journal of Political Science*, 50 (2016).
- 47 Lichtenstein in *Judaism's Encounter*, 366.
- 48 William Kolbrener, "Torah UMadda: A Voice from the Academy," and Aharon Lichtenstein, "To Sharpen Understanding," *Jewish Action* 64:3 (Spring 2004).
- 49 Much of this work, such as Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud* came later, but Zoroastrian influence on the Babylonian Talmud was already discussed by figures such as R. Isaac Hirsch Weiss in his *Dor Dor ve-Dorshav*.
- 50 David Henshke, 'Mah Nishtannah': *The Passover Night in the Sages' Discourse* [Hebrew].
- 51 *Judaism's Encounter with Other Cultures*, 47
- 52 See Rabbi Moshe Meiselman, *Torah, Chazal and Science* (Israel: Israel Bookshop Publications, 2013), Rabbi J.D. Bleich, *Contemporary Halakhic Problems*, Vol. VII (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2017), and various responses by Natan Slifkin (available at rationaljudaism.com).
- 53 Eleazar Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem, 2003).
- 54 David I. Shyovitz, *A Remembrance of His Wonders: Nature and the Supernatural in Medieval Ashkenaz* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).
- 55 Jeremy Brown, *New Heavens and a New Earth: The Jewish Reception of Copernican Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Brown often discusses our issue of Judaism's response to its surrounding intellectual culture so explicitly as to sometimes border on the polemical.
- 56 Adam Ferziger, *Exclusion and Hierarchy: Orthodoxy, Nonobservance, and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005). See also Matthias Morgenstern, *From Frankfurt to Jerusalem: Isaac Breuer and the History of the Secession Dispute in Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
- 57 A similar criticism of this volume was made by Alan Brill, "Judaism in Culture: Beyond the Bifurcation of *Torah* and *Madda*," *The Edah Journal* 4:1 (2004), cf. Yitzchak Blau, "Contemporary Fads and Torah uMadda: A Response to Alan Brill," *The Edah Journal* 4:2 (2004). Brill's main point, however, that the presented dichotomy between Judaism and culture is a false one, is not one shared by this reviewer.
- 58 It is of course no accident that Rav Lichtenstein chooses to define culture in accordance with Matthew Arnold ("the best that has been thought and said in the world") instead of deferring to anthropologists or social critics such as John Bodley, Clifford Geertz, and Raymond Williams, but it is their definition which is closer to the colloquial.
- 59 Kolbrenner, "Torah Umadda"
- 60 See Tzvi Teichman, "The Jew in a Gentile Society: Chukat Ha'Akum" *RJJ Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society* 3 (1981):64-85.
- 61 David Ellenson, *Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer and the Creation of a Modern Jewish Orthodoxy* (University of Alabama Press: Alabama, 2003), 24.
- 62 Israel Ba'al Shem Tov, *Keter Shem Tov* 3rd Edition, ed. Jacob Emanuel Shochet (NY: Kehot Publication Society, 2004), 446.
- 63 Zev Reichman, *Flames of Faith: An Introduction to Chasidic Thought* (New York: Kodesh Press, 2014), back cover.
- 64 <https://www.yutorah.org/rabbi-zev-reichman/>
- 65 William B. Helmreich, *The World of the Yeshiva: An Intimate Portrait of Orthodox Jewry* (Augmented Edition), Hoboken: Ktav Publishing House Inc., 2000) 26-30.
- 66 Reichman, *Approbation*.
- 67 *Niddah* 30b.
- 68 See *Likkutei Amaraim*, 5a.
- 69 https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/livingtorah/player_cdo/aid/424364/jewish/A-Three-Part-Vow.htm.
- 70 Reichman, 33 note 32.
- 71 33.
- 72 36-47, 240.
- 73 118.
- 74 227.
- 75 47-56.
- 76 36-46.
- 77 121-133.
- 78 132-139.
- 79 182.
- 80 Back Cover.



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